

The Primal Hunter

Chapter 1101: Conceptualizing Concepts

Jake's loss was quick and entirely as he'd expected. version of Artemis he was fighting now was not same as Lord of Hunt from back in Challenge Dungeon. This was real Artemis with her full comprehension of concepts. version back n had only been a mere specter of real thing, and difference was stark. Emblem definitely wasn't made for gods to duel mortals, as sheer difference in conceptual understanding made it a total non-starter.

Without precognitive reaction times, that first arrow would have hit him in eye. It wasn't a question of being quick or not at that time; it was simply impossible to dodge with stats he had within Emblem.

It was like asking someone to dodge a bullet from ten steps away. only way to avoid getting hit was to look at barrel and dodge before bullet was even fired. Trying to react only after bullet had left its chamber wouldn't leave enough time and end in certain death.

arrow shot by Artemis – an Artemis with stats close to a pre-system mortal – was faster than any bullet shot by a handgun. It was a speed that didn't make any sense at all from Jake's perspective, and he guessed that was why she had started out with an attack like that for this exact reason.

"That first arrow was fast... way too fast," Jake muttered in contemplation. "So fast that it really didn't make any sense. It was as if it exploded into motion second you let go of string. I saw string move, and arrow didn't even have time to get fully propelled by it."

With his pretty high Perception, even with lowered stats, Jake had indeed seen string of Artemis' bow move. However, it had only barely moved forward a few centimeters before arrow just shot out ahead of it as if rocket-propelled.

"I considered for a while what I could even teach you," Artemis said. "I know you would benefit greatly simply from dueling, but I still wanted to help you more directly at least once. I may be overstepping with what Malefic Viper finds acceptable, but I choose to accept consequences if that's case."

"Don't worry, if he does get mad, I'll handle it," Jake waved off notion. "Besides, I'm kind of dense and stubborn, so I doubt I'll suddenly be corrupted by what you say."

"Alright. What I'm about to talk about next all comes down to you believing things to be facts despite that not necessarily being the case," Artemis said.

"What do you mean?" Jake asked with a frown.

"I've never experienced a pre-integration universe myself, but I have interacted with plenty who had. Having lived without the system gives certain unique insights and viewpoints, but it also births a lot of fundamental misunderstandings of how the world works, in particular when talking about physics," Artemis explained.

"I'm aware that in the world you grew up in, you had rare simplistic magical equations that could accurately tell you most things. It was a simpler world in many ways, and I know one of the most fundamental laws was related to objects in motion and the energy they possessed while being in movement."

Jake nodded along, naturally knowing about Newton's Second Law. Mass times acceleration equaled force. He still wasn't quite sure where Artemis was going with all this, though.

"If we go by this law, then answer me this: why did my first arrow that hit your thigh barely penetrate, while the one that hit your chest went in deep? The first one was faster, so fast it didn't make any sense by your own account, and the arrows had the same weight, so shouldn't the first one have done more damage?"

"Some sort of concept or magic was at work," Jake shook his head. "You poured more energy into that second arrow, thus making it stronger."

"Energy. Right," Artemis nodded. "The next question... why is light magic so slow?"

"Light magic is plenty fast," Jake said with a frown. "It's one of the fastest schools of magic there is."

"But isn't it still slow compared to actual light? And I'm not just talking about before the system. Look outside the window. You see the crown of Yggdrasil, but consider how far away it truly is. If we go by your pre-system terms, there would be many light years between here and there, so doesn't that mean you're now seeing how the World Tree's crown looked like years ago? Except you're not. If we teleported there, what you would see wouldn't change. The concept of light, in its purest form, is near-instant. If you observe a star from across the multiverse, you see it just the same as someone standing right next to it."

"Yet there's also light magic that appears slow. So slow it can be dodged, even without precognition. That's likely what you see when you battle mages who use this particular school. Yet, at other times, they can flash a spell that blinds you, this light hitting your eyes the moment it's unleashed. Why not simply have every scorching beam of light have this same speed?" Artemis asked with a raised eyebrow.

Jake considered question for a while before answering. "Because amount of energy a person can pour into an attack is limited, and if it all goes to making attack faster, damage will be lesser."

"Right," Artemis nodded. "Now transfer that same concept to a physical object."

"How?" Jake asked, genuinely not getting that part. In his mind, a sword swung quicker also hit harder. That was just what made sense and what he also usually encountered when fighting. Most of strongest attacks Jake had ever faced were also fastest, with only a few exceptions.

"To comprehend that, you need to broaden your understanding of physics because what you currently believe is limiting you," Artemis answered. "laws of physics simply don't work way you think y do anymore."

"But it does work like I expect, at least ninety-nine percent of time. I've seen pre-system physics work pretty damn well," Jake said with a frown, remembering weapon deployed by Arnold against Prima Guardian. Rods from God was a weapon that worked purely off physics and was literally just dropping something incredibly heavy, going incredibly fast.

"I never said physics doesn't work way you expect it to most of time. I'm saying that law of physics you believe in doesn't," Artemis said as she helpfully took out what looked like a small cotton ball from her inventory and tossed it to him.

Jake inspected it thoroughly and looked up at Artemis. "What do you want me to do with this?"

"Just confirm re's nothing fishy about it," Artemis said as she reached out a hand to take it back. This content belongs to **novel•fire●net**

Taking anor moment to inspect cotton, Jake indeed saw nothing wrong with it. It didn't even have any energy of note but was a perfectly ordinary and uninteresting fluffy little thing. Handing it back to Artemis by placing it on her palm, she promptly flipped it over as it began floating toward ground slowly.

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"Try to stop it from touching ground," Artemis said.

Jake did as asked and attempted to catch it with his foot like it was a falling balloon, but moment it touched his foot, he felt as if he'd just tried to stop fall of a dwarf star. His foot was pushed down and nearly crushed between floor and cotton ball before Artemis moved her own foot and pushed Jake's out of way.

He was about to say something as he expected ball to crush floor and level entire palace, but what instead happened was that it landed softly on ground, bouncing slightly before a small gust of wind made it roll to side.

"Before you ask, no," Artemis said with a smile. "I didn't do anything to cotton ball between it touching your foot and floor. All I did was decide and make its velocity constant. Naturally, I poured in conceptual energy to do that."

Waving her hand, cotton ball teleported to appear in her palm again as Artemis looked at Jake. "Hold out your palm in front of you."

Jake once more did as asked. He watched as Artemis made cotton ball float upwards in high-ceiling meditation chamber before stopping at top, about eight meters up. It was right above Jake's outstretched palm, and he wondered what Artemis was up to.

"I poured in exact same amount of energy into this cotton ball as last one. I'll now launch it down with full speed into your palm," Artemis said, Jake trusting her, especially seeing as his danger sense didn't react.

"Keep an eye on it," she reiterated, and Jake kept watching ball closely. "I'll launch it down in three... two... one... now."

Jake was ready for something to happen as he kept looking upwards. When Artemis said now, cotton ball disappeared from sight, but a moment later, Jake spotted it through his sphere and he also felt it.

Looking down, he stared at cotton ball sitting in his palm. From his point of view, it had just been teleported re, and he hadn't even felt impact... but he knew that wasn't what had truly happened.

"Do you understand what happened re?" Artemis asked him with a raised eyebrow.

"I can guess," Jake muttered. "This time, you channeled all conceptual energy into pure speed, making ball descend impossibly fast at level of it nearly being teleportation."

"But did it hurt?" Artemis asked. "Because going by pre-system logic, that cotton ball should have torn off your entire arm. No, actually, seeing as it surpassed pre-system speed of light, it wouldn't even have been possible. Yet it was."

"I didn't feel anything," Jake shook his head, and now he also understood what Artemis had done in arena. "Those first arrows you shot in arena, you dedicated most of energy you poured in to get more speed at loss of power."

Artemis smiled at this answer. "That's remarkably close. When you normally shoot an arrow, everything is balanced. You unknowingly channel in concepts of what you believe archery is, and limitations and power of your simplistic understanding of physics

affect every shot. Every arrow you shoot is, theoretically, perfect. The balance between damage done and speed of flight is optimal, but what if you can tilt that balance a bit to either side? What if you can make an arrow faster but deal less damage? Or make it slower and deal more? It seems counterintuitive, but it's not."

Listening to what Artemis said, Jake fell into thought. One of the biggest weaknesses of archery was naturally having to actually hit with his arrows. If he could make these arrows faster, he would be able to hit things more easily, and the damage being decreased wasn't a massive issue as it shouldn't affect his poisons.

Additionally, it would make his archery a lot more unpredictable if arrows flew at different speeds. Claiming momentum in fights should become easier, and it wasn't as if foes could easily discern that quicker arrows were less dangerous, making it great for forcing enemies away.

"Don't get me wrong, what I'm talking about isn't easy nor natural to most people," Artemis said. "Your current understanding, even for those who grew up with this system, is the most intuitive. The most powerful arrows of an archer do tend to also be the fastest as they simply have a lot more energy infused into them. Additionally, if you use a powerful skill, trying to change the balance gets magnitudes harder."

Jake nodded along to her words as she continued.

"I also want to clarify that your understanding isn't wrong. It has a lot of truth to it, and actively messing with conceptual energy within each arrow isn't a feasible method of fighting. In most cases, having a faster arrow does also mean it will do more damage, just be aware that this isn't due to some law of physics. It happens because that's what you believe should happen, and the energy you put into an arrow reflects that. The same is true in all other aspects of battle. What I'm talking about right now is a gross oversimplification of the effect of concepts, but nothing I said is definitively wrong, and it should be enough for now."

"Got it," Jake nodded as he considered everything they'd talked about. Concepts were something Jake still had a difficult time fully understanding, even if he knew they were pretty much bread and butter that made everything work.

Swords relied on the concept of sharpness to cut things, armor on the concept of durability and resilience to block attacks, and hammers on the concept of... smashing stuff to smash stuff. What Jake still struggled with was the entire concept of better understanding a concept to make it stronger.

Sword Saint was the complete opposite of Jake in this aspect. He had spoken a lot to the old man about concepts, and one of the things he'd learned was that no one could truly explain why something was. The old man could tell Jake that he "deepened his understanding" of the concept of sharpness, but he couldn't properly put into words what exactly he understood.

No matter what, effects couldn't be denied. From Jake's understanding of things, concepts were one of fundamental sources of power in system, alongside stats and energy. When one made an attack, three most important parts were how many stats one had that affected skill, how much energy one had poured into it, and how deep conceptual understanding one had of what went into attack.

When Jake fought Artemis in arena, ir stats were equal. amount of energy y could pour into an attack was also mostly equal – with Artemis still having a solid edge. However, as both shot arrows of same size and used same weapons, most impactful difference between two of m was ir understanding of concepts...

And re, difference between m was truly that of a god and a mortal. It was difference between someone using an inferior rarity skill and a divine skill to do same attack. Even if both had same stats and equipment, it wasn't hard to see who was superior.

Artemis left Jake alone to ponder for a while until an hour later, y reentered Colosseum. ir duel was slightly longer this time, with Artemis purposefully not hitting Jake as she kept showing off and allowing Jake to take everything in. Ultimately, he still met his end and had anor conversation before it was back to meditation and thinking for anor hour, at which point it was arena time once more.

This was how time passed for next few days. Jake got more and more into zone as Artemis showed off more and more things, many of which were far beyond Jake's understanding or anything he dared even try to attempt as a mere C-grade.

Jake felt pretty confident that Artemis was doing this style of pretty darn confusing teaching on purpose. She wasn't trying to hammer home one singular point or make him realize one specific thing. Instead, she was trying to make him think. Make him question how things worked with hope that he could broaden his perspective. That he could begin to think in new directions from what he was used to.

Lesson that had resonated most with Jake was still first one about speed. It was one Jake felt like he was closest to approaching, and furr conversations on topic only strengned his thinking.

"Few concepts can stand alone. In nearly all attacks, we use some form of composite with aspects from many different concepts, often far more than we even realize. Every step you take relies on concepts. When your arrow is in flight, consider how many concepts it interacts with during flight. Dependent on environment, re's wind, moisture in air, dust, light, gravity, space, and so many more. Penetrating through all se can be put under umbrella of dealing with concept of friction."

It was all getting pretty damn complicated, but despite that, Jake began to form some actual ideas. One of m was related to a concept Jake had some familiarity with and had even incorporated into some of his or skills already.

If he wanted to lean more into making his arrows faster... in or words, making it travel time shorter... what was more fitting than concept of time itself?

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Chapter 1102: Perception Best Stat

Sometimes in life, one has to ask oneself important questions. What do I want to do with my life? What brings me purpose? How do I feel about someone? This was one such situation as Jake asked himself a vital question:

Am I actually a fucking idiot?

Jake had tried hard. Really hard. Artemis was helping him as much as she could, too, but so far, Jake felt like he'd made no progress. It had been over a week since he began practicing with goddess, and all Jake had learned so far was to dodge a little bit faster with lower stats.

Logically, he understood what she said. Jake also knew what he wanted to do and formed vivid ideas and plans. Sadly for him, no matter what he tried, he simply got no response as he'd shot several thousand arrows with no change in concepts he could infuse.

To make matters worse, Artemis was all supportive, which just made Jake feel infinitely less cool.

"Concepts aren't something one easily understands, especially if you're trying to deepen your comprehension of difficult concepts. concept of time is notoriously one of hardest of all, and it's not at all surprising it takes some time. Also note that often understanding of concepts doesn't come a little at a time. It comes in floods as one steps over certain boundaries of insight."

Was what she was saying truth? Yeah, but that didn't make Jake feel any less dumb, especially when he compared himself to those around him. Sylphie innately just understood a lot of concepts, and easily learned ones related to wind. Dina was a beast when it came to comprehending anything nature-related, and even Fallen King had deep insight into concepts he used.

Finally, re was Sword Saint, and more Jake trained with Artemis, more he understood how much of a monster old man was. He still vividly remembered how old man had touched upon concept of void merely by traveling through it and seeing it once. How

old man's skills were pretty much all born from his deep understanding of concepts. He was simply on another level compared to someone like Jake.

Trying to understand the difference between them wasn't even something Jake could begin to do. According to Artemis, there were some traits people who were incredibly skilled at comprehending concepts had in common, though.

One of them was a powerful imagination that could go beyond ordinary. It was a commonly known fact that humans couldn't actually imagine anything new. All they could do was create something from all the building blocks they already had obtained through their memories.

With the system, this remained the same for the most part. However, there was now a new way to get knowledge: from the system itself. Merely by trying hard enough to imagine something truly new, on rare occasions, the system ended up helping a little, a new image or visualization thus being made reality. People who were able to do this more than others tended to be pretty good at understanding concepts.

The second important trait was the worldview of a person. This was one of those truly unidentifiable kinds of things that, despite years of study, there was no way to measure. It all came down to how someone's brain worked when viewing the world. Those who were skilled at comprehending concepts often viewed the world as far more abstract. They saw metaphors and meaning in things that others didn't.

Third important trait was understanding oneself. This one was a bit like the one before but more related to how someone saw their place within the multiverse. Someone like Sword Saint saw himself as a swordsman. Just his title alone was part of his identity. It was an arrogant title, claiming he wasn't merely a swordsman but one standing at the apex.

When going over these three traits one by one, Jake felt that he wasn't particularly outstanding in any of them besides maybe the last one. Jake had an okay imagination, but he was more the type who had to see something firsthand. He could imagine things, sure, but his solutions to fights were rarely very imaginative.

As for the second trait, Jake was definitely weak there. Jake didn't really think much about things he saw, and he kind of felt that his Bloodline was actively a demerit in this aspect. With his Sphere of Perception and high Perception stat in general, Jake saw what he perceived as fact. He didn't try to overanalyze as he knew his Sphere always showed him the truth. He didn't need to look for deeper meanings, for if there were any, he would have already detected them.

Finally, with the third trait, Jake did know exactly who he was and where he fit into the world. The problem was, that didn't really help much as Artemis made one more thing clear...

"These traits aren't to be viewed in isolation from one another. Dao Sect has most people who specialize in mastering concepts above anything else, and according to their teachings,

one needs all three. y support one anor and create a greater whole, so merely being strong in one is far from enough.”

So, yeah, things didn’t look good for Jake. Artemis kept trying to help him, though, as two of m went into Colosseum once more for what had to be well over hundredth time as y entered it roughly every hour – minus time y actually spent in re, as cooldown period of Emblem only began after both exited.

“I also have some understanding of concept of time, but not because I ever practiced it,” Artemis said. “As you progress through grades, you innately just get more insight into how world works. You don’t even feel that you do, but as a C-grade, your unknowing understanding of world is leaps beyond what y were as, say, an E-grade. Understanding all concepts at a low level becomes elementary once you reach a high enough level. re is a reason why you will have a very hard time coming across any S-grade unable to teleport or any god unable to stop time on a localized scale.”

Jake nodded along, understanding that part. Perhaps easiest example for Jake was concept of flying. When in E-grade, Jake needed wings to fly around, while in D-grade, he could easily fly simply by using his mana. Everyone could fly through use of ir energies in one way or anor, not because everyone learned same magic but because everyone understood some of basic laws of multiverse, at least enough to fly around a bit.

Artemis nocked an arrow as she took aim. “As I said, time is a powerful concept, and with stats of a mortal, it’s hard to use. All concepts still require some level of energy to truly display what y’re capable of. With my limited power, I can do a few things, though.”

Watching closely, Jake saw movement of energy he recognized as having concept of time mixed into it swirl around arrow. Artemis let go of string a moment later as arrow flew forward... and slowed down. Strafing to side, Artemis shot two more arrows, both of m doing same as y flew forward about a meter before stopping.

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Right after shooting a fourth arrow, all three of initial ones suddenly shot forward again alongside ir final brethren. Four arrows struck wall of arena within a tenth of a second of one anor, all of m flying with roughly equal power.

Turning to Artemis, Jake saw she was breathing heavily, and her aura was a lot weaker than before.

“This body really is patic,” she muttered before standing up straight. “Do you know what I did re?”

“You delayed three first arrows so y would launch at same time as fourth one,” Jake said.

“And how did I do that?”

“Through concept of time,” Jake shrugged. “More specifically... well, I guess you didn’t tell arrows when to start moving again with a mental command. That would likely have drained too much energy. So my guess is that you infused each with a packet of Willpower that effectively put each arrow on a timer, and you perfectly executed shots so everything lined up.” Chapters first released on [novel♦fire♦net](#)

“You detected concept of time infused into each arrow?” Artemis guessed.

Jake nodded in confirmation.

Artemis observed him a bit before smiling. “You know, besides traits I mentioned earlier, there is one thing that tends to bring people ahead of curve when it comes to understanding concepts. However, as this method doesn’t help those naturally talented in area in a meaningful way, it isn’t often discussed as a trait.”

“Is that thing hanging out with gods on a daily basis and getting personal lessons?” Jake asked semi-jokingly.

“I reckon that doesn’t hurt, but no. Even greatest teacher needs a competent pupil, or both are just wasting their time,” Artemis shook her head. Jake wasn’t entirely sure he agreed as if he felt as if First Sage could have taught even dumbest kid in every class to ace every test.

“What is it, n?” Jake asked with some curiosity.

“Void Mechanic. Arnold, I believe, is his name. I looked into people close to you, which wasn’t hard as this man is quite famous for a variety of reasons, especially among some of my friends in Altmar Empire who are very keen to have him visit one day,” Artemis began. “Do you think he fits three traits I mentioned earlier?”

“Fuck no,” Jake instantly replied. Arnold didn’t view anything as even halfway abstract. If he couldn’t make a formula or algorithm to understand something, he didn’t even bother trying to use it. He was a man who sought knowledge beyond anything else, and he demanded logic before he would accept anything. A realm of logic that perhaps only he could understand, but logic nevertheless.

“Yet concepts he deals with are of an incredibly high level. My guess is that he understands nomological concepts by forming his own logic around them. But in order to begin even considering concepts, he needs to first perceive them. And that’s where another trait helping to better understand concepts comes into play: Perception stat.”

“If that’s the case... doesn’t that mean I’m more daft than I first imagined?” Jake muttered.

Artemis just smiled and shook her head. "Seeing is understanding, as saying goes. When one becomes able to perceive concepts, one also becomes able to analyze and try to understand them. Form one's own concept from another's. Someone like Void Mechanist does this through study and a high level of intellect that can't truly be copied. However, for people like you and I, that isn't gonna happen."

"Are you saying you also struggled to understand concepts?" Jake asked her.

"I don't think comparing our situations makes much sense," Artemis shook her head. "You already far surpass anything I had accomplished when at your level. That includes my comprehension of concepts. You may think you're bad at it, but that's only because you're trying to understand concepts that someone of your level shouldn't even be touching upon. And if you did, it would be in a school of magic you were highly specialized in."

"Is that a yes or no?" Jake asked, unable to hold himself back from at least teasing her a little. Mainly to make himself feel better, as he had been feeling quite incompetent during last few days.

"A yes, for most part," Artemis sighed. "I sucked at studying concepts, and like you, I learned best while in combat. Trial and error was my way forward until, finally, things would just click into place. Something I believe you can relate to."

Jake nodded as Artemis continued.

"My highest stat was Perception for most of my Path. At times, Agility got close to overtaking it, with it happening at times during my earlier levels, but as I got higher in grades, more I focused on Perception," Artemis began, and as she'd regained some energy after arrows earlier, she began pacing back and forth.

"Most of stats are rather self-explanatory and easily understood. Strength makes your body stronger, Agility makes you faster, Intelligence makes your spells more powerful, Toughness makes you more resilient, and so on and so forth. Now we of course have three stats that include resources in Stamina, Vitality, and Wisdom. Stats that are often considered odds one out and least understood in general are Willpower and Perception. Willpower is its own thing, but I would argue that Perception is far less understood than even Willpower. Reason for this is how stats are expressed to others."

Artemis pointed toward ground with a finger and focused. After about a second, sand began whirling around ever so slightly before calming down. Jake had no real movement of energy, and he instantly knew what Artemis had done.

"With pure Willpower, you can make world do as you want it to. You are limited by nothing but your imagination, which, as we have discussed, is a legitimate limitation. Oh, and, of course, your energy reserves and mental energy. However, limits of Perception are not anything that can be seen outwardly. In my eyes, Perception is most

personal of all stats. It does not affect world – outside of when skills make use of it – but instead is entirely internal. Only you know what your senses perceive, and even if you could share a sense with another, there is never any guarantee that two people who are looking at the same thing see it identically.”

“old trope where you can’t know if your version of a color is the same as someone else’s,” Jake muttered.

“Something like that,” Artemis nodded. “When most people think about Perception, they think about usual senses. Smell, touch, hearing, taste, and the one most people consider: sight. Along with that, there are naturally ones to sense energies, and whatever skills provide. However, there are so many more, some of which I’m sure you’ve noticed. Perception also affects the danger sense of every living creature. It affects its ability to perceive space around them, to notice if others are nearby, estimate how powerful other beings are, and many other things that would take too long to list, but perhaps the most important thing it does when we’re talking about understanding concepts is Perception’s effect on intuition.”

By now, Jake was very engaged as he listened on.

“Intuition is, in my humble opinion, the greatest benefit of having high Perception. All living beings are, at least in part, driven by instinct. It’s only natural. Even someone like Void Mechanist unknowingly relies on his intuition all the time. It’s what gives birth to those moments of inspiration while studying something or those that subtly guide him to research one topic over another to find a wished-for solution faster. It’s the same for you when you’re trying to improve your understanding of a concept. At any moment, inspiration may strike, and by your intuition making a thought appear.”

Artemis was still pacing back and forth in the arena, clearly quite passionate about this particular topic.

“Not to say intuition can’t be dangerous. It isn’t perfect by any means, and it can easily lead you astray should you trust it entirely. Instincts are naturally flawed, but in this particular context, when it comes to comprehending concepts... there are no wrong answers. No one has the exact same comprehension of a concept as another, and only one who needs to accept your understanding is the system, nothing nor anyone else.”

Stopping her pacing, Artemis looked at Jake and smiled. “That’s why I don’t think you have any cause to worry. Even if you find comprehending a concept difficult right now, and even if you don’t have personality traits that correspond to a high level of conceptual understanding... it doesn’t matter. Just let your high Perception do the work and keep practicing and experiencing more and more until finally you intuit an answer. Rely on your instincts, and trust them to guide you to comprehension.”

Jake had gone into this lesson with the hope of improving his archery... what he hadn’t expected was to instead learn things about his Bloodline and himself that he hadn’t

even considered before. Neir had he expected Artemis to once and for all confirm a ory Jake had since his integration into system. A definitive universal truth Jake saw no good argument against:

Chapter 1103: An Intrinsic Relationship

Jake had always known that his investment in Perception was a stroke of genius. He wasn't just doing it because his Bloodline increased his Perception, and because having his senses improve just felt right somehow. That feeling of rightness likely came from his intuition, and since intuition came from Perception, it was truly a self-perpetuating cycle. Knowing that Perception was a lot grander than Jake usually read about stat didn't surprise him at all. Through his Bloodline, he already knew that Perception was far from a simple stat, but he had perhaps underestimated just how closely tied to stat his Bloodline truly was.

Artemis talked about intuition being flawed at times and how one couldn't entirely trust it, but in Jake's case, he genuinely viewed his own intuition as more trustworthy than anything or anyone else. If Villy said one thing and his gut said anor, he would go with his gut a hundred times out of a hundred, and so far, it had yet to lead him astray.

Jake also knew by now that his Sphere of Perception, as he called it, was more or less just an extension of spatial perception. Everyone had some kind of understanding of ir own positioning within space and could vaguely feel what was around m. Jake just took that entire concept to a whole new level through his Sphere of Perception, which gave him omnidirectional detection of everything.

Well, mostly everything. It only allowed Jake to see shapes. Sphere of Perception didn't display color, and unless writing in a book was made with insanely thick ink that stuck up slightly, Jake couldn't read it eir using his sphere... not that he could anyway, as Sphere of Perception didn't work with his translation skill.

His danger sense was also boosted to a level far beyond what Perception could usually do. Artemis talked about how it allowed precognitive knowledge of an attack simply by having high enough Perception, and upon elaboration, she explained that having a significantly higher Perception stat than one's foe helped, and if opposite was true, Perception also became utterly useless in regards to danger sense.

A C-grade would never even be able to know y were in any kind of danger before a god killed m. That particular aspect of danger sense definitely didn't seem to be a thing for Jake at all, as he could feel if gods had any ill intent quite easily. On that note, killing intent, as many called it, was just an extension of danger sense, allowing one to detect if something or someone planned on attacking. This in itself was an instinct people had even before system, as re were countless examples of people getting "vibes" from someone that y were about to turn aggressive.

Feeling that someone was observing you was also just a fusion of danger sense and intuition. Artemis explained that she knew when Jake was looking at her and where precisely he was looking, which luckily didn't get Jake into too much trouble. This effect, just like danger sense, only really worked on people weaker than oneself or not too much stronger.

Jake's version of this was also taken to absolute extreme. He knew when anyone was observing him, no matter how strong y were. Having realized a lot of things, it took a lot of willpower for Jake to hide his inner thoughts from Artemis, as he still wasn't ready to expose his biggest secrets related to his Bloodline, many of which not even Villy knew.

more he learned, more Jake couldn't help but consider how his Bloodline had seemingly turned his Perception stat into something that could only be described as transcendent in quality. At least some of its effects were, and Jake now also couldn't help but wonder if anything bad could have happened if he hadn't invested sufficiently in his Perception stat. Could he have potentially lost some of Bloodline-empowered abilities he'd begun to take as a given?

It was all hard to tell, but Jake suspected that power of his Bloodline was intrinsically tied to Perception stat one way or another.

He also began to consider that it was possible Villy had already known or suspected this. Jake had told Primordial that he got a percentage increase in Perception from his Bloodline, something that was apparently not at all normal. He at least hadn't ever come across any accounts of others having it.

While most factions kept powers of Bloodlines secret, y did reveal some things about m to convince others y were powerful. It was also a pretty normal thing for factions with powerful Bloodlines to form alliances and attempt to have children with mutated fusions of several Bloodlines, and in this process, exact descriptions of several Bloodlines sometimes leaked.

Jake considered when he would have to talk to Villy more about it at some point, but for now, he chose to move on. While deepening his understanding of his Bloodline was all well and good, it didn't help his current predicament much.

talk about concepts continued for a couple of more days. several days all felt overly long and detailed, and every second only revolved around concepts. Jake tried his darndest, but in the end, it boiled down to Jake indeed being a bit of an idiot when it came to understanding m. At least if he wanted to do so the traditional way.

Ultimately, he and Artemis decided that the best way for him to see some real progress was for Jake to put himself under pressure. He needed to stimulate his own instincts and, during moments like those, seek an understanding of concepts he wished to improve.

Jake wasn't all too happy about it, though. He felt a bit like a failure, having to accept that training with Artemis alone likely wasn't going to cut it. Even if he did manage to experience some real progress, it would be far slower than if he just accepted reality and went out for some practical experience.

Training had a problem that it couldn't add real pressure. Within Colosseum, Jake wasn't at risk of dying. Artemis never attacked him with genuine intent to kill, even if she could kill him within Colosseum.

In a real thing within Nevermore, Colosseum had felt far more realistic, even if he also had multiple lives re. It had been real enough so that even if Jake recognized that it was a Challenge Dungeon with multiple lives, instinctively, he still treated every battle as a genuine life and death.

This could be most easily seen by his survival instinct not kicking into gear during the duels within Emblem. Jake wouldn't have surrendered himself to his instincts and allowed himself to do whatever he'd gone at the end of Colosseum of Mortals even if he could, but in this instance, he couldn't even if he wanted to.

It didn't help that Jake could continue to see the world around his actual body outside Emblem when he and Artemis were inside. He had that weird double-vision where he had to filter one out and focus fully on the sphere his projected form possessed within simulated Colosseum, and doing all that forced Jake to constantly be in a state of recognizing that the world within Emblem wasn't real.

This story is posted elsewhere by the author. Help me out by reading the autistic version.

Anyway, Emblem was overall great for this type of practice, but it wasn't enough for someone like Jake. If it had been Sword Saint training with a god specializing in swordsmanship, Jake felt as if he'd already have upgraded several skills.

Artemis clearly recognized that Jake didn't feel happy about the conclusion of the two of them had reached as she sighed and spoke.

"Don't think there's anything wrong with this kind of approach; everyone's different, and no method is necessarily better than the other. From how far you've already come on your Path, you're already far ahead of the curve and being way too hard on yourself," Artemis assured him. "I myself was never good at learning anything outside of during a hunt. Perhaps the most famous example of someone notoriously horrible at getting anything out of training on his own is War God. Primordial, which many recognize as the most powerful god in multiverse when it comes to pure combat, doesn't possess the three traits we spoke about at all. From my understanding, his moments of enlightenment all came during combat, and due to his Transcendence, he was able to take massive risks against more powerful opponents to eventually break through his current limitations and upgrade his skills. As you've probably guessed by now, the most common expression of someone deepening their understanding of a concept is a skill upgrade. It's not a requirement for

upgrading a skill to also better understand fundamental concepts behind it, but if I had to guess, it would be most common one.” The link to origin of this information rests in novel *fire* net

Jake genuinely appreciated Artemis’ attempt to keep him positive, but he still felt that only way to alleviate his own frustration was to see some actual progress, and best way to do that would be through combat.

“Thanks for your encouragement... and I think it’s time we head out to one of se many fabled hunting grounds I’ve heard so much about,” Jake said with a smile, trying to be positive.

“y won’t disappoint you,” Artemis nodded. “Now question is just what one you are interested in.”

“You know what? Surprise me,” Jake said.

“Oh? Well, sure. What kind of level range are you aiming for?”

“Late and peak C-grades... maybe a few weaker B-grades mixed in, dependent on power of variants,” Jake said. He wasn’t confident he could get proper competition from anything in C-grade at this point, so if he truly wanted to push himself, fighting a B-grade could be necessary.

“Alright, I have a few places in mind that could use a culling,” Artemis said with a smile.

“And I’ll gladly be hunter that gets job done,” Jake responded, beginning to feel a little hyped up to finally get his body moving again after spending so long only training with mortal stats in Emblem or meditating.

“Great,” Artemis said as she took out a token and tossed it to Jake. “Use this before going through one of gateways, and you will reach an outpost close to hunting ground. I figure you can handle rest from re.”

Jake caught token and nodded as he also wanted to clarify one more thing. “No one will be watching me while I’m doing this, right? You won’t assign me people who are hiding and making sure I don’t mess up and find myself killed?”

“re won’t be anyone,” Artemis promised him.

“Good,” Jake nodded.

“But I can’t say if Yggdrasil will step in if you do die somehow,” Artemis added.

“I hope she doesn’t,” Jake said, as he didn’t even like thought of that.

Artemis didn't say anything to Jake's comment as she just nodded. "Now go. Chances are I'll still be around when you return, and in any case, you can use token I just gave you to contact me at any time. You know, if you need extraction or help in any way... or just want a chat. I'll also use it to contact you if anything happens."

"I may just take you up on that casual chatting offer," Jake smirked as he stood up and stretched. "In that case, I'm off. Going to be good to get in a few more levels."

"Enjoy yourself," Artemis said as she watched Jake walk out of living room and toward gateway.

Jake felt better as he held up token to gateway while infusing energy into it. gateway reacted and without furr hesitation, Jake walked through it.

His foot stepped from palace atop a mountain into a tall wooden outpost floating on an island in sky. Jake saw blue skies stretching out before him as he walked forward onto platform where gate was constructed. With his sphere, he saw entire island and eight buildings it had on it, with seven of m being small wooden lodges or huts.

last building was a lot larger than all ors and looked a lot more official. Jake also saw a single person sitting within, and as he observed this person, individual inside also noticed Jake's arrival.

Guess I'm supposed to go inside and check in or something, Jake thought to himself as he walked toward it while observing his surroundings. entire place definitely gave off cozy vibes, and while re was no one else on island besides Jake and person inside large lodge, re were traces of ors occasionally staying re.

Entering large lodge, he instantly made eye contact with a beastkin sitting behind a counter about five meters from entrance. Without thinking, he used Identify as Identify was also used on him.

[Beastkin – lvl 349]

beastkin, who looked to have descended from some kind of rodent, observed Jake and was first to speak.

"A human, eh? Are you here alone, or will you be bringing any companions?" he asked in a super casual voice, which surprised Jake a bit.

That is when Jake realized... he hadn't even made his mask visible. During se days with Artemis, he naturally didn't walk around with a mask on all day but had made it invisible. He'd entirely forgotten to make it show again, and he guessed that was why beastkin hadn't recognized him.

Normally, a mask was used to hide one's identity, but for Jake, mask was almost his hallmark by now. Considering all this, beastkin probably just saw Jake as some C-grade hunter dozens of levels beneath himself who'd come to outpost for a little hunting trip.

And Jake had no interest in correcting him.

"No, it's just me," Jake said with a smile. "Hoping to get in a good hunt, I have a few things I wanna practice."

"I can only wish you luck," beastkin said with a polite smile. "I will warn you, though, jungle has been a bit restless recently after two new decently powerful B-grades appeared in last couple of years. You can check wall over re to get a better understanding of areas to avoid and where safest to hunt. Oh, and do remember to check list for no-go targets."

Jake looked over and saw a massive map covering one of walls. It was clearly magical as it looked like ink was moving ever-so-slowly, and on it, he also saw a lot of small blips, which he at first thought were targets to hunt down until he saw a list off to side, displaying about five hundred names.

"Those are ones currently registered and hunting below. Based on how you're acting, I'm going to guess this is your first time at one of hunting grounds?" beastkin asked with a chuckle.

"Guilty as charged," Jake didn't deny.

"No worries, no worries," beastkin shook his head as he pointed to a small stack of pamphlets on desk in front of him. "Take one of those before you leave; it contains some basic etiquette rules and whatnot. It also helps with keeping track of endangered creatures you aren't allowed to kill. It will also serve as tracker for map, and if need be, you can tear off back page, and it should alert anyone else holding a pamphlet nearby."

"Alright," Jake said as he walked over and picked one of m up. "How many B-grades are re in hunting ground?"

"Locally in this district? Forty-seven. It fluctuates a bit as some of m migrate around, and some evolve while ors are killed off, but this is one of areas with not that many, so don't worry too much. y aren't strongest eir, and y tend not to bor with weaker C-grades, so you should be fine."

beastkin obviously assumed Jake was being cautious about encountering too powerful beasts, and he couldn't help but just smile and nod. "I guess we'll see. Thanks for introduction."

“No problem and I hope to see you again,” Beastkin nodded with a smile. “Happy hunting.”

With that sendoff, Jake exited lodge, ready to see what Panon of Life hunting grounds had to offer.

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Chapter 1104: Introduction To Hunting Grounds

Jake stood in air, observing grand jungle that spread out endlessly beneath him. When he looked into distance, he faintly detected curvature, indicating that he was no longer on Great Planet. He guessed he was on another planet, likely smaller than Earth by a fair margin, about a fourth size. Earth after system, that is, as by pre-system standards, planet would still have been considered decently large.

Jungle below was insanely dense, to point where Jake couldn't see anything down there. He estimated plants and trees to be incredibly tall, with an entire world existing beneath its canopy, teeming with life.

Occasionally, during few minutes Jake spent observing, he saw creatures appear above treelines, some fighting, some merely traveling, and others running across dense growth, likely to avoid obstacles in jungle below.

Not too far behind him, outpost still floated in sky, but Jake couldn't see it even if he turned around. A powerful barrier covered entire place, and it was only while holding his pamphlet that he could detect its exact location. He could also just remember where it was and fly there, as barrier only blocked occasional energy attacks from beasts fighting below and not anything that entered.

Jake assumed beastkin he'd met there also had task of dealing with wayward beasts accidentally invading outpost. With all formations placed up there, Jake reckoned he could easily deal with even low-tier B-grades. Or he could just call for help.

Either way, chances of that happening were very low, as Jake could distinctly feel that no B-grades were nearby. Creatures in immediate vicinity seemed to mostly be mid-tier C-grades, with one of monkeys he saw jumping above treetops at level 286. Well below anything Jake would ever find worth fighting.

So, his first task was to move toward an area of jungle. He detected mana density to be higher in a certain direction, and without much further hesitation, Jake set off, flying and teleporting toward somewhere he could find worthy prey.

Jake had already noticed that there weren't many creatures occupying sky. Usually, natural sky islands were formed from clouds or dense collections of mana, but nothing of the sort could be seen anywhere. That likely also meant that many monsters didn't permanently live and hunt in sky, making it far easier for Jake to travel far above jungle.

While flying, Jake studied information in magical pamphlet he'd been given to become familiar with local endangered species. He purposefully avoided reading anything about monsters actually living beneath, as he wanted that to be a surprise. Plus, it wouldn't be fair if he knew about his prey's abilities when you didn't know anything about him.

What he did read up on was local geography and different zones planet he was on had been split up into – and yes, it was a planet. Entire surface of planet was split into five zones, each centered around five massive lakes. These five lakes were all nearly entirely circular and may as well have been oceans when going by sheer size. You also each created thousands of rivers flowing in all directions around them and were source of all growth in jungle below.

This wasn't most impressive part, though. It was that all of these lakes were connected despite being spread out evenly across planet. It turned out that entire center of planet wasn't made of rock, soil, and all usual stuff it was on places like Earth. Instead, if one dug down just a few hundred kilometers, no matter where it was, one would find water.

I did complain about water levels... and this feels like half a water planet, Jake thought to himself upon realizing that entire underground of place was just one massive ocean. That being the case, Jake was surprised as he read further and realized that planet barely had any aquatic creatures... until he read reason why.

At very center of this planet, a single entity lived. A plant had consumed core of planet and began growing from there, creating a web of seaweed that covered interior of entire planet. Pamphlet made it very clear that no one should dive too deeply into any of five lakes, as if one went too deep, you risked being caught by this plant.

Jake did consider if maybe this utterly massive piece of seaweed was potential prey, but reading that it was estimated to be peak B-grade, he thought again. Besides, Jake reckoned it would take way too long, even if he wanted to go for big seaweed. Who even knows how many liters of poison it would take to contaminate a planet-sized body of water?

Continuing to read pamphlet a bit more, Jake saw a certain section that made him look upwards. Narrowing his eyes, he soon spotted what he was looking for as he shot

upwards for a few hundred kilometers before he found himself blown to one side as incredibly powerful winds caught his wings.

This feels almost by design, Jake thought with a smile as he began to fly toward lake in this section. There were massive jetstreams in sky connecting all lakes, with outposts built beneath these streams. Traveling within it, Jake's speed increased several times over as even if he just sat still, he would be blown across planet at tens of thousands of kilometers an hour.

With use of this jetstream, it didn't take long for giant lake to reach Jake's line of sight. He'd aimed for lake as, by all that he'd read and according to what he felt, most powerful creatures tended to live in its vicinity due to intense and powerful mana given off by water. As Jake got closer, he even spotted what looked like a few floating islands spread across surface of lake, and by his assumptions, this would be where he could find B-grades, as y likely preferred to live closest to water and what could be closer than your own private island?

That was for later, though. For now, Jake wanted a bit of a warmup and to see what local wildlife had to offer. Diving downwards once he estimated he would be able to find things worth hunting, Jake entered stealth as he approached entrance to jungle.

Blasting through dense foliage creating roof of jungle, Jake soon found himself in what seemed like an entirely new world. Greenery filled his vision as massive jungle world could be seen in all directions, and air was filled with a mix of life and water mana due to high moisture in air that was reminiscent of a rainforest.

Looking down, Jake was still over a kilometer above surface of planet, but he could barely see bottom due to all plants in way. Trees and tall plants were in all directions, with vines and other growths connecting everything, creating a web of life.

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Floating down, Jake studied his surroundings carefully before he soon spotted a creature. It was hanging upside down from a vine, seemingly ready to move should any prey get too near. This chapter is updated by **novel★fire★net**

It had two long legs that reminded Jake of an ostrich, except these legs were both armored with scales of some kind. Above was a relatively thin chest covered in feathers with two wings to each side, both with three-fingered hands at end, which gave Jake faint bat vibes, except these wings remained full of multicolored feathers. Finally was head, which was most colorful of all. It looked borderline identical to look of a macaw, including thick beak that Jake didn't doubt could crush most living things into dust.

Using Identify, he guessed that if he went by level, it could definitely also crush his skull if it managed to catch him.

[Rainbowfear Songcrusher – lvl 332]

name of parrot-ostrich-monstrosity was pretty fitting as it did look like it was wearing a rainbow coat, though he still had yet to learn what songcrusher thing was all about. Something he saw no reason to delay finding out.

When down on underbrush below, Jake dispelled his stealth while behind a tree. He wanted to see how bird would react when it saw Jake as he soon moved forward and entered its line of sight.

He instantly felt a gaze land on him, and he looked up to stare back at bird's eyes as it opened its beak.

A faint sense of danger instantly made Jake retreat behind a tree as he heard what sounded like an over-tuned subwoofer. bassy sound released a directed wave of force that blasted past where Jake had just been standing, blowing off a piece of bark from tree Jake had just retreated behind while tearing up ground.

Alright, straight to fighting, I see.

Moving to or side of tree, Jake pulled out his bow and nocked an arrow. Peeking out, Jake released arrow toward parrot monster, but it reacted quickly as it released anor sound wave that blew apart Jake's arrow and made him go back behind tree again as it blocked blow.

Out of curiosity, Jake tried to infuse his elbow with a bit of destructive mana as he slammed it back into tree he had his back up against, only to find his simplistic attack capable of barely damaging bark, showing just how durable se trees were. Which, in retrospect, made sense because if trees were so easily felled, two C-grade monsters fighting would have leveled entire sections of jungle already.

Having confirmed durability of local greenery, Jake went back on offensive. damn parrot had yet to even move from its vine, and Jake was planning on changing that. Before, he'd also placed his Mark on bird should it move, but his sphere alone was large enough to still encompass it as Jake went on offensive.

Rar than go out from behind tree and shoot, Jake instead shot to side. With Jake's guidance, arrow flew in between trees and vines as it curved around to hit parrot in side, but once more, bird reacted in time as it flapped its wing, releasing a wave of rainbow light that blew arrow away.

However, this move had left it open as anor two arrows came from or side, followed by a third descending from above. Trying to react, parrot blew away one of two with a soundwave but was struck by third right as arrow from above severed vine it had been hanging from.

Trying to get back to an upright position, the beast wasn't ready for Jake jumping out from behind the tree, an Arcane Powershot already channeling. It saw Jake just as he released a powerful arrow and tried to blow it away with a shockwave of sound, but the Arcane Powershot proved too powerful for its usual tactics to work.

The bird was struck by the Arcane Powershot in the wing, as the bird managed to turn its side to the arrow right at the end to reduce damage. Meanwhile, Jake was struck by the soundwave that had been aimed at his Powershot, and as it washed over him, Jake felt a slight tingle of pain ring through his body as the attack had damaged even his internals slightly.

It wasn't a bad attack, but it was clear which of them had come out of this looking worse. While the bird was still trying to stabilize, Jake released another barrage of arrows toward it, striking it with three more before the parrot retreated behind a tree.

Jake tried to curve his arrows again, but the beast had seen that trick before and wouldn't just sit still and be hit. With impressive speed, it began flying and using its long legs to jump around the perimeter of where Jake was standing, looking for an opening to strike as Jake kept shooting arrows after it.

His next twenty arrows ended up missing as it was evident the parrot knew this environment extremely well. It took advantage of the cover afforded to it while slowly closing in as safely as possible, having clearly decided to kill Jake rather than do a wise thing and escape.

Jake faced the challenge head-on as he continued trying to hit his foe, actually getting some good practice in. The jungle was filled with obstacles Jake had to consider when shooting his arrows, and with such a fast-moving target, it was difficult to even release arrows that could threaten the bird.

Yet he did manage to. In tandem with Rainbowfear Songcrusher getting closer, Jake also got more accurate, hitting a few minor strafing blows even as the bird did everything it could to avoid taking any damage. It even released waves of rainbow light that obscured its location and created mirror images to confuse Jake, none of them having any effect on Jake.

In the end, it decided to stop delaying. Jake had gotten into the zone and perhaps even a bit too comfortable with the parrot slowly approaching that he wasn't completely ready when it suddenly stopped on a dime and changed directions before charging directly at Jake.

A whirlwind of rainbow light surrounded the parrot as Jake got off a final arrow that hit the bird in the wing just before it was upon him. With incredible momentum, it aimed straight for Jake's head in an attempt to crush his skull before he even had a chance to dodge.

The rainbow light that surrounded Jake and the parrot seemed to slightly affect Jake's mental state as he felt Pride of Malefic Viper react, and a deep bassy sound let out by Rainbowfear Songcrusher just before it went for the killing blow sought to stun him.

At that moment... Jake was disappointed he hadn't been able to get more archery training in. With little to no effort, he dodged snapping beak of parrot and used his overly durable bow to slam bird into ground head-first.

Before it even had a chance to realize how outmatched it was, Jake followed up by grasping back of parrot's head and pushing it down fur as his hand began to glow dark green. beast tried to kick Jake and gave off rainbow explosions, but Jake was too strong in comparison to bird. It definitely wasn't a monster that focused on Strength and found itself utterly suppressed as malefic toxins invaded its head and rest of its body from re.

Jake also activated all poison that had been on arrows he'd hit bird with throughout fight, seeing no need to drag things out. He felt toxins corrode and break down parrot's skull, but just n, parrot let out a loud screech that made Jake react as he pressed down hard, crushing skull of beast into ground, killing it instantly.

You have slain [Rainbowfear Songcrusher – lvl 332] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

incredibly loud screech toward end had genuinely hurt Jake's ears, and he stood up and observed beast closely as he shook his head to get off all rotten biological matter that covered it.

A creeping feeling welled up in his mind as he looked at dead bird. A faint sense of danger lingered, and Jake decided to check out magical pamphlet as something clearly felt wrong.

"Rainbowfear Songbirds (including variants hereof): Agile monsters of avian variety. Attacks include..."

Jake skipped forward in description until he saw a bolded note at end.

"Note: Generally avoid engaging Rainbowfear Songbird, as y are rarely found alone and shall call flock if ir life is threatened. Upon death, Rainbowfear Songbirds will release a dying call that marks ir killer and summons ir entire flock. Should this happen, immediately seek assistance and evacuate to outpost."

Just as he finished reading this, he heard dozens of loud screeches echoing through jungle, more joining in as sounds grew closer.

That day, Jake learned that doing his homework on opponents was a good idea... if he was boring and didn't want a bit of excitement in his life, that is!

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Chapter 1105: Enemies On All Sides

rogue stealthily moved through underbrush, clearing a path for his allies. Not far away, hidden within a magical concealment formation, his two hunting companions waited for him to finish. ir prey was a peak C-grade creature y had been eyeing for a while, and all ir preparations were complete.

Now, y only had to navigate this godforsaken stretch of jungle in one piece to reach ir destination. With stealth, y didn't expect to be noticed by local wildlife, and y just needed nothing unforeseen to happen.

A screech echoed through jungle, nearly causing rogue to lose his footing. His eyes widened in surprise and fear as screech was answered from all around m. Bird cries filled jungle as auras erupted in all directions, birds taking to sky to avenge ir fallen comrade.

rogue stopped entirely, hoping none of insane, psychotic birds would spot him and his party and decide to attack m. As he hunkered down, he heard his hunting party leader speak through ir telepathic link.

"That was dying cry of a Rainbowfear Songbird," mage in ir party said, stating what y all already knew.

"Do you think one of B-grades decided to invade territory of Rainbowfears?" ir third party member, a ranger, asked.

"Doubtful. All local B-grades wouldn't risk it, and re wouldn't be anything in it for m to hunt C-grades. y would only risk serious injury or death by going after Rainbowfears," mage responded. *"I think re's a bigger chance some migratory creature entered this area and killed one of Rainbowfears, unaware of consequences."*

"It could also be a hunter," rogue pointed out jokingly, trying to lighten mood.

"Sure, right, totally," ranger joked back. *"Not like Rainbowfears are notoriously aggressive, attacking anything within ir territory on sight, and anyone with even slightest knowledge of this hunting ground avoids fighting those damn things. One could hope it's some B-grade hunter that's decided to finally wipe out se psycho birds, but I wouldn't get my hopes up."*

"B-grade hunters are only allowed here if it's to restore balance of ecosystem, so it can't be. So, if it were a hunter, y would be C-grade, and thus, we would have already

been notified through manual. So it has to be a monster,” ir party leader pointed out, ever serious one.

“Could still be a hunter. y would only get help if y used hunter manual to seek assistance,” rogue said with a small grin.

“Yeah, he’s got a point! Maybe someone or some party decided that taking on an entire flock of Rainbowfears was a good idea. You know, for fun of it,” ranger continued joke.

“Enough,” ir party leader shut down chatter. *“Regroup, and let’s return and go long way around. Chances are, whoever was stupid enough to slay a Rainbowfear Songbird is already dead, or it’s a B-grade. In eir case, we’d best stay clear of area until it calms down again.”*

While rogue would have loved to joke around more and maybe even try to find out who or what had messed up and killed a Rainbowfear, he knew retreat was best option. If it were a hunter, he could only hope that it was one with good stealth abilities or some life-saving treasure, as that should at least give m a chance to escape.

If it was a party... it was doubtful everyone would make it out. Eir way, only logical response would be to try and escape without drawing any more attention to mselves before making it back to Outpost.

Just n, a shockwave of energy rushed through jungle, momentarily causing many trees and plants to sway, revealing sky through ir thick canopies. rogue and his party stopped in ir tracks as y saw glimpses of a beam of purplish energy shooting into sky from where dying cry of Rainbowfear Songbird had originated, announcing to all where kill was.

Staring, rogue was no longer in mood for jokes as he realized that whoever or whatever had decided to antagonize Rainbowfears was just as insane as those damn birds.

Pressure.

It was best thing one could have when trying to improve mselves. Some felt pressures of responsibility or expectations, but Jake preferred this kind. kind where if he didn’t manage to step up and face whatever challenge was in front of him, he would more than likely find himself a cold, dead corpse at end of it.

That was why he decided to step up this time around. With a single Pulse, he knew he was surrounded by enemies coming for him from all sides. He did use his head a little and quickly skimmed what pamphlet said about Rainbowfear Songbirds, and one section convinced him to go ahead with this plan:

“re are no B-grades among Rainbowfear Flock in Area 1.”

With that knowledge, Jake had all confidence he needed to announce his presence to local flock of birdbrains. He flew up above treeline as he unleashed his aura as well as a beam of arcane mana, both into ground below and sky above. He already saw monsters coming for him and took out his bow with a slight smirk, identifying a few of weird parrots he saw running across treetops.

[Rainbowfear Songcrusher – lvl 331]

[Rainbowfear Songcrusher – lvl 335]

[Rainbowfear Songslinger – lvl 329]

[Rainbowfear Songbender – lvl 338]

There were different variants of these Rainbowfear Songbirds, though they all looked pretty much identical. Songcrushers seemed to be most numerous, and as Jake already had some grasp of what they would do, he decided to test out two or three variants for now.

Taking aim, Jake released a barrage of arrows toward two birds running toward him, one of them a Songslinger. It opened its beak and released a shrill sound that made Jake dodge to the side as an invisible projectile of condensed sound shot by him. At the same time, the birds were hit as a dozen explosions sent two birds flying into the jungle below.

A case of literary theft: this tale is not rightfully on Amazon; if you see it, report violation.

Turning to his next target, Jake shot another barrage, this one toward a single Songcrusher that was getting a bit too close. It tried to blow away his arrows with its large shockwave of sound, but arrows all exploded, shrouding its vision before a second stable arrow blew through explosion, hitting it in the eye and sending it tumbling.

A Songbender was also closing in, and this one gave off a stronger aura than the others. It was already gathering energy as Jake shot an arrow, and it responded quite well as a cloak of rainbow light created a shield that blocked the attack.

Following up, the cloak changed form into a spear and shot toward Jake, forcing him to dodge out of the way as he admired the school of magic he'd never encountered before. He had no idea what kind of affinities these birds were even using, but sound was definitely a big part of their Paths, and even Songbender was letting out low cawing sounds as it manipulated its magic.

And it was quite good at it, as the spear Jake had just dodged exploded shortly after passing by him, transforming into a storm of rainbow thorns trying to strike him in the back. Summoning a barrier of arcane mana, Jake blocked most of them but soon found himself under attack by Rainbowfear Songbirds that had managed to get close enough to use explosive speed to reach him.

Trying to face all se birds in a straight-on fight would just have him be surrounded and worn down, so Jake prepared to move and make use of ample space afforded to him. This was territory of Rainbowfears, yes, but Jake was also quite good at familiarizing himself with local environments.

Blasting himself downwards with destructive arcane mana, Jake sought to reenter jungle below once more. With his Pulse, he counted a total of seventy-one Rainbowfear Songbirds currently in pursuit of him, and only thing he could do was just to get a move on picking m off one by one.

Back in jungle, Jake was instantly jumped by a Songcrusher leaping off a tree toward him, but he was fast enough to angle himself and kick birdbrain in beak, launching himself away as he also decided to get a bit more serious. He kind of had to, considering four parrots were closing in fast, and with his current speed, avoiding m all would be hard.

Arcane Awakening activated at stable percentage as power flowed through Jake's body, and making use of his improved speed, he managed to blast by two birds while pulling out his bow.

A rain of arcane arrows bad jungle in explosive arcane mana as a cover, allowing Jake to retreat in direction of a lone Songbender that had yet to locate Jake visually. He briefly stopped on a branch and began charging an Arcane Powershot, taking aim and standing ready for when Songbender would enter his line of sight.

He managed to charge attack for nearly three full seconds before his target was about to appear. Before Songbender even had time to see Jake, he released string of his arrow, and a moment later, parrot appeared from behind a large tree. It had no time to react at all as Powershot struck it in chest, sending blood and fears flying everywhere as yet anor explosion alerted all nearby Rainbowfears to Jake's location.

Not wasting his time to finish off bird, Jake shot several more arrows toward it as he got moving again, and combined with damage from Arcane Powershot and fact se birds weren't very durable, he soon got a notification.

You have slain [Rainbowfear Songbender – lvl 330] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

Right as he got it, a massive soundwave swept in from side, taking Jake by surprise and forcing him to block as he was blasted away. wave had been faster and stronger than anything else Jake had encountered, and he soon realized why.

Well, ain't that something.

Four Songcrushers and one Songslinger were approaching him toger, and he saw Songcrushers all release a soundwave of ir own, only for Songslinger to release an

attack of its own that absorbed and amplified attacks of four ors into one massive wave.

Another such attack arrived only a moment later, this one even more powerful and condensed. Dodging behind a tree, Jake was shocked to see bark explode everywhere as the poor thing had a hole blown into it, and a second wave sent the entire thing tumbling and Jake scrambling to the side.

A group of five birds really upped the pressure as they released attack after attack, forcing Jake to retreat away from them. Luckily, they couldn't move very fast while also doing their sound attacks, letting Jake get some good distance as he went for a solitary Songcrusher.

His target wasn't ready as it was soon struck by an arrow from behind after leaping and flying toward its brethren, blasting it down into the ground and through several vines. Another two arrows sought to finish it off, but Jake was forced to abandon his assault as two Songbenders released a combined attack where they summoned a shower of crystalline rainbow fragments that bombarded Jake's location like a minigun.

Not being able to kill Songcrusher was a bit annoying, but hopefully, the poison on the arrows would put it out of commission... at least, that was hope until Jake saw a new variant of parrot make its appearance as it flew over, escorted by two Songcrushers.

[Rainbowfear Songmender – lvl 341]

It began singing once close to Songcrusher, and rainbow light fell upon the heavily damaged monster and began to heal it. Instantly, this fight had gotten a lot more annoying as Jake would actually have to finish off his opponents now or risk getting into a really prolonged fight he wasn't sure he would win.

Not that it was certain he had a choice, as Jake was just happy he had held back with Arcane Awakening and kept it at a safe level for now. Retreating once more while circling around to try and find a semi-isolated foe. He soon found one, and through a barrage of arrows and a quick Arcane Powershot, Jake got his second kill before he swiftly moved on, never allowing too many opponents to surround him at once.

He purposefully tried to run in unpredictable patterns, but whenever he fought something, all Rainbowfears became aware of his location. The dying cries of birds he killed certainly didn't help matters either. In fact, Jake felt as if birds got better and faster at locating him more time went on, making him feel as if he was on a bit of a timer. New novel chapters are published on ***novel·fire·net***

Jake did manage to kill four more parrots while leaving three ors severely injured over the next ten or so minutes, with those three getting saved by their feared comrades. By now, it was nearly impossible to find isolated Rainbowfear Songbirds, making it incredibly hard to pick them off.

many birds garing was both a good and a bad thing. For one, it meant that Jake could more easily kite m around without running into opponents, no matter direction he went, so that was definitely beneficial.

As for bad things... oh boy, re were a lot of those. It really shouldn't come as a surprise when one considers how sound worked even before system, but sound waves tended to compound. Several loud sounds toger amplified one anor, creating even more powerful sound waves. parrots used this as more Rainbowfear Songbirds that were toger, more y could amplify one anor, to level that some in flock had to dedicate energy to protecting mselves and ors against ir own attacks.

Jake had run into a group of twelve birds, which, through ir combined effort, were able to release massive blasts of pure sound that made trees bend and tore apart everything in ir path. re was probably a limit to how strong ir combo attacks could get, but Jake had no interest in finding out.

Anor bad thing about m all being gared was that healers and Songbenders with defensive magic were always nearby. Shooting arrows into a packed flock of over sixty high-tier C-grade bird monsters that could heal and support each or wasn't going to get Jake far, and he knew it.

But... re was some icing on cake.

Originally, Jake had come for archery practice, which was still plan, but he had to get an upper hand first. many Songbirds garing up meant that oretically, attacks with large areas of effect should prove useful, but rule of intensity versus scale was still a thing, meaning Jake couldn't do much meaningful damage if he just aimed for making big explosions.

He did have one relatively new weapon in his arsenal, though. One that he believed would prove highly effective in current environment he found himself within... luckily for him, he had a pretty good stock of special bottles just waiting to get popped open.

That's right, it was time for some good old chemical warfare by unleashing poison gas upon local avian population, war crimes be damned.

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Chapter 1106: Angry Birds

Poisoning entire local population of Rainbowfear Songbirds took a bit of preparation. If Jake simply began throwing around bottles haphazardly, he doubted he could create a large enough field of death to do damage he wanted to.

That's why Jake took a slower and more measured approach. Checking his inventory, Jake had a total of one hundred and twelve bottles of liquid poison gas, most of m made during his stay with his parents or brief moments of downtime he had recently. It was a lot of bottles, and each of m was quite dangerous in its own right.

[Arcane-Infused Rotbreath Poison Gas (Rare)] – With every breath, life shall wane, and destruction roams. Mixing potent death affinity toxins and arcane energies, a powerful poison gas has been concocted. This poison is primarily inflicted through breathing,g but can also easily penetrate bodies of anyone in physical contact with it. If inflicted, it will spread through body and cause necrotic damage to any tissue it affects, causing flesh to rot. Destructive arcane energies allow it to spread faster as it weakens foe's tissue. Wounds caused by necrotic poison are extremely difficult to heal.

To achieve desired effect, Jake set his plan into motion. While moving around, still trying to attack occasional parrot, Jake also began to place poison bottles all over jungle in a circular pattern while cycling around Rainbowfears.

As a reminder, bottles poison gas was stored within were of Jake's special design. With nothing more than a mental command, Jake could have bottles detonate, turning each into its own remote-activated gas bomb.

Jake spread se bottles and embedded m in trees or hung m from vines all around place, his storage rapidly depleting. During this, he naturally had to make sure Rainbowfears stayed in roughly same area, and he moved deliberately to force m into garing even more.

He did manage to kill anor parrot that had strayed from flock, Jake taking Songslinger by surprise with a fully charged Arcane Powershot from behind, blowing its head straight off. This naturally helped serve as confirmation that birds would do well garing toger as y hunted for Jake.

Things did get spicy a few times when Jake got too close to flock. combined attack of dozens of late-to-peak C-grades wasn't something Jake could take lightly, and he even ended up suffering a few minor injuries as he fought back, landing a fair number of arrows himself in retaliation.

Progress was swift, though.

Fifty left.

An area of roughly fifteen square kilometers was what Jake had designated as blast zone. It was within this area that Jake spread bottles out evenly, with expectation that poison gas should cover entire thing. From what limited experimentation Jake had with this kind of poison gas, he was capable of very slightly controlling poison gas even after he released it. Not by much, but by using Touch of Malefic Viper and fact his arcane energy was an intrinsic part of this particular poison gas, it should be enough for Jake to contain zone he planned on gassing.

environment would likely also prove highly beneficial to Jake. thick canopies above should help contain poison somewhat, and dense life affinity in air was perfect medium for a primarily death-attuned poison. se Rainbowfears had also proven mselves somewhat fragile, likely due to ir Paths mostly revolving around defense through magic or winning through overwhelming offensive power, as some of sound waves Jake had to flee from could easily kill most peak C-grades and severely injure even some B-grades.

Sadly for m, Jake was pretty damn good at avoiding even invisible attacks as he always managed to stay at a distance that was safe enough to not risk taking lethal damage yet still close enough to give Rainbowfears hope y could land a solid hit.

Thirty.

By now, Jake had spread out enough poison bottles to create full zone of poison gas, but Jake wanted a few more in immediate area around all Rainbowfears when he unleashed gas cloud.

While parrots were gared, y weren't exactly clumped up. y tended to still keep sometimes up to a hundred meters between each or as y moved around, a short distance to a C-grade, but when re were over sixty of m, it meant y still occupied quite a large area, hence need for poison gas zone to be as big as Jake was planning on making it.

Moving toward center of this zone, Jake placed even more bottles re to ensure poison mist would be strongest in epicenter. After spreading fifteen more, Jake decided it was good enough. He spent anor ten minutes getting Rainbowfears nice and riled up, even shooting a few Arcane Powershots into ir midst, injuring but not killing some of ir members to really piss m off.

Once in position, Jake got ready. Using his superior speed, Jake had created some distance between pursuing flock and himself, buying ten or so seconds to do final preparations.

Fifteen bottles of poison gas in liquid form appeared around him as Jake condensed arcane mana to surround each and every one of m. He formed arcane bolts containing gas bombs and waited.

screeches of angry birds grew closer, and right before y spotted Jake once more, he shot all mana bolts forward. Songcrusher in lead of flock saw arcane bolt mid-flight and quickly moved to dodge, something it successfully did as bolt flew closer to center of bird flock.

A similar thing happened in a dozen or places as bolts were missed all over... just as Jake had planned as he focused his mind and gave command to all bombs spread throughout jungle at once, including bolts he'd just attacked with.

Boom goes ... well, not quite dynamite.

Despite Jake's thoughts, re was no grand explosion. sound of Rainbowfears drowned out everything else, as all Jake heard was glass shattering... and environment changed.

A deep purple – almost black – blanket of mist instantly covered jungle. It slightly obscured vision, but no one had any time to consider that aspect of poison gas. All of Rainbowfears as one stopped mid-attack as poison surrounded m from all sides. All of m had been breathing to increase resource restoration and even as part of releasing ir sound attacks, making many unwillingly take a deep breath of poison gas, instantly having it enter ir bodies.

Panic didn't even have time to fully set in before an Arcane Powershot pierced into midst of Rainbowfears, aimed at a Songmender that was protected by several or parrots just moments before.

Jake aimed to take full advantage of situation as he activated Timeless Focus of Apex Hunter's effect he'd lovingly named Rapid Fire. Speeding his actions up, Jake released a few dozen arrows in swift succession. He wanted to take down every healer among m during this time, as that was one of biggest worries with this plan.

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second biggest was what was about to happen next. Instinctively, majority of Rainbowfears sought to escape poison mist, and while some began to flee to sides, many also shot straight upwards, which would allow m to exit poison mist... something Jake naturally didn't want m to do as he unleashed anor attack he knew would take quite toll on him.

Holding nothing back, Jake pushed his Arcane Awakening furr, making his aura spike as Jake also fully unleashed his Bloodline upon chasing birds who were already in a state of distress. Finally, to truly take advantage, Pride activated as he mentally attacked several dozen late-to-peak C-grades at once.

Jake had expected to feel severe backlash... but unexpectedly, he was fine. No splitting headache. No pain whatsoever. This nearly delayed Jake longer as things had not gone as he'd hoped, but luckily for him, effect on all Rainbowfears was more than effective, leaving m all stunned from mental attack.

Restarting his assault, Jake began picking off more of Songmenders. re were a total of five in flock, and all of m were now exposed. stunned birds who'd just suffered some severe mental damage spent even longer within poison, and to make matters even better, ir instincts to help one anor began to be a detriment.

Having noticed Jake trying to kill Songmenders, nearly all or parrot-like monsters stopped trying to flee and instead wanted to help ir healers. However, in order to do that, y needed to remain within poison cloud for longer, and with so many being affected, even if Songmenders were left alone, y would struggle to keep up.

More shockwaves of pure sound erupted from group of birds as y went on offensive once more, but Jake was more prepared this time. Using One Step, he dodged in time as he shot anor arrow into chest of a Songmender. A Songcrusher jumped for him right n, but he effortlessly avoided its initial attack before following up with a swift kick that sent it into trajectory of an incoming soundwave.

To Jake's surprise, rar than be hit by attack, Songslinger who'd released soundwave managed to dispel it in time, leaving Songcrusher unharmed. Behind Songslinger, Songbenders of group used ir odd rainbow magic as y fought back against poison mist, trying to push it away while creating shields for damaged Songmenders.

Not gonna give you time for that.

Curving arrows were back on menu as Jake continued his assault before birds could fully get ir bearings. About twenty of m had still shot into sky above to escape poison mist, with ors trying to address what was happening to m, leaving an opening Jake couldn't waste.

Arrows curved in and hit a Songmender in neck before promptly exploding, taking half of neck with it in process. Anor Songmender tried to come and help, but a quick Gaze and an arrow to skull put down anor.

three remaining ones weren't long for this world eir, as Jake spared nothing to finish m off. He even ended up taking a nasty retaliatory attack to get last one with a Powershot, leaving flock without any of ir healers.

By now, about thirty seconds had passed since Jake released poison gas cloud, and he knew Rainbowfears had adapted by now. ones who'd fled to sky above were less affected by poison than those on ground below, and none of m wanted to reenter now poison-filled jungle.

With its healers dead, remaining Rainbowfears also shot up into sky to find non-toxic air, which was actually fine with Jake as he gladly shot arrows after them during its escape.

Contrary to birds, Jake was having a swell time surrounded by poison gas. In fact, it felt quite nice, and his mana was being actively restored through Palata of Malefic Viper. These birds likely believed Jake would also have to flee jungle to escape deadly environment, but nope, he gladly stayed with a smile on his face as he nocked another arrow.

Songslinger floating above tree line, just outside of range of poison mist, wasn't ready as an Arcane Powershot pierced through leaves below it, tearing off one of its wings and sending it tumbling. A Songbender summoned a barrier to try and block any follow-up attack but instead found itself under fire as an arrow struck it in chest, sending it tumbling through air and down through canopy, back into poison mist once more.

This had been next part of Jake's plan. dense jungle was incredibly good at hiding anything within it, making it impossible for even him to scout down into it from above. same was true for birds, meaning that as long as Jake was hiding within, they couldn't even counterattack properly.

That meant its only option if they wanted to fight back was to reenter poison mist. Of course, they also had option of simply fleeing battle, but Jake knew they wouldn't. While it was a bit cheap, Jake had skimmed more of description of these Rainbowfears and seen that they were indeed highly territorial, to level where they would rather fight and die than abandon what they believed was rightfully theirs. On top of that, they were perhaps most vindictive species Jake had ever seen, and if anyone killed a single Rainbowfear, they would hunt that person down until they all died or its target was pecked to pieces. In summary... very angry birds.

With a massive advantage, Jake continued making use of his Mark and Pulses to locate his prey above as he kept shooting Arcane Powershot after Arcane Powershot. they tried to dodge or block, but Songbenders couldn't defend everyone at once. they also tried to counterattack, but Jake wasn't stupid enough to stay in same place after attacking, as he moved around constantly.

Evidently, Rainbowfears were unsure how to proceed as dying cry after dying cry echoed out. Ultimately, birds made decision to fight Jake within poison mist, which likely just expedited its deaths. Within mist, they were clearly weaker, and all Jake had to do was buy time and slowly whittle them down one by one while staying mobile and never allowing them to lock him down or surround him.

One by one, he managed to finish them off as parrot-like monsters only grew weaker with every passing moment. Jake was also beginning to have a harder time as his Arcane Awakening was taking a toll on his body. His longevity in combat was definitely being tested. Still, recent improvements to his soul once more proved momentarily beneficial when dealing with both these blights.

In the end, it still took Jake an hour before the final Rainbowfear Songbird was slain. As he killed the final one and heard perhaps the longest dying cry so far, he knew no other Rainbowfear Songbird was nearby to hear it.

Standing over the final dead bird, Jake breathed heavily as he took a seat on a stone. His environment was beginning to look quite grim as the poison mist hadn't only been killing birds within but even this entire section of the jungle. The trees and plants had all been absorbing some of the mist, and while that did mean most of it had dispersed by now, it also resulted in the smell of rot becoming quite pervasive.

With a Pulse, Jake could see that the circular section of the jungle Jake had unleashed his poison mist in didn't look very good anymore and would likely take quite a few years to recover.

This degree of environmental destruction had totally been worth it, though... because Jake had gotten a sweet level from it all!

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 303 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

It wasn't much, but it was honest work and a good start. With a satisfied smile, Jake prepared himself for another meditation session to recover from overusing his boosting skill, something that wasn't anything new to him.

However, as he closed his eyes, he couldn't help but get a nagging gut feeling as a faint sense of danger still lingered... making him believe that perhaps his dealings with these Rainbowfear Songbirds weren't entirely over yet.

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On the other side of the planet, on the largest island within Grand Lake at the center of Area 5, a large island with several trees sat. Rainbowfear Songbirds could be seen everywhere, most of them tending to nests and protecting their eggs. This chapter is updated by
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In a clearing, a Rainbowfear sat on a large nest with its eyes closed. It had no eggs but was simply resting while absorbing abundant environmental mana given off by Grand Lake. It was a peaceful time, as none dared invade the territory of these birds.

Just then... it heard something. The eyes of the Rainbowfear bird shot open as it stood up in an instant, taking in the sound. The final death knell of a Rainbowfear Flock.

The soundwaves had traveled across the planet, amplified and empowered with every death cry. From it, emotions, memories, and images entered the Rainbowfear's mind as it became aware of what had happened to one of its flocks.

It saw killer as its voice rumbled.

“Human.”

aura of a B-grade briefly flared as large avian monster calmed down. It wanted to go immediately but found itself unable to due to it being breeding season and rest of its flock needing protection.

However, Sovereign did not fret. Rainbowfear Songbirds always got ir revenge.

Always.

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Chapter 1107: An Odd Little Encounter

Jake had been more injured than he initially thought. destructive energies running through his body due to his boosting skill had obscured much of internal damage, but once it was dispelled, Jake could see and feel just how dangerous sound-based attacks could be.

As he meditated to recover, Jake also analyzed battle and admitted that poison had proven more effective than he first assumed. It wasn't just due to its efficiency, but also how it made those affected act.

Inducing panic in his opponents was a powerful weapon, and it was natural to attempt to flee to safety if suddenly thrown into a highly toxic environment. mental effects were perhaps even superior to toxic ones, as Jake felt confident he would have had a much harder time if Rainbowfears had stayed down in jungle and tried to kill him.

poison wouldn't have killed m quickly. In fact, none of birds died due to exposure but were all finished off by arrows or or attacks. poison helped deal damage, but more importantly, it hampered ir natural healing and allowed all of Jake's or attacks to deal more damage.

Admittedly, it had been quite an investment to set up poison mist field of death. He had spent over a hundred rare bottles of poison mist, and ingredients and time consumed to make se weren't negligible. It had definitely been worth using all poison, but Jake concluded that making bigger poison mist bombs would probably be a good idea.

Jake took a lot of mental notes, and even if he hadn't achieved much progress in archery, he had learned a lot about his poison gas. Trying to actively train and understand a concept during combat wasn't easy at all. He had tried to apply concept of time to his arrows several times during fight, but it never succeeded. Technically, he had succeeded in infusing m with energy, but all this energy he infused into arrows with intent of altering its speed instead just wasted away during flight, utterly directionless.

All he could do was keep trying until things finally fell into place. He really wanted ability to shoot arrows with vastly differing speeds so he could alter balance between dealing damage and flying faster, just as Artemis had displayed. Jake knew just how impactful this would be for him, and Artemis had agreed as she used speed-up arrows in a similar fashion to what Jake was planning, even as a god.

While speeding up arrow with concept of time would consume some of attack's energy, thus lowering its damage, it wouldn't affect arrow itself and anything that may or may not be coated in it. In other words, Jake would be able to shoot arrows that would fly incredibly fast but deal little damage. At least y would if y couldn't still inflict its full poison payload, which in reality, would make overall damage not be lowered that much.

Artemis did something similar with her special arrows that would grow life. She shot arrows so fast y practically teleported to its targets, seeds embedded in arrows sprouting upon arrival with full power.

Having great ideas but lacking ability to pull m off was frustrating, especially when Jake knew only thing stopping him was his own brain not letting things click into place yet.

Trying to dispel these negative thoughts, Jake refocused his efforts on recovery. His recent Meditate readings proved helpful as Jake healed faster than nearly all or people with Meditate skill. connection to his Soul and whatever concept governed passive recovery was strengthened through methods of First Sage, and Jake would only take a couple of hours to be back in top form once more.

As he meditated, poison gas around him also finally dispersed fully. It had been slowly corroded away by mana in environment, many living things within jungle, and even ground itself that had absorbed quite a lot of it.

This left jungle looking more dead than alive, and things only got worse during Jake's recovery. He was happy he had chosen to sit on a stone as many of trees around him were now black and rotting, and he felt lucky that none of dead debris falling from above landed on him during his meditation session.

Jake had guessed it would take a long time for environment to recover, likely years. However, Jake soon realized just how wrong he had been. It only took minutes after all poison mist was gone before aura of life welled up all around Jake. Many things had died, yes, but those that survived took full advantage of all newly provided compost.

New small plants sprang from ground and began to grow in real time. Rotten bark peeled off trees that had survived as a replacement layer began growing, and all of dead organic matter was practically slurped down into soil as jungle itself ate it up.

When Jake was done meditating two hours later, signs of recovery were already stark. A lot of green filled Jake's vision as he opened his eyes. aura of death was nearly entirely gone, even if jungle still looked mostly rotten and dead in most places, especially when one looked up as canopy that usually provided complete cover was gone. As Jake had stopped controlling poison mist during his recovery, much of it had floated upward, corroding cover and entering skies above, where it had rapidly dispersed, allowing sun's rays to shine through unimpeded.

Oh... I never noticed, re are three suns, Jake suddenly mentally noted, wondering how he had missed that. It also didn't look like it was later in day than when Jake had arrived. Considering he had flown quite a ways around planet using jetstream, he should have noticed some change to day-night cycle by now. Considering he hadn't, Jake made educated guess re was no such cycle, and instead, it was day... well... all day.

Standing up within rapidly recovering jungle, Jake felt a bit better that he hadn't caused any long-term ecological damage. As for damage he had dealt to Rainbowfear Songbirds... well, from all Jake had read in pamphlet, y had been some real assholes, and no one would miss having m around.

