

Oracle 761

Chapter 761 I Love You

[Side Mission n°4 : Space Exploration : Leave the planet Quanoth and find out the cause of the impending apocalypse.]

Jake was taken aback when he received this sudden notification. At the beginning of the Ordeal, he had also attempted to fly out of Quanoth to get a broader view, but he hadn't received any assignments at the time. What had changed since the last time?

[Your strength and intent.] Xi answered matter-of-factly in his place.

Indeed, the main difference from before was that he was determined to reach the sun at any cost, whereas last time he had retreated at the first hurdle. Somehow, the Oracle System was able to sense his resolve.

Unless, this mission was too difficult for the old Jake and that showing it to him too soon would have caused him to devote his efforts to a nearly impossible mission, making him risk his life without reaping any benefit. Now that he had a reason to leave the planet, the Oracle had no reason to stop him.

As he entered the black storm clouds of the troposphere, Jake felt a slight resistance from the friction of the air, and his hair stood on end from the static electricity. With his normal eyesight, he could barely see the tip of his nose, and without his Myrtharian Eyes he would have been totally blind.

RUMBLE!

By the time Jake heard the clap of thunder, the lightning had already struck him. He had not activated his Oracle Shield and was hit by the full brunt of the electric blast. His body began to crackle, arcs of electricity streaking across the surface of his skin, but apart from a persistent buzzing in his eardrums he was unharmed.

" For fuck's sake, I almost had a heart attack!" Jake cursed angrily, his left hand resting on his thumping heart.

[Last time you didn't have to activate your Oracle Shield before entering the stratosphere]. Xi remarked with a worried tone. [Those black clouds are floating lower than before.]

"Hmm..." Jake frowned, hesitating to activate his Oracle Shield right away.

In the end, he gave up on the idea altogether. Only the heavens knew how many kilometers thick this atmosphere was. The later he activated his Oracle Shield, the more Aether he would save and the better his chances of success.

Bracing himself for more lightning strikes, Jake endured a deluge of lightning bolts during his ascent and the last ones, he had to admit, stung a bit... When he finally reached the upper boundary of the troposphere to cross into the stratosphere, his appearance was already a sight to behold.

His silky gold-silver hair was disheveled and slightly charred, while his skin was covered with third degree burns, its black and charred color telling a lot about the high voltage of these electrocutions. As for his already battered armor, Jake had been forced to put it away in his Space Storage. Perhaps

because of the material, but it acted like a lightning magnet and the number of lightning strikes had decreased by half as soon as he got rid of it.

'If this was the me from three months ago, I would have been badly injured. Maybe not enough to kill me, but plenty enough to fry my brain and make me pass out.' Jake concluded as he finally broke through the stratosphere.

The fact that he had resisted the urge to activate his Oracle Shield accounted for some of his injuries, but the true reason was that these dark clouds were not the same as before. Three months earlier, he had only encountered these clouds from the stratosphere, whereas this time he had encountered them a few kilometers after leaving the ground.

This boded ill for the upper layers of the atmosphere.

Resolute, Jake did not slow down and even accelerated again, deciding to fearlessly face the danger. He instantly sensed the shift in surroundings.

From the slight friction of the air that barely slowed him down, he felt like he had just dived headfirst into a quagmire given the compactness of these clouds. If three months earlier, the black clouds of the stratosphere were like soaked cotton, these clouds were practically like solid ground on a rainy day.

If the lowest altitude and the dangerousness of these clouds keep increasing so fast, the apocalypse was indeed only a matter of time. He predicted that within three months, these clouds would touch the ground and 95% of the population would be forced to migrate northward. In four months, only aberrations like Jake would be able to survive.

He also remembered the giant three-headed bird he had encountered during his first attempt to fly outside the atmosphere and it reminded him that there might also be some beasts perfectly adapted or invulnerable to these environments, but logically they should be the minority.

Luckily, Jake did not come across any flying monstrosities this time. Not at this altitude anyway, or he would have been in trouble.

CRACK!

The lightning bolt that struck him this time shook his brain so hard that he was momentarily stunned and when he recovered he found that he had plummeted several hundred meters.

"The true challenge is starting now." Jake muttered to himself as he traced Words of Power on his charred skin to increase his defenses, aerodynamics and velocity.

At the same time, he turned on his Silver Stone Skin, his skin taking on a distinctive metallic sheen. In the process, he began to cast a few defensive Aether Spells, and he reduced his speed slightly to redirect some of his telekinetic power to encase his body in a protective force field.

CRACK! CRACK!

Two huge, dazzling bolts of lightning as wide as a truck struck him in rapid succession, his body becoming a blindingly blue torch of lightning for a split second.

[Jake?! Are you okay?]

For a moment she had forgotten that she could consult his Oracle Status in person. The lightning man remained unresponsive but gave a thumbs up to say he was okay.

[Phew...]

It wasn't that Jake didn't want to answer her, but right now he was extremely focused. The Words of Power had begun to drain his willpower and mental strength. He had already summoned Xion's Soul Stone in his right hand, but it had unfortunately lost some volume after its overuse. He would soon have to become more frugal if he didn't quickly find an alternative source of energy.

CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

Three bolts of lightning struck him at once this time, but his defenses held up again. A relieved expression appeared on Jake's face and he even began to smile. With some pride, he finally made it through the entire stratosphere without using his Oracle Shield.

At last, he left the storm cloud zone, entering the mesosphere, the same zone he gave up last time. Looking down, he got another glimpse of the planet Quanoth and was appalled to discover that the black clouds now covered more than half of the planet compared to the last time.

Lodunvals, which still had plenty of daylight three months earlier, was now shrouded in darkness. Thinking back, Jake realized that Laudarkvik's two hours of daily sunlight had not occurred since he came out of seclusion. It had been pitch black all the time.

Now looking overhead, Jake gazed at the vast electromagnetic storm that had caused him to retreat the last time. His view was clear, and there were no dark clouds in his way. Yet the threat was at least ten times greater.

The vision reminded him of the colorful nebula pictures he used to enjoy as a child, except that here it was not a cloud of interstellar gas and dust, but a huge mass of lightning, Mana, Aether and other elemental magic particles. To venture inside would be to expose himself to a massive amount of power exceeding that of several billion nuclear bombs.

Besides, the Mana and Aether currents were so chaotic that it was impossible to predict what awaited him inside. He could vaguely make out the sun beyond this storm and not having changed his mind he took a long breath, then slowly flew towards the "nebula" encompassing the planet.

He ran an Oracle Scan, but the report left him confused. It didn't seem as dangerous as he feared, but he was right about the chaos inside. The Mana in there had so many variations, that it was not an exaggeration to say that all of the spells devised by Quanoth's mages throughout the ages potentially existed within this enigmatic magical storm.

The danger was no longer the storm itself, but being hit by some kind of unpredictable Mana. If it turned him into a statue, poisoned his cells to death or turned him into a toad against his will, his ascent would not only stop right here, but would also make him a laughing stock. The last example, though, was highly unlikely.

Still, Jake wasn't ready to give up. When he was about to make contact with the chaotic energies, Xi suddenly stopped him.

[Activate your Oracle Shield. I know it's going to cost us, but it's too risky.]

Jake hesitated briefly, but decided to trust her.

"Fine. I'll do as you say."

And that was his best decision of the day. What he saw inside would haunt him forever. It was a sight beyond comprehension.

Those streams of multicolored lights amazed him to the core, but when he saw his Oracle Shield start to flicker alarmingly like it was being thrashed by a million Rank 13 Digestors all at once, Jake was scared shitless.

"Holy shit! Xi, I love you. You really are my guardian angel!"

[You will profess your love for me when we get out of here.] She replied in a voice that was a little more snappy than she intended, but one could still tell that she was clearly happy.

Forty-five minutes later, they finally left the Mana Superstorm, the previous joy on Jake's face replaced by an ugly grimace somewhere between rage and regret.

"Fuck! 27B Aether points gone just like that..."

Chapter 762 What The Fuck Is That?!

He felt like crying, but it only lasted a microsecond. The next moment, his eyes rolled out of their sockets and he almost shat his pants out of fright.

"W-What the FUCK is that?!" Jake blurted out, aghast with terror.

Once out of the Mana Storm, he finally had a chance to see what was causing it. At first, he thought space was just a little dark and empty, as if some of the stars were missing. Then his brain started to kick in and he realized that there was a huge obstacle in front of him occluding his vision and concealing some of the cosmos.

At length, his confused mind finally pictured the huge thing obstructing his vision and fear struck him.

A hand. A huge hand. Black as a moonless night, devoid of reflection and substance. Dozens of fingers as long as a small planet and ending with the same gas, Mana, Aether and stardust soup fueling this Mana Superstorm. From it thousands, millions of lightning arcs as wide as a skyscraper formed long filaments of light raining down on the electromagnetic storm, strengthening it every second.

Awestruck after realizing this initial staggering truth, he flew as fast as he could out of the ionosphere, dodging the rain of lightning, and then summoned the starcruiser that came with his Purgatory and ignited the thrusters at full blast without regard for the expense of Aether. Between living poor or dying rich, Jake had shamelessly chosen the former.

Despite the cost, it turned out to be a wise decision. As soon as he commanded the ship to speed up, it reached about 50% of lightspeed in a split second, nearly 150,000 km/s.

If he were still on Quanoth, or even in the upper atmosphere, the friction of the particles would have destroyed the ship's illusion instantly. Even if he was ready to restore the illusion as many times as

needed with a lot of Aether, his fortune would have been squandered in less than a tenth of a second and he would have died on impact.

Thankfully, this time he was in the sidereal void. The frictional forces were zero and his Aether expenditure was not affected in any way beyond the usual sustaining cost of the Purgatory.

As a matter of fact, the Aether Soul Core that powered the Purgatory was still growing slowly but surely. Although it was not an Aether Core designed to absorb Aether, its development was passively increasing its Aether levels and its ability to harness it.

After a year and three months, the Purgatory could now produce 1.1B Aether points per day. The difference wasn't huge, but over time it would be like night and day.

Seconds after leaving the planet with his ship, Jake turned off the thrusters and turned around to satisfy his curiosity. His jaw dropped to the floor in one look and for the first time in a very long time he felt cold. The freezing chill that ran down his spine was purely imaginary, but in the face of what he had just seen it was understandable.

