

The Primal Hunter

Chapter 1171 - A Moment Of Prayer

"y finally had it in stock?" Keerla asked with excitement as Solana walked into living room holding a large bottle in her hand.

"Just got in a new shipment last night," Solana said with a smile as she put bottle of oil-like substance down on table.

Keerla rushed over and opened it up to inspect its contents. smell alone gave her high hope, and a quick Identify confirmed it was indeed some good stuff. "Yes! re should be enough here to make at least twenty strings."

"So two bows," Solana teased her partner.

"Hey, I've gotten more consistent!" Keerla mumbled. "Besides, last batch of wood was shit compared to what I'm working with now."

"I'm just saying, better at least make one bow or we'll have to return to a Hunting Ground to get more Credits," Solana said.

"We're already running low again!?" Keerla exclaimed. "We've barely just gotten back from our last hunting trip. How can we already be low on funds?"

Solana just looked at Keerla with a raised eyebrow, her eyes not meeting her partner's but instead directed at necklace around her neck.

Keerla noticed and looked down at latest major purchase of ir household.

"Oh, yeah."

"Yeah," Solana chuckled, shaking her head. "On positive side, vice-head druid at work is recruiting for a new project, and I think I have a solid chance at qualifying."

"If you aren't qualified, who is?" Keerla said proudly. "Especially after our recent hunting trip."

Solana just smiled, though she did look a little concerned. Keerla, on the other hand, wasn't worried, even if she maybe should be.

Her latest trip to a Hunting Ground had been her most adventurous yet. Finding themselves fighting enemies they weren't confident in beating wasn't anything new, and getting assistance from other hunters while in a pinch also wasn't that odd.

However, for it to turn out that the one who'd come to your assistance was Chosen of a Primordial, now that was certainly something they hadn't experienced before. It was a kind of event that both Keerla and Solana wouldn't have been able to answer whether it was good or bad before it happened, as such a hypothetical was just too silly to even consider.

Even now, they couldn't entirely agree if that encounter had been positive or negative.

Keerla thought it was positive. After that encounter, both of them had noticed a growth spurt, resulting in both of them getting more levels, Records, and even a skill upgrade for each of them. Even such a small meeting with Chosen had a significant impact on their lives.

Perhaps too big of an impact, which was why Solana was worried.

Chosen of Malefic Viper was likely most talked about mortal Chosen at current time due to everything he'd been up to. His simply being Chosen of Malefic Viper and seemingly involved with return of Primordial was already enough to make people curious about him, but his subsequent actions had only heightened interest.

He was no longer just famous for his connection to Viper, but known as top of all-time Leaderboards of Nevermore and Harbinger of Primeval Origins, meaning that even without his Patron, even gods would bother to take notice.

It was a given that an encounter with someone like that would have an impact on their Records, and a positive one in most cases, as they had met as allies. However, their meeting hadn't just been both of them briefly encountering Chosen before splitting up.

Because before they parted, a promise had been made, which had sown a seed of karma. One that Solana was afraid would haunt them or bring about something bad.

They owed Chosen of Malefic Viper a favor, something both of them had recognized. Usually, making a promise like that to another C-grade was just something one casually did, but things changed when it involved someone of Chosen's caliber.

"Look, I know you're worried, but you really don't have to be," Keerla said with a smile.

"Such a karmic debt isn't good for us," Solana insisted. "We owe a debt, and in order to repay it, we need to give something of value. What do we own that Chosen of Malefic Viper would value? What could we possibly provide that can in any way compare to him helping us out of a situation that could have resulted in our deaths?"

“Nothing,” Keerla said, shaking her head. “Besides, we only promised dinner.”

“A vague promise made to Chosen of a Primordial known for consuming powerful treasures, and a member of Order of Malefic Viper, where offering rare and exotic poisons to dinner guests is only considered polite,” Solana sighed. “What if his version of a ‘mean dinner’ is some mythical rarity poison we couldn’t afford even if we sold ourselves into slavery?”

“You’re such a doomer sometimes,” Keerla said, trying to calm dryad down. “From our little encounter, he seemed like a decent guy, right? I don’t think he would want to take advantage of us just because we foolishly made a promise without knowing who he really was. Heck, he probably just finds it amusing.”

“Or, alternatively, he was just playing around by hiding his true identity and will find it equally as fun to mess with two stupid members of Panon of Life who made a misguided promise,” Solana sighed.

“Look, do we even need to rehash this same conversation again?” Keerla sighed. “We haven’t heard anything yet from Chosen, have we? Isn’t it more likely than any of our or speculation that he never took promise serious in first place? If he forgets or doesn’t care about us repaying favor, nothing happens. I’m sure that sometime in future we will look back at this time and laugh at how nervous you were.”

Solana looked a bit calmer as she let out a deep breath. “You know I worry, but you’re probably right.”

“Duh, of course I’m right! I tend to be, don’t I?” Keerla said as she went over and put her hands around her partner. “Now, speaking of promises, I do believe someone deserves a reward for finally helping find that damn oil.”

“It was really hard to get,” Solana smiled in response, but before anything more could happen... Keerla felt something from within her spatial storage that made her stop.

“Just a second... someone is reaching out to me through my communication token,” Keerla said, pulling away, a bit perplexed about who could be contacting her using token.

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Taking out token, she froze up entirely and just stood re.

Solana looked at her with concern for a moment before realization dawned on her. “Is... is it...?”

Keerla looked at her partner as an awkward smile marred her face. “I guess he didn’t forget?”

Solana just held her face in her hands. "Please tell me he isn't--"

Keerla just continued to stand there before lowering her hands, cold sweat running down her back. "I... eh... we're having guests next week?"

"Guests? As in multiple?" Solana's eyes opened wide.

"Yeah... he said he's bringing a date..."

Two of them just looked at each other for several seconds before Keerla tried to smile and lighten mood. "Hey... think about it this way. If we get out of this in one piece, we will have the greatest story ever to tell friends and family and a whole bunch of Records to boot!"

"We need to report this to our Patrons," Solana said in a severe tone. "Sooner rather than later."

Keerla's eyes opened wide at having not even considered that option. "Of course! I'm sure you'll want to know, considering Chosen's position, and maybe you'll even provide some advice to make things go smoothly!"

"Exactly," Solana said as she practically dragged Keerla out of the house toward the local altar garden to pray at the statues. Solana had little hope of her Patron, Yggdrasil, actually providing any advice, while Keerla thought there was a decent chance her Patron would at least answer.

As for when Artemis would provide any advice, that was yet to be seen, as both of them honestly believed it was far more likely that their god would bother to get involved in mortal affairs, making this more about reporting to their Patrons than seeking any actual help.

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"A date has been set!" Jake said with a happy smile as he spoke out loud to the empty room, where the only one listening in was that creep, Villy. "I guess we got lucky and caught two of them at a good time, considering you had time to accommodate us as soon as next week!" NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON *novel✂fire✂net*

Jake was looking forward to his first official date and was pleasantly surprised that Keerla answered so quickly. He was even more surprised at how quickly she agreed to host him and Artemis. Granted, the high elf hunter had been a little stiff in her speech, but Jake understood that people sometimes could get a little nervous around him due to his status.

He was also fully aware that two of them were probably panicking a bit at Jake suddenly reaching out and them now having to prepare, but most of his guilt over that was washed away by knowledge that this would ultimately turn out to be a good thing for two of them.

Despite rumors that circulated around him, Jake knew how to be a proper guest and was genuinely thankful that two would host him. He was also looking forward to learning more about how people in Panon of Life lived and to seeing some more modest areas of territory.

After quickly checking that Jake had some proper casual clothes to wear for following week, he went down to cellar cavern area to calm poor Jasper. Sadly for him, Warpsnatcher had taken opportunity to slip away after Artemis also left by quickly jumping to gateway and using it to go plunder some more loot for his piles.

Instead, Jake just went down re to check on ritual circle and improve upon it a little here and re. After that, he experimented some more with his new Invocation skill before it was time to meditate and go over knowledge he'd gained from First Sage once more. After being fully recovered, Jake quickly checked in on Soulflame Cradle and infused some more mana into it before he went back to experimenting with Invocation once more.

About two days passed with Jake being all alone in his palace – alright, King was also re, but he hadn't even moved since he entered meditation. After whole second day passed, Jake began to get a little worried that Artemis wouldn't make it back in time for dinner date, but luckily for him, she returned as third day had just begun.

Jake had been in middle of testing out Invocation on Scales of Malefic Viper as she appeared in living room above, making Jake instantly abandon his experiment and quickly make his way up to her again.

Artemis naturally saw him coming, but hadn't taken a seat, indicating to Jake she didn't plan on staying very long. Entering living room, Jake looked at her inquisitively as she started speaking in an amused voice.

"Hey, I want you to guess who reached out to me with a prayer not long after two of us got invited to that dinner," Artemis said with a wry smile.

"I wanna guess Keerla, since she was one you'd blessed?" Jake asked.

"Exactly," Artemis chuckled. "I do get my fair share of prayers, but hers was certainly one of most unique ones. Poor girl was nervous out of her mind, but I managed to calm her somewhat."

"That's good," Jake said, not wanting two dinner hosts to be bundles of anxiety. Artemis speaking of Blessings and prayers did get him curious, though. "Say, how often do you get prayers? And how often do you answer?"

"I get a lot of prayers... more than I bother to count every day," Artemis said with a shrug. "Most of them don't even ask for a response but are just said to grant one praying courage, forgiveness, or to merely pay reverence."

“How about ones who do ask for a response?”

“Depends on question and who’s asking,” Artemis answered. “If it’s one of few people with a Divine Blessing or my Chosen, I answer every time. Generally, lower level of Blessing, less likely I am to answer. Additionally, answer I can provide becomes less clear lower Blessing. In Keerla’s case, seeing as she only has a Lesser Blessing, I couldn’t directly convey words but only a feeling of calmness and assurance.”

“I see,” Jake muttered. “What kind of thing do people usually ask about? I reckon it’s quite different from my interactions with Viper.”

“Oh, y most certainly are,” Artemis chuckled. “But usually, y just ask for assurance and confirmation before making important decisions. Many pray before battling a powerful foe, sometimes questioning if y should even do so.”

“Praying with hope that your god will tell you not to fight sounds like something someone who’s just looking for an excuse to back out of a fight would do,” Jake scoffed.

“It often is,” Artemis answered casually. “But those kinds of prayers are better than final requests. Those prayers are definitely worst. When a mortal is lethally injured, praying as death is rapidly approaching, all you, as a god, can do is offer m some level of comfort. Many pray, asking for help or more power to overcome death, and it’s not a nice feeling knowing that it’s not something you can do. Even if I decide to give someone at death’s door my Blessing, what would that help?”

“Have you ever answered a prayer by descending directly to help one praying?” Jake asked curiously.

“In a combat scenario? No. I have in a few or instances, but only because or gods are also involved in matter,” Artemis said. “But such a thing is very rare. Usually, gods don’t interfere directly with mortal matters.”

Jake nodded along slowly, Villy having already talked about that several times in past.

“A bit of a topic change, but how did you come by Blessing Keerla? How do you even decide who to bless?” Jake continued to ask questions relentlessly to satisfy his curiosity.

“I didn’t bless her personally,” Artemis shook her head, entertaining Jake.

“You had a priest do it?”

“I don’t have priests, at least not traditional kind,” Godqueen chuckled. “I do have people with religious Paths who can give out my Blessings with my permission, though. Mostly, se are not only representing myself, but all gods of Panon of Life. That’s how Keerla got hers. She was deemed talented enough to have it granted, thus she was

given it. For Lesser Blessings, I don't personally review every individual, as that would simply be a waste of time and effort. I check every person with Divine Blessings, of course, as well as many of those with Major and even Greater Blessings."

"I'm learning a lot today," Jake smiled.

"Glad to hear it," Artemis shook her head. "Speaking of Blessings, I have a feeling Keerla will be in for an upgrade soon, as Records she'll get through her direct yet brief interaction with you will definitely strengthen her potential."

"I'd wager that a direct interaction with her Patron in disguise will also positively affect her," Jake smiled.

"Also a possibility for sure," Artemis chuckled. "Now, my brief amusement over getting a prayer about an upcoming dinner aside, I come directly from Nature's Attendant's side."

"Oh?" Jake said, totally fine with extreme change of subject. "Has anything changed with bow ritual?"

"You could say that. At least my work here is done, and Nature's Attendant also seems to be wrapping things up," Artemis said in a casual voice.

Jake was confused about what she meant by that until a thought struck him. "Do you mean that...?"

"The problem is, without future owner of bow, we can't finish ritual," Artemis said in a teasing voice. "To clarify, we're not in a rush to finish it, so if you want to wait a few days and-"

"Artemis. Don't even joke about keeping a man away from his new bow," Jake interrupted Godqueen.

"I just gave option," Artemis chuckled as space magic wrapped up two of them.

Finally... it was bow time.

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Chapter 1172 - A Companion For Life

“Good, you’re here,” Nature’s Attendant said as soon as Jake and Artemis arrived. “I take it you’ve been updated on state of things?”

“Just that we’re in final stretch,” Jake answered, his gaze scanning entire formation. Usually, drawn lines were subtle, but now, everything was teeming with energy, all runes and whatnot shining brightly.

He also felt that entire ritual was currently in a state of semi-dormancy. Nature’s Attendant had delayed it as he waited for Jake and Artemis to arrive, but moment he allowed formation to fully activate once again, it would be like letting go of a fully drawn bow’s string.

“Precisely,” Nature’s Attendant nodded. “two branches that will make up bow are now as grown as y can be while under my purview. only thing left is final infusion, where you’ll create a connection with bow. However, I will warn you that this is also one and only point of failure in this.”

“How so?” Jake questioned as he observed two sprouts that had grown into what could almost be called two small trees. Both of m had grown in a spiral pattern around one anor, two effectively merging into one, and with how y were bending over slightly, y had even grown into shape of a bow.

“You need to be acknowledged by it,” second-in-command of Panon of Life answered. “I want to say that this shouldn’t be a concern, but items of this nature can be very fickle. Especially in this case, I have some cause for concern that I hope won’t materialize into any actual challenges.”

“Could you elaborate?” Jake questioned, really wanting to go into this with full knowledge.

“ritual has gone a lot more smoothly than I anticipated, and growth of two plants exceeded my expectations, and not by a little eir,” Nature’s Attendant sighed. “This tells me two things. First of all that two are incredibly compatible with one anor, and secondly that energy y’ve been nourished with has proven to be highly effective.”

“Both of those sound like good things?” Jake asked, perplexed.

“Oh, y are. Assuming you manage to get acknowledged, that is,” Nature’s Attendant chuckled as he went over and stood in front of two plants that had grown into shape of a bow. “This bow does not contain sentience, much less sapience. However, it can be viewed as a living item, even if it doesn’t have a Truesoul. As with any or living being, it has instinct. And right now, I cannot predict what that instinct is telling it, only that from experience, faster a plant like this grows and stronger it gets, more arrogant it also becomes.”

“So I’ll need to give my new bow a stern talking to and prove myself superior or worthy of wielding it?” Jake asked.

“That’s an oversimplification,” Nature’s Attendant shook his head. “Remember that this bow is formed from a set of Records, and those Records have colored and formed its instinct. You need to have an approach that’s suitable.”

Nature’s Attendant paced a bit back and forth as he kept looking at bow. “Consider this. If I decided, here and now, to unleash my full aura and will upon you with option to either submit and serve or die, would you willingly submit?”

Artemis looked a bit disturbed at hypothetical, while Jake didn’t hesitate to answer. “I would tell you to respectfully go fuck yourself.”

Chuckling, old god shook his head. “As I would expect you to. However, seeing as your Records as well as Records of an Apex Hunter are a huge part of this bow, I fear that it may adopt a similar instinctual response to you, where it would rather choose to win and die than submit.”

Jake frowned as god continued.

“When ritual fully completes, there will be a brief window where bow will have to fully merge with you once more. As I said, it doesn’t have a Truesoul of its own, meaning it will have to rely on yours. However, should it resist, it will not be bound to any soul and thus win away with not even I capable of doing anything about it.”

“So I have to convince a potentially defiant and moody bow to join me willingly?” Jake now guessed.

“Or your first idea turns out to be best approach. No one can tell you, as only you can communicate with bow as it’s been tied to your soul from very start of this ritual. I want to give you advice on how to proceed, but I truthfully have none that I can confidently stand behind,” Nature’s Attendant shook his head.