Cracking his neck after sitting down for a while, Jake decided to continue his exploration of jungle. Not before garing his loot from hunt, though. In pamphlet, he had read that monster cores – something he didn't normally even bor garing – were highly requested to be brought back and sold at outposts. Being a good little hunter, Jake decided to gar those immediately nearby, and it only took him a few minutes to get thirty of m. se cores were only common and uncommon rarity, showing that Rainbowfear Songbirds weren't exactly peak creatures, at least not individually.

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Nothing else had entered his sphere during his recovery, likely because no monster wanted to enter domain of Rainbowfears or newly-created domain of rot, meaning Jake hadn't seen anything else Hunting Ground had to offer. That also meant nothing had taken his loot, and with nothing else nearby, he had no reason to remain unless he wanted to try and gar every core re was, which would not only take too long but, more importantly, be too tedious.

Rar than fly into air for quicker movement, Jake decided to run while staying down in jungle. Not only would that allow him to better explore his environment, but it was also a great excuse to practice some basic movement techniques and his One Step, as re were a lot of obstacles in overgrown jungle.

Getting a move on, Jake continued his exploration as he ran toward where he knew pamphlet, called Grand Lake of Area 1, was located. closer he got to it, more powerful monsters would be, and he was still hoping to encounter a B-grade monster to have a good fight.

After exiting domain of Rainbowfears, Jake still kept running for quite a while without seeing much of anything, which really hammered home how territorial damn birds had been. On way, he did see a few dead beasts hanging from vines or trees, most of m with ir skulls crushed and a few discarded rainbow fears embedded in ir bodies, likely serving as warnings to stay away.

He ended up running for anor five minutes before signs of non-plant life began to appear. Tracks from or monsters and even a few bones could be seen here and re, and through a Pulse, Jake saw several creatures ahead of him, all with several kilometers between one anor.

As he was analyzing all se creatures in distance, he released anor pulse to see a small monster suddenly appearing only a few kilometers ahead of him. Jake was upon it in mere seconds as he slowed down and tried to take a more sneaky approach.

However, Jake had been going too fast and released too much energy between his running and teleporting, meaning he had already been spotted. Jake quickly stopped as on a branch a dozen meters up and thirty or so meters ahead, creature that had suddenly appeared sat and stared down at him as Jake stared back at it, using Identify on instinct.

[Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher – lvl 346]

It was a small four-legged creature, no taller than Jake's knees, as it sat on its hind legs. Soft-looking blueish-white fur covered its body except for a back with glimmering spikes, reminding Jake a bit of a porcupine. small, cute sort that is. It also had many cat-like features, including its face and limber body, making it overall look like a fusion between a cat and a porcupine.

Subtly, Jake double-checked pamphlet as he was pretty sure he remembered this creature's name from endangered animals list. However, before he could fully confirm, creature disappeared, only to reappear a few steps in front of Jake.

He didn't react in fright as he felt no sense of danger from cute-looking beast that stared up at him with big eyes. It tilted its head back and forth a few times before cautiously approaching. Jake remained still as little thing sniffed Jake's boots before looking up at him again as it lifted its small paws up and cupped m toger.

"Gift!"

little creature mispronounced word quite badly, and Jake was momentarily surprised as he just stared down at thing in confusion.

"Me. Gift!"

Jake shook himself out of his stupor and, without really thinking much, took out one of uncommon monster cores from a Rainbowfear Songmender. He knelt down and placed core in creature's paws. It stared at core for a little while before looking back up at Jake.

"Thank!"

With those words, little thing scurried off, jumping a few steps like a squirrel before its body faded away, and even when looking through Jake's sphere, it had disappeared somewhere else.

Standing re for a few seconds, Jake scratched back of his head before mumbling, "Did I just get scammed? Robbed? What was that all about?"

He was confused enough to pull out pamphlet before finally checking if Warpsnatcher had indeed been considered an endangered species, and yep, it was right re on list. Pulling up more information on thing, Jake saw it was pretty limited, though re was some.

"Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher. Known entities within Hunting Ground: 1. This creature is extremely mobile, able to cross vast distances, enter and exit its own subspace realm at will, and has proven itself to have potent magic within realms of space and mysticism.

From reports, this creature does not show outward aggression unless attacked first. Instead, it has been known to steal bounties reaped from ors' fights without ever engaging in combat itself, giving rise to ory it's a scavenger pursuing a Path focused on consumption of natural treasures. If spotted, do not attack or antagonize, but seek to retreat or wait for it to leave."

It didn't have any section about creature using cuteness to scam people out of loot, nor anything about it being able to talk. While all C-grade beasts could learn to talk, most of m never did. First of all, it took time to learn to communicate in a way enlightened races understood, and while Jake's translation skill was potent, it couldn't translate random bird screeches... not to say people couldn't learn to understand m, especially if a beast in question wished to communicate its meaning to enlightened.

Sylphie was a prime example of this. Did she just screech? Yes, yes, she did, but her screeches held intent and willpower that could communicate what she wanted to say to people familiar with her and able to interpret her meaning. Rainbowfears never even tried to communicate with Jake, though he did reckon y talked amongst mselves with how organized y were.

Putting away pamphlet again, Jake shook his head and got a move on again, trying not to think too much about a cat-hedgehog scamming him. At least thing had been cute, making him not feel too badly about it.

He had already spotted several potential targets for archery practice with his pulses and was now going toward one of larger ones. It was a beast he hadn't expected to see within a dense jungle, as it seriously didn't seem to fit, but as he got closer and saw creature in question... yeah, it still made no sense to see that kind of beast in a jungle. Google search **novel•fire•net**

[Crystalhide Oxen Lord – lvl 348]

It was a large ox, as name implied. It was about four meters tall and over six meters wide, with stumpy and sturdy legs that crushed underbrush as it moved around. Seeing a giant ox that looked as if it was covered in gray glass shards was super weird, and Jake wondered how it even fought, considering terrain.

Luckily for him, he was going to find out very soon as he approached large ox. Jake made no attempts to hide as he got within a few hundred meters, and upon doing so, beast noticed him. It turned its head toward Jake, staring at him for a moment as Jake wanted to see if beast would make first move. He had already confirmed this wasn't some endangered species, and while he could have tried to take it down with a stealth attack, what was point of that if Jake was meant to be training his archery?

A second or so passed with ox observing Jake. It was long enough for him to consider if it was even aggressive... which was when he felt rumbling from below. Jumping into air just in time, Jake managed to dodge out of way as a forest of crystal shards bloomed beneath him. ox that had orwise looked passive began to glow as environment took on a silver hue, beast unleashing some form of domain skill.

Crystals grew from trees all around Jake, pointed toward him, and were ready to fire and skewer him from all angles. Jake saw se hundreds of attacks being prepared, as he nodded to himself.

So that's how it fights.

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Chapter 1108: SOS

Solitary monsters were definitely superior to those who formed groups. It made sense, as these creatures would have been killed a long time ago if they couldn't handle groups by themselves, and natural selection had done a good job of filtering out weaker beasts that preferred to be alone.

Crystalhide Oxen Lord had been a respectable opponent. Very durable, for sure, and Jake's regular arrows couldn't even penetrate its crystalline exterior. Its offensive capabilities did turn out to be a bit lacking, which was okay with Jake as it gave him more time and space to practice his archery. In the end, it wasn't a monster that had any chance of fighting Jake in the first place unless he really messed up, so the result was as predictable as could be.

So was the result of following dozen fights, all against peak C-grade solitary monsters that occupied their own small territories close to Grand Lake. None of them were in the line closest to the lake, which was where the most powerful C-grades lived, so Jake still had some harder opponents to go through before it was B-grade time.

Jake knew he was strong for his level, but he still had some level of caution when dealing with peak C-grades in particular. The problem with creatures at the peak of any rank was that Jake had no clue how long they'd been at that level. When facing anything in the middle of a grade, it was a solid guess that the opponent was relatively young and still progressing on their own Path. Meanwhile, a peak C-grade could have been a peak C-grade for thousands of years for all Jake knew, and this individual could have spent all that time getting stronger and stronger, upgrading all their skills in an attempt to perhaps one day break through to B-grade.

Villy had also made it clear that while Jake would have a hard time finding equals in C-grade, he definitely could encounter beings superior to himself within the same grade. Perhaps he couldn't find anything at his own level he couldn't beat in a fight, but against those in higher levels, they were bound to be a few around.

What was the chance of him actually finding an incredibly powerful C-grade variant genius in the Hunting Grounds? Incredibly low, but a low chance was still a chance. He already knew some unique and powerful monsters could exist in the jungle as while that Warpsnatcher that scammed him hadn't been dangerous, it definitely had been a high-tier variant.

That's why Jake took a careful approach the closer he got to Grand Lake. Additionally, Jake also wanted to limit himself somewhat by sticking to archery unless he didn't have any other choice. Admittedly, Jake's desire to have a fight won out over his intent to meticulously work on an archery upgrade, but he still had hope he could figure things out. He just also prioritized getting levels.

Sneaking through the jungle in stealth, Jake soon enough found his next prey. It was a mutant tree that had evolved into a tall and thick treant that was walking around,

consuming or trees by punching a needle-like tree arm into m and draining m of life energy.

Seeing such a horrendous sight of cannibalism, Jake simply had to step in as warrior for justice he was. While treant was busy slurping down its non-intelligent brethren, a greeting in form of an Arcane Powershot struck it in arm, blowing it off entirely as treant stumbled back with large, heavy steps that made ground shake.

It responded quickly as ground below it erupted, hundreds of vines springing up in an attack Jake felt as if he'd seen a thousand times before. Easily dodging all vines, Jake counterattacked and made use of his far superior mobility to fight slower but far more durable treant.

treant was around fifteen meters tall and took hits quite decently, regenerating whatever damage Jake did in an instant as heavy life energy in air nourished it. Some of vines that it tried to attack Jake with originally also changed directions as y penetrated into smaller trees and plants. treant that Jake had unfondly named a mosquito treant began to drain vital energy out of m, increasing its regeneration rate furr as entire creature began to glow green.

Finally, treant did something unexpected. All vines retracted as treant leaned forward and stepped down, exploding into motion as a wave of broken bark shot out like fragments from a grenade, revealing a far thinner treant that practically teleported over to where Jake was floating.

Fast.

A fist of woody goodness came straight for Jake's face, but he managed to blast himself out of way with a bit of arcane mana, only for him to need a second blast to get furr away as anor punch came from below.

Summoning his wings, Jake retreated as tree barreled after him. It had lifted its hands up to a defensive position as mosquito treant had evolved into a boxer treant. It bobbed and swayed, throwing jabs as it chased Jake while attempting to avoid his arrows as best as possible, something that wasn't overly difficult considering Jake barely had time to shoot any.

Jake was quickly forced to use his boosting skill to keep up as treant kept trying to corner him. At one point, he even found himself taken by surprise at just how quick a damn tree could move and punch as it dashed forward, glancing Jake with a blow and sending him spinning through air from impact.

Stabilizing quickly through a quick Gaze to stop treant in its tracks for a mere moment, Jake moved to reclaim momentum as he made better use of environment and curving arrows to land shots on quick treant.

After about a minute, green glow on his opponent began fading, and monster retreated back and began to play defensive once more as it sought to absorb more life energy from surrounding plants while thick layers of bark began to rapidly grow all over it, returning treant to its bulky form.

It was an interesting fighting strategy, for sure. treant effectively had a defensive and offensive mode, with offensive one evidently consuming far more energy, which it needed to consume in its defensive form. Considering it used life energy and was a sentient tree that could use this life energy to also heal itself, killing treant was far from easy, especially when it was in its bulky defensive mode, as energy it absorbed to power up itself also served as a constant healing tonic.

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Should I just use poison? Nah, let's see if I can do enough damage without it, Jake thought to himself with a smile as he decided to have a little competition with tree. Who would win? Jake spam-firing arcane arrows or treant's regeneration and life absorption.

Despite treant trying to cheat by attacking Jake with vines again during its feeding time, it shouldn't come as a surprise that Jake was winner as he whittled down treant, never allowing it to enter its quick offensive form a second time.

Looting life core of treant, Jake took a moment to sit down and rejuvenate as he reflected on battle he'd just been through. After about half an hour, Jake was ready to continue, but after only moving for a few minutes, something caught his attention.

pamphlet he'd been given in outpost was giving off a weird aura, and as Jake pulled it out, entire thing started shining as an arrow of light formed above it, facing inwards toward Grand Lake.

Jake instantly knew what was happening.

Someone activated emergency thingie.

Which is to say a hunter – or a group of hunters - within hunting ground found themselves in trouble and requested assistance from anyone nearby. Jake had read this part of pamphlet during one of his recovery times, and he knew that helping people wasn't mandatory or even expected. In fact, all hunters were warned that there was no expectation that summoning "help" wouldn't just result in someone coming by to try and take advantage of situation, so anyone activating function really only ever did so as an absolutely last resort.

Jake took a moment as he considered his next actions. He had never been good samaritan kind, and he knew going to help could be a risk. It was easy to guess that a hunter or group of hunters capable of fighting enemies this close to Grand Lake were

quite powerful in its own right, so anything that made him this desperate was bound to also be a danger to Jake.

Now, he also had to consider that this could be a trap of some kind. His danger sense wasn't really warning him either way, though he could feel dangerous auras in the direction of the SOS signal. Either way, he knew how some enlightened were, and it was totally possible they were trying to use the emergency function to lure in the hunters, even if such a thing was definitely frowned upon.

However, despite there being a lot of reasons not to go, Jake only hesitated for a moment before he took action and headed straight toward where the arrow was pointing.

In a situation like this, Jake ultimately saw little reason for him in particular not to go. Logically, there certainly were a lot of good reasons not to go, but Jake didn't fear entering a dangerous situation, and if it was a trap, Jake would gladly teach assholes making said trap a little lesson.

As for the scenario where it was people who needed help and Jake was capable of helping them, well, he only saw upsides to going. Getting a good reputation within the Panon of Life could only be a positive thing, and as chances were, the person who needed help was from the Panon of Life, it only seemed proper for Jake to help, seeing as he was an honored guest of the faction.

Sprinting through the jungle with Unseen Hunter active, Jake avoided any and all monsters in his way as he followed the signal and got closer and closer to his destination. After running for about three minutes at absolute full speed, Jake began to hear sounds of fighting in the distance.

Jumping up and entering the skies, Jake sped up even further with One Step as he teleported a few times before he finally laid eyes on what was going on. He saw two people in the distance, standing in front of a mound in the ground, which had a cave within it. Two were clearly guarding the entrance to this cave, but it wasn't looking super good for them, considering they found themselves surrounded by monsters.

He checked out the monsters first, which were sitting in trees surrounding the mound. All of them looked very humanoid, and they even wielded weapons, but Jake could tell they were monsters, something Identify on a few of them also confirmed.

[Grand Simivita Shaman – lvl 348] The source of this content is novel•fire•net

[Grand Simivita Spearmaster – lvl 347]

[Grand Simivita Terramaster – lvl 348]

Only animal Jake could compare them to was apes, except since all had mostly green fur that allowed them to blend into the jungle environment. Their names were rare and impressive, though, and

Jake got feeling that se Simivitas were relatively common creatures in multiverse, seeing as se were clearly high-version variants.

From a quick count, Jake saw eleven apes surrounding two people who'd activated emergency signal. Jake also used Identify on m real quick... and he began to consider if this encounter was even an accident.

[Dryad – lvl 334 – Minor Blessing of Yggdrasil]

[High Elf – lvl 325 – Lesser Blessing of Artemis]

What were odds of meeting two people both blessed by gods Jake had recently met? Artemis had to have known that someone she had blessed was in this Hunting Ground, right, or did she have so many followers she didn't even keep track?

Anyway, dryad and elf were both women, with dryad wielding two thin curved swords while high elf unsurprisingly had a bow. Both of m were in defensive stances, waiting for apes to make a move first, and Jake was honestly a bit surprised at what hold-up was all about.

It was only about ten seconds later that Jake knew why. Three more apes had arrived, two of m flanking a third that was larger than all ors. It was even wielding a sword Jake reckoned had been taken off some hunter, and necklace of skulls from elves, humans, dwarves, and or enlightened that hung around its neck made it clear it had quite a kill record.

[Grand Simivita Chieftain – lvl 349]

This newcomer ape was clearly up to no good, and Jake got vibes that things were about to go south. He couldn't hear what was being said, but it seemed that Chieftain was capable of speech as some form of negotiations started. Seeing as Jake had no hope, he didn't wait to charge an Arcane Powershot, and good thing he did.

Not even five seconds into negotiations, y broke down. Chieftain seemed to yell something as everyone exploded into motion at once. dryad dropped a seed on ground that instantly began sprouting as two women jumped forward.

Behind m, vines formed a barrier all around mound, sealing it in and allowing two of m to not worry about whatever was within it – something Jake quickly realized was likely cause of this entire conflict.

elf and dryad tried to go straight for Chieftain, likely in an attempt to kill leader quickly and make enemy lose morale, but y were outmatched. Chieftain swung its sword, forcing dryad to block awkwardly while being sent scurrying back, and elf's barrage of arrows was blocked as Terramaster Jake had identified earlier jumped down from its tree and slammed a staff into ground, making a wall of soil rise up and block it.

shaman who was sitting out of line of sight of two women waved an odd-looking wand as it began to channel magic to launch a sneak attack on two women before y even saw it... However, ape never had time to cast anything as it experienced a sneak attack of a caliber far beyond anything it was capable of.

A pinkish-purple line cut through jungle as an arrow arrived from above. shaman didn't even have time to react as fully channeled Powershot, released from a hidden Jake, tore through its body indiscriminately, shearing off its entire upper body before arrow slammed into tree it had been sitting on, exploding a moment later, sending splinters flying everywhere.

At same time, Jake revealed himself as his aura flared, and he nocked another arrow, ready to provide assistance. high elf and dryad both noticed him alongside Simivitas, and he was ready to get a good fight in as a voice echoed in his head from high elf archer staring at him.

"Are you insane!? Run! Get out of here while you still can!"

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Chapter 1109: Misjudgements

y had definitely bitten off more than y could chew.

Keerla and Solana had always been a good team when hunting together. Solana was a talented dryad fighter, and Keerla had proven herself skilled enough with a bow to be blessed by Artemis. Individually, y were strong, but together, y could hunt down even peak C-grades with relative ease.

That was until y encountered m. While exploring near Grand Lake, y discovered a mound with a cave – an oddity in jungle. However, before y could scout it, more monsters appeared.

It was Simivita tribe, one of most powerful tribes of social beasts on planet. y arrived in a group of ten, and before Keerla and Solana could fully grasp situation, a beast emerged from mound. It was a long, li creature at apex of C-grade, and Keerla instantly recognized it.

"That's Fortuna Ferret... I didn't even know any of those were still here," she remarked upon seeing one of rarer creatures in Hunting Ground. It was endangered, with only a few remaining, primarily due to high value of its fur.

Its fur was one of few items believed to be capable of “altering fate.” Armor and accessories made from its fur seemed to make dodging attacks easier, and using beast’s core in crafting significantly increased chance of success.

This led to severe over-hunting, with most of se ferrets killed across multiverse. Due to ir rarity, finding multiple ferrets was difficult, making reproduction even rarer... which was why Keerla and Solana acted as y did that day.

After Fortuna Ferret exited its mound and spotted Simivita attackers, it went on offensive. It was far more powerful than any of m individually, but by working toger, y managed to hold off beast temporarily. Three Simivita Shamans were casting spells in back, and with Keerla and Solana watching, ir magic manifested.

Four of ir kind were heavily injured in process, but y succeeded in stalling Fortuna Ferret long enough. magic created a large whirlwind below beast, focusing all its power on moving beast rar than dealing damage.

Screaming loudly, Fortuna Ferret was sent airborne and launched into distance by combined ritual magic of three Shamans, who all looked quite tired afterward.

Seeing all this, Keerla had to figure out what was going on as she snuck into mound... and that’s where she found m. It turned out Fortuna Ferret had been a jill with five kits hidden inside mound, protected by ir parent.

At least y had been protected... but now ir mor was gone, whisked away by wind magic. Keerla had to make a decision fast as she reached out to Solana through ir paired rings that allowed communication – a quite lovely wedding gift from Keerla’s parents back in day.

“It’s kits... Fortuna Ferret kits...” she said, those words enough to convince her partner.

“Can y be moved? What do you need me to do?” Solana instantly responded, knowing situation was dire.

Neir had to think much about what y had to do next. y were both members of Panon of Life, and re was no way y could leave kits to ir fate, knowing what would happen to m.

Simitiva were a race that could perhaps one day evolve into an enlightened species, but for now, y remained monsters. y grew by killing, naturally through absorbing energy in environment, and most importantly for this situation, consuming things.

Simivitas were also known to be quite superstitious. y weren’t religious per-se, with some of m even known to have Blessings, but y still believed things that didn’t make sense to ors. One of those was that consuming young of powerful beasts led to birth of more powerful children. Seeing as even Simivita likely knew of Fortuna Ferret’s unique abilities, perhaps y even thought eating se kits would give m luck.

To be clear, none of this was true, all that would happen if y ate kits was that re would now be five less Fortuna Ferrets in Hunting Grounds, with only gains placebo at most.

"I'm not sure y can be moved, and ir mor is still alive... so for now, I think best we can do is stall," Keerla responded after thinking for a moment.

Besides, she already knew re was no way she and Solana would be able to run efficiently while carrying five kits that were all about size of herself. Not while being chased by entire Simivita tribe, y'd just pissed off. five kits were sleeping currently, perhaps made to do so by ir mor, which meant that trying to release and hope y could escape on ir own was also completely out of question.

Without thinking furr, Keerla also decided to pull out her Hunting Grounds Manual and she kept it ready should things escalate. For now, she and Solana quickly agreed to try a daring strategy: diplomacy. New novel chapters are published on **novel•fire•net**

Walking out of mound, Keerla was soon joined by Solana as y took up a defensive position outside of it. When y did so, some of Simivitas that had stayed behind spotted m, and one of ape-like creatures instantly began hollering loudly.

"Wait, we don't want to fight!" Keerla spoke loudly while still trying to keep her voice calm in an attempt to make use of her profession that had to do with husbandry. She had a few skills that made it easier to calm beasts and monsters, and she really hoped those would work even on Simivitas.

Luckily for her, it seemingly did, as apes did calm a bit at her words. y were far from actually calm, though, as Keerla tried to speak again. "We saw your fight and wanted to come help... but those kits in re aren't worth fighting for, not for you. We do need m, so maybe we can talk about that?"

As she spoke, Keerla also tried to estimate how many Simivitas y were dealing with and ir chances should a fight begin. When y were first spotted, she already saw one run way, likely to get help, but if ten that had originally fought Fortuna Ferret was all tribe had in this immediate area, it should be possible to-

"Chieftain say want!" one of Simivitas yelled, having seemingly learned some words. ors turned to it and hollered a bit angrily at giving out information like that... but Keerla was very grateful as she didn't hesitate to activate emergency signal of Hunting Grounds manual.

If a Chieftain was coming, this wasn't something she and Solana could handle by mselves. Moreover, a Chieftain being around meant that y risked something even worse appearing.

"Do you think help will come?" Solana asked cautiously.

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"It's doubtful," Keerla answered honestly. "Even if help does arrive, we would need it to be a full first-rate party if we want to put up a fight. Anything else.... yeah. I think our best hope is for Fortuna Ferret to return and hopefully, with its help, we stand a chance."

"If it comes down to it-"

"We'll escape," Keerla agreed. While y both felt a duty to protect kits, y still valued ir lives more and wouldn't throw m away. y had to at least try, though.

Keerla and Solana stared down apes for a while as no one made any moves or did anything. With every passing second, elf and dryad hoped help would arrive, but unluckily, Chieftain was first to make his appearance.

[Grand Simivita Chieftain – lvl 349]

All of Simivitas were already toward peak C-grade, but Chieftain was truly at peak and decently more powerful than ors. Even if Keerla and Solana had to face him alone, it would be an incredibly difficult fight y had no way of assuring y would win. If y also factored in or Simivitas, things looked very bad.

newly arrived Chieftain also sized up elf and dryad as he spoke far more eloquently than ape from earlier, which only made matters worse. necklace of skulls also didn't leave much to imagination when it came to his level of diplomacy.

"You dare block my path?" he asked with a deep voice as if he found situation funny.

Keerla still had to try as she spoke up. "We wish to propose a trade if Chieftain is interested. lives of kits for-"

"Trade? I don't think you would be willing to trade what I want," he smiled, flashing his sharp teeth.

A bit of sweat ran down Keerla's back as she asked something she knew she wouldn't like answer to: "What does Chieftain want?"

"Your skulls!" Chieftain yelled, having enjoyed taunting m.

Solana didn't hesitate to throw down a seed to summon a temporary protective barrier around mound to keep kits safe as she and Keerla both attacked, trying to take down Chieftain in a quick surprise attack while he was still overconfident.

It... didn't work out. y were outmatched, and it didn't look like help would arrive, at least not until a spark of hope appeared. Keerla was busy trying to help Solana as Chieftain attacked her when suddenly an attack arrived from above...

Only to hit a tree instead of anything y were fighting.

Keerla stared up to where attack had come from right as it arrived and used Identify as she saw a humanoid form.

[Human – lvl 307]

Instantly, disappointment washed over her. n, she felt a sense of regret and responsibility. A level 307 human had no place being re, but if he was, chances were he was quite talented for his level. For her to drag him into something like this... no.

"Are you insane!? Run! Get out of here while you still can!" she yelled to him, projecting her voice telepathically.

If she and Solana had to flee, he would likely be slower and thus left behind, meaning that-

Right n, Keerla finally spotted something... all she had seen earlier was an arrow hit a tree, but as splinters flew through air, she noticed something else mixed in with m. Blood and gore flew into air, which was also when Keerla realized something else.

That arrow had broken apart a tree. A tree in Hunting Grounds jungle, a place in which trees were notoriously durable.

Keerla took anor moment as she felt aura of human wash over her... and finally, she realized that her gut reaction had been utterly idiotic as she tried to correct herself.

--

Jake was naturally taken aback at being yelled at for killing an ape about to sneak attack high elf and dryad. It was a bit rude, but it did make Jake wonder if he'd fucked up somehow and read situation wrong, but right as such thoughts entered his mind, he heard same elf speak again.

"Wait! Sorry, I misjudged, and-"

"Do you want help?" Jake cut her off as he'd already nocked anor arrow.

"Yes!"

And that was all Jake needed to know. With his Pulse of Perception, he'd naturally put some things toger. sleeping beasts within mound all looked a bit young and not exactly

creatures fit for combat, making him guess y were newborns or at least very young children.

Now – and this may be Jake’s bias speaking – but his guess was that elf and dryad were both trying to protect se younglings, while big scary ape with a skull necklace was bad guy who wanted to do something bad to se little ones. Of course, he could be entirely wrong, and elf and dryad had actually kidnapped pets of innocent Chieftain with plans of eating m, but Jake was willing to bet he had things right way around.

Taking aim, he released anor Arcane Powershot aimed at Terramaster. ape reacted quickly as it tried to summon defenses and save itself, but Jake got a nice assist from dryad, who threw a wooden dagger toward his target, temporarily delaying it just enough for Jake to send anor monster tumbling to ground. Sadly, seeing as he no longer had benefits of Sneak Attack and a fully charged Arcane Powershot, this one survived even if it remained badly injured.

Jake didn’t have much time to evaluate damage he’d done as he had to keep shooting to help dryad and elf, who were both getting heavily pressured. dryad was using her twin swords to fight a Spearmaster and two or melee-oriented Simivitas while Chieftain was going for elf, who could only try to survive.

Meanwhile, casters were in back, making matters more difficult for two women. Unluckily for se casters, y had a Jake to contend with now as he released a constant barrage of arrows down upon battlefield.

This was one part he’d missed about Nevermore... having allies to take aggro and just being allowed to stand still shooting arrows for maximum damage output could be nice at times, even if novelty did wear off relatively quickly if things got too easy.

That wasn’t a problem in this case, though, as his tanks were far from capable of handling pressure on m. Even with Jake’s help, elf found herself pushed back repeatedly by Chieftain, who seemed to enjoy battle a bit too much.

Jake decided to change target as he sent several arrows after Simivita leader, but ape responded well. He turned toward incoming attack and raised a hand as a spectral shield with a greenish hue appeared, successfully blocking Jake’s arrow.

“I’ll finish you off later, human, so wait your turn!” he yelled confidently. Seeing attitude of this Chieftain, Jake suddenly got an idea and yelled back.

“Trying to use all your underlings to tire me out, huh?” Jake said in a taunting voice.

Chieftain took bait hook, line, and sinker as he momentarily stopped pursuing elf and turned toward Jake. **“Nonsense. Human, your taunts are useless, your efforts those of a desperate weakling.”**

Jake realized he had guy just where he wanted him, making him smile. **“Funny, I consider you weak one here.”**

“A human using wings to imitate birds because he dares not face his foes on ground daring to speak of weakness is laughable,” Chieftain said, shaking his head.

“He’s trying to bait you into a melee fight. He knows you’re a danger to him with your current positioning, but if he can get you on ground, he-“ elf helpfully tried to inform Jake.

“I’m fully aware,” he responded telepathically as he also spoke once more.

“It was just convenient,” Jake said.

“n prove your power, human,” Chieftain said with a grin. **“Face me in a duel like a man. On ground, without using that silly stick of yours.”**

“Why would I do something that dumb?” Jake asked, acting as if he was about to nock anor arrow.

“If you win, my tribe shall return and leave this place... and if I win, I get your skull,” Chieftain proposed, definitely fully aware that what he offered wasn’t really worth anything. If Chieftain lost, he would likely be dead or incapacitated, in which case Jake and two women would have advantage. Meanwhile, if Jake was killed, elf and dryad would likely be screwed or at least have to flee.

“You know what? I don’t need a bow to kill you,” Jake said as he dismissed his bow as he’d promised and began flying downwards. **“I’ll show you who real weakling is here.”**

Chieftain grinned widely. **“I’m looking forward to it.”**

“Why would you-“ elf tried to question Jake before stopping herself. *“Never mind... we’ll follow your lead.”*

Good call, Jake thought to himself as he slowly approached ground to face Chieftain, who thought he was taking advantage of Jake’s ego. Meanwhile, Jake had just been aiming for a way to ensure everyone survived. He wasn’t confident in keeping both dryad and elf alive while providing ranged support, not against this many apes.

It definitely had nothing to do with fact that Jake thought having a little melee duel after this much archery practice could be a fun side-quest distraction. Definitely not a factor at all.

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Chapter 1110: Simivita Chieftain

Taking a break from practice to have some fun was a great way to refresh mind and approach topic with a fresh outlook. At least, that was Jake's excuse when he decided to fight Simivita Chieftain in melee.

It was likely also best idea if his goal was to ensure everyone survived. Jake had no way to guarantee safety of two women, and he doubted barrier set up by dryad could hold if Simivitas all began to attack it.

If killing Chieftain quickly with ranged attacks was an option, Jake would have preferred that, but he doubted he could kill it easily. ape wasn't a weak variant, though Jake wouldn't consider it a high-tier one either. It was likely solidly in upper realms of mid-tier.

Upon landing on ground, Chieftain kept smiling as he lifted a hand. When he did so, many apes behind him retreated. Jake decided to throw elf and dryad a look, and two of them were smart enough to follow his directions and back off.

Two sides were solidly formed, with their representative combatants in middle. Chieftain was confident as he lifted his sword off his shoulder and pointed it toward Jake, no longer infusing his voice with energy as he spoke.

"I shall give you credit for not being a coward," ape said. "A rarity among your kind. Most run away upon seeing me or face me with large groups. Few have dared stand before me alone. Especially not anyone of your level."

Jake was a bit surprised at honest words of ape and responded in kind. "I can also respect that you are willing to face me without army at your back. Doing so would have made things a lot more complicated."

"Only way to make you face me and not run away," Chieftain chuckled. "You seem intent on helping those females. I originally came here with intent of consuming spawn of ferret within mound, but spirits tell me your skull is even more valuable. Be proud, knowing that your death shall be impetus for my ascension to become a B-grade Warlord."

"Funny, I'm over here not even thinking I'll get a level-up by killing you," Jake answered casually as he began walking forward without any weapons drawn. "But you should also be proud. Dying to me in a duel will give your Records and Path far more meaning than

you can even imagine. Perhaps I'll even remember this encounter... assuming you make it memorable enough."

Two incredibly arrogant fighters, neither imagining a world where they could lose, simply sized each other up, waiting for one of them to make the first move. Jake continued slowly approaching with steady steps, tension building as he soon entered the range of Chieftain.

The sword moved in an instant, aiming to cut Jake cleanly in half. At the very last moment, Jake sidestepped and dodged. Chieftain reacted quickly despite having missed, jumping to the side and swinging his blade again while creating some distance.

Taking another stance, he immediately closed the distance and went on the offensive. Jake easily dodged two regular swings, but as a third one was mid-swing, it suddenly blurred for a moment as if vibrating intensely. Hundreds of cuts filled the air as some form of skill was used, taking Jake somewhat by surprise as he was forced to jump back, skirting across the ground. Narrowing his eyes, he looked down and saw a slight cut on one of his bracers.

Seeing as Chieftain was a monster, Jake hadn't assumed him to be very skilled with a weapon, but evidently, that was entirely wrong. In again, he likely shouldn't have assumed as many of the Simivitas had races corresponding to weapons, indicating that using weapons was a big part of their Path and Lineage.

"You're fast, but more than that, you're perceptive," Chieftain said, having clearly expected that surprise attack to hit. "I would be very disappointed if that's all you have."

"Patience, we've only just begun," Jake responded as he indulged Chieftain's curiosity and went on the offensive a little. Using One Step, Jake teleported slightly to the side of Chieftain before instantly launching him to the side with an arcane blast.

Chieftain turned to respond in an instant, but Jake narrowly dodged the sword coming for him. Originally, Jake had wanted to go for a good punch, perhaps even summoning his katars to make it a stab, but he only found the range to land a solid kick that would also allow him to retreat in the process.

When the kick connected, his foot exploded with destructive arcane power, sending Chieftain sliding back and Jake flying through the air as he did a backflip and another arcane blast to land fast, ready to instantly pounce again as he shot forward.

Katars finally appeared as he managed to fly by Chieftain, landing two nasty cuts to the side of the beast as Jake spun around and landed on a tree, leaping like a stabbing frog to try and land a blow to Chieftain's back.

Unfortunately for Jake, the Simivita wasn't easily taken by surprise as he jumped into the air while turning around, cutting downwards toward Jake's direction, his sword bathed in a greenish-blue light that sent out a crescent slash.

Jake had to step down mid-air to teleport out of way as crescent wave flew by him, splitting tree Jake had just used as a jump-off point vertically. Not abandoning his assault, Jake closed in once more and managed to land another drive-by cut before Chieftain could strike back.

Making use of his superior speed and near-perfect dodging abilities, Jake continued dancing around Chieftain, landing several minor attacks one after another. Ape didn't seem overly bored, and wounds left by Jake healed rapidly as Jake guessed Simivita was trying to understand Jake's movement pattern better.

What Chieftain hadn't accounted for was accumulating poison that had wormed its way into his veins. When he finally noticed, quite a lot had already been inflicted, and Chieftain wasn't happy as his eyes opened wide.

"Poison? You..."

"What, are you gonna claim that's cowardly? Blame yourself for not detecting it earlier," Jake got ahead of criticism.

Chieftain scoffed. "You just sped up your own death needlessly. I was beginning to enjoy myself, but it appears I'll have to end things sooner than I would have preferred."

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Upon saying those words, aura of Chieftain began to spike as he deployed a boosting skill – another trait more powerful variants tended to have. Same odd greenish-blue aura enveloped his body and began spiking as Ape truly went all out.

"Spirits of Old, Protect Me," Chieftain spoke as odd energy gathered around his body, forming a full suit of transparent armor.

"Spirits of Old, Strengthen Mine Arms," he continued as his sword began to glow a ghostly light and give off a far more powerful aura. Jake could see strain on Chieftain's body as he spoke one last time.

"Spirits of Old, Guide Me."

With those words, his power grew to a whole new level as his aura spiked further. His eyes began to glow a ghostly light as what Jake guessed to be spirit energy empowered Chieftain.

"Now fall before might of Ancestors!"

Raising his blade toward Jake, it began gaining power as an ominous wind swept through the area right before a beam of condensed light erupted from the sword, flying straight toward Jake, who watched the incoming attack with calm eyes.

--

Keerla watched on as Simivita Chieftain unleashed its spirit magic. She and Solana had already suspected that Chieftain had powers of a Spiritcaller, and they had been right... which didn't bode well.

Spiritcallers were known for their ability to temporarily have spirit energy inhabit their body, empowering them significantly. It all linked back to the odd spiritual practices of the Simivita tribe that allowed them to "keep in contact" with their ancestors, even if this contact only came in the form of tapping into Records for specific skills.

Watching the battle, the human hunter was far more powerful than Keerla had expected and even seemed to have the upper hand, but she feared things were about to take a turn. Chieftain had gotten significantly stronger, and she guessed the human was already using a boosting skill to close the gap in stats between himself and the far higher-leveled monster.

However, his uncanny ability to avoid his opponent's attacks gave her hope. If he could stall out Spirit Empowerment long enough, Chieftain should enter a period of weakness, and coupled with the poison he had apparently inflicted, he should have a legitimate chance of victory.

Just as she thought this, Chieftain lifted its blade to unleash an attack. She expected the human to dodge, but he remained still even as energy gathered, making Keerla guess he wanted to dodge at the very last moment.

A guess that was very wrong, apparently. Chieftain unleashed its attack that Keerla had no confidence in facing, but the human didn't move a single step. Instead, he raised a hand just before it struck him.

An explosion erupted, making several of the trees around him bend and sending soil and plant parts flying everywhere. Keerla stared, confused about what had happened. Did the sight of Spirit Empowerment scare him somehow? Why had the human acted so irrationally?

"I expected more after that dramatic performance. Turns out it was all tricks."

A second explosion erupted as all the dust was cleared away in an instant, revealing the form of the hunter. His hand that had blocked the prior attack had some damage on it, but it looked as if scales now covered it. Energy practically radiated off his body, and the odd affinity he'd used throughout the fight filled the atmosphere all around him.

He lowered his hand as a katar appeared in it once more, and he bent his knees, ready to pounce. **“Now it’s your turn to block.”**

Keerla didn’t even see as he disappeared. All she saw was that in very next moment, he was right in front of Chieftain, who quickly tried to respond to sudden attack by swinging his blade. However, mid-swing, he suddenly just stopped moving as Keerla saw a brief orange glow from eyes of human hunter.

n, suddenly, Keerla saw double. hunter became two as each flanked Chieftain from opposite sides, both stabbing forward with ir right hands that had katars with energy whirling around m. Chieftain was already able to move again, but it was too late as both katars penetrated through spirit armor and into his abdomen before exploding with pink-purple light, sending Chieftain flying back through a thin tree and into a larger one, breaking off a huge piece of bark.

Keerla was slack-jawed as hunter casually regarded effects of his attack as one of his two selves faded away into a puff of black smoke.

--

Jake watched as Chieftain struggled to stand back up. He’d decided to respond in kind as ape boosted himself fully by also unleashing his own Arcane Awakening. Despite how much more impressive Chieftain’s skills looked, y paled in comparison to Jake’s far simpler boosting skill.

Walking forward, Jake spun two katars around a few times, giving ape a bit of time to stand up. He was pleasantly surprised when eyes of Chieftain weren’t filled with fear but instead caution and a continued will to fight.

Perhaps he expected Jake’s attack to be a one-off, which it kind of was, as he didn’t want to use Eternal Shadow and Gaze again one after anor, but that didn’t mean ape suddenly stood a chance.

Without any warning, Jake teleported with one of his casual steps, appearing in front of Chieftain. An explosion of spirit energy instantly erupted from his body as his armor transformed into dozens of ghostly hands reaching for Jake and trying to constrain him. ape grinned, believing Jake had fallen for his trap as several hands grasped Jake, and he raised his sword, ready to bring it down upon constrained human.

Jake responded by unleashing Pride of Malefic Viper, his presence washing over Chieftain as he took control of immediate area. ghostly hands unraveled as faint sound of screams echoed from energy, and ape who stood with a sword raised above his head wasn’t ready at all for Jake to break out of his spiritual chains effortlessly.

Several more stabs to chest sent beast stumbling as Jake circled around, now even faster and stronger than before, difference having only grown after boosting skills were

used. Despite Chieftain's best efforts, Jake left dozens of cuts in rapid succession before he finally decided to finish things.

Midway through slipping behind ape, Jake kicked it in side of its knee, his foot exploding with arcane energy as blast made beast buckle and lose balance. Continuing his movement, Jake stabbed into or knee before making his katar explode with arcane energy, forcing Chieftain down on its knees.

Jake was no longer in a hurry as he walked around kneeling body of ape. spirit energy around his body had already started to fade as his skin was rotten in several places from all poison coursing through his veins. y both knew fight was over even as Jake got in front of Chieftain, who looked up with tired eyes. THIS CHAPTER IS UPDATE BY
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"Human... you're strong... too strong..." Chieftain said as he bread heavily. "I'm... inferior. Please, tell me... was I a good opponent? Did I fight well?"

"You did your best, and that's all anyone can ever ask for," Jake simply responded, not willing to lie but also respecting his opponent enough to give him this last moment of dignity.

"So I die... with honor," Chieftain smiled as his eyes closed for a moment. He seemed to gar his last strength as he yelled loudly.

"Retreat, my brethren! Return to clan, and tell Warlord I've joined Ancestors!"

voice of Chieftain echoed through jungle for a few seconds as his head fell down, limp, all signs of life leaving his body.

You have slain [Grand Simivita Chieftain – lvl 349] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

Jake looked at corpse for a moment before turning his gaze toward many observing Simivitas. He had confidence in killing all of m should need arise, but it wouldn't be easy. Luckily for him, y quickly followed orders of ir fallen Chieftain and ran away.

Glancing at corpse of Chieftain, Jake was a bit surprised that y hadn't even taken it with m out of respect, but he realized a moment later why that wasn't necessary as body began to turn greenish-blue and ghostly, and within ten seconds, it entirely dispersed, leaving only sword and skull necklace behind.

He decided to pick both of m up with a sigh before turning to reason why he had even taken on this fight in first place.

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Chapter 1111: Classification Change

Jake truly experienced woes of being too strong, as even something like Simivita had proven unable to put up a proper fight. He likely wouldn't have bored fighting Simivitas, as battling a large tribe was unnecessarily stressful, and he preferred facing solitary monsters.

Picking up loot dropped by Chieftain, Jake saw that one was a rare sword, and skull necklace was an epic item that could apparently be used in occult rituals. Neir were items Jake cared much about, and he had far better already, which once again proved that he was fighting beings far below his capabilities.

Still, he had taken on challenge to do a good deed, and luckily, it seemed as if things had turned out well, as he finally had time to address dryad and elf. two of m had headed toward him after fight concluded, likely in part to also check up on kits within mound. At least dryad made sure to dispel barrier of wood protecting it by turning cocoon back into a seed she put away in her inventory.

Seeing two approaching, Jake was ready for what would come next. It was same song and dance he'd been through so many times before. Based on how much Jake had shown during fight, y had definitely guessed he was Chosen of Malefic Viper, as he hadn't exactly been subtle, even using Scales of Malefic Viper and poison during fight. Not to mention that he was wearing his regular mask, which was apparently what many remembered him by.

Having already mentally prepared himself... Jake didn't experience what he had thought would happen at all.

"Thanks for assist. Things wouldn't have turned out well without you," high elf said in a polite tone as she and dryad got close. "I'm Keerla, and this is Solana. I think you're owed an explanation of what's going on, and what happened is that..."

She continued to explain what had led to all this. All about seeing this Fortuna Ferret, mound, kits, and ir desire to protect young ones from Simivita, who apparently liked to eat children of powerful races with thought y would get stronger. Based on what Jake knew about Records, it probably even worked to some extent, as genuine belief had power in its own right.

As explanation came to a close, it was apparent that two women had no idea who Jake was but only saw him as an incredibly talented and powerful hunter. way dryad named Solana looked at him was with a bit of fear, but rar than fear of his identity, it was

more fear of not knowing who he was and if his ignorance was somehow offensive to him. At least those were the vibes she gave off when she spoke in a cautious tone.

With explanation done and dusted, Jake had a few questions, though. One more pertinent than any other. "What happened to Fortuna Ferret?"

Keerla looked as if she realized something as her eyes opened wide. "Crap, I completely forgot... she should be returning soon if nothing else has happened to her, and considering it's a Fortuna Ferret unless she encountered some B-grade, she'll be fine."

"Just pointing this out, but how reasonable do you think this ferret is?" Jake asked furrowed. "Because I would be in quite a foul mood if I had just been flung far away and had to rush back to help those I care about."

He was speaking from experience with that one, remembering what had happened when Eil'Hakan invaded Earth and sent him straight to the other side of the planet.

"I... hopefully it'll be fine?" Keerla said, not sounding that sure before having a brief moment of panic. "No matter what, please do not harm Fortuna Ferret! It's one of endangered species, and seeing one with kits is even rarer."

"Relax," Jake assured her, not interested in fighting an endangered ferret. "But you two do need to consider what comes next. Simivita tribe knows of this mound, and where Fortuna Ferret is staying now, I would be highly surprised if they don't return sooner or later. Likely with an even stronger force next time."

It would be a bit of a downer for Jake to save a bunch of baby ferrets only for them to die a week later. The two women nodded in agreement with Jake's words as the dryad spoke. "Fortuna Ferrets aren't unwise, and I'm sure we can convince her to relocate somewhere safer. The problem is that while many solitary monsters are in this area, Simivita are still the strongest by far and have a presence everywhere. It'll be hard to find somewhere safe, as even stronger enemies are to all sides... seeking away from Grand Lake also isn't an option as that requires passing through Rainbowfear territory, which would be a death sentence to her and her kits."

"Rainbowfear territory? Do you mean the territory in that direction?" Jake asked as he pointed toward where he'd roughly come from.

"Yes... I'm surprised you didn't encounter any, but from your first attack and ability to remain unnoticed by all of us, I assume your stealth skills are good," the dryad answered.

"Oh, I did encounter quite a few of those damn birds," Jake muttered. "Shouldn't be a problem heading through that place anymore. Maybe it'll even be safe to settle down here for a while."

Keerla looked perplexed at Jake for a moment before she realized. “Did you wipe me out?”

“You didn’t leave me much choice,” he shrugged in response, wondering if such actions were looked upon negatively by members of Panon of Life. “I will warn you that the area took some damage during the fight, though, but with how rapidly the jungle recovers, it should be fine.” source of this content is *novel.fire.net*

“Are you a member of Panon of Life?” Keerla asked straight up. “Because if you are, I seriously wonder why I never heard about someone like you.”

“I’m not,” Jake answered truthfully. “Just a visitor here to experience Hunting Grounds and what else Panon of Life has to offer.”

“I see,” she said, not trying to pry further. “I’m not sure you need this warning, but Rainbowfears are very vengeful creatures, and if you killed that many of them, you can likely track you through karma now. While it’s true there are no truly powerful Rainbowfears in Area 1, the same is not true elsewhere. It’s likely even a B-grade may make a move against you.”

“Thanks for the warning,” Jake said, barely stopping himself from saying: “Don’t threaten me with a good time.”

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He also wasn’t particularly scared of being tracked through karma unless Eversmile had randomly decided to help Rainbowfear Songbirds. Shroud of Primordial should block all attempts to track him from the birds, though that naturally didn’t rule out him tracking him down anyway using more old-fashioned ways.

Right now, as Jake was in thought, what you had been waiting for also happened. Jake felt an aura approaching, one more powerful than Chieftain he’d just slain by a fair margin. It was moving fast, blazing through the jungle and reaching the mound within seconds of Jake detecting its approach.

Out of the thick greenery, the form of a beast appeared, its aura flaring out, and its mood definitely not good. Feeling this aura of a beast, Jake nearly wanted to go for a tussle with it. He definitely understood why apes had sent it away and wanted to avoid a fight. Identify also confirmed it was indeed a beast at the peak of C-grade.

[Fortuna Ferret – lvl 349]

Its eyes darted around the battlefield, likely trying to get an understanding of what had happened. There were clear signs of fighting, and the ferret did look like it was about to attack

Jake and two women, but Keerla quickly raised her hands and motioned for m to back away from mound.

"We came to help you," she spoke in a soft voice. "We made Simivitas retreat, and your kits are safe."

ferret understood her words and quickly moved toward mound and entered it. Through his sphere, Jake saw mor nervously approach five sleeping kits, nudging m a little with her nose and rubbing her face all over m until satisfied. A few seconds later, she turned around and walked out of mound again, all her aggressiveness gone as she regarded Jake and two women.

Its eyes lingered on women only for a moment before settling on Jake, proving it had pretty good instincts, managing to identify him as strongest despite being lowest level.

"No need to thank me; I came because of se two," Jake said, ferret nodding in acknowledgment as it opened its mouth and started cutely dooking.

Solana and Keerla looked confused as elf spoke apologetically. "I'm sorry, I don't--"

"Yeah, y'll definitely come back," Jake answered ferret's question.

Fortuna Ferret looked troubled as it let out its cute sounds once more.

"We talked about it earlier, but I wiped out all those damn birds in Rainbowfear domain recently, and while I can't assure it'll be safe re, it's definitely an option. From what I saw, no or monsters dare approach area," Jake explained.

Considering this proposition for a moment, Fortuna Ferret eventually agreed that evacuating re would be a good idea. elf and dryad both looked at Jake rar confused, as ferret went back into its nest.

"You understood what she said?" elf asked, surprised.

"Evidently so," Jake shrugged. word "understood" was an odd one here, as Jake naturally also only heard cute dooking noises from ferret, yet he knew what it wanted to ask anyway. Perhaps his many years Sylphie-whispering had given him a great talent to understand beasts... or perhaps he had always been inclined toward more bestial side of existence.

"Wow... it usually takes me at least a few days before I begin to understand beasts I care for," elf muttered. "Tell me you at least have some skill related to husbandry."

"Nope, pure talent," Jake smiled.

"Sometimes, world truly isn't fair," elf sighed. "Eir way, I want to thank you again for help. You didn't have to, especially as a guest of Panon. This may be a bit presumptuous, but could I have some contact details from you? I want to compensate you in some way after returning from Hunting Grounds. I'm not saying I can offer much, but maybe I can even get some of my seniors to pitch in, seeing as you helped save Fortuna Ferret kits."

Jake considered for a moment before shrugging. "Sure, I guess, though I don't need anything."

"That's why I said it may be a bit presumptuous, as I mainly want a way to contact you again for purely selfish reasons. You're clearly not a nobody, and if you are a nobody, you won't stay one for long. I would be an idiot to not even attempt to make friends with someone who's bound to go far," elf said, being surprisingly honest. dryad clearly wasn't a fan as she looked on a bit scared, wondering what Jake's reaction would be.

He just chuckled and shook his head. "Appreciate honesty. And you know what, how about instead of giving you a way to contact me, you give me something to reach out to you?"

"That's fair," elf agreed, though she did look a bit disappointed. Jake guessed her plan had been to look into Jake using whatever he gave her to figure out who exactly he was. Additionally, Artemis had told him that it was actually pretty common for gods to bless people based on recommendations from those y had already blessed, and Jake could totally see a world where elf was trying to figure out if Jake could potentially be interested in having Artemis bless him.

Which, while it would be funny, wasn't really an option.

"Alright, here, take this," elf said, taking out a small wooden plaque. "With that, it should be pretty easy to reach out and find us. We live toger, and I'll gladly invite you over to dinner one day. Solana here is mean in kitchen, and her cooking definitely isn't something you'll want to miss."

"I'll definitely take you up on that offer," Jake smiled and nodded as he got a funny idea. "Would a plus one be acceptable?"

"Sure, more merrier," Keerla smiled, clearly happy that Jake seemed receptive to idea. If he truly had no plans to ever reach out again, why would he bor asking about such things, after all?

Of course, what she didn't know was who Jake considered bringing along as he had most hilarious idea... but all things in good time.

As ir conversation ended, Fortuna Ferret also returned, this time not alone. five kits with it followed along with careful steps, having been woken up by ir mor as y didn't want to delay evacuating as no one knew when Simivita would return.

Of course, not before Jake took chance to be attacked by five curious human-sized ferret kits, all at ir mor's behest. All of m curiously sniffed Jake's body and rubbed ir heads on him, and whenever he tried to reach out and pet one, it reacted by rolling on ground to dodge, playfully looking at Jake as if daring him to catch it.

Solana and Keerla looked at him with some jealousy while y briefly talked about what would happen next. Jake had a good time for a few minutes before it was time for m to head off. two women would escort Fortuna Ferret and kits to Rainbowfear domain, and while Jake was offered to join, he wanted to continue his hunt.

While he wouldn't classify this encounter as a waste of time, he did consider it inefficient. As he'd said to Chieftain, he didn't even expect a level from killing a peak C-tier anymore unless it was a powerful variant, and sadly for Jake, most powerful variants in Hunting Grounds were considered endangered.

He needed stronger opponents to push himself, and while he could get lucky finding a powerful, non-endangered solitary monster or face off against a large group of peak C-grades, Jake considered just not boring with m anymore.

Instead, he reckoned it was time to finally seek out and take down his first B-grade, and from his brief talks with Keerla and Solana, he already had a target in mind.

As he headed toward Grand Lake, Jake recalled fond days of reaching D-grade and his first exploration of forest near Haven. He remembered his Lighttail Monkey genocide, which had ultimately resulted in getting a banana musa and a good fight with his very first Prima.

Jake was now C-grade... and while se Simivitas weren't quite monkeys, y were apes, and that was close enough. He'd already taken down one Chieftain, and he reckoned y weren't very keen on him right now. Moreover, apes Jake allowed to retreat had gone back and likely told this Warlord – someone Keerla confirmed to be B-grade - what had happened, so Jake was definitely on a shit list re. two women had also confirmed that Simivitas would definitely hunt him down if given opportunity, and y even encouraged him to fight back and kill as many as he could - or be bored to - as y were halfway considered an invasive species on planet.

Seeing as Jake had already made m an enemy, and considering Simivitas weren't endangered, Jake decided to change ir classification... skipping over endangered and going straight to extinct.

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Chapter 1112: Simivita Island: Outer Region

Grand Lake 1.

Lame name aside, se lakes, numbered one to five, were source of mana and growth for entire Hunting Ground, nurtured by powerful entity living within planet. Each Grand Lake served as center of every Area, and due to way environmental mana propagated, more powerful monsters could be found closest to lake, with most powerful ones residing on islands within lake.

Though perhaps calling m islands wasn't entirely accurate, as y were more akin to entire continents before system. n again, continents were technically just islands called continents, and it was all down to semantics.

Eir way, Jake had decided he was done scouring lake's shore for powerful peak C-grades and set his sights on one of islands. Before he departed from Keerla and Solana, y had helpfully pointed out which island to "avoid at all costs," which was precisely one he was now headed towards.

He activated stealth while flying over water, not wanting to catch attention of any or creatures during his flight. Expanding his senses, he felt powerful auras from many different islands, indicating re were quite a few B-grades on se islands, with most of m having at least one.

From what Jake had gared, fights between B-grades were incredibly rare. It was risky to fight, and gains were minuscule compared to risks in eyes of se B-grades. That didn't mean y wouldn't take advantage of a weakened rival if opportunity arose, which meant that even if one B-grade killed anor, should it suffer any injuries in process, it would be hounded by ors until fully slain.

Of course, se B-grades being this passive also meant most of m were barely making any progress on ir Paths. y were slowly gaining power, yes, but as this was a Hunting Ground, few B-grades ever lived for more than a century before eventually getting hunted down. Some did leave planet entirely, but most ended up killed, often by a talented C-grade like Jake.

Artemis had truly chosen this Hunting Ground well, knowing Jake intended to hunt down a B-grade, and se B-grades were prime for that. y were relatively weak variants, all at beginning of grade, and many of m lacked proper experience fighting with ir B-grade power. y were also generally lazy, confined to ir domains, and more concerned with sleeping while absorbing energy given off by lake than improving ir skills and qualitative abilities.

Not that this meant Jake had an easy task before him. A B-grade was, in end, a B-grade. Even weakest B-grade was equivalent to an incredibly talented peak C-grade variant and, in many instances, even stronger simply due to its higher stats and qualitative boost given upon evolution.

Usually, there was another concept at play that Jake had never noticed. Artemis called it “suppression of grade” or something like that, and it ultimately boiled down to those of a lower tier doing less damage and taking more from those of a higher grade. This apparently wasn’t only a thing with grades but even levels. This naturally left Jake quite confused until Artemis made it clear that someone like Jake wasn’t affected.

Pure power could counteract this concept somewhat, and there were also skills that could fight against or even nullify this concept entirely. One such example was a skill Jake had since beginning of his Path as a hunter, namely Big Game Hunter. While Jake wanted to criticize wording used, it was mentioned in skill as part of a section that Jake never really cared about:

“As you forever chase horizon, you have become more accustomed to facing higher-level enemies. Increases user’s resistance to auras and gives a small increase to...”

Aura resistance wasn’t really a thing to Jake, but it was apparently aura of every living being that created this concept. This also made Jake wonder if his Bloodline made him immune to what was effectively a debuff when fighting higher-leveled foes. Not that it would be a massive effect, as Artemis made it clear, one would be hard-pressed to find anyone who regularly hunted down higher-leveled foes not to have an effect similar to Big Game Hunter’s aura resistance. In summary, it was mainly a problem for weak people.

Learning about this concept did make Jake interested, though, as he wondered if it only worked one way. As in, did it only work when those of a higher level suppressed those beneath them? If not, what stopped Jake from making use of this concept even when hunting more powerful foes? What’s to say he wasn’t already using it unknowingly at times?

He had noticed that whenever he unleashed his aura – often in concert with Pride – his foes were far more vulnerable. At first, he guessed this was due to them not reacting properly to attacks as they were taken by surprise and perhaps even a little frightened, but he began to consider if there was more to it.

Doing a bit of testing about that also seemed like a nice way for Jake to not feel as bad about his utter lack of progress when it came to improving his archery. Not that deciding to have melee duels with apes had helped him any, either.

Soon enough, Jake reached Simivita Island, as it had been lazily dubbed. From estimates in Hunting Ground Manual, as Jake had been told pamphlet was officially

called, there should be around three thousand C-grade Simivitas on island, all above level 325 at least.

Alright, there were actually at least ten thousand, but Jake didn't count those below level 325 as he had no interest in fighting those. While Jake had thought about making Simivitas go extinct, that had very much been hyperbolic.

Killing Simivita children and those not even fully grown yet wasn't something Jake had any interest in whatsoever. Killing those weaker than himself still gave Jake an icky feeling, and he hoped that tribe would be smart enough to keep those too young to fight properly away from any battlefields, as he really hoped he wouldn't be forced into a situation where he had to kill a bunch below level 300.

Landing on shore of island, Jake released a Pulse while keeping stealth active. He immediately spotted several of apes, and to his surprise, he saw some of them even fighting or monsters. That's when Jake remembered something else dryad Solana had mentioned briefly. Sometimes, monsters did travel between islands, all at encouragement of B-grades. They would bring back anything they killed and even try to steal some of natural resources from one another. In some ways, it reminded Jake of "planned" battles Villy talked about, which Risen and Holy Church used to nurture talent and keep their members on their toes.

The presence of enemies on island only helped Jake, as it would make Simivitas take longer to notice his presence. He also decided that while practicing archery was important, hunting itself took precedence for now.

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With those thoughts, Jake snuck into less dense forested area close to shore. It turned into a full-on jungle further one went inland, but there were mainly trees with a lot of spacing between them for the first fifty or so kilometers closest to shore on mostly round island.

He quickly noticed an isolated Simivita sitting atop one of larger trees. It looked out over water with a careful gaze, and it didn't seem concerned about being spotted itself, likely due to its respectable camouflage skill. In front of Jake's Perception, it naturally didn't stand a chance, and he easily identified it.

[Grand Simivita Scoutmaster – lvl 343]

Jake had already guessed there would be scouts keeping an eye out for any invaders. Seeing it sitting there so casually, Jake got into position straight beneath branch Scoutmaster was sitting on. Aiming upwards, Jake began charging an Arcane Powershot as Unseen Hunter kept him undetected. He even activated Arcane Awakening for an additional boost, as he didn't want this to be a prolonged encounter.

Scoutmaster was picking its nose and only noticed attack far too late. From beneath, thick branch was ripped apart, and an arrow penetrated ape through its bottom and exited its skull in a perfectly straight line, destroying everything in its path.

Death was instant, and C-grade barely had time to register that it had been hit before it died.

Okay, yeah, se Simivitas are definitely weaker on average than Rainbowfears, Jake confirmed to himself, as he knew he shouldn't dally. His attack hadn't exactly been subtle, seeing as it created a pillar of arcane light, and as expected, he heard two incredibly loud screeches just a moment later, and with a Pulse, he confirmed it was two or Scoutmasters.

A huge squad of apes would no doubt assemble and be re shortly, but by that time, Jake would be long gone as he re-entered stealth and snuck away toward his next target. About five minutes later, anor Simivita was slain, followed by a third seven minutes after that.

Using his Pulses of Perception, Jake saw a decently large squad of tightly packed apes moving toger, chasing after where he made his moves. It had only taken about ten minutes for more than twenty to gar, and while Jake had confidence in taking m all on relatively easily, he didn't want to reveal all cards in his hand quite yet. For now, he was more than happy being regarded as a one-trick ambush predator as he kept up his hunt of isolated apes.

Soon enough, over an hour had passed, and Jake had taken down anor nine apes, all but one killed with a single attack, with lone straggler requiring a follow-up barrage to finish off.

pursuit squad had grown to over fifty by now, and effects of his assault could even be seen elsewhere. On what he considered eastern section – Jake had entered from sourn one – invaders from anor island had gotten newfound life through Jake's distraction. Around thirty mantis-like creatures had made rapid progress as apes were busy dealing with issues elsewhere and had begun to turn into a problem of ir own as y made it furr and furr inland, something apes definitely weren't a fan of, and for good reason.

About halfway between center of island and outer regions was a belt where most of Simivitas lived. This included those not suitable for combat and young too weak to fight yet. While Jake had no intentions of wantonly killing se, group of mantis creatures certainly didn't have same sensibilities. In fact, y seemed to target this region purposefully, trying to avoid fighting as y hurried inland.

Jake saw this and decided to give apes a little hand. He purposefully killed two Simivitas ahead of where group of mantises was moving, baiting his pursuit squad over in that direction. He succeeded, and not too long after, he had not only shaken off his

pursuers, all while likely making m think y had dealt with invasion, but also avoided helping a bunch of murderous insects do something he found unacceptable.

He considered continuing his hunt immediately, but instead decided to take a small break upon realizing he was no longer being pursued. He also wanted to head toward normn area of island to check that out and hopefully lessen number of Simivitas furr.

For now, he wanted to make some preparations should he run into a huge crowd of apes at once. From fight with Rainbowfears, Jake had learned that poison gas was definitely effective, even if it did have some pretty serious downsides, primarily that enemies could just move out of it.

Against Rainbowfears, things had still worked out fine because those birds were actual psychos who would rar die than retreat, but Simivitas had proven mselves more than willing to retreat should y find mselves in an unfavorable situation. That's why Jake wanted to create a poison gas that was a bit more... subtle.

kind that his enemies wouldn't even know y had been infected with before Jake decided to awaken it through Touch of Malefic Viper. Jake already had practice making this sort of poison when in liquid form, and applying it to poison gas shouldn't prove too difficult.

Besides, he also reckoned he could do with a re-stocking of potions.

Jake spent next three days doing some alchemy before he moved on once more, continuing his hunt. For about six hours, he was a scourge to island's normn section as he hunted down a few dozen Simivitas, even going as far as to take on small groups of up to three, always making sure re were no survivors to report back about him.

He only stopped because group hunting him got too big, and he found a good hiding spot where he hunkered down for a bit more alchemy until things calmed down once more. It ended up taking anor three days before Jake moved back to eastern section and continued his rampage, getting bolder and bolder with every success as he tested his limits. Not limits of if he could beat Simivitas, but if he could do so fast enough before assistance arrived or before any of his prey could escape.

This hunting pattern continued for a few weeks as Jake cycled between alchemy and killing, his progress good in both fields as he even began to refine poison gas he was working on to work better against Simivitas by including some of ir cores in crafting process.

Jake was happy with his progress in both areas, and he generally had a good time doing two things that he loved: killing local wildlife and creating alchemical weapons that would definitely be classified as war crimes if ever used.

--

As Jake was having a good time hunting, and quite a few of top figures from Earth had left planet to seek out ir factions across multiverse, ir home planet was calm as everyone was settling in with new normal after system event ended. NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON *novel●fire●net*

For a few months, anyway.

Because, while it certainly wasn't on mind of someone like Jake, Miranda was more than a little busy preparing for what would happen soon. In fact, most of factions in ninety-third universe were preparing mselves for a new, unknown normal.

A new normal where ninety-third universe wasn't just ninety-third universe but a true part of wider multiverse, as day when first outsiders could travel to ir universe drew nearer with every passing day.

On Earth, Miranda had naturally also done all she could to prepare. With level limitation in place, she wasn't overly worried too powerful people would arrive, but she still remained cautious.

She and or smart heads had considered for a long time how y would approach visitors from or universes, and for a time even considered closing down planet entirely, not allowing anyone to come... but ultimately, y decided on quite opposite.

re would still be some restrictions, as if not, Miranda feared planet would be overrun, but in general, y would have few limitations. What y instead had were rules every visitor was expected to follow.

Was this best approach?

Miranda had no idea. Nobody really did, though she had gotten some advice from her Patrons, many of which weren't that useful, as Miranda wasn't interested in ruling same way Order of Malefic Viper did.

Besides, if ir approach turned out to be a bad idea... y would find out very soon as day ninety-third universe opened up – at least in a limited capacity - finally arrived.

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Chapter 1113: Beginning Of A New Multiversal Era

Scarlett couldn't help but feel excited. This was her first official task as a member of Order of Malefic Viper, and it wasn't an insignificant one either.

With opening of ninety-third universe, many factions were naturally interested in establishing a presence on Earth. Many already had, but far more were looking for an opportunity, including those who never had a chance before now.

Surprisingly, Order of Malefic Viper technically didn't have a presence on planet. y didn't explicitly control any territories, and there weren't any headquarters or institutions associated with faction. Yet, in eyes of many, entire planet already belonged to Order, seeing as Chosen of Malefic Viper was World Leader of Earth.

For Order to expand its presence on Earth was a given, and Scarlett was all for it. One of her tasks was to escort members of Order to Earth and discuss with Miranda terms of where y could settle.

Besides members of Order, Scarlett was also to escort members of or factions, namely Dragonflights, who had shown interest in having a more formal presence on Earth. Scarlett had been a bit surprised when she was informed y had been given permission by Miranda to travel to Earth with a fairly large delegation, but she definitely didn't complain.

Over last few years, she had been getting closer to members of Dragonflights and was fully aware of why these organizations approached her. y knew getting to Lord Thayne directly was a tall order, and Meira was now Chosen of Duskleaf and not someone y dared approach either. That left just herself, Irin, and Reika as potential targets for Dragonflights to get an "in" with Chosen. As a snake – a race closely related to dragons – she was obvious target.

She had struggled with this in beginning, but after a discussion with Draskil – Malefic Dragonkin that some even believed to be Chosen of Malefic Viper for a time – she realized she should just embrace it. In his words:

"Kiss-assers are gonna try and get to you no matter what, so why not take advantage and at least get to know those trying to please you? Exploit me as much as y want to exploit you, and if you get lucky, you might even find a few people in there you genuinely get along with. Shit, I've expanded my harem three times over already just by not denying that Chosen and I hung out for a while."

Ignoring last part, his words did carry some wisdom. Scarlett couldn't change reality, only how she responded to it. And she had gained some actual friends during this time, having even gone to Nevermore with children of dragons. This update is available on **novel•fire•net**

Now, she was even getting credit from those she knew among Dragonflights for allowing m to visit and get a presence on Earth, and Scarlett gladly took this credit as she saw no reason not to.

“My Lady, members of Emberflight should be here shortly, but I was informed y were running a little late,” a succubus informed her as Scarlett sat deep in thought within her way-too-big training chamber.

“Did Lumenflight reach out?” Scarlett asked.

“Yes, y showed interest in being part of a second wave if possible. For now, y have too many or areas to focus on and not enough members to confidently expand,” demon answered.

“Alright,” Scarlett nodded as she got up. She checked a token and saw it was only a short ten minutes till universe would open up, and everyone was already meant to be gared by now. Scarlett planned on being last one to show up, as that was apparently what one was supposed to do, but she didn’t want to risk being late.

succubus who had been assigned as Scarlett’s assistant during all this followed along, as she would also be one of people going to Earth with m. level restriction of 300 or below wasn’t very restricting, but it was one of reasons Scarlett had been assigned leader.

While re were a few strong people who would go to Earth, Scarlett would be strongest among ir group. She had already reached peak C-grade and only needed to overcome final wall before her evolution to B-grade, something she was still working on slowly and steadily.

Teleporting once with succubus, Scarlett arrived at a massive outdoor area with around five thousand people gared of all races and internal factions of Order. Vampires, dragonkin, scalekin of all sorts, humans, elves, dwarves, Risen, beastkin, and a lot of beasts or or monsters in human form. re were even a few members of Altmar Empire and United Tribes mixed in.

Scarlett observed m and saw many were nervous about going to planet ruled by Chosen of Malefic Viper. She was standing atop a raised podium overlooking people gared below on large teleportation circle that had been prepared, and while she couldn’t detect person, she knew a god was hidden somewhere, in charge of actual teleportation through void to ensure nothing went wrong.

“Nervous about going home?” a voice suddenly asked beside her as a familiar person had also arrived. It was very same dragonkin who sometimes gave good and or times questionable advice.

[Malefic Dragonkin – lvl 312]

"No, not really, though I am looking forward to seeing how my old subordinates are doing," Scarlett said with a smile. "Are you nervous about going re? To homeworld of Chosen?"

That's right, Draskil had also decided he wanted to tag along to Earth. In truth, his status within Order of Malefic Viper surpassed Scarlett's by a fair margin, but dragonkin had insisted she become official leader of this little trip, as not only was she a native of planet, but because he seriously didn't want to be in charge of anything. If a situation didn't have to do with fighting or women, Draskil very rarely bored getting involved.

"Depends, should I be nervous? Is it true that your planet has a lot of water?" dragonkin asked, Scarlett fully aware of his extreme hydrophobia.

"It has, majority of surface is covered in it," Scarlett answered honestly.

"n why fuck do you call it Earth?" dragonkin complained. "Why not just call it Water if it has so much of it? That would be far more honest."

"I'm not one who named it," Scarlett shrugged. "Though I have heard it has many or names, such as Blue Planet, which I guess could be described as more accurate. Except re are planets which are effectively all water, so even that wouldn't be very accurate."

"Bah, such planets should be destroyed upon sight," Draskil complained.

"Just don't go and do something dumb on Earth," Scarlett sighed, fully aware that fighting Draskil likely wouldn't end well for her if it came down to it. While she was many levels higher than him, he was still considered a top-tier genius by standards of multiverse and someone far superior to herself. Not that she was too worried, as Earth had things that were far more threatening than she.

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"I'm not an idiot," Draskil scoffed. "Though I do plan on seeing if I can pay Void Mechanist a visit..."

"Just don't antagonize him," Scarlett shook her head as she remembered pamphlet that those from Order had been handed out about Earth. It was compiled with help of natives from planet, and Miranda had even chipped in with making it by including laws and norms of planet.

One section of information pamphlet was about notable figures on planet. It talked about those not currently re, but also those who had stayed behind. Most notable was naturally Miranda, Verdant Witch and de facto leader of planet. She was right hand of Malefic One's Chosen and person he trusted most, and that alone granted her an

incredibly high status. Not to mention that she carried Divine Blessing of Witches of Verdant Lagoon, with rumors that she was a Chosen candidate.

However, she was still considered a relatively approachable person as she had a very public role. same could not be said for Void Mechanist, who had a section primarily filled with warnings to not piss him off needlessly. He was type of person that a lot of people didn't really understand how he fit into power structure of planet, and Scarlett had to admit she was also perplexed.

He seemed entirely outside of hierarchy. He had no official designations, no granted title, no nothing. By all accounts, he was just a guy who lived on Earth and preferred to be left alone while also being extremely powerful and respected by those with actual institutional power. best way to describe him would be something like a reliable long-term contractor who wasn't officially part of leadership structure, yet was still often heavily involved in matters of planet.

But most importantly for those about to visit Earth, he was someone who could remove m from surface of planet if y annoyed him too much, and no one would do anything about it. In or words, he was someone to just leave hell alone and, at most, admire his large metal dome from afar. At least for most... Scarlett had heard that a few of those from Altmar Empire had plans to make contact with Void Mechanist, and she could only wish m luck.

"Bets on if Emberflight will make it?" Draskil asked after several moments of silence.

"I would assume y do, if only with a minute to spare," Scarlett said. Sure, y said y would be late, but she still expected m to know that she wasn't going to delay everyone just for one of Dragonflights.

"Hey, you don't know how bloody long Helen can take to get ready sometimes," Draskil shrugged, though he did have a dumb smile when talking about fellow dragonkin he had been aggressively pursuing for a few years. Scarlett wasn't sure how much progress he'd actually made, but at least Helen seemed somewhat receptive.

Oh yeah, Helenstromoz, red dragonkin that tried to get close to Jake once upon a time, would also go to Earth. Just as y talked about m, seven people teleported onto platform, dragonkin in question in middle, looking a bit frazzled. Scarlett also had to recognize that Helen was one of more powerful people going to Earth, barely making it below level 300 cut-off.

[Dragonkin – lvl 298]

"I apologize we're late, but re was a problem with a gift we had prepared," Helen quickly explained by sending a telepathic message, and Scarlett just sent a quick acknowledgment in return as she didn't have time to engage in a conversation here and

now as she floated down and landed on teleportation platform alongside Draskil and succubus as she spoke loudly, infusing her voice with Willpower.

“Prepare yourselves; teleportation shall begin shortly. For those teleporting between universes for first time, be aware that experience can be rather uncomfortable. For those who have teleported between universes before, be aware this will be a lot rougher than what you’re used to,” Scarlett spoke loudly, even putting a small joke in re. At least, she thought it was a joke.

Serious nods all around confirmed everyone was serious.

A few seconds passed, and despite seemingly nothing changing to Scarlett and all those standing on platform, something did change. Mortals couldn’t detect it besides most powerful among them, but all gods knew at that moment that veil between universes had weakened.

At once, across ninety-two first universes, countless teleportations activated at once. Resources capable of funding entire panons were expended in mere seconds as trillions upon trillions were teleported into ninety-third universe at once, as a new era had begun.

Some planets would find themselves conquered by forces who got outside assistance. Others would solidify their power, while a few places were nearly unaffected, as natives were too powerful or had limited all incoming teleportation enough for it not to be a problem. At least not for now.

Given enough time, factions of old would claim ninety-third universe same way they had ninety-two prior. Some would struggle, but in the end, only choice most so-called “independent” planets had would be between subjugation or annihilation. Only way to survive was to either become part of a large faction... or find yourself under influence of a faction that didn’t care to rule every planet under their purview with an iron fist.

They would all still know that this iron fist existed and had power to smash their planet to smithereens should “independent” faction prove themselves just a bit too problematic.

--

Miranda stood alongside Lillian, Arthur, Sky Whale in humanoid form, members from Noboru clan, and representatives from most large factions who had a presence on Earth.

Large teleportation circle prepared in relatively empty section of human-occupied section of planet began to light up as it activated mere seconds after universe opened up. This teleportation circle was placed on a raised stone platform to inscribe complex runes that Neil, Scarlett’s snakes, and many others had worked on for last few months.

It was barren land around for thousands of kilometers, with nothing besides temporary buildings primarily constructed by earth mages surrounding teleporter. The buildings were far worse than anything an actual Builder could make, but given they only had a hundred days to prepare everything, Miranda wasn't particularly upset that the welcome that awaited most of those about to arrive wasn't exactly a red carpet one.

And good thing there wasn't a carpet anywhere in sight because it would have been quite nasty after what happened next. As several thousand figures appeared on the massive teleportation platform, about four out of five began to violently throw up, a few fainted, and there were even two who started screaming loudly.

Miranda couldn't help but nod as she also remembered her first time teleporting to the first universe. Seeing as one side of the teleporter was a lot rougher than the other – which could only be expected as what was constructed at Order had been made by a god – getting a bumpy ride was unavoidable.

Some of the new arrivals had handled matters pretty well, though. The more powerful people were able to suppress whatever discomfort they felt, while a few had experienced this type of teleportation several times before, including two people who were leading this expedition.

"Hello, Scarlett, long time no see," Miranda said as she floated over and landed on the platform while regarding the albino snake in humanoid form. Beside her, she saw a powerful-looking Malefic Dragonkin who observed her back to one side, with a succubus down on all fours throwing up on the other.

Scarlett looked at Miranda for a moment as the snake girl forgot all decorum for a moment as she jumped forward and gave the witch a big hug. "Miranda!"

Miranda could only smile and return the hug. "Silly girl... I've missed you too."

She couldn't help but remember the days she was teaching the far more powerful snake how to be more human-like, and while it wasn't a particularly positive moment of her life back then, she now looked back at it fondly.

