

DoomApricot

System Dilemma Book II The Raging

-A LITRPG ADVENTURE-

System Dilemma

The Raging

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This book is dedicated to:

*James
Crepusculum
Alfredo Spuri
Archie
Bajara kim
ShadeByTheSea
Ilawen
Tom
Marcus Jean-Louis
Trawgg
chris
WaterDragon
Erik
Chase kirby
Matthew
Deane L Uptegrove
Puggan Se
Christopher Bates
GenericKane
Bladesunder*

*Of course, my family, my friends and my loved ones too.
(and yours truly.)*

“The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time.”

Mark Twain

1. Glitchers & Deities

As usual, the classes' descriptions were too vague for my liking.

I tried to open the system shop to buy information on the classes that I got, but I wasn't able to access it. All that appeared was a system screen saying that 'Establishing Connection is impossible due to admin constraints'.

Huh? This is weird. I assume this means that a system admin prohibited me from accessing the shop for whatever reason, and I think I know who the culprit might be...

I took a look at the mysterious figure that was sitting on a chair and reading a novel. He didn't have facial features, so I couldn't get a read on his current mood.

Nonetheless, I called for him and asked him about the matter.

"Hey...Mister," I said with a slightly stressed tone of voice, "I assume you're a system admin, right?"

"THE system admin, yes. That's an alias of mine," he replied without raising his head or making any unnecessary motion, "Don't worry about the shop, it's going through mandatory maintenance or something like that I guess?"

"I was going to ask...Oh well, never mind," I replied with a monotonous voice as his dry reply pissed me off somewhat, "Then, I hope you enjoy your book. I bet you'd like the happy ending..."

He waved his hand and told me to mind my own business for now. I went back to focus on the class options that were in front of me and started evaluating them one by one.

The first one made me feel sick in the stomach, as it gave off the vibes of a slightly 'heroic' class. It seemed like the host who used this class would be bound by some limitations on his powers, unless he used his skills to fulfill his duties as a punisher.

Besides, I didn't want to live for a higher cause that had nothing to do with my personal beliefs, and I wasn't okay with serving a calling that was imposed on me because of a class choice. There wasn't much information on the skills that would be given if I chose this class, but I assumed that it would be focused on burning people, especially 'bad' ones.

No Bueno.

The second class instantly grabbed my attention, as it increased my fire affinity by thirty points. Affinity wasn't something that could be increased using commonly found items, and even the system shop lacked anything that could increase it. People in my past life waged wars on one another just for information on ways to increase it.

The increase in affinity would strengthen my flames, but most importantly would tone down the pain that I felt when I set my body on fire.

Thus, this should exponentially increase my powers as a close-combat fighter. I'll be able to burn myself with hotter flames than the current ones without feeling more pain!

The description also stated that this class would have great power against large groups, and that was something that I would appreciate. The class didn't seem to have many conditions to be able to use it, and I liked it that way.

This might be the one unless the third choice is out of this world!

I checked the third class, and I was disappointed in all honesty. It seemed to be the strongest out of the three choices, but the price of such power was too much.

From what I understood, it made the person emotionally unstable. I already had a couple of abilities that fucked up my mental state, and I didn't want more trouble on that front.

Furthermore, this class allowed me to burn my soul to increase my powers. The description stated that this action would decrease my lifespan, but I doubted that it would stop with that. Fiddling with the soul always brought catastrophic

results, and it was one of the main reasons that Soul Magic was a forbidden practice in my past life.

Sometimes, the soul magician tears away a random portion of his test subject's soul, only for the poor creature to become a vegetable instantly.

I made my final choice and was about to choose the class that I wanted when I remembered something.

What if the system interrupts my speech once more and chooses a different class for me?

I knew that vocalizing my command would dramatically decrease the chances of mishaps happening, but it wasn't enough to eliminate the possibility of a 'bug' occurring.

I decided to ask the mysterious system admin, although I wasn't keen on talking with him due to the way he reacted to my previous question.

"Hey, Mr. System Admin," I said, "Since you know so much about me, I assume you understand that my system is somewhat 'bugged'. I'd like to know if there is any way that could allow me to choose my desired class without the system misinterpreting my words."

Suddenly, he closed his book shut and raised his head toward me. He put the novel on the ground and started walking toward me.

"I don't like the nickname; find something else. Anyway, that's a great question," he said, "The reason why the bugs occurred is that the system conflicted with your latent ability. However, you do not need to worry about such a thing occurring here. This place is under my total control, and I can lighten your latent ability's influence on the system. Besides, this issue will fade away once you're taught how to control your latent ability."

Conflict? Latent ability? What the hell is he talking about?

"I am sorry, but I don't unders.." I replied, but he interrupted me.

“Oh, little Jason... Everything will be explained when the time is right,” He said, “You’ll be overwhelmed if you’re exposed to so much information in a small timeframe. Just trust me, I am the fucking system admin.”

He had a point, as I was already feeling somewhat tired and there was a faint headache due to the absurdity of our current situation.

Oh well, you only live once; there is no need to have so much fear as long as one does his best.

“I choose the class **Pyrotechnical Incinerator** of the Legendary grade as my next class”, I said.

Suddenly, a feeling of drowsiness and weakness hit me. I knew that the class evolution would render me unconscious, but I found the floor uncomfortable.

Suddenly, a small mattress appeared next to me. It had a length of two meters and a width of one meter, and it was in pristine condition. It seemed soft and cozy.

“Thank me later,” said the mysterious figure without raising his head toward me.

I crawled into the mattress and fell into a deep sleep as soon as I put my head on it.

.
. .
.

I woke up after an undetermined amount of time and tried to remember if I had any dreams during the class evolution.

It was blank, and I couldn’t remember any meetings with the hooded figures or anything of that nature.

Either I didn’t meet them during this class evolution, or I did but ended up losing my memory of the event.

Two system screens appeared in front of me. One of them congratulated me on the class evolution, and the other gave an expanded description of the class.

<p>[Congratulations, Host Jason Stubbs is the first human to evolve his class twice!]</p> <p>[He's the first human to reach the D rank!]</p> <p>[Obtained Class: Pyrotechnical Incinerator (Legendary)]</p>	
<p>Would you like to globally broadcast this system notice?</p>	
<p>[Agree]</p>	<p>[Decline]</p>

Hell yeah!

I agreed to broadcast the system notice, and I was about to check the class's description when something interrupted me.

The mysterious man closed his book with a loud thud and asked me a question as he walked toward me.

“So did you meet the hooded figures once more?” he said.

“Uhh, I don't think I did,” I replied, and added as soon as I realized the implications of his question, “What the hell man? Is there anything you don't know about me?”

I was already suspicious of this guy and had a hard time trusting him due to how mysterious he was, but this revelation might've single-handedly made me paranoid of him.

“Relax kid! It's not just you, I know nearly everything about everyone,” he said, “As a token of goodwill, I'll tell you some stuff about them,”

He sighed, then resumed his speech.

“Those hooded figures are all Glitchers, but not all Glitchers can join their little gang. They're born with Latent abilities, and they're called Glitchers because their latent

abilities cause bugs when the host uses the system,” he said, “One of the members must’ve established a connection with you during the tutorial using some kind of latent ability because they’re scouting for new members,”

I nodded, and he kept going.

“I am not sure about the reason why they’re trying to communicate with you,” he said, “I guess they’re trying to evaluate you, to see if you’re worthy of joining their organization,”

*

An old guy was sitting on a revolving chair, and the projection of a lady was in front of him. She had a slender figure, silver hair, and gray eyes.

He spoke with an air of superiority and confidence as if he was a sublime being. The lady answered his questions, and only asked questions of hers after raising her hand and making a polite request. She looked at the ground and didn’t keep eye contact with him.

Shame was apparent on her face, and her eyes were red.

“Don’t worry about it, Stella,” the old guy said, “He might be stronger than you individually, but there are three of you. Besides, he doesn’t have the backing of so many important figures like you! Take it easy, you’ll catch up to him when we deliver to you the resources that we promised.”

“Thank you, Almighty Holy One,” she replied as she bowed, “It’s just that I was used to speaking with the lesser deities of our Great Church, and I was surprised to find out that I was going to talk to you. This is the second time that you talked to me ever, so I thought you’d be mad at me and the other two. I am glad you’re so understanding.”

“My benevolence knows no bounds,” the old man replied as he gave the lady a radiant smile, “Take care of yourself and let Oleg and Igor know that I am proud of their progress.”

The lady smiled, and her projection disappeared.

The old guy stood motionless for around a minute before he spun his chair to the other side and started screaming.

“Fuck!” “FUCK FUCK!”, He walked around the hallway of his room, and he broke some beautiful vases as he kept cursing.

“Why the hell aren’t those three hosts performing better than a lowly Glitcher? He evolved his class once more, but they didn’t even clear the tutorial yet!” he spoke to himself loudly, “I handpicked them exactly when the system integration happened! I chose them out of eight candidates who had Legendary classes based on their personalities and their future potential, and I was sure that I picked the best three!”

He stopped walking and added.

“I even pulled some strings and paid a lot to the Queen of Fairies to have my candidates in the same tutorial group! Yet, they disappointed me!”

He inhaled and spoke once more, but his tone was much quieter this time.

“If I knew of the potential of that Jason guy, I would’ve picked him straight away! He’s on his own, but his performance is still better than those three clowns.”

He stopped speaking and contemplated about something that had been on his mind for a while.

Jason had a Legendary class, but he didn’t have any class when the tutorial started. He wasn’t among the humans who had Legendary classes when the system integration happened, so there was no way for me to convince him of joining my Great Church at that time.

Now, he’s protected by that weirdo, and I can’t touch him.

How the hell did he slip out of my grasp? Just, how did he hide his Legendary class?

2. No Matter What It Takes

Oh, that was out of the blue...

“What the hell is a latent talent anyway,” I said.

“Remember the corpse right there,” he replied as he pointed toward the body of the Bahamut, “You’ve beaten it using your latent ability. I don’t even know much about it, so we’ll have to discover it step by step.”

‘We’? is he planning on intruding into my personal life?!

“Don’t worry, kid,” he said, “I could kill all humans on a whim, and I might be able to do things that you’d find unimaginable. Why would you refuse free help?”

“Free help always comes with strings attached,” I said, “I am not even sure if I could repay you for what you already gave me, but I guess I can’t dissuade you from lending me a hand, can I?”

The mysterious man clapped as he laughed, then he told me to focus on my bullshit instead of rambling around. He warned me sternly not to disturb him unless I had something incredibly important to discuss; he told me that he reached a critical part in the novel.

Ugh...I’ll check the description of the new class and the new skills that come with it.

-Excess EXP used.

-Host levelled up x4!

-Host reached Level 79! 16 MAG, 16 END, and 80 free stat points acquired.

[Class: Pyrotechnical Incinerator (Legendary)]

Jason was an average human for a while, until he wasn't! His legacy will go on for ages as the Earthling with the fastest clear time of the tutorial!

The system recognized his efforts as he faced armies of enemies, and emerged victorious despite being greatly outnumbered.

He's slowly climbing the power ladder, and his prospects are getting brighter and brighter.

This Class is a memorial to **Jason**, who stood against all odds and defeated the **Primordial**! Give him a round of applause, please! As this might be his lifetime's achievement...

This Class was carefully balanced and optimized to assure some satisfaction.

-Each Level gives the host: **4 MAG** points; **4 END** points and **20 free stat points**.

-If the Host desires to use a skill, he must shout its name.

-Host is immune to fire damage.

-The past class skills were improved accordingly.

-In addition to the past skills, the host obtains 2 other skills.

-Damage is increased by 80% against beings made of flesh.

-Increases fire affinity (30/100)

-Upgradable.

[Host gained Class Skill **[Unlimited Fireworks]** (Legendary)!]

[Host gained Class Skill **[Deus Ex Machina: One against Many]** (Legendary)!]

-Host acquired 1 extra title for the impressive feat!

Aha! I still haven't checked the titles that I had! Never mind, I'll check them once I am done reading the skills' descriptions.

[Unlimited Fireworks] (Legendary)	Active
<p>Jason is a conceited person who believes himself to be better than others, that's why he prefers fighting alone!</p> <p>Jokes aside, he truly likes fighting alone. Thus, he became experienced in the art of staying out of the enemy's range while being able to control the battlefield.</p> <p>The system recognized his efforts, and deemed him worthy of having a Dimensional Bubble!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-The host is the center of the bubble.- Radius of the bubble: 20 meters.	

- Inside the dimensional bubble, the host will be able to use all forms of fire magic without having to spend any mana.

- Fire damage is increased by 400% inside the bubble.

- Once the enemy is trapped, he can't escape unless the host allows him to or the skill is turned off.

(Activation Condition 1: Make sure the enemy stays around 20 meters away from you or less for about five minutes.)

(Activation Condition 2: Make sure that both you and your enemy are on fire.)

(Activation Condition 3: Make sure that the enemy hears this skill's chant.)

Warning: Dimensional Bubbles are advanced and complicated forms of magic and they need a chant to stabilize them.

Warning: You're free to choose this skill's chant. It must be formed of at least six words and twenty words at most.

**[Deus Ex Machina: One against Many]
(Legendary)**

Passive

Jason was a stupid host, he fought groups of monsters at a time.

Miraculously, he always managed to emerge victorious!

This is a reward to keep him going for a little longer.

-Increases your STR, DEX, and AGI by 2% per enemy on the battlefield.

-Increases your STR, DEX, and AGI by 2% per attack that you got hit with. (Max 200%)

-Increases your STR, DEX, and AGI by 2% per attack that you hit an enemy with. (Max 200%)

Both abilities seemed rather good, and I was equally impressed by them. The first ability had some activation conditions, but they weren't impossible.

The first ability needs a chant huh? I'll come up with a random one later.

The second ability was straightforward, and it had great potential if I played my cards right in the battle.

I took a look at the previous abilities that I had, and all of them improved when it came to their mana cost, their stat boosts, and their cooldowns. However, the one that stood out the most was [It's fine!], as it granted me around four stats points per 10 K at this point. Furthermore, I found out that I would only feel seventy percent of the flames' pain due to my current fire affinity.

My offensive flames' damage also increased by thirty percent for no extra mana cost.

It's time to check the titles that I got...

I asked the system to show me the titles that I acquired, and thirteen system screens appeared.

[Title acquired: Class Dropout]

Class Dropout

Either you got a bad class, or you were too stupid to change what the system assigned you at first!

You are the first Earthling to acquire a new class through external means!

-Gain 100 free stat points.

[Title acquired: Solo Delver]

Solo Delver

Loneliness might be one thing, but solitude is completely different.

You are the first Earthling to clear a dungeon on your own!

-Gain 30 points in STR, and MAG.

[Title acquired: Monster Slayer]

Monster Slayer

Gotta kill them all!

You are the first Earthling to participate in killing five hundred monsters.

-Gain 50 points in STR, MAG, VIT, AGI, DEX, and END.

One Man Army

Why are you fighting so many creatures on your own?

This is suicide!

You are the first Earthling to kill five hundred monsters on your own.

-Gain 80 points in STR, MAG, VIT, AGI, DEX, and END.

[Title acquired: Boss Steamroller]

Boss Steamroller

An area boss is strong enough to hold control over a vast location.

Nevertheless, you defeated one of them!

You're the first Earthling to beat an [Area Boss]!

-You get the General Skill [Scout Boss] (Uncommon)!

[Title acquired: Divine Superstar]

Divine Superstar

Some people are monsters, while others are born to be monsters of fame!

You're the first Earthling to grab the attention of at least thirty entities of the divine realm!

-You get to choose one of these two stats:

[Charisma]

[Rage]

I was checking the titles one by one until one of them stood out among the rest.

Divine superstar, huh? It's offering me one of two great stats!

Charisma was a stat that improved the person's charm and people's first impression of him; it was rather useful when it came to interpersonal relationships. I've heard that it was capped at a maximum of one hundred and fifty stat points, and its usefulness would've been unparalleled.

On the other hand, Rage was a more straightforward stat. Each stat point in it gave the same effect as multiple stat points in the Strength stat, but it had a drawback. The higher that stat was, the more irrational the person became. The host's mental capacities would degrade, and he'd start acting like a berserker.

The Rage stat didn't have a stat limit, and it could make the person insane if they invested too many points in it.

It was obvious which one would suit me better, and I couldn't wait to get my hands on it!

The titles are already looking tasty! And there are still seven other ones that I haven't checked yet!

*

“So... What did they tell you?” Igor asked Stella. He tried to keep a smile on his face, but the sweat on his face exposed his anxiety.

“Umm... Were they upset with us because Jason is running laps around us?” said Oleg as he waited for Stella's reply, but it never came, “I don't care either way. Being a tank is so boring, and I sure as hell won't be able to stand out using my class!”

Oleg sneered when Stella ignored him. He was playing around with the skull of an Amphiwolf, and the blood that covered his face didn't seem to bother him.

Stella had a poker face and gave her companions stern gazes. She took her time before she replied.

“I met the Almighty Holy One,” she said, and the other two gasped loudly. She waited for the surprise to subside before she resumed speaking, “He wasn't upset with us, and he's aware of our efforts. He said that he was proud of us and that he'll be expecting great things from us once we're out of the tutorial.”

Igor sighed and sat on a tree log. He asked her about the helpful resources that the Great Church promised them when the system integration happened, and Stella furrowed her eyebrows at the question.

“I am sure you know that our performance has been subpar so far, and you still believe that we deserve our sponsors' help and attention?” said Stella with a monotonous voice, “The Leader of the Great Church is so benevolent that he still believes in our potential. However, I am disappointed with our achievements!”

“Ugh, can’t we just take it easy and enjoy the tutorial while it lasts?” said Igor.

“Pleasure isn’t something that we should care about,” said Stella, “We’re heroes, and we must serve as examples for the other humans to follow. We’re a reflection of our sponsors, and we can’t tarnish their image.”

“I mean, I’m just in for the thrill and the fights,” said Oleg, “I’ll play along as long as we get to have some action!”

Stella sighed and said with a stern tone of voice.

“Excellence is our only option. We’ll overcome that ‘Jason Stubbs’ no matter what it takes, and I’ll make sure that both of you are working hard enough to satisfy our sponsors.”

The other two laughed nervously and followed Stella’s lead as she made it to the last Area Boss’s lair.

“...no matter what it takes...” she whispered as she kept up the pace.

3. The God of Deceit

I chose Charisma as the title's reward, as the other option wasn't suitable for me. There were only so many free stat points available, and I didn't plan on allocating any of them to any detrimental stats like rage.

High Charisma would be useful outside the tutorial, as I planned to make a guild and a guild leader could make use of such a stat.

Alright, I'll check the remaining titles that I got.

[Title acquired: Templar Vanquisher]

Templar Vanquisher

Temples are sacred structures, but you only care about the rewards that they offer!

You're the first Earthling to clear all the challenges of a Divine Temple!

- You get the General Skill [Divinity Meter] (Uncommon)

[Title acquired: Evolver I]

Evolver I

Evolution is inevitable, but you've done it faster than anyone else.

You're the first Earthling to evolve his class once and reach the E rank!

-Gain an 11% boost to all stats (Applied after flat boosts)

[Title acquired: Maximus Niveau]

Maximus Niveau

There's a limited quantity of monsters inside a tutorial, thus the amount of EXP is finite.

For you to reach the seventy-fifth level, you must've been rather competent!

You are the first Earthling to reach the 75th level in the tutorial.

-Gain 75 points in STR, MAG, VIT, AGI, DEX, and END.

[Title acquired: Millenium Agent]

Millenium Agent

One thousand was a lucky number, they said.

No one would be able to have more than such a number of points in a single stat, they said.

They were wrong!

You are the first Earthling to have more than a thousand points in at least one stat.

-Gain 200 free stat points.

[Title acquired: Primordial's Bane]

Primordial's Bane

They weren't meant to be killed!

Hell, you weren't even supposed to meet one of them!

You are the first Earthling to kill a Primordial!

-You get the General Skill [Aura] (Unique)

[Title acquired: Evolver II]

Evolver II

Gotta go fast, right?

You're the first Earthling to evolve his class twice and reach the D rank!

-Gain a 12% boost to all stats (Applied after flat boosts)

[Title acquired: Hero of an Epic]

Hero of an Epic

Keep up the grind, pal!

You're the first Earthling to bring an Epic skill to its maximum level!

-You get an **Epic Skill** Upgrade Point!

The stat boosts were straightforward, as I knew the effect that they would bring. The flat boosts would be applied first, then the percentage-based ones after them. The latter buffs were some of the best rewards, as they scaled with the user's current stats.

I was happy to get an Upgrade Point this fast, as it would allow me to evolve a fully-leveled Epic Skill of my choice.

For now, I'll check the new general skills that I got.

I opened their descriptions, and three system screens appeared.

[Scout Boss] (Uncommon)	Passive
<p>You're talented when it comes to finding bosses, but you're even better when it comes to slaying them!</p> <p>Enjoy the hunt!</p> <p>-Allows the host to find Boss Monsters that are within this skill's range.</p> <p>(Range: one hundred meters away from the host)</p>	

[Divinity Meter] (Uncommon)	Passive
<p>The divine realm is a mystery, and only some mortals know some information about it.</p> <p>Nevertheless, it's advised that you keep your distance from it.</p> <p>It was curiosity that killed the cat, after all.</p> <p>-Allows the Host to spot structures or locations that have to do with divine entities</p> <p>(Range: twenty meters away from the host)</p>	

[Aura] (Unique)	Active
<p>Once a person trains hard enough for a sufficient duration, he'll learn about his strength and weaknesses.</p>	

Aura is the culmination of a person's state of being, and it can be used to assert dominance.

Don't bully weaklings, okay?

-Unleashes the Host's unique Aura to the surroundings.

(Range for immediate effect: one meter away from the host)

(Range for mild effect: fifteen meters away from the host)

Suddenly, I felt great danger coming from the mysterious entity that was a couple of meters away from me. I stared at him, and I could see many purple dots surrounding his body, and I knew by instinct that this was the effect of my [Divinity Meter].

I turned my attention toward the room that we were in, and I felt many traces of divinity all over it. It was proof that this structure was made by a deity; most likely the mysterious system admin.

So, not only is this guy the system admin, but he is a deity too? Impressive!

I tried to activate my Aura, and I felt the air around me thicken. I noticed a dark aura surrounding my body, and my shadow's color became pitch black.

Nonetheless, I had no feedback on how my Aura felt when encountered, so I couldn't judge how effective it would be as a method of intimidation. I needed an external observer.

Maybe the system admin can give me an idea of my Aura's effectiveness...

I looked at him, and his focus was still on the book that he held in his left hand.

"Hey, Mysterio..." I said, "How effective do you think my Aura is?"

He closed his book and raised his head toward me. His whole body was black, and its outlines shifted constantly. I felt

uncomfortable dealing with him, as I couldn't have an idea of his emotions based on his facial expressions.

“Aura?” he said, “It’s so weak that I barely noticed it; I can show you what a true Aura is like if you’d want. Besides, the nickname you chose for me is shitty.”

I didn't want to face the aura of a deity head-on, so I rejected his offer. I wasn't even sure if he was physically present in this room, or if this body was just an avatar of his.

“Why are you trying to be so mysterious?” I said, “I don't think we'll be able to communicate effectively if you're not willing to cooperate, and I am not enjoying my current state of ignorance.”

He sighed, and his figure instantly shifted. He took the form of a young adult with short black hair and a goatee. He was taller than me, and he had blue eyes and wore extravagant clothes. His arms had many tattoos, and they were muscular.

He had a blue shirt decorated with many large feathers, and his black pants were adorned with jewels of different colors and shapes. He was bare-footed, and his hands had many rings.

He smirked, and he gave off a sleazy vibe.

“Better?” he said, “This is one of my many forms, and it's nearly as old as you, at least physically. I've heard that communication can be easier for mortals if they were close in age.”

I was still barely a young adult, but this was still better than having to deal with a snotty child or an old hag.

“Yeah, this is much better,” I said, “I have a couple of questions actually.”

The smirk left his face, and he furrowed his eyebrows. He put his hands on his hips and tilted his head a bit.

“Questions, questions, questions,” he said with a displeased tone of voice, “I told you to take it easy; we have more than ten days before everyone else clears their tutorial

iterations. I'll answer one question, for now, so choose wisely."

I couldn't take it easy, as I wanted to go back to Earth earlier than others. This mysterious entity was wasting my precious time, and I'd miss out on a lot of fun if I arrived after some other people.

I was about to ask him about the reason why he's keeping me here, but I stopped before the words came out of my mouth.

The answer to that question wouldn't be helpful, and I doubted that I could force him to send me to earth if I knew his motives. I was a time traveler, and he knew about that. Besides, it seems like he's interested in my latent ability.

There was a more pressing mystery that needed closure.

"Who the hell are you?" I said.

I knew that this guy was a deity and that he was a system admin. Somehow, he could read my mind and he knew most of my secrets if not all of them.

He sighed and smirked once more.

"That's a disturbing question, but I'll give you a summary," he replied.

Suddenly, he shapeshifted and his look completely changed. He had red hair, thick eyebrows, and a large smile that revealed his sharp teeth. He wore a red bandana on his head and his arms were thicker than my legs.

Once more, he transformed into another person. It was a child with blonde hair and red eyes. He wore a white robe and had a couple of small wings on his back.

He kept transforming into different people quickly. They were of different sexes, and ages and their physical features differed.

All of a sudden, he transformed back into the young man with the goatee.

“I am the current system admin, and I am known by many other names. My current form is known as Loki; your race has a couple of legends about him, but most of them are erroneous. I fill in history’s gaps and play the roles of people that are needed for certain events to occur. I fix mistakes, and make sure that everything is going according to what the system records dictate.” He spoke.

He took a deep breath and raised his arms in the air. He grinned and kept speaking.

“I can peer into anyone’s records, and that allows me to get a general idea about their existence. I can also read minds, but I can only see what the person is actively thinking of,” he said with a wide grin, “I am not your average deity, but I believe you already know that. I know that you’ve come from the future; I was the one who sent you back. I couldn’t find out the reason behind that action of my future self, and that’s why I am keeping you around.”

The revelation startled me. It wasn’t enough to sate my curiosity, as I didn’t know what ‘records’ were and why the system needed an admin. Moreover, I had no idea why someone would send a Dismantler like me to the past.

Still, his explanation gave me a general idea about the reason behind his interest in me, his mysterious form, and his ability to read minds.

I was impressed with this entity. If I understood correctly; he was more powerful than most gods. He would make for a great sponsor if he was generous too.

On the other hand, it meant that my chances of running away from him were slim if not non-existent. He had a certain degree of omniscience, and that was somewhat terrifying.

Besides, I am so disappointed that my time travel was a premeditated event! I thought that I got lucky and the universe decided to give me a second chance...

I sighed and stared at the system admin.

‘Loki’ seemed intent on hearing my reply, as he crossed his arms and gave me a stern gaze.

“Great!” I said, “Then you’ll let me go back to earth if you find out the reason why you sent me back in time?”

He laughed loudly as he replied.

“Hahaha! Don’t worry! The passage of time here is rather slow; every second on Earth and the Tutorial is equivalent to an hour here. We have all the time in the world to experiment!”

“...alright then, at least let me go before anyone else gets to Earth,” I said.

‘Loki’ nodded, and grabbed his book once more.

I’ll check the mystery boxes for now.

4. Interrogation

This guy claims to be the one that sent me back to the past, so I guess that slowing the passage of time in a certain area should be easy for him.

I sighed and decided that it was time to unwrap some gifts.

I walked toward the pile of boxes that were in front of me and grabbed the little card that was on top of a Golden Mystery Box.

I examined it, and a system screen showed up.

[Soul Identity]	(Unique)
<p>You've participated in the tutorial and got some tutorial points; this is proof of those feats.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Host: Jason Stubbs-Current Tutorial Points: 197580000 points	
<p>Warning: You need this item to spend your tutorial points balance once you arrive at a System Trading Station.</p>	
<p>Warning: This item is the sole proof of your identity as a System Citizen!</p>	

Finally got my hands on this!

This item was mandatory in many deals and trades, especially with foreign races. People without a Soul Identity

were treated like garbage, and only illegal organizations hired them as expendable workers for dangerous jobs.

Humans imitated the aliens and segregated those without Soul Identities. Guild Leaders were afraid that the foreign races would stop trading with them if they hired the ‘Illegal citizens’.

However, I do not need to fear those aliens’ backlash. I am planning to start a revolution against societal norms, and I have sufficient power and resources to make my plan possible.

Many humans ended up as ‘Illegal citizens’, and Petra was among them. I planned to give them jobs in my organization, as long as they were competent enough for the position offered. I had many plans, and I’d need all the manpower that I could get.

The ‘illegal citizens’ would have to sign strict contracts just like anyone else that would join my guild, but such a fate was better than working as an organ smuggler.

My guild wasn’t going to be a charity, but a certain degree of fairness will be maintained. I needed to prepare for the dungeon breakouts, as they might cause humanity to go extinct.

Sigh... I’ll be busy for a while once I get to Earth.

I put the Soul Identity on the boxes and opened my status screen.

It was rather messy; it was already crowded in its previous form but the addition of titles made it even worse.

I asked the system to hide the titles unless prompted otherwise and to show the status screen in the same way as before.

When the system confirmed that my command was fulfilled, I opened the status screen once more.

A system screen appeared in front of me.



Host: Jason Stubbs	HP 2800/2800 (1 HP/20 seconds)
Class: Pyrotechnical Incinerator	Mana 8700/8700 (14.5 mana/1 second)
Level 79: 412120/3082000	Stat Points: 744
STR: 439	VIT: 584
DEX: 402	AGI: 413
MAG: 879	END: 1077
LCK: 0	CHA: 0
Class Skills:	General Skills:
[Flame-n-Go]: Level 31	[Zoom]: Level 2
[It's fine!]: Level 31	[Shut-Down]: Level 2
[Burn That Invader!]: Level 17	[Light Steps]: Level MAX
[Kill Them Before They Spread!]: Level 23	[Shadow Assimilation]: Level 14
[Dismantle]: Level 5	[Divinity Meter]: Level 1
[Plasmic Torch]: Level 16	[Aura]: Level 1
[Flawed State of Being]: Level 23	
[Unlimited Fireworks]: Level 1	

[Deus Ex Machina: One against Many]: Level 1	
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Now we're cooking, the titles increased my stats by orders of magnitude! Moreover, those are a lot of free stat points!

I allocated a hundred points in Luck, and a hundred and fifty in Charisma.

I was about to open many mystery boxes, and every bit of Luck should improve my chances of getting something good out of them.

These boxes gave items of different grades based on their colors; Regular, Copper, Silver, and Golden were the types of boxes that I knew about, and each of them gave items of a certain grade.

In my past life, I acquired a regular box and a copper one. They gave me a Common cleaver and an Uncommon backpack respectively.

I was so excited about the Silver and Golden mystery boxes, as they gave Epic and Legendary items respectively. Items of those grades were scarce, and Mystery Boxes were some of the only sources of them early on.

However, I have no idea about the custom mystery boxes...

As a reward for my efforts in the tutorial, I got six mystery boxes. One of them was a custom one, and it was my first time hearing about such a thing.

I shrugged my shoulders and was about to open the regular mystery box when I heard muffled noises coming from the other side of the room.

I raised my head and saw the mysterious entity questioning a group of four people. There were three men and women, and they bore little resemblance to humans.

One of the men looked like an orc and he had a vertical scar that passed through his right eye, another looked like a red goblin and he had his black hair in a ponytail, and the

other resembled a human, but his pointy ears and whiskers revealed that he was a beastkin.

The woman had red hair, eyes, and skin. She had two little horns on the sides of her head, and a grin was glued to her face.

The four of them were sitting on the ground, and a thick rope was wrapped around them. They were handcuffed, and their legs were bound to the ground.

The mysterious entity still had the form of the young man that he called 'Loki', and he kept smirking as he threatened them and asked them all kinds of questions.

He noticed my stare and waved his hand.

"Oh! Hey Jason," he said, "These guys were supposed to rescue you in the tutorial; they're C rank hosts and they're members of an independent organization that places a lot of emphasis on integrity."

He clicked his tongue repeatedly and shook his head.

"Some people bribed them to let you die, but you survived on your own," he added, "Those same people tried to kill you on several occasions too. I already know the culprits behind this event, but I want a verbal confession from these people."

Oh...

Now everything made sense! I was already suspicious about some weird occurrences in the tutorial, and this was like the last piece of a puzzle. It explained the weird behavior of the fairies at the end of the tutorial, the Primordial's appearance, and the fight against Chris too.

"So, why are they still alive if you already know the information that you've been looking for?" I asked. Seeing that this guy could read minds, he must've found out about the identities of the people who wanted to kill me.

The four people visibly paled at my question, and they started trembling. The woman begged for her life, the goblin said that he had children, and the other two whimpered silently.

‘Loki’ ignored them, and stared at me.

“Accusations of crime are uncommon among deities for a reason. Sure, some of us can read minds, but I need someone to testify against the perpetrators.” He replied.

For some reason, my intuition told me that ‘Loki’ didn’t care much about getting revenge on the deities that planned for my death. It felt like this guy enjoyed playing around with these guys and torturing them psychologically, as he finished reading his book not too long ago and a new source of fun was needed.

Well, I’ll just focus on checking my mystery boxes.

I touched the Regular Mystery Box and commanded the system to open it.

[Host opened a Regular Mystery Box!]

[Host acquired an item (Common)!]

[Cleaver #78]	(Common)
This is the most popular Cleaver for butchers throughout the Intergalactic Systematic Union. Made from a titanium alloy, and sharpened using the latest tech available; this little boy can pack a punch! We’re sure that you’ll find this tool satisfying. Enjoy your dull job! -Self-Sharpening -Self-Repair	



Hello, my old friend, today we meet again!

This was the same cleaver that I got in my past life, and I had mixed feelings about it.

It got me through hard times, as I didn't need to repair it or sharpen it regularly. On the other hand, I felt that the system was making fun of me by giving me something that butchers used.

Anyway, it was useful so I had nothing to say about it.

I put it next to my other items and opened another mystery box.

[Host opened a Copper Mystery Box!]
[Host acquired an item (Uncommon)!]

[Build-Up Grenade]	(Uncommon)
<p>When life gives you a grenade, throw it back!</p> <p>You can also use it to kill some thugs, right?</p> <p>This is a special grenade, and its effect can be devastating if you charge it enough.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-This grenade absorbs thermal energy (Limit: 10 Petajoules)-Absorption starts when the host exposes this item to a source of thermal energy and says 'Start the Charge'-The bomb detonates after five seconds from leaving the host's hand.	

Warning: The bomb can detonate even if the energy absorbed is less than the limit.
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Warning: The bomb detonates immediately once the energy limit is reached.

Oh yeah, this is different from the item that I got in my past life!

This was a good item, and it could cause a lot of damage if I charged it enough. Furthermore, it synergized well with my skillset since my class focused on controlling fire, and the bomb could absorb thermal energy.

If I charged it enough, it could get more powerful than a lot of nukes.

Still, that would take a very long while of charging...

I put the grenade on top of the table next to me and opened the Silver Mystery Box.

[Host opened a Silver Mystery Box!]

[Host acquired an item (Epic)!]

[Hydrocarbon Junk Fuel Dispenser Mark VII]	(Epic)
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Pollution is a serious problem; many species went extinct as a result of it.
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But fret not! For we have a practical solution.

This is the result of a certain tech-savvy species' endless research, and it's a marvelous masterpiece.

It gets rid of plastic, and converts it into highly flammable fuel!

Beware! The species that made this item went extinct because they recklessly burned their planet.

-Converts hydrocarbons of all forms to pure fuel (1:1 mass ratio)

Warning: This item is not a toy for children.

Warning: This is a restricted item that should only be used if the host has a license for it.

The item resembled a barrel. It was cylindrical, with a radius of fifteen centimeters and a height of forty centimeters. It had a faucet on its side, and its lid opened easily when I twisted it.

I was interested in discovering what made it tick, but I was disappointed when I found nothing inside it. The barrel was empty, and I was disappointed.

I couldn't even see any runes on its insides.

Another item that only works thanks to 'magic'.

I was also interested in examining the fuel that it made, but that would be for later.

I put it aside and tried to open the first Golden Mystery Box when the mysterious entity interrupted me.

He called for my name and waved his hands. I halted my actions and looked at him.

He had a grin on his face and seemed elated, but his hostages weren't as lucky.

All of them were laying on the ground, eyes shut. I thought that they were dead for a second, but I noticed their chests moving as they breathed.

Did he finish questioning them?

“Hey,” he said, “I have something interesting to tell you, and I'd like you to answer a couple of my questions.”

5. To Be Blessed

“You’ve heard about the Great Church, right?” he asked me. “I am not sure if they made their presence known in your past life; they prefer to run things from behind the scenes.”

I tried to recall any memories that I had about this ‘Great Church’, but I couldn’t remember anything from my past life that was related to it.

I was about to deny having heard of it when a certain memory popped up inside my head.

When I was inside the temple, I’ve come across that name. It was the organization that the Pegasus was a member of, the one that was trying to gather as many followers as possible to convert them to mindless puppets.

If the description that I saw in the temple was correct, then their ultimate goal was to have all their followers commit suicide for some kind of ritual.

“I’ve never heard of it in my past life,” I said, “But I’ve encountered that organization’s name in the tutorial. It’s the church that’s trying to brainwash people through gifts and blessings, right?”

“This makes things a lot easier,” he said, “Watch out for them. Those four guys from the rescue team took bribes from many gods to let you die, and the most prominent ones were lesser deities from the Great Church. That organization will most likely bless some powerful people from your planet; you’ll know it when they come knocking on your door. Some of those deities might even offer you their blessings, to make you a mindless follower in case you got greedy.”

To sum it up, many deities tried to indirectly murder me back in the tutorial. Furthermore, they’ll try to bless me, only to make me a mindless puppet!

My opinion on the deities instantly plummeted, as I used to hold them in higher regard before. I expected them to be lofty

beings that didn't care about mortals' matters, but it seemed like they were too interested in killing a poor man like me.

Why can't I have a calm life? Ugh...

Their blessings were the cornerstones of many people's lives, and I was envious of the lucky bastards that got the support of those higher beings.

People like Stella, her two companions, and many others were blessed by deities. Heck, even Chris had been blessed, and it was one of the only reasons why he made it big in my past life.

Those people used to get free resources and they were able to progress much faster than poor bastards like me.

In fact, I was hoping that this guy would offer me his blessing. I knew nothing about the other gods, and he's been helpful so far. I didn't trust him fully, but he didn't show any ill intentions so far.

Besides, he seems capable of providing some help if the deities ever tried to forcefully erase me. I shook off these thoughts, as I had other important things to take care of.

"I understand your concern, and I'll be cautious. I am pretty sure that many deities would be interested in blessing me, but I'll worry about that later," I said, "As far as I knew, the blessings would be offered once I am back to earth. For now, I have a couple of mystery boxes to open, and the corpse of the Primordial to dismantle."

'Loki' smirked, and pulled a couple of little orange balls out of nowhere. He sat on the ground and juggled them while humming an upbeat song.

I was in awe by the display of his skill as a juggler, but I shrugged my shoulders and went back to opening my gifts.

[Host opened a Golden Mystery Box!]

[Host acquired an item (Legendary)!]

[Anti-Gravity A.I. Floating Shield]

(Legendary)

It's unusual to find an item like this, as people would kill one another to get it for themselves.

This item's origin is unknown; one kid found it by chance as he was passing through the desert.

It allowed him to get a good position as a mercenary, and he lived a good life!

That is, until he got backstabbed by his friend to take this item for himself.

This shield brought a lot of misery to its owners, as its powers were worth the bloodshed.

Legends say that this item was made by an ancient race that preceded the system's appearance.

-Has different effects depending on the attack's estimated damage.

-Absorbs Radiant Energy.

-Floats around the host automatically, unless he consciously controls its course.

-Detects Danger within ten meters from its owner, and changes its position to obstruct the attack before it gets close to the host.

-Reflects attacks to their source if they cause less damage than the first threshold. (~3 Tonnes of TNT)

-Nullifies attacks if they cause less damage than the second threshold. (~8 Tonnes of TNT)

-If the Host Desires, this shield can nullify **any** attack once. (The shield disintegrates after the attack is nullified)

- Can expand to have a radius of thirty centimeters.
 - Upgradable.
- (Range: four meters away from the host at most.)

Warning: This item is soul-bound. The only way for someone else to take it is by killing the previous owner.

The shield was as small as a compact disk, and it was pitch black. It was useful, especially if I was engaging too many enemies to pay attention to my surroundings.

Besides, it could reflect most of the attacks that I'd face early on; I'd no longer have to worry about mobs. On the other hand, it was soul-bound. It meant that people who lacked the strength to protect themselves wouldn't be able to use it if I bound it to myself.

Not to mention that this item could be upgraded later on!

It was my first time seeing an upgradable item, and I had no idea how to improve it on my own. I shrugged my shoulders and put it next to my other items, as I could always buy information from the shop or ask my mysterious friend.

I opened my second Golden Mystery Box.

[Host opened a Golden Mystery Box!]

[Host acquired an item (Legendary)!]

[Infrared Thermal Bodysuit: Warfare

(Legendary)

Ver.]

War is always around the corner, and you have to be prepared.

No matter the number of regular soldiers in an army, it is the elites that change the tide of battle.

This suit is given to those who prove themselves to be the best warriors of their country; it is a national treasure that was passed from one generation to another.

A great war happened, and the owner of this bodysuit survived.

However, his fellow soldiers weren't so lucky, as all of them died. The people were disappointed in him.

Overwhelmed by grief, he gave up this bodysuit and isolated himself from everyone.

Rejoice! You're the current owner of this bodysuit.

-Can be charged with Thermal Energy.

-Once this suit is charged, its special ability can be activated. (Makes the host invincible to external damage for five minutes at most) (Duration depends on the suit's stored energy)

-Increases STR (max. x1.20) (Depends on the suit's stored energy)

-Magnifies the heat of the host's fire attacks (max. x1.20) (Depends on the suit's stored energy)

-Immune to fire damage.

-Can be used to camouflage the host, and its colors and patterns can change at will.

-Can become invisible if the host desires.

-Greatly reduces damage from all attacks.

-If an attack causes enough damage to bypass the host's defenses and kill him in one shot, this suit will allow its owner to survive with 10 HP (twice a day)

-Self-repair (Can be accelerated with Mana)

Warning: This item deteriorates if kept in a cold place.

Warning: This item is soul-bound. The only way for someone else to take it is by killing the previous owner.

I like this! It appeared just in time!

I grinned widely. It wasn't common to find armor that was immune to fire damage, but here it was.

It was a tight suit, and it covered the whole body, even the eyes. It had a texture similar to that of polyester, and its fabric's color was gray.

I was glad that it could change its color according to my whims, as I could just let it be invisible and pretend as if I was wearing nothing.

Haha! The enemies would underestimate me when they see me putting on nothing but a cape and a crown!

It could also serve as a second layer of stealth, thanks to its disguise.

I doubted whether it could fit me as it seemed too tight, but I shook my head at the thought. Legendary items were bound to have some sort of size-changing mechanic so that anyone could use them.

I tried to put it on, and it didn't take much effort to do so. I tried to camouflage myself using the suit's features, and I was satisfied with the effect.

I put on my shorts over the suit and made it invisible.

Great! This is way more comfortable than I thought it would be.

I looked in front of me, and the only box that remained was the Custom Mystery Box.

It resembled cardboard boxes and had my full name written on its sides. It looked even shabbier than the Regular Mystery Boxes, but I knew better than to judge a book by its cover.

Alright, let's see what this box contains.

[Host opened a Custom Mystery Box!]

[Host acquired an item (Unique)!]

[Jason's Anti-Glitch Radar]	(Unique)
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Keep your friends close, and your enemies even closer.

Jason's fate is intricately tangled with Glitchers, and he'll meet many of them throughout his journey.

-Detects Glitchers.

(Range: Scans up to two hundred meters away from the host.)

Warning: This item will be confiscated if its effect is revealed, and its owner will be blacklisted from using System Trading Stations and System Worldwide Markets.

-This can only be used by **Jason Stubbs**.

It was a small circular device. It had a screen that indicated my current position with a red dot, and it kept beeping as if it scanned for Glitchers around me. The map gave no details about my location, and no Glitchers were close by.

This will be useful, no matter if I joined their little organization or not.

I tried to turn the little gadget off, but it had no buttons. I tried to command it to switch off, but that didn't work either.

I shrugged my shoulders and put it alongside my other items. I noticed that the table was getting a bit crowded, and I doubted whether my bag of holding could handle all of them.

I dusted off my hands and took a look at the Primordial's corpse that was sitting in one of the room's corners.

It's about time I dismantled this one. I might need a much bigger bag of holding soon...

*

Loki was a bit skeptical when he heard that people from Jason's planet found juggling to be enjoyable, but he no longer had any doubts.

It didn't take him more than five minutes to learn to juggle balls effectively.

