

# The Primal Hunter

## - Chapter 1029: Primal Hunter vs Celestial Child (6)

### Chapter 1029: Primal Hunter vs Celestial Child (6)

From the very beginning, the Paths Yip of Yore and his Chosen walked were flawed. The flaw wasn't extreme, and it wasn't something that made it necessarily a bad Path, but it was a flaw nonetheless. One there truly didn't appear to be any workaround for.

Their Paths both fundamentally revolved around lies. It was to make themselves appear as something they truly weren't, gaining recognition and faith from others based on the false truth they represented. In many ways, Ell'Hakan's Path was more complete than Yip of Yore, as the actual truth behind Ell'Hakan's grand lie was far less well-known, and his Bloodline made convincing others of his truths far easier.

However, no matter how many people Ell'Hakan or Yip of Yore convinced of a lie, there would always be at least one person who knew the truth. One person who weakened the entire foundation of their Paths, as their Records of knowing reality couldn't help but influence their skills. This person was naturally the one in the center of everything and the spreader of the lie:

Themselves.

Yip of Yore knew when he was lying. So did Ell'Hakan. They knew they were spinning tales to try and gain power, and in some ways, how couldn't they? They were the Origins of their own stories, after all.

That was why someone like the Malefic Viper looked down on Yip of Yore's Path despite recognizing it was powerful. In his eyes, it truly was just an inferior version of something Valdemar did accidentally.

Valdemar also gained power from legends and stories about him as they helped amplify his Records and, thus, even his entire faction. The difference was that these legends weren't born from lies or grossly overexaggerated truths; they were merely tales of the War God's actual accomplishments. He was just a showman by nature, and his innate disposition easily gave birth to new legends, certainly helped along by Gudrun actively promoting Valdemar's feats.

This wasn't something Ell'Hakan or Yip of Yore could accomplish. Not as long as they themselves knew, deep down, that the fundamental truth of their power was based on a lie. Yip of Yore had tried to fix this, tried to forget aspects of the lie to make them more

truthful in his own mind, pushed it to the back of his memories, and even had a Transcendent that helped him take Records, making his claims closer to being “truth,” but in the end, he still knew it was all a lie.

It seemed like an impossible flaw to address until now.

On that day, Ell'Hakan overcame the weakness of their Paths... but at what cost? He had genuinely wished to be the Celestial Child in his final moments, and his Bloodline had made his intense desire become the truth... not by actually turning him into the Celestial Child of legends, but by genuinely making him believe he was.

It was all a delusion... a lie so powerful he even fully believed it himself.

Jake... didn't know Ell'Hakan wasn't the “real” Celestial Child.

And now, neither did Ell'Hakan, and there was power in such a pure belief as now the only contradiction to Ell'Hakan's truth were the Records of the system. Records the Usurper was now claiming as his own, mixing them with Yip of Yore's Legacy, as something entirely new was formed, creating the grand illusion that was Ell'Hakan's vision of what the Celestial Child of legend once was.

What and who he now was.

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Jake had only activated Touch of the Malefic Viper for two seconds when he felt the change. Ell'Hakan was already dying; Jake could obviously feel that, and he hadn't believed that the few seconds it would take for him to fully pass would mean anything. In fact, he'd believed that using Touch would be the fastest way to fully end Ell'Hakan as he corroded away the remaining vital energy of the Usurper. His opponent was already only hanging on through sheer Willpower alone and was as good as dead, which was why Jake hadn't seen what happened next coming at all.

His intuition did warn him a moment beforehand, and Jake instantly tried to move forward to just stab Eternal Hunger through Ell'Hakan's skull with the hope that he could speed things up, but he only got a single step before he stopped... was stopped.

The moonlight from above intensified as two concentrated shafts of light hit Jake, immobilizing him entirely as if his soul had been bound by ethereal chains. Right as he was snared, he saw Ell'Hakan raise a hand toward the sky as he spoke.

**“Mothers... I'm here.”**

Ell'Hakan began to slowly float off the ground as two shafts of moonlight also hit him and lifted him up. Jake quickly broke free from his restraints and moved to attack Ell'Hakan, but a shockwave of energy sent him sliding back, making Jake frown. Even if

Ell'Hakan was clearly out of vital energy, he still had mana to work with. Jake was just surprised he could mobilize it in his current state... assuming it was Ell'Hakan mobilizing it.

Because the entire vibe the Usurper gave off had changed.

There was a feeling of aloofness in the air, and the mana was more powerful than before, with new concepts mixed in Ell'Hakan hadn't used before. The fact he'd used the moonlight was also clearly different, but it shouldn't come as a surprise considering the former Chosen's moniker of the Celestial Child.

To be clear, despite the vibe around Ell'Hakan changing as if he'd become an entirely different person, it was clearly still Ell'Hakan. His soul was the same, and his mana signature was the same... but something had clearly charged inside of him.

*Gotta finish him off before something else unexpected happens*, Jake told himself as he pulled out his bow again. The weapon only had a few dozen seconds to rest since his last use, but much of the destructive energy that still lingered in its body was gone now, giving Jake confidence it would hold up.

Taking aim, Jake quickly charged an Arcane Powershot toward the floating Ell'Hakan. As the arrow was in flight, Ell'Hakan finally reacted with his one eye opening wide in an instant as his body exploded with mana once more.

He flung his own body upwards, carried by the moonlight to dodge the arrow. Jake responded by shooting another, only to be met with multiple barriers blocking him. Not to be deterred, Jake shot several more arrows as he made them curve around the many barriers. While the nahoom tried to block them all, he failed as several struck his already battered body, exploding on impact and worsening his wounds that were already looking pretty damn lethal.

Yet, despite the damage, Ell'Hakan kept floating upwards, and Jake got an even more odd feeling than before. Not quite one of danger, but his intuition still warned him, making Jake take preemptive action. He didn't know if the guy planned on escaping or whatnot... but there was no way Jake was gonna let that happen.

Before he'd arrived on Ell'Hakan's planet, Arnold had stopped by Valhal's planet. He'd brought with him a few things, one of which Jake had been saving, unsure if he had to use it. Jake had held back on it for a few reasons... all of which should become clear upon reading the description of said item. RαNÖBĚš

**[Void Sphere (Unique)] – Can temporarily trap the user and another individual in a Void Sphere Dimension. Both targets must be C-grade or below. Activation time is dependent on the abilities of the user and the selected target. This Void Sphere is incomplete, causing the Void Sphere Dimension to not be wholly stable and giving it a severely limited duration.**

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First of all, yes, Arnold had succeeded in making a Void Sphere. Somewhat. Compared to the real thing, this one sucked ass with a lot of drawbacks, with Arnold not even knowing how long it would last or how long it would take to activate.

However, a Void Sphere was still a Void Sphere, and as Ell'Hakan floated into the air, Jake took out the item which just looked like a black tennis ball of glass. Focusing on the item and Ell'Hakan above, he felt his mana drain from his body as the item got infused.

Right then, Ell'Hakan also stopped floating upwards as he rose to stand upright. More and more barriers kept appearing, the Usurper burning through whatever mana he had left at a rapid pace, seemingly not caring about the cost at all.

**“To find myself in such a state... how embarrassing,”** the voice of Ell'Hakan echoed, but his tone was different. **“Mothers, please banish the memories of seeing me like this from your eternal memories, and I swear I shall wash away the stain on my name.”**

Jake kept activating the Void Sphere as Ell'Hakan barely regarded him but instead looked toward the sky and the moons. **“Firstly, allow me to address the pathetic state of this body of mine... with help, if you will... from all of you.”**

The final words echoed weirdly, and Jake felt something odd pass over him. A certain kind of emotion was triggered, not from the figure floating above but from the environment itself. However, before he could fully identify the cause, the Void Sphere abruptly activated as a black beam shot toward Ell'Hakan faster than any C-grade could possibly react.

As it hit him, a shockwave erupted from both Ell'Hakan and Jake as the Void Sphere exploded upon activation. The two of them were banished to their own Void Sphere Dimension in an instant, isolated from the rest of the world and the planet.

This sudden change clearly affected Ell'Hakan, making him frown. Everything appeared the same, with even the powerful moonlight remaining. Truthfully, the only thing Ell'Hakan had been separated from was all the other natives on the planet... which appeared to be why the former Chosen frowned.

**“Void sorcery?”** he spoke, looking down at Jake. **“A valiant attempt... but the connection between myself and my subjects is not so easily severed. You shall not deny my fellow nahoom the privilege of showing their loyalty.”**

Jake finally understood what the odd emotional compulsion he felt from the environment was after he said this. Ell'Hakan was using the Planetary Pylon to send out an order of

sorts and compelled all the natives to do... something. Jake didn't understand what exactly it was, but he would soon come to learn it.

Because, after only a few seconds, Jake saw the first few strings of energy gather around Ell'Hakan. It was faith energy, but this time, it felt different. Way different. After the first few strings, the faith energy began multiplying to an extreme level as Jake was forced to take a step back, his eyes opening wide at the sight. THIS CHAPTER IS UPDATE BY novel~fire~net

*Did he seriously...?*

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Back in the capital city of Ell'Hakan's homeworld, the nahoom were gathered around the palace, all in prayer as they knew their planet faced the largest crisis they had ever encountered. One that made the Prima Guardian be nothing but a faint memory.

However, as with the Prima Guardian, they wholeheartedly believed in the victory of their god... the victory of the Celestial Child. But they also knew that the opponent he faced was special. He was the incarnation of an evil god, a being of pure death and destruction that sought to snuff out the light of the stars and bring about the end of everything.

Only the Celestial Child could stop such a monster... and as they were all in prayer, they heard the call. Their god needed help. Their help.

The priest leading them in prayer smiled gleefully as he opened his arms wide and stood up as he spoke: **"Rejoice! The Celestial Child has opened the Gates of Celestial Ascension!"**

A few figures were impatient and couldn't wait even a moment after hearing the call as they slumped over right then and there. The priest was envious of their instantaneous devotion, but he knew his job was to guide them all. The only ones who were unlucky were the children too young or those who needed to continue serving on this plane... fortunately for him, he remained one of the lucky ones.

**"Now let us go! Join me as we take to the stars!"**

With these words, he watched everyone in the grand plaza, save for those who were forced to stay, slump over as their souls left their bodies, and the priest could only smile, satisfied as he joined them, willingly extinguishing his own soul and ending his life.

All for a greater purpose. All for the Celestial Child.

William, back on Earth, was carefully monitoring his ritual for any major events happening in the galaxy. Primarily, he was looking for any significant movements of forces by reading the massive karmic web to see if anything big was happening.

However, just then, he felt it. When he'd gone to Ell'Hakan's planet way back then, he'd placed a few hidden magic circles to monitor the planet from afar. Ones that would only be triggered if certain conditions were met... and just now, nearly every single one of them activated at once. William was shocked as he hurried to check what the hell was going on.

The karmic web he observed shuddered as he focused on the planet in question, trying to read the waves of karma from there... but all he saw were strings breaking apart and dispersing. He had a serious look on his face as all the remnant energy from these broken karmic connections were gathering in one place, all their will, hope, and faith included.

He kept watching with bated breath as the strings just kept breaking... a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand... million... ten million... a hundred million... it simply kept going as a massive karmic maelstrom gathered on the planet where he knew Lord Thayne and the Usurper battled.

*I'll need to report this*, he said as he quickly got up and headed out of his small formation room. Miranda would, without a doubt, want to know as soon as possible that in just a few seconds, the majority of the entire nahoom population had suddenly ended their own lives, filled with devotion as they did so.

Jake watched as a cyclone of pure energy revolved around Ell'Hakan, the powers of absolute faith manifesting as Jake realized what was going on. He'd made his subjects do the ultimate act of faith and committed what was realistically ritualistic suicide, all with the intent of their lives turning into nothing but a small string of faith energy.

He had no way to reasonably estimate how many people had ended their lives, but it was certainly an extreme number. What's more, Jake watched as more than ninety-nine percent of all this faith energy merely dispersed into nothingness as Ell'Hakan had no way to properly absorb or use it, his abilities as a C-grade simply not adequate... but with so much of it, his utter lack of efficiency didn't matter.

This cyclone of faith kept swirling as some of it was absorbed by Ell'Hakan, and some of it went into the skies, empowering the moons. The severed limbs of his opponent were replaced with appendages of pure energy, and even the missing parts of his body were merely filled in with energy to replace what had been lost.

Ell'Hakan's entire body was glowing and burning with power as he stared down at Jake. **"I apologize for the wait, would-be destroyer of my world."**

Jake returned his gaze, and he had just one question as he also infused his voice with power. **“What exactly happened to you?”**

The nahoom took only a moment before sighing. **“I merely remembered who I truly was.”**

**“Who are you then, if not Ell’Hakan?”** Jake questioned.

**“Ell’Hakan... the name of the former slave allowed to be the vessel of I, the Celestial Child. An honorable role, to be allowed to inhabit my reincarnation, and one he shall be recognized for,”** the nahoom spoke.

Jake just stared at the nahoom as the faith energy kept coming and entering his broken and battered body. Most of the poison was getting rapidly eliminated, and the curse energy dispersed, but Jake still couldn’t help but sigh and shake his head.

*He’s lost his fucking mind.*

**“There is sadness in my heart for what comes next, but you must die for the transgressions you committed against my world. You may struggle, but it will only prolong the inevitable,”** the clearly mentally broken Ell’Hakan said.

It appeared that, in his grand delusion, the nahoom couldn’t see it, but Jake most certainly could. Ell’Hakan gave off an even more powerful aura than before now, his body literally glowing with power... and while he was a little better off than before his sudden change, it wasn’t by much, and one thing was more clear than anything:

There was no fucking way his body or soul could handle what was currently happening to it.

The Celestial Child raised a hand, the moonlight behind him intensifying as Jake bent his knees, ready to move at a moment’s notice. He faintly heard the sound of his own heart beating with excitement as he felt his senses intensify, a hint of happiness flashing through his mind. A part of him was happy that the Usurper hadn’t simply died so easily... oh, but to be absolutely clear, Ell’Hakan or the Celestial Child or whatever the fuck he wanted to call himself now was going to die.

Jake’s danger sense warned him just then as he moved to dodge, all his senses in a state of hyperfocus as his Bloodline responded, the auras of the Celestial Child and Primal Hunter clashing in a battle for supremacy that would decide not just the fate of the planet but the entire Milky Way Galaxy.

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## Chapter 1030: Primal Hunter vs Celestial Child (7)

A beam of moonlight struck where Jake had just been standing as he dodged out of the way, but rather than leave a big burning hole like the sunbeams had before, this one was far more subtle. Where it had hit, the ground just turned white and cracked, a faint wave of extreme cold washing over Jake from the impact spot.

*First fire, now ice*, Jake mentally commented as the Celestial Child held out his hand as his trident appeared. He grasped it with both hands – one made of pure celestial energy born from faith energy and the other real – and pointed it down toward the ground as if it were a staff.

It pulsed once, making Jake's eyes open wide as a bright spark appeared from thin air before quickly exploding in a rain of starlight, making Jake dodge even further than he had initially planned to. Even so, Jake managed to release several arrows while moving, dodging every attack heading his way as a rain of exploding starlight and moonbeams came at him.

Ell'Hakan also managed to block all the attacks heading his way as barriers of solidified moonlight appeared to meet the arrows. Picking up even more speed, Jake rapidly took to the air to make it easier to dodge by giving him another direction to use while avoiding the nahoom.

Likely realizing he was wasting his energy, Ell'Hakan lowered his trident and regarded the weapon for a bit. **“Your cowardly strategy will not work. I can see it. You believe my vessel will not be able to contain my power, so let me assure you. Even if it is destroyed, even if my body fades, I shall remain.”**

Yeah, Jake wasn't even going to address that one as he dodged another few attacks before Ell'Hakan stopped trying to play mage and entered melee once more. From Jake's point of view, Ell'Hakan was definitely fucked in the head because while he claimed he would totally remain even when his “vessel” stopped working, Jake felt pretty certain reality disagreed with that statement.

The assumption that Jake was just trying to drag out the battle wasn't a bad one, though. Because, in all honesty, just being purely on the defensive and dragging things out would be the wisest strategy Jake could deploy.

Ell'Hakan was essentially using a boosting skill far beyond what his body could handle, but rather than burn his own energy, he was constantly absorbing and using faith energy as fuel. The thing is, no matter how many people he sacrificed and no matter how much faith energy he absorbed, he was ultimately still limited by his body – or, as the Celestial Child called it, his vessel.

So, if Jake wanted a safe victory, he wouldn't even try to attack but just dodge around until his opponent burned himself out. However, Jake didn't want to do that. He wanted the fight and to kill Ell'Hakan for good on his own... plus, the guy had already pulled off a miracle and survived when he should already have been dead once.

Jake wasn't going to accept it happening a second time by playing things too passively.

Still, all this did make Ell'Hakan extremely dangerous as the nahoom turned into a beam of light, the sunlight replaced with moonlight as he used his movement skill. Appearing right in front of him, Jake, for the very first time, could use both his katars with Eternal Hunger now back being a melee weapon.

He met the trident as he tried to parry it, but as his weapon got closer to Ell'Hakan's, he felt as if the katar was magnetically repelled from the trident while his opponent's weapon veered in an unnatural angle toward Jake's chest.

Twisting his body equally unnaturally, Jake still barely avoided as he spun in the air and tried to land a blow on the nahoom, but his opponent responded quickly, using his arm made of pure energy to block the attack. Jake did manage to cut off the hand, but it was instantly regenerated, it happening so fast that Jake's swing hadn't even finished before he was met with a blast of white light from the newly formed hand.

The light washed over Jake and was met with Scales of the Malefic Viper that nullified most of it as he infused the skill with extra energy. The white flash of light didn't blast Jake back or anything. Instead, he felt himself momentarily freeze up and get slower as Ell'Hakan swung his trident.

Without any hesitation, Jake erupted with arcane energy as he caused an explosion in front of himself, getting blasted back from the shockwave while narrowly avoiding a nasty cut. He carefully stabilized, telling himself to be more cautious moving forward.

Not giving him any break, Ell'Hakan continued attacking, showing off the same pure skill as a warrior he had before. Even if it seemed like his personality had drastically changed, Ell'Hakan was clearly still himself, seeing as he had the exact same fighting style now as before. As for how in the hell it made sense for someone "reincarnated" to only use the skills of the person's body they had taken over... yeah, the short answer was that it didn't.

One good thing about his change was that Jake hadn't felt the use of Ell'Hakan's Bloodline even once so far. For good reasons, Jake couldn't be entirely confident Ell'Hakan wasn't still actually using it subtly on Jake here and there, but he did have a theory that the entire Bloodline was kind of preoccupied with keeping the delusion going.

This did help Jake a little, but he still found himself on the back foot as he faced the onslaught of the massive powered-up Ell'Hakan. He ended up making a mistake soon

after, misjudging the distance slightly due to the odd pull of the trident, resulting in Jake blocking Ell'Hakan's attack directly rather than deflecting it.

Jake felt pain rush down his arm and hand from the impact, barely holding on and giving Ell'Hakan a chance to strike for more. The trident flashed with white light again. Jake expected to have his movement affected, but instead, he was actually blasted back this time as a sense of death and cold washed over him.

Even if much of the light was blocked by the scales, Jake still felt his soul be affected as he took a significant amount of direct damage to his health pool. Moreover, rime formed on his clothes and scales from the cold light.

By now, one thing was pretty evident.

The moon affinity used by Ell'Hakan was altered compared to what Jake had read about. It had an odd stillness to it... a sense of serenity that was definitely not healthy to have in the middle of a fight.

Usually, the moon was seen as quite a mysterious concept. It was heavily tied to the concept of mysticism and magic itself, and while it wasn't anything odd for it to also be expressed as cold energy, it usually wasn't like this. Compared to the Lucenti affinity - the concept of moonlight – this light also differed substantially.

The tale has been illicitly lifted; should you spot it on Amazon, report the violation.

It had way too much death baked into it. Rather than death only being expressed through coldness, the magic deployed by Ell'Hakan had the death affinity itself be part of it. In many ways, what Jake currently faced was the exact opposite of the sun affinity from before. Death instead of life, cold instead of heat, and rather than having the ability to stimulate healing and life, this one had the exact opposite as it sought to still everything.

Chances are this expression of the moon affinity was born from the faith and belief the native nahoom had regarding the twin moons. To the nahoom, the moons were harbingers of cold and death on the planet. The planet was entirely desert, so he could only assume how extremely low the temperature could drop during the night... and he couldn't help but imagine how many had frozen to death, with the last thing they saw the two moons in the sky, hanging above them like the eyes of the grim reaper. RANÖbEs

Jake couldn't say if this interpretation of the moon affinity was more or less dangerous than the regular kind, but one thing he did know was that it was far more offensive in nature. He took soul damage every time the light washed over him, and the coldness slowed Jake down in both body and soul, making it an incredibly dangerous mix with Ell'Hakan's powerful physical abilities and – after his boost – superior stats.

Finally, Ell'Hakan now fought as if he had unlimited resources, which, to be fair to him, he kind of had as he was being fed more faith energy than he could possibly handle.

Jake wasn't entirely losing out, though. Relying on his usual technique of being primarily defensive while landing the occasional counterattack, Jake worked to disrupt his opponent's momentum while not getting caught out of position himself, occasionally even landing a small counter.

After a dozen seconds of Ell'Hakan failing to land any blows despite constantly slowing Jake down or trying to impede his movements with the cold moonlight, he once more changed things up.

Ell'Hakan swung his trident wide, releasing a wave of pure energy that glittered like starlight, forcing Jake back as he prepared for Ell'Hakan's follow-up. However, rather than charging, the Usurper raised his trident toward the sky as he spoke.

**"Starfall."**

A massive beam of solid starlight shot upwards at an incredible speed before exploding over a hundred kilometers up. As it exploded, a wave of multi-colored light filled the air like a thick cloud... a cloud that rapidly began falling toward the ground. New novel chapters are published on *novel·fire·net*

Ell'Hakan, who had been staring upwards with a smile, was suddenly in for a rude surprise as an Arcane Powershot struck him square in the chest, blasting him into the horizon as Jake swiftly whipped out his bow the second he saw the opportunity to do so.

However, right after Jake hit him, space itself seemed to twist for a moment as Ell'Hakan was dragged back through reality, appearing where he had just been hit before, with no signs of the arrow having ever struck him. He didn't even say anything but instead just charged before Jake could shoot a new Arcane Powershot, Jake unsure what kind of skill he had just used.

Jake reacted by teleporting back while taking a potshot, keeping an eye on the attack arriving from above. He kept retreating back but was soon caught up with as the nahoom used his movement skill again right after Jake teleported.

Switching weapons quickly, Jake used both katars to block and redirect a downward swing, making the ground erupt as the trident struck it and caused an explosion of light that sent Jake skirting back. While still blinded, Jake bent backward, avoiding a horizontal slash as he twisted his body and kicked Ell'Hakan, launching himself away again.

Giving chase, Ell'Hakan made his trident glow with powerful moonlight once more, creating a domain of frost and death all around him that froze the ground in his wake. This was timed with the attack from above also finally arriving.

Tens of thousands of crystalline shards of starlight fell from the sky like rain, each of them highly unstable based on an extremely brief analysis. With a charging Ell'Hakan and the attack from above, Jake also took things up a notch as he infused his presence with energy, activating Pride of the Malefic Viper.

The domain of frost met tough competition as Ell'Hakan entered range, Jake diving forward to meet his opponent. As he dove, the air above him shivered as arcane mana manifested, dozens of destructive bolts and orbs appearing to meet the shards of starlight.

Jake and Ell'Hakan clashed as stars met arcane, massive explosions of multi-colored light and Jake's destructive arcane energy enveloping them as they kept fighting despite the constant explosions happening all around.

This cascade of explosions ended up distracting Ell'Hakan far more than Jake as he found himself blinded and, at times, disoriented, allowing Jake to take advantage as he landed several stabs on the Usurper, blood splurting into the air with every attack.

His opponent stumbled but quickly recovered as he purposefully got stabbed in the stomach and used the opportunity to grab Jake's forearm with his hand of starlight. The hand instantly began glowing, Jake's scales fighting back hard. Gritting his teeth, Jake used his other katar to try and stab Ell'Hakan in the neck, but the nahoom managed to block it, forcing Jake to take more extreme measures. Jake's body split into two as a shadow disengaged out of his back, the Shadow Vault aspect of the skill allowing him to get away.

At the same time, the real Jake purposefully stabbed his arm deeper through Ell'Hakan's stomach before making the entire arm explode, the overflowing arcane energy in his body erupting inside Ell'Hakan's stomach.

Having lost an arm, Jake stumbled back as a trident swung for his neck, but all he did was smile as he was hit. The trident successfully beheaded the Eternal Shadow as the real Jake had switched positions with it just in the nick of time. Ell'Hakan was clearly perplexed even as the Arcane Powershot hit him in the shoulder – the one where he still had an arm of flesh and blood - blasting it off entirely.

Jake prepared to launch a follow-up arrow, but right as he let go of the string, he suddenly lost strength in his arm, making him fumble and miss the Arcane Powershot entirely as Jake grimaced, looking at his arm where Ell'Hakan had held him.

Despite using Eternal Shadow, Jake still had a burnt-in handprint on his forearm, the skin there entirely white and lifeless. What's more, it was rotting all the way through, with even the Soulshape having taken damage. While he had managed to land a good hit, the cost had been pretty big, too, as even if he switched places with his Eternal Shadow, he'd still lost a good deal of vital energy from that stunt.

Opposite him, Ell'Hakan regarded his missing arm but seemed to barely mind as a new arm of starlight instantly formed while he began walking forward.

**“You still fail to comprehend what you are facing. As long as the stars and moons of the universe exist, so shall I,”** he said in a calm and confident voice. **“The biggest mistake you’ve made was to trap me with you within this world of void sorcery. All that did was make your escape impossible, cutting off all paths for survival.”**

Jake glared at his arm once more as he tensed it up, purposefully flooding it with vital energy as it healed quickly. He barely cared about what Ell'Hakan said as he regarded the nahoom with a cold gaze.

“I guess we’ll see if it was a mistake or not.”

The nahoom just sighed. **“It was.”**

Just then, the entire body of the Celestial Child pulsed, as in the sky, a second explosion of starlight happened that caused a rain of shards, all done without him even having to shoot a beam up there. At the same time, he took another step forward but stomped hard this time. From his stomp, a wave of cold spread in a circle all around him. Jake took to the air immediately to dodge, as below him, the ground erupted with ice crystals piercing through the ground.

With the same stomp that summoned these ice shards, Ell'Hakan propelled himself forward, his aura of cold and death only growing as he approached his final end. Far above in the sky, above the falling shards of starlight, the twin moons also began to glow with renewed power as the moonlight fell upon Jake, sending a cold shiver through his soul.

Jake responded by empowering his Pride of the Malefic Viper even more as magic manifested all around him to meet the multi-pronged attack, as once more, katars and trident clashed under the cold moonlight, one battling to “save” his world despite already being a dead man walking, but refusing to see it due to his massive delusions, while the other...

Well, the other one was just doing it because he wanted to, and as the pressure mounted, the opportunities he knew it could lead to, as there was no better time than a battle like this, one which genuinely threatened his life, to push himself further and progress his Path.

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## Chapter 1031: Primal Hunter vs Celestial Child (8)

Explosions and cutting waves of crescent moonlight reshaped the landscape as Jake and Ell'Hakan battled across the planet's surface, tearing everything up in their path. Most of it was sand, but there were also plenty of massive rocky plains for them to destroy as Jake constantly redirected Ell'Hakan's blow away from himself and into the environment, with the nahoom not caring in the slightest as he continually released his rain of starlight shards.

Courtesy of the Void Sphere, none of their destruction was reflected in the real world, and neither did they encounter any other living beings as they continued fighting, the fight having taken on its own tempo. Ell'Hakan had slightly powered up once more despite his state seemingly worsening, making him able to constantly put pressure on Jake.

Not that Jake was losing out much as the battle stayed surprisingly equal for a while, with Jake constantly retreating and forcing Ell'Hakan to give chase to avoid Jake pulling out his bow, as while Ell'Hakan had a slight advantage in melee combat, it was the opposite when distance was established.

Jake did wonder a few times if attacking even mattered much, as despite doing a lot of damage, Ell'Hakan seemed to not care in the slightest. In fact, it seemed to almost make him stronger as despite losing another arm and taking multiple injuries, he simply healed everything immediately using his odd starlight energy. Or, well, considering he called himself the Celestial Child, perhaps calling it celestial energy would be more accurate.

However, Jake soon became confident that despite nothing seemingly changing, his attacks did have an effect. He began to notice that the poison still running through Ell'Hakan's body began to move differently when it sought to attack his vital energy, almost as if it met obstructions or cut-off paths. Moreover, as Jake focused more on the poison in Ell'Hakan's body using Sense of the Malefic Viper, he began to notice the small cracks.

Not on any armor or weapons, but on Ell'Hakan's Soulshape, indicating his soul was breaking apart in real-time, and whenever Jake landed a blow, he only sped up the process. Seeing this, Jake even doubted it for a moment as he questioned how Ell'Hakan could remain so damn blasé about everything. If Jake could detect the massive amounts of soul damage going on, so could Ell'Hakan, right?

Because Jake sure as hell noticed how much his forearm hurt every time he moved it, the damage from being grabbed earlier taking annoyingly long to heal. While it wasn't enough to negatively affect his combat prowess, it was bad enough to make Jake extremely cautious of ever allowing Ell'Hakan to catch him like that again.

To avoid being caught, Jake had also chosen a very specific direction to move in, as the two of them were rapidly moving toward where the largest population of the nahoom had once presided: the capital city.

He planned on using the area to his advantage, as the nahoom really liked building tall towers and large buildings that should help block many of Ell'Hakan's attacks, while Jake felt confident that these obstacles would instead only lead to more of his arrows hitting as he got more opportunities for tricky curving arrows.

Soon enough, the city appeared as they went over a sand hill, Ell'Hakan shooting a beam of moonlight straight through the sand as it was kicked up everywhere during his pursuit. Jake dodged the beam as he shot an arrow that the nahoom decided to dodge, slowing him down slightly and giving Jake a chance to use a few instances of One Step before his opponent turned into a beam of light and pursued once more.

He appeared in front of Jake as he unleashed an explosion of starlight that Jake purposefully blocked with a barrier of arcane mana to launch himself toward the city. He was ready to be attacked again, but instead, the nahoom began talking while giving pursuit.

**“Even now, it stands proud, a beacon of life and a testament to the power of the nahoom in the middle of the desert,”** the Celestial Child spoke, turning his attention briefly toward the capital city Jake was nearly at.

**“I do find it appropriate for this to be the site of the battle, and I shall bury you here once you’re dead, erecting a monument to serve as a warning and reminder to all who dare try and walk a similar path to yours.”**

**“Reminder to whom?”** Jake yelled back in between using One Step. **“How many did you kill of your own kin already? Are there even any alive to build the monument for you?”**

**“I did not kill my kin. They simply gave their lives to protect this planet. They know that should I fail to slay you, it will mean the end of this world, your very existence a threat to the universe,”** the Celestial Child responded calmly. **“You also underestimate the nahoom. We are a hardy race, and even if you had succeeded in your plot of destroying the planet, we would have survived through our kin spread throughout the galaxy. Kin that shall return and help rebuild once you have fallen.”**

The confidence of the nahoom was almost impressive, and Jake would have had at least an iota of respect if he didn't know it stemmed from Ell'Hakan mind-fucking himself into oblivion. He truly was utterly delusional, believing everything he said with genuine conviction as if it were the absolute truth.

While that was pretty damn laughable, Jake also recognized how dangerous it was. Ell'Hakan was effectively closer to an elemental or spirit now with his current body, only hanging on due to the constant influx of faith energy and an insane display of Bloodline-fueled Willpower that could truly only come from someone so broken.

Finally entering the capital city proper, Jake instantly used the many tall towers to his advantage. Ell'Hakan followed, but he seemed in less than a rush. In fact, rather than chasing after Jake directly, he instead flew up into the air. Initially, Jake thought he was doing this to keep better track of Jake, but instead of looking downward to where he would be, the nahoom instead stared directly at the sky.

Up there, the twin moons were still glowing brightly, though neither of them had released any attacks for quite a while. Seeing Ell'Hakan stare at them, Jake just shrugged mentally as he shot an arrow toward him, the nahoom at least aware enough of himself to quickly move and block it.

**"Impatient... but very well,"** Ell'Hakan said as he turned toward Jake. **"You are powerful. More powerful than I had expected you to be, even considering I do not believe I underestimated you. Considering the failing state of my vessel, dragging things out needlessly seems ill-advised... so allow me to hurry things along."**

The Celestial Child held out his arms to each side, and from Jake's perspective, it looked like he held a moon in each hand. The light behind him suddenly intensified, and Jake's eyes opened wide as he felt a wave of warmth wash over him right as he was blinded. ~~RáNoḃEs~~

**"Sunrise."**

With a moon in each hand, the Celestial Child looked like he became the sun itself as it rose up behind him, joining the twin moons in the sky, all shining brightly. Jake was instantly assaulted by the heat as it mixed with the coldness of the moonlight from before.

A massive maelstrom of faith energy swirled around the newly formed sun, feeding it some of all the energy Ell'Hakan couldn't absorb. This skill usage had clearly sped up the nahoom's demise further, but despite that, this wasn't a good thing for Jake... far from it.

Rather than this "sunrise" making the sun start by actually being a sunrise, it appeared already mostly risen immediately, the heat it gave off also representing this. Jake's scales were immediately put under extreme pressure as the heat of the sun began to burn Jake, and despite the sun still not being at its highest point yet, things were already worse than when he'd fought against this skill last time...

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Because despite the rising sun, the moons hadn't gotten any weaker. In fact, it appeared to be quite the opposite.

The moonlight had been changed slightly in nature as the coldness was gone. Even the element of death had disappeared, with both of them entirely replaced with the concept of stillness, said concept having been amplified as the moonlight lost its other properties.

This resulted in Jake's body not only being burnt, but he also felt himself get slower as the moonlight sought to immobilize him. The Celestial Child had effectively activated a double domain, and right now, the only saving grace was that Jake had a moment to adapt as the Celestial Child didn't look like he could move freely while keeping the skill ac-

A beam of light appeared in front of Jake as Ell'Hakan appeared, even his physical body now reflecting his rapidly deteriorating soul as white cracks had appeared throughout, revealing glittering starlight inside the fissures in his body. Jake saw these fissures but didn't have time to consider them more as he desperately moved his katars to block the trident bathed in starlight that swung for him.

Jake was launched back upon impact, the celestial energy searing into his flesh as it penetrated the already weakened scales. His opponent instantly followed up, and because Jake couldn't move as he wanted due to the moonlight, he failed to fully block as he received a cut to one of his forearms.

He tried to make some distance and make use of the city's layout, but he was simply too slow now to get away fast enough. Jake was pushed back repeatedly as he tried to minimize injuries, the only harm he did to Ell'Hakan stemming from the few times some of Jake's toxic blood splurged on him.

Every wound Jake received was infected with the celestial affinity, burning into his soul along with his body, not to mention the fact having his scales broken by the trident strikes made the actual sun also burn him, worsening his injuries.

*This can't go on*, Jake thought desperately as he kept being pressured, only getting a minor break after being blasted through a large stone tower, which temporarily gave him cover as it crumbled down around him.

The double domain was too much to deal with, and Jake tried to fight back as he kept resisting it with Pride of the Malefic Viper. However, the skill simply wasn't strong enough to keep up. While it did allow him to more easily impose his will upon the world around him, Jake still had to actively use it to resist.