Also... it did help break the ice for what was about to come next, as Miranda had meetings galore prepared and more work on her plate than she could possibly finish in the short term. Not that she complained too much, as the experience points were good. It was so good that Jake had to be wary she wouldn't evolve to B-grade before him.

"Greetings, my lady," Malefic Dragonkin greeted Miranda just as she and Scarlett disengaged from their hug. He held out his hand, motioning Miranda to give hers as he spoke again. "It would be my pleasure if Ms. Wells would join me for a one-on-one meeting to-"

“No,” Miranda just said, already knowing enough about Draskil to know what he was trying.

dragonkin instantly retracted his hand and shrugged with a grin. “Worth a shot.”

“It really wasn’t,” Scarlett sighed.

“I would beg to differ,” Draskil doubled down.

“You know what? I changed my mind,” Miranda said with a big smile. “We should have a meeting just two of us... have you ever gone scuba-diving before? An incredible experience after system.”

Draskil looked confused for a moment until succubus, who had been busy only moments ago throwing up, had gotten back up and seemingly sent a telepathic message to Malefic Dragonkin, explaining what Miranda was talking about.

dragonkin looked at Miranda and nodded. “Truly worthy of being called a witch in both class and temperament, and one of only people who can handle Chosen of Malefic One.”

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Chapter 1114: Creeping Death

“Be honest here. I know it’s not ideal, but do you think that’s better or worse than expected?” Jake asked projection of a woman in front of him.

“Slightly worse... I had underestimated arrogance some people possess. Even if y logically know y need to rein in ir egos, in heat of moment, y forget mselves and act based on old habits,” Miranda said with a sigh. “Those from Dragonflights are especially a handful.”

“Remember that you have my full backing to act however you see fit,” Jake said stoically.

“Oh, I’m aware, but luckily, factions are pretty good at handing out punishments internally to satisfy us, and when we’ve had to step in, none have dared to complain. Most factions believe – rightfully so – that ir current presence on Earth is very much a probationary period to see if y’ll be allowed to stay for long term,” Miranda explained.

"That's good, at least," Jake nodded. "Have you had any issues with some of more notable figures?"

"You're asking about Draskil, right?" Miranda asked with a slight smile, Jake nodding in confirmation.

"Surprisingly, he's been on his best behavior, though he has expressed discontent over lack of interest from female natives," Miranda chuckled. "I guess it is true that average woman's type often isn't someone scaled and with a tail. Alas, I've tried to convince him that beauty standards evolve over time, and he should try to stick with those more integrated with rest of multiverse."

Jake shook his head, not really surprised, as he asked a few more questions to get a better understanding of how Earth was doing after ninety-third universe had been opened up.

It had happened a month ago now, and using one of Miranda's skills to reach out, y had this conversation with Jake in hiding while recovering. Back when universe had opened up, Jake had felt odd shift instantly, and not long after, Miranda had reached out and asked him some basic questions before y scheduled this follow-up meeting.

From his furr questions, Jake learned that, overall, things were going well, even if re were challenges, primarily born from culture clash between natives of Earth and those living in accordance with norms of multiverse.

One easy example was entire concept of queueing. Naturally, one still had to sometimes queue in multiverse, but it was standard that those with status or power could always skip ahead without having to ask or do anything else. No one batted an eye if Jake went ahead of everyone while back in Order, and he even knew that in cases where re were limited slots for something, and if Jake decided he wanted to take part while re were no more slots, someone of "low" status would simply be kicked out.

Meanwhile, on Earth, it was naturally considered quite bad manners to skip ahead. Someone like Jake would still be allowed to, and so would some ors, but average Earthling didn't subscribe to norm of someone being ten levels above m, meaning that someone can just skip ahead.

This was just one small, relatively insignificant example – one that Jake wasn't even sure if fully fit as re were still examples of cultures on Earth that didn't respect sanctity of queue - but re were dozens of ors, too, and when y all compounded, real issues could be created. According to Miranda, re had even been a few examples of people from Order or anor faction with high status killing a native "nobody" for insulting ir honor or some or nonsense like that.

se were naturally biggest problems, and in most cases, se people would be sent back to first universe and punished by Order of Malefic Viper. Having m stay on Earth and

punish me was just way too complicated, and Miranda wasn't comfortable jumping straight to capital punishment for a "young genius" from a major multiversal faction.

It was all very complicated, and Jake could only respect Miranda for handling things as well as she was. Luckily, some of the factions that had visited hadn't created any problems at all.

vampires had stayed with the Noboru clan and been on their best behavior, even helping many of the newly evolved vampires to better understand their Path. There was the Altmar Empire who had done some trading, explored the culture, and even visited Arnold with a delegation of scientists.

Miranda had been a bit afraid something could go wrong there, but things had turned out very smoothly, which didn't really surprise Jake. He knew that Arnold respected the methods of the Altmar Empire after having studied the Altmar Census Golem in D-grade, and the scientist had even procured more creations from the empire of elves to study. Now, he had been given a chance to discuss science with young talents from the Empire itself, and while they certainly weren't on his level, their different perspectives and teachings would undoubtedly prove valuable to him.

Jake and Miranda discussed a bit more about some details before it was time for them both to get back to their matters at hand.

"I have confidence things will improve with time, and these are primarily growing pains. Both sides need time to adapt, and as we've talked about many times before, newer generations of Earthlings will be far more integrated with the norms of the system. That doesn't mean we can disregard those with conservative views from before the system, and I must praise my own genius for getting Arthur on the council as he can offer some valuable insight, and hopefully, Earth can create its own culture that can make most people happy," Miranda finished off with saying, having quite a positive outlook on the future.

"So, no civil war within five years?" Jake asked jokingly with a small smirk.

"I will strangle any rebellion in its cradle before it even has a chance to utter a single word of dissent," Miranda answered coldly while keeping her same positive smile.

Jake didn't comment about that very scary statement but just nodded as they soon cut off connection. He felt confident Miranda had a handle on things, and while he had considered if he would have to return to Earth briefly to stabilize things, it appeared that wasn't necessary.

Which was good because Jake had a lot of apes to kill.

Releasing a Pulse, he made sure no patrons were nearby before he moved from his hiding spot. During the last month, Jake had killed a lot of apes. Enough to attract attention

of B-grade Warlord. Warlord had moved himself on several instances, but Jake had dodged him every time as he had no interest in facing off against B-grade when he was with his army.

It was getting tougher to kill apes, though. Jake had taken down several hundred of m already and eliminated pretty much every single Scoutmaster remaining. Because of this, surrounding islands had noticed lack of scouting and upped ir attacks recently, which gave Jake space and time to continue his own assault as several fights were always going on around island.

apes now moved in squads, often with five to ten apes at a time. Jake aimed for smaller teams to begin with, but a week ago, he encountered a patrol he couldn't kill fast enough before a second one arrived, and while he did end up killing this second patrol for most part, three apes made ir escape to report back to Warlord. It was after that Warlord had also begun to move personally, realizing this was no longer just usual attacks from surrounding islands having increased.

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However, even if things had gotten harder, Jake had also gotten better at finding kills. While it wasn't enough for any kind of skill upgrade, Jake also noticed how much his Unseen Hunter had improved over last month, and even his archery had seen a bit of practice, though still primarily in realm of curved arrows and just overall power Jake could pour into every attack.

Finally, re was experience gained from what had to soon be nearing five hundred near or peak C-grades, and it was honestly... Jake wasn't sure if he would call it disappointing, but it wasn't a lot, eir.

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 304 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 308 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 305 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

Two levels were still two levels, but Jake definitely felt experience gain having dropped off. His Path truly did make gaining levels a lot harder, his Anomalous Soul not helping things eir.

Jake did have ways to make up for it, though. He got more experience than usual when killing ors far above himself in power and levels, so truly, if he wanted to get some good leveling in, he needed to be taking out B-grades. If not, he doubted he could reach B-

grade himself within a century, with how much worse his experience gain would begin to get closer he got to his evolution.

For now, he could at least squeeze a bit more experience out of killing peak C-grades before it was time to take on Warlord. Before he could take down B-grade, he would have to take down most annoying C-grades, which was what Jake was about to do now.

Chieftain Jake had killed to help Fortuna Ferret was far from only one among Simivita tribe. Jake had seen a total of eight during his scouting of island, and today would be day he made that seven as he closed in on a patrol team very isolated from ors. Likely because tribe had full confidence this group wouldn't be attacked, seeing as y numbered twenty-four Simivitas, including ir peak C-grade Chieftain leader.

Usually, this kind of large group would be hard to handle for Jake, who primarily specialized in strong single-target damage and fighting individuals, but through power of alchemy, Jake had created a little something just two days prior that he was excited to test out.

It was naturally anor type of poison gas, one that would hopefully be even more effective than what he used against Rainbowfear Songbirds.

[Arcane-Infused Creeping Death Poison Gas (Rare)] – Unseen, without taste, without sound, death shall creep up upon those unlucky enough to experience this poison gas. Mixing potent death affinity toxins, arcane energies, and soul-soothing waters, a powerful poison gas has been concocted. This poison silently inflicts any biological entity that comes into contact with it. toxins are dormant upon inflictions as y are stabilized, but will automatically activate if too much accumulates, or alchemist activates poison manually by turning stability into destruction. Destructive arcane energies allow it to spread faster as it weakens foe's tissue. Wounds caused by necrotic poison are extremely difficult to heal.

Oh, and yes, its successful creation had also led to anor nice level gained that Jake had genuinely not expected.

'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of Malefic Viper] has reached level 313 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 309 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

When it came to poison itself, Jake was quite pleased with its effectiveness. He had infused his arcane affinity to stabilize poison during normal conditions, and while it was mostly undetectable, it wasn't completely impossible to sense, even for Simivitas. poison gas still contained innate energy that ors could perceive, and while Jake could

gamble on apes being foolish enough to linger in an area filled with unknown mana in air, he didn't like his odds.

Fortunately for Jake, he had found an ingenious method to mask poison gas:

Big explosions.

Anor Pulse confirmed Chieftain and his squad would soon be upon Jake. Some of them were slightly injured from fighting or invaders, and Jake reckoned they were a bit low on energy, which made this a perfect time to strike.

Charging his Arcane Powershot, he waited patiently for Chieftain to appear within his line of sight. He was standing in middle of jungle, down on ground, and soon enough, he saw apes.

They all charged right toward Jake, but he didn't move at all. He stood perfectly still as his Arcane Powershot kept charging, and it was only when apes got within ten meters of him that Chieftain noticed something was off. At that point, it was way too late to dodge.

An Arcane Powershot blasted straight into chest of unprepared Chieftain, sending him flying back hundreds of meters into a large tree that toppled from impact. Without any pause, Jake unleashed Pride and his full aura while summoning explosive arcane orbs in air. At same time, he also took out a handful of bottles in each hand and tossed them out.

A moment later, all arcane orbs exploded alongside bottles, filling entire jungle with an aura of destruction. Poison mist also permeated jungle, but due to arcane explosions, why wouldn't there be traces of Jake's affinity lingering in air everywhere?

Many apes had been tightly grouped while moving through jungle and were all hit by Jake's opening attack of arcane explosions. Not that it had done a lot of damage, only resulting in some damaged fur here and there. Only one who wasn't faring well was Chieftain, but even he still lived, as Jake felt same spirit-energy aura erupt from ape as he'd felt during his duel.

Jake had already fully activated his boosting skill from get-go, and Chieftain had a hole through his chest large enough for a beach ball to fit through, making Jake doubt he was gonna survive long without serious assistance or immediately switching to focusing on recovery. Rarer than that, ape instead went fully on offensive. As he roared loudly, all apes surrounding Jake woke up and went into a frenzy as they all attacked Jake at once. READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT [novel●fire●net](#)

He was ready and responded by jumping back while unleashing a barrage of arrows that all exploded, sending a few apes flying while injuring others. Before his opponents could recover, Jake stepped down and teleported to side as he released another barrage, this time of stable arrows that tore into a cluster of apes.

From side, a fully powered Chieftain charged at Jake with a spear piercing through air, but Jake easily responded by dodging to one side as Eternal Shadow manifested on or, stabbing Chieftain in neck before dispersing when ape exploded his own armor to try and get temporary clone away from him.

By that time, Jake had already retreated and resumed his barrage of arrows upon large group of chasing apes. Those of m capable of magic tried to lock Jake down or hit him with ir own spells, but with Pride up and Jake holding nothing back, he eir dodged or nullified every attack as minutes slowly passed.

Due to his constant attacks and intermittent throwing of more poison gas bottles, none of apes noticed anything was amiss. Well, alright, a couple of m died of arrows, and ir leader was on his last legs, so y definitely knew something was wrong, but y hadn't detected poison.

Jake continued to systematically dismantle group of C-grades, and Chieftain quickly realized y didn't stand a chance at all. He himself was also nearly dead, large hole in his chest not healing at all due to poison Jake's initial arrow had been inflicted with, and seven or so arrows that had struck him since also didn't help matters.

That's when he made a wise decision.

“Retreat!”

Sadly for apes, it was too late. y had spent nearly five minutes within a poison cloud, and even if Jake didn't take action personally, poison had soon accumulated enough to automatically activate.

As all apes turned tail to run, Jake raised a hand as Touch of Malefic Viper activated, and all Creeping Death poison was activated at once. already damaged apes fell out of trees from sheer pain while trying to run as ir bodies began rotting from inside. Jake didn't lose this opportunity as he floated into air and began to finish off apes one by one, starting with Chieftain.

After ir leader was dead, or apes still tried to run, and ir distress calls had certainly caught attention of or patrol squads, but none were close enough to reach ir location in time.

entire encounter ended up taking less than ten minutes, resulting in death of twenty-four Simivitas. By time assistance finally arrived, all y found were rotting corpses and discarded weapons, and before y could fully figure out what had happened, yet anor distress call came from elsewhere on island as Jake had truly begun to up ante with intent of forcing Warlord into a direct confrontation.

And if he didn't... death would continue to creep its way furr and furr into his tribe.

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Chapter 1115: Simivita Warlord

large red mantis regarded its eggs for a moment before exiting large hollowed-out tree. Surrounding it were about a hundred mantises, most of m orange and all of m with razor-sharp blades as ir appendages.

red mantis regarded a deep orange one kneeling at front as male spoke. "Mistress, I have returned from Simivita island... and I believe we should stay clear of it for now."

"Has Warlord decided to deal with all invaders personally?" red mantis asked, knowing that if it was so, she would have to go herself should her forces have any chance. One needed a B-grade to fight anor B-grade, after all.

"No... no, re's something else re. Something has been systematically dismantling Simivita forces, and from what my scouts and I gared, it's an individual. A powerful entity has invaded m," scout reported.

"One of enlightened hunters?" red mantis wondered, a sense of dread running through her body. She was only a C-grade last time a Great Culling appeared. Powerful entities had appeared from above and slaughtered every B-grade on islands, and now she feared something similar was occurring.

scout looked unsure for a moment, his hesitation more than enough to make red mantis imagine worst.

Her senses went to cave filled with eggs as she steeled herself. "Have or islands had any response yet?"

"y also seem to have backed off and stopped invading Simivitas for now," scout answered.

"y sense it, too," B-grade mantis sighed. "We shall focus on defending our home for now. Recall all invading squads and hunker down until this catastrophe blows over... or toward us."

--

Jake really thought that system should include special titles to commemorate when one had killed a certain number of creatures of any given race. Like, an upgradeable

Mushroom Slaughterer title or something fun like that. Of course, he knew that reason re wasn't one such title was because titles were a manifestation of powerful Records while killing armies of same creature was a good way to get hit by diminishing returns.

Still, it would have been nice for Jake to know for certain when he had killed his thousandth Simivita without having to go back and count his kill notifications. If a title had been a thing, Jake wouldn't have accidentally blown past such a momentous milestone without even noticing, and now he was already well beyond that.

Anor two months had passed since Jake arrived on Simivita island, and by now, he was pretty much done cleaning up anything that could get in way of his final B-grade hunt. He'd also noticed a week ago that all invasions from or islands had more or less stopped... perhaps because Jake also began to hunt down se invading forces. If he hadn't, y would have gone straight for civilian apes, after all.

This period of hunting apes had naturally given him plenty of experience, even if none of fights had been truly challenging.

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 306 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 307 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 310 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

Two levels weren't anything to complain about, though. However, what mattered more was progress he had made on island.

By now, Warlord had definitely realized what was going on. Jake had refused to fight B-grade when he was moving around with a big squad, but had instead picked off groups he wasn't a part of. After invasions had stopped, Warlord was still moving around with a large group, but today, things finally changed.

Warlord had moved out all alone, not a single or ape with him. Jake had hunted down a squad less than a day ago, and B-grade was moving toward where that had taken place, perhaps to check out ir status or perhaps to face off against ir killer.

Eir way, Jake had decided to face this Warlord head-on. For a moment, Jake considered if he should start fight with his regular strike from stealth, but decided to change things up a little. He wanted to speak with this Warlord briefly, as a part of him wanted to know who first B-grade he killed had been.

Jake had already confirmed that there were no or C-grades within hundreds of kilometers as Warlord grew closer. Tension and anticipation were building and soon Jake heard his prey.

“Hunter! If you hear me, come! It is I you have come for, isn’t it!” he yelled loudly, voice of Warlord echoing through jungle.

Warlord was still a good distance away, and a minute later, he repeated same words, confirming that Simivita ape didn’t actually know Jake’s location. He was just guessing that Jake was in vicinity.

He had time to yell once more before he got close enough for Jake to respond while still not revealing himself.

“Finally, you dare approach me without an army,” Jake spoke, projecting his voice while trying to hide its origin.

Warlord stopped dead in his tracks as he looked around, trying to locate where Jake was speaking from for a moment before yelling again.

“You have hunted down my kin long enough. This is not my first time playing this game with you hunters, though you have proven yourself most persistent and difficult to deal with I’ve encountered thus far,” Warlord said, clearly full of confidence. NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON *novel•fire•net*

“That’s high praise,” Jake said, intent on also making himself last hunter this Warlord would ever encounter. As he spoke, he was moving around, trying to get himself in a suitable position for when it was time to strike.

“It is. It shall take us many years to recover from damage you have done. But we will recover. We always do. I come here today, facing you with Ancestors at my back, carrying will of my tribe on my shoulders. Say, hunter, what do you have besides ability to hide like a coward?” Warlord said, proving himself quite a talker.

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“I have only myself and full confidence in my own power and belief,” Jake responded, trying to return same energy as ape.

Warlord kept glancing around himself, clearly expecting an attack to arrive at any point. His expression had slightly changed, though, as Warlord looked even more confident now.

“A lone hunter, I see. Perhaps that is also why you wished to face me in single combat. Very well, two of us shall duel, and upon my victory, I shall offer you to One Beneath,” he spoke, Jake realizing that he had kind of just confirmed he was on

his own, though, in his defense, he assumed Warlord already knew. In again, all Warlord had to go on were reports, and it was entirely possible apes who had fled battle just hadn't seen anyone else that Jake was with.

What y had for certain seen was his level and fact he was C-grade, which wasn't anything Jake had tried to hide. Quite opposite. He was more than happy to make his foe overconfident, believing Jake was weaker than he truly was.

“Your willingness to face me alone does show some courage. To enter domain of anor and seek to battle above your own station is not something many dare to do.”

By now, Jake had positioned himself well with a clear path for his arrow to fly while still remaining around a kilometer away. He had considered striking from directly above, but Jake believed that would be too predictable, and besides, he wanted battle to take place within jungle rather than simply flying through air. Also, he got a quick glance at Warlord while moving, which also allowed him to get a quick identify off.

[Grand Simivita Warlord – lvl ???]

Seeing those three question marks got Jake pumped, and feeling aura of B-grade, difference between a C-grade and a B-grade was truly stark.

“I fought several of your Chieftains. y all battled with honor and fell with ir heads held high,” Jake commented as he began charging his Arcane Powershot, ready to get battle started.

“Hopefully, so will you,” Warlord said as he stood ready as if he knew an attack would be coming soon.

Warlord looked a lot like Chieftain Jake had fought before, except this ape was slightly larger, standing at around three and a half meters with its back slightly arched. Ape wore no armor but had a large twin-edged axe seemingly made entirely of wood. Tattoo-like symbols covered greenish fur of B-grade, and Jake knew that power was hidden in those markings as he fully expected Warlord to unleash spirit magic just like all Chieftains had been capable of. His base assumption had always been that a Warlord was just an evolved Chieftain, and so far, that seemed accurate enough.

Jake felt strain on his arm, and he knew it was time. Opening his eyes wide, Jake bread out as he let go of string, and Arcane Powershot exploded forward. It ever-so-slightly curved around a large tree and went straight for Warlord, who stood on a large stone within a small clearing.

B-grade stood re passively as arrow closed in, still concealed by Jake's stealth skill. Jake had already nocked anor arrow as his opening blow arrived and slammed into Chieftain.

An attack that was fully capable of slaying peak C-grades in a single blow pierced into Warlord... as something odd happened. It went into Warlord, right as it looked as if his body split in two. A ghostly version of Warlord was blasted back with an arrow embedded in it, Jake's attack harmlessly phasing through real body of Warlord as it had seemingly also entered some odd spirit realm.

A moment later, arcane arrow exploded, this explosion remaining very much real as it swept over Warlord, who had already turned his head to look in Jake's direction. **"Found you!"**

With a single step, B-grade exploded into motion as Jake felt ground slightly shake from this mere movement. Releasing his arrow, Jake instantly moved afterward by jumping into air right as Warlord swung its axe.

A greenish-blue crescent wave of spirit energy swept across jungle, phasing through trees as if y weren't even re. Jake observed as all bark where crescent wave had passed through began to blacken and crack, as if all life had been drained from it, and Jake knew that getting hit by such an attack wouldn't be a pleasant experience.

Right n, arrow Jake had shot before dodging also arrived, but Warlord dodged to side right as arrow exploded beside him. With an angry roar, explosive arcane mana was dispersed as Warlord also launched himself into air, giving chase.

Jake released a Rain of Arrows down upon charging B-grade, who summoned a large spirit ape that encompassed his entire body and blocked dozen arrows aimed at him.

Stepping down, Jake teleported out of way as he spun around and shot another arrow that Warlord didn't react to properly in time, as he was hit in side of his arm. arrowhead barely penetrated through his thick hide, and ape quickly moved to rip out arrow as Jake instead made it explode, infuriating B-grade furr.

Warlord raised a hand as mana began condensing around him. Jake was ready to dodge as he suddenly felt energy in atmosphere change. A wave of spirit energy washed over him and entire jungle a moment later, making it look as if a faint fog covered everything, and his vision turned a slight light blue.

"You do not merely fight me... but entire tribe that you have made an enemy of," Warlord said as his aura also began to increase in intensity.

Right n, Jake also felt movements of energy through his sphere. ghostly fog began to gar in four different places, taking shape of apes, each wielding a unique weapon. ir entire bodies were ghostly and see-through, but Jake knew that getting hit by those weapons would feel very real, and Identify also confirmed y were real... summoned, but real.

[Simivita Ancestral Spearmaster – lvl ??? - Summon]

[Simivita Ancestral Swordmaster – lvl ??? - Summon]

[Simivita Ancestral Hammermaster – lvl ??? - Summon]

[Simivita Ancestral Axemaster – lvl ??? - Summon]

All four of them gave off auras of B-grades, but their actual power level was more akin to a peak C-grade. Jake estimated each of them to be roughly as powerful as a Chieftain, though as they began to move, their diversity in techniques seemed quite limited.

They attacked him using their weapons in an attempt to encircle Jake, with Warlord not far behind as he propelled himself forward with spirit energy surrounding him. Jake escaped encirclement quickly as four summons gave chase, and within moments, it became clear that these Ancestral spirits could only fight using pure physical prowess, which also explained why no shamans had been summoned.

Dodging attacks from five enemies at once proved a lot more difficult, as soon, a B-grade Warlord was upon him. Jake felt a slight sense of pressure being this close to a B-grade as an axe descended toward him, radiating power.

With a blast of arcane energy, Jake managed to retreat out of range of an axe swing that tore through the air, and before Jake even had time to stop his own momentum, Warlord interrupted his own attack mid-swing as the axe was thrown toward Jake.

Desperately swaying to the side, Jake failed to fully avoid the axe's aura as he was cut in the side, making him grimace in pain. Seeing an opportunity, Warlord let out a battle cry that seemingly empowered the four summoned warriors as they all began to glow, and their speed increased.

Seeing the spirits close in, Jake's eyes narrowed.

Let's try that.

His eyes opened wide as his aura and Pride were fully unleashed, pushing back the spirit fog around Jake. At the same time, he also attacked the four spirits at once using Pride, but found it mostly useless as these summons didn't have souls. What they instead were were magical constructs, and as he kept making distance, countermeasure ideas began to appear in Jake's mind.

With the fog around Jake temporarily dispelled, the spirits still backed off, and Warlord also hesitated a moment, giving Jake a chance to land a quick potshot to his chest, making the B-grade fly back a little.

“You hunters always have so many tricks,” Warlord scoffed as a wave of spirit energy wrapped around Jake's arrow right as it exploded, suppressing the destructive

energies. **"I see no reason to delay this any more than it needs to... so prepare yourself."**

aura of B-grade spiked even more as spirit energy revolved around him as Warlord boosted himself furr.

Jake didn't respond as fog began to close in once more, despite spending a lot of energy to keep it at bay. B-grade and his summons were clearly in a superior position to eyes of an outside observer, and as Jake saw it approach, he had just one thought...

He's weaker than I thought he would be.

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Chapter 1116: Expectations vs. Reality

Jake had approached this fight with a lot of expectations and forethought. He had imagined many scenarios of how his first true fight against a B-grade would go, and in truth, he had created a lot of assumptions in his mind.

only or B-grade Jake had fought was metal monster within Minaga's Endless Labyrinth. That monster had been incredibly powerful, fast, and even if Jake faced it now, he wasn't sure he would stand a chance, as he seriously doubted he had seen all it had to offer.

He also knew that B-grades were a lot stronger than C-grades, same way C-grades had been a lot stronger than D-grades. He still remembered his first time killing a C-grade and how difficult that had been. Panr had pushed Jake to his limits, and it had gone down to wire with him eking out a victory.

That's why Jake had been so careful. He had wanted to feel out Warlord in beginning of fight before B-grade even got serious, which was why Jake had also held back... in fact, he had relied solely on stat boost from Big Game Hunter, which, while significant, only tended to show its full potential in combination with his true boosting skills.

Yet, despite Jake holding back so much, pressure exerted upon him just wasn't re. Was he in a disadvantageous position? Yes, but it wasn't as bad as Jake had expected it to be. Moreover, he had assumed magic of a B-grade to be on a different qualitative level; however, when he looked at summoned spirits, all Jake felt was disappointment.

With Warlord and four Ancestor spirits closing in, Jake stopped holding back as much. Arcane Awakening sprang to life as Jake boosted all his stats by around 30%, and that was on top of boosted base stats from Big Game Hunter.

This explosive release of power made Warlord hesitate for a moment, which was a big enough opening for Jake to go on counterattack. However, rather than go for B-grade, he went straight for Spearmaster Ancestor, having identified that summoned variant as most dangerous because of its long-range capabilities.

Jake easily dodged spear thrust as his hand glowed with destructive arcane energy. Striking for spirit's chest, Jake empowered his hand further second he made contact.

A blast of arcane energy flooded into spirit, and a few moments later, it began to lose its shape as ghostly fog that made up its body started dispersing into air. Before full extent of what Jake had done could even be realized, he'd struck Hammermaster with a similar attack as it also started dispersing.

Warlord saw what happened and attacked Jake intending to make him stop, but his axe swings—while powerful—were not fast or complex enough in technique to catch Jake out.

Using his katars, Jake also engaged in melee combat for first time as he did something daring. Rather than dodge a swing from Warlord, Jake raised both katars to block blow.

Perhaps thinking Jake had messed up, Warlord refused to miss this chance as he roared and put even more power into swing. A moment later, Jake felt impact as his arms buckled and reverberations coursed through his entire body as he was sent flying by attack.

Jake flew through several vines and other greenery before he finally managed to stop himself as he slid across lush ground, kicking up a small mound of dirt in process. Pain coursed through his arms from blocking blow, and from this one exchange, Jake became certain of a few things.

First of all, this Warlord did have pure power worthy of a B-grade. This blow had just been a normal hit and not a skill, yet Jake could feel pain all way to his bones. Blocking several of them in a row was definitely out of question.

Second, Jake was confident this Warlord specialized in classic heavy warrior traits with some magic sprinkled in. B-grade wasn't that fast, but it was incredibly strong while also having a decently resilient body based on how little his arrow had penetrated earlier, indicating high Toughness. Seeing as it was a Simivita - an ape race with decent vitality - Jake also assumed Warlord had a high stat re.

Third and finally, Simivita Warlord wasn't good at using his own power. There could be a lot of reasons for this, but Jake assumed it primarily came down to lack of experience. B-

grades in Hunting Grounds rarely, if ever, fought, and when y did, it tended to be against far weaker opponents. Plus, Warlord was strong enough to kill most peak C-grades with a single well-placed attack, meaning B-grade likely never had to truly push itself to improve. Why fix what ain't broken?

This lack of experience now came back to bite ape in ass. two remaining Ancestor spirits had chased after Jake, giving him a great opportunity to quickly get rid of both. In less than two seconds, he'd placed a swift palm strike on each, making m disperse once more.

reason Jake had so easily dismantled se spirit summons all came down to how poorly y were made. y were essentially just puppets created from spirit mana with Willpower infused into m, all done with help of System. Each of m had a lot of energy poured in, but it was all done so poorly, Jake quickly realized just how flawed y were.

Years spent doing Puzzle Box of Seeker had made Jake quite proficient in analyzing and dismantling magical constructs, and se spirit summons were no different. Jake didn't even have to fully destroy m. He just had to destroy what kept m toger. y were like structures built with only a single supporting pillar, and if someone knew to give it a good kick, entire thing would all come crumbling down, no matter how impressive structure was. In this case, structure wasn't even that impressive, as Jake felt that Warlord still had to actively give commands to his summons to make m attack.

“Do you think will of Ancestors is so easily destroyed? For every one you return to great beyond, anor two shall rise,” Warlord said as he floated closer, seemingly still very confident in himself.

Perhaps he believed that Jake had taken some serious damage from blocking attack earlier, and while destruction of Ancestor spirits did have some impact, what happened next made it clear Warlord didn't view it as that big of a loss.

reason why he was called a Warlord in first place also became readily apparent.

“Ancestors, heed my call! Join me in defending clan! Join me as we go to war!” Warlord yelled, his aura now spiking to its apex.

A dense wave of ghostly fog erupted from his body as it enveloped a far wider area compared to before. At same time, it began condensing in dozens of places at once, creating more Ancestor spirits. se gave off a slightly weaker aura than first ones, but through sheer numbers, Jake definitely found this situation more dangerous.

Especially with what happened next, as fog also condensed around Warlord. A large spectral clone of himself appeared above ape's head before re-merging with him, resulting in yet anor spike in strength as B-grade roared.

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His roar was echoed by mana Ancestor spirits, and for first time since beginning of this fight, Jake truly faced a Warlord who didn't need to bring an army around... not when he could merely summon one.

Finding himself completely surrounded, Jake let out a sigh as he smiled. *Let's do this.*

Arcane energy welled up from within his soul and permeated his body in an instant as his skin began to crack from destructive energies. His stats grew to new heights as Jake fully activated Arcane Awakening, boosting all his stats by a massive 60%. When one also counted additional stats gained from Big Game Hunter, Jake wasn't *that* inferior in pure stats compared to a B-grade. Even if one counted fact that a B-grade's stats all had a higher efficiency.

Facing off against relatively weaker, but far more numerous, Ancestor spirits, Jake would have a far harder time dismantling m individually. Not to say he didn't try, as Jake's first act after boosting himself was to destroy two of summoned spirits, but only a few seconds later, Warlord summoned two more, all while attacking himself.

It appeared that Warlord didn't care in slightest about conserving resources, likely believing that he could bully Jake with a far superior mana pool. Of course, he couldn't know that Jake had an absolutely monstrous reserve of mana because of his mask and Anomalous Soul, meaning hunter was fully willing to respond in kind.

Jake and Warlord clashed several times as y moved around jungle, Jake trying to constantly keep a certain level of distance between himself and Warlord, though occasionally he was forced into a brief melee scuffle where he had to pull out his katars.

During this chase, Jake kept Pride active as constant bolts and orbs of destructive arcane mana appeared, blasting back Ancestor spirits and keeping m at bay, Jake consuming thousands upon thousands of mana every minute. It was all worth it, though, as whenever Jake got some distance, he landed arrows on Simivita Warlord. Individually, se did little, but as fight continued, damage accumulated. Not to mention poison that Warlord was constantly fighting against.

As fight progressed, Jake also began to feel several observers from afar who had noticed this scuffle going on. He assumed it was B-grades from surrounding islands who used different means to scout, and while it was a possibility one of m would try to strike down whoever ended up winner, Jake didn't feel a need to address m for now, though he did have a lingering feeling at least one of se observers could prove an issue down line.

However, for now, he had a fight to finish. constant exchanges followed, with Jake still not losing out and only taking minimal damage here and re, while Warlord was faring far worse.

“Your level... is it a lie?” Warlord asked after several minutes had passed, and green fur of B-grade was now matted with blood.

“No, it’s accurate,” Jake responded as he kicked an Ancestor spirit in face, as his foot exploded, sending himself flying away from summon.

“How?” Warlord asked as he blocked an arrow with his axe, only for anor to hit him in leg.

“This is just my Path,” Jake answered, as way this battle was going rapidly became clear to both of m. Simivita Warlord was simply too slow to catch up to Jake, and hunter was too good at dodging for B-grade to take advantage of few opportunities he got.

Warlord’s last chance was to win battle of endurance. Even if keeping up his ghostly fog domain took a lot of resources, Jake was also constantly spending a lot keeping his Pride active while conjuring arcane magic. Not to mention mental toll it took for Jake to keep track of nearly forty Ancestor spirits that just kept getting re-summoned whenever Jake destroyed one.

However, Jake had ultimate cheat as a simple blue bottle killed all hope Warlord had. Consuming mana potion, Jake’s rapidly drying out resource pool was instantly replenished, while Warlord evidently did not have any Simivita Alchemists in his tribe to provide him with any potions.

Realizing status quo would only end in death, Warlord tried to change things up several times, but he really didn’t have means or opportunity to do anything. He had to keep chasing Jake, or he would find himself constantly bombarded by arrows. Running wasn’t even an option, though Jake doubted Simivita would do it even if he could, seeing how much se apes cared about honor.

Warlord tried to shoot out crescent waves of spirit energy and maneuver his summons to surround Jake, but with Sphere of Perception, Jake was always one step ahead. As minutes passed, y both knew an end was drawing near, especially when Jake got in a nasty Arcane Powershot that nearly blasted off B-grade’s arm, which also demonstrated deteriorating resilience of ape. Before, Jake could at most have hoped for that shot to take off a chunk of flesh, but with Warlord’s body weakened by poison and over a hundred arrow holes, his fur was too destroyed to offer proper protection anymore.

Despite his advantage, Jake didn’t let up his assault but kept his focus. As Warlord had gotten more desperate, Jake had been forced to use Eternal Shadow yet anor time, and

he hoped to limit himself from having to do so again due to increasing cooldown and cost of using skill repeatedly. As for Gaze, he had tried to hold back on using that, though he had felt forced to a couple of times.

After two minutes passed, and Jake struck Warlord mid-air in arm, sending B-grade spinning out of control before crashing into ground. Jake was ready for him to launch himself up for another swing, but this time, B-grade stayed down.

Jake saw ape slowly try to stand through his Sphere, but B-grade fell to his knees, arms hanging limply to his side. Many summoned Ancestor spirits also stopped attacking and instead moved toward Warlord. This odd movement also made Jake stop his attack as dust cleared, revealing form of ape.

Blood covered his entire body and pooled beneath him as ape bled heavily. Lowering this bow, Jake observed Warlord, who was only running on fumes now. His body was broken, his aura weak, and death grew near.

“My... predecessors spoke of legendary hunters who would appear with power far beyond what we believed possible. I always took it as mere stories. After evolving to B-grade, no C-grade ever entered my eyes. Even arrogant hunters who came here intending to slay me were all killed or fled. However, today I realize I was foolish one. legends were true,” Warlord spoke, his voice still sounding strong despite how weak ape was.

Jake said nothing as Warlord continued.

“Even as I die, know that Simivita tribe will survive. Even if every one of my kin on this island die, know that we are everywhere. Records of my ancestors echo throughout world, and with my death, I shall join choir.”

While Warlord spoke, all still-summoned Ancestor spirits surrounded B-grade summoner in a circle as y kneeled. One by one, y began dispersing and turning into dense fog that floated toward Warlord.

“Tell me, hunter... I fought terribly, did I not? Throughout this battle, I realized all my shortcomings and how weak I truly was despite power I hold.”

Jake decided to be honest as he answered. **“You didn’t do well, no. You have never truly tested limits of your power, but coasted through existence, relying on natural advantages of being a B-grade. All you truly managed was to make me a little tired.”**

“I see,” Warlord said, his head falling down as he let out a deep sigh. All fog from surrounding summons entered his body at that moment, and Jake had an odd premonition as his eyes opened wide.

“In that case, allow my last moments to be dishonorable!” Simivita Warlord yelled as his body exploded with spirit energy for one last time. Jake felt B-grade burn his own soul and existence as he rose into air, dense fog garing all around him.

Just n, Jake felt something else. An observer had moved toward Jake, and as he looked straight up, he saw a faint multicolored flash. He didn't have time to get a good look at it, though, as Jake found himself surrounded by an incredibly dense fog that transformed into ape limbs that reached out and tried to grasp Jake. rightful source is novel-fire-net

At same time, true body of Warlord shot toward Jake as B-grade's flesh and bone melted away, revealing only a transparent soul that let out a ghastly light. This light washed over Jake as burning soul temporarily restrained Jake along with spectral limbs that surrounded him on all sides, like chains from beyond grave.

Right as Jake was fully constrained, a deep sense of danger flooded his mind. His head whipped upwards toward source of danger as a rainbow-colored creature entered his sight, rapidly descending toward him.

[Rainbowfear Sovereign – lvl ???]

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Chapter 1117: A Storm of Fears

Jake focused his senses, as rar than panic in his moment of crisis, he felt a deep sense of calm that allowed him to respond best way he possibly could. final gambit of Warlord had bound Jake tightly in a fashion not easily escaped. It wasn't his physical body that was restrained, but his soul, and even if said soul was far more powerful than norm, a B-grade willing to burn its own existence was still more than capable of affecting it.

Even if his body couldn't move, Jake could still mobilize his energies. Realizing he couldn't use it to free himself, he instead summoned a barrage of arcane bolts that flew up toward descending Rainbowfear Sovereign.

At same time, he conjured a large arcane orb right in front of himself as Jake's body began glowing with arcane light as if he was about to blow himself up. B-grade bird ignored Jake's attack as it easily deflected Jake's arcane bolts, but y still exploded, serving as a temporary distraction.

A fraction of a second later, large arcane orb in front of Jake also exploded as his body erupted with arcane energy. For a mere moment, he was freed from constraint, timing so brief Jake didn't even have time to try to take a single step... but what he had been able to do was use another skill.

From perspective of Rainbowfear Sovereign, it saw its prey constrained before several enormous explosions of arcane energy limited its view of what was happening. Right as things began to clear, it saw human darting to side, having freed himself from constraints.

Jake saw Sovereign instantly change direction as it charged toward fleeing Jake... unaware it was chasing shadows. Fully constrained, Jake moved slowly to free himself as Rainbowfear Sovereign crashed down upon his Eternal Shadow like a meteor, tearing it apart entirely before continuing down and slamming into ground.

A shockwave of force washed over Jake, and a moment later, he heard its cry of anger upon realizing it had been tricked. Jake knew he was still in a tricky situation, but luckily, Warlord had weakened a lot at this point. It was already dying, and while Jake's explosions had primarily been to obscure vision of Sovereign, it had also helped speed up Warlord's demise.

To fully free himself, Jake also took out Eternal Hunger as he forced his arm free. Throughout fight, Jake hadn't even needed to use his built-up Hunting Momentum, but now he unleashed all of it at once. With full power, he stabbed ghostly version of Warlord that let out a faint screech before he lost all focus in his eyes, and as Jake felt last whispers of life leave Simivita, he knew he had successfully slain his first B-grade.

Not that he had any time to celebrate notifications or even two levels gained. A beam of rainbow light shot toward Jake as he was still restrained, as spirit fog faded away. All Jake could do was angle his body slightly to side, making beam strike him in shoulder where it pierced straight through before continuing to embed itself in a tree... after passing through two others first. As energy faded, Jake saw it had been a single fear, with its origin approaching Jake swiftly.

Gritting his teeth, Jake tore away rest of spectral limbs that no longer contained any strength, as rest of spirit fog would soon be fully dispersed. Just in time, too, as Jake had to avoid three more fears as he fled to side, trying to get away from Rainbowfear Sovereign.

He had only briefly seen creature and only experienced a few attacks, but from that alone, one thing had become absolutely clear:

It was far more powerful than Simivita Warlord.

“Even in death, that damn ape couldn’t prove useful,” a voice echoed throughout jungle as Rainbowfear Sovereign floated forward. **“I hoped to finish this quickly, but it appears that will not happen.”**

Jake quickly took out his bow as he prepared to go on offensive.

“You killed my kin. Slaughtered expansion I ordered made within this area. For that, I’m obligated to seek vengeance, no matter who or what you are,” Rainbowfear Sovereign said with a sigh. **“Such is my Path.”**

Arrows curved around trees as y came for B-grade, but Rainbowfear dodged both as he shot out his own fears in return, and to Jake’s surprise, y could also curve as four came straight for Jake.

Dodging out of way while returning fire and continuing to move, he expected Sovereign to lose his location. However, to Jake’s surprise, B-grade accurately located him continually, no matter how much he moved around dense jungle. What was even weirder was that Jake knew bird couldn’t actually see him, yet it was aware of his location.

Jake began to retreat, and when distance reached about five hundred meters, B-grade finally gave chase. Right n, Jake also detected something. It was subtle, but Sovereign was giving off an odd sound, one that Jake couldn’t actually hear, but he faintly felt movements of sound waves through jungle.

Echolocation? Jake asked himself as he realized how Rainbowfear could see him. se birds were natural experts in sound magic, and this was evidently just anor application of it, as B-grade could seemingly create something similar to Jake’s Sphere of Perception through sound.

However, it appeared that range was limited to about five hundred meters, which was far less than Jake’s own Pulse of Perception. It was larger than his constantly active Sphere of Perception, though that wasn’t something Jake couldn’t fix.

For now, he had a far more pressing issue. Rainbowfear Sovereign didn’t immediately charge for Jake but simply sought to keep him within a couple of hundred meters at all times as B-grade sent out constant ranged attacks.

Usually, this kind of situation would be great for Jake. He could dodge every single fear relatively easily, and while B-grade also dodged Jake’s arrows, he would have confidence in being first to land a hit under usual circumstances.

This wasn’t usual circumstances, and Jake realized this Rainbowfear was a lot more calculating than Warlord had been. It had observed fight between two, and likely concluded that Jake was a threat, which made Sovereign approach fight using safest strategy it could come on:

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Buying time.

While Jake had beaten Warlord convincingly, fight had still consumed a lot of energy. What's more, Jake had activated his boosting skill fully, effectively putting him on a timer. Meanwhile, Sovereign hadn't needed to boost itself yet, and its resource pools were full. All bird needed to do was drag things out long enough, and it would eventually come out victorious.

Jake knew this, and he knew status quo had to change. He was now experiencing the other side of what Jake had put Warlord through, and Jake could agree it sucked. The difference between them was that Jake had a lot more means of combat than an ape.

While shooting out arrows, Jake summoned his wings to maneuver better. At the same time, he burned blood within him, creating a gas cloud that spread as he retreated, forcing Sovereign to enter if he gave chase.

B-grade did, but once more had countermeasures as a whirlwind of energy appeared around the bird, pushing away all gas. Jake wasn't deterred as he kept creating poison mist, his arrows also continuing to curve around trees, trying to hit Sovereign that responded by sending out more fears.

Shortly after, Jake landed his first arrow. It had curved in from an awkward angle, taking Sovereign by surprise as it took damage for the first time. Not even ten seconds later, another one landed, Jake having gotten better at making his arrows more unpredictable and making sure more of them would prove problematic at the same time.

Jake didn't do a lot of damage with these arrows, but the fact he was hitting at all showed that the fight was progressing in Jake's favor.

“ Rainbowfear clan is one of the oldest races on this planet. I am fully aware that we are but a small speck of dust in the cosmos, but it is our dust. All races of this world grow up quickly, reaching C-grade within a few years of birth, and within a decade, all are fully grown. This planet is a gift, yet also a curse. This growth makes us powerful fast, yes... but it also limits us. Becoming a B-grade is something that cannot be done unless something extraordinary happens,” Rainbowfear Sovereign suddenly spoke despite not letting up its attacks while also taking one more arrow from Jake.

“There are only a few ways to improve our growth. One is through natural resources found throughout the planet, which is why we occupy different territories and compete. The second is through the greatest source of Records this planet receives... hunters,” B-grade spoke as it closed in, its attack speed increasing while doing so.

“I am fully aware that you think of this as some Hunting Ground. It’s no secret to any of us B-grades, but simply reality of our existence. You hunt us, but in turn, we also hunt you. You hunters carry Records that are incredibly valuable to us. I became what I am today through consuming heart of someone ors once referred to as a genius. What about you? What shall my kin consume from your body?”

“I don’t know, but I doubt eating me would be healthy. I’m quite toxic, if I say so myself,” Jake responded in a ligharted tone.

“n let only strongest of young survive consuming your flesh. All it shall do is strengn next generation. Your death shall be anor warning to never make enemies of Rainbowfear clan,” B-grade said, as it was now within a hundred meters.

That’s when Sovereign also took things up a notch. Jake felt movements of mana as B-grade unleashed a barrage containing hundreds of rainbow-colored fears that all honed in on Jake from nearly all sides. Blocking m was out of question as Jake stepped down and sought upwards. While he had wanted to fight Warlord within confines of jungle, he didn’t have same desire when it came to Rainbowfear Sovereign.

bird wasn’t solely a melee fighter, and it was clearly suited to fighting in jungle. Jake didn’t even have his spherical vision advantage. Due to that, Jake would prefer to battle in open air, where neir of m could use terrain to ir advantage.

Teleporting three times, Jake soon appeared far up in sky as storm of hundreds of fears flew out of jungle below toward him. Jake released hundreds of arcane bolts in return, trying to shoot m down in mid-air, but a few still got through as Jake ended up receiving half a dozen cuts from fears he couldn’t fully dodge.

Before se fears could turn around and strike again, Jake released a pulse within his Pride that severed mental connection Sovereign had with fears for a fraction of a second. That fraction was enough as y all lost power and stopped ir flight before harmlessly fluttering in wind as y fell to ground.

Despite pain from his newly received cuts, Jake nocked an arrow and took aim at Sovereign below. Charging an Arcane Powershot, he waited for B-grade to give chase, but to his surprise, bird stayed below, watching.

Jake clicked his tongue as he eventually had to let go of string. Sovereign, having nothing else to focus on, effortlessly dodged to side before bending both of its ostrich-like legs. It went down in a squat before shooting upwards a moment later with absolutely insane speeds.

A blink of an eye later, a clawed hand met katars as Jake found himself pushed back by sheer momentum of bird. Jake was sent spinning through air as he tried to stabilize himself. He thought he had time, but B-grade instantly changed direction mid-air and

was already upon him again, forcing Jake to block a second time as he was blasted away.

Through his sphere, he saw Sovereign not fly around, but jump. Whenever it pressed its feet hard down, mana gared instantly, creating stable platforms and allowing beast to jump rapidly, giving it far greater speed than usual. New novel chapters are published on [novel◇firt◇net](#)

“Before D-grade, we Rainbowfears are flightless birds. wings are re to help grant us greater speed as we travel through jungle, but true source of our speed lies in legs,” Sovereign said as he closed in again.

Jake was ready to block anor powerful claw, but instead, bird twisted its body, created a platform beneath one foot, and used or to kick forward. Jake barely reacted in time by jumping backwards while blocking with both hands, but impact still sent his katars smashing into his chest, and he felt bones in his arms crack in several places.

“And for some of us, our legs also become our greatest weapon,” Sovereign said confidently, while lowering its leg. **“At first, I wanted to finish this swiftly, but you avoided that. n I wanted to kill you safely, but you also made that difficult. Now, I shall kill you holding nothing back.”**

With those words, Jake’s chance of fighting back properly was lowered significantly once more. He was already struggling with speed of Rainbowfear Sovereign, and as B-grade’s body began to glow with rainbow light and its aura spiked toward heavens, things were only beginning to look even worse.

Despite knowing this, Jake remained calm and spoke. **“You really like hearing sound of your own voice, huh?”**

“Well,” Sovereign shrugged as it leaned slightly forward. **“I am a songbird.”**

B-grade stepped down and practically teleported to appear in front of Jake. In response, Jake stepped down himself a fraction of a second earlier as he teleported to side, spinning around as he nocked an arrow. With anor step, Sovereign’s taloned foot appeared mere centimeters from Jake’s face as he also teleported once more before releasing his arrow.

His timing had been good, and Sovereign didn’t even have time to register incoming attack before an arrow penetrated its fears and into its flesh. B-grade let out an annoyed sound as rainbow energy surrounding its body disintegrated arrow, but from this one hit, Jake was sure.

Rainbowfear Sovereign was stronger than Warlord. It was faster. Far better at fighting. It likely even had more abilities and methods of combat. However, it was inferior to Warlord in one crucial aspect:

Durability.

Which meant that even if things were looking tough, and Jake was confident he had seen far from everything B-grade had to offer, he still saw a path to victory... though he was on quite a tight timer as his body was already beginning to show signs of breaking down from overusing his boosting skill.

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Chapter 1118: Limiting Possibilities

A small piece of human skin floated through air while being disintegrated by destructive arcane mana. Human it had originated from had already teleported away as a taloned foot shot through speck of skin, obliterating it entirely.

Sovereign quickly spun in air to kick an approaching arrow before getting blasted back slightly as it exploded. While flying back, Rainbowfear summoned two more platforms of mana it used to jump, chasing after Jake once more.

Jake had tried to shoot another arrow, but had to abandon his plan and switch to katars. He managed to dodge first kick, but Sovereign showed its experience in combat as it immediately created another platform under missed kick, using it to jump back and out of range from Jake's counter. Immediately after, it leapt forward, striking with its clawed hands, making Jake block or dodge several blows as two of them engaged in a heated melee.

More than a hundred blows were exchanged in mere moments as Sovereign proved itself a skilled close combat fighter. It switched between kicks and claw swipes, making full use of its natural weapons and the fact that, should Jake ever get struck, he would receive deep lacerations.

At the same time, Jake found it difficult to land any hits on Sovereign. B-grade knew it had superior range due to its larger size, and took full advantage of its longer arms and legs to never give Jake an opportunity to attack any weaker areas. What's more, Jake couldn't even damage legs easily as fears that covered them were different from others, functioning as powerful, natural scale-like armor.

All other fears had also changed slightly after B-grade used its own boosting skill. Jake barely landed a few swift cuts, but he found his katars harmlessly sliding across fears as if they were incredibly slippery. After it happened a third time, Jake snuck in a quick stab and pierced through space between fears before drawing a few drops of blood.

From that, it was evident Jake would have to aim for using piercing attacks, but Sovereign was fully aware and made that very hard as its assault continued. Jake dodged, blocked, parried, and did all he could to not get hit as he was rapidly pushed back, two of m flying across sky across Simivita island.

Right as Jake felt like he could keep up, Sovereign took things up a notch. Suddenly, its body flashed with rainbow light as it sped up and kicked Jake square in chest, right through his block. Jake flew back, his already damaged bones getting worse as Rainbowfear was upon him again.

Jake blasted himself downwards to dodge out of way when he saw anor kick incoming, and he barely managed to get below Sovereign as it spun and turned its head toward Jake. Its beak opened... which was when Jake was reminded why race was called Rainbowfear Songbirds.

A screech unlike anything Jake had ever heard before slammed into him. It was like a massive physical wall impacted Jake before passing right through his body, tearing everything apart in process and launching him down toward ground. Jake coughed up blood as his internal organs had all been ravaged, leaving a faint trail of blood as he went through canopies of trees covering jungle before hitting ground hard.

Despite intense pain, Jake had no reprieve as he rolled to side and even released a blast of arcane mana to get away as Sovereign touched down a moment later. Upon impacting ground, Jake heard a deep thumping sound, making ground crack and erupt as a shockwave of sound had been sent into ground through foot.

This shockwave also slightly hit Jake, sending him flying even furr as he quickly stabilized himself in mid-air. A barrage of rainbow beams shot after him, but Jake teleported away to dodge as he equipped his bow and returned fire.

A deep booming sound exited Sovereigns beak in response, repelling Jake's arrow before sound wave dispersed harmlessly only a few meters in front of B-grade. Jake was confused about what Rainbowfear Sovereign had done, but he had no time to look for answers as bird continued to give chase, insisting on staying in melee.

Jake dodged to side once more, barely avoiding B-grade as it flew past him. He got off a single arrow before Sovereign was upon him again, and yet again he barely dodged, making bird crash into a tree.

Bark and wood was sent flying everywhere as entire tree was blasted into two pieces, and with burrowed momentum from striking tree alongside anor platform of mana, Sovereign turned around quicker than Jake had expected, landing a nasty swipe with its claws on Jake's chest, tearing through his already tattered armor and leaving him with four deep cuts.

Having Sovereign get close enough to do that, Jake took advantage. Rather than quickly retreat as usual, he closed in and unleashed a Piercing Fang, stabbing Eternal Hunger into joint between arm and shoulder, hoping to affect Sovereign's movements.

His attack struck true, forcing Sovereign to retreat this time around to ensure Jake's strike wouldn't penetrate too deep. This gave Jake opportunity to also leap back and take out his bow and try to turn it back into a ranged battle.

Jake's arrows were blocked by another booming sound shield, but they had done their job as Jake teleported back several times, choosing to stay within confines of jungle. His choice to fight in open air had been a massive mistake, as he'd misread capabilities of Sovereign entirely.

It was incredibly fast, but it primarily traveled in straight lines. Sure, it could change direction on a dime by jumping off summoned mana platforms, but each change still took a fraction of a moment, which was enough time for Jake to react in most scenarios.

Within jungle, traveling in straight lines became far less effective because of many natural obstacles. Even if Sovereign could destroy trees, it still took effort, and Jake could just keep moving around to never run out of trees.

While running, Jake naturally also attacked as much as possible, trying to land arrows on Sovereign. His practice from earlier proved useful, as even if B-grade could dodge most attacks, it still found itself with an arrow sticking out of it occasionally.

At the same time, Jake was back to dealing with a storm of fears chasing after him, but this situation was far preferable to one he had found himself in mere seconds earlier. However, that didn't mean situation was good at all.

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Jake's skin had peeled off in many places at this point, and cracks marred his entire body from overuse of Arcane Awakening. His stamina was still holding on, but his mana was dropping fast, and his health points had also suffered quite a loss from all accumulated damage from first Warlord and now Sovereign.

If Jake didn't have Anomalous Soul and Arcane Supremacy, he wasn't confident he would even still be moving, but for now, he held on as best as he could while looking for a way to turn tables quickly. He was confident that if he got just one great opening, he could do severe damage with a single Powershot. To accomplish this, Jake had even begun to work on creating a Protean Arrow within his quiver, though with how focused he was on fight, progress was slow.

He was lucky that his many fights with or Rainbowfear Songbirds had given him decent insight into creatures, making creation of arrow easier. Hopefully, it would also make final product stronger, because Jake really needed it to be.

About a full minute passed as Jake kept fleeing through jungle while shooting arrows, Sovereign chasing him while slowly closing in, seemingly waiting for its chance to close distance in an instant. Jake had been running in a mostly straight line, but as he used Pulse, he realized things were about to get complicated.

Behind him was shoreline of island, and he was rapidly closing in on it. Chances were, Sovereign knew this and wanted to make sure Jake would be forced out of jungle into a more advantageous battlefield for it.

Jake tried to change direction, but Sovereign was one step ahead and moved to cut him off. Their speeds were nearly equal, and Jake had no confidence in slipping past, meaning he had little choice but to continue his direct retreat directly toward open waters of Grand Lake.

Less than thirty seconds later, Jake could smell vast lake, and after two more uses of One Step, he found himself outside of safety of jungle. At edge of jungle, a flash of rainbow light appeared in Jake's vision as it turned into Sovereign blink of an eye later.

Jake dodged first two kicks, having already switched to his katars to try to fight back. Rainbowfear Sovereign got more ruthless than before, attacking with swift and decisive blows in rapid succession, not giving Jake slightest chance to fight back. All he could do was try to match momentum of Sovereign and try to find an opening as he continued to make use of his dodging skills.

However, before he found an opening, Sovereign released another sound attack, pushing Jake back for a moment as bird followed up with another different kind of attack. Jake heard a high-pitched sound that hurt his ears and tried to make world spin, but Jake managed to control his own sense of hearing enough not to be overly affected. Not that Sovereign even noticed, as Jake was already stunned from previous hit and couldn't move in time as his foot was caught by clawed hands of Rainbowfear.

Twisting his body while kicking Sovereign, he freed himself right as he was flung towards lake below. Jake struck water and went a few dozen meters deep into mana-rich environment. For a second, Jake thought that perhaps this was good for him. Birds weren't exactly known for doing well in water, so there was a chance he could have a moment of reprieve by staying underwater.

Oh, how wrong his thoughts were.

Immediately, a sense of danger flooded over Jake, and he knew he had to get out. From deep beneath waters, he felt a presence notice him, which in itself was plenty

unsettling, but what truly sent his danger sense into overdrive was what Sovereign did next.

Rainbowfear dove straight into waters head-first, and Jake saw beast's chest slowly swell up as if it had taken a deep breath. n, it opened its beak... and that's when Jake was reminded of something:

Sound is amplified and travels faster in water.

A loud screech unlike anything Jake had ever experienced before washed over him. He felt his blood vessels burst, several of his internal organs felt as if y exploded, and Jake coughed up a huge mouthful of blood and fleshy bits that were forced out of his body. His ears also hurt, his vision distorted, and for a moment, he wasn't even sure if he was still conscious... and yet he moved.

Without thought behind it, Jake instinctively knew he had to get out of water before Sovereign could unleash anor attack, and before what lurked below got involved. He blasted himself upwards with an explosion of arcane mana and soon erupted out of surface as he quickly regained his bearings.

Luckily, Sovereign also took a moment to get out of water again after diving in. It was only a bit over a second, but it was enough for Jake to cough up anor large globule of blood with something else mixed in he really didn't want to take a prolonged look at.

A quick scan of his body revealed damage was substantial, and as he looked at Sovereign and felt state of B-grade through poison that inflicted bird, Jake knew that while he had done some damage, compared to what he had taken, it was barely anything.

Yet Jake was intent to keep fighting, even if things definitely weren't looking good. His Protein Arrow was still getting prepared, and he still had a few tricks up his sleeve he was waiting for a good opportunity to use... along with something Sovereign had shown he could potentially exploit.

“You’re tenacious. Most beings would have tried to run away or given up by now, but not you,” voice of Sovereign echoed as B-grade floated out of water. **“That’s respectable, if puzzling. You believe re is still a way for you to win, which does give me a sense of unease. Makes me inclined to kill you sooner rar than later.”**

Without furr warning, Sovereign exploded into motion as it attacked once more, starting its assault with a sound attack that blasted through Jake, sending reverberations through his body. Right after, a talon tried to tear Jake's flesh from his bones, but Jake managed to dodge and slam his Eternal Hunger into leg of bird, barely penetrating empowered fears.

This left an opening, though, as Jake was sliced down his arm, letting even more blood. He fought back for several more exchanges, getting a stab or two himself as even deeper cuts marked his body. Struggling through pain, Jake teleported away and released a barrage of arcane bolts that exploded upon getting near Sovereign.

Unbored, B-grade went straight through destructive arcane mana and did something Jake had been waiting for. Sovereign let out same high-pitched sound attack it had used earlier, which was intended to temporarily disorient Jake.

Sadly for bird, it didn't work on him. Not because of his Sphere or anything like that, but simply due to his superior Perception allowing him to control his senses to level where he could resist skill entirely.

Sovereign had expected Jake to be unable to muster a response, but instead he moved at very last moment, dodging out of way from a talon aiming to take his head and closing in as he punched Rainbowfear in stomach with all his power, also using a Piercing Fang in process.

Eternal Hunger went in deep as Jake's knuckles made contact, and Sovereign screeched in pain loud enough for Jake's ears to bleed as shockwave forced him back, katar left inside body of B-grade.

Before bird could rip weapon out, Jake exploded rest of arcane energy he had poured into weapon, sending it flying out on its own alongside blood and fears. This was Jake's first time doing solid damage to Rainbowfear Songbird, and Jake couldn't help but to flash a toothy bloody grin at finally feeling like he was making progress.

However, his smile quickly faded as Rainbowfear Sovereign did something unexpected. With a wave of its hand, a small red potion appeared, which B-grade quickly chugged down, and Jake saw wounds he'd inflicted throughout fight quickly begin to heal, and even poison within Sovereign's body was attacked by active vital energy that flooded bird's body.

What B-grade had done was naturally consume a health potion, and Jake nearly wanted to hypocritically call out Sovereign for cheating as he finally experienced being on or side of potion superiority due to his own cooldown.

Jake's newfound hope for victory after landing a solid blow was quickly washed away... and his options to still eke out a victory and time he had available to do so had both been severely reduced.

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Chapter 1119: "Great... just great."

Jake's entire body was battered and broken, and all he could realistically do was just try to keep everything together. As he saw Rainbowfear Sovereign recover in real-time, his already aching body started to hurt even more.

Looking at his resources, things weren't great either. This chapter is updated by **novel~fire~net**

Status

Health Points (HP): 101,313/302,775

Mana Points (MP): 130,291/533,531

Stamina: 90,123/303,175

While none of them were critically low, all of them were falling rapidly and at an accelerating rate. Especially his stamina and health points were a concern, as longer his Arcane Awakening stayed active, more he consumed just keeping himself moving.

In fact, by now, Jake could only move normally because of the sheer amount of power circulating through his fleshy vessel. Second he deactivated Arcane Awakening, backlash and weakness would likely be enough to, if not outright, knock him out, immobilize him entirely.

Meanwhile, Sovereign took a deep breath as his own injury healed, and he turned toward Jake again.

"A gift from a hunter I once spared for accidentally invading my territory. He was a skilled alchemist, from what I gathered, and ending his life would have meant an inability to access his spatial storage. I was impressed enough to keep him around for a while to create potions for my flock until our hunters arrived in an attempt to free him, and I killed myself upon realizing he was no longer worth hassle."

Jake didn't respond but just took this brief moment to catch his breath and try to control energy coursing through his body just a little more efficiently than before. His senses focused, and his entire body was clear to his inner eye. Subtly, he managed to direct flow, helping him just a little as B-grade no longer seemed inclined to give Jake a break.

Why would Sovereign? All his external wounds were already mostly healed.

I still have a chance, Jake reaffirmed to himself as bird leaned forward and stepped down, launching itself forward. One Step ahead, Jake teleported and twisted around before releasing an arrow that split into a dozen, only to be met with a sound wave to block it.

Trying to get some kind of momentum going, Jake shot several or arrows as B-grade shot for him again. One of m landed, drawing a bit of blood, but Jake also had to flee once more as he found himself in a less-than-advantageous environment. open air above Grand Lake gave Sovereign ample space to make long, swift jumps, while Jake had a hard time dodging.

Thinking on his feet, Jake's next teleport took him down onto surface of lake, a decision that proved wise. He had originally hoped to shoot anor arrow, but Rainbowfear Sovereign hesitated to jump for a moment, allowing Jake to shoot several in a row.

Rar than shoot straight down for him, Sovereign shot down and to side as it slid across water and kicked toward Jake. Jumping to side, Jake chose not to teleport this time around as he began using surface of water like it was solid ground.

At same time, he also pulled out his two katars as two engaged in melee combat, as one thing had quickly become clear:

While Sovereign could use water offensively in combination with its sound attacks, it was also afraid of truly entering it. If it was because of birds in general not liking to be in water or because of what lurked below, Jake naturally couldn't know, but what he did know was that he would use this to his advantage.

Jake constantly moved back as he even made water erupt and splash onto bird at times to try to limit its movements, or perhaps just annoy it. For a few moments, he also considered diving, but remembering sound attack, Jake chose not to, and he felt pretty damn confident that bird had practiced that kind of attack precisely because it knew its own weakness in water.

Nearly a full minute passed as two danced across water, creating tall waves from ir constant clashes, and while Jake did try to get back toward island and cover of jungle on several occasions, Sovereign was fully aware of Jake's intent and moved to stop him at every turn.

Feeling his resources dwindling even furr, Jake knew he had to change things up. He had landed a few blows himself, but he was fully aware that in several of those instances, it was because B-grade willingly traded blows, knowing it was in a far better state than him.

Trying to get some kind of advantage back, Jake decided it was time to deploy one of his hidden cards. He had managed to hold back from using it for a good while, meaning

cooldown and cost of skill had both been reduced significantly, so next time he had even slightest opening, Jake moved to strike.

He narrowly dodged a kick as he jumped back and drew his bow. At same time, another version of himself appeared and closed in to try to stab B-grade in chest with a cursed katar. For a brief moment, bird was unsure who to go for, but upon seeing Jake charging a quick Arcane Powershot, it decided.

Slipping by version of Jake striking in melee, B-grade shot forward towards “real” Jake, who was charging an arrow. With no time to continue his attack, Jake released Arcane Powershot immediately, striking foot of Sovereign right before foot struck him.

An explosion of arcane energy shook surface of lake and sent water flying everywhere as Jake was kicked square in stomach, taloned foot powerful enough to create a hole through his stomach. Bird had guessed right, and version of Jake with bow had been real one... or, well, it had been right before it had been struck, anyway.

Rarer than see blood and guts flying, Sovereign instead found itself surrounded by destructive arcane mana and a dispersing shadow. Before bird could fully comprehend what had happened, an arrow struck it from behind and sent it flying.

Jake had switched places with his Eternal Shadow right before he had been struck, and clone he entered had already been in position for Jake to release a quick Arcane Powershot second it became “real.”

Nocking yet another arrow, Jake kept up assault and even used Rapid Fire function of Timeless Focus as he sped up his shooting furrr. Dozens of arrows were shot every second toward still-stabilizing Sovereign, most of them finding purchase as this sequence of events had worked out far better than Jake could have hoped.

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However, he had far from turned tide. Sovereign was soon stabilized fully and moved to dodge every arrow, no matter how much Jake tried to curve and bend them, all while closing in on Jake again.

A moment later, Sovereign entered Jake's sight, now looking worse for wear, with a piece of flesh and feathers missing from its back and a few arrow wounds covering its body here and there. Still, its aura seemed to have only grown stronger and more tenacious as Songbird released a massive shockwave of sound that forced Jake to summon a stable arcane barrier to try to defend himself.

Barrier shattered, and Jake was sent tumbling back with B-grade in rapid pursuit. With a quick blast of arcane mana, Jake barely avoided a kick and instead suffered yet another scratch that sent his blood flying into air.

His entire arm was mangled already, and as he dodged again, Jake swung while tensing up muscles, sending blood flying toward head of Sovereign. It hit B-grade in eyes, making bird screech in pain as blood sizzled and burned due to its toxic properties.

Sadly for Jake, he had no way to take advantage as screech of pain doubled as a sound attack and sent him reeling back. By time he moved to strike, Sovereign had already wiped blood away and just looked more pissed than a second earlier.

Still, Jake had done some damage and had found a bit of new hope. Yet just as that hope flourished, Sovereign once more proved its own power. Closing in on Jake, its aura spiked as a barrage of rainbow fears were shot out, but rarer than go for Jake, y began circling him a few dozen meters in all directions.

At same time, Sovereign knelt down and took a deep breath. Jake's danger sense exploded as all surrounding fears contracted and shot toward him, and in very same instance, B-grade shot forward with more speed than ever before.

Jake focused all he could as he used a skill he really hoped to avoid. Gaze activated as B-grade was frozen in split second he was in mid-air, allowing Jake to barely dodged out of way, albeit while taking half a dozen cuts from fears.

Taking out his bow, Jake turned and wanted to capitalize on his use of Gaze... but he had severely overestimated how effective it would be. While skill had frozen Sovereign, it had been briefer than Jake expected, meaning by time he was ready to attack, Sovereign had already summoned a platform of mana beneath both its feet as it exploded into motion once more, this time at close proximity.

There was no time left to dodge properly anymore. At most, best-case scenario would be to sacrifice an arm, but Jake knew that if he did that, he would have no chance of victory anymore. So instead of dodging, he did exact opposite.

Regular arrow Jake had nocked was switched out for his Protean Arrow, which had been completed only half a minute earlier. It was a hastily made one, and it far from lived up to potential of skill, but for now, he would have to be good enough.

Jake had barely started channeling Arcane Powershot when foot closed in on him, and as it did, Jake jumped straight backwards to give him just a sliver more time. His leap backwards still put him in Sovereign's direct path, and his danger sense exploded as a fatal blow was upon him... and as a final response, he claimed moment.

Time slowed down all around Jake until it came to a complete standstill. Jake also stood frozen, as only thing that functioned was his mind. In this world where concept of time was made null, a hundred thoughts whirled around in Jake's mind. He looked at frozen picture that appeared in front of him and saw talons of powerful B-grade glisten with

blood from Jake's body, but also bird's own blood from Arcane Powershot he had landed earlier.

He saw many or wounds on Sovereign, and he saw his own body. Jake had ample time to fully understand his own state, and it truly wasn't looking good. Not like re was anything he could do about it here and now... instead, he had to move.

Ever-so-slowly, as Jake willed it to, time began resuming. Timeless Focus in combination with Moment of allowed this very little time to have a lot of impact as his Arcane Powershot was charged up at an utterly insane pace, Jake also pouring in every bit of Hunting Momentum he had built up. Because time affected Jake differently during this period, his leap also rapidly widened distance between him and Sovereign as he prepared to land a devastating attack.

But... things didn't always go according to plan.

As time moved once more, he saw realization dawn in Sovereign's eyes. A platform of mana began slowly appearing beneath kicking foot to stop blow before it would even connect with Jake. He could release his arrow here and now, but he knew it wouldn't be fast enough. Sovereign was still a good seven meters from Jake, and Jake's backwards momentum while Moment remained active was too high, meaning by time he released his arrow, he would already be over twenty meters away.

Anor Gaze was out of question as Jake knew it wouldn't end well for him. With time slowly resuming, Jake let go of string, but contrary to his body or energies, arrow didn't travel with effects of Moment. It only slowly moved forward, and as his ultimate survival skill was slowly winding to an end, Jake wished for nothing more than his arrow to travel faster.

He wished for it not to take such a long time to arrive, as if it too was affected by Moment of ... which was when something clicked.

Jake asked himself why he had tried too hard to control concept of time within arrows when an answer had been right re all along. Jake couldn't control concept of time with any of his skills. It wasn't something he was capable of. No... no, rar than control concept of time, he denied concept's control over him. He denied its dominion and forced himself to stand outside of it.

combination of Timeless Focus and Moment of had made Jake's Path forward clear to him, and rar than control concept of time that affected Protean Arrow... he denied concept's control over it.

And it listened.

With no warning or indicator of any kind, Protean Arrow sped up, and right n, Moment also came to an end. Sovereign, who looked as if it would dodge Jake's Powershot,

opened its eyes wide as arrow appeared far faster than any of Jake's previous attacks. B-grade attempted to screech and summon a barrier, but it was already too late.

As Sovereign had only barely managed to land on platform it had summoned—a mere fraction of a second away from dodging out of way— B-grade was struck by large Protean Arrow.

attack penetrated straight through bird's chest as a massive dose of poison and destructive arcane energy was delivered into body of Jake's opponent. B-grade was launched back and bounced on water several times, leaving a trail of blood and fears in its wake.

Jake stared as he still had in wondrous feeling of his epiphany and incredible effect it had on arrow. Sure, he had spent some of innate energy of arrow to reduce effect concept of time had on it, but it had been more than worth it, as he had struck true.

Over two kilometers away, Rainbowfear Sovereign finally stopped itself by forming a barrier beneath its feet to brace against. B-grade didn't leap to attack but just stopped as it kneeled down on water, a massive wound now marring its chest. Jake knew he had done some serious damage... but a B-grade was still a B-grade.

Despite how damaged Sovereign was, Jake knew this wasn't over. He was proven right as B-grade stood up tall a few moments later, staring toward Jake with newfound apprehension but also determination.

Jake, in turn, checked his body once more, and... yeah, it was bad. Very bad. However, if he really squeezed out everything he had, maybe he could-

Just then, his thought process was interrupted as he felt something. Jake's eyes darted to side as, on horizon, he saw something approach. Then he felt something in another direction, his head turning as he saw something else approaching.

His sudden head-turning caught attention of Rainbowfear Sovereign as it also checked out what was happening... and it was clear this hadn't been B-grade's machinations.

Since fight with Warlord, Jake had known that B-grades on islands were observing him. That was how Sovereign had been able to get one over him in first place, as Jake hadn't found it that odd.

However, now, it appeared that B-grades were no longer satisfied with merely watching as Jake felt approaching auras of nine B-grades from islands on Grand Lake. Each was flying toward himself and Sovereign at high speeds, and when he briefly made eye contact with Rainbowfear, he saw annoyance and slight sense of distress from B-grade.

None of them had planned or wanted this to happen, as the situation had just turned a lot more perilous.

Standing there, with so many approaching enemies, Jake felt a wave of exhaustion wash over him as he breathed out a loud sigh while muttering to himself.

“Great... just great.”

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Chapter 1120: Retreat

Jake was arrogant. Cocky. This wasn't something he would ever dispute, and he was fully aware of who he was. However, no matter how arrogant Jake was, he still knew when he found himself in a situation he couldn't handle.

Dealing with Rainbowfear Sovereign was already a gamble. Jake wasn't entirely confident he would win the fight, but now that the B-grades had decided to get involved, he knew he wouldn't stand a chance.

Looking at Sovereign, the bird was evidently also concerned about this development as the two of them stood there for several seconds as several B-grades approached, surrounding them.

“This is not of my design,” Sovereign spoke, more concerned about newcomers. For good reason, too. Sovereign was far from in peak condition and covered with wounds everywhere, not to mention poison coursing through the bird's body.

“I don't think I need to tell you if I'm behind it,” Jake sighed.

“I heard you muttering under your breath before,” B-grade simply stated.

A lot of potential scenarios for what Jake would do next ran through his mind as he evaluated the situation. For a second, he considered potentially teaming up with Sovereign to fight the interfering B-grades, but truthfully, that wasn't an option. Jake wouldn't be able to keep fighting for more than a couple of minutes more no matter what, and there was no way he could win during that time.

He also considered going all out. In other words, he considered unleashing his Bloodline fully, but Jake didn't want to do that for a plethora of reasons. He had no idea what consequences of doing so outside a Challenge Dungeon would be, what kind of backlash he could suffer, and perhaps more importantly, if it would even be enough.

Going by fight against Valdemar, it wasn't kind of thing he could keep going for a long time, and if just one or two B-grades survived, Jake was back to not knowing his state after using it.

Jake considered several more things, but he was soon out of time. Sovereign and Jake had reached a silent understanding to pause their battle as they waited, both considering what their next move would be. Seconds ticked by, and as Jake felt auras get ever-closer, he did something he really didn't enjoy doing.

His wings flared to life once more as energy collected within him. Sovereign looked at Jake and quickly realized what he was doing.

"I do not fault you, it's only good choice," B-grade spoke. "Even if I am aware your decision is not great for me. Even should I survive what comes next."

Jake simply nodded in acknowledgement as he kept his wings primed. He had made a choice he hated, but knew was only realistic option:

Retreat.

Wings of Malefic Viper were made for this, but Jake still delayed leaving for a bit. He allowed B-grades to get closer, and as they did, he felt slight sense of bloodlust in their auras, making him certain they hadn't come to try to broker a diplomatic solution to their conflict.

Instead, they had come to take advantage of their fight, either to take down Jake, Sovereign, or both. Jake found it pathetic, which was why he waited for them to get hit by his Pulse.

During this wait, Jake also did something else. Raising his hand, Jake used another of his trump cards he had been waiting for a good opportunity to unleash, but in another fashion than he had expected.

Touch of Malefic Viper activated, not to control or empower poison within Sovereign, but to do exact opposite. Using skill, Jake sought to purge and weaken his own poison, directing it to destroy itself and toxic energies to self-cannibalize.

Sovereign looked at Jake with confusion upon feeling what he was doing, but Jake just shook his head.

"Don't misunderstand... I just have no interest in helping those vultures," Jake spoke as he got rid of most of his inflicted poison. By the time he had, first few B-grades also entered range of his Pulse, and based on how they came from all sides and would arrive so close to one another, this was clearly a coordinated strike.

With Pulse, he got a good look at B-grades he was dealing with. A few seconds later, he unleashed another Pulse and saw five remaining which had also entered his range.

Jake committed se creatures to memory as he spoke, infusing his voice with whatever power he had left.

“I’ll remember all of you.”

His voice echoed throughout Grand Lake as Jake activated his Wings of Malefic Viper.

