

## Guardian gods 431

Chapter 431:

Aska felt an immediate sense of relief when the song ceased, but his expression quickly darkened as his gaze locked onto the dragon. Before he could act, a voice—one only he could hear—whispered in his mind:

"There's no need to tangle with the dragon. This battle is already lost."

Without hesitation, Aska heeded the warning. He didn't bother issuing an order to his remaining zealots. Instead, he activated his newly acquired power, accessing the other world as his figure flickered and vanished from sight.

Ceruleanor, having decimated Aska's forces, did not immediately depart. He understood the delicate balance of intervention—his role was to aid, not to decide the conflict outright. Though the battlefield had been mostly cleared, a few scattered zealots still remained, and more were beginning to pour out from the other world. Their numbers had dwindled significantly, but the battle was far from over.

With a final, thunderous sweep of his tail, Cerluleanor sent a cascade of rocks and debris crashing into the remaining zealots, further disrupting their ranks and ensuring they posed no immediate threat.

With a powerful thrust of his wings, the blue dragon ascended, leaving behind a scene of devastation and a lingering sense of awe. The water churned in his wake, the currents carrying the scent of ozone and the dust of disintegrated zealots.

The last remnants of Aska's zealots were scattered, some buried beneath the fallen rubble, others struggling to regroup. Yet their will to fight had been shattered. Without their leader, without their momentum, they were nothing more than remnants of a broken assault. Some attempted to flee, slipping into the rift that still pulsed faintly in the water, a gateway to the other world from which they had come. Others, too injured or disoriented to escape, were swiftly dispatched by the recovering merfolk warriors.

One mermaid, Flowua daughter turned her gaze upward, watching the last traces of lightning fade into the depths.

Then, a shift.

The currents stirred unnaturally, twisting in patterns that did not belong to the natural ebb and flow of the ocean. A deep, resonant hum pulsed through the water, not unlike the vibrations of the mermaids' song, but far more ancient. Flowua's eyes widened.

Something was answering the call.

At first, it was only a shadow, an indistinct mass moving within the abyssal darkness. Then another. And another.

The song had been silenced, but its purpose had been fulfilled.

The great ones were stirring.

Flowua's blood ran cold as she turned to her warriors. "Fall back." Her voice, urgent and commanding, cut through the lingering stillness. "Now."

The Murlocs, less attuned to the shifts in the ocean's balance, hesitated, their guttural voices rising in confusion. But the mermaids understood. They had heard the stories, the whispered warnings passed down through generations. The song was meant to summon the ancient creatures of the deep—but calling them was one thing. Controlling them was another.

A deep, guttural rumble echoed through the waters, resonating in their very bones. The darkness below began to writhe, titanic forms shifting just beyond the veil of sight. The battlefield had been mostly cleansed of zealots, but something far more dangerous had been awakened.

The princess wasted no time as she turned sharply, her voice cutting through the water as she repeated again. "Retreat! Now!"

The mermaids and Murlocs hesitated only for a moment before obeying, their forms darting away from the battlefield, leaving behind the remnants of the zealots who were still struggling to recover. The

current swirled unnaturally around them, a warning that something immense was rising from the depths.

Then, the first form emerged.

A monstrous limb, thick as an ancient pillar of stone, broke through the darkness, its surface covered in twisting barnacles and bioluminescent scars. It coiled through the water with eerie precision, wrapping around an unfortunate zealot before dragging him into the abyss. No scream. No struggle. Only the rush of water filling the space he once occupied.

The remaining zealots, those still trying to regroup, barely had time to react before the sea itself turned against them.

A colossal maw, lined with rows of jagged teeth, snapped shut around a cluster of warriors, its glowing eyes watching with cold detachment as it devoured them whole. Another creature, its form shifting and indistinct, moved like a shadow through the battlefield, pulling zealots into unseen depths with tendrils of pure darkness.

Panic set in.

The zealots who could still move attempted to flee, swimming desperately toward the fading rift that led back to the other world. Some made it, their figures vanishing in a blink. Others weren't as lucky.

A massive tail, thick and powerful, slammed into the battlefield, sending a shockwave through the water. The force sent zealots spiraling in all directions, disoriented and helpless. Those that remained were picked off one by one, their final moments lost in the churning abyss.

From a safe distance, Flowua and her warriors watched, their retreat swift but not without glancing back at the chaos they had unleashed. The sea god's gift had been a desperate measure, and now they bore witness to its price.

The ocean would claim its due and there would be nothing left of the invaders.

As the last echoes of the battle faded into the deep, Flowua exhaled, tension leaving her body in a slow, measured wave. The zealots were gone. The war, at least this battle, was over.

But as she looked into the abyss, where the summoned creatures still lingered, a cold realization settled over her.

Would they return to their slumber?

A huge eye meanwhile was staring at the princess and the merfolk who held their breath, suddenly the eye looked at the distance where Flowua was heading before closing its eyes and just like that it was gone.

And so, the battle reached its inevitable conclusion. The zealots had been eradicated, save for the exceptional few left behind to contend with the elite warriors of each godling race. With nothing else standing in their way, the path to the demigods' ascension lay open.

Ikem didn't know how long he had been walking. Time had blurred into a distant, irrelevant notion, swallowed by the vast expanse of the land he now traversed. This was the farthest he had ever ventured from his own territory, deeper into the unknown reaches of the continent. Despite his dominion over these lands, there were still places untouched—even by him.

Now, he stood among them.

As a demigod with a profound affinity for the wood element, he could feel the overwhelming vitality pulsing through this place. The trees were ancient, some older than him, their presence steeped in an ageless wisdom that whispered through the air. Every leaf, every root, thrummed with energy, their essence resonating with his own.

Influenced by both Brix and Aqua, he was mindful of the life surrounding him. Though his current form was massive, his every movement was deliberate, careful not to crush the sacred trees beneath his feet. It was almost comical—the sight of a towering giant, burdened by the weight of a heavy rune pillar, moving with exaggerated caution to minimize the damage caused by his sheer size.

Then, without warning, it happened.

Ikem fell into a trance.

It was a sensation he had come to know well—one that always preceded a great shift, a step forward in his existence. The wood element stirred restlessly, its presence more alive than ever, the voices of the forest swelling into a chorus that only he could hear.

This was how he had come to master his domain.

It was in moments like these that he had first forged his bond with Bara, the symbiotic entity that had amplified his strength and abilities. And now, as the whispers of the ancient trees wove around him, he knew—another change was coming.

One that would shape the course of his journey forever.

As he continued his journey, the question posed to him by the wood elements echoed in his mind—a question that had followed him since he reached his peak at the 5th stage:

"What kind of god do you imagine yourself to be?"

Ikem had spent a decade pondering this, seeking an answer that truly defined him. As the son of the God of Nature, he understood that no singular aspect of nature could set him apart—his father's domain was vast and all-encompassing. If he were to claim any divinity, it would drown within the boundless expanse of what nature already embodied.

Thus, he turned inward. He searched for what made him distinct, what separated him from the divine legacy he was born into.

And then, there was Bara.

His merging with Bara had opened his eyes to an unseen world—a world hidden in the fabric of life itself. It was a world not merely of towering trees and sprawling roots, but of the unseen forces that

wove existence together. These were the things he and Bara reveled in exploring—the intricate, often unnoticed relationships that sustained life.

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It was through this perspective that Ikem came to understand symbiosis.

He saw that the world thrived on mutualistic, parasitic, and commensalistic relationships. Most living things were not truly independent; they coexisted with countless unseen organisms, bound together in an eternal dance of cooperation and conflict. Just as he was in symbiosis with Bara, his power evolved, reshaping his wooden manipulation into something beyond what had ever existed. The roots and trees under his control no longer bore the ordinary hues of nature; they bled. Their bark deepened into a visceral crimson, their growth fueled by the blood they consumed. They fed on the essence of others, drawing strength from sacrifice.

Even his own body had become a living extension of this principle. His roots could detach, burrowing into foreign trees, latching onto creatures, spreading like a parasitic network of life, an extension of his will.

Through this, Ikem understood the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of symbiosis. It was not merely a static relationship—it was a constant negotiation of power, a delicate balance between dominance and dependency. It was a living consciousness beyond a singular entity.

He could hear it now—the collective whisper of all microorganisms living in harmony with their hosts. It was the silent conversation between the roots of trees and the mycorrhizal fungi that fed them. It was the unseen presence of bacteria shaping the bodies of creatures, influencing health, behavior, even evolution itself. A quiet hum of life in its purest form.

This knowledge reshaped not only his own power but his people's understanding of life itself. Among all others, they became unparalleled in their comprehension of biological nature. Their healing surpassed that of any other, for they did not simply mend flesh—they guided life's very process, influencing the unseen forces that dictated growth, decay, and renewal.

Through their wisdom, they even shaped a new life.

It was this mastery that led to the birth of the Hippogriff. A creature that bothers Zephyr a lot at his young age.

The creature was no natural creation—it was a manifestation of Ikem’s understanding of symbiosis and microorganisms. It had not been merely born; it had been guided into existence. The melding of species, the reshaping of genetic destiny, the influence of unseen life—this was the power Ikem had come to wield.

And in this, he had found his answer.

He was not a god of nature. He was the god of the unseen, of interwoven existence, of the endless dance of life feeding upon life.

At last, after a decade of silent contemplation, Ikem had his answer.

