

Card Apprentice Daily Log

#Chapter 2651: Jill's Dilemma - Read Chapter 2651: Jill's Dilemma

Chapter 2651: Jill's Dilemma

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Southern Region, Blossom District, Sky Blossom City, Guild Association Mall

The entire city was out on the streets or on the rooftops, searching for the demigods fighting above their city before they even had a chance to react in panic and run to safety. The deities vanished into thin air, finally allowing the early morning sunrays to reach the city. It all happened so fast that most of them wondered if it had been a dream; only when they took to the grimoire network did they understand what they had just witnessed and actually transpired.

"Baem, follow them?" Corey instructed her pet from the terrace of the TSR Guild's building, observing her boss and the Emissary of Light's soul projection as they teleported out of the city, knowing that with Lil' Baem's sense of smell and speed, it wouldn't be hard for it to track and catch up with them.

"Corey, stop!" Susan and Jill called out simultaneously, watching her jump atop her giant pet snake's head. Landing on Lil' Baem's head, she asked, "You guys also want to come too? Jill, Lil' Baem wouldn't allow an unfamiliar person to ride it..."

"No, we just received a text from Wyatt asking us not to worry. He will return soon and keep us updated," Jill said hurriedly, and Susan added, "Yes, he asked us not to waste time worrying about him and to keep the operation going and complete all the orders on time."

Jill couldn't help but glance at Susan, realizing that the content of their texts from their beloved was completely different, even though he claimed that he didn't differentiate between them. At first, she grew jealous, thinking that Susan was deeply integrated into their beloved's organization, even leading it in his absence, while she herself was still on the outside. She couldn't accept it; her ego wouldn't allow it.

It was one thing to share her beloved with the other two temptresses, as she couldn't control him, but power and money were different. Those she wouldn't share and would keep all for herself, because unlike her beloved, they didn't possess a will and were meant to be controlled.

However, looking at Susan, she suddenly felt something stir in her gut and immediately asked her, "Did you two fight or something?"

"No, what would make you think that?" Susan hurriedly denied, though a little surprised she explained not waiting for Jill's response, "I asked him to give me some space to think things through, so this is him giving me my space."

"Things like what?" Jill asked in puzzlement, a little delight blooming in her heart. She couldn't help it. After all, the one in question was one of her love rivals.

Jill had sought Susan out, hoping to assert the hierarchy between them, to show the chasm of difference when it came to strength, beauty, background, intelligence, and the like, but thanks to that meddling little girl with the monster snake pet, she failed and could only swallow her grievances. So, she didn't feel any guilt, even though Susan and she could now be considered more than acquaintances.

"Things like—" Susan was about to answer Jill out of habit, but then realized the latter wouldn't understand. Jill and Anna had openly declared their relationships with their partners to the entire world, unlike her, who still couldn't make up her mind, worrying about the world's perception of their relationship. Shaking her head, Susan continued, "You wouldn't understand. Corey, don't dare try to slip away."

"But he promised to help me acquire a soul trait last night," Corey complained as she lay flat on Lil' Baem's head, dejected and disappointed. This wasn't the first time he hadn't kept an appointment with her. Then, turning onto her stomach and propping her chin on her palms, she looked at Jill and Susan and asked, "Why did he contact only you two? He should be contacting me first. Instead, he didn't even text me."

"Why would that be?" Jill asked quickly, on guard, wondering if her beloved had a fling with this little girl as well. She was starting to understand what her colleague meant when she said that dating handsome and popular men could be tiresome and mind-numbing.

"Why? Because I'm his best friend. Think about it. Besides me, who is he close with non-romantically?" Corey proclaimed herself her boss's best friend, assigning a new meaning to the term.

Listening to her answer, Jill's heart finally began beating regularly again. At the same time, she started to realize that the anxiousness and insecurity she was feeling wasn't just the result of dating a handsome and capable man. Maybe she wasn't as comfortable

with her beloved dating other women while dating her as she claimed to be. This anxiety and fear surely weren't normal, at least not if she truly was fine with their arrangement.

"By that logic alone, there's Cortney, Bloodette, Sarah, Jaya... those names are just off the top of my head," Susan listed one after another, all of whom had a better chance of being considered her beloved's best friend than Corey. But noticing the latter's expression turn gravely dull, she hurriedly added, "You're more like Wyatt's bratty little sister. I mean, think about it. You're the only one who gets away with the kind of shit you pull. He always finds a reason to forgive you or help you."

"Who wants to be his sis—" Corey was about to reject the idea of being her boss's little sister, but then a genius thought crossed her mind as she said, "Big sis Su, if I'm his bratty little sister and also your little sister, then doesn't that make all three of us brothers and sisters?"

"Sure, whatever works for you, honey," Susan agreed without thinking much of it. After all, Corey had been very vocal about opposing their relationship.

"There is no point in arguing with you guys; you are smitten with him." Corey got off Lil' Baem's head and headed to the basement of the building, while Lil' Baem took to the sky, after informing, "I'll go check on Dredre to see how she's adjusting to Bloodette's dungeon seal."

Chapter 2652: Uncharted Way Beyond

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Unknown

"Where the fuck am I?" I asked, looking at my surroundings, which resembled a mountain range. Because of my size, I felt as though I were standing in an ill-constructed maze of massive stones and snow.

While the Hive Spirit tried to locate where the damned Emissary of Light had teleported us, I turned to find the city guard captain lying half-dead from exhaustion, no longer being supported by faith after the Emissary of Light cut off his soul projection.

A pair of my floating arms hovered over the guard captain, using celestial empowerment to strengthen his overexerted will and awaken him. Simultaneously, I sent messages to my women and subordinates, informing them of my well-being, assuring them of my return soon, and asking them to continue their work as usual. So that they wouldn't worry about me or let the world's perception of me affect their duty to me.

Once my thousand-plus floating heads confirmed there was no threat nearby, I immediately returned to my regular form, not wanting to attract any more attention or trouble than I already had, until I was sure the Emissary of Light hadn't teleported me to the—

'SON OF A BITCH!!!' I cursed aloud in my mind, as the Hive Spirit, with the help of the Devil Merchant Code's inter-realm transportation function's location feature and the data it had collected on the Card World's geography, confirmed my suspicions. It determined that the Emissary of Light had indeed sent me to a never-before-explored, uncharted part of the Way beyond, approximately 67,000 miles from the Southern Region.