“Just follow your instincts, Jake,” Artemis chimed in with a comforting smile. “I think that’ll be your best bet.”

Jake slowly nodded. Artemis was definitely right. He also wasn’t going to ask about what Panon of Life would do if ritual did end up being a total failure. In that instance, Jake would have lost not only his old bow, but Panon would also have lost a lot of resources and time invested. Failure wasn’t an option that he even wanted to seriously entertain when standing right in front of finish line.

“I think that’s all I can say on that matter,” Nature’s Attendant also nodded. “Now let’s conclude ritual. For this, I’ll need you to infuse energy as normal as I do finish touches. At same time, Artemis will attach prepared string, completing bow fully. Once

complete, window you have remaining to fully bind bow will be rapidly closing, so try your best to succeed before that happens. We cannot delay if you find yourself troubled."

"Alright," Jake said. He would be lying if he said he wasn't nervous. It also felt a little unfair that Nature's Attendant had sprung this final failure point on him right here and now, but Jake could only guess god had his reasons.

"n let us proceed," Nature's Attendant nodded. "I will limit energy flow, granting you roughly an hour to successfully be acknowledged, at which point Artemis will have to attach string. Remember, once string is fully merged with bow, you will have seconds, not minutes."

At direction of Nature's Attendant, Jake went into position. He would kneel and infuse energy into formation circle around five paces from seemingly fully grown bow, allowing him to observe it during entire process.

"Ready?" Nature's Attendant looked at Jake.

"Ready," Jake nodded, and with that, god started last part of ritual.

Power enveloped entire area as Jake felt draw on his power instantly. Jake responded gladly as he began to infuse formation, drain quite manageable compared to many of or times he'd been sucked dry by this particular ritual.

It didn't take long before Jake felt anor massive difference between this time and all those prior. Rar than merely infusing magic circle with energy, he felt himself truly merge with formation, and he felt all of it at once... especially bow sitting right in front of him.

As energy surged into bow, something within it began to awaken. At first, it appeared less than pleased, but upon noticing Jake's energy infusion, bow greedily began to absorb as much as it could.

Taken from , this narrative should be reported if found on Amazon.

Jake watched on as bow began to glow as veins of his arcane mana pulsed all over bow's body. two wooden branches hugged each or tighter than before as y merged even more, seams between where two types of wood met becoming harder and harder to see.

Not wanting to waste time, Jake sent a bit of his will towards bow in an attempt to connect with it. However, upon noticing more than pure energy, bow vehemently rejected approach, Jake feeling its instant instinctual rejection of what Jake was trying to do.

Uncharacteristically, Jake didn't push things but slowly backed off from bow after this first rejection. He waited a little before trying again, this time with a subtle approach, with result being yet another strong sense of rejection. This happened several more times over next few minutes as ritual rapidly progressed.

It may look like Jake was wasting his time, but he slowly began to learn nature of this rejection, and it was very much as Nature's Attendant had spoken about. bow contained a lot of Jake's Records, which meant that instinctual consciousness that had been born was very similar to Jake's. At least he had heavily affected it.

Considering vessel this consciousness dwelled within was constructed from a bow, all about being an apex hunter that strives to fight anything stronger, no matter risk, this part of Jake's Records was only amplified and brought to surface. Adding a branch directly from a Primordial did introduce some level of calmness, but also helped spur on innate sense of superiority bow possessed.

A part of Jake had wondered why Yggdrasil, considering her absolutely massive size, didn't donate more branches like this to Nature's Attendant to create items from, but he now understood. Ultimately, new owner of any item Nature's Attendant created had to still be accepted, which set a ridiculously high standard for who was qualified.

After poking bow a few more times, it was clear his usual approach wouldn't work this time around. Jake knew that if he went more forceful route of proving himself superior by fully unleashing his Bloodline, he would be able to suppress instinctual consciousness within bow, but he also believed that wouldn't end well for him or bow.

Like Jake himself, bow would fight back to bitter end. It would see Jake's attempt to bind it as a challenge, and knowing it couldn't get away due to it being an immobile bow stuck in formation, it would act like a cornered beast. Despite not standing a chance and likely not even being able to injure Jake's soul, it would certainly give its best shot.

This put Jake in quite a pickle as he found himself unsure how to proceed. bow wasn't actually consciousness but was indeed pure instinct, meaning words wouldn't reach it, only sentiment and emotions. This limited negotiations a lot, as Jake could do anything as complex as bartering with it.

That didn't deter Jake as he just kept trying, having decided to at least get bow more used to Jake's constant presence as he made his will a constant companion to energy which bow still greedily absorbed.

Seeing as he didn't try to directly force his will into bow, it slowly got accustomed to Jake's presence. Likely also because it so closely mimicked energy it loved to absorb. This allowed Jake to get a better read of bow and even connect to it at least a little bit to better feel it out.

A few times, Jake tried to have his will get a little closer, but bow reacted like an angry cat hissing at this approach, ready to claw him should he try to get closer. Still, he kept trying, feeling like he could get at least a little closer every time as he continually attempted to convince bow that two of them were cut from the same cloth.

Jake's slow and steady approach did seem to make some progress, but there was one major problem with it... Jake was under a strict time limit. Despite what he fully believed to be Nature's Attendants' best efforts, ritual was rapidly approaching its end, marked by when bow was indeed fully formed.

When that happened, Jake heard a faint sound of something snapping. Looking at bow, he saw that bow had broken free from ground entirely, making bow slowly float upwards as now only pure energy connected it to ritual. Find newest release on **novel*fire*net**

Right then, Artemis also made her move to do her part. She appeared in front of bow as a string of some unknown material appeared. This string floated toward bow, and to Jake's surprise, he saw bow gladly accept it as some of its wood slightly unwound at top and bottom.

This allowed each end of string to merge directly with body of bow. With bow in place, Artemis threw Jake a look as she mumbled "good luck" before teleporting away again.

At the same time, Nature's Attendant spoke into Jake's head. *"Now's time. I wish you success."*

Jake didn't hesitate as he tried to infuse his will into bow once more, this time not with intent to dominate, but trying to foster a feeling of kinship. He tried to convince bow that they were meant to be one and of his own worthiness to wield it.

He felt his soul slowly begin to merge with bow as he believed it had accepted him... but when process passed point where it became clear Jake was 'owner' and bow nothing more than a tool, he felt its rejection once more, stronger than before.

Quickly, he tried again, but once more, he found himself aggressively rejected. Beginning to feel a bit desperate, Jake made several more attempts over next few seconds, but that only ended the same way.

Knowing he indeed had only seconds remaining, he had to try something drastic.

Standing up, Jake kept infusing energy into formation as he walked closer to bow. This was Jake's last-ditch effort, as he had only one idea left, and given limited time, he likely had only this final gamble.

Reaching out to bow, Jake wrapped his hand around handle. When he did this, he felt bow fight back as destructive arcane energy surged out of it and into Jake's body, trying to shake him off.

This only made Jake smile as he responded by pushing in his own energy directly. At same time, he stopped all pretence and attempts at convincing bow that he was one meant to wield it all of that or stuff... instead, he tried to win it over with a far simpler message, with a single mental image and one equally simple question.

image he sent was of himself wielding bow, a Protean Arrow drawn and ready to fire as a True Dragon stood before him. With it, a question he knew himself well enough to know he would be unable to reject:

"Wanna kill a dragon with me?"

For first time, Jake felt his will find some leeway as it entered bow. It seemed enamoured with concept of hunting down a dragon, instinctually drawn to idea, as that was indeed what it was born to do. It's Path. Yet re was still some doubt, which Jake sought to quickly relieve.

A second mental image appeared, this time showing Jake hunting something far more impressive than a dragon. It displayed Jake standing with bow in front of a bare-chested human wielding a simple axe, ir two auras clashing as Jake was ready with an arrow already nocked.

"Wanna see what apex really looks like?"

Jake's strategy had changed from trying to convince bow he was some fated partner to instead offering something far more tangible... idea that he could be its vehicle to fulfill its purpose and Path. For it not to merely be Jake making use of bow, but for bow to equally make use of Jake to accomplish its own desires.

Right as Jake saw signs, his time was indeed about to run out... rejection disappeared, and instead, a powerful connection formed as he and bow had found a common goal.

All around m, formation began to break apart and disperse, but Jake barely noticed it as he instead focused solely on weapon in his hand. Not wanting to delay, he quickly used Identify, in part to confirm he had indeed succeeded.

[Apex Hunter's Bow of World Tree (Mythical)] – Formed by Nature's Attendant from a gift by system and a branch of World Tree, a bow of untold potential has been born, fit only for a hunter that stands at apex. A true apex hunter seeks only 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. This bow is overflowing with life energy, making it near-

indestructible and ensuring it will recover from any damage as long as host is still alive. All your arcane energy infused into bow will find itself amplified. Faint whispers of a consciousness linger within wood. Untold potential lingers within, allowing this bow to adapt and grow in tandem with user. Enchantments: Apex Hunter. Requirements: Soulbound

“Good job... for a moment re, I feared failure. Also, don’t be too disappointed that it’s only a mythical rarity item,” Nature’s Attendant said in a comforting voice as he teleported over right next to Jake. “Making it more powerful wasn’t feasible when you’re still in C-grade, but give it time and attention, and it shall grow as you do. It’s nothing if not adaptable.”

Jake nodded, already feeling that. While some parts of bow would stay same, he felt a nearly limitless potential for change and adaptation within it. With time, it would only grow stronger, and even name of bow would change to something far less generic.

Who knows, maybe he could even get one of those truly legendary weapons with only a single-word name... but for now, Jake was more than satisfied, as he knew he’d just obtained a companion for life to wield alongside Eternal Hunger.

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Chapter 1173 - A Bow For A Bright Future

Jake held his new bow firmly to get a proper feeling for it in his grasp. As he held it and tried to probe bow furr, he indeed felt faint whispers of some instinctual consciousness within, but it was too weak to do anything. For now, it was merely a seed, which truthfully would be a good term to describe entire bow.

A mere seed for what bow could one day truly flourish into.

“How high do you estimate its level to be?” Artemis asked Nature’s Attendant as she’d also walked over to better inspect Jake’s new weapon.

“Hard to say,” second-in-command of Panon of Life shook his head. “It all depends on Jake. system-provided Records providing Apex Hunter function are of an unquantifiable level of quality, making it all very unpredictable.”

Jake barely listened to two of m as he was too busy just holding bow as a bit of his arcane energy entered it. He felt energy surge into bow and through veins in wood, and as it did, wood resonated with energy and responded.

As bow said, far than merely conducting energy at a perfect level, bow conducted it more than perfectly, even amplifying it. At same time, he also saw bow slightly change in color as he infused it with energy, faint fissures and lines of arcane energy began to appear as he continued to pour in energy.

It looked almost as if bow was about to shatter into pieces, but Jake knew there was no impact on its durability at all. In fact, it seemed more durable with arcane energy infused than without, even if that energy was of destructive variant.

Jake guessed it had something to do with innate powers of bow being awakened. Either way, arcane energy or not, Jake had a hard time seeing anyone being able to break it. He was even confident in blocking a Glimpse of Spring: Stormcut with body of bow, something he wasn't confident his temporary Titanstring bow could do, despite being primarily focused on durability.

Briefly raising his gaze, he looked at Artemis, who had been observing him. She instantly understood his look and gave a quick nod of approval.

Without further ado, Jake raised bow and put three fingers on string. Drawing back string, he felt progressive resistance be absolutely perfect as an arrow appeared, courtesy of his Arcane Arrows skill.

Artemis waved her hand as several small orbs appeared in sky, and Jake instantly loosed an arrow toward one of them. Quickly drawing bow several more times, he shot down each of them in rapid succession, getting a way better feel for his new weapon.

With another nod to Artemis, she smiled as she conjured a realistic-looking image of a wyvern flying in sky. Jake drew his bow once more, but this time didn't shoot right away.

Instead, he started charging up an Arcane Powershot, feeling energy surge through his body as he did so. Arcane energy flooded into bow, all of it being amplified as it did so. At same time, veins of arcane energy covering bow became more striking with every passing second.

Jake continued charging as pressure built up. Arcane Powershot was a unique skill in that it had nearly limitless potential for its power. All it was limited by was Jake's own body and durability of bow.

With every passing second he channeled, attack would be stronger, but toll on both his and bow's body would grow. string would get heavier, and his muscles would begin to tear until he simply couldn't hold on anymore, at which point Arcane Powershot would be released. Of course, Jake tended to shoot right before his body experienced failure, as going all way to failure would also leave him weakened afterward.

This time around, with his new Apex Hunter's Bow, Jake channeled it for longer than any time prior. Something that very much surprised him, as unless bow was limit to his channel time, it usually didn't matter.

However, Jake realized that bow was doing more than just amplifying arcane energy he channeled into it. It also faintly helped him as powerful life energy echoed out from bow and back into Jake's body, allowing him to channel just a little bit longer.

Alas, re was still a limit, and soon enough, Jake had to let go and unleash his Arcane Powershot.

His entire body exploded with destructive arcane energy as arrow soared toward summoned image of a wyvern. false creature roared as energy struck it, tearing through its body in an instant, leaving a massive hole in its wake, only for tail of pure destructive energy that followed arrow to tear apart rest of wyvern's body.

Jake was breathing heavily as he lowered bow, but to his surprise still felt life energy within bow resonating with his body. It didn't provide him any life energy, but instead, it stimulated what was already within Jake, making his body heal faster from backlash of having fired Arcane Powershot. It was an effect not mentioned in bow's description, but certainly a welcome one.

"Impressive power for a C-grade," Nature's Attendant nodded approvingly. "Especially considering that was without any boosting skill and with a regular arrow."

"You definitely do have a strong Powershot," Artemis nodded. "Which is only to be expected, I guess. Any proper archer worth ir bow has a strong Powershot. If not, y're just wasting one of greatest skills provided by system."

"Thanks," Jake said, in full agreement with Artemis. "This bow definitely helped give it some extra punch."

Jake was unsure of just how much extra power new bow had provided, but if he had to give an estimation, it had to be around fifteen percent or so. A more quickly charged Powershot would likely be more in five to ten percent range, but even that was pretty damn massive.

Especially when one factored in that this didn't include Apex Hunter effect. That effect had also only gotten stronger after bow's upgrade, adding even more damage based on level disparity. Overall, he estimated his fully charged Arcane Powershot with a Protean Arrow had gone up by roughly twenty-five percent in power. Adding on Jake's newest profession skill, making whatever poison he threw into mix more potent, and Jake was nearly feeling sorry for poor B-grades that would fall during his Path to B-grade.

"I take this reaction of yours to mean you're satisfied?" Nature's Attendant asked with a smile.

"Oh, definitely," Jake confirmed without a shred of hesitation.

"Good, I would think less of you if you weren't able to recognize its potency," Nature's Attendant nodded. "Now, I do wish to give you some more practical knowledge about it. Seeing as I made bow using this relatively unique crafting method, it differs from those you usually use quite a bit. This is primarily expressed through its ability to grow with you, but also possibility of it getting a full ego one day."

"Like Bobo?" Jake asked, remembering Dina's living armor.

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"Potentially, though Bobo is a unique case," Nature's Attendant explained. "Bobo is fully sentient and has been since creation. Due to Dina having a version of my Bloodline, she was able to inject Records related to it into plant, resulting in Bobo. All done with my guidance, of course. In your case, I naturally didn't feel confident guiding you on how to apply eir your arcane affinity or Bloodline, as I do not have adequate understanding of eir."

"That makes sense," Jake muttered, looking down at bow. "But re's still a chance bow can one day get a full-on ego? Like... a talking weapon?"

"If I may," Artemis chimed in. "I have a difficult time seeing that happen."

"Oh? Why is that?" Nature's Attendant asked with interest, with Jake naturally also giving her a curious look.

"Because it's Jake who made it," Artemis began her explanation. "His Path is far more instinctual than nearly any I've ever seen before, and it's only natural his bow will be similar. With that in mind, his bow will naturally adapt in a direction where it becomes most efficient at what it does. In that evolutionary development, I have a hard time seeing bow ever encountering a situation where dedicating energy to maintaining an ego will be more efficient than empowering or aspects of itself. Instead, if I see anything ego-related developing, it will be its instincts strengning to perhaps one day border on sentience, but that would be limit."

