

New World 291

Chapter 291: A Sovereign

I showed Torix my status, and we read with a vicious hunger.

Becoming a sovereign entails tremendous opportunities, and it entails even greater responsibilities. By accepting this class, you've ushered yourself into the highest echelon of those living. It's similar to attaining godhood, and in that matter, you decide what your reign will represent. Will it be a rule of benevolence or one of annihilation?

You will decide.

Class completion – 100%

The Sovereign is a class oriented around conquering, expansion, and a widescale influence. It is one of the system's highest level classes, and it comes with many benefits that few know of. You will be one of those few, and if you use the benefits offered to you wisely, you can unlock doors that will vastly broaden your overall potential.

Good luck.

Since the Sovereign gives many broad and other specific bonuses, they'll be detailed below using a series of general bonus outliers. This structures the numerous additions, granting you the opportunity to organize all the benefits therein.

I turned to Torix, "They have to sort everything, or else people get lost. Woah."

Torix raised a finger to his skeletal mouth, "Shh. I'm reading it."

I followed suit.

The main benefits of the Sovereign class are as follows:

A Sovereign's skills are without equal, and those that attempt to find the depths of your talent, they will be lost in the ocean they find. A. Doubled learning rate of sovereign skills. B. Doubled ease of sovereign skill formation. C. Sovereign skills enhance other skills. D. After creating a sovereign skill, you gain three more legendary skill slots. This allows three legendary skills and one sovereign skill in total. E. A sovereign skill forms perks based on the kind of owned planets. A Sovereign is defined by what they rule. The stronger and more that they own, the larger their personal influence will become. A. You receive a 1,000 bonus to your level cap for each owned planet. B. Proper maintenance rewards credits.

Ba. 1 million credits per city maintained. Salary received yearly. Bb. 2.5 million credits per region maintained. Salary received yearly. Bc. 100 million credits per planet maintained. Salary received yearly. C. Terraformed and fringe worlds offer additional rewards on top of those mentioned. Ca. Terraformed worlds offer 100 million credits and automatic ownership. Cb. Fringe worlds offer 100 million credits and 25 blue cores. Cc. Forbidden Knowledge – individual runic inscriptions, artifacts, and eldritch are incredibly valuable. Reward-based on the specimen. III. A Sovereign breaks many of the standards and norms placed on others. Where they would find barriers and closed doors, a Sovereign finds open arms. A. You can use, learn of, and speak in the dimensional cipher, a unique runic language. B. You're granted monthly meetings with the local Overseer. Yearly meetings with Schema and Baldowah are permitted. Use them wisely. C. Exile status is now granted after a trial amongst other Sovereigns. You are no longer under the system's mercy. D. Galactic council status obtained. You can join a council that represents the will of Schema's elite. Your vote and voice will decide future laws and changes regarding Schema's future. E. Forbidden research unlocked. You may now study eldritch, Old Ones, AI technology, genetic engineering, and hidden magic. *Must receive a permit from local Overseer during monthly visitations. A Sovereign's social prowess is well beyond notable. They command the spaces around them, dictating the will, thoughts, and drives of others. A. New stat unlocked – Awe | Awe is a stat deciding the application of personal pressure, aura capabilities, resistance to other's awe, and it steadily empowers your guildsmen. B. Perk unlocked – A Ruler's Bearing | This ability triples the radius of auras and AOE abilities. C. Perk unlocked – A Ruler's Wisdom | Grants sharper intuition regarding many vital situations. This includes critical insights to prevent bottlenecks, better understanding of people and their intentions, and better negotiation and trade skills. D. Perk unlocked – A Ruler's Majesty | Charisma granted a 10% bonus, and social skills enhanced in net effectiveness. E. +3,000 to your new awe stat. A Sovereign is unstoppable, a conquerer of all they see. They are granted the might to crush opponents and the persistence to do so for eternity. A. 100% increased total regeneration for health, mana, and stamina. B. 100% increase to health, mana, and stamina totals. C. 20% increase to attribute totals. D. +10,000 to level cap | Current cap: lvl 25,000 E. Entropy mana unlocked. Remember that as a Sovereign, you may no longer push your limits. You will find that you discarded them long ago, and now, all is possible before you. Your enemies will tremble, your allies will revere, and all will know you, for you are legend. We stared at the variety of benefits, many of them unexpected and kind of out there. As the

finalization screen popped up, I turned to Torix, “Welp, I’ll see you on the other side.” Torix stood up, giving me some room, “Let’s assume it’ll be a successful transition.” I pushed the yes button, and an absurd rush of mana coursed through my veins, bones, and mind. The energy flow left my skin heated till it glowed, and the concrete beneath me melted. Sizzling air coursed up from me, creating a wind tunnel in the room. Torix snapped his fingers, creating an insulating barrier from the rest of the room as my class changes took place. Once more, my skin ruptured as uncontrolled growth took place. My blood boiled as I singed the world around me. Time and space bent under the vast energies while gravity warped under my feet. I shook in place, unable to tolerate the overwhelming rush of strength, power, and vitality. I came to life once more, and my senses took the experience in. A dilation occurred around me. It was difficult to describe as if the space I owned increased in size. My reach exceeded the scale of this room now, taking up a reasonable chunk of the mountainside. Both above and below, my surroundings fell into my dominion. My determination here, it was absolute. It gave me a sensation of control, this territory under my will. That change passed, and other alterations took place. My mind sharpened, my weaknesses becoming strengths. It was as if I stood over a vast ocean of potential, and now I gained access to that endless sea. It gave me more words to say, motivation to move forward, and an understanding of people. This lucidity wrapped around me, becoming my new normal. Another augmentation took place after. These invisible chains that stopped me and held me back, they snapped. They opened up new possibilities and horizons that unveiled in an unseen distance. They filled me with a growing sense of hope and a renewed sense of motivation. At that moment, anything was possible. Once more, another phenomenon took hold of me. It was pure, unadulterated mana. It rushed. It poured. It suffused everything, drenching me down to my core. My entire being radiated, a vibration rattling me until my teeth cracked, and my bones disintegrated to powder. The enormous deluge of energy expanded outwards beyond the physical limits of my body. This energy emanated from the area around me, and it diffused with crackling intensity. An ionizing cloud formed throughout nearby space, the air melting. Radiation ebbed from every pore on my skin, and I went blind. I could no longer see, feel, or hear. Everything went numb outside of one sensation – energy, cosmic in size and utter in nature. It left me unable to think, and whether ten seconds passed or a hundred years, I couldn’t have told you. It felt like an eternity wafting in a storm of energy. This energy faded, gradually at first, before sinking into nothingness. It left behind different vigor, one that wasn’t foreign. It was my own. It flickered, snapped, and echoed into the distance. It left a gentle warmth, one contained but forboding a torrent of violent power. It spoke with a voice of madness, an endless hunger that feasted on its own flesh, like an ouroboros that defied nature. It was me. I stood, having fallen to my knees at some point. I stared around me, and Torix stood with his grimoire open. Twenty golems circled my transformation, each golem assisting our lich with an elaborate, runic incantation. Peering around, I found myself in a pile of mush. It was heated plasma, the air sapped from all the space around me. I existed in a vacuum contained by those around me. I lifted a hand, and mana poured out like a cosmic flood. Cold inundated, and the space around me stabilized. Torix and company took a deep breath, no longer needing to contain the volatile energies I emitted. As I walked over towards Torix and my first golem Alpha, their multiple protective barriers fell down. Over them, I loomed

like a titan. I raised a hand, "There we go. It's good that's over with." Torix gawked at me, his skin crawling. I don't know why, but I could tell. To put him at ease, I reached out a hand and put it on his shoulder, "Thank you for keeping the guild safe while I handled my class." Torix nodded, "Yes...disciple." I stepped past them and my golems. The others stared from a distance, Spear peering from behind him. Across the room, he whispered, but I heard every word, "And a monster is born." I ignored him. I'd decide if I was a monster or not. I peered at my followers, and I lifted my hands, "With my class unlocked, I'll be able to crush Lehesion under my feet. Thank you all for helping protect my family here while that happened." I raised a hand, and the Rise of Eden draped out. It went well past its previous limits, covering the entirety of the room. Using its stat-boosting effects as a bolstering agent, I spoke out, "Now, let's get ready for war, everyone." Everybody popped into action, going back to their practices—all besides Torix, who stepped up to me with an inkling of hesitation. I tilted my head, "Are you alright? You seem, I don't know, weird?" My eyes widened, "Was I out for weeks or something?" Torix waved his hands, fumbling with his words, "No, it's been three hours. As for my strangeness, I...I don't know. I-I just, so, well, hm...you feel different. That's all." I grinned at him, "I'm the same." Torix's posture relaxed, but he laughed, "Hah...You're not. That much is certain." "We'll see. Let's inspect my status sheet and come up with some plans moving forward." "But of course." Heading towards Torix's lair, I turned behind me. Reaching out a palm, I restored the missing concrete with gray stone. The vast scar my transformation left would act as a reminder of what any other considerable modifications would do. They would take time, and they might cause more damage than I expected. I noted that, making sure to only handle them post-combat and in a safe place. Once at Torix's lair, he and I hovered on mana derived seating. I opened my status, and we inspected the damage done. It was plenty.

The Living Multiverse(Lvl 15,000(Cap: 25,000) | Current Influence: The Rise of Eden | Class: Sovereign) Strength – 82,480 | Constitution – 102,382 | Endurance – 198,003
Dexterity – 43,942 | Willpower – 160,718 | Intelligence – 101,818 Charisma – 41,950 |
Luck – 57,490 | Perception – 32,921 |Awe – 5,201 Health: 689.2 Million/689.2 Million |
Health Regen: 20.3 Billion/min or 339.0 Million/sec Stamina: Infinite | Ambient Mana
4.001 Trillion Mass: 16.8 Million Pounds(7.6 Million Kilos~) Height: 17'6 (5.33
meters) Damage Res – 99.24% | Dimensional Res – 100% Phys Dam Bonus – 84.4
Million % | Damage Bonus – 40% The Rise of Eden – enhances base stats by 30%,
increased to 40% to allies within aura's radius. Mana Conversion – 6.7 Billion
mana/min siphoned into runes and armor. Many of my stats ballooned from the class.
The health and mana bonuses did most of the work, making my health regeneration
absurdly high. It would only take two seconds to fully recuperate from a deadly attack.
At this point, killing me would be damn difficult for even someone like Yawm. I
couldn't die in one hit, after all. The stat bonuses increased in a much more linear
manner. They all boosted up, charisma and willpower in particular. As for everything
else, I received respectable boosts in everything. The attribute bonus was the reason for
that, along with all my attribute conversions. Combine that with my cipher bonuses,
and every stat I owned stood towering over most specialized mains. Well, besides for
awe. Wielding my new torrents of mana, I lifted a hand, squeezed it, and reached out
my fingers. As I did, a quintessence crystal expanded outward. I bisected it using
slicing, telekinetic panels. I pulled those pieces apart, hovering them millimeters from

each other using hundreds of gravity wells. Turning to Torix while raising my eyebrows, “Well...It was worth the wait, I suppose.” Torix’s eyes flared white, and he stayed speechless. He shrugged, “Every stat is at least three times higher than mine. That’s incredible, you know. Way to steal my thunder after gaining my class.” I smiled, “Come on now, I couldn’t match that evil speech you gave. It left our guildsmen chilled.” Torix shook his head, “Nice attempt at deflection, but I can’t understand your stats anymore. The numbers, they’re difficult to comprehend. You can generate, let me see, ah yes, 3,000 times as much mana as me. Excellent. Just superb. I am a mage class, after all. It only goes to reason that you’d have an army of me’s worth of health regen.” I nodded at my stat sheet, “I do agree that my stats are getting out of hand. I think this is my last big net gain, outside of my sovereign skill to be fair. And elemental furnaces. And speaking in the cipher. You know what, I think my dimensional skills are unexplored too. Ah man, the fused mana type, I could use that too. It mentions entropy here.” Torix deadpanned, “Yes, this must be the last part of your exponential growth. Your reassurance just now was comforting in that regard.” I rolled my eyes, “I appreciate the sarcasm.” Torix stared up, “I do wonder if you could face a Spatial Fortress now? Your stats seem up to it. That much is certain.” I raised a hand, “I...I don’t know. Maybe?” Torix let his hands flop against his sides, “Time will tell, I suppose. Regardless of your new potential, I say we develop a plan for using those sovereign bonuses. They mentioned many perks I hadn’t expected.” I opened my status. It turned blurry for a moment before it changed colors to red, like an Overseer’s HUD. I rolled my shoulders, “Well, damn. Looks like I’m moving up.” “Certainly. I say we move in order, handling each bonus from your class to maximize this discussion’s orderliness. What do you say to that?” I nodded in silent agreement. Torix pointed at my status, “In the beginning, it mentions sovereign skill augments. How close are you to gaining one of those skills?” I furrowed my brow, “I don’t know. I have two legendaries, three mythicals, and seven unique skills. I don’t really know how I’d fuse my mythicals, but it should be possible. Hunter of Many is primarily about, you know, hunting. I could manage to do that while using Matter Conversion easily. The same could be said for A Manifold Mind.” “You sound as if there’s a large however incoming.” I pushed two of my fingertips together, “I don’t see A Manifold Mind and Hunter of Many making a legendary skill. They could, in theory, but I think it wastes my potential. I could use that legendary slot on something more important, like primordial mana. I’m pretty damn sure that mana type is important for my future progress.” “Ah yes, your auras are dictated by your mana types. You could also use your other, strongly integrated legendary skills to bolster your lack of primordial mana knowledge. Speaking of which, how goes that studying?” I frowned, “Poorly. It’s still a struggle. I can’t seem to understand it.” Torix nodded, “You’ll get it, certainly. Pushing that aside, do you have any plans regarding your future skill development?” I opened my skill menu, pointing at my uniques, “So, here’s what I’m thinking. Artisan of Destruction is a new skill of mine. It’s handy since it helps me make golems. Fusing that together with other skills is very important. I think that primordial mana will be unique, like all the other advanced mana types. Considering all of that-“ I waved my hand at all my other unique skills, “I’ll level with you. I don’t really know what to fuse it with next.” Torix pointed at Mass Manipulation, “What of this one? It seems rather useful.” “That skill has a deceiving name. It lets me shrink or expand myself. I think it

would kill most people, or at least discomfort them.” “It would allow you to dictate the size of your creations better, would it not?” I tapped my chin with a knuckle, “I guess. Hmm, it could be good with primordial mana. I might make denser stones or specific kinds of materials better. Primordial is origin and dominion mana, after all, and it should give me even more control over whatever I create. That could be useful with detail-oriented work.” “I agree. I believe this would be the most pertinent skill for fusing. That you have at the moment, at least.” “That’s the next milestone then. After that, what about the planet owning bonuses from the class. What do you think of those?” Torix scoffed, “Oh, all of that is simple. We will conquer a wide swath of the known universe. That much is to be expected of us now, given our net abilities.” I blinked, “Huh...galactic conquerors? It sounds cool and all, but that’s pretty aggro.” “Indeed. That is precisely why I enjoy it.” I pointed at the fringe and terraformed world bonuses, “I get that, but how about we try this instead? I don’t want to crush other species under my foot, and if I learned anything from Blegara, it’s that managing even a simple planet is hard. If we make a settlement from the ground up, we decide how it develops.” Torix leaned back, crossing his arms, “Do you believe we have the means for it?” I remembered the giant rift on Blegara, funneling untold volumes of water onto its surface. “Yeah, I do.” “Then we’ll do as you say, guildleader.” Torix pointed at the last segment of the planet owning section, “I see Obolis must’ve specialized in this particular section. He loves searching out secrets and the like.” I analyzed my memories, finding Obolis’s one message. I shook my head, “He has a different class. It’s called the Founder.” “Perhaps it’s a rare variant of Sovereign?” “Yeah, it could be. We don’t have enough knowledge to say. Either way, these special privileges seem pretty spicy if I do say so myself.” “Oh, most definitely. They remind me of my ability to learn the cipher.” I facepalmed, “Duh, how’d I forget that. I’ll teach you that for an hour a day, like our mind magic duels.” Torix’s eyes turned green, “Thank you, disciple. A teacher’s greatest joy is to learn, especially from those they once taught.” I jeered, “You didn’t have the teachers I had at my school, then.” I pointed at the third section of my sovereign bonuses, “So...When should we start our meetings with the Overseer and Schema? I’ve had a few, but I’m imagining this is more like a way of stating grievances or something.” Torix tilted his head, “It would likely, at the very least, act as an excellent forum for asking questions. You could learn a lot if we spent some time asking for the right answers, especially from Baldowah. I remember Yawm’s runes. Perhaps we could use that forbidden knowl-“ “No. I’m not doing that.” Torix shrank in my vision, recoiling some. I looked away, “I mean, I’d really enjoy not doing that, if you know what I mean.” “Of course...I won’t speak of it again.” A strained silence passed over us before I pointed at my status again, “So, uh, it looks like I won’t get exiled out of the blue anymore.” Torix jumped for an opportunity to end the awkwardness, “Oh, most certainly. That is, it’s quite the boon. I don’t know if it will be a legitimate court, but it’s better than nothing.” I nodded, pointing at the galactic council part, “And look at this shit. I’m a member of a galactic council. Me of all people?” “Hah, my disciple has joined an echelon I knew nothing about. Excellent. Superb. Tremendous and all that.” Torix and I stared at our status screen before laughing at how ridiculous we sounded. I shook my head, “Man, I never imagined I’d be here. Ever.” “Me either. I believed I’d be studying on my moon base until the day time stopped and the universe grew cold. Now, I am a part of a guild with tremendous potential.

Considering our capabilities, we should be able to enact tremendous change.” I narrowed my eyes, “Yeah, I could be an actual Harbinger of Cataclysm.” “Gah, I remember mocking you for that name. Now, it seems more than fitting.” I simpered, “Hah, it still feels off to me.” Torix shrugged, “In actuality, it matters more what others think of that title. I can assure you now, it’s difficult to imagine you as anything else.” “Yeah, thanks for that. I don’t think my view of myself has changed as much as I have. I still think of myself as similar to what I started, but in reality, I’m worlds apart. Either way, what about these new research options? What do you think about all that?” “Oh, I’m most certainly excited. I’ll be exploring a few of the more malicious avenues of necromancy, but that isn’t all. I’ll be implementing more of the eldritch augments we’ve found.” I raised a brow, “What other eldritch boosts do we have?” “The Omega Strains.” “They’re eldritch?” Torix leaned back, “Well, in a manner of speaking, yes. They seem to be a primordial, primitive evolutionary step towards eldritch. The strains are the eldritch equivalent to what viruses are to us. Not quite dead and not quite living, yet they still enact their will on life. That is what the Omega Strain acts as.” “Yeah, Amara might be able to help us ally with other eldritch too. If Schema allows it.” Torix scoffed, “Could that AI even stop us now?” I remembered the forced eclipse created by a Spatial Fortress’s arrival, “I think he can. For now.” Torix steepled his fingers, “We shall see. Now, I sense this new awe stat of yours. It definitely creates an aura about you that wasn’t present before.” “What’s the difference?” I lifted my arms, giving them a close look, “I don’t see it.” “It’s less that you’re different and more so that your abilities are more readily apparent. Before, you seemed like an average person granted an extraordinary opportunity. In that way, you abused your circumstances to the fullest, but you always came across as mostly normal.” I scoffed, “Sheesh, people could’ve fooled me into thinking the opposite. Half the time, I feel like a demon.” Torix waved a hand, “No matter what you appear to be, your actions will still speak volumes. Those that saw you in action will most certainly have their opinions swayed. Now, even those that haven’t seen your capacity will be put at a disadvantage. At the very least, they’ll experience even greater discomfort than normal.” I frowned, “Huh, I don’t know if I like that.” “It’s the reality we now face, however. Regardless, those combat bonuses appear to have vastly exceeded what they mention. What is your mana generation now? Ten times higher than before or something silly like that?” I waved my hand, “I lost track of all my multipliers long ago. I’m just glad that Schema does all the math for me instead.” Torix stood from his chair of dominion mana, “That leaves the last of this discussion – the entropy mana. Is that, perhaps, all manas fused together?” I opened a dictionary using my status, “It shouldn’t be. Entropy is about decay and chaos. Most of the manas are more about order and control.” Torix walked back and forth, “Then perhaps it’s some kind of...er...I don’t know. That might be a question worth asking the Overseer or Schema.” I winced, “Or maybe even Baldowah. I could ask them about a lot of this stuff.” “We’ll come up with a list of questions for it.” Torix reread the sections before letting out a quick sigh, “Well then, I’d say that about covers it. Ten times mana. Far stronger, heavier, faster, and you have this weight about your presence. It’s outright oppressive, I might add.” I nodded, “And I have a lot more options moving forward. I won’t be reliant on the Empire for that anymore.” “That about covers that. We need to prepare for our siege of Blegara.” I bopped myself up by stomping one foot. I transferred that force with telekinesis, pushing myself upward. Turning towards him, I

rolled my shoulders, “Sounds about right.” As I stepped out of the lair, a bit of stone over Torix’s room cracked. A few crumbs fell out, and before I left, Torix pointed at it, “My stone generation is still quite iffy. Would you mind assisting me in recreating this?” I nodded, waving a hand over the stone’s wound. It reconstructed, the color identical to the surrounding rock. Torix whipped out some primordial mana, making several vines and mosses nearby grow into the empty space. It got me curious, so I stepped up, “How did you learn about primordial mana anyway?” “Oh, this? After unlocking my archmage class, I got the inkling suspicion that my approach had been all wrong up to that point. You see, I’d attempted copying other people’s primordial mana, and each one of them would tell me something different.” Torix raised one hand, speaking in a gruff voice, “You must wish for the growth of others, but in your way.” His voice grew lighter, “You must treat the object as if it were a tool with a mind. Respect and control, in equilibrium.” Torix threw his hands up in frustration, “Regardless of how I managed my thoughts, primordial mana never arrived for me. It was only when I tried making the mana using my own, original thoughts that I conceived the power.”

“Huh...so what were your thoughts?”

Torix cackled, “Hah, well, I simply imagined erasing the mind of my creatures and recreating them in my image. A better image.” Torix snapped his fingers, creating primordial mana,

“Eureka, my conundrum was solved.”

“I’ll give that a shot. Mimicking hasn’t really worked so far for me either.”

“Good luck with your efforts then, disciple.”

I stepped out of the room, thinking it was weird the stone cracked over Torix. Either way, it led to a helpful conversation with the lich, so I counted it as a lucky coincidence. Either way, I had plenty to do before we invaded Blegara. We needed rings for every Omega Strain user, more golems, and armor for the gialgathens. As I created multiple consciousnesses, I smiled with confidence.

It was time to see how much of a difference a class made in practice.

Chapter 292: A Manifold Mind Applied

Using my new skill, I brainstormed while walking toward Mt. Verner’s surface. At this point, I had quite a few options at my disposal, and using them all well would make a

world of difference. Keeping that in mind, I sat down in my usual golem building spot. There, I drafted up a few strategies and techniques for saving time.

My first good idea came from my newfound aura range. At this point, my dimensional wakes were no longer only for my personal use. These enhancing areas could cover immense distances, affecting thousands of people at once. Most importantly, I could augment others with Rise of Eden, which gave them extra stats.

Therefore, where I worked mattered, and I changed work stations. The golem creating crew did good work, no doubt, but it was a team of twenty people. The engineers used the extra stats from Rise of Eden well, but there simply wasn't enough of them. Considering my golem making station required no machinery or buildings, moving workplaces was easy too. I was the end all be all for golem creation, so I moved into the forest above the Omega Strain users.

There, the once-abandoned tunnel acted as my main aura center. Using a bit of eyeballing, I positioned myself to get in range of the super golems and the strain users. This put me in a great spot, affecting hundreds of rapidly growing members, maximizing my aura's utility. The forest served as a serene background for my work too, the sounds of birds and wildlife calming me down.

Yup, nature was incredible.

Planting myself into this position, I crushed the trees around me under a gravitational panel. They pulped into heated syrup, the water within boiling from the extreme pressure. Solidifying the mass with the grasp of my fist, I created a condensed blob of organic matter. Event Horizon culled it, disintegrating the life surrounding me for one hundred feet in every direction. It could go further, but that's all the space I needed.

I motioned my arm sideways, creating a sheet of stone around me. At five feet thick, it acted as a foundation. Using telekinetic drills paired with gravity wells, I bored hundreds of holes through this giant pad of rock. Liquid steel siphoned into these crevices before I sent a gravitational pulse through the mass. This pulse straightened the uneven layers of the steel, orienting them all in the same direction.

Right behind that gravity, I pulsed out intense cold, freezing the steel in the appropriate alignment. A sheet of metal over the floor followed, using the same building strategy. I created steel girders above those, rising up just below the trees. Lifting my arms, glass

pooled between these columns. Looking up, I passed a hand over my head, making a roof of stone over me.

With an enclosed space finished, I walked forward, slicing through the glass with superheated, telekinetic contact points. A rectangular slice fell forward as I walked out of my enclosure. Lifting myself above it, I stared down, thinking of ways to disguise this place. I created a raised edge around the entire roof before filling it with a five-foot layer of dirt. Uprooting and replanting trees, I simulated the nearby environment above my golem making domicile.

Pacing back inside, I lined the glass doorway with a layer of steel. At the same time, I cleaned up the enclosure, making it neat and orderly. Finishing that, I peered around. The whole place leaked in natural light from all directions, but it was dark. That wasn't optimal for detail-oriented work, and the dirt above pressured the site. This meant even mild gusts of wind made forboding creaks throughout the structure's framing.

Aiming to reinforce, I lifted my hands, creating pillars. Making another circle within, these metal columns supported the roofing. Connecting them with steel barring, I traced out a simple pattern onto the ceiling, making the steel 'flow' a bit. Lifting my hand, chains of black steel appeared, and at their endpoints, metal, waning moons cropped up. At the bottom of these crescents, I flattened them out, giving them platforms. Creating quintessence, white crystals spawned on these places, giving this place clear, efficient lighting.

I did the same to the outer pillars, giving this place a post-industrial yet magical vibe. Staring around, I liked it quite a bit. It lacked Torix's retro stylings since I kept it so minimal. At the same time, the subtle accents I put up helped give the place warmth. I didn't want this place to feel cold, after all.

Mulling it over, I resolved to give the engineers at the top of Mt. Verner a similar abode. They'd wake up to a brand new workstation, and that might make their workflow better too. Putting that aside, I walked outside. Using a robust and dense gravity well, I burrowed a hole towards the tunnel below. This crushing process reverted dirt back into stone, making the water within evaporate in plumes of steam.

Pulling the dirt out of my path, I passed through this new shaft, and I reinforced the walkway with stairs, stone, and steel. Crashing through the concrete below with the flick of a finger, I found a work crew using drills and cement mixers to make new rooms in the abandoned tunnel. I gave them a thumbs-up before carving a name into the tunnel I just made.

‘The Golem Center’

I put my hands on my hips, admiring my penmanship. All the carving helped out here, giving my lettering a fancy edge, but either way, I walked through the hallway towards the golem’s training room. Etching its new name beside the door, I walked in to find Spear training our troops as always. I gestured to ten golems, and they followed me out while I gave Spear a wave. He gave me a slight bow before resuming their training.

We leaped back up to my golem center. With the new workplace handled, I turned towards the golems. They’d act as my assistants, holding up certain parts and whatnot so that I didn’t have to float every piece of every golem. Using humans would’ve been preferred, but they’d literally explode since these golem parts were glowing hot half the time.

Giving my golem assistants a simple set of directions, I plotted some other refinements to golem making with a different consciousness. Peering around, several new departments formed in my head. I could make many golem eyes, cores, limbs, runes, and bodies at once. Doing so multiplied my productivity, and I scoped out methods of doing that while coming up with a few other adjustments.

Once finalized, I revved my elemental furnace to full power, having plenty of mental capacity to spare. I put another mind onto skin ripping duty, my ability to regenerate far exceeding my ability to tear my skin. Yet another consciousness tasked itself with melting the generated metal. More minds compiled, and I made a dozen of myself focus on elementary parts of the golem building operation.

While getting these minds intent on complex, dynamic assignments overburdened them, my fractured mind handled simple chores productively. They worked better than I did at full force because these fragmented parts of myself, they lacked the extra mental capacity for boredom. That’s part of why I hadn’t split up golem making into so many tasks before this. It was for my own quality of life.

I mean, who wanted to do the same thing over and over again? Not me, at least typically. In the case of these miniature minds, they handled the grunt work while I kept everything together. This also stretched the limits of what A Manifold Mind could do, which trained the skill. That was good since I wanted that mythical ability to be as strong as possible.

This process also exposed the skill's limits. I couldn't make infinite minds at full power, so at most, three to four of them revved at around 70% efficiency. Yeah, that was still an unreal efficiency boost, but I wasn't going to net something crazy like a one hundred times faster golem making process.

I wanted to, however, so I pushed my limits. Eventually, I hit a wall where any more minds formed would make my mental capacity minuscule. So tiny, in fact, that they'd be unable to accomplish anything. It was kind of scary, as once I split myself apart, it became difficult to pull myself back together. I could end up like a confused Hydra, walking around with innumerable heads but no central brain for functioning.

Keeping that in mind, I made sure one thought stream was large enough to fuse the others back together. Operating within those bounds, I got myself back to work. Each part of myself handled different aspects of the process, and my super golems ran simple stuff simultaneously. For my material gathering, I gave strips of skin to one golem to hold. Another golem helped hover these strips up as I melted them. Several other golems then suspended different parts of the golem.

Once those parts solidified, another golem floated the pieces into their proper arrangement. A different super golem pulled parts of the heated mass and used my gyrating ball technique to make spheres. He got out ten at a time, and the largest of my minds charged the runes for cipher inscriptions onto those cores.

This energizing process took up the majority of my mental effort. Invigorating the cipher required holding a certain mindset the entire time, and doing so required concentration. From that difficulty and others, I learned a lot. For one, splitting up the tasks like this showcased details about golem making. Some parts took up many times more mental capacity than others.

For instance, most of the molding parts required minuscule amounts of attention. The material was good, and it required little shaping or precision. On the other hand, charging runes for several cores at once took up at least half of my mental faculties. Handling this many golems at once also exhausted me. After a few hours of this work, I needed an actual, genuine break for once.

This wasn't just a pause without cause; my mind needed some rest. To help get my mind refreshed, I walked through nature for a bit, clearing my head. This left me rejuvenated to start up once more after fifteen minutes. I continued this cycle, generating golems at a rapid pace. These refinements built on one another and my skills

accelerated the growth too. At the same time, I empowered my legions below using Rise of Eden.

After a few days, I completed another facility during the night for the engineers, enjoying the job change. I kept this cycle up for the next week, falling into a work heavy trance. Days and nights passed, but I kept my head down, grinding the entire time. It left me fulfilled since I used my full abilities for once. Unlike what I'd done recently, I couldn't let up while making golems, at least like this. It required every bit of my faculties; else, I made common mistakes the entire time.

It left me tired by the end of the week, but I was proud of what I accomplished. I kept up contact and calls with Althea, Torix, and my primordial teachers as well. In line with that progression, I quintupled my golem production, creating two hundred or so warriors. As I focused in, I lost the exact count. They were many, however.

Those super golems improved over my last design, being registered as level 14,000 by Schema. This wasn't from a design fix but merely from my raw stat total rising. After all, their materials improved as mine did. This gave me a delicate balance after this. I needed levels for more stats, and that would permanently make my golems better.