There was not just one hand, but TWO. A colossal entity was holding the planet Quanoth between its two hands like a basketball. Jake couldn't see the other hand earlier because it was on the other side of the planet.

Beyond those two nightmarish hands was something incomprehensible, gigantic, wrapped in a starry blanket that looked like it had been ripped from the fabric of the universe. This indescribable entity was several tens of millions of kilometers high, its face like an ocean of darkness wherein one would have planted six lightning suns positioned like the 6 of a dice to give it three pairs of eyes.

Where the veil of stars was thinner at the end of its arms, one could catch a glimpse of a dark blue metallic sheen. As for its lower body, its legs were non-existent. The starry blanket drifted through the void like a long cloak, space warping and merging with it, forming a spectacle that exceeded human logic.

[Th-This! Impossible! It shouldn't be here!] Xi stammered in shock. What they had just seen was beyond her wildest predictions.

As he perceived his Oracle AI's turmoil, Jake temporarily forgot his dismay and asked,

"Do you know what this thing is?"

Xi remained silent for a moment to sort out her thoughts, then once she calmed down she disclosed in a trembling voice,

[It's Aerae.]

Jake wasn't as surprised as he thought he would be. In fact, he was relieved when he heard the answer. Only an Ancient Designer could explain this abomination. The amount of power contained in this creature was beyond comprehension.

Without even doing anything, by the mere virtue of being there, space was collapsing in its wake. If Xi had told him that it was just an ordinary pawn, now he would have been truly dumbfounded.

Besides, he had already met an Ancient Designer during his Second Ordeal. Xion Zolvhur was certainly less impressive, but the fact that the entire asteroid was nothing more than a tiny portion of his crystallized Spirit Body was equally impressive.

[You don't understand. It's not a clone. It's the real one. Auras is here!] Xi insisted, seeing that he was making light of the revelation.

Jake grew serious as he heard the gravity in the young woman's voice, but even then he couldn't see how it was a big deal. Clone or not, it was still an Ancient Designer like any other.

[You still don't understand. This is the Fourth Ordeal, not the Tenth. The number of Fourth-Ordeal contestants in the Mirror Universe is countless. Even if they are the elite of the elite, one Quanoth would never be enough for all those Players. Do you understand what I mean?]

Jake became solemn this time. There wasn't just one Quanoth planet, he should have known better. This was because there were creatures in the Mirror Universe that could not be tested by normal methods. Quanoth might be adequate for small species like humans, but a few hundred meters was probably the limit. Beyond that, and such an alien would break the balance, removing any fairness in this Ordeal.

Imagine a beast as big as Auras? Even a hundredth of its size, its weight would be enough to disrupt the planet's orbit. Its every step would generate tidal waves hundreds of kilometers high and earthquakes powerful enough to fracture the whole crust of the earth.

If such a beast existed, it could not be tested by conventional methods. That was why there were other Quanoth planets.

Contrary to what one might think, what was really shocking was not that there were other Quanoths, but that the real Auras had chosen to oversee their Fourth Ordeal in person. This meant that his trusted clones or subordinates were currently in charge of the other planets, leaving him free to monitor the ignorant ants that they were, bustling about pointlessly, oblivious to their own insignificance.

When Jake came to this realization, a shrill grinding sound like a badly oiled gear travelled through the cosmos all the way to him regardless of the sidereal void that was supposed to prevent the sound from spreading. Looking up in the direction of the screeching noise, his face blanched as he saw the huge black hole and the six lightning suns that served as its eyes turned in his direction.

A new wave of terror petrified him and the ocean of darkness suddenly rifted apart, unveiling a world of metal reminiscent of the inside of a hangar, albeit the size of Mars. Even more chilling, this metal crack stretching in the middle of this mass of darkness looked uncannily like a smile...

Then the monstrous mental sense that had just passed over him withdrew and the gigantic entity turned its attention back to the planet Quanoth in its hands, blissfully disregarding its existence.

[Side Mission n°4: Space Exploration: Leave the planet Quanoth and find out the cause of the impending apocalypse: Mission completed.]

Jake was pleasantly surprised by this notification. For him it was free Ordeal credits. He had never intended to solve this huge mystery, but simply to get to the sun.

This unexpected discovery had also given him a new insight.

Wasn't he safe here in space, far away from Quanoth? Its black clouds and Mana Superstorm had no hold on him from up here. Even if he couldn't reach Celestial City or its Divine Academy in time, he still had this escape route to survive.

[I don't think this plan would work.] Xi immediately disagreed. [If you decide to give up and stay here until the end, yeah sure, you'll be fine, although you'll fail your Main Mission. But if you go back to Quanoth and try again to leave the planet in a few months, do you really think it will be that easy?]

Jake's heart sank as he heeded her warning. At the rate Sir Aurae was expanding and densifying its Mana Superstorm, the day it covered the whole planet, Quanoth would become an unbreakable prison.

At that moment, Jake praised his own farsightedness for choosing to visit the sun now and not several months later. If he had attempted it then, just reaching the troposphere would have been impossible.

Refocusing on his goal, Jake took one last complicated look at the massive entity, hoping one day to be able to hold his own against such a powerhouse, then restarting his ship's thrusters, he set off for the sun.

Twelve or thirteen minutes later, the star cruiser began to slow down, before coming to a complete stop a few thousand kilometers above a huge plasma sphere. Switching off the Purgatory, Jake floated into the void, closing his eyes to enjoy the sun's caress.

"We're finally here. Time to get to work."

Chapter 763 I Hope Lost Divinities Will Appreciate My Gift

The good news was that here he didn't need his Aether Sun Core to digest the magic metals in his Space Storage. Getting close to the star was enough.

The thing was, its size, mass and density was a tad higher than expected. This sun was almost ten times larger in diameter than the one warming the Earth, and the swirling plasma inside was so turbulent that if he wasn't careful, he might end up being ground to a pulp inside.

Replace the water with plasma at tens of thousands or millions of degrees, and imagine how the oceans would behave after Aurae shook the Earth like a protein shaker. That was the level of plasma stirring on the surface of this sun.

Put another way, if he fell into the water, or rather into the plasma, he would be sucked into rollers of such magnitude that he would be crushed under thousands of kilometers of plasma before he knew what hit him.

'Still, I need to get closer.' Jake's eyes narrowed as he peered down at the gigantic ball of plasma below him.

Driven by determination, he shot toward the star noiselessly into the void of space, feeling the temperature and radiation hitting his body's surface skyrocket at a breath-taking rate.

'This sun is hotter than I thought, but I can still handle it.' He estimated calmly.

Suddenly, a solar flare erupted out of nowhere, a geyser of thousands of kilometers of plasma gushing from the star's surface. Plasma projectiles several kilometers long flew towards him like meteors and

Jake had no choice but to perform many spins, loops and twists to avoid being crushed by several thousand tons of plasma propelled at tens of thousands of kilometers per hour.

After having dodged the first salvo, the flaming projectiles having lost their momentum were recaptured by the sun's enormous gravity and Jake found himself once again forced to intensify his evasive maneuvers.

'Exploring a star is trickier than I thought it would be.'

[You're underestimating yourself, Jake.] Xi cheered him gently. [Your Constitution is more than 21,000 times that of a normal human, and your resistance to heat and radiation is terrific for your level. Adding your Agility and Vitality, your body is also extremely ductile, which is why you can use the Compression spell to reduce your size. Have faith in yourself, Jake. Even if this solar flare hits you, the worst you'll get is a few broken bones, but you won't break. Without Aetheric Augmentation and some of the special powers the Players use to strengthen their spells and weapons, it's almost impossible to hurt you significantly.]

Jake had to admit she was right. It was like hitting a tennis ball with a racket with all his might. Even if the ball was catapulted hundreds of meters, it wouldn't pop. When an object exceeded a certain threshold of hardness and elasticity, it became much more difficult to damage.

In the real world, what was elastic was rarely hard. A sharp diamond could scratch any piece of rubber without difficulty, but it would break at the slightest twist exceeding its resistance.

And Jake was considerably more elastic and flexible than any chewing gum and hundreds of times stronger than the hardest diamond. Even if he were hit by a planet-sized asteroid, as long as its speed did not exceed ten or a hundred times his own maximum movement speed, he would survive, even if it meant being flung to the other side of the cosmos.

This was the danger of high-level Evolvers. The pure Aether defining a world's Aether density was not enough to create such anomalies. Even if an individual's Aether density increased, it would not greatly affect their regeneration speed, intelligence or flexibility.

But it was different for bloodlines and Aether encodings.

The seven main Aether stats were the Oracle's welcome gift to the Mirror Universe. This gift seemed ordinary at first, especially compared to the potential of a bloodline, but that was because all Evolvers had never known a life without these Aether Encodings. In reality, they were far more valuable than one might think.

Jake had not yet attempted to create his own Aether Encodings, but now that he had been promoted to the rank of Aetherist apprentice, he had every intention of looking into it. He was sure that this field had immense promise, not to mention the fortune he could make by reselling his products.

'In that case, let's get closer, since I have nothing to fear.' Jake shrugged in response to Xi's encouragement.

He sounded confident, but in truth he was extremely cautious. The previous solar flare had been impressive, but it was nothing compared to a large-scale flare. These could form plasma columns of

several hundred thousand kilometers and the ionized matter could reach 800km/s and be as hot as 10 to 100 million degrees.

If Jake was hit by such an eruption, 21,000 of Constitution or not, it would be a miracle if he wasn't instantly vaporized.

Growing more and more focused, his body cautiously drew closer to the star and soon he had to close his eyes to avoid burning his retina. With his eyes closed, he activated his Myrtharian Vision, and began to navigate in the sidereal void, observing the energy and radiation flows around him.

A few dozen minutes later, he stopped a few hundred meters above the star. No new solar flare matching the intensity of the previous one hindered his progress, but random plasma geysers stretching several kilometers were not uncommon.

Nevertheless, he was pleasantly surprised to find that with his Myrtharian vision he could to some extent predict the timing and location of these flares. Nearby plasma currents held no secrets for him. Even when he wasn't completely sure of his predictions, he was usually right, proof that his Luck stat was doing its job.

