

Card Apprentice Daily Log

Chapter 2501: Hypocrisy

Date: Unspecified

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Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning

"Young man, is this your first time out of your lab? Or are you just ignorant enough to underestimate the top ten universities? Considering you are from the Southern Region, I bet on the latter. You guys have nothing to show for yet are very proud of themselves. Don't think I didn't notice your judging eyes. At first it was amusing, but now it's just annoying," Lucine remarked, listening to the boy question why they didn't hold the number one university position in the Card World despite having the Labyrinth of Myriad Past.

Lucine found the boy's judging eyes amusing when she initially thought he was just an ignorant genius from the improvised South. However, that amusement soon turned into annoyance when she realized he wasn't the ignorant genius she had assumed him to be.

No, Lucine wasn't looking down on the boy. She found him looking down on Morningstar University amusing. However, when she began to sense that he had the capital to look down on Morningstar University, she no longer thought it was amusing but annoying. *'How dare he look down on Morningstar University?'*

She lost it when he collectively looked down on the top ten universities by asking her why Morningstar University wasn't already the number one university. Yes, there was little to misunderstand about what the boy said, but that was what made it so infuriating. Telling her that her rivals weren't good enough was the same as telling her that she wasn't good enough.

Clearly, Lucine didn't like this feeling of not being good enough compared to him. It had been a while since she felt like that from a fellow Card Apprentice, let alone one from a lower realm. As for her lashing out, it was instinctive.

"Calm down. I also noticed the amusement in your eyes towards me. You don't see me complaining," I defended, staring into Lucine's eyes. "Man, you people from the central region are so entitled."

"Woah! What do you mean by entitled? It's not our fault that students across the five regions want to join us," Lucine remarked, but it made no sense to me, so I asked in puzzlement, "What?"

"You know what I mean. You are the one who dragged the entire central region into this," Lucine replied, not bothering to expand on it.

"So, you attacked the Southern Universities? Are you twelve?" I looked at Lucine in disbelief. Instead of a generous elder, she was now acting like a spoiled little brat.

"Young man, have you no shame? You're the one who looked down on my university and verbally attacked the Central Region, forgetting I'm your elder. Yet you remember I'm your elder only when I defend my university and nation?" Lucine spoke the first thing that came to her mind. She didn't care how it made her sound; she just wanted to win this argument against the boy. She was competitive like that.

"Wait, I only brought up the central region because you brought up the southern region first and when did you become my elder? That's beside the point. I just wanted to know if the other top universities had their own aces like your Labyrinth of Myriad Pasts. I meant no offense by it," I explained, no longer planning to continue bickering with Lucine, who seemed to be desperate about this for some reason. So, I let get away with it.

"Why didn't you directly ask that then?" Lucine complained before proceeding to answer me, "Yes, all top ten universities have inheritances left by their predecessors. Not just us; the royal and noble families, the big sects, and hidden clans—they all have an inheritance from their ancestors. Not all of these inheritances are as glorious as our Labyrinth of Myriad Pasts, but they are enough for them to maintain their feeble existence for several generations. This is precisely why we are able to survive despite the tyranny of the current government."

"By chance, do you know what the inheritances of the other top universities are?" I asked, pushing my luck as much as possible. Hoping, Lucine was still feeling generous after our friendly banter.

"Just a little, like how the five regions think that Morningstar University's inheritance is the 'garden of beginning' and the time vestige. No outsider except you knows about our labyrinths of Myriad Pasts. I don't know why, but there is something oddly satisfying and addicting about sharing a secret. So, what do you think, is Morningstar university where you see your future?" Lucine asked, though I felt she was conveying that if I said no, she would have to silence me.

"You are too honest. Are you sure it's okay to share this information with me?" I asked Lucine, ignoring her attempt to get me to enroll at Morningstar University. Also, I was a little concerned if she should be so honest with me. I got the feeling she didn't share

everything she knew with me, but I also felt that what shared with me was more than enough to get her into trouble.

"Should I be concerned? What are you going to do with this information? Post it on the grimoire network. It will get deleted or buried in piles of useless posts right after you post it. Besides, I know you are smart enough to know better than to do that," Lucine said nonchalantly while I was stuck trying to figure out if it was a threat or a warning from his well-wishing elder.

"You really don't know who I am, do you?" I said to Lucine, finally confirming that she truly had no idea who I am except for what Dean Faust told her about me.

"Why are you famous, or someone important, or something? Sam wrote that you are the Card World's future. I don't know why he would think that, but I bet he had a good reason to do so. Honestly, I haven't been keeping up with current news. It's already a miracle that I'm talking to you without forgetting midway and wondering where and what I'm doing," Lucine explained, not wanting the boy to misunderstand her. Also, she knew that though her bet on creating a perfect clone had worked, she knew it wasn't a cure or permanent measure against her Time Rule Dementia.

"Forget about it," I brushed off answering Lucine on that. Instead, asked her, "So, who far into the past have you guys traveled?"

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- Chapter 2502: Kidding?

[1,010 words]

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"We can travel back to the point when our predecessor used his time rule mastery to turn the Lightning struck-stump into the Time Vestige's temporal anchor," Lucine answered, dodging the core of the boy's question.

I rolled my eyes at Lucine, she couldn't have been more obvious. You would think someone with her experience and age would know how to lie or just be straightforward. Say no if you don't want to answer. Why bother with these tricks? Was it because she was overwhelmed by me and was unable to say no to me?

"I know that. I asked you, how far back has Morningstar University traveled in time?" I asserted, not leaving her a way out. Either she gave me a firm 'no' or the answers I sought.

"I can't tell you that. It's one of our core secrets. I'm willing to make an exception if you join us," Lucine proposed. She not only gave the boy firm no but also made it so he would stop bringing it up and pestering her.

"Was that hard?" I remarked, eyeing Lucine, who was still waiting for my response about enrolling at her university. Not bothering to answer her, I ask, "I still don't get why you didn't just use the time vestige to come find me in this past?"

"That's because I wasn't sure I would find you here. So, I needed to trace your path, which isn't possible with the Time Vestige. Sam thought that with your mastery of the Time Rule, you couldn't help but struggle against the spatial and temporal forces and, as a result, go off-trail into the vast Temporal River. But, not only did you not struggle and not go off-trail, you made it all the way here and stayed put. I was worried I would have to scour the Time River for eternity in hopes of finding you," Lucine explained her difficulties and the risks she took on just to rescue the boy.

A part of her felt it was a miracle that she found him so easily. The only problem was he was showing no sign of returning with her, despite her persuading him and doing her best to satisfy his curiosity about her Labyrinth of Myriad Pasts. They had been here long enough, they needed to leave her quickly. Besides the timeline dementia, there was another threat in here.

"Oh, I see. Now, excuse me. Since I am here, I might as well make the best of it to try and start my comprehension of time rule," I informed Lucine honestly and let her be, having made myself comfortable on a flat boulder by the lightning struck stump to commence my comprehension of time rule. I didn't dare to be seated on the lightning struck stump as there was a tiny tear in space and time above it. It wasn't as obvious as when the time tunnel was summoned, but it was there. I didn't want to repeat the mistake young Ahalya once did.

"Movement of truth," I muttered to myself, sitting on the boulder in lotus position, preparing to see if I could comprehend the time rule, wondering if it would elude me like the entire Myriad Realm's time rules avoided me?

Before I could close my eyes, Lucine interrupted me, asking me if I misspoke, "You mean continue your comprehension of time rule, right? Don't you already have a certain

mastery of time rule? Also, are you surprisingly stupid enough to comprehend time rule in a time prison?"

"I never said that I had a certain mastery in time rule," I was honest because Lucine would find out once I try to comprehend time rule and also because I didn't want to lie to someone who had risked her life to rescue mine. What's the point of power if I can't afford to be honest to people I care about?

Yes, I considered Lucine a friend now. This complicated my plans to use Morningstar University as a stepping stone to announce my plans to the five regions, but I had made changes to the plan when I learned that all top Universities had their own inheritance, each as useful as Morningstar University's Labyrinth of Myriad Past. The top ten universities wanted my VR-universe, and I wanted their inheritance. I'm sure we could negotiate something.

Besides, in these tough times when demons were about to invade our world for the second time, we need to be united and not fight amongst ourselves. As the Southern Hope, I needed to take a lead and set an example to all. Let me repeat myself: I am not doing this because I am greedy for the inheritance of the top ten universities.

"What? Then how did you survive the temporal and spatial forces and the temporal currents on your way here? How are you resisting the timeline dementia? I get it, you are kidding me, right?" Lucine lost it and bombarded the boy with questions without giving him an opportunity to answer. "Funny, for a second you almost had me there."

"Think what you want to think. I'm not kidding now, nor was I kidding when I said I can cure your time rule dementia," I replied nonchalantly, shrugging my shoulders. "And why shouldn't I comprehend time rule in a time prison?"

"You say you aren't kidding, but you don't know why you shouldn't comprehend the Time Rule in a time prison?" Lucine remarked, wondering if anything this boy told her so far was true and not just some convenient lie he spun up on his feet. But seeing that he genuinely didn't know why, she decided not to be petty and answered him, "That's because the timeline in the time prison is looped to trap the prisoner in here. If we comprehend the time rule where the timeline is looped, we will be inflicted with time rule dementia."

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"What? I never heard of that," I exclaimed in shock as Lucine revealed to me that comprehending time rule in a looped timeline would lead to being inflicted with time rule dementia. There was no mention of this in the book I learned about Time Rule Dementia.

Considering that the book stated that Time Rule Dementia was a disease that mostly plagued Celestials and was not seen among any known races in the Myriad Realms, when Lucine was the living contradiction to that, I'm guessing the book was outdated.

Wasn't it outdated? It did mention that except celestials, no known races could survive Time Rule Dementia. So, they never had a living subject to determine the cause and effect.

Lucine's case was special. She only managed to survive because she boldly cut most of her infected soul and had two Soul sour fruits to save whatever was left. It was a gamble. She lived to tell the tale, but she didn't manage to fully get rid of her Time Rule Dementia.

It took two miracle fruits to save Lucine's life, but still she wasn't fully cured and lived as a memory challenge loon. This was enough to tell how deadly Time Rule Dementia was: hundred percent mortality rate excluding celestials.

"Um, that's not surprising. I only knew that comprehending the time rule of a looped timeline causes Time Rule Dementia after I comprehended the time rule of this past in desperation to save Ahalya. I guess you are not stupid after all," Lucine answered, explaining how she was inflicted with Time Rule Dementia.

"Ah, that explains why your soul pathways were vanishing into this past of all the pasts when in our present. No, no, that's not right—" Midway through my realization, I paused and glanced at Lucine to find her grinning with ecstasy. Ignoring her weird expression, I continued, "You used your incarnation as an anchor to ensure that the soul pathways of your brain that vanishes into the past because of time rule dementia vanishes into this past and not across the various possible pasts of the Card World.

By doing so, you not only ensured your divinity knew where to find the vanished soul pathways to help with you passively recover and also use the soul pathways that vanished to this path to nourish you incarnation that way it wouldn't be tainted by this pasts' energies yet continue to grow until it was ready to help you actively manage the Time Rule Dementia.

I thought it was all a coincidence, you lucked out and managed to create a perfect clone without getting it tainted with this past's energies, but turns out you knew what you were doing. That's just ingenious. How did you manage to think and calculate all that while

protecting yourself and rescuing Ahalya? That's no longer in the realm of the card apprentices."

I was really impressed by what Lucine had done to survive the Time Rule Dementia. She not only thought of a solution to a mortal disease in a few seconds but she thought of a solution that she could use and perform at that instant. That was to say, a solution within her capability and means. For one to have that kind of presence of mind and concentration when you were surrounded by certain death, it was just monstrous.

Lucine immediately became a living reminder for me not to underestimate the Card Apprentices.

Lucine allowed herself to bask in the admiration of the boy for a few seconds before she shook her head and humbly revealed, "No, I'm no genius. It's just the effect of my origin card 'Premortem Savant.' It turns me into a savant a few seconds before I die. The triggering conditions of my origin card are very strict and demanding. I don't dare simulate these conditions just to trigger it, fearing the consequences to follow will not be something I can handle. So, it's basically useless in regular times. If anyone should be considered a genius, it should be you. I can't believe you managed to figure out the solution I opted for... how did you even manage to do it? I didn't even reveal anything to you. It's as if you just saw right through me. It's just uncanny."

"Premortem Savant, that's an interesting origin card. But be honest, you never really tried to trigger it by putting yourself in harm's way in a controlled environment?" I said, not believing Lucine for a second when she claimed that she didn't try to trigger her origin card. From what I learned about her so far, she had a curious brain like mine and it was simply impossible for her not to try and figure out ways to control her origin card. It would go against everything we stood for.

Lucine rolled her eyes and reluctantly agreed, "Yes, I did try to figure out how I can control my origin card. But I learned that as long as I knew I was safe, it was simply impossible for me to trigger my origin card. So, I had my colleagues fake try to kill me without telling me, even erased the related memories, but nothing worked. It was as if my origin card had a mind of its own. Soon, I stopped trying. So far, I only managed to trigger my origin card that one time."

"You know what that tells me? It tells me you've never stepped outside the bubble that Morningstar University has created around you. And it also tells me that you're in the wrong profession—or that your fated ingredient chose the wrong card apprentice. You should have joined the army or one of the guilds. With your origin card, by now, you would have become one of the strongest in the Five Regions, or even found a way to grow beyond the limits of the Card World's power system. Your card is clearly meant for someone who embraces danger, someone who doesn't let the risk of death wash away their greed."

I spoke my mind to Lucine the same way I would to a friend. I believed she always possessed an adventurous spirit suited to her origin card. Otherwise, she never would have found her fated ingredient to create such a origin card in the first place. I suppose life simply happened.

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"What do you know, young man? You speak as if you know me, but you don't. When I was your age, I had already traveled to the farthest point of the Way Beyond that any card apprentice has ever reached. I spent three months there—exploring, documenting the terrain, and studying the monstrous flora and fauna with the help of the local Supreme Beings. Don't tell me I lack an adventurous spirit. I'm just as adventurous as any card apprentice out there. Maybe even more. And what about you? Have you ever even seen a Supreme Being, let alone spoken to one?" Lucine remarked, excitement flaring in her voice. It seemed I had struck a nerve. Truth has a way of doing that.

"Let me guess—you weren't alone, but traveling with a team of demigods," I said, already knowing how her mind worked. She wasn't aware of her privileged life. I wasn't blaming her for being born into a powerful lineage; I was trying to help her understand that it was precisely that privilege which kept her from ever pushing herself far enough to trigger her origin card during any of her adventures.

Besides, I had not only seen and spoken to a Supreme Being—I had played with one. Her name was Bloodette, the Blood Supreme, and we were the best of friends.

"Of course. I'm not an idiot. I considered every possible scenario and made the necessary preparations before entering the Way Beyond. I even hired a team of diamond array masters from the Central Array Master Association, just to be safe. Why do you think my expedition was successful?" Lucine replied with a confident nod. She was more than a little proud of herself. I would be too.

A seventeen-year-old card apprentice pulling off a successful expedition into the unknown depths of the Way Beyond was indeed something to be proud of. In her, I saw the same overcautious nature and obsessive preparedness that I possessed. We were alike—we took calculated risks, always making sure the odds leaned in our favor. But sometimes, a person has to leap without thinking. She had done that when she rescued

Ahalya, triggering her origin card for the first time—and now, she was doing the same to rescue me.

Because of my humble origins and ambitions, I took such leaps far more often than I should have. But in Lucine's case, her royal background ensured she never had to take those leaps herself. Someone else always stepped in to take them for her. Until she was the only one left. Forcing her to take the leap this time. Otherwise, I don't think that Morningstar University or Dean Faust would send her out to rescue me. I was impressed that Lucine gracefully stepped up when it mattered. Proving that Morningstar University was right to dot on their princess, the direct descendant of their founder.

I understood that there was nothing I could say or do. Lucine would have to realize it on her own. So, I simply shook my head and agreed with her. "Impressive. Now, let us get out of here."

Now that I learned I shouldn't comprehend the time rule inside the time prison—unless I wanted to suffer from time rule dementia—it quickly lost its attraction to me. With Hive Spirit having already used my primordial soul pupils to collect and record all the data of this timeline, I was no longer interested in continuing to explore this past.

I planned to return to our present. So, I approached the lightning-struck stump in this past and, upon touching it, resonated with the frequency of the stump in our present, summoning the time vestige that was anchored there to retrieve us.

We could travel through the temporal river, but without Lucine's support, I would be swept away by its current. This time, there were no temporal or spatial forces from the time tunnel that sucked me into this past to suck me back to our present. If I wanted to return, I would need to summon the time tunnel myself. Since, Morningstar University had no idea where in their Labyrinth of Myriad Pasts we were, to help us. And since I was already forming the time tunnel, I might as well call upon the time vestige to take us back with it.

Sensing the temporal and spatial shifts around us as I resonated with this timeline's temporal anchor, Lucine quickly realized what I was attempting to do. Her astonishment only grew as she saw the time tunnel beginning to form, confirming that I had succeeded. Having heard earlier that I had not yet begun to comprehend the time rule, she couldn't help but ask, "Wyatt, how are you doing this?"

"Told you I can cure your time rule dementia. Do you regret it now?" I teased, knowing this should be enough for her to understand that I hadn't been lying—I truly believed I could help her. For someone in her situation, even that small promise was something worth giving a shot.

Lucine was left speechless when she realized I had taken offense at her not believing me about my claim about helping her cure her disease. Just as she was about to reply, we were both startled by a loud, eerie laughter.

"Eheheh-eeeh! My patience and gamble have paid off. I finally get to be free of this damn place."

I turned toward the source of the laughter, only for Lucine to suddenly rise into the air. She summoned her diamond grimoire and ordered, "Wyatt, once the time vestige arrives, take it and leave. I'll hold this devil back. Don't worry about me. Sam will know what to do next."

"That's brave of you, little girl. Unfortunately, neither of you is leaving this damned place. I am," the voice responded, mocking her resolve.

It belonged to Slay — one of the ten leaders of the fallen 'Ten Commandments' dark faction from the Dark Realm.

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I silently watched a slim, dark silhouette slowly revealing its figure from one of the lush green giant trees of the 'garden of beginning,' wondering how my primordial soul pupils missed it.

I guessed it wasn't hiding here to begin with; it only arrived after it sensed the stray temporal and spatial forces as I summoned the time vestige and only dared to show itself knowing that I can't stop the formation of the time tunnel and the arrival of the time vestige midway not wanting to risk losing the time vestige between this past and our future.

The silhouette fully revealed itself to be an eight ft tall, pale pink skinned, female humanoid with a rounded head featuring a long, thick, dark pink, semi-rigid appendage that extends backward from the base of its skull reaching its knees, curling slightly at the tip, a white sleeveless toga its hairless body. Looking into its pair of beady, pitch back eyes, I couldn't help but frown, trying to guess which race the devil belonged to.

It took me a second, but with my primordial soul pupils and the Hive Spirit's help, I recognized her race.

The Devil Slay was an Ovumite, an all female race born within the grim peaks of one of the thirteen deadliest places in the Dark Realm — Shrouded Hills. There were only 1141 Ovumite recorded throughout the history of the Dark Realm. Each one stronger than the other and believed to be alive to date, starting the rumor that they were unkillable.

Many believe Ovumites weren't this strong when they came down the Shrouded Hills. As they consume the essence of their most formidable enemies, using it to get pregnant in pursuit of conceiving a new body that blends the strengths of both bloodlines. As the new form develops, the old body serves as its womb—and its first meal. When the rebirth is complete, the former flesh collapses, hollow and spent, while the new form emerges stronger than before.

In undergoing this rebirth, they remain forever young and vigorous, each transformation leaving them stronger in body and sharper in mind than they were previously. Yet this power comes at a terrible cost—they do not reproduce. Every potential offspring is consumed in the act of renewal. *'To grow is to sacrifice the future for the perfection of the self.'*

Begging the question: how were the known 1,141 Ovumites born in the first place? No one knows, because those who dared to travel up those slopes were never seen again. But the passing winds carry the wails of these lost souls down the hill. Serving as a stark reminder to the rest.

I didn't know a lot about the 'Ten Commandments' faction, but from what I heard about them, I knew this faction was almost considered a semi-ruler class organization. Fortunately, the celestial world's penalty applied to the Devil in this time prison too. As a result, the Semi-ruler class Devil's strength was reduced to the Semi-noble class. Still, it posed a challenge for the strongest of Card Demigods, whose strength peaked at the chivalry class. So, it was no surprise that Morningstar University's founders trapped this one in the time prison.

"How is this possible?" Lucine muttered to herself, realizing that even though the devil had become aware of the time prison, the timeline was not looping back to the moment of the devil's original entrapment. Normally, the time prison would endlessly reset, erasing the devil's memories and awareness each time it regained them. That was how the prison subdued its captives—an infinite cycle of revelation and oblivion, giving no chance to act on the truth.

"Out of my way. I'd rather not kill you two and ruin my fun," Slay said, advancing slowly toward the lightning-struck stump.

She knew with centuries of suppressed rage and frustration churning within her, holding back would be a herculean task for her. She would likely end up killing the two instead of merely disabling and confining them. Contrary to her plans to trap them in this time prison and give them a taste of their medicine. A terrifying yet satisfying release.

"What's the point of trying to escape this time prison?" Lucine countered. "You've been here so long, surviving on the soul energy of this past, that the moment you step into our present you'll crumble to dust. Your body has already been tainted by this timeline. Returning to the original one will destroy you. So you might as well give up and make yourself comfortable here."

"So are you, puny demigod," Slay sneered. "Yet you still plan to return to the original timeline, because you know that if one has enough mastery over the time rule, this level of tainting won't matter." She scoffed at Lucine's attempt to mislead her again.

Besides, it was only her body that had survived by feeding on the soul energy of this timeline. Her soul remained untainted. With her power, she didn't even need a physical form to escape this backwater realm and take her revenge come time.

Lucine knew she knew that. Yet she still tried to act clever. Did she take her for a fool? Slay had been willing to hold back, but this one was forcing her hand.

"Wait... I remember you," Slay suddenly exclaimed, her tone shifting into something sharp and delighted. "You're the one who used the Soul Sour Fruit in here to offset the toll of crossing the taboos of time and weaken this time prison. And now here you are again—helping me. Is this fate? Anyway, you're the one I should thank for my freedom. I owe it all to you. Hehehe!"

Slay laughed wildly, recalling every small event that had led her to slowly unravel the rules of the time prison until this very moment. She reveled in the chance to throw it all back in Lucine's face. "Change of plans. I will use you to create the Soul Sour potion—to make up for all the time I lost trapped in here."

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"Keep dreaming for another eternity," Lucine shouted, hearing Slay's plan and deciding to use her own life to correct her mistake. The bloodshot intensity in her eyes made her resolve clear—she would stop the devil even if it was the last thing she ever did.

"You are not enough," Slay replied, disappearing from sight and reappearing in front of Lucine with her massive hand wrapped around Lucine's neck. Lucine struggled—trying

to breathe, trying to break free—but her strength didn't answer her call. It appears, coming in contact with the devil, her prowess betrayed her. The fight ended before it even began.

Slay then turned toward the low-tier card apprentice, deciding to kill him. Tormenting him would bring her no satisfaction—not when she could instead turn Lucine into a Soul Sour Fruit, destroy the Card World, and claim its Will Fragments all for herself. With that thought in mind, the appendage on her head snapped forward like a whip, striking toward his skull.

"Celestial Blood Fate Domain," I uttered just as Slay's pseudopod hovered a mere inch away from shattering my skull into fragments. At my words, the entire world seemed to freeze. Everything was instantly washed in a blood-red hue. Slay's pseudopod, no matter how hard it strained, couldn't close that final centimeter to reach my eyes. It was as if an invisible force opposed it.

Feeling the celestial domain unfold, Slay's pitch-black bead-like eyes widened with excitement. "Hybrid Celestial," she breathed.

She tossed the demigod in her grasp aside—flinging Lucine far from the lightning-struck stump where the time vestige had already arrived—and turned her full attention toward me, locking onto my gaze. As she stared, something primal stirred within her, a sensation she hadn't experienced in ages. My cold, indifferent expression only intensified it. Saliva began to spill from the corners of her mouth.

Wiping it away with the back of her hand, she murmured, almost reverently, "Your existence—our fated meeting—makes every moment I spent trapped in this damned time prison worth it."

Listening to her confession, a revolting feeling twisted in the pit of my stomach, and I unconsciously took a step back. The last time I had felt something like this was when I learned about Jill Norley's physique—Carnivorous Womb. Those were memories I neither wanted to relive, nor entirely forget.

To an Ovumite, encountering an organic Hybrid Celestial was the equivalent of their wet dream manifesting into reality. In the Myriad Realms, Hybrid Celestials were even rarer than Ovumites, and finding one with an organic physical body was nothing short of a miracle. So, no one but Slay could truly understand the level of ecstatic joy she felt at this moment—especially now that she believed she could escape this damned time prison any time she wanted to.

The Ovumite racial ability allowed them to steal the essence of the strongest beings they defeated in battle, using it to conceive a new body superior to their current one, while retaining all of their realm and power. For a race like that, an organic Hybrid Celestial was the perfect prey—an evolutionary shortcut straight to the perfection they sought.

Ovumite abilities fell into the same realm of unsettling as Jill's Carnivorous Womb physique, which allowed her to use the essence of a mate her physique deemed worthy and conceive a child with similar talents, physiques, abilities—and most importantly—their realm.

As disturbing as these abilities were, the first thing that passed through my mind was, *'At least Jill was one voluptuous babe.'* As if saying I wouldn't mind cooperating with Slay if her aesthetics matched my kinks.

For some reason, even in this situation, my mind chose to complain about the Ovumite's physical features instead of worrying about how to fight an enemy from a race considered unkillable in the Dark Realm. Even I was concerned about my own priorities at that moment.

"To think that of all the Myriad Realms I would find you here, under these circumstances... I suppose there is such a thing as fate and destiny," Slay murmured, her intense gaze leaving my eyes to travel over every inch of my body—like a foodie savoring a pastry on display before placing an order.

"Don't worry, I'll be gentle and quick," Slay assured me, mistaking my disgust for fear, as she retracted the pseudopod that still couldn't close the final centimeter between us no matter how hard it strained.

"Kneel," I commanded, the word leaving my mouth filled with sheer disgust, just as Lucine—her fall cushioned by my celestial domain—finally regained her footing and rejoined us.

"Huh?" Slay uttered in disbelief as her knees buckled. To her shock, she realized she no longer had control over her own body. Every countermeasure she attempted failed, and ultimately, she kneeled before me.

Seeing this, Lucine froze mid-step, her eyes flickering between me and the kneeling Slay. She had experienced firsthand how helpless she was against Slay, even when Slay had been weakened by the Card World's Will.

Lucine was not weak and to be underestimated. She was among the top fifty strongest in the Five Regions and only half a step away from forming her own time rule stream and had a couple of hybrid runes. Yet, none of that mattered in front of Slay. She couldn't even summon her strength in that battle. That feeling of helplessness was something she could never get used to.

Yet now, the very devil who had filled her with dread was kneeling before a mere Card Master.

The astonishment faded quickly, replaced by a chilling realization:

Just how strong was this boy?

Was he truly a Card Master?

Or a Card Demigod pretending to be one?

Was it the boy's celestial rule domain?

While Lucine was still in a daze from the sudden shift in the battlefield, Slay roared, "As expected of a Hybrid Celestial. Fortunately for me, you are still young and haven't matured yet. Unfortunately for you, I have a World Calamity Stake. Hehehe!"

Summoning what appeared to be a massive wooden pillar shaped like an oversized stake. With all her strength, Slay drove the gigantic wooden stake into space and time at that point in the physical plane piercing through my Celestial Blood Fate Domain.

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Chapter 2507: The Commandment Of Negative Passion - Covetous Devil 'Slay Saleos'

[1,037 words]

Chapter 2507: The Commandment Of Negative Passion - Covetous Devil 'Slay Saleos'

Date: Unspecified

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"What in the actual hell?" I blurted out, watching in disbelief as Slay—who should have been completely powerless inside my Celestial Blood Fate Domain—summoned a massive wooden stake. She drove it straight into the very fabric of space and time of the physical plane, piercing directly into my celestial domain.

As Slay nailed the stake into space and time, my Celestial Blood Fate Domain burst like a soap bubble. The blood-red hue that had drenched the world began to run and fade, dripping away like paint washed off by rain. As the domain shattered, Slay rose steadily

to her feet, releasing the overwhelming aura of a Semi-Ruler-class being. Both Lucine and I were taken aback. Dread could be seen in Lucine's eyes.

This chain of events, none of it made sense. Inside my Celestial Blood Fate Rule Domain, Slay shouldn't have been able to access her storage treasure—let alone summon a stake of that size and muster the strength to force it through dimensional layers and rupture my domain as if it were nothing.

Only after activating my Primordial Soul Pupils did I understand. The stake called the World Calamity Stake was actually crafted from a single twig of an actual and fully grown World Calamity Tree. Refined through dark arts, it was made to resist and even negate suppression from the Will of the realms themselves—Celestial forces included.

There was a reason why World Calamity Trees were capable of devouring and destroying entire worlds. They possessed an innate resistance to the will of any world they invaded. No matter how overwhelmingly strong a world's will was, it could not suppress the tree's realm or existence the way it would suppress any other foreign invader.

The World Calamity Stake was crafted specifically to exploit this trait. By refining a twig from a fully grown World Calamity Tree, the devils created a tool that could negate or resist the suppression of a world's will. They came in a set of nine stakes, used to set up the celestial binding array. In it, celestial force and other celestial abilities become useless. With it, they could easily destroy realms' wills and harvest fragments of those realms' wills without being hindered by the world's will suppressing their realm.

The array was required to suppress an entire realm, but nailing a single World Calamity Stake was enough for a small part of it.

In other words, it was the power of the World Calamity Stake that allowed Slay to resist my Celestial Blood Fate Domain and drive that wooden stake through the fabric of space and time. By doing so, she not only shattered my domain but also nullified every celestial ability within the stake's area of influence.

This meant I could no longer use my celestial force, nor could I borrow the Card Celestial's celestial force. I couldn't even re-establish my Celestial Blood Fate Domain. At the same time, the world's will suppression that had been limiting Slay's realm vanished entirely. As a result, her true strength was fully released—allowing her to display the complete might of a Semi-Ruler-class being.

With the limit on her realm removed, Slay rolled her neck and shoulders with a satisfied expression before releasing a long, refreshed sigh. This was the first time she truly felt whole in a long while.

Lucine's mind simply shut down. She had barely begun to grasp my strength when the battlefield shifted again in Slay's favor—within mere seconds. The sheer,

incomprehensible power radiating from Slay made Lucine question everything she thought she understood about the world's power system.

Morningstar University had indeed documented that there were subdivisions and classes within the Card Demigod—or Devil—realm. They had learned this after centuries of observing the devils imprisoned within the Labyrinth of Myriad Pasts. But no one had ever expected the gap between those classes to be this massive.

So it was no wonder that Lucine, as an Upper Chivalry-class being, was left utterly stunned the moment she sensed the full presence of a Semi-Ruler-class entity for the first time. The gulf of power between them was not just large—it was vast, immeasurable, and beyond anything she had ever conceived possible.

"Hey, you still sane?" Slay sneered, glancing at Lucine—who looked as though her very soul had slipped out of her body. The sight amused her. If Lucine was already breaking down just from her unrestrained presence, Slay wondered how the girl would react once she discovered what Slay could truly do with this power.

"..."

Lucine could only stare blankly at her, beyond even the ability to respond to mockery. She appeared hopeless and even as if she had surrendered when actually, all of her attention and focus were on figuring out a way out of their predicament, knowing Slay wouldn't risk damaging her.

"Hehehe." Slay chuckled, taking her time and savoring the moment. In her eyes, the two card apprentices before her were not enemies—they were blessings handed to her by fate. One was a miracle potion, and the other was a shortcut toward her ideal, perfected body. She had already broken one of them, and the other still had some fight left in his eyes. As expected of a Hybrid Celestial.

Slay approached me slowly, step by step, with the ease of someone who believed the battle was already over. There was not a shred of caution in her movements—only confidence. She met my gaze with a playful glint and spoke, "You're small, and definitely not my type... but I suppose I'll have to settle for you, my prince."

Then she straightened slightly, as though making a formal introduction.

"Your Highness, allow me to introduce myself properly. The Commandment of Negative Passion, Covetous Devil 'Slay Saleos' — one of the Ten Leaders of the Ten Commandments faction."

The sudden change in Slay's tone caught me off guard. But it became clear she may not have respected me as her next mate, but my identity as a Hybrid Celestial clearly came with a different kind of acknowledgment.

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"Huh...?"

A strange wave of desire surged through me—sudden and overwhelming. I found Slay... irresistible. Dark impulses pressed against my mind, thoughts of forcing her down and claiming her flashing through my head before I could stop them. The very fact that such ideas appeared there made my stomach twist in disgust.

Slay's smile widened as she watched my internal struggle unfold—my reluctant mind and my traitorous body betraying me. She could feel it. She knew. The heat flushing through me, the tension I couldn't hide, my pant's crotch area bulged and pulsated... a visible reaction that left no room for denial.

I agree that it had been a long time since I did it—but this level of honest reaction from my body wasn't normal. This wasn't me.

No... the problem wasn't from me.

It was her.

Did she use some kind of aphrodisiac on me?

No, that couldn't be it.

Lucine was standing right there, untouched by whatever I was feeling. I didn't feel a thing toward her—not even a flicker of interest. It was as if my entire awareness had narrowed to only Slay. As if the rest of the world—Lucine, the battlefield, everything—had been pushed out of my senses.

There was only Slay. Only her voice. Only her presence. Like there was no room left in me for anything else.

"What's wrong, my prince?" Slay asked, voice dripping with honeyed mischief. "Do you need... assistance?"

The playful smile vanished—replaced by a slow, predatory grin that showed far too many teeth as sadistically informed, "Then get on your knees and beg me, Your Highness."

Clearly, Slay was holding a grudge for the moment I forced her to kneel before me... I felt guilty about that.

Guilt, Why?

Why in the hell would I feel bad about that?

What the fuck was happening to me?

Had she slipped some kind of love potion on me?

No—impossible. If she had, the Hive Spirit would have detected the influence immediately. The Hive Spirit hadn't raised a single alarm. Which meant that whatever was affecting me wasn't an aphrodisiac or a charm-type potion.

That left only two possibilities: unique curses or runes. But curses wouldn't work on me. My resistance to them was too high. So that meant — it was a rune. A unique one. One specifically designed to bypass reason and directly influence instinct.

'Wyatt. Stop listening to her.' Lucine's voice entered my mind, strained but steady. *'If you can, shut off your senses and erase every memory of her, leaving enough to fight her. Don't hold back. Finish her off as quickly as possible. Because the more you know about her... the more you look at her, hear her, smell her, feel her, taste her, think of her... the stronger her hold on you becomes. Even your own strength will betray you for her.'*

She had understood the effects of the Commandment of Negative Passion, Covetous Devil 'Slay Saleos' without me helping her.

Lucine didn't hesitate. She immediately used her Celestial Rule Dementia—methodically erasing her memories of Slay. Not all of them—just enough to strip away attachment, familiarity, recognition of form. Leaving only what was necessary to fight her and nothing more. This way, she ensured that Slay's ability would only be able to influence her a little, even negligible. As long as she keeps erasing her memoirs of Slay periodically she was fine.

'Got it,' I replied back, impressed by Lucine's deduction ability. She was spot on.

Slay was the embodiment of Negative Passion itself, capable of invoking desire and passion in anyone, men and women alike. Then, using these desires and passions as twisted chains to manipulate them and everything of them. What Lucine failed to realize

was that Slay's ability grew stronger when the target already held someone else in their heart. The deeper the affection, the quicker the corruption took root.

It wasn't her fault she overlooked this. Only someone who loved would ever notice the pattern. And Lucine... she seemed long past such things.

But me?

In the midst of this chaos, I came to confirm that I was in love. I just didn't know with whom. Was it Anna? Susan? Or... both?

The confusion only made Slay's influence worse. There was something else—some similarity I recognized about her ability. It reminded me of the Carnivorous Womb's effect on Jill.

Jill's Carnivorous Womb invoked overwhelming desire and passion in its host, forcing them to mate with a partner chosen by the womb itself. The host had no control.

Slay's power worked the same way—only reversed. Not only did she get to choose her mate, but she invoked desire and passion in her mate, bending their instincts and reason so they would mate with her willingly. Or mindlessly, to be more accurate.

And just like in the case of the Carnivorous Womb—Slay's victims had no control.

As I compared Jill and Slay—the abilities of their physique, the way their powers affected desire—I couldn't ignore the similarity. The thought struck me suddenly, almost absurd at first: Was Jill a failed attempt at creating an Ovumite?

The moment the idea formed, the seriousness of it sank in. It was possible. Disturbingly possible.

After the first Demon Invasion, it was no secret that many Card Apprentices turned to demon and devil merchants, trading morality for power. Some sought forbidden knowledge; others experimented with dark arts beyond the boundaries of reason or ethics.

So, it was possible Demigod Norley, known as the Mad Researcher, was one of them too. I carefully select my words because I have no evidence, but my gut told me that he was one of the worst offenders.

So it wouldn't be surprising if he had acquired genetic material of an Ovumite by trading with demon/devil merchants and used it in his experiments that grind thousands of innocent souls to fuel his research until Jill—his adopted daughter—the result of that madness and the light that guided him to his current Sani life.

Of course, this was still speculation—but it wouldn't remain speculation for long. If I compared the soul pathways I had saved from Jill with Slay's soul pathways, the truth would become obvious almost immediately.

And when I did...

Yes. Jill truly was a failed hybrid between a Card Apprentice and an Ovumite.

Judging from her soul pathways and Ovumite soul pathways, it was a miracle she had survived at all—let alone managed to grow as much as she had.

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"What are you two scheming?" Slay asked, her voice low and amused, having sensed the silent mental exchange between the Hybrid Celestial and the miracle drug. Her black eyes narrowed as she noticed the subtle shift in Lucine's gaze—her influence weakening. "Oh? So you've figured out my racial abilities. How adorable. But tell me—does that change anything?"

"..."

Lucine didn't answer. Instead, her aura surged—rising sharply, violently—until it reached its absolute limit. Her energy clashed against Slay's overwhelming Semi-Ruler presence, like a candle flame pushing back against a roaring inferno. She was ready to stake her life here—to hold Slay off long enough for me to escape.

"Hehehe."

Slay's laugh was soft and cruel, dripping with mockery seeing Lucine ignorantly using her tiny Chivalry-class realm to resist a Semi-Ruler realm. She tilted her head, amused beyond reason. "Even if I just stand here without lifting a finger—you still wouldn't be able to harm me. In fact—" her grin widened, sharp and predatory, "you'll end up on your knees, begging me to use your insignificant little existence."

'*Space-time rule fusion. Hybrid Rune: Blackhole,*' Lucine mentally activated one of her hybrid runes, focusing her intent sense solely on Slay. Soon, the spatial and temporal

forces in Slay's surroundings began to distort, defying their natural state. Time in that area slowed to an extreme crawl, while space itself began to stretch inward. As a result, in that spot, a tiny black hole was about to form—its pull threatening to collapse everything in the vicinity. The consequences of pushing spatial and temporal forces to their limits were terrifying.

However, Slay, who stood at the center of this collapse, only grinned. There was not a single trace of panic or concern in her expression—her grin actually grew wider. She didn't try to retreat or defend herself. Instead, she taunted Lucine,

"Is that all? It will take more than that for you to even scratch my body. Come on now, don't hold back—give it your all. Prove me wrong. Maybe, maybe, when I am destroying this stupid realm of yours, I will spare your friends and family... and take them as my slaves."

I could see that Lucine was giving everything she had, but a semi-ruler class Ovumite's body was simply too strong. The amount of spatial and temporal force her hybrid rune, Gravity, could influence to generate a blackhole wasn't anywhere near what was needed to affect Slay.

Lucine's hybrid rune was powerful—powerful enough to let her challenge opponents above her realm. However, it still couldn't bridge the vast gap between the Chivalry class and the Semi-Ruler class. And that was without accounting for Slay's own mastery over the rules of space and time.

Maybe if Lucine had already reached the Peak or even Upper Noble class, things might have turned out differently. But reality was rarely so forgiving.

Even so, this wasn't the end for her. With her hybrid rune, Lucine could tear open space and time and escape—either into the void or into the temporal river. She would have done so already... if not for the fact that she didn't plan on leaving me behind.

"Are you done?" Slay asked Lucine with a smirk. Then, without even waiting for her response, she used her mastery of space-time to gather the Lucine's pebble sized blackhole on her index finger and flicked it out of the 'garden of beginning.' into the void of this past.

Seeing this, Lucine's mind snapped. Disturbing a black hole of that scale should have been enough to annihilate the entire Central Academic City. Yet Slay had handled it as casually as tossing aside a pebble. It was proof that Slay's mastery over space-time, combined with her realm, could create a black hole many times larger.

Which meant that if she were not being suppressed by the World's Will, Slay could have erased the entire central region off the face of Card World with a single strike. And on top of that, she worshiped—or served—someone known as the Devil Merchant Code. Against beings of that level, they had never stood a chance to begin with.

"Do you want to try again?" Slay asked, though the hopelessness and defeat in Lucine's eyes made the question unnecessary. Losing interest, Slay turned back toward me—her beloved Hybrid Celestial—with a slow, amused smirk.

With the discovery of a miracle drug and a Hybrid Celestial, Slay's initial anger and frustration had eased. Her focus was no longer solely on taking revenge for being confined in a time prison—she was now thinking about her return to the Dark Realm. She had been gone for a long time, and she knew things would have changed in her absence. So, there was no need to rush. Her first goal was to completely subdue and secure both the miracle drug and the Hybrid Celestial, then use them as leverage to stage her comeback.

With her racial ability and the Hybrid Celestial's essence, at present she had no real need for the miracle potion. Instead, she planned to trade Lucine away. And once she had extracted enough essence from the Hybrid Celestial to conceive her new body, she intended to continue harvesting his essence and sell it to her sisters. They would pay any price to obtain the essence of an organic Hybrid Celestial.

However, that plan carried its own risks. Many of her sisters had already reached the Ruler Class long before she had descended the Shrouded Hills. And beyond that, the Card Celestial was still waiting for her in the original present—someone she would inevitably have to face once she retrieved the World Calamity Stake and returned from this past using the time vestige.

Because of that, she needed to mentally and physically subdue the Hybrid Celestial. She needed to make him her love slave—someone who would obey her every command and desire, regardless of the harm it brought to himself. She needed him firmly under her control, so that nothing unexpected could happen during her escape from the Card Realm and throughout her comeback in the Dark Realm.

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I was awe-inspired watching Lucine produce a black hole, only for Slay to casually toss it into the void as if they were playing catch with a ball. As far as I knew, there were two Hybrid Runes capable of producing black holes. The first was the Hybrid Rune: Gravity, and the second was the Hybrid Rune: Blackhole. Both were based on the same

Newtonian principle that gravity is the curvature of space-time, yet they achieved similar results through entirely different methods.

Hybrid Rune: Gravity was formed by the fusion of the Earth Rule and Space Rule meanings, enhancing the user's invisible gravitation pull on surrounding mass—much like how a planet pulls its moons into orbit.

According to Newtonian law, everything with mass exerts its own gravitational force. Hybrid Rune: Gravity allowed the user to amplify their personal gravitational field and manipulate how it interacted with other gravitational sources. This meant they could alter their own gravity to fly—or increase it to crush everything around them.

However, Hybrid Rune: Gravity could only create a black hole through self-destruction, similar to how a dying star collapses to form one. To do so, the user would have to compress their own mass inward, forcefully folding space into itself—literally turning themselves into a black hole. It was basically a more devastating form of self-implosion.

Meanwhile, Hybrid Rune: Blackhole, formed by fusing Space and Time rule meanings, allowed the user to manipulate the space and time of themselves and anything within their range. In other words, they could directly alter the curvature of space-time around themselves or any target nearby. As a result, they could control the gravitational forces acting on themselves and on anything within that range. Hence, by pushing the curvature of space and time to extremes, they could force any point in space to collapse into a black hole.

I had yet to start the comprehension of the Earth, Space, and Time rules, let alone their meanings, and fuse them to forge hybrid runes. So all I could rely on was my scientific understanding and the descriptions I had read in the Infinity Library to interpret what I was witnessing.

I could use my Primordial Soul Pupils to examine the fused rule meanings within Lucine's and Slay's hybrid runes—but then I would be risking rule contamination. I wasn't willing to pay that price just to satisfy my curiosity. It was far too steep a cost to scratch an intellectual itch.

From what I could gather, Lucine had used the Hybrid Rune: Blackhole to create the tiny blackhole, while Slay had used a combination of both Gravity and Blackhole hybrid runes to stably move it atop her index finger and casually chuck it into the void so that it wouldn't detonate halfway through.

With this, Slay not only outperformed Lucine in every aspect but also displayed flawless control over mass, space, and time. Combined with her Semi-Ruler-class realm and her racial ability of Negative Passion, she was practically invincible.

How was anyone supposed to fight something of that caliber?

Lucine's despair was justified.

Sniff. Sniff.

Suddenly, I caught a familiar fruity scent in the air. It was the fragrance of the incense sticks I had made for Dredre, crafted from the bark and oils of the World Calamity Tree.

My gaze snapped toward the gigantic wooden stake embedded in the fabric of space-time. The flat end of it was slowly burning—no flame, just a red-hot ember glow, releasing thin trails of soot. The enormous stake, made from a twig of a World Calamity Tree, now looked like a colossal incense stick filling our surroundings with a refreshing but mesmerizing fruity scent.

Seeing this, panic surged through me and a heavy sense of urgency gripped my chest. I had planned to use that gigantic World Calamity Tree wooden stake as the evolutionary material to unlock my fifth transformation. I didn't think I could find another evolutionary material of similar or better fit for my transformation. And even if such a material existed, I wasn't sure I currently had the strength to obtain it. After all, World Calamity Trees were extinct, and any materials derived from them were heavily regulated and grossly overpriced.

When Slay first took out the stake, my mutated Ego Gem had reacted with a strong internal urge. It tried to tell me that I could use the stake as an evolutionary ingredient for its next transformation, but I had been taken aback by the fact that Slay was able to ignore the influence of my Celestial Blood Fate Domain to pay heed to it. But once I knew, I had been keeping my eye on the wooden stake. So, imagine my horror when I saw it slowly burning. Feeling I would lose the opportunity forever, I felt an urgency to retrieve it before it burned away to ash.

I wasn't the only one unhappy about this—Slay was as well. Her face twisted in irritation as she said, "It seems we will have to speed up our introductions, my prince."

I frowned when through my primordial soul pupils I learned the stake was burning because the Card Celestial had finally noticed the oddity in one of its past and was attempting to deal with it. However, the ability of the tool crafted from a Ruler-class World Calamity Tree twig was holding it back—at the cost of slowly burning away its own durability.

If all nine stakes of the set had been nailed into the space-time fabric around the Card Celestial in a proper array formation, they would have fully restrained it and left it helpless. But with only one stake in place, the Card Celestial could still force its way through. It was only a matter of time.

No wonder Slay's smug expression had soured so suddenly—it was like she had just swallowed a fly. Not only was the wooden stake priceless, but being noticed by the Card Celestial meant that she could no longer escape without confronting the Card Celestial.

With the combination of the gigantic wooden stake tool and the hybrid celestial, she should have known better, it was impossible for her not to attract the attention of the Card Celestial. Still, she wasn't overly worried as she had the Devil Merchant Code backing her. As long as she was willing to pay, anything was possible.

Slay wasn't the only one in a predicament, so was I. I had to get a gigantic world calamity tree wooden stake tool before the Card Celestial fully reduced it to ash.

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Chapter 2511 - 1000 Curse Armor

[1,010 words]

Chapter 2511: 1000 Curse Armor

Date: Unspecified

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Aside from restricting the invaders' realms, the card world's will had never directly acted against them. I never understood why. But if I had to speculate, then based on what I was experiencing now, it was most likely because it had never considered the invaders a true threat to its existence—at least not until Slay used that stake-shaped tool carved from the twig of a world calamity tree. That was what finally frightened it into intervening.

"My prince, please do not resist. I do not wish to harm you. But if you leave me no choice..." Slay warned, drawing out a slave globe meant to capture both Lucine and me. Her other hand reached for the stake tool, clearly prepared to flee this damned realm the moment she secured us.

However, she froze mid-sentence as my body began to expand—slowly, steadily—until I stood nearly nine feet tall. Before she could react, she realized the transformation had only begun. From my skin, one after another, 1024 identical heads emerged, each accompanied by a pair of humanoid arms and legs. They sprouted all at once, intertwining and layering over me, forming a grotesque lattice.

They wove themselves together like living links, wrapping around my form until my entire body was encased in something resembling chainmail—only this armor was composed of heads, limbs, and faces. As the transformation settled, the newly formed appendages dried and hardened, solidifying into a macabre exoskeletal plating fused with my skin.

The most unsettling part was the eyes. Even hardened, they moved—rolling, twitching—each face shifting through expressions that were impossible to read. Anger, grief, agony, joy, madness—every emotion flickered across them, as though a thousand different souls were screaming through the armor, all at once.

'*Thousand Curse Armor*,' I intoned silently, the words resonating through my mind. I nodded in quiet satisfaction. Then, fixing my gaze on Slay, I asked, "Well then—how do you like it?"

My Curse Armor was formed from approximately 1,024 ruler-class curses, though calling it that precisely lacked a certain impact. So, I stuck with the name 1000 curse armor.

The Thousand Curse Incarnation was my strongest form, and Thousand Curse Armor was my strongest armor. Wearing the strongest armor over the strongest form, I felt untouchable—as if there was no existence I could not face. And when I fueled this greatest combo of mine with pure primordial energy, I reached a state that was undeniably my peak.

I allowed myself to reveal this only because the Card Celestial could not observe anything occurring here. The stake-shaped tool carved from the twig of a world calamity tree severed its perception in these parts entirely. That meant I did not have to worry about it discovering that I could summon and wield primordial energy.

And to be honest, Slay was the kind of opponent I was trying to find to test my full power against. An opponent with whom I could fight, unleashing my full power without holding back.

"My prince, now you are my type," Slay said with a glint in her black beady eyes. And soon complained in annoyance, "Your Highness, do we have to do this? Now? Can't you just obediently enter the slave globe?" She turned to look at the stake and her heart ached seeing its durability slowly burning away.

"My prince... this form of yours is my type," Slay murmured, a glint flickering in her beady, black eyes. But almost immediately, her expression twisted into irritation. "Your Highness, must we really do this? *Right now*? Could you not simply enter the slave globe obediently?"

Slay unconsciously glanced at the stake shaped tool curved out of the twig of a world calamity tree. I could clearly see the pain in her eyes as she watched its durability

continue to burn away. I understood what she was feeling as I too felt the same. Which was exactly why this needed to end quickly.

Meanwhile, Lucine—who had already lost the will to resist after witnessing Slay's flawless command over mass, space, and time—was now overwhelmed by a conflicted storm of emotions. Horror twisted her expression as she watched my transformation, disbelief tightening her breath at the powerful presence I exerted. And yet, despite her misgivings about my chances against Slay, despite the dread that clung to her like a second skin... a faint, unbidden hope surfaced within her. A hope that perhaps, somehow, I could stand against Slay—and we would survive this ordeal.

"My prince, forgive me... but I will have to be rough now," Slay said, just as the appendage atop her head snapped forward like a whip. It lashed toward me at a neck-breaking speed.

The moment the meaty club at the end of her pseudopod was about to strike me, I shifted my weight and sidestepped, catching it in my right hand. In my grasp, it writhed and stretched, straining violently to break free. When brute force failed, it instead coiled along my arm, tightening and twisting in an attempt to crush or contort the limb into submission.

Slay's lips curled into a knowing smirk, seeing me play right into her arms. Her racial ability's influence on her targets grew stronger with any form of direct physical contact. Even if the pseudopod could not physically harm me, prolonged touch meant her influence would seep in—slowly, steadily—attempting to erode and claim me the longer our bodies remained connected.

'Wyatt, what are you doing? Let go.'

Lucine's voice sounded sharply in my mind, strained with urgency. *'Didn't I warn you? Her ability's influence deepens the more exposed you are to her. The longer you stay near her—the more you see her, smell her, hear her, touch her, the more you...'* her voice trembled, *'taste her—the stronger her hold on you becomes. Let go of her pseudopod. Now.'* She repeated her deduction of Slay's racial ability, desperate to make me understand before it was too late.

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'Don't worry about me. I know what I'm doing,' I responded to Lucine, while simultaneously directing her to move as far away from the stake as possible. *'And whatever you do, do not try to pull the stake out. Don't ask why. Just trust me, for once—stay away from it.'*

I had already noticed her searching for a chance to remove the stake while I was keeping Slay occupied. She believed that if the stake was pulled free, the Card World's will would resume its suppression, forcing Slay's realm back down. She had no idea that Slay had provoked the Card Celestial itself—and it was now pushing with everything it had to break through into this space-time and take care of the puny threat once and for all.

'Fine,'

Lucine conceded, though reluctantly. She trusted that I must have a reason strong enough to justify my actions. However, if she knew my true intentions—if she understood the unnecessary risks I was taking—I doubted she would be willing to gamble alongside me.

Lucine had never once considered reaching out to the Morningstar University or other card apprentices of this timeline for help. She didn't want to place any additional strain on the time prison's loop. If a native card apprentice of this timeline were to realize that someone from the canon timeline had turned their timeline into a time prison with a never-ending time-loop, it would only complicate matters further. There was no telling what consequences might follow—or how those consequences might ripple back and affect the canon timeline itself.

And there was another reason—each time the time prison loop reset, Morningstar University in this time gets destroyed in an explosion caused by a failed experiment. That blast would gravely injure Slay, who gets thrown into the time prison. In that weakened state, she would always summon that same grimoire-like tool and eventually begin to scream:

"Devil Merchant Code."

Again.

And again.

And again. Until she realized something was off. Then she would begin to scrutinize her surroundings—first the remains of the university, the five regions, then the world itself, and eventually the timeline—until she uncovered the truth and reset the timeline and memories back to the beginning, continuing the cycle.

This was why no card apprentice from Morningstar University ever arrived, despite the chaos erupting in the 'Garden of Beginning.' They had long since monitored and recorded every possible reaction Slay would have within this time prison. They had carefully mapped a safe path to enter this world only when necessary—to search for resources for their projects in the time vestige.

Morningstar University in this timeline was chosen precisely because it was already fated to be destroyed. It was a timeline that could be sacrificed—made into Slay's eternal cage.

Call it hypocrisy or something else if you like, but in the end, Lucine's ancestors had taken a perfectly functional timeline and turned it into a time prison just because Morningstar University gets destroyed here—despite the fact that it was merely an alternate branch of the canon timeline.

"You two, I am starting to feel left out," Slay remarked with exaggerated melancholy, clearly sensing the mental exchange between Lucine and me.

I frowned, noticing that she was no longer rushing to subdue me. Instead, she had eased into a conversational pace, waiting—letting her racial abilities influence seep in, increasing her hold over me with time. This caused me to wonder if my grip on her pseudopod had startled her more than she let on. I hadn't expected caution from her, especially when she believed she still held the advantage.

"Stop teasing me already," I remarked proactively, my gaze sharpening. "Show me what you've got." I said trying to confirm if my guess was right.

"All in good time, my prince. Have a little patience," Slay replied, with a calculated smile. Seeing the Hybrid Celestial suddenly erupt with so much power out of nowhere had unsettled her. Not to mention the eerie and baleful aura surrounding him. She began to doubt that, having pushed them into the corner, the Hybrid Celestial was planning to bring her down with him. To sacrifice himself to save his friend's life.

This way, one of them gets to live and stop her from returning to the canon timeline.

Slay didn't dare to underestimate what a hybrid celestial was capable of. Not to forget, the hybrid celestial was her shortcut to perfecting her body and making a quick comeback in the Dark realm.

There was just too much on the line to act willful. So she chose the safest approach, even if it meant letting the wooden stake carved from the world calamity tree's twig erode itself away. She blamed herself for the mess, *'This is what I get for playing with my food.'*

"Sigh." I exhaled, realizing Slay truly had no intention of fighting me, let alone confronting me directly.

Just then, I felt the subtle slackening of her pseudopod's grip around my wrist—it was deliberately slow in order not to alert me. She was preparing to discard it before I could use it against her. It wasn't even a sacrifice, considering she already intended to abandon this physical body after returning to the canon timeline. It was tainted by this timeline, after all.

So she had indeed noticed something. Had she seen through my use of primordial energy? I had been careful—extremely careful. But now wasn't the time to dwell on that. If there was a moment to act, it was now.

'Evil Sealing — Thousand Curse Coffin,' I chanted mentally, activating one of my ultimate techniques knowing that if I tried to fight her head-on, she would simply avoid me and stall, waiting for her racial ability to erode my will. Which was never going to happen considering my thousand plus primordial spirits. Therefore, I needed to end this in one decisive strike without giving her a chance to respond.

"—Shit!" Slay snapped, instantly sensing the shift in my soul signature. Her instincts screamed at her. Without hesitation, she tried to sever the connection—discarding the pseudopod entirely—terrified that I might use the physical contact between us to drag her down with me with my last breath.

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'Evil Sealing Thousand Curse Coffin!'

With my chant, the eyes of all one thousand and twenty-four heads woven into my Curse Armor ignited with a dangerous radiance, as though each one had awakened.

The expressions on the heads varied—vivid, shifting, disturbingly alive. Each face twisted and contorted, embodying the curse that its primordial spirit had housed to become a full curse incarnation. At the same time, the fingers and toes of the interwoven hands and legs began to twitch—first faintly, then unmistakably—before fully awakening. As primordial energy surged through them, their dried up and hardened skin flushed with a menacing red radiance, radiating a paradoxical sensation of searing heat and bone-deep cold.

Within a fraction of a second, the interwoven mass of more than a thousand heads and their paired limbs began to unravel. They detached from my skin in a smooth, organic motion and latched onto Slay's pseudopod still coiled around my wrist. Tearing from my form, they crawled and slithered upward along the pseudopod in a grotesque, synchronized surge.

Slay, who had already been on high alert and was subtly preparing to sacrifice her pseudopod, reacted the instant she saw this. She immediately severed the pseudopod attached to her head and moved back, putting distance between us while the corner of her lips turned upwards in a grin. The detachment of the appendage revealed her smooth pink head, the elongated, bulbous skull angling diagonally to support the whip-like pseudopod with its hardened, fleshy club-shaped tip.

With the bridge between us severed, the thousand-plus curse incarnations crawling along the pseudopod had seemingly lost their path to their target—at least, that was what Slay believed. But these were curse incarnations powered by primordial energy. The moment they had latched onto her pseudopod, escape had already become impossible. They would haunt her to the end of the world. They were inevitable.

The smug look on Slay's face froze the moment she realized the Hybrid Celestial was no longer encased in his grotesque flesh armor. A faint itch began crawling across her skin. At first, it was merely irritating—then, in the very next breath, it surged into agony. It felt as though something was burrowing beneath her flesh, clawing and tearing, struggling to rip the skin and crawl to the surface from the depths of her soul.

Tormented, Slay looked down to see her pink skin stretching taut, the outlines of tightly packed heads, arms, and legs pressing from beneath—like ceramic wrap pulled to its absolute breaking point over a mass of writhing faces and limbs.

The sight was grotesque—so much so that it wasn't only Slay who felt terror. Everyone who witnessed her current state was struck with the same chilling dread.

Lucine nearly fainted at the sight of human faces and limbs pressing outward from beneath Slay's skin—like the distended belly of a pregnant woman long past her term with a grotesque outline of the baby's head and limbs forming on it. As if stuffed inside a jam-packed jar made of flesh, stretching to its limits to make room.

Lucine couldn't tear her eyes away from the grotesque spectacle, but eventually her gaze shifted to the one responsible for it. Just like Slay, she had sensed the sinister, baleful force behind his power. Her mind instinctively leaped to the worst possible conclusion. She wanted to stop him—to tell him not to throw his life away for hers—but she had no idea how they could prevent Slay from returning to the canon timeline. She simply wasn't strong enough and out of options.

In that helplessness, Lucine finally understood the privilege she had been ignorant of her entire life. She wanted to risk her life and drag Slay down with her, but the bitter

truth struck her—aside from the crude, self-destructive detonation of her own divinity, she possessed nothing. No cards, no runes, no techniques that allowed one to gamble life for overwhelming power. She had never needed them before.

Only now did she begin to understand what the boy had been trying to help her realize earlier—when they spoke of her Origin Card. *'So this is why... my Origin Card had only triggered once, and never again.'*

Meanwhile, I frowned, observing that Slay's body was not just strong, but it was very versatile. Her body not only withstood the initial wave of more than thousand ruler-class curses powered by primordial energy, but continued to resist. It was a clear demonstration of just how terrifying an Ovumite physique truly was.

However, the struggle did not last long. Hive spirit and had extensively studied Slay's soul pathways and arrangement, perceiving the weak points of her physique. Allowing the curses to make a targeted strike. As such the tug of war between Slay's physique and my curses ended in my favor.

The heads and limbs burst through her skin, tearing it to bloody shreds, and began to weave themselves together—fingers linking with fingers, toes hooking around toes—forming a macabre lattice. In moments, Slay was encased in a coffin made of interlocked heads and limbs, with only her face left exposed, positioned as the grim centerpiece of the grotesque construct.

Until the very end—aside from the initial shock—Slay remained confident that her physique could suppress my curses. After all, through countless cycles of selective breeding, she had forged a body that could, in principle, be considered immune to curses. Even if they were of higher class than her in strength.

But reality struck without mercy. Of course, she struggled, fought with everything she possessed—only to find that the very strength and physique she took pride in had been bound, suppressed, and rendered useless the moment she was restrained and sealed within the flesh coffin.

Encased in the Evil-Sealing Thousand-Curse Coffin, Slay's once-overwhelming presence—the aura that had dominated the battlefield—disappeared in an instant. Removing the immense unruly pressure on the others. Lucine, inching toward the stake cautiously, asked, "Is it over?" Prepared to remove the stake at the first sign of aggression from Slay.

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"Yes. So, just step away from the stake for now," I said, reassuring Lucine and asking her not to remove it until I gave the signal.

"No. I'll stay right here—just in case," she refused, shaking her head with a grim, steady resolve.

I couldn't help but find it a little endearing—like a fully domesticated husky refusing to step outside into winter snow, choosing heated floors over loyalty, yet still trying to look brave.

"Don't worry, I won't remove it unless there's no other choice. And... are you alright?" Lucine added, unable to hide her concern. She had sensed it—my energy signature had already fallen back to the Card Master realm. She couldn't help but wonder what price I had paid to wield that power.

The guilt sank in sharply. She had come here to save me, yet she was the one being protected. The realization left her embarrassed—almost ashamed.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Just give me a minute to finish this. Then we can leave this bloody past behind us," I replied, turning my attention to the coffin. I had used every curse in my arsenal to seal Slay, so naturally, my realm had reverted to its original state.

The Evil-Sealing Thousand-Curse Coffin, with Slay bound within it, slowly drifted toward me. It stood upright, allowing our gazes to meet directly. Sealed at the very moment she believed she had finally escaped her time-prison, I had expected frustration or agony on her face. Instead, the greed in her eyes for me only deepened.

"My prince... you truly surprised me," Slay murmured, her voice disturbingly serene—as if she had simply discovered something she desired even more, having realized that the Hybrid Celestial was far stronger than she had ever anticipated.

As a member of a race born to fight and pursue the ultimate perfected physique, Slay, though clearly disappointed, accepted defeat against me gracefully. Unlike the ancestors of Lucine, who had tricked and trapped her in their temporal prison, he had defeated her body directly—overpowering her physique in a fair and honest fight.

Because of that, she felt no anger toward him. Instead, her desire toward him only intensified. To her, the stronger the Hybrid Celestial proved to be, the further she could advance toward physical perfection by claiming his essence.

This realization alone filled her with hope and joy. In her eyes, he had not defeated her but had proved himself to her. This mindset prevented her from having a mental breakdown, having been sealed right when she was beginning to think that not only she was free but hit the jackpot.

Seeing her current mental state, I found myself both impressed and relieved. It made the conversation I intended to have with her far easier than I had anticipated. And truly, she had nothing to be ashamed of in falling victim to my Evil-Sealing Thousand-Curse Coffin. It was one of the ultimate techniques I had devised specifically to counter beings on the level of the Deviant Devil Mamas Mulias, Librarian Jr., Elder Chaos Dwarfs, and similar entities.

Actually, the fact that her physique had nearly resisted it—if not for the curses exploiting its precise weak points and being fueled by primordial energy—spoke volumes about her strength. Yet that realization brought another to the forefront: Perhaps my ultimate techniques were still not as strong enough as I would like them to be. To restrain beings capable of traversing anywhere in myriad realms as if they were merely strolling through their neighborhood.

"You seem to be in a rather good mood for someone who just lost everything she held in the palm of her hand," I remarked, teasing lightly before steering toward the point.

"What can I say? I'm an optimist," Slay replied with a calm and conversational tone. "I don't dwell on what I lose, only on what I stand to gain. After all, you have to give something up to make room for more, don't you think?" She spoke as though she weren't sealed and a prisoner, but a couple of friends talking over a cup of coffee. Instead of standing on opposite sides of the bars.

I wasn't sure what fueled her composure—and I didn't have the time to deduce it. The wooden stake carved from the twig of a World Calamity Tree was burning faster now, the embers consuming it at a visibly accelerating rate. If this continued, in just a few more minutes there wouldn't be enough material left for me to offer to my Primordial Calamity Soul Gem as an evolutionary ingredient to satisfy one of the conditions for unlocking my Fifth Transformation.

"Haha, you're right. Then, if you don't mind my asking—what exactly are you trying to make room for?" I asked, marking the beginning of the negotiation. Slay was far more valuable to me alive as a blood kin than dead or reduced to a mere calamity daughter gem.

If I simply wanted a semi-ruler-class Ovumite Calamity Daughter Gem, I could have fed her a daughter gem and been done with it. But for obvious reasons, I intended to recruit Slay as blood kin, not convert her into a daughter gem.

In most cases, I would first recruit the target into a calamity daughter gem and then prompt them into blood kin. But with Slay, I needed to take a different approach to

maximize the potential of her marvelous physique. For that, she had to be brought in as bloodkin from the start.

Thanks to the extraordinary physiology of the Ovumite, Slay would not simply turn into a calamity daughter gem when fed one. Instead, she would conceive a new body through it—and be reborn as a perfected Primordial Calamity Daughter Gem. Now imagine that process occurring under the influence of my cursed bloodline.

From what I had learned through my existing bloodkin, as long as the target willingly surrendered themselves and allowed their body to become a calamity daughter gem, they would be chosen by the cursed bloodline and reborn as bloodkin.

Given that, and considering our current circumstances, I believed I could negotiate with Slay to join me as one of my bloodkins.

Did this negotiation really need to happen now, of all times?

Yes, because I didn't have a storage card capable of storing away the Evil Sealing Thousand Curse Coffin. And knowing a Celestial's temper, the moment the Card Celestial arrives, it would erase Slay from existence without hesitation—to eliminate even the slightest perceived threat to itself. Like everything else up to this point, this was now or never.

If the negotiation failed... I could always cut my losses and convert her into a calamity daughter gem. Then Card Celestial will have to show mercy, or else I had other methods to ensure the safety of my daughter gems.

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An evil sealing thousand curse coffin forged from one thousand and twenty-four curse incarnations, each harboring a ruler-class curse, sealed away every facet of the semi-ruler-class Ovumite was something only an unranked storage item card could hold.

Slay might have appeared calm and compliant on the surface, but beneath that façade, her will fought fiercely against the curses suppressing her strength. Even sealed, her body never ceased its struggle, instinctively resisting the curse's grip. Empowered by her indomitable will and innate resilience to curses, she relentlessly strained to break free from her confinement.

If not for the continuous flow of primordial energy sustaining the Thousand-Curse Coffin's sinister seal, her physical form would have eventually overpowered the curse's influence and shattered it entirely. Honestly, I doubt evil sealing thousand curse coffin would have been able to successfully seal Slay if not for the primordial energy.

Even without the threat of the Card Celestial discovering my use of primordial energy or turning its wrath on her, I doubted I could remove the Evil-Sealing Thousand-Curse Coffin sealing Slay from this past to our present.

Currently, Slay's body's innate resistance to curses and the coffin's primordial soul-powered bindings were locked in a situation similar to the river and the dam. I feared that the temporal and spatial turbulence within this time vestige might disrupt that balance—shifting the scales in Slay's favor.

This only proved that even without their high realms, the semi-ruler and higher-class dark races were monstrously powerful. Their racial physiques and inherent traits were nothing to underestimate. They were much like me—beings whose true strength couldn't be measured by realm alone. Any other regular semi-ruler-class devil would have been easily subdued by the Evil-Sealing Thousand-Curse Coffin, even without it being fueled by primordial energy—but not Slay.

It wasn't that she was stronger; rather, through her racial ability, she had refined her body's resistance to curses to its utmost limit. It mirrored the way I was immune to the laws of time. Unfortunately for her, that resistance wasn't absolute. Perhaps one day, just like her, I too would discover the limits of my immunity to the time rule. But I was sure before that unfortunate day arrived I would be prepared for it.

"What else could it be but my pursuit to perfect my body to its zenith? If you're willing to assist me, I'll owe you a debt. We Ovumites always repay our gratitude," Slay replied, her tone resolute and devoid of hesitation. Her words made it clear—her sole obsession was evolving her body to the absolute pinnacle of the myriad realms. In essence, she was declaring her willingness to set aside the differences between us and even owe me a favor, so long as I aided her.

Hearing her out, my brows tightened. She was speaking as though she still held control, as if she could shatter the Evil Sealing Thousand-Curse Coffin at any moment. It seemed I would have to remind her of the reality of her situation. This wasn't a negotiation between equals—it was more like a death row inmate making a final plea before the execution.

She knew she held no leverage to bargain with me—I held her life and death firmly in my grasp. All it would take was for me to pull out the stake, and the Card Celestial would take care of the rest. Yet, she was acting tough. With all the doors shut, she had no choice but to bluff.

"Beggars don't get to choose. Here's the deal, I will not only give you my essence, but also help you refine your body to perfection—if you swear absolute loyalty to me. Otherwise, I'll remove the stake and let the Celestial Will erase your pitiful existence from this world. You don't have all day to decide," I said, my gaze switching to the stake driven through the space time fabric of the physical plane.

I had laid all my cards on the table, without deception or pretense. After all, one cannot be tricked into becoming my bloodkin—the cursed bloodline only accepts those who embrace their fate willingly and completely. That's why I had to be transparent and honest with Slay.

Now the choice lay entirely with Slay—she could either submit to a lifetime of servitude, trusting my promise to help her refine the perfect body, or die at the hands of the Card Celestial. Knowing the Ovumites' obsession with achieving bodily perfection, I was confident the odds were in my favor.

Even if she chose death, it wouldn't matter. I would simply turn her into a Calamity Daughter Gem. After all, a semi-ruler-class Ovumite calamity daughter gem would serve me far better than a dead Ovumite ever could.

"You know, the last person who made me that promise—in exchange for my loyalty—left me to rot in this damned time prison," Slay spat, her voice dripping with venomous resentment. "I don't even know how long it's been, but it's been long enough for me to stop believing he'll ever come back for me. And now, you come offering the same deal. Tell me—how do you expect me to react?"

"The 'Ten Commandments faction' was annihilated by our predecessors," I replied evenly. "The Devil Merchant Code liquidated all your assets to recover its debts, and now the 'Seven Princes of Hell' faction hold its right to our world. It's not that no one from your faction wants to save you, Slay—it's that no one from your faction remains to do so. As for trusting me... I honestly can't say. But as long as you're alive, we can find out together. So—what's your choice?"

I didn't give her the luxury of dwelling on her emotions; time was slipping away fast. One-fourth of the stake had already turned to ash, and I needed at least half of it intact to fulfill the evolutionary conditions for my fifth transformation. I wasn't worried about her holding a grudge against me over our predecessors ending her faction. If she did, then good. She had another reason to live.

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"Seven Princes of Hell? Who the hell are those bastards? How dare they set their sights on the property of the 'Ten Commandments?' Who gave them the nerve?" Slay roared, her voice booming with fury. Thankfully, her power and realm were sealed—otherwise, our eardrums would've been blown apart.

Even in her rage, she wasn't stupid. She didn't dare lay blame on me or the card apprentices for the fall of her faction. She was doing everything she could to redirect her anger elsewhere, forcing herself to stay focused on the negotiation. She already lacked leverage; giving me a reason to withdraw would only make things worse for her.

From the very beginning, it was clear that she wanted to bargain for her life—but eternal servitude wasn't a price she was willing to pay. She was desperately trying to lower the cost, to get out with something left of herself to make a strong comeback.

Funny how life turns on its head—once, she held her freedom in her hands. Now, she was reduced to bargaining for her very survival.

Once she finished venting her anger, Slay turned her focus to me and asked, "If I agree to your deal, how do you plan to guarantee my loyalty? Do I have to sign a soul contract?"

She knew her situation better than anyone. As a devil merchant, she understood the rules of negotiation inside out—but reality wasn't something she could sweet-talk her way out of this time. There wasn't enough time left for her usual clever tactics or slow, calculated bargaining. The situation was desperate—this was a now-or-never moment.

The instant the Celestial Will descends, it would be over for her. She had known the risk from the very moment she drew out the stake carved from the twig of the World Calamity Tree.

"Nope, nothing like that. Ovumite's reputation speaks for itself. All I need from you is to serve me willingly and wholeheartedly," I said, making it clear that I wasn't forcing her into servitude—she was choosing it, in exchange for her life.

For a dark entity, Ovumites were known to be honorable—so long as they weren't deceived. They despised trickery more than anything. When they descended from the shrouded hills with pure intentions and open hearts, unaware of the deceitful ways of

the Dark Realm. But the realm saw them as naïve outsiders, simple folk to be exploited and fooled at every step.

Unfortunately for their deceivers, the Ovumites possessed exceptional bodies that made enslaving them nearly impossible. Quick to learn and even quicker to evolve, they soon outgrew any chains meant to bind them. Their adaptability was their greatest gift—and their greatest weapon.

That's why you'd never find an Ovumite slave in the entire Dark Realm. Every one of them, given time, would rise to a place of power—admired, feared, and even worshipped by those who once looked down on them.

"Ah," Slay muttered, clearly taken aback that a hybrid celestial from the backwaters of the Myriad Realm knew so much about her kind. Only then did she begin to realize how badly she had underestimated me—even though she had tried her best not to, given my celestial heritage.

"One more thing," she continued, regaining her composure, "how do you plan to handle this realm's Celestial Will? It has already marked me as a threat—it won't let me go."

Now that she had shown a hint of willingness, her cunning started to surface again. If I didn't have a plan to deal with the Celestial Will, that weakness would become her leverage. The negotiation was far from over; she hadn't agreed to anything yet—just left the door open.

Unfortunately for her, I wasn't going to grovel just to get her to take the final step. Why would I? Even if I didn't know how to counter the Celestial Will—but she did—it didn't change the fact that she was still my prisoner. Whatever method she had to save herself would only matter after I chose to release her. Until then, she could only wait to die.

"You'll have to trust me on that. I have my ways," I said calmly, my tone carrying just enough mystery to keep her guessing. I didn't bother calling out her little trap—after all, fighting for her life was her right, just as protecting mine was my own.

Slay's eyes narrowed as she studied me, realizing I hadn't taken the bait. I kept my impatience well hidden, my expression steady and unreadable. I couldn't afford her knowing that time was strangling me just as much as it was her—perhaps even more.

She still had time until the stake was completely burned, but I only had until half of it turned to ash. A quarter was already gone, and with each crackle of the burning wood, my unease deepened. Seeing my plan was taking longer, I found myself wondering if a Semi-ruler-class Ovumite bloodkin was worth losing a perfect evolutionary ingredient for unlocking one of the conditions of my fifth transformation.

One the one hand I didn't know if conditions would ever perfectly align for me to get a powerful and capable Semi-ruler-class bloodkin like Slay. On the other hand I didn't know if I could ever find wood from a ruler-class world calamity tree. It was a dilemma that I wouldn't have to face if Slay were to stop dragging this negotiation out and give an answer right now.

"Fine, I agree to willingly and wholeheartedly serve you. But, I want your essence upfront. As, if you fail to protect me from the realm's celestial will, our deal is off and I will do everything in my power to protect myself," Slay finally agreed to my offer only after adding a condition of her own.

"Sure, we have a deal then," I said with a controlled smile, knowing what was going through Slay's mind. Unfortunately for her, regardless of what she had planned once she willingly ingested my primordial celestial daughter gem, I would win.

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Lucine was slowly inching toward the stake driven into the space-time fabric of the physical plane, despite my clear warning not to. Thankfully, she didn't try to remove it. It seemed Slay's earlier burst of full power had left a mark on her—a lingering trauma that wouldn't fade so easily. She only felt safe when she believed she had some measure of control over the situation.

I couldn't blame her. I'd probably feel the same if Slay had used her racial ability to turn my own strength against me. Being betrayed by your own power—your own body—wasn't something a mind could recover from easily.

Lucine no longer felt safe in her own flesh, nor in her mind. I honestly couldn't imagine how anyone could cope with that kind of violation.

She would have to work through that, just as she was doing now.

As Lucine listened to my exchange with Slay, her expression kept shifting—curiosity, disbelief, then something sharper. She was clearly startled to realize that I knew far more about the Ten Commandments and Slay than I had ever let on. It dawned on her that my secrets went deeper than just hidden strength.

A flicker of grievance crossed her face; she couldn't help but feel as though she'd been used, deceived even. But it wasn't my fault she had underestimated me because of my age—and talked more than she should have in hopes to have me enroll into Morningstar University.

However, she got over it quickly—at least outwardly. When she realized I was planning to recruit Slay, her shock was almost comical. That was the kind of idea people whispered about but never dared to attempt.

It wasn't that no one had ever thought of it before. Many card apprentices had tried to subdue or enslave a devil, but such attempts usually ended in tragedy. Devils would rather embrace death than serve a lowly card apprentice from some backwater corner of the Myriad Realms. After all, they couldn't truly die outside the Dark Realm—it merely sent their souls back into the embrace of the Dark Realm's womb waiting for an opportunity for revival. That simple fact made enslaving them nearly impossible.

Sure, a card apprentice could force open a gate to the Dark Realm and destroy a devil there permanently, but that was a gamble no sane person would take. The risk far outweighed the reward—especially when facing a creature armed with powers and schemes most couldn't even begin to comprehend.

Lucine couldn't help but wonder how I actually planned to pull it off. Still, she wasn't entirely in the dark—she had caught fragments of the exchange between Slay and me and seemed to have pieced together part of the picture. From what she could tell, I was using the imminent arrival of the Card World's Will as leverage, turning it into a leverage against Slay in my plan to enslave her.

What puzzled her, though, was how seriously Slay seemed to take the threat. Devils didn't truly die outside the Dark Realm; at worst, their essence would disperse and eventually return to the womb of the Dark Realm's will. Yet Slay's unease was unmistakable—she was genuinely afraid.

Lucine frowned, realizing there was more at play than she understood. There had to be something hidden—some detail that only Slay and I knew—something that made even a devil fear death outside her own realm.

"Unless... no way," Lucine whispered under her breath, her mind racing. Could the realm's Celestial Will truly possess the power to kill a devil outright? The more she thought about it, the more it seemed possible. After all, the might of a Celestial Will was something far beyond her comprehension—something that transcended the laws she knew.

'No wonder he told me not to pull out the stake,' she realized, her pulse quickening as the pieces began to fall into place. After all, the stake was one thinking keeping the Celestial Will's power from influencing this past.

Understanding that, Lucine's awe grew. *'Maybe—just maybe—he really could pull it off.'* Perhaps she was witnessing history in the making: the moment a mere card master succeeded in doing what no one else in the card world's history ever had—subduing a devil.

Under Lucine's astonished gaze, I summoned a Primordial Calamity Daughter Gem and held it before Slay's lips. "This gem," I said calmly, "is the crystallization of my essence. It contains everything you need to conceive yourself a new body."

Slay didn't hesitate. She parted her lips and accepted the gem without a trace of suspicion. She knew well enough that if I'd intended to harm her, I wouldn't need her consent to do it. She wasn't worried about swallowing the essence now because as an Ovumite, she could simply store the essence and choose to conceive her new vessel at her convenience.

However, the moment she tried to swallow it and store it within her body, her confidence faltered. To her shock, the gem instantly dissolved in her mouth, flooding her body with its essence before she could react.

Her eyes widened in horror as she realized her body had already become pregnant, the process of growing her new vessel in her womb beginning on its own.

But her terror wasn't born from the act itself—it came from what it meant. The body being nourished within her was tainted by the temporal laws of this timeline. When she eventually returned to her original timeline, this vessel would disintegrate into ash for breaking the taboos of the time rule. Even if she abandoned it and regenerated another, that one too would be marked by the same curse of time. By being born in this past and not the original present, the very origin of her new body would be breaking the taboos of the time rule.

If things continued as they were, she once gain stuck in an endless loop—a slow, suffocating curse that would force her to shed body after body until she finally surrendered her flesh altogether.

As an Ovumite, her body was her greatest pride—the purest expression of her strength, lineage, identity, and her existence itself. Every curve, every cell carried the essence of her race's perfection. To be forced to abandon that... to watch it wither and crumble away under the punishment of time—was a fate far crueler than death for her.

If she had to give up her body, she might as well die. For an Ovumite, losing their form wasn't just a loss of power—it was akin to losing their purpose, the breaking of the very core that defined their existence.

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"Aa... Wyatt, what's happening?" Lucine asked, reaching for the stake as she noticed the Evil-Sealing Thousand Curse Coffin fading with each passing second—its once-brilliant glow dimming, as though its power was being drained away.

