

PATH OF THE DEATHLESS (BOOK 2 COMPLETED)

10 (I) Weavers

When the Great One fell and descended into the chasm, their blood brought new life to the ruined world. It was their blood that graced us with life in the first place, their blood that seeped magic and skills into this crippled world, their blood that saved our forebearers from annihilation.

When the first of the ancient Blood-Clans supped from the Great One's body, they were irrevocably changed. Their being was altered and made perfect. They were elevated beyond the confines of humanity and mortality, their hearts changing to beat where the Great One's could no longer.

But as the First Blood proved to be our apotheosis, it also imbued things beyond us—or perhaps the Great One carried the vermin within them all along. What can be said about the Composer is that it hatched itself from the Great One's body, emerging as a contender for this new world; a false-god decreeing itself to be true.

It stole cattle from us. It brought discord upon our court. For years, it struck at us without our knowing, and for years we warred amongst ourselves, not knowing that a new enemy was rising beyond our sight.

When the Weaveresses came, we were not ready. When the abominations hatched from the bodies of our cattle during the days of the Silent Purge, we did not know what we faced. But we survived. By the perfection of the First Blood, by the legacy bestowed upon us through the Great One, we endured. Now we know our enemy—the ones weaving their schemes in the dark, desiring to steal the Great One's body away from the other Great Faiths for their fell desires.

The children of the Composer come. And they do not seek coexistence, but dominance. And so, we are to feast on unpalatable blood, to bite into the kindred of spiders if we seek to continue our Bloodlines and reach High Unification.

-On the Children of the Composer, Court of the First Blood

10 (I)

Weavers

The feral weaver ripped its stinger out from Shiv's back as it tried to pry itself free from its impalement. The spider-wasp-man-horror let out a silent scream

as it pushed away from Shiv, focusing too much on its own pain, and not on him.

Shiv just learned the consequences of only having a Common Awareness Skill. The weaver, meanwhile, discovered a lesson in picking the wrong prey.

He growled and bade the ice to melt within his chest. He slipped free from the needle as his wound stung from the cold water. Straining his Biomancy, he tried to push all the paralytic venom he had contained earlier—only for a geyser of blood to blast out from his back in a sudden spray, dappling the struggling weaver in red.

A lightness washed through Shiv's head. That didn't feel good at all. He needed to get better at using his Biomancy—probably by killing himself with it a good number of times. Right now wasn't just an opportunity to advance through battle, but also for exploration. There was someone he could drain from, and so there was no consequence for dying.

The poor feral weaver had no idea what kind of fight it just started.

“Come on!” Shiv snarled as he jammed his spear into the monster's hairy torso. He felt his strike sink a good half meter into its large body, only to stop dead against a dense piece of tissue. Shiv commanded a cone of spearing ice

to blast out from the weaver. A good portion of its chest vanished as a wave of ice exploded through it.

The weaver didn't die. It tumbled back, wailing in hissing agony, but it didn't die.

"You got some resilience there, spider, but you really should have stuck to flies." Shiv grinned weakly as he stumbled after the weaver, preparing to finish it off. As he aimed his spear at its head, a lance of searing pain slashed down along his neck. His skin cooked. His muscles split apart as if under a beam of intense light. Only his bones endured—somewhat. His spear fell out of his hands as he found his tendons cut, and Shiv sighed with tiredness and frustration.

Looking right, he saw another three weavers advancing on him. Two of them were like the one he just injured—with the only difference being the huge swords and hammers they held. The last weaver towered over both of them, standing around three and a half meters. A nimbus of fire pulsed around this one, and its eight eyes gleamed like burning coals in the dimness of the cavern. In one of its hands was a large staff with a glowing crystal at its tip.

Shiv found himself at a loss for words. "They can be mages?"

Faintly, he heard Valor reply: *“Of course—almost any thinking race can become a mage capable of using any lore of magic. Even some simpler creatures can find themselves instinctively attuned to a lore.”*

“Good to know,” Shiv breathed. “Listen, Valor, I’m probably going to go away for a second, but I’ll be back, alright? Trust me.”

“Shiv? What are you doing? How many are there? I can help—”

It wasn’t that Shiv didn’t want the dagger’s help—he would have quite welcomed it, in fact. But his arms were useless, and the other weavers were coming at him fast. This life was used up. Time to die.

Of course, that didn’t mean he was going to go quietly.