"Well, now that we're here it's time to start doing what we came here for."

He summoned his dim red Aether Sun Core, but did not immediately dunk it into the star's plasma. Before he began, he studied its Aether Symbol first. After several minutes of intense scrutiny, he exhaled with a long sigh.

"As expected from Cekt. I can't see the Runes. However, I'm an Aetherist now, so it's not like I have no solution for this."

He obviously couldn't match his master's performance easily, but he could build on it. But to do so, he had to be willing to make some sacrifices.

With a regretful expression, he siphoned off all the remaining energy within his Aether Sun Core, then disposed of the plasma coating the Aether Core at the center, releasing it to become part of the ionized matter of the star beneath him.

The Aether Sun Core in its raw form was just like any other Aether Core except that it was combined with one or more Aether Symbols. After absorbing so much Aether, the Aether Symbol had become extremely dense, collapsing under its own weight.

If it was the original Aether Symbol that Jake had created in the first place, it wouldn't have happened, but since it was his master's handiwork it wouldn't be surprising if he had incorporated other Aether Symbols of his own into the equation to explain this occurrence.

Luckily, for this problem too he had a solution.

[Aether Compression/Expansion: With effort and patience you can change the size of your Aether Runes and Symbols.]

This was one of the new skills included in his second Soul Class welcome pack. Eager to quench his thirst for knowledge, he immediately set to work.

This Soul Class Spell he didn't really understand, but he knew how to use it instinctively like walking or breathing. It was basic privilege after having let an unknown stele rewrite his Soul's Aether Code.

He focused on the Aether singularity at the heart of the Aether Sun Core and after a moment he got a sense of what he had to do. It was like pulling on a shoelace to untie a knot. Simple, but the result was immediate.

The ultra-compressed Aether Runes slowly began to swell and Jake suddenly became aware of the astronomical amount of Aether this Aether Sun Core had stored after all this time.

"T-This..."

At that very moment, he learned the hard way why it took so much Aether and energy to improve a bloodline. Every bloodline, especially those of high rank, had Symbols in their Aether Code specifically dedicated to Aether compression. This was the only way to guarantee the continuous levels up of the bloodline.

Of course, these Aether Symbols had their limits. Whether a bloodline was of natural or artificial origin, the Aether Runes were not always correctly drawn. There were often minor defects, but combined in the billions, they formed a fundamental elevation threshold that the bloodline could never transcend.

By slightly modifying these Aether Symbols responsible for compression, the Aether Code could only regress, but due to the high density of Aether acting as Aetheric gravity, this could take some time, or even be nigh impossible for an Aether Core.

Jake focused all his mental power on the tiny Aether Symbol, and after a few minutes he was able to enlarge the runes enough to see a little more clearly.

It's exactly as I imagined.

In addition to the light and heat spells that Jake had planned, Cekt had also added a Compression Spell, an Anchor Spell, but also two more advanced Aether Spells: Energy and Matter Conversion.

Properly set, these Aether Spells could convert Aether into matter, energy and vice versa, allowing the Aether Sun Core to grow exponentially by absorbing heat and radiation from the environment.

With the reverse analysis complete, Jake now knew how to make an Aether Sun Core just like Cekt.

Since Jake was right next to a star, he intended to make the most of his stay...

'A few thousand Aether Sun Cores, hehe... I hope Lost Divinities will appreciate my gift when we meet again...' Jake laughed sinisterly as he began to weave the Runes of the first Aether Core of a long series.

Chapter 764 You Should Thank Me

Of course, he had no intention of creating exactly the same Aether Sun Cores. The one Cekt had modified was set up to replace and eventually grow a real sun. This was far too advanced for an Aetherist apprentice like Jake.

He could guess roughly what the various symbols did, but some of them were just too intricate to understand. Given enough time, and his ability to instantly replicate the Aether Runes and Symbols cast at least once, he was confident he could do it.

Except it would take years.

Even assuming he had an eidetic memory and thousands of times the observational and comprehension skills of a normal person, the amount of data was just too great. Even a supercomputer had its limit, let alone a human, nearly human... not really human like him.

After many experiments and observations, Jake had already determined that the simplest Aether Spells were often the most awesome and destructive. Because they touched directly on the fundamental physics forces and energies: gravity, radiation, magnetism, heat, etc...

They were the simplest spells to draw and their Aether Symbols were relatively simple too. Ironically, it was easier for an Aetherist to produce a powerful laser beam than to fill a glass of water. In the former case, any Aetherist apprentice could do it, while in the latter it would be difficult to find even a Rank 2 Aetherist who could comfortably accomplish this feat, let alone in combat.

With time, it was possible for even an apprentice Aetherist to weave complex spells, but these were time-consuming projects that could not be cast in combat nor used in everyday life, which limited their usefulness.

From the Aether Sun Core modified by Cekt, Jake intended to keep the two Aether Symbols responsible for heat and light, the one responsible for converting matter and energy into Aether, but not the part capable of doing the reverse.

Since all things were originally Aether, deconstructing matter and energy into Aether was like burning a tree to retrieve the ashes, while using those same ashes to recreate an identical tree would be incomparably more complex.

That is, Jake would give up making mini suns, but instead he would have thousands of Aether Sun Cores giving off the same shine, but only taking up the space of a small dot in his Space Storage.

"Hahaha, I'm finally going to be rich." Jake raved as he imagined the result.

No sooner said than done. He stretched his mental sense to its maximum range, which was much greater than before, and began siphoning off all the Aether inside his domain. Within seconds, a massive stream of Aether converged into one point, compressed mercilessly by Jake's overwhelming mental force.

This feat was due not only to the explosive growth of his stats and Spirit Body levels, but also to his new Soul Class. The Aether Affinity passive gave him increased Aether awareness and control, while also increasing the power and decreasing the cooldown of his Aether Spells.

In less than twenty seconds, a new Aether Core was born. Compared to his first Aether Core which took him days to complete, there was much to celebrate. He then took a few hours to draft the required Aether Symbols, 98% of the time spent on this Energy and Matter Conversion Spell.

After casting each spell once, his Soul Class Instant Casting passive came into play, allowing him to instantly cast all spells with a compression no greater than a Grade 1 Bloodline.

The first Aether Sun Core was completed a few seconds later.

[Aether Sun Core: 1 point]

At this point, the Aether Sun Core had such a low density that it was of no use. The Aether Core had only just been created and the effectiveness of the Aether Symbols was limited to the little Aether they could passively draw in from their surroundings. This was enough for some light, but nowhere near what Jake required.

Jake then repeated the procedure as many times as necessary, and about 36 hours later he had over 4000 Aether Sun Cores ready for the next step. He had also created an additional 2000 Aether Cores, to which he had just added the Energy Conversion Symbol. He intended to turn them into his Aether plants for years to come.

Plop, plop, plop!

Jake could almost hear the thousands of Aether Cores dropping into the star's plasma, but he knew it was only happening in his head. These Aether Cores were made of nothing but Aether, so they had no substance. He hadn't really dropped them either, but was controlling them from a safe distance with his telekinesis after leaving his mental imprint on them.

" Now all we have to do is wait."

[It should be quicker than you think, you might be surprised.] Xi giggled as she was reminded of an anecdote. [In the Mirror Universe, you're by no means the only Aetherist to have come up with this idea. In fact, anyone who can get as close to a star as you can has probably thought of it. However, the greed of some has pushed them too far down this path to the point where they have consumed stars and then entire galaxies to grow their Aether Cores. At some point, the lack of stars began to threaten the very survival of the species on many planets and the Oracle had to intervene. Today this is highly regulated and the Oracle heavily condemns this practice when it is carried out without consideration for nearby habitable or inhabited planets. You need a permit to harvest a referenced star... and you should know that as long as you wear your bracelet the Oracle System sees the same thing as you do. This means that even if you discover a new star, it will be referenced in the database at the same time.]

"Fuck me... Should I expect to see the police on my island when I come out of the Red Cube by the end of the Ordeal?"

[Hehe, who knows...]

" ... "

A few minutes later.

[Your Aether Sun Cores should be ready. Pull them up.] Xi reminded him out of the blue.

"Hmm? Isn't it a little early yet? It's only been a few minutes." A perplexed frown formed on Jake's face
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[Remember what happened when you dipped your Aether Sun Core into that mini sun. It only took a few moments. If you want to be able to control these Aether Sun Cores without standing thousands of kilometers apart, you better not pull them out too late. The regular Aether Cores, on the other hand, you can let them soak in the plasma a little longer.]

"Fine. It won't hurt to take a look at them." Jake conceded half-heartedly.

With a thought, he recalled the thousands of submerged Aether Sun Cores and was immediately battered by a wave of radiation. He had underestimated the power of all those Sun Cores gathered together. He stowed them all in his Space Storage, then kept one to inspect.

"It's pretty hot and bright, but I can still touch it without much effort." Jake concluded a few seconds later. Then he added to Xi, " See, in the end we took them out too soon."

[Tche, a little caution never harmed anyone.] Xi sucked her teeth, or at least that was how he imagined her hologram would react if she stood before him.

Jake proceeded to soak the Aether Sun Cores again, and a few minutes later he was finally satisfied with the results. For his training over the next few months, this would do the trick. Meanwhile, he let the Aether Cores continue to absorb the heat from the star.

Bored to death from waiting, he began making Aether Cores again, dropping them in the "ocean" immediately after completion.

A few days later...

"Is it just me or is it getting a little colder?" Jake said suddenly as he opened his eyes with a bad feeling.

When he saw the dim luster of the star below him, his face went blank in horror, his whole body breaking out in a cold sweat.

"Th-This... What have I done?! Xi, why didn't you warn me?!" Jake asked in a panic.

[Because you didn't tell me. You are now the proud owner of 11,638 level 5 Aether Cores. That means their Aether density is somewhere between 100,000 and 1M. With this, you will be able to spam as many Aether Spell as you want, but only after you got your body and soul used to the density. This will be good training for you. You can also use it to upgrade your Purgatory or as a power source for all sorts of high tech Mirror Universe stuff. You should thank me.]

"But this sun..."

[That's not our concern. This star will be fine... Maybe. But because of the Mana cage erected by Aurae around Quanoth, the planet's temperature won't decrease any time soon. The process will take a few years. Aurae didn't stop you, so consider that you had his blessing.]