Right before Jake was unable to see or say anything, he made brief eye-contact with Sovereign, and he hoped y would have chance to meet again to finish what y’d started. He wasn’t quite sure B-grade had same thoughts.

world around Jake was corroded in his next moments, concept of space faltering, and focusing rest of his power, Jake moved as reality turned into a blur. Jake traveled through reality as he shot straight up and to side, aiming to get as far away as he possibly could.

His instinct was his only guide, as he trusted his intuition to take him somewhere safe. world continued shifting by, a blurry, unrecognizable mess of colors and shapes, but soon, skill was running out of energy.

world quickly came back into focus as Jake found himself in an unrecognizable space. It was dark, and Jake believed he was underground somewhere. A wave of exhaustion immediately washed over him, but he had to remain conscious until he knew if he was truly safe.

Using a quick Pulse, Jake confirmed he was beneath ground, and he even saw water less than a hundred meters below him. He was inside a cavern that didn’t have any obvious entrance, but what it did have was a lot of... stuff.

As his eyes adapted, he saw piles of what looked like random equipment, empty potion bottles, sticks, fruits, pieces of fur, fears, teeth, horns, hundreds of cores... so many different items. only thing y all had in common was innate energy each item possessed.

Just n, as Jake was wondering where hell he was, he detected movement. A familiar creature had appeared within his sphere, and as Jake turned to look at little critter, it also noticed him.

[Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher – lvl 346] Follow current novels on *novel♦fire♦net*

odd mixture between a cat and a porcupine looked at Jake as its head tilted back and forth several times, clearly confused how Jake had gotten re. Jake was cautious, despite not feeling any hostility from creature. He knew that second he deactivated his boosting skill, he would be incredibly vulnerable. Weak enough so that any random C-grade could kill him easily.

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"Hurt?" small creature asked in a small voice, shaking Jake out of his thoughts.

"Yeah," Jake just confirmed.

critter tilted its head back and forth a few more times before getting an idea. Running to one of its piles of loot, it quickly picked out an item and picked it up with its small hands before jumping over to Jake and holding it up.

"Hurt bad. Rest good."

Jake looked at outstretched blanket as he realized his instincts had indeed made a good call. With a small smile, Jake accepted blanket, making Warpsnatcher very happy as it jumped back and kept looking at Jake, as if waiting for him to rest.

Not wanting to disappoint little thing, Jake moved his hand and telepathically spread out blanket behind him so he could lie down. Taking a deep breath, he mentally prepared himself for what would come next.

"Thanks," Jake muttered to little critter as he deactivated his boosting skill. instant he did, pain shot throughout his entire body, as Jake wasn't even able to scream. His soul shuddered from over-exhaustion, and Jake's body did only thing it could to preserve his mind while trying to recover.

Jake's consciousness slipped as he fell backwards, unable to move or think anymore as his entire system shut down, and Jake was out cold before his body even hit blanket.

--

Area 1 had been shaken more that day than it had for last decade. A B-grade had been slain, and more than ten of Island owners had made ir move, as even a B-grade from Area 5 had chosen to invade territory.

All because of a single C-grade who was barely even a high-tier C-grade.

Standing upon lake, invading B-grade calmed its nerves. Rainbowfear Sovereign waited as soon enough, nine B-grades were upon it. With human long gone, Sovereign easily assumed why y were re.

One by one, B-grades stepped less than a kilometer away as y encircled Sovereign. None of m, besides one, were recognizable to him, and Sovereign also felt that this B-grade was strongest among m.

She was a winged humanoid creature with glowing dust surrounding her body, and she also chose to be one to speak on behalf of herself and or B-grades.

“Where did hunter disappear to?” she asked, making her intent clear immediately.

y had indeed come to slay human. Doing so was one of greatest ways for B-grades to grow and potentially even leave planet referred to as a Hunting Ground. Records of a young genius capable of slaying enemies above his rank were not to be underestimated, and this particular human had already proven himself by first slaying Warlord and n afterwards fought Rainbowfear Sovereign and put him into his current state.

“Gone. Your approach was less than subtle, and feeling he had no path to victory, human chose to escape using some odd skill or item,” Sovereign answered truthfully, seeing no reason not to.

“You didn’t stop him?” anor B-grade, a large and scaled bipedal crocodile-like creature, asked.

“Does it surprise you that such a capable human has means of escape that neir I nor any of you could have stopped?” Sovereign scoffed.

“Perhaps you could have stopped him if you were in a better condition,” anor B-grade chimed in, this one a li female creature with bat-like wings and an aura of death surrounding her. **“You are looking a bit... tired.”**

Rainbowfear Sovereign felt gazes of nine B-grades resting on his injured body, and he knew ir thoughts. Killing or B-grades was difficult and risky, as getting injured made one an easy target. Right now, Sovereign was quite injured, and he expected nothing less than for m to take advantage.

Yet, despite se thoughts, Sovereign laughed as he spread out his winged arms.

“You speak truth. I am tired. Injured. Displaying my full power at this point wouldn’t be very easy,” Sovereign said as he nodded before raising his head, his aura spiking as a torrent of rainbow light erupted from his body.

“This is perfect opportunity to strike me down... but do so knowing that in process, I shall take along with me one of you to depths of nothingness,” Sovereign said with a growling voice. **“As long as you’re willing to take that risk, stop wasting my time and come at me.”**

His threatening words echoed throughout Grand Lake for several seconds, as none of m made a move. Sovereign knew that under normal circumstances, only one amongst B-grades that posed an actual threat to him was Forest Fae, who had been first to address him.

However, that didn't mean his words didn't ring true. If he went all out to kill one of m alongside himself, one of m would die... and as more seconds ticked by, it appeared none wished to risk being that someone.

"That's what I thought," Sovereign scoffed as he floated into air, planning to head upwards and ride jetstream back to his own domain.

"Relax, we just came for human, not you," Forest Fae spoke in a calm voice. Her words were hollow, and Sovereign mentally scoffed as he flew upwards.

"Rar than us being worried, shouldn't you be one shaking your fears in fear?" bipedal reptilian asked. **"You ambushed human after he already killed Simian Warlord, and yet you came out looking like that. What do you think happens when hunter recovers and returns?"**

Sovereign, who had already floated high up in air at this point, looked down at m and shook his head mockingly. **"How kind of you to worry about me."**

Being out of range, Sovereign risked nothing more as he shot upwards towards sky, making sure none of B-grades were following him. He had seen no reason to voice his true final thoughts, as truthfully... from look in hunter's eyes before he escaped, Sovereign had a strong feeling he wasn't only one who had cause to be worried for when he recovered.

One thing was certain, though... this wouldn't be last time Rainbowfear Sovereign and masked hunter would meet.

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two older-looking men both stood in front of small sapling, watching it with careful eyes. One of m held out a hand as a single golden droplet appeared and fell down upon plant, instantly getting absorbed.

re was some nervousness between m as y waited several seconds before a small shimmer of golden energy appeared on sapling. This energy soon began shifting and transforming as it formed a golden pattern on leaves, making both men brea out a sigh of relief.

"So far, so good," Nature's Attendant spoke.

"It appears stable for now, but we won't know for sure unless this stability persists for at least an hour," Duskleaf sighed, really hoping ir experiment would work out this time around. This was ir one-hundredth and eighth attempt, and y were starting to run out of both seeds and golden liquid, meaning if y failed too much more, y would have to go back and procure more ingredients and craft more. only thing that had enough of was special soil Nature's Attendant had created.

"This is most stable variant thus far," Nature's Attendant said, trying to be positive as he knelt down to get closer to small sprout. "A lot more lively, too."

"A good sign," Duskleaf nodded.

"Speaking of good signs... you finally took a Chosen," Nature's Attendant changed topic with a smile. "How many eras has it been since you last had one of those?"

"There never was a need to have one," Duskleaf said dismissively.

"Yet you changed your mind now," Nature's Attendant chuckled. "This Meira must truly be someone special."

Duskleaf was silent for a while before sighing. "Truthfully... she's not. Don't get me wrong, she's not bad, but compared to a Chosen, she's far behind and lacks innate talent. Her Path will be far more difficult than others, and all she can do is keep struggling to try to keep up and overcome her own limitations time and time again."

Nature's Attendant was silent for a little while as he kept smiling. "What made you decide to take her as your Chosen? It's not like you had a lack of talented people interested in being your Chosen. I know Altmar Empire has tried hard to get some of its young geniuses under your wing in vain."

"She worked hard," Duskleaf spoke as he kept looking at small sprout. "Even if she wasn't good at something, she kept trying, never giving up."

"That's not a unique quality," Nature's Attendant said.

"I know," Duskleaf instantly agreed. "But it's most important quality."

Nature's Attendant was about to say something as small sprout in front of him suddenly spiked with energy as golden pattern crackled, and a second later, small plant wilted away and died.

"Energy overload? We'll have to delay reaction of compound for next attempt," Duskleaf said without missing a beat as he closely studied wilted plant, not a single hint of discouragement on his face despite failure.

Looking at his old friend and partner in this project, Nature's Attendant could only smile and nod. *Most important quality, indeed.*

"I'll prepare soil to better help absorb energy to counteract reaction in case of a similar occurrence," second-in-command of Panon of Life spoke, Duskleaf giving a single nod of affirmation as a second later, both men were gone from isolated world, preparing for attempt number one-hundred and nine.

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Chapter 1121: Archery Upgrade Successfully Failed

Jake slowly woke up as he felt something pressing down on his chest. At first, he thought that maybe little Warpsnatcher had decided to use him as a pillow, but as he observed through his sphere, he realized that definitely wasn't case.

Opening his eyes, Jake saw a lot of different colors as he found himself covered in fruits of different shapes and sizes. A particularly big, coconut-looking fruit rested on his chest, carefully balanced and propped up by or fruit all around to make sure it didn't fall down.

Moving a little, Jake shook off many fruits as he forced himself to sit. mere act of sitting up sent spikes of pain running through Jake's body as he coughed loudly, blood coming out in process.

After his coughing fit, Jake bread heavily as he was tempted to just lie back down again. blanket he had been lying on was a magical treasure like most or things teleporting C-grade Warpsnatcher had gared, and it even increased recovery by a little when resting on it. Jake did not know if it helped shorten his duration of weakness, but even if it could, he reckoned effect would be negligible at best.

Looking around cavern, he didn't see Warpsnatcher anywhere, but fact that he had been covered in fresh fruit indicated it had been. Inspecting fruit in question, Jake felt a bit of hunger as he shrugged and picked a peach-looking thing up. He didn't reckon eating it would be dangerous, and Identify told him it was just an uncommon rarity fruit that did nothing when those of enlightened races consumed it raw. Not outside of alleviating hunger a bit. Instead, it was kind of item that monsters could eat to absorb energy within, or those with cooking skills could create something actually useful from.

Biting into fruit, Jake found taste incredibly sweet, and while it indeed didn't help his horrid state to consume it, thing had at least been tasty. Inspecting his body more thoroughly, Jake confirmed what he already knew.

Bloody miracle I can even live with a body this broken...

His internal organs were, to put it in nicest terms, still mush. With his evolutions, Jake had lost most of his organs, but some, like heart, lungs and kidney, remained. Now, he only had one lung left, which helped explain why breathing was hard, his kidney was just straight-up gone, and his heart was full of holes and lacerations. only thing his

internals were still filled with was a lot of unrecognizable mush that, while Jake couldn't outright see it, he assumed probably looked a bit like strawberry jam.

Those sound attacks had really done a number on him, but it wasn't as if rest of his body was any better. His muscles had been destroyed by his own destructive arcane energies, and when he observed his legs, Jake knew he wouldn't be able to stand up yet, even if he wanted to.

His vital energies were hard at work repairing his body, but such a thing took time. It wasn't even as if consuming a healing potion would work, as this wasn't kind of damage that could be fixed using that. Checking out his Soulshape, he also confirmed a slight bit of damage re, once more caused by Arcane Awakening's overuse.

Overall, Jake concluded that during this fight, he had pushed himself beyond his limits and n a bit furr. He had kept Arcane Awakening going for longer than ever before, and without Arcane Supremacy and his upgrade to Anomalous Soul, Jake would have lost and had to flee far earlier.

Using his internal clock, Jake estimated he had been knocked out cold for around two days. Which is to say that his current state was after already healing worst of it for two days, really hammering home just how far beyond his limits Jake had pushed himself.

Closing his eyes, Jake entered meditation to hopefully expedite his recovery. Luckily, even if his body was a complete mess, his Soulspace remained undamaged and a great refuge. Meditation's ability to cut off all or senses also came very in handy when this injured, as constant pain wouldn't distract him.

Inside Soulspace, Jake finally also took time to check out his notifications. Because of sudden entrance of Rainbowfear Sovereign, Jake could not really revel in kill, but now he could.

You have slain [Grand Simivita Warlord – lvl 354] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

It couldn't be forgotten that this was Jake's first B-grade kill. In all honesty, it felt anticlimactic as Warlord hadn't even been that powerful, and with all that had happened right afterwards, his fight with Warlord seemed almost insignificant.

Which was also why Jake found it surprising, but also reaffirming when he checked two next notifications.

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 308 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 311 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 309 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

He had hunted so many damn apes and barely made any progress, but one relatively easy fight against a B-grade had resulted in two levels. Sure, there was a bonus in Records from it being Jake's first B-grade kill, but experience increase from jumping grades couldn't be denied. Especially not for someone like Jake.

If he had also killed Sovereign, experience would have been way more insane. Speaking of Sovereign.

Jake allowed some of his senses to seep into outer world as he felt for something. After a few seconds of struggle, Jake could subtly detect Hunter's Mark he'd left on B-grade, confirming Sovereign was still alive. Incredibly far away, but still alive.

With this knowledge, Jake breathed out a sigh of relief and sank his consciousness back into his Soulspace. Knowing Sovereign still lived meant Jake had a chance for a proper fight. However, before Sovereign, Jake now had nine or B-grades to also hunt down. y had ruined his fight with powerful B-grade, and even now, as Jake reflected on battle, he did not know who would have won if two had kept going. All he knew was that he still wanted to find out next time y met.

One of reasons Jake had any confidence in his victory was naturally epiphany he had shortly before he had to flee. Even if he hadn't managed to get kill and experience points from his fight with Sovereign, he had definitely not come out of it empty-handed.

Though he hadn't gotten what he'd expected and aimed for, eir.

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Sadly for Jake, when it came to upgrading his Archery skill, he had completely failed. Perhaps his failure wasn't entirely Jake's fault, though. Neir was it Artemis'. He had a skill she wasn't aware of and that Jake barely even thought about, but if he had just taken some more time and truly considered matters, perhaps he would have realized he had perfect skill to make his "time arrows" all along.

Because, while Jake had failed to gain a skill upgrade to his archery skill, he had succeeded in gaining an upgrade to passive skill Unblemished Arrows of Horizon... now with an added Arcane in re.

[Unblemished Arrows of Horizon (Ancient)] – To allow your arrows to reach horizon unblemished and unobstructed is nothing but a given for a hunter of Horizon's Edge. Allows your arrows to gain significant resistance to all environmental factors and far more easily destroy any environmental energy or material. Grants a slight increase in penetrative power against energy-based defensive barriers and magical interference that may obstruct arrow. potency of

Unblemished Arrows of Horizon skill is determined by inherent power of arrow. maximum and minimum potency of Unblemished Arrows of Horizon is determined by Perception.

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[Unblemished Arcane Arrows of Horizon (Legendary)] – To allow your arrows to reach horizon unblemished and unobstructed is nothing but a given for a hunter of Horizon's Edge. Allows your arrows to gain significant resistance to all environmental factors and far more easily destroy any environmental energy or material. Arcane energies allow this effect to expand and affect certain concepts, eroding and altering conceptual influence on arrows. This aspect of skill requires active control and input by Hunter. Grants a slight increase in penetrative power against energy-based defensive barriers and magical interference that may obstruct arrow. potency of Unblemished Arrows of Horizon skill is determined by inherent power of arrow. maximum and minimum potency of Unblemished Arrows of Horizon is determined by Perception.

Not much of skill description had changed. In fact, it was mostly same one as before, except for one added sentence in middle about concepts. more Jake thought about it, more this upgrade also made sense.

From very beginning, Jake had viewed best aspect of Unblemished Arrows to be fact that it removed wind resistance from equation. It meant that Jake's arrows could shoot faster and furr without being affected by environment as much. Before, he had always considered environment medium in which his arrow traveled, so if it flew through water, Unblemished Arrows would make it not slow down as much.

However, why did skill have to be restrained to only resisting most obvious things? Well, it turns out it didn't. Resisting more complex was just significantly more difficult, and Jake was fairly confident he couldn't have done it without "cheating" using his arcane affinity.

additional effect also wasn't passive, as per new description:

"This aspect of skill requires active control and input by Hunter."

Unblemished Arrows had always just been a background skill Jake could comfortably forget, but now he had to actively use it if he wanted his arrows to resist concept of time. Or any or concept, for that matter. key was that Jake had to actually comprehend concept to actively control its resistance, and Jake was fully aware that if his new skill could passively make his arrows resist concept of time itself, he wouldn't have gotten just a mere legendary skill.

Jake had a lot of things he wanted to test, including upgraded skill's interaction with Penetrating Arrow, which increased effectiveness of Unblemished Arrows, but all of

that would have to wait for when Jake was able to physically move. For now, he had to focus on recovery... and figuring out how he was supposed to upgrade his archery skill now.

He also realized that he had to think more for himself when it came to forming his archery skill. From what Artemis had said, her archery skill had ability to manipulate concept's effect on her arrows, but evidently, Jake didn't need that as he had an entirely separate skill to do so. There was also a chance that Jake could merge Unblemished Arrows and his Archery skill one day, but such considerations were for far future, and he doubted he even wanted to do that.

Looking at this current archery skill, it stood out being only epic rarity, however, its effects remained extraordinary. It allowed him to bend arrows by infusing Willpower into his arrows, but more importantly than anything else was its increase to all damage Jake did with a bow based on distance of his shots and his Perception. Especially Perception part.

Jake did not know how much stronger it made his arrows, but Jake had a feeling it was meaningful. Increased effect of Strength and Agility while wielding a bow was naturally also nice, but all archery skills had that by default, though Artemis said hers only increased her Wisdom, likely because she heavily relied on her special plant arrows. In many ways, Artemis was halfway a summoner that used archery to deliver her summons, while Jake was an archer who used magic to enhance damage done of his arrows.

Looking over his skills a bit more, Jake continued considering matters for next few hours as he meditated and recovered. After he had done all thinking he possibly could without losing his mind from being unable to actually experiment, Jake turned to a certain tome left by First Sage to get his mind off things.

Nearly half a day passed with Jake studying before something moved in cavern. He opened his eyes to find Warpsnatcher back, and a second later, a picnic table was summoned into air before falling down onto a pile of loot. Critter didn't even look at Jake as it dismantled table and took out a few metal plates that had been hidden within before waving its small parts, destroying useless wood.

Several more items were summoned over next half a minute, each of them sorted into different piles using a system only known to Warpsnatcher. With business handled, beast finally turned to Jake as it jumped over and looked up at him with big eyes.

"Better?" rightful source is *novel•fire•net*

Jake couldn't help but smile as he gave a painful nod. "A little better."

Warpsnatcher tilted its head back and forth a few times before jumping closer and placing a palm on Jake's leg. It tapped his leg two times before jumping back again.

“Be better?”

“I’m working on it,” Jake smiled as he resisted reaching out to pat creature. He did not know if doing so would be considered rude, and he really didn’t want to make orwise friendly near-peak C-grade mad.

little thing seemed happy enough with Jake’s answer as it picked up a small fruit and offered it. Jake fought through pain as he took fruit and put it into his mouth, finding it quite tasty. It reminded him of a more flavorful avocado.

Satisfied at seeing Jake eat something – almost as if Warpsnatcher viewed Jake as some poor hurt baby bird – it clapped its little hands and padded his leg yet again.

“Home safe. You rest,” Warpsnatcher said before it promptly jumped away again. With its fourth jump, its entire body shimmered and disappeared, no longer even within Jake’s Pulse range.

Would give Sandy a run for ir money when it comes to running away... though I guess Sandy is a lot tougher in case y get hit, Jake thought, shaking his head a bit. Or at least he tried to before stopping himself halfway through turning his neck as a sharp pain shot through his body, reminding him not to move.

Alone once more, Jake closed his eyes and reentered meditation. It would take a while before Jake was back in fighting condition once more, and during this time, he would have little else to do but read tome left by First Sage and ponder existence.

Outside of reading tome, which could get mentally exhausting, Jake kept himself motivated by summoning statues of nine creatures within his Soulspace. Each was a B-grade on his shit-list, and he had plenty of time to decide which of m he was going to hunt down first once he recovered. He hadn’t been able to get a good read on ir individual auras, and thus didn’t know which of m were stronger or weaker, but going just by appearance alone from snapshot he’d taken with Pulse, he was already starting to hone in on one of B-grades.

It was bipedal crocodile-like creature, and reason Jake focused on that one was because of its facial expression when Jake had used his Pulse. It had a smile that made its face very punchable, and while, sure, perhaps attributing human expression to inhuman creatures wasn’t fairest thing to do, Jake had to start deciding which one he disliked most somehow.

Not like it overly mattered, as he had no intentions of leaving any of m alive.

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Chapter 1122: Ree-Covered

"We'll arrive shortly," god said as she looked at hawk that was roosting on top of her bed, having gared all bedding to make a small nest.

"Ree!" Sylphie responded happily before flapping her wings and flying up. UPDATE FROM *novel♦fire♦net*

"I want to bring attention to fact that our late arrival is primarily because you insisted on taking detours," god sighed, as she wondered why she had even taken this job... well, alright, she knew why she had taken it. Escorting Sylphian Hawk had been a sought-after assignment, in part because it was expected to be incredibly easy, but primarily because it would help m form better relations with leadership of Panon of Life.

Potnia had taken on this task also because of Chosen of Malefic Viper. She had risen to godhood only three eras ago and had been Chosen of Artemis before her ascension to godhood. After becoming a god, she had remained close with Artemis, which was also why she found current situation quite... puzzling.

Things had changed after Artemis went to Nevermore just a few years ago. When Potnia heard that her former Patron was busy visiting Chosen of Malefic Viper and spending quite a lot of time with him, Potnia at first orized that Artemis was trying to strengn relationships between Order and Panon of Life, which would make some sense. Artemis was a hunter goddess, after all, and Chosen of Malefic One was also a hunter specializing in archery, so if she could color his Path just a little and help him, it could be great for relationship between two Primordial factions.

However, as days progressed, and when she briefly met Artemis after she had gone to visit Chosen... Potnia had begun to believe that what Artemis was hoping to nurture wasn't relationship between two factions, but two people. Namely, herself and Chosen.

What's more, Artemis didn't deny this at all, which only confused Potnia furr. Artemis had reputation she did for a reason, but now she was suddenly interested in getting close to a mere C-grade mortal. An impressive one, sure, but still just a mortal who some would argue had barely begun his Path.

Potnia didn't have to guts to interrogate Artemis directly, so when mission to escort Sylphian Hawk was presented, Potnia saw it as a great opportunity to get to learn more about what was going on from person she and ors considered closest to Chosen.

With a Path that revolved around rearing and fighting alongside beasts, Potnia was ideal candidate, and with her power at Fifth Circle of Divinity, she was neir too strong nor too weak to serve as a proper escort.

place y were visiting was led by a Sylph at Seventh Circle of Divinity, so if someone too powerful had served as escort, Sylphs would likely have found mselves pressured, while if someone who had only just become a god came along, it could be viewed as disrespectful... even if Sylphs weren't known to care about that sort of thing.

Anyhow, Potnia had run into some problems with her plan of learning things from Sylphian Hawk. Maybe she had gotten too content, but Potnia usually had a really easy time convincing any and all mortal animals to tell her whatever she wanted to know. Her Path made m innately trust her and view her as a safe person, but none of that had shown any effect on Sylphian Hawk... at least not in way Potnia had wanted it to.

only effect it had seemingly had was to make hawk more comfortable, asking Potnia and ir entire flight crew to make random stops whenever "wind whispered" about something interesting in vicinity. Granted, se minor excursions had all been fruitful for hawk, but that didn't mean it hadn't delayed ir arrival by a lot.

Luckily, journey was at its end now as Potnia walked with happy hawk out to deck of flying ship. On a side note, yes, y could have used teleportation, but opted for a more scenic route so hawk could see more of Great Planet.

Arriving on deck, massive pillar of wind was visible in distance. tornado stretched upwards into sky, where it was swallowed by a wormhole connected directly to Vortex Pinnacle, a World Wonder Potnia didn't dare visit due to how dangerous it was.

Around this tornado, sky islands had been constructed, and y all floated around, turning with tornado, albeit at far lower speeds. remnant energies from World Wonder leaking through wormhole made this blessed land for any creature walking a Path using wind affinity, and even at this distance, hawk could feel it.

"Ree!" she screeched gleefully while flapping her wings, making Potnia smile.

"Our presence has already been noticed," she said. "I will retreat to background and allow Miss Sylphie to handle matters from here on out."

"Ree," bird agreed, while also politely thanking Potnia for her work, making goddess smile even more.

"Just call for me if you need me for anything," Potnia said as she teleported to a hidden room within flying vessel. Chances were, she would stay re until Sylphie wanted to leave again. Not that Potnia complained. This was exactly why escort work was considered a simple job. Unless things went *really* wrong, one wouldn't really have to do anything, and even in cases of conflict, diplomacy was nearly always solution, as no one wanted to make an unnecessary conflict with a god simply due to actions of a mortal.

Potnia had also briefly conversed with Sylph goddess who ruled this communion of Sylphs, and things shouldn't go wrong. In fact, upon realizing who and what Sylphie was, this Sylph goddess even expressed personal interest in meeting with hawk, which partly shared a name with her race. Especially upon realizing she was blessed by Stormild, sole elemental Primordial and greatest god in existence to most elementals.

Still, Potnia had to keep an eye out as half a dozen S-grade Sylphs soon surrounded ship, all looking curiously at small green hawk that sat perched on railing. Wind blew around ship, and a form of communication Potnia could not understand took place between wind elementals and part-elemental bird.

Some nervousness did worm its way into Potnia's mind when a full minute passed with no one moving, but just then, Sylphie let out a loud screech and flapped her wings, many Sylphs responding by also transforming into shapes of birds as she flew down, and together, they all took off and headed towards largest of sky islands floating around tornado.

I wish you luck in your endeavors, Potnia thought to herself, still a bit miffed that she'd failed to learn much about what was truly going on between Artemis and Chosen of Malefic Viper, though she did have her oracles.

A lot of oracles... including those that, if she weren't a god, would definitely have been considered heretical to even think about.

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Much less writing me down.

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Jake stretched, his entire body cracking after having meditated for too long. Jumping up and down on his toes while shadow boxing a little, Jake confirmed he was back to a pretty acceptable state. He wasn't quite fully healed yet, but wonders of natural recovery had certainly done their job.

Helped along a little by Meditate, sure, but all Meditate really did was speed up natural recovery. Granted, Jake did speed it up a lot more than usual, as despite his lack of skill upgrades, he had improved skill continually while studying tome left by First Sage. It had definitely saved him a few days of sitting on his ass.

"Good now?" little Warpsnatcher asked curiously as it watched Jake jump around.

"Definitely getting re," Jake answered politely to critter that had allowed him to stay in its home during these roughly two weeks of recovery. Feeling a lot better, Jake also finally had confidence to ask some questions he had been wondering about, now that he no longer had to be overly worried about beast turning aggressive or kicking him out.

“Can I know why you decided to save me?” Jake asked a question that had been burning in his mind for a fortnight. Sure, Jake had given Warpsnatcher a single core from a Rainbowfear Songbird, but watching pile of cores beast had already collected, it was just one among thousands now.

Warpsnatcher looked at Jake for a few moments before answering. “Hunter nice. I help Hunter. Hunter help me.”

Jake frowned, not entirely sure what creature was getting at. Noticing his confusion, Warpsnatcher held up its palms as a large orb of magic appeared. “Hunter from big world.”

orb floated upwards as cat-like porcupine creature summoned a tiny orb. “Me from small world.”

Realization struck Jake as he realized what creature was getting at. “You want to leave this planet?”

“Leave!” Warpsnatcher started clapping its palms happily, confirming Jake had guessed right... which put him in a bit of a debacle... because according to rules, Jake couldn’t help Warpsnatcher with that.

One of rules of Hunting Grounds was that one was not allowed to bring any monsters outside planet unless given express permission. This even included regular hunting targets, much less endangered species. Warpsnatcher was mega-endangered and definitely not something that could just be smuggled out.

Jake did understand why creature wanted to leave, though. From what Rainbowfear Sovereign said, some of older B-grades appeared aware that this was just a Hunting Ground with limited growth potential for all those living on planet. y could all grow to high-tier C-grade relatively quickly, but evolving to B-grade was incredibly difficult, while going even furr than that was borderline impossible.

Records on a single planet were simply too limited. Killing hunters was one way to inject new Records into a B-grade’s Path, but best way would naturally be to leave planet behind entirely and explore multiverse.

Chances were Warpsnatcher knew this too, and from aura and abilities displayed by little beast, Jake was confident it was a high-tier variant. kind that had a harder time evolving than or monsters, likely resulting in a B-grade evolution being borderline impossible if it remained on planet.

Jake found himself deep in thought and didn’t even notice when Warpsnatcher began poking him to get his attention. Back in reality, Jake looked down at critter as it stared up at him with its large cat-like eyes. “You help?”

Taking a deep breath, Jake nodded. "I'll do what I can."

He couldn't make any more promises than that, and luckily, Warpsnatcher seemed happy with his reply as it danced around a little before searching through a pile of fruit and taking out one, which it promptly offered to Jake.

Taking weird purple fruit, Jake nodded politely as he ate thing. It had a strong chocolate flavor. With a few happy jumps, Warpsnatcher left cavern again, leaving Jake to sit down for his final meditation session before it was time to get topside again.

Jake really had to hand it to his intuition. Going to Warpsnatcher's hideout had been a brilliant move. only or place safer had to be outpost, and Jake honestly preferred this cavern as he didn't even have to consider or people potentially being around.

Around a day and a half later, Warpsnatcher returned once more with a few new pieces of loot. Jake watched it unpack and sort its findings before he spoke up.

"I'm all good now, so I'll leave," Jake said, catching attention of beast.

It turned around and scanned him from top to bottom. After a second, it tilted its head and spoke in its tiny voice, this time perhaps even sounding a bit nervous. "Come find again?"

"I promise I will," Jake said in a reaffirming voice, making Warpsnatcher happy.

"Me help you go top!"

Clapping its hands, fur on little beast started to shimmer as if it was about to disappear again. A silver light began filling cavern, enveloping Jake as he felt something pull at him slightly. Feeling no sense of danger, he trusted Warpsnatcher and didn't resist as world around him began turning weird and blurry.

All colors disappeared, and for a second, everything looked... off. It was as if he could see outline of everything, like reality was just an in-progress sketch. only solid things were trees far above, which all looked like solid white masses. However, before Jake could properly commit what he saw to memory, he found himself standing in jungle once more, Warpsnatcher beside him, looking a bit tired.

"You big!" it exclaimed, sitting down.

"Are you calling me fat?" Jake asked, acting all offended.

"No! Big!" Warpsnatcher corrected him, clearly not getting joke. creature looked in thought for a while before seemingly finding word. "Heavy! You heavy!"

Jake was about to make anor joke as it clicked. Warpsnatcher wasn't talking about Jake's physical form, but his metaphysical one. In or words, he had a "heavy" soul.

Teleporting stronger people was harder than teleporting weaker ones. It took more energy, effort, and teleporter had to be more complex. In many ways, it wasn't inaccurate to say that stronger people were "heavier" to transport than weaker ones. Jake, with his Anomalous Soul and power that he had proven capable of taking down B-grades, was definitely one of "heaviest" C-grades around.

What Warpsnatcher did wasn't strictly teleporting, but affecting stronger people with any kind of magic was just harder. That was also why healers were pretty much useless when it came to treating those significantly stronger than mselves, and having a support member in party with roughly equal power to everyone else was a requirement for true top parties of multiverse.

"I apologize for my heaviness," Jake said with a slight smile, Warpsnatcher taking his apology at face value.

"It okay! You go!" Warpsnatcher said as it raised its two paws above its head. "Fight!"

Jake chuckled and shook his head as he walked off, raising a hand to wave goodbye to Warpsnatcher that mimicked his movement, waving him goodbye. Once Jake was a suitable distance away, he slowly shifted his own position within paradigm of Perception, disappearing from sight.

Once Unseen Hunter was active, Jake took to air to orient himself and properly determine his distance from Grand Lake. His escape had taken him pretty far, and it would take him about an hour and a half to reach massive lake once more.

Over last two weeks and a bit, his Hunter's Mark had also naturally faded from Rainbowfear Sovereign, and he could confirm that B-grade hadn't left its Area since getting re. Seeing as Sovereign couldn't have known Jake had a mark on it, he assumed bird wouldn't interfere in what would come next.

Starting his preparations for hunt, Jake traveled to Grand Lake, and during following two days, he scouted many islands to try to get an idea of what he was dealing with. Using Pulse and stealth, Jake looked for nine B-grades on his shit-list, and once he found one, he left a Hunter's Mark on it.

A part of him had feared that B-grades would be smart and stick toger after hearing his threat before leaving, but it seemed that B-grades were as afraid of each or as y were of Jake. Rar than sticking toger, y all stayed in inner circles of ir islands, surrounded by peak C-grades of ir kin.

While that was annoying, Jake learned Simivita had definitely been one of most populous species. Additionally, before, Jake still wanted to improve his archery and learn his own limits.

Now... now, Jake didn't care about that. All he cared about was showing se B-grades just how royally y had fucked up by ruining Jake's fight.

Floating far up in air, Jake held out Eternal Hunger as malleable weapon warped, taking on shape of a spear-like arrow, energy surging as Jake remained hidden with Unseen Hunter.

Far below, deep inside jungle, surrounded by kin it believed offered it safety, a B-grade relaxed, unaware that its pissed-off grudge-fueled reaper was readying his metaphorical scy.

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Chapter 1123: His Lordship, Draconic Crocolisk

Biting off head of green-furred ape, Draconic Crocolisk chewed as skull was crushed within its maw. Drinking blood from now headless captive, B-grade celebrated as many or scaled monsters around also reveled in ir victory.

After Simivita Warlord had fallen, natives of what was formerly known as Simivita Island all fled, while those who were left behind had all been hunted down. damn apes weren't easily gotten rid of, and chances were survivors would join anor tribe elsewhere. Eir way, Crocolisk and or B-grades had all taken over island and began reaping its resources.

Despite its happy mood, Draconic Crocolisk wasn't entirely pleased, though.

"Should have killed that damn bird," he muttered, annoyed at cowardice of or B-grades. None of m dared to fight Sovereign, partly due to how little y would gain from it.

bird hailed from anor section of planet, so killing it wouldn't even result in more territory. Grand Lake which Sovereign's island was placed on was also a lot more dangerous than one Draconic Crocolisk occupied, as a lot of older B-grades lived re.

Most of B-grades around Draconic Crocolisk had only been B-grades for a few decades at most. Only Forest Fae had been a B-grade for over a century, which was definitely why she was considered strongest on Grand Lake.

Draconic Crocolisk had full confidence that if he had also been a B-grade for an entire century, he would be far stronger than some stupid fae. In fact, with just one good opportunity, he could close gap...

With a tooth-filled smile, B-grade drank last of Simivita's blood as he leaned back on his throne of stone and bones. "Let's hope that human stops by again to create some chaos and excitement."

"Your Lordship, aren't you worried about this human choosing to come here?" a peak C-grade Crocolisk asked with a face full of concern.

Without any warning, Draconic Crocolisk reached and grasped head of or reptilian. or party didn't even have time to react as claws dug into its skull, drawing blood.

"Are you saying I'm weak enough to die to some C-grade human?" B-grade asked in an angry tone. "Warlord was patically weak, and that stupid bird was just overconfident. Even if human has a few tricks up his sleeve, so what?"

Throwing C-grade away, making it smash into a tree, Draconic Crocolisk spread out its arms and grinned widely. "Even if he dares face me within my own territory, what's he gonna do to me? I have scales and Legacy of dragons! No C-grade can penetrate my-

Just n, a pervasive sense of danger washed over Draconic Crocolisk. It was kind of danger that normally made creatures react quickly and try to dodge... but Draconic Crocolisk had never been one to dodge.

Blessed as a rare variant from birth, he possessed Lineage of a True Dragon within his body. He had always been stronger than ors his level, easily evolved, and even reached B-grade within only twenty years of birth because of unique environment of planet and his sheer innate potential for growth.

One thing that had never let him down was his scales— most pronounced aspect of his Draconic Lineage. y offered flawless magic resistance, and no C-grade had ever even chipped a single scale since he became a B-grade.

However, perhaps most important reason why Draconic Crocolisk responded as it did was due to a lack of experience. Most believed instinct was something entirely uncontrolled, but such an understanding was heavily flawed. Instinct was instead merely innate action that came before thought, and this innate action was built on something. Muscle memory, habit, or, once more, most importantly, experience.

Draconic Crocolisk had always reacted to danger by believing in his own durability, and so he had done that day. Sadly for him, this instinctive response proved to be worst he could have possibly made, as only micro-adjustment he made before getting stuck was to position most durable part of his body to block brunt of incoming attack...

His skull.

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Jake had held nothing back. All of this passive skill stacked up to nines, whatever Hunting Momentum he had gained passively by observing B-grade, his boosting skill fully activated at a 60% boost, and of course, a Powershot channeled to point Jake's shoulder was about to explode from overexertion.

payload he delivered was also strongest Jake could make. Eternal Hunger, transformed into shape of a large spear-like arrow, and Protean Arrow of Eternal Horizons used to truly augment that attack by embracing mythical weapon in destructive energies, creating an Impetus Arrow. entire thing naturally coated with his best Heartrot Poison for maximum damage, should his opponent survive initial impact.

All of this delivered from stealth and far up in air, down upon Draconic Crocolisk. re was so much at play at once that it was hard to keep track of, but Jake had put in time to make sure this was an attack that B-grade couldn't just walk away from.

He needed to do some serious damage with his opening attack if he wanted a chance to win. B-grade was surrounded by its kin, and Jake needed it weakened and damaged for him to have any confidence in taking it down, as, while Jake did believe in himself, he also knew that fighting a B-grade alongside its army wasn't something he could handle.

Releasing arrow and watching it descend, Jake was ready to make sure it would strike true. Draconic Crocolisk stood below, its arms spread out while showing off to what it clearly considered its lesser brethren.

Ready with Gaze for when B-grade noticed attack and tried to dodge, Jake waited with bated breath as arrow closed in, anor attack already nocked as he was ready for follow-up. entire flight down didn't even take two full seconds, but to Jake's eyes, arrow may as well have been traveling in slow motion. He hadn't even done anything with his new Unblemished Arrows, as he hadn't seen a need to. Manipulating timing of arrow wouldn't have made it hit harder in any way, after all.

As arrow was about to strike, Jake predicted Crocolisk would try to dodge. With how fast arrow was flying, it definitely wouldn't succeed and likely end up striking shoulder. A survivable hit for sure, but one that would give Jake a massive advantage.

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However... Draconic Crocolisk didn't try to dodge at all. Instead, it did exact opposite and purposefully moved its head into pathway of arrow at very last moment as all scales that covered beast's body brimmed with energy.

Jake didn't doubt that B-grade was durable. It definitely had far higher toughness than both Sovereign and Warlord. dragon-like scales covering monster's body were impressive indeed... but y weren't even real dragon scales, and even if y had been, y wouldn't have stood a chance against arrow.

Penetrating Arrow and his upgraded Unblemished Arrows came into play as faint magical barrier given off by scales was instantly broken through, arrow not losing any momentum at all as it pierced through scales of B-grade. Next, sharp tip of Eternal Hunger encountered thick skull of Crocolisk, which offered more resistance than scales, though still far from sufficient in stopping two-meter-long arrow.

arrow pierced through skull, into neck, chest, and stomach, before finally exiting at thigh because arrow had veered slightly off course by many bones it had to destroy during its travel through B-grade's body.

After exiting body of Draconic Crocolisk, arrow impacted ground with meteoric proportions. A massive explosion of arcane energy swept through center of island, sending dozens of C-grades flying in process as a crater several kilometers in radius formed, destroying an entire section of jungle as trees were uprooted and tossed away.

crater hadn't even fully formed before a rain of arrows fell upon island, and a tenth of a second later, second salvo arrived as Jake used Rapid Fire from Timeless Focus to shoot down Rain of Arrows after Rain of Arrows.

Massive explosions of destructive arcane mana enveloped crater. Jake focused as he peered through all se explosions, as he focused solely on creature in middle, intent on not giving it any reprieve. Draconic Crocolisk had lost its entire head, majority of its upper body, and an entire leg where arrow had exited at thigh. Yet, despite around sixty percent of its entire body mass being destroyed, re was no notification in sight.

Not enough yet, Jake told himself as he kept shooting. vitality of a B-grade was truly not to be underestimated, and raw damage of Jake's attack simply hadn't been enough to end its life in one blow, even if hit had been absolutely perfect.

That didn't mean he couldn't end fight quickly, though. He saw flesh of B-grade wriggling as Draconic Crocolisk began regenerating in real time, but Jake didn't want to give it opportunity. Making use of his newfound time arrows, as he called m, Jake shot down incredibly quick stable arrows; concept of time itself corroded during flight, cutting ir travel down to a fourth.

se arrows struck right where most regeneration took place, and while arrows could only pierce flesh because of its delicate and exposed state and did very little damage since a lot of ir innate energy was consumed to burn through concept of time to arrive faster, same couldn't be said about poison that coated every arrow tip.

Heartrot Poison impeded regeneration because of its hemotoxin properties, and Jake aimed his arrows wherever B-grade attempted to heal. Well, Jake didn't really believe Crocolisk was consciously controlling its regeneration process, which only made job easier for Jake, as he knew beast had to be burning through vital energy at an absolutely astonishing rate.

Jake was on a timer, though, as B-grade wasn't alone. His initial attack and explosive follow-up had sent all nearby C-grades flying, leaving many of them disoriented and shaken, but soon some of the stronger ones managed to stabilize and get a read on situation. Three peak C-grades moved toward Crocolisk, seemingly intent on using their bodies as shields, but a Gaze on all three delayed them by a few moments, allowing Jake to land a couple more arrows on Draconic Crocolisk.

His next arrow was blocked, as a C-grade crocodile that also walked on two legs managed to get in front of it, but the next two struck true as Jake made some incredibly tricky shots, both curving arrows and manipulating their time to make them fly faster and more unpredictably.

At this point, a second C-grade moved to help its leader, followed by the last of the trio. Jake kept shooting and got in a few potshots, but soon, more C-grades joined its comrades, forming a wall of bodies between Jake and his target. A few of the beasts even began taking to air, flying straight toward him.

Jake couldn't hit any more arrows... but it had been enough.

Raising a hand, it glowed a dark green color as Jake empowered and stimulated poison within B-grade's body. He actively helped his toxins fight against vital energies of Draconic Crocolisk, and he could already feel now that it was enough. Health Pool of B-grade was just about dried up, and with a final push, Jake aimed to finish it.

Detonating his Hunter's Mark, a brief flash of arcane energy lit up the crater, fading away instantly. Left behind was the broken body of B-grade, flesh now no longer wriggling with any fervor. Instead, what remained of the once mighty ruler of the island turned black and rotten as the aura of the second B-grade in Area 1 was whisked out within only a few weeks of anor.

You have slain [Draconic Crocolisk – lvl 352] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 310 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

Jake took his level and had no interest in sticking around any longer. Hunting these C-grades seemed meaningless, and a few of them even stopped mid-air upon realizing their leader had died.

When Jake turned and left, only a few pursued him for a few minutes, but y quickly gave up upon realizing y had no chance of catching him, and even if y caught him, all that would await m was death.

Flying while using occasional One Step, Jake quickly got far away from island to take a brear. Seeking down toward an island, Jake found one with nothing close to shoreline as he touched down and deactivated his boosting skill so he could fully recover once more.

After drinking a quick mana potion, Jake entered meditation once more while briefly reflecting on “fight” he just had, and went away from hunt with a few key takeaways. most important thing was that his fully powered attack could definitely take out a B-grade in one hit if everything went according to plan. He had been both lucky and unlucky with Draconic Crocolisk. Lucky that it was a bloody moron that thought it could take his arrow head-on, allowing Jake to land a dream arrow, and unlucky in that beast had definitely been on more durable side.

Regardless of luck, mere fact his arrow had torn through a seemingly bulky B-grade with such ease was proof of just how powerful his attack was. Impetus Arrow, using Eternal Hunger as a medium, was on a whole or level compared to anything else Jake could use for his opening attack. Its damage was compounded by so many damn passive and active effects at once that it created a blow no C-grade should be capable of delivering.

Speaking of Eternal Hunger, Jake had naturally retrieved it with a mental command before he left, likely confusing crocodile-like beasts as mythical weapon that had nearly killed ir leader in one shot, simply dispersed into black smoke, only to reappear within Jake moments later.

A second thing Jake was now more certain of than ever was just how inexperienced se B-grades were. This wasn’t like fighting a B-grade that had slowly grown through grades over a couple of centuries through precarious fights, but more like beating up beasts that had grown up in a nice zoo with food provided three times a day.

re were some obvious exceptions, such as Sovereign, and he had a feeling—and also severely hoped—some of or B-grades would also prove mselves capable of actually fighting, but it wouldn’t be all of m. Check latest chapters at **novel·fire·net**

Not that it mattered, for he was going to take down all nine B-grades... well, eight now.

After recovering for roughly an hour and drinking a stamina potion after getting back up, Jake headed out once more, his second target already scouted out during his preparation phase earlier.

Following Draconic Crocolisk, Jake was no longer overly concerned about his ability to kill se B-grades. His goalpost had moved, and he was now aiming for something that

would sound certifiably absurd and ramblings of a madman to any or C-grades his level.

Let's see if I can take down next one in a single shot.

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Chapter 1124: Craters

Forest Fae floated above massive crater alongside two or B-grades; one a small treant and or a female lion-like creature in humanoid form, making her resemble a beastkin. Below m, energy pulsed with ir every breath, fissures of pure destruction still marring land from what had happened re only half an hour prior.

“Did y deploy a B-grade hunter?” lion asked, her face full of concern.

“We cannot rule it out, though whoever it is must be related to that human,” Forest Fae answered as she floated down to furr inspect odd energy that still lingered. It had a purple-ish sheen, and when she moved her hand to touch some of it, it jumped to her hand, attempting to destroy it. With little effort, she dispelled it, but mere act of energy was concerning.

“I’ve never encountered energy like this before... It’s an unknown affinity. An unnatural one,” Forest Fae continued. “Whoever this hunter is, I doubt y’re a member of Panon of Life.”

As one of older creatures living in Hunting Grounds, Forest Fae knew more than most, including true nature of ir home. She had survived many purges herself and seen over a thousand B-grades fall to hunters during her life, but this recent development concerned even her.

“If... a B-grade... why this way?” treant asked in a slow fashion, not able to communicate that well with its summoned avatar.

“Chances are, it’s hunter who went after Warlord and fought Rainbowfear Sovereign,” she answered with a frown. “Which means we are indeed dealing with a C-grade... just a powerful variant of one. It’s also possible human hid his level and is truthfully a peak C-grade. I’ve encountered hunters capable of fooling Identify before.”

two ors nodded in agreement, that explanation being only one that made sense. reason y doubted hunter had been behind this and not someone with a similar affinity

was because of human's level. y had all seen he wasn't even level 320, so it made little sense that he had been source of recent happenings. Instead, it made more sense that a senior or perhaps teacher of this C-grade had arrived and begun to take revenge.

That, or human, had hidden his level all along, and he was just a single step away from B-grade. Because alternative was that his level was indeed only barely in late-tier C-grade, which none of m could accept logically, as that would simply be too ridiculous a notion.

Floating up above crater once more, Forest Fae considered ir next steps. three of m had been formally allied for last decade or so, but ir alliance was fickle, to say least. treant couldn't move his own body easily, while lioness was less than trustworthy. Moreover, y all had ir own domains... and of course, re was perhaps most important aspect:

This hunter, who was causing a ruckus, was clearly outstanding. Forest Fae had been looking at an opportunity like this for a long time, as she knew something else ors didn't: ultimate reward for slaying a young genius like this.

Hunting Grounds was a limiting environment, but if one proved mselves talented or powerful enough, y could escape planet and seek wider multiverse. She had tried to leave many times, even attempting to go to one of those so-called Outposts, where she was told about this opportunity. All she had to do was kill a single C-grade hunter...

"What... we... do?" treant asked after a while.

"No matter what, we need to be careful," lioness said with crossed arms.

"Do you two believe yourselves weaker or stronger than ones who have fallen so far?" Forest Fae asked m.

Both didn't answer, making her nod. "n we go our separate ways. Allow this hunter to give his best shot, and rar than allow this human to use us as a whetting stone to sharpen himself, let us reverse it and use him to temper ourselves."

Opportunity and danger nearly always went hand in hand, and while B-grades of Grand Lake were notoriously averse to conflict, y hadn't managed to evolve to B-grades in first place without a lot of ambition.

"If... he come... he dies," treant spoke before quickly wilting away and turning into dust as it was unsummoned.

"Whatever he does to attack does seem powerful..." lioness said with a smile. "But what does it matter if he can't hit?"

With those words, she also disappeared, showing off her incredible speed. Meanwhile, Forest Fae stayed floating re for a while before letting out a sigh as she summoned a portal of mystic light and stepped through it to return to her own domain.

y were all confident, yes... but so had five or B-grades been, yet only proof of m having ever existed was now a crater in ground.

--

Jake stood far up in air and watched as Forest Fae stepped into a portal after two or B-grades had already left. This was his first time getting a proper look at monster, and he had to admit she was definitely strongest of bunch. Definitely stronger than crocolisk and four or B-grades Jake had taken down after that, including B-grade that had been living on island below.

Sadly, Jake had yet to take down a B-grade in a single hit. resilience and wellspring of vital energy B-grades possessed had simply proved too much, even when Jake had faced weaker B-grades than Draconic Crocolisk – at least weaker when it came to durability. Overall, Draconic Crocolisk had likely been weakest B-grade at this Grand Lake, and definitely stupidest, as all ors had at least tried to evade or block his attacks. Purposefully trying to use your skull to dodge definitely wasn't strategy.

What wasn't sad was what Jake had gotten out of his hunt thus far. Seeing as how leveling only got harder furr Jake got, and relatively simple strategy and ease of se hunts, he had assumed that levels would be hard to come by at this point. However, those expectations had been entirely wrong, as so far, it had been one level per B-grade kill, including one he had just killed.

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 314 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

While every level wasn't a massive power increase, Jake did get stronger with every kill, making next one easier. He also made subtle improvements to his methodology, and while difference and, thus, increase in power from this had been insignificantly small compared to raw stat increases from every hunt, progress was progress.

Having killed five of nine B-grades who had interrupted his fight with Rainbowfear Sovereign, Jake had been a bit afraid he was running out of targets he wanted to hunt soon, but luckily, treant that had just shown up hadn't been part of initial group.

Jake had scouted out and was aware of this B-grade. It was an evolved stumpy tree on one of islands, one that looked as if it had grown in reverse, as only thing above ground was a thick tree stump, while a deep web of roots formed a canopy beneath.

Before, this tree and lion woman hadn't been targeted, but now that y had shown mselves to be working with Forest Fae, y had just added mselves to shit list. lion-like

woman's taunt that Jake likely couldn't hit her made her a tempting next target, and while he considered going for her next, he moved elsewhere to make himself more unpredictable. Also, those three were likely strongest B-grades Jake planned on facing in short term, excluding Sovereign.

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Plus, he also had to recover a bit before his next hunt. Loosing his most powerful arrow took quite a toll on his body, and he needed a good hour between every shot to ensure maximum power. Plus, Jake felt safer beginning every fight with full resources, as things were bound to go south at some point.

After recovering, Jake moved toward his next target. It took him a little while before a B-grade sufficiently exposed, and while he had considered going for lioness or big tree, he wanted to save those for later. three at crater had been most powerful B-grades at Grand Lake, after all.

Soon enough, he was at anor of B-grades who had interrupted his fight. He did all his usual preparations and observed creature for a while to get a bit more Hunting Momentum built up for his initial hit.

target this time around was an odd lizard and wolf hybrid, and creature had set up a defensive and detection aura all around its small grove in middle of island, likely believing that would be enough to detect Jake's attack before it was too late.

Spoiler: it wouldn't be.

Once everything was good to go, and B-grade was sufficiently isolated away from its peak C-grade minions that patrolled around barrier, Jake unleashed his arrow.

Anor pillar of pure arcane destruction descended upon an island on Grand Lake, no barrier or detection magic enough to help B-grade in slightest. Similar to or B-grades, this one was also confident in its ability to survive even if surprised, sinking quickly into ground as soon as it sensed danger, but at that moment, hunter's Primal Gaze immobilized its soul, freezing it completely.

barrier meant to protect wolf was shattered, and detecting lethal attack evidently hadn't worked in slightest as Eternal Hunger struck down and pierced wolf through its back, exploding once more upon impact as entire clearing was leveled.

C-grades tried to help, but Jake knew drill by now and didn't let up his assault, all boosting skills fully active right from get-go. Like a rain of death, arrows fell upon B-grade, and no matter how hard C-grades tried to save ir leader, conclusion was already written when Jake's open attack struck true.

Soon enough, B-grade's aura of life faded away, list of targets reduced by anor one.

You have slain [Alpha Terrascale Greatwolf – lvl 355] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 315 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 314 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

Jake smiled upon seeing notification, as he really felt his Path had begun to pick up speed after he switched to hunting B-grades consistently. With wolf dead, Jake was once more chased by a small army of C-grades, but through power of being pretty damn fast, Jake quickly got away and found a safe place to hide and recover before any or B-grades had a chance to try to interfere.

This recovery session ended up being a bit longer than usual, as Jake also stocked up on poisons and even decided to make a few that weren't Heartrot Poisons. Namely, he made a poison he believed would be more effective when used on tree monster, and while it was a lot worse than what he had for flesh and blood lifeforms, it would have to make do.

He also decided to make a few of his neurotoxins. More accurately, he brought back and used an old recipe he hadn't touched in quite a while. Back when Jake had visited his parents and Caleb's family before Prima Guardian event fully ended, Jake hadn't walked away entirely empty-handed. This chapter is updated by novel•fire•net

Umbral Lotus that was planted beneath Skyggen had truly bloomed over years and had been close to reaching mythical rarity, but even if it hadn't fully gotten re, Caleb had still gotten Jake a few Umbral Lotus Leaves in exchange for Jake helping train some of Court's assassins with aura resistance.

With those lotus leaves and or ingredients Jake had procured from Order and elsewhere, he had enough materials to make a poison he believed would be quite effective on tree monster.

[Soul-Petrifying Shadow Poison (Rare)] – A special poison created by combining several powerful ingredients with singular goal of creating a potent neurotoxin able to affect soul. This is a soul poison that will actively attempt to affect any Soulshape it touches due to its nature. Once infected, Soulshape will become more rigid, severely limiting all mobility. dark energy makes all movements of energy more difficult for any affected target. This poison is incredibly difficult to cleanse and has a slight ability to self-replicate if not actively challenged, and it will strengn itself more poison is injected.

It was very same poison Jake used to help Fallen King slay his fellow Unique Lifeform, Ashen Phantom Devourer. Back n, during invasion of Earth by Ell'Hakan, this poison

had proven very effective, and now Jake had made an even furr improved version with better materials.

Jake didn't hesitate to invest all materials he had available to make six batches, resulting in a total of twenty-two bottles of poison that he planned on unleashing upon tree when time was right. For now, he still had a few or B-grades to hunt down first.

Having taken a week to recover and craft his poisons had also allowed Grand Lake to calm down a bit more than before. Perhaps or B-grades assumed wolf had managed to harm Jake, or maybe y hoped he was gone, but eir way, B-grades still hadn't been smart enough to band toger and face him as a group, as that was quite frankly only way Jake could see things not working out for him.

Moving on to his next target, it was a large bull monster that looked a lot like a Minotaur in that it had hands and legs, but it used its hands to walk on all four a bit like a gorilla, and on its head, it had two massive curled horns that looked as if y were made of glass.

It was definitely impressive and strong-looking... but it turned out to be a creature primarily specialized in magic. Plus, it was one of rare solitary B-grades that didn't have an army, so even if Jake ended up taking longer than usual, result was still inevitable after creature's defensive illusory formation couldn't trick Jake's superior Perception stat, allowing him to hit right monster despite hundreds of illusions patrolling island.

You have slain [Grand Lightburn Mirrorhorn – lvl 357] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 316 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

Jake retreated with nothing more than a few burnt holes in his clos from laser beams B-grade had unleashed as a final desperate gambit to kill him. Needless to say, despite quick attacks, Jake hadn't been seriously injured and went to recover once more.

Anor half a day later, he was at his next target, striking before B-grades likely expected him to. His target this time was largest monster he had killed so far. It was a massive crab, its shell alone about fifteen meters across. Its island was a relatively unique one, in that it was made up entirely of sand, with most of island technically under water, but just surrounded by a sand bank, which was likely what separated it from Grand Lake itself.

How and why a crab like this had joined Forest Fae to mess with Jake was truly a mystery that Jake didn't care to solve. This was also anor mostly solitary monster, though re were or peak C-grade crabs also present on island. y clearly weren't re to help with anything, though, as y were all spread out and alone, most of m were buried beneath sand in shallow waters.

So was B-grade Jake was targeting, and while it would have definitely helped if crab had dug itself a few dozen or perhaps a hundred meters down, trying to hide just a measly two or three meters beneath surface was just a great way to limit its own mobility and allow Jake to see if he could break through a B-grade crab's shell. It also had a decent stealth skill capable of fooling Jake's eyes before he used his boosting skill, which was definitely impressive.

Its shell was also impressive... at least it was until it was cracked by an Eternal Hunger arrow. This fight also proved itself to be on longer side, with more difficulties than ors as this monster had some serious water magic it tried to fight back with, it still ended predictably, as after nearly ten minutes of constant bombardment of arrows, B-grade fell lifelessly on ground, leaving nothing but a shell filled with rotting flesh within.

You have slain [Aquaclaw King Crab – lvl 358] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 317 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 315 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

With this one down, Jake only had three left on his current list of targets. A lion monster, a treant, and most powerful B-grade at this Grand Lake, Forest Fae. However, seeing as he kept getting levels with every kill, Jake began considering...

Should I just do a clean sweep of all B-grades?

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

- Chapter 1125: Emeraldclaw Prideleader

Chapter 1125: Emeraldclaw Prideleader

Well... it turns out B-grade lioness hadn't been entirely wrong when she postured and claimed Jake wouldn't even be able to hit her. He had chosen her as his next target, and after finding her island, he found it entire center of place, mostly deserted with nothing re but a large mound of rocks with lioness sitting on top of it, seemingly waiting for Jake's arrival.

Brief scouting confirmed all C-grades were towards outer edges of island, making intent of this B-grade clear. She openly challenged Jake to fight her, full of confidence despite what had happened to all ors.

Jake had gladly accepted this invitation and prepared his usual opening salvo. He knew this B-grade was stronger than ones he had killed prior, so he did have some expectations of his first shot, not ending things instantly. n again, she was clearly an Agility-focused beast, so her durability likely wasn't that good.

Eir way, with everything ready, Jake unleashed his Eternal Hunger arrow. As always, B-grade failed to see through Jake's stealth before it was too late, and it was only when arrow was imminently about to strike that her danger sense warned her of incoming attack.

As expected, she instantly tried to move to side, but Jake was ready. Focusing his will, arrow began to veer a bit toward where she dodged, adapting on fly as Jake also used Primal Gaze on lioness, making her freeze up.

arrow closed in, but just when it looked like B-grade's life would end with a single arrow like so many ors, lioness showed she did indeed have reason for her confidence. Despite being affected by Primal Gaze, energy welled up from within her as green lightning coursed through her body and enveloped her entire form.

With speed equivalent or even surpassing Sovereign, lioness tried dodging to side, but in end, Jake's Eternal Hunger Protean Arrow, in combination with Primal Gaze, wasn't easily escaped.

Despite not getting struck in a lethal place, lioness was still forced to sacrifice an arm as she swiped out toward arrow in very final moment before it struck, making it miss her chest and head in trade for shearing off her entire arm at shoulder.

arm was sent flying into air, where it was rapidly destroyed by destructive arcane energies mixed with curse energy, and Jake was already prepared to follow up as a barrage of arrows rained down upon island.

However, lioness was quick and dodged m all despite her missing arm, seemingly able to easily read trajectory of every shot, even if y curved and came from odd angles. lightning still lingered on her fur, but sudden burst of speed and ability to free herself from Primal Gaze's effect had definitely been from a skill similar to Jake's own Moment of .

Despite missing arm, lioness shot into air, briefly locking eyes with Jake.

"Finally, you've come!" she yelled, a maniacal grin on her face as green lightning enveloping her body intensified.

She didn't even seem bored about missing arm as her other hand had morphed into a clawed hand, bad in lightning. During her ascent, Jake didn't let up as he bombarded her with arrows, and while she blocked, dodged, or swept away most of m, she ended up with two more stable arrows sticking out of her body before she was upon him.

Seeing her get this close, Jake quickly recalled Eternal Hunger from below and summoned large arrow back in his hand right before she was upon him, having crossed more than ten kilometers between m in mere seconds.

Wielding Eternal Hunger like a spear, Jake pierced forward and clashed with claws of lioness. An explosion of arcane energy and green lightning rocked sky and separated two for a brief moment, just long enough for Jake to change his grip on spear as he unceremoniously broke off its tip.

When he did so, entire shaft portion of spear began turning into dark smoke as spear tip was broken off in such a fashion that Jake could hold it like a katar – albeit not very well. He also took out his other katar as he began slowly morphing Eternal Hunger back into its proper shape to fight with it better.

He had just done this when lioness shot towards him, and he noticed her arm was already healing, green lightning seemingly of life affinity. Which, in retrospect, made sense considering lioness' race's name.

[Fulminated Emeraldclaw Prideleader – lvl ???]

Emeralds were often gemstones infused with powerful life affinity magic, and after several clashes with claws of lioness, name Emeraldclaw was indeed an apt description.

“So you have more than just one trick, huh?” lioness asked as she pushed Jake back with her rapid assault. It was clear she had held nothing back eir, but had jumped straight to using her boosting skill at full power right from beginning.

Jake blocked repeatedly as he didn't even bother answering. Instead, he read attack pattern of lioness, who was clearly just buying time for her second arm to fully regenerate. About half a minute went by as two of m clashed across open skies above island, quickly making its way downwards to jungle below.

At this point, arm of lioness had nearly fully regenerated, and with a final burst of lightning, entire arm flashed green as Jake now faced two clawed hands enveloped in green lightning that sent almost poison-like harmful life energy into his body with every clash, even if Jake wasn't hit directly.

“You're pretty good at dodging... but you missed your chance to exploit that opening attack of yours,” lioness smiled as she looked at her healed hand before looking at Jake again with her cat-like eyes. “Regularly, when I encounter creatures like you, I

would usually consider offering a chance to surrender and become part of my pride... perhaps even my mate... but rewards I shall reap from killing you are just way too tempting."

Jake remained quiet as lioness flashed a toothy grin before she shot towards Jake again, her eyes burning with desire to rip him apart. Eternal Hunger had also finished morphing into its usual shape by now, and as she closed in, Jake let out a deep breath as he leaned forward to meet B-grade's assault.

Katars met claws as Jake kept moving down while blocking and dodging, with two of m soon on ground. lioness tried to use this to her advantage, as Jake could no longer dodge downwards as she raised an arm, forming a massive claw of lightning.

With a quick One Step, Jake teleported away right before she brought down her attack, which even summoned a green lightning strike from a cloudless sky, making ground erupt with soil and stone from impact. Discover more novels at *novel·fire·net*

A shockwave washed over Jake as he was already in a defensive stance, his feet now solidly on ground. As expected, lioness shot out of still-falling debris a blink of an eye later with bestial aggression.

She clawed, kicked, and released blasts of lightning in rapid succession, pushing Jake furr and furr back as she attempted to overwhelm him with sheer speed. Compared to Sovereign, her overall movement seemed slightly faster, but Sovereign had higher explosive speed because of his jumps. Attack speed-wise, rapid swipes from lioness surpassed any foe Jake had faced so far, as he couldn't miss a single beat, or he would be in serious trouble. Not too much trouble, though, as when it came to actual power behind blows, Sovereign was far superior.

Stolen story; please report.

Rainbowfear was also superior in or areas, such as experience and cunning.

After two had clashed more than a hundred times in just a few seconds, Jake finally spoke up. "You're fast. If you ran, it would be hard to catch you, and you could team up with or B-grades."

Jake didn't actually want her to run, but after fighting this long, he was beginning to have a ory. This lioness had not been part of group that originally spied on Jake, so she likely didn't know that much about him or details of his fight with Sovereign. That meant her information likely came from Forest Fae... and Jake was doubting if she had been a reliable source of information. This doubt was furr reinforced with her next sentence.

"Run? Me? Like you ran from Rainbowfear Sovereign?" she scoffed, briefly stopping her attacks as she moved back. "I already know what happened. You killed Simivita

Warlord primarily with that powerful opening attack of yours, before n proceeding to fight Rainbowfear Sovereign and getting your ass handed to you, forcing you to flee with your tail between your legs.”

Okay, Jake had kind of expected that he would need to prod and probe until lioness revealed what she believed to be truth, but here she was just spilling everything without a second thought. Not that Jake complained, as it made things a lot easier.

“Seems like Forest Fae lied to you,” Jake shrugged. “Which does make me wonder why. Perhaps she wants to get rid of her competition among B-grades. Maybe she even views you as a threat.”

“Nice try,” lioness said, shaking her head as she slightly lowered her posture, ready to pounce. “But I’m not gonna let myself be affected by words of a desperate hunter who knows he’s met his match and is trying to save his own hide. Rar than me escaping, you should consider fleeing yourself... except you already used your treasure, so I guess you’re stuck here with me.”

Jake opened and closed his mouth a few times, genuinely confused about what hell she was on about. After a moment, he just sighed and shook his head, deciding not to waste his time on this conversation any more. He had already confirmed his ory, and with that confirmation, he was quite certain no help would arrive, which meant he could take his time with this fight.

After having all his hunts end with nothing more than Jake bombarding his opponent from a dozen kilometers up in sky... Jake welcomed it as lioness pounced at him again.

While Jake loved archery, a good melee was also healthy once in a while, and this lioness was a perfect opponent. She was faster than Jake, but not too fast, and her raw power was manageable, allowing Jake to engage her in a proper bout as he stopped merely blocking and dodging, but also went on offensive.

Right as a claw descended upon Jake, he narrowly dodged it and stabbed lioness in side of her exposed arm with a quick jab. She quickly retracted her arm and jumped back as she spun and kicked Jake, but he easily ducked under it before stomping, releasing a wave of destructive arcane energy.

With same stomp, Jake also shot forward as he unleashed his own swift barrage of stabs and cuts, forcing lioness on defensive as Jake saw her eyes open wide in surprise at his actions. Her attempts to avoid taking any damage were fruitless, as Jake cut her and left minor puncture wounds over twenty times in less than half a minute, turning her look of surprise into one of confusion and slight fright.

Realizing Jake had gotten serious, she didn’t even try to make more quippy comments but also upped her own level as lightning aura enveloping her body intensified as she

sped up slightly. Besides this, her entire forearms also began to change into a green color before turning partly crystalline. That name Emeraldclaw really wasn't for nothing, and both her offensive and defensive prowess had just gone up a level.

Jake's only response to this was a sense of relief as her slight power-up meant she could better fight back. As she pounced on him again, Jake was ready as he blocked and tried to counter, but an emerald forearm blocked his blow, deflecting Eternal Hunger completely and even releasing a burst of green lightning that made Jake retreat slightly.

lioness gave chase, but Jake had expected her to as he abruptly stopped his retreat and instead shot forward, taking B-grade by surprise as he managed to cut her in shoulder before she could muster a proper response. She attempted to counter, but Jake had already narrowly dodged out of her attack range, ready to move in and strike again.

Still confident in herself, lioness kept up her attack as Jake continued to meet her head-on. surrounding jungle was rapidly torn apart as y regularly switched offensive and defensive roles; lioness even used a few more skills to gain an advantage, including a green lightning vault that made her temporarily intangible.

Jake also pulled out more skills, including a use of Eternal Shadow that netted him a fist-sized hole in his opponent's stomach, which was also moment that marked turning point of a fight that had quickly been going downhill for lioness.

gap in experience between Jake and lioness had only become more and more stark longer ir battle went on. Jake had slowly adapted and learned how B-grade fought, her habits, her flaws, everything that he could use to exploit her attack patterns to land hits himself.

Contrarily, lioness had adapted little. Jake guessed she had gotten to her station primarily because of her far superior speed and innate power, allowing her to rip apart most opponents quickly before fight even got going.

ir fight had taken roughly twenty minutes, resulting in continent-sized island having vast swaths of it destroyed or at least marked by ir battle, especially in later parts when lioness began losing her cool and stopped focusing as much, resulting in her energies rampaging, balance between intensity and scale broken.

This was anor sign of someone who lacked experience. Usually, it was smartest to limit scope in order to increase intensity of an attack. With same arrow, Jake could choose to blow up a town or just a small house, but town-wide explosion would be so weak that it wouldn't hurt someone close to his own power level at all. Meanwhile, if he made explosion smaller and more intense, he could deal significant damage.

What he saw from lioness in her last moments was a lack of focus caused by her desperation, resulting in her attacks looking far more impressive while, in reality, being far weaker. She unleashed skill after skill, summoning mountain-sized claws to try to somehow hit Jake, even going as far as to conjure bolts of green lightning to rain down upon jungle, destroying terrain, but doing little more.

In front of attacks like se, Jake didn't even have to dodge, as he could just charge straight through summoned claw and stab B-grade in stomach. After that stab, lioness stumbled back, lightning aura surrounding her body flickering as she stumbled and fell backwards to ground.

With lightning fading, her bloodied and rotting body was clear to all. She had turned out to have far superior Vitality than Jake had expected, but in end, it didn't matter if she couldn't land any proper hits on Jake.

"Fuck..." she muttered. "That Fae bitch lied, didn't she? You're... definitely stronger than that damn bird."

"She definitely deceived you," Jake said in an indifferent tone. As for part about Sovereign, Jake wasn't sure. His increase in power from all se levels wasn't insignificant, and he had fought Sovereign while already tired first time around. If y had a rematch here and now, he was definitely confident.

"Should have never trusted her... oh well," lioness said, shaking her head as she looked up at Jake. "At least do me a favor and also kill her, alright?"

"Already planned on it," Jake nodded.

"Great..." lioness also nodded, her breathing ragged as she seemed to stare into space for a while before muttering to herself. "A pretty good death, all things considered..."

With those words, her head fell limply down as a notification appeared.

****You have slain [Fulminated Emeraldclaw Prideleader – lvl 354] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level****

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 318 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

Looking at level lioness had been, Jake was now more sure than ever that Fae had viewed lioness as a threat. She had been lower level than most of or B-grades Jake had killed, yet she had been strongest so far by a fair margin.

Jake had just been a terrible matchup for her. He was fast enough to dodge her claws, strong enough to parry, and far more skilled than her in every aspect of combat. With

proper training, which would definitely have included a few skill upgrades, she could have been a legitimate threat.

However, as things were, her Path had ended this day, and Jake no longer planned on dwelling on things, as only thing he would do for her was to at least honor her wish of taking out Forest Fae...

After putting on his best lumberjack act and doing a bit of logging, that is.

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Chapter 1126: Defensive Measures Of Tree Monsters & How To Counter m

Hiding majority of its body beneath ground was honestly a good way for tree monsters to avoid getting attacked. Not best way, but beings like that really needed anything y could get ir branches on to deal with opponents able to inflict serious damage at long range.

It was definitely biggest weakness of tree monsters. y tended to have far higher Vitality and Toughness as well as resource pools that not even Jake could compete with. Several incredibly powerful passive skills were also to be expected, though it all came at severe cost of being unable to move. Well, move under regular circumstances.

It wasn't odd for tree monsters to have some limited mobility options, especially upon reaching B-grade. More than mobility, Jake would call it relocation tools, though. Ways to eir uproot mselves alongside a large piece of land, or perhaps ability to teleport elsewhere.

y all had in common that y weren't applicable to combat and required a lot of preparation, which meant that tree needed to be able to handle opponents despite being unable to move.

re were many ways to do this, with four methods being prevalent. first one was to never get found in first place. Illusory fog, formations, stealth... re were a lot of ways for a tree to hide itself, but if it were found, it needed one of three or methods.

second method was also straightforward: be impenetrable. Be so tough and have so many magical barriers defending yourself that your opponent simply couldn't break through and actually deal any damage. Being immobile did mean tree had plenty of

time to make preparations, making vast majority of m domain fighters, not unlike Miranda and all her witch-abilities.

Sometimes, opponent had too powerful offenses, though, so some form of offense was needed, which was naturally third method. Magic in all forms one could imagine naturally came in here as tree could learn whatever ranged spells it wanted to try to shoot down attacker with what was effectively anti-air magic cannons. se anti-ranged fighter tools were also regularly deployed beforehand, making taking down a powerful tree monster a lot like assaulting a well-defended castle.

However, even most well-defended castle could find itself in a situation where it had to move out and address opponents at times, which was where fourth and final method could be found: summons. Trees could inherently grow and even create offshoots of mselves, making many develop skills to create clones or treant soldiers, something Jake had seen frequently when fighting tree monsters before.

Jake had considered what kind of defensive means B-grade tree would have, and with it being a B-grade and all, it honestly shouldn't have come as a surprise that answer was all of m.

entire island tree lived on was covered by a fog that sought to obscure tree from view, making it difficult to pinpoint where actual monster was. Alongside this, island was covered in hundreds of "fake" tree stumps of reverse-growing tree, all of m hidden among all or vegetation of dense jungle.

se many fake trees weren't just re to fool an attacker, though. All of m also served as focal points for powerful formations that tree had likely spent decades, if not centuries, placing down as it grew and took over entire island, where it was now only life that remained.

Both defensive and offensive formations could be seen, and Jake also spotted signs of several hidden treant monsters spread around island, all giving off an aura similar to tree, which was why he didn't consider re to be any life outside of B-grade. se treants were just soldiers or drones without any real soul or mind of ir own.

Now, Jake could understand why a B-grade like this would have confidence in mself. It was an impressive setup that would scare away many hopeful hunters from even attempting to attack, and if y did attack, chances were y wouldn't get much out of it. Trees were also known to have an insane regeneration rate of energy as y could absorb mana directly from ground, and ir ability to get it from environment surpassed something like a human's several times over.

In many instances, tree could regenerate faster than someone could deal meaningful damage, turning it into a waste of time for everyone involved. And as Jake looked down at large island, he guessed this was also conclusion most talented C-grade hunters from Panon of Life would make.

Artemis had shared that Panon of Life tended to produce fighters with relatively lower than average offensive prowess due to its focus on life magic. This meant that hunters who had attacked the tree in the past likely hadn't been best at damage dealing, and any life-affinity offensive magic they did use, the tree would be very resistant to. Being a tree and all.

All of these things definitely made the tree monster Jake was about to face incredibly impressive, but in truth, this wouldn't be a fair fight at all. When it came to hiding, Jake had taken just a few minutes to find the main body of B-grade, fog covering the island having no effect in front of his supreme Perception stat, which even allowed him to identify the tree despite it having a skill to avoid that happening.

[Grand Adansonia Lifeshaper – lvl ???]

Having located his opponent just meant Jake had to deal with all or defensive means... except not really. Jake had no intentions of making this a normal fight in any way. He had confidence in winning by just setting up shop far up in the sky while raining down arrows, but that would take a long time. Long enough for two B-grades to perhaps get involved, including Forest Fae... especially since Jake had no idea where she was.

After killing the lioness, he had flown by just to check her island and failed to spot her despite scanning the place with Pulse, meaning she had to be elsewhere. Her showing up after Jake had already burned through a lot of his resources could easily turn an otherwise safe situation hairy.

That's why Jake had decided to handle this B-grade tree not solely as a hunter but also as an alchemist. That's why Jake had made so much neurotoxin – or soul poison, as it was also often referred to as. Nearly all advantages of the tree came down to its superior resource pools and ability to rely on the environment, so what would happen if Jake inhibited B-grade's ability to use its own energy while also turning the environment that supported it toxic?

Well, they were both about to find out.

Floating close to the upper edges of the atmosphere, directly above the island, Jake stood surrounded by nearly a thousand larger-than-normal bolts of arcane mana, all hanging suspended in the thin air. Inside each of these bolts was a reddish black liquid that had come straight from Jake's veins as he'd bled out more blood for this attack than an average donor could give in their entire lifetime.... ten times over. At least.

If you discover this narrative on Amazon, be aware that it has been stolen. Please report violation.

Meanwhile, Jake also prepared his usual Eternal Hunger Protean Arrow, alongside roughly five hundred arrows coated in his Soul-Petrifying Shadow Poison. He stored all these poisoned arrows inside his quiver, ready to be unleashed after his initial strike.