Jake listened as he looked down at bow and started nodding halfway through. While idea of having a talking bow did seem neat, in grand scheme of things, what was point of it? How would it make bow better at killing shit that it could talk? No, it made far more sense for it to develop its ability to work in tandem with Jake's instincts to make m best hunter in existence.

"Hm, I cannot argue against that analysis," Nature's Attendant muttered. "I do suppose you have a far more intimate understanding of Jake and his instinctual side than I do."

Artemis threw her superior a glare, which only made old god chuckle.

"Is re anything more I have to be aware of?" Jake asked, helping his girlfriend out by quickly getting conversation back on topic.

"Just a few more basics. In order for bow to grow, you need to actually use it in combat, which I suppose won't be a problem for you. Secondly, you may reach a point where bow requires external assistance to keep up with your growth, but I also suppose you will find a solution re. Besides that, re truly isn't much more to consider, only that I hope bow will serve you well and do so for a very long time," Nature's Attendant answered.

"You should add that due to you being creator behind bow, you also benefit as it grows," Artemis added on, getting a small revenge on Nature's Attendant.

"Minor insignificant benefits," god waved notion off.

"Right now, yes, but who's to say what future brings?" Artemis shrugged. source of this content is *novel■fire■net*

"Hopefully, at least one dead dragon," Jake joked, truthfully not caring much that Nature's Attendant could potentially benefit from Jake using a bow god had helped make. Same as how he didn't care that Arnold benefited from Jake using equipment made by him. It was a win-win situation in Jake's mind.

"Once your preparations are complete, that is," Artemis added on.

"Certainly," Nature's Attendant nodded in agreement. "If you tried to kill a True Dragon right here and now... I'm not saying victory is impossible, but it will require you to do something truly extraordinary and for dragon to be far weaker and more incompetent than rest of its kin."

Artemis slowly nodded along with those words, making Jake clarify.

"I know, I know," Jake sighed. "My deadline is just to kill one before I evolve to B-grade. Still got a couple dozen levels to go before n, so don't worry. I at least won't consider it before I have a proper Dragonsbane poison."

"Good call," Nature's Attendant nodded with approval.

Jake also nodded as he looked toward Artemis. "Should we take our leave? Not gonna lie, testing out bow right away was perhaps a little excessive. I'm feeling pretty damn drained."

It shouldn't come as a surprise, but final parts of ritual had really wrung Jake dry of energy. His subsequent testing of bow hadn't made matters better, especially not as he limit-tested Arcane Powershot. At least he hadn't been dumb enough to activate his boosting skill, because if he had, there was a big chance Artemis would have had to carry him home.

"Sure, I don't believe we have more we need to discuss?" Artemis asked, throwing a questioning look at Nature's Attendant.

"No, I believe we're finished," old god responded. "I also have to get back to Duskleaf. Oh, and before you ask, no, I'm not going to share anything about what we're working on. Some things you're both better off not knowing."

"I wasn't going to ask," Jake said bluntly, making Nature's Attendant chuckle and shake his head.

"Yet you are curious," god said, getting last word before he teleported away, leaving Artemis and Jake behind.

"Ready to go?" she asked.

"Beam me home," Jake said.

Artemis looked at him with a frown. "I assume that means yes, but I have no idea what it actually means."

"You need an omniscience skill... or my translation skill needs to get better at conveying references," Jake muttered.

"If it's any comfort, translation did convey your intent. words just didn't make a lot of sense," Artemis shook her head before she teleported two of them back to Jake's palace.

"Also, from my understanding, omniscience skills shouldn't allow you to understand references like that," Artemis added once they appeared in living room. "At least not usual ones I've heard of... but again, it shouldn't be surprising if Malefic One has one superior to those I know. I remember Mor Tree mentioning that he's likely being in multiverse with highest Wisdom. At least he used to be."

"Maybe he still is?" Jake shrugged. "Speaking of... You reckon Yggdrasil is one with highest Vitality stat?"

"I have no idea," Artemis sighed. "Ultimately, who has highest stats is a relatively useless discussion, as stats express themselves differently from being to being. Even if Mor Tree had lower Vitality than a human, she would surely have far more life energy than one."

"I guess," Jake said, fully aware that it ultimately didn't matter. Still... "Doesn't mean I won't aim to be being with highest Perception in entire multiverse."

"All-Seeing one might give you competition re," Artemis chuckled, referring to Void God known as Oras, who also happened to be Arnold's Patron.

"Actually, do Void Gods even have same stats as ors?" A thought struck Jake.

"I assume so, but I don't know," Artemis admitted. "I've never directly interacted with a Void God."

"Really?" Jake asked with surprise. "Never? You're a Godqueen. I find it hard to believe you've never bumped into one when making your way through void, considering how many journeys you must have taken through it."

"One doesn't merely bump into a Void God," Artemis chuckled, shaking her head. "Very few gods have ever interacted with one, and vast majority of us would like to keep it that way."

Jake kept looking at her with doubt as Artemis stared back at him, a look of realization in her eyes.

"You're about to tell me you've met a Void God, right?"

Scratching back of his head, Jake hesitated to answer.

"Wait... multiple?" Artemis looked genuinely gobsmacked.

"... just two," Jake muttered, remembering time he'd traveled to his Chosen reveal party with people from Earth and had been intercepted by Oras and one or Void God.

"How and why?" Artemis asked, not even giving Jake any grace despite being tired from whole bow ritual thing.

"Well, Oras, because he blessed a friend, and I guess we're both Perception fans," Jake said. "As for or one... it was just kind of re? Looked like a mess of shifting cubes or something, real weird that one. Didn't even bring a gift like Oras did."

Admittedly, Jake was fucking with Artemis by adding that last part.

"... what do you mean gift?"

"For my Chosen reveal party," Jake said as if it were obvious before proceeding to take out void lollipop he'd been using to keep his Perception all topped up after every level up.

[Vision of Oras (?)] – A small bead containing Records and energy created through unknown means by Void God, Oras. This item has been bound to Chosen of Malefic Viper, Jake Thayne, and cannot be used by anyone else. Consuming this bead grants +125812 Perception. Directly consuming this item may cause adverse effects. Beware, staring into small bead may grant you visions of void.

Also, yes, amount of stats it gave from Jake instantly consuming it had more than doubled since he'd gotten it. In retrospect, Jake didn't think this was because item had gotten stronger, but because system estimated Jake could get a few more stats before consuming orb would inevitably blow him up... or implode him... definitely kill him.

Artemis stared at orb for several seconds before letting out a big sigh. "What can you even do with that thing?"

"Get Perception," Jake said, sparing Artemis knowledge that Jake used it as a lollipop. He would save that one for later.

"I want to ask more, but I won't," goddess had seemingly surrendered. "If I were you, I would go get some rest. When you're back in top form, testing out that new bow of yours seems pertinent."

"Definitely up for that," Jake concurred as he prepared to go have a lie-down, but not before smiling at Artemis. "Just for a little, though. We have a dinner date to attend, after all."

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Chapter 1174 - Something Worth Celebrating

plan had been simple.

Jake would recover from bow ritual and n proceed to do some archery fun with Artemis until it was dinner date time.

However, after only a few hours of playing around with Artemis, it became clear that it was a bad way to test his new bow. His archery was same no matter weapon, and all that had changed was power behind every arrow, which naturally made no difference when training technique with a Godqueen.

That's why he had quickly moved on from pure archery training to actual hunting. With help of Artemis, he had gone straight to an opportune Hunting Ground that goddess believed was suitable for Jake to test things out.

It was a Hunting Ground Jake would want to visit again, as it seemed like a perfect spot for him to grind some levels. It was a large planet nearly exclusively occupied by B-grades, ranging from barely evolved to closing in on level 400, also known as mid-tier B-grades.

location Jake had chosen to hunt was in far north of planet. It was a desert of ice and mountains, occupied primarily by ice elementals, different beasts, and semi-humanoid monsters known as Olthorn. se Olthorn were goat-like bipedal monsters usually living in groups, but it wasn't hard to catch odd one out when y went hunting alone.

In beginning, Jake had killed a few weak B-grade beasts, finding ir level of competency to be roughly equal to that of B-grades in or Hunting Ground. In or words, easy kills.

While y hadn't grown a lot stronger since n, Jake most certainly had grown decently, having gained levels in both his class and profession. However, biggest upgrade by far was his new bow, which finally allowed Jake to not only exert his full power, but even amplified it.

A new bow, better poisons courtesy of Invocation, and higher stats all resulted in Jake killing five B-grades on first day, which sadly only netted him a single level-up.

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 321 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 322 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

On second and third day, he killed anor twelve, gaining him yet anor level-up, which really hammered home diminishing return.

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 322 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

Finally, he reached day four – last day before he would have to return and get ready for his dinner date. On this day, he killed nine B-grades, but just before it was time to return, he wanted to try out one more thing.

Between every kill, Jake had needed rest to fully recover, and a few of fights had dragged out, with longest one lasting around half an hour. In or words, Jake had failed to kill any of his prey with a single shot so far.

Granted, he did make things harder for himself by never using his new skill, Event Horizon, but Jake wanted to save that first activation for a special occasion. Also, using it would make it harder to get a feel for how much more powerful his new bow had made him.

Even so, Jake had gotten close a few times, and when he located his final prey before it was time to go home, he felt confident this would be one. It was a Mystical Olthorn Cryomancer wandering all alone through endless icy land. A juicy, barely-evolved Olthorn. With a walking stick and a relatively weak-looking frame, with name also being a huge hint, Jake knew he was dealing with a caster.

Casters were dangerous when on offense, but defensively? Unless y had pre-prepared magic ready that would be triggered automatically, y tended to be squishiest by far, especially when faced with someone like Jake, who could stop m from erecting any barriers right before y were struck.

With his target located and chosen, Jake took his position far up in sky. One of or reasons he'd chosen an Olthorn for this test was due to having killed nearly a dozen of m so far, giving him a decent understanding of Olthorn race, resulting in a stronger Protean Arrow.

One that was naturally coated with Jake's best Heartrot Poison, created right before this hunt, he prepared his Powershot while hidden by Unseen Hunter. Arcane Awakening fully activated from get-go as he funneled energy into his Apex Hunter's Bow, feeling it greedily take everything in as it slightly changed color from infused arcane energy.

Jake charged for as long as he physically could, right up to point he felt his body begin to give out. Knowing it was time, Jake unleashed most powerful attack he could – without use of Event Horizon, that is – and watched it descend toward unsuspecting B-grade.

As expected, Olthorn's danger sense alerted it to incoming attack a moment before it would strike, but before it had time to react defensively, it felt Primal Gaze of a hunter lock down its soul.

Frozen, caster who hadn't prepared any passive defenses was struck by arrow. Jake watched as it penetrated right down into skull of Olthorn, piercing all way through and down into ground, destroying everything in its wake. A massive explosion of destructive arcane energy cracked utterly enormous slate of ice for tens of thousands of kilometers in every direction, radiating out from a bloody spot.

Through destruction, Jake saw that more than half of B-grade's body had been utterly destroyed, including its entire head, most of its chest, and one leg. rest of its body was barely keeping it together, and its flesh wiggled to try to regenerate, but Heartrot Poison managed to put a stop to any attempt at survival.

It took a dozen seconds of Jake standing re with bated breath before he finally punched air in celebration. "Fuck yeah! One shot, one kill!"

You have slain [Mystical Olthorn Cryomancer – lvl 350] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 323 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 323 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

sounds of system's dings came in to celebrate with him, rewarding Jake another level. With more than twenty-five levels to go before it was evolution time, Jake had finally managed to slay his first B-grade in a single attack, and he hadn't even used hisoretically strongest attack to do so.

Sure, it had been one of weakest B-grades imaginable, but still a B-grade nevertheless, making Jake quite proud of himself. It was also good that it had died in one shot because, looking at his shoulder and back, he'd definitely overdone that Arcane Powershot, going by amount of damage he'd dealt to himself. While he could have continued to shoot a few arrows, especially with help of bow gifting him some life energy, it definitely wouldn't have been recommended by any credible doctor.

"Genuinely impressive," a voice said from behind, as Jake was still mid-celebration. "I didn't ex-

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Artemis had appeared only three meters behind Jake, and before she could finish her next sentence, Jake turned around and gave her a big smooch. She seemed surprised despite being a goddess who'd seen him coming far in advance, but also totally fine with development as she returned sentiment.

Just for a little, though, before she gently pushed him away with a smile. "As I was saying, I didn't expect you to succeed this soon. innate lifeforce of a B-grade isn't easily overcome in a single attack, but fact you are capable of it means damage behind that arrow is far more than meets eye."

"I definitely do have a fair deal of multipliers behind scenes," Jake nodded, still elated by his accomplishment. "With one of m being this awesome bow. damage amplification when going up a grade is nothing to be scoffed at, and with it working in tandem with all my or skills that make me stronger against higher-level enemies, I do certainly pack a punch when on hunt."

"You know... I wouldn't be against it if you wish to skip that dinner," Artemis said. "It's vanity compared to progress you'd make here in Hunting Ground. While your profession will certainly take a while longer to reach peak C-grade, with your current pace, it shouldn't be long before your class gets re. Seeing as it's you, I wouldn't be worried about being limited by Records, eir."

"Skipping something you already promised to attend is a dick move," Jake argued, wanting that dinner date.

"It would certainly be unkind to those two, but in grand scheme of things, not repaying two mortals for what I understand to be minor aid rendered wouldn't be a big deal," Artemis shrugged.

"Are you saying this because you don't want to go?" Jake asked with a raised eyebrow.

"No, but I won't lie and say I find myself overly enthusiastic at prospect," Artemis admitted. "I'm afraid it's going to be... awkward."

"Probably, but to borrow your words, feeling awkward in front of two mortals shouldn't matter in grand scheme of things," Jake said a bit teasingly.

"I suppose not," Artemis relented as she gave Jake a serious look. "I want to really clarify that you shouldn't reveal who I am at any point. Not that I'm a god, eir. moment y're aware, y'll become subject to my presence, which would make entire encounter very unpleasant for everyone involved."

"I know, geez, I wasn't going to," Jake waved her off, muttering in a low tone afterward: "At least not until towards end..."

"You weren't even trying to ensure I didn't hear that," Artemis glared at him.

"Nope," Jake responded shamelessly. "Now, let's get back to our temporary abode. I need to clean up, get some rest, and prepare to go get a nice dinner with my Godqueen girlfriend."

Artemis shook her head and teleported m both back to palace, where she left him alone to do his final preparations. Jake also knew that, despite what Artemis had said, she was looking forward to his dinner just as much as he was. At least that's what her obsession with making sure her disguise was perfect indicated.

Besides, would eir of m really want to skip ir first official date, even if entire setup for it was admittedly a bit scuffed?

"I take it all is well, sister?" three-eyed woman asked her kin.

“Better than expected,” Vesperia responded, walking out of pool made of golden blood. “I will need to return to World Wonder again soon if I wish to continue my rapid progress.”

“Naturally,” Odonestra nodded. “Getting in some hunting is only healthy, and you’ll need to train your new Queen’s Guard to ensure y’re up to task.”

“Indeed,” Vesperia gladly agreed as she summoned a golden robe to cover her body as she followed her sister through massive hive deep within heartlands of Endless Empire.

Over last couple of years, she’d been going back and forth between Nevermore and Endless Empire as she trained herself and prepared for her breakthrough to B-grade. Usually, it would be risky for her to leave domain of Endless Empire without divine guardians, but Nevermore was a special case.

Due to special tokens given out by Wyrmgod, she could teleport directly into World Wonder and back to where she had left from again. As this was a system-assisted feature, it pierced all anti-teleportation protections and worked every time without fault. Follow current novels on *novel.fire.net*

Vesperia had wondered what Wyrmgod’s fellow Primordial Rigoria thought of Nevermore handing out such tokens even to her greatest enemy, but from her understanding, Maker apparently didn’t care.

“Do you think you’ll be able to use lance soon?” Odonestra asked after y’d walked for a while.

“Not before B-grade, that’s for certain,” Vesperia shook her head. “And even n, I would only be able to use a fraction of its power.”

“That would still be a massive boon,” her fellow True Royal smiled, a hint of sadness on her face. “Since first Vesperia, so many treasures have lain dormant, waiting for ir rightful heir. We truly had lost faith that y would ever be claimed.”

Vesperia put a soothing hand on her sister’s shoulder. “No one could have predicted appearance of someone like my Sire. We can only be grateful he decided to use his gift to bless Endless Empire with revival of my royal lineage.”