Observing this, Lucine immediately assumed the worst. She believed that after getting what she wanted from me, Slay had broken off the negotiation and was now trying to escape from the Evil-Sealing Thousand Curse Coffin. In her frustration, she blamed me for being foolish enough to trust a devil without securing a soul contract first. What she failed to remember was that we were inside a version of the Card World's past—and any soul contract made here would hold no power in our present. Especially now, when the Celestial Will couldn't access this timeline due to the stake carved from the World Calamity Tree's twig.

"Relax—she's one of us now," I assured Lucine, keeping my tone calm but offering no details. Yet, the doubt in her eyes and her hand hovering mere inches from the massive wooden stake told me she was past the point of taking my word for it.

Sighing, I added, "Don't worry. The essence of the Curse Coffin being absorbed by her will ensure her obedience to me. That's all I can say. You understand how this works, don't you?"

"No, I don't. In fact, I think it would be wiser if I just pull out this stake," Lucine said, feigning ignorance as her hand inched closer to it, her eyes fixed blankly on me.

"Stop playing dumb. This isn't funny—it's serious," I said in a low, firm tone, watching her using the stake to toy with me. Even though I knew she wouldn't actually pull it out, I still played along; the last thing I wanted was to provoke her into doing something reckless.

"I'm playing dumb? No, you were," she snapped back. "You made me reveal classified secrets of our university and turned me into a fool by acting like a naïve but genius student when you clearly are not. Aren't you ashamed to act like a helpless little card master when you clearly are a lot stronger than anyone I have met so far? And why does she keep calling a Hybrid Celestial? What does it even mean? "

She was blaming me now—angry that, in her attempt to impress and recruit me by sharing info of her university's hidden inheritance, she had been outplayed. Now that I

had saved both our lives, she twisted it into me, claiming that I tricked her into exposing what she shouldn't have by pretending to be weak when I clearly am not.

When she put it that way, it did sound like I'd led her on. I hadn't forced her to tell me anything—but I hadn't stopped her either. That wasn't my fault; she should've known better. Still... her friend would have stopped her.

And then there was the issue of Slay addressing me as a Hybrid Celestial—something I had no idea how to explain to Lucine.

"Hybrid Celestials are those who can conjure a celestial rule domain—like me, for example," I told her, keeping my explanation vague enough to stay technically true. Then, steering the conversation away, I added, "I didn't trick you, Lucine. You were too eager to recruit me into your university. Don't pin your mistakes on me."

"A mistake I wouldn't have made if you'd been honest with me," she shot back, stepping away from the stake and closing the distance between us in the heat of the argument.

"Hey, I'm just a humble card master," I said with mock innocence. "It's not my fault that you—a card demigod—happen to be weaker than me. Are you sure you're not a fake card demigod?"

I wore an expression of genuine doubt as I spoke, and it hit her exactly as I expected. Lucine froze, her eyes narrowing into a chilling glare that silently asked if I'd really just said that.

"How dare you?" she snapped, her voice rising with fury. "I am a true card demigod! You're a fake card master—a shameless fraud pretending to be weak when you're clearly strong enough to stand among the greatest in our world!"

Before I could respond to her outburst, Lucine's tone suddenly shifted. "Is that thing alright?" she asked, pointing toward what remained of the Evil-Sealing Thousand Curse Coffin—now reduced to a grotesque, meter-tall egg of hardened flesh.

"Yeah, she's fine," I replied to her casually, my gaze drifting to the burning stake nearby. The embers had nearly consumed halfway through its length. By my estimate, I had only a couple of minutes left before it was too damaged to serve as an evolutionary ingredient for my fifth transformation. Unfortunately, that wasn't nearly enough time for Slay to give birth to her new body.

Yes, I knew that by having her conceive her new body here in this past, I was taking a risk of it breaking the time rule taboo and being punished by the time rule when in our present. But that risk only applied if the newborn drew nourishment from her current body, which was tainted by this timeline.

Slay's new body, however, was being nourished by the ruler-rank Thousand Twenty-Four Curses and primordial energy. There was no danger of temporal contamination. In fact, this method not only strengthened her body's resistance to curses but also allowed her to use the primordial energy to form a pure, stable vessel, free from the usual hidden defects caused by her selective breeding—where she tried to inherit traits and talents from countless mates.

This approach made her evolution both efficient and safe; her new body would be stable enough not to collapse from the conflict of incompatible physiques, traits, and abilities by having them undergo fusion with the help of primordial energy to become the best of the two worlds.

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"By the way, you don't happen to have a high-rank dimensional storage card—one that can hold an alive egg, do you?" I asked Lucine, my eyes fixed on the massive wooden stake that was moments away from burning halfway through.

Now that the Evil-Sealing Thousand Curse Coffin and Slay had, in a way, fused into this grotesque egg before me, I no longer needed a delicate unranked storage card to carry it. Any storage card capable of storing living things would do.

This was my last chance—my only shot at salvaging at least half of the gigantic stake carved from the twig of a ruler-class World Calamity Tree so that I might still be able to use it to unlock the evolutionary condition for my fifth transformation.

"Huh, why—" Lucine began, but she stopped midway as realization dawned on her. Summoning her grimoire, she asked quickly, "Do you want me to store the egg for you?"

"Would it be possible if I were to equip it to store the egg— Yes! Just store it, hurry!" I shouted, cutting myself off as I rushed toward the burning stake. Every second mattered now. I had to pull it out of the space-time fabric before the embers consumed it precisely halfway through—before the last chance to use it as an evolutionary catalyst went up in smoke.

Just as I pulled the stake free from the space-time fabric, my eyes met Lucine's—we had moved in perfect sync. She had stored the grotesque egg away in her card at the exact moment I secured the stake and fed it to my primordial calamity soul gem. But before I could sense the chances in my mutated ego gem, the world itself seemed to shudder.

The Celestial Will of the Card World surged into the timeline like a tidal wave of divine fury. Its wrathful presence pressed down on us, crushing the air from our lungs. It wasn't just me who felt it—she did too.

Lucine had met the Celestial Will before during her venture into the spiritual plane to comprehend rules and their means. This time, however, was nothing like her past encounters. She stiffened under the suffocating weight of its attention.

During her previous encounters, the Celestial Will had always regarded her with distant indifference—neither cold nor kind, a force greater than her that watched over her existence, giving her a sense of security in this vast expanse. Now, it was different.

"Wyatt, what's going on?" Lucine asked, her voice low and strained, eyes darting around as the air itself quivered under the crushing weight of divine pressure.

Her heart raced. For the first time, she personally felt its attention. However, this time... it was different. Now, she could sense unexplained anger from it. She could feel the Celestial Will's gaze on her—not distant or detached as before, but focused, seething. Its fury was unmistakable.

Was it because we tampered with time rule knowing the time taboos? No, that wasn't it as the Labyrinth of Myriad Past had existed for centuries, the Celestial Will had never reacted like this before.

Then it hit her—the egg. The grotesque, pulsating mass she had just sealed inside her SSS-rank dimensional storage card. That had to be the reason. The Celestial Will was after Slay.

Her pulse quickened as the oppressive presence pressed harder against her spirit, demanding her to hand over the egg and she turned to me, uncertainty flickering in her eyes. "Wyatt... is it because of the egg?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper, hesitant but needing to know before making her next move.

"Yes, it is. Give me a second—I'll work something out," I told her, keeping my tone steady even as the divine pressure bore down on us harder.

Closing my eyes, I used my dual presence, one anchored in the physical world, the other extending into the spiritual plane. To help project my celestial voice across the fabric of both realms.

Through that resonance, I tried to convey my intent to the Card Celestial: that I had already disposed of the stake carved from the World Calamity Tree's twig, and that Slay had been subdued. Neither posed a threat to it anymore.

It was my first time using the celestial voice and vision to communicate with another celestial. The only other time had been with Dalie, who—lonely and seeking kinship—had welcomed my hybrid presence rather than rejected it. The Card Celestial, however, was different. I couldn't find it on either plane; it had concealed itself deliberately. Yet I could feel it watching, its will pressing against mine, vast and incomprehensible.

'Fuck, where the heck is it?'

Unable to locate it, I had no choice but to cast my voice into the void—a cry across the planes, earnest and desperate. I shouted my explanation, hoping the Celestial Will would listen... and that it would calm down before it decided to bring down its wrath on us both.

'it's stupidly strong and unreasonably stubborn.'

As the moments dragged on and I got no response from the Card Celestial while its divine presence continued to press us, I began to regret my greed for the stake. If I had known that just speaking with a celestial—let alone persuading it to forgive Slay—would turn into such a nightmare, I would have risked everything to procure it.

I felt this way now that I had the stake and had no way to return it—even if I wanted to. That's how greed works: when you don't have something, you crave it desperately, convincing yourself it's worth any cost. But once it's in your hands, the thrill fades, and all that's left is the weight of what it cost to get it.

It was times like these I couldn't help but wonder if I was a gambler — a thrill-chasing adrenaline junkie. I wonder if that's the adventurous spirit the people speak of.

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"Wyatt, I'm sorry. I have to take out the egg," Lucine said hesitantly, her tone heavy with uncertainty. On one side stood their creator and provider; on the other, a teenager she had once considered a friend—a teenager who had hidden things from her and let her make a fool of herself.

Come to think of it, why was she even hesitating? She respected his intelligence and strength he achieved at his age. Also, Sam spoke so highly of him. True, but he was also an arrogant manipulator who liked to play the wolf in sheep's clothing. No matter how hard she tried to justify it, she couldn't find a single good reason to risk offending the celestial will of the card world for his sake.

"No, Lucine, don't," I warned, my voice laced with both urgency and desperation. "Just ignore it. It's nothing more than a big old crybaby throwing a tantrum to get its way."

Lucine froze, her grimoire hovering over her hand. The words I'd just said echoed in the air, and she turned to me with a look of sheer disbelief. Had she really just heard me call the Card World's Celestial Will—the supreme consciousness of their realm—a big old crybaby? And at a time when it was already furious?

"Wyatt, have you completely lost your mind?" she shouted, her voice trembling with panic. "Do you have a death wish? Shut the hell up before you drag me down with you!"

Her terror was so raw it almost made me laugh—if the situation weren't so dire. The way she looked at me, anyone could tell she was seconds away from throwing her hands up and screaming, *'I'm not with him! I don't even know this idiot!'*

Instead, she hurriedly pulled out the egg from her dimensional storage card, terrified that the celestial will might crush us both like bugs in its fury. I could only watch helplessly as all my effort, all the careful planning, went straight down the drain.

But just as I braced myself for the celestial will to obliterate Slay's egg, something entirely unexpected happened—the divine pressure pressing down on Lucine and the egg suddenly disappeared. Instead, it intensified several times over and focused entirely on me. It felt almost... deliberate, as if the celestial will was silently commanding me to bring out the gigantic stake carved from the twig of the World Calamity Tree.

I was taken aback by the Card Celestial's actions. Why would the Card Celestial spare Slay's egg? Could it be that it had finally confirmed Slay no longer posed a threat now that she was a calamity daughter gem? If so, that was uncharacteristically merciful of it. Come to think of it, it hadn't even tried to override Lucine's grimoire or her cards to destroy the egg, even though it easily could have just when it found the egg in Lucine's card. Instead, it allowed her to make her own choice—respecting her will.

For all its power and authority, the Card Celestial had always treated its children with fairness—whether it was outsiders like Corey the reincarnator, or even me, a mere transmigrator. Especially me as unlike Corey I wasn't born here.

I couldn't say for certain that the Card Celestial knew I was a transmigrator—but honestly, how could it not? Something that vast and all-seeing would have noticed the moment I set foot in its world.

"Wyatt, just take out the stake. Your life is more important than that thing," Lucine urged, her voice trembling as she watched me stand unmoving under the crushing pressure. She couldn't understand why I was still resisting, why I wouldn't just yield before the will of the world itself.

From her point of view, the celestial hadn't bothered to destroy Slay's egg—it might not even bother with the stake either. But if it did decide to act, I would be the first to die.

As she looked at me, frustration and confusion warred within her. How could someone clever enough to deceive her so easily be so foolish now? To challenge the world's will over a single artifact—no matter how extraordinary it was—seemed like pure madness. The stake might have been powerful enough to shield this timeline from the celestial's gaze, but it wasn't worth gambling one's life for.

Lucine couldn't help but wonder what had come over me—what kind of stubborn pride or hidden reason made me defy a being that could erase me with a thought.

"I can't take it out because I used it," I admitted, forcing the words out through gritted teeth. Within its domain, lying to the Card Celestial was impossible—it would see right through me. So I gambled on the truth, hoping honesty might earn me a shred of mercy.

But the moment the words left my mouth, the divine pressure bearing down on me surged. It was as if the very air turned solid, crushing my lungs and bones, each breath becoming a battle.

Lucine's eyes widened in horror as cracks began to ripple through the space around me. The invisible weight was focused entirely on me now, pressing with a fury that made my vision blur. I could almost feel its wrath, its voiceless question reverberating through my mind—You used it?

At that moment, I realized my gamble had backfired spectacularly. The truth hadn't earned me favor—it had only deepened its rage. I really wanted to find and strangle the idiot who said, *'The truth will set you free.'*

Unless, of course, by free they actually meant dead.

In that case—my bad, my guy.

I'd had enough.

"If you don't believe me, come on then! Let's fight it out!" I roared, letting every ounce of my meager celestial force explode outward. The air around me trembled as my power collided head-on with the overwhelming intent of the Card Celestial.

It was like throwing a pebble at a mountain—futile, reckless, and utterly suicidal. But at that moment, I didn't care. If it wanted a fight, I'd give it one, even if it crushed me to dust in the process.

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"Holy shit!" Lucine gasped, staring at me using celestial force to fight the world's celestial will's intent with her mouth hanging open.

She couldn't believe what she was seeing—me, a mere card apprentice, actually using celestial force against the world's celestial will itself. It was, in her words, the most absurdly stupid and impossibly brave thing she had ever witnessed.

Bizarre didn't even begin to cover it. As far as Lucine knew, a card apprentice could only wield celestial force by borrowing it from the Card World—the very same entity I was now challenging. To her, watching me do this was like seeing a son flaunt his father's money before his father. Was it not the stupidest and daring act?

And from the look on her face, she was absolutely certain that at any second, that "father" was going to make me regret every reckless word and action.

But then—something no one expected happened.

The divine presence vanished. Just like that. The crushing weight that had been pinning me down disappeared as if it had never existed.

With the sudden release of pressure, my celestial force erupted uncontrollably, launching me skyward like a cannonball. I tore through the air, the world below shrinking in an instant, the echo of Lucine's shocked gasp fading beneath me.

For a heartbeat, I hung there amid the clouds, gasping for breath, half-expecting the will of the world to return and finish what it started.

But there was only silence—vast, heavy, and impossibly still.

"Don't leave, you owe me an explanation," I yelled in both human tongue and celestial voice. Before long, I calmed down thinking, *'Who knew the Card Celestial would be so reasonable?'*

If I were in the Card Celestial's place, I wouldn't have let things end like that. Knowing that something capable of threatening me was still out there, walking free, would've gnawed at me. Even if the odds of it ever being used against me again were almost nonexistent, I wouldn't take that chance.

No, I'd make sure it was gone—utterly erased. That's what any being with real power would do. Mercy was a luxury only the invincible could afford. I wonder if the Card Celestial was aware that it couldn't particularly be considered invincible in the Myriad Realms. Did it ever talk with the other celestials? Did it even have friends? Or was it some kind of aloof, divine loner hovering in this corner of the Myriad Realms?

No... that didn't seem right. Considering how deeply the dungeons were woven into its ecosystem—each one connected, thriving, and interdependent on other realms—I'd bet the Card Celestial wasn't a recluse at all.

If anything, it probably was the social butterfly among celestials—networking through celestial channels, exchanging insights into rules source and the origin source, taking a step toward their version of transcendence.

If that weren't the case, then I might just have to ask Dalie to reach out to the Card Celestial—to try and befriend this possible loner among the celestials. If anyone could charm a solitary celestial, it would be someone like Dalie, desperate enough for a friend to chat up even a cosmic recluse. Otherwise, Card Celestial might continue to stupidly show mercy to its enemy believing it was invincible when it was totally not.

Besides, with the coordinates I will be providing Dalie, finding it through the celestial channels would be child's play for her. All she'd need to do was show up, smile, and start talking—and knowing Dalie, she'd keep talking until even the Card Celestial gave in and listened.

I know I should've been relieved that the Card Celestial had dropped the matter—that it hadn't pursued me further for using the stake carved from the World Calamity Tree's twig. But instead of relief, a strange unease coiled in my chest. Something about its silence didn't sit right.

Was it really that laid-back? Or was this the calm before something worse? Did all celestials just... let things slide like this?

Before I could think further, Lucine's voice cut through the air.

"Wyatt, what just happened?" she demanded, flying closer, her eyes wide with disbelief. "How did you even use world's own celestial force to clash against the world's will? Not only that—you made it back down!"

Her tone was half awe, half panic. To her, what I'd done wasn't just impossible—it was sacrilege. And yet, I had done it.

"I can't believe what I just saw," Lucine went on, not even giving me a chance to reply. Her voice trembled with lingering disbelief, yet there was a strange spark in her eyes—a kind of wild excitement pushing through the shock.

The fear that had frozen her moments ago was now replaced by a rush of awe and curiosity. It was as if witnessing something so impossible had jolted her out of reason itself.

She hovered closer, her words tumbling out in a rush. "You—are you the chosen one? The true son of the card world?"

I ignored Lucine's excited rambling and made my way toward Slay's egg. My focus shifted entirely—away from the celestial and Lucine's disbelief—to the fragile, grotesque thing that pulsed faintly with life before me.

The egg throbbed in a steady rhythm, its surface glistening with faint curse energy. As I drew closer, it gave a heavy thump, almost as if recognizing my presence. I could feel the dark, intricate weave of the thousand and twenty-four curses at work within, feeding and reshaping Slay's essence into her new body.

I had fed her enough primordial energy. Anymore would do her no good. Primordial energy was more about qualitative change than quantitative change. Besides, with the Card Celestial around I didn't dare to use primordial energy.

I crouched beside Slay's egg, examining the flow of energy, making sure there were no disruptions or anomalies. I trusted the card celestial but I had to do my due diligence. Everything seemed stable. The curse nourishment was holding steady. It was enough.

Satisfied, I turned back toward Lucine, who was still talking a mile a minute, half in awe, half in confusion. Stretching out my hand, I cut her off mid-sentence.

"Lucine," I said calmly, "lend me your dimensional storage card."

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After Ceed's birth transformed my Seed World into a true realm, I hadn't found the time to craft any storage cards of my own. For the most part, I relied on the standard ones I'd obtained by trading phantom mushroom wood with Jill Norley. They were decent enough—capable of holding herds or even monster eggs—but nowhere near capable enough for Slay's egg.

Sure, I could've carried it back to our present physically through the Time Vestige, but why go through that trouble when I could simply borrow a dimensional storage card?

"No way, it's personal," Lucine shot back instantly. Her card held all her prized possessions—perfumes, jewelry, clothes, delicacies, and more. Sure, specialized item cards existed for such things, but she preferred the touch of mortal's peak craftsmanship and ingenious alchemy over mass-produced cosmetic or designer cards. She liked it when other women asked her where she got her perfume or jewellery or clothes because not only were they stunning but they were refreshingly unique. There was no way she'd let me near the one holding those private treasures with such high personal value.

"Here, take these storage cards and transfer your items into them before you hand me the dimensional storage card," I said, taking out a few empty storage cards as if I didn't hear her rejection.

"Here, take these storage cards and move your things into them before handing me the dimensional storage card," I said, pulling out a few empty ones as if her refusal had never reached my ears.

"Didn't you hear me? I said no—" Lucine began sharply, but I cut her off before she could finish.

"Hurry up," I urged, glancing around. "The Celestial Will's tantrum has already drawn too much attention. If we stay any longer, the card apprentice of this timeline will find us."

"Why can't I carry the egg?" Lucine demanded, glaring at me with clear irritation and no intention of giving in.

"Fine," I sighed, smirking slightly. "You carry the egg. But if anything happens to it, I'm holding Morningstar University fully responsible." My tone dripped with mock seriousness, hoping to intimidate her into surrendering the card.

"This is my university's Labyrinth of Myriad Past, and Slay is our prisoner," Lucine shot back sharply. "If anything, you should be the one paying me for allowing you to recruit such a powerful and capable devil servant."

Before I could respond, she strode over to Slay's egg and stored it in her dimensional storage card—completely ignoring my protest and doing it without a shred of hesitation.

I couldn't help but raise an eyebrow in amusement, wondering if Lucine had conveniently forgotten that while this might be her university's Labyrinth of Myriad Past, I was the strongest one here.

As for her taking Slay's egg, I wasn't particularly concerned. Once Slay was reborn in her new body, she would seek me out no matter where—or in whose possession—she was within the Card World. After all, she was my most powerful calamity daughter gem, or bloodkin... second only to Dalie, of course.

I had done everything I could to help Slay to be chosen as my bloodkin, but there was no way to predict how the cursed bloodline would react until her new body finally took shape.

"You sure you want to take this conversation there?" I asked with a teasing grin. "Did you forget how I ended up here? Considering everything I've had to do—and suffer—because of your university's failure to properly manage its own Labyrinth of Myriad Past, I'd say I'm more than entitled to a generous compensation package for the trauma and emotional distress I've endured."

Lucine, who had been smugly satisfied after claiming Slay's egg, froze. Her confident smile faltered into a tight, uneasy frown.

"Man, Morningstar University sure is irresponsible," I went on, feigning a sigh. "They put their guests in mortal danger. If I weren't as strong as I am, I'd have died long ago. I really feel bad for the poor students who have to study there. How are they supposed to study if they are busy defending themselves from the university's poor management?"

"You take those words back, or I'll destroy the egg for good. I won't feel an ounce of guilt — she's a devil who's slaughtered countless card apprentices and others," Lucine warned, summoning her diamond grimoire to defend her university's honor.

"Nope. I don't lie. Go ahead and destroy Slay's egg and forever be known as the sinner who denied the five regions a powerful ally for the coming second demon invasion," I shot back, daring her. I knew she actually wanted Slay to serve me even more than I did.

Morningstar University had been monitoring Slay through the Time Vestige for centuries. They knew exactly how strong, intelligent, and dangerous she was. For

generations, they had tried to unravel her secrets—studying her every word and deed—yet all their efforts had ended in miserable failure.

Now that Lucine had witnessed me subdue Slay, she saw a rare opportunity. Through me, Slay's master, her university could finally uncover what they had sought for ages. That's why Lucine wanted Slay to become my servant even more than I did.

It also explained why she hadn't immediately removed the egg when the Card World's Celestial Will appeared. She did in the end, but the hesitation mattered. To defy the will of the world—even for a few breaths—was to defy the very voice of the gods for a card apprentice. That brief act alone showed how much she wanted me to succeed in binding Slay.

Still, Lucine wasn't foolish. She knew I was far too cunning to be trusted blindly. That's why she needed leverage, something or someone, to help her keep me in check and ensure I cooperated with Morningstar University. That's why she argued with me to store Slay's egg with her. Unfortunately, she was overestimating Morningstar University and herself to take Slay's egg.

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"I don't have time to argue with you. I'm heading back," Lucine said curtly, rolling her eyes as she turned toward the Time Vestige. She knew better than to waste her breath — debating with me was pointless when I clearly understood far more about the situation than she did.

Still, countless questions swirled in her mind. Everything she had seen and heard in this past unsettled her. How had I managed to defy the Card Celestial? And why had Slay kept calling me Hybrid Celestial?

She wanted to ask me directly, but she already knew how that would go — I would never give her a straight answer. So, instead, she tried to piece it together on her own, replaying every word and every sign she had witnessed.

But Lucine's understanding of the myriad realms was too limited. She had glimpsed too little and grasped even less. Her reasoning, confined by her shallow world view, couldn't

possibly lead her anywhere near the truth. Even if she had somehow understood everything she'd seen and heard, she still lacked the perspective to interpret it correctly — much less uncover the reality hidden behind it.

Lucine's understanding — her entire worldview — was confined within the boundaries of the Card World. She was like a frog trapped at the bottom of a well, staring up at a narrow circle of sky, while the answers she sought lay far beyond the boundaries of the well. On some level, she knew this too. That was why she didn't bother arguing any further about who owed whom in this entire Time Vestige ordeal.

Yes, I had saved her life — but she was only here because she had come to save mine. It evened out in the grand scheme of things. Unless, of course, Lucine was foolish enough to feel grateful to the very person who'd dragged her into danger in the first place. She seemed like the type, but something told me that this time, she wouldn't.

She was still stewing in quiet embarrassment, after all. The realization that she had revealed too much — that she had gone so far as to recruit me into Morningstar University without understanding the full extent of what I was — weighed heavily on her. Now that she did know, she was desperate to shift the blame, convincing herself that I had deliberately manipulated her into exposing the university's core secrets.

Well, perhaps I had nudged her along a little — but in truth, she had done most of the work herself. She was the one who kept talking, sharing things she never should have, all on her own in hopes of tempting me into enrolling into Morningstar University.

Had Lucine known my history with Morningstar University — especially their conspiracy with the Central Government to have me kidnapped — she would have never dared to tempt me into enrolling there using such means. The very thought would have frozen in her throat.

Shaking my head, I followed her into the Time Vestige that hovered above the lightning-struck stump. The vestige was a kind of subspace. Within it, Morningstar University had constructed an entire campus — towering spires and intricate structures veiled beneath an SSS-rank Kaleidoscopic Maze Array Formation.

It turned out that the formation Henricks once mentioned wasn't merely a defense mechanism. It was capable of traveling in time along with the time vestige, and even moving in and out of time vestige entirely. All along, while I was within the Garden of Beginning, the maze formation had been residing here, hidden in plain sight.

The Time Vestige itself served as the core of this colossal array — and, like the vestige, it was utterly unique across all timelines of the Card World.

What truly caught me off guard, however, was what awaited inside. Morningstar University's campus within the Time Vestige was teeming with life. Card apprentices moved about in quiet focus — some immersed in research and experimentation, others

lost in comprehension of the elusive time rule. Then there were those that maintained the records on various timelines of the card world and the time prisons their founders had created. The air thrummed with a strange, solemn energy — the pulse of knowledge and ambition suspended between centuries just like the original Morningstar Campus.

I hadn't expected to see so many people living within the Time Vestige. It made me wonder if this place was the true final sanctuary the founders of Morningstar University had once spoken of—a haven meant to preserve the card apprentice community should the demons ever conquer the world. And not the 'Garden of Beginning.'

Whatever the case, card apprentices living here and working made sense. As long as these apprentices gathered the ingredients and materials they needed from any timeline, they could continue their experiments here indefinitely, without worrying about breaking the time taboos and regardless of where the time vestige was anchored in time. It would only be a concern if they ever wished to return to their original timeline. Even then they would just return to the original timeline.

What truly astonished me, though, was that Lucine had chosen to reveal this hidden campus to me at all. The Time Vestige I stood in now was nothing like the one Morningstar University presented to the five regions. That one was a carefully constructed illusion—a controlled image meant for display. But this... this was the real Time Vestige, a secret realm where Morningstar's true research and ambitions were cultivated unknown to the outside world.

They had deceived the five regions about nearly everything—the number of people who could access the Time Vestige at once, the sheer amount of resources required to sustain it, even the true nature of its operation. If the five regions ever learned the truth about the Time Vestige, let alone the Labyrinth of Myriad Pasts, chaos would erupt. A war wouldn't just be likely—it would be inevitable.

So why wasn't Lucine worried about revealing it to me? Did she truly trust me not to use this knowledge against her or Morningstar University? Or perhaps she believed I already knew enough to deal them irreversible damage, and that revealing more would change nothing—only make the inevitable worse.

"Wyatt, you can comprehend the Time Rule here. We have chambers equipped with arrays that enhance focus and induce a state of calm. If you wish, you're free to use them," Lucine said, her tone composed yet unexpectedly open.

Her words caught me off guard. For someone as cautious and calculating as her, this level of transparency was rare. Maybe she no longer felt the need to conceal anything—perhaps she believed I already knew too much. Or maybe, on some instinctive level, she understood that hiding humanity's final sanctuary from me was pointless.

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"What do you want?" I asked Lucine, finally concluding that her kindness had a purpose. As for my previous inner monologue, I wasn't naive enough to think she was being nice out of pure goodwill. Why? Because people being good to me without wanting something in return always made me uneasy. The only ones I was ever willing to bear that fear for, in this life, were Susan and Anna.

"What do you mean?" Lucine asked, her tone carrying genuine confusion. But as my words sank in, a disdain-filled smirk curved her lips. "Get over yourself. The time zone inside the time vestige shifts depending on which timelines we travel between in the temporal river. And since you suddenly summoned the vestige from that past, our tight schedule got thrown off. We'll need to make a few quick stops before heading back to our present. Until then, you might as well be productive and comprehend the time rule."

"I knew that," I lied, though the truth was it had completely slipped my mind while I was busy worrying about what Lucine was planning with her sudden kindness towards me. This was why I said my biggest fear was someone showing selfless kindness to me. I can't figure them out. That makes me vulnerable to them. And I hate feeling vulnerable. It's as simple as that.

"So, how long do I have to wait here?" I asked Lucine, ignoring my spiraling thoughts.

"Months—maybe even a year or two," Lucine said casually. "But don't worry, only a week or two will pass in our present. Also, with your talent, your time here should be more than enough for you not only to begin comprehending the time rule but also to reach the bifurcation point and gain a small understanding of one of its meanings."

"Two weeks? No way! I can spare a day at most," I blurted out, panic rising in my voice. "A lot of people depend on me—without me, they will fall into chaos, total chaos."

The thought of being cut off from the Myriad Realms for two weeks made my stomach twist. I had too many commitments waiting for me in the Card World, the Lil' Red Storm World, and the Dark Realm. If I didn't handle them on time, all my plans would go up in smoke.

"You should've thought about that before jumping into the temporal river," Lucine remarked, her tone sharp with quiet reproach. Her words made it clear—she knew I hadn't been dragged in by stray temporal and spatial forces. I'd chosen to follow them.

Before I could deny it, she went on, "How do I know that? Simple. If you have a way to resist timeline dementia, then you clearly have a way to handle temporal forces. And with your strength, resisting spatial forces wouldn't be difficult either. Young man, you reap what you sow."

"Hahaha," I laughed, trying to sound casual, then added, "I'm sure we can work something out. For instance, I could help you with your time rule dementia—at a discount, of course—and in return, you help me get back to our present within a day."

"Up to your tricks again, huh?" Lucine sneered, her gaze dripping with disdain. "Let me tell you a secret, young man—I never once believed you could help me with my time rule dementia, let alone cure it. Sure, you're strong enough to defeat an unranked devil, capable enough to defy the world's will, and clever enough to summon the time vestige. I have no idea how you managed all that as a mere card master. But none of it is reason enough for me to believe you can solve an illness that has plagued even the celestials."

My expression darkened instantly at her words. She was treating me like some con artist always trying to deceive her, when in truth, I'd done nothing but be sincere with her from the start.

"Are you holding me hostage?" I asked, suspicion creeping into my voice as I wondered if this had been her plan all along—to trap me inside the time vestige. "Or are you forgetting that I can control the time vestige?" I added, exaggerating the claim just to drive the point home. Also, I was feeling cornered within the time vestige.

"Young man, do you know what the first thing I did after entering the time vestige was?" Lucine asked with a playful tone with her lips curling into a teasing grin.

"Breathe?" I replied, pretending to play dumb.

"Yes," she said, rolling her eyes at my childish response, and with a smirk, she continued, "and I told the staff to activate the resonance disturbance field. Go on then—try commanding the time vestige to take you to the temporal anchor in our present."

Her confident smile screamed, '*Checkmate, sucker.*'

I didn't even bother trying. I'd sensed the resonance disturbance field as soon as it was put up and didn't mind it believing it was being used for someone's research. Now, thanks to Lucine, I knew it had been set up specifically to target me. I had no plans to do anything about it. I feared in my struggle for control over the time vestige with

Morningstar University any number of small variables could cause all of us to be lost in the temporal river for eternity.

"Ah! So I was right—you did use resonance synchronization to summon the time vestige to that past from our present. Hahaha!" Lucine burst into laughter, taking my silence as her victory. And judging by the look on her face, she truly felt like she'd just made a major discovery.

Lucine had been hailed as a genius since birth—praised, admired, and even worshiped for her unmatched intellect by her teachers, colleagues, and students alike. But everything changed when she met this young man. He understood and accomplished things that defied her comprehension, making her feel intellectually cornered and outclassed.

That was why this moment meant so much to her—it was proof that she could still keep up, if only for a fleeting second. This meant he wasn't beyond her. She will not only catch up to him but overthrow him. *'This feeling is refreshing. It has been a while since I felt like this. Maybe days ahead won't be so boring after all.'*

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I had underestimated the Time Vestige. It turned out to be far more than what I expected it to be. Morningstar University did a good job ensuring that other Card Apprentices never learned about its true capabilities or the possibilities it could unleash.

Inside the Time Vestige, they could obtain any number of rare or extinct ingredients from the Labyrinth of Myriad Past. They could also conduct experiments without worrying about time limiting their research. With the Time Vestige, they never had to fear falling behind their competitors—rather, it was their competitors who had to worry about keeping up with them.

With so much time and so many resources at their disposal, it was no surprise that they produced countless useful and practical patents and copyrights each month. What was

truly surprising was how the other top universities managed to keep up with such an overwhelming advantage and stay in the race for so long.

The more I thought about it, the greedier I became for the inheritances held by the other top ten universities. Learning this alone made my trip to Morningstar University worthwhile.

"What's with that creepy look in your eyes? What are you thinking?" Lucine, who had been celebrating her minor victory, froze when she noticed the expression on the teenager's faces. She could tell he was up to something, and her guard shot up instantly.

"It is important that I return to our past as soon as possible," I stressed to Lucine so she could understand that I wasn't just saying that but it was true.

"I am sorry, Wyatt. There is nothing I can do. If you don't follow the schedule, you will lose a lot of money. Enough to affect our university's overall performance. With the Grand Academician Bowl coming up, we really can't afford this loss. It will affect our ranking. You know how seriously we take our ranking," Lucine rejected my plea, saying that the loss there made his request unreasonable.

"What if I cover your losses out of my own pocket? Would you set sail for our present immediately?" I offered to compensate them so we could return as soon as possible. It would put a dent on my wallet, but that was nothing compared to the losses I'd suffer if I were stuck in here for two whole weeks without any contact to the outside world.

"No," Lucine rejected me without hesitation before explaining, "First of all, I don't believe you have that kind of money. Secondly, no amount of payment can make up for the setback our various researches will suffer if the Time Vestige goes off course taking time out of our already delayed schedule just to drop you back in our present. Wyatt, forget it and wait."

"Sigh!" I let out an exaggerated breath at Lucine's reply. I wanted to shout, *'Somebody, please, I'm begging you—tell this stupid woman who I am and what I'm worth!'* At first, it had felt refreshing to meet someone who didn't know my achievements and treated me like a normal person, but now it felt as if Lucine was going out of her way and finding new ways to underestimate me.

Lucine frowned at my long sigh and said, "You do realize most Card Apprentices would gladly pay an arm and a leg just to spend a day or two in the Time Vestige. Yet here you are, crying and complaining even though you get to stay for a year or two for free. Aren't you being a little entitled?"

I no longer had the patience to argue with this woman. All I wanted was to return to our present as soon as possible. So, with a heavy heart, I made an offer. "How about this—

I'll cure your time-rule dementia for free. And if I manage to treat it to your satisfaction, you repay me by getting me back to the present within a day. How does that sound?"

I wasn't worried that Lucine would go back on her word after I delivered. In this Time Vestige, I was the strongest—strong enough to force things to go my way if I wanted. But I wasn't a bully, and besides, Lucine had risked her life to come rescue me. Even if I didn't need the help and ended up saving her instead, the intention still counted. Especially when I remembered how, back when that Viltronian bastard terrorized Earth, the very people I considered as friends had turned against me, fearing for their lives. So, Lucine, a stranger, risking her life for me, moved me.

"It seems you really are desperate if you're willing to put your trust in me. Returning to the present within a day must be very important to you," Lucine said solemnly. She listened to me with a serious expression, as though she finally understood my situation and was giving it genuine thought.

Lucine nodded. "I understand your situation. I can get you back to our present before a full day passes there—but in return, I don't want you to cure my time-rule dementia or compensate us for any losses we'll suffer by helping you. Instead, I want Slay to cooperate with us in studying the Dark Realm. What do you say?"

'Finally,' I shouted in my mind as Lucine revealed what she wanted more than anything. I had suspected this, but I didn't expect her to go after it so directly. This was good.

"Nope, that price is way too high," I replied. "How about this—you make a list of everything you want to ask Slay, and I'll have her answer the questions I'm comfortable letting her answer. If you want information that's truly valuable, then we'll discuss the price separately. Basically, as long as you're willing to pay what it's worth—aside from sending me back to the present as soon as possible—I'll have Slay cooperate with you."

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I had long planned to make the card apprentices of the five regions aware of the Dark Realm and the Myriad Realms. People needed to understand what lay beyond our world's borders—the threats waiting out there, as well as the opportunities. I hoped that

knowledge would unite them under a new purpose, pushing them to build toward something greater instead of fighting over the scraps they currently had.

The ambitious like Emissary of Light, Matron, and even Supreme Leader especially needed to be reminded that the Card World wasn't the end but only the beginning. Countless adventures and opportunities were waiting beyond it. There was no need for them to make the boundaries of the Card World as the ceiling of their ambition. Just like how Giddon managed to carve a place for himself in Devil Merchant Code and even Dark Realm.

Now that Lucine had brought it up, I decided it was time to start waking the five regions to the reality of the Dark Realm and the Myriad Realms. So I agreed to let Slay cooperate with her interrogation—under my supervision. I would decide how much they learned and what they learned about those realms, keeping everything firmly under my control.

No, I wasn't trying to become a dictator of the Card World. I only wanted to protect the five regions.

Even without knowing what the so-called demons and devils truly were or what they were capable of, plenty of Card Apprentices had already chosen to become demon or devil worshippers back in the days. So, imagine what would happen if they learned the entire truth. Would they even bother resisting the second demon invasion, or would they simply give up, believing it was pointless?

That's why it was crucial to control what they learned, how much they learned, and when they learned anything about the Dark Realm and the Myriad Realms. This way, I could guide the narrative and make sure the information did more good than harm. Otherwise, I'd be helping the 'Seven Prince of Hell' faction secure victory before they even stepped foot into the Card World.

"No way," Lucine said, rejecting my proposal without much thought. "If we agree to that, we'll only learn what you want us to know. That gives you the advantage. Acting on information filtered by you would be no different from preparing a bed for you to sleep in. We might as well skip the pretense and just do whatever you want."

"Lucine, there's no way I'm giving you what you're seeking for. Just accept what I'm offering and don't force my hand," I warned, letting a bit of intimidation slip in to push her toward a compromise. With my strength, taking control of the Time Vestige wouldn't be difficult. The only reason I was holding back was for the sake of everyone inside it—especially Lucine.

She needed to understand that this negotiation was happening only because of my goodwill toward her. She really shouldn't keep pushing her luck.

"Are you threatening me?" Lucine asked, narrowing her eyes at me.

"Was I not obvious enough? Or do you want me to try taking control of the Time Vestige by breaking the resonance disruption field?" I said calmly. I knew that if Lucine was smart enough to use the disruption field against me, then she was certainly smart enough to understand the countless things that could happen if I actually tried to force control over the Time Vestige by shattering it. One of the most likely outcomes being the Time Vestige getting destroyed in the struggle, leaving the few of us lucky enough to survive drifting endlessly in the temporal river for eternity.

I had been patient and considerate until now, but if she planned to use the Time Vestige to hold me hostage and force her way, then I wasn't going to sit back any longer. If she wanted a fight, I'd gladly show her that not only was I always ready for one—I fought to win, no matter the cost. Just ask the Viltronian bastard and his minions back on Earth. Oh, wait—you can't, because I massacred every last one of them.

"You wouldn't—" Lucine exclaimed, realizing exactly what I was implying. She was sharp, no doubt about that.

I cut her off with a smirk. "Why wouldn't I? I don't know about the rest of you, but with my talent, I'm certain I can survive in the temporal current long enough to make it back to our present sooner or later."

Lucine glanced around, her eyes sweeping over Morningstar University's second campus—the SSS-rank Kaleidoscope Maze Array and all the Card Apprentices within it. At that moment, she realized I wasn't the one trapped here. They were trapped here with me.

Only then did she understand the grave mistake she'd made by revealing this side of the Time Vestige to me. However, a part of her—one that had been studying me closely since the moment we met—urged her to call my bluff and push the stakes even higher. But when she looked at the thousands of Card Apprentices scattered across Morningstar University's second campus, she hesitated. These people were the future of Morningstar University.

The very fact that they were in Morningstar University's second campus meant they weren't just talented—they were loyal. These were the students chosen to lead and shape the university's future. And the amount of time and resources invested into nurturing thousands of such Card Apprentices was staggering.

Even setting aside the material losses, the sheer effort required to gather this many gifted and loyal students again would be unimaginable. Losing them would cripple Morningstar University's standing and set them far behind in the top-ten university race for years to come.

Clearly, Morningstar University couldn't afford to lose these card apprentices. Making it harder for Lucine to call my bluff even though every fibre of her being was telling her

that the 'Wyatt' she knew wouldn't do that. But she couldn't take any chances with the future of Morningstar University.

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"Fine, you win. I'll settle for interviewing Slay under your supervision," Lucine finally conceded, even though she was convinced I was bluffing.

After all, it wasn't just the university's talented and loyal card apprentices on the line, but the time vestige itself—and with it, the Labyrinth of Myriad Past. Losing a group of apprentices was unfortunate but recoverable; Morningstar University could train a new batch with enough time and recourse. But losing the time vestige meant losing something irreplaceable. Without it, the Labyrinth of Myriad Past was practically useless.

In the end, the risk was far too great for her to gamble on. Her personality wouldn't allow it, not when she carried the responsibility of being a direct descendant of Morningstar University's founders. Making the safer choice was the only option she could accept.

"Aww, that offer expired. Choose wisely next time," I said, pulling back my offer to Lucine with a playful grin. By giving in, she'd practically admitted that she would bend over to my whim if I pushed her hard enough. I would have respected her more if she had simply walked away instead of responding to my bluff. Not only did she back down but also revealed just how desperately they valued a one-on-one interview with Slay.

At first, I genuinely wanted to work with Lucine, but after watching her try to chip away at my goodwill at every turn, I'd had enough. Now, I would show her what it truly meant to negotiate with Dalton V. Wyatt—the card apprentice who once tricked a Devil into handing over a Demon Merchant Token without even realizing what the Devil Merchant Code was.

"What? This is too much, Wyatt!" Lucine complained, feeling that I was being an obnoxious jerk bullying her with my strength.

"Too much? I'm being too much," I shot back.

"I offered to cure your terminal disease, offered to pay for your losses, and even agreed to let you interview Slay under my supervision. Yet none of it was enough for you. You kept demanding more, waving around the fact that I jumped into the temporal crack of my own accord. If you were smart enough to deduce that, then you should also be smart enough to grasp the consequences if I had not let the temporal and spatial forces drag me into the temporal river. Either the time vestige would collide with me and reduce me to dust, or I'd tear open the wall of the time tunnel trying to escape—both of which could have caused serious damage to the time vestige, not to mention the card apprentices in it."

"I'm not claiming I did it for Morningstar University. I did it for Ahalya, and because I was curious. But instead of appreciating the consideration I showed, you not only trapped me here but tried to weaponize that fact against me. And now you think I'm the one being too much?"

I hit her so hard that from the look on her face I half-expected her to hand over her lunch money and run off crying to her mama.

"Really, Mr. Saint? You could have walked out of the eye of the time tunnel from its end in our present by going against the stray temporal and spatial forces instead of giving into them. That way you could have moved out of the time vestige's without tearing the tunnel wall," Lucine mercilessly shot back. "Don't pretend you didn't know that. You knew exactly what you were doing. You were just hoping I wouldn't know and that I'd let you have your way out of guilt."

She looked at me with open disdain, as if saying, *'I've seen through all your tricks, you charlatan.'*

"I couldn't push against the stray temporal and spatial forces because of my special card to resist the time rule. If I used that resistance to fight the temporal currents, it could have disrupted the formation of the time tunnel—and possibly damaged it altogether. Trust me, I did what was best for all of us at that moment," I argued back explaining the challenges I was facing at that moment that she had failed to account for. I didn't hesitate to employ deceit to keep my secrets safe. It would be stupid of me if I ended up spilling my secrets for the sake of winning an argument.

"Do you think I enjoy diving into a river when I don't even know how to swim? Because that's exactly what your accusation sounds like. Why would I willingly jump into the temporal river when I don't have even a shred of comprehension of the time rule? I did it because it was the only logical move to make sure the time tunnel reached our present safely." I kept my explanation brief—just enough to make my point without going into the finer details.

Listening to my explanation, Lucine stared at me for a moment before snapping, "I call bull."

"What?" I asked, taken aback. She was the first person I had ever hinted to about my immunity to the time rule, even if I wasn't totally honest and said it only indirectly. So it stung a little—not only did she refuse to believe me, she dismissed it right to my face.

"I said I don't believe you," she repeated, then muttered under her breath, "Special card that resists the time rule, he says... more like a special card for spewing nonsense."

Her sneer deepened, and the disdain in her eyes for me sharpened like a blade.

"You don't believe me?" I asked, my tone turning dangerous—an unspoken challenge hung in the air. *'If you don't believe me, then come. Let's settle it.'*

"Why would I believe you? You're the same guy who keeps trying to fool me by claiming you can cure my time-rule dementia," Lucine fired back instantly, not even pausing to register the threat in my voice. She was too worked up to notice it at all. "Even if I pretend you aren't trying to trick me and you genuinely think you can cure a disease that even celestials can't, there's only one other explanation for why you'd believe that—you're insane. A complete loon. So which is it? Are you a loon or a conartist?"

She didn't hold anything back. When she wanted to, she could be one mean broad.

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"That's it, I've had enough of this," I snapped, reaching out to grab Lucine by her pale white, thin wrist, uttering, "Celestial Blood Fate Domain."

Soon, the entire time vestige was dyed in shade of red and before Lucine could even react, I seized her soft, slender wrist and pulled her into my embrace. She let out a startled gasp. "Wyatt, what are you doing?" she exclaimed in shock.

Lucine's immaculate eyes widened in shock, and her soft white hand strained to break free from my grip—but it was pointless. The moment she was pulled into my embrace, feeling my warmth and catching my scent, her lips tightened in a strange, conflicted tremor. Her eyes grew misty as she struggled harder, offering resistance that was more emotional than physical.

With my thousand and twenty-four curses already used to seal Slay, I had to rely on my celestial rule domain to suppress Lucine's strength and overpower her. Fortunately, Lucine wasn't trained in martial arts and had never developed her physical abilities. My Celestial Blood Fate Domain was the perfect counter to someone like her.

"What am I doing? I'm going to forcefully cure your time-rule dementia," I said. "And if you dare resist my treatment, I'll blow this entire time vestige to hell while we watch from the temporal river." I leveled the threat at her before she could fully process if I was still capable of displaying the same strength I had used against Slay.

"If you want to kill me, just say it. Don't hide behind excuses about curing my time-rule dementia—it's pathetic," Lucine snapped. But despite her words, she stopped struggling and stayed in my hold, still as a cornered cat pretending not to be afraid. Her proud expression didn't match the way her body quietly surrendered to the moment. She was the last living royalty of the Morningstar University after all.

Honestly, I wouldn't have been able to pull this off if not for her fear that I might unleash my full power I used to face Slay, not to mention the Celestial Blood Fate Domain. Sometimes a person's own mindset becomes their prison. In Lucine's case, after watching me take down Slay—someone who had toyed with her—with effortless ease, she'd already decided that I wasn't just stronger than her, but stronger than anything the combined forces inside the time vestige could muster.

So when I applied even a little pressure, she folded instantly, convinced that resisting would be pointless and would only make things worse for her. This was the power of suggestion. With my arrogant, cutting words, I made her believe I could still summon the same strength I'd shown against Slay. And it wasn't hard especially since she had already witnessed firsthand just how much power I could bring out when I needed to.

It wasn't just Lucine whom my celestial rule domain was suppressing. Even the card apprentices who had been watching our heated exchange from afar—those who had immediately tried to rush over when I pulled her into my embrace—were caught under its influence. Luckily for me, the strongest among them were only elite card demigods. With my celestial rule domain stripping away their soul energy and rule power privileges, they struggled just to approach me as I held Lucine hostage above Morningstar University's second campus.

They glared at me from below, scrambling in all directions as they searched for a way to reach us and rescue their ex-Dean.

"Shut up. I regret the moment I told you I could cure your time-rule dementia. I have no idea what possessed me back then. But congratulations—you're the first person in all five regions to receive my services for free," I said as I kept a close eye on the card apprentices inside the time vestige, making sure those little troublemakers weren't plotting anything stupid while I forced Lucine to undergo my treatment and also change the course of the time vestige back to our present.

"Wyatt, I am sorry," Lucine apologized and just when I wanted to remind her it was too late to apologize she began, "I was wrong. You are not a con artist trying to trick me. Clearly, you are a mental patient. I believe you believe you can cure me. It seems my teasing and constant rejection elevated your condition."

"Shut up, you dementia patient. I know how insane this sounds, but everything will make sense once you're cured of your time-rule dementia. Then I will collect my debt with interest," I said, sending her a list of ingredients. "Have one of your trusted students fetch these—the real versions, not any substitutes from Labyrinth of Myriad Past."s."

The time vestige didn't just store counterfeit ingredients from various pasts—it also held genuine ones meant for real experiments. After all, where else could you find a perfectly controlled environment like this? They ran trials here, conducted research here, and even did the volatile projects that would be far too dangerous to handle in the outside world. Not to mention the benefit of the time differential.

Honestly, the time vestige would make an excellent place for a sweatshop.

"Wyatt, these things are costly. Do you have the money to pay for them?" Lucine asked after going through the list of ingredients I shared with her.

"Why would I pay for those ingredients? I am using it to cure you. If anything Morningstar University should pay for them if they are not willing to pay for them then you pay from your pocket," I argued, I was crazy enough to force my services on to her for free but I wasn't stupid enough to also pay for it.

The reason I was going this far to cure Lucine's time-rule dementia was simple: I had reached out to help her again and again, and each time she shot me down. If she had just rejected me, I could have accepted that. But she rejected me while insisting I was a con artist trying to deceive her. If I didn't cure her now, she—and plenty of others—would take that as proof that I really had been trying to trick her and that I was a con artist

That, I couldn't tolerate.

Only I knew the internal battles I fought back when the five regions branded me as the Silver Milk Fraudster. At the time, I could understand why people believed it. But now?

Now it was just infuriating.

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"Wyatt, listen to me. I will get you the help you need. We can find the best Card Medics the Card World has to offer—" Lucine said, still trying to convince me that I was mentally ill and needed treatment.

I cut her off in annoyance. "Someone does need help, alright—but it's you. And I'm going to make sure you get it. Once you're cured, be ready to pay the ultimate price for getting on my nerves. Now, tell your people to bring me the ingredients I asked, or I'll go find them myself."

What infuriated me most was that Lucine wasn't pretending—she was genuinely concerned. I knew time-rule dementia was a condition even the Celestials couldn't cure, but after everything I had shown her, shouldn't at least a part of her consider that I might actually be capable of what I claimed? Instead, for reasons known only to her, she stubbornly chose to believe I was a con artist trying to deceive her, rather than allow for the possibility that I knew what I was doing and that it wouldn't hurt to at least try my way.

"Wyatt, don't make any hasty decisions. Someone will bring you the ingredients. But while we wait, can you explain how you intend to cure me?" Lucine asked, clearly trying to figure out what the 'mad' version of me she had in her mind planned to do to her in the name of treating her time-rule dementia. A part of her still believed I was trying to kill her, and that curing her time-rule dementia was nothing more than a ruse I had crafted to justify my actions to Morningstar University and the five regions. But she couldn't think of a motive.

However, I never made a habit of explaining my plans and methods to my clients. They told me what they wanted and how much they were willing to pay, and the rest was my problem. How I delivered the results within their budget was entirely up to me—that was always the arrangement. So if I couldn't be bothered to explain myself to paying customers, why would I bother explaining anything to someone I was forcing to undergo my treatment?

Getting no answer from me, Lucine didn't back down. She continued, "You do realize the problem isn't with me, but with the part of the time rule I unintentionally comprehended while rescuing Ahalya from that past, right? The punishment for breaking a time taboo is the same as rule contamination. There's no cure for it. It's a dead end. It's not something anyone can fix. Even the all-powerful Celestials are helpless against it."

"Five more minutes. If they don't bring me the ingredients I asked for, we'll go get them ourselves," I warned, cutting off Lucine's attempts to stall. I had already given her the list of what to bring, yet she stalled at every turn. First, she didn't even pass the list to her students, and now they were dragging their feet on purpose. Realizing this, I told her to make them move faster.

I would have gone to get the ingredients myself, but I couldn't risk revealing any weakness in front of Lucine. If she realized I couldn't summon the same strength I used against Slay, the situation would turn against me in an instant. Then, I would truly become her hostage.

My Celestial Blood Fate Domain was absolute, but its consumption of celestial force and rule power was equally insane. Right now, I was sustaining it with only my Card Master realm strength. It was just enough to keep things stable, nothing more.

If Lucine and the other card demigods inside the time vestige decided to act together, I wouldn't be able to hold the domain for long unless I found a way to compensate for my lacking realm. In here, cut off from the Devil Merchant Code, my options were severely limited. As for using primordial energy, it was not an option.

So even though I was furious, I couldn't afford to act recklessly or draw too much attention. I had to be smart about this. Otherwise, instead of curing Lucine and proving myself, I might actually end up looking like the con artist she believed me to be.

"Wyatt, they'll bring them soon. How about you withdraw your Celestial Rule Domain? It's disrupting several ongoing research projects and experiments. I promise I'll fully cooperate with you," Lucine pleaded, after receiving multiple distress calls from her students about my domain covering the time vestige interfering with their work.

"Can you take an oath in the presence of the world's will?" I asked, not interested in arguing with her. I knew full well that my Celestial Rule Domain had not only severed their access to soul energy and rule power, but was also to interfere with their ongoing research and experiments. I was counting on that pressure to push Lucine into negotiating her surrender to me before I reached the limits of sustaining the Celestial Blood Fate Domain.

"Wyatt, don't you trust me?" Lucine asked, feigning innocence as she leaned closer, her immaculate eyes lifting to meet mine as if she expected me to fall for the act. And honestly, I might have—Lucine was one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen. Her natural charm was hard to resist. She had the kind of aura that reminded you of that one pure, elegant teacher, you couldn't help but have impure thoughts about.

"Nope. You're the same woman who took her savior hostage right after he saved her life from a powerful devil. Honestly, I can't trust you with anything," I said, deliberately exaggerating my accusation to cut off any further attempts from her to avoid taking an oath before the Card World's will.

"Fine, I'll take the oath. Just retract your Celestial Rule Domain. You've already caused enough damage," Lucine grumbled, realizing her charm had failed her. It was the first time she'd been forced to rely on it—and she blamed the age difference for why it didn't work.

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After Lucine took the oath—word for word as I had dictated it—in the presence of the Card World's will, I finally withdrew my Celestial Blood Fate Domain, relieved to no longer maintain it and worry about getting busted by Lucine as a fraud. Not long after, one of the card demigods arrived with the ingredients I had requested.

"Wyatt, do you really want to go through with this?" Lucine asked as I inspected the ingredients, making sure none of them were versions of themselves pulled from the many pasts of the Card World.

I didn't bother answering her. Instead, I slowly flew toward an empty card lab on campus that my Hive AI had located—anything to get away from her constant whining. But, there was no escaping it otherwise; she simply wouldn't shut up. I blamed myself for not having the foresight to include a clause in her oath that would have forced her to stay quiet throughout the entire process. Give me a few hours of peace.

"Wyatt, are you listening?" Lucine called out. Without giving me a chance to respond, she continued, "What did I ever do to you for you to treat my life like this? Why are you doing this? What right do you have to experiment with me?"

"Shut up!" I snapped, turning to glare at her before adding, "You're being too loud. I can't even hear myself think. Give me a moment, will you? You might be eager to throw your life away, but I'm not planning on killing you—not yet. My ego won't be satisfied if you die wrapped in your own ignorance. You're going to live long enough to understand

just how wrong you were. Then maybe I might be willing to kill without giving you a chance to repent."

"You..." Lucine glared at me, but no words followed once she realized I was trying to cure her purely out of spite. The real problem was that she didn't believe I could cure her at all—she thought I might end up killing her in some misguided delusion.

Yes. Even after everything that had happened, this woman still believed I thought I could cure her time-rule dementia only because I had gone insane.

...

"Go sit in that corner and don't utter a peep," I instructed Lucine as we entered the card lab, pointing toward the far, empty corner of the room while I began arranging the ingredients in order. Lucine gave a curt nod and quietly moved to squat in the corner. She had no choice—she had taken the oath.

Despite all these ingredients, I was still missing several crucial ones needed to cure Lucine's time-rule dementia. Morningstar University didn't have them, since they weren't native to the Card World, and I couldn't access the Devil Merchant Code from inside the time vestige. Fortunately for Lucine, I always carried a handful of essentials—ingredients I considered fundamental for any card creator to keep on hand at all times.

[— Ingredients —

- > Starfall Moss x 500 grams
- > Lucid Temporal Petal x 30 units
- > Temporal Bloom Thyme (with stem) x 6 units
- > Meridian Lotus x 18 units
- > Temporal Echo Resins x 100 grams
- > Rift Glass Powder x 30 grams
- > Four Petal Vine (30 meters) x 3 units
- > Blood Swamp Cucumber (minimum 20 cm long) x 3 units
- > Clampedo cores x 6 units
- > Demon Face Mushroom beard Strands x 12 units]

Among all the ingredients, the Clampedo cores and the demon-face mushroom beard were the only ones not native to the Card World. I carried them with me because Clampedo cores were essential for non-natives who wanted to begin cultivating within the Dark Realm's power system, while the demon-face mushroom beard was necessary to cleanse the darkness contained within those cores.

Through extensive research, I had discovered that using Clampedo cores together with my understanding of Viltronian cores allowed me to transform almost any living being into a demon. I never intended to play god, of course, but certain plants, animals, and even insects—despite being trapped in the mortal realm due to their racial limits—possessed properties that, when applied correctly, could create results nothing short of miraculous.

Two such examples were the four-petal vine and the blood swamp cucumber. The fact that Morningstar University's card apprentices even bothered to store these two ingredients should tell you they had their uses. They were very versatile, given how many purposes they could serve.

The four-petal vine's roots would take the shape of whatever creature's blood it fed on. In the wild, since it drank the blood of many different creatures, its roots usually formed into something that could only be described as a chimera—a twisted blend of every species it had ever fed on.

This was one of the two limitations holding the four-petal vine back from showing its true potential. The second was its racial realm limit—it was forever restricted to the mortal realm. No matter how high the realm of the creature whose blood it consumed, it could never break past its own limit. What was even more astonishing was that it wouldn't die from devouring the blood of powerful beings, despite being a mere mortal-realm plant.

I planned to use the Clampedo core to help the four-petal vine unlock its full potential, and then use that enhanced form as part of the method to cure Lucine's time-rule dementia. The same was true for the blood swamp cucumber.

However, the blood swamp cucumber had a much higher racial realm limit. It was an A-rank monster found only in a specific nature of dungeons known as the Blood Swamps. So far, nineteen Blood Swamp dungeons had been discovered across the five regions and the portion of the Way Beyond that had been explored—each one ranked higher than A-rank. Among card medics, these monsters were regarded as a miracle ingredient for anyone below the Card King realm.

I planned to use the Clampedo core to push this limit even further so it could be used on Card demigods too.

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In the corner of the card lab, Lucine squatted with her back against the wall. It wasn't that she didn't want to sit properly—it was simply that her princess gown made it impossible. But as she stayed there, she suddenly wondered why she was even doing this. That was when it hit her: she was following the boy's orders without him having to force her, moving like his puppet.

She couldn't help glaring at his back grudgingly. The only reasons she could endure this humiliation were the oath she had sworn before the Card World's will—and the fact that he was far stronger than she was.

After witnessing his true strength—how he subdued Slay with ease and even defied the Card World's will—she couldn't help but reconsider her view of the younger generation. For the first time, she felt a spark of hope. Perhaps, with people like him rising up, they might actually have a chance of achieving the same miracle their ancestors once did when they successfully held back the demon invasion.

But to her disbelief, he had turned out to be a complete psychopath—someone who not only believed he could cure a disease even the Celestials were helpless against, but also forced her to undergo his ridiculous treatment for time-rule dementia. How in the world were the four-petal vine and the blood swamp cucumber supposed to help with something that had plagued even the celestials?

She couldn't stop herself from wondering whether he actually planned to kill her and then quietly pocket all those expensive ingredients for himself. He said he wouldn't kill her, but she could no longer bring herself to trust a word he said.

Right now, Lucine felt as if the entire world were conspiring against her. She had never felt this wronged in her life. Maybe she could have understood it if it had happened anywhere else—but here of all places? She felt hopeless.

It was happening on the sacred grounds of Morningstar University, the institution founded by her own family, surrounded by her trusted aides and students. As the princess of Morningstar University, she had never imagined that one day she would be treated this poorly within the very place she ruled and the place where she was loved the most.

Lucine had no choice but to swallow her grievances, because the boy whose V-shaped back and broad shoulders she was staring at in a trance was undeniably stronger than anyone in the university. Only now was she beginning to understand why he dared to act so boldly within Morningstar University—like a loan shark visiting a defaulter. Yet, Sam had only good things to say about him.

It was all Samuel's fault. If he hadn't spoken so highly of the boy, she would never have gone out of her way to recruit him using those "unconventional" methods—and she wouldn't be in this miserable situation now. She planned to teach Sam a lesson when they returned to their present.

After directing all her grievances and anger toward Sam, Lucine felt a little better. Her thoughts grew lighter, her mind clearer. Only then did she finally have the presence of mind to observe what the boy was doing with the four-petal vine and the blood swamp cucumber.

She extended her intent toward his platinum grimoire, trying to peek into his crafting process. But to her astonishment, her intent couldn't penetrate the grimoire at all. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't get past its barrier.

"Stop messing around. You're the one paying for these ingredients," the boy warned, having sensed her attempts to break past his grimoire's barrier and peek at his soul-crafting process. Unfortunately for her, his grimoire wasn't platinum grade at all—it was unranked. Unless she were at the ruler class or above, she could forget about breaking through its defenses with intent alone.

Lucine froze like a spooked cat, then immediately pretended it hadn't been her—as though someone else had done it, despite there clearly being only two people in the card lab.

"Huh? Did you say something, Wyatt?" Lucine asked, feigning ignorance with the most exaggerated innocent expression she could muster at that moment.

"Ah!" Lucine exclaimed when a familiar face surfaced on the back of the boy's head. It was him. He looked at her with clear disdain and said, "You do realize there are only two of us in this lab, right?"

"Stop doing that," Lucine muttered, creeped out by the sight. "Your physique is the most bizarre physique I've ever seen."

"You stop playing around and at least pretend to be a proper hostage." The boy remarked before the face on the back of his head slowly submerged back into his head.

"Wait, don't go," Lucine called out and then, seeing the face resurface, she asked, "Tell me what you are doing with Four Petal Vine and the Blood Swamp Cucumber? How are

they going to help with my condition? Tell me, I have the right to know. After all you are—wait, don't leave, I'm not done asking."

As she continued with her questions and complaints, the face instantly sank back into his head. Seeing this, Lucine called out in surprise—only for the voice to warn her sternly, "Quiet. If I hear one more peep from you, I'll sedate you and continue without you. I don't need you awake for this process."

Hearing his threat, Lucine fell silent immediately, not even daring to mumble under her breath. She knew all too well that the boy could be ruthless over the smallest things. Instead, she began plotting all the different ways she would punish Samuel once she got out of this mess — if she got out of this mess alive.

Just as her boredom was starting to set in, the boy's grimoire suddenly shone with brilliant light and expelled three four-petal vines. But these were nothing like the ones she knew. Each one looked... altered—mutated in a way that made her instincts tighten.

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I began the treatment process by placing three top-tier Clampedo cores, three four-petal vines—each roughly thirty meters long and separated from the same parent—and nine strands of demon-face mushroom beard onto my grimoire's creation page.

Using the Breath of Erosion, I refined them thoroughly, making their soul pathways more adaptable to the changes I intended to introduce. This would increase the chances of successfully mutating the four-petal vines using the Clampedo cores.

After refining their soul pathways, I first used the pathways of the three top-tier Clampedo cores to merge with the three four-petal vines, successfully mutating them into four-petal demon vines. Then, I used the soul pathways of the nine strands of demon-face mushroom beard to help the newly formed demon vines fully embrace their dark nature, completely removing the side effects caused by using Clampedo cores to transform a mortal-tier plant into a demonic one.

I was far from finished. Everything up to this point had relied on the accumulation of my knowledge and help from my primordial soul pupils. What came next, however, would draw on my comprehension of the Blood Rule. This was one of the main reasons I had chosen the four-petal vine over the other appealing alternatives—its blood-based abilities could be reshaped, refined, and tailored to my needs through my understanding of the Blood Rule and of course a little help from my primordial soul pupils.

I had already pushed three Blood Rule meanings—Blood Fate Plunders, Blood Curse, and Blood Plague—to the ultimate tier and reached the stage where they needed to be fused into a single Blood Rule stream. Only by doing so would I be able to comprehend additional Blood Rule meanings and merge them into my stream without limitation.

My understanding of the three Blood Rule meanings had advanced to the point where I could perform a bestowal—a technique I learned by observing Pax Whiteburn's origin card receive one from Demigod Michael Angelo's will within the Card World's womb. I intended to carry out a similar bestowal on all three four-petal demonic vines, strengthening the innate connection they already shared from having originated from the same parent vine.

Among the three Blood Rule meanings I had comprehended, my grasp of Blood Fate Plunder meaning was the deepest, followed by Blood Curse meaning, and lastly Blood Plague meaning. I planned to use the Blood Fate Plunder meaning to perform the bestowal on all three four-petal demonic vines, linking their individual fates into a single thread. This would elevate their connection to the point where, despite having distinct bodies and minds of their own, they would be one and same, functioning as one.

My bestowal would not end there. It would also enhance their vampiric ability to feed on the blood of other creatures, allowing their roots to not only assume the form of whatever they consumed but also gradually alter their intertwined fate to mirror that creature's fate.

In essence, the three four-petal demonic vines would become a single entity with three different bodies and minds, each capable of plundering both the form and fate of its prey through blood.

I had successfully performed bestowals on my other creations on the first attempt, so I wasn't particularly worried. Focusing my understanding of the Blood Fate Plunder meaning, and using my soul pupils to pinpoint the soul pathways responsible for the vines' vampiric abilities, I began the bestowal—merging their fates and granting them the power to plunder fate through blood.

The bestowal was a complete success. I had mutated the three four-petal demonic vines into a single Triunion four-petal demonic vine.

Usually the next would be to turn it into a card by moving the modified soul pathways into a common core and turning it into a card, but not today as I didn't the Triunion four-petal demonic vines but their fully developed roots having assumed their complete form.

Then I turned to Lucine, who was sulking in the corner after her intent failed to break past the barrier of my unranked grimoire and peek into my soul-crafting process. If I had a diamond grimoire, I would have been helpless against her spying, but mine was one of only two unranked grimoires in the entire card world. For someone who had lived so long, Lucine still behaved spoiled and childish. That was why, when I told her to sit in the corner, I never expected her to accept it quietly.

Still, the turn of events that followed worked in my favor. The more setbacks she experienced, the longer she would remain obedient, giving me enough time to prove I was telling the truth when I said I could cure her time-rule dementia. Then I would own her flat ass.

When I physically turned to look at her after releasing the Triunion four-petal demonic vines, the sulking and bored Lucine instantly stiffened. She stared at me with wary eyes, as if I were her mortal enemy. And honestly, in her current state, that was exactly how she saw me—an opponent forcing her into a fake 'treatment,' one she believed was merely a pretext to kill her under the guise of curing her time-rule dementia.

"Wyatt, it's still not too late. We don't have to do this. Please let me go—I'll have them take you to our present as quickly as possible," Lucine made one final attempt to persuade me, swearing she would give me anything I asked for as long as I didn't force her to undergo my treatment.

Lucine had long since given up. She already knew the only reason she could store Slay's egg in her dimensional storage card was because I allowed it, and I did so only because I was completely confident I could take it back whenever I wished. She no longer harbored the delusion that, with enough planning, she could ever control me.

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"It's too late for that. Stop arguing. I don't understand why you're so resistant to my treatment. If something goes wrong, at best you'll lose your life, and at worst you'll lose your memory and spend the rest of your days as a loon living off the good will of the people," I said, trying to get Lucine to willingly cooperate. The next step of the treatment required her full participation to achieve the best results; forced cooperation would only distort the outcome irreversibly. And knowing myself, if I could achieve better, I would never settle for merely good.

Therefore, I needed her to stop resisting and wholeheartedly cooperate with the treatment. Just because she had sworn an oath before the Card World's will to undergo and comply with my plan didn't mean she had to like it. I could have added a clause requiring her not only to like it, but willingly participate in it, but I doubted she would have sworn the oath if I had. Just because she had caved didn't mean I could force her to swear unreasonable oaths; that would be counterproductive.

"Easy for you to say when it's not your life on the line," Lucine shot back as she got to her feet and walked over, her curiosity overriding her fear. Her eyes lingered on the mutated four-petal vines, and she couldn't help but ask, "What did you do to them? They look even more sinister than before."

"So, you're afraid of death. Is that it?" I asked, not bothering to wait for her response. I continued with a sneer laced with disdain, "So the entire Morningstar University will face the backlash of your oath simply because you're too afraid to die. Impressive. I didn't expect this from the last living descendant of the Morgenstern family. If your ancestors could hear this, their bodies would be rolling restlessly in their coffins."

"Who said I was afraid of death? Why chase death when I still have a few good years left?" Lucine shot back. "Wyatt, don't think I don't see what you're trying to do. But fine—I'll bite. Out with it. What do you want from me?" she asked with a smug grin, refusing to fall for my trick. She had fallen for them enough times to know better now.

She had seen through me. She was beginning to understand that if I bothered to take an interest in someone, it meant I wanted something from them. Otherwise, I wouldn't waste my breath. She now knew I wasn't a con artist—just overly calculating and practical acting only to protect my interest, unless the other party had proved themselves worthy of my trust and time. She had once done that, but then ruined it by pushing her luck with me.

"That's the Triunion four-petal demonic vine I just created. I've shared all the information about it, along with the instructions for what I need you to do with it. Go through everything now, and ask me if you have any questions," I said, pointing at the three mutated four-petal vines.

Lucine eyed the mutated vines with clear skepticism, repeating the name I'd given them under her breath as she summoned her grimoire and opened the file I'd shared. It took her less than a minute to scan through and fully grasp the few hundred pages of

introductions, followed by the instructions detailing exactly what she needed to do with the mutated vines.

"You want me to help them grow to the devil realm by feeding them my blood inside the time-expansion chambers? Even if I overlook whether that's remotely possible for a mutant four-petal vines to achieve devil realm, do you have any idea how much time-rule power it would take to elevate them to the devil realm? That's more than what Morningstar University earns in net profit over three whole years!" Lucine exclaimed in utter disbelief. She couldn't believe I had the audacity to shamelessly ask her to do something that would cost Morningstar University its three years' net worth. Even if she were willing, it wasn't a decision she had the authority to make. And beyond that, such an astronomical amount of capital wasn't something the university could mobilize at a moment's notice, let alone inside the time vestige.

Even though they were in the Temporal River, surrounded by time-rule and temporal forces, those energies were far too raw and violent to be used directly.

They had to undergo a refinement process before they could power the time-expansion chambers or applied for numerous other things in the time vestige. And while their source of time-rule power was technically limitless, there was still a cap on how much they could refine within any given period, an unfortunate limit due to their lacking level of their arrays.

Most of these arrays were established by their ancestors and have aged. Despite the timely maintenance the time was taking a toll on the arrays and their efficiency was decreasing. It was a growing concern for Morningstar University. Therefore, about a third of the research in the time vestige was based on reverse engineering their ancestor's array formations or creating new array formations to replace their ancestor's array formation.

Many strategies were proposed to handle the situation, but the most viable one was to search their Labyrinth of Myriad Past for a timeline where their ancestors' teachings remained intact and had been passed down for generations—or, even better, a past where their ancestors were still alive. That way, they could directly seize the information they needed from that version of the card world's past. And since the array would be used within the time vestige, they didn't have to worry about that version of having past having altered time rules; they could apply the knowledge here without worrying about any such constraints.

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- Chapter 2534: Time Tribute

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

"No, that can't be right. I already calculated the output of your time-rule power refineries. With your current consumption rate, if you divert even a small portion of the time-rule power you're sending to the reserves, you can easily supply the amount needed to elevate the Triunion four-petal demonic veins to the devil realm. You wouldn't even have to touch your main reserves," I said, baffled by how unreasonable Lucine sounded. I didn't doubt that she was lying to me. She could be many things, but a liar wasn't one of them.

The moment I stepped into the time vestige, the Hive AI—assisted by my primordial soul pupils—was already scanning and recording everything: the entire structure of the vestige and every modification Morningstar University had made. That was how I knew all of this. I was gathering the data because I intended to build an artificial time vestige of my own.

Was it even possible?

I believed it was. Especially with the help of the devil merchant code. After all, it was the architect and builder of the inter-realm city in the spiritual plane, and the Dual World that existed in both the spiritual and physical planes.

Why would the devil merchant code help me?

It was no secret that any demon or devil merchant could hire it, as long as they were willing to pay the proper offering. I had already employed its services several times to construct SSS-rank array formations at a low cost, mostly because they were based on my own personal designs. But if you wanted it to act as both architect and builder, then it would certainly make your wallet bleed.

"How did you reach that conclusion?" Lucine asked, stunned. But she knew it was pointless to expect an answer from me, so she shook her head and said, "Never mind. Just understand this—there are no reserves of time-rule power. That's tribute. Now, redo your calculations and you'll see I wasn't lying to you."

"Tribute? To whom—the Central Government?" I asked at once.

She was right. If I stopped treating the time-rule power stored by the refineries as reserves, then the amount needed to elevate the triunion four-petal demonic veins to the devil realm would indeed equal nearly three years of their net profit. Which meant I would have to restructure my entire treatment plan for Lucine.

"That's not something you need to worry about. All you need to know is that we can't touch the tribute. No matter how much you threaten, it's not going to happen. You might as well try it yourself and see what happens," Lucine said, her tone firm as her lips curled into a mocking sneer. She practically dared me to destroy the time vestige. Her confidence was unsettling—she sounded certain that the vestige wouldn't be harmed, and that I would be the one to face the consequences.

If she was so sure, then why had she caved to pressure earlier and sworn an oath before the card world's will? Maybe that whatever gave her courage now had been her last resort, something she never wanted to rely on. And now that I had touched that boundary, she was suddenly being cryptic and even provoking me to test my luck.

Noticing my thoughtful expression as I tried to figure out what made her so confident, she smiled and said teasingly, "How about I make it a little easier for you? The tribute isn't for the Central Government."

I had already ruled out the Central Government. This wasn't the Five Regions—this was the temporal river, the time-rule stream of the card world, where they held no authority at all. The idea that the Central Government or its Masters could protect the time vestige here was absurd. And the fact that Lucine dared me to destroy it now, while we were sailing the temporal river itself, only confirmed it.

So who was giving Lucine this sudden confidence?

Who was the tribute of refined time-rule liquid meant for?

It clearly wasn't anyone inside the time vestige. The strongest person here was Lucine, followed by a handful of elite demigods. None of them could guarantee protection in a place like this.

Only one existence could—

the spirit of the card world's time-rule stream itself.

No, that didn't make sense. I had met the spirit of the blood-rule stream before—by copying the blood-rule power resonance Bloodette used to comprehend the blood rule meanings and communicate with it. From that encounter, I learned that the rule-stream spirits of the card world were indifferent to card apprentice. If not for its need to address its herald's wellbeing—Bloodette's condition—it would never have answered my call. In fact, it had slapped me out of the time-rule stream for daring to mimic its herald's resonance in the first place.

So it definitely wasn't the spirit of the time-rule stream.

Then who could it be?

Yes... that was the only answer. It had been right in front of me the whole time. No one else would dare to guarantee protection for someone within the temporal river.

It was the herald of the time-rule stream—the Time Supreme.

If Morningstar University had the support of the Time Supreme, then everything suddenly aligned: the time vestige, the temporal anchors, the time tunnels, the Labyrinth of Myriad Pasts, even the immense tribute of refined time-rule liquid. All of it made perfect sense now.

I finally understood why Morningstar University—despite creating the Labyrinth of the Myriad Pasts—wasn't ruling the Five Regions and was only considered one of its top forces. It was because they hadn't built the Labyrinth themselves. Someone else had constructed it for them, and that same being was maintaining and protecting it in exchange for a hefty tribute.

But that raised an even more puzzling question:

How did they find the Time Rule Supreme and convince it to help them in the first place? Especially when there had always been deep, long-standing tensions between the supreme beings and card apprentices.

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"The Time Supreme," I said to Lucine, watching her face closely to see if my deduction hit the mark. And as expected, Lucine proved she would be terrible at poker.

"How did you figure that out?" she burst out, genuinely shocked. She stared straight into my eyes, as if she could dig the answer out of my soul—though she knew she would never get what she wanted.

"I'll tell you if you tell me how you got the Time Supreme to help you," I offered, seeing just how frustrated she was that I had uncovered Morningstar University's deepest secret. She could only blame herself for that, after all she was the one who dared me to it.

Now that I was certain the Time Supreme was the one giving Lucine the confidence to challenge me inside the time vestige—while we were drifting through the temporal river—I felt cold sweat run down my back. I silently thanked my fortune for not falling for her taunt and pushing my luck. Not that I'd ever be foolish enough to destroy the time vestige. It was the only thing shielding me—and countless other innocent souls—from being lost in temporal river who knows how far away from our original timeline. But it didn't stop me to threaten Lucine using it.

"Deal. But you go first. I don't trust you," Lucine said. "And don't you dare lie or try to act clever this time. I'll break the deal immediately." Her warning was blunt and honest—if I wanted to know how Morningstar University secured the Time Supreme's help, I had to play straight. Yes, they paid a hefty tribute for Time Supreme's cooperation, but that alone couldn't have been the reason. If Supreme beings could be hired with offerings, card apprentices would have attempted it ages ago. Unless the Time Supreme was different from the others of its kind.

"The answer was obvious," I replied. "Who else would dare promise protection inside the temporal river—let alone safeguard an entire time vestige? It had to be either the spirit of the time-rule stream or its herald, the Time Supreme. And with that massive tribute of time-rule liquid, only the Time Supreme could consume that much on a regular basis. It also explains why you're all so weak despite your outrageous progress in time-rule comprehension."

I kept my tone steady, showing I was honoring her conditions. Now it was her turn.

"As simple as that," Lucine muttered after hearing how I deduced that the Time Supreme was their backer in the temporal river. Her cheeks puffed in irritation, feeling cheated yet again. But they slowly deflated as she realized I had answered her honestly and upheld my side of the deal.

She shot me a grudging look before letting out a long sigh, fully aware that she wouldn't be able to stop herself from telling me everything—just like she had with the Labyrinth of the Myriad Past and the second campus of Morningstar University. For reasons she couldn't explain, she always ended up wanting to brag about Morningstar University to me.

What she didn't realize was that she was like a rancher boasting to a wolf about how plump her pigs were. So, she shouldn't blame the wolf if it slipped in under the cover of night to take a few.

Lucine began, "When we first discovered the time vestige, we learned it was the home of the Time Supreme, Kronos. And unlike every other supreme being, Kronos—just like the vestige itself—was a unique existence across all timelines of the Card World. However, unlike the time vestige it can also exist in every timeline at once if it chooses to.

"It was unimaginably powerful, second only to the Card World's will and the spirit of the time-rule stream. But it was also unbelievably lazy. It refined bare minimum time-rule power it needed just to maintain its realm and existence, and then it simply lay here, doing nothing. Even when it noticed my ancestors trespassing in its home, it didn't bother to act. As long as they didn't bother it, it didn't care that they were running around inside its house.

"My ancestors were stunned by its temperament. It was nothing like any supreme being they had ever encountered. So a few of them decided to try approaching it, hoping to establish some kind of trade. But anyone who tried to disturb it was simply thrown into the temporal river—never to be seen again.

"Even so, my ancestors refused to give up. The possibilities of working with the Time Supreme were too great to ignore. So they sought help from the progenitor of the Unparalleled Bloodline—the founder of the Southern Region and the Southern royal family—who happened to be the adoptive brother of the Blood Supreme, Bloodette.

"With Blood Supreme Bloodette's mediation, our ancestor finally reached an agreement with the Time Supreme, and that's how we secured its help in our endeavors."

"So, correct me if I'm wrong—everything you and Morningstar University have today is thanks to Bloodette and the progenitor of the Unparalleled Bloodline helping you broker a deal with the Time Supreme?" I asked, fixing Lucine with an unkind stare as the memory of the Southern Family's demigods struggling helplessly against Belphegor's Worldhog incarnation resurfaced in my mind. They hadn't had enough time-rule based cards to defend themselves, all because Morningstar University had been cutting the Southern Region's quota for decades.

It would be one thing if those cards were charity. But they were sold at inflated prices—several times their true cost. And when the Southern Region tried to buy more, offering even higher prices, Morningstar University still refused. That wasn't business; that was repaying kindness with betrayal.