Shiv ripped off his satchels and threw them toward the bottom of a nearby mushroom to avoid damaging them in the bloodshed to follow, then charged the oncoming weavers. He positioned himself so that one of them would be between him and their Pyromancer at all times. If he was dealing with an archer, this would have been a wise strategy. Sadly, magic was more like a field, and the fire weaver reminded Shiv of this lesson by just combusting the air around him rather than shooting another beam of fire.

Shiv choked on smoke and pain as he came ablaze inside and out. His bones endured the heat, and his remaining muscles held quite well, but his skin was peeling off of him, and he beheld his fat *bursting* all over in such vivid detail that he felt sick. As Shiv burned, he realized the reason he was so aware of all his injuries was because of his Biomancy. He could feel the state of his biology and other organisms near him, and right now, he was a *very damaged* organism.

Well. Time to see if I can get attuned to Pyromancy as well.

He leaped off his feet and launched a flying knee at the first weaver coming at him. The spider-monster found itself surprised and failed to bring up its large hammer in time to protect itself. He slammed hard against its chest, and the weaver toppled over, hammer flying out of its hands.

A flash of movement came from his side before he could celebrate. Shiv tried to block—but his arms were useless. He lifted his shoulder and decided to take the blow there instead of on his neck. An explosion of pain rocked his body as Shiv felt himself get launched off his feet. He tumbled through the air while his right arm barely remained attached to his body by a partially cracked bone and a few sinews.

He finally stopped as he crashed hard against the side of a giant mushroom. Shiv scrambled to his feet as the vision in his left eye went out. His Biomancy told him the eye just ruptured from his internal temperature. Magic was kind of bullshit when you weren't prepared to face it. Shiv saw the sword-wielding weaver flying toward him with his remaining sight. Problem was he couldn't tell how exactly far it was—having only one eye.

Time slowed as he hit a state of agonized focus, and Shiv twisted to the left. It still wasn't fast enough to avoid the tip of the blade grinding along the sides of his lower ribs—but he was definitely getting faster. The weaver crashed into him as the rest of its blade sank into the base of the mushroom. Shiv responded by biting off one of its palps. Acid burned his teeth and inner mouth, but Shiv didn't care—he was on fire anyway.

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Frankly, he was alright with being on fire. That came with the territory when one hunted lesser vampires for most their teenage years.

He headbutted the monster, then kneed it in one of its lower limbs. The weaver cried out—more from his flames jumping on it than the impact. Shiv would have kept the fight going, except all the heat rushed to his head, and his skull burst apart in a small explosion of fire.

Toughness > 45

Physicality > 40

Reflexes > 34

Grappling Proficiency > 22

Striking Proficiency > 13

Parry > 8

Biomancy > 4

Skill Gained: Spear Proficiency 1 (Initiate)

Shiv's body toppled over. The weavers assumed they were done. But Shiv continued the fight as a Revenant, his presence only revealed as the faintest outline of crimson mana in the world. He gripped the sword-using weaver with

one hand, draining its vitality first while sweeping his newly strengthened Biomancy skill through the spider-thing's body. The field felt stronger than before, and spread out wider too. No longer was it just a sphere slightly wider than his body. Now it extended a bit more than a few arm's lengths away. He also noticed an increased clarity of detail when sweeping through the weaver's body.

It was strange and *inhuman*, and the organs were all weird. Even with his Biomancy Skill leveled, he still didn't have the first clue what he was examining. Not really when it came to his own body, and absolutely not when it came to a monster. But that was okay: He didn't need any actual knowledge when the intent was to harm. Breaking someone was the easiest thing to do.

Like with the high vampire, he found the softest bits of flesh he could sense and *squeezed* with his field. The crimson mana highlighting Shiv's silhouette flared and wove his intent. This time, rather than crying out in pain like the high vampire, the weaver Shiv targeted seized and collapsed as its eight eyes burst within its head, spraying gray-white ichor over Shiv's corpse. He frowned down at his body, at the fact that the spider's brain matter was leaking out from its now hollowed sockets, and finally at the fact that he outright killed the damn thing rather than just hurting it.