He found the hobby to be interesting and useful; it improved the person's reflexes and hand-to-eye coordination.

As a bystander, he kept an eye on all the ongoing tutorial iterations, and a certain group impressed him. They had Legendary classes, and they were minutes away from beating the third Area Boss of their tutorial.

At this rate, they might clear their tutorial iteration before Jason gets back to earth.

He increased the time dilation of the room that he and his pupil were inside. Each second on Earth and inside the Tutorial became equivalent to five hours here.

Jason insisted on going back to Earth before anyone else; the rascal probably wants to steal some useful stuff before

anyone is there to see him.

When Jason cleared his tutorial iteration, the nine people in his group were ejected from the tutorial. Loki have been keeping each one of them in a separate pocket dimension.

I forgot about them for a while! I'll send them back to Earth once I am done explaining some stuff to Jason.

Usually, the 'Blessing' feature only became available once the host went back to his planet, but the god and pupil duo were in a bit of a bind here.

The deity wanted to teach the kid some fundamental concepts and impart to him bits of critical knowledge, especially about latent abilities and Glitchers. He had a couple of experiments to try too.

However, Jason would have to accept the mysterious being's blessing and none of the others for any of that to happen. The information that Loki planned on giving him was somewhat sensitive, and the mischievous deity would be in a bit of a bind if the human revealed it to other higher beings after accepting their blessings.

Many deities were already interested in blessing Jason, and some of them offered lucrative benefits.

I'll just spoof Jason's location so that the system believes him to be on Earth; that's the easiest way to enable the 'blessing' feature while he's still in this pocket dimension.

Loki couldn't wait to see the kid's growth and whether the event that his future self warned him about deserves the attention or not. Besides, he had some profitable plans for Jason.

'They're moving', huh? I had a general idea about what my future self tried to warn me about, but couldn't he include some details?

The mysterious being shook his head and stopped juggling the balls, putting them in one and only spatial ring. He had many urgent tasks on my plate; he'd have to teach the kid, investigate the Glitchers' actions more frequently and keep tabs on more deities.

Loki sighed, he hated routine and monotony.

At least my duties are more enjoyable than before.

Now that Jason was nearly done checking his rewards, his soon-to-be sponsor felt it was time to give him some more information.

“Hey kid,” Loki said, “Come here for a minute, there is something important that I need to tell you.”

6. Tricking the System

Where am I? I wonder... this was the first thought of Petra Lehmann in a long while.

She regained her consciousness all of a sudden, and she felt a sharp pain in her forehead. She suspected that her head got injured, but she was relieved to find no traces of blood after checking it.

The lady was alone in a small dark room, and she could move freely all around it. There was some canned food in one corner, in addition to some bottles of water. There was a toilet in another corner too.

How did I get here?

She tried to remember the events that led to her current situation, but her memories were jumbled weirdly. It took her a couple of minutes to remember her last memories before losing consciousness.

Nine humans -including her- were inside the safe room, and they were confused about the fairies' strange actions. The group tried to get out, but they gave up when the fairies used force against those that kept trying.

After that, I just sat there. Until a weird system screen appeared.

It said that a member of their group cleared the tutorial by satisfying the hidden condition and that their tutorial iteration was over.

She recalled people panicking, saying that the tutorial was supposed to be over after twelve days and that it wasn't fair for them. People like Chris and Marla still had single digits levels, in addition to lacking any tutorial points. They demanded an explanation from the fairies, but they received nothing.

The fairies wished them luck, and they told her and her fellow comrades to blame 'Jason Stubbs' if they wanted to point our fingers at someone.

Jason, Jason, Jason... He's always in the center of trouble, and I am starting to hate his name...

When the tutorial was over, she noticed the ranking list of people in their group changing once more. Well, the only thing that changed was Jason's number of tutorial points; he had around two hundred million points if she remembered correctly.

Suddenly, her stomach made a weird noise; she was glad that no one was around to hear it. She was starving, so she grabbed some canned tuna to sate her hunger.

She decided to check some of the system screens that appeared when she was asleep.

-Host gained a total of 0 tutorial points throughout the tutorial clear.

-For having gained no tutorial points, the host is deemed as an **Illegal Citizen**.

-Good luck, **Petra Lehmann!** You're gonna need it!

What the hell is this 'illegal citizen' thing?

It didn't matter; She couldn't wait to get back to Munich and live a normal life once again.

*

I hoped that Loki wouldn't interrupt me, as dismantling this corpse was one of the things that I've been looking forward to for quite a while.

I really deserve some great loot for the pain I had to go through, right?

I walked toward the Primordial's body and my eyes were opened widely at the sight before me. The creature was still as enormous as it was when I first encountered it, but it didn't seem as frightening.

Three of its wings were partially destroyed, and another wing was no more. There was a giant hole in its torso, and I could see the floor beneath the Primordial through it. There was no liquid blood, but the injured area of the corpse had many purple stains.

I was impressed with myself, even though I didn't remember anything about the battle after getting struck by the Primordial's wide-scale attack.

Oh, how the mighty have fallen! I didn't expect to survive my encounter with it, but here we are!

My latent ability was another mystery that I needed to make sense of as soon as possible, but my current priority was to dismantle the corpse in front of me.

I put my hand on the corpse's arm, but I felt something pinching my back for a moment. I turned and found my mysterious friend waving at me.

"Hey kid," he said, "Come here for a minute, there is something important that I need to tell you."

I fought the urge to tell him to fuck off, as the possible punishment wasn't worth it. I inhaled deeply and opened my mouth.

"No, I am busy right now," I said with a poker face, "I'll talk to you in a minute. I am sorry for this, but I've been eager to dismantle the corpse for a while."

I tried to be respectful without sucking up to him. This mysterious guy was giving me friendly vibes, and he didn't seem to care about respect all that much.

Still, this guy was a god, and gods were eccentric.

There was a small chance for him to overreact and lash out, maybe even break a couple of my bones for being impudent.

His facial expression contorted, but he didn't make any negative comments.

All of a sudden, he started laughing and clapping. He sat on the ground and started talking after he calmed down.

“It seems like the little strength that you got made you brave! Other deities would have killed you on the spot for refusing to play along with their whims, but I hate formalities,” he said, “Just treat me like a friend. Tell me once you're done with your little task.”

Phew, it seems like my assumption about him was correct.

I put my hand on the Primordial's arm and used the [Dismantle] skill. I was a bit anxious about the number of drops that I would get from this guy, as his state seemed bad.

[Condition of the corpse: 66% intact.]

[Host gains three drops!]

[Host gains [Manadizium Horn]!]

[Host gains [Primordial's Mana Core]!]

[Host gains [Primordial's Mana Reactor (Busted)]!]

The mana core was as large as a volleyball, and it was crimson. It was a straightforward reward, as I could just convert it to shop points. After thinking for a while, I decided not to convert it. It wasn't a regular mana core, and I decided to study it in depth once I had enough free time.

I'll quickly buy the other items' descriptions... Oh, the shop doesn't work here.

I sat for a couple of minutes staring at the items in front of me, but I couldn't think of anything to do. I was about to ask my mysterious friend if he could help me, when something grabbed my attention.

All of a sudden, three system screens appeared in front of me.

[System Admin]	You're welcome! But I am still putting this on your tab.
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I stared at 'Loki', and his muffled laughs pissed me off. He hid his mouth using his hand and pretended to be deep in thought.

He finds this funny, huh?

I appreciated his help, but he didn't respect my privacy at all; he could've waited for me to ask him instead of reading my thoughts.

Oh well, I'll just check the description of the other two items.

[Manadizium Horn]	(Epic)
The Primordials were a race accustomed to using mana	

and their abilities allowed them to reign on top of the food chain for a while.

They were the strongest beings, and no one dared to stand against them.

Until the System appeared.

They're extremely scarce in the wild, but the hunters still coveted them for the special nature of their bodies.

This is a horn made of Manadizium, the element of which a Primordial's skeleton is made.

-Greatly Conductive of all forms of Energy (Mana, Heat, Electricity...etc.)

-Greatly Resistant to all kinds of damage.

It was nearly as long as my height, and it was as white as snow. It had a spiraling pattern, similar to Narwhal's horns.

I played around with it, but it was too big to be used as a weapon in its current form.

I'll have to find a blacksmith to make something useful out of this... Besides, I doubt if a random blacksmith could even scratch this item's surface.

I didn't know a blacksmith who had the tools and the experience to work with Manadizium, but I knew where to look for someone like that. Foreign creatures should have already arrived at Earth at this point, and I was eager to meet some of them; especially Ratska the Gnome.

He might be able to recommend a qualified blacksmith.

I tried to set this item on fire to see how well it conducted the heat, and if it could survive high temperatures.

As soon as I used my [Flame-N-Go] skill, I felt a sharp pain in my chest. It was rather painful, but not enough to stop me from using my skill.

However, the more I kept using the skill the worse the pain got.

“I advise you not to use any Mana for a while,” said ‘Loki’, “Like I told you before, the connection between your soul and body got a bit damaged in the fight with the Primordial. If you force yourself too hard, your soul might break down and explode. I suspect that this thing happened due to your Latent Ability’s effect, and I’ll help you on solving the issue.”

I guess this makes sense. It seems like winning a fight against the Primordial cost me greatly, but this is still better than death.

According to the mysterious man’s words, it seems like this problem wasn’t permanent and could be solved.

“Oh,” I said with a sad tone of voice, “That’s a bummer, but I guess I’ll take it easy until my body and soul heal. I don’t want to be a cripple for the rest of my life.”

I took a look at the other item.

[Primordial’s Mana Reactor (Busted)]	(Epic)
<p>Primordials are ancient creatures, and they’re proficient in the absorption of ambient mana!</p> <p>They can absorb great amounts of mana and store it for extended durations of time.</p> <p>Most of them were caught to be used as mana batteries for factories and Tutorials, and they can no longer be found in the wild.</p> <p>The ones inside the tutorial are mere vegetables, and they’re no longer as powerful as they were before.</p> <p>Nevertheless, they’re still coveted for their useful drops.</p> <p>This Mana Reactor can absorb ambient mana at a fast rate, store it and detonate portions of it according to the</p>	

user's commands.

It's Busted; this allows it to function in a state of overdrive. However, it'll deteriorate much faster.

- Greatly absorbs ambient Mana.
- Greatly stores ambient Mana.
- Greatly detonates ambient Mana.
- Greatly improves the user's control over Mana.

Warning: This item can only be used if it's transplanted into a living being's body, and connected to his natural Mana meridians.

Warning: The older the test subject is, the higher the failure rate of the transplantation.

It was glowing brightly with a crimson color. It had the shape of an icosahedron, and there were cracks all over it. It was as big as my torso, but it was as light as a couple of feathers.

I don't know much about mana reactors, but I can tell that this item is one of a kind.

This could be useful if I used it right. I had many other items that I got from the previous bosses, and I had a plan to make great use of them.

I held the Mana Reactor with my left arm and walked toward the table on which my items were laid. I picked up my bag of holding and put everything inside it. It was filled to the brim, but I managed to shove the Reactor inside it after organizing its contents.

I need to protect this little bag with my life! The success of my guild depends on it!

I took a look at ‘Loki’, and he still wasn’t paying attention to me. I called him to inquire about whatever it was that he wanted to tell me.

“Hey, Loki,” I said, “I am done with my task, and I organized everything. What is it that you wanted to talk about?”

“Come closer here,” he said as he made a little motion with his hand, “There is a little system feature that I’ll activate for you, you’ll like it.”

I didn’t know what this was all about, but a new system feature was bound to be something useful.

As soon as I was close enough, he put his hand on my forehead. I felt a bit dizzy, but the sensation went away instantly.

“So, what did you do, and what should I expect?” I asked.

“I just spoofed your location to show up as ‘Earth’. The ‘Blessing’ feature will be unlocked, and we need to talk about it,” he said, “It’s better if we took care of it here since we have time.”

Oh, so I am going to pick a sponsor!

I didn’t understand the urgency behind his actions, especially since returning me to Earth would’ve unlocked the feature anyway. My guess was that he wanted me to pick him as a sponsor before the other deities swayed my opinion.

It doesn’t matter. I can pick multiple sponsors anyway, the more the merrier!

A couple of system screens appeared in front of me.

<p>-Congratulation! Host Jason Stubbs is the first human to go back to Earth after finishing the tutorial!</p>

-Host gained a title for his feat!

-Welcome back to Earth, **Jason Stubbs!** The Blessing feature is unlocked.

-You can pick (a) sponsors now!
-Choose from the list:

7. The Reign of The Uppers

Two system screens appeared in front of me, one of them had details on the title that I gained and the other had the option of scrolling as it showed a wide variety of options.

[Title acquired: Initial Returnee]

Initial Returnee

Tutorials are supposed to be over after twelve days, but you're already back on Earth!

Where is everyone else? Who are these weird creatures?

You're the first Earthling to go back to Earth after clearing the tutorial!

- You'll have your name broadcasted in the System Trading Stations for one week starting from the moment you returned. (Earth Time).

-You gain 80 free stat points.

That's sweet! The extra fame is going to help, and the free stat points are good!

I realized that this title meant that my name was currently being broadcasted on Earth's Trading Stations, so the alien races should've already seen it.

I grinned, as this would've made my negotiations with them much easier once I went back to Earth.

I closed the title's description and took a look at the long list of blessings that appeared in front of me.

[List of Blessings]	Number of Options: 794
[Agni's Personal Blessing]	[Check the Details]
[Almighty Holy One's Personal Blessing]	[Check the Details]
[Anubis' Personal Blessing]	[Check the Details]
[Aphrodite's Personal Blessing]	[Check the Details]
[Azazel's Personal Blessing]	[Check the Details]
[...]	[...]
[...]	[...]

There were too many available options, and I kept scrolling for a while. I had no idea which deities offered the better blessings, so I went back to the beginning and checked the details of the first blessing on the list.

[Agni's Personal Blessing]
Agni is a deity of the fire element, and many people

believed that he was the personalization of fire!

Revered by many people as the true god of flames, he blessed many worthy followers of his and allowed them to hold a portion of his magnificence!

He's been impressed with your control of the flames, and he wishes to bless you even though you attained your class through a shady avenue!

Can you prove yourself to be worthy of this deity's support?

Advantages:

-Increases Fire affinity to 100.

-Allows you to teleport to his highness's realm divine for personal training whenever you'd like.

-Weekly resources to increase your power and improve your progress.

-Imparts the [Brahmagni] method of refining mana.

-Gain a title; [Agni's Chosen].

-Allows you to act as Agni's only avatar on Earth; you'll share his teachings with the other humans and convert them into his followers.

-You'll undergo a special operation to go back to being a normal human; your system will stop glitching forever!

-The next class evolution would force you to choose the class [Agni's Underling] (uncommon).

Warning: You'll be able to accept a maximum of **ten** blessings if you accept this one.

[Accept]

[Decline]

I like the fire affinity, but this is too much...

I didn't care much about the inane nonsense and just skipped ahead to the advantages of this blessing. It gave many useful benefits, but some of the 'advantages' were too much for me.

I didn't want to become an avatar, as that would force me to take on many responsibilities and heavily restrict my personal life. Furthermore, everything would be for naught once they forced me to give up my class to get an uncommon one instead.

Besides, I didn't want to become a regular human, as that would've meant losing my latent ability. It allowed me to defeat the primordial, and that was enough for me to have an idea of how useful it could be.

This blessing had many positives that I liked, but the weird clauses made it a no-go.

I'll skip to the next one.

I opened the description of Almighty Holy One's personal blessing, and read its contents intently.

[Almighty Holy One's Personal Blessing]

The Great Church is one of the most popular organizations in the Intergalactic Systematic Union, and that's for a good reason!

It saved many children from the slums and gave criminals second chances. Its leader is the Almighty Holy One, the High Deity of Light, Freedom, Prosperity, and Healing.

He's been watching your interest intently and wants to recruit you as a Special Knight and one of his agents on your planet.

He's so benevolent, and he decided to give someone like you a chance at redemption.

Advantages:

-Increases Holy, Fire, Water, and Ice affinities to 100.

-You'll be assigned a consulting deity who'll be responsible for guiding you, protecting you, and answering your questions.

-Allows you to teleport to your galaxy's Great Church sector for personal training whenever you'd like.

-Daily resources to increase your power and improve your progress.

-Imparts the [Way of a Hero] method of refining mana.

-Gain a title; [Great Church's Chosen].

-Allows you to act as the Almighty Holy One's fourth avatar on Earth; you'll share his teachings with the other humans and convert them into his followers.

-You'll undergo a special operation to go back to being a normal human; your system will stop glitching forever!

-Your consulting deity will choose the next class for you when you can evolve it once more.

-If you don't accept this contract, you'll be hunted until you die.

Warning: You'll be able to accept a maximum of **three** blessings if you accept this one.

[Accept]

[Decline]

'...give someone like me a chance at redemption', huh? These blessings are pissing me off...

I inhaled a deep breath and decided to look at these blessings objectively. The blessing would improve my affinities nicely, and that would allow me a lot of freedom in case I wanted to use skills of these elements.

Furthermore, it seems like they were more generous than Agni when it came to resources. On the other hand, it seemed like I would only meet my consulting Deity instead of the Almighty Holy One himself.

I only opened this blessing's description to get a quick laugh, but the last clause scared the shit out of me. I didn't know whether they'd send an overpowered being to hunt me, or if the Great Church's blessed humans would hunt me.

According to what 'Loki' told me earlier, the Great Church wanted to kill me to have full control of Earth through their other Blessed heroes. I was curious about the identities of the three avatars of the Almighty Holy One, but I had a guess.

Stella, Igor, and Oleg... The identity of the deities that blessed them remained a mystery in my past life...

I checked a couple more blessings, but they were all somewhat restricted one way or the other. The interesting thing was that they all seemed intent on transforming me into a non-Glitcher. I had no idea why they hated Glitchers so much.

Too many mysteries about Glitchers, yet I am still in the dark.

I took a look at 'Loki', and we made eye contact as he was already looking at me. He was squatting and he was eating popcorn with a grin on his face, as if he enjoyed seeing my silent suffering.

"So...", I said, "Aren't you going to tell me which one of these is your blessing? Is it 'Loki's Blessing? Or something related to the 'system admin'?"

He smirked and shook his head.

"The former is just an alias of mine, and the latter is my job!" he said loudly, "Just keep scrolling down; my blessing should be the last one on the list."

It took me about ten seconds of scrolling to find the last blessing on the list, and its name was a bit weird. I opened its description to find more details.

[???'s Personal Blessing]

Ever since he became the system admin, ??? was always there. At times, he was Prometheus. At others, he was Loki. Sometimes he even had to erase a deity and take his place.

It was a tough job, but he had to keep the scenario going forward.

He seldom interacts with deities, let alone mortals. It's a miracle that he took interest in a mortal like you, and he's willing to bless you.

Advantages:

-No need for formality with ???, he's your friend, ally, and partner!

-Teaches you the fundamentals of controlling your Latent Ability.

-Gives you the title, [The Candidate].

-Allows you to contact him through a special system feature; 'InterGalacticLine'.

-Teaches you a forbidden chapter of history, [The Reign of The Uppers].

-You're prohibited from sharing anything related to [The Reign of The Uppers] with anyone that ??? doesn't approve of.

-Keeps the 'Shop' feature going; it'll stop working if you accept another Blessing.

-Free Maintenance! The conflict between your system and your latent ability will be alleviated until you're proficient in controlling your latent ability.

-Many growth opportunities will be unlocked!

Warning: You'll be able to accept any number of blessings if you accept this one.	
[Accept]	[Decline]

The lack of a name for the system admin startled me, so I asked him about it. He shrugged his shoulders and told me that no one remembers his old name anyway except for himself. He told me to call him 'Loki' or 'Prometheus', and asked me to treat him as a friend without being formal.

He hates formalities, huh? Going as far as including a clause about being my 'friend' in the blessing...

I read the description in front of me, and I had mixed feelings about it. On one hand, this mysterious deity seemed to tolerate my latent ability and he was even planning on teaching me about it. The title seemed interesting compared to the ones that the previous contracts offered, I'd have to take some random history lessons too if I accepted his blessing.

'The Reign of The Uppers', huh? I am curious about this one, and I suspect that it has something to do either with Deities or Glitchers.

On the other hand, this blessing lacked the resources and the personal benefits that the two previous ones offered.

I would've appreciated some extra fire affinity...

Another clause caught my eye; it said that the only way to keep the 'Shop' was to accept this blessing. It wasn't that big of a problem, because this blessing didn't restrict the number of blessings that I could pick.

All in all, this blessing was much less restrictive than the previous ones.

So, I am free to take other blessings if I accept this one, but I'll have to give up on the shop if I do so...

“So...,” I said as I squinted my eyes, “What does the ‘Shop’ have to do with all of this? Wasn’t it compensation for my problematic system?”

“Oh, it was meant to be like that!” he replied with a smile, “You see, the items that you’re buying are coming from someone’s pocket, and I am pretty sure you realize the advantage that the shop gave you. If you accept another blessing, then you’ll have to deal with the consequences of your greed.”

“You could’ve restricted the total number of blessings that I could accept if I took yours, right?” I asked.

“That’s true,” he said, “But I believe that the only way to build trust between each other is by giving you freedom of choice. I am pretty sure you want some extra fire affinity, and you can get it from another blessing if you deem it more useful than the system shop.”

He shrugged his shoulder and put his hands behind his head and started humming.

So, he’s allowing me some freedom of choice, unlike the other deities.

The system shop was one of the most important reasons behind my current success, in addition to my future knowledge. It would’ve hurt a lot to lose it, but it wasn’t as instrumental as it was before. I was already one of the strongest humans, if not the strongest individually; the snowball was already big enough to keep rolling on its own.

I understood ‘Loki’s perspective; a relationship based on trust was much better than one based on control and fear.

I was already apprehensive about the other deities, as some of the clauses in their blessings were outright detrimental. I was even suspicious that many of them offered me blessings to shackle me and hinder me from getting too powerful to threaten their other blessed hosts.

I thought about it for a while and checked many more blessings to see if some of them were relatively less restricted.

However, ‘Loki’ interrupted me.

“So, which blessing are you planning on choosing?” He asked.

8. The Antecedent Era

Sigh.

I would've appreciated having more time to think about my decision concerning the blessing, as there were many options that I still haven't checked yet. A boost to the fire affinity was on the top of my wish list, so I asked 'Loki' if he could increase my affinity as a part of his blessing.

He said that as much as he wanted to help me, each blessing had a hard limit of benefits that could be offered. He told me that I could accept the blessing of another deity if I wanted the fire affinity so much.

'Pick an extra blessing if you want', huh? I am pretty sure that he'll make me regret doing that...

'Loki' might've given me the freedom to take other blessings in addition to his, but I suspected that it was just a test to see whether I deserved his attention or not. He had been supportive so far, and he was the only deity that tolerated people with Latent Abilities like me.

I didn't like the other deities' attitude anyway, so his blessing was the only real option.

I'll thank him for his help so far, and tell him about my choice.

"It's somewhat late to say this, but thank you. Sending me back in time was a priceless gift, it was a second chance for me to have a better life," I said, "The system shop was also indispensable for me; I owe most of my current success to it. Hell, I wouldn't even have my current class if not for the class change pill that I got from it."

I tried to be as earnest as possible, as I was truly grateful for these gifts. I was about to tell him that I would accept his blessing as my only option, but he interrupted me all of a sudden.

He started laughing loudly. I was confused about his actions and waited for an explanation

“You’re welcome, kid!” he said, “I just remembered something funny. Remember when you wanted to buy the manual class change pill? I was the one that picked the automatic one for you! It was a funny prank, wasn’t it?”

Suddenly, I felt angry and frustrated with this deity. I had been pissed off for a while about that event, but I brushed it off because I thought that the system automatically interrupted my command halfway through due to a bug.

Now that I found out that the event was deliberate, I was pissed off.

It wasn't funny! My class might be powerful, but it's terrible to experience the pain of being burned alive on a daily basis! A weaker class with no drawbacks would've been a much better choice...

It took me tens of seconds to control my emotions. I was glad that the class was powerful, else I would’ve reacted violently and tried to hit ‘Loki’. I kept my silence and stopped talking to him, I even started re-evaluating my decision of choosing his blessing.

He must’ve noticed my emotional turmoil, as he instantly teleported to my side and spoke with a serious tone of voice.

“Don’t let the emotions cloud your judgment, kid,” he said, “You don’t know how manual class change pills work; let me tell you. Once you buy it, a curated list of ten random classes appears in front of you. Their descriptions can’t be seen unless you bought access to them in the shop, and your points weren’t enough to do that.”

He has a point...

“Even if you chose the best one out of those ten classes based on intuition, you would’ve wasted too many points on the manual pill. You see, I picked a very good class for you and you’ll learn to appreciate its offensive prowess; it used to belong to my previous chosen one before he got killed....” He added, but melancholy seeped into his voice when he started talking about the previous owner of my class.

So, he's claiming that his ultimate goal behind giving me his past chosen one's class was for me to save some shop points? For fuck's sake, I had to spend the points that I saved up to buy the [Shut-Down] skill!

I took a deep breath and calmed my emotions down; it wasn't healthy to cry over spilled milk, and my class still had its positives. I was alive thanks to it, and that was what mattered.

I didn't expect [The Burned Man] class to hold such importance for the mysterious entity, and his sad tone of voice revealed that the destiny of his previous chosen one wasn't good.

I asked him about what happened to the person that he talked about, and he said that some deities killed him indirectly. The interesting part was that he was a Glitcher too!

Oh shit, does this mean that I am destined to die because I am a Glitcher? Why does this guy even involve himself with Glitchers so much?

I asked 'Loki' the questions that were on my head, but he said that the only way for me to find out was by accepting the blessing.

"Alright," I said, "I'll accept your blessing."

I opened the Blessing menu and scrolled down to find 'Loki's blessing. I accepted it, and a feeling of dizziness hit me.

-Congratulation! Host **Jason Stubbs** got blessed by [???]!

-Would you like to choose another blessing?

[Yes]	[No]
Warning: The decision is final; you can't choose an additional blessing if you decline, and you'll have to choose one if you accept.	

Nah, I don't want to be involved with those deities.

I chose 'No' and the system screen disappeared.

"Alright then, it's time for a little history lesson," said Loki, "Now, follow me".

He walked toward a certain wall, and a door opened. He entered and motioned for me to follow him. The room had little light, so I couldn't make out the details of the surroundings. The only thing that I noticed was the great number of cables on the ground.

'Loki' snapped his fingers, and a certain object started glowing in front of us.

It was a spheric pod, and it reminded me of science fiction movies that I used to watch. Its color was silver, and it had a radius of around a meter. A single thick cable emerged out of its lower hemisphere, and it separated into many thinner cables which were spread around the room.

Once we were in front of the mysterious device, 'Loki' tapped it twice with his index finger. Then, its upper hemisphere separated into two portions, and each of them moved sideways to expose the pod's interior.

There was a black seat inside it, and there was a large control panel on one of its inner walls.

Is he going to send me through space or something?

"Sit down," he said as he motioned toward the black seat.

"What for?" I asked, but he didn't answer.

He tapped the ring that was on his right index finger, and a small black disk appeared out of it. It was pitch black, and it was smaller than his palm. He held it with both hands and stared at both of its sides intently for around a minute.

“All is good,” he said, “This little disc is a priceless artifact, as it contains vivid memories of a certain person from the past. The interesting part is that he lived before the system was a thing. Get in the pod, it’ll allow you to see his memories from a first-person view.”

I guess this disk contains the information about ‘The Reign of the Uppers’ that was mentioned in the blessing...

I asked ‘Loki’ about my assumption, and his grin confirmed it. I inhaled, then went inside the pod and sat on the seat. ‘Loki’ fastened two seatbelts around me, and he inserted the disk into a certain slot in the pod’s control panel, then he fiddled around with the buttons for a while.

What are the seatbelts for?

Before I was able to ask ‘Loki’ about that, the pod closed around me and he was already five meters away from me. He grinned and waved his hand at me. All of a sudden, a viscous liquid started leaking from the pod’s walls. I didn’t understand much about the ordeal so I thought about using force to escape, but I trusted ‘Loki’, at least a little.

It didn’t take long for the liquid to fill the pod, and I was completely submerged. I couldn’t breathe anymore, and I cursed ‘Loki’ inside my head.

Out of nowhere, my seat started spinning around itself with increasing speed, and I felt nauseous. I felt my consciousness slipping away from me, and I was sure that I threw up at least once.

Then, everything went dark, and I couldn’t stay awake anymore. I started dreaming about something, but I didn’t remember anything about it.

Suddenly, I felt something pinching my cheek, so I opened my eyes.

“Wake up, Jason, It’s not time for you to take a nap” a certain voice called for me, and I was sure that I’d heard it before.

I opened my eyes, and I saw the familiar ‘Loki’ squatting next to me.

I looked around me and discovered that I was on a grassy field. The ground felt wet, and I realized that it was muddy once I got up.

I need a bath as soon as possible; my back is completely covered in mud.

I took a look at my hands, and their color was much paler than before. I was wearing brown shorts and a beige shirt, and both of them were haggard.

My limbs also seemed shorter than usual, and I was barefoot.

“Where the hell am I?” I asked ‘Loki’, and was startled when I heard my own voice. It was the voice of a young boy, and it was too different from mine.

I had a guess, but it seemed too wild to be true. I pinched my left arm, and it felt rather painful. I grabbed some mud and put it inside my mouth; it tasted as sour as the mud from my grandparents’ garden, and I nearly puked due to the foul taste.

I am currently inside a different body!

I inhaled, then asked. “This is temporary, right?”

‘Loki’ still had his usual form, but he seemed to be floating and his body was translucent.

“Yeah, no worries,” he said, “they say that the best way of learning is by interacting with the source material, and I agree! This is the best way to have an enjoyable history lesson!”

“...Ok.,” I said, “So, what year is this?”

“Welcome to the last year of the Antecedent Era,” he said, “We’ll learn about an important chapter of history; a time in which Glitchers reigned supreme!”

9. Revolution Time

“Then, this must be the recording of a distant past,” I said, “What about our current location?”

“Now, that’s irrelevant. We’re on a planet thirteen trillion light years away from Earth,” he replied, “Oh, I remember something interesting! This planet’s galaxy had been erased a long time ago!”

I took a look at the ground, and I felt a chill going through my whole body. I found it terrifying to be in a place whose destiny was inevitable destruction.

Well, this is just a simulation so I can't change this place's fate...

‘Loki’ told me about the direction that we needed to head in to get to the closest settlement, and I started walking. I admired the surroundings, as I wouldn’t have been able to tell that I was inside a replica if I didn’t have prior knowledge.

I was in awe of the small black disk; it was astonishing for a disk that small to hold this amount of data.

That pod must be a priceless relic too; I suspect that it's the one doing all the heavy lifting in this simulation!

My mysterious friend floated next to me, and he kept his silence aside from casual comments about the animals we found along the way. Sometimes we saw an animal that had a similar counterpart on Earth, but the vast majority of creatures differed greatly from Earth’s animals.

Flying crocodiles, Moose with fangs, Horses with eight eyes and eight legs, and many others. The creatures looked nothing like the animals I knew from Earth, but I couldn’t help comparing them to one another.

The impressive thing was that I couldn’t feel any mana flowing inside these creatures, but the space around us was rich in mana.

Do monsters exist in this place?

I asked 'Loki' about the lack of monsters, as it was the name that people used to call wild creatures that could use mana.

He chuckled, then told me that monsters weren't a thing yet. I wasn't satisfied with such a vague answer, but he told me to take it easy and enjoy the ride.

I asked him about the system, and he said that it still hasn't appeared anywhere in the vast universe at this point in history.

So, this world has no system yet?

I tried to open the status screen but to no avail. I examined some rocks on the road, but no system screens appeared. I was completely convinced that this place didn't have a system, and I resumed my journey silently.

After walking for about ten more minutes, we saw a large town from afar. It had stone walls around it, and there was a single entrance that had two guards watching over it. A large palace could be seen from the outside

"Look over there," said 'Loki', "This is the hometown of your current body's original owner; you'll learn more once we get there."

I kept walking, but at a slower pace. Once I was twenty meters away from the entrance, I was able to see the two guards clearly, and both of them were humans.

One of them was short and chubby. He was bald, and he had an unkempt beard. He had a full-body iron suit, but it seemed like he put it on hurriedly. He had a glass bottle in his left arm, and the beverage inside it smelled like alcohol. Despite his appearance, he has a stern facial expression and he took his duty as a guard somewhat seriously.

The other was taller and as thin as a twig. He was clean-shaven, and his hairstyle was similar to a crew cut. He was hunched over a chair, and he had a stupid smile on his face. He didn't even look at half of the people going through the town's entrance.

I felt some anxiety along the way. I feared being found out as a fraud by the guards, but they couldn't tell anything amiss

about me once I got there. They even knew the original owner of my body.

“Good afternoon, Johannes!” said the chubby guard, “Don’t go wandering around too far, we were going to search for you if you didn’t show up before night!”

“Oh! Hey, Johannes,” said the thinner guy, “Don’t listen to Serge! You’re a man now, and a man can do whatever the hell he wants!”

Oh! I can understand everyone’s speech even though their speech sounds different from any of Earth’s languages.

He winked at me, and Serge seemed pissed off.

“Shut the fuck up, Bert!” said Serge, “I’m the one who looks for children once they’re lost; you’re just lazing around!”

They looked at each other sternly, then started laughing. I shared the laugh for a moment, then entered the town.

As I kept walking, I gave ‘Loki’ a side glance; no one seemed to notice him floating next to me.

“Oh, you’re curious about the reason why no one’s staring at me?” he said when he noticed my glances, “It’s because I’m not physically here, you’re the only one who’s truly inside this place.”

He moved closer to me and slapped my head. It felt rather painful; just like the time when my friend hit me with a baseball bat.

“However, I can physically interact with my surroundings as you can see,” he added as he shrugged his shoulders, then went back to sightseeing.

Fucking prick...

I sighed, then resumed walking. This town resembled Earth cities before the industrial revolution; people looked like regular humans, they wore simple clothes and walked on foot, except for the occasional carriages that were pulled by some animals. Their heads seemed similar to pigs’, and each of them had six long legs.

I am having some doubts about the people of this place being simple humans...

The town seemed lively, and everyone seemed to know one another as they greeted each other often. There were many shops open, and the clerks looked eager to sell their merchandise.

Everyone seemed normal, and I couldn't see anyone having a trace of mana inside of him.

It seems like common people at this age couldn't use mana at all! Just like Earthlings before the system integration...

Suddenly, I felt something poking my back. I turned around expecting 'Loki' to be fooling around, but I found a little girl.

"Here you are, Johannes! You worried me," she said with a cheerful tone of voice as she held my left hand with both of hers. "I've been looking for you for a while! You promised me that we'd go see the parade together, and I didn't find you at your house in the morning!"

Woah, what the hell is this situation?

It was already too much for me to be suddenly inside another person's body, but it's stressful to meet people that knew you but you couldn't recognize them.

Out of nowhere, I felt like I instinctively knew this girl's name.

"Lunaria...", I said, "What parade are you talking about?"

"What!", she said with her eyes wide-opened, "The capital's second-in-command Upper is visiting our town today! There will be a parade, and the Upper is going to display some of his Divine Powers to us."

She didn't make a comment about her name being wrong, so I must have been spot on. I was both glad and confused that I knew it, but the information that she revealed to me was more important right now.

It seems like these Uppers have some kind of powers, unlike the regular folk... Could these Divine Powers be what

'Loki' called Latent Abilities?

I decided to play along with Lunaria and followed her around. She led me closer to the large palace that I saw earlier when I was outside the town, and we secretly sneaked through a certain stairway to go on top of a smaller building that was adjacent to the palace.

“This place has the best view of the parade in the whole town,” said Lunaria as she grinned and puffed her chest with pride, “Oh look! Here they come!”

The road suddenly became empty, and people were huddled on each of its sidewalks.

I concentrated hard on the road, and I could see a large litter held by eight strongmen. Inside the vehicle sat a young male, he had outrageous clothes that were adorned with many gems, but his face was nothing special.

However, I sensed Mana flowing into his body and out of it.

This guy must be the Upper that Lunaria spoke about...

He wasn't alone inside the litter, and he seemed to be enjoying his time

There were two women with him in the litter; each of them sat on one side of the man. They looked like maidservants; they wore obscene clothes that hid little skin, and they occasionally brought some food from the table to the man's mouth.

All of sudden, he clapped thrice and the weather instantly changed. Many clouds gathered above the town, and it started raining.

Everyone that was on the road's sides kneeled, and they thanked the man and prayed for him profusely.

I was startled when Lunaria kneeled too, and her eyes glistened with tears.

“Oh, Almighty Upper!” she said, “Bless you for all the good you bring upon us! We hope for your mercy and eternal grace!”

Suddenly, she turned toward me and gave me a weird look. I realized that kneeling was a custom of these people, and it was bizarre for me not to act just like the rest of the people of this town.

I kneeled for a while and got up when the parade moved on from this area.

‘Loki’ appeared next to me, and he snapped his fingers. Everything stopped, and he started speaking.

“The people used to revere Uppers, as they were the only people capable of using ‘Divine Powers’ as they called them,” he said, “Now, we’ll fast forward a couple of years!”

He snapped his fingers once more, and everything started moving quickly.

I lost consciousness for a while, then opened my eyes once I heard people speaking loudly next to me.

“You did well, Johannes! You even managed to join the town’s guard corps!” said a thin guy that I recognized to be Bert, but he seemed older, “Just drink some booze and you’ll forget about her! It’s not the first time that a common person’s fiancé left him for an Upper!”

“Yeah, kid!” said Serge, “Be strong! You’ll find a better woman soon anyway, and there isn’t anything you could do to that guy either! All women want a lavish life, and regular people can’t provide that kind of luxury.”

Fiancé? Leaving for an Upper? Now, this was interesting.

I took a look at myself and noticed that I got much taller and put on a fair amount of muscle; I was already old enough to be an adult back on Earth. I realized that ‘Loki’ must’ve skipped time ahead for me to see the important events from Johannes’s memory.

I didn’t remember anything about a fiancé at first, but some memories popped up inside my head when I concentrated hard enough.

It was a cold day, and I was walking next to Lunaria. She was my fiancé, and we were holding hands.

All of a sudden, she pushed me away and told me that she was sick of me. She took off the ring that I gave her as a present and threw it on the ground.

Not only that, but she slapped me and said that it was for all the misery she had to deal with. I knew that Johannes was a nice fellow, and couldn't remember him mistreating her no matter how hard I concentrated.

A couple of days after that event, I heard that she became a certain Upper's concubine. Her master was an Upper that could control the weather; the same one that we saw in the parade that happened in this town.

I didn't know about Lunaria's intentions for leaving Johannes, but I assumed that it was more than just Greed. It was the only option possible, if she rejected the Upper then he would've murdered both her and Johannes.

I stopped reminiscing about my current body's memories, as something interrupted me.

[System notice:

[System integration: Success]

[Welcome, Host]

Hello, **Johannes Tavarik!** You'll gain the ability to level up and increase your powers!

This is your chance to make everything right! Take

what's rightfully yours!

Revolution is the only path to change your fate. The only way to beat someone powerful is by using greater power than his.

[The system noticed your efforts; would you like to accept the uncommon class [Guardian]?]

Suddenly, Bert dropped his bottle of booze and he started speaking with a shaky voice.

“Ay...Guys..” he said, “Something weird appeared in front of me, I think I’m finally going insane!”

“Really!” said Serge, “If you’re talking about some boxes that mention a ‘system’ and shit like that, then I’m in the same boat as you!”

“What about you, Johannes?” asked Bert.

The system was here, and I was anxious about the events that would come after this...

10. The Insurgents

“This is when the system first appeared on this planet,” said ‘Loki’ as he snapped his fingers once more.

Everything around us stopped moving, and the silence was eerie.

I could still move, so I looked around me. I was inside a pub with Bert and Serge, and we were drinking heavily. It seemed like Johannes got close to them after becoming a town guard.

Suddenly, ‘Loki’ interrupted my train of thought.

“Poor Johannes, something unfortunate happened to him out of nowhere,” he said as he shrugged, “Uppers used to do whatever they wanted, and no one had the power to stop them.”

From what I understood, Uppers were the only people who could control mana. People didn’t have the guts or the power to rebel, and the technology of this world still wasn’t developed enough to allow the creation of mass-destruction weapons.

I guess people became complacent and lazy; the presence of Uppers eliminated the need to innovate and invent new tech.

Still, it irked me how people took their suffering silently. I knew that some people had it even worse than Johannes, but they didn’t even try to do anything.

Some people were executed for making eye contact with Uppers, and others were punished in front of large crowds because they weren’t presentable enough.

It’s odd to remember events that I’ve never been through; I’ll ask my mysterious friend about it later.

I was curious about the reason why I had Johannes’s memories, but I had other important questions to ask.

“Why do people still admire the Uppers?” I asked, “And how do they even acquire their ‘Divine Powers’?”

“Well, most commoners were happy during these times. Life was simple, but everyone had their needs taken care of. There were no conflicts between people and they didn’t have to deal with any external threats on their own.” He spoke.

He furrowed his eyebrows, then added.

“Uppers were born that way, and lineage had no influence on whether the child got a Divine Power or not,” he said, “Many commoners had kids with Divine Powers, but a ritual was needed to allow them to use those powers. Those children were venerated, and they were taken away from their families to live with other Uppers.”

I get it. Uppers considered themselves to be the master race...

“So, the children were raised with the mentality that they were superior to regular people,” I said, “That explains their petty actions...”

He nodded, then snapped his fingers twice.

Everything around me started moving at a much faster rate, but it was still slow enough for me to understand the events. I became an observer of Johannes’s actions, as his body moved on its own.

The town guards asked people about the strange floating windows and everyone confirmed seeing them.

People were skeptical at first, but they realized the value of the system after acquiring some levels. Everyone got a class, and most of them were combat-based.

The commoners learned that killing animals allowed them to level up, so they hunted the wild creatures. As time went on, the animals got bigger, stronger, and faster, but the villagers were progressing at a faster rate.

Uppers all around the planet didn’t like the appearance of the system, calling it a temptation of the devil. Many people stopped using the system in fear of the Uppers’ punishment, but a lot of them kept leveling up secretly.

Some of the Uppers were interested in this wizardry that allowed people to gain powers, so they tried to take advantage of the system to increase their strength.

Something interesting happened when they leveled up; their Latent Abilities got harder to use with each level gained.

Unwilling to lose their 'Divine Powers', they stopped using the system.

On the other hand, commoners kept grinding levels and most of them acquired superhuman levels of power.

Johannes and the other two town guards used to hunt together. They leveled up at a fast rate due to their teamwork and they were among the strongest in their town.

Out of nowhere, 'Loki' appeared and stopped the flow of time.

"The next scene is somewhat amusing," he said, "it's the penultimate event before the disaster."

Disaster?

I was about to ask for more details, but my mysterious friend skipped ahead in time. It felt dizzy as usual, and I opened my eyes once that sensation went away.

I looked around me, trying to get familiar with the surroundings. It was nighttime and the moonlight illuminated the area.

I was inside a forest, sitting on a tree log; Bert and Serge were next to me. Silence pervaded the place, except for the occasional hissing of roaches.

There was a bonfire in front of us, and some meat was being cooked on top of it.

Suddenly, Bert broke the silence.

"Today's hunt was plentiful! I even managed to reach the fifty-third level, yet the two of you haven't reached the fiftieth level yet," he said as he chuckled.

We laughed for a while, but his facial expression changed all of a sudden. It wasn't usual for Bert to act seriously; we

were confused.

He furrowed his eyebrows and his eyes displayed his determination; the stupid smile was gone. He took a deep breath and resumed his speech.

“Are you satisfied with your current life?” he asked us.

Serge nodded straight away, and I imitated him after some hesitation. Bert shook his head, and his disappointment was evident.

“I mean, we’re extremely powerful, yet we’re still town guards,” he said with a grin, then he addressed me and kept going, “The Uppers stole your fiancé, and you’re still obeying them!”

Then he addressed the chubby town guard and added, “And you Serge! You had to close your shop, and give it up for a cheap sum! Just because an Upper wanted the building for himself!”

He got up and started walking around the bonfire, and he went on.

“We’re town guards because our dreams were taken away from us!” he said, “However, we can do something about this.”

Serge nodded, then he replied.

“I agree with you Bert, and I am sure Johannes shares the same sentiment,” he said, “But there are only three of us! We can’t change anything on our own, and there are too many Uppers for us to take on.”

“You have a point,” said Bert with a smirk, “However, we’re not alone! I had been in contact with a couple of my friends from the capital, and they’re planning to attempt a coup all around the country.”

I interrupted him, as I was interested in his ‘friends’.

“Who are your friends? Besides, can we even trust them?” I asked, “And most importantly, what would happen if the coup is successful?”

“They call themselves the Insurgents, and they’ve been planning for this since the day of the system’s appearance. Many people have already joined them, and I am feeling optimistic about this operation,” he replied, “They’re going to eliminate Uppers, and they’ll re-establish governments to be under the rule of commoners. It’s about time our living conditions changed.”