The Emissary of Light's endgame to escape my checkmate caught me by surprise. To be honest, I had underestimated the capability of faith. Only now that I had experienced it, I knew that with enough faith he could simply teleport us out of the Southern Region, despite my resisting it with all my will and celestial force.

Yes, my celestial force was strong, but compared to the Emissary of Light's faith reserve, it fell short by a wide margin. I knew that, I thought it wouldn't matter, but it did.

This came as a tremendous shock to me, as I was a hybrid celestial. Teleporting me against my will was akin to teleporting a very small celestial. Even Dark Races, who could destroy celestials for their celestial will fragments, couldn't achieve that. This included the likes of the Devil Merchant Code, which could teleport Demon/ Devil Merchants anywhere within the known myriad realms and even explore the unknown myriad realms, for a premium.

Now I was beginning to understand how the Dark Cults had managed to survive while opposing the Devil Merchant Code. I should have known that Dark Cults capable of making the Devil Merchant Code go out of its way to preach against them were not to be underestimated. Faith was mighty enough to threaten even the Devil Merchant Code, one of the entities in the known Myriad Realms closest to achieving transcendence.

This was enough to prove that the Dark Cults' mastery and knowledge of faith was by far superior to that of the Emissary of Light, who was foolishly limiting himself by trying to become the true son of the Card Celestial as he hadn't been exposed to the world outside of the Card World. If he did, his ultimate goal would never be to become a celestial affiliated with the Card Celestial.

Just thinking about how I had been blindsided by someone like that pissed me off so much that I couldn't even take solace in the fact that he might have used up a huge chunk of his faith reserves to teleport me so far away against my will. The reason I was caught unprepared was that, as a rookie demon merchant, I had yet to be exposed to the faith practiced by Dark Cults, which didn't get enough credit in the devil merchant code. Had I known faith was going to be so troublesome, I would have approached this whole differently.

How could I, when my plan had been to expose him to the five regions as a false herald? Now, I was left wondering what I had managed to achieve from all this and how the five regions would react to my true form. It all felt moot, except for the Celestial Empowerment, which made my anger recede a little.

"Master Wyatt, thank you for saving my squad and me," the guard captain said as he awakened, immediately expressing his gratitude without attending to his weak and exhausted body.

"Don't mention it. Get healed." Taking out a few high-grade blood elixirs, I handed them to him and said, "We are in an unexplored part of the Way Beyond."

"Uncharted Way Beyond?" the guard captain exclaimed in utter horror as he finally began to scrutinize his surroundings in terror. Every little sound suddenly seemed to spook him. He was an elite card demigod who had survived countless battles and wars, yet out here he behaved like a child trying to cross a dark alley late at night. After all, these were parts of the Way Beyond that even the bravest card apprentices would not dare enter without extensive preparation and a proper team, let alone waking up here with no preparation or knowledge at all.

"Stop spacing out and drink the potions before you fall unconscious from exhaustion again," I reminded the guard captain, who seemed to have forgotten all his survival training and experience as he grew aware of our eerie surroundings. To me, the sight was mesmerizing, but as the saying goes, beauty is in the beholder's eyes.

"Yes, yes, sorry," the guard captain nodded vigorously before chugging down the elixirs, his rigid posture gradually easing as he began to accept our circumstances.

Meanwhile, I turned my attention to exploring my options for returning to my city from this goddamned place. However, with baggage in tow, most of the obvious methods I would normally rely on were no longer viable.

Chapter 2653: Dangerously Beautiful Way Beyond

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Unknown

I glanced at the guard captain, who was focused on his recovery, before beginning to scout for a suitable place to set up Dalie's teleportation array and connect it to her teleportation array network.

At first, I considered that since I was already here in the uncharted Way Beyond, I might as well explore it, turning my return trip into an adventure filled with exploration and

foraging. I had only heard of how dangerously beautiful the Way Beyond was, with its bountiful resources, but now that I am here, I might as well check it out for myself.

However, if even part of what I had heard about the Way Beyond were true, then I couldn't turn my return trip to the five regions into an adventure, because the guard captain, though an elite demigod, was not capable of tagging along with me on such a journey.

Therefore, I decided to set up a teleportation array in a secluded place nearby, use it to return home with the guard captain, and come back for the adventure I had planned when I had more time on my hands.

After all, I had three urgent commitments that I had to attend to no matter what: one with Morningstar University, another with my calamity daughter core, Cuth Diya, and the last with Moon Frost and her tribe in the Dark Realm. These commitments would vastly affect my future plans, so I couldn't afford to neglect them.

Having made up my mind, I headed up the nearby mountain, as earlier one of the floating heads had found an empty cave there. With proper arrangements, the cave could be transformed and used as a long-standing teleportation hub.

It would also serve as a good resource point when the freedom fighters explore this part of the Way Beyond. Apart from those working on the teleportation hubs, most of the freedom fighters were sitting on their asses. I planned to have them explore the surroundings and forage for resources.

I wasn't worried that their strength would be insufficient to explore this land, because while surveying my surroundings, the thousand-plus floating heads had found that apart from a few peculiar flora forming the limited vegetation at the foot of these mountains, there were no other living creatures in these mountain ranges. It was totally deserted.

Besides, the freedom fighters had experience exploring and inhabiting unknown realms. The uncharted Way Beyond shouldn't be that hard for them, especially with a teleportation hub nearby for escape in case of emergency.

As I flew uphill, leaving a limitless barrier around the guard captain, allowing him to focus on his recovery without any worries, I found the quietness very peaceful. Except for the two of us, there was no other being in these mountain ranges.

Yes, I found the situation weird for two reasons. First, this place was nothing like the monster- and supreme-being-crawling Way Beyond I had heard of. Second, why would the Emissary of Light bother to throw me into a safe zone despite losing a substantial amount of faith over it? Things didn't add up. The Emissary of Light I knew wasn't the type to forgive someone. There had to be a reason he teleported us here, out of all the places in the Way Beyond.

Therefore, I was very cautious. I made use of my primordial soul pupils to explore ahead before heading into the cave. My giant floating heads had already checked the surroundings thoroughly with their soul pupils and found no threats, but since this involved the Emissary of Light, I had to be extra cautious.