Lucine's eyes widened as she realized she had revealed far more than she intended. Her expression twisted with guilt as she sensed exactly where I was steering the conversation. She knew Morningstar University's treatment of the Southern Royal Family had been deeply unfair, especially considering the friendship between their

ancestors. But she also knew the truth: she wasn't in charge, and things had changed. In the current times, trust and loyalty always came second to interests.

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While Lucine sat there drowning in guilt over how Morningstar University had treated the Southern Region in recent decades, I was still trying to process the revelation that the first card apprentice with the unparalleled bloodline was actually Bloodette's adoptive brother. It was a stunning twist.

But when I recalled the vision Bloodette had while helping Sarah and me subdue Demigod Redfall and lock him away in my calamity daughter gem within a heathen stone prison—back when he used Sarah's bloodline as a bridge to slip out of the river of reincarnation and force his way into the Card World in an attempt to seize her body—everything suddenly started to fall into place.

In that vision, it became clear that someone from Anna's bloodline had been the one to seal Bloodette inside the dungeon seal. And now, after learning about the connection between the unparalleled bloodline's progenitor and Bloodette, I was starting to lean toward the idea that he was the one who had imprisoned her there.

Aside from figuring out who had sealed Bloodette, the more pressing question was why they had done it. They hadn't just locked her away in a harsh dungeon for centuries to follow—they had stripped her of her prowess and memories as well. If they were truly that closely related, how could they bring themselves to treat her with such cruelty? Even someone driven by deep-seated hatred wouldn't normally resort to something so extreme.

I wondered if Lucine knew the answer. Maybe her ancestors had passed it down along with the stories of how they first acquired the time vestige. And if that was the case, why did no one in the Southern Royal Family have even the slightest idea of how Morningstar University ended up with it? Information like that should have been preserved and handed down through every generation.

Damn it, the Southern Royal Family really was in shambles. The current generation didn't even know a large portion of its own history. I couldn't help but question who was responsible for such a mess. Then again, judging by the last few generations in their family tree, it was clear they were nothing like the other royal families and noble clans.

The Southern Ruler had married a commoner soldier, and together they'd had two children.

The Southern Ruler's sister, Field Marshal Lorn, married a commoner academician and had three children of her own.

The Southern Prince was still single, showing no intention of starting a family anytime soon.

The Southern Princess had married a commoner as well, had a daughter, and eventually divorced.

It was as if none of them cared about preserving their bloodline or heritage. They lived however they wanted, offending plenty of people in the process. If not for their unparalleled bloodline, I had no doubt the number of royal families in the five regions would have already dropped to three.

"Lucine, does the Southern Royal family not know about this piece of history?" I asked, despite knowing that if they did, Southern Princess would have long used it to fix the attitude of Morningstar University toward her family and Southern Region, maybe more.

"No, they don't. It was the Unparalleled Bloodline Progenitor's idea. He believed the time vestige should never belong to a single person or family. Otherwise, they would eventually use it to elevate themselves instead of serving the greater good, turning it into a tool of oppression when it was meant to be a symbol of hope in times of crisis.

He was a remarkable man. He entrusted my ancestors with the responsibility of recruiting talents from all five regions and selecting the best among them to form a council—one that would oversee the time vestige and ensure it was always used for the people, not for any single organization.

My ancestors wanted to give his bloodline a permanent seat on the council, but he refused. He said, 'If my sins are not my descendants' sins, then my glory should not be their glory either. You may invite one member of my bloodline each generation, but only if they prove themselves worthy and swear an oath: never to reveal the council's existence or its secrets to anyone who does not already know of it.'

He was stubborn like that. So my ancestors could only agree with him, granting the Southern Royal Family additional quotas to attend Morningstar University so they would have more opportunities to produce someone worthy of joining the council.

They also believed that the descendants of such a great man would likely be remarkable as well. So, as a gesture of gratitude to the Unparalleled Bloodline Progenitor for all he had done, they unanimously decided to give the Southern Royal Family's vote greater weight than the votes of other council members.

For centuries, everything went according to plan. But in the last couple of centuries, none of the Southern Royal Family members who attended Morningstar University proved worthy of a seat on the council.

The current Southern Ruler's aunt was the last to hold the Heatsend seat, but for reasons known only to the Southern Royal Family, she was imprisoned in their heritage land. With her gone, her seat has remained vacant.

The current Southern Princess was a promising candidate, but she married Gainover. Everybody except her could see he was a snake. And honestly, even as a woman myself, I still can't understand why the best and brightest among us fall for treacherous jerks and idiots.

Then came Anna Heatsend. She wasn't even being considered at first—until we discovered her origin card, Ann. With their combined intellect and strength, she suddenly became a serious contender. And then she went and massacred the entire Davis clan.

After that came Luna Lorn. She wasn't a Heatsend, but since their seat had remained vacant for so long, we chose to bend the rules a little. In the end, she betrayed all of us and defected to the Freedom Fighters.

It's not that we've forgotten the kindness of the Unparalleled Bloodline Progenitor—it's just life," Lucine said, trying to explain herself and ease the guilt weighing on her voice.

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"All I'm hearing is that you people used every excuse possible to deny the descendants of the Unparalleled Bloodline's progenitor a seat on the council.

Luna, I can understand.

But how do you justify rejecting the Southern Princess because of her choice of husband? Who she loves or wants to build a family with has nothing to do with whether she's fit to sit on your council.

And how do you justify rejecting Anna for wiping out a clan of demon worshipers? Since when did killing demon worshipers become a sin? Are you saying our predecessors were sinners too, even though they fought demon worshipers to protect their world and their people from demon invasion?

You guys are bold. I'll give you that. Sitting in your precious time vestige, deciding who's right and who's wrong based solely on what suits you. You've become exactly what the Unparalleled Bloodline's progenitor feared. Lucine, shame on you for letting it come to this. Forget the Southern Royal Family. Do you think your ancestors will be happy to learn the current state of the council?"

I laid the blame squarely on Lucine. The council that was meant to serve the greater good had become nothing more than an arm of Morningstar University—becoming the very thing it was created to prevent.

From Lucine's explanation, three things became clear to me. First, I used to wonder why the descendants of the Southern Royal Family kept attending Morningstar University—so far from home and at the cost of their own security—instead of simply studying at the academies in the Southern Academic City. Now I understood it wasn't a tradition but a part of the test to enter the council.

Second, the Unparalleled Bloodline Progenitor was a self-righteous prick—someone willing to sacrifice the very people who depended on him for the sake of his so-called greater good. I despised people like that. And the more I thought about it, the more it seemed likely that he had brainwashed Bloodette into accepting whatever cruel fate he had arranged for her.

Lastly, it was obvious that certain members of the council had taken advantage of the long absence of a Heatsend representative. They were slowly stripping away the privileges Lucine's ancestors had granted to the Southern Royal Family, acting as though the agreements of the past no longer mattered.

Even I could see they were targeting the Southern Royal Family, yet Lucine kept defending them, brushing it off as 'just life.' As the last living descendant of Morningstar University's founders, she clearly wasn't fulfilling her responsibilities. Her time-rule dementia wasn't a valid excuse either—she had only developed it in the last couple of decades, while the council had rejected the Southern Princess and Anna long before that.

If I hadn't already come to understand what kind of person Lucine truly was, I would have suspected she was working with the other council members behind the scenes.

I believed the reason for Lucine's failure to protect her ancestor's legacy was simple: She had been so absorbed in her research and projects that she never truly kept an eye on the council. She trusted them to uphold the greater good and assumed they would do the right thing. Instead, they began coveting the privileges granted to the Southern Royal Family. They seized every excuse they could find to strip away those hard-earned benefits, one piece at a time.

"Wyatt, it's not as simple as that—" Lucine began, trying to defend the council's decisions. I cut her off.

"No, Lucine. It is as simple as that. The council members aren't just making it impossible for a Heatsend to claim their rightful seat—they're actively targeting them. They're withholding the privileges the Southern Royal Family is entitled to. Anyone paying the slightest attention would see it. But you can't... I honestly don't know why the best and brightest women always end up trusting treacherous jerks and idiots."

Hearing me throw her own words—once meant for the Southern Princess—back at her, Lucine stared at me, unblinking. But deep in her chest, something trembled. A quiet, unwelcome thought whispered that I might actually be right. Maybe she had trusted her people too blindly. Maybe she had failed to see the ugliness in them that others could spot with ease.

Lucine didn't want to doubt her own people—she never had. But when she imagined the day she would have to face her ancestors and explain the state of the council, she faltered. That hesitation was enough. For the first time, instead of reflexively defending them, she decided she needed to take a long, hard look at everything she had ignored until now.

"Wyatt, I promise you I'll fix this—if it truly needs fixing," Lucine said, her voice steady with resolve. It was the first thing she mentally added to her agenda for when they returned to their present.

"I don't care how you fix it," I replied. "What I want is the Southern Princess on the council by the end of this week. If you don't make it happen, I'll give her the information I have and let her fight for what rightfully belongs to her family."

I didn't particularly want the Southern Princess gaining more authority. Especially through me then she already was. If anything, I would've preferred Anna taking that seat. But this could serve as a fitting return gift to the Southern princess who had given me the Freedom Fighters as a gift. It would settle the score between us when we finally met.

And besides... Anna already had more weight on her shoulders than she was ready for. She didn't need another responsibility added to the pile—not yet.

"What do you mean? I told you all of this in confidence—not so you could turn around and blackmail me with it," Lucine sighed, wondering how she had ended up trusting and opening her heart to such a treacherous jerk and idiot.

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"Call it blackmail or a threat—whichever suits you. I want the Southern Princess to have a seat on the council, and I want her to know she has my full support. You have one week," I said, savoring the chance to show Lucine what it feels like to be played by someone you thought was a friend. She had taken me hostage using the time vestige. I still was, in one way or another. It was only fair she tasted the same treatment. "By now, you should understand what happens when you cross me."

Back when I was neck-deep in dark-realm trouble, the Southern Princess quietly struck a deal with the freedom fighters, who were desperately seeking my help to keep their bankrupt ass afloat and sinking cause alive. At first, I assumed she did it to spite me for taking her trusted aide, Field Marshal Lorn.

But things escalated quickly. Somehow, the world leaders stacking outside of the dungeons linked to the Yellow Plains planet found out about the deal. Instead of waiting any longer, they decided to launch a joint raid on the freedom fighters.

Desperate, the Freedom Fighters reached out to their new ally for help, only to find that they couldn't reach the Southern Princess at all. Every attempt to contact her failed. Henricks even abandoned the battlefield to track her down, but she was nowhere to be found. As a last resort, he came to Lil' Red Storm, where he had previously dropped off me and Field Marshal Lorn, hoping the Field Marshal could help locate her.

But the Field Marshal—who had recently become a devil merchant—had already entered sector WS9909 to pursue a higher level on the Martial Path. With no way to find her, Henricks eventually opened up to me, though it took a bit of nudging on my part.

Once I understood what the Freedom Fighters were facing, I negotiated my own terms before offering any help. It wasn't until I officially took the Freedom Fighters under my wing that I learned the truth: the Southern Princess herself had leaked their situation to the World Leaders and had been avoiding them on purpose.

In the end, I gained both the Freedom Fighters and the D-rank Silver Beach Dungeon for a fraction of the price Henricks had originally demanded.

Why did she do this? It was her way of offering peace. She had orchestrated events that might cause Anna to lose her love for me—just as she had once lost her love for her mother by walking too far down the extreme path and embracing it. That same chain of events had also led to me taking Field Marshal Lorn away from her.

Finding out that she tried to reconcile by giving me such a generous offering caught me off guard. But I had no interest in making peace with her. How dare she meddle in my relationship with Anna? I was still undecided about who I should choose as my partner, but now I almost wanted to choose Anna just to spite her mother. Yet I knew that would be unfair to both Anna and myself, so I forced myself to calm down.

I couldn't simply hand the Freedom Fighters back to her. They weren't objects I could return—they were people, with hearts and will of their own. So I began searching for the perfect replacement, something I could send back instead, something that would deliver my message clearly.

And today, I finally found it. With this, she would understand that I wasn't finished with Anna—not even if Anna was finished with me.

I couldn't wait for the meeting Colleen had promised between the Southern Princess and me. I already knew exactly where she was, but I couldn't just go to her. That would make it seem like I had nothing better to do, or worse, that I was so eager to see her that I dropped all my responsibilities just for her.

No—that was not how our first meeting should happen. It mattered too much. It would shape the tone of our relationship going forward. The stronger I appeared, the better. Ideally, I'd tear into her the moment we met, but she was too sharp for that approach. Still, this was good enough.

"Wyatt, you're being unreasonable. This isn't your neighborhood watch council where you can appoint anyone you like," Lucine said, rejecting my demand outright. "I can't come up with a single logical reason to even propose giving the Southern Princess a seat on the council to the council—much less actually place her on the council within a week. It's just illogical."

She made it clear she wasn't going to bend, no matter how much I pressed her.

"What's truly illogical is how you all stripped the Southern Princess and her family of what rightfully belongs to them just because she married a jerk. You can't justify rejecting her in the first place, yet now you're worried about justifying why she should receive what's already her family's due.

And tell me—what's the point of having members of the Southern Royal Family take an oath not to reveal the council's existence or secrets to anyone outside those who already know, if you're going to punish them for their choice of partner anyway? From where I stand, your Morningstar University's time-vestige council feels no different from a gossip neighborhood committee—acting on whims rather than the purpose it was created for.

Lucine, you know in your heart that the Southern Princess is the right choice for that seat. She's proven herself again and again to the people of the Southern Region and all the other Four Regions. She's the one currently leading the fight against the looming second demonic invasion.

Are you really going to ignore everything she's done just because she once married someone who didn't deserve her love or loyalty? Think about how absurd that sounds. And tell me this—weren't you young once? Didn't you make mistakes you regret now? Yet something good still came from them, didn't it? The same applies to the Southern Princess.

So here it is: either you give her the seat, or I come for all of you."

I laid it out plainly, making sure Lucine understood just how unfair the council was being—and that if they didn't place the Southern Princess on the council by the end of the week, they wouldn't just be slighting her. They'd be making an enemy out of me. The time vestige might be under the protection of the Time Supreme, Kronos, but their original campus back in the Central Academic City definitely wasn't.

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After listening to everything I said about granting the Southern Princess a seat on the Time Vestige Council, Lucine fell silent. She wasn't ignoring me—she was thinking it through, weighing my words carefully.

The empty Southern Royal Family seat had been a burden on her mind for centuries now, especially with the growing tension between the Southern Royals and Morningstar University. She didn't want to be the one under whose leadership a friendship—one that had lasted generations—finally broke. She understood that her duty required her to prioritize Morningstar University above all else, and her ancestors would never blame her for that. But they would surely be disappointed to see a bond they had nurtured for so long fade away.

So Lucine made up her mind quietly: the Southern Princess would get her seat on the Time Vestige Council.

The boy was right. The Southern Princess had proven herself to all Five Regions through her leadership in the Southern Region and her efforts against the impending second demonic invasion. Someone like her should be welcomed into the council with open arms—even if she'd been rejected once before.

This didn't mean the council had been wrong to reject the Southern Princess back then, nor did it mean she was getting special treatment now because of the boy's threats. It simply meant that she had grown—far more than anyone expected—forcing the council to reevaluate her worthiness of the seat.

Yes, that was it.

Lucine nodded to herself as she reached this conclusion, convincing herself that adding the Southern Princess to the council was not only reasonable but beneficial. It didn't signal that the council had lost its way. And even if they had been mistaken in rejecting her before, accepting her now would only prove that the council wasn't afraid to acknowledge its missteps and correct them.

"Now that I think about it that way, I agree with you," Lucine said at last. "I see no reason the Southern Princess shouldn't claim her ancestors' seat on the council. I can't promise anything, but I'll give it a try."

In the end, she had agreed to my push—only after thoroughly talking herself into it.

"Not good enough. She will be on the council if the council wants to keep existing. There's nothing to negotiate," I said, refusing to give Lucine even an inch. This was something they should've handled ages ago without needing me to push them. It felt like someone demanding a tip for doing the job they were already paid to do. And besides, this was my return gift to the Southern Princess. Lucine saying she would 'try' wasn't going to cut it.

"Fine, I'll make it happen. Is that good enough for you? Are you satisfied now? Or is there something else you don't like?" Lucine snapped, attitude spilling over.

"Yes," I said. "I don't like your tone. You're acting like I'm forcing you to do something you weren't already supposed to do." I flashed her a teasing grin, knowing full well that she understood the council had been in the wrong from the start. Yet here she was, trying to save face by pretending the current Southern Princess had only recently earned the right to be on the council—when, in truth, she'd been worthy since the day she first enrolled in Morningstar University.

"Y-you... weren't you supposed to treat me or something? Please hurry, I don't have time to argue with you," Lucine said, nearly losing her temper. But she swallowed it down—what else could she do? Fight me? Impossible. After seeing the kind of strength I could summon when pushed, she knew that challenging me would be the same as courting death. Argue with me? That was pointless too. I always managed to say something that got under her skin.

"About that," I said, shifting back to the real issue. "With this new information, I'll need to revise the treatment plan I had for you. I need a few more ingredients. I've already shared the list with your grimoire—have your people gather everything."

Lucine blinked, unable to fathom what I just said. *'Are you treating a Celestial disease or a common cold to change your treatment willy-nilly? You sure you are not trying to kill me?'*

"And," I continued, "it would help if you told me the three time-rule meanings you've already comprehended to the ultimate tier and are trying to fuse them into a time rule stream. Only if you don't mind. If you'd rather not say, forget it. I'll figure something out on my own."

Since Lucine couldn't produce the amount of time-rule power I needed for my original treatment plan, I had no choice but to improvise. Unfortunately, there wasn't much room to maneuver, so knowing which time-rule meanings she had comprehended might give me the breathing space I needed.

Given what had just happened, I wouldn't be surprised if she hesitated to share that information with me. But at the same time... knowing her, I also wouldn't be shocked if she told me anyway. I honestly had no idea why. She was supposed to be good at keeping secrets—like the entire existence of the Time Vestige Council—yet somehow she kept spilling everything to me... including the entire existence of the Time Vestige Council.

"You really are something, aren't you?" Lucine said, staring at me in disbelief seeing me expect her to share sensitive information about her strength after what I just did? After I used something she told me in confidence about her against her?

"Well," I said, flashing her my most charming smile, "you've already revealed everything else to me without meaning to... so why stop now?"

"Actually, I did mean to tell you those things, young man," Lucine said, lifting her chin as if she were about to unveil something profound. "Because the three time-rule meanings I've comprehended are Past Prowler, Parallel Present, and Future Finding."

She spoke the names as though they alone justified every reckless confession she'd let slip, as though revealing them would suddenly make all her earlier decisions make perfect sense.

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"Yeah, you'll have to do better than that. Just listing the time-rule meanings you've grasped isn't enough. I need details. I am a complete layman when it comes to the time rule. I haven't even begun to comprehend it yet. You can't expect me to know what these random time rule meanings are capable of just by their titles. You need to give me more substance than that," I said, noting how my words made Lucine's expression turn awkward.

"Sorry, I thought I'd already told you. This is why I hate using the 'Future Finding' time-rule meaning," Lucine said, apologizing before drifting into her own thoughts.

I was starting to realize she'd been relying on her time-rule meanings to decide how to deal with me. But why? Maybe she was trying to avoid a certain future—or steer things toward one she preferred. It sounded ridiculous the moment it crossed my mind, yet it was the only explanation that made sense for the way her attitude kept shifting.

She kept revealing Morningstar University's secrets to me even though she knew exactly how deep my grudge ran: they'd partnered with the central government to abduct me in the Southern Capital under the flimsy cover of an early admission interview.

Why tell me anything, let alone the darkest secrets of her family and her university? I couldn't think of any reason other than her trying to bend the future—either away from something she feared or toward something she wanted. At first I thought it was because she wanted me to enroll in Morningstar University but now I am starting to think there was more to it.

Why wasn't I offended by any of this? I wasn't sure. Maybe it was because I had no idea what kind of future she was trying to steer toward—or away from. That was assuming she was actually doing it. And honestly, if she was capable of something like that, I'd happily sign up for her fan club. The very idea that someone could pull this off just by comprehending the time rule was incredible. The geek in me was screaming, I want to comprehend the time rule! I want to comprehend the time rule!

If anything, Lucine had only made me admire her more. Still, I figured there had to be some kind of drawback to her Future Finding ability. Otherwise, knowing her love and loyalty for Morningstar University, it would have already been the unrivaled top university in all five regions—or ruling them outright.

"Ah! I did it again. You don't even know what the Future Finding time-rule meaning is," Lucine said, knocking her head with her knuckles in a cute little gesture before moving on. "Let me start with the first time-rule meaning I comprehended: Past Prowler.

"In the early tiers, it only let me travel spiritually into the past—mine, or the past of anything else, living or not. At the advanced tiers, I could physically enter those past moments. And in the higher tiers, it reduces the punishment of breaking the time taboos like disturbing the past, breathing soul energy and air from the past, bringing soul energy or other tiny particles from the past to the present, etc. Achieving ultimate-tier mastery in this rule is one of the reasons I've managed to survive this long despite suffering from time-rule dementia.

"The second time-rule meaning I comprehended was Parallel Present. In the early tiers, it let me observe my parallel selves living out different present moments across the card world's timelines. The advanced tiers allowed me to communicate with those versions of myself. And at the higher tiers, I could actually visit their timelines—or bring them into mine. But the punishment for breaking the time taboo by stepping into a parallel timeline is severe, so I only use it when I have no other choice.

"The third and last time-rule meaning I grasped was Future Finding. It basically lets me search through the countless possible futures of the card world and locate the one I want to witness. At the early tiers, it's little more than a dream—because that's all it does: show me the future I want to see, nothing more. If I wanted to see you doing something absurd like drinking piss, I could locate a future where you're doing exactly that and watch it. I hope that helps you understand what I mean."

"Only at the advanced stage do I gain the ability to locate the strand of the future where the card world starts moving toward the outcome I want to see. At first, I thought I could

use that to guide Morningstar University toward the future I envisioned. But I eventually learned the hard way that the future is constantly shifting. Every action I took to pull things closer to my ideal outcome ended up altering the future itself, pushing me even farther away from what I was trying to shape.

"No matter how tightly I tried to control things, I would always hit a dead end sooner or later. And that was the best outcome. In the worst case, my interference could trigger disasters—like the Way Beyond massacre. My regret over what happened back then was so overwhelming that I pushed myself to comprehend the entire Future Finding meaning all the way to its ultimate tier in a single month.

"In the higher tiers, Future Finding lets me pinpoint the exact fragments of future I need to orchestrate in order to build toward the outcome I want. But the cost is enormous. It burns through my time-rule power just to see the future to help me negotiate the right price for a single card I plan to buy in the present. And the farther the future I'm aiming for, the more power it takes to track down every anchor event and orchestrate them flawlessly in the present. Only by completing these events one by one can I shape the future I dream of into the future we eventually reach."

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"My Lady, you are the master of the past, present, and future!"

I nearly shouted those words as I listened to everything Lucine's three time-rule meanings were capable of. And honestly, I wouldn't have been wrong—she really was the master of all three, at least when it came to her own past, present, and future.

It was hard to believe someone with abilities this overwhelming had spent her later years tucked away inside Morningstar University, living out a quiet retirement. But I supposed the punishment for breaking the time taboos must have been brutal, especially now that she was dealing with time-rule dementia.

Time rule was terrifyingly powerful because everything begins with time and ends with time. But it had limits—the time taboos. Time always moved forward. It never stopped, never rewound. It branched into countless possibilities, but each of those paths

eventually collapsing on itself. Only the one sturdy enough to endure the longest would become the main timeline—continuing forward, carrying everything with it as it pressed on through eternity.

This was the widely accepted theory of time in both the Card World and all of the Myriad Realms.

That meant our timeline was the oldest surviving branch of the Card World's timeline—making it the main timeline. If it were ever to collapse, the next oldest branch would immediately take its place as the new main timeline. In other words, even if the Card World perished in this branch of the Myriad Realms' timeline, it would continue existing in another.

There was no such thing as true death for the Celestials—only the loss of a single branch, much like how our bodies shed countless cells every day and replace them with new ones.

I wasn't sure if this was truly how things worked, but the theory heavily leaned toward the idea that life itself gives rise to everything else. Without someone living to witness or shape existence, nothing would exist at all.

I found the idea arrogant—almost as if the living of the Myriad Realms were declaring, "Without us, you are nothing."

And if this theory were truly accurate, how would we even know whether our branch was the true main timeline of the Myriad Realms? What if the real main timeline didn't even contain the Card World at all? Would that make us... virtual? How would something like that even work?

Clearly, the theory had gaps. But anyone could see it originated in the Dark Realm and then spread through the Myriad Realms.

A fitting comparison would be Earth: the British set the Greenwich Meridian as the reference line for global time, even though an oceanic meridian would have served better as a reference line. The first one to define the system gets to make the rules. I just didn't expect the same thing to be true in the Myriad Realms—especially in a place where beings could study the time rule, with some even learning it directly from the time-rule source.

I supposed this was something I could puzzle over in my retirement years. For now, though, all I could think about was how Lucine's three time-rule meanings, paired with her premortem savant origin card, would turn her into a one-woman army on any battlefield. If the second demon invasion ever came to pass, sending her alone would probably be enough—if she were more soldier than academician.

Learning what she was capable of had me fired up about comprehending the time rule myself and choosing my first time-rule meaning. If I somehow ended up with Future Finding, I'd practically be untouchable in my realm anywhere in the Myriad Realms. Sure, Future Finding had its drawbacks, but I had time-rule immunity and access to primordial energy. Every weakness it had, I had a counter for.

The problem was getting the time-rule meaning I actually wanted. Choosing Future Finding at the bifurcation point was like winning a lottery with odds worse than one in a million. I wasn't nearly optimistic enough to expect to land Future Finding for any of my three time-rule meanings.

However, that disappointment from knowing this only made me admire Lucine even more. Maybe she'd just been lucky to end up with three outstanding time-rule meanings, but it didn't change how I felt. I even found myself wondering what kinds of runes and hybrid runes she'd forged from them. I'd already seen her use the blackhole hybrid rune, so I couldn't help assuming that the rest of her runes would be just as impressive—if not stronger.

Lucine gave me a confused look when she caught me outright staring at her, eyes gleaming like a kid who'd just found his new favorite superhero. She tried shifting out of my line of sight, but my gaze followed her, which only made her more uncomfortable. Even knowing that, I couldn't look away. Her time-rule meanings were perfectly suited for both research and battle. A combination like that deserved every bit of envy and admiration I felt.

"Wyatt, could you stop staring at me like that?" she asked, a helpless edge in her voice—like she was the victim and I was some creep bothering her on a packed subway. What was with these women? They were all ridiculously strong and smart, yet at moments like this they acted like they completely forgot it at home.

I cleared my throat and asked, "So... what runes did you create using those time-rule meanings? Any hybrid runes among them?"

"Huh?" Lucine stared at me, stunned. "You're... not angry that I used my Future Finding meaning to steer you toward a future I wanted?"

"Not really," I usually replied. "If anything, I'm more bothered by the fact that you'd expose something this dangerous about yourself to me. What exactly are you trying to achieve that you're willing to lay yourself bare like this?" I asked, genuinely curious about Lucine's end game. What was worth all this?

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I waited for Lucine to respond, but she only stared back at me with an empty expression. When her face finally shifted, it was thoughtful. That alone told me she was using her Future Finding time rule meaning to figure out how to answer my question. But judging from her troubled look, she must have realized it was one of those situations where revealing the answer might ruin the outcome—like sharing a birthday wish or a wish made on a falling star.

Understanding that, I let out a quiet sigh and spared her the trouble.

"You don't have to push yourself," I said gently. "If you can't answer, it's fine. I understand."

"Huh?" Lucine looked genuinely surprised to see me take it so calmly—almost too calmly. She clearly hadn't expected me to be this understanding, especially not when she had just used her ability in a way that could easily be seen as manipulating me.

But to be honest, I didn't think she was manipulating me. Ever since we met, everything she'd done was consistent: welcoming me as a guest of Morningstar University, trying to rescue me, trying to convince me to enroll, fighting Slay beside me, taking me hostage inside the time vestige, and now putting herself in my hands for treatment.

Through all of that, I made my choices because they felt right at the time. Was she steering things so I'd react the way she wanted? Maybe. I wouldn't know. And as long as her actions didn't harm me or my people, I didn't really care.

Besides, I could afford to be casual about it. My resistance to time rules gave me the confidence not to worry about whatever little influence she might exert.

"It's not that telling you would ruin my chances of creating the future I want for all of us," she said, struggling to find the right words, "but your existence is an unexpected variable in that future. How do I explain this... ah, okay."

"Imagine a long transparent tube with water flowing through it. The flow represents the timeline, and every droplet in that stream represents us. Now, at a certain point in the tube—let's call it point A—you take out a single droplet of water. Let's name that droplet B. You add red ink to B and then place it back into the tube at point A."

"As that droplet B moves along with the flowing water, the red ink starts to spread, coloring the droplets around it. Gradually, the entire stream turns red. The clear water becomes something entirely different." "You're like that droplet B after it's been injected with red ink," she continued. "Anyone you come into contact with has their future tinted red, and anyone they contact ends up the same. Little by little, the entire future turns red, i.e. shifts in a completely different direction. To be clear, when I say 'future turns red,' I mean future changes into something entirely unlike what the future would have been."

She let out a slow breath, her expression earnest. "That's why it's so hard for me to talk to you normally while using my Future Finding time rule. Every time I try to look ahead, your influence keeps altering everything. But... seeing how understanding you've been about me using my ability to guide our conversation toward a future I think is best, I felt I should be honest with you."

"So you're telling me I'm an unforeseen variable in the timeline—and instead of resisting me, the timeline is adjusting around me? Is that what you mean?" I asked, the pieces finally starting to come together. A faint suspicion about the origin of my time rule immunity took shape in my mind. If I'm correct, I might not be able to enjoy it for long.

"That's narcissistic of you. But yes, that's one way to put it," Lucine admitted after a brief moment of thought. "Ever since I met you, even my own future has been thrown off. Using Future Finding has become harder. It's not that I can't use it anymore—it just takes much longer and drains a lot more time rule power. But when you are directly involved, it's even worse. My Future Finding just... buffers."

She sighed. "I wait and wait, and when nothing comes through, I eventually give up and act on instinct instead. I have been relying on Future Finding for so long that I've started feeling socially awkward around you. Thankfully, my intuition still works well enough, even after getting ignored by the future for all these years."

The corner of my lips lifted when I realized my timeline resistance hadn't failed me. Lucine still couldn't use her Future Finding time rule on me. The more the situation shifted in my favor, the harder she tried—but no matter what she did, her ability simply refused to work where I was concerned. In the end, she had no choice but to talk to me the old-fashioned way.

I also began to feel a quiet dread toward whatever being or event was responsible for my transmigration in the Myriad Realms. It had to be unimaginably powerful—powerful enough that an entire timeline was bending over backward just to accommodate my existence.

Now that was some almighty-level stuff. It made me rethink my entire stance on the higher power that might be watching over all of us. I shook my head, not wanting to dwell on this topic further.

"Are you sure your instincts are working correctly?" I teased, raising a brow. "Because according to you, I'm supposedly trying to kill you while pretending to treat you."

I couldn't resist mocking her a little—especially after she'd accused me of going insane and trying to murder her. Yet somehow, in the middle of all that, she had basically handed me the good boy card without realizing it.

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"I don't know. I still feel that way. Fearing your strength, I have no choice but to resign myself to fate," Lucine said, shaking her head with exaggerated helplessness.

Even without Future Finding, she was still a formidable opponent. The way she handled me without relying on her trusty time rule meaning was proof enough. She didn't win, but she managed to change my stance—from planning to declare war on the top ten universities to seriously considering forming cooperative ties with them instead.

"Out of our friendship," she added with a dramatic sigh, "if you do end up killing me because of your insanity, I promise I won't haunt you."

"Please haunt me—I'm begging you," I said with a grin. "I'll catch your soul and use it as an ingredient to craft an undead summon card. An undead that can wield time rules... now that's a dream."

I stared at her with exaggerated intensity, and Lucine actually shuddered, taking a step back in genuine fright. Seeing this, I couldn't help but sigh, *'Woman, you really have a very low opinion of me.'*

"On a serious note, do you think there's something wrong with me?" I asked, trying to get a sense of how natives of the Myriad Realm would instinctively react after discovering I was an unforeseen variable in their timeline. I needed to know what kind of response to expect if I ever crossed paths with someone who had the ability—and the rule meaning comprehension—to peer into the future. That way, I could at least prepare myself.

Lucine was kind, and she was weaker than me, so this situation was manageable. But if it were a ruler-class being with a personality... I would be caught completely unprepared.

"I don't think so," she replied. "If something were truly wrong with you, the timeline wouldn't be adjusting to accommodate your presence. It would be trying to kill you or force you out—just like how a body destroys harmful pathogens that slip in, yet accepts the antibodies we introduce."

"Timelines have their own mechanics," she continued calmly. "There's no point worrying about it right now. If the timeline considered you dangerous, nothing and no one I can think of could stop it from reacting however it wanted. Besides, if you were harmful to it would have destroyed you already."

Listening to Lucine, I let out a quiet breath—not because I fully agreed with her, but because she didn't show even a hint of hostility toward me after learning I was a time variable. That alone was reassuring. It suggested that other future seers might also react without fear or aggression learning the impact of my existence on the timeline.

My reasoning was simple: people instinctively find puppies and kittens adorable, but recoil in disgust from feces regardless of their race across the globe. Instinct comes first. And if future seers didn't *instinctively* feel threatened by someone like me, then their first thought toward me wouldn't be to deal with me. That was all I needed. Curiosity I could handle—hostility was the real danger. As long as they didn't perceive me as something poisonous to the timeline, I had nothing immediate to fear.

Thinking along those lines, my mind drifted back to my first encounter with Librarian Jr. Zaltan. We had met only once, yet for reasons unknown to me, he went out of his way to help me—just enough to make me owe him a favor. Not only that, he entrusted Dredre to me as my personal book guide and even slipped information on how to evolve a Pixie into an Elder Pixie into one of the books, as if he wanted me to find it and use it to help Dredre become an Elder Pixie.

I never fully understood why someone with his status would bother with a non-native demon merchant. Why make a mortal owe him anything? Why hand over something from his father's treasured collection? Back then, he led me to believe it was because I treated the Pixies fairly, unlike the other demon and devil merchants.

But now... I couldn't help but question that assumption and wonder if he was like Lucine—a Future Seer—then things made a lot more sense. Maybe he saw that I was a time variable. Maybe he noticed how the timeline became murky around me. If so, that would explain his sudden interest and his willingness to invest in me despite it being that either of us has met the other for the first meeting.

It explained a lot—but it was still only speculation. All I could do was accept things as they were. Even if I learned the truth, it wouldn't change anything. I owed him, and when the time came to repay that debt, I would—so long as it didn't go against my interests.

After all, he did help me when I needed it most. His small investment had made my life far easier and far brighter. Honestly, I doubted I could have achieved even a tenth of what I had without Dredre. She was my miracle—my little lucky charm.

'My god, I miss her laughter.' Just thinking of Dredre made a wave of homesickness crash through me. An urgency welled up inside me—a need to finish everything here as quickly as possible so I could return to my little wind chimes.

When I glanced at Lucine, I caught her frozen in place, staring blankly into the void. She was trying to use Future Finding again. And failing. Still. I had no idea when she would finally take the hint. She was definitely curious—probably bursting with questions—but she kept them to herself, knowing she wouldn't get any answers out of me and that her curiosity would only give me more leverage.

"Hey, Lucine," I called out casually. "How attached are you to your human demigod body?"

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"What's that supposed to mean? Brat, you do realize I'm older than your great-grandparents, right?" Lucine snapped, clearly taking my words the wrong way. Well, I had phrased it with a hint of double meaning on purpose, and she usually handled jokes just fine—but I suppose even she had her limits. Fair enough.

"I meant that my treatment will require you to give up your old body. Are you okay with that?" I clarified. "No pressure. If you can't part with it, I'll think of something else."

"Wyatt, are you even listening to yourself?" Lucine shot back, still avoiding the actual answer. "Time-rule dementia is something even celestials are helpless against. And here you are talking about having multiple ways to cure it. Do you really think that sounds like something a sane person would say?"

"It's a yes or no question. If you don't answer, I'll take it as a yes," I said, not interested in arguing. I missed my little lucky charm. It was her first time outside the Infinity Library and away from my care. I needed to check on her—especially with the Card Celestial and little Beam around.

"Before I answer, what's going to happen to my body?" Lucine asked, hoping this time she would get an answer for a change. Her wish was granted.

"I'll give it to your incarnation," I said. "That way, it will carry the time-rule dementia in your place, while you receive a new, upgraded body crafted and optimized for your divinity."

"That's a good idea, if you can actually make it work. But wouldn't that render my incarnation useless?" Lucine asked with a nod, listening to my plan to treat her time-rule dementia. She didn't believe I could pull it off. She had once tried to use her incarnation as a scapegoat herself, but it had gone terribly wrong, leaving her in a coma for nearly six months.

"What are you using it for right now? Suppressing the effects of your time-rule dementia, right? It's already useless, and you still have to stay on guard against the disease. With my method, you'll be completely free of it and able to live normally," I pointed out the obvious, fully aware she was being critical just for the sake of arguing. She had been against this plan from the very beginning, and nothing I said was going to make her admit otherwise.

"Will my new body still be humanoid and not hideous?" Lucine asked, afraid I might turn her into a frog or a cow out of spite or as a joke.

"Yes. You could call it a demonic human body. You'll keep your current appearance, but your new body will be modeled after one of the most powerful dark races to ever exist. It will more than make up for your lack of martial prowess," I explained patiently. This wasn't just about treating her time-rule dementia anymore—this involved transferring her divinity into a body I designed myself. I needed to be absolutely sure she was comfortable with the procedure.

"What dark race is that?" Lucine asked. She knew I had extensive knowledge of dark races—I had identified Slay's race with a single glance. Even though she had no idea what an Ovumite was or how rare and powerful they were for a Dark Race, she trusted that I knew everything worth knowing about them. So when I said her new body would come from one of the strongest dark races, she didn't question the claim. But the fact that they looked human made her both curious and understandably cautious.

"Again, it's a yes or no question. If you don't answer, I'll take it as a yes and move forward with my treatment plans," I repeated, noticing how she kept trying to push for more each time I gave her even a little leeway. She was persistent, I will give her that.

"Hey, it's my body. How can I decide without enough details—" Lucine began, ignoring my warning. So, I acted immediately. "Yes, it is. Now give me a strand of your hair and go back to your corner."

"Humph." Lucine huffed and, passing me a strand of her hair, she returned to her spot. She had already mentally prepared and looked forward to the new body I keep talking about, but she also wanted to test whether I would follow through on my threat. She didn't expect me to be so decisive—yet I proved her wrong.

I didn't have to wait long. Lucine's staff soon brought the second batch of the ingredients I ordered for the improvised treatment plan. I neatly arranged them, checking their quality, making sure they were of our timeline and not the fake from the alternate timelines.

[— Ingredients no.2 —

- > Virgin Clay Of Giya (Red Color) x 6000kg
- > Dews Of Dark Spring (First Sunray Dews) x 15kl.
- > Tempered Stone Of Millennium Titan x 4 units
- > Four Petal Vine (30 meters) x 3 units
- > Clampedo cores x 3 units
- > Demon Face Mushroom beard Strands x 6 units]

I ordered additional four petal vines, deciding it would be easier to start from scratch than to deconstruct the soul pathways of the existing Triunion Four Petal Demonic Vines and then modify it again.

Those vines had been mutated using my Blood Fate Plunder rule meaning and demon cores refined from Clampedo cores. They were useless for my improvised treatment plan. For the new approach, I needed Viltronian cores instead of regular demon cores to mutate the four-petal vines. In short, I needed Four Petal Viltronian Vines, not the Four Petal Demonic Vines.

The only reason I hadn't used Viltronian cores in the first place was because I assumed Morningstar University could spare the time-rule power needed to raise the Triunion Four Petal demonic vine into a Devil. Now that I knew they couldn't, I had no choice but to rely on the cockroaches of the dark races instead.

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With enough nutrition and time, a Viltronian could grow into a Devil-rank being and even reach the Ruler-class. Even with the bare minimum nutrition, they could survive in the harshest corners of the Myriad Realms. Their problem wasn't capability—it was themselves. They were an overly aggressive race, challenging anything and everything with their nearly indestructible bodies, including their own kind. Because of that, most of them died long before they ever reached the age required to unleash their true potential and dominate the Myriad Realms.

Yes—age. All they truly needed was to live long enough. But this foolish race couldn't even manage that. As far as I knew, not a single one had ever lived to see their full potential. Almost all of them died prematurely, usually at the hands of their own clansmen. They loved picking fights far beyond what their strength could handle. Jaya Keith was a perfect example of that.

In some ways, the Four Petal Vines were similar to Viltronians, though not nearly as exaggerated. With enough nutrition, a Four Petal Vine could survive almost indefinitely, even in the harshest corners of the Myriad Realms. However, their roots were highly coveted, so the moment they were discovered by anyone, they were harvested without hesitation.

By giving the vines a demonic core, my plan was to have Lucine feed them her blood inside the time-expansion chamber until they reached Devil rank and a semi-noble class. After that, I would harvest their roots—roots that would have taken on Lucine's shape, since they had fed exclusively on her blood. I would then craft those roots and her incarnation together into her substitute and transfer the time-rule dementia into them, freeing Lucine from the disease once and for all.

However, because the time vestige didn't produce enough refined time-rule power to support this plan, I shifted to using raw time-rule power instead, which was abundantly available. And the only beings I knew with the physique to withstand the temper of temporal forces were the Viltronians. Ahalya's Taintless Physique was another option, but I didn't have enough data on it, so I chose to stick with what I understood well.

A Four-Petal Viltronian Vine was far more domineering than a Four-Petal Demonic Vine. According to Hive AI and my calculations, Lucine's body could barely keep up with the consumption demands of a Triunion Four-Petal Viltronian Vine created using my Fate Plunder Blood rule meaning and three Four-Petal Viltronian Vines. If she alone bore the burden of nourishing them to Devil rank, her demigod body would be damaged beyond repair. It would be basically useless.

So instead of extracting the disease from Lucine's body, I chose to extract Lucine's divinity from her body—transferring it into the need body crafted from the roots of devil-rank Triunion Four-Petal Viltronian Vine while using her old body and her incarnation to refine a perfect substitute, which would carry the time-rule dementia in her place.

Lucine had been yelling it from the start: there was no cure for time-rule dementia. Even celestials were helpless before it. She was right. However, she was forgetting that a celestial suffering from time-rule dementia in one timeline wouldn't be suffering from it in another. She herself was a living example of that.

Yes, there was no cure for time-rule dementia, but their other methods to deal with it. The question was whether one was prepared to pay the price needed. In Lucine's case, it was her old body and perfect incarnation created using soul sour fruit.

Going back to the basics. Lucine had received it as punishment for violating a time taboo. That meant that as long as there was someone there to bear the punishment in her place, she was free. Just like how the celestials use their alternate selves throughout the timeline to bare theirs. I.e. was to create a perfect substitute to bear this punishment for her. Not just any substitute would work; it had to be convincing enough to fool time itself.

To create something that was convincing, I had no choice but to use Lucine's incarnation. And now that I could use her body as well, the chances of success increased dramatically.

Without wasting a moment, I got to work. Laying the ingredients onto my unranked grimoire's crafting page, I started by refining the Clampedo cores and the Demon Face Mushroom beard strands into Viltronian cores for the three four-petal vines. Once the cores were ready, I infused them into the vines, transforming the three Four-Petal Vines into Three Four-Petal Viltronian Vines. Then, using my Blood Fate Plunder rule meaning—and the natural connection the vines shared—I pushed the mutation further, merging them into a Triunion Four-Petal Viltronian Vine.

Setting aside the soul pathways of the Triunion Four-Petal Viltronian Vine, I took the four tempered stones of the Millennium Titan and shaped them into large stone pots. I filled each one with 1,500 kilograms of Giya's red Virgin Clay, then planted the bodies of the Four-Petal Viltronian Vines in three of the pots.

Next, I used the Breath of Erosion to refine 500 grams of Starfall Moss, thirty units of Lucid Temporal Petal, six units of Temporal Bloom Thyme with stems, eighteen units of Meridian Lotus, one hundred grams of Temporal Echo Resin, and thirty grams of Rift Glass Powder. After that, I ground everything into fine dust and mixed it into fifteen kiloliters of Dark Spring Dew collected at sunrise.

I used this mixture as fertilizer for the Triunion Four-Petal Viltronian Vine housed in the three pots made from the Millennium Titan's tempered stones and filled with Giya's virgin clay. Once everything was prepared, I summoned all four stone pots into the card lab.

Turning to the curious Lucine, I said, "Let's take these pots to the time-expansion chamber and officially begin your treatment. Come, lead the way."

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Soon, two calamity clones stepped out of me and effortlessly lifted the four massive stone-carved pots, one in each hand, waiting for Lucine to guide us to the Time Expansion Chamber.

"I can never get used to your ability—it's so creepy. Aren't you worried you'll scare little girls away and you will remain single?" Lucine joked lightly as she opened the lab door and headed out.

Still, her eyes lingered on the stone pots, clearly surprised by the strong temporal energy radiating from them. That was thanks to the temporal ingredients I had mixed into the dark spring dew and used as fertilizer for the clay. They should help the Triunion Four-Petal Viltronian Vine's nearly indestructible Viltronian physique endure the raw time rule power inside the chamber during the treatment.

As for Lucine herself, she would be sitting in the fourth stone pot. The clay, pulsing with temporal nutrients, should keep her body stable long enough for the entire treatment to be completed. I wasn't worried about the death of her incarnation or her real body after the treatment. By then, both would have become dead weight. It's best if they died saving Lucine the trouble of making the hard choice of ending its suffering.

"Look who's talking," *'I shot back. I wonder if you're the oldest virgin card apprentice alive in the card world,'* I said the last part in my mind, not daring to speak to them aloud. I wasn't afraid of Lucine, but I also didn't want to spark her ire. People say provoking a woman's ire is deadlier than drinking poison every day.

"What's that supposed to mean? I've had my fair share of boyfriends," Lucine argued, her tone defensive. "It's just that I get too caught up in experiments and forget about them... or the experiments last so long that they forget about me and move on. My first love is my research. I just haven't found a man who can accept that, so I'm single. Don't mistake my being single as a lack of opportunity—I just haven't met the right one."

She spoke with a seriousness that made me pause. And for a moment, I saw a glimpse of my own future in her—if I didn't find the time to straighten things out with Susan and Anna.

I nodded, mentally reminding myself to make time for Susan and Anna. Lucine, however, misunderstood the gesture as me agreeing with her ridiculous logic. She lifted her head proudly, like a peacock showing off its feathers.

If research truly was her first love, she wouldn't bother wasting centuries searching for the "right one." The truth was obvious—her standards were impossibly high, and she had spent ages rejecting every poor soul who for some reason managed to catch her interest.

"Here we are. Just a reminder—we can only spare so much refined time rule energy for you," Lucine warned as we approached the Time Expansion Chambers. She was clearly worried I might burn through the stockpile they had set aside for several promising research projects. If that happened, it would damage their chances of winning the Grand Academician Bowl.

"Don't worry, I won't be needing any refined time rule energy," I assured her. "And you do know that this is for you and not me,"

Lucine froze mid-step, turned sharply, and stared at me with a grim expression.

"Then why are we going to the Time Expansion Chamber?" she demanded, ignoring my last comment. "Without refined time rule power, it's no different from a regular chamber with exceptional insulation."

"I plan to use the raw time rule energy to power the Time Expansion Chamber," I answered honestly, though a part of me worried she might not actually agree as channeling raw time rule energy through the Time Expansion Chamber's arrays would put their durability under extreme strain.

Lucine's eyes widened and tears welled up as she cried, "I knew it! You were planning to kill me. I knew it was all a ruse. And I'm such a fool—I trusted you even when my instincts told me otherwise!"

Her outburst immediately stirred the demigods who had been "stealthily" tailing us. Their hostility locked onto me at once, but not one of them dared step forward. Lucine had warned them often enough about my strength.

Most of them hadn't left the Card World in years. Inside the time vestige, they couldn't access the Grimoire Network and had to rely solely on Morningstar University's internal system. In other words, about ninety percent of the card apprentices stationed here had no clue who I was—just like Lucine.

"Enough. Get inside," I said, grabbing her wrist before she could spiral any further. "I know what I'm doing. Just keep trusting me foolishly for another hour or so."

I pulled her into the Time Expansion Chamber and shut the door behind us. Ignoring her cries and complaints, I guided her to the far corner of the chamber and made her settle there. Then I turned my attention to the time expansion array carved into the walls and floor.

I and a handful of calamity clones began adjusting its structure, modifying it to suit my purposes and reinforcing its stability to make sure it could withstand the surge of raw time rule energy through it long enough for the treatment to finish. Using raw time rule energy made the entire process far more dangerous, but I trusted the preparations and adjustments I had made. It would be enough.

Lucine finally stopped crying and stared at me—and at my calamity clones—as we continued adjusting the Time Expansion Array. Her expression was full of silent criticism, as if accusing me of vandalizing her precious equipment. In her mind, she was probably wondering what I could possibly know about the array to think I had any right to modify it for my use.

At this rate, she was convinced she wouldn't die from the raw time rule power—I'd end up killing her first when the array exploded.

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After finishing the modifications, I recalled my calamity clones back into me. Lucine had stopped whining by then, but she immediately began circling the chamber, examining every alteration I had made. With each adjustment she came across, she couldn't help gasping, exclaiming, or sighing in disbelief. It was obvious she was impressed—though she would rather die than admit it out loud.

"Wyatt, when and where did you learn our university's Time Expansion Array formation?" Lucine finally asked, her face turning serious. "As far as I know, no one outside the core members of Morningstar University even knows this array exists."

She wasn't accusing me—she was assuming the worst: that Morningstar University's precious formation had already been leaked to the rest of the five regions without their knowledge, and that I was one of the lucky thieves benefitting from that breach.

"I understood it after a glance. It's not that hard," I replied, not bothering to sugarcoat anything. Lucine would believe whatever explanation she built in her own head anyway—and she'd settle on the idea that her university's secrets had been stolen long before believing I simply figured it out on the spot.

"Why don't you just say you created the Time Expansion Array formation?" Lucine snapped, exactly as I expected.

I truly didn't understand this woman. Just minutes ago she was crying and begging for her life, and now she had the nerve to glare at me over an array formation. I couldn't help feeling a bit sorry for her—she hadn't shown this much backbone when she thought I was planning to kill under the guise of treating her, yet the moment she imagined someone stealing her university's property, she immediately threw her gloves on and came at me.

Clearly, to her, Morningstar University was worth more than her life.

"I know what you're thinking. But trust me, that's not the case. Your university's precious array hasn't been leaked," I said, trying to stop her imagination from spiraling into catastrophe. "I really did figure it out at a glance. I might not look like it, but I don't brag about my talent—I just tell the truth. If others feel like I'm exaggerating or lying, it's not my problem but theirs."

Thanks to my Primordial Soul Pupils that were capable of seeing through the mysteries of an origin source, understanding a simple time expansion array formation was not only normal but nothing in comparison.

"..."

Lucine didn't reply. She only glared at me, eyes narrowed, scrutinizing me as if she could peel back my soul and check the truth herself. After a long moment, she asked, "Can you swear that in the presence of the World's Will?"

"Don't push your luck," I warned her. "Just refine each body of the Triunion Four-Petal Viltronian Vines with one of your time rule meanings. If you're unsure about anything, check the file I sent to your Grimoire. Hurry!"

I instructed her on what she needed to do to officially begin the treatment process. Lucine stared at me for a long moment before finally summoning her grimoire and scrolling through the file I had shared with her.

"What's this 'V.' in the mutated vine's name?" she asked. In the file, the entry clearly read Triunion Four-Petal V. Vine.

"Don't stress over minor details. Just get on with it," I replied, not bothering to explain. The truth of the Viltronian lineage was something only Jaya and I shared.

Besides, I had a strong suspicion that the Card Apprentices had already wiped out the Viltronians who had entered this world through the dungeons, all because the race was notoriously aggressive and violent. Based on my speculations their disappearance was no mystery—merely an expected outcome. They had been blessed with bodies anyone would envy, yet cursed with barely any intelligence to actually use or develop those nearly indestructible physiques.

"I thought I was only getting one new body," Lucine said, stunned by what I had managed to accomplish with nothing more than a mortal Four-Petal Vine. She couldn't fathom how I had done it. Had I gotten this knowledge from somewhere? Had someone taught me? She simply couldn't wrap her mind around it—just like she couldn't accept that I understood the Time Expansion Array with a single glance.

"Aren't you happy you're getting three bodies for the price of one incarnation and one real body?" I asked. Once again, I choose to avoid answering her.

"Why can't you just stop with the questions and do as I say? Especially when you already know I'm not going to answer?" I snapped when I saw Lucine gearing up to ask yet another question.

"So what if you don't want to answer? If I want to ask, I'll ask. If you don't want to respond, then don't. Why are you shouting?" Lucine shot back, her tone rising to match mine.

Her sudden pushback made me stop and stare at her. I decided to ignore her outburst believing the closer she grew to confronting the idea of dying during the treatment, the more volatile her personality became. Instead of arguing, I shifted my focus to finding a way to ease her mind. Answering her questions would help, but she would nitpick every

tiny detail of my process—we'd be stuck here the entire day. I needed something stronger, something that would truly reassure her she wouldn't die.

Maybe I should stay with her inside the Time Expansion Chamber throughout the entire process, guiding her moment by moment.

But that would be pure mental torture for me. Time expansion array uses time rule power to expanded time, depending on time rule power supplied one hour out here could be several billion years in time expansion chamber. She would have to spend several billion years inside the chamber to grow the Triunion Four-Petal Viltronian Vine to devil rank. For her, enclosed within the stone pot, it would pass like one long, hazy dream.

For me, it would be an eternity of suffering. And on top of that, with raw time rule power flooding the chamber, I wouldn't be able to comprehend anything except space and time rules. I might be reclusive, but not to the extent of surviving billions of years doing nothing but comprehending those two rules.

With my mutant ego gem's synchronization rate, I might even reach godhood in both in that period of time—but the price would be far too steep. I wouldn't come out as the same person who walked in.

This wasn't going to work.

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Lucine's behavior was unbecoming of someone of her age and standing. It was the inevitable result of relying too heavily on her Future Finding time rule meaning for far too long. The side effects were finally catching up to her—and the stakes had never been higher: death or rejuvenation. And in truth, she had no real choice left. Wyatt had already trapped her with an oath in the presence of the World's Will, and her concern was no longer for herself but for Morningstar University. If Wyatt's motive was to kill her, what assurance was there that he would stop with her? Especially now, after she had spilled the existential secret of Morningstar University to him, trusting instincts that had

long since grown unreliable. She no longer knew what kind of future she had just set into motion, and that was unsettling for her.

As I pieced Lucine's mental state together, I understood what I needed to do to put Lucine at ease so she could cooperate with my treatment without fear or hesitation.

"Lucine," I called, pulling her out of her daze. Meeting her eyes, I declared, "I swear in the presence of the World's Will: if you die or become bedridden because of my treatment, I will take on all your responsibilities and carry them out to the best of my ability."

As my oath settled in the air, the confusion in Lucine's gaze cleared. She could see that my intentions in treating her time rule dementia were genuine. She still wasn't confident I could cure a celestial disease, but my oath told her one thing unmistakably—I believed wholeheartedly in my own method.

"I knew I hadn't misjudged you," Lucine said softly, a relieved smile touching her lips. Then her expression tightened. "However, I'm not entirely sure I can trust all my responsibilities to someone who thinks he can cure a celestial disease. That would be rather irresponsible of me."

"Technically, I'm not curing you. I'm just helping you craft a perfect pasty to take the punishment for breaking the time taboo in your stead," I said—anything to help Lucine feel more at ease with the procedure.

"Then, technically, you're experimenting, and I'm your guinea pig. I can die knowing that," Lucine replied with a resigned nod. Then, almost too casually, she added, "If you put it that way, I'm tempted to sabotage the treatment myself, just so you'd be stuck with my responsibilities. At least then I could die knowing I'd chosen the perfect heir."

"Don't even joke about that," I said, the weight of my oath hitting me all over again. I didn't need the Card Celestial to enforce my promises—I was a man of my word.

"Alright then, let's get started," Lucine said, her voice carrying a newfound enthusiasm—that came from believing she was helping me run an experiment. If it succeeded, she would finally be free of her time-rule dementia. And if it failed, she took comfort in knowing that I would serve as her insurance to her beneficiary, Morningstar University.

Lucine had already gone through the file I'd sent her and fully understood what I needed her to do—and how to do it. She had only been nitpicking and acting difficult to irritate me to death before I forced her into a treatment she believed might kill her. But now that the misunderstanding had been cleared up, she dropped the act and began refining the three bodies of the Triunion Four-Petal V. Vine using her time-rule meanings with great concentration. Each body was refined with a different time rule meaning, turning them into V. Vine Past, V. Vine Present, and V. Vine Future.

It was for this reason that I'd been so desperate to swear an oath in the presence of the World's Will—to put Lucine at ease. I needed her to give her full effort when refining the three bodies of the Triunion Four-Petal V. Vine with her time-rule meanings. Only then would the results be not merely satisfactory, but exceptional—perhaps even miraculous. Her own oath to me only ensured that she would undergo the treatment procedure; it didn't require her to approach it with sincerity. Even if she cooperated half-heartedly, the oath wouldn't trouble her. That was what I wanted to avoid. I needed her focus, not her indifference.

I observed closely as Lucine refined the three bodies of the Triunion Four-Petal Viltronian Vines. Her technique and precision were excellent, but she was still much slower than I had been.

With the Breath of Erosion and my primordial Soul Pupils, my refining speed was on an entirely different level. The Breath of Erosion accelerated the process, while the Soul Pupils left no room for error.

Even though Lucine was in a higher realm than I was, that alone wasn't enough to bridge the gulf created by those two abilities. After all, both the Breath of Erosion and the primordial Soul Pupils were coveted even by peak ruler-class beings. So it was no surprise that her refining process took far longer than the time I needed to finish preparing the rest of the treatment.

"I'm done," Lucine muttered, drained to the core. It had taken everything she had to refine the three Triunion Four-Petal Viltronian Vine bodies into Vine Past, Vine Present, and Vine Future.

She couldn't help glancing at me, remembering how easily I had refined them earlier, mutating them into what they had become. To her, it must have looked effortless. But that was only because Breath of Erosion handled most of the work while I simply guided it with the precise insights from my Primordial Soul Pupils.

For me, a card master, the process that left even a card demigod like Lucine exhausted was effortless because of the difference in the methods we had at our disposal. Proving why Breath of Erosion was coveted even by beings who had reached the pinnacle of the Myriad Realms.

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"You're a monster. What's your secret?" Lucine groaned, letting out a long sigh as she shook her head in disbelief. In her long life, she had met countless geniuses, but none quite like me. From the look on her face, she seemed on the verge of weighing death during the treatment as a viable option.

"I have too many secrets," I replied calmly. "Which one are you curious about? And before you choose, think carefully. Are you sure you can bear the weight of knowing even one of them?"

I wasn't boasting. Every one of my secrets was far too dangerous to reveal—my transmigration, my primordial origin card, my little charm Dredre... the list went on, and not a single one was something Lucine could safely hear or accept. The consequences of any of them coming to light were far too heavy for someone to manage. And for a person who couldn't make decisions without relying on her Future Finding time rule meaning, it was better she stayed unaware.

"As if you'd ever tell me your secrets. Hmph." Lucine snorted, clearly unconvinced. After spending enough time with me, she knew one thing well—I would sooner take my secrets to the grave than share them with anyone.

"Opportunity was right in front of you, and you didn't take it. So don't come crying later, saying I'm never willing to tell you anything. It's simply that you're not strong enough to hear them," I said, shaking my head, wondering why I even considered sharing one of my secrets with Lucine.

Somewhere along the line, she had unknowingly found my weakness. She shared everything with me—every worry, every vulnerable truth—trusting me in ways I never expected. Somehow, that slipped past my defenses. For a moment, the cautious part of me couldn't help but doubt whether she truly couldn't use her Future Finding time rule meaning on me. Because her strange, almost foolish honesty had made me lower my guard around her.

She was the third person to ever manage that, after Susan and Anna. And what surprised me even more was that I hadn't known Lucine for long at all. That was why I couldn't help but wonder—was Lucine really unable to read my future, or was she using her time rule meaning after all?

No, it was just Lucine—her kindness, to be exact. She never had hidden motives or schemes directed at me from the moment we first met. Yes, she wanted me to join Morningstar University, but only because she genuinely believed it suited me. If she had felt otherwise, she would never have tried to push me into it, no matter how talented I was.

It was her warm nature, the gentle presence she had cultivated over her long life, that made me feel at ease around her. She was the kind of elder / mentor everyone deserved—someone whose very existence made you feel cared for, valued, and safe. Sometimes she could be a little silly, but that was part of what made her so endearing.

"So, what's next?" Lucine asked, brushing off my earlier comment. She clearly didn't believe me. The one time I was actually willing to answer her, she didn't push for it. I guess it just wasn't meant to be.

"You'll bury yourself in the fourth stone pot. It will not only protect you from the turbulent raw time rule power in the chamber, but the clay in it will provide you with the required nutrition lasting you for the entire procedure using the raw time rule power. I've also carved an array into it that will let you share your blood essence with the three Viltronian Vine bodies. And once they reach devil rank, the array will help you transfer your divinity into them—"

Before I could finish explaining the next stage of her treatment, Lucine had already moved closer to the fourth pot. She examined the inscriptions carefully, tracing the array with her eyes until she suddenly interjected, "I understand. But are you sure these clay pots can protect me and the Viltronian vine's root bodies in them from the raw time-rule power swirling around the chamber?"

"Yes. I can guarantee it completely," I said with confidence. After all, the Hive Spirit had run millions of simulations on this procedure, and in every single one, the pots held up perfectly and performed exactly as needed.

"Alright, I understand now. From inside the pot, I need to feed the three vine bodies, monitor the growth of their root bodies, and refine them with my time-rule meanings while comprehending their development as they evolve into devils. That way, when I transfer my divinity into them and leave my old body for my incarnation, the process will be much smoother," Lucine recited as she floated over the pot and settled into it.

She prepared to sink herself into the clay using only her intent, not even bothering to ask how long the process would take or whether she would remain conscious through it. It wasn't haste—she simply didn't want to know. Those details would only make her hesitate, and she'd already decided to go through with this. For her, it was better not to hear anything that might shake her resolve.

"All the best," I said as Lucine sank into the pot. She called back, "See you on the other side."

I left the time-expansion chamber and sealed the door behind me. Then I keyed in the configuration for the chamber's time-expansion array and fed in the raw time-rule power drawn from the temporal river the time vestige was currently sailing through. Once the time expansion array was powered and everything was set, I activated the chamber.

Based on my calculations, it would take only an hour outside for the Viltronian Vines inside the chamber to reach the devil rank completing the several billions of years growth, and then less than a fraction of a second for Lucine to transfer her divinity into her new bodies and acclimate to them. Meaning, Lucine should step out of the chamber in an hour.

Such incredible speed was possible only because of the overwhelming abundance of raw time-rule power at our disposal. If not for the time-rule vestige at our disposal, none of this would have been possible. Seeing what it could accomplish, my desire to make an artificial time vestige of my own grew into an itch in the back of my head.

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Standing outside the time-expansion chamber, I suddenly found myself with nearly an hour to spare. Since I wanted to stay close in case anything went wrong for Lucine on the other side of the door, I chose to begin my comprehension of the Time Rule right there. After witnessing the way Lucine and Slay bent time to their will, I could hardly wait to grasp that power myself.

When it came to blending with the world, I had always been aligned with both the physical and spiritual planes thanks to my duality trait, which let me exist in both at once. Because of that, I bypassed the usual layers and tapped directly into the Time Rule Source—the very origin from which celestials draw their understanding of time. Yet, as a hybrid of celestial and World Calamity Tree, the source did not welcome me as warmly as it would a pure celestial. Even so, that didn't stop me; I had come here for one reason: to comprehend and master the Time Rule.

But the moment I began delving into it, I stumbled onto the truth behind my immunity to time itself. What I had feared ever since discovering that Lucine's Future Finding couldn't affect me had finally been confirmed. My resistance to the Time Rule had always been temporary—a lingering side effect of my transmigration to Myriad Realms that I would eventually lose. If I began comprehending the Time Rule now, that inevitable moment would arrive today.

I finally understood why I possessed immunity-level resistance to time rule: time itself had been adjusting around me, slowly reshaping its flow to accept me as part of it. Once that adjustment finished, my immunity would vanish, and I would stand no different from anyone born in the Myriad Realms. I didn't know how long the process was meant to take naturally, only that it was inevitable.

The real problem was this: actively comprehending the Time Rule on my part would speed up that adjustment. By the time I reached the bifurcation point—the threshold where mastery into the meanings of the rules begins—the Myriad Realm's time would have fully incorporated me into it. And with the affinity I possessed to the rules as a hybrid celestial, I knew I would reach that threshold long before the hour ended.

That was why I said the day I lost my resistance to the Time Rule would be today, should I choose to comprehend it.

With this revelation, I found myself facing a real dilemma. If I wanted to wield the power of time in myriad realms, I would have to give up my luxurious resistance to the time rule in the Myriad Realms. Now that was a hefty price for me.

My resistance to the Time Rule had been a major pillar of my strength, the silent shield that had carried me through crisis after crisis. From Chris Chase to Belphegor's world-hog incarnation, I had survived—and even won—because time itself couldn't get a proper grip on me.

Without that resistance, I wouldn't have lasted against the likes of Ollie, Kiren, Christina, or Cam with their Super-time cards. Forget leaping into the time river, exploring an alternate past, or subduing the commandment of negative passion - Covetous Devil 'Slay Saleos'.

Without this one advantage, I would have already ended up as a dementic loon, paying the price for breaking the taboos of time. In my current realm, I needed my resistance to the time rule.

Yes, I would eventually lose my resistance to the Time Rule once the Myriad Realm's time fully incorporated me. But if I gave it up now by comprehending and mastering the Time Rule, that resistance would be gone forever. On the other hand, if I held on to it until the incorporation finished—or until the day I no longer needed it—I could still choose to comprehend and master the Time Rule later.

It was a choice between keeping a fading advantage for as long as possible... or sacrificing it immediately for the incredible power I desired to wield.

As I continued weighing the pros and cons of keeping my Time-Rule resistance or giving it up to finally comprehend and master the rule of time, my thoughts were abruptly cut short. My ears perked up at the soft hiss of the time-expansion chamber's door sliding open marking the conclusion of my treatment plan for Lucine's Time-Rule

dementia. All that remained now was to see the results. I was confident they would be satisfactory, but I couldn't help wondering whether the outcome would be considered excellent or extraordinary or even miraculous.

More than an hour had passed, yet I still sat there wrestling with the choice between keeping my resistance to the Time Rule or gaining the ability to wield it. No—it wasn't indecision. I had already made my choice. I just hadn't fully accepted the price.

The truth was hard to swallow: the cost of my time rule resistance was the very thing I wanted to grasp. My time rule resistance had always seemed like a blessing, but only because I hadn't known what it was costing me. And it stung even more now that I knew I would eventually lose that resistance anyway. All I could do was hope that, when that day came, it wouldn't be too late for me to comprehend and master the Time Rule.

Like anyone else, I feared the unknown. But I had never let the comfort of the familiar hold me back. I always pushed myself to explore and prepare for what lay ahead. I didn't cling to my Time-Rule resistance because of fear—I held onto it because it was simply too valuable. It let me move through time without worrying about the punishments tied to breaking its taboos. Meanwhile, even Lucine, who was on the cusp of forming her own Time Rule stream, wouldn't dare to attempt what I would.

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No longer dwelling on the steep price of my Time-Rule resistance, I stepped into the time-expansion chamber—just in time to witness the three new bodies of Lucine rising from their pots. They weren't alone. A withered corpse emerged from the fourth pot as well. To my surprise, Lucine's incarnation that had been trapped in her original body had survived the treatment and her Time-Rule dementia... as an undead. It seemed she had gained far more from this procedure than I expected her to.

I watched as the three new bodies of Lucine turned to face the withered, undead Lucine—now their Incarnation—and for some reason, the entire chamber fell into an eerie, suffocating silence. They stood frozen in place, staring at their original body, now their incarnation.

Soon, they broke their standoff, and just as I was about to let out a breath of relief, they moved—swiftly landing around me and circling me in perfect unison. The three Lucine spoke at once, their voices overlapping perfectly, "Wyatt, you were right. You really did cure my Time-Rule dementia."

Ignoring their spooky speech, I activated my Soul Pupils to verify that everything had gone as planned—only to discover that all four of Lucine's bodies brimmed with immense temporal energy. The three new bodies of Lucine had no sign of time-rule dementia, while the withered-old body did.

I noticed immediately that this undead incarnation was unlike any other I had ever seen. All of its soul pathways and energies were completely still—frozen, as if time in it or in contact with it would become still. There wasn't a flicker of change anywhere in its entire body. I also realized it wasn't moving on its own; every step it took was guided by the intent of Lucine's other bodies.

Still, the results were as I expected and more.

I couldn't help but feel genuinely impressed by what she had accomplished. It made me feel that swearing an oath to steady her nerves—to take such an active role in the entire treatment—had been completely worth it.

"Don't tell me the obvious. Tell me how you're feeling—how well did the procedure go," I eagerly said, urging all four of Lucine to share every detail of their treatment, especially anything they had obtained through it. They, too, appeared more than eager to share their experience with me.

But before they could begin, all four of Lucine's bodies suddenly converged, merging into a single form. I almost shouted in shock. After everything we had done to free her from Time-Rule dementia, she had just reabsorbed the incarnation that was now suffering from the punishment of breaking time taboo in her stead.

Sensing my rising panic, Lucine offered a gentle smile. "Relax, I know what I'm doing," she said softly. "As I told you earlier, your treatment truly cured my Time-Rule dementia. My undead incarnation can suppress the remnants of it using the fourth Time-Rule meaning I pushed to ultimate comprehension—Eternal Stillness. As the name implies, it represents the point where time is still, losing all its meaning."

Hearing the words Eternal Stillness, my mind instantly jumped to the Big Freeze theory from Earth—where the universe ends not in an explosion, but in a slow collapse of thermal dynamism. In that scenario, entropy reaches its maximum, energy becomes evenly distributed, and all physical processes gradually cease as the universe approaches absolute zero. It's the ultimate stillness, the point where time itself loses meaning.

Imagining the implications and possibilities of Lucine's Fourth Time Rule meaning my mind when blank. No wonder she dared to take her undead incarnation carrying the time-rule dementia back into her. In the big freeze, time technically still exists, but its passage becomes effectively meaningless. If time itself was meaningless, what use was the punishment for breaking time taboo, it too was meaningless.

Wait a minute—if her undead incarnation was the embodiment of the Eternal Stillness Time-Rule meaning, then everything I had noticed suddenly made sense. Of course its body showed no change; of course every pathway and stream of energy was frozen solid. No wonder it needed help just to move.

In its current state, it was essentially a temporal meat shield, a vessel built to absorb the punishment for breaking time taboos. But even that had limits. If Lucine pushed it too far, her undead incarnation would be erased into nothingness like any other undead being.

Still, the fact remained: with this incarnation, Lucine could break certain time taboos without having to fear the consequences—at least to a considerable extent.

"You did well," I said, genuinely impressed. Lucine hadn't just completed her assignment—she had gone above and beyond, tackling the extra credit on her own. The emergence of Lucine Past, Present, and Future fell neatly within my calculations. But the birth of Lucine End—that, I had never anticipated.

Inside the time-expansion chamber, Lucine had followed my treatment plan thoroughly, but she had also gone far beyond it. Using the excess time surrounding her—something she had in overwhelming abundance in there—she not only fused her three Time-Rule meanings and condensed her Time-Rule River, but, together with her incarnation, she comprehended a fourth Time-Rule meaning... and pushed it all the way to ultimate comprehension.

While Lucine focused on channeling her first three Time-Rule meanings into refining the three Viltronian vine root bodies, her incarnation used their newly comprehended fourth meaning to refine Lucine's original body—preparing it to take over once Lucine shifted into her new vessels.

When Lucine transferred her divinity into the three refined bodies and transformed them into Lucine Past, Present, and Future, her incarnation simultaneously completed the refinement of the original body, reforging its divinity through their fourth Time-Rule meaning, Eternal Stillness.

From that process, Lucine End was born—Lucine's undead incarnation, the embodiment of the Eternal Stillness meaning of time rule. Since she had already forged her Time-Rule stream, she could now fuse her three bodies—and even her incarnation—back into herself with effortless ease.

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The more I looked at Lucine standing before me, the more satisfied I felt. How could I not be? She had achieved everything I expected of her and far more. It felt like assigning ordinary homework and receiving a masterpiece in return. No wonder teachers love their overachieving students. Watching them grow must offer a satisfaction that helps soften the sting of their meager wages. Still, I'm probably overthinking it—any teacher would choose the fair pay they rightfully deserve.

"What are you doing?" I asked Lucine rhetorically when I caught her staring at me blankly. Clearly, she was once again using her future-finding time-rule meaning on me. I guess she had grown addicted to it. And who wouldn't be? It gave her a taste of omniscience—so much so that even calling it godlike wouldn't be an exaggeration.

"Nothing. Now that I've formed my time-rule stream, I wanted to see if the Future Finding meaning would work on you. But no luck. It seems you're a bigger variable than I expected," Lucine said, her voice edged with the same irritation and displeasure you'd see in someone trying to quit cigarettes. Being around me had cut off her reliance on Future Finding time-rule meaning for a while now, and she was starting to feel the withdrawals.

I shook my head in disappointment, expecting more from her having risen to the ranks of top strongest in the Card World. Just then, Lucine grasped my right wrist. I didn't even realize it before she grasped it. Thanks to the Viltronian physique, she now had the physical prowess that would contend with Field Marshal Lorn, who was a Martial Sage. With that, Lucine's only weakness was also taken care of.

Before I could ask what she was doing, a coldness spread through my body from her touch—only to vanish a moment later as if it had never transpired. I immediately realized that Lucine had used her fourth time-rule meaning, Eternal Stillness, on me. But it failed to break through my time-rule resistance. And in that instant, I finally understood why she had been trying to use her Future Finding meaning on me earlier. With her newfound strength, she wanted to measure herself against me.

Of all things, she had chosen to test me with her time-rule mastery. I couldn't really blame her; time-rule was her strongest field. Unfortunately for her, I also happened to have the strongest defense against it. So she quickly reached the conclusion that even with her new upgrades and prowess, she still wasn't a match for me and hurriedly let go of my arm.

"Aren't you being a bit ungrateful?" I asked Lucine, holding her gaze and looking straight into her frightened, guilt-ridden eyes. "I went through all that trouble to cure your time-rule dementia, even after you called me a liar, a fraud, insane—and even accused me of trying to assassinate you. And now that you're cured, the first thing you do is attack me? As expected of you Morningstar University types. Not only are you heartless, you don't even have the decency to show a shred of honor."

Lucine looked away, avoiding my gaze, and tried to defend her university with a weak protest. "Wyatt, you're going too far. I wasn't being ungrateful—I only wanted to test my strength, and you're the only one here strong enough for that. Besides, since you're the one who suggested and led the procedure, aren't you responsible for helping me evaluate and adapt to my new prowess?"

"You remembered that? I thought you'd forgotten. Otherwise, you wouldn't have attacked me without warning and then tried to downplay it and defend your actions by claiming you were just testing your new prowess. You Morningstar University people set a new-record for ungratefulness and shamelessness every single day—just when I start to think I've seen it all," I snapped back at Lucine, irritated by her attempt to act clever with me.

Thankfully, as an academician, Lucine's first instinct wasn't to test her strength with her fists but to rely on her time-rule comprehension. If she hadn't been cautious and had gone with the old-school method of testing one's strength, my cover would have been blown instantly.

As a hybrid Celestial–Viltronian–World Calamity Tree, my physique was extremely strong for a card master, but with all my SSS-rank curses being used to nourish Slay's egg, my physical strength was nowhere near that of a devil-realm Viltronian. It would have been an instant defeat.

I can't stress enough how overwhelming a Viltronian physique was—especially in the devil realm, even though Lucine's still technically at the peak of the chivalry class. That alone would allow Lucine to fight opponents a whole class above her.

"I'm being ungrateful?" Lucine snapped, glaring at me before firing back, "If I were ungrateful, would I have ordered my staff to return the time vestige to our present and treat you with the utmost respect, no matter what happened to me—even before I entered the time-expansion chamber? That was before you even swore your oath in the presence of the world's will. Tell me, if I intended to be ungrateful, why would I make those arrangements?"

"Wyatt, tell me."

Lucine wasn't lying. She really had instructed her staff exactly as she claimed, long before I swore the oath to calm her nerves. In fact, that sincere gesture was one of the things that convinced me to take the oath in the first place. I still wasn't sure whether she'd done it out of fear of the strength I'd shown her or because she genuinely trusted me—but regardless of her motives, she had done it.

"Anyone can claim anything now," I shot back, even though I knew perfectly well that none of her actions came from ungratefulness. I accused her anyway, deliberately trying to rile her up and coax her into proving how thankful she truly was—not just for curing her time-rule dementia, but also for helping her grow stronger.

"If you were truly grateful," I added with a pointed look, "you'd hand over a few of the time-rule runes Morningstar University has been secretly nurturing in here."

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One of my long-standing principles was to never take on a job without getting paid. The last time I broke that promise to myself was when I exterminated that Viltronian bastard and his turncoat army of Human–Viltronian hybrids. I faced more than half the humanity to achieve it, to do my part for the right thing—and in the end, all it earned me was a traitorous death.

Yes, my original reason for curing Lucine's time-rule dementia was to protect my reputation and show Lucine I wasn't a fraud. Now that I had accomplished that, it was time for me to be compensated. I knew that if I handed Lucine a bill, she would pay it without the slightest hesitation. But being so direct wouldn't get me the form of payment I actually wanted. So instead, I gave her the perfect reason to reward me with exactly what I had in mind.

Back when Hive AI scanned the entire time vestige with its primordial soul pupils for my plan to build an artificial one of my own, it discovered a hidden section—a vault designed specifically for artificial ego gems. These gems held countless broken and intact runes from various rule systems, including time-rule. I would be lying if I said I

wasn't tempted at first, but after learning that my time-rule resistance came at the price of being unable to comprehend time-rule myself, that temptation had grown into outright greed. Those time-rule runes became the perfect way to compensate for my lack of comprehension of time-rule.

Yes, activating time-rule runes would require time-rule power, and I had none, since I hadn't begun my comprehension of time-rule. But I possessed something far better—primordial energy. Using primordial energy openly would be risky, of course, but that was a problem I could solve later.

The tricky part was getting my hands on quality time-rule runes. Outside of extremely rare and unpredictable circumstances, Morningstar University was practically the only source for them in the entire card world. I could technically buy them through the Devil Merchant Code, but time-rule runes were scarce there, and even if I did manage to find one, the price would be astronomical—unless it came from a common time-rule meaning, which was practically useless to me.

Naturally, my attention kept drifting back to Morningstar University's vault full of artificial ego gems.

"What? How did you know about them?" Lucine gasped, genuinely shocked. Even among the core members of the university aware of the second Morningstar campus hidden inside the time vestige, almost none knew about the vault—let alone the trove of time-rule runes stored within it.

Only a tiny handful of people, mostly the members of the time-vestige council, knew of its existence. It was their ancestral wealth, accumulated over generations and reserved exclusively for Morningstar University's most exceptional researcher and guardian-card apprentices.

They were a university, not a militia, so this was the only reliable way for them to maintain the number of guardians needed to protect Morningstar University. After all, even with access to the time vestige, they couldn't guarantee that every talented student would comprehend the time-rule to a satisfactory level.

Henricks was the perfect example. His comprehension of space-rule meanings was unmatched across the five regions, yet when it came to the time-rule, he moved at a snail's pace. For disciples like him, Morningstar University had prepared these runes.

And it wasn't just time-rule runes—there were runes for every rule. Not all card apprentices were as fortunate as I was. Even if they had the talent, they didn't have the time to master every rule. So they would abandon certain rules and rely on these runes to compensate whenever necessary.

"Like I told you earlier, even if you hadn't revealed anything to me, I would've deduced it sooner or later," I said, letting a smug, knowing look settle on my face. I enjoyed the

shock on Lucine's features—right before it twisted into conflicted regret. She realized she had walked straight into my trap, and she couldn't help staring at me because of it.

"Wyatt, ask for something else," Lucine pleaded, her expression tightening painfully. "Those runes are the legacy of the university's brave and generous teachers and students—the ones who were willing to strip their runes and entrust them to the university before their deaths. They're not something we can trade. They can't be given to an outsider."

Before I could even respond, she shifted the blame to me with a frustrated groan.

"It's never easy with you. You always find new ways to push my buttons. Wyatt... I really am indebted to you for what you've done for me. But the price you're asking for is too much."

"Why are you throwing around so many big, fancy words? Legacy, brave, gracious—just say you don't want to pay me if you don't want to. I knew you Morningstar University people were all the same and shouldn't be trusted. Just drop me off in our present and we will part our ways amicably," I said, exaggerating my distaste at Lucine—the same Lucine who had just asked if she was being ungrateful.

"Wyatt, I'm not going to argue with you about this," Lucine replied firmly. "Those teachers and students entrusted their runes to us for the sake of the university. Treating them as a commodity would be an insult to their intentions and their love for Morningstar. It would be akin to us designating their memory. Now that would be truly ungrateful on my part. Yes, I'm indebted to you but I'm indebted to them as well."