Keeping that in mind, I bided my time while getting ready for Blegara's siege. I handled other business while this passed as well. The gialgathens' armor took up less time than the golems since they required no cipher etching. Basically, the Omega Strain rings took literal minutes since I could mass produce a hundred with each batch. I just made them like Ophelia's ring, and it made our guildsmen stronger.

That was a point worth mentioning; their strength was my own. Even more so, my guild peoples' letters gave me a lot of motivation. Some of their thank you letters just floored me. These ordinary, everyday people evolved from the ring's stat boosts alone, not even mentioning the powers they granted.

For specific individuals, the Omega Strains made them even more potent too. It gave me a smile on my face, seeing how our guild saved a family or helped someone find their way. That transparency for what I accomplished, it kept me going strong. It was hard to burn out when I was getting this much fuel to keep going.

Either way, we prepped everything for Blegara by the end of the week. I gave myself a break for a few hours before the siege, and that's why I leaned against my golem center, looking at the stars. Everyone else rested while my mind wandered endlessly. I glanced

at the lights above and wondered what planets were there. It was awe-inspiring, which made me feel smaller, but in a good way.

Waking me from this trance, a message from Obolis appeared.

Obolis Novas, the Finder of Secrets(lvl 24,629(Cap: 27,000) | Class: Founder | Guild: The Empire) – I hope you're doing well, Harbinger. To skip further pleasantries, I ask you to forgive my bluntness – my ability to wait is waning. We lose throngs of albody every day, many of my people dying. The war effort is far from over, but the heavy losses and lack of progress are killing morale. I promised my people you'd help us. They are beginning to doubt.

As am I.

While I understand you are caught in your own machinations, I ask that you hurry with your tasks at hand. We need the ahcorus to assist us. Further delays might mean our undoing, and to prevent that, I ask you to go to Svia and speak with Wrath. I can facilitate that meeting if required.

Please respond forthrightly.

I flinched while reading his message. He was definitely right about me taking my sweet time starting his mission. I opened my own status, feeling guilty given the situation,

Daniel Hillside, The Harbinger of Cataclysm(lvl 15,000(Cap: 25,000) | Class: Sovereign | Guild: The Harbinger's Legion) – Hey, sorry. I'll lease ten of my super golems right now as an apology. What would be a fair offer for you?

A message popped up within seconds.

Obolis Novas, the Finder of Secrets(lvl 24,629(Cap: 33,000) | Class: Founder | Guild: The Empire) – Well, I can see you've gained a class, a variant of the Ruler class at that. Welcome to the council, and I could help you arrive there with the correct impression if you'd like. Just as well, I pray that your strength will be in our favor.

For the golems, I am willing to pay 1 million credits per golem, per month leased. I can send those payments preemptively if required.

That was enough money to buy quite a few dungeon cores, something I still needed after blowing my fortune on red ones. At this rate, I could chip away at my core fulfillment while helping the guy out. It was a win-win situation.

Daniel Hillside, The Harbinger of Cataclysm(lvl 15,000(Cap: 25,000) | Class: Sovereign | Guild: The Harbinger's Legion) – That sounds good to me. Before that, can we meet up soon for the Blegara transferral? I want to start a siege there before heading over to Svia. With a bulwark made, I think we can gain some serious ground there over time. That helps us both.

Obolis Novas, the Finder of Secrets(lvl 24,629(Cap: 33,000) | Class: Founder | Guild: The Empire) – I shall make it so. Can you have an arrangement now? I'm at my study, and I'm currently busying myself between two other meetings, which are something I'm not particularly fond of. They are an unfortunate necessity given my position.

I looked around, finding myself just loafing around for once. The stars shined overhead, satisfying fatigue washing over me. Yup, I definitely had time.

Daniel Hillside, The Harbinger of Cataclysm(lvl 15,000(Cap: 25,000) | Class: Sovereign | Guild: The Harbinger's Legion) – Here are my coordinates. We can hash this out real quick—also, meetings. I have so many of those nowadays, so I can understand your pain.

I waited for a few seconds before a portal popped up in my vision. Through it, Obolis's personal study showcased itself again in all its glory. Amidst the luster of foreign ores, the sheen of rare armors, and the solemn quiet of his underground bastion, I paced through. On the other side, the fur over Obolis's neck stood on end as I strode in.

He peered up from his work slowly, eyeing me with an air of suspicion. His eyes widened before he returned to his usual, unshakable confidence. Obolis steeped his fingers,

“Well, you appear quite different. I've heard the phrase that a class changes people. You appear to embody the sentiment.”

I stepped up to him, “It helped me out, in more ways than one. It took a long time to unlock as well, but it was worth the wait. I’m not the only one making progress, though. You gained a few levels too since I last saw your message.”

Obolis raised his eyebrows, “That is inevitable, given my ongoing war with Elysium. Though I am adept in combat relative to most, I never fancied myself as a warlord like some Rulers. I prefer a more economic and informational form of combat. I’ve found it works well, and it requires far fewer sacrifices and compromises than most battles. That being said-“

Obolis leaned forward, “I find myself in need of a fighter, and soon. When can I expect your help with the ahcorus?”

“A week.”

Obolis leaned back before mulling over some information in his head. He nodded, “That’s acceptable. Your super golems should act as buffers until then. I would prefer a quicker arrival, however.”

At this point, my class’s changes showcased their results. I found myself staring at Obolis with ease, no pressure coming my way. Whether from my new awe stat or only from the other attributes, his presence didn’t command me as it once had. If anything, I sensed the opposite. While Obolis controlled his body language and inflection without fail, his body reacted like prey.

His heart rate rose. His fur bristled. His eyes dilated. I found signs all over that he was struggling internally while he downplayed the difference my class made. He was one of the few people I could talk to without exerting this passive pressure, so an inkling of sadness crept up my chest. I held it down as I raised an eyebrow,

“How many elemental furnaces could I expect to get by the end of our deal?”

Obolis leaned back, staring at his claws for a second. He calmed himself, and he no longer showed those same signs. I let out a sigh of relief while he tapped his talons on his desk. He stated,

“I can grant you eight.”

I tilted my head, “How about ten?”

“I need them for the war I’m waging. They don’t grow on trees, as you are already well aware.”

I leaned back, “Hmm, I wanted the furnaces before since they multiplied my mana growth. They don’t multiply my mana anymore, however. My mana generation exceeds the furnaces now, so I don’t need one of them anymore. I need many.”

Obolis’s eyes widened, “I see...Then what else could I offer you in their place? I can’t afford to turn them over, but there are other resources at my disposal.”

I raised a hand, “You know plenty of different worlds, right?”

“Yes. I’ve parsed the stars many times in my pursuits. What do you need to know in particular?”

I spread out my arms, “Can you give me the coordinates for a few worlds close to being terraformed and aren’t overly...I don’t know how to say this, ‘fringed’ I guess? I want to convert dangerous worlds, and I’ll colonize them instead of taking over established places.”

“Ah, you mean like Blegara? The eldritch rule, but not overly so...Hm, you’d probably be searching for a world more infested than theirs, however. Something more like the ahcorus, where Plazia rules deep underground. By freeing those places, you add to the galactic volume of planets instead of fighting for what’s already there. Noble, but difficult.”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what I’m trying to do.”

“I can arrange that. I even own several solar systems where those barren worlds reside. I’ve considered terraforming them myself, but the economics simply didn’t go in my favor. That overruled any other reason for colonization. Your golems could act as pseudo Fringe Walkers, however. If you can find the necessary resources, you may be able to feed a planet as well.”

I reached out a hand, “Give me ten of those planets and the resources to terraform. Do that, and I’ll settle on five furnaces. You can even choose fringe worlds near your own planets. I’ll take those, clean them for you, and your worlds will be safer for it. If you have them, I need terraforming information as well. Anti-fringe world procedures and documentation would also help.”

Obolis stood before interlocking his hands behind himself. He walked through his chambers, staring at the unfully formed Ruhl to his left,

“I could arrange that. There exists a gas giant in our home system, one rich in oxygen. Harvesting those gases could grant atmospherically poor worlds the option to thrive. Water exists on Blegara, and that will do for now. You could bring life from other worlds as the start of these ecosystems if required.”

Obolis shook his head, “I would need further compensation for such a transaction, however. Worlds, as you may imagine, are difficult to come by. Could you guarantee trade deals with us on your settled planets to facilitate the deal?”

“Trade deals like the ones for Blegara, where the albonys are first come, first serve?”

He gave me a gentle grin, “You know, I preferred negotiating with you when we first met. Now, it’s become quite the ordeal, where many variables are at play.” Obolis reached out a clawed hand, tapping the glass,

“But it is interesting to bounce all these possibilities around in my head. I could offer you the worlds for that sort of exchange. If I do so, you’ll be required to clear the fringe worlds first for my planet’s security. That will make this arrangement feasible, and as you mentioned, I may offer worlds that passively benefit mine as well. It’s always a blessing when fringe worlds aren’t nearby. The eldritch that spawn can be world ending horrors.”

Obolis turned to me, “As you’ve seen.”

I remembered the Spatial Fortress, and it would be even worse if it was uncontained. Pushing that aside, I kept the conversation rolling by reaching out a hand,

“Do we have a deal then?”

Obolis shook his head, “You’re not one for chatter. Hmm, I can arrange this. I’ve also drafted up the documentation for Blegara’s transferral to you. It comes with a contract that I had shortened for ease of understanding. Not every individual may be a system lawyer, as you know, so I kept that in mind.”

I nodded, “Send it over. I’ll read it.”

Obolis fiddled with his status, and the message popped up. I opened the documentation, and it carried a hundred-page long abstract detailing the contract. I frowned, “Ok, so this is the shortened version?”

Obolis laughed, “Hah, did you think a contract for a planet would be insignificant?”

“Not really, but maybe the shortened version wouldn’t be a half-hour read.”

I narrowed my eyes, staring at the document.

“Or maybe three minutes. Huh...”

I spread out ten consciousnesses, and I opened twelve pages at the same time. Pulling them all to reading, I got a grip on the deal’s contents within five minutes. Closing out all the abstract, I raised an eyebrow,

“It mentions an embassy in the capital and that the albony there isn’t punishable by the laws on Blegara. Why?”

Obolis leaned back, “I see you’ve been working on your mind as of late. Hmm, the reasoning for that legal practice is the differences in culture. The Vagni carry strange, nonsensical laws. I don’t want my citizens to be at their mercy should they break the local customs. In subsection B6, you’ll note the albony there are still subject to the Empire’s laws, which are more than stringent, I assure you.”

“Alright, just making sure.”

I reread the document a few times, and my different minds argued back and forth, presenting the pros and cons here. After ten minutes, I came to a consensus – this was the deal we arranged. However, I wrote up an addition to the contract, one written in the cipher. It was a simple yet effective section about good faith, where both of us were held accountable for our earlier conversation.

Now, I wasn't the biggest fan of cipher contracts. My deal with Yawm put me in a terrible position with Schema, but at the same time, I understood their value. The cipher relied heavily on intent, and that's exactly what I needed. I didn't want Obolis to rope me into some ridiculous, fine print using his lawyers. This, er, addendum ensured I wasn't getting cheated, and it saved me a lot of time since I didn't need to reference a lawyer for it.

While I planned it out, I waved at Obolis, "Give me a minute. I need to add something to the contract."

Obolis nodded, "Certainly."

Obolis worked as I ironed out the cipheric inscription in my head. He held a meeting where he spoke about various dealings on his worlds, learned about war fronts, and discussed new leads for expeditions. He still kept pertinent details silent, using the thought based messaging system from Schema. It was interesting seeing how he managed everything, however.

As I finalized the cipheric inscription in my grimoire, Obolis paced up and watched me write. We talked while I etched.

Obolis murmured, "That is by far the strangest grimoire I've ever seen. It's...metallic, and the different colored pages serve different purposes, do they not?"

"They do. One's for cipher documents while the other pages are for normal runic work."

"I imagined you'd be more of a brute regarding this kind of task. You actually carry quite a bit of talent for this, at least as far as I can tell."

I frowned, "Thanks, I guess."

Obolis leaned over towards my ciphering, “You write out the lines, and I can trust them. That, that is a rare thing for me to do, and it speaks to your ability.”

I shrugged, “I figured out a long time ago that I was good at runes. I beat out Torix in them despite him being better at ‘bookish’ stuff. According to Helios, you’re quite good with the cipher as well. You made his gauntlet.”

“Hm, in a manner of speaking, yes. That was based on other elemental furnaces I’d seen rather than my own work. Beyond that, I can manage simple inscriptions involving most topics, but creating depth with it is still beyond my grasp. I feel this as a mental block more than one in ability.”

“Why would you hold yourself back?”

Obolis closed his eyes, “I’ve seen the cipher’s consequences first hand, and I’d rather not deal with them, despite the tempting rewards it offers.”

I finished the etching, “Ok, I can understand that. The runes are scary as all hell. I remember Yawm was covered in them, and they warped his mind, body, even his soul. He wouldn’t have been as...unhinged, otherwise. I’d hate to have the same happen to me.”

Obolis’s eyes narrowed, “Yet you carve them into your skin?”

“It’s different. I made these. Yawm didn’t make his own. He relied on something he didn’t understand, and it corrupted him. I’m not letting that happen to me.”

Obolis tilted his head, “I supposed that’s right, and it’s a shame, truly. I read Yawm’s story and what happened to him. Yawm was a being of purpose, ambition, and brutality. His inability to show restraint regarding the Old Ones was what led to his eventual downfall. I can understand his mistakes as I almost walked down his same road.”

My mana roared through the pages of my grimoire, and I actively cooled it using quintessence while charging the document. Otherwise, it would melt. As I did, I raised a brow,

“So you wanted infinite power from the Old Ones too?”

Obolis raised his palms to his defense, “I wouldn’t word it quite like that. For me, I always wished to be an explorer, even in my youth. To that end, I committed to a path that gave me absolute freedom. I questioned how to go about seizing that freedom many times, and in the end, conquering came out as the only answer. Exploring requires resources, and dominance provides that.”

Obolis shook his head, “And so I went about the accession of others. I did so many times and on so many worlds. I now own thirteen, though it’ll be twelve soon. As I’ve gained ground, I’ve refined my approach, and as I’ve aged, I learned how to manage these people within my means. When I first began my search for domination, I was dissimilar to my current self.”

I finished the runes, a glowing series of symbols floating off the page,

“Ah, I remember one of your titles is the Carnage of Olstata. I’m guessing there’s some history behind that.”

Obolis winced, “There is, though I’d rather not speak of it.”

I opened my status, the contract opened in view. I squinted at it, remembering the deal wasn’t actually written down. Trying out something, I pulled the glowing runes over, and they created staticky ripples in my red HUD. The documentation changed, the additional cipher markings assimilating across all domains. Obolis scratched the side of his head,

“That’s quite odd.”

“I’ll be honest, I didn’t know if that would work or not. It saves us some time, though, doesn’t it?”

“Indeed, it does.” Obolis went silent for a moment, his mind wandering to distant memories. He sighed, “Daniel, I know it may be out of turn for me, but I’d like to offer you some advice.”

I raised my palms, “Oh man, don’t hesitate. I need all the help I can get.”

“There’s wisdom in those words, and they apply to everyone. As for my advice, I want you to understand something. You, you’re in a similar position to where I was centuries ago. However, you carry more potential than I did.”

“Don’t sell yourself short.”

Obolis smirked, “Your words are hollow, Harbinger. My point is, you’re in a position of great responsibility and potential. I would imagine that you feel liberated with possibilities as if there are no horizons that may weigh you down. Before you march forth, know this – our mistakes now will result in regret.”

That sounded obvious, so I raised my brow, “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Obolis smiled, “I believe my point requires more emphasis, hm? To elaborate, I’ll share some research with you. Did you know that many unaging immortals die by suicide before reaching a thousand years of age?”

I tilted my head, “How are they immortal if they can die?”

“There are many different kinds of immortals. Most are simply immune to death via several perks that extend your life span by killing eldritch. You have this perk already. You’ll be considered immortal like any sentient if you live past a century and showcase no signs of aging.”

Obolis walked back and forth, “Schema can keep anyone alive if they continue slaughtering monsters, which is trivial after a certain point. This leads to a certain kind of timeless sentient, one that may die from trauma but not from the unending march of time. You stand at the crossroads between that immortality and true immortality.”

Obolis stared at several glowing poisons lined up for display near us,

“I would be horrified by that prospect, as you may be. Eternal life is both a curse and a blessing, as you may never end your existence should it grow too painful to bear. That’s the reason most unaging immortals never live to see a thousand years of age – their pain outgrows their ability to cope.”

Obolis peered around the room, “And in that manner, that is the outcome I most fear. To die in battle or exploring an unseen path is a noble and becoming death. To end one’s life out of regret...It’s a sad way to leave this existence. I wouldn’t wish it on my worst enemy, even those in Elysium.”

Obolis turned to me and spoke with a voice carrying a distant sadness,

“Try to live your life without regret. It’s something that you can never be cleansed, and it will follow you until you die. I’m of the opinion that it’s worse than being trapped in a cage, because unlike a prison, you may never escape regret. It will follow you with a single-minded pursuit that is unending and eternal like a ghost.”

Obolis’s eyes went distant, “And those ghosts will drag you down until you can no longer stand.”

A silence passed over us, and his words soaked in like poison on exposed skin. Hearing him reminded me of Springfield, Michael, Kelsey, and even my relationship with my father. I carried those failures like wounds, and I beat myself over the head with them from time to time. Peering at Obolis, the unaging immortal probably had far more burdens to bear, and by the sounds of it, they wore him down.

I gave him a solemn nod, giving his warning heed.

“Thank you for the advice. I’m taking it to heart.”

Obolis gave me a sad smile, “Good, good.” Obolis turned to his status, “Ah, I’m needed elsewhere. Of course.” He gestured a hand to me, “This was an unexpected talk, but it’s fortunate we were able to have it. As always, it’s been a pleasure.”

“Same here.”

Obolis pointed down his hallway, “You remember the way out, I imagine?”

“I do...Obolis?”

“Yes?”

“You know, I think about it too sometimes. My mistakes that is.”

Obolis scoffed, “Oh, you could tell I reminisce from time to time?”

“I can. I do the same. Something that helps me is remembering that I can’t know everything. I can only know what I know right now. That means that the decisions and mistakes I made, they were still the best outcomes I could have, given my situation.”

I waved a hand, realizing I was trying to give advice to someone who outdid me in experience by orders of magnitude,

“I, uh, I don’t know. It helps me sometimes.”

Obolis froze in place for a moment. He grabbed his jaw, “I’ll keep that in mind. It was good chatting, but I must be on my way. Goodbye.”

I walked out of his chambers, reaching the rotating stairway. Stepping down towards the warp, I reflected a bit on what I’d done lately. Hearing Obolis like that made me more thoughtful about my actions. Either way, I reached the warp with my mind racing in many directions.

Our Omega Strain divisions all carried rings, and we numbered over a thousand strong now due to Torix’s marketing. My golems numbered in the hundreds, and our gialgathens were now armored. With my class, I’d be unleashing devastation on a regional scale as well. Plus, I could gain a few levels from taking out the Hybrids. That was always a plus.

Knowing all this, I stepped out of the ionized air of the warp-drive. I rolled my shoulders, my eyes widening at the thought of battle. Trying out my new abilities, the prospect left me brimming with anticipation. I gripped my fists as I opened my status. With a quick thought, I sent a guild wide message,

Daniel Hillside, The Harbinger of Cataclysm(lvl 15,000(Cap: 26,000) | Class: Sovereign | Guild: The Harbinger’s Legion) – Blegara is ours now, and we’re going to retake it, one triumph at a time. We wage war tomorrow, so be ready for blood, destruction, and most of all, victory.

I closed my status while the sun rose in the distance over the hills. Before the day was over, Elysium would know what we were capable of.

They all would.

Chapter 293: The siege of Saphigia

I reached out my hands and clapped them together, releasing a dull thud. Getting myself amped up, I reminded myself what to do. I could make a massive difference during this siege, and that might ensure our victory. Those thoughts fueled my resolve as I stepped up to Mt. Verner. Walking towards a cleared out hillside, many of our members walked around in the open, using Omega Strains.

It was as Torix and I agreed; everybody already prepared for the battle. Others practiced working with my rings, some floating in the air already. That was good. Mobility kept our people away from the Hybrids. Stepping past one of my super golems, they'd do well there too. Surrounded by ten legion members apiece, the supergolems stood heads taller than the crowds around them. They'd protect everyone during the invasion.

Walking up the shortest of these golems, I found my most loyal member,

“How's it going, Alpha?”

The golem turned towards me, something about its thoughts unknowable, even if I made its mind,

“I am well. I thought about what you told me when we met last.”

I raised an eyebrow, “What did you figure out?”

“I contemplated how limited we golems are. It left me feeling insignificant. This feeling, while inevitable for all living creatures, was...painful. It left me empty and afraid. In that darkness, I found purpose, however.”

I nodded, finding myself admiring Alpha's willingness to dwell on these kinds of topics. I couldn't tell if those kinds of reflections didn't bother me or if I was too scared

to bring them up. I was better off than most considering my being a dimension, but I still paled compared to an Old One and the like.

It sounded like Alpha wrestled with those same concepts. The first golem raised a hand to me, “But you gave me a reason to be. I use that to quell this apprehension...I wonder if all things that live must contemplate their existence like this?”

“I think they do.”

“Then, that is good. It will keep us humble despite the frames we wield. In that manner, we dwarf humans...I remember telling you it was a miracle that humans survived the last time we talked. I aim to enact that sentiment towards our enemies but in action instead of words.”

Alpha met my eye, “I-I also wish to make you proud.”

I smiled at him, “You already have.”

I gave him a pat on the shoulder, glad he was keeping a team safe. He wasn't alone in that effort. Our necromancer would join him, commanding our forces, so they operated in harmony. Torix stood with Chrona and Krog beside him, and they all wore some variation of my skin. It gave me an odd sensation looking at them. If that's what I looked like, then I dreaded seeing me in person.

Outside of those three, Hod, Amara, Kessiah, Althea, and Spear stood nearby. Florence and Helios wouldn't be participating in this siege. They studied on the third floor, remaining with noncombat personnel. Only those present would be joining in the attack, and we intended on making it count. What we lacked in numbers, we aimed to compensate for in quality.

In total, we amassed 250 super golems, 2,000 gialgathens, and 2,000 Omega Strain users. Outside of that, we had 1,000 supportive members. They'd help set up camp once we established a fortress. After walking up from the warp, I passed by these soldiers, and I dwarfed them. They gawked at me, the super golems bowing their heads.

My guildsmen followed suit. As they did, the talkative crowd across the mountainside quieted. Even my followers did so, the ritual feeling out of place for just me. It took all

I had to accept this, er, reverence, I'll call it. I wanted to just make a joke and let everyone loosen up. However, part of being a symbol was being larger than life.

We needed everyone to feel like our victory was inevitable. This process was a crucial part of that. Still, discomfort ate at me even after I stood beside my core members. Lifting an arm, I raised a platform of earth generated beneath us from my mana. With a good view of our surroundings, I peered at the people here.

They drilled the combat requirements for today over the last two weeks, many veterans showing their faces in the mix. My followers and I already made the plan while I created the golems, and we'd make up for our numbers using quality. Knowing this, I kept our members in suspense until after Torix gave me his patented loudspeaker magic.

With everything in place, I expanded Rise of Eden while lifting my hands, "Everyone, rise."

The aura gave my command more weight, and they listened. Our people synchronized the stand up even without any planning. Torix's training made sure that was the case. It was my turn to do my part, so I met as many eyes as I could while starting my speech,

"Many of those here know the taste of war and the shedding of blood. To those veterans, I have nothing to say aside from congratulations on living on and building our guild. Without you, we'd never have made it this far. Our lives and current prosperity was built on your sacrifices."

I raised a hand, "For those that are new here, I'd like to remind you what we're fighting for. These people we fight today, Elysium, they've committed genocide. The gialgathens here know all too well what they're capable of, and these monsters will be coming for our planet next. Given our track record of kicking their asses, I'd say they hold a grudge against us too."

A laugh radiated through the crowd, one filled with confidence. I smiled too, "We'll return that favor, but we happen to speak louder with our actions than they will with their words. I promise you that."

Many of our members raised a hand and let out a roar in agreement, gialgathens included. I turned and peered at many,

“We’ve evolved from a guild that struggled against Yawm to one where you fight beside golems strong enough to bring that monster to his knees. I used my sweat, tears, and blood to make these guardians for each of you. They are behemoths of might, and they’ll tear anyone apart that would wish you harm. Their loyalty is also absolute, so treat them well.”

Taking out Yawm individually was a bit of a stretch, but our guildsmen believed me. It didn’t hurt my argument when supergolems stomped in unison, and the mountain quaked as they telepathically shouted,

“As we live, your enemies shall die.”

Our guildsmen gave them wide-eyed looks, but before they felt out of place here, I widened my arms,

“Know that none of you are helpless even without these titans by your side. These Omega Strains were made with our enemies in mind, researched by our archmage Torix. He’ll assist each of you, ensuring your fights matter and that your victories hold meaning. We’ll gain ground with every passing second, and he’ll guarantee our losses will be nonexistent.”

I wasn’t rigorously honest about the Omega Strains either, but my exaggeration served its purpose. Looks of intention and resolve covered those present. That’s exactly what we needed. I gripped my hands into fists,

“We will expand through Blegara, and it will be the first piece of our conquest. I will charge ahead of you all, and I will leave carnage and devastation in my wake. My new class has made me into a true Harbinger of Cataclysm. I no longer live in its namesake. I am it embodied, and I will aim my abilities towards those that defy us.”

I shook my hands, “Believe me when I say that they fear me. I fought toe to toe with Lehesion before my class. Now, I will evoke biblical wrath onto our enemies, and when they sleep, they will remember what I’ve done. It will be etched into their memory, unable to be forgotten.”

I changed the Rise of Eden to Event Horizon, “You all, you will be pivotal in this. I want our enemies to live in a nightmare. I want them to be terrified of their own

shadow. I want them to regret ever having heard our names. We are legion, and we exist as a force of nature, an unstoppable torrent that will drown them in our endless march.”

The vibrance and fervor of Event Horizon infested those here, and they roared out in violence. It wasn't only useful for the draining effect, after all. Tapping into that primal instinct, I let out an inkling of ascendant mana to get them excited,

“We will conquer this world and then ours. We'll establish cities, routes of trade, and protection for our families. The eldritch will be rumors of a forgotten age, and the Hybrids will be stories we tell our children at night. With this battle, we establish ourselves as a galactic power, one worthy of fear and awe. This is our first step into a bright future, one where we are victorious.”

The crowd let out another shout before I raised a fist,

“Now, who will take that first step with me?”

The crowd let out a booming outcry of approval, one that echoed for miles around. Not too many miles, though, as Torix dampened the earth-shattering echo. We didn't want Elysium discovering us. With everyone inspired, I turned towards the others here,

“You all remember the plan, right?”

They each gave me nods, my followers, and generals preparing for the upcoming battle. Turning towards Spear, I grinned, “You ready?”

The Sentinel shivered as my helmet collapsed over my face. A menacing grin appeared over it, its hunger endless. Spear waved his dimensional slicers with hesitation,

“I...am.”

He got his swinging in rhythm before ripping dimensions, and I jerked the spatial rends apart. I tore further than ever before, creating an enormous splice large enough for gialgathens to fly through. An ocean opened on the other side, my blood boiling at the sight of my next battle. It'd been too long.

But before that, I pulled out a bit of my molten fabric. Creating two struts for the dimensional portal, I pried them into the warp before Spear gawked at me. I turned to him, “Eh, just trying out something new.”

He glared, “You realize that this dimension isn’t something to play around with, don’t you?”

I tilted my head, “Does Schema?”

Spear leaned back, but I waved my hands, “Spear, that’s a rhetorical question.”

Spear looked like he wanted to retort, but he chose to stay silent.

I turned towards Blegara, “Come on, let’s go.”

I jumped forward through the engorged veil. Water appeared beneath me, the wind of Blegara humid and heavy. As I sliced through the water, no one followed just yet. They were to witness my initial assault and handle the aftermath. Knowing this, I floated down towards the epicenter of Saphigia, Blegara’s capital.

Below me, many Vagni, Hybrids, and Elysium people stared from above. I drifted downwards, an omen of what was to come. As I did, alarm systems went off throughout the city, their detection magic discovering our tear in space-time. It was irrelevant. Their defensive artillery, Hybrids, and mind mages turned their jaws towards me. They clamped down with fury, violence, and competence.

Against my skin, sharpened fangs shattered. Under my gaze, their fury turned to frailty. In my shadow, they turned into ants under a child’s heel. I loomed over their vessels, and my mana charged. It permeated the water around me, the entire landscape deforming under its presence. I warped the space around me, the void screaming out.

And they heard my name.

I reached out my hands, gravitational wells exploding outwards in a plume of darkness and radiation. These growing blots of black consumed the vessels, ripping the hulls apart like cold glass under boiling water. Within seconds, little remained of their vast fleet under me. I used more mana, my skin heating until the water boiled around me.

Glowing and visible, I separated my mind into three parts. One attacked the most apparent clusters of foes using my singularities. This fractured their line and spread chaos throughout their ranks. Another logic strain retaliated at the telepathic links formed against me, and this prevented mental fatigue and damage from culminating over this battle.

My final mind wielded my magic and auras like vast whips of carnage. Event Horizon sculpted the city beneath me, eliminating the espens present. Beyond those members, I melted the sand beneath every Hybrid's feet, and a second sea of glass formed, the ocean boiling around them.

I splashed this glass over Hybrids before flash freezing it. Catching them in the trap, I pulled my hands apart and slammed them together. A kinetic wave snapped these frozen monsters, and a wave of gravitation followed. This all happened as I bombarded their lines with singularity after singularity, leaving a wasteland where my enemies once stood.

Gravitation followed, swarming the few remaining survivors collapsing from compressive snaps. These tiny pulses of gravity crushed individuals, immobilizing them. Event Horizon washed over these remains, eliminating the corpses and those left alive. It sapped these remains, leaving the seafloor abandoned as it passed.

My relentless assault continued. I froze the blood in their bodies, and I crushed their skulls under gravity wells. I pulped individuals with telekinetic flicks of my finger, their bodies more fragile than glass. Within minutes, I devastated a several mile wide area beneath me, which left little for Elysium to defend.

But they were a galactic power for a reason. Elysium's defense systems activated, and reinforcements arrived. From portals, Hybrids from other cities on Blegara came in mass. Ships, dreadnoughts, and submersibles swarmed into the sea, and they brought the blighted with them. These twisted leviathans carried improved Hybrids, Version 2.0s riding them.

This swarm appeared before me, yet I remained steady. No fear ran up my spine. I stared them down and left them stricken in terror. They would gaze upon what I wrought, and they'd tremble. I was built for this. This was within my means, and they needed more than fodder to handle me now.

From behind me, my guild invaded as I lifted my hands at the incoming forces. I lobbed simultaneous gravitational singularities, having saturated my frame with mana. They triturerated under the might of gravitation, and swaths of water disintegrated, swallowed by the gravitational holes. Waves erupted upwards, turning the steady sea into a stormy puddle.

These compressed wells of gravity enacted a destruction absolute, tearing enormous swaths of their forces apart in seconds. Those alive sent back vital information to the further reinforcements, and their portals split apart into multiple directions. From these vantage points, their Hybrids, Blighted, and mind mages advanced.