Pride allowed him to more easily summon mana into the air all around him, and while he did try to use his arcane affinity to stabilize the space, the combined powers of the sun and moonlight were just too difficult to battle at the same time. Especially while also

dealing with a physically more powerful nahoom currently burning his own soul while swinging a star-wrapped trident around.

His only real way to fight back was to try and adapt on the fly to the domain. His scales were admittedly doing a wonderful job, and without them, Jake would have been completely and utterly fucked. The scales did also help analyse all the energy they absorbed, giving Jake some level of insight into the kind of magic he was dealing with, but proper analysis and discovery of a way to counteract it would take long... way too long.

Ell'Hakan exploded through the falling debris of the falling tower, stabbing Jake, who was still trying to deal with the domain. Failing to fully block once more, Jake was sent spinning toward the ground as he smashed through a multi-story house and into the ground, the impact of hitting the house actually hurting as the buildings were constructed by Builders who had strengthened all the materials used significantly.

Getting up quickly, Jake barely teleported away in time, only to be struck in the back half a second later by a beam of starlight blasting him down a long street and through another five houses before he landed on the dusty street once more, rolling several times.

Punching the ground, Jake caused an explosion of arcane energy, launching him upwards with his back blistering and burning from a combination of the beam of starlight and powerful sunlight.

*If not for this damn domain...* Jake cursed as he was forced to dodge another three ranged attacks, Ell'Hakan closing in again.

Usually, the best way to battle a domain was with one's own domain... the problem was, Jake didn't have one. The closest thing he had was Pride, and that wasn't a real domain skill. It was more of an aura skill than anything else. Domain skills altered the world, while all Jake could do was affect the world just around him by imposing his will, which simply wasn't enough...

... wait, why wasn't that enough?

As Jake was once more sent flying through the air, he questioned himself why it wouldn't be enough? Pride of the Malefic Viper made it easier to control the area all around him, made it easier to summon magic there, and even allowed him to attack anyone within his presence with mental attacks.

Right now, Jake's presence extended quite far. If he wanted to, he could even make it extend at least dozens of kilometers in every direction, though it likely wouldn't work to infuse that entire area with mana using Pride. Doing so would also be extremely wasteful, as it all came back to the importance of scope versus intensity.

That's when Jake got his idea to fight back. Right now, he had his presence extend quite a good distance away from himself to fight any ranged attacks, the skill having proven very useful against the falling star shards, but right now, he didn't need that.

Jake focused as he slowly retracted his own presence, consolidating it. It shrunk from extending a few hundred meters in every direction to less than a hundred, then fifty, forty, thirty, twenty... Jake kept retracting his presence until it was only in a five or so meter radius all around him.

Right as Ell'Hakan closed in again, trident raised and ready to strike, Jake made his gamble. Activating all his Willpower, Jake focused on Pride of the Malefic Viper as he imposed his will upon the world in his immediate surroundings.

Rather than try to make his own domain, Jake did just the opposite... he willfully expelled any domains. Leaning into the concept of Pride itself, Jake simply didn't allow any domain to affect the area his presence had already laid its claim on, arrogantly only allowing his own magic to exist there.

Jake felt his mind be strained as he pushed his Willpower further than usual, the double domain fighting back against what Jake was trying to do. Blood began to drip from Jake's nose as he strained himself too much... but soon, it was replaced with a wave of confidence as he felt his body lighten up and the moonlight's effect on his body severely lessen, making him know he'd succeeded. The extra Willpower also instantly became useful, Jake instantly feeling he got it as he barely had to even check the notification.

**Skill upgraded: [Pride of the Malefic Viper (Legendary)] --> [Pride of the Malefic Viper (Legendary)]**

Ell'Hakan's attack arrived just then, but Jake could move again. He dodged it significantly faster than before, taking the nahoom by surprise as Jake landed a counterattack by stepping forward and quickly jabbing his opponent in the chest.

The Usurper stumbled back and swung to counter, but Jake was faster as he kept pace and landed another stab, dodged the swing, and stabbed one more time for good measure, every attack of his resulting in even more cracks forming across Ell'Hakan's already rapidly breaking down body and soul.

**"Even now, you grow stronger,"** the Celestial Child said as he dodged back from one of Jake's attacks.

"Wouldn't feel right if you were the only one," Jake smiled, using his newly improved Pride to manifest magic all around him as hundreds of arcane bolts appeared instantly. At the same time, he also finally consumed a health potion to try and better his current state.

He had taken quite the pummeling, leading to wounds covering his entire body, most of them burning with celestial energy. The vital energy instantly flooded his body and began to heal him, the nahoom in front either not noticing or not caring. The most update novels are published on **novel•fire•net**

**“Perhaps it wouldn’t, and it does prove you are worthy of being recognized as my adversary,”** the Celestial Child responded right as the sun above flashed, a massive laser of pure light descending as the nahoom charged again. Jake quickly released his mana bolts, sending them flying in an unpredictable swarm as he dove forward.

Dodging the sunbeam, Jake clashed with Ell’Hakan yet again, the nahoom no longer taken by surprise from Jake successfully nullifying most of the two domains’ effect on him. To clarify, Jake was still burning through mana to resist it, and even then, some of it continued to leak through. The effect was just so much less now, and his scales could handle it for the most part.

As Jake and Ell’Hakan crossed weapons, their magic also met all around them, arcane energy clashing with celestial magic as they rapidly tore through the capital city. Jake occasionally got the opportunity to create distance and use the environment as he had originally planned, but Ell’Hakan was equally quick to adapt as he was rarely taken by surprise.

Somehow, the fight had moved to seeming equal again, almost having turned into a battle of endurance. Jake was burning through his resources quickly to keep up with the stronger Ell’Hakan, while Ell’Hakan was burning through his very existence. Jake had long stopped holding anything back, even using another two Eternal Shadows to dodge while landing solid counterattacks, despite the increasing cost of using the skill consecutively.

Both of them had to know the fight was nearing its end, with Jake only having one burning question in his mind... did the Celestial Child have any more tricks up his sleeve?

Because Jake almost hoped he did... this desire soon to be realized.

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## Chapter 1032: Primal Hunter vs Celestial Child (9)

Jake's Pride of the Malefic Viper pressed Ell'Hakan as he managed to force the nahoom back by unleashing a blast of arcane mana, and using that opening, Jake rapidly charged and loosed an Arcane Powershot.

More flesh and blood were torn off as Ell'Hakan was sent spinning, but he stabilized in mid-air, only to unleash a crescent wave of starlight that tore apart the tower Jake had quickly dodged behind.

Nocking another arrow, Jake barely stepped down in time to teleport away as a beam of moonlight struck where he had just been standing, giving him just enough time to shoot another arrow.

A flash of sunlight from above sent another laser of pure fiery destruction down, the energy mixing with the moonlight as Jake felt the attempt to slow down his movements once more, but with Pride, he managed to resist and avoid the beam.

The heat still singed him, and it put Jake in a bad position as Ell'Hakan used his movement skill to close in again. Jake was forced to take a nasty cut to avoid lethal damage, his movements not as fast as he would like to as even if Pride allowed him to avoid much of the double domain's effect, he wasn't entirely immune.

Still, Jake got in a good hit in return, stabbing Ell'Hakan in the chest and tearing out another piece of flesh. By now, the nahoom barely looked like a nahoom anymore. Most of the skin and flesh on his chest had been sheared away little by little, only to be replaced by starlight. He also only had a single leg left, with even that being partly replaced with the same celestial energy.

It was evident he was out of vital energy to regenerate his actual physical body and that he was just doing stopgaps to keep himself moving. The limits of Willpower truly shocked Jake, as he wasn't sure if anyone else could have kept going in the current state that Ell'Hakan was in.

Jake would compare the current Ell'Hakan to a leaking faucet... no, a faucet that was filled with holes while still being turned on. Usually, this faucet would be connected to a water tank – the soul and his resource pools – and needless to say, having the faucet be this fucked up would empty it out pretty damn quickly.

However, Ell'Hakan kept himself going by constantly filling up his water tank. He'd effectively placed a waterfall of faith energy right above his water tank, pouring in energy constantly to keep him going.

Even as Jake began to poke holes in the tank itself, making it leak all over the place, Ell'Hakan kept filling it up constantly. The waterfall just kept pouring... and while he, in his extreme delusion, believed he would survive once it stopped, Jake was certain of the opposite.

The moment he ran out of his constant torrential supply of faith energy, his water tank would empty within seconds, resulting in his death. Of course, there was one more way to kill him before that happened... to destroy enough of the water tank to make its structural integrity break down entirely.

With the cracks showing even on his physical body, Jake knew the nahoom wasn't far off from collapse. The Willpower of Ell'Hakan was not only actively controlling the waterfall pouring in faith energy, but the duct tape making the current water tank not fragment and break, and at some point, the nahoom would simply not be able to keep up anymore. The link to the origin of this information rests in *novel·fire·net*

Of course, Jake couldn't say his own body was in a good state, either. He'd been under the constant exposure of domains for most of this fight, slowly whittling away at his resource pools as he had to fight it off. Not to mention the fact he had to replace his scales many times over, had to keep Presence active for much of the fight, and all the hits he'd taken to avoid more serious ones.

It all added up, and contrary to Ell'Hakan, Jake didn't have an endless supply of energy... not that he would want to enter a state similar to Ell'Hakan's, as the second he'd done so, he was already a dead man walking. His soul had taken damage beyond repair a long time ago, and he was realistically just waiting for death right now.

Jake's own soul was also already pretty damn strained, having kept Arcane Awakening fully active for a while now. His skin was slowly peeling from the overflowing arcane energy running through his body, and his internals had taken some damage from both the arcane energy and celestial energy battling inside of him. He hadn't lost any limbs yet, true, but only because he'd avoided those kinds of injuries at all costs to avoid a decrease in combat ability. Due to the current state of Ell'Hakan, trading blows simply wasn't worth it most of the time, so even if Jake could bisect Ell'Hakan in trade for an arm, he wouldn't do it.

That was the case despite all the chances Ell'Hakan gave Jake to do so, and even when they clashed once more, and Jake got a great chance to cut off the nahoom's one remaining limb, he refused as he didn't wanna risk losing his hand in return. Instead, he just landed a light stab before getting away, avoiding taking an injury himself.

**"You fight with fear,"** the Celestial Child said, giving pursuit. **"Why? Do you not trust in your own will and desire to live like I do? Where there is will, there is a way. I believe, no, I know my soul is one with the stars and that I am eternal no matter what happens to any of my vessels. You cannot kill me... but it appears as if you believe I can kill you. That's why this isn't a battle you can win. You don't believe in yourself enough."**

Jake ignored him entirely, as quite frankly, responding was a fool's errand. What was the saying again? Never argue with delusional people because they'll drag you down to

their level and beat you with just how bloody out of touch with reality they are? Okay, Jake definitely got that one wrong, but the point still stood.

Besides, Jake needed to focus all he could on the fight, as he planned on walking away from it alive, unlike the looney he was facing.

As another half a minute passed, Ell'Hakan's state only got worse and worse, only with Jake landing what few blows he could. No, the real cause of damage was the poison in the nahoom's body, rotting away what little flesh he had left, resulting in nearly the entire remaining leg now also being made of starlight.

Soon, only a bit of his upper chest and head would remain flesh and blood, the rest nothing but energy. This extreme soul damage would naturally result in Ell'Hakan dying, but to Jake's surprise, the deteriorating state of Ell'Hakan's soul integrity also led to something else before that happened...

Because, right as the two of them clashed again, Jake felt something react. Ell'Hakan also clearly noticed as the two of them made distance from each other. Right then, the entire Void Sphere Dimension also began to shake violently as tears in reality disrupted space itself as the shortcomings of the item Arnold had created in a few months now showed themselves. Then again, perhaps it was unfair to put anything on Arnold as it was questionable how many items for C-grades could handle what was happening.

**"You..."** the Celestial Child said, staring at Jake as space shuddered all around him.

Jake just answered with a light smile and a shrug. "It's your fault that the connection became too unstable."

*Because it looks like even the system considers you close to already dead,* Jake added mentally as he saw the notification explaining what was happening.

### **Divine Bargain of the Malefic Viper successfully completed.**

It was only a guess, but Jake assumed that with Ell'Hakan's deteriorating state, his connection to the Planetary Pylon had indeed become too damaged, allowing the Divine Bargain to go through pretty quickly. At least it was faster than Jake expected it to be if he was being completely honest. *RaNoBÊS*

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Which did make him ask two things... first of all, what was his reward for the Divine Bargain?

And secondly... what was happening to the planet as a result of the bargain?

--

Moments ago, the Planetary Pylon was pulsing, struggling, as it fought off the snakes wrapped around it as they only got tighter and tighter. Then, suddenly, a green glow appeared as the eyes of the snakes opened all at once, a hiss sounding out that sent a subtle wave of energy pulsing out from the Planetary Core before fading away slowly.

In the wake of this fading light, the snakes were gone... along with the entire Planetary Pylon that appeared as if it had just been whisked out of existence entirely.

Only a second passed before the entire core room began to shake, the walls cracking before crumbling, with the entire thing collapsing in upon itself, making the core room no more. This destruction only began to spread as soon everyone would know what happened to a planet that had it's Planetary Pylon taken away in the most literal sense of the word.

"What the hell do you need a random Planetary Pylon for? What's more, with it separated from its planet..." Duskleaf asked as he stared up at the Planetary Pylon that was already cracking and breaking apart. Having been disconnected from the planet, it would soon crumble to dust, making it entirely useless.

"Hey, be nice," the Viper said with crossed arms in a faux offended tone. "This was a gift from my dear Chosen. One that he expects something in return for, sure, making it a bit more transactional than I would have liked, but isn't it only polite to always give gifts in return when receiving one? Also, more than anything, it's the thought that counts, and I can only appreciate the thought behind this one."

Duskleaf frowned as he realized. "Wait... if Jake gave it to you... and considering the aura of the Pylon... did he?"

"That's right," Vilastromoz said, wiping a tear from his eye. "I'm just so proud. Jake finally destroyed his very first planet... oh, how they grow up so fast."

As the Void Sphere Dimension was soon approaching collapse, two things happened at once. Firstly, right after Jake thought about what he would get for the Divine Bargain, a small item appeared right in front of him. He didn't even have time to Identify it before it simply disappeared and entered his storage.

Probably for the best, too, as Ell'Hakan charged at him right then, trident held high. The moon and sunlight got refracted by the tears in space, but Jake and the nahoom were unaffected even as the world around them was seemingly falling apart. Jake was pressured back, going on the defensive, and soon enough, the entire Void Sphere Dimension shattered like a mirror.

The two of them returned to the real world immediately, where it was quickly made clear why the poor Void Sphere Dimension had been destabilized. Right as they appeared

back in reality, Jake had to dodge to the side as a torrent of lava erupted from below, enveloping Ell'Hakan as a geyser of lava several kilometers tall shot up from a fissure in the ground below.

After the Void Sphere Dimension had been broken, they'd also returned to the desert they originally entered it from, but that desert had now rapidly changed. Massive earthquakes powerful enough to move entire continents had opened up fissures in the ground for all the sand to fall down, lava spat up in different places, and the sky was filled with thunderstorms as even the atmosphere was rapidly unraveling.

**“You have broken my world,”** the Celestial Child said, his voice cold. **“For that, I shall break you in kind.”**

The nahoom's power suddenly intensified even more as a newfound stream of faith energy fueled him. For a second, Jake was confused about where it came from, but he soon understood.

Not everyone had sacrificed themselves the first time around, but now that the world was ending, they, too, had given their lives to help support their god.

His increased level of power instantly put pressure on Jake as he was repeatedly forced back. The nahoom had no regard for defense anymore – not that he had a lot to begin with – and his increased speed made him even more dangerous as he tried to end Jake's life then and there.

Jake thought quickly as he dove into one of the newly opened fissures in the ground, barely avoiding a spout of lava and rock fragments being thrown up. Ell'Hakan gave chase, sending a large crescent wave of starlight forth that tore the sides of the fissure apart and opened a path through the lava spouts.

Focusing on his Sphere of Perception and danger sense, Jake purposefully dove toward an area where the entire side of the fissure was cracking and falling apart. Right as Ell'Hakan reached Jake again, he turned around and blocked, the shockwave from their clash sending Jake flying back while also breaking the already cracked rocks apart right beside them.

A mountain-sized slab of rock instantly tumbled down on Ell'Hakan, giving Jake a moment to retreat further as he, this time, took to the sky. An explosion behind him let him know that Ell'Hakan was hot on his trail. Jake looked up and saw the thunderclouds hanging far lower than usual, and the layers of the sky had already fallen apart as the energy of the planet was rampant.

Constant thunderbolts with enough power to injure even Jake struck down on the ground, creating massive craters all around, as it felt like the entire planet was trying to exert whatever energy it had left. The chaotic environment made simply existing there a hazard... or, in Jake's case, an opportunity.

As Ell'Hakan approached again, Jake purposefully flew to where he felt a sense of danger. Ell'Hakan reached him right as Jake dodged out of the way of a lightning bolt that instead struck the nahoom, blasting him down toward the ground.

A beam of light shot up toward Jake from the newly created crater, a smoking Ell'Hakan flying up a moment later. Jake kept retreating, making use of the environment whenever he could to strike at Ell'Hakan while avoiding taking too much damage himself.

However, even if Jake had an environmental advantage, Ell'Hakan still managed to get in his fair share of attacks. One of his legs was nearly severed as he was stabbed by the trident right as it exploded, Jake barely hanging on to the limb because of the bones.

The collapse of the world also only accelerated, happening far more swiftly than Jake could have ever expected. As the fissures grew, entire landmasses were raised due to the shifting plates, the stone not made for such rapid change as it cracked and broke apart, entire country-sized slabs of rock breaking apart down the middle, only making the destruction worse as their split caused pressure elsewhere, accelerating the collapse.

Jake and Ell'Hakan were approaching one of these massive slabs of raised land that looked like a giant wall stretching as far as the eye could see. The two of them exchanged several blows before Jake dodged out of the way, making Ell'Hakan's trident release a blast of energy into the giant slab of raised rock.

Within this rock, a large magma chamber resided, and as the land had been compressed as it was raised, the magma had been under extreme pressure... right as a trident stabbed a hole into the chamber, making the entire thing expand outwards.

An explosion of magma and stone erupted from the side of the mountain, covering Jake and Ell'Hakan in the liquid molten rock in an instant. The magma itself couldn't do any damage to either of them, but what it did do was blind them momentarily.

Ell'Hakan quickly reacted as he swept away the lava as best he could, glimpsing Jake, who was coming straight for him. Without any hesitation, the nahoom stabbed through the lava and found purchase as he struck Jake right in his chest, piercing the heart.

For a brief moment, an expression of pleasant surprise flashed across Ell'Hakan's face before quickly vanishing as the Jake he'd just stabbed dissolved into black smoke right as an Arcane Powershot pierced through the smoke and struck the unprepared Ell'Hakan straight in the neck.

The power of the attack, combined with the poison having rotted much of the neck already, resulted in a head flying into the air as Ell'Hakan was decapitated by the arrow. Jake didn't celebrate, though, as even with the head gone, there was no notification.

What he saw instead was the nahoom stumbling back for a single step... only for a new head of pure energy to appear. However, right as it did, Ell'Hakan's entire body looked like it flickered as if he was losing his form. Cracks began to visibly grow as he mimicked his planet by rapidly approaching collapse.

Yet, even in this state... the delusion persisted. The form of Ell'Hakan appeared to stabilize for a moment as he regarded Jake.

**“This vessel is nearing its end... and so is my world. Both shall be buried here, and this part of the galaxy shall become a memorial, but do not forget my promise. You shall be buried alongside this vessel and planet both.”**

Jake knew with certainty whatever was about to come as the Celestial Child's final attack. One that would consume whatever he had left, alongside all the remaining faith energy.

Preparing himself, Jake took a defensive stance as Ell'Hakan raised his trident toward the sky. Lighting was still striking all around him, the shaking of the world from the planet's collapse deafening... yet as he raised that trident, the world seemed to relax.

Far above, the sun and twin moons began to glow brighter than before... and then they moved. The two moons began to slowly move in front of the sun, a blanket of darkness falling over the world as they did so, and Jake's eyes opened wide as he felt that what was about to come wasn't something he was confident in surviving. This realization came right as the Celestial Child spoke what would more likely than not be the last word at least one of them would hear:

**“Eclipse.”**

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## **Chapter 1033: Primal Hunter vs Celestial Child (10)**

The dark skies above were roaring with power, the faith energy of Ell'Hakan having all gathered into one singular point. A pressure powerful enough to calm the planet briefly washed over it right after Ell'Hakan spoke as the eclipse formed.

Gone was the scorching heat of the sun, the stillness of the moonlight having completely disappeared. Instead, it was replaced with something else. It was an all new kind of concept that seemed to align with both the sun and the moon, yet surpassed both.

For a very brief moment, Jake thought back to the Tutorial when he'd used the corrupted shard on the King of the Forest and created an explosion resembling an eclipse. Back then, it had all been born from two opposing and unstable energies forcibly mixing... and in truth, this wasn't much different.

The sun was a bringer of warmth and life. Meanwhile, the moon represented a harbinger of cold nights and the stillness of death. Mixing these two wasn't meant to happen as they opposed one another... but it could be done, which was when another memory flashed of someone who had successfully merged opposing concepts to catastrophic results:

Minaga. During the final boss fight of his Labyrinth, the Unique Lifeform used fusion spells of fire and frost as his so-called "big spells." What was born of a successful fusion was more than the sum of its parts, the destructive potential reaching entirely new levels.

The Celestial Child had accomplished something very similar. Jake couldn't say if it surpassed what Minaga had done during the fight back then, but he did feel certain the scope of this was far, far larger.

And so was the cost.

As Ell'Hakan stood there, his hands spread as the world experienced a total eclipse, the rest of his remaining flesh peeled off, and his body began breaking apart even more as wide cracks formed down his entire mid-section, even the body of starlight, barely able to keep itself together anymore. This content belongs to novel ♦fire♦net

Not even a second had passed since Ell'Hakan spoke, Jake's mind working at high speeds as he evaluated what to do. Run? No... no, his intuition made it pretty clear he wasn't going to get away from what was coming, and even One Step wasn't an option as space itself in a massive area was being suppressed.

Block the attack? Jake wasn't confident, far from it. Whatever was coming would be unlike anything Jake had faced before. To even call it an attack of a C-grade seemed inaccurate... it was more akin to a mass-sacrifice attack, something used by the Holy Church through massive sacrificial rituals. The biggest difference was that the level of faith those who had sacrificed their own lives for this attack far surpassed even those the Holy Church normally had sacrificed themselves. That, and the fact the ritual was being conducted by Ell'Hakan, an incredibly powerful being himself, especially after he abandoned any future to fully immerse himself in his delusion, and the fact he was also giving up the rest of his own life to do the ritual.

So... no, blocking was out of the question.

Call for help? They wouldn't arrive in time.

Try to negotiate? Yeah, fat chance.

Trick Ell'Hakan somehow? The dude was so far into his own delusion that Jake could bring back the "real" Celestial Child - assuming he had ever even existed in the first place - and Ell'Hakan would still proclaim himself the real one even as every single god in the multiverse vouched for the real one's authenticity.

Jake was wracking his brain as only two options appeared... one was to do what he'd done back when he faced Valdemar in Nevermore. Pulling on his Bloodline like that came with massive risks, though, and in all honesty, Jake wasn't sure what the result of doing so would be.

Back then, he had been in his "mortal form" due to the Challenge Dungeon. Now, he was quite evidently not, and as he vaguely remembered how he felt back then, Jake feared the consequences of using that kind of power. A lucky outcome would be to experience a period of weakness for a good while after using it, but it was equally possible he would experience some kind of permanent loss.

The point was that Jake had no way of knowing, which made him reluctant. Especially after the entire Palate of the Malefic Viper fiasco, Jake was a lot more careful about just using his Bloodline willy-nilly. Yes, it was powerful, but perhaps it was too powerful at times, and no matter how he used it, he would still have to bear the cost of its usage.

This left Jake with only one real option left in his mind... one that was perhaps the simplest when facing this kind of massive attack:

Kill the caster before he finishes fully casting the skill.

Without any hesitation, Jake pulled out his bow and started shooting. Intuitively, he knew that getting close to Ell'Hakan, who was already burning up his entire existence, would be problematic, and he was confident in dealing more damage with a bow than even if he could make contact and start stabbing while using Touch of the Malefic Viper.  
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The response to Jake's attack was lackluster, to say the least. A few barriers that seemed ot almost be cast automatically appeared, blocking two arrows before the third one penetrated through and hit Ell'Hakan head-on.

It struck him in the chest, the arrow piercing all the way and leaving several cracks where it hit as if Jake had struck a statue. The second arrow had a similar result, and so did the third, but Ell'Hakan seemed unbothered as he still stood there with the trident raised as the eclipse finished fully forming and powering up.

Jake desperately kept shooting, holding nothing back. He infused every Arcane Powershot as quickly as he could to deal more damage and pushed his boosting skill

above even the 60% he really didn't want to go beyond, all to try and destroy the vessel of Ell'Hakan – or to lean into the metaphor of earlier, make the water tank fully collapse.

The arrows were weakened by the pressure from the eclipse, but they still each dealt tremendous damage. Jake's danger sense grew as his body moved faster and faster before he felt that the true attack was about to arrive, and he knew it was time to unleash his final gambit.

From his quiver, Jake took out a large arrow he'd been preparing in the background for a while. Just because Jake had used the Eternal Hunger arrow earlier didn't mean Protean Arrow was out of commission, and this arrow had truthfully been ready for a while as he'd started to form it right after he'd used Eternal Hunger. He just never saw a good opportunity to use it, not before now.

Nocking the Protean Arrow, Jake took aim and charged Arcane Powershot quickly before loosing it, also pouring in every shred of Hunting Momentum he had left. Right before the arrow struck the Celestial Child, Jake pushed himself by using Primal Gaze to try and momentarily stun his foe with the hope it would assist in destabilizing his foe's soul.

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Primal Gaze activated as Jake felt his eyes about to pop out of his head from the strain as he felt like he'd just used the skill on several people at once. All the faith energy in Ell'Hakan's body had changed his soul permanently, making it foreign and damaging for Jake to look at, which was also the reason he had been apprehensive about using Gaze throughout the fight.

Even so... despite the backlash perhaps not being worth it, the skill worked. Ell'Hakan froze right before the Protean Arrow struck him in the chest, the arrow piercing straight through him as the nahoom buckled over. Cracks formed across his entire body, making it look as if he was about to shatter, but Jake wasn't done yet.

*Now.*

Throughout the fight, Jake's Hunter's Mark had been building up energy little by little with every blow Jake landed. Each individual hit hadn't contributed much, but with how Ell'Hakan had just taken all the hits as he became closer and closer to a being of pure faith energy, the build-up had only increased, reaching a level beyond anything Jake was used to.

And now, he detonated that entire Hunter's Mark all at once.

The still-keeled-over Ell'Hakan lit up as Jake detonated the charge, arcane light flashing out of every fracture and hole in the nahoom's already broken body. It burned him from

the inside as it dealt direct damage to his soul, and Jake felt the soul of the Celestial Child shudder...

Shudder, but not break.

Jake's face fell as Ell'Hakan slowly raised himself to a standing position again. The Celestial Child looked down at Jake with an expression of scorn and arrogance, letting Jake know that he'd failed.

With his trident raised, Jake saw Ell'Hakan command the eclipse as he lowered his weapon, the celestial phenomenon obeying his command. In the sky, a black pulse of energy sent a shockwave down as a massive pillar of energy began descending toward the planet. It broke through the already damaged atmosphere, making the sky shatter and break apart upon impact as it continued down with Jake as its only target.

The dark light of the eclipse covered an area as far the eye could see, and Jake could only desperately draw his bow and shoot another arrow as the light descended toward him. The attack the Celestial Child unleashed wasn't a super flashy one, nor did it appear very destructive. Even the atmosphere hadn't truly been "destroyed" by the light of the eclipse... the balance keeping the struggling atmosphere whole had simply been broken by the overwhelming surge of energy.

Jake's danger sense was going berserk as he stared at this light that seemed to bring with it only oblivion, and he knew he wouldn't walk away from blocking it... so he did just the opposite.

His scales dispersed, all defenses scattered, and Jake refocused all of Arcane Awakening to be purely offensive. With Jake exposed, even the passive suppression of the eclipse strained his soul, but he had to ignore it as he just kept trying to somehow end Ell'Hakan before he himself met his end... but it seemed doomed.

Jake questioned what to do at that moment. His plan had failed, and in truth, he had no idea what he was truly dealing with anymore as that eclipse skill surpassed Jake's expectations manifold. Even if Ell'Hakan died, would the attack persist? Did Jake even have a chance to end the fight here and now? Did he really need to risk using his Origin Energy to empower his Bloodline?

He had so many questions and no way to get away or do anything else but attack as the light came for him. As he faced death, Jake kept looking for the best way forward, but he needed more time... and as his sense of danger grew and the light of the eclipse drew closer, he felt his own heartbeat. It was beating fast, the stress from the fight coursing through him, but the closer the danger got, the more his heart slowed down, and when he had only a scarce couple of seconds left before the lethal attack would strike, Jake claimed the moment as his own.

**Moment of .**

His skill activated as Jake willed it to, his mind more focused than ever before as time slowed down all around him, his heartbeat getting slower and slower until finally... it entirely stopped.

And as it stopped, so did the world.

***Skill Upgraded: Moment of (Legendary)] --> [Moment of (Mythical)]***

Jake stood unmoving, not thinking about anything he'd just done, as everything was frozen in place around him, the only thing active seemingly his mind and senses. He watched the light of the eclipse and his opponent, who stood with this light as his backdrop. Jake also stared at the state of Ell'Hakan and his body, and as he analyzed the many fractures and used Sense of the Malefic Vlper to understand his opponent's state, a plan began to form.

He wasn't sure how long had passed with the world frozen all around him, but Jake quickly began to feel an odd strain. He felt as if his soul was about to be torn from his body, and he knew he had to move and allow himself to be affected by time once more.

The second Jake moved, so did the world also slowly come alive. The eclipse light began slowly descending once more, as only now did the usual effect of Moment of trigger, with the world moving in slow motion as Jake was still moving at full speed.

He quickly drew the string of his bow and released an arrow, hitting the still-slowed-down Ell'Hakan at a certain spot in his chest where there already was a crack. A second arrow hit a second crack less than a blink later, with a third following suit nearly instantly after.

As he kept shooting, the brief Moment he'd claimed was rapidly coming to an end, but Jake wasn't done yet. His heart was still beating, slowly getting faster, but Jake focused all his will to buy more time... but he knew it wouldn't be enough.

Jake kept drawing his bow, and every time he did so, his perception of time always slowed down as he pulled back the string to take aim, courtesy of one of his often-forgotten passive skills. Yet now, this perceived slowdown in time only annoyed him as his body couldn't keep up with what he wanted it to do.

He focused deeply on the sensation of time being slowed by Moment of and held on to that sensation as long as he could, hoping to get off the right amount of arrows... and as he did so, his body responded. It was unclear if Jake moved faster or the world was slower, but even as Moment came to an end, Jake kept rapidly nocking and shooting arrow after arrow, far faster than he ever could before. As Jake was fully focused on simply continuing to shoot, knowing that the second he stopped, he would lose all momentum and whatever state he was in, he even ignored the notification.

***Skill Upgraded: [Steady Aim of the Apex Hunter (Ancient)] --> [Timeless Focus of the Apex Hunter (Legendary)]***

By now, Ell'Hakan looked like a pincushion from all the arrows Jake had shot that stuck out of him, with eighteen arrows in total. But it wasn't enough as Jake kept shooting even as his body screamed at him to stop.

*Nineteen.*

His shoulders were tearing, and blood was already streaming down his chest and arm from the cracks in his skin, but he kept shooting.

*Twenty.*

The arm wanted to just hang limp, but he needed two more, making Jake grit his teeth so hard his gums began bleeding as everything hurt, especially as he kept himself in his accelerated state to keep shooting.

*Twenty-one...*

As he loosed his final arrow, several more vessels burst in Jake's body, but he got it off as his arm fell down his side, unmoving.

The arrow flew true and hit Ell'Hakan right in the center of his chest the very moment eclipse light also enveloped his body. Everything in Jake's vision turned down as he was about to be consumed by the light, and he only had time to do one final thing as he sent a mental command.

Each arrow had pierced into one of the many cracks lining his opponent's body, and Jake had placed every single one of them in a very deliberate pattern. Placed them so that the second he detonated every arrow at once, the fissures in the Celestial Child's body and soul would widen and crack... and as everything would happen at once, not even give him a chance to keep himself together, no matter how much Willpower or how strong his delusion.

From within the dark light of the eclipse, a single flash of arcane light lit up as the twenty-two arrows embedded in the Celestial Child's body all turned destructive and blew up at once.

Jake's danger sense was still screaming, his heartbeat about to go crazy as his survival instinct wanted to take over... but then it disappeared. Within his sphere, he saw the body of the Celestial Child finally experience critical failure, too much damage to his soul's integrity happening at once, making it collapse in an instant as he simply exploded.

With the dark light of the eclipse mere meters from Jake, it was washed away and replaced by a wave of starlight that blew harmlessly over his body. The eclipse light was entirely gone, with wisps of starlight raining down upon the broken planet instead, each of them fragments of the Celestial Child's soul. The moons and sun were gone, the eclipse nowhere to be seen as if it had never been there, and the world was calm once more as even all the remaining faith energy began to scatter, the "god" it had gathered around no more.

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## Chapter 1034: Scattering Starlight

Jake felt a sense of calm despite the destruction of the planet continuing after the eclipse had disappeared. Weariness washed over Jake, but he didn't allow himself to relax just yet...

Because no fight was truly over until the system notification said so.

He remained on guard despite his danger sense not picking up anything. Watching the starlight scatter, Jake questioned the lack of a notification... as suddenly, some of the starlight began to gather.

*Even a goddamn cockroach couldn't have survived that*, Jake cursed internally as the starlight formed a vague outline... one Jake naturally recognized. It was flickering and unstable, but it was there.

Even so, Jake didn't make any moves because he didn't feel anything from it. No aura, no soul, nothing. He wasn't even sure what he was looking at. A final remnant of will, perhaps, taking on the shape of Ell'Hakan? The shattered pieces of his soul regathered to be absorbed by the system?

Lots of unknowns... all of which probably didn't matter. What did matter was the actions of this being of starlight. It didn't make any moves but simply raised its head toward the sky, the voice of Ell'Hakan echoing out.

**"Despite looking at them so often... they're still beautiful, aren't they?"** Ell'Hakan spoke as he looked up at the moons. **"I always imagined even my ancestors looking up at this same starry sky, having the same thoughts of grandeur I did... I was just the only one given the opportunity to turn desire into reality through the integration of the system."**

Ell'Hakan turned to look at Jake, and as he met the nahoom's gaze, he knew he was back to normal, no longer believing he was the Celestial Child anymore.

**"I can only assume it was the system's machination for us to be placed in the same galaxy like this... and for a while, I even viewed it as a boon. To have a powerful entity to compare myself against struck me as fortunate, as it would allow me to go further than I otherwise would. My circumstances would become my motivation, and you, my fuel for growth. Turned out to be the opposite. Hopefully, I was at least worthy of fulfilling that role."**

The nahoom looked Jake directly in the eyes. **"Do not let my death be a waste. Keep growing stronger, surpassing anyone who came before you. Set a new standard for the definition of a genius in the multiverse, one that no one can ever surpass. That way, I will at least be remembered as the one who dared oppose the apex, my story living on through your legend. Do that... and I'll at least feel like I had the last laugh."**

"You really do like the sound of your own voice, huh?" Jake couldn't hold himself back from commenting. "Pretty sure you should already be dead right now."