Odonestra smiled. “True. Speaking of your Sire, do you believe he will visit our domain soon? I know that he recently led mortal delegation from Order of Malefic Viper and visited Panon of Life. Something that bird a declaration of friendship between two Primordial factions, causing quite a stir.”

Vesperia was surprised at hearing that last part, and she knew her sister had included it to inform her. Vesperia knew her Sire had gone to visit Panon of Life but hadn’t been

aware of this declaration of friendship as it had happened while she was immersed in golden blood pool.

As for Odonestra's question: "I have brought up and made it clear an open invitation stands, but as you know, my Sire has many obligations and desires, and I'm certain many factions would gladly have him grace m with his presence."

"I see," True Royal goddess nodded. "Perhaps best approach would be to go through Order of Malefic Viper. We already have some connection to faction, but increasing our bond wouldn't be unwise, especially after last declaration. Perhaps it could even help strengn our somewhat strained relationship with Panon of Life. Having more political allies could prove beneficial."

"Certainly," Vesperia nodded, deep in thought.

It was true that Endless Empire did lack allies. y didn't have a lot of enemies, mind you, but neir did y have many factions whom y would dare call ir true allies. In fact, most large factions wanted to keep Endless Empire at arm's reach and only kept relationship neutral due to Endless Empire's power.

Panon of Life, Holy Church, and Risen were all in camp of factions who looked upon Endless Empire with unfriendly gazes. Holy Church and Risen had somewhat similar expansionist tendencies to Endless Empire, leading to a natural conflict. Meanwhile, Panon of Life disliked how Endless Empire ravaged local biomes and terraformed m to better serve Empire.

Or factions, such as Valhal, Dao Sect, Nine Hells, Court of Shadows, and various mercenary and merchant organizations, were entirely neutral toward Endless Empire, gladly trading with m whenever opportunity arose.

When it came to allies, Endless Empire only had a few. Perhaps a bit surprising was Altmar Empire. Altmar Empire was also a close ally of Automata Legion but had managed to position itself in a way that allowed it to be an ally with both.

For longest time, Order of Malefic Viper had been in same camp as Valhal and Court of Shadows. Sure, y had dealings with Endless Empire, but y weren't outright allies.

Changing that wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing, especially after Malefic Viper's return and rise of his already famous Chosen.

"Will you be returning to Nevermore now?" Odonestra asked, changing subject rar abruptly.

"Yes, that's plan," Vesperia nodded.

"How many years you got left in re?"

"A bit under seven," Vesperia answered. Considering she had reached level 340, those years should prove enough time for her to reach peak C-grade and begin to make her preparations to evolve.

A scenario where she found herself hitting any kind of wall didn't even cross her mind. For any True Royal, much less her, such a sentiment would be ridiculous.

"Good," Odonestra nodded. "Be safe when re. You're still only True Royal of your Lineage."

"I've created some Hive Queens who have a chance to evolve should I fall," Vesperia tried to calm concerns of her sister.

"It would still be safer if we found a mate for you to ensure a proper heir," Odonestra sighed. "We have had interest, you know."

"In due time," Vesperia waved off notion for now. "Besides, I have no intentions of falling any time soon."

Odonestra nodded in acknowledgment as she led Vesperia to her chambers. re, Vesperia fully resupplied before quickly leaving for Nevermore yet again, planning on spending anor few years re hunting, with it likely being her final trip for C-grade.

Vesperia knew her sisters were all looking forward to Vesperia's evolution, as her becoming B-grade would mean she was a fully grown True Royal. But re was one thing she hadn't discussed with m yet. Vesperia from first era and Vesperia now were both True Royals of Vespernat Lineage; however, even among True Royals, despite ir race names remaining same... re was variance. y were all considered extremely high-tier and powerful, yes, but as individuals, y still varied in power and potential.

And not to discredit her own ancestor... but Vesperia was very confident that she surpassed one she inherited name from and would be one to show multiverse what a true Vespernat Hive Queen was capable of.

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Chapter 1175 - Good Start So Far...

"Do you think we'll die if we mess up too badly?" Keerla asked in a casual tone, nearly making Solana drop bowl she was in midst of mixing.

"Don't even joke about that!" dryad said with a horrified look.

"I was just wondering out loud," Keerla shrugged. "Considering that recent declaration of friendship thing, imagine if we host a dinner so horrible Chosen of Malefic Viper does out and denounces entire Panon of Life afterward. If nothing else, we'd be famous. Probably dead, but definitely famous."

Solana threw her partner a deadly gaze, making Keerla back off. "Easy! re's no way y won't enjoy your food, so relax! If I were actually worried, I wouldn't dare to make jokes."

"Yes, you would. You always joke about when you're nervous, and right now, you're extremely nervous," Solana mercilessly cut through Keerla's facade.

"... would it be best if I just shut up?" Keerla muttered.

"No... no, just try to be positive or talk about something else to take my mind off things. I would ask for your help with cooking, but I don't want to accidentally serve food so horrible that this dinner turns into a declaration of war," Solana said, making a joke of her own.

"You're right," Keerla sighed. "As long as we follow advice of my Patron, surely things can't go too wrong, right?"

"No, y shouldn't," Solana shook her head.

y had both been pleasantly surprised when Artemis had answered Keerla's prayer, seeing as y both assumed y wouldn't get a response. In Solana's case, Yggdrasil had expectedly remained quiet.

Still, just that little bit of divine guidance had given m a lot of confidence that y could get through this trial in one piece, and perhaps even get out on or side better than before.

Neir was under any illusion that this wasn't an absolutely massive opportunity y couldn't squander. Even if neir had Paths centered around politics, y knew importance of a seemingly simple dinner like this and what it could mean for ir futures.

If nothing else, sheer Records y would gain from having a personal relationship with Chosen of Malefic Viper would be insane. Of course, massive opportunities could also turn into worst of disasters, which was why both of m were bundles of anxiety ahead of dinner.

re was especially one part that had m nervous.

"Could you remind me why you offered a plus one?" Solana asked after she'd been cooking for a while, preparing way more dishes than y would possibly need.

"In my defense, I had no idea who he was, and it seemed a little rude to invite a single guy to our house just so he could feel like a third wheel," Keerla answered, also working on her own to make sure utensils were absolutely perfectly placed in table with identical spacing. She'd even gone as far as to read a book about how to set a table properly, learned nothing she didn't already know, but just having her existing knowledge confirmed had helped her calm down.

"I wonder who it could be," Solana muttered. "Did you get any clue when you spoke to him?"

"And that it's a woman of some kind," Keerla sighed, unable to hold herself back from joking. "Guess Malefic One got lucky with his Chosen re. Imagine if someone with a Bloodline like that turned out not to like women."

"Wouldn't mean he wasn't going to have any," Solana shrugged. "I doubt we can even begin to imagine kind of expectations someone like that will be under. It wouldn't be surprising if to him, topic of children was one entirely divorced from emotions and was instead purely practical."

"And now you're making me depressed," Keerla sighed, her joke falling flat when confronted with cruel downsides those with his status often found mselves subjected to. "Anyway, who do you think he's bringing? Someone we've heard of? Wait, maybe it's Dinaldria!? Those two did spend a few decades toger in Nevermore."

"If anything was going on between those two, we would surely have heard about it through grapevine," Solana shook her head. "I think it's more likely that someone from diplomatic entourage will come along. That, or someone he's met while here."

"So you expect it to be some casual acquaintance he's just bringing along to avoid coming alone?" Keerla asked. "That would make sense, I guess. Unless it's someone like Dinaldria, re's no way Malefic One would permit a serious relationship."

"Exactly," Solana nodded, pretty confident in her assessment.

"We should still treat her nicely, though. No matter who she is, just fact that he's bringing her along means she must have some kind of status," Keerla said. Even if her only achievement was to casually be dragged along to a dinner with Chosen of Malefic Viper, that would still make her a figure Solana and Keerla had to be careful around.

"I would hope we treat all guests nicely, even if y didn't have any status of note," Solana said in a semi-scolding tone, making Keerla a bit embarrassed.

"You know what I mean..."

"I do, but words are important," Solana said in her usual stern tone. "Especially today, of all days."

To that, Keerla could only nod in agreement as the couple continued preparing for when their visitors would arrive. y'd discussed so many things regarding this day and even considered whether y should borrow a mansion or something instead of hosting Chosen of Malefic Viper in their relatively small home, but ultimately, y decided not to go overboard but stay honest.

their house had never been cleaner, though, and y had gone out and bought a lot of items to ensure everything looked as presentable as possible. From tablecloth and tableware to ingredients in meals provided, y'd gone all-out, hoping that their efforts would be enough to please Chosen of Malefic One. If he ended up unhappy with what y provided and let his disapproval show... yeah, they had a silent agreement that talking about it when his arrival was this close should be avoided. THIS CHAPTER IS UPDATE BY **novel•fire•met**

Of course, what y didn't know was that Chosen y were so worried about would be too socially awkward to complain or point out if anything did actually displease him.

Something Jake definitely hadn't appreciated enough was visiting more mundane areas of new places he visited. He'd seen many of grand sights on Great Planet that Yggdrasil had taken root and explored a couple of Hunting Grounds now. Even all places y stopped while traveling to Great Planet had been major hubs and important locations within domain of Panon of Life.

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However, where he was going now was far from grand, at least not in grand scheme of multiverse. To Jake, it was still an impressive place, but compared to what else he'd seen, it was indeed mundane.

Not in a bad way, mind you.

"I love design choices here," Jake commented as he walked through narrow and barely defined street. building he was looking at was one carved from over a dozen trees that had fused together and were clearly still alive despite people living in them.

On both sides of the tree were smaller wooden buildings, clearly not grown out of ground or anything, but merely constructed using timber in a far more regular fashion. A few more houses down, a tree with a house built on top of it stood, and right on the side of street was a large hollowed-out boulder with windows and beautiful carvings and art covering it.

"It's certainly natural," Artemis, who walked beside him, commented. "This is kind of small town that appears when rules are lax. We enlightened still prefer to live close to one another, so it's only natural that we'll build close to others, yet our personal styles and preferences vary widely."

"I can definitely see that," Jake nodded, as his sphere allowed him to see even more interestingly designed buildings, including a floating platform with a tent on it, a trap door leading into an underground house, and a brick house that was so damn normal it looked entirely out of place.

Fifteen minutes earlier, two had passed through what Artemis referred to as city center. There had been actual cohesion in how things were built there, but now that they had moved into what could be considered suburbs, it was wild west.

A small detail Jake and two women he was about to visit for dinner had definitely forgotten about was the fact that they'd never given Jake an address to their home. Luckily, Jake had a Godqueen guide, which had allowed him to get there. It also wasn't that suspicious that Jake had found it, even if two questioned him, as he had access to all assistance he required from Panon of Life, and locating two C-grades would be a simple task.

Keerla and Solana didn't live on Great Planet, but had a house in a galaxy quite a bit away from it. Panon of Life had countless planets inhabited with life like this, and just in solar system that Jake and Artemis currently found themselves in, seven planets like this one could be found.

Speaking of Artemis, Jake most certainly approved of the disguise she'd come up with. It didn't work to trick his sphere, but it certainly fooled Jake's eyes, as he wouldn't have been able to recognize her without his Bloodline.

She was still a wood elf, but most of her features had shifted to make her look quite a bit different. Her usual olive skin had darkened a few shades, her eyes had become slightly larger, and overall, her face had undergone a transformation, making it impossible to assume she was the same person.

In Jake's opinion, she still looked damn good despite the changes. Clothing-wise, she'd dressed down a bit, probably because wearing divine rarity equipment would stand out a bit. Instead, she wore a dress with cuts made to ensure it was still easy to move around in, a fashion trend Jake had noticed a lot before. It appeared that it was standard practice to ensure that even casual clothes were still functional in case something unexpected happened.

"Do you remember what we agreed on regarding my identity?" Artemis asked as the two were soon at their destination.

"You're a near-peak C-grade genius hunter I got close to in another Hunting Ground, and you carry a Divine Blessing from Artemis," Jake said. "I still think it's a little risky to go with that. Keerla has a Blessing from you already, so isn't it possible she knows about everyone with a Divine Blessing?"

"It's not possible, no," Artemis shook her head. "And this is better. For it to make sense that I accompany you, I would need to be of at least some level of status, and if I have

status, not having a Blessing would stand out far more. Besides, acting as if I'm blessed by myself should help keep story straight."

"I guess," Jake shrugged, as he continued to look around while admiring different buildings. Most of m were empty, with formations locking m down, but re were a few people here and re, most of m meditating or working on ir professions inside.

On topic of Artemis having a Blessing, Jake had suggested she just spoofed having one by Nature's Attendant or some or god, but Artemis shut that down instantly. mere notion of acting as if some or god had blessed her seemed offensive to her and not something she would even consider, so Jake had dropped subject.

"I feel like I also need to remind you to act like a mortal," Jake said right as two familiar women entered his sphere, showing y were real close now.

"This isn't my first time, you know," Artemis chuckled. "Eternity is a long time, and I've done my fair share of roleplay here and re."

"Oh, I definitely know you're not a novice when it comes to roleplay," Jake said teasingly.

"Perhaps we should also tone those kinds of jokes down," Artemis said with a smile. "To avoid making things awkward for those two."

"See? Already thinking like a mortal, caring about ir opinions," Jake chuckled right as two reached a wide staircase leading up a small hill.

On top of hill was a medium-sized wooden lodge with a design not that much different from Jake's own back in Haven. It was surrounded by trees on all sides and looked pretty cozy, especially with smoke rising from a small chimney on roof.

"You take lead," Artemis said as y'd both stopped in front of steps leading up to house. "Makes most sense with your superior status."

"But I'm also a gentleman," Jake smiled cheekily as he held out a hand. "If you may accompany me, my lady."

Artemis looked at his hand for a moment before shaking her head and just taking it as two walked up staircase side-by-side. Artemis seemed in a good mood despite having been on edge of wher y should even attend... though she did mutter some scary things under her breath.

"Yeah... if things go sideways, erasing one small planet shouldn't be a problem."

"What was that?" Jake asked, giving her side-eye.

“Oh, nothing,” Artemis gave him an innocent smile. “Just thinking out loud.”

Yeah, Jake chose to ignore that one as he and Artemis soon found mselves in front of door to Keerla's and Solana's place. On way up stairs, y'd entered a basic formation that did things like regulate temperature, keep out rain, and or simple things like that, but it also had ability to function as a magical motion detection doorbell.

That's to say, two inside definitely knew Jake and Artemis were right on ir doorsteps, and Jake found it a bit endearing how y were both practically teleporting around to make sure everything was as it should be.

Solana had already made her way to door, but Keerla was still looking at table with laser focus as dryad silently yelled toward elf to come to door. Being nice, Jake gave two a few more seconds before he knocked, giving Keerla time to get to door. As expected, with door locked, no sound could escape building, courtesy of more regular builder formation magic.

Raising his hand, Jake knocked a few times. On or side, he saw two take a deep breath in unison before Solana opened it with a big smile on her face.

“We welcome Chosen of Malefic One and his honored companion to our humble home,” Solana said as she bowed down deeply, Keerla doing same thing behind her.

“Thank you for having me, and please relax,” Jake said in a calm tone, wanting to make things more casual as quickly as possible. “I'm visiting you as a fellow hunter and not in any official capacity. Just treat me as any or guest of equal standing you may receive, and do same to my lovely company.”

Yeah, Jake had rehearsed that a lot, hoping it could help calm two. It seemed to somewhat work, at least on Keerla, as he saw elf visibly relax a little. Solana still seemed on guard, as she neverless stood up straight.

Keerla did same thing, and with ir eyes raised, y finally properly saw Artemis, who stood beside Jake. Godqueen, disguised, took opportunity to introduce herself as well.

“It's a pleasure to meet you two. I'm Diana, a simple hunter and a faithful of Artemis,” god introduced herself. Technically, she didn't even lie, as Artemis did have a lot of faith in herself.

Keerla perked up a bit at hearing this as she bowed. “It's an honor to meet anor faithful of Mistress of Hunt.”

“Meeting kin is always pleasant,” Artemis smiled, and Jake already felt tension get a lot better as two elves formed an instant connection through ir shared faith.

Good start so far... now let's hope food is actually good.

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Chapter 1176 - A Dish To Remember

difference in status provided by a True Blessing compared to a divine one was truly vast.