I shifted to Rise of Eden, and I partitioned myself into several minds once more. One of these minds generated singularities on clustered enemy forces. This split their offensive apart. Beyond those, others came riding in, forming a telepathic link with me. Their blighted shot out orange plumes of acid, and their Hybridized leviathans swam into combat range.

One of my minds chased these telepathic links down, and I didn't launch a mental assault back. Instead, I smothered the source with Event Horizon. Though still somewhat useful on Hybrids, Event Horizon disintegrated the squishy mages, all the flat damage overwhelming them. This proved much more helpful than fighting them at their own game.

Another mind focused on dismantling the telepathic connections between Hybrids and espens. Unlike their controllers, the Hybrids lacked any real intellect to beat. They obeyed like puppets pulled by unseen strings. Copying Alpha's strategies, I tugged at those strings while surging bursts of ascendant mana through them.

This created short lapses in the espen's control, which became deadly from the ascendant mana's influence. The Hybrid's orange pustules pulsed red, and they attacked everything nearby, often each other. This made for an efficient, targeted approach instead of brute-forcing them to death like I usually did.

Despite my onslaught, some of their ships escaped my singularities long enough to fire at our troops. This was where I made yet another mind control my dimensional shield. I generated my pocket dimension, swallowed the dreadnought's blasts, and reversed the artillery back at them. This left little for our troops to dodge as they rolled in.

And even those that passed beyond this decimation, they fought with me in hand to hand combat. Magic or not, I could still crack skulls with my fists, and it required little thought to do so. Dwarfing these foes, I tore the blighted apart. I charged through bodies, awash in red and orange blood. I siphoned the life from enemies coming to close, and I gored enemies through telekinesis.

My all-out offensive gave our ground troops free rein. They rode into the warzone without doubt or pause. They secured Vagni, letting them escape from my carnage. Others killed Hybrids, silvers, and Elysium soldiers left behind. They went in all directions, the golems acting as vanguards. Behind them, the gyalgathens carried mind mages and power armor wearing humans.

Between these ranks, the Omega division came through. These members crashed over the seafloor, dashing at the Hybrids. A woman from our guild crashed into these metal monsters first, and the Omega Strain pierced its chest. It sucked the life out of the Hybrid, the twisted monster howling out in agony.

It died seconds later, the Omega Strain's thirst quenched. The strain division continued this breach, devouring the metal within our enemies. We used this saturation tactic to fully charge our Omega Strains, and it gave us a tremendous headstart in this battle. Their individual efforts cleaned the few remaining forces I left behind.

But this was only the beginning. We walked a bloody path of many miles, and this was the first step.

Leaping around, I cracked the earth and glass all around me. These jumps gutted the ground, making craters large enough to swallow buildings. My armor grinned with joy as I indulged it with Event Horizon, running through the enemy ranks. I throttled the minds of their mages. I snapped necks and bit through bone. I boiled the blood in their bodies. I crushed arteries in their skulls, and I inundated the sea in their corpses.

Little remained from my passing, but what I left behind, my guild conquered. Torix commanded the mass of our army, and he did so with intelligence and ability. His mind operated at a supernatural speed, commanding various forces with fluidity. At the same time, he controlled our enemies' corpses, giving them wills of their own with his newfound primordial mana.

Torix didn't stop there. He bolstered our soldiers with quintessence magic, granting them enhanced attributes. These soldiers and super golems ripped gaping holes in

Elysium's defenses where I wasn't present. Torix used his ascendant mana as well, flooding Hybrid's minds with the desire to kill. Many Elysium troops died by being devoured and by their own Hybrids.

This was still only a part of our victory. Althea took out the strongest members of the enemy army, one at a time. Usually, she just shot these spears that were easy to forget about. Though significant, they weren't exactly flashy. Well, something drastic changed, and now her spears unleashed these massive explosions. They would pierce into an enemy before exploding outwards with tectonic shockwaves.

These aftershocks left ripples in the ocean like children playing in a bath. The sheer size of these waves sent apocalyptic shivers up my spine, and they scattered the light above us. This cast innumerable shadows that Hod abused to his fullest extent. He took out elemental mages, snapping necks, tearing jugulars, and ripping heads. They left plenty for me to do, and I continued battling for hours.

In this war, I acted as our juggernaut. I ran forward, unveiling my full arsenal as I did. Wielding multiple magics, I generated acts of absolute ruin. Earthquakes spawned under my feet. Tsunamis covered the surface as I passed. The ocean boiled into an abyss. It was a display of my potential, realized to its fullest extent at this moment.

I wanted this fight to be a milestone for our guild, one where we carved our names into history. If I had my way, Schema would write out how we began a complete pushback for the war. An essential piece of that, my guildsmen secured the territory I left behind. Super golems acted as unmoving constructs, our omega division handling stragglers.

They leveled rapidly, many of our members capping their levels in the process. They began stabilizing the territories we passed as the fighting died down. Each golem could monitor a one-mile radius, its vision and senses sharp. Humans helped, each of them offering judgment to certain situations. This gave us the ability to rescue the Vagni, many of them just looking for a way out of this endless war.

I offered a solution as we bodied their lines. Despite this rapid progress, we eventually slowed down. Our assault coursed out like a blitz, but so did Elysium's eventual retaliation. They summoned new foes for us to face, many upgraded Hybrids joining the fray. Like us, Elysium prepared for battle, and they began bringing out larger prey for me.

Version 2.0's appeared, their strength formidable. Not formidable enough for me, however. Their mental tricks no longer phased me, and without that edge, I could put all of my focus on taking one out. It was as simple as pinning one down and blowing it up with a singularity. It took all of seconds, and those that closed in, I simply crushed with my hands.

A Version 2.0 couldn't beat a super golem, we found out, though they got close. Our guildsmen turned the tide in that regard, giving us an edge. The gialgathens as well, they gave us a superiority in mobility that proved invaluable. From scouting to transport, they offered urgent utility to the rescue services, Kessiah leading the charge with her healing. And aside from their utility maneuverability, the gialgathens connected to the Vagni, something I hadn't expected.

The gialgathens had controlled the espens long ago, even before the espens had language. This was due to the gialgathens innate, telepathic communication. Comparatively, the espens showed a refined edge similar to humans while the Vagni mirrored animalistic warriors. Because of that, the gialgathens herded the Vagni with relative ease. Seeing the Vagni's reaction reminded me of when I first saw the flying amphibians.

Gialgathens, they struck a memorable scene. That immediate awe gushed from the Vagni as the gialgathens drifted overhead. It didn't hurt that a gialgathen's wings enabled superior swimming, giving them a grace similar to when they were in the sky. I could tell they were once aquatic, and they hadn't altogether left those adaptations behind.

I abused these factors to the fullest, giving us a controlled territory exceeding the Empire's grasp at its fullest. Within hours, we contained the center point of the city, and by the end of the day, we safeguarded nearly twenty square miles. This gave us a bastion to launch from, giving us innumerable advantages.

Spear created warps for supply chains, giving our troops fresh food, unsalted water, and resting places. Torix established a non-aquatic zone with his magic, letting our members move and breathe with ease. The super golems established a baseline perimeter for this depot, and I generated rows of wild plant life.

I did so at random, culling the non-edible varieties. Afterward, I created a swarm of crabs to feast on the various plant life in our underwater terrarium. This established a farm, one the Vagni immediately got to work in. The gialgathens commanded while offering them protection, allowing the Vagni to begin founding new lives here.

Yeah, all in eight hours.

The speed of our establishment defied reason, our plan working better than we imagined. Our resources converted to this planet perfectly. In particular, many of the gialgathens preferred Blegara to Mt. Verner. This gave them a bit more oomph when fighting, their typical laziness replaced by ferocity. By the time we finished establishing a fully realized camp, I peered at the beginnings of a colony.

Finalizing the effort, I established a tower covered in runes, some enchantments cipheric and others every day. I pulled out a blue core at the top of this lookout, one of the two I had remaining. Planting it down, I went through the system menus before stamping our position onto this world. My palm placed, I began charging.

The elemental furnace on my chest roared, and my own mana funneled into the device. By the time I finished, the blue core sizzled to the touch. I finished in only twenty seconds. The dungeon heart's protective barrier washed over our new colony, our members flabbergasted that it was already here.

I stared around at that point, finding my super golems finishing off Hybrids in the distance. Twenty of them kept this central camp secure, protecting us as explosions radiated in the background. Gialgathens swam and carried our members across the seafloor, ensuring few casualties came out.

It was a thing of beauty.

Wanting to focus on construction, I honed into my working mode. Talking with a few engineers on the scene, we drafted up a few ideas. As they sketched onto blueprint paper, an explosion radiated from overhead. I peered upwards and found one of my super golems falling in pieces. Its eyes shattered; it no longer sustained life, having been the first casualty of its kind.

It was Alpha.

A burst of rage roared into my mind as I stared up at whatever did this. Standing outside of a dimensional rift, a Sentinel stared down at us. It loomed like a forerunner, one that beckoned forth a second wind for Elysium. It mirrored Spear in both demeanor

and appearance, so I believed our Sentinel had gone mad. Looking closer, I found signs of this Sentinel's corruption.

It carried a single dimensional slicer, the magenta-colored blade humming underwater. Its armor cracked, though gray graphene soaked between the aged fractures. Eyeless and without a face, a remnant wore the armor, but it was no longer its own being. Nanomachine laden fluid pumped through large exposed veins clustering in its joints. It twitched at random, an ever-present fight for control booming in its mind.

I analyzed the creature, trying to ween as much information out of it as possible before running in.

Hybridized Sentinel(lvl 21,019) – This mockery of Schema's glorious troops results from a Sentinel being Hybridized. While still retaining fragments of its previous mind, it has been wholly neutralized via a psionic solution. Whether or not this is the same means of controlling Lehesion is unknown.

What is known is this is a harrowing foe. It wields the graphene armor that most Sentinels boast, further augmented by implants. This monster also wields a dimensional slicer, using the absolute weaponry to enact harm onto anything it touches. There is almost nothing known that can withstand a dimensional slicer's attack head-on, so evasion is recommended.

Outside of this, the years of training also assist the Sentinel in becoming exceptional. This gives it a tremendous hand to hand combat ability and mental prowess. Sentinels can cast a variety of magic, most of it non-absolute in nature. Some arcane magic can be used, and this is the most deadly of these sorcery based abilities.

Last of all is the Hybridization process. As disgusting and filthy as the monsters are, Hybrids are incredibly tenacious. They carry regenerative abilities exceeding almost every known species. Combine that with their metallic constitutions and nanomachine laden blood, and they are physically strong while being difficult to kill.

Most would need to run. I ask you to show this monster what you're capable of.

By Personalized AI-C90

It was interesting that my perception got high enough to see which personalized AI was making my statuses. That being said, the Hybridized Sentinel lost in its mental war, so it banged its chest with its spear. A vast echo rippled across the landscape as mana flooded through its tear in dimensions. Like Lehesion before him, a sacrificial ritual empowered this being beyond its limits, and it radiated with energy.

Rearing back its spear, it let out a swipe that launched out a dimensional wave. It tore across the blue core's defenses, leaving cracks in the hexagonal barrier. Before it swiped again, I propelled myself towards the attack. Reaching out a hand, the slice snapped against my palm, unable to harm me. I gripped the slicing energy, draining it. The Sentinel leaned back from my presence, and I glared at the poor sap stuck in that armor.

It telepathically linked to me, speaking on conversational terms,

“Ah, it's you again. The so-called Harbinger.”

It was someone I wasn't familiar with, but that didn't matter. Staring them down, I roared back, “You're going to die here... You know it. That meat puppet can feel it.”

The Sentinel they controlled trembled, but its psionic controllers repressed its urge to run. My armor grinned, “I cannot wait until after I'm able to reach you all.”

The voice replied, “You will never be able to find us.”

I shot a mental bombardment its way, just a raw burst of will. The mind's resolve wavered as I gripped my hands into fists harder than iron,

“I will, and when I do, there'll be nowhere left to run.”

It feigned confidence, but I pressed on,

“Have you ever thought about how fragile you are? One pulse of so many different forces, and you die. It's a miracle you can even survive, but you still chose to make me your enemy.”

It replied, “We’ve made far greater enemies than you, like Schema.”

I narrowed my eyes, “Schema hides on an unseen planet while I fight on the frontlines, and I do so without fear of death or failure. I can walk across stars without burning, and I can drift across the cosmos without breathing. They do me no harm, not them nor the monsters you wield.”

“Those monsters will be the death of you and your guild.”

“But they are only monsters to you. See, unlike Schema, I need not hide, for I can face anyone in battle. Unlike Elysium, I need no puppets, for the body I wield is invulnerable.”

Event Horizon crept towards the creature as I seethed,

“You, you may bide your time, but know that I am eternal.”

The runes across my armor shined crimson,

“And I will find you.”

Chapter 294: Revenge Given Form

The twisted Sentinel lobbed out his first mental attack, a sort of initial jab combined with a feint. This typical opener gave me plenty of leeway for my start. I partitioned two minds for mental magic as I did with Torix, one for offense and one for defense. They went to war against the telepathically inclined being, and the rest of me charged the wretch.

The Sentinel hovered himself backward, several mana streams directing his movement. Event Horizon smothered him after the initial seconds of battle, and his energy fizzled. The draining aura outpaced his ability to physically manifest mana, leaving him sinking down in the water. I shoved my knee at his face, but he raised his spear to deflect. Angling just right, the Sentinel knocked my foot up before slicing at me.

I slapped the spear sideways, the close-range abilities of the weapon feeble. Passing over him, I redirected myself with a gravity well. Pulled down towards him, I reared

back a fist. At the same time, I made another consciousness that controlled gravitational magic. This let me simultaneously generate an antigravity well under the Sentinel.

Bobbing him upwards, I caught his momentum and his face by surprise. My blow landed with pinpoint precision, transferring immense force into the Sentinel's body. His armor cracked over his nose before he shot downward through my earlier magic. Recreating the feat, I generated numerous powerful antigravity wells under him. This lobbed the Sentinel back and forth like a pinball being slapped up by flipper bats.

Each of my attacks targeted his skull, intending to kill. Upon each impact, I reverted to the Rise of Eden, augmenting my stats as well. This gave me harder hits before I continued suppressing the Sentinel with Event Horizon. The mana draining effect of my ascendant aura, in particular, crippled the Sentinel completely.

It left him running on empty, unable to make even a wisp of magic. His mental abilities faltered as well, most of his endeavors manifesting in little progress. This standstill came from me weaving between his mental assaults while prodding back with my own barrages. This put me in an unfamiliar position; the mental fight would be over before long, but instead of me losing, I was actually winning.

But the fight wasn't over yet. The Sentinel jerked back and forth under the extreme stresses of both my magic and physical strikes. His rapid movements left the Sentinel within unable to do anything, but the mind mages controlling him kicked into action. More members joined them, bolstering their mental attack. Their ritual strengthened, mana siphoning into the Sentinel. His spear charged, containing enormous plumes of arcane energy.

With the augments, his mobility returned, able to function once more. I missed a weighted punch, and he skimmed me with his spear. It left a long slice in my leg, but only for a second. It closed as quickly as he cut into it, my regeneration unmatched. My armor laughed, a hollowing sound radiating across the landscape.

I leaned into this fear causing tactic, sending taunts at the Sentinel,

“Come. Surely you have more than one swing in you?”

A culmination of minds voiced, “We will adjust.”

Surrounding us, version 2.0's flooded forth. Several dozen arrived, their psionic controllers joining the fray. They merged with the connection before smothering my own mind magic. Sent into a spiral, I lost the smooth connection between me and my body, which left me vulnerable. Imposing on my opening, the Sentinel dashed forward, his spear raised.

Magenta-shaded, arcane energy flooded his spear before he sliced towards my head. A tear in dimension formed as the arc of his strike came towards my skull. The blade made contact with my helmet's aura before I opened my mouth. The teeth of my helm widened, and my armor snapped its jaws into the hilt of the spear.

An instinctual, primal rage took me over, and I smashed two quick haymakers into the Sentinel's body. Powdered graphene erupted from the impacts, making gray clouds in the water. Plumes of evaporated water gushed beyond the Sentinel, the heat left from my fists palpable. Before I continued, version 2.0's converged, holding my limbs. I struggled for a few seconds as they tried sinking their teeth in me.

The Sentinel roared at me, "Who's afraid now?"

I laughed while opening my dimensional storage. From it, I unloaded a bottled up, kinetic blast. Earlier, I used some singularities and captured the resulting explosions. Using them like ammo from my pocket dimension, I put those implosions point-blank for me and the Hybrids. I survived the intense radiation and compressive shockwave. The Hybrid's fared far worse.

The attack rippled through their bodies, those closest to me inflicted with grievous wounds. The more distant ones had their senses jumbled as if I used a sonic grenade on them. Event Horizon expanded over them while I pulled my hands close. My armor writhed over my skin, my flesh becoming fluid. A true monster, I lashed out in all directions, tendrils of my armor piercing into the many version 2.0's.

These prongs tore through them like harpoons through fish. Once impaled, large hooks formed on the other ends of these spikes. Creating a gravity well over me, I funneled them towards my frame while pulling them closer. Many fought the pull, some Hybrids even howling out in terror. Those screams were silenced as my armor drenched their mouths and eyes, tearing through their soft bodies.

The Sentinel used his arcane spear to slice the feelers sent his way, but he could only watch on as I consumed his reinforcements. What was once a deadly attack now gave

me greater life. The actual Sentinel, still living, trembled as its puppeteers struggled to control it. The psionic controllers shouted from within,

“I...what in the hell is wrong with you? You’re a monster, worse than the eldritch.”

My usual body walked out of the shivering mass of dying Hybrids. My armor grinned at the twisted Sentinel, and I spoke,

“No. I choose if I’m a monster. It’s unfortunate, but you brought it out of me.”

Version 2.0’s began dying, and their corpses disintegrated into mana, letting me step forward,

“Now, you must deal with the consequences.”

My armor reformed, reconstituting my typical frame. Sprinting towards him, other forces congregated at my position again. Stopping midcharge, I peered around, forming a plan against them. I had charged a few latent singularity explosions earlier, but they wouldn’t fall for that trick again. That left one option left – an all-out brawl. Preparing for the free-for-all, I peered around while visualizing my first few strikes.

I didn’t need to.

Spears drilled through them before exploding amidst clusters of enemies. The resulting orange and gray clouds cast shadows that Hod warped from. Our shadow lurker left our enemies in pieces that burned amidst umbral fires. Torix joined my telepathic connection, and he went forth like a bat scrambling out of a cage. His offensive mirrored our previous bout, lacking any hesitation or mercy.

I joined him, smashing towards the Sentinel’s mind. More mages joined the mass controlling the Sentinel, several Hybrids in the distance running wild as their controllers joined the fray. A dogpile of consciousnesses began, and we played a mental game of tug of war. This favored me, as it required a primary controller.

Now, as the controller, we both struggled to maintain the sheer volumes of mental energy passing through our minds. At least he did. My willpower and intelligence meant I could handle tremendous damage. As these mental flows enhanced further still,

my head warmed to the touch. It kept building until it radiated heat, which paled compared to my own self-heating tactics.

The other primary controller, the one who killed Alpha, began wailing as the mana's heat burned him. Unlike me, most weren't made of such a robust material. They were flesh, bone, and water. Hot water boiled, even after a person was systemized by Schema. Now, an average person could probably handle about one million mana every second. This would warm them, but it wouldn't cook them alive.

Any more than that, and they'd begin to die. This conflict escalated beyond that, and as it rose further, so did my enemy's anguish. Even in my anger, I didn't relish in his pain. I wanted this fight over and that manipulator dead. Jolting forward, I pressed on with a variety of attacks. I stormed the area with lightning, creating streams of volatile energy. I deluged the region in gravitation, buckling his knees. I swamped his legs in molten ground, a tactic I enjoyed using.

This left the Sentinel pressed onto his back foot the entire time. I left little room for escape, surrender, or revenge. I enacted my own will, but others joined the fray. My team supported me as I fought, stopping anyone from interrupting our fight. On the other hand, I kept pursuing and ripping this Sentinel's body apart. In this endless cycle, the Sentinel's armor cracked and crumbled over time.

That armor astonished me with just how long it lasted. I guesstimated that a paper-thin sheet of it would stop a tank bullet. Even under the unreal stresses of my attacks, it withstood for a while. Even when put under extreme heat, it retained shape. Even more, it protected the person inside. Whether or not that was a benefit was debatable, however.

The individual that acted as the mental conduit, his skull fried during the battle. He attempted disconnecting, but I latched telepathic claws into him. Using my master's tactics, I chased without revealing my defenses. I kept calm, cold, and composed while dismantling his mind. I did so while thrashing his physical form as well. They weren't the only ones that could use mind magic.

In the process of doing that, I slammed the Sentinel into the blue core's barrier. I already bashed the Sentinel into Hybrids, buildings, and boulders alike. For both of us, these materials acted like gelatin, unable to withstand our physical forms. In this way, the blue core's barrier served as my most potent weapon. The reason was simple – it was hard to break.

So, smashing him against that resulted in lots of rebounding force. Every action had an equal and opposite reaction, after all. Armed with that knowledge, I hugged the Sentinel to me before rising high into the ocean. As I came down, the water boiled. The Sentinel garbled out,

“We’ll both die, you idiot.”

I just smiled, not choosing to answer him. This wasn’t my first rodeo. My armor let out a chuckle as well, one that I allowed it to have. That chuckle turned into haunting laughter. The twisted Sentinel heard the confidence in that voice, and he scrambled for survival. Before landing, he pulled his arms out of my grip. With his spear, he charged the bright, mauve blade and pierced my face.

It dug deep through my jaw and into my chest, but it didn’t matter. By the time he pulled the blade out, my wound healed. It did cause a sickly gurgling as my armor laughed, however. This only further frightened the Sentinel as he stabbed again and again, but my grip didn’t lessen. It only constricted tighter. As we got close to the core’s barrier, He charged the blade, shifting the magenta-colored edge to a deeper violet.

He sliced through dimensions before the blade made contact with my shoulder. On touching my skin, the blade snapped. There was no resistance, and it was unable to do me harm. As the edge flopped sideways, the Sentinel stared at me. From the cracks in its facemask, its eyes hollowed. The corrupted Sentinel put a hand on my shoulder, and he spoke in his original voice,

“It was a good fight.”

We smashed into the blue core’s barrier, a vast plume of energy erupting. Beneath us, strains of energy stretched out from the hexagonal forcefield. It called upon its reserves to restrain our landing, and it somehow sustained the collision. Peering down, I uncovered why. Chrona and Krog flew under me, each using their own abilities.

Chrona used her temporal field to slow down the energy transfer, letting the barrier take less initial damage. Krog used a sonic roar to break my shockwave’s impact. This dispersed the force enough, and the forcefield stayed standing. I stood atop it, standing over the shattered remains of a Sentinel.

But even if the Sentinel died, the psionic controller lived within it, and so, our battle still raged. I held with an iron grip, not letting that controller go. His mind reached its

absolute limit, and on the other side, his defenses faltered. My mind rushed through his, and I sensed his own senses. He collapsed, blood trailing from his eyes and nose.

It was cramped in his, I don't know, skull? I couldn't really tell what it was. He simply lacked the ability to have my entire mind within his. It strained him, and his body disintegrated from the effort. It gave me enough time to search through vague memories. As I pilfered, I gained a few esoteric ideas. They lingered like bubbles floating in the wind.

Holding for only a few seconds, I still locked them in place with my excellent memory. These ideas would take time to analyze, so I didn't bother deciphering them until after this was over.

Which was pretty soon. Seconds later and the controller died. I didn't want him to go like this, and I typically stopped this kind of fate preemptively. However, when he killed Alpha, he also killed my mercy. He foamed at the mouth while I jerked my mind back towards my body. It wasn't like I fully crossed over either since he couldn't hold my entire mind. It was more like I sent one of my mini-minds over and pulled it back.

Either way, I stared down at the dead body of a Sentinel after returning. I closed a fist, staring down at it. I remembered the Overseer's words when I last saw a Sentinel pass. Honoring those traditions, I lunged down and tapped the Sentinel's chest plate with my hand,

"You may rest for all time, brother. You fought the tide, and so it fought you back. Though washed away to sea, you will always be remembered."

I laid my head on its chest,

"In Eternum, Vive."

Placing my palm onto its neck, my armor began assimilating the body's mana. It always saddened me when one of these guys died, but I pushed through that sensation. The Overseer gave me advice when we first fought Lehesion, and I agreed with the sentiment. Schema's world was harsh, and it required brutal tactics like this to survive.

Standing up, I carried the body and the spear with me. Leaping down, I landed beside the edge of the blue core's barrier. Without a threat nearby, its physical manifestation

faded, letting me enter. On the other side of the forcefield, I found several people watching me. The first I noticed was the least evident of these individuals: Amara and Hod.

They hid behind the others, but the terror in their eyes as they gawked at me was evident. It left my hair standing on end, so I shifted from Event Horizon to The Rise of Eden. This settled them down some, but they still stayed on edge. The others I found proved far more welcoming.

Krog and Chrona flew overhead, both of them circling my position while thundering to the heavens,

“We are victorious.”

They were right. The Hybrids stopped their first offensive as the Hybridized Sentinel died. They still rallied a few miles from our encampment, but this left us with about twenty square miles of secured territory. Not much for a planet, but it was plenty considering we were in the middle of Blegara’s capital. It wasn’t too shabby a place to start our conquering of the area.

Knowing how important this victory was, I raised a fist and shouted,

“We’ve won.”

A group of my guildsmen let loose with approval and celebration. The gialgathens, in particular, let out a deafening telepathic howl. It left me stunned, both with joy and a bit of mental whiplash. Either way, they meant well, so I let it slide. Before I began celebrating, I turned towards where the Sentinel and my fight initially started.

There, resting in pieces, was Alpha. I winced at the sight, his eyes dead and cold. I raised my hands to everyone crowded around me, “Excuse me. I have to handle something first.”

They backed away before I paced up to Alpha’s body. I leaned over, putting my hand on his chest piece. It was cold. I grimaced at the sight, his death affecting me more than I thought it would. I made hundreds of these guys, new and improved versions even. None of that changed the fact that he was the first of his kind.

Losing him was a new kind of sting, and I hadn't expected it. I turned towards the others here, and I raised my hands, "Golems. Come here."

Those that heard obeyed. The golems raced over towards my position, several dozen collecting here. The others helped Vagni in the distance or cleaned up the messes there. I let them continue with their worthy pursuits. I just wanted Alpha to be remembered, kind of like how the Sentinels and Overseers respected the passing of their own.

I turned to the golems here, "I don't know what kind of burial he would need, but you guys are probably more in tune with what he would have wanted. Any ideas?"

A golem walked forth. It was Beta, the second of his kind,

"Master, I believe he would want to assist the war effort. He died a noble and complete death, and for us, we could hope for no greater honor than assisting the whole."

I took a few steps back from Alpha, "Then do what you can."

The other golems stepped up, and they lifted the body over us with gravitation. They each used their own version of Event Horizon. While paling in comparison to my own aura, they used many of them condensed over his body. The intensity mounted until Alpha's remains began disintegrating.

He converted into the two mana types he was made of, both quintessence and ascendant. Those energies flowed over the other golems, the subtle hues of red and white both melancholy and beautiful. Over those few seconds, he disintegrated into a cloud of colorless ether.

In the end, he joined his brothers and sisters to fight on.

Beta turned to the others, "For Alpha."

They telepathically boomed, "For Alpha."

Turning around, I remembered where we stood. On the outskirts of our camp, many troops scattered out wet sand and ocean stones. They used plastic covered documents or system loaded data for communications, which wasn't exactly efficient. Given their lack of conducive working conditions, now was as good a time as any to build. It would act as an interlude for all the fighting I'd be doing this week as well.

To start, I stayed over at Alpha's resting place where he was last living. I took a mental image of my first golem made with a mind. Using that form, I molded a massive block of white stone. I chipped away at it, tearing it apart and cleaving at corners. Minutes passed, and I got the rough approximation of Alpha. After an hour, a more refined take appeared. It served as a memorial for him.

Beside the golem, I made several faceless warriors. One wore power armor, one wore an Omega Strain, and another was a gialgathen. Creating a metal plaque, I etched a date for the battle along with a quote – 'To those that sacrificed everything so that we could have anything.' Having honored our fallen, I turned and found several people grouped around me. They paid their respects as I finished.

Surrounding the monument in glass and metal, I protected it from the elements while giving it a walkway. Continuing work along that line, I spent the next few hours creating buildings for our people. Explosions in the background weren't precisely the best way to focus, so by sealing my members off from those distractions, I guaranteed more productivity for our people. It improved their quality of life too while we sieged here.

Watching me craft buildings in minutes also motivated the teams here. It gave this new place a sense of permanence, one where we had no intention of leaving. Knowing this, I built everything to last. I kept the designs similar in scope and function to my own golem center. Minimalist and functional, I gave them bulbs of quintessence as lighting too.

Unlike other mana bombs, I kept the crystallization stable, having learned quite a bit about solid mana after making the gems so often. I tied runic wiring to many of these buildings as a finishing detail, making the lighting serve dual purposes; they beautified and powered these living areas. This combined with roadways I generated along with metallic lamps powered by the same source.

This process continued until the next morning. Staring around, I found myself having crafted a miniature city overnight. People filed into my architecture as I made them, and it always filled me with pride seeing people enjoy, laugh, and live in what I made.

That being said, this comfy interior gave the entire waterfront an incredibly surreal sensation.

On the one hand, my golems fought in view, just a mile away. They destroyed wave after wave of Hybrid reinforcements. On the other hand, soldiers sat in enclosed dwellings, comfortable and secured. They rested well, being able to block out the roar of war. The rings I gave them served that purpose, letting them float in place. This creative use was pioneered by Diesel, actually.

He spread the word, and now this antigravity sleeping style was commonplace throughout my guild. This improved living standard extended to my elite as well. Torix maintained control from an improvised lair as the siege dragged on. His hideaway offered relative tranquility, so Torix no longer needed to get his hands dirty anymore. This quiet enabled further outstanding logistics and orders from our lich, and he outmaneuvered the enemy time and time again.

Never needing sleep, Torix continued this through each night. During the days, Althea used the blue core's tower as a sniper's nest. Her spears tore enemy ships sent here, giving us aerial and nautical superiority. On the ground, Hod handled the situation, keeping his mind intent on personal, contained killings. He followed Kessiah, who operated under various rescue missions. This gave us a steady stream of pretty pissed off Vagni, but they did as they were told.

For now.

Amara worked on that issue, getting everything ready for our announcement. This gave us plenty of leeway for the operation's timing, and I readied that for our full advantage. I gathered a team of twenty gialgathens, Krog and Chrona included among them. We sat in our secured zone, communicating effectively despite the war waging beyond Torix's isolatory magic.

Staring at them, I raised a hand, "How are you all holding up?"

They established a telepathic multilink, one where anyone could join. Krog spoke out first,

"We're doing well. To have gained this much ground so soon fills our kind with pride. The ability to stretch our wings and explore as well, it's something I've long missed. I know others shared in my longing, and they share in my excitement as well."

Chrona peered at her skin, the silver sheen especially radiant today, “This place isn’t as dry, either. I prefer this world to yours. The oceans, they are beautiful flying spots.”

She peered away, “Er, not to offend you, Harbinger.”

I raised a hand, “Trust me, no offense taken. I figured you guys would. Either way, we need to get a grip on the local populace. I don’t want to wipe them out, and having them evacuated would make this a lot less complicated. To do that, I need to convince them that the eldritch are terrified of me.”

A gialgathen in the back boomed, “Not too difficult a feat for you, I’d imagine.”