**"I should indeed, and it's not me who's causing this, but someone who left a small gift with me right before he passed,"** Ell'Hakan said with a sigh. **"A message you will be given shortly as I pass into the night."**

Ell'Hakan's body began to slowly shimmer, seemingly fading as he smiled for a final time.

**"I pass with the knowledge I shall be eternal... for every time you look at the stars or stand beneath the moonlight, you will remember me. Of that, I'm sure."**

With those words, he slowly faded away, the starlight scattering. Right until the end, Jake really didn't like that orange bastard. He couldn't even die without needing to have the last say.

Jake knew whatever was happening wasn't done yet, though, as the starlight rapidly regathered, this time taking on another familiar form that Jake had also seen not that long ago:

Yip of Yore.

But not really. The Ell'Hakan before was actually him, but this? This was just a specter of Records. A memory of sorts, Jake reckoned. Even so, he appeared quite lifelike as his form became far more corporeal than Ell'Hakan had been, the former pinnacle god regarding Jake.

**“So both the Patron and his Chosen turned Usurper have fallen... I would lie if I said Ell’Hakan’s defeat came as a surprise,”** the fragment of Yip of Yore said. Jake knew saying anything himself would be useless as the fragment couldn’t actually hear him. It was indeed just there to deliver a message.

**“Let me not waste your time, but be direct: act with caution, Jake Thayne. Be careful of the one you call your Patron. Be wary at all times and watch your back... and rather than try to convince you why, let me simply show you why.”**

The body of starlight exploded as it formed a scene Jake could only guess was from the final moments of the fight between the Malefic Viper and Yip of Yore. The entire image was very blurry, likely due to some system interference, but Jake still got the gist of it. If he hadn’t, the echoing and fading voice of Yip of Yore laid it out clearly. **raNoBEş**

**“The Transcendence of the Malefic Viper allows him to turn others into fuel for his own Path. Transmute them into pure Records for him to consume. At the same time, look at yourself and what you are... what you can become. Consider and ask yourself if this is the fate in store for you at the side of the Malefic One. If he doesn’t simply view you as nothing more than another ingredient. Ask yourself if you will be wise and take the opportunity to distance yourself before it’s too late. You have been warned... the rest is up to you.”**

Jake saw the starlight image completely scatter, and he couldn’t help but think that both Yip and Ell’Hakan sure liked going out dramatically. They couldn’t just die like everyone else but had to have this kind of dramatic sendoff.

He naturally also considered Yip’s words briefly, and while he believed the dead god had spoken the truth about Villy’s Transcendence, Jake didn’t take his thoughts much further than that. He’d chosen to trust the Malefic Viper. He was Jake’s friend, and he wasn’t going to let the words of some sore loser damage their relationship, especially not with how evident it was that Yip wanted to set up Jake as his method of revenge. Still, keeping the knowledge in the back of his mind would only be wise.

With all of that done, Ell’Hakan and Yip of Yore finally having said their piece, the last of the starlight dispersed, floating upwards toward the stars above, and finally, Jake got the ultimate confirmation that Ell’Hakan – the Celestial Child – was no more.

***\*You have slain [Nahoom – lvl 303 / Herald of Celestial Cycles - lvl 295 / Foretold Champion of Yore – lvl 311] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level.\****

First of all, Jake had to admit that Ell’Hakan’s class and profession both sounded pretty darn powerful. Likely because they had been. He’d been second only to Jake in this generation, so it only made sense both of them had been absolutely top-tier.

He had many more thoughts about Ell'Hakan's Path but shelved them for now, partly because he was distracted by the rush of experience that flooded Jake's body. Even if the level disparity between Jake and Ell'Hakan had been small, the fight had still been extremely close, and the Usurper's Records were naturally quite extreme, making it no surprise that Jake got quite a few levels.

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***\*'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 297 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points\**** Follow current NOVELS on [novel●fire●net](#)

...

***\*'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 302 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points\****

Jake had gained six whole levels in his class from the fight, which was more than adequate... especially when you considered that his class wasn't the only thing that had gained experience.

***\*Congratulations! You have successfully defeated the former Chosen of Yip of Yore, who usurped the Path of his Patron after his fall. A new feat has been accomplished. Bonus experience earned\****

***\*'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 296 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points\****

...

***\*'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 299 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points\****

While it was less than his class, Jake didn't complain. The experience came from upgrading Pride alongside what the notification said about defeating the former Chosen of Yip of Yore, and based on the order of notifications, he'd gotten two levels from upgrading Pride and two from slaying Ell'Hakan.

Two levels for killing another Chosen certainly didn't seem like a lot, but one had to consider the context. Ell'Hakan was no longer a Chosen at all when Jake killed him, more or less severing all relations he had with the Viper.

Jake had gained *a lot* of levels already when doing all the Yip of Yore stuff, and this had just been the conclusion of all that. A nice wrap-up of everything, with now both the Patron and Chosen dead.

His final notifications – before he got to all the skill upgrades – were, of course, the race levels. And, if one had a keen eye and saw Jake's new levels in his class and profession, they would know that Jake had officially broken into high-tier C-grade.

***\*'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 296 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points\****

...

***\*'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 300 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points\****

Reaching level 300 felt like a milestone despite not actually meaning anything in the grand scheme of things. It wasn't like he would get more stats or anything; it just mentally felt like another barrier had been overcome.

It was a satisfying feeling, and as Jake allowed all his boosting skills to drop, the newly gained levels made him already feel a little better. Moreover, he had one more thing to get to... because while he said all the starlight had scattered before, there was still one place where it persisted.

Right where Ell'Hakan and Yip of Yore had faded away, a singular object now floated. Jake drew closer as he felt its powerful aura, and he already knew what it was.

It was his loot from the fight. With Ell'Hakan turning his entire body into energy, most of his equipment was gone, and the only other piece of gear around was the trident down on the ground, but seeing as it had already become void of energy, Jake assumed it had been Soulbound.

That left just this one item. In the same vein where Jake assumed that one of his eyes would become the loot of his killer, it appeared that Ell'Hakan left behind a heart. A heart made of starlight.

***[Starlight Heart of the Celestial Child (Unique)] – The crystalized heart of Ell'Hakan, also known as the Celestial Child, former Chosen and Usurper of Yip of Yore. This Starlight Heart was created after his death, containing his Records. Contains remnants of the Bloodline of the [Redacted], granting it unique powers. This item allows you to [Redacted] while held. Additionally, if consumed, the Starlight Heart of the Celestial Child may grant the consumer [Redacted]. May the powers of the moons and stars guide you.***

Jake read the description and only had more questions than answers after doing so, along with one burning question in his mind...

*Should I just destroy it?*

Jake didn't like the description of the item at all. For it to contain remnants of Ell'Hakan's Bloodline was incredibly unsettling to Jake, so much so he didn't even really want to touch it, much less take it with him.

He was also surprised it was unique rarity. At least he was right up until he read the stuff about the Bloodline, as that more likely than not explained the unique tag. Bloodline stuff also explained why every single effect the Starlight Heart apparently had was redacted.

Honestly, Jake pretty much felt scammed as he looked at the item. Intuitively, he knew it was powerful – at least mythical rarity if it hadn't been turned unique - but he was nevertheless extremely hesitant. Alas, ultimately, he didn't feel any sense of danger from the item, and it at least shouldn't have any malicious passive effects if Jake just stored it away. Safely, of course.

Taking out a special wooden box Jake had stolen from the Order at some point, Jake stored and sealed the Starlight Heart inside before putting it in his spatial storage for further investigations later. Perhaps he would even give it to someone trusted to figure out what the item was all about, but all of that was for when Jake wasn't stuck on a planet that was rapidly breaking apart beneath him.

Having collected his items, Jake prepared to use his ring to escape by teleporting back to Earth. He had nothing more to do on the nahoom planet and was quite frankly looking forward to finally going home...

However...

Reality had other plans.

Right as Jake began to activate the ring to teleport away – the channel to do so taking a few minutes - he detected movement above. It was not from a thunderstorm or anything else like that, but the movements of a person.

Jake instantly activated a Pulse of Perception as he saw him.

A familiar man walked through the skies, carrying a lantern in his hand, and as Jake saw him, he also felt confident this had been the person observing him right as he began to fight Ell'Hakan. As he realized this, that's also when Jake saw what this newcomer was doing.

The dispersed starlight that had floated upwards when Ell'Hakan truly died all flew in his direction... and as it got closer, the light of the lantern hit this starlight, seemingly giving it new life before the lantern absorbed all of the starlight into itself.

It only took Jake a moment to realize what was happening... that starlight was effectively the final remnants of Ell'Hakan's body while also containing the final vestiges

of his soul... and seeing who was collecting this starlight along with who he represented, Jake felt a surge of anger as he stared up into the sky and yelled.

**“Jacob, what the fuck do you think you’re doing!?”**

His words echoed throughout the sky, his teleport already having been interrupted. Despite Jake’s damaged state, he also didn’t hesitate to shoot upwards toward the Augur.

Jacob saw Jake coming and simply finished collecting the last starlight as he waited. It only took a few seconds before Jake arrived right in front of the Augur, practically ready to punch his former boss in the face.

“I asked you what the fuck you’re doing,” Jake said in a cold tone. Colder than he’d ever spoken to Jacob before, as he knew what the man was up to.

“You already know,” Jacob sighed as he looked at the lantern. “The Holy Church invested a lot in Ell’Hakan. Just from what happened on this planet alone, you should understand why. His Bloodline is simply too valuable to give up on... so even if the investment will be extreme, and no matter how bad the result, the Holy Church is determined to resurrect him. All they need from Ell’Hakan is for him to fulfill his promise, even if what is revived wouldn’t truly be him anymore.”

Jake was raging inside, staring Jacob directly in the eyes. “That’s not going to happen.”

“The Church wants it to,” Jacob simply spoke. “And I’ve been tasked to recover what I could to make it possible and store it within this lantern.”

He lifted up the item in question, showing it to Jake.

“Of course, direct divine involvement would be required to salvage enough for a resurrection, meaning that as long as the universe remains locked down for the rest of this system event, all we at the Church can do is store what we can in this lantern,” Jacob continued, looking Jake directly in the eyes as he spoke.

Jake was confused with the way Jacob spoke... he was overexplaining things for sure, and while it took Jake a moment, he soon realized...

“You want me to-“

“My task is done here,” the Augur cut Jake off. “And I shall now make my escape before I’m slain and lose the lantern by using a skill that allows me to switch places with my Guardian, who will fight you to buy time while I get away.”

With those words, Jacob’s entire body flashed, and in an instant, a large warrior appeared in his stead. Bertram, who Jake hadn’t seen in quite a while, had taken the

Augur's place just as Jacob had said he would, the former expert in security before the system regarding Jake.

"Long time no see," Bertram said, giving a respectful nod. "Now if you would be so kind as to kill me."

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## Chapter 1035: Primal Hunter vs Augur's Guardian (1)

Jake just stared at the guy before frowning. "You want me to kill you?"

"That would be best," Bertram nodded.

"Why?" Jake just asked. Sure, he was pissed at the situation, but clearly, it was more complicated than he knew. Especially with the way Jacob had talked making it very obvious he wanted Jake to do something about it.

"Because we stole the soul of Ell'Hakan, obviously," Bertram explained. "That ought to make you quite mad, right? Only seems proper that you kill me for having taken part in it."

"Okay, hold your horses, what the fuck are you and Jacob playing at?" Jake asked curtly, wanting to stop beating around the bush.

"Everything is as he told you," Bertram just said, looking Jake directly in the eyes. "The Augur of hope was tasked with saving whatever of Ell'Hakan he could with the goal of reviving him once the universe opens up. Sure, what will be revived won't be something I'm even sure could be called Ell'Hakan anymore, but it should have the Bloodline, which is ultimately what the Holy Church wants."

"But not what Jacob wants to happen," Jake said, Bertram neither confirming nor denying.

Jake was in thought for a moment before asking: "Is the Holy Church sure they really wanna do this? Are they absolutely certain they want to steal my prey away? I would hope they know what will happen and expect consequences to come from that."

"They do... to a certain extent," Bertram nodded, though he did seem a bit unsure of just how far Jake would go. "But you do also really underestimate how much they value that Bloodline... think about it like this, if you died and the Endless Empire had the

opportunity to revive you and keep your Bloodline, don't you think they would use any means possible, even if doing so would make them a lot of enemies? Certain people view Ell'Hakan as something like that. An invaluable treasure they simply cannot miss out on acquiring."

"I guess I could see the Endless Empire go pretty damn far..." Jake muttered.

"Exactly," Bertram said with a nod. "While I'm certain the Church would prefer to stay in your good graces, the gains simply outweigh the risk on this one. Sure, here in our tiny little Milky Way, making you an enemy is an extremely scary matter, but in the wider multiverse? Not so much. Some also believe they can placate you somehow... but honestly, I don't know. I'm not really privy to many of these plans, and neither is Jacob, for that matter. This is all some of the higher-ups making these kinds of decisions, and we mortals are merely cogs in their machine."

"You don't sound happy with how things currently are with these so-called higher-ups," Jake said, not hiding his feelings at all.

"It is what it is," Bertram just shrugged. Discover more novels at [movel◇fire◇met](#)

"Why is it like it is, though?" Jake genuinely questioned. "This is far from the first time Jacob has seemingly acted against the interests of the Holy Church. If there is so much disagreement, why stay? You two are only risking yourselves, and if you're discovered, I can only begin to imagine the consequences – assuming you haven't already been found out. So... why not get the hell out of dodge while you still can?"

Bertram listened and nodded along at several points. He took a moment to answer, as he couldn't help but look down at the rapidly deteriorating planet beneath them.

"The Holy Church is big... utterly massive. It's the single-largest faction in the entire multiverse for a reason. It's one of the only factions that welcome everyone, no matter their race or heritage. This size is both the Holy Church's greatest strength and also its greatest weakness," Bertram began to explain.

"While it's true the Holy Mother is the supreme leader of the Holy Church, she cannot be everywhere and cannot do everything. This has led to several factions forming within the Church, each of them powerful enough on their own to rival some other pinnacle factions. These internal factions don't always agree on what to do, and they may even give conflicting orders at times. Earth and the entire Milky Way are under the management of one of these internal factions, and it's them who made the decision to carry out this plan."

"You're saying the Holy Mother isn't involved?" Jake asked, having kind of assumed that to be the case, though perhaps that was wrong of him.

Jake knew he had a very skewed view of how the multiverse worked because of Villy and their friendship. Because he was so close to Villy, he also often ended up directly dealing with other gods or Primordials, having even met the Holy Mother before during Nevermore, but needless to say, this was far from the norm.

In fact, most times, the peak gods didn't even know what was going on with the mortals of their factions, geniuses or not. Instead, they had others manage things. In some ways, this was often the entire reason they made factions to begin with. It was all just so that they didn't have to do much themselves to keep things running while still enjoying the boons of commanding a massive faction when convenient.

The best of both worlds and Jake totally got it, considering he was also the same kind of absent leader who just reaped the benefits of technically ruling a small faction while barely doing any work.

So, if he thought about it a little more, it made perfect sense that the Holy Mother wouldn't be actively involved in any of this and that she was-

"Oh no, she's very involved," answered, stopping Jake in his thoughts instantly. "In fact, if she wasn't, the situation indeed would be one where we were both putting ourselves at massive risk. However, you need to remember... Jacob is blessed directly by the Holy Mother. While he may be working for an inner faction, he is ultimately directly serving the Holy Mother. They have the authority to give him orders, yes, but not the authority to punish him should not fail to act accordingly. All they can do is request the Holy Mother to carry out punishment... something she has yet to do." R4D0BÊŠ

"You mean to say that the Holy Mother doesn't disapprove of Jacob's actions?" Jake asked with confusion.

"I don't know," Bertram sighed. "I doubt even Jacob knows. All I'm certain of is that Jacob is doing what he believes is right and that it's my job to keep him safe. Who knows, maybe the Holy Mother wants to see if Jacob can actually enact any positive change through his actions? Or maybe she's just giving him a really long leash that she'll eventually yank back before tying him to a pole. Either way... we stay because Jacob believes that being with the Holy Church is where he can help the greatest number of people... even if things here are far from perfect."

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"It sounds like a bloody mess," Jake shook his head as he wondered: "Say, is it okay for you to be saying all this?"

"To be saying what?" Bertram asked, giving a sly smile. "I'm just buying time for the one I protect to use the Prima Vessel to teleport back to the planet the Holy Church prepared for him to hide out on until the universe opens back up. Can't you see we're

clearly fighting right now, my death only drawing closer as I do my best to try and keep the injured but still monstrous Chosen of the Malefic Viper busy?"

"Do you really need these theatrics?"

"Maybe, maybe not, but Jacob believes that this inner faction thinking that we are truly enemies would be beneficial to what he wants to achieve," Bertram replied honestly.

"Yeah, the Holy Mother definitely knows that's not the case," Jake muttered, thinking back to Nevermore and the fact the Holy Mother had always been enjoying the live stream there. He could only begin to assume that the Holy Mother had seen them interact there.

"Of that, we are in agreement, but as I said, she has yet to act upon this knowledge," Bertram just shrugged. "At least not in any negative fashion... in fact, the only change has been positive. Not too long ago, Jacob was given a Divine Blessing by the Holy Mother, which is also why he has taken such center stage during this Ell'Hakan debacle... despite seemingly working against the Church's interest at several points."

"Well, that's just bloody confusing," Jake muttered as he let out a loud sigh. "I finally fucking killed Ell'Hakan, and now shit has to get complicated again right away... there really isn't any way to avoid putting myself on a direct collision course with the Holy Church, is there?"

"Not unless you decide to sit back and take a passive approach, allowing them to do as they want," Bertram shook his head.

"I guess I should have seen this coming the moment I determined myself to kill Ell'Hakan for good, knowing the interest the Church had in him..." Jake said, letting out a second sigh as he looked back at Bertram. "Do you need to buy any more time, or are you good with dying now? I kind of want to get out of there before the entire planet explodes... or implodes... honestly, I don't plan on sticking around to find out."

"Fair enough," Bertram nodded. "Just make sure to kill me in a way that really hammers home how angry you are that we dared steal away the soul of your prey."

"It's gonna hurt," Jake said, flashing a smirk.

"I can take it," Bertram said as he lifted his shield and sword. "You know, to really make it look like we had a tough fight..."

"Already on it," Jake said, as he decided to push himself before getting off the planet. He reactivated Arcane Awakening despite the burning sensation it sent through his body and charged at Bertram, wanting things to look proper.

Katar already in hand, he smashed into the Guardian's shield, finding himself surprised at how sturdy Bertram's defenses were. Then again, he probably shouldn't, as while Bertram wasn't quite considered a true pinnacle fighter, he was still pretty damn durable and even had a very impressive level that surpassed both Jake's and Ell'Hakan's, likely due to Augur bullshit.

### **[Human – lvl 311]**

Still, Bertram wasn't truly fighting back, and Jake was simply on another level power-wise. He quickly made several deep cuts into the shield, even using Touch on it to leave a deep handprint, really hammering things home.

The sword also wasn't spared, Jake giving that a good round of Touch of the Malefic Viper, too. Finally, with the weapons addressed, both really looking like Bertram had been in a hard-fought battle, Jake went in for the body of the far larger man.

Eternal Hunger stabbed Bertram in the chest, a void Katar hitting him in the stomach just below. The Guardian grunted and stumbled back, but Jake kept on as he stabbed a dozen times, Bertram taking it pretty damn well as the poison dug into his body.

"You're a pretty good practice target," Jake commented as he kept attacking. "You can take a lot, and you can't really die as long as Jacob is around, right?"

"I would prefer not to be reduced to a target dummy," Bertram said as Jake continued going ham.

"Not just any target dummy, but a top-tier one," Jake joked as Bertram pretended to fight back, making the wounds he took look defensive in nature. "I am curious... seeing as you get resurrected by Jacob, how do you deal with stuff like soul attacks? Aren't they still a danger?"

"They are annoying, but not overly so," Bertram responded calmly, even as he was being torn to shreds. "You would be surprised just how sturdy my soul is. Moreover, one shouldn't underestimate the abilities of an Augur. The system very happily helps Jacob heal any soul injuries I have during the resurrection process. Ah, but traces of how I died can still be found, and any soul injuries tend to leave detectable echoes behind, so whatever damage you do now will leave evidence behind that's visible immediately following my resurrection."

Jake subtly nodded along, Bertram looking like a bloody mess by now, with Jake knowing the guy didn't have long. For a moment, he wanted to try using Primal Gaze to test how sturdy his soul truly was, but he stopped himself. If Bertram was right, and his soul indeed was impressively sturdy, Jake really didn't need that kind of backlash from his own skill. He was already in for a bad time once back on Earth due to overusing his boosting skills, and he saw no reason to make it worse.

It didn't take that much longer before Bertram was only a few steps from death. It had taken way longer than Jake had expected it to, making him consider the outcome if Bertram had actually been fighting back. Not in the sense that Jake believed the Guardian stood even the shadow of a chance, but more how bloody long it would have taken with Bertram being a wholly defensive warrior and all. Quite a good defensive warrior at that.

Still, all his tankiness did was make him look even more brutalized as Jake went in for the killing blow. He stabbed Bertram directly through his chest, really driving Eternal Hunger in there as he penetrated the man's heart before willing the weapon to get draining.

Bertram groaned as his life force was being absorbed; the curse energy really invaded his body.

"Filling my body and soul with curse energy... nice touch," Bertram said with a light smile as his life rapidly faded away. "Ah... I almost forgot... when you come for us... have help ready... like the hawk... Carmen... swordsman... may be needed..."

Jake was almost annoyed as Bertram slumped over, a notification popping up letting Jake know the guy had died. Jake would have liked him to elaborate on his final words, as Jake couldn't help but question why he would need help. Adding insult to injury, even the kill notification sucked.

***\*You have slain [Augur's Guardian]\****

Evidently, some skill was hiding it, or maybe this was just how the kill notification of an Augur's Guardian worked. Either way, Jake really had to stop dallying around and get the hell off the planet as soon as possible.

While the Celestial Child and his Eclipse had calmed the thunderstorms – primarily by just destroying them all – the planet below Jake was still only getting worse. The earthquakes hadn't stopped, the entire terrain utterly unrecognizable, and as the rest of the remnants of the atmosphere faded away, Jake could only assume that total collapse was imminent.

To avoid being around for that, Jake took out his special ring for the second time that day and activated it to teleport home. Bertram's words that Jacob had used the Prima Vessel did make Jake consider if he could go and use that, but he decided not to try, primarily because he had no idea where the Vessel was by now. The best he could assume was that it had fallen into some abyss by now.

As the ring slowly activated, Jake once more let his boosting skill fade away, a massive wave of weakness washing over him. He felt tired throughout his entire body and soul, and more than anything really wanted to take a good nap after getting back to his lodge... but before doing that, he had a few skill upgrades to check out.

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## Chapter 1036: A Warrior's Return

Jake was whisked through space as his teleportation ring finally activated. Below him, the planet was nearer to collapse than ever, but Jake didn't stick around to see its final moments, even if it would have been interesting to do so.

While he wasn't entirely certain what would happen with a planet that lost its core or had the core destroyed, he knew it, at the very least, meant it was no longer a planet but now just a big floating rock in space. The system's laws no longer protected it, and its source of new energy was gone, making everything into pure chaos.

A part of Jake did want to know what would happen when a planet was destroyed like that, but he definitely wasn't going to ask Villy as he felt pretty damn confident the god would respond by kidnapping Jake for a live demonstration.

Anyhow, appearing back in the Prima Vessel on Earth, Jake instantly had several gazes turn to him. One of them was the space mage Neil, who Jake hadn't seen in a bit, with the other one being William.

Neil looked surprised at Jake's sudden appearance and looked like he wanted to say something but stopped himself when he saw Jake's current state, likely deciding now wasn't a good time. William also just gave Jake a certain look. Jake nodded, and William breathed out a sigh of relief at the confirmation that it was over.

Walking out of the teleportation room, he headed to the teleportation hub to return home to Haven. Jake was utterly spent and just wanted to go and rest in his damn lodge. Just walking around and flying a bit between things was hard. Shit, it was so bad Jake didn't even bother to activate stealth, as it was only really now that he was truly back in safety as the weakness began to hit him... and it hit him hard.

Still, he walked into the teleportation hub with steady steps. Jake reckoned he looked absolutely ridiculous, the current state of his body not exactly pleasant to look at – Neil's reaction had all but confirmed that. His armor was mostly destroyed, his body filled with wounds and holes everywhere, and he could honestly easily have been mistaken for a zombie where the makeup artist had gone a bit over the top.

Sadly for everyone else, Jake was too tired to mind any of that as he just kept heading home. After another teleport, Jake was soon back in Haven, where he had to walk all the way from the teleportation hub to his lodge. Flying would have been faster, but by

the time Jake got to the forest city, even something so simple as levitating himself felt like a struggle.

So, despite how it looked, Jake walked down the street as the people there parted and gave him plenty of space, probably to avoid getting blood or something else equally nasty on their clothes.

Jake could only begin to imagine their thoughts from them seeing him in such a state, but he really didn't have the brain power to think about stuff like that. The weakness and weariness just kept increasing the more time passed, Jake barely observing his surroundings but just focused on making it home without taking a nap on the street. And luckily, he soon reached the lodge.

Entering the valley, he went straight into the lodge and didn't even bother cleaning himself up as he stumbled over to the couch – having enough sense not to want his bed to get dirty – and just fell down onto it as he closed his eyes.

The plan had been to go over his skill upgrades, but that had been postponed till after his nap. As Jake slipped into sleep to recover, his final thought was a small apology to Miranda for making her find some excuse for why Jake walked through the city looking like a homeless zombie.

Miranda had spent a long time considering all the outcomes of Jake's battle with Ell'Hakan and what would come after. Earth was extremely messy following everything with the Malefic Viper and Yip of Yore had gone down, but she'd managed to control the narrative somewhat by making everyone focus on a common objective: taking back what was lost when the Holy Church and Ell'Hakan attacked before. Plus a little bit extra for good measure, of course.

However, there was still one glaring issue to address: Ell'Hakan. He was the leader of the enemy forces and a one-man army in his own right. Many also still questioned if the Chosen of the Malefic Viper could truly defeat him. The nahoom had done well spreading rumors of his own near-godlike status, with many truly believing it, even on Earth.

Needless to say, a lot had hinged on the confrontation between Jake and Ell'Hakan. Miranda had thought about what would happen if Jake lost, and the result was quite obvious... they would all be completely and utterly fucked. The person they had gathered around would disappear, and their morale would hit rock bottom. Maybe she could still rely on others like the Sword Saint, but Miranda wouldn't expect the old man to join her in a war without Jake around.

Jake winning, on the other hand, would be a massive boon. His victory would either mean that the Celestial Child was dead or had fled, both of which would result in Ell'Hakan's faction naturally crumbling. There were still questions about how the Holy Church would react, but in the end, Miranda concluded that no matter what, it would be

good for Ell'Hakan to die. Considering that, she also concluded it would be for the best if everyone knew that Jake had gone to fight Ell'Hakan. If he lost, they would be fucked anyway, while if he won, she wanted to advertise it immediately.

And she trusted he would win... and based on what she had just been informed not long ago, he indeed had come out victorious. That left Miranda with her next task: advertising this victory. A way to let everyone know that the Chosen of the Malefic Viper had slain the former Chosen of Yip of Yore. She considered how she would put together the grand announcement instantly to communicate in the most efficient and morale-boosting way.

However... she didn't even get that far before she was chimed down, and Lillian hurried in. She had with her several recordings and relayed several loud rumors about Lord Thayne. Miranda frowned as she opened the first recording before her eyes opened wide at the sight.

She saw Jake walking through the streets as everyone gave way. Every one of his steps looked heavy as if every footfall was a struggle, which it likely was, considering his state.

Wounds covered him from head to toe. He had dried blood everywhere, not to mention all the burns and cuts, some of them even still seemingly teeming with energy. His face remained hidden beneath the mask that had red streaks all over it, and it honestly seemed surprising he wasn't already dead...

Yet, despite the aura not being recorded, Miranda could almost feel it just from what she saw. His head was held high as he walked, his bloodshot eyes hidden behind the mask tired but determined as his pace remained steady. He looked a step away from death... yet gave off the aura that should anyone try to finish the job, it would be the last thing they ever tried.

At that moment, Lord Thayne looked like a warrior walking straight out of the battlefield, the sole survivor. One Miranda had already advertised he'd gone to before. All the onlookers knew that he'd come from his battle with Ell'Hakan, and his stride was not that of a loser. The mere fact he returned was proof of that... proof that he was a warrior who had returned a victor.

Miranda couldn't help but smile as the recording finished, and she saw how no one dared follow him as he entered his private area around the lodge. Miranda had wracked her brain on what kind of theatrics she wanted to put on to announce that Jake had defeated Ell'Hakan, but it seemed as if she had wasted her time because she honestly couldn't have thought of any better way to announce it than for Jake to confidently walk through the streets, covered in his own blood and the blood of the Celestial Child.

It was nothing less than an absolute declaration of his own victory and the sacrifices he had been willing to make in order to defeat the enemy leader. It showed just how far he

had been willing to go for all of them to achieve victory. A display of why he was the World Leader of Earth in the first place and why he was worthy of the title of the strongest in the galaxy.

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Jake had no idea how long he had slept when he finally woke up. The fact his entire body was sore didn't help him figure it out either, as he had no idea how long he would feel like shit, but hopefully it wouldn't be for too long. rÃÑÒBĚS

Even after opening his eyes, Jake really didn't want to get off his couch as he just kept lying there. A few more minutes passed before Jake mustered up the courage and used a bit of mana to float over the phone Arnold had installed in his lodge. As he put a hand on it, he instantly knew a message was waiting for him. One from Miranda, just as he had dreaded.

Deciding to just bite the bullet, Jake listened to the message, fearing the scolding he expected to come his way as he heard her voice.

*"Good job, and recover well. I'll make sure no one disturbs you until you reach out first."*

Jake had to do a double-take, not entirely sure he had heard her right. There were no scolding words, no anger, nothing. He was genuinely confused, but hey, why complain about a good thing? She was probably just being nice because she knew he wasn't in a good condition.

Breathing out a sigh of relief, Jake put the phone back where it belonged, and with newfound energy from not being in immediate trouble with the resident witch, Jake finally got to what he had originally wanted to do before he got too tired:

Looking at skill upgrades.

The first one he started with was naturally the first one that had upgraded during the fight and the one with the longest description by far as Jake opened up and saw the new Pride of the Malefic Viper.

***[Pride of the Malefic Viper (Legendary)] – The arrogance and strong will of the Malefic Viper are known throughout the multiverse, and all of existence is made to quake in fear in his presence. Allows the Alchemist to far more easily force their will upon the world. Significantly increases the effect of all Words of Power spoken. By channeling mana, you can make your presence no longer simply a warning but a weapon to target the psyche of your foes directly, and during this time, forcing your will upon the world in any area affected by your presence***

***becomes even easier than before. As your pride has only grown stronger, you have become able to not only bend mana to your will but deny the presence of any other forms of energy within your rightful domain, increasing resistance to all forms of energy-based attacks when you are infusing your presence with mana. The cost and effect of this is dependent on Willpower and the power of what you are weakening. Your pride increases all resistance to any kind of mind-affecting effects, but be warned that it wanes in despair. All effects of the mental attack increase based on the target's vulnerability, the nature of your mental attack, and the disparity in Willpower between you and your foe. Passively provides 9 Willpower per level in Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper (C-grade variant). May your will be truth, your pride eternal.***

So, yeah, a lot longer, for sure. However, the only truly impactful change was one sentence being added:

***“As your pride has only grown stronger, you have become able to not only bend mana to your will but deny the presence of any other forms of energy within your rightful domain, increasing resistance to all forms of energy-based attacks when you are infusing your presence with mana. The cost and effect of this is dependent on Willpower and the power of what you are weakening.”***

This described the domain-denying effect of Pride Jake had used during the fight pretty accurately, and Jake even felt like there could be more to it. Anyway, besides this effect being added, the other aspects of the skill had also all been slightly improved by the upgrade, part of that due to the increased stats he always got when upgrading one of the Viper's Legacy skills.

Moving on, as there really wasn't much surprise with this upgrade, Jake turned his attention to a skill he was far less sure about. He went a bit out of order and looked at his new Timeless Focus of the Apex Hunter that had upgraded quite unexpectedly toward the end of the fight.

Jake only remembered his feelings when it happened and not much else. He just knew that at the time, he felt like he simply needed more time, and he entered a state of hyperfocus where he moved faster, his body allowing him to somewhat keep up with his Perception.

Looking at the old Steady Aim and the new upgrade, Jake was curious about what had changed and what the new skill description said.

***[Steady Aim of the Apex Hunter (Ancient)] – When the string is taught and the arrow ready, the Hunter's focus reaches new realms. To aim and place the perfect shot is what any hunter aims for, and as one who stands at the apex, you refuse for even time to hamper your accuracy. Allows the Hunter to significantly heighten his focus when the bowstring is fully pulled, tapping into the concept of***

***time to slow down his perception of it while simultaneously boosting all effects of Perception significantly. All effects scale with Perception.***

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***[Timeless Focus of the Apex Hunter (Legendary)] – With bow in hand and the arrow ready, the Hunter's focus reaches new realms. To continuously and rapidly land the perfect shot is what any hunter aims for, and as one who stands at the apex, you refuse for even time to hamper your accuracy or speed. Allows the Hunter to significantly heighten his focus when the bowstring is fully pulled, tapping into the concept of time to slow down his perception of it while simultaneously boosting all effects of Perception significantly. While wielding a bow and having shot at least two arrows in a row without moving, the Hunter can enter a state of Timeless Focus, accelerating the Hunter's body to rapidly shoot arrows progressively faster. This effect is canceled if the Hunter is forced to move, the shooting pattern changes drastically, or is otherwise distracted, leading to a loss of focus. Cooldown and maximum duration are determined by Perception, and all effects of Timeless Focus of the Apex Hunter scale with Perception.***

Steady Aim had been one of those skills Jake just had, used in every single fight, but never really actively thought about. It was just a nice-to-have and allowed him to charge Arcane Powershot faster, improved his aim, and gave him a bit more time to control the flight paths of his arrows as it slowed down his perception of time.

Now, it did more than just that.

Jake still wasn't sure if he wanted to call this new part of the skill Rapid Fire or Timeless Focus as the skill itself called it, but the effect was effectively akin to using a Rapid Fire skill.

It allowed Jake to shoot regular arrows far faster, and while it definitely had a lot of restrictions, Jake had no complaints. Getting an active component to a passive skill just felt like a pure bonus, and Jake could see this have several uses, though perhaps not in most one-versus-one battles outside of toward the beginning of the fight where he could start with massive distance between himself and his opponent.

Once recovered, Jake definitely had to go testing a bit. Of course, for now, he still had one more skill to look at.

Moment of was Jake's first legendary skill, gained through his Bloodline getting angry at a skill that directly overlapped with what the Bloodline already did. Jake knew some weird system stuff was going on with the creations of the skill, making it end at legendary rarity, but now it had been improved to mythical. READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT ***novel•fire●net***

In truth, Jake kind of believed it had deserved to be mythical in the first place, if not even better. While the description said it “slowed down time,” that wasn’t entirely accurate. It was more like Jake separated himself from the concept of time, making himself experience the world as being slower while remaining unaffected. Actually, maybe saying it slowed down time was still accurate considering relativity... though that entire point was kind of moot due to the changed description of the skill now acknowledging Jake separating himself from the concept.