Magic is bullshit, Shiv thought to himself. No wonder the high vampire liquefied him so easily at the start of their battle. When one lacked a comparable magic skill of their own—or Magical Resistance—there was nothing they could do to stop a mage. Shiv guessed that was why magical

formations and mage corps were so essential for the Republic's forces. But this also put into perspective how *terrifyingly* powerful the vicar was to outmatch all of Blackedge's vanguard by themselves. *The serpent must have control over Biomancy and Pyromancy... At least. They managed to convert fire to life back to fire again.*

And that was the thought Shiv held in his mind as he rushed the weaver mage. Maybe he could do the same thing someday. But he needed the fire weaver weak, first. He wanted to die to this thing a few times to see if he could get a skill, but only after he ensured it was at his mercy.

The weaver Pyromancer looked on at the corpse of the sword-wielding weaver in confusion. From its perspective, Shiv was a burning mess of meat, and then there was a flash of red, the vagueness of a spell pattern, then the sword weaver's eyes exploded before it fell dead next to Shiv. Its confusion only intensified as Shiv placed his ghostly hand against its body and started draining it. His shadow began to solidify again, and Shiv prepared himself to see if he could break one of the monster's arms or something.

As he tried to channel his Biomancy mana into the weaver, however, he felt his intent crash against something hard. There was something of a wall inside the fire weaver, and when he struck it, the weaver writhed in pain even as it was drained. However, Shiv couldn't affect its body. He tried again, and he felt the wall inside the weaver crack a bit, but to his disbelief, the weaver's head

snapped to attention as it noticed him even before his shadows were finished forming.

It has a Magical Resistance Skill, Shiv guessed. As he slammed his Biomancy against the fire weaver's resistance, the monster directed a blast of fire using its staff through Shiv's shadow-cocoon. It passed right through Shiv, and nearly incinerated the hammer weaver coming over to help. The weaver that ambushed Shiv earlier was slowly crawling toward the others. It was leaking copious amounts of viscera from its torso, but it wasn't impacted in the same way a human might be.

As the hammer weaver entered the effect radius of Shiv's Biomancy, he reached out for it while draining the fire weaver. The hammer weaver managed about three steps toward the fire weaver before its brain matter sprayed out from its bursting eyes. Shiv laughed silently as it toppled over, letting its hammer go. Popping people and monsters was really fun—no wonder the high vampire liked doing it.

The shadows around Shiv parted just as the fire weaver stopped channeling its magic in confusion. Shiv grimaced as he realized most of his weapons were still on his body—including his kitchen knife, since he hadn't bound it to himself. He dealt with that problem by gripping the fire weaver's massive stinger and driving his shoulder into its chest like he was trying to perform a takedown on a human.

The spider-monster wasn't nearly as heavy as the cave biter—but they were still pretty heavy. Thankfully, Shiv's ever-climbing Physicality came in handy as he lifted it off the ground and spiked it back down. The fire weaver, unprepared for a physical confrontation with someone less than half its size, crashed hard against the ground as its staff bounced out of its hands.

Shiv then broke one of its palps with a descending elbow. As the monster's head snapped back, he felt a surge in the temperature around him. He flung his Biomancy against its resistance one more time. Something inside it cracked and broke. Shiv felt his mana field slip through the cracks. Patterns of fire and Biomancy flared around both mages as they unleashed their intents on each other.

Shiv immediately caught fire again, searing pain consuming him in an instant. At the same time, he wrenched and tore at anything he felt was vulnerable inside the fire weaver. It broke focus first, clutching at its torso with its eight clawed hands and arching its back. Shiv continued slamming his elbows down on its body as he twisted at tendons and ripped open organs. It was horrifically easy to wound someone with Biomancy. Valor was right: Without magic resistance or a counteracting Biomancy Skill, it was basically commanding a living organism's body to rip itself apart.

As the fire weaver shivered and curled in on itself, Shiv decided it had had enough for now. “Stay alive,” he said, pulling his mana field out from the crack he made. “I still need you to kill me a few times.” As Shiv staggered over to find the weaver’s staff, he felt at his skin and flesh using his Biomancy and sighed at the damage.

Most of his skin was destroyed. His nerves—if that was the weird network he could sense—were starting to go too. He tried using his Biomancy on himself like the high vampire did—he remembered seeing the bloodsucker heal himself—but regeneration was harder than Shiv expected. Though he had the intent, what he lacked was the exact knowledge of what he was doing and how he wanted things to work. Something did start growing all over Shiv’s body: Boils and clumps of misshapen tissue. He started regenerating tumors all over himself, and his movements turned jerky and wrong as he reconnected his nerves in the wrong way.