The gialgathens laughed, and I raised a fist, “You’re right. It’s not. In fact, I’m a little too effective at scaring them now. I need the biggest of those monsters grouped together, but they run from me. That’s where you all come in.”

I pulled out blocks of quintessence, Amara and Hod’s favorite flavor of mana,

“We can use these to bait the eldritch all into one place. Once clustered, I’ll be using Amara’s broadcast to show the eldritch submitting to me. That will really help out with getting the Vagni over to our side. They love their old gods, so if the old gods worship me, then logic dictates the Vagni will worship whoever the eldritch worship.”

Krog narrowed his eyes, “What if the Vagni don’t follow through with that reasoning?”

My runes flared red, crimson light bathing those around me, “Then I’ll give them a different reason to follow me, one equally convincing.”

The gialgathens paled, both heartened and terrified by me at the same time. Turning to Amara, I raised an eyebrow, “Are you ready?”

She tapped a few keys before nodding,

“Yes, Harbinger. Everything we need is prepared. We need only herd the wolves with these sheep.”

She narrowed her eye laced palms at the gialgathens, “Enormous sheep.”

The gialgathens laughed, their natural confidence on display. I turned to those here, “Then let’s take this planet’s people in one fell swoop.”

After handing out the quintessence, everyone got to work. Amara nabbed a piece as I tossed them to our flyers, and she indulged with great hunger. Our force of gialgathens went about dispersing the bait after, leaving me with a bit of time before the eldritch clustered up. Optimizing as much as possible, I figured checking my status wouldn’t be a waste of time.

And I was right.

Chapter 295: A Convincing Argument

Opening my status, numerous notifications came pouring in. The first one was unexpected, but welcome nonetheless.

Congratulations! You’ve learned the new skill Lightning Generation.

Lightning Generation(lvl 13) – Many wish they wielded the powers that lay dormant at your fingertips. Use it wisely. Allows the user to generate electricity.

Congratulations! You have fused the normal skills Lightning Generation, Electrical Clasp, Lightning Eater, Throwing, and Deconstruction into the unique skill, Empowered Automaton. 168 Skillpoints awarded.

Empowered Automaton(lvl 12) – You walk in the wake of energy, and it flows through you, augmenting your every move. Grants the better use of electricity, giving the user empowered stats while charged.

Mass Manipulator has been enhanced by the mythical skill, Hunter of Many. This has turned Mass Manipulator into Mass Molder.

Mass Molder(lvl 74) – Most are given a shape and form, and they cannot change it. You are fluid, and in that fluidity, you find power. Allows the user to alter densities of matter slightly and gives the user the ability to change one's shape more quickly.

It was an absolute outpour of skills, which was a nice bonus. Lightning Generation came from using electricity as a weapon against the twisted Sentinel. Considering the massive streaks of mana based lightning I spawned during my mana charging, electrical generation was something I'd expected a while back. Using it actively as a weapon must have made the difference here for learning it.

As for the unique skill, I revved it into action as I read on. Empowered Automaton gave me a slight tingling sensation like I was charged with static. Giving it a bit more juice, electricity hummed through the water, killing a few nearby fish. Remembering where I was, I silenced the skill so I wouldn't kill nearby people. Giving myself a mental slap, I continued thinking.

The stat bonuses from the unique skill seemed negligible, but the actual electricity proved quite volatile. Charging myself and fighting while super-heated would make me even more challenging to approach. It gave me a few new ideas for making other skills oriented around putting myself through hell. With my sheer tankiness, I could walk around in a perpetual storm of various elements.

Everyone around me would suffer, but I'd be just fine. Ice, fire, electricity, gravitation, magma, and wind, I could just plant those streams of magic over myself then launch my body at an enemy. It would be more straightforward than aiming and maintaining mana at a distance, albeit a bit unconventional. This meant more powerful streams of those magics as well.

That came down to a matter of distance – the further a magic's epicenter was from me, the more mana it cost to maintain. Where I used my mana decided most of its efficiency, so putting it right at my center of mass made the spells more effective. Of course, it wasn't as if I was hurting for mana or anything, but I pinched pennies where I could, even if I didn't need them.

Putting those ideas aside, I checked out Mass Molder. It was a slight augment for my Mass Manipulator skill, and it just made modeling my armor easier. Useful, but it wasn't a deal-breaker. I probably earned the ability from taking out the Hybrids with my hook attack. Considering the efficacy of that, I remembered this skill for later. It might do me more good than I initially presumed, but I'd have to wait and see.

Either way, it was time for me to check out other parts of my status update. I got a nice stockpile of skillpoints from all the skills I learned and leveled. That was something I forgot in my previous status check – selecting my next tree. It had been so long that I forgot about the process in general. Opening my menu, I perused my options.

Purger(Clear a quarantine)(0/250) | Owner of Worlds(Own a habitable world)(2,500) | Anomaly(Be singular in nature)(2,500) | Creator of Armies(Generate a formidable fighting force)(2,500) | Immortal(Have a possible lifespan of over 100,000 years)(2,500) | Builder(Build over ten buildings that are livable)(150) | Conquerer(Take a city by force)(1,500)

Each of the trees drew me in for different reasons. Purger and Builder seemed like quick, easy boosts in their relative abilities. Builder, in particular, played a crucial part in making my colonies from here on out. Purger probably assisted with quarantines, which Plazia-Ruhl still hadn't created. For now, I put that on the back burner.

Owner of Worlds appeared useful, as I planned on owning several worlds. That being said, it would be a hot minute before I got ownership of another planet. On the other hand, Creator of Armies stuck out as one of the most appropriate choices. Unlike Owner of Worlds, Creator of Armies helped me out right now, letting me boost my armies or help make them better. That was always useful, and it would be for the foreseeable future.

On the other hand, the Immortal tree wasn't my cup of tea. It took me, like, three seconds to regenerate to full health. I didn't need more survivability, which I guesstimated the tree was about. Online searches didn't help me out there. As for Conquerer, that tree seemed the least useful. I had no issues wiping out populaces. If anything, my most significant limitations revolved around not killing other people while slaughtering enemies.

After weighing those options, I stuck with something simple – Builder. Yeah, it was pretty basic, but sometimes, choosing vanilla was the best option. Doing just that, I funneled all my points into the tree. It rewarded well after that.

Most Sentients use their lives to destroy. They break others, the eldritch, and even themselves. When they pass, nothing lives on after them. You've chosen a different path, one that leaves behind a bounty for others. Whether after death or before life, your chosen marks remain.

+10% Building Speed

This decision, the one of creation, is a difficult one to resolve one's self for. It involves giving away your ego and the drive for personal power. In this way, many of your current decisions revolve around those around you. It takes a strong mind to give to others, and you are an example of that strength embodied.

+10% Building Speed

This strength acts as a beacon for others. You shine brightly, casting an overflowing light onto those that congregate in your glow. That glow manifests as the comforts of living well; no rain nor wind will lash your friend's backs. No monsters will rush through their doors, and no cold will bite their fingers and toes.

+10% Building Speed

This protection creates community, a shelter for those that need an escape from a harsh reality. You forge a new one in place of a callus nature, an existence that is warm and comfortable. This allows others to grow in kind, and in that way, you've created a garden from which others may flourish.

+10% Building Speed

For their growth is your own, and in their tempering, you can only smile. You are but a piece, yet still part of the whole. You relish in this task, for you are a builder of homes and a crafter of comfort. Take pride in it.

+10% Building Speed | 100% increased learning speeds for construction based skills

It was a humble but welcome addition to my trees. It synergized with my current building tasks, and I appreciated the learning speed increase. Considering the number of colonies we'd be making soon, this was a wise decision long-term. Figuring I'd get my other small tree out of the way, I invested into Purger in the same way.

To purge is more than to destroy. Yes, you must eradicate the filth present and preserve the lives of those still living. More than this, you act as a cleansing agent, one that goes

through the land and restores balance. This balance exposes itself as new growth. By culling the old, you make way for the new.

+4% Damage In Quarantined Areas

This fresh restoration requires the culling of what lingers on. In that manner, don't mistake yourself as a reaper of these lost souls or infected people. You are granting them peace so that their families may live on. You are giving them a future worth living, one that is brighter than the dim present they bask in.

+4% Damage in Quarantined Areas

A light bringer, a dawn treader, and a dark culler, you walk forth through desolate lands and aged spaces. By choosing this path, you make a path for those behind you. By making a situation less grim, you allow others to do the same. Set these precedents, and you grant others the right to follow you.

+4% Damage in Quarantined Areas

And they will; you grant security and peace. Your presence, though basked in death, is a comfort to those around you. You exist not as a plague doctor that omens death but as a vaccine that promises life. The helpless, they peer at you in awe. Their fear is multifaceted, as it contains joy and retribution as well.

+4% Damage in Quarantined Areas

This retribution comes in the form of continuing on. Though upon the graves of those that have perished, their lands are now clean of infestations. That is because of you as you are the purger of vermin.

+4% Damage in Quarantined Areas | +10% Speed in Quarantined Areas

Once more, these were simple, useful bonuses. Unlike the larger trees, these didn't change my build or grant me wide, sweeping bonuses. They simply assisted me with specific jobs and tasks. Considering I planned on clearing fringe worlds eventually, it was good to get this out of the way. That investment left me with only a few skill points

left. Taking a glance at my other trees, I put the rest of my points into Creator of Armies.

It served me best for now, and with that handled, I checked out my status. Without really thinking the situation through, I just poured all my points into endurance. At this point, the multipliers worked like a charm for me. With that handled, I opened my status and gave it a look-see. This seemed like a nice bump up as far as stats were concerned.

The Living Multiverse(Lvl 18,461 (Cap: 26,000) | Current Influence: The Rise of Eden | Class: Sovereign)

Strength – 90,951 | Constitution – 113,694 | Endurance – 232,558

Dexterity – 48,012 | Willpower – 186,592 | Intelligence – 116,592

Charisma – 45,946 | Luck – 65,096 | Perception – 35,016 |Awe – 5,201

Health: 920.8 Million/920.8 Million | Health Regen: 31.6 Billion/min or 527.4 Million/sec

Stamina: Infinite | Ambient Mana 5.402 Trillion

Mass: 21.3 Million Pounds(9.7 Million Kilos~)

Height: 17'11 (5.46 meters)

Damage Res – 99.27% | Dimensional Res – 100%

Phys Dam Bonus – 115.7 Million % | Damage Bonus – 40%

The Rise of Eden – enhances base stats by 30%, increased to 40% to allies within aura's radius.

Mana Conversion – 7.1 Billion mana/min siphoned into runes and armor.

The gains were incredible. Due to all of my trees and multipliers, my mana generation continued exponentially increasing. It made me wonder if Schema would install a cap for some of my previous perks just for me. I mean, I doubted anyone else beat me in endurance. That could very well be the case for willpower as well.

Either way, everything else bolstered over time as well. In particular, my ambient mana jumped up an enormous amount from my last fight. Eating a Sentinel and tons of boosted hybrids tended to do that, and it was a good feeling knowing those efforts were getting recognized. As for every other stat, the gains were gradual yet inevitable.

It was a great feeling as my hand hovered over the finalize button. Right before selecting it, I jolted out of my daze. I remembered my Sovereign transformation and how violent it was. Keeping that in mind, I flew up above the sea, treading into unknown waters. Fifteen minutes later, and I gained access to a small island on the surface. With some molded fabric, I put myself into a cocoon of my dimensional threading, hoping it would contain my power-up.

Selecting finalize, I figured out quickly it would not. The sheer size of my stats meant the amount of mana Schema siphoned to me was abnormal. If anything, it might be the literal highest amount of mana he sent towards anyone. That meant lots of energy transferred, and with energy came heat.

Lots of it.

I scorched the ocean around me, the island burning into a pit of molten glass. As it sunk deep into the ocean's depths, an enormous geyser formed overhead. The water poured towards me and evaporated in mass, resulting in a gigantic whirlpool. This oceanic event left a substantial chunk of the surrounding sea drying out, and water from far off poured in to compensate.

That was about all I could comprehend at the time. It took all of my concentration to not be driven insane by all the mana. It was energy incarnate, a swarm that left me reeling. My vision faded like last time, and the resulting bonuses went unnoticed for that reason. I mean, how could I feel my mana increasing when I was melting?

I couldn't, and so this process continued for a few minutes. By the time it finished, my own body had turned into a semi-molten slop. Concerned for my well being, I held

myself together for a moment using magic. I generated something similar to my standard shape using hundreds of gravity wells, but I still deformed under the mana streams.

And yet, I lived. If anything, it left me stunned by my absurd, unending vitality. The fact of the matter was this – I'd never taken this kind of damage from anything else besides my class unlock. My stat increases were more dangerous than my actual fights now, and keeping that in mind, I intended on splitting up my next series of level-ups. If I took only a thousand attributes at once, it wouldn't be like this.

That was a relief. Either way, I finished my status work before soaring back to base. Once there, I found most of the gialgathens had returned from the eldritch luring mission, but a few were missing. Krog and Chrona were included in that bunch, along with a few of the more militant members. I landed amidst the returned gialgathens in a plume of uplifted sand and water. As I did, a smaller gialgathen telepathically spoke to me,

“There you are, Harbinger. We've gathered the eldritch while you were away. Our elite are pulling them together, and we will carry Amara with us whenever you're ready.”

I gave him a nod, “Let's go then. It's time.”

We headed out, crossing over Elysium territory. I blocked and deflected attacks as we passed, melting any clusters of Hybrids while floating overhead. It took the pressure off before we breached into the countryside. Here, few signs of Elysium showed themselves outside of the superior transport systems. The waterways powered by the leviathans were impressive as always.

So impressive that I didn't tear them down. That kind of direct, economic damage wasn't going to win the natural populace over, and it hurt the Vagni more than Elysium anyway. For now, I let those kinds of boons help out the native public, and I intended on implementing something similar soon.

That required the Vagni's support, however. Crossing the rural villages, we landed far past them into the eldritch's territory. Only the small fry monsters remained, the air thickened by dispersing mana. That source radiated off past a trench, where Krog and Chrona floated along the surface. Following them, shifting eldritch tore at one another, and they created vast ripples through the ocean.

These were the precursors to world eaters. During this highly competitive stage, thousands of these guys roamed the world harvesting organic matter. This gave them tremendous girth but a low density, but they still intimidated even seasoned veterans. The titans stood hundreds of feet tall like Kaiju, ready to tear down a city. They held no shape, however, and this free-flowing form gave them a unique breed of horror.

Unlike a monster with a shape, these were like amorphous nightmares. They existed almost like concepts instead of actual things. If one came rushing over an ordinary city, they would've smothered it, a tidal wave of darkness. That ability to harvest a world's resources reminded me that these guys acted as one of the eldritch's highest evolutions.

Despite that, these prefringe eldritch paled in comparison to their final forms. A Spatial Fortress darkened a planetside, mirroring an eclipse or new moon. These guys stuck to casting shade over hillsides. Well, I wasn't the kind of hillside they'd be pulling that off with. I turned to Amara, who still messed around with her status beside me. I sent her a message.

Daniel Hillside, The Harbinger of Cataclysm(lvl 18,461 (Cap: 26,000) | Class: Sovereign | Guild: The Harbinger's Legion) – Start sending the broadcast. I'm ready.

She gave me a nod, and for some reason, even the eldritch appeared confused for a moment nearby. I ignored that strangeness once the Hybrids and Vagni began staring forward. A few attempted smothering the screen popping up in front of them while others gawked at the fight between the behemoths in the distance.

For me, nothing appeared, but I had faith in Amara's skills. I charged mana into my blood. It took a few seconds of charging before I fully inundated with energy, and as I did, a familiar sensation returned – hunger. Some type of voice appeared in my mind, and it screamed out to kill, maim, and murder. It wanted to rip corpses and relish in the ensuing carnage.

I raised my eyebrows, taken aback by the sensation. I hadn't experienced this since before killing Yawm, far back in my early days of gaining my armor. It had terrified me at first, and I didn't know it was a natural part of having high amounts of mana. In general, my willpower tended to smother my high mana's mental effects, but now, those disturbances outdid my passive mental resistance. However, these voices no longer whispered. They symbolized the size of my mana, and my recent gains turned those whispers into the howling of an abyss.

And from that abyss, their screams echoed until they were deafening.

I smiled at the sensation, my hands shaking a bit. Though this presented a more immense challenge than before, I was no longer some naive schoolboy. I was the leader of a legion, and that armed me with knowledge. Using that experience, I shifted my mana to quintessence, the voices turning from howling demons to motivational angels.

I wanted to build, create, and make something of myself, but that wasn't helpful for what I was about to do. Taking a moment, I held my breath steady before pulling my mind to a singular point. Wielding this condensed mindset, I crushed the sensations, urges, and conflicting disturbances caused by my mana. It could howl all it liked, but that didn't mean I had to listen.

They silenced in moments, and I stood over them once more. Thinking on it, this mana-based outburst explained quite a few oddities. My armor acted on its own in my fight against the Sentinel. Most likely, that was under the influence of my ascendant mana. It could be helpful at times, so I kept that in the back of my mind, having put those old demons back to bed.

Returning to violence, I shifted back into my ascendant wake, Event Horizon. Knowing that would be the most effective aura, I launched myself towards the battle taking place before me. Krog and Chrona flowed around each other in action, both a marvel on their own but a miracle together.

They were like water and oil in a glass, both so intertwined I could hardly tell the difference between them. This coordination had reached new heights, and that connectivity demonstrated itself with each of their shifting strikes. They kept the eldritch at bay, doing well in not harming the monsters overtly. Chrona, most of all, could've obliterated the eldritch with her temporal dilation. However, keeping in line with the mission, they left these beats intact for me.

I appreciated the effort while closing in. Half a mile away, the eldritch slowed their fighting, unable to ignore my presence. At a quarter-mile, they glowered in my direction. Once I became more than a blot in the distance, a chill ran up their spine. The smallest began taking steps away, but it was too late.

I was upon them.

Within my grasp, I held the runners firm using powerful gravitation. It stunned them, leaving them unable to move but still able to stand. Knowing I needed to convince the eldritch to submit, I let the voices of my ascendant mana speak through me. This meant not suppressing the desire to destroy, and I took on this more monstrous persona.

In a way, it was liberating.

“So, it’s good to see you all still have some fight in you. You’ll need it for what’s to come.”

I kept my cipheric runes calm, not channeling my mana. Some of these eldritch still sensed something was amiss, and they were smart enough to listen to that instinct. However, a few, the brave ones, spoke out in fractured voices,

“Who are you, little one?”

“He gives us little to fight over, doesn’t he?”

“To speak in tones knowable to us...interesting. Perhaps this sheep is a wolf in disguise?”

I’d heard the whole ‘wolves’ schtick more than enough by now. I raised a hand,

“I have a mandate for each of you. You will now be my apostles, and you shall teach the Vagni that I am your ruler now.”

The most massive eldritch snickered, the largest of them then smiling with its many mouths. Its eyes locked with mine, and it cackled,

“You would rule us then? A tiny morsel, so small that you disappear in my shadow?”

It snarled, “You speak with no meaning, and you cast out words without thought. I tread horizons, and I carve them of their worth. I leave nothing behind me, a bringer of desolation. Within my grasp is the world before you, and yet, you, a tiny, measly youngling, believes you may contain me.”

It hissed, “Know what you are, or others will remind you.”

I charged some mana, my cipher runes beginning to swell. The smaller, smothered eldritch wrestled in the grasp of my mana, but the larger ones held their ground. Decades of being on top of the food chain numbed their instincts. It was about time I reawakened them.

“I believe that each of you has forgotten what fear is. Perhaps you have become gluttons, growing fat on the weakness of others. I forged myself amidst the powerful, and I have come out of that forge as the strongest. That strength is my weapon, and you will listen to me, or you will suffer.”

They no longer laughed, a few of the larger eldritch taken aback. The largest held its ground still. A few of its mouths smirked,

“And what will that suffering entail? An upset stomach after I engulf you?”

I charged further, allowing a weakened version of Event Horizon to leak out. It crossed over to the bravest amongst them, and it shivered. A few of its eyes showed concern, but the eldritch remained steadfast, its confidence absolute,

“If this is all you are, then you are still nothing.”

I increased my runic empowering tenfold, and by now, they understood the scale of my mana. They saw horrors, a shackled monster of many mouths, eating itself without end. Even Mr. Big Boy took a pause, his eyes widening from the first inklings of fear. It mouthed,

“This...This is an abomination. You are...a monster.”

I increased my charging yet again by tenfold, “Are you beginning to understand who you’re dealing with?”

I pressed Event Horizon into its body like a steel nail through a soft palm. The eldritch grunted out in pain, its underwater form shaking in agony. It let out ripples as it gasped,

“Cease that aura. It is aberrant. You, you’re a mangling of nature, and you should be killed before you cannot be stopped.”

And yet again, I multiplied my mana channeling. At this point, all of the eldritch cowered before me, several forced to bow from just the pressure alone. I needed no magic. I needed no direct threats. They understood that if they disobeyed, they’d be the next morsel fed to the cipheric runes.

The largest among them was the last left standing, and I pressed over him like a behemoth. I really played up the whole larger than life Harbinger thing,

“You’ve made a grave misunderstanding, little one.”

The largest fell down, unable to sustain its weight anymore. I leaned over him, placing a foot onto one of its eyelids,

“I passed the point of no return long ago. That barrier, the one of infinity, is one I’m more than comfortable in now. Knowing that, you understand what I can do to you, don’t you?”

The eldritch shivered before its many eyes watered. It shouted out in desperation as my mana increased further,

“Please, I will do anything. I will eat the dirt you tread upon. I will jump into voids, and I will march as your soldier. Make this agony stop. Please. Please. Please.”

In the distance, Amara looked away, unable to keep gazing at the spectacle. I couldn’t blame her. I took no joy in torture, whether it was to a monster or not. The eldritch, they didn’t decide to be this way. They were born like this, so wanting to grow and expand was instinct. In a way, I was similar. I didn’t have any real choice when I gained this armor in BloodHollow long ago. It was that or death.

And I presented that same choice to this eldritch.

“Listen, little one. There is hope for salvation here.”

My mana peaked to its utmost maximum, and by now, they believed my mana was infinite. It swarmed, a storm forming around the beasts. The water shifted crimson red, and those near us struggled as a deep madness soaked through them. The creatures turned frantic, their despair absolute. These monsters, they shifted around in terror while waiting for their torment to end.

And, it did.

I shifted my aura to the Rise of Eden, and I considered these eldritch my allies. Instead of the raging torment of Event Horizon, they gained an enormous increase in stats. Their wills were now bolstered instead of weakened, and they felt tremendous motivation to empower themselves. Letting them linger in the sensation, I raised my hands,

“I can bring you all to a higher plane. You all wallow down here, abandoned to this new dimension. Each of you struggles with your new forms, grasping at anything for power. This is because each of you is aimless, and you each exist without reason. This is because you lack meaning. I, I can offer you that meaning.”

The quintessence mana forced them to evolve. They gained denser musculature, harder bones, and sharper teeth. Their minds expanded, and they existed in rapture for a moment. Shutting the Rise of Eden off, that rapture ended. The sublime augments ceased forming, and they no longer experienced the surge of sudden growth. Torn from this, they shouted out,

“No, give me more.”

“It was complete, and now it is fractured once more.”

“I need more.”

I raised a hand, generating a block of quintessence. I threw it at the largest eldritch, who grasped it firmly in a tendril. I narrowed my eyes at them all,

“Be my apostles, and I can give you more than your wildest dreams. Obey me, and you will all prosper.”

I shifted my aura to Event Horizon, “Disobey me, and I will leave each of you shattered.”

I left the destructive dimensional wake on for only a moment before silencing all of my auras. I peered down at them,

“Speak.”

The largest, most defiant of them fell to his knees, and he raised his tendrils as if worshiping an angel,

“I will follow you...Harbinger.”

Another eldritch fell, its form akin to a nightmare more than a living thing,

“I too will follow you, Harbinger.”

They repeated those words, time and time again. Hovering over them, they submitted in their entirety. To them, the mana I offered was like a drug they needed. It gave them everything they hungered for, and in theory, I could give them all that and more. I wouldn't, but even just a little would go a long way.

Having them in the palm of my hand, I spread my arms and boomed my words, “My first decree is for all other eldritch to serve me, and you shall be my messengers. You may eat them no longer. You must abstain from indulgence, and I will offer you something better in place of their flavorless meat.”

I reached out a hand, several quintessence crystals forming over the individual eldritch. They grasped at them with a wild hunger before draining the energy within. Once finished, I raised a fist,

“Once the word is spread, tell the Vagni that I am the oldest of their gods. I am an ancient being that existed before time. I awoke and watched the universe form, and I allowed this world to become whole. I have now returned to take my rightful place as ruler here.”

Yup, good old me, being an ancient being before time...Totally.

The eldritch nodded, "Yes, Harbinger." The largest spread his vast arms wide, "I will not be silent until all Vagni know you are their true ruler, Harbinger."

I'll be honest, I held down a burst of laughter at these guys. Something about having these anomalous horrors bow to me was so...comical. It wasn't something I ever imagined for myself, and my only coping mechanism for this craziness was humor. I kept that under control, pointing out into the distance,

"Now go. Let the people of this world know the oldest of their gods has returned, and I wish for my chosen ones to escape the forces that afflict them here. They speak blasphemy against you and us, and so, the Vagni must escape them. Tell them to leave the cities and go into the wastes. There, I promise them a new life. A better one."

I beat my chest with a fist, "One where they live with the old gods, learning their wisdom."

The enormous horrors before me obeyed, and they trekked away into an uncertain future. They left marks and scars on the land as they did, their forms massive enough to tear stone and rend dirt. Once far away, I got a message from Amara,

Amara, the Lost One(lvl 7,829) – The transmission has ended. I can no longer sustain it.

I let out a sigh of relief, turning to Chrona and Krog above me, "Holy shit, I can't believe I pulled that off."

Chrona gave me a gentle smile, "I must admit, I was rather wrapped up in your performance. You understand how to give things a sense of scale, and you wield that understanding like a weapon in your speeches."

Krog grinned, showing his fangs, "Well done."

Turning towards the edge of a vast oceanic trench, I spotted Amara and a super golem staring. I gave them a thumbs-up before saying,

“Let’s go meet with them. We’ll see what the situation looks like now and reassess.”

We passed over a dark crack in the earth, looking like a wound beneath the sky. Nearing the others, I set up a telepathic multilink with Amara and the golem. In rushed a surge of fear, one dampened by some respect. It came from Amara who murmured,

“You were terrifying, as you always are. If we eldritch are wolves, then you are Fenrir, he who will rule us.”

The gialgathens and I got together, landing in front of her. I stepped up,

“Well, er, thanks...So, uh, how did the broadcast go?”

Amara cackled with a hint of evil under her breath, “Oh, better than I imagined it would. I’ve infiltrated several of their informational streams, and the Vagni have been deeply swayed by your performance. It goes without saying that the eldritch across this aquatic wasteland have also been convinced.”

I raised an eyebrow, “Wait, eldritch? We only broadcasted to the Vagni, right?”

Her eyes narrowed, “That is what we both believed, but I broke through one of their defensive protocols seconds before the announcement. I was able to extend the broadcast to the eldritch that live here as well. Even those without eyes saw your broadcast, the visualization utter and complete.”

My eyes widened, “So they all saw that? Every eldritch here?”

“Yes. Several raids by grouping eldritch have already begun.”

I stepped up, putting a hand on Amara’s shoulder, “Now that’s what I call exceeding expectations.”

Reaching out my hand, I generated a stream of quintessence for Amara, and she held her hands out wide. Her hair grabbed any of the shining stones that missed her palms while she drooled into the water. Grinning from ear to ear, Amara nodded,

“Thank you very much, Harbinger.”

I raised a fist, “I give my own what they deserve, so expect more than this. That being said-” I leaned closer to Amara with a knowing smile,

“Don’t think I’m going to keep believing you’re just some Builder’s apprentice forever, though. Capeesh?”

Amara scoffed, “A humble beginning doesn’t mean I will have a humble end. Of anyone, you should understand those words well.”

Remembering my past as a screw-up from school, I pursed my lips while leaning back. She was right about that one. Finding the others gawking in surprise, I outstretched my hands,

“We’re taking our siege worldwide, and we have an army of our own as well to attack from all sides.”

The gialgathens raised their many wings, casting a shadow over Amara and me. They let out another roar before we returned to our headquarters. In the center of Saphigia, the situation stabilized, vast swaths of the patrolling Hybrids sent to the capital’s outskirts. The reason for that was twofold.

On the one hand, many eldritch attacked from the outside. To protect the local populace, Elysium sent in guards for their protection. On the other hand, the Vagni showed a stark reduction in support for Elysium. Without them doing what they were told, outright chaos ensued. That was all thanks to Amara. Eventually, I needed to get a grip on what her past was and understanding that would lead to getting the most out of her talents.

She already surpassed anything I imagined she was capable of, and I couldn’t even guess the edge of her potential either. That was a heartening realization. Either way, a regroup was required. The situation changed completely from this morning, so I got our guild’s elite together in the largest building I crafted overnight. Within those walls, we

sat at a round table while the gialgathens rested on landing platforms surrounding us. Glass windows showed the war outside our sanctum, and the quintessence crystals bathed us in a pale light.

I leaned back in my chair made of gravitation, gesturing to everyone, “What’s the aftermath of operation: Eldritch Shakedown?”

Torix read a flood of messages from his many sources of information, “There appears to be a high number of factional changes from the Vagni. Initial figures presume a 40% conversion rate in cities with up to 60% in rural areas. It’s better than I envisioned, and the figures are climbing as we speak. In particular, the eldritch’s support is the most convincing for the more skeptical Vagni.”

Torix turned to Amara, who ate three different mana crystals in a single hand,

“Based upon my minimal skills of deduction, I imagine it was you we have to thank for the eldritch’s support?”

Amara didn’t answer, but the happy look on her face spoke volumes. Torix threw up his hands, “This is excellent. We should expect up to 60% of urbanites and 80% of rural Vagni to transfer before the week is done.”

I leaned forward, tapping my chin with a knuckle, “Huh, that’s good. We’ll need to take full advantage of this opening then.” I pointed at the gialgathens here, Krog and Chrona sitting alert,

“You two, scope our surrounding cities near Saphigia. We should be able to contain what’s going on there. We’ll be able to get a solid grasp on the land near us, letting us establish more cities. My idea is to make bulwarks that are protected by blue cores. Once we have those set, we’ll create perimeters protected by my super golems.”

Krog and Chrona bowed before they flew out through an opening made for them. I turned to Torix, “Get the territory near here stabilized and running economically as quickly as possible. I want the local populace to see us like a wave of prosperity. That requires good transportation, along with buyers for standard Vagni goods. I need the credits from it as well.”

“As you wish it, it will be so.”

Torix stood, pacing off towards his lair. I pointed at Hod and Althea, “Can you two do some scouting on a few of the nearby military outposts here? We’ll need to take the entirety of Saphigia before this week is out.”

Althea and Other Hod gave me a thumbs up before they disintegrated into thin air, undetectable and intangible. I peered towards Kessiah, who looked run ragged, her face pale from blood loss. Remembering the ring I gave her for blood production before, I pulled out some fabric from my pocket dimension.

Molding more rings and amulets in seconds, I charged my grimoire while speaking,

“I’ll be building you a hospital. Let’s go.”

By the time I arrived at the new building spot, I had begun floating a few finished rings over to her. Her fingers were loaded with metal now, along with amulets, bracelets, and even chain belts. Some gravity augments were necessary so she could continue moving; otherwise, she’d be rendered inert. The weight aside, each piece perked her up some. This left her feeling much better by the time I constructed the base of her building.