Her eyes lost the earlier guilt, replaced with resolute indifference. Just as I wondered if I had pushed her a bit too hard, she added—this time with a touch of reluctance,

"However... if you truly want those runes, I can give them to you—if you officially join Morningstar University. Don't misunderstand. We can't trade them or give them to outsiders. But if you're one of us, there's nothing stopping me from giving you a few and then some to show my gratitude."

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'You bitch,' I cursed inwardly as Lucine calmly said she would "compensate" me with time-rule runes—if I enrolled in Morningstar University. And here I was, thinking I might have been too harsh on her earlier.

Feeling the heat of my glare, Lucine faltered before adding, "It's your choice. It's not like I'm forcing you... but that's the only way I'm allowed to give you the rune."

"No, no—how could I ever doubt the great Saint Lucine Morgenstern?" I scoffed, shooting her a look of pure disdain. "Clearly, it's my fault for not knowing the sacred procedures."

This woman still hadn't given up on trying to pull me into her university. I thought showing her my capabilities would humble her. Instead, it only made her hungrier for me.

"Wyatt, I know it would be beneath someone of your caliber to attend the university as a student. That's why—if you're willing—you can join as a professor. With your ability, you could pass the Academician exams with ease and apply for tenure," Lucine said, already mapping out my entire academic career at Morningstar University. Clearly, she had put real thought into this. I suppose billions of years spent in a time chamber, refining three new bodies and grasping the time-rule, left her with plenty of time to plan my future too.

Sensing the storm gathering behind my silence after listening to her words, Lucine quickly cut in before I could speak. "Wyatt, don't even think about threatening me with the threat of leaking the secret of the time vestige to others. If you do that, the Southern Princess will never get a seat on the council—because there won't be a council left for her to join."

I watched her with amusement—she really had come prepared. But I had no intention of blackmailing her for the runes. I'm not a criminal, and frankly, I have more than enough leverage to make Morningstar University beg me to accept their time runes. Cutting off their supply of silver milk powder or shutting down VR-Universe access to the Morningstar district were just a couple of options that came to mind.

Lucine had no idea she was poking the wrong card apprentice.

Unfortunately for her, time was on her side. I didn't have the luxury to play drawn-out games just to secure a few runes. And besides—this was something I could resolve with a simple, honest conversation with her. No need to bring out the big guns for something so small.

"Lucine, that's enough," I said, calm but firm. "I can't join Morningstar University, and you know exactly why. I'm already spoken for—I'm set to become the City Lord of Southern Academic City. And we're preparing for the upcoming Academician Bowl, which you understand better than anyone."

I exhaled as my patience thinned but still intact.

"So stop messing around and just take me to the vault. I'll pick a few time-rule runes and craft them into rune spirits before we return to our present."

"What? Who in their right mind would let a teenager become the City Lord of an Academic City? That's like asking the students to teach the class. I don't believe it," Lucine blurted out, stunned.

She tried to figure out which lunatic thought putting me in charge of the Southern Academic City was a brilliant idea. It wasn't that she doubted my ability—just my age. I might be exceptionally smart, but did I really have the experience or judgment to manage an entire city, let alone an academic one? In her mind, someone in the Southern Royal Family had clearly lost it. Otherwise, there wasn't a sane explanation for their decision.

"Believe it or don't, that doesn't change anything. Now stop giving me a hard time and let's get to the vault," I said, rubbing my hands together, already imagining what the time-rule runes stored inside could do.

"Yes, you're right, Wyatt. It doesn't change anything. But since you can't enroll in our university, I'm sorry to say this—you really have no fate with our time rules. You might as well give up," Lucine said. She agreed with my words, yet still refused to pay me with time-rule runes.

I shot her a frown, only to realize she was pretending. After everything she'd said—loyalty, legacy, bravery—if she backed out now, wouldn't that be humiliating for both her and Morningstar University?

I let out a long sigh and said, "Now who's being difficult? You just had to test your luck. And look what you've done—you've put both yourself and Morningstar University in a spot where you either choose to be ungrateful or embarrass yourselves. This is on you. So tell me—will you be ungrateful, or will you bring shame on yourself?"

Lucine could have simply handed over a couple of time-rule runes, but she insisted on pushing her luck. At this point, refusing to give me what I asked for as compensation for curing her would make her look ungrateful, because those runes were actually wartime commodities—despite her insisting they were "legacy." But if she gave them to me now, she'd embarrass herself and the university for treating them like trade goods right after claiming the opposite. No matter what she chose, she'd end up with her own foot in her mouth.

"Aren't you enjoying this a little too much? Aren't you even worried?" Lucine asked, trying to threaten me with the idea that she might actually choose to be seen as ungrateful just to save her university's face by refusing to acknowledge anything. Knowing how much she loved Morningstar University, it wasn't an empty threat—she might really do it.

"Fine. I'll help you out this once," I said, giving my head a slow shake, clearly enjoying the situation far more than I should. But honestly, she brought this on herself by trying to act clever without knowing the full story. If she had known who I truly was, she would've known better than to mess with me.

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"How can you help me with this?" Lucine asked, frowning. A moment later, her eyes lit up as she leaned forward hopefully. "Are you going to change what you want as compensation for curing my time-rule dementia and helping me grow my strength?"

"Yes," I said. "I'll change it—if you agree to announce my appointment as City Lord of the Southern Academic City to all five regions, and give me the time-rule runes I choose as diplomatic gifts."

I laid out my condition and her solution at the same time. If she did what I asked, no one would see her as ungrateful, and her university wouldn't suffer the embarrassment she had nearly dragged it into.

And as a bonus, I would accomplish every reason I came to Morningstar University in the first place. I had planned to make the announcement by using Morningstar University as a stepping stone, but now that I knew about the top ten universities' inheritances, I couldn't afford to appear too aggressive. The smarter move was to have Lucine make the announcement for me and present me with a couple—or even several—time-rule runes as diplomatic gifts. Once the other top ten universities saw how close I'd grown to Morningstar University, they would likely rush to approach me on

their own. I wouldn't even need to seek them out. That way, I can negotiate with them on my terms.

If Lucine and Morningstar University chose to work with me, both sides would profit immensely. After all, they only stood to gain by being on my good side. Nothing brings former rivals together faster than shared benefit and mutual growth.

"Diplomatic gifts?" Lucine repeated, confused, trying to figure out how her dilemma had anything to do with diplomacy.

"I'm your guest, aren't I? And as luck would have it, I'm also the soon-to-be City Lord of the Southern Academic City. In a way, my visit can be treated as a diplomatic meeting between Morningstar University and the Southern Academic City. Call a press conference, make a big show of our friendship and alliance, we make our announcements, and you hand me a few time-rule runes as diplomatic gifts. That is—if you don't consider using the runes as diplomatic gifts as disgracing the memories of your loyal and brave teachers and students," I said, laying out the plan and couldn't help teasing Lucine a little.

Lucine quickly cut in, "I get it now. But since the time-rule runes will be diplomatic gifts, we will choose them for you—"

"You're pushing it again," I warned, stopping her mid-sentence, wondering if she had some kind of itch that made it impossible for her to quit while she was ahead.

"I was kidding," Lucine said, tossing her hands in the air. "When it comes to things like this, your mind works wonders. Are you sure you don't want to become a lawyer?"

"For what? So you people can make a fortune while paying me in scraps?" I shot back, rolling my eyes. Since I dared to unravel and master the mysteries of the universe, the rules of man were hardly a challenge.

"Great, then let's head to the vault. I can't wait to get my hands on those babies," I said, urging her forward as an unconscious grin stretched across my face. How could I not smile? Knowing that soon I'd command time itself—threads of it dancing at my fingertips, bending to my will—was enough to make anyone grin.

"I can take you to the vault, but I can't open it right now. Only two of the three key bearers are currently inside the time vestige, including me. And to unlock the vault, we need all three keys—the last one is with the remaining key bearer in our present," Lucine explained, dousing my excitement.

"Don't look at me like that. We have a rule that no more than two key bearers can travel through the time vestige at once. It's to protect the runes in the vault. Since very few people even know it exists, if the key bearers ever abused their authority, we might not find out until it was too late. To stay extra safe, we usually send only one key bearer at a

time. But this situation is unexpected. Don't worry—you won't be missing out. You can still pick your runes once we return to our present."

Lucine went on to explain the entire procedure required to open the vault. It was an exhausting process, and the more she talked, the more deeper my excitement slumbered. Still, considering the value and danger of the time-rule runes, I understood why such strict measures were necessary. Once someone stole them, it would already be too late for regrets.

"Fine. Take me to a chamber where I can comprehend space rules. I don't want to waste any more of my precious time on this," I said, letting my disappointment show. Only I knew how torturous the wait would be—knowing those time-rule runes were so close yet still out of reach.

"Wait, what's the rush? I just came out of a long seclusion. Keep me company," Lucine called out as I started to leave the time-expansion chamber, stopping me in my tracks. For a moment, I wondered if I'd misheard her. But then, keeping my expression firm, I said, "Just spit it out. What do you want? Beating around the bush will only irritate me further."

"Can you share the recipe you used to fertilize the Virgin Clay of Giya (red)?" Lucine finally dropped the act and asked directly.

"Didn't I already give you the list? Can't you figure it out yourself?" I said, unwilling to hand over the recipe for free. Even if she knew the ingredients I used, she had no idea about the ratios. And trying to work those out through trial and error would take them centuries—even with the time expansion inside the Time Vestige.

At this pace, Lucine will never get an upper hand on me.

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"..." Lucine stared at me, unsure how to respond. She didn't want to beg me for the recipe, nor did she dare ask me to name my price to trade it, because she knew exactly what I would demand—the university's precious time-rule runes. It wasn't that she

thought my price was too high or the exchange unfair, but those runes were limited, and she couldn't bring herself to part with even one.

Still, the fertilizer recipe for the virgin Clay of Giga was extremely important to her and to the university.

One thing had to be understood: during her treatment in the time-expansion chamber, the entire chamber had been flooded with raw time-rule power. Anything that would come in contact with raw time-rule power would be reduced to dust. She had spent what amounted to countless years surrounded by that raw time-rule power, yet had emerged with three newly refined bodies, without even a scratch to show for it.

That was only possible because she had been buried inside the pot filled with the fertilized virgin clay of Giga. It ensured that the rampant raw temporal energy couldn't reach them or interfere with the procedure.

She had discovered this during her treatment and was genuinely amazed by my ingenuity—how I had come up with a way to tame raw temporal forces inside the time expansion chamber due to the use of raw time-rule energy. She tried to figure out how I accomplished it, studying the list of ingredients I used and the fertilized virgin clay of giga she had been buried in.

But she couldn't unravel the secret. All she managed to discover was that when raw or refined temporal forces acted on the fertilized virgin clay of giga, it triggered a unique reaction: the clay converted that temporal power into nourishment for itself, indirectly benefiting anyone buried within it. The array carved onto the pots amplified this effect, producing enough nourishment such that those inside wouldn't exhaust the nourishment meant for the clay and unknowingly kill the clay, but instead would absorb the overflowing energy.

Because of this, the cycle could continue indefinitely—without any external interference—for years, centuries, millennia, or even billions of years.

This reaction between the time-rule power and the fertilized virgin clay of giga made it impossible for her to extract any trace of the original fertilizer I had used. Without that original sample and the little information she knew, she had no way to begin analyzing the ratios of the ingredients that went into creating it.

Lucine wanted the recipe because, with it, she could build an entire time-expansion chamber out of fertilized virgin Clay of Giga—one that could run directly on raw time-rule power while keeping the interior safe for experimentation from the raw temporal force that would be introduced in the chamber's atmosphere for using raw time-rule power to power the time expansion array instead of refined time-rule power.

Such a chamber would eliminate the need to use refined time-rule energy to power the time expansion array entirely. Replacing their current chambers with ones made from

fertilized clay would save the university a massive amount of refined time-rule power, freeing it for other purposes.

And so, once again, Lucine found herself trapped in a dilemma because of me—a fact that visibly irritated her. If she could have gotten away with it, she probably would've beaten me up just to vent the sheer frustration she felt every time she had to discuss or negotiate with me.

"If you have nothing else to add, let's head to the space-rule comprehension chamber. I want to grasp a couple or more space-time rule meanings and push them to ultimate mastery before we return to our present," I said. Lucine didn't respond, clearly unwilling—or unprepared—to pay the price I demanded for the fertilizer recipe. She just needed time. Eventually, she would come around; once her potential gains outweighed her losses, she always did.

We both enjoyed a good bargain, but only one of us held the leverage this time. The only things she had that interested me were the time-rule runes, the time vestige, and the labyrinth of Myriad Past. Without those, I wouldn't have entertained this conversation at all. I would have already gone into seclusion to study space-rule comprehension. After witnessing Field Marshal Lorn's pseudo-celestial space-rule domain in action, I wanted one of my own. Ranking space-rule second on the list of rules I wanted to comprehend.

"Wyatt, how about this—you don't have to give me the recipe, just help me build a time-expansion chamber using the fertilized virgin Clay of Giga (red) in the time vestige? What do you say?" Lucine proposed. If she couldn't afford the recipe, then spending a smaller price to have me construct the chamber for her was the next best option. She had already seen what I was capable of; she knew I could lay a time-expansion array without issue. Building a few chambers out of clay was well within my skill set.

More importantly, once I started working on the structure, it would give her the perfect opportunity to obtain a sample of the original fertilizer used on the virgin Clay of Giga (red). She wouldn't admit it out loud, but that was her real aim. It was to be expected from someone who had raided countless variant pasts, stolen their unique inventions and discoveries, then reintroduced them in our present as their inventions and discoveries while shamelessly calling it archaeology, lying to their consciousness.

"As long as I'm compensated for my services, I don't mind helping you," I said, fully aware of what Lucine was plotting. "One time-rule rune of your choice per chamber—same dimensions as the one you're using now."

"What? Why don't you just take me hostage and rob our rune vault instead?" Lucine snapped, practically choking on my rates. What she failed to grasp was that I held a complete monopoly in this field. The rates for my services were mine—and mine alone—to decide.

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"Wyatt, just because you have a mouth doesn't mean you can spout nonsense. You need to take responsibility for what you say. How can you justify such a ridiculous price for building a time-expansion chamber?" Lucine demanded, unable to wrap her head around my rates. She genuinely felt I was making things difficult for her out of sheer habit.

"I don't have to justify anything to you. If you think my prices are too high, go find someone else to build your time-expansion chambers," I replied, shaking my head casually, knowing not to fight a desperate bull.

"Y-you're taking advantage of my situation," Lucine complained. She understood the truth—my monopoly and her desperation meant I had the power to set whatever rates I pleased. Still, she couldn't resist trying to appeal to my sense of morality in hopes of coaxing me into something more reasonable. If that sort of moral appeal actually worked on me, I would've already wiped out the Human-Viltronian hybrids back on Earth and let them atone for their sins like in persons living off of the taxpayers' money.

"I'm simply following Morningstar University's example," I said, referring to their near-monopoly on time cards across the five regions.

Seeing Lucine fall into a pensive silence, finally realizing she wouldn't get the fertilizer recipe without giving up a few time-rule runes, I couldn't resist teasing her, remarking, "It sucks being on the other end of the stick, doesn't it?"

Lucine stared at me with a frustrated look before finally asking, "How much for the recipe? Considering our short but close history, I hope you'll give me a discount."

In the end, she bowed her head—not for her own sake, but for Morningstar University. It showed just how far she was willing to go for them, even if it meant swallowing her pride in front of me.

I shook my head. Once Lucine got serious, the fun was over, so I decided not to drag things out. "How about this—I have other deals and projects I want to discuss with

Morningstar University. If we manage to reach an agreement, I'll include the fertilizer recipe as part of the cooperation."

"What are they? You can discuss them with me. I have the authority to agree on the university's behalf. Tell me—so long as it's nothing excessive, I'm sure we can work something out," Lucine said quickly, eager to strike while the iron was hot. She feared I might change my mind later over some trivial annoyance, so she wanted everything settled now. As long as time-rule runes weren't involved, she would bend over backward to meet my demands. That was how important the fertilizer recipe was to Morningstar University.

"No, I can't discuss it with you. Because of your time-rule dementia, you've been out of the social loop in the five regions for far too long. You have no idea who I really am or what I intend to discuss. There's no rush—we can talk about it slowly once we're back in our present," I said, rejecting her request with a calm explanation.

Besides, this way she would finally understand how I felt having to wait until we returned to our present before I could choose the time-rule runes she had promised me.

"There you go again, trying to act mysterious. How am I supposed to know who you truly are and what you want to discuss if you won't tell me?" Lucine shot back, clearly dissatisfied. She thought I was just dodging the conversation to avoid discussing the deals and terms with her. This made a part of her even wonder whether I was underestimating her because of our history—where she had often relied on me or ended up losing arguments to me. Not to mention I had proven that I was stronger and smarter than her by defeating Slay and curing her time-rule dementia.

Otherwise, why wouldn't I simply explain everything now? To her, it felt like I was just using her lack of knowledge about me and the current state of the five regions as an excuse to underestimate her. She hated this feeling, but she didn't know enough to argue back.

"Lucine, don't overthink it. I'm not trying to act mysterious or undermine you. It's just that I hate bragging about myself," I said, rubbing my nose with a smug look, fully aware that keeping her in the dark was getting under her skin.

"Not brag? You sound pretty narcissistic to me," Lucine muttered, rolling her eyes. She wondered if she really was reading too much into things. Not everything had to be about her, after all. She had to stop taking things personally.

But my talent and age were overwhelming even for the best among us, and Lucine was no exception. Given the age difference between us, this bothered her more than she wanted to admit.

"You're just jealous," I said, pretending to be disappointed at being called a narcissist.

"Young man, stop acting innocent. I've never seen anyone with thicker skin than you," Lucine said, giving me a firm slap on the back before heading out of the chamber. She stored the four pots in her new storage card as she walked. Even though the procedure was over, she believed the pots still held significant research value—especially if I refused to hand over the fertilizer recipe and our negotiations fell through.

"Come on, I'll take you to the boundless space chambers."

"Did you already comprehend time-rule power?" Lucine suddenly asked, finding it strange that I wanted time-rule runes yet planned to study space-rule meaning inside the time vestige. Most card apprentices would fight tooth and nail for the chance to comprehend time-rule here, yet I was choosing something entirely different.

"No, I don't plan on comprehending the time rule for the foreseeable future," I answered honestly, without offering any further explanation.

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"Why is that?" Lucine asked, genuinely puzzled at why anyone would choose not to comprehend the time-rule in the very place built for it.

"Just because you can, doesn't mean you have to," I replied, trying to sound cryptic for once. It was the only kind of answer that made sense without revealing the truth—something I couldn't afford to do. Any other answer would only lead to more questions.

"And you say you don't like to brag," Lucine muttered, only half listening to my supposed wisdom as she walked ahead with a confident sway, her curvy hips shifting left and right.

I couldn't help the faint smile tugging at my lips as my gaze followed that rhythm. The moment Lucine's intent sensed my intense gaze, she stiffened. Her playful stride snapped into a perfectly measured, elegant walk. Not daring to look back.

Arriving at the boundless space chamber, Lucine gestured toward it with a deliberately neutral expression. "If you need anything, ask the staff on duty. Someone will call you when we reach our present. All the best."

She kept her eyes averted the entire time. Then, without a backward glance, she turned and walked away. Clearly, my earlier gaze had crossed a line with her. So much so, she treated me like an acquaintance losing her original enthusiasm. I felt she was overreacting. Admiring her beauty didn't mean my thoughts were impure.

Well, she had a very conservative and traditional worldview about these things. In this time and age, who else cared about seeming ungrateful, or felt even a flicker of embarrassment over a little hypocrisy? No one—except her. And despite the fact that no one but the two of us knew what had happened, it still bothered her enough that she was willing to part with her precious time-rule runes.

"One moment," I called out just as I stepped into the boundless space chamber.

"What is it?" she asked—appearing before me in a flash. Clearly, she hadn't actually left; she'd been lingering nearby, still undecided about how she felt or how she wanted to act around me.

When she caught the subtle grin on my face, realization dawned. Her cheeks warmed, her eyes narrowed, knowing I was teasing her.

"You're a beautiful grandma. Own it," I said simply, then closed the door of the chamber before she could react, fully aware this would only make Lucine act colder toward me later. Otherwise, teasing her wouldn't be nearly as fun.

Shaking my head, I shifted my attention to the boundless space chamber. As the name suggested, it had boundless space within it. Not literally boundless, but under the influence of the boundless space array, the tiny space of the chamber had stretched so in all directions, enough to house a few cities in it. The stretching of space was the working principle behind the boundless space array.

It was essentially their testing ground for volatile experiments—the boundless space within its walls capable of containing almost anything without putting pressure on the time vestige itself. Of course, it came with one small side effect: time moved slightly faster here compared to the rest of the vestige.

But the chamber's true value lay in the dense concentration of spatial forces produced by the boundless space array etched into every surface. That made it an ideal place to comprehend the space-rule. With my talent, the boost provided here was of no use to me, but ignoring a free opportunity like this would be nothing short of foolishness in the eyes of the other card apprentices. To avoid scrutiny, I choose to act normal.

Being too eye-catching had never stopped me before. But Lucine was different. She knew I was a time variable—something the timeline had absorbed instead of rejecting or trying to erase. I was certain she would use her parallel present meaning of time rule to observe various iterations of young Wyatt across multiple presents of the card world, trying to piece together what a Hybrid Celestial truly was and why Slay believed I was one.

I didn't know how the younger Wyatt fared in those branches of time, but I knew Lucine would not find the answers she'd been searching for in them. But now she knew far too much to get lucky. I decided not to tempt my fate, I might end up giving her leverage over me.

After confirming that Hive AI had fully copied the boundless space array through my Primordial Soul Pupils, I settled into position and began my comprehension of the space-rule. Drawing on resonance through my dual presence across both planes and the power of my celestial origins, I allowed myself to dissolve—becoming one with the physical plane and the spiritual plane simultaneously. From there, I aligned with the space-rule stream of the card world and followed its current, using it as a guide until I finally connected with the space-rule source itself.

What I had just achieved wasn't something ordinary people could even dream of. Even with my resonance and dual-presence abilities, becoming one with both planes should have been impossible. Mortals simply weren't built to withstand that kind of strain. Even demigods and devils couldn't accomplish it with just these two abilities; they would need to have reached the ruler class before their bodies and souls could endure the pressure of merging with both the spiritual and physical planes at once.

The reason I could achieve, as a mere card master, what even demigods and devils could not was simple: I wasn't just any card apprentice—I was a Hybrid Celestial. It was the celestial half of me that made the impossible possible. It allowed me not only to merge with both planes simultaneously, but also to reach the space-rule source itself—the very place where true celestials like the Card Celestial, Dalie, and others comprehended their space rules.

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Have you ever woken to find yourself suspended in pitch-black darkness wondering:

"Where am I?"

"What is this place?"

"Why is it so dark?"

"Am I enclosed inside something?"

If yes, then congratulations—you've realized the existence of space and begun your first steps into comprehending the space-rule.

How do I know? I know because that was exactly how my comprehension began. After following the card world's space-rule stream to its source, I suddenly found myself adrift in absolute darkness. With no idea where I was—only the unsettling certainty that I was somewhere. And in that instant when I recognized I was somewhere—acknowledged it—that recognition alone meant I had already begun my comprehension of space-rule.

[You have begun comprehension of the space-rule.]

When that moment of confusion cleared, I caught the realization that I had reached the space-rule source. The source of all space rules across the myriad realms.

With each tentative movement in that pitch-black emptiness, I felt myself learning—slowly, instinctively. Every gesture, every shift of intention seemed to fill the void with a faint trace of my own presence, as though I were turning nothing into something and something back into nothing. Each action—no matter how small—expanded my understanding of the space-rule.

It wasn't just movement. My thoughts had weight here. Every attempt to define the emptiness around me, to understand myself within it, to grasp how we interacted—each insight sharpened my comprehension at an astonishing speed. It was almost too easy.

[Your comprehension of the space-rule has advanced to Basic Mastery.]

That alone was enough to trigger my caution. Space-rule wasn't as rare as time-rule among card apprentices, but it was still uncommon. If comprehension truly came this easily, wouldn't more card apprentices master it? That was why I believed this simplicity in my comprehension of space-rule was because of my affinity for space itself.

Once I had defined the emptiness, myself, and the relationship between us, I pushed deeper—attempting to define us and our interaction from different ways I was inspired to in that emptiness.

The more I understood the space rule with respect to me and vice versa, the stronger my existence anchored within the space rule. It allowed me to impose orientation onto the void itself, up, down, right, left, north, south. I tried to redefine the emptiness and redefine myself, with every possible inspiration that came to me within that nothingness, growing my understanding.

[Your comprehension of the space-rule has advanced from Basic to Intermediate Mastery.]

Soon, I realized something subtle but unmistakable: with every increase in my understanding of the space-rule, both my own presence and the presence of the space-rule source grew more prominent. Or maybe it wasn't that I and the space-rule source were growing together—maybe I had finally gained the clarity needed to perceive it.

Was that it? I couldn't tell. When I entered the Blood Rule Source, I had already comprehended two blood-rule meanings. My foundation there had been far deeper than what I currently possessed for space-rule. Not to mention, the Blood Source had revealed itself to me from the very beginning, unlike the space-rule gradually and unfolding.

One thing, however, was certain—the deeper my comprehension of space became, the more I realized how much of it still lay hidden. The more I understood, the more I saw how much remained to be uncovered, defined, shaped, and mastered.

[Your comprehension of the space-rule has advanced from Intermediate to Advanced Mastery.]

[Having reached Advanced Mastery of the space-rule, you have arrived at the Space-Rule Bifurcation Point. Please choose one meaning of the space-rule to continue your comprehension.

Caution: Once you choose a meaning of a specific rule, you cannot choose another meaning of space rule until you achieve complete mastery over your current choice.

Note: Due to the card apprentice's Myriad Primordial Souls, the card apprentice may select different rule meanings for each primordial spirit to comprehend. However, it is advised to select the same rule meaning for all primordial spirits until you forge your own Space-Rule Stream, to avoid complications.]

As soon as I reached advanced mastery and arrived at the bifurcation point, the void around me shifted. The pitch-black emptiness blossomed into a vast expanse of stars—an endless, glittering night sky stretching in every direction.

It didn't take long for me to understand what I was seeing. Every "star" wasn't a star at all, but a celestial's Space Stream Spirit, each one immersed in its own comprehension of the space-rule in the space-rule source. Each point of light represented a will, a

presence, a spirit of countless celestials' comprehension into the space rule, regardless of where they were in the myriad realms and what they were doing, all pursuing their own meanings of space.

At last, I was seeing the space-rule source in its true form. The realization struck me with a quiet awe. Surrounded by countless luminous space rule stream spirits, I couldn't help but wonder whether I, too, appeared as a star to the other celestials' space rule stream spirits—just as they appeared to me.

Maybe I wasn't bright enough yet to be noticed from the far reaches of the space rule source like these celestials' space rule stream spirits, but my presence was here all the same.

Once I had taken in the full view of the space-rule source, I finally felt the bifurcation point of the space-rule. And it was nothing like the bifurcation points of the rule streams back in the womb of the card world.

Here, every aspect and attribute of the space-rule was illuminated before me—each one a distinct point in the space rule source, representing a different meaning of space. Instead of vague choices with unknown outcomes, these meanings carried a clarity I hadn't experienced before.

Unlike the card world's rule streams, where I had no real sense of what each meaning could do or what path it might lead me down, the space-rule source offered me partial understanding. Enough to sense the essence behind each meaning. Enough to see what each path could become.

Only now did I realize what a tremendous opportunity I'd missed when I comprehended the third blood-rule meaning. Instead of connecting to the Blood Rule Source, I had chosen the safer route—comprehending through the blood-rule stream of the card world.

All because I feared the blood-rule slaves wandering the Blood Source.

That fear had cost me clarity, depth, and the insight I was now experiencing within the space-rule source when choosing a meaning at the bifurcation point. Still, I received some guidance from the blood rule stream spirit of the card world due to my friendship with Bloodette. I don't regret comprehending the blood plague meaning of the blood rule.

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Standing among the stars that lit up the empty expanse around me, I carefully examined the space-rule meanings before me. The options here were few. Unlike inside the card world's womb—where I could draw from a vast palette of millions of space-rule meanings within its rule stream—only the meanings I had personally uncovered were available for selection now.

Now I was starting to understand why one couldn't know what a rule meaning truly did while inside the womb of a realm's will when choosing it. It was because we hadn't discovered those meanings ourselves; they were things the realm's will had already comprehended and merely allowed us to access. But in the rule source, there was no such guidance. There, we could only comprehend the meanings we personally uncovered.

Understanding this, I finally realized why choosing rule meanings that resonated with my physique, traits, or cards at the bifurcation point helped me select meanings that were at least somewhat related or compatible with them. It ensured I always ended up choosing a rule meaning I could actually use. That was to say, it had always been my own comprehension of those rule meanings that guided me toward options that worked well with my physique, traits, or cards.

As these coincidences were just explanations waiting to happen. Deducing this, I felt neither excited nor upset.

Choosing a rule meaning within the rule source wasn't a gamble the way it was when choosing a rule meaning in the realm's womb. That was good in one sense—but also a problem for a perfectionist like me. I could no longer just pick one and be satisfied with it until I could choose another.

Knowing myself, with my habit of overthinking everything, I would only keep digging deeper, uncovering more and more space-rule meanings without comprehending any of them, convinced each time that I could find something better.

So, I decided not to be picky. I would focus on comprehending three space-rule meanings to their ultimate mastery, fuse them to form my space-rule stream, and only then explore and comprehend as many other space-rule meanings as I wished. I could afford to do this because my mutated ego gem's synchronization rate was extremely high—on par with that of a newborn celestial, making me hybrid celestial.

I looked through the meanings available to me, and my attention finally settled on the space-rule meaning of elasticity. As its name suggested, this space rule meaning allowed me to comprehend and master the elasticity of space itself.

Without giving myself a chance to rethink my decision or consider any other meanings, I immediately began comprehending the elasticity aspect of the space-rule meaning, knowing it was more than enough to serve as my first space-rule meaning. I reminded myself that there would always be more tempting rule meanings out there, and that I had to learn to be satisfied with my choice; otherwise, I would never be able to advance my mastery of the space rule beyond the advanced mastery.

[The Card Apprentice has crossed the rule bifurcation point and stepped into the Elasticity meaning of the space rule.]

Note: Please deepen your comprehension of the elasticity meaning of the space rule to access more detailed information.]

Soon, I understood that the elasticity of space was its tendency to return to its original form after being distorted by an external force. With that realization, I attained basic mastery of the elasticity space-rule meaning.

[The Card Apprentice has gained basic mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule.]

Note: Please deepen your comprehension of the Elasticity meaning to the level of ultimate mastery before selecting the second meaning of the space rule.]

I continued comprehending the elasticity space-rule meaning with a single-minded focus, delving into its fundamentals and gaining a clearer understanding of what elasticity meant in the context of space. I no longer saw it merely as a reaction from space when an external force was applied to it, but also as space's own ability to deform—whether by stretching, compressing, or folding.

[The Card Apprentice has advanced basic mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to intermediate mastery.]

[The Card Apprentice has advanced intermediate mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to advanced mastery.]

[The Card Apprentice has advanced the advanced mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to rare mastery.]

[The Card Apprentice has advanced the rare mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to super rare mastery.]

With a single mind, I comprehend the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to super rare mastery without interruption, and then paused to create a rune 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule.

[Rune: Limitless Strain

Type: Innate rune

Tier: Unique rune

Spirit: Unborn

Durability: [100/100]

Effect: Infinity is a unique tier rune of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule. It allows the card apprentice to deform space infinitely without breaking, losing its structure, or encountering a maximum stress limit by consuming the space rule power.

Note:

i) The rune can be advanced to higher-tier by with the card apprentice's comprehension of the elasticity meaning of space rule. ii) Nourishing the rune with space-rule power may give birth to rune spirit.]

After going through the information on 'Limitless Strain,' I couldn't have been more satisfied with it. Then, using the rune, I advanced my comprehension of the space-rule meaning from super-rare mastery to unique mastery.

[The Card Apprentice has advanced the super rare mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to unique mastery.]

[The Card Apprentice has advanced the unique mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to super unique mastery.]

[The Card Apprentice has advanced the super unique mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to Ultra mastery.]

[The Card Apprentice has advanced the ultra mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to plus ultra mastery.]

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[The Card Apprentice has advanced the plus ultra mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to ultimate mastery.]

Before long, I achieved ultimate mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule and once again found myself at the bifurcation point to choose my second space-rule meaning. Having reached ultimate mastery in my first meaning, I now had more meanings available in the space-rule source than I did the first time. With a single glance, I could tell there were at least twenty times more space-rule meanings available to me this time than before.

I was just about to pick one at random and begin comprehending it before I started overthinking, when a text suddenly appeared in my grimoire, informing me that the Time Vestige had reached our present and I could get off whenever I was done and ready.

The news caught me off guard. Lucine had told me it could take weeks, months, or even a full year, yet not even thirty-six hours had passed since I entered the Boundless Space Chamber. We had arrived a lot sooner than I had expected to. And in other words, I had reached ultimate mastery in a space-rule meaning in barely a day and a half.

If other card apprentices ever heard about this, they would flip the table, wondering how the world could be so unfair. While they struggled for weeks, even months, just to begin comprehending a single rule, I had reached ultimate mastery, in a brand-new meaning of rule I had only just started comprehending, under two days.

After receiving the text, I felt a bit relieved—not because I was glad to return to our present earlier than expected, but because it meant I no longer had to rush my choice of a second space-rule meaning. Instead of forcing myself to focus on just three meanings as quickly as possible to advance my mastery of the space rule, I preferred to take my time and choose carefully, making sure the rule meanings were compatible with me and suited my battle style.

This way, when the time came for me to fuse my first three space-rule meanings to form my very own space rule stream, the process would be far less tedious and time-consuming.

It had taken Lucine billions of years in seclusion in time expansion chamber to fuse her three time-rule meanings and forge her time-rule stream. Granted, the time rule was far more complex and rarer than the space rule, but the sheer span of time involved was

not something anyone could ignore. So if I planned to forge my own space-rule stream, I needed to be far more careful with my choices of space-rule meanings.

As for the elasticity space-rule meaning, I chose it only because it met all my requirements and checked every box. That was why I began comprehending it without any hesitation. I also believed that the first three meanings one comprehended formed the foundation of their mastery over that rule. And for the sake of eventually achieving ultimate mastery of the space rule as a whole, having a strong foundation was essential.

Now I planned to apply my comprehension of the elasticity space-rule meaning in my daily life and in combat, to see where it excelled and where it fell short. By understanding its strengths and weaknesses, I could choose the other two space-rule meanings with elasticity at the center, making it easier to fuse them later and forge my space-rule stream.

Unlike other card apprentices who had to choose their rule meanings blindly, I could select mine with full awareness of what each was capable of within the space-rule source. It would be foolish not to take advantage of that. Others didn't have the luxury of picking meanings that were both compatible and mutually reinforcing—but I did. So I intended to use that advantage to plan ahead for the rule-fusion stage and the stream-formation stage. This way, I could form my space-rule stream as quickly as possible and go further into the space-rule meaning.

Mapping out my next course of training for later, I stepped out of the Boundless Space Chamber and found Lucine waiting for me. A smile tugged at my lips, seeing her there to greet me after my seclusion.

Noticing my smile, Lucine bit on her lips in annoyance and snorted, saying, "Don't misunderstand. I wasn't waiting. I just wanted to check on you before leaving the Time Vestige. I only arrived a moment ago."

"Aww, you were checking up on me?" I teased, pretending to be touched and making my voice as obnoxious as possible.

Lucine narrowed her eyes and, ignoring my question, she warned, "Wyatt, I know we're familiar enough that we don't bother with formalities. But I'm still your elder, and I expect those formalities from you in front of others."

I raised my left eyebrow in amusement. "And what's in it for me?"

I had a feeling my teasing was the reason she suddenly cared about such things—especially with her second family, Morningstar University, watching. Maybe she didn't want them to misunderstand our relationship as something more than it was. If that was the case, I could see why appearances mattered to her suddenly.

"What do you mean by what's in it for you? You should be doing it anyway. It's basic manners," Lucine replied while staring straight at me, making it clear she wasn't going to back down on this one.

"Fine, but if you push your luck, don't blame me later," I said, agreeing with her while warning her not to overdo it. Knowing her personality, I doubted she'd stop while she was ahead, but at least I'd said my part.

Seeing her nod, I asked, "We arrived a lot sooner than you said we would. Were you lying to me earlier?"

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"I did exaggerate the time frame a bit, but I didn't lie," Lucine said in her defense before quickly steering the conversation my way. "How was your seclusion? How far did you get with the space-rule?"

"I was lucky enough to grasp space-rule and raise the level of my first space-rule meaning to ultimate master," I replied honestly. I didn't care whether Lucine believed me or thought I was boasting. "I was planning to come out to apply it and to upgrade the space-rule rune I created from that meaning. So, it's good we're already back in our present."

I didn't blame Lucine for anything. Everyone has their own thoughts and plans. As long as they weren't harming me or getting in the way of mine, there was no reason to clash over every minor disagreement. Otherwise, I'd end up fighting the entire myriad realms.

"I see you're thinking ahead and not rushing to upgrade your rune to ultimate-tier the moment you reach ultimate mastery in the rule-meaning used to forge it. I'm guessing you're planning to use that rune as the base to forge a hybrid rune?" Lucine asked, taking an interest in my practice like an elder guiding their junior.

She pretended to ignore the fact that I had not only begun comprehending the space rule, but had also reached super rare mastery in it by raising my first space-rule

meaning to ultimate mastery in just about thirty-six hours. Even though she kept her voice calm, the storm that revelation caused in her was clear in her eyes.

"Yes, I am," I said with a nod. "I want to apply it first and see which direction feels right for developing it further. Hopefully, in the future i'll be able to forge a rune that's compatible with this one and successfully create a hybrid rune." I explained my plans as the two of us walked out of the time vestige together.

"Good luck, but don't rush it. Take your time. It will come naturally sooner or later," Lucine said, wishing me luck. She knew better than most that not every card apprentice was lucky enough to comprehend compatible rule meanings to create hybrid runes. We could make all the plans we wanted, but nature always had its own plans. And the worst thing anyone could do at a time like that was try to fight the storm. That would just be foolish.

But in my case, I was the storm. Unlike other card apprentices who had no choice but to gamble at the rule bifurcation point inside the realm's womb, I wasn't bound by that uncertainty. By comprehending rules directly from the rule source, I didn't need to wager my future on chance. I could simply choose from the rule meanings I had already uncovered. So I wasn't worried—in fact, I was certain that I would eventually succeed in forging a hybrid rune.

I already had a set of compatible rule meanings among the rule meanings I had comprehended to forge hybrid runes: Blood Fate Plunder, Blood Curse, and Blood Plague. With my ultimate mastery over each of them, I had learned that they were naturally compatible with each other in their own way. I was confident I could forge at least three different hybrid runes using those meanings. If I did, it would give me a massive advantage when it came time to fuse those three blood-rule meanings and form a blood-rule stream.

I just needed to make the time for it.

Sigh

I couldn't help but let out a long sigh, struck by the irony of my situation. I was standing inside the Time Vestige, a place overflowing with time—yet somehow, I still didn't have enough of it. I couldn't fully take advantage of the Vestige's abilities because I had too many matters waiting for me in the Card World, Lil' Red Storm, and the Dark Realm.

Sure, a day in here barely amounted to an hour outside, but staying inside meant cutting myself off from the outside world entirely. And that was a problem. I didn't want another incident like the one with the Freedom Fighters. They had reached out to me for help, and I could have taken them under me for free. But I was too busy to respond, and the Southern Princess seized the opportunity—handing them over to me as compensation for meddling in my relationship with Anna.

In the end, I dragged myself into a fight for a seat on the Time Vestige council with the Southern Princess, when I could have given that seat to Anna, a friend, or even a bloodkin if things had unfolded properly.

I had too much going on across three realms. If I was absent for long, everything I'd planned and worked for could fall apart. The root of all these problems was simple: I was trying to handle everything myself, when what I should be doing was focusing on what I need and want to do. And to do that, I had to offload some of the work.

I'd already done it before—handing inter-realm commerce over to Susan, Clown Mask, and their team; Fine Gold to Diana, Cindy, and theirs; the Freedom Fighters to Dalia, Joy, and the others. I needed to push more of the workload outward. But the issue was that there was no one left who was both capable and trustworthy enough to take on the rest of my responsibilities.

I had more than a thousand perfect clones, yet not a single one of them was suited to shoulder even a fraction of what remained. For now, they were only good for learning and combat, not the responsibilities I needed handled. And speaking of that, what I truly needed at this moment were capable, trustworthy people who could serve as my representatives in the Card World and the Dark Realm.

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Earlier, I had planned to groom Corey Bright to serve as my voice in the Dark Realm, with Demigod Redfall backing her. It was a big gamble, but I trusted Corey Park to guide her well. The issue was that Corey Bright was still too weak and needed time to mature. It would be a long while before she could represent me in the Dark Realm.

But with Slay joining our side, I finally felt I had the representatives I needed there.

That left the Card World. I needed someone equally capable and trustworthy to act as my representative here. They couldn't just be competent—they had to carry real authority. Otherwise, they wouldn't survive a single day among these hyenas. If power weren't such a defining requirement, I would have simply made Susan my representative in the Card World and let the others serve as her council.

I had three candidates in mind who fit my requirements, but the problem was that none of them were part of my group. Since I couldn't find the right person in-house, I was considering an outside hire. They were all capable and powerful, but their loyalty was uncertain. And each of them had prior commitments and arrangements of their own—I couldn't be sure they would abandon those to work with me.

Normally, if I couldn't fully trust someone, I wouldn't even bring them into consideration. But these three were different. I did trust them—just not enough to think they would put my interests above everything else.

The three candidates were Jill Norley, Asong Young, and Agatha.

Each of them possessed the qualities I needed in a representative for the Card World. They had deep experience in this exact kind of role. After all, they had spent most of their lives serving as the representatives of their own respective masters.

Jill had been her father's representative for as long as she could remember. As the daughter of one of the founding demigods, she grew up dealing with her father's friends, Masters, from a young age. Let alone the world leaders, they were nothing new to her.

Asong had served as the representative of the people for decades. Even when she was chronically ill and on the verge of death, she still faced world leaders without hesitation, fighting for mortals who had no voice in a world ruled by cards and card apprentices.

And then there was Agatha. She had represented Demigod Windsor long enough to earn a level of trust few could hope for—enough trust for him to leave his daughter Aba in her care and protection.

All three of them were remarkable in their own ways. I'd be fortunate to have even one of them on my side, but I wanted all three. The million-dollar question was whether they would set aside their existing commitments and choose to stand with me when I called.

If not, all this debating in my head was nothing but wasted time.

I would have to seek them out and ask their opinions in person. I wasn't sure about Jill or Asong, but Agatha had already spoken to me about starting a venture together when Aba enrolled in Morningstar University. Since the university didn't allow students to bring servants or bodyguards on campus, Agatha would be staying in the Morningstar University District with plenty of free time on her hands.

She had suggested partnering with me to sell the soul-tech medical devices I created using soul craft inspired by modern machinery to cure Lucy Roberts' autism in Sun Blossom City to mortal doctors and alchemists.

She believed it would provide more accessible and affordable medical care for mortals and card apprentices alike. It was a noble idea, but I had to wonder whether she would be willing to go a step further and serve as my voice in the Five Regions.

"Master!"

As Lucine and I stepped out of the Time Vestige, a young woman barreled toward her at neck-breaking speed, throwing herself into Lucine's arms. It was none other than Chief Denise Johnson's daughter, Ahalya Johnson.

"Laya, you silly child, why are you crying? Didn't I come back alive and in one piece?" Lucine asked gently as she wiped the tears from her youngest student's cheeks.

"Master, what about your time-rule dementia? I heard it flared up and you lost consciousness. Are you really alright?" Ahalya asked, her voice trembling with worry as she searched Lucine's eyes, trying to see how much the condition had worsened after her trip to the past through the temporal river.

After submitting the results of their research and experiments in the Time Vestige to the university, Ahalya had rushed back to the Garden of Beginning ignoring the Dean's strict, repeated warnings. She couldn't sit still after learning how her master's condition had flared up because of Henricks and that jerk of a master of his.

"Haha, about that—it's been taken care of. I don't have to worry about it anymore," Lucine said lightly, offering no further explanation. She knew that if she told the truth, no one would believe her, and worse, it might draw unwanted attention toward me.

"What do you mean, Master?" Ahalya asked, genuinely confused. It was Lucine who had always discouraged her from researching time-rule dementia, insisting it was something even celestials were powerless against—that she shouldn't waste her time on a hopeless project. And now that same mentor was claiming she had "taken care" of it. Ahalya couldn't help wondering if this sudden confidence was a symptom of the condition worsening—delusion, denial, something slipping through the cracks.

"I cured your mentor's time-rule dementia," I said from the side, stepping in when I saw Lucine hesitating to tell her the truth out of fear it would create trouble for me. Her clueless self was still trying to "protect" me from being targeted by Masters, even though I had already told her that her own university and the central government had allied and tried to kidnap me in the Southern Capital.

Besides, I was getting tired of waiting for their emotional reunion to wrap up—I needed to let Ahalya know she should head back to Sky Blossom City. Her mother missed her.

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

c 2564

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning

"You did?" Ahalya asked, her eyes widening with joy. She had doubted her beloved mentor when Lucine claimed the time-rule dementia that had plagued her for over a decade was resolved, but when it came to me, she accepted it instinctively—surprised only by my choice to help her mentor. She was no stranger to the difference between me and her university.

"Of course he's joking. How could a teenage card master cure a celestial disease? It doesn't even sound believable," Lucine cut in, waving off my words as if they were nothing more than a silly boast. She shot me a quick wink, urging me to keep quiet and let her cover for me. In her mind, my age explained everything—reckless, attention-seeking, and unaware of the trouble such claims could cause.

"Huh?" Ahalya blinked at her mentor, confusion and worry mixing on her face. Turning back to me, she asked, "Wyatt... are you sure you cured her time-rule dementia? Are these just side effects from the procedure? Nothing permanent, right?"

Seeing her mentor ramble like that, Ahalya began to wonder if Lucine truly wasn't fully cured—or worse, if she was still experiencing lingering side effects from the procedure. Ever since she learned about me and my sudden rise, she had followed my journey as a card apprentice obsessively—not quite like a fangirl, more like an elder sister with a younger-brother complex. She knew every one of my achievements, from how I cured Lucy Robert to the miracles at the orphanage. With all that in mind, she had no trouble believing I could cure her mentor's time-rule dementia; she was only surprised that I actually chose to help her master. After all, the reputation of my pettiness preceded me.

"Laya, how can you believe him but not me?" Lucine demanded, genuinely hurt that her beloved disciple trusted my words over hers. The reversal rattled her so much that she stopped trying to cover for me, her pride stinging. She knew Ahalya loved her, but did her disciple really think she wasn't capable of curing time-rule dementia? For a renowned researcher like Lucine, that doubt cut almost as deeply as questioning her daughter's love.

"Master, that's Wyatt," Ahalya replied matter-of-factly, offering no explanation—as if my name alone answered everything. I hadn't realized my reputation had grown to that

point in the Five Regions. Discovering it on the spot left me both impressed and a little startled.

"I know who he is—" Lucine began, intending to ask for a proper explanation, but I interrupted her.

"Do you?" I asked. "Do you know who I am? Do you really know who I am?"

I finally let out the frustration I'd been holding back over Lucine's dismissive attitude toward me and undermining me because of my age on every turn, catching both her and Ahalya off guard. With their full attention on me at last, I decided it was the best moment to say what needed to be said before they continued their emotional reunion.

"I don't have time for this, so I'll be direct," I said. "Ahalya, the next time I see you, either you'll be with your mother or she'll be here with you—whichever works best for the three of you. Lucine, the next time we meet, you'd better know who I really am. And talk to your university—make every arrangement for what we discussed. If you don't, I'll approach another top-ten university instead. Make sure everything is ready by the time I return."

With that, I delivered my message to the mentor-disciple duo and turned away, heading toward Henricks, who was standing beside Dean Sam. Henricks was an outsider here, unlike Ahalya, and Morningstar University had already gone out of its way to accommodate him for my sake.

"Wyatt, you're leaving?" Lucine asked. I nodded, feeling drained by her stating the obvious, and answered, "Yes. I figured I might as well handle some of my other work while you talk with your university and get everything sorted out. Standing around while you all discuss things feels like a complete waste of time. I'll be back soon. Just do your part—I don't want to hear any excuses."

"Hey, is that how you speak to your elders?" Lucine snapped.

I shook my head. "That's how I talk to patients."

"See ya."

Before she could throw another question at me, I was already beside Henricks. I had used my first space-rule meaning in tandem with my celestial force to pull it off. By making the space between us elastic and then compressing it with my celestial force, I dragged myself to his side in less than a fraction of a millisecond—faster than teleportation.

"Oh, boss. Did you finally start comprehending the space rule?" Henricks guessed the moment I appeared beside him. He had clearly sensed the distortions in the air, and the way he narrowed his eyes in concentration made it obvious he was trying to figure out

exactly which space-rule meaning I had used. Considering how close he was to forming his own space-rule stream, I wouldn't be surprised if he could pick up on such details.

"I did. But why are you slacking off here?" I asked, my brows tightening.

"Boss, how can you say that?" Henricks protested. "I came to check on you, but these people wouldn't give me a straight answer, so I was trying to get to the bottom of it before you showed up." He explained himself quickly, careful not to sound like he was complaining. He knew full well that if the Freedom Fighters failed to justify the investment I'd made in them, I wouldn't hesitate to cut ties.

Watching him act like a tragic daughter-in-law being scolded by a tyrannical mother-in-law, I couldn't help but snort in irritation. I had no intention of entertaining Henricks's antics any further and was just about to tell him to take me out when Dean Sam suddenly spoke up with unexpected sincerity.

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Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning

"Thank you for helping Madam Lucine despite our differences. Please know that all academicians involved in the Southern Capital incident have been stripped of their tenure and ordered to vacate the university premises at the latest. And rest assured—whatever promises Madam Lucine made with you will be honored by Morningstar University to the fullest. I will personally see to it. If there is anything else the university or I can help you with, please don't hesitate to command it."

Dean Sam had overheard my conversation with the mentor-disciple pair through his intent sense. Learning that Lucine's time-rule dementia had been cured genuinely pleased him, and he sincerely thanked me for making it possible. In his relief and gratitude, he didn't hesitate to offer me what was essentially a verbal blank check—completely unaware that Lucine had already blabbed their core secrets to me.

I wondered if he would be able to say the same knowing this or when he learned the price Lucine had agreed to pay me. I didn't bother myself with that, it was up to Lucine now. Yet, I wondered if Dean Sam was on the time vestige council and one of the key bears to the vault hidden in the second campus of Morningstar University. He should

be. If he genuinely meant his words to me, then it shouldn't be hard for him to help Lucine come through for me.

"Lucine is my friend. I only did what any friend would do," I said before turning to Henricks, signaling him to take me to the coordinates I'd just sent to his grimoire. I completely ignored the furious glare Lucine shot my way—she had told me very clearly to treat her like an elder in front of others, and she knew I'd deliberately done the opposite just to get under her skin.

Dean Sam was a very perceptive man, he understood more than I said from my words, my behavior, and Lucine's reaction. He could tell that if anything, I was understating my relationship with her. He also knew that while only a few hours had passed here, it could have been months—or even years—for us inside the temporal river. With time involved, he kept an open mind, convinced that almost anything was possible.

Ignoring the glint in his eyes, I gave Henricks a subtle signal. He opened a space gate to the coordinates I had shared with him, and with a brief nod to the trio, we stepped through and left.

"Master, I've shared the dossier on Wyatt with your grimoire," Ahalya said, passing along the file she had personally compiled on me. She knew that in the past few months—while her condition had been deteriorating—her master had been in seclusion trying to keep it under control and had missed everything happening in the outside world, including my rise and my growing influence across the Five Regions. So she handed it over without hesitation, almost like a proud older sister bragging about her younger brother.

Even though Ahalya had never met the young Wyatt, she had always seen him as a little brother because of what his parents had once done for her and her mother. She had even planned to use her master's connections to enroll me into the university through the back door, fully prepared to risk Lucine's reputation if needed. In her heart, nothing she did for young Wyatt could ever come close to what his mother had done for the two of them.

"He's Ellen Duskborn's child!" Lucine exclaimed, stunned to learn I was a legacy student. Before continuing through the dossier, she turned sharply toward the Dean and demanded, "Sam, if he's a legacy applicant, why hasn't he already been recruited into the university?"

Having been freed from her time-rule dementia, Lucine's next ambition was simple: get a talent like me—or just me—into her university, whether as a student or a teacher. She didn't care which. As long as I became part of the Morningstar University family, she would consider it a victory. So when she discovered that I had already been connected to the university from my maternal side of the family and yet somehow had not been admitted, the shock hit her hard. For the first time, she was genuinely disappointed in Morningstar University.

"I'm sorry, Your Highness. I failed to manage the staff under me properly," Dean Sam said at once, assuming full responsibility for their oversight when it came to me.

With Lucine's deteriorating condition keeping her in seclusion and his own attention absorbed by research, the university's administration had clearly slipped. He had only recently learned that one of the most wanted criminals was, in fact, a senior professor at Morningstar—someone who had not only manipulated the university from within but had also orchestrated the conspiracy against me.

Morningstar University had punished the staff involved in the Southern Capital incident, all to appease me, but in the end they had shifted most of the blame onto Sansa Baylor, a.k.a Senior Professor Sansa Orian.

For the first time, Lucine felt genuinely disappointed in Morningstar University. Yet even with that sting in her chest, she couldn't tear her eyes away from the dossier—especially the part confirming that I was Ellen Duskborn's son and that assistant professor recruit Kate Duskborn was my aunt. My maternal grandparents had attended the university, and my great-grandfather had even held tenure there. The Duskborn family had a long, storied connection with Morningstar University.

"This changes everything," she murmured, unable to hide the shift in her thoughts. If anything, the revelation only strengthened her determination to bring me into Morningstar's fold.

With renewed enthusiasm, she continued reading through the dossier Ahalya had painstakingly compiled, absorbing every detail of my achievements. And when her disciple's neatly written conclusion described my meteoric rise across the Five Regions, she repeated under her breath, "This changes everything."

Her enthusiasm dimmed as she read through the list of my creations and achievements. There weren't many, but each one had contributed far more to the advancement of the card apprentice society than anything the top ten universities had managed in the past century. Only now did she begin to understand why I kept calling her ignorant—and why her disciple had such unwavering faith in my abilities.

Remembering how she had spoken to me and behaved earlier, her cheeks warmed with embarrassment.

"Is it true that he once planned to attend Morningstar University?" Lucine asked, confirming the detail with both her disciple and Dean Sam. She didn't touch on how the university had used that information to conspire against me. After seeing how strongly I now rejected the very idea of enrolling, it was hard for her to believe that I had once wished to attend Morningstar—defying even the Southern Royal Family's plans for me.

"Yes, Your Highness," Dean Sam replied with a solemn expression. He knew that if he were to die now and his soul were to enter the World's Womb, he wouldn't be able to

face his master or the other elders and founders of the university. By neglecting his duties and burying himself in research, he had unknowingly cost Morningstar a chance that could have elevated it into the greatest university in the Five Regions—finally putting it on the path its founders had once dreamed of.

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Chapter 2565: Lucine's Embarrassment-II

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning

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Chapter 2566: Jillian's Pub

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Jillians' Pub

"Boss, why are we here?" Henricks asked, glancing around the pub at drunk college kids either fighting or making out with loud music playing in the backdrop. Given his age, he clearly felt out of place.

Right then, a blonde college girl with smeared mascara bumped into him and snapped, "Hey, watch it—" She froze halfway through her sentence, squinting at him as if trying to place a familiar face. "You look like my grandpa. Wanna buy me a drink?"

"You still got it, old stud. Have fun." Leaving Henricks alone with the drunk blonde, I headed upstairs to the VIP section and spotted the reason I'd come here. She was entertaining a few women tonight. Knowing her, she wouldn't spend a single penny unless there was money to be made.

"Kid, where do you think you're going— Sir, please." The VIP lounge bouncer tried to stop me, but the moment he recognized me, his tone shifted and he stepped aside, inviting me in with respect.

I gave him a nod and walked up the open-riser staircase, my eyes drawn to the stunning silhouette of the curvy woman ahead of me. She was in the middle of giving a speech to a group of women seated on a massive C-shaped couch.

I was surprised to discover that she had already broken through and was only a step away from reaching the semi-demigod realm. However, if she managed to form her divinity in a single attempt, she could bypass that unnecessary stage entirely and join the prestigious ranks of card demigods who achieved it before turning a century-old.

The moment they noticed me, they started whispering among themselves, subtly fixing their dresses, hair, and makeup before sending a series of tempting smiles my way—completely ignoring the speech.

The girl delivering the talk remained oblivious to the shift in the room until her own body betrayed her. She suddenly pressed her thighs together, bent her knees slightly, and let out a soft, sensual moan before turning around. Her gaze snapped to me instantly, sharp and focused—like a hawk zeroing in on its prey.

"Wyatt, what are you doing here?" Jill blurted out, her face flushing with embarrassment even as her body moved on its own—closing the distance and jumping into my arms. Before long, she was already nibbling at my right earlobe, unable to stop herself.

"I thought you had your physique under control around me," I said, wrapping my arms around her waist. My right hand traced up her spine, reaching the back of her head. My fingers curled around the base of her skull, guiding her head back gently. Her lips pulled away from my ear, a thin thread of saliva stretched between us.

It was obvious Jill wasn't the one steering her body anymore. Her carnivorous womb had taken over again, slipping back into its stud hunting habits. The difference was that this time Jill's mind was clear—she was fully aware, fully conscious—yet completely trapped inside a body ruled by that relentless force of her physique.

She wasn't completely gone like the first time her physique flared up around me. I supposed that counted as progress.

Without wasting any more time, I activated my Myriad Devil Transformation to mask my various energy signatures. To the naked eye, I still looked like myself, but to her carnivorous womb, I was no longer the chosen prey. Losing sight of its target, it retreated back into slumber.

Jill wiped her lips and elbowed me in the ribs, grumbling, "You did that on purpose."

"Hey, you're the one who said you had it under control," I shot back, pretending to wince even though her blow didn't even tickle. If I didn't play along, she'd keep hitting me until I did.

"Whatever. Aren't you planning to let me go now?" Jill asked, subtly trying to pry my arms from around her waist. Her cheeks warmed as she finally felt my firm meat pressed against her lower abdomen.

"Me? You threw yourself on me. Now, that I pitched a tent, you want to leave. You tease," I said, pressing Jill's crotch hard against mine and shifting slightly, not wanting the women who were watching the show to see my pants bulging at its crotch area.

"Aren't you shameless? Unless you plan to commit, don't you dare think of taking advantage of me," Jill completely misunderstood my teasing as a booty call. I'd already made it clear to her that my heart was set on someone else, and as a self-respecting woman she refused to be the third wheel.

"Shameless? Who was the one nibbling my ear like she hadn't eaten in days?" I shot back. She wasn't wrong—I was taking advantage of her—but I couldn't help but tease her, her body was just too vulgar and provocative.

"Unbelievable. Wyatt, let go of me right now," Jill snapped. She still had feelings for me—wanted to be with me, even—but not like this. Not right after her body had acted up in front of everyone. The embarrassment from her carnivorous womb taking over was written all over her face, and it clearly rattled her.

"Don't struggle. Just give me a few more seconds," I murmured, pulling her closer and whispering the plea into her ear. At the same time, I loosened my grip around her waist. From that moment on, she could leave any time she wanted.

But she didn't.

Instead, she relaxed, her resistance fading as her wrists settled lightly on my shoulders. Her soft fingers slid into my hair, and she looked into my eyes with a familiar, playful spark.

She didn't mind my closeness—maybe even enjoyed it—but that didn't stop her from using the moment to tilt the balance in her favor. That was Jill for you; she loved turning any situation into a bargain.

She opened her mouth, ready to throw out something smirking and sharp, when an arrogant voice cut in:

"Hey, asshole! Didn't you hear her? She told you to let go!"

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2567: Limitless Barrier

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Jillians' Pub

Jill and I turned our heads at the same time to see who was trying to play the prince rescuing a damsel in distress. To my surprise, it was a young card demigod. He had sharp features, fiery red hair, and striking green eyes—looked like he'd just crossed his first century. Not a bad-looking guy at all. He clearly inherited the best of his parents' genes in terms of appearance... but when it came to common sense, the line must have skipped him.

Jill's brows drew together the moment she saw him, a flicker of irritation crossing her eyes. The women on the couch reacted the same way—they just didn't dare show it as openly. Their expressions told me everything I needed to know. He may be one of Jill's persistent suitors, the kind who didn't understand the word "no."

"What are you staring at? Didn't you hear me? Let her go, or I'll make you," the demigod warned, his glare fixed on me.

I couldn't help but laugh. I released Jill's waist and raised both hands in mock surrender.

"Relax, man. You've got it all backwards. She's the one hanging on to me. Please—by all means—help me get her off."

Before I could even finish teasing the red-headed demigod, Jill cut in with a kiss to my mouth. Her tongue rushed in, fiercely teasing mine. Ignoring the demigod, I indulged in the kiss. Jill's technique had gotten a lot better. I couldn't help but let out a shameful moan; she was too damn good at it. It was as if she had gone to university just to learn kissing and aced it. I knew Jill was fiercely competitive, but this was just insane.

Seeing us kiss and ignore him, the demigod's eyes flared in rage. His right fist suddenly lit on fire, and he threw a punch aimed at my head. I felt a strong flame rule power from it; I'm sure Jill did too. However, she closed her eyes tighter and kissed me fiercely, as if there was no tomorrow. When she, a woman, could be so daring, how could I back down? My left palm grabbed her right ass cheek, and my fingers dug in. My right hand bundled her loose hair and pulled her head back while I leaned in, taking control of the kiss.

Meanwhile, the red-headed demigod stared in disbelief as his punches failed to reach us. Every blow lost momentum mid-air before bouncing harmlessly off the empty space around us. No matter how much force he poured into it, he couldn't break through the invisible wall.

If all he relied on were flame rule power and brute strength, he never stood a chance. With my space rule mastery, I had woven a thin space bubble around Jill and me. To normal

senses it was invisible—barely even a shimmer—but in truth its walls were stretched to an extreme.

Using my space rule mastery, amplified by the Limitless Strain rune and my celestial force, I pulled the bubble's boundaries outward until they became an impossibly thin membrane—thinner than a strand of hair, yet extending limitlessly long.

I called it the Limitless Barrier. Despite its name, it was just a trick I came up with on my feet.

Every attack aimed at us had to cross that limitless stretch of warped space before it could reach our bodies. And by the time his punches traveled that limitless distance, all their energy bled away and eventually rebounded straight back.

Unless he figured out the principle behind the Limitless Barrier—and had some way to counter the limitless strain woven into it—his fists were never going to reach us.

Earlier, when I saw his good looks, his realm, his barely-a-century age, and the fact that he stepped in for Jill without hesitation, I wondered why she wouldn't at least give him a chance. But the moment he attacked me just because Jill kissed me, the answer became obvious.

Jill tapped my shoulder urgently, struggling to keep pace with me. When I finally broke the kiss, she sucked in a deep breath—only to grab my face and pull me right back for round two. She clearly wasn't ready to surrender. She had mastered the theory, but her practical experience was still lacking, so in the end she couldn't keep up with me and my hybrid physique.

Meanwhile, the red-haired demigod launched attack after attack from every direction, each one failing to reach us and instead stirring chaos throughout the pub. Students panicked and scrambled for the exits. Jill's companions ran for cover as well, though they didn't flee altogether. Despite being unable to help, they stayed close enough to watch over her.

That surprised me. I'd always assumed Jill was a loner and had no real friends—especially after Luna left to join the freedom fighters.

"You done? Or do you want to go another round?" I asked Jill, who still looked unconvinced even after losing three times in a row. She clearly didn't want to admit defeat, but with the chaos the redhead was causing in her pub, she chose to pull back for now—planning to return in full force once the nuisance was handled.

Even then, Jill didn't rush. She remained in my arms, using my pupils as a makeshift mirror to fix her hair and wipe the trace of moisture from her lips. After straightening her dress, she leaned in, gave me a light peck on the nose, and said, "I'll be right back."

As soon as Jill left my embrace and turned to face the red demigod, calling out, "Uncle!" The latter stopped his relentless attacks and stared back at his niece with a blank but polite face. Meanwhile, I blinked in confusion. Since when did Norley have such a young brother?

As Jill stepped out of the protection of my barrier, I dispersed it completely. After watching the red-haired demigod's attacks up close, I'd already determined he wasn't anywhere near elite level. He barely registered as a threat to me.

"Your Highness, please stop acting out," the redhead demigod said respectfully. "You're the one who reached out to the Brothwork family's heir. He helped you, and whether you like it or not, you're expected to attend his party. Otherwise, you'll put the master in a difficult position."

His tone was polite, but every few seconds his gaze flicked toward me with a sharp, dangerous glint that hadn't been there before. That was when it hit me—he had been suppressing his true power this whole time. He wasn't weak; he just wanted Jill's full attention.

From the way he spoke, he sounded like one of Demigod Norley's loyal subordinates. But as far as I knew, Norley preferred working alone—especially after adopting Jill. Seeing someone this young and this strong serving under him didn't add up... and it raised even more questions.

Chapter 2568: Demigod Sean Brothwork

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Jillians' Pub

"He didn't help me—we went into business together. Uncle Sean, you know that better than anyone. You and your family are twisting the story," Jill shot back at demigod Sean Brothwork. "If anything, I helped him and his family make a fortune. He should be thanking me. Instead, he's harassing me. I don't know why I expected anything different from a Brothwork—an ungrateful bunch."

"Your Highness, please mind your words," Demigod Sean cautioned before continuing, "The Brothwork family is one of the longstanding wealthiest families in the five regions. They didn't need the small profit your... profane venture generated. Young Master Brothwork only agreed to you to help out of respect for our Master. Don't forget—he was the only one who stepped forward when everyone else refused."

"Oh, really? Then tell him to return every dividend I paid his family. Then I'll believe he didn't need the 'little' money from my 'profane' venture," Jill said, her tone dripping with mockery as she pressed Sean to support his claim—or step aside.

"Your Highness... you can tell that to Young Master Brothwork yourself tonight, at the dinner party he's hosting to celebrate the success of your venture," Demigod Sean replied in a neutral voice, though his eyes betrayed him, revealing that his intentions were not as neutral.

"I'm not going, and you know exactly why. There's nothing left to discuss—I've already made my decision. Now leave before I report you to father." Jill no longer wished to argue with Sean, fully aware he would keep repeating himself like a parrot. It was clear he wasn't listening at all; he simply wanted to force her to comply with his demands.

"Please, go ahead. I'll wait," Sean replied, openly daring her to call her father and report him. He knew perfectly well that Demigod Norley was preoccupied with developing better pleasure cards than my slime fairy cards and remained blissfully unaware that Jill had used his discarded pleasure card recipes to launch a new venture in the service industry.

Norley might forgive her for selling his substandard cards without permission. But if he ever found out she had partnered with the Brothwork family to fast-track the entire operation—after he'd repeatedly warned her not to get involved with the likes of the Brothworks or any of the other major families—she would never hear the end of it.

That wasn't it, what Sean was truly after was more nefarious.

"Do you think I don't dare?" Jill exploded, outraged that Sean had the nerve to challenge her. She didn't expect much from him, but he had never once dared to cross her—out of fear of her father. Yet by going behind her father's back and doing exactly what he had forbidden, she had unintentionally handed Sean the courage to push her now.

"Yes. I don't think you will," Sean replied smugly. He wanted Demigod Norley involved. Knowing how fiercely Norley adored Jill, Sean was certain he would clash with the Brothwork family to avenge even the slightest grievance against his daughter.

Jill knew that as well—that was the very reason she hesitated. She didn't want her father drawn into a conflict with the Brothworks. She didn't doubt his strength, but in the end, he was still just one card apprentice, while the Brothwork family was one of the oldest and most powerful households in all five regions.

"You—!" Jill glared daggers at Sean, wanting nothing more than to get rid of this snake once and for all, to end her father's greatest source of trouble. But she was trapped. If she didn't follow through on her threat, this infuriating uncle of hers would only grow bolder. If she did, she would be pushing her father straight into someone else's scheme.

Sean wasn't in any rush. He looked at Jill with a broad, satisfied grin. No matter what she chose, he would get the result he wanted. If she called her father, his task would be completed all the sooner. If she refused, then she'd have no choice but to attend Young Master Brothwork's dinner party—and knowing the man's habits and reputation, Jill would almost certainly end up calling her father anyway.

Caught in a tight corner, Jill summoned her grimoire in a bluff. But when Sean didn't so much as flinch, her heart sank. His total lack of reaction confirmed what she already suspected: there was a scheme in motion.

She was still scrambling for a way out when she felt a familiar hand curl softly around her neck and settle on her shoulder in a reassuring hold. She opened her mouth, ready to tell me not to involve myself, but I leaned in before she could speak. My lips hovered beside her ear as I murmured, "Jill, I'm feeling parched. Go fix me a drink."

My voice carried across the room as though I had whispered into each person's ear individually. Every pair of eyes snapped toward us, stunned that I would speak to Jill like that—order her, even. After all, in their minds she was the very picture of independence, a woman with both ambition and the backing to enforce it.

Yet to everyone's surprise, Jill simply nodded. She summoned a bottomless spirit-scotch glass and brought it to my lips, feeding me like a personal attendant. She was only buying time to think, so she didn't mind playing along for now. Under any other circumstance, she would never serve me so openly—especially not in front of her new friends.

"Kid, get your damn drink yourself," Sean snapped in rage. When I continued ignoring him, he added, "Kid, this is the Central Region. Here, frauds and tricksters are punished with the death penalty."

"Oh? Was that supposed to be an insult or maybe a threat?" I replied, bored. "Can't you come up with something better? At least give me a reason worth killing you over—something impressive enough for your family to carve on your tombstone, something your descendants can proudly pass down."

He wasn't wrong, though. I was far from the Southern Region now. In a foreign land, I no longer represented just myself but the entire South. I had to keep that in mind.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2569: Got You!

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Jillians' Pub

"Babe, since when did you have an asshole for an uncle?" I asked Jill, sipping the scotch she fed me with effortless grace. "His grin makes me want to punch him. No wonder you and your father never mention him."

I spoke loudly on purpose, fully intending to provoke Sean. It wasn't like he'd done anything that justified me killing him—not yet, anyway. He was a jerk, but still Jill's uncle, Demigod Norley's brother. What puzzled me was how someone barely a century old and carrying the Brothwork surname was related to Demigod at all.

"You son of a bitch!" Sean roared as he lunged at me with everything he had, hoping to reach me before I could deploy my Limitless barrier. Unfortunately for him, my thoughts moved far faster than he ever could. A massive wall-shaped Limitless barrier materialized instantly, cutting him off.

He slammed into it, unable to cross the endless stretch of space it contained. Realizing he would never reach the far side, he tried to pull back and switch tactics. But when he stopped, he didn't bounce off the barrier as his attacks had before. Instead, the limitless barrier folded around him, sealing him inside a sphere of limitless space. I called it Limitless Prison.

Inside the Limitless Prison, Sean thrashed with everything he had, unleashing every technique in his arsenal without restraint. Unfortunately for him, he clearly lacked any understanding of space rules. Without that foundation, he had no chance of unraveling the mechanics behind the Limitless barrier—much less escaping it. Every second he struggled only widened the gap between him and any hope of freedom.

When he finally realized his efforts were useless, he stopped and began screaming—though nothing he shouted crossed the infinite gulf isolating him from the outside world. Whether he was threatening me or begging for release, no one could tell. So, we simply ignored him.

"So, what's his story? And what exactly is going on? Who has the guts to forcefully invite the great Jill Norley to their dinner party?" I asked casually now that the nuisance was contained.

"Before that, tell me why you're here. What do you want?" Jill countered instead of answering. She assumed—as usual—that I only came to her when I needed something from her.

"It pains me that you think so little of me," I said with feigned disappointment, masking the fact that she was absolutely right. She knew it; I knew it. But she didn't need to call me out so directly.

"I asked you first. So you go first," I quipped, tilting my chin toward the scotch glass in her hand, signalling her to feed me.

My lips parted as she brought the bottomless scotch to them with deceptive gentleness—only for her to suddenly try and shove the glass into my mouth. Since it had no bottom, she was basically trying to drown me in booze.

Cough! Cough!

"Woman, have you lost your damn mind? How dare you attempt to murder your benefactor?" I sputtered, stumbling back and releasing her. I knew I should've stopped teasing while I was ahead, but her reaction was way over the top.

"Benefactor? Why don't you just call yourself a great and noble prince?" Jill shot back before ramming the glass against my mouth again—this time hitting my teeth and forcing the scotch into my nose, over my lips, and down my chin and neck. "Go find your damsel at the bottom of this glass!"

I caught her wrists and spun her around, pulling her flush against me. My arms wrapped around her as I settled my chin on the curve of her nape, cheek brushing against her ear. Inhaling her scent, I guided her hands down to her waist still captured in mine as I murmured, "I truly pity the unfortunate soul who ends up marrying you."

"Wow, I haven't seen anyone ignorant enough to pity themselves," Jill said, making it perfectly clear she meant I would be the one marrying her.

"And what makes you think I'd marry a wild girl like you?" I murmured, rubbing my nose against her cheek as she twisted in my hold, trying to free her arms.

"If you're not going to take responsibility, then behave yourself!" Jill shouted, mortified as she noticed her new group of friends openly watching—and recording—us. I ignored them and quietly instructed Hive AI to wipe their footage, hacking into their grimoires without a sound.

"Why should I buy the book," I teased, brushing my face through her hair before nestling into the curve of her neck, "when I've already read it cover to cover without missing a single detail? Not to mention I can reread it anytime I feel like it. Do you follow?"

"Let go of me, you vulgar bastard!" Jill snapped. She struggled harder, more frantic this time. She knew I was messing with her, but the words hit differently. It might have been a joke to me, but to her it sounded like I was casually stating something painfully obvious.

"Fuck!" I cursed—not because of anything Jill did, but because Hive AI informed me that some of Jill's friends weren't just recording us... they were live-streaming us.

I was screwed. They had broadcasted us across the five regions without our permission. Who even does that? Apparently, even card apprentices would sell their souls for views.

Hearing my outburst, Jill finally stopped struggling. "Well, now the whole world thinks I'm yours and you're mine," she said smugly. "Let's see how you dodge responsibility now, you bastard."

My eyes widened. I had no idea when she planned this—if she even had planned it. I didn't have time to figure it out before she revealed everything herself.

"I know you're here for the pleasure-card venture I started. I launched it despite knowing it was your next big project just to piss you off—"

Before she could deliver the punchline, I cut in, "So you did all this just to catch me off guard and legitimize our short but illicit relationship by exposing it to the world—"

"And for the money, of course," Jill added, snuggling into my embrace as if she hadn't been trying to drown me in scotch moments ago. "I told you I'd get you."

"Yes, you did," I said, shaking my head and releasing her.

Jill turned around, placed her hands on my chest, and leaned in. She brushed a quick kiss against my nose before smiling up at me.

"This should teach you to never underestimate me."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2570: I Just Know!

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Lil' Red Storm, Ceed World, Mystic Dimension

Inside the Mystic Dimension, a woman seated in a lotus pose abruptly opened her eyes. They were steady and determined, yet behind that resolve trembled a sharp, chilling sense of foreboding—an instinct that she was about to lose something precious. The fear only hardened her resolve.

Her figure flickered and vanished, reappearing before the massive seal that guarded the dimension's only exit. She stood silently before it, fixing her gaze on the immovable barrier. Then, gathering every ounce of strength into her fist, she struck.

A brittle, web-like crack spread across the seal from the point of impact, creeping outward until the entire structure collapsed—only to reveal another seal beneath it.

She didn't flinch. Though unsurprised, a flicker of frustration and urgency flashed through her eyes. She had to get out of her asap no matter the cost.

Drawing her power together once more, she drove her fist into the new seal. This time, it didn't budge—not even a tremor. Even so, she kept hammering at it, blow after blow, refusing to relent. Her knuckles split open, blood smearing across the cold surface, but she continued to strike with unyielding force.

"I thought you were giving up," a faint, almost withered voice echoed from afar—distant yet perfectly clear, carrying a note of curiosity at the woman's sudden burst of urgency.

"I thought you were going to keep pretending to be deaf and dumb," she shot back, irritation threading through her tone as she continued to strike the seal without pause. No matter how hard she struck, the seal didn't so much as tremble. She couldn't scratch it, couldn't even leave the faintest dent. Her breath grew ragged, but her bloody fist kept rising and falling, each blow more desperate than the last.

"Let me out!" she roared, finally abandoning the futile attempt to break the seal through sheer force. Her fists lowered, blood dripping between her fingers. Then she addressed the voice from earlier, trying to reason with it. "I think something's wrong... with him. You entered the Mystic Dimension for his sake, didn't you? He needs us now. Do you really no longer care for him?"

When no response came even after a long silence, the woman exhaled and shook her head in disappointment. Yet her resolve only hardened. She will get out of here and be there for her beloved or die trying. She lifted her bloodied fists again, ready to strike the seal once more. Just then, the voice from earlier finally replied, "And how do you know he's in trouble?"

"I just know," the woman answered without hesitation. She paused for a moment, then added, "I can't explain it, but you have to trust me."

"You just know? Since when did you become a diviner?" the voice mocked, its tone dripping with sarcasm.

"I'm not a diviner, but something is wrong! I feel like I'll lose him If I don't find him now!" she yelled, her voice breaking into a mix of panic and desperation. "Let me out of here, please."

When her plea was met with silence, her expression twisted, and she resorted to threats. "Let me out right now, or if something happens to him, I swear I'll kill you—even if it kills me."

"Hahaha... good luck with that," the voice sneered, utterly unconcerned. "But until then, if you want to leave the Mystic Dimension, you already know where the exit is."

Then it fell silent.

"You bitch! How can you be so heartless? After everything he's done for you?" the woman shouted into the vast emptiness of the Mystic Dimension, her rage echoing back at her. The voice's cold indifference only stoked her fury. "You're just as ungrateful and calculating as your mother. I guess the apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

"Shut up! I am nothing like her! And what did he ever do for me?" the voice shot back instantly, finally showing some emotion in it. The woman's words had struck a raw nerve.

"How dare you?" the woman snapped, disbelief twisting her features. "Did you forget he made a deal with a devil to save your ass when you got stomped by that semi-demigod? He was ready to sell his soul for you!"

Her voice shook with fury at the voice's ingratitude. If she had been capable of it, she would have taught that ungrateful brat a lesson herself.

"Yes, he did. And I am grateful to him. Not just me—the entire Southern Region is," the voice replied, its tone returning to a cool, controlled neutrality. "If he were truly in danger, there are plenty who would rush to his aid, even at the risk of their lives."

She paused, then continued with pointed suspicion. "And I would go myself... but how am I supposed to know you're not lying to skip training, just so you can run off to see him? If you want to be by his side so badly, you're free to leave. Nobody is stopping you."

"Why do you assume I'm lying?" the woman shot back, stung by the accusation. She couldn't understand what she had done to earn such distrust.

"Why? Do you really need to ask?" the voice replied, its tone cooling once more. "When it comes to him, I can never trust you."

There was no intention of explaining further—nor of continuing the argument. The voice had already decided there was nothing to gain from dragging this conversation on.

"If you know that," the woman said urgently, "then you should also understand how much he means to me. I would never make light of him being in danger. You have to trust me—just this once, please."

She poured every bit of her fear and sincerity into those words, hoping that the voice would understand: she couldn't lie when it came to him.

"..."

For a moment, the voice wavered. A part of her almost believed the woman's plea. But then she reminded herself that the entire Southern Region was out there, ready to protect him. With that thought, she hardened her resolve, pushed aside the flicker of doubt, and chose not to respond.

Ignoring the woman's pleas and threats alike, she refocused on her training.

Left with silence once more, the woman gritted her teeth and returned to pounding the seal, her bloodied fists rising and falling in relentless determination.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2571: Demigod Norley's Heir

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Jillians' Pub

"I know this doesn't change anything," Jill said, sensing the conflict in my emotions. "But I was hoping it would at least earn me a date with you. A proper date."

"A date? You created a whole scandal just to get one date with me?" I asked, brushing my fingers through her silky hair as she rested in my arms. My other hand was intertwined with hers. We were curled together on the couch in her office, finally hidden away from the public eye. "Aren't you afraid you'll never find a husband if I say no?"

As for Sean Brothwork, I had already compressed the limitless prison into the size of a marble and stored it inside the dimension card I'd borrowed from Lucine. He was the gift I intended to bring to the dinner party tonight—held at the Brothwork family's Morningstar Manor—where I would attend as Jill's plus one.

"If you say no," Jill whispered, clutching my hand even tighter, "I'm afraid I won't be able to live... let alone care about getting married."

"Wow, talk about no pressure," I joked, though the truth was I did want to go on that date with Jill—wanted to see where this could lead.

I knew I had feelings for Susan and Anna, but nothing had ever truly moved forward with either of them. Susan had asked for space, and Anna... well, once she came out of seclusion, she might simply treat me the same way she treated her mother. She might not really hate me, but that didn't mean nothing would change if she used her feelings for me to go further into the extreme path.

Was it wrong of me to pursue someone who was here, someone who was choosing me now, instead of waiting endlessly for people who weren't? Was it selfish to accept love that came without chaos, without pain, without uncertainty?

That was Jill. No drama. No mixed signals. Just straightforward ambition—and desire. She took what she wanted and was willing to pay the price for it. There was a strange comfort in that honesty and greed.

"You know what? Let's do it. Let's go on a date," I said as I lifted my head and pressed a kiss to the top of her head which laid against my chest.