After making sure there were no surprises hidden in the cave, I entered it. Heading deeper inside, I found a space large enough to host a large-scale platform capable of supporting multiple teleportation arrays.

Just as I was about to begin setting up the array formations, I sensed that the guard captain had awakened, completing his recovery. I remotely retrieved the limitless barrier protecting him while signaling where he could find me.

Then, I summoned my primordial spirit clones and got busy laying the foundation, reinforcing the cave structure, and setting up several protective array formations before moving on to erecting the teleportation array formations.

Working as a team, with our combined efforts, it didn't take long to turn the cave into the infrastructure for a teleportation hub. Meanwhile, the guard captain stood guard at the cave entrance, careful not to get in the way of whatever it was I was doing.

He didn't pester me with his fears; he quietly stood guard, letting me do what I wanted without question. It was a vast difference compared to his reaction when he learned that we were in the uncharted part of the Way Beyond. Now, he felt like a veteran card demigod who had served in the Southern Watch, distinguished and outstanding enough to be trusted by the royal to guard my city.

Just as my clones and I began setting up the teleportation array on the platform we had just designed, we sensed a change in the surrounding soul pathways. The oxygen and soul power content in the cave's atmosphere was rapidly being replaced by what looked like an energized yet stable form of methane.

Noticing this rapid change, without hesitation, I retrieved my clones and rushed out of the cave toward the guard captain, only to find him passed out, with the entire valley and the peaks of the mountain range devoid of oxygen and soul energy, drowning in a fog of an energized yet stable form of methane. Due to the heaviness of this energized methane, even the blowing wind had come to a halt. The entire mountain range had turned into one massive disaster. I was finally beginning to understand why these mountain ranges were devoid of living creatures.

I immediately covered both myself and the unconscious guard captain in a limitless barrier before checking on him. As I inspected him with my soul pupils, I found that his entire soul pathways were clogged with this an energized yet stable form of methane, rendering him unconscious. Had I arrived a few hours later, he would have died from poisoning and suffocation, though I couldn't guarantee which would have claimed his life first.

Just as I was grasping for a way to save the guard captain, a deep, unnatural rumble tore through the valley. A massive boulder broke free, rolling down the mountainside like a harbinger of the end. My blood ran cold as I watched it create a snowball effect, causing multiple stones to roll down colliding and crashing into one another. Seeing the sparks fly, I cursed aloud, "Fuck!!!"

BOOOOM!!!

In an instant, the entire mountain range, from its highest peak to its lowest foothills, detonated.

Chapter 2654: Stone Supreme

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Unknown

As the boulder and stones rolled down the mountain and struck other rocks, they generated sparks. With enough sparks, even the energized yet stable form of methane in the area ignited and detonated, which in turn triggered the methane in its vicinity, forming a cascading chain reaction. It was like witnessing nature's version of a thermobaric missile at work. In under a couple of minutes, the entire mountain range was reduced to a sandy dessert.

Thanks to my limitless barrier, I was able to witness all of this with my primordial soul pupils without any interruption from the explosion itself. I even saw the snow on the mountains vaporize into scorching steam during the blast; under the all-round pressure of the explosion, the vapor condensed and accumulated, forming pockets of superheated steam within the blast zone.

When the methane detonation subsided, these pockets of superheated steam burst thunderously as the pressure that sustained them vanished with the explosion. This gave rise to another round of explosions. However, this second wave was deadlier and more destructive than the first, reducing whatever remained of the mountains after the initial blast into fine sand. It also created violent drafts capable of burning anything they came into contact with to ash.

One had to understand that this energized yet stable form of methane was the result of soul energy. I had never seen such a form of methane in Earth's natural environments or laboratories. That was to say, the destructive power of this methane fog was more than sufficient to completely level and pulverize the Mountain range. If that didn't get the job done, the pockets of concentrated, superheated steam did.

Knowing this, I didn't dare retrieve my limitless barrier. I left it in place and tended to the guard captain instead. I made use of my soul energy manipulation to create extremely thin energy needles and pierced his soul pathways, drawing the methane out of his body and flushing it with clear, refined soul energy. Methane was colorless, tasteless, and odorless; the poor guy never saw it coming. His intent sense should have, but the methane fog had spread too quickly, covering the entire mountain range in mere seconds.

Just as I was expelling the methane from the guard captain's body and circulating pure soul energy through him, the surrounding dunes of sand began to sink, forming a vast, swirling pattern around a pitch-black void beneath them that acted as the eye of the phenomenon. The suction force it generated was overwhelming. Within minutes, the entire desert was swallowed.

Fixed in the air and surrounded by infinitely stretched space, I escaped the suction force and witnessed everything in horror. When I looked down at the origin of the pitch-black void, I saw the walls of ground closing in on itself like a anal hole before water began to spurt out from the cracks, rapidly filling the crater and forming a large lake.

When I made use of my primordial soul pupils, I detected a massive concentration of pure stone rule power moving beneath the ground, deep underground, diving further into the card world's crust until it moved out of my vision. Its pace was far too fast for me to interfere in any way. All I could tell was that it was humongous, and that its body was similar to Bloodette's, formed entirely from condensed rule power. I immediately suspected it was the Stone Supreme, but without definitive proof, I couldn't confirm anything.

Compared to the Blood Supreme, who had chosen the form of a human, the Stone Supreme seemed to have taken the shape of a humongous underground behemoth or even a leviathan. I couldn't help but wonder how long it would take for something like that to decimate a city. Judging by how quickly it had reduced an entire mountain range to sand and swallowed it whole, the answer was clear. Far less time than anyone could afford.

I also couldn't help but wonder whether the Stone Supreme had warned the living creatures inhabiting the mountain range before deciding to feed on it, giving them time to migrate. Otherwise, I couldn't think of a better reason why the entire mountain range was devoid of life, except for a few flora born from stone-rule. If this were true, was the Stone Supreme showing care and mercy toward these living creatures, or was it merely ensuring that its palate remained restricted to the diet it preferred, stones?

From what I had observed during my time with Bloodette, I had realized that supreme beings, like humans, were social. However, unlike humans, they were simple-minded but not to the point of being called stupid, emotionally honest, and fearless. That was to say, supreme beings thought simply, not shallowly. They ignored politics, strategy, and

social norms unless those things clashed with their values and interests. When it mattered, their instincts were razor-sharp.