As always, I kept the design simple, but I partitioned rooms out more than usual. Poorly designed hospitals spread disease, so I put some time and effort into keeping things safe. Along with preventing cross-contamination, I made several enormous rooms for the gialgathens. This, combined with some of our medical personnel, meant we could help keep people stable until a real healer arrived.

Handling that situation, I left Kessiah to her healing before heading over towards the monument I made for Alpha and our other fallen. Besides the memorial, a Sentinel’s armor and spear glistened with cracks on their graphene surfaces. I sat down, inspecting the cipher runes laced between the armor’s chinks.

Giving everything a quick glance, I committed the unrealistically elaborate cipher inscriptions to memory. Doing the same with the spear, I inspected every part I could find before a portal opened up behind me. From this warp, an old friend walked out with sad steps. That sadness altered into shock as I stood over him, a head taller than he was.

I commanded his attention, his helmet scarred by recent battles. So many wounds littered his surface that a few patches of tar-like skin exposed themselves from chips in his exoskeleton. Most of all, he was missing an eye. The pivotal figure stared at me in evident surprise as I lifted the Sentinel's spear and armor to him,

"It's good to see you again, Overseer. How have you been?"

Chapter 296: A Loyalty, Fractured

The Overseer peered up at me, "To think that you'd come this far as quickly as you have." The Overseer opened his status, viewing my class and whatnot, "It's been a long time since a Sovereign was made, and with your stats no less. Excellent work."

Not expecting a compliment, I beamed with some pride, "Well...thanks. I appreciate the recognition."

The Overseer turned to the Sentinel, "Further talk must wait until after his service has transpired."

The weary giant walked over to the fallen Sentinel's armor and spear, but I stopped the Overseer with a hand on his shoulder, "I already paid his respects."

The Overseer stood taller as if a weight was taken off of him, "Ah, then that is good... Very good."

I let my arm down while the Overseer stared down at the corpse. His gaze lingered, and thoughts of all kinds boiled beneath the surface. The Overseer remained solemn as he muttered,

"Of all the people I imagined to honor us in death, you were among the last of them. Did you have a change of heart due to Schema's awards, perhaps?"

I raised an eyebrow, "What was my opinion before just now?"

"Spear tells me of your disdain for Schema. I imagined it would extend to us as well, as we are representatives of the AI."

My eyes widened as I remembered my remarks to Spear. After the situation with the Spatial Fortress and Althea, keeping my cool regarding Schema grew difficult. I might've been more scathing than I intended, so I kept the Overseer's words in mind moving forward. If Spear relayed my chats to others, then I'd watch what I said around him.

I raised a hand, "There's been a misunderstanding. I'm not trying to act like Schema's evil or that I hate him. I'm just aware of his shortcomings. That's all."

I pointed at the Sentinel's armor, "And to say I don't respect someone like that, a soldier that dies in battle for what he believes in...that's disingenuous."

The Overseer leaned back, "I'll take your word for it. Worthy of note, you've gotten better with words. In our first meeting, you once sounded like a simpleton. Now you speak with purpose...and the mark of intention."

He narrowed his eyes at the last few words, but I shrugged it off, "Eh, it's the class talking."

The Overseer gave me a slight nod, and his guarded nature waned. He rolled his shoulders as he loosened up some. He even let his hands clank against his sides. He seemed 'off' like something bothered him. For an average person, I'd have ignored signs this subdued. However, the Overseer showed little emotion, so even subtle cues hinted at larger issues beneath the surface. Trusting my instincts, I frowned,

"Hey, you alright?"

A touch unbalanced, he peered up at the shifting, underwater seascape, "Does it matter?"

"Depends. If you want to perform on your job, then yeah, it does."

He sighed before shaking his head, "I...I just need to rest."

I stomped the ground, generating two blocks of stone. I sat down on one of them, "Why not take a break here? You look like you need it."

He glowered at a Hybrid in the distance before one of my super golems destroyed the abomination. Watching one of the disgusting monsters be rived in half, the Overseer let out a melancholic laugh,

“This is as good a place as any, I suppose. I do enjoy watching those beasts die.”

We sat under my base with the war waging over us before I leaned forward, “So, how’s Schema doing against Elysium?”

The Overseer put a hand on the side of his head, “Less than optimally. We, his soldiers, are faring even worse still. Our forces have been pushed further back than our projections initially indicated. They send wave after wave of Hybrids at us, and that result is in an endless wave of casualties for both sides.”

I nodded, “Torix predicted that they’d do that. It isn’t like silvers or the eldritch are in short supply, and that’s what Hybrids are made of. Althea confirmed it.”

“Those are banes, yes, but now their disease, Hybridization, it spreads to even us. They’ve begun turning our own soldiers into vessels that are awe-inspiring in their power and might.”

The Overseer glared at the dimensional slicer beside us, “That is a fact you are well aware of. I can see you’ve already handled one of our converted members.”

I frowned, “Yeah, he had to be put down. Or she. Honestly, I couldn’t tell you what it was after Hybridization.”

“It doesn’t matter what it was. It matters what it is now. That corruption spread through it, and so now it must be culled. I wish that I could say that is the only Sentinel we’ve lost, but that is far from factual. We’ve never suffered this many fallen Sentinels, not since Schema began recording our fatalities centuries ago.”

The Overseer shook his head, “Even more so, we lost an Overseer the other day to Lehesion. That is the rumor spreading through our ranks.”

Staring at the Overseer's many wounds, it was only a matter of time before one of them fell. You could only work someone so hard before they tumbled apart. I winced at our Overseer, "Damn."

"This is the first time in Schema's history that one of my kind has been killed. It brings home a stark reality for all of us. We may perish at any moment."

I remembered Alpha, "That's true. We all can."

"It is different for me. One of the benefits of becoming an Overseer is immortality. You're guaranteed to live forever. With this war, that is no longer the case, and my coming mortality makes me dwell on my life. Did I live it well, or do I carry regrets with me that I refuse to acknowledge?"

He peered at a cluster of Vagni being huddled to safety, "As an example, since this war has started, I've killed civilians like them. Others have replicated that same evil, their beings drenched in blood and their paths marred by corpses."

Visions of cities being disintegrated in balls of fire and light passed over my eyes. I envisioned the millions I killed on Giess during my nightly bombings of their metropolises. Yeah, I was one of those people the Overseer talked about. The Overseer continued, his words like a dagger between my ribs,

"Wars bring about the deepest horrors of those that fight in them."

I swallowed a sickness in my stomach, "Huh...yup."

The Overseer waved a hand, "Not, not to criticize you or your efforts. You killed the enemy. That constructs you in the image of a hero, and you are one of Schema's greatest assets. That makes you one of our greatest assets as well."

It was a weird way of wording a compliment, but I took it to heart, "Yeah, it's easy to forget I helped anyone sometimes."

The Overseer pointed a massive finger at me, "Your decisive action against the rebels delayed their initial offensive, and that resulted in several planets not being overrun during their original blitz. Throughout the conflict, those planets inevitably fell, but you

gave them time they wouldn't have otherwise had. Save that guilt for another time or for tangible mistakes because killing those monsters wasn't a mishap. It saved billions of lives."

"Holy shit. Billions?"

"Yes."

"Woah...Still, it sounds like my bombing of Giess didn't matter in the end. The planets still fell."

"Evacuations were more complete, and fewer casualties occurred. That alone is more than most of my actions have amounted to."

I never fully considered the results of my decision to bomb Giess. For me, it equated to mass murder, but hearing about evacuations and fewer deaths bolstered my own spirits a bit. That encouragement faltered as the Overseer rubbed his missing eye without thinking about it. As he did, blue, humming nanomachines kept most of his body intact at this point, glowing over patches of exposed skin.

The suit could only stop so many of the impacts he suffered from. Some of his exposed, tar-ish skin revealed a nasty wound on his shoulder, the nanomachines unable to fully protect him any longer. It made his doom and gloom attitude fit his appearance. That culminated in his brooding sense of mortality that now loomed over him.

The rebellion changed him. Instead of being an invincible, almost robotic director of affairs, he now carried a weakness and vulnerability. He no longer spoke with absolutes, and his faith was shaken to its core, giving way to doubt. It made him more human, and it warmed me to see him show some emotion.

But, it also made me somber. The Overseer was kind to me in his direct, no-nonsense way. His advice helped, even if it was often blunt like a hammer. Before I ruminated further, the Overseer caught himself rubbing where his eye once was, and he pulled his hand back with a quick jerk,

"Despite those setbacks, we have ceased Elysium's advancements, for now. They took the planets they initially targeted, but their success came from their original strategy. By

choosing vulnerable worlds, they ensured a high chance of success. After those easiest of worlds were taken, they now lack any firm grip on other planets. That we know of.”

He reminded me of Althea’s report on Gypsum. A place like that was just begging to breakaway from Schema, and I imagined there were plenty of other planets just like it. I peered around at Blegara,

“Yeah, kind of like this place, huh?”

“Indeed. You’ve managed to establish a place of relative safety here. It’s dreamlike that such serenity can be achieved amidst this mayhem. It’s thanks to those constructs, as I understand it.”

He pointed at Alpha’s memorial. I nodded,

“Our progress is definitely because of them.”

“It would serve you well to remember that. Many in positions of power forget those that are under them. In many ways, that is what I am experiencing now. Schema is leaving us to fend against this army by ourselves.”

“Isn’t he sending classers to help?”

The Overseer stared down at his massive palms, “Yes and no. Some classers still decide to help, but they will abandon us if the situation becomes remotely dire. That is exacerbated by Schema’s lack of tactical utilization. We, Overseers and Sentinels, are being thrown in lines of fire where we are killed in mass. This leads to inefficiency, and by now, we could’ve achieved far more with the lives we’ve lost.”

“It sounds like you have your own ideas of how to fight Elysium. If that’s the case, why not let Schema know about them? It couldn’t hurt to get a new perspective.”

The Overseer scoffed, “You’ve attempted discussing your viewpoints with Schema before, haven’t you?”

I grinned, “Like talking to a brick wall.”

The Overseer shook his head with a laugh. He raised a hand, turning serious, “Humor aside, I commanded troops in my past. I fought against Yawm and his kind, and I learned how to wage war. That put me in a position to judge how Schema fares at the task. I believe that we are strong, but our enemies are endless.”

He turned a palm to me, “You understand this, but you are fortunate enough to retain the tenacity to fend off wave after wave of enemies. We are not in such a fortunate circumstance. Sentinels and Overseers are explosive, powerful, and quick. Each member is akin to a moving bomb, one with high initial resilience and a tremendous output of force.”

The Overseer waved his hands, “Your golems, they are more reminiscent of a hurricane. They slowly but surely march forward, whittling the enemy down one at a time. This means they are similar in their abilities when compared to a Sentinel, but instead of explosivity, they shine in their resilience.”

“Yeah, endurance is my specialty, and since my golems are made of me, they’re no different. Our team actually honed in on that longevity, making them durable killing machines. We even designed them with mind magic augments, so they’re difficult to subdue from multiple fronts. That stops them from being taken by the enemy.”

“There is wisdom in your approach. We are different. Our capacity for mind magic was severed, along with many other abilities. Eliminating our mental sorcery made us easier to control for Schema, but now that limitation makes us easier to subdue for their psionics. That aged safety precaution has rebounded on us in this conflict, exposing one of Schema’s weaknesses. Even more so, that magic isn’t the only sacrifice we’ve made.”

The Overseer rubbed his neck while staring down, “I am pressed between two walls closing in, and now I am at the cusp of being crushed by both of them. I am given no choices, which means I walk a predetermined path, one I cannot change. Indeed, your golems may be more sentient than us.”

Those words sank in with silence. A solemn moment passed before I raised a hand, “But you still talk to me like a normal person. I think you’re selling yourself short here.”

He let out a deep sigh, “Yes. You’re correct. My negativity stems from being pushed to my limits, both mentally and physically. Cracks from that pressure are showing themselves now, and that is why I talk like this.”

“It sounds like morale’s pretty low.”

Needing an outlet, the Overseer glared off in the distance, “It is the lowest it’s ever been. I speak from my perspective, of course, so I may be off base. My sentiment can be summed up, however. We fight tirelessly for the ideal Schema represents, and in the end, we help all sentients. Schema does not reciprocate our sentiment, and so, our lives are thrown away.”

The Overseer squeezed a hand into a fist, “This conflict, it will result in an enormous price to pay. I fear that Schema refuses to give even a cent to that cause...And in turn, we shall pay that price for him.”

His words clopped down like lead blocks landing on the ground, and I grimaced at his predicament. Damn, I was glad I hadn’t become a Sentinel or Overseer earlier. It was noble in a way, sure, but I couldn’t manage that kind of personal sacrifice. Just as concerning was putting my life in someone else’s hands. It rubbed me the wrong way, and it didn’t help that the Overseer mentioned a growing number of casualties either.

Empathizing some, I crossed my arms, “Man, I can’t imagine what it’s like having your comrades thrown away like that then having to honor them after the fact...over and over and over again. It must be hard.”

The Overseer leaned back in his stone chair, peering at me, “It’s strange that I’m discussing all of this with you. I shouldn’t disclose my doubts like this at all, most of all with a usurper. Perhaps your obstinance is why I’ve decided to do so. You, of all people, wouldn’t report my words to any higher-ups. You also understand some of my past, so perhaps your judgment will be tempered by mercy.”

I wrinkled my brow, “I didn’t think there were members higher up than you?”

“You’ve much to learn still. There are forces higher than Schema nested in the cosmos. He simply keeps them covered, and they choose to play along, remaining hidden. When you meet Baldowah, you will come to understand that.”

I spoke with confidence, “I’ve seen Old Ones more than once. They are overwhelming in many ways, but for the most part, they are limited. Maybe not where they come from, but here, in this dimension, they can only do so much. That means I just have to understand their limitations and work around them. Old Ones aren’t so bad if you do that.”

The Overseer steepled his large hands, “Yes, but understand that you don’t have access to what their limitations are. It is akin to cutting wires to a bomb. You never know when your actions will inadvertently cause it to explode.”

I narrowed my eyes, “I’ll make sure to watch my step then.”

“I mean no offense with my statements. They are simply realities for you. If anything, I am simply warning you because you remind me of myself. I was in a similar position to yours when I became an Overseer. Schema offered me a deal, and at the time, I couldn’t refuse. I took on this duty. In time, I completed my task of killing Yawm and avenging my species.”

The Overseer pushed his fingertips together using more force, “And now that my revenge is over, my species is still left shackled, but now I am bound along with them. The shackles are simply harder to see.”

It was a strange metaphor, but I shrugged, “It sounds more like your growing cynical. I get that. You’re in a precarious position, so you’re not in the best state of mind. It might be a good idea to take a step back and breathe.”

The Overseer leaned towards me, his voice rising, “Before I turned into this, I became a Breaker to kill Yawm. After many years of hunting and searching, I cornered that monster. He trounced me in combat and gave me mercy. Do you know why?”

I dwelled back, thinking of the intimidating figure,

“I don’t know. He probably thought you were useful.”

“That is correct. Yawm’s mercy acted as a message to my kind. He howled that he was above us, both in ability and character. That message stayed with me until his death, keeping me in stasis until you killed him. It was as if I was frozen in time, my goals

single-minded and my paths narrowed. When he died, my perspective reopened, and new possibilities came to light.”

The Overseer tapped his neck, “But this will never allow me to escape my previous decision. I will work for Schema until time ends or death, whichever comes first. There was a time I dreaded that eternity of servitude, but hearing of a fallen Overseer, it makes me fear my mortality once more and for the first time in ages. Perhaps I should appreciate that fear. It shows I am still alive.”

I furrowed my brow, “Maybe one day you’ll get out of that suit. You never know.”

“It is as much a part of me as that armor is of you.”

I lifted a hand, slicing my wrist with a heated blade of my armor. Silver, reflective blood leaked out as I smirked,

“You sure about that?”

The blood coiled back around my wrist, healing my wound. The Overseer let out a shallow laugh, “Perhaps not.”

A peaceful silence passed over us before the Overseer raised a hand to me,

“What of your new status as Sovereign? Have you began planning out any political moves?”

I shook my head, “No. I’m trying to make the most of this next week before I go to fight Plazia.”

“You should keep your new council position in mind when doing so. You could meet many people who rule many worlds. They would be similar in stature to Obolis, or far greater if they are ancients within the system. Some have lived for thousands of years, growing the entire time.”

A chill ran up my spine at the thought of ancient rulers. I lifted an eyebrow, my curiosity rising, “How would I size up against them?”

The Overseer scoffed, “You’re a big fish in a small pond.” He leaned forward, “However, that council isn’t an ocean. It’s more akin to a large lake, one with sharks ready to bite. If it were up to them, they would swallow you whole as a hearty meal, but you won’t need to hide for long before you exceed them, given the trajectory of your growth. It’s what comes after your rise that I find interesting.”

He leaned back, “Schema didn’t name you the Harbinger of Cataclysm without reason.”

Thinking of all the possibilities on my plate, a growing sense of unease passed over me. I raised my eyebrows, “Do you have any advice? For me, that is. It’s not often I get to talk to anyone that understands my position and isn’t trying to take advantage of me.” I pointed at him, “At least I don’t think you are.”

The Overseer tilted his head, “You want consultation from me? One of Schema’s dogs, hmm?”

“You’re more like a guard or assistant. Besides, dogs are awesome. Anyway, I need some perspective. Considering the places you’ve been as an Overseer, you’re offering plenty of that.”

The Overseer dwelled over my words and mulled them over in his head. Finalizing his thoughts, he stated, “Then listen well. I’d recommend three courses of action.” He raised a large finger, “The first is to treat your allies well and use their full potential. You can give those around you an enormous boost in their aptitudes. Wasting that is like throwing gold into a dark well without a bottom. To see that come to pass, it would be a shame.”

“Note taken. What else?”

“You must learn primordial mana. Given your unique situation, that energy will serve you best over the long term.”

He was telling me something I already knew, but I pushed down the urge to be a smartass,

“Alright. Done.”

“And lastly, know your worth. Many will wish to tie you down from here on out and use your abilities for their own benefit. In terms of combat, you will be unique in the future. Don’t give those tools to someone else. Let them be your own, and use them as you see fit.”

“Now that sounds like my kind of advice.”

The Overseer peered off, “Good. Keep those reflections in mind moving forward, and you shouldn’t be in too conflicted a position.”

A blip popped up in his red status, causing the Overseer to stand up, “Your future aside, I must leave. There are many I must help, and time is finite.” He stared at me, “For most of us.”

I pulled myself up, “Ok, well, I got some advice for you too before you head out.”

The Overseer leaned forward, “Ah, surprising. I will listen.”

“There was a point when I was forced to fight Yawm, and there was no way of defeating him in front of me. It was hopeless, but I managed to make the best of a bad situation. Of course, I made mistakes, and my situation isn’t perfect, but I’m in a better place than I was then. Knowing what you’ve done and been through, I know you can do the same. Hold onto this idea, and you’ll make chances where there are none.”

“Chances where there are none...Hm, that’s true. That arises from hope, a powerful emotion, and it’s pulled me through many a dark time already. It may do that once more.” He lifted a hand, “I’ll try to heed your words if you heed mine.”

I reached out a hand, “Then it’s a deal.”

The Overseer gave my hand a firm shake before peering up at the colony, “Good luck with your siege of this planet. You shall need it, should Lehesion arrive.” The Overseer raised a fist, “We will do our best to keep him busy in the meantime.”

I grinned, “Good. Keep fighting.”

The Overseer picked up the Sentinel’s armor and spear before heading out. He stepped through the veil, leaving a lingering weight behind him. One could imagine that weight manifested from the severe conversation or perhaps from the Overseer’s harrowing report of the war front. For me, that wasn’t quite the case. Those factors left their impacts, but another reason pressed down like anvils on my feet.

As the Overseer left, I waited for a few minutes with cold sweat dripping down my brow. Not real sweat but the metaphorical kind. At the same time, I kept my breaths measured, not expecting my circumstances to play out so well. After fifteen onerous minutes, wild excitement raced up my chest.

The Overseer had made a mistake.

I floated myself over towards Alpha’s memorial, hovering above the action. I scanned the ground for remnants of my battle with the twisted Sentinel. I found chunks of glass, rubble, and debris scattered about, but none of that mattered. Minutes passed, and I wondered if I’d misremembered. As I began to doubt myself, I found a violet shard sticking out from a pile of rubble.

Perfect.

I darted over, wrapping my hand around the humming, heated blade. It still sizzled with arcane energies, the intricacies hidden within its depths unknown to me. Pulling it close to my eyes, ancient incantations of the cipher sprawled over the surface of the spear shard. This was the fragment that snapped during my battle with the twisted Sentinel.

I’d thought about taking a piece from a Sentinel before, but uncovering their secrets would’ve only resulted in being exiled. With my new Sovereign class, that wasn’t the case any longer. I could research forbidden tech until my heart was content.

And that forbidden tech started here, with my own dimensional slicer.

Chapter 297: A Change of Pace

Peering at the blade’s inner sections, I found similar, multi-layered designs I’d encountered before. Unlike my own, this blade didn’t stop at one layer of context for

the surface lines. Many sheets coated a core of energy powered by some far off, cipheric flow of energy. Discovering where that originated was all but impossible, but learning Schema's ciphering techniques were quite the opposite.

Keeping that in mind, I pocketed the shard into my personal dimension, saving it for later. Studying it would be massive for my future, but it was a long term investment. Even from a casual glance, the runic markings exceeded well beyond my grasp, similar to an elemental furnace. It would take years to fully know how it worked.

The shard wasn't going anywhere either, assuming the Overseer didn't demand it back from me. However, he couldn't prove I took it, and I'd argue that it was taken by a Hybrid or the like during the conflict. It wasn't as if I or my guild was omnipotent, after all. Regardless of how I obtained it, the fragment offered a point of progress I needed.

If I could use my own dimensional slicer, learning to warp wouldn't be necessary. That would save me a lot of time I didn't have, but for now, I put the rest of my intentions back to Blegara and its capital, Saphigia. My time here was limited, and I wanted to establish a robust and long-lasting presence here before leaving.

The first way of doing that was by destroying enemy forces throughout Saphigia. I had the means, and I was also the most lethal soldier in our army. Before walking down that road, other ideas popped up in my head first—those ideas spawned from the Overseer's advice, particularly the part about helping allies.

Even if I didn't want the guy knowing I took the Sentinel's spear shard, it wasn't like I ignored him during our conversation. I meant what I said, and I listened intently. Using that advice immediately, I put up a bulletin list of what needed doing. First and foremost, Kessiah came to mind. She needed a real boost given how much healing she managed on her own, and a bunch of half-ass jewelry wasn't going to cut it. The same could be said for the empty hospital I gave her.

Brainstorming for a few minutes, I came up with a few ideas that I went about executing. The first plan involved messaging Torix about helping Kessiah with logistics. She needed someone bringing her people to heal instead of her running through the front lines. That kept her safer, but it also made her healing more efficient since she'd be more rested.

Sending Torix that request, I headed back over towards the hospital. Once inside, I found many troops healing from their wounds and infestations of the Hybrids. Using

Omega Strains, several doctors discovered they could clear minor Hybridization using them. The Omega strains harvested the metal out of the body precisely, requiring less intervention from me directly.

Just as these new approaches took a load off me, I wanted other measures in place to take a load off of Kessiah as well. The first part of that process involved making a healing station for her specifically. This new post required three main components: a room covered in supportive runes, tools to lower the amount of blood necessary for her healing, and a new suit specialized for her.

Lining those three pieces together, I got to work on the room first. I set it up at the center of the hospital. Calling on healing specialists in the guild, I got a few runic diagrams commonly used in Schema's new age hospitals. These runes worked to enhance healing, prevent bleeding, and bolster natural regeneration. Combining those runes with my own, I multiplied mana regeneration, increased endurance, and added constitution for the entire area.

With the blueprints in place, I translated some of the work into the cipher. At this point, I understood the complex, dimensional language pretty well, and managing robust uses for the archaic words could be done. Influencing an area in a certain way was one of those new possibilities. In this case, that involved an enormous amount of healing centric incantations.

Of course, I was still limited to what I could do. Adding mana regen? I could do that. Assisting mental focus? Trickier, but still doable. Increase intracellular water retention? Well, let's just say it was a work in progress. Even if I could do something like that, the cipher was incredibly potent on physical spaces. That's why I stayed careful while crafting clean, crisp inscriptions for the room. Having all this work backfire would be soul-crushing, after all.

Managing all those issues, I designed it for the perimeter of the place. Once blueprinted, my carving started up in my grimoire. It took several hours, but I got a revised and refined copy of the engravings before I began charging them up. With that locked in, I racked my brain for quick, easy additions. To my good fortune, a few ideas came to mind.

Molding my dimensional fabric, I built several tables for people, each with crystallized quintessence loaded in them. This mana type acted as a mobile power source for anyone needing something powered, and it could charge a healer up as well. I combined that with the runic power system I made for a few of the previous buildings

earlier. This connected the hospital like a modern building, giving it the luxuries of electricity.

I also made a ring that generated freshwater. Installing it in several spaces, these rings acted as sinks powered by quintessence as well.

Beside the sinks, I made a unique operating table for Kessiah. I placed many enchantments over its surface, some of them mirroring the wall's runes to compound their effects. I even gave a sterilizing zone effect for the trickiest medical work needed here. It would be for priority cases that required immediate attention.

That finished up my simple ideas, and I moved onto my other main ideas next. One of those primary helpers for Kessiah was tools. She handled all of her healing with only her blood, over and over. Giving her other options would let her be more targeted with her abilities.

Of course, I wasn't exactly an expert on the task at hand, but a bit of brainstorming gave me suggestions. In particular, a few utensils immediately stood out. A scalpel would be pragmatic, not only for simple surgeries but for taking out Hybridization as well. The blade being made of my armor ensured that ability.

As for the second tool, I was thinking of a syringe that amplified the effects of whatever it injected. Many medicines worked wonders, and having something like that might be useful. As for the third and final tool, I settled on a plated block of quintessence. I know, I know, a giant block of mana. Genius. Revolutionary even.

In all honesty, was it complicated? Maybe not, but it would be useful. Crude compared to the other tools, the plated quintessence would act as an enormous power source that Kessiah could draw from. She needed that kind of charging station to prevent anemia, along with a team of people helping her out, so her talents shined.

With that coming together nicely, I finished energizing the wall runes. A flowing ribbon of enchantments cascaded from the pages of my grimoire. They lined up across the walls, singing through stone with utter ease. To power these augments, I generated crystal bulbs of quintessence, acting as both light and power sources for said runes.

It gave the entire expanse an ancient yet gentle atmosphere. On the one hand, the cipher dotted the walls with its unknowable depths. On the other, the modernistic and

minimalist designs I cooked up gave it a clean feel. It didn't clash as much as I expected, so I counted that as a bonus.

After that, I drafted and revised runic work from several medical personnel on the site. They worked with Bryan, the retired dungeoneer, to give me runic work that amplified the scalpel and syringe functions. Having a reference, I once again went about translating and charging up the cipheric augments involved.

It took another few hours since the first tool, the scalpel, required tiny, precise markings across every inch of its surface, excluding the blade. That required the vast majority of the scalpel's time investment, as the actual razor wasn't tricky. It did take a bit of finesse to get the edge sharper than what I usually made, as actually chipping away at the edge of my fabric was nearly impossible by now. I ended up just growing a sharp shard and welding it to the end of a handle.

Eh, if it works, it works.

Once I refined that section, I got the runic work sorted out as well. Having a few medically knowledgeable staff helped me tremendously since I could ask questions the entire time. This sped me along while I molded out the glass for a syringe. The only other parts needing my dimensional fabric were the device's actual needle and struts along the sides.

The plunger required some molten metal as well since it would be reused and often. I made that part imbued with hunger, which made the device self-cleaning. It would absorb a thin layer of the compound remaining after injecting any kind of medicine. It saved cleaning time, along with solving some sanitation concerns as well.

Speaking of saving time, I saved a lot of time on the plated quintessence. It took seconds to make, a real godsend compared to the other utensils. It turns out that generating a big block of quintessence and wrapping it in a thin sheet of dimensional fabric didn't take much effort. I put an antigravity well augment on the surface to help suspend its heft too, and boom, a portable power source was made.

Staring at the crude block, I gave it straps for carrying around, and I spread some elementary runes over a few of the empty spots on the surface.

You could never have too many runes, after all. After finishing the physical work, I charged my runes in the meantime. Once saturated, I hovered my first batch of glyphs for the scalpel in front of me.

Inching down with a hiss, the glowing symbols floated around onto the handle. Combine that with the glistening edge, and it resembled a dagger more than the scalpel it was supposed to be. However, it served the purpose as both a weapon and medical tool well enough, so I moved on.

For the syringe, I took a different approach. Leaning on the plunger's innate hunger, I tricked the runes into doing what I wanted. I made the cipher markings require a kind of trading pattern to operate. A bit of physical matter in, and it would dispense energy out.

This flow of power served as a check all augments, boosting the properties of anything within the syringe. It could be dangerous with certain compounds, but it could be tested on other things before living people. Having already finished the backpack, I lined up my work and gave it an inspection. It was solid stuff for the most part.

The Woundless Carver(lvl requirement: 9,000) – This blade was designed by the Harbinger of Cataclysm to be both apt at slicing and poor at killing. This thin edge can inflict temporary wounds that will quickly regrow within minutes due to the strange, unearthly runic carvings along with magic impulses sent off routinely by the apparatus.

These impulses grant energy and vitality to both the user and the recipient alike. If close, others can benefit from the item as well. Combine this with the runic augments, and this is a potent weapon for anyone who wields it, doctor or not.

This is due to the blade retaining the tremendous durability of its composing material. If used swiftly, it can still kill someone before they can regenerate. It also offers defensive measures, being able to block blades and bullets given skill from the wielder. Even more so, the edge devours eldritch and Hybridization on contact, letting it clear minor infestations.

These properties culminate in a potent tool when used well.

+2,500 Endurance+1,500 Willpower+1,250 Constitution

+1,250 Intelligence+500,000 Health+500,000 Health Regeneration per minute+1 Million Stamina Regeneration per minute+350,000 Mana Regeneration per minute

Temporary Wounds – Any wounds imposed by this blade are restored within a minute of inflicting them. This includes post-death, though life restoration will not occur, only tissue restoral.

Precision – Prevents the shaking of the user’s hands and gives greater dexterity of the fingers and arms.

Healing Pulse – Every fifteen seconds, a regenerative pulse emits from this blade, restoring mental acuity and focus for the next few seconds. It also speeds regeneration for anyone in the AOE | Current Radius: 10ft/3Meters

I smiled at it, hoping it would serve Kessiah well. I turned my eyes to the syringe.

The Immolating Epicure(lvl requirement: 8,000) – This hypodermic needle is a strange, dangerous artifact created by the Harbinger of Cataclysm. Using strange, awkward runic work, he’s made a dimensional rift within this device’s glass tubing. Anything entering it must trade a portion of its mass in exchange for energy. This energy results in increased potency for whatever is being injected or drawn. While potent in the hands of a healer, this device could also serve other nefarious purposes. An addict could use this to increase the purity and potency of a chosen drug, as could an assassin do so for poisons. This multiple-use case scenario means this is an explosive, dangerous device that should be kept in safe hands, else it be used for vile purposes.

Immolation – Anything drawn or injected must sacrifice 1/10th of its original mass. The metal of the syringe will devour this as a sacrifice.