It’s a rebellion, isn’t it?

I thought about it for a while and realized that commoners had a rather high chance of pulling it off.

Uppers’ Latent abilities stopped working once they acquired many levels in their classes, and most of them still had low levels because they feared losing their ‘Divine Powers’.

There was no way for them to match high-leveled commoners, not to mention that commoners had the advantage of numbers to their side. A one-sided massacre was the only possible result that I imagined.

Bert kept speaking about his dreams and what he’d do once the rebellion succeeded, but I didn’t pay him any attention as I was deep in thought.

‘Loki’ stopped time once more, and he had a wide grin on his face.

“Next up is the main course,” he said, “Get ready, as the next scene might get a little too heavy. I’ll skip ahead a couple of months, and you’ll witness the aftermath of the coup.”

I lost consciousness when he fast-forwarded the passage of time, and I opened my eyes feeling a sharp pain in my belly.

I took a look at the location that felt painful, and a small knife was stuck there. It was painful, but I knew that the injury wasn’t fatal.

I was wearing heavy armor, and I held a long sword with both of my arms and it was covered in blood.

A corpse was laying on the ground in front of me, and there were many holes in its torso. Blood was pouring

profusely out of the injuries; the man was beyond saving.

I found his face to be familiar, and I recognized him to be the Upper that Lunaria left Johannes for.

A system screen appeared in front of me.

[Human: **Ravel Milendious**] (Common) (Class: (Level: 4) defeated! Host earned 12200 EXP.

-Host reached Level 51! 6 STR and 6 VIT were acquired.

I felt a rush of adrenaline out of nowhere, but it disappeared after I breathed deeply for a couple of seconds.

I was inside a luxurious room; its walls were decorated with precious gems and beautiful paintings.

I must be inside Ravel's castle in the capital; they must've pulled off the coup!

I scanned the area around me, and corpses covered the floor. There were more than twenty inside this room, and many of them had their heads cut cleanly.

Most of them were maids and poor servants, and they were only serving the Upper to preserve their lives.

Oh shit, Johannes killed everyone that stood in his way!

“I believe this is enough history about Glitchers,” ‘Loki’ said as he appeared next to me, “Funny thing is, you would’ve been an Upper if you were born in this era!”

“An Upper? I might live well for a while, but one day a villager would slaughter me with a butter knife!” I said with a shaky voice.

My hands were trembling due to the Adrenaline, and I shuddered when I imagined my fate as an Upper if I were born in the Antecedent Era.

I remembered something important and asked ‘Loki’ to allow me to check something.

I ran around the castle, and the number of corpses was staggering. The injury in my belly felt painful, but I endured the sensation with sheer willpower.

I met some people along the way, and they seemed to recognize me.

They wore armor that was similar to mine, and every suit of armor had the same insignia. It depicted three swords; two of them stuck in the ground and the third one floating above them and pointing toward the sky.

They're members of the Insurgents...

They asked me about my mission, and whether I was injured or not. I gave them quick answers and kept running through a large hallway. There were many corpses, but none of them resembled the person that I was looking for.

I can't find Lunaria... Johannes did all of this just to have a shot at getting her back, yet she's nowhere to be seen!

Suddenly, I noticed a certain corpse on the ground, and I was sure of it.

It was Lunaria, and she was dead. There was a long cut on her torso, and she was covered in her own blood.

I felt bad for Johannes. He didn't have many ambitions like Bert and he didn't care about changing the status quo; the only thing he wanted was to get Lunaria back.

What a sad existence...

It was depressing to witness such a life from a first-person view.

‘Loki’ appeared next to me, and he said with a cheerful voice.

“The rebellion was successful in case you wanted to know. The Insurgents managed to overthrow the previous regime, and established themselves as the rulers of this country.” he said, “Bert and Serge attained advanced positions in the new country that emerged, and so did Johannes. The Insurgents spread their influence to many other countries, and revolutions happened all around this planet. After that, rebellions against Uppers happened all around the universe!”

I wanted to ask him for more details about Johannes’s life, but I felt that it was better for me to focus on other things.

“What happened to the remaining Uppers?” I asked.

“Most of them were exiled, and they became known as Glitchers. The ritual to awaken their Latent Abilities was lost throughout history, and many people died without ever finding out that they were Glitchers,” he said, “There are a few organizations that still have access to the awakening ritual, but they operate secretly in fear of retaliation from the deities.”

The cloaked people that I met during my first class evolution must’ve been an organization of Glitchers...I need to find out more about my Latent Ability; it’s my best bet to find out more about them.

Furthermore, I realized the reason why deities hated Glitchers so much.

So, deities were regular people back in the day, huh?

“Let’s go back,” I said, “You’re going to teach me the method of using my Latent Ability, right?”

“Yeah, it’s about time,” he said as he patted my back.

11. The Legion

‘Loki’ did something that made me lose consciousness, and I woke up feeling terrible nausea.

I opened my eyes, and I found myself submerged in a sticky substance.

Oh fuck, at least I am awake for real this time.

A system screen appeared in front of me.

- Host **Jason Stubbs** learned adequate information about [The Reign of The Uppers].

- ??? fulfilled a certain clause of his Personal Blessing!

I tried to read what the windows said, but I couldn’t concentrate at all.

I felt feeble as if I had been starving for weeks.

Moreover, some sticky substance managed to get into my nostrils when I tried to breathe.

I might suffocate at this rate...

I tried to untie my seatbelts, but I couldn’t find the buckle. I thrashed around, and I kept doing so for quite a while.

Suddenly, the liquid’s level around me started decreasing; it was being re-absorbed back into the pod’s inner walls.

I took a deep breath and wiped the viscous liquid off my face using my hands.

The upper hemisphere of the device parted into two portions, and I saw ‘Loki’ staring at me from the outside.

“Rise and shine, kid. It’s morning!” he said.

He snapped his fingers once, and the seatbelts untied automatically. I got up from my seat and walked out of the pod. I massaged my neck and cleaned the sticky substance that remained on my skin to the best of my abilities.

‘Loki’ chuckled and clapped his hands once. The sticky liquid disappeared from my skin, and I no longer felt nauseous.

I mumbled a ‘Thanks’ and kept walking to go back to the previous room that we had been inside.

My mysterious friend followed me at a brisk pace, then he said “It was a wild ride, wasn’t it?”

The events that I witnessed had a deep effect on me, and I still remembered a great portion of Johannes’s memories.

“Why is it that I remember too many of Johannes’s memories? Even the ones that I didn’t witness directly,” I asked.

The events of Johannes’s life seemed too vivid, and I was sure that I could recall most of his life if I tried hard enough.

“Well, that’s a drawback of using the Cerebral Resonance Connector. A copy of Johannes’s memories had been implanted into your brain, and that’s the only way to achieve the necessary resonance for the device to do its work. You’ll feel confused for a little while,” he replied, “It’s a good reason why this device is no longer available to the public. In addition to the fact that it prevents the host from breathing when the machine is running.”

“Woah! So, I could’ve died due to suffocation!” I shouted.

“Well, you’re still alive so there’s that,” he said as he shrugged his shoulders, “The device could’ve fried your brain too! But don’t worry, remember that you’re way stronger than a regular human.”

I gave ‘Loki’ a piercing gaze, but he didn’t even make eye contact with me.

This guy flabbergasted me and I wasn't sure whether trusting him any further was a good choice or not.

He kept walking till he reached the center of the first room. He sat on the ground, a black marker appeared in his left hand.

What now? Is he going to give me a drawing lesson?

He started by drawing a large perfect circle with a radius of about one meter, then he drew a pentagram inside it.

He wrote many bizarre symbols around the circle and inside the pentagram, then a small transparent bottle and a brush appeared in his hand out of nowhere.

The bottle contained red liquid, and it gave off a strong metallic stench once he opened it.

Fucking hell! Now, he's going to use blood instead of ink.

He dipped the brush inside the bottle, then drew a larger circle around the first one. He nodded when he was done, then he put away the items that he used to draw this masterpiece.

All of a sudden, he began speaking in a weird language as he touched the perimeters of the outer circle.

The drawing on the ground started glowing with crimson light, and it got brighter the more he spoke.

I had a guess about what he was trying to do, but I hoped that it wasn't the case.

"Alright, I'm finally done," he said as he dusted off his hands, "Come here, Jason. I need you to lay on top of this cute drawing."

Shit.

"No, there is no way for that to happen," I said as I shook my head to indicate my refusal, "This looks like a ritual to summon an Eldritch creature, and you're asking me to stand on top of it?"

"Actually, that wasn't a bad guess," he said as he put his hand under his chin, "It's a bit complicated, but the goal of this ritual is to disconnect you from the system temporarily and to

forcefully establish a link between your latent ability and your record identifier.”

I didn't know what a record identifier was, but I knew that this ritual was dangerous.

I was convinced that I would die the moment I stepped on top of that circle, it was self-evident.

“Can't you disconnect me from the system using some kind of admin privileges?” I spoke.

He smirked and said that it didn't work that way.

Left with no choice, I walked toward the Eldritch Summoning Array.

I stepped on top of it, and nothing happened. I realized that I was being overly dramatic earlier, and my anxiety disappeared.

Maybe this process will be soothing and comfortable.

Suddenly, I felt a sharp pain surging throughout my whole body, especially my head.

I tried to get up, but I was paralyzed from head to toe.

I regret accepting this guy's blessing.

Then, I lost consciousness.

I woke up to the noise of many people talking to one another, and they stopped speaking all of a sudden. I was looking at everything from above as if I was floating.

I took a look at my limbs, and they were translucent. My whole body was ethereal, just like the time when I met the cloaked figures during my first class evolution.

Wait a minute, I remember going through something like this...

The memories were jumbled up before, but everything was clear now. I remembered what happened after the Primordial's attack rendered me unconscious.

If not for this ability of mine, I would've died back then.

I scanned my surroundings, and it was just like the previous time. There were many people, and each one of them had the same face as mine. Even their clothes were the same as the ones that I'd been wearing by the time 'Loki' forced me to go through the weird ritual.

I was about to introduce myself, but one of the 'Jasons' beat me to it.

"Oh! 'Main Jason' is here," he said with a cheerful tone of voice, "Let's give him a round of applause."

Suddenly, everyone started applauding. I tried to count the number of people, but the lighting in this place was insufficient for me to make a good estimation.

There are more than a hundred 'Jasons' here at the very least.

"Does anyone here know where we are?" I said without much optimism, "Also, how is it possible for everyone here to look just like me? Are you Alter Egos of mine? Or some kind of imagination that my mind conjured?"

I asked too many questions, and I didn't expect them to be answered.

However, their reactions startled me.

"We're you," blurted a certain Jason.

"And You're every one of us," said another.

"However, we're not exact copies of one another," added another Jason.

"Yeah... Our experiences differ somewhat," mumbled Jason, "But we're still the same, at least deep down."

Then, one of the Jasons got up and he spoke loudly.

"For example, I am Jason Stubbs. I was born in a world that had a system for more than three thousand years, and I have an Epic class," he said, "I was nurtured by my family to become a strong expert, and that's what I am."

"As for me, I'm from an Earth that has no 'system', and I don't even understand what that's supposed to mean," another

one mumbled, “I was a diligent student, and I managed to enter medical school. Now, I am a famous Neurosurgeon and I participated in discovering a cure for Rabies!”

Suddenly, one of my little friends got up from his seat and started shouting.

“Aye, How the hell did you do that bro? I am still in my first year of medical school!” he said.

“Bruh, I am still in high school.” Blurted another Jason.

The situation was getting out of control, and the chaos was too much. These people spoke randomly, and their conversations weren’t productive at all.

“Alright, Everyone,” I said, “Shut the fuck up for a minute! I have an important question to ask.”

I tried thinking of a suitable question, but nothing specific came up. Nonetheless, there was a single question that I felt compelled to ask.

What the hell is going on here?

*

This is weird...

Jason went through the ritual, and it was successful.

However, Loki could no longer read his thoughts. He even tried to increase the efficiency of his mind reading abilities through direct contact with his pupil’s head, but it didn’t work.

His mind seemed completely blank to the mysterious deity; he found it eerily similar to a dead man’s mind.

I wonder if he could still think when he’s using the Latent Ability? Or if his ability makes his mind invulnerable?

Loki had never seen a mortal able to hide his thoughts away from him when he was trying to read them, so this made Jason even more interesting.

What was even more exciting was the nature of his latent ability. It was true that Loki couldn’t scan his thoughts in real

time, but he could still see the flow of mana into his body and out of it.

At first, the deity thought that his latent ability was either a psychic one or a mental one, but he was wrong.

The deity laughed uncontrollably all of a sudden, before recollecting himself.

Loki didn't have a mirror, but he knew himself well enough to guess his current facial expression.

It's that ugly grin once more; the one that appeared on my face once I discovered something intriguing.

Everything was clearer now, and Loki had a good guess for the reason why he sent Jason back in time.

12. Void and Emptiness

Everyone inside the room stopped speaking, and they stared at me intently. There were many questions that I wanted to ask, but I had to be patient.

I tried to open my status screen, but it didn't appear. I tried using other features of the system, but nothing worked.

So, the system doesn't work here? This is odd...

Another mystery was my current form; My body was translucent and I was floating. I wasn't sure if my current form was because my soul got transported outside of my body or if it was just a projection of my consciousness.

“Alright, everyone,” I said, “First of all, where the hell are we?”

I had some theories, but they all seemed farfetched.

The first possibility was that my soul got transported to some distant pocket dimension, and these ‘Jasons’ were transported from other universes.

The system didn't work in this case because that pocket dimension must've been in a place that wasn't integrated into the Intergalactic Systematic Union yet.

Another possibility was that I was dreaming, and these people were imaginations that my mind created to allow for creative thinking and multitasking.

However, I wasn't confident about this one, as these guys had some knowledge that I'd never seen before.

The fight against the Primordial was sufficient proof of this notion, as they knew of a way to numb the painful sensation caused by the flames.

Let's hope that these guys can answer this question...

One of the Jasons that were sitting in the front row stood up, and he spoke excitedly.

“Hello everyone, I am Jason Stubbs, but I guess you already know that. I work as a Domain Investigator; the closest description of my job using your time’s vocabulary would be a ‘fancy astrophysicist’,” he said as he giggled, “I am not sure if I am the most qualified one in this room to answer this question, but I’ll try my best.”

He raised his hands and moved his fingers in weird patterns. Suddenly, a blue hologram appeared in front of his face, and he moved it upwards so that I could see it better.

“According to what I heard from the other guys, most of the people here are from the twenty-first century,” he said, “Well, I am not. I come from the thirty-fourth century, and the system appeared on our Earth a couple of years ago. My calculations aren’t sophisticated enough to find the exact coordinates of our current location, but this hologram gives an approximated estimate.”

I nodded, then looked at the three-dimensional image in front of me.

There were a great number of black dots on the right side of the screen, and all of them were surrounded by a large sphere.

There was nothing around the sphere; it was completely desolate except for a single red dot.

It was isolated and far from the sphere containing the black dots.

The hologram itself was fascinating, so I inquired about it. Astro Jason said that it was a projection of his imagination and that all of us could do it if we tried to.

I tried to study the hologram, but the information wasn’t sufficient. I gave up and asked Astro Jason to give me a summary.

He sighed and shook his head, then started speaking.

“Each of the black dots is a universe, and the large sphere around them is the Multiverse Border,” he mumbled, “The red dot is our current location, and it’s located outside of the

multiverse as you can see. It's not usual for something to exist in the Void, and this is my first time seeing this phenomenon."

The Void? The Multiverse?

I asked him about the Multiverse, and he confirmed its existence much to my surprise. He also said that the Void was the name that his people chose for the desolate space outside of the Multiverse.

I still wasn't sure whether the red dot referred to the location in which this meeting was happening, or if it was the location of Loki's pocket dimension.

Loki didn't answer me when I asked him about our location, but I decided to insist once I went back.

I thanked Astro Jason for his help and asked the remaining people if they had any other information about our location.

A certain Jason raised his hand briefly, then spoke.

"You're supposed to know the answer to that question," he said, "You're the Main Jason after all."

Once again, another one of them calls me 'Main Jason'...

"What do you mean by the 'Main' Jason?" I asked, "And what makes you think that I am the 'Main' one?"

The same Jason replied with a displeased tone of voice.

"You're The Jason, we're just other Jasons from other places," he blurted, "We can tell just by looking at you. Even if one of us disappears, you'll keep on living. However, we'll die for sure once you bite the dust."

"Aren't the people here different versions of me? From other universes or timelines?" I asked.

A certain Jason spoke from afar, and I couldn't pinpoint his exact location, but he was sitting in the back.

The lighting in this place wasn't strong enough, thus I wasn't able to see most of these guys' faces.

"We're sure that we have strong ties to you, but we're just as oblivious to this whole thing as you are," he said, "I have

memories of spending my life as a delinquent, then going to prison for attempted murder. Being locked up is so boring, so I am glad that you invited us.”

So, my Latent Ability summoned for these guys? Does that mean that it summons other versions of myself, and I get to meet them?

I still wasn't sure whether they were real people from other universes, or if they were just simulations that my ability created.

Nonetheless, I was curious about what the latest Jason said, so I resumed my discussion with him.

“You said that you were glad that I invited you,” I spoke as I furrowed my non-existent eyebrows, “Does that mean that you could've rejected my invitation?”

This was an important point, as the usefulness of this ability depended on whether the Jasons were free to indulge me with their presence whenever I needed some help.

“Yeah, we could theoretically reject the invitation, but why would I do that?” he spoke, “I am a prisoner, and this is a priceless opportunity for me to have some time away from that wretched place.”

Right...

This meant that important people like Dr. Jason and Astro Jason might not be present when I needed their help, and only the miserable versions of myself had enough free time to come here for a chat.

Suddenly, I felt strong dizziness, and the surroundings grew hazy. I tried to concentrate, only to feel a sharp headache.

All the Jasons got up from their seats, and they spoke in unison.

“It's a shame that we have to cut our meeting short, it seems like you're at your limit. Most of us are busy people, and we only accepted your invitation this time because it was your first time calling The Legion,” they snapped their fingers

at the same time, then added, “Nothing is free in this world, Jason. The Legion bids you farewell.”

The Legion...

I couldn't concentrate enough to catch everything they said, but that word left a strong impression on me.

I closed my eyes, and a system screen appeared in front of me.

[An Old Acquaintance]	-Loki is not your friend, but he's not your enemy either. Don't overshare about your ability unless you have no choice. -Remember; Nothing is free in this world.
-----------------------	--

Is this one of Loki's pranks?

Suddenly, I recalled a certain memory once I finished reading the message.

'Nothing is free in this world', huh?

I've heard these words before, from a certain cloaked figure. I wasn't sure how he could contact me even though the system didn't work in this place, but I decided to keep his advice in mind.

It's safer anyways to keep some information to myself, at least until I learned the true motives behind Loki's help.

Then, I woke up.

'Loki' was in front of me, and he was grinning.

*

Jason woke up, and the pentagram on the ground disappeared. A replica of the drawing that was on the ground appeared on the kid's back, but it was much smaller than the original.

Alright, this should allow him to access his latent ability once he learns how to manipulate mana without the help of the

system.

Jason's was different from usual, and he seemed to be lost in thought. He had an accelerated cardiac rate, and he was breathing faster than normal. He got up and kept staring at the wall in front of him. Loki waved in front of his face, but he didn't even blink.

It wasn't usual for a creature of his power to display these symptoms unless he encountered an incredibly bizarre event.

His latent ability was time-space-based, and using such abilities was mentally taxing.

I wonder what the exact effect of his latent ability is.

Loki tried to read his thoughts to discover the reason behind his weird reaction, but he wasn't able to access his memories of the time he spent unconscious. They seemed to be encrypted, and he couldn't browse them at all.

His inability to do so disappointed him, but he figured the kid could answer the questions anyway.

"You're feeling anxious kid," the deity said, "What's wrong?"

He flinched, then smiled.

"Oh, it's nothing. I am just trying to process my memories," he replied, "Johannes's memories were already too much for me, and now I have something else on my plate."

This was an opportunity to ask for more information about his latent ability, but Loki made sure not to be too pushy.

"Did you meet some kind of Eldritch Horror? Do you even remember what you went through?" the patron asked.

There was a possibility that a meeting with a scary being stressed him, and there was a chance that his memories got jumbled up like the time he first used the Latent Ability.

"My memories are in a state of disarray," he mumbled, then added with a stern tone of voice, "Aren't you going to tell me where we are right now?"

Loki didn't understand the reason behind his sudden question, but he decided to tell him anyway.

I am sure he'll fully cooperate once I answer a couple of his questions.

The mysterious being snapped his finger, and a certain wall of the room became transparent. The space outside was dark, but there were many beautiful stars.

There was also a giant planet not too far away from them, and he was sure that Jason would recognize it.

The interesting human advanced toward the transparent wall, and he opened his eyes widely.

"Is this Earth?" he asked with an amused tone of voice. He had a slight smile on his face, and his eyes twinkled.

"Yes," Loki said, "I put my pocket dimension this close to Earth to observe in real-time the events that occurred when everyone was still inside the tutorial."

Earth didn't seem that different from afar, as it still had the same look. Many foreign races arrived there when humans were inside the tutorial and they did some renovations. Furthermore, the wildlife was adapting to the system's arrival.

Jason nodded, then he said that he didn't remember much about his ability except the fact that he met many people who looked just like him.

The god wasn't satisfied with the information that Jason gave him, as he felt that the kid hid some details from him.

"We'll continue speaking about this subject after you go back to Earth," Loki said, "Once you take off your clothes, you'll see a new tattoo on your back. It's related to your Latent Ability, so don't worry about it too much."

"For real! You're sending me back to Earth?" He asked excitedly.

"Of course!" the mysterious being replied.

Then, he snapped my fingers and Jason was gone.

I am sure he'll like the place that I sent him to.

13. The Initial Returnee

It seems like he's either playing along with my lies, or he's genuinely unable to read my thoughts.

I told Loki that I met many people who looked just like me, but I didn't give him details about what the other Jasons spoke about.

Loki wasn't convinced, but I said that my memories were still mixed up and that I would tell him more details once everything cleared up.

I made sure to keep the weird message that I received a secret, at least for now.

I wonder if I'll see the Glitchers in person soon...

I had my Anti-Glitch radar, and I suspected that it would prove to be useful, but I still had to think about the present.

Loki surprised me when he said that we were floating in space above Earth, as I thought that we were stranded around some corner of the universe.

This means that the meeting with the Jasons took place in The Void.

I knew nearly nothing about my latent ability, let alone the Multiverse and the Void.

I sighed; there were too many mysteries that I needed to solve. On the bright side, the necklace that I got from Quetzalcoatl's temple might allow me to find some answers.

I'll try to buy as many necklaces from other people as possible.

Loki surprised me when he said that he would send me to Earth this soon, as I expected that he would keep me in his pocket dimension for way longer.

He snapped his fingers, and the view in front of me changed immediately.

Everything within my line of sight turned blue, and I felt nothing under my feet.

I looked down, and a strong current of air hit my face. All of a sudden, I realized what was happening; I was falling.

Oh shit! Loki teleported me above a large water body!

I searched for my bag of holding and found it hanging from my waist. I checked my body, and I had my cape, and crown on. I even had my shirt, shorts and the new suit on.

I was glad that he sent my equipment along with me, but I had to check the contents of my bag of holding later.

For now, my priority was to fall safely, then find the closest land to my current whereabouts.

“[It’s fine!]” I activated my skill, and my body caught fire. I chose the low temperature of six hundred Kelvin, as I didn’t need stronger flames for the purpose that I had in mind.

I propelled myself upward by controlling the flames’ burning direction and intensity, and my falling speed decreased exponentially.

I was a hundred meters above the water at this point, and my speed was rather slow. I wasn’t happy about Loki’s prank, but I couldn’t do anything against him anyway

I also needed to get ready for the meeting of the top rankers, as it would take place once the tutorial was officially over.

There were too many things to do, and I’d better find a System Trading Station soon.

Once I was ten meters above the water, I noticed some weird silhouettes moving underwater. I hastily examined them.

[UniShark] (Uncommon)	Level: 48
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I still couldn't see what they looked like, but there were more than ten of them according to the system. Once I was five meters above them, they brought their heads out of the water and opened their jaws widely.

They must be thinking that the sky pitied them and granted them easy prey.

My flames could've propelled me even further in the air to fly, but I needed to increase their temperature higher than two thousand Kelvin to achieve the feat of flying. High temperatures might destroy my bag of holding, so I didn't want to risk it.

Alright, Let's take the bloody path.

I grabbed my bag of holding and hid it between my hands to protect it from my incoming attack.

I dropped into the water with a splash, and I felt many teeth contacting my body. However, I waited for as many sharks to get around me as possible.

I was three meters underwater at this point, and I was curious about the effect of my powers in such an environment.

“[Kill Them Before They Spread!]” I used my multi-target skill, and a heat wave erupted from my body in all directions.

I heard sizzling sounds and many cracking noises; the water around me took on a deep shade of red.

A system screen appeared in front of me.

[Unishark] (Uncommon) (Level: 48) defeated x6! Host earned 1870000 EXP.

I noticed that I haven't killed all of the Unisharks despite the radius of my attack being large enough to encompass them all.

It seems like my flames don't work well underwater, but I am still glad that they're not completely useless.

I controlled my flames to propel me upward and took a look at my surroundings once I was floating.

I noticed some land on my left side, so I swam in that direction. I increased my speed by using the flames as jets, and it took me less than a minute to reach the beach.

It was a long sandy beach and there was a forest behind it.

I went out of the water and started walking on the sand; I was surprised to find someone already standing there, and it wasn't a human.

It was a bipedal creature whose height reached my waist. It wore a full body suit of leather armor and held a staff with both of its arms.

It had tanned skin, blue eyes, and pointy ears. Its hair was brown, and there were many freckles on its face.

Oh! It's a female Gnome!

She trembled and looked at me with fear in her eyes.

"Mis...Mister Devilman. Please don't hurt me, I'll give you a lesser mana stone," she said as she bit her lip, "Actu... Actually, I have four lesser mana stones. Take them and leave me alone!"

I wasn't surprised to see her speaking English, as the foreign races that arrived on Earth all had some kind of language translation skill.

I grinned; I knew the reason behind her reaction. I turned off [It's fine!], and the flames no longer covered my body.

"Don't worry, child. I am just a human trying to get back to civilization," I said with a warm smile, "Do you know the way to the closest System Trading Station?"

I was optimistic about the situation; my Charisma was high enough

All of a sudden, the fear disappeared from her eyes and disappointment replaced it. She stopped trembling and crossed her arms. She turned her face away from me and pouted.

“Oh, so you were just a regular human; I had my hopes up for a second, especially since you’re wearing a cape and a crown,” she said as she gave me a side glance, “First of all, I am not a child; I’m a teenager. You might be a little handsome for a human, but no one gets away with calling me a child. I would’ve totally helped you for free ‘cause you’re strong and can do fire magic, but you’ve ruined my day.”

Then, she gave me an expectant look.

Did she think I was some kind of demon king when I got out of the water at first?

I had mixed feelings about her reply. I was glad that she was open to helping me for free at first; It was proof that my high Charisma was working. However, I felt bad about my mistake of calling her a child; she was too short for a gnome and her facial features were baby-like.

It’s like the old days when I played otome games, the only difference being that I couldn’t reset the save file in real life.

I sighed, then told her about my intentions honestly. I needed to find a System Trading Station as soon as possible, and I’d be wasting time if I kept negotiating with her.

“If you lead me to a System Trading Station within two minutes, I’ll give you one of these,” I said as I pulled a lesser mana stone out of my bag of holding. “It’s the only one that I have, else I would’ve offered more. Also, my crown and clothes aren’t up for negotiation; they’re family heirlooms.”

I lied to her about being poor because I knew Gnomes rather well. Most of them were stingy and they negotiated for hours before striking any deals.

I hope Ratska gives me an easy time when I negotiate with him later on.

Her eyes twinkled and she grinned. Then, she started running in a certain direction. I followed her easily; the shorter legs of gnomes weren’t efficient for running.

We got away from the beach and went through the forest. There were many pine trees around us, but each one of them had a length of at least thirty meters.

Even the plants are affected by the system...

I was interested in this Gnome, as she might be a useful contact later on.

“By the way, what’s your name?” I asked her.

“Nina,” she said without turning toward me, “and you?”

“I am Jason Stubbs,” I replied.

She sneered and gave me a disdainful side-glance.

“You? Being the Initial Returnee? He’s the first human to finish the tutorial, his name is spread all over the world,” she said, “Why would someone like that come out of the sea in such a remote area? I advise you to see Wilkor, he’s an apothecary and he’ll give you something for your delusions.”

People like these infuriated me, as if boasting about being another person would make me popular or bring me happiness.

“You can examine me if you want, the system will confirm my identity,” I said with a grin, “There is no reason for me to lie to a child like you.”

Suddenly, she stopped in her tracks and gave me a piercing gaze.

Gotcha!

“My class has the uncommon variant of [Identify],” she blurted, “I’ll use it on you, and we’ll resume our journey after I find out that you’re some random human. Gosh! I am not even sure if someone like you will keep his promise and give me the lesser mana stone once I fulfill my side of the deal.”

I smirked and raised both of my arms a little. I didn’t care much about exposing my identity to become famous, but I wasn’t going to let her call me a delusional person for introducing myself properly.

“Take your time identifying me, Nina,” I said, “I might give you an autograph if you behave well for the rest of the trip.”

14. Tiny Alveria

She flinched for a minute, then increased her pace. The trip through the woods went by fast than I guessed it would, as she was quite fast for a Gnome

“Yo..You don’t need to pay me, Mr. Jason,” Nina stuttered, “Anyone will be happy to help the Initial Returnee.”

“I promised to award you, and that’s what I am going to do,” I said sternly.

She nodded hastily, then resumed running.

Once we were at the edge of the forest, Nina spoke.

“You’ll find the town ahead,” she said, “We only added some temporary buildings to the existing town, but it’s much better now.”

“What’s the name of this place?” I asked.

“Oh! We decided to call it Tiny Alveria,” she said while blushing, “The elders of the three clans are the ones that agreed on that name.”

I grinned; the name wasn’t that funny but her reaction was. Her attitude shifted completely after learning about my name.

Jason Stubbs must be rather famous around here.

“I meant to ask you about the name of this island before the system appeared,” I clarified, “If you know it, of course.”

“According to some documents that we found, this island was called Gwa-de-lop.” she said while scratching her chin, “I am not sure about the pronunciation; my translation skill isn’t the best available.”

Oh; She means Guadeloupe! This is an island in the southern Caribbean Sea; it’s close to Southern America.

I was too far away from my house, but I could use [Zoom] to go back home. Still, I would have to deal with the cooldown; it wasn’t a time-efficient method of frequent traveling.

Teleportation Stations would be constructed soon, and they'll make worldwide transportation much easier.

I kept following the little Gnome, and a little while later we were able to see 'Tiny Alveria'. I saw flying vehicles in the air, and there were many skyscrapers in the town.

What? They already built skyscrapers?

In my past life, I went back to Earth twelve days after the tutorial started. I've heard that the foreign races did most of their construction in the first couple of days, but I didn't believe it.

Such a feat would've been impossible for humans before the system integration.

I guess everything is possible with the help of classes and boosted stats.

Nina decreased her pace, and so did I. There was a small wall surrounding the town, but it wasn't high enough to prevent intruders from going in.

I considered entering the town discretely, but I decided to enter legally to prevent inadvertent trouble from occurring.

We were five meters away from the gate, and I noticed a certain humanoid creature standing next to it.

A Peacemaker...

They were artificial creatures offered by the system as a reward to City Lords when they achieved an impressive feat. They were scarce, and the presence of one of them meant that this town's leader was rather competent.

They had advanced artificial intelligence, and they could do menial tasks without tiring or feeling bored. Their most popular occupation was as policemen, and it was fitting for their names.

There wasn't much traffic around the gate, so I didn't have to wait in line.

Getting into towns will become arduous as soon as humans return.

I greeted the Peacemaker, and he nodded his head slightly.

He had the form of a humanoid creature, but his skin was made of a transparent metal alloy. His internal organs, limbs, and fuel could be seen, but a large robe hid most of his body.

He had a hood on his head, but it wasn't enough to hide his brain. It resembled a human brain, but I tried not to think about it too much.

“How could I help you?” he said with a mechanical voice. “Oh! Nina is here!”

Nina nodded and entered the town. I tried to follow her, but he stopped me.

“A lesser Mana Stone is the fee for entrance into town.” He said with a neutral tone of voice.

I should've jumped above the town's wall; at least this fellow isn't asking for an outrageous sum.

I only had two lesser Mana stones, and already promised Nina to give her one of them. Being penniless felt painful but there wasn't much to do about it. I had to get to the System Trading Station to buy some funds using my tutorial points.

It would've helped if my 'friends' from the tutorial could pay their debts faster, but that isn't going to happen any time soon.

I gave the entrance fee to the guard, and he went out of my way. I shook my head with regret and entered the town.

“Welcome to Tiny Alveria,” said Nina, “It's a small town in the Northern part of Gwa-de-lop, but it's being expanded.”

I nodded, but my attention was on something else.

The city awed me; it's been quite a while since I saw such a city.

My past life was rather shitty, but at least it had some positives.

As far as I knew, Guadeloupe was a normal island with regular buildings, not some metropolis straight out of a cyberpunk setting.

The old buildings were still on the ground, but everything looked more modern. Roads were glossy and they seemed fragile at first glance. However, my opinion about its durability changed immediately once I saw a carriage holding ten Unisharks passing with great speed.

This place was way too different from Earth's Pre-System towns

The skyscrapers were constructed on top of the old buildings of this town, and they seemed to be constructed with light materials.

There were many billboards on the buildings' windows, and they showed different advertisements. A good number of them greeted Jason Stubbs and congratulated him for being the Initial Returnee.

There was even a large purple hologram above the town that said 'Congratulations on clearing the tutorial, Jason Stubbs!'

My 'Initial Returnee' title said that the congratulations will go on for a week, and I wasn't sure about the duration that I spent away from Earth.

It took me less than a day to finish the tutorial, and Loki must've kept me for a short while.

Actually, I am not sure about the duration that Loki kept me for, but I'll find out soon.

"Hey Nina," I whispered to my guide, "There is a question that I want to ask."

She flinched, then stuttered, "Su..Sure! As long as it's something that I know about."

I sighed; it seemed like her anxiety wouldn't go away easily.

"When did you arrive at Earth? And How long did it take for the workers to renovate this town?" I asked.

"I arrived with my tribe a little while after the tutorial happened; we were among the first wave of immigrants," she said, "Well, it has been forty-six hours since the system

integration, and the laborers have been working nonstop since then. The work still isn't done, but almost everyone is taking a rest now."

"It's impressive what y'all managed to achieve in such a short duration," I said, "I assume Gnomes did most of the work here, right?"

Gnomes brought incredible changes to Earth in my past life; they were unrivaled when it came to jobs that required high dexterity.

Nina nodded, then she replied with a hint of pride in her voice.

"Yes, the other races can't even do maintenance jobs, let alone create something from scratch. Still, they're somewhat useful when we need some monster materials."

Exactly; Gnomes usually shied away from combat, and even the ones with powerful classes preferred to use their strength for blacksmithing and heavy labor.

I thanked her for answering my question, then kept walking. The streets were crowded, but there weren't any humans in this area. Most of the people here were Gnomes, Lizardmen, and Elves.

Once in a while, a creature gave me a piercing stare. I wasn't sure about it, but their gazes seemed to hold disdain within them.

I grinned in response but ignored them for the most part. Many members of the foreign races viewed us with contempt, as our planet had only recently received the system.

They were 'The Elitists', and they caused many riots in my past life.

Still, these Elitists are nothing but a minority among the people that arrived on Earth; they aren't a threat to Earthlings.

I was impressed with the new look of this city, and the best part was that they didn't destroy any of the old buildings.

Despite everything, the foreign races wanted to have friendly relations with humans. They could've claimed the rights to certain areas of Earth, but they didn't. They cooperated even when it was disadvantageous for them.

I noticed that Nina was familiar with many people along our way, as she greeted most of them. Even Elves and Lizards seemed to know her.

She might be more important than I thought; I'm intrigued about her.

It was rude to ask someone about their class directly, so I had to be somewhat vague.

"Hey Nina," I called for the little Gnome.

"Um.." she turned her head toward me, "How could I help you?"

She was visibly less stressed by my presence than before, as she no longer trembled when speaking.

"You seem to be popular around this place," I said, "Even people from the other races are friendly with you."

"It's true, I've helped some of these people before," she replied with a cheerful voice, "Most people are thankful for my help, especially adventurers because they get injured easily."

"Oh! So, you must be a healer then," I said with an excited voice, "Do you work for some kind of religious house?"

"Not really, I help injured people regardless of their race or religion, and I am not a permanent member of any party" she blurted, "I like helping people, and I don't care that much about remuneration if the person can't pay for the treatment."

I nodded then resumed moving silently. I could already see a distinct building from afar, and it had the usual appearance of a System Trading Station.

The people that greeted Nina seemed endless; one of them appeared almost every three seconds.

It was obvious why she was popular; she healed people indiscriminately and she didn't ask for enormous sums of money.

Healers were usually greedy and they made sure to extort as much money from their patients. The injured people had no choice, as they cared about their lives more than anything.

I was interested in her class and level, so I examined her.

She had a level of thirty-eight, but the regular examination didn't show her class.

Her level is impressive if she was truly a healer.

I opened the system shop, and it worked. I silently thanked Loki for it, but a certain realization hit me.

He must be observing right now, but I can't do much about it...

I bought details on Nina for thirty shop points, and I found out about her class. She had an uncommon class called [Salvatress], and it had some healing and supporting abilities.

It wasn't easy for a healer to level up, as the only way for that to happen was through healing people.

Usually, healers died early during their careers, mostly due to carelessness, bad coordination, and lack of precautions. Most of their classes couldn't use their regenerative skills on themselves and had low health and bad physical stats.

She might be useful if she's as competent as she seems.

I was ten meters away from the System Trading Stations, so I stopped thinking about the little Gnome.

I bid her farewell and asked her if she was interested in joining my guild later on. She trembled and opened her eyes widely after hearing that question but nodded with approval. She told me that she lived in a temporary tent in the southern part of the island, just like the other Gnomes.

The building in front of me had a cubic shape and all of its dimensions were approximately five meters. It was mostly

black, and it seemed even smaller than the safe room. However, I knew that it was more impressive on the inside.

Its door stood out, as it was completely white save for a yellow knob.

As soon as I entered the System Trading Station, some screens appeared.

[Welcome, Host! You're the first Earthling to use a System Trading Station.]

[How can we help you?]

-Host gained a title for his feat!

15. The Observer

Oh, another title?

[Title acquired: The First Customer]

The First Customer

System Trading Stations are like regular shops, and they have finite resources.

Early bird takes the worm, right?

You're the first Earthling to enter a System Trading Station after clearing the tutorial!

- You'll have a permanent discount of 10% on all merchandise.

The discount was underwhelming on paper, but it meant a lot to someone who had a huge number of tutorial points.

I dismissed the system interface, and scanned the interior of the System Trading Station.

It was spacious, with an area of at least a hundred square meters. The floor was completely white, and my dirty legs didn't leave any markings as I walked.

Cleaning Runes are rather impressive!

I looked ahead of me, and I saw two counters. There was a person behind each counter, and their clothes resembled business suits. They provided customer service and took care of the transactions.

Both of them were women, and they looked like regular humans. They had the same physical and facial features; they had blonde hair and blue eyes, and they looked gorgeous.

However, this was just a ruse from the system.

The system customizes the clerks' look depending on the customer; humans met human clerks and so on and so forth.

It was a useful feature; it allowed for the comfortable usage of this facility.

Each counter had a different function. The leftmost one offered items to hosts for tutorial points, and the rightmost one allowed people to sell their items for tutorial points.

I walked ahead at a brisk pace and took my chance to verify my bag of holding.

I opened it and scanned its contents. I took out my Soul Identity; it was a crucial item for me today.

Everything else seemed to be in pristine condition. I sighed, Loki didn't do anything weird to my items.

I thought he would empty my bag of holding at the very least...

Something in the bag of holding grabbed my attention; it was a rolled scroll, and this was the first time that I'd seen it. I took it out and opened it.

Suddenly, the scroll exploded in a strong flash. The explosion didn't cause any damage, but my eyes were blinded for around twenty seconds.

Fuck! Is he enjoying this?

As soon as I regained my eyesight, I saw a couple of system screens in front of me.

[Congratulations! You activated the InterGalacticLine]

What's up, kid

I hope you liked the little prank!

You can call me through the InterGalacticLine; Just tell the system to open a line to Loki!

-Call soon, or else I'll call you-

Yours truly,

I sighed, I wasn't going to call him for quite a while because I had too many things on my plate.

I dismissed the system screens and went ahead toward the left-most counter.

"Greetings, sir," said the woman, "Can I see your Soul Identity?"

I gave her the ID, and she scrutinized it for a couple of seconds.

"Lovely, I am impressed that you decided to visit such a remote area," she spoke, "Is there something specific you'd like to buy? I can give you a filtered list of items if you'd like."

I already knew what I wanted to get; it was one of the most useful items on this list. Furthermore, there was only one Observation Shard available.

"I'd like to buy Earth's Observational Shard," I said.

"Hm, that's a good decision," she replied, "Accept the transaction, and you'll get your item."

This Transaction will cost 45000000 tutorial points.

[Accept]

[Decline]



The item's original cost was fifty million tutorial points; the discount already saved me five million points.

"I accept", I said. A small round gem appeared on top of the counter. It was as small as a marble, and it glowed with a white light.

[Earth's Observational Shard]	(Epic)
Every Planet has a coordinating center, and observational shards can peer into it. -This shard unlocks the 'Observer' system feature. ('Observer' gives detailed information on Earth's current state)	

I thanked the clerk, then held the Observational Shard in my hand.

Sweet! Stella's guild had this item in my past life, and it was one of the most important reasons for their prominence.

It required direct physical contact to work, and it was rather powerful. It worked like an encyclopedia; it had information on Earth's resources.

Whoever used it would know about the location of every single dungeon available, every single treasure trove, and all the resources.

However, it only gave vague information when it came to living creatures. It could tell the person about the races that lived in a certain area, but it didn't give their exact numbers, names, or levels.

This is my first step toward creating a powerful guild; I'll have access to a lot of information, as long as it was about a

natural resource.

My next step was to find Ratska; the Gnome who would later be dubbed ‘The Brewer’. I needed his skillset to create certain potions.

In my past life, he was a member of Stella’s guild. They manufactured Permanent Stat potions, and they had no competition. The Observational Shard gave them information about the dungeons that contained Trolls, so they didn’t need to worry about the lack of Trolls’ essences.

As far as I know, I can buy information on a certain person’s location using the System Trading Station.

“I’d like to buy information on a certain person’s current whereabouts,” I told the lady behind the counter, “His name is Ratska, and he’s a Gnome.”

The clerk’s eyes flashed for a couple of seconds before she shook her head.

“The total number of results is 10578. I am sorry, but that name is common among Gnomes,” she said, “Do you have any more details?”

I thanked the clerk for her cooperation, but shook my head to her question.

I didn’t know anything about the little guy, except his name and race. He was a myth among commonfolk, and he almost never made any public appearances.

I knew what he looked like, but he didn’t seem that different from other Gnomes to me.

There was no other option; I had to use the system shop.

I hope the information is cheap, but you never know what to expect from Loki.

I opened the System Shop and asked for information on Ratska.

Suddenly, a system screen appeared in front of me.

[System Admin]	<p>-I had to go through your memories to find enough information about this little guy, but I am positive that I got him.</p> <p>-His current whereabouts will be automatically transferred to your brain once you read this message.</p> <p>-Consider this a freebie, I am willing to help you as long as you reciprocate.</p>
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New information popped into my head; the Ratska that I looked for was currently in Osaka, and I had an image of his current living place.

The System Shop proves its usefulness once more...

I put my new item in the bag of holding and went out of the System Trading Station. I really needed a new spatial pocket, but I decided to buy a new one once I found Ratska.

I used [Zoom] to teleport to Tokyo; it was the closest place to Ratska among the ones that I've visited before.

*

In a distant place, two cloaked figures walked side by side. One of them was considerably taller than the other, and the difference in physique was staggering too.

They had a looming presence, and their shadows wavered with each step they took.

It was nighttime, but there was no moon to be seen in the sky. The two figures walked on a road surrounded by trees, and no sounds could be heard.

People of diverse races crowded the road, and the air was heavy around the place. The passengers looked at one another with ferocious gazes, but all of them kept their distance from the two mysterious people.

"Lazar is still nowhere to be seen," one of the cloaked figures whispered, "I've never seen a slacker like him! He's always absent when we need him the most; it's infuriating."