If I had to guess, the Stone Supreme had warned the living creatures for both reasons. I even believed that the living creatures had helped the Stone Supreme by clearing away vegetation that didn't suit its appetite, which explained why we had only seen stone-rule plants and nothing else. Not that it mattered, as everything would have been reduced to ash or sand. Perhaps those living creatures had performed it as a sign of respect, or outright worship.

Of course, that was all based on the assumption that the Stone Supreme had warned the living creatures to leave the mountain range. It was also possible that the mountain range had been devoid of life from the very beginning. Honestly, I didn't have all the facts and now that the mountain range was gone I never will.

But the Emissary of Light did. Otherwise, how would he have known that the Stone Supreme was about to feast on this mountain range? Or perhaps it had merely been a coincidence, considering that he recalled his soul projection without killing the guard captain. Given his nature, and knowing that I could undo his brainwashing, he should have killed the guard captain, yet he didn't. Maybe he hadn't known where we would be teleported at all and had sent us away randomly, simply to expend as little faith as possible.

Be that as it may, I was beginning to realize that returning to the five regions with baggage weighing me down was not going to be easy.

Chapter 2655: Stone Supreme: Petra Petros

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Way Beyond, Unknown

Fwoosh!!!

Just as I was focused on circulating soul energy through the guard captain's body, I caught, from the corner of my eye, a column of water shooting up from the vast lake beneath me. By the time the sound reached my ears, I sensed an entity forcing its way into my limitless barrier, attempting to cross its infinitely stretched space to reach me. Moments later, my limitless barrier ruptured like a bubble, tearing the stretched space apart.

The unconscious guard captain and I were nearly pulled into the resulting spatial void. I hurriedly secured him and prepared to escape the range of the suction force, but a pair of hands suddenly seized us and dragged us out of there.

"Card Apprentice, is your friend okay?" an ethereal voice asked.

I turned toward the source of the voice and saw the one responsible for this upheaval. It appeared humanoid, with natural famine attributes. She had petrified gray skin, hair, and eyes and looked less like a living being and more like a living statue, or a gargoyle. Even so, she was undeniably striking. The craftsmanship was on an entirely different level.

"Stone Supreme?" I blurted out in astonishment as I watched the void closing as the space behind her rapidly knit itself back together.

I now understood why my limitless barrier had ruptured so suddenly. It was because her overall mass exceeded what the density of my limitlessly stretched space could withstand. Despite her size, she was unimaginably heavy like the world itself. Her mere presence within my stretched space had pierced a tear through it. And since the space itself was stretching limitlessly, that tear continued to expand until, with a pop, the entire barrier shattered into fragments.

"My human name is Petra Petros. I will allow you to call me Petra," the Stone supreme introduced herself as if this wasn't the first time meeting humans.

"Hi, Petra. I'm Dalton Wyatt. My friend is fine," I replied, checking on the guard captain as I induced him into a deeper sleep and sealed him inside a miniature limitless prison bubble, storing it in my dimensional storage card beside Slay's egg, next to Jill's uncle. I wanted to avoid doing this, but I was forced to anyway to ensure I was prepared for any possible scenario. Hopefully, for the guard captain's sake he doesn't wake up earlier than my calculation.

Petra's brows furrowed as she watched me store the guard captain away. Then she said, "You are strong enough to have survived my demolition. I will give you that. But you heeded your greed instead of my warning. Now suffer the consequences of your insolence."

"Wait! Wait!" I uttered, not wanting to fight a supreme being in the Way Beyond, which was crawling with them. However, without even listening to my explanation, Petra attacked me with a strange stone rule. It bypassed all my defenses. Under its effect, all the minerals in my body began to attract one another and coagulate into stone.

It reminded me of kidney stones, only this experience was a thousand times worse. The pain was unbearable. It felt as if I were being petrified from the inside out. In the next instant, her stone rule flooded my body, and those small stones rapidly expanded into massive thorns that pierced outward all at once, causing my body to burst into a shower of blood, leaving a huge thorny stone.

My primordial calamity soul gem remained intact, embedded within the mass of thorny stone as it fell toward the lake. I intended to feign death and slip away once Petra left. However, the free-falling stone mass abruptly came to a halt midair.

Petra intervened, manipulating it until the stone disintegrated and exposed my soul gem. With no other choice, I reconstructed a new body and attempted to reason with her once more. "Petra—"

"Is that a mutated ego gem?" Petra cut me off and asked with an authoritative tone.

"You know about mutated ego gems?" I asked, feigning exaggerated shock to tickle Petra's pride, hoping to buy a few more seconds before she destroys the second body.

From the fact that she had come to meet us in her humanoid form, I gathered that she had experience dealing with card apprentices. And from what she had said earlier, I inferred that she had indeed warned the living creatures occupying the mountain range to leave, among whom card apprentices appeared to have been present as well. Now that she could identify my soul gem as a mutated ego gem, it was clear that she had a solid grasp of card apprentice knowledge.

Also, proving that my earlier assumption that this was an unexplored part of the Way Beyond was clearly wrong.

Between Petra's words and the Emissary of Light teleporting us here, I was beginning to understand that it might have been the Empire's card apprentices that Petra had encountered before. It seemed the Empire was also active in the Way Beyond. At least in this part of the Way Beyond, they were more active than in the five regions. I couldn't help but wonder how their expedition had managed to stretch so far into the Way Beyond.

"Yes, it was a mutated gem," I answered Petra. She frowned and immediately asked, "How come I couldn't crush it, no matter how hard I tried?"

I stared at Petra with a deadpan expression, screaming internally, Why don't you just ask me how to crush my ego gem? Of course, I didn't voice those thoughts. Instead of answering her question, I redirected the conversation. "Where in the Way Beyond is this? My friend and I were teleported here by our enemy. Fortunately, I was strong enough to withstand your demolition. Otherwise, we would have had no way of getting back home."

Petra stared at me in silence, listening carefully, before saying, "Don't you dare lie to me. You will turn into stone. Even your mutated ego gem will not be able to save you this time."

Chapter 2656: *Petruth Rune*

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Way Beyond, Unknown

Listening to Petra, I hurriedly checked my body. Seeing that I hadn't turned to stone, I said, "I didn't turn into stone. That proves I didn't lie to you and that I'm telling the truth."