He was not merely the son of the God of Nature. He was something more.

His power did not lie in the simple dominion over trees and beasts but in the unseen web of existence—the quiet connections that wove life together, the intricate dance of root and soil, parasite and host, decay and renewal. He had grasped the true essence of wood—not just as a material, but as a living force, a conduit of endless exchange.

He was the god of Verdant Communion.

As the realization settled within him, the air thickened. The world seemed to pause, as though the very land, sky, and rivers held their breath in acknowledgment.

And then, she came.

Nana.

The world called her thus, for she was not merely his grandmother—she was the Elder Spirit, the silent heart beat of this world. She stepped forth, draped in robes the color of ancient bark and newborn leaves, her presence carrying the scent of deep forests and the whisper of distant constellations. Her eyes, dark as the night sky with dots of stars in it, yet alight with wisdom, met his.

A slow smile graced her lips.

"So, you have finally seen child."

Ikem bowed—not in submission, but in reverence. "Yes, Nana. I have found what I am."

She extended a hand, old and lined, yet brimming with the quiet might of one who had seen empires rise and fall like seasons.

"Then speak, child. Tell me of your path."

And so, he did.

He told her of Bara, the entity that had fused with him, reshaping his very being. He spoke of the unseen world—the fungal networks that passed knowledge through roots, the trees that drank blood to grow strong, the parasitic vines that thrived even as they fed. He described his power, no longer bound to simple control over wood but instead an extension of life itself—a force of mutual growth, of sacrifice, of boundless interconnection.

He recounted the Hippogriff, a beast that should not have existed, yet did—because he had willed it so, because he understood the malleability of nature, of evolution itself.

Nana listened, her expression unreadable. Then, she turned to the heavens, lifting a hand.

The stars trembled.

The sky itself peeled apart, revealing the vastness beyond. From that celestial rift descended a throne—not of stone nor metal, but woven from living roots, pulsating with golden ichor, its form shifting like a great tree caught between seasons. It carried the scent of rich soil and fresh rain, of bark hardened by time and leaves forever reaching for the sun.

Nana turned to him, her voice now resonating through the marrow of the world.

"Then rise, my child. Take your place among the gods. Your path is set, your domain realized. Now, tell the world—who are you?"

Ikem stepped forward, and the earth itself answered.

Red roots erupted from the ground, twisting toward the sky, latching onto the divine throne as if embracing an old friend. The whisper of the unseen became a roar—the voices of roots stretching deep, of fungi sharing secrets, of the ever-hungry, ever-thriving wood.

Ikem inhaled deeply, feeling the pulse of all things interconnected.

Then—

He spoke his name, his truth, his godhood.

"I AM IKEM, SON OF THE GOD OF NATURE AND CURSES NOW TO BE

THE GOD OF VERDANT COMMUNION!"

As soon as Ikem proclaimed his divinity, reality trembled. A force beyond mortal comprehension seized him, pulling him into the very essence of his newly formed realm.

Nothingness surrounded him.

A vast, empty void stretched in all directions—a blank canvas awaiting the touch of creation. But Ikem felt no fear, no hesitation. He knew this was not true emptiness. It was potential.

And then, he felt Bara stir.

The being that had dwelled within him for so long, that had fused with his essence, now uncoiled from his spirit like a great serpent shedding its skin. Ikem did not stop it—this was always meant to happen. With a deep, guttural reverberation, Bara plunged into the formless ground of the realm, vanishing into its depths, drilling towards the very heart of this unborn world.

For a moment, all was still.

Then, the ground shook.

A tremor rippled outward, the silent realm rumbling as though awakening from an ageless slumber. Ikem watched, eyes gleaming, as the first root erupted from the soil, thick and glistening, pulsing with a deep, blood-red hue.

More followed.

An entire network of roots surged forth, twisting and intertwining, drawing sustenance not from mere soil but from something far more primal—the echoes of all the creatures Bara had ever devoured.

And then, the first tree was born.

A single towering monolith of wood surged skyward, its bark dark as night yet glistening as if soaked in ichor. Its branches spread wide, extending endlessly, stretching across the realm like a vast skeletal canopy. Its leaves burned, not with ordinary fire but with an eternal red flame—a fire of renewal, of transformation, of insatiable hunger.

Ikem smiled. This was his domain.

A sudden gust of wind rushed through the realm, carrying the burning leaves away. They drifted, glowing embers in the dark void, scattering far and wide. Wherever they fell, life began to stir.

From the ash of the fallen leaves, new life forms emerged—wooden creatures, molded by the essence of the beasts whose blood had once fed Bara.

Some were colossal, their forms reminiscent of the great beasts that had once roamed the mortal lands, now reborn as towering wooden titans with glowing red veins. Others were small, scuttling things, their wooden exoskeletons shifting like living roots, darting through the undergrowth of newly sprouted crimson forests.

The template for this life had already been written—not by Ikem’s hand alone, but by the countless creatures that had been consumed, their forms now reshaped into something new, something eternal.

With every second, the realm bloomed.

Vast crimson jungles stretched into the horizon, their trees whispering in a language only the wood understood. Rivers of sap-like ichor carved through the land, teeming with writhing, root-like organisms. The air pulsed with the breath of an ecosystem that should not exist, yet did.

And at the center of it all, standing before the ever-burning Towering Red Tree. These life forms are still without souls but one thing Ikem came to understand with souls, it can be created but with the right condition and passage of time, it was something that will bloom and Ikem was looking forward to the new life of these wooden lifeforms.

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Ikem’s ascension caught the attention of the other demigods who reached their goal at the same time as he did and was experiencing the same thing he was.

Ursula on her own path on her continent, brought her to a place of fire, with Lava mountain spread around. The place trembled with heat as Ursula made her way across a landscape that no mortal could tread.

Towering lava mountains loomed in the distance, rivers of thick, molten magma carving their paths through the scorched terrain. The air shimmered with unbearable heat, the very ground pulsating with raw, untamed fire. Any ordinary being would have been reduced to ashes upon stepping foot in this place.

But Ursula?

She walked with a smile.

The searing flames, the scorching air, the overwhelming radiance of destruction—it should have devoured her. And yet, as she stepped across the magma lake, the fire did not consume her.

It embraced her.

The heat, once a source of pain, now felt like a warm breeze against her skin. The flames curled around her, licking at her form like affectionate spirits welcoming her home. And as she took another step, she felt it—the fire awakening.

She was no longer merely walking through this inferno.

She was calling it to life.

The fire elements stirred, their flickering presence drawn to her, whispering in tongues of flame. And then, the world around her shuddered, and a question resonated within her very soul—

"What type of god do you imagine yourself to be?"

Ursula stilled.

For a moment, the question almost made her laugh. If only Ikem were here. He would have seen the purest joy she had ever felt, the radiant happiness that rarely graced her features. This was what true freedom felt like.

And yet, she hesitated.

She sometimes resented being a demigod. Not because she did not love her people, her children, or the divine blood that ran through her veins—no, she cherished them more than anything. But she loathed the constant political games, the exhausting maneuvering required to ensure their safety.

She was not a leader.

She was not the wise ruler her people deserved.

And if not for her prideful children and their unwavering faith in their lineage and her father, she might have simply led them into obscurity, allowing her people to be absorbed by stronger forces.

Ursula understood the necessity of power, but she despised it all the same. If she could have chosen, she would have walked a simpler path.

But godhood?

Godhood was a means to an end.

Just as she now walked across this lake of molten fire, basking in its warmth as though it were an extension of herself—so too did she want to step freely into her father's realm.

A realm of searing, overbearing flames.

A place where, in her past, she had been burned.

Rejected.

For all her strength, she had once been deemed unworthy. The fire had scorched her flesh, tearing away at her pride, forcing her to acknowledge her own weakness.

That past? She wanted to erase it.

She wanted to spread her wings within that inferno, to let her father's fire bathe her without pain, without rejection.

She wanted to prove herself—to him, to the world, but most of all, to herself.

And then, the answer came.

"Family."

The flames surged in response.

For all the burdens she bore, nothing was more important to her than her family. Not just her children, but all of them.

Her cousins, her fellow demigods, her entire godling race.

She would be their warmth. Their comfort and strength.

A reminder that even divine families fracture, that even gods clash and wound one another.

But more than that—

She would embody the very essence of family itself.

The cycles of love and conflict. The ebbs and flows of kinship. The pain that sometimes divides, and the healing that brings them back together.

With mortals, she would be a beacon of resilience. A protector. A guide.

She understood that families were never perfect, but in their imperfection, they endured and that, above all else, was what mattered.

As the realization settled within her, the flames around her roared.

A vortex of gold and crimson fire spiralled into the heavens, carving a path through existence itself, reaching beyond the sky, beyond the realm of mortals—

As the firestorm surged, as Ursula's revelation solidified within her soul, the flames around her shuddered. The molten rivers halted, their flow frozen in reverence. The air grew heavy, the very elements holding their breath.

And then—A presence emerged.

A light golden and warm, yet carrying the weight of eternity.

She had arrived.

The flames parted, bending away as Nana stepped forth.

She did not appear imposing, nor did she command attention with overwhelming force. Yet, the world itself bowed before her.

Where Nana walked, the fire whispered. The magma, once searing and wild, cooled beneath her steps, shifting into smooth, gleaming obsidian. The heat that had once felt welcoming to Ursula now became something else—something soothing, as though she had stepped into the embrace of a mother's arms.