“Calm down, Vivian,” blurted the other figure, “I already sent a mysterious message to the new prospect; this will buy us enough time to get our shit together.”

The woman sighed, then opened her mouth once more.

“What do you think about the kid’s latent ability?” she whispered, “Do you think it’s what the current Usurper is looking for?”

“Maybe, maybe not,” replied Albert, “His latent ability is time-space based, but I’m not sure about its prospects. We’ll know more about it if we get an opportunity to meet Jason.”

Vivian nodded, and the two of them kept walking in silence. They took a left turn once they reached a certain sign; it read ‘Upper Tavern to the left’.

They walked through the forest, and it took them around ten minutes to reach their destination.

It looked like a normal Tavern; it was filled with people, and they seemed in high spirits. Some of them sang, and others danced.

“They never cease to disappoint me; these guys are always loitering around,” said Vivian, “They’re tarnishing the legacy of our predecessors.”

Albert sighed, then he kicked the Tavern’s gate causing its doors to snap. They broke apart, and many portions flew around. He entered, and told Vivian to follow him.

She shook her head, then entered the building.

There were eight people inside, and all of them had different races. However, all of them were humanoid sapient creatures.

The noise brought their attention to the door, and some of them screamed in discontent. However, they stopped in their tracks when they recognized the newcomers, and silence pervaded the building.

No one made eye contact with Albert, let alone complain about his violence.

“What do we have here,” he spoke as he walked around the place, “I believe I told you yesterday that we’ll resume our activities, and that this place needed a renovation.”

Albert looked around, but no one spoke.

“Mister Albert,” said an old man as he bowed, “We’re lacking funds, that’s why the maintenance is delayed. As for the party, I’ll take responsibility for these guys’ carelessness.”

“Raise your head, Lev,” replied Albert, “These people are adults, and you’re not a babysitter. As for the funds, they’ll no longer be a problem, these drunkards will work as mercenaries starting from tomorrow.”

Many people flinched at Albert’s words, but no one complained.

“It’s a shame to see our district’s members so miserable,” said Albert, “We might’ve been in a state of decline in the last two years, but it’s no longer the case. There is still hope for us to rise from the ashes, and I’ve found a promising lad.”

Everyone raised their heads and looked at him with determination in their eyes.

Vivian coughed and move in front of Albert.

“It’s true; we’re lucky this year. We scouted Lazar a couple of months ago, and we have a new promising candidate,” she said, “We’re already in a good position, and we’ll rise even further if we play our cards right. Everyone here will split up; you’ll notify all the districts within our Universal Sector that we found a candidate who could help us with our goals.”

The people in the Tavern seemed invigorated, and they stood from their seats.

“His name is Jason,” said Albert as he nodded, “And I’ll meet him personally soon.”

16. Meet the Brewer

Igor was staring at the corpse of the Hydra, and he pulled his great sword out of the ground. He grabbed a rag and started cleaning it.

The corpse of the Hydra was lying on a puddle of dark crimson blood, and it had no heads attached. Its torso had many deep cuts that exposed its innards.

Oleg let out a shrill, then fell to the ground. He panted heavily, and his injured legs trembled as they bled profusely from many small wounds.

His scalp had a long cut that extended all over the top of his head, and his skull was visible. Both of his eyes were swollen, and his nostrils bled.

He struggled to get up, only doing so after relying on his shield as a crutch. The broad piece of metal lost its bright sheen long ago, and many dents covered it.

“Oh fuck, it’s been quite a rush. Tanking all seven heads of the Hydra on my own was harder than I thought; I’m so thrilled!” He spoke as blood came out of his mouth, “The pain is excruciating; several of my bones must be broken right now. Thanks for not healing me, Igor! It’s a pleasure to work with you, maybe the two of us should team up?”

“The fight was a piece of cake; you’re just a reckless brat who took many attacks head-on. Even so, it’s more fun when Stella is not fighting with us,” said Igor as he grabbed a green potion out of a bag, “You’re welcome, little pervert. I didn’t heal you just to focus on the battle anyway. Hurry up and drink some potions, Stella will get angry if she sees you in this state.”

The two of them were sitting on a fallen tree next to each other, and they laughed after the exchange was over. The surrounding forest lost many trees around the area of the fight, but it didn’t decrease the beauty of the place at all.

Oleg shook his head, then drank the potion after struggling with the pain for about a minute. His injuries regenerated at a visible rate, and he started jumping around to test the state of his body.

All of a sudden, someone started speaking from behind the two guys.

“It’s a shame that the corpse would disintegrate soon; I am sure we would’ve gained some useful items if we could loot it,” spoke the person; the voice was soft and refined, and it belonged to a lady, “I’ve spoken with the Almighty Holy One, and he’s asking us to work harder than before.”

Stella had a poker face, and she seemed as flawless as ever. Her silver hair was silky smooth, and her eyes were just like a pair of sapphires. She seemed much loftier than her two companions.

“Oh?” said Igor with a smirk, “Is it something related to that mythical ‘Jason’?”

“Unfortunately, yes. The Great Church offered him a blessing, yet he rejected it,” she said with a shaky voice, as if she didn’t believe her own words, “It’s a shame; It would’ve been useful to have someone like him around. The Almighty Holy One mentioned many other subjects, but this one seemed rather important to me.”

“So,” replied Oleg as he tilted his head, “Should we kill him?”

“We’ll discuss that in detail,” She spoke, “Now that we’ve finished the tutorial, dealing with him is our most important priority. The Great Church can’t remain stable on Earth with someone like him roaming freely.”

The other two nodded, then resumed staring at the space in front of them. Many system screens appeared, and they mentioned the rewards for clearing the tutorial.

“Also, Oleg,” she said with a sharp voice, and the adolescent perked at her call, “I know what you did today. You’re getting punished for your suicidal tendencies.”

Oleg looked the other way as if he was ashamed, but he was grinning.

*

I closed my eyes and imagined a certain beach in Japan. It was the place that I remembered the most; it left a strong impression on me.

I visited Tokyo when I took a small vacation from my work as a porter; it was even more exotic than it was before the system appeared.

The usual feeling of disorientation hit me when I used my skill, and I opened my eyes when I felt sand underneath my feet.

I looked around me; this was indeed the same beach that I thought of, but it was deserted at this point. The sun was stronger than it was in Guadeloupe, and the waves rose and fell violently.

It would've been an exhilarating experience to spend a day here, but I need to find Ratska lest he gets scouted by other humans.

I decided to head toward the city itself; I wanted to see it now that I had an opportunity.

I started walking to get away from the beach, and I passed through a forest. It was crowded with Ginkgo trees that were taller than usual. The forest didn't seem any different from a Pre-System one, but I didn't hear the clicking of any cicadas.

I increased my pace, and I arrived at Tokyo city after a couple of minutes, or at least what remained of it.

The system is capable of bringing the good, but this is one of its ugly effects.

I'd never visited this city before the system appeared, but I've seen plenty of pictures. It was one of the world's largest metropolises; it was alive. The skyscrapers, the bustling crowds, the colorful billboards, and the always-on lights; were all gone.

Debris filled the roads, and not a single building remained standing. I walked with slow steps and scanned the farthest buildings from me; Tokyo was destroyed.

I opened my eyes widely; there were many corpses under the wreckage close by, and their blood painted the area. Many living creatures of various races fetched the corpses of their fallen comrades, and they walked silently while holding them.

What a horrendous sight...

I wondered about the cause of this great damage, so I asked a Lizardman that was passing by about it. He gave me the cold shoulder and didn't even look me in the eye.

His reaction was excessive, but I didn't hold it against him as he might've been grieving the death of a friend. I tried speaking with other people; Gnomes, Dwarves, Elves, and even a Naga. However, they all ignored me.

Oh well, I guess I'll resume looking for Ratska.

I closed my eyes, and I visualized a certain map. It had information on my current location and marked Ratska's whereabouts with a red dot. I had to go to the west; he was about four hundred kilometers away from me.

I scratched my head; the distance was rather long, and I couldn't increase the temperature of my flames too much lest my bag of holding got destroyed.

I should've bought a new one when I was inside the System Trading Station...

I shook my head and started running. I ignited my body with eight hundred Kelvin flames, and my speed increased exponentially. The fallen buildings made the place messy and chaotic, but I could navigate it easily thanks to my [Light Steps] skill.

I scanned my surroundings as I moved nimbly. Everything within my sight was destroyed, and something else grabbed my attention.

Many areas on the ground seemed darker than the rest, and their smell indicated that they've been burned. However, the

dark spots were perfect circles; something that I doubted regular fire could achieve.

It might be something else instead of fire... I wonder what kind of monster could cause this much damage so fast?

No living monsters roamed this area, but I saw many corpses. Some of them looked like winged lions, and others resembled horned beetles.

The rest of the journey was dull, and I reached Ratska's location after running mindlessly for a while.

I closed my eyes and visualized the map. My location overlapped with Ratska's, but he wasn't next to me. I was standing on top of a paved road; there were no trees next to me for him to hide inside.

I found it strange at first, but then I realized that the Gnome must've been hiding in the sewers.

I searched for the closest manhole and kicked it continuously. It withstood two strikes using my current strength, before snapping into many pieces.

I jumped into the sewer and fell on the canal itself. The smell was abhorrent, and some lumps covered my feet and legs.

I cursed softly, but some commotion grabbed my attention. I visualized the map once more, and Ratska has already moved from his previous position.

"Who are you?" said a certain figure from behind me with a stern voice.

I looked back, and it was a Gnome. He was ten meters away from me, and he held a dagger using his right hand. I concentrated on his face, and he was too old to be the Gnome that I'd been looking for.

He was shorter than a human child, and his equipment looked shabby. He had tanned skin, green eyes, and black hair. He didn't have facial hair, but his wrinkles were proof of his old age.

“Who are you? Do you know a Gnome called Ratska?” I asked, “I’ve heard from a friend that he’s living in this place.”

The other Gnome flinched but soon regained his composure.

“I am a guard of an underground Gnome settlement,” he said, “I am sorry to disappoint you, but there are no Ratskas here.”

I was about to threaten the old man, but I thought of something even better. I rummaged through my bag of holding and grabbed a [Troll’s Blood Essence].

I bought some information on this guard from the system shop. His name was Frevel, and he was a Farmer with a level of forty-four.

“Don’t worry, Frevel. I am just a friendly guy, and I promise I have no evil intentions,” I said, and Frevel flinched when he heard his name, “This is proof of my goodwill. You’re an old man, and I am sure you’ll appreciate every bit of Vitality you could get.”

I dangled the vial in front of his eyes and asked the system to send him a copy of its description. Suddenly, his eyes lost their defiant gaze, and a warm smile appeared on his face. He hid his dagger inside its sheath and relaxed his posture.

“I am not sure how you know my name, but I’ll assume you’re a distant friend of mine that I’ve forgotten about,” he said as he rubbed his hand together, “Actually, my memories are worsening over time; that’s why I forgot about little Ratska! I’ll go fetch him right away.”

He went around a small corner and came back with another Gnome. The newcomer looked like a younger version of Frevel, and he was even shorter. As far as I knew, he was about nineteen years old at this point.

“Say Hi to this man,” Frevel told Ratska, “He might give us good rewards if you behave well.”

I nodded and waved my hand at the younger Gnome. Frevel walked toward me at a brisk pace and snatched the vial from my hand once he was close enough.

It was sad to see the guard exposing Ratska's location so easily, but such was the nature of our world. The extra vitality was too sweet for an old man like Frevel. Every point in VIT improved his lifespan a little and increased his HP.

“Hi, stranger,” said Ratska, “I am not sure who you are, but I'll trust you if you're Old Frevel's friend. Besides, it seems like you have some nice rewards with you.”

He noticed the old Gnome drinking a certain vial, and he wanted to know more about it.

“Hello, I've heard good stories about your potion brewing skills,” I said, “In fact, I've come here to ask you about something related to making potions. I need a skilled brewer who's able to work with essences like the one that I gave to Frevel.”

Ratska sighed, then he held his hand in front of him, waiting for me to give him another essence. I grabbed a Troll's Mana Essence and gave it to him. I wasn't sure if he had a variant of the Identify skill, but he might've been able to recognize the essence even if he didn't.

“This is impressive,” he said as he eyed the vial in front of his eyes, “This is an essence gained from a Troll; I am not sure if you realize how valuable this item is. Trolls are extinct creatures in many places; consider yourself lucky that you managed to gain two essences. Too bad you gave one of them away so easily.”

Frevel hid the empty vial in his pouch, and he looked away.

I grinned and asked Ratska to come closer to me. He was a bit cautious around me but he complied nonetheless.

“Take a look at this,” I said. I let him touch the bag of holding momentarily, which allowed him to see its contents.

He looked for about thirty seconds, then looked back at me with a raised eyebrow. He took another look at the bag of holding, and he even rubbed his eyes as he scrutinized the items that he saw.

“Okay man,” he said, “What in the actual fuck?”

“Exactly,” I said, “I have a lot of essences, and I know where to get more of them. You don’t need to worry about the resources, but I want you to answer this question. Can you make advanced potions out of these essences?”

I knew he could, but I had to be formal and ask him about it.

“How do you know me? And what makes you think I’m that talented?” he said as he squinted his eyes, then he shook his head, “Actually, scratch that. You’re one of the only people who believed in my abilities; you must’ve done a lot of research to find a miserable Gnome who just arrived on this planet. As far as your question went; Yes, I can create advanced potions out of these, and out of the other interesting items that you have too.”

I had many kinds of essences, the items that I obtained from the Amphiwolves, and the items that the Bosses dropped.

All is going well; he’s implying his interest in my offer.

He took a deep breath, then resumed speaking.

“Do you want the potions for your personal use?” he asked as he rubbed his chin, “Or maybe you’re offering me a job in an organization?”

“A guild,” I said, “I am opening a guild soon. It’ll be a generalist one, with alchemy as one of its specializations.”

He raised an eyebrow, then stared at me.

“A generalist guild?” he said, “Why?”

“Because I can. I am somewhat stronger than the regular human; I have a legendary grade class,” I said, “I know that generalist guilds might not be as successful as specialized ones due to the division of funds and manpower, but don’t worry about that. As long as you do your job well, you’ll receive good remuneration.”

He opened his eyes widely when I mentioned my class, but his surprise faded away quickly.

He walked around the sewers’ canal while rubbing his chin, completely unaware of the filth that covered his pants.

At least he has his shoes on...

All of a sudden, he turned toward me and offered me a handshake.

“We’ll talk about the remuneration,” he said as he grinned, “but for now, I am open to your idea. Mr...?”

I shook his hand firmly and patted his head.

“Jason,” I said, “We’ll discuss your responsibilities at the guild and your remuneration outside. For now, let’s get out of the sewers; the smell is unbearable.”

17. A New Ally

Ratska agreed to follow me outside; he told me to wait until he brought his backpack.

I waited for him, and Frevel came closer to me and started a conversation.

“That kid is our tribe’s only hope,” he said as he sighed, “Treat him well, please. I hope he finds success in this guild of yours.”

I nodded without replying to Frevel; the old guard went away as he waved his hand at me.

So, Ratska’s success was delayed in my past life because he was reluctant to leave his tribe and family behind...

Suddenly, I heard the sound of water splashing repeatedly, and a little Gnome appeared from afar. He was running, and he panted when he arrived at my location.

He wore a full-body chainmail armor, and he had a leather helmet that only exposed his eyes. Two daggers were attached to his waist, and he held a small shield using his left arm.

“I hope I wasn’t late,” said Ratska as he struggled to catch his breath. His posture was stiff, and his arms were crossed. He tapped his right hand’s fingers on his left arm repeatedly.

“Nice outfit, but we’re not going to war,” I spoke as I shook my head, “The place we’re going to might be ugly, but there are no threats for you to worry about.”

“I am not strong; I have to prepare,” he mumbled as he followed me, “The outside world is dangerous from what I’ve seen, and there is no such thing as being over-prepared.”

The kid had a point considering the nature of his class, but he’s being paranoid; I told him that I had a Legendary grade class...

We walked as we spoke with one another; we were getting close to the manhole I used to enter the sewers.

“The surface is not as dangerous as you might think, and I’ll protect you in case something appears out of nowhere,” I replied, “I am not sure which creature wrecked the buildings on the surface, but he’s no longer roaming the streets. Besides, I haven’t seen any regular monsters on my way here.”

“I am not sure, man. When we arrived at this island, some giant beetles with spinning horns killed at least a dozen Gnomes from our tribe,” he said as he shook his head, “Furthermore, I hear consecutive stomps, and the sound of buildings breaking apart every single night. Sometimes, the ground vibrates due to the sheer mayhem happening on the surface. Living in these dirty tunnels might be uncomfortable, but it’s safe.”

Now, that’s interesting...

We reached the manhole at this point. I jumped out and gave the little Gnome a helping hand. He thanked me, and we resumed walking.

His posture was still stiff, and his arms were crossed. He was anxious, but I wasn’t sure whether he was afraid of me, or the monster found on the surface of the city.

Or maybe both?

We took a walk around the streets, or whatever remained out of them. Every building was wrecked, and the roads were filled with debris; broken concrete, glass shard, large blocks of concrete, and monster corpses.

The surroundings are ugly and messy, but I can’t do much about it.

I planned on getting to know my little friend better before explaining his job at my guild. I kept walking randomly around the place, and the brewer followed me.

Something appeared in my mind, so I asked Ratska about it.

“You mentioned hearing sounds at night,” I said, “Do you have any details on that? Is it related to the creature that destroyed this place?”

The little Gnome sighed, then he spoke after jumping over the remains of an unidentified corpse. It was rotten and stinky.

“I am not sure about that, but I’ve heard rumors from the tribesmen,” he replied, “Some of them believe that a giant humanoid monster comes out of the sea at night, and wreaks havoc. Even so, it was Zirk who spread those rumors; I wouldn’t believe anything said by that sleazy Gnome.”

I didn’t remember Japan being ruined in my past life; I knew about the countries that were destroyed when humanity was gone, and it wasn’t one of them.

Maybe someone fixed Japan before the rest of humanity went back? Or maybe I caused a strong butterfly effect?

I nodded, then stopped in my tracks. I noticed a certain silhouette moving on top of the debris from afar, but the only thing that I discerned was that it was a quadrupedal creature.

A Monster. This is the first living one that I’ve encountered in Japan...

I raised my hand in front of Ratska who’s been following me and motioned for him to halt.

“We might face some danger,” I said, “Brace yourself.”

“I told you that the surface was dangerous!” shouted the Gnome as he shivered, “Maybe I shouldn’t have come here...”

The little Gnome kept talking to himself, but I focused on the enemy ahead of us. It was close enough to be seen clearly at this point, and it increased its pace as it moved toward us.

It had the general shape of a lion but was gray. Its skin had a rough texture just like the surface of the concrete.

It had two green wings attached to its back, and they were folded as it walked toward us. They were dry and scaly, and each of them was big enough to cover one side of the creature’s torso.

It’s a Medulin...

“Close your eyes, Ratska, and face the other direction,” I blurted as I pointed the index finger of my right arm at the

monster.

The little Gnome stood there confused, and his legs trembled. I pushed him lightly, and he woke up from his trance.

The Medulin was twenty meters away from us, and it let out a shrill. It opened both of its wings, and each one of them contained many eyeballs that stared straight at me.

I closed my eyes and used [Burn that Invader!] on the enemy. I opened my eyes when I heard the sizzling sound of flesh being burned by the flames.

The Medulin was laying on the ground, and it no longer moved. We moved closer toward it, and it had a large hole extending from its head to its butt.

“Well, that monster died quickly; You’re stronger than I thought,” noted Ratska as he stared at the corpse with wide eyes, “It’s a Medulin if I remember correctly. A monster capable of petrifying the onlookers.”

“Correct, as expected of you,” I said as I clapped, “You really deserve your reputation as an accomplished brewer of potions.”

“Ugh, I am not sure what reputation you’re talking about. People know me as Ratska the Illegal Citizen, the one who sells mundane potions to shady people,” he mumbled as he looked away, “Yes, I am an Illegal Citizen. It’s better, to be frank about it, instead of hiding it to get the job.”

Oh? So, he was an Illegal Citizen too? This explains a lot...

“It doesn’t matter much; It’s not wise to judge people’s abilities based on having a Soul Identity or not,” I said, “I am willing to hire you anyway, and your salary won’t be affected by this fact.”

“Oh,” he said as he giggled, then he stared at my face, “I expected you to lose interest in me once I revealed that secret of mine; I didn’t think I’d get this far. I am not sure whether you tolerate Illegal Citizens or you’re just pretending to, but this will make our conversations easier.”

His posture relaxed visibly, and he let his arms hang on his side.

He's no longer anxious around me; I hope he'll open up to me soon...

"I am glad you're being honest," I said.

"It's the key to building trust," he said as he shrugged, "Now, let's get going. You've been standing next to that corpse for too long; it'll disintegrate after a day or so."

"Check this out," I said as I grinned.

I used [Dismantle] on the corpse, and I obtained three items. They were the same as one another; Medulin's Eyeballs.

[Medulin's Eyeball]	(Uncommon)
<p>Some creatures can burn their enemies, and some of them can destroy their brains!</p> <p>However, Medulin's aren't like the rest. Their greatest power is their capacity to petrify their enemies.</p> <p>Be cautious around them; You might turn into a statue of yourself before you even realized it!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Can be used to create a potion with a petrification effect.-Can be transplanted.	
<p>Warning: Incompatible hosts will get severe hallucinations if they transplant this item.</p>	

"This explains how you have so many essences inside your bag of holding; these eyeballs are rather interesting too," said Ratska as he rubbed his chin, "I'm even more excited to join your guild now."

“As I told you, I can take care of resources,” I said as I grinned, “For your salary, I was thinking of five larger mana stones per month. Moreover, you’ll get five percent of the profits from selling any potion you made yourself, and two percent for the potions that your eventual assistants made.”

I didn’t know what Stella’s Way of The Champion guild offered him in my past life, but this was a good offer from an objective point of view.

“Five larger mana stones; that’s fifty thousand lesser ones!” he blurted, “Oh god! I might be able to save my tribe from poverty if you’ll give me that much for real. I’ll accept it before you change your mind; where’s the contract?”

“You’re not going to negotiate?” I asked as I raised an eyebrow.

“Of course not! You’re giving me the chance to work with exotic items, and I’m getting paid very well to do my hobby!” he said as he clasped his hands, “What more can a man dream of?”

I am sure other guilds would offer him better deals down the line if they knew of his abilities...

I shook my head and shrugged my shoulders.

“I haven’t prepared a contract yet; we’ll figure that out once the guild is being constructed,” I said, “Do you know where the closest System Trading Station is? I need to buy some items.”

“Oh, I can help you with that. I’ll lead the way from now on; it’s not that far away,” he added.

I nodded, then followed him. He took a left turn, then kept walking in that direction. I wasn’t sure how he knew the way to the Trading Station; he must’ve passed it by when he was still on the surface.

He walked with quick steps, but I was able to keep up with his pace easily.

Suddenly, he took out a small item from his backpack, and he showed it to me.

“I’ve found this item on my way to the secret hideout,” he said, “Do you know what this is? My intuition is telling me that it’s useful, but I can’t get it working.”

I received the item and held it in my hand. It had the shape of a slate, and both of its faces reflected the light. One of its sides had two buttons, and the other had one.

It was a smartphone; a modern one at that.

“We call this a smartphone, and it’s a useful item to have around,” I explained, “Almost every human had one of these before the system appeared, and many of them considered it indispensable. It improves the quality of life; you could use it to automate tasks, talk with people far away from you, search for obscure information, and even for leisure. Its benefits are endless, but humans wasted its potential on something we called ‘social media’.”

Suddenly, he interrupted me.

“Oh! Oh!” he shouted as he jumped in his place, “Turn it on! I’d like to take a look at it.”

I nodded, then pressed the power button constantly for many seconds. Nothing showed up on the screen, so I tried once more.

However, it refused to turn on.

“The battery’s dead; this means that this item is no longer charged, and it needs to be for it to work,” I said, “It’s in good shape, and we’ll get it working once we find a working power outlet and a suitable charger. Don’t worry about it; Technology will be revived when the majority of humans are back.”

I felt bad for the previous owner of this phone; I had to find a new phone for Ratska and return this one when I got a chance.

In my past life, technology was useful for the first couple of years after the system integration. People used it to share their findings about the system, and many new forums appeared.

I used to lurk around the forums to find a creative way of using my previous class, but I ended up amassing a lot of trivia instead.

I gave the little guy back the phone, and he treated it more delicately than before. He hid it in a separate pocket of his backpack.

Ratska's shoulders slumped and he looked at the ground, but he nodded nonetheless. He must've been disappointed when he couldn't take a look at the phone, but there was nothing that I could do in such a situation.

He kept walking, but his pace was slower than before. I knew that the journey would take too long.

He should just give me directions, and I'll get us there in no time...

"Why don't you tell me about its general location?" I proposed, "I'll give you a piggyback, and we'll get there quickly."

"Hell no!" he shouted, "I don't care much when others treat me like a child, but I can walk on my own!"

I chuckled at his reaction. I insisted, explaining that we would save time and effort if he relented.

It took some arguments, but he gave up after a while. He told me to keep going in the same direction that we've been headed.

He rode on my back, and I went ahead. We didn't encounter any monsters on our way, and the whole area was filled with the buildings' wreckage.

"There is something that I've been dying to ask you about," said Ratska, "You're wearing a crown and a cape; Are you from a royal family? Or do those items have incredible effects?"

"The second choice," I replied with a smirk, "Their effects aren't groundbreaking, but having them on doesn't inconvenience me at all. Besides, I find them stylish."

He nodded, then went silent for a while. I was curious about the reason behind this guy's expertise in potions; It was one of humanity's most talked about secrets in my past life.

I could've bought information about him secretly as he was within my line of sight, but I asked him directly instead.

If he refuses to answer, then I'll use the system shop anyway...

“Can you tell me more about your class? I am curious about the reason behind your proficiency with potions.” I said.

18. Unknown Enemy

“Well, not many people know about my class,” said Ratska, “It’s an epic class called [Perpetual Brewery]; one of its class skills allows me to increase the success rate of any potion every time I tried to brew it. As a result, I can reach a hundred percent success rate after a variable number of tries.”

“That’s incredible, isn’t it? A sixty percent success rate is considered incredible among other potion makers,” I said as I grinned, “What’s the downside?”

“There aren’t many downsides, except the lack of a skill that allows me to create unique recipes. Also, I take quite a while to reach a respectable success rate when brewing any potion,” he noted, “It’s a good class all around, and I am sure I would’ve found a lot of success if I wasn’t an Illegal Citizen.”

It seemed too good to be true, so I bought some details about his class from my system shop. He had a level of sixty-two, and he had great stats for a crafter.

I checked his class skills one by one; he had four of them; one of his skills was called [One step, One milestone].

[One step, One milestone]: (Epic)	Passive
<p>Life is not a sprint, it’s a marathon! The same goes for brewing potions.</p> <p>Take it slow and relax. You’ll botch too many potions, but the final result is worth it.</p> <p>Keep up the grind, kid!</p> <p>- Every time you try to brew a potion; its success rate increases by 2.3%.</p> <p>(The success rate increases even if the potion wasn’t brewed successfully)</p>	

None of his other class skills had detrimental effects, and neither did his class.

What a poor Gnome; he's been treated unfairly just because he didn't have a Soul Identity.

“Excellent,” I told the Gnome, “I’ll increase our pace further; hang on tight.”

“Wait; This wasn’t your fastest pace?” replied Ratska with a shaky tone of voice.

I grinned and ran even faster than before. It didn’t take too long for Ratska to get used to my speed, and he resumed talking with me.

We discussed the resources needed to kickstart a potion brewing factory, and I was astounded by the intricacies.

“We’d need at least ten thousand Flasks, a hundred thousand batches of Vileweed, and about eight thousand pipettes,” He mumbled, “Of course, I am considering wide-scale production, which would need at least a thousand assistants who would take care of the easier steps of brewing potions. You’ll need lab coats, glasses, and gloves for every one of them. Preferably multiple sets per worker.”

“I assume we’ll also need many tables, chairs, and cabinets to store the raw resources when there are too many to store in spatial bags,” I said as I raised an eyebrow, “We’ll also need cooled rooms to store the final products if we end up producing more than a thousand batches per day.”

“Brewing potions is an expensive process, but at least it’s profitable,” said Ratska as he patted my shoulder, “We’ll need other items in case you want your guild to truly shine, but I am not sure you’ll be able to afford them. For now, I suggest you buy the items we talked about.”

“As I said before, don’t worry about the resources. I am richer than you imagined,” I said with an amused tone of

voice. Ratska underestimated me, but I didn't give it much thought for now.

Oh! That's the System Trading Station!

I saw a cubic room from afar, and it was completely black.

"There it is," said Ratska as he pointed toward the building from over my shoulder, "Put me on the ground, I'll just walk."

Ratska looked nervous, and his eyes were downcast. Something was wrong with him, but I wasn't sure what it was.

"What's wrong?" I asked as I gave him a side-glance, "Already missing your family?"

"It's not like that," he whispered as he tugged at his backpack, "I feel sad whenever I see a Trading Station, as I can't enter them. It reminds me of my failure during the tutorial, something that destroyed my prospects when the tutorial was over in my world."

"It seems like you got lucky when you met me," I said with a grin, "The only thing that people should care about is competence, not some random ID that the system issued."

Ratska nodded, then he spoke once more.

"The reason why I came to Earth was to have a new chance," he added, "After a couple of years of working my ass off, I was on my path to success, and my name started to spread. All of a sudden, people on my home planet no longer bought my potions, even those that I sold under pseudo-names. The guilds' committee said that I was standing out too much, and they put my customers on a blacklist, even the ones that had a Soul Identity."

*He must've been too successful for an illegal citizen...
What a shame, he should've been hailed for his skills.*

We were ten meters away from the System Trading Station, and something grabbed my attention about it.

A large white banner hung over the wall that contained the station's door, and there was something written on it.

It congratulated 'Jason Stubbs' for being the Initial Returnee; it was the first time that I'd seen my name mentioned in Japan.

"Too bad this country is ruined," I said as I clicked my tongue, "I am not even sure if the foreign races know about me."

"Jason...Jason Stubbs," said Ratska as he raised an eyebrow and rubbed his chin, "It can't be! You're the first human to come back from the tutorial?"

His eyes were opened wide as he looked at the banner that mentioned my name, then he stared at my face as he furrowed his eyebrows.

"Yes, that's me," I said as I shrugged, "I must've forgotten to tell you."

Unlike Nina, Ratska respected me from the get-go; that's why I didn't try to impress him by bragging about myself.

"That was unexpected; I am flattered that the Initial Returnee himself is interested in hiring me," said Ratska as he nodded his head repeatedly, "Actually, this explains a lot. I have higher hopes for our guild, and I'll try my best to make it work."

"I'll be back in a couple of minutes," I said, "Can you take care of yourself till then?"

"Of course," he said, "I have a level of sixty-two, and I can use my daggers somewhat decently. Besides, I can't enter the System Trading Station even if I wanted to.

I entered the System Trading Station, and it looked just like the previous one. Even the clerks looked like the ones that I met before.

I found it strange, as they didn't look like this in my previous life; they were brunettes with brown eyes instead.

Maybe the system considers my current existence to be different from my previous one; I am not sure.

It was interesting, but I had to buy the items quickly to get out of here.

I walked toward the leftmost counter and spoke with the lady standing behind it.

“It seems like I’ll be dealing with you a lot in the coming days,” I said with a smile, “What should I call you?”

“I am Chloe,” she replied as she smiled, “What can I help you with?”

“I need a Guild License, and a Building License,” I said, “The Building License should allow for a building with an area of at least a hundred thousand square meters.”

Having a Guild License was one of the conditions of opening a guild, and it was rather expensive; costing two million tutorial points.

The people that opened guilds early on were among the top rankers, but many others managed to do so by saving up tutorial points for a couple of years.

The Building License was self-explanatory; it allowed its owner to build a facility as long as its total area didn’t exceed a certain limit.

I could always buy another Building License if I ever wanted to expand my guild.

Chloe nodded and prepared the items using a system screen in front of her, then she motioned for me to keep going once she was done.

“I’d like to open a System banking account, and to have a System Union credit card,” I said, “I also want to buy one million lesser mana stones. Put them in my bank account, please.”

“Alright,” she replied, “You’ll be able to liquidate your bank account’s balance in any System Trading Station, or in a System Union Bank once they’re built.”

I nodded and was about to leave when I remembered something important.

I need a new bag of holding...

“I want a bag of holding,” I said as I grinned, “The largest one available, please.”

Chloe raised an eyebrow and gave me an incredulous look, but she shook her head and smiled after seeing my grin.

“We also have storage rings; they’re more convenient than bags, and they only cost fifteen percent more for the same storage space.” She proposed.

I contemplated my choice, and a ring seemed better for my needs.

I knew that they offered custom versions of the regular items, but I didn’t know how much they’d cost.

“I want the largest storage rings available, and I want a fire damage immunity to be applied to it,” I said.

Chloe furrowed her eyebrows, and she spoke.

“Accept the transaction, then you’ll have all of your items in the new storage rings,” she said, “I’d like to note that the storage ring contributed to around seventy-five percent of the total price.”

Surely, it won’t be that expensive, right?

This Transaction will cost 54000000 tutorial points.	
[Accept]	[Decline]

I felt pain in my heart, but I accepted the transaction anyway. The System Trading Station was the cheapest source of such a storage ring.

“It must’ve been the fire immunity,” I said as I raised an eyebrow, “How much would the total cost be if the storage ring didn’t have it?”

“The fire damage immunity added twenty million to the total cost,” she replied with a warm smile, “That’d be eighteen million for you because you’re our first Earthling customer.”

I shrugged my shoulders and accepted the transaction.

A small ring appeared on the counter. It had the same color as gold and had no gem attached to it. Small words were written on its interior face.

‘Jason Stubbs Property’, huh? This means that no one besides me will be able to use it unless I agreed.

I took my ring and scanned its contents. Immediately, I was surprised by its endless depth, and the items that I bought seemed tiny compared to the ring’s overall space.

I’ll check its description, and the other items’ once I am out of here.

Ratska was waiting for me, and it was rude to stay for longer than necessary.

I walked toward the door, then opened it. As soon as I went outside, I felt an intruder inside my [Flawed State of Being]’s range.

He had a humanoid shape, and he held a large sword in both arms. I wasn’t able to discern the exact shape of his face, as he moved too quickly for my eyes to get a good look at him.

Someone is already back on Earth, and they’re attacking me...

*

Petra opened her eyes and scanned her surroundings. She was on top of a familiar grassy field, and she was laying on the ground.

This is the Hofgarten, I am back in Munich!

She searched for other people to ask them about the current situation, but the park was deserted. She even went out in hope of finding any humans other than herself, but she only saw some strange creatures.

They were around a meter tall, and all of them had shaggy brown hair. They wore black leather coats, and they moved fervently around the area.

She mistook them for humans at first, but they had certain characteristics that changed her mind about them.

All of them had large pointy ears, and they were so short that it was concerning.

Did these creatures invade our planet?

She used her [Identify] skill on one of them, and her eyes welled with tears when she saw their race.

They were dwarves, and the description stated that they were a race that lives in cold environments, and they spent their time crafting items or building new structures.

She realized that her normal life was long gone and that the world changed during her absence.

She fell to the ground, and tears slid down her face as she wept. Her life wasn't that spectacular, but it was better than killing monsters for a living.

I am not sure if I'll ever adapt, but I'll try to survive...

She looked at the dwarves once more and gathered her courage to talk to them; she hoped to find more clues about Earth's current state from them.

The men had bushy beards, and they were slightly taller than the women. Each creature held at least one wooden log, and they transported them to an empty area next to the park.

Didn't this area have many trees? Oh shit, these creatures must've cut them all!

A female dwarf passed next to Petra, and she seemed old as her face had many wrinkles. She had a sturdy frame, and she had brown hair and eyes. She looked bored as she roamed around the area, and she spoke with the confused girl when they made eye contact.

"Oh, Darling," she said, "You're the first human we've seen; I hope we'll get along with one another. If you need

anything, just ask me.”

Suddenly, another dwarf spoke with the dwarf lady.

“Leave her alone, Tamira,” said a male dwarf, his face was filled with wrinkles, and he had a grumpy face, “Don’t bother with humans; they’re a moronic race, and you’re wasting your precious time by talking to one of them. We need to finish building King Morantt’s castle as soon as possible; we can’t afford to fall behind the other settlements.”

“Oh, shut up Daken. King Morantt appointed me as this project’s supervisor, not you. Get back to work, or I’ll force you to do so,” said Tamira as she giggled, then she told Petra not to worry about what Daken said.

It seems like they’re building some kind of castle, and this lady is the one in charge.

Petra’s heart warmed a little at Tamira’s offer of help, and she had some questions to ask.

“U..mm, you said that I was the first human in this area,” she asked, “Does this mean that no humans have arrived here at all?”

“You’re the first one we’ve encountered,” said the old lady as she put her hand on her cheek, “However, we’re sure that at least one other human arrived already, but we haven’t seen him yet. Many banners are floating around the city to welcome his arrival; it seems like he’s the first human to return to Earth.”

“Oh, what’s his name?” Petra asked.

The first human to return to Earth must be someone popular, right?

He might’ve been some kind of special ops agent or a world champion in some kind of physical activity. The possibilities were endless, but Petra was sure that he was special.

“His name is ‘Jason Stubbs’,” she said, “I am not sure about my pronunciation, but it’s as close as I could get.”

Her pronunciation was good, but Petra couldn't open her mouth to tell her about that.

It seems like I can't run away.

19. Dangerous Times, Dangerous Measures

The unknown enemy was aiming a gigantic sword at me, and his speed was phenomenal. I didn't have enough time to scan his facial features; I could only block the attack.

I'll take a look at my enemy after blocking the attack, but I have a good idea about this attacker's identity.

There weren't many people that cleared the tutorial this early, and the ones that could threaten me among them were even fewer.

The sword was twenty centimeters away from my abdomen, and I had to react quickly.

I thought about meeting the attack head-on, but I wasn't arrogant enough to meet such an attack without any precautions.

I had to burn myself with flames of a high temperature so that my stats were high enough.

However, Ratska was close by, and I didn't want to injure or kill him accidentally. Furthermore, most of my items were inside the bag of holding, and it wasn't immune to fire damage.

I wasn't in direct contact with any shadows, so I couldn't use [Shadow Assimilation] to teleport myself

Sigh.

“[Zoom],” I whispered; My destination was just behind my opponent.

The skill teleported me instantly, and the attack hit nothing but thin air. The sword made a sharp sound, and the air around me vibrated due to the strength contained in that strike.

My enemy turned around to face me, and I was able to take a good look at him.

He was at least two meters tall, and he had a muscular build. He had spiky black hair, and brown eyes and his nose was crooked.

His eyebrows were thick, and he had an ugly grin on his face.

He had a full-body silver armor suit, and it was adorned with many purple jewels. The portion that covered his torso didn't contain any gems; an insignia was engraved instead. A tall white angel held a large sword, and he pointed it upward.

This is Igor; The Battlefield Hegemon.

He was a hero of mine in my past life, and now he's trying to kill me.

"Good reaction there, Jason," he said as he smirked and held his great sword over his shoulder, "I am Igor, and I'm here to claim your life."

He advanced toward me at a slow pace, then he raised his great sword toward me.

I laughed, then clapped.

"I am busy right now, and I'll appreciate it if you went home right now," I stared at him with deadpanned eyes, "I won't kill you today, but you'll regret messing with me."

The Almighty Holy Bastard must've been salty that I didn't pick his blessing, and he's serious about ending my life.

I scanned my surroundings for Ratska, and he was standing at the exact spot where I left him before entering the Trading Station. He was twenty meters away to the right of Igor.

I was glad that Igor didn't kill him yet, but the Gnome was agitated. His eyes were downcast, and he was fiddling with his fingers.

Igor must've done something to him...

"[It's fine!]" I shouted, and a coat of flames covered my body. Orange flames danced brightly around me, and they remained firm even when the winds swayed them.

“What is it that’s fine?” asked Igor as he smirked, “Well, at least I know you won’t be when I am done with you.”

I wouldn't have shouted if I didn't need to do so...

I pretended to charge at Igor, and he held his Great Sword in front of him. However, it was just a feint. I pointed my finger toward him and shouted.

“[Burn That Invader!],” An Orange beam of flames erupted from my finger, and it crossed the distance between me and Igor instantly. I targeted his heart, but he reacted by slightly tilting his body.

I invested half of my mana in this attack; I prioritized making the beam as strong as possible, and its radius was half a centimeter.

It struck his shoulder and penetrated it easily. I heard sizzling sounds, and Igor let out a sharp shrill as he caught his shoulder.

His body started catching fire, but the process was very slow. He was about to fall to the ground, but I didn’t plan on giving him enough time to do so.

All of a sudden, he raised his great sword and threw it to his right. The weapon flew away with great velocity, and it spun as it kept going.

That's where Ratska is!

Immediately, I changed my course and parried the sword with a palm strike when it was ten meters away from the little Gnome. The sword was about two meters tall and twenty centimeters wide, and it was completely black except for continuous white patterns on one of its sides.

The blade looked heavy but it seemed even heavier when I struck it. Interestingly, the flames burning my body flickered after making direct contact with the sword, and it returned to Igor before touching the ground.

“Are you okay?” I asked the Gnome. I made sure to extinguish the flames burning my body when I got close to Ratska; I didn’t want to kill him by accident.

“Yeah,” he whispered, “I am sorry; I tried to prevent him from ambushing you, but he threatened to kill me.”

I patted Ratska’s head, then turned toward Igor.

The sword was back in his hand, and my flames were spreading even further throughout his body.

The left half of his torso was on fire, and so was the left side of his face and his left arm.

“You’re a maniac, aren’t you?” he said as he laughed with a coarse voice, “I’d better take you more seriously than before.”

He raised his sword and touched the burned area with it. Out of nowhere, the flames got extinguished, and the burns started healing slowly.

Shit, now I can’t use [Unlimited Fireworks], and he’ll still have his mana... I need to get serious!

I took off my regular clothes, cape, and crown; the only item that I kept on was my new legendary-grade suit. I put the equipment that I took off inside my new spatial ring, then rushed toward Igor.

My suit was charged with some thermal energy; I decided to play it safe and use its special ability.

A system screen appeared in front of me and it said that I’d be invincible for fourteen seconds. I wasn’t satisfied with the short duration, but I couldn’t do much about it.

Igor grinned, and he got into a battle posture. He raised his sword in front of him only using his right arm, as most of his left side was burned.

I had a plan, and it seemed promising. I changed my path slightly; I wanted to attack Igor from his left side exclusively. His left eye was swollen and the tissue around it got cauterized, so his perception and defense must’ve been feeble on his weakened side.

The grin disappeared from his face when he saw me changing my path, and he ran away. He was faster than me,

which was commendable for an injured person holding such a heavy weapon.

Suddenly, he raised his weapon toward Ratska, but he didn't throw it this time. He slashed repeatedly at the Gnome from afar, and energy strikes erupted from his sword as it glowed with a bright golden glint.

I clicked my tongue and went back to defending Ratska. I parried some of the attacks and blasted some of them off using [Flame-N-Go].

I was pissed off at this point; I didn't mind my enemy using underhanded tactics, but he was not fighting me at all.

I noticed that the cooldown of my single-target skill was over; it was time to get rid of this guy once and for all. I pointed my finger toward his head this time and invested all of my remaining mana in the attack.

“[Burn That Invader!],” I shouted, and a beam erupted from my finger; its target being Igor's forehead.

My opponent was already waving his sword in front of him to generate energy attacks; he furrowed his eyebrows when I pointed my finger at him.

He managed to slightly tilt his great sword and move it in front of his face. The fire beam struck the blade, and the blade flashed with a golden light as the beam got dimmer and thinner.

However, the beam wasn't completely nullified; it got reflected and it penetrated his right thigh.

The contact between my attack and Igor's leg produced a large snapping sound. His leg was now pointing in the wrong direction, and a large portion of his muscles got burned and fell to the ground. There wasn't much blood; the flames cauterized the wounds as soon as they made them.

Igor cried loudly, and his face paled. His right eye dimmed, and some tears fell out of it. He lost his footing, but he regained his balance by using his sword as a crutch.

“You’re even stronger than we thought,” said Igor as he tried to clap while leaning on the great sword; he failed to do so, “However, you’re not strong enough.”

The dude’s body got completely ruined, but he still had some confidence. I didn’t know whether this was a bluff or not, but I decided not to lower my defense.

He waited for me to reply, but he clicked his tongue and shook his head when I didn’t.

“Man, I was just testing the waters to see if you were worthy of being my rival, but it seems like I’m weaker than you,” he said as he grinned; some blood fell out of the right corner of his mouth, “I hope you survive this attack, we’ll meet once more during the top rankers’ obligatory meeting. It takes place a couple of hours after the tutorial is officially over; I’m sure you won’t miss it.”

Stella will go after me viciously once this crook dies, and she’ll probably be much stronger than him.