In all fights prior, Jake had expected a lot from his initial arrow, but this time around, all Jake aimed to do was destroy defensive barriers shielding island. Using his Protean Arrow as a wall-breaker did feel a bit odd, but Jake felt confident this was best approach, and soon enough, all his preparations were complete.

Jake did a final Pulse and a scouring of his surroundings to see if Forest Fae or any or B-grades were nearby before he decided it was go-time. Nocking his Eternal Hunger Protean Arrow, Jake took aim for unassuming tree stump with just a few willow branches sticking out of it. It didn't look like a B-grade, nor did it give off aura of one currently, but Jake knew this was true body of tree.

After fully channeling his arrow, he let go as he let it descend. Right as he loosed arrow, he also commanded all bolts to fall before instantly taking out a poison arrow and shooting that, too.

In many ways, this opening salvo reminded Jake of Ashen Phantom Devourer. Back n, he had also created a huge cluster bomb of arrows and even shot arrows down with varying power to ensure y would all arrive at same time. Back n, Jake had done this simply by not pulling string as hard to make first arrows descend more slowly, but this time, Jake had a new trick up his sleeve.

Before his Protean Arrow even arrived, Jake had shot out thirty poisoned arrows, all falling with varying speed as concept of time seemed to affect each one differently. only thing y all had in common was that all of m would arrive at roughly same time, give or take less than half a second, as even if Jake was pretty damn good at timing things, he had limits.

Far below, tree didn't notice attack before it struck barrier, likely also due to a lack of danger sense that most animals possessed. Jake watched as his arrow pierced through a thick barrier of dense energy, shattering it completely and sending out a shockwave of force that destroyed entire barrier covering island like it had been a fragile bubble of glass.

arrow continued down into trunk of B-grade, penetrating deeply into wood. It pierced over nine meters into tree that stood only ten meters above ground, and just as B-grade likely thought Protean Arrow was done doing its thing, Jake activated part two of attack.

A wave of destructive arcane mana erupted from Protean Arrow, destroying tree from within and sending mana down into root network to ravage re, but perhaps most importantly, Eternal Hunger was freed from its Protean Arrow shell.

It wasn't hard to guess what would happen when a mythical cursed artifact of hunger came into direct physical contact with a tree brimming with powerful life energy. weapon instantly started going on offensive without Jake even having to do anything,

serving as a wonderful distraction as roots erupted from ground and sought to extract Eternal Hunger before it could do too much damage.

This distraction meant B-grade didn't properly respond when rain of arcane bolts fell upon island. With barrier destroyed, there was nothing stopping m from falling down like small meteors of arcane mana.

Only a few dozen were destroyed before reaching ground, but that didn't even matter. Jake had never intended for se bolts to explode, as instead, y penetrated into soil, after which bottom section quickly self-destructed, depositing toxic blood into ground below.

A moment later, Jake's first wave of arrows also arrived. se had been aimed not at main tree trunk of B-grade, but at all "fake" trunks it had spread throughout island. se trunks were connected to real one, and Jake hoped to either sever this connection or weaken it severely with a good dose of soul poison.

arrows all struck true as y penetrated into twenty-eight trunks with utmost precision and timing. Jake had never stopped shooting arrows, and more were on their way as tree finally began responding properly.

A lot had happened from Jake's perspective, but in truth, only a few seconds had passed since first arrow landed, and it wasn't surprising at all that tree had needed a while to get its bearings and formulate a response.

All across island, magic lit up as runes covering "fake" trunks gave off powerful mana. Vines and other plants erupted from ground to block incoming attacks, with some of m moving to pull out arcane bolts stuck in ground, likely believing y were source of ground rapidly turning toxic, and not toxic payload y had come with.

Toward center, around true body of B-grade, two dozen treants rose from ground, all giving off respectable auras toward peak of C-grade. Half of m shot into sky from where Jake was shooting, while other half stayed and tried to help address damage Jake had already done.

approaching treants weren't even a concern to Jake, as it would take m too long to reach Jake for him to care. All he had to do was shoot around m as he continued bombarding island below with shadow poison arrow after shadow poison arrow.

Below, B-grade kept trying to respond as best it could, but it was dealing with a lot of things at once. soil was poisoned and began seeping into its roots, its trunks were getting struck by arrows, sending an insidious poison into tree's system, limiting its ability to mobilize energy, while a cursed spear had thoroughly embedded itself within main trunk.

Meanwhile, Jake didn't give tree any chance to rest as arrows were constantly in air, curving and flying at different speeds, hitting tree again and again, no matter how much it tried to defend itself.

When he began to run low on shadow poison arrows, Jake even began to use Rain of Arrows liberally, splitting each arrow into a few dozen to blanket island in arcane explosions. Shooting repeatedly, Jake soon chugged a mana potion, making sure he could keep going without slowing down in slightest.

Jake's entire upper body soon started to hurt as he had been shooting for several minutes straight with no breaks, releasing roughly ten arrows a second. While Jake didn't count, a conservative estimate of how many arrows had been on island exceeded three thousand... not counting Rain of Arrows. Factoring that in, true number reached far into tens of thousands, if not already above a hundred thousand. latest_episodes are on_novel~fire~net

This was also a great time for another lesson on how to deal with stationary monsters like trees. These kinds of monsters tended to fear alchemists or those who could use powerful toxins or curses that affected a large area, as it could potentially destroy its entire domains, thus weakening it. However, there was something one could do that was perhaps even more effective than corrupting domain of a stationary monster:

Leveling it entirely.

Below, island was no longer filled with a jungle, but had become a wasteland of pure destruction. Destructive arcane energy had blown up and disintegrated so much soil its entire root network of tree was exposed, and as Jake continued to bombard island, it was questionable if it would even qualify as an island anymore when Jake was done as average elevation had definitely been lowered by several meters already.

B-grade tree monster was durable. Strong. However, it was limited, and if Lioness could say she had met a terrible opponent in Jake, this tree had right to say it had just encountered its natural predator: a ranged fighter with powerful toxins, able to nullify and counter anything tree could do.

Jake's shadow poison, having done wonders in limiting tree's energy movements, prevented it from properly defending itself against Jake's continued bombardment. Healing itself using its innate talents to absorb nutrients from ground resulted in just poisoning itself even more, and while B-grade did manage to dislodge Eternal Hunger from within its trunk, by time it did, damage was already done.

In many ways, this had never been a question of if Jake could kill tree... just how long it would take.

answer to which ended up being fourteen minutes and thirty-two seconds.

You have slain [Grand Adansonian Lifeshaper – lvl 355] - Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

Jake finally stopped shooting and took a moment after notification appeared, before he realized he had indeed only gotten one. That is to say, no level-up from this kill, which was a bit disappointing.

A lot of arrows were also still mid-air and continued to fall upon island, as Jake allowed himself to relax for a moment. He looked down and saw island pretty much entirely destroyed by his attack, and Jake could sigh as he turned his head towards island Forest Fae usually occupied.

And there was one.

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Chapter 1127: Rain & Smoke

Elsewhere in domain belonging to Panon of Life, a Hunting Ground not dissimilar to one Jake was at also had some notable visitors. granddaughter of Nature's Attendant had come, and contrary to Jake, she had no chance of staying anonymous, as she was quite known throughout Panon of Life.

Even if she wasn't, her aura made it clear she belonged to a powerful Lineage, her dryad race also far from an ordinary one. What was unusual was her travel companion, though, as she was visiting Hunting Ground with an old-looking human man. At least people found it odd, until y realized he had been her party member in Nevermore and was a major contributor to how she had performed so well in World Wonder, bringing a lot of pride and prestige to Panon of Life.

se two had also entered Hunting Ground with goal of gaining a few levels, and while y battled toger in beginning, both of m had intentions of improving as individual fighters. Especially Sword Saint had entered Hunting Ground with a lofty goal... one he was currently in midst of accomplishing.

Dina was watching from afar as human swordsman fought far larger beast in a battle that had now been going on for over two full hours. From atop mountain, surrounded by barren land, she watched deep valley below, as well as several additional valleys that had been formed throughout fight as two fought under heavy rainfall.

Sword Saint was naturally human swordsman, while beast was an entity Dina would never dare face. It was a massive monster, over five kilometers in length, and three kilometers in height as it walked on its four pillar-like legs. Every time it moved, earth shook, and lava spewed from ground.

It was a variant of tortoise, its shell made of obsidian and rock, with several small volcanoes springing from its back, releasing fumes and lava as huge creature exhausted heat. Its head was also covered in same obsidian, making it an incredibly durable monster.

Perhaps more important than any of this... it was B-grade.

[Obsidian Magmashell Tortoise – lvl ???]

A relatively newly evolved B-grade, but B-grade nevertheless. In front of such a colossal creature, Sword Saint looked like an insect, but that had actually been partly on purpose.

Beating a B-grade in a straight-up fight wasn't something feasible for any but strongest of C-grades. Especially not a C-grade like Sword Saint, who wasn't even that close to peak C-grade yet. That's why he had chosen an opponent he was especially suited to face.

Due to its massive frame, tortoise had a difficult time moving quickly enough to respond, while Sword Saint could make use of his smaller frame to move quickly around and take advantage of slow movements of tortoise.

Usually, a Magmashell Tortoise wouldn't need to physically strike an opponent. reason why Dina stood on top of mountain was to avoid massive cloud of toxic smoke that B-grade released, while also staying out of way of extreme heat it continued to let out. It also used some earth magic, but it was relatively limited, and tortoise was far from skilled enough to land any meaningful hits with its magic.

This type of monster tended to win by slowly killing whatever dared to attack it, while not being able to lose. shell was borderline impenetrable and filled with lava and dense, toxic smoke, while rest of its body was covered with obsidian skin. In case of emergencies, beast could even retreat fully into its shell, sealing off entrances and making it look like just a giant mountain of molten obsidian.

To someone like Dina, this was a foe she would never even dare face. It would burn her attacks to a crisp before she had a chance to land any of m, and her offensive prowess simply wasn't good enough to do any meaningful damage to such a massive creature. She could fight it for a long time, but at one point or another, she would lose.

Sword Saint was exact opposite. If Obsidian Magmashell Tortoise could be called a direct counter to Dina, Sword Saint could be called one to B-grade.

Constant rainfall suppressed smoke and heat from monster, draining its resources and weakening it. steam filling air as water evaporated also raised humidity to extreme levels, helping human swordsman manipulate water all around him to empower his own attacks, all while defending himself as he kept cool through constantly keeping a couple of thin layers of water covering his entire body.

Meanwhile, he once more proved that while ir Nevermore party had lacked a bit when it came to utility and a proper bulky front-liner, y had more than made up for it through sheer offensive prowess.

Dina had watched over last two hours as Sword Saint had slowly whittled down massive B-grade and what could truly be called death by a million cuts. He had aimed for its legs and head primarily, but also shown himself capable of penetrating shell if he really needed to, as in his words:

“Given time, nothing can withstand erosion.”

In or words, he had kept attacking same spots repeatedly with piercing beams of water, slowly weakening area before he broke through, dealing significant damage to massive tortoise.

fight seemed like it had been carefully controlled and planned out by Sword Saint, but Dina knew that slightest slip-up over last two hours could have resulted in him getting into serious mortal danger. Just one mansion-sized pillar of rock hitting him would be disastrous and more likely than not force swordsman to retreat.

In addition to this, he had to be careful when it came to going overboard. Sword Saint had a very gentle boosting skill, but he couldn't push it all way from beginning, and had to pace himself, as y both knew it would be a long battle. Ultimately, it would all come down to if Sword Saint could continue to not make a single mistake while dealing enough damage for his own resources to outlast B-grade. A tall order, but Dina had full belief in Sword Saint as she watched silently at what was bound to be final moments of fight.

Sword Saint rapidly moved around right front leg of tortoise, cutting as he circled around it, leaving what from afar looked only like a small scratch, but was in fact a deep laceration as blade was constantly being extended by an extra edge of water.

A loud roar made ground erupt, sending spouts of lava flying everywhere, but swordsman dodged it all as he moved for head of tortoise, landing several more cuts before he had to retreat again as B-grade did a consistently good job at protecting its head.

Flying above creature, Sword Saint dodged several blows as he sent piercing erosion stabs into existing gaps in tortoise's shell, making it roar once more and try to stop him as massive clouds of poison smoke was exhausted, but swordsman quickly sought

downwards as he teleported through rain to appear off to side and right above water-filled ground.

Dina saw as man pushed himself and switched his stance. With a slow movement, he raised his blade, and in concert, rain stopped falling and water on ground started to rise in shape of droplets. n, he moved quickly, tens of millions of droplets shooting upwards into underside of B-grade and toward sky, and for a moment, Dina saw an incredible sight.

entire tortoise, larger than many mountains, was lifted from ground by countless droplets of water that struck its underside. Individually, se small, needle-like attacks did nothing, but combined, ir impact was definitely noticeable.

This book's true home is on anor platform. Check it out re for real experience.

What's more, attack was far from over.

All droplets of water that had shot upwards began garing in sky as Sword Saint stood with his sword raised. A whirlpool of water formed before turning into shape of a rain dragon. With tortoise still in mid-air, Sword Saint brought down his blade, making dragon descend upon B-grade.

Dina was forced to fly into air as dragon slammed tortoise down hard enough to form a massive crater, making fissures all around, one of which spread to Dina's mountain, breaking off its side.

Not wanting to see itself defeated, tortoise rose again and roared, every single volcano on its back erupting, and crater around it turning into one massive volcano as entire area was bad in lava and ash. It was a colossal release of energy... and a massive mistake Sword Saint could take advantage of.

With its head raised as it roared, turtle had exposed its neck entirely, and Sword Saint would not miss this opportunity. Throughout fight, obsidian skin covering turtle's neck had slowly been weakened and cut off, all to prepare for this moment as swordsman teleported and appeared just below turtle, already in a stance ready to draw his blade.

B-grade realized its mistake too late, as an attack even more powerful than what it had just endured was unleashed.

“Glimpse of Spring: Stormcut.”

A crescent wave of transcendent destruction cut into neck of colossal tortoise, creating a waterfall of burning blood as blade extended and cut halfway through entire neck of beast. This burning blood fell down towards Sword Saint, but he did not show any fear as he finally showed something Dina had been waiting to see:

His final C-grade class skill. swordsman had reached level 320 in his class shortly before this, and now Dina could finally see it in action for first time.

Sword Saint remained standing where he was for a moment before his body seemed to shift. Two versions of him formed, a real one and a gray, transparent version of himself that reversed through time. Nothing about this version seemed real except for sword it held in its hand.

This entire process was nearly instant as gray clone took same stance Sword Saint had been in a moment prior, and right as real man retreated away, clone was ready to draw its blade as Dina saw Sword Saint silently mouth two words.

Echoing Blade.

clone drew its blade as two words echoed out of its mouth, sounding identical to what Dina had heard only a few moments prior.

“Glimpse of Spring: Stormcut.”

A second attack, equally as powerful as first one, cut upwards into existing wound of Obsidian Magmashell Tortoise, and this time around, it went all way through as mighty B-grade was decapitated entirely.

massive head fell to ground, and a moment later, rest of beast’s body collapsed, losing its head too much for such a large creature to endure.

With B-grade dead, Dina no longer held back as she hurried over to where Sword Saint stood in front of large, fallen head of tortoise. Landing on ground not far away, she still felt lingering powerful aura of slain B-grade as pride in Sword Saint’s achievement filled her heart.

To kill a B-grade while still at his level was... amazing.

“You did it,” Dina said in an excited voice, as she couldn’t suppress her own smile.

“I did,” Sword Saint said, still standing re stoically. Seeing him this up close, Dina saw his body was covered in burns and bruises, all his clos burnt away, except his pants.

“We should move before or creatures come to explore what has happened after fighting died down,” Dina said, being practical despite this being a moment where y should revel in victory.

“I concur,” Sword Saint wisely agreed as he turned his head toward her with stiff movements. “That being case, would you be a dear and do me a favor?”

“Of course, what is it?” Dina asked, tilting her head.

“Could you carry me? Because I believe I’m about to faint from exhaustion.”

He had barely gotten words out as Sword Saint’s right leg gave out, and Dina hurriedly waved her hand as a few vines sprang from ash and water-covered ground to catch him, Sword Saint already out cold before he got caught. READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT **novel★fire★net**

I wonder if Jake has also killed a B-grade yet... knowing him, he probably has, Dina thought as she summoned a strapping board of wood and vines to wrap Sword Saint in before taking off.

Jake’s Path was no doubt a powerful one. It allowed him to slay foes far more powerful than himself, his skills closing gap significantly. Most powerful was, of course, his opening attack that used majority of his hunter skills in concert to unleash one devastating strike that had proven itself capable of nearly slaying weaker B-grades in one blow.

However, Jake had discovered one major weakness, one that, granted, was a weakness for all but a few Paths in multiverse:

Not being able to find his target.

Forest Fae had entirely disappeared from Grand Lake as far as Jake could tell. He had spent a fair deal of time scouring islands, and he had spent quite a while on Forest Fae’s island, putting some of his tracking skills to use to see if he could locate where she was off to.

Sadly for Jake, Forest Fae had likely expected Jake or some or hunter on her trail to have tracking skills, and had used several methods to hide her tracks. All Jake could tell was that she had been gone since around time Jake killed B-grade lioness, perhaps having expected herself to be next.

On island of Forest Fae, Jake discovered plenty of preparations to fight, though. B-grade seemed to be quite similar to a witch in that she’d set up a plethora of formations and had created totems to be spread throughout island, likely serving as catalysts for some kind of magic.

Yet all of se had been entirely abandoned. Sure, her domain wasn’t as heavily fortified as tree’s, but it was definitely enough to put up a fight of some kind.

What Jake did not find on island was anything of particular value. or B-grades tended to have natural treasures y at least used for ir own growth, but Forest Fae had left nothing behind, which told Jake she had definitely left voluntarily.

After spending around five full days searching, Jake concluded she had eir relocated or gone into hiding. Likely a mixture of two, as Jake should have been able to catch her if

she was just hiding, his Pulse was quite an overpowered tool when it came to finding someone. That's also why he was confident she was no longer at Grand Lake at all.

He also hadn't felt anything or anyone observing him recently, at least nothing he couldn't recognize source of, so Forest Fae definitely wasn't using some magic to keep track of him. Not that he believed a B-grade would be able to in first place, Shroud of Primordial being a thing and all.

Anyway, her absence left Jake with a major question, though...

What now?

There were a lot of B-grades and a lot of islands available, and from Jake's scouting, they had all prepared for him to strike at some point. A few of the smarter B-grades had even grouped together, staying two to three on the same island. The sense of tension hanging over Grand Lake, especially after an entire island had effectively been leveled, was palpable.

However, the more Jake scouted these islands, the less inclined he felt to hunt any of them. In fact, he would say his recent actions were behind his decision to leave them be. All of them had the option to try to ambush him or try to attack while he was fighting one of the B-grades on his shit-list, but none of them had. They had taken a stance of not messing with Jake, so Jake would reciprocate that sentiment.

Thinking hard about what to do, Jake eventually decided that if the cowardly Forest Fae had fled and wanted to hide, he wasn't going to waste his life away trying to find her somewhere hidden on the planet. Instead, he sought elsewhere, as he did have one or two B-grades, he had some unfinished business with.

Taking to the sky, Jake sought the jetstream. On the way, he also checked out the Hunting Grounds Manual to confirm a few things, including information on where Rainbowfear Sovereign lived, but also if he'd missed anything in the section about Forest Fae.

As two of the older B-grades, both Sovereign and Fae had a lot of information recorded, and both of their sections were filled with warnings that they were two of the stronger B-grades on the planet. The section about Forest Fae had fewer warnings than that of Sovereign, likely because of her more cautious nature, while Sovereign was known to stomp in the skull of anyone daring to enter his domain.

Forest Fae was also recorded as more scheming in nature. Jake would definitely have to add some new sections to her information, though, as despite having read about her, he hadn't expected her to use Jake to take out competition before running away herself and going into hiding.

Shaking his head from how annoying she had been, Jake soon reached the jetstream and entered it, allowing him to fly with incredible speed toward Area 5 where Rainbowfear Sovereign lived.

This Area contained more powerful B-grades and C-grades alike, but difference wasn't anything extreme. Sovereign was considered one of three strongest B-grades of Area 5, and likely top ten on entire planet, really hammering home how curated entire place was as a Hunting Ground.

Flying quickly, Jake scanned planet below as he flew, seeing signs of combat here and there during his travels, including what he expected to be hunters. Few hunters dared be near any of Grand Lakes, but instead hunted far away from them, dealing with high-tier C-grades at most.

A small smile crept onto Jake's lips as he thought about many hunters hard at work, looking forward to reaching his destination and his next prey. Sovereign had to know Jake was coming for him, and he was looking forward to seeing what kind of counters B-grade had come up with.

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Chapter 1128: A Diabolical Strategy

Jake couldn't help but feel that this entire planet was fake somehow. After arriving in Area 5 and spotting Grand Lake, it looked nearly identical to one on the other side of planet. This one was also almost perfectly circular and about same size, while being filled with similar-sized islands. It all felt like someone playing a planet-building video game and, after making one Area, got lazy and just copy-pasted it a few times to finish quicker.

Thinking about it a bit more, Jake wouldn't even be surprised if that was close to truth of how this planet was made. It all seemed so designed to create an environment with monsters between high-tier C-grade and ones barely in B-grade. mana density was perfect for it, with most mana coming from lakes, hence why B-grades naturally gared, forming a natural progression of power when one moved closer to a Grand Lake.

And then, of course, there was creature that resided at center of planet. mere fact that this plant wasn't more involved in happenings of planet but seemed more like just a regulator of mana in environment convinced Jake it had to be planted, or at least controlled in some way. If not, would Panon of Life even risk sending its young talents, knowing that some unknowable entity could decide to kill them and all of life on planet when it randomly decided to?

Jake thought not.

He estimated all Hunting Grounds were similarly designed and curated. Yet at same time, planet was also left alone for most part, with no powerful people sitting watch to make sure nothing unwanted happened. Jake could have totally died to Sovereign, and no one would have stepped in, which, in retrospect, was probably a requirement for it to be a good Hunting Ground in first place.

best way to sabotage a young genius was to coddle and always watch over m, after all. Without genuine danger, Records would be crap.

Shaking his head, Jake soon spotted island he had been aiming for. It was towards center of Grand Lake, and it looked like description in Hunting Grounds Manual except for one tiny little detail...

Was re always a giant mound of soil re?

In middle of island, a large clearing had been made, and a huge pile of soil and rock had been gared, constructing a small mountain that reached over sixty meters into sky. Flying closer, Jake was confused about what he was looking at, but when he was within Pulse distance and released one, he realized what was going on.

It wasn't just a pile of soil, but a deep hole had also been dug and hollowed out partly. Beneath around a hundred meters of soil and rock, Rainbowfear Sovereign sat, seemingly waiting for Jake's arrival.

Scouting rest of island, Jake frowned. One of strengths of Rainbowfear Sovereigns and a huge reason why Jake hadn't gone to this island right away was that he knew how dangerous se birds could be in large flocks. Jake had estimated re to be several hundred around Sovereign, and that was conservative.

He had come with full expectations of having to make this a prolonged siege where he would kill peak C-grades and whittle down number of Rainbowfear Songbirds before he could engage B-grade Sovereign, but it appeared that wasn't needed at all.

re was not a single or bird or living being larger than a squirrel within a thousand meters of Sovereign. He was all alone within his mound, genuinely confusing Jake. Not to say it wasn't a good strategy to make a physical barrier to defend itself against Jake's opening attack, though it wasn't enough to fully deter Jake if he wanted to land a Protean Arrow. attack would be weakened, sure, but not by that much, as his destructive arcane energies were remarkable as paving way for his arrows.

Sovereign had misunderstood one thing, though... Jake had never planned on handling this B-grade like all ors. His fight with Sovereign had been interrupted by ors, and even if Rainbowfear had attacked Jake in ambush initially, he had no intentions of returning favor.

Instead, he wanted to pick up where y left off. Fully healed this time around, sure, but Jake didn't want to start fight with a massive advantage. Additionally, more he looked at scene on island, more Jake felt that something was... off.

Could Forest Fae have gone here? Jake also questioned. While he couldn't feel her observing him, it was possible she was hidden somewhere nearby and would make her move once fighting began. If that was case, things could get hairy, but well... Jake still had Wings if he needed to escape again. Doing so would be super embarrassing, but option was re.

Landing on island, Jake approached mound. He heard a soft clicking sound from within, and a second later, he knew Sovereign was aware of his presence. Despite this, B-grade didn't move, but kept sitting down in center of its small cavern.

Walking into mound, Jake looked for traps and had his senses on high alert, but even as B-grade entered his line of sight, he felt not faintest sense of danger... which didn't make any sense. He should feel something being this close to Sovereign, one of most powerful B-grades on planet, yet re was nothing.

For a moment, Jake even wondered if this was real Sovereign, but all his or senses told him it was confusing him furr. It didn't help his confusion when Jake fully entered small cavern and stopped less than five meters from still-sitting B-grade.

"You've come," Sovereign spoke in a calm tone.

"Expectedly so, I would assume," Jake commented, not letting down his guard. Rainbowfear in front of him had proven itself resourceful and cunning so far, with warnings on Hunting Grounds Manual also reiterating this. He knew B-grade had some kind of scheme or was up to something. He just couldn't figure out what.

"Indeed," Sovereign nodded solemnly. "I've heard of your recent actions. Overlords of ir own domains have fallen one after anor, power balance in Area 1 completely broken."

Curious as to how Sovereign knew what was happening on or side of planet, Jake raised an eyebrow. His first guess was that it was related to Forest Fae, but he still joked around. "Do you have an information agency or something?"

"Word spreads fast. Some of more powerful beasts from Area 1 have fled here after ir leader died, and besides that, I do occasionally send my kin to gar information. We have many roosts spread across planet and means to communicate between m," B-grade explained, being surprisingly forthcoming.

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"n I guess you also know why I'm here?" Jake asked, still ready for B-grade to leap up and try to kick him in face.

"I do," Sovereign nodded as he sighed and changed topic again. "Since last we met, you've grown stronger. You've proven yourself able to slay B-grades in rapid succession, turning yourself into a scourge nearly every creature on this planet fears. Moreover, you've proven that even if we try to slay you, if we cannot hinder your escape, you will simply return stronger and strike unseen from a clear sky with unfathomable power."

Jake didn't say anything as Sovereign spoke, everything he said pretty accurate. He still wasn't sure where B-grade was going with it, though.

"I considered my approach to deal with such an opponent carefully. Please, allow me to explain my thoughts. My first instinct was to gar my flock, but tell me truthfully, would you not just have thinned it out until only I remained?" Sovereign asked.

"Probably would have," Jake more or less confirmed.

"That's also my assumption. You could kill a few every day before retreating again, and I would be able to do nothing about it. All such a strategy would do was delay inevitable, sacrificing lives of my kin. Unacceptable," B-grade said.

"I naturally also considered forming alliances with or B-grades, but I am fundamentally averse to such tactics, and here in Area 5, I would be hard-pressed to find anyone willing to put mselves in your crosshairs to assist me. Most would prefer to just lie low and treat you like a storm y hope to pass quickly."

Jake frowned even more as he allowed Sovereign to keep speaking, Songbird really living up to its name as he really loved sound of his own voice. Luckily for B-grade, Jake was curious enough to keep listening attentively.

"n I could go into hiding, but that would leave my flock exposed to attacks from outside forces, and it would risk you attacking m instead of me... except I don't believe you would do that. When such a thought struck me was when I decided on my strategy," Sovereign said, raising his head and looking at Jake.

"You're a hunter who seeks a challenge. thrill of hunt. You do not care to kill those weaker than yourself. So, I will shamelessly appeal to your spirit as a hunter and present myself as prey not worth hunting."

Now Jake was really confused, but he soon realized what B-grade was getting at right as Sovereign elaborated. The source of this content is **novel•fire•net**

"I know that if we fought now, I would lose. Die. Even if I have a shallow chance of winning, I do not have confidence in my victory. So I will not fight you. I will do nothing

but sit here, and you can do whatever you wish to do next. No matter what, I will refrain from resisting, even if my passiveness results in my own demise, so be it.”

Jake realized strategy Sovereign had chosen, and it was downright diabolical. He could only stand re and stare at B-grade, and looking at B-grade, Jake felt confident Rainbowfear was being one hundred percent serious.

“This is...” Jake muttered, genuinely unsure of what to do in this kind of situation.

If Sovereign refused to fight back and would just allow Jake to kill it, what would point even be? He even felt that Sovereign suppressed its own energies and power, meaning that if Jake wanted to, he could walk right over and cut B-grade’s head off without much effort.

He can’t be serious, right? Jake asked as his face turned serious. Without any warning, Jake stepped forward as Eternal Hunger appeared in his hand, and with full force, he stabbed katar forward, even using Piercing Fang.

blade rapidly approached eye of Sovereign... yet B-grade stayed unmoving. Right before he hit eye, Jake stopped himself, tip of katar not even a full centimeter from pupil of B-grade. Arcane energy sparked around weapon like lightning, a bit of it jumping toward eye.

“Ow,” Sovereign muttered in a monotone voice, blinking a few times, but not moving in any or way.

Jake frowned and pulled back his katar while just staring at B-grade. He had never encountered a situation like this, and Jake was genuinely unsure of how to respond. Even if Jake killed Sovereign now, he would get absolutely fuck-all out of it.

In order for one to earn experience and Records from a kill, or party had to at least fight back. That’s why top factions couldn’t just have ir young genius kill some D-grade slave while still only in F-grade to earn a title and a massive amount of experience.

This scenario was effectively same.

“You’re a real bastard, you know that, right?” Jake said, dismissing his weapon.

“I’m fully aware this strategy is incredibly cowardly,” Sovereign nodded in agreement. “However, I remain insistent it’s best approach I could take.”

“You know, I could just go slaughter your kin one by one until you decide to get off your ass and try to stop me,” Jake said.

Sovereign just smiled. “You won’t. I believe you won’t.”

Naturally, B-grade was entirely right, and Jake had just tried to rile him up a little.

"Most creatures would at least try to fight back when cornered," Jake muttered. "This strategy of yours is recklessly risky. It's downright unnatural."

"You are only here on this planet to hunt. To gain levels. Records. If I take away your purpose for killing me, all that's left is any animosity you may have towards me. Admittedly, it remains risky as I ambushed you, and you have reason to kill me outside of system rewards that doing so would bring."

"But I won't," Jake sighed, as he had to admit... he'd now lost to Rainbowfear Sovereign twice. Killing B-grade like this would just feel wrong in every way. Jake didn't just want to kill his foes. He wanted to fight m. He knew himself well enough to know that to him, hunting was inherently about proving himself superior to his foes while slaying m was merely natural conclusion of that process. With Sovereign, his opponent had already admitted defeat and refused to fight, making killing him meaningless.

"Is that how you older B-grades lived this long?" Jake asked after a while. "Through underhanded tactics and being cowards? First that damn Forest Fae, and now you."

"Forest Fae also dodged a direct confrontation?" Sovereign asked, looking a bit surprised.

"Yeah," Jake nodded, annoyed. "She's gone. Searched all over Grand Lake in Area 1 and from looks of it, she's entirely abandoned her own island and isn't hiding on any of or islands."

"I see," Sovereign spoke, looking in thought for a moment as he lowered his head. After a few more seconds, he looked up at Jake. "How about a proposal to alleviate dissatisfaction born from conclusion of our enmity?"

"Not sure I would say enmity has concluded, but sure, what do you propose?" Jake asked.

"I have a method to locate Forest Fae."

Jake instantly perked up as he raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

Sovereign nodded. "If you will allow me to demonstrate... without you taking it as an invitation to strike."

"Go ahead," Jake said, waving off damn bird. "I'm not gonna attack someone not even willing to fight back."

“Very well,” Sovereign said, and in next few moments, his aura flared to life once more. He stopped suppressing his own power, and Rainbowfear stood up. “We should go outside.”

Jake nodded and followed as two walked out of cave. A small part of Jake was still cautious, but sheer lack of danger he felt from Sovereign made him confident B-grade indeed had no intentions of fighting him at all.

Once outside, Sovereign led Jake toward a small clearing, stopping a bit before y entered. “Ahead, you will see a ritual circle. This circle is not made in an attempt to- “

“Dude, I get it. No fighting,” Jake sighed. “Just do your thing.”

Sovereign did as Jake said as he entered clearing. Jake proceeded to watch as rainbow-colored mana gared around B-grade and sent out faint echoes of mana that seemed to sweep across land.

“We Rainbowfears are masters of sound,” Sovereign spoke, once more unable to hold back his Songbird heritage from taking over. “Sound can come in many forms, but what many don’t know is that each being has ir own... rhythm. ir own sound. Every soul lets out a distinctive and unique hum, and while telling m apart or even hearing m in first place is usually impossible, re are methods. Having known Forest Fae for a long time, I remember her sound... and now I hear it.”

mana seemed to reach a crescendo as B-grade was filled with energy before turning in a particular direction, his eyes opening wide. “Found her.”

“Where?” Jake asked, beginning to believe he may have a fight on his hands yet.

Sovereign seemed conflicted for a moment before he raised a clawed hand and pointed. “Merely two islands over that way... in domain of creature hailed as most powerful B-grade on this planet.”

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Chapter 1129: More Complicated Than First Assumed

Jake needed a moment to process what Sovereign had just said. Looking toward where B-grade bird was pointing, Jake was damn close to calling Sovereign a damn liar as Forest Fae being this close seemed too much of a coincidence, but he didn’t. Instead, he asked B-grade to clarify.

“most powerful B-grade you say... now why would Forest Fae be in its domain? Are you allies? If so, why is Forest Fae located in Area 1, and this or B-grade in Area 5?” Jake asked skeptically.

“To my knowledge, no, two do not have a friendly relationship,” Rainbowfear Sovereign shook his head. “Darkwood Chimera has always been a solitary creature. It’s not known to have formed any alliance or even positive relations with anyone. At the same time, Chimera doesn’t invade others’ territory, meaning no one dares bother it.”

Jake listened, also hearing the name of B-grade in question. Jake hadn’t read up on any of B-grades in Area 5, but seeing as Jake had been put on a direct collision course with this monster, he decided to check Hunting Grounds Manual entry quickly.

“Darkwood Chimera. A mutated variant of Darkwood creatures that were wiped out from planet millennia ago. As one of the oldest B-grades and due to the power of its variant, this monster is considered the strongest B-grade on planet. Engaging it in combat should be done with absolute caution. Is not known to be aggressive unless its domain is invaded. If successfully hunted, please report your kill to the nearest Outpost. No other information shall be provided, and good luck is wished to any who take up the challenge.”

This was one of the shortest entries to a monster that was recognized as likely the strongest B-grade. It wasn’t that surprising, though. Jake had noticed that information was scarce when it came to B-grades, likely because Panon of Life didn’t want to give too much away. Walking into a fight with too much foreknowledge about your opponent when you didn’t know anything about you wasn’t very fair either, so Jake respected the lack of information.

What he didn’t respect was Chimera, likely having decided to help Forest Fae for some reason.

“This is annoying,” Jake muttered.

“It’s certainly outside my expectations,” Rainbowfear Sovereign also frowned. “From what I know, anything and anyone that dares enter Chimera’s territory is promptly torn apart and consumed. I cannot comprehend why Forest Fae would be an exception.”

“You know what she’s capable of better than I,” Jake said, turning to B-grade. “Seeing as Darkwood Chimera is technically a plant monster, does she perhaps have some kind of magic that’s super effective against it? Perhaps something allowing her to control or stay hidden from other monsters?”

“Forest Fae primarily relies on illusion magic, mysticism, and nature magic. It’s possible she can hide and remain undetected while still staying on the island, but from the sound of mana, she is towards the center of the island... same place where Chimera lives,” Sovereign answered, rainbow-colored magic still lingering in the air from the ritual he had performed.

Jake considered matters for a moment before asking B-grade bird again:

“How powerful is this Chimera? Have you ever fought it?”

“Yes, I have,” Sovereign nodded. “About two decades ago, we had a clash. You might not know this, but occasionally, treasures spawn from beneath lake and float to surface, always sparking a conflict when that happens. Back n, I battled Chimera and lost.”

“How badly did you lose?” Jake wondered.

Sovereign took a moment before looking at Jake. “I envision a battle between you and me would end in a far more miserable loss.”

Jake raised an eyebrow at that answer as he was beginning to get an inkling of Sovereign being up to something. “Almost sounds like you’re encouraging me to fight this Chimera.”

“Assuming Forest Fae uses it as a shield, will you?”

“If she does, two are gonna be fighting toger. Perhaps I can defeat one of m, but both at once might be a tall order,” Jake said, doing a bit of hinting on his own. Also, to know if Sovereign was planning what Jake thought he was planning. IF YOU WANT TO READ MORE CHAPTERS, PLEASE VISIT novel-fire.net

Sovereign was quiet for a moment, staring toward island before speaking. “If Chimera dies, and I’m involved with kill, I will be recognized as most powerful in not only this Area, but potentially entire planet. act would also hopefully help push me to where I can leave this Hunting Ground for good. Last but not least, I have no love for Forest Fae, and seeing her slain alongside Chimera would only bring me joy.”

Turning to Jake, bird continued: “Of course, benefits brought upon with ir death cannot compare to gains I would receive should I succeed in slaying you. But I have already resigned myself to that not happening, so yes, instead, I am looking to take advantage of your presence on this Hunting Ground to elevate myself.”

“At least you’re honest about it.” Jake couldn’t help but chuckle. “I hope you understand why I would be skeptical about fighting alongside you, though. You’ve shown yourself to be quite willing to ambush ors if an opportunity arises. Also, from what I know, you Rainbowfears are quite notorious for holding grudges. Am I really to believe you won’t try to exact revenge if given chance?”

“Do you know why we are a race that holds grudges?” Sovereign answered Jake’s question with anor question.

“Because you’re petty?”

"No. It's for survival," Sovereign answered. "As you've no doubt noticed, Rainbowfear Songbirds are not exemplary on their own. At least not in C-grade. To make up for our weakness, we had to create a weapon that would make ours hesitate to attack us in the first place, as we are fundamentally fragile compared to our monsters. Being a vengeful race has helped tremendously here, to the point it has become part of Rainbowfear Songbird Path."

"See, you saying holding a grudge is part of your Path makes me more certain you're gonna try to kick me in the head from behind should I ever turn my back," Jake said.

"I just told you before. We do it for survival," Sovereign said. "If a grudge hampers survival, it goes against my Path far more. I already tried and failed to kill you. With that, I fulfilled my obligations and attempted to exact revenge. Moreover, the reason why my attempt failed lies with Forest Fae, so if I bear any grudge now, it's towards her."

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"Just Forest Fae?" Jake asked. "How about all the B-grades I killed?"

"You must know by now that Forest Fae was a ringleader. They all followed her lead to slay you and potentially even me." Sovereign shook his head before looking directly at Jake.

"I have voiced my offer. I propose that rather than fight one another, we stand side by side to defeat Chimera and Forest Fae. Of course, should Chimera not be involved with Forest Fae at all, but just involuntarily involved, I shall leave and allow you to hunt her on your lonesome," B-grade proposed.

"Not gonna lie and say I don't have some serious reservations... but sure," Jake agreed to team up with the bird that had tried to kill him the last time they'd met.

"You have my word that I will not attack you," Sovereign said. "Even if you attack me first. I do want you to know that while you may hold reservations, so do I. But be aware that my involvement in this fight is not an invitation to turn your weapons toward me in the event of your victory."

"Fine," Jake waved off B-grade. He would have liked to still fight Sovereign, but he had to accept it wasn't going to happen. Instead, he would have to find satisfaction in an impromptu team-up with a former enemy... though in truth, he didn't really plan on making it a real team-up.

"To make matters easier for both parties, I propose we try to split them two apart and have our own individual fights," Jake said. "I believe there is a high chance Forest Fae has some magic that can interact positively with Chimera, so if we keep them away from one another, we can avoid that. Moreover, if they have indeed formed an alliance, I would expect their teamwork to be far superior to ours. Finally, no need to worry about being ambushed if we aren't side by side."

Jake saw no need to voice final reason he wanted to avoid fighting together with Sovereign, as he saw no reason to explain his own skills to her. If he fought alone, he could still use Lone Hunter, which Jake seriously needed if he was to fight a B-grade, likely even stronger than Sovereign.

Lone Hunter also boosted effects of Big Game Hunter, and against a B-grade, that boost was quite meaningful. Not to say Jake would be unable to fight properly without Lone Hunter, but he would definitely be weaker.

"That sounds reasonable," Sovereign agreed. "The question is, who are you to fight, and who am I to battle?"

"I believe you care more about revenge than I do, and seeing as Chimera is strongest, I think my answer is clear," Jake said smugly.

"Chimera shall be yours, and I will keep Forest Fae out of the way," Sovereign nodded. "I cannot guarantee my victory against Fae, though. She is a tough opponent with many tricks. However, do not be concerned, for while I cannot guarantee I will kill her, she certainly will not be one to kill me."

"Well, everything's planned out, then," Jake said, cracking his neck. "Let's go."

"Indeed, there is no need to delay," Sovereign said as he began walking forward. "I have one proposal, though. My showing up here will be unusual, but not entirely unexpected. I can simply explain that I heard the sound of Forest Fae's mana and came to investigate. In the meantime, you can remain hidden and ready to strike once the situation is confirmed. If it turns out Chimera is not allied with Forest Fae, she shall meet a swift death at our hands."

Jake didn't argue, but nodded. Though deep inside, he definitely hoped that Chimera would actually be allied with Forest Fae. Facing the most powerful B-grade on the planet sounded like a damn good time, and Chimeras tended to be pretty interesting and even powerful opponents, though it was hard to tell from just the name alone.

Chimeras were more a classification of monsters than anything. A Chimera was just a combined form of several beasts, and this one was apparently even made out of wood, going by its name. Though considering it was still a Chimera, Jake was fully prepared to meet some weird combination between flesh and wood squashed into one.

Heading off with Sovereign, the two of them flew a relatively short distance over to the island of Chimera. There were still around five thousand kilometers separating each island from one another, with every island being a few hundred kilometers in radius at its smallest.

As they flew, Jake entered stealth but let Sovereign be aware of where Jake was. Due to how Unseen Hunter worked, Jake simply informed Sovereign where he was made his

skill ineffective on B-grade, something that confused bird quite a bit, but Jake refused to elaborate on how his stealth skill worked.

Soon enough, island entered sight, Sovereign speeding up as Jake went skywards in case he would have to start blasting. In preparation to face Sovereign, Jake had neglected to make an Eternal Hunter Protean Arrow as he planned on fighting B-grade without it, but during its flight, Jake used some time to prepare a non-Eternal Hunger Protean Arrow. It would make his opening strike weaker than it could be, but that was just something he would have to live with.

When y got within boundaries of island, Jake began to really feel aura of monster that lived re. Its presence has soaked into environment itself, entire jungle teeming with its energy signature. This jungle was also different from any of prior ones. It was a lot less green and instead had far more muted colors, influence of a creature with Darkwood in its name clear.

From this, Jake instantly recognized that this Chimera used dark and life affinities, perhaps a combination of two. A type of opponent Jake likely hadn't met before, which already made him look forward to what came next.

Watching from afar, y reached furr and furr into island. Occasionally, Sovereign let out a soft clicking sound as a bit of rainbow-colored light was emitted from his body, and based on how he slightly corrected his course after each one, Jake assumed he was continually checking for Forest Fae's location using his weird sound magic.

It didn't take long before y approached center of island. Jake detected what was coming before Sovereign did, but made no attempts to say anything to keep illusion of Sovereign being alone going. Besides, two seconds later, Sovereign stopped abruptly, feeling presence moving through jungle below.

A few more seconds later, Darkwood Chimera showed itself. From jungle, a large creature emerged, approximately ten meters from head to toe. Chimera reminded Jake a bit of a dog at first with how it had four legs, but its head was more akin to that of an alligator, and what was more disturbing was its almost barrel-shaped mid-section.

entire stomach region resembled a twisted mass of flesh and wood that had been forced together and spun around a spool. What's more, this section pulsed every few moments, bark-covered flesh contracting and expanding unnaturally.

In summary, it was a four-legged creature with eighty percent of its body mass comprising barrel-shaped midsection, with four legs and a head sticking out of it. re was also a tail, but it was obviously just one of fleshy wood bits that looked to have temporarily escaped tangled nightmare.

Using Identify, Jake confirmed this was indeed one y had come looking for.

[Darkwood Chimera – lvl ???]

This creature floated up and regarded Sovereign as it spoke, its voice sounding monotone and genderless, as if someone had changed void to anonymize it. **“Rainbowfear Sovereign. Why have you invaded my domain?”**

Sovereign, not intimidated in slightest despite how grotesque or B-grade looked, crossed his arms and answered. “Invaded? Oh, it must be my misunderstanding. I thought you were having a get-together, seeing as Forest Fae is allowed here.”

“You are here for Fae?” Chimera asked, its voice genuinely giving Jake horrible vibes.

“Yes,” Sovereign answered without missing a beat.

“I see. Yes, she came to me and informed me of what has been happening in Area 1. In return, I allowed her to stay. But seeing as you are here now... you can have her. She’s fulfilled her purpose,” Chimera said, throwing Jake and Sovereign off. **“In turn, have hunter reveal himself.”**

Chimera looked toward sky, not seeing Jake, but clearly suspecting he was re. Sovereign was already perplexed why Chimera was acting as it was, and he was even more confused with what B-grade said next... while Jake suddenly realized this monster was more complicated than he’d first assumed.

“Show yourself, hunter... no... I should call you Chosen of Malefic One.”

Jake suddenly felt something was off with his last Identify, and while he usually limited skill to just basic information to limit risk of his Identify being noticed, this time he tried to see everything he could, which certainly complicated situation furr.

[Darkwood Chimera – lvl ??? – Lesser Blessing of ???]

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Chapter 1130: Vault

Jake had not expected to see anything that wasn’t a hunter with a Blessing somewhere literally called Hunting Grounds. In so many ways, it made little sense at all, as from Jake’s perspective, se monsters were all set up as potential targets for young talents of

Panon of Life to hunt. Giving something like that was a massive gamble at best and a total waste at worst.

Not to say a Lesser Blessing was a tremendous investment from a god, but it was an investment nevertheless. Moreover, based on how Jake couldn't see name of god that had blessed creature, it had to be one capable and willing to hide its true identity, all while also knowing about Jake and being able to put together that he was one at Hunting Grounds.

Is it a member of Panon of Life? Some outsider? Why would you bless a Chimera here in first place? Is Chimera being blessed related to me somehow?

So many questions, several of which he doubted he would get any answer to as Chimera spoke again.

"I know who you are, even if others don't. Contrary to all these monsters, all this prey, I'm here willingly. I have been offered opportunity to leave already and integrate into multiverse, but I chose to stay," Chimera said, its words clearly shocking Sovereign, who spoke up.

"You've been granted passage?" B-grade asked, as if nothing else Chimera had said mattered. "And yet you still stay? Why?"

"That is none of your concern," Chimera answered dismissively, its gaze still scouring skies, looking for Jake, who remained hidden. **"But to Chosen of Malefic One, I shall answer. None of you has any idea what multiverse is truly like. Here, in this Hunting Ground, we are rulers. Supreme beings. At times, prey, yes, but on outside, we are always prey. We are at bottom of food chain, nothing but fodder for true B-grades."**

At this point, Jake had begun to realize something as he decided to stop hiding. He slowly revealed himself as he stared down at Chimera before speaking, infusing his voice with Willpower.

"You are fodder, yes... unless you have backing," Jake said.

"Precisely," Chimera said, its monstrous head doing its best impression of a smile. **"I have been granted an opportunity. A way to thrive once I leave this Hunting Ground. And it's all because of you."**

"You're welcome?" Jake said with a shrug. He already had a very good idea what this opportunity was all about.

"Welcome? Yes... Yes, I will be welcomed with open arms and a feast beyond my imagination!" Chimera said, its voice echoing throughout island. **"All I need to do is one thing..."**

“Kill me?” Jake asked, having already guessed his outcome a while ago.

“You already knew... and yet you’ve shown yourself in front of me. You remain still and do not run,” Chimera said, its pulsating bark-covered fleshy bits seemingly growing larger than before. **“I may be nothing but fodder in multiverse, but here, on this planet, I am predator, and you, still only a mere C-grade, prey! Now come, be fodder that shall nurture my future!”**

Chimera discarded any furr intentions to converse as its mid-section entirely unraveled, revealing eight thick tendrils of flesh and bark, and at same time, it shot towards Jake up in sky... or at least it tried to.

Before it could get far up, a taloned foot struck it, and despite being blocked by two tendrils, B-grade was sent flying to side. Cracks formed on bark covering se freaky tendrils, showing just how strong B-grade Rainbowfear truly was.

“Forest Fae is preparing to strike. Watch out,” Jake warned Sovereign as he also pulled out his bow.

“Fae!” Chimera screamed on cue, and just n, a pillar of white light erupted from jungle below, aimed straight at Sovereign. With Jake’s warning, bird dodged to side in time and created a platform to leap off as B-grade charged toward ground where Forest Fae stood, surrounded by magic circles that had been hidden only moments prior.

se magic circles all activated at once, unleashing a torrent of energy upon charging Sovereign, who responded by summoning his sound shield in an attempt to block blow. Several of spells were successfully stopped, but a few still made it through, damaging Sovereign, but not slowing him down at all.

Forest Fae was forced to teleport away as she turned into a flash of leaves right as Sovereign touched down, his foot making ground quake and break apart as all magic circles were destroyed, and deep fissures were formed for several kilometers in all directions from impact.

Despite coming down with such force, Sovereign used momentum to give chase as Forest Fae and Sovereign headed away from Jake and Chimera, sound of ir fighting continuing as y clashed repeatedly.

“So, had you planned on teaming up with her to take me down?” Jake asked in a judgmental tone, Sovereign having given Jake to taunt B-grade and make it talk a bit longer.

“No... no, I merely used her for information on you. To know what kind of being you are. What you can do,” Chimera said as it slinked through air, its body continuing to twist and warp as tendrils soon were fully unwound.

Jake saw each of m was at least a hundred and fifty meters long and filled with black bark that gave off an ominous feeling. se tendrils all grew out of a relatively thin stomach area that its legs were only loosely connected to by bone-thin limbs.

Mix of an alligator, dog, and octopus? Jake wondered. It definitely wasn't those three exact animals, but just similar variants found throughout multiverse.

se tendrils on Chimera moved like feelers as y extended up towards Jake. **“With two distractions gone, show me what it means to be a so-called Chosen of Malefic One!”**

With swift movements, Chimera shot towards Jake, running through air on all fours, and during its run, Jake saw flesh and bark intermixing and covering its thin legs, turning m bulkier and stronger as creature sped up.

Jake responded by launching himself skywards while shooting arrows down, but all of m were blocked as tendrils merely swept m away. As he was shooting, Jake also considered last words B-grade had said.

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It had called him “a Chosen of Malefic Viper.”

Not Chosen of Malefic Viper. Almost as if it didn't truly know what a Chosen was. first time around, it had said it right, but this change-up sowed a seed of doubt in Jake's mind that this Chimera hadn't just been told this was Jake's title by whoever anonymous god had blessed it.

Certainly a mystery, but not one Jake had time to solve in that moment as tendrils rapidly closed in on him. Two stabbed towards him, ir tips sharpening like spears, while two ors swept in from its side after having grown longer and thinner to function better as whips.

Jake was quick and stopped dodging backwards as he instead dove into stabbing tendrils, getting him out of way from two whips as a katar appeared in each hand. Testing durability of tendrils, Jake stabbed into one as he dodged by it. He easily stabbed into fleshy bits through small gaps in bark that had inadvertently been created to make tendrils flexible.

However, right as he stabbed in, Jake had to rapidly retract his katar as bark began growing to trap weapon, and small vines even began reaching toward Jake's arm as if trying to wrap him up.

A quick blast of destructive arcane mana allowed Jake to successfully disengage, but in process, he couldn't fully dodge an attack from behind as he was lashed across back, but luckily, Jake's armor held firm as he avoided getting a large laceration.

Jake didn't even have time to consider his next move as all eight tendrils came for him from all sides, some stabbing, some sweeping, and some cracking like whips as y flew through air.

His eyes were open wide and darted around as Jake avoided three dozen blows in span of less than a second, finding every microscopic opening available to him before he finally got an opportunity to use One Step, taking him furr into sky and away from constant assault.

It's fast... extremely fast, Jake had already realized, and it had also quickly become clear he needed to make a choice. Eir he needed to fight at range using his bow or in an extremely close melee situation. To be anywhere from ten to two hundred and fifty meters from B-grade was a death zone, preventing any proper defense.

Jake's first choice had thus been to try to get out of that range and use his bow. He continued to teleport upwards several more times, shooting downwards in between every teleport as he had his arrows curve and twist in air in an attempt to hit body of Chimera, but despite his best efforts, every attack was blocked by vines.

Switching things up, Jake stopped trying to destroy body and went straight for vines instead. A barrage of explosive arcane arrows collided with two vines, blanketing sky in arcane destruction... at least for a brief moment.

In very next second, explosions imploded as two vines glowed with dark energy, absorbing and nullifying all of Jake's mana in process. Right as he prepared to follow up, one of vines whipped toward Jake, unleashing a large black crescent wave of energy towards him, forcing Jake to abandon his attack and dodge out of way. Follow current novels on *novel✕fire✕net*

For a second, Jake wondered if Chimera had somehow absorbed and thrown back Jake's own arcane energy, but he quickly saw that wasn't case. mana B-grade had summoned to counter Jake's attack just had to go somewhere, and rar than let it fade away, monster had simply thrown it towards him in a relatively haphazard attack.

Chimera tried a few more ranged attacks as it chased Jake, but he easily avoided all of m. problem was that his own attacks didn't have much effect in return, B-grade turning out to be quite durable. Anor problem was that Jake had already activated his boosting skill at stable 30% just to keep up a little while Chimera hadn't used any as far as Jake could tell.

Far in distance, Jake continued to see occasional sign of Sovereign and Forest Fae battling, which made Jake feel as if he was on a bit of a timer. Not because he believed Rainbowfear bird would lose, but because Jake didn't want B-grade to return victorious while Jake had barely made any progress.

Jake, having tried to attack in a few different ways, finally decided to just go with most straightforward one he knew. One that always seemed to get job done. While keeping his distance, Jake kept shooting singular stable arcane arrows covered in poison toward Chimera, making m bend and even slow down and speed up at times, turning m unpredictable. He missed a few, but most arrows struck small gap between bark and penetrated into flesh, where y unleashed ir toxic payload.

Slow and steady wins race, Jake told himself as he waited for Chimera to finally do something new as it chased him across sky. By now, y had already moved far away from where y had originally met and were taking quite a tour around island.

Realizing this wasn't an advantageous status quo, Chimera finally changed things up. Dark mana began seeping out of B-grade, surrounding its body with a faint fog Jake couldn't see through, even with his extremely high Perception. This fog also began to surround all tendrils, and just as Jake considered what point of this even was, entire monster disappeared.

Jake's eyes opened wide as his danger sense screamed at him right before large B-grade appeared right behind him, its eight tendrils instantly lashing out. Going on full defense, Jake took out both katars and summoned several barriers of arcane mana to buy him a bit of time as he dodged out of way from initial assault of strikes.

Despite his best efforts, Jake still took a few scratches here and re, but he managed to close distance. Rar than try to run away again, Jake estimated it would be smarter to draw closer and make it more awkward for Chimera to attack using its long tendrils, and from looks of it, Jake's plan had been a good one, as rate of attacks reduced.

Soon, he was face to face with large monster, as its head, same size as his entire body, stared down at him. alligator-like head snapped down, trying to eat Jake in a single chomp, but Jake dodged out of way and tried to stab monster in eye. Most creatures tended to defend ir eyes, but to Jake's surprise, his katar easily found purchase as he split eyeball of B-grade in two... only for entire eye socket to start morphing as it grew teeth of wood and tried to bite off Jake's hand.

Jake had to let go of his weapon and retreat, and luckily he had attacked with Eternal Hunger, that despite B-grade trying to steal his weapon away, Jake easily recalled it as he backed a bit away.

Chimera didn't let up, though, as it tried to bite him again while manipulating its tendrils to strike him from behind. Jake kept making it hard for B-grade to hit him as he moved so that any attempt to strike him with tendrils would result in Chimera hitting itself instead, meaning Jake only had to deal with head trying to eat him over and over again.

He managed to land a few solid hits before Chimera once more changed status quo. With a loud roar, a blast of black smoke was released, enveloping Jake and everything else. Inside this dark cloud, Jake could barely see his own hand, but what was more

important was constant drain he felt on his body, forcing him to activate Scales to fight it off.

With Scales active, Jake could mostly shake off energy-draining effect as he kept striking with his katars in rapid succession, Chimera's attempt to force Jake away unsuccessful. It was a good strategy by Chimera. Make a cloud in extremely close melee that drains resources and blinds opponents, forcing m out of it and into optimal range of tendrils again. Sadly for B-grade, Jake was quite suited to face this kind of attack, as blindness had no effect, and energy drain was dealt with effortlessly through Scales.

What's more, Chimera definitely wasn't used to fighting like this. Its attempts to bite and use its feet and body to attack were clumsy at best, giving Jake plenty of opportunities as he kept stabbing and cutting away at far larger monster. He even got chance to strike its stomach region where tendrils originated from, and re, he found quite tender flesh that he gladly ravaged.

It also kept trying to strike with its tendrils, and while y were annoying to avoid, large size of Chimera worked against it as Jake simply moved around its body, going above and below it, using monster's own body as cover against tendrils.

Jake continued striking for a few more seconds before monster made its next move. Having realized black cloud wasn't getting job done, Chimera chose to retreat as its body was once more enveloped in energy as B-grade practically teleported backwards... no... it didn't teleport.

Before, when Chimera had moved, Jake had already felt familiar energy, and now that he felt it again, he was certain. Chimera indeed hadn't teleported.

It had Shadow Vaulted.

Which could only mean one thing...

Court of Shadows?

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Chapter 1131: Psychological Warfare

Assassinations weren't just about killing a target. At least not for Court of Shadows. It was Path of its entire faction, and Path of many of its members. However, just like it was a hunter's Path to slay monsters, that didn't mean a hunter could just kill any monster.

A hunter could slay a thousand weak beasts an entire grade below himself, and it would give him nothing. In fact, it could hurt his own Records. In the same vein, an assassin didn't merely care about killing someone. It had to be a kill that would allow an assassin to progress its Path.

This mentality was part of the reason why Court of Shadows was tolerated throughout the multiverse. It had standards. Rules. Its edicts dictated everything from the kind of pay expected to the length of any assassination contract.

The length of a contract was an odd concept to many who hired Court without much foreknowledge. The way Court operated was that a contract would only last for a set amount of time, during which its faction would try to take down a target. Should it fail to slay a target during this period, a portion of a deposit would be returned, minus expenses for attempts on a target's life.

This also resulted in assassination contracts not always being successful by design. It was a careful balance that had been struck, where an assassination target could prove themselves worthy of surviving attempts on its lives. This especially mattered when it came to contracts on young talents, as the success rate on those was far lower than average. Having a rule like that also allowed Court of Shadows to take more contracts on young geniuses without just becoming a slaughterhouse of anyone showing promise that enemy factions wanted to get rid of before it could mature.

A primary reason why the success rate was so low on young geniuses was due to a number of rules. A fundamental one.

One would never see Court of Shadows send some A-grade to wipe out a group of C-grades. In fact, one of its basic rules was that one should never have a target below one's own grade.

That's to say, an S-grade would never assassinate an A-grade, an A-grade would never kill a B-grade, and of course, a B-grade would never try to kill a C-grade. This was one of its most basic edicts... but no rule was ironclad. Everything had exceptions.

One exception was naturally that an assassin and member of Court of Shadows could always defend themselves if attacked, even if an attacker was below its own grade. A nice little loophole that Darkwood Chimera had gladly taken advantage of... though it was still unsure who its true prey was.

"It actually went and did it?" the green-haired woman asked as she saw Primordial stare into empty space with an amused smile.

“That y did,” Malefic Viper chuckled, shaking his head.

Not too long ago, he had been contacted by a courier from Court of Shadows, delivering a message from Umbra. All it said was that someone had attempted to take out a contract on Jake.

Viper instantly understood purpose of this message. It didn’t say y had accepted any contract, so this was an opportunity for Viper to respond and tell m not to accept contract. A smart play by Umbra. Vilas would have to ask her not to accept it, which could be construed as owing a favor, while if Viper did nothing, Court would only once more prove that y indeed dared to accept contracts on just about anyone.

Needless to say, Vilas hadn’t responded. Why would he? He saw nothing wrong with a little contract being taken out on his Chosen. He knew edicts of Court of Shadows. ir entire modus operandi. On a contract like Jake, y would definitely adhere to it strictly, which in Viper’s mind just meant one thing:

A fun time for Jake.

If anyone was suited to facing assassination attempts, it had to be his Chosen. Vilas himself had a hard time taking Jake by surprise, so he wished any aspiring assassin who wanted to make a name for mselfs luck.

What he hadn’t expected was for m to use a tactic like this. One where Jake gave assassin rightful justification to kill him despite being a grade higher. It was novel, but also clearly not a new plan, as based on what Chimera had shown, it hadn’t been blessed just recently, but been a member of Court of Shadows for a while.

Well... alright, calling Chimera a member didn’t seem quite right. More like it was a candidate to become a full member. In fact, that was deal Viper assumed Court and Chimera had struck. Chimera would serve Court as an assassin in this Hunting Ground for a set limited amount of time or for a limited number of targets, and in return, it would be allowed to fully join Court, getting backing it had talked about wanting.

Pretty clever and incredibly low-risk for Court of Shadows.

“I wonder who hired Court...” goddess wondered out loud.

“re are a lot of candidates, I reckon, but for once, I have a feeling it isn’t actually related to me,” Viper chuckled.

“Are you worried about him?” Verdant Sister asked. She had been re to deliver a message just prior and had taken this opportunity to stay around a bit longer.

“Worried?” Viper asked with a smile. “Why would I be? It’s a Chimera, sure, but let’s be honest, every single B-grade in that Hunting Ground is absolutely pathetic, to level I hesitate to even call them true B-grades.”

“But your Chosen is still only C-grade, and from what I remember, not even that close to peak yet,” Verdant Sister pointed out.

“True,” Viper nodded. “Which is why these B-grades can at least still provide some level of challenge to him. If he couldn’t even kill these now, how is he supposed to kill a True Dragon before evolving to B-grade?”

Verdant Witch’s eyes opened wide. “You want him to kill a True Dragon before evolving?”

“Me? No,” Vilas chuckled. “I’m pretty sure he’s one who will refuse to evolve until he’s killed one.”

“Comparing these B-grades to a True Dragon...” female god sighed.

“Yeah,” Viper shrugged. “He still has a ways to go, but given enough preparation and with improvements he’ll make between now and peak C-grade, I believe he can do it. Assuming he avoids getting killed by assassins from Court of Shadows, that is.”

With those words, Viper turned his attention to watching the fight unfold, looking forward to when this one would be good enough pressure for Jake to improve once more.

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Jake narrowly dodged as eight tendrils shot for him rapidly, each moving independently to try to lock down or strike him directly. To make matters more complicated, Chimera had evidently released a boosting skill of some kind, as its power and speed had both gone up a notch.

Arcane Awakening being fully activated was Jake’s only response to keep up as the battle continued. Jake tried to chase after Chimera, but it was quite good at using Shadow Vault to create distance between itself and Jake.

Keeping up with all attacks was difficult, and Jake failed to properly counterattack, as he had too much to deal with at once to focus on anything besides dodging. He kept looking for an opening to exploit, but while the monster showed its lack of experience when it came to close combat, it had clearly trained this fighting style a lot.

After nearly getting hit for umpteenth time, Jake considered his options and decided to change status quo. He remembered back when he had Shadow Vault himself and his very first training session with skill. He also remembered that skill had some limitations. While it could pass through things, doing so drained more energy. Passing through living things, now that was something Jake felt pretty damn confident Chimera wasn't capable of due to how it had used skill so far.

And re just happened to be an entire jungle filled with living things right below him. While Jake could see tendrils be very adept at fighting within jungle due to ir insane flexibility, Jake still believed it would be an advantageous environment for him.

That's why he found a brief opening to blast himself downwards and out of range from Chimera. At same time, he pulled out his bow and continued taking potshots, aiming for gaps in bark of tendrils. It did very little damage, but everything counted.

As expected, monster gave chase to try to keep Jake within its optimal attack range. Being on ground, Jake also lost ability to dodge downwards, meaning entering jungle wasn't entirely bad for it.

For a little while, Chimera tried to stay above or near canopies of trees, but Jake kept moving in a way to make it impossible for B-grade to attack effectively, forcing it to eventually enter jungle proper.

“Do you believe this is advantageous to you?” Chimera asked tauntingly as it kept striking with its tendrils while Jake kept shooting stable arrow after stable arrow while moving rapidly through jungle.

“Hopefully,” Jake decided to banter a bit. Usually, he wouldn't bor, but a lot of things still nagged him.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that whatever god had blessed Chimera was from Court of Shadows, and that this B-grade had been given a job to kill Jake. Likely, that was why monster cared so much about taking him out in first place. He would be Chimera's escape from this planet and source of his backing once off-planet.

Jake's biggest question was, who hell would hire Court of Shadows to kill him? It might be a bit rude, but first candidate to enter Jake's mind was Villy himself. Jake could totally see snake god hire Court to send assassins after Jake for some extra training and experience. It would also make sense for it to be Viper, as Jake reckoned Primordial would know about assassins being hired and potentially even had to approve it. While Umbra was considered to be at same level as twelve Primordials, making someone like Viper an enemy was still risky.

However, it didn't feel right. First of all, timing was wrong. Villy wouldn't hire m while Jake was off visiting Panon of Life in what even Primordial had called an official

diplomatic mission. It would also be odd to hire assassins to kill your own Chosen within dominion of an or Primordial-level faction.

That meant someone else had enough hatred for Jake to hire an assassin to kill him. Was it perhaps someone who had been related to Yip of Yore? There were still a lot of gods who'd backed Yip out there.

It could also totally be the Holy Church, though they tended to only hire the Court of Shadows to handle internal matters. Perhaps it was just someone who didn't like to see Jake's name on top of the Nevermore Leaderboards... either way, whoever was behind this had to be powerful to dare hire an assassin to kill the Chosen of the Malefic Viper and have the Court accept the mission.

So many unknowns... all of which Jake had no way of finding out besides trying to probe Chimera a bit.

As he dodged through the jungle, avoiding strike after strike, Jake also slowly got closer to Chimera, all while speaking again. **"I know the faction who promised to give you a place in the multiverse... and do you genuinely think you'll want to invest in you?"**

Jake's words seemed to have some effect as tendrils were thrown off ever-so-slightly, Jake taking the chance to instantly close the distance and get close to Chimera, thus exiting its optimal range.

"Look at yourself. You're a B-grade, yet this is the best you can do? Someone of your caliber isn't even worth being cannon fodder to the Court of Shadows," Jake continued, and he noticed that the especially mention of the Court of Shadows had an effect.

"You... how do you know-" Chimera began, but Jake stopped it from speaking by teleporting right below the big monster before punching upwards with a Penetrating Fang, stabbing deep into the stomach of the B-grade.

It screamed before trying to crush Jake, but he was too fast and cut the monster across its stomach, causing a small waterfall of sludge-like brown blood to pour out, the wound taking a long time to close due to Heartrot Poison.

"I've encountered people from the Court of Shadows many times before," Jake said, his speaking having no effect on his ability to fight, while it clearly messed with Chimera. **"In fact, there was a time you really wanted to recruit me. An offer I would have perhaps taken in a different life."** Official source is novel•fire•net

His katars moved across the body of Chimera like a whirlwind, leaving dozens of cuts every second as the monster struggled and tried to stop Jake in any way it could. Entering the jungle also quickly proved an excellent move, as tendrils struggled to avoid hitting trees or other obstacles while trying to catch Jake.

“I know m well enough to know that in ir eyes, you are nothing. A means to an end at most. Even if you leave this planet, what do you think awaits you? Do you think y can magically turn you into a B-grade that’s worthy of actually being called a B-grade? Even if y could, why wouldn’t y invest those resources in someone actually competent?”

Chimera tried to get away several times, but Jake didn’t let B-grade flee. Strings of arcane mana wrapped around monster in several places, Jake using m to pull and swing himself while attacking, leaving his opponent more and more bloodied. All while, he continued channeling his inner Songbird.

“How long have you been on this planet without facing any real challenge? How long have you hidden away like coward you are? How can anyone with such a fragile mindset ever achieve anything? only thing weaker than your power is your mind.”

Getting a good opening, Jake stabbed right where one of legs connected to Chimera’s body and released a blast of arcane mana, nearly severing entire thing. He felt his poison had accumulated quite a bit inside monster’s body, too, ravaging it from within.

“Makes me wonder what kind of god wasted a Blessing on you. Did y do it out of pity? Vanity? Eir way, whoever this god is, y are living proof that even divine can sometimes make idiotic decisions,” Jake said, deciding to also insult Patron of Chimera, hoping monster was reverent type.

Eir way, Jake’s plan had worked out well so far. His psychological warfare bought him a lot of time as two had torn through jungle, destroying vast swaths of it during ir fight, as Chimera had constantly tried to eir get away from Jake or attack him.

Yet he couldn’t be entirely calm... because even if everything he’d said about this B-grade being trash was true, it was still a B-grade. Moreover, what he’d seen so far didn’t even put it at level of Sovereign. Far more durable, sure, and Jake could see Sovereign lose to Chimera, but in most scenarios, his money would be on bird.

That meant Jake could only conclude monster had more to show. question was just what it was waiting for, as things were going, Jake was rapidly building an advantage.

As Jake landed several more stabs, Chimera finally had a proper way to get Jake away from it. monster roared with immense power, releasing a shockwave of dark mana that temporarily forced Jake away, all as voice of Chimera echoed.

“Useless... weak... unqualified... yes... I am patic,” defeatist tone of B-grade swept through jungle. **“But... I’m also a Chimera. I change. Adapt. Improve. It remains incomplete, but you leave me no choice. Witness me and lay eyes on power found within shadows!”**

torrent of dark energy exuded from Chimera only seemed to increase in intensity as it began to slowly change properties, going from dark energy to shadow energy. At same time, Jake also heard a cracking sound as within darkness, Chimera was changing form.

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Chapter 1132: "Is this really all you got?"

Chimeras, being a mix of different creatures, also often meant its physical body could be quite malleable. These creatures often changed a lot between evolutions, but even within same evolution, they could change forms, primarily because they had a more powerful version of Polymorph skill that most monsters unlocked when evolving to C-grade.

This improved version was able to do far more than slight physical alterations or create a humanoid form. It could allow them to change their forms substantially, to a level where some of the properties of their body could shift entirely.

Jake had seen the absolute extreme of this with Chimera that had dwelled within his Soulspace before it merged with Sim-Jake. Summoned from pure Records, that creature shifted shape like water, altering anything and everything at incredible speeds during combat.

Clearly, this mediocre Chimera couldn't quite achieve that, yet it had managed to redesign itself. An alteration that changed the creature significantly from its looks of old.

When the black torrent of energy finally let up, Chimera stepped out of darkness, emanating a more powerful aura than before. From its dog-like form, it now stood vertically, and its entire body had shrunk down from being nearly ten meters long to just five meters tall.

Its fleshy mid-section had seemingly been squashed together, and the gap was mostly closed as the creature looked a lot more bulky. Calling Chimera human-like wasn't entirely right now, but it had certainly closed the gap somewhat, as it did have a human-like torso and a head attached. The head was the same crocodile one as before, but with Chimera's changed form, it at least looked closer to some ancient god found depicted in a pyramid than a weird sausage dog with a reptilian head. It still looked weird as hell, though, as it had no legs or arms, the four thin and pretty useless legs it had before now gone.

The eight tendrils from before remained, but those had also changed in both form and function. Four of the tendrils were embedded in the ground, functioning as legs, a bit akin to a

spider. Anor two tendrils were coming out of its shoulder region, both looking thicker and far more deadly now. At end of each tendril, Chimera had created what looked like a double-edged battleaxe. kind with a sharp tip at top, letting B-grade still use m to stab.

Finally, its last two tendrils had undergone most change. se two grew out of Chimera's back and were a lot shorter than four ors, though y did look more durable. se had also changed at ir ends as some of plant monster heritage of Chimera was showing through two blooming flowers of flesh, both emanating powerful shadow magic.

Overall, Jake would say this was definitely an improvement from how Chimera looked before, even if he felt like re was still some work to go before it was perfect. form also looked a lot more functional and harder to deal with.

“Through embracing shadows, I shall become more than what I was,” Chimera said, energy within its body still increasing slightly, giving Jake impression it wasn't staying in its old form just for fun. This changed form required far more energy to sustain, and Chimera likely couldn't even be in it without first using its boosting skill.

“Lost for words?” B-grade spoke again as Jake was still mentally evaluating things. **“Good, for I shall not give you time to find m, as I've had quite enough of your venomous tongue.”**

With those words, Chimera made its move. One of axe-headed tendrils swung down from above, making Jake dodge back and out of way before it impacted ground... except it never did.

Instead, axe-tendrils emanated shadow before as it phased through soil effortlessly, as it kept its circular momentum and did a full rotation before coming down again far faster than Jake had expected.

or axe also made its move, this one being launched forward with its sharp tip to try to impale Jake should he try to dodge backwards again. For a brief moment, Jake considered trying to make two tendrils collide with one anor, but quickly abandoned that idea as he teleported away at very last second.

His gut had saved him once more as two tendrils seamlessly phased through one anor, meaning had he tried to make m collide, Jake would have eir lost an arm or have a big hole in his body now.

Jake didn't have any time to rest as from below ground, anor attack was rapidly approaching. four tendril-legs of Chimera served more like roots as y dug deep and even grew as two of m headed toward Jake from beneath. For more chapters visit *novel•fire•net*

Retreating away, Jake summoned his bow and tried to shoot at B-grade, but that's when two flower tendrils came into play. One of them pulsed with mana as a barrier of dark magic appeared, blocking Jake's potshot. At the same time, the other flower also pulsed to release a beam of pure dark mana.

Jake avoided the beam, unable to shoot again as he needed to address the tendrils. The two axes moved more swiftly than the previous tendrils, and although handling two was easier than eight, the tendrils had become significantly stronger and less predictable. Chimera had evidently taken measures to compensate for its weaknesses. Having numerous tendrils often resulted in them obstructing each other; however, the ability to transform into shadows and phase through one another turned this into an advantage, enhancing its unpredictability.

This evolved version of Chimera also didn't have any parts with exposed flesh anymore, giving Jake fewer obvious places to strike. Everything was nicely covered in bark, though to make the tendrils moveable, there were still small gaps here and there which Jake could aim for.

Assuming he wasn't just planning on breaking through the bark, that is.

For now, Jake chose to stay on the defensive to learn what Chimera was now capable of. Those blooming flesh flowers gave Jake an uneasy feeling, making him hesitate to go on the offensive until he knew better what they could do.

In the meantime, he learned more about the axe tendrils, especially. First of all, they couldn't phase through or parts of Chimera's body besides the axe tendril. Jake also noticed that when Chimera struck the ground, it hadn't done so entirely harmlessly. The underbrush of the jungle had been cut through, giving Jake an idea, one he confirmed moments later as Chimera struck a tree, and this time, the tendril didn't phase through.

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Instead, the axe cut through the tree, felling it entirely. It did slow down the attack, but not by much, and the axe-shape chosen by Chimera suddenly made a lot more sense, as it had likely selected this design in part to better fight in the jungle and have the ability to remove obstacles.

Suddenly, the environment wasn't much to Jake's advantage anymore. Quite the opposite, in fact. Using its four tendril-legs, Chimera rapidly gave chase, moving easily through the jungle as it kept attacking Jake with a mixture of magic and physical blows. Meanwhile, Jake's One Step was hard to use due to the dense jungle, especially when Jake wanted to avoid stepping on the ground at all costs to avoid the tendrils. Chimera constantly kept hidden down there.

When Jake was nearly cut by an axe and had to block a dark beam of energy that ended up still grazing him, he knew it was time to seek toward the sky once more. With

both katars, Jake parried axe's upward swing. blow hurt his arms, but as planned, he was propelled through thick canopy above and sent flying into air.

Jake borrowed this momentum to fly even higher as he pulled out his bow and released a rapid barrage at Chimera that was still down in jungle. A second later, B-grade broke through tree-tops, only to be met by a rain of exploding arrows it hadn't been able to see in time.

This attack did limited damage, but it stalled Chimera for a moment, giving Jake time to charge a quick Arcane Powershot. By time Chimera resumed its chase, Jake had charged enough and released his attack.

Once more, B-grade tried to swipe away Jake's arrow with a tendril, but this attack was different from those prior. Jake had purposefully slowed down his Arcane Powershot arrow to appear like a more regular arrow, successfully fooling Chimera into not even bothering to dodge.

tendril hit side of stable arcane arrow, only to be repelled by energy surrounding Arcane Powershot as attack continued, striking B-grade square in chest, blasting it down and back into jungle.

Despite being surprised and now having a nice hole through its bark, monster was quick to get back up and shoot toward sky, only to be met by another Arcane Powershot, this one sped up to arrive faster.

This time, Chimera tried to block with a shadow barrier, but it was broken through and monster was struck again. Due to Jake using some of energy of arrow to speed it up and barrier blocking some, Chimera avoided being blasted back into jungle and only spun around in air a few times.