Nana's face, carved with the wisdom of ages, bore the trace of an amused smile.

Her voice, soft yet resonant, drifted through the air.

"So, this is where your path has taken you."

Ursula's heart thundered in her chest.

She had always wanted to see her grandmother, she felt like if anyone among her family of gods would understand her feeling about Family, it only would be Nana.

Nana was the quiet, ever-present force that guided.

The flame that illuminated but did not burn. The ember that never faded. She was the one who had lifted Ikem's throne to the sky.

And now, she was here—standing before her.

Ursula clenched her fists. "Yes," she said, her voice unwavering. "This is what I want."

Nana chuckled softly. "I see that." She tilted her head, eyes gleaming. "But tell me, Ursula... What is it that you wish to build?"

The question carried no challenge, no doubt—only the quiet expectation that Ursula had already found her answer.

And she had.

With each step she had taken upon the burning earth, with each memory of her past pain, with every flicker of warmth that reminded her of what truly mattered...

She had already chosen.

"I will build a family," Ursula declared, the very flames around her igniting anew in response. "A family that will stand together through love and pain. A family that will endure."

Nana nodded and did something she never did before as she pulled Ursula into a hug before letting go with a smile.

"Then let us begin."

She raised a single hand, her fingers trailing through the air like an artist painting upon an invisible canvas.

The ground beneath them rumbled.

The flames gathered, twisting into pillars of searing gold. The very magma itself rose, shifting and reshaping under Nana's silent guidance.

And as she did with Ikem— She lifted Ursula's throne into the heavens.

A great firestorm erupted, not in destruction, but in creation.

A mountain of flame and obsidian formed beneath Ursula's feet, growing ever higher. The sky itself parted, the very fabric of the world making way for something greater.

Her throne. Forged from the very fires of the earth, it stood upon a foundation of molten stone and unwavering will. A monument not of dominion, but of endurance.

The fire embraced her, rising in great waves—carrying her upward.

Up, up, past the clouds, past the barriers of mortality.

Higher, to where she belonged. Before she went past the boundary she proclaimed to the world "I AM URSULA DAUGHTER OF THE SUN AND SKY GOD CREPUSCULAR AND NOW TO BE THE GODDESS OF THE ASCENDANT HEARTH & EVERFLAME BONDS"

As Nana watched, her expression never changed.

Only when Ursula's flames reached the stars did she whisper—

"And so, another one rises."

Ursula sat upon her newly risen throne, her body alight with divine fire. Yet, despite her ascension, her realm was desolate.

It seemed to stretch infinitely—a world of crimson skies, dark obsidian mountains, and endless plains of fire. But it was silent. Lifeless. A mere extension of her divinity, but not yet a home.

And she would not allow that.

With a deep breath, she placed her hands upon the armrests of her throne. Her flames spread outward—not in destruction, but in creation.

The first to answer her call was the guardian of her fire.

From the embers of her soul, the great Phoenix of the Everflame stirred.

It had always been there, a presence nestled deep within her being—an eternal flame of protection and renewal.

With a mighty cry, it spread its massive wings and took flight. Fire trailed in its wake as it soared into the empty sky, shaping it, defining it.

The once barren heavens became a celestial inferno, shifting in hues of red, gold, and orange. Like a hearth's eternal blaze, the sky now burned with a comforting, unyielding light.

Ursula watched, smiling.

The Phoenix, now truly at home, became the guardian of her skies, a radiant presence that would never dim.

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But it was not enough.

She rose from her throne, stepping forward as her fire followed her will.

She pressed her hand against the scorched earth—and from beneath her fingertips, life erupted.

Not in the way of forests or rivers, but in the way her divinity dictated.

Hearths began to take shape—great and small, floating islands of stone and fire, each burning with a welcoming glow. These would be places of refuge, homes for those seeking warmth, seeking solace.

From the flames, beings began to emerge.

First were the Keepers of the Hearth, spirits wreathed in gentle embers, taking form as humanoid figures with smoldering eyes and soft, flickering bodies. They would tend to the fires of this world, ensuring that no warmth ever faded.

Next came the Infernal Sentinels, beings of living magma with blackened armor-like hides. They would be the watchers, the protectors—ensuring that no force could ever shatter the bonds Ursula sought to forge.

And then—

She lifted her hands, calling upon her greatest creation yet.

The Ascendant Flameborn.

Beings of flame and light, given true form—neither fully spirit nor fully mortal. They carried her essence, her belief that family could always rise again. They would be the inheritors of her warmth, the children of her realm.

As they took their first breath, Ursula exhaled.

She could feel it now. The shift.

A place of resurgence.

A place where those lost could find warmth.

A place where bonds, no matter how strained, would never truly break.

As the flames continued to spread, the embers dancing like stars across her realm, Ursula sat back upon her throne.

And for the first time in a long, long while—

She felt at peace.

Her rune pillar was already set in place amidst the river of magma.

Ursula sadly has no idea, the impact of what she just did with her realm. It was to be expected as since birth, the fire element has always welcomed her. She failed to recognize that these fire elemental beings she thought she called forth on her own was a congratulatory gift given to her from the elemental realm.

On the southern continent, Roth arrived in the imperial capital, catching a glimpse of the people who might one day become his people's enemies. His journey took him past the city until he reached a mountain eerily similar to the one his people inhabited. This mountain was naturally shrouded in mist, teeming with vibrant life.

Carrying the rune pillar, Roth fought against the trance threatening to overtake him, resisting the temptation to step beyond the boundary and ascend before laying the pillar where it felt right.

Surveying the surroundings, he took a deep breath. He wasn't ready to leave the mortal world just yet—but when the time came, he would return.

His form shrank and shifted into that of a bat, wings spreading as he took to the sky, heading back to his people.

On the northern continent, in the endless expanse of ice and snow, a massive werewolf could be seen striding forward, carrying a large rune pillar.

As Maul pressed on, he suddenly realized he had crossed an unseen boundary. The snow beneath his feet had vanished, replaced by a frozen path of deep blue ice. The howling wind grew fiercer, cutting through him with an unfamiliar chill.

Taking a moment to observe his surroundings, Maul noted that the ice formations here were ancient—older than even the gods. Curious, he extended a claw and slashed at the ice. The sensation and feedback told him everything he needed to know without even looking—he hadn't left a single mark.

Grinning, he continued forward, the relentless cold beginning to seep into him—a sensation he had never experienced before.

At that moment, as the howling wind swirled around him, he recalled the domain he had comprehended. Just like that, Maul fell into a trance, the ice element stirring to life around him, whispering the same question that all demigods faced:

"What kind of god do you see yourself as?"

Among all demigods, Maul had experienced the loss of loved ones more than any other. The frozen continent where he now sought to develop his power was both a blessing and a curse to him.

As the son of the Goddess of the Moon and Motherhood, he cherished this world of pristine whiteness. Yet, it was this very world he loved that had also taken the most from him. The merciless snow and unyielding cold had claimed those dear to him, not just through its harshness but through the dangers lurking beneath its serene surface.

The barren, snow-covered lands offered little in the way of resources, forcing him to hunt far from home. But each time he left, he left his family vulnerable—exposed to the watchful eyes of predators and the monstrous creatures that prowled these frozen wastes.

At the time, he had not been strong enough to protect himself, let alone his children. Loss became an old companion. But what shattered him was the day a great bird swooped down and carried away his only daughter before his very eyes.

Thankfully, his son Wulv survived. Wulv had grown into a strong and composed man. And he himself despite their past, had found love with a female dragon. Together, they bore a daughter—a child Maul showered with affection, cherishing the second chance fate had granted him. Through her, he found an opportunity to mend the wounds of the past.

Yet, that past was never forgotten. It shaped Maul into the man he was today—a king beloved by his people, a father adored by his children, and a lover cherished by his wife.

But to those who dared to stand against him, Maul showed a side of himself that his people never witnessed—a vengeful, merciless force that harbored only hatred for those outside his circle of love and loyalty.

It was this part of him that shaped his domain—a realm of ice-cold vengeance, a frozen abyss where the souls of those who perished under his claws were bound for eternity. Chained within his domain, they suffered the relentless torment of the howling wind, their agony unending.

And when the time for battle came, these tortured souls became his vanguard, capturing more of the wretched fools who dared threaten him and his loved ones.

It was then that understanding dawned upon him—the kind of god he was meant to be.

A god of cold vengeance and unwavering protection.

A deity who embodied the relentless cruelty of winter and the unyielding ferocity of a parent guarding their young. He did not concern himself with justice in a broader sense—only with the safety and well-being of those he held dear.

As part of his people's power system, Maul attained the constellation Corvus (The Crow). While often associated with death, the crow also symbolizes memory, intelligence, and protection.

Crows are seen as messengers between worlds, mirroring Maul's connection to the souls trapped within his domain. Their inky blackness represents not only the abyss he commands but also the darkness within him—the grief and rage that fuel his every action.

With that, he had his answer and so, she appeared.

Like with all demigods, Nana took a form that would bring Wulv comfort. She was not an imposing deity nor a distant observer—her presence was warm, yet firm, like the quiet embrace of the moon over an endless winter night.

She offered him a knowing smile. "It seems you have found your answer," she said, her voice carrying the weight of certainty.

Maul met her gaze, his golden eyes reflecting the frozen expanse around them. "Yes," he replied, his voice steady. "I will not waver. My path is clear."