However, something alarming happened.

With a swift motion, Igor stood on his left leg; no longer relying on his sword as a crutch.

I found his movement suspicious, but there was no way for me to run away without risking Ratska’s life.

Then, Igor pulled his blade out of the ground and then planted it once more.

Suddenly, the sword disappeared for a second before reappearing once more.

Out of nowhere, I felt a sharp pain in my legs, and I started falling to the ground.

Heh?

I checked my legs, and they were no longer there. I fell to the ground with a loud thud, and blood was pouring out of my thigh stumps profusely.

“If it was Stella who fought you instead of me, then she would’ve said that you deserved this for messing with the

Great Church,” he said as he rolled his eyes, “It doesn’t matter to me; I only want to fight strong people. I hope this isn’t enough to kill you, so stay alive for a while and grow even stronger. I’ll kill you personally, and your head will be my greatest trophy. Also, the Gnome was called Ratska, right? I am sure he’s a valuable person, else you wouldn’t have protected him this fiercely.”

All of a sudden, his body disappeared alongside his weapon; he teleported himself out of here.

I was still shocked at the way my legs disappeared, and I didn’t let out any cries or whimpers.

“Mr. Jason,” shouted Ratska as he rushed at me, “Oh no, this is all my fault! Shit, I don’t even have any herbs to craft a quick potion.”

The blood loss weakened me, and I felt like I was about to lose consciousness.

I need to fix this injury as soon as possible, lest I die.

“Hey, Ratska,” I said with a weak voice, “Hide behind the Trading Station, and don’t ask me why.”

The Gnome was running in circles, and my voice startled him. However, he nodded quickly but left as tears welled in his eyes.

Don’t worry kid, I won’t die and you won’t lose your first job opportunity in years.

When Ratska was behind the cubic building, I increase the temperature of the flames burning my body to six thousand Kelvin.

[It’s fine!] increased my regeneration rate when my body was on fire, and the current temperature closed the wound instantly. Then, new legs started growing.

It took about two minutes before my legs were completely regenerated, but I managed to do it nonetheless.

I called Ratska after extinguishing the flames that burned my body, and he was astonished when he saw my legs once more.

“Why didn’t you say that you could regenerate amputated limbs?” said Ratska as he stared at me with wide eyes.

I shook my head and didn’t reply to his question.

Stella’s bunch were too eager to exterminate me; I had to be cautious. Besides, they might try to pull a fast one during the top rankers’ meeting which was going to take place in nine days.

I was concerned about my Legendary thermal suit, as a portion of it got destroyed too easily for my taste. However, it got repaired quickly when I used its self-repair feature.

Something else weighed on my mind; it had to do with Igor’s last statement.

It’s no longer safe to leave Ratska alone; Igor knows that he’s an important person, and they’ll investigate more about him.

I thought about giving Ratska my Anti-Gravity Legendary shield, but I decided not to. We just got to know each other, and he might betray me when he gets a better offer as we didn’t sign a contract yet.

I need better equipment for this guy, and I need exclusive contracts with the best blacksmiths too...

I could’ve bought some equipment for him from the System Trading Station, but it was more cost-efficient to have an accomplished blacksmith craft them.

Dwarves and Lizardmen are the best blacksmithing candidates...

Both of these races were experienced when dealing with metals, but I preferred Lizardmen when it came to creating blades and sharp weapons, as it was along their style of combat.

Besides, Lizardmen did not need to worry about the forge’s flames being too hot, thus they could play around with metals that had high melting points, unlike Dwarves.

“Are you familiar with Lizardmen, Ratska?” I asked.

“There were some of them on my home planet, but I didn’t interact much with them,” he replied as he nodded; he regained his normal facial expression, but his face was still pale, “They live in hot, dry climates, and they’re stubborn folk who take great pride in their connection to Dragons.”

It was true; most of them preferred to live in deserts. Areas like the Sahara and the Gobi Desert were filled with Lizardmen, as they planned on terraforming those places to better suit their needs.

“I am giving you two hours to prepare yourself, Ratska,” I said, “I’ll take you back to the sewers, and meanwhile, I’ll buy more items that we need for our journey.”

“Journey?” asked Ratska, “What journey are you talking about?”

“We’re going to Africa,” I said as I grinned.

I need to play my cards quickly... I lack the resources that Stella’s group has, and I have to make up for the difference using my future knowledge and some underhanded methods.

20. Blazing Requiem

“What is Africa?” asked Ratska as he tilted his head, “And why should I accompany you there?”

“It’s a continent on this planet. We’ll visit a certain place called the Sahara; it’s one of the biggest deserts on this planet, and it’s a perfect place for Lizardmen to settle in,” I answered, “We’re going to scout for some additional guild members; precisely blacksmiths and laborers. I know about some competent Lizardmen that are currently living there, and we’ll try to convince them to join our guild.”

He rubbed his chin for a while, before speaking.

“Okay then, I’ll take some time to get ready,” he said as he shrugged, “Did you buy the items that we spoke about?”

“I bought a Guild License, a Building License, and a credit card,” I replied, “I haven’t bought any of the items that we’d need to start our alchemy project, as I don’t know about the market rates of such items yet. However, I am sure that buying them from the crafters themselves will be much more profitable.”

“I see, so you haven’t created the guild yet. As for the items needed to create potions; It was wise not to buy a large quantity from the Trading Station, but you’ll need to get in contact with competent glassworkers, tailors, and horticulturists. You could always save yourself the headache by paying some extra points when you use the Trading Station,” he said, then his eyes became downcast, “Those facilities would’ve helped me a lot when I was on my old planet. I could’ve sold my potions to the Trading Station without exposing my identity or resorting to the black market.”

Lacking a Soul Identity must’ve taken its toll on the little Gnome...

Such was the way of our current world; it was unfair and harsh.

System Trading Stations were truly phenomenal; People could sell their products there below market rate, but it was useful for those who had astronomical quantities of certain products, as resellers would only buy smaller portions at a time.

“For now, I’ll take you back to the area where you used to live. Gather your items, and I’ll meet you next to the manhole that we passed through,” I proposed, “As for me, I’ll run some errands, buy some personal items, and create the guild after thinking of a suitable name. I’ll pick you up in two hours.”

“Actually, I might need around six hours or more,” he said as he made some calculations with his fingers, “The underworld is more active than you think; there is a large community of various creatures there, and I hold an important position. I’ll take care of some paperwork, and delegate my tasks to competent assistants. Besides, I have too many personal possessions, and packing them will be a hassle.”

“Alright, I understand,” I nodded, “Here, you can use this bag temporarily. It’ll help you when you’re packing your items; it has a volume of one cubic meter, which might not be enough to contain everything, but it’ll make it easier for you.”

I pointed my finger at a small brown pouch that was attached to my waist; it was my bag of holding. I gave it to him after transferring my items to the new storage ring that I wore on the index finger of my left hand.

He received the bag, then he opened his eyes widely as he examined it.

“Oh! This is a bag of holding,” he blurted, “I had to sell most of my past possessions to get Interplanetary Immigration Permits for my tribe members, and I only have one spatial bag left. I didn’t carry it with me as I feared that you’d steal it, but I trust you now. Thank you, Jason.”

“You’re welcome. There is another thing that I’d like to give you,” I smirked, “Actually, I don’t have it yet; I’ll be right back. Try not to get ambushed during my absence.”

Ratska chuckled, then he waved his hand at me as I entered the System Trading Station.

I walked toward Chloe's counter and greeted her.

"It's me again," I smiled, "I need two communication crystals. Each of them should be able to accommodate being connected to a total of ten other crystals, and I want their grade to be Uncommon."

"Sweet," smiled Chloe, "That'll be eight thousand tutorial points."

I accepted the transaction, and two yellow crystals appeared on the counter. Each of them had a cluster shape, and they looked slightly different from one another.

I put them both inside my storage ring and thanked Chloe for her help. I was about to leave the Trading Station when I remembered something important.

I really need a clock...

I used to have a digital watch, but it got destroyed during the tutorial. I couldn't even buy information on time and date from the system shop, as it only offered information related to the system.

I asked Chloe to give me the clock expansion; it was a special feature in the system that allowed the host to see the time and date in different time zones based on his current whereabouts.

Its cost was five thousand tutorial points; it was somewhat expensive for what it offered, but it was the surest way of keeping track of time without needing to buy a new watch or do maintenance.

I commanded the system to put a little clock at the upper left edge of my view at all times. It was currently two o'clock in the afternoon.

Loki should've given me all the system expansions for free; what a stingy deity.

I sighed, there was a good chance that he was watching me right now; I wondered about his reaction to my blasphemy.

I wanted to buy some other things, but I came out of the System Trading Station as fast as I could; leaving Ratska alone wasn't a wise idea but it was my only option in this case.

“Oh, you're back already,” Ratska was playing with small rocks on the ground as he spoke, “What did you get this time?”

I handed him one of the crystals that I bought, and he nodded when he saw it.

“I see,” he said, “It's a good idea to have a communication crystal, especially after being ambushed by the man with the large sword.”

I nodded, then asked him to activate it and link it with mine.

Ratska seemed familiar with communication crystals. He injected mana into his crystal and it glowed brightly.

I did the same thing, then we moved the crystals closer to each other. A ding could be heard when they made contact, and a system screen appeared in front of me.

-Linking is successful!

-You can call the owner of the other crystal by injecting Mana into yours while thinking of him.

“This will be helpful if you ever get into trouble or need to relay important information,” I said, “Now, ride on my shoulders. I'll take you back home as fast as I can.”

Ratska put his communication crystal in the bag of holding after he linked it with mine. He furrowed his eyebrows when I told him to ride on my shoulders, but he complied nonetheless.

The ride back home was dull, and we didn't see much except for some Gnomes and Elves hauling the corpses of their fallen comrades.

Japan's infrastructure was something from the past, all that remained was the debris and the wreckage. I felt uneasy; there was a small chance that my presence caused a severe butterfly effect, but I felt like there was more to it than that.

I am interested in meeting the creature that destroyed Japan, but that'll have to wait.

We arrived near the place where I found Ratska for the first time, and I opened the manhole for him.

"We'll meet again in six hours, Mr. Jason," He said, "I'll be bringing my potion brewing tools; we might need some of them on our way. I hope our trip ends up being successful, and I can't wait to meet interesting people too."

He smiled, then jumped into the manhole. He waved at me from inside the sewers, then he started walking. I closed the manhole and considered my next moves.

I had to buy a [Party-wide Zoom] scroll from the Trading Station, as that was the cheapest way to teleport alongside another party member when Teleportation Stations were not a thing yet.

It still costs two thousand tutorial points a pop; it's not cheap at all considering its consumable nature...

I opened my storage ring and pulled the Guild License out.

It was a white piece of cardboard, that had the English words 'Guild License (Unused)' written on it.

"I'd like to use this Guild License," I mumbled, and a system screen appeared in front of me.

-What would you like to call your guild?
--

[...]

I should've consulted Ratska on this... Oh, I can call him using the crystal.

I took it out of the storage ring and infused it with some of my mana. It only took a couple of seconds before he answered the call.

A small hologram appeared on top of the crystal, it showed Ratska's face as he no longer had his helmet on.

"Oh, Hi," he said, "Are you testing the crystal? I am a bit busy, so I'll have to hang up if the test is complete."

"Actually, I wanted to ask you about the guild's name," I said, "I have some ideas in mind, but I would like to hear your opinion on it."

"Well, our guild is a generalist one, so it'll be somewhat difficult to come up with a name," he rubbed his eyes as he spoke, "I am sorry, but the smell in this place makes my eyes teary. Anyway, what do you think about 'Glorious Potions and Some Mercenary Work'?"

"That's a rather long name, but thank you," I smirked.

"Well, you can't describe everything that our guild can do in a couple of words. Besides, it's a cool name, anyone..." He raised an eyebrow.

"Bye, Ratska," I hung up on him.

I'll just choose an edgy and concise name, to pull the new adventurers effectively.

I came up with a random name, then focused on the system screen in front of me.

"I choose to call my guild 'Blazing Requiem'," I said. It wasn't the best possible name, but I didn't have the time to contemplate such a thing.

-You're now the guild leader of Blazing Requiem .
-You can invite new members to join your guild.
-Host gained one title for his feat!

I opened the titles screen and checked the new title's details.

[Title acquired: A Guild among Guilds]

A Guild among Guilds

It's not cheap to open a guild, but you did it without much effort!

You're the first Earthling to create a guild!

- The limit of members of your guild is 40% higher than the regular limit (Current limit: 700)

It was a cool title, but something else grabbed my attention on the titles list.

I opened its description; it's been a while since I gained it and the system didn't notify me about it.

The Candidate

-You are the candidate!

-??? chose you as a possible candidate.

What a useless title...

I was disappointed with the title that came with Loki's blessing; I shook my head and dismissed all the system screens in front of me.

I took another item out of my storage ring, it was Earth's Observational Shard.

The Observational Shard was an impressive weapon, as it was immune to all kinds of damage. Stella's guild advertised it as an indestructible object in my past life, and people were fascinated with that.

I closed my fist around it and commanded the system to show me Japan's map with the locations of all the dinosaur skulls. It also showed the size and volume of each bone when I looked it up.

I'll use this time productively and clean Japan.

A map showed up, and it marked the locations of around twelve thousand individual fossils in Japan.

I put my crown and cape inside the storage ring; the only equipment that remained on my body was the Thermal Suit, as it was the only one immune to fire damage.

"[It's fine!]," I shouted, and my body caught fire. I increased the temperature of my flames to four thousand Kelvin, as I could endure it for at least a couple of hours.

I began my cleaning mission in a spiraling pattern, starting from my current location. I had to dig to find most of the bones, as the debris had a thickness of at least ten meters and it reached thirty meters at times.

However, nothing stood against me with my current stats. I could cut through concrete as if it was butter, and my kicks left craters on the ground.

I found large skulls, spines, and even medium-sized bones like femurs and humeri.

I didn't bother to search for small bones like phalanxes, as they would likely get destroyed when I tried to dig them up.

At times, I had to dig a hundred meters downward, and it was a dull task. I spun my body around like a drill, propelling myself using my flames; it made the process of digging much faster.

After about five hours and a half, I have already found eighty-five percent of the dinosaur bones and converted them into shop points.

Too bad I ended up destroying at least ten bones; accidents happen.

After finishing my task, I went back to where I'd meet Ratska.

Japan used to be a wreck, but now it seemed like a burned wreck. I felt sorry to ruin the place, but it was already beyond saving.

At least I made sure to extinguish all the fires before they spread violently...

"Oh well, I did my best," I mumbled as I shook my head and extinguished my flames, "Open the shop window."

Shop window:	[Current points: 320788 points]
-What are you looking to buy? [...]	

Sweet! I can buy some special stats now.

However, I realized something. I looked at my clock, and Ratska was already half an hour late.

I took out the communication crystal and made a call to him, but he didn't respond.

He must've left the communication crystal somewhere and went looking for some items...

I shook my head and sat on the ground; it didn't hurt to wait another half an hour.

Suddenly, I heard loud stomps coming from my left side.

I concentrated and saw the silhouette of a large humanoid being. The creature was at least eighty meters tall, and I couldn't make out the details as it was nighttime and the sky was cloudy.

The only thing that I could make out was its color, it was completely black.

21. A Journey To the West

This creature might be the one who destroyed the place.

The humanoid monster's shape was similar to a human being's; it had defined muscles around its body, but its face was blank.

It walked toward the city, but I estimated that it was still standing in the sea based on the splashing sound that was made by its stomps.

Such a large monster stays underwater during the day, and comes out at night, huh?

This creature was an enigma; I'd never heard of something like it in my past life. I examined it and bought its system description. The information cost me around three hundred shop points; it was unusually expensive.

It had a level of one hundred and twenty-three, and a system screen containing its description appeared.

[Prober]	(Uncommon)
<p>Too many faults; nothing is perfect...</p> <p>Mortals suck at designing structured buildings, but they don't know it. Probers are creatures of curiosity and art, but they can't express themselves using sensory communication methods.</p> <p>These creatures can repair all the faults within an object, as long as the process was within their means.</p> <p>They test the durability of structures that they find interesting, but that goes wrong most of the time.</p> <p>Well, some people claim that they do it just for fun!</p>	

Their lack of sensory organs must've been the reason for their inability to communicate, but there was something that I didn't understand.

Did it ruin Japan just because its buildings were interesting?

The description also said that creatures like this could repair faults, but that could have various interpretations.

I shook off the thoughts and watched the creature advance. Its movements were sluggish, and they reminded me of how robots were portrayed in Pre-System media.

When the Prober was within the city's vicinity, something strange happened.

It clasped its hands together, and their color changed from black into pale blue. A translucent sphere emerged from its fists, and it expanded till its radius became larger than thirty meters. The Prober was at the center, and he stood unmoving.

The debris that was within the sphere's range rose in the air, then it got separated into many chunks.

Each chunk went back to the ground and assembled into a building in pristine condition.

Oh...

Then, the Prober raised his clasped fists in front of him. He separated them for one moment before clapping with great force.

Its action generated a strong shockwave in front of it, and the pale blue color of its fists invaded the air of the city. The wreckage around me had a bluish tint when I looked at it, but the color disappeared soon after.

Suddenly, all the debris within my line of sight rose in the air, including the bunch that I was standing on.

I jumped out of the way and watched the miracle happen. The levitating debris got separated once more, and each chunk got converted into a building.

In ten minutes, the whole city looked as good as new. I didn't know what Osaka looked like before, but all the buildings around me seemed perfect. There was even an area that had a small park; it even had trees.

The Prober can even regenerate trees?

Suddenly, the communication crystal that I held in my left hand flashed brightly; Ratska was calling. I injected some mana inside it, and the hologram of the Gnome appeared.

"I am sorry, Jason. I was inside an obligatory meeting; the tribe elders needed my assistance with the delegation of administrative duties in the underworld," he spoke with his high-pitched voice, "They were unhappy when I told them about our journey and it took me a lot of time to convince them, that's why I didn't pick up. Oh, wait, where the hell are you? I can see some intact buildings behind you."

"It's fine; I suspected that you got ambushed by someone else. Currently, I am on top of the sewers where we first met," I spoke, "You might not believe this if I tell you, so take a look."

I turned the crystal around so that Ratska's hologram faced the mysterious creature. The buildings were still being auto-assembled, and the speed of their construction was phenomenal.

"Woah, what's going on?" Ratska gasped, "How could that creature even do it?"

"Keep watching," I spoke, "The real action will happen soon."

After about a minute, the Prober finished all the buildings within the city, then it started moving once more. It walked slowly at first, then its pace increased gradually till its movements started causing sonic booms.

It wrecked everything in its way; It used kicks, punches, and headbutts too. Occasionally, it unleashed beams of lightning out of its palms, and they burned the targets that they touched to a crisp.

So, the burning marks that I saw earlier today were caused by this monster...

The creature was getting closer to my location, so I moved to another area that was already destroyed.

“I’ve never seen a creature like this,” said Ratska, “I am sorry, Jason, but I am not coming out of the underground until that guy disappears into the ocean.”

“I understand your concern; use the extra time that you have to pack more tools and materials,” I suggested, “The more the merrier, and don’t worry about the number of bags, as we’ll shove everything into my spatial ring.”

“That’s true. You never know when a potion might be needed,” he spoke.

“All right then, I have some urgent tasks that I need to accomplish. I’ll call you when I’m done,” I said, then I hung up by halting the injection of mana.

I felt an urge to attack this creature using my full strength, but I stopped after thinking more about the endeavor. The Prober had a unique ability, and I didn’t know about its limits.

It could potentially be used to repair all the damage that the arrival of monsters would cause on our planet.

I wonder if a beast tamer could take control of this creature, and use it for beneficial purposes?

Besides, Osaka was mostly ruined; I’d have to wait for the next time the Prober fixed the city before I defeated it.

The Prober was still running around, then it disappeared into another city and I could no longer track it.

I was amazed by this new creature. There were no rumors about something like this in my past life, and I wasn’t sure whether the Prober disappeared or got killed by some big shots.

No matter, I’ll just focus on making more friends and scouting for talented individuals. I can’t let Stella’s group get away lightly after that ambush...

I remembered vaguely that Stella's guild hired a certain group of talented Lizardmen one year after the system integration, and that they used to live in the Sahara before joining her guild; the Way of The Champion.

The individuals weren't as distinguished as Ratska was, but they left an impression on the public as a group. My goal was to scout them for my guild before Stella got a chance to do so.

Now, I have to think of a way to find the village where those people are gathered...

I knew that the group brought large quantities of Mythril with them when they joined Stella's guild, and they gave it all to Stella as a gift.

Mythril was a metal that appeared on Earth after the system integration; It was Iron that got infused with ambient mana. More importantly, it wasn't common on the planets that had the system for a while, as it was valuable and people extracted it quickly.

This means that they spent a long time in a place that was located in the Sahara, and which had a progressive Mythril reserve close by...

I pulled Earth's Observational Shard and commanded it to show me the locations of all the Mythril reserves in the Sahara.

Three possible locations came up, and I eliminated one of them as the quantity of the metal wasn't big at all.

The remaining two locations had similar quantities of Mythril reserved, and they were far away from each other.

Sigh; I'll have to check them one by one... Too bad I don't even know the names of those people or what they looked like to search for them using the System Shop.

I've never visited this place on Earth; I was just a random person, and I didn't visit dangerous places like the Sahara if I could help it.

I held the observational shard in my left hand and commanded the system to show me the way to the closest of the two Mythril reserves, and an arrow appeared in front of me.

I hid the Shard inside my storage ring and shouted, “[Plasmic Torch]!”

I was interested in finding out how this skill of mine interacted with my thermal suit.

My body’s opacity decreased quickly, and I turned into a translucent gas that had an orange hue.

I could dissipate my body around the air, but I chose to keep it contained inside the thermal suit. The storage ring didn’t fall off the suit; it was floating inside the plasma that took the position of my hand.

I looked like a flame that was sculpted to look like a human, and I could control my limbs even better than before. Everything around me moved slower than before; I still wasn’t used to the heightened senses of this form.

I flew up in the air until I reached the Stratosphere, then I started following the arrow that guided me to the location of the Mythril reserve.

I took off in the direction as fast as I could, and I estimated my speed to be way greater than the speed of sound as my movement in the air created sonic booms.

I might arrive in around an hour...

The sights below me weren’t as attention-grabbing as I thought they’d be, besides from some cities in China that had skyscrapers that reached my current height.

I zoned out and kept going ahead until a notification appeared, and pulled me out of my trance.

I’ve reached my location already, huh? Less than half an hour passed after my departure according to my system clock.

I descended to a height that was closer to Earth and checked the area under me. I made sure to detract my plasma

inside the thermal suit and activate its camouflage feature so that I kept myself from standing out.

The area under me was supposed to have a large reserve of Mythril, but I didn't see any movement. It was still midday in this area, yet I couldn't see any Lizardmen.

There were thick dunes of sand under me, and nothing indicated the presence of a mine here.

Just in case, I descended to the ground and turned off my skill. I investigated the area on my own, but I couldn't find a single proof of living beings in this area.

It seems like no one has discovered this Mythril reserve yet; I'll keep this in mind.

I took five minutes of rest, as using [Plasmic Torch] gave me some negative ideas. As soon as I felt better, I took off once more, my destination being the other Mythril reserve.

It was around five hundred kilometers away from me, but I reached it in two minutes.

This skill is like having a free private jet, but better!

I was flying a fair distance above the ground, as the area underneath me was crowded. There was a large hole in the ground, and many Lizardmen could be seen there. Many of them entered the hole with empty bags, and they came out with ones filled with an azure metal that shined brighter than silver; I could even spot it from afar.

Gotcha! Now, I'll tail some Lizardmen to find their village.

The city that I looked for wasn't that far away; its distance from the mine was less than a kilometer. It looked much better than I expected; I could see buildings that were at least a hundred meters tall, and they were all adorned with various gems.

I couldn't see the details from my current location, but that didn't matter as I would enter it later on with Ratska.

I descended to an obscure area that was a kilometer away from the town in the other direction; it would be our destination for the [Party Zoom].

As soon as I was satisfied with my preparations, I used [Zoom] to teleport next to the System Trading Station in Osaka.

I bought a [Party Zoom] scroll from there with two thousand tutorial points, then I set my body on fire and started running toward the area where I'd meet Ratska.

I found him already waiting, and many Gnomes were behind him. There were at least two hundred of them, and all of them were as tall as the brewer or even shorter.

I extinguished my flames and resumed walking toward Ratska slowly. There were around thirty bags next to him, and all of them were filled to the brim.

“What the hell, man?” I shouted, “I told you we're going on a journey to the Sahara, not to Valhalla.”

The Gnome blushed, but his eyes regained their composure quickly.

“I am a potion brewer, but I still am a researcher too! These bags contain rare materials, useful tools, and some recipes and books,” he noted, “Your storage ring can handle all of this anyway, and we might need an obscure potion at any moment. Besides, you're the one who told me to get everything that might be useful!”

This is the excuse that hoarders use to keep saving up items and carrying them around.

I shook my head and sighed.

“All right, whatever suits you,” I said as I pulled a scroll from my storage ring, “Say goodbye to your friends; it's time to go.”

Ratska quickly turned toward the other Gnomes and hugged each one of them. The whole process took around ten minutes, but I spent the time thinking of a way to enter the Lizardmen Village when we get there.

Lizardmen were people that hated hot-blooded creatures like humans and looked at them with disdain, but they didn't show any of that when they were in human cities.

However, we were about to enter a Lizardmen exclusive settlement. They might prohibit us from entering the city at all, or even use violence against us.

I might have to sneak into the city and meet their leader secretly... Depending on the situation, I'll either threaten him or bribe him to let me enter.

It wasn't the perfect solution, but I didn't have much time. I had to move quickly to create a guild that could overtake Stella's.

"All right, Mr. Jason. You can put the bags inside your ring," said Ratska before turning to his comrades, "I'll miss you everyone, but I am doing this for you! I'll get rich, then I'll come back."

The other Gnomes waved at him; some were smiling but many others had tears in their eyes. I looked for Frevel the guard to give him a farewell, but he was nowhere to be seen.

I am not sure how he'd feel about Ratska's journey...

I put everything inside the ring, then told Ratska to hold the scroll with his hand.

"Now, inject some of your mana inside it," I said.

I imagined the area of the Sahara that I wanted to teleport to, and the scroll disintegrated. A system screen appeared in front of me, and it said that the teleportation will be successful.

I closed my eyes to decrease the dizziness and opened them when I felt my bare feet touching the sand.

Ratska seemed unaffected by the teleportation, he was smiling and staring at the surroundings with wide eyes.

Suddenly, I heard a shriek, and the voice seemed higher-pitched than regular Lizardmen.

It's a female! And a young one at that!

I wasn't sure about its meaning, but my limited knowledge of the Lizardian language told me that the person was asking for help.

22. Young Mythril Seeker

“I just heard someone crying for help,” I asked the Gnome standing to my left, “I think it’s a young Lizardfolk. Can you hear it?”

“I am not sure,” he said as he wiped some sweat off his forehead, “Why would a young creature even be in such a place?”

The place that we arrived at was a kilometer away from the city of the Lizardfolk, and there was nothing here but sand. Large dunes surrounded us, the hot wind was blowing on our faces, and the sun was shining brightly.

I looked around me to locate the Lizardfolk, but mirages obstructed my vision.

I have to hurry, the little girl might be in grave danger...

I hurriedly closed my eyes and focused on the faint sound that I heard. I relied on the [Flawed State of Being] skill to improve my perception, and the voices around me got clearer immediately.

The cries of help were coming from behind me, so I turned around and ran vigorously in that direction.

“What’s up, Mr. Jason?” blurted Ratska as he hurried behind me, “Are we in danger? Why are you running?”

His small legs prevented him from reaching great speeds, so he lagged.

“We’re not in danger, but someone is!” I shouted, “Make sure to follow me, we might need a potion depending on the state of the Lizardfolk.”

“Lizardfolk?” he screamed, “It might be an ambush for all we know; I hope you know what you’re doing!”

Even if it was an ambush, I’ll just kill them all...

I ran for thirty more seconds before I saw the little Lizardfolk that was crying for help. I was twenty meters away

from her, and she looked miserable.

Her left arm and leg were torn, and she was bleeding on the ground. The sand underneath her congealed to form a reddish paste due to the great amount of blood that dripped from her wounds. She held a small dagger with her right arm and was waving it haphazardly in front of her.

Three similar creatures were running around her, taking turns to bite and headbutt her. They looked like foxes, but their fur was sand-colored. They were as big as a wolf, and their ears were larger than their heads. A reddish stripe of fur extended along the back of these creatures.

I examined them; they were Ghibli Fennecs, and their levels were between thirty and thirty-five.

I pointed my finger toward one of them and used my single-target skill against it. A fire beam erupted from my finger and penetrated the Fennec's skull. I invested two hundred mana in the attack, and it was more than enough for the kill.

The other two abruptly stopped attacking the young Lizardfolk and stared at me. Suddenly, they growled and charged to attack me.

I raised my fists in front of me, ready to take them on. I expected the little Fennecs to desperately attack me, but they used a special ability. Both of their bodies became translucent, then they transformed into strong gusts of wind.

I braced myself for a surprise attack, but the creatures ran away.

At least they're smart...

Now that the monsters were dealt with, I ran toward the Lizardfolk. She growled and waved her dagger at me; she was scared.

“Can you make a potion that would heal this kind of injury?” I asked the Gnome, “Something that would grow the limbs back.”

He rubbed his chin for a couple of seconds, then replied.

“It’s doable, but it’s somewhat expensive,” He sighed, “Pull out the bags numbered three, four, and eight from the storage ring. I’ll get it done within a minute; make sure the Lizardfolk is still alive by then.”

I nodded, then gave him the bags that he wanted.

“Don’t worry about the cost; I’ll compensate you.”

Saving this Lizardfolk will facilitate the process of communication between me and her kin.

After that, I rummaged through my storage ring to search for the HP potion that Petra gave me in the tutorial, and I found it quickly. It reminded me of the fight against Chris in the second phase, and I was curious about his current situation.

I am not sure whether he acquired some tutorial points or not, but that doesn’t concern me anyway.

I showed the potion to the Lizardfolk, and her aggression lessened considerably. She stopped waving her dagger around but still grasped it in her right hand.

I uncorked the vial and brought it closer to her. She looked away for a moment, before opening her mouth. She drank the green liquid, then closed her eyes.

This should buy some time for Ratska...

The bleeding slowed down and the Lizardfolk sighed and relaxed. She nodded at me, then stared at Ratska.

He was still working on the potion, and the process was tedious. The Gnome held a large flask with his left hand and added three green marbles into the purple liquid, then he sealed the flask with a cork and mixed it.

The liquid turned black, then the Gnome smiled and uncorked the vessel.

“It’s done,” said Ratska as he scrutinized the black mixture, “Here you go.”

He handed me the potion, and I helped the little girl drink it. I returned the flask to Ratska as soon as she emptied it.

Suddenly, she screamed. Her limbs grew back in the span of a second, and she squirmed in pain for quite a while.

I walked around waiting for her pain to subside.

Suddenly, a system screen appeared in front of me.

[InterGalacticLine]	
Loki is calling...	
[Accept]	[Decline]

He's calling now of all times?

I walked a fair distance away from Ratska and the Lizardfolk, and I told my little friend to take care of her till I came back.

I accepted the call. I didn't know how this system feature worked as it came with no instructions; the only thing that I knew was that the communication happened in real-time.

"Hello?" I mumbled. I wasn't sure if my sponsor heard me, but there wasn't much else that I could do.

"Hey! If it isn't my favorite blessed," I heard his voice normally as if he was standing next to me, "You're progressing well, aren't you?"

"I am doing my best," I noted, "It seems like the Great Church is intent on exterminating me. I am pressed for time right now, and I didn't have a chance to call."

Besides, the current period before humans come back to Earth is my best opportunity to grow my guild.

"You are doing your best; in fact, you're working too hard," he spoke with his cheerful tone, "Your body-soul

connection is worsening over time.”

Oh?

When I went back to Earth and used my abilities, I didn't feel any pain. I assumed that Loki healed my body-soul connection, and brushed it off as one of his mysterious actions.

“Didn't you fix that problem before sending me back to Earth?” I asked.

“I did, but it's just a temporary measure. You're so close to tearing off the band-aid,” He spoke, “Take it easy for at least a month; if you use your abilities four more times in the next month, then you'll become crippled for the rest of your life.”

“What if I get ambushed once more?” I mumbled.

However, no reply came back.

Shit... He must've hung up...

I was thrown off by Loki's words, and I didn't believe them at first. However, I wasn't brave enough to try my limits.

I guess I'll have to be cautious for a while...

I went back to check on the injured Lizardfolk, and she was calm this time. She hugged her knees and sat on an area that had little sand.

As soon as she noticed me, she started speaking in the Lizardian language.

I didn't understand much, but her polite tone of voice indicated her intention of thanking me.

She doesn't have the translation skill, huh?

Most immigrants had this skill, as it was one of the cheaper options. I motioned for her to stop using my hand, and bought the uncommon variant of the [Translator] passive skill from my system shop for two hundred points.

“Do you understand me now?” I spoke. The young Lizardfolk nodded, then she replied with a slightly high-pitched voice.

“I do! Thank you, stranger. I expected today to be my last, but you saved me when you defeated those creatures,” she spoke, “I am Zinnia; what’s your name?”

She stood up and shook my hand.

“Jason Stubbs, and I am glad you survived,” I replied with a smile, “Why are you roaming this area alone? The Sahara is a dangerous place, and you might meet deadly monsters regardless of your level.”

“I’ve heard of you; it’s a pleasure meeting a strong person!” she spoke enthusiastically, before her voice became softer, “I have no choice; this is the best way to earn some materials and funds. I was on my way to a certain mine close by when those foxes ambushed me.”

“You’re talking about the Mythril mine, right?” I said with a raised eyebrow, “Aren’t you too young to be a laborer?”

“My class isn’t suitable for combat,” she replied, “Transporting Mythril was the only way to have the funds that I needed.”

Silence followed her statement, and I mulled over this girl’s life conditions.

Her life must’ve been harsh, and her clothes weren’t the best. She wore a beige shirt and brown pants and had no shoes on. Her limbs were thinner than usual and her forearms were covered in straps; she might’ve been hiding some scars or some valuable equipment.

She didn’t have much else except a shabby dagger that she attached to her waist and an empty bag that was laying on the ground.

I took this chance to get a good look at Zinnia. Her body was covered in blue scales, whereas her belly, neck, and hands were covered in white ones. She was slightly taller than Ratska; a short height for an adolescent Lizardfolk.

She had blue eyes, and her face was covered in a mixture of blue and white scales. She had a small horn on each side of her head, and the left one was slightly shaved off.

I sighed and advanced toward the corpse of the Ghibli Fennec.

I dismantled it and obtained three skin pelts. I put everything inside my ring when I heard Zinnia clapping.

Oh? She thinks that my [Dismantle] skill is awesome?

“Oh, right,” Ratska interrupted the silence, “Zinnia said that she lived in the city close by, maybe she’ll help us enter?”

“For sure,” said Zinnia as she nodded, “Usually, Lizardfolk don’t allow strangers to enter the town, unless they’re accompanied by citizens. Leading you to our town is the least that I could do to my saviors.”

Great! Now, I have one less excuse to use violence; let’s hope that the communication with the town leader ends up being productive.

“Alright! Let’s go,” I spoke, and Zinnia took the lead.

We made small talk along the way, and I found out more information about Zinnia. I was surprised to find out that she was nine years old; she was just a child even by Lizardfolk’s standards.

She said that her class was focused on talking to spirits, and I didn’t pry further as she was uncomfortable with the subject.

After walking for a couple of minutes through sand and rough ground, we reached the town’s borders.

There was a wall around the town, and it was two meters tall and thick enough for a person to walk on top of it. It was made of a translucent material similar to glass, and some Lizardfolk were walking on top of it. They used some fire-based skills to turn sand into the material that the wall was made of.

I took a deep breath and spoke addressing Ratska.

“We need to keep a low profile; don’t call me using my full name in public unless I tell you to do so. Also, don’t go around brewing epic-grade potions like the one you used to heal Zinnia.”

“Understood,” he replied, “I am surprised you know about the grade of that potion.”

Of course, I do; It was one of Stella’s guild’s exclusive potions in my past life.

“Follow me, and don’t speak with the guards,” said Zinnia as she took the lead.

We reached the town’s entrance, and there were two mature male Lizardfolks standing guard. Each one of them was more than two meters tall, and they wore helmets and basic leather armor that protected their torso.

“Halt!” one of them shouted.

“We’re not accommodating people of the other races yet,” the other one added.

“Don’t worry, guys,” said Zinnia, “They’re with me. They are travelers that saved my life, and they wish to experience our culture.”

“Don’t be stupid, Zinnia,” said one of them, “You’re just a child; it’s obvious that they’re taking advantage of you!”

“They saved my life!” shouted Zinnia, “I owe them, and I can vouch for their good intentions.”

I am sorry, Zinnia. I might have to threaten the leader of this town a little...

“They might’ve brainwashed you; Dwarves and Humans are insidious creatures,” one of them spoke, “We’ll call for Mr. Gerz; he’ll take you home.”

Then, that guard entered the town to call for this Mr. Gerz person.

“I am not a Dwarf!” blurted Ratska, he raised an eyebrow and tried to follow the Lizardfolk that offended him.

“Don’t move,” threatened the remaining guard; he pointed a spear toward Ratska, “We haven’t decided what to do with you, yet.”

“It’s cool, Ratska. It’s not time to do it, yet,” I whispered to the Gnome to diffuse the situation.

He calmed down and crossed his arms.

We waited for ten minutes, and we just sat on the ground as we waited for this mysterious person to arrive.

Suddenly, someone spoke with a coarse voice.

“Zinnia! You’re late,” He passed through the gate and hugged the little Lizardfolk, “You worried me!”

“It’s fine, father. I had some trouble, and these people saved my life.” She replied while pointing toward me and my companion.

Mr. Gerz was two and a half meters tall and had a stocky upper body. A scar passed through his left eye; it must’ve been permanently damaged.

His scales were a mixture of red, white, and yellow, and he had a fierce gaze in his right eye. He held a cane in his right hand, and his right leg differed from regular Lizardfolk legs; it was an artificial metal limb.

Mr. Gerz stared at me for a couple of seconds, then he chortled.

“Don’t worry, guards. These guys are speaking the truth,” he said, “It’s okay, I’ll be vouching for them.”

The guards nodded and turned away from us.

I thanked him, and Ratska did the same, then we followed him and Zinnia into the town. Mr. Gerz walked with steady steps despite his disability, and he patted Zinnia’s head along the way.

“I should be the one thanking you,” said Mr. Gerz with a shaky voice, “I don’t have much in life, and Zinnia is a gift that appeared in my life out of nowhere. I was afraid that God would take her away from me abruptly. Her father would’ve been disappointed in me if she died under my care.”

“Mr. Gerz is my adoptive father, and I am living with him and my adoptive mother,” explained Zinnia.

It was obvious why Zinnia had to do odd jobs; her adoptive father was in no shape to do strenuous jobs, and

manual labor was the best paying line of work on a newly integrated planet due to the abundance of natural resources and the need for construction.

I was about to speak when a Lizardman spoke abruptly with a loud voice.

“I assume that the two of you are the new guests of the town?” he said.

He was even taller than Mr. Gerz, and his body was completely covered in black scales. He wore a Hawaiian shirt and a pair of green shorts. His tail was much longer than usual Lizardfolk tails; it was at least a meter long and he waved it around as he spoke.

He had a smirk on his face, but that might’ve been my imagination.

They sent a messenger as soon as we entered the town?

I made eye contact with Ratska and he was raising an eyebrow, then we nodded at the speaking Lizardman.

“Welcome; I am the leader of the city, and I’m expecting a visit from you in twenty-four hours,” he took a parchment out of his bag of holding, opened it, and read its text, “You’re the first group of foreigners to enter our city, and I am interested in chatting with you. The Lizardman reading this message will accompany you to my place when the time comes.”

23. Bribe

I raised an eyebrow and stared at the Lizardfolk messenger.

Why is he wearing Earthling clothes? And how did the leader of the city find us so quickly?

“Who are you?” I asked him.

“Rauchlim. Feel free to explore the city; I’ll find you wherever you are,” he whispered as he faded into a thick cloud of smoke that appeared in his original position.

I checked the clock, and it was quarter past four.

I’ll wait till tomorrow; this town’s leader seems more interesting than I expected.

“Well, I guess there is no incentive for us to keep a low profile,” said Ratska as he shrugged, “Besides, people would be fascinated with you if you reveal your identity.”

Ratska pointed his finger upward, and I raised my head to stare at the sky.

There were many floating black holograms, and each one of them welcomed Jason Stubbs and congratulated him on returning to Earth. An outrageous system screen stood above the holograms, and I could read it after I tilted my head.

“Welcome home, Jason Stubbs. You’ll never walk alone.” I read the text softly.

Ratska nodded and patted my back, then Mr. Gerz joined our conversation.

“It must be a thrill, you know?” he spoke with his usual coarse voice, “Living as the Initial Returnee. He must’ve been really lucky.”

Zinnia chuckled, then whispered some words in the ears of her adoptive father as we walked.

He stared at me, and his eyes were opened widely.

“That’s unbelievable,” he said, “Someone like you visiting us is truly an honor, but I suggest you keep your identity a secret. Most Lizardfolk view the other races negatively, and the Initial Returnee is the only human whose name they know of; They’ll resent you. Besides, most people are jealous of you regardless of your race; some riots might start if you expose yourself.”

Oh... I am glad that the regular examination command doesn't show the name of a sapient creature, and Scribes are rare among Lizardfolks anyway.

I nodded at the old man’s words and followed him as he started walking along the road. The ground was rough, and there wasn’t much sand on it.

I scanned my surroundings, but nothing grabbed my attention; the buildings in this area weren’t impressive like the ones that I saw in Tiny Alveria.

Most houses around us were huts that were made out of hardened sand. The ceilings were made out of translucent yellow glass just like the windows. Each hut had a rectangular door that was made out of dull gray metal; a quick examination revealed that the material was impure iron.

There was a small space between each house, but it wasn’t big enough to let a human pass through, let alone a Lizardfolk.

In short, this area was rather primitive.

I can't imagine why Lizardfolks are living here without making a fuss about it, but they might like this kind of environment for all I know.

I thought about the meeting with the leader of the Lizardfolk, and it seemed strange that he was that interested in meeting a random human and his Gnome friend. I suspected that the boss of this place knew of my identity beforehand; one of his servants must’ve had the [Identify] skill.

I guess I can't ambush him now, as he would blackmail me later if he manages to record the event; I'll have to bribe him instead.

I pulled Ratska closer to me and told him about my general plan.

“We’ll try to learn about the town, find a lodging place and prepare for the negotiations with the leader of this town,” I whispered, “It seems like the general public still doesn’t know about me, so we’ll be discreet. I’ll give you more details once we find a quiet place.”

The Gnome nodded and kept walking silently. He scanned the surroundings, but his poker face indicated his disinterest in the buildings of this place.

I noticed many people staring at us through the windows, but they hid as soon as I tried to make eye contact with them.

“The area that we passed through is the outer district; this is where orphans and disabled people live,” said Mr. Gerz with a stern tone of voice, “The houses here are given for free to whoever is in need, but people still need to work for a living.”

“I’d be living here if Mr. Gerz didn’t take care of me,” said Zinnia as she lowered her eyes.

“Ha! I’d be living here myself if it wasn’t for my past as an experienced blacksmith when our people still lived on the Sihlium planet,” blurted the old man as he laughed, “Besides, our current house isn’t that better off. I’d be ashamed to show it to our guests.”

I was curious about Mr. Gerz’s living conditions, and we arrived at his place after walking for about two minutes.

The architectural style was similar to that of the buildings that we saw in the outer district of the city, but his house was much bigger. The building was thrice as long as the ones that we saw before, and it had two floors. Each floor contained three rooms, and each one of them was as big as a hut.

“Vexilla!” shouted the old man at the closest window to the door, “We have guests; prepare the living room!”

“Coming!” a slightly high-pitched voice replied from within the house, then she added after a couple of seconds, “I’ve already organized the tools; you can bring them in!”

The old man invited me and Ratska inside the house, and we followed him. The hallway's walls, ground, and ceiling were all made of hardened sand, and there were no decorations on the wall.

He led us to a large room on our left, and we sat on shiny blocks of metal around a wooden table. The metal was azure, and it reflected the light that seeped through the windows brightly.

“Mythril...,” I mumbled, “Do you work with metals?”

“I am a blacksmith, just like my father and his,” Mr. Ger replied with a softer voice than usual, “I used to make good items, but this leg of mine ruined my prospects as I lost a lot of strength. Nowadays, I stick to making daggers and simple tools.”

The old man was sitting on a similar block of Mythril, and he pointed toward his right pegleg. He put his cane on the ground, then stared at his artificial limb with an anguished face.