While flying up towards Jake, four legs of Chimera began changing. Likely because it was now airborne, there was no need for legs to walk around on, making them now have a new function.

All four of them lengthened, and bark covering them turned darker as they sharpened into spear-like limbs, all while still remaining somewhat as legs to help navigate and change direction while flying.

During its flight, Jake continued to shoot arrows, while Chimera responded with beams of dark mana that Jake avoided. Though he had high natural resistance to dark mana due to his affinity for it, each hit still caused significant damage. When Jake had been grazed earlier, he did not suffer much physical harm but lost a substantial amount of energy as attack removed energy from his shoulder. Attack had done some work, and without passive barrier from Arcane Awakening, damage would have been more severe.

Speaking of damage, Jake also managed to land a few more arrows on Chimera, all delivering its payload of toxins. Even if B-grade had changed form, that hadn't healed all damage Jake had done before it did so. monster had an insane amount of Vitality, allowing it to fight back against poison extremely well, but everything had its limits.

fight was far from over, though, and Chimera appeared fully aware of Jake's poison as it actively sought to eliminate it internally while fighting.

A dozen seconds passed as B-grade chased Jake across sky before deciding to close distance. Jake saw entire body of Chimera covered in shadows, and before monster even fully vaulted, Jake used One Step to get away.

Just in time, too, as Chimera was upon him instantly, and before it even fully exited its Shadow Vault, it used skill again to continue its chase. Jake, ready with both katars, went straight for where B-grade was about to appear and used his prescient instincts to avoid first strike of his opponent as he landed a solid jab straight into chest of Chimera.

He didn't have any time to be pleased with his blow as bark around where his katar penetrated began to move and, once more, attempt to envelop his hand and steal his weapon away. Jake could only smirk as he blasted his hand free with arcane energy before teleporting away again, leaving his katar stuck in Chimera as it was slowly getting covered by bark.

Jake teleported back several times, switching to a bow as he nocked an arrow and paused to charge an Arcane Powershot. Chimera perceived Jake's maneuver as unwise, considering he was only one Shadow Vault away. Predictably, creature enveloped itself in a shadowy aura as it prepared to strike stupid hunter.

Half a second passed... and shadowy aura faded away, skill failing to activate.

Taking full advantage, Jake released an Arcane Powershot, blasting Chimera away and sending it tumbling through sky, leaving a trail of mud-like blood in its wake. After stabilizing, B-grade tried to Shadow Vault again, but for second time in a row, skill failed, and it got another Powershot for good measure.

Charging a third blow, Jake had to hide a smile. inexperience of Chimera had once more reared its ugly head. It believed it had successfully disarmed Jake by stealing away his katar, not knowing that this had been its folly.

With a normal weapon, something like Shadow Vault wouldn't be blocked, but one of requirements for a skill like Shadow Vault was that it could only be used on yourself. One couldn't bring along or living entities... and Eternal Hunger very much straddled line between a living entity and being merely a weapon. It was a part of Jake's soul, and as long as it was in physical contact with Chimera, Shadow Vault was off limits.

Jake even purposefully suppressed Eternal Hunger, so weapon didn't release any curse energy or tried to absorb vital energy from Chimera. reason for that was also because stupid B-grade was absorbing weapon deeper into itself to keep it sealed away, likely after having recognized it as an extremely powerful artifact. It believed it had robbed Jake of a great tool, unaware it had just eaten a ticking time bomb.

To make matters worse, Chimera should already know Jake could retrieve weapon remotely, though perhaps it believed re were restrictions, seeing as Jake hadn't retrieved it yet. Eir way, Jake was all good with current status quo as he continued releasing Arcane Powershots toward Chimera that had to dodge normally while trying to figure out why its skill failed to activate.

“What have you done to me!?” Chimera screamed when its skill failed to activate yet again right before it was struck by anor Arcane Powershot, blasting off a large piece of bark and sending blood raining down on jungle below.

“Wait...” monster unwillingly exclaimed after it stabilized. Jake instantly felt that B-grade figured out problem and began to extract Eternal Hunger, which was when Jake allowed cursed weapon to feast.

From within Chimera's body, cursed weapon was activated, and instantly it got to work like it had been starved for centuries. Vital energy was being drained at a rapid pace, and act of moving weapon through its wiggling flesh only did furr damage to B-grade.

Additionally, it wasn't as if Jake stopped attacking during all this, as he kept unleashing Arcane Powershot after Arcane Powershot. With every arrow released, a sense of impatience grew within Jake.

Yes, he had grown quite a bit stronger since his fight with Sovereign, and this Chimera had shown itself to be overall more powerful than Rainbowfear... however...

Is this really all you got?

It had to have more to show, right? Jake severely hoped it did, and luckily for Jake, he would soon learn that sometimes one gets what y hope for... along with accompanying lesson that sometimes one should be careful what one wishes.

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Chapter 1133: Shadow Realm

Through great struggle, Chimera extracted Eternal Hunger from within its body, weapon slowly emerging from bark. As it did this, B-grade also struggled with Jake's constant barrage of arrows, his attacks never giving his opponent slightest chance to rest or recover as damage kept accumulating across Chimera's body.

During his shooting, Jake also noticed a few flashes of light out of corner of his eye, and based on auras he vaguely felt in that direction, Sovereign and Forest Fae's battle had also grown in intensity.

Jake wouldn't be surprised if Forest Fae were hoping for Chimera to win and come help her. Sovereign definitely knew not to expect a helping hand from Jake, as honestly, even if he finished his battle first, Jake would just go watch two B-grades fight, cheering for Sovereign at most.

Back at his own fight, Chimera finally fully extracted weapon, at which point Jake gladly retrieved it with a simple mental command. curse had done some serious work on B-grade while helping Jake recuperate a nice amount of health points. Perhaps most importantly, poison in Chimera's body had been allowed to spread near-uninhibited during B-grade's fight with Eternal Hunger.

At this point, Jake wasn't even planning on some dramatic victory. He would instead just slowly take B-grade down, burning through its health points until there was nothing left. Not most interesting victory, but most efficient one. Latest content published on **novel·fire·net**

It would take a little while, though, especially now that Shadow Vault was back on menu. Having hopefully learned its lesson, Chimera shot towards Jake again using Shadow Vault skill, its two axe tendrils already mid-swing as creature appeared a dozen meters in front of Jake.

A final Arcane Powershot was released, B-grade blocking most of it through flower tendrils as it simultaneously attacked with two axes. Jake retreated away, dodging both swings before he had to deal with four long spear-like tendrils that had been monster's legs not long ago.

se proved to be a lot weaker than axes, allowing Jake to block one if he used katars, which did admittedly mean he was severely outmatched in pure Strength. In fact, Jake was pretty confident that only stat he had his opponent beaten in was Perception, especially considering effectiveness increase to all stats that came with evolutions.

Blocking a few tendrils, Jake was smacked around in sky, flying all over place as he controlled his trajectories and made sure to never get into any truly dangerous positions. In fact, he noticed that every time he blocked with edges of his katars, y cut into tendrils and injected a bit of poison.

only things he truly had to be wary of were axes and blasts of dark magic shooting out of flowers here and there. A single momentary slip-up would result in Jake taking disastrous damage and entire momentum of fight reversing, but that was difference between Jake and a B-grade like this.

Jake was used to these kinds of fights. To him, it was almost normal to battle opponents that could kill him in a couple of blows if he messed up. On the other hand, Chimera fought like a monster that had always relied heavily on its own extreme durability and extreme pool of vital energy. It had never needed to learn how to dodge attacks properly or be defensive.

Chances were Chimera had been in a lot more fights than Jake throughout its life, but there was a vast gulf of difference between quality of its fights. Jake wouldn't even be that surprised if this were the first time in its life Chimera truly had its life threatened.

Its response upon realizing that wasn't good, as it became increasingly desperate with its attacks. A whirlwind of tendrils rained down on Jake, trying to find that one opening that could turn the tide, but he was simply too damn good at dodging to be caught out by such a simplistic opponent.

His katars kept slowly whittling away at tendrils while he occasionally got some distance to shoot a quick potshot. Due to damage Jake's Arcane Powershots had done before, there were several gaps in bark yet to be healed, giving Jake plenty of places to hit for good damage.

As desperation grew, Jake got in more and more attacks as Chimera grew even sloppier than it had already been. Its wounds were oozing with poison, and while Jake had taken some damage throughout the fight, it was nothing too serious.

If nothing drastic changed, the winner was clear. Yet despite being this close to killing yet another B-grade, a nagging feeling welled up in Jake's chest. The more he thought about it, Chimera only being capable of this just felt wrong.

Not just that it was too weak, in Jake's opinion, but that it should have more tools, primarily due to its connection with the Court of Shadows. Shadow Vault was not a skill that could be granted through a Blessing, as it was a combat skill, so B-grade had to have had it for a while.

In fact, seeing as it was a skill in the first place, Jake guessed Chimera likely had it before even evolving to B-grade. If that was the case, why did the monster have so few shadow magic abilities? So far, it had only shown Shadow Vault, the ability to turn its tendril-axes shadowy, and some of the simplistic uses of free-form magic.

Moreover, none of these skills had anything to do with what the Court of Shadows was known for in the first place. Sure, shadow affinity was its namesake and affinity assassins from

Court used, but it didn't solely define its fighting style. Jake's own brother was a good example of this.

Court's fighting style relied on explosive power above anything else. Its boosting skills tended to be more extreme, with harsher backlashes and shorter durations in exchange for more power. Its skills also tended to cause a lot of damage at a relatively low cost.

More than anything, Jake remembered something else that made Court of Shadows best assassins in multiverse. One of the easiest ways to defend oneself was to be surrounded by allies and defenders at all times. Many nobles and high-ranking individuals had bodyguards with abilities that allowed them to block and even take damage in place of their protectee. That meant unless assassins wanted to wipe out an entire entourage of guards, they would have to have a way to isolate their target.

And Court of Shadows had just the thing for that. One that relied on the ultimate achievement of Umbra and what had truly made her recognized as equal to Primordials:

Shadow Realm.

Jake had no idea if this Shadow Realm was in fact her divine realm, the result of some Transcendent skill, or something entirely different. All he knew was that when it was created, Shadow Realm became part of the world and could be found anywhere. One just had to know how to access it.

Something any member of Court of Shadows worth their salt could do.

“You... have forced me into this,” Chimera said, its voice betraying just how tired it was. Jake was definitely looking a bit better, and while his armor was in tatters and his body filled with scratches and wounds, he was totally fine.

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However, just then, Chimera's body began to give off a powerful aura as its power grew once more. For a second, Jake wondered if it had pushed its boosting skill further than before, but he quickly discarded that idea. Pushing a boosting skill beyond its regular limits was not a low-level technique and resulted in death within mere seconds, unless very tightly controlled. Chimera had not shown itself capable of something like that.

Yet its aura kept growing, as it was clearly doing something that pushed it beyond its own limits. When shadows began to swirl around B-grade, that was when Jake realized what it was doing, and he could only smile, full of expectation... though the next words from Chimera were a bit disappointing.

“Behold, power beyond your comprehension! Through my will, I shall throw us into Realm of Shadows, not even allowing you to leave a body behind! Know that

this was your doing, and even if I cannot leave Shadows through my own doing, with your death, I will have fulfilled my contract!" B-grade yelled as it continued garing energy.

Jake wasn't sure that much exposition was needed, but he reckoned Chimera did it because it noticed Jake stopped attacking for a moment when it spoke first time, so it hoped continuing to talk would buy it time. It was entirely correct, though what it had said definitely only made Jake more disappointed in B-grade.

It did explain why Chimera hadn't forced Jake into Shadow Realm from beginning, though. If it didn't know how to leave re again, it would be stuck in a world of nothingness until something powerful enough to pluck it out passed by, or it learned how to exit by itself. Jake would bet on latter being Chimera's best bet, going by level of talent it had shown so far.

A moment later, a shockwave of energy was released from B-grade, moving way too fast for Jake or anyone to react. As it washed over him, Jake felt color and light of world fading away as reality shifted.

In a flash, world Jake had found himself in before was gone. Far beneath m, island that had once housed a jungle was completely barren, with nothing but sand on it, and all or auras on entire planet were gone. only thing allowing Jake to see remaining in this world was a muted sun that gave off an odd, dark shine that he was reluctant to even call light.

Jake took a deep breath as he experienced Shadow Realm for first time, and he instantly understood how Court had become as powerful as it was, even if he remained confused how it even worked. This wasn't some illusion or metaphorical representation or anything like that, but a mirror of entire world. With his Sphere, Jake confirmed he had indeed been transported to an entirely separate and equally real space.

It was fascinating to say least, and Jake turned to regard Chimera that now looked different once more, though only slightly. entire creature had turned pitch-black as its entire body was enveloped by shadow energy, empowering Chimera to a new level.

"This world of shadows shall be your grave," Chimera spoke as its form distorted, and it disappeared from where it had been floating several kilometers away.

In next moment, monster appeared right next to Jake, its two axes sweeping upward with more speed and power than before. Jake dodged to side right as two flesh flowers gleamed. He had expected anor few beams of dark magic, but instead, Jake felt an odd restraining aura fall over his body. world turned slightly darker, as if shadows were closing in on him.

Jake got slower as shadows of tendrils wormed ir way across his body as if crawling beneath his skin and scales. At same time, six remaining tendrils of Chimera attacked

again, and Jake, because of odd magic that had befallen him, was unable to respond perfectly.

He was struck by one of spear-tendrils in leg, stabbing a hole clean through it before tendril quickly retracted away before Jake could stab it. With tendrils coming in from all sides, Jake was about to use One Step, but when he was about to touch down, feeling of danger prevailed, making him stop and change his tactic.

His eyes opened wide as Pride unfolded, and for a brief moment, shadows in Jake's surroundings took on a dark green hue. Pushing his mana, Jake managed to block all four spear-tendrils with powerful barriers as he addressed two axes by dodging and using his katars.

With brief opening coming from unleashing Pride, Jake also tested what was up with One Step as he used skill. Upon stepping down, Jake teleported, but rather than go where he had wanted to, he appeared a hundred meters away upside-down. Perplexed, he instantly used it again, only to teleport around two hundred meters directly into sky.

concept of space is warped by shadows, Jake quickly realized. Perhaps with Pride, he could create a somewhat stable space and use One Step within Legacy Skill range, but it didn't seem worth it.

Before Jake had time to consider more, Chimera was upon him. Jake continued trying to get away, but despite having teleported randomly around, whatever magic those flowers were constantly casting on him hadn't disappeared. Pride clearly didn't work against skill eir, and even after he covered his entire body in scales to try to resist, it barely had any effect.

slowdown effect wasn't that profound, and Jake quickly realized something when Chimera got closer and attacked him. furr away he was from B-grade, more potent skill became, while when he was directly in front of it, slowdown only had a slight effect.

Melee it is, Jake told himself, both katars at ready as he deflected a tentacle and moved to stab B-grade, but this time it was fast enough to Shadow Vault back a dozen meters before swinging down an axe from above to try to split him in two.

Jake flew in pursuit, two of m engaging in a brawl, and for first time in this battle, he was actually struggling. After entering Shadow Realm, Chimera had grown stronger in every way, while it had used that odd suppression skill to make Jake slower. All in all, it had been enough to shift balance, now giving B-grade a slight advantage.

For now, that is.

Chimera had already been in a less-than-ideal state before entering Shadow Realm, and now Jake saw strain it took to maintain all magic it used to get an edge. Moreover, Jake suspected its boosting skill was kind that grew more powerful within Shadow

Realm at cost of a bigger burden on body. This all combined to put B-grade on a timer to kill Jake before it would run out of juice itself.

Not to say that Jake was confident in just playing for time. Chimera had a lot of shortcomings, but longevity was not one of m. Even now, he could feel overflowing vital energy within it, and despite poison doing a solid job, Jake needed to keep doing damage to ensure his victory. If not, he was afraid damn B-grade would eventually nullify all poison through sheer vital energy alone.

two kept brawling as Jake adapted to newfound power and speed of Chimera and began to use some of skills he hadn't before. This included Gaze, which he used to buy himself time to avoid an attack while also landing a nice counter, tearing off more bark, and getting in another dose of poison.

Things were getting rougher, though, and Jake was especially suffering in one area. Because he was fighting a faster opponent that effectively had six limbs to constantly attack with, he had to block a lot more than usual, which left his hands in a terrible state from constant impacts. His gloves helped, but y were already severely damaged, clearly not made to withstand blows of a B-grade, no matter how low-tier it was.

Katars weren't designed to be used defensively, and Jake was suffering consequences of that as he continued blocking and dodging despite bones in his fingers slowly being turned to dust as he was just waiting for one of m to get entirely torn off by a particularly powerful blow.

Jake considered countermeasures as he tried to focus solely on dodging, going on defensive more than before. This clearly made Chimera annoyed as it got restless, overextending for an attack and giving Jake an opportunity he had to exploit fully.

As a barrier of stable arcane mana appeared and deflected a tendril, Jake shot toward head of Chimera, both katars ready as he prepped a Piercing Fang. An axe was coming from below, but it was slightly too slow, and for maximum damage and to confuse his opponent furr, Jake used another skill he had kept hidden thus far.

Right as Jake struck for head of B-grade, another version of himself split off from main body and went for chest of Chimera. In that brief moment, Jake saw confusion flood eyes of B-grade as it was unsure who to attack, and that brief moment was all Jake needed to land two devastating blows.

A double Piercing Fang slammed into Chimera's neck and chest at same time. Not even blink of an eye later, all four embedded katars exploded, two with curse energy and two with destructive arcane mana, as B-grade was blasted away with two large holes in its body. Blood, flesh, and bark rained all over Jake as his opponent tumbled through air, but he didn't have any time to celebrate or even follow up as his head whipped upwards. With wide eyes, he stared toward endless darkness of Shadow Realm... and felt something stare right back at him... no... it wasn't looking at him.

It was at Eternal Shadow right beside him. An Eternal Shadow that was dispersing a lot slower than usual.

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Chapter 1134: Umbral Influence

Jake stared into sky's eternal darkness, trying to discern who or what was observing his clone. At his side, Eternal Shadow followed his gaze as it, too, looked back at whatever presence lurked.

At this moment, Jake also noticed something else. In distance, Chimera that had just been blasted away stopped mid-flight as its entire body turned fully black, as if it had become one with shadows, frozen in time and place.

His Eternal Shadow looked toward sky for a few more moments before it fully dispersed, having lasted longer than usual for sure, but still with a limited duration. At its disappearance, attention of being in sky naturally turned to Jake, who had just absorbed cursed shadow energy.

Just n, Jake felt something connect to his mind. He couldn't even tell if this connection stemmed from presence or Shadow Realm itself... but he recognized voice. It was same as Mistress of Shadows from Colosseum of Mortals.

An entity better known as Umbra.

“How odd. To find traces of my own Records and Legacy, unauthorized and stolen. Within Realm of Shadows, no less. n again, considering usurper in question, perhaps such heretical actions shouldn't come as a surprise.”

Jake listened – not really having a choice in matter – as rar scathing words entered his mind. At first, he felt a bit confused about what she was even saying, but that's when he remembered and... yeah, alright, she had a point.

Eternal Shadow of had been created as an upgrade to Shadow Vault – a Legacy Skill of Umbra. If that was only link it had to goddess, she really didn't have any grounds to complain, but those weren't all Records skill contained.

Sim-Jake, his or self that had existed within simulated reality created by Seat of Exalted Prima, had been a follower of Umbra. Gotten quite respectable Blessing, too.

When two of them recombined, Sim-Jake lost most of his Records, but whatever remained of him became part of Eternal Shadow skill. A large part of reason Shadow Vault had been skill to upgrade in first place was because Jake's or self knew it well. It shouldn't have come as a surprise that another version of Jake dedicated to really learning about his own dark affinity and, by extension, shadow affinity would turn out to be quite good at it.

All of these Records containing Legacy of Umbra had merged with Shadow Vault to create Eternal Shadow skill. Records that once belonged to Sim-Jake were now part of Jake... but Jake in this reality wasn't one who had become a follower of Umbra.

He wasn't one who'd been given her Legacy and Records. Instead, he'd obtained them in a roundabout way without permission, and people who took Records directly from gods without permission had a name in multiverse:

Heretics.

In silent world of Shadow Realm, where Chimera still remained frozen in place, Jake spoke to god who ruled place.

"I want to clarify that circumstances aren't as they look," Jake tried to explain himself. "I obtained this skill from-"

"I know," Umbra responded, her voice sounding a bit amused. "Seat of Exalted Prima is an interesting World Wonder. One I'm certain we've barely glimpsed potential of. Still, Records do rightfully belong to me. In same vein, Records of your simulated self belonged to you as authentic version, so do Records of my simulated self belong to me."

Her answer just confused Jake further as to why she'd said what she said. "I would argue skill isn't heretical."

"But Records do belong to me, and action of creating your skill does qualify as a heretical one," Umbra said, not leaving much room for argumentation. Especially not with her next words. "Not that such a brand would matter to someone who's never been faithful in first place. Not even to his own Patron."

More she spoke, more Jake was confused about why Umbra had made her presence known like this. She wasn't asking Jake anything, and it wasn't even as if she was probing for him to spill any information, as certainly in her voice was overwhelming.

Still, Jake neither confirmed nor denied as he tried to reclaim some manner of control in conversation – all while staying respectful and not pissing off god of shadows and assassins.

"I don't wish to be rude, but may I know why leader of Court of Shadows has approached me in middle of battle?" Jake asked straightforwardly.

“I detected you and followed my curiosity. Not many chances to speak with Harbinger of Primeval Origins, now are re?” Umbra said, continuing to sound amused. ***“Appearing before you in body would have been preferable, but even now, I feel deep roots of Yggdrasil surrounding shadows, and I very much doubt she would welcome my intrusion into what’s ultimately still her domain.”***

“Just curiosity, eh?” Jake asked, feeling re was more to it. He also didn’t feel any enmity from endless dark sky, so he decided to be just a little cheeky. “Couldn’t your curiosity count as breaking rules of Court? A being of your caliber getting directly involved with contract of a mere C-grade seems unprecedented.”

“Rules for e, not for me,” Umbra also joked... except Jake came to realize she wasn’t actually joking. ***“I will admit, assassin this time is not most impressive. So perhaps we should make it a bit more interesting? And you have just thing to make it so.”***

Jake was about to say something as shadows suddenly enveloped his entire body, and for a brief moment, he thought a Primordial-level entity had actually decided to outright attack him. That’s until he realized what source of se shadows was.

When it came to equipment, especially upgrading said equipment, Jake didn’t tend to care overly much. As long as he had a good bow and katars, he was fine. Besides that, he mainly cared about gear for stats, which was why one of neglected gear slots he barely thought about was an item that didn’t and couldn’t give any stats:

His cloak.

That’s also when Jake remembered origin of this item. A shady merchant had happily sold it to Jake for a steal, and as Jake hadn’t felt any danger from item, he’d gladly bought it. Especially as it even had function to improve his stealth. Something that had been very useful in Nevermore before he got Unseen Hunter.

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Since n, he’d kind of forgotten item, and he just wore it out of habit. It offered little after all... but now that he used Identify on his own damn cloak again, he realized remembering would probably have been a good idea.

[Midnight Shadow Cloak (Ancient)] – A cloak created from essence of an unknown creature dwelling in realm of shadows. Incredibly durable to all kinds of attacks. Allows wearer to blend into shadows when standing still or moving slowly, masking ir presence and all ir actions, including ir energies. Improved furr if already dwelling in shadows. When worn within Shadow Realm, cloak will passively absorb energy to repair itself or assist user during ir travel through darkness.

Requirements: level 200+ in any humanoid race. Must have touched upon Shadow Realm.

Jake hadn't noticed its effects within Shadow Realm quite yet, in part because cloak had already been in tatters by time he entered it. Now, entire item was teeming with energy, Umbra's voice echoing again.

"I shall be fair and offer you a choice. An opportunity. Continue as you were, while I disappear as if I were never here in first place. Or, more interestingly, give me this cloak of yours and let its Records merge with Chimera. A more difficult fight will await you, but so will greater rewards. What say you, hunter?"

Jake still couldn't figure out what hell Umbra was doing. Why was she doing all this? It all seemed surprisingly random, but Jake seriously doubted it was. Moreover, for her to become directly involved in this way was extremely unusual.

As for her offer... well, it would definitely be one way to convince Jake to approve his own assassination. He was effectively being asked by boss of assassination agency hired to kill him if he wanted to give his would-be killer a better weapon.

He tried hard to determine Umbra's intent, and he had a difficult time seeing why she would want him dead in first place. According to Villy, she wanted him to grow stronger. Jake was in many ways a direct counter to Umbra's Path due to his Bloodline, which logically would dictate that Umbra wanted to kill Jake, but in reality, she wanted to use him as a whetstone to improve herself. At least Viper thought so.

Moreover, Jake didn't feel any animosity from her. His intuition wasn't warning him, eir. Finally, Umbra had done a lot to form some kind of relationship with Jake through his bror, so to just interfere like this and kill Jake seemed like an odd choice.

Not to say she wasn't willing to put Jake in a potentially deadly spot. If Jake would die to something like that, he was never worthy of being her whetstone in first place.

With all that in mind, Jake smiled and chuckled. "This is eir an extremely clever way to get around some kind of law or limitation by appealing to my desire for a good fight, or you're planning something else I won't even bor guessing."

"Oftentimes, right answer is found somewhere in middle. Have you made your decision?"

"Let's finally see what was up with that creepy cloak," Jake smiled. "Sure, let's go with interesting option."

"I hope you enjoy yourself."

Right after she said those words, Jake felt something. His cloak, which was already acting up, began absorbing shadows around it as a whirlpool formed in his vicinity. cloak absorbed immense amounts of shadow energy at behest of Umbra, enough for it to be utterly unable to contain it.

entire cloak began to come apart and turn into motes of deep shadow that flew toward endless darkness in sky. Once more, Umbra's touch was felt as y all gared into a spherical shape before shooting towards Chimera.

That was when B-grade Chimera also became able to move again. shadow energy merged with body of Chimera, and as it did so, creature underwent yet anor change.

two flowers that had been shining with dark light before began growing and went from looking a bit like two black sunflowers to two lotuses in full bloom. axes grew darker and became metallic as shadows empowered its weapons. Finally, four tendrils extending below B-grade all turned metallic like axes, with ir ends seemingly becoming a lot more malleable, as two of tendrils grew hands on ir ends while two ors remained sharp spears.

When entire transformation was done, Chimera had even shrunk down to be slightly smaller than before, thinner and more li, but most notable thing was definitely black cloak that now covered its body. It looked like a large, tattered black bedsheet was draped over its body, entire thing filled with holes as it swayed unnaturally, with small pieces of cloth even falling off every moment, only to regrow again.

For a few moments, Chimera was still as it gazed towards endless darkness of sky.

“ shadows... y have blessed me. Granted me power,” Chimera spoke, slowly beginning to move forward as cloak continued swaying unnaturally. **“I have become one with Shadow Realm... and soon so will you.”**

From perspective of Chimera, it had only been a few seconds since Jake and his Eternal Shadow had blown it away. brief conversation Jake had with Umbra hadn't had any meaningful effect on Jake's ability to fight, and while it had strengned Chimera, this entire sequence of events had benefitted Jake in one crucial aspect:

He now felt actual excitement for what was to come as Chimera swayed and disappeared from sight. It had indeed become one with shadows, melding into environment itself as it moved swiftly through it, approaching Jake with deadly intent.

Both katars at ready, Jake deflected first blow as B-grade reappeared while already mid-swing. He tried to avoid outright blocking due to horrid state of his hands and fingers, hoping that with active infusion of his vital energy, he could heal m a little.

Retreating away slightly, first difference between Chimera before and now was seen. Beforehand, flowers made Jake slower more he moved away, but now it was even

more than that. As Jake moved away just a few kilometers, darkness all around him closed in, shadows trying to invade his body and deal damage. Only with Pride and passive barrier from Arcane Awakening did he avoid being affected, but he couldn't move too much further, or the effect would intensify.

Chimera now showed its second difference from before. Two of its tendrils had grown hands, which Jake presumed were to grab him, but now shadows gazed in both as black daggers manifested and were quickly thrown toward Jake.

Fast.

Jake moved to avoid, but both daggers moved through Shadow Realm at incredible speeds and even seemed to hone in on him. Taking a gamble, Jake used One Step to dodge away and got lucky in the sense that a random teleport took him to the side and out of two daggers' flight path. This chapter is updated by novel ♦fire♦net

After missing, both daggers dispersed into shadows once more before reappearing in hands of Chimera, reminding Jake a bit of how he could recall his own Eternal Shadow.

A skill he would probably have to use again soon, as Chimera had charged toward him after throwing, all six tendrils swinging for him. Facing the challenge directly, Jake met its charge and expertly moved in between tendrils, deflecting and dodging where he had to while closing in on B-grade.

Getting close enough to attack, Jake tried to cut Chimera, emphasis on tried. Eternal Hunger swept across monster's body but found itself encountering a cape that now covered it. This cape wrapped around his katar as if alive, Jake failing to even strike heavily damaged bark beneath it, and thus did no damage.

Instead, he found two daggers flying at him from an awkward angle as two spear-like tendrils stabbed for his stomach. Steeling himself, Jake ended up having to purposefully get cut by one of the daggers as it flew by him and lacerated his back, but it at least gave him a chance to try to attack again.

Stabbing forward, the cloak once more attempted to stop Jake's blow, but this time around, he managed to pierce through it and into B-grade. It still weakened his blow, but just knowing that at least stabs could still get through was a huge relief, and with this knowledge, Jake retreated a bit away again... however, in the process, he had to block an axe swing.

Despite using both katars and bracing himself, Chimera had grown slightly stronger after Umbra's interference. This meant that even if Jake blocked as well as he could, impact still sent enough force through his poor hands to break two fingers in both entirely, sending him flying back as pain shot through him.

Fuck, he cursed internally as he gazed down at his less-than-healthy hands. legendary gloves had done a good job of making his hands more durable for a long time, but as an item, y were still limited and could only do so much to make up for just how damn fragile human body could be.

Bloody cheating that Sovereign's talons can be as tough as actual weapons, Jake cursed as he prepared himself to block again despite immense pain and deteriorating strength in his grip, really wishing in that moment he didn't have weak and fragile human hands.

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Chapter 1135: Limitations Of Human Body

Jake had entered this final stage of fight with quite a few injuries, but so had Chimera. In fact, between two of m, Chimera was definitely worst off. While whatever Umbra had done had increased its overall power, she hadn't healed monster at all, and whatever poison permeated its system remained as powerful as ever.

Defensively, only new addition was cloak, but it wasn't as if B-grade lacked durability in first place. addition of cloak made cutting attacks ineffective, but he could still stab through and penetrate flesh.

When he got a chance to retreat slightly and release a barrage of arrows, he also learned that he could penetrate cloak with those. Explosive arrows had little effect as cloak nullified destructive mana for most part, forcing him to stick exclusively to stable variant.

Overall, Jake estimated power-up to Chimera wasn't huge. It had added more means of combat to monster, though, especially with its two flying shadow daggers that were a pain to deal with. Especially seeing as Jake was in quite literal pain every time he had to parry anything.

axe swings were simply too powerful for Jake to deal with, especially now. Even if he merely deflected blows and didn't take brunt of hit, he still felt a tang of pain every time. Vital energy was doing its job, trying to heal Jake's hands and fingers constantly, but just couldn't keep up, seeing as Jake couldn't exactly take a break and relax.

Despite things being tough, Jake remained confident, though. He still had a few cards up his sleeve, after all.

Diving into melee once more, Jake dodged in between tendrils and summoned a set of stable arcane barriers to block an incoming shadow dagger that flew at him from behind. Stabbing forward, Jake landed another nice jab, but he had to quickly retreat afterwards as an axe came down from above.

Circling around B-grade, Jake tried to make use of his better mobility and smaller frame. As he got behind Chimera, Jake noticed something. Shadow Realm appeared less dark at B-grade's back, and his body felt lighter and faster, which was when he realized it.

Those flowers... its magic only works frontally.

Jake wanted to punch himself for not figuring it out faster, though even if he had, it was doubtful how useful that knowledge would have been. tendrils themselves could turn without body having to, meaning Jake was only free from flowers' influence for less than half a second. Enough for him to land another quick stab, but not enough for anything more.

Retreating away, Jake avoided both daggers, but two spear-tendrils came quicker than he had anticipated, putting him in a tough spot of having to choose between axe and spears. choice was clear as Jake had his thigh pierced, attack luckily not strong enough to go all the way through.

He also used this as an opportunity by dismissing one of his katars and grasping vine once it pulled out of his leg. Right as it was in his grasp, his hand began to glow a deep green as Touch of Malefic Viper activated, sending a flood of poison through tendril and toward main body of Chimera.

B-grade quickly tried to make Jake stop, but Jake managed to avoid two hits while still keeping hold of tendril. His grip was too strong for thin appendage to get itself free, but Chimera still tried to pull him all over the place.

Finally, an axe came that Jake couldn't dodge without letting go. Right before attack reached Jake, he held out his hand as an explosion of arcane mana sent him flying back with sudden speed, dragging tendril along with him... right into path of axe.

Chimera screamed as it cut off its own tendril, poisoned blood flying everywhere from amputated limb. With a small smirk, Jake quickly pulled out his bow and took full advantage of B-grade's lacking experience and combat prowess once more.

It shouldn't come as a surprise, but overreactions to taking a lot of damage were a great way to take even more damage. Most creatures considered competent learned to fight through pain, or didn't feel it in the first place. At least you had some way to deal with pain. Evidently, Chimera was not one such creature as it reeled back in agony, giving Jake time to release a far more powerful follow-up than he should have any right to.

An Arcane Powershot charged for several seconds, blasting into shoulder region of reeling Chimera, piercing straight through cloak and into flesh and bark of B-grade. This content belongs to *novel•fire•met*

His aim had been far from random, as Jake had targeted close to where one of flower-tendrils connected to rest of Chimera's body. Initially, he had only hoped to maybe blow off tendril, but with extra time provided by Chimera's patic reaction to losing a single tendril, he had aimed for more.

entire shoulder section was blown off Chimera, including tendril that was sent flying into Shadow Realm, flower of flesh wilting after being separated from B-grade.

This attack seemed to shock Chimera back to reality as its survival instinct finally won out over its reaction to pain. Annoyingly so, despite losing one flower, suppressive effect on Jake hadn't lessened in slightest, meaning Jake probably had to get rid of both to free himself fully.

Something that would be quite difficult, as B-grade was back to attacking, now with newfound fervor after losing two tendrils. small one Jake had made Chimera cut off itself wasn't healing eir, due to effects of Touch and all or poisons coursing through B-grade's system.

Despite losing one of his methods of attack, that didn't make things any easier for Jake. Quite opposite. Chimera had been more arrogant and confident after its power-up, but as fight had continued, it realized Jake still wasn't an easy target. Its confidence had slowly morphed into frustration and a slight sense of desperation which colored its attacks.

Usually, this wouldn't necessarily be hard for Jake. A powerful opponent losing ir cool and attacking wantonly was a good thing under normal circumstances, but this B-grade was never skilled enough at fighting for it to have any effect. One would expect that when technique and coordination started to falter, it would have a negative effect, but for Chimera, its desperation only made its attacks faster and stronger.

constant onslaught of axes, daggers, tendrils, and even B-grade trying to ram him with its entire body, put Jake solidly on back foot. He was pushed back repeatedly as he continued to dodge, block, and deflect as much as he possibly could, damage accumulating with every passing second.

This reckless attacking method did leave plenty of openings for Jake to exploit, but he had a hard time committing. If he wanted to strike back, he would have had to get close to Chimera, putting him in a dangerous situation. What's more, with current state of his hands, Jake wasn't even sure he could put all his power into m without his fingers falling off.

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Something needs to change, Jake told himself as he did something he had delayed doing. Using special function of his necklace, a Malefic Health Potion appeared inside his mouth as Jake munched down on entire thing, allowing flood of vital energy to rush through his body.

Mentally, he tried to control as much of this energy as possible towards his hands, fingers, and even his wrists, which were also starting to experience trouble. Jake instantly felt his situation improve, and he got a second wind to strike back, landing a few stabs in exchange for more cuts marring his own body.

He was still waiting for an opportunity to get final flower tendril out of way, but Chimera was very defensive of it, even with its semi-desperate fighting style. With flower still up, ranged combat wasn't a feasible option. While effect was barely noticeable while near Chimera, Jake considered committing and potentially even sacrificing something in exchange for taking down last lotus.

However, even having to do something like that felt... insulting. Only reason he even had to consider something like that was because of damn state of his body... no, not his body, his damn hands.

Jake knew Toughness wasn't his highest stat, and it never would be, but he had still never suffered this badly. Sure, he often felt heavy impacts rattle through his body when he had to block something, and bones in his fingers had broken at least a few thousand times, but usually it never limited him.

With a good flow of energy and his Soulshape intact, Jake could continue to use his body as normal, even if it was severely damaged. Things like muscles and tendons shouldn't be what limited Jake, and in some ways, y still weren't. Jake could still forcefully move his hands and fingers like normal. problem was that if he punched too hard or blocked a too powerful blow, his fingers would just... bend. Break.

Something no amount of energy or stable Soulshape could stop from happening.

At this point, fight wasn't solely about beating Chimera but about Jake overcoming himself and this obvious weakness he had uncovered. He hated feeling, and slowly, many of his plans were washed away by his stubbornness.

Did he have a Protean Arrow prepared? Gaze? Moment? More uses of Eternal Shadow? Yes, to all of m, but Jake didn't want to use m. Not now. Not as a crutch for him to escape his own shortcomings.

Instead, he foolishly faced challenge head-on.

As fight continued escalating, two exchanged blow after blow in a vicious brawl. Chimera's durability and longevity were truly its most outstanding properties, as despite

Jake doing all he could to inflict more poison and even using Touch a few times here and re, B-grade was refusing to fall.

With shadows empowering it, monster made full use of its environment as it continued to absorb energy from all around it. cloak also kept mending itself by absorbing shadow energy whenever Jake managed to damage it, leading to a less-than-stellar cycle.

Jake's belief that he had an advantage as long as he dragged things out rapidly faded away as Chimera didn't seem to tire at all, no matter what he did to it. Especially not after he realized just how much energy it was constantly getting from Shadow Realm, as that was definitely a part of Umbra's influence he could do without.

That meant he would have to do something drastic to get back his advantage, and Jake was wracking his brain for what to do. Especially about his hands. He considered many possibilities and searched his memories for what he had done in past, and a few ideas emerged, with especially one memory standing out.

He remembered time he battled Hive King termite. How he had failed to penetrate its carapace with normal attacks and how trying to stab it had been a downright painful experience, as it felt like punching a wall. Back n, he had infused his entire body with stable arcane energy right as Hive King charged into him, all done in an attempt to stand perfectly still while also increasing his durability.

Sure, he was still absolutely wrecked by Hive King and used Eternal Shadow to avoid taking lethal damage, but concept had worked to some extent. Of course, things weren't as simple as just infusing his hands with stable arcane mana. If it were, he would have done so a long time ago, and technically, he was already infusing his entire body with stable arcane energy through Arcane Awakening whenever he used his boosting skill.

Say Jake did infuse his hands with stable arcane mana. It would turn m rigid and not even that much more durable. It definitely also wasn't a healthy option, and re was a reason that last time it was done in combination with Eternal Shadow.

Yet... he felt like he was onto something. At least partly. He scoured his memories for or ways, and an obvious one that entered his mind was naturally Carmen, but he instantly knew her methods weren't ones Jake could use. She made her entire body into a living weapon through a long period of forging it, and her entire Path as a Runemaiden was what allowed her to be what she is today. It wasn't something Jake could mimic on fly.

However, re was one person in Jake's memories who was both a human and had managed to display what Jake would call superhuman durability and resilience, even among or superhumans. A man who could stand before any beast unarmored and unarmed, yet most would still agree he wielded every advantage. Someone who was perhaps strongest melee combatant in entire multiverse:

Valdemar.

He was someone who would never let limitations of human body inhibit him... no... he probably didn't even believe his body had any limitations in first place, and if something did bother him, he would barrel through and fix it through sheer will and his Transcendent fighting aura.

Jake was pushed back yet again as an axe had gotten too close for comfort, leaving a cut down his front. By now, his entire body was filled with wounds, Chimera growing in confidence as Jake had a hard time finding opportunities to attack with current state of his body.

He did get a brief opportunity now as he tried to apply some kind of temporary measure. Strings of arcane mana appeared and wrapped around both his hands to try to keep them together, even if every bone was broken.

Chimera didn't seem keen on giving him more time as it charged once more, Jake meeting it head-on as he directly parried a shadow dagger before proceeding to punch forward with a Piercing Fang.

Power rushed through his arm and hand as he struck B-grade directly in chest. katar went straight through cloak and into bark. However, at same time, force also went back into Jake's hand and arm, and at this point, even if he had applied wrappings of arcane mana, his poor fingers had reached their limits.

All four fingers broke entirely at their base from katar, pressing into them as his hand buckled unwillingly. Jake grimaced in pain and quickly pulled back, but in the process, he had to let go of his katar, as he could no longer open and close his hand.

Instead, four fingers just hung limply, barely connected to rest of his body anymore, and only reason they had even stayed attached was due to being encased in his tattered gloves.

His only lucky break was that Chimera had been sent back from attack, giving him a brief moment as he stared down at his broken hand. He tried to close it into a fist, but there was no reaction at all.

Move.

As Chimera stabilized and quickly positioned itself to attack again, Jake just stood there and looked at his mangled right hand, a feeling of anger and indignation welling up inside of him. He simply refused to acknowledge his body was this weak. That he couldn't even handle his own attacks. Sure, he could understand something like Arcane Powershot taking a toll on body as that could be charged infinitely and was only limited by his own durability, but this current situation?

It was unacceptable.

With his left hand, Jake took out Eternal Hunger again and forcefully placed it in his right hand. Closing his eyes, Jake took several deep breaths even when Chimera was upon him.

Stability...

Using his arcane energy to make his hand more stable wasn't a good option. He already knew that... but he wasn't entirely on wrong track. He already used Arcane Awakening to flood it with arcane energy, so he needed something else to be source. Something far more fundamental.

From front, two axes began descending toward Jake, yet he remained unmoving as something stirred in his mind. two axes got ever-closer until finally... world slowed.

Jake had entered his Moment of as he remained unmoving, world entirely still. Eyes still closed, Jake appeared within his own Soulspace for a brief moment as he connected with a certain set of Records within m. se Records began to be given form within his Soulspace as he had a very vivid memory associated with ir Origin.

Records mixed with memories and his Willpower inside Soulspace, as in outside world, his orwise mangled hand began to give off a slightly foreign aura. completely ruined fingers began rapidly healing as y forcefully reattached under influence of this aura and Jake's will. As y mended, one by one, fingers slowly closed around handle of katar, world started moving once more.

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Chapter 1136: Weakness Overcome

Within eternal darkness of Shadow Realm, goddess who called it her home observed a small corner of this multiverse-covering realm with great interest. A curiosity for sure, considering involved parties she observed were merely a C- and a B-grade locked in combat.

entire fight was... sloppy. Almost to a hilarious degree. One fighter was extremely skilled and was, in certain areas, able to be considered unrivaled, especially in his grade, if not among all mortals. Meanwhile, or was unskilled, untrained, and lacked any outstanding abilities. only advantage it had was its B-grade stats and power that far surpassed far more skilled C-grade human.

And sometimes, raw power did overcome technique. human was struggling, his body unable to keep up with what he required of it. His limbs were giving out with every clash, and Umbra saw struggle and frustration whenever his body couldn't adhere to his will.

She guessed human had some way to turn tide, but for some reason, he kept stubbornly fighting in same way. Finally, it reached its limit where it seemed as if he'd gone one step too far, accumulated damage passing a point of no return. That last hit had broken dam, his human form showing its limitations.

Yet, he kept just standing re, looking at his hands as if y had just greatly betrayed him. After recovering, Chimera moved to strike in retaliation, and once more, hunter did not do as one would expect. In fact, quite opposite.

With an enemy closing in, he closed his eyes. Even as two axes were prepared and swung down toward his head, he remained still. Umbra merely observed, having a good idea about what Chosen was doing. To experience growth in combat was a hallmark of anyone worthy of calling mselves a genius, and this appeared to be one such moment.

timing could have been slightly better, though. As axes grew closer, Umbra saw distortion of time affecting Chosen, as he used a skill goddess had only heard of but never seen in person before. From her perspective, it didn't look like it did anything, but she knew that from human's point of view, time no longer moved same.

To use a survival skill as a way to buy a second of enlightenment was novel, and as goddess of shadows wondered if it would be enough... she felt it. Nothing that had happened so far had even been worthy of raising an eyebrow. hunter had shown nothing she didn't already know about or found truly outstanding.

However, in that moment, she felt a familiar aura from human. One that belonged to one man who had shown multiverse that humanity was a pinnacle race that was re to stay. aura of a legendary warrior...

Except it wasn't his aura, even if, for blink of an eye, it did feel like it. Instead, it had been a very faithful imitation born from Records of Valdemar. As a human, Chosen naturally had a deep, innate connection to Valdemar, same way most dark elves were connected to her.

That didn't make his feat any less impressive, though. To produce an echo of a Primordial's aura from mere Records...

Umbra couldn't help but smile as human opened his eyes again, feeling quite confident he was hiding even more secrets than she'd first assumed.

--

Jake's eyes opened as a feeling of power welled up from both his katars and entered his hands and forearms. He felt his grip, tighter than ever, and as axes descended toward him, a sense of stability and confidence rushed through his body.

Rather than dodge, he moved his hands upwards to block one of descending axes using both katars. A move that would have resulted in at least four fingers flying off merely a second ago.

An axe struck Jake's katars, and he felt force permeate through his body as he was sent flying downwards from impact... his guard holding throughout. Looking at his hands through holes in his gloves, Jake dispelled his scales and saw that his skin now had a blackish color. What's more, it gave off a faint aura of curse energy.

Looking at his hand, he saw an even deeper black color permeating it, giving off a metallic feeling mixed with something more. Something that Jake couldn't identify at all, at least not until he realized why he couldn't identify it... because there was nothing to identify in the first place. Void was absence of everything, after all.

It was evident that the nature of two weapons Jake wielded had affected his hands and went down to just below his wrist. His soul had merged with his weapons, and in return, his weapons had merged with him, becoming an even greater part of Jake than before.

Jake's moment of enlightenment had been brief, and from the looks of it, Chimera had yet to fully realize something had changed. It hadn't even noticed Jake's demeanor had grown far calmer, even as it charged again.

With his newfound melee capabilities, Jake met B-grade head-on, and this time around, he no longer feared blocking or deflecting blows of his opponent. His sudden change in strategy evidently took aggressive B-grade by surprise, as it hadn't expected him to deflect an axe swing before diving straight past a shadow dagger and stabbing Chimera in the chest for what felt like umpteenth time.

Previously, when he did this, he also released an explosion of energy to give himself some space, but not this time. Instead, he quickly withdrew his katar and stabbed again, getting in several quick jabs before he was forced to dodge again.

He moved around B-grade, and on the way, he got a glimpse of his hands again through gloves and saw his black skin had returned to normal, even if the full effect remained. Jake quickly covered himself in scales as, despite the increase in durability, he hadn't suddenly transformed his hands into those of a Runemaiden. They were a lot tougher, but still within reason.

Jake also noticed something else as he continued his assault while taking full advantage of his newfound momentum. Every blow felt stronger than before, if only by a little. He hadn't gotten any levels, but the notification he got let him know the reason.

Fangs of Man had gotten an upgrade, and as Jake's passive melee skill, that meant an increase to effectiveness of Strength and Agility. Overall, result was that Jake's hands and arms could now move faster than before, and his overall power had experienced a slight upgrade in concert with durability increase.

All bad news for Chimera.

“What did you do?” monster asked as it whipped around, bringing with it a barrage of tendrils that forced Jake to retreat temporarily.

“Improved,” Jake simply answered as he kicked down while creating a stable arcane platform beneath his foot, shooting forward. “Something you probably can't relate to.”

His petty insult didn't appear to have any effect as Chimera continued attacking, speaking more to itself than to Jake.

“For so many years, I've lorded over this Hunting Ground. For so many years, I've prepared myself to leave, and now that I finally have my one opportunity, you will not stop me!” B-grade yelled, releasing a small shockwave of shadow energy that washed over Jake as he passed right through and was nearly upon his foe. Newest update provided by *novel·fire·net*

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se words from Chimera did annoy him, though. “You could have left at any point. You said yourself you had been given opportunity to leave already, but declined it. You only have your own cowardice to blame.”

“I have made no decisions I regret!” Chimera insisted as Jake dodged two axes and parried both shadow daggers at once, right as spear-like tendril shot up from beneath. Rar than try to dodge, Jake purposefully moved his foot into its path and allowed it to smash up into his boot.

As expected, nothing could harm most overpowered boots in multiverse. Instead, he was merely sent flying upwards, straight toward his target: one remaining shadow flower.

Ignoring pain in his foot from impact, Jake went straight for thin tendril as Chimera desperately tried to get out of way, but Jake was too fast. Infusing both katars with energy, he used anor set of Piercing Fangs as he penetrated into tendril, and once in re, he twisted and made both his weapons explode in a blast of destructive arcane mana.

entire tendril was severed as second flower of flesh wilted, and as it did, suppressive effect on Jake instantly dispersed. halfway severed tendril swayed a few times before it stopped moving, and right before Jake's eyes, it began to seep out black smoke.

Jake quickly retreated after having launched his successful attack, which was when he saw that it wasn't just that one tendril that had started leaking out shadow energy. All throughout body of Chimera, black smoke was emitted, and he saw tattered cloak that covered its body begin to tatter even more as fragments of it merged with B-grade.

“Even if shadows may take me... so shall you be claimed,” Chimera said, its voice calm.

Right n, a cracking sound echoed throughout Shadow Realm as bark on Chimera broke apart all over its body, revealing black rotting flesh beneath that began to squirm and move.

In a rain of disgusting brown blood, tendrils one by one erupted from exposed body of Chimera, each of m absorbing shadow energy expelled from B-grade's body as new bark-like material formed only at ir tips. Some formed spear-like ends, while ors were turned into more hands.

Within moments, Chimera had grown anor twenty tendrils to attack with, looking more like some eldritch horror than anything else. All of se tendrils swayed in air threateningly, daggers of shadow energy appearing in all empty hands as spear-tendrils slowly lowered mselves and pointed straight toward Jake.

“Now die.”

entire Chimera was enveloped in mana as it Shadow Vaulted forwards, appearing again right in front of Jake as it swung its now nearly thirty tendrils all at once. B-grade had entirely given up any semblance of defense in order to kill Jake, and based on how it was still constantly leaking energy, this truly was its final gambit.

And boy, was it a stupid one.

Could Jake try to dodge all tendrils? Sure, and he reckoned he would even have a good shot, as even now y were clearly getting in way of one anor. However, why would he bor when he had a far better approach available?

Leaping backwards, Jake summoned his wings and rapidly began flying backwards as Chimera pursued. Sadly for B-grade, it was slower now due to its less-than-ideal form, and it had to rely on Shadow Vault to try to keep up.

Meanwhile, Jake pulled out his bow and, with flowers out of way, he switched to a full-range fighting style. So what if he'd just gotten an upgrade to his melee skill? That didn't mean he had to only use that, and besides, he had already succeeded in overcoming unacceptable weakness he identified.

Evidently, Chimera had expected Jake to continue using only his katars and was not ready when salvo of arrows arrived. With its bark mostly gone, it now only had a

tattered cloak covering it here and re, and Jake knew just how weak body could be without any proper armor, be that armor natural or acquired.

Arrows pierced into flesh one by one as Jake kept his distance through a clever use of arcane blasts and using his wings while maneuvering around Shadow Realm. As he already knew, Shadow Vault worked in straight lines, so as long as he kept flying in an unpredictable pattern, Chimera never quite locked him down and make use of all its tendrils.

Instead, it could only struggle as damage accumulated with every poison-coated arrow. flesh was beginning to come apart in several places, and rot was spreading at an alarming rate. insane Vitality of Chimera still allowed it to hold on for a while longer, but by now, ending already felt like it was written.

Chimera's final gambit had been an utter failure and only sped up its own demise, and under watchful eye of goddess of shadows, Jake prepared to finish job. He continued his assault for a few more moments, waiting for Chimera to make its next desperate move, and luckily, he didn't have to wait long.

After using anor Shadow Vault, Chimera threw every single shadow dagger at once, each one aimed straight for Jake as y rapidly flew toward him. Relying a bit on luck, Jake used One Step right before he was hit and found himself teleported half a kilometer diagonally away from Chimera, dodging all daggers.

Taking advantage, Jake released a Rain of Arrows upon Chimera that responded by trying to destroy all arrows before y struck. However, right as arrows met tendrils, all of m exploded at once. se explosions focused on scope rar than intensity, as y were absolutely massive and were several dozen kilometers in radius each.

explosive arcane mana masked what Jake did next as he finally took out his Protean Arrow, which had been slow-cooked in his quiver all this time. It had been done for a while, but with flesh flowers, he never had an opportunity to use it. Not before now.

Jake began charging an Arcane Powershot, and to buy himself a little more time, he also used power of shadows a bit himself. A second version of Jake appeared as his Eternal Shadow shot forward, straight through rapidly fading arcane energy.

Less than a second later, Chimera spotted Jake—or at least what it thought was Jake—as it used Shadow Vault to pursue. Jake's Eternal Shadow kept running away from Chimera as it tried to attack over and over again, but as it was effectively a clone of Jake, his Eternal Shadow was also quite good at dodging.

With its increased duration within Shadow Realm, clone managed to buy even more time, but alas, Chimera simply had too many tendrils by now. Eventually, Eternal Shadow was struck by a shadow dagger, but to Jake's surprise, it didn't immediately disperse. Instead, its entire body turned black and shadowy, revealing to Chimera it

had been a clone all along, but for a brief moment more, Eternal Shadow remained tangible. Tangible enough to strike and land one more solid hit before finally becoming one with shadows.

This brief moment gave Jake one more second to charge his Powershot, though he reckoned at that point it was already good enough. Letting go of string, a shockwave of arcane energy temporarily pushed back shadows as it flew toward Chimera. Every bit of Hunting Momentum had been poured into it, and right before it struck, Jake used Gaze to stop Chimera from dodging away with a Shadow Vault.

arrow struck true and upon impact, flesh and blood exploded everywhere. Chimera had its entire mid-section destroyed, two dozen tendrils were severed and sent floating through shadows, and at that point, all knew fight was over.

As a final measure, Jake raised his hand and activated Touch of Malefic Viper to stimulate poison within Chimera's body truly. In addition, he triggered Arcane Charge from Hunter's mark, shadow realm lighting up in a flash of arcane light a second later as Chimera screamed before it fell silent.

All squirming tendrils that were still attached fell down limply as entire body of Chimera turned black and semi-translucent, as if it were about to use Shadow Vault again. Except Jake knew it wasn't.

It was simply becoming one with shadows, as its body slowly began dispersing like smoke, its voice echoing for a final time, its words not making much sense.

“Shadows... I see... finally...”

With those words, rest of Chimera faded away as B-grade truly became one with shadows for good, a notification confirming its death.

You have slain [Darkwood Chimera – lvl 359] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 319 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 316 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 320 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

Several notifications, in fact, as levels were evidently back on menu. Two this time around, which seemed pretty fair considering this had been one of harder fights Jake had gone through, especially with interference of Umbra.

Speaking of...

“I believe congratulations are in order,” voice of Umbra echoed from all around. **“As well as your promised reward.”**

Where Chimera had died, only tattered cloak now floated, but with goddess' words, shadows gared around it. se shadows clearly contained some of Records of Chimera, but also those of Shadow Realm itself, and shortly, Jake's forgotten cloak had been given all new life.

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Chapter 1137: Cloak & Katars

shadows became denser while Jake floated over toward cloak as it floated within Shadow Realm. It was giving off a powerful aura now, and as item was complete, he instantly knew. Despite it being an entirely new item, cloak was already bound to Jake as it had been created using his old cloak.

Looks-wise, not much had changed. It remained an entirely black cloak, except now it looked almost intangible. Holding out his hand, cloak began floating toward him, and as it did, Jake naturally used Identify on it to know what he was now dealing with.

[Umbral Cloak (Legendary)] – A cloak born using a B-grade Chimera and very essence of Shadow Realm itself. Incredibly durable to all kinds of attacks. Allows wearer to meld into shadows when y stand still or move slowly, masking ir presence and all of ir actions, including energies. This cloak is eternally connected to Shadow Realm, faintly drawing on its energies. As long as soul of user and Shadow Realm persist, so shall this item. Allows user to temporarily expend absorbed shadow energy of Umbral Cloak to form a Cloak of Shadows, defending m from all forms of attack.

Requirements: Soulbound

re was quite a lot to unpack in that description. It retained old function of cloak that improved his stealth... well, alright, it didn't really improve his stealth as anything it did, Unseen Hunter did better, but maybe Jake could still layer two effects somehow.

next section was all about how cloak was connected to Shadow Realm, and how that meant it would never be truly destroyed as long as Jake was around, all while absorbing energy. rest of description was talking about its new true use, which was to create a

so-called Cloak of Shadows to defend himself. It was something Jake would naturally have to test effectiveness of, but for now, he was stuck on part where it was constantly connected to Shadow Realm.

"Clever," Jake said as he touched cloak. item was made entirely of shadows, yet when he touched it, it felt more like silk. cloak was incredibly comfortable to touch, and it was practically inviting him to wear it. "Really clever."

"What may Chosen of Malefic Viper be talking about?" Umbra asked, still observing him. **"Are you unsatisfied with your reward?"**

"No, no, it's really good," Jake shook his head. "I'm just admiring cleverness of what you did. This cloak feels almost like a trap."

Umbra was quiet as Jake continued speaking.

"Since it's always connected to Shadow Realm, considering your own relation to this place, I'm going to make educated guess you can easily detect an item you've even taken part in creating. In or words, if I bring this cloak with me, it means you will always know my location even with protection of my Patron. Which seems like quite hazard, considering Court of Shadows has a contract out on my life right now."

"I'm almost insulted by insinuation," Umbra chuckled. **"I'm not saying you're wrong. In fact, you're entirely correct in all your assumptions, besides fact that it will affect current contract out on you. Do you truly think I'm directly involved in a contract on a mere C-grade?"**

"Well, you are currently being directly involved with said C-grade," Jake shrugged. "Not a stretch to assume you're involved with or details of contract."

"Hence why I said I was only almost insulted. Your suspicion isn't entirely unfounded, but do allow me to clarify that I have no interest in directly interfering with any matters of your contract. I shall neir hinder nor assist with what happens. Outside of this little encounter, that is," Umbra spoke. **"Besides, why act as if having a contract out on you is a bad thing? I'm genuinely impressed that Malefic Viper wouldn't be first one to take out a contract on your life. It's good training and teaches young to be more wary."**

"Thanks for confirming Viper isn't behind it," Jake said. "Say, I wouldn't happen to be able to convince you to tell me who took out contract, would I?"

"You could," Umbra said in a slightly teasing voice. **"All it would require was for you to renounce Malefic Viper as your Patron and join Court of Shadows. If you did that, contract would naturally also be cancelled. I also believe I may soon be in need of a new Chosen, as my current one is preparing for her ascension."**

“Yeah, I think that’ll be a non-starter,” Jake shook his head and chuckled.

“A pity. Not like you hold much fealty toward Malefic Viper in first place. Oh, and don’t worry, I wouldn’t expect you to have any toward me either. It doesn’t appear to be in your nature, and besides...” Umbra said, having a dramatic pause for effect. **“Having a Chosen that’s also a Heretic would be a rare novel experience.”**

Jake was a bit taken aback at her words, but kept his calm as he chuckled. “I’m pretty sure being a Heretic and a Chosen are mutually exclusive.”

“So am I, but that’s what makes it interesting, isn’t it?” Umbra chuckled. **“Alas, I shall not hold you up for much longer. Be free to use cloak if you want to or not. You could even leave it here if you so desired. Doing so would certainly be your loss, but choice is yours.”**

Still holding cloak in his hands, Jake just sighed. “Oh well, I am known to walk willingly into traps occasionally.”

With those words, he put on cloak, fully aware of potential dangers it posed. As he put it on, entire thing shifted to better fit his body, and from his connection to item, he felt his ability to manipulate it. He also confirmed that, despite it not being mentioned anywhere, he definitely did feel like traveling around inside Shadow Realm would be a lot easier while having it on.

Finally, with just a mental command, Jake could make entire cloak disappear as it faded into shadows. When he did so, it even became entirely intangible, once more just confirming to Jake that cloak’s true form was just a bunch of shadows mashed together.

“A wise choice,” Umbra said. **“This may sound odd coming from me, but I wish you luck in surviving your contract and whatever endeavors you’re up to.”**

“You too,” Jake said. “Well, alright, I don’t wish you luck in successfully having me assassinated, but all or nothing. Oh, and do remember to be nice to my brother.”

“And if I’m not?”

“I don’t need a contract to hunt someone or something down, and I’m quite comfortable setting long-term goals,” Jake said, not a hint of jest in his voice.

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“Almost tempting. However, Court and I treat Judge based on his own merits, even if his connection to you did play a role in how he originally obtained his position,” Umbra clarified.

Hearing that was oddly comforting to Jake as he nodded, glad to hear his bror wasn't just riding high on nepotism. Though, based on how strong Jake's bror was, thinking he was just relying on connections was a bit insulting.

"That's reassuring," Jake said as a thought just struck him. "Wait... how am I supposed to leave Shadow Realm again?"

"You will automatically be returned once being that brought you here perishes or runs out of energy," Umbra explained.

"In or words, you're keeping me here?" Jake asked rhetorically, as Umbra's influence was really only good explanation Jake could find.

"I was, but yes, it's your time to leave, and as I said, I wish you luck on your Path. Till next we meet, Heretical Chosen of Malefic Viper."

Jake didn't even have time to say anything before world around him was suddenly filled with light. shadows faded away, and mere seconds later, he found himself standing back in sky above island, not a single trace of battle he had just had in Shadow Realm visible anywhere.

only trace that remained was black cloak swaying in wind behind him, still accurately looking like it was made up entirely of shadows. Alone once more, Jake had quite a few things he needed to address, first and foremost being upgrade Jake had gained during his adventure to Shadow Realm.

Taking out Eternal Hunger, Jake grasped it in his hand and instantly felt effect activate once more without him even willing it to. He saw strands of curse energy mixed with something else enter his hand and forearm, empowering it as everything affected pulsed black for a moment before returning to normal.

With his or hand, Jake tried poking his wrists and found m incredibly tough, yet still flexible. It wasn't just skin that had grown stronger, but entire bottom part of forearm.

Dismissing Eternal Hunger again, effect instantly disappeared. Anor flick of his wrist later, and katar was back in his hand, followed by anor pulse of energy. Using his or hand, Jake took out his Voidblade katar, once more feeling effect as that hand was also made far more durable.

Finally, he tried to cut his own skin in empowered area, and... yeah, alright, he cut right through. So, his skin had not turned cut-resistant or anything like that, but n he tried punching his own forearm. Jake definitely felt its increased resilience, finding it far tougher from bone to flesh.

Deciding to stop experimenting, Jake instead did what he should have done in first place and checked notification he'd gotten regarding skill upgrade to Fangs of Man.

[Fangs of Man (Ancient --> Legendary)] – Walking in Path of a legendary warrior, you, too, refuse to see yourself limited by what others claim to be humanity's natural weaknesses. Humanity's natural weapons have never been its teeth, claws, or anything else innate to man, but tools you wield and its ability to adapt anything into an instrument of destruction. Your hands are made to hold tools, now more so than ever, as you refuse to have your body be your limiting factor. Allows hunter to more effectively use anything deemed compatible as a melee weapon. Makes hunter more familiar with any melee weapon wielded. Allows you to forcefully integrate a weapon into your Soulshape temporarily, vastly increasing its durability if otherwise fragile. In return, durability and stability echo back into you, vastly increasing durability of whatever part of your body wields weapon. All effects related to weapon integration are more effective and easier to accomplish with Soulbound weapons. Adds a bonus to effectiveness of Strength and Agility, no matter what melee weapon you wield. Durability increase of weapons and body based on Willpower.

Reading upgraded description of skill that had gone from ancient to legendary, only real change was portion about durability echoing back into his own body from weapon he was wielding.

Fangs of Man had always been able to make whatever melee weapon Jake wielded more durable. Usually, it wasn't an effect Jake used as both Eternal Hunger and Voidblade Katar were already plenty durable, to level where Jake couldn't realistically damage either, even if he wanted to. Not without Alchemical Flame or maybe Touch of Malefic Viper, anyway.

Now, that relationship had kind of been turned around, and now Jake's own body could adapt to durability of weapons he used. From what Jake could see, this wasn't some defensive skill that would suddenly allow him to block swords with his hands, but solely something to ensure that he wouldn't be harmed when blocking or striking. Alright, he probably could still be damaged if he tried to block something way too powerful, but Fangs of Man upgrade had definitely raised threshold.

Another major boon of this upgrade was fact that it was his general melee skill. counterpart to his archery skill. It meant that, without Jake doing anything different or expending any energy whatsoever, he would get a higher stat boost when wielding weapons. It was pretty much free power given by system, which was why upgrading one's basic martial techniques was considered so important... and why Jake, in some ways, found this Fangs of Man upgrade a bit tragic.

Not to misunderstand, upgrade itself was awesome, but Jake had come to this Hunting Ground in part to upgrade his Archery skill, yet he instead found himself upgrading Fangs of Man to legendary. Targeting specific upgrades really was hard, and more often than not, for someone like Jake, who tended to find most of his improvements from battle, whatever epiphanies he had were as much dependent on what he fought as it was on his own desires.

Jake considered testing things a bit more, but he really wasn't in a state to. His body was quite battered and bruised all over, and he still had his boosting skill active, though he had toned it down a bit after Chimera had died. Still, he would have to deactivate it eventually, at which point he would be in for a nasty period of weakness.

Before that happened, he had one thing he needed to check out. Far in distance, right in center of island, Jake felt discharges of energy from two fighting B-grades, telling him that somehow Sovereign hadn't been able to finish job despite all shit Jake had gone through, including his conversation with Umbra.

Not wanting to find himself weakened while getting ambushed by a victorious Forest Fae, Jake quickly began making his way over re, happy that One Step was back on menu as he rapidly traveled across sky.

It didn't take him long to reach site of battle, where he found jungle in quite a messy state. He saw signs of Sovereign charging down several times, and mana still lingered in air from Forest Fae's magic.

Continuing to fly a bit furr, he soon spotted two B-grades. Forest Fae was teleporting, leaving clones behind her every time she did so, magic constantly swirling around her, creating thousands of attacks where most of which were illusions.

Meanwhile, Sovereign was fighting as he usually did: with incredible speed, power, and occasional sound attack. Jake saw how Sovereign ignored most of illusions through his echolocation skill, but he evidently couldn't tell with certainty what was real and illusory all time, resulting in a lot of inefficient movements.

He was too fast for Forest Fae to ever hit, and as Jake watched m fight for a good thirty seconds, he totally understood how it had dragged on for so long. Forest Fae was one slippery bastard, and Sovereign had an answer to every kind of attack Fae could throw at him.

Still, based on how two looked and ir respective auras, it wasn't hard to determine which of m had upper hand. Sovereign was injured in several places with many cuts all across his body, but nothing that Jake could consider lethal, though his missing eye did admittedly look quite painful. Most importantly, Sovereign's aura remained stable. [READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT NOVELX](#)

Forest Fae, on or hand, had an aura reminiscent of a flickering candle in a windstorm. She was missing an entire leg, her wings had long been torn off, and while she was clearly using healing magic on herself all time, she couldn't keep up, as even during time Jake watched, he saw Sovereign rip out a good pound of flesh from her side.

Looking directly at Sovereign when fight had a momentary lull, Jake reached out.

"Need help?" he quickly sent mentally, already aware Sovereign had spotted him.

“No, *she’s mine*,” Sovereign responded.

Jake just smiled in response, having totally been ready to answer “too bad” if Sovereign had said yes. He trusted Rainbowfear to handle his own business. Meanwhile, Jake calmed his boosting skill a bit more to buy himself some time, as he also had a very important thing to consider.

Opening his system menus, option was sitting right re, and seeing as Sovereign was being so damn slow, he took a quick peek.

Arcane Hunter of Horizon’s Edge class skills available

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Chapter 1138: Event Horizon

wonders of skill selection. Jake always liked m. y offered a great opportunity to review Jake's accomplishments since receiving his last one, but far more importantly, y provided best system-supported method for directly experiencing a power increase. Outside of evolutions, that is.

This skill selection was perhaps most exciting yet. At end of every grade, one would get a skill related to essence of that class. Before C-grade, Jake’s classes hadn’t been best, but y had increased gradually with every grade, and now, Jake had a pretty damn good one, which meant he would also get a pretty damn good final offering. Just going by tier of his class – extrapolated from stats it gave per level – Jake already had high expectations of final skill, and more or less already assumed now he would pick it.

For reference, in E-grade, Jake had gained Arrow of Ambitious Hunter, a skill that had now become legendary Protean Arrow. In D-grade, he had gained Relentless Hunt of Avaricious Arcane Hunter, skill allowing Jake to accumulate Hunting Momentum while fighting. It was effectively anor massive passive skill that would allow Jake to make some devastating attacks by expending his Hunting Momentum, all without any cost.

And now it was time to see what final C-grade class skill would be.

Jake could be wrong, but he was fairly confident it was going to be eir a peak legendary skill or just straight-up a mythical one. Seeing as Jake already had three mythical class skills, he knew his chances of getting anor one were larger than usual.

Of course, before it was time to see that skill, he had four more options to go through meticulously while waiting for Sovereign to finish playing around with Forest Fae. First of which was at least a little interesting, if only for reason Jake assumed he had it.

[Entangling Arcane Vinearrow (Epic)] – A meeting between life and arcane, resulting in entanglement of your foe. Allows hunter to shoot an arrow of life energy that will sprout into vines upon hitting a foe or whenever hunter wills it to. The vines will try to wrap themselves around your target to limit its movement, and once target is bound, vines shall seal themselves in place using stable arcane mana. Durability of vines depends on Wisdom. Adds a bonus to effectiveness of Agility, Strength, Perception, and Wisdom when using Entangling Arcane Vinearrow.

Artemis' influence was evident with this one. Jake had never even tried to make a vine arrow himself, but lo and behold, just because he spent some time with a goddess who was known to specialize in that kind of thing, he was offered ability to.

As for skill itself, it looked... fine? Nothing particularly outstanding, really. Only notable thing was that this was a fusion between life affinity and Jake's arcane affinity, at least to some extent. Its ability to turn stable and lock down a foe was also a novel application of Jake's affinity, and he even theorized that he could make entire vine blow up should he so desire.

However, Jake also got feeling skill was actually worse than it looked, at least for what Jake would use it for. Sure, it would definitely be able to constrain an A or C-grade around Jake's level, but he had no confidence in it working against something like Sovereign or Chimera. Both of them would likely tear through vines before they would even have a chance to wrap their bodies, all with very little effort.

There was just no scenario where Jake saw an epic rarity skill from a C-grade be capable of entangling a B-grade for any meaningful length of time, and if Jake wanted his foe to keep still, he already had Gaze.

Never having even considered taking it, Jake moved on to second option, this one just straight-up boring.

[Arcane Clusterbomb Arrow (Epic)] – One explosion can easily be the beginning of many more. Allows hunter to release an arrow that, upon impact, will explode into several explosive arcane orbs that can then be further detonated. This ability can be charged to increase amount of arcane orbs. Maximum amount of mana arrow can contain depends on Wisdom. Adds a bonus to effectiveness of Agility, Strength, Perception, and Intelligence when using Arcane Clusterbomb Arrow.

Arcane explosions. Yay. Not like Jake didn't already have a hundred different ways to make that happen. In fact, looking at this skill, Jake got impression it only had two real use-cases.

first one was if Jake was fighting huge armies of enemies and wanted to create chaos by setting off numerous explosions. In that case, Jake would rather just shoot a good Rain of Arrows with exploding arcane arrows to get the job done, but this skill could technically be better.

A second way to use it was for terraforming the local environment through arcane destruction. A practice recommended by zero out of ten environmental agencies. Jake wasn't big on widespread destruction in the first place and saw no reason to get a good skill that really didn't seem useful in any or situations.

Hence why he rapidly continued on to another interesting skill... a really interesting one, actually.

[Ceaseless Riposte of Shadowed Hunter (Ancient)] – With one step ahead and a foot within Shadow Realm, you always find an opportunity to strike. Allows hunter to counterattack with a piercing thrust after successfully dodging a melee attack. While disengaging from this riposte, hunter will be covered in shadows, allowing you to perform a minor vault, concealing your movements while providing defense against minor attacks. Has a low internal cooldown that's reduced with every successful dodge. Successive strikes without taking major damage yourself deals additional damage. Adds a bonus to effectiveness of Agility and Strength when using Ceaseless Riposte of Shadowed Hunter.

So, this was definitely the newest addition to the list by Jake's estimates, having perhaps been born not even a full hour ago when he was within Shadow Realm and interacted with Umbra. The mere fact that Jake got a skill inspired by what had just happened proved Records obtained by experience were substantial, even if it didn't feel like a massive deal to Jake.

The skill itself did look very Jake, though. Dodging was definitely Jake's greatest ability, and this one directly took advantage of it. Additionally, Jake was limited when it came to melee skill as he only really had Piercing Fang, and another one like this would be nice, even if Piercing Fang and Ceaseless Riposte felt like they would have some overlap, seeing as both were effectively just stabbing attacks.

If Jake was desperate to develop his abilities as a melee combatant further, this would definitely have been an option, but more than anything, Jake looked to it for a bit of inspiration for when he had to update Piercing Fang eventually. Jake doubted he could even use the Shadow Vault portion of the skill, but he did like the look of dodges, making his attacks harder, especially the more damage from successive strikes portion looked tasty.

Looking through skills like this was great food for thought. Even if Jake knew there was no shot that he was gonna end up selecting it. Sufficiently inspired, Jake continued on to second-to-last skill, and this was the first legendary one, as well as the first skill directly related to his class.

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[Arcane Hunter's Tracking of Horizon's Edge (Legendary)] – You are a hunter willing to track your prey all way to edge of reality, and once you have ir scent, re is no escape. Grants extreme proficiency in tracking down prey as long as you know ir basic signatures, be y physical or magical ones. Makes it far easier to distinguish different tracks. Relying on your instincts, you are capable of picking up tracks and clues about your prey that ors may be unable to, and while tracking, all your senses can be focused on act. Once you have met all conditions to properly track a foe, you will innately know ir location, wherever it is. While tracking down prey, Relentless Hunt's Hunting Momentum accumulates far faster. Bonus experience earned when slaying a tracked prey (dependent on total time spent tracking). Adds a large bonus to effect of Perception while tracking. WARNING: This skill is unlocked by and will serve as an upgrade to your existing Bestial Hunter's Tracking, resulting in loss of skill.

Ah, tracking. Jake had done a bit of tracking here and re, including here in Hunting Grounds, especially when he was looking for Forest Fae. Of course, he had failed to actually find her before he went and teamed up with Sovereign, but if he had this skill upgrade back n, he would have likely been able to track her down himself. The source of this content is *novel* ♦ *fire* ♦ *net*

re were a lot of elements to this one for sure. It seemed to make every aspect of Bestial Hunter's Tracking skill it upgraded better while adding on a few more things, including faster accumulation of Hunting Momentum and bonus experience earned for killing his prey. Assuming this bonus experience stacked with Hunter's Mark, a skill like this would be good at making up for experience penalty Jake suffered due to his Anomalous Soul and powerful Path.

Of course, anor way to overcome those penalties was just to keep improving and hunt down B-grades, something Jake planned on doing, anyway. He also didn't want to "waste" a skill selection on upgrading a tracking skill he honestly didn't care overly much about.

Pulse of Perception was already more than good enough at finding things, and he could always work on improving his tracking skill by himself. Heck, maybe Artemis could even give a few tips in that department, seeing as she was definitely skilled in all traditional hunter abilities, of which tracking was definitely one.

More than anything, from very beginning of this entire skill selection, Jake had known it would be final skill he was most interested in and would pick ninety-nine times out of a hundred. Looking at next offering, Jake had indeed been entirely correct, as he was offered his very first mythical skill in a class skill selection... well, first real one anyway, as he didn't count useless war god skill he was offered after his little duel with Valdemar.

[Event Horizon (Mythical)] – For a moment, you glimpse ultimate goal of Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge. At end of your Path, at edge of all one seeks, you find Event Horizon... and make it your prey. Allows hunter to glimpse Event Horizon, designating a target to be one with it and thus considered your new Event Horizon. Upon activating skill, gain a glimpse of your true Event Horizon, creating a reality where only you, horizon, and any potential prey exist. Event Horizon encompasses all realities, inescapable and unavoidable. Only you are capable of glimpsing Event Horizon, and what you are capable of perceiving is determined by Perception. Your arrows naturally seek toward subject designated Event Horizon and will always reach it should you so desire. You will always see location of Event Horizon once a subject has been specified. All effects that scale off distance to your target will have its effectiveness maximized when hunting Event Horizon. power of your soul determines duration of Event Horizon. Your Path has led you here, but for now, a mere glimpse of Event Horizon is all you are capable of, knowing it carries promise of an endless domain to one day make your own.