When meeting someone with a Divine Blessing, you would show m respect and recognition, as only way y could have possibly gained such a Blessing was due to ir high innate potential. It was effectively a seal of approval from a god, indicating that y were truly part of elite and individuals one should take notice of.

Jake's True Blessing of Malefic Viper, on or hand, meant he was effectively spokesperson of his god. ir prophet. It was almost expected for or mortals to treat a Chosen with same level of respect y would treat god behind True Blessing, as y were ir mortal representatives.

In simplest of terms, difference between two Blessings was like difference between how one would dare treat a mortal and a god. This difference couldn't be more clearly outlined than that which occurred at beginning of double dinner date, when one looked at contrast between human and dryad, and two elves talking.

"I definitely think some of newer regulations regarding number of hunting parties allowed at a time are a bit too strict when it comes to lower-level Hunting Grounds. One of my little nieces recently got to mid-tier D-grade, and she barely managed to spend two years in a Hunting Ground before she and her team were called back to make space for a new team to take ir place. I think rar than limiting it by number of teams, any regulations should take into account how efficient each team is," Keerla spoke enthusiastically to Artemis, still managing to get in a swift bite of food in between some of her sentences.

"My guess would be that se new regulations were, in part, made for sake of simplicity. It's difficult to keep track of every team's efficiency at same time unless re were way more surveillance throughout every Hunting Ground, which y also want to avoid. You are partly right that hunting efficiency of teams should be considered, and that's why y lowered number. average hunting team has simply gotten more efficient since last update to regulations. Besides, if se new rules are overdoing it, I'm sure y'll be rolled back sooner rar than later," Artemis responded, seeming more genuinely engaged in discussion than Jake would have first thought she would be. Chapters first released on **novel•fire•net**

Meanwhile, Solana and Jake, who sat across from one another, only exchanged some pleasantries here and there, with Solana remaining a bundle of anxiety. In many ways, having two elves sit beside him with their constant discussion about hunting grounds and whatnot helped keep things from getting tense.

Going back a bit, after Jake and Artemis had been invited inside the house, you'd gotten a quick tour of the place before finally jumping right into actual dinner. Solana had prepared a three-course meal of main dishes as well as a plethora of hors d'oeuvres that filled the dinner table, which seemed slightly too big for their dining room, making Jake guess you had swapped out their usual smaller two-person table for this one on account of Jake's visit.

The first dish Solana had brought out was some kind of fish that Jake didn't recognize at all. It was paired with a lot of herbs and spices, which also allowed Jake to experience some all-new flavors. Overall, Keerla certainly hadn't lied when she said Solana was a good cook. At least this was some of the best food Jake had ever had.

Granted, Jake probably sucked at identifying if food was good or not. One thing he'd learned was that ever since integration, all food tended to just be a lot tastier. Cooking skills were damn overpowered in that regard, and coupled with Jake's lack of exposure to any food outside of eating raw toxic materials for Palate, Jake probably thought all food was damn good.

Artemis, who had a lot more exposure to the wonders of multiversal food, also seemed happy enough, though, so it couldn't be that bad.

Finding a small lull in Keerla's and Artemis' conversation, Jake spoke up. "Keerla really wasn't lying, you are quite a chef. I guess you have some kind of skill?"

He had spoken to Solana, but Keerla was the one to answer, keeping the same enthusiastic tone as she'd used when discussing with Artemis just prior. "No skills, she's all talent!"

Keerla seemed to realize she'd spoken without thinking, and a flash of horror crossed her face... but luckily, Artemis was quick to jump in.

"Really? I've had similar dishes from people who make cooking their entire Path that weren't as good," Godqueen in disguise said, turning her head to Jake. "How about Chosen? Does he have any interest in cooking? I know a fair share of alchemists, especially those from the Order of Malefic Viper, pick it up as an auxiliary skill."

"No, no, I would rate myself pretty damn horrible in the kitchen," Jake chuckled. "In fact, I've barely cooked since before the initiation of my universe. Probably because I don't have to and always find myself busy with one project or another."

"If I may," Solana began, having built up some courage to ask a question. "I've heard talks that in an uninitiated universe, there isn't any mana and all, with all creatures effectively considered level 0. Is this true?"

“Putting a level on anyone at all would have been considered weird,” Jake said in a casual tone. “Without system, there are no stats, no levels, no nothing. In fact, I’m fairly confident everyone was inferior to even level 0 humans, as we didn’t get benefits of some stats.”

Jake was specifically referring to willpower here. He still remembered that first day, standing on that giant pillar inside Tutorial, and how everyone had been unnaturally calm due to Willpower stat suddenly kicking in.

“Is it true humans had to eat and sleep all time before integration?” Keerla also asked, her curiosity outweighing her caution.

“Recommended to sleep at least eight hours and three healthy meals every single day,” Jake said, getting looks of disbelief from both elves and dryad. Yes, Artemis was also playing along, acting all surprised.

“How did society even work with so much time dedicated to nothing?” Keerla wondered out loud.

“You know, I do find that notion a bit funny, considering people post-system can easily spend what would be considered an entire lifespan just sitting on their ass in meditation,” Jake pointed out.

“Fair enough. Still seems silly to sleep away a third of every day,” Keerla said with a smile, earning her a small kick from Solana below table, making herself speak again. “Not that I mean any disrespect toward Chosen of -“

“No, it’s definitely silly by multiversal standards,” Jake agreed, backing her up. “And no need to apologize. As I said, I’m just here as a fellow hunter. Truthfully, I prefer being treated normally and find it awkward when people are overly respectful. If I’m getting any respect, I would prefer it to come from my own achievements and not because a god decided to give me a True Blessing.”

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“Even if we go by that standard, wouldn’t everyone still treat you overly respectfully? Even disregarding your identity as Chosen of Malefic Viper, it’s not like you don’t have plenty of fully self-earned achievements under your belt. At least you did last time I checked All-time Nevermore Leaderboards,” Artemis pointed out in a humorous tone.

“See, that should only lead to a normal level of respect and recognition,” Jake defended himself. “Kind that makes people go, ‘cool, great job,’ and then move on to a more interesting topic.”

“Your view of normal is seriously warped,” Artemis chuckled, shaking her head.

"n join me in having a warped mindset and act like fellow hunters for a night," Jake smiled in response, glad to see Artemis try to help ir two dinner hosts.

She purposefully acted very casual with Jake as a way to show two that it was okay to do so. In ir eyes, she was just anor C-grade like m, and even if she did have a far higher status than both of m combined, it wasn't even comparable to gap between mselves and a Chosen of a Primordial. So if Artemis could treat Jake like a 'normal person,' perhaps so could y. At least that was hope.

Luckily, it seemed to have worked somewhat, as Solana spoke up next, touching on a topic y had in common. "Speaking of fellow hunters... Fortuna Ferret we encountered last time apparently managed to take over one of islands after you left due to power vacuum of all dead B-grades. I also heard that Rainbowfear Sovereign has fully established itself as most powerful B-grade in Hunting Ground, and re were talks of it now being too powerful to remain for much longer.

"Oh? Sounds like quite a bit has happened re," Jake said, a little surprised. "Do you two keep up to date with that place?"

"It's our usual Hunting Ground that we've used for last few decades," Keerla answered. "Without really thinking much about it, you come to know and get interested in entire place's development after a while."

"I see," Jake nodded. "That makes sense, even if I can't fully relate. I'm more of quickly in and out type of guy who, as you said, leaves power vacuums in my wake."

"Hey, who hasn't gone a bit overboard and overdone a hunting trip a little here and re?" Keerla continued to joke.

"It can definitely be hard to avoid, but in my defense, it's not my fault y give so much experience," Jake said with a smile, happy to see Keerla appreciate his somewhat dark humor.

While it had certainly taken a while, ir two dinner hosts had finally begun to properly loosen up, and by time y finished ir first meal, atmosphere was a lot less tense than when y'd started.

two were still cautious and had a few moments when a flash of panic crossed ir faces, but Jake acted as if he hadn't seen and remained polite and friendly. Artemis also did a banger job being a peak C-grade huntress who repeatedly showed couple that Jake wasn't some stuck-up asshole who would get angry if y forgot to put 'Lord' in front of his name.

After finishing first meal, Solana urged Jake to stay seated as Keerla quickly moved to clean up. Jake still considered offering to help, which was when he was once more

reminded he was in a magical multiverse when Keerla just swiped her hand across table, depositing all dirty tableware into her spatial ring.

A few moments later, Solana walked in with four floating bowls surrounding her, dryad looking nervous once more. Beside him, Jake saw Artemis hiding a huge smile, and when he looked at bowls more closely... he realized. It was undeniable when he felt faint reaction from Sense of Malefic Viper.

No... she wouldn't, would she?

mischievous look Artemis gave Jake told him she truly had.

"I hope this doesn't come as a surprise, but this is our first time hosting a member from Order of Malefic Viper," Solana started speaking as bowls slowly lowered mselves down in front of four of m.

"Wanting to be good hosts, two of us agreed that we would try to tailor menu to taste of Chosen. Through prayer and what little research we could do, I made this dish, which I hope Lord Thayne will appreciate, even if it certainly isn't up to his usual standards."

Jake looked down as he saw bowl of mushroom soup emanating toxic energy.

"Of course, three of us aren't as capable as Chosen, so I prepared se," Solana continued, making several small bottles float down and land in front of each person. Within was some kind of antitoxin.

"Simply add until toxic energy is entirely eliminated, or keep as much of it as you desire to add a little extra spice," dryad finished her speech that Jake was fairly certain was at least semi-rehearsed.

Before Jake could say anything, Artemis spoke up.

"What a wondrous idea!" she said in a cheery tone, looking at Jake. "How thoughtful, and doesn't it just look delicious! Wouldn't you agree, Lord Thayne?"

Jake put on a forced smile as he saw dryad and high elf across from him look back with hopeful eyes. Seeing that... what kind of monster would Jake be to speak up negatively? "Yeah, it's definitely not something I saw coming..."

"See?" Keerla said, nudging Solana with her elbow. "I told you we couldn't go wrong with divine guidance!"

"Divine guidance, huh?" Jake said, keeping up his smile.

Keerla confirmed proudly, as Artemis leaned forward.

“You never go wrong following advice of Mistress of Hunt,” she shamelessly praised herself.

“Definitely not. wisdom of a god is incomparable to that of us mortals, so it’s only natural if ideas are also top-notch!” Keerla nodded enthusiastically, turning to look at Jake, her gaze full of expectation.

Noticing Solana also looked at him, he knew what y wanted as Jake resigned himself to his destiny and picked up spoon. Taking a good scoop, Jake put it in his mouth, chewed a few times, and swallowed.

mushrooms in soup had been cut into fine slices, and mushrooms mselves had a meaty texture. Toxicity-wise, it indeed wasn’t anything to write home about, but two clearly had gone out of ir way to find relatively rare life-affinity poisons unique to Panon of Life, as Jake detected four entirely new poisonous mushrooms he’d never had before.

As for taste? It... wasn’t bad. problem was, again, Jake compared it to his own version of mushroom soup, which was just moss and mushrooms thrown wholesale into a bowl of water, sometimes even still with a bit of dirt mixed in for extra flavor.

After watching Jake eat, all eyes were on him for his reaction. Keerla and Solana were full of hope and expectation, while Artemis looked mischievous as hell, not even trying to hide that she’d been one to plant idea of serving him mushroom soup.

Alas... Jake truly didn’t have much of a choice in how he reacted. His mom had taught him too good table manners for that.

“It’s delicious, definitely better than usual mushroom soup I sometimes eat,” Jake said, being completely honest while not seeing need to mention he despised eating mushrooms in first place and would never do it if not for Palate.

“I’m delighted that Chosen of Malefic One has such praise for my cooking,” Solana said with a big smile as she also motioned for ors to dig in.

Of course, y all added ir antitoxin to soup first, in order not to poison mselves. However, Keerla chose to be brave and didn’t fully detoxify her soup, giving food a little extra kick.

Again, level of toxicity wasn’t at level where it could harm C-grades. As crafter of meal, potency of toxin was limited to Solana. Considering that, it was only to be expected that she wasn’t capable of crafting anything that could truly hurt those at or around peak C-grade.

“Who doesn’t enjoy a good mushroom soup once in a while?” Artemis said after a little while of silence. Jake guessed the two dinner hosts had purposefully given him time to truly enjoy the special meal.

“Not part of my usual palate, but certainly a novel experience,” Solana said, Jake getting the vibe she personally wasn’t a huge fan.

Keerla just nodded as she ate in silence, Jake unable to tell if her distorted face was a result of her disliking the meal or because she was purposefully poisoning herself.

Jake, feeling pressured to do so, finished his mushroom soup like a good dinner guest, consoling himself that this could technically count as training. When he was done and Jake believed he was in the clear, Artemis looked over at his empty bowl.

“Done already?” she asked, a sense of dread flooding over Jake, as he already knew what was coming next. “Perhaps you could ask for seconds, seeing as you enjoyed it that much?”

“I do have more in the kitchen,” Solana said with a big smile that Jake couldn’t refuse as he internally sighed while handing over his bowl, with Artemis full of glee beside him.

“Yes, please... and if you could also bring another bowl for Diana, I’m sure she would appreciate it,” Jake said, unwilling to go down alone.

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Chapter 1177 - Just Dessert

Jake truly understood why the Palate of the Malefic Viper increased endurance after finishing the main course, because keeping up a happy face while enduring emptying of Solana’s entire pot of poisonous mushrooms was no easy feat.

Luckily, he got a little help from Artemis, whom he dragged along into the gates of hell by his side. Solana and Keerla were both done with the mushroom soup after only one bowl, with Keerla needing to down the antitoxin toward the end of hers as she was not feeling super well, so both of them were definitely happy to see Jake and Artemis eat with such gusto.

Unfortunately, Jake still ended up taking the brunt of it, but in the end, the entire bowl of mushroom soup was finished. Seeing how happy Solana was as she went to fill that last bowl of soup nearly made it worth the suffering.

Nearly.

Annoyingly, Artemis didn't raise a fuss at all but acted like a perfect dinner guest who loved menu. It was almost infuriating, but Jake couldn't even tell if she genuinely liked soup or not. If he didn't have his own inherent bias that it was a meal from depths of hell, he would have perhaps even guessed she actually liked it.

Putting down spoon after final mouthful, Jake kept up his smile of lies as he spoke more words filled with twisted truths.

"Yep, I can definitely confirm that's best mushroom soup I've had. Thanks for making it," Jake said, once more not technically lying. He was grateful that Solana and Keerla had subjected mselves to eating mushroom soup in an attempt to make Jake happy, even if y had done so under false pretenses.

"Yes, it was certainly a dish to remember," Artemis, architect of this culinary act of terrorism, added with an innocent smile.

"I'm glad you two liked it so much," Solana said, seeming a lot calmer now than when y'd eaten mushroom soup. Jake could only begin to imagine how devastated she would have been if Jake had rejected her hard work, once more confirming to him that his suffering had been worth it.

"I repeat, never doubt Mistress of Hunt!" Keerla added happily as she began to clean up bowls.

Artemis nodded to that statement, making Jake throw her a glance. She looked back at him, all smiles, fully aware of what he'd done. Perhaps this little prank was her way of getting back at Jake for convincing her to do this in first place, or maybe it was just her being playful. Eir way, Jake would get his payback, one way or anor.

"I hope it's fine if we take a little break before desserts," Solana said as she walked back into room and motioned toward room next to m. "It would be an honor if you would join us in living room for some snacks and relaxation."

Again, it seemed a bit rehearsed, but it had definitely gotten more casual than when y'd first gotten re, so that was progress.

"We would be glad to," Jake said, as he and Artemis followed Keerla to next room as Solana brought in snacks and different beverages. Sitting down on comfy sofa, joined by Artemis beside him, all four soon found mselves sitting.

"Lord Thayne, do you know how much longer you plan on staying in Panon of Life?" Solana asked, getting conversation started, though she quickly seemed to realize her words could be interpreted in a negative way. "Not to say I wish you'd leave! I'm merely curious."

"I have a few projects here I plan on finishing up, but once that's done, I'll return to Order of Malefic Viper for a while," Jake answered, ignoring panicked apology. "After that, I should really return to my own universe and check on my home galaxy. While I do believe in people I entrusted running things to, showing up once in a while would probably still be best."