“Don't worry, father,” Zinnia comforted the old man, “I am old enough to take care of myself, and I can even help you. I've saved up some money, and I can lend it to you if you need it.”

“Oh, Zinnia. What would I do without you; just don't put yourself in risky situations like today, as you would've died if it wasn't for Jason,” Mr. Gerz hugged his daughter, then spoke to me, “I know nothing about humans' palate, but I'll tell Vexilla to prepare something similar to what the other squishy creatures usually eat. You can sleep inside this room tonight, but we don't have any mattresses as we sleep on the ground.”

“Don't worry about that,” I replied with a smirk, “I appreciate your help, but I am an independent person. It'll tarnish my reputation if people knew that I took advantage of others instead of using my wealth. We'll take this chance to learn about Lizardfolks' culture, and we'll stay at an inn until we accomplish our goals.”

Zinnia's family's financial situation was horrendous and I didn't want to be a burden on them. Her adoptive father was generous enough to help me enter the town legally, and I didn't plan to over-welcome my stay.

"Oh, really?" he asked, and I nodded, "Then, at least tell me some stories about the events that happened to you at the tutorial. You must've had a lot of action going on, right? I miss the days when I used to fight large creatures; I used to be our city's best fighter even though my class wasn't specialized in combat."

I was curious about the old man's level; I bought some information from the shop, and he turned out to have a class called Hammer Hoodman, with a level of sixty-eight.

It was an uncommon class that focused on blacksmithing with combat on the side.

That's impressive!

"All right then," I said, "I'll give you the abridged version of what I faced in my tutorial iteration."

The old man stared at me with great interest, and so were Ratska and Nina. All of them grinned, and their eyes were opened widely.

After about two hours, I finished telling them about the part where I killed the Primordial. I edited the story slightly so as not to reveal my connection to deities, but I kept all the action.

"Damn," said Ratska as he clapped, "Gnomes call people like you 'action heroes'; I am not sure if that word got translated properly. Your tutorial experience was much better than mine, as I spent a lot of time tinkering around with herbs and didn't level up at all."

"I was born in a world that already had the system, so I didn't go through a tutorial," blurted Zinnia, "But now I am somewhat sad because I missed such an opportunity to grow stronger and make good memories. I am also interested in that Primordial creature you spoke about; you said that he resembled dragons, right?"

“The tutorial isn’t as easy as you might think,” interrupted Mr. Gerz with a stern voice, “Jason had a strong class, and it played a big role in his success. I am thankful that you don’t need to go through the tutorial; many of my friends got traumatized because of it.”

Zinnia nodded, but she still stared at me.

“How about I take you to the nearest inn to our house?” she proposed, “It’s not far away from here, and their prices are good.”

I suspected that she wanted more information on the Primordial, but I played along as I wanted to get some sleep too.

She left the house, and Ratska followed her. I waved my hand at the old man and left while closing the door behind me.

“So,” said Zinnia as she led the way, “about the Primordial. Did you manage to get any items out of it?”

I took out the Bahamut’s horn and showed it to the little girl. She stared at it with wide eyes and tried to touch it. However, I hid it inside the storage ring before she managed to do so.

“Maybe I got some items, maybe I didn’t,” I grinned as I made a hushing motion with my left index finger, “Why are you interested in that creature anyway?”

“It’s related to my biggest dream in life,” she mumbled, “Anyway, here’s the inn. I’ll introduce you to the owner.”

Her biggest dream? I am curious about that...

The building in front of us was made out of hardened sand, but it was more pleasing to the eye. It had five floors, and each one of them contained six rooms.

On its door were words that I’d never seen before, but I recognized their meaning to be ‘Inn’. The translation skills were weird, and the weirder part was that people readily accepted their existence.

Zinnia entered the building and spoke with a woman. Her body was covered in white scales, except for her head which

was covered in red ones. She wore a tight black robe, and she looked stunning even by human standards.

After a while, the little girl came out and invited us to enter the inn, then she bid us farewell and went back home.

She seems hurried for some reason, but I can't do anything about it...

“Welcome, Gentlemen,” said the owner of the inn, “I am Quaya, and I’ll lead you to your rooms. Follow me.”

We nodded and followed her.

She asked us about our names and about the kind of rooms that we wanted. Ratska told her to give him a cheap room, but I interrupted him. I asked for our rooms to be among the best ones, and for them to be as quiet as possible. Quaya nodded and led the way.

“Don’t worry about the cost,” I whispered to the Gnome, and he nodded.

We ascended the stairs of the building until we reached the second floor.

“Please, touch this orb,” she asked me, and I complied. I felt the orb siphoning a small amount of my mana.

She asked Ratska to do the same, then she resumed speaking after he did.

“Good; these are your rooms,” she pointed toward two adjacent rooms, “The door will recognize your mana and it’ll open when you touch it. The daily fee is ten lesser mana stones, and you can pay the total fee when you’re about to leave. We’ll offer you two custom meals per day, and they’ll be delivered to your rooms. You’ll find a communication crystal inside your rooms; you can use it to contact a manager or even me.”

“When’s the next meal,” asked Ratska, “I am dying of hunger, and I am tired.”

I also felt hungry, but I could suppress the urge if I concentrated enough. I could go for days without sleep at my current level, but a good night’s sleep would never hurt.

“It’ll be delivered to your room in an hour,” she replied, “We’ll prepare it based on your species’ culinary preferences. If you don’t like it, then you can ask the chefs to cook a different one using the communication crystal.”

“Thank you, Quaya,” I spoke with a smile, “I appreciate your professionalism. We can take care of ourselves at this point; I’ll call you if I need anything.”

She nodded and descended the stairs.

As soon as she left, Ratska tried to enter his room, but I grabbed his shirt.

“Wait,” I whispered, “Don’t let your guard down inside the room, and sleep early because you’ll be busy tomorrow. An important mission is waiting for you.”

“What?” he said as he yawned, “Hurry up, I already want to take a nap.”

“We’re going to bribe the leader of this town,” I whispered, and the Gnome opened his eyes widely, “For that, I want you to brew some potions.”

24. Hopes and Dreams

“What are you trying to do?” he asked me with a raised eyebrow, “Didn’t we come here to invite people to join our guild? Why bribe them?”

“The chief of this city has illegal control over a Mythril reserve, and I am sure he’s already amassed a decent quantity of the metal in the past couple of days. He can sell the metal in the black market for high prices, and weapons made out of it can be sold for profitable sums too,” I said, “As soon as he and his citizens join my guild, I’ll confiscate all the Mythril and seize control of the mine, and the laborers will no longer be able to mine the metal without permission from the top rankers’ council as it’s a resource point that belongs to Earthlings. Why would he convince his citizens to work for me if he had the choice to stay here as a rich monarch?”

I had to give him more incentives to join my guilds...

I could threaten him, but I decided to bribe him instead to form a friendly relationship. Of course, I didn’t plan to kiss his feet and throw money at his face; I’ll give him enticing reasons to join my guild, and tell him that I would use force if he didn’t want to.

Now that I think about it, he must’ve given a lot of Mythril to Stella to keep her mouth shut about where he got the metal from...

Ratska furrowed his eyebrows and scratched his chin with his left hand.

“I assume you want to bribe him with my potions, right?” he said, “Which ones do you want me to make?”

“The permanent stat buff potions,” I whispered, “What would you need to craft at least five Magic potions and five Vitality ones?”

“I need as many flasks as possible, one hundred Vileweeds, two hundred Zephyra flowers, two hundred Cyclops’ eyes, and as many Troll’s essences as you could

provide me with,” he whispered, “I know the recipes of most variants of the permanent potion, but I didn’t have the chance to try any of them myself due to the lack of Trolls’ essences. People just consumed them raw instead of risking the chance of failing the potion brewing process.”

He was asking for a huge quantity of resources, but I didn’t complain. It was a worthy investment to help him reach a hundred percent chance of brewing both kinds of permanent potions.

I am not sure if he’ll be able to brew a potion using the Troll’s true essence, but this isn’t the right time to ask him about it.

“What’s your success chance of brewing either of the permanent potions?” I asked.

“Around thirty percent, and it’ll increase further with each brewing attempt.”

“Don’t worry about the resources then. It’s a long-term investment, and it will pay off down the line,” I smiled, “Have some rest; I’ll get you those resources tomorrow.”

“Alright then. Good night,” he mumbled as he walked away. He touched the door of his designated room, and he entered when it opened.

“Good night,”

I waved my hand at him and walked toward the door of my room. I put my hand on the door, and it opened as soon as I touched it.

My first impression of the room was that its ceiling was much higher than what I used to; it was at least six meters high. A white crystal was attached to each corner of the ceiling, and they provided light.

So, they aren’t using electricity yet...

The room looked much better than the one at Zinnia’s house, and it was larger; its ground had an area of about eighty square meters. The floor was made of a smooth layer of shiny

blue quartz, and the walls were made out of hardened sand that was covered in matt gray paint.

There was a square window on the wall opposite to me, and its glass was transparent, unlike the yellowish one that the windows of the outer district of the town were made of.

All the furniture in this room was made out of wood and painted white. There was a king-sized bed on the right side of the room, and one nightstand on each side of it.

A red communication crystal was on top of the nightstand to the left side of the bed, and it was twice as big as the ones that I bought for me a Ratska.

The bed sheets were also white, and so were the pillows.

On the left side of the room were two closed wooden doors, and they were four meters apart. Each one of them was at least three meters tall and a meter wide.

I walked toward the bed, then jumped into it when I was close enough.

What a soft mattress! Humans should've been thankful for their easy life before the system appeared.

I enjoyed the comfort for a while, then got up to take a look at whatever was behind the two doors of the room. The left one contained a toilet. It was similar in concept to Indian toilets, but it was too large for humans.

The other door led to a small room that contained a bathtub, and it was at least thrice as large as the ones commonly used by humans.

I grinned, then I took off my thermal suit. It became translucent as soon as it fell to the ground.

I put it inside my storage ring and stretched my arms and legs. I opened the hot-water faucet and waited for the bathtub to fill up, then I jumped inside it.

“This is so cozy...,” I mumbled.

I scrubbed my body, and the quantity of grime and filth that came out surprised me. I had to drain the bathtub twice

due to the accumulation of dirt in the water.

I smelled myself and realized the difference between my current state and the previous one. I stunk a lot before cleaning myself, and I didn't even notice.

Ratska should've said something about it... Oh well, I guess living in the sewers for a while numbs the person's sense of smell.

After about thirty minutes, I went out of the bathtub and dried myself using a towel that was hanging from the wall.

There was a large mirror, so I took the chance to see my body. My physique was more muscular than it used to be in my past life and before the system came, and I was slightly taller than before.

My hair was still black, but it was shiny, and needed a haircut. Even my eyes no longer gave the impression that they belonged to a dead fish.

I noticed the large tattoo that was on my back, the one that was related to my Latent Ability according to Loki. It was a large pentagram that was surrounded by two circles and many symbols from a foreign language.

I tried to make sense of those symbols, but I didn't understand shit. Either my translation skill didn't have information on this language, or the symbols were something from the Antecedent Era.

I should probably call Loki; Now that I can't use my system-based skills, I should take the chance to improve my control over my latent ability.

I silently commanded the system to call Loki, and he replied immediately.

“Hello, Jason,” he said, “How's the weather?”

“You must be bored, huh? It's sunny as always, and you probably already know that,” I replied, “I'd like to inquire about that large tattoo on my back; you said that we'd talk about it through the InterGalacticLine. I can't use my system-

based skill right now, and I thought that working on my Latent Ability would be the best investment of my time.”

“True, True,” he spoke with his usual cheerful tone, “Using your latent ability wouldn’t put as much stress on your body-soul connection as the system-based stuff, and it’s mostly safe to experiment with even in your case. The trick to using it would be learning to control ambient mana without the system’s assistance. After achieving that, you’ll have to direct that mana into your tattoo and power up every symbol using it. Then, your Latent Ability will be good to go.”

The system made controlling ambient mana with basic proficiency as easy as breathing, how hard could it be to do it on my own?

“Got it,” I replied as I nodded, “Thank you, and I’ll keep you updated on my progress.”

He laughed for a while, called me a ‘Fool’, then hung up.

I smirked, then put on my Thermal Suit once more and changed its color to be completely black. I walked toward the bed full of confidence. Then, I sat there and closed my eyes while trying to imagine the mana around me. It seemed like a thick stream of gas co-existing with air.

I concentrated hard for a couple of minutes, trying to get a small amount of mana to move according to my will, but I failed miserably.

I tried once more but kept at it for half an hour this time. However, I made no progress.

Shit, I would’ve given up on it if there was an easier method to achieve natural control of mana, but there is nothing to do about it...

I sighed and got up to take a look at the city through the window.

I could see the inner districts of the city, and they were livelier than the outer ones. Even the buildings were much better.

There was a large castle made out of white quartz; it must've been the leader's house.

I wonder what kind of person he is...

If the negotiations with him went well, then I'll be able to hire all the competent citizens of this town. There were many skilled blacksmiths and craftsmen living here, and having them as members of my guild would improve its overall power.

Suddenly, I heard a ringing sound. I turned around; its source was the communication crystal.

I moved toward it and touched it with my hand.

All of a sudden, a tiny hologram of a Lizardfolk appeared on top of the crystal. Her thin head, slender build, and slim shoulders indicated that she was a female, but I wasn't sure about the color of her scales due to the blue hue of the projection.

"Hello mister," she spoke, "We're preparing a steak for your dinner; do you have any objections about the meal?"

"It's perfect," I said with a smile, "In fact, I'd like a small box of matches and a large piece of plastic to be delivered along with it. Put it on my tab."

"Okay," she bowed, "They'll be swiftly delivered to your room." Then, the projection of that Lizardfolk disappeared.

After about ten seconds, I heard knocking on the door.

When I opened it, I found a decorated white plate on the ground with a cooked steak on top of it. There was also a small cardboard box, a large plushie in the shape of a Lizardfolk, and a folded piece of paper next to the plate.

I opened the piece of paper, and it contained a message from Quaya. She told me not to worry about my expenses here, and that she'd take care of all of my needs.

I took my meal and the other items with me inside the room and put them on top of the empty nightstand. There were no utensils delivered with the plate; I had to use my common Cleaver to cut the steak.

I cut it into two portions, and blood started dropping out of each piece when I pressed them with the cleaver.

As I thought, people here eat meat raw... They didn't even cook this steak properly.

I took my Epic grace fuel dispenser and an empty flask out of my storage ring. I put the plushie inside the fuel dispenser and the barrel started making a continuous buzzing sound.

The buzzing stopped after about ten seconds, and a system screen appeared saying that the conversion was a complete success.

I opened the barrel's faucet into the flask, and a transparent liquid started leaking. It filled the flask quickly, and I had to close the faucet to prevent the fuel from falling to the ground. The fuel dispenser still contained some fuel, but I didn't have other empty flasks to store it in.

I'll just keep the fuel inside the dispenser until I buy some empty flasks...

I went into the bathroom and brought my items with me, including the steak. I dropped three drops of the fuel to the ground and ignited them using a match.

Suddenly, a large blue fire started as soon as the fire contacted the transparent fuel. The flame was nearly twenty centimeters tall, and it burned fiercely and brightly.

This is the result of burning three drops of fuel! This is my chance to properly cook the steak.

I held a portion of the steak with each hand and exposed them to the flame. This was my best method of cooking the steak without using my skills.

The fire was strong, but I didn't feel any pain from it thus I couldn't estimate its temperature. It got extinguished after burning for about a minute, and my steak was well done at that point.

The area underneath the flame was discolored; it was paler than the usual blue quartz of this room. Interestingly, the fuel

didn't leave any sludge, unlike most fuels that humans used back in the day.

I wonder if they'd realize that I burned the bathroom floor...

I shrugged, put my meal on the plate, and went back toward the bed. I ate the steak slowly using my cleaver; it was the first meal that I had in a couple of days, and it was delicious.

The fuel that the Dispenser produced didn't leave any leftovers after burning, and it could burn for much longer than usual fuels. It'd be game-changing if some craftsmen could reverse engineer the fuel dispenser, and mass-produce similar items.

I'm going to visit Elves and Dwarves soon anyway; I'll see if any of them can achieve that feat.

I put my cleaver, and the fuel dispenser back inside my storage ring, then I pulled my Legendary grade shield out.

It would be helpful to me, but there wasn't much that could hurt me on Earth at my current level, at least until the first dungeon breakout. I was still debating whether I should take it for myself, or give it to a weaker but crucial member of my guild like Ratska.

I also needed to sign a contract with the Gnome, in case he got a better offer and decided to pull the rug from underneath me. I was sure that this town's chief had some servants with variants of the Scribe class; I'll ask for one of them to form a contract between me, Ratska, and the town's leader.

I'll just sleep for now; tomorrow will be a busy day and I have to take a rest now that I have the chance to do so...

I put the shield back inside the storage ring and sprawled on the bed. I took a look at my system clock; it was nine o'clock.

I closed my eyes and tried to imagine the stars throughout the ceiling.

I slept before I even realized it.

I woke up feeling refreshed; this night's sleep was one of the best in my entire life. It was five o'clock in the morning; everyone must've been asleep at this point.

I went out of the room and descended the stairs.

Quaya was standing behind the counter, and she had a bored expression on her face. She greeted me as soon as we made eye contact.

"Hi Jason, Good Morning," she said with a chuckle, "Zinnia told me about you. I've never thought someone like you would visit our town."

"Good morning, Quaya," I spoke with a smile, "I have some urgent business deals with this town's chief, and I hope to become friends with him."

She laughed, then replied.

"You mean you want to become friends with her?"

"Oh, I didn't know that, but such a thing wouldn't prevent us from becoming friends, would it?" I smiled, "Anyway, can you tell me about the direction that I should take to get to the nearest System Trading Station?"

Quaya gave me a long list of simple instructions to get to the trading station, and I thanked her before leaving. I walked for less than a minute, but something strange grabbed my attention.

The roads were empty, and I couldn't see any Lizardfolks walking around.

The silence is almost eerie; I expected poor people to be early risers at the very least.

Suddenly, I felt something entering the perception field of [Flawed State of Being].

It was a single creature, and it appeared without alerting me at all.

25. Shadow Renegade

Am I being ambushed again? Oh no, Ratska is alone in the hotel!

I looked around, raising my arms to guard myself in case of a physical confrontation. I expected the creature that appeared next to me to be one of the three ‘heroes’, but his physical features weren’t those of a human.

Skinny, but disproportionately tall. An imposing body that was covered in pitch black scales, ending with a long tail that moved around erratically. His clothes were the only humanoid thing about him; a pink Hawaiian shirt that was covered in colorful patterns, and a pair of green shorts.

He stared at me with his gray eyes; his vertical pupils reminded me of many tough lizards that I faced in my past life.

Rauchlim? What is he doing here?

The Lizardfolk stood two meters away from me, and we maintained eye contact. His hands were behind his head, and he was grinning.

“Hello, Jason,” he spoke as he smiled, “As I told you yesterday, I am always keeping an eye on you. Are you looking for a guide in this town? I can help.”

I still didn’t trust this mysterious messenger, so I kept my fists raised in front of my face. His abrupt appearance was a testimony to his power, and his class must’ve specialized in stealth.

“What’s the purpose of this sudden visit?” I asked him, “you said that you’d pick us up when it’s time for the meeting, and it’s too early for that. Besides, the surroundings are too silent for my taste; do you know anything about that?”

I suspected that this whole ordeal was him testing my strength, to see whether he could neutralize me in case I became aggressive during the meeting with the chief.

He rolled his eyes, tilted his eye, and smirked. His tail started moving faster than before; it was a sign of agitation for Lizardfolks.

Stella and her friends are trying to kill me for a stupid reason, and Lizardfolks are aggressive creatures by default; People aren't giving me rest at all...

Suddenly, Rauchlim's tail stopped moving and he spoke.

“No need to act like that. Wouldn't it be better if we got to know each other? You're strong, and I can be useful,” he said as he turned away from me and started walking, “I can take you to the System Trading Station if you're unsure of the way there.”

He knows about my destination, and he's avoiding my question about the reason behind the lack of Lizardfolks in this area...

“Oh, I am sorry about that,” I was about to speak, but he interrupted me, “I was eavesdropping on you before you came out of the inn. Anyway, I'll show you the most important parts of our city as we walk toward your destination.”

He had a smirk on his face as he turned toward me, and started walking slowly.

I sighed and pretended to be deep in thought. I examined the Lizardfolk secretly and bought extra information about him from the shop.

I was startled by the information that I obtained. He had a level of one hundred and twenty, and his class was even more amazing. Its grade was epic, and it was called [Shadow Renegade].

Detailed information on the class cost me eight thousand shop points; it was expensive, but information on a potential foe would always be useful. It was a variant of the assassin class, with strong stealth, a short-distance teleport that cost nothing, and had no countdown.

The strongest offensive skill of that class was one called [Carotid Snatch]. It allowed the user to kill his enemy in one

shot, provided that he landed a direct attack on the foe's neck while still being in stealth.

It must've been costly for the chief to bring such an individual during the first immigration wave...

The current Earth was still a newly integrated planet, one that didn't go through any breakouts since its integration into the system. As a result, the Intergalactic Systematic Union prevented overtly powerful individuals from entering the planet unless they had connections or paid a pricey fee.

"You're rather strong, aren't you? A Shadow Renegade on Earth; it must've been quite expensive for you to visit our lovely planet," I said with a grin, causing Rauchlim to stop in his tracks and squint his eyes, "Lead the way to the Station; I have some questions about the chief of the town anyway."

Rauchlim stared at me for a couple of seconds, before he motioned for me to follow him as he walked. He put both hands behind his head and spoke.

"We thought your class was purely offensive; I am surprised that you can identify people," he said, "I am also sorry for my colleagues' impudence; it's among our customs to identify visitors who enter our city. Akeniska is interested in the purpose behind your visit, and to be frank, that's the reason why she ordered me to follow you around."

Akeniska... She must be the chief of this town...

I decided to tell him about the superficial reason behind my visit and save the real one until I met Akeniska.

I wonder how they'll react...

"Oh, you should've said so from the beginning," I said as I laughed, "Let's say a foreign race visits a planet, then they start stealing a resource without a permit. What would be the reaction of the native residents of the said planet?"

"As we expected..." he muttered as he lowered his hand and put them inside his pocket, then he turned toward me, "I am sorry, Jason, but I'll have to cut our conversation short. I have orders to relay such information as soon as I discover it,

but you don't need to worry about this. We can solve the inconvenience amicably.”

“Sure,” I spoke with a grin, “I am anticipating the meeting with your chief; send her my regards.”

He nodded, then disappeared into a cloud of smoke.

It's that teleporting skill again...

I was wondering whether they'd try to kill me during the meeting, or try to bribe me. Nonetheless, I didn't care much about the Mythril itself or the potential bribe that they'd offer to buy my silence, as it wasn't the real reason behind my visit.

I hope the negotiations go smoothly... For now, I'll buy the items needed from the System Trading Station.

I walked for a while according to Quaya's instructions, and I soon found the cubic building that I'd been seeking.

I entered the building, and it looked as clean and glossy as it usually did. Chloe and I had a friendly conversation, then I spoke with the other clerk that looked similar to Chloe.

She said that her name was Brittney, and spoke similarly to her colleague. She offered me two million tutorial points for my thermal suit, but I declined her offer politely. She insisted on buying my Legendary grade suit, so I took my leave and said goodbye to her. Then, I went back to Chloe's counter and bought the items that Ratska needed.

The whole transaction cost me eight hundred thousand tutorial points, which was a lot considering the consumable nature of these items. I knew that this transaction wouldn't be the last of its kind and that I'd have to repeatedly buy the same items until the Gnome's success rate became one hundred percent.

Not to mention that I'll have to repeat the investment for every potion recipe; Sigh...

Nevertheless, I was sure of the Gnome's success regardless of the initial cost of the project.

I left the System Trading Station after bidding farewell to the two clerks, then I went back to the inn that I'd been staying

at. It was around seven in the morning at that point, and many Lizardfolks roamed the streets.

Most of them looked at me for less than a second before ignoring me. However, some of them kept staring at me as I passed through, and they didn't break eye contact whenever I looked at one of them.

Weird...

I shrugged and kept walking, and I reached the inn after a short while.

I pushed the door open and saw Quaya and Ratska sitting around a table. The owner of the inn seemed amused as she listened to the Gnome, and he ate a loaf of bread as he spoke to the lady.

They noticed me as soon as I entered the building, and they greeted me and invited me to join their table. I sat on the empty seat next to Ratska, and he offered me a small portion of bread.

“You should try this bread!” said Ratska, “It's one of the best ones that I've ever eaten. I didn't expect Lizardfolks to have such bread, as I expected their delicacies to be meat-based.”

Quaya jabbed his left shoulder lightly with her right fist, and the piece of bread fell from his hand.

“That's cheeky,” she said, “We're not the savages that you imagine us to be. Certainly, we hate dealing with people of the other races, and that's mainly due to their prejudices.”

Then, she turned toward me.

“Ratska told me about the fight you had before you visited our town,” she spoke, “Actually, I've been interested in hearing more about your adventures during the tutorial.”

“Sure, I'll tell you everything when I have time,” I said with a smile, “For now, there is something we need to do. I'll borrow Ratska for a while; you too can resume your conversation in the evening or tomorrow.”

“Of course,” she replied, “I hope our facility meets your expectations; I’d appreciate some advertising later on if you’re happy with our services. I can offer you mana stones, or even some exotic treasures if you’d like.”

“We can discuss this later today, if you have the time,” I waved at her, then dragged Ratska along with me as we ascended the stairs.

He stared at me for a moment, then back at Quaya. He raised an eyebrow, then spoke.

“Why the hurry, man? It’s so early in the morning, and I was having a good time.”

“I have already bought the items that you requested; you can start brewing potions once we’re inside my room. I’ll watch over you for the rest of today.”

“Why are you so hasty? Did I do something that pissed you off?” the Gnome asked, “Don’t worry about the story that I told Quaya about; I omitted the part where your legs got amputated. You can calm down.”

How the hell did he come to that conclusion?

“No...Just, No,” I said as I dragged him; we were five meters away from my room, “There is a strong Lizardfolk in this town, and he might be able to kill you if I left you alone for longer than necessary.”

“I don’t think he would risk killing me, considering the possible consequences,” he mumbled, “Anyway, it’s better to finish the potions early, then I’ll be able to spend some time with Quaya later on.”

“Good,” I said, then I put my hand on my room’s door.

The door opened wide, and I entered while motioning for the Gnome to follow me.

I laid the new items that I bought on the bedroom floor, and I handled the flasks with care to avoid breaking them accidentally. I organized everything into different piles, then I put fifty Troll’s essences of each kind on the bed.

The Gnome opened his eyes and mouth and walked around the room holding the items and staring at them. He looked at each item for a while, but the items that he was infatuated the most with were the essences.

“This should be everything; you can organize the room however you like,” I noted, “You have nine hours to make as many permanent potions as you could. I’ll stay in the room’s corner and practice a certain skill of mine.”

“All right, I’ll start immediately,” he answered absent-mindedly, “Just to warn you, I might scream excitedly if the potions succeed despite the low success rate, so don’t worry about that.”

“It’s okay. If you need more essences, just ask me and I’ll give them to you. Don’t worry about anything dangerous happening to you, as I’ll be able to detect all intruders,” I spoke, “See you after a couple of hours.”

I waved my hand, sat on the ground next to the corner closest to the door, and closed my eyes. I decided to spend these hours doing something productive, and my priority was to increase my capacity to control ambient mana without needing the system’s assistance.

I focused on the thick fog of mana around me and tried to control a droplet of mana. However, I couldn’t even influence its course as it moved around.

I tried the same method for a while, but I made no progress. Suddenly, a system screen appeared in front of me. I could read it with my eyes closed, but such a thing was normal for the system.

[System Admin]:	Don’t focus on a small part; try controlling the whole instead. Think of it as a cloudy sky. You won’t be able to change the weather unless you controlled a substantial number of clouds.
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I'll try it that way...

I silently thanked Loki for his advice, then focused back on the surroundings. I tried controlling strands of mana, but it didn't work. Every time, I increased the volume of mana that I tried to control.

When I tried to control all the mana inside a room, I felt a ripple going through the thick fog. It wasn't something that I induced intentionally, but it was the first time that I influenced mana in any meaningful way.

Suddenly, I felt something touching my right arm.

I opened my eyes, and it was Ratska looking at me. He had bags under his brown eyes, and his face seemed skinnier than before. His dark brown hair was disheveled, and he breathed heavily. However, he had a wide smile on his face.

“Do you want more Troll's essences?” I asked.

“I am done, and I've done better than I expected,” he spoke, “I have about twelve permanent Vitality potions and ten Magic ones. The success rate of each potion type is about fifty-five percent right now. I can brew more if you'd like, but I think this is enough for what you have in mind.”

Then, he spoke about the technicalities, and how his current brewing set was holding him back. However, I didn't understand such details, so I didn't pay him much attention and nodded absent-mindedly.

I still can't believe it; there was no way that nine hours passed so quickly... Either I had been hyper-focused on the task, or time went by faster when the person practiced mana control.

I checked the time, and it was four o'clock in the afternoon; Rauchlim should be arriving soon.

I stood up and stretched my arms. I thanked Ratska for his efforts, told him that I'd pay him once we finished our negotiations with this place's chief, and gave him two potions of each type as a gift.

I put all the remaining flasks and consumable items inside my storage ring. There were no remaining essences on the bed, but I still stored their vials in case I needed them in the future.

“You did good, Ratska. I’ll take care of the rest,” I said as I pulled my cape and crown out of the storage ring, and put them on. I went out of the room and descended the stairs.

“Why are you equipping the cape and crown now of all times?” asked Ratska as he followed me.

“We’re going to meet this city’s chief, and she’ll try to pamper us with bribes and gifts to leave her alone,” I said, “However, you have to assert your dominance in such a situation. I like wearing my crown and cape, and I don’t care whether Akeniska found my outfit disrespectful or not.”

26. To Kill a Newbie

“Okay...,” mumbled Ratska.

His clothes were modest compared to mine. He put on a different set of equipment, and they seemed more valuable than the previous ones. They were made of black leather, and I couldn't spot a single speck of dust on them.

He even put on a fragrant deodorant for the first time since we met; he smelled like Jasmine now. He held a comb with his left hand and a small mirror with his right one, and he straightened his disheveled hair using it as we descended the stairs.

“Why are you preparing so much?” I asked without turning back toward the Gnome, “We're going to meet a Lizardfolk town chief, that's it. She's the one who should be anxious about the meeting, not you.”

I took a sneaky look at the little Gnome and saw him staring at the comb and the mirror for about a second before he hid them inside the bag of holding that I gave him.

“This is my first time meeting an authoritative figure publicly,” he muttered, “I've always had to lay low and hide my existence from the eyes of such people, and I am feeling stressed about it. I guess it's better to heed your advice and stop overthinking.”

So, he's just anxious...

I used to be similar to Ratska in my past life, always respecting guild leaders and adventurers. However, such people enjoy picking on others who respect them, especially those that couldn't defend themselves, just like me when I was a dismantler.

After Natalie's and Rob's deaths, people started avoiding me, and guild leaders ignored the fact that I existed. I was treated with more respect, and no one picked on me anymore. I realized that I could fend for myself even as a weakling, and I changed my behavior to be more proactive.

It seems like Ratska resembles me more than I expected...

“Don’t worry, Ratska,” I spoke with an assertive tone of voice, “You did your part of the mission by brewing the potions; you can just observe from now on, or you can do whatever you want if it suits you that way.”

We reached the first floor, and Quaya was sitting behind her large counter that was located beside the building’s door. A monocle was sitting in front of her right eye, and she was staring at a magazine that she held with her right hand.

She closed the magazine when she noticed us descending the stairs, and she wished us success in our negotiations with Akeniska.

“I hope you stay in our city for a while after the negotiations, regardless of the outcome,” she asked me with a smile, “I still didn’t hear about your adventures, and I believe we’d be able to build mutually beneficial relations.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” I smiled, “if everything goes according to my desires, then we’ll be able to meet each other often.”

She nodded, then turned toward Ratska.

“I enjoyed talking to you; We’ll resume our conversation as soon as you’re back here,” she giggled, “I hope you can handle your liquor.”

“Of course, I can!” Ratska bowed then he followed me once more.

We went out of the building, but Rauchlim was nowhere to be seen. I checked the clock, and it was five past four.

There are still ten more minutes before Rauchlim arrives...

Ratska walked back and forth, and he scanned the surroundings as he did so. He hummed a cheerful tune, but the sweat that trickled on his face revealed his anxiety.

I opted to sit on the ground, and I tried to replicate my successful attempt at manipulating mana, but I didn’t succeed.

I felt a disturbance in the ambient mana around me, so I opened my eyes with haste. I noticed a thick black cloud of smoke appearing in front of me before it disappeared instantly and a tall Lizardfolk appeared instead of it.

So, if I improve my control over my mana manipulation skills, I might be able to detect attacks and ambushes before they occur... Interesting.

“Jason, my friend! How are you?” said Rauchlim with a smile, “I see that your outfit is somewhat different today; I didn’t take you for the person who’d dress up for meetings.”

He had a purple Hawaiian shirt, and a pair of brown shorts this time. He didn’t even look at Ratska, let alone greet him.

“Your teleporting ability is as interesting as always, Rauchlim. I might need your help one day,” I said as I grinned, “Mind you, this isn’t my official outfit; it’s my casual attire! Anyway, lead the way.”

Ratska squinted his eyes when the Lizardfolk ignored him, but he didn’t react.

The Lizardfolk giggled and gave me a thumbs up, then motioned for us to follow him.

Rauchlim ran at a fast pace, but both of us could keep up with him. He led us through many shortcuts and narrow pathways, but I could tell that we were getting closer to the large palace made out of white Quartz.

After about ten minutes of constant running, he stopped abruptly. There was a large empty area in front of us, and the large white palace was tens of meters away from us.

Ratska started panting when he stopped, so I asked him whether he could keep going or needed a small rest. He reassured me and said that it wasn’t a new experience for him due to his low Endurance stat.

I sighed, then stared at the castle in front of us. It was at least eighty meters tall, and its area was at least ten thousand square meters.

The whole building was made out of white Quartz, except for the windows which were made out of transparent glass. The shape of the castle was rectangular, and it contained four towers.

Rauchlim walked at a brisk pace toward the gate of the building; he was relaxed and whistled on his way there. He motioned for us to follow him, so we did.

More than ten Lizardfolks were standing in front of the gate, and four on top of each tower. Each one of them had full-body Mythril heavy armor; which would have been costly if not for the presence of a source of that metal nearby.

I bought some information about them from the system shop. Their levels hovered around the eighties, but most of them had common class except for the occasional uncommon one.

I am pretty sure that Akeniska had to pay enormous fees to bring these guys along; it's like cheating to bring people this strong to a newly integrated planet...

Most of them had axes, others had swords, and some of them had spears. The common characteristic between their weapons was that all of them were made out of Mythril.

The chief of this Lizardfolk tribe really benefitted from the Mythril, didn't she?

We were ten meters away from the gate, so I increased my pace. Both Rauchlim and Ratska were startled by my actions, as I was ahead of our Lizardfolk companion at this point.

“Wait, Jason,” whispered Rauchlim from behind me, “This isn't how you're supposed to act; you need to feign respect at the very least.”

I pretended not to hear him and kept going.

The gate of the castle was at least ten meters tall, and eight meters wide. It was a double gate, and both of its doors were made out of Mythril.

Although it wasn't the most beneficial way of using the precious metal, at least the gate would withstand strong attacks

long enough for the residents of the castle to prepare a counter-attack or even run away.

The guards in front of it raised their weapons, and they hissed and growled at me when I was five meters away from the gate. Some of them even charged at me, but Rauchlim screamed as soon as they displayed their hostility.

“Don’t! He’s the Lady’s guest, and she’ll be disappointed if your actions cause her trouble,” his voice was stern, and it was different from the way he usually spoke, “Don’t force me to punish you personally.”

Suddenly, all the guards stopped in their tracks, stared at one another, then went back to their original positions.

Good...

I kept walking slowly, and Ratska increased his pace to keep up with me. The guards opened the gate, and I greeted each one of them despite their aggressive behavior against me.

These people might end up as my employees; a little kindness now would pay off later...

We passed through a long and dark tunnel, and I couldn’t see anything around me except for a small light emerging from the opposite end of the tunnel. I could hear Rauchlim whistling behind us, and I estimated the distance between us and him to be around ten meters.

“Is it just me, or did the guards give me disdainful stares?” Ratska whispered, “I might be paranoid, but I am guessing that residents of this city hate Gnomes for some reason.”

“Oh, don’t worry. They looked at me that way too,” I replied.

Still, his suspicions might be accurate; they kept staring at him even after we entered the tunnel...

I walked without uttering more words, and I was able to see the area inside the castle. It was an area full of greenery, and I could hear the water babbling from the fountains.

We went out of the tunnel, and to call this place a garden would’ve been an understatement. The whole ground

underneath our feet was covered in grass.

Many flowers were growing around, and their colors and shapes differed; I couldn't even spot two flowers that looked like copies of one another. There were more than twenty trees, and each one of them bore different fruits.

These plants are all native to Earth, but they aren't supposed to grow in the Sahara's climate...

Many birds chirped, and they flew around us. Most of them were colorful, and they decorated the trees when they landed on top of them.

Suddenly, a Lizardfolk came out of a door on the opposite wall of the garden, and he asked us politely to follow him. He looked like a regular Lizardfolk; his scales were a mix between orange, red, and black, and he had a cap on top of his head and a robe covered the majority of his body.

Interestingly, he didn't have a tail, or he hid it well enough.

"That's the regal speaker," whispered Rauchlim from behind us, "He's the lady's second favorite servant, after me of course."

I nodded, then followed the regal speaker alongside Ratska. We entered through the same door that he came out of, and we found ourselves inside a large room.

More than a hundred guards were sitting in front of the wall opposite us, and each one of them held a Mythril spear. They were physically bigger than the guards of the outer gate, and they looked menacing.

A large throne was in front of us, and a Lizardfolk sat on top of it. I estimated her height to be the same as mine, which was too short for a mature Lizardfolk.

Her body was covered in golden scales, except for her belly and neck which were covered in white ones, and she had crimson irises. She wore a translucent robe, that exposed a lot of skin but obscured the important details.

The regal speaker was in front of the throne, and he was facing us. He received a scroll from Akeniska, and he opened

it and started reading its contents.

“This is Ruzfol, speaking on Lady Akeniska’s behalf,” he said, “This is her formal greeting, and she’ll converse with you later. She thanks Jason Stubbs for honoring our city with his visit; she considers it as an opportunity for growth and cultural exchange with one of the most powerful residents of this planet, if not the strongest outright.”

His voice is coarse, but it’s soothing; I can see why he’s the one making speeches.

I nodded, and Ruzfol kept going.

“We welcome you as an honorary resident of our town; you could build a house wherever you want inside the city’s borders, and you wouldn’t need to pay any taxes or bills whatsoever,” he said, then his voice turned into whispers as he squinted and brought the scroll closer to his face, “and your Dwarven slave too.”

Suddenly, Ratska started screaming, and everyone stared at him.

It seems like this town’s residents truly hate Gnomes; even their leader Akeniska is not afraid of displaying such behavior in front of me...

*

Stella’s projection was floating in front of the Almighty Holy One. He displayed a warm smile, but in reality, he was disappointed with her group’s failure to accomplish the task that he assigned them.

“I am really sorry, master,” Stella bowed and fidgeted with her fingers, “Igor did his best; he even fought enough monsters to evolve his class for the second time to ensure winning against Jason, but it wasn’t enough. I’ll take the matter into my own hands if you’d like me to, although I’m not sure of winning against that ingrate.”

“Don’t worry, everything is under the church’s control. Besides, such a matter will be taken care of by the lesser deities of our organization,” he spoke with a warm voice and activated a skill to make my words soothing to the listener.

“Go back to Earth and train. Give the Divine Remedy to Igor; it’ll alleviate his suffering and cure most of the damage that he received during his unlucky fight. Also, make sure to help Oleg when it comes to leveling up; it’s against my teachings to leave comrades lagging behind. That mortal known as Jason will disappear soon, and you don’t need to concern yourself with him anymore.”

“Understood, master. I’ll do everything within my power to make sure that humans are led to the right path,” Then, her projection disappeared.

The deity eased into his comfy throne and relaxed his posture. He let out a sigh and thought about the possible options to exterminate that bug before he became a genuine obstacle to the Great Church’s assimilation into the newly integrated planet.

He even has a reliable source of exclusive intel; I wonder if the Usurper is feeding him information, and why would he do that?

The deity reminisced about Igor’s fight against Jason, and he felt pissed off once more. The Great Church’s blessed couldn’t injure Jason at all, and he only did so by expending the little divinity that was stored in his Starry Night Sword.

That annoying mortal proved his strength, but the Almighty Holy One still thought he wasn’t a match to the holy blessed ones if the three of them took him on.

However, Stella was leveling up, and she was busy with the guild’s logistics and scouting for potential talent. If the Great Church forced her to chase Jason around, then the Way of The Champion guild’s prospects would take a heavy hit.

Oleg was useless on his own, and he needed power-leveling to keep up with the other two, let alone Jason. He reached his second class evolution a couple of hours ago, and it wasn’t spectacular enough to let him defeat the Usurper’s blessed.

Jason is much stronger than each one of those three, and I am sure he would’ve destroyed Igor if he didn’t have a

companion to worry about during the battle.

The holy deity ordered his underlings to launch investigations on the Gnome that accompanied Jason and found him interesting. He had a useful skillset, and such a person would've been a useful member of Stella's guild, despite being an Illegal Citizen.

Jason might recruit all the talented people on the Church's radar if we didn't do anything about it.

He couldn't see a way for Stella's guild to succeed as long as that annoying person lived. They had to erase Jason Stubbs; it was now or never.

I'll hire a mercenary strong enough to kill Jason without alarming him. There was nothing that money couldn't solve, and the Great Church wouldn't have to deal with the consequences of Jason's death if we played our cards right.

He reached out for a transparent crystal that was floating to his right side and injected divinity inside it. No projections appeared this time, but a feminine voice came out.

“What are your orders, sir?”

“Contact the Intergalactic Troopers,” the Almighty Holy One spoke, “tell them we need them to kill a newbie named Jason Stubbs. Give them the planet's location and the target's coordinates. Offer them a good compensation, and tempt them with intergalactic tax exemptions, as long as they killed that mortal quickly and efficiently.”

We'll see how he handles the newbie killers...

27. Remember

Ratska charged toward Ruzfol, but I held him off as I caught his neck with my left hand. I raised him off the ground, and he thrashed around trying to release himself from my grip.

Silence filled the room, and the guards lowered their spears. They no longer looked at us with disdainful gazes; most of them stared at Akeniska with wide eyes and tilted heads.

The remaining guards grinned as they leered at Ratska, and he cursed them as he screamed at me to let him go.

I didn't take him for the type to get angry, but this isn't the first time that the Lizardfolks treated him badly.

Asides from Quaya, Zinnia, and Gerz, everyone else either called him a dwarf or sneered at him. I wondered about the reason behind their behavior, and I planned on asking the chief about it when the time was suitable.

All of a sudden, Ratska stopped flailing and moving erratically, and he inhaled deeply.

“First, it was the town’s guard calling me a dwarf. Then, this smokey bastard treated me like invisible air,” He shouted, “And now, I am being called a dwarven slave! What the hell! Have some respect! I am not sure why you’re acting this way, but taking out your personal issues with Gnomes on me is a sign of immaturity and lack of foresight.”

Akeniska’s face darkened and when the Gnome spoke coherently, she crossed her legs and fidgeted with her fingers as she waited for him to stop speaking.

Is it just me, or she's disappointed with Ratska's reaction?

I released the grip on the Gnome’s neck and put him on the ground. He thanked me and proceeded to massage his neck as he stared at Akeniska.

She sighed and opened her mouth.

“It’s just a mistake, and you’re overreacting. People like you are slaves in the place that we came from, and my regal speaker didn’t know any better,” her voice was high-pitched, and it was unpleasant, “you’re embarrassing your companion and erroneously framing my guards as racist people, so I’ll make an exception for you. Ruzfol will apologize to you in person later on, and you’ll be given permanent access to an exquisite room in my castle to alleviate your frustration.”

“What a load of bullshit! We certainly had problems with slavery due to our feeble bodies and ineptitude as fighters, but calling us dwarves is an insult to the dreadful history between them and many of our tribes.” shouted Ratska, “More importantly, I am pretty sure your scribe already identified me, so you should have enough information about me not to blunder like that. Besides, stop shifting the blame to that speaker of yours; We all know that you’re the one who wrote the text on the scroll.”

Ruzfol was still holding the scroll with both hands, and he was staring at the text. He didn’t react when Akeniska and Ratska spoke about him; it seemed like he was in a state of trance.