"But still..."

The once dazzling sun was now just a dull, cold rock, at least on the surface. According to Xi, the core where thermonuclear fusion was taking place was still going strong. After a few months or years, the star would be bright again. In the meantime, Quanoth's natives would just have to cover up.

Chapter 765 You Robbed A Bank?

"Anyway... I guess I fulfilled my intended objective." Jake pushed his doubts from his mind, then summoning his Purgatory starcruiser once more, he fired up the thrusters and shot straight for Quanoth.

He could have ingested the magic metals on the spot, but he was afraid Xi's prediction would come true and he'd be stuck outside the planet's atmosphere.

It was okay if he was alone, but he had just rallied all the Myrtharian Nerds in preparation for a life-and-death battle, and as a leader and organizer he absolutely had to be there or he would be unable to look them in the face at their next reunion.

A few moments later, the planet Quanoth, but more importantly the gigantic silhouette of Aurae, came into his field of vision. Quietly peering at the Mana Superstorm, Jake suddenly suggested,

"Hey Xi."

[What's up?]

"You don't think I could do the same thing to this Mana Superstorm that I just did to that star? A Mana Conversion Aether Symbol should be a breeze next door, right?"

[...]

"Xi?"

[You can try, but it won't work. Ultimately, that Mana Superstorm and those black clouds belong to Aurae. I doubt he'll let you destroy his creation with impunity, or this Ordeal is no longer relevant.]

" But how can I know without trying?"

[Then try.] Xi sighed, having no doubt about the outcome.

Jake trusted Xi's judgment, of course, but sometimes you had to see the result in person to be fully convinced. A few seconds later, a new Aether Core that looked a little different from the others was born.

With a thought, he steered it toward the Mana Superstorm and the Aether Core disappeared inside. Jake waited patiently with bated breath, but a few seconds later their mental link was severed.

'What happened?' His eyes widened sharply.

[No idea, probably a Reverse Spell. This Mana Superstorm contains millions of variations corresponding to different spells. It would be amazing if there wasn't one to convert Aether into Mana. By throwing that Aether Core in there, you probably helped the storm grow a bit].

" ... " Jake's face turned ugly as he realized he had done all this for nothing.

[I told you so hehe.] Xi laughed mercilessly in his head.

Jake's ego was triggered and his Myrtharian vanity immediately entered the fray,

"Hmmpf, I refuse to believe that I can't destroy this Mana Storm if I cultivate an Aether Core strong enough."

[Stop it.] Xi stilled him with an exasperated voice.

"What if I create a Mana Core directly?"

[Forget it. That won't work either.]

Jake racked his brain for a solution, but in the end he was forced to give up. There were plenty of ways to get rid of this Mana Storm, but each required a level of power and technique he didn't have yet. Some plans seemed viable, but that was only because he didn't know what this storm was really capable of.

"Never mind, let's go back to Quanoth then." He said cheerlessly, somewhat dispirited.

He still gave Aerae a middle finger, figuratively making Xi sweat profusely, but the colossal entity continued to ignore them. Who knows if it got the message...

Snorting, he activated his Oracle Shield, then crossed the Mana Storm in the opposite direction. Once Jake was gone, the six lightning suns serving as Aerae's eyes blazed brighter as if they could finally express their anger.

"This Earthling sure is impertinent. If it weren't for the rules I set myself, I would have taught you how to treat your elders with respect.

Then the Ancient Designer turned his attention back to the planet, forgetting about this insignificant ant who was just one Player among millions.

A while later, Jake descended from the sky with a supersonic bang, landing above his underground hideout and generating a crater several meters in diameter as well as a deafening shockwave.

"Jake, you're finally here!"

"Hmm?" Jake was surprised, recognizing familiar voices.

Turning his head, he saw two beauties in armor, their pink shoulder-length hair floating in the wind behind them. Their skin had acquired a healthy tan and they looked better than ever. Their aura was also much more imposing than at the beginning of the Ordeal.

The hair and irises of both sisters were still pink, but there were subtle differences between them now. Enya's hair tended more towards red, while Esya's hair tended towards white. It was clear that their recent experiences and new Soul Classes had changed a few things.

"Enya? Esya? You're here already? I thought you were on a ship lost in the ocean." Jake raised a bemused eyebrow.

Esya giggled happily, boldly pulling him into a hug with a kiss on his cheek before he could react.

"Because we missed you~"

As he recovered from his surprise, Enya hopped over to him and gave him a kiss on the other cheek. Confused and flustered by their brazenness and the tender eyes they were giving him, Jake blurted out awkwardly,

"Is your father still insisting on this marriage?"

"What? Can't we give you a hug and a smooch after three months of not seeing each other?" Enya chuckled as she took two steps back. Then she looked at him from head to toe and said seriously, "Your power has increased again. I thought I was catching up, but I feel like I'm falling further behind."

Esya also stopped teasing him and observed him carefully. Jake was in his human form miniaturized right now and although a normal human wouldn't know the difference, every cell in his body was bursting with power. Her face showed the same dejection that Jake had in front of Aurae earlier.

It was now his turn to be confident.

"And you haven't seen anything yet." He smiled enigmatically. "Wait a few days and you'll understand why. Ah, come to think of it, I also have gifts for you two."

Both sisters' eyes lit up at the word gift. They had expected local souvenirs, but they became speechless as they watched him summon thousands of Aether Cores and Aether Sun Cores into the sky.

"You can pick one of each." Jake said generously, as if this fortune meant nothing to him when a week earlier he would have rather endured a thousand tortures than part with his one and only Aether Sun Core.

"W-where did you get this?" Esya stuttered, her jaw still dangling to the floor in shock.

"I made them myself using Quanoth's sun." He answered proudly. "You'll never guess who I met..."

The two sisters were burning with curiosity, but they knew he would make them languish until they couldn't stand it anymore before he spilled the beans. Rather than fall for his game, they chose to focus on the Aether Cores above them.

"I want this one and this one."

"I'll take this one and that one over there."

"Excellent choice." Jake shrugged as he called the other Aether Cores back into his Space Storage.

After briefly sharing their adventures with each other, he asked,

"Besides you, have any other members arrived?"

"Only Peter, but the first batch should be here soon." Enya reported reliably. "Lucia and the others won't arrive until tomorrow. Vincent and Sigmar in two or three days. Gerulf and Rogen probably within a week. Will... Still no news. I hope nothing has happened to him."

Sigmar's presence was uplifting. As for Will's silence, there was nothing he could do unless he went to check on him personally, but Jake had other things to worry about.

The trio then looked for Peter, who was suspiciously picking mushrooms in the forest...

"Hey man! Try this mushroom. It's soooo damn good." The emo-looking addict greeted them in flip-flops with a wicker basket in hand, living his best life.

"...Ugh no, but thank you anyway." Jake refused with a stiff face.

The two sisters didn't even so much as give him a glance, harrumphing as they each turned their heads to different sides instead of returning the drugged Player's greeting.

Jake then escorted the two sisters and Peter to his underground lair and introduced them to Aisling, her sister and Jeanie. Maybe it was the female sixth sense, but the Dhampir Succubus and the two sisters immediately sensed tremendous danger when they met, as if their place in Jake's heart was threatened.

'We must not let this woman anywhere near Jake.' Esya whispered telepathically to her older sister.

Enya immediately nodded at the suggestion with a little too much gusto. Peter, on the other hand, was delighted to meet Jeanie and immediately asked her if she could produce some dust like the pixie in Peter Pan.

Seeing him pester the embarrassed fairy who didn't know where to hide, Jake gave her a sympathetic look, then after chatting a little with the rest of the group he went back to the magic room to train with the two sisters who wanted to accompany him. They planned to use the heat from his Aether Sun Cores to cultivate their own Fire and Light Cores.

Jake arranged several dozen Aether Sun Cores around him, then emptied his Space Storage of all his fancy materials, a small mountain of priceless metals piling up before him.

"Wow! You robbed a bank?" Esya whistled admiringly with dollars in her eyes.

"That surpasses the amount of treasure we've stolen during our pirate career..." Enya muttered to herself, somewhat bummed to have lost on that front as well.

Then, before their gawking eyes, Jake proceeded to munch on the pile of treasure, helplessly watching a fortune greater than their own sink into the stomach of a single man.

Chapter 766 Gold Myrtharian

Crunch, crunch...

Jake proceeded to chew and gobble emotionlessly the metal mountain in front of him. He had turned off the miniaturization and with all those Aether Sun Cores, his over 5m tall incandescent body was glowing with white light and blazing heat.

In this state, it was impossible for these metals not to melt. Orichalcum quickly became as soft as a marshmallow, while Adamantium, known for its indestructibility, melted like everything else.

Once his stomach was full, Jake would take a short break and concentrate on channeling all that heat and energy into his stomach, turning his digestive system into a super furnace. Slowly, the metals dissolved, passing through the pores of his small intestines into his bloodstream and then into his cells.

The Orichalcum, solid, resistant to temperature variations and an excellent magic conductor, began to penetrate the neurons of his brain, the walls of his blood vessels, his muscles and even his bones to a certain extent.

The Mithril, also very durable and capable of detecting evil, liquefied much more easily, fusing with his cells without difficulty.

The Adamantium, virtually indestructible, merged with his skeleton, claws and teeth, and to a lesser extent the rest of his cells, making him more and more unbreakable.

The other magical materials in his collection that Jake had purchased or stolen melded even more easily into his cells, bringing him unknown benefits. Xasnite, Magnazi, Oranium, Ashix, Tuskalt ect... So many materials whose names he had learned only recently and that he had decided to include in his diet to optimize his odds of success.

Before he knew it, as his bones, teeth, muscles and organs grew stronger, the speed at which he was gobbling up the mountain of metals only increased. The Adamantium that had seemed so difficult to bite into suddenly didn't hurt his teeth so much and the consecutive cycles of chewing and digesting became shorter and shorter.

The two sisters were left at a loss for words by this unusual feast and their disbelief only grew with each passing hour. Jake was not aware of it, but from their vantage point they could clearly see his size and weight increasing.