"Did you really conquer an entire galaxy while only in C-grade?" Keerla asked, looking a little skeptical.

"Eh, just planets with enlightened species on m," Jake clarified. "However, it's pretty understood that of major multiversal factions, I'm one who won battle. I'm fully aware that re definitely still live beings, especially close to center, that are far too powerful for me and every or native."

At center of every galaxy was a massive black hole that all solar systems revolved around, and closer one got to this black hole, greater mana density tended to grow. It wouldn't be surprising if A and perhaps even an S-grade or two could be found close to galaxy's center, though Jake wasn't sure if Milky Way Galaxy was large enough to spawn S-grades.

"I see... yeah, that makes a lot more sense," Keerla nodded. "I wonder how new declaration of friendship will impact your galaxy and planet. Seeing as it's ruled by Order of Malefic Viper, it wouldn't be weird if a lot more people from Panon of Life would start going re."

"Small clarification," Jake added. "I'm one who officially rules it. Not Order of Malefic Viper. Sure, y are involved, but it's m helping me and not me conquering galaxy for m."

"And before you ask, no, that's not mere semantics," Artemis said, having seen through ir two hosts' thoughts. "Order of Malefic Viper is not only faction with ruling power over galaxy. Instead, from my understanding, it's more a council of sorts, involving several influential World Leaders and powerful individuals. Order's true role is powerful backing that ensures no or faction dares to try to take control."

Solana listened and slowly nodded. "I have a hard time wrapping my mind around how such an arrangement truly works, but I guess things are a lot different with restrictions still placed upon universe."

"Oh, yeah, for sure," Jake nodded. "It is opening up slowly, though. Speaking of, once it's opened up to those at your level, you two are free to come for a visit. I would be remissnot to return hospitality."

"It would be an honor," Solana said, slightly bowing her head.

"No expectations or pressure, just an open invitation," Jake clarified.

“Not going would be silly,” Keerla chuckled. “Especially to your galaxy. mere fact that we even know so much about your galaxy shows how it’s become a maelstrom of Records.”

“Oh, definitely, which is likely also why so many or factions have been annoying,” Jake chuckled, shaking his head as he ate a small biscuit from snack table, which immensely helped get taste of mushroom out of his mouth.

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two looked a little uncomfortable shit-talking or major multiversal factions, which was likely why Solana tried changing topic a little.

“If it’s not too much to ask, what kind of projects have you been up to during your visit to Panon of Life? Besides hunting, of course,” dryad asked curiously.

“No, it’s totally fine,” Jake put her worries to rest. “I’ve delved into some of resources provided by Panon of Life to upgrade some skills, and recently I’ve been working on a big ritual I won’t share details of. Besides that, se projects are pretty much just all training in preparation for my B-grade evolution.”

“I see,” Solana nodded, seemingly thinking about his answer a lot more than Jake saw any need to.

“Do you have any big goals you want to achieve before evolving?” Keerla asked, leaning forward. “To you, it may sound a little silly, but I want to successfully hunt a B-grade before I evolve. With just Solana and me.”

“That’s a good goal,” Jake said, not joking around at all. Based on what he’d seen from two, y should be able to do it, even if it would be hard, making it a worthwhile goal.

“And now you’re about to tell me your way loftier one,” Keerla chuckled.

“I want to solo hunt a True Dragon,” Jake said, a confident smile on his lips.

Solana and Keerla both stared at him for a solid two seconds before Keerla started full-on laughing. Solana looked a bit panicked and motioned for Keerla to stop, but elf was too amused as she kept shaking her head.

“If any or C-grade had told me that with a straight face, I would be sure y were just yanking my chain, but if it’s you... Yeah, that’s definitely a goal worthy of someone like you,” Keerla said encouragingly.

“But it won’t be easy and not a task to be taken lightly,” Artemis added, speaking as both her genuine self and her current role.

"Definitely not," Jake shook his head. "Which is why a fair number of my preparations are in part to achieve this goal. I'm working on making a Dragonbane poison, and just recently, I even got a sweet upgrade to my weapon that'll surely help with hunt."

Mentioning bow, Jake subtly threw Artemis a glance to see if talking about it was perhaps a bad idea, but based on her look, it wasn't a big deal if Jake wanted to flex his World Tree bow.

"Oh? A new bow?" Keerla asked with interest. "Can... can I see it? I would also show you my epic rarity bow, but I'm afraid I would only be embarrassing myself." IF YOU WANT TO READ MORE CHAPTERS, PLEASE VISIT *novel·fire·net*

"I'm not a snob when it comes to having good gear," Jake said with a shrug. In most cases, for someone like Keerla, difference was negligible in first place, especially when it came to armor. y wouldn't be able to as easily "cap out" capabilities of ir equipment, while Jake far more often found himself bottlenecked by his gear.

"But if you want to see it, sure," Jake said as he waved his hand and summoned his Apex Hunter's bow. Keerla's gaze was laser-focused on it from moment it was summoned, her eyes wide.

"Can... can I touch it?" she asked nervously.

"Sure, but don't try to infuse energy or anything. It can get a bit fussy if people do that," Jake warned her.

Keerla nodded as she touched bow with a single finger. She dragged it along body of bow and even leaned forward to smell wood. With shaky hands, she picked it up and tried to hold it, but she seemed intimidated just from having it in her hands, making her quickly put it down.

high elf took a deep breath as she kept looking at bow. "That... isn't a normal weapon. Not in slightest."

"I would hope not," Jake chuckled, delighted to see his new weapon praised that much. "If it were, it would be an insult to Yggdrasil, Nature's Attendant, and myself."

His comment earned him a few more stares as Jake elaborated. "Due to certain circumstances, both of m wanted to do me a favor, which ended up being m helping me with creating this bow. wood comes half from a bow I already had, granted directly by system, and or from Yggdrasil. As for string, I had help of Artemis."

This elaboration only made m stare even more, and Solana even lowered her head a little, seemingly unsure if she should be bowing toward an item that could be categorized as divine in nature. Keerla was a bit of same as she stared down at her hands that had touched bow earlier.

After a little while, Solana was first to get herself together as she lowered her head and bowed. "Thank you for allowing us to see this marvel of creation."

"You're overdoing that politeness thing again," Jake pointed out. Things had just been going so well before, and everyone had really lightened up.

"Cut me some slack," Artemis said, shaking her head. "It's your fault for bringing out something like that. How about you show off your Sin weapon next?"

More stares, but at least her interjection had managed to lighten mood a little bit while giving Jake chance to put bow back in his spatial storage. Once it was gone, two seemed to visibly relax, making Jake realize that perhaps a bit of that divine aura still lingered on bow, based on how nervous it had made two.

"Seriously, thanks for letting me see it," Keerla smiled after a few seconds. "I'm a bowyer by trade, and just seeing something like that made me feel as if I've improved my level of craftsmanship. I can almost feel Records coursing through my Truesoul. Okay, not really, but I like to imagine thought."

"No problem," Jake said, returning her smile as he ate another cookie, giving Solana a look. "These are damn good. Did you bake them yourself?"

He already knew she had been one to bake them, but he still asked to nicely bring her back into conversation. It worked wonderfully.

"Huh? Yes, yes I did, and I'm glad Lord Thayne likes them," dryad said, having been given chance to clear her head a little.

"Not as good as soup, though," Artemis said with a bright smile.

Jake just smiled in return as he ate another cookie. He would get his revenge someday; he just had to figure out how and when.

Having switched to lighter subjects, four of them stayed in living room and talked a while longer. Jake primarily asked questions about how it was living in Panon of Life and about territory as a whole, while their two dinner hosts asked Jake about some of his exploits and also finally got whole story about what had happened back in Hunting Ground.

They were quite surprised, and Keerla even chuckled when Jake mentioned Rainbowfear Sovereign refusing to fight Jake. Two were even more surprised when he spoke about Chimera and how it had been an assassin from Court of Shadows that tried to take Jake down and even dragged him into Shadow Realm.

No, Jake did not mention his brief encounter with Umbra or how he'd gotten his cool new cloak.

Artemis didn't talk a lot but only asked some basic questions here and re. Jake did find some pleasure when Keerla began to ask her about how she'd ended up getting blessed by Artemis and if she'd ever seen Chosen of ir "shared faith."

Did Jake encourage Keerla a little bit to keep asking? Yes, but sadly Artemis was pretty damn good at entire roleplay thing, having perfect answers at every turn. She was so good at telling half-truths that technically weren't lies that it was a little scary.

After Jake had eaten just enough cookies for it not to be considered too impolite, Solana went back to host mode.

"Oh, look at time! We shouldn't forget about desserts," she said, acting all surprised, even if Jake was fairly confident she'd been hyperaware of everything and had just been waiting for a natural lull in conversation to bring up dessert.

"I wouldn't miss it," Jake smiled, even if he felt a faint tinge of fear. If Artemis had also given divine guidance regarding dessert, he was already dreading what was to come.

Solana motioned for m all to stay sitting as she went to kitchen. Jake forced himself not to look at his sphere and instead dedicated all his energy to hoping that he wasn't going to be receiving anor mushroom dish.

dryad returned to living soon after, carrying a large plate. Jake looked over, and to his horror, saw that she had brought a large blue mushroom sticking out of a base made of green moss.

Terror was about to invade Jake's mind as he realized... Sense hadn't reacted. Upon a closer look, he also saw that moss looked slightly off. It was glistening. Moreover, toward bottom of base, re were slight signs of moss... melting.

That's when Jake realized. It wasn't actually a blue mushroom sticking out of moss.

It was a goddamn ice cream cake shaped like that.

And it was best damn dessert he'd ever eaten, with not a trace of actual mushroom anywhere in sight.

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Chapter 1178 - Not One Calm Day

"I was serious about that invitation to visit my planet," Chosen of Malefic Viper said with a smile as he stood right outside house with his partner for dinner, Diana, by his side.

"We'll certainly take you up on offer once it's possible for us to go re," Solana answered with a bow. Not going would be foolishly passing up a great opportunity. She already knew that she and Keerla would have to report everything that had happened during this dinner to ir higher-ups, and chances were that this open invitation would cause both of m to be placed into several courses on diplomacy.

"Thank you for invitation. It was a lovely evening, and food was absolutely wonderful, especially soup," Diana said, nodding her head.

"I'm glad you could come," Solana also bowed to wood elf archer, knowing that woman definitely also had a status far surpassing that of Keerla and herself.

As for mention of mushroom soup... Solana had to admit that while she had done her best, she wasn't very used to working with toxins during cooking, meaning end result hadn't been as good as she'd hoped.

Fortunately, Chosen had enjoyed it enough to finish entire pot. Diana didn't eat as much but also dug in, though Solana expected it was mostly to eat alongside Chosen. Despite her status being a lot higher than irs, she still only had a Divine Blessing, and no one could fault her for wanting to get closer to someone like Lord Thayne. This chapter is updated by *novel·fire·net*

Luckily for her, Lord Thayne did seem to have taken a liking to wood elf.

"Hey, you could pay me back by putting in a good word with Artemis," Keerla smiled shamelessly at Diana.

Solana threw her wife a quick glare that high elf didn't even register as Diana answered with grace.

"I don't doubt she's pleased with how great hosts you are, and I wouldn't be surprised if she'd begin to pay a little extra attention to you going forward. Especially not if you'll be visiting ninety-third universe," peak C-grade wood elf said.

Keerla remained shameless as she placed a hand on Diana's shoulder. "Don't worry, if I make it big, I won't forget about those who helped me get re and will definitely return favor."

"Looking forward to it," Diana chuckled. All Solana could do was be happy that Diana wasn't easily offended. Keerla was quite curt when she felt close to someone, and she'd definitely taken a liking to Diana based on how her etiquette had gone out window.

“Hey, if it’s worth anything, I’ll also put in a good word with Yggdrasil,” Chosen of Malefic Viper said casually as he looked at Solana.

statement was absolutely ludicrous, and if it had come from anyone else, Solana would have laughed at notion that a C-grade could talk to her Patron, Mor Tree, much less have Primordial actually listen. However, seeing as it was Chosen of Malefic One who walked around with a bow created from divine wood donated by Mor Tree... he likely wasn’t joking.

“I’m unworthy of such praise,” Solana said, feeling genuinely awkward even thinking about someone as insignificant as her being mentioned to leader of Panon of Life.

“If you feel that way, n work towards becoming a person who would be worthy,” Chosen said, keeping same casual tone despite his words.

“I’ll do my utmost,” Solana bowed again, unsure what to say. Chosen seemed happy with her response as he smiled.

“In case I hadn’t said it... Thank you for hosting us. It was indeed a lovely evening, and I hope we meet again. Perhaps in my home next time. I’m not best chef, but hey, I know how to order catering,” Lord Thayne said in a tone that made Solana unsure if he was joking or not.

“He’s not joking, in case you’re wondering,” Diana dispelled Solana’s internal thoughts, something she’d done several times prior already throughout evening. Truly, she had a great understanding of Chosen.

“It would be an honor to visit your abode,” Solana bowed.

“Yeah, definitely not going to say no to that,” Keerla agreed in less polite words, but at least she also bowed respectfully.

“Just one rule,” Lord Thayne said with a smile. “No bowing all time on my planet, alright?”

“We’ll try to keep that in mind,” Solana said, hurriedly straightening her back.

“I’ll be seeing you later, n,” Chosen of Malefic Viper nodded as he turned to leave.

“You two have a great night, and I’m sure we’ll meet again,” Diana also gave m a nod as she threw Keerla a look, likely because y both shared a Patron.

Solana was about to bow again, but stopped herself as she joined Keerla in waving at two as y left. Right around when it got sufficiently awkward to stay re waving, she and Keerla went back into ir house. Closing door, Solana threw her wife a look.

"We survived."

"More than survived... that went great!" Keerla said with a huge smile. "At least I don't think we'll get purged for having offended Chosen of Malefic Viper. We even got an invitation to visit his planet, something you said higher-ups are hoping this declaration of friendship would make easier, and here we are with an open invitation."

"It certainly went a lot better than expected," Solana said with a slow nod, genuinely surprised things had gone that well.

"We definitely got lucky he brought along Diana," Keerla sighed. "She rocked. Without her, things would have been super awkward, especially in beginning."

"She was indeed skilled in conversation and reading social cues," Solana wholeheartedly agreed. "And you still don't remember having heard of her before? C-grades with Divine Blessings are relatively rare, and if she managed to get this close to Chosen of Malefic Viper, I'm surprised re hasn't been more talk about her."

"Nope, never even heard of anyone with that name having a Divine Blessing of Mistress," Keerla shook her head. "But that isn't super surprising. A lot of those with Divine Blessings are in specialized hunting squads or lone hunters that aren't very public."

"I guess," Solana sighed. As a follower of Mor Tree, Solana definitely had a way better understanding of influential mortals who held high-level Blessings of her Patron, but even she wouldn't dare claim she knew about all C-grades with Divine Blessings of her Patron.

"Hey... do you think those two are toger?" Keerla asked after thinking for a moment.

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"I think re's something going on for sure," Solana speculated. "most likely scenario is that Artemis and Mor Tree both pushed for Diana to get closer to Chosen of Malefic Viper during his stay here, and he decided to take her up on offer to enjoy some female companionship."

"So you think y're just banging?" Keerla asked curtly. "I feel like y had pretty good chemistry, and Lord Thayne didn't treat her as just a temporary plaything... n again, he was all-around way nicer than I thought Chosen of Malefic Viper could possibly be."

Solana threw Keerla a glare for potentially blasphemous statement, making Keerla shrug.

"What? You were thinking exact same thing."

“Some thoughts are best kept as just that: thoughts,” Solana said, shaking her head. “As for true nature of ir relationship? Who are we even to speculate? All I will say is that if she does manage to become one of his recognized partners, Panon of Life would be more than pleased.”

“But for now, you think y’re just banging,” Keerla reiterated.

“I never said that,” Solana crossed her arms.

“But you were thinking it,” Keerla smiled cheekily. “And for record, I’m gonna make a wild prediction... I think y’re already totally an item, and things are just kept under wraps for now. In fact, I wouldn’t be surprised if this entire Declaration of Friendship was partly made on grounds that two are toger.”

Solana just stared at Keerla for a few seconds. “Sometimes, your wild ories do really drift into territory of conspiracy ories.”

“Hey, I think I’m right,” Keerla chuckled. “Don’t underestimate intuition of a hunter. re’s definitely more going on between those two than meets eye.”