The wind stilled for a moment, as if the world itself was listening. The souls within his domain stirred, their chains rattling in anticipation. His constellation, Corvus, shimmered above, a black star in the sky—a reminder of both his burden and his purpose.

Nana's expression remained unreadable as she studied him. "Then you are ready to take the next step," she said. "But remember, Maul—vengeance and protection are two sides of the same blade. One will always threaten to consume the other."

Maul exhaled, the cold mist curling from his lips. "I know. And I accept that risk."

Nana nodded, satisfied. Then, with a wave of her hand, the sky above them darkened, and a path of silver light unfurled before him—one leading deeper into the divine realm.

The cold winds howled as Maul took a step forward, his figure standing tall amidst the frozen wasteland. The realization of his divinity burned within him—not as a fire, but as an all-consuming frost, a force as relentless and unforgiving as the winter that shaped him.

He turned his gaze to the heavens, to the endless night where Corvus, his constellation, shimmered in silent vigil. His voice, deep and unwavering, carried across the icy expanse.

"I am Maul, God of Cold Vengeance and Unyielding Protection, son of the goddess of Moon and motherhood. I am the biting frost that punishes the wicked, the silent night that watches over its own. To those who threaten my kin, know this—I am the storm that will never relent. I am the winter that does not end."

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As his proclamation echoed and he dropped the rune pillar, the sky above him cracked open. A great, spiraling vortex of silver and deep blue unfurled, an ethereal bridge stretching into the divine realm. The moment his foot touched the path of silver light, the air around him shifted. His mortal shell could no longer contain the power surging within him—his body shimmered, his form unraveling into pure divinity.

The mortal world faded behind him. Ahead, a vast emptiness stretched, waiting to be shaped by his will.

Maul closed his eyes and let his essence expand, his very being merging with the forming world. He did not seek warmth or paradise. His domain would reflect his soul—a frozen abyss, vast and unforgiving, yet unbreakable in its silent embrace.

The land took shape, sculpted from ancient ice, deeper and denser than any in the mortal world. Towering mountains of frost loomed in the distance, their peaks cutting into the starless void above. Below, endless fields of snow stretched beyond sight, a land untouched by time or warmth.

At the heart of his realm stood a great frozen fortress—Helwinter Keep—a citadel of black ice and shimmering silver, radiating an aura of both sanctuary and judgment. It was a place where the weary could seek shelter, yet where the condemned would know no escape. The howling winds that once tormented him now served as sentinels, carrying the cries of those who had perished by his hand.

Deep within the core of his realm, beneath layers of unyielding ice, lay the Frozen Abyss, where the souls of his enemies remained bound—chained by their own hatred and fear, their suffering an eternal echo in the halls of his vengeance.

As his realm solidified, his divinity pulsed through its very foundation. The sky above was dark yet clear, illuminated by an eternal aurora—a silent, watchful guardian over his dominion.

Finally, he stood atop his throne, carved from the purest ice, his presence casting long shadows across the frozen expanse. He had ascended.

As the ascension of the demigods on the surface reached its conclusion, the focus shifted to the two who remained beneath the waves.

Tide had arrived at the place indicated by the rune tower he carried—a realm teeming with vibrant marine life, where iridescent sea creatures wove intricate patterns through the water. Schools of luminescent fish darted around him, their scales shimmering like scattered stars, while tendrils of bioluminescent jellyfish pulsed with an ethereal glow. The creatures regarded him with curiosity, sensing the presence of something—or someone—new in their domain. As he moved forward, they swirled around him in a mesmerizing dance, their motions carrying an almost ritualistic grace.

For Tide, this moment was yet another reminder of why he revered his father, the god of the sea and storms. Even after centuries spent beneath the waves, the ocean continued to unveil new mysteries, proving that no matter how much he thought he understood, there was always more to discover. The vastness of the sea humbled him, reinforcing both his admiration and his ambition.

As he followed the path laid out for him, the familiar sensation of divinity brushed against his consciousness, pulling him into a trance-like state. A question echoed in the depths of his mind:

"What kind of god do you imagine yourself to be?"

For as long as he could remember, his dream had been to rule the sea as his father did. It had seemed inevitable—a destiny written in the tides. But at the fifth stage of ascension, just before he could advance, he had been confronted with an undeniable truth: the entire sea could never belong to him. The realization struck deep, unsettling something within him. To claim dominion over the ocean in its entirety was beyond his grasp, beyond anyone's. The sea was not something to be owned—it was a force of its own, ever-shifting, ever-expanding.

It was the water elementals who had guided him through this revelation, showing him a path he had never considered before. While his fellow demigods wielded power over their elements, none understood them as intimately as he did. Unlike the others, he did not merely command the water—he listened to it, let it shape him as much as he shaped it. He could feel the currents whisper to him, the tides pulse with a rhythm older than time itself.

Now, standing on the precipice of divinity, he could say with pride that among all the demigods, he alone had forged a true bond with the sea. His unwavering admiration and boundless ambition had culminated in the birth of his domain—a realm of fluid strength, of movement unshackled, of sovereignty through unity.

Since he could never lay claim to the sea, his domain manifested as a kingdom, a microcosm of the world above, where his will was absolute. With a whispered word and a gesture, he commanded the elements, the water swirling and rising to form his "Sentinels." Six hulking figures, each a testament to his power, stood before him. From his meticulously curated treasury, he bestowed upon them six legendary weapons, each humming with ancient magic, transforming them into extensions of his own might.

This act, the creation of his Sentinels, was the culmination of Tide's life, the realization of his deep-seated desire to rule. Unlike other demigods, burdened by the complexities of human interaction, Tide

had forged a harmonious relationship with his people. His leadership had been wise and just, his kingdom flourishing. The Murlocs, often relegated to the fringes of society, now enjoyed a prosperity they had never known. Even the tension with his sister, ruler of a neighboring undersea kingdom, had been resolved, their combined strength now a force to be reckoned with. Tide's path to ascension was clear.

His thoughts drifted to his divine cousins, now among the gods who watched over the mortal realm. He yearned to join them, to share in their celestial duties, and to finally observe the world above without the limitations of his demigod form. He envisioned long conversations, shared laughter, and the quiet satisfaction of protecting the world alongside his family.

The question of his divine portfolio had long been settled in his mind. He was a master of the Everflowing Treasury. The sea, though he couldn't claim it as his domain, had been generous. His treasury overflowed with riches, not just gold and jewels, but artifacts of immense power, each a story waiting to be told. He understood that his control extended beyond the mere accumulation of wealth. It encompassed the flow of resources, the opportunities that arose and vanished like the tides, and even the subtle currents of fate itself. Perhaps, he mused, it even touched upon luck, the unpredictable element that could make or break empires.

A shadow crossed his brow. The humans, those land-dwelling creatures, were becoming bolder. Their ships, once mere specks on the horizon, now ventured further and further into the sea, their curiosity piqued by the mysteries that lay beneath the waves. This expansion was inevitable, he knew, and it would bring change. He would need to be ready. As the God of the Everflowing Treasury, he would not only command wealth, but also the foresight and wisdom to navigate the shifting tides of the future, ensuring the prosperity of his people and the preservation of the delicate balance between the mortal and divine realms.

With his path clear came the appearance of Nana, She smiled, her gaze sweeping over him as though she already knew his decision.

"It seems you have found your answer."

A deep breath filled his lungs. "I have."

The world trembled in response. The air became thick with energy, the sea itself stilling in reverence.

Then, he spoke.

"I am Tide, son of the god of sea and storms now the Master of the Everflowing Treasury. I am the tide that brings fortune and the wave that drowns the reckless. I am the hand that weighs wealth and fate alike. To those who honor the balance, prosperity shall follow. To those who seek to hoard or plunder unjustly, know that even the greatest riches slip through grasping fingers like sand in the tide."

As his proclamation resounded across the ocean, Nana raised a hand. From the depths of the ocean and the heights of the sky, a great force coalesced. The waters churned, parting as a throne of shifting gold and deep sapphire rose from the abyss. The Throne of Tides.

It was a seat of wealth, and of power—its form constantly shifting, as if made from liquid wealth itself, shimmering with ever-changing light. Nana lifted it higher, and higher still, until it reached the sky itself, where gods sat among the heavens.

Ascension had begun.

As he took his place upon the throne, his mortal shell cracked away, dissolving into pure divinity. The sea roared, rejoicing in the rise of its new patron. The winds carried his name across distant shores. In that moment, he ceased to be a man. He was a god.

The world opened before him, a vast emptiness waiting to be shaped by his will. He extended his hand, and the large space responded.

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From the shadows of the deep, his divine realm took form—a place of infinite waters, where grand cities of coral and pearl rested beneath waves of liquid silver. The Everflowing Treasury was not merely a vault; it was a kingdom where wealth moved like the tides, where golden rivers flowed, and where the souls of those who sought fortune in life now drifted, ever entwined with the fate they had chosen.

Ships of spectral merchants sailed these waters, forever trading, forever seeking the right moment to grasp opportunity before it slipped away. The sky above shimmered, reflecting the wealth below, yet never revealing its full depth.

And at the heart of it all sat his throne, hovering over the boundless expanse of the Everflowing Treasury. From there, he would watch, guide, and shape the fate of those who sought fortune—or ruin.