At first the pile of metal was almost as high as he was, but after a few hours it was only up to his waist when he had only eaten 20% of it. At the same time, the molten rock beneath his feet began to behave frantically, changing its state of matter rapidly under the influence of invisible forces. Sometimes an electric arc would flash in the air and then immediately disappear as if it had never existed.

The two sisters were well aware that they had to train even harder if they wanted to have any hope of catching him, but at this moment they were just mesmerized by the show. To see him evolve before their very eyes into something incomprehensible was a rare sight that they could not miss.

At long last, an indefinite time later, Jake reached out and grabbing only air he realized he had eaten the entire stack. He felt a little unsettled for a moment, but soon he felt the changes inside his body and after immersing himself in the magma, he closed his eyes, entering a very deep trance.

Hours passed and the two sisters began to train as well, absorbing the Aether Sun Cores' heat and light to nurture their own Firelight Cores. Jake remained motionless the entire time, completely losing track of time and reality.

As the three of them were training, the Myrtharian Nerds began to show up on their own or in batches, but without Jake to receive them on the surface, they could only set up camp in the Wilderness, several kilometers above him.

The goblin couple Xort and Niss were among the first to arrive with a squad of hobgoblins belonging to a tribe they had rescued. Among the first batch, there were also humans like Hephais, Nicolet, Ingranus the Bold, Kelly and her brother Khal who seemed to have recovered from their soul injuries etc...

In the second batch, Lucia arrived with her army of knights and Dragonids. The impact of their footsteps shook the earth and the makeshift camp of the first Myrtharian Nerds was soon ready for war. It is only when they recognized the resplendent blonde female warrior that they finally relaxed.

Lucia felt terribly upset that she couldn't meet up with Jake right away, but without Gerulf or another Kintharian it would be a waste of time unless she was willing to drill into the earth's crust for several kilometers. In the end, she had no choice but to give the order to set up camp and be patient.

In the third batch, an overwhelming presence erupted above them, a gigantic shadow spanning the forest for over half a kilometer. Looking up, their jaws dropped to the ground at the sight of a humongous Eastern Black Dragon.

Compared to the appearance of Lucia and her army, the ordinary members were in a state of total panic. If not for the powerhouses like Hephais, Ingranus and Lucia, their group would have scattered to the four winds without looking back.

Very few of them had seen Sigmar's appearance in the flesh, but Hephais was one of them. Recognizing the black-haired man in the sky, a feeling of immense relief crossed his face, then very quickly reverted to the cold, calm demeanor of an assassin.

Once his identity was revealed, the initial panic was replaced by elation and Sigmar and his dragon mingled with the group seamlessly. When Hephais told the others who Sigmar was and what he was capable of, their admiration turned to respect.

"Sigmar no longer exists. Now just call me Hade." The young man smiled amiably.

As he talked with them, he was surprised not to see Jake, the reason for his coming. When Lucia repeated Peter's message, a weird expression showed on his face. He cast his gaze to the earth and the corner of his lips curled up slightly.

"You won't have to wait for him much longer. He's awake." Hade announced in an enigmatic voice.

Kilometers underground, a sudden roar of laughter rang out, an oppressive aura suffusing the magma chamber where Jake and the two sisters were staying. Near the heart of the Aether Sun Cores formation, a six-meter giant was levitating within the lava, the magma he had been immersed in seconds earlier forming a void sphere around him, as if a solid wall prevented him from approaching this human.

When Jake inspected his Oracle Status, a grin of ecstasy lit up his face.

"Lost Divinities, wash your neck clean for me, because it's payback time. This time, we'll see who runs away with their tail between their legs."

[Grade 10 Gold Myrtharian Bloodline: Level 4]

[Gold Myrtharian Body lvl4: The robustness of a Kintharian, combined with the intellect of an Eltarian, the fighting instinct of a Myrmidian and something more. The physical and brain abilities are 32 times (8 times at lvl3) as good as a normal human, but without the limitations. (New!) Your bones, teeth and claws are 320 times stronger than those of a normal human. Your digestive abilities allow you to digest

almost anything in a short time. Your cells can now passively store, purify and absorb ambient energy (including heat, radiation and Aether) as well as matter (earth and metal) to gradually strengthen themselves or reuse it later. At each additional level, the physical and mental abilities will be doubled as well as the speed of progression, tolerance to heat, pressure and radiation.]

[Gold Myrtharian Spirit Body lvl4: The Eltarian Spirit Body solidifies the Spirit Body and strengthens the Kintharian Aether Skills by adding telekinesis. The Spirit Body of a Myrtharian is 24 times greater(12 times at lvl3) than that of a normal human and has a natural instinct conferring a form of precognition. The Spirit Body can also passively absorb a decent amount of ambient energy (including heat, radiation and Aether) and matter (earth and metal) to strengthen itself. These faculties double at every level.]

[Gold Myrtharian Soul lvl4: Strong Fire, earth, metal, light(radiation) attribute (Average fire, earth, metal and light attribute at lvl3) and slight Lightning attribute. Able to feed on the Aether contained in heat, earth, metal, lightning or radiation to survive and strengthen itself.]

[Aether Bloodline Skills:]

[Accelerated Golden Myrtharian lvl4 growth: Closely related to positivity, determination, pride, fighting and anger. The effect doubles with each level.]

[Self-Encoding: There are no longer any limits to the Aether Stats, as the Aether is constantly being compressed to make room. However, the cost in Aether required to increase stats will quickly become exponential. Using the Aether encoded by the Oracle Device to increase the Aether stats is no longer recommended if the Encoding level doesn't match.]

[Aether and Soul Tribute: A defeated enemy will surrender a fraction of his Aether and soul to the bloodline holder (It is no longer proportional to the threat level).]

[Warrior Gold Myrtharian Trance lvl4: As a result of the above-mentioned emotions and the will to vanquish in battle, the body stats will be temporarily increased by 400-800% (200-400% at lvl3). The effect doubles with each level.]

[Spiritual Gold Myrtharian Trance lvl4: By calming the mind through meditation, it is possible to amplify the mental stats as well as the quality of the Spirit Body from 400-800% (200-400% at lvl3). The effect doubles on every level.]

[Spiritual Gold Myrtharian Eyes lvl4: It becomes possible upon activation to analyze one's opponents to understand their physical, mental and Aetheric weaknesses. Passively, it is possible to see Aether and other supernatural elements at a certain distance without going through the Extrasensory Perception of the Spirit Body. The eye is now able to harness and channel the power of the Spirit Body and Soul Spells, as well as any Energy-based Spell. (New !) With each additional level, it will be possible to obtain more information.]

[Gold Stone Skin lvl4: The body can withstand high temperatures and radiation, including high pressure and friction. The skin can alternate between a rocky or metallic state as desired and its thickness can also be modulated to form different appendages or weapons. It is also possible to alter this metallic structure into any previously digested metal. (New !)]

[Heat and radiation tolerance lvl4: The body temperature is no longer fixed at 37°C and can withstand a much higher and lower internal temperature without shutting down.]

[Earth and Steel Manipulation lvl4: Including all the minerals, metals, atoms and inorganic traces found in the soil of Kinthar's home planet, as well as all metals and materials previously or subsequently digested. At lvl4 you can now bend rocks, boulders and steel to your will, including digested magic metals. The finesse of control and perception doubles at every level.]

[(New!)Gravity Manipulation lvl 1: Derived from Earth and Metal manipulation, you can increase or decrease gravity up to 10 times via your Spirit Body.]

[(New)Magnetism Manipulation lvl1 : Derived from Metal Manipulation, you can control the magnetic fields around you to a certain extent.]

[(New)Lightning Manipulation lvl 1 : Derived from Magnetism and Heat manipulation, you can now control lightning to a certain extent.]

[(New)Lightning Tolerance lvl 1 : Slightly increased tolerance to electricity.]

[(New) Magic Artefact lvl4 : By digesting all these magic materials, your body has become an ideal magical conductor. Your tolerance to Aether, Mana and any other type of primordial energy is multiplied by 16. The control of any type of primordial energy is facilitated in your own body.]

[Heat and Radiation Control lvl4: . It becomes possible to thermally and energetically excite AND cool down any object, including one's own body. At lvl4, you can now perform advanced heat and radiation manipulation. The finesse of control and perception doubles at every level.]

[Telekinesis lvl4: It becomes possible to control objects remotely via the Spirit Body. At Spirit Body and Physical Body equivalent, it is only possible to exert 400% (200% at lvl2) of the Physical Body's strength. Control is not limited to simple actions anymore. The effect doubles at each level.]

[Accelerated Healing lvl4: It is possible to heal even the most lethal and disabling wounds by burying oneself underground in a warm space. At lvl 4, the Passive Regeneration ability operates without any need to bury oneself. This passive recovery can now regenerate limbs and is no longer discounted. Dependent on the environment, the body's tolerance to heat, radiation, earth, metal, earth, lightning.]

[Spirit of Revenge: After a defeat, and if the host's will has not wavered, the bloodline will be greatly stimulated.]

Chapter 767 Do You Mind?

BOOOM!

The vacuum sphere repelling the lava he was floating in expanded wildly and the magma within a 60 meter radius disintegrated into Aether, before being quickly sucked back into his starving cells, his Aether and Reiga Core.

Jake's withered body began to swell from 6 meters to 7, 8, 10, 15, before peaking at 18 meters in height. Then his cells' terrific digestion abilities kicked in and his body began to shrink while his aura soared.

After regaining his previous height, he quelled his bloodline agitation and initiated the miniaturization, regaining his handsome appearance and build. Jake then quietly flew out of the magma lake, landing in front of the two frozen sisters.

The man in front of them exuded a majestic presence, a feeling of compact power that urged them to submit to his gaze. On the surface, he didn't seem to have changed much, but to Evolvers with keen senses like them, all those minor differences were striking.

The Jake before them had already returned to his ordinary human appearance, but his looks seemed even more polished than before. It wasn't the kind of beauty those androgynous, beardless models prided themselves on having, but a manly beauty that inspired masculinity and strength.

His muscles were not ridiculously developed, but they were hard as steel and they could hardly believe it, but his skin and hair seemed to glisten as if he were not an actual human of flesh and blood, but a metal statue.