And this was why mages spent so long reading books and spent years at an academy. Because one could be as powerful a Biomancer as desired, but simply thinking 'heal' at one's body would only result in the crudest manifestation of the spell. Shiv’s Biomancy told him he was rapidly turning into a walking mass of cancers. He tried to stop the growths, but it seemed he crossed some kind of tipping point for his body. More and more tumors were appearing inside him by the minute. Soon, the flames became a lesser component to his greater pain.

Although... This could be useful too. I can experiment on myself constantly without too much fear, so long as I have someone to drain from nearby. I don't have the luxury of schooling, but I can get a practical education through trial and error. And maybe Valor. I wonder if he knows anything about Biomancy.

Groaning as his body broke apart inside while it burned outside, he reached down to pick up the weaver's staff. Only to feel another *biological entity* enter his mana field. The attack was coming at him fast—and from behind. Something about it mirrored how he was initially stabbed in the back by the first weaver. Shiv's Reflexes activated—he dove right just as he *tore* at the enemy's flesh using his Biomancy.

He strained his field as it flayed the exoskeleton off an ambushing weaver. A headache formed inside Shiv's skull—pushing his magical skill to the limit was like spraining a muscle, but for his mind.

That somehow feels worse than my body literally coming apart.

The weaver that tried to stab him in the back went tumbling ahead as its hairy exterior practically came unzipped from its body. Without the exoskeleton, the weaver couldn't move and writhed on the ground like a newborn baby wailing silently for someone to hold it. Its flesh was a slick pearl-white, and Shiv could smell a sweet odor leaking from its body—could *taste* it through his Biomancy. In the delirium of pain and mana-strain, he wondered how it might taste as an ingredient.

Coughing, he weakly pushed himself off the ground, only to hear the buzzing flaps of more wings. Looking around, he saw another two weavers land in front of him. Three more landed behind. More emerged from his left, still flying through the air, and to his right, a group of five godsdamned spiders were now clad in shell-like armor, walking ahead of a weaver with a large, crystal helmet.

Shiv gripped the fire weaver's staff as he chuckled in disbelief. "Can... can you guys wait your turn?" He gestured at the downed fire weaver, who was still writhing in pain. "I got something to finish first with this one—"

"Surfacer... Die..." A very sibilant and hateful voice emanated from the weaver wearing the crystal headdress. The words washed into his mind—not so unlike when he spoke to Valor. What the spider-monster and the dagger shared was a distinct lack of a mouth, so Shiv worked what little remained of his suffering mind to come to a conclusion: He was dealing with a mind mage—a *Psychomancer*.

A spider... Psychomancer.

Weavers

This felt like something out of a horror novel, and was yet another thing the bestiary didn't mention. He was beginning to think that the Yellowstone Republic really didn't do very much to learn the abilities of monsters. The gaps in knowledge were becoming appalling.

"Yeah, okay," Shiv said. "But why? You all attacked me. What did I even do?"

"Walked... in territory..."

Shiv stared at the spider. "That's felling it? You're all trying to kill me for walking on your lawn?"

"Yes..." the mind weaver hissed.

"Well, you're a tainted asshole, and I'll see you again soon." Shiv briefly considered killing himself using his Biomancy as he was already on the verge of death, but decided that was quitter's talk. He'd die good and hard every time to get more skills, but also because he wanted to make every death count.

There was something poignant and horrific about the experience that he sort of enjoyed. It was something no one else could do.

As he clutched the fire weaver's crystal staff, he felt his mind clear unnaturally, even against the pain, and his field condensed. It didn't expand, but it felt like he could channel more of his intent within the existing area of effect. Shiv couldn't help but blink. No wonder mages liked their weird staffs so much. This was an immediate boost to his power. Guess that's why they called them focus crystals.

“Well,” Shiv said. One of his ears fell off from the flame, and a cluster of tumors grew over it. “Let’s get bloody, then.”

He charged the armored weavers in front of the mind-spider. He wanted to see how many of them he could get through before he fell. Unlike the other weavers, these ones were disciplined and waited for him to come. They pulled out blades that resembled huge chunks of iron on a stick rather than actual swords, and prepared themselves.

In response, the Deathless used his new staff to aid his still-aching mind as he tore at their fingers and joints with his Biomancy.