"Really?" Jill blurted, rolling over and propping her chin on my chest so she could look directly into my eyes. Her disbelief was almost adorable.

"Yes," I said with a nod, unable to hide my own small smile. "And I already have the perfect place in mind. What are you doing tomorrow morning?"

A breakfast date sounded like the perfect start.

"Nothing. I'm always free for you," Jill replied with a burst of excitement as she climbed up to my face and kissed me with fierce urgency. Before we realized it, we were both naked and finally finished what we hadn't been able to back in that pregnant dungeon months ago—several times over. I had almost forgotten, but my Hive AI made sure I only fired blanks.

"It's a lot more fun than I remember," Jill murmured, resting her head on my arm as we lay buck naked on her office carpet. Finally tasting pure passion instead of the one induced by her carnivorous womb.

"I wish I could say the same," I muttered softly. Jill jabbed an elbow into my ribs, prompting me to add, "I'm kidding."

"You'd better be," she warned, pulling a comforter from her storage card and draping it over us before nestling comfortably in my embrace.

"So, what's the deal with your uncle?" I asked now that our mouths were finally free—and too tired for anything else.

"So, why did you really come to find me?" Jill countered, ignoring my question. At first, she assumed I had come to confront her for stealing my idea about starting a pleasure-card venture. But now that things had escalated into this, she was beginning to suspect there was more behind my visit.

"It's work stuff. We can talk about it after our date tomorrow," I replied, choosing not to argue with her.

"Sean Brothwork is a bastard born to someone important in the Brothwork family—descendants of one of the founders," Jill began getting a straight answer from me. "He's not actually my uncle. I only call him that to keep him from getting any ideas about me."

"Hold on. You're the daughter of one of the founders, yet you still have to be cautious of a bastard from an obscure branch of another founder's line? Doesn't that sound absurd?" I asked, startled to realize that Jill's childhood had been far more complicated than I assumed. I already knew her birth had been tragic, but as the only child of a founder, I expected she wouldn't need to worry about things like this.

"Well... Sean isn't just a bastard of the Brothwork family," Jill said after a brief pause. "He's also my father's designated heir." She exhaled softly before continuing, "When my father wanted to step down and live a normal life raising me, the transition wasn't simple. The other founders told him he could only retire if he chose a successor—essentially, his heir."

"Because my father was a loner and deeply repulsed by his own past, he didn't want any of it passed down to me. That left him with no one suitable to act as his heir. The other founders, of course, were more than willing to let him pick one of their descendants instead. Realizing exactly what they were plotting, my father chose Sean—a bastard—not as his disciple but as his brother and heir, purely to spite them."

"Sean was honest in the beginning, but as he grew stronger, inheriting most of my father's years of knowledge and hard work, faced with my father's indifference toward him and his hard work, he became corrupt. He started developing ambitions toward me and my father's fortune. But because he feared my father, he never dared to act openly on those intentions. At least, not until recently."

Jill's expression darkened.

"Lately, he's begun conspiring against my father... openly."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2572: Brolock BrothWork, Divine Heirs' Club

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Jillians' Pub

"Hold on—he only became that strong after inheriting your father's life's work? Then he's either useless, or I've been giving the founders too much credit," I laughed, realizing Sean was Demigod Norley's heir.

From everything I'd learned and seen in Clown Mask's future vision, the founders were frighteningly powerful—so powerful the Three Mischiefs had to scheme together and stab them in the back at their weakest. And yet this so-called heir of Demigod Norley didn't even require me to dope myself with SSS-rank curses. I took him down with nothing more than a simple trick from my space-rule rune.

"What makes you think my father would share his life's work with that joke?" Jill rolled her eyes as she pulled my free arm around her. I had no idea how much closer she expected to get to me. At this point, she was practically burying herself in me. "Dad only teaches him just enough to keep the other founders off his back. That's one of the reasons Sean hates him. It's not that my dad has anything against the guy—he just doesn't want to help the founders create another monster like he used to be before I was born. He's willing to teach Sean other

things that are just as good, but Sean isn't interested. So, over the years, things just turned into what they are now."

"So, he wouldn't mind if I killed Sean, right?" I asked, breathing in her intoxicating scent. I'd considered turning Sean into a calamity daughter gem, but the thought of him being around the founders too often gave me pause. Those people were far too sharp and perceptive—a calamity daughter core would never hold up under their scrutiny like a bloodkin would.

"He wouldn't, but the other founders would. After I was born, Sean basically became the only link left between my father and them," Jill said with a small smile, reacting to my slight movements and warm breath. Her physique had smothered her passion her entire life, but when it came to me, I was like its kryptonite. Even my slightest touch let her feel the heat, the desire—everything that made her feel like a woman. For the first time in her life, she felt whole—at peace, exactly where she belonged.

"So he's basically their snitch—the flimsy straw keeping them at bay," I said, realizing Sean was more than just Demigod Norley's designated heir. He was the only thing keeping them off her father's back.

"A snitch, that he is, but he's not what keeps them off my father," Jill corrected. "I am. They know my father would return to the past he abandoned for me... if it were for me."

"Then what's the deal with this young master Brothwork?" I asked, shifting the topic as Jill's mood dimmed every time we mentioned Sean or her father or the founders. Besides, Hive AI couldn't find anything on this so-called young master of the Brothwork family—or the family itself. I figured these people didn't like being in the spotlight, just like their ancestors who preferred pulling the central government's strings from the shadows.

"That's Brolock Brothwork. The Brothwork family is grooming him to be their next leader. He became a card demigod just a few weeks ago, yet he's already managed to kill a couple of elite demigods. You've heard of the Divine Heirs' Club, right? He's their current leader.

"Divine Heirs' Club, it's an old group started by the founders' descendants. The younger generation in those families kept it going for the generations to come—"

"Are you part of that club too?" I cut in.

"No!" Jill snapped, genuinely offended that I'd even consider it. "My dad never let me mingle with those families when I was young. And by the time I got older, I'd already developed my own interests and my own opinions—unlike those snobs who know nothing but bragging about their families. Besides, they didn't want anything to do with me either."

"Be that as it may, the reason I brought this up is because when I needed the funding and connections to launch the pleasure-card venture as fast as possible, I reached out to a few of those heirs. At first, plenty of them were interested. I had more investment and backing

than I needed, so I was planning to launch the pleasure cards across all five regions from the start. But then, out of nowhere, they all rejected it in an instant.

And right after that, Brolock contacted me. I knew exactly what was going on. Still, I went into business with him because the deal was fair—more than fair, really—so I'd have been an idiot to turn it down. But ever since then, he's been using it as an excuse to get close to me, almost making me regret the decision... until you showed up, just like I expected you would.

What took you so long? I thought you'd come running the moment I announced my venture. Since you didn't, I had no choice but to take his money and see it through. My dad is going to lose his mind when he finds out I used his subpar card recipe to sell cards to the public—"

Jill kept ranting, going on and on about how I hadn't taken her bait fast enough, forcing her to use Brolock's money just to make more money for both herself and him. I let her complain until I'd heard enough, then pulled her small head into my arms and kissed her so hard she nearly felt her scalp blow off.

Jill slapped my shoulder, telling me to stop and let her catch her breath. I only eased up when I was sure she couldn't hold on any longer. The moment I let her go, she gasped for air—and as soon as she caught her breath, she climbed on top of me, settling on my torso. Then she leaned forward, her hair spilling over my face as she bent down and sank her teeth into my neck. I couldn't tell whether she was trying to hurt me or turn me on, but I was already worked up enough to go a few more rounds.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2573: Crazy Love/ Lust?

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"We're late," Jill complained as we rode my gold nano-morpher hover bike to Brolock's dinner party—the one he was hosting to celebrate the success of the pleasure-card venture he'd invested in. For once, I was actually dressed for the occasion, wearing the fancy suit Jill had picked out to match her dress.

"I thought you didn't even want to go," I said, genuinely confused. After all, the only reason we were attending was so I planned to use the event as a stage to launch my fairy slime cards that were far superior and cheaper than their joke of pleasure cards.

I had Henricks make a run to Sky Blossom City to fetch enough Fairy Slime Cards for me to give away during the party. After all, the one thing I could always count on the rich second-generation kids for was being the most depraved people in the world.

"I didn't," Jill replied, "but since we are going, I want to do it properly. I hate doing anything half-assed."

In truth, she was still annoyed because I'd overindulged in her body earlier—I'd nearly dislocated her hip. Viltronians were an energetic species, with the power of the Celestial and the World Calamity Tree mixed in, I... may have gone overboard. There was no denying that. Thankfully, she loved me enough to handle that part of me even though her body could barely cash those checks.

"I'm sorry, I'll be gentle next time," I apologized, but Jill, whose head was resting on my back, simply replied, "Don't worry about it. It was rough, but I enjoyed it. Besides, once I forge the runes I have in mind, you will be the one begging me for mercy."

I fell silent. That was the moment I realized her dissatisfaction wasn't rooted in me almost wrecking her body, forgetting myself in the moment's pleasure, but in me enjoying her body more than she had enjoyed mine. I knew she was competitive, but this level was utterly insane. The thought alone got me aroused again. Was I going crazy too?

"Oh, gods, you're up already?" Jill exclaimed, her arms wrapped around my waist, registering the bulge in my pants. Before I could respond, she whispered something that was both utterly shocking and deeply arousing: "Do you want a quickie?"

Before I could even articulate a response, her hands were already unzipping my pants. We were only a few hundred yards from the Brothwork Manor's front gate. Guests were arriving one after the other; there were far too many eyes in the air. "What in the world are you doing? Have you gone completely insane?"

"Go higher and circle around. It won't take long," Jill ordered, not even pausing to seek my consent. I wondered if this was her way of getting back at me for ramming her until she could no longer hold on and had to beg for surrender. Just when I thought she couldn't get any crazier, she went and completely outdid herself.

"Yes, my lady," I conceded. I would gladly accept this kind of punishment any time of the day. Instead of descending the hover bike at the manor gate, I turned it around to circle back once we were done.

As we hovered around, with Jill enthusiastically attending to my needs, I instructed the Hive AI to utilize a space rule to isolate us from the outside world, specifically to prevent high-level Card Apprentices from peeping in.

Once I was satisfied, I intended to turn on the autopilot and give Jill the time of her life, but she rejected the idea. Then, I remembered: what we did earlier was meant to be punishment, allowing Jill to satisfy herself with the illusion that she had dominated me, not the other way around. I was confused; I didn't understand how this arrangement worked. Because, to my mind, I had won, regardless of who really won between us.

"Just drive," Jill ordered, using her Cleaning Cards to instantaneously restore us and our clothing. If we didn't have a party to attend, I honestly would have insisted on satisfying her despite her refusal, just to see what kind of punishment she would devise next.

Descending the hoverbike at the front gate of the Brothwork Manor, we dismounted, and I retrieved the vehicle into my Grimoire. We then followed a beautiful maid who led us into the manor's left wing, where the party was being held.

As soon as I set foot inside the left wing of the manor, the entire theme changed abruptly—from its stately Victorian style to what resembled a depraved sex dungeon. I couldn't help but ask, "Jill, are you sure this is a dinner party and not some sort of orgy party?"

"I don't know. I can never tell with these people. If it is, feel free to join in—" Before Jill could finish, I cut in, asking, "You are kidding, right?"

I knew instantly that this was a test.

"Nope, I'm serious. We just started dating; how can I know your preferences? If you like orgies, I won't stop you. I also need to find out how I feel about you taking part in one while you're with me," Jill replied honestly. After all, this was her first relationship; she didn't truly know what she was doing, even though she had read extensively on what she was supposedly expected to do.

Yes, it was a test. But it wasn't one of the stupid scenarios shown in braindead rom-coms. She genuinely wanted to gauge her own feelings about me being with other women while we were together, because deep down, no matter how much she tried to ignore it, she knew I had feelings for others—specifically Anna and Susan. She was still trying to figure out how to feel about that. Furthermore, she herself was still unsure if I harbored similar feelings for her, believing she had strong-armed me into accepting the date.

"You know I wouldn't have asked you out if I didn't genuinely want to date you? Stop overthinking things," I assured Jill, pulling her closer and pressing a kiss to her forehead.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2574: Drew Rockin

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"Well, well... look who finally arrived—the scandalous couple of the year!"

A cutting voice sliced through our moment. Jill and I turned to see a blond man standing behind us, dressed in a white tux with a pink shirt and a red bow tie, a cocktail balanced casually in his hand.

"Drew, get lost," Jill snapped. The smile on his face faltered for a heartbeat before returning as he said, still grinning, "Aren't you going to introduce your one and only friend to your brother-in-law?"

Jill, who had been a moment away from driving Drew off, froze the instant she heard him call me brother-in-law. With a reluctant smile, she finally introduced us, "Wyatt, this is Drew Rockin—my ex-business partner."

"Ex-business partner?" Drew echoed in theatrical shock. "Wow, Jill. Didn't think you'd turn into one of those people who forget their roots the moment they make it big." He clutched his chest dramatically, playing the victim.

"You know exactly what you did," Jill shot back, giving him no room to save face. Drew let out a long, weary sigh, defending, "Come on, Jill. You know I didn't have a choice. Unlike you, I'm stuck in this crappy club. And you loved it when I used its connections to help you. You even called me the best partner you ever had."

His entire life was dictated by his family, and the one thing he felt he had any real control over was his friendship with Jill. Seeing her still furious with him—despite knowing why he made his choices—left him visibly disappointed. He threw his hands up in frustration, accusing, "But now that I can't use this identity to benefit you, suddenly I'm an ex-partner? That's cold. I never thought you could be so ungrateful."

"How dare you call me ungrateful? After everything I did for you? And you still chose your little club over me," Jill fired back.

Her anger only made it clearer that she genuinely valued Drew's friendship—she wouldn't waste a second arguing with him otherwise, not with me standing beside her.

"You did a lot for me, sure," Drew said, "but you also charged a premium for every favor—"

He didn't get far.

"That's because if I didn't, you'd never appreciate my help. You take anything free for granted," Jill snapped, cutting him off.

She really was more like me than she realized—she wouldn't lift a finger without charging something for it and was incredibly petty. But charging a premium even to a friend? Even I wouldn't take it that far.

"No, it's because you're a money grubber. A total cheapskate," Drew shot back, clearly unmoved by her reasoning.

Both of them looked seconds away from saying something they'd regret, so I stepped in.

"Go greet the host first," I said, slipping between them.

I wasn't here to watch Jill argue with her friend—I was here to launch Fine Gold's Fairy Slime Cards.

"Wyatt, stay out of this. I need to teach this ungrateful brat a lesson," Jill said, trying to push me aside. When she couldn't budge me, she simply climbed over me instead, planting herself between us as she glared daggers at Drew.

"Consider this my last lesson to you. This one's free," she warned, her voice low and fierce, ready to give him a thrashing. They were both Card Emperors, but Jill was already on the verge of forming her divinity, while Drew was still miles from that point. So yes—if I hadn't stepped in, she absolutely would have taught him a lesson.

I wrapped my left arm firmly around Jill to hold her back, then used my right hand to give Drew a light pat on the back, saying, "You two can sort this out later. For now, take me to the host."

Drew took a moment to steady himself and nodded, adding, "Brother-in-law, Brolock isn't here yet. He'll only show up about forty-five minutes after everyone else arrives. And considering you whisked away the woman he was after... well, he might make us wait an hour or two."

"But we're free to help ourselves to the Dream Nymph card samples until he arrives," Drew added. The moment he said it, he felt Jill's stare burn into the side of his head. He pretended not to notice, acting perfectly innocent.

"Even better," I blurted, glancing around the hall at the guests openly—and shamelessly—indulging in Jill's Dream Nymph cards. These were the richest—and most depraved—people in all five regions. In other words, the perfect target audience for my Slime Fairy cards.

Then I pulled out a stack of starter Slime Fairy cards and turned to Drew, asking, "Can you do me a small favor?"

"Name it," he replied instantly—much too eager to impress his new brother-in-law. Honestly, good thing I held back from slapping him earlier for addressing me as his brother-in-law on Jill's account.

"Keep a few for yourself and hand the rest to the high-value guests. Tell them they're a gift from Jill," I instructed Drew, passing him the stack of slime fairy cards. Drew skimmed one of the cards, brows shooting up in interest, he couldn't help but ask Jill, "Slime Fairy? I thought the upgraded version was going to be called Dream Nymph 2.0."

Jill, who had no idea what I was planning, was momentarily caught off guard. Even so, she played along smoothly. She caught a glimpse of the card info from the corner of her eye and said coolly, "Those pleasure cards were created by Wyatt. They're the whole reason I've been rushing to unload as many Dream Nymph cards as possible. Once his cards hit the market, no one will bother buying mine."

"Give me a minute—I'll unload these and be right back," Drew said, hurrying off into the hall, which honestly looked like one massive, extravagant sex dungeon.

If not for the purifying array continuously cleaning the air and sanitizing everything, I wouldn't have stepped foot in that place at all.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2575: Already?

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"So, is this the business you wanted to discuss with me after our breakfast date tomorrow?" Jill asked once Drew left, clearly wondering whether I planned to use her Dream Nymph card distribution channels to sell my Slime Fairy cards in the Central Region.

"Well, it's part of it," I replied, choosing not to elaborate.

I wouldn't have dared to promote my pleasure cards under Jill's name if I hadn't already known how she would answer after tomorrow's talk.

At first, I thought Jill had started the pleasure card venture just to make quick money. But now that I knew she'd done it to trap me, I understood that she wouldn't refuse anything I asked of her.

After all, she was willing to tarnish her father's long-standing reputation just to secure a single date with me. Women this obsessed with you were rare. Most people would keep their distance from someone like her... but I preferred keeping her close.

I barely had time to love or care for myself, but she loved and cared for me enough for both of us. With her at my side, I knew not a single day of mine would ever be dull.

"How about we have that talk now?" Jill asked. Neither of us had any interest in whatever this party was supposed to be—group sex, group masturbation... who even decided the distinction?

"Nah. I want at least one proper date with you before I go and ruin it," I declined. I was confident Jill would agree to work with me, but only the ignorant find comfort in certainty; I knew better than to assume.

Listening to my words, Jill blinked in surprise, then her face lit up. She took my hand and led me toward one of the empty gardens in the mansion's left wing, not bothering to wait for Drew. "Don't worry about him," she said reassuringly. "He has a good nose. He'll find us."

"He seems to genuinely care about you," I said, still surprised she had someone she could actually call a best friend—especially one from the opposite sex. With Jill's physique, most men couldn't help but have profane thoughts about her; resisting them was nearly impossible.

"Why? Are you jealous?" Jill teased, a wide grin spreading across her face. She clearly enjoyed the idea that I disliked her having a male best friend.

If that were truly the case, I wouldn't have asked him to help distribute the Slime Fairy cards at the party. But I didn't deny it. Better to let her have her fun. "Yes," I said. "He's a good-looking fellow. Don't tell me you're keeping a boy-toy on the side."

"Yes, I am. What are you going to do about it?" Jill shot back, letting go of my hand as she rushed ahead, spinning around to face me while acting cute and ridiculous at the same time.

"Woman, did you already forget what I can do?" I asked, raising a brow. "It hasn't even been that long," I added, alluding to our intimate combat session that had lasted the entire day.

The moment I brought that up, the playful smile on Jill's face faded. "Just you wait," she declared. "Let's see if you can still say that once I finish creating those runes."

I sighed, realizing exactly where I had gone wrong. "Do you have to be that competitive? Most women would be thrilled to have a partner who can help them reach orgasm—and here I am giving you multiple, each lasting for hours."

"Well, I'm not like most women, am I?" Jill shot back, clearly offended by the comparison. "Just enjoy yourself for now. We'll see who gets the last laugh."

I'd made that mistake before—with the other two as well. I supposed I was just like most men in that regard: incapable of learning from my own missteps.

Still, there was one upside to all this. Jill wasn't planning to abstain from sex while forging those runes she believed would make her the best in bed across the entire Myriad Realms,

not just the Card World. Well, how could she abstain? She clearly enjoyed the deed—maybe not as much as I did, but she certainly enjoyed it.

"I leave you alone for one moment and you're already fighting with my brother-in-law? At some point, you should consider the possibility that you are the problem," Drew's voice came from behind us, mocking Jill's competitive, petty streak.

"Already?" I asked, surprised he'd returned so quickly.

"Yep. They were instantly mesmerized by the beauty and sound of the Slime Fairy card," Drew said, stepping closer. "You were right—it's leagues above the Dream Nymph card. Even if you priced it at ten times the Dream Nymph's cost, they'd still clear out every store. Once I ran out of cards to hand out, I honestly thought they might tear me apart from disappointment. I barely escaped with my life. Brother-in-law, you've created another game-changing card, congrats."

Drew didn't hold back on the praise. He did me a favor without even exerting any effort.

I took out a small stack of premium Slime Fairy cards—ones I'd set aside for VIPs—and handed them to him. "Thank you," I said. "Keep these. Use them however you see fit."

One premium Slime Fairy card was more than enough to satisfy a Card Apprentice, yet I gave Drew an entire stack. They were meant to be gifts for his friends and elders to his relationships and connections. Even though the card hadn't officially entered the market, its value was already undeniable. He could auction the whole stack and make a fortune if he wanted—I wouldn't mind in the slightest.

All I cared about was ensuring the depraved elite of the Five Regions learned that the Southern Region now had a pleasure card far superior to the Dream Nymph card. It was only a matter of time before they came knocking on my door.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2576: Brolock's Shock

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"My work is done. Since the host is too arrogant to show himself, shall we take our leave?" I asked Jill and Drew, seeing no reason to keep lingering at this profane excuse of a party. The

host was clearly on a power trip, making his guests wait like obedient pets. Sure, he allowed everyone to sample the pleasure cards, but the bar and buffet were off-limits. To think I had even prepared a gift for him—what a waste of my consideration.

"Sure," Jill agreed instantly. Drew, however, gave a nervous chuckle and said, "You guys go ahead. I have to stay."

"No, you don't," Jill shot back without hesitation. "You're coming with us."

"Don't start that again," Drew sighed, shaking his head. She did this every single time despite knowing exactly how things were for him. He was a nobody in the Rockin family. Aside from his parents and siblings, no one even knew he existed until he managed to get into the Divine Heirs Club. Back when no one noticed him, he'd wanted to prove himself. But now that his family finally acknowledged him, he wished more than anything that things had stayed the way they were. Sometimes he even regretted ever joining the Divine Heirs Club in the first place.

His parents and siblings were proud of him, but they didn't know the truth—not even half of it. To the Rockin family, he was nothing more than a well-packaged pawn carrying out their orders. The moment he stepped even slightly out of line, they threatened his family's safety. His parents still believed they had lost their youngest child to a miscarriage, but in reality, that "miscarriage" had been the family's retaliation against him for refusing to betray Jill when he'd been given the chance. He could never bring himself to tell his parents or Jill—his closest friend—because he feared what the family might do to them if he did.

He dreaded the day they would demand he betray Jill again.

And now, with the entire world knowing Jill was dating Southern Hope, his family saw an opportunity. They wanted him close to Southern Hope, and the easiest way was through Jill. That was exactly what he was doing here tonight. In truth, he should have left the party with them to strengthen that connection, but he stayed behind because the pleasure cards he had received from Southern Hope were enough to keep his family satisfied for the moment. He didn't want this relationship to progress any further because he knew too well what awaited him if it did.

Jill shot Drew a sharp glare, ready to snap at him again, but she held herself back and simply muttered, "Know your limits, dumbass. Call me if you need help."

"I know, girl," Drew said with a gentle nod. "And you stop being so competitive. You're not alone anymore—you're part of a team now. Am I right, brother-in-law?"

I had no idea if they were even talking about the same thing at this point. I just kept a polite smile on my face and nodded at Drew, ready to say goodbye. But before I could, a sudden commotion erupted in the main hall where the party was being held. The noise quickly moved toward us.

Moments later, a man in extravagant attire rushed into the garden, trailed by a swarm of attendants and aides. Even without an introduction from Jill or Drew, I could guess who he

was: Brolock Brothwork, our arrogant and shameless host. My assumption was confirmed the moment I heard his entourage address him as Young Master Brolock.

I wondered what had rattled him so badly that he not only disrupted his own party but also abandoned his tradition of making guests wait for his grand entrance—just to come looking for us.

"Jill, is this the Dream Nymph 2.0 card you were bragging about? These are incredible—too good, honestly. They deserve a name of their own. Are you really sticking with Slime Fairy? Don't get me wrong, it fits their nature, but I'm sure we can come up with something better," Brolock gushed the moment Jill entered his line of sight, completely ignoring Drew and me as if we weren't even there.

"You've got it wrong," Jill said, her expression turning cool. "It's not the Dream Nymph 2.0 card, and I didn't create it. It belongs to Wyatt. Your party was so bland he decided to liven things up by sharing one of his new creations. Fun, right? They instantly made the party several times more exciting. You must've seen it on your way over."

She didn't sugarcoat a thing—she flat-out called his party bland.

The Brothwork family claimed they had little real interest in Jill's venture, and that Brolock was only investing to show respect to Demigod Norley. But from the way he reacted, it was clear he cared a lot more than he let on. The pleasure-card market was simply too massive for even his family to ignore. Judging by his behavior, the only reason he hadn't already tried to seize control of Jill's venture was because she kept insisting that the better pleasure cards were still in development.

Now that he had seen my Slime Fairy card, he finally understood she hadn't been bluffing. And that realization was a double-edged blade for him—he was both tempted by it and frustrated that it wasn't his. That was why he broke his own tradition and rushed out to meet her the moment he learned about these new cards.

But the instant Jill told him the Slime Fairy card wasn't hers but mine, Brolock's expression froze and hardened. When his gaze shifted to me, I suddenly wasn't invisible anymore. Even so, the stiffness in his face didn't fade. He understood perfectly well that unlike Jill, I wasn't short on investors. All I had to do was utter a single word and world leaders would line up—whether they believed in the venture or not. For the chance to earn my goodwill, they would gladly pay fortunes. Not that I needed it.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2577: Ignorant Figurehead

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"Tell me that the Dream Nymph 2.0 cards that you're developing are better than these Slime Fairy cards," Brolock demanded of Jill, his voice leaving no room for anything but the answer he wanted.

"Nope. Not even close," Jill replied without hesitation. "I knew he was developing this card, remember? That's why I told you we should offload as many Dream Nymph cards as possible before their value tanked. Now that he has announced his pleasure cards, no one's going to buy ours." She shrugged, mocking herself. "So? Planning to buy shares in the company? I'll sell you my stake for pennies on the dollar. What do you think? Deal?"

Her tone was half-joking, half-resigned, openly offering to hand over her share of the pleasure-card venture for practically nothing—all to drive home just how thoroughly the Slime Fairy card eclipsed everything they had built so far.

"You're kidding me, right? I haven't even recovered what my family invested in your venture, and now you're calling it quits? Do you think this is a joke?" Brolock exploded, his voice shaking with fury.

It wasn't the money that enraged him—it was the stain of failure. He prided himself on an unbroken streak of profitable investments, a record so spotless his family had dubbed him the Midas Touch of the Brothwork clan. If Jill's venture collapsed, he wouldn't just lose funds—he would lose his title, his pride, and the prestige he wrapped himself in. His ego couldn't bear the thought.

"Joke? No, I'm not joking," Jill replied, her tone turning icy. "Every investment carries its own risks. You knew that perfectly well when you backed my venture. And now you've seen my competition you should know this is the end. My Dream Nymph 2.0 Card still in development doesn't even qualify as competition anymore. Facing reality now is better than dragging out a slow death, don't you think?"

Her cold expression made it clear she wasn't going to let him order her around. They were partners—not master and servant.

"No—how can you just give up without trying?" Brolock snapped, spiraling at the mere thought of failure. "There has to be something you can do. You can't abandon everything we built. This isn't just about you—it's about me. I cannot fail. You have to find a solution. The pleasure-card venture cannot collapse. At the very least, we need to build it up enough to sell for a profit."

For all his celebrated success, Brolock was nothing more than a pampered child riding the momentum of his family's power. His so-called record came from investing in ventures that were already guaranteed to succeed. Companies didn't take his money because they needed it—they accepted it to avoid retaliation. Taking his investment was effectively pledging

allegiance to the Brothwork family. And they weren't the only ones who operated that way; several powerful families did the same.

If not for the protection of the Southern Royal Family, I would've been targeted too—forced to accept their "investments," only to have them leech off my work for the rest of my life. These families weren't investors; they were parasites. Their contributions were nothing more than an advance payment on the profit they intended to siphon indefinitely.

Not that the Southern Royal Family was any better than the others—they weren't. The only reason they weren't able to extort me was because Anna had signed a contract with me under the witness of the world's will. That single moment robbed them of the chance to exploit me and instead forced them into the role of my protectors. I was lucky. Without that twist of fate, I might have spent this life on the run too.

"What are you trying to say? I don't get it," Jill said, feigning confusion as if she did understand true reason for Brolock's frantic reaction.

When actually she was certain it wasn't about the money, she understood the real issue: he simply couldn't accept failure. It was common knowledge that the Brothwork family's golden boy had never tasted defeat. Thanks to his family's influence and power, all he had ever known was success.

"Is this about money?" Jill asked, tilting her head as if genuinely trying to help. "I can look for a buyer, but selling it at a profit might be pushing it. Unless you want to sell it right now—before the Slime Fairy cards are officially announced and hit the market." She offered the suggestion as though she were doing him a great favor.

Watching Jill work, I immediately understood what she was aiming for—full control of her venture. That was why she was being so bluntly honest with her investor. And it made perfect sense. The company owned the data and service rights of most professional sex workers across the central region. Even if my Slime Fairy cards completely eclipsed her Dream Nymph cards in the market, she could still earn back a hundredfold by selling that data alone.

The fact that Brolock couldn't see this only proved he was nothing more than an ignorant figurehead—the Brothwork family's poster boy—while the real brains of the family were entirely different people. Realizing this, I felt relieved that I hadn't killed or released Sean Brothwork.

Listening to Sean speak about Brolock—and finding nothing noteworthy about him in the Grimoire Network—I realized I had overestimated the man. This fool, obsessed with maintaining a title yet blind to what Jill was truly after, clearly lacked both the intelligence and the courage to orchestrate a conspiracy against Demigod Norley using Sean as a pawn. The mastermind had to be someone else.

It seemed I needed to have a conversation with this so-called heir of Demigod Norley to uncover who was actually pulling the strings from the shadows.

Given the founders' long-standing relationship, it wasn't impossible for grudges to exist, but their interests were too deeply intertwined for them to act recklessly—unless someone crossed a line they couldn't tolerate. So it definitely wasn't the founders. More likely, it was a bold descendant attempting to leap the dragon gate by using Demigod Norley as a stepping stone.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2578: Foreboding

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"Really? You would do that for me?" Brolock asked Jill with reverence, clinging to her words like a drowning man grasping a floating log.

"Don't mention it. One company has been approaching me for a while, trying to buy my venture. Their offers were never high enough, so I kept them at arm's length. But now..." Jill paused, as if the idea had only just occurred to her. "Now I might as well accept before they hear about the Southern Region's Slime Fairy cards."

Seeing Brolock nod, she summoned her grimoire and immediately got to work. "Give me a moment. I'll contact them right away and finalize the deal."

Then, Brolock's attention shifted to me. With a detached tone, he asked, "Do you want to buy her venture? It would make expanding into the Central Region easier."

I hadn't expected him to speak to me so directly after treating me like air and not to mention, after learning I am the reason he was failing. For a moment, I wondered if I had misjudged him—apparently, after repeating the same task for decades, even a pig could learn a trick or two. Still, I had no interest. I offered a polite smile and shook my head, choosing not to interfere in Jill's plans.

Though Brolock knew nothing about the inner workings of Jill's venture, he did understand one thing clearly: the Central Region was his home turf. Without support from his family—or from any of the other major families—I wouldn't be able to expand here even if I bought Jill's venture. They would make sure of that, at least until I handed over a sizable portion of the pie. He understood this well enough to approach me with the offer... or perhaps it was his aides who urged him to do so.

I ignored him and instead studied the members of his entourage. Brolock himself wasn't the real obstacle; they were. If Jill intended to pull this off, these people were the ones we had to worry about.

I had no doubt they were more than mere attendants. They were his advisers—the council he leaned on when making major decisions. They were the ones who kept him from blundering into bad investments, the ones who convinced him to hold steady rather than panic-sell... much like he was about to do now.

What puzzled me was their silence. What were they waiting for? They should have already noticed that Jill was up to something, shouldn't they? Were they trying to decipher her endgame? And if so... shouldn't they have figured it out by now?

What made her venture valuable? The Dream Nymph card recipe, of course, and the extensive data on prostitutes across the Central Region—along with the rights tied to them. Even if the Dream Nymph recipe had lost its worth with the introduction of the Slime Fairy card, the data and the rights remained priceless. They should know that... shouldn't they?

No. They might have been sharks in the investment world, but they understood nothing about the pleasure card market. That domain was still new—one that only Jill and I were truly exploring. It was impressive enough that they had managed to foresee its potential and invest early, blocking the other families from throwing their money into Jill's venture.

But they operated under a flawed assumption: that no one would dare cheat the Brothwork family. In their world, such a thing was unthinkable. What they failed to grasp was that the rule didn't apply to Jill or me. Not only did we dare to cheat the Brothwork family, but we would carve out a massive share of the profits for ourselves.

They thrived only in waters they understood and dominated. The moment they drifted into unfamiliar territory, they were as blind and powerless as anyone else.

Still, they at least had the sense to wait and observe Jill's intentions instead of leaping at her offer the way their foolish master had. I remained patient as well, watching to see whether anything unexpected might occur.

Nothing did. Jill contacted the so-called organization interested in buying her venture, had them draft the agreement, and sent a copy directly to Brolock. Only then did her eyes reveal a hint of concern. As expected, Brolock immediately investigated the organization and uncovered everything there was to know about them.

He wasn't pleased to discover that their offer was low because Jill refused to sell the rights to the Dream Nymph card, insisting on renting it instead. But after his "careful" and "insightful" persuasion, Jill reluctantly agreed to sell the rights—at a premium. The overall valuation of her venture rose accordingly, securing a tidy profit on paper that conveniently kept Brolock's investment record spotless.

I knew it. These people truly had no grasp of the pleasure card market. They fixated entirely on the Dream Nymph card rights, exactly as Jill intended, completely overlooking the far more valuable asset: the data and rights connected to the prostitutes across the Central Region.

In the end, Brolock—utterly convinced he had weathered a crisis through sheer brilliance—invited us to stay for dinner with his other guests. Jill rejected him outright, claiming she had lost too much money to have an appetite. Even so, he continued pressuring her to remain... until, quite suddenly, he stopped caring whether we stayed at all.

His abrupt shift in enthusiasm was troubling. Drew noticed it too. He finally stepped in, urging Jill to stay for dinner while subtly rubbing at the corners of his eyes, trying to signal her. But Jill, having just secured a massive profit, was far too excited. She could barely wait to get back and celebrate with me by making the bed creak.

Just as Drew was becoming painfully obvious, Brolock shot him a sharp look, silencing him instantly. That was when Drew and I both confirmed our suspicions.

Meanwhile, Jill remained blissfully unaware. Lost in her own little world, she kept tallying her gains, not even sparing a thought for Brolock's or Drew's strange behavior. It was as if she had no sense of danger whatsoever. Then again, thinking back on it, unlike other heirs I had encountered, she didn't have bodyguards lurking in the shadows wherever she went in the five regions.

And why would she? She was the one and only daughter of a Founder.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2579: Temporal Separation Array Formation

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

As a maid escorted us toward the manor's main gate, I glanced at Jill—clinging to my arm, completely absorbed in her own jubilant little world—and let out a long sigh. She was unlikely to be the one in danger. Their target was almost certainly me.

I had been in the Central Region long enough to expect something like this. Ever since I left Morningstar University and arrived at Jill's pub, I had wondered when they would finally make their move. Yes, I had defeated card demigod Sean with ease, but that alone wasn't enough to intimidate the people plotting against me.

Now, at last, they had chosen to act. They took their time—clearly wanting to be thorough, not to spook their prey into retreat.

But I wasn't concerned. I had come fully prepared for this outcome. In fact, I was looking forward to the loot. Many among the Freedom Fighters needed Diamond-grade grimoires to break into the Card Emperor realm and rise further. And now, I had the perfect opportunity to stock up.

What concerned me was Jill's complete lack of caution. She behaved as if the entire Central Region were her personal backyard. Part of me wanted to believe Demigod Norley had given her some powerful safeguard—a card she could rely on in times of danger. After all, she had once handed me Demon Merchant Ezra's card, which later revealed itself to be Devil Merchant Belphegor's card in disguise. That single act led me to uncover the Devil Merchant Code and eventually become a demon merchant myself.

Again and again, I had seen signs indicating that Demigod Norley possessed far deeper ties to the Dark Races than any of the other Founders. Whatever those connections entailed, I could only hope Jill wasn't carrying another concealed monstrosity like that demonic card... or be forced into a situation where she would need to use it. Though I had come prepared, so had they. Because of that, I couldn't be certain how the situation would unfold.

I was confident the enemies waiting outside wouldn't harm Jill, but Jill wouldn't simply stand by and watch me get ambushed. If she interfered, she might force their hand, pushing them into harsher measures. Hopefully, my preparations were enough to prevent things from escalating that far.

Yes, I could have called Hendricks and avoided the ambush entirely. But that wasn't why I was here. I hadn't come to run or hide—I came to make a statement. To show the world that anyone who thought they could take what belonged to me was gravely mistaken. This would give those eyeing a share of my pie something to reconsider.

As we reached the manor's front gate, my Primordial Soul Pupils immediately detected the ambush lying in wait just beyond the property. They didn't want to take any chances. They could have attacked me inside the Brothwork family's Morningstar Manor, yet they refrained.

I suppose even they still had a bottom line they weren't willing to cross.

"Wyatt, stop. There's an ambush ahead." Jill snapped out of her blissful haze the moment I summoned my nanomorpher hover-bike, she rang with sharp warning.

"I know," I answered with a nod.

Originally, I planned to leave Jill at the manor gate and face the ambush alone—show them I'd seen through their setup and still chose to walk straight into it. But knowing her, she would never allow that. So, I had no choice but to bring her along. Even so, I hadn't expected her to notice the danger at the last second. She must have some higher-grade danger-sense card or rune, something subtle but potent enough to warn her of an ambush of this magnitude.

"You know and you're still walking into it?" she snapped. "Have you gotten cocky just because you defeated one demigod? An ambush is nothing like facing a half-wit demigod. There are at least a dozen Card Demigods out there, each one an elite with centuries of experience. Stop being reckless and call Hendricks before they realize we've spotted their ambush and attack blindly!"

She was full-on nagging now, her irritation barely restrained. If we hadn't just started dating—and if she wasn't trying to spare my feelings—she would've outright called me stupid, maybe even a moron, for daring to walk knowingly into a trap like this.

"Listen to me—I've got this. Why else do you think I dared to leave the safety of the Southern Region and come to the Central Region of all places? Just sit back and enjoy the show," I told her, certain of my preparations. But Jill didn't buy it. She insisted, "I'm coming with you."

"I never said you couldn't." I swung onto the hoverbike and offered her my hand. She could have boarded on her own—she was a Card Emperor, after all—but we both knew these small gestures were part of why we hadn't simply flown here. Flying would've been faster, far more efficient. But riding together gave us something we rarely had: quiet moments of shared closeness, allowing us to get to know each other better.

"They're using a Temporal Separation Array," Jill warned as she settled behind me. "The moment we step outside the gate, we'll be pulled into a time-space separate from our reality. Entering is easy, but escaping without locating the core is incredibly difficult because of the time displacement. Even with the core, we'd need perfect timing to return to the correct moment. I studied this formation in depth back at university—it has almost no exploitable flaws. Are you sure you still want to do this?"

Jill warned me with genuine concern just moments before I lifted the hover-bike's accelerator.

"That's perfect," I exclaimed, revving the accelerator. "Of everything they could've used, time is the one thing I'm least worried about. Trust me on this one."

With that, we shot forward—straight into the ambush—riding my golden nanomorpher hoverbike.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2580: Time Ambush

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor, Temporal Separation Array

"They've spotted us," the demigod with the long, pointed beard reported from within the temporal-separation array the moment Jill sensed the danger ahead. "I told you—placing an array right at the gate was too obvious. We need to act now, before he calls Henricks."

"No need," replied another demigod concealed within the bearded one's shadow, cautioning him against sounding the alarm prematurely. "Even Henricks can't step into the space inside Brothwork Manor. The isolation arrays layered over the estate were designed by the founders themselves, tailored to the manor's geography. There's only one exit, and it leads directly to us. Unless he plans to live as the Brothwork family's guest indefinitely, he'll have to come out."

"What if he contacts the Southern Royal Family for help? Any one of those unparalleled monsters could get him out safely. Or what if she calls her father? Then everything we've done will amount to nothing."

The bearded demigod's mind spiraled through every possible way their operation could collapse, but the demigod in his shadow answered with steady patience, "The higher-ups have already arranged interference should that happen. Still... let's hope it doesn't come to that."

"Let's hope it doesn't come to that? What the hell is that even supposed to mean? Who in their right mind wouldn't call for help after realizing there's an ambush ahead—"

The bearded demigod abruptly stopped speaking as he watched the youth—renowned as one of the brightest minds of his generation—walk straight into their ambush with his lover at his side. "Did they not notice us? I watched her—they definitely did. Then what are they thinking?"

"They did say that boy is extremely arrogant. Maybe today is the day his arrogance finally catches up to him through us," the demigod lurking in his colleague's shadow offered, drawing from the briefing he'd received on their target.

"Let's hope it's just that," the bearded demigod murmured, silently praying this wasn't one of those moments where the hunters found themselves becoming the hunted.

...

"Wow, that felt exactly like entering a dungeon gate," I remarked as our hover bike slipped into the temporal-separation array. It was as if we had crossed into an entirely different world with its own time flow. Usually, the moment one were to pass through one time flow to another, they would be hit with a heavy wave of temporal dissonance—an abrupt, disorienting jet lag that they couldn't ignore.

For an average card demigod, it would take minutes for their body and divinity to acclimate to the local time. As for a card master or a card emperor, they wouldn't even get that chance. Caught in an ambush here, their strength would be crippled, their bodies reduced to dust long before they could adapt. And that was only one of the array's many passive effects. Everything about this formation was engineered for assassination.

But Jill and I were different.

I had my innate resistance to time rules, and Jill—daughter of Demigod Norley and a researcher at Morningstar University—carried an entire arsenal of time-rule cards.

The time within a temporal-separation array doesn't speed up or slow down the flow of reality—it creates an entirely separate time zone that exists parallel to ours. Anyone authorized by the array can wield time-rule abilities or time-related cards at half their usual effort and cost, granting them far greater efficiency than their targets.

In other words, entering the array doesn't require time-rule comprehension to survive its shift; anyone who steps in is forcibly integrated into its temporal field. Their body and divinity simply need time to adjust to the change—much like stepping into cold water. It bites at first, but once your senses recalibrate, the chill fades into familiarity.

For Jill and me, my time-rule resistance and her arsenal of time-rule cards allowed our bodies and ego gems to adapt instantly, without either of us even noticing the transition.

Also, the new time zone within the array actively suppresses anyone it traps, doubling the effort and cost needed to invoke time-rule powers and cards or any abilities tied to them. That obstacle didn't affect me—and Jill had more than enough time-rule energy and cards to ignore it entirely.

"What now—are we just going to sit here and wait for them to attack us? Is that really your plan?" Jill demanded as I eased the hover bike to a halt, letting it drift silently in midair. "Tell me you have something better. Because if you don't, I swear I'll beat you to a pulp before they get the chance."

"There are forty-five demigods hidden within the array's time flow," I reported, studying the seemingly empty expanse around us. "At least a dozen have comprehended the time rule, and the rest are armed with high-level time-related cards."

To the naked eye, the array looked deserted, but it was anything but that. The demigods were using accelerated time streams to conceal themselves; anyone remaining in the normal flow wouldn't sense them—much less see them. On top of that, two more demigods were tucked into the array's shadow, guarding its core with shadow-rule techniques.

They'd covered every angle. They were thorough, no question about it.

"How are you even sensing them?" Jill demanded, stunned. "My time cards are still scanning the time flow second by second in ascending order, trying to determine the speed of their time stream in this time flow. They haven't found anything yet."

Her reaction made sense. A time-related card could identify temporal anomalies, but it couldn't simply leap to the highest possible acceleration to spot someone hiding using

accelerated time streams without the proper time rule and meaning comprehension. It had to check each temporal layer one second at a time until it matched the enemy's accelerated flow—only then could it pull the user into that same stream, allowing them to fight on equal footing.

But that method only worked if the enemy was slow, careless, or significantly weaker—long enough for the scanning to finish. Yet here I was, someone who hadn't even comprehended the time rule, pinpointing enemies concealed in accelerated time the moment we stepped in. Jill couldn't help but wonder whether I had created a new time-related card, something far superior to the ones she carried.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2581: Using World Decree As Contract

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor, Temporal Separation Array

"I have my means," I answered, offering Jill no further explanation—only for her to scoff, "You already tricked me to become yours; you don't have to act mysterious around me now."

"No, I do. At least if I want to keep you around," I countered lightly, tipping my head back until it rested on her shoulder. She leaned in, letting hers settle against mine. The demigods still hadn't moved against us—not yet, anyway—so I allowed myself that moment.

"You think I'm only with you because of your tricks, is that it?" Jill asked, her voice carrying a subtle chill.

That was when it hit me: no matter how open-minded a woman might be, she wouldn't tolerate certain jokes—not ones aimed at her.

Or... maybe it was simply too early in our relationship for that kind of teasing.

"Honestly, I have no idea what you see in me. You even gave me the demonic card your father entrusted to you for your protection after the Pregnant Dungeon ordeal. You went as far as betraying his trust to warn me about the conspiracy during the Southern Capital incident. And now, after I admitted I have feelings for other women, here we are dating. If I asked you why me of all the people in the world, I doubt you'd tell me... would you?" I spoke from the heart. I genuinely didn't understand the reason behind Jill's unwavering devotion—devotion that had stirred feelings in me despite myself.

"No, I won't. Because I also want to keep you around," Jill replied, turning my own words back on me.

I guessed she finally understood what I meant. Her arms tightened around my waist, and she pressed her face into my shoulder as if trying to sink deeper into me. I turned my head, tilted back against her shoulder, just enough to gently nibble on her earlobe.

In the end, both of us were pretending we had control over this relationship, clinging to whatever comfort we could find to settle our restless hearts.

"Ahem. You two have been ambushed. Please conduct yourselves appropriately."

A voice cut through our moment. A bearded demigod stepped out from hiding, his shadow stretched unnaturally long despite the array's controlled lighting.

"We know that. Why else would we stop here in the middle of an array, dumbass?" Jill shot back without lifting her chin far from my shoulder, speaking to him as if he were beneath notice. She feared nothing from them—government dogs or major-family enforcers alike. None of them would dare touch her.

"Your Highness, please stay out of this. We already have authorization from Demigod Norley," the bearded demigod said, offering a half-truth in hopes that invoking her father's name would make her withdraw.

"I'm guessing your master didn't tell him I was with Wyatt—just that Wyatt has captured his heir. Am I right?" Jill smirked, confident speculating.

She knew her father too well. If he'd been informed she was involved, he wouldn't have granted them permission even if they claimed Wyatt had killed one of the founders, let alone for some excuse about retrieving an heir.

The bearded demigod fell silent, his expression twisting as Jill effortlessly exposed his lie. Inwardly, he cursed Brolock. If that fool had managed to keep Jill at the dinner table and sent their target out alone, they wouldn't now be forced to tread so carefully with the target standing right in front of them.

"Your Highness, our orders are clear. Please don't blame us if you get hurt," the bearded demigod said at last, dropping the polite façade. It was a warning—leave now, or they would no longer be held responsible for what happened next.

"You've all gotten quite bold, haven't you? Wait until my father hears about this," Jill replied, summoning her grimoire. The man went pale instantly, panic flashing through his eyes. That panic turned into astonishment when I stopped Jill from actually contacting her father.

Under normal circumstances, no card apprentice inside a temporal separation array could reach the outside world. But knowing Demigod Norley, he had no doubt given his only daughter a means to do so, just to be available for his daughter at a moment's notice, regardless of the situation's scale. He simply wanted to be there for her—just as any father would.

"Jill, let me handle this on my own," I said as I stored the nanomorpher hover-bike back into my grimoire. Without warning her, I shifted to my flight ability and lifted us off the ground. Jill, seated behind me, stiffened for a moment before adjusting; once she understood the change, she released her hold on my waist and hovered beside me. I took her hand in mine. Observing this, the bearded demigod responded with an exaggerated eye roll.

"Fine. But if they push too far, I'm calling my father," Jill warned, directing a cold glare at the bearded demigod, promising that he would face consequences far beyond anything he wished to face.

"Your Highness, please rest assured," the bearded demigod said quickly, hands raised in a placating gesture. "We are only here to negotiate with Master Wyatt. As long as he cooperates with our requests, you may continue your date as if nothing happened." His tone made it clear that he wanted a peaceful resolution even more than we did.

Then he summoned his diamond grimoire and unfurled a scroll. The moment Jill saw it, her eyes widened.

"World Decree!" she exclaimed.

She couldn't believe the founders had gone so far as to use something as precious as a World Decree just to deal with me. At first, it felt excessive—but when she considered who I was, what I possessed, and what I was capable of, she realized it wasn't unreasonable for them to bring out a World Decree to restrain me.

The bearded demigod extended the scroll toward me.

"Master Wyatt, please review the contract and sign it. If anything in the terms displeases you, speak up. My masters are more than willing to accommodate a brilliant mind like yourself."

The moment he mentioned the Masters, the color drained from Jill's face. She understood immediately: the only way I would be allowed to walk out of here alive was by signing the World Decree—and in doing so, acknowledging them as my masters.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2582: Blackhole

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor, Temporal Separation Array

"World Decree?" I murmured as I took the scroll from the bearded demigod. I had no intention of signing it, yet I couldn't help but be captivated by it. The scroll radiated a level of authority far beyond anything a mere card demigod—one who hadn't even broken past the chivalry-class—should possess, let alone channel through an item. It seemed I had once again underestimated card apprentices, just like any other demon or devil merchant who dared to the card world.

My primordial soul pupils revealed that the scroll contained only a single ability—Celestial Voice. But its execution was far more sophisticated than anything I had achieved with my own Celestial Voice. The scroll could directly whisper the words recorded in it into the ears of the Card World's Will, i.e. the Card Celestial. Until this moment, I hadn't even known to wield my celestial voice to that level. Then again, I was still little more than a novice when it came to wielding my celestial senses.

Yet of all the questions swirling in my mind, the one that troubled me most was this: why would the Card Celestial heed the wishes of card apprentices conveyed through a World Decree. I took this question personally because it had ignored my own calls.

The World Decree functioned more like a letter to the celestial—whether the Card Celestial chose to act on it was ultimately its decision. But judging by how the Masters were willing to use such a measure to enslave me, they clearly believed the Card Celestial would honor it.

"Wyatt—" Jill called out in shock when she saw me take the world decree, but her voice was abruptly cut short. An unseen pressure wrapped around her, choking off her words. She traced the force to its source and shot a sharp glare at the bearded demigod, who offered a cold, passive-aggressive warning, "Your Highness, this doesn't concern you. Please stay out of this—"

"...like hell it doesn't—"

The bearded demigod halted mid-sentence as a dangerous surge of power tore apart his hold on Jill, freeing her voice in an instant. Both he and Jill turned toward me, disbelief etched across their faces. Neither could comprehend the force now pouring off me, it was no mere card master's aura, but something already eclipsing the strength of most demigods.

After emerging from the time vestige, the Hive Spirit had already combed through the inter-realm network and replenished the SSS-rank curses in my arsenal. The moment I sensed them restored, a subtle but welcome feeling of security settled over me—an assurance in a region teeming with enemies on every side.

"I take it you're the best those so-called 'Masters' of yours were willing to spare," I said, drifting toward the bearded demigod. I stopped only when our faces were inches apart, close enough for him to feel my breath. Then, with a casual slap to both his cheeks, I added, "Behave. Or I won't mind sending you and your friends to your deaths a few minutes sooner."

The bearded demigod tried to swat my hand away, but his body refused to respond under the pressure I exerted. His partner—lurking within the shadows—attempted to come to his aid, only to freeze the moment our eyes met. When he caught sight of my grin, he instantly shifted his gaze toward the array core concealed behind him in the array's shadow and broke into a cold sweat.

Sensing his partner's distress, the bearded demigod dropped to his knees mid-air and bowed to Jill. "Your Highness, please forgive my insolence. I did not know any better."

Meanwhile, his shadow-bound companion used his shadow-rule prowess to relocate the array core, hoping the distraction caused by his colleague's behavior would let him hide it once more. But with my primordial soul pupils, I immediately tracked where he shifted it within the array's darkness.

As my gaze followed him unerringly—no matter what trick he attempted—both the bearded demigod and his hidden partner began to panic. They had no idea how to proceed. Their instructions had been simple: recruit me using the World decree, and act only if they failed to do so.

However, before they could receive any response from me, the situation unraveled faster than either of them could manage. My strength caught them off guard, they had never anticipated that my presence alone would be enough to freeze their bodies in fear.

Now they found themselves trapped in a dilemma—whether to attack or hold back. After all, I had not yet rejected their offer. By accepting the World Decree into my hand, I had implicitly shown that I was at least considering their proposal.

They dared not give me any reason to refuse it. Their Masters valued me—and what I possessed—far too highly. Even as a slave bound to them, I would still outrank these guys by a wide margin. Offending someone who might soon be their superior was the last thing they wanted.

So they clung to the hope that this encounter would reach a peaceful conclusion, praying this matter wouldn't escalate beyond their control anymore.

"Let us all have a proper talk without this array getting in the way, shall we?" I said, activating my 'If You See Me, I See You' ability. My curse clone slipped into the shadow where the demigod was hiding, crossed through the array's veil, seized the core, and vanished—reappearing as I withdrew, the array core now resting in my hand.

With my Hive Spirit and Primordial Spirit acting in tandem, I took control of the temporal separation array formation the moment I touched its core—hacking into it before the hostile demigods could even register what had happened.

But I did not use it to dismantle the formation. Instead, I twisted its flow, manipulating the array's temporal field while channeling my space rule and celestial force to manifest a massive black hole at its center.

The instant the black hole formed, the surrounding time collapsed into a sluggish crawl. The demigods hiding in the accelerated time stream were forced out into the open, along with the one lurking in the array's shadow. And then, with a silent pull, the black hole consumed the array entirely. It collapsed and evaporated from the world as if it had never existed.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2583: I Didn't Think I Could Love You More

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor, Temporal Separation Array

Ever since the bearded demigod revealed himself, Hive Spirit and I had been on high alert, tracking each demigod across their respective accelerated time streams. I had only one physical pair of eyes—two, if I counted my spiritual body in the spiritual plane. A thousand more if I included my Primordial Clones, and twice that again if I counted their spiritual bodies. Yet, despite all that, I was currently relying on my one pair in my regular form. Even with my abilities, monitoring all of them scattered across different accelerated time streams was far from easy.

Normally, I wouldn't have been able to maintain this level of awareness. With my time-rule resistance, I would have been pulled directly into whichever accelerated time stream was the fastest. In that scenario, I would exist in the same time flow as the demigod with the greatest mastery over time acceleration, while the others would appear frozen to me.

But now—thanks to my mastery over the space rule working in tandem with my time-rule resistance—I could peer into multiple accelerated time streams while remaining anchored in the original one. It allowed me to see them all, without being forced into any single temporal flow.

Yes, it was incredible—an ability most card apprentices would kill for—but it was also incredibly taxing, even for someone with my capabilities. So the moment an opportunity arose to pull everyone back into the original timeline and ease the strain on my vision, I took it without hesitation.

As for how I managed to summon a black hole—an enormous one, no less—the answer lay in the combination of tools and mastery at my disposal. Using the array core, I seized control over the time within the formation; with my celestial force, I substituted the mass required to anchor the phenomenon; and my command over the space rule—especially its elasticity meaning and the limitless strain rune—made the structure stable enough to manifest.

With all the necessary components at my fingertips, creating a black hole inside the array was simply a matter of intent.

Why, then, were the demigods hiding in their various accelerated time streams forcibly pulled out of them?

Because time slows down near a black hole—an effect predicted by one of the greatest minds from Earth. The moment the black hole formed, its influence collapsed the differences between the streams, dragging them back toward the original flow.

With such a massive black hole disrupting their accelerated time-rule streams, every one of them was dragged back into the original timeline. But I had gone a bit overboard with its size. It was far too large for its own good—and for me to maintain control—so I forced it to consume the very array that had allowed me to summon it. Once the array vanished, the black hole collapsed and evaporated as if it had never existed.

Had it persisted even a moment longer, it would have swallowed me and Jill along with the demigods. And that would have been monumentally stupid on my part.

In my defense, I was creating a black hole. Yes, that should have been even more reason to act with caution and precision, but—well—try playing god for a second and see if you don't lose yourself just a little. Thankfully, I still had enough presence of mind to fix my mistake before it became fatal.

"Holy shit!" Jill shouted as she rushed toward me, leaping into my arms. Her legs wrapped around my waist, her arms locked around my neck, and she peppered my face with frantic kisses—pausing only long enough to spill out bursts of breathless excitement.

"You... manifested... a black hole... using... space rule... celestial force... the array core... It was freaking awesome! I... love you... I love you... Even though for a moment I thought we were all dead—but then you fed it the array and handled it. Fuck, that was just incredible. And you even used the black hole to drag all these assholes out of hiding."

She turned toward the hostile demigods, who were still trying to make sense of what had happened—how I had acted faster than they could despite being in the original time stream while they were in accelerated ones, how they had failed to reclaim the array core in time, and why the black hole had pulled them all out.

Jill let out a long sigh. "Honestly, it would've been better if you had tossed these assholes into the black hole along with the array."

"I would have—if not for their divinities and diamond grimoires," I said, scanning the demigods to confirm none of them had been accidentally swallowed by the black hole.

"When did you become this strong?" Jill asked, feeling out my energy signature, trying to dissect it and uncover the source of my sudden rise in power.

"I was always this strong. I just never felt the need to show it," I said, unable to resist the brag. With one of the most beautiful women in my arms and nearly forty-five demigods recoiling in fear, how could I not?

"Oh, I never knew I could love you even more," Jill breathed. She usually hated my narcissistic streak, but right now she found it charming. I supposed the difference was simple—this time, she'd seen I wasn't boasting without substance.

Overhearing our exchange, the forty-five demigods exchanged glances and immediately shifted into position, arranging themselves into a precise battle formation.

"What's the rush?" I called out, taunting them. "Whether you die now or a few seconds later, death will greet you with the same indifference."

"Master Wyatt, there is no need for things to escalate. Please—look over the contract and tell us how we can adjust it to your satisfaction. As I said earlier, our Masters are generous and tolerant when it comes to recruiting someone of your prowess and know—"

The bearded demigod never finished his sentence. His body folded inward, collapsing as his divinity and diamond grimoire tore free from him and drifted into my hands.

I stored them away and sighed. "You talk too much. If you want to fight, then shut up and fight."

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Chapter 2584: 'Wheels Of Time' Battle Array Formation

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

Using my celestial force and the Limitless Strain Rune, I can stretch space without limit, free from the risk of tearing or distorting it. If a card apprentice were caught inside a space I had stretched in this way, it would look to the naked eye as though they were simply stuck walking at that point of the pace. When in reality, they would be running across an endlessly elongated space, unable to make any actual progress.

Now, what happens when I stop channeling my celestial force to maintain that limitless stretch? The moment I release it, the space snaps back to its original state. And the card apprentice trapped within would be crushed instantly by the recoil of that violently contracting space. The temperature released from this process would instantly evaporate whatever was caught in it, like their mangled remains.

That was how I killed the bearded card demigod—making it seem as though his body folded inward and collapsed before evaporating. Afterward, I used my celestial force to gather his divinity and grimoire.

The bearded demigod died in a gruesome instant, without even the chance to resist. With his death, the companion hiding within his shadow was forced out. He attempted to slip into another shadow the moment he emerged, but he too was dragged into the endlessly stretched space similar to the one that had trapped his partner. Unlike before, there was no shadow within that boundless expanse for him to take refuge in. With nowhere to escape, he suffered the same fate—crushed by the recoil of space snapping back to its original form and evaporating into nothingness by the resulting heat—without managing even a token struggle.

Once again, I used my celestial force to gather his divinity and diamond grimoire.

Watching two of their comrades die gruesomely—without resistance and before any of them could even process what had happened—the remaining forty-three demigods in their battle formation reacted at once. Abandoning any hope of a peaceful resolution, no longer praying that the situation might remain within their control, they immediately activated their time-related cards and runes, triggering the 'Wheels of Time' battle formation. At this point, their only focus was to subdue me and drag me before their masters, trusting them to judge both sides accordingly.

As the demigods vanished from her sight and her own time-related cards flared in warning, Jill realized the temporal flow around her was being distorted. She quickly called out to her love, "Wyatt, look out—they've entered their respective accelerated time—"

Her warning cut off midway. She froze, stunned, as several dozen divinities and diamond grimoires flew toward me in rapid succession. I stored them neatly within my dimensional storage card, one after another.

Jill's eyes widened, disbelief washing over her. Before she could stop herself, she blurted out, "What the fuck happened?"

Given the tension of the moment, Jill hadn't even blinked—yet somehow the card demigods had vanished, replaced in an instant by the cluster of divinities and diamond grimoires now orbiting around me. She had no idea what had happened.

She immediately dismissed the notion that I had killed them within their accelerated time. She knew full well that a single time-related card wasn't nearly enough for me to enter the fastest time flow generated by the demigods' battle formation. I had not even comprehended the Time Rule, let alone reached a level where I could step into the highest accelerated time flow of the Wheels of Time battle array.

With that possibility ruled out, she was left with no reasonable explanation for how I could have eliminated every demigod inside the Wheels of Time battle formation. After several seconds of mentally retracing every angle, she gave up and simply asked, bewildered, "How? How did you do it?"

"I have an unusually high resistance to the Time Rule," I replied, offering the truth—though with no intention of elaborating further.

The moment the remaining demigods activated the Wheels of Time battle array, thanks to my time resistance I instantly slipped into the fastest accelerated time flow among the multiple accelerated time flow they had generated. There, I found only a single elder demigod still capable of movement—everyone else's time flow was so slow they appeared completely frozen.

The old demigod was stunned to see me standing beside him within the highest time acceleration of their formation. Before he could react, I summoned aloud, "Limitless Celestial Domain."

At my command, I shifted the entire 'Wheels of Time' array formation into a single point within my Limitless Celestial Domain that was stretched infinitely. Then, with deliberate intent, I released the stretched space. It snapped back to its original form in an instant, crushing every demigod inside into pulp. The heat generated from the collapse evaporated what little remained of their bodies, leaving nothing behind.

With the domain retracted, I calmly gathered the divinities and diamond grimoires that surfaced following their deaths.

The Time and Space Rules were severely wronged by most card demigods, unable to bring out their true destructive power. Not all of them possessed the talent or affinity required to comprehend these rules, and even those who did often found themselves lost when they reached the bifurcation points. Without luck along with proper insight, they could never hope to showcase the true potential of either rule.

Take Henricks, for example. His mastery of the Space Rule was largely confined to spatial travel. It wasn't that he lacked ambition—he simply lacked compatible foundations. The three foundational Space-Rule meanings he comprehended to the ultimate tier were all random. Using sheer insight and creativity, he repurposed those mismatched rule meanings to incorporate them in his spatial travel and aid his origin card, but that was the limit of what he could construct from such scattered foundations.

Not everyone was fortunate enough to discover a method for selecting rule meanings at a bifurcation point inside the World's Womb like I managed to do so before I became a hybrid celestial—before I gained the privilege of comprehending rules directly from the rule source, just as the celestials themselves do.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2585: Disappointing Standards

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"Is that it?" I murmured, my tone deliberately provocative as I gazed up at the distant clouds scattered across the night sky. Through my primordial soul pupils, I picked up a cluster of powerful soul energy signatures—each one several times stronger than the demigods I had just handled. Judging by their intensity, they were all at the peak of the chivalry-class within the demigod/devil rank.

They had clearly sent cannon fodder to do their dirty laundry while they remained far away, watching closely, ensuring none of their prior arrangements failed to keep potential reinforcements from reaching me. Anyone attempting to interfere would be intercepted long before they got close.

My words weren't meant solely to lure them into a direct confrontation. I was genuinely disappointed by the standard of the card demigods I had faced. I had killed everyone of them without drawing on the entirety of my strength or even bothering to summon my Frosling corpse puppet spirit cards.

I supposed it was unfair of me to compare them to demon or devil merchants, who had access to the knowledge and resources of the myriad realms, not confined to a small, isolated world tucked away in the backwaters of the myriad realms. But fairness had nothing to do with reality. They still had to face it. The enemies poised to invade their world wouldn't show mercy or turn back simply because the situation seemed unjust.

If anyone deserved blame, it was the founders—the so-called masters, or whatever grand titles they preferred. They were the reason the card demigods performed so poorly. These people clearly possessed the knowledge and the means to uplift their forces; the existence of the World Decree alone made that obvious. Yet they refused to share it, afraid their own card apprentices might one day become threats to their rule.

A relic with the potential of the World Decree could allow the demigods to reshape and elevate the card world to unimaginable heights. Instead, these greedy fools used it merely to tighten their grip over the five regions.

I couldn't help but wonder whether any other race, given the ability to commune with their realm's will and command it to act on their behalf, would make the same choices.

Just thinking about it made my blood boil. I wanted to storm their bases right then and smash their skulls open just to see what kind of filth sloshed around in their so-called brains. Had they lived under the comfort of authority for so long that they'd forgotten to wonder what lay beyond the boundaries of the card world? How much longer did they intend to cling to such a hollow existence?

Ah, right—they were still "waiting," still "accumulating," preparing for their grand raid on the unranked dungeons.

Cowards, the lot of them. They had stalled the growth of the five regions for millennia because they were too terrified to step into the myriad realms for the unranked resources they needed, and too distrustful of the dark races to trade with them honestly.

In contrast, my respect for the descendants of the unparalleled bloodline—JJ and Anna's ancestor—rose sharply. The one who left behind the Ruby Vault, JJ was now in possession of, had not wasted his life trapped within the card world. He had dared to explore the Myriad Realms. I had no idea what became of him, but at least he hadn't lingered in the Southern Region, leeching its fortune like the founders had. With his talent and potential, he certainly could have, had he chosen to.

However, I now understood why the Masters weren't truly worried about a second demon invasion. With something like the World Decree under their control, they had little reason to fear devils entering the card world.

"Don't worry—they won't make a move against us," Jill said, following my gaze toward the figures hidden in the distant clouds.

"Why?" I asked, genuinely puzzled about the certainty in her voice.

"For the same reason someone like Field Marshal Lorn doesn't rush to handle every minor disturbance along the Southern borders. It's all to preserve the illusion of peace—the illusion that keeps the five regions from fracturing into endless small civil wars fueled by hunger for power and authority. Once a card demigod reaches a certain level of strength, the rest expect them to abide by a set of unwritten rules if they want to continue living within the five regions. Otherwise, they're free to explore the Way Beyond and carve out a land for themselves, like the Empire did. But most choose to rebel—like the freedom fighters you're sheltering now—and eventually end up on the most-wanted list."

Her words settled heavily. It was another crucial piece of history and regional law I had never come across. I had always believed the Empire was founded solely by the followers of Demigod Michel Angelo. While that part was true, it was also a fact that they had been forced

to do so because the Founders of the Five Regions refused to let their practices spread within their territory.

"That's a pity," I sighed, glancing at nearly half a dozen divinities and diamond grimoires—so close, yet completely out of reach.

"You know... my dad created it," Jill said suddenly, watching me take out the World Decree after storing away the divinities and diamond grimoires.

"Really?" I stared at her in astonishment. I had never imagined Demigod Norley as the one responsible for creating the World Decree. It wasn't that I underestimated his capability, but his demeanor and personality never hinted at such monumental accomplishments.

"Can you tell me what it actually does and how it works?" I asked, pretending not to understand the mechanics behind the World Decree. I wanted to hear how a card apprentice perceived it. They were the ones who created it, so of course they knew its function—but I was more interested in understanding why the Card Celestial responded to them.

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Chapter 2586: Demigod Von

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"You know what a royal decree is, right? A World Decree works the same way, except it comes from us through the Card World's will. Because of that, it's absolute. Whatever you inscribe into it becomes the new truth of the Card World. But there are laws that govern how it can be used, depending on your intent. If those conditions aren't met, the decree won't function—and the world's will might even punish the user. That's why it's never used unless there is truly no other choice," Jill explained, sharing everything she understood about the World Decree.

It wasn't far from what I had already inferred about the World Decree. As for the laws she mentioned, I could only assume they were the dos and don'ts they had uncovered through repeated trial and error—pushing the Card Celestial's patience until it finally rained divine retribution down on them.

I say this because the Card Celestial, like any celestial, was remarkably patient with its natives. For it to be driven to punish them, they must have done something truly severe to provoke the celestial will of their own realm.

However, knowing this did make me feel a little better about the Card Celestial ignoring my calls.

What the Masters were doing was essentially acting in a way designed to provoke a specific reaction from the Card Celestial. Otherwise, the very first thing they would have done upon obtaining the World Decree was declare themselves rulers of all humanity. I bet they did exactly that but failed. Until they figured out a list of dos and don'ts and declared them as the laws to using the World Decree.

"I take it the Masters understand these laws well enough to wield the world decree at their whim—especially since they planned to use it on me to force me to submission," I remarked to Jill, fully aware that the Masters knew these laws thoroughly enough if they were confident enough to use it against me.

"Yes, they do. Even more so than my father, who invented the World Decree," Jill said with a nod before asking, "By the way, how do you know about the Masters?"

"What do you think?" I replied, avoiding a direct answer as I debated whether it was wise to reveal the Clown Mask's future vision. The Freedom Fighters knew about it, but that didn't mean I should speak of it freely.

No—at least not until I was certain I could handle the Masters myself. Until then, it was better to let the three mischief deal with them as planned earlier. The World Decree was more than a surprise; it was a warning not to underestimate them. If they were preparing to raid Unranked Dungeons, then they had long surpassed the chivalry-class. I wouldn't be surprised if they were already in the noble-class of the card demigod realm.

"Was it the Southern Royal Family?" Jill guessed. It was the obvious assumption, after all. I could have taken the easy route, but I shook my head. "No. I have my ways. I'll tell you when the time is right."

"I don't like that answer, but I do appreciate that you didn't lie to me," Jill said, leaning in to kiss my cheek—only for one of the figures watching us from the clouds afar to suddenly move and appear several feet away. Jill froze mid-kiss in fear, but I simply pulled her into my embrace with a grin.

"Shit—you scared me, Uncle Von," Jill exclaimed as she pulled herself out of my embrace. In response, the well-groomed, neatly dressed demigod urgently asked calmly, "Does your father know about this?"

From his words—and Jill's sudden, uncharacteristically reserved reaction—I immediately understood that this Uncle Von was an elder she genuinely respected, unlike her Uncle Sean, before whom she had shamelessly sucked on my tongue as if it were the most delicious popsicle in the world. Realizing this, the grin on my face faded into a frown. The problem was simple yet aggravating: Uncle Von was here on an official mission for the Masters, and he

was also a friend of both Jill and Demigod Norley. In other words, the prey was dancing right before my eyes, yet I couldn't hunt it. And for a predator, what could be more tormenting than that?

"The entire Five Regions already know about it. If he doesn't by now, he will sooner or later," Jill replied calmly.

"Hahaha, so I know before him," the demigod said, his dignified expression finally easing as clear amusement surfaced. He took visible pleasure in the fact that he had learned of Jill's relationship with me before her father. "I've heard he's opened a new laboratory and returned to researching to design pleasure cards. It seems time is finally beginning to favor your family."

Then Demigod Von suddenly turned his gaze on me and let out a weary sigh. "Out of all the men in the world, it had to be him."

"Uncle Von, what is that supposed to mean?" Jill asked, her cheeks puffing in displeasure. "What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing—that's the problem," Demigod Von replied, shaking his head in quiet dismay. "Considering your condition, only someone like him could satisfy you. So you're fine with this relationship, or—"

"I am," Jill cut in hurriedly, nodding vigorously. Her reaction drew a faint, amused smile from Demigod Von, who clearly found her eagerness endearing.

Hearing Demigod Von's earlier words, I couldn't help but glance at him again, surprised by how much he knew about Jill's physique. In that moment, I finally understood why he was so invested in Jill and my relationship. It seemed Jill's carnivorous womb had long been a source of concern among her elders.

As I studied him, he turned his gaze toward me. Our eyes locked, and he said evenly, "Young man, unless you intend to sign the World Decree, return it to me now."

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Chapter 2587: Demigod Von's Niece

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

Listening to Demigod Von, I couldn't help but let out a chuckle. Noticing it, he asked with mild amusement, "What's so funny?"

Demigod Von had been more than impressed watching me take down nearly four dozen demigods—each armed with time-related cards or runes—with effortless ease as a card master. Yet he wasn't afraid of me. With his mastery of the space rule, he had seen through my limitless strain trick and was confident he could overcome it, no matter how innovatively I wielded it.

"I was just wondering," I said evenly, "whether you guys can bear the consequences of me signing this World Decree." Then, shaking my head, I continued, "Now that it's in my hands, you can forget about that. Go and inform your Masters that I love their gifts—and I wouldn't mind more of them. Tell them to send as many as they like. I'll receive every single one."

"Hahaha, young man. Now I know what they meant when they said I would see true arrogance when I met you.' They were right, you lived up to your reputation," Demigod Ron nodded. "But, young man, you need to know your limits. We are not someone you want to cross paths with, let alone the masters. Know what's good for you and hand over the World Degree if you don't plan to sign it."

"Uncle Von, why do I get the feeling that you're daring him to sign the World Decree?" Jill snapped, clearly sensing her uncle's rudeness toward her lover. She didn't care who was right or wrong. She cared about both of us—though, at this moment, she cared more about me than about her uncle.

"Girl, stay out of this. Hasn't he already proven that he can take care of himself?" Demigod Von said, warning Jill not to be overly protective of her boyfriend and risk bruising his ego. If her boyfriend truly loved her, he might understand—but over time, no one could say how such things might fester or twist into something ugly between them. As the saying went, prevention was better than a cure.

"Uncle, if you weren't related to me, he would have taught you a lesson by now. Stop trying to bully him through me," Jill said, fully aware that I was holding back because of her. If it had been anyone else, I would already be harvesting their divinity and grimoire.

This man was fortunate to be Jill's uncle, and he wasn't shy about using that fact to his advantage against me. It wasn't that he believed he would lose to me; rather, he preferred to resolve this matter peacefully if possible. I believed it was the reason he was the one who came here among his colleagues hiding in the clouds afar.

"Girl, it's my right as the bride's uncle, so stop meddling. This is between me and my son-in-law," Demigod Ron said shamelessly.

Jill was left flabbergasted and immediately scolded him, "Uncle, stop embarrassing me. We haven't thought that far ahead."

"You're still talking?" Demigod Rod said sternly, though a teasing note lingered beneath his tone. "Besides, what use are we elders if not to ask the difficult questions—no matter how awkward they may be?"

"Uncle, I'm begging you—please stop," Jill pleaded, nearly bringing her hands together in supplication.

The longer I watched the exchange between Demigod Von and Jill, the deeper my frown became. The closer Jill stood to Demigod Von, the harder it was for me to embarrass him—let alone kill him and harvest his divinity and grimoire. Unless he gave me a compelling reason, I had no intention of doing anything that would cause Jill grief or jeopardize our relationship before it had even reached its first date. Von had been given a longer leash—but if he didn't know when to stop while he was ahead, I wouldn't mind tightening it.

Ignoring her pleas, Demigod Von turned his attention to me and asked, "Boy, what are your plans for my niece?"

I couldn't help but study him, sensing that his question carried more weight than it appeared. I attributed it to his concern over Jill's physique and it choosing me as her ideal mate. It seemed that, despite his subtle tests, he still wasn't entirely sure whether he was speaking to Jill herself—or to the instincts of her carnivorous womb. If I were in his position, I would have shared the same concerns.

"Don't worry. Her physique is dormant," I said flatly. "I prefer my dates to have brains."

My deadpan assurance only served to fluster Jill further. She slapped my back in embarrassment and protested, "How can you say something like that with a straight face?"

Demigod Von's gaze shifted back and forth between Jill and me, still unable to determine whether it was truly Jill before him. Everything he knew about the Carnivorous Womb had come from Demigod Norley's accounts alone. He carefully observed every subtle sign, searching for any indication that it was Jill's physique acting rather than Jill herself. Yet, sensing each other's scent lingering on us, he found it difficult to accept that his pure, innocent niece could be so forward. It had to be the Carnivorous Womb—or so he convinced himself.

"Uncle Von, please stop," Jill said softly, growing uncomfortable under his scrutiny. His gaze wasn't vulgar, yet it carried a weight that made her feel as though she had disappointed him. In that moment, she wondered—if she couldn't face her uncle like this, how would she ever face her father? Unconsciously, she stepped closer and hid behind me, using me as a shield to block the demigod's probing stare.

Seeing his niece retreat behind me, Demigod Von immediately realized he had crossed a line and corrected himself. "You're an adult now. You're free to make your own decisions and choose your partner—"

Jill cut in comically, raising her voice in protest. "I've been an adult for the past few decades, Uncle!"

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Chapter 2588: Signing The World Decree

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

Demigod Von ignored Jill's protest and stopped dwelling on whether the figure before him was truly Jill or the manifestation of her Carnivorous Womb inhabiting his dearest niece's body. He resolved to visit his old friend later, to inform him and seek his counsel on the matter. Until then, he chose to treat her as his niece, unwilling to see that unsettling gaze directed at him again.

For now, however, he turned his attention back to his duty; his colleagues were already growing impatient.

"Young man, hand over the World Decree if you have no intention of signing it. It is not something you should possess. It will only bring you trouble—if not outright harm should you attempt to use it," Demigod Von said one final time, extending his hand with a stern expression. It was clear he was prepared to resort to force if I continued to resist.

"Very well, I will," I said. "But before that, answer me this—if I sign the World Decree, are you certain your Masters can bear the consequences?" I asked, a faint smile tugging at my lips.

"Are you saying you intend to sign it?" Demigod Von pressed, clearly amused by my words. "If so, then go ahead. The Masters have outlived countless so-called geniuses. You will be no exception."

"Yes, I do," I replied. I opened the scroll and, without bothering to read it, signed my name. I added calmly, "There. Don't say I didn't warn you."

"Wyatt!" Jill exclaimed, trying to stop me—but before she could react, I had already signed the scroll. It dissolved into the surroundings, and moments later, an aurora spread across the star-filled night sky.

Demigod Von was equally astonished. He had never believed I would sign the World Decree. Yet as the decree dispersed and the aurora blanketed the heavens, he found himself at a loss for words. He never expected me to sign the World Decree. Now that I had, it was far too late for him to regret his words.

"Why did you sign that?" Jill demanded hysterically, grabbing my collar. Panic was etched across her face, her eyes glistening with tears.

"Relax," I said, pulling her into my embrace. "I just wanted to see what divine retribution looks like." As I spoke, I gently turned her head toward the sky. The aurora that had moments ago painted the black sky had vanished without a trace, leaving behind a starless night shrouded in dark, roiling clouds.

Watching the exchange between Jill and me, Demigod Von finally accepted that it was truly his niece standing before him—and not the Carnivorous Womb. His gaze followed hers toward the sky to witness a sight even the Masters feared. The aurora had vanished, replaced by roiling dark clouds. It was the unmistakable sign of the World's Will in fury. What followed was divine retribution.

"What did you do?" Demigod Von asked in dread, unable to tear his eyes away from the churning heavens as the thunder grew louder with each passing moment.

"What did I do?" I echoed, shrugging innocently. "I warned you before I signed the World Decree when you asked me to."

The reason I signed the World Decree—declaring myself a slave of the Masters—was simple. I knew that even if I agreed to the contract inscribed in the World Decree, the Card Celestial would not. I was not merely one of its investments; I was also a hybrid celestial. It might be willing to abandon an investment, but it would never sacrifice a fellow celestial. Hybrid or not, it had already accepted me—otherwise, it would never have entrusted me with the Eye of Fortune, nor assisted me in obtaining the Eye of Prosperity to recreate the Eye of Tao.

It was no different from a cat being indulged by its human owner with the finest cuts of meat. The owner might spoil it endlessly—but the moment the cat dared to ask for human flesh, it would be put down without hesitation. The same held true for the Masters, who had grown accustomed to being indulged by the Card Celestial through their incessant World Decrees.

Unable to suppress my curiosity, I added, "Who inscribed that World Decree? Right now, I wouldn't want to be in their place." I paused, genuinely wondering who the Card Celestial would punish, though I was almost ninety percent certain that it was the Masters. It would be shocking if a Master were to perish under divine retribution—and even more so if all of them did. "Was it all of the Masters... or just one of them?"

"It was the Masters," Demigod Von replied with a steady tone. "But don't worry. This isn't their first rodeo, and it won't be the last." He spoke with confidence in their ability to withstand divine retribution.

After all, if they were unable to endure such punishment, they would never have been able to push boundaries or explore the limits of what could—and should—be achieved through the World Decree. It was through this process that they deduced laws to wield the World Decree without provoking the World's Will. Had they been deterred by divine intervention, they would never have risen to their current heights. They feared it, yes—but they never allowed that fear to halt their pursuit of power.

"How did you know the World's Will would reject the World Decree?" Jill asked, staring deeply into my eyes.

"I didn't actually know," I replied. "I just felt that if it were any parent, they would never agree to let one child enslave another—let alone assist in making it happen." I spoke in a deliberately profound tone, hoping she would get lost deciphering the metaphor rather than pressing further.