"Hmm, I don't know," Petra said, squinting as she stared at me intensely. Then she admitted, "I'm unable to use my Petruth Rune¹ on you. I wonder if it's because of your mutated ego gem."

She continued to stare at me hard before remarking, "You aren't lying to me, right?"

"I'm not lying to you," I replied awkwardly, only for Petra to stare even harder before letting out a long sigh and complaining, "This isn't fair. Why can't I use my Petruth Rune on you? Now how am I supposed to decide whether I should kill you or not?"

"Would it help if I said I was friends with another supreme being?" I asked, thinking that Petra was just as innocent as Bloodette, except that the former possessed the ability to determine whether someone was lying or telling the truth. That combined with her prowess, no card apprentice would dare to cross her.

"Who?" Petra asked eagerly. "None I know would befriend a card apprentice."

"The Blood Supreme, Bloodette," I revealed grandly, only to find Petra's gossipy expression instantly petrified into indifference, then hardened into a grim one as she replied, "You're friends with the Blood Supreme. That's great, but where did you last see her, and when?"

"Why do you ask like that?" I countered instead of answering, having sensed killing intent in Petra's eyes, along with a trace of disgust, whenever I mentioned Bloodette.

"Ask like how? I don't understand," Petra replied stubbornly, deliberately feigning ignorance as she forced a smile onto her face.

"Bloodette," I said again. Noticing the flicker of disgust that crossed Petra's face at the sound of the name, I immediately pointed it out. "There. That look on your face. What was that?"

"Where? What look? This is how I normally look," Petra insisted, continuing to pretend.

So I casually looked past her and waved my hand. "Hi, Bloodette. Did you come to rescue me?"

"Bloodette, you bitch!" Petra suddenly screamed. She spun around, frantically searching for Bloodette, and swore, "Today, I will kill you for sure—"

Unable to find even a trace of Bloodette, Petra quickly turned back to me and demanded, "Where is she? Where did she go?"

I slowly shook my head and, meeting her gaze, pressed, "Are you still planning to deny that something's wrong?"

"You tricked me," Petra said, staring at me in shock as she retreated several steps, as if I were the plague. It was clear she had realized that without her Petruth Rune, she was extremely vulnerable to deception.

Seeing Petra stare at me like a spooked gargoyle backed into a corner, I knew she was weighing whether to kill me or keep me alive to extract Bloodette's location. Knowing that her Petruth Rune didn't work on me, she had abruptly shifted from a social butterfly into something far more socially awkward and withdrawn. I would be lying if I said I wasn't enjoying the look on her face. Still, I had to act before she reached a hasty decision out of desperation.

"Petra, why do you hate Bloodette?"

Petra continued to stare at me in silence, offering no answer. So I pressed further. "I swear, if you tell me why you hate Bloodette, I'll tell you where to find her."

"You swear?" Petra asked cautiously. Seeing me nod with a gentle smile, she finally said, "She killed me and my friends for the sake of a card apprentice. We planned to hunt her and that card apprentice down, but for some reason we couldn't sense her. So, I believed she was dead and chose not to descend. Until you mentioned her name. Now I assume she was hiding in your small settlement all this time with that card apprentice. Just think about it make me angry"

"No, she isn't with that human. She's imprisoned by them in a dungeon seal, unable to break free or even die. She has no recollection of her past and is completely alone. Trust me, she's in more misery than any of you could possibly put her through," I said, despite having no idea which card apprentice Petra was referring to. I wonder if it was the one Bloodette saw in her vision while helping Sarah. Besides, I shared this information because I hoped it would either temper her anger or push her toward pity, or even cruel amusement, at Bloodette's suffering.

"How dare you card apprentices seal and harm a supreme being? This is outrageous!!!" Petra cried aloud, as if she hadn't been shouting about killing Bloodette moments earlier. I was thoroughly confused, unable to make sense of what was going on in that

stone head of hers. Then she suddenly looked at me and asked, "You're not lying to me, right?"

"No, I wouldn't lie about something like this. As I said earlier, she's a friend of mine, and I'm helping her break out of the dungeon she's sealed in. I'm one of the good ones. If you want, I can bring over a clone of her as proof. Maybe seeing you will jog her memories," I assured her with the most charming smile I could manage.

"No need to bring her clone. Take me to the dungeon seal. I'll break it open and free her, and once she has recalled her memories and grown used to her freedom, I'll kill her. That will teach her not to kill me and my friends," Petra declared, laying bare her intentions for Bloodette.

"No, you can't go to the five regions. If you do, you'd be breaking the treaty between supreme beings and card apprentices," I said, making it a priority to avoid a scenario where Petra would rampage through Sky Blossom City in an attempt to free Bloodette.

- Petros + Truth = Petruth. (Petros in Greek is Stone/ Rock.)

Chapter 2657: Bloodette's Best Friend

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Way Beyond, Unknown

"What treaty? The one you card apprentices break every damn day?" Petra asked with open disdain, clearly no fan of the treat that only ever seemed to serve the other side. "I doubt they'll mind if I break it just once."

"Hey, Petra," I said, frowning, "how do you know that Bloodette killed you and your friends for a card apprentice if you died and were reborn afterward?"

Petra looked even more confused than before. "What do you mean? Won't you remember someone who killed you and your friends?"

"I mean this," I continued, clarifying my thoughts. "If you were reborn anew, shouldn't your memories have started from scratch? You should have forgotten everything from before. At least, that's what I've heard."

I was beginning to suspect that Petra might actually be dumber than Bloodette, who possessed none of her past memories at all. The only reason Petra hadn't been exploited and discarded by some card apprentice, the way Bloodette had, was because of her Petruth Rune. If possible, I should forge a similar rune for my calamity daughter cores. That would help them function more independently.

"Oh, that," Petra said. "There are several ways to retain one's memories after dying and being reborn. The most common relies on understanding and comparing the rules and their meanings. Through that process, our memories return in fragments. Slowly but inevitably, once we reach the limit of the card world, we recover everything from all our previous deaths."

She went on, her explanation precise and deliberate. "There is another method as well. Using certain rules and meanings, you can extract and preserve your memories, then have a trusted companion return them to you after your rebirth. Both methods come with drawbacks, but traditionally we favor the former. With the latter, you must constantly update the stored memories you've entrusted to someone else, all while hoping they don't die before you or alongside you. That kind of maintenance is troublesome, so I chose the first approach."