I wasn’t convinced that a servant would do such a brazen thing that might undermine his master’s reputation. I guessed that she wrote that part intentionally, to see whether she could get away with it or not.

Akeniska stared at the regal speaker for a moment, before she sighed and looked at Ratska.

“What do you want?” She tilted her head as she spoke with a stern voice, “keep in mind that I’m only tolerating you because of your relationship with Jason.”

“Apologize,” Ratska crossed his arms, “Now, in front of all your guards.”

“Cocky, aren’t you?” she giggled, “Guards! Eject him from the castle.”

The armored Lizardfolks that were standing behind the throne charged in our direction and most of them hissed as

they did so. Ratska hastily pulled two potions from the bag of holding that was attached to his waist, and he raised both of his arms as if he was about to throw the flasks at the enemies.

Those explosive potions might kill many guards; an unnecessary bloodbath will ensue after that!

Akeniska grinned as if she was interested in the mayhem that would happen, and her speaker hid behind her throne. I realized that the only way to stop the bloodbath was through my interference, even though I didn't want to use my powers due to my body-soul connection issue.

Besides, most of my offensive skills would've caused a lot of inadvertent damage to the surroundings.

This is the best opportunity to try that skill; I hope it doesn't deteriorate my body-soul connection too much...

"[Aura]" I whispered, and black translucent fog surrounded my body. Then, the fog extended to the surroundings until it filled the room; all the Lizardfolks stopped in their tracks and started trembling.

Akeniska's body started quivering, and she spoke softly with a soft voice.

"What a powerful skill...", she said, "you don't see such a thing every day; it seems like you're slightly better than other Initial Returnees when they were at your level. Please, turn off your aura; it's suffocating me, and the guards are losing consciousness already."

Many Lizardfolks fell unconscious to the ground, others huddled toward each other, and some of them rolled into balls to protect the vital parts of their bodies.

Oh, it's working better than I expected!

These guards had levels in the eighties, which was impressive even though most of their classes were of the common grade. I didn't expect my aura to have such a staggering effect, but I wasn't going to complain about a positive thing.

The Lizardfolks looked miserable, but I didn't turn off my aura yet.

“Apologize to Ratska first,” I said, “Then I'll turn off my skill.”

Akeniska clicked her tongue and stared at Ratska for a couple of seconds.

“We're sorry for the inconvenience,” she whispered.

It wasn't a perfect apology, but it was good enough.

I turned off my aura but didn't let my guard down. There was a high chance for the guards to attack us once more, and I needed to be ready in case such a scenario occurred.

As I expected, some of the Lizardfolks held their spears and resumed charging at us. However, Akeniska held her hand and shouted.

“Stop the assault,” she ordered, “I need all the guards to leave, except for Rauchlim. You should also leave, Ruzfol.”

Perfect...

Then, she turned toward me and spoke.

“Thank you for keeping your word,” she spoke with a softer voice; it wasn't as jarring as her previous one, “What is it that you're seeking by visiting our humble city? Is it wealth, resources, or even women?”

“A city whose gates are made out of Mythril isn't exactly humble, is it?” I shook my head, “No, I came for something else entirely.”

“Maybe you'd like exotic experiences?” She asked as she tilted her head, “Follow me. As for the Gnome, Rauchlim will take him to his room; don't worry about his safety, I wouldn't risk making you my enemy anyway.”

I looked at Ratska, and he gave me a thumbs up and winked. He showed me one of the destructive potions that he was about to throw earlier, then he hid it back inside the bag of holding.

It seems like he can take care of himself...

His mood visibly improved after Akeniska's apology, and he hummed a tune as he followed Rauchlim through a door in the opposite wall.

I followed Akeniska as she entered through another door that was adjacent to the previous one, then we ascended a set of spiral stairs.

"I am sure you'll like what I prepared for you..." she whispered.

I raised an eyebrow but followed her nonetheless. There wasn't much light in this area, so I could only rely on my [Flawed State of Being] skill to lead me upstairs.

Akeniska opened a door, and light passed through it. She entered and motioned for me to follow her.

I found myself in an exquisite room. It was wide, with an area of at least one hundred square meters. The ceiling was decorated with gems of different shapes and colors, creating mosaic imagery. The floor was made out of white tiles, and they remained unblemished even after we stepped on them.

There wasn't much inside the room. A king-sized bed, two large tables, and a small nightstand. There was a door on the left side of the king-sized bed, and a large balcony to our right side.

Akeniska motioned toward one of the room's corners; a table was there, and on top of it was a bag of holding.

"I hope you like that gift," she whispered, "I can give you more; different things too. Just ask, and I'll try to satisfy your wishes."

I walked toward the table and picked up the bag of holding. It had a volume of about a thousand cubic meters, and it was filled to the brim with Mythril nuggets.

Not a bad quantity, if I was a regular adventurer that is...

"You know that mining a resource without an official license can get you in deep trouble, right?" I asked Akeniska as I turned around.

She flinched and looked away from me.

“We came early to this area, and we even had to pay extra fees to pick an area that had a reserve of valuable resources close by,” she whispered, “It’s not like we got it for free; we paid a lot and my citizens are working day and night to extract it. I can give you ten times this quantity, so how about you turn a blind eye, and vouch for us among other Earthlings for about a month? We won’t bother you after that, and we’ll prepare more Mythril for you during that month.”

I pretended to think about her offer for about a minute, but I already decided not to accept it; it wasn’t what I came here for, and it wasn’t enticing compared to what I could get if I hired them.

I clicked my tongue and shook my head.

“I’m sorry, but your offer isn’t enticing enough for anyone to entangle themselves in this illegal business,” I grinned, “Don’t try to increase the offer, as I didn’t come here to get such a thing. I came to cooperate with you.”

“Cooperate?” she tilted her head, “Can you elaborate, please?”

“I need experienced blacksmiths, and I’ve heard that the majority of this city’s citizens were masters of the craft,” I said, “Is it true that they crafted weapons for the fighters of a planet on the brink of its second breakout? That rumor seemed wild; such people shouldn’t even be here on earth unless someone had connections and bribed powerful people to bring them along.”

Not only were the blacksmiths too skilled for such a newly integrated planet, but even the fighters and the regular citizens were also over-leveled for the threats of the current Earth.

These people came from a world that had the system for quite a while, and they planned to use their advantage to thrive on our planet.

Even a poor gal like Zinnia who couldn’t afford the Translation skill had a decent level compared to most Earthlings once they emerged out of the tutorial...

I stared at Akeniska, and she was still silent. She closed her eyes, then clasped her hands together.

“Competition on advanced planets is fierce, and a new city lord like me can’t make a name for herself there. Many powerful people immigrated into my city looking for success, but we stagnated on our previous planet Sihlium.” she whispered, “Newly integrated planets are filled with opportunities, and I took a gamble. I borrowed a lot of mana stones and did what I needed to do to bring all of my city’s citizens along with me. The Mythril is our only hope; we might be able to pay the debt if we make good weapons using it and sell them to rich Earthlings.”

I held the bag of holding and moved closer to Akeniska. I gave it to her, then I spoke.

“Too bad, there is no way for you to take your bribe. The contents of this bag of holding are nothing to me by the way,” I said, “I opened a guild, and I want all of the town’s citizens to immigrate to its eventual location. I’ll provide the resources needed to craft weapons, and we’ll discuss the remuneration later.”

“Oh,” she opened her eyes widely, and hissed softly, “This is too much to take in; I’ll need more details. Besides, I should consult with the citizens on this matter because it concerns them all.”

“Of course, feel free to ask anything,” I said as smiled, “You see, my guild isn’t just a regular one. We’ll have a monopoly over certain potions, and all the citizens will be able to buy them at discounted prices if they join my guild.”

“What kind of potion are you talking about?” she asked. Her tail moved around quickly, and her eyes were opened widely.

“Before that, I need to use the bathroom,” I said, “Where can I find it?”

My bladder was hurting ever since we arrived at the castle, and this was the best chance for me to empty it;

Besides, I had to check the descriptions of those potions before showing them to this woman.

Akeniska motioned toward a door that was to the left of the King-sized bed. I thanked her and entered the bathroom.

There was a large bathtub to my left size; big enough to be a swimming pool according to earth's standards. The toilet was to my right side, and I quickly discharged my bladder's contents there.

I can't believe that I didn't urinate for more than two days; the system changed our bodies a lot...

Then, I took two potions out of my storage ring. The flasks were similar to the ones that contained the regular potions, but the contents differed.

The two flasks held a dark green liquid and a navy blue one respectively. The liquids twinkled when I exposed them to the light that came through the bathroom's small window, and the phenomenon was pleasing to the eye.

I was about to examine them, but I heard whispers in the bathroom. I quickly hid the potions, in case I got ambushed by strong people.

I looked around, but I didn't see anything. However, I felt my ears perking up when the voice whispered my name.

Hold on a minute, I've heard that voice somewhere before...

Then, the voice became loud enough for me to hear without concentrating too much.

"You need to remember, Jason," he whispered, "The threads of fate are finally tying up, and everything will depend on you."

I traced the voice's source carefully until I found myself in front of the bathroom mirror. It was three meters tall, and two meters wide, and I could see the image of a cloaked figure inside it.

I looked back at the space behind me, and the cloaked figure wasn't there. It was as if the mysterious person only

existed inside the mirror.

The figure had a large gray robe that covered most of its body, and a dark hood that revealed none of his facial features. He wore thick black boots and dark chainmail gloves.

The outfit was similar to something that I'd seen before, and I remembered it vividly.

He's that 'Albert' that I met in that dream that I had during my first class evolution; why is he appearing now of all times?

"I assume you're one of the Glitchers," I said, "What do you want from me? Can't you explain the situation first?"

"I'll be there when you least expect me," his voice echoed, "that's when you'll need us the most. Remember, nothing is free in this world."

I blinked, and the Glitcher was already gone.

28. Whispers

I was alone inside the bathroom; I sighed.

Now I am left with more mysteries to solve.

I stood in front of the mirror and stared at it for more than a minute, but nothing was weird about it. I looked at its description, but the system said it was a regular mirror.

If the system was telling the truth, then ‘Albert’ the Glitcher was on Earth.

Maybe he can access the mirror from distance and use it as a medium to video-call people?

I wondered why he wasted his time visiting this planet only to act mysteriously; he could’ve explained the goal of their organization or the reason why they told me not to trust Loki all that much. Realizing that I could do nothing about this, I shook off my thoughts about the subject and put it on my back-burner

I stared at my potions for a moment, then examined them; their descriptions cost me two thousand tutorial points each.

[Permanent Vitality Potion: Troll Ver.]	(Uncommon)
<p>This is a potion made by the hands of a skilled Gnome who happened upon its original recipe.</p> <p>Using Troll’s Vitality essence as the base material and other valuable catalysts and stabilizers, he altered the original recipe and successfully created an original brew!</p> <p>The vital mana of the Trolls is still abundant in this potion, and the other components magnify its effects.</p> <p>-This potion increases VIT permanently (+4)</p>	

Warning: it's advised not to consecutively drink too many potions of this kind.

[Permanent Magic Potion: Troll Ver.]

(Uncommon)

This is a potion made by the hands of a skilled Gnome who happened upon its original recipe.

Using Troll's Vitality essence as the base material and other valuable catalysts and stabilizers, he altered the original recipe and successfully created an original brew!

The pure mana of the Trolls is still abundant in this potion, and the other components magnify its effects.

-This potion increases MAG permanently (+4)

Warning: it's advised not to consecutively drink too many potions of this kind.

It's four times stronger than the regular essences! I can price it even higher than I thought I would.

I suspected that the potions differed in potency, so I checked them one by one. To my surprise and joy, I found them all to be as good as the first ones that I examined.

I grinned and put all the potions back in the storage ring. I decided to give Akeniska one potion of each kind as a freebie and to tempt her with more of them when she convinced the citizens to immigrate to a place more suitable for humans to live.

The Sahara has the potential to be a good spot for a guild, but I can't live in a stranded place forever.

I still didn't decide upon the exact location for my guild, but the best place that came to mind was Europe. It connected two other continents, and it was a strategically important place for the events that would unfold in the future.

Besides, the first breakout would happen in less than a year and take place in southern America. The dungeons in that continent would implode, allowing the monsters inside them to escape. I couldn't risk building my businesses there; as the ensuing chaos ruined both of the American continents.

Hundreds of millions of humans died before the stronger ones found a solution; it was a disaster that brought despair to many people's hearts, including mine, despite not being directly affected by the consequences.

Now that I had enough strength to affect large-scale events, it was one of my priorities to prevent the breakout, both to preserve the human race and to help Earth prepare for the coming breakouts.

The meeting of the top rankers would reveal the conditions to prevent the breakout, but I don't know them yet, and I am not sure why Stella and the others couldn't do anything about that event.

I could only imagine the destruction that the coming breakouts would cause. The foreign races spread rumors that the second breakout was at least five times as destructive as the first one, but I died before witnessing it.

Still, I must first focus on the present and improve my guild.

I put the potions back inside the storage ring and went out of the bathroom. Akeniska was sitting on the bed, and she looked at me the moment I opened the door.

"Hello," she said, "Did you prepare the items you told me about?"

I grinned, then pulled the potions from my bag of holding; one of each type, then threw them next to her on the king-sized

bed. She held them and stared at them for a couple of seconds, before opening her eyes widely.

So, she can identify items herself... I am curious about her class...

I decided to postpone buying information about her class; the time wasn't suitable for that and I couldn't afford to be distracted.

"How...Just... it shouldn't be possible for someone like you to have this," she stuttered, "Where did you get this from? What do you want in return for these two?"

"I have more of these, and I can create an endless number of them," I grinned, "Consider these two potions as gifts; you can drink them to try their effects, or you can give them to an expendable servant if you think it's too good to be true."

She stared at the flasks as she held them in her hands, then put them carefully on the nightstand.

"Thank you for the gift, Jason. It's generous to give me such a valuable potion," she spoke, "I'll give them to one of my promising guards later, as it would be a waste for someone like me to drink them. You opened my eyes, and now I realize that we should cooperate. I'll make sure everyone in the town agrees to immigrate to your eventual guild location, just give me a couple of days to accomplish it. You can enjoy yourself in the meantime; I am sure our city has many things that you've never seen before."

Then, she extended her right hand toward me. I grinned and shook her hand. Her scales felt solid and firm, but they were smoother than glass.

"I am excited to work with you," I said, "However, I advise you to have more respect for Ratska; he's the one who brewed those potions. If you cross the line and hurt the people that I care about, you'll end up begging me to kill you."

Her eyelids twitched for a moment, but she recovered before her surprise became too apparent.

"Understood, Mr. Jason," she nodded hastily; I could feel her hand trembling, "I'll make sure to apologize sincerely to

your friend. I really hope the relationship between you and me ends up being fruitful for both of us.”

I smiled, then walked away from her. I was headed toward the room’s exit when she called me once more.

“Mr. Jason,” she said, “I would’ve like to offer you a room in my castle, but none of my other rooms are good enough for you, except this one. You could spend the night here if you’d like; I am excited to hear about your adventures, and I’ll tell you more about the Lizardfolks’ culture.”

I doubt that telling stories would be the only thing happening in this room later; she even tried to justify asking me to sleep with her.

It certainly was an interesting chance to try a new experience, but I couldn’t be complacent at this point. The Great Church might send another hooligan for me, and I’d better keep my mind sharp.

“We’ll see about that later,” I said as I waved my hand at her, “I’ll go to the Garden; there is something that I need to do.”

I wanted to practice my mana control, as it was the only way for me to learn more about my latent ability. I had a hunch that knowing more about my ‘Legion’ would help me unravel the mysteries of the Glitchers.

Besides, I might be able to learn more interesting information if I could meet the Jasons once more.

I opened the room’s door when its handle was within my reach and descended the spiral stairs. I entered the castle’s hallway and found Ratska standing there talking to a Lizardfolk.

“Hello, Zinnia,” I waved my hand, “How are you?”

“I am good,” she spoke, “I am glad you’re doing well. I came to the castle as soon as Quaya told me that Rauchlim took you here; I was curious about the outcome of your meeting with our Lady, and I wanted to chat a bit.”

“She surprised me,” spoke the Gnome as he smiled, “I was standing in the hallway when I heard a commotion in the garden. I went out and found the guards trying to get her to leave the castle, but she was adamant that she wanted to meet ‘her saviors’. Rauchlim allowed her to enter after I asked him to.”

I scanned the hallway for Rauchlim, and he was standing next to the throne with a small book in his right arm. He waved at me as soon as he saw me, then he went back to reading his book.

I told Ratska and Zinnia that I was going to the Garden to train, then left them. They seemed excited to speak with one another, but I couldn’t understand why they kept arguing about the superior race; Lizardfolks or Gnomes.

Of course, it’s humans, right?

I smiled at my immaturity; I thought that the latest events jaded me, but I was still the old silly Jason.

I exited the hallway through its exit and found myself inside the garden once more. I walked for a while until I reached the largest tree that I could see, and sat beside it.

It was about twenty meters tall, and it cast a large shadow on its surrounding area. The heat of the scorching sun didn’t bother me much, but I appreciated the cold air around the gigantic tree.

I sat there, close my eyes, and focused.

Ambient mana was moving around me, and the fog was thicker than the one I witnessed inside the inn.

I wonder why this place has a richer mana concentration...

I concentrated once more, trying to empty my mind and avoid scattered thoughts. The mana was clearer than ever, and I felt like I could control it somewhat.

I tried the trick that Loki told me about; to control all the mana that I could feel. My perception of mana allowed me to clearly visualize the ambient mana within a radius of thirty

meters away from me at most, and the range was already better than it was at the start of my training.

I willed the mana to move, and it moved to my surprise. For some reason that I didn't know, the mana in this area felt much easier to control than before.

The ambient mana within half a meter away from me could be controlled with ease, but my control worsened the farther the distance between me and the mana.

Still, the quantity of mana that I could control was much better than my expectations. I tried to move it around me in swirling patterns, and I succeeded in that.

After that, I willed the mana to interact with the strange tattoo on my back. As soon as they made contact with one another, I could feel the mana disappearing 'into' the tattoo and that experience was somewhat painful for me.

Suddenly, I started losing control of the ambient mana, and the fog that I accumulated around the tattoo was about to disperse. I clenched my jaw and pushed all the mana violently into the tattoo.

The pain was incredible even with my high Endurance, but it disappeared after about a second when my control of the ambient mana slipped away.

I feel disoriented and dizzy, and I fell to the ground feeling weakness all over my body.

Then, I heard whispers.

29. Me and Myself

I tried hard to keep my eyes open but to no avail. The drowsiness was overpowering, and I felt my consciousness slipping away from me.

Then, I opened my eyes, only to find myself in a dark room.

I was staring at the floor from above, and my body had an ethereal form as it floated freely.

Just like the previous times when I used my latent ability...

I looked around the room, and the surroundings were way more visible than usual. For the first time, I could see all the seats inside the room and I could see the details of the floor and the walls. I was surprised to see the room much smaller than I expected it to be; there weren't enough chairs to accommodate all the Jasons that I met the previous time.

Maybe the mana that I injected into the tattoo wasn't enough for the Latent Ability to work to its full extent.

The floor was covered in gray tiles, and they looked pale due to the accumulated dust.

However, most of the chairs were empty, except for one near the distant wall of the room. A Jason was sitting there.

There was a crown on top of his head, a cape around his neck, and he wore the legendary grade thermal suit which hid most of his skin under its black fabric.

He was fidgeting with his fingers and looking at the floor with a deadpan face. He must've noticed my stares; he turned toward me and greeted me cheerfully.

“Oh, Jason!” he said, “How are you? What brought you here?”

“Shit's not as good as it could be, but I am managing. How about you, Jason?” I replied, “Well, I've been training my mana control, and a chance to use my latent ability presented

itself to me. Something's strange though, why are you the only one here?"

Last time, there were tens of Jasons if not hundreds; I wasn't sure about their exact number due to the dim lighting...

The other Jason sighed and stood up, then he walked away from his chair.

"I am not sure if you understand what a prisoner feels like, but it's a dreadful experience in short," he spoke with a smirk, "In the society that I came from, the laws became stricter due to the invasion of an oppressing race of humanoid octopi; humans are arrested for the slightest of mistakes against the Rebuilders, as they call themselves."

Oh! So, it's criminal Jason... Too bad that the Jasons look the same even when it comes to their clothes; I can't tell them apart at all...

I didn't see myself doing anything extreme enough to get me in prison, and I was curious about the experiences that lead Jason to end up in prison.

Moreover, I wanted to know more about him to see how we differed from one another. He might end up being helpful, whether through advice or as an external source of valuable information.

"It feels painful to see myself suffering such a fate; you have my condolences," I said with a sad tone of voice. It was hard to see oneself suffering from an external point of view, no matter what he did to get himself into this trouble. "How did you get into prison?"

He sighed, then his voice got soft as his eyes lost some of their focus momentarily before regaining it.

"Our world already had the system by the time I was born, so I didn't have to go through the tutorial," he said, "The class that I gained was an uncommon one called Karma Burglar. It gave me stronger skills than other classes of a similar grade, albeit at an annoying caveat."

Then, he stopped speaking, as if he was thinking about the words that he ought to say.

His class seems interesting though... I wonder how it correlated with his 'crime'.

“What’s the problem with your class?” I asked when the silence took more than ten seconds.

“Leveling up was hard; nearly impossible due to the social structure,” he muttered, “I had to steal people’s possessions, and proclaim that I was the one who stole them. Each successful steal gave me a lot of EXP, but I gained no EXP from stealing more items from the same person. My parents, my six friends, and some strangers were the only people that played along with my ‘farce’, but I ran out of willing people quickly.”

“Couldn’t you pay people to help you level up?” I said. Money could solve all problems, and I knew that many people would be willing to help him for minimal compensation.

“I didn’t care about leveling up when I was younger; little did I know that I was hindering my potential career and future. Only when I became twelve years old did I start taking things more seriously,” he added, “However, my parents died when I was sixteen years old, and everything went downhill after that. I wasted my remaining money to get people to help me level up, and I became penniless before I even knew it. I ended up stealing drugs using my improved thievery skills and consumed them instead of selling them to make money. After that, I attempted to murder a prick when I was still high; little did I know that he had a much higher level than mine.”

What a poor lad... He reminds me of myself somewhat.

“How was your life before our parents died?” I asked. I was curious about his past, and how it differed from mine. Besides, learning more about him would allow me to consider him as an individual rather than a different version of myself.

He gave me a short summary of the most important points of his life, and they were the same as mine. We both went into the same elementary school, studied under the same teachers, and even had the same friends.

The main differences between us were the date of the system's arrival, an alien invasion, and our classes differed too.

It seems like we're rather similar to one another; it's crazy how he got into prison and I worked as a butcher after our parents' death.

Suddenly, I felt disoriented, and the surroundings became hazy. The other Jason sighed and scratched his cheek.

"I really would've wanted to talk to you more," he said, "But it seems like the circuit wasn't powered up well enough. We'll see each other soon, take care and be selective with the people you trust."

I felt my consciousness fading away, and I heard some people speaking when I regained it.

"Jason.."

"Jason..."

"Wake up..."

Then, one of them slapped me lightly on my face, causing me to regain my consciousness fully. There were two speakers; Zinnia and Ratska, and they were staring at my face from a close distance.

They jumped slightly when I opened my eyes suddenly, but they recovered from the surprise soon enough.

"Oh, Jason," Ratska was smiling, "Why are you taking a nap here of all places?"

"Yeah, right," Zinnia added, "You could've asked the chief to provide you with an empty room."

Well, I didn't expect to be able to activate my latent ability out of nowhere; it was meant to be training for mana control...

I kicked up and landed on the balls of my feet. Then, I patted both of their heads and told them to take it easy and that I was fine.

"How about you stop treating me like a child for once; you're embarrassing me," Ratska furrowed his eyebrows, "I

am as old as you, if not slightly younger...”

I'll be twenty years old in a couple of months, and Ratska was nineteen at this point... He has a point.

“Ah, don’t sweat the details,” I waved my hand at him, “I am treating you as a friend, a friend!”

“Well, Ratska,” Zinnia said as she put her hands on her hips, “You have a baby’s face, a child’s body, and you throw tantrums as any child would. Besides, we get along well, and I am only nine years old!”

“Hell no! I came here to check up on you, Jason, but I wouldn’t have come if I knew this would happen,” said Ratska as he stomped away, “Now, someone ten years my junior is making fun of me! What a world we live in.”

Zinnia and I looked at the Gnome’s back as he left. He went inside the castle hallway and slammed the door behind him.

“I think you went too far,” I told the little Lizardfolk, “He’s insecure about his height and child-like features.”

“Oh,” said Zinnia as she fidgeted with her fingers and stared at her feet, “I thought he was cute, but I might’ve overdone it a little... I’d better apologize to him before it’s too late.”

Then, she ran after him.

It's interesting how Zinnia enjoys Ratska's company unlike the other Lizardfolks; I wonder why they hate Gnomes all that much...

I was alone once more, so I stretched my arms and legs. I thought about sitting once more to practice my mana control, but I felt mentally tired after using my latent ability; Legion.

Still, I need to use my time productively...

A good objective would be to dig up the dinosaur bones of the immediate surroundings and convert them into shop points. The system shop contained some special stats, but they were expensive as hell and I couldn’t buy any of them unless I had at least five hundred thousand points.

Which is nearly double my current shop points...

I thought about Ratska's safety, and whether it was okay to leave him alone or not. I didn't want to protect him too much; he evidently hates to be treated like a child.

Even with Igor's last ambush, Ratska didn't get injured at all. There was a good chance that the Great Church investigated his background and found out about his potential as a potion brewer.

At most, they would kidnap him; it would be counter-productive for them to kill him.

On the other hand, Lizardfolks weren't trustworthy, especially with the blatant display of disrespect that I witness upon entering the castle's hallway for the first time.

However, Akeniska knew his value at this point; I made sure to tell her that he was the one who brewed the potions to ensure his safety among the Lizardfolk. The chief wouldn't dare kill him; she might seduce him or try to make a secretive deal with him at most.

I can deal with that; he's an independent person, and I should treat him as such... Even if he leaves, I can always find other venues to make money and he'll come back when he realizes the advantage of being my companion...

With a sigh, I took off my cape and crown and put them inside the storage ring. I went out of the castle and started running toward the town's exit.

The two guards looked startled to see me running toward the exit, but they didn't prevent me from leaving the town.

I didn't want to use my skills at all, but Loki said that I could use them at least four more times before my body-soul connection worsened.

The special stat that I have in mind is rather impressive, and I believe it to be worth the risk that I am taking by using my skills.

I kept walking away from the town and looked around me to ascertain that I was in an isolated location; I didn't want

anyone to see me pulling out Earth's observational shard. There was nothing around me except sand, but those speaking Lizards enjoyed hiding inside sand dunes sometimes.

When I was sure that I was the only sapient creature in the vicinity, I pulled the shard and commanded the system to show me a map of the location of all the dinosaur bones in my vicinity.

A map showed up in front of me, and there were many red spots on it signifying the locations of bones.

“[It's fine!]” I shouted; people would've called me a lunatic if they saw me shouting the names of my skills, but it wasn't as embarrassing as before.

Flames enveloped my body, and I felt more powerful than ever. Then, I started running toward the closest location of the dinosaur bones.

I rotated my body like a drill and dug into the sand to find the bone that I'd been looking for. It was a large skull of a creature that had four horns and a wide jaw; I converted it into shop points immediately.

The observational shard was still within my closed left fist; it resisted the highest of my temperatures which impressed me.

I followed the map's direction and found more spots that contained dinosaur bones of varying sizes and shapes. I even encountered some Ghibli Fennecs along the road and murdered them all.

It was nighttime when I finished converting the bones in a radius of eighty kilometers away from the town; I checked the clock and it was a quarter past nine.

Killing all those Ghibli Fennecs allowed me to level up once more; my current level was eighty.

I'd better go back to leveling after I finish setting up my guild; Stella's companions are probably well ahead of me, but I can't let the gap widen.

I sighed; my current priority was to buy a useful stat from the system shop.

Shop window:	[Current points: 748329 points]
-What are you looking to buy? [...]	

“Show me the three cheapest stats available,” I said.
Now, which one should I pick first?

30. Empath's Dilemma

A list of options appeared in front of me.

[Sleaziness]	650000 points
[Intuition]	750000 points
[Empathy]	980000 points

Just like in my past life; Sleaziness is still available!

In my past life, there was no way for me to acquire so many points, but I still had fantasies about filling my status screen with some of these stats.

I opened their descriptions one by one; I already bought information about them in my past life because of my curiosity.

Besides, each of their descriptions only cost me fifty points.

[Sleaziness] (SLZ)

Just like a street rat, someone who has this stat will thrive in criminal environments through illegal jobs and black hat schemes.

Each point in this stat allows you to spot great opportunities that others missed because of ethical restrictions. When the stat is high enough, you'll have a mindset that puts the greatest pragmatists to shame.

However, it's still within your hands to choose whether you make use of those opportunities or not.

(Max: 50 points)

[Intuition] (INU)

Sometimes, things happen, and you realize their cause without even thinking about it.

Some people call this a gut feeling, and others call it intuition.

Each point in this stat increases your capacity to reach correct deductions even when you're lacking key information. You'll know it when the intuition strikes true, trust me.

Don't put all your eggs into this basket; it might lead you astray if you're lacking too much information.

(Max: 30 points)

[Empathy] (EMP)

People have feelings.

I know. It sounds insane, but it's the truth.

Most people act based on their feelings, even when they don't know it. Thus, it's much easier to sway them to your side through motivation rather than logic.

Choose this stat at your own risk; Empaths tend to turn out empty on the inside.

(Max: 70 points)

Based on my current points, I could only buy the first and second options. However, I could always search for more

dinosaur bones; the price wasn't too big of an issue.

Sleaziness seemed like a decent option, and it had an average stat cap which meant that its effect will be somewhat noticeable.

The world will become a dark place filled with despair once the humans are back, so I'd need all the help that I could get to prevent myself from lagging behind my rivals and wanna-be supervillains.

Moreover, it's the cheapest option, and I'll be left with some points to save up for future purchases.

Intuition seemed good on paper, and it could help in a pinch. Nonetheless, it had a low cap, which meant that its effect wouldn't be as obvious as I'd like it to be.

I've heard about some people that acquired this stat through a class evolution, but it wasn't good enough to distinguish them from people who didn't have it. The main reason was its variable nature.

It remains an option, but I don't have enough points to justify buying a situational stat.

Empathy was the best option out of the three, but it was much more expensive. Its effect was great, and it could synergize well with my charisma stat.

Its maximum cap was quite good for its relatively cheap price. As a result, its effect will be much more pronounced.

I contemplated the matter for a couple of minutes; the most practical options were Sleaziness and Empathy, but I preferred the latter.

Sigh... It seems like I'd need to look for more dinosaur bones...

It was already nighttime; the sky was clear and the moon was looming over the area. The climate was cold, and no sounds could be heard in such a place.

The silence was crushing, and I felt the solitude for the first time in quite a while. The people that I enjoyed spending time with in my past life were most likely still inside their

tutorial iterations; I'd need to wait eight more days to meet them.

I hope I can rebuild my friendship with them...

I sighed and tightened my left hand's grip on the observational shard. Then, I commanded the system to show me the locations of dinosaur bones within a radius of two hundred kilometers away from me.

There were so many fossils available for me to extract, and three of them were true gems. The map depicted them as larger-than-usual red dots.

It'll take me many hours to convert most of these fossils into shop points...

I sighed; I didn't know what Loki meant by using my skills 'four times at most' before problems happened, as he didn't explain much.

Still, taking risks to acquire more strength is better than cowering in fear and hoping no one surpasses me...

I ignited my body and ran toward the closest fossil that the map showed.

Extracting fossils, converting them, then pinpointing the next target. It was a chain of monotonous tasks at this point, but I did them without complaints because the reward was worth it.

After about two hours of labor, I heard a faint ringing sound coming from my storage ring, so I took a look to identify its source.

It was my yellow communication crystal; Ratska was calling.

I inject a meager amount of mana into the device and greeted the caller.

"Hey Ratska," I said with a cheerful voice, "Are they going to kill you? Did you get ambushed?"

"No!" he shouted, "Your excursion is taking longer than I expected it to! We've had a party, and we played for a while,

yet you're nowhere to be seen."

I took a look at the system's clock; it was three in the morning, but I still didn't have enough shop points to buy the stat that I wanted.

"Don't worry; I have some personal business that I need to take care of," I said, "I'll be back in an hour at most."

"All right then," he muttered, "Oh, right! Make sure to come directly to Akeniska's castle; they're hosting a party and it's still ongoing. You might catch up with us if you return fast enough, and the chief said that she prepared good rooms for each one of us; better than the ones at Quaya's guild."

"Okay, I'll try to finish my tasks faster," I said, "See you later."

Then, I injected some mana into the crystal to hang up on him.

Party? Ratska and Akeniska? It seems like their relationship improved a lot during my absence.

I didn't expect such a thing to happen so fast, but it wasn't too farfetched now that the Lizardfolk chief realized the value of that Gnome, regardless of their past problems with his kin.

Now that I remember; I still haven't asked Akeniska about the reason behind their hate for Gnomes.

I sighed and shook off the thoughts. I had to focus on my task if I wanted to go back home fast enough.

I increased the temperature of my flames to three thousand Kelvin, which gave me a huge physical power boost.

The sand wasn't that hard to penetrate when my temperature was high enough, and the tunnels that I left after drilling through the ground were a sight to behold. The molten sand turned into glass, and it reflected the moonlight to make for a dazzling sight.

Still, this is another environmental chaos that my system skills caused; I wonder what people's reaction to these glass tunnels would be like...

I kept going until I found a large femur bone that belonged to a creature with a level of over three hundred. I converted it into shop points, and it gave me a hundred fifty thousand points on its own.

Jackpot!

I opened the shop window once more.

Shop window:	[Current points: 1078564 points]
-What are you looking to buy? [...]	

“I’d like to buy the Empathy stat,” I mumbled.

Then, I heard a ringing sound and a system screen appeared in front of me saying that the purchase was successful. I had nearly a hundred thousand shop points left, and saving them up for a future purchase was my best option.

I opened my status screen and found the new stat with zero points invested in it under the luck stat. I was about to invest seventy stat points in it but decided to wait until I was close to living creatures to see the difference that the stat made in real-time as it increased.

“[Zoom],” I whispered as I imagined Akeniska’s castle garden. It was time for me to go back, and I hoped to join the party before everyone went to sleep.

My eyes were closed, and I felt light dizziness as usual. For a moment, my legs left the ground, and I floated amidst the trip. I was curious about the way that teleportation abilities worked; it was a subject that commoners had no right to know in my past life.

I opened my eyes; I was inside Akeniska’s castle.

However, the silence was eerie. Ratska said that a party was going on, so I expected to hear people celebrating loudly

at the very least.

I walked at a fast pace toward the castle hallway, but I didn't find anyone. Well, anyone alive to be precise.

More than twenty Lizardfolk corpses were laying on the ground, and the floor was covered in a thick red liquid.

All of them had full body armor; they were castle guards. I leaned closer to one of the dead creatures; his throat was slit, but he didn't even have a surprised look on his face. Most of the other guards had the same kind of look on their faces; only the ones furthest away from the hallway entrance had their eyes wide open.

Suddenly, I heard the door that led to the upper floor opening; some guards came out and they shouted.

"Halt!" There were three of them, and they trembled as they spoke. As soon as they recognized me, they sighed and spoke in a normal voice.

"We're sorry for the ugly sight, Mr. Jason," they said, "The enemy was overwhelming, and he plowed through our colleagues as if they were wet paper. We decided that our chief's safety came first, so we hid alongside her in the basement."

I noticed that they didn't mention Ratska; it was suspicious.

"Where is Ratska?" I spoke, "I hope he's hiding with your chief."

All of a sudden, they lowered their heads and stared at the floor underneath them. Their reaction was very unsettling, and I had to grit my teeth to prevent myself from shouting at them.

I waited for about a minute before one of them spoke.

"There were three attackers," he said, "They were after the Gnome, and they promised not to hurt us if we backed off and let them do their job."

These motherfuckers...

I moved slowly toward the guard that spoke and punched him in the neck. His body flew away, and it struck the wall.

“Please...,” the fallen Lizardfolk mumbled, “We had orders, we’re just the lady’s employees. They told her some stuff; she knows where they took him! All I know is that he’s just a hostage, at least that’s what the green Warhoog said.”

Green Warhoog? Who the hell is that?

I suspected that Ratska got taken by the Great Church’s underlings, but it seems like either it wasn’t them or they had assistance from a third party.

Either way, my best option was to find Akeniska and ask her for whatever information she knew.

“Where the fuck is your chief,” I blurted, “I need to have a chat with her.”

However, no one replied, and they kept their heads lowered. I scoffed and opened the door that led to the upper floor.

I ascended hastily and opened the door to the room that she showed me earlier in the morning. The door was unlocked; she didn’t even bother to lock it despite the danger that was looming over the place.

She was sitting on her bed, staring at one of the permanent potions that I gave her earlier this day. I scanned the room; no guards were watching over the chief, as if she felt safe all alone.

Maybe Rauchlim is hiding somewhere close to her...

She turned toward me and smiled. Then, she hid the potion inside her storage ring and stared at me.

“You didn’t kill any one of those three guards,” she whispered, “This saves me the time of explaining how the situation has absolutely nothing to do with us. We tried to protect the Gnome, we really did. Rauchlim beat the two humans, but the green Warhoog was too strong for him.”

The green Warhoog again...

“We’ll talk about your failure of protecting my comrade later. Now, you’ll tell me everything that the ‘Green Warhoog’ told you,” I tried to speak as calmly as I could, but my voice was still very loud, “I am not a very patient man.”

“All right, no need to use violence,” she sighed, “He said that his name was Beliat and that you did something to offend one of his clients. The humans alongside him suggested that he takes the Gnome as a hostage, so he did.”

“What did the humans look like?” I asked.

“One of them was tall with black spiky hair with burn marks covering his body, and he had a large sword. The other looked like a child, but he had the eyes of a maniac, he was short and baldheaded.” She replied as she made eye contact with me.

Those descriptions are very fitting of Igor and Oleg; respectively.

“Did the Warhoog mention anything about the location of the hostage?” I asked once more.

I knew that the Warhoog was baiting me by taking Ratska as a hostage and that they most likely wouldn’t hurt him due to his objective value as a brewer of potions, but I hated being treated like a doormat.

Leaving the Gnome to his fate was the safest option for me, but I was an honorable person. Ratska was one of the few people that treated me with respect, and I considered him my friend despite our professional relationship.

This is it; I’ll destroy the Warhoog and all those fuckers.

“He left you this crystal,” she said as she handed me a small white gem, “He said that Ratska was already on a different planet and that you had ten hours at most before he got brainwashed.”

I took the gem from her hand and injected some mana inside it.

A vivid image appeared inside my head as if I visited the place before. The ground was gray, and large intricate stone

structures surrounded the area. The sky was purple, and there were four moons and a large black hexagonal prism floating in the sky.

It seems like they're inviting me to teleport there; they'll regret it...

31. A Battle in Vivaldium

I closed my eyes and focused.

My blood was boiling as I visualized the image that appeared inside my head. I wasn't sure whether Ratska was in the location that the gem showed me or not, but there was no way for me to ascertain that fact.

I opened my eyes and stared at the white gem in my hands. It was oval, and it reflected light in many different colors.

What the hell is this item?

“Do you know anything about this?” I asked Akeniska as I showed her the gem.

“They said that it's your portal to Vivaldium,” she said softly, “The Warhoog said that injecting mana is enough to take you there.”

“Did they mention anything about the tribulations that I might face there?”

Akeniska shook her head, then closed her eyes and lay on the bed.

It seems like she doesn't know much either.

I turned away from her and started walking, but she whispered some words.

“I am sorry for our failure, Jason,” she said, “I have already notified all the citizens about your offer, which I am sure is no longer available. However, we'll be glad to help you if you ever need anything; it's the least that I can offer you.”

“I'd like you to keep scouting potential guild members amongst the Lizardfolks during my absence,” I said, “This might save me some precious time.”

“It'll be my pleasure to do that,” she replied.

Then, I thanked her for her help and resumed walking toward the door. I descended the stairs hastily and passed through the castle hallway in a rush.

It only took me a couple of minutes to reach the town's outer wall. I didn't waste any time looking at the town's buildings; I was too busy thinking about the probabilities of Ratska's survival. I jumped over the town's wall and walked in the desert without a specific destination in mind.

There is a good chance that they already brainwashed him, and their next plan was to send me to a planet filled with creatures much stronger than me and watch me get ripped apart from afar.

I sighed; Things never go smooth for too long.

As if I was struck by a curse...

I shook off the negative thought and opened the status screen. I had to invest some stat points into the Empathy stat now that I had enough free points to justify the decision. I allocated seventy points to that stat and took a look at my current skillset.

I could've been stronger if I had someone to take care of the guild logistics for me...

Host: Jason Stubbs	HP 2800/2800 (1 HP/20 seconds)
Class: Pyrotechnical Incinerator	Mana 8800/8800 (14.57 mana/1 second)
Level 80: 18450/3161000	Stat Points: 524
STR: 439	VIT: 584

DEX: 402	AGI: 413
MAG: 884	END: 1082
LCK: 100	CHA: 150
EMP: 70	
Class Skills:	General Skills:
[Flame-n-Go]: Level 33	[Zoom]: Level 2
[It's fine!]: Level 33	[Shut-Down]: Level 2
[Burn That Invader!]: Level 17	[Light Steps]: Level MAX
[Kill Them Before They Spread!]: Level 24	[Shadow Assimilation]: Level 14
[Dismantle]: Level 5	[Divinity Meter]: Level 1
[Plasmic Torch]: Level 16	[Aura]: Level 1
[Flawed State of Being]: Level 23	[Scout Boss] Level 1
[Unlimited Fireworks]: Level 1	
[Deus Ex Machina: One against Many]: Level 1	

I dismissed the system screen and thought about my best options. I could always call Loki to ask him for a favor, but there was a good chance that he would try to act mysterious as usual.

Suddenly, a system screen appeared in front of me.

[InterGalacticLine]	
Loki is calling...	
[Accept]	[Decline]

Weird... Is he always reading my mind?

I accepted the call, and greeted him.

“Hey Loki,” I said, “What’s up?”

“Jason! It’s interesting how you attract trouble like a magnet,” he said, “Don’t you think it’s odd for a Warhoog to appear on Earth this early?”

“What the fuck is a Warhoog?” I asked.

“Well, they’re humanoid creatures with pig faces,” he said, “And they’re greedy bastards with no principles to hold them back. Also, they’re an old race that was integrated into the system early on, so most of them have a level of over one hundred and fifty.”

That explains why Rauchlim couldn’t beat the Warhoog that kidnapped Ratska, but I still didn’t know anything about this enemy of mine.

“Do you know who sent them?” I asked. I knew that he had the answer to that question, and I hoped that he would give it to me with no strings attached.

He might’ve heard that thought after all...

“Hahaha! Jason, don’t worry!” he said with his usual cheerful voice, “When did I ever swindle you? I am an

honorable sponsor and I plan on taking care of you to the best of my abilities.”

“Then, answer the damn question!”

“Alright, Alright,” he said, “The Warhoog was employed by the Great Church, and they’re taking Ratska as a hostage but they’re not planning on releasing him at all. He’s in a place called Vivaldium, and you have a ticket to teleport there.”

I looked at the gem in my hands, then I replied.

“You mean this gem? What can you tell me about this Vivaldium place?”

“It’s a harsh place, but there are enough rules to assure your survival. You’ll understand when you get there,” he said, “All I can say is, the place is quite competitive.”

Then, he hung up before I could ask for more details.

Oh well, I guess I’ll have to go there and check the place on my own...

I closed my eyes and injected mana into the white gem. It felt as if I was pouring my mana into an endless pit, but I kept going. The gem was only half full by the time I injected six thousand mana in it; I had to pull out my staff to double my mana regeneration to keep up.

After injecting about twelve thousand mana, I heard a popping sound. The gem disintegrated into a handful of sand that floated away from my palm.

The floating sand gathered in front of me and formed a circular ring. Then, a portal appeared. It was similar to the dungeons’ portals, but its color was bright white instead of pale blue.

I concentrated hard on the portal, but I couldn’t see through it.

I shrugged; there wasn’t much that I could do at this point. I could’ve invested all of my remaining stat points, but I didn’t know what kind of challenges I would face on Vivaldium.

Here goes nothing...

I put my hand through the portal, and I felt relief when I realized that my fingers were still attached to it. I inhaled deeply, then walked inside the portal.

Out of nowhere, I found myself in a new environment.

Stony surface, purple sky, and multiple celestial bodies looming over the planet.

I scanned the surrounding area, but I couldn't find any living creatures. There were many stone pillars around me, but they weren't memorable due to the lack of any drawings on their surface.

Suddenly, I heard my name being called.

“Jason Stubbs, Move forward three steps.”

Huh?