His irises were pure gold, surpassing the golden yellow of his original Myrmidian Bloodline, and their glow never ceased to shine. His hair was still silver, but its sheen was comparable to that of mithril. The few strands of gold that dotted his hair also surpassed the luster of pure gold. His claws and teeth were like pure diamonds, the shimmer of light glinting at the slightest movement subconsciously drawing the eye.

Even more shocking, his body was cloaked in a faint halo of light and energy. In daylight, under the sun, an ordinary human would not notice it. But in the middle of the night, Jake would definitely appear fluorescent, like a celestial god dispelling darkness.

'How powerful had he become?'

That was the big question the two sisters had in mind. If they could see Jake's Oracle Status, they would have gotten their answer and it would have traumatized them for a long time.

[Spirit Body level: 34>38(Digitized)]

[Species: Gold Myrtharian]

[Physique: Gold Myrtharian Body lvl4]

[Height: 4.21> 6.17 meters]

[Weight: 3564> 12046kg]

[HP: 212000>928990 (Regen: 9344,6 HP/s)]

[Soul Class: Rune Aetherist]

[Strength: 12384>54489.6]

[Agility: 6714.5> 29543.8]

[Constitution:21200>92899]

[Vitality:15950>70216]

[Intelligence: 6342>27748]

[Perception: 13251.4>57986]

[Extrasensory Perception: 6797> 29855]

[Luck: 51>207]

[Reference for an adult human jobless level 1: HP:10, stats: 1 .]

[Aether Stats: 3686>3815]

[Aether Core: 5620>5719 points.]

[Reiga Core lvl 1>2.]

First of all what was striking when seeing Jake's stats was his weight. If before he weighed the weight of a big sedan, now he weighed more like a bus. If he wasn't careful, each of his steps could crush rocks, while a car's body would cave in if he were to stumble upon it.

His height had not increased by leaps and bounds, but Jake figured that was because he had prioritized quality over quantity. If he had chosen to consume thousands of tons of ordinary rock until he reached his saturation point, he would undoubtedly have become much taller, but his Bloodline Grade would not have improved.

The next thing that stood out was that all his stats had at least quadrupled. The passive of his Myrtharian Body was of course the main culprit, but the three extra levels of his Spirit Body, which combined with the attribute bonuses of his Soul Class, also had a substantial impact.

It wasn't clearly stated in the Oracle Status, but since he had assimilated Tim's Beskyrian Bloodline into his own, he also possessed the Lucky Body and its power was aligned with that of his Myrtharian Body. It was a slow progressing Body stat, but with this bloodline upgrade the difference would definitely be felt.

His Aether Stats and Aether Core had also grown a bit over the past few days, while the Reiga Core, or more accurately the Reiga Symbol had accumulated enough Reiga to advance to level 2. It was now producing enough Reiga every day to cast dozens of spells with C4-like firepower.

Negligible compared to his other abilities, but the power of these spells could be boosted by artificially raising their Aether density through his Aether Core. More importantly, the Reiga Core was not an inaccessible Reiga sinkhole from which he could only retrieve the crumbs.

Although most of the Reiga produced was used to nurture the Reiga Symbol, all the Reiga accumulated over time in the Reiga Core was available to him. After several days, the amount of Reiga stored posed a danger to most Players if used wisely.

Done with his status inspection, Jake finally noticed the two transfixed sisters staring at him with round eyes.

"What? Did you miss me that much?" He chuckled coolly, before abruptly raising his head to the ceiling.

"Hmmm, they're already here."

As Jake's Myrtharian Eyes peeked through kilometers of rock, his gaze met another man's. Recognizing the Player peering at him from the surface, an amused smile spread across his face.

"I'm going back up to the surface to fetch the others. Want to come with me?" Jake offered to the two sisters."

"I-I'd rather keep training a little longer." Esya declined with a bitter face.

"Likewise." Enya was calmer, but her face was a little stiff.

Jake could sense that something was bothering them, but he thought it best not to interfere.

"All right. I'll leave the Aether Sun Cores at your disposal."

Both sisters nodded mechanically, their minds elsewhere, then once Jake left, the discouragement they were trying hard not to show burst forth all at once. Enya stroked her little sister's hair to cheer her up, but from her shaken look it was clear that she was in dire need of cheering up as well.

"We won't be able to catch up to him anymore." Esya stated with conviction in her voice.

"You're right, we can't. But that's why he's our leader. Even if we can't compete, we can still fight alongside him, or at least relieve him of some of his burden."

"Hey, do you think he's stronger than dad?" The little sister asked with a hint of schadenfreude in her eyes.

Enya, who was thinking about how she could improve her training, was suddenly brought back to reality. She tried to compare Jake's aura just now to her father's the last time they had seen him and found that she couldn't immediately give an answer.

Their father Phirune, had already completed 4 Ordeals a year ago, and as a Fire Archmage of Ega, his stats far surpassed those of ordinary Evolvers at their first Ordeal. In addition to being a talented mage, Phirune was intelligent, experienced, and ambitious. He was an outstanding warrior who could adapt and respond to all kinds of opponents, ensuring that his Ordeal Ratings would be at the top of the pack.

But what about the aura that the two sisters had sensed earlier? Well, if their father hadn't completed an Ordeal or two since then, they were pretty sure the outcome of their duel would not be pretty.

"Anyway, let's train. We'll go get our second Soul Class after the battle against Lost Divinities and Laudarkvik and hopefully that will unlock some new options." Enya exclaimed, her good mood restored.

"Yay!"

As the two sisters recovered from this emotional roller coaster, Jake poked his head out of the ground in the middle of the Wilderness. When he turned his head around, his gaze was met with hundreds of tents.

Normal members had ordinary, even rustic tents like Xort and Niss, but some like Sigmar resided in a fortress as large as the Dracul clan headquarters. His black dragon was wrapped around a steel fortress,

sound asleep. His snores echoed loudly, their breath raising impressive gusts of wind. Because of his new pet, the former Fluid Grandmaster had been forced to set his abode outside the camp.

The nearby Myrtharian Nerds were taken aback when they saw Jake appear, at first thinking it was an enemy attack, but as they recognized him, delighted smiles brightened their faces.

"Hey boss, how are you doing?"

"Hey Boss, take a look at my new technique..."

" ... "

Jake greeted everyone patiently, exchanging a few pleasantries with each member before finally managing to escape by making up an excuse. He thought he would be able to meet Lucia, but he couldn't find her either. As he bumped into the spearman Ingranus, he learned that like Sigmar, because of her army she had been forced to set up her camp separately from the main camp.

"Thank you."

To avoid any chance of being bothered again, he immediately teleported in the direction given, reappearing in the forest. At a glance, he spotted another clearing nearby, and as expected he saw many tents, as well as hundreds of knights and thousands of strange winged lizardmen, Dragonids.

Relaxed, he walked toward the camp, immediately alarming the sentries on duty.

"W-Who are you?" A Dragonids shouted in a guttural accent.

"Jake Wilderth. The leader of the Myrtharian Nerds."

The sentries' expressions changed abruptly, their faces breaking out in cold sweat. Before they could embarrass themselves further, a beautiful woman with long golden hair, matching eyes, and tanned skin came running in their direction. Recognizing Jake, her face beamed with happiness and pride. With her army behind her, she bragged with a smile,

"I brought some guys along for the next battle, do you mind?"

Chapter 768 Catching Up

Jake smiled warmly, then swept his eyes leisurely over the crowd of knights and Dragonids. To him it was just a casual glance, but to these natives it was as if they were a bunch of mice spotted by a big cat. The overwhelming feeling of fear was visceral and it was only when the gaze shifted to someone else that they resumed breathing properly.

'F-fucking terrifying.' One of the knights thought fleetingly before passing out quietly. He was the youngest knight in Lucia's army, a recently promoted squire.

Seeing no one else faint, Jake was greatly pleased. The average strength of these warriors was on par with A-Rank Adventurers of level 60 to 70. Their captains were above level 70, making them elite even in Laudarkvik.

One Dragonid in particular was almost twice as massive as his brethren, and his scales were a breathtakingly pure sapphire blue. Its long, membranous wings were folded behind its back, their glistening black edges ending in razor-sharp spikes. Its level was an impressive 81.

"Who is that?"

Following Jake's gaze, Lucia identified the one he was referring to. Smiling, she introduced the person,

"This Dragonid is the general of this army. He pledged fealty to me after I defeated him in a duel. His name is Temra."

Jake found it hard to hide his amazement this time. If Lucia could defeat such a high-level Dragonid beyond level 80, then her power wasn't too far off from his before his recent power-ups. The current Lucia was probably more powerful than him at the beginning of the Ordeal.

"By the way Jake... Isn't there something you should tell me?" Lucia asked with a grimace, her face twitching as if she were suppressing some kind of discomfort.

"What do you mean?" He asked, clueless.

"Why has the Myrtharian Body passive suddenly become four times more powerful? I can feel my bones, muscles and skin rebuilding every second as if someone is tickling me from the inside. Extremely unpleasant."

"Tsk! And you dare to complain? Many Players would pay to receive such a blessing. You should be thanking me instead." Jake smirked. "Now you can also use lightning to train your physique."

"Peh, only masochists like you and Gerulf would subject themselves to such torture. I prefer to fight new foes."

"What's your bloodline anyway? Still the Myrmidian bloodline?" Jake asked curiously. After four Ordeals, there should be some change.

"Nope. Now, it's a Grade 10 Hybrid-bloodline called Neithnikidian." She bragged coquettishly. "Don't worry, I'm strong."

"I never doubted it."

Jake would have liked to accept every member of this army into the Myrtharian Nerds, but alas he didn't have enough spots available. At best, he could still accept just over 400 new members. Aware of this limitation, Lucia invited only Temra and the other captains above level 70. In all, 23 people.

"Let's go see Hade, shall we?." Lucia said as she hugged his arm. "I missed you, you know."

"I missed you too." Jake rolled his eyes laughingly.

The pair flew to Sigmar's metal fortress. Jake was shocked when he saw the huge dragon up close. Next to this creature, the Dragonids were like worms.

As soon as Jake and Lucia landed, the sleeping dragon cracked open one of its orange eyes and its vertical pupil narrowed in surprise.

"Brat, you're not weak at all." The giant lizard complimented him before closing his eye. "You must be the leader Hade told me about. No wonder Hade chose to join your faction. If you're looking for him he's inside."