Her expression darkened. "That's why it was such a shock when I learned that Bloodette was the one who killed me. She was my friend."

Petra paused, steadying herself. "It didn't truly matter in the end. Within the confines of the card world, we cannot be permanently killed. Even so, the betrayal still hurt." Her gaze sharpened. "And for that, I will have my revenge."

She fell silent after that, her focus clearly slipping as thoughts of Bloodette's betrayal resurfaced.

"So you and Bloodette were friends?" I asked with my genuine surprise evident in my voice.

"Haven't you been listening?" Petra snapped. "Didn't I just explain that? As a matter of fact, we were best friends. I was the one who taught her how to create rocks using Blood Rule power. It was incredibly simple, yet she never thought of it until I pointed it out to her."

I responded with an awkward smile, quietly relieved that she no longer seemed to be weighing whether to kill me. At the same time, the revelation that Petra had been the one who taught Bloodette how to form Blood Rule rocks and stones caught me off guard.

And now Bloodette was sealed within a dungeon themed around that very concept. The irony was unsettling. The more I thought about it, the more surreal it became, and my curiosity about Bloodette's past only deepened.

"If you really were friends," I said, choosing my words with care, "don't you think Bloodette might have had her own reasons or circumstances for what she did? Maybe she believed you would understand once you heard her side of the story. She might have thought you would at least listen, even if you didn't forgive her."

I paused when Petra's expression hardened with irritation, but I pressed on. "I'm not asking you to forgive her, and I'm not telling you to abandon your desire for getting even with her. All I'm suggesting is this. Hear her out, for the sake of what you once shared. If that friendship ever meant anything to you, listen first, then decide what to do with her afterward."

"Hear her out?" Petra asked, narrowing her eyes at me in suspicion. "Didn't you say she lost her memories?"

"Didn't you say you'd kill her after she regains her memories and grows accustomed to her new freedom?" I countered, deliberately reminding her of her own words, hoping she would grasp what I was implying.

It was a long shot, but to my surprise, she didn't disappoint me. Realization flickered across her face. "Oh," she said slowly. "But first, we'll have to free her. Take me to where she's being sealed right now."

"I'm sorry. I can't," I replied. "If I take you there, you'll only make things worse and won't be of any help to Bloodette. The dungeon seal is directly connected to her. It's unbreakable, just like you supreme beings, until the required conditions are fulfilled."

Petra cried out immediately, her voice sharp with accusation. "You swore!"

"I swore to tell you where Bloodette was sealed," I said calmly, jogging her memory before she could brand me a cheat and return to debating whether to kill me. "I never swore that I would take you there."

Then, honoring my promise, I added, "Bloodette is sealed in the Blood Rock Gate Dungeon of Sky Blossom City, in the Southern Region."

"You have to take me there," Petra insisted. "I need to see the dungeon seal for myself and decide what must be done."

In her urgency, she seemed to forget everything else. Her eagerness to reach Bloodette was unmistakable. She wanted to see her, to check on her condition, and to find a way to help her escape the dungeon seal. It was clear that, despite the fire she breathed whenever Bloodette's name was mentioned, concern still lay at the core of her anger.

Perhaps she hadn't been exaggerating after all when she said they were best friends. But that makes things difficult for me.

Chapter 2658: Nepo Baby Petra Petros

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Way Beyond, Unknown

Had I known that Petra and Bloodette were this close, I would have reconsidered my approach. At the very least, I wouldn't have made Bloodette's circumstances sound so miserable to Petra. Now, I had no idea how to get her off my back about taking her to meet Bloodette.

"What are you thinking?" Petra snapped. "Stop wasting time and take me to her already."

Her impatience snapped me out of my thoughts, only reinforcing the realization that I had played this entirely wrong. But how was I supposed to know she would care so deeply about someone whose very name made her radiate such thick killing intent?

Shaking my head, I said, "Fine, I will take you there, but you will have to take an oath in the presence of the world's will, that you will listen and follow my arrangement."

Knowing I couldn't get rid of Petra, I decided to recruit her instead. Her Petruth Rune would come in handy. Perhaps she could even help me create cards modeled after her Petruth Rune. Having a powerful supreme being at my beck and call wouldn't hurt if she agreed to take the oath in the presence of the card world's will.

"You do know that oaths don't actually work on us, right? We can break them anytime we want," Petra said, looking at me with a sneer.

Hearing that, I realized something crucial. Supreme beings had their own rule stream spirits backing them. No oath could truly bind them. They could always rely on their connections to escape the consequences. In other words, trying to use oaths taken in the presence of the world's will to trick the supreme being wasn't possible unless they chose to honor it themselves.

My thoughts immediately drifted to the idea of using a demon merchant contract, but I quickly suppressed it. That would be crossing a line. After all, the Card Celestial had been remarkably accommodating toward my existence, even offering its assistance on several occasions. There was a chance it might extend the same consideration to me in Petra's case as well.

If that were the case, then an oath taken in the presence of the world's will could still hold weight, so long as I neither harmed nor coerced Petra into doing anything shady. It wasn't as though I planned to do that anyway, so I decided to give it a try.

"It's fine. I trust you," I said, doing my best to sound casual. "If you take an oath in the presence of the world's will, I can take you to where Bloodette is."

Petra immediately sneered. "So you think I am lying to you, huh? Don't come crying to me when it doesn't work. Either way, you'll still have to take me to Bloodette, no matter what."

"Yes, yes," I nodded, quickly urging Petra to proceed before she could change her mind. She took the oath as follows:

"I, Petra Petros, the Stone Supreme, swear in the presence of the world's will to follow Dalton Wyatt's arrangements and commands, in exchange for him taking me to where Bloodette is sealed."

After swearing the oath, Petra then ordered me, "Now, take me to where Bloodette is."

"First, morph into a complete human, or change your form into a ring or bracelet. That way, I can take you into the Five Regions without drawing any attention. You decide," I instructed Petra, intending to test whether my hunch was correct.

I never got the chance as Petra was unexpectedly obedient. In the blink of an eye, she morphed into a human woman clad in full-body crystal armor. Her facial features and physique remained the same as before, except now they were formed of flesh rather than condensed Stone Rule power.

"Good. Now find a secluded location where no one can disturb us, but one that's suitable for setting up a teleportation array formation. That way, you'll be able to travel back and forth," I instructed Petra.