Descending to the depths of the Flowua side, her rune pillar guided her toward the place where her father once clashed with his counterpart. The scars of their battle still lingered, though time and the relentless tides had worked to erase them. The vast chasm her father had carved into the ocean floor had long since been filled, yet a haunting emptiness remained. No sea creatures had returned, as if they still feared the lingering echoes of divine wrath.

Something had changed in this part of the ocean. The currents no longer flowed naturally—they were turbulent, chaotic, as if the sea itself rejected anything that dared approach. The very water seemed to rebel, its motion not a simple current but a forceful rejection, pushing away all intruders with an almost sentient will.

Flowua felt the pushback and smiled. It had been a long time since the sea itself had resisted her. Unlike other demigods who commanded a personalized domain—territories molded to their will—Flowua had none. Her power was not confined to a single realm but extended as far as her endurance allowed.

At the stage where most demigods sought to comprehend and manifest a domain, Flowua had done something different—she had shattered that limitation. Her understanding of water was not about control but about movement, about the ceaseless flow of existence itself. She had always disliked how the ocean, the very thing she belonged to, created resistance against her. And so, she had overcome it.

She comprehended fluid friction, not as a hindrance but as a force to erase. Her power negated resistance, rendering her movement unimpeded. In water, she moved as if no currents opposed her; on land, the very air parted before her, allowing her to traverse with unnatural speed. She had become one of the fastest beings in existence, untethered by the limitations of friction.

Now, as she faced the sea's defiance, she responded in kind. Her power extended, crashing against the ocean's unnatural turbulence, dissolving its resistance as she took her first step forward. But the moment she did, the opposition grew stronger—far beyond anything the sea itself could produce.

This was no ordinary resistance. The waters had been tainted, infused with the lingering auras of two gods. A clash of divine wills had seeped into the currents, warping them into something unnatural, something that refused to yield.

For the first time in a long while, Flowua felt the sea truly fight back. And that only made her more determined.

Flowua closed her eyes, letting the turbulence wash over her. The sea raged against her presence, its resistance unnatural—wild, corrupted, almost alive with the echoes of the divine battle that had scarred this place. But she did not fight it. Instead, she surrendered herself to the flow, allowing the water to envelop her, to press against her skin, to seep into every fiber of her being.

And then, she let go.

A deep stillness overtook her mind as she drifted into a trance, sinking into the depths of her own existence. Her body remained in motion, yet her consciousness expanded, reaching beyond the physical. In this state, she was neither here nor there—she was the current, the tide, the shifting weight of the ocean itself.

Within the depths of this trance, a voice echoed, ancient and powerful. It resonated not in her ears, but within her very soul. "Flowua," it intoned, "you have defied the currents, shattered the resistance, and bent the very sea to your will. You stand on the precipice of divinity. But the question remains: what type of god do you want to be?"

For the longest time, she had defined herself by movement, by her ability to erase resistance. But what was she beyond that? What was she when there was no path ahead, no opposition to overcome?

The answer lay in the water. It had never merely been an obstacle; it was life, force, will. It was the unyielding push and pull of existence itself. It was not just the flow, but the reason for movement.

Her mind dove deeper, past the knowledge of demigods, past the mortal understanding of the sea. She glimpsed something vast, something ancient—the true nature of fluidity. Not just the absence of resistance but the very force that guided all things into motion.

Flowua saw rivers carving through stone, storms churning across the sky, the great unseen currents of the deep shifting the world itself. Water was never truly still; even in stillness, it was alive, waiting, adapting, shaping.

And then it struck her.

She had spent her existence removing obstacles from her path, but in doing so, she had only grasped half the truth. The flow did not merely erase resistance—it redirected it, transformed it, bent it to its will.

Her trance deepened. She felt her very being unravel and reform, reshaping into something greater. Her power expanded—not just negating friction, but commanding it, guiding it. Where there was resistance, she would not merely cancel it—she would shape its direction, turn it into power, mold it into force.

And so, as she returned to herself, as her consciousness snapped back into her body, Flowua did not merely stand against the sea's resistance—she became the force guiding its currents.

The tainted water pushed against her, trying to repel her presence.

This time, she did not erase its force.

She redirected it and at the same time it's form changed.

The chaotic turbulence that once opposed her now flowed around her, its force bending and breaking to her will. The path ahead, once blocked, now welcomed her like an extension of her own body.

The solidified water crunched beneath Flowua's feet, each step a testament to her defiance. The divine pressure, meant to be an insurmountable wall, now fueled her ascent, the transformed water a bizarre, almost beautiful path carved through the resisting sea. She continued her climb, the massive pillar held aloft, its weight seemingly insignificant against the force of her will. The aura of the two gods pulsed around her, a desperate attempt to maintain its hold, but it was like trying to contain a raging river with a sieve.

As Flowua ascended further, the strange, solidified path stretching before her, a profound shift occurred. The chaotic energy of the resisting sea, the clash between her power and the divine aura, began to coalesce. The world around her seemed to slow, the churning water calming, the solidified path shimmering with an ethereal glow.

Flowua opened her eyes, and in that moment— A deep vibration pulsed through the ocean, a resonance that rippled through the very fabric of the sea. Flowua had already become the flow, had already embraced the boundlessness of movement—but now, something greater called to her.

The sky.

A golden thread of divinity wove itself into the waters, reaching down like a beckoning hand. Flowua could feel its pull, the undeniable force of ascension. Yet, the weight of the sea held her down, not as resistance, but as a final tether to the world she had always known.

And then—Nana arrived.

She did not rise or appear; she was simply there, standing amidst the endless deep, her form untouched by the turbulence. She gazed at Flowua with knowing eyes, her presence as vast and eternal as the ocean itself.

"You are ready," Nana said, her voice carried by the very currents Flowua had once fought against. "But you must leave the sea behind to claim what is yours."

Flowua hesitated, looking down at the depths she had called home. She had never known a sky, had never belonged to still lands and open air. The ocean had been everything—her cradle, her battlefield, her proving ground.

Nana extended her hand. "It is not abandonment, Flowua. The sea will always be a part of you. But now, you must take your place among the gods."

A shift occurred. The waters around them began to split, parting as if bowing to Flowua's newfound divinity. The golden thread above became a pillar of light, piercing through the sea, calling her upward.

Flowua clenched her fists, then exhaled.

She had never feared forward motion. She would not start now.

With a single step, the currents lifted her—not as a struggle, but as an ascension. The ocean did not pull her back; it carried her forward, honoring her rise. Nana guided her, the light intensifying as Flowua broke through the surface for the first time in her existence.

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And there, above the sea, beyond the limits of the world she had known, she saw it—

Her divine throne.

A vast, shimmering construct of ever-shifting water, suspended in the sky, woven into the heavens themselves. It was not a fixed domain, nor a stagnant realm—it was movement incarnate, an endless flow that stretched as far as she willed it.

Flowua reached out, and the throne responded, wrapping around her like an embrace. The moment she sat upon it, the sky trembled, and the world below acknowledged her existence as a god.

"I am Flowua, daughter of the storm and sea god, now the goddess of Goddess of Unimpeded Progress and Adaptive Force"

Flowua's divine realm is not a static place, nor is it bound by rigid structures or fixed landscapes. It is a realm of constant movement, an ever-shifting expanse where progress never ceases, where every force that opposes is merely reshaped and repurposed into something greater.

At first glance, the realm appears as a vast, liquid sky—an ocean without a seabed, an endless cascade of rivers, waves, and currents that twist and spiral into infinity. The waters here do not obey gravity; they flow in every direction—upward, sideways, even folding into themselves—without ever losing momentum. Streams of radiant energy course through the currents, glowing in hues of silver, deep cerulean, and shifting gold, embodying the cycle of motion and adaptation.

Scattered throughout the realm are massive, floating formations known as the Wellsprings of Adaptation—colossal spheres of compressed, swirling water and divine energy. These wellsprings act as catalysts for change, absorbing resistance and obstacles, then releasing them as new possibilities.

At the very center of the realm, suspended in a vortex of cascading waterfalls, is Flowua's Divine Throne, a structure of liquid crystal that is never in the same form twice. One moment it is a spiraling tower of fluid glass, the next a ring of floating platforms orbiting a core of pure motion. This is the heart of her realm—the place where all paths converge, where every stream of progress ultimately leads.

From here, Flowua watches over her domain, guiding those who seek unimpeded progress, whispering insights to those who struggle against resistance. Unlike other gods, she does not promise to remove challenges—instead, she ensures that every struggle becomes a stepping stone, every obstacle a force that pushes one forward.

With Flowua ascension, the final pillar was set in place, locking into alignment with the others. A deep, resonant hum spread through the air, echoing across the land and sea, vibrating in the bones of all who stood witness. Simultaneously, the pillars on distant continents trembled in response, their dormant power now fully awakened. An invisible force pulsed outward from them, an intricate lattice of energy that spread across the planet like veins of light, unseen by mortal eyes but deeply felt by all who possessed even the faintest connection to magic or divinity.

From the heavens, it appeared as though a great seal had been drawn across the world, a barrier not of physical substance but of raw cosmic will. A gentle yet absolute force enveloped the planet, pushing outwards, repelling the creeping tendrils of the gods' counterparts—their influence forced to retreat like shadows before the rising sun.