Jake had given permission to all the faction's upper echelon officers to invite new members, but they were to use the privilege sparingly. Sigmar was obviously one of those officers and knowing his character Jake wasn't worried about him abusing that power.

There were no visible doors in this steel fortress, but Jake didn't need a door. He waved his hand casually and the solid metal wall parted in two, the liquefied metal forming two rollers flowing in opposite directions. Lucia was silently awed, but she simply followed him inside.

Sigmar was already waiting for them inside, comfortably seated in a padded leather chair, fiddling with what appeared to be some kind of black crystal ball.

'A palantir?' Jake muttered in his head, thinking of a particular worldwide known fantasy saga.

Seeing Jake's keen interest regarding the item in his hands, Sigmar composedly explained,

"One of my first Fluid Artifacts repurposed as an Aether Artifact. I use it to communicate over long distances and augment my mental sense to monitor what's happening on the continent."

'Dang! That's cheating!' Jake's eyes bulged with jealousy.

"That sounds cool. If you have another one I'll take it." He tried his luck anyway.

"Oh, you're interested in this bauble? Take this one, I've got plenty more in my Space Storage. It will be easier to talk to each other in the future."

Lucia remained silent, but from her pouting face she wanted one too. Noticing her envious expression, Hade chuckled and tossed her another one. A wide, joyful smile immediately broke out on the young woman's face.

As with the other members when he first arrived, the former Fluid Grandmaster immediately warned him of his name change,

"By the way, don't call me Sigmar anymore. Now it's just Hade."

Jake was taken aback, but he accepted without overthinking it. When they first met, he had introduced himself as Hade and to be quite frank he was more used to that name.

With a snap of his finger, Hade conjured up two more chairs for Jake and Lucia along with three cups and a steaming pot of tea and they began to catch up.

"Is this fortress also a repurposed Fluid Artifact?" Jake guessed as he watched the walls with his Myrtharian Eyes.

"It is. Except I made it after your third Ordeal ended. I realized that I don't like sleeping under the stars. I look young and cool like this, but I'm over 150 years old. I'm an old man and I have to take care of my back." Hade jested, though his smooth skin didn't show a single wrinkle.

Jake was more interested in its defensive qualities and the fact that he would be able to access a sizable amount of metal at any time to launch attacks or speed up his recovery. Once again amused by his new leader's interest in his trinkets, he said,

"If you want one, I can make one in a few days, but you have to provide the materials. I can emulate ordinary alloys, but the defensive capability of the final artifact will suffer. For housing though it's more than enough."

"No problem. By the time the others arrive I'll gather the materials. Make me a list."

"Okay."

When Jake skimmed the list of required materials, he chuckled unintentionally when he saw an Aether Core somewhere in the middle.

"Is a level 5 Aether Core good enough?"

"Pfffft! Cough, cough, where in the world did you get that?" Hade spat out all his tea, losing his composure for the first time since they met.

Jake motionlessly erected an invisible barrier to intercept the tea drops and after evaporating them away with a thought, he told the Fluid Grandmaster what he had been doing for the past few days. At the end of his tale, a stifling silence settled over the room.

"You... Okay, I'm bowing out. I'm not as young and carefree as I thought I was." Hade moped theatrically as he suddenly felt very tired.

"No, no, I'm younger than him and he's definitely not normal." Lucia shook her head, glancing speechless at Jake, "Though, next time let me come with you, I've never seen a star up close."

"I'm more interested in this Ancient Designer, Aerae right? I met Xion Zolvhur too during my Second Ordeal, but he looked hostile, like he was holding back from killing me. I chose to end the Ordeal before getting the promised rewards." Sigmar gave them a wry smile as he recalled the incident.

Jake was shaken by this anecdote. The Xion he'd met was a kindly old Zhorion, but the latter had explained that he was just one of many avatars of the real Ancient Designer and that they operated independently from each other. He immediately thought of the Corruption when he heard Hade's story.

"I can take you to him now, but I have a feeling we'll see him again sooner or later." Jake eventually offered, but without enthusiasm.

"No need, the encounter with Xion was enough for me. I'd rather avoid these primordial beings as much as possible. If this Aerae is as incredible as you described, I'd rather keep my distance."

After that, Jake gave an Aether Core and an Aether Sun Core each to Lucia and Hade. Their bloodlines were not based on these elements, but with the Myrtharian Body passive they would still benefit somewhat. At this point, Lucia revealed to him that her bloodline had some affinity with the sun and light, so it was a much more fitting gift than he initially anticipated.

They talked some more, but this time Jake explained who their foes were and what his intention was. They expected their enemies to be strong, but not that strong. The threat was not only the Players of Lost Divinities, but also the Undead army that Vhoskaud had concealed somewhere.

Upon learning that Lost Divinities' players were impossible to kill, Hade had no explanation to offer, but against all odds Lucia exclaimed,

"I have a pretty good idea how they do it."

Chapter 769 Divinity

Jake and Hade were taken aback, but they were curious about what she was going to say.

"It's simple, the answer is in their name. Divinities." Lucia revealed with a smirk.

Divinity? Jake had obviously mulled over that possibility. If the founder of this faction wasn't absurdly arrogant then he was probably regarded as a god somewhere in his home universe. That he chose to recruit only Players with such a prestigious status as his own was not so surprising either.

However, there was a difference between being considered a god and actually being one. If it was enough to be abnormally powerful and have great powers, then Jake could be treated as a god in the eyes of the Earthlings from a few years ago.

With his abilities, he could easily annihilate the entire Earth if he felt like it. By sharing his Vitality he could heal, he was invincible, unkillable, could command the elements and even produce precious metals like gold, platinum or mithril from his own body.

If one used this definition, then he was indeed a god. But a mortal god. It didn't explain how those Lost Divinities Players had survived his attacks after being annihilated to the last cell.

His other assumptions were more hazardous and much harder to verify. They were based on the Dream Aether's enigmatic nature, which implied that all beings were interconnected. Their thoughts blended into the Dream Aether's fabric, accumulating until eventually they came to life.

That was why Xi had told him early on: Everything that can be imagined exists somewhere in the Mirror Universe. That could be interpreted in a broad sense, but also literally.

If the latter theory prevailed, then there could be all sorts of real gods, more or less powerful depending on how many thoughts brought them to life. This could include vague concepts such as Love, War or Money, as well as real or imaginary deities such as the deities of the Greek or Scandinavian pantheon. It could also include imaginary fictional characters provided that enough Evolvers believe in their existence in the Mirror Universe.

"I see you already have a clue." Lucia chuckled as she saw their brows scrunched up in a thoughtful expression. "To summarize, there are those who are perceived as gods, those who pretend to be gods, and those who are gods because they have been imagined as such or embody ideas or concepts that have given them life. Divinity is the source of divine and conceptual energy that these imaginary belief-based gods use to harvest the Faith Energy of their believers. As long as the Divinity exists, or a person believes in their existence, they cannot really die. To be on the safe side, they can place their Divinity in a secure location not too far from their body, nullifying the chances of defeating them permanently."

'Xi, did you know about this?' Jake probed with a grim expression.

[I wasn't sure.] The Oracle AI confessed in a distressed and somewhat guilt-ridden voice. [It didn't seem likely in a low-level Ordeal, because it usually takes a high Dream Aether density for these kinds of miracles to occur. Such Aether density should not exist in lower Seed Worlds like the one where Earth used to be, nor even this one where Quanoth is. I think this kind of natural god can only be spawned in advanced worlds as those of the Eighth Ordeal or higher.]

Jake stood motionless for a long moment, before experiencing a sudden epiphany.

'There is still a possibility. Lost Divinities is an old faction belonging to some old system, right?'

[Hmm, that is indeed the case. I don't remember much about it, but there is also a famous faction called Lost Divinities in System A0. Their leader is said to be able to stand up directly to the Oracle and its Ancient Designers. Its Divinity is said to be Omnipotence. Basically, anyone in the universe who firmly or subconsciously believes in the existence of an all-powerful god provides Faith Energy to its Divinity and its divine powers match their expectations.]

Jake was stunned when he learned of the existence of such an absurd and overpowered entity. If such a thing was possible then it supported his hypothesis even more.

'If so, can a Divinity be shared, or at least its power?'

[I don't know, but in all logic... Yes.]

"I've figured out how Lost Divinities do it to survive my attacks." Jake sighed wearily. Sure, the mystery might have been solved, but it didn't tell him how to defeat them.

"Glad I could be of help." Lucia gave him a beaming smile.

"I think I figured it out too." Hade nodded. He, too, had been talking with his Oracle AI.

The reasoning was as follows. If enough Evolvers in the Mirror Universe believed in the existence of Batman, then somewhere a Batman could exist. On the other hand, this Batman, if he had a Divinity, could not share it with other people. Why not? Because that would be tantamount to diluting his own existence. There could only be one Batman.

It was different for the conceptual Divinities. Love and War were universal concepts. Each civilization had probably believed at some point in its history in gods embodying these concepts. Ares, Freya, Anat, Ishtar, Chiyou, Seth, Hachiman, Indra, Athena, Taranis, Mars, Sekhmet ect...

On Earth alone there were dozens of them. Although it was highly unlikely that the believers of that time were enough to bring them to life as individuals, on the scale of the Mirror Universe it was more than enough to create a Divinity of War. The first person to get their hands on this Divinity had to be more than powerful enough to share their Divinity with their subordinates, bestowing upon them divine powers similar to their own.

Taking the concept to the extreme, Ares, Seth and these other known gods could even be Evolvers in his service sent to Earth at a time when technology was still not very advanced to preach the good word and provide more and more Faith Energy.

Taking it a step further, one could even imagine that some of these gods had borne children, their Divinity affecting their bloodlines and their potential in unpredictable ways.

"As unrealistic as it sounds, let's consider the worst case scenario." Jake suggested, rubbing his temples.

"Okay." Hade agreed. "The worst case scenario would be that all the Players in this faction are true gods with their own unique Divinity that defines them. Most would be spirits, deities, or gods in their home worlds from the most popular local beliefs, but according to the birth principle of Divinities and the fact that they come from lower worlds like us they would have to be extremely weak, barely more tangible than mirages. As long as they have a follower somewhere in the Mirror Universe or B842 they can't really be killed, but it should take them so long to regenerate that they pose no threat to us.