Epicure – Given this apparatus’s hunger, it owns a refined palate—the more potent the drawn liquid, the better this device’s output.

Emergent Improvement – As a liquid is injected, it will be more potent after the initial sacrifice. This can result in strange outcomes. I winced at the needle, kind of surprised by how...mixed its results were. I’d be handing this off to Kessiah to see what she thought of it, but it might be in better hands with Torix.

The Everlasting Battery(lvl requirement: 4,000 | Mana Reserve: 1 Billion) – This simple device is a storage container for an unreal amount of quintessence based mana. It can enable ridiculous output by any standard user, and it has virtually endless use cases. Any mage would kill for this device, along with a few mana starved galactic leaders. The reasoning for this scarcity is simple – this device is safe to use. Most large mana batteries are incredibly volatile. Even when used with great caution and care, the crystallized mana can be taken advantage of by most competent mages. Others have tried this same strategy to only have the mana within the battery tampered with, resulting in a colossal explosion. This battery is protected by a sheath of strange matter that is hyper resilient. This resiliency comes with other perks as well. The material powers a flotation enchantment on the pack’s surface, making it weightless. It’s tough enough to serve as a shield, and it even slowly rebuilds its mana reserves using this material’s natural mana production. These factors make this valuable, so ensure that its wielder is either immensely powerful or protected well. Now that was a more positive breakdown, and it doubled as a warning from Schema for my artifact’s quality. I appreciated the guidance, as it kept me from putting people in negligent danger. However, hoping Schema and other people would advise me all the time wasn’t going to work out long term. Taking a more proactive approach, I sent Kessiah a super golem guard. She was always on the front lines with Krog guarding her, and while he did an admirable job, Alpha’s death taught me that I couldn’t be overly cautious. Plus, we owned enough golems that being stingy with them was foolish. After sending one of the

titans to Kessiah, I put my hands on my hips, inspecting my work with pride. These last few steps concluded my medical revamp, and the medical utensils sheened on the new operating table. The tools and etched room splayed out with a simple yet refined look. Inscriptions covered most of the surfaces, giving it a detailed appearance that contrasted the simple designs. It reminded me of a library for that reason; it was a place full of detail and depth yet laid out for practical purposes. Satisfied with that end result, I turned to one of the medical practitioners that helped me with the wall glyphs, “Hey, let Kessiah know this is for her, alright?” The woman bowed, “Of course.” Happy with what I’d done so far, I moved out towards Torix. Devising plots within his lair, he turned to me while his obelisk automated many maneuvers at once, “Ah, guildleader. It’s good to see you. What do you need?” I raised a hand, “I’m just here to look around. You know...check on stuff.” “Hmm...check as you will then, but do give me space to continue my tasks. Many of these dilemmas require a semblance of speed, lest those on the battlefield perish from my negligence.” I gave him a thumbs-up, looking around. His lair was, once again, a cluttered mess. His chaotic mess, no doubt, but damn, was it hard to look at as an outsider. Not wanting to mess with his flow, I assisted him with strictly positive stuff. That started a potent yet straightforward tool – a massive mana crystal. I mean, the pack I made for Kessiah even hinted at the prospect and giving Torix more mana would only help him out. Finding the middle of his space empty, I generated a circular table of stone there. I left the middle of the rock open. It imitated a hollowed sundial. Creating metal holdings, I retained a gothic, angular style mana holder before filling it with quintessence. The bars offset most physical traumas before I created a web of wires around it. They’d slice anything that got too grabby. The behemoth gemstone itself offered light to the dim room while ebbing with radiant energy, leaving my skin warm and tingly. It reminded me of the comfort of a warm bath combined with the alertness of a cold shower.

Torix watched the entire time while still working. He neither interrupted nor asked what I was doing, choosing to observe instead of interrupt. It wasn’t until I wrapped the last wire around the stone that he gestured at it, “Would you mind putting a few mana circuits up to that? It would help immensely with dispersing the mana within.”

I nodded and etched them out via heated telekinetic contact points. With the glyphs sketched, Torix gained a massive supply of mana he could hook up to any device he wanted. Well, if he runically connected the machines, but Torix versed himself with those non-cipheric runes already. Adding to the refinement, I carved in extra runes for general enhancement of the area. They were the same generic enhancers I used for Kessiah’s rooms.

Now polished, the crystal holder and enchanting lines hummed throughout the room, each of them giving off a gentle purr. The wafting echoed about until it faded to a faint thump like a hummingbird’s wings. Combined with the white light, and the lair took on a different air entirely. It also illuminated the dusty, ancient pages of Torix’s grimoire as he pulled his book out.

Simple yet effective, Torix poured over his incantations many times until they shined with efficiency. No matter the number of refinements, the actual book showed its limitations even now. It was a grimoire made before he gained his new body. Considering his schedule and workload, I didn't blame him for stalling the creation of a new booklet, but that didn't mean he needed it any less.

In his place, I'd have done the same thing. Considering the torn pages and ripped seam, I eyed it while a prick of shame spawned in my chest. I'd put so much on the necromancer that he didn't have time to change it, despite being more than able to. He needed a new one and now, so I tapped his shoulder,

"Torix, when was the last time you made a new grimoire?"

He peered down at it and channeled mana into his own runic markings, "Hmm, it's been quite some time. Given my new parameters, I'd imagine I'm long overdue for a more modern edition. However, my time is strained, and even with a new booklet, I lack the wherewithal to fill its pages. Being aware of those factors, I muster up the utility I still can out of this."

He held the book up before I threw a punch at it. Stopping just short, my fist blew wind over the pages, and dust percolated into the air. Catching the light of the quintessence at an angle, the particles danced like glowing fractals. They reminded me of the new battery, but they also demonstrated how ancient Torix's book was.

Torix scoffed at the sight, "To think it had been so long since I last cleaned it. Perhaps I should allocate time for its replacement."

I raised my hands, "Give me the ritual, and I can make one for you. My cipher translations might give you more to work with too."

"Hmm...I don't think that's even possible, given the ritual's constraints."

"Send me some runes and we'll see."

Having already drafted up everything on his own, it was obvious that Torix intended on making a grimoire. He simply hadn't gotten around to it. I stared at his markings,

“I can make this work. I just need to force a few parts with the cipher.”

“That sounds rather dangerous. Are you certain that’ll work as intended?”

“It will and won’t. I’m not trying to change myself or an individual with the cipher right now. It’s more like I’m trying to make my mana flows work for someone else’s ritual. That’s more than doable, but it just won’t be as stable as a normal grimoire creation. There could be some blowback from forcing it to work.”

“If I’m honest with you, I don’t fully understand how the cipher works still, despite your tutoring as of late. Regardless of my ignorance regarding this matter, if you believe you can do so, then by all means. Your completion of this would save me a rather painful headache. Thank you for even considering it.”

“Consider it done. I’ll be back in a few hours.”

“I anticipate your arrival, disciple.”

Walking off, I conceptualized a few ways of making this happen. I’d done this before, so I already understood the general sentiment behind a grimoire’s creation. Making someone else’s tome throw a wrench in that process since mages often enjoyed various knick-knacks and features for their grimoires. Features that I didn’t use. Getting those adjustments handled in writing beforehand helped sort that stuff out.

That wasn’t the only concern, however. I didn’t want to make a frankenstien booklet that blew up when used. A grimoire required a person’s will and intelligence to manifest, and I was using those attributes from me instead of Torix. I mean, I already knew Torix well, but the cipher needed an absolute kind of understanding.

That meant I wouldn’t be able to just force the entire ritual. I needed to incorporate as much of Torix’s individual writing as possible. At the same time, the parts of the rite that feasted on his will would have to suffice on my intent instead. That could be fenangled by the cipher, which could bend the laws of space-time. This wouldn’t be anything that dramatic.

Knowing what to do next, I got my problems lined up. The first concern came from constraints on our territory. Any grimoire rite used many markings and formulae, and I found no nearby rooms for a project of this scale. The cipher additions only ignited further issues. A bit of quick thinking fixed this issue right up. Taking a nod from Mt. Verner's design, I installed a basement into the lair of Torix.

I pulled this off thanks to the blue core's shielding being spherical. It stretched down, granting us quite a bit of unused real estate below our war camp. Taking some of that unrealized terrain, I carved out ceilings of stone and floors from fire. The stone filled in from my mana as I walked. The fire was melted sand, making a layer of clouded glass to walk on from sand below. Reinforced by struts of steel, this glass expanded outwards in every direction.

Even with the generated stone as a support, this football-field-sized space required extra enforcement. Stabilizing with steel, I plopped pillars in evenly spaced increments. These columns synchronized in circles stretching out from the center of the room, where I placed a monolith for the grimoire's generation.

Having a giant zone now, I etched in the fundamental runes first. Not needing my grimoire for these necessary incantations, I handwrote these down using multiple minds at once. Some cipheric commands weaved into this framework but only where necessary to save me time and keep true to Torix's original vision. Replanting the dimensional augments later, I grimoired them in with the charging and glowing style I usually used.

This allowed many benefits. The cipher required a level of precision that was difficult to maintain long-term. Having a steady mind or not, a person's concentration wavered from time to time, so by limiting the amount of cipher work, I also limited the number of mistakes I could make. That's where the glass flooring came in handy. Being translucent, I viewed both sides of the double-layered, dimensional cipher I used. That saved me lots of time I otherwise used checking for errors.

Melding the two runic styles also saved me the laborious effort of converting all of Torix's ritual. In a word, Torix was 'chatty' when he wrote out his runes. That extended the ceremony by leaps and bounds, and considering the sheer volume of etchings required, I cut some corners. As few as I could manage, but it still left a mark on the rite.

The rest of the process took up an hour, most of that dedicated to charging mana for Torix's grimoire. All it required was putting a palm on the monolith at the ritual's center

plus a bit of mana. My mind wandered to my next upgrade for my followers during that time. Amara needed armor, after all.

During this lapse in attention, the sheer enormity of this ritual escaped me. Plasma formed in the air as streaks of crimson lightning streaked out. I didn't notice because I'd split my mind into many parts, all of them consumed with some critical task. This left the piece of my consciousness dedicated to charging overwhelmed by the job. All it could do was funnel mana, and it lacked the awareness to warn my other minds.

As the mana seeped out, it saturated my hand placed on the central monolith. A tiny prick of pain radiated up, which most people would overlook. It wasn't often I felt pain, however, so it captured my attention like a leg snapped up by a bear trap. Staring down, I found the ritual running haywire.

The ritual accepted my mana in place of Torix's, but it oozed out more mana than a normal ritual would. That wouldn't have mattered much for a normal person, but my mana exceeded the norm by orders of magnitude. Even a reactive pulse would level our entire camp and then some.

Thinking fast and on my feet, I opened my pocket dimension. Swiping it over the monolith, the grimoire and the monolith fell into the void. The energy fizzled into a vast silence, and I stood in the center of it all. I frowned at the now empty runes, their light dispersing into their surroundings. I'd failed the rite.

Well, I'd failed it so far.

Taking a moment, I thought the situation through. In stasis, the ritual remained unfinished but close to completion. Once done, it would radiate out in a massive explosion that would destroy the area. Containing that required my pocket dimension swallowing the fallout before the fallout swallowed our camp.

A solution popped up in my head, and it put a satisfied grin on my face. I sent Chrona a message, telling her to come to my coordinates. As she flew over, I made an entrance for her outside of Torix's domain. She flew into my basement, being mindful of the glass flooring as she landed here. Once settled, she tilted her head at me,

“What is it that you needed so urgently?”

I pointed at the missing monolith, “There’s a ritual that’s happening. I’m going to finish the grimoire then put the resulting shockwave into my pocket dimension. I don’t trust my reaction time to be precise enough to handle that. I think I’ll miss netting up the explosion, pretty much killing everybody here.”

A bead of cold sweat fell from Chrona’s face, “That is...unfortunate. H-how am I to help you with this?”

I put my hands on my hips, “You’ll slow time in this one spot, making the explosion less...well, explosive. It’ll radiate slowly, and I’ll put it back into my pocket dimension. Once there, I’ll just pull out the grimoire and keep the explosion in my storage for later.”

“Guildleader... You’re insane.”

I raised my eyebrows, “Insanely smart, eh?”

Her eyes widened, “It...It is a solution, but I believe it’s overly risky.”

“It’s only risky if you can’t slow down time much. What kind of temporal dilation could you put on an area like this?”

I gestured at the ritual’s center. Chrona curved her tail until the tip of it rubbed the bottom of her chin, “I could cut it down to less than a hundredth the speed of normal time, given how small the area is.”

I clapped my hands, “That’s perfect. I can work with that.”

“Then I am willing to try if you believe this is a good idea.”

I gave her a thumbs-up, radiating confidence, “It is. Let’s do this.”

Planting the cleaved section of monolith back in place, I radiated energy through the runes. They charged through nearby stones until they glowed with volatile heat, electricity, and kineticism. My surroundings quivered, the stone seeming to come to life as if shifted in our vision, blurred by the warmth.

This left Chrona uncomfortable, the energies damaging her skin and concentration. To keep her safer, I stretched out several tendrils of armor around the monolith. More thin cables of the metal pulled out from my corded armor like leaves from a branch. This branching continued until the cords created a tessellated pattern that grew smaller and smaller. These metallic ferns covered the area with my dimensional fabric.

They acted as conductors, absorbing and soaking up the latent energy releasing from the ritual. This cooled the nearby area, letting Chrona breathe a sigh of relief. It also gave me a nice bonus.

New Skill Learned! Conductive Plumes(lvl 10) – You’re able to wield your hunger as a fluid tool, one without limit. In that infinity of options, you’ve constructed yet another way of devouring, one that is more passive yet no less effective. +10% to passive energy absorption from created ‘plumes.’

This was one of the absolute weirdest skills I’d ever gained, but hell, I’d take what I could get. It let Chrona stay and form her temporal dilation, so I counted the crazy skill as a blessing. Either way, these, er, ‘conductive plumes’ worked as advertised; Chrona didn’t get melted in this ritual’s aftermath.

Minutes passed before the ceremony got close to completion. Coming within a few seconds of being fully realized, I gave Chrona the sign to do her thing. The moment she generated the temporal field, the ritual slowed down to an absolute crawl. The next two seconds of the rite extended out for the next fifteen minutes.

Turns out, Chrona’s time powers wrought better results than even she intended. That was superb because the ritual’s culmination let out a tectonic boom. Even when slowed down immensely, the shockwave still moved out at a blistering pace, but I caught it in time. Swiping over the ritual once more, the monolith disappeared in a starry portal.

Having contained the resulting burst, I smiled at Chrona as she let out a deep sigh. Chrona wiped her draconic face with her tail, droplets of sweat pooling over her skin,

“Daniel, please give me more warning before we handle something like this again in the future.”

“Eh, I’ll try.”

“Comforting. Very comforting.”

Rummaging through my pocket dimension, I found the kinetic blast floating in stasis. Searching through that place was like finding a memory, one you visualized clearly. In this case, it stuck out from recency and the dynamism of the event. Contained within that blight of percussive forces, an object lay at the center.

There it was. Pulling it out, a large, pristine grimoire poured from stasis. Generating crystalized quintessence to get a better look at it, Chrona and I gawked at its pages.

It suited our ancient necromancer well.

Chapter 298: Applying Input

The tome reflected the same cutthroat, ruthless mindset of its owner. A foreign but elegant leather sheened navy blue, gold trimming the edges. Black gemstones lustered on the surface, and it carried Torix’s patented flair. Peering closer, these polished onyxes cast back any light like eyes in the dark. Those reflections followed me as I turned the booklet, following my every move.

It made these bound pages come to life in a bizarre brio. It was as if the book saw the truth of this world and was dying to share it. In that regard, it mimicked its owner. That insight personified in the tome’s heft as well; it commanded over twice the size of my own grimoire. Torix would fill out every nook and cranny of every page, no doubt, so it was good he had the extra space.

Inspecting closer, that wasn’t the only cool part of it. Tapping the grimoire, a hollow pong emitted from the back of the textbook. Attached along the rear cover, a hollow casing revealed several canisters and cubbyholes. A few chains and metal knobs held them in place, giving it an aged but refined appearance. Beyond those brass pieces, dark, heavy pages filled the back of the tome.

They were made of the same singed metal that made up my own grimoire. Torix would be able to etch out his finished ciphering here and charge them as I did. Standard runes likely carried the same sort of utility, as the text carried the same silver metal running through its spine as mine did. Chrona shared in my wonder, so I gave her a nudge, “Thanks for the help. Torix is going to love this.”

She tilted her head, “It does seem suited for him, from the overlong pages to the weighty demeanor.” She turned to the entrance of this underground sanctuary, “I am glad to help you how I can, but I must return to my post. My brethren need me above.”

“That’s all. Good luck.”

“You as well.”

She flew off before I took the grimoire up past a revolving staircase I made earlier. Walking into Torix’s lair, I held the book high. Torix basked in the light of his newfound battery. He already charged his fancy obelisk with the power source and seeing him use it so soon was gratifying. Tapping him on the shoulder, I handed him the tome.

“Finished it.”

Torix turned, grumpy from today’s frequent disruptions. That cantankerous demeanor turned to stunning surprise as he held up his hands with the grimoire in hand. His fiery eyes flared bright white with surprise,

“Daniel, this...this is incredible. It’s eerily beautiful, almost haunting. Ah, the eyes of the gemstones follow. Hah. A nice touch, if I say so myself.”

I put my hands on my hips, “Thanks. You’re the one who made it look like that, though. For me, I think the metal pages spawned from how my own grimoire was made. Those pages let you etch the cipher and charge them up. They’ll float down like glowing lyrics, singeing onto whatever surface they land on.”

“I’ve often wondered how you gained that ability. It’s a rather impressive utility to have, undeniably so on more robust materials.” Torix turned the volume around, operating the nooks and latches with intrinsic ease, “These will help contain any physical needs for alchemy and the like. Crystallized mana, poisons, hmm, I’ll dwell on what to do with these when I have the time.”

He pulled it up to give it one last lookover, “It’s remarkable, really. Thank you. Thank you so much.”

A smile came out of me as I turned a palm to it, “What exactly do you plan on doing with it? Considering your reaction, you must have plans?”

“Hmm, well, there are quite a few uses for grimoires. After all, you can precode spells that would otherwise be overly complex for practical use. I believe that is how the Emperor used so many advanced magics during his time here on Blegara. He had a grimoire stashed out of sight where he kept using spell after spell from it.”

“Could he have hired someone to write out the spells in his grimoire then used them without actually understanding the magic?”

“Hmm, it’s possible but unlikely. I doubt he managed such a thing. Obolis used those spells without thought, and that shows a deep level of understanding, not only for the runes but also for how the magic works. Considering his age, he’s had more than enough time to accrue many of the skills required and whatnot.”

“It makes me wonder if he’s hiding his potential from us. Either way, I don’t think I’ll ever get that much use out of a grimoire.”

“Perhaps you could explain your reasoning?”

I crossed my arms, “I’m a ‘feel’ based magician. I use magic like muscle memory, which means I can’t manage complex, multilayered spells without practice. By the time I could use sorcery like that, I wouldn’t need the grimoire. I could just mold the magic as if it were a part of my body.”

“Ah, yes, I do remember discussing it. We exist on opposing ends of that spectrum, then. I’m very much a thought driven caster. I find my premade spells invaluable for keeping my combat effectiveness high. Otherwise, I am overwhelmed by my contrasting thoughts.”

Torix swung a hand, “You know what, I believe your health-oriented magic might explain the more physical aspects of your own casting.”

“I think so too, but it’s just a guess.”

The necromancer cupped his chin in curiosity, “Your guess is as good as mine. It would require research, which is notoriously difficult on your fabric. Few tools can so much as scratch the substance, along with most forces.”

He stared down, “And despite acid, heat, elemental forces, anything honestly, I’ve yet to uncover its composition, atom wise.” He looked up and waved his hands, “Ahem, though this debacle is no doubt interesting, I must return my full faculties to work. We are on a war front, after all.”

“Eh, it’s easy to forget. Cya Torix. Good luck researching.”

“And you as well doing whatever it is you do in your free time.”

Walking out with a wave, I stepped out of his lair nestled in a cluster of corals. Beyond those renovations, I sent him one of the super golems as both an assistant and a guard. Despite Torix’s menacing potential in combat, he could still be killed if someone like Lehesion got his hands on him. Even if it was a bit of overkill, keeping him protected offered us a lot of security. Some might say I was too safe, but if anything, this guardianship was long overdue.

What really drove that point home was having Alpha die in battle. He was a weaker super golem, but his tenacity far exceeded Kessiah’s or even Torix’s. It put how dangerous this mission was into perspective. Any of us could die at any moment, so preventing an untimely demise stood high on my list of priorities.

Also on my to-do list was giving Amara a suitable reward. She did the most for our guild of anyone over the last few weeks, even more than me...Arguably. Ok, probably. Either way, that kind of talent and loyalty deserved recognition, and I sent her a super golem guard as well. Even more so, I got to plan out a set of armor for her, one unique given her strange combat style.

That reminded me to make Kessiah a set of armor as well. I drafted up plans for both of them, keeping Kessiah’s simple and mobile while orienting Amara’s for combat. For our medical practitioner, I created mobile hand joints along with general cable mail. This interwoven, thick, and wire-based mesh was supported by struts that would absorb crushing forces.

Along those braces, I installed inserts for the tools I made earlier. Wire thin holsters also allowed her to carry an assortment of other devices if she needed them, like

tourniquets or splints. Along the inner arms, crystallized quintessence acted as a power source for the armor. Complementing these fuel hubs, I molded reinforced cufflinks near the ends of joints. A few seconds of carving later and gravitational well generators popped up along the joints of the cable strata.

To personalize the armor a bit more, I placed mind magic links to the wearer along the armor's spine. This gave it a central hub for all the runic formations, and it gave Kessiah a rudimentary collection of my magics. She wasn't going to be making singularities anytime soon, but a weak gravity well or more regeneration was within her grasp. A tailor also handled the clothing and uniform aspects. Otherwise, it'd be a bit... ugly.

I mean, it was like a car frame connected by a lattice of cables. Effective for protection? Oh yeah. Aesthetic? Not in my lifetime, unless fashion really changed soon, which could be the case given how weird fashion could be at times. Anyways, the point is, it bothered me enough to have it tailored. That alone was telling.

Having that handled, I went on to fashioning Amara's armor next. She used her hair as a weapon, one that was tactile and sensory. It gave her a discerning precision that paired well with her natural eldritch brutality. Wanting to accentuate those traits, I got my hands on a tech specialist and engineer – John McSmitty answered my call. Our resident albon professional, he hooked me up with some camera tech for Amara's palm eyes.

I made this adjustment because fighting for her was an unnatural, arduous process. That might be why she was a more docile eldritch than most. I mean, she sliced people apart while having her eyelids touch the action. She compensated via spreading her hair out like little feelers during her forays, but eyesight was always helpful.

Stopping that issue in the future, I made a suit that gave her several cameras to view from on her palms. She'd be used to switching viewpoints often since she moved her hands all the time in conversation, and it gave her a 360-degree perspective wherever she went.

Beyond the sight issues, I had the same tailor for Kessiah measure out Amara's proportions and settle on a flexible jumpsuit for her. It would act as the undershirt for the armor laced over her. Otherwise, the armor would rub her skin raw over time. The dimensional fabric was more durable than she was, so that was inevitable. It was better to fix it before it became a problem.

So handling that, John McSmitty interwove the camera's wiring into this jumpsuit with vantage points over her palms. Having an actual reference for the metalwork after, I began my own project of giving her more combat ability. The most important part of that involved her gauntlets, as they protected her eyes and gave her devastating weapons in the form of her claws.

Maximizing that potential, I ended the gauntlet's fingers with long, bladed points riding the top part of her fingertips. That let her handle detail work with the armor on. Thickened palm plates also kept her eyes safe, along with the nerves that traveled to her head from there. The arms and chest plate were simple enough after that, fitted for her using the previous measurements.

The legs followed before I filled in some of the more delicate joint work. While not perfect, I studied a few medieval armor suits to see how they interlocked various armor pieces. I did that because Amara moved strangely in combat. Creepy and menacing, her joints often bent in the wrong direction, meaning she needed tons of flexibility.

This made the resulting plate mail more delicate compared with some of my previous armors. It also enabled Amara to handle detailed work like typing even with it on. For her face, the opposite situation proved helpful; less was more. I gave her a closed helm with one central opening – a thorny maw.

It acted as my own armor did, generating a red haze over the face and biting without mercy. Amara would hopefully appreciate the sentiment because she was still an eldritch. Her body was a weapon, and given my armor's ravenous nature, it suited both her and the metal well.

Unlike the front, the back of the helm was left open, besides a net of tightly interwoven cables. I tied more strands of my fabric from these cords that stretched outwards from the armor like a mane of hair. At the ends of these strands, I implanted a series of tiny, hooked blades, giving each strand slicing potential. If pulled around skin or bone, they'd slice right through with ease. Pulling one back, they were essentially serrated piano wires.

Painful and effective.

All the threads took up the most time, but my Manifold Mind skill was a real lifesaver here. I made many of these wires at once while implanting blades at the same pace. It

saved me days of labor, turning a day or two of work into a few hours. That included the cipheric runes, quintessence batteries for the cameras, and the other adjustments.

As I did all that, I made sure to keep one mind large enough to observe my surroundings. I wasn't about to have another meltdown occur under my watch like with the grimoire ritual. Finalizing one segment with a flash-freeze, I stepped back from my work with a grin on my face. Adding to that bit of joy, our tailor brought in Kessiah's armor using a team of omega strain users.

The armor weighed down with too much weight for an individual otherwise. Peering them both beside each other, they were damn fine pieces of smithing. Kessiah's was a fitted leather suit made from eldritch skin of some kind. It smelled like cedar and wine, and the tailor even embroidered it with the medical cross along the back of a jacket he threw in for free.

I'd pay him extra. As for Amara's, it contrasted the homier medical ensemble that Kessiah gained. Our eldritch's armor carried no gaps for eyes or ears, making the head a challenging point to damage. The gauntlets proved thick and durable, many enchantments covering their surface for making them more manageable weight wise.

The cables finished the effect, making her look outright ominous. Being pretty sure they were quality, I still inspected them both just to make sure they were up to snuff.

The Amaranthine Healer(lvl requirement: 10,000) – This unimposing outfit is actually a garb covering a wire lattice and several sets of cuffs underneath. These wires enable strutted durability, even carrying magical siphoning abilities. The cuffs are nigh-invulnerable, both assisting with preventing crushing forces or being useful apparatuses for smashing enemies.

This disguises the more advanced aspects of this garb. Along its surface, a forest of runes covers it along every etchable inch. This grants many surprising abilities to the wearer, serving the purpose of an exoskeleton more so than a wire mesh. This armor can move through telepathic signaling, it can generate gravity wells, and it can power magic for a time.

This culminates in an exceptionally advanced yet powerful suit of armor that many would be envious of. Be careful with who you give this to, else they might be attacked.

It was an excellent start to this analysis session, so I turned to the next notification, hoping for a description just as upbeat.

A Monster's Evolution(lvl requirement: 10,000) – This is a work made by the Harbinger of Cataclysm for an eldritch usurper. While usually an offense worthy of exilement, this eldritch usurper has proven useful on occasion, so the powers at be have decided to let this issue go.

For now.

Speaking solely of the armor, it sports smooth, gliding joints along with a maw of steel to reinforce a monster's jaws. It also contains an open-back helm for tentacled heads or some unknown yet equally disgusting attack method. The humanoid features also include claws and a network of cameras for the palms. Once again, this is a strange feature, but it exists, so we're noting it.

Despite these strange choices, the crafting work involved is excellent, so the level requirement is very high. Be careful who you give this armor to, as it may come back to bite you later.

Eh, not quite as positive, but it would do. I grabbed the armor's jaws, moving them up and down. This could actually come to bite me later. Hah. Terrible puns aside, the apparent warnings from Schema fell onto deaf ears. I wasn't scared of Amara anymore, and she'd already done more than enough to prove I could trust her. Though, eating a bunch of people during her escape from Gypsum didn't exactly help with that.

She had a good excuse – desperation. That being said, I didn't want her running rampant in this armor. To help monitor that a little, I took a super golem nearby and gave it the armor. I pointed at the titan,

“Make sure you keep Amara safe and comfortable. And uh, don't let her eat people in a demonic rampage.”

“If you will it, then it shall be so, creator.”

The golem floated off, light as air from its gravitation magic. I hoped Amara would enjoy the plate mail enough to wear it, but the eldritch were unpredictable with this

kind of thing. My cipheric rune charging was one example of that since it seemed pretty benign to me while terrifying to them.

Either way, I finished up my second day here on Blegara with a more realized team of elites. Staring at our city's outer line, the blue core's barrier stretched out beyond our overtaken territory. We needed more ground for expansion since our subdued district already swelled from all the extras I added.

Setting up another quick goal, I empowered my runes and called in some super golems from our forces. Several of them walked beside me as I recruited Krog and a few gialgathens as a cleanup crew. The grizzled general landed beside us minutes later, and he spoke with confidence,

“Ah, guildleader. It's good to see you faring well. That's a mighty force you've amassed. I assume we'll be expanding outward then?”

I stood with twelve or so golems,

“We'll be tearing them down while you guys pick through what remains. After clearing the area out, you'll need to establish points we can use later for resource gathering and safety. Highpoints will be the most useful.”

“For the line of sight?”

“That, and I can create bunkers in them like we have with our home base.”

“We shall do as you ask. I anticipate we'll be the ones staying there then instead of the humans as well?”

I raised an eyebrow, “Why?”

“We may escape fire and fury. Humans, all of their ingenuity aside, are slow and frail by comparison. We may survive the onslaughts of our enemy until we've secured this domain utterly, as we intend to.”

I shrugged, “Hm, I didn’t think about that, but it’s a good point. Keep that in mind as we head out.”

“Then let us leave this place for another.”

Krog flared his wings, as did his squad of gialgathens. The size of those spread limbs took up an enormous amount of space, enough that it intimidated even me. Not to be outdone, I synced up telepathically with each golem one at a time, letting them know what I intended on doing. After a few seconds, I facepalmed.

Linking to them all, I gave them commands. In unison, they replied to my orders without doubt or hesitation. Lining up beside me, their single-mindedness carried savage brutality. There just wasn’t any mercy in them. They’d kill until they were killed themselves, and there was no questioning that motive.

That machine-like precision kept them efficient, but it also made me wonder if they’d have nuance. As if answering my internal question, a golem stomped onto a stray saysha beetle roaming through our territory. Its heel soaked up the smeared remains.

Yeah, they weren’t the negotiating types.

They’d be useful here, though. I leaned down, signaling them to leave. We gravitationally leaped through the air before diving past the first forcefield made by Torix. The water surrounded me like a chilly wind. Water waved above, the ocean never settling down. Breathing water in, fractured scents wafted through my nose. It was mostly clear but with a hint of a chemical aftertaste.

That was thanks to the Hybrids. Moving on, I partitioned out a few minds for various tasks. Having each anima handle certain aspects of my fighting would make more use of my abilities. The first of those consciousnesses was a wielder of Event Horizon. They’d whip it over weaker enemies and clusters of Hybridization.

Another of my minds would wield my elemental furnace, churning out its energy. Yet another psyche would handle where I moved in battle. At the center, I operated all of my skills as a captain of a ship. Every piece came together with a primary commander staffing it all.