At the gaping hole left by Ikenga and Keles, the very fabric of reality shuddered as the breach they had once passed through began to mend itself. The translucent shield, woven from the converging energies of the pillars, sealed the hole shut with an unyielding finality. A golden luminescence pulsed along the edges, pressing back the foreign influence that had sought to seep into this realm. The last traces of that unnatural corruption recoiled, unable to resist the sheer magnitude of the restored order.

Meanwhile, in their own forsaken domain, the gods' counterparts stood in eerie silence, watching. From their vantage point, the change was undeniable—like a great celestial curtain being drawn before them, shutting them out against their will. The luminous barrier obscured their view of the mortal realm, solidifying the divide that had once been fractured. Some among them raged, their forms shifting and writhing with fury at their exile, while others merely watched with cold, calculating eyes, already plotting their next move.

Plans had already been laid, etched into the very fabric of fate. Now, there was nothing left for them to do but wait—slumbering beneath the surface of reality, patient and still, until the voices of their Zealots called them back into the waking world.

With that, the ascension of the demigods reached its completion. Their transformation was absolute, their existence no longer bound by the constraints of mortality. But even as their power solidified, another struggle remained unfinished. The godlings had one final task—to purge the remaining Zealots who still roamed the land, carrying the will of their forsaken patrons.

Yet, what should have been a swift and silent eradication had become something far more chaotic, far more dangerous. The Zealots, having received the blessings of the gods' counterparts, were no longer mere fanatics. Their bodies pulsed with unnatural energy, their resilience defying what should have been possible. The godlings, once confident in their ability to root them out under the cover of darkness, now found themselves locked in a battle that had spilled into the waking world—one that no mortal could ignore.

The night sky, once a quiet witness to whispered executions, now bore the scars of war. Tremors rattled through the streets, shaking homes to their foundations. Explosions tore through the silence, sending shockwaves of light and sound that turned midnight into an imitation of dawn. Smoke rose in thick, choking plumes, carrying the acrid scent of destruction. Those who had hoped to cower behind their doors, to press their hands over their ears and pretend the world outside remained unchanged, could no longer deny the truth. The nightmare had forced its way into reality.

The godlings fought with measured precision, striking at the Zealot leaders while desperately shielding the mortals and their fragile cities from complete devastation. Every building left standing, every street not reduced to rubble, was a small victory in the face of unrelenting chaos.

But the Zealots did not fight to win. Their battle was no longer one of conquest but of remembrance and leaving a permanent mark. They did not seek victory—they sought legacy. Every strike, every reckless surge of destruction was not aimed at the godlings themselves but at the land, at the walls, at the monuments and streets where history had been written. They carved ruin into the very bones of the world, ensuring that no matter the outcome, their presence would be impossible to erase.

For example in the eastern continent. The air crackled with residual heat, the scent of burnt earth and ozone stinging the nostrils. Ikem's grandchildren, battered and bruised, leaned heavily on one another, their breaths ragged gasps. Myrrha's left arm hung uselessly, a dark stain blooming across her tunic. Ash, ever stoic, balanced precariously on a single leg, his face pale and drawn. Tula and Brook, their faces grim, bore wounds that revealed glimpses of bone, testament to the Zealot leader's relentless assault. They were spent, their divine energy flickering like dying embers.

The Zealots, driven by a mad fervor, weren't concerned with strategic victory. Their leader, a figure wreathed in an aura of unsettling power, seemed less intent on defeating the godlings and more on scarring the land, leaving an indelible mark of their presence. It was a campaign of devastation, a testament to their destructive ideology.

And nowhere was this more evident than the transformation of the eastern mountain. Where once a proud peak had stood, now a jagged, crystalline monstrosity jutted into the sky. The Zealot leader, in a display of terrifying power, had channeled an unimaginable heat, a fiery torrent that had engulfed the mountain and, impossibly, transmuted its very substance into shimmering crystal. The transformation was violent, instantaneous, leaving the surrounding landscape scorched and barren. The sheer scale of the destruction was breathtaking, a monument to the Zealots' destructive power.

This act, this brutal reshaping of the land, was a symbolic victory for the Zealots. It wasn't about territory or resources; it was about asserting their dominance, about etching their name into the very bones of the world. The crystal mountain, gleaming malevolently in the sun, was a constant reminder of their power, a symbol of their contempt for the natural order and a chilling testament to the godlings' inability to prevent such wanton destruction. It was a wound on the world, and a wound on the godlings' pride.

Myrrha coughed, a fleck of blood staining her lips. "He...he wasn't even trying to defeat us," she whispered, her voice hoarse. "It was...a demonstration."

Ash nodded grimly. "A message," he corrected. "A message to all who would oppose them."

Tula, her face etched with pain, looked towards the crystal mountain, her eyes filled with a mixture of awe and dread. "It's...beautiful," she murmured, "in a terrifying

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Brook shivered, despite the lingering heat. "And it's a symbol of our failure," he finished, his voice barely above a whisper. The weight of their responsibility, the knowledge that they had been unable to protect the land, pressed down on them, heavier than any physical blow. The crystal mountain stood as a stark reminder of the Zealots' power, and the devastating consequences of their unwavering fanaticism.

The change in strength after the Zealot leaders received the blessing of the counterparts, made them feel like they were facing their grandfather who just ascended.

Everyone was at the fifth stage but the difference in strength makes one question if they were in the same stage of strength.

Myrrha, her remaining arm trembling, struggled to parry a blow that sent shockwaves through the very ground. "It's...it's like fighting grandfather again," she gasped, her voice laced with disbelief and a touch of fear. Ikem, their grandfather before he ascended always managed to humble them. Now, facing the Zealot, that same awe, that same sense of overwhelming power, was back, but twisted and corrupted.

A faint, ethereal glow emanated from Ash's hand. "The signal's sent," he said, his voice strained. "The kingdom knows. Now we just...wait."

Myrrha leaned against Tula, her strength failing. "Wait for what? Another demonstration of their power?"

"For rescue," Ash replied, his gaze fixed on the horizon. "We can't even fly, let alone teleport in this state."

Across the vast ocean, on the western continent, the scene was eerily similar. The harpy leaders, wings tattered and bloodied, perched on the charred remains of what was once a fertile valley. In its place now lay a vast, dark lake, its surface thick and viscous, writhing with an unsettling sentience.

"By the Great sun," screeched Zeph, one of the harpy leaders, his voice raspy. "That...that thing is mocking us!"

"It's like nothing I've ever seen," added Gale, her usually sharp eyes filled with confusion. "Fire doesn't touch it. Wind just...passes through it."

"He said it was a 'gift'," muttered Stratus, his feathers ruffled in disgust. "A gift of eternal darkness."

"A gift that ruined our lands!" screeched Zeph, his talons digging into the scorched earth. "That Zealot...he was obsessed with leaving his mark"

A younger harpy, Cirrus, spoke hesitantly. "The signal's been sent, Elder. But...will they even believe us? This lake...it's...unnatural."

Gale sighed, her gaze fixed on the writhing lake. "They'll believe us when they see the devastation. Just like they'll believe the stories from other continents."

Stratus shook his head. "This isn't just about power, it's about...ideology. They don't want to conquer, they want to...corrupt."

Zeph looked at the dark lake, its surface reflecting the dying light of the sun. "They want to leave their scars on the world," he said, his voice filled with bitterness. "And they're succeeding."

On the southern continent, Roth's return was a beacon of hope, but the battle was far from over. The Zealot leader, empowered by the blessings of their counterpart, presented a challenge even for Roth's considerable strength. The clash was a whirlwind of power, a dance of destruction that threatened to tear the very land apart. However, the Zealot, realizing they couldn't defeat Roth in a straight fight, resorted to a desperate tactic: targeting Roth's people. Recognizing his fierce protectiveness, the Zealot aimed to exploit this weakness, attempting a kamikaze attack designed to inflict maximum casualties.

Roth, reacting swiftly, managed to intercept and redirect the Zealot's suicidal charge. The resulting explosion was devastating, leaving behind a horrifying legacy. A section of the battlefield was now engulfed in a strange, dark fire. The flames burned with an unnatural hue, casting an eerie glow across the landscape. The heat emanating from the inferno was intense, almost unbearable, and a faint, disturbing whisper seemed to rise from the heart of the blaze, a seductive murmur that tempted those nearby to draw closer. Yet, despite the extreme heat, the fire didn't spread. It remained contained, a localized inferno burning with unnatural intensity and whispering insidious promises.

This dark fire, a product of the Zealot's desperate final act. It was a scar upon the land, a constant reminder of the Zealots' presence and their destructive influence.

Roth stood before the dark flames, his face grim. The unnatural fire crackled and hissed, its whispers slithering through the air, tempting, promising. He could feel the pull himself, the insidious allure of the heat and the strange, seductive murmurs. It was a corruption, a stain on the land, and a constant threat to his people.

"Something has to be done about this," he muttered, more to himself than anyone else.

A few of his vampires approached cautiously, their faces etched with worry. "What can we do, Roth?" one of them, a seasoned warrior named Kael, asked, his voice low. "The fire...it's not natural."

"It's the Zealot's final curse," Roth replied, his gaze fixed on the flames. "A testament to their madness."

"But it doesn't spread," another warrior, Lyra, pointed out. "It just...burns."

"That's what worries me," Roth admitted. "It's contained, yes, but it's also...persistent. And those whispers..." He shook his head. "They're not just noise. They're...suggestions. Temptations."

Kael frowned. "Temptations to what, Roth?"