**[Moment of (Mythical)] – Instincts ascended to directly touch upon the concept of time itself. Through your supernatural instinct for survival, you seize the moment of crisis and turn it into one of opportunity. If a blow would otherwise deal substantial damage to the Hunter, separate yourself from time as the world stills around you. As long as the Hunter doesn’t move, neither shall the world as you seize the moment for a limited duration. Once the Hunter makes any action, the world comes alive as the Hunter progressively allows time to affect him once again, the world remaining slowed down during this process. The Hunter is unaffected by the slowdown and can move uninhibited for the duration. Has an internal cooldown between each activation. Effect and internal cooldown of the skill are based on Perception.**

It was definitely a pattern that descriptions of skills just got longer, but this one had quite a few changes throughout. The first of which came in the very first sentence:

“Instincts ascended to **directly** touch...”

The word “directly” had been added, which seemed like a small thing, but Jake felt like it wasn’t. Moreover, it now said he separated himself from time. Finally, it, of course, included what had happened during the fight with Ell’Hakan, where the fight had fully frozen as Jake stood still.

This effect pretty much allowed Jake time to plan out how he wanted to use the following slowed-down time after he took any actions. Also, it wasn’t like he ever needed to freeze the world entirely if he didn’t want to. He could just use Moment the same as before, and hopefully, its usual effects had also gotten a little better.

He had no real way to know, as Moment of came with absolutely no instinctual knowledge, likely due to its unusual origins. So, yeah, Jake would need to also do a few tests with this one once recovered.

He had a lot he needed to do, as he was certain the death of Ell’Hakan had created quite the chaos in the Milky Way Galaxy. Jake also had to address the Holy Church and their actions. He was bound to remain busy for a while. However, for now, he only had one essential task that took precedence over everything else:

Taking another nap.

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## Chapter 1037: The War of the Milky Way Galaxy

All attempts to contain the news of Ell'Hakan's death were an utter failure. Many World Leaders didn't even try as they were unsure of what exactly they were supposed to do. Now that they had lost their leader, did it even make any sense to try and hide his death? To some, the answer was no, as they instantly began to look into alternatives, as they knew there was no way to survive in the Milky Way if they stood alone.

However, there was a small group that outright denied his death, refusing to believe he could have been killed by Jake, their minds simply not able to think in that direction, more likely than not due to repeated mental manipulation from Ell'Hakan.

These and many other factions who had solidly put all their eggs in the Ell'Hakan basket didn't see many potential actions they could take. They had positioned themselves as enemies of the Order of the Malefic Viper, and now that it was clear the Chosen of the Viper had been working in the interest of his Patron all this time, what options did they have?

Suddenly deciding that, actually, maybe the Order wasn't so bad after all, would ruin all credibility they had. These World Leaders had spent months, if not years, spreading propaganda about the evils of the Order and the Earth faction, with the general civilian believing that losing to the Order would mean being forcibly sacrificed in some mad ritual or forced into slavery if they got lucky.

Many of these leaders instantly sought toward the Holy Church, trying to find an ally in them as they had been allied only a few hours prior. Especially seeing as the Church had even spread its presence to many of these planets, infiltrating the leadership structure.

However, from one moment to the next, there was a mass exodus of officials and members of the Church as they abandoned many of the planets they had recently been part of effectively taking over. They left nothing behind as the Church began to congregate on a lower number of planets, taking a very defensive position while trying to distance themselves as much as possible from Earth and all the factions who had been fully allied with Ell'Hakan.

The split was, needless to say, less than pretty. Ell'Hakan and the Holy Church had worked closely together, often even acting as one, so for one part of these whole to die

while the other jumped ship... yeah, trying to hide that Ell'Hakan's faction was completely and utterly fucked was an impossible task.

Oh yeah... and the fact that Ell'Hakan's planet had now turned black on the Planetary Map provided for the system event only hammered home his absolute defeat as even his planet had been wiped off the map.

This fact definitely didn't help the panic that was spreading throughout Ell'Hakan's former faction. Despite it not being his intent, Jake had sown an all-knew fear in the World Leaders across the galaxy.

Because now, losing could mean not just lives lost but the entire planet reduced to nothing. The Chosen of the Malefic Viper had shown not only the capabilities but the willingness to destroy an entire planet to defeat his enemy, and who was to say he wouldn't do so again?

Nobody wanted to find out.

Ultimately, this all resulted in three different camps emerging from what had once been Ell'Hakan's faction.

First was those who now desperately tried to change sides by reaching out to Earth, fully surrendering while looking for a path of survival. These World Leaders tended to be those who were still of relatively sound mind and had only ever sided with Ell'Hakan because they sided with who they thought would win. Needless to say, they had been very wrong with their assessments and now experienced much internal conflict as all they really cared about was not putting themselves on a collision course with the inevitable winners of the galactic war.

Secondly were the forces who now attempted to take a neutral stance, even denying they had ever been close with Ell'Hakan in the first place. Some of these were even quick to try and affiliate themselves with other major multiversal factions, such as the Court of Shadows, Altmar Empire, United Tribes, or any faction even halfway willing to take them, really. They did this to some effect, but the multiversal factions were hesitant to make a move while at the same time incredibly interested as having an "in" through the Milky Way Galaxy could prove most useful.

Planets of this second camp were usually ruled by World Leaders who had very much tried to take a wait-and-see approach but had ended up loosely siding with Ell'Hakan around the time when it looked pretty damn evident he would be the winning side. At that time, they didn't really have much choice either, as Ell'Hakan's faction put pressure on them to pick a side, as without a massive multiversal faction to back them, neutrality was not an option.

The second group also included those who had managed to never really pick a faction to back in the first place. These were mainly planets who had done the system event

themselves without ever getting assistance and had tried to avoid unnecessary contact with other factions throughout the event. The primary reason these planets were also categorized into this camp was for simplicity, considering what would come next.

Third and finally were those who were just in too deep. These were the World Leaders and factions who had fully bought into Ell'Hakan's story and joined him as much as one possibly could. Even if they weren't delusion to the level of insanity, many of these World Leaders still refused to back down and wanted to stay fighting. Perhaps they even still believed victory was possible under the leadership of King Iludar who had been Ell'Hakans right-hand man during much of the system event.

This third group ended up being the smallest camp, as most World Leaders had read the writing on the wall. Few wanted to fight till the bitter end when they could already taste the bitterness at the tip of their tongues. Still, some would fight, and truthfully, had anyone ever expected this conflict between Ell'Hakan and Jake Thayne to not leave the galaxy with its fair share of scars?

Miranda and the World Council on Earth quickly took action after Ell'Hakan's death as they went on the offensive, trying to wipe out the remaining loyalists of the Usurper. It did not take long for many of the factions in the first camp to present themselves, offering to fight their former allies to prove their loyalty to Lord Thayne and Earth.

An offer Miranda gladly accepted as she allowed the former comrades to battle it out, limiting any losses those who had remained on Earth's side from the beginning would have suffered. Not too much, though.

She purposefully made sure the original forces of Earth and their closest allies handled the most important planets, in part to ensure the job was done properly and in part because war was a good opportunity for growth. In what could only be called a clear display of her having embraced multiversal logic, she accepted that war could be a boon and help push people to grow, even if such wars also came with losses.

Then again, despite calling it a war, to many, this was closer to just cleaning the galaxy up. Destroying an already fractured faction wasn't difficult, especially not when many who were formerly on the other side were quite frankly scared shitless.

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Still, Miranda was aware the conflict wouldn't end fast, and she honestly did want to drag it out a bit to better access many of their new potential allies. Additionally, she wanted to do things properly while limiting the losses amongst the civilian populations of enemy planets, and the longer they dragged things out, the more time the regular person had to become disillusioned with their current leaders.

While dealing with these other factions, she and others on the World Council also gave themselves time trying to find an answer to a very important question:

What would come next?

With Jake the winner in the battle of Chosen and Earth's faction set to take over the galaxy, how exactly would this takeover work in the long term? Not that she was complaining, as there were many questions and even more profession levels to be gained for Miranda as they tried to make a halfway stable leadership structure for not just a singular planet but an entire galaxy. R̂aNÔBÊŚ

Right now, they were united through conflict, but once that conflict ended, the playing field would change drastically and become far more purely political in nature. There were a lot of actors to keep satisfied, and she and all the other leaders had a daunting task ahead of them.

There was also one more thing she couldn't quite figure out on her own, but that she would need Jake for. Because while she had a good idea of how to handle most factions, there was one she felt very unsure about. Sure, they had retreated and seemed to have no interest in fighting, but the one legitimate threat to Earth's complete takeover of the galaxy was still the Holy Church, which continued to rule nearly a hundred fully loyal planets.

Miranda had her own thoughts on how to approach them... but she had the distinct feeling getting rid of them wouldn't be easy if they decided they had to go. And knowing Jake... they had to go.

Jacob had activated the Prima Vessel on Ell'Hakan's crumbling planet and quickly been whisked through space toward the main planet the Holy Church operated out of in the Milky Way Galaxy. It was one of the planets the Church had claimed shortly after the Tutorial had ended, and one Jacob had been on many times before whenever he was in the ninety-third universe and not on Earth.

Appearing within the Prima Vessel there, several people were awaiting his return. Five humans, all wearing white robes, looked at him expectedly as he appeared, not even trying to hide their worry. Not worry about Jacob, though, but of the one he carried with him in the lantern.

"Augur, I'm pleased to see you returned safely," the head priest said with a serious look as he motioned for Jacob to follow him out of the Vessel. "Seeing as you returned alone... I take it the Bloodline Patriarch met an unfortunate end?"

"No, the Bloodline Patriarch won," Jacob said, purposefully being obtuse as the head priest looked confused for a moment. "Ell'Hakan was slain by him."

The head priest was quick enough to understand and didn't let his annoyance show at all. "Did you manage to succeed in saving him?"

“What was left,” Jacob sighed as he summoned the lantern and revealed the soul within.

It didn’t take more than a few seconds for the priest to notice the state of the soul before he frowned. “It’s... not ideal. What happened?”

“He overdrew on his very existence using his Bloodline,” Jacob shook his head. “I saved whatever was left, even if it wasn’t a lot.”

“I understand,” the head priest sighed. “The most important part is that the possibility still lives.”

Jacob nodded as he looked down at the lantern and the soul of the Usurper within. The entire thing was so fragmented and damaged that even with all the nurturing he as an Augur could do, he didn’t have much hope.

The goal was to resurrect him, yes, but what would there even be left to resurrect? With this level of soul damage, his memories were bound to be either entirely gone or, at the very least, scrambled beyond oblivion. Jacob also felt utterly certain that no matter what the Holy Church did to bring Ell’Hakan back, his Path was done.

Whatever level he would be revived at would be the end of the road for him. Jacob even estimated his lifespan would be extremely limited... all in all, they would only resurrect a husk compared to what Ell’hakan had once been. A living creature that had no other purpose than to propagate his Bloodline, as even if everything else got broken, the Bloodline was one with the Truesoul, meaning that as long as the Truesoul didn’t return and get recycled by the system, it would have the full Bloodline.

One of the biggest concerns the Holy Church had during this entire thing was related to the Bloodline Accords. They were very much toeing the line with Ell’Hakan but were barely on the right side of the rules as Ell’Hakan had consented and agreed to everything already. In fact, the only reason why Jacob could save his soul using his lantern was due to Ell’Hakan’s prior consent, as he could only save the souls of those who had already given him permission to do so.

During the Usurper Ritual, they had baked in a failsafe where Ell’Hakan’s soul would also be marked according to a contract they had established beforehand. All the contract did was give pre-approved consent for Jacob or any other member of the Holy Church to save his soul if possible, with the goal of having Ell’Hakan carry out his promise of giving his Bloodline to the Holy Church. Even if he was unable to consent during the time he had to be saved, the contract remained in effect, allowing Jacob to do what he did. The way the contract and all that was complicated and something the gods had been directly involved in, and honestly...

Jacob didn't like this entire scenario. He didn't like it at all. Everything felt wrong, but he couldn't show it outwardly, as that would only get him sidelined again. He could complain, be sarcastic, disapproving, but he still had to act accordingly, which he had.

Of course, they still doubted him... but that's what Bertram was currently working on bettering.

"Do you know what happened to the Chosen of the Malefic Viper? What was his reaction to your presence, assuming he detected you?" the head priest asked after a bit.

"He is a hunter specializing in Perception, I don't think there's any C-grade that could have remained undetected," Jacob shook his head. "As for his reaction... well, it was less than stellar, to say the least. In his mind, we stole his prey away, and I had to use my Guardian to escape before he attacked me."

The head priest frowned before he spoke words that clearly showed how little he understood Jake.

"That's problematic. Perhaps in the heat following the battle, he failed to properly assess the situation. He had already won the fight, the Records from the kill his, and he loses nothing from us obtaining the remnants of the Usurper's soul. We will have to properly compensate him and try to reach an agreeable compromise, as I'm sure he understands that a conflict helps no one."

Jacob wanted to call the guy an idiot but held himself back, as he believed a demonstration would be better. Of course, he had to wait for said demonstration to arrive, or more accurately, for him to be able to revive.

The party of priests and Augur headed toward a large dome-shaped building where a magic circle had been prepared. It was created to amplify the effects of Jacob's lantern, and seeing as he couldn't allow the lantern to leave his person, Jacob planned on spending the coming period there.

On the way, they discussed several more matters, with the head priest keeping Jacob up-to-date on the retreat of the Holy Church believers across the galaxy. Jacob avoided commenting once more, as all he could hope was that the galactic conflict would end in a fashion that limited harm to the average person, though he knew some suffering was unavoidable in war.

Right as they arrived at the large building Jacob would live in for the foreseeable future, he felt it.

"My Guardian has been slain..." Jacob muttered as he didn't hesitate.

In front of the head priest and other priests who were with him, Jacob used a long cooldown skill to immediately bring back his Guardian. An outline of light formed as

Bertram was quickly revived, but the moment he was, the large man fell down on one knee, breathing heavily.

A stench of death and the unmistakable aura of a curse lingered in his body and soul, making the head priest frown.

“What happened?” Jacob asked, feigning concern. He had told the head priest and others that Bertram had tried to talk to Jake rather than fight him, but now it looked rather evident most of the talking had been done through violence. The source of this content is [movel·fire·net](#)

“He is not happy,” Bertram said as he quickly stabilized himself, the lingering effects of his death quickly dispersing. “We need to be ready...”

“I see,” Jacob sighed, the head priest also looking concerned for a moment as he regarded the Augur.

“If he does come... we still have that, right? Is it still useable?” the head priest asked.

“It is,” Jacob confirmed. “Though I hope we won’t have to go to such drastic measures...”

“Hopefully not,” the head priest nodded as he looked in thought. “I’ll try to negotiate and placate the Chosen of the Malefic Viper to avoid dragging out this unnecessary conflict.”

“You do that,” Jacob just said as he entered the dome-shaped building... fully aware he wasn’t going to spend that long in there as there was no way Jake wouldn’t come for them.

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## Chapter 1038: Doing A Bit of Catch-Up

Jake stretched as he felt his mobility back to normal, and his body pretty much fully healed. Sleeping truly was one of the most overpowered hidden skills in the multiverse, speeding up healing so damn much it was almost unfair for those who didn’t have the ability to sleep. Well, alright, based on what Jake had learned by talking to Dina during Nevermore, everyone could still technically learn to sleep, but it was incredibly difficult to the level of being nearly impossible.

Anyhow, moving on, with Jake up and fit for a fight, he instantly considered his next move. Jake was not known as the type to plan ahead, and in truth, he didn't have any plans for what would happen after Ell'Hakan was slain. He reckoned they would move on to securing the rest of the universe, but nothing had been pre-planned on his end.

However, the Holy Church quickly helped him find a new objective by having Jacob take away Ell'Hakan's soul before running. Instantly, he knew what his next task was, though this one was a bit more complicated than dealing with Ell'Hakan, and he would need to consider his next move to make sure he wasn't causing people around him trouble by acting recklessly.

One thing was for certain, though... there was no fucking way Jake would ever allow them to revive that nahoom bastard. Something the Holy Church seemed not to understand.

From a logical perspective, Bertram had been right in that Jake didn't have any reason to want the Truesoul of the nahoom. Jake had, for all intents and purposes, killed Ell'Hakan already. He'd gained all the Records and experience from the kill. The war against the former Chosen was over, Jake the unquestioned victor. He had no need for the Truesoul and shouldn't care if it was returned to the system or intercepted by the Holy Church.

But he did care.

Not because he was afraid Ell'Hakan would be revived and seek revenge. Whatever was revived wouldn't be the same person Jake had killed, not after his soul had fractured like that, and he would be too weak for Jake to even consider him an opponent. Besides, the Church would certainly do all it could to keep him away from Jake for the rest of his life – however short it ended up being.

No, the reason why Jake wanted Ell'Hakan dead and gone for good was because he despised his Bloodline on a fundamental level. Jake was a simple man. He knew he was. Nothing was better than when things were straightforward and easy for everyone to understand. Schemes, mental manipulation, political maneuvering... he hated all of it. The only times he would ever engage in that kind of thing was when forced to do so or as a favor for someone he cared about.

Ell'Hakan was like the antithesis of Jake's Path. He was all about lies and delusions and a world molded through manipulation. His Bloodline took away the free will of others by warping their emotions, making it in many ways worse than straight-up enslaving someone. At least slaves knew they were slaves, but through Ell'Hakan's Bloodline, they weren't even afforded that right.

While it was possible the system would one day recycle the Bloodline and hand it out through a system event like it had done with the one Villy had obtained from the First

Sage, that day would be far in the future if it ever even happened. Something he definitely hoped it wouldn't.

Jake also felt strongly that the reason Jacob wanted Jake to act against the Church's interest in this matter was because he also saw the dangers of the Bloodline. Saw how damaging and wrong it was. The Bloodline was fundamentally different from how the Holy Church usually operated, as while blind faith and belief were something the Church strived for, they knew actual benefits were the true way to recruit and maintain people.

That's why they offered tangible benefits like the presence of the Holyland, safety, nurturing, hope for a better future for descendants, and an overall very functional civilization for people to be part of. Geniuses who were nurtured by the Church could safely leave their families behind, knowing that they would live peaceful lives that made even the relative peace of most places on Earth before the system seem filled with conflict.

As Jake had said before, then he totally understood why the average person would want to be part of the Holy Church. In fact, if his parents were part of the Church, Jake would have felt perfectly safe around it, assuming they were moved to live far away from the frontlines. Safety truly was the biggest thing the Church offered for sure...

But with Ell'Hakan's Bloodline, they wouldn't even need to offer anything. Jake knew that the Church did have some insane zealots who were simply blinded by faith, but with Ell'Hakan's Bloodline, they could take things far further. He didn't even want to imagine how they could use the Bloodline to recruit people if they got their hands on it. There was a risk the Bloodline would weaken or mutate to not be as useful, but Jake wasn't going to risk anything.

He was sure the Church had many plans on how to use it, even ones Jake hadn't considered in the slightest, which only made him more determined to nip it in the bud while he still could.

Also... while Jake went over a lot of reasons why he wanted the Bloodline gone, he ultimately didn't have to justify himself at all. Ell'Hakan had been his kill, and anything from that kill rightfully belonged to him. It didn't matter that he had no way to trap a Truesoul; it was still his loot, and the Church couldn't simply swoop in and take it because Jake couldn't.

Having gathered his thoughts, Jake considered what to do next, but it didn't take him long to decide. While talking to Miranda was certainly important, he had someone else he wanted to catch up with more than her. Someone he really wanted an update from regarding all the recent happenings and to, of course, also brag a bit about his own victory.

With the universe still mostly locked down, Jake had to go down to his lab and set up a simple ritual to reach out across the void to his dear Patron. The two hadn't talked for a

good while and had a lot to go over, with Jake really wanting to hear how things were going in the rest of the multiverse. He especially wanted to know how he planned on dealing with Jake's live roasting session that had been broadcast across most of existence. Jake really didn't want to return to the Order as a pariah who everyone thought was at least halfway a heretic for what he'd said.

Setting up the ritual, Jake quickly reached out. From the looks of it, the snake god had been waiting as Jake instantly got a response.

"Well, well, well, here we are. Killers of Legends, the two of us. How does it feel to have killed your first Chosen of a pinnacle god? Though I guess he was technically the Usurper of one toward the end... but hey, it still counts!" Villy said in his usual jovial and relaxed tone. RÀNøßËŠ

*"It feels quite nice,"* Jake responded with a smile. *"How do you feel, killing your first pinnacle god after so long doing fuck-all killing?"*

*"Oh, it never gets old. Yip was quite a tasty meal if I have to say so myself,"* the Viper said, satisfied. *"Speaking of which, I have a little something for you when you come back to the Order after everything is over in your little galaxy and the system event concludes."*

"Oh?" Jake asked, curious. *"What is it?"*

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*"A home-cooked snack I made from what was once Yip of Yore. Ah, Jake, what I'm about to tell you is very fucking confidential, so take it to your grave, alright?"* the Viper said. Jake quickly sent a confirmation that his mouth was wired shut, making the snake god continue.

*"My primary reason for wanting to kill Yip of Yore in the first place was to absorb his Records to make up for some of the momentum I lost during my isolation. The Transcendence I used on him allowed me to effectively use him as an alchemy ingredient, and... and you already know all this how?"* Villy stopped himself, some-fucking-how detecting Jake knew.

With the Viper not hiding anything, Jake also didn't. *"Yip of Yore told me through Ell'Hakan when I killed him. Well, rather than telling me, it was more like a warning."*

*"He was a crafty bastard, sneaking out a message like that through his own Records... impressive indeed,"* the Viper said with some genuine admiration. *"Anyhow, when I turned Yip into a snack, I made sure to keep a little piece for you to eat, but you'll definitely need to do so while under my direct supervision as it isn't fit for consumption by C-grades. Or any mortals, really."*

*"Looking forward to it,"* Jake nodded with a smile.

He couldn't help but find Yip of Yore's warning about the Viper funny. The god had spoken as if he'd just revealed some grand secret – which he technically had – that would undoubtedly create a massive rift between Jake and the Viper. A seed of suspicion in Jake, making him question if his Patron truly was on his side or just preparing him for consumption.

Now that all seemed to dumb, as the Viper just came out and outright spilled the big secret. Then again... it couldn't hurt to ask. You know, just to make sure.

*"Yo, Villy, just to make sure, you aren't actually just fattening me up to eat me once I become big and plump enough, right?"* This text is hosted at *novel\*fire\*net*

*"Do you want the real answer or a joking one?"* the Viper instantly responded, having likely expected this kind of question from Jake.

*"Up to you,"* he just shrugged.

*"How unfun... which is exactly why that's exactly what I'm planning! Soon, you shall be ripe for consumption, and I shall devour you in body and soul!"* the Viper joked. At least, Jake hoped he was joking...

*"But in all seriousness, no, you're quite frankly not fit for my palate. Your Records don't match mine at all and are even opposing mine in many places, making you an incredibly inefficient snack. Oh yeah, and then there is the fact you have a Bloodline, which just makes things even more complicated as I can't eat a Bloodline, meaning I'll have to filter away all aspects of your Bloodline before I have an edible product. Seeing as how your Bloodline is closely tied with nearly everything you do, I hope by now you understand why trying to eat you would be a waste of time. The cooking process would remove all the best nutrients and just take way too long,"* Villy actually explained why he wasn't going to eat Jake.

*"Besides, seeing as you're giving me plenty of benefits without being eaten, why slaughter my golden goose? It wouldn't make any sense. Ah, but changing the topic a little, I do have one complaint about something you recently handed me. What exactly do you expect me to use a crumbling Planetary Pylon for?"*

*"Oh yeah, that,"* Jake nodded. *"Just wanted it out of there, you know?"*

*"So you effectively used me to dump garbage... got it,"* the Viper said. *"I will admit I was surprised when I first saw the skill in use. For you to get a Divine Bargain skill is quite something."*

*"Hopefully, it was a happy surprise. I am a bit miffed that you talk as if Divine Bargains are something you already know about, though,"* Jake muttered in the last part.

*“Divine Bargains are a thing, though this is my first seeing it between someone blessed and their Patron. The only other time I’ve seen mortals with a Divine Bargain skill is high-grade merchants – usually always S-grades - who can create Divine Bargains with gods. Their version does seem a bit different than yours, but I reckon many of the principles are similar,” Villy explained. “One thing that is different is that I had little input on what to offer you in return. I had some, but the best I could give you, according to the rules of the skill, seemed to be the default reward this time around. That fragment thing.”*

That was when Jake was reminded of the reward he got during the fight with the Celestial Child, and without further delay, Jake pulled out the item. What appeared was a small fang-shaped stone-like object that pulsed with energy, yet as Jake used Identify, he found himself disappointed.

**[Malefic Bargaining Fragment (Ancient)] – An item obtained from a successful Divine Bargain with your Patron. Contains Records and energy related to the Malefic Viper. Has many alchemical uses.**

*“How come the reward is so shit? I bargained with what was effectively a damn planet, and all I got was an ancient rarity fragment? What the hell would I need to offer to get something better?”* Jake asked the Viper with some genuine confusion.

*“Something that doesn’t suck? Honestly, it’s surprising you even got an ancient rarity item. Must be because the Pylon had belonged to the Usurper of Yip and not because of the item itself,”* the snake god said.

*“... how is a goddamn Planetary Pylon not considered a valuable thing to bargain with?”* Jake asked with exasperation.

*“Better ask yourself why you think it would be,”* Villy shot back. *“You gave me a Pylon that instantly started crumbling and breaking apart the second you separated it from its planet. One that didn’t even belong to you, and by the time Ell’Hakan was dead, the entire Pylon was already crumbled to dust... not that it wouldn’t have crumbled either way. Also, why would I ever need a Planetary Pylon in the first place? I could go fetch a few right now if I so wanted. Planets are dime-a-dozen, and their Pylons aren’t valuable to a god. Remember, Jake, you are bargaining with me, so whatever you offer in the bargain needs to be valuable, not from your perspective as a mortal, but from my point of view as a god.”*

Jake took a moment before muttering: *“That... actually makes sense. Huh. So, what do you reckon would be considered good items for bargaining?”*

*“Unique things. Things I can’t easily obtain myself. I’m also not even sure what you offer necessarily needs to be tangible objects, but as I am not the one with the skill, I’ll leave you to figure things out on your end,”* Villy said, moving the conversation along.

*"I'll definitely experiment a bit," Jake nodded. "Say, after everything that happened... how are things after Yip's death? Any update on the situation?"*

*"As you would probably expect, I've had quite a lot to do. The goals of this entire scenario were multi-faceted and allowed me to weed out quite a few of the gods who weren't truly loyal. It's hard to assure the Hidden Ones all remained loyal with so much time passing and that they weren't just waiting for an opportunity to go somewhere they hoped would be better. So, giving them the chance to join Yip of Yore, who seemingly had the upper hand, was a great opportunity to do a bit of spring cleaning," the Viper answered.*

*"The reactions are also as expected, with the support flooding in from other factions who were hesitant before. Of course, most of the biggest ones never seemed to believe I would lose in the first place; not much changing on their end. Still, this was a good way to at least assure them that the Order is still a faction no one can take lightly."*

*"Sounds like things are going well," Jake smiled. "But... how about the reaction to our little play?"*

*"Oh, you mean to when my own Chosen teamed up with Yip of Yore and started shitting all over me, painting me as the biggest villain of the multiverse? That play?" Villy asked teasingly.*

*"The reaction is, more than anything, confusion. Confusion that I reckon will only increase once word of you killing Ell'Hakan spreads. It has been clarified that it was all part of my scheme and that you remain my Chosen, but no one understands how you did as you did. Many rumors are even circulating that it may be related to your Bloodline, seeing as it deals with presences."*

Villy was clearly enjoying himself explaining all this as Jake quite frankly felt a bit nervous. *"I'm more worried about the reaction when I return. What kind of story can we even tell to convince them?"*

*"Convince them? Fuck that. Say nothing and let them wonder. It's already known that everything you did and said was part of my plan. How we pulled it off is none of their concern, and rather than try to make up some explanation for them to poke holes in, let them reach their own flawed conclusions. We don't owe anyone any explanation to anyone," Villy said dismissively.*

*"But now it's your turn. How did your battle with the Usurper go?"*

*"I won?" Jake simply said. "Though I will say the fight got a bit more complicated than I expected... especially toward the end. Oh, and what came after the fight didn't exactly simplify things either."*

Jake began to go over the fight and how everything had gone down as he worked toward the ending, knowing that soon, the two of them would have a talk about how to handle the Holy Church.

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## Chapter 1039: A Hearty Conversation

Villy was very interested in Jake's fight with Ell'Hakan, far more than Jake had thought he would be, considering it was just a battle between C-grades. Alright, to be fair, the god was clearly just being polite while listening to Jake's tale... right up until Jake mentioned Ell'Hakan going full delulu Celestial Child mode.

After that, the Viper began to show genuine interest as Jake went over everything. Toward the end, the god was incredibly engaged, and he seemed more interested in discussing Ell'Hakan than the fact that Ell'Hakan's Truesoul had been robbed away by an Augur.

*"I'm gonna admit that he surprised me, which just shows that one should never underestimate a powerful Bloodline. Doing what he did to hang onto life isn't something I expect you to see again any time soon, if ever. His expert use of faith energy to maintain his own body was also extraordinary, if ultimately fatal. As you said, he was already dead the moment he fully began to believe he was the Celestial Child,"* the Viper said, having decided to give his interpretation of what Ell'Hakan had done.

*"I've told you before, but belief and will are far more powerful than you can imagine. He truly believed he was this Celestial Child, and the system rewarded his belief. Ell'Hakan genuinely believed he had that kind of power, and up to a limit, he was granted it, only limited by the stats of his mortal soul. However, what I find the most impressive is that he was apparently so delusional in his belief that he couldn't and wouldn't die that even the system seemed to believe it. Of course, no amount of belief and delusion can truly alter reality on a fundamental level, and when you shattered his Soulshape for good, that was it, no matter how much he believed something like that wouldn't kill him."*

*"I didn't expect you to praise him so much,"* Jake said after a brief pause. *"Almost makes me jealous."*

*"Eh, don't be. You did ultimately prove yourself the better Chosen by killing him, and let's not act like your Bloodline isn't at least twice as ridiculous as his. What was it you said it allowed you to do? Upgrade a skill to literally pause time from your perspective until you move to restart it? Yeah, that alone makes me question how the system fucked*

*up allowing someone like you to pass through quality control,” the snake god said semi-jokingly.*

*“All I’m saying is that you had a good opponent. Someone worth actually fighting. Hearing you talk about the battle and what Ell’Hakan was capable of, I can’t help but consider what he could have been if Yip of Yore hadn’t snatched him up, but if the Dao Sect had instead gotten him to join them. His ability to emotionally manipulate himself would have been extraordinary there, and with proper teaching and guidance, the unsettling elements of his Bloodline could have quickly been suppressed and perhaps even turned into a positive. He would also be one of their celibate monks, of course, as I do agree that spreading such a Bloodline seems like a bad idea... which gets us to the finale of your little fight.”*

*“The Holy Church,”* Jake nodded, them having finally reached perhaps the most important topic they would have to discuss.

*“Right... what are you planning on doing about it?”* the snake god asked.

*“I was kind of hoping you had some input,”* Jake said bluntly.

*“Why would I?”* Villy said, Jake easily imagining him shrugging on the other side of the telepathic connection. *“Last time I checked, you were the one slighted in this matter, not me. You were also robbed by a bunch of C-grades, making it very much a mortal matter. I see no reason to get involved with something like that... and neither would I expect anyone else who should stay out of C-grade affairs to.”*

Jake quickly understood what Villy was getting at. He wasn’t going to take part in this, and neither would anyone else higher up in the Holy Church. As he said, this was a C-grade matter. His words also held the implication that should the Church decide to get involved with people who shouldn’t, the Viper would respond in kind.

Still, Jake did hold some worries.

*“I’m pretty certain that the ones who want Ell’Hakan’s Bloodline are very high up in the hierarchy. Powerful gods. I guess what I’m worried about is pissing them off too much, creating future trouble for myself. Bertram compared it to how the Endless Empire would react if someone killed me, cutting off their Path to creating new True Royals, and when I think about it like that, I could see them carry a grudge that could become very annoying down the line,”* Jake explained his thoughts.

*“I don’t think you can compare anything to the pure fanaticism displayed by the Endless Empire when it comes to their True Royals. Do I think the Holy Church will be pissed off? Yes. Do I think it will create some conflict down the line if you do what I think you plan on doing? Also yes. Do I think that’s a bad thing? No, no, not really. What are you afraid of? Even if someone killed you, the Endless Empire wouldn’t make a god descend for revenge. No, they would send C-grades, assuming a C-grade killed you.*

*Responding with appropriate force is such a norm that even they would follow it, much less the Holy Church,” the Viper explained.*

*“Could still prove very annoying...” Jake muttered. Even if only C-grades would be coming for him, the Holy Church’s methods weren’t generally known to be the straightforward kind, and Jake would really love to avoid dealing with a bunch of schemes to try and get revenge on him.*

*“You worry too much. Do also remember it’s just one internal faction of the Church you’re pissing off, and by doing so, you may even make another one like you. I would also add that with you being who you are, you are bound to get into conflict with big factions at some point, and let’s not act like you are currently buddy-buddy with the Church. So, as I said, just do what you want to do, and if the Holy Church wants to make an inappropriately disproportionate response, I’ll gladly step in. But if not... let the C-grades play,” the Malefic Viper assured Jake.*

*“Alright,” Jake finally nodded, feeling somewhat assured by the Viper’s words.*

*“Look, if it’s any reassurance, then no one from the Holy Church has contacted me about Ell’Hakan’s Bloodline. If they truly viewed his Bloodline as something equally important to how the Endless Empire views yours, then the Holy Mother herself would have come by for a visit. The fact that she nor anyone else has even tried should let you know that they truly don’t care that much,” Villy said, calming Jake further.*

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Jake sighed as he looked toward the ceiling of his lab, considering what to do next as he resolved himself. *“I guess that’s just how things are.”*

*“Sometimes, it indeed just is what it is. I would bet on the Holy Church reaching out relatively soon to that witch of yours with talks about compensation, so that will be fun. Who knows, maybe they’ll even offer something so good that you decide to forgive and forget?” Villy said jokingly, seemingly looking forward to Jake’s continued chaotic future.*

With the topic of the Holy Church handled, the two of them proceeded to shoot the shit for a while, just discussing everything they had been up to as Jake learned a lot more about what had been happening in the rest of the multiverse while Jake was busy killing the Usurper and recuperating afterward.

The fallout from Yip of Yore’s death had yet to settle, seeing as it had only been a couple of days ago the god had died, meaning things remained very much chaotic. Villy naturally took advantage of this chaos as much as he could, expanding the Order of the Malefic once more, this time with newfound vigor.

Having killed quite a few gods following the death of Yip of Yore, Villy had also sown chaos in many places in the multiverse by creating power vacuums, as these gods tended to rule their own small turfs. Factions spanning many galaxies had suddenly lost their Patron god and were spiraling, with the Order not making it better by swooping in and laying claim to the domain of the fallen god.

Things were still in their early stages, but the Viper was pleased with the developments so far. It would take many years before the Order could truly settle down in all its newly conquered locations, but contrary to last time, their foundation was far more powerful this time around.