Even the golems were a part of this. They moved with me, listening to my orders quick as my limbs did. Oddly enough, they became parts of my body, living extensions of what I could do. I didn't even have to voice my commands with language. If I so much as directed intent at them, then the golems interpreted that motive into action. Peering at a disgusting monster? A golem would smash it. A blighted one needed to be pulled down? No problem, several golems used gravity wells to press it downward.

In the end, the golem's conformity inspired yet another avenue for expanding my potential. If I could gain enough mental strength, I could wield an entire army in sync. No matter how strong Lehesion was, he wouldn't be able to outmuscle that. Even Schema's fleets or a Spatial Fortress would struggle against something that united yet individually powerful.

And I couldn't know when Lehesion would show up. I only knew he'd come in force. Either way, I put that next step on the back burner. The super golems and I went forward into Hybridized territory. Corals and seaside sprawled out below us, Hybrid forces interspersed between Vagni and twisted Leviathans. Elysium forces amassed outside our blue core's barrier, several ships and clustered enemies rallying together.

To the Hybrids within our dominion, my golems went forward and destroyed. To those outside our barrier, I raised a hand. Endless torrents of mana channeled through my palm while my primary mind converted the raw energy into deadly potential. An outpour of gravity wells spiked throughout the enemy forces. They collapsed into singularities.

Darkness consumed them. Like eclipses under the ocean, these umbral spheres swallowed entire ships at a time. Fueling their resulting implosion, the matter converted into energy and rippled outwards in mass. Calamitous outputs of kinetic power ripped soldiers into gelatinized blobs of red, orange, and gray. Matter melted. Defiance died.

The overwhelming onslaught left nothing alive. These physical forces I generated exceeded what the Hybrids were built to handle. Stringing those shockwaves sideways, I moved an arm to aim this bombardment. In seconds, what was once a fleet was a vast wasteland of minced rubble and sliced fragments. Of what, I could no longer tell.

Steel juggernauts dotting the sky pulped like paper mache. City eating horrors disintegrated into outright voids before the surrounding water flooded the emptied space. Everywhere else caved from the nearby brunt of it all, leaving the city shaken but not quite shattered. I lowered my hand, staring at my palm with a bit of surprise.

I'd improved pretty quickly up to this point, but this defied all conventions. The ease at which I destroyed, well, it was beyond my comprehension. It was like I couldn't get used to the power jumps anymore because I didn't really know where my limits were right now. I was breaching into territories I hadn't imagined crossing, and I didn't do so in tiny steps. I leaped into this chasm, and I couldn't see the bottom of it any longer.

Catching up from behind, Krog and his soldiers flew up towards me but maintained distance,

“You...you did that, guildleader?”

I nodded. Krog shouted at his troops telepathically, “To fight a deity, you must bring a deity.” Krog turned to his brethren, “And we've one, haven't we?”

I made a fist, “Naw. I'm just someone powerful. You'd be amazed at what you guys could do as well. With a bit of effort, of course.”

They listened close, giving quick nods and intent stares. My golems acting as a cleanup crew for me, and I massacred the enemy forces bunching up near our borders. By the time I obliterated the majority of the gathering foes, they had retreated away from us. Turns out that even the brainless felt fear, and these Hybrids were no exception. I wasn't one to let the monsters escape, however.

We chased the monsters down and culled them. Once our position was solidified and secure, we helped our teams and gialgathens move into the secured landing zones. Torix's water barrier shifted further out, giving us more air space to work with. We moved tainted sands and corrupted stones from the premise, returning Blegara to its natural beauty.

At the same time, our guild worked towards expanding the Vagni's purpose here. We wanted them to stay busy outside of farming, and they carried a strange but fascinating culture with them. That came with an aesthetic of their own, along with a way of doing things. Maintaining that would be key to keeping them content in the future.

To ensure their place, I commissioned thousands of artworks and buildings how they usually made them. I also had several city planners who worked in Mt. Verner help ease the process along. We'd need a denser, more compacted capital than Saphigia once was. For that purpose, I had these civil engineers map out roads and other details.

This kept everything contained, practical, and elegant. All of this was paid using the guild's funds, which pumped out a steady flow of credits. Even if the Vagni didn't fully understand what the credits meant, they could equate it to food and housing. That was more than enough.

It gave us a solid base to work with by the end of the day. Extending beyond the blue core would be difficult, however. The ships Elysium used could maintain excellent range while still firing annihilating weaponry. To exposed targets, that meant instant evaporation. Considering our guild's numbers, we couldn't afford to lose anyone like that.

So that's where the golems came in. With everything consolidated and protected by the blue core's barrier, they were free to extend outward. To get that process moving along, I took to the seas and left them awash with the dead. Figuratively, of course. I didn't actually leave corpses.

Between Event Horizon, my armor's draining, and the singularities' evaporating effects, I left a trail behind me ringing with stillness. The quiet in those places seemed louder than most echoing booms or numbing explosions because of where we were. This was a front line. Noise ebbed and flowed at all moments, even through the water. It was often loud enough that I felt it more in my bones than my ears.

Yet when I passed, that noise ceased, and silence lingered.

I didn't intend on leaving the situation so barren for long, however. After dispatching Elysium's armadas, I spent my time crafting new golems. These outdid even my second models, using my more highly leveled blood and body as the primary improvement source. Though the assault models took precedent, I still introduced a few innovations during this time. The most important one was conscripting a new model from Ophelia – the constructors.

I wish I could say the idea for these golems hit me from my own ingenuity, but that wasn't the case. They came from necessity and from leaning on Elysium's methods for managing settlements. The rebels used the twisted Leviathans as road makers who kept the waters safe. On land, Hybrids served this purpose. We needed something similar to replace their benefits and then some. Otherwise, we'd be dismantling a society and replacing it with chaos.

I wouldn't sleep at night if that was the case, though I didn't often choose sleep anyways. The point is, the constructors acted as my own take on the Leviathan/Hybrid role. This new model emphasized city building, maintenance, and protection. In fact, one of them outdid ten of my assault golems for those specific tasks. That opened up the fighter models to focus on fighting instead.

We made this adjustment so quickly because the only change was mental, not physical. All of the golems came equipped with many skills and abilities already—more than they needed, in fact. An example was how they could construct matter from mana as I did. They simply preferred destroying enemies and getting rid of Hybridization. On the other hand, these constructors loved making buildings, drafting plans, and working with engineers.

That's where my production process came in handy. I could just adjust the runic configuration I charged in my grimoire, and the resulting golems were entirely unique. The previous ones enjoyed destruction while these prospered in peace and prosperity. Serving two different purposes allowed the giants to specialize in their given roles. It also meant I didn't need to help so much with planning either. They did all this while letting the Vagni do their thing.

By the time the week passed on Blegara, I had manufactured thirty of these constructor models along with another one hundred assault models. This made us a powerful, militant force throughout Saphigia, extending our grasp well beyond the blue core's shielding. With my support, the golems, gialgathens, and omega divisions expanded outwards, clearing swaths of Saphigia.

They established high points, erecting bunkers beneath these undersea hills. We worked the Vagni hard in the meantime, paying them well to build back up their capital to its former glory and then some. During this span, Elysium raided many times. Each passing day, they sent larger numbers of troops, Hybrids, blighted ones, Leviathans, and vessels.

I massacred them all.

They couldn't dent us. The blue core's shielding stopped even antimatter blasts, and I could charge it in seconds. While doing so, I siphoned singularities over fleets at a rapid pace. I was a null void to their forces, a wall that couldn't be outdone. Any number of ordinary troops were nothing, and they would need to tear this planet apart to get us off it. That wasn't an option since they wanted this world so badly.

Still, they sent more and more with stronger and stronger enemies within. They kept their twisted Sentinels in reserve since their dimensional attacks proved ineffective against me. Everything else they had, they threw at us. Despite that relentless offensive, I found time to build between the episodes.

I grew efficient. I worked in the open, maintaining good sight of the area. We got several scouts inspecting the horizons at all times, along with gialgathens above water. This kept our lines of communication tight, so reacting quickly was a given. These efforts from us kept casualties to a minimum.

That was the best way of handling Elysium's generic strategies: kill without being killed. We couldn't afford to trade soldiers. We had to create a sustainable system for dispatching their endless waves of Hybrids and vessels. If we did that, they wouldn't be able to whittle us down.

That's what we set up in a week: a dozen vantage points with excellent visibility, a growing cityscape run by constructors, and roaming golem guards that cleared areas out.

By the time my stay here was up, I left behind an expanding settlement that already paid dividends to the guild. It would take an eternity before I actually made money from this place, but that wasn't the point. The gialgathens established a place to grow, the Vagni retained some semblance of purpose, and we held the line against Elysium. These weren't the best task forces that Elysium had to offer, but our defense illustrated an ability to stop their mundane offensives.

They'd yet to send their ultimate devastator, and I wasn't sure I was ready.

Preparing full-proof measures against that golden gialgathen would have to wait until after I stopped Plazia Ruhl for Obolis. I'd be getting a few more elemental furnaces and other resources from him, and it might not take all that long either. I didn't want to underestimate a Ruhl, but they wouldn't survive an outpour of singularities. Nothing could, outside of an Old One or Lehesion. Or any of the other hidden powers that the Overseer mentioned during our talk.

I shivered for a second. I needed to stay on guard. Overwhelming or not, getting overconfident would be the end of me. Those thoughts lingered in my mind as I sent a notice to Helios. I needed his warping to get me to the ahcorus's homeworld. While

there, he'd be by my side 24/7 in case I needed to be sent back here at a moment's notice.

Poor guy. Anyways, while waiting on him, I opened my messenger and let Florence, Other Hod, Amara, and Althea know to meet me here too.

Torix and Kessiah were too vital for our stay here, and they'd have an evacuation plan if Lehesion landed while I was gone. I worried about the golden gialgathen arriving and destroying all of this, but I set those anxieties aside. We'd need to fight him at some point, and if we did, I'd figure out just how far away I currently was.

Or even how ahead.

I held onto that inkling of confidence as I gazed at the seascape. I filled with pride, finding a line of our territory. Where we landed, homes came up, Vagni schooled near, and golem protectors kept all of it safe. Outside that line, it was abject chaos with Vagni struggling to survive and horrors roaming the hills. It was one thing to destroy something and leave nothing behind. It was another task to replace havoc with prosperity. It was a fulfilling struggle, one I enjoyed.

Interrupting that bit of serenity, portals opened above our domain. It was another raid like the ones we'd stopped so far. In retaliation, mana gushed through runic configurations over my skin, and I oozed unstable flows of power. Reaching up a hand, I pointed at each of these warps and detonated the areas behind them.

Before they could shut, building facilities, out bays, and carriers crumbled. They caught us at the wrong time, and I didn't have to react. I was right here, killing some time before Helios arrived. As the albony did, he gawked at the carnage. They couldn't even escape their portals before being slaughtered.

My mind partitioned, letting me turn to Helios while still handling the assailants,

"You ready to leave? We'll be rounding up a few other members of my guild before we leave, like Hod and Althea. We'll need their stealth abilities."

Helios fumbled his initial words, trying not to stare at the singularities, "I-I am. I've also completed the warping lessons you'll need." He composed himself, "Let's hope you show promise in the field. It appears you'll still serve a purpose regardless."

The last portal from Elysium closed, its inside gutted by another cataclysmic explosion. I nodded, "I'd hope so. Come on, let's go."

We took one step before yet another portal opened in the distance. I rolled my eyes before reaching up a hand. Seconds passed, yet no singularity formed over the area. I stared at my hand, wondering if it was broken before I lifted my eyes. This portal bordered gold, its rim engorged with an enormous deluge of energy.

There was only one who carried this kind of energy. Lehesion arrived.

From that warp, halcyon claws pulled apart dimensions, shearing space-time. Eyes emboldened with knowledge beyond their years surveyed our stronghold before a massive pair of jaws opened. From the enormous maw, a burst of noble, telepathic laughter poured out. The behemoth gazed at what I built with disdain.

Lehesion snickered, "So, this is all you've constructed. It's quite quaint and simple when compared with Elysium's grandeur."

With confidence, I shouted, "Elysium is a kingdom built on corpses."

My words contrasted my inner thoughts. A chill ran down my spine as I doubted myself. This was it. I had to perform. If I didn't, a massive portion of my guildsmen would die. My stomach sank. My face numbed. With a quick mental slap, I put that fear and pressure behind me, using it to spur me forward. Feeling returned along with my strength.

I took no chances, sending a message to our guild, one premade for this situation. People began evacuations as Lehesion pulled his entire form from his portal. The beast radiated majesty, the bright, energized armor both blinding and bold. He needed no air, having withstood space and cataclysms alike. He required no food, his body generating endless energy already.

That behemoth's form stared down at me, his eyes narrowed to slits,

"You speak as if the creation of a kingdom may be done without death. Even this tiny domain of yours rests on bodies. My domain is simply superior. The carcasses you've

created are mere mounds by comparison to mine, and your piles disappear under the shadow of the mountains I've made. That darkness exposes the distance between you and I."

He spread his wings while dampening his lustrous glow. He covered my entire line of sight in his dusk, Lehesion's shadow looming across a portion of my city. My knees wanted to wobble under pressure, and Lehesion grinned,

"That distance between us, you are too blind to see it. Beneath these wings, you are an insect under the mercy of a coming storm."

I took a moment, remembering what happened to Springfield. Yawm destroyed it utterly, leaving nearly no one alive. I was helpless then. I was no longer helpless now, and I wouldn't be stalling with a conversation either. Tohtella or another Adair could arrest control of Lehesion at any moment, and he'd blast everything I built to pieces.

That wasn't an option. I'd be keeping this frog dragon busy this time, so busy he'd be unable to even unsettle some sand. I leaned over, my armor's maw growing monstrous and my metal skin rippling like a pool of dark mercury. I expanded Event Horizon over Lehesion, and the giant winced.

My form shivered as my armor hungered for his energy-laden flesh. The supergolems near me filed into ranks, each of them unspeaking and unmoving. They felt no fear, only bloodthirst. I channeled that within myself, allowing my ascendant mana to bend my mind. That part of me was a monster, and I unleashed it now.

Gripping my fingers to fists, I seethed,

"You believe I'm an insect? No. I am living metal, denser than stone and harder than steel. You so much as touch my domain, and you will suffer."

A crack showed under Lehesion's confidence, "And what could you do to me if I destroyed this little lot of land?"

"I will burrow under your skin and eat you alive."

Chapter 299: A Shining Massacre

Lehesion took a step onto the seafloor, and it cracked as he grimaced, “You shall try, but you shall fail, as all have failed before you.”

My armor grinned, “From how I see it, you’ve lost against a Spatial Fortress already. You lost yet again on Gypsum if not for their nanomachine construct. What makes you so certain I’ll fail if you’ve been at the mercy of two already?”

His eyes turned to glimmering coals under his brow, “You question that which you don’t understand, child.”

I growled, “Then come and test yourself. Let’s go.”

Lehesion roared out with enough force to silence the region. It bounded past me, rolling off my shoulders like water dripping from an umbrella. Beside me, Helios fell to his knees, blood dripping from under his mask. Lehesion seethed, “You feel that? That is my scope. That is my magnitude. You will never exceed it.”

“Quit stalling and fight.”

Outrage surged over Lehesion’s face before he condensed his aura into his body. The energy flowed without end as he bolted towards me through the water. Gritting my teeth, I met his rush. The behemoth collided with me, exuding enough force to crush mountains, but I withstood it. My arms didn’t crumble, they stayed strut, and my legs didn’t break. I still stood on solid ground.

But Lehesion kept applying pressure, pushing me back with a clawed hand. Both my arms pressed against his scaled armor. As he crushed me into the sandy stone, he laughed,

“It is as I’ve said. You are an insect.”

My armor laughed as mana saturated my frame. The will to destroy inflamed me, a point of ignition. My hands gripped his crystalline plates. Supergolems to my left and right raced outwards to evacuate civilians and Vagni while I kept Lehesion planted with my hands. I grasped harder and harder still, my muscles tightening like cords of steel.

His condensed mana armor cracked then snapped, and my living armor flooded in. He kept stomping down onto me, his massive palm sinking lower. I did not descend. I sank up. His flesh and skin softened from our last bout, neither part of him as dense or overwhelming. He didn't crush me under his mass. He didn't even cause my knees to buckle.

No, my hands seeped into his, and I sapped his blood, flesh, and bone. Event Horizon poured over him, the aura condensing over his skull. He grimaced, but I wanted him to hurt. I opened my armor's jaws and bit into the saturated meat before me. Lehesion pulled his hand back out of reflex. My jagged jaws tore him open, and he found chunks of his golden body gored out.

The delicious meat hung from my dark, metal hands and my jagged, dripping maw. As his flesh soaked into mine, I leaned down and shouted,

“Come on then.”

Lehesion's eyes widened before he took a step back. Behind me, Helios pulled himself up from the mental whiplash of Lehesion's roar. The golden gialgathen's eye crossed over to my ally, and I grimaced. Lehesion might aim for my team instead of me. Ensuring that wasn't a possibility, I bent down and shot forward, telekinetic pads synergizing with heavy gravity wells.

Lehesion whipped his tail towards me. I used my pocket dimension, his whipping limb sinking into the starry abyss. Reaching him, I grabbed the underside of his jaw, my fingers extending into bone and skin alike. He roared and whipped away, a chunk of his face tearing out as he did. Reacting in pain, he side-slashed a clawed hand. I didn't dodge away.

I closed in. Ducking under his arm, I turned on my feet. Turning my hand into a dark spear, I slammed my hand into his chest. Tendrils of armor spread outward into his organs, along with my fingers before Lehesion slapped me sideways. I didn't see it, but the sheer force sent me barreling away from the beast. He was still strong.

I smashed through an underwater hillside before piercing deep into the depths of Blegara. The landscape reformed under me as I pierced it. Nestled under many layers of stone, I laid broken, but my body pulled together before my eyes in a second. So quick was my reformation, it acted with a startling violence, my guts whipping together at frightening speeds.

Nearby, several chunks of Lehesion spread throughout the ground. My armor shot out in hunger, absorbing them despite the ground's pressure above. Leaping out of the underground pit, I found Lehesion gawking at the wound I left behind. Exposed ribs and golden blood seeped into the ocean. That blood clouded around Lehesion as he grimaced at me. Despite the anger, a measure of panic unfolded over his calm demeanor.

He took quicker breaths, his heart speeding up in his chest. It wasn't long before he composed himself, and he charged up a ball of energy around his mouth to retaliate. Before he finished, Helios made a portal in front of his jaws. The condensed energy beam blasted into Lehesion's side, wounding the massive beast.

I turned, finding Helios hiding on an ice tower within the blue core's shielding. He oversaw the fight there, ready to assist when necessary. He gave me a quick nod, no retreat or fear oozing from him. No matter his past mistakes, I couldn't fault his bravery in battle. If I had my way, Helios would say the same of me.

So when Lehesion charged his energy for another world-ender, I assaulted his mind. Dual consciousnesses ran rampant across an unseen horizon right at him. When the telepathic connection formed, a majestic, ancient mind lashed out at me. It found a legion waiting for its arrival. Swiveling around it, my minds evaded his attacks like schooling fish. My defensive psyche shepherded this mass and deflected Lehesion's onslaughts all at once. Simultaneously, my offensive consciousness acted as a juggernaut, tearing across the gialgathen's exposed thoughts.

In one moment, I tread over memories. Another second passed, and I smashed his lines of logic. Lehesion brightened himself until blinding, but I persevered and wounded his more methodical processes. He lost control. The goliath gaped at his surroundings, staring around in dismay.

It stunned me seeing how vulnerable this monster was, but it also explained how Elysium gained control of Lehesion in the first place – his strong body held a weak will. Those psionics controlling Lehesion loomed when I reached the further recesses of Lehesion's anima.

There, I found a prodigious mass of minds suppressing him.

They created a cord of some kind that any of them could connect with. Just grazing this enormous tether, I found thousands of minds working in unison at all moments. They maintained an iron grip over the gialgathen, ensuring no lapses in control. That's why Lehesion was undefended; his mind fought elsewhere.

That mass of psionics took notice of my intrusion, and many detached from this unbreakable bond with Lehesion. They crashed into me with the unity of a nation and the malice of an enemy. As individuals, I could've smothered them. When together, they acted like a wave of ants running over a mantis. Each of them hacked away at my enormous consciousness, the minuscule traumas mounting into a beating.

But I was no mantis of flesh. I was like a mantis of metal. Exhaustion and pain radiated from the mental wounds, but I held a tight grasp of my mind. I fell onto a knee, control of my left leg lapsing. I twitched, my body being arrested from me. Reorienting my approach, my defensive mind shot into action. It sliced through a connection point, weakening the assault. My offensive mind charged, ripping out psyches left and right.

I blinked, orienting myself again. Able to stand, I bolted forward towards Lehesion's actual body. I couldn't afford to relent or ease up on the pressure, and so I hit Lehesion's healed chest. As I did, the minds within him quivered. They felt the unbridled agony, the crushing bone, and the ripping sinews just like Lehesion did.

In the wake of that pain, they wavered for only a moment. I smiled, a drop of blood oozing from my lip. I'd found their weakness – pain. I pulled a hand back, turning on the balls of my feet and striking Lehesion. I amped the incoming blow with my gravity wells and telekinetic sharpening. At the same time, I charged my fist with pure cold. That chill seeped through him, flash freezing his muscle.

Force erupted outwards, and pieces of Lehesion fell. I breathed in his blood, and I became an engine of destruction. I reached back, and another murderous strike landed across his frame. The water around us carried a shockwave that disintegrated stone. I heated my body, turning into a molten behemoth. Each time I landed a punch, stab, or strike, the mass of detached psionics flinched.

I amassed heat into my body until I glowed. A thin layer of steam poured from my armor, submerging me in a thin later of air. Shards of salt fell from this dispersal of ocean water, and I smeared those shards into Lehesion's wounds as I stabbed a hand into his frame. Lehesion howled out, but his screams turned into a symphony in my ears.

His pain was my survival.

I honed in on this weakness. Moving forward, I shot out electricity into his nerves when I touched him. He winced, and more elements molded in my hands as I assaulted him. Burning ice left pieces of Lehesion frostbitten. Heated plumes of magma burst from my knuckles as they grazed him. Even Helios struck out with void ice as well.

The ruler of worlds calculated each attack, making the most of his mana and mental endurance. Lehesion lifted a hand to strike, but Helios blocked it with void ice. Lehesion swiped a tail, and another blot of the violet snow lodged itself around him before Lehesion got momentum in his tail whip.

This continued while I tore at his weakened mind. In this relentless charge, I poured on punishment in all its forms. I crushed. I froze. I electrocuted. I smashed. I ripped and gored. The endless torrent of wounds weakened the mind mages that fought against me. They retaliated in kind, sending more of their members to throttle my psyche.

This mounting mental pressure stressed my split consciousnesses. At times, my physical control lapsed. Those lulls lasted for short, instant bursts before I retook physical command. Despite their success in that domain, they never gained authority of my minds. With those wills, I ripped and gouged out portions of Lehesion's body, one section at a time.

I froze his blood and pulled the air from his lungs. He choked, drowning in a void. Lehesion gasped, being strangled while I sent out waves of electricity and impacts to his body. I existed like breathing darkness, a black hole swallowing a bright star. In that moment, I lost myself in anger and rage and fury. It consumed me, but I allowed it to. This was not the desperate rage I leaned on once before. It was a controlled and cold frenzy.

My relentless annihilation came from necessity. Any moment Lehesion gained an understanding of his surroundings, he unleashed overwhelming strikes and attacks. Several veered off my city's forcefield, and each time they did, I trembled in fear. Everything I owned fell in that dome of energy. I put that fear behind me, using it to surge myself into action.

My dread converted into an animalistic fervor. I darted in, consumed, and rampaged until Lehesion scrambled to even reply. And yet, Lehesion still pulled himself together.

The psionics nested in his brain bore down hard on me, and their perpetual pressure crippled me. I missed attacks, failed magic, or even fell at times.

These lapses led to the deaths of many. Hordes of Vagni perished in blinding fires, storms of light, and furious eruptions. Several supergolems evaporated in those attacks, and I still remember their deaths. My own guildsmen died while evacuating to the city as well. For some of them, I saw their faces.

Those faces still haunt me.

But the psionics paid a dear price for weakening me. Their tether waned in strength, and each mage sent to me reduced the Adairs' absolute control of Lehesion. This gave Lehesion more freedom. The freedom to express rage and hatred of me. His mental defenses bolstered, no longer stripped bare by his psionic controllers. His movements became less hazy, no longer dulled by the lag from being controlled. Lehesion evolved before my eyes, becoming the monster I remembered.

Yet, I fell into a rhythm all my own, and in my wrath, I poured forth slaughter without end.

I swung, parried, dodged, deflected, blocked, stabbed, hooked, tore, maimed, and mauled him. Each hunk of flesh I devoured played on his fears of being eaten, a fear entrenched after his encounter with his first Spatial Fortresses. I leveraged that vulnerability like twisting a knife lodged in someone's ribs.

I wielded that knife in other ways. I infested his mind with insidious thoughts of being devoured. Those fears wracked at his sanity and the psionics piled more mages onto their unified offensive. I grimaced at the numbing pressure, so many minds pooling onto mine that it felt that my body wasn't my own.

I allowed them to smash my consciousnesses. I lost awareness at times, forgetting pieces of the fight. Evertime I awoke, an unbridled terror flooded through me. Without my perpetual fighting, Lehesion would wipe out my guild in a blaze of light. I'd lose everything.

Despite my growing desperation, I never ceased fighting. Whether I fell apart or not, I would become whole again within a second. They shattered my mind over and over again. I broke out of those deaths without fail. Even if they killed me each second, I regenerated faster than that.

My rejuvenation was infinite. It defied any expectation or demand. It held my mind together under an unholy stream of damage. It struck dread in me at first, but I became comfortable with this dance of death over time. My durability became evident then undeniable. Forgoing my defenses, I kept mounting my attacks with greater fury.

Each of those soul-wrenching blows and earth-shattering strikes tortured Lehesion. Over time, this frenzied, chaotic battle sunk into the wells of a monotonous slog. They grew desperate for an end, but I was unending. I'd been here many times. I made my home here, in this living hell. Lehesion had not.

This torture kept mounting until Lehesion's movements slowed. He wanted to escape. He found himself in purgatory, one of my making. He couldn't sustain my punishment, yet he couldn't die from it either. Eonoth revived him even if he wished to die.

He swung his tail towards me, but I soaked it into my shield and struck him. He snapped his jaws at my neck, but his maw fell onto a ball of spines. He flew into the air above for relief. Lehesion met void ice before I pulled him back into the depths. And those depths sunk deeper.

I pulled him into a dark sea. Minutes of fighting turned into hours. Pain turned to misery, and Lehesion fell into this horrific eternity. His attacks, while cataclysmal and ruinous, took time to generate. His eclipse magic couldn't be cast because I offered him no room to breathe. He couldn't blow me apart with his laser breath either as Helios reflected it back to him each and every time.

This disarmed his arsenal of world-ending weapons. His most potent tools voided, Lehesion relied on his physical and mental techniques. They waned with time, but mine did not. And so, I devoured with abandon. I ripped out chunks of flesh and meat, using this as an opportunity to charge my runes and gain ambient mana. I practiced skills, combining elemental energies.

But most importantly, I needed Lehesion to understand that if he ever fought me again, he'd be trapped in this endless cycle. I pulled no punches as he faltered. I left no mercy as panic coursed over his eyes. His will to defy me would be expunged until nothing but a hollowed husk remained of it, one that ran from the whisper of my name.

I took no pleasure in the process. I gutted him. I tore skin from flesh and flesh from bone. He couldn't escape me with speed or distance as I kept pace. He couldn't run to

madness as his controllers kept him sane. Lehesion fell into that hellfire, one kindled by harm but sustained by his masters' unwillingness to give in. Despite being in the middle of that tug of war, Lehesion still remained cognizant. He tried many tactics. He spread his aura, keeping my physical form away. He opened portals for warping out, and he even tried attacking my people instead of me.

For the aura spread, I discovered Event Horizon couldn't pierce it, but the Rise of Eden could. Warping proved even simpler to stop. He still had to physically jump through a warp, and I wasn't about to let him. As for attacking my guildsmen, he succeeded.

I couldn't stop him from purposely crushing Vagni and the like, as he proved too challenging to control. It was a bitter pill I had to swallow, but I made sure he paid his own blood price. Reinforcements attempted aiding Lehesion, but they perished in the umbral blots of my singularities. The Adair's mental ambushes proved lethal, but I kept them minimized by unleashing wave after wave of physical anguish through Lehesion.

Anytime Lehesion dove down towards me, I met his dive head-on. The resulting impulse disintegrated blocks of the cityscape. I crushed Lehesion's left arm with a sharp hook from my left hand, and the gialgathen's shearing bone released enough force to level buildings. The shockwave itself tore across the sea, leaving it unsettled like a pool being cannonballed continuously.

These waves swallowed the skyline above the sea, making a mockery of the ocean's size and scale. It was like a puddle to us, and that pool rippled with an intensity unbounded—the same devastation wrought from the heat of our strikes. Even the slightest blow induced otherworldly volumes of friction. A grazing kick or shredding claw boiled the water around us, killing many in our warpath.

These impacts...they killed many. Both sides suffered heavy losses. Vagni perished. Remnants, espens, and Hybrids died in mass. We scorched Saphigia until little of it remained. The sheer volume of damage made the conflict feel meaningless for us both. What were we fighting for anymore? We killed and killed but obtained no ground, neither of us.

It saddened me, but I overwhelmed grief with rage. This was my homestead, a new frontier for my people. If I let Lehesion ground himself, he'd induce an apocalypse over everything we built here or the little left of it. There'd be nothing but a dried sea and a molten wasteland left behind when he finished us. We'd never expand over Earth either if Elysium knew they could send Lehesion over at any time.

And so, I enacted a living hell for Lehesion. I never relented. I poured forth like an eruption with no end. I bit at his heels like a pack of immortal wolves. I mauled his spirit, and I tore his bones. At times, I felt his fear and his terror, but I swallowed that sickness in my stomach. He was my enemy, and no enemy would be left living.

Eventually, Lehesion and I stood amongst a scarred horizon. We shattered swaths of Saphigia. We stared at each other, both of us exhausted. Lehesion grimaced at me, a deep disgust bubbling out, but an even more profound dismay simmered under the surface. He howled,

“How do you live knowing you are an abomination? Do you ignore it? Do you hide from the pain of knowing you’re a calamity?”

My arm, just disintegrated, reformed in a flash. Liquid metal shot out of my torso and snapped into its previous shape, ready to go. I remained silent, but my armor laughed for me, cackling out in a haunting reverberation like metal. I spoke between its unsettling echoes,

“If you choose to stand behind me, then I am your guardian. If you choose to stand beside me, then I am your leader. If you stand against me, then I am your destroyer. Tell me, Lehesion-“

I spread my hands,

“Where do you stand?”

Pieces of his crystal armor fell from his frame, few shards of it remaining over him. Fresh scars over his skin dissipated, but the mental ones wouldn’t mend so quickly. His breathing quickened as he sputtered,

“You...you are only a monster. I may stand anywhere I wish with you, and it will serve no consequence. You cannot affect me.”

I raised a hand, and he backed away. I scoffed,

“You fear being eaten when you’ve already been swallowed.”

Lehesion's eyes widened, "No. You are wrong. I am not prey. I am the hunter. I-I must be."

I stood tall, "No, you are a sword that is wielded by others and swung where they cannot reach. The Adair's have torn your mind to pieces, and now I battle the fragments they hobble together. You fight without urgency because you don't fear death. You battle without cunning because you've never needed it. You even strike without intent since even a light brush is all you've ever needed to kill."