Roth sighed. "To despair. To madness. To the same fanaticism that drove the Zealots. This fire isn't just a physical threat; it's a spiritual one."

Lyra shivered. "I can feel it, Roth. The pull. It's...unsettling."

"We need to find a way to extinguish it," Roth declared, his voice firm. "But I fear conventional methods won't work".

He then remembered the world spirits "Hope they can do something about this," Roth murmured to himself, the dark flames flickering in his peripheral vision. He knew this was beyond his power, a corruption that required something more, something ancient. With a snap of his wings, he transformed into a bat, launching himself into the twilight sky. Behind him, his people followed suit, a swarm of leathery wings beating against the air as they too shifted into their bat forms, following their leader back to the safety of their home.

Once they were gone, the battlefield fell silent, save for the crackling of the unnatural flames and their incessant whispers. A figure materialized from the shadows, their features obscured by a dark cloak. They moved with an unnerving grace, their presence somehow amplifying the unsettling atmosphere of the place.

The flames, sensing a presence, reacted as if alive. They pulsed and writhed, their whispers growing louder, more insistent. The figure approached the inferno, seemingly unaffected by the intense heat radiating from it. They extended a hand, a single finger outstretched towards the dark flames.

With a disturbing eagerness, the fire leaped forward, latching onto the offered finger. The whispers intensified, swirling around the figure, seemingly communicating, tempting, promising. For a fleeting moment, a flicker of something akin to struggle crossed the figure's hidden face. Then, a blinding flash of light erupted, momentarily illuminating the scene. When the light subsided, the figure's hand was gone, severed at the wrist. The severed hand fell into the heart of the dark flames, consumed instantly.

The figure, unfazed, took a step back, the stump of their arm already beginning to heal. The flesh knit itself back together, the skin closing seamlessly, as if nothing had happened. The figure, their purpose unknown, their motives shrouded in mystery, turned and walked away, disappearing once more into the shadows, leaving the dark flames to flicker and whisper in the desolate silence.

Deep beneath the ocean's surface, in the twin kingdoms of the deep, the Zealots had left their mark. The impact of their passing echoed a historical catastrophe, a dark period etched into the very foundation of their underwater civilizations. Legends spoke of a time before the kingdoms, when the sea was a murky, lifeless expanse, choked with the decaying remains of countless creatures. Now, the Zealots had recreated this horror, though in a new, disturbing form.

The battle's aftermath was a stark contrast, a visual representation of the Zealots' destructive power. One side of the ocean, where the clash had occurred, was a scene of oily, dark pollution. The water was thick and viscous, a swirling mass of black sludge that repelled light and seemed to suffocate all life. It was as if a massive oil spill had occurred, staining the once vibrant underwater world with a dark, suffocating hue.

This polluted zone stood in stark opposition to the surrounding waters, which remained a clear, vibrant blue. The line between the two was sharp, a clear demarcation between life and death, between the natural beauty of the ocean and the corrupting influence of the Zealots.

The dark slick spread slowly, a creeping plague threatening to engulf the remaining pristine waters. The once thriving coral reefs in the affected area were now coated in the thick, black substance, their vibrant colors dulled and muted, their inhabitants either dead or fleeing in terror. The fish that remained swam sluggishly, their movements labored, their scales coated in the oily film.

The godlings of the sea gathered near the border of the tainted water, their faces etched with a mixture of exhaustion and grim determination. The battle against the Zealot leader had been arduous, a desperate struggle that had pushed them to their limits. But even with the victory, a sense of unease lingered. The dark, oily stain that now marred their once pristine waters was a constant reminder of the Zealots' destructive power.

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"By the currents," breathed Coralia, her voice filled with dismay. "The legends...they were true."

"Worse than true," added Delphin, his usually jovial demeanor replaced with a somber expression. "This...this is a catastrophe."

"We won the battle," said Thalassa, her voice firm, attempting to rally their spirits, "but the war is far from over."

"Indeed," agreed Coralia. "This...this contamination. It spreads. We need to contain it, isolate it before it consumes the entire ocean."

"Easier said than done," Delphin pointed out. "Creating a barrier strong enough to hold back this...this corruption...it will require immense power."

"And what about the creatures?" Thalassa added, her gaze sweeping over the schools of fish attempting to navigate around the polluted zone. "The unintelligent ones...they won't understand. They'll swim straight into it."

"We'll need to guide them," Coralia said, her voice filled with determination. "Create pathways, safe routes around the tainted water. It will be a monumental task, but we have no choice."

"This will take all of us," Delphin said, his voice grim. "Every godling, every spirit, every creature with a shred of intelligence. We need to work together if we're going to save our home."

Thalassa nodded. "We'll send out the call. Rally the others. This is not just a fight for our kingdoms, it's a fight for the survival of our entire world."

Meanwhile, high above the eastern continent, Xerosis felt the familiar tug of arrival. A thrill, mingled with anticipation, coursed through her as she emerged from the opulent cabin of her airship. Her gaze, sharp and focused, pierced the swirling clouds below, seeking the legendary peak that marked her destination. It was a mountain spoken of by her cousin Ikem, its summit shrouded in mystery and perpetually veiled by the swirling mists. Even from this distance, she could feel the raw power emanating from it, a silent promise of the wonders – and perhaps dangers – that lay ahead.

With a subtle mental command, Xerosis willed the airship to ascend. The vessel responded instantly, smoothly rising through the turbulent air. Yet, a disquieting sensation began to creep in. Despite the ship's steady climb, the clouds remained stubbornly close, an impenetrable white blanket that refused to yield. Xerosis frowned, her brow furrowing slightly. She had expected to break through the cloud cover long ago, to be greeted by the crisp, clear air of the higher altitudes. Instead, she found herself trapped within a swirling vortex of mist, the air thick and damp. A hesitant unease settled over her. Was this some trick of the mountain, a magical defense designed to deter unwanted visitors?

Shaking off her apprehension, Xerosis focused her will, urging the ship forward. The airship sliced through the dense cloud cover, its prow cutting a path through the swirling white. Time seemed to stretch and distort as they journeyed through the seemingly endless sea of clouds. Then, a glimmer. A faint, ethereal light pierced the gloom ahead, beckoning her closer. Hope flickered within Xerosis. She fixed her gaze on the light, guiding the ship towards it with unwavering determination.

As she drew nearer, the light grew brighter, more defined. The swirling clouds began to thin, revealing glimpses of what lay beyond. It was a breath taking panorama of vibrant green, a tapestry of lush forests stretching as far as the eye could see. Waterfalls cascaded down moss-covered cliffs, their spray catching the sunlight and creating miniature rainbows. Birds of every imaginable color soared through the clear, azure sky, their melodious songs carried on the gentle breeze. Xerosis gasped, her breath catching in her throat. It was a world reborn, a vibrant testament to the power of nature.

The airship continued its forward momentum, smoothly transitioning from the oppressive cloud cover to the open expanse of this new sky. Above her, a different sun shone, not too warm and blinding like the one she knew. Xerosis leaned against the railing, her eyes wide with wonder. Finally, she understood. This was her uncle's realm, the land of the green. And from her vantage point high above, she could see it all, a breathtaking vista of unparalleled beauty and untamed magic. The initial unease she had felt was gone, replaced by a sense of awe and a renewed determination to ascend and have a similar realm.

From her aerial perch, Xerosis drank in the breathtaking panorama of her uncle's realm. It was a world sculpted by nature's own hand, a vibrant tapestry woven with emerald forests, sapphire rivers, and

amethyst mountains. The air itself hummed with a palpable energy, a raw, untamed magic that tingled on her skin. Waterfalls, like ribbons of liquid silver, cascaded down cliffs draped in moss of every shade of green imaginable, from the deep forest hues to the vibrant lime of new growth. Crystal-clear lakes mirrored the sky, their surfaces undisturbed by even the slightest ripple. Flowers, unlike any she had ever seen, bloomed in a riot of color, their petals shimmering with an otherworldly luminescence. The very air seemed to vibrate with the songs of unseen birds, their melodies weaving a symphony of nature's music.

The forests were not mere collections of trees; they were living entities, their leaves rustling in what seemed like a whispered conversation. Sunlight filtered through the dense canopy, dappling the forest floor in shifting patterns of light and shadow, creating an ethereal, almost dreamlike atmosphere. In the distance, mountains rose like jagged teeth, their peaks capped with snow that shimmered like diamonds in the warm sunlight. The rivers snaked their way through the landscape, carving paths through the verdant valleys and feeding the lush vegetation that thrived along their banks. It was a realm of untamed beauty, a place where nature reigned supreme.

But it was one particular sight that truly captured Xerosis's attention, anchoring her gaze. In the heart of the realm, nestled within a secluded valley, stood an awe-inspiring spectacle. A colossal tree, its trunk thicker than any she had ever witnessed, reached towards the heavens, its branches laden with leaves of every imaginable shade of green, from the deepest emerald to the palest jade. It was a being of immense age and power, radiating an aura of ancient wisdom and serene strength. And entwined around its massive trunk, as if it were a living part of the tree itself, was a serpent of equally colossal proportions. Its scales shimmered with an iridescent blend of green and purple, catching the sunlight and creating a mesmerizing display of color.