I had no intention of explaining that I was part celestial, and that the Card Celestial would never consent to such an arrangement. Even if it somehow did, it would never enforce it—I was no longer dependent on it.

It was much like a parent who may dictate a child's life while they still live under the same roof, but loses that authority once the child starts earning and moves out on their own.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2589: Divine Retribution

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

I wouldn't be wrong to say that I had grown independent of the Card World. I no longer needed it—except for a lingering sense of belonging. As someone who had sensed the Origin Source and was part celestial, I truly had no reliance on the Card World except for its occasional baptism every time I broke through to higher realm in the card power system. That was a gift and not something I couldn't do without.

For a Card apprentice, the only thing binding them to the Card World was its rules within its womb. Unless one had sensed the Rule Source itself, they could only continue comprehending rules within their world's womb without risk of rule contamination. That was why, no matter how powerful the Dark Race became or how far across the Myriad Realms they ventured, they always returned to the Dark Realm and never dared to set their sights on its Celestial Will.

Sensing the origin source as a part celestial, I had outgrown this dilemma and had achieved complete independence from the Card World, and that was one of the key reasons the Card Celestial regarded me as an equal.

Now that I was no longer dependent on it, how could the Card Celestial possibly enforce the World Decree on me? It had no leverage to do so. Even if it tried to impose the World Decree by force, what could it accomplish if I simply left its sphere of influence and moved to Lil' Red

Storm, the Dark Realm, or any of the thousands of other realms out there? Nothing. It could not even stop me from leaving—especially with the Devil Merchant Code aiding me.

If it were to enforce the World Decree, it would only turn a potential ally into a potential enemy, and the Card Celestial was far too shrewd to make such a mistake. That much was evident when it offered me affiliation, or alternatively, the freedom to carve my own path in the wider realms. A being capable of such foresight would never be foolish enough to uphold the predatory World Decree of the Masters.

This was the true reason I dared to sign the World Decree—and the Card Celestial did not disappoint me. Now, I could only hope that in its rage, it had killed a few of the Masters, if not all of them, becoming the catalyst that would accelerate the Three Mischiefs' plan to overthrow the Masters. That way I could implement my plans to overthrow them and prepare the Card World for the upcoming demon invasion.

"How dare you gamble with your life?" Jill shouted, striking me as tears streamed down her face. "You belong to me now. You don't get to gamble with your life unless I say so. Do you understand?"

"Alright, alright—calm down," I said, catching her wrists and stopping the rain of slaps. "I'm fine. Nothing happened to me. I'm nobody's slave." I hadn't expected her reaction to be this intense. "Though I can't say the same for those who tried to enslave me."

Seeing that I was still in the mood to joke, Jill glared at me with fierce, unyielding eyes. "Remember this," she said firmly. "Your body is mine, so you're not allowed to hurt or harm it."

"If my body is yours, does that mean your body is mine—" I began with a playful smile. Jill flushed and shyly nestled into my embrace—until her uncle loudly cleared his throat. Startled, she sprang out of my arms like a frightened little cat.

I couldn't help but roll my eyes at him and ask, "Why are you still here? I've already signed the World Decree. If you're not satisfied with the outcome, bring me another one—I'll sign that too."

Demigod Von shook his head at my remark and said, "You know, many of my colleagues have signed the same World Decree. Yet it never enraged the World's Will. It has enforced those contracts to this day, let alone punish the Masters with divine retribution for it." He paused, then added thoughtfully, "I suppose, like any parent, our World's Will has a favorite child."

By his words, Demigod Von was placing both the Masters and me among the favored children of the Card World—yet among them all, I was favored enough for the World's Will to punish the Masters on my behalf.

I had met the Card Celestial's favored ones, and I knew I was not among them. I was an anomaly—an unforeseen variable, even to the Card Celestial itself. The fact that it treated me as an equal was proof enough of that.

Soon after, Demigod Von shook his head. Stopping his whining, he said, "Very well. You're right—my work here is done. I should be on my way. Before I go, just remember this: if you ever mistreat Jill, I will hunt you down, even if it means going against the World's Will."

"I don't mistreat my possessions, let alone my woman," I replied calmly, mocking him as I added, "And aren't you overestimating yourself? Forget challenging the World—I don't think you could defeat even one of my summon cards."

Demigod Von clenched his fist at my taunt, but he restrained himself when his gaze fell on his niece. With a final shake of his head, he turned to leave—only for Jill to call out, "Uncle, when you meet my father and he learns about my relationship, can you tell me how he reacts? So I can prepare myself accordingly."

"Of course," Demigod Von replied with a nod.

Taking the cue, I added, "If possible, please keep me updated on the Masters' status as well. And if one of them happens to die, don't forget to invite me to the funeral."

Demigod Von paused mid-step and fixed me with a long, hard stare. It looked as though he wanted to say something, but in the end, he swallowed the words on the tip of his tongue and left in silence.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

Chapter 2590: Nanny Cards

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

After Demigod Von left, I immediately contacted Lois through my hive spirit, leaving her a message to ask about the Masters facing divine retribution. I didn't attempt to contact her directly. I had no idea where she was at the moment, nor did I understand the full extent of the Masters' means. Instead, I left her messages, trusting that she would reach out to me when she could.

"Wyatt, don't blame Uncle Von. He means well," Jill said after making sure Demigod Von had truly left. "In fact, he was my nanny. Being a single parent wasn't easy for my genius father. For someone who could unravel the mysteries of the world, he somehow couldn't figure out

how to raise a baby. Uncle Von, on the other hand, became a father in his teens. He had plenty of experience in that area and helped my father tremendously."

"If not for his love for you, he and his companions wouldn't have left this place alive," I assured her, making it clear that I hadn't taken offense at Demigod Von's overprotectiveness regarding our relationship. "That said, if your father truly understands how difficult parenthood is—especially single parenthood—what is he doing researching pleasure cards? Shouldn't he be developing nanny cards instead? Unless..." I paused, a crooked smile forming. "Unless he plans to get all men addicted to pleasure cards, leaving them with neither the interest nor the time to make babies with real women. Now that would be a truly diabolical plan. As expected of a Founder."

"That's not funny," Jill said, fixing me with a stern look. If anything, it only encouraged me to push further.

"Why?" I teased. "Because it could very well be true?"

Jill narrowed her eyes at me, but realizing that the more she reacted, the more I would needle her, she forced herself to calm down and smoothly changed the subject. "Actually, the nanny card idea isn't bad at all. Maybe nanny summons could take the form of the parent while caring for the baby. That way, parents wouldn't worry about their children forgetting them—"

"What is it with you and your father?" I cut in, feigning indignation. "Why are the two of you so determined to steal my ideas and claim them as your own? Can't you come up with something original for once?"

"Since when did nanny cards become your idea?" Jill shot back. "You only brought it up to mock my father. I'm the one who realized that, if it were a real card, the Five Regions would have a strong market for it. Stop being such a greedy narcissist. By your logic, the first person who ever joked about creating a powder to boost one's soul power or a card to digest soul-energy monster meat should be credited with your Silver Milk Powder and VR-Slime cards."

She didn't pause, her frustration finally spilling over. "And my dad didn't steal your idea. At best, he copied it—no, he took inspiration from it. That isn't a crime. You should be flattered that my father found inspiration in one of your works. Instead, here you are, ungratefully calling him a thief."

"Yeah? Are you even hearing yourself?" I shot back without thinking. "You sound like every damn lawyer out there defending a thief."

The moment the words left my mouth, regret hit me—I knew I had gone too far.

Jill was right about her father drawing inspiration from ideas. Unless he had created pleasure cards using the actual card recipe of my Slime Fairy card, he hadn't technically copied or stolen anything from me—he had merely taken inspiration from my work. The real reason I

was angry lay elsewhere. It was how he had taken that inspiration. He had trespassed into Fine Gold's research facility and gone through my work without my permission. That was what truly infuriated me.

Still, considering he was my girlfriend's father, it was something I could have overlooked. But after what I had just said, I wasn't so sure I still had a girlfriend.

"Call my father a thief one more time and see what happens," Jill warned, her gaze sharp and unyielding as it locked onto mine.

"You saw me kill nearly four dozen demigods in the blink of an eye, didn't you?" Instead of apologizing, I coldly reminded her of the gap in our strength. At that moment, I was certain I had crossed a line that couldn't be walked back.

"No, I didn't," Jill snapped, her expression stern. "All I saw was you collecting nearly four dozen divinities and diamond grimoires." Then she pointed at me, her voice hardening. "That's more like it. Don't you ever insult my father in front of me again."

"So, it's fine if I insult him without you knowing?" I asked. At that point, it sounded less like I was trying to save the relationship and more like I was actively trying to end it—let alone fight for it.

"I'll remember this," Jill said grudgingly, then added firmly, "Take me home."

"Sure, but that will have to wait," I replied, turning my gaze toward the Brothwork Manor. The ambush meant for me had been arranged right outside their estate. That alone made their involvement obvious. And I wasn't in the habit of letting enemies walk away, nor of forgiving them.

"Wyatt, tell me you're not thinking of raiding the Brothwork Manor," Jill said, horror creeping into her voice. "Tell me you're not that foolish."

She had watched me kill nearly four dozen demigods, but she also knew exactly how terrifying the descendants of the Founders were. It wasn't just their personal strength—everything about them was overwhelming. Their subordinates, their resources, their arrays—they surrounded themselves with the best of the best.

Jill didn't believe I would fail to achieve whatever goal I set my sights on inside the manor. What she feared was what would come after. Once I was done, I would place myself squarely at the top of the Founders' hit list. And she didn't want her boyfriend to die before he had even taken her out on a proper date.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters. Tap the middle of the screen to reveal Reading Options.

#Chapter 2551: Lucine Past, Present, Future, & End - Read Chapter 2551: Lucine Past, Present, Future, & End

Chapter 2551: Lucine Past, Present, Future, & End

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

No longer dwelling on the steep price of my Time-Rule resistance, I stepped into the time-expansion chamber—just in time to witness the three new bodies of Lucine rising from their pots. They weren't alone. A withered corpse emerged from the fourth pot as well. To my surprise, Lucine's incarnation that had been trapped in her original body had survived the treatment and her Time-Rule dementia... as an undead. It seemed she had gained far more from this procedure than I expected her to.

I watched as the three new bodies of Lucine turned to face the withered, undead Lucine—now their Incarnation—and for some reason, the entire chamber fell into an eerie, suffocating silence. They stood frozen in place, staring at their original body, now their incarnation.

Soon, they broke their standoff, and just as I was about to let out a breath of relief, they moved—swiftly landing around me and circling me in perfect unison. The three Lucine spoke at once, their voices overlapping perfectly, "Wyatt, you were right. You really did cure my Time-Rule dementia."

Ignoring their spooky speech, I activated my Soul Pupils to verify that everything had gone as planned—only to discover that all four of Lucine's bodies brimmed with immense temporal energy. The three new bodies of Lucine had no sign of time-rule dementia, while the withered-old body did.

I noticed immediately that this undead incarnation was unlike any other I had ever seen. All of its soul pathways and energies were completely still—frozen, as if time in it or in contact with it would become still. There wasn't a flicker of change anywhere in its entire body. I also realized it wasn't moving on its own; every step it took was guided by the intent of Lucine's other bodies.

Still, the results were as I expected and more.

I couldn't help but feel genuinely impressed by what she had accomplished. It made me feel that swearing an oath to steady her nerves—to take such an active role in the entire treatment—had been completely worth it.

"Don't tell me the obvious. Tell me how you're feeling—how well did the procedure go," I eagerly said, urging all four of Lucine to share every detail of their treatment, especially anything they had obtained through it. They, too, appeared more than eager to share their experience with me.

But before they could begin, all four of Lucine's bodies suddenly converged, merging into a single form. I almost shouted in shock. After everything we had done to free her from Time-Rule dementia, she had just reabsorbed the incarnation that was now suffering from the punishment of breaking time taboo in her stead.

Sensing my rising panic, Lucine offered a gentle smile. "Relax, I know what I'm doing," she said softly. "As I told you earlier, your treatment truly cured my Time-Rule dementia. My undead incarnation can suppress the remnants of it using the fourth Time-Rule meaning I pushed to ultimate comprehension—Eternal Stillness. As the name implies, it represents the point where time is still, losing all its meaning."

Hearing the words Eternal Stillness, my mind instantly jumped to the Big Freeze theory from Earth—where the universe ends not in an explosion, but in a slow collapse of thermal dynamism. In that scenario, entropy reaches its maximum, energy becomes evenly distributed, and all physical processes gradually cease as the universe approaches absolute zero. It's the ultimate stillness, the point where time itself loses meaning.

Imagining the implications and possibilities of Lucine's Fourth Time Rule meaning my mind when blank. No wonder she dared to take her undead incarnation carrying the time-rule dementia back into her. In the big freeze, time technically still exists, but its passage becomes effectively meaningless. If time itself was meaningless, what use was the punishment for breaking time taboo, it too was meaningless.

Wait a minute—if her undead incarnation was the embodiment of the Eternal Stillness Time-Rule meaning, then everything I had noticed suddenly made sense. Of course its body showed no change; of course every pathway and stream of energy was frozen solid. No wonder it needed help just to move.

In its current state, it was essentially a temporal meat shield, a vessel built to absorb the punishment for breaking time taboos. But even that had limits. If Lucine pushed it too far, her undead incarnation would be erased into nothingness like any other undead being.

Still, the fact remained: with this incarnation, Lucine could break certain time taboos without having to fear the consequences—at least to a considerable extent.

"You did well," I said, genuinely impressed. Lucine hadn't just completed her assignment—she had gone above and beyond, tackling the extra credit on her own. The emergence of Lucine Past, Present, and Future fell neatly within my calculations. But the birth of Lucine End—that, I had never anticipated.

Inside the time-expansion chamber, Lucine had followed my treatment plan thoroughly, but she had also gone far beyond it. Using the excess time surrounding her—something she had in overwhelming abundance in there—she not only fused her three Time-Rule meanings and condensed her Time-Rule River, but, together with her incarnation, she comprehended a fourth Time-Rule meaning... and pushed it all the way to ultimate comprehension.

While Lucine focused on channeling her first three Time-Rule meanings into refining the three Viltronian vine root bodies, her incarnation used their newly comprehended fourth meaning to refine Lucine's original body—preparing it to take over once Lucine shifted into her new vessels.

When Lucine transferred her divinity into the three refined bodies and transformed them into Lucine Past, Present, and Future, her incarnation simultaneously completed the refinement of the original body, reforging its divinity through their fourth Time-Rule meaning, Eternal Stillness.

From that process, Lucine End was born—Lucine's undead incarnation, the embodiment of the Eternal Stillness meaning of time rule. Since she had already forged her Time-Rule stream, she could now fuse her three bodies—and even her incarnation—back into herself with effortless ease.

Chapter 2552: Ungrateful Lucine

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

The more I looked at Lucine standing before me, the more satisfied I felt. How could I not be? She had achieved everything I expected of her and far more. It felt like assigning ordinary homework and receiving a masterpiece in return. No wonder teachers love their overachieving students. Watching them grow must offer a satisfaction that helps soften the sting of their meager wages. Still, I'm probably overthinking it—any teacher would choose the fair pay they rightfully deserve.

"What are you doing?" I asked Lucine rhetorically when I caught her staring at me blankly. Clearly, she was once again using her future-finding time-rule meaning on me. I

guess she had grown addicted to it. And who wouldn't be? It gave her a taste of omniscience—so much so that even calling it godlike wouldn't be an exaggeration.

"Nothing. Now that I've formed my time-rule stream, I wanted to see if the Future Finding meaning would work on you. But no luck. It seems you're a bigger variable than I expected," Lucine said, her voice edged with the same irritation and displeasure you'd see in someone trying to quit cigarettes. Being around me had cut off her reliance on Future Finding time-rule meaning for a while now, and she was starting to feel the withdrawals.

I shook my head in disappointment, expecting more from her having risen to the ranks of top strongest in the Card World. Just then, Lucine grasped my right wrist. I didn't even realize it before she grasped it. Thanks to the Viltronian physique, she now had the physical prowess that would contend with Field Marshal Lorn, who was a Martial Sage. With that, Lucine's only weakness was also taken care of.

Before I could ask what she was doing, a coldness spread through my body from her touch—only to vanish a moment later as if it had never transpired. I immediately realized that Lucine had used her fourth time-rule meaning, Eternal Stillness, on me. But it failed to break through my time-rule resistance. And in that instant, I finally understood why she had been trying to use her Future Finding meaning on me earlier. With her newfound strength, she wanted to measure herself against me.

Of all things, she had chosen to test me with her time-rule mastery. I couldn't really blame her; time-rule was her strongest field. Unfortunately for her, I also happened to have the strongest defense against it. So she quickly reached the conclusion that even with her new upgrades and prowess, she still wasn't a match for me and hurriedly let go of my arm.

"Aren't you being a bit ungrateful?" I asked Lucine, holding her gaze and looking straight into her frightened, guilt-ridden eyes. "I went through all that trouble to cure your time-rule dementia, even after you called me a liar, a fraud, insane—and even accused me of trying to assassinate you. And now that you're cured, the first thing you do is attack me? As expected of you Morningstar University types. Not only are you heartless, you don't even have the decency to show a shred of honor."

Lucine looked away, avoiding my gaze, and tried to defend her university with a weak protest. "Wyatt, you're going too far. I wasn't being ungrateful—I only wanted to test my strength, and you're the only one here strong enough for that. Besides, since you're the one who suggested and led the procedure, aren't you responsible for helping me evaluate and adapt to my new prowess?"

"You remembered that? I thought you'd forgotten. Otherwise, you wouldn't have attacked me without warning and then tried to downplay it and defend your actions by claiming you were just testing your new prowess. You Morningstar University people set a new-record for ungratefulness and shamelessness every single day—just when I start

to think I've seen it all," I snapped back at Lucine, irritated by her attempt to act clever with me.

Thankfully, as an academician, Lucine's first instinct wasn't to test her strength with her fists but to rely on her time-rule comprehension. If she hadn't been cautious and had gone with the old-school method of testing one's strength, my cover would have been blown instantly.

As a hybrid Celestial–Viltronian–World Calamity Tree, my physique was extremely strong for a card master, but with all my SSS-rank curses being used to nourish Slay's egg, my physical strength was nowhere near that of a devil-realm Viltronian. It would have been an instant defeat.

I can't stress enough how overwhelming a Viltronian physique was—especially in the devil realm, even though Lucine's still technically at the peak of the chivalry class. That alone would allow Lucine to fight opponents a whole class above her.

"I'm being ungrateful?" Lucine snapped, glaring at me before firing back, "If I were ungrateful, would I have ordered my staff to return the time vestige to our present and treat you with the utmost respect, no matter what happened to me—even before I entered the time-expansion chamber? That was before you even swore your oath in the presence of the world's will. Tell me, if I intended to be ungrateful, why would I make those arrangements?"

"Wyatt, tell me."

Lucine wasn't lying. She really had instructed her staff exactly as she claimed, long before I swore the oath to calm her nerves. In fact, that sincere gesture was one of the things that convinced me to take the oath in the first place. I still wasn't sure whether she'd done it out of fear of the strength I'd shown her or because she genuinely trusted me—but regardless of her motives, she had done it.

"Anyone can claim anything now," I shot back, even though I knew perfectly well that none of her actions came from ungratefulness. I accused her anyway, deliberately trying to rile her up and coax her into proving how thankful she truly was—not just for curing her time-rule dementia, but also for helping her grow stronger.

"If you were truly grateful," I added with a pointed look, "you'd hand over a few of the time-rule runes Morningstar University has been secretly nurturing in here."

Chapter 2553: Lucine's Gratitude

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

One of my long-standing principles was to never take on a job without getting paid. The last time I broke that promise to myself was when I exterminated that Viltronian bastard and his turncoat army of Human–Viltronian hybrids. I faced more than half the humanity to achieve it, to do my part for the right thing—and in the end, all it earned me was a traitorous death.

Yes, my original reason for curing Lucine's time-rule dementia was to protect my reputation and show Lucine I wasn't a fraud. Now that I had accomplished that, it was time for me to be compensated. I knew that if I handed Lucine a bill, she would pay it without the slightest hesitation. But being so direct wouldn't get me the form of payment I actually wanted. So instead, I gave her the perfect reason to reward me with exactly what I had in mind.

Back when Hive AI scanned the entire time vestige with its primordial soul pupils for my plan to build an artificial one of my own, it discovered a hidden section—a vault designed specifically for artificial ego gems. These gems held countless broken and intact runes from various rule systems, including time-rule. I would be lying if I said I wasn't tempted at first, but after learning that my time-rule resistance came at the price of being unable to comprehend time-rule myself, that temptation had grown into outright greed. Those time-rule runes became the perfect way to compensate for my lack of comprehension of time-rule.

Yes, activating time-rule runes would require time-rule power, and I had none, since I hadn't begun my comprehension of time-rule. But I possessed something far better—primordial energy. Using primordial energy openly would be risky, of course, but that was a problem I could solve later.

The tricky part was getting my hands on quality time-rule runes. Outside of extremely rare and unpredictable circumstances, Morningstar University was practically the only source for them in the entire card world. I could technically buy them through the Devil Merchant Code, but time-rule runes were scarce there, and even if I did manage to find one, the price would be astronomical—unless it came from a common time-rule meaning, which was practically useless to me.

Naturally, my attention kept drifting back to Morningstar University's vault full of artificial ego gems.

"What? How did you know about them?" Lucine gasped, genuinely shocked. Even among the core members of the university aware of the second Morningstar campus hidden inside the time vestige, almost none knew about the vault—let alone the trove of time-rule runes stored within it.

Only a tiny handful of people, mostly the members of the time-vestige council, knew of its existence. It was their ancestral wealth, accumulated over generations and reserved exclusively for Morningstar University's most exceptional researcher and guardian-card apprentices.

They were a university, not a militia, so this was the only reliable way for them to maintain the number of guardians needed to protect Morningstar University. After all, even with access to the time vestige, they couldn't guarantee that every talented student would comprehend the time-rule to a satisfactory level.

Henricks was the perfect example. His comprehension of space-rule meanings was unmatched across the five regions, yet when it came to the time-rule, he moved at a snail's pace. For disciples like him, Morningstar University had prepared these runes.

And it wasn't just time-rule runes—there were runes for every rule. Not all card apprentices were as fortunate as I was. Even if they had the talent, they didn't have the time to master every rule. So they would abandon certain rules and rely on these runes to compensate whenever necessary.

"Like I told you earlier, even if you hadn't revealed anything to me, I would've deduced it sooner or later," I said, letting a smug, knowing look settle on my face. I enjoyed the shock on Lucine's features—right before it twisted into conflicted regret. She realized she had walked straight into my trap, and she couldn't help staring at me because of it.

"Wyatt, ask for something else," Lucine pleaded, her expression tightening painfully. "Those runes are the legacy of the university's brave and generous teachers and students—the ones who were willing to strip their runes and entrust them to the university before their deaths. They're not something we can trade. They can't be given to an outsider."

Before I could even respond, she shifted the blame to me with a frustrated groan.

"It's never easy with you. You always find new ways to push my buttons. Wyatt... I really am indebted to you for what you've done for me. But the price you're asking for is too much."

"Why are you throwing around so many big, fancy words? Legacy, brave, gracious—just say you don't want to pay me if you don't want to. I knew you Morningstar University people were all the same and shouldn't be trusted. Just drop me off in our present and we will part our ways amicably," I said, exaggerating my distaste at Lucine—the same Lucine who had just asked if she was being ungrateful.

"Wyatt, I'm not going to argue with you about this," Lucine replied firmly. "Those teachers and students entrusted their runes to us for the sake of the university. Treating them as a commodity would be an insult to their intentions and their love for

Morningstar. It would be akin to us designating their memory. Now that would be truly ungrateful on my part. Yes, I'm indebted to you but I'm indebted to them as well."

Her eyes lost the earlier guilt, replaced with resolute indifference. Just as I wondered if I had pushed her a bit too hard, she added—this time with a touch of reluctance,

"However... if you truly want those runes, I can give them to you—if you officially join Morningstar University. Don't misunderstand. We can't trade them or give them to outsiders. But if you're one of us, there's nothing stopping me from giving you a few and then some to show my gratitude."

Chapter 2554: Overreaching Lucine

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

'You bitch,' I cursed inwardly as Lucine calmly said she would "compensate" me with time-rule runes—if I enrolled in Morningstar University. And here I was, thinking I might have been too harsh on her earlier.

Feeling the heat of my glare, Lucine faltered before adding, "It's your choice. It's not like I'm forcing you... but that's the only way I'm allowed to give you the rune."

"No, no—how could I ever doubt the great Saint Lucine Morgenstern?" I scoffed, shooting her a look of pure disdain. "Clearly, it's my fault for not knowing the sacred procedures."

This woman still hadn't given up on trying to pull me into her university. I thought showing her my capabilities would humble her. Instead, it only made her hungrier for me.

"Wyatt, I know it would be beneath someone of your caliber to attend the university as a student. That's why—if you're willing—you can join as a professor. With your ability, you could pass the Academician exams with ease and apply for tenure," Lucine said, already mapping out my entire academic career at Morningstar University. Clearly, she had put real thought into this. I suppose billions of years spent in a time chamber, refining three new bodies and grasping the time-rule, left her with plenty of time to plan my future too.

Sensing the storm gathering behind my silence after listening to her words, Lucine quickly cut in before I could speak. "Wyatt, don't even think about threatening me with

the threat of leaking the secret of the time vestige to others. If you do that, the Southern Princess will never get a seat on the council—because there won't be a council left for her to join."

I watched her with amusement—she really had come prepared. But I had no intention of blackmailing her for the runes. I'm not a criminal, and frankly, I have more than enough leverage to make Morningstar University beg me to accept their time runes. Cutting off their supply of silver milk powder or shutting down VR-Universe access to the Morningstar district were just a couple of options that came to mind.

Lucine had no idea she was poking the wrong card apprentice.

Unfortunately for her, time was on her side. I didn't have the luxury to play drawn-out games just to secure a few runes. And besides—this was something I could resolve with a simple, honest conversation with her. No need to bring out the big guns for something so small.

"Lucine, that's enough," I said, calm but firm. "I can't join Morningstar University, and you know exactly why. I'm already spoken for—I'm set to become the City Lord of Southern Academic City. And we're preparing for the upcoming Academician Bowl, which you understand better than anyone."

I exhaled as my patience thinned but still intact.

"So stop messing around and just take me to the vault. I'll pick a few time-rule runes and craft them into rune spirits before we return to our present."

"What? Who in their right mind would let a teenager become the City Lord of an Academic City? That's like asking the students to teach the class. I don't believe it," Lucine blurted out, stunned.

She tried to figure out which lunatic thought putting me in charge of the Southern Academic City was a brilliant idea. It wasn't that she doubted my ability—just my age. I might be exceptionally smart, but did I really have the experience or judgment to manage an entire city, let alone an academic one? In her mind, someone in the Southern Royal Family had clearly lost it. Otherwise, there wasn't a sane explanation for their decision.

"Believe it or don't, that doesn't change anything. Now stop giving me a hard time and let's get to the vault," I said, rubbing my hands together, already imagining what the time-rule runes stored inside could do.

"Yes, you're right, Wyatt. It doesn't change anything. But since you can't enroll in our university, I'm sorry to say this—you really have no fate with our time rules. You might as well give up," Lucine said. She agreed with my words, yet still refused to pay me with time-rule runes.

I shot her a frown, only to realize she was pretending. After everything she'd said—loyalty, legacy, bravery—if she backed out now, wouldn't that be humiliating for both her and Morningstar University?

I let out a long sigh and said, "Now who's being difficult? You just had to test your luck. And look what you've done—you've put both yourself and Morningstar University in a spot where you either choose to be ungrateful or embarrass yourselves. This is on you. So tell me—will you be ungrateful, or will you bring shame on yourself?"

Lucine could have simply handed over a couple of time-rule runes, but she insisted on pushing her luck. At this point, refusing to give me what I asked for as compensation for curing her would make her look ungrateful, because those runes were actually wartime commodities—despite her insisting they were "legacy." But if she gave them to me now, she'd embarrass herself and the university for treating them like trade goods right after claiming the opposite. No matter what she chose, she'd end up with her own foot in her mouth.

"Aren't you enjoying this a little too much? Aren't you even worried?" Lucine asked, trying to threaten me with the idea that she might actually choose to be seen as ungrateful just to save her university's face by refusing to acknowledge anything. Knowing how much she loved Morningstar University, it wasn't an empty threat—she might really do it.

"Fine. I'll help you out this once," I said, giving my head a slow shake, clearly enjoying the situation far more than I should. But honestly, she brought this on herself by trying to act clever without knowing the full story. If she had known who I truly was, she would've known better than to mess with me.

Chapter 2555: Key Bearers

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

"How can you help me with this?" Lucine asked, frowning. A moment later, her eyes lit up as she leaned forward hopefully. "Are you going to change what you want as compensation for curing my time-rule dementia and helping me grow my strength?"

"Yes," I said. "I'll change it—if you agree to announce my appointment as City Lord of the Southern Academic City to all five regions, and give me the time-rule runes I choose as diplomatic gifts."

I laid out my condition and her solution at the same time. If she did what I asked, no one would see her as ungrateful, and her university wouldn't suffer the embarrassment she had nearly dragged it into.

And as a bonus, I would accomplish every reason I came to Morningstar University in the first place. I had planned to make the announcement by using Morningstar University as a stepping stone, but now that I knew about the top ten universities' inheritances, I couldn't afford to appear too aggressive. The smarter move was to have Lucine make the announcement for me and present me with a couple—or even several—time-rule runes as diplomatic gifts. Once the other top ten universities saw how close I'd grown to Morningstar University, they would likely rush to approach me on their own. I wouldn't even need to seek them out. That way, I can negotiate with them on my terms.

If Lucine and Morningstar University chose to work with me, both sides would profit immensely. After all, they only stood to gain by being on my good side. Nothing brings former rivals together faster than shared benefit and mutual growth.

"Diplomatic gifts?" Lucine repeated, confused, trying to figure out how her dilemma had anything to do with diplomacy.

"I'm your guest, aren't I? And as luck would have it, I'm also the soon-to-be City Lord of the Southern Academic City. In a way, my visit can be treated as a diplomatic meeting between Morningstar University and the Southern Academic City. Call a press conference, make a big show of our friendship and alliance, we make our announcements, and you hand me a few time-rule runes as diplomatic gifts. That is—if you don't consider using the runes as diplomatic gifts as disgracing the memories of your loyal and brave teachers and students," I said, laying out the plan and couldn't help teasing Lucine a little.

Lucine quickly cut in, "I get it now. But since the time-rule runes will be diplomatic gifts, we will choose them for you—"

"You're pushing it again," I warned, stopping her mid-sentence, wondering if she had some kind of itch that made it impossible for her to quit while she was ahead.

"I was kidding," Lucine said, tossing her hands in the air. "When it comes to things like this, your mind works wonders. Are you sure you don't want to become a lawyer?"

"For what? So you people can make a fortune while paying me in scraps?" I shot back, rolling my eyes. Since I dared to unravel and master the mysteries of the universe, the rules of man were hardly a challenge.

"Great, then let's head to the vault. I can't wait to get my hands on those babies," I said, urging her forward as an unconscious grin stretched across my face. How could I not

smile? Knowing that soon I'd command time itself—threads of it dancing at my fingertips, bending to my will—was enough to make anyone grin.

"I can take you to the vault, but I can't open it right now. Only two of the three key bearers are currently inside the time vestige, including me. And to unlock the vault, we need all three keys—the last one is with the remaining key bearer in our present," Lucine explained, dousing my excitement.

"Don't look at me like that. We have a rule that no more than two key bearers can travel through the time vestige at once. It's to protect the runes in the vault. Since very few people even know it exists, if the key bearers ever abused their authority, we might not find out until it was too late. To stay extra safe, we usually send only one key bearer at a time. But this situation is unexpected. Don't worry—you won't be missing out. You can still pick your runes once we return to our present."

Lucine went on to explain the entire procedure required to open the vault. It was an exhausting process, and the more she talked, the more deeper my excitement slumbered. Still, considering the value and danger of the time-rule runes, I understood why such strict measures were necessary. Once someone stole them, it would already be too late for regrets.

"Fine. Take me to a chamber where I can comprehend space rules. I don't want to waste any more of my precious time on this," I said, letting my disappointment show. Only I knew how torturous the wait would be—knowing those time-rule runes were so close yet still out of reach.

"Wait, what's the rush? I just came out of a long seclusion. Keep me company," Lucine called out as I started to leave the time-expansion chamber, stopping me in my tracks. For a moment, I wondered if I'd misheard her. But then, keeping my expression firm, I said, "Just spit it out. What do you want? Beating around the bush will only irritate me further."

"Can you share the recipe you used to fertilize the Virgin Clay of Giya (red)?" Lucine finally dropped the act and asked directly.

"Didn't I already give you the list? Can't you figure it out yourself?" I said, unwilling to hand over the recipe for free. Even if she knew the ingredients I used, she had no idea about the ratios. And trying to work those out through trial and error would take them centuries—even with the time expansion inside the Time Vestige.

At this pace, Lucine will never get an upper hand on me.

Chapter 2556: Stealing? No, Its Archeology

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

"..." Lucine stared at me, unsure how to respond. She didn't want to beg me for the recipe, nor did she dare ask me to name my price to trade it, because she knew exactly what I would demand—the university's precious time-rule runes. It wasn't that she thought my price was too high or the exchange unfair, but those runes were limited, and she couldn't bring herself to part with even one.

Still, the fertilizer recipe for the virgin Clay of Giga was extremely important to her and to the university.

One thing had to be understood: during her treatment in the time-expansion chamber, the entire chamber had been flooded with raw time-rule power. Anything that would come in contact with raw time-rule power would be reduced to dust. She had spent what amounted to countless years surrounded by that raw time-rule power, yet had emerged with three newly refined bodies, without even a scratch to show for it.

That was only possible because she had been buried inside the pot filled with the fertilized virgin clay of Giga. It ensured that the rampant raw temporal energy couldn't reach them or interfere with the procedure.

She had discovered this during her treatment and was genuinely amazed by my ingenuity—how I had come up with a way to tame raw temporal forces inside the time expansion chamber due to the use of raw time-rule energy. She tried to figure out how I accomplished it, studying the list of ingredients I used and the fertilized virgin clay of giga she had been buried in.

But she couldn't unravel the secret. All she managed to discover was that when raw or refined temporal forces acted on the fertilized virgin clay of giga, it triggered a unique reaction: the clay converted that temporal power into nourishment for itself, indirectly benefiting anyone buried within it. The array carved onto the pots amplified this effect, producing enough nourishment such that those inside wouldn't exhaust the nourishment meant for the clay and unknowingly kill the clay, but instead would absorb the overflowing energy.

Because of this, the cycle could continue indefinitely—without any external interference—for years, centuries, millennia, or even billions of years.

This reaction between the time-rule power and the fertilized virgin clay of giga made it impossible for her to extract any trace of the original fertilizer I had used. Without that original sample and the little information she knew, she had no way to begin analyzing the ratios of the ingredients that went into creating it.

Lucine wanted the recipe because, with it, she could build an entire time-expansion chamber out of fertilized virgin Clay of Giga—one that could run directly on raw time-rule power while keeping the interior safe for experimentation from the raw temporal force that would be introduced in the chamber's atmosphere for using raw time-rule power to power the time expansion array instead of refined time-rule power.

Such a chamber would eliminate the need to use refined time-rule energy to power the time expansion array entirely. Replacing their current chambers with ones made from fertilized clay would save the university a massive amount of refined time-rule power, freeing it for other purposes.

And so, once again, Lucine found herself trapped in a dilemma because of me—a fact that visibly irritated her. If she could have gotten away with it, she probably would've beaten me up just to vent the sheer frustration she felt every time she had to discuss or negotiate with me.

"If you have nothing else to add, let's head to the space-rule comprehension chamber. I want to grasp a couple or more space-time rule meanings and push them to ultimate mastery before we return to our present," I said. Lucine didn't respond, clearly unwilling—or unprepared—to pay the price I demanded for the fertilizer recipe. She just needed time. Eventually, she would come around; once her potential gains outweighed her losses, she always did.

We both enjoyed a good bargain, but only one of us held the leverage this time. The only things she had that interested me were the time-rule runes, the time vestige, and the labyrinth of Myriad Pasts. Without those, I wouldn't have entertained this conversation at all. I would have already gone into seclusion to study space-rule comprehension. After witnessing Field Marshal Lorn's pseudo-celestial space-rule domain in action, I wanted one of my own. Ranking space-rule second on the list of rules I wanted to comprehend.

"Wyatt, how about this—you don't have to give me the recipe, just help me build a time-expansion chamber using the fertilized virgin Clay of Giga (red) in the time vestige? What do you say?" Lucine proposed. If she couldn't afford the recipe, then spending a smaller price to have me construct the chamber for her was the next best option. She had already seen what I was capable of; she knew I could lay a time-expansion array without issue. Building a few chambers out of clay was well within my skill set.

More importantly, once I started working on the structure, it would give her the perfect opportunity to obtain a sample of the original fertilizer used on the virgin Clay of Giga (red). She wouldn't admit it out loud, but that was her real aim. It was to be expected from someone who had raided countless variant pasts, stolen their unique inventions and discoveries, then reintroduced them in our present as their inventions and discoveries while shamelessly calling it archaeology, lying to their consciousness.

"As long as I'm compensated for my services, I don't mind helping you," I said, fully aware of what Lucine was plotting. "One time-rule rune of your choice per chamber—same dimensions as the one you're using now."

"What? Why don't you just take me hostage and rob our rune vault instead?" Lucine snapped, practically choking on my rates. What she failed to grasp was that I held a complete monopoly in this field. The rates for my services were mine—and mine alone—to decide.

Chapter 2557: Boundless Space Chambers

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

"Wyatt, just because you have a mouth doesn't mean you can spout nonsense. You need to take responsibility for what you say. How can you justify such a ridiculous price for building a time-expansion chamber?" Lucine demanded, unable to wrap her head around my rates. She genuinely felt I was making things difficult for her out of sheer habit.

"I don't have to justify anything to you. If you think my prices are too high, go find someone else to build your time-expansion chambers," I replied, shaking my head casually, knowing not to fight a desperate bull.

"Y-you're taking advantage of my situation," Lucine complained. She understood the truth—my monopoly and her desperation meant I had the power to set whatever rates I pleased. Still, she couldn't resist trying to appeal to my sense of morality in hopes of coaxing me into something more reasonable. If that sort of moral appeal actually worked on me, I would've already wiped out the Human-Viltronian hybrids back on Earth and let them atone for their sins like in persons living off of the taxpayers' money.

"I'm simply following Morningstar University's example," I said, referring to their near-monopoly on time cards across the five regions.

Seeing Lucine fall into a pensive silence, finally realizing she wouldn't get the fertilizer recipe without giving up a few time-rule runes, I couldn't resist teasing her, remarking, "It sucks being on the other end of the stick, doesn't it?"

Lucine stared at me with a frustrated look before finally asking, "How much for the recipe? Considering our short but close history, I hope you'll give me a discount."

In the end, she bowed her head—not for her own sake, but for Morningstar University. It showed just how far she was willing to go for them, even if it meant swallowing her pride in front of me.

I shook my head. Once Lucine got serious, the fun was over, so I decided not to drag things out. "How about this—I have other deals and projects I want to discuss with Morningstar University. If we manage to reach an agreement, I'll include the fertilizer recipe as part of the cooperation."

"What are they? You can discuss them with me. I have the authority to agree on the university's behalf. Tell me—so long as it's nothing excessive, I'm sure we can work something out," Lucine said quickly, eager to strike while the iron was hot. She feared I might change my mind later over some trivial annoyance, so she wanted everything settled now. As long as time-rule runes weren't involved, she would bend over backward to meet my demands. That was how important the fertilizer recipe was to Morningstar University.

"No, I can't discuss it with you. Because of your time-rule dementia, you've been out of the social loop in the five regions for far too long. You have no idea who I really am or what I intend to discuss. There's no rush—we can talk about it slowly once we're back in our present," I said, rejecting her request with a calm explanation.

Besides, this way she would finally understand how I felt having to wait until we returned to our present before I could choose the time-rule runes she had promised me.

"There you go again, trying to act mysterious. How am I supposed to know who you truly are and what you want to discuss if you won't tell me?" Lucine shot back, clearly dissatisfied. She thought I was just dodging the conversation to avoid discussing the deals and terms with her. This made a part of her even wonder whether I was underestimating her because of our history—where she had often relied on me or ended up losing arguments to me. Not to mention I had proven that I was stronger and smarter than her by defeating Slay and curing her time-rule dementia.

Otherwise, why wouldn't I simply explain everything now? To her, it felt like I was just using her lack of knowledge about me and the current state of the five regions as an excuse to underestimate her. She hated this feeling, but she didn't know enough to argue back.

"Lucine, don't overthink it. I'm not trying to act mysterious or undermine you. It's just that I hate bragging about myself," I said, rubbing my nose with a smug look, fully aware that keeping her in the dark was getting under her skin.

"Not brag? You sound pretty narcissistic to me," Lucine muttered, rolling her eyes. She wondered if she really was reading too much into things. Not everything had to be about her, after all. She had to stop taking things personally.

But my talent and age were overwhelming even for the best among us, and Lucine was no exception. Given the age difference between us, this bothered her more than she wanted to admit.

"You're just jealous," I said, pretending to be disappointed at being called a narcissist.

"Young man, stop acting innocent. I've never seen anyone with thicker skin than you," Lucine said, giving me a firm slap on the back before heading out of the chamber. She stored the four pots in her new storage card as she walked. Even though the procedure was over, she believed the pots still held significant research value—especially if I refused to hand over the fertilizer recipe and our negotiations fell through.

"Come on, I'll take you to the boundless space chambers."

"Did you already comprehend time-rule power?" Lucine suddenly asked, finding it strange that I wanted time-rule runes yet planned to study space-rule meaning inside the time vestige. Most card apprentices would fight tooth and nail for the chance to comprehend time-rule here, yet I was choosing something entirely different.

"No, I don't plan on comprehending the time rule for the foreseeable future," I answered honestly, without offering any further explanation.

Chapter 2558: Teasing Lucine

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

"Why is that?" Lucine asked, genuinely puzzled at why anyone would choose not to comprehend the time-rule in the very place built for it.

"Just because you can, doesn't mean you have to," I replied, trying to sound cryptic for once. It was the only kind of answer that made sense without revealing the truth—something I couldn't afford to do. Any other answer would only lead to more questions.

"And you say you don't like to brag," Lucine muttered, only half listening to my supposed wisdom as she walked ahead with a confident sway, her curvy hips shifting left and right.

I couldn't help the faint smile tugging at my lips as my gaze followed that rhythm. The moment Lucine's intent sensed my intense gaze, she stiffened. Her playful stride snapped into a perfectly measured, elegant walk. Not daring to look back.

Arriving at the boundless space chamber, Lucine gestured toward it with a deliberately neutral expression. "If you need anything, ask the staff on duty. Someone will call you when we reach our present. All the best."

She kept her eyes averted the entire time. Then, without a backward glance, she turned and walked away. Clearly, my earlier gaze had crossed a line with her. So much so, she treated me like an acquaintance losing her original enthusiasm. I felt she was overreacting. Admiring her beauty didn't mean my thoughts were impure.

Well, she had a very conservative and traditional worldview about these things. In this time and age, who else cared about seeming ungrateful, or felt even a flicker of embarrassment over a little hypocrisy? No one—except her. And despite the fact that no one but the two of us knew what had happened, it still bothered her enough that she was willing to part with her precious time-rule runes.

"One moment," I called out just as I stepped into the boundless space chamber.

"What is it?" she asked—appearing before me in a flash. Clearly, she hadn't actually left; she'd been lingering nearby, still undecided about how she felt or how she wanted to act around me.

When she caught the subtle grin on my face, realization dawned. Her cheeks warmed, her eyes narrowed, knowing I was teasing her.

"You're a beautiful grandma. Own it," I said simply, then closed the door of the chamber before she could react, fully aware this would only make Lucine act colder toward me later. Otherwise, teasing her wouldn't be nearly as fun.

Shaking my head, I shifted my attention to the boundless space chamber. As the name suggested, it had boundless space within it. Not literally boundless, but under the influence of the boundless space array, the tiny space of the chamber had stretched so in all directions, enough to house a few cities in it. The stretching of space was the working principle behind the boundless space array.

It was essentially their testing ground for volatile experiments—the boundless space within its walls capable of containing almost anything without putting pressure on the time vestige itself. Of course, it came with one small side effect: time moved slightly faster here compared to the rest of the vestige.

But the chamber's true value lay in the dense concentration of spatial forces produced by the boundless space array etched into every surface. That made it an ideal place to comprehend the space-rule. With my talent, the boost provided here was of no use to me, but ignoring a free opportunity like this would be nothing short of foolishness in the eyes of the other card apprentices. To avoid scrutiny, I choose to act normal.

Being too eye-catching had never stopped me before. But Lucine was different. She knew I was a time variable—something the timeline had absorbed instead of rejecting or trying to erase. I was certain she would use her parallel present meaning of time rule to observe various iterations of young Wyatt across multiple presents of the card world, trying to piece together what a Hybrid Celestial truly was and why Slay believed I was one.

I didn't know how the younger Wyatt fared in those branches of time, but I knew Lucine would not find the answers she'd been searching for in them. But now she knew far too much to get lucky. I decided not to tempt my fate, I might end up giving her leverage over me.

After confirming that Hive AI had fully copied the boundless space array through my Primordial Soul Pupils, I settled into position and began my comprehension of the space-rule. Drawing on resonance through my dual presence across both planes and the power of my celestial origins, I allowed myself to dissolve—becoming one with the physical plane and the spiritual plane simultaneously. From there, I aligned with the space-rule stream of the card world and followed its current, using it as a guide until I finally connected with the space-rule source itself.

What I had just achieved wasn't something ordinary people could even dream of. Even with my resonance and dual-presence abilities, becoming one with both planes should have been impossible. Mortals simply weren't built to withstand that kind of strain. Even demigods and devils couldn't accomplish it with just these two abilities; they would need to have reached the ruler class before their bodies and souls could endure the pressure of merging with both the spiritual and physical planes at once.

The reason I could achieve, as a mere card master, what even demigods and devils could not was simple: I wasn't just any card apprentice—I was a Hybrid Celestial. It was the celestial half of me that made the impossible possible. It allowed me not only to merge with both planes simultaneously, but also to reach the space-rule source itself—the very place where true celestials like the Card Celestial, Dalie, and others comprehended their space rules.

Chapter 2559: Space Rule Source

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

Have you ever woken to find yourself suspended in pitch-black darkness wondering:

"Where am I?"

"What is this place?"

"Why is it so dark?"

"Am I enclosed inside something?"

If yes, then congratulations—you've realized the existence of space and begun your first steps into comprehending the space-rule.

How do I know? I know because that was exactly how my comprehension began. After following the card world's space-rule stream to its source, I suddenly found myself adrift in absolute darkness. With no idea where I was—only the unsettling certainty that I was somewhere. And in that instant when I recognized I was somewhere—acknowledged it—that recognition alone meant I had already begun my comprehension of space-rule.

[You have begun comprehension of the space-rule.]

When that moment of confusion cleared, I caught the realization that I had reached the space-rule source. The source of all space rules across the myriad realms.

With each tentative movement in that pitch-black emptiness, I felt myself learning—slowly, instinctively. Every gesture, every shift of intention seemed to fill the void with a faint trace of my own presence, as though I were turning nothing into something and something back into nothing. Each action—no matter how small—expanded my understanding of the space-rule.

It wasn't just movement. My thoughts had weight here. Every attempt to define the emptiness around me, to understand myself within it, to grasp how we interacted—each insight sharpened my comprehension at an astonishing speed. It was almost too easy.

[Your comprehension of the space-rule has advanced to Basic Mastery.]

That alone was enough to trigger my caution. Space-rule wasn't as rare as time-rule among card apprentices, but it was still uncommon. If comprehension truly came this easily, wouldn't more card apprentices master it? That was why I believed this simplicity in my comprehension of space-rule was because of my affinity for space itself.

Once I had defined the emptiness, myself, and the relationship between us, I pushed deeper—attempting to define us and our interaction from different ways I was inspired to in that emptiness.

The more I understood the space rule with respect to me and vice versa, the stronger my existence anchored within the space rule. It allowed me to impose orientation onto the void itself, up, down, right, left, north, south. I tried to redefine the emptiness and

redefine myself, with every possible inspiration that came to me within that nothingness, growing my understanding.

[Your comprehension of the space-rule has advanced from Basic to Intermediate Mastery.]

Soon, I realized something subtle but unmistakable: with every increase in my understanding of the space-rule, both my own presence and the presence of the space-rule source grew more prominent. Or maybe it wasn't that I and the space-rule source were growing together—maybe I had finally gained the clarity needed to perceive it.

Was that it? I couldn't tell. When I entered the Blood Rule Source, I had already comprehended two blood-rule meanings. My foundation there had been far deeper than what I currently possessed for space-rule. Not to mention, the Blood Source had revealed itself to me from the very beginning, unlike the space-rule gradually and unfolding.

One thing, however, was certain—the deeper my comprehension of space became, the more I realized how much of it still lay hidden. The more I understood, the more I saw how much remained to be uncovered, defined, shaped, and mastered.

[Your comprehension of the space-rule has advanced from Intermediate to Advanced Mastery.]

[Having reached Advanced Mastery of the space-rule, you have arrived at the Space-Rule Bifurcation Point. Please choose one meaning of the space-rule to continue your comprehension.

Caution: Once you choose a meaning of a specific rule, you cannot choose another meaning of space rule until you achieve complete mastery over your current choice.

Note: Due to the card apprentice's Myriad Primordial Souls, the card apprentice may select different rule meanings for each primordial spirit to comprehend. However, it is advised to select the same rule meaning for all primordial spirits until you forge your own Space-Rule Stream, to avoid complications.]

As soon as I reached advanced mastery and arrived at the bifurcation point, the void around me shifted. The pitch-black emptiness blossomed into a vast expanse of stars—an endless, glittering night sky stretching in every direction.

It didn't take long for me to understand what I was seeing. Every "star" wasn't a star at all, but a celestial's Space Stream Spirit, each one immersed in its own comprehension of the space-rule in the space-rule source. Each point of light represented a will, a presence, a spirit of countless celestials' comprehension into the space rule, regardless of where they were in the myriad realms and what they were doing, all pursuing their own meanings of space.

At last, I was seeing the space-rule source in its true form. The realization struck me with a quiet awe. Surrounded by countless luminous space rule stream spirits, I couldn't help but wonder whether I, too, appeared as a star to the other celestials' space rule stream spirits—just as they appeared to me.

Maybe I wasn't bright enough yet to be noticed from the far reaches of the space rule source like these celestials' space rule stream spirits, but my presence was here all the same.

Once I had taken in the full view of the space-rule source, I finally felt the bifurcation point of the space-rule. And it was nothing like the bifurcation points of the rule streams back in the womb of the card world.

Here, every aspect and attribute of the space-rule was illuminated before me—each one a distinct point in the space rule source, representing a different meaning of space. Instead of vague choices with unknown outcomes, these meanings carried a clarity I hadn't experienced before.

Unlike the card world's rule streams, where I had no real sense of what each meaning could do or what path it might lead me down, the space-rule source offered me partial understanding. Enough to sense the essence behind each meaning. Enough to see what each path could become.

Only now did I realize what a tremendous opportunity I'd missed when I comprehended the third blood-rule meaning. Instead of connecting to the Blood Rule Source, I had chosen the safer route—comprehending through the blood-rule stream of the card world.

All because I feared the blood-rule slaves wandering the Blood Source.

That fear had cost me clarity, depth, and the insight I was now experiencing within the space-rule source when choosing a meaning at the bifurcation point. Still, I received some guidance from the blood rule stream spirit of the card world due to my friendship with Bloodette. I don't regret comprehending the blood plague meaning of the blood rule.

Chapter 2560: Space Rule Rune: Limitless Strain

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

Standing among the stars that lit up the empty expanse around me, I carefully examined the space-rule meanings before me. The options here were few. Unlike inside the card world's womb—where I could draw from a vast palette of millions of space-rule meanings within its rule stream—only the meanings I had personally uncovered were available for selection now.

Now I was starting to understand why one couldn't know what a rule meaning truly did while inside the womb of a realm's will when choosing it. It was because we hadn't discovered those meanings ourselves; they were things the realm's will had already comprehended and merely allowed us to access. But in the rule source, there was no such guidance. There, we could only comprehend the meanings we personally uncovered.

Understanding this, I finally realized why choosing rule meanings that resonated with my physique, traits, or cards at the bifurcation point helped me select meanings that were at least somewhat related or compatible with them. It ensured I always ended up choosing a rule meaning I could actually use. That was to say, it had always been my own comprehension of those rule meanings that guided me toward options that worked well with my physique, traits, or cards.

As these coincidences were just explanations waiting to happen. Deducing this, I felt neither excited nor upset.

Choosing a rule meaning within the rule source wasn't a gamble the way it was when choosing a rule meaning in the realm's womb. That was good in one sense—but also a problem for a perfectionist like me. I could no longer just pick one and be satisfied with it until I could choose another.

Knowing myself, with my habit of overthinking everything, I would only keep digging deeper, uncovering more and more space-rule meanings without comprehending any of them, convinced each time that I could find something better.

So, I decided not to be picky. I would focus on comprehending three space-rule meanings to their ultimate mastery, fuse them to form my space-rule stream, and only then explore and comprehend as many other space-rule meanings as I wished. I could afford to do this because my mutated ego gem's synchronization rate was extremely high—on par with that of a newborn celestial, making me hybrid celestial.

I looked through the meanings available to me, and my attention finally settled on the space-rule meaning of elasticity. As its name suggested, this space rule meaning allowed me to comprehend and master the elasticity of space itself.

Without giving myself a chance to rethink my decision or consider any other meanings, I immediately began comprehending the elasticity aspect of the space-rule meaning, knowing it was more than enough to serve as my first space-rule meaning. I reminded myself that there would always be more tempting rule meanings out there, and that I

had to learn to be satisfied with my choice; otherwise, I would never be able to advance my mastery of the space rule beyond the advanced mastery.

[The Card Apprentice has crossed the rule bifurcation point and stepped into the Elasticity meaning of the space rule.]

Note: Please deepen your comprehension of the elasticity meaning of the space rule to access more detailed information.]

Soon, I understood that the elasticity of space was its tendency to return to its original form after being distorted by an external force. With that realization, I attained basic mastery of the elasticity space-rule meaning.

[The Card Apprentice has gained basic mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule.]

Note: Please deepen your comprehension of the Elasticity meaning to the level of ultimate mastery before selecting the second meaning of the space rule.]

I continued comprehending the elasticity space-rule meaning with a single-minded focus, delving into its fundamentals and gaining a clearer understanding of what elasticity meant in the context of space. I no longer saw it merely as a reaction from space when an external force was applied to it, but also as space's own ability to deform—whether by stretching, compressing, or folding.

[The Card Apprentice has advanced basic mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to intermediate mastery.]

[The Card Apprentice has advanced intermediate mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to advanced mastery.]

[The Card Apprentice has advanced the advanced mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to rare mastery.]

[The Card Apprentice has advanced the rare mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to super rare mastery.]

With a single mind, I comprehend the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to super rare mastery without interruption, and then paused to create a rune 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule.

[Rune: Limitless Strain

Type: Innate rune

Tier: Unique rune

Spirit: Unborn

Durability: [100/100]

Effect: Infinity is a unique tier rune of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule. It allows the card apprentice to deform space infinitely without breaking, losing its structure, or encountering a maximum stress limit by consuming the space rule power.

Note:

i) The rune can be advanced to higher-tier by with the card apprentice's comprehension of the elasticity meaning of space rule. ii) Nourishing the rune with space-rule power may give birth to rune spirit.]

After going through the information on 'Limitless Strain,' I couldn't have been more satisfied with it. Then, using the rune, I advanced my comprehension of the space-rule meaning from super-rare mastery to unique mastery.

[The Card Apprentice has advanced the super rare mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to unique mastery.]

[The Card Apprentice has advanced the unique mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to super unique mastery.]

[The Card Apprentice has advanced the super unique mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to Ultra mastery.]

[The Card Apprentice has advanced the ultra mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to plus ultra mastery.]

#Chapter 2561: Ultimate Mastery Elasticity Space Rule Meaning - Read Chapter 2561: Ultimate Mastery Elasticity Space Rule Meaning

Chapter 2561: Ultimate Mastery Elasticity Space Rule Meaning

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

[The Card Apprentice has advanced the plus ultra mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule to ultimate mastery.]

Before long, I achieved ultimate mastery of the 'Elasticity' meaning of the space rule and once again found myself at the bifurcation point to choose my second space-rule meaning. Having reached ultimate mastery in my first meaning, I now had more meanings available in the space-rule source than I did the first time. With a single glance, I could tell there were at least twenty times more space-rule meanings available to me this time than before.

I was just about to pick one at random and begin comprehending it before I started overthinking, when a text suddenly appeared in my grimoire, informing me that the Time Vestige had reached our present and I could get off whenever I was done and ready.

The news caught me off guard. Lucine had told me it could take weeks, months, or even a full year, yet not even thirty-six hours had passed since I entered the Boundless Space Chamber. We had arrived a lot sooner than I had expected to. And in other words, I had reached ultimate mastery in a space-rule meaning in barely a day and a half.

If other card apprentices ever heard about this, they would flip the table, wondering how the world could be so unfair. While they struggled for weeks, even months, just to begin comprehending a single rule, I had reached ultimate mastery, in a brand-new meaning of rule I had only just started comprehending, under two days.

After receiving the text, I felt a bit relieved—not because I was glad to return to our present earlier than expected, but because it meant I no longer had to rush my choice of a second space-rule meaning. Instead of forcing myself to focus on just three meanings as quickly as possible to advance my mastery of the space rule, I preferred to take my time and choose carefully, making sure the rule meanings were compatible with me and suited my battle style.

This way, when the time came for me to fuse my first three space-rule meanings to form my very own space rule stream, the process would be far less tedious and time-consuming.

It had taken Lucine billions of years in seclusion in time expansion chamber to fuse her three time-rule meanings and forge her time-rule stream. Granted, the time rule was far more complex and rarer than the space rule, but the sheer span of time involved was not something anyone could ignore. So if I planned to forge my own space-rule stream, I needed to be far more careful with my choices of space-rule meanings.

As for the elasticity space-rule meaning, I chose it only because it met all my requirements and checked every box. That was why I began comprehending it without any hesitation. I also believed that the first three meanings one comprehended formed

the foundation of their mastery over that rule. And for the sake of eventually achieving ultimate mastery of the space rule as a whole, having a strong foundation was essential.

Now I planned to apply my comprehension of the elasticity space-rule meaning in my daily life and in combat, to see where it excelled and where it fell short. By understanding its strengths and weaknesses, I could choose the other two space-rule meanings with elasticity at the center, making it easier to fuse them later and forge my space-rule stream.

Unlike other card apprentices who had to choose their rule meanings blindly, I could select mine with full awareness of what each was capable of within the space-rule source. It would be foolish not to take advantage of that. Others didn't have the luxury of picking meanings that were both compatible and mutually reinforcing—but I did. So I intended to use that advantage to plan ahead for the rule-fusion stage and the stream-formation stage. This way, I could form my space-rule stream as quickly as possible and go further into the space-rule meaning.

Mapping out my next course of training for later, I stepped out of the Boundless Space Chamber and found Lucine waiting for me. A smile tugged at my lips, seeing her there to greet me after my seclusion.

Noticing my smile, Lucine bit on her lips in annoyance and snorted, saying, "Don't misunderstand. I wasn't waiting. I just wanted to check on you before leaving the Time Vestige. I only arrived a moment ago."

"Aww, you were checking up on me?" I teased, pretending to be touched and making my voice as obnoxious as possible.

Lucine narrowed her eyes and, ignoring my question, she warned, "Wyatt, I know we're familiar enough that we don't bother with formalities. But I'm still your elder, and I expect those formalities from you in front of others."

I raised my left eyebrow in amusement. "And what's in it for me?"

I had a feeling my teasing was the reason she suddenly cared about such things—especially with her second family, Morningstar University, watching. Maybe she didn't want them to misunderstand our relationship as something more than it was. If that was the case, I could see why appearances mattered to her suddenly.

"What do you mean by what's in it for you? You should be doing it anyway. It's basic manners," Lucine replied while staring straight at me, making it clear she wasn't going to back down on this one.

"Fine, but if you push your luck, don't blame me later," I said, agreeing with her while warning her not to overdo it. Knowing her personality, I doubted she'd stop while she was ahead, but at least I'd said my part.

Seeing her nod, I asked, "We arrived a lot sooner than you said we would. Were you lying to me earlier?"

Chapter 2562: Wyatt's Heralds

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

"I did exaggerate the time frame a bit, but I didn't lie," Lucine said in her defense before quickly steering the conversation my way. "How was your seclusion? How far did you get with the space-rule?"

"I was lucky enough to grasp space-rule and raise the level of my first space-rule meaning to ultimate master," I replied honestly. I didn't care whether Lucine believed me or thought I was boasting. "I was planning to come out to apply it and to upgrade the space-rule rune I created from that meaning. So, it's good we're already back in our present."

I didn't blame Lucine for anything. Everyone has their own thoughts and plans. As long as they weren't harming me or getting in the way of mine, there was no reason to clash over every minor disagreement. Otherwise, I'd end up fighting the entire myriad realms.

"I see you're thinking ahead and not rushing to upgrade your rune to ultimate-tier the moment you reach ultimate mastery in the rule-meaning used to forge it. I'm guessing you're planning to use that rune as the base to forge a hybrid rune?" Lucine asked, taking an interest in my practice like an elder guiding their junior.

She pretended to ignore the fact that I had not only begun comprehending the space rule, but had also reached super rare mastery in it by raising my first space-rule meaning to ultimate mastery in just about thirty-six hours. Even though she kept her voice calm, the storm that revelation caused in her was clear in her eyes.

"Yes, I am," I said with a nod. "I want to apply it first and see which direction feels right for developing it further. Hopefully, in the future i'll be able to forge a rune that's compatible with this one and successfully create a hybrid rune." I explained my plans as the two of us walked out of the time vestige together.

"Good luck, but don't rush it. Take your time. It will come naturally sooner or later," Lucine said, wishing me luck. She knew better than most that not every card apprentice was lucky enough to comprehend compatible rule meanings to create hybrid runes. We could make all the plans we wanted, but nature always had its own plans. And the worst

thing anyone could do at a time like that was try to fight the storm. That would just be foolish.

But in my case, I was the storm. Unlike other card apprentices who had no choice but to gamble at the rule bifurcation point inside the realm's womb, I wasn't bound by that uncertainty. By comprehending rules directly from the rule source, I didn't need to wager my future on chance. I could simply choose from the rule meanings I had already uncovered. So I wasn't worried—in fact, I was certain that I would eventually succeed in forging a hybrid rune.

I already had a set of compatible rule meanings among the rule meanings I had comprehended to forge hybrid runes: Blood Fate Plunder, Blood Curse, and Blood Plague. With my ultimate mastery over each of them, I had learned that they were naturally compatible with each other in their own way. I was confident I could forge at least three different hybrid runes using those meanings. If I did, it would give me a massive advantage when it came time to fuse those three blood-rule meanings and form a blood-rule stream.

I just needed to make the time for it.

Sigh

I couldn't help but let out a long sigh, struck by the irony of my situation. I was standing inside the Time Vestige, a place overflowing with time—yet somehow, I still didn't have enough of it. I couldn't fully take advantage of the Vestige's abilities because I had too many matters waiting for me in the Card World, Lil' Red Storm, and the Dark Realm.

Sure, a day in here barely amounted to an hour outside, but staying inside meant cutting myself off from the outside world entirely. And that was a problem. I didn't want another incident like the one with the Freedom Fighters. They had reached out to me for help, and I could have taken them under me for free. But I was too busy to respond, and the Southern Princess seized the opportunity—handing them over to me as compensation for meddling in my relationship with Anna.

In the end, I dragged myself into a fight for a seat on the Time Vestige council with the Southern Princess, when I could have given that seat to Anna, a friend, or even a bloodkin if things had unfolded properly.

I had too much going on across three realms. If I was absent for long, everything I'd planned and worked for could fall apart. The root of all these problems was simple: I was trying to handle everything myself, when what I should be doing was focusing on what I need and want to do. And to do that, I had to offload some of the work.

I'd already done it before—handing inter-realm commerce over to Susan, Clown Mask, and their team; Fine Gold to Diana, Cindy, and theirs; the Freedom Fighters to Dalia, Joy, and the others. I needed to push more of the workload outward. But the issue was

that there was no one left who was both capable and trustworthy enough to take on the rest of my responsibilities.

I had more than a thousand perfect clones, yet not a single one of them was suited to shoulder even a fraction of what remained. For now, they were only good for learning and combat, not the responsibilities I needed handled. And speaking of that, what I truly needed at this moment were capable, trustworthy people who could serve as my representatives in the Card World and the Dark Realm.

Chapter 2563: Three Candidates For Outside Hire

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning, Time Vestige, Morningstar University 2nd Campus

Earlier, I had planned to groom Corey Bright to serve as my voice in the Dark Realm, with Demigod Redfall backing her. It was a big gamble, but I trusted Corey Park to guide her well. The issue was that Corey Bright was still too weak and needed time to mature. It would be a long while before she could represent me in the Dark Realm.

But with Slay joining our side, I finally felt I had the representatives I needed there.

That left the Card World. I needed someone equally capable and trustworthy to act as my representative here. They couldn't just be competent—they had to carry real authority. Otherwise, they wouldn't survive a single day among these hyenas. If power weren't such a defining requirement, I would have simply made Susan my representative in the Card World and let the others serve as her council.

I had three candidates in mind who fit my requirements, but the problem was that none of them were part of my group. Since I couldn't find the right person in-house, I was considering an outside hire. They were all capable and powerful, but their loyalty was uncertain. And each of them had prior commitments and arrangements of their own—I couldn't be sure they would abandon those to work with me.

Normally, if I couldn't fully trust someone, I wouldn't even bring them into consideration. But these three were different. I did trust them—just not enough to think they would put my interests above everything else.

The three candidates were Jill Norley, Asong Young, and Agatha.

Each of them possessed the qualities I needed in a representative for the Card World. They had deep experience in this exact kind of role. After all, they had spent most of their lives serving as the representatives of their own respective masters.

Jill had been her father's representative for as long as she could remember. As the daughter of one of the founding demigods, she grew up dealing with her father's friends, Masters, from a young age. Let alone the world leaders, they were nothing new to her.

Asong had served as the representative of the people for decades. Even when she was chronically ill and on the verge of death, she still faced world leaders without hesitation, fighting for mortals who had no voice in a world ruled by cards and card apprentices.

And then there was Agatha. She had represented Demigod Windsor long enough to earn a level of trust few could hope for—enough trust for him to leave his daughter Aba in her care and protection.

All three of them were remarkable in their own ways. I'd be fortunate to have even one of them on my side, but I wanted all three. The million-dollar question was whether they would set aside their existing commitments and choose to stand with me when I called.

If not, all this debating in my head was nothing but wasted time.

I would have to seek them out and ask their opinions in person. I wasn't sure about Jill or Asong, but Agatha had already spoken to me about starting a venture together when Aba enrolled in Morningstar University. Since the university didn't allow students to bring servants or bodyguards on campus, Agatha would be staying in the Morningstar University District with plenty of free time on her hands.

She had suggested partnering with me to sell the soul-tech medical devices I created using soul craft inspired by modern machinery to cure Lucy Roberts' autism in Sun Blossom City to mortal doctors and alchemists.

She believed it would provide more accessible and affordable medical care for mortals and card apprentices alike. It was a noble idea, but I had to wonder whether she would be willing to go a step further and serve as my voice in the Five Regions.

"Master!"

As Lucine and I stepped out of the Time Vestige, a young woman barreled toward her at neck-breaking speed, throwing herself into Lucine's arms. It was none other than Chief Denise Johnson's daughter, Ahalya Johnson.

"Laya, you silly child, why are you crying? Didn't I come back alive and in one piece?" Lucine asked gently as she wiped the tears from her youngest student's cheeks.

"Master, what about your time-rule dementia? I heard it flared up and you lost consciousness. Are you really alright?" Ahalya asked, her voice trembling with worry as she searched Lucine's eyes, trying to see how much the condition had worsened after her trip to the past through the temporal river.

After submitting the results of their research and experiments in the Time Vestige to the university, Ahalya had rushed back to the Garden of Beginning ignoring the Dean's strict, repeated warnings. She couldn't sit still after learning how her master's condition had flared up because of Henricks and that jerk of a master of his.

"Haha, about that—it's been taken care of. I don't have to worry about it anymore," Lucine said lightly, offering no further explanation. She knew that if she told the truth, no one would believe her, and worse, it might draw unwanted attention toward me.

"What do you mean, Master?" Ahalya asked, genuinely confused. It was Lucine who had always discouraged her from researching time-rule dementia, insisting it was something even celestials were powerless against—that she shouldn't waste her time on a hopeless project. And now that same mentor was claiming she had "taken care" of it. Ahalya couldn't help wondering if this sudden confidence was a symptom of the condition worsening—delusion, denial, something slipping through the cracks.

"I cured your mentor's time-rule dementia," I said from the side, stepping in when I saw Lucine hesitating to tell her the truth out of fear it would create trouble for me. Her clueless self was still trying to "protect" me from being targeted by Masters, even though I had already told her that her own university and the central government had allied and tried to kidnap me in the Southern Capital.

Besides, I was getting tired of waiting for their emotional reunion to wrap up—I needed to let Ahalya know she should head back to Sky Blossom City. Her mother missed her.

Chapter 2564: Lucine's Embarrassment-I

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning

"You did?" Ahalya asked, her eyes widening with joy. She had doubted her beloved mentor when Lucine claimed the time-rule dementia that had plagued her for over a decade was resolved, but when it came to me, she accepted it instinctively—surprised only by my choice to help her mentor. She was no stranger to the difference between me and her university.

"Of course he's joking. How could a teenage card master cure a celestial disease? It doesn't even sound believable," Lucine cut in, waving off my words as if they were nothing more than a silly boast. She shot me a quick wink, urging me to keep quiet and let her cover for me. In her mind, my age explained everything—reckless, attention-seeking, and unaware of the trouble such claims could cause.

"Huh?" Ahalya blinked at her mentor, confusion and worry mixing on her face. Turning back to me, she asked, "Wyatt... are you sure you cured her time-rule dementia? Are these just side effects from the procedure? Nothing permanent, right?"

Seeing her mentor ramble like that, Ahalya began to wonder if Lucine truly wasn't fully cured—or worse, if she was still experiencing lingering side effects from the procedure. Ever since she learned about me and my sudden rise, she had followed my journey as a card apprentice obsessively—not quite like a fangirl, more like an elder sister with a younger-brother complex. She knew every one of my achievements, from how I cured Lucy Robert to the miracles at the orphanage. With all that in mind, she had no trouble believing I could cure her mentor's time-rule dementia; she was only surprised that I actually chose to help her master. After all, the reputation of my pettiness preceded me.

"Laya, how can you believe him but not me?" Lucine demanded, genuinely hurt that her beloved disciple trusted my words over hers. The reversal rattled her so much that she stopped trying to cover for me, her pride stinging. She knew Ahalya loved her, but did her disciple really think she wasn't capable of curing time-rule dementia? For a renowned researcher like Lucine, that doubt cut almost as deeply as questioning her daughter's love.

"Master, that's Wyatt," Ahalya replied matter-of-factly, offering no explanation—as if my name alone answered everything. I hadn't realized my reputation had grown to that point in the Five Regions. Discovering it on the spot left me both impressed and a little startled.

"I know who he is—" Lucine began, intending to ask for a proper explanation, but I interrupted her.

"Do you?" I asked. "Do you know who I am? Do you really know who I am?"

I finally let out the frustration I'd been holding back over Lucine's dismissive attitude toward me and undermining me because of my age on every turn, catching both her and Ahalya off guard. With their full attention on me at last, I decided it was the best moment to say what needed to be said before they continued their emotional reunion.

"I don't have time for this, so I'll be direct," I said. "Ahalya, the next time I see you, either you'll be with your mother or she'll be here with you—whichever works best for the three of you. Lucine, the next time we meet, you'd better know who I really am. And talk to your university—make every arrangement for what we discussed. If you don't, I'll

approach another top-ten university instead. Make sure everything is ready by the time I return."

With that, I delivered my message to the mentor-disciple duo and turned away, heading toward Henricks, who was standing beside Dean Sam. Henricks was an outsider here, unlike Ahalya, and Morningstar University had already gone out of its way to accommodate him for my sake.

"Wyatt, you're leaving?" Lucine asked. I nodded, feeling drained by her stating the obvious, and answered, "Yes. I figured I might as well handle some of my other work while you talk with your university and get everything sorted out. Standing around while you all discuss things feels like a complete waste of time. I'll be back soon. Just do your part—I don't want to hear any excuses."

"Hey, is that how you speak to your elders?" Lucine snapped.

I shook my head. "That's how I talk to patients."

"See ya."

Before she could throw another question at me, I was already beside Henricks. I had used my first space-rule meaning in tandem with my celestial force to pull it off. By making the space between us elastic and then compressing it with my celestial force, I dragged myself to his side in less than a fraction of a millisecond—faster than teleportation.

"Oh, boss. Did you finally start comprehending the space rule?" Henricks guessed the moment I appeared beside him. He had clearly sensed the distortions in the air, and the way he narrowed his eyes in concentration made it obvious he was trying to figure out exactly which space-rule meaning I had used. Considering how close he was to forming his own space-rule stream, I wouldn't be surprised if he could pick up on such details.

"I did. But why are you slacking off here?" I asked, my brows tightening.

"Boss, how can you say that?" Henricks protested. "I came to check on you, but these people wouldn't give me a straight answer, so I was trying to get to the bottom of it before you showed up." He explained himself quickly, careful not to sound like he was complaining. He knew full well that if the Freedom Fighters failed to justify the investment I'd made in them, I wouldn't hesitate to cut ties.

Watching him act like a tragic daughter-in-law being scolded by a tyrannical mother-in-law, I couldn't help but snort in irritation. I had no intention of entertaining Henricks's antics any further and was just about to tell him to take me out when Dean Sam suddenly spoke up with unexpected sincerity.

Chapter 2565: Lucine's Embarrassment-II

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Morningstar University Campus, Garden of Beginning

"Thank you for helping Madam Lucine despite our differences. Please know that all academicians involved in the Southern Capital incident have been stripped of their tenure and ordered to vacate the university premises at the latest. And rest assured—whatever promises Madam Lucine made with you will be honored by Morningstar University to the fullest. I will personally see to it. If there is anything else the university or I can help you with, please don't hesitate to command it."

Dean Sam had overheard my conversation with the mentor-disciple pair through his intent sense. Learning that Lucine's time-rule dementia had been cured genuinely pleased him, and he sincerely thanked me for making it possible. In his relief and gratitude, he didn't hesitate to offer me what was essentially a verbal blank check—completely unaware that Lucine had already blabbed their core secrets to me.

I wondered if he would be able to say the same knowing this or when he learned the price Lucine had agreed to pay me. I didn't bother myself with that, it was up to Lucine now. Yet, I wondered if Dean Sam was on the time vestige council and one of the key bears to the vault hidden in the second campus of Morningstar University. He should be. If he genuinely meant his words to me, then it shouldn't be hard for him to help Lucine come through for me.

"Lucine is my friend. I only did what any friend would do," I said before turning to Henricks, signaling him to take me to the coordinates I'd just sent to his grimoire. I completely ignored the furious glare Lucine shot my way—she had told me very clearly to treat her like an elder in front of others, and she knew I'd deliberately done the opposite just to get under her skin.

Dean Sam was a very perceptive man, he understood more than I said from my words, my behavior, and Lucine's reaction. He could tell that if anything, I was understating my relationship with her. He also knew that while only a few hours had passed here, it could have been months—or even years—for us inside the temporal river. With time involved, he kept an open mind, convinced that almost anything was possible.

Ignoring the glint in his eyes, I gave Henricks a subtle signal. He opened a space gate to the coordinates I had shared with him, and with a brief nod to the trio, we stepped through and left.

"Master, I've shared the dossier on Wyatt with your grimoire," Ahalya said, passing along the file she had personally compiled on me. She knew that in the past few months—while her condition had been deteriorating—her master had been in seclusion trying to keep it under control and had missed everything happening in the outside world, including my rise and my growing influence across the Five Regions. So she handed it over without hesitation, almost like a proud older sister bragging about her younger brother.

Even though Ahalya had never met the young Wyatt, she had always seen him as a little brother because of what his parents had once done for her and her mother. She had even planned to use her master's connections to enroll me into the university through the back door, fully prepared to risk Lucine's reputation if needed. In her heart, nothing she did for young Wyatt could ever come close to what his mother had done for the two of them.

"He's Ellen Duskborn's child!" Lucine exclaimed, stunned to learn I was a legacy student. Before continuing through the dossier, she turned sharply toward the Dean and demanded, "Sam, if he's a legacy applicant, why hasn't he already been recruited into the university?"

Having been freed from her time-rule dementia, Lucine's next ambition was simple: get a talent like me—or just me—into her university, whether as a student or a teacher. She didn't care which. As long as I became part of the Morningstar University family, she would consider it a victory. So when she discovered that I had already been connected to the university from my maternal side of the family and yet somehow had not been admitted, the shock hit her hard. For the first time, she was genuinely disappointed in Morningstar University.

"I'm sorry, Your Highness. I failed to manage the staff under me properly," Dean Sam said at once, assuming full responsibility for their oversight when it came to me.

With Lucine's deteriorating condition keeping her in seclusion and his own attention absorbed by research, the university's administration had clearly slipped. He had only recently learned that one of the most wanted criminals was, in fact, a senior professor at Morningstar—someone who had not only manipulated the university from within but had also orchestrated the conspiracy against me.

Morningstar University had punished the staff involved in the Southern Capital incident, all to appease me, but in the end they had shifted most of the blame onto Sansa Baylor, a.k.a Senior Professor Sansa Orian.

For the first time, Lucine felt genuinely disappointed in Morningstar University. Yet even with that sting in her chest, she couldn't tear her eyes away from the dossier—especially the part confirming that I was Ellen Duskborn's son and that assistant professor recruit Kate Duskborn was my aunt. My maternal grandparents had attended

the university, and my great-grandfather had even held tenure there. The Duskborn family had a long, storied connection with Morningstar University.

"This changes everything," she murmured, unable to hide the shift in her thoughts. If anything, the revelation only strengthened her determination to bring me into Morningstar's fold.

With renewed enthusiasm, she continued reading through the dossier Ahalya had painstakingly compiled, absorbing every detail of my achievements. And when her disciple's neatly written conclusion described my meteoric rise across the Five Regions, she repeated under her breath, "This changes everything."

Her enthusiasm dimmed as she read through the list of my creations and achievements. There weren't many, but each one had contributed far more to the advancement of the card apprentice society than anything the top ten universities had managed in the past century. Only now did she begin to understand why I kept calling her ignorant—and why her disciple had such unwavering faith in my abilities.

Remembering how she had spoken to me and behaved earlier, her cheeks warmed with embarrassment.

"Is it true that he once planned to attend Morningstar University?" Lucine asked, confirming the detail with both her disciple and Dean Sam. She didn't touch on how the university had used that information to conspire against me. After seeing how strongly I now rejected the very idea of enrolling, it was hard for her to believe that I had once wished to attend Morningstar—defying even the Southern Royal Family's plans for me.

"Yes, Your Highness," Dean Sam replied with a solemn expression. He knew that if he were to die now and his soul were to enter the World's Womb, he wouldn't be able to face his master or the other elders and founders of the university. By neglecting his duties and burying himself in research, he had unknowingly cost Morningstar a chance that could have elevated it into the greatest university in the Five Regions—finally putting it on the path its founders had once dreamed of.

Chapter 2566: Jillian's Pub

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Jillians' Pub

"Boss, why are we here?" Henricks asked, glancing around the pub at drunk college kids either fighting or making out with loud music playing in the backdrop. Given his age, he clearly felt out of place.

Right then, a blonde college girl with smeared mascara bumped into him and snapped, "Hey, watch it—" She froze halfway through her sentence, squinting at him as if trying to place a familiar face. "You look like my grandpa. Wanna buy me a drink?"

"You still got it, old stud. Have fun." Leaving Henricks alone with the drunk blonde, I headed upstairs to the VIP section and spotted the reason I'd come here. She was entertaining a few women tonight. Knowing her, she wouldn't spend a single penny unless there was money to be made.

"Kid, where do you think you're going— Sir, please." The VIP lounge bouncer tried to stop me, but the moment he recognized me, his tone shifted and he stepped aside, inviting me in with respect.

I gave him a nod and walked up the open-riser staircase, my eyes drawn to the stunning silhouette of the curvy woman ahead of me. She was in the middle of giving a speech to a group of women seated on a massive C-shaped couch.

I was surprised to discover that she had already broken through and was only a step away from reaching the semi-demigod realm. However, if she managed to form her divinity in a single attempt, she could bypass that unnecessary stage entirely and join the prestigious ranks of card demigods who achieved it before turning a century-old.

The moment they noticed me, they started whispering among themselves, subtly fixing their dresses, hair, and makeup before sending a series of tempting smiles my way—completely ignoring the speech.

The girl delivering the talk remained oblivious to the shift in the room until her own body betrayed her. She suddenly pressed her thighs together, bent her knees slightly, and let out a soft, sensual moan before turning around. Her gaze snapped to me instantly, sharp and focused—like a hawk zeroing in on its prey.

"Wyatt, what are you doing here?" Jill blurted out, her face flushing with embarrassment even as her body moved on its own—closing the distance and jumping into my arms. Before long, she was already nibbling at my right earlobe, unable to stop herself.