All doubt surrounding the Malefic Viper disappeared the moment he killed Yip of Yore, seemingly without breaking a sweat. The very correct rumor that the Viper had planned the confrontation between himself and Yip from the very start also began to propagate, only making more people afraid of the notorious Malefic Viper and all the more determined to not make him an enemy.

Of course, some questions still remained. One big enigma in everything that had gone down was Eversmile. He had seemingly not been involved in much toward the end, only advising and helping Yip of Yore here and there, only to instantly disappear afterward.

Many questioned if he had truly backed Yip or if he had also worked for the Viper. It quickly became clear that at least Valhal had kind of played both sides, effectively just working as officiators of the fight, but Eversmile had been far more involved early on, having even stepped in to help Yip of Yore during the Chosen Ceremony.

Jake was also curious about exactly what Eversmile was up to, but Villy kept the details confidential, refusing to share anything juicy. All Jake did become certain of was that Eversmile definitely had some personal interest in the matter, likely doing some weird karmic experiment or something. That, or he just thought it was a fun scenario to observe as it unfolded.

Either way, as the two of them kept talking, they soon ran out of any recent happening to discuss, which was when Villy remembered something.

*"I totally forgot to ask, but what did you get for killing Ell'Hakan? Seeing as he was a former Chosen turned Usurper and the unique state he forced his body and soul into during his final moments, some real whacky stuff had to have been going on with his Records, which should lead to an interesting reward,"* Villy asked curiously.

*"I did get something pretty interesting,"* Jake said as he didn't hesitate to pull out the Celestial Heart that had formed from Ell'Hakan's Records upon death. As a reminder, once someone died, a certain amount of their Records tended to gather in a specific part of their body, infusing it with energy and turning it into an actual item. This was where all the drops from beasts came from, and the enlightened were no different.

After describing the heart as Villy couldn't see it due to them only speaking over a telepathic connection, the god became more and more interested, especially because the description had redacted portions and even said it had remnants of Ell'Hakan's Bloodline. A phrasing Jake did want a clarification on.

*"What exactly does it mean when the system says it contains remnants of Ell'Hakan's Bloodline? Does it mean that the Truesoul that the Holy Church has is missing a part or something? That shouldn't be a thing, right?"* Jake asked.

*"It's not a thing, no. The Truesoul and Bloodline are one. You cannot scrape off a part of it like that. No, I reckon the Records in this Celestial Heart are more akin to those that would come when someone with a Bloodline gets a child. Based on what you said, the Celestial Child believed until the very end he was a Reincarnation, and this may be a reflection of that. The heart is also connected to Bloodlines quite deeply, making this a very unique and interesting item you've received,"* the Viper spoke rather enthusiastically.

*"Wait... if the Records are a bit like that of a child, does that mean this item could be used to revive the Bloodline even if I got rid of his Truesoul?"* Jake asked, once more considering if he should just destroy the heart then and there.

*"No, that's not how Bloodlines work at all. What I suspect you have is instead an item that has a Bloodline-level ability. One that can do something related to an aspect of Ell'Hakan's Bloodline. But, truth be told, I can't say much with certainty without inspecting the Celestial Heart closely in person,"* Villy said.

Jake nodded along as he kept staring at the item in question.

*"Oh, by the way, you asked earlier what kind of stuff would be good to put on the table in a Divine Bargain... well, that Celestial Heart is definitely one such item, and truth be told, I wouldn't complain if you decided to offer that up,"* the Malefic Viper said.

*"So sorry, the skill is on cooldown,"* Jake quickly said. *"Not that I would give it to you just like that anyway. Not before I know what it does. A description with that many [Redacted] in it is simply too juicy to give away before I figure it out myself."*

*"Just don't eat it or try to experiment with it, okay?"* the Viper said, turning serious. *"Keep it locked away until you're back in the Order, and we'll look at it together. While the probability is low, the mere fact it's so closely tied to a Bloodline makes it possible the Celestial Heart is harmful in some way. Also, I do want to, at the very least, see it myself before you accidentally fuck it up somehow."*

*"Fair,"* Jake relented, putting the Celestial Heart away for safe storage once more. The Viper did have a point. Seeing as how dangerous Ell'Hakan's Bloodline was, messing with an item containing remnants of it – one that didn't even say what it did in the description – seemed quite risky. At least way too risky, considering he was still low-key

considering just destroying it... though now he had a fear that destroying it could also lead to something unintended.

*Yeah, better leave it in there till I'm back at the Order,* Jake told himself as the two of them moved on and talked about some more minor matters, but truth be told, there really wasn't much to discuss at this point. The source of this content is [novel](#) [fire](#) [net](#)

The Patron and Chosen had both won their respective battles and were now both busy reaping the rewards. The Order would expand to many more places in the multiverse, the Malefic Viper now far more notorious after he'd shown that he wasn't simply relying on his legacy but was truly worthy of his title of Primordial.

Meanwhile, Jake was to claim his galaxy and thus solidify the power of his own budding faction, though, in truth, it would be Miranda doing much of the work. Jake wasn't sure how he wanted things to be done and how to handle everything even once the galaxy was taken over – the process of actually conquering it being nothing more than a formality at this point.

Luckily, he had smart people in his corner who could figure all those things out, and as he finished up his talks with Villy for now, he prepared to head out for a meeting with Miranda and others to discuss what would come next... including his plan of invading the Holy Church's domain to end El'Hakan once and for all.

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## Chapter 1040: Office Meeting

Miranda was busy trying to go over all the many messages she was constantly being sent by World Leaders spread throughout the galaxy, her head starting to hurt from all the damn work she had put upon herself.

These World Leaders were often desperate, wanting answers instantly as they were in the process of trying to find a way to survive this entire conflict. Sadly for them, Miranda was fine with letting them simmer a bit in their own mistakes. The only World Leaders she did respond instantly to were their existing allies and their requests for support. She tried to be so on top of this that she would support them before they even asked.

With a war going on, she naturally also had to stay updated on the many battles currently taking place throughout the galaxy. At least a few hundred planets were

involved, the war taking place on so many battlefields at once as the remnants of Ell'Hakan's loyalists put up a valiant effort to defeat the evil Order of the Malefic Viper.

She had expected most of them to lock down their planets immediately to not allow others entry, but surprisingly, that didn't turn out to be a major obstacle. The many planets still needed allies to stand a chance, and allowing their teleporters to stay open for others to evacuate or provide reinforcements was simply required.

Then again, perhaps the World Leaders knew that time wasn't on their side. Even if they locked down their planets, they would only isolate themselves and cut off their Path to keep growing stronger. All the meanwhile, Earth and its allies would keep progressing until one day, they decided to use a teleporter that didn't require permission to activate. Follow current novels on [novel✕fire✕net](#)

The teleporters Arnold had initially created were far better now. Even if they didn't use those, they also had Sandy, who was now capable of traveling the entire galaxy rather effortlessly. Sure, it was slower than the other teleporters, but the cosmic worm was still the best method of space travel available in the galaxy, if not among any C-grades in the entire universe. Miranda could only begin to imagine just how good that worm would be in B-grade.

Either way, no matter the method of transportation, most factions knew it was only a matter of time before they got a visit, making many try to reach out first. Miranda even had reports of a few civil wars breaking out within the same day of Ell'Hakan dying, the people trying to wrest control from the current World Leader in a fight for the survival of the planet. A fight to make the Chosen of the Malefic Viper spare them in what they expected to be an upcoming purge.

That was somewhere they had things wrong, as while a lot of people were certainly going to die, Miranda still saw it as a priority to limit civilian losses as much as possible. She knew what Jake had done to Ell'Hakan's planet, and truthfully, she didn't approve. Destroying an entire planet was going too far, even if the citizens there were messed up in the head. Sure, she was aware that Ell'Hakan's Bloodline was a factor she didn't fully understand... but still.

Was it the simplest solution to just go scorched earth and kill anyone who opposed the new rule? Sure, but that wasn't the kind of rule Miranda wanted to create. She wanted people to know scorched earth was an option, sure, but never the first one.

This did complicate matters as the natives of the galaxy were less than inviting to their new overlords, but Miranda believed that with time, it would change. Besides, it wasn't like the plan was to invade and take over every damn planet themselves, just make sure that the World Leader knew who was really in charge in the galaxy. Did this require instating a few puppet World Leaders here and there? Sure, but Miranda was already working hard on that.

As she was considering another message she just got in from an undecisive World Leader who had now finally decided to pick a side, Miranda was informed that a certain hunter was on the way to her office.

For a moment, she considered calling everyone available so they could discuss things with Jake present but decided against it. She wasn't even sure what Jake wanted, and whatever it was, it should be fine if discussed a bit later. Also... Jake tended to prefer smaller meetings rather than big ones, especially if he still wasn't back in top form after killing Ell'Hakan.

That turned out not to be an issue as Jake soon appeared before her, his aura stronger than ever and utterly stable, showing he had fully recovered after the fight. Luckily, he had clearly used his stealth to get there, considering he had just suddenly appeared in the middle of her office out of nowhere.

"Hello there," Jake said with a smile, Miranda slowly raising her gaze to regard him.

"You appear in a better condition than I had expected you to be after your stunt of walking through Haven looking like you had one foot in the grave and the other still on the battlefield," Miranda commented. Jake instantly looked embarrassed as he scratched the back of his head.

"Yeah... about that..."

"It was brilliant," Miranda smiled approvingly. "Utterly brilliant. I don't usually find an opportunity to praise you when it comes to matters like that, but this time, you truly outdid yourself. The recordings of your return have already spread all throughout, even to different planets, and I have to admit... you did make quite the impression."

Jake looked confused, Miranda only finding amusement from his confusion as she had very quickly realized there was no way Jake had thought his actions through back then at all. Heck, he even looked like he thought he'd fucked up. Not that she blamed him for not thinking things over with the state his body had been in.

"I... you're welcome, I guess?" Jake said, incredibly unsure. "Could you, eh, explain a bit why what I did was so brilliant? You know, for future reference."

Miranda couldn't help but smile as she did just that. She explained how Jake's appearance had radiated both power and sacrifice, how he showed the entire planet just how far he was willing to go to achieve victory. How he even made quite the dashing figure despite his gruesome appearance, his aura far more intimidating than usual as he walked through the streets a wounded but victorious beast.

He looked like he kind of got it. At least Jake said he did, but Miranda still didn't feel too sure.

"It isn't something you can simply replicate. It came from the genuine nature of the action, and if you planned on doing it on purpose, it wouldn't have the same impact," Miranda explained. "Just be happy that your actions turned out to be great. In more ways than one."

Miranda proceeded to move the conversation along as she summoned a star map with all the planets in the galaxy currently embroiled in conflict highlighted. "Do you see all these planets?"

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Jake looked at the map and the planets Miranda further highlighted before he nodded. "Those are the ones with active fighting right now?"

"Exactly. But notice how some of them are former allies who have now been invaded, even if the majority are purely enemy plants on the defensive," Miranda continued. "Why do you think our opponents would go on the offensive despite how much riskier that is?"

"Because they're batshit crazy and have been mindfucked by Ell'Hakan for years?" Jake asked.

"Not entirely incorrect, but no," Miranda said, not able to entirely disagree with that statement. "No, the reason they are on the offensive is because they feel like it's now or never. They believe they cannot wait, as doing so will give you time to recover."

"But I'm already recovered," Jake muttered.

"Something they don't know and likely don't expect either. When not even I considered you would have recovered this quickly, how could they? That's why they're trying to strike now, as they think it's their final chance before you can take to the field once more," Miranda explained.

She proceeded to go over a few of the places their opponents were making a push, but the more she explained, the more Jake frowned before he finally spoke up.

"Why are they even fighting? Do they really think they can win? Because if they did, wouldn't they try to invade Earth and kill me while I'm still injured?" Jake asked a very good question. One Miranda didn't have a clear answer to.

"We have no idea what they're thinking. Maybe they want to force us into a situation where we will negotiate and sign a contract allowing the planets to remain fully autonomous? Perhaps they just want to deal as much damage to us as possible before going down? Or, maybe they're indeed just batshit crazy and have no thought behind it... truthfully, we have no way of knowing. Not that I believe it matters much," Miranda answered.

“Because they’re getting crushed,” Jake said as he continued looking at the map.

“Indeed they are. Ell’Hakan and King Iludar, who is now leading the Chosen’s former loyals, had worked hard gathering the elites from all the planets under their influence and uniting them into one force. This left the planets these elites were effectively stolen from far weaker and, quite frankly, utterly chanceless,” Miranda shook her head.

“That does leave the question... where are these elites?” Jake asked.

“It indeed is the big question right now. We know they retreated to one of the larger planets they controlled, but even King Iludar’s planet seems abandoned by the elites. I can’t help but think they’re trying something. Some final hail-mary. That, or they’ll attempt to hide somewhere. There are so many planets, pretty much all of them not fully explored, and it wouldn’t be hard for even a few thousand elites to hide in some cavern underground on some unassuming planet for a few years until the universe opens back up,” Miranda voiced her thoughts.

“And I assume we don’t want that to happen?” Jake asked. “Honestly, I don’t care overly much if they run away or stay and fight. Either way, they’ll be out of the picture.”

“True, but their continued existence does pose a threat to the new rule we are trying to establish. The mere knowledge their former leaders and elites are out there will be a spark of hope that those who oppose us will hang onto. Hope that one day these people will return, leading to our downfall. This hope will give certain people confidence and make it far harder to snuff out those who oppose us too much, and we may even end up with factions of terrorists – or freedom fighters in their eyes – who work on the behest of those who escaped,” Miranda explained, Jake seemingly realizing she had a point about halfway through the explanation as he nodded once she was done.

“You know what, I’m just going to trust your judgment on this one,” Jake shrugged. “Of the two of us, you’re definitely more qualified to decide what our best next move would be.”

That was one of the things Miranda appreciated about Jake. He could at least realize when he wasn’t the most qualified person to take part in or comment on something, and in those instances, he was totally fine with letting someone else take over.

Jake was, for all intents and purposes, her boss. He was the owner and CEO of the company called Earth, and she was simply the chief of operations, managing everything.

However, rather than be like those shitty bosses Miranda still remembered having before the system - the kind who knew fuck-all about how the company actually ran but only had knowledge about a small part of the whole – Jake at least knew he didn’t know much. He was arrogant to a fault, sure, but he didn’t need to constantly prove to others

he was the guy in charge. They already knew, and if they didn't, he would be happy to remind them when necessary.

"In that case, please do me the favor of staying in hiding for just a little longer. I will keep communicating outwardly that you are not to be disturbed during this time, making Iludar assume you're injured and hopefully bait him out," Miranda explained. "At the same time, I'll have William try to track him down. We know they still have spies on Earth, and if things go well, William can use those."

"I guess I can sit back and chill for a little," Jake agreed without any contest. "There is one thing, though... we may be going to war with the Holy Church."

Miranda frowned, confused, as she glanced at the galactic map once more. All the planets ruled by the Holy Church were confined to one sector, and all of them had not made any moves, so why would they be going to war? From her estimates, they were fully on the defensive and not an enemy she saw a need to make. Moreover, she was pretty sure one of the many people waiting to get a meeting with her was a representative from the Church...

Before Miranda could ask why Jake thought this, he explained what had happened during his battle with Ell'Hakan, including the final part where the Augur had taken the Truesoul and retreated to one of the worlds owned by the Holy Church.

After he was done, Miranda was in thought for a moment before she asked:

"Have you discussed this matter with the Malefic Viper?"

It seemed like something he would talk about with his Patron.

"Yeah, I did, and he advised me to just do what I wanted, but-"

"Then we do just that," Miranda cut him off, seeing no reason to hear more.

"But aren't you worried that-"

"Jake," Miranda cut him off again. "I'm not going to try and act as if I know more or is more qualified to judge the situation than a Primordial. If he says something, I don't have the right or arrogance to disagree or argue against him."

Quite frankly, she did find it highly questionable that Jake often questioned his own Patron, but she did know he had a strong streak of blasphemy, which seemingly didn't bother the Malefic One, but again, who was she to dare assume it should bother him?

"I guess," Jake sighed loudly as he changed the subject. "Any words from the others, by the way?"

Miranda nodded, changing the galaxy map a bit again, having expected the question. “Arnold returned to Earth the moment he could after he handed things to you on Valhal’s planet, and last I checked, he is busy in his workshop and does not want to be disturbed. Speaking of Valhal, Carmen is still there handing stuff related to them and effectively serving as a diplomat between Earth and them.”

“Sylphie is... somewhere. Honestly, I have no idea. Same for Sandy. Vesperia is on one of the planets under the control of the Endless Empire, Caleb and Casper both with their respective factions for now... oh, and the Sword Saint is on the battlefield, effectively serving as the general with boots on the ground of this entire conflict. The rest are either just here on Earth, or I’m unaware of what they’re doing.”

Jake nodded along as he seemed to consider things for a while. “Alright, I guess I’ll head back to the lodge and act injured then. But keep me posted on how things are going, and let me know if there’s anything I can help with. I also want to address the Holy Church sooner rather than later.”

“That’s understandable,” Miranda said. “I do have someone from the Holy Church who tried to reach out, and based on your story, I wouldn’t be surprised if they want to try and bargain or offer compensation for us – or more specifically, you – to leave them alone. But as I said, I’ll let you handle all that in the fashion you see fit.”

“I will, I will,” Jake sighed as he paused for a bit. “Well, it looks like you got things handled, so I’ll head back before anyone spots me and ruins our little story of me still being a mess. Perhaps having a bit of time for some alchemy is for the best, actually...”

“Oh, how come?” Miranda asked curiously. “Close to a new skill selection or something like that?”

“Nah, not a skill selection... just what I anticipate to be a very interesting encounter.”

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## Chapter 1041: Long Overdue

Jake always liked coming home for a nice session of alchemy. Having such an enjoyable pastime certainly helped him not be annoyed when matters he deemed more important or urgent had to be temporarily put on the back burner.

He especially didn’t mind it this time around, as his next level would be quite the impactful one. Jake was level 299 in his profession currently, meaning that with one

more level, he would finally reach high-tier C-grade with his profession, but more than that, he would get another charge for the Path of the Heretic-Chosen skill.

The final charge that would allow him to have his long-awaited encounter with the First Sage. At least, that's what he assumed was going to happen once he used the skill while focusing on the enigmatic master of the Malefic Viper.

Jake still had a lot of questions regarding the entire thing. First of all, five charges were a lot of charges to use on the skill, considering he only got one every 20 levels in C-grade. Each charge was often enough to give a skill upgrade for one of his Legacy skills, so he really hoped spending five at once would be worth it.

Thinking about it more, the fact Jake had been told it was five charges was even more confusing. Clearly, the First Sage, who Jake had pretty much concluded was the person who left the message on his boots, somehow knew about Jake and his skill. Which was super weird, considering, oh yeah, the Malefic Viper had personally confirmed he'd killed the First Sage while in C-grade all the way back in the first era.

It quite frankly didn't make any logical sense whatsoever. Then again, the First Sage's existence didn't make any sense according to the Viper either, as the man had been simply too powerful and talented for what should be possible. His abilities in bending the rules of the system were simply on another level.

Based on how he could even talk to Jake through time and space from beyond the grave and imprinted a message on Jake's boots, he had likely reached a level of circumventing and manipulating the system far beyond what even the Viper had assumed. It was already impressive enough the man had discovered Jake during his use of Path of the Heretic Chosen, but communicating directly like this somehow felt more impressive.

On a side note, Jake did feel bad about not having talked to Villy in-depth about the fact he believed a meeting with the First Sage was soon upon him. However, he didn't regret his decision to keep Villy in the dark for a variety of reasons.

First of all, what if Jake was wrong? What if he gave the Viper false hope that Jake could ask some important question or something similar to that? Jake would feel like a royal asshole if that was the case. Even if he did end up having a vision revolving around the First Sage, who was to say Jake would actually interact with the man? No, there were just too many unknowns.

Secondly, Jake just didn't want anyone to know in case the meeting did happen and Jake learned something he really shouldn't have. Perhaps even something the Viper wouldn't like for him to know. The chances of that happening were low, but they still existed.

Third and finally, the Viper was just weird when it came to matters regarding the First Sage. He clearly respected the man beyond anyone else Jake had ever seen the god talk about. Villy was, for all intents and purposes, a narcissistic asshole who believed he stood at the apex of the world, never acknowledging anyone as superior to himself.

A trait Jake shared, which was why they got along so well. The biggest difference just was that Villy had the actual power to back up his arrogance, while Jake still had a while before getting there.

Yet, despite the Viper's ego, he still called the First Sage his master. He still spoke as if the old man Jake had seen teach the mortal Viper alchemy was a being beyond him that he didn't dare claim himself superior to.

That in itself spoke volumes to what kind of man the First Sage had been, and Jake couldn't wait to meet him assuming that was what would happen.

Also, if Jake did ultimately decide to tell the Viper after his meeting with the First Sage, he had a feeling the snake god would forgive Jake for not having shared anything beforehand. Shit, Jake could probably just make the excuse that the First Sage had been the one reaching out to Jake first, and Jake wasn't sure if the Viper's former master wanted Villy to know. Jake could say he just hadn't said anything before he'd actually confirmed he was being reached out to by the First Sage and gotten permission to share details of their interactions. Always easier to ask for forgiveness rather than permission and all that.

Anyway, before Jake would even know for sure if he would meet the First Sage, he had to get a level in his profession, and the best way to do that was with some good old poison concocting.

Heading down to the lab beneath his lodge, Jake instantly felt at home as he went over to his favorite spot on the floor he liked to sit within the big glass bubble. It was just like any other spot on the floor, but this one was still the best.

He felt excited, as with quite a few levels gained recently and improved Willpower from Presence upgrading, Jake was looking forward to seeing how much better he could make his Heartrot Poison.

Ah, but before he got crafting, Jake did something extremely important as he took out his void lollipop and gave it a good lick, instantly feeling the energy enter his body as his Perception increased.

Preparations done, Jake smiled as he took out his cauldron and ingredients, humming to himself while slitting his own wrist to pour blood into the cauldron, his Alchemical Flame heating it up for some good old alchemy time!

--

Days passed as the war in the Milky Way rapidly progressed.

Alright, despite calling it a war, there was only one place where actual armies were facing off against one another. In most cases, the fighting happened between a few hundred people to a thousand people at most, as while numbers could be beneficial, most C-grade forces, like those in the Milky Way, simply didn't have the means to utilize large formations or rituals.

Throwing weak C-grades or even D-grades at trained C-grade fighters was just needlessly tossing lives away. Even the most delusional World Leaders didn't try to simply kill those they ruled, as doing so would lose them all the support they had left and get them readily ousted.

Now, despite most fighting happening with smaller forces, there was still that one planet that had actual armies battling it out. The planet in question was King Iludar's homeworld that Earth had directly invaded at the onset of the galactic war. There, they had sent a few thousand C-grades initially, followed by far more from the many allied planets Earth had gathered.

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The response from the other side was to do the same as fighters flooded in from all across the galaxy, ready to face off against Earth and its allies. This was the battlefield Miranda talked about when she spoke about one where the fighting could be beneficial to even the weaker participants. Many who took part had already plateaued on their Paths, and this war could be a chance for them to break through once more. That, or they would die... which, as harsh as it sounds, wouldn't really be a loss to Earth as a whole.

This planet ended up being by far the one with the most people fighting, with there being nearly a hundred thousand on each side. Earth did have superior numbers with all their allies, and after the Holy Church backed off and stopped supporting the Ell'Hakan loyalists, the other faction simply didn't have that many competent fighters left.

However, the Earth faction purposefully withheld forces to make it seem as if the other side had a chance and could maintain morale somewhat. To the general, the Sword Saint, this was not a battle in which he questioned whether they could win, only how many benefits they could gain from the fight. Newest update provided by

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The Sword Saint obviously didn't take to the field himself, seeing as doing so would turn the battle into a slaughter. Singular, powerful individuals were simply too impactful in large battles, and seeing as the other side didn't have anyone to match the Sword Saint, it would just be him flying around cutting people down until he got tired or he was out of opponents.

As the battle progressed there, he, too, wondered where the elites were, and part of the reason for this war on Iludar's homeworld was to try and lure him there with the opportunity to fight with a home advantage. Granted, the swordsman had been spotted a few times on the planet, which could be why Iludar and the rest of those who remained loyal to him didn't want to fight.

As the days slowly passed by, the battle was far from constant, as there were many lulls and small breaks for attempted diplomacy. Eventually, the Sword Saint didn't even show himself any more; everything instead being handled by other members of the Noboru clan. No one knew what he was thinking about, but during the last few hours before he stopped appearing, he had looked quite deep in thought as if he'd just realized something.

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While many planets were embroiled in battle during this time, others in the Milky Way took the opportunity to stabilize themselves internally. This privilege was primarily offered to the planets that had managed to stay entirely neutral—be it through belonging to a multiversal divine faction or simply talented leadership—or those that had allied with Earth.

Sure, they perhaps had to send some fighters to prove they were still loyal, but the World Leaders themselves and the skilled politicians and officials they commanded were free to handle internal matters.

It was evident to anyone with any insight that once the fighting stopped, the battle would simply shift from vast plains and deserts to the political arena. There were already rumors that some kind of system would be set up that recognized each individual World Leader and allowed them to remain primarily autonomous once everything was said and done.

Even so, in this union or council that they would all become part of, there was bound to be a hierarchy. If not officially – besides recognizing the supremacy of Earth – then unofficially. Even if they knew who would be at the top, the positions directly beneath Earth still looked up for grabs, many World Leaders now trying to make themselves and their planets look as good as possible to try and claim as much future influence as possible.

One of the planets that were busy preparing for this transitional process was the one ruled by the supreme Voice of the One. Everyone already knew that this was one of the planets bound to have influence, seeing as it held the record as the most populated planet in the galaxy. Moreover, their World Leader, Kindroth, had allied himself with Earth very early on and been a very involved figure, making everyone assume he would get a high position with a lot of authority and influence.

Of course, he did face some major challenges at home, primarily related to the theocracy he'd created to unite the planet as one. Trying to convince everyone that the Order of the Malefic Viper was now in charge wouldn't be an easy matter and a task no one envied Kindroth of. Yet the elf seemed convinced he could do it, and from the looks of it, he didn't seem wrong.

He had always been a crafty individual, after all, and he'd managed to unite his planet for a good reason. So had he made good decisions during the entire conflict with Ell'Hakan, having a strong, heavy dislike toward the Chosen from their very first meeting.

Yet perhaps he had been a bit too crafty and had made some decisions that soon would come back to haunt him. As he was busy trying to change the doctrine of the world's religion to accept the Order of the Malefic Viper, his decisions came back to haunt him. Something that was perhaps long overdue.

While in his personal residence on top of the mountain, he heard the noises as the structure was forcefully broken into. Kindroth instantly reacted as he got up, preparing to make his escape as an aura fell over the chamber.

**“My comrades are spread throughout the city, ready to act should you run,”** a familiar voice echoed, making Kindroth stop in his steps as he turned toward the entrance of the chamber as a figure walked in.

Kindroth looked toward this man as he frowned. “Resorting to threats of massacring innocent civilians seems beneath you, Iludar.”

“Times have changed,” the man responded as he continued walking into the room. “Sometimes we have to use methods we would prefer to do without, but desperate situations call for desperate measures.”

Cutting through the bullshit, Kindroth looked directly at Iludar. “What exactly do you want? Because I have a hard time seeing how it would benefit you even if you had me killed or slaughtered innocents on my homeworld.”

“Fine,” Iludar didn't delay as he looked serious. “Put me in contact with the Holy Church and the Augur... I have an offer for him.”

Jake smiled, satisfied as he took in a good whiff of the toxic fumes that filled the glass bubble. Palate, while still damaged, and the internal stomach remaining off-limits and barely working, still did work with its regular passive effect, instantly confirming to Jake even before he bottled up his poison that it was a good one.

It was poison powerful enough for the fumes to instantly kill any D-grade that accidentally inhaled them, and even weaker C-grades wouldn't feel good breathing it in. And that was just the fumes... even someone around the start of mid-tier C-grade would

see their lives end if they accidentally touched the blackish liquid in Jake's cauldron, much less drank it or had it injected through a bit of stabbing.

"A really good one," Jake said as he stuck his finger into the mixture and had a taste. Far from his first time, but this one tasted a bit sweeter than normal, and that was saying a lot, considering the mixture was always quite sweet. As for why pure death liquid was sweet? Hell if Jake knew.

All he knew was that his efforts had not just been blessed with the best concoction of Heartrot poison he'd ever made but the all-important level he'd been waiting for.

***'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 300 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points***

***'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 301 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points***

It had ended up taking far less time to level up than Jake had expected, meaning he had probably been close to a level in the first place. It was good it hadn't ended up taking him too long, though, and after Jake hurriedly bottled up the concoction, Jake turned his attention to what he was the most excited about.

Focusing on Path of the Heretic-Chosen, he visualized who he wanted to meet. Closing his eyes, the image of the First Sage appeared in his mind, yet as the seconds passed... nothing.

Frowning, Jake tried to briefly imagine wanting to upgrade Fangs of the Malefic Viper, which he already had some good ideas on how to upgrade at this point, getting an instant response.

**Requirements met.**

**Do you wish to experience the forming of a Record Fragment related to the Path of the Malefic Viper? Uses remaining: 5**

Jake's frown only deepened as he tried to focus on the First Sage again. Several seconds passed, the skill remaining silent... until suddenly, Jake felt something weird. He got several notifications at once, but before he could even see them, only one remained before him.

**Requirements met.**

**Do you wish to experience the forming of an [Unknown]-Record Fragment related to the Path of the Malefic Viper? Uses remaining: 5**

**Warning, experiencing an [Unknown]-Record Fragment will consume 5 charges.**

Jake breathed a sigh of relief before smiling, not having to be asked twice. *Let's fucking go.*

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## Chapter 1042: A Historic City

What even are Records?

This was a question Jake had naturally asked Villy before and gotten a rather generic response that one's Records were the gathering of all one's actions and achievements throughout life. One's Records was made up of one's Path and vice versa. Records were everything... but that only raised more questions.

Because if they were everything, then how could Records be lost? How could someone like Eversmile erase someone's Records? Did he even erase their Records in the first place when the Malefic Viper could still remember everything everyone was meant to forget? This chapter is updated by *novel•fire•net*

Would someone everyone had forgotten still have Records at all? If no one remembered them, why would there be? If there was no one left to remember... did the system even bother anymore?

Then what about Records that were erased but someone still remembered... what if memories existed that only a single person in the entire history of the multiverse remembered and had seen? What if what that person had seen... never existed in the first place?

For some unknown reason, Jake was flooded with these questions as he felt his Path of the Heretic-Chosen activate. He felt his consciousness shift... until more was dragged along.

Usually, when Jake used the skill, he would *feel* as if he had truly gone somewhere, but his soul would remain anchored where he had used the skill. However, this time around, something was clearly different, as rather than experiencing a vision, Jake felt as if he was teleported.

Everything around him shifted, the world dissolving around him, as Jake felt himself be transported. Instantly, he knew that this kind of teleportation, or whatever it could even be called, held more power and conceptual complexity than all of the times Jake had

traveled through the void combined. He wasn't just traveling through space but time and reality.

But was he truly traveling in time? Or was he merely immersed in the memories of the system with both body and soul?

Jake had no answer even as he began to get his bearings. All he knew was that whatever was going on was something that only the system was capable of doing.

A world manifested around him, and suddenly, he had solid ground beneath his feet.

He nearly stumbled in surprise, as for the first time ever, Jake could actually interact with the world he had been transported to. The ground was covered in soft gravel, and Jake found himself standing in the middle of a small city with wooden buildings all around, most of them two stories tall.

Looking at these buildings, the architecture was mostly simple and functional, the structures made of stone and wood, and as Jake looked at them, he noticed the sheer lack of energy in most of them. These were buildings made before the system had arrived... in fact, the entire city looked like something that could have easily been constructed in a medieval world before the initiation.

Down the street, he saw several larger buildings, including a four-story building that stood out to Jake for some reason. Far in the distance, a castle sat atop a hill, with small buildings leading all the way up to it.

Jake quickly responded by releasing a Pulse of Perception as he scanned the entire large city and even beyond. The city was surrounded by farmland with several small farmsteads all around, and beyond these farmlands, Jake saw woods and overall very normal geography. Almost too normal.

Things seemed oddly small to Jake, which was when he realized something.

*It looks a lot like Earth did before the integration.*

Not in the sense this planet was a copy of Earth, as the crops and plants were clearly alien, but in that the scope of everything was just smaller. This wasn't a world that had been expanding by the system, but one that had roughly the same proportions as pre-integration Earth.

However, despite everything looking so normal, this world very clearly wasn't. Because something was missing... in fact, a lot was missing. Beneath the soil of the farmland, Jake saw only nothingness. Pure void, reminding him of when he looked outside of dungeons.

That in itself wouldn't be super weird, though. If this was a world manifested by the system, it didn't need to perfectly recreate everything, right? However, what was weird was the fact that the majority of the buildings in the city and even more so outside were experiencing the same thing.

Some rooms of the houses were simply big voids, nearly all of the cupboards were void, and the spaces between furniture, pictures, and walls didn't exist at all... in some ways, it kind of reminded Jake of a videogame where the system had only bothered to render the parts Jake would actually see if he walked around.

As Jake stood there taking everything in, the realization that he was entirely alone also hit him. The city looked like it had been alive mere moments prior, as he even saw a horse carriage down the street he was standing on, the reins of the horse now lying on the ground in front of the empty cart with tire marks behind it.

It was as if every other living being had been teleported out of existence, leaving only Jake behind.

More than anything, Jake was confused as he stood there, as things didn't make any sense. He had focused on the First Sage when he used the skill, so why was he there alone? What was he supposed to see?

Had he somehow been fucking scammed into wasting five uses of Path of the Heretic-Chosen to teleport to some empty pre-system city?

Luckily, before Jake could spiral too much, *he* appeared.

Out of nothingness, as if he had always been there, an old man suddenly manifested only a few meters away. He looked exactly like he had during the prior visions with the Malefic Viper, except he now wore a simple gray robe and looked a bit less kept than he had during Jake's prior visions.

The man was standing with his back to Jake, looking at one of the buildings. It was a building unique in that it was whole. There were no voids within, the system having bothered to render every part of it.

Jake couldn't help himself as he scanned the man, filled with confusion... something a quick Identify quickly explained why.

### **[Human – lvl 9]**

It was no trick or a skill hiding the man's real grade... the First Sage standing right there was truly just a G-grade human. Someone weak enough to die from Jake breathing too hard. At least, that's how Jake usually felt when he stood in front of someone so weak, yet in front of this old man, Jake's instincts keenly warned him that attacking would be most unwise.

Not that Jake had any intention of being aggressive in the first place, he simply couldn't help himself but size up anyone and everyone he came across. He wasn't even sure if the old man had noticed Jake yet as he stood there for a few seconds, simply looking at the house before sighing.

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"This is – was – my home for over fifty years," the First Sage spoke. "I bought it using the inheritance from my father, who passed away when I was still a young man. It was honestly too big for me... but I couldn't sell it. Even if I remember the house perfectly, I can distinguish between my own memories and reality, and giving up being able to visit would have been too much. I would have loved to see it once more... but alas."

Jake was confused and unsure what to say as the man turned toward him. He gave Jake a light smile, finally speaking to Jake for the first time.

"Would you walk with me?"

Still perplexed, Jake just nodded automatically as the First Sage led the way, Jake just following along as they began walking down the street. They were heading toward a large building in the distance – the one that Jake felt stood out before – and as they walked, Jake couldn't help himself.