I pounded my chest with a fist, "But I've wallowed in my own blood and fought through it. I've lived with death. It made me strong. You'll find I fight without mercy because I've never been allowed to have it. I strike to kill because I can't afford to do otherwise."

I spread my fists, "The lives we've lived, they're worlds apart. That's why when you crushed me, I decided to stand tall even when I was in your shadow. Now that you lie in mine, you cower in the dark. That is what your reincarnation has given you – a weak strength."

I spit blood into the sea, the silver shifting through the steam layer evaporating from me. The shining blood dispersed amidst the water, siphoning back to me. I stared him down,

"Grow a backbone and come fight me again." I cracked my knuckles, "Or I can keep carving you up. It's your choice."

The congregation of psionics controlling Lehesion ceased attacking me at that moment. A palpable relief flooded me as they did, their unrelenting pressure similar to my own. That reprieve lasted only so long as I leaned back, an inkling of concern sprouting in my chest. Something changed in Lehesion.

Lehesion's eyes grew bloodshot, orange, nanomachine-infused liquid surfacing through his veins. He whispered, "No more."

Around him, something snapped. Lehesion's energy spiked, and it flooded his frame until he sheened with radiation and an ominous, blue glow. I remounted my offensive

on his mind, but I found something strange waiting for me. The psionics no longer defended Lehesion. They joined my own offensive, tearing as much as they could.

No, they didn't tear. These mages gnawed in absolute desperation. Their urgency infected me, and I redoubled my own efforts. It wasn't enough. Lehesion wrestled full control of his mind. Once more, he became whole. I no longer faced a shell of his former glory. I faced the full wrath of a legend, his powers and instincts no longer stripped.

He was the shattered god no longer. He was whole.

His ancient, full luster returned. He emitted intense radiation near him, the energy encapsulating everything in a dangerous but warm glow. His scars receded, and he took deep breaths of appreciation,

“Ah, I am myself again. To be given freedom is a blessing, one I've lacked appreciation for in the past. I'll do so no longer.”

His words sent a chill down my spine. I kept attacking his mind, and I uncovered pieces of what was happening as I did. They only made my stomach sink faster as I discovered more. I learned the Adair family helped break down the connection Lehesion had with Eonoth, the Old One. They'd lessened the barriers between the two, giving Lehesion more of the Old One's primordial, inconceivable energies.

But, I hadn't faced any of those new powers. No, I had met a living factory that powered Elysium's entire stat system, even while we fought one another. The whole time, he carried the brunt of a new society on his shoulders, and I hadn't known it. Lehesion grumbled,

“And with this freedom, what will I do? Tear down my manipulators? They stand beyond my reach, hidden amongst the stars. Destroy their armies? They number many, and they sprawl across planets. It would take time that I no longer have.”

I continued attacking his mind. Memories of our fight flooded me. When Lehesion wanted to maul, the mages weakened him. When he wished to devastate, Elysium enfeebled his attacks. As I ruptured and cleaved him apart, Elysium kept his unchecked rage shackled. The psionics faltered as I put pressure on their limiters and controls. Now, I faced Lehesion with his mind returned and his powers unbounded.

And staring at me, the beast's overbearing confidence returned,

"But, you stand here, Harbinger. You've earned my ire and my gaze. Now, little one, let us see if you may survive its fury."

Chapter 300: Altercation and Obliteration

I lifted a hand and shouted, "Now wait just a minute. You're actually free?"

Lehesion narrowed his eyes, slicing his tail down at me in a flash. I lifted my shield overhead, the starry portal larger than my own body. Lehesion cut his own limb, leaving a gaping hole where he'd of hit me. Revulsion spread over his face as the seafloor quaked beneath me.

The ripples and cracks spread back until they stopped along the blue core's barrier of my city. I gawked back at the fallout sticking my palms at Lehesion, "Hey, big guy, I'm talking to you. Are you lying to me about being unshackled?"

Genuine confusion spread over Lehesion's face while his eyes narrowed, "And what if I am, little one? Why would it matter to one who will die?"

"It matters because we can talk this out. How did you escape? I thought that was impossible."

"Your torturing out sustained my capturer's tolerance for it. Now I roam free, my life perpetual, my wrath infinite."

I checked, having been tearing his mind up for a while now. Lehesion told the truth. He was free. Thinking on my feet, I switched Event Horizon to The Rise of Eden, washing the boosting aura over Lehesion. He eclipsed his previous form, becoming a monster even more formidable. The rush of stats flustered Lehesion further, and he gawked at me,

"What are you doing? Did my full strength drive you mad, and now you wish to die before it overtakes your full sanity?"

Still tethered to his mind, I shifted my attacks towards the psionics, attempting to help Lehesion out. Gritting my teeth, I frowned, “We’re not enemies.”

A primal hatred bloomed in Lehesion chest as he took a step forward. The sea quaked as cracks ebbed outwards from his claws, “And you would have me believe that after what you’ve done? After sundering my body, after enveloping my mind in thorns and claws and pain? Our battle was purgatory, one where I rested in the cage while you prodded from afar.”

He simmered, “And now you wish to cease our battle when that cage has been lifted.” He radiated golden energy, “You will find I am not so easily tricked nor defied.”

I shook my head, “Let me explain myself.”

He snarled like an animal, “My patience grows thin, thinner than the string tying you to life. A string I will snap in my jaws, soon, should your reasoning falter.”

I grimaced, the mind mages overwhelming in number and skill, “I tore you down because you were a pawn to someone else. I have nothing against you, Lehesion. If anything, I think we could be allies. Maybe even friends, under different circumstances.”

Lehesion spread his wings, his body emboldened by the Rise of Eden, “Your words fall on deaf ears, little one. Evoking my wrath will lose you all you’ve ever held dear.”

Incalculable amounts of mana streamed in as Lehesion shined, “My people and my planet are dead. Of yours, only ash will remain-“

I roared, “Are you a pawn by choice, or are you really just this stupid?”

I caught him off guard, and the giant gialgathen sputtered, “What? No. I am not. In fact, I am unequaled in intelligence.”

I spread out my hands, “You should talk me down into surrendering if you’re that damn smart then.”

Lehesion tilted his head, “You are unyielding. You may not be reasoned with.”

“Try me.”

“Uhm...Then, then I shall do so.”

The golden gialgathen coughed, “I am pitted against you at all times and at every corner. Each time we’ve met, you’ve attacked me relentlessly. Killing you now would make my existence far more bearable. I am certain of it.”

He got back into his standard bearing, “And so, I shall destroy you.”

I pinched the bridge of my nose, “Lehesion, you’re a literal legend. You can reason better than that.”

Lehesion snapped, “I have just now regained my senses after decades of being chained down by a horde of psionics. When you’ve been in the same circumstance, then you may judge me. Until then, be silent, and cast your appraisals elsewhere, perhaps on something you actually understand.”

“Ok, ok, you’re right. You’re not in the best position to make calls about what to do next. I’ll give you some more time before I take you for a fool, alright?”

“You stall for time to preserve your petty guildsmen and your tiny city. I know that much.”

“You’re not wrong, but that’s not the only thing I’m doing. I’m defending you. If all I wanted to do was stall for my guild, then why would I do that? I’m also why your stats are boosted. That doesn’t add up with what you just said, does it?”

During this entire conversation, I fought against the psionics using four different minds at once. The rest of me was invested in this conversation. Lehesion took note and put a wing under his chin,

“That is...it is bizarre. Once I was freed, your acts changed in an instant.”

I nodded, “That’s because I’m against Elysium, the guys controlling you. If you’re not controlled anymore, I don’t want to fight you. Hell, I would fight hard to protect you if that’s what it takes to keep you away from the Adair’s. You don’t even have to pay me back. Think of it as a way of compensating for the bad blood between us.”

Lehesion’s eyes flared wide, the agony still vivid in his mind, “And you believe that bad blood can be washed away so easily?”

“No. I don’t. I know it would be a hard and long road to recover from what I’ve done. That’s why I’m helping you to start walking down that road. You kill me now, and you’ll lose any ability I have to repay you.”

I gestured to the desolate wasteland around us, “And let’s face it, I’m the only one who’s fought to keep you sane for the last few decades, right?”

Lehesion calmed, “I...Hmm... Yes, that’s right. It’s been longer than I can remember that I’ve been whole. You fight to keep my fragments together. Admirable, yet foolish in the end.”

Lehesion blinked while fighting off the psionics, “There is no way of saving me any longer. I may have broken free of their restraints, but the ties between them and I, they cannot be broken. They are as entrenched as the connection between Eonoth and my reincarnation, two parts of the same whole.”

His eyes saddened, “And now I am the lesser of those two halves, the piece that is used by the larger fragment.”

I shook my head, “Bullshit. Remember, you fought these mind mages alone for decades. With my help, you can pull out of this...this cycle.”

The nanomachines swarmed into his skull to retake his mind. His eyes turned bloodshot from them, orange streaks pulsing beneath the white of his eyes. Lehesion didn’t so much as flinch,

“Listen, youngling, for I have a story to tell you.”

I beat back mind mages, “Ok, but uh, keep it short.”

“I will, as short as the story may be told. I lived my first life well, having few regrets. Before my fall, I gained one – Emagrotha and my relationship with her. We grew to despise one another. In the end, she betrayed me, piercing my back after I trounced her in battle.”

I frowned, “Never turn your back on an enemy.”

“Wise advice, but I believed she was still a friend—even a lover. Our disagreements ended in my demise. An ancient one, older than time and more powerful than can be conceived, granted me another life in a new body. From forest green to gilded gold, my hide changed in color. Mana effused my bones, and energy coursed in my blood.”

He pointed a wing to his proud chest, “I became what you see before you, a god to many.”

“Not to me.”

“I’m well aware. I’m no god in my eyes either. I see my faults clearly now, and they led to my undoing. I changed the course of my previous life using these gifts granted to me. I altered history. Many events came to pass, but my arrogance led me to believe I would be victorious in all outcomes.”

I frowned, “But then you mangled Emagrotha, right?”

His face crinkled in rage and horror, “No. I did nothing of the sort. That ancient being is the one that destroyed Emagrotha. I only aimed to cease her rebellious nature. I would never, not in a thousand lifetimes, wish that upon her.”

He couldn’t meet my eye, and as his head lowered, my eyes widened, “You loved her again, didn’t you?”

“In both of my lives, yes. Emagrotha loved me as well, in my first one. She became my enemy in the second far earlier, but that is yet another failing of mine. The point of this story, however, is singular. I was given all of these advantages, and look what I wrought upon myself and my world.”

He marveled at the destruction around him, “I killed my people. I may have won the war I forged for the espens, but I lost Emagrotha. The espens were given freedoms they abused, and I usurped order across our lands. I blundered in all the tasks I’d set before myself. All my powers only magnified my mistakes.”

His story reminded me of my own position and how I might do the same. Lehesion stared up, “And as I wallowed in regret after our great war and what was done to Emagrotha, these...magicians found me in solitude. They offered me redemption, a drive to continue forth. In the end, they stole my mind from me, along with everything I ever was. I am now a husk.”

His eyes glazed over, “In all my actions, I have failed. I was betrayed in my past life. Despite being given gifts greater than any before me, I wasted them. My body grew strong, but my mind grew weak. These people, these monsters, they’ve infested deep under my skin.”

Lehesion reached up, shearing his face with his claws. Orange liquid oozed from him. I winced at the sight as he grimaced, “You cannot save me. Nothing may, not even death, for I cannot die. I am a ghost, a shell of what I once believed in. My wit has regressed from being a tool, and one can only have their mind violated for so long before it is no longer theirs.”

His voice cracked, “If my mind is taken and my body is used, what of Lehesion has remained? There’s little lingering. I have been tied to Elysium as an anchor is tied to a ship. They rest above the water while I drown in the abyss below. I am a mere tool, once to my arrogance and now to these mages.”

He shook his head, “So many years have passed me by. In those spans, I have lost who I am. It’s been an eternity, and I can no longer remember who I was. I...I-“

He peered down, sinking into a pit,

“I am nothing.”

I took a step back, his sincerity scorching like fire. We needed the guy on his feet, but Elysium gouged out all the fight he had in him. I spread out my hands, “Lehesion, what

are you talking about? You're awe-inspiring. You can do anything. Why are you beating yourself down like this? I'm supposed to be doing that for you."

I swung my fists, kind of surprised I felt the need to cheer the guy up, "You're the invincible destroyer, remember? Act like it."

He scoffed, "I am as fragile as I am undying."

"I wouldn't have guessed. You've taken me out more times than I can count, and I consider myself pretty tough, actually."

He only took me out twice, but hey, that's not what he needed to hear right now. Lehesion softened his gaze at me,

"But in the face of weakness, others have shown courage. I stood in the face of strength, and I exposed my weakness instead. For that, I have paid dearly. I have lost everything. You remain unbroken by this world, and for that, you should be grateful."

I waved my hands in frustration, "Sure, whatever, I'm not shattered, but dammit, you're about to blow up everything I've been working hard for. We need you to get a grip and take back control of yourself. It sounds like you really need that too."

Lehesion shook his head, "The destruction of your city may wait, as you've disarmed me, somewhat. I doubt that will last, given the telepathic tethering I've had implanted. They will overcome me again, for they are a many, and I am one. Once engulfed, I will become their immortal puppet once more."

I pointed at my armor, "If it's the nanomachines, I can take them out of you."

He gave me a sad smile, "The Hybridization leaves no effect on me. It merely bolsters my physical abilities. They've injected some kind of...psionic fluid into me, and it assimilated decades prior. Where or what it came from, I know few certainties about it. It was composed of something that felt similar to that ancient one, Eonoth."

I thought about what happened to Althea with Yawm. She was afflicted by Etorhma's tears, and she ended up dealing with the horrific aftermath. If they did something like

that to Lehesion, there was no way to separate the effects on him. We could only alleviate the symptoms at this point.

Lehesion shrugged, “What I do understand is that no matter what has happened to me, no matter what I endure, they will return in mass.” He winced, “It is only a matter of time before they retake me, and so-“

He spread his wings, “I will use this moment of freedom to enact their will. Perhaps their restraints will be less stringent thereafter. I show loyalty, and they show kindness in turn. You simply are the aggressor before me.”

He flared bright, “And you will be silenced.”

Thinking fast, a plan popped up in my head, “Now wait one minute, that isn’t necessarily the case. If you can’t stop them, maybe you can escape them.”

“There is nowhere I may hide. They are within me.”

“Maybe you can’t get away from them here, but maybe you could go somewhere else. Somewhere where time doesn’t pass.”

Lehesion rolled his eyes, “Now we speak of fantasies.”

I opened my pocket dimension. “What? No. This is it. You can hide in here.”

Lehesion frowned, remembering the portal’s effectiveness against him, “Aw, that trick. Annoying, perhaps, but I doubt it can stop them from overwhelming me, whether that field destroys me or not.”

I raised a hand, “Now that’s where you’re wrong. We can’t overwhelm their mind magic, sure, but we can stop it in other ways.” I pulled out a chunk of Lehesion that got caught in the starry portal earlier, “See this?”

Lehesion’s eyes widened as his aura returned to the flesh. I poked it, and Lehesion turned to his tail and gawked, “What...what kind of ability is that? Is it not a void of

death? Maybe a disintegrating circle of some sort? How can I continue to feel my tail? That's fascinating but-

He shivered, "Disturbing as well."

I shoved it back into the portal a second after. Lehesion raised his brow and widened his eyes, "To think that such an ability could even be possible. Incredible."

I shrugged, "It's my dimensional space. I'm a living dimension. Multiverse, actually."

"Dimension? Like Chrona's insane musings?"

"She's right. See everything around you? Anything and everything is in our dimension. It is the dimension." I pointed at myself with a thumb, "Everything except me, that is. I'm not a part of this space. I'm a different dimension, just way smaller. I'm more alive as well...Probably." I frowned, "I'm kind of lost on the details, to be honest."

"Hah. Then you are puny for your kind."

I crossed my arms, "I'd rather be the chief of a village than the pawn of a king."

Lehesion rolled his eyes, "Ah yes, you're very witty, but what does this have to do with my predicament?"

"I can put your head in here." I gestured at my warp, "They won't be able to control you then. You'll be in stasis, just like that hunk of tail was earlier."

"Is that not the same as death?"

"Of course not. You'll still be alive, and eventually, I'll be able to get you out of your awful circumstances. Besides, Elysium could collapse in just a few weeks without you propping up their system. Hell, just breaking free for a few minutes is probably wrecking their credibility as we speak."

A long silence lingered over us. Lehesion tilted his head at me as if I were insane,

“You’re actually serious?”

“Dead serious.”

Lehesion peered as if searching for some hidden intent oozing out of me. He found none, and he bellowed out in hearty laughter, “By the Old Ones, you’re a fool. An imbecile. A complete moron.”

I frowned, “Yeah, yeah, laugh it up.”

Lehesion grinned at me, “But, you’re just the kind of fool I like. Your childish idealism is amusing, perhaps even infectious, but...I am too broken. I will never have myself fully restored. Thank you for giving me hope, even if it was hollow in the end.”

I snapped, “You know what? You piss me off.”

Lehesion’s smile turned wicked, “Now that I’m unwilling to do as you ask, you’re opinion of me changes. Disappointing, surely, but expected. I have more reason to hate you beyond mere differences of belief, however.”

I pointed at him, “No, I’m not mad you disagree with me. I’m mad because you keep pretending you’re helpless just so that you can give up.”

Lehesion’s eyes turned to slits, “Giving up? I’ve been tormented for decades, attempted every option available to me, and you say I’ve given in?” His face wrinkled, contorting in anger, “You’ve never seen nor faced even one of the obstacles I’ve overcome. You’ve never been rived open, whether from your own failures or by the tortures of tormenters.”

I beat my chest, “You haven’t even tried my plan, so how can you say you’ve tried it all? And besides that, you don’t know me. You don’t know whether I’ve lost everything or not.”

With his frame shining, he echoed, “And you expect me to trust you, a different tormenter, one who has torn me to shreds, Over and over again?”

“No, I don’t expect that at all. I’m letting you know you have other options, whether you think you do or not. You just prefer having everyone choose your options for you because you’re afraid to fail again. Hell, you’re afraid to clean up the mess you left behind because you think you’ll make a bigger one.”

He yelled, “And what of you? You murder in the millions for personal gain. You’re a monster who hasn’t even tried to improve the lives around you. All you do is devour while everything burns around you.” Lehesion pointed at everything around him, “Here’s an example.”

I narrowed my eyes, “I wouldn’t have chosen this. I pacified the eldritch on this planet to stop the blood sacrifices, and I’m working to establish order and prosperity.”

“That order is built on blood and corpses. It is no different than Elysium’s governance.”

I pointed at some constructor golems behind me, “You see them? They’re literally made of my blood, and that’s the difference. I’m not wiping out species, torturing eldritch, and mind-controlling people to get what I want. I’m taking the time to build from the ground up with my own two hands.”

Lehesion hissed, “I see that you’ve deluded yourself into believing your justice is somehow greater than the Adair’s, just as all bloodthirsty conquerors do.”

I glared at him, “I stopped your species’ extinction. They’d be wiped out to subservience, a military tool if I hadn’t stepped in. Bloodthirsty conquerer? If that were the case, I’d of eaten the gialgathens instead of saving them.”

Lehesion stepped back, “I...That-“

I pointed at a blighted one swimming in the distance, “You see that? That’s what Elysium’s done, and don’t you ignore it and pretend it never happened. The gialgathens would be wiped out if not for what I did. And it cost me. It cost me dearly. I was dragged into the center of this war for doing that. I could’ve backed away and come up with some kind of deal with Elysium instead. I didn’t. I refused to turn the other way while they decimated your kind.”

Lehesion's eyes widened as I pointed at him and shouted, "And now I can't give them a new home because you'll destroy it." I let my hands drop to my sides in frustration, "It's like you won't stop until you've completely killed everybody. It's like you want a clean slate, and you're willing to do anything for it."

Lehesion blinked as his face followed the corrupted form of a gialgathen swimming across the ocean. Lehesion gripped his claws into the ground, his proud stature shrinking. I shook my head in disgust, "Calling me a bloodthirsty conquerer, the nerve. How about you look in a mirror?"

Beads of sweat poured from Lehesion's brow, his heart racing in his chest. Lehesion's composure cracked before I raised my hands, "Come then. There's no point in talking anymore. I'm not going to compromise with madness. I can see what's right is right, even if you can't."

The burden of protecting Lehesion's mind deluged over my own like a dam breaking. The psionics rallied, rebuilding the scaffolding that contained Lehesion so well before. That framework shut down any tampering of my own, and I only delayed the inevitable as they closed in on a complete reconstruction.

Furthering that repair, Lehesion stopped defending himself. He blinked while he tried to escape his contrasting thoughts. Something in him had snapped as if the weight of his deeds crushed him. In a fury, he turned to me, "I...I can no longer bite the hand that feeds me."

I roared, "It doesn't feed you. That hand is strangling you."

No longer in the mood to talk, Lehesion rallied the last inklings of his defiance. He charged at me like a storm. Darting in a blinding dash, his enormous body moved with uncanny agility as if he held the speed of many in his wings. My auras reverted, Event Horizon smothering his skull before his paw crushed me down.

His mana scales were empowered once more by streams of mana. I sunk into the ground before it melted beneath me. I liquified the sand and stone before pulling the magma over Lehesion with telekinetic nets. He outpoured his aura. The molten rock splattered across the buildings and wastes nearby, water fizzling into boiling bubbles. Lehesion took a breath, siphoning country-breaking power into his maw. Releasing it, Helios created a portal in front of Lehesion's mouth.

Lehesion's beam transferred towards his side. It collided with his defensive aura, and the shielding held strong, its protective properties emboldened by untold amounts of mana. Seconds passed, and the ocean evaporated in a heated boil, plasma piling beside Lehesion with bursts of steam. A blue glow ebbed from Lehesion as a growing crater formed beneath him.

He was releasing radiation—lots of it.

Despite these enormous, rebounding forces, Lehesion only empowered his ray of death. Helios lunged to one knee as the edges of his portal cracked. Another surge from Lehesion and the warp snapped like a glass jar landing on a stone floor. Helios collapsed behind me before Lehesion reached out a clawed hand.

My eyes widened as Helios stared forward. From under his black mask, blood leaked out of Helios's eyes and ears. He growled as mana siphoned into his elemental furnaces. He thundered in defiance while creating a defensive barrier of void ice around my city.

The water, hardened by the absolute coldness, sustained the light before exploding outwards. It was enough time for two super golems to stand in the way of the beam's wrath. They caught the ray's volatile stream, the arms, chest, and faces melting off the golems while Helios threw up his hands. More void ice swallowed them all, and it protected the golems long enough for them to regenerate. Lehesion's laser kept plowing through their defenses as I charged him.

I smashed my fists into his mana barrier, but his onslaught never ceased. Helios stared down at my guildsmen and the Vagni below. He grasped a hand into a fist, his mana furnace revving. The barrier around our city snapped, and Helios lifted his hand.

A mountain of void ice materialized between the city and Lehesion's ray. Helios put this mountain at an angle, and the beam rippled upwards towards Helios and the golems. Helios arms fell, and he took his last breath. In that endless light, a shadow fell over all three of the figures.

The blinding glow flashed over them, and I blinked, my stomach sinking like a stone in water. They were gone.

The beam carried past them, angled up over the void ice. This beam obliterated an enormous pathway of Saphigia, my golems protecting our city and charging the blue

core's barrier once more. The flashing bolt nullled all before it until it crossed into the horizon, leaving a gaping hole left in the ocean.

One attack and Lehesion parted the seas. Those vast walls of water piled back in, tsunamis forming and ebbing out in all directions. They'd swallow the few coastlines across Blegara, wiping out entire populations of native wildlife. All in one breath.

I turned to Lehesion, stunned by his utter destructive abilities. Whether he could kill me or not, he'd leave this entire world scarred and mutilated. Even more so, Helios's sacrifice left me stunned. We weren't his guild, and these weren't his people. No matter his motivations, the ruler of worlds put himself in the line of fire.

And he was consumed by it.

Lehesion's enormous form loomed with that same promise as he snarled at me. My pulse raced, the enormity of the battle falling over me like a lead cloak. Everyone could die. Every single guild member, the Vagni, even the eldritch, were all going to die here in a dry sea doused in atomic fires. Fire, I'd survive.

Those thoughts racked my mind before Lehesion smashed me into the dirt. Another tectonic explosion ushered forth, and the ground caved without measure. Buildings miles away tumbled. The sea acted as a puddle splashed by a child. The apocalyptic nature of Lehesion's will evinced out undeniably; his destructive potential was infinite.

I couldn't comprehend the full scale of our fight any longer. It exceeded the bounds of what I considered real, and for that reason, I was afraid. Not for my own death, but the deaths of everyone I cared about.

And that was because of one factor – I withstood the carnage. My body remained formed. My mind retained reason. My bones did not break, and I did not crumble. At the bottom of a pit of magma, steam, and stone, I kept my hands overhead. I held Lehesion's paw.

The behemoth's eyes widened as I glared up at him. Every fiber of my being oozed out desperation, the sheer scale of this fight putting me on a razor's edge. I couldn't just distract him anymore or leave him in pain. I needed Lehesion away from here. We needed to evacuate this place, or else there'd be nothing left.

And every single mind under my domain raced forwards towards that goal. No longer was I crippled by the Adair's psionics. They all rushed for Lehesion, and that left me undaunted by their relentless hounding. Without the need to face them on that field, I regained my own full abilities.

I turned whole, and I would show him the Harbinger of Cataclysm's absolute fury.

In an enormous display of magic, I siphoned mana into my frame. It pooled for seconds, Lehesion grinning down at me as he smashed his other hand on me. Ignoring him, energy flowed in my blood and heated me until I burned. Arcs of white lightning burst forth as I shifted to the Rise of Eden. The water trembled along with the sky and clouds above. Even the fabric of time around us curved out from me as I made my presence here complete.

Releasing the mana in a single burst, the roaring energy poured from my hand until cracks formed on my palm. Deep beneath Blegara's crust, I generated a gravity well of untold proportion. It swallowed the ocean. It lifted not just us but the entire battlefield as well. An enormous chunk of Blegara rose, cracks echoing out in the sea and the sky alike.

This region stretched out for miles, and the clouds over us parted as massive waterfalls fell into the waters below. Lehesion and I drifted into the heavens, where we left Saphigia and my city behind. Lehesion gawked around him, his own battles rarely measuring to this standard either. The air washed over us before I reached out a hand, willing mana to saturate the risen seafloor beneath us. In a torrential display of might, I inundated this vast island, keeping it afloat.

Lehesion marveled, "The depths turn into the heavens above."

I squeezed my left hand, my armor steadily drilling itself through Lehesion's armor. He peered down at me, swatting me with his tail. My vision flipped, spiraling in a tumble. Before losing complete control of my levity, I snapped myself still. Lehesion followed me, but I met his tackle head-on.

We jolted in an overwhelming collision. The ocean caved beneath us, and the ground relented before us. The buildings left disintegrated as kinetic energy rebounded in a kinetic outpour that liquefied metal and powdered stone. We unleashed a shockwave that collapsed buildings for hundreds of meters in every direction.

In all of that, I flew backward like a boulder let out from a catapult. I gouged out a trough of earth and sand football fields broad. Standing from the heated pit of glassy magma, the wet rock dissolved before re-solidifying once more. Wrenching my feet from the fresh stone, I wiped bits of rock from my shoulder, no worse for wear.

Lehesion's arm bent in the wrong direction, and he snapped it back into place. He raised his scaly brow, "You're inexhaustible. I'll give you that."

Before I shouted back, a spear sliced into the behemoth. The lance of bone carried cracks of violet, ebbing some kind of foreign, palpable energy. A section of Lehesion disappeared before he imploded. Splattering in all directions, half of his body lay disfigured. Regenerating in an instant, Lehesion snarled,

"The silver girl. Obnoxious."

I turned where he stared, finding only a whisp of hair remaining of her. Althea left me smiling before Lehesion's eyes widened. He winced as decaying arms crawled from the earth and pulled him down. The craggy, sandy ground turned to tar that rushed into Lehesion's mouth, eyes, and ears. Enchanted skeletons made of the Omega Strains rose from the mush, stabbing at him before Lehesion's aura purified his surroundings.

To my side, Torix landed with his hands crossed behind him. He turned to me, "The evacuations are complete, disciple. We've done what we can, and others are charging the city below."

A shadow beneath Lehesion swelled, and from it, Other Hod sliced. He left a nasty gash that burned with an umbral fire. It fed liquid and sizzled on blood as Hod unleashed a torrent of other attacks, using a bit of light magic he learned. He created artificial shadows, and they worked as well as real ones, Other Hod escaping through my shade when Lehesion outpoured golden lightning in all directions.

I generated conductive plumes to siphon the electricity to me, feasting on the raw energy. Other Hod stood behind me, releasing two super golems and Helios from his shadow. That's why darkness flashed over those three before the ray consumed them. Helios peered around before standing upright. Other Hod hissed,

"I saved them, Harbinger."

“Good.” I met Helios’s eye, “I won’t forget you saving the city.”

Helios took a breath, the albony shaken. He took a hand and slapped himself in the face before growling out, “Don’t thank me yet. Your city is still at his mercy.”

Undeterred, Lehesion stepped forward before a chorus of sonic roars forced him back. Krog and a legion of his elites flew past Lehesion, tearing him down with ebbs of sound. This new battalion landed behind me after making their assault, Lehesion peering at them with disgust. Whether he admitted it or not, the dribbling blood from his ears meant the attack busted his eardrums. It looks like they’d been practicing.

Lehesion opened his mouth, and an energy beam poured out at us in an instant. Before landing, it slowed down, entering a time dilation.

Chrona’s silvery figure flew over us while I reached up with my own dimensional shield. Lehesion’s energy poured into my dimensional space before I pulled myself towards the colossus. As I did, I followed the beam’s trajectory, swallowing it in the shield before reaching him. Lehesion concentrated his aura into the tip of his tail and whipped it at me.

I pulled out my shield up and unleashed the grimoire creation’s aftermath. Simultaneously, I shrunk the pocket dimension’s entrance, condensing its releasing energies into a beam—that ability drilled through Lehesion before I arced it sideways. Cleaving through Lehesion’s torso and mana scales, a clean gash appeared over his skin.

His precise tail whip turned into a chaotic mess as Lehesion’s long limb crushed the ground behind me. Shifting on my feet, I smashed my fist into his chest with all my strength. These attacks mutilated Lehesion, but a patch of his mana scales burst, knocking me far back. I dragged along the ground on my feet before a wing stopped my slide. Turning around, Krog and several gialgathens used wind magic for the catch.

Chrona walked up to my side with the other gialgathens. Following in their wakes, dozens of my golems hovered up along the edge of our floating battleground. I linked my mind to theirs. Our enormous, mobile unit faced Lehesion down before the golden gialgathen showed his fangs,

“It appears you’re no longer alone.”

I took a breath, the air clear. I always held all this responsibility on my own, but now it felt like everyone else took it off my shoulders. That alleviating pressure let me breathe deeply. Refreshed and grinning, I peered at Lehesion, my confidence returning,

“Yeah. It looks like it.”

Lehesion sheened bright, “Excellent. It appears as though I’ll kill you all without needing to find everyone.”

The sky darkened as he eclipsed it with his magic. Lehesion trembled the ground with his voice, “Though you will find there is nowhere left to run.”