"This brings us to the second component of the worst case scenario. These lesser deities have become Evolvers just like us and have used their assets to achieve excellent results at their first Ordeals. The Oracle always gives appropriate rewards to those who deserve them. If I were a belief-based god and the last believer believing in my existence was about to die, the first thing I would want would be to get a real body, a bloodline that matched my identity and essence, but which would not be dependent on anyone's fleeting thoughts and beliefs. If such relevant bloodlines exist then they should have specific abilities to maximize the use of this Faith Energy and the matching Divinity.

"This brings us to the third component of this worst-case scenario. Each of these Players would be a minor deity with their own Divinity, their own bloodline, AND they would have been lent a sliver of power from another much more powerful Divinity. In that case, we can destroy their body and soul, but killing them for good will be nearly impossible."

"But we can mortally wound them." Lucia countered with a fighting glint in her eyes. "I doubt many Lost Divinities members have two Divinities as you describe, one of their own and one borrowed. From Jake's description, most were just cannon fodder. On top of that, you left out another major possibility."

"And which one?"

"Descendants and ordinary Players who obtained a divine bloodline qualifying them to receive a Divinity or create their own."

Jake cast a knowing look at the young woman.

"That reminds me, you still haven't told us how you found out about Lost Divinities..." He quipped calmly.

"I was waiting for you to pop the question, hehe." She giggled smugly. "Thanks to my bloodline. The Neithnikidian bloodline, it's a combination of my Myrmidian bloodline and two other divine bloodlines based on the template of a demiurge goddess and another goddess of victory. This fact alone would not have been enough to arouse my suspicions, but you see, after I got this bloodline in my Third Ordeal, they contacted me to recruit me. I don't know how they found out, but the facts are there. I asked around looking for other Myrtharian Nerds who had received a similar invitation and found a few.

"Asfrid for example, has assimilated a bloodline named Nereid, which to put it simply are sea nymphs considered minor deities. Lost Divinities also contacted her."

While Hade wondered about the deeper purpose of such a mass recruitment, Jake and his narcissism were indignant about something else entirely.

'Did these cheap gods just try to recruit my subordinates right under my nose?'

Now he was pissed.

Chapter 770 See. It Wasn't That Hard

Seeing a vein bulge on Jake's forehead along with his eyebrows curving sharply downward, Lucia and Hade didn't need to be geniuses to figure out what was going on.

"Please Jake spare the chair armrest. It took me a while to craft them." The former Fluid Grandmaster groused apprehensively as he saw Jake's hands clutching the armrests of his chair a little too hard.

Jake snapped out of his trance and apologized profusely.

"I'm not in the mood for conversation anymore. Let me know when everyone is here, I need to blow off some steam." He announced as he stood up before striding to the exit.

Hade and Lucia exchanged an awkward glance, then the Fluid Grandmaster reminded him,

"Keep the Communication Artifact I gave you handy so we can contact you."

Lucia bowed in appreciation of Hade's hospitality, then ran after Jake.

"No matter where you go, I'm coming with you."

Jake gave her a sidelong glance, but eventually gave up.

"Whatever you say."

His gaze drifted to the northeast and with a bang he took off into the sky, breaking the sound barrier and leaving a supersonic boom in his wake. Lucia glared at him, stomping her foot on the ground grudgingly as she watched him fly away.

"Jake, wait for me!"

"Hmm?"

The Gold Myrtharian who had already gone far away turned his head and almost burst out laughing. He hadn't thought about the possibility of Lucia being unable to fly. Chasing after him, she was bouncing several kilometers high like a grasshopper to catch up with him, but she was rendered helpless when his figure blurred into the clouds.

Feeling a bit guilty, he returned down to fetch her.

"Damn it, did they ever teach you chivalry?" She grumbled adorably, her face red with embarrassment.

After her lament he heard her mumble to herself,

"...I must learn to fly for the next time."

"Sorry, if you're a good girl I'll teach you. Now that I'm officially an Aetherist I should be able to do it." Jake sheepishly apologized.

"I'll take your word for it!"

"Yeah, yeah, don't worry. I only have one word" He bragged while lifting his chin up with a smug attitude.

After that, Jake scooped her up with his telekinesis and the duo flew to the Ret'Asi Empire capital. After a while, not holding on anymore, Lucia asked,

"Why do you want to go there? Kanui may be the hub of the empire, but in my opinion Laudarkvik is much more interesting."

"I want to check on Will's situation. He's the only one who hasn't responded and what you just told us has raised my suspicions. I hope I'm wrong, but I want to be sure."

Quietly stalking his Shadow Guide, Jake traveled up the trail to Will until he saw a lush valley trapped between three mountains a few dozen kilometers from the capital. Hastening his descent, he coolly observed the landscape, looking around for his friend.

This valley didn't look like much at first glance, but as he ran an Oracle Scan Jake was alarmed to find that many winged creatures resembling the dragons and wyverns of legend were swarming this place. They were not as large as Hade's dragon, but more than big enough to take on most large dinosaurs.

In the heart of the valley, there was a secluded village with a dated architectural style, but what set it apart from the other towns was that every building was made of stone and everything seemed to be oversized. The height and width of the doors, windows, walls and ceilings were more than enough to fit 15 or 20 meter tall giants.

In the streets, Jake and Lucia saw a few men, women and children wearing traditional clothes and what they all had in common were the two horns on their foreheads and the gem-like scales covering part of their faces.

Ignoring them, Jake continued to follow his Shadow Guide and eventually landed in front of a stone building even larger than the others whose vaguely pyramidal structure loosely evoked that of a temple or a mausoleum, but in any case an important building.

"Halt! Only authorized guests and Soulspeakers are allowed to pass." An imposing warrior whose armor was as emerald as his scales barred their way with his spear.

Not angry, Jake calmly looked at the guard as he released a sliver of his aura along with his new Gravitation Skill and said,

"I'm looking for one of my comrades. His name is Will Hopkins and I know he's here."

The guard's expression changed slightly, his eyes immediately growing wary.

"And you are..."

"Jake Wilderth."

The guard's slit-pupil eyes widened with a gasp and he yelled hostilely,

"Leave. If you refuse to comply I will have no choice but to kill you."

Jake's eyes narrowed and his expression darkened. Lucia also smirked as she unsheathed the Myrmidian sword that had accompanied her since her very first Ordeal. In a cold voice he replied,

"Are you sure you want to stand in my way? As long as you bring Will in front of me, I'll gladly stay out. Otherwise, don't blame me if I accidentally destroy your valley while trying to reach my friend."

At that moment, he fully activated his Gravitation Skill and released all the spiritual pressure he was capable of pumping out. The temperature shot up, arcs of electricity began to sizzle around him, and the ground hundreds of meters around him began to ripple like the surface of the ocean in the midst of a storm.

The guard gulped with difficulty, then with a dry voice he stuttered,

"I-I will pass on your request."

Drenched in sweat and with his valiant bearing nowhere in sight, he bolted for the building without looking back, leaving them alone to stand outside. A few moments later, an elder wearing a long golden robe walked out to meet them, a scornful and condescending look on his face.

Unlike the guard, his horns and scales were as golden as his robe, and an oppressive spiritual presence spilled from his body without any apparent effort. When his gaze fell on Jake and Lucia, he said,

"Jake Wilderth and Lucia I presume? Will is not available at this time. Please come back later."

The frown on Jake's face intensified, but he was beginning to realize that he may have been overreacting for nothing. These natives didn't seem to have any connection to Lost Divinities.

"Can I at least know what he's doing and when I can see him?" Jake inquired patiently.

Eyeing them with a self-important air, the elder snorted,

"Will and his dragon Charizard have been chosen to become our new Soulspeakers. They are currently undergoing intensive training under the supervision of our Dragon King."

'So cliché!' Jake was speechless. Why wasn't this kind of encounter happening to him?

When he'd heard about his cousin Vincent's hilarious plight, he'd already been flabbergasted, but now it seemed like something straight out of a webnovel.

"And may I ask what a Soulspeaker is and what his duties consist of?" Jake ignored the old man's haughty attitude and continued asking his questions.

"A Soulspeaker uses his Soul Force to command the forces of nature and other creatures with his Soul. Here is an example. Kneel!"

Before they knew what had just happened, Jake and Lucia found themselves kneeling in front of the elder, who flipped his white hair and gave them a dismissive look before heading back inside the temple.

Jake and Lucia's civilized facade shattered simultaneously.

"You... Son of a..."

Jake teleported without warning and before the cocky old man realized the danger, a foot powered by a force equivalent to tens of thousands of tons and enhanced by his Gravity skill stomped on his skull, embedding his thunderstruck body into the temple's stairway.

BOOOOOOM!

A crater several dozen meters deep was formed in an instant with the old man stomped in the center and a powerful seismic wave spread through the temple, then the whole valley, causing the structure to collapse. An energy barrier activated, encompassing the building and saving it from total destruction.

Jake's leg had already turned to adamantium, and the sheer power of the kick sent the old native rocketing several kilometers underground, through multiple layers of bedrock before ending up embedded far below the surface, his condition unknown.

"Proud that you made me kneel with your magic trick? I don't need that to make you eat the ground." Jake said as he spat into the hole at the center of the crater.

Plop!

It took a while, but eventually he heard his spit hit its target. The wet impact woke up the battered old man, and when he realized where he was and what had happened, he went berserk. And yet, a trace of fear flitted across his face. This near death experience had been an eye opener.

Jake knew that his kick would not kill the old man. He had done a scan just before and the result had baffled him.

[Jinlong (Golden Dragon), Grandmaster Soulspeaker lvl 90]

As he counterattacked, Jake had been taken aback by the strength of his kick and for a split second he had been worried that he might have killed him. Fortunately, all was well that ended well. The old dragon was in bad shape, but with the Digitization and his high stats he would be fine.

"Cough cough..."

A moment later, the old man with no visible wounds and even his hair combed back emerged from the crater. His countenance was now much more humble, much to Jake's satisfaction.

"Let me escort you to Will."

"See. It wasn't that hard." Jake smiled as he entered the temple, followed by Lucia who broke into laughter alongside him.