"Excuse me... but what exactly is going on right now?" Jake questioned out loud, feeling that this entire situation was very odd.

"A great question that we will need patience to answer," the man said, continuing his steady pace. As they got closer to the large building, the First Sage began talking again as he motioned to different buildings around him. "You see that building? It belonged to Majali, one of the best bakers in the country. Without fault, I always got my bread there as there simply was no better. Ah, and that there is Pielddro and Son, a rather misleading name as even the grandson had gotten involved toward the end. Truly a family of skilled carpenters and good people that many owed favors due to their kindness. We had a particularly harsh winter where they sacrificed much of their stock to make sure everyone had warm houses..."

The First Sage kept pointing out buildings during their walk, Jake staying silent as he just listened. He learned about dozens of families who had lived in the city from the old man, and it was clear the First Sage had known them all well personally. He tended to include how he personally knew and interacted with the people there, his tone nostalgic.

Something that really didn't make any sense. Jake was supposed to experience a Record Fragment right now. A snapshot of history... but this clearly wasn't it. Sure, he was in a location that had long become history, but that wasn't the same, far from it.

Jake was also keenly aware the reason for all this was the level 9 human in front of him – a level that also made no damn sense. That is, unless this truly was the First Sage shortly after the integration, and seeing as the town remained relatively whole as if it hadn't been that long since the system arrived, that could be the case.

Then again, that just raised more questions, and he really hoped he would get some answers sooner rather than later.

Reaching the steps leading up to their destination, the First Sage stopped talking about the other random houses and turned toward Jake.

"This here is the Great Library. I know it may not look like much compared to what you've seen before, but to me and many others, this was the greatest treasure of our small country. A house of knowledge and learning that gave the common man hope of bettering himself," the First Sage explained, leading Jake up the steps.

At the top of the stairs, a large wooden door opened when they got close. Jake did not feel any movement of energy as it did so.

Walking inside, Jake saw lit candles lighting up the four-story tall library. The entire building was large and wooden, with books stacked on top of books everywhere on all four floors. Jake had expected the place to have a musky smell, but instead, it had a fresh scent, making it clear how well-maintained the library was.

"I was a librarian... the librarian," the First Sage said, walking inside as he slightly touched one of the many wooden pillars holding up the second floor. "This library was my workplace and my second home. For the last forty years before the initiation of the system, I was in charge here. It was my pride and joy."

Jake looked around the library more, seeing the tens of thousands of books gathered there. It was an impressive collection, especially for a medieval world. Every single book looked handwritten, and Jake could only begin to guess how much time and effort had been spent creating and collecting them all.

"I've always loved books," the First Sage continued, taking one out of a bookshelf as he opened it. "Perhaps it's because I relate to them. Books are... perfect. The content of a book doesn't change with time but remains the same, the knowledge within perfect as long as the book persists. Memories of man change with time and warps to fit perception. It's flawed."

Skiping through a few pages of the book, the First Sage smiled as he quickly skimmed the pages. "Books and the knowledge within are how humanity even knows our history, something that's true across all planets. It's something that truly unites us. Out of all the different races, we are second to none when it comes to immortalizing knowledge in writing."

He closed the book and placed it back on its shelf, exactly where he had taken it, down to how far inside the shelf it had been. "We humans are short-lived. Elves, even before the system, lived hundreds of years, making the need for writing down history less as they often had someone alive who remembered history. Word of mouth was good enough for them. The same was true for many other races, while others simply didn't see the need to write down the past. A shame, really."

Jake, once more unable to hold himself back anymore, couldn't help but ask. "Where exactly are we?"

"In the past," the First Sage gave Jake the first actual answer. "A fragment of it, anyway. One that never existed, yet once did. What you see all around you is history. My history... and my Records."

"What do you mean when you say this place never existed?" Jake questioned.

"Oh, it did exist. It's just that what you see now didn't," the First Sage said as he sighed, staring out at the vast library. "This world is created entirely from my memory. My Records. I am the only one who remembers it, with even the system having chosen to forget."

"Is that why the world seems incomplete?" Jake asked, having reached a realization.

"Exactly so. The world you see is made from my memory, but how can I remember what I never knew in the first place? I have been to most places in this city and seen most buildings, but naturally, I couldn't have visited everywhere. Those places you see as voids are merely gaps in my memory, nothing more, nothing less," the First Sage explained as he moved toward a table, motioning for Jake to follow.

"Humans tend to fill in the gap themselves when they don't know something. Their imagination takes over, and they form an image of falsehood in their mind that slowly morphs into truth. Don't get me wrong, this falsehood is often incredibly close to the truth. It's no stretch to imagine that beneath the upper layers of soil, there will be more soil, rocks, clay, and all the other elements one would assume to find down there... but I don't imagine these things. Not because I'm incapable of it but because I choose not to. I want to know, not imagine."

Jake followed the First Sage to sit at the table. The lit candles were quite frankly rather useless due to the great natural lighting that seemed to hit the table perfectly, making it a great reading spot.

"But I'm also keenly aware I can't know everything. Only strive to. Yet, over the years, it began to irk me when I don't know something," the First Sage explained. "It makes me curious to the extreme."

The First Sage looked directly at Jake as he sat across from him. “And you truly sparked my curiosity when I saw you that day. You were someone not meant to be there. Someone I didn’t remember being there, yet you were. I also know you weren’t there because of me but because of Vilas. A visitor of his, not of my time. Tell me, what era are you from?”

The question seemed rather normal to ask... except...

“How do you even know what eras are?” Jake asked back, frowning. The First Sage had died during the first era... before eras were a thing. It was like someone asking about the “First World War” while living before the second one took place. It just didn’t make sense.

“I simply do. Now please, what era?” the old man continued, unoffended by Jake’s question.

“The ninety-third,” Jake decided to just answer honestly.

“Ninety-third, huh...” the First Sage muttered before smiling. “That makes me happy to hear.”

“If I may... why did you tell me all these things while walking here?” Jake asked a question that honestly wasn’t even that important. He just couldn’t hold back his curiosity.

The First Sage seemed pleased with the question, though, as he gladly explained. “As I said, this world is made from my memory. I’m also the only one remembering this place and the people who once lived here, but now, so do you. It brings me comfort knowing that someone else is also aware of their existence. Also, I believe it is only polite to introduce myself, and I see no better way of doing so than letting you know about my life and history. Which brings me to perhaps my most important question...”

Jake had gone into this entire thing believing the First Sage had reached out to Jake because he knew something. Knew about him. How else could he have engraved the message in the boots? How else could he have known about Path of the Heretic-Chosen? It had seemed like such a safe assumption. However, the question asked by the old man shattered that perception instantly.

“Who are you?”

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## Chapter 1043: More Questions Than Answers

The question from the First Sage hung in the air for several seconds as Jake digested it. He had well and truly expected the First Sage to know all about Jake from the beginning, seeing as he seemed almost all-knowing... yet from his question, it was almost the exact opposite. Something that just didn't track his expectations at all and made Jake question the old man.

"You really don't know?" Jake genuinely asked.

"I only ask questions for good reasons, more often than not, as a means to make the other party consider a matter deeper. This is not one of those cases. I truly do not know who you are, something it appears you find perplexing," the First Sage answered. "If it brings you any comfort, I also find it highly perplexing that I do not know who you are and how exactly you got here."

"You reached out to me first," Jake pointed out as he even went as far as to point to his boots as he slightly lifted up the flap... only to see the inscribed words gone.

The First Sage looked at Jake's boots and, before Jake had time to panic about the change to the item, spoke. "I will indeed reach out that way to you, and I will indeed gain some insight into your capabilities of experiencing the past when you visit with me during my teaching of Vilas."

"You are speaking in future tense," Jake muttered.

"Because I've yet to do any of those things," the First Sage gave a very non-answer. "Truthfully, I didn't know you would appear here and now either. What is happening right now is all new to me. New memories and Records are being formed for both you and I. So I truly do wish to know who you are."

Jake considered things for a bit until he ultimately decided just to be truthful. The First Sage was clearly being very mysterious, but Jake felt no malice from him at any point, only curiosity. There was also the fact that Villy had trusted his teacher so much, and Jake felt a certain level of second-hand respect for the G-grade human sitting in front of him.

"My name is Jake Thayne, and I'm a rather recently integrated human in the ninety-third universe," Jake said. "I'm also a friend of the Malefic Viper... or Vilas, as you know him."

The First Sage nodded along and smiled. "I find the usage of the word friend odd here. From what I see, you are his Chosen, are you not?"

“Being his Chosen and his friend aren’t mutually exclusive,” Jake shrugged, not even bothering to ask how the old man knew about Chosen or gods in the first place, as when he died, there hadn’t been any gods yet. It was very evident by now the First Sage knew far more than he could possibly be supposed to.

“Some would argue those two are indeed mutually exclusive,” the First Sage couldn’t help but smile. “Then again, I guess you balance things out with a healthy dose of heresy.”

Again, not even worth pointing out how the hell he knew Jake was also a heretic, something pretty much no one else could detect through Shroud of the Primordial and Jake actively trying to hide it.

“What can I say? We have a unique relationship,” Jake once more shrugged, not exactly sure what to say.

“That, I do not doubt,” the First Sage said, pausing a bit as he changed the topic. “How is he doing? Vilas, that is.”

The question surprised Jake a bit as it seemingly came out of nowhere and was once more the kind of thing Jake halfway expected the human to already know. Still, it made Jake a bit happy the old man asked.

“I wish I could just say he’s doing well, but it’s complicated,” Jake sighed. “I don’t want to divulge his personal issues, but I can say that he lost people he really cared about a very long time ago, and that still haunts him even now. He is doing a bit better recently I hope, but before this era, he spent many eras never leaving his divine realm.”

“I see,” the First Sage muttered before sighing. “Bloodlines truly are double-edged in nature, giving so much, yet they also have demands. Not being able to forget seems like something that’s purely a boon, but you do not know how privileged you are to be able to leave unpleasant memories in the past. How lucky it is that time can heal wounds of the mind, something he and I cannot experience. Though I reckon you do understand the double-edged nature of Bloodlines to some extent, seeing as you have quite the potent Bloodline yourself.”

Jake let a lot of weird stuff slide, but this one he couldn’t help but question: “How do you know the Viper has your Bloodline?”

“Some questions are too complicated to answer given the time we are given, and the knowledge will bring you no benefits,” the First Sage shook his head. “Suffice to say, I do know some things. I know who Vilas became and that he is now known as one of the twelve Primordials. I also know the other eleven Primordials. Valdemar, Eversmile, Wyrmgod, Stormild, Blightfather, Holy Mother, Yggdrasil, Aeon, Rigoria, Starseizing Titan, and of course the Daofather.”

“Do you also know who Umbra is?” Jake tried asking.

“She is the Leader of the Court of Shadows,” the First Sage casually answered. “I also know... no... knew of Yip of Yore. A talented one, but foolish in his ambition.”

“You said you knew of him... as if...” Jake tried testing the man in front of him. Something he instantly caught onto.

“I know that Yip of Yore is dead, killed by the Malefic Viper,” the First Sage said with a smile. “As I said, I know a lot of things you rightfully assume I shouldn’t. Know of a lot of people I have no reason to know of. Yet when it comes to you, I know nothing. Which is indeed quite perplexing, seeing as you have karmic connections with your fair share of Primordials.”

“It sounds like you know about gods, so why is it odd you don’t know me?” Jake questioned.

“Because I know of Jacob. Of Carmen. The one who calls himself the Sword Saint, Arnold, and many more who share deep connections with powerful gods, especially Primordials or Void God Oras in the case of the man called Arnold,” the First Sage explained, Jake staring at him genuinely shocked.

“But you... with you, I draw a blank. I genuinely have no idea who you are or where you came from, yet I get the strong feeling I should know.”

“Is it because of my Bloodline?” Jake instantly asked, assuming it had to play a part, as when weird stuff was going on, it was usually related to Bloodlines.

“I don’t know that either, but I do find it a safe assumption, seeing as you’re not a Transcendent,” the First Sage responded with a smile. “I find this all rather exciting. I’m learning quite a few new things today.”

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Jake really wanted to try and get to the bottom of this, but he knew he wasn’t going to get an explanation. So, instead, he asked something else, changing the topic drastically.

“Say... this may seem abrupt, but the Malefic Viper said he killed you... that you asked him to kill you,” Jake asked without truly asking. Because, honestly, by now, Jake seriously doubted that had actually happened as he began to believe that instead the First Sage had-

“He will indeed be the one who slays me,” the First Sage simply nodded in confirmation. “And I will ask him to do that not far in the future.”

“Why?”

“That is the most complex question you’ve asked so far,” the First Sage kept smiling. “All I can tell you is that it had to be done, and it laid the foundation for the Malefic Viper one day becoming who he is today, getting the Bloodline he now wields.”

“So you did have some greater purpose,” Jake muttered to himself. “What exactly happened? Did you find a way to merge with the system? Avoid death? Was it even the real you the Viper killed?”

He still had so many damn questions and theories. The old man had knowledge of the present day, which had to mean he had some connection to it, right? Also, to Jake, it simply didn’t make sense that someone as powerful as the First Sage would simply allow themselves to die like that.

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“Jake. I am a human. Born a human, died a human. I am no spirit, no aspect of the system... just an old librarian who tried to do things that couldn’t and perhaps shouldn’t be done,” the First Sage answered. “My death at the hands of Vilas was a true one, and that day, my Path ended.”

“It... just doesn’t make any sense,” Jake protested. “Why the hell would you just let yourself die? Also, if you did die, then how can you still-“

“Nothing I can say will ever satisfy your curiosity or innate need for answers,” the First Sage lifted a hand to interrupt Jake. “Words are powerful. This was one of the first things I taught Vilas, and I hope he also taught you the same. Some things I simply will not say because they are too dangerous to speak into existence.”

“Is there also some Forbidden Knowledge in there?” Jake questioned further, thinking maybe that was part of the explanation.

“My mere existence is considered Forbidden Knowledge, so no, there is nothing I cannot say. Usually, knowledge of me is kept hidden by the fact no one can speak to me... yet the system has given permission for this meeting,” the First Sage shook his head as he looked at Jake. “I see you doubt that statement?”

“From what I have been told, you were quite proficient in fooling the system,” Jake pointed out. “I halfway assumed this entire scenario came about due to that proficiency.”

“Fooling the system, huh...” the First Sage said, shaking his head in disbelief. “You cannot fool that which is omnipotent and omniscient. I cannot, Vilas cannot, and you cannot. What we can do is bend the rules a little, but do not be illusioned, all happens with the full knowledge and permission of the system. Once more, I would have expected my disciple to have explained this to you.”

“He probably did,” Jake muttered as he kept looking at the old man sitting in the chair across from him. “Still. Why would the system allow you to bend the rules if it could stop you?”

“For the same reasons that it allows Bloodlines and Transcendents to exist. The system has infinite power, infinite potential, infinite knowledge... yet it remains imperfect. Do you know why?”

The First Sage looked at Jake with expectant eyes, making the poor hunter wrack his brain. He remembered prior conversations, and an answer quickly came to him.

“It’s still growing.”

“That is half the answer indeed,” the First Sage smiled proudly. “The system cannot change by itself, but it can learn. We are the impetus of its learning. Free will is a subject I know is much discussed, but do allow me to clarify that it’s absolutely real. In fact, it’s the one thing I can guarantee to exist, for without free will, there would be no change. The system emphasizes choice above nearly anything else, and the choices we make are what shapes the system and our collective future.”

The First Sage stood up after saying this as he went over and opened a small window, looking outside at the recently system-integrated land. “The first era was more flawed than you can even begin to imagine. The system had a lot to learn then. And learn it did. It’s an endless process that we are here to spur on... Transcendents and those with Bloodlines more than everyone else.”

“Why does the system even care about improving?” Jake asked.

“It doesn’t,” the First Sage smiled. “Your question is flawed in the first place. The system doesn’t *want* anything. It merely is. Surely, you must have heard the usual comparisons between the system and natural laws? The system is indeed just a natural law... a far more complex one than any other that supersedes and encompasses all other natural laws, but a natural law nonetheless.”

Jake did indeed know many of these things, yet he saw incredible value in having the First Sage say the same. It could be compared to having read something on the internet at one point and having that same something confirmed by the leading scientist on that topic... one source was just way more reliable than the other.

However, despite the conversation being rather enlightening – if not super informative, as the First Sage had been so damn mysterious – Jake began to question why he was actually there. He had to remind himself that he had spent five entire uses of Path of the Heretic-Chosen to meet the First Sage. That was 100 levels worth of uses accumulated for this one meeting... but all he had gotten so far was a conversation. Based on how long prior visions had been, this one should also be coming to a close soon.

“Hey... this may come off a bit wrong, but what was the purpose of this meeting?” Jake asked after the two of them had been silent for a good ten seconds, the First Sage just looking out the window during all this time.

“I don’t know, and you never answered how you got here,” the First Sage answered calmly. “I made clear why I wanted to see and know about you, but you never returned that sentiment. So do enlighten me... how and why are you truly here?”

“I used a skill to get here... one that allows me to see Record Fragments related to the Legacy of the Malefic Viper,” Jake just answered honestly. “However, usually, I do so as an intangible entity that cannot interact with the world but only experience it through the body of the Malefic Viper. The primary use of the skill seems to be to upgrade other Legacy Skills. At least, that’s how I used it thus far. When in C-grade, I could focus not only on a skill I wanted to upgrade but also a person... and with your nudging message, I focused on you when I used the skill this time around, the cost being pretty damn big as I could usually experience five visions with what I spent on this one.”

He really held nothing back as he explained everything to the First Sage, once more seeing no reason to. In fact, quite the opposite, as maybe it could help Jake get something out of this encounter.

“Quite a peculiar and powerful skill,” the First Sage nodded, not asking for any further explanation. “It does explain a few things, including the manifestation of this world and the new Records you are allowed to bring and absorb.”

“Truthfully, I still have a hard time understanding the skill,” Jake shrugged. “It’s also unique rarity, by the way.”

“I figured as much. The Path you walk does strike me as rather unique, being both a Chosen and a Heretic, something I assume is related to your Bloodline,” the First Sage casually commented. “However, hearing your explanation, it seems as if you are meant to gain some benefit from this vision, as you call it, am I correct?”

“That’s how it usually goes,” Jake shrugged. “This one is clearly different in nature, though. First time I can actually talk to someone and have a physical body and not just be a ghost on the wall. Also, I don’t get anything every time. It’s just an opportunity to get benefits.”

He had really hoped to get something good from using five charges, though.

“What kind of visions do you usually experience?” the First Sage questioned.

“There’s no set kind, but usually some important and impactful moment revolving around a skill. But, again, that probably happened because I used the unique skill while focusing on a Legacy skill.”

“That does explain why you appeared during the use of my Transcendent skill back then,” the G-grade human in front of Jake nodded as he seemed in thought for a while.

Jake remained quiet, not really sure what to say or ask. To be clear, he still had a fuckload of questions, just none he assumed he would actually get an answer to. In fact, he felt as if this entire conversation had just left him with more questions than answers.

After what felt like ages, the First Sage nodded and spoke to himself. “Let us do that.”

The old man turned away from the window and looked at Jake. “It seems only proper. Also, you are the friend of my disciple, so you should get some benefits from this encounter... but before we get to that, would you like to join me on a walk down memory lane?”

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## Chapter 1044: A Journey Down Memory Lane

Jake had no idea what it meant to take a walk down memory lane, but there was no way he would reject such a proposal.

“Where are we going?” Jake asked curiously. Seeing as he was talking to a level 9 G-grade human and that his Pulse of Perception covered the entire city and far beyond, Jake had a hard time seeing anywhere they could go... which just proved his lack of imagination.

“It’s not a question of where but when,” the First Sage smiled as he motioned Jake to follow. “This world of your creation is truly peculiar. The Records are flowing freely, time malleable to the slightest touch. When you use the skill regularly, have you been able to experience the same vision multiple times in a row?”

“Yeah, they tend to repeat a few times, giving me more time to understand what the system is trying to show me,” Jake nodded.

“I see... I apologize in advance, but I already interrupted that mechanism to stretch out this singular branch of time,” the First Sage casually said. “So you will only be able to see and experience things once this time around.”

Jake just nodded, unsure what to say. It was probably better only experiencing things once, though, and honestly, while Jake did find some enjoyment from constantly asking

questions, he was also keenly aware that so far, he had benefitted very little if at all. Also, one more thing had been bothering him.

“Will I even be able to talk about our encounter today? As you said, things regarding you are considered Forbidden Knowledge,” Jake asked.

“It gladdens me to say that I do not know. My status has changed several times already. I believe partly because it was manifested that the two of us would meet, making such a thing required,” the First Sage answered.

“It changed?” Jake asked, perplexed. “It’s getting really hard to believe you actually died and aren’t just some freaky time traveler.”

The First Sage chuckled, shaking his head. “As I said, my Path ended the day I was slain by my disciple. There is a big difference between knowing something and having truly experienced something. To experience it, you must have, in some aspect, taken part, thus mixing your Records with the scenario. My Records in your time only live on through those who remember me, not any of the actions I can do. Until now, it seems.”

“So, not time travel?” Jake confirmed semi-jokingly.

“Not in the way you are thinking, though it could be argued that me sending knowledge and Records from my time to yours through this encounter is a form of time travel,” the First Sage shook his head. “I said it already, but I do find it peculiar the system even allows this... though it is with guardrails and our conversation more like than not made Forbidden Knowledge, making it hard to divulge and spread any of the Records I share with you. The only one I would guess you can still speak to about this is Vilas, but I would safely assume he is the only one, if at all,” the First Sage answers.

“Considering he has a copy of your Bloodline, I would also assume that to be the case,” Jake nodded as he followed after the First Sage, who led him toward the exit of the library building.

The First Sage stopped and turned to look at Jake. “He doesn’t.”

“Huh?” Jake exclaimed. “What do you mean? Bloodline of the Immortal Mind, right? One that gives perfect memory? You even said you both had the same drawback of not being able to forget things with time...”

“It’s the word copy I find issues with,” the First Sage said. “No two Bloodlines can ever be perfectly alike as they merge with the Truesoul of whoever possesses it. Just as the Bloodline molds the person, the person molds the Bloodline. When it comes to the powers of the Bloodlines, yes, they are indeed identical, but that does not mean it’s the same Bloodline, nor are the ways we found to use said Bloodline.”

"I don't get the distinction..." Jake muttered. "It's like saying two magic affinities are never the same because two people will always use it differently."

"And such a saying would be correct. I hope you can come to understand why," the First Sage merely spoke, motioning for Jake to follow once more.

Jake wanted to keep questioning the man but didn't as he followed along. They reached the door, and Jake expected them to go back out into the city; however, that wasn't what happened. Instead, when the First Sage opened the door, a large chamber appeared on the other side. Passing through the door, the First Sage's appearance also changed slightly as his robe was replaced with a white one, and his unkempt looks also got tidied up.

However, what Jake noticed first was how the man's aura changed, as it had suddenly changed from that of a G-grade straight to E-grade.

### **[Human – lvl 85]**

"Our integration back then was very different from the one you experienced. We had no Tutorials. No guidelines. It was just another average day when suddenly everything changed. I was in the library working the moment mana flooded the universe. My area was lucky, but others not so much as they experienced quite the geographical changes," the First Sage explained, as he and Jake walked into the large circular chamber.

Through Jake's Sphere and a Pulse, he knew they were in a tower more than half a kilometer tall. They were not in a city but some kind of castle or fort instead, with only a few supporting buildings below... though it did look like the place had once been a lot busier.

"The small kingdom I hail from was a vassal state of the empire that ruled our continent at the time. Seeing as I proved myself exceptional, I soon traveled to the empire as they were recruiting anyone talented to try and understand how our world had changed," the First Sage continued, leading Jake to a small balcony that gave them a great look at the surrounding area.

"In retrospect, it was impressive the empire survived the integration. It lost huge swaths of land, but the emperor was decisive and embraced the system quicker than nearly anyone else. He encouraged exploring the system even after some religious groups called it the work of evil."

Jake looked at the vast land in front of him and saw it was quite a bit different from where he had first appeared. Large fissures had opened up where had once been farmland, confirmed by Jake still seeing some remnants of farms here and there.

Yet what caught his eye more than anything else was something far in the distance. An area covered in darkness wherefrom Jake felt an ominous aura... one he didn't expect to feel in a newly initiated world:

Desolation.

"That there is a place known as the Desolates. You can see only the edge of it, but the desolation consumed much of the continent, creating a no-go zone. To be clear, the concept of desolation there is weak enough for D-grades to travel relatively effortlessly. At least the edges of it. It grows more powerful the closer you get to the center," the First Sage explained, Jake instantly putting two and two together.

"The Viper was known as the Wyvern of the Desolates..."

"Yes, that right there is indeed the birthplace of who will one day be known as the Malefic Viper. Right now, he is simply struggling to survive, being nothing more than a small snake surrounded by far more dangerous predators. His circumstances forced him to develop intelligence and cunning to survive, leading him down a rather unique Path that will one day result in him becoming a dragon."

"On the day he leaves the planet," Jake nodded, remembering the mural from the Challenge Dungeon where he began his Path as an Alchemist of the Malefic Viper.

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"Indeed," the First Sage nodded, giving Jake a proud smile. "You know quite a lot about your Patron. Things I wouldn't expect."

"Well, he did kind of brag about evolving into a dragon and taking to the stars through a big mural in a Challenge Dungeon... but besides that, is it weird for friends to know each other?" Jake shrugged.

"I guess not," the First Sage just shook his head as he walked toward the edge of the balcony. Jake followed along without really thinking about it as the old man motioned for Jake to join him in getting on the railing.

Jake did so, and right as he stood on it, the entire railing fell apart, Jake and the First Sage falling along with it as suddenly Jake felt himself far up in the sky freefalling. Beside him, the First Sage had grown once more as his aura changed. The source of this content is ***novel~fire~net***

**[Human – lvl 141]**

Far below them, Jake saw a vast army marching forth, approaching the Desolates.

“As humanity explored and conquered more and more of the world, the Desolates, which was frighteningly close to the empire, quickly became a nuisance... especially as it was spreading. Armies were sent in there to try and find the center and hopefully the source of the desolation, but to no avail.”

Time began to fast-forward as Jake saw the entire army turn to bone that crumbled into dust. Jake and the First Sage also sped up their falling as very quickly they landed on the ground not far from the edge of the desolation.

“After countless expeditions failed, people began to grow panicked, and all of the greatest minds were tasked with trying to find a solution.”

Raising a hand, the First Sage used some kind of magic as a white line was drawn all along the border of the Desolates, stopping the spread and containing the desolation.

“I was the one who found this solution and stopped the spread of the desolation. For this accomplishment, the emperor gave me the title of First Sage,” the man explained his origin story.

“What kind of magic is this?” Jake asked as he looked at the white line. Jake believed he was pretty good at analyzing and recognizing magic, but this white line made no sense to him. It may as well have been made of glowing chalk for all he knew.

“It’s from a Transcendent skill,” the First Sage answered casually. “You can view it as creating the opposite of desolation to cancel out the concept.”

“Was this the first Transcendent skill you made?” Jake questioned with wide eyes.

“No,” the old man just shook his head.

“I see... say, this may be too much to ask, but how many Transcendent skills did you have?” Jake asked, really wanting an answer to that one.

The First Sage smiled at Jake as he looked toward the sky. “The system was a lot more... flawed back in the day. It allowed more than it does in your time, and I happened to be there at a time when more was allowed than usual. I will not say more than that, but suffice to say, I took advantage.”

Jake kept looking at the white line drawn across the land. Seconds passed, and he just couldn’t help himself anymore.

“How strong are you really?” Jake questioned. It was a simplistic and dumb question, but would Jake really be Jake if he hadn’t asked it?

The First Sage didn’t feel strong, yet every fiber of Jake’s being was screaming at him to not try and do anything to the man. It didn’t make any sense, and if Jake didn’t have

such an extreme level of trust in his own instincts and intuition, he would have felt like something was wrong with it.

“Another complicated question,” the First Sage sighed. “Before I can even begin to answer, what do you mean when you ask how strong I am? Are you asking about my level? Total stat points? The potency of my aura? Potential? What does it truly mean to be strong?”

“It’s not that complicated,” Jake muttered. “Power is the ability to never allow anyone to trample on you... and for that to be the case, you need to be able to defeat others. To me, the strongest is someone who can defeat everyone else, simple as that.”

“What if there is only one other person who can equally match you in the world? Are you still the strongest?” the First Sage asked. “What if there are eleven others who can equally match you? What if you and these eleven each have a mix of good matchups, meaning you have a higher chance to win against some but not others? Who is the strongest then?”

“You’re talking about the Primordials,” Jake pointed out the obvious.

The First Sage didn’t say anything as he lowered his gaze and looked into the Desolates. “Sometimes, balance is the most important, not determining who is the strongest. Keeping things simple is fine but within reason.”

“Alright, then change the definition to the strongest being someone powerful enough so that no one can kill them,” Jake sighed.

“So, to you, Minaga is the strongest?” the First Sage chuckled before turning serious. “Enough. Being the strongest is a good goal to strive for, but it’s no destination you want to ever reach.”

Jake wanted to ask more but got silent as he decided to take a shot he really didn’t feel would work. “Can you show me the most powerful opponent you ever killed while alive?”

“The strongest... isn’t feasible. Nothing I can show would be useful in the slightest and may even prove detrimental,” the First Sage sighed and shook his head. “The way I defeated powerful opponents is not something that can be replicated, nor anything you can learn from.”

“Isn’t that up to me to determine?” Jake asked a bit defyingly. If there was one thing Jake was proud of, it was his Perception and ability to analyze things using it. It was the sole reason why Path of the Heretic-Chosen had been such an awesome skill for him in the first place... and to see a feat of strength from the First Sage, who Jake felt very damn certain was fucking overpowered had to be beneficial... right?

Oh, how wrong he was.

“Fine,” the First Sage sighed again. “I can show you something as we jump forward in time more than I would prefer. I will also offer no explanation after as we get back on track and continue our journey down memory lane. Agree?”

“Agree,” Jake said, falsely believing he had just gotten some kind of victory.

“Let’s go, then,” the First Sage said. “What we will see next is a memory of mine, and we will both have to be non-present for it.”

Jake wasn’t sure what the old man meant by this as he walked forward, crossing over the white line leading into the Desolates. The second his foot stepped down on the gray and dead ground, the two of them appeared in the middle of... nothing.

Pure darkness all around, except for the First Sage’s body slightly glowing. He and Jake had both turned into ghostly forms as they floated there, Jake unsure what he was supposed to see, and really surprised to see them in space. C-grades usually didn’t explore space, and this wasn’t just some solar system exploration either... this was deep space.

“One of the areas known as a great void. While not actually part of the Void, the concept has begun to bleed through here,” the First Sage said, offering the only explanation he would give for what happened next.

As if on cue, a figure appeared in the distance. Jake saw another – a tangible – version of the First Sage walking through space as every step brought him forward a distance Jake couldn’t even properly measure. He was fast... way too fucking fast. Yet Jake distinctly felt this version of the First Sage was indeed still only a C-grade, and to his surprise, even Identify worked.

### **[Human – lvl 349]**

The First Sage kept traveling forward at speed Jake doubted even an S-grade Sandy could match, as suddenly he stopped and turned his head.

“How bothersome,” the First Sage muttered, yet he seemed as if he had expected what happened next to happen.

A crack in nothingness formed as something came out. A tendril of pure nothingness stretched through, tearing the void as something sought to emerge. Jake instantly felt a headache coming on as he stared at these tendrils, but the ghostly version of the First Sage waved his hand as what looked like a glass panel appeared in front of Jake, allowing him to see what was about to happen without taking any damage from viewing what Jake instinctively knew was a Void Dweller.

It was a being comparable to a god... a creature that gods who traveled through the void feared. Tearing through space and time, the creature slowly began to emerge, its body struggling to maintain itself in this semi-void area of space.

The C-grade First Sage looked at this creature emerge as he spoke.

**“Slow.”**

Jake felt the entire world warp around the First Sage as if time itself slowed down in his immediate surroundings. Just in time, too. A tendril from the Void Dweller shot forward; Jake only able to register it happening due to the warped time.

What was left of space trembled and shattered as the First Sage was about to be struck as he spoke.

**“Delay.”**

The tendril didn't even touch the First Sage, as his entire body was atomized from merely being close to the Void Dweller. One moment, he was there, and the next, he was simply erased by the powers of the void... yet his presence remained... his death delayed.

**“Pause.”**

Calmly, his voice echoed through the void, unable to be suppressed by even a being with the powers of a god. A faint outline of the First Sage formed where he had been killed only moments prior as he lifted a finger and pointed toward the Void Dweller.

**“Reversal.”**

The tentacles of the half-emerged Void Dweller stopped moving entirely... and a second later, its body began to drift, getting torn apart by space as energy had left its being. The creature's body had suffered no damage... yet Jake knew.

Its soul had been extinguished... the fate of the dead First Sage shared with the Void Dweller.

**“Return.”**

For a final time, the voice of the First Sage echoed as his atomized body gathered into one again, forming his body. With a wave of his hand, a new robe appeared on his body as he turned and stepped down again, continuing his journey as the slain Void Dweller floated behind him while slowly disintegrating. The entire encounter had only taken a few seconds.

Jake could only stare, barely able to comprehend what he'd seen... but he did know one thing.

Every single word spoken during that encounter had been a Transcendent Skill... and the First Sage had long transcended beyond the concept of merely being overpowered.

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## Chapter 1045: To Leave Empty-Handed

The world shifted again as Jake found himself transported out of the semi-void back to standing within a tower once more. However, despite the change in environment, he just kept staring into thin air as the “fight” he'd just seen replayed in his head.

Calling it a fight at all felt wrong.

It was more a display of absolute dominance. An effortless one, done simply as a chore as if the man had swatted a fly bothering him. What's more... the concepts innate to his Path of the Heretic-Chosen remained in effect, which was why Jake assumed he understood so much of what had happened.

The First Sage had first slowed down time to give him enough leeway to react against a creature with god-tier powers. If not for this, he simply wouldn't have been able to respond at all.

Secondly, he delayed his own death. Jake clearly saw that his body was destroyed; the entire soul of the First Sage shattered alongside it, entirely consumed and destroyed, yet his death was delayed.

He then paused the state of his destroyed body and soul for a brief moment before doing... something. He called it reversal, but to Jake, it looked more as if he swapped the state of being between himself and the Void Dweller. It changed so that the Void Dweller was the one who had its soul destroyed and the First Sage unharmed.

Then, all he had to do was return his body to a state before he delayed his death.

During it all, he had used no energy or power in the classical sense. Everything had been purely conceptual. It was magic dealing in the realm of absolutes. Questions of dead or alive, states of being, and relative perception of reality. It all seemed so... binary.

Every single action had to be perfect. The First Sage couldn't miss any timings by even a fraction of a second, or he would have truly died – in fact, he did die before reversing that state of being.

All of it had been at such a high level Jake couldn't help but question... could anyone survive that? Could the First Sage kill anyone using a move like that? Would even the Malefic Viper stand a chance?

... would Jake, no matter how strong he ever became, be able to even resist? For the longest time, Jake had confidence in himself that even if he wasn't the strongest right now, he had the potential to one day be. He wanted complete freedom through power... but could he ever attain such a thing if beings like the First Sage were even able to exist?

What the fuck could Jake's so-called "overpowered" Bloodline do in front of a fucking delete-button?

**Thump!**

Jake felt a pulse echo through his body as the thought appeared. His heart was beating fast, as if his body was rejecting the very notion of powerlessness. Instead, a sense of determination flooded his mind.