Since this was her domain, she would know the terrain far better than I ever could. She was the best person to choose a location for a teleportation hub that wouldn't be discovered by monsters or the Empire's card apprentices.

"A teleportation array formation? In that case, this place should suit your needs," Petra said.

Without any warning, she grabbed me by the waist and plunged straight into the ground. I didn't resist.

Taking advantage of her confidence that the oath wouldn't truly bind her, I had deliberately kept its wording as vague as possible. That ambiguity granted me considerable leeway, enough to compel Petra to act according to my arrangements when necessary.

Even so, I still didn't know whether the Card Celestial would uphold her oath on my behalf, out of consideration for me. Based on my past interactions with it, however, I had a strong feeling that it would. After all, I wasn't harming Petra or restraining her against her will.

I didn't know what rule meaning Petra was using, but it allowed her to carry me through the crust of the card world as though we were diving into an ocean. Before long, we emerged into a vast subterranean world. Seeing my momentary awe, Petra asked smugly, "Welcome to my home. What do you think?"

Under different circumstances, I might have applauded with tears in my eyes. Unfortunately, countless journeys through dungeons and other realms had long since dulled my sensitivity to such spectacles. Take my and Dredre's creation, the Ceed World, for example. It was several times more mesmerizing than Petra's subterranean realm.

Regardless, it was a good location to build a teleportation hub, but it lay several miles below ground level. I doubted Petra would be willing to personally assist my subordinates with commuting between the hub and the surface.

Although it wasn't an ideal site for my Way Beyond exploration plans, I decided it would suffice as a temporary solution.

[**#Chapter 2659: All Hail The Southern Hope! - Read Chapter 2659: All Hail The Southern Hope!**](#)

Chapter 2659: All Hail The Southern Hope!

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Southern Region, Blossom District, Sky Blossom City, Teleportation Hub

"We are here," I said to Petra as we emerged within the teleportation hub of Sky Blossom City.

The moment my words settled, I realized we were not alone.

Anna stood at the forefront, flanked by Susan, Jill, Corey, Cortney, Cindy, and the others, all waiting in disciplined silence. Beyond them, the plaza had transformed into a living formation. The Fine Gold Guards were arrayed in immaculate ranks, armor catching the light like sheets of molten sun. The Bright Lion Gang stood nearby, their presence less formal but no less imposing, eyes sharp and posture resolute. Behind them gathered the Rehabilitated Criminals Army, the Sin Army, assembled with an almost solemn gravity, as if determined to prove that their past no longer defined their blades.

Encircling the hub, the regular employees along with citizens who filled every balcony, street, and skyway overlooking the platform. Their voices had fallen into a reverent hush, replaced by a solemn weight in the air, as though the city itself had drawn a breath. All eyes were fixed upon the teleportation array, upon us.

This wasn't just a grand reception, but the acceptance of my true form. My gaze drifted to Cindy. She stood composed among the others, calm but with a mischievous glint in her eyes as ever, there was no mistaking her role in this. She controlled the teleportation array network. Without her warning, without her coordination, such a gathering would have been impossible.

The sheer scale of it sent a quiet tremor through me.

Beside me, Petra's eyes widened, her posture tightening as suspicion flickered across her expression. For a brief moment, she seemed to wonder whether this was an ambush of my making, an elaborate trap meant to close around her the instant she stepped forward. I paid it no mind and moved ahead, intending to address the gathered forces.

I never got the chance.

Before a single word could leave my mouth, the crowd spoke as one.

Their voices rolled across the teleportation hub like a controlled thunderclap, unified, disciplined, and heavy with reverence.

"All hail the Southern Hope!"

"Bearer of Hope! Anchor of the South!"

"By your will, we stand!"

The proclamation reverberated through stone and steel, through armor and bone, carried not merely by lungs but by conviction. The very air seemed to vibrate with it.

The Fine Gold Guards moved first. Clad in radiant armor, they shifted with flawless precision, as though rehearsed a thousand times. Every guard struck fist to chest in perfect unison, the impact ringing out like a ceremonial bell.

"By oath and gold, we endure!"

"Command us, Southern Hope!"

"Our blades are ready. Our lives are yours!"

Their formation did not waver for even a heartbeat, yet the strain was visible. It was as if sheer discipline alone held them upright, resisting an instinct deeper than training, the urge to kneel before something they recognized as greater.

The Bright Lion Gang followed, less rigid but no less fierce. Led by Aurelia Malvin, they stepped forward as one, heads lowered in respect rather than submission. Their voices rose louder than the rest, burning with pride and battle-hardened loyalty.

"The Lion bows only to Hope!"

"Where you walk, we follow!"

"Let the South roar!"

This was not worship. It was allegiance, earned through blood and battle.

Then came the most striking sight of all, the Sin Army.

The Rehabilitated Criminals Army, led by Demigod Redfall and Yin Widow, lowered their grimoires and went to one knee in unison. The motion was heavy, deliberate, and absolute. Not born of fear, but of resolve. Their voices were rough and imperfect, shaped by hard lives and harder choices, yet utterly sincere.

"Witness us!"

"We were broken!"

"By the Southern Hope, we stand redeemed!"

For them, this was not a greeting. It was a vow, spoken aloud and renewed before the entire city.

Then my three queens, Anna, Susan, and Jill, ascended the teleportation platform and came to my side. Their steps were elegant and unhurried, each movement carrying a quiet authority that drew every gaze in the hub toward them. They did not need to announce themselves. Their presence alone was enough.

As they took their places beside me, anticipation tightened in my chest. Anna and Jill had already acknowledged me openly, their choices made without hesitation. Susan, however, had yet to do so. Before the eyes of the entire city, I found myself waiting, wondering whether she would accept me here and now, with no veil of privacy to soften the moment.

I never received my answer. The fragile stillness shattered as Petra suddenly broke formation, rushing past us toward Cortney's side. Her composure fractured completely as she shouted with a sharp alarm and disbelief, "Bloodette!!!"

The girls turned toward me at once, suspicion plain in their expressions. I raised both hands slightly and shook my head, projecting innocence as I explained, "That's the Stone Supreme, Petra Petros. We met at the Way Beyond. Apparently, she and Bloodette are best friends, so I brought her along."

"Oh."