The first armored weaver gave a silent cry of surprise as its weapon toppled out of its hands. He targeted the others with mixed success. The second armored weaver had a Magical Resistance Skill—Shiv hit the third and fourth, pulping the insides of their skulls. The last also felt like hitting a solid wall—so Shiv adapted. Instead of trying to kill them directly using his Biomancy, Shiv seized the two weavers he had just killed and launched them at the fifth armored weaver with a cry of effort. Both of the dead weavers crashed hard against the last of their number. Spots formed in his vision, but Shiv kept going. He punted the first weaver as hard as he could and sent it sprawling toward the second weaver—the only armored one still standing.

It swatted the first weaver aside with its weapon and flew toward Shiv with an explosive flap of its membranous wings. It was fast. Faster than him—but not by that much. It swung its great blade—so Shiv stepped closer and smacked it down by the hilt, parrying it into the ground. The weapon got stuck there, and Shiv punched the weaver in the chest—only to break his knuckles on the protective shell they were wearing.

“Damn—” was all Shiv got out before the weaver speared its stinger into his chest. He tried dodging, but his body gave out on him. He found solace in the

fact that he would have managed to catch the stinger if he wasn't so close to death. But he could still take this one with him. He slammed his Biomancy field against their resistance, and the weaver jerked in silent pain even as it injected paralytic venom into his body.

Shiv groaned as he sagged over on the stinger. He was faintly aware of the fifth armored weaver pushing the two he threw at it off the top of its body. The mind weaver, meanwhile, was watching him intently. So were all the others.

As Shiv's mana field smashed once more against the second weaver's resistance, he felt it finally break, and reached inside its flesh. He was still clinging to the staff, somehow. Time to make this thing's death ugly.

Or he would have if *some felling asshole* didn't blast him with a spell of its own. A bright and pale pattern formed around the mind weaver as it channeled its intent against Shiv. *Something* that wasn't physical burst inside his skull, and he let out a choked cry as his consciousness flickered. It was like something was tearing into his mind, peeling at the very things that made him *him*. Shiv's eyes rolled back up into his head as the mental attacks intensified.

Flashes of the mind weaver's own thoughts bled over. "*Break... scream... die... sell body back to the mothers...*"

Shiv could feel his sense of self fracturing. He suffered a lot of things in his life, but this was something else altogether. It was like drowning inside himself. And it was a good thing he kept his grip on the staff too, because otherwise, he might not have had the focus required to use his Biomancy on himself.

Shiv compelled his mana field to squeeze. His head turned to paste. But as his physical body dropped dead, he found that his mind was still raw with pain.

Broken Moon that hurts! He glided toward the mind weaver, only to notice it was still staring at him. Not his corpse. Him. The place where his ghost was.

“What is this... Dead? But still here? How?” Its mind was alive with curiosity and interest. A terrible dread welled up inside Shiv. Not good. He couldn't take any chances with this one—he might be Deathless, but his mind was still vulnerable.

Frankly, it might be the most vulnerable thing about him. Shiv imagined what a Deathless coma patient was like. The thought was an ugly one.

He unleashed his Biomancy on the mind weaver at the same time they directed a mind spell back at him. In the exchange, they traded wounds of differing severity.

Toughness > 49

Physicality > 43

Reflexes > 37

Grappling Proficiency > 24

Striking Proficiency > 14

Parry > 11

Biomancy > 8

Unfortunately for the mind weaver, Shiv's Biomancy was more than a bit stronger than it used to be.

While a wave of *pacification* slammed into his mind—making him wonder why he was fighting these weavers, and how it would be better to surrender himself to spiderfolk—Shiv's attack also targeted the weaver's mind in a more *visceral* way.

Shiv looked on blankly at the other weavers for a few beats as the mind weaver's spell lingered. He was just happy to be around them. The mind weaver's skull burst apart in a jet of white-gray ichor as the mess that was its brain went sailing somewhere unseen. Its crystal hat bounced off too.

Shiv giggled at the spiders in his Revenant form, marveling at their beauty and cuteness. They really were the best. Humans were terrible next to the weavers—barely worthy of being pets. Meanwhile, the other weavers reacted in sudden horror at the death of their mind mage.

They scrambled over its body, poking and examining, unaware of what the mind mage realized—that Shiv was still there among them.