"I thought you had your physique under control around me," I said, wrapping my arms around her waist. My right hand traced up her spine, reaching the back of her head. My fingers curled around the base of her skull, guiding her head back gently. Her lips pulled away from my ear, a thin thread of saliva stretched between us.

It was obvious Jill wasn't the one steering her body anymore. Her carnivorous womb had taken over again, slipping back into its stud hunting habits. The difference was that this time Jill's mind was clear—she was fully aware, fully conscious—yet completely trapped inside a body ruled by that relentless force of her physique.

She wasn't completely gone like the first time her physique flared up around me. I supposed that counted as progress.

Without wasting any more time, I activated my Myriad Devil Transformation to mask my various energy signatures. To the naked eye, I still looked like myself, but to her carnivorous womb, I was no longer the chosen prey. Losing sight of its target, it retreated back into slumber.

Jill wiped her lips and elbowed me in the ribs, grumbling, "You did that on purpose."

"Hey, you're the one who said you had it under control," I shot back, pretending to wince even though her blow didn't even tickle. If I didn't play along, she'd keep hitting me until I did.

"Whatever. Aren't you planning to let me go now?" Jill asked, subtly trying to pry my arms from around her waist. Her cheeks warmed as she finally felt my firm meat pressed against her lower abdomen.

"Me? You threw yourself on me. Now, that I pitched a tent, you want to leave. You tease," I said, pressing Jill's crotch hard against mine and shifting slightly, not wanting the women who were watching the show to see my pants bulging at its crotch area.

"Aren't you shameless? Unless you plan to commit, don't you dare think of taking advantage of me," Jill completely misunderstood my teasing as a booty call. I'd already made it clear to her that my heart was set on someone else, and as a self-respecting woman she refused to be the third wheel.

"Shameless? Who was the one nibbling my ear like she hadn't eaten in days?" I shot back. She wasn't wrong—I was taking advantage of her—but I couldn't help but tease her, her body was just too vulgar and provocative.

"Unbelievable. Wyatt, let go of me right now," Jill snapped. She still had feelings for me—wanted to be with me, even—but not like this. Not right after her body had acted up in front of everyone. The embarrassment from her carnivorous womb taking over was written all over her face, and it clearly rattled her.

"Don't struggle. Just give me a few more seconds," I murmured, pulling her closer and whispering the plea into her ear. At the same time, I loosened my grip around her waist. From that moment on, she could leave any time she wanted.

But she didn't.

Instead, she relaxed, her resistance fading as her wrists settled lightly on my shoulders. Her soft fingers slid into my hair, and she looked into my eyes with a familiar, playful spark.

She didn't mind my closeness—maybe even enjoyed it—but that didn't stop her from using the moment to tilt the balance in her favor. That was Jill for you; she loved turning any situation into a bargain.

She opened her mouth, ready to throw out something smirking and sharp, when an arrogant voice cut in:

"Hey, asshole! Didn't you hear her? She told you to let go!"

Chapter 2567: Limitless Barrier

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Jillians' Pub

Jill and I turned our heads at the same time to see who was trying to play the prince rescuing a damsel in distress. To my surprise, it was a young card demigod. He had sharp features, fiery red hair, and striking green eyes—looked like he'd just crossed his first century. Not a bad-looking guy at all. He clearly inherited the best of his parents' genes in terms of appearance... but when it came to common sense, the line must have skipped him.

Jill's brows drew together the moment she saw him, a flicker of irritation crossing her eyes. The women on the couch reacted the same way—they just didn't dare show it as openly. Their expressions told me everything I needed to know. He may be one of Jill's persistent suitors, the kind who didn't understand the word "no."

"What are you staring at? Didn't you hear me? Let her go, or I'll make you," the demigod warned, his glare fixed on me.

I couldn't help but laugh. I released Jill's waist and raised both hands in mock surrender.

"Relax, man. You've got it all backwards. She's the one hanging on to me. Please—by all means—help me get her off."

Before I could even finish teasing the red-headed demigod, Jill cut in with a kiss to my mouth. Her tongue rushed in, fiercely teasing mine. Ignoring the demigod, I indulged in the kiss. Jill's technique had gotten a lot better. I couldn't help but let out a shameful moan; she was too damn good at it. It was as if she had gone to university just to learn kissing and aced it. I knew Jill was fiercely competitive, but this was just insane.

Seeing us kiss and ignore him, the demigod's eyes flared in rage. His right fist suddenly lit on fire, and he threw a punch aimed at my head. I felt a strong flame rule power from

it; I'm sure Jill did too. However, she closed her eyes tighter and kissed me fiercely, as if there was no tomorrow. When she, a woman, could be so daring, how could I back down? My left palm grabbed her right ass cheek, and my fingers dug in. My right hand bundled her loose hair and pulled her head back while I leaned in, taking control of the kiss.

Meanwhile, the red-headed demigod stared in disbelief as his punches failed to reach us. Every blow lost momentum mid-air before bouncing harmlessly off the empty space around us. No matter how much force he poured into it, he couldn't break through the invisible wall.

If all he relied on were flame rule power and brute strength, he never stood a chance. With my space rule mastery, I had woven a thin space bubble around Jill and me. To normal senses it was invisible—barely even a shimmer—but in truth its walls were stretched to an extreme.

Using my space rule mastery, amplified by the Limitless Strain rune and my celestial force, I pulled the bubble's boundaries outward until they became an impossibly thin membrane—thinner than a strand of hair, yet extending limitlessly long.

I called it the Limitless Barrier. Despite its name, it was just a trick I came up with on my feet.

Every attack aimed at us had to cross that limitless stretch of warped space before it could reach our bodies. And by the time his punches traveled that limitless distance, all their energy bled away and eventually rebounded straight back.

Unless he figured out the principle behind the Limitless Barrier—and had some way to counter the limitless strain woven into it—his fists were never going to reach us.

Earlier, when I saw his good looks, his realm, his barely-a-century age, and the fact that he stepped in for Jill without hesitation, I wondered why she wouldn't at least give him a chance. But the moment he attacked me just because Jill kissed me, the answer became obvious.

Jill tapped my shoulder urgently, struggling to keep pace with me. When I finally broke the kiss, she sucked in a deep breath—only to grab my face and pull me right back for round two. She clearly wasn't ready to surrender. She had mastered the theory, but her practical experience was still lacking, so in the end she couldn't keep up with me and my hybrid physique.

Meanwhile, the red-haired demigod launched attack after attack from every direction, each one failing to reach us and instead stirring chaos throughout the pub. Students panicked and scrambled for the exits. Jill's companions ran for cover as well, though they didn't flee altogether. Despite being unable to help, they stayed close enough to watch over her.

That surprised me. I'd always assumed Jill was a loner and had no real friends—especially after Luna left to join the freedom fighters.

"You done? Or do you want to go another round?" I asked Jill, who still looked unconvinced even after losing three times in a row. She clearly didn't want to admit defeat, but with the chaos the redhead was causing in her pub, she chose to pull back for now—planning to return in full force once the nuisance was handled.

Even then, Jill didn't rush. She remained in my arms, using my pupils as a makeshift mirror to fix her hair and wipe the trace of moisture from her lips. After straightening her dress, she leaned in, gave me a light peck on the nose, and said, "I'll be right back."

As soon as Jill left my embrace and turned to face the red demigod, calling out, "Uncle!" The latter stopped his relentless attacks and stared back at his niece with a blank but polite face. Meanwhile, I blinked in confusion. Since when did Norley have such a young brother?

As Jill stepped out of the protection of my barrier, I dispersed it completely. After watching the red-haired demigod's attacks up close, I'd already determined he wasn't anywhere near elite level. He barely registered as a threat to me.

"Your Highness, please stop acting out," the redhead demigod said respectfully. "You're the one who reached out to the Brothwork family's heir. He helped you, and whether you like it or not, you're expected to attend his party. Otherwise, you'll put the master in a difficult position."

His tone was polite, but every few seconds his gaze flicked toward me with a sharp, dangerous glint that hadn't been there before. That was when it hit me—he had been suppressing his true power this whole time. He wasn't weak; he just wanted Jill's full attention.

From the way he spoke, he sounded like one of Demigod Norley's loyal subordinates. But as far as I knew, Norley preferred working alone—especially after adopting Jill. Seeing someone this young and this strong serving under him didn't add up... and it raised even more questions.

Chapter 2568: Demigod Sean Brothwork

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Jillians' Pub

"He didn't help me—we went into business together. Uncle Sean, you know that better than anyone. You and your family are twisting the story," Jill shot back at demigod Sean Brothwork. "If anything, I helped him and his family make a fortune. He should be thanking me. Instead, he's harassing me. I don't know why I expected anything different from a Brothwork—an ungrateful bunch."

"Your Highness, please mind your words," Demigod Sean cautioned before continuing, "The Brothwork family is one of the longstanding wealthiest families in the five regions. They didn't need the small profit your... profane venture generated. Young Master Brothwork only agreed to you to help out of respect for our Master. Don't forget—he was the only one who stepped forward when everyone else refused."

"Oh, really? Then tell him to return every dividend I paid his family. Then I'll believe he didn't need the 'little' money from my 'profane' venture," Jill said, her tone dripping with mockery as she pressed Sean to support his claim—or step aside.

"Your Highness... you can tell that to Young Master Brothwork yourself tonight, at the dinner party he's hosting to celebrate the success of your venture," Demigod Sean replied in a neutral voice, though his eyes betrayed him, revealing that his intentions were not as neutral.

"I'm not going, and you know exactly why. There's nothing left to discuss—I've already made my decision. Now leave before I report you to father." Jill no longer wished to argue with Sean, fully aware he would keep repeating himself like a parrot. It was clear he wasn't listening at all; he simply wanted to force her to comply with his demands.

"Please, go ahead. I'll wait," Sean replied, openly daring her to call her father and report him. He knew perfectly well that Demigod Norley was preoccupied with developing better pleasure cards than my slime fairy cards and remained blissfully unaware that Jill had used his discarded pleasure card recipes to launch a new venture in the service industry.

Norley might forgive her for selling his substandard cards without permission. But if he ever found out she had partnered with the Brothwork family to fast-track the entire operation—after he'd repeatedly warned her not to get involved with the likes of the Brothworks or any of the other major families—she would never hear the end of it.

That wasn't it, what Sean was truly after was more nefarious.

"Do you think I don't dare?" Jill exploded, outraged that Sean had the nerve to challenge her. She didn't expect much from him, but he had never once dared to cross her—out of fear of her father. Yet by going behind her father's back and doing exactly what he had forbidden, she had unintentionally handed Sean the courage to push her now.

"Yes. I don't think you will," Sean replied smugly. He wanted Demigod Norley involved. Knowing how fiercely Norley adored Jill, Sean was certain he would clash with the Brothwork family to avenge even the slightest grievance against his daughter.

Jill knew that as well—that was the very reason she hesitated. She didn't want her father drawn into a conflict with the Brothworks. She didn't doubt his strength, but in the end, he was still just one card apprentice, while the Brothwork family was one of the oldest and most powerful households in all five regions.

"You—!" Jill glared daggers at Sean, wanting nothing more than to get rid of this snake once and for all, to end her father's greatest source of trouble. But she was trapped. If she didn't follow through on her threat, this infuriating uncle of hers would only grow bolder. If she did, she would be pushing her father straight into someone else's scheme.

Sean wasn't in any rush. He looked at Jill with a broad, satisfied grin. No matter what she chose, he would get the result he wanted. If she called her father, his task would be completed all the sooner. If she refused, then she'd have no choice but to attend Young Master Brothwork's dinner party—and knowing the man's habits and reputation, Jill would almost certainly end up calling her father anyway.

Caught in a tight corner, Jill summoned her grimoire in a bluff. But when Sean didn't so much as flinch, her heart sank. His total lack of reaction confirmed what she already suspected: there was a scheme in motion.

She was still scrambling for a way out when she felt a familiar hand curl softly around her neck and settle on her shoulder in a reassuring hold. She opened her mouth, ready to tell me not to involve myself, but I leaned in before she could speak. My lips hovered beside her ear as I murmured, "Jill, I'm feeling parched. Go fix me a drink."

My voice carried across the room as though I had whispered into each person's ear individually. Every pair of eyes snapped toward us, stunned that I would speak to Jill like that—order her, even. After all, in their minds she was the very picture of independence, a woman with both ambition and the backing to enforce it.

Yet to everyone's surprise, Jill simply nodded. She summoned a bottomless spirit-scotch glass and brought it to my lips, feeding me like a personal attendant. She was only buying time to think, so she didn't mind playing along for now. Under any other circumstance, she would never serve me so openly—especially not in front of her new friends.

"Kid, get your damn drink yourself," Sean snapped in rage. When I continued ignoring him, he added, "Kid, this is the Central Region. Here, frauds and tricksters are punished with the death penalty."

"Oh? Was that supposed to be an insult or maybe a threat?" I replied, bored. "Can't you come up with something better? At least give me a reason worth killing you over—"

something impressive enough for your family to carve on your tombstone, something your descendants can proudly pass down."

He wasn't wrong, though. I was far from the Southern Region now. In a foreign land, I no longer represented just myself but the entire South. I had to keep that in mind.

Chapter 2569: Got You!

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Jillians' Pub

"Babe, since when did you have an asshole for an uncle?" I asked Jill, sipping the scotch she fed me with effortless grace. "His grin makes me want to punch him. No wonder you and your father never mention him."

I spoke loudly on purpose, fully intending to provoke Sean. It wasn't like he'd done anything that justified me killing him—not yet, anyway. He was a jerk, but still Jill's uncle, Demigod Norley's brother. What puzzled me was how someone barely a century old and carrying the Brothwork surname was related to Demigod at all.

"You son of a bitch!" Sean roared as he lunged at me with everything he had, hoping to reach me before I could deploy my Limitless barrier. Unfortunately for him, my thoughts moved far faster than he ever could. A massive wall-shaped Limitless barrier materialized instantly, cutting him off.

He slammed into it, unable to cross the endless stretch of space it contained. Realizing he would never reach the far side, he tried to pull back and switch tactics. But when he stopped, he didn't bounce off the barrier as his attacks had before. Instead, the limitless barrier folded around him, sealing him inside a sphere of limitless space. I called it Limitless Prison.

Inside the Limitless Prison, Sean thrashed with everything he had, unleashing every technique in his arsenal without restraint. Unfortunately for him, he clearly lacked any understanding of space rules. Without that foundation, he had no chance of unraveling the mechanics behind the Limitless barrier—much less escaping it. Every second he struggled only widened the gap between him and any hope of freedom.

When he finally realized his efforts were useless, he stopped and began screaming—though nothing he shouted crossed the infinite gulf isolating him from the outside world. Whether he was threatening me or begging for release, no one could tell. So, we simply ignored him.

"So, what's his story? And what exactly is going on? Who has the guts to forcefully invite the great Jill Norley to their dinner party?" I asked casually now that the nuisance was contained.

"Before that, tell me why you're here. What do you want?" Jill countered instead of answering. She assumed—as usual—that I only came to her when I needed something from her.

"It pains me that you think so little of me," I said with feigned disappointment, masking the fact that she was absolutely right. She knew it; I knew it. But she didn't need to call me out so directly.

"I asked you first. So you go first," I quipped, tilting my chin toward the scotch glass in her hand, signalling her to feed me.

My lips parted as she brought the bottomless scotch to them with deceptive gentleness—only for her to suddenly try and shove the glass into my mouth. Since it had no bottom, she was basically trying to drown me in booze.

Cough! Cough!

"Woman, have you lost your damn mind? How dare you attempt to murder your benefactor?" I sputtered, stumbling back and releasing her. I knew I should've stopped teasing while I was ahead, but her reaction was way over the top.

"Benefactor? Why don't you just call yourself a great and noble prince?" Jill shot back before ramming the glass against my mouth again—this time hitting my teeth and forcing the scotch into my nose, over my lips, and down my chin and neck. "Go find your damsel at the bottom of this glass!"

I caught her wrists and spun her around, pulling her flush against me. My arms wrapped around her as I settled my chin on the curve of her nape, cheek brushing against her ear. Inhaling her scent, I guided her hands down to her waist still captured in mine as I murmured, "I truly pity the unfortunate soul who ends up marrying you."

"Wow, I haven't seen anyone ignorant enough to pity themselves," Jill said, making it perfectly clear she meant I would be the one marrying her.

"And what makes you think I'd marry a wild girl like you?" I murmured, rubbing my nose against her cheek as she twisted in my hold, trying to free her arms.

"If you're not going to take responsibility, then behave yourself!" Jill shouted, mortified as she noticed her new group of friends openly watching—and recording—us. I ignored them and quietly instructed Hive AI to wipe their footage, hacking into their grimoires without a sound.

"Why should I buy the book," I teased, brushing my face through her hair before nestling into the curve of her neck, "when I've already read it cover to cover without missing a single detail? Not to mention I can reread it anytime I feel like it. Do you follow?"

"Let go of me, you vulgar bastard!" Jill snapped. She struggled harder, more frantic this time. She knew I was messing with her, but the words hit differently. It might have been a joke to me, but to her it sounded like I was casually stating something painfully obvious.

"Fuck!" I cursed—not because of anything Jill did, but because Hive AI informed me that some of Jill's friends weren't just recording us... they were live-streaming us.

I was screwed. They had broadcasted us across the five regions without our permission. Who even does that? Apparently, even card apprentices would sell their souls for views.

Hearing my outburst, Jill finally stopped struggling. "Well, now the whole world thinks I'm yours and you're mine," she said smugly. "Let's see how you dodge responsibility now, you bastard."

My eyes widened. I had no idea when she planned this—if she even had planned it. I didn't have time to figure it out before she revealed everything herself.

"I know you're here for the pleasure-card venture I started. I launched it despite knowing it was your next big project just to piss you off—"

Before she could deliver the punchline, I cut in, "So you did all this just to catch me off guard and legitimize our short but illicit relationship by exposing it to the world—"

"And for the money, of course," Jill added, snuggling into my embrace as if she hadn't been trying to drown me in scotch moments ago. "I told you I'd get you."

"Yes, you did," I said, shaking my head and releasing her.

Jill turned around, placed her hands on my chest, and leaned in. She brushed a quick kiss against my nose before smiling up at me.

"This should teach you to never underestimate me."

Chapter 2570: I Just Know!

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Lil' Red Storm, Ceed World, Mystic Dimension

Inside the Mystic Dimension, a woman seated in a lotus pose abruptly opened her eyes. They were steady and determined, yet behind that resolve trembled a sharp, chilling sense of foreboding—an instinct that she was about to lose something precious. The fear only hardened her resolve.

Her figure flickered and vanished, reappearing before the massive seal that guarded the dimension's only exit. She stood silently before it, fixing her gaze on the immovable barrier. Then, gathering every ounce of strength into her fist, she struck.

A brittle, web-like crack spread across the seal from the point of impact, creeping outward until the entire structure collapsed—only to reveal another seal beneath it.

She didn't flinch. Though unsurprised, a flicker of frustration and urgency flashed through her eyes. She had to get out of her asap no matter the cost.

Drawing her power together once more, she drove her fist into the new seal. This time, it didn't budge—not even a tremor. Even so, she kept hammering at it, blow after blow, refusing to relent. Her knuckles split open, blood smearing across the cold surface, but she continued to strike with unyielding force.

"I thought you were giving up," a faint, almost withered voice echoed from afar—distant yet perfectly clear, carrying a note of curiosity at the woman's sudden burst of urgency.

"I thought you were going to keep pretending to be deaf and dumb," she shot back, irritation threading through her tone as she continued to strike the seal without pause. No matter how hard she struck, the seal didn't so much as tremble. She couldn't scratch it, couldn't even leave the faintest dent. Her breath grew ragged, but her bloody fist kept rising and falling, each blow more desperate than the last.

"Let me out!" she roared, finally abandoning the futile attempt to break the seal through sheer force. Her fists lowered, blood dripping between her fingers. Then she addressed the voice from earlier, trying to reason with it. "I think something's wrong... with him. You entered the Mystic Dimension for his sake, didn't you? He needs us now. Do you really no longer care for him?"

When no response came even after a long silence, the woman exhaled and shook her head in disappointment. Yet her resolve only hardened. She will get out of her and be there for her beloved or die trying. She lifted her bloodied fists again, ready to strike the seal once more. Just then, the voice from earlier finally replied, "And how do you know he's in trouble?"

"I just know," the woman answered without hesitation. She paused for a moment, then added, "I can't explain it, but you have to trust me."

"You just know? Since when did you become a diviner?" the voice mocked, its tone dripping with sarcasm.

"I'm not a diviner, but something is wrong! I feel like I'll lose him If I don't find him now!" she yelled, her voice breaking into a mix of panic and desperation. "Let me out of here, please."

When her plea was met with silence, her expression twisted, and she resorted to threats. "Let me out right now, or if something happens to him, I swear I'll kill you—even if it kills me."

"Hahaha... good luck with that," the voice sneered, utterly unconcerned. "But until then, if you want to leave the Mystic Dimension, you already know where the exit is."

Then it fell silent.

"You bitch! How can you be so heartless? After everything he's done for you?" the woman shouted into the vast emptiness of the Mystic Dimension, her rage echoing back at her. The voice's cold indifference only stoked her fury. "You're just as ungrateful and calculating as your mother. I guess the apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

"Shut up! I am nothing like her! And what did he ever do for me?" the voice shot back instantly, finally showing some emotion in it. The woman's words had struck a raw nerve.

"How dare you?" the woman snapped, disbelief twisting her features. "Did you forget he made a deal with a devil to save your ass when you got stomped by that semi-demigod? He was ready to sell his soul for you!"

Her voice shook with fury at the voice's ingratitude. If she had been capable of it, she would have taught that ungrateful brat a lesson herself.

"Yes, he did. And I am grateful to him. Not just me—the entire Southern Region is," the voice replied, its tone returning to a cool, controlled neutrality. "If he were truly in danger, there are plenty who would rush to his aid, even at the risk of their lives."

She paused, then continued with pointed suspicion. "And I would go myself... but how am I supposed to know you're not lying to skip training, just so you can run off to see him? If you want to be by his side so badly, you're free to leave. Nobody is stopping you."

"Why do you assume I'm lying?" the woman shot back, stung by the accusation. She couldn't understand what she had done to earn such distrust.

"Why? Do you really need to ask?" the voice replied, its tone cooling once more. "When it comes to him, I can never trust you."

There was no intention of explaining further—nor of continuing the argument. The voice had already decided there was nothing to gain from dragging this conversation on.

"If you know that," the woman said urgently, "then you should also understand how much he means to me. I would never make light of him being in danger. You have to trust me—just this once, please."

She poured every bit of her fear and sincerity into those words, hoping that the voice would understand: she couldn't lie when it came to him.

"..."

For a moment, the voice wavered. A part of her almost believed the woman's plea. But then she reminded herself that the entire Southern Region was out there, ready to protect him. With that thought, she hardened her resolve, pushed aside the flicker of doubt, and chose not to respond.

Ignoring the woman's pleas and threats alike, she refocused on her training.

Left with silence once more, the woman gritted her teeth and returned to pounding the seal, her bloodied fists rising and falling in relentless determination.

[#Chapter 2571: Demigod Norley's Heir - Read Chapter 2571: Demigod Norley's Heir](#)

Chapter 2571: Demigod Norley's Heir

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Jillians' Pub

"I know this doesn't change anything," Jill said, sensing the conflict in my emotions. "But I was hoping it would at least earn me a date with you. A proper date."

"A date? You created a whole scandal just to get one date with me?" I asked, brushing my fingers through her silky hair as she rested in my arms. My other hand was intertwined with hers. We were curled together on the couch in her office, finally hidden away from the public eye. "Aren't you afraid you'll never find a husband if I say no?"

As for Sean Brothwork, I had already compressed the limitless prison into the size of a marble and stored it inside the dimension card I'd borrowed from Lucine. He was the gift I intended to bring to the dinner party tonight—held at the Brothwork family's Morningstar Manor—where I would attend as Jill's plus one.

"If you say no," Jill whispered, clutching my hand even tighter, "I'm afraid I won't be able to live... let alone care about getting married."

"Wow, talk about no pressure," I joked, though the truth was I did want to go on that date with Jill—wanted to see where this could lead.

I knew I had feelings for Susan and Anna, but nothing had ever truly moved forward with either of them. Susan had asked for space, and Anna... well, once she came out of seclusion, she might simply treat me the same way she treated her mother. She might not really hate me, but that didn't mean nothing would change if she used her feelings for me to go further into the extreme path.

Was it wrong of me to pursue someone who was here, someone who was choosing me now, instead of waiting endlessly for people who weren't? Was it selfish to accept love that came without chaos, without pain, without uncertainty?

That was Jill. No drama. No mixed signals. Just straightforward ambition—and desire. She took what she wanted and was willing to pay the price for it. There was a strange comfort in that honesty and greed.

"You know what? Let's do it. Let's go on a date," I said as I lifted my head and pressed a kiss to the top of her head which laid against my chest.

"Really?" Jill blurted, rolling over and propping her chin on my chest so she could look directly into my eyes. Her disbelief was almost adorable.

"Yes," I said with a nod, unable to hide my own small smile. "And I already have the perfect place in mind. What are you doing tomorrow morning?"

A breakfast date sounded like the perfect start.

"Nothing. I'm always free for you," Jill replied with a burst of excitement as she climbed up to my face and kissed me with fierce urgency. Before we realized it, we were both naked and finally finished what we hadn't been able to back in that pregnant dungeon months ago—several times over. I had almost forgotten, but my Hive AI made sure I only fired blanks.

"It's a lot more fun than I remember," Jill murmured, resting her head on my arm as we lay buck naked on her office carpet. Finally tasting pure passion instead of the one induced by her carnivorous womb.

"I wish I could say the same," I muttered softly. Jill jabbed an elbow into my ribs, prompting me to add, "I'm kidding."

"You'd better be," she warned, pulling a comforter from her storage card and draping it over us before nestling comfortably in my embrace.

"So, what's the deal with your uncle?" I asked now that our mouths were finally free—and too tired for anything else.

"So, why did you really come to find me?" Jill countered, ignoring my question. At first, she assumed I had come to confront her for stealing my idea about starting a pleasure-card venture. But now that things had escalated into this, she was beginning to suspect there was more behind my visit.

"It's work stuff. We can talk about it after our date tomorrow," I replied, choosing not to argue with her.

"Sean Brothwork is a bastard born to someone important in the Brothwork family—descendants of one of the founders," Jill began getting a straight answer from me. "He's not actually my uncle. I only call him that to keep him from getting any ideas about me."

"Hold on. You're the daughter of one of the founders, yet you still have to be cautious of a bastard from an obscure branch of another founder's line? Doesn't that sound absurd?" I asked, startled to realize that Jill's childhood had been far more complicated than I assumed. I already knew her birth had been tragic, but as the only child of a founder, I expected she wouldn't need to worry about things like this.

"Well... Sean isn't just a bastard of the Brothwork family," Jill said after a brief pause. "He's also my father's designated heir." She exhaled softly before continuing, "When my father wanted to step down and live a normal life raising me, the transition wasn't simple. The other founders told him he could only retire if he chose a successor—essentially, his heir."

"Because my father was a loner and deeply repulsed by his own past, he didn't want any of it passed down to me. That left him with no one suitable to act as his heir. The other founders, of course, were more than willing to let him pick one of their descendants instead. Realizing exactly what they were plotting, my father chose Sean—a bastard—not as his disciple but as his brother and heir, purely to spite them."

"Sean was honest in the beginning, but as he grew stronger, inheriting most of my father's years of knowledge and hard work, faced with my father's indifference toward him and his hard work, he became corrupt. He started developing ambitions toward me and my father's fortune. But because he feared my father, he never dared to act openly on those intentions. At least, not until recently."

Jill's expression darkened.

"Lately, he's begun conspiring against my father... openly."

Chapter 2572: Brolock BrothWork, Divine Heirs' Club

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Jillians' Pub

"Hold on—he only became that strong after inheriting your father's life's work? Then he's either useless, or I've been giving the founders too much credit," I laughed, realizing Sean was Demigod Norley's heir.

From everything I'd learned and seen in Clown Mask's future vision, the founders were frighteningly powerful—so powerful the Three Mischiefs had to scheme together and stab them in the back at their weakest. And yet this so-called heir of Demigod Norley didn't even require me to dope myself with SSS-rank curses. I took him down with nothing more than a simple trick from my space-rule rune.

"What makes you think my father would share his life's work with that joke?" Jill rolled her eyes as she pulled my free arm around her. I had no idea how much closer she expected to get to me. At this point, she was practically burying herself in me. "Dad only teaches him just enough to keep the other founders off his back. That's one of the reasons Sean hates him. It's not that my dad has anything against the guy—he just doesn't want to help the founders create another monster like he used to be before I was born. He's willing to teach Sean other things that are just as good, but Sean isn't interested. So, over the years, things just turned into what they are now."

"So, he wouldn't mind if I killed Sean, right?" I asked, breathing in her intoxicating scent. I'd considered turning Sean into a calamity daughter gem, but the thought of him being around the founders too often gave me pause. Those people were far too sharp and perceptive—a calamity daughter core would never hold up under their scrutiny like a bloodkin would.

"He wouldn't, but the other founders would. After I was born, Sean basically became the only link left between my father and them," Jill said with a small smile, reacting to my slight movements and warm breath. Her physique had smothered her passion her entire life, but when it came to me, I was like its kryptonite. Even my slightest touch let her feel the heat, the desire—everything that made her feel like a woman. For the first time in her life, she felt whole—at peace, exactly where she belonged.

"So he's basically their snitch—the flimsy straw keeping them at bay," I said, realizing Sean was more than just Demigod Norley's designated heir. He was the only thing keeping them off her father's back.

"A snitch, that he is, but he's not what keeps them off my father," Jill corrected. "I am. They know my father would return to the past he abandoned for me... if it were for me."

"Then what's the deal with this young master Brothwork?" I asked, shifting the topic as Jill's mood dimmed every time we mentioned Sean or her father or the founders.

Besides, Hive AI couldn't find anything on this so-called young master of the Brothwork family—or the family itself. I figured these people didn't like being in the spotlight, just like their ancestors who preferred pulling the central government's strings from the shadows.

"That's Brolock Brothwork. The Brothwork family is grooming him to be their next leader. He became a card demigod just a few weeks ago, yet he's already managed to kill a couple of elite demigods. You've heard of the Divine Heirs' Club, right? He's their current leader.

"Divine Heirs' Club, it's an old group started by the founders' descendants. The younger generation in those families kept it going for the generations to come—"

"Are you part of that club too?" I cut in.

"No!" Jill snapped, genuinely offended that I'd even consider it. "My dad never let me mingle with those families when I was young. And by the time I got older, I'd already developed my own interests and my own opinions—unlike those snobs who know nothing but bragging about their families. Besides, they didn't want anything to do with me either."

"Be that as it may, the reason I brought this up is because when I needed the funding and connections to launch the pleasure-card venture as fast as possible, I reached out to a few of those heirs. At first, plenty of them were interested. I had more investment and backing than I needed, so I was planning to launch the pleasure cards across all five regions from the start. But then, out of nowhere, they all rejected it in an instant.

And right after that, Brolock contacted me. I knew exactly what was going on. Still, I went into business with him because the deal was fair—more than fair, really—so I'd have been an idiot to turn it down. But ever since then, he's been using it as an excuse to get close to me, almost making me regret the decision... until you showed up, just like I expected you would.

What took you so long? I thought you'd come running the moment I announced my venture. Since you didn't, I had no choice but to take his money and see it through. My dad is going to lose his mind when he finds out I used his subpar card recipe to sell cards to the public—"

Jill kept ranting, going on and on about how I hadn't taken her bait fast enough, forcing her to use Brolock's money just to make more money for both herself and him. I let her complain until I'd heard enough, then pulled her small head into my arms and kissed her so hard she nearly felt her scalp blow off.

Jill slapped my shoulder, telling me to stop and let her catch her breath. I only eased up when I was sure she couldn't hold on any longer. The moment I let her go, she gasped for air—and as soon as she caught her breath, she climbed on top of me, settling on my

torso. Then she leaned forward, her hair spilling over my face as she bent down and sank her teeth into my neck. I couldn't tell whether she was trying to hurt me or turn me on, but I was already worked up enough to go a few more rounds.

Chapter 2573: Crazy Love/ Lust?

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"We're late," Jill complained as we rode my gold nano-morpher hover bike to Brolock's dinner party—the one he was hosting to celebrate the success of the pleasure-card venture he'd invested in. For once, I was actually dressed for the occasion, wearing the fancy suit Jill had picked out to match her dress.

"I thought you didn't even want to go," I said, genuinely confused. After all, the only reason we were attending was so I planned to use the event as a stage to launch my fairy slime cards that were far superior and cheaper than their joke of pleasure cards.

I had Henricks make a run to Sky Blossom City to fetch enough Fairy Slime Cards for me to give away during the party. After all, the one thing I could always count on the rich second-generation kids for was being the most depraved people in the world.

"I didn't," Jill replied, "but since we are going, I want to do it properly. I hate doing anything half-assed."

In truth, she was still annoyed because I'd overindulged in her body earlier—I'd nearly dislocated her hip. Viltronians were an energetic species, with the power of the Celestial and the World Calamity Tree mixed in, I... may have gone overboard. There was no denying that. Thankfully, she loved me enough to handle that part of me even though her body could barely cash those checks.

"I'm sorry, I'll be gentle next time," I apologized, but Jill, whose head was resting on my back, simply replied, "Don't worry about it. It was rough, but I enjoyed it. Besides, once I forge the runes I have in mind, you will be the one begging me for mercy."

I fell silent. That was the moment I realized her dissatisfaction wasn't rooted in me almost wrecking her body, forgetting myself in the moment's pleasure, but in me enjoying her body more than she had enjoyed mine. I knew she was competitive, but this level was utterly insane. The thought alone got me aroused again. Was I going crazy too?

"Oh, gods, you're up already?" Jill exclaimed, her arms wrapped around my waist, registering the bulge in my pants. Before I could respond, she whispered something that was both utterly shocking and deeply arousing: "Do you want a quickie?"

Before I could even articulate a response, her hands were already unzipping my pants. We were only a few hundred yards from the Brothwork Manor's front gate. Guests were arriving one after the other; there were far too many eyes in the air. "What in the world are you doing? Have you gone completely insane?"

"Go higher and circle around. It won't take long," Jill ordered, not even pausing to seek my consent. I wondered if this was her way of getting back at me for ramming her until she could no longer hold on and had to beg for surrender. Just when I thought she couldn't get any crazier, she went and completely outdid herself.

"Yes, my lady," I conceded. I would gladly accept this kind of punishment any time of the day. Instead of descending the hover bike at the manor gate, I turned it around to circle back once we were done.

As we hovered around, with Jill enthusiastically attending to my needs, I instructed the Hive AI to utilize a space rule to isolate us from the outside world, specifically to prevent high-level Card Apprentices from peeping in.

Once I was satisfied, I intended to turn on the autopilot and give Jill the time of her life, but she rejected the idea. Then, I remembered: what we did earlier was meant to be punishment, allowing Jill to satisfy herself with the illusion that she had dominated me, not the other way around. I was confused; I didn't understand how this arrangement worked. Because, to my mind, I had won, regardless of who really won between us.

"Just drive," Jill ordered, using her Cleaning Cards to instantaneously restore us and our clothing. If we didn't have a party to attend, I honestly would have insisted on satisfying her despite her refusal, just to see what kind of punishment she would devise next.

Descending the hoverbike at the front gate of the Brothwork Manor, we dismounted, and I retrieved the vehicle into my Grimoire. We then followed a beautiful maid who led us into the manor's left wing, where the party was being held.

As soon as I set foot inside the left wing of the manor, the entire theme changed abruptly—from its stately Victorian style to what resembled a depraved sex dungeon. I couldn't help but ask, "Jill, are you sure this is a dinner party and not some sort of orgy party?"

"I don't know. I can never tell with these people. If it is, feel free to join in—" Before Jill could finish, I cut in, asking, "You are kidding, right?"

I knew instantly that this was a test.

"Nope, I'm serious. We just started dating; how can I know your preferences? If you like orgies, I won't stop you. I also need to find out how I feel about you taking part in one while you're with me," Jill replied honestly. After all, this was her first relationship; she didn't truly know what she was doing, even though she had read extensively on what she was supposedly expected to do.

Yes, it was a test. But it wasn't one of the stupid scenarios shown in braindead rom-coms. She genuinely wanted to gauge her own feelings about me being with other women while we were together, because deep down, no matter how much she tried to ignore it, she knew I had feelings for others—specifically Anna and Susan. She was still trying to figure out how to feel about that. Furthermore, she herself was still unsure if I harbored similar feelings for her, believing she had strong-armed me into accepting the date.

"You know I wouldn't have asked you out if I didn't genuinely want to date you? Stop overthinking things," I assured Jill, pulling her closer and pressing a kiss to her forehead.

Chapter 2574: Drew Rockin

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"Well, well... look who finally arrived—the scandalous couple of the year!"

A cutting voice sliced through our moment. Jill and I turned to see a blond man standing behind us, dressed in a white tux with a pink shirt and a red bow tie, a cocktail balanced casually in his hand.

"Drew, get lost," Jill snapped. The smile on his face faltered for a heartbeat before returning as he said, still grinning, "Aren't you going to introduce your one and only friend to your brother-in-law?"

Jill, who had been a moment away from driving Drew off, froze the instant she heard him call me brother-in-law. With a reluctant smile, she finally introduced us, "Wyatt, this is Drew Rockin—my ex-business partner."

"Ex-business partner?" Drew echoed in theatrical shock. "Wow, Jill. Didn't think you'd turn into one of those people who forget their roots the moment they make it big." He clutched his chest dramatically, playing the victim.

"You know exactly what you did," Jill shot back, giving him no room to save face. Drew let out a long, weary sigh, defending, "Come on, Jill. You know I didn't have a choice. Unlike you, I'm stuck in this crappy club. And you loved it when I used its connections to help you. You even called me the best partner you ever had."

His entire life was dictated by his family, and the one thing he felt he had any real control over was his friendship with Jill. Seeing her still furious with him—despite knowing why he made his choices—left him visibly disappointed. He threw his hands up in frustration, accusing, "But now that I can't use this identity to benefit you, suddenly I'm an ex-partner? That's cold. I never thought you could be so ungrateful."

"How dare you call me ungrateful? After everything I did for you? And you still chose your little club over me," Jill fired back.

Her anger only made it clearer that she genuinely valued Drew's friendship—she wouldn't waste a second arguing with him otherwise, not with me standing beside her.

"You did a lot for me, sure," Drew said, "but you also charged a premium for every favor—"

He didn't get far.

"That's because if I didn't, you'd never appreciate my help. You take anything free for granted," Jill snapped, cutting him off.

She really was more like me than she realized—she wouldn't lift a finger without charging something for it and was incredibly petty. But charging a premium even to a friend? Even I wouldn't take it that far.

"No, it's because you're a money grubber. A total cheapskate," Drew shot back, clearly unmoved by her reasoning.

Both of them looked seconds away from saying something they'd regret, so I stepped in.

"Go greet the host first," I said, slipping between them.

I wasn't here to watch Jill argue with her friend—I was here to launch Fine Gold's Fairy Slime Cards.

"Wyatt, stay out of this. I need to teach this ungrateful brat a lesson," Jill said, trying to push me aside. When she couldn't budge me, she simply climbed over me instead, planting herself between us as she glared daggers at Drew.

"Consider this my last lesson to you. This one's free," she warned, her voice low and fierce, ready to give him a thrashing. They were both Card Emperors, but Jill was

already on the verge of forming her divinity, while Drew was still miles from that point. So yes—if I hadn't stepped in, she absolutely would have taught him a lesson.

I wrapped my left arm firmly around Jill to hold her back, then used my right hand to give Drew a light pat on the back, saying, "You two can sort this out later. For now, take me to the host."

Drew took a moment to steady himself and nodded, adding, "Brother-in-law, Brolock isn't here yet. He'll only show up about forty-five minutes after everyone else arrives. And considering you whisked away the woman he was after... well, he might make us wait an hour or two."

"But we're free to help ourselves to the Dream Nymph card samples until he arrives," Drew added. The moment he said it, he felt Jill's stare burn into the side of his head. He pretended not to notice, acting perfectly innocent.

"Even better," I blurted, glancing around the hall at the guests openly—and shamelessly—indulging in Jill's Dream Nymph cards. These were the richest—and most depraved—people in all five regions. In other words, the perfect target audience for my Slime Fairy cards.

Then I pulled out a stack of starter Slime Fairy cards and turned to Drew, asking, "Can you do me a small favor?"

"Name it," he replied instantly—much too eager to impress his new brother-in-law. Honestly, good thing I held back from slapping him earlier for addressing me as his brother-in-law on Jill's account.

"Keep a few for yourself and hand the rest to the high-value guests. Tell them they're a gift from Jill," I instructed Drew, passing him the stack of slime fairy cards. Drew skimmed one of the cards, brows shooting up in interest, he couldn't help but ask Jill, "Slime Fairy? I thought the upgraded version was going to be called Dream Nymph 2.0."

Jill, who had no idea what I was planning, was momentarily caught off guard. Even so, she played along smoothly. She caught a glimpse of the card info from the corner of her eye and said coolly, "Those pleasure cards were created by Wyatt. They're the whole reason I've been rushing to unload as many Dream Nymph cards as possible. Once his cards hit the market, no one will bother buying mine."

"Give me a minute—I'll unload these and be right back," Drew said, hurrying off into the hall, which honestly looked like one massive, extravagant sex dungeon.

If not for the purifying array continuously cleaning the air and sanitizing everything, I wouldn't have stepped foot in that place at all.

Chapter 2575: Already?

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"So, is this the business you wanted to discuss with me after our breakfast date tomorrow?" Jill asked once Drew left, clearly wondering whether I planned to use her Dream Nymph card distribution channels to sell my Slime Fairy cards in the Central Region.

"Well, it's part of it," I replied, choosing not to elaborate.

I wouldn't have dared to promote my pleasure cards under Jill's name if I hadn't already known how she would answer after tomorrow's talk.

At first, I thought Jill had started the pleasure card venture just to make quick money. But now that I knew she'd done it to trap me, I understood that she wouldn't refuse anything I asked of her.

After all, she was willing to tarnish her father's long-standing reputation just to secure a single date with me. Women this obsessed with you were rare. Most people would keep their distance from someone like her... but I preferred keeping her close.

I barely had time to love or care for myself, but she loved and cared for me enough for both of us. With her at my side, I knew not a single day of mine would ever be dull.

"How about we have that talk now?" Jill asked. Neither of us had any interest in whatever this party was supposed to be—group sex, group masturbation... who even decided the distinction?

"Nah. I want at least one proper date with you before I go and ruin it," I declined. I was confident Jill would agree to work with me, but only the ignorant find comfort in certainty; I knew better than to assume.

Listening to my words, Jill blinked in surprise, then her face lit up. She took my hand and led me toward one of the empty gardens in the mansion's left wing, not bothering to wait for Drew. "Don't worry about him," she said reassuringly. "He has a good nose. He'll find us."

"He seems to genuinely care about you," I said, still surprised she had someone she could actually call a best friend—especially one from the opposite sex. With Jill's

physique, most men couldn't help but have profane thoughts about her; resisting them was nearly impossible.

"Why? Are you jealous?" Jill teased, a wide grin spreading across her face. She clearly enjoyed the idea that I disliked her having a male best friend.

If that were truly the case, I wouldn't have asked him to help distribute the Slime Fairy cards at the party. But I didn't deny it. Better to let her have her fun. "Yes," I said. "He's a good-looking fellow. Don't tell me you're keeping a boy-toy on the side."

"Yes, I am. What are you going to do about it?" Jill shot back, letting go of my hand as she rushed ahead, spinning around to face me while acting cute and ridiculous at the same time.

"Woman, did you already forget what I can do?" I asked, raising a brow. "It hasn't even been that long," I added, alluding to our intimate combat session that had lasted the entire day.

The moment I brought that up, the playful smile on Jill's face faded. "Just you wait," she declared. "Let's see if you can still say that once I finish creating those runes."

I sighed, realizing exactly where I had gone wrong. "Do you have to be that competitive? Most women would be thrilled to have a partner who can help them reach orgasm—and here I am giving you multiple, each lasting for hours."

"Well, I'm not like most women, am I?" Jill shot back, clearly offended by the comparison. "Just enjoy yourself for now. We'll see who gets the last laugh."

I'd made that mistake before—with the other two as well. I supposed I was just like most men in that regard: incapable of learning from my own missteps.

Still, there was one upside to all this. Jill wasn't planning to abstain from sex while forging those runes she believed would make her the best in bed across the entire Myriad Realms, not just the Card World. Well, how could she abstain? She clearly enjoyed the deed—maybe not as much as I did, but she certainly enjoyed it.

"I leave you alone for one moment and you're already fighting with my brother-in-law? At some point, you should consider the possibility that you are the problem," Drew's voice came from behind us, mocking Jill's competitive, petty streak.

"Already?" I asked, surprised he'd returned so quickly.

"Yep. They were instantly mesmerized by the beauty and sound of the Slime Fairy card," Drew said, stepping closer. "You were right—it's leagues above the Dream Nymph card. Even if you priced it at ten times the Dream Nymph's cost, they'd still clear out every store. Once I ran out of cards to hand out, I honestly thought they might tear

me apart from disappointment. I barely escaped with my life. Brother-in-law, you've created another game-changing card, congrats."

Drew didn't hold back on the praise. He did me a favor without even exerting any effort.

I took out a small stack of premium Slime Fairy cards—ones I'd set aside for VIPs—and handed them to him. "Thank you," I said. "Keep these. Use them however you see fit."

One premium Slime Fairy card was more than enough to satisfy a Card Apprentice, yet I gave Drew an entire stack. They were meant to be gifts for his friends and elders to his relationships and connections. Even though the card hadn't officially entered the market, its value was already undeniable. He could auction the whole stack and make a fortune if he wanted—I wouldn't mind in the slightest.

All I cared about was ensuring the depraved elite of the Five Regions learned that the Southern Region now had a pleasure card far superior to the Dream Nymph card. It was only a matter of time before they came knocking on my door.

Chapter 2576: Brolock's Shock

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"My work is done. Since the host is too arrogant to show himself, shall we take our leave?" I asked Jill and Drew, seeing no reason to keep lingering at this profane excuse of a party. The host was clearly on a power trip, making his guests wait like obedient pets. Sure, he allowed everyone to sample the pleasure cards, but the bar and buffet were off-limits. To think I had even prepared a gift for him—what a waste of my consideration.

"Sure," Jill agreed instantly. Drew, however, gave a nervous chuckle and said, "You guys go ahead. I have to stay."

"No, you don't," Jill shot back without hesitation. "You're coming with us."

"Don't start that again," Drew sighed, shaking his head. She did this every single time despite knowing exactly how things were for him. He was a nobody in the Rockin family. Aside from his parents and siblings, no one even knew he existed until he managed to get into the Divine Heirs Club. Back when no one noticed him, he'd wanted to prove himself. But now that his family finally acknowledged him, he wished more than anything that things had stayed the way they were. Sometimes he even regretted ever joining the Divine Heirs Club in the first place.

His parents and siblings were proud of him, but they didn't know the truth—not even half of it. To the Rockin family, he was nothing more than a well-packaged pawn carrying out their orders. The moment he stepped even slightly out of line, they threatened his family's safety. His parents still believed they had lost their youngest child to a miscarriage, but in reality, that "miscarriage" had been the family's retaliation against him for refusing to betray Jill when he'd been given the chance. He could never bring himself to tell his parents or Jill—his closest friend—because he feared what the family might do to them if he did.

He dreaded the day they would demand he betray Jill again.

And now, with the entire world knowing Jill was dating Southern Hope, his family saw an opportunity. They wanted him close to Southern Hope, and the easiest way was through Jill. That was exactly what he was doing here tonight. In truth, he should have left the party with them to strengthen that connection, but he stayed behind because the pleasure cards he had received from Southern Hope were enough to keep his family satisfied for the moment. He didn't want this relationship to progress any further because he knew too well what awaited him if it did.

Jill shot Drew a sharp glare, ready to snap at him again, but she held herself back and simply muttered, "Know your limits, dumbass. Call me if you need help."

"I know, girl," Drew said with a gentle nod. "And you stop being so competitive. You're not alone anymore—you're part of a team now. Am I right, brother-in-law?"

I had no idea if they were even talking about the same thing at this point. I just kept a polite smile on my face and nodded at Drew, ready to say goodbye. But before I could, a sudden commotion erupted in the main hall where the party was being held. The noise quickly moved toward us.

Moments later, a man in extravagant attire rushed into the garden, trailed by a swarm of attendants and aides. Even without an introduction from Jill or Drew, I could guess who he was: Brolock Brothwork, our arrogant and shameless host. My assumption was confirmed the moment I heard his entourage address him as Young Master Brolock.

I wondered what had rattled him so badly that he not only disrupted his own party but also abandoned his tradition of making guests wait for his grand entrance—just to come looking for us.

"Jill, is this the Dream Nymph 2.0 card you were bragging about? These are incredible—too good, honestly. They deserve a name of their own. Are you really sticking with Slime Fairy? Don't get me wrong, it fits their nature, but I'm sure we can come up with something better," Brolock gushed the moment Jill entered his line of sight, completely ignoring Drew and me as if we weren't even there.

"You've got it wrong," Jill said, her expression turning cool. "It's not the Dream Nymph 2.0 card, and I didn't create it. It belongs to Wyatt. Your party was so bland he decided to liven things up by sharing one of his new creations. Fun, right? They instantly made the party several times more exciting. You must've seen it on your way over."

She didn't sugarcoat a thing—she flat-out called his party bland.

The Brothwork family claimed they had little real interest in Jill's venture, and that Brolock was only investing to show respect to Demigod Norley. But from the way he reacted, it was clear he cared a lot more than he let on. The pleasure-card market was simply too massive for even his family to ignore. Judging by his behavior, the only reason he hadn't already tried to seize control of Jill's venture was because she kept insisting that the better pleasure cards were still in development.

Now that he had seen my Slime Fairy card, he finally understood she hadn't been bluffing. And that realization was a double-edged blade for him—he was both tempted by it and frustrated that it wasn't his. That was why he broke his own tradition and rushed out to meet her the moment he learned about these new cards.

But the instant Jill told him the Slime Fairy card wasn't hers but mine, Brolock's expression froze and hardened. When his gaze shifted to me, I suddenly wasn't invisible anymore. Even so, the stiffness in his face didn't fade. He understood perfectly well that unlike Jill, I wasn't short on investors. All I had to do was utter a single word and world leaders would line up—whether they believed in the venture or not. For the chance to earn my goodwill, they would gladly pay fortunes. Not that I needed it.

Chapter 2577: Ignorant Figurehead

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"Tell me that the Dream Nymph 2.0 cards that you're developing are better than these Slime Fairy cards," Brolock demanded of Jill, his voice leaving no room for anything but the answer he wanted.

"Nope. Not even close," Jill replied without hesitation. "I knew he was developing this card, remember? That's why I told you we should offload as many Dream Nymph cards as possible before their value tanked. Now that he has announced his pleasure cards, no one's going to buy ours." She shrugged, mocking herself. "So? Planning to buy shares in the company? I'll sell you my stake for pennies on the dollar. What do you think? Deal?"

Her tone was half-joking, half-resigned, openly offering to hand over her share of the pleasure-card venture for practically nothing—all to drive home just how thoroughly the Slime Fairy card eclipsed everything they had built so far.

"You're kidding me, right? I haven't even recovered what my family invested in your venture, and now you're calling it quits? Do you think this is a joke?" Brolock exploded, his voice shaking with fury.

It wasn't the money that enraged him—it was the stain of failure. He prided himself on an unbroken streak of profitable investments, a record so spotless his family had dubbed him the Midas Touch of the Brothwork clan. If Jill's venture collapsed, he wouldn't just lose funds—he would lose his title, his pride, and the prestige he wrapped himself in. His ego couldn't bear the thought.

"Joke? No, I'm not joking," Jill replied, her tone turning icy. "Every investment carries its own risks. You knew that perfectly well when you backed my venture. And now you've seen my competition you should know this is the end. My Dream Nymph 2.0 Card still in development doesn't even qualify as competition anymore. Facing reality now is better than dragging out a slow death, don't you think?"

Her cold expression made it clear she wasn't going to let him order her around. They were partners—not master and servant.

"No—how can you just give up without trying?" Brolock snapped, spiraling at the mere thought of failure. "There has to be something you can do. You can't abandon everything we built. This isn't just about you—it's about me. I cannot fail. You have to find a solution. The pleasure-card venture cannot collapse. At the very least, we need to build it up enough to sell for a profit."

For all his celebrated success, Brolock was nothing more than a pampered child riding the momentum of his family's power. His so-called record came from investing in ventures that were already guaranteed to succeed. Companies didn't take his money because they needed it—they accepted it to avoid retaliation. Taking his investment was effectively pledging allegiance to the Brothwork family. And they weren't the only ones who operated that way; several powerful families did the same.

If not for the protection of the Southern Royal Family, I would've been targeted too—forced to accept their "investments," only to have them leech off my work for the rest of my life. These families weren't investors; they were parasites. Their contributions were nothing more than an advance payment on the profit they intended to siphon indefinitely.

Not that the Southern Royal Family was any better than the others—they weren't. The only reason they weren't able to extort me was because Anna had signed a contract with me under the witness of the world's will. That single moment robbed them of the

chance to exploit me and instead forced them into the role of my protectors. I was lucky. Without that twist of fate, I might have spent this life on the run too.

"What are you trying to say? I don't get it," Jill said, feigning confusion as if she did understand true reason for Brolock's frantic reaction.

When actually she was certain it wasn't about the money, she understood the real issue: he simply couldn't accept failure. It was common knowledge that the Brothwork family's golden boy had never tasted defeat. Thanks to his family's influence and power, all he had ever known was success.

"Is this about money?" Jill asked, tilting her head as if genuinely trying to help. "I can look for a buyer, but selling it at a profit might be pushing it. Unless you want to sell it right now—before the Slime Fairy cards are officially announced and hit the market." She offered the suggestion as though she were doing him a great favor.

Watching Jill work, I immediately understood what she was aiming for—full control of her venture. That was why she was being so bluntly honest with her investor. And it made perfect sense. The company owned the data and service rights of most professional sex workers across the central region. Even if my Slime Fairy cards completely eclipsed her Dream Nymph cards in the market, she could still earn back a hundredfold by selling that data alone.

The fact that Brolock couldn't see this only proved he was nothing more than an ignorant figurehead—the Brothwork family's poster boy—while the real brains of the family were entirely different people. Realizing this, I felt relieved that I hadn't killed or released Sean Brothwork.

Listening to Sean speak about Brolock—and finding nothing noteworthy about him in the Grimoire Network—I realized I had overestimated the man. This fool, obsessed with maintaining a title yet blind to what Jill was truly after, clearly lacked both the intelligence and the courage to orchestrate a conspiracy against Demigod Norley using Sean as a pawn. The mastermind had to be someone else.

It seemed I needed to have a conversation with this so-called heir of Demigod Norley to uncover who was actually pulling the strings from the shadows.

Given the founders' long-standing relationship, it wasn't impossible for grudges to exist, but their interests were too deeply intertwined for them to act recklessly—unless someone crossed a line they couldn't tolerate. So it definitely wasn't the founders. More likely, it was a bold descendant attempting to leap the dragon gate by using Demigod Norley as a stepping stone.

Chapter 2578: Foreboding

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"Really? You would do that for me?" Brolock asked Jill with reverence, clinging to her words like a drowning man grasping a floating log.

"Don't mention it. One company has been approaching me for a while, trying to buy my venture. Their offers were never high enough, so I kept them at arm's length. But now..." Jill paused, as if the idea had only just occurred to her. "Now I might as well accept before they hear about the Southern Region's Slime Fairy cards."

Seeing Brolock nod, she summoned her grimoire and immediately got to work. "Give me a moment. I'll contact them right away and finalize the deal."

Then, Brolock's attention shifted to me. With a detached tone, he asked, "Do you want to buy her venture? It would make expanding into the Central Region easier."

I hadn't expected him to speak to me so directly after treating me like air and not to mention, after learning I am the reason he was failing. For a moment, I wondered if I had misjudged him—apparently, after repeating the same task for decades, even a pig could learn a trick or two. Still, I had no interest. I offered a polite smile and shook my head, choosing not to interfere in Jill's plans.

Though Brolock knew nothing about the inner workings of Jill's venture, he did understand one thing clearly: the Central Region was his home turf. Without support from his family—or from any of the other major families—I wouldn't be able to expand here even if I bought Jill's venture. They would make sure of that, at least until I handed over a sizable portion of the pie. He understood this well enough to approach me with the offer... or perhaps it was his aides who urged him to do so.

I ignored him and instead studied the members of his entourage. Brolock himself wasn't the real obstacle; they were. If Jill intended to pull this off, these people were the ones we had to worry about.

I had no doubt they were more than mere attendants. They were his advisers—the council he leaned on when making major decisions. They were the ones who kept him from blundering into bad investments, the ones who convinced him to hold steady rather than panic-sell... much like he was about to do now.

What puzzled me was their silence. What were they waiting for? They should have already noticed that Jill was up to something, shouldn't they? Were they trying to decipher her endgame? And if so... shouldn't they have figured it out by now?

What made her venture valuable? The Dream Nymph card recipe, of course, and the extensive data on prostitutes across the Central Region—along with the rights tied to them. Even if the Dream Nymph recipe had lost its worth with the introduction of the Slime Fairy card, the data and the rights remained priceless. They should know that... shouldn't they?

No. They might have been sharks in the investment world, but they understood nothing about the pleasure card market. That domain was still new—one that only Jill and I were truly exploring. It was impressive enough that they had managed to foresee its potential and invest early, blocking the other families from throwing their money into Jill's venture.

But they operated under a flawed assumption: that no one would dare cheat the Brothwork family. In their world, such a thing was unthinkable. What they failed to grasp was that the rule didn't apply to Jill or me. Not only did we dare to cheat the Brothwork family, but we would carve out a massive share of the profits for ourselves.

They thrived only in waters they understood and dominated. The moment they drifted into unfamiliar territory, they were as blind and powerless as anyone else.

Still, they at least had the sense to wait and observe Jill's intentions instead of leaping at her offer the way their foolish master had. I remained patient as well, watching to see whether anything unexpected might occur.

Nothing did. Jill contacted the so-called organization interested in buying her venture, had them draft the agreement, and sent a copy directly to Brolock. Only then did her eyes reveal a hint of concern. As expected, Brolock immediately investigated the organization and uncovered everything there was to know about them.

He wasn't pleased to discover that their offer was low because Jill refused to sell the rights to the Dream Nymph card, insisting on renting it instead. But after his "careful" and "insightful" persuasion, Jill reluctantly agreed to sell the rights—at a premium. The overall valuation of her venture rose accordingly, securing a tidy profit on paper that conveniently kept Brolock's investment record spotless.

I knew it. These people truly had no grasp of the pleasure card market. They fixated entirely on the Dream Nymph card rights, exactly as Jill intended, completely overlooking the far more valuable asset: the data and rights connected to the prostitutes across the Central Region.

In the end, Brolock—utterly convinced he had weathered a crisis through sheer brilliance—invited us to stay for dinner with his other guests. Jill rejected him outright, claiming she had lost too much money to have an appetite. Even so, he continued pressuring her to remain... until, quite suddenly, he stopped caring whether we stayed at all.

His abrupt shift in enthusiasm was troubling. Drew noticed it too. He finally stepped in, urging Jill to stay for dinner while subtly rubbing at the corners of his eyes, trying to signal her. But Jill, having just secured a massive profit, was far too excited. She could barely wait to get back and celebrate with me by making the bed creak.

Just as Drew was becoming painfully obvious, Brolock shot him a sharp look, silencing him instantly. That was when Drew and I both confirmed our suspicions.

Meanwhile, Jill remained blissfully unaware. Lost in her own little world, she kept tallying her gains, not even sparing a thought for Brolock's or Drew's strange behavior. It was as if she had no sense of danger whatsoever. Then again, thinking back on it, unlike other heirs I had encountered, she didn't have bodyguards lurking in the shadows wherever she went in the five regions.

And why would she? She was the one and only daughter of a Founder.

Chapter 2579: Temporal Separation Array Formation

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

As a maid escorted us toward the manor's main gate, I glanced at Jill—clinging to my arm, completely absorbed in her own jubilant little world—and let out a long sigh. She was unlikely to be the one in danger. Their target was almost certainly me.

I had been in the Central Region long enough to expect something like this. Ever since I left Morningstar University and arrived at Jill's pub, I had wondered when they would finally make their move. Yes, I had defeated card demigod Sean with ease, but that alone wasn't enough to intimidate the people plotting against me.

Now, at last, they had chosen to act. They took their time—clearly wanting to be thorough, not to spook their prey into retreat.

But I wasn't concerned. I had come fully prepared for this outcome. In fact, I was looking forward to the loot. Many among the Freedom Fighters needed Diamond-grade grimoires to break into the Card Emperor realm and rise further. And now, I had the perfect opportunity to stock up.

What concerned me was Jill's complete lack of caution. She behaved as if the entire Central Region were her personal backyard. Part of me wanted to believe Demigod Norley had given her some powerful safeguard—a card she could rely on in times of danger. After all, she had once handed me Demon Merchant Ezra's card, which later

revealed itself to be Devil Merchant Belphegor's card in disguise. That single act led me to uncover the Devil Merchant Code and eventually become a demon merchant myself.

Again and again, I had seen signs indicating that Demigod Norley possessed far deeper ties to the Dark Races than any of the other Founders. Whatever those connections entailed, I could only hope Jill wasn't carrying another concealed monstrosity like that demonic card... or be forced into a situation where she would need to use it. Though I had come prepared, so had they. Because of that, I couldn't be certain how the situation would unfold.

I was confident the enemies waiting outside wouldn't harm Jill, but Jill wouldn't simply stand by and watch me get ambushed. If she interfered, she might force their hand, pushing them into harsher measures. Hopefully, my preparations were enough to prevent things from escalating that far.

Yes, I could have called Hendricks and avoided the ambush entirely. But that wasn't why I was here. I hadn't come to run or hide—I came to make a statement. To show the world that anyone who thought they could take what belonged to me was gravely mistaken. This would give those eyeing a share of my pie something to reconsider.

As we reached the manor's front gate, my Primordial Soul Pupils immediately detected the ambush lying in wait just beyond the property. They didn't want to take any chances. They could have attacked me inside the Brothwork family's Morningstar Manor, yet they refrained.

I suppose even they still had a bottom line they weren't willing to cross.

"Wyatt, stop. There's an ambush ahead." Jill snapped out of her blissful haze the moment I summoned my nanomorpher hover-bike, she rang with sharp warning.

"I know," I answered with a nod.

Originally, I planned to leave Jill at the manor gate and face the ambush alone—show them I'd seen through their setup and still chose to walk straight into it. But knowing her, she would never allow that. So, I had no choice but to bring her along. Even so, I hadn't expected her to notice the danger at the last second. She must have some higher-grade danger-sense card or rune, something subtle but potent enough to warn her of an ambush of this magnitude.

"You know and you're still walking into it?" she snapped. "Have you gotten cocky just because you defeated one demigod? An ambush is nothing like facing a half-wit demigod. There are at least a dozen Card Demigods out there, each one an elite with centuries of experience. Stop being reckless and call Hendricks before they realize we've spotted their ambush and attack blindly!"

She was full-on nagging now, her irritation barely restrained. If we hadn't just started dating—and if she wasn't trying to spare my feelings—she would've outright called me stupid, maybe even a moron, for daring to walk knowingly into a trap like this.

"Listen to me—I've got this. Why else do you think I dared to leave the safety of the Southern Region and come to the Central Region of all places? Just sit back and enjoy the show," I told her, certain of my preparations. But Jill didn't buy it. She insisted, "I'm coming with you."

"I never said you couldn't." I swung onto the hoverbike and offered her my hand. She could have boarded on her own—she was a Card Emperor, after all—but we both knew these small gestures were part of why we hadn't simply flown here. Flying would've been faster, far more efficient. But riding together gave us something we rarely had: quiet moments of shared closeness, allowing us to get to know each other better.

"They're using a Temporal Separation Array," Jill warned as she settled behind me. "The moment we step outside the gate, we'll be pulled into a time-space separate from our reality. Entering is easy, but escaping without locating the core is incredibly difficult because of the time displacement. Even with the core, we'd need perfect timing to return to the correct moment. I studied this formation in depth back at university—it has almost no exploitable flaws. Are you sure you still want to do this?"

Jill warned me with genuine concern just moments before I lifted the hover-bike's accelerator.

"That's perfect," I exclaimed, revving the accelerator. "Of everything they could've used, time is the one thing I'm least worried about. Trust me on this one."

With that, we shot forward—straight into the ambush—riding my golden nanomorpher hover-bike.

Chapter 2580: Time Ambush

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor, Temporal Separation Array

"They've spotted us," the demigod with the long, pointed beard reported from within the temporal-separation array the moment Jill sensed the danger ahead. "I told you—placing an array right at the gate was too obvious. We need to act now, before he calls Henricks."

"No need," replied another demigod concealed within the bearded one's shadow, cautioning him against sounding the alarm prematurely. "Even Henricks can't step into the space inside Brothwork Manor. The isolation arrays layered over the estate were designed by the founders themselves, tailored to the manor's geography. There's only one exit, and it leads directly to us. Unless he plans to live as the Brothwork family's guest indefinitely, he'll have to come out."

"What if he contacts the Southern Royal Family for help? Any one of those unparalleled monsters could get him out safely. Or what if she calls her father? Then everything we've done will amount to nothing."

The bearded demigod's mind spiraled through every possible way their operation could collapse, but the demigod in his shadow answered with steady patience, "The higher-ups have already arranged interference should that happen. Still... let's hope it doesn't come to that."

"Let's hope it doesn't come to that? What the hell is that even supposed to mean? Who in their right mind wouldn't call for help after realizing there's an ambush ahead—"

The bearded demigod abruptly stopped speaking as he watched the youth—renowned as one of the brightest minds of his generation—walk straight into their ambush with his lover at his side. "Did they not notice us? I watched her—they definitely did. Then what are they thinking?"

"They did say that boy is extremely arrogant. Maybe today is the day his arrogance finally catches up to him through us," the demigod lurking in his colleague's shadow offered, drawing from the briefing he'd received on their target.

"Let's hope it's just that," the bearded demigod murmured, silently praying this wasn't one of those moments where the hunters found themselves becoming the hunted.

...

"Wow, that felt exactly like entering a dungeon gate," I remarked as our hover bike slipped into the temporal-separation array. It was as if we had crossed into an entirely different world with its own time flow. Usually, the moment one were to pass through one time flow to another, they would be hit with a heavy wave of temporal dissonance—an abrupt, disorienting jet lag that they couldn't ignore.

For an average card demigod, it would take minutes for their body and divinity to acclimate to the local time. As for a card master or a card emperor, they wouldn't even get that chance. Caught in an ambush here, their strength would be crippled, their bodies reduced to dust long before they could adapt. And that was only one of the array's many passive effects. Everything about this formation was engineered for assassination.

But Jill and I were different.

I had my innate resistance to time rules, and Jill—daughter of Demigod Norley and a researcher at Morningstar University—carried an entire arsenal of time-rule cards.

The time within a temporal-separation array doesn't speed up or slow down the flow of reality—it creates an entirely separate time zone that exists parallel to ours. Anyone authorized by the array can wield time-rule abilities or time-related cards at half their usual effort and cost, granting them far greater efficiency than their targets.

In other words, entering the array doesn't require time-rule comprehension to survive its shift; anyone who steps in is forcibly integrated into its temporal field. Their body and divinity simply need time to adjust to the change—much like stepping into cold water. It bites at first, but once your senses recalibrate, the chill fades into familiarity.

For Jill and me, my time-rule resistance and her arsenal of time-rule cards allowed our bodies and ego gems to adapt instantly, without either of us even noticing the transition.

Also, the new time zone within the array actively suppresses anyone it traps, doubling the effort and cost needed to invoke time-rule powers and cards or any abilities tied to them. That obstacle didn't affect me—and Jill had more than enough time-rule energy and cards to ignore it entirely.

"What now—are we just going to sit here and wait for them to attack us? Is that really your plan?" Jill demanded as I eased the hover bike to a halt, letting it drift silently in midair. "Tell me you have something better. Because if you don't, I swear I'll beat you to a pulp before they get the chance."

"There are forty-five demigods hidden within the array's time flow," I reported, studying the seemingly empty expanse around us. "At least a dozen have comprehended the time rule, and the rest are armed with high-level time-related cards."

To the naked eye, the array looked deserted, but it was anything but that. The demigods were using accelerated time streams to conceal themselves; anyone remaining in the normal flow wouldn't sense them—much less see them. On top of that, two more demigods were tucked into the array's shadow, guarding its core with shadow-rule techniques.

They'd covered every angle. They were thorough, no question about it.

"How are you even sensing them?" Jill demanded, stunned. "My time cards are still scanning the time flow second by second in ascending order, trying to determine the speed of their time stream in this time flow. They haven't found anything yet."

Her reaction made sense. A time-related card could identify temporal anomalies, but it couldn't simply leap to the highest possible acceleration to spot someone hiding using

accelerated time streams without the proper time rule and meaning comprehension. It had to check each temporal layer one second at a time until it matched the enemy's accelerated flow—only then could it pull the user into that same stream, allowing them to fight on equal footing.

But that method only worked if the enemy was slow, careless, or significantly weaker—long enough for the scanning to finish. Yet here I was, someone who hadn't even comprehended the time rule, pinpointing enemies concealed in accelerated time the moment we stepped in. Jill couldn't help but wonder whether I had created a new time-related card, something far superior to the ones she carried.

#Chapter 2581: Using World Decree As Contract - Read

Chapter 2581: Using World Decree As Contract

Chapter 2581: Using World Decree As Contract

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor, Temporal Separation Array

"I have my means," I answered, offering Jill no further explanation—only for her to scoff, "You already tricked me to become yours; you don't have to act mysterious around me now."

"No, I do. At least if I want to keep you around," I countered lightly, tipping my head back until it rested on her shoulder. She leaned in, letting hers settle against mine. The demigods still hadn't moved against us—not yet, anyway—so I allowed myself that moment.

"You think I'm only with you because of your tricks, is that it?" Jill asked, her voice carrying a subtle chill.

That was when it hit me: no matter how open-minded a woman might be, she wouldn't tolerate certain jokes—not ones aimed at her.

Or... maybe it was simply too early in our relationship for that kind of teasing.

"Honestly, I have no idea what you see in me. You even gave me the demonic card your father entrusted to you for your protection after the Pregnant Dungeon ordeal. You went as far as betraying his trust to warn me about the conspiracy during the Southern Capital incident. And now, after I admitted I have feelings for other women, here we are dating. If I asked you why me of all the people in the world, I doubt you'd tell me... would

you?" I spoke from the heart. I genuinely didn't understand the reason behind Jill's unwavering devotion—devotion that had stirred feelings in me despite myself.

"No, I won't. Because I also want to keep you around," Jill replied, turning my own words back on me.

I guessed she finally understood what I meant. Her arms tightened around my waist, and she pressed her face into my shoulder as if trying to sink deeper into me. I turned my head, tilted back against her shoulder, just enough to gently nibble on her earlobe.

In the end, both of us were pretending we had control over this relationship, clinging to whatever comfort we could find to settle our restless hearts.

"Ahem. You two have been ambushed. Please conduct yourselves appropriately."

A voice cut through our moment. A bearded demigod stepped out from hiding, his shadow stretched unnaturally long despite the array's controlled lighting.

"We know that. Why else would we stop here in the middle of an array, dumbass?" Jill shot back without lifting her chin far from my shoulder, speaking to him as if he were beneath notice. She feared nothing from them—government dogs or major-family enforcers alike. None of them would dare touch her.

"Your Highness, please stay out of this. We already have authorization from Demigod Norley," the bearded demigod said, offering a half-truth in hopes that invoking her father's name would make her withdraw.

"I'm guessing your master didn't tell him I was with Wyatt—just that Wyatt has captured his heir. Am I right?" Jill smirked, confident speculating.

She knew her father too well. If he'd been informed she was involved, he wouldn't have granted them permission even if they claimed Wyatt had killed one of the founders, let alone for some excuse about retrieving an heir.

The bearded demigod fell silent, his expression twisting as Jill effortlessly exposed his lie. Inwardly, he cursed Brolock. If that fool had managed to keep Jill at the dinner table and sent their target out alone, they wouldn't now be forced to tread so carefully with the target standing right in front of them.

"Your Highness, our orders are clear. Please don't blame us if you get hurt," the bearded demigod said at last, dropping the polite façade. It was a warning—leave now, or they would no longer be held responsible for what happened next.

"You've all gotten quite bold, haven't you? Wait until my father hears about this," Jill replied, summoning her grimoire. The man went pale instantly, panic flashing through

his eyes. That panic turned into astonishment when I stopped Jill from actually contacting her father.

Under normal circumstances, no card apprentice inside a temporal separation array could reach the outside world. But knowing Demigod Norley, he had no doubt given his only daughter a means to do so, just to be available for his daughter at a moment's notice, regardless of the situation's scale. He simply wanted to be there for her—just as any father would.

"Jill, let me handle this on my own," I said as I stored the nanomorpher hover-bike back into my grimoire. Without warning her, I shifted to my flight ability and lifted us off the ground. Jill, seated behind me, stiffened for a moment before adjusting; once she understood the change, she released her hold on my waist and hovered beside me. I took her hand in mine. Observing this, the bearded demigod responded with an exaggerated eye roll.

"Fine. But if they push too far, I'm calling my father," Jill warned, directing a cold glare at the bearded demigod, promising that he would face consequences far beyond anything he wished to face.

"Your Highness, please rest assured," the bearded demigod said quickly, hands raised in a placating gesture. "We are only here to negotiate with Master Wyatt. As long as he cooperates with our requests, you may continue your date as if nothing happened." His tone made it clear that he wanted a peaceful resolution even more than we did.

Then he summoned his diamond grimoire and unfurled a scroll. The moment Jill saw it, her eyes widened.

"World Decree!" she exclaimed.

She couldn't believe the founders had gone so far as to use something as precious as a World Decree just to deal with me. At first, it felt excessive—but when she considered who I was, what I possessed, and what I was capable of, she realized it wasn't unreasonable for them to bring out a World Decree to restrain me.

The bearded demigod extended the scroll toward me.

"Master Wyatt, please review the contract and sign it. If anything in the terms displeases you, speak up. My masters are more than willing to accommodate a brilliant mind like yourself."

The moment he mentioned the Masters, the color drained from Jill's face. She understood immediately: the only way I would be allowed to walk out of here alive was by signing the World Decree—and in doing so, acknowledging them as my masters.

Chapter 2582: Blackhole

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor, Temporal Separation Array

"World Decree?" I murmured as I took the scroll from the bearded demigod. I had no intention of signing it, yet I couldn't help but be captivated by it. The scroll radiated a level of authority far beyond anything a mere card demigod—one who hadn't even broken past the chivalry-class—should possess, let alone channel through an item. It seemed I had once again underestimated card apprentices, just like any other demon or devil merchant who dared to the card world.

My primordial soul pupils revealed that the scroll contained only a single ability—Celestial Voice. But its execution was far more sophisticated than anything I had achieved with my own Celestial Voice. The scroll could directly whisper the words recorded in it into the ears of the Card World's Will, i.e. the Card Celestial. Until this moment, I hadn't even known to wield my celestial voice to that level. Then again, I was still little more than a novice when it came to wielding my celestial senses.

Yet of all the questions swirling in my mind, the one that troubled me most was this: why would the Card Celestial heed the wishes of card apprentices conveyed through a World Decree. I took this question personally because it had ignored my own calls.

The World Decree functioned more like a letter to the celestial—whether the Card Celestial chose to act on it was ultimately its decision. But judging by how the Masters were willing to use such a measure to enslave me, they clearly believed the Card Celestial would honor it.

"Wyatt—" Jill called out in shock when she saw me take the world decree, but her voice was abruptly cut short. An unseen pressure wrapped around her, choking off her words. She traced the force to its source and shot a sharp glare at the bearded demigod, who offered a cold, passive-aggressive warning, "Your Highness, this doesn't concern you. Please stay out of this—"

"...like hell it doesn't—"

The bearded demigod halted mid-sentence as a dangerous surge of power tore apart his hold on Jill, freeing her voice in an instant. Both he and Jill turned toward me, disbelief etched across their faces. Neither could comprehend the force now pouring off me, it was no mere card master's aura, but something already eclipsing the strength of most demigods.

After emerging from the time vestige, the Hive Spirit had already combed through the inter-realm network and replenished the SSS-rank curses in my arsenal. The moment I sensed them restored, a subtle but welcome feeling of security settled over me—an assurance in a region teeming with enemies on every side.

"I take it you're the best those so-called 'Masters' of yours were willing to spare," I said, drifting toward the bearded demigod. I stopped only when our faces were inches apart, close enough for him to feel my breath. Then, with a casual slap to both his cheeks, I added, "Behave. Or I won't mind sending you and your friends to your deaths a few minutes sooner."

The bearded demigod tried to swat my hand away, but his body refused to respond under the pressure I exerted. His partner—lurking within the shadows—attempted to come to his aid, only to freeze the moment our eyes met. When he caught sight of my grin, he instantly shifted his gaze toward the array core concealed behind him in the array's shadow and broke into a cold sweat.

Sensing his partner's distress, the bearded demigod dropped to his knees mid-air and bowed to Jill. "Your Highness, please forgive my insolence. I did not know any better."

Meanwhile, his shadow-bound companion used his shadow-rule prowess to relocate the array core, hoping the distraction caused by his colleague's behavior would let him hide it once more. But with my primordial soul pupils, I immediately tracked where he shifted it within the array's darkness.

As my gaze followed him unerringly—no matter what trick he attempted—both the bearded demigod and his hidden partner began to panic. They had no idea how to proceed. Their instructions had been simple: recruit me using the World decree, and act only if they failed to do so.

However, before they could receive any response from me, the situation unraveled faster than either of them could manage. My strength caught them off guard, they had never anticipated that my presence alone would be enough to freeze their bodies in fear.

Now they found themselves trapped in a dilemma—whether to attack or hold back. After all, I had not yet rejected their offer. By accepting the World Decree into my hand, I had implicitly shown that I was at least considering their proposal.

They dared not give me any reason to refuse it. Their Masters valued me—and what I possessed—far too highly. Even as a slave bound to them, I would still outrank these guys by a wide margin. Offending someone who might soon be their superior was the last thing they wanted.

So they clung to the hope that this encounter would reach a peaceful conclusion, praying this matter wouldn't escalate beyond their control anymore.

"Let us all have a proper talk without this array getting in the way, shall we?" I said, activating my 'If You See Me, I See You' ability. My curse clone slipped into the shadow where the demigod was hiding, crossed through the array's veil, seized the core, and vanished—reappearing as I withdrew, the array core now resting in my hand.

With my Hive Spirit and Primordial Spirit acting in tandem, I took control of the temporal separation array formation the moment I touched its core—hacking into it before the hostile demigods could even register what had happened.

But I did not use it to dismantle the formation. Instead, I twisted its flow, manipulating the array's temporal field while channeling my space rule and celestial force to manifest a massive black hole at its center.

The instant the black hole formed, the surrounding time collapsed into a sluggish crawl. The demigods hiding in the accelerated time stream were forced out into the open, along with the one lurking in the array's shadow. And then, with a silent pull, the black hole consumed the array entirely. It collapsed and evaporated from the world as if it had never existed.

Chapter 2583: I Didn't Think I Could Love You More

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor, Temporal Separation Array

Ever since the bearded demigod revealed himself, Hive Spirit and I had been on high alert, tracking each demigod across their respective accelerated time streams. I had only one physical pair of eyes—two, if I counted my spiritual body in the spiritual plane. A thousand more if I included my Primordial Clones, and twice that again if I counted their spiritual bodies. Yet, despite all that, I was currently relying on my one pair in my regular form. Even with my abilities, monitoring all of them scattered across different accelerated time streams was far from easy.

Normally, I wouldn't have been able to maintain this level of awareness. With my time-rule resistance, I would have been pulled directly into whichever accelerated time stream was the fastest. In that scenario, I would exist in the same time flow as the demigod with the greatest mastery over time acceleration, while the others would appear frozen to me.

But now—thanks to my mastery over the space rule working in tandem with my time-rule resistance—I could peer into multiple accelerated time streams while remaining anchored in the original one. It allowed me to see them all, without being forced into any single temporal flow.

Yes, it was incredible—an ability most card apprentices would kill for—but it was also incredibly taxing, even for someone with my capabilities. So the moment an opportunity arose to pull everyone back into the original timeline and ease the strain on my vision, I took it without hesitation.

As for how I managed to summon a black hole—an enormous one, no less—the answer lay in the combination of tools and mastery at my disposal. Using the array core, I seized control over the time within the formation; with my celestial force, I substituted the mass required to anchor the phenomenon; and my command over the space rule—especially its elasticity meaning and the limitless strain rune—made the structure stable enough to manifest.

With all the necessary components at my fingertips, creating a black hole inside the array was simply a matter of intent.

Why, then, were the demigods hiding in their various accelerated time streams forcibly pulled out of them?

Because time slows down near a black hole—an effect predicted by one of the greatest minds from Earth. The moment the black hole formed, its influence collapsed the differences between the streams, dragging them back toward the original flow.

With such a massive black hole disrupting their accelerated time-rule streams, every one of them was dragged back into the original timeline. But I had gone a bit overboard with its size. It was far too large for its own good—and for me to maintain control—so I forced it to consume the very array that had allowed me to summon it. Once the array vanished, the black hole collapsed and evaporated as if it had never existed.

Had it persisted even a moment longer, it would have swallowed me and Jill along with the demigods. And that would have been monumentally stupid on my part.

In my defense, I was creating a black hole. Yes, that should have been even more reason to act with caution and precision, but—well—try playing god for a second and see if you don't lose yourself just a little. Thankfully, I still had enough presence of mind to fix my mistake before it became fatal.