Anna and Jill exchanged a glance, then nodded in understanding. A heartbeat later, realization struck, and they cried out in unison, their voices sharp with disbelief, "You brought a supreme being into the city? What is wrong with you?"

"Relax. I've got her under control," I replied nonchalantly. I then reached into my spatial storage and produced two unconscious figures. "Here, take them. They might need some... therapy."

I handed the unconscious guard captain to Anna and passed the equally unconscious Sean Brothwork to Jill. I felt a twinge of sympathy for the Guard Captain, but none at all for Sean. If anything, he had earned every mental bruise.

Turning back to Susan, I asked in concern, "By the way, where's Dredre?"

"She's in the dungeon seal with Bloodette," Susan replied. "Keeping her company."

I nodded, a quiet smile forming on my lips as I thought of how far Dredre had come. Almost unconsciously, my gaze drifted back to the gathered forces, to the city standing in unified silence. Only then did it truly sink in that this grand reception was a measure of my own journey as well, a reflection of just how far I had come.

Chapter 2660: +2 Bloodkins

Date: Unspecified

Time: Unspecified

Location: Myriad Realms, Card World, Southern Region, Blossom District, Sky Blossom City, Teleportation Hub

"Petra, stop scaring her and let go of her. That's not Bloodette, but her current best friend, Cortney," I said as I strode toward them.

Petra was openly manhandling Cortney in public. The fact that Cortney had dressed with minimal restraint, only made the scene more heated and steamy. Against Petra's overwhelming strength, Cortney was utterly powerless, unable to muster even the faintest resistance. The paparazzi could not have asked for a better spectacle.

"Let go of me, bitch," Cortney screamed, her voice ringing out as it proved to be the only defiance she could muster against Petra's monstrous strength.

"But that still doesn't explain why I sense Bloodette's soul signature from her," Petra asked me, finally releasing the shaken Cortney.

Cortney hurriedly adjusted her clothes, and for the first time in her short life, she regretted not dressing more modestly. Her embarrassment quickly hardened into anger, and she glared fiercely at Petra.

"That's because Bloodette helped her forge her mutated ego gem," I explained before formally introducing them. "Cortney, this is Petra Petros, the Stone Supreme. She claims she was Bloodette's old best friend. Could you take her to Bloodette's dungeon seal? I'll join you after I finish greeting everyone."

Cortney's eyes widened in shock. This was a huge deal as Bloodette had no recollection of her life before being sealed within the dungeon. Seeing someone emerge from her friend's forgotten past filled her with sudden joy, and she immediately forgave Petra's earlier actions. She extended her hand toward Petra and introduced herself, "Hi, I'm Cortney. Wyatt's friend, and Bloodette's best friend."

Petra ignored the offered hand, snorting instead as she muttered, "We'll see about that."

Cortney took the dismissal in stride and turned to me with a reassuring smile. "Leave this to me, Wyatt."

As Cortney escorted Petra toward the dungeon seal, I moved quickly to Corey's side and gave her clear instructions. "Go with them and keep a close watch on Petra. If she shows any signs of acting out, don't hesitate to use Lil' Beam, and report to me immediately."

"Alright," Corey said, then tilted her head with an exaggerated drawl, her expression resembling a loan shark pressing a long-overdue debtor. "But when are you finally going to help me acquire a new trait?"

"I'll find a way to make it up to you. Now go, keep up with them," I urged Corey, implicitly promising that I would find a way to make it up to her for the long delay in her trait acquisition. Hearing my promise, she reluctantly hurried after Cortney and Petra, and as they departed, I discreetly signaled demigod Redfall to dispatch Yin Widow to support Corey from the shadows.

While I had been preoccupied running across the card world, demigod Redfall had been far from idle. He had located Yin Widow's hideout and resurrected her using the contingency methods she herself had prepared, but with one single change. He used my primordial calamity daughter gem as the new vessel for her soul to arrive and sustain in the physical plane.

Yin Widow was more than pleased to see her son had found an even more powerful vessel for her resurrection. She willingly accepted the primordial calamity daughter gem as her new soul vessel. As a result, she was resurrected directly as my Bloodkin. However, she was far from her peak. Her soul remained tainted by the Breath of Erosion, and her grimoire was still in Anna's possession. Even so, as a Bloodkin, she was vastly stronger than most of the demigods present.

Having fulfilled his promise to his mother, the last remnants of resistance within Redfall dissolved, and he too accepted his new status, successfully becoming a Bloodkin. This sequence of events confirmed my hypothesis: the will of my calamity daughter gems played a decisive role in whether they would be accepted by my cursed bloodline and successfully transform into my Bloodkin.

With the immediate trouble handled, I turned to the people waiting to meet me. Most were familiar faces, though several strangers were mixed among them. Asong Young, in particular, had arrived with numerous members of her political party and family. It seemed the live stream of my clash with the Emissary of Light had drawn far more attention than expected.

Just as I neared the assembled guests, a reporter called out from within the crowd, "Master Wyatt, who won the duel?"

The question made me pause. I turned toward the cluster of reporters, who were being held back by the Fine Gold Guards. The noise quickly subsided as my gaze swept over them, and I answered plainly, "I won. Wasn't that obvious?"

The crowd immediately erupted into cheers, celebrating my victory as if it were their own. While I still had their attention, the reporters pressed forward with another question.

"Master Wyatt, Master Wyatt," one of them called, "but the Emissary of Light claimed that he was the victor. How do you respond to that?"

"If the fight were about who ran home first to lick their wounds, then yes, he won, because he was already back at his nest," I said with open scorn. "But this was never about us. It was about protecting the southern citizens from outside threats like him. I'm pleased to announce that I managed to save the city's demigod guards, undoing his brainwashing. Soon, I'll begin treating the remaining citizens who were also ensnared by that false herald. I request their family members not to worry and to wait for the good news."

Just as I was about to leave, one sharp-eyed journalist seized the brief opening and fired off a rapid barrage of questions.

"Master Wyatt, what is your relationship with wanted and notorious criminals such as Demigod Redfall, Yin Widow, and others? Are you certain that someone hailed as the

Southern Hope should be associating with figures like them? Are you attempting to build a personal army? What was the true purpose of today's display? Was it meant as a challenge to the Southern Royal Family? And speaking of the Royal Family, what exactly is the nature of your relationship with the Southern Heir?"