Jake and Artemis walked through streets for a little while until Godqueen teleported m both back to Jake’s residence. Back in familiar and private surroundings, Jake turned to Artemis.

“You nearly started a war between Panon of Life and Order of Malefic Viper today.”

“And I did so with not a single shred of regret,” Artemis answered in a stoic tone, returning his gaze.

two looked at each or for a few seconds before Jake chuckled and shook his head. “You seriously convinced Keerla that serving mushrooms would be a great idea?”

“Sure did,” Artemis nodded, bereft of shame.

“What would you have done if I’d raised a fuss or complained?”

“I knew you wouldn’t,” Godqueen smiled. “Even if every single meal had comprised only mushrooms and moss, you wouldn’t have said anything. You might have been unable to hide your dissatisfaction, but if Solana asked you directly if you enjoyed meal, you would have forced a smile and nodded.”

Jake glared at Artemis. “I’m not going to disagree, but fact you knew how I would react only makes betrayal worse, and you do know that I’m gonna get you back for it, right?”

“Oh, I’m already looking forward to seeing what you come up with,” Artemis said, her demeanor making Jake believe she was serious.

Not wanting to harp on with subject, Jake changed it. "I need to ask... am I only one surprised everything went so smoothly?"

"What do you mean?" Artemis asked, having somehow not expected that question.

"You know, nothing weird happened. We just went re, ate, had a good time, and went home. biggest happening was you pulling a prank and me perhaps going overboard by being unable to hold myself back from showing off my new bow," Jake explained.

"Yeah?" Artemis said, continuing to look perplexed. "I can see why y would have been nervous of anything going awry, seeing as y were hosting Chosen of Malefic Viper and his mysterious companion for night, but why are you surprised things went as expected?"

"Because y usually don't?" Jake asked, now confused about why y weren't both confused. "Your real identity somehow wasn't revealed, and no or gods had done anything to mess with things. Shit, I'd halfway expected Minaga to show up halfway through, acting offended at not having gotten an invitation. Oh, or maybe it would turn out ir neighbor was secretly a group of assassins from Court of Shadow that would try to catch me off guard. It could also be that Duskleaf or Nature's Attendant suddenly needed one of us or something like that, resulting in m teleporting into dining room halfway through main course. You know, I just expected *something* to go wrong."

Artemis stared at Jake for several seconds, a look of genuine concern on her face. "I'm almost beginning to understand why you're not a fan of social events if that's how you expect m all to go..."

"Well, not all of m," Jake muttered.

"Most times, events are surprisingly uneventful. y are predictable. Sure, all those things *could* have happened, but chance would be ridiculously low," Artemis shook her head. "Even if chaotic gods like All-God Legion surely do skew things toward unpredictability."

Jake was quiet for a little while as he wondered if perhaps reason things usually went wrong was because of something Jake did or if he had just gotten unlucky. Sure, sometimes he could definitely pin things on Villy, such as time he went eating with Scarlett and Primordial decided to roleplay a waiter, but he couldn't put it all on Villy. Maybe explanation instead was that Artemis had been re and had helped Jake not say something that would have led to something major happening?

In end, Jake just sighed. "I guess you got a point... not every social garing turns into day being overly eventfu-"

As if on cue, gateway in Jake's temporary residence activated, and out stumbled a small, familiar, cat-like creature. Jake hadn't even turned his head to look with his eyes before he noticed something was wrong.

Before he could even use One Step, Artemis teleported him alongside herself to appear at gateway where Jake saw Jasper. Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher was covered in bloody wounds all over his body, and Jake felt that peak C-grade had suffered severe damage not only to his body but his soul. At same time, Jake saw little guy's body shimmer with constant energy, letting him know some kind of boosting skill was still going.

"Jasper, what hell happened?" Jake said as he hurried to take out a health potion and force-fed little guy.

"Me... treasure," Jasper said after drinking potion, making Jake notice what Shimmerfur was holding.

Between his small paws, Jasper held a weird multi-colored crystal about size of a fist that gave off an odd and unsettling aura. Jake had been too busy looking at Jasper's state at first to notice it, but now that he was looking at it, Jake knew it wasn't anything simple.

A quick Identify confirmed Jake had severely underestimated what he was looking at.

[Supreme Jewel of Drifting Planes (Mythical)] – A natural treasure born in a small world drifting between universes. This jewel passively emanates a unique aura belonging to that of Drifting Planes, allowing any monster below A-grade within to experience rapid growth. Has a myriad of alchemical uses, but must be approached with caution due to potency of its inherent energy. WARNING: Due to being separated from Drifting Planes, this jewel will soon start to decay and leak energy rapidly. Estimated time until instability reaches critical threshold: 6 days, 1:29:05

"How ..." Jake muttered, but he didn't get furr as his attention was still on Jasper. healing potion had helped Warpsnatcher's wounds start healing, but Jake felt that it was far from enough.

Artemis, who also looked down at Jasper with concern, spoke and said something Jake already suspected. "He's suffered severe soul injuries from overdraft."

"Can you help?" Jake asked, already aware of what answer would be.

"No, not with this kind of injury. Not when it's caused by backlash," Artemis shook her head. "It's not something external sources can heal."

"Escape... hard," Jasper said, still holding tightly onto jewel. "Needed... treasure. Sorry."

Artemis, who had a hand on Jake's shoulder, transferred her voice into his mind. *"This is more than simply overspending himself. He took severe damage to his soul from external attacks while it was already harmed by his own doing... if he fully deactivates current boosting skill he's using, I fear permanent damage would be a best-case scenario."*

Frowning, Jake asked Jasper straight-up: "Can you evolve now?"

Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher nodded slowly.

"How long can you hold on with your boosting skill?"

Jasper, who was already looking tired, seemed to realize what Jake was saying as he acted tough. "Enough."

With determination, Jake nodded and threw Artemis a quick look. She instantly knew as three of m were teleported down to cavern below palace. Down to where all treasure piles could be found... and ritual circle y had already been integrated with.

"We're moving a bit faster than I had originally planned, but it seems like we don't have a choice," Jake said, looking at Artemis, who was carrying Jasper. She gently placed him in center of ritual circle, where little guy sat up.

Warpsnatcher looked over at Jake with his big eyes, a hint of tiredness in m, but little guy's determination overshadowed it.

"Ready!" Jasper said, trying to sound as strong as possible.

"Alright," Jake nodded, knowing time was tight.

I hope I'm also ready for this, he thought as he initiated ritual, things having moved a lot faster than he would have liked. Alas, he should have known that one doesn't simply have a calm and uneventful day, including a dinner date, if y were called Jake Thayne.

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Chapter 1179 - A Ritual Performed In Haste

ritual slowly began to come alive as lines drawn on ground within cavern, connecting all loot piles, glowed with color of Jake's arcane affinity as he poured in his energy.

Needing a moment to think as ritual began winding to life, Jake closed his eyes and calmed down. He had no idea what fuck was going on or what had happened with Jasper, but he could make an educated guess. Warpsnatcher had gone somewhere called Drifting Planes and stolen jewel from a bunch of far too powerful monsters and barely managed to escape back to Jake's residence using special token Jake had given him.

Jake was also fully aware that for this kind of soul injury, there were very few ways to fix it, but all tended to require either a Transcendent skill or direct involvement from system. Jasper's current situation wasn't that much different from Jake's back during Tutorial when he had overdrafted his own soul to kill King of Forest. Back then, his savior had been system fully healing him upon completion of Tutorial.

Jasper's only real option was doing same thing now, but rather than leaving Tutorial, he could choose to evolve. If he did so before deactivating his boosting skill, none of soul damage would be permanent; however, if he deactivated it, chances were his option to evolve in first place would disappear due to soul damage.

Perhaps that had been why Jasper had dared this kind of heist in first place. He wanted to use system as a perfect healing tonic should he overexert himself. Likely, he had returned with intent of evolving down in cavern amongst his treasures, as Jasper had told Jake prior that he needed to evolve there.

It was a long shot, but maybe Warpsnatcher had even considered that Jake could help should something go awry. No matter what, he doubted Jasper had planned on suffering his current injuries, as state of little guy was quite horrid.

Ultimately, whatever thoughts Jasper had didn't matter anymore. Things were clearly messed up, and if Jake wanted to pull off this ritual to help Jasper, he needed to do it now or never.

Jake opened his eyes once more when he felt his arcane mana had properly propagated throughout entire ritual circle. At least part of it he needed to activate for this first part. Many piles of loot collected by Jasper over a long period of time began emanating energy, and Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher in middle did his part as he started greedily absorbing portions of this energy.

As a reminder, Jasper had always planned to absorb Records and energy from his stash during evolution process. It was standard practice for Shimmerfur Warpsnatchers to do so, as sudden infusion of Records right before evolving could help achieve a better evolution and even help guide direction of evolution somewhat based on nature of consumed loot.

Consuming powerful natural treasures before a big evolution wasn't anything weird for all monsters. In fact, many only became able to evolve in first place due to consuming

some extremely powerful natural treasure, and when he looked at Supreme Crystal of Drifting Planes held tightly, Jake began to suspect this was one such item.

"Tell me a bit about that crystal Jasper brought back," Jake said to Artemis as he continued guiding ritual.

"It's from Drifting Planes, which is a common name given to a collection of minor worlds that exist outside of regular universes. Some believe Drifting Planes were once a single large world, but were at some time broken apart and became many fragmented smaller worlds it is now," Artemis began her explanation, adding a lot of fluff Jake didn't need to know, but when factoring in she was delivering entire speech in less than a second, he didn't complain. In fact, learning more about item and even where it came from would only prove beneficial due to Sagacity of Malefic Viper.

"se Drifting Planes aren't too dissimilar to that world called Yalsten, you talked about. Also similar to Yalsten is that Drifting Planes contain unique energies and treasures born from environment itself. Most valuable are jewels from re, but as se jewels cannot last for long outside of unique environment of Drifting Planes, and y can't even be put in spatial storages, which is why y are most often consumed by creatures within."

Jake listened as he continued working, memorising everything she said.

"In fact, many creatures go to one of se Drifting Planes with an energy intensity suiting m with hopes of obtaining one of se jewels. This is especially true for monsters closing in on an evolution, as it's well known that consuming one can help a monster overcome a wall and be able to evolve. Seeing as Jasper had a mythical version of se jewels, even a peak B-grade would have wanted it. It's a miracle Jasper even obtained one and made it back here."

If Jake's guess was correct, Jasper had completed his evolution quest upon stealing jewel and was indeed planning on using it during evolution. At least that would explain why Warpsnatcher still clung tightly to it even now.

"So, a natural treasure suited even for peak B-grade monsters to consume in preparation for an evolution," Jake nodded.

"A peak B-grade would likely need more than one jewel, but for a C-grade, it's already more than most would be able to handle," Artemis said, her voice calm as she observed everything that was going on with ritual so far.

"Can use?" Jasper asked from center of ritual circle, looking concerned and tired. boosting skill was naturally still going at a maintenance level, but Jake saw wounds his potion had healed before beginning to reemerge, showing that little guy wasn't doing well at all.

"I'm not going to tell you what you can or can't choose during evolution," Jake said to Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher in a serious tone. "You are master of what you become entirely. I'm just here to provide you with an extra boost along way, and while that jewel will certainly affect outcome, we are already in completely unexplored territory, so I can't tell you what effects will be."

This was a conversation y had already had several months ago when Jake and Jasper originally agreed to do this ritual, but he still found it pertinent to give a reminder. Primeval Origin Energy or Jake Juice, as enlightened called it, was something fully beyond Jake's conscious control, and all he could do was faintly guide it.

Jake performing this ritual in first place was in part for him to explore ways he could control energy better. He wanted to better direct it towards helping with evolution, and at least feel as if he had some control over ritual.

To clarify, Jake wanted no control over evolution itself, and he doubted system would allow him to eir. If Jake knew one thing, it was that system was big on choice. Sandy hadn't been forced into becoming space worm y were today, but could have chosen not to go down that evolutionary Path. All Jake had done was give option.

That remained all Jake hoped to do, though this time without a special system-provided item to function as catalyst to make it happen. Instead, he would infuse his Primeval Origin Energy into Jasper through many loot piles in a quasi-direct fashion.

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A few minutes passed as Jake ensured everything was as it should be, and he even found a small error he rapidly fixed on fly as he moved on to next stage. Jasper had already been infused with a lot of energy from his own loot piles, while all Jake had done was lightly assist in process. NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON *novel**fire**net*

Now it was time for him to take a far more involved role.

"Be ready, Jasper," Jake said, keeping his tone and demeanor serious. "I'll begin to slowly introduce Primeval Origin Energy into ritual. Remember, even if you feel like you want to evolve, wait till I'm done or tell you to go ahead... or until you can't hold on any longer and just need to go for it."

Jasper nodded, small movement clearly painful. It was clear Warpsnatcher's body was deteriorating at a more rapid pace than Jake had first feared, and it was even beginning to turn stiff.

Pushing things along, Jake sought deep within himself and touched upon pool of energy that usually remained hidden away and guarded by his Bloodline. At his behest,

it answered as Jake slowly felt Primeval Origin Energy surface and enter his body right from where his heart was.

deep rhythmic sound of his heartbeat echoed in Jake's mind as slightest tinge of energy exited his fingertips and mixed with his arcane energy to enter ritual circle. As his heartbeat slowly sped up as more and more energy wormed its way out, it apparently became audible as Artemis looked at Jake with a mix of interest and concern.

"Jake, would it be alright if I informed or parties that may be interested in observing and lowered barrier of palace to allow this?" Artemis asked Jake a moment later, having seemingly remembered that perhaps this was something y should do. *"I'll make sure to inform m that y should only observe without revealing mselves and not-"*

"I don't care," Jake spoke out loud, not boring with telepathy. Despite it not looking like he was doing a lot, Jake was very focused in that moment, and he didn't have time to think about much else as he struggled to ensure Primeval Origin Energy and his arcane affinity properly mixed.

Usually, he would use Jake Juice by directly infusing it into items he held in his hand or, at very least, into an object not too far away. Now, he had to make energy travel through lines of magic circle, through loot piles, and into Jasper. All while keeping it tightly wrapped in his arcane energy, as that was only thing that could contain his Jake Juice without making it affect stuff around it.

He was reasonably sure that if he poured Primeval Origin Energy into ground haphazardly, it would alter soil in some way, but ultimately end up completely wasting valuable energy. That's why he had to ensure it got to its destination in one piece.

At same time, Jake also wanted to subtly affect Primeval Origin Energy somewhat. One of Jake's biggest fears when using his unique energy was that he would accidentally end up turning someone into a living calamity. With Demon Prince, it had been a bit too close for comfort, and memory of Temlat, his first and perhaps only disciple he would ever have, still lingered in back of Jake's mind as a cautionary tale.

That's why Jake wanted to influence Primeval Origin Energy to be more, well, stable. He knew energy was incredibly volatile by nature, but he hoped that by mixing it with some of his stable arcane energy, he would turn it gentler and more controlled. Jake already knew that re were certain similarities between his Jake Juice and arcane affinity, and he hoped that would smooth process.

As expected, Jake also soon noticed that a few more eyes had found mselves observing orwise unassuming cavern in last few seconds after Artemis lowered barrier around palace meant to stop m from doing so. He instantly clocked observers as Yggdrasil, Duskleaf, Nature's Attendant, and two separate Minagas. Villy was naturally also observing, but he had done so since beginning.

Several more minutes passed as entire aura in room began to change. Despite not a single iota of Primeval Origin Energy leaking, it still affected its surroundings slightly, and Artemis clearly felt it. Needless to say, so did Jasper, who was in center of it all and had continually been absorbing energy and Records like a champ so far.

However... now was time to get serious. Jake Juice had been flowing for a while, and he felt confident in controlling it better now. Additionally, while he couldn't be certain, he had a feeling that introduction of concept of stability had worked at least somewhat.

Perhaps more importantly, Jasper was struggling despite his apparent success. Absorbing all that energy while also keeping his boosting skill active was taking a constant toll that was only getting worse with time. While Jake wasn't entirely clear on Warpsnatcher's state, he knew he had to hurry things up or everything would be for naught.

"Jasper, prepare yourself; we're entering final stage," Jake said as he took a deep breath.

Right before Jake truly made final push, Jasper did something surprising... small cat-like creature took jewel he had been holding tight until now, and with a struggle, pushed far too large item into his mouth. Somehow, he managed to get jewel all way in, fully consuming it despite seemingly physical impossibility of act.