There were no true absolutes in the system. If there was a Transcendence that allowed what the First Sage just did, there had to also be one that allowed someone to avoid or survive it. If not a Transcendence... then he felt it from his Bloodline. It didn't only reject his sense of powerlessness, but from deep inside, a sense of certainty appeared.

*That couldn't have killed me.*

Jake had no logical explanation for this certainty. He just had it. He just knew that the First Sage wouldn't have been able to destroy his soul in the same way.

With determination, Jake took a deep breath as he looked up at the First Sage who had been standing there waiting. The old man made eye contact with Jake before smiling, giving him an approving nod.

"Let's continue." Google search novel●fire●net

There was no need to say anything more. They'd already agreed Jake wouldn't ask any questions about what he'd seen, and Jake planned on sticking to that promise. The First Sage also looked like he wasn't going to volunteer any information as the two of them began walking down a set of stairs.

"This tower was where I first met Vilas," the First Sage said.

“But you’d observed him from afar before that,” Jake commented.

“True, a few times. I had to confirm some things,” the First Sage nodded, not even trying to deny it. “Have you heard about how we met?”

“Something about you catching him breaking into your tower?”

“Exactly. Of course, I knew Vilas would come, and one could even say I halfway baited him. I knew I had something he wanted, making it only a matter of time before he would try to infiltrate the tower,” the First Sage nodded with a proud look.

“His methods were truly unique. The talent he had for manipulating energy and even Records back then was already astonishing. He’d already learned how to change his status, and using that, he posed as a human. In the realm of fooling others and being covert, he was and still is truly only second to Eversmile.”

“Why did you take him as your disciple in the first place?” Jake asked a question he reckoned was rather important.

“He asked me,” the First Sage simply responded.

“You just admitted to baiting him to come... you wanted him as your disciple; don’t act as if you were just being kind because he asked,” Jake said sharply.

“Doesn’t change the fact I wouldn’t have taken him in if he hadn’t asked me,” the First Sage said, not a hint of regret of how he handled things. “But yes, I did want him as my disciple. He was the most talented individual from our homeworld, bar none. I wanted someone to carry on my Records and Legacy, and he truly was the only option.”

“Did you know he would become a god already back then?” Jake asked as they went through the tower floor by floor, Jake recognizing some things from prior visions there.

“To say I knew would be inaccurate, but I did expect him to,” the First Sage said, being the first person Jake had ever heard confidently say he believed someone else would become a god. “Perhaps saying expect is too much... becoming a god is no easy feat, but I believed he could do it.”

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The tour of the tower continued as the First Sage switched topics and began talking about his life in the empire and the time he had spent with Villy as they descended floor after floor. Jake learned a lot of interesting details and asked his fair share of questions, gathering plenty of potential ammunition to make fun of Villy with later.

When they reached the bottom floor, their location once more changed, but not to somewhere new. Instead, they returned to where they had first started, back in the library the First Sage had worked in for so many years before the integration. The library looked a lot older and worn down now, making it clear many years had passed since Jake was first there.

Also, this time, they weren't alone... instead two other people were already there with Jake and the First Sage back in their ghostly forms. The two people already present in the library were naturally the First Sage, who sat in a chair while the familiar form of the C-grade Malefic Viper stood in front of him.

The First Sage on the chair looked a lot different than the one Jake had been walking with, though. His beard was a lot grayer now, wrinkles covered his face, and he looked thinner and sickly. Despite his sunken eyes, the old man still gave off a powerful aura... but it was clear to all that it was waning.

"This is the day I died," the First Sage who stood beside Jake said with a light smile.

Jake turned back and saw the Malefic Viper standing in front of the First Sage. His mouth moved, but Jake didn't hear any words come out, neither did he hear the First Sage's answer, no sound present for this part.

The Malefic Viper spoke again, Jake seeing his frustration before he saw something Jake really hadn't expected to see. Villy started pleading, tears welling up in his eyes, but the old man sitting in front of him just shook his head and gave a comforting smile. It was clear that Jake and the other First Sage had entered this conversation toward its ending, and the Viper looked almost listless at this point.

Villy was unwilling... but eventually, he just nodded and sighed. The Viper stood up and went over to the First Sage who still sat in his chair. The old man looked up and gave a final comforting nod as the Viper embraced his head in a hug. As he did so, the hands of the Viper began to glow green as the remaining life force of the First Sage left his body.

The Viper hugged the dead man tighter as tears streamed down his face. The body of the First Sage turned into pure energy soon after, slipping out of his grasp as Villy fell to his knees. That's where the image cut off, leaving only Jake himself as their bodies came corporeal.

"I never had a family... not besides the one I was born into," the First Sage spoke. "Once, when I was a young man, I did have someone I loved. However, sickness took her. We humans were just so fragile before the system. I never dared get close to anyone after that, and I cannot even begin to imagine the pain if I had lost a child, which was why I never had any. However... I cannot deny that Vilas did become family, unintended or not..."

He turned to Jake. "I hadn't seen the last part of that vision myself... I was gone, after all. I learned something new about myself... you have my thanks for that."

Jake was silent for a moment as he stared at the empty chair the First Sage had died in.

"Why did you do it?"

"I told you, it had to be don--"

"Not that," Jake said as he turned to the First Sage. "Why did you force him to kill you like that? You can have a million fucking excuses, but why couldn't you have given him a proper explanation. Why the fuck didn't you tell him some of all the shit you're telling me now? You clearly knew he would one day get your Bloodline... so why force him into making this kind of memory?"

Jake couldn't help but feel angry as he clenched his fists. He'd never seen his friend in that much pain, all of it caused by the First Sage, who still refused to give a proper reason.

"The reason he told me you wanted to die was because the memories of loss were too much for you to handle... but that's clearly bullshit," Jake said, not seeing any reason to hold back.

"It wasn't the entire truth, no," the First Sage sighed. "To be clear, I was overwhelmed by my memories, and the burden of life was wearing on me, but you are right. I didn't die simply due to that. I understand what I did wasn't fair, but believe me when I say that if I had lived, there wouldn't be a Malefic Viper today. I *had* to die for your future to exist."

"That's the best explanation I'm gonna get, huh..." Jake muttered, far from satisfied. "You know the Viper knew there was a chance I could communicate with you like this, and I asked him if there was anything he wanted to know... do you know what he wanted me to ask?"

The First Sage was quiet as Jake was still angry.

"He asked how come someone as brilliant as you never found a solution to the emotions of loss that caused your death. How someone who would clearly have become the first god could just give up like that. Or, you know, if you just had some higher goal in mind," Jake said. "He asked the last part with a lot of hope... and the first as if he was also looking for a good answer to the question of how to deal with the sadness himself."

The First Sage stared at where he had died and sighed. "I would answer that there is no solution... at least not a good one. The closest thing I found was to always live with a goal. To always have something to strive toward. A reason to live. Also, to find comfort

by knowing that through you, the memories of those you cared for will live on eternally... and should you die, their memory will die with you."

Jake was silent as he memorized the words to share with Villy later. However, he wasn't satisfied. "Do you have anything else you want to say to him?"

It took a few moments as the man was thinking before he smiled. "Just tell him to remember that as long as my memory lives on, my Records and thus proof of my existence will always remain. Also, not to stroke his ego too much, but he became far more brilliant than I ever imagined. I couldn't be prouder."

Once more they were silent for a little before Jake sighed. "That's why you wanted me to know your life story, right? You wanted a second person to know about you, thus ensuring the survival of your Records."

"In part, yes. However, it isn't truly necessary for you to remember or know about me," the First Sage shook his head. "However, I do believe it best you do. I also believe it best you get a greater understanding of your Patron and friend. Vilas is powerful, and he rarely shows his true emotions. However, when they do show, the result can be drastic if not catastrophic."

Jake just nodded, not having to be told that twice. The entire reason the Malefic Viper had gone into isolation in the first place was because of a powerful emotional response leading to what was still considered the biggest disaster in the history of the multiverse, even so many eras later.

"After I died, Vilas was hurting, and he took out the hurt on the world around him. At this point, he had no match anymore, having long proven himself the most powerful creature on the planet. With me gone, there was simply no reason to keep the world around as he went on a rampage, resulting in all life being destroyed, the world turned desolate."

"Sometimes what you remember seems very inconsistent," Jake muttered, wondering aloud how the First Sage knew of events happening shortly following his death when he claimed he didn't know what happened only a few seconds after.

"Perhaps it can appear so, but I have not lied to you once," the First Sage smiled, the two of them standing a while in the library. Jake wasn't really sure what more to say at this point, and the vision was bound to be coming to an end sooner rather than later now that they were done going through their walk down memory lane.

Jake wasn't even sure what he'd wanted out of this meeting with the First Sage in the first place. Not outside of sating his own curiosity anyway. True, he hadn't gotten any tangible benefits from the encounter, but that didn't mean he regretted it. He knew that the Records from this had to hold some value, and he'd learned a lot about Villy and, in part, even himself.

“Once more, thank you for this encounter,” the First Sage said after what had to be nearly half a minute of silence. “I feel like I’m the only one who’s truly benefitted from this encounter, but allow me to benefit some more by having you carry more of my Records into your time.”

The man turned to Jake. “Not to say this won’t benefit you. See it as my way of paying you back for being a good friend of my disciple. Besides, It also only seems proper not to have you leave entirely empty-handed.”

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## Chapter 1046: A Sagacious Opportunity

“Not going to lie, I kind of expected my reward for this would purely be Records,” Jake said after the First Sage mentioned he wouldn’t let Jake leave empty-handed. Something he truly didn’t feel like he was even if he left here and now.

“In some ways, no matter what you gain, it will have purely been Records... but I understand what you mean. Records are certainly part of the reward, but it is as much a reward for me as you. No, it’s only fair of me to give you something more tangible, something not made purely of my Records.”

“What, you’re gonna teach me a Transcendent skill or something?” Jake asked jokingly.

“A Transcendent skill cannot be taught, only learned through personal enlightenment not influenced by any other forms of transcendent insight. Something I believe you will have a very hard time ever achieving due to your Bloodline being so all-encompassing,” the First Sage shook his head.

Jake gave the old man a look asking for him to elaborate, making the First Sage smile.

“I asked you who you were when we first met, and while you did give me a surface-level answer, it didn’t really tell me much. As you’ve observed my life, so have I observed your reactions to everything,” the First Sage said, waving his hand as the library was instantly cleaned up, looking new once more. He motioned for Jake to take a seat at the same table as before, which he promptly did.

“You react to external stimuli instantly, your subconscious mind making you respond before your conscious one can even catch up, yet your reactions remain sound. Moreover, you don’t really look at things a lot of the time, yet you know what’s going on anyway. Despite displays of power or immediate changes in surrounding, you never

flinch or put up your guard, as if you know that no danger is posed to you. Usually, even when a person knows they're within a vision where no harm can come to them, they'll still instinctively react to what could be a danger... yet you don't," the First Sage continued.

"It's obvious to me that Perception is by far your highest stat, but there's so much more than that. You also didn't react even when the Void Dweller was seen, at least not to its aura. All of this makes me believe that your Bloodline is innately tied to your instincts, if not your senses in general, seeing as you have some kind of omnidirectional detection as part of your Bloodline. I also feel something hidden deeper inside, something even more powerful... likely what led to you being what you are. A human more human than any other."

Jake didn't exactly feel great about being analyzed this deeply, nor the fact anyone was capable of it.

"Am I that obvious?" Jake muttered.

"No, I'm just good at distinguishing if someone is using a skill, Bloodline, or Transcendence. Bloodlines tend to be more passive in nature or become automatically applied when certain actions are taken, and, like me, yours is constantly active. However, even when Bloodlines are active, there is a spectrum. You are familiar with Nature's Attendant and his Bloodline to communicate with all plant-life, I take it? His Bloodline is also technically always active but only a small part of it. It's only when he communicates actively you can see it get even close to being fully active."

Jake nodded along, once more done questioning how and why the First Sage knew certain things he really bloody shouldn't.

"Yours is highly active at all times, meaning you are constantly using many aspects of it. This in itself isn't surprising, considering I believe it has many passive elements... what is surprising is that I can feel there's a lot more hidden. If I'm correct, you are actively suppressing aspects of your Bloodline, likely because it's too powerful for your current body and soul to fully handle it," the First Sage continued.

So far, he hadn't said anything wrong. Jake was suppressing his Bloodline by making his Sphere of Perception smaller and only releasing pulses, as having it fully active at all times indeed wasn't something he could handle. Hearing the First Sage mention it couldn't help but give Jake hope.

"Do you have a solution?" Jake asked expectedly.

"I do indeed," the First Sage nodded, Jake getting excited at the prospect... right until he heard the answer: "Evolve."

Jake deflated and sighed. "I kind of hoped for something faster."

“Matters of the Bloodline cannot be solved through external factors,” the First Sage shook his head. “It’s your Bloodline. It revolves around the dominion of your Truesoul. I wouldn’t even want to try and help you, as doing so would be to trespass on territory I feel like I’m very much not welcome.”

“Good point,” Jake sighed. Yeah, Jake would definitely have an adverse reaction if the First Sage tried to do anything that had to do with his Bloodline.

“The root cause of your issue isn’t even a problem in the first place,” the First Sage explained as he looked at Jake deeply. “Your current body simply isn’t capable of properly handling your Bloodline, meaning the strain you would be under if it was fully active would likely prove detrimental if not outright fatal.”

“I know,” Jake sighed. He was fully aware his Bloodline was far too powerful for him to truly handle.

“This may seem like a change of topic, but do you know what happens when someone relatively weak gets an extremely powerful high-rarity skill?” the First Sage asked. “Say if the average mid-tier C-grade got a mythical skill?”

“No?” Jake asked, confused.

“It’s extremely rare, but there have been instances where individuals got skills too powerful for them to handle. Of course, with the skills being system-granted, some level of protection is built-in, but it’s not always enough,” the First Sage began explaining.

“Using the skill will, even under ideal circumstances, be akin to using a powerful boosting skill. They will strain their bodies immensely, with repeat uses potentially resulting in soul damage or even death. The reason this happens is because they are simply too weak for their own skill. Their body cannot handle it. Take that very same skill and give it to someone like you with far higher stats, and you would be able to handle it without suffering any weakness afterward, as the skill would fit the person.”

“You’re saying I’m like that with my Bloodline?” Jake questioned.

“Precisely. The stronger you get, the more you will be able to handle your own Bloodline. At least, that’s my theory. I reckon after evolving to B-grade, you will be able to fully handle your Bloodline,” the First Sage explained.

Jake was surprised and breathed out a sigh of relief... as he asked something without thinking: “Even with the Bloodline also evolving, right?”

For perhaps the very first time in their conversation, the First Sage stared at Jake, a face full of confusion as if whatever Jake had asked was either the stupidest or most surprising thing he could have ever said.

“What do you mean when you say it evolves?” the First Sage asked calmly as he leaned forward.

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At that moment, Jake knew he'd fucked up and said too much. Villy had warned Jake many times not to talk about his Bloodline in detail, but in this conversation with the First Sage, he had kind of let his secrets just flow freely out. He'd let down his guard and wasn't sure how to get out of this one or if he should just answer truthfully.

In the end... he was already in too deep, and Jake saw no world where he could make up a convincing lie or story in the moment. He also didn't want to just deny elaborating, so he decided to at least be a little truthful.

“As you said, my body can't handle my full Bloodline, so I believe the system restricted it somehow,” Jake shrugged, trying to act a bit more ignorant than he actually was. It wasn't a lie that he didn't know why it was evolving, though he did have his own theories.

The First Sage looked at Jake for a few seconds before he smiled. “I'm beginning to see why Vilas believes you worthy of being a friend. You're a rather interesting one. I will admit, I did have a hard time seeing how you and my disciple could ever be friends considering how different you are. He is a schemer by nature, someone who uses cunning to achieve victory. Meanwhile, you seem like the kind who prefers to just kick down the door and start fighting.”

“Hey!” Jake said, acting all offended. “I wouldn't kick down the door... I would blow off the roof with an arrow.”

“Same result,” the old man shook his head. “I want to ask more, but seeing as I haven't been the most forthcoming either, I shall also allow you to keep your secrets. The world is ultimately more interesting when there are still unknowns left to ponder.”

Jake was surprised the old man gave up that easily, but he definitely wasn't complaining. The First Sage looked at Jake for a few seconds before he spoke again.

“I believe we have been off-topic enough. Our time is still limited, so let us not delay any further. As you recall, our first meeting happened during the time Vilas was forming what would one day become his Legacy skill known as Sagacity of the Malefic Viper,” the First Sage said, Jake perking up as he knew what was coming next would be important.

“You too possess this Legacy skill, I feel, but its Records appear a bit... hollow. Usually, the way to get this skill is to learn a variety of different disciplines of alchemical crafting to a certain level and study enough alchemical ingredients to pass a certain threshold,

along with a few other requirements, all while of course having sufficient Records related to the Malefic Viper... but you didn't do any but the last of these things, did you?"

"No, my way of getting it was a bit more... novel, I would say," Jake answered truthfully. The only reason Jake had unlocked Sagacity when he had was because of the drop of blood he consumed during his Trial of Myriad Poisons. That drop contained so much knowledge it was enough to qualify Jake to get the skill way back then. It had been a massive lucky break; no two ways about it.

"You consumed something containing a massive amount of Records, didn't you... would you allow me to look more closely?" he asked, holding out a hand.

Jake was hesitant but felt no danger as he nodded and let the old man touch his hand. The moment he made contact, it was as if an electric current ran through his body, and he felt his heartbeat begin to speed up right as the First Sage let go again.

"I only took a little peek," the First Sage smiled, shaking his head. "To consume a drop of blood infused with Records of a Primordial while still remaining who you are... my curiosity continues growing. Alas, I've benefitted enough, and now it's your turn."

The First Sage looked at Jake. "I will not decide for you, nor will I give you anything but an opportunity. I do not plan on saddling you with more of my Records, which is why Sagacity is the perfect skill to upgrade, as it already innately contains some of my Records, even in the Malefic Viper's version. I can help you unlock some of the Records innate to the skill by using the drop of blood as a catalyst while merging it with a few of my own insights."

Jake listened intently while nodding along, knowing this was an opportunity.

"Whatever you gain will be solely up to you, but do be warned that the process won't be pleasant," the old man warned. "What do you say? Are you interested?"

Jake failed to suppress a smile as he looked at the old man. "Not gonna say no to an opportunity."

He also couldn't help but notice that the First Sage would infuse Jake with even more of his own Records, not that Jake was complaining. Having seen the power of the First Sage, he couldn't see a world where having the man's Records wouldn't be beneficial."

"Very well," the First Sage said as he lifted his hand and pointed a finger at Jake's forehead. "Good luck."

Without any warning, they just jumped right into it. A beam of light hit Jake before he could even react, making Jake instantly close his eyes and send his consciousness into his Soulspace as he used Serene Soul Meditation.

He appeared within his soul just in time to see a beam of light descend upon the drop of the Malefic Viper's Blood floating in there. The moment this light hit the droplet, a shockwave erupted from it, washing over Jake's entire Soulspace as he fell to his knees. Follow current NOVELS on [novel★fire★net](#)

An immense headache assaulted his mind as the drop of blood released an inexhaustible torrent of knowledge fueled by the beam of light that didn't show any signs of fading.

Jake felt almost similar to when he unlocked a new skill and was infused with innate knowledge, except this case was far worse. In fact, the best comparison he could make was the times he had failed to suppress his Sphere of Perception, and the information provided by that overwhelmed him.

It was also similar in the fashion that Jake instantly knew he could make everything stop... but the moment he did, he would have no way of starting things back up again. If he fainted, everything would also end, but Jake had no intention of letting his consciousness fade away.

If Jake was confident in one thing, it was his stubbornness and refusal to give up, and just like the Trial of Myriad Poisons back then, he had no intentions of backing down before he had extracted every shred of benefits he could get from this.

Knowledge continually flooded his mind as Jake took everything in as well as he could, trying to internalize it all. However, he quickly noticed that with every passing second, everything intensified. The beam of light that struck the drop of blood grew denser as the Records released improved not only in quantity but quality.

Jake barely registered the first system notification of an upgrade as he even pushed himself to stand up within his Soulspace. Despite everything, Jake forced himself forward as he took heavy steps toward the maelstrom of Records being released from the droplet of blood.

He took everything in as his eyes remained determined. He refused to faint and instead drew closer to the blood. Even as his vision blurred and he felt his mind muddle as a headache unlike any other assaulted him, he didn't stop.

Step by step, he drew closer. Images flashed in his head as he knew things he'd never even heard of mere moments ago, new disciplines of alchemy that he had never even studied innately becoming familiar.

Yet Jake kept feeling like it wasn't enough. He also knew that no matter how much he was trying to hold on, with the ever-increasing intensity, it was only a matter of time... so he took a final gamble.

Pushing through, Jake soon stood before the drop of blood as his form within Soulspace distorted. He reached out, his hand getting destroyed and remade constantly as it drew closer to the droplet right until Jake had his hand right in front of it.

His mind was on the verge of giving up as the faint sound of a heartbeat echoed throughout his Soulspace, and a final flood of focus went through Jake's body, his soul momentarily fully stabilizing as Jake clenched his fist around the droplet of blood.

What could only be called a tsunami of Records and knowledge instantly flooded Jake's mind as the beam of light sent in by the First Sage hit Jake's body as well as the droplet of blood directly.

A massive shockwave instantly blasted Jake back from the drop of blood as the beam disappeared and the droplet of blood calmed. Jake's body within the Soulspace faded away as it was blasted back, his consciousness fading as a faint smile marred his lips as the final thing that entered his mind was a notification.

### **[Sagacity of the Malefic Viper (Legendary)]**

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**[Sagacity of the Malefic Viper (Mythical)] – The blood of the Malefic One, combined with the teachings of a sage, leads you toward omniscience. Allows the Alchemist to extract knowledge from a fragment of the Malefic Viper's Records to claim his knowledge as your own. Grants the Alchemist of the Malefic Viper a far better understanding of mana and most affinities. Grants the Alchemist knowledge of a myriad of alchemical ingredients, allowing him to far more easily identify them. Allows the Alchemist to make creations he does not have the associated crafting skill for (if no associated skill is found, a small bonus to stat effectiveness shall still be provided). You can freely modify and change the displayed information of anything you create, fooling most identify skills. Knowledge further increases Records infused when crafting. Passively provides 9 Wisdom per level in Alchemist of the Malefic Viper (C-grade variant). May your search for knowledge be as inexhaustible as the Malefic One as you strive to prove yourself worthy of being considered a sage.**

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Back in the library, the First Sage looked at the fainted human before him. He appeared in thought for a moment before he spoke:

"I changed my mind... let's also give him a gift of my own Origin."

Assuming Jake would wake up in time to receive it, of course.

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## Chapter 1047: One Final Lesson

It became clear rather swiftly that they still had time for the First Sage to give Jake a final opportunity, as he was only unconscious for about half a minute before his eyes opened once more. He raised his head slowly and met the eyes of the First Sage.

“Willingly knocking yourself out and remaining knocked out to better accommodate the influx of knowledge and Records is quite the novel strategy,” the First Sage spoke in his usual calm tone as his gaze hinted he was at least somewhat impressed.

“Yeah... seemed to be the best response,” Jake said with a nod, still not entirely clear-headed. He’d wanted to get as much knowledge out of the drop of blood as humanly possible, to the level of nearly harming his own soul. It had been pushed right to the limit before Jake had – as the First Sage said – allowed himself to be knocked out.

Once knocked out, the Records and knowledge he’d absorbed would have time to settle in his unconscious mind without Jake having to suffer through the experience. Jake had, for all intents and purposes, deterred absorbing some of the knowledge after absorbing it, getting him a more than satisfactory result as he’d just gained his very first mythical rarity Legacy skill from the Viper.

This upgrade did feel very weird, though. Normally, when Jake upgraded his Legacy skills, he had a plan for how he wanted to upgrade it, but this time around, he really didn’t. Sure, he had some thoughts before entering this vision about how he could potentially upgrade the skill in the future, and the connection it had to the First Sage had also strafed his mind, but nothing had been concrete.

That’s also why the influx of knowledge was so damn extreme this time around. The First Sage had simply unlocked the Records and knowledge already sealed within the drop of blood in Jake’s Soulspace and allowed him to freely bathe in it while absorbing as much as he could.

The result of this was a skill upgrade Jake would take quite a while to digest. Sagacity was innately a skill related to knowledge, so for Jake to get full benefits, he would have to spend way too long sitting and trying to find every little new thing he now suddenly knew...

... or more realistically, never do that and instead only realize how wise he now was when he used Identify and randomly got information he hadn’t expected to get.

Anyhow, Jake could still check out the updated description to see some of the actually tangible gains. The first thing he noticed was that despite becoming mythical, the skill still only gave 9 stats per level. Jake would lie if he said he hadn't hoped for more, but then again, he knew there had to be some kind of limit to how many extra stats he could get.

Despite the First Sage sitting across from him seemingly proving the opposite, the system did tend to have a sense of wanting to maintain balance. Yeah, Jake should just be happy he got nine extra stats, as that was already quite overpowered.

The second benefit from the upgraded Sagacity Jake instantly saw was that he would now gain stat effectiveness bonuses even when crafting stuff he didn't have a specific skill for. A pleasant surprise for sure, and one that would no doubt benefit Jake in ways he hadn't even quite yet realized. It also meant that he was now more incentivized to broaden his scope of crafting a bit more.

Third was a benefit Jake hadn't even thought about, but should really have considered: the ability to manipulate displayed Records of crafted items. Jake knew that Villy was able to change descriptions to fool people – such as the time he made a party of adventurers drink poison they thought were health potions – but he hadn't known if that was related to his Legacy.

In retrospect, this really shouldn't have come as a surprise. In the arts of poisonering, being able to change descriptions and hide something's toxic nature was pretty standard. Many were even offered skills to hide the poison as far back as F-grade, even if Jake had never seen a skill or an upgrade to a skill allowing him to do it.

This was likely because Jake wasn't keen on hiding his poison. He instead focused on just making the most potent concoction possible for maximum damage, and rather than fool an opponent into drinking spiked tea, he would rather just throw the poisoned tea cup in someone's face to get the fight started. In the simplest terms... hiding his poison was toxic just wasn't really a part of Jake's Path.

The upgraded Sagacity was far more than just hiding information on poisons, though. It allowed him to change the display information on *all* things he crafted, be they potions, poisons, or anything else. However, while the skill clearly stated Jake could freely modify and change the displayed information, he instinctively knew there were some limitations.

Not to say it was a lie; Jake could freely change the descriptions, just that the more he changed something, the easier it became to see through by others. If Jake wanted to change a health potion to display that it was actually a "potion of instant-godhood," even an F-grade who'd just gotten the Identify skill would be able to see through his bullshit.

Hiding that a potion was actually a poison... now that was a lot simpler as both were liquids interacting with the health pool. Of course, Jake would have to do a lot more

experimentation to truly grasp the full effects of changing Identify descriptions. He did have quite a few ideas, though... including how to maybe hide that any Grimoire he made was a bit too much on the heretical side.

Anyhow, the final change to the skill outside of everything just getting better was the **“Knowledge further increases Records infused when crafting”** sections. At first, this didn’t really read like much, but Jake instantly knew that out of everything... this was perhaps the most important aspect of the upgrade and what truly made it worthy of being considered a mythical rarity skill.

If Jake understood this aspect of the skill correctly, it was effectively an amplifier to every single thing Jake crafted. One that scaled with how familiar he became with a crafting process and a product – something that naturally already resulted in a better outcome. It would mean that Jake double-dipped in getting better at crafting stuff by getting an extra little bonus from Sagacity when doing everything. Now, the actual bonus could be utterly dogshit, but it was still the kind of effect that was just a pure passive bonus, and if Jake knew one thing, it was that passive bonuses tended to be pretty damn overpowered when stacked enough.

Having mentally gone over the most important aspects of the skill upgrade, Jake also felt his head be a lot clearer. He knew he still had a lot to explore, but for now, he didn’t want to waste the time he had remaining with the First Sage by experimenting. There would be plenty of time for that when not in a vision of Records from the past.

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The First Sage also noticed that Jake seemed more clear-headed as he continued speaking.

“Integrating too much knowledge at once can also prove harmful, especially if you cannot digest it all properly,” the man spoke as he tapped a finger on the table. “Your soul got quite strained during that process... disappointingly so.”

Jake was about to say something as he stopped himself. “What do you mean?”

“That it’s weaker than I would have expected,” the First Sage shook his head. “More fragile than it should be... not to mention the fact a wound from a broken skill remains. While it isn’t actively harming you right now, the injury will become part of your soul for good if you don’t manage to fix it quick enough, leaving a permanent scar.”

Without thinking, Jake reached up and touched the small scar he still had on his neck from the fight with the Sword Saint during the Treasure Hunt, something the old man obviously noticed.

“Such a scar isn’t a problem. It’s more a reminder of your Path and an entirely self-imposed one. I don’t feel that it’s a scar left from regret, so it shouldn’t become anything that haunts and hurts your Records,” the First Sage shook his head. READ LATEST

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Jake slowly nodded his head, already kind of aware but still happy for the confirmation. “What do you mean when you say my soul is weaker and more fragile than you expected? I know it’s wounded, but as you said, that shouldn’t be actively weakening it.”

If there was one thing that Jake tended to be pretty damn confident in, it was the power of his soul, which was why he found the First Sage’s words so confusing. Because of his soul, he had managed to tame Eternal Hunger and sealed a cursed creature more than capable of wiping out the entire solar system with ease within his Soulspace. Not to mention all the other stuff he had done.

Shit, even the drop of blood he’d just used to get his skill upgrade was proof of his soul’s power. He had defeated his own scaly version when he absorbed it and avoided getting overwhelmed by the Records of the Viper. Jake had even gone as far as to enter the Soulspace of someone else to help the Demon Prince. There, he had been so much more powerful than even a pinnacle genius similar to his own level... so how the hell was Jake’s soul weak when it was evidently far more powerful than even other peak figures of his own level?

“I can see that you’re skeptical about what I said,” the First Sage smiled. “Don’t get me wrong, your soul is incredibly powerful. It’s on another qualitative level compared to other C-grades your level, no doubt as a consequence of your Bloodline. I can even detect that you integrated some aspects of a cloned soul of yourself... a simulacrum created by the system, I expect. Not even going to ask about that one. My point is that you have a massive innate advantage, which is why I find it so disappointing.”

“Still not sure why that would be disappointing,” Jake said with pure confusion. “Sure, you can argue it isn’t earned, but not like I can do anything about it. I just used the advantages I had.”

“But that’s all you did,” the First Sage said, shaking his head as he leaned back. “Originally, I wanted to end this exchange of Records here. However, after seeing what I just did, I have decided to give you an opportunity. Rather than explaining, I will show you my disappointment and make you understand.”

“How?” Jake asked, slightly unable to hide his excitement and not really at all offended anymore. In truth, getting a skill upgraded to Mythical already made it worth spending five charges of Path of the Heretic-Chosen... but Jake wasn’t going to say no to more.

“You have such confidence in the power of your soul. In your Soulspace. So that is where this lesson shall be taught. I will give you the opportunity to absorb some of my

Records. You have experienced having a manifested soul image with your Soulspace before, correct?"

"Yeah, a few times, and I kind of have one in there right now," Jake nodded as the shadowy version of himself representing Eternal Hunger was in there. "But... not gonna lie, not sure I'm keen in trying to absorb some of your Records directly. Not after seeing what happened to that Void Dweller."

"That apprehension is part of the problem," the First Sage sighed loudly, shaking his head. "No matter. Explaining will only waste whatever precious time we have left. So, tell me, do you wish to take this risk?"

"What exactly are the risks?" Jake asked, not entirely sure what the First Sage was going to do. Absorbing Records could risk one losing themselves and turning into something else than they were before, such as what had nearly happened to the Demon Prince, but Jake felt that wasn't what the First Sage was getting at when he spoke of risks.

"Yes or no," the First Sage simply said, looking Jake in the eyes.

Jake understood then that the "test" had already begun. He considered for a while before ultimately concluding that the First Sage shouldn't want to harm Jake, at least not purposefully.

While he was filled with questions, there were a few things Jake was confident about. One of them was that the First Sage cared about Villy, and with that assumption, he shouldn't want to hurt Villy's friend, right?

It was evident Jake could still end up worse off... but ultimately, nothing ventured nothing gained. The First Sage was dangerous as fuck, no two ways about it, but that also made any benefits Jake could get from him all the more valuable.

"Yes," Jake just said, having resolved himself.

"Very well," the First Sage said as he held out a hand. One of the books flew out from a shelf and landed in his hand, and for a moment, it glowed with energy as the First Sage set it down on the table.

"This book shall be the vessel in which I infuse my Records. You will have a final choice to absorb it, or not once I'm done, but know that should you not, everything will end shortly. There also won't be much time to absorb it, as when I'm done infusing it, the world created by my Records in this vision will begin to crumble," the First Sage explained.

Jake nodded, the First Sage placing his palm on the book which didn't even have a cover or a title. "Then let us not waste time no longer. Prepare yourself."

With his palm on top of the book, the First Sage spoke some words Jake couldn't hear as his entire body started to glow. He looked at Jake a final time before he began to slump over...

Dead.

Jake didn't have time to process much. The instant the First Sage died, the entire world began to crumble around them, and Jake felt that the vision was indeed soon coming to an end.

Without any hesitation, he reached out and grabbed the book, furiously absorbing all the energy from it. A process that proved effortless, as the moment Jake took the book in his hands and actively willed to absorb it, the book began to glow as it blew up into glowing pages that spun around Jake and entered his body. Everything happened in mere moments, and from within his Soulspace, Jake felt something appear as he closed his eyes.

When he opened them again, he found himself standing on the gray ground of his Soulspace, a sky of arcane energy far above. Directly in front of him, spinning glowing pages had appeared. They whirled around before gathering in a single spot and forming the outline of a humanoid figure.

A second and a flash of light later, the First Sage stood in front of Jake within his Soulspace. The moment he did, Jake saw the shadowy version of himself wake up and look toward the two of them, with even the drop of blood from Villy having a reaction.

Jake looked at the man with wide eyes as a faint tinge of doubt entered his mind as he asked himself if he had perhaps fucked up allowing such an entity into his Soulspace.

"Let us begin the final lesson," the First Sage spoke in his usual casual tone as he lifted a foot slightly off the ground. "First task..."

He slammed his foot into the ground within Jake's Soulspace, and the moment he did, Jake felt as if the entire world had been compressed. The sky above drew closer as Jake's field of vision narrowed, and he felt he was getting crushed within his own soul as the voice of the First Sage echoed from everywhere, yet nowhere.

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## Chapter 1048: A Harsh Lesson

This was the first time Jake ever felt any kind of real pressure while within his own Soulspace and he took longer than he probably should have to muster a response. He'd nearly fallen to his knees by the time he braced himself and forced his body to stand as he released a wave of energy stopping the compression, and-

Suddenly, his vision split in two as he saw the First Sage stand with a finger pointing toward the ground. It and everything else was cut in two as Jake was perfectly bisected down the middle, intense pain flooding his mind.

**“Slow.”**

Jake's body instantly regenerated and reformed, only for him to get blasted back with one of his arms exploding like a balloon of blood from him trying to block right at the end.

Just then, some of what slumbered within his Soulspace came alive. A shadowy figure appeared behind the First Sage, wielding a katar and stabbing for his body, but before any attack had time to land, the figure was blasted back...

Only to reappear instantly, but this time, there were five versions of Eternal Hunger attacking at once. However, they were instantly crushed as the space around the First Sage imploded, leaving the sixth – and real – version of Eternal Hunger that had just teleported to appear above the First Sage remaining.