Jake... had a lot of questions. This was definitely a complicated skill that Jake needed to read several times over to get a good understanding of, and even now, he knew he still had a lot of things he wouldn't be able to grasp before taking skill.

To remove any doubt, this would be skill he was going to select, but he still wanted to ponder it before accepting, not just out of habit or vanity but to try to get an understanding even before he would receive innate knowledge upon acceptance.

Starting from top, Event Horizon was a rarely simply named skill and referred to a known concept. Event Horizon was endpoint of everything, at least from viewpoint of an observer. It was, quite literally, horizon of all events that could ever have happened. At true Event Horizon, everything ceased to be, and nothing could escape it.

Most often Event Horizons were talked about when discussing black holes pre-system, but now, with physics changed, something like Event Horizon had turned into something entirely conceptual. A concept of immense power based on what Jake could see, and perhaps most importantly, one that was limitless by definition.

skill even referred to it as "your Event Horizon" and didn't speak of concept as an absolute, once more clarifying its relative nature. Again, overall a very confusing skill, but, in words similar to what Sword Saint would probably say, there were many profound truths contained within.

Getting to actual effects of skill itself, it seemed to have two major parts to it. first part occurred when Jake first activated skill, which allowed him to glimpse Event Horizon for a moment. At that point, he would only be able to see himself and potential prey, as described. Definitely something he would have to test to really figure out how worked.

next part was when one got to meat of it. Jake could designate a target to be one with Event Horizon, at which point several things seemed to come into effect, most notable being part about all damaging scaling being maximized at a distance.

This would effectively just be a straight-up damage bonus alongside or weird stuff skill did. It also seemed like skill would make it easier to hit his target, though, again, experimentation was required. distance thing looked as straightforward as could be, though, and lest it be forgotten, Jake had one skill that gave him a damage bonus to enemies based on how far y were:

His Archery skill.

"Adds a small damage bonus to all arrows based on distance traveled and Perception."

Jake never thought much about this aspect of his archery skill, as frankly, he often couldn't control how far he was from his target when shooting. Being too far away also had its obvious downsides, so he'd never even tried to see what maximum damage he could get out of his Archery skill was.

What he did know was that distance portion of his Archery skill seemed to also scale with Perception, two effects complementing one another. This part of skill also wasn't something Jake had even thought about upgrading as he worked on improving his Archery skill, but now with Event Horizon, Jake felt an even bigger fire under his ass to finally upgrade damn skill.

He also saw a new upgrade path that focused more on increasing damage based on Perception and distance traveled, rather than trying to implement any or complicated concepts like time magic. Yeah, he should just keep things simple when it came to his Archery skill when he already had so many or passives taking effect whenever he shot an arrow.

By now, Jake had spent long enough considering skill he knew he would end up picking anyway, so without furr ado, he made his selection.

Instantly, innate knowledge flooded his mind, telling Jake far less than he would have expected. only actual knowledge he got was how to activate skill, and he considered for a moment doing so; however, sadly for Jake, he found himself distracted by approaching B-grade.

Turning his head, he saw Sovereign flying over, looking a bit more injured than before, but it wasn't hard to determine who had won duel between B-grades as he carried a head in one of his talons.

"It is done," Sovereign said, definitely looking tired as he observed Jake. "And somehow, you appear more powerful than when we last parted. From my guess, you

grew once more from your battle with Chimera, only confirming foolishness it would have been to fight you.”

”Hey, don’t be that negative. Also, I do have something I would like to test out if-”

”I would remain still and accept my untimely end without any resistance,” B-grade said without missing a beat.

”Spoilsport,” Jake muttered. Oh well, he would have to find something or someone else to test it on. For now, as Jake gazed out over planet and looked at Sovereign, he felt that re wasn’t much left in this Hunting Ground actually worth hunting.

Chimera had been strongest B-grade, which really showed low average quality of place, and Jake had even defeated an even more empowered version of that monster, so unless some or B-grade had abilities that directly countered Jake, he doubted he would find any proper challenge.

I guess it’s time to head home... though I do have a few stops to make on way, and a promise to fulfill.

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Chapter 1139: Friends In High Places

”Do you intend to continue your hunt?” Sovereign asked after a few seconds of silence.

Jake shook his head. ”No, I don’t see point. If this Chimera was most powerful that this planet had to offer, re are no opponents left worth hunting. Well, I still think you could put up a good fight, but since you’re being boring and refuse to fight, I guess my time here is done. Speaking of being done, you took quite a while dealing with that Fae, eh?”

”I informed you she was a tough opponent, not because she was stronger than me, but because of her magic. She quickly realized during our battle that her chances of victory were slim, so she switched to buying time with hope that Chimera would kill you and come to her assistance. When she realized Chimera had lost, she tried a last gambit that you see result of held within my talons.”

”Fair enough,” Jake said, still finding himself surprised at just how much Rainbowfear Sovereign enjoyed talking. ”Anyhow, I plan on leaving. How about you?”

"I shall not leave yet," Sovereign shook his head. "Soon, but not yet. In this coming time, I shall take advantage of power imbalance of planet being broken and prepare for one who lurks below to release another set of treasures meant to restore balance. During this, I will have another B-grade Rainbowfear emerge and take my position as leader, allowing me to leave."

"And you can just leave?" Jake wanted to make sure.

"I can. Killing Forest Fae has qualified me fully," B-grade nodded.

"Good for you, I guess," Jake said as he gave Bird a smile. "Honestly, I would be lying if I wished you luck in your endeavors as you Rainbowfears really are assholes by nature, but I will at least wish you luck with leaving this planet and entering multiverse proper."

"Thank you," Sovereign nodded. "Though I will never fight you, no matter what you say."

"Don't flatter yourself," Jake shook his head. "By time you leave here, I very much doubt I would bother fighting you, either. I have standards, you know."

"In that case, let our Paths never cross again," B-grade said with a solemn nod.

"We'll see," Jake said with a smile, as he knew system and Records had its way of making people meet again. Karma was definitely also involved somehow. "Goodbye... for now, at least."

With those words, Jake turned and headed off toward horizon. He used One Step for a good distance before he found an island that seemed safe enough. B-grades had evidently evacuated area due to fight going on, making Jake feel relatively safe as he found a place to sit down and meditate and fully deactivate his boosting skill.

Right as he did so, Jake instantly had pain shoot through his body as weakness flooded through his system. He had been putting on a bit of a front when facing Sovereign, as his body truthfully wasn't in best condition. Fight with Chimera had been pretty long, and Jake had taken his fair share of blows throughout. He could still have fought B-grade, but that would definitely have resulted in an even worse time down line.

Jake meditated for about a full day before he felt close to peak condition again. After giving a quick mental thanks to First Sage for his assistance in recovery, Jake took to skies as he headed toward jetstream.

As mentioned, Jake had a couple of stops he wanted to make before leaving Hunting Grounds. One of them was to check in with Fortuna Ferret as Jake was a little curious how it was doing, and another one was naturally to fulfill a promise he had with a certain little Warpsnatcher.

It didn't take that long before Jake was back in Area 1 once more, and from above, he quickly located Fortuna Ferret, who was now chilling in former territory of Rainbowfears. He saw it down re, its children playing around with its parent watching happily, and Jake decided he didn't need to go down re.

Instead, he just smiled as he headed to area where Warpsnatcher had dropped Jake off after he'd recovered last time. When he got re, Jake considered searching area, but ultimately decided to just make his presence known. Quite loudly so.

Blaring his aura, Jake expected little critter to locate him sooner or later, and luckily for two of m, it turned out to be former. Within his sphere, Jake saw a faint shimmer in air as weird cat-porcupine-hybrid appeared. Turning his head, Jake used a quick Identify as he felt a very minor change in beast's aura.

[Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher – lvl 347]

"Hey, you got a level since last we met, eh?" Jake said with a smile.

"You many!" Warpsnatcher replied while clapping its small paws.

"I sure did," Jake replied proudly, having indeed gotten quite a few levels. He had been level 309 in his class after killing Simivita Warlord last time he and Warpsnatcher met, while now, he was already level 320. It was quite insane speed, especially when one considered penalties from Anomalous Soul and Jake's overall difficult Path. n again, hunting B-grades as a C-grade was a very efficient way to farm experience.

"Why here?" Warpsnatcher asked after two of m were done having its mini celebration. Jake detected a faint hint of hope in critter's voice, already knowing what it was waiting for.

"I'm about to leave this Hunting Ground, and I did make a promise, didn't I?" Jake said with a smile.

"Found way?" Warpsnatcher asked, showing that it had some insight into rules of hunters. It seemed to at least already know that Jake wasn't allowed to bring Warpsnatcher with him just because he wanted to.

Jake also knew this. It was written quite explicitly in rule book, which was also why two or hunters who had interacted with Fortuna Ferret hadn't even considered it an option to take it with m.

only way for a non-hunter to leave Hunting Grounds was to qualify while in B-grade, which was effectively done to keep average power level of planet low, or in rare instances, hunters could petition for a monster to leave. This was very rare, though, and only ever seemed to happen in cases where a beast master wanted to take in a beast as a companion or pet.

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re was nothing about what one could do if y just wanted to help out a beast to leave.

“Not exactly,” Jake answered, instantly seeing Warpsnatcher deflate.

“Stuck?” it asked, looking up at Jake with its huge cat-like eyes.

“I didn’t say that. I just said I haven’t found a way,” Jake said with a comforting smile.

“But that doesn’t mean I can’t fulfill my promise. I have something even more powerful than permission, something capable of bending every rule and making every kind of exception.”

Jake paused for dramatic effect as Warpsnatcher’s mouth was wide open, creature full of anticipation.

“Nepotism,” Jake finally revealed, and it was instantly clear poor Warpsnatcher had no idea what that meant.

“Neo... tist?” it said, looking very confused.

“Nepotism,” Jake repeated. “It means I have important and powerful friends who can help us out.”

“Good?” Warpsnatcher questioned.

“Very good,” Jake smiled. “I won’t make any promises, but I will do my best to take you along, and I have a strong feeling my best will be good enough. Rules be damned.”

Jake had stayed anonymous when he came to this Hunting Ground, as he had seen no reason to flaunt his identity. He had originally planned on staying anonymous, but sometimes, making use of his reputation and connections could be useful.

Rules were written for regular members of Panon of Life, but Jake wasn’t even a member of Panon in first place. Plus, Jake was pretty damn confident that if Chosen of Yggdrasil stopped by and wanted to bring a random C-grade beast with m from a Hunting Ground, no one would dare object no matter rules.

His confident demeanor seemed to convince Warpsnatcher, and little critter jumped into air a few times in happiness. “Leave! Leave!”

“Leave indeed,” Jake smiled and nodded. “Now follow me. We’re heading to Outpost.”

“Dangerous?” Warpsnatcher questioned.

“Not when I’m with you,” Jake said. If a monster approached Outpost alone, Jake assumed y would find mselves in quite trouble. Those formations alone allowed even a peak C-grade caretaker to kill any B-grade on planet easily. “Now, are you ready to go?”

“Wait!” Warpsnatcher said as it disappeared next second before Jake could even ask what y had to wait for. About a dozen seconds passed before Warpsnatcher returned, looking pleased with itself.

“Ready!”

Through a bit of deductive thinking, Jake guessed what little hoarder had left to do. “You went to fetch your stuff?”

“Yes!” Warpsnatcher said happily.

“Say, why did you even collect that much stuff in first place?” Jake asked, curious if it truly was just monster’s Path.

“If give. Me leave,” C-grade explained, Jake frowning at answer.

Warpsnatcher had tried to gar enough things to buy its own way off planet, it seemed, not knowing that would never work. Perhaps it had seen or hunters trading and assumed if it had enough stuff to trade, it could also negotiate with hunters.

“Luckily for you, I already got payment, so you can keep all your stuff,” Jake said in a comforting voice. “Now let’s go.”

“Okay!” critter said, ready to go. [READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT ~~novel~~·fire·net](#)

Taking to air, Warpsnatcher followed, teleporting through air as it kept up with Jake nicely. more Jake learned about creature and more he saw it move, more certain he became that it really wasn’t a creature that did combat at all. It was so damn specialized in speed and being elusive while also being good at snatching stuff. Hence name Warpsnatcher.

In many ways, it was a creature like Sandy. Both walked a Path that revolved around treasures rar than combat. Both still had some combat options available to m, but it wasn’t truly how y grew.

Jake and Warpsnatcher were silent as y soon approached Outpost that only Jake could see from afar due to his Hunting Grounds Manual. As he got closer, a Pulse revealed Outpost, and Jake saw that compared to last time he went re, quite a few more people were now present.

A quick count told Jake there were around fifty people in total, and he recognized three of them. One of them was naturally attendant who took care of Outpost, who looked busy from snapshots Jake took. Two were Keerla and Solana, two hunters Jake had met when Simivita attacked Fortuna Ferret.

"Just a warning, there are a lot of people there, so stick close to me," Jake warned Warpsnatcher, and at his cue, the creature teleported over and appeared on top of Jake's shoulder mid-flight.

Approaching Outpost, Jake didn't slow down but still wanted to make sure barriers would allow its entry, as he wasn't sure if Warpsnatcher would be automatically blocked. Luckily, that didn't seem to be the case as Jake passed through all barriers safely while carrying the little critter.

When he was through, he looked down and saw all the people already outside. They weren't there for Jake or even looked his way, but were busy discussing something. Jake subtly listened in... and he hadn't been entirely right when he said they weren't there for Jake.

"I contacted our managers, and there have been no special arrivals within the last year in our Outposts, either. It's possible someone was snuck onto the planet through unauthorized means, but we also need to consider the possibility of it being a newly evolved B-grade. One that possesses power surpassing all others," caretaker said to the slightly worried crowd of hunters.

"You say the same thing every day. When are investigators arriving?" a hunter asked with a sigh.

"That's the thing... they don't seem to be in a hurry and told me just to wait, which must mean they know what's going on, right?" caretaker argued.

The crowd continued talking as Jake began floating down, caretaker looking up towards him. Even if Jake had tried to hide his entrance as much as possible, he simply didn't have the ability to hide from the formations covering the outpost.

"Hey, you!" beastkin caretaker yelled toward Jake, making others also turn toward him. It looked for a moment as if caretaker wanted to ask Jake something else... but that's when he spotted the beast sitting on his shoulder. "You... is that Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher? You brought it here?"

By now, Jake had reached the ground and landed, and he just confidently nodded. "Yep, it is. Little fella helped me out, and in return, I promised to lend a hand with leaving this Hunting Ground."

Jake's words instantly made people look at him like he was an idiot, with only Keerla and Solana looking at Jake with some concern, as Keerla was even nice enough to send a telepathic message.

“What hell are you doing? You know that bringing native monsters to Outposts is strictly forbidden, much less leaving with one... I get that you’re not necessarily a member of Panon of Life, but rules still apply to you, and so do consequences. Look, if you try to- “

“It’s fine,” Jake cut her off with his own mental response, appreciating unneeded concern.

“I get that this is a hectic time, but that doesn’t mean all order has fallen apart,” caretaker sighed, shaking his head. “Go release native immediately, and- “

“We can make an exception,” Jake responded confidently, primarily to calm down nervous and shaking Warpsnatcher that was trying to dig itself down into his shoulder.

“I don’t have time to deal with this,” caretaker groaned, crowd now even more convinced Jake was some moron. “With authority vested in me as an Outpost Manager, I hereby place you under arrest for attempted smuggling and breaking Hunting Ground regulations. Now hand over Warpsnatcher and surrender yourself willingly.”

When Jake heard se words, he couldn’t help but feel a hint of excitement. This was such a novel experience as it was his first time ever getting arrested, counting both pre- and post-system.

Sadly, or perhaps more accurately, luckily, Jake doubted he would get to spend any time in slammer, as he’d already activated token Artemis gave him right before he entered Outpost. Before anyone could even approach Jake, an aura appeared from teleporter, one that definitely didn’t belong to anyone who should come to a planet for C-grade hunters.

It was an S-grade woman, wearing simple lear armor, but her appearance instantly put everyone on alert, and Jake quickly threw an Identify her way. result of which made Jake fairly certain she had come because of him.

[Human – lvl ??? – Divine Blessing of Artemis]

caretaker, as well as several or hunters, instantly went down on ir knees and spoke in unison.

“I greet Hunting Director!”

ir voices echoed, filled with respect and reverence, and in response, newly arrived Hunting Director also knelt down toward Jake.

“I greet Chosen of Malefic Viper.”

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Chapter 1140: Little Fella

Jake honestly felt a bit relieved when he saw it was “only” an S-grade with a Divine Blessing that had shown up. A part of him had feared Artemis would send some lower-ranked god, or worse, come on her own to provide assistance. If that had happened, situation would have been a bit too much in Jake’s opinion, though even this was a lot.

At least Jake deemed it so based on looks he got from crowd, especially Keerla, Solana, and poor caretaker, who looked like he wanted to jump right off floating island. Jake wasn’t sure why that guy looked nervous. He should be proud instead, as first person to ever arrest Chosen of Malefic Viper for a hunting violation.

“You came quicker than I expected,” Jake said to newly arrived S-grade. At same time, he also made sure to use his own aura to cover trembling Warpsnatcher that was trying to bury itself in his shoulder.

He had never seen poor thing this scared before. Likely because it never had to be scared under usual circumstances. Due to just how damn elusive little monster was, Jake doubted even local B-grades had a chance to catch it, not even someone like Forest Fae with her weird magic.

However, an S-grade was on a whole or level. There was no B-grade, much less a C-grade, in multiverse capable of escaping a true S-grade. Especially not someone at level of woman who had just arrived.

“My Patron insisted,” S-grade answered as she stood up, quickly shedding her aura of over-politeness. “I’m uncertain what issue is, but I’ve come to resolve it.”

“Not really an issue per se,” Jake said casually as he lifted a hand and patted little Warpsnatcher on head. “It’s just that I decided to bring this little guy with me out of Hunting Grounds, and I predicted doing so could lead to some challenges, seeing as it does technically break rules.”

“I wouldn’t say it only technically breaks rules. Rules are very clear in that area,” S-grade sighed. “However, it naturally isn’t a problem, though it would have been easier if you had informed us beforehand, so this entire scene could have been avoided.”

"Everything was decided rather spontaneously, and I realistically couldn't give much forewarning," Jake shrugged, still casual in his demeanor and speech. S-grade seemed to mirror his casual demeanor somewhat as she nodded and turned towards caretaker.

"I take it there won't be any issues if Chosen of Malefic One decides to bring along a singular C-grade beast?" she asked a very leading question that poor peak C-grade really couldn't say no to.

"N... no, of course not!" caretaker said, straightening his back. "I'll make sure to handle any paperwork, and issue can officially be considered closed!"

Jake could be petty and ask if he had been released from custody, but he decided not to be a dick. poor guy already had scare of his life, and making it worse was just unnecessary.

"Good," S-grade nodded as she looked at Jake. "I briefly went over recent reports of what has happened on this planet, and saw that a fair number of B-grades have been slain recently, and power dynamics have shifted. Am I right to assume you're cause?"

"That would indeed be a good assumption," Jake confirmed. "I just returned from slaying Darkwood Chimera, which I believe was most powerful B-grade present on planet. That being case, I have no reason to stay."

Jake's revelation that he had killed B-grade Chimera definitely raised a few eyebrows, especially seeing as Jake still wasn't hiding his level. It was generally accepted that someone at Jake's level simply didn't stand a chance against B-grades, and yet he had just claimed to have killed strongest on planet.

However, Jake also saw surprise disappear just as fast as it appeared. Likely because y remembered who Jake was. While barely anyone knew how Jake looked outwardly, y did know about him. y knew about new top scorer on Nevermore Leaderboards, and y knew it was Malefic Viper's new Chosen. Jake could rightfully be called most famous C-grade in multiverse, and he was even a contender to be most well-known mortal, especially amongst gods.

"I see. It sounds like you had a fruitful hunt," S-grade Hunting Director said, to which Jake gave a quick nod. It wasn't surprising either. Artemis had been one to pick this Hunting Ground for Jake after all, and it made a lot of sense that general power level suited him greatly.

"I'm glad to hear facilities of Panon of Life have proven worthwhile," Director said. "Unless you have more matters to settle here, are you ready to leave?"

"Yeah, just one more thing," Jake said as he briefly glanced into crowd of onlookers and made eye contact with Keerla, who stood frozen beside Solana.

“Don’t forget you two still promised me a mean dinner,” Jake sent telepathically, once more being nice by not singling out two from crowd. He knew just how annoying being center of attention could be, and it wasn’t a fate he wanted to lie on m.

Turning back to Hunting Director, Jake nodded. “Alright, ready to go. Do I need to do anything more to bring this little guy?”

S-grade briefly glanced at Warpsnatcher that still looked afraid of far more powerful entity. “No, not from my point of view. We’re already breaking convention here, so re’s no official protocol to follow. Besides, I was ordered by my Patron to handle any obstacles you request of me, so even if re were administrative challenges, I would address m.”

Jake got feeling S-grade was subtly trying to probe him for just why Artemis had given her such orders. She very clearly outlined that Artemis had done a lot to help Jake, which likely didn’t make much sense from her point of view.

Even if Artemis had been assigned to ensure Jake had a good stay, it wouldn’t make any sense. She was a god, so why would she be this personally involved? Jake totally understood S-grade’s suspicion and made sure not to give anything away.

“See, I told you things would be fine,” Jake said as he took Warpsnatcher off his shoulder and held it in his arms like cat-like creature it was. little guy snuggled into his arms, still looking around nervously at all hunters who stared at it.

Following motion of S-grade, Jake stepped onto teleportation platform, and without furr ado, he was whisked away from Hunting Grounds, Warpsnatcher in tow. When Jake arrived on planet, Artemis had helped him get re directly, but this time, he returned through more official channels.

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teleportation took Jake, Warpsnatcher, and S-grade to anor planet within Panon of Life’s territory. Right as y appeared, Jake naturally released a Pulse, and first thing he noticed was how dense yet small this place was.

Jake could detect curvature of planet, meaning it couldn’t be that large, likely only size of moon pre-system. Give or take. However, place was absolutely packed with buildings everywhere, and just hall Jake appeared in was absolutely massive.

y had appeared on top floor, standing on what was clearly S-grade Hunting Director’s personal teleportation circle. Far below m, Jake saw what he could only refer to as portal room. building y were in was tower-shaped, and most of or floors were one big portal room, filled with what had to be tens of thousands of portals.

If Jake's guess was correct, each and every single one of these portals led to a Hunting Ground... and this was just one of many towers a single Pulse could see.

"Is this your first time here?" S-grade asked, even more casual now than before.

"It is," Jake nodded.

"Curious. You would ordinarily have had to pass through here to enter Hunting Ground," she commented with a raised eyebrow.

"Curious indeed," Jake said in a dry voice. "I take it this is some kind of hub that allows access to all different Hunting Grounds?"

"All of them?" S-grade asked as she chuckled and shook her head. "No, far from all of them. Just this sector I'm Hunting Director of."

"How many Hunting Grounds are you managing in total?" Jake questioned, genuinely curious. There had to be at least a few hundred thousand, right?

"It does fluctuate a little, with some being added and others decommissioned, but as of last census, just above ninety-six million, two hundred and eleven thousand," Hunting Director answered as if spouting out such a high number wasn't absolute insanity.

"That's a lot of Hunting Grounds," Jake muttered.

"Some are more populated than others, and it takes a lot of work to manage them all," S-grade answered, glancing his way. "Especially when individuals appear who upset balance by slaying a lot of monsters in charge."

"Sorry for giving you work," Jake shrugged, not really meaning his apology.

"Speaking of work, now that we are away from others, I would like to ask you directly: why is my Patron so personally involved in this matter?" Hunting Director finally just came out and asked.

Honestly, it was a bit refreshing, and Jake definitely felt that people here in Panon of Life were less reverent than back in Order of Malefic Viper. Likely because Jake wasn't actually Chosen of a god that they actively worshipped. Sure, they respected his status, but far less than those back at Order.

As for S-grade's question... Jake decided to give her a bit of a half-truth.

"I have been receiving archery lessons from her, and when I got here, I also brought a present from my Patron. I guess you can put two and two together with that information," Jake said rather nonchalantly, fully aware she definitely wouldn't reach the right conclusion from that.

He actively saw S-grade frown before seemingly realizing what was going on. "I see... that does make some sense. Seeing as that means you're likely to meet her again, could you put in a good word? It would be truly wonderful."

"I guess that's not too much to ask," Jake said. In his arms, he felt Warpsnatcher moving around uncomfortably, telling Jake it was time to go as poor thing really didn't like bathing in presence of an S-grade, even if Jake protected it.

"Thank you," Hunting Director nodded. "If you plan on staying in Panon of Life for an extended period, I reckon we will meet again. I watch over most Hunting Grounds in your immediate level range, and I'll happily provide personal advice on which Hunting Grounds I believe are best."

"I may just take you up on that offer," Jake smiled as he looked toward a certain wall in chamber. "That's a gateway, right?"

"It is," S-grade confirmed. "And we are close enough to your residence to teleport directly re."

"n I believe it's time I take my leave. I have a lot to digest back at my residence," Jake said as he scratched Warpsnatcher. "And I also think this little guy will like some calm."

"Before you go, what exactly do you plan on doing with that Warpsnatcher?" she asked curiously.

"Well, that's gonna be up to this little fella, isn't it?" Jake answered rhetorically. "I'm just returning a favor, nothing more."

"Curious behavior, but I'll not be one to judge," she shrugged. With that, Jake made his way over to gateway and placed a hand on it as he looked toward Hunting Director.

"Goodbye or till next we meet," Jake said with a smile as he activated gate, using token he'd been given. gateway in front of him changed, and with a single step forward, he and Warpsnatcher teleported across a vast distance, right into way too large castle that was Jake's temporary home at Panon of Life.

Exiting gateway, Jake took a deep breath and enjoyed fresh air of his personal residence. mana was way different this close to Yggdrasil, something Warpsnatcher also instantly noticed as it raised its head and took a few sniffs.

"Home?" it asked, looking up at Jake. This chapter is updated by **novel•fire•net**

"Yeah, this is my home right now," Jake said with a smile.

Warpsnatcher looked around for a few moments before jumping from his arms and landing on floor. Next, its body began to shimmer as Jake's sphere informed him little

critter teleported around between different rooms, checking out most of large castle before returning to Jake.

“Big!” it yelled, lifting its two paws.

“It is pretty big,” Jake agreed. “But I do have to warn you about something. I’m not always alone here and sometimes get visitors. Just know that none of m are gonna harm you, okay? Even if y may seem very strong.”

se words made C-grade a bit concerned as it sat down. “Stronger than woman?”

“If you’re talking about woman from before, n yes,” Jake nodded. “A lot stronger.”

“Not dangerous?”

Jake was about to answer... but someone else came before him.

“No, I’m not dangerous,” voice of Artemis echoed as goddess appeared in room a second later.

Her sudden appearance spooked Warpsnatcher as it jumped right back into Jake’s arms and dug itself into his embrace.

“Look at what you did now,” Jake shook his head as he stroked poor thing.

“I’ve already reined in my aura as much as I possibly can,” Artemis said. “Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher is just especially sensitive towards auras of ors. y possess a set of very powerful skills that allow m to identify dangerous creatures and areas, but when it comes to someone like me, all it can detect is that it can’t detect anything, which usually correlates directly to danger.”

“You seem to know a lot about Warpsnatchers?” Jake asked as he continued stroking C-grade, trying to calm it down.

“I know a lot about most beasts,” Artemis said, once more reminding Jake he was speaking with a god who had lived for longer than his entire universe had existed several times over.

“Are y a powerful variant?” Jake just asked directly, seeing no reason to beat around bush.

“Powerful? That’s hard to answer,” Artemis said as she went over and made herself comfortable on a sofa. “Rar than powerful, I would call m unique. I will also clarify that it’s definitely not native to Hunting Grounds you found it in, but n again, Warpsnatchers aren’t really considered native anywhere.”

"If you're not native to that planet, how did you get here?" Jake asked Warpsnatcher as he also walked over and sat down on sofa opposite Artemis.

Despite its nervousness and fear, little C-grade still answered. "Sent."

"You were sent here?" Jake exclaimed in surprise.

"Let me clarify," Artemis chimed in. "When offspring of Warpsnatchers reach a certain level of maturity, their parents teleport their young elsewhere in universe. Dependent on power of parent, this can be across an entire universe or perhaps just a single planet. All I do know is that even a B-grade Warpsnatcher can send their young from one galaxy to another."

"Now that does sound pretty darn powerful," Jake said as he looked down at Warpsnatcher. "Aren't you indeed a powerful little space magician?"

"You don't strictly use space magic," Artemis clarified. "Their magic is more in realm of mysticism. Space magic is certainly involved, but only to a certain extent. Generally, what they do is referred to as Shimmermyst magic."

"And is Shimmermyst magic considered powerful?"

Artemis shrugged once more. "Depends on user. It definitely can be, though its applications don't tend to be combat-focused. As you've probably already realized, Warpsnatchers aren't fighters. I am curious, though. What are you trying to truly learn with all these questions?"

"I'm just considering something," Jake shook his head as he looked down at Warpsnatcher. *Yeah... I guess this little fella is a candidate.*

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Chapter 1141: Secrets Disclosed

It took a while for Warpsnatcher to finally calm down enough that it was comfortable being alone. Artemis had definitely been right in that it could sense power level of others, something that was really hammered home when poor Warpsnatcher went outside and saw giant Primordial tree in distance. This resulted in poor thing hiding in Jake's arms for another few hours.

little fella was pretty quick at adapting, though, and while it remained scared of Artemis, it could at least exist in same space after about half a day. It also helped that castle or palace or whatever Jake wanted to call his residence had so many rooms, as that allowed Warpsnatcher to go elsewhere if too uncomfortable.

Also, it gave C-grade somewhere to hide all its loot. residence had a cellar area, and Warpsnatcher quickly took a good section of it as its personal storage. Seeing as Jake wasn't sort to store fine vintages, he didn't need place he was pretty sure was originally meant to be a wine cellar.

Once Warpsnatcher had left and was busy setting up its own little home, Jake finally found himself alone with Artemis once more.

"So, how did you find Hunting Ground?" Artemis asked curiously. "You seem to have at least found it interesting based on you bringing something back from re."

"It was pretty good," Jake smiled. "Killed my fair share of B-grades."

"I can see that based on your progress," Artemis nodded. "Quite an astonishing speed considering your Path. However, I must warn you. Those B-grades are, to put it kindly, barely even qualified to be called that."

"Yeah, y were all very low tier," Jake agreed.

"Below low tier, I would say," Artemis shook her head. "Bottom tier. se are creatures that, based on ir own innate talents, likely wouldn't have ever even made it to C-grade. environment in Hunting Ground was very curated to allow ir growth and existence in first place. Sure, sometimes re are standouts, but those are few and far between."

"Some of variants weren't *that* bad," Jake said, considering things like peak C-grade Simivita Chieftains. Sure, y were pretty weak, but not outright horrible.

"I'm not talking solely about ir stats but ir ability to display ir true power," Artemis sighed. "As we talked about a lot, conceptual understanding and application are a cornerstone of powerful. This comprehension is gained eir through practice and enlightenment or innate understanding, eir granted directly by system or simply through nature."

Artemis held out a hand as wind began swirling above it despite no detectable amounts of mana being used. "Sylphie is a great example of a creature with high innate comprehension, though I do see she has also learned a lot by herself. However, even if she didn't try, Sylphian Hawk would have gained a high level of understanding merely from ir race and inherited knowledge. Warpsnatcher is very much same. y know how to use ir magic and have at least some level of understanding about how it works by nature. Meanwhile, enlightened like you and I need to learn most things on our own, though we are given assistance through receiving more system skills."

“Meanwhile, I guess those B-grades had neither innate nor learned affinities?” Jake asked, having reached his natural conclusion of where Artemis was going.

“Precisely. Of course, you have truly reached B-grade, so given proper practice and if you’re taught enough, even those B-grades may end up becoming halfway decent creatures at one point, though A-grade will be a long shot for any of them.”

Jake nodded, at least finding it a bit comforting to know Sovereign at least still had some chance to become stronger and not be stuck in low-tier B-grade forever. Sure, he hated that damn bird with a passion, but you had still been comrades in arms for a little while.

“Warpsnatcher doesn’t seem to fall into that category of weak variants, though,” Jake commented after a few seconds.

“It’s not. Usually, a creature with a relatively high-level variant would be removed from a Hunting Ground of that level as it would upset the balance too much, but due to Shimmerfur Warpsnatchers being non-combat focused, it was left alone. Also, it is a natural way of Warpsnatchers to grow up in all sorts of different environments, so its presence was considered acceptable,” Artemis explained.

“That poor little fella did find itself stuck, though,” Jake sighed.

“Only until B-grade,” Artemis shook her head. “At that point, we would have had to move to remove the beast as its presence would truly upset the balance. Even if Warpsnatcher is not a combat-focused race, it would still be more than capable of slaying every other B-grade on that planet upon evolving. In a scenario where it didn’t do that, all treasures would be monopolized, and the balance once more broken. So in that sense, your removing Warpsnatcher now is a good thing.”

“Oh, yeah, totally did it for the sake of future balance and whatnot,” Jake said cheekily as he had a thought. “Say... I’ve not really been able to figure this out yet, but do you know if Warpsnatcher is male or female? Perhaps neither?” The source of this content is **novel**fire**net**

“It’s male,” Artemis answered. “You can tell from the ears. You’re more pointy on males. At least while you’re still in C-grade. After evolving, its look changes based on personal preference of Warpsnatcher in question.”

“What grade are Warpsnatchers normally?” Jake asked curiously. Peak races in the multiverse were natural B-grades and included things like dragons and other mythical beings.

“Natural C-grades. You tend to spend the first few years while in D-grade accompanying your parents, but upon evolving to C-grade, you’re sent off into the multiverse to live on your own. Only upon reaching B-grade will Warpsnatchers usually try to look for a mate, starting the cycle all over again.”

“You only reproduce with others of your race?” Jake asked curiously. He knew a lot of monsters had children with enlightened races or even other monsters. Powers of Polymorph skill and ability to take on humanoid forms all allowed for that.

“For most part, though, there are always exceptions,” Artemis said, looking at him curiously. “I must admit, you seem a lot more interested in Warpsnatchers than I would think.”

“Yeah, I’m considering something... say, do you know if Warpsnatchers have some kind of powerful ancestor they descended from? You know, like fire birds can often trace their lineage back to phoenixes and such,” Jake asked, still doing a bit of research.

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“Not as far as I know,” Artemis shook her head, now looking even more curiously at him. She seemed indecisive for a moment before finally just coming out and asking something she had likely wondered for a while:

“Say... is this related to your abilities as Harbinger of Primeval Origins?”

Her question meant Jake now had to consider matters. For a while, it had been common knowledge that Jake was capable of manipulating Primeval Origins, but details around this ability were all kept very vague on purpose. Leading theory seemed to be that Jake had some kind of unique Soulbound item only he could use.

Origins included that it had something to do with Jake’s bloodline, but that there were some serious limitations to it, such as a cost Jake wasn’t willing to pay or some other requirement.

The point was that only Villy and Jake knew the full truth. Well, alright, Duskleaf and Meira likely also knew for most part, while his creations also had a good chance of knowing. However, he had never told any outsiders, and Viper had made it clear it should be kept that way.

It wasn’t necessarily a question of trust either, but limiting the potential of someone leaking truth. The easiest way to limit exposure was to limit the number of people capable of exposing him.

That was why Jake found himself unsure of what to answer. On one hand, he didn’t want to keep a secret like that from Artemis, but on the other hand, he knew he would be keeping secrets no matter what. There were things about his Bloodline that Jake hadn’t even told Villy, and things would likely stay that way until Jake was strong enough that revealing everything couldn’t come back and bite him in the ass.

Artemis seemed to notice Jake's indecision and smiled comfortingly. "I understand if you want to keep that to yourself. We all have secrets that are best kept hidden unless we have no other choice."

Her answer only made Jake feel even worse as he sighed. *Eh, fuck it.*

"It is related to that," Jake finally answered. "I was considering helping Warpsnatcher when he evolves to B-grade. Or at least try to."

Artemis, seeing that Jake had decided to open up, pried a bit further. "Are you sure that's wise? Based on what I know, there are a lot of factions who would like to see your talents used to help them instead, and given the limited nature of your ability..."

"Those limitations are heavily overblown," Jake answered honestly. "There are limitations for sure, yes, but they aren't that bad. I'll also say that I'm not considering this only out of altruism and because that little fella is just so damn cute. I'm doing it partly for selfish reasons as I've yet to help a creature evolve to B-grade before, and I want that achievement under my belt before I evolve to B-grade myself."

Jake was being honest there. It was one of the things he had considered putting on his to-do list before evolving to B-grade. He already knew that Records he gained from Sylphie, Sandy, and Vesperia were absolutely insane, and now, especially after having gained so many levels, he felt pretty damn filled up on Jake Juice.

"If you don't mind me asking... how does it work?" Artemis questioned. From the way she asked, she didn't seem like she had high expectations of getting a straight answer.

"Honestly? I couldn't tell you," Jake shook his head. "I don't control evolutions or Primeval Origins. I just spur them on. Give them a little push into the light. Ultimately, the final result still depends on whatever creature is evolving."

"So, you have a way to add Records to a creature?" Artemis asked, pretty much hitting nail on the head.

"That's probably the most accurate description, yeah," Jake nodded. During this conversation, Jake also made very sure no one else was listening in. The barriers of the palace were already fully active, but Jake trusted his senses far more than them, and besides the passive observation of Villy, no one else was peeking.

Speaking of Villy, Jake was taking this conversation relatively slowly to give Villy time to jump in if he felt the need to. So far, Primordial hadn't seen the need to comment or tell Jake to shut the fuck up. Which was a good sign, right?

Artemis once more looked deep in thought as Jake continued talking.

“However, I can’t just summon Records out of thin air. I need something to get process going. Records to light a spark under. I’ve never done it directly to a creature, and I don’t intend to do so either this time. If I want to help Warpsnatcher, I need an item related to Warpsnatcher’s Path for me to manipulate. Monster cores tend to fit best, usually,” Jake said.

“So, in summary, you can use core of a monster or some or catalyst of Records, manipulate this catalyst, and through that create an item a monster can consume?” Artemis asked.

“In essence, yes,” Jake nodded. At least, that was all Jake had done for Sandy. He had infused a meteorite with Jake Juice, after which Sandy had eaten it, and eventually evolved into what you were today. Of course, that space rock had been a gift from system, so it had quite intense Records to begin with, which was an important factor.

With Demon Prince after Nevermore, Jake had once more manipulated an item of immense Records to allow Demon Prince to evolve and change into Cerulean Demon King. However, that entire thing had shown Jake dangers of what he could do.

Records couldn’t be too overpowering, or one absorbing them would find themselves overwhelmed. With Sandy, you had gotten around it with item originally being one granted by system, Records thus passive beyond imagination. With Demon Prince, you had used your method to handle overwhelming Records: an even more powerful being possessing overwhelming Records getting directly involved.

“entire process will involve rituals and stuff, but before I can do anything, I will need a catalyst to get things rolling,” Jake said. “Of course, I need to make sure I want to do this in first place and also ask Warpsnatcher what he wants.”

“Would you allow me to assist in process when time comes?” Artemis asked, quickly clarifying what she meant. “There are few things that add meaningful Records to me as a god, but this Harbinger of Primeval Origins ability of yours is one I believe can add value to my Path. Just mere fact I know Harbinger of Primeval Origins name is proof of potency of these Records.”

“I’m not gonna say no, but I’m also not sure how you could help,” Jake said, scratching his chin. “Not outside of helping procure items and such. Having you be directly involved in process will definitely mess things up, as adding Records of a living god can’t possibly be smart.”

“Any role I can play would be great,” Artemis smiled. “I suspect you already know this from Viper, but second you created True Royal, an echo of Records was sent throughout entire multiverse. Even I subtly felt it. shift. This ability of yours can give birth to what perhaps once was or what could have been at Origin of any Path. Of existence itself.”

Artemis looked down and straight through floor toward Warpsnatcher that was currently busy sorting shiny rocks into three perfectly evenly sized piles. “With all our talk of concepts, I don’t believe I need to tell you that conceptual power involved in this ability of yours transcends anything I’m capable of. It’s not merely creation of life, but alterations of Origins. Of entire Paths.”

Turning her attention back to Jake, she looked him directly in eyes. “Thank you for trusting me with this knowledge. I strongly suspect I entered a very exclusive club of those who are in know.”

“You have,” Jake nodded with a small smile.

“Imagining or members of this club does feel a little frightening,” Artemis chuckled.

“Hey, if it’s any comfort, n I’ve got plenty more secrets that only Viper is privy to. And a bunch that he doesn’t even know about,” Jake said in a joking tone, despite what he said being perfectly true.

“How comforting indeed,” Artemis shook her head, briefly glancing down at Warpsnatcher again. “Say, if you plan on effectively adopting this Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher, have you had any more thoughts on what to call him?”

“Maybe he already has a name,” Jake said in a hopeful voice.

“Only enlightened or those who frequently interact with enlightened tend to bor having names,” Artemis said.

Jake cursed a bit internally. Vesperia had been so nice because she already had a name for herself. Jake didn’t have to do anything re at all. However, now, it seemed he was forced into anor situation where his horrible naming sense could lead to him getting bullied by half of people he knew if he ended up choosing anor stupid name.

I guess Snatchie is off table already, Jake told himself as he tried to look at Artemis for help, as he nervously scratched back of his head.

“Say... you wouldn’t happen to have any good name suggestions for a Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher?”

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Chapter 1142: Girl Scary

Artemis seemed to take Jake's question very seriously as she frowned deeply. After a few seconds of consideration, she sighed and spoke. "I... have a bit of a confession. While I do keep beast companions, I only started doing so in higher grades, and I've never actually had to name, well, anything."

"Really?" Jake asked with surprise. "How about that Voidpiercer?"

"Already known by that name when we met," Artemis shook her head.

"Huh," Jake muttered. "Still, that doesn't mean you can't have good suggestions. I'm very open to suggestions over re."

Artemis once more considered for a while, looking toward little fella who was still busy sorting all his stuff. "Alright, considering it's a Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher, and taking into account its Path and magic abilities..."

Jake was waiting with bated breath as Artemis took this extremely serious during this dramatic pause. Finally, she looked at Jake, who was ready to hear best damn name suggestion ever.

"How about Snatchie?"

Only for him to learn that perhaps Artemis was just as terrible at naming stuff as he was. Jake couldn't help but cough at suggestion before he chuckled. "You know, I considered same, which means it's certifiably a horrible name."

"It's not that bad," Artemis said, crossing her arms. "It's descriptive. Warpsnatcher snatches things, hence Snatchie. re is a logical through-line."

"If we actually named him Snatchie, I would get my head bashed in by Miranda," Jake chuckled while shaking his head.

"You're exaggerating. I doubt that assistant of yours would dare do something like that." New novel chapters are published on [movel♦fire♦net](#)

"Oh, you don't know her," Jake insisted. "No, no, we need a better name. Something that's an actual name would be preferable."

Jake put on his thinking cap and considered potential names he believed could fit little bugger. He also considered kind of magic Warpsnatcher was capable of, as well as where he had found it. Looking at Artemis, Jake got an idea. A name from mythology appeared that he believed could fit.

"How about Hermes?" Jake said, feeling a bit proud of that one. Hermes was a mythological god known to be able to pass through realms and represented travelers, merchants, and even thieves. more Jake thought about it, more-

"Hermes? Like courier god?" Artemis asked while tilting her head a little. "I guess it could fit?"

"Wait, back up a little," Jake said. "You know a Hermes?"

"Yeah," Artemis nodded. "There's a god named Hermes who commands the Hermes Trading Association, one of the largest merchant factions in the multiverse. They are especially known as excellent couriers, and when valuable goods have to be transported into restricted areas or under safe circumstances, they are likely the best choice. Especially if Hermes himself takes on the job."

"Alright, yeah, scratch Hermes then," Jake sighed, disappointed. Damn, he should have known there was already a god named that out there. In fact, he wouldn't be surprised if most of the gods of mythology had counterparts in the multiverse, though evidently the details didn't always seem to fit.

Artemis was one example of it definitely not fitting perfectly, but so was Hermes. From what Artemis said, they barely knew one another, yet on Earth, they had been part of the same Pantheon. Thinking back, chances were humans had just interpreted the Records that bleed through and constructed their own tales based on that. History and old stories weren't known to be the most accurate and tended to be more fiction than fact, though with the introduction of the multiverse, there were some truths here and there.

"I still think Snatchie is a good name," Artemis muttered while looking to the side.

"Wait, are you pouting?" Jake asked as he leaned forward.

"I'm not," Artemis insisted.

"You totally are!" Jake laughed and pointed.

"I told you. I'm not," Artemis said, trying to sound resolute, though Jake could still see she was one hundred percent pouting after having her idea shut down.

"You know what, I think we both learned a valuable lesson today," Jake chuckled.

"We're both equally terrible at naming things. But you do know what that means, right?"

"What?" Artemis asked, humoring him.

"We'll have to ask others for input when the time comes," Jake continued to joke around, as Artemis looked even more confused now than before.

"When the time comes for what?"

"Ah, never mind, it doesn't matter," Jake waved her off, still with a cheeky smile. "We'll have plenty of time to decide. At least I assume so. Say, on a totally unrelated note,

how is reproductive cycle of enlightened creatures affected by system? Specifically, gestation periods.”

Artemis looked like she was about to answer his question seriously until she realized what he was getting at. Jake really had to hold himself back from laughing as he saw her head turn slightly red before she quickly got her involuntary response under control.

“I should brand you a heretic for that kind of joke,” Artemis said, also leaning forward.

“You wouldn’t be first one to try. Actually, thinking back, I think last one who tried to brand me a heretic also did it shortly after coming onto me,” Jake said with a smile, remembering Hive Queen way back n.

Artemis looked Jake directly in eyes before sighing. “Sometimes, I wonder what I’ve gotten myself into.”

Jake was about to say something, but before he could do so, he was thrown back onto couch, a wood elf goddess sitting on top of him. A pair of lips covered his a second later, and at that point, his only response was to reciprocate. He moved his hands to hold Artemis, but before he could, she stopped him.

He felt a tinge of pain on his lower lip as Artemis leaned back, licking her own as a drop of Jake’s blood had gotten onto m.

“Be satisfied with that,” Artemis said teasingly as she pushed herself off him while still keeping eye contact. “For now.”

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Jake wanted to say something, but just shook his head instead. “You know, if you’re that insistent on Snatchie...”

“Hm?” Artemis said, acting ignorant. “No, deciding on name is wholly up to you. My involvement will only be auxiliary at best. In end, Warpsnatcher is not mine to name.”

“n- “

“But I will have veto for our firstborn,” Artemis said, her teasing smile back. “No rush, though. In your words, we’ll have plenty of time to decide when time comes. Now, I have some matters to attend to, so I’ll see you in a couple of days. My absence should also give Warpsnatcher plenty of time to acclimate. Oh, and don’t miss me too much. Being overly clingy is such a turnoff.”

With those words, and before Jake could say anything, she teleported away, leaving him back on couch with a slightly bleeding lip. Jake raised a finger and swiped it off as he chuckled to himself. "Should be careful about teasing a goddess too much. Or not."

Standing up, Jake stretched a bit. He was pretty damn sure that Artemis had no business but just made up an excuse to leave. It was a bit unfortunate, but Jake still felt in a way better mood as he headed down toward cellar where little fella who had yet to be named was busy doing his own thing.

All loot had to be properly sorted, after all. Warpsnatcher had its own spatial storage, but this storage seemed to mix up all items, forcing poor guy to sort everything once out. Jake wondered if it was some kind of compulsion, but as he surveyed piles of loot, Jake felt like re was more to it.

Warpsnatcher was very exact about where everything had to be placed. re was perfect spacing between piles, and if he took a top-down look, it could almost look like Warpsnatcher was setting up some kind of formation. Not that he could detect any mana or energy movements, but it was still possible that some form of Warpsnatcher Feng Shui concept was at work.

"Hey buddy, how are things going?" he ended up asking cat-like creature as it turned and looked at him.

"Busy!" he said, turning back to continue sorting his pile.

"Do you like place?"

Warpsnatcher seemed in thought for a moment as his small paws kept moving. "Okay. Girl scary."

"She can be a little scary, but she's not dangerous," Jake tried to comfort little fella. "Say, have you made any considerations for what you would like to be called?"

It was a long shot, but hey, who knows? Maybe he could get lucky, and little guy already had a name.

"Me... me!" C-grade said after a few seconds while raising his arms as if to show off his entire body.

"I know, but I mean something like a name," Jake said, thinking for a bit. "You know, like how I'm a human, but my name is Jake."

Warpsnatcher looked at Jake while turning its head nearly ninety degrees to side. "Human... Lake?"

“Jake,” he corrected. “It’s something to make it easier to distinguish us from one another and give each person more individuality.”

“Jake... Jake...” Warpsnatcher repeated a few times, trying to get the word correct. “Me... also Jake?”

“No, that would be confusing,” Jake shook his head. “You know, think about it a little, if there’s something you would like to be called. I’ll also think about something in the meantime, alright?”

“Okay,” Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher agreed. Jake watched as the little guy went over and took a few more pebbles from another pile and placed them on top of the one he was currently working on. Going back one last time to grab the last pebble, Warpsnatcher stopped before jumping over to Jake and holding the pebble high.

“You place!”

Jake looked at the pebble and back at Warpsnatcher, who was looking up at him with his big cat-like eyes. He just couldn’t resist and picked up the pebble as Warpsnatcher jumped with glee and led him over to the pile while holding up his small paws.

“Place!”

Doing as told, Jake placed the pebble on top as Warpsnatcher clapped its palms in happiness.

“Done!”

“You’re finished setting up?” Jake asked with surprise.

“This done!” Warpsnatcher said as it turned around and spread out its paws. From out of nowhere, another pile of what looked like useless junk appeared, the entire thing taller than Jake.

“More pile!”

“More pile indeed,” Jake chuckled and shook his head. “I’ll leave you to it.”

“Bye!” the little guy waved as Jake waved back and returned to the living room upstairs. Once back here, Jake took a few deep breaths before deciding to just meditate a bit to calm his mind and body.

Like that, time started passing.

Jake spent next few days just relaxing in palace, sometimes playing with Warpsnatcher. A couple of days later, Artemis did indeed return, and y were very much back to business as usual, though Jake still felt y were a bit closer than before.

Not long after, two had a brief training session, during which he had to confess that he had failed to upgrade his archery skill while away in Hunting Ground.

However, when he explained that he had technically succeeded in manipulating how time affected his arrows, just through use of his arcane affinity and skill Unblemished Arrows, Artemis could only shake her head and chuckle.

“Isn’t that only a good thing? Primarily passive skills like that are incredibly powerful, and if you can separate m from your main archery skill, that’s only good. Having too complex a main fighting skill isn’t necessarily an advantage,” Artemis explained. “We don’t walk same Path. Even if we achieve some of same results, our way of getting re will naturally differ. In end, I do believe re is a good chance you will eventually consolidate this Unblemished Arrows skill into your main archery skill, but keeping m separate for now is definitely recommended. But it does mean that for now, you need to consider anor approach when it comes to upgrading your archery.”

“I already have an idea re,” Jake smiled, briefly outlining his plan to focus more on distance equals more damage aspect of his archery skill, as well as his desire to make it scale more off Perception. You know, seeing as Perception was still by far his highest stat.

“Damage increasing with distance is also relatively common,” Artemis nodded. “Of course, it comes in many forms. Sometimes it’s based on flight times, or times absolute distance, and in ors, it’s merely that arrows can absorb energy from environment while in flight, hence making m more powerful when y strike if y flew for longer. My arrows were based on life affinity, so y naturally grew while in flight. I once shot an arrow across a galaxy, and by time it arrived, it had already grown into a grand tree that sealed entire solar system I had aimed at. Alongside my target, obviously.”

“Sounds like Vinearrow extreme edition,” Jake chuckled, also briefly mentioning Vinearrow skill he had been offered during his skill selection, something that got a good chuckle out of Artemis. He didn’t tell her actual skill he ended up picking, though. He wanted Event Horizon to be a surprise, and he hadn’t had a good chance to test it out eir, so he would prefer to avoid any follow-up questions he wouldn’t be able to answer.

“More like a Treearrow,” Artemis joked, as y moved on to what else Jake had gained during his Hunting Grounds trip. Luckily for Jake, Artemis did find it amusing that Jake had gone to upgrade his archery skill, but ended up instead getting his melee skill to legendary rarity.

She was also already aware he had Fangs of Man skill. When Jake had used it back during Ell’Hakan and Yip of Yore debacle to make it more convincing that Jake was

considering joining Valhal, news of Jake having this skill spread far and wide throughout multiverse. As someone who had kept up with what Jake was up to, Artemis thus naturally also knew.

“Your natural talents truly do lean more towards a melee fighting style, if I’m being perfectly honest,” Artemis said after Jake did a brief demonstration of his upgraded skill.

“But I like bow more,” Jake argued.

“I wasn’t suggesting you should focus only on melee combat,” Artemis corrected herself. “I would actually consider it a positive. One of biggest weaknesses of archers in multiverse is what happens when enemy gets close. Usually, we deal with this by finding means to keep our foe at a distance, but your situation is unique. You can seamlessly switch between both fighting styles and remain a pinnacle combatant, no matter case.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know I’m awesome,” Jake waved her off. “only quality I have surpassing my awesomeness is my humbleness.”

“You mispronounced arrogance,” Artemis chuckled.

“Gotta be at least a little arrogant, you know? In fact, did you know I’m arrogant enough to even dare pursue a goddess?” Jake smiled. “Now if that ain’t peak arrogance, I don’t know what is.”

“I would call it delusional, but if it’s working out for you, I guess that doesn’t really fit,” Artemis smiled in return.

Jake was about to flirt back as Artemis’ expression suddenly changed. She turned her head and looked out palace window, straight toward utterly massive tree in distance. After nodding a few times, she looked back at Jake.

“Mor Tree has asked for our presence. Your presence, more specifically,” Artemis said.

“Is it about Fallen King?” Jake asked, fully back to serious mode.

“Yes... and something about a bow?”

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Chapter 1143: Mask & Bow

Jake wasn't foolish enough to believe that he had timed his return from Hunting Ground so well that he only needed to be back for a few days before Primordial of Life reached out to him.

Instead, y had likely been waiting for his return to begin next phase of whatever y were doing. It had been made clear initially that revival of Fallen King wouldn't be a quick endeavour, and Jake fully expected that y just needed him to continue process.

As for bow, this would only be beginning. Dina had evidently reached out to Nature's Attendant, who had gotten ball rolling, and Jake hoped it would be possible to source some raw materials directly from Primordial. Of course, matters likely wouldn't be that simple, as Jake wouldn't be capable of using something containing Yggdrasil's Records as a mere C-grade.

Eir way, time would tell. Artemis and Jake had headed straight toward Primordial after message was received, and it was quite evident hunter goddess was even more nervous than mortal C-grade. Jake was more excited than anything.

"Do you still get nervous when visiting Yggdrasil?" Jake asked as y went through a teleporter.

"You not being nervous is outlier here, not me," Artemis shook her head.

"I'm just wondering why," Jake shrugged. "Like, what's worst that can happen? I doubt she would call us re just to harm us, so no reason to be nervous about anything in that vein. So only thing we really could be nervous about is what she'll think of us once re. Seeing as I reckon she already knows you quite well, as long as you act normally, what can go wrong? Just don't say anything weird or start spouting your most batshit conspiracy ories that you really shouldn't ever mention to anyone, and things will be fine."

Artemis sighed. "You of all people should know that sometimes emotions can be irrational. This is one of those times. Also, now you got me curious about which insane conspiracy ories you're hiding."

"Ah, sorry, we don't have time to go over all of m before we get re," Jake answered cheekily, as with one more teleport, y were within influence of Yggdrasil's aura.

Once y were, Primordial locked onto m both. Jake felt subtle movements of space around him, and he didn't resist as he was teleported one last time. Upon appearing again, first thing Jake noticed was change in environmental mana. Right away, he knew y were back inside Divine Realm of Yggdrasil.

Feeling solid ground beneath his feet, Jake opened his eyes and found himself standing in a meadow in front of a singular tree that looked like a miniature Yggdrasil. One that gave off full aura of Primordial.

Right next to him, Artemis instantly looked uncomfortable, making Jake unconsciously extend his own aura to protect her. She felt better right away and threw a thankful look Jake's way right before a shift in environmental mana caught her attention.

This mana gazed into a female dryad, embodying the aura of Yggdrasil. She looked at both of them before speaking.

"You came faster than I'd expected. Good. We are ready to move on to the next phase of rejuvenation of Unique Lifeform."

With a wave of her hand, the tree in front of them had its crown open up, revealing a familiar-looking figure within. Jake's eyes opened wide as he recognized Fallen King's body.

"Is that- "

"Part of vessel," Yggdrasil answered. **"However, true body remains masked on your face. For now, at least."**

"What do you mean?" Jake asked with a frown.

"In process of rejuvenation, Records of Unique Lifeform were laid bare before me. I saw connection that had been forced between you two, and karmic linkage both of you wish to be rid of. This is an opportunity to do just that. Only should you wish for your fates to be severed, that is," Yggdrasil explained before finishing off with an offer that Jake hadn't even thought about.

In truth, he'd kind of forgotten the connection between himself and Fallen King. It was an extremely one-sided bond they shared. One where Jake could forcibly summon Fallen King to his side, snuff out his Truesoul with a mere thought, and Unique Lifeform even found his own progress limited by Jake, not allowing him to evolve before Jake did. Worst of all, if Jake died, so would Fallen King.

Jake had never liked that this connection between them had been forced. He was a reckless person by nature, one who liked taking massive risks for equally massive rewards. Doing that while his life directly depended on his survival sucked. Sure, it hadn't stopped Jake, but it had crossed his mind at times.

For orcs, having a Unique Lifeform essentially bound to serve you would be something they would never want to get rid of. It was like having a pinnacle genius as your slave. To Jake, it was a horrible arrangement, though, and he knew that Fallen King would have died sooner than it would have allowed Jake to treat him as a servant. Likely dying while trying to at least take off Jake's head in the process.

So being offered a chance to sever the chains binding them... it was an absolute no-brainer.

"If you can make Fallen King truly independent once more, please do so," Jake said in a serious voice. "And if you need anything from me to make it happen, just ask away."

Jake was fairly certain severing his connection with Fallen King would have some negative consequences. No, he didn't consider fact that Fallen King had once been an enemy and was an actual threat should he choose to turn on Jake. After having spent fifty years in Nevermore with Unique Lifeform, he knew King was an asshole, but he was also trustworthy. Perhaps more importantly, he wasn't stupid and knew that if he and Jake had a proper fight to death, it would end same as ir last death battle.

No, true loss was right in front of his face. His mask. mask currently contained Truesoul of Fallen King, and if Unique Lifeform had to be fully autonomous again, it was natural that mask had to go.

"I will need mask you are wearing and your permission to manipulate it," Yggdrasil said, exactly as Jake had expected.

Without any hesitation, Jake took off mask and offered it up.

"Can you explain what you'll do?" Jake asked, more out of curiosity than anything else.

mask floated upwards, and Jake felt Yggdrasil prod for permission. Even as a Primordial, she couldn't manipulate a Soulbound item without express permission from user. It was a hard rule by system, and unless she had a Transcendent skill or Bloodline to fuck with or people's equipment, Jake had to give go-ahead. Something he naturally did.

When he did so, he felt consequences instantly as his mana pool instantly fell by tens of thousands of points, and his mana regeneration also suffered a severe reduction. Losing such a quite frankly overpowered item was a shame. However, it was a price Jake was more than willing to pay if it meant resurrection of Fallen King.

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"This mask is true body of Unique Lifeform, yet it isn't. He can exist independent of mask, vessel holding a perfect mirror of Truesoul. Entangled across any distance, space, linked through absolute power of system."

Jake nodded along, already knowing that. Well, alright, he knew general concept behind why Fallen King could technically both be on his face and floating around shooting golden force beams, as well as how re could be two masks at same time.

"We shall exploit this unique power. This duality of soul. Before, mask you wore was true body, while mask on vessel was mirror. This shall be reversed."

original mask will become one with Unique Lifeform, allowing him to become truly independent once more, while I shall forge mirrored mask for you."

"Wait... you'll make a new mask for me?" Jake asked, having definitely not seen that one coming.

"New? It can be viewed that way. mask's Records will remain primarily same, though I shall add to it out of necessity rather than choice. Also, allow me to clarify. This is a requirement, not merely something done as an extra favor. When Unique Lifeform originally mirrored his existence, split was permanent. Perhaps it had always been that way... perhaps that was how he survived your encounter in first place. When you destroyed Unique Lifeform, you made mirror become original... and thus he found himself bound to you, as mask housing his only remaining Truesoul was your rightful reward. When you later used Soul Renewal granted by system, you conjured a new mirror once more, while keeping original as your mask."

Jake listened intently as it became evident that Yggdrasil had quite insight into history between Jake and Fallen King, down to existence of Soul Renewal item. He did question how she had learned all this, but he didn't want to ask about it directly because he cared far more about meaning of her words.

"So there will still be two masks, both containing Truesoul of Fallen King, but 'true' mask will shift to be one only controlled by Fallen King?" Jake asked. "I just want to make sure that walking around with mirrored version won't afford me any control."

"As you will hold mirror, you will be able to destroy it and cause major annoyance to Unique Lifeform, but you will no longer hold control over his life or death. growth of mirror will also depend on original, not other way around. If you feel uncomfortable with this arrangement, you can always surrender your control of mask back to Fallen King entirely. For now, I seek only to create a mirror of original, thus completing soul of Unique Lifeform and allowing his full rejuvenation. What happens from there is none of my concern."

"Alright," Jake nodded and sighed. Yggdrasil was probably right. This was a matter he would have to discuss with Fallen King once they finally got opportunity, which would hopefully happen sooner rather than later.

"Very well. I cannot tell you exactly how long full rejuvenation shall take, but during it, I will need to hold on to mask."

Jake nodded again, naturally having expected that.

"With that matter solved, I believe there is nothing more to address," Yggdrasil said.

As if prompted by those words, anor presence descended upon meadow. A portal opened up, and out stepped a familiar old man holding a staff with a flower at its end.

Seeing him, Jake smiled. "Hello re. Can I take a guess and say Dina talked to you?"

"How insightful," Nature's Attendant smiled in return. "Something about you needing a new bow and wanting to use a part of Yggdrasil to craft it."

Artemis, who had been standing next to Jake and just seemed happy to be re, turned her head slowly and stared at Jake in disbelief. He didn't see big deal about asking that as he nodded.

"Yeah," Jake said confidently. "You may not know this, but Yggdrasil was also a mythological tree back in ninety-third universe before integration. In so many legends and stories, re were talks of artifacts crafted from parts of World Tree, and just imagining a bow using such material is just... can you blame me for at least trying?"

"I respect gumption," Nature's Attendant chuckled. "And I do owe you a favor, don't I?"

"Helping me get an awesome bow I can hopefully use for a long time, if not forever, would be just about best favor I could imagine anyone giving me," Jake said honestly.

His current bow had served him well, but compared to his old Apex Hunter bow, it was lacking. All it really had going for itself was extreme durability.

"From what I understood, you want it based on Records of anor bow you also possess?" Nature's Attendant asked. "Could you show me this bow?"

"Of course," Jake nodded as he took out his old friend. Summoning it, bow that appeared looked worn and was cracked in several places, but it still remained whole enough to register as an item.

[Bow of Apex Hunter (Legendary)] – A bow offered directly by system due to Earth's performance during Treasure Hunt event. Once broken, now reforged, bow is more durable than ever and has an even higher level of mana conductivity. This is a bow for an apex hunter who only seeks to challenge worthy foes and effortlessly strikes down those inferior that dare impede his quest. Increases damage done against foes dependent on level disparity – both lower and higher – up to a certain threshold. This effect is based on Perception. bow is incredibly durable and will adapt to energy infused into it, beginning to take on its properties and empowering attacks using adapted energy. Enchantments: Apex Hunter. Requirements: Soulbound

Reading section about bow having already been broken once and now being more durable than ever was honestly funny. A great juxtaposition to now twice-broken bow that looked far from durable.

"May I?" Nature's Attendant asked as he walked over, making Jake nod as old man took bow in his hands. Jake felt him try to inspect it with his energy, and he naturally allowed god to do so.

A few seconds passed before god smiled. "I understand why you want to keep it. It's a potent effect and not something easily replicated."

"Yeah, it definitely served me well," Jake confirmed, looking at this old bow with nostalgic eyes. It had been with him in its current version all throughout Nevermore, which was already respectable, considering it was an item that couldn't upgrade by itself like Eternal Hunger. Especially when one considered stress Jake's arcane affinity constantly put poor bow under.

"Tonken, do you believe it feasible?" Yggdrasil's voice echoed.

"I was worried at first, but if we use Records in this bow as base, I believe it's possible," Nature's Attendant nodded. "It was directly granted by system, and conceptual complexity reflects that."

"Good," Yggdrasil said, finally turning her head toward or goddess present. **"Artemis, you are to assist Tonken in creating a bow for Chosen of Malefic Viper. As an archer, your assistance should prove useful, and you are in a prime position to bring Chosen with you to provide input when Tonken requests."** Latest content published on novel**fire**net

"Yes, Mor Tree," Artemis answered, bowing deeply.

"Proceed. I shall call for Chosen once more when needed."

With those words, Yggdrasil's summoned dryad clone disappeared, and pressure bearing down on m was reduced. At least by a little, as Nature's Attendant was still re.

"So, what do you need me to do?" Jake asked second-in-command of Panon of Life after a second or so of silence.

"For now... nothing. I'll bring this bow back with me and ensure seed I prepare can house its Records," old man explained. "Down line, I will need you to feed seed and sprout energy intermittently. That is to say that leaving for any Hunting Grounds isn't recommended, as seeds can be quite demanding, and timing of when y are fed energy can have a high level of impact on final result."

"Alright," Jake said, as he wondered something. "Say... how is Yggdrasil involved when you're making seed and all that?"

Nature's Attendant smiled at Jake's question before shaking his head. "I would think an alchemist like you had heard of grafting. We shall grow a small sapling that can serve

as body of your new bow, after which we will graft a piece of Yggdrasil directly onto it, allowing Records to merge, creating something greater than whole. That's why we were concerned Records of sapling wouldn't be sufficient to withstand those of Yggdrasil, but seeing this bow you gave me, and knowing who you are, I do indeed believe we can create something quite wonderful."

Jake nodded along to explanation, and after asking a few more mostly meaningless follow-up questions, Jake's brief visit with Yggdrasil and Nature's Attendant came to an end, Jake leaving both a bow and a mask poorer.

With what Nature's Attendant had said, Jake also shouldn't go hunting for next period. Coupled with fact he'd just gotten a lot of class levels, and many subjects remaining on his to-do list before evolving, it wasn't that hard to figure out what would come next.

That's right, it was alchemy time... with a bit of meditation and quality time with Artemis sprinkled in here and re.

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Chapter 1144: Future of Multiverse

Artemis did not leave domain of Yggdrasil with Jake. Instead, she was to stay behind and assist Nature's Attendant in planting seed that would one day turn into one part of Jake's new bow.

Her staying behind also gave goddess some courage to ask a question that had been boring her for a while. From her own perspective, she knew why she treated Jake way she did. She had a natural attraction due to his Path, and he appeared in her eyes like apex of hunters. He was a natural, and that was something irresistible about his demeanor and aura.

For gods or even those who just lived long lives, physical appearance was barely a factor to consider when discussing attraction. Instead, personality and presence were what truly mattered. aura someone gave off when entering a room said far more about a person than ir physical appearance. Everyone who wanted to was good-looking by default, but one couldn't easily fool ors with aura y gave off.

And Jake... Jake had an aura that made it easy to mistake him for a god superior to even Artemis herself. At least at times. If he hid his level and focused on it, she suspected he could impersonate a god well, at least for a time. Oh, and he would, of

course, be in quite a pickle if an actual god tried to test his aura and accidentally crushed him with his energy-fueled presence.

Despite all this, he was unmistakably a mortal. Yet, despite this indisputable fact, Artemis saw Yggdrasil and Nature's Attendant both treat him better than even the gods. Even if he was Chosen of Malefic Viper, a fellow Primordial, it just didn't truly make any sense to Artemis.

Perhaps she was inspired by Jake's bluntness, or perhaps it was a momentary lapse in judgment, but shortly after Jake had been teleported away, she turned to Nature's Attendant and just straight up asked him.

"If I may... why do you treat Jake like this? Why are you acting towards him almost as if he's an equal?" she asked Nature's Attendant. Instantly after asking, she felt a pang of regret, but at that point, it was too late.

Luckily for her, second-in-command of Panon of Life didn't seem offended by her bluntness, as he just smiled. "You've been a god for a fair amount of time, haven't you?"

She nodded, indeed having a few eras under her belt.

"During this time, you must have met your fair share of mortals. Geniuses beyond compare. Those who stood at the pinnacle of their generation. Tell me, when you recall all of them, do any of them remind you of Viper's Chosen?" the older god asked her.

"In some aspects," Artemis muttered. "They all had the same level of confidence. Arrogance, I would almost say. Of course, Jake is different in that this confidence doesn't crumble even before gods, while a regular genius would still find himself suppressed by the natural order. He is unique when one considers that, as well as the abilities he has shown as a Harbinger of Primeval Origins."

Artemis almost didn't mention that last one as she wanted to avoid that topic if possible. As a high-ranking member of Panon of Life, she had a responsibility towards her faction, and it was expected of her to share pertinent information when obtained.

That's why Jake had put her in a rather difficult position when he revealed some of the truths of his Harbinger of Primeval Origins ability. However, she had already decided that what was imparted in confidentiality would remain confidential. Jake had trusted her with that knowledge, and she had no intentions of betraying that trust, even if her keeping it a secret could be looked upon unkindly by the top brass of Panon of Life.

"It's true he does have many unique aspects to him, while others remain rather rare for a god, of course," Nature's Attendant nodded. "But I think the most unique thing about him is the situation he has put us gods in. We are all so used to the universal law of suppression. I expect my aura to have a profound effect on those significantly weaker than myself, and I approach interaction with that in mind. I correct my demeanor as much as I can to still

make or person comfortable, even if I rarely succeed.” rightful source is
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“But with Jake, that’s not a thing,” Artemis muttered.

“Precisely so. Talking with Jake is like talking with a being that possesses equal or even superior power to me. I don’t need to correct how I act and make it suitable for a mortal. There is something unique about that, and something I think most of us gods miss. The fact that this ability also seems to extend somewhat to others is a massive bonus. Just take yourself as an example. You are far more casual now than you usually are, and with every time we meet, it gets better. Even with Dina, I now feel like I’m talking to my granddaughter without her being filled with fear that she’s trying hard not to show,” Nature’s Attendant said with a big smile on his face.

“I understand that, but I’m still not certain why that means you, Mor Tree, and even Malefic One have chosen to treat Jake almost like an equal,” Artemis kept voicing her thoughts.

“Tell me, dear, what is the biggest difference between a god and a mortal?”

“Immortality,” Artemis answered without any hesitation. An obvious answer would be power, but some peak S-grade mortals could battle even weaker gods, yet no matter how powerful an S-grade got, time would still spell its doom.

“Right,” Nature’s Attendant nodded. “But gods still die. All the time. Tell me, you seem to have gotten a good understanding of Jake so far, so how do you think he would meet his death? Alone at home in a bed after his lifespan expires, or with a weapon in hand, fighting a too powerful foe?”

“The latter, obviously,” Artemis said, shaking her head.

“I concur entirely,” Nature’s Attendant smiled. “I, too, believe that he will either die trying to achieve greatness, or he will ascend and stand alongside gods. Complacency and passivity are simply not in his nature.”

“That doesn’t guarantee godhood, though,” Artemis sighed. There simply was no guarantee. There had been more top geniuses of the multiverse who had failed to ascend to godhood than she could count. Even if they tried with every fiber of their being to attain immortality, for some, it would just never come.

“No, and his chances of ascension still remain slim even should he retain his current momentum, but so what?” Nature’s Attendant asked. “We already agreed he has only one of two fates. Godhood or an untimely death in pursuit of it. With that in mind, what do you think the pros and cons are to us treating him like an equal?”

Artemis considered his question for a while before speaking. "Pros are a good relationship, obviously. Cons is naturally opposite of that. Looking down on Jake would make him view you incredibly unfavorably. However, to play devil's advocate, I could argue anor con is appearance and personal slight a god may feel from recognizing a mortal as one of m. It feels almost like an insult to a god's Path to recognize a mere mortal's as comparable to irs. It undermines everything y've been through to earn respect y currently have."

"Right," Nature's Attendant nodded. "For cons, I do agree to some extent. It does hurt ego a little talking to someone so much younger, weaker, and less knowledgeable like he's equal in standing to you, but honestly? I can accept it. As gods, we need to consider things on a far wider time scale than mortals, especially when you're a god leading a major faction. We need to consider not just this era, but one that comes next. Now consider pros and cons again, but rar than here and now, how you will think back on your actions during this time and era in future."

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It didn't take long for Artemis to realize what he was getting as she nodded. "I see..."

"Good," Nature's Attendant smiled. "I didn't need to think for long about how I wanted to treat Jake, and neir did Yggdrasil. Taking a small hit to our ego now for potential benefits in future is more than worth it."

"Right," Artemis nodded.

She finally understood what Nature's Attendant was getting at, and it made a lot of sense... perhaps because her thoughts had already been somewhere similar. Before Jake had arrived at Panon, and even during her time in Nevermore, she had considered deeply if she truly wanted to pursue something more with Jake or just keep what had happened inside Colosseum of Mortals as a glimpse of what could never be.

Ultimately, she decided pros did outweigh cons. In event that Jake should die as a consequence of being a mortal, Artemis would still have a memory she could look back at with fondness and sadness. It would be regrettable for sure, and she could see herself cursing herself for ever getting emotionally involved, but she knew that given eternity afforded by immortality, she would one day be able to truly have it be nothing more than a distant memory.

However, in unlikely event that Jake went all way... well, Artemis had a lot of thoughts if that happened. Which was why she treated Jake way she did right now. She had to assume he would make it to godhood, or she would ruin what could be if he did, because re was no way he would accept her treating him as lesser than herself... something that was admittedly one of his more attractive traits.

It appeared that gods such as Yggdrasil and Nature's Attendant had same mindset. Well, besides part about finding him attractive. If Jake died on his Path, most y would have lost was m feeling a bit uncomfortable at times. Even n, y had still ultimately helped Chosen of anor Primordial, and based on Viper's attitude so far, he was sure to look fondly upon those helping his Chosen.

Meanwhile, if Jake did make it to godhood, y would have a powerful ally. Or, at very least, y wouldn't have set mselves up with an incredibly dangerous future enemy.

"re is one more reason, though. We talk a lot about mortals failing to reach godhood as a result of complacency, but I believe we, gods, are far worse sinners in that respect," Nature's Attendant spoke after a few moments of silence. "Especially we, oldest."

"What do you mean?" Artemis asked, genuinely unsure of what he was getting at. From her point of view, he and Yggdrasil were always busy doing one project or anor. y were never slacking off. Sure, a lot of what y did was something that wouldn't pay dividends for a long time, assuming it ever would, but such work was also important.

"Yip of Yore," Nature's Attendant said with a sigh. "He was... how to put it... a wake-up call. To many of us. This is something I don't share with you lightly, but re was genuine concern even amongst some of top factions as Yip rose to power and only kept rising."

Artemis remained quiet as Nature's Attendant began pacing back and forth.

"When Yip broke all records and became a Godking, we looked at him as if he were some interesting curiosity. When he broke through that barrier and entered Empyrean Steps, some began to take him more seriously. When he began walking those Steps, it became a concern. In less than an era, he had caught up with and surpassed many who regarded mselves as part of old guard. Gods who had been around since first few eras.

"Some viewed Yip as a sign of hope, which confused many of us. Hope against what? That's when much of resentment that had been hidden came to fore. It's in our nature to expand our factions, claim territory, resources, and recruit those we deem worthy, but this left many of gods unwilling to serve or gods in dust. y felt suppressed, undermined, and y began to resent those of us who monopolized everything. With Yip at ir helm, y believed y had found a god capable of standing up to even Primordials."

"y were obviously wrong," Artemis shook her head.

"No," Nature's Attendant said in a stern voice. "y were not. And that's true cause for concern. Yip of Yore was impatient. He had barely lived for a full era before he foolishly tried to kill Malefic Viper of all gods. Now, imagine if Yip had been smarter. What if he had waited for anor era? Five more? What if he had honed himself and fully realized his Path before aiming for throne? If he had... things could have gotten dangerous. Very dangerous."

“You’re saying that- “

“Anor Yip of Yore will rise, of that, re’s no doubt,” Nature’s Attendant said as he looked at Artemis. “And re is a good chance next genius who will make a meteoric rise has already been born. In fact, it may be hunter we just met. So far, his performance has already surpassed Yip of Yore even when y were same grade, and if he continues that growth...”

Artemis had considered Jake becoming a god, but a part of her had somehow not considered what kind of god he would become. It was normal for new gods to be a lot weaker than older ones, and even if y could catch up somewhat, given enough eras, y would be playing catch-up forever. However... Nature’s Attendant was right that Yip had seemingly broken that balance entirely. By time he died, he had already been a god that surpassed Artemis several times over. If Jake indeed became a god that matched or surpassed Yip, caution of or gods made a lot more sense.