"Holy shit!" Jill shouted as she rushed toward me, leaping into my arms. Her legs wrapped around my waist, her arms locked around my neck, and she peppered my face with frantic kisses—pausing only long enough to spill out bursts of breathless excitement.

"You... manifested... a black hole... using... space rule... celestial force... the array core... It was freaking awesome! I... love you... I love you... Even though for a moment I thought we were all dead—but then you fed it the array and handled it. Fuck, that was just incredible. And you even used the black hole to drag all these assholes out of hiding."

She turned toward the hostile demigods, who were still trying to make sense of what had happened—how I had acted faster than they could despite being in the original time stream while they were in accelerated ones, how they had failed to reclaim the array core in time, and why the black hole had pulled them all out.

Jill let out a long sigh. "Honestly, it would've been better if you had tossed these assholes into the black hole along with the array."

"I would have—if not for their divinities and diamond grimoires," I said, scanning the demigods to confirm none of them had been accidentally swallowed by the black hole.

"When did you become this strong?" Jill asked, feeling out my energy signature, trying to dissect it and uncover the source of my sudden rise in power.

"I was always this strong. I just never felt the need to show it," I said, unable to resist the brag. With one of the most beautiful women in my arms and nearly forty-five demigods recoiling in fear, how could I not?

"Oh, I never knew I could love you even more," Jill breathed. She usually hated my narcissistic streak, but right now she found it charming. I supposed the difference was simple—this time, she'd seen I wasn't boasting without substance.

Overhearing our exchange, the forty-five demigods exchanged glances and immediately shifted into position, arranging themselves into a precise battle formation.

"What's the rush?" I called out, taunting them. "Whether you die now or a few seconds later, death will greet you with the same indifference."

"Master Wyatt, there is no need for things to escalate. Please—look over the contract and tell us how we can adjust it to your satisfaction. As I said earlier, our Masters are generous and tolerant when it comes to recruiting someone of your prowess and know—"

The bearded demigod never finished his sentence. His body folded inward, collapsing as his divinity and diamond grimoire tore free from him and drifted into my hands.

I stored them away and sighed. "You talk too much. If you want to fight, then shut up and fight."

Chapter 2584: 'Wheels Of Time' Battle Array Formation

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

Using my celestial force and the Limitless Strain Rune, I can stretch space without limit, free from the risk of tearing or distorting it. If a card apprentice were caught inside a space I had stretched in this way, it would look to the naked eye as though they were simply stuck walking at that point of the pace. When in reality, they would be running across an endlessly elongated space, unable to make any actual progress.

Now, what happens when I stop channeling my celestial force to maintain that limitless stretch? The moment I release it, the space snaps back to its original state. And the card apprentice trapped within would be crushed instantly by the recoil of that violently contracting space. The temperature released from this process would instantly evaporate whatever was caught in it, like their mangled remains.

That was how I killed the bearded card demigod—making it seem as though his body folded inward and collapsed before evaporating. Afterward, I used my celestial force to gather his divinity and grimoire.

The bearded demigod died in a gruesome instant, without even the chance to resist. With his death, the companion hiding within his shadow was forced out. He attempted to slip into another shadow the moment he emerged, but he too was dragged into the endlessly stretched space similar to the one that had trapped his partner. Unlike before, there was no shadow within that boundless expanse for him to take refuge in. With nowhere to escape, he suffered the same fate—crushed by the recoil of space snapping back to its original form and evaporating into nothingness by the resulting heat—without managing even a token struggle.

Once again, I used my celestial force to gather his divinity and diamond grimoire.

Watching two of their comrades die gruesomely—without resistance and before any of them could even process what had happened—the remaining forty-three demigods in their battle formation reacted at once. Abandoning any hope of a peaceful resolution, no longer praying that the situation might remain within their control, they immediately activated their time-related cards and runes, triggering the 'Wheels of Time' battle formation. At this point, their only focus was to subdue me and drag me before their masters, trusting them to judge both sides accordingly.

As the demigods vanished from her sight and her own time-related cards flared in warning, Jill realized the temporal flow around her was being distorted. She quickly called out to her love, "Wyatt, look out—they've entered their respective accelerated time—"

Her warning cut off midway. She froze, stunned, as several dozen divinities and diamond grimoires flew toward me in rapid succession. I stored them neatly within my dimensional storage card, one after another.

Jill's eyes widened, disbelief washing over her. Before she could stop herself, she blurted out, "What the fuck happened?"

Given the tension of the moment, Jill hadn't even blinked—yet somehow the card demigods had vanished, replaced in an instant by the cluster of divinities and diamond grimoires now orbiting around me. She had no idea what had happened.

She immediately dismissed the notion that I had killed them within their accelerated time. She knew full well that a single time-related card wasn't nearly enough for me to enter the fastest time flow generated by the demigods' battle formation. I had not even comprehended the Time Rule, let alone reached a level where I could step into the highest accelerated time flow of the Wheels of Time battle array.

With that possibility ruled out, she was left with no reasonable explanation for how I could have eliminated every demigod inside the Wheels of Time battle formation. After several seconds of mentally retracing every angle, she gave up and simply asked, bewildered, "How? How did you do it?"

"I have an unusually high resistance to the Time Rule," I replied, offering the truth—though with no intention of elaborating further.

The moment the remaining demigods activated the Wheels of Time battle array, thanks to my time resistance I instantly slipped into the fastest accelerated time flow among the multiple accelerated time flow they had generated. There, I found only a single elder demigod still capable of movement—everyone else's time flow was so slow they appeared completely frozen.

The old demigod was stunned to see me standing beside him within the highest time acceleration of their formation. Before he could react, I summoned aloud, "Limitless Celestial Domain."

At my command, I shifted the entire 'Wheels of Time' array formation into a single point within my Limitless Celestial Domain that was stretched infinitely. Then, with deliberate intent, I released the stretched space. It snapped back to its original form in an instant, crushing every demigod inside into pulp. The heat generated from the collapse evaporated what little remained of their bodies, leaving nothing behind.

With the domain retracted, I calmly gathered the divinities and diamond grimoires that surfaced following their deaths.

The Time and Space Rules were severely wronged by most card demigods, unable to bring out their true destructive power. Not all of them possessed the talent or affinity required to comprehend these rules, and even those who did often found themselves lost when they reached the bifurcation points. Without luck along with proper insight, they could never hope to showcase the true potential of either rule.

Take Henricks, for example. His mastery of the Space Rule was largely confined to spatial travel. It wasn't that he lacked ambition—he simply lacked compatible foundations. The three foundational Space-Rule meanings he comprehended to the ultimate tier were all random. Using sheer insight and creativity, he repurposed those mismatched rule meanings to incorporate them in his spatial travel and aid his origin card, but that was the limit of what he could construct from such scattered foundations.

Not everyone was fortunate enough to discover a method for selecting rule meanings at a bifurcation point inside the World's Womb like I managed to do so before I became a hybrid celestial—before I gained the privilege of comprehending rules directly from the rule source, just as the celestials themselves do.

Chapter 2585: Disappointing Standards

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"Is that it?" I murmured, my tone deliberately provocative as I gazed up at the distant clouds scattered across the night sky. Through my primordial soul pupils, I picked up a cluster of powerful soul energy signatures—each one several times stronger than the demigods I had just handled. Judging by their intensity, they were all at the peak of the chivalry-class within the demigod/devil rank.

They had clearly sent cannon fodder to do their dirty laundry while they remained far away, watching closely, ensuring none of their prior arrangements failed to keep potential reinforcements from reaching me. Anyone attempting to interfere would be intercepted long before they got close.

My words weren't meant solely to lure them into a direct confrontation. I was genuinely disappointed by the standard of the card demigods I had faced. I had killed everyone of them without drawing on the entirety of my strength or even bothering to summon my Frosling corpse puppet spirit cards.

I supposed it was unfair of me to compare them to demon or devil merchants, who had access to the knowledge and resources of the myriad realms, not confined to a small, isolated world tucked away in the backwaters of the myriad realms. But fairness had nothing to do with reality. They still had to face it. The enemies poised to invade their world wouldn't show mercy or turn back simply because the situation seemed unjust.

If anyone deserved blame, it was the founders—the so-called masters, or whatever grand titles they preferred. They were the reason the card demigods performed so poorly. These people clearly possessed the knowledge and the means to uplift their

forces; the existence of the World Decree alone made that obvious. Yet they refused to share it, afraid their own card apprentices might one day become threats to their rule.

A relic with the potential of the World Decree could allow the demigods to reshape and elevate the card world to unimaginable heights. Instead, these greedy fools used it merely to tighten their grip over the five regions.

I couldn't help but wonder whether any other race, given the ability to commune with their realm's will and command it to act on their behalf, would make the same choices.

Just thinking about it made my blood boil. I wanted to storm their bases right then and smash their skulls open just to see what kind of filth sloshed around in their so-called brains. Had they lived under the comfort of authority for so long that they'd forgotten to wonder what lay beyond the boundaries of the card world? How much longer did they intend to cling to such a hollow existence?

Ah, right—they were still "waiting," still "accumulating," preparing for their grand raid on the unranked dungeons.

Cowards, the lot of them. They had stalled the growth of the five regions for millennia because they were too terrified to step into the myriad realms for the unranked resources they needed, and too distrustful of the dark races to trade with them honestly.

In contrast, my respect for the descendants of the unparalleled bloodline—JJ and Anna's ancestor—rose sharply. The one who left behind the Ruby Vault, JJ was now in possession of, had not wasted his life trapped within the card world. He had dared to explore the Myriad Realms. I had no idea what became of him, but at least he hadn't lingered in the Southern Region, leeching its fortune like the founders had. With his talent and potential, he certainly could have, had he chosen to.

However, I now understood why the Masters weren't truly worried about a second demon invasion. With something like the World Decree under their control, they had little reason to fear devils entering the card world.

"Don't worry—they won't make a move against us," Jill said, following my gaze toward the figures hidden in the distant clouds.

"Why?" I asked, genuinely puzzled about the certainty in her voice.

"For the same reason someone like Field Marshal Lorn doesn't rush to handle every minor disturbance along the Southern borders. It's all to preserve the illusion of peace—the illusion that keeps the five regions from fracturing into endless small civil wars fueled by hunger for power and authority. Once a card demigod reaches a certain level of strength, the rest expect them to abide by a set of unwritten rules if they want to continue living within the five regions. Otherwise, they're free to explore the Way Beyond and carve out a land for themselves, like the Empire did. But most choose to

rebel—like the freedom fighters you're sheltering now—and eventually end up on the most-wanted list."

Her words settled heavily. It was another crucial piece of history and regional law I had never come across. I had always believed the Empire was founded solely by the followers of Demigod Michel Angelo. While that part was true, it was also a fact that they had been forced to do so because the Founders of the Five Regions refused to let their practices spread within their territory.

"That's a pity," I sighed, glancing at nearly half a dozen divinities and diamond grimoires—so close, yet completely out of reach.

"You know... my dad created it," Jill said suddenly, watching me take out the World Decree after storing away the divinities and diamond grimoires.

"Really?" I stared at her in astonishment. I had never imagined Demigod Norley as the one responsible for creating the World Decree. It wasn't that I underestimated his capability, but his demeanor and personality never hinted at such monumental accomplishments.

"Can you tell me what it actually does and how it works?" I asked, pretending not to understand the mechanics behind the World Decree. I wanted to hear how a card apprentice perceived it. They were the ones who created it, so of course they knew its function—but I was more interested in understanding why the Card Celestial responded to them.

Chapter 2586: Demigod Von

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"You know what a royal decree is, right? A World Decree works the same way, except it comes from us through the Card World's will. Because of that, it's absolute. Whatever you inscribe into it becomes the new truth of the Card World. But there are laws that govern how it can be used, depending on your intent. If those conditions aren't met, the decree won't function—and the world's will might even punish the user. That's why it's never used unless there is truly no other choice," Jill explained, sharing everything she understood about the World Decree.

It wasn't far from what I had already inferred about the World Decree. As for the laws she mentioned, I could only assume they were the dos and don'ts they had uncovered

through repeated trial and error—pushing the Card Celestial's patience until it finally rained divine retribution down on them.

I say this because the Card Celestial, like any celestial, was remarkably patient with its natives. For it to be driven to punish them, they must have done something truly severe to provoke the celestial will of their own realm.

However, knowing this did make me feel a little better about the Card Celestial ignoring my calls.

What the Masters were doing was essentially acting in a way designed to provoke a specific reaction from the Card Celestial. Otherwise, the very first thing they would have done upon obtaining the World Decree was declare themselves rulers of all humanity. I bet they did exactly that but failed. Until they figured out a list of dos and don'ts and declared them as the laws to using the World Decree.

"I take it the Masters understand these laws well enough to wield the world decree at their whim—especially since they planned to use it on me to force me to submission," I remarked to Jill, fully aware that the Masters knew these laws thoroughly enough if they were confident enough to use it against me.

"Yes, they do. Even more so than my father, who invented the World Decree," Jill said with a nod before asking, "By the way, how do you know about the Masters?"

"What do you think?" I replied, avoiding a direct answer as I debated whether it was wise to reveal the Clown Mask's future vision. The Freedom Fighters knew about it, but that didn't mean I should speak of it freely.

No—at least not until I was certain I could handle the Masters myself. Until then, it was better to let the three mischief deal with them as planned earlier. The World Decree was more than a surprise; it was a warning not to underestimate them. If they were preparing to raid Unranked Dungeons, then they had long surpassed the chivalry-class. I wouldn't be surprised if they were already in the noble-class of the card demigod realm.

"Was it the Southern Royal Family?" Jill guessed. It was the obvious assumption, after all. I could have taken the easy route, but I shook my head. "No. I have my ways. I'll tell you when the time is right."

"I don't like that answer, but I do appreciate that you didn't lie to me," Jill said, leaning in to kiss my cheek—only for one of the figures watching us from the clouds afar to suddenly move and appear several feet away. Jill froze mid-kiss in fear, but I simply pulled her into my embrace with a grin.

"Shit—you scared me, Uncle Von," Jill exclaimed as she pulled herself out of my embrace. In response, the well-groomed, neatly dressed demigod urgently asked calmly, "Does your father know about this?"

From his words—and Jill's sudden, uncharacteristically reserved reaction—I immediately understood that this Uncle Von was an elder she genuinely respected, unlike her Uncle Sean, before whom she had shamelessly sucked on my tongue as if it were the most delicious popsicle in the world. Realizing this, the grin on my face faded into a frown. The problem was simple yet aggravating: Uncle Von was here on an official mission for the Masters, and he was also a friend of both Jill and Demigod Norley. In other words, the prey was dancing right before my eyes, yet I couldn't hunt it. And for a predator, what could be more tormenting than that?

"The entire Five Regions already know about it. If he doesn't by now, he will sooner or later," Jill replied calmly.

"Hahaha, so I know before him," the demigod said, his dignified expression finally easing as clear amusement surfaced. He took visible pleasure in the fact that he had learned of Jill's relationship with me before her father. "I've heard he's opened a new laboratory and returned to researching to design pleasure cards. It seems time is finally beginning to favor your family."

Then Demigod Von suddenly turned his gaze on me and let out a weary sigh. "Out of all the men in the world, it had to be him."

"Uncle Von, what is that supposed to mean?" Jill asked, her cheeks puffing in displeasure. "What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing—that's the problem," Demigod Von replied, shaking his head in quiet dismay. "Considering your condition, only someone like him could satisfy you. So you're fine with this relationship, or—"

"I am," Jill cut in hurriedly, nodding vigorously. Her reaction drew a faint, amused smile from Demigod Von, who clearly found her eagerness endearing.

Hearing Demigod Von's earlier words, I couldn't help but glance at him again, surprised by how much he knew about Jill's physique. In that moment, I finally understood why he was so invested in Jill and my relationship. It seemed Jill's carnivorous womb had long been a source of concern among her elders.

As I studied him, he turned his gaze toward me. Our eyes locked, and he said evenly, "Young man, unless you intend to sign the World Decree, return it to me now."

Chapter 2587: Demigod Von's Niece

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

Listening to Demigod Von, I couldn't help but let out a chuckle. Noticing it, he asked with mild amusement, "What's so funny?"

Demigod Von had been more than impressed watching me take down nearly four dozen demigods—each armed with time-related cards or runes—with effortless ease as a card master. Yet he wasn't afraid of me. With his mastery of the space rule, he had seen through my limitless strain trick and was confident he could overcome it, no matter how innovatively I wielded it.

"I was just wondering," I said evenly, "whether you guys can bear the consequences of me signing this World Decree." Then, shaking my head, I continued, "Now that it's in my hands, you can forget about that. Go and inform your Masters that I love their gifts—and I wouldn't mind more of them. Tell them to send as many as they like. I'll receive every single one."

"Hahaha, young man. Now I know what they meant when they said I would see true arrogance when I met you.' They were right, you lived up to your reputation," Demigod Ron nodded. "But, young man, you need to know your limits. We are not someone you want to cross paths with, let alone the masters. Know what's good for you and hand over the World Degree if you don't plan to sign it."

"Uncle Von, why do I get the feeling that you're daring him to sign the World Decree?" Jill snapped, clearly sensing her uncle's rudeness toward her lover. She didn't care who was right or wrong. She cared about both of us—though, at this moment, she cared more about me than about her uncle.

"Girl, stay out of this. Hasn't he already proven that he can take care of himself?" Demigod Von said, warning Jill not to be overly protective of her boyfriend and risk bruising his ego. If her boyfriend truly loved her, he might understand—but over time, no one could say how such things might fester or twist into something ugly between them. As the saying went, prevention was better than a cure.

"Uncle, if you weren't related to me, he would have taught you a lesson by now. Stop trying to bully him through me," Jill said, fully aware that I was holding back because of her. If it had been anyone else, I would already be harvesting their divinity and grimoire.

This man was fortunate to be Jill's uncle, and he wasn't shy about using that fact to his advantage against me. It wasn't that he believed he would lose to me; rather, he preferred to resolve this matter peacefully if possible. I believed it was the reason he was the one who came here among his colleagues hiding in the clouds afar.

"Girl, it's my right as the bride's uncle, so stop meddling. This is between me and my son-in-law," Demigod Ron said shamelessly.

Jill was left flabbergasted and immediately scolded him, "Uncle, stop embarrassing me. We haven't thought that far ahead."

"You're still talking?" Demigod Rod said sternly, though a teasing note lingered beneath his tone. "Besides, what use are we elders if not to ask the difficult questions—no matter how awkward they may be?"

"Uncle, I'm begging you—please stop," Jill pleaded, nearly bringing her hands together in supplication.

The longer I watched the exchange between Demigod Von and Jill, the deeper my frown became. The closer Jill stood to Demigod Von, the harder it was for me to embarrass him—let alone kill him and harvest his divinity and grimoire. Unless he gave me a compelling reason, I had no intention of doing anything that would cause Jill grief or jeopardize our relationship before it had even reached its first date. Von had been given a longer leash—but if he didn't know when to stop while he was ahead, I wouldn't mind tightening it.

Ignoring her pleas, Demigod Von turned his attention to me and asked, "Boy, what are your plans for my niece?"

I couldn't help but study him, sensing that his question carried more weight than it appeared. I attributed it to his concern over Jill's physique and it choosing me as her ideal mate. It seemed that, despite his subtle tests, he still wasn't entirely sure whether he was speaking to Jill herself—or to the instincts of her carnivorous womb. If I were in his position, I would have shared the same concerns.

"Don't worry. Her physique is dormant," I said flatly. "I prefer my dates to have brains."

My deadpan assurance only served to fluster Jill further. She slapped my back in embarrassment and protested, "How can you say something like that with a straight face?"

Demigod Von's gaze shifted back and forth between Jill and me, still unable to determine whether it was truly Jill before him. Everything he knew about the Carnivorous Womb had come from Demigod Norley's accounts alone. He carefully observed every subtle sign, searching for any indication that it was Jill's physique acting rather than Jill herself. Yet, sensing each other's scent lingering on us, he found it difficult to accept that his pure, innocent niece could be so forward. It had to be the Carnivorous Womb—or so he convinced himself.

"Uncle Von, please stop," Jill said softly, growing uncomfortable under his scrutiny. His gaze wasn't vulgar, yet it carried a weight that made her feel as though she had

disappointed him. In that moment, she wondered—if she couldn't face her uncle like this, how would she ever face her father? Unconsciously, she stepped closer and hid behind me, using me as a shield to block the demigod's probing stare.

Seeing his niece retreat behind me, Demigod Von immediately realized he had crossed a line and corrected himself. "You're an adult now. You're free to make your own decisions and choose your partner—"

Jill cut in comically, raising her voice in protest. "I've been an adult for the past few decades, Uncle!"

[#Chapter 2588: Signing The World Decree - Read Chapter 2588: Signing The World Decree](#)

Chapter 2588: Signing The World Decree

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

Demigod Von ignored Jill's protest and stopped dwelling on whether the figure before him was truly Jill or the manifestation of her Carnivorous Womb inhabiting his dearest niece's body. He resolved to visit his old friend later, to inform him and seek his counsel on the matter. Until then, he chose to treat her as his niece, unwilling to see that unsettling gaze directed at him again.

For now, however, he turned his attention back to his duty; his colleagues were already growing impatient.

"Young man, hand over the World Decree if you have no intention of signing it. It is not something you should possess. It will only bring you trouble—if not outright harm should you attempt to use it," Demigod Von said one final time, extending his hand with a stern expression. It was clear he was prepared to resort to force if I continued to resist.

"Very well, I will," I said. "But before that, answer me this—if I sign the World Decree, are you certain your Masters can bear the consequences?" I asked, a faint smile tugging at my lips.

"Are you saying you intend to sign it?" Demigod Von pressed, clearly amused by my words. "If so, then go ahead. The Masters have outlived countless so-called geniuses. You will be no exception."

"Yes, I do," I replied. I opened the scroll and, without bothering to read it, signed my name. I added calmly, "There. Don't say I didn't warn you."

"Wyatt!" Jill exclaimed, trying to stop me—but before she could react, I had already signed the scroll. It dissolved into the surroundings, and moments later, an aurora spread across the star-filled night sky.

Demigod Von was equally astonished. He had never believed I would sign the World Decree. Yet as the decree dispersed and the aurora blanketed the heavens, he found himself at a loss for words. He never expected me to sign the World Decree. Now that I had, it was far too late for him to regret his words.

"Why did you sign that?" Jill demanded hysterically, grabbing my collar. Panic was etched across her face, her eyes glistening with tears.

"Relax," I said, pulling her into my embrace. "I just wanted to see what divine retribution looks like." As I spoke, I gently turned her head toward the sky. The aurora that had moments ago painted the black sky had vanished without a trace, leaving behind a starless night shrouded in dark, roiling clouds.

Watching the exchange between Jill and me, Demigod Von finally accepted that it was truly his niece standing before him—and not the Carnivorous Womb. His gaze followed hers toward the sky to witness a sight even the Masters feared. The aurora had vanished, replaced by roiling dark clouds. It was the unmistakable sign of the World's Will in fury. What followed was divine retribution.

"What did you do?" Demigod Von asked in dread, unable to tear his eyes away from the churning heavens as the thunder grew louder with each passing moment.

"What did I do?" I echoed, shrugging innocently. "I warned you before I signed the World Decree when you asked me to."

The reason I signed the World Decree—declaring myself a slave of the Masters—was simple. I knew that even if I agreed to the contract inscribed in the World Decree, the Card Celestial would not. I was not merely one of its investments; I was also a hybrid celestial. It might be willing to abandon an investment, but it would never sacrifice a fellow celestial. Hybrid or not, it had already accepted me—otherwise, it would never have entrusted me with the Eye of Fortune, nor assisted me in obtaining the Eye of Prosperity to recreate the Eye of Tao.

It was no different from a cat being indulged by its human owner with the finest cuts of meat. The owner might spoil it endlessly—but the moment the cat dared to ask for human flesh, it would be put down without hesitation. The same held true for the Masters, who had grown accustomed to being indulged by the Card Celestial through their incessant World Decrees.

Unable to suppress my curiosity, I added, "Who inscribed that World Decree? Right now, I wouldn't want to be in their place." I paused, genuinely wondering who the Card Celestial would punish, though I was almost ninety percent certain that it was the Masters. It would be shocking if a Master were to perish under divine retribution—and even more so if all of them did. "Was it all of the Masters... or just one of them?"

"It was the Masters," Demigod Von replied with a steady tone. "But don't worry. This isn't their first rodeo, and it won't be the last." He spoke with confidence in their ability to withstand divine retribution.

After all, if they were unable to endure such punishment, they would never have been able to push boundaries or explore the limits of what could—and should—be achieved through the World Decree. It was through this process that they deduced laws to wield the World Decree without provoking the World's Will. Had they been deterred by divine intervention, they would never have risen to their current heights. They feared it, yes—but they never allowed that fear to halt their pursuit of power.

"How did you know the World's Will would reject the World Decree?" Jill asked, staring deeply into my eyes.

"I didn't actually know," I replied. "I just felt that if it were any parent, they would never agree to let one child enslave another—let alone assist in making it happen." I spoke in a deliberately profound tone, hoping she would get lost deciphering the metaphor rather than pressing further.

I had no intention of explaining that I was part celestial, and that the Card Celestial would never consent to such an arrangement. Even if it somehow did, it would never enforce it—I was no longer dependent on it.

It was much like a parent who may dictate a child's life while they still live under the same roof, but loses that authority once the child starts earning and moves out on their own.

Chapter 2589: Divine Retribution

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

I wouldn't be wrong to say that I had grown independent of the Card World. I no longer needed it—except for a lingering sense of belonging. As someone who had sensed the Origin Source and was part celestial, I truly had no reliance on the Card World except

for its occasional baptism every time I broke through to higher realm in the card power system. That was a gift and not something I couldn't do without.

For a Card apprentice, the only thing binding them to the Card World was its rules within its womb. Unless one had sensed the Rule Source itself, they could only continue comprehending rules within their world's womb without risk of rule contamination. That was why, no matter how powerful the Dark Race became or how far across the Myriad Realms they ventured, they always returned to the Dark Realm and never dared to set their sights on its Celestial Will.

Sensing the origin source as a part celestial, I had outgrown this dilemma and had achieved complete independence from the Card World, and that was one of the key reasons the Card Celestial regarded me as an equal.

Now that I was no longer dependent on it, how could the Card Celestial possibly enforce the World Decree on me? It had no leverage to do so. Even if it tried to impose the World Decree by force, what could it accomplish if I simply left its sphere of influence and moved to Lil' Red Storm, the Dark Realm, or any of the thousands of other realms out there? Nothing. It could not even stop me from leaving—especially with the Devil Merchant Code aiding me.

If it were to enforce the World Decree, it would only turn a potential ally into a potential enemy, and the Card Celestial was far too shrewd to make such a mistake. That much was evident when it offered me affiliation, or alternatively, the freedom to carve my own path in the wider realms. A being capable of such foresight would never be foolish enough to uphold the predatory World Decree of the Masters.

This was the true reason I dared to sign the World Decree—and the Card Celestial did not disappoint me. Now, I could only hope that in its rage, it had killed a few of the Masters, if not all of them, becoming the catalyst that would accelerate the Three Mischiefs' plan to overthrow the Masters. That way I could implement my plans to overthrow them and prepare the Card World for the upcoming demon invasion.

"How dare you gamble with your life?" Jill shouted, striking me as tears streamed down her face. "You belong to me now. You don't get to gamble with your life unless I say so. Do you understand?"

"Alright, alright—calm down," I said, catching her wrists and stopping the rain of slaps. "I'm fine. Nothing happened to me. I'm nobody's slave." I hadn't expected her reaction to be this intense. "Though I can't say the same for those who tried to enslave me."

Seeing that I was still in the mood to joke, Jill glared at me with fierce, unyielding eyes. "Remember this," she said firmly. "Your body is mine, so you're not allowed to hurt or harm it."

"If my body is yours, does that mean your body is mine—" I began with a playful smile. Jill flushed and shyly nestled into my embrace—until her uncle loudly cleared his throat. Startled, she sprang out of my arms like a frightened little cat.

I couldn't help but roll my eyes at him and ask, "Why are you still here? I've already signed the World Decree. If you're not satisfied with the outcome, bring me another one—I'll sign that too."

Demigod Von shook his head at my remark and said, "You know, many of my colleagues have signed the same World Decree. Yet it never enraged the World's Will. It has enforced those contracts to this day, let alone punish the Masters with divine retribution for it." He paused, then added thoughtfully, "I suppose, like any parent, our World's Will has a favorite child."

By his words, Demigod Von was placing both the Masters and me among the favored children of the Card World—yet among them all, I was favored enough for the World's Will to punish the Masters on my behalf.

I had met the Card Celestial's favored ones, and I knew I was not among them. I was an anomaly—an unforeseen variable, even to the Card Celestial itself. The fact that it treated me as an equal was proof enough of that.

Soon after, Demigod Von shook his head. Stopping his whining, he said, "Very well. You're right—my work here is done. I should be on my way. Before I go, just remember this: if you ever mistreat Jill, I will hunt you down, even if it means going against the World's Will."

"I don't mistreat my possessions, let alone my woman," I replied calmly, mocking him as I added, "And aren't you overestimating yourself? Forget challenging the World—I don't think you could defeat even one of my summon cards."

Demigod Von clenched his fist at my taunt, but he restrained himself when his gaze fell on his niece. With a final shake of his head, he turned to leave—only for Jill to call out, "Uncle, when you meet my father and he learns about my relationship, can you tell me how he reacts? So I can prepare myself accordingly."

"Of course," Demigod Von replied with a nod.

Taking the cue, I added, "If possible, please keep me updated on the Masters' status as well. And if one of them happens to die, don't forget to invite me to the funeral."

Demigod Von paused mid-step and fixed me with a long, hard stare. It looked as though he wanted to say something, but in the end, he swallowed the words on the tip of his tongue and left in silence.

Chapter 2590: Nanny Cards

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

After Demigod Von left, I immediately contacted Lois through my hive spirit, leaving her a message to ask about the Masters facing divine retribution. I didn't attempt to contact her directly. I had no idea where she was at the moment, nor did I understand the full extent of the Masters' means. Instead, I left her messages, trusting that she would reach out to me when she could.

"Wyatt, don't blame Uncle Von. He means well," Jill said after making sure Demigod Von had truly left. "In fact, he was my nanny. Being a single parent wasn't easy for my genius father. For someone who could unravel the mysteries of the world, he somehow couldn't figure out how to raise a baby. Uncle Von, on the other hand, became a father in his teens. He had plenty of experience in that area and helped my father tremendously."

"If not for his love for you, he and his companions wouldn't have left this place alive," I assured her, making it clear that I hadn't taken offense at Demigod Von's overprotectiveness regarding our relationship. "That said, if your father truly understands how difficult parenthood is—especially single parenthood—what is he doing researching pleasure cards? Shouldn't he be developing nanny cards instead? Unless..." I paused, a crooked smile forming. "Unless he plans to get all men addicted to pleasure cards, leaving them with neither the interest nor the time to make babies with real women. Now that would be a truly diabolical plan. As expected of a Founder."

"That's not funny," Jill said, fixing me with a stern look. If anything, it only encouraged me to push further.

"Why?" I teased. "Because it could very well be true?"

Jill narrowed her eyes at me, but realizing that the more she reacted, the more I would needle her, she forced herself to calm down and smoothly changed the subject.

"Actually, the nanny card idea isn't bad at all. Maybe nanny summons could take the form of the parent while caring for the baby. That way, parents wouldn't worry about their children forgetting them—"

"What is it with you and your father?" I cut in, feigning indignation. "Why are the two of you so determined to steal my ideas and claim them as your own? Can't you come up with something original for once?"

"Since when did nanny cards become your idea?" Jill shot back. "You only brought it up to mock my father. I'm the one who realized that, if it were a real card, the Five Regions would have a strong market for it. Stop being such a greedy narcissist. By your logic, the first person who ever joked about creating a powder to boost one's soul power or a card to digest soul-energy monster meat should be credited with your Silver Milk Powder and VR-Slime cards."

She didn't pause, her frustration finally spilling over. "And my dad didn't steal your idea. At best, he copied it—no, he took inspiration from it. That isn't a crime. You should be flattered that my father found inspiration in one of your works. Instead, here you are, ungratefully calling him a thief."

"Yeah? Are you even hearing yourself?" I shot back without thinking. "You sound like every damn lawyer out there defending a thief."

The moment the words left my mouth, regret hit me—I knew I had gone too far.

Jill was right about her father drawing inspiration from ideas. Unless he had created pleasure cards using the actual card recipe of my Slime Fairy card, he hadn't technically copied or stolen anything from me—he had merely taken inspiration from my work. The real reason I was angry lay elsewhere. It was how he had taken that inspiration. He had trespassed into Fine Gold's research facility and gone through my work without my permission. That was what truly infuriated me.

Still, considering he was my girlfriend's father, it was something I could have overlooked. But after what I had just said, I wasn't so sure I still had a girlfriend.

"Call my father a thief one more time and see what happens," Jill warned, her gaze sharp and unyielding as it locked onto mine.

"You saw me kill nearly four dozen demigods in the blink of an eye, didn't you?" Instead of apologizing, I coldly reminded her of the gap in our strength. At that moment, I was certain I had crossed a line that couldn't be walked back.

"No, I didn't," Jill snapped, her expression stern. "All I saw was you collecting nearly four dozen divinities and diamond grimoires." Then she pointed at me, her voice hardening. "That's more like it. Don't you ever insult my father in front of me again."

"So, it's fine if I insult him without you knowing?" I asked. At that point, it sounded less like I was trying to save the relationship and more like I was actively trying to end it—let alone fight for it.

"I'll remember this," Jill said grudgingly, then added firmly, "Take me home."

"Sure, but that will have to wait," I replied, turning my gaze toward the Brothwork Manor. The ambush meant for me had been arranged right outside their estate. That alone

made their involvement obvious. And I wasn't in the habit of letting enemies walk away, nor of forgiving them.

"Wyatt, tell me you're not thinking of raiding the Brothwork Manor," Jill said, horror creeping into her voice. "Tell me you're not that foolish."

She had watched me kill nearly four dozen demigods, but she also knew exactly how terrifying the descendants of the Founders were. It wasn't just their personal strength—everything about them was overwhelming. Their subordinates, their resources, their arrays—they surrounded themselves with the best of the best.

Jill didn't believe I would fail to achieve whatever goal I set my sights on inside the manor. What she feared was what would come after. Once I was done, I would place myself squarely at the top of the Founders' hit list. And she didn't want her boyfriend to die before he had even taken her out on a proper date.

[#Chapter 2591: Immovable Force In A Limitlessly Expanding Space - Read Chapter 2591: Immovable Force In A Limitlessly Expanding Space](#)

Chapter 2591: Immovable Force In A Limitlessly Expanding Space

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

I understood where Jill was coming from. Landing at the top of the Masters' hit list would do me no favors and might even disrupt my plans for them. However, leaving things as they were would run counter to the very reason I had come to the Central Region. It would send the message that no one could challenge me or eye what was mine—unless they were descendants of the Masters. That idea didn't sit right with me.

I couldn't overlook this. If anything, I was more certain now than before. Everything about the situation only reinforced that I was doing the right thing.

"Now you have two choices," I said calmly. "I can take you home first and come back later to settle the score, or I can settle it now and take you home afterward. Your choice." It was, in its own way, my attempt to make amends for my earlier arrogance.

Hearing this, the tension in Jill's expression eased. She smiled faintly and said, "Fine. Take me home."

I knew immediately what she was trying to do. Once I took her home, there would be no returning here. Realizing that, I withdrew the offer without hesitation. "Too late. I've decided I'll take you home after I'm done here."

"Have you lost your mind?" Jill exclaimed. "The array covering the manor is immovable." Rather than wasting her breath arguing knowing once I made up my mind I wouldn't change it, she tried to warn me instead.

"Jill," I replied, "do you know what happens to an immovable force in an endlessly stretching space?"

"What?" Jill asked, not even giving it a thought. She didn't even try to guess. Now that was rude.

"Nothing," I answered. "Nothing will happen."

Jill frowned and pressed, pointing out, "Would it not move along with the space?"

"Yes—you would be correct if I were stretching the space actually occupied by the immovable force," I replied. "But that isn't what I'm doing. I'm only stretching the surrounding space—the parts unoccupied by it. That way, the immovable force remains exactly where it is, while everything around it is pushed farther away." By then, I had fully captured her attention.

"So you're planning to stretch the space beneath the array covering the manor?" Jill said, her tone dripping with skepticism. "The manor would sink along with the land below it, while the array stays fixed in place. This isn't a cartoon. Don't you think the Masters would have anticipated underground attacks and ensured the array protects the manor from every direction?" She scoffed, openly mocking the idea.

"Who said anything about stretching the space under the array?" I snapped. "That's your ridiculous idea, not mine. No wonder you and your father like to s—"

I stopped myself mid-sentence, realizing too late that I had crossed another line.

Jill was already staring at me with blazing eyes. "Yes?" she barked. "Tell me. My father and I like to what? Go on. Say it."

"Sing—that's it. You and your father like to sing," I said, grasping at the first word that came to mind starting with 'S.'

"Sing?" Jill repeated, incredulous. "Is that really the best you could come up with on the spot? And you still like to fancy yourself a genius. Hmph." She sneered openly, holding nothing back. At this rate, I doubted we would even make it to our first date.

"Anyway," she continued, regaining her composure, "how do you plan to deal with the array after stretching the space around it?"

"Watch me," I replied, offering no further explanation. There was no need for words when I could give her a live demonstration.

"Limitless Celestial Domain." I invoked my celestial space-rule domain, expanding it from my immediate vicinity until it enveloped the entire Brothwork Manor and its surroundings. The array protecting the estate immediately detected the intrusion and reacted, but its influence failed to reach the Limitless Celestial Domain, becoming lost within the boundless expanse within the space rule celestial domain.

"What's wrong with the array?" Jill blurted out as she watched it grow dimmer and thinner by the second. Then realization struck her, and her eyes widened. "You're killing the array by using its own design against it."

"You not only realized that the array was customized to its surroundings—making it immovable like a mountain in this region—but also understood that trying to destroy those surroundings would only strengthen it," Jill said, her thoughts racing as she watched my plan unfold. "Any damage dealt to the environment would simply be absorbed by the array, since channels the array uses feed on the surrounding energy to keep running."

Her eyes widened as the conclusion clicked into place. "So, you stretched the surrounding space so far apart that the energy transfer between the array and its environment became inefficient. It can no longer sustain itself... such that it's slowly dying." She let out a sharp breath. "Damn. It was right there. How did I not see it before?"

I nodded, assuring Jill that her deduction was correct. In truth, I didn't need to do things this complex. I could have simply released the limitlessly stretched space itself—collapsing the array, its surroundings, and everything within the space in an instant. The pressure and temperature unleashed in that moment would have annihilated everything inside, evaporating it all to nothingness.

But doing so would have killed innocent people within the manor as well—people like Drew, for example. My grievance was with the Brothwork family, not with everyone under their roof. That was why I devised this method to deal with the array instead. Once it was neutralized, I would personally deal with every Brothwork inside the manor and leave the rest alive to spread the story across the Five Regions.

I watched as the array protecting Brothwork Manor slowly withered and died. Until the very end, the Brothworks' array master never realized what was wrong. They attempted to call for reinforcements, but every signal, every plea, vanished into the boundless expanse of my Limitless Celestial Domain.

When the array finally collapsed, I extended my arm toward Jill and said, "Come. Help me spare the innocent."

The Brothworks—and, in truth, most descendants of the Masters—were an enigma to the Five Regions. I was no exception. Aside from the individuals I had already identified, I had no idea who among those inside the manor were Brothworks and who were merely their servants and guests. Hopely, Jill knew.

Chapter 2592: Double Standards

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"Are you crazy?" Jill slapped my hand away at once, staring at me in disbelief. "Are you doing this on purpose?"

"What do you mean?" I replied, feigning ignorance. I had another motive to have Jill tag along with me while I killed the Brothworks present at their Morningstar Manor, but Jill caught on immediately. I knew she wouldn't fall for it, yet I had to try.

"Don't give me that dumb look. And how dare you try to use me to get to my father?" Jill shot back, mentally adding another mark to the growing list of things she intended to get back at me. Oh yes, she was pettier than I was. That was one of the things I liked most about her.

Anna and Susan didn't compare to Jill in this regard. If either of them had been in her place, Susan would have quietly endured it or done something drastic, like leaving me without a word, while Anna would have called me out, perhaps even started a heated argument, only to forgive me almost immediately out of love.

Jill was different. I knew for a fact that she was only overlooking my loose tongue and careless actions for now. She was simply waiting for me to grow comfortable in our relationship. When that time came, she would make me pay for everything I had said and done today—and for whatever I might say or do in the future.

In her presence, I could finally let loose the greedy side of myself. It was the same greed that had made me a world-renowned entrepreneur in my past life—doing what I felt, saying what I thought, and taking what I wanted. I could allow that side of me to surface around her because I knew she would keep it in check, rather than silently suffer or walk away because of it. After all, when it came to greed, she had me thoroughly beaten.

When I was with her, I couldn't help but think, *'If it's with her, I could monopolize any market across the myriad realms.'*

"Fine, you got me. But how is this any different from you using his Dream Nymph cards to get to me? Come on now, there aren't two different sets of rules for us, are there?" I argued with Jill, not hesitating to strike below the belt. "If not, then tell me why I can't use you to get to my father-in-law when you can use your father to get to his son-in-law. Aren't you ashamed of such blatant double standards?"

"Who is your father-in-law and how are you his son-in-law? Damn it, Wyatt, stop spouting nonsense," Jill snapped, flustered despite herself, her cheeks heating up with embarrassment.

"Isn't your father my father-in-law? Or does this mean you're just going to dine and dash? Hit it and quit it? I feel so used," I said, wiping at imaginary tears and putting on an exaggerated show of sorrow.

"Are you crazy? How dare you call my father your father-in-law when we haven't even been on a proper date?" Jill exclaimed, worked up by my cringeworthy words. Then, catching the subtle, playful glint in my eyes, she huffed and added, "Believe it or not, I'd dare to marry you right here, right now. You know what? Let's get married right now."

"Jill, stop being so clingy. We haven't even been on our first date. I should've known this would happen when you put out on our first meeting. My mother warned me about girls like you—" I teased, unable to resist how cute she looked while fuming. I could practically imagine myself biting those puffed-up cheeks and filling my stomach.

Before I could finish, she pounced on me, raining punches and kicks as she shouted, "I'm going to kill you!"

"Alright, alright. You're not clingy or easy. I'm the clingy and easy one in this relationship, okay?" I surrendered at once, knowing better than to push my luck.

"Don't patronize me. Only time will tell which of us is clingy and easy," Jill shot back, taking my teasing a little too personally.

"If it's with you, I'll always be the clingy and easy one between us," I said, trying to sweet-talk my way out of it. Instead, Jill flared up.

"Why are you putting it like that? Do you plan on being with other women while you're with me? I knew you were a scumbag. My father warned me about boys like you... ah—w-what are you doing?"

Before she could finish turning my words against me, I leaned in and bit her left puffed cheek, gently sucking on it. Jill yelped, but the sound quickly melted into a soft moan.

"Sorry, I couldn't help it. Blame your cheeks. They tempted me," I said as I let go.

"Of course. Blame the woman. You men really are cut from the same cloth," Jill complained, wiping my saliva from her cheek. Then she turned toward the Brothwork Manor and said calmly, "Go on. Do what you need to do. I'll wait for you out here."

There was more to my asking Jill to come along to the Brothwork Manor than simply having her help me identify the Brothworks within the crowd. I wanted to use this opportunity to draw a clear line between Demigod Norley and the Masters.

If Jill were seen assisting me in killing the Brothworks, then the Master to whom the Brothwork family belonged would inevitably blame Demigod Norley for his daughter's involvement in the deaths of several of his descendants. I didn't know whether this would be enough to sever a relationship that had endured for millennia, but it would be a solid first step.

I did this because of the direction things were taking between Jill and me. When the time came for me to overthrow the Masters, I didn't want to be forced to face and kill my potential father-in-law just to reach his allies. To prevent that possibility, I had already decided to push Demigod Norley away from the Masters. I didn't need him to join my camp, but I could not allow him to side with them. If he did, I would have no choice but to kill him alongside the Masters—carving a tragic end into my relationship with Jill.

Chapter 2593: You Get Me The Best

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"Are you sure you don't want to come?" I asked Jill, using the moment to gauge how serious she was about our relationship. I knew she liked me, but how much? It was in moments like these that one truly measured a partner's feelings.

"Wyatt, I know what you're trying to do," Jill said calmly. "I love you, but I can't be selfish because of that. I have responsibilities and duties as a daughter. My father has always been there for me, quietly fulfilling his role and his obligations as a father, and more than that. It would be irresponsible of me to do what you're asking. If I went through with it despite understanding this, I would be ungrateful. Honestly, I'm a little disappointed that you would use my father to test my love for you."

Her words laid bare my intentions, and explained her sense of duty as a daughter, expressing her disappointment in my actions.

"I had no intention of making you choose between me and your father. I was just—" I began, wanting to explain that my goal had never been to estrange her from him, but to separate her father from the Masters.

This misunderstanding between us stemmed from my belief that Demigod Norley's love for his daughter ran so deep that he would fight the entire card world for her. Jill, however, didn't want her father to wage war against the world on her behalf. She wanted him to be happy, doing what he loved, and always be in her life. She was willing to go to any lengths to ensure that.

Once I understood this, I was about to explain myself fully, but Jill cut me off. "Wyatt, I know. Just go. I'll be here, waiting for your return."

I hesitated, wanting to explain again, but Jill reassured me that no explanation was necessary, silently mouthing, "Trust me. I understand."

That was when I truly realized it. This was Jill I was with, not Susan or Anna. She proved me right. She understood me and my greed—my greed for our future. That was why she didn't need me to spell out what I was doing or why I was doing it.

The only miscalculation I made was failing to consider what Jill wanted as a daughter, not just as my lover. As a man, I had blindly assumed it was a father's duty to sacrifice for his child. But as a daughter, Jill didn't want her father to sacrifice himself for her. She simply wanted him by her side, always.

"You get me the best," I murmured, pulling Jill into my embrace and kissing her forehead. When I was with her, I felt everything at once. It wasn't chaotic, but perfectly measured, moving in a cadence that made me want to lose myself in it.

"I have to. Because you're the one for me," Jill replied softly, leaning in to seal her words with a kiss before I could say anything that might ruin the moment.

After the brief kiss, Jill reassured me, "Don't worry about my father's past and his friendship with the Masters. As far as I know, he always treated it as a business transaction. He created cards and stuff for them, and they ensured his research and projects were well funded. It has been decades since my father last needed them. Now, all that remains is nostalgia. They've already begun sidelining him and eyeing his inheritance. His patience with them is wearing thin. I'm sure my father has his own plans for them. Once our relationship develops further, I'll talk to him. Anything before that would be pointless."

"Alright, we'll do it that way. But what do you mean by 'once our relationship develops further'? We've already done the deed multiple times. How much further can it go? Don't tell me you're planning to tell him only after we have our first child?" I teased, unable to help myself. I was hopelessly addicted to her cute reactions.

To my surprise, Jill ignored my jab and fired one back instead. "Our first child? How many children do you see us having? Pump your brakes, you despo."

"Let's raise an entire army," I leaned in and whispered into her ear, "one big enough to help us monopolize all the markets across the Myriad Realms."

Her eyes widened at my words, and she gave me a playful punch. "Slow your roll, buddy. When you say things like that, I start reconsidering this entire situation."

"Situation?" I blurted out, genuinely offended that she'd reduced our relationship to a mere situation, only to hear her shoot back, "Now who's clingy and easy?"

"Didn't I already tell you?" I replied without missing a beat. "When it comes to you, I'll always be the clingy and easy one in our so-called situation. Now do you believe me?" I asked, lacing my fingers with hers and holding her gaze.

"Woah, you're really getting good at this," Jill said playfully. "Or is it that you're only putting in the effort now that I outed you as the clingy and easy one between the two of us?"

As she spoke, she leaned in until her lips hovered just short of mine. Even without touching, I could feel them.

She was a temptress, no doubt about it. If I lingered any longer, she would occupy my thoughts for the entire night, becoming the only thing I could focus on. That wasn't good, considering a manor full of clueless people was waiting for me to pass judgment on their fate.

"What's wrong? Cat got your tongue?" Jill asked when I didn't respond.

In that moment, I finally understood why people said work and relationships didn't mix. If this was what working alongside Jill was like, I'd never get anything done. Shaking my head, I said, "I have work to do. Stay right there. I'll be back, and we'll continue where we left off."

With that, I hurried into the Brothwork Manor, leaving Jill—who had thought she had me wrapped around her skirt—momentarily stunned. She called out, "Wyatt—"

But I was already gone.

Chapter 2594: My Need, My Longing, And My Greed

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"Master Wyatt, what is the meaning of this?"

One of the demigod guards stationed at the manor gates demanded an explanation. After experiencing the endlessly stretching space of my limitless celestial domain, they had no choice but to wait for me there. All of them were adept in the space rule, as expected of guards employed by a major noble family. Yet none of them could breach my domain. Even after deducing the mechanism behind it, they were powerless. As this was not an ordinary rule domain. It was a celestial rule domain.

"Where were you," I asked coldly, "when I, one of your guests, was ambushed right at your doorstep?"

As I spoke, Hive Spirit quietly hacked into their grimoires, sifting through their contact lists to help me distinguish the Brothworks from their invited guests.

"Master Wyatt, we truly had no knowledge of this. But you seem unharmed, and that is fortunate—"

He never finished the sentence.

The moment Hive AI retrieved all the information I needed, I killed the demigod. Without wasting another breath, I slaughtered the remaining guards, collected their divinities and grimoires, and moved on without pause.

Then the real hunt began.

I swept through the manor, killing every Brothwork and their subordinates one by one. I ignored their curses, pleas, their bargains, and their desperate attempts at negotiation. None of them were spared.

Fortunately, this manor was merely a venue Brolock used to host parties and gather members of the Divine Heirs' Club. There were no children present. Because of that, I had no reason to spare any of the Brothwork family members or their subordinates in this manor.

In the end, I found Brolock cowering behind his entourage. Shielded by his aides, he desperately offered me wealth, influence, and favors in exchange for his life. There was nothing he could offer that I could not simply take for myself. So, I killed Brolock, along with the few guests who stepped forward to defend him or plead on his behalf.

Once I was certain that every Brothwork family member and subordinate within the manor was dead, I ordered the remaining guests to leave in an orderly fashion. I did not seek out Drew Rockin, nor did he seek out me. Neither of us wished to cross paths.

After everyone had departed, I returned to Jill. Together, we stepped out of the limitless celestial domain, and I recalled it. The endlessly stretched space collapsed in on itself, shrinking back to its original size. Everything caught within it was crushed, reduced to dust, and evaporated into nothingness.

With that, the Brothwork's Morningstar Manor was erased from the face of the world overnight by a single card master. True to the low-key nature of the Masters' descendants, the incident would never be made public across the five regions. Yet those who needed to know would learn of it all the same.

If you asked me, half of my agenda for coming to the Central Region had been completed flawlessly. Anyone who dared provoke me after this would either be profoundly ignorant or supremely confident in their own strength. Either way, I welcomed them. They would all meet the same end.

"Now I see what you and Anna have in common," Jill said suddenly, referring to the Southern Emperor and her personal army's massacre of the Davis family.

I froze, unsure how to respond. I wanted to ask her why she would bring up Anna now, of all times. I thought we were doing well. One of the reasons I had wrapped up my business so quickly was so I could come back and continue where we had left off.

And yet, she chose that moment to mention Anna.

How do I feel about it?

First, I feel cockblocked.

Second, I feel like I let Anna down. I had feelings for her, and I still do. Those feelings will not simply vanish overnight.

Third, no, I do not plan on seeing Anna. I am with Jill, and I am not a two-timing asshole.

That said, I do owe Anna an explanation and an apology. I promised her I would wait and take her on a proper date once she made it out of the Mystic Dimension. Granted, I said it partly to motivate her, but it was not a lie. I missed her, and I missed her antics.

After all that, how could I turn around and hook up with Jill? I feel like a liar. Like a monster. I honestly do not know how it happened. How could I break a promise like that?

If I am being truthful, Jill swept me off my feet. I do not feel comfortable admitting it. She made me feel as though, for once, I could forget everything else and be selfish. Just for a moment. To accept her affection without expectations or conditions.

All I had to do was let her love me.

Regardless, it does not change the fact that I betrayed Anna's trust. Knowing her, she will find it in her heart to forgive me, but I do not think I will ever be able to forgive myself. Worse still, she will likely make it her life's mission to hunt Jill down, just as she does with her father, demigod Gainover.

At least Anna was trapped in the Mystic Dimension and had no idea about my betrayal yet. Susan, on the other hand, was not so fortunate. I could not imagine what she must be going through after watching me accept Jill's confession on a live stream.

It was not as though this thought had never crossed my mind before. Somewhere deep down, I was angry at Susan for asking for space and leaving me behind when I could not have been more transparent about my feelings for her. I had avoided confronting that anger until now. A part of me had been punishing her for doing that to me.

The more I thought about it, the more I questioned myself. Why was I entangled with these three women? Why could I not simply choose one and commit to her? It was not that I did not want to. It was that each of them appealed to a different side of me, and those sides of me refused to be ignored.

Susan appealed to my republican side. She embodied my values and principles.

Anna appealed to my democratic side. She reflected my pursuit of freedom and peace.

Jill appealed to my capitalist side. She embodied my greed and selfishness.

In other words, I needed Susan, I longed for Anna, and I was addicted to Jill.

For now, that was as far as I could understand my feelings for the three of them.

Chapter 2595: Only With You Can I Be Shameless And Selfish

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

"Don't worry, I'm not starting anything," Jill said, her disappointment evident after watching my stiff, conflicted expression for far too long.

It was clear I had failed her test. She was certain of what she had already sensed. I still had feelings for Anna, strong enough to weigh on me with guilt. Strong enough to prove that she was not the only one in my heart.

"Then why bring her up now?" I asked, needing to be sure she had not mentioned Anna simply to test me. I believed that being with Jill meant I would not have to deal with that kind of drama.

"Because Anna has come out of seclusion as a Card Demigod," Jill replied. "Coming out of seclusion, she immediately broke into the Northern Region to kill Demigod Gainover, her father. It's all over the Grimoire Network. Top ten trending, right after our relationship scandal."

She tried to sound nonchalant, but the worry beneath her tone was unmistakable. She was afraid I would leave now that Anna was no longer in seclusion. Jill had never truly believed she could be the only one in my heart. She already knew about my feelings for Anna and Susan, I had been painfully obvious about that. And now that Anna had returned, the fears she had buried deep within herself surfaced all at once.

"Also, Susan Tucci has made it onto the trending list as well," Jill continued. "People are maliciously dragging that poor girl through the mud because of our relationship scandal. They're calling her a mistress, a third wheel, a gold digger, and worse. I checked to see if someone was orchestrating it, but no. She isn't being specifically targeted. It seems she simply became the focus of public envy and jealousy because you chose her. The Southern Hope chose her."

She went on, "I've used my connections to suppress the worst of the hate posts and comments, but there's no denying it. Your popularity has become her curse."

She spoke calmly, but her words subtly pushed the blame onto me, as if implying that the closer I stayed to Susan, the more harm I would cause her.

I immediately understood what she was doing and why. She was afraid that now that Susan was suffering, I would rush to her side and leave Jill behind.

As I had said, Jill understood me better than anyone. She knew what Anna and Susan meant to me. However, she was too clever for her own good. She had thought through all of this, yet she failed to consider one crucial thing.

She had forgotten to understand what she herself meant to me.

I stepped forward and pulled Jill into my arms, saying softly, "Thank you and sorry for putting you through this. Now I know I didn't choose wrong."

Her eyes widened in confusion. Of course she did not understand what I meant. How could she? All she had done was put me before everything else, even herself. Despite knowing that I might leave her the moment I learned Susan was in trouble and that Anna had come out of seclusion, she still told me everything. She knew how much they meant to me and did not want me to be devastated by learning the truth too late.

I held her by the shoulders, steadying her dazed expression, and looked down at her. "Jill, come with me to the Fine Gold. I need you."

"What?" Jill blurted out, startled.

"I wanted to talk about this tomorrow, after our breakfast date, but it looks like that will have to wait," I said. "So I'll say it now. Jill Norley, will you stay by my side?"

As I asked, I lowered myself onto one knee. It was not a proposal. I knew she was not ready for that yet. It was simply a gesture, and a promise of intent.

"You are shameless and selfish, you know that," Jill said, piecing everything together. "Just this once I will help you. As for my answer, ask me again after our first date. I'm not some little girl who will be overwhelmed by emotions and willingly give up her interests for her love, only to regret it later. I will take what's mine."

"What are you talking about? What's mine is yours," I said, watching Jill turn calculating and greedy right after I had practically confessed to her. What kind of luck was this? First Susan, now Jill. These women were going to drive me insane.

"I'm sure you think that," Jill replied, rolling her eyes, "but I don't think the other two would agree."

She did not need to spell out who she meant. They were Anna and Susan, she couldn't be more obvious.

"Also," she added casually, "I want the biggest share. After all, I got intimate with you before them. That makes me the first."

"Wait, what?" I asked, completely missing the obvious double entendre. The confusion must have been written all over my face. "You don't know that. How could you even know that?"

"I know," Jill said confidently. "At best, you kissed them. You didn't even make it to second base with either of them."

"You're wrong," I protested. I had gone to second base with Anna.

"Over-the-clothes doesn't count," Jill said flatly, as if she had read my mind.

"You witch, how are you doing this?" I asked with exaggerated shock and disbelief. "What kind of sinister magic is this?"

"Why don't you come fight me with your mighty sword?" Jill teased. "If you defeat me, I'll tell you."

Her hands slid around my waist, drifting lower until they squeezed my ass, but after a little playing around her expression soon turned serious.

"Aren't you worried," she asked quietly, "that Anna didn't come looking for you after coming out of seclusion? Instead, she broke into the Northern Region to kill her father."

"Why would you ask me that?" I said, startled, suddenly wondering if she knew more than she was letting on.

"It's no secret that Anna is an Extreme Path partitioner," Jill replied. "That's one of the reasons the Masters didn't oppose the Southern Ruler choosing his granddaughter as his heir instead of his daughter—"

She never finished as a furious, thunderous voice cut through the air.

"How dare you!"

"How dare you kill my son and then stand there flirting with your woman!"

"I will make you scandalous lovers pay for your sins."

Chapter 2596: The Eldest's Gambit

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Central Region, Central Academic City, Morningstar University District, Brothwork Manor

Snap—

The furious voice vanished, swallowed by the thunderous snap of stretched space rebounding as abruptly as it had formed. A moment later, a divinity and a diamond grimoire streaked toward me. I collected them and turned to Jill, asking, "Whose father was that?"

"One of the Brothworks you killed, obviously. You took out quite a few of them today. So, it's hard to tell whose father he was exactly," Jill replied, unaware of exactly who I had just slain.

"By that logic, it could have been anyone," I countered. "It's not just Brothworks I killed here today." Then I added, "Let's get out of here before more mouths throw themselves onto the fire."

"To where, though?" Jill asked, just as I summoned Henricks to pick us up.

"What do you mean, where? To Fine Gold," I said. A portal opened beside me, and from the other side, Henricks greeted us. "Welcome back, boss."

Moments later, Jill and I stepped through the portal and emerged atop the rooftop of the TSR Guild's new headquarters in the Sky Blossom City.

"By the way, what about the group of demigods I sent with Redfall? Have they settled in well?" I asked, checking in on the West Princess and her companions, who arrived here with Redfall. Later finding a change, he ditched them to go revive his mother. I did give him a primordial calamity daughter gem, leaving it up to him to decide. This way I could better test my cursed bloonline and bloodkins.

"Yes, they have. In fact, they've taken quite a liking to your criminal rehabilitation and reintegration program. Ever since their arrival, they've done nothing but ask about it," Henricks replied. He had no idea what the West Princess and her entourage were doing in Sky Blossom City, especially alongside Redfall. After all, it was common knowledge that they had been the prime instigators of his downfall.

"Keep them occupied until the Southern Capital transfers that student gang that got tangled up with the Southern noble families," I instructed. "Once that happens, hand the students over to those five and inform them that they are responsible for the students' criminal rehabilitation and reintegration program."

As I spoke, I thought to myself, *'That should keep them busy until I'm free to make proper arrangements for them.'*

"Got it, boss," Henricks nodded. Noticing me wanting to ask something but hesitating, he added, "Anything else, boss?"

"How is Susan doing?" I finally asked. I had already decided not to go see her. This was something she had to face on her own if she truly wanted to be with me. Jill had put it perfectly: My popularity was Susan's curse. Unless she could fathom the courage and strength to undo this curse, there was no real future for us.

To the world's leaders and the citizens of the Five Regions, she was the easiest target among my three girls. She needed to toughen up. Because, this kind of instance will be a common thing if she wants to be with me.

"She's buried herself in work. The other girls tried to talk to her, but she brushed them off, telling them not to worry and insisting she was fine," Henricks replied, a hint of sympathy in his voice.

He had been rooting for Susan ever since they met. Compared to me ending up with Jill or Anna, he felt it would be better for the freedom fighters if I chose Susan for the very same reason people were tearing into her on the grimoire network right now: she was seen as weak, a nobody.

"What do you think?" I asked, seeking Henricks' opinion rather than a simple report of what he had observed.

"I don't think she's doing fine," Henricks said honestly. "I saw her come up to the terrace during her break, cry it out, and then head back to work." Then, glancing at Jill, he hesitated before adding, "I mean no offense, but I think she's hurting more because you chose Her Highness Jill than from the online hate."

"Are you calling me a homewrecker, ex-Field Marshal?" Jill snapped instantly, taking offense. His fleeting thoughts had not escaped her notice. She immediately understood that the freedom fighters, now a significant part of my forces, were aligning themselves with Susan to secure their interests as my forces continued to grow. "I'm sick of people saying 'no offense' and then saying the most offensive thing possible. As far as I know, Wyatt wasn't in a committed relationship with anyone when we got together. So, how am I the villainess here?"

"Please forgive me, Your Highness. I overstepped," Henricks apologized at once. After all, Jill was now officially his boss's lady. He couldn't imagine Susan ever speaking to him so sharply, she would always find the patience for her elders. Nor could he understand how his boss had chosen the bossy Jill over the gentle Susan.

"Yes, you were out of your lane, ex-Field Marshal. Make sure there won't be a next time," Jill warned. She knew that if she wanted to stand as my eldest, she could not afford to let these people walk over her. She had already begun to play the game, while the other two did not even realize it existed, let alone that they were part of it.

"Rest assured, Your Highness," Henricks said, swallowing his grievances. He resolved to contact Susan as soon as this was over. He had been waiting for a chance when I could meet her alone, far from that damned White Snake and Crazy Corey. But with events moving so quickly, he could no longer afford to wait for the perfect moment. He would have to wing it.

"Humph," Jill snorted, picking up from Henricks' tone that he had chosen to stand behind Susan and that there was no changing his mind.

I pretended not to hear the exchange between Henricks and Jill, choosing to stay in my own lane and let Jill handle it. Sometimes, one needs to know when to do nothing at all.

Chapter 2597: Finding Ned

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Southern Region, Blossom District, Sky Blossom City, TSR Guild, New Headquarters

"I got news on Ned," I said, breaking the standoff between Jill and Henricks.

"Ned? Where is he? How is he?" Henricks asked eagerly. Ned's whereabouts and well-being had been weighing on his mind ever since they left me alone with Sansa at the Yellow Plains.

"Sansa's pawns dropped him off somewhere in the Central Capital late this evening," I replied, based on the information the Hive Spirit had gathered from her paw clans' VR chats.

"Really? Then why didn't he contact me? I've been in this realm the entire time," Henricks asked frantically.

"I don't think he knows it himself. He was probably drugged—" I began, but Henricks cut in.

"Why would she do that? What does she stand to gain? Is this a trap to lure us out?"

"She did it because I suggested it," I said calmly. "That way, she ensured Ned's death while keeping her promise to Baylor. No, it's not a trap for us. It's a gift for the central government."

I answered patiently, fully aware of Henricks' fragile state of mind.

This man-child was the same man who had remained calm when the freedom fighters were on their last legs, betrayed by the Southern Princess, infiltrated by the Matron, and the World Leaders breaking in through the front door. For him to act like this in front of me showed how much Ned's friendship meant to him, and how wholeheartedly he had accepted me as his boss.

Now that he was no longer the leader but a subordinate, he no longer felt the need to hide his emotions from those beneath him. He could show them openly. Still, he might have done so with a little more restraint.

I could see Jill losing all respect for him. Or perhaps that was exactly what he was aiming for. I didn't dare underestimate this old fox, and neither should Jill.

"Why?" Henricks finally asked, having calmed himself. His face was deadpan, his voice edged with cold intent. It conveyed the unspoken intent that if I failed to give him a satisfactory answer, he would gracefully retire from his duties to me and the freedom fighters alike, and fight me to the death.

"To save him. Sansa would have killed him, unable to swallow what happened in the Yellow Plains. So I warned her that killing him would only earn her more hatred from Baylor. Instead, she could show mercy for appearance's sake, dump Ned onto a busy street in the Central Capital, and let the government handle the rest. She took my

suggestion, though she made a few adjustments of her own," I explained, mindful of Henricks' bond with Ned. I, too, had known brotherhood in my past life, but unfortunately, it had not withstood the test of time. Hopefully, there's would.

"I see. Do you know where exactly? I'll go get him now," Henricks said urgently, his mind finally locking onto what needed to take priority.

"No. So far, I haven't been able to find out where in the Central Capital they dropped him," I said. "I suggest you head there and start searching. I'll contact you immediately if I learn anything."

Henricks thanked me at once and summoned a portal to the Central Capital, but I stopped him before he stepped through. "Take Ollie and Cam with you. They'll come in handy if things escalate."

"Ollie too?" Henricks asked doubtfully, unable to believe that pervert would be of any real help in the search if not a hindrance.

"He may be sleazy, but this falls right under his alley, and the Central Capital happens to be his turf," I replied. "Promise him a few free trips to brothels and he'll be plenty motivated." I knew Ollie appeared unreliable, but in truth, he was the one who handled all the dirty work in his group so the others wouldn't have to. As for Cam, with him around, they wouldn't have to worry about being surrounded or outnumbered.

Henricks nodded in understanding. Then Jill added, "I'll have my people monitor the government's secure channels and keep an ear open for anything related to Ned or the freedom fighters. If they hear something, you'll know."

"Thank you," Henricks said gratefully, noting Jill's willingness to help him despite his earlier challenge to her authority through Susan.

Jill nodded as she watched him summon another portal and head toward the West Princess and her entourage.

"What's Big Sister Christina doing here?" Jill asked, catching sight of the latter's figure through the portal.

"She and her friends work for me now," I replied. At the same time, the Hive AI tapped into my VR information network and informed me that Susan was still in the building, working, with Corey keeping her company. I suspected Corey had rushed over to stay by her mother's side after learning about the scandal involving Jill and me.

"When did that happen?" Jill asked in shock, then added, "You do know she prefers women, right?"

"What do you take me for?" I asked, exaggerating my reaction as I feigned offense. "Besides, how do you know that?"

Jill confided in me with a smug smile. "She approached me after hearing that I wasn't interested in men. When I told her about my condition, she said she'd be open to a nightcap, provided my partner was handsome and accommodating."

"What are you suggesting?" I asked, feigning ignorance, even though I knew she meant nothing by it and was merely sharing a juicy bit of gossip with her partner.

"Nothing," Jill said, brushing it off. She rolled her eyes at my childish reaction before asking, "Aren't you going to meet Susan? Or is my presence stopping you? No need to spare my feelings."

"No. She asked for space, and I'm giving it to her," I replied. "Besides, she has to get through this on her own. Otherwise, a life with me would only make her miserable, and resentment would follow. It's best to let nature take its course this time."

Chapter 2598: I'm My Own Enemy

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Southern Region, Blossom District, Sky Blossom City, TSR Guild, New Headquarters

"So, you're giving her space, by being with me. Otherwise, what am I supposed to make of what you said?" Jill suddenly turned my own words against me, pressing them to my throat and leaving me momentarily speechless. Seeing my stunned expression, she patted my back and added consolingly, "It's good that you're finally being honest with me. That way, I can start helping you deal with those two little girls. After all, it's the queen's duty to find wives and concubines for the king."

I stared at Jill with a deadpan expression. She had a way of drawing out my primal side, as if simply being near her stripped away my restraint. Worse still, she didn't shy away from that part of me. She accepted it, even encouraged it. If she was the spark, then her words and actions were the fuel, lighting and feeding a fire in my heart that refused to die.

Yet, despite everything, I always found myself drawn to her. I wouldn't go so far as to say she brought out the worst in me, but I also couldn't claim she brought out the best. I lacked the words to label the part of me that surfaced in her presence, but there was one thing I knew for certain. I never regretted what I said or did when I was with her.

Seeing my hesitation, my reluctance to fully accept the thoughts I had just voiced, Jill shook her head and said, "The sooner you come to terms with how you feel, the better it will be for you, for me, and for those two."

I wanted to deny it, yet I couldn't. There was nothing left to deny. Jill was right. Noticing my inner struggle, she finally relented and went easy on me. "Stop wasting time here. Go find Anna. Leave this one to me," she instructed before adding pointedly, "And in exchange, put a lot more thought into our first date. Don't you dare forget."

Jill turned to leave with practiced composure, but just as she reached the terrace door, she found herself unable to open it. She paused, then awkwardly turned back to look at me, her cheeks flushing red. I hurried to explain, "I've added your grimoire ID to the system. You have full access to all my facilities."

"Thank you," Jill muttered before opening the terrace door by scanning her grimoire ID and hurrying down the stairs. She had played the role of a chill, calculating, diplomatic queen flawlessly, only for her exit to undo it. Had she maintained her composure instead of giving in to embarrassment, she might have pulled it off.

Shaking my head, I forced myself not to dwell on it, avoiding my own feelings out of shame and guilt. When I was with Jill, she made those feelings seem acceptable, even natural, yet I knew they were wrong.

All my life, I had believed in monogamy. I had been raised on the idea of "the one." And now here I was, harboring feelings not for one or two, but for three different women. Each was equally beautiful and intriguing in her own way, each making me feel complete and whole in a manner unique to her. Facing them brought me as much happiness as it did shame.

All my life, especially in my past life, I had never been ashamed of myself. I was guilty of many things, but shame had never been one of them. Yet whenever I confronted my feelings for those three women, I felt equal measures of joy and shame.

Why was that?

Why could I face those feelings when I was with Jill, but not when I was with the other two?

Was it because I had been honest with Jill in a way I hadn't been with the others?

Was it because Jill had accepted my true feelings?

Did that mean the only way to rid myself of this shame was to be honest with Susan and Anna, just as I had been with Jill?

To let them decide whether they wished to respond to my feelings or not?

To let them decide whether their feelings for me were strong enough to look past the ugliness of my own desires?

Was my truth, and their acceptance of it, my salvation?

Was that it?

So, was it acceptable for me to be in a polygamous relationship, so long as everyone involved was willing and accepting? Was that truly all there was to it?

No. My salvation lay in accepting my own truth. And the truth was simple. I wanted all three of them. The very thought of being forced to choose between them set my nerves on edge.

I had never liked the saying that to gain something, you must lose something else.

In my past life, or in this one, I despised that phrase because it claimed to be an unavoidable truth. Perhaps it had been true once, but in this life, I refused to believe it.

Here, I was no longer as helpless as I had been before. I possessed the power and the means to pursue everything I desired. And all I wanted now was to not be forced to choose between Susan, Anna, and Jill. Was that really too much to ask?

Yet, in the end, it seemed that even in this life I was just as helpless as I had been in the last, because the enemy I faced was myself. I was the judge, the jury, the executioner, and the defendant of this case.

No one else was forcing me to choose between Susan, Anna, and Jill. I alone stood in my own way.

Jill, who was part of it all and knew everything, wasn't forcing me to choose. If anything, she was pushing me to confront my feelings and accept them, believing that the sooner I came to terms with them, the sooner I could act on them.

The only person who needed convincing was myself.

And perhaps Corey. If she knew what I was thinking right now, she would never forgive me. Fortunately for me, she was now one with her darkness. Otherwise, I would have to worry about that psycho trying to kill me in my sleep, or worse, on the toilet seat.

Chapter 2599: Southern Man-Whore

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Southern Region, Blossom District, Sky Blossom City, TSR Guild, New Headquarters

Thinking of Corey snapped me out of my spiral. Having the memories of Earth, she was likely the only one who could truly understand why I struggled so much with the idea of embracing polygamy. Setting those thoughts aside, I headed toward the teleportation hub.

"Hi there, boss," Cindy greeted me as I arrived. She had clearly traveled from the Southern Capital to Sky Blossom City after learning I was here. I suspected Henricks had tipped her off.

I nodded to her and couldn't help asking, "Should I be worried that you're already forming factions, even before we can be considered an established force?"

"Boss, it's the only way for us little guys to stay relevant in your fast-growing organization. Otherwise, in the blink of an eye, we'll be replaced by card emperors and demigods," Cindy replied candidly.

She wasn't wrong. I had already brought in the Western Princess and her ragtag group of demigods, and now I was planning to bring in Jill, Asong, and Agatha as well. With so many powerful and capable figures joining, it would be difficult for talents like Cindy and Diana to rise any further in ranks. At best, they would be stuck at the middle tiers of my organization.

Yes, my organization operated on a merit-based system, but there was no denying that a low-level card apprentice could never earn merit at the same pace as a high-level one. Left unchecked, it would simply become another case of the rich getting richer while the poor grew poorer. That wasn't to say the high-level card apprentices didn't deserve their rewards. They did. But as their leader, it was my responsibility to help everyone grow, so they could continue earning more merit by serving me more effectively.

It was my duty to ensure that the ceiling above every member of my organization kept rising. If it didn't, they would begin to feel trapped, pressured into survival mode, and driven to actions they would never normally consider. Everyone was fighting for a better future. I didn't want to be the one who denied them that chance.

With that in mind, I met Cindy's gaze and said, "I completely overlooked that. Thank you for bringing it to my attention. Give me some time. I'll figure out a solution."

"Why?" Cindy replied, a hint of self-reproach in her voice. "It's not your fault that our talent isn't good enough."

"Neither is it your fault," I said firmly, knowing from experience that a person's talent alone did not define their worth. And sadly in this world no amount of hard work was enough to make up for talent.

Cindy was taken aback by my words. After a moment, she shook her head, assuming I was merely trying to comfort her, and continued with her self-deprecating smile, "Yes, I know that. I blame my luck."

"I don't know about your luck," I replied, "but I do know this. You chose to follow me, and you're giving me everything you have. I can't walk your path for you, but I will make sure you have every opportunity and every tool you need to keep up with me. That, I promise. So don't lose sight of your dreams yet. Don't get lost in these games. Let's make it there together. Okay?" I said, offering her a simple, honest smile.

"Okay!" Cindy answered eagerly. Then, returning my smile with one of her own, she added, "Now I see why those girls keep falling for you left and right."

"Don't tell me you've fallen for me too," I teased as we walked toward the teleportation array.

"Unfortunately, no. Your aesthetics aren't my type. Only little girls like Jaya would be into that," Cindy clarified in excessive detail, to the point that it felt like she was overcompensating, as if trying to hide something.

"So, you like a dad bod?" I asked. After all, my physique was the pinnacle of the human male form. It didn't get better than this.

"Yes, but not the kind that comes from overeating and a lack of exercise," Cindy replied. "I mean the natural kind. Aged like fine wine. Dense, rugged beard. Menacing, yet comforting at the same time. Every time I kiss him, it reminds me that I'm with a man. A true man." Lost in her imagination, she forgot herself and began to overshare.

"Ahem," I cleared my throat, feeling uncomfortable, snapping her out of her trance.

She blinked, then instead of apologizing, asserted firmly, "You're the one who asked."

"This counts as sexual harassment, right?" I said, reminding her that we were still at work and that I was, in fact, her boss.

"Boss, no one would believe you," Cindy replied calmly. "Your reputation already precedes you across the five regions."

"What reputation?" I asked, genuinely astonished.

"Come on, boss. First Anna, then Susan, and now Jill. People are bound to talk," Cindy said as if it were inevitable. "They even started a betting pool on which other women

you might be seeing on the side. Someone made a whole list. There were a few names on it that even surprised me."

"It hasn't even been a day," I complained helplessly. There were just too many card apprentices with too much time on their hands out there.

"Hey, boss," Cindy continued, leaning in conspiratorially. "Why don't you tell me who else you're seeing besides those three? If I win, I'll split half the profits with you." She tried to pass it off as a joke, but the glint of greed in her eyes betrayed her.

"Have you lost your damn mind?" I thundered. "Where are your priorities, woman? Your boss is being publicly shamed across the grimoire network, and all you can think about is hitting the jackpot with insider information instead of defending my reputation?"

"Boss, I am defending you," Cindy replied smoothly, rubbing her hands together with a sly grin. "This is my way of getting back at them for insulting you. If I cheat them blind and take all their money, wouldn't that be the most satisfying revenge?"

"Sure, they lose money, you make money, but what about my reputation?" I snapped, thoroughly displeased. "The five regions will stop calling me the Southern Hope and start calling me the Southern man-whore."

The thought made my blood boil. Whoever had started that betting pool was going to pay for it.

Chapter 2600: Late Night Whispers

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Southern Region, Southern Capital, Fine Gold Capital Branch, Teleportation Hub

Cindy and I used the teleportation array together to arrive at the Southern Capital. The freedom fighters' array masters had picked up the pace and were doing an impressive job constructing teleportation hubs, linking them one by one to the teleportation network across all first-tier cities of the Southern Region.

Our focus on first-tier cities was deliberate. These hubs could be opened to the public sooner, allowing us to generate revenue to maintain the completed infrastructure while simultaneously funding the construction of hubs in other cities. Expecting a single individual to shoulder the full cost of a project of this scale was never realistic. My intention was only to invest enough to initiate the project and keep it operational long enough for the revenue it generated to fund the expansion.

This approach ensured that the project was self-sufficient from the ground up, preventing it from collapsing and dragging my savings down with it. Now even the Southern Royal Family, which was still sitting on the fence, would have no choice but to stop stalling with senseless politics and begin pulling their weight.

All of this was possible because the first-tier cities of the Southern region proved remarkably welcoming and accommodating toward the Fine Gold, despite the higher-ups having yet to greenlight the project within their jurisdictions. These cities went out of their way to assist us, helping select suitable land and construct solid infrastructure so that, in the end, all that remained was for the array masters to arrive, inscribe the teleportation arrays, and connect them to our teleportation network.

In their efforts to accommodate the Southern Hope and do him a favor, they were, in truth, acting in their own best interests.

It was not that they failed to understand the benefits a functional teleportation hub would bring to their cities. Rather, they lacked the authority to approve a project of this magnitude on their own. Even so, where there was will, there was a way. These cities exploited loopholes in their bylaws to not only allocate land for the teleportation hubs, but also secure funding to build the infrastructure, then patiently wait in line for the array masters to arrive and complete the inscriptions, integrating each hub into the teleportation network.

Proving that when interests were aligned, no force could halt progress.

"Keep up the good work," I said to Cindy before taking to the skies. As I rose into the night, my Hive Spirit detected multiple demigod-realm energy signatures hidden among the clouds, picked up through the edge of my primordial soul pupils. I had not been paying attention, but it had.

As I drew closer to the demigods concealed in the clouds, their heated argument drifted to my ears.

"How can you still have the face to defend him after he killed so many innocent people, including the demigods on duty who tried to stop him?" one of them demanded.

"Stop repeating the same lie over and over," another snapped back. "It's not as if telling a lie enough times will turn it into the truth. We both know what actually happened. Leave while we are still being civil."

"He killed nearly sixty elite demigods. With the second demon invasion on the brink, do you have any idea how long it will take to make up for those losses? How can you be indifferent to such a senseless massacre?"

"How can you be so indifferent when you know that what you call senseless is exactly what you speak of?" came the cold reply. "Please leave. My answer will remain the

same. He is under the protection of the Southern Royal Family. Nothing you shout or do here will change that."

"You've said enough. What is there left to discuss?" the other voice snapped. "He is a bloodthirsty murderer. We only stopped out of courtesy to notify the Southern Ruler. We will do what we must. It would be best if you do not get in our way, if you know what's good for you."

"What exactly are you trying to achieve here?" the voice snapped. "Everyone knows the Southern Royal Family will never abandon him. And if you truly intended to bring him to justice, you would have acted already instead of coming here to 'inform' us. Don't tell me you're not here to seek justice, but to blow this matter out of proportion and use it to pester him into paying you a sizable compensation. What makes you think that would work, when he wasn't afraid to face nearly four dozen demigods inside a temporal separation array?"

"How—what in the hell are you talking about?" the other voice blurted.

"Don't deny it, we know exactly what you bastards tried to pull. Fortunately for you, he ended it quickly and cooled down after massacring those pups from the Brothwork family. Had he delayed even a little longer, you would have been forced to face the Southern Prince himself. And given the path he is walking, he wouldn't have concluded it by wiping out the Brothwork family's pups anyway. So whatever it is you're trying to accomplish here, stop it now, before it's too late for you to regret it," the voice warned them to stop seeking disaster.

Instantly, the other voice refuted, "Believe whatever you want, but you can't deny the hard evidence. He killed Brolock and other Brothworks in their Morningstar Manor over a rivalry in the pleasure card market. When the demigods on patrol attempted to intervene, he killed them as well. There are numerous cases lodged against him. Unfair trade practices are the least of his concerns."

"Unfair trade practices?" came the mocking reply, followed by laughter. "Now I finally understand. You're not here to beg, you're here to bury him under a mountain pile of laws and steal what's his claiming you are following legal procedure. I shouldn't have expected anything less from you lot."