But the most striking feature of this magnificent creature was its wings. Vast and powerful, they were folded gracefully around the tree, their membranes catching the light and revealing intricate patterns that seemed to shift and change with every movement. The wings, a blend of deep forest green and vibrant amethyst, were tipped with feathers that shimmered like polished obsidian. The serpent, a creature of breath taking beauty and terrifying power, seemed to be in a symbiotic embrace with the ancient tree, a living testament to the harmonious balance of nature.

Xerosis, utterly captivated by the breath taking vista unfolding before her, remained oblivious to the pair of reptilian eyes that had fixed upon her from the heart of the valley. The vibrant greens, the shimmering waterfalls, the sheer untamed magic of the realm had ensnared her senses, drawing her into a world of wonder. She was so absorbed in the spectacle that she failed to notice the subtle shift in the air, the almost imperceptible feeling of being watched.

A sudden shiver snaked down her spine, breaking the spell of her reverie. A voice, clear and surprisingly youthful, spoke from directly behind her. "It's more fun when you head down to join them than staying up here."

Xerosis's breath hitched. Instinctively, her body dissolved into a wisp of blue smoke, a reflexive act of self-preservation. She reappeared a short distance away, her eyes now fixed on the source of the voice. Standing before her was a figure that appeared to be a child, their face beaming with an innocent smile. There was something familiar about the presence, a resonance that tugged at the edges of her memory. The child's brow arched slightly, a hint of amusement flickering in their eyes as they observed Xerosis's startled reaction.

A blush crept up Xerosis's cheeks. She had made a hasty assumption, her mind still caught in the afterglow of the awe-inspiring landscape. "I thought you were... gone, Uncle?" she stammered, her voice tinged with embarrassment.

The child-like figure pointed at themselves, their smile widening. "No, I am not him. I am just a realm consciousness connected to the spirit world of this realm. You can see it as me being another child of his, only I did not come from his... balls." The last part was delivered with a touch of wistful regret, the smile faltering for just a moment before returning to its previous brightness. The child's expression conveyed a sense of longing, a hint of something missing. It was a strange and oddly candid admission, spoken with the guileless honesty of youth, yet carrying a weight of unspoken meaning.

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Xerosis's blush deepened, her thoughts swirling with a mixture of confusion and amusement. This version of her uncle seems a bit unhinged, she mused internally, trying to reconcile the childlike demeanor with the immense power she knew he possessed. The casual mention of his... origins, combined with the touch of melancholy in the child's voice, painted a rather peculiar picture of the God of Nature.

The spirit consciousness, seemingly oblivious to Xerosis's internal turmoil, continued, "We have been expecting you for a while now."

Xerosis's brow furrowed. "We?" she asked, genuinely confused. "I don't know that many people here." Her mind raced, trying to think of who might be waiting for her in this hidden realm. She had come seeking her uncle, but she hadn't anticipated meeting anyone else.

"You will know them soon enough," the child-like clone of Ikenga replied, his smile returning to its full brilliance. "For now, why don't we head down so you can fully experience the realm?" He gestured towards the vibrant world below, his eyes sparkling with anticipation. The invitation was clear, an offer to guide her through the wonders of her uncle's domain and introduce her to those who awaited her arrival.

Xerosis, still slightly bewildered by the encounter with the realm consciousness, decided to accept the invitation. "Alright," she said, a small smile playing on her lips. "Lead the way."

The child-like figure beamed, clapping their hands together. "Excellent! There's so much to see!" With a skip in their step, they turned and began to descend, floating gently towards the valley floor. Xerosis followed, her initial apprehension slowly giving way to a sense of excitement. She dissolved into her blue smoke form once more, reforming as she landed gracefully beside the spirit consciousness.

The tour began. The child, who introduced himself simply as "Ikenga's child" a title Xerosis found both amusing and slightly unsettling, proved to be an enthusiastic and knowledgeable guide. He led her through the whispering forests, pointing out the unique flora and fauna that thrived in this magical realm. He showed her waterfalls that cascaded into pools of crystal-clear water, where fish with scales like shimmering jewels darted among the smooth stones. He introduced her to creatures she had only heard of in legends: six-legged deer with coats of pure white, birds that sang melodies that seemed to weave magic into the air, and butterflies with wings that shimmered with all the colors of the rainbow.

Ikenga's child seemed to know every hidden grove, every secret waterfall, every breathtaking vista. He narrated the history of the realm, sharing stories of ancient spirits and the powerful magic that flowed through the land. He explained the delicate balance of nature, how every creature, every plant, played a vital role in maintaining the harmony of the ecosystem. Xerosis listened intently, her initial reservations about the strange child fading with each new wonder she witnessed. The spirit consciousness, despite their unusual origins, was clearly dedicated to showcasing the beauty and magic of their home.

They explored meadows filled with flowers that glowed with an inner light, their petals unfolding and closing in time with the rhythm of the realm's magic. They climbed gentle slopes to reveal panoramic views of the entire valley, the tapestry of green stretching out beneath them like a living map. Ikenga's child even showed her a hidden grove where fireflies danced in the twilight, creating a mesmerizing spectacle of light and shadow.

As the day progressed, Xerosis found herself relaxing, enjoying the tour and the company of her unusual guide. The initial awkwardness of their meeting had dissipated, replaced by a comfortable camaraderie. Ikenga's child, with their boundless energy and infectious enthusiasm, was doing their best to ensure

that Xerosis had a memorable experience. He seemed genuinely delighted to share the wonders of the realm, their joy in its beauty infectious.

Osi and Boros remained in the shadows, their presence concealed, their forms blending seamlessly with the realm. They watched in silence, their gazes locked onto Xerosis as she followed the child through Ikenga's vast and ever-growing domain. Their interest was not in her journey itself, but in what it represented—the key to ascension. If she could carve a path forward, perhaps they could too.

Yet, for all their patience and discretion, the consciousness of the realm seemed to be aware of their intent. It never once acknowledged them nor guided Xerosis in their direction. Whether this was an act of indifference or deliberate avoidance, they could not say. But it was clear: if they wished to unravel the mystery of ascension, they would have to find their own way.

As the tour of Ikenga's realm neared its conclusion, the child, who had led Xerosis so playfully, came to an abrupt halt. Xerosis stopped just behind him, sensing the shift in the air. The once cheerful and carefree energy surrounding the child was gone, as if stripped away in an instant. In its place was a quiet gravity, something ancient and knowing.

The child turned to her, his gaze sharp, his voice steady.

"For those we are going to meet next, you need a steady and calm mind," he said, his words slow and deliberate. "Never let your emotions guide you, else there is no going back for you, and your path of ascension ends here."

The weight of his words pressed against her like an unseen force. She understood now—this next meeting was not just another step in her journey. It was a threshold, one that, if crossed carelessly, would consume her entirely.

Xerosis opened her mouth to speak, but before she could utter a word, the child simply waved his hand. In response, the ground beneath them shifted, splitting apart like the surface of a still lake disturbed by an unseen force. From the depths of the realm, something new emerged—a world layered upon the one she stood in. It bore similarities to Ikenga's domain, yet something about it was profoundly different.

The energy that bled from this place was unlike mana. It was purer, stripped of elements and definitions, existing beyond the familiar forces of magic and power. It was raw, untouched, and absolute. The child remained silent as he stepped forward, crossing the threshold into the new realm without hesitation.

Xerosis lingered, staring into the open gateway. A strange unease crept into her mind, a whisper at the back of her thoughts warning her of the unknown. But there was no turning back. Swallowing her hesitation, she followed him in, and just as she did, the portal sealed itself shut behind her.

The first sight to greet her was unexpected—deer. But these were no ordinary creatures of the wild. The energy they radiated sent a deep, resonant warmth through her, a feeling she had not experienced since the underworld. It was familiar, almost nostalgic. Her eyes widened in realization. These were the children of Wardenwild—beings tied to an ancient guardian, an agent of her mother who had long since ascended to a spirit.

The last she had heard of Wardenwild, he had been stationed on the southern continent, his watchful presence keeping Murmur at bay, ensuring that no dead souls fell into his grasp. To see his kin here meant that this place was tied to forces far greater than she had anticipated.

Yet, despite this strange sense of familiarity, Xerosis could not shake the feeling that she was being watched. A chill ran down her spine as she surveyed her surroundings. The presence of the deer comforted her, but there was something else—many things, hidden yet aware of her. Her senses, sharp as they were, barely registered them. These entities bore no magical signature, no trace of mana or spiritual resonance, yet they were undoubtedly significant to this place.

Then, she saw them. Hanging from the towering trees of the spirit realm, apelike beings clung to the branches, their piercing gazes locked onto her. They murmured amongst themselves in hushed voices, their fingers pointing in her direction. The sight of them stirred a memory within her—her cousin, the apelings. There was an eerie resemblance, though these creatures carried an ethereal presence, as if they had long since transcended mortal existence.

The beauty of the spirit realm was undeniable. Majestic elemental treants roamed freely, their massive forms pulsing with the essence of nature itself. They acknowledged her presence, some even waving at her with slow, deliberate gestures that she could only interpret as a form of greeting. Their faces, if they could be called that, twisted into what she perceived as smiles.

And yet, despite the breathtaking scenery and the presence of beings tied to her past, comfort eluded her. Something was off. Perhaps it was the subtle but undeniable shift in the child's aura, or maybe it

was the ever-present weight of unseen gazes pressing down on her. A quiet voice at the back of her mind whispered that she did not belong here, that she was an intruder in a realm beyond her understanding.

But it was too late to turn back now.