Meanwhile, Shiv started having intrusive thoughts while coldness started to build inside him. He wondered why he was starting to think of the spiders as *monsters*, why he wanted to *drain their vitality* so badly. He also felt this strange terror—like if he didn't drain them soon, he was going to die for good—*oh, Broken Moon I'm disappearing!*

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Shiv drove his hand into the body of the nearest weaver. It twisted in pain. He reached out to drain another next to it, but Shiv found that it didn't really speed

the resurrection process up much at all. What he drained was probably bottlenecked by his skill.

Regardless, there were a bunch of very spooked weavers looking around now, and more than a few were pointing to his newly forming shadow. Shiv cursed internally and started crushing as many vulnerable brains as he could.

He would love to stay and fight and grind, but the mind mage had him *rattled*. There was no way he was sticking around to find out if there was another mind weaver. He couldn't level against them easily either. Biomancy could kill him. Pyromancy could kill him—frankly, a lot of magic could kill him.

Psychomancy? That didn't kill him, but it definitely hurt like all the hells, and might just see him willingly enslaved. The thought of what the mind weaver just did disgusted Shiv. He'd rather experience true death than become a slave.

As skulls burst apart around Shiv, he finished draining vitality and resurrected. He picked up the weakened weaver he just drained and threw it at one of the few others that had Magical Resistance. As they crashed to the ground, Shiv started running for his spear and equipment. It took him a while to find his original corpse, and he battered the Magical Resistances of those along the way while dodging thrown weapons.

Shiv's mind raced as he made a plan of escape. The damned spiders were wasps too, so they had wings. That meant he wasn't going to easily outrun them. Thankfully, the mushrooms made flying straight a bit hard, but their Reflexes were still greater than his. He needed something to slow them down—or confuse them.

He reached Nomos's spear first. Picking it off the ground, he thrust it upward and formed a sloping dome over his first corpse. It was like a sphere with a gap for him to run through, with all the weavers on the walled-off side.

Meanwhile, he continued striking the weavers he could sense with his mana field. Those who broke, he crushed with impunity, straining his field over and over until it felt like his soul was starting to ache. Meanwhile, he heard them hammering against the carved barrier of ice. There was a sloped roof on top of him, so they couldn't just drop from above either. That gave him a few seconds before they went around and tried to cut him off. He quickly created a sheet of ice to make it hard to stand.

As he started trying to sift through the burned remains of his previous body, partially fused to his equipment, Shiv realized he was being stupid and used his Biomancy on his corpse—it was still *biomass*, after all. With a final exertion of will, he managed to smear his body into paste. It was not quite the liquefaction the high vampire was capable of, but it worked well enough. Pulling his stuff that hadn't been incinerated away from the goop that once composed his body, Shiv did a quick check for his most essential items.

Kitchen knife! He equipped that again. Other daggers... Ah, right, Valor. The rest is next to the mushroom over there. This should be all.

He rushed out toward the opening he left for himself. Just then, two weavers came into view—and then slid out as they slipped across the ice. A few moments later, he heard their wings buzz as they flew back—only for Shiv to detonate his makeshift ice bunker. Their Toughness was too high for any of the small fragments to deal any harm, but Shiv jabbing them with his exhausted mana field added to the distraction. He melted the ice on the ground with the spear and started sprinting as fast as he could. Between his Physicality and Reflexes, he was moving faster than he ever thought possible, ripping up patches of soil with each step.

He caught sight of the fire weaver struggling to get up, and Shiv stabbed at it—sending a blade of ice through the weaver's midriff. The spider fell into two twitching pieces as Shiv kept going, offering a half-hearted apology. "Sorry. You can kill me in the next life!"

But it wasn't the spider that heard him. *"Shiv! What's happening? Are you alright?"*

"Yeah, mostly. You were right, this place is horrible! I hate the weavers, I hate this place, and I really hate mind mages!"

"Ah, yes. Your first encounter with one? And you survived without being enthralled?"

A long spike punched into a mushroom beside Shiv as he snatched up his supply satchel. He could hear a lot of angry buzzing behind him. He started throwing up walls of ice as he ran, hoping that some of the weavers might smash into the obstacles. "Yeah, while they were focused on blowing my mind metaphorically, I did it literally."

Valor chuckled. *"It seems they were more unprepared to meet a Biomancer, new to the skill and magic though you might be. Well done."*

Shiv blinked at that. He liked hearing that. He almost never heard that. Georges's admission that Shiv was cut out to be a chef was practically the only other time in Shiv's life when someone offered him a full, genuine compliment. Shiv quite liked hearing compliments. He wanted more. "Thanks. I think I did pretty good myself." He grunted, barely avoiding a fall as he stumbled from a blunt object impacting his right shoulder. He looked behind and saw two weavers closing on him. One of them apparently threw its hammer at him.