“You want to ensure next rising star isn’t antagonistic towards us,” Artemis said. “No, better than that. You want that person to consider us an ally already, or, at very least, to recognize our respect for new generation.”

“We are merely positioning ourselves for a change that is inevitable,” Nature’s Attendant nodded. “You have already seen some of young geniuses from this new generation. I’m not even talking about Chosen of Malefic Viper, but those from his planet. Several of m are candidates to become anor figurehead for younger gods, and in rest of new universe, re is no lack of such candidates. Ell’Hakan, former Chosen of Yip, was also a monstrous genius in his own right and only fell because he made an enemy of one superior to himself.”

“And a rising tide raises all boats,” Artemis muttered. “competition amongst generation will allow m to spur one anor on to reach even greater heights. Records will echo among m, creating an even stronger effect as y inadvertently help one anor.”

“Dina has already experienced this,” second-in-command of Panon of Life said with a small smile. “Those fifty years in Nevermore were far more beneficial than I can even imagine. Not just for her immediate growth, but Records from connections she formed will help her Path greatly.”

“I will admit, I know little about Jake’s party members outside of cursory,” Artemis confessed. “Well, I know Dina, and I’ve heard much about Sylphie, but swordsman and Unique Lifeform, not so much.”

“Yes... swordsman,” Nature’s Attendant said. “A Unique Lifeform is a Unique Lifeform. Powerful by default, as is ir birthright. However, that swordsman... I cannot quite find words to describe him. He is overshadowed by his proximity to Chosen of Malefic Viper, but we cannot overlook or forget about him. Doing so would be a grave error.”

“He’s that powerful?” Artemis asked with some surprise. “I understand he’s a Transcendent, but from what I know, it’s not an overwhelming one. Glimpse of Spring, I believe it’s called?”

Nature’s Attendant smiled and shook his head. “ hint lies in name. Glimpse. I’ve not been privy to it, but during his battle with Umbra in Colosseum of Mortals, he fully unleashed it. Afterwards, recording has been sealed, and Court of Shadows refuses to share any information. All I do know is that afterwards, swordsman’s danger rating in Court of Shadows’ internal system was upgraded and is now equal to that of Chosen of Malefic Viper.”

Artemis frowned as she recalled orwise unassuming old-looking swordsman. Besides looking old, Artemis hadn’t picked up anything else special about him besides perhaps his calmness. She had seen recording of her image losing to him in Colosseum of Mortals, and from that alone, it was clear he was an extremely skilled swordsman, but still. highest danger rating from Court of Shadows was not easily achieved.

“Anyhow, enough talking about future of multiverse,” Nature’s Attendant said. “Instead, let us go plant a seed to furr relationship between Panon of Life and person who seems to be at center of this new era. I also wouldn’t want to hold you here for too long, so you can get back to him.”

Artemis nodded as she and Nature’s Attendant teleported away toward personal garden of god. This conversation had been very clarifying to her, and she also felt that she was considered closer to absolute apex of Panon of Life than ever. Perhaps some of ir thoughts and concerns also extended to her now, if she truly did continue to grow closer to Jake.

However, so did expectations and hope she suspected Yggdrasil and Nature’s Attendant both held toward her. It was almost funny to consider impulsive and emotional decision to pursue Jake that both her image in Nevermore and her true self outside had made would somehow become part of considerations made by Primordials and or apex beings regarding future of entire multiverse.

Seeing her own recent progress after many years of stagnation, she also began to think that perhaps rising tide of new generation was a lot higher than even top factions realized.

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Chapter 1145: Two Small Sprouts

As gods were discussing future of very multiverse itself, one of people at center of it all was busy doing something far more important. At least from his perspective.

"Five of m," Jake insisted, a severe look on his face.

"No!" person he was doing business with rejected his offer. "Two!"

"Only two? Now that's just ripping me off. Four should be fair, and honestly, even n, I feel like I'm taking a loss," Jake crossed his arms.

or party looked in thought for a moment before coming up with a counteroffer. "Eleven for four!"

"Eleven rar than ten? Hm... alright, that seems doable, but know that you definitely won this exchange," Jake sighed as he took out eleven of beast cores he'd collected and traded m for four pieces of amber.

Warpsnatcher seemed happy enough with trade and went to put its new loot in its rightful pile as Jake said his goodbyes and went towards his alchemy lab. pieces of amber were worth a lot more to Jake than beast cores, as he could melt down amber and use it to create what would hopefully be an improved rejuvenation potion.

Amber was, essentially, crystallized blood of trees. When it was first formed from resin, it had been filled with life energy, but after entering waters around Grand Lakes, it had been furr infused with powerful water affinity mana. Water and life affinity often went hand in hand and complemented one anor nicely, and combined with or regular herbs, which were also filled with life energy, this amber was a great catalyst.

Entering his alchemy lab not too far from where Warpsnatcher had set up its lair, Jake got to work. With his class now a fair deal ahead of his profession, Jake wanted to get his alchemy up to speed. He also still had one more skill selection remaining in this grade, and being greedy boy he was, Jake wanted to see it sooner rar than later.

Of course, one way to get levels was to upgrade his Malefic Viper Legacy skills, and Jake did plan on doing that, too. In fact, working on this rejuvenation potion was part of it. Jake only had Blood and Fangs of Malefic Viper left to upgrade, and while he already had some thoughts about how he could upgrade Fangs, he was honestly a bit stuck with Blood.

Checking out skill, it did a lot, just like all or Legacy skills, but that was part of issue with upgrading se.

[Blood of Malefic Viper (Legendary)] – blood of Malefic Viper is a toxin more deadly than most poisons and lifeblood of an immortal being. Allows Alchemist to infuse ir blood with energy to turn ir blood poisonous, imitating ir Patron and even carrying traces of True Blood of Malefic One within. blood can be used as

an ingredient in alchemy or as a deadly weapon against your foes. nature of poison is determined based on Records of Alchemist. Allows your blood to carry more energy than usual, including vital energy, passively speeding up regeneration. This effect is further amplified when consuming a health potion or sources of beneficial vital energy. blood's toxicity level is based primarily on Vitality and Wisdom but receives an increase from all physical stats. Increase in natural regeneration based on total health pool. Passively provides 3 Vitality per level in Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of Malefic Viper. May your blood be forever bane of all that wishes you harm, and that which brings you eternal life.

As skill was right now, it had three core components. first and definitely most important one was to turn his blood toxic. Jake's blood was a decent enough poison in its own right, and sometimes he did use it when he wanted to avoid "wasting" any of his crafted ones, but true value of his blood came during crafting.

Jake's blood was a brilliant ingredient in pretty much anything he made outside of potions. Even with se, he used his blood in his Malefic Potions, but as Jake was only one who could use those, he also crafted variants that ors could use here and re.

For poisons, his own blood had pretty much replaced use of water. Which, yes, did mean Jake could easily bleed out several liters every crafting session, but he was kind of used to it by now.

two or functions of skill were an increase in regeneration and ability to make health potions better. Not in that y restored more, but in that y did it thing faster and more efficiently. se two functions definitely did go hand in hand.

Finally, re was technically also passive stats given by skill – perhaps its most overpowered aspect – but Jake didn't need to consider that part when working on an upgrade. It was just part of deal.

Jake had put a lot of thought into how he could upgrade Blood of Malefic Viper, and he saw one of two directions to take skill. One was to make it better at creating blood to use in alchemy, while or was to further pursue its ability to increase regeneration, or perhaps even tag on an additional ability to skill.

Deciding on a direction wasn't easy, though. re were pros and cons to both, and even if Jake did choose to focus on regeneration, toxic blood would become more potent simply due to skill upgrading. Of course, so would regeneration if he focused on toxic blood.

Eir way, Jake decided that best approach would be to become more familiar with both aspects of skill before he would fully decide. Creating and fully understanding rejuvenation potions was just one part of that, and one of most approachable things Jake could work on right away.

Compared to or potions, rejuvenation potions were rare unique in that they needed far more balance than any of others. If one simply mixed a healing and a mana potion, one would end up with a really shitty-tasting drink that didn't restore either resource. Jake knew this from personal experiments.

Yet with rejuvenation potions, all three energies could exist in harmony within the same bottle, and once consumed, would restore all resources equally. Of course, it would restore a lot less than a dedicated potion for any of individual resources, but overall would give more.

The reason Jake believed understanding rejuvenation potions was important was to comprehend the nature and concepts behind this balance. Because there was another thing that was capable of containing all three energies at once, all in harmony:

His own body.

As well as his blood.

Jake's blood naturally contained vital energy, as all blood tended to. However, when he infused it with mana through Blood of Malefic Viper, that didn't mess up vital energies within at all. If Jake wished for it to retain its Vitality-based properties, he totally could, which was a big part of why Malefic Health Potions were a thing.

Finally, seeing his inner energy – also known as Stamina – constantly coursed through his body, it too was seamlessly merged with his blood. Understanding how his own blood worked seemed like the most straightforward way to learn how a skill called Blood also worked.

That's why Jake got to work with his usual way of learning how to craft things properly: being an utterly wasteful rich kid with more money than sense. Rare than waste time on theory and all that jazz, Jake just tossed in ingredients and tried with no regard to how much he wasted.

Like that, Jake worked for the next couple of days, sometimes taking breaks in between to meditate and continue studying the tome left by First Sage. Upgrading his Meditate skill was also something on his to-do list, but it wasn't something he could force. He still had plenty more time before he evolved to B-grade anyhow.

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Jake also dedicated some time to check in on Cradle to see progress with his Soulflame, and things were looking better than ever. There were several powerful Arcane Soulflames within, and while the appearance of a Supreme Soulflame was never guaranteed, Jake held hope.

After a full week of wasting ingredients and studying, Jake was close to success with rejuvenation potion, but that was when Artemis returned. She had been gone for longer than Jake had expected, and when he went to greet her after finishing his craft, he felt that she seemed slightly... different. It was subtle, but something about her demeanor had definitely shifted.

"Hey, welcome back," Jake said, walking into living room where Artemis had decided to read a book while waiting for him.

"Well, thank you," she smiled. "Though, sadly, we'll have to leave again shortly. Nature's Attendant needs your input to get process of creating that bow of yours going."

"Already? That's pretty fast. I thought he would need more time to prepare things, considering raw materials involved," Jake commented.

"I do want to remind you that he's an existence second only to Mor Tree herself," Artemis pointed out. "This also isn't first time he's used materials provided by Mor Tree for his crafting."

"Is that flower staff he carries around made with her assistance?" Jake asked curiously. Nature's Attendant always walked around with same staff, and Jake could definitely feel it was no ordinary weapon. In fact, it felt more like it was its own separate living entity.

"No, it's an artifact he obtained a very long time ago," Artemis shook her head. "I'm not really certain about its origins or how powerful staff is, but what I do know is that its sentient and has enough power even without a wielder to kill someone at my level."

"So a scary flower staff," Jake nodded. "Anyhow, we should get going, shouldn't we?"

"We definitely should," Artemis nodded as she stood up and stretched. "Teleport incoming."

Jake didn't resist as, in very next moment, he was swept up by space magic and found himself transported to appear right in front of a large wooden manor that stood in middle of a forest.

Far above m, crown of Yggdrasil formed sky, and based on fact that Jake saw a wall that extended endlessly to both sides, not too far behind manor. He quickly guessed y were right at trunk of Yggdrasil.

"You should knock," Artemis nudged him.

"Is this where Nature's Attendant lives?" Jake asked with surprise. manor was fairly large, sure, but it was still just a three-story building that didn't look overly impressive.

entire thing was made out of stacked logs, and while there were some decorations there, it definitely didn't look like the home of a god.

Before Artemis even had time to answer his question, Jake realized that it definitely wasn't his house... because there wasn't one. With his sphere, Jake should be able to see inside of the manor, and even if the inside had been spatially expanded to the extreme, Jake should still be able to at least see that.

However, all he saw behind the front door was nothingness. Void. There was no interior, just a set of walls encasing the void itself.

"No, not at all," Artemis chuckled. "This door in front of you serves as an entrance point to Nature's Attendant's personal garden. A portal, if you will."

"Is it his Divine Realm?"

"Something like that," Artemis neither confirmed nor denied.

"Alright, alright, keep it a mystery," Jake chuckled as he finally knocked on the door. After three knocks, the door slowly began opening on its own, but rather than seeing wooden floors and a nice foyer to put your coat and shoes, he saw grass on the other side. Yet the first thing Jake noticed wasn't what entered his eyes but his nose.

A powerful scent of flowers washed over Jake, and his Sense of Malefic Viper skill went insane. Without even thinking, Jake stepped through the door and entered an entirely different world, as an endless, lush garden extended out as far as the eye could see.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Artemis asked, having followed in after him. "In this garden, you can find nearly any herb found in the multiverse, many of which you would be hard-pressed to find anywhere else. There are even those that can only be found here." Follow current NOVELS on novel•

Artemis walked up next to Jake as she motioned for him to follow as they started walking.

"As we've talked plenty about, Pantheon of Life cares about maintaining nature and preserving balance. In that pursuit, we are also big on conservation, and not just of animals, but of anything that possesses life, including plants. This entire garden is also the biggest conservatory of extinct herbs and plants in the entire multiverse, and before you ask, yes, sometimes a few of these extinct herbs are cultivated specifically to be sold off."

Jake took a few deep breaths as he walked, which was when he detected something rather unexpected. He turned towards a certain direction as his Sense of Malefic Viper had picked up a familiar energy, Artemis following his gaze.

"Yes, Malefic Viper has also contributed to some of the plants found here, including a few that are of his own creation," Artemis shared. "Malefic affinity is one I will admit I have

little to no understanding of, outside of fact I would like to avoid coming into contact with it, but that's also what makes it so interesting when a plant can exist with this affinity."

"Right," Jake nodded as he looked ahead. Two of them were walking on a road of grass, lined by fields of flowers on both sides, as they approached a clearing in middle of field. There, Jake already saw familiar old man standing, his staff embedded in ground a bit away.

Jake saw that next to Nature's Attendant, two small sprouts had already appeared, and even from a distance, he felt a distinct aura from each of them. One of them was teeming with overpowering life energy and, despite being nothing more than a sprout, looked as if even a hurricane caused by Stormild herself couldn't make it bend.

Meanwhile, the other gave off a far different kind of aura. This one was more aloof, yet aggressive. As if it refused to even acknowledge that small sprout next to it was in any way comparable to it. Seeing two of them side by side, he didn't doubt that, had they been actual children, they would already be fighting.

"What are your initial thoughts?" Nature's Attendant spoke, having noticed what Jake was looking at.

"They... don't seem to get along," Jake commented in an unsure voice.

"Heh," Nature's Attendant chuckled. "You're completely right. One is like an immovable object, unbending and uncompromising. Meanwhile, the other is aggressive, wanting to move forward like an unstoppable force. Two opposites, for sure."

Jake nodded, already realizing the source of the two sprouts. One was created using Jake's old bow, while the other had come from Yggdrasil. It was incredibly subtle, but Jake still detected auras of their origins, and he genuinely wondered how the god wanted to combine them.

Well... it turns out he wasn't. Jake was supposed to be the one to do that.

"They will certainly need a guiding hand. But I will not be the one to do that, only their true owner can have that job," Nature's Attendant smiled. "Both of them are like children who constantly want to compete, so they need a firm parent whom both respect. A parent that, be it an immovable object or an unstoppable force, can take on either, or better yet, both at same time."

"What do you need me to do?" Jake asked as he walked closer.

"Be that parent to them," the god smiled. "Parenting can be either difficult or easy, and luckily for you, I believe all that's required of you in this case is your mere presence. Your job here

is simple: merely infuse your energy into soil that both plants occupy. Let m feel your presence. Soak in your mana. Place your hand on circle.”

As he said this, a magic circle appeared, covering entire clearing and even surrounding fields of flowers.

Jake nodded as he knelt down and placed a hand on ground, right in center of circle that Nature’s Attendant had pointed out. Right as he did so, he felt a connection to land itself, and within it, two energy signatures. y were not sentient, but more like pure instinct.

moment y noticed Jake, he felt aggression from one and an indomitable will from or, which only made him smile as he infused his energy. At first, neir sprout seemed receptive, at least not until Jake also unleashed his aura upon clearing. Both seemed frightened for a moment, just long enough for both to let down ir guard and take in a sliver of his energy.

Having gotten a taste of Jake’s energy, both sprouts had a complete reversal in ir attitudes as both began craving it. Jake obliged as he infused more and more energy into formation, two small sprouts eating it up like re was no tomorrow. Soon, over a minute had passed, and Jake just kept pumping in resources, draining all his pools at once, even his health pool.

Yet two sprouts, each no larger than a finger, just kept chugging away. Both grew a little from this massive infusion of energy, but sadly for m, ir drinking fountain had a limit.

Nature’s Attendant waved his hand as formation disappeared, severing Jake’s connection to two sprouts. Breathing heavily, Jake looked up at god.

“I... think y... wanted more?” he said through labored breathing.

“All things in moderation. I think y’ve had quite enough for today and need a bit to digest it all,” old man chuckled. “Besides, I also think you need a moment to rest.”

“I’m... no... I’m not fine,” Jake said as he tried to stand up and instead began falling over, only to be caught by Artemis.

Feeling delirious and tired, Jake looked at Artemis. “I’m gonna take a little nap, okay?”

“Sweet dreams,” she smiled and shook her head as Jake gave her a big smile before he allowed his consciousness to slip and passed out from sheer exhaustion, having once more experienced what it felt like to have his resource pools down to single digits.

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Chapter 1146: Expansion Plans

Jake woke up with a killer headache, finding himself lying comfortably on a couch back at his palace residence. He took a moment to orient himself as a voice echoed from directly above him.

"You know, most people are able to pace mselves and not embarrassingly pass out," Artemis said, her words sounding almost like a scolding, but her tone didn't indicate she disapproved.

Opening his eyes, Jake stared directly up at Artemis, who looked down at him, which was also when he realized that comfortable pillow he was lying on wasn't a pillow at all.

Smiling, Jake looked at Artemis a bit teasingly. "I don't know. I think it turned out quite well. At least I'm not complaining about situation I currently find myself in."

"Mighty cocky for someone who just knocked mselves out on accident," Artemis chuckled.

"Hey, those small sprouts should be happy. y got quite meal," Jake commented casually. "Though I will admit, y consumed a lot more than I thought y would be able to. Did Nature's Attendant starve poor buggers or something?"

"No, you're just too weak to provide m with proper nutrients," Artemis said, not a hint of jest in her voice.

"Ow, that's hurtful."

"Sometimes, truth hurts," Artemis shrugged. "You should be happy. fact that y could absorb that much energy means that final result will be stronger, right? Nature's Attendant isn't holding anything back with this one, which means your input is essential. He can't provide energy himself, or his Records will inevitably turn item into something only gods can use."

"Sounds like I'll have to knock myself out a few more times, eh?" Jake joked.

"Or, better yet, you could stop just before you pass out from exhaustion. That way I wouldn't have to carry you home," Artemis said with exasperation.

"And miss out on getting a lap pillow from a goddess? Never."

"If it happens again, I'm gonna throw you off in middle of busiest market in Panon of Life," Artemis threatened. "And I'll make sure that your only way back will be through asking strangers for directions."

"You wouldn't," Jake said, a hint of actual fear in his voice.

"Oh, I would."

"Evil truly knows no bounds," Jake sighed. "Point taken. I should avoid passing out next time."

"Good," Artemis smiled triumphantly. "Now stop lazing around. You've already slept for five hours."

"But I'm just--"

Artemis stood up with no regard for Jake lying on her legs, pushing him down toward floor. Forced to react, Jake stopped his fall and pushed himself off floor and into a standing position.

"See, not that hard," Artemis smiled. "While I would love to laze around more, I sadly do have some obligations I need to attend to. Don't miss me too much."

"Hey, when my mind is in alchemy mire, I miss or think about nothing else," Jake shrugged.

"That's only a good thing," Artemis said. "Oh, and do say hi to Warpsnatcher for me. It was hanging out in living room when I returned and looked at me as if I'd killed you when it saw me carrying around your limp body."

"Poor little guy," Jake sighed as he checked using his sphere and saw Warpsnatcher hide within one of its loot piles in cellar. "I'll go down and talk to him."

"You do that. See you later," Artemis said as she teleported away, presumably to do god stuff.

Jake did as he said he would and went down to cellar right away to assure Warpsnatcher that things were fine, and that Artemis hadn't cruelly killed him and paraded his body around in some bizarre display of superiority. He wanted to say that Artemis wouldn't do that kind of thing, but when he considered her earlier threat, she definitely did have ability to display pure evil.

On topic of deciding a name for little guy... still a work in progress. Something very Jake-like, such as Snatchie or Warpie, was tempting, but he decided to take his time and think about a proper name that Miranda wouldn't smack him over head for.

Hopefully, if Warpsnatcher did successfully evolve to B-grade, new race would give him a good idea.

After reassuring his little friend, Jake went straight back to his alchemy lab and continued working on making a rejuvenation potion. At least for a little while, but seeing as his resource pools were still rar barren, he soon switched to meditation and studying tome left by First Sage.

Like that, Jake got back into grind as he worked on several projects at once. only times he contacted outside world were if he needed something, in which case Jake just had to send a message through his token, and a delivery would arrive shortly after. Everything ordered naturally was put on tab of Order of Malefic Viper.

Days passed, and soon enough, Jake had his first success as he crafted a common rarity rejuvenation potion. However, Jake knew he could do better than that and kept pushing, and only a few days later, he finally got what he wanted.

You have successfully crafted [Rejuvenation Potion (Uncommon)] – A new kind of creation has been made. Bonus experience earned

As with or potions, requirement for uncommon rarity was to consume at least a hundred thousand resources in total, and Jake barely passed that threshold as he bottled up liquid and used Identity on newly created potions.

[Rejuvenation Potion (Uncommon)] – Restores 34,432 health, stamina, and mana when consumed.

With potion done, Jake didn't need to think long about what to do with it. Jake chugged entire thing down as he closed his eyes and focused on how energy spread throughout his body to restore it. He observed how liquid split off into different streams of energy as it was carried through his Soulshape before eventually being fully absorbed or dispersing.

Opening his eyes again, Jake took mental notes of how energy had acted as he also felt subtle effects of Palate doing its work. To better understand its restorative properties, Jake had already consumed an exorbitant quantity of herbs, but consuming a finished potion was also nice at times. This update is available on **novel•fire•net**

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Seeing as he had an hour's cooldown time on potion, Jake went back and worked on other matters for a while. When he felt like time was right, Jake consumed another potion and felt its effects on his body as a plan slowly began to form. Not one necessarily made to upgrade Blood of Malefic Viper, but it was part of it.

After a few days of alchemy, Artemis returned to the palace to fetch him, though Jake did notice something about this version of her. After a bit of probing, he learned she had just sent an avatar, as her true body was busy elsewhere. Jake tried to ask what she was up to, but the goddess remained mysterious as she brought Jake back to Nature's Attendant's garden.

This time around, Jake didn't pass out. Nature's Attendant was also re to facilitate the process just like last time, and after Jake returned home with at least a few resources in the tank, he went straight back to meditation as Artemis took her leave again.

During all this time passing, Warpsnatcher had also finally finished fully setting up its own little territory, at which point Jake could confirm it did indeed function similarly to a formation. Simply being near all the loot, Warpsnatcher would get experience, though it appeared that the little guy needed to occasionally update the hoard. Jake did ask the nearly peak C-grade if he needed to head out and procure some stuff elsewhere, but Warpsnatcher assured Jake everything was fine.

It was only a day later that he realized that a lot of shinier decorations of the palace had started to vanish, only to appear in the cellar hidden under piles of what to Jake were pure junk.

As Jake was working on all his own stuff, he couldn't help but wonder how everyone else was doing. He knew that Sword Saint and Sylphie were both up to their own stuff within the Panon of Life territory, and if anything surprising had happened with them, he would have heard, but there were also others to consider.

Such as what was going on back on his home planet.

Miranda was fairly sure she would evolve to B-grade before Jake did. Not because Jake was particularly slow at leveling or anything, but because of the absolute shitload of work she had been saddled with to manage all of his affairs.

Ever since the universe had opened up to the rest of the multiverse, Earth had a constant stream of people coming through. Some wanted to visit, others wanted to settle down here, and a scarce few even tried to see how they could gain influence over the planet.

Plenty of religious organizations also tried to make their play, which was where Miranda surprised many of them. As per discussions with Jake and many others, these organizations weren't outright rejected but instead could apply to get their own small territory on the planet.

These territories were no larger than small villages, and they were still fully under the authority of the World Council. However, this gesture of allowing these factions to establish themselves went a long way toward gaining allies.

It also communicated to the multiverse that Earth was a mostly neutral territory. One that, as long as the laws were obeyed, anyone was free to visit. Of course, not everyone was

allowed to visit, as Miranda had already predicted shitshow y would be in for down line with open borders. re was a relatively strict border control, but as number of visitors remained limited for now, y didn't have too much to do.

This policy also helped battle rumors that Order of Malefic Viper had sought to push out all or major factions from galaxy. Or, at very least, that any of factions that were allowed had to make mselves subordinate to Order. If only a few factions were around, this rumor would have some ground to stand on, but when it was only Holy Church that was banned, it was clear to all who problem was.

Sure, no one dared speak that Holy Church had gotten thrown out deservedly, but based on what Miranda had gared, a lot of people sure as hell were thinking it.

Miranda remained very careful to make distinction between Earth and Order, making it clear y remained two separate entities. Sure, Order did fully back Earth, but y weren't officially rulers. Due to Malefic Viper's prior declarations that his Chosen was his own person who could make decisions without his Patron's input, this claim was acknowledged.

Admittedly, Miranda was fairly certain majority of influential factions just viewed this as Viper allowing his Chosen to play around and have his own galaxy to rule autonomously, but as long as y didn't cause trouble, Miranda didn't care what flawed conclusions y reached. In due time, y would realize truth.

Sitting in her office, Miranda was going over most recent crime reports – a positive one as people were finally beginning to realize Earth was serious about its laws and applied m equally to everyone – but just n, she had a knock on door.

Looking up from report, she spoke. "Come on in."

She had not been expecting any visitors, and Lillian was currently away supervising establishment of anor megacity outside of territory humanity originally occupied. As a reminder, all humans on Earth had been confined to just a small section after Tutorial, but now, plans to reclaim entire planet had already been set in motion.

"Excuse intrusion," a woman said as she opened door.

Miranda was surprised when she saw who it was and instantly frowned. "Has anything happened with Arnold?"

visitor was personal assistant of Arnold, someone who usually didn't even leave huge metal dome. Wanting to know as much about one of most powerful people on Earth as possible, Miranda had looked into Arnold as much as she could, and it hadn't been difficult to learn about who he was before system arrived.

Arnold had always been a genius. A genius, but also different, to level where he had a hard time relating to normal humans. Despite his lack of interpersonal skills, Arnold's genius had been enough to provide him with a lot of power and funds, some of which he had used to hire woman who now stood in Miranda's office. Her name was Nanna, and outside of her job working for Arnold, she didn't appear that extraordinary.

She had originally been hired as his personal assistant, but had quickly become manager of Arnold's life outside of his work, showing that she was indeed competent. It was a role she had also adopted after system arrived, and her Path was now essentially one with Arnold's. In many ways, she was reason why Arnold still had resources to continue working on all his products, even if Arnold had become better at handling matters by himself.

However, that didn't answer why she was in Miranda's office in first place.

"No, he's fine, but preoccupied with his current project," Nanna answered. "Hence why I took initiative to visit you by myself about a challenge we are currently facing."

"What seems to be problem?" Miranda asked curiously.

"In a single word... space. underground factory continues to expand, but we will soon reach a limit where it's no longer workable to continue expanding," she explained. "At least not without risking causing issues for city above. If we move closer to Haven, we also risk ruining ecosystem and causing forest problems."

Miranda frowned, though she wasn't surprised. Arnold had originally set up shop in old Fort close to Haven and had stayed there ever since. He already owned a large area above ground with his metal dome, with majority of Arnold's factory and workshop beneath ground. Constructing down there was bound to bring challenges, especially with level of energy Arnold was working with. Also, Arnold was already a bit miffed that he had to do his weapon testing so far away from his metal dome, as Miranda banned him from testing high-powered explosives right beneath city.

"I take it you've come here because you have some idea how to address this challenge?" Miranda asked. She had already offered for Arnold to get his own large territory far away from any or settlements, but he hadn't seemed interested.

"I managed to get a sit-down with my boss, and after a lot of discussion and calculations on his part, we concluded that there is currently no place on Earth suitable when taking considerations for future into account," Nanna explained, making Miranda frown.

"Do you plan on leaving Earth, n?" she asked, considering matter a bit. "There are a few unoccupied planets in our galaxy that could be used..."

“No, boss wants to stay near enough to Earth to make visiting and short-range teleportation convenient. Oh, and Records from just being near or on planet are too good to miss out on.”

“What exactly are you proposing?” Miranda asked, quite unsure what Arnold’s assistant was getting at.

“Well... taking everything into account... we’ve been wondering if perhaps moon is for sale?”

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Chapter 1147: A Bloody Hard Time

Miranda took a moment to process request as she shook her head. “You are aware that moon is currently having a bit of a ghost problem.”

“I am indeed,” Nanna confirmed. “A B-grade is occupying it, to be exact.”

“Right,” Miranda nodded. “And a B-grade that I’m fairly certain World Leader has plans to hunt down. Last time I checked, this ghost caused him quite some grief and even severely injured Chosen of Boundless Hydra. With that in mind, he definitely considers it his prey.”

“He likely does, but that doesn’t mean he has a monopoly over wanting revenge. As you just said, Chosen of Boundless Hydra is most wronged party by Ghostvine Sovereign. Seeing as Chosen of Malefic Viper is currently indisposed, Sandy has agreed to allow Arnold to stand for Operation: Moonfall.”

“Operation: Moonfall? Really?” Miranda asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Named by Sandy, and apparently also someone called Tom? Eir way, name isn’t important. Originally, Arnold considered just launching this operation on his own, but I believe it would be best to approach you first,” Nanna said. “moon is halfway considered a part of Earth, and World Leader does have some control over it, so I wanted to run things by you first and ask if Arnold can claim it.”

Miranda got quiet as she considered offer. In truth, situation on moon did remain a concern for her. Having a B-grade lurking above ir heads like that was unsettling, even if it had been reported that this B-grade seemingly didn’t have any true intelligence.

This lack of intelligence could also turn out to be a danger, though. Creatures like Ghostvine were driven by instinct, and instinct to grow was stronger than any or. When moon stopped being a suitable source of nutrients, it was bound to seek out Earth, and while Miranda was confident y could handle moon invading m, she would prefer to avoid such a situation ever taking place.

That's why Arnold's offer to take care of lurking threat was tempting. Having Arnold set up shop on moon would also solve space issues he was currently suffering from, and by time even moon became too small for scientist, he should have good enough spatial expansion tools to make it work.

Having him up re was also another layer of defense for planet. Miranda was fully aware that Arnold was as deadly as any of or peak geniuses on planet, and his presence would serve as a deterrent to any would-be troublemakers. If she granted him moon, she would also have some level of influence over Arnold and have him owe her and planet a favor. More so than he already did.

only real problem with giving Nanna go-ahead was Jake's reaction to learning someone had potentially stolen his prey. However, she didn't want to let such concerns stop her from making decision she believed was best. Jake hadn't called dibs on Ghostvine Sovereign, and Nanna did have a point that Sandy was one with a more rightful grudge.

Still, she wanted to play things safe, and considering she had a legendary skill with sole function of contacting Jake across nearly any distance or space, reaching out to him wouldn't be overly difficult.

"I'll give preliminary approval for now, but I'll need to check in with Chosen of Malefic Viper before providing you with a final answer. I will expect you'll be granted permission, though," Miranda said. "In meantime, we'll also have to draft up what an agreement for handing over moon would look like. I'll also need some more insight into what exactly you plan on doing up re."

Nanna smiled as she summoned a tablet and handed it to Miranda. Accepting tablet, Miranda saw it was already full of blueprints and plans, making her chuckle and shake her head. "I got feeling you were still in your initial planning stages."

"To Arnold, his initial planning stages look like ors' finished projects," Nanna smiled, Miranda unable to argue against that one.

Briefly scanning what she'd been handed, Miranda had to give him credit. He had a lot of plans for place, none of which she objected to. After a minute or two of getting a basic understanding, Miranda nodded again.

"Alright, this all seems good, but as I said, I'll have to contact World Leader to confirm it's fine," Miranda reiterated.

"We will wait patiently," Nanna bowed.

"But just one question before you go," Miranda said, putting down tablet and looking Nanna straight in eye. "From everything I'm seeing here, Moon isn't your only choice. There is plenty of barren land on Earth, so be honest with me... Arnold just wants a moon base, right?"

"I'm unable to neither confirm nor deny that Arnold's self-admitted childhood dream of having a moon base may have influenced his viability assessment models," Nanna smiled in response, confirming what Miranda had indeed suspected.

"Figures," Miranda sighed. "Say, from one personal assistant serving an eccentric genius who is equally likely to destroy or better world to another, what is your coping strategy to deal with... well, Arnold, in your case?"

"Raunchy romance novels," Nanna answered without a shred of hesitation or shame. "You would be surprised how many are still being produced, even now. I would recommend that you read some, but I would be careful if I were you, or experience would leave you less sane."

"Why?" Miranda asked curiously. Sure, it had never really been her thing, but getting a new hobby could be an idea to better destress when Jake got too Jake-like.

"Fan fiction," Nanna answered, looking Miranda straight in eyes. Miranda took a moment before she realized what she was hinting at.

"... I should make a law against that."

"If you do, don't have it work retroactively," Nanna said, remaining bereft of shame.

"This conversation has left me more stressed than before," Miranda said, leaning back in her chair. "I guess I'll just stick to working until I either suffer a nervous breakdown or get accustomed to it. Willpower is one hell of a stat sometimes."

"Also, my highest stat for a good reason," Nanna smiled. "Will you reach out once you've contacted Chosen of Malefic One, or should I come by again at a later date?"

"I'll send someone to inform you," Miranda waved her off. "Oh, and do tell Arnold I wish him luck in ridding moon of its haunted nature."

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"I believe phrase he used was to 'bust' moon," Nanna chuckled. "All while humming a familiar me song."

“Goddamn geniuses and their childish natures... either way, good luck. Both in dealing with moon and one who’s going to deal with it.”

Nanna thanked Miranda for her well wishes as she took her leave, Miranda letting out a loud sigh. While this brief meeting had left her with even more work, it had admittedly also helped her mental state a little, as Miranda couldn’t help but smile at the knowledge there were other people out there dealing with the same kind of bullshit she was.

--

Life and Vitality.

Both were words, some even considered identical. Yet, when it came to conceptual understanding, there was a vast gulf between the two. One that Jake would have to properly understand if his plan to upgrade Blood he’d formed would come to fruition.

Life was nothing more than an affinity of energy, and on the surface, a lot simpler to get a basic understanding of. It was one that was considered relatively high in the ranking of concepts, equal to the concept of death, but still below that of time and space. Of course, classifying concepts into how complex they were was a mostly meaningless exercise, as all concepts were inherently boundless in nature.

Vitality, on the other hand, was far simpler, yet on the scale of conceptual power, far beyond any of the regular concepts. Vitality was a stat that determined the amount of life points someone had, at least that was its most immediate effect.

Higher Vitality also increased the regeneration speed of the body as well as the health pool. However, the reason why Vitality was considered so complex was because of the things it could do that simple comprehension of a concept never could.

When one increased Vitality, one also increased lifespan. To all life-based creatures in the multiverse, it was the stat that governed how long someone would live within their grade and race. If two people of the same race were both at the peak of C-grade, and one had significantly higher Vitality than the other, that person could potentially live thousands of years longer.

Of course, there were other factors. Elves naturally lived longer than humans, though the gap did lessen as one progressed through the grades. There were those who never had Vitality in the first place or had forsaken it. To many of them, the only limitation to their lifespan was the absolute limit of the soul imposed at every grade. A barrier one could only break through by stepping into godhood.

Meanwhile, life affinity was a natural one that could be found in the atmosphere anywhere life thrived. The entire domain of the Panon of Life was filled with it, and merely being in that kind of environment sped up natural regeneration.

Jake had wondered a bit for a while how exactly Dina's magic worked. Or Eron's, for that matter. Healing magic in general had always been odd in Jake's mind, as it seemingly broke rules of how magic was meant to interact with or people. Check latest chapters at *novel✕fire✕net*

Most kinds of magic, even helpful kind, one had to accept being affected by it or be overpowered. When Artemis wanted to teleport Jake with her, she had to air force him along or Jake had to give consent. same was true even for something simple, like having anor person donate energy into an owned item.

Yet healing magic worked without consent. It could enter body without any resistance and touch any part of soul, even deepest parts of Truesoul, in some instances. Of course, in most cases, healing was done to directly restore resources. same proved true for many buffing skills that helped empower one's allies, but for now, Jake focused on why this form of life magic was allowed to affect ors so effortlessly.

Did system just know that it was helpful? Or was re some or concept at work? Jake had wondered this for a while, and he had ordered several books on life affinity and even gotten a few natural treasures he hoped could provide some kind of insight.

Jake believed that to truly understand how his Blood of Malefic Viper worked, he had to better understand life in general, and healing magic was at least part of that. Blood was physical representation of life, and every drop was teeming with it. At least that was one role blood took.

When inside Jake's body, it was indeed carrier of vital energy and a source of life, but once outside of his body, it could become a deadly toxin possessing not a hint of life anymore.

It was a dichotomy Jake still had yet to fully understand, but he did know it had something to do with transformation of energy from one kind to anor. When Jake infused his blood with mana, he turned all life energy into what Jake could only properly describe as malefic energy.

This belief was furr reinforced by toxicity of Jake's blood, primarily scaling with Vitality stat. What blood did was turn life into death, vitality into decay. For Malefic Viper, it was bound to be same. A mere droplet of his blood could corrupt countless worlds beyond recognition, yet it also contained enough vitality to create myriad lives.

From droplet of blood within Jake's own Soulspace, he knew just how powerful it could be, and he had studied it plenty, trying to glean any insight. Sadly, he was at a way too low level to gain any comprehension from true blood of a Primordial.

One thing about Blood of Malefic Viper that Jake had never even thought about was fact that its toxicity was based purely on defensive stats. Wisdom and Vitality were two

primary ones, but if Jake used any or kind of offensive magic – even kind that summoned poisons – it would be reliant on his Intelligence.

Intelligence was what usually determined power of one's magic. This could even be seen with Touch of Malefic Viper, which scaled off Intelligence more than any or stat.

Now, Jake did have one major source of damage that didn't scale off Intelligence at all. Besides his physical attacks, of course. Jake's poisons didn't use Intelligence stat at all, but used Wisdom above anything else. Seeing that Wisdom was also second big stat that scaled toxicity of Jake's blood, his act of transforming his blood into a toxin was, at least in eyes of system, seemingly considered doing alchemy.

That being case... Jake began to wonder if he could do more with his blood than he already was. As things were, Jake could either infuse his blood with energy or he couldn't. When infused, poison created was based on his Records and completely out of Jake's control. It was simply an amalgamation of all toxins Jake had ever created or consumed, which made it good at a bit of everything, but at same time, never excellent either.

reason it worked so well in Jake's crafting was because he could filter out all energies he didn't need relatively easily and just have blood function as a catalyst to amplify entire brew while also adding required liquid.

However, if Jake were able to better control alchemical process taking place within his own blood, Jake could do so much more. He could create more specialized toxins, make better catalysts, or even filter out nearly all toxins and make his blood more suited for potions. Perhaps he could even "overcharge" his blood with energy.

This was Jake's main goal after having considered how he wanted to upgrade Blood of Malefic Viper. He wanted to improve core aspect of skill and part that would be most useful. Upgrading potency of his blood also meant upgrading poison mist from Wings and venom from Fangs of Malefic Viper. All Viper's Legacy skills were synergistic with one another, after all, and Jake had also realized something else about Blood of Malefic Viper.

As a human, Jake naturally didn't have any venom sacs or anything like that. When Viper was polymorphed into a humanoid form, he likely also didn't, which forced him to create an alternative. To Jake, his blood now more or less functioned as his own personal venom sac. At least that was where any toxins he excreted from his body were directly sourced from.

In all honesty, while Jake did have one direct goal, his mind was a bit all over place when it came to how he would get there. He had nearly too many things he wanted to try, and whenever he got a good idea, it just raised five new questions he felt like he needed to answer before he could succeed.

That was why it was almost a blessing when Jake was interrupted from his thoughts by Miranda, who asked him about moon, of all things. Now, Jake did have to admit that entire thing about moon being haunted had kind of slipped his mind until he was reminded, but when she mentioned it, he instantly had a desire to go check it out.

However, Jake chose to show grace and allowed Arnold to handle moon. While he did want to kill Ghostvine to help take revenge for Sandy, it was ultimately still Sandy who could rightfully seek revenge. Jake hadn't even met Ghostvine personally, at least not properly.

While he would indeed have loved to go if only to watch fight, right now, he was having a *bloody* hard time figuring out how to upgrade his Malefic Viper Legacy skill

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Chapter 1148 - Power of Blood

"You seem distracted," Nature's Attendant spoke as Jake knelt down and slowly infused magic circle with his energy.

"Just a lot of jumbled thoughts rattling my mind se days," Jake confessed with a sigh as he continued his energy infusion.

This time around, god has asked Jake to do infusion slowly and steadily, something Jake had no complaints about. This brief break from his own mind was also welcome, as it allowed him to shift his perspective slightly and not have his head filled with thoughts of blood and concepts all time.

Even so, Jake couldn't entirely dispel se thoughts, as powerful aura of life in environment made him think about it, and he unconsciously took deep breaths to stimulate Palate at least a little.

"Something you'd care to share?" Nature's Attendant asked. "This old man is considered rar knowledge by most people's standards."

"I guess it can't hurt," Jake sighed as he voiced some of his concerns. He talked about how he had been mulling over how to upgrade Blood of Malefic Viper and his attempts to understand better how life magic worked in first place. Additionally, he found healing magic sometimes confusing due to its freedom from system restraints.

Nature's Attendant listened patiently to Jake's ramblings, staying unjudgmental throughout. Jake knew that old man likely saw all of Jake's problems as utterly insignificant and low level, Jake akin to a toddler complaining that multiplication was hard to a doctor in mathematics.

At end of his rant, old man just kept smiling as he looked out over field of flowers. "I can't speak about Path of Malefic Viper as it's not mine, but I can talk a bit about life. To me, life is second-most beautiful affinity right after nature itself, but for nature to flourish, re must naturally be life. same is true for you. For re to be blood, re has to be life."

"Yeah, yeah," Jake muttered and sighed again. "That's simple enough. Someone has to be alive to have blood, so--"

"Not necessarily," Nature's Attendant interrupted. "Risen have blood despite not being alive. Many undead do. When an elemental transforms itself into a humanoid form, it also naturally has blood and can thus bleed. However, this blood has nothing to do with life. re is no Vitality within such a being... yet it does represent ir basis of existence. ir spilled blood is a sign that ir "life" is waning."

Nature's Attendant swept his hand outwards toward field of flowers, directing his gaze to m. "Plants cannot bleed eir, yet y are all full of life. Full of Vitality. Your thinking that blood represents life isn't inaccurate, as in your case it does, but it isn't a universal truth."

"Is re any universal truth?" Jake asked.

"If I had to pinpoint one... blood represents change," Nature's Attendant said in his usual calm voice.

"Change?" Jake asked, not really seeing how that one made sense in a grander context. Sure, someone bleeding a lot would be changed from alive to dead, but blood as a concept?

"Blood is a physical thing. In most contexts, it's a vehicle to carry vital energy from your soul to your body, allowing it to restore itself. It stores life to nourish living. However, it's only that. A vessel. When a Risen bleeds, spirit points and not health points are what seep out. When an elemental in humanoid form bleeds, mana is spilled."

Jake nodded along, faintly aware of those things already. However, more he thought about it, weirder it was that Risen and fully mana-based creatures even had blood in first place. For a while, he had guessed it was done just as part of process of mimicking a humanoid. That just because humans, elves, beastkin, and or enlightened all had blood, so did a monster taking humanoid form, even if said monster didn't even have a Vitality stat.

However, that explanation was, in truth, a rare unconvincing one. Monsters were highly concerned with efficiency and designed their humanoid forms to still allow for combat. That being the case, including something superficial like blood was wholly unnecessary, as it wasn't even anything aesthetically... unless it wasn't superficial at all.

That's when Jake asked himself another question: why had he assumed that blood was only made to carry vital energy? Sure, that was the most common form of fundamental energy it carried, but what if blood was just a magnificent vessel to carry all forms of energy? Perhaps even the best vessel out there.

Jake looked up at Nature's Attendant and uttered his realization: "Blood and life... have nothing fundamentally to do with one another, do they?"

"Fundamentally? No... even if blood more often than not carries life, it exists without it," Nature's Attendant smiled. "If blood equalled life, vampires would be quite proficient in affinity, but instead, your master has blood affinity instead. An entirely separate one that deals with the true fundamental aspect of blood."

"It's a natural energy-carrier," Jake continued. "A liquid that has a theoretically limitless affinity to hold energy, as an amount that can be contained within a single drop is wholly dependent on who bled the blood in the first place."

"Is that all it is?"

"Probably not... but for now, I think this is good enough," Jake muttered, as he had a lot to think about.

"Sometimes, it's good to know when enough is enough," Nature's Attendant nodded approvingly. "A notion that also applies to supplying energy to formations."

That's when Jake realized he was getting dangerously close to knocking himself out again as two devilish sprouts were still hungrily munching down on his energies. Two of them had grown even more since last, and were now about the length of a foot. Two also remained somewhat antagonistic toward one another, but their relationship had evolved more into one of rivals than outright enemies.

"Yeah, probably good to call it a day here," Jake said as he stopped supplying energy, much to the disappointment of the poor sprouts. "I have a lot of experiments to get to."

"Do remember proper rest," Nature's Attendant said in a lecturing tone. Raising his hand, he gave Jake a smile. "Till next time."

With a wave of his hand, Jake was teleported away and appeared back in his palace once more, now armed with new inspiration. He could barely wait and went as far as to chug a potion to restore some mana, as he rushed down toward his alchemy lab. For more chapters visit *novel•fire•net*

Once re, Jake took out a bucket and placed it on a table. Without any hesitation, he used a katar to cut himself and began filling bucket with blood. He didn't infuse it with energy or turn it toxic, but just bled his own basic human blood.

As he bled it out, Jake also analyzed it closely. first thing he noticed was how quickly vital energy within blood began to disperse once it was outside his body. After only a few minutes, vast majority of vital energy would be gone, leaving blood behind as nothing more than a nasty-looking liquid that a lot of people had phobias about.

Jake waited patiently for all vital energy to disappear from blood until he was left with nothing more than mundane blood. From re, Jake tried placing a finger down into liquid and closed his eyes as he tried infusing his mana into it. He easily did so as soon enough blood within bucket was filled with mana... which only made Jake frown.

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It's wrong.

blood had indeed absorbed mana, but it felt similar to how water could also absorb his mana. In fact, when he took out anor bucket and filled it with purified water, he could infuse just about as much mana into that as he could his blood before it would begin to disperse naturally.

Looking at blood more closely, Jake felt that it no longer even felt like blood. Not proper blood anyway. He wasn't sure what was wrong, but one thing was certain: mana stored inside of it wasn't stored properly.

With a third bucket, Jake used blood made toxic through Blood of Malefic Viper. He bled out a fair amount before stopping, as he didn't have to come even close to filling it before he confirmed his suspicions.

Not dispersing.

blood within poison bucket was filled with more mana than one he'd manually infused with pure mana. It had gone beyond limit of how much mana Jake could usefully infuse within water, and unless he used special water of a higher rarity or spent a long time refining water, he wouldn't be able to infuse more into it.

However, what mattered most was how stable mana was within poisoned blood. It felt like it belonged re as if toxic mana had always been part of blood. Jake also knew from experience that he could infuse far more energy into it while crafting, meaning he was far from his blood's limit for energy storage.

After a few minutes of consideration, Jake went over to a small pile of books he had collected over last couple of weeks. He sorted through m before finding one he had

been thinking about. It was a basic book made for E-grade mages who wanted to learn a type of magic that Jake had never touched but only heard a bit about:

Blood magic.

No, not vampire kind. Kind where, instead of mana, one could use health points to cast spells instead. Well, in reality, one just mixed health and mana during casting, creating more powerful effects when performing certain kinds of magic. Blood magic rarely actually involved blood, but resulting magic did often have a reddish aura due to vital energies mixed in, which had given birth to name.

Jake wanted to read more about this kind of magic as he faintly remembered something mentioned in book. After scouring through it for a bit longer, he finally found section he'd briefly skimmed before and read it more closely this time.

Having had a lot of practice studying from tome left by First Sage, Jake quickly understood what author of book had tried to convey.

Section he had been looking for was one about using vital energies of or people when casting blood magic. Unwilling participants. It explained why such an endeavor was incredibly difficult, and toward end, it had a section about creating something called Blood Beads that stored vital energies of oneself or others.

Vital energy, which was what blood mages used, could only properly exist within confines of Soulshape, and blood was just a physical substance to absorb and contain it. If one wanted to contain vital energies within blood, one had to seal it inside using special means, which would ultimately crystallize blood. This process of creating beads and crystallizing m also had to happen inside body, making it all a very painful process.

However, with enough practice, a blood mage could even learn how to directly manifest blood outside of body while allowing it to contain vital energies... through a process where one transformed nature of energy within blood to no longer be considered regular vital energy.

To Jake, this all read a lot like what Blood of Malefic Viper did. Core of issue lay in that blood was created specifically to house only one unique form of energy under extremely specific circumstances.

In Jake's case, his blood was created by his body to store *his* unique signature of vital energy and only within his Soulspace. This specificity allowed blood to be so good at what it did, but Viper had found a way to change nature of blood in a fundamental way.

skill allowed blood to retain its pristine aspects, which were largely due to its direct creation by system, while simultaneously enabling alchemist to manipulate it and transform it into a toxin.

Jake had taken a while, but he realized that reason why Viper could do this was similar to why blood mages could learn to manifest ir blood directly outside of ir bodies. Blood mages had to change mselves to make it happen. What y did was to permanently alter ir own bodies and keep ir blood constantly infused with mana. It was a long and arduous process, not too dissimilar to what Jake had cheated his way into getting with Arcane Supremacy.

What Viper had done was same, just infinitely more intricate and impressive. Jake didn't notice it, but his body had changed. His Records of it, anyway. Whenever Jake ate anything toxic, he'd consume a part of toxin and store those Records within his body. Jake's entire body was a giant mass of toxins that Jake only had to manifest whenever he so desired.

This realization also answered a few things Jake had wondered for a long time, such as why mana cost for Blood of Malefic Viper was so low. All he did when he used Blood of Malefic Viper was just to stimulate toxins already part of his blood, a process that was far cheaper than truly transforming all blood into a toxin... but that didn't mean it wasn't something Jake could do.

One had to remember that all Malefic Viper Legacy skills were connected. Part of a greater whole. Jake didn't need to simply infuse his blood with powers contained in Blood of Malefic Viper, but instead he could use skill responsibility for true change.

As blood was inside Jake's body, he was constantly touching it... meaning Touch of Malefic Viper should work. Jake, who was already tired after infusing formation with energy earlier and having jumped right into work after getting some direction and continued being a helpless workaholic as he couldn't help but try to confirm his ories.

Sitting down with his legs crossed, Jake felt his entire body and blood flowing within it. He felt himself connect with flow as he took hold of blood. Controlled it. Raising a hand, Jake pricked a small hole in his finger as he focused on Blood of Malefic Viper.

A droplet fell onto floor and instantly began sizzling due to its acidic properties. Jake had consumed plenty of acids, after all, making his blood quite good at corroding all things, living or inanimate.

Moving his hand slightly to side, anor droplet fell down beside first one, sizzling just same for a while before expending its energy. Jake kept sitting re, letting drops of blood fall for anor half an hour, until suddenly, a drop fell that felt slightly different from all those prior.

It hit floor and splattered just like all ors... but re was no sizzling sound. No corrosion at all. Jake opened his eyes and looked at drop of blood, a small smile forming on his lips as a notification appeared before his eyes.

[Blood of Malefic Viper (Legendary --> Legendary)] – blood of Malefic Viper is a toxin more deadly than most poisons and lifeblood of an immortal being. Allows Alchemist to infuse ir blood with energy to stimulate its inherent toxicity, imitating ir Patron and even carrying traces of True Blood of Malefic One within. nature of poison can be determined by alchemist, limited only by your Records. Allows your blood to carry more energy than usual, including vital energy, passively speeding up regeneration. This effect is furr amplified when consuming a health potion or or sources of beneficial vital energy. blood's toxicity level is based primarily on Vitality and Wisdom but receives an increase from all physical stats. Increase in natural regeneration based on total health pool. Passively provides 9 Vitality per level in Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of Malefic Viper (C-grade variant). May your blood be forever bane of all that wishes you harm, catalyst of your creations, and that which brings you eternal life.

Jake briefly skimmed notification and noticed a few changes here and re, many of which only appeared cosmetic in nature. only genuine change was exactly what Jake had been aiming for... ability to control what toxins he transformed his blood into. skill also acknowledged his understanding that Jake didn't infuse his mana to turn it toxic, but merely stimulated toxicity already dormant within his blood.

It appeared like a small change, but Jake knew it was a big qualitative leap. It had progressed his ability to control his blood by a fair deal, and he also subtly felt like a direction for mythical upgrade had been set. However, those were all considerations for later.

For now, Jake had three important things to do. first one was to be happy about his gains, which even included two nice levels – him getting two likely because he was already close to one before this upgrade.

'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of Malefic Viper] has reached level 314 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 317 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of Malefic Viper] has reached level 315 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points

second thing Jake really had to do was stop himself from nodding off, as he was absolutely exhausted and out of energy. That's to say, he really needed a good nap to recover in order to do third important thing properly.

This upgrade to Blood of Malefic Viper, as well as his recent hunting trip, had inspired Jake a bit... and seeing he'd just upgraded one Malefic Viper Legacy skill and even his melee fighting skill.

Well, let's just say Jake planned on getting his second skill upgrade containing word Fangs soon.

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Chapter 1149 - A Burst of Venom

Jake's connection with concept and name Fangs was a long and storied one, and so was his quest to upgrade final Malefic Viper Legacy skill. He had faced many issues along way, but now, every piece had finally fallen into place.

Thinking back, when Jake really considered it, he couldn't help but find name of his melee skill funny. Fangs of Man. Knowing its origin only made it funnier. Jake was fairly confident that name came from Valdemar randomly shouting it out when using skill against Villy back when y were both in S-grade, and since Valdemar was Valdemar, he naturally decided to name it after cool thing he shouted. At least that was Jake's interpretation of things.

Fangs of Malefic Viper was a name that made a lot more sense. For most venomous snakes, ir fangs were ir only weapons against both prey and predators. It was also one of most deadly weapons any creature natively possessed.

Poison was a much-feared affliction to everyone, even after system arrived. Jake himself remembered back in beginning of Tutorial, where a bunch of badgers had proven incredibly lethal due to ir venom.

Of course, possessing Palate of Malefic Viper, Jake wasn't affected by most poisons anymore. However, that didn't mean he couldn't recognize just how powerful poison could still be, especially for monsters who had an incredibly potent innate toxin.

Scarlett, Alabaster Crimsoneye Snake, possessed a venom that Jake was not confident in overcoming, considering its sheer toxicity. Not even if y were same level. Monsters simply had too large of an advantage when it came to using venom, seeing as venom was literally a part of ir body.

This fact allowed monsters to constantly refine and improve poison over time. Moreover, it enabled m to store it in greater quantities and release it all in a single, incredibly lethal attack.

Meanwhile, Jake inflicted poison by coating his weapons in it and very slowly making it build up. Compared to a snake that could bite someone and deliver an entire payload directly into its opponent's body, Jake was far worse.

Jake recognized and knew this... which meant he had also been considering a way to address issue. Moreover, Jake had considered how to upgrade Fangs of Malefic Viper for a long time. However, both problem and advantage of skill were its extreme simplicity.

Fangs of Malefic Viper essentially just revolved around making poison Jake inflicted better. It did so that all poisons Jake created were more effective when injected directly into an entity, and only alterations Jake had made to it were for skill to recognize his melee weapons as fangs. This had furr allowed him to excrete poison out from his katars, but it wasn't same as what something like a snake could do.

All it did was coat weapon in poison. On or hand, Jake had seen how a snake injected all its venom. Its teeth had small holes, so that instantly bit down, poison could be directly injected in large quantities.

Now, snakes did also coat its fangs in venom passively after injecting a foe, as some always tended to linger on afterwards, but that was just a nice little bonus. Having his only real way of inflicting opponents with poison equivalent to a snake's "nice little bonus" wasn't something Jake particularly liked.

He had tried before to see if he could somehow inject more poison at once. So far, only truly effective method had been through special Protean Arrows, but even there, Jake tended to focus on increasing power of arrow itself and not on toxic payload it contained.

After some experimentation, Jake also became very confident that with his current upgrade Path, he had no way to apply Fangs of Malefic Viper more directly to ranged attacks, making him refocus more on melee aspect of skill. More specifically, part about turning his weapons into fangs.

Being able to excrete poison out of weapons seemed like it would allow him to release far larger quantity of poison at once, with little modification. However, he quickly came to learn that it wasn't so easy. Yet Jake had kept trying over years, occasionally conducting small experiments when not busy with other tasks, going all way back to Nevermore.

So far, it had been failure upon failure. That's until his latest few skill upgrades. Jake had identified a few major obstacles to his upgrade idea, one of which was feeble nature of human body and slightly lackluster connection between his hands and his katars.

Even if his katars were considered part of Jake's Soulshape due to Fangs of Man, that didn't mean y were as much a part of it as his actual body. connection was ultimately artificial, as it was caused by a skill. That being case, Fangs of Man being only ancient rarity had become a limiting factor for Jake when it came to upgrading Fangs of Malefic Viper.

amount of poison Jake would have to transfer into katars at once to release a meaningful toxic payload simply hadn't been re. Anor problem had been delivery time.

re was a good reason snakes had ir venom glands located in ir heads and close to ir fangs. Even after system, this remained same. Due to this proximity, delay between deciding to inject a large payload and actually injecting it was nearly instantaneous. If Jake wanted to create a somewhat similar effect, he would have also to store toxin close to his fangs.

Seeing as his fangs were his katars, Jake would have to store toxic payload in his hands. Storing a lot of energy of any kind in one body part was bound to put it under stress, and as fight with Chimera had proven, Jake's hands already suffered enough stress during combat. This meant that all Jake would have done by forcing his hands to store a large amount of poison would be to make m more vulnerable.

Jake's Fangs of Man upgrade had fixed all se problems. skill now being legendary rarity meant it better matched Fangs of Man, and new additional effect of skill made his hands far more durable when wielding katars. Jake, achieving this higher durability by having powers of his weapons echo back into his hands, also furr strengned his weapon's identity as part of his Soulshape, as his hands and weapons truly did seem to become one now.

With that challenge overcome, Jake believed a Fangs of Malefic Viper upgrade was just around corner... except he n ran into anor problem. Sure, his body was now able to handle what he wanted it to do, but did that mean he could do it? answer here turned out to be no.

Even if he attuned his body to function more similarly to fangs of a snake, he still lacked natural ability to produce and control injection of venom. He didn't have an entire physical part of his body dedicated to process, and he wasn't keen on trying to somehow make one through evolutions eir.

When it came to production of venom, Jake had once more run into an issue. venom passively created from Fangs of Malefic Viper to coat his weapons came from Blood of Malefic Viper. That's to say, even if Jake somehow did manage to inject a relatively large amount of venom at once, all he would be injecting was his own blood, which, while a good venom, was still rar lackluster.

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That's where his newly gained Blood of Malefic Viper came in. With this upgrade, Jake could now control his blood far more profoundly than before. While it didn't allow Jake to outright carry out his plans, it served perfectly as a bridge to make it possible. increased control and ability to decide which kind of toxin he was creating was a good enough start for Jake to get experimenting.

With his two upgrades under his belt, it was time to upgrade his final Malefic Viper Legacy skill.

After he had upgraded Blood of Malefic Viper, Jake had a good rest before he got straight to work, trying to upgrade Fangs of Malefic Viper. He didn't need to do any more crafting or preparations. He just had to execute his plan and experiment until everything fell into place.

Holding both katars, Jake closed his eyes and shadow-boxed as Fangs of Man activated. With increased durability of his hands, Jake began to infuse mana into blood contained within m consciously.

At same time, he tried to contain blood in his hands. Not in that he wanted to fill m up with blood and make m swell, but by ensuring that whatever blood was within his hands remained same toxic blood he was currently infusing.

Jake failed over and over again as several small issues reared ir ugly heads, but Jake wasn't discouraged. Upgrades were never meant to be easy, after all.

Still, this one would prove to be far easier than most prior ones. Rar than having to learn much new, it was all about finding right way to take advantage of tools he'd already forged for himself with prior upgrades.

Days passed by as Jake kept getting closer and closer to a proper result. One of things he improved was to acquire actual things to hit. Jake ordered target dummies by hundreds, each made of a disturbingly realistic flesh-like substance. He hit se over and over again after he'd spent time trying to prepare a toxic payload, and finally, only eleven days after he upgraded Blood of Malefic Viper, he found success.

Stabbing forward with Eternal Hunger, Jake felt powerful toxin having accumulated sufficiently. His katar penetrated into flesh dummy, and moment it did, Jake unleashed toxin he had hidden away.

From katar, a flower of blood bloomed as it was shot out, as if katar had dozens of invisible holes. total amount of blood released wasn't even that significant, but violent way in which Jake released it made entire flesh dummy explode, pieces sent flying, decaying in mid-air from death affinity poison Jake had unleashed.

Before all rotting pieces of oddly realistic fake flesh hit ground, Jake was struck by a notification confirming his success. With a big smile on his face, Jake checked his notification and saw upgraded version of skill.

[Fangs of Malefic Viper (Legendary --> Legendary)] - When born, Viper had limited weapons to fight with, yet it prevailed only with its fangs. Its bites deliverer of death. As a human, you have integrated se concepts and made m your own, proving that you, too, have fangs. Allows any part of your Soulshape viewed as a weapon to function as fangs, making it possible to excrete venom through m, and passively empowers any toxin upon your fangs. This effect is furr amplified when biting with your canines. When baring your fangs, you can accumulate venom to unleash in a devastating Venomburst Strike, inflicting an empowered toxin upon your foe. potency of all toxins is dependent on Blood of Malefic Viper. Additionally, all poisons you have crafted or created are significantly more effective when injected directly into body of your foes. Passively provides 9 Strength per level in Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of Malefic Viper (C-grade variant). May your fangs be harbingers of death, a single touch spell certain doom.

Jake read description and saw that not much had changed besides obvious. He did find it interesting that system called what he'd just done Venomburst Strike, seeing as that was what Jake called it inside his head to better visualize attack. That was one of tricks from First Sage's tome. Names held power, so naming your own techniques or moves could help you learn m more easily or even make m stronger.

Eir way, besides that, description had been cleaned up a bit in a few places, with some more flavor text here and re. n re was increase in stats, which was a much-welcome bonus. Jake always felt like his Strength was lacking behind, as whenever he clashed with foes, he always found himself on losing side. Alright, it may have been a factor that Jake usually only clashed with enemies far superior in level to himself, but still, it would be nice not to be pushed around too much.

Outside of upgrade itself, Jake also got a nice extra level, which was much appreciated, if also entirely expected.

'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of Malefic Viper] has reached level 316 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 318 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

He could claim to be disappointed at only getting one level, but seeing how easy upgrade had been to get, he really didn't have grounds to. Besides, Jake was more than happy that he'd achieved one of his goals he'd set out for himself before it was time to evolve to B-grade.

Upgrading every Malefic Viper Legacy skill was something he naturally just had to do, and he'd even managed to get one of m to mythical through help of First Sage. Of course, saying he was all done with his Legacy skills would be quite facetious, as Jake still had one major issue to deal with regarding m.

Despite it not being a problem in his day-to-day, Palate of Malefic Viper remained broken. Jake would be lying if he said he wasn't nervous about it remaining a broken skill, but he also believed in himself to be able to fix it.

Perhaps more importantly than believing in himself, he believed in tools First Sage had granted him to help heal his own soul. old master of Malefic Viper had clearly been able to fix Jake's soul if he'd so desired, but had instead optioned to make Jake do it himself as part of some lesson.

Jake was already well underway in learning this lesson with study of tome within his Soulspace. He wasn't all way yet, but he was getting re. For now, he would just be happy with what he'd achieved.

After spending next few minutes cleaning up rotting pieces of fake flesh from floor, not to make room, which he'd randomly chosen as his training room, too disgusting, Jake headed back to living room to rest and fully recover his resources. Doing so was also a good opportunity to engage in a bit more meditation and reading from First Sage tome.

On way re, Jake went over plans in his head. He felt like he was getting close to B-grade, despite technically still being a good distance away. However, he felt that it was still good to ensure he got everything done by time he maxed out his class and profession so he could fully focus on any potential evolution quest, even if it would be optimal to simply have already completed said quests during his preparation phase.

Hunting down a dragon should at least make doing class one easy, right?

Before he could kill a dragon, Jake still had a way to go, as he'd struggled with some weak Chimera that barely knew how to fight.

Once Jake had fully recovered, he returned to his usual schedule of alchemy, meditation, visiting Nature's Attendant, and spending quality time with Artemis here and re, although she was only ever available with an avatar, as her real body was occupied. READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT novel-fire.net

Like this, days turned to weeks turned to months as Jake burned through alchemical materials like re was no tomorrow. It hadn't been one of his original plans, but with all his recent improvements to his alchemy, Jake had resolved himself to also get an upgrade to his Concoct Poison skill before evolving.

To achieve this, Jake had started working on a new type of poison that was considered a notch harder than ones Jake regularly made, and doing something new definitely

paid off. In about four months, Jake had significant results... if one ignored waste of materials, that is.

'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of Malefic Viper] has reached level 317 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points

'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of Malefic Viper] has reached level 318 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 319 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

Two levels had ticked in, and Jake was already working toward a third one, as his daily rhythm was broken that day. Artemis had come by only a few days after she'd fetched him to visit Nature's Attendant for bow business, and moment Jake saw her, he had a good idea what this was about. Her words confirmed his suspicion.

"Mor Tree has asked for your presence."

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Chapter 1150 - Return of King 2: Gold Edition

Death... was no stranger to him. This wasn't even his first time meeting his own demise. Both times, he had been slain by a foe he had failed to adequately assess, but circumstances had differed vastly.

first time, because of his own overconfidence and arrogance, while second time around, he had walked toward death willingly. Intentionally. Looking back at decision made that day, it was a puzzling one.

Unique Lifeforms were beings at pinnacle of multiverse. y were darlings of system itself and tended to be hard-pressed to find equals in ir own level range. Yet he had been surrounded by m and even given his life to save anor creature he'd come to consider a peer. In large part due to feeling a sense of responsibility for having put two of m in a precarious position in first place.

However... could a creature so innately arrogant as Fallen King truly give his life so selflessly? answer was no. Not truly.

King felt like he had been stagnating, and he knew why. He was a King. A ruler. A sovereign meant to rule over or monsters in his dominion, yet that part of his identity had not only been put on back burner but suppressed by his circumstances.

Despite hunter never abusing fact that he held King's life in his hands, fact that he did remained. That being case, could he truly call himself a King? What kind of king could claim competence in ruling ors when he couldn't even rule over his own life and death?

His entire existence had become a disgusting parody of what he was supposed to be. name Fallen King had been chosen as a reminder of his own incompetence. To remind him that he'd fallen once and to never repeat that mistake.

A reminder he'd followed... even as he'd seemingly fallen once more. But this time it hadn't been a mistake, but done in a very deliberate fashion. Seeds had been planted for future, and all King could hope for was that those around him would be competent and willing to pick up puzzle pieces he'd left behind. Original content can be found at novel**fire**net

Dying by sacrificing himself should also serve as an adequate motivator. hunter had proven himself a person who would go to edge of reality if it meant helping those he cared about or repaying a favor. Of course, it remained a threat that should hunter die, so would whatever remained of King, but such was a risk he'd willingly taken.

And as consciousness of Unique Lifeform known as King reformed, it appeared his risk had paid off. A small spark of awareness had slowly sprouted into more as mind of King had gradually been reassembled over a long period.

copy of his consciousness – something King had spent years forming – re-merged with rebuilt soul of Unique Lifeform, allowing him to once more remember who he was. He had stored this spark within his true body worn by hunter, as that had been both safest and only option he had.

As more and more awareness emerged, King began to faintly perceive his own surroundings. first thing he noticed was just how energy-dense environment was. It far surpassed any expectations he had, and what's more, mana filling air clearly belonged to a powerful entity.

Before King could even fully understand what was happening, being ruling realm he found himself reconstituted in let herself be known.

“Unique Lifeforms also surprise me. Each one of you is odd in your own ways, which is worth preserving simply on account of your lives being unique.”

King, not yet able to distinguish anything in his surroundings, felt voice directly invade his mind as he could only answer by faintly projecting his own thoughts.

“Who?”

“However, what you also have in common is an extreme level of natural competency that leaves most so-called young geniuses full of envy,” creature King knew had to be a god, completely ignored his question.

“Do not believe what you did can be hidden from me. Your plans are as clear as sun at dawn. In order for something to be fixed, it sometimes has to be broken first – for a connection altered, one has to nearly sever it in preparation. This... death of yours. It was far too convenient and purposeful.”

King remained silent, fully aware that creature hunter had found to assist in resurrection was far from simple. Sure, Unique Lifeform had known process wouldn't be easy and perhaps even include an miracle provided by system, but current scenario still seemed like overkill.

“I would ask you reason behind subterfuge, but instead, I will ask you only two questions. Answer se truthfully, and I shall ignore what I know and keep it hidden. Lie, and your deceit shall be revealed. Do you accept?”

Left with no or option, King naturally agreed.

“Was this done out of harboring hatred or negative emotions toward ors, or because you had to do it for your own Path?”

“Path,” King answered truthfully. And it was indeed truth.

god who had facilitated King's return had been entirely correct in that his demise had been planned to some extent. timeline had been moved up by circumstances, but intent had been re for a while.

He knew he had to do something drastic to save himself. Ever since King had been bound to Jake, he'd looked for a way to sever connection, but everything had been in vain. As god said, in order for connection to be severed, it had to be nearly entirely broken first.

Seeing as connection had been formed through death, only solution was to fix it using similar means. King had to die in order to once more live as an independent creature, at least that's what he believed.

As for why he hadn't simply spoken to hunter about this... well, because King knew Jake would have agreed to help, and that was unacceptable. For too long had King relied on hunter and had to ask for help. This time around, King hadn't been willing to ask.

Instead, he'd purposefully manipulated hunter into a scenario where he would do what King wanted him to. In truth, King didn't like having to do this as he believed it beneath him, but he also couldn't have his new life start on terms of hunter. He had to at least feel like he'd been impetus behind his free existence, even if that feeling was nothing more than delusion on King's part.

Taken from , this narrative should be reported if found on Amazon.

It was all about feeling like he was in control once more. Even if he ultimately still had to rely on help of ors to resurrect fully, what king didn't have ors assist him at times?

"As suspected," powerful goddess said, seemingly satisfied with King's answer. **"Second question... will you swear to never so foolishly risk your life again? Despite your machinations, fragments you created were far from perfect. You played with concepts beyond your standing and nearly doomed yourself in process. Such disregard for life is distasteful."**

second question was an odd one, but it provided King with an answer as to who was helping him. He felt powerful nature and life mana everywhere, and magic affecting his soul was faintly reminiscent of what Dina had used. Considering hunter's affinity to get involved with only gods at pinnacle of existence and fact that god who was speaking to him was female, he quickly put together who exactly hunter had found to help.

"I swear to Mor Tree," King answered, putting much effort into making a complete sentence. In his current state, he couldn't even fully feel his body, or if he even had a body. For all he knew, he was just a drifting soul kept stable through powers of a Primordial.

"Good. Continue your Path with knowledge that it's your great fortune that such a flawed plan came to fruition through efforts of hunter you tricked."

King didn't say anything more but simply acknowledged that what he had done was questionable, but Unique Lifeform remained insistent on it being necessary. Even if his plan had failed, he would have had no regrets. It wasn't anything he'd shared with ors, but if he hadn't done this, King knew he would never have evolved to B-grade.

"Thank you... Mor Tree," he still managed to get out right as he felt energy affecting his body intensify to a whole new level. He felt his soul set alight and become filled with power as his senses finally expanded beyond merely sensing energy affecting him.

He saw his own body... and finally realized. He was back to being nothing more than a mere mask, yet he could instantly tell difference. This wasn't same mask from before his most recent death, but one he'd worn before his first one. His original mask and "true" one.

At same time, he felt another part of himself nearby. There was a second identical mask somewhere, also containing a mirror of his Truesoul. One incapable of thought, yet as real as true one. Fact that King had two souls at all times was reason why he'd even been able to survive thus far.

To be clear, second mask hadn't come into existence because of what happened in Tutorial. King had been born with both. However, when accepting to become a Tutorial boss to escape his planet, one mask had disappeared and only came back when King had resurrected first time around.

Now, both masks were separate, neither with a body attached. At least not yet.

Seeing his surroundings more clearly, King saw he was in a large meadow, floating above a tree. Not too far away, several people were observing what was happening, but sadly, King couldn't fully distinguish who they were. He had his suspicions about at least one of them, though, as he seriously doubted hunter wouldn't be present to witness fruit of his efforts.

Right then, tree below him opened up its crown and revealed a familiar-looking body. It was practically identical to vessel King had created for himself once upon a time, and he instinctively felt a connection with it, which struck him as odd.

Usually, King had to create his own body. Original one he had was created after getting inspiration from wildlife in forest he'd been born inside, and despite it not being made of actual bone and wood, it had been a nearly perfect replica.

However, despite not being made by King using his own unique creation method, this body felt as if it were his own creation. Vessel was already attuned to his body, and what made it even weirder was that body, quite frankly, wasn't something Unique Lifeform would have been able to create on his own.

It was too powerful. Too full of energy. It was also entirely made of wood and didn't possess bone-like claws and feet King usually had. Not yet anyway.

As if drawn together, mask and vessel floated toward one another, mask floating downwards and vessel rising. King focused all his efforts on what would come next, as finally it was time for return of King.

One that's free.

One that's complete.

One that's Fallen no longer.

Jake had gone with Artemis right away, and only a few teleports later, y had arrived at domain of Yggdrasil. Toger with Artemis, two of m approached tree he knew Primordial had used to create King a new body, and he couldn't help but feel excited.

Above tree already floated a very familiar-looking mask. More than that, mask gave off a very familiar aura.

He still felt a lot of lingering guilt for Fallen King's death, as he still felt that if he hadn't gotten himself injured by stupidly messing with Palate, he would have been able to push back Child of Loss back n.

Knowing that Unique Lifeform was about to make his return genuinely made Jake happy, and he was all smiles as y soon found mselves standing before tree. Right n, Yggdrasil also made her entrance, as energy gared and took form of a dryad.

“You have arrived.”

“As requested,” Jake nodded politely, as he couldn't help but glance at tree. “I must admit... I'd thought this would end up taking a lot longer.”

“My role proved simpler than anticipated. I merely had to facilitate with much of framework already provided.”

Jake nodded, knowing that King had taken some precautions before his death as y'd discussed back when Jake gave Yggdrasil mask. He was naturally happy Unique Lifeform had done that, as without his help with Desolate Child of Loss, re was a big chance that encounter could have ended with more than one death.

“What happens now?” Jake asked as he glanced at mask and tree, where he saw fully grown body contained within.

“Now, you witness.”

Yggdrasil turned around and waved her hand as crown of tree began to split open. From split trunk of tree, vessel of King began rising upward, while at same time, mask grew in power and energy as it was lowered.

Looking at vessel, it was an entirely wooden version of King's body. Jake knew that true body of King wasn't actually made of wood but just a material that was a near-perfect imitation; however, it looked like after this, King would indeed have a wooden body.

As body and mask slowly approached each or, a golden aura began emanating from both, as if y were synchronizing and resonating with one anor. two continued to grow nearer until finally mask and vessel made contact.

moment y did, an explosion of golden light enveloped meadow. Golden veins spread from mask and onto new body of Fallen King, and as it reached hands and feet, bark of wooden body began to split open as bone-like features grew out.

Seeing ivory claws and feet, Jake couldn't help but smile as King was starting to look like himself once more. golden aura also continued to intensify with every passing moment, as Jake not only felt familiar aura of King, but one that felt even more powerful than before.

It also somehow felt more... complete. As if aura Fallen King had given off for all time Jake had known him by that name had been flawed. Without feeling this aura, Jake would have never been able to notice it, but now that he compared two, flawed nature of Fallen King's aura was evident.

Jake kept watching as King's transformation slowly came to an end and his aura settled down. As it did, a final burst of energy washed across meadow, and Jake found his vision filled with illusory images of what looked like golden trees everywhere.

This image faded in mere moments as two wisps of light ignited within eye-holes of mask, signifying full return of King, and for good measure, Jake used a quick Identify, also confirming King had indeed rid himself of self-shaming name he'd carried for all those years.

[Golden Forest King – lvi 299]

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