At that moment, Jake began to wonder if he could even dare to call himself reckless, because a C-grade consuming a mythical rarity natural treasure made for B-grades was definitely up re with Jake trying to eat a fragmented World Core using Palate.

He also knew that now he *really* had to hurry. With a final deep breath, Jake activated Invocation of Malefic Viper and empowered Sagacity, granting him even more control over entire ritual circle.

That's also when Jake learned something else. Sagacity made items better based on his Records and knowledge related to crafting process, and this seemingly had quite effect on his Primeval Origin Energy.

He didn't have time to consider any of this, though, as he was too busy pouring in a flood of Primeval Origin Energy. Jake's heartbeat sped up and became audible enough for even Jake to hear it echo throughout cavern.

With every beat, entire ritual circle pulsed with light and power, sending anor surge of energy into Jasper. Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher took it all in like a sponge as one by one, piles of loot around cavern lost ir luster and energy, and every single item lost its energy and thus majority of its Records, all to feed Jasper's evolution.

se piles were emblematic of Jasper's Path. y were all treasure and seemingly insignificant items Warpsnatcher had gared throughout his life and stored in Hunting

Ground. It was culmination of decades, if not more, during which little guy had thieved, collected, and stored everything in an odd formation. After today, all of those piles would become absolutely useless, with many of items even turning to dust as if exposed to desolation. This was something that would have happened even without Jake's ritual, but now, all of those Records were furr influenced by Primeval Origin Energy.

Soon, nearly all piles were fully consumed in ritual. Jake kept focusing on keeping everything going as he raised his gaze and saw something that wasn't good.

Jasper, standing on his two hind legs in center of ritual circle, was still absorbing all energy coming to him, but his state had deteriorated rapidly. All his old wounds were back, many of m leaking blood visually. What's more, his fur had begun to lose its luster, signifying he couldn't keep boosting skill going for much furr.

If it dropped, it would all be over. Jake wanted to say something, but little guy was already swaying as he tried to keep his eyes open and his consciousness intact. Rar than speak, Jake acted as he gritted his teeth hard enough for taste of blood to fill his mouth as he pushed himself as far as he could.

One final heartbeat echoed throughout entire cavern, bringing with it a shockwave of Primeval Origin Energy mixed with his arcane affinity. From perimeter of circular ritual, this energy began travelling inwards, and as it passed through circle, it destroyed entire thing, dragging with it all remaining energy and Records still lingering within.

Upon impacting loot piles, it forced out whatever was left as ritual circle rapidly grew in size before finally striking Jasper in middle. impact was almost physical, and in that brief moment it struck, Jake realized it had been too much for already weakened peak C-grade to handle.

In an instant, luster on Jasper's fur began rapidly fading. boosting skill was no longer active, and Warpsnatcher's eyes lost all focus as y shut closed, little guy falling forward with no signs of consciousness.

Jake's eyes were open wide in disbelief, and he was about to yell something, but just before last hair lost all shine, one of Jasper's eyes barely opened, a faint light within shining right as Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher's entire body disappeared.

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Chapter 1180 - Result of Ritual

Vilastromoz chuckled to himself and shook his head as he couldn't help but find situation funny. Several gods at pinnacle of existence watched on with interest as Jake performed his ritual to assist Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher. His dear Chosen had even given m permission to do this, which was quite a privilege. Even if it couldn't count as a real favor, it was certainly an act that incurred some level of karmic debt, something Jake had no doubt not even considered for a moment. Though, to be fair, he had been rar busy, seeing as Warpsnatcher had been actively in process of dying.

Anyhow, what he found funny was ritual itself. Vilastromoz viewed himself as quite an expert in most things magic, which naturally included formations and ritual circles. Jake's ritual was even one born from his oretical foundation in a skill related to his Path as his Chosen, not that it should matter, seeing as it was just a mere C-grade formation. The source of this content is movel.fire.net

Yet, despite being a measly C-grade formation that looked like drawings of a child to a god, Vilastromoz had been unable to truly detect anything. His observation had gone beyond mere sight, same as all or observing gods, yet all he'd been able to discern was faint sound of a heartbeat echoing throughout cavern and energy moving through ritual circle.

"Not gonna lie, I was a bit worried Jake would end up revealing something related to his Bloodline he shouldn't... but this is just comical," Viper spoke to himself, imagining all or gods watching and having gained no greater insight into Jake's abilities than y had an hour ago.

Sure, y could extrapolate some things, but it was extremely limited. In fact, Vilastromoz guessed that y would view Jake's unique capabilities as Harbinger of Primeval Origins as even more mysterious than before. Shit, y, as y were mere observers, wouldn't even get any Records worth mentioning, meaning only people truly benefiting from ritual were Jake himself, hopefully Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher, Artemis, and naturally Vilastromoz himself.

Granted, one thing had been revealed to all those looking, and that was how simple everything seemed to be. Viper had heard through grapevine that some factions believed that he himself had to construct entire ritual circle with Jake only functioning as a font of power. Now, it was clear to Panon of Life that wasn't case and that as long as Jake decided and had whatever mysterious resource required available, he would be able to pull off ritual on his own.

This information could have been bad to share publicly, but Panon of Life being in know wasn't a bad thing. Yggdrasil and Nature's Attendant certainly wouldn't want to see it widely shared, and seeing as Jake and Artemis were an item, she would naturally come to learn more about his abilities down line, so this was just accelerating timeline a little.

Having said all that, as ritual wound to a close, there was still one important aspect left to consider, and that was the final outcome of everything. It was to discover what Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher had become as a result of Jake's assistance in its evolution.

If it evolved into some living calamity... well, that could be very bad for sure. However, if it turned into a powerful beast that wasn't a threat to everything and everyone merely by existing, this entire scenario would have been nothing more than a brilliant advertisement for why Jake would be someone Panon of Life really wanted to keep as an ally.

--

Jake felt tense all over his body, and not just from extreme energy drain he'd just gone through. For a second there, he thought Jasper had been unable to hold on, but he'd managed to barely last long enough to accept system prompt.

Now, all Jake could do was wait. Truthfully, the time it took for creatures to evolve never made much sense to him. Sometimes, it was practically instant, while other times, it took annoyingly long. Sure, for a person evolving, it took a while, but it was pretty clear by now that time was a relative term, especially when the system got involved.

"Did you succeed?" Artemis asked after a few seconds had passed. She'd seen Jasper disappear, yes, but that didn't necessarily mean Jake had done everything the way he wanted.

The entire ritual circle being destroyed towards the end likely also added to the uncertainty.

"That's hard to say," Jake said, shaking his head. "As I said, this is a first. None of us will truly know before Jasper returns."

"I see," Artemis said as she joined him in his silence as they both waited. If many observers also no doubt would have preferred for it to be an instant process, but alas, the system did as the system did.

Every second just staring at where Jasper had disappeared from was torture, but they didn't have any choice but to exercise patience. Luckily, they didn't have to wait that long before a creature popped into existence.

The evolution had resulted in quite a few changes, even if the overall appearance remained mostly the same. Jasper's body still had a light blue color all over, but the spikes on his back were reduced significantly in length, now also looking a lot smoother than before. His paws were also the same, except now being entirely white underneath.

Size-wise, Jake couldn't tell any difference whatsoever, though his length had increased by a fair deal. A long, thin tail extended up his back, and at the end of it was something that

looked like a small gemstone, though upon closer inspection, Jake realized it was just hair that was shaped oddly.

Overall, his cat-like features had gotten a boost while porcupine ones had been downgraded. He still looked like Jasper, though, and if Jake ever wanted to start a merchandising business selling cute stuffed animals of all creatures he'd helped create with his Bloodline abilities, Jasper would give Sylphie a run for her money. Sandy would definitely be in last place, and as for Vesperia... well, Jake feared anything made in her image appealed to a far different clientele.

Jasper was currently sitting on his butt, naturally also fully healed. Soon enough, he opened his eyes, which was when Jake saw another difference. His pupils had turned into a deep blue color that gave off a faint shine, indicating some kind of ocular skill.

Finally, having completed his physical assessment, Jake used Identify to see what Jasper had become, which didn't go very well.

[?]

Something blocked Jake's Identify. Something Jasper definitely didn't have before. Seeing this, Jake turned to look at Artemis, who was frowning.

"What's wrong?" Jake asked, feeling a bit concerned due to her reaction.

"I found my use of Identify impeded for a moment when I used it..." Artemis muttered.
"On a B-grade?"

Okay, so it turned out that Jasper had a very effective skill at hiding from Identify, but for now, there was something more important to determine.

"Hey, Jasper?" Jake said in a slightly elevated tone to get former Warpsnatcher's attention. So far, little guy had only been sitting there unmoving, almost as if he wasn't even registering his own surroundings.

Taken from , this narrative should be reported if found on Amazon.

However, right after Jake spoke, Jasper turned his head and looked at Jake. Without any warning, he disappeared, only to appear right in front of Jake, both paws raised toward sky.

"Success!"

Despite evolution, his voice remained exactly same, making Jake smile as he squatted down to be closer to house-cat-sized B-grade that had just teleported in a way that didn't involve space magic, which Jake didn't understand in slightest.

“That was a close one,” Jake said as he tried to push his luck a little, primarily on account of how soft Jasper looked. He scratched little guy on his head, but only response he got was ears twitching a bit as B-grade kept looking up at him.

“No risk, no gift!” Jasper said wisely, clearly in a great mood due to his recent evolution.

“True, true. Say, can you do so I can see what your new race is called? You’re blocking me right now.”

“Okay,” B-grade quickly agreed as he closed his eyes tightly and even clenched his small paws in effort, and a few seconds later, Jake got an Identify off, finally seeing what he had created.

[Shimmershroud Planeswarper – lvl ???]

So... yeah, new name, but still one very similar to before. In fact, same was similar enough for Jake to doubt whether he had even succeeded. Jasper was going to evolve no matter what, and while Planeswarper did sound like of cool, one had to remember this was still a B-grade creature, and its names tended to sound pretty nice as long as they weren’t bottom-tier variants.

As for judging Jasper’s aura, things got a little complicated. Jasper was fully suppressing his aura at that moment; in fact, all traces of his presence were entirely gone. Jake felt that if he looked away for a second, he would lose track of where Planeswarper was, and without his Sphere, it wasn’t certain he would have even noticed Jasper had returned from his evolution.

This meant Jake’s only way of judging how strong Jasper was relied on his Bloodline, but because Jasper wasn’t a fighter, it was hard to get a good read. He did get a vibe that little guy wasn’t weak, but he also had that vibe before.

“Do you have any insight as to Jasper’s new race?” Jake asked Artemis with curiosity. He also considered asking Villy, but that would have felt rude considering he already had a god standing right next to him.

Artemis looked at Jasper for a while, studying him closely as Planeswarper stared back at her.

“I do consider myself somewhat well-versed in Shimmerfur variant evolutions as I looked into it recently... and I’ve never come across anything called a Shimmershroud Planeswarper before. I have seen creatures with Planeswarper in its name, though, and they tend to be relatively powerful variants. When it comes to Shimmershroud portion, I’m drawing a blank,” Godqueen answered honestly.

Jasper, who had been staring up at her while she answered, suddenly clapped his paws and motioned toward Artemis. “Not scary!”

It took Jake a moment to realize what Jasper was getting at before he smiled. "So, at least we confirmed that, but I guess we best make completely sure. Hey, Artemis, can you show off your presence a little?"

Artemis didn't even ask if he was sure, as she just sent it. Jasper looked a bit surprised as a aura of a Godqueen fell over two of m, but outside of his initial reaction, he didn't do anything besides stare up at her.

"Yep, alright, it's a hundred percent now," Jake nodded with a smile. "More or less complete aura immunity, at least to a Godqueen. Similar to Sandy, Vesperia, and Sylphie."

"Who?" Jasper asked, tilting his head.

"Ors I helped," Jake answered. "So I guess you are kind of related to m?"

"Family?"

"Something like that, sure," Jake smiled, not wanting to shoot down notion. At least he looked at those three as family, and he had no problem including Jasper in that.

"Family!" Jasper clapped his paws again, once more making it clear that despite having evolved, he was very much still same little guy.

As he spoke with Jasper, Jake also subtly reached out to a certain Primordial and quickly got an answer.

"Shimmershroud Planeswarper also aren't anywhere to be found in my mighty mind palace, so I'm pretty confident in stating that this is eir a first, or reemergence of anor long-dead variant. When it comes to how powerful newly evolved B-grade is, I think you'll find yourself pleasantly surprised. I believe that... Jasper was it? Has a rar unique skill-set, making him quite a creature to deal with if you want to keep your stuff unrobbed," Malefic Viper gladly answered Jake's inquiry.

That answer furr supported prevailing ory that Jasper had become a pretty powerful variant. Of course, being a non-combat monster, it was harder to say how "strong" he was, as usually best way to tell was just a fight.

However, Jasper specialized in getting quickly in and out, and honestly, Jake hadn't been confident in catching an escaping Warpsnatcher, much less a Planeswarper. Monsters specializing in survival and consumption of natural resources were pretty much always able to escape from ors ir level, and with someone like Sandy, y were so durable that Jake felt like fighting m would be a waste of time.

Jasper didn't look particularly durable, but that didn't mean he would be easy to fight. Granted, Jake did have a good matchup considering one of Jasper's main strengths

seemed to be his extremely powerful stealth, something Jake could more or less ignore due to Bloodline shenanigans.

Not to say Jake had any confidence, and just based on that weird teleport earlier, Jake was reasonably certain that Jasper was very good at running away if he so desired. Of course, to really know, Jake wanted to do some tests.

“Hey, Jasper, you up for showing what you can do?” Jake asked Planeswarper as he saw no need to hide his own curiosity or delay learning more about what his latest ritual as a Harbinger of Primeval Origins had brought into multiverse.

“Okay!” Jasper readily agreed as he looked toward way leading upstairs. “Go up?”

“Yeah, we should go somewhere with more space for sure,” Jake nodded before turning to Artemis. “Oh, and let’s get that barrier covering palace back. I believe audience has already gotten show y came for, and re’s no reason to leak what Jasper can do unless he wants to be one doing leaking.”

“That’s fair,” Artemis agreed, and a second later, Jake felt barrier covering palace meant to stop curious observers appear once more. Of course, piercing it for gods like Yggdrasil and Nature’s Attendant was simplicity itself, but y still respected it as Jake felt all gods withdraw.

Besides Villy, but Jake was used to him by now, and if Jasper and Jake ever spent any time toger, snake god would learn all about little guy, anyway.

Jasper, looking between Jake and Artemis, raised his paws up and stood re for a bit.

Jake looked confused, but Artemis didn’t hesitate and quickly moved. She bent down and picked up Jasper with both hands, a big smile on her face as she held little guy like a cat lying on his back in her arms.

“So you evolve to B-grade and suddenly turn lazy?” Jake muttered.

“He nearly died, so he can get a little break,” Artemis defended Jasper as she scratched his stomach, which was when Jake learned that a Shimmershroud Planeswarper could purr.

Turns out that even Godqueens aren’t immune to cute animals, Jake thought as he just motioned for m to head upstairs.

As three of m made ir way upstairs, Jake checked his notifications, which he’d ignored until now, and saw that he had indeed gotten quite a few, with first one in itself being rar interesting.

Congratulations! A new type of ritual has been completed, your assistance resulting in evolution of a C-grade Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher into a B-grade Shimmershroud Planeswarper - A new feat has been accomplished. Bonus experience earned

This notification acknowledged what Jake had done in a surprisingly straightforward way without mincing any words. That was definitely a surprising yet welcome development. Jake's only fear was that simple appearance of notification meant that reward hadn't been substantial; however, it quickly became clear he'd still gained plenty of experience.

'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of Malefic Viper] has reached level 324 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points

...

'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of Malefic Viper] has reached level 327 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 324 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 325 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

Four levels for a ritual made in such haste were more than worth it. Of course, it counted a lot extra that this had been Jake's first time doing a ritual exactly like this, but he reckoned that if he repeated it, he would still get decent experience.

And speaking of repeating it, Jake noticed something else surprising. When he looked inside himself, he expected to feel a sense of emptiness, seeing as he'd poured out quite a bit of Jake Juice during ritual; however, to his surprise, sensation he got wasn't one of emptiness. Sure, he'd spent a decent amount, but...

I feel like I could do anor one or two without any issue... maybe more...

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