The Deathless's mana field felt recovered a bit from the earlier strain, but he wasn't going to be ripping anyone in half anytime soon or smashing through resistances. He constructed a few more ice barriers—but these weavers were quick and twisted through the air, dodging the coming blockades expertly. Shiv would've been impressed if they weren't trying so hard to kill him.

“Have you escaped them yet?”

Valor asked.

“Not quite. They’re pretty persistent.”

“That is... not surprising. You murdered their Deepseer. Their mind mage. Mind mages are just below Diviners in the weavers’ social hierarchy, be they feral or accepted by the Weaveresses. This nest of ferals likely will never forgive you for the transgression, and devote all they have to killing you. Even if it means their own extinction.”

“Look at me making lifelong enemies in record time,” Shiv growled. The buzzing of the weavers’ wings was right behind him. He couldn’t afford to get bogged down in another brawl. Time to try something weird. Shiv launched another slab of ice into the air—and frowned, the construct smaller than he expected. It seemed that the spear’s field could be overstrained too, even without being attached to a person. Still, he continued with his plan. He pulled it back toward the weavers but turned it to water as they dodged. One of them cried out as some of the wetness hit it in the face—and then it crashed into the base of a mushroom. The other one stopped its pursuit as well—going back for its comrade. That surprised Shiv. He expected these creatures to behave like—well, monsters. Lesser vampires didn’t really care if their ilk died.

But the weavers... They could think. He knew they could feel from a bit of mental spillover when the mind mage was trying to break his consciousness. Shiv almost felt a little bad about all the spiders he killed—up until he remembered they attacked him first for a terrible reason and brutally murdered him without cause a few times.

He kept running, looking behind every now and again to see distant shapes moving between the mushrooms. The buzzing was starting to draw a bit closer, but as Shiv looked back ahead, he discovered another problem: He was running out of land. At some point, the small forest of massive mushrooms ended, and he found himself staring at an approaching cliff.

“Ah, shit,” Shiv muttered. “Not good.”

“What?”

“Cliff. They can fly. I can’t. Hope I survive the drop.”

“Wait, Shiv—”

But there was no time, and nowhere else to go. Shiv leaped as hard as he could, and he shot into the air—far higher than he wanted. He regretted the act since he didn’t want to experience that much of a drop, but it was too late to do anything now. Or was it? He held tight to his spear. His own mana field felt more refreshed. Maybe he *could* fly. A lot of magic was moving or manipulating a certain thing, anyway. His body was biological. Biology was a thing he could move. So was ice.

He gripped himself using his field and tried to soar through the air. He immediately regretted that. Incredible pain and discomfort passed through him. Apparently, the concept of biology didn’t have that much to do with flying, so his intent shaped a spell that ended up ripping his flesh from his bones. Chunks of meat did go *flying*—just not all of him. And not altogether. This was how Shiv learned that the smaller organs and bits of his body pulled easier than others when he exerted Biomancy in haste. He cried out in pain and stopped. “Stupid idea! Very stupid!”

He tried with his spear, forging a platform beneath him. However, he slipped right off when he tried to use it as some kind of mystical transport—because it was, after all, felling ice.

In retrospect, flying was a lot harder than the aero magi made it seem. There were a lot of mechanics involved. Things Shiv needed to learn.

“Shiv. What is happening?” Valor asked.

“So. I didn’t quite manage to figure out how to fly. That requires more practice. Falling right now.” Shiv shifted his body and looked down. A mossy mountain face greeted him, and far below, he saw what looked to be a deep-blue river rushing through more bioluminescent vegetation. He couldn’t see any weavers down there yet, so that was something at least. “I see a river below, so I’m going to try to aim for that to blunt my fall.”

“Shiv... When you’re falling at high speeds, water can be as hard as a solid surface.”

Shiv blinked. “It can?”

“Yes.”

Shiv shrugged helplessly. “Well, Valor, if I bounce off the water, I might be able to solve my other worry.”

“What other worry?”

“I can’t swim.”

“Ah. Oh, no.”

“Don’t worry,” Shiv said, comforting himself more than the dagger. “I got a lot of Toughness.” *And might be about to get even more in a minute.*