A bubble of energy formed around Eternal Hunger and simply fell down on the old man as he lightly tapped it, banishing it to who-knows-where.

The attack hadn't managed to touch the First Sage, but it had still given Jake some time to stabilize once more, and honestly, it had done far better than Jake expected.

**“Aren't you embarrassed?”** the First Sage asked. **“A single skill. A weapon, merely of mythical rarity, nearly matching you in the power it can display. Did I overestimate your Records?”**

Jake knew he was being taunted, but he more than willingly fell for it nevertheless as he counterattacked. He still had no idea what the First Sage was trying to do or what lesson he was teaching Jake... but he knew that he had to fight, or this could end really badly for him, making the soul damage he took when he fucked up trying to upgrade Palate look like a mere flesh wound.

A storm of arcane energy gathered around Jake as thousands of arrows formed, and with a single thought, he sent them flying toward the First Sage like a massive fish school as they curved in the air.

However, right before they hit the First Sage, the old man merely tilted his head. The barrage of arrows flew into an invisible hole, only to get teleported right above Jake as he was hit by his own attack from a portal he couldn't even see.

The arrows tore into Jake as he forced them all to explode at once, attempting to hit the First Sage with the resulting explosion before they all had time to enter the portal. At the same time, Jake stepped down as he teleported.

Teleported right into his own arcane explosion, taking him by complete and utter surprise as they evidently wasn't where he'd wanted to go. The blast sent Jake flying, but he didn't get even a moment to relax as the space around him twisted and compressed once more, and before he had time to properly respond, his body was crushed into a peanut-sized marble.

Regenerating instantly, Jake made himself appear down on the ground, only for said ground to rise up and crush him between two massive slabs. Immediately, he regenerated again, not even thinking about attacking the First Sage as he only sought to dodge whatever would come next.

Space once more twisted, but relying on his senses, Jake barely dodged in time and got away, only to get hit by a follow-up that exploded his body into thirty-nine equally sized cubed pieces.

Appearing yet again, Jake blocked the next attack as he tried to make some distance, only for space to compress yet again, making it impossible to escape. As the world was shrinking, Jake focused on making it stop, and he did successfully slow down the compression for a second before the First Sage gave it a good push and crushed Jake into fine paste.

**"How long can you allow this to continue?"** the voice of the First Sage echoed.

The old man had yet to move a single step within Jake's Soulspace as he controlled everything as if this was his world. Jake tried to fight back but was constantly one-upped and had his body destroyed over and over again. Every single death hurt a shitload, and to make matters worse, he felt himself begin to grow weary with every death.

Gritting his teeth, Jake tried to do everything he could as he mobilized his energies. Maelstroms of arcane mana formed to defend him, and he felt his body grow more powerful as he dragged out more power with every resurrection. He was faster and more durable now than in the beginning... but every time he improved, the First Sage merely upped the ante.

**"You are like an adult having only ever fought children. You've never had to actually try to win; you were just naturally stronger,"** the voice of the First Sage echoed, making the skies churn. **"Do I need to remind you that this is your Soulspace? Clearly, you can access it freely, yet this is the best you can do?"**

Jake released a massive wave of arcane power that seemed to cover the entire world, but it was parted like the sea as Jake once more found himself cut in two.

**“Are you beginning to understand my disappointment?”** the old man continued as Jake’s entire Soulspace was torn apart and reassembled several times over as the First Sage kept asserting more power and control.

**“It’s like you’re an archer who learned how to nock an arrow and then decided it was good enough. Like a warrior who knows how to hold an axe no longer seeing the need to practice. You stopped at the starting line.”**

Jake desperately tried to make all the arcane mana in the sky heed his call, but the First Sage raised a hand as a barrier covered the sky, sealing in the energy Jake tried to move. At the same time, the ground below was seized and rose as millions of massive spikes erupted all over.

**“But why would one bother to learn how to properly shoot a bow or use an axe if they are so naturally gifted they beat all their peers without ever trying? This is the mentality you have seemingly embraced... so much so you don’t even appear to realize you can and need to improve. And now you are seeing the folly of your foolishness and arrogance.”**

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The intensity and speed of attacks only increased as Jake struggled more than ever before. He felt his Bloodline seething as he pulled out all he could, making all his specs also continue to rise. Meanwhile, the words of the First Sage seared themselves into Jake’s mind as he was getting a good scolding.

Problem was... Jake had no idea what the First Sage wanted from him. He got the gist of it: he wanted Jake to train his soul somehow, but how in the hell was he expected to do that now? Practice took time, and if things continued like this, he wouldn’t have much more time.

Jake felt somewhat insulted by the barrage of words, but he couldn’t deny them either. It was true that Jake had never actively trained his Soulspace in any way; he had just relied on it from beginning to end. But in his defense, he questioned if the Soulspace could even be “trained” in the first place.

The Soulspace was just the world within one’s soul. Everything in there was a representation of Records and didn’t truly exist. That was why Jake’s body could get destroyed over and over again, as it wasn’t really his body but just how he viewed himself within his own little internal world. Same for the terrain that would be instantly rebuilt whenever broken.

All the other external things in Jake's Soulspace, like Eternal Hunger and the drop of blood from the Malefic Viper, were also merely representations of Records. The drop of blood didn't exist physically anymore after Jake had absorbed it, and Eternal Hunger's true form was essentially just a mass of pure curse energy sealed within a form-changing weapon and not the odd fusion between Sim-Jake and the curse chimera Jake normally had sitting about.

So, with everything just being representations of Records, how the hell did the First Sage expect Jake to do more than he already was? He was already drawing out all the power he had, yet he kept losing out even as he was slightly improving all the time.

**"You seem stuck. Are you truly that ignorant?"**

For the first time, the old man moved from where he had been standing. He took a single step forward as he teleported, appearing right in front of Jake.

**"Ask yourself why."**

Jake couldn't move a muscle as the First Sage raised a palm and released a shockwave that atomized his entire being.

**"I am just a mass of Records. This is far from everything I truly am, and what you see is nothing but a mere fragment, yet you are so powerless... why is that?"**

"I don't fucking know," Jake responded with a growl as he regenerated again, this time appearing behind the First Sage as he attacked. He failed spectacularly as both his arms were merely erased simply by getting close to the First Sage's body.

**"Is it because you're weak?"** the First Sage asked as Jake found space around him fold once more, the old man crumbling it like origami paper. **"Are you lacking in potential?"**

That clearly wasn't the reason, as Jake felt pretty damn confident in his talent above anything. His Records were of such a high quality that he felt as if he should be more powerful than the First Sage, seeing as he was indeed just a Record Fragment. Oh yeah, and they were in his bloody Soulspace, where he should have an advantage.

**"You're still confused? Why? Think,"** the First Sage seemed to have lost a bit of his patience as he turned a palm toward the sky. The entire ground beneath Jake was torn up as a tornado descended and caught his newly regenerated body in the swirling debris and powerful wind.

The tornado began to grow and get more powerful as it even started to drag in and consume the sky of arcane energy. Caught within, Jake was trapped in a loop of death and regeneration as he struggled to try and keep his body from getting destroyed too quickly.

**“So many Records, so much potential, so much power... yet this is all you are capable of, huh,”** the First Sage said, waving his hand as the tornado exploded, sending Jake flying back as his world reassembled along with his regeneration, the gray rocky ground and sky returning to normal.

**“This world is made up of your Records. It’s a representation of your Path,”** the First Sage said, his tone calmer than before as he seemingly gave Jake a small breather. **“That being the case, why does it look like this?”**

The words sent out a shockwave that tore up the ground and also destroyed Jake’s body yet again, showing just how outmatched Jake continued to be. By now, he also really began to feel the strain.

He had died hundreds of times... far more times than the Demon Prince had back then. Every time, he easily regenerated his body, but an odd feeling of weakness had begun to sneak into his mind. A sense of tiredness that felt foreign.

It wasn’t the same as when Jake overspent his mental energy, but it did feel somewhat similar. It left a feeling of tiredness - a sneaking exhaustion that made Jake want to close his eyes and take a nap... but he knew that the moment he surrendered and rested would be the end. Granted, he wasn’t sure what would actually happen as the invader into his Soulspace was the First Sage, but if it had been an entity like the Cerulean Devil, the result would be Jake effectively dying as Records would fuse, creating an entirely new being.

As for the First Sage’s question... Follow current novels on [novelfire.net](#)

“This is how it’s always looked,” Jake groaned as he took in the terrain.

**“I asked you why,”** the First Sage spoke once more, really not showing any kindness as he cut a finger across the air, separating space and cutting Jake apart again.

“That’s like asking why the sky is blue,” Jake answered, regenerating and trying to counterattack, only to have the ground rise and crush him.

**“A good question... why is it blue?”**

“Refracted light and stuff...” Jake muttered, on the watch for the First Sage’s next attack.

**“So you do have an answer to that one. So let me ask you something else... why is the ground gray and dead here?”** the First Sage asked, stomping down and splitting said ground as a large fissure opened up and rose to consume Jake.

Jake wanted to blurt out something again, but he stopped himself as he considered the question: Why was the ground looking as it did?

It had always looked pretty much the same ever since the first time he entered his Soulspace. In fact, his entire Soulspace looked like it had the first time he entered it, save for the new objects in there and the sky now being made up of arcane energy. He had never questioned why it looked like this, as he just assumed this was the default look for a Soulspace created by the system or something like that.

However, from the sounds of it, this wasn't the case.

**“Are you finally beginning to realize?”** the First Sage asked, still not showing any kindness as he kept up the pressure by attacking again, manipulating the environment as if he owned it.

**“Or are you still wandering in ignorance, unable to understand?”** the old man continued, once more moving as he teleported again to appear in front of Jake and blasting him back.

Jake spun through the air as he was knocked upwards toward a First Sage already waiting there.

**“This is your Soulspace.”**

Reality folded and crashed into Jake as he was torn to shreds three times in rapid succession, barely able to keep his mind straight.

**“A world created based on your Records, true...”**

A casual handwave sent a palm larger than Jake could see crashing into him, seemingly destroying the entire Soulspace again as Jake was killed again. However, rather than focus on what was happening to him, he was focusing on the First Sage's words as a realization began to sneak into his mind.

**“But made entirely by you.”**

The folding space consumed Jake as he didn't even try to stop it but felt for something deeper.

**“So I ask you again...”**

Raising a hand toward the sky, the First Sage took hold of all the arcane energy up there and formed it into the shape of a massive spear.

**“Why do you allow me control in this world that is yours?”**

The massive spear descended toward Jake as something seemed to click in his mind. For some reason, the descending attack no longer felt as threatening as he reached out, and right before it hit him, he clenched his fist and stopped the spear.

As the spear stopped, the First Sage smiled for the first time ever since they entered the Soulspace. **“Good... but not enough.”**

With a push, the spear was forcibly sent down, but Jake was quick enough to dodge out of the way as he landed in the air not far away.

**“Now for the second task...”**

Stretching out his arms to each side, energy began to gather around the First Sage as Jake prepared himself, a renewed sense of confidence as realization had begun to sneak in.

**“Fight.”**

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## Chapter 1049: Something New

The question that had really gotten the gears turning in Jake’s head had been when the First Sage asked Jake why the ground appeared as it did. It was such a simple question, but when he thought about it, Jake realized he didn’t have an answer... because he’d never thought about it.

Never questioned it.

It had taken Jake longer than he would have liked, but he soon realized the answer as he knew why the ground was gray and dead. It was like that because Jake expected it to be. An expectation that had started to be set for him all the way back in F-grade when he’d first set foot into the divine realm of the Malefic Viper.

In fact, Jake began to realize that he had unknowingly modeled the entire Soulspace according to the divine realm of the Malefic Viper. The very first time Jake had traveled into his Soulspace, that was simply how he expected it to look, and as his own perception created the world, it had become exactly what he imagined. As for how this expectation had been born in the first place?

Jake finally recalled the very first time he entered his Soulspace proper. It wasn’t on purpose back then, but it had happened during the Trial of Myriad Poisons, where he had absorbed the drop of the Malefic Viper. Back then, when he saw where his consciousness had gone, he had even believed for a second he had appeared back in the divine realm of the Viper as he battled his other far more draconic self.

While he didn't know exactly, Jake began to suspect that the Records being infused from the drop of blood and the entire Trial of Myriad Poisons back then had combined with his unconscious mind to create the Soulspace he'd first experience. It hadn't seemed out of place at all either because why wouldn't it make sense to battle a Malefic Dragonkin version of himself in a space reminiscent of the Viper's divine realm?

When Jake later learned more about what the Soulspace was, he just assumed it looked the way it looked. He had formed a first impression of how his Soulspace was supposed to look and had just rolled with it... never thinking that it really didn't have any reason to look like it did.

The only other Soulspace Jake had ever entered or seen was the Demon Prince's, and back then, he had even commented on how similar it looked to his own... once more, not even considering that perhaps aspects such as color and general design were heavily influenced by Jake's own interpretation. Chances are Jake's own expectations of how a Soulspace was supposed to look quite literally colored his view of all other Soulspaces, and in the eyes of the Demon Prince, it appeared quite different.

It all boiled down to the fact that there were a lot of things Jake simply never questioned or thought about in the slightest, but in his defense, he truly had never felt the need to. Never before had Jake felt pressured in his Soulspace and truthfully, even if he could "train" to become stronger inside his Soulspace, why would he?

Power inside the Soulspace had no direct relation to how strong Jake was in the real world. The power one could display in the Soulspace was more representative of how powerful someone could one day become, but that was it. Even if he got better at controlling his power within the Soulspace, things like Gaze wouldn't get stronger.

It also wasn't as if he hadn't made use of his Soulspace or ran into something he missed being able to do. He had fought Sim-Jake and trained there for many years, stored all the stuff he wanted to store there... and that was about it. Because the Soulspace didn't really have any major uses in the first place. Villy had also never once said that Jake should do some Soulspace training or whatever, and the snake god tended to give those kinds of tips if he thought it would benefit Jake.

All of this is to say that Jake found his position of never delving further into "getting stronger" inside his Soulspace easily defensible. Literally, the only time he would need to show power in there was during a situation like this where he was fighting an image created of Records.

Jake still didn't know why the First Sage wanted Jake to push himself like this or exert control over his Soulspace in ways he hadn't before... but now he at least understood what the old man was getting at with all his questions.

Looking up at the floating First Sage, who gathered his energy, Jake stood ready and responded quickly. Merely willing it to happen, he made space fold around the First

Sage, only for the old man to stomp down and crush the changes immediately, which left him open to a massive arrow shooting down from a bow created entirely of the sky's arcane mana.

Rather than attack Jake, the First Sage destroyed Jake's attack instead as Jake dove deeper into the changes he experienced after that switch in his brain had been flipped. He did realize he had a lot of misunderstandings and false assumptions, with the biggest one being the assumption that his body in there was even somewhat real.

The vessel Jake inhabited was just a mere frame of reference to make interpreting the Soulspace easier. He had limited himself to his body, while in truth, everything outside of a few external things – the First Sage included – was all part of Jake.

**“You realize now, but I continue to see your doubt. It’s true; the Soulspace isn’t really that important to train or even understand... at least not normally. Tell me, have you ever spoken to others about entering their Soulspace? Because, believe it or not, that is far from a common ability. Especially doing so freely.”**

Jake didn't respond to what he assumed to be a rhetorical question, in part because the First Sage took things up a notch. He began to manipulate the ground beneath Jake once more, forcing him to counter the old man as Jake destroyed most of the massive spikes coming for him while directing some of them toward the First Sage above.

**“That is a talent and a gift. One you would do well to make use of. In the long run, it will allow you to better understand and interpret your own Records... and by doing so, get a better idea of how you can affect them. Not to say there can't be some more immediate benefits.”**

The two of them attacked each other relentlessly as the entire Soulspace was torn apart over and over again, their control seemingly evenly matched, which really showed how much of a monster the First Sage was. He was forcibly controlling the inside of Jake's soul and not just matching him but doing so while casually talking.

However, Jake was at least improving, and improving quickly, as the control of the First Sage began to slip in tandem with Jake's growing stronger. Earlier, the First Sage had asked Jake why he allowed him so much control before, and now Jake was gladly taking it all away.

He forced space to crumble all around the First Sage, everything folding in onto itself as the First Sage responded by unwrapping what trapped him before removing all space in his immediate surroundings.

Right as he did so, Jake reached out and forced space to reappear, the First Sage taken by surprise as everything around him imploded. Jake saw reality itself wrap around the body of the old man, but right before it could crush him, he snapped his

fingers as all the space disappeared once more, with Jake finding himself unable to bring it back this time around.

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**“Good... very good,” the First Sage said, clearly satisfied. “I do apologize for my harsh tone earlier, but it wasn’t difficult to see that sparking your spirit of competition was the best way to make you progress. Now let us move on to the third task... to truly claim and make everything yours.”**

The fight continued as Jake kept pressing whatever advantage he could get. All sense of weariness was also long gone, as Jake realized that despite his body being broken over and over again, he hadn’t truly taken any damage. It had all been in his damn head as he believed he had to feel more weary and weaker, thus making it a reality. The body he constantly lost had been so weak that now he didn’t see it as being representative of who he was at all anymore.

Jake wasn’t doing anything he wasn’t capable of. He wasn’t growing stronger at all... he was just claiming what power he already had in the first place and simply didn’t know how to access and use. He felt the entire world around him within his grasp, with the only two areas he didn’t have total control over being the ones right around the First Sage and Villy’s drop of blood.

Raising his hands, the roaring sky of inexhaustible arcane energy surged as Jake brought down a massive pillar of pure power that fell upon the First Sage. The man defended as a barrier appeared, barely blocking the attack as Jake kept increasing the intensity of the attack... the First Sage finding time to speak even while being pressured.

**“By now, you may have already begun to suspect, but allow me to make it absolutely clear: within the Soulspace, you are absolute. Some even call it the Soulrealm, though that term was never widely adopted, even if I believe it may be more accurate because it is indeed the realm within the soul. A realm that can one day be solidified and manifested into reality... through a process called Divine Ascension.”**

Hearing the First Sage finally confirm something Jake had long suspected was kind of nice. It wasn’t very useful knowledge and probably not some massive secret, but he was sure the First Sage was going somewhere with the revelation.

Upping the pressure of the arcane beam he was currently trying to scorch the old man with, Jake finally found purchase as he broke through the barrier erected by the First Sage. The energy burned through the old man, seemingly consuming him whole... yet his voice echoed again.

**“Consider the implication of a mere mortal even daring to make thoughts toward how his Divine Realm shall one day look. But also consider the thoughts of already making more use of your Soulspace now. If you know it can one day become real, then why not at least make it real to you personally? Real, and something that is entirely of your own design. With understanding comes the opportunity for expansion.”**

The arcane energy dispersed, an uninjured First Sage standing where the massive pillar of destruction had been mere moments earlier.

“I’ve already used my Soulspace for training before, but you say I can make it even better for it?” Jake asked, not willing to give the First Sage a break even if he spoke as he attacked once more. NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON [movel\\*\\*fire\\*\\*met](#)

**“Better for training and just better overall,” the First Sage said. “The system has already opened the door for you and you have the Records ripe for the taking... all you need to do is reach up and claim them. Claim everything. Remember, this is your world... the world of Jake Thayne. Are you saying it cannot become more than it is? Now, prepare yourself.”**

Jake had sent attacks after the First Sage, but before they even reached the old man, he disappeared. Jake instantly saw him appear off to the side, and Jake responded as he made the ground rise to crush him, only for the man to stomp down, making everything explode with such force Jake was pushed back.

Before he had time to properly react, the old man was upon him. Jake folded space to limit his movements, but everything was shattered apart as the First Sage reached out and landed a palm on Jake’s chest.

The moment that happened, something changed. Before, nothing had actually ever hurt Jake, which was also why his Bloodline had been so silent. He was never in any real danger because Jake was barely spending anything on constantly regenerating his body.

However, instantly, he felt that the palm strike was very different. His danger sense woke up, and Jake felt an intense pain he couldn’t even begin to describe as he was blasted back, a searing handprint on his chest.

His eyes opened wide as the First Sage teleported again, Jake taking no chances as both katars appeared. Before, when he was getting absolutely destroyed, Jake had been working under the assumption he only had to use his own body to fight, but now he gladly dragged in everything around him to empower the vessel he’d manifested.

This resulted in Jake being far stronger as he managed to block the attack from the old man who was using his bare hands. His katars struck the exposed flesh of the First

Sage, but he felt as if he'd struck solid diamond as his slash merely slid across his opponent's arm.

Jake switched things up as he tried to get some distance by quite literally creating it through stretching space between himself and his opponent, but the First Sage proved too fast as he simply crushed space with a fist and was upon Jake instantly.

Forced to dodge, Jake was sent reeling back, the true pain once more surging through his body as he felt his own heart begin to beat faster. It only sped up further as the First Sage continued his intense offensive, and Jake began to realize that while he was in complete control of the world, none of that mattered when the one who was fighting could mercilessly crush anything in his way.

In fact, the old man didn't even try to control the environment anymore. Instead, he solely used his own body which was far more solid than Jake could even begin to imagine. No matter what Jake did, he couldn't penetrate the First Sage's defenses, while Jake himself was sent reeling back whenever he even made direct contact with the old man's attacks.

**“Everyone has Soulspaces, but that doesn't mean the basis for every Soulspace is the same. Within their Soulspaces, many beasts tend to have far more powerful and durable bodies while lacking control of the environment, while ghosts and most undead have weak bodies while possessing far better control of the environment.”**

Jake listened as he shot into the air, teleporting into the sky of arcane energy as he wrapped it all around him. With his increased control of the Soulspace, he knew this was where he was strongest and readily embraced it.

The arcane mana wrapped around his body, forming several layers that both defended and helped him attack as he clashed with the First Sage a dozen more times, standing a better chance now but still finding himself on the back foot.

**“The reason why the basis for Soulspaces varies is that souls differ widely. Usually, this variance comes in the form of scope through the quality and quantity of Records one has, but on rare occasions, the soul itself is different from the norm. Their vessel has grown to a level where the usual conventions of the soul are something the system recognizes they can reach beyond.”**

Upping the tempo even more, the First Sage pummeled Jake, his danger sense growing with every attack he received. His heart was beating quickly, and Jake tried to absorb all the arcane energy he could to keep up, but it was all in vain as he was blasted back repeatedly.

No matter what, his body simply couldn't keep up, and he had to try to rely on controlling the environment, but he kept feeling as if he was hitting a wall.

**“Mutations can occur, especially when one walks a unique and powerful Path. But balance must be achieved. With this, the system rarely helps. It is your soul, after all.”**

Jake was struck again as he once more seemed to realize something. He was blasted down toward the ground as he stared up at the sky of arcane mana and felt the powerful energies within... energy that surpassed other aspects of his Soulspace.

**“There is yet to be a commonly accepted word to call these people with mutated souls, but the system tends to refer to their souls as...”**

As the First Sage approached Jake again, he barely responded as the old man placed a palm on his chest, causing a surge of power to enter him.

**“Anomalies.”**

Jake’s body was torn apart and exploded as the entire ground was torn up and the Soulspace torn asunder, the sky of arcane mana the only thing remaining.

Yet Jake felt no pain but only the thumping of his own heart. He didn’t will his body or the environment to regenerate what was... instead, he allowed his instincts and unconscious mind to construct - mutate - his Soulspace something new, this time entirely his own.

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## **Chapter 1050: A Whole New World**

For several seconds, Jake’s Soulspace was reminiscent of the void as nearly nothing existed there. The only clue that it was even his Soulspace was the sky of arcane mana that still remained, unaffected by the changes to come, as there, quite frankly, was nothing to improve on. At least not directly. All improvements would come from bringing the sky in balance with the rest of the Soulspace.

Even as Jake’s body was dispersed, he didn’t immediately regenerate it. Instead, he became one with this sky as he felt everything at once. Jake had never actively thought much about how his Soulspace should look like, and neither did he do so this time around.

Instead, he moved according to what felt most natural – and truly, was anything more Jake-like than leaving everything to instinct? Hence, rather than actually design anything with thoughtful intent, Jake proceeded to simply act.

The skies roared, and the First Sage willingly retreated and gave Jake space as the Soulspace began to surge with energy as countless particles appeared from the nothingness, swirling as matter was created. The ground was formed first, no longer the dead gray rock as before, but soil teeming with life and energy.

With a thought – intent behind the action this time not for what he wanted, but for it to happen - the world blossomed. Grass, the color of Jake's arcane mana spread out across the land, and countless plants resembling herbs and other shrubs began to rapidly grow everywhere the eye could see. Occasionally, massive trunks sprang from the ground, covered in leaves that looked like crystals, and within moments, an enormous forest was born, continuing into an endless horizon.

Above, the sky continued to churn as the arcane mana connected to the ground, a cycle forming as the newly grown trees and other plants began to greedily absorb the energy from above. This exchange happened intermittently, with bolts of arcane mana resembling lightning descending upon the many trees, infusing the world below with arcane energy that turned from its destructive form into stable energy, making the trees grow further.

Finally, there was the last piece of the puzzle. The one thing that would complete the Soulspace.

A single humanoid figure manifested as Jake reformed his body. Bolts of lightning immediately struck him as he appeared, and a torrent of energy surged from below, making him feel an intimate connection with the Soulspace, surpassing anything prior.

At that moment, as Jake realized the new shape of his Soulspace, he couldn't help but think about a concept he'd read about a long time ago... one he had definitely butchered with his interpretation of his Soulspace, but hey, he barely remembered what it had been about in the first place.

Still, he thought it fit.

Heaven, earth, man. The heaven was his mana, the earth his inner energy, and man his vital energy. Each, they complimented one another, and together they formed the soul of Jake Thayne.

With this interpretation, Jake finally opened his eyes. The First Sage saw Jake regain his body and smiled before he instantly stormed at him. However, rather than get another good smacking, Jake merely raised a hand as he blocked the palm strike of the old man. Jake felt a shockwave of energy reverberate through his body as he pushed back with all his power.

Their clash sent out a shockwave that tore through the Soulspace, yet failed to even topple any of the trees as the ground was too stable for them to so easily destroy. The result of their clash was that the old man was sent staggering back, small cracks forming on his hand.

**“Good... very good,”** the First Sage said as he looked at his hand that was quickly healing. **“Do you feel it surging? Embrace that feeling and let it carry you forward.”**

With a small nod, Jake focused on the feeling that was indeed there. When the First Sage had struck him just now, that palm strike had been like a blacksmith's hammer giving that final push to solidify Jake's newly created body.

With it solidified, so did the rest of the Soulspace around him as he felt something within him begin to grow. Grow and change. His chest felt warm, and he knew a skill upgrade was coming, but something about this one felt far different from any prior he had ever had. Something else than merely a rarity was changing, and luckily for Jake, the system allowed him to know what was happening as he was flooded with system messages.

**Incompatible Skill Upgrade Records for [Anomalous Soul of the Heretic-Chosen (Legendary)] detected.**

**Skill Upgrade changing to Skill Mutation.**

**Congratulations! Your [Anomalous Soul of the Heretic-Chosen (Legendary)] has successfully mutated from a Profession skill into a Race skill.**

***Skill Upgraded:***[Anomalous Soul of the Heretic-Chosen (Legendary)] – Heresy and orthodoxy united in one body, power claimed from both. To be both a Chosen and a Heretic requires not only mental deviancy but a truly anomalous soul to reconcile opposing concepts. A soul that only grows more unique as you walk further on your Path as a Heretic-Chosen. Due to your connection to your Patron, your mana will begin to carry faint hints and morcels of the Records of the Malefic Viper when crafting poisons, making each creation more potent. Due to your identity as a heretic, this is not granted but taken, resulting in significantly increased mana expenditure during this process. As your soul mutates, so does it get empowered, allowing it to break convention. Going forward, every stat point in Wisdom increases your Mana Points by 12.5 rather than 10. May your very existence become an anomaly that shuns normalcy for power as you continue paving your own Path as a Heretic-Chosen. Note that this skill results in a permanent change. Losing your status as a Heretic-Chosen or your profession will make the skill further mutate and transition into a race skill.

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**[Anomalous Arcane Soul (Mythical)] – Heretic and Chosen. Stability and Destruction. Intelligence and Instinct. You walk a Path of paradoxes, forever maintaining a tight balance as you strive to bring your unique Path toward perfection. Due to your connection to your Patron, your mana will begin to carry faint hints and morcels of the Records of the Malefic Viper when crafting poisons, making each creation more potent at the cost of significantly increased mana expenditure as you forcefully lay claim to these Records. Soul energy floods your vital and inner energies, allowing your soul to remain far more stable even when the body is destroyed or heavily damaged. As a result of your soul successfully mutating to better fit your Path, it can store more energy than regular beings, resulting in every stat point in Wisdom, Vitality, and Endurance increasing your Mana Points, Health Points, and Stamina by 12.5 rather than 10. Immensely increases your capability to convert your energies while reducing loss during the process. Latent potential in your soul has been unlocked, allowing you far more control within your Soulspace. May your soul continue to grow toward eternity as your Path evolves.**

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**Notice: Your skill [Anomalous Arcane Soul (Mythical)] has been moved from Profession Skills to Race Skills on the status menu.**

Jake could barely focus on reading the flood of messages as the feeling of having something so fundamentally change within him was honestly goddamn euphoric. The change was sadly relatively quick after the system got involved and took him through the entire process as his Soulspace had now fully stabilized. Everything in there had calmed, and not far away, he saw the shadowy figure of Eternal Hunger appear, sitting cross-legged within a small dark clearing. Not far away, the drop of blood from the Viper was also back, creating a small area around itself with no life or arcane mana.

Seeing no need to mess with either of them, Jake turned his attention to the actual skill upgrade, and damn did he have some notes.

This was his first time seeing a skill change category like that, though he did know it was possible, and the original Anomalous Soul had already warned him it would happen if he lost his status as a Heretic-Chosen. Now it had mutated and changed because Jake caused it, but he couldn't say the original skill being primed to being capable of doing so didn't play a huge part.

Thinking about it, perhaps his interpretation that his Soulspace was akin to the Malefic Viper's Divine Realm had helped him to get offered the Anomalous Soul of the Heretic-Chosen in the first place. However, now, Jake had severed that connection entirely, even if the skill retained the effects it had while a profession skill. It was true the Path of the Malefic Viper influenced Jake's, but his Path was still entirely his own, and so was his soul. The drop of blood was merely a guest in his Soulspace, and the Records from

the Viper Jake possessed were ones Jake had entirely taken. Even if Villy was their Origin, the second they became part of Jake's Path, he no longer viewed Villy as having any form of ownership. He wasn't a faithful Chosen after all, but as much a filthy heretic who was all about taking without asking.

When it came to the name of the skill, he had some mixed emotions. Anomalous Arcane Soul sounded so... basic. It didn't sound like a mythical skill at all, and in truth, Jake had kind of expected to see another "of " skill. However, when he really thought more about it, did he really want that? Did it even make sense?

Because there was no fucking way that the Soul of was merely a mythical rarity skill. So, seeing the skill look so basic could be viewed as a good thing, as it meant there was plenty of room for further improvement down the line.

Anyhow, moving on to the actual skill itself and its effects, everything it did was entirely passive, which Jake definitely wasn't going to complain about. From an immediate assessment, the biggest upgrade was definitely that his resource pools for Stamina and Health Points had just expanded by 25%, matching the existing bonus increase it had already given to his mana.

Needless to say, that was an utterly massive upgrade. Alongside this, he could already feel how much more easily Jake could transform the different energies within his body from one into the other. He had essentially created connections that allowed exchange within his Soulspace through the balance he'd achieved. Jake wasn't sure if this improved ability to exchange energy would have any tangible effects while fighting as it still wasn't very efficient and still took time and a bit of concentration, but hey, the option was now there.

Then, there was the newly added section talking about his soul growing more stable. Jake still wasn't entirely sure what this meant, or if it even meant anything at all to him, as Jake was already pretty damn stable and quick to react even while heavily damaged, but he got the feeling this change would prove useful. Mainly the portion where it mentioned his body being destroyed... but all of that was for later experimentation.

The final part of the skill description mentioned Jake unlocking latent potential, allowing him far more control within his Soulspace. This was the most obvious part of the upgrade as that was what Jake had been doing all this time with the First Sage, and it bode well for Jake to further upgrade the skill in the future. He knew there were things he would now be able to do using his Soulspace, with the possibilities effectively endless. Technically, he already had those abilities before, but now he knew he had them.

Now, Jake did know that while this kind of upgrade was absolutely awesome, it was technically too awesome. Experiencing such a fundamental change to his soul was bound to have some consequences, which the First Sage would soon gladly outline as the old man stood with a big smile as he looked at Jake.

“Congratulations are in order,” the First Sage said, no longer bothering with infusing his voice with any energy as the lesson was over.

The two of them had landed on the ground while Jake went through the skill upgrade, and with a mental command, Jake summoned a table for them to sit at out of politeness.

“Thank you,” Jake said with a small bow before he took a seat.

“No need for thanks, you’re effectively my grand disciple,” the First Sage waved him off casually before he turned a bit more serious. “Our time remains short, so let us skip further celebrations and pleasantries. Seeing as you already had your soul mutate once, I assume you know of the drawbacks?”

Jake nodded slightly as he still asked. “I think I do, but if I’ve learned anything today, it’s that sometimes my base assumptions can be really off.”

The First Sage chuckled a bit as he explained: “As your vessel expands, so does what’s needed to fill it. The Records required for every one of your evolutions will be higher than before, making them more difficult and the quests harder, especially for your race evolution. You will also need more experience points for every level gained going forward, resulting in each level taking longer. Now, I call these drawbacks, but let me clarify: I do not actually see them as such. While it may appear detrimental on the surface, the more Records and the more experience you gather in your mortal years, the happier you’ll be in the future that you struggled in your youth as you approach divinity.”

“Yeah, that tracks with what I already knew,” Jake nodded, as he did bite onto one thing. The First Sage mentioned Jake’s evolutions getting harder, specifically pointing out the race quest, but so far, Jake had never once struggled with evolving, and he didn’t believe he would for B-grade either. Especially seeing as he didn’t even have race evolution quests. This could mean that the old man didn’t know about this part of Jake... and honestly, he felt kinda good about at least having some secrets in front of a man who seemed almost omniscient.

“I suspected as much. Vilas should have taught you some things, seeing as you are his Chosen,” the First Sage nodded with a smile before he sighed. “Alas, let the lesson fully end here. It’s soon time for me to go and for you to return to your time and reality. Would you have the honor of destroying this Record Fragment?”

Jake looked at the old man for a second before shaking his head. “I thought you said the lesson was over, so why the test? We both know I’m not capable of doing that.”

With Jake’s increased control of his Soulspace, he could also far better analyze the being sitting in front of him and the Records this image of the First Sage was made from. It was a mere fragment, yes, but the Records within it felt absolutely horrifying to try and destroy. Jake wanted to compare it to the power of the drop of blood or when

Villy had briefly popped into his Soulspace when he fucked up Palete, but both comparisons felt wrong.

Even now, Jake truly couldn't see through the old man, and he wasn't sure if he ever would. All he did know with certainty was that if the First Sage had truly entered Jake's Soulspace with the intent to break him... The most update novels are published on novel

"In fact, I'm pretty sure if you wanted to, you could have effectively killed me," Jake sighed, following up his prior words.

The First Sage was silent for a moment as he looked toward the sky and squinted. When he did, Jake felt his heart beat strongly a single time as the old man spoke, shaking his head. "I'm not entirely confident I would have had a good ending either."

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