I turned my head around to scan for the sound's source, but I couldn't find any living beings in the vicinity. My best option to find out more information was to comply with the voice's orders.

I shrugged and moved forward three steps.

Suddenly, a blue hologram appeared in front of me.

It depicted a small creature, with a grotesque face and a hunched back. He had a robe that covered most of his body, and the only visible parts were his three-finger hands and face.

“Hello,” he waved his right hand at me and gave me an ugly smile, “What an unfortunate creature. What brought you here?”

“Aren't you supposed to give me information about this place?” I raised an eyebrow.

“Huh,” he said, “I didn't take you for a brave one; most people arriving here are scaredy cats. Anyway, the best description of this world is that it's a colosseum. You're here to fight, and you'll die if you don't win.”

The fuck? I didn't sign up for this...

“I didn’t come here to do any of that,” I said as I crossed my arms, “I am here to retrieve my friend. He’s been kidnapped, and they said that I could retrieve him if I come to this planet.”

“Well, that’s one of the tactics they use to bring potential participants,” he nodded, “Debt, fraudulent contracts, bankruptcy... All are potential methods that the Intergalactic mercenaries use to catch good fish.”

“I assume that there is no way for me to escape this planet at this point,” I said, “Except by surviving till the end?”

I didn’t know what dangers I might face, but I didn’t plan on abandoning Ratska anyway. I was the one who put him in this trouble, and he was my friend.

The ugly creature grinned, and he told me to follow the arrows on the ground before the hologram disappeared.

Many arrows appeared on the ground in front of me, and I assumed that they led to wherever this fight-till-death would take place.

Those three heroes... I’ll end them before humans even hear about them.

32. Next Fight in Five

The arrows were red, and each one of them was ten centimeters long. There were too many for me to count, and they succeeded one another in a winding line.

I followed them as I navigated my way around the stone pillars that surrounded me. I didn't expect to end up on a different planet when everything was going smoothly, but I couldn't abandon Ratska to whatever fate these motherfuckers planned on making him go through.

The more I walked the fewer the pillars that I saw on the road until I couldn't see any of them at some point.

I had some thoughts about the unfinished business that I left on Earth; my guild. I already established it as the first Earthling guild, and all that was left was to recruit people and construct the building itself.

I already made efforts to recruit blacksmiths from Akeniska's village; I hope she manages to convince them all to join my guild; Blazing Requiem.

There were other Lizardfolks that I wanted inside my guild too, such as Zinnia and her adoptive father, as they helped me enter the village, find lodging, and the conversations with them were enjoyable.

I would've also liked having the chance to recruit some Dwarves and Elves to take care of construction work, but saving Ratska was my current priority.

Suddenly, something ahead of me grabbed my attention, so I concentrated to find out more details about it.

It was a rectangular object that stood alone in an empty area. I was eager to find out more about it, so I quickened my pace.

It turned out to be a door, but it was weird for a door to be in the middle of nowhere. I roamed around the door but found nothing weird about it. At least superficially.

It was made of dark brown wood, and it was two meters tall. It was rather similar to doors from Earth, and I found this point to be interesting.

I examined it, and the description said that it was a spatial door.

Well, I guess the best way for me to find out more is by opening it.

I twisted the knob, and the door opened to reveal a small cubic room. Inside it was a bed, a bucket, a small table, and a green communication crystal on the floor.

I raised an eyebrow and roamed around the door once more. The other side of it also showed the same exact room, as if I could get there by entering from whichever end of the door that I'd like.

I wonder if the room is a trap...

I rummaged through my storage ring and grabbed an Amphiwolf's gallbladder. It was a small green lump of flesh, and it gave off a slightly stinky smell.

I threw it inside the door and kept my eyes on it to see its outcome in real-time. Apparently, the greenish flesh fell safely on the room's floor, and it didn't explode or get zapped instantly as I expected it to.

Maybe I'm just being paranoid... Whoever invited me here could've just killed me without needing all this trouble.

My primary goal was to save Ratska and to kill the bastards who kidnapped him if I got the chance, and the only way for that to happen was by playing along with the Warhoog's script for the time being.

They were planning on toying with me, which meant that they underestimated me a lot.

And I'll make sure they regret it, even if killing them tears my soul apart...

I grinned and entered the door.

I didn't feel disoriented like the times when I used teleporting abilities; passing through the door didn't feel any different from walking on a regular road.

As soon as I entered the cubic chamber completely, the door slammed shut behind me.

It seems like they have remote control over the door; I guess they'll keep me here until they need my services in the colosseum...

I grabbed the item that I threw earlier, and put it on my storage ring, then scanned my surroundings.

The floor was made out of wood that was cracked and scratched in many different areas. The walls and ceiling were painted black, but the paint was torn off in many areas.

The bed was to my right side. It was slightly taller than me, with a metal frame and a white wool mattress on top of it. There were no pillows or bedsheets on the bed; only a shabby mattress.

There was a small square table to my left side, and one of its legs was snapped in half. A bucket was next to it, and a wooden panel on top of it had the English words "shit here".

Great! Just, Great.

I was about to sit in bed to think about my best options when the green communication crystal glowed for a moment before a projection as tall as me appeared next to the door.

"Well, well, well," the ugly creature said, "What do we have here?"

It was a humanoid living being, as tall as I was, and I would've mistaken him for a feral monster if not for his display of sapience through speech.

His skin was pale green, or at least the visible parts were. He was very hairy; his chest, legs, and head were covered in fuzzy dark green hair. He wore leather pants and a chainmail suit.

His hands and feet were hooved, and two long tusks came out of his mouth. He had a long snout, just like the ones that

pigs possessed.

I assume this is the Warhoog who kidnapped Ratska...

He wasn't as intimidating as I thought he'd be, but I couldn't examine him through the projection to estimate his true level of strength.

"Where is Ratska?" I said with a serious voice as I maintained eye contact with the Warhoog.

"You're talking about the Gnome, huh?" he replied as he snorted, "Oh, worry not about him. First of all, I'm not the one who kidnapped him, the one who did is my older brother, Beliat. If you have a problem, then you should talk to him, if you find him that is, haha!. I am just an organizer of the event that's about to take place, so no need for you to act so aggressive. Anyway, it's quite disrespectful of you not to ask me about my name, so a self-introduction is due."

He inhaled deeply and puffed his chest, then spoke.

"I am Karflel, a first commander from the Intergalactic Trooper forces, and I am charged with the mission of watching over you as a D rank combatant in Vivaldium's leisurely events."

"What if I decline to participate in that bullshit?"

"Then the Gnome will be fed to the Darkslingers." He crossed his arms and grinned.

I didn't know what a Darkslinger was, but the name sounded ominous as fuck. I didn't even know for sure whether Ratska was alive or not, and I needed confirmation on that.

"I need assurance that Ratska is still alive," I said as I mirrored his facial expression and hand position, "Else, I'll go apeshit, and I am pretty sure I can cause a lot of damage even if I end up dead as a consequence of that endeavor."

Karflel snorted, and he turned away from me. His projection disappeared for a couple of seconds, before appearing once more as he held a familiar Gnome in his hands.

Ratska seemed alive, but he was handcuffed and gagged too. As soon as we made eye contact, he opened his eyes

widely and moved them sideways repeatedly.

I smiled and gave him a thumbs up; he was warning me about the potential danger, but I knew about that already.

Then, Karflel disappeared once more before appearing again empty-handed.

“Alright, prince,” he said with a smirk, “any other services you’d like before you do your damn job?”

I grinned.

“Actually, my sword has been collecting dust in the storage ring for a while,” I pulled my Blazing Saber and caressed it, “I think it might need some polishing; I’ll allow you to lick it if you beg.”

All of a sudden, the Warhoog’s smirk disappeared, and he furrowed his eyebrows.

“Cocky, aren’t you?” he said, “We’ll see how you handle your enemies. They’re all D rankers and above; don’t let your guard down!”

“Why would I even need to fight them?”

“Well, some rich people like this kind of fight,” he said, “the kind that ends only by one of the fighters’ deaths. Surrendering is not an option.”

“What’s in it for the ‘Intergalactic Troopers’ to gather poor people and force them into this kind of shit?”

“Well, we’re just middlemen,” he said, “Here, agree to the system notice.”

[Vivaldium Arena Service]

You consensually agree to participate in Vivaldium’s Entertaining Event.

Yes	No
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“Remember, your friend is relying on you,” he said as he shrugged.

I agreed to participate; it was my only option. However, I was a bit worried about my potential enemies.

According to the last system notice, people have to participate in these games consensually. This meant that my enemies will be people that were forced into this kind of situation, and they’ll be desperate to kill me to pass to the next round.

The worse point was that they were all D rankers or better according to Warhood; I might face some real trouble.

D rankers are people with levels between seventy-five and one hundred and fifty! I might die instantly if I face C rankers or above...

Then, the Warhoog disappeared. I held the green communication crystal and tried injecting it with mana. However, nothing happened.

“Hey,” I shouted at the communication crystal, “I need more information!”

I looked at the door, then walked toward it. I twisted its knob when it was within reach, but the door didn’t budge at all.

Fuck.

Then, a system screen appeared.

[Vivaldium Arena Service]
Your next fight will take place in five minutes.

00:05:00

33. Transformer

Five minutes...

I walked around the room, thinking about the best things that I could do in the given time before the fight.

I could've invested my stat points into Magic or Endurance, but I decided to hold off on that. This was only the first fight, and my chances of facing weak people were as high as they could ever be.

Karflel didn't provide any information about the nature of the fights and their rules, so I assumed that everything was allowed, including items.

I stared at my storage ring, and grinned; I didn't have too many items, but the ones that I had were of high grade.

Quality trumps quantity, and since people here have no choice except to fight, most of them wouldn't have good items, especially those that are here for financial issues.

Then, I remembered that my foes would likely be in the same situation as me; trying to pay off their debts or save a kidnapped relative.

I sighed; they were my opponents, but they were likely in worse situations than mine. However, I didn't plan on faltering or going easy against them, as I came here to save my friend.

I paced back and forth in the small room praying for my first fight to be easy, as my body-soul connection had issues and I didn't want to exert a lot of pressure on it.

The countdown to my first fight appeared once more when I touched the door's knob; there were around three minutes left before the fight takes place.

I wonder whether I still have access to the system shop here...

As expected, the system shop worked perfectly. I even bought information about the green communication crystal, and its description appeared. Apparently, it was an uncommon

variant of regular communication crystals, with a much wider range and the ability to be linked with only one other crystal.

I was also curious whether I could use the InterGalacticLine, so I commanded the system to call Loki. However, my call didn't go through, and a system screen appeared a couple of seconds later.

[System Admin]	Bruh, I am banging some divine chicks; call me later. I hope you have a good reason for this interruption.
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Well, fuck. At least I know the InterGalacticLine can work in a pinch...

I sighed and sat on the floor to meditate and practice my mana control to relax before the fight. Vivaldium was richer in mana than Earth; I suspected that it had to do with the time since each planet's system integration.

I couldn't control the mana at all, no matter how hard I concentrated. My hopes of being able to use my latent ability on demand instantly disappeared, and I was distraught.

It's hard being a Glitcher nowadays...

I remembered the weird shit that Albert said at Akeniska's bathroom; that he would help me when I was in a dangerous situation.

I might need some help here; I might get crippled if I overexert myself, and my enemies might be on a completely different level of strength...

I had the [Shut-Down] ability to help me in case of such a gap in strength, but I wanted to keep it as a trump card because of its long cooldown.

Out of nowhere, I heard a loud ringing sound coming from behind the door before it opened. A robotic voice called my

full name and told me to walk outside the room to

Strong blue light entered the room and attacked my eyes, and I could hear loud screams too. Ahead of me was a long corridor, and it had a bluish hue due to the lights shining on it.

It seems like this door's destination changed based on the operators' whims...

I stood on my feet and walked at a steady pace. The door slammed shut behind me as soon as I was a meter away from it, and it gradually faded away from the wall.

I guess it's either do or die, now.

The more I walked, the louder the screams of bystanders became. Ahead of me was a large circular arena, and I could see the silhouette of my opponent from afar.

I was inside a stadium, and the stands were full to the brim with spectators. They were of various races, sizes, and colors, but the common thing between them was that they were all cheering.

I took a look at my opponent. He was a male, tall and scrawny, and looked rather similar to a human except for his pointy ears and strange hair and eye colors.

He had purple hair and pale yellow eyes, and he raised both of his arms in front of him as if trying to guard his face.

A Sky Elf...

He stared at me from head to toe, before he started shivering.

I raised an eyebrow; I was sure that my appearance wasn't scary enough to make him shiver.

I took a look at myself. I was wearing a full-body black suit that covered all of my body parts except for my hands, feet, and a portion of my face. I also had my crown and cape on, and I was barefooted.

I couldn't see my facial expression, but I was either smirking or pretending to be bored.

Go figure... I look like an insane bastard.

I waved my hand at my opponent, and he visibly jolted and started shaking even faster.

Then, a recognizable figure appeared between us.

It was Karflel the Warhoog, but he was here in flesh this time.

“Calm down, Jason,” He said as he grinned, “We don’t want any mishaps happening before the fight officially starts.”

His voice was loud and clear; I expected that he used some kind of skill to achieve this effect.

“Go fuck yourself, ugly pig,” I replied, but my voice was much weaker than his, and I doubted that the spectators heard my words.

The Sky Elf started shivering and sweating even harder, and Karflel clicked his tongue.

“Anyway, these two fighters are here for the first time ever, so introductions are due,” he said as he pointed toward us both.

Then, he looked at me and said.

“In the southern part of the arena, we have Jason Stubbs,” He said, “He’s an Earthling with a level eighty Legendary class.”

Suddenly, the crowd started cheering even harder.

“Alright, everyone. His class might be special, but his level is low,” he added, “He’s here to save a certain companion of his; too bad the little Gnome offended the wrong people to get himself in this mess.”

I furrowed my eyebrows; these people kidnapped Ratska, and they were making up shit now.

All of a sudden, the Sky Elf calmed down. He sighed and wiped his sweat off. He lowered his arms slightly; he was letting his guard down.

He’s feeling relief... He might be of a much stronger level than mine.

“As for his opponent, it’s Mazkarel Filtr,” he said, “A mercenary with a level of one hundred twenty-eight. Moreover, his class is epic! He’s here to save his nephew from slavery; She seduced one of our organization’s members, and he sought to punish her for that.”

Mazkarel furrowed his eyebrows at the statement, and his face reddened in rage.

The Warhoog grinned, then he giggled for a couple of moments and disappeared.

The same robotic voice from earlier resounded, and it announced the start of our battle.

Mazkarel approached me slowly and carefully as he sized me up.

I had to set things right with him before we tried to kill one another, so I opened my mouth.

“One of us might turn the other into meat soup, so I believe I should tell you this,” I said, “I have nothing against you, but I’ll try to kill you no matter what happens. I hope you understand because my friend is in danger and I can’t afford to die on him.”

“Just fight,” he whispered, “We don’t have all the time in the world. The victims might be getting tortured as we speak; it’s better to finish this fight quickly.”

I grinned; I liked this guy’s personality, and I would’ve wanted to befriend him if not for our current dilemma.

Too bad I’ll have to kill him.

I took off my cape and crown and put them inside my storage ring.

“[Plasmic Torch]!” I shouted, and my flesh turned into pure plasma. I locked onto my opponent and charged toward him as fast as my current body allowed me to.

The heat spread inside the arena, but none of the spectators seemed to hurt as if there was an invisible barrier that protected them from whatever happened inside the arena.

Great; I can go all-out without any repercussions or environmental damage to worry about!

Mazkarel looked startled as if he didn't expect an all-out attack from the start.

He tried to run away, but his speed was too slow.

It seems like his class doesn't focus on speed and evasiveness, else he wouldn't have tried to take the fight slowly.

We made contact with one another, and he flew away as he caught fire. Both of his arms took the biggest brunt of the attack, and they were torn off and fell to the ground next to me as they burned.

I looked at Mazkarel's body, and he was leaning on the distant wall as he burned. His body was completely on fire, so I couldn't tell how much destruction the flames caused to his body.

Well, it seems like he's dead in one shot. I expected more from someone of his level...

Suddenly, Mazkarel roared, and his body started sizzling. His body lost its usual humanoid form and turned into purple goo.

The flames were extinguished when the Sky Elf turned into a purple sticky substance, but that wasn't the end of it.

The substance gathered in front of me, and it accumulated to take on a much bigger form than Mazkarel's usual scrawny body.

He transformed into something ugly and his new form looked like a real monster.

34. Cometh the Man

Mazkarel's previous haggard clothes turned to rags, and he took on the shape of a purple monster that was at least ten meters tall. Its torso was that of a furry mammal, but its head was covered in feathers.

He had a beak, just like any bird, but it was somewhat different than usual; it had sharp teeth attached. He had four legs that were as thick as tree logs, and he stood on all of them. Despite that, he was still two and a half meters tall at least. He had a long purple tail with a black club attached to its end.

The abomination had white foam coming out of his mouth continuously, and his face contorted as if in suffering. He gave off creepy vibes, as if he came straight out of a horror tale.

Mazkarel stared at me with its completely dark eyes, and he roared as he charged at me.

Did this guy lose his mind?

He was charging at me as if he forgot the amount of damage that he incurred as a result of our previous clash. There was a good chance that he had no long-range offensive skills, but I couldn't lower my defenses.

His speed was increasing with each step he took, and I didn't doubt for one second that a collision with this freight train would leave me unscathed.

Certainly, one of the best ways to win in any physical conflict is attacking the enemy relentlessly, but the monster in front of me took that advice too literally.

As soon as he was three meters away from me, I took off in the air and flew above him. He stared at me from below, trying to jump to reach me. His first jump got him rather close to me, but I widened the gap between us easily.

However, he couldn't even jump more than half a meter from the ground now that he no longer had the momentum that he had when he sprinted. Amusingly, he kept trying to jump up

from the same position, as if he didn't think of using momentum to increase his vertical leap.

He must've lost access to a large portion of his mental faculties with this transformation...

I waited in the same spot for about fifteen seconds trying to bait him to use any long-range attacks that he might've been hiding, but he kept growling at me and slashing at the air above him.

He couldn't even stand upright on two feet even when he tried to do so; his current form simply wasn't a good matchup against someone with good mobility and speed.

This fellow's specialty must be close-range combat, yet he doesn't even have a weapon!

My intuition told me that this transformation was Mazkarel's trump card, and he was hoping to win against me with pure strength and brutality.

I grinned or at least tried to do so given the nature of my current body, then I landed ten meters away from my foe. He immediately turned toward me and started running; he didn't plan of giving me breathing room.

I turned off my [Plasmic Torch] skill, pointed my finger toward the huge purple beast, and shouted.

“[Burn that Invader!]”

Everyone in the crowd ceased screaming slurs at me and my opponent, and started laughing in unison as if I did something stupid. It was indeed stupid, but my class forced me to utter the names of my skills for them to activate.

Shouting a skill's name is no big deal, really; it grows on you after a while, and it's no longer embarrassing me at this point...

A bright orange beam of flames erupted from my finger, and it reached its destination in less than a second. As soon as the attack hit its mark, the purple monster's skull exploded into a gory mess and his corpse fell to the ground as it ceased moving. It even caught fire and burned vigorously.

Great! He must've used some kind of incredible skill to survive my first attack, but this one should be fatal.

I sighed, waiting for a system screen to appear telling me that I murdered the frail Sky Elf.

However, no screens appeared despite the corpse remaining on the ground for a little less than ten seconds.

Something's wrong; I can feel it...

Out of nowhere, the corpse of the purple furry monster transformed into a sticky substance, but it wasn't purple just like the previous time; it was bright yellow.

I suspected that Mazkarel was going to cheat death once more and transform into another creature, perhaps even more ferocious than the purple bird-mammal hybrid that I had to face this time.

I need to defeat the motherfucker, now!

My single-target attack skill's cooldown wasn't over yet, and it wasn't a suitable skill for such a situation; the multi-target one was better.

I set myself on fire to increase my movement speed and sprinted toward the gooey mess as it concentrated into a certain spot.

As soon as I was ten meters away from him, I shouted.

“[Kill Them Before They Spread!]”

A heatwave emerged from my body and spread around in all directions.

The yellow sticky substance caught fire and burned until it turned into a stinky pile of black soot.

I waited for the system screen to announce my win, but it didn't appear.

Fuck... How come this guy keeps cheating death like it's nothing?

I even tried to burn the black soot that remained, but it wasn't enough to kill the bastard. I was extremely curious

about his class at this point, and I had enough time to buy information about it from the shop.

When I examined the pile of black soot, a system screen appeared saying that it was a Sky Elf with a level of one hundred and twenty-eight.

I bought additional information about his class and skimmed through most of its details to find whatever it was that gave him this pseudo-immortality.

He had an epic grade class called [One More Avatar], and nothing about it stood up except for an interesting class skill.

[A Thousand Faces] (Epic)	Active
<p>Mazkarel lived to please people when he was young, and it was his wish to be able to transform into others on command.</p> <p>He was also a damn good role player; a perfect candidate for the perfect class.</p> <p>The system recognized his efforts, and this is the fruit!</p> <p>-Whenever the Host kills one creature of a certain species, he learns more about their biology, culture, and schools of thought.</p> <p>-When the Host kills ten thousand creatures of a certain species, he attains one [Record].</p> <p>-[Record]: Alternate form that the user can tap into.</p> <p>(Condition 1: The Host can only use this skill once a year.)</p> <p>(Condition 2: The Host can go back to his original form after at least one year spent in a certain form.)</p> <p>(Condition 3: Maximum number of forms that can be recorded is one hundred.)</p> <p>(Mana Cost: N/A)</p>	

<p>Notice: If the host incurs fatal damage in any form, he can sacrifice that form permanently and transform into one of the [Records] to have a second chance at life.</p>
--

That's a good skill; too bad I can't see the number of forms that he's recorded so far...

My only option at this point was to keep on killing him before he got a chance to transform again; I had to play it safe.

This is a chance for me to use my [Unlimited Fireworks] skill!

It required three conditions for it to work, which made it quite restrictive. However, its destructive potential more than made up for it. I wanted to use it against Igor in our previous fight, but the situation didn't allow me to fulfill all the three conditions quickly enough.

First of all, both I and the enemy had to be on fire.

Good, the sticky substance is on fire, and so am I.

Then, I had to keep the enemy within twenty meters away from me for about five minutes.

The arena's radius is about ten meters, so it's not a difficult condition. Besides, we've been fighting for about eight minutes.

All that remained was the third condition: the enemy had to hear the skill's chant.

Hehe! This is it!

I waited for Mazkarel to recover; I wasn't sure whether sticky substances could hear or not, but it was worth trying.

The sticky substance was white this time, and it made weird sounds as it gathered. I stared at the wall to my left, waiting for the Sky Elf to finish transforming. He took longer

than usual, so I had to stare at the wall for longer than I intended to.

Suddenly, Mazkarel's current form uttered a high-pitched cry that pulled me from my trance, and I turned toward him.

He had the form of a white horse that had wings on its back; It was a Pegasus.

The fact that he can transform into a Pegasus means that he killed at least ten thousand of them! That feat takes a lot of courage and might to achieve, and I am not even sure where he managed to find so many of them.

"I am sure you can hear me, Mazkarel. My respect for you went a notch now that you transformed into a Pegasus; it means you've managed to kill more than ten thousand of them without being punished," I inhaled, then said with a smirk, "Too bad you can't give up on the fight; I would've advised you to do so. Still, I'll make sure you witness beautiful fireworks before you bite the dust. Farewell, pal. Dust to dust."

Suddenly, the sky on top of us shifted its color from purple into cerulean blue, and many orange dots decorated the sky.

Well, it's a fake sky; a mirage that my skill made up.

The crowd looked surprised as they stared at the sky, and they stopped screaming instantly. It seemed like the new sky awed them, as it was the opposite of Vivaldium's gloomy sky.

I grinned; I instinctively knew that my skill was activated successfully. Now, I could use my offensive skills without having to spend any mana, and their damage would be much higher than before.

The Pegasus in front of me looked at the sky as if it dazzled him before he snapped out of his trance and glared at me.

He flapped his wings and soared above me. He flew around in circles and flapped his wings around to launch mini tornadoes at me.

I grinned and pointed the index finger of my right hand at him.

“[Burn that Invader]!” I shouted, and the crowd started laughing when they heard me.

I made sure to increase the attack’s power to the maximum that my body could handle, as mana wasn’t an issue at this point.

An orange fire beam with a radius of about fifty centimeters erupted from my finger and struck the Pegasus. The attack itself must’ve looked like a soldier trying to launch a warhead using a pistol.

I am not sure how such a large attack can emerge from my finger without devastating it; the system is really wacky...

Still, the attack’s power was no joke, as the white flying horse fell to the ground immediately. Mazkarel’s body caught fire, and it started bleeding through the large wound that the attack left when it penetrated its torso.

Once more, the corpse turned into a sticky substance; it was black this time. I sighed; I hoped for Mazkarel to run out of his avatars quickly.

My body-soul connection must’ve taken a large toll as a result of this fight; I was actually hoping to defeat him with my first attack...

The fight got stale at this point. Mazkarel kept resurrecting himself, and I defeated him repeatedly. Rinse and repeat.

The whole sequence happened about twelve times before his last corpse stopped moving for good. It was a small blue bear with silk-smooth fur. It was the size of a pit bull, but it had incredible speed and water magic.

I hope this is the last one.

Suddenly, many system screens appeared in front of me.



[**Sky Elf: Mazkarel Filtr**] (Epic) (Level: 128) defeated!
Host earned 38560000 EXP.

-Host leveled up x10!

-Host reached Level 90! 40 MAG, 40 END, and 200 free stat points acquired.

[**Kill Them Before They Spread**] leveled up x4! It reached level 28.

[**Flame-N-Go**] leveled up x6! It reached level 39.

[**It's fine!**] leveled up x6! It reached level 39.

[**Burn that Invader!**] leveled up x6! It reached level 23.

[Flawed State of Being] leveled up x4! It reached level 27.

[Plasmic Torch] leveled up x2! It reached level 16.

[Deus Ex Machina: One against Many]: leveled up x4! It reached level 5.

[Unlimited Fireworks] leveled up x7! It reached level 8.

Then all of a sudden, I felt my consciousness slipping away from me. The surroundings turned foggy, and I struggled to keep standing upright.

Lately, I'm losing consciousness more than I would like to... I hope nothing bad happens...

Suddenly, my eyelids opened forcibly and I started scanning my surroundings; I was standing in a crowded room. Soothing music was being played, but I couldn't see the performers.

I assume this song is merely a record; of course, they wouldn't bother to treat us with respect considering what we've been through so far.

Many people were staring frantically at their surroundings, and at one another. Most of them were different from each other, and their hostility was evident.

Many of them wore haggard clothes, but some had better equipment. I was among the minority, so the people with shitty armor stared at me with obvious greed.

These motherfuckers... I am sure they're other fighters in the arena; they'll get a fair chance to loot my items if they survived me...

Suddenly, Karflel the pigman's projection appeared on top of us; it was a floating hologram.

"Hey hey, everyone," he said as he clapped his hands, "Calm the fuck down; why are you standing there and acting stupidly."

Everyone glared at him, and many of them cursed him and spoke obscenely about him. He evidently got angry, as the grin left his face.

"Alright then, let's cut to the chase," he said, "Everyone here is a winner. Well, a winner of a single fight to be precise. Still, this means that you're one step closer to achieving your goal..."

Then, he started speaking about respect and that we should venerate him because of how great he was as an organizer of the Vivaldium games. I didn't care about that shit at all; I couldn't wait for my next fight to find Ratska.

Still, I didn't trust Karflel's words; there was a good chance that they never planned on freeing Ratska no matter how many fights I won and that they were just using me for economical gain.

I should ask people around here; maybe I could obtain useful intel...

I scanned the crowd, and something grabbed my attention. I saw a figure, wearing a cloak that was similar to the one that Albert the Glitcher wore.

One of the Glitchers is here?

35. Cometh the Hour

Karflel the Warhoog called this room the lobby, and he said that only winners were allowed to enter. He proceeded to list the code of conduct in this place; no fighting, no stealing, no usage of system skills, or else we'd be ejected forcefully.

Meh... Most of these rules are obvious and he's wasting our time with his speech; I'd better track the cloaked motherfucker before he slips away.

The cloaked figure was ten meters to my left, and he was moving away by the hour. There were hundreds of people in the crowd, and I was afraid of losing this chance of talking to someone that might've had knowledge about Glitchers whatsoever.

I hope he's not an imposter at least...

This person wasn't Albert because he had a thinner body, but getting some answers from him was within the realm of possibility, especially if he was an important member of their mysterious organization.

I still wonder why Loki didn't prohibit me from meeting the other Glitchers... He was Omniscient for all I knew, so I didn't believe for a second that they fooled him.

The 'Glitcher' increased his pace of movement as if he was deliberately running away from me, and I had to move faster to keep up with him.

Why is this guy running, now?

Out of nowhere, someone pushed me from my right side. The action wasn't strong enough to make me fall, but it distracted me from the person that I'd been chasing.

"Hey, watch where you put your legs. Pushing people around without apologizing is disrespectful as hell," said a giant minotaur with a scruffy voice; he was the one who pushed me, "Trust me little boy, you don't want trouble with someone like me. Anyway, it's not like you could win if push comes to shove."

He was at least two meters and a half tall, and he met my expectations of a stereotypical Minotaur. He even seemed to grin as he flexed his muscles in front of me.

Big hands, even bigger arms, legs as thick as my torso. His whole body was covered in pale brown fur, and he wore nothing but a pair of large black shorts.

Still, muscles aren't the true representation of strength nowadays when you can pump your strength using stat points.

I looked back toward the cloaked person, and he was nowhere to be seen. I was pissed off; this Minotaur indirectly caused me to lose track of someone that might've been able to enlighten me about Glitchers.

“Well, Mr. Herbivore Cow. I am pretty sure your big muscles got into your head, but don't worry about that. I'll make sure to grill them well before eating them in front of the spectators,” I said with a smirk, “Now, how about you fuck off? If you have anything against me, then ask the walking pig to arrange for a duel between us.”

Now, get angry, and try to attack me... We'll see where that leads you to.

As expected, the Minotaur snorted, and he charged toward me. I half-expected him to shrug it off and call me an immature prick, but he turned out to be the childish one.

I didn't even bother to raise my hands to guard my face, as I was sure that the organizers of this event weren't stupid enough to allow a violent bout to ensue in the lobby. Still, I could always use my [Plasmic Torch] skill if his attack was dangerous enough.

Out of nowhere, the green Warhoog appeared between me and the Minotaur, and he took his attack head-on. I heard a loud thud when the Minotaur's fist touched Karflel's head, then something cracked. Then, the Minotaur fell to the ground, grabbed his right fist, and started wailing.

“That's your first strike and only one for the matter,” said Karflel with a smirk, “As a punishment, you'll be forced to participate in your next battle with that injury. Try something

stupid once more, and you can kiss goodbye to your lover once and for all.”

“No...” whispered the Minotaur, “Alanza didn’t do anything to deserve this... I don’t believe you! There is no way that she seduced the city’s Mayor. She is my wife! My dream-come-true!”

Then, the Minotaur started rambling as he stood up and walked away.

Karflel turned toward me and spoke.

“That bastard’s wife had been sleeping with too many important people, and she stole the wrong woman’s man,” he said with a smirk as he pointed toward the leaving Minotaur, “The offended woman hired us to kidnap his wife, and we obliged without any issues. Such a case puts my mind at ease! Some people deserve true pain, and I take great joy in tormenting them.”

He’s speaking as if he’s a paragon of wisdom and principles, yet he’s likely the one who kidnapped Ratska despite him having nothing to do with my conflict against the Great Church...

“So, why didn’t you just kidnap me instead of the little Gnome,” I asked, “You could’ve brainwashed me and sold me to a wealthy fat-ass; I am certain that you could do it. Hell, you could even take me as a hostage.”

I wasn’t sure with this guy wanted to talk to me, but I was glad to play along. I was in an unknown territory, and I had to adapt quickly to have the best chance of saving Ratska.

I might be able to extract some information if I can keep the conversation going...

“Could, yes. Would, no,” Karflel said as he shrugged, “You have the protection of a mysterious yet dangerous sponsor, and we’re not ones to seek divine punishment. Certainly, you could argue that we’re risking such punishment for bringing you to our arena. However, your presence here as a fighter means you accepted Vivaldium’s Arena contract

without being forced to do anything against your will, so we should be safe.”

“Huh,” I sighed. He had a point; I could’ve refused the contract and given up on Ratska, but it wasn’t something that I could do especially because I’m the primary reason he was in this situation to begin with, “I assume this isn’t the first time that you had fighters with sponsors like me, and I am sure many of them died while fighting. How did that go?”

“Well, some deities seek revenge, but we have sufficient protection against such cases because the contract we arrange with their proteges is approved by the system. Besides, it’d be embarrassing for a god to fight with mortals like us over a stupid person who chose to risk his life when he could’ve gotten away easily,” he smirked, “Especially in your case; the people who want you dead are mega-important, and I don’t think your mysterious deity would want to mess with them no matter how strong he was.”

Yeah; The Great Church again...

I was about to ask the Warhoog about Ratska’s fate in case I didn’t win enough fights, but he disappeared before I even opened my mouth.

Then, his projection appeared once more above us, and he apologized for the negative emotions that the Minotaur’s assault might have elicited.

Well, I lost my lead on someone whom I suspected to be a Glitcher because of him; fuck the Minotaur.

Suddenly, I felt a chill behind me; it was my [Flawed State of Being] warning me of a possible ambush. I closed my eyes and focused on my surroundings through that skill’s field of perception.

However, I couldn’t find anything suspicious within a radius of three meters away.

Then, I heard whispers.

“The hour of revelation is close by,” a hollow voice said, “Prepare yourself and try not to disappoint me, Jason.”

I turned around trying to spot the mysterious person who whispered these words into my ears, but I couldn't find anyone. I was slightly surprised to find that the voice was feminine, but that was the only valuable information I could gather based on her words.

I guess it's too much for me to expect a civilized conversation with these people, but I'm quite interested about 'the hour of revelation', whatever it meant.

The vibe and tone of her words made the subject seem quite important and intense, and I didn't want to underestimate the situation because it might be especially grave.

I sighed and turned my attention toward Karflel's projection as he spoke about more inane bullshit.

This guy really liked talking...

"As always, the fans would like to thank you for the great fights that you displayed today in the arenas," he said, "Now, enjoy your time here; you'll be taken to your room after a while and the next fights will take place tomorrow."

All of a sudden, the lobby expanded horizontally until it was spacious enough to accommodate all the fighters with ease. Then, many tables appeared around the room; at least a hundred of them.

On each table were five cups and a large transparent bottle that contained a light brown liquid. There was a table next to my left side, so I took the chance to try the beverage.

I uncorked the bottle with my hand, then took a sip of the liquid after pouring it in a cup. It turned out to be an alcoholic drink that I'd never tasted before. It was mellow, sweet, and slightly aromatic. It was tasty, but nothing to write home about.

Light rum? No, not quite the same... This drink isn't that good by Earth standards, but it's good enough for a free beverage.

Still, I was a bit thirsty, so I took the whole bottle for myself. Many people close by cursed me under their breaths for my selfishness, but I didn't care at all. I didn't want to

engage them, as there was a high chance for them to snap at me and they'd be punished meaninglessly.

The emotional vibe of the room was quite intense, and I was sure that many fighters were so close to breaking down psychologically. Perhaps taking the whole bottle for myself wasn't the best decision in such a situation, but pissing off my opponents was something I'd totally do to get the upper hand.

Besides, the organizers of this event must be rich enough to have a steady supply of such a low-quality drink.

As I expected, another bottle appeared on the table a couple of seconds after I emptied the first one. The people who got angry at me beamed with joy at the sight, and they all moved towards the table to try the drink.

As I expected, they started arguing about who'd take this bottle, and it didn't take long for one of them to raise his fist at another one.

Karflel appeared once more between the fighters, diffusing the situation. Then he took on the offending party's attack just like he did to the Minotaur before.

Sigh...

I looked at the people around the lobby; I was now able to see their faces and individual features. Some of them tried to assert their dominance over those who were less physically intimidating by threatening them, and many of them tried stealing each other's belongings.

I wasn't sure if all of these guys were natural bullies, but I suspected that this behavior was just a defense mechanism to cope with this extraordinary situation.

At the end of the day, most of these arrogant pricks will die because of their hot temper... What a waste of time that they could've used to gather intel.

I focused on Karflel's speech once more as it was the most interesting thing in the room.

"Today, we had some incredible performances," said Karflel, "Even our most grumpy fans were impressed by them;

this edition of the Vivaldium Games is shaping up to be one of the best in the last couple of years, and it is up to you to make it the best of the best.”

Oh? This is a good chance for me to learn more about the heavy hitters that might end up killing me...

“As an incentive for y’all to try harder, we’re allowing another fighter to make his wish come true,” he said, “Usually, only the last remaining fighter can make a wish, but the fans encouraged us to change this rule a bit. The fighter who manages to impress the most fans, a.k.a. the Fan Favorite, will have his wish granted even if he loses a fight later on.”

So, they’re trying to push these people to fight desperately against more powerful enemies, even if it meant their death, just for a chance to impress the fans...

“As we all know, each one of you is here to make a certain wish of his come true; it’d be a bummer if you died without fulfilling it,” he shouted, “Rejoice and suffer, fighters of Vivaldium’s arena! You have a chance to have your wish granted even if you’re not the strongest here, and for now, we’ll take a look at the top five contestants according to our loyal patrons.”

36. Black and White

“The first round was quite spectacular, I might add,” said Karflel as a giant light shone upon a tough-looking fighter among the people standing in the lobby, “This fellow here was three milliseconds away from breaking the Intergalactic record for the fastest takedown in Vivaldium’s arena history. Give a round of applause to Schweizz Velbas!”

Yet, no applause could be heard; eerie silence pervaded the lobby. Everyone’s attention was on the highlighted fighter; many of them scrutinized him, but the majority opted to look away after staring for a couple of seconds.

He’s not exactly menacing, but he seems like an odd snowflake for sure...

Schweizz was a three meters tall, well-built person; simply put, he was a giant. The right half of his body was pitch black, and the other half was snow white. He lacked hair, and he didn’t have a nose or a mouth either.

His right eye was white, which contrasted with his right side’s color and vice versa.

He has no pupils either! I am not even sure what he’s staring at...

Shweizz didn’t have an outfit on or any equipment for that matter; he was completely naked. However, it wasn’t an issue as he lacked any genitalia. The presumably phenomenal fighter didn’t hold any weapons either, but I could see a storage ring on his left hand.

He didn’t show any reactions to being the center of attention to hundreds of fighters, even when some of them insulted him audibly.

“Here’s a small clip of Schweizz’s fight,” The Warhoog’s projection said, “Oh boy, what a formidable opponent. I feel sorry for whoever’s gonna face him.”

Suddenly, Karflel’s projection disappeared and a system screen appeared on top of each one of us.

Two people were facing one another in the arena, one of them looked like an oversized mantis, and the other one was Schweizz Velbas himself.

The Warhoog was standing between them, then he announced the start of the fight.

The black-and-white fighter raised his right arm at his opponent, then the large bug imploded immediately. His exoskeleton made loud sounds as it broke apart, and his sticky innards came out through the cracks.

The spectators of the fight went silent, and Schweizz left the arena soon after Karflel confirmed his win.

Then, the video clip was over, the system screens vanished, and Karflel appeared once more.

“I’ll show you four more clips of the prominent fighters among you; the ones that the spectators were most pleased with,” he said, “You’ll only see curated moments of each fight; It won’t be fair to reveal the crucial details about each fighter’s skill set.”

Then, we got to see four more fights in quick succession as the system screens reappeared.

Each fight was short, to begin with, and the clips were even shorted as they only contained the moments leading to the knockout blow.

However, the third fight stood out to me.

The fighter had a cloak on, one that covered his whole body. He had black gloves on his hands, and his face was covered with the large hood that was attached to his cloak.

That’s the fellow Glitcher that I saw earlier... Now, this is interesting.

Yet, the fight wasn’t as flashy as I thought it’d be. The Glitcher’s opponent looked like a skinny werewolf with gray fur all over his body, and he held a short sword in each hand.

The Glitcher walked casually toward the werewolf who started shivering after the cloaked fighter walked a couple of steps toward him.

Is that an effect of an aura?

The werewolf charged ahead as he screamed, but his speed was pathetic.

I raised an eyebrow; the Warhoog said that everyone here had a level of seventy-five at the very least, and it wasn't logical for the werewolf to be that slow.

He would've been fast compared to a human before the system came around, but that's slow based on today's standards.

I watched as the werewolf kept getting closer to his opponent who didn't even try to run away. The werewolf was within range to land a clean hit with his weapons, and he tried to strike the Glitcher with two horizontal slashes.

The blades moved toward the Glitcher, albeit slowly, but he didn't even try to dodge. The blades didn't even scratch his cloak and seeing that a direct hit didn't cause any damage, the werewolf dropped his weapons and tried to run away.

However, the Glitcher laughed loudly with a slightly raspy voice, then he swiftly slapped the werewolf in his head.

The attack's impact wasn't too loud, but its might was unquestionable as it tore off the werewolf's head.

The fighter's body fell to the ground, and blood trickled slowly out of his neck.

The Glitcher didn't even bother to stare at the corpse that his attack left on the arena; he just turned around and left.

The spectators exploded in cheers, and many of them hailed the winner because of his overpowering display of strength.

They must've enjoyed the werewolf's despair...

Then, the clip was over. There weren't many details that I could deduce from the Glitcher's fight except the fact that he either had a very high level or a special method of neutralizing his enemies' powers.

Maybe his latent ability allows him to confuse his opponent or something like that?

Nonetheless, he seemed like a formidable opponent, and he was even more dominant than Schweizz.

The system screen above me disappeared when all four clips were over, and Karflel spoke once more.

“The five people whose fights you saw are the fan favorites, and people are eagerly waiting for their fights,” he said, “You might have a chance of making a name for yourselves if you won spectacularly, but your chances are much higher if you faced one of those five and won; most spectators are going to watch their fights.”

Shit... I hope I face some random weakling instead of these; my body-soul connection might break down immediately if I fought one of them...

“As for now,” said Karflel with a smirk, “You’ll be teleported back to your rooms, and you’ll know when it’s time for your next fight.”

Suddenly, one of the people in the lobby screamed. He looked just like a human, except for the fact that he was much shorter, had pointed ears, and had a thick brown beard.

A Dwarf...

“Wait!” he said, “This tournament is rigged! People like me aren’t as powerful as that Schweizz person or even the other four guys whose fights were broadcasted; it’s nearly impossible for me to save my daughter. I’d say we should all abstain from fighting even when we’re inside the arena; let’s see how the organizers of these bloody games take that.”

Another person screamed. He was a Lizardfolk that had blue and yellow scales.

“Yeah! We should boycott these games!” he said, “I am here because of a huge debt, and I can’t see a way out of this place except my death! I could’ve spent about ten years doing menial labor instead of taking part in these Vivaldium games.”

Many people joined the rally, and all of them voiced their concerns about the legitimacy of these games.

Most of them accused the Intergalactic Troopers of rigging the games to ensure that a selected fighter of theirs won the games, and some of them said that the best option was for us to rebel.

They realized that winning is nearly impossible...

“Oh god, it only took a single round of fighting for the participants to protest this time; I wonder if we showed them too much too soon...,” he said, “Well, go fuck yourselves! You have no choice but to fight, and let me warn you; you’re not the only group of people to entertain the idea of rebelling against us, and you won’t be the first ones to succeed either!”

People kept screaming, but the Warhoog’s hologram smirked and snapped his fingers.

Then, a feeling of dizziness hit me and I got teleported back into the small cubic room that I arrived at before my first fight.

It seems like they won’t change the room that I’m assigned to; I’ll have to get used to it...

The same bed, table, and green communication crystal too; they didn’t even bother to upgrade the furniture, and dust still covered the walls and a good chunk of the floor.

I walked toward the bed and sat on its edge. Today was a strange one, and I had many things to think about.

It seems like many of the participants in the Vivaldium games realized that their loss is inevitable, and now they’re trying to find a way to escape with their lives...

I closed my eyes, and let my mind drift away. I had unfinished business on Earth, my little friend is in grave danger, and I still hadn’t figured out the reason behind the system admin’s interest in me.

Too much for poor Jason... I used to be a dismantler not too long ago, and now I’m being put in extraordinary situations...

A system screen appeared in front of me.

[Vivaldium Arena Service]
Your next fight will take place in five minutes.
00:05:00

I sighed and spent the next five minutes pacing around the room.

I knew that my chances of winning this tournament weren't too bad due to the nature of my class, but my worsening body-soul connection might kill me soon.

It's bad to put all your eggs in a single basket; I'll think of an alternative plan just in case.

I had a rough idea about the plan to save Ratska, but I'd need to get in contact with my fellow Glitcher.

And for that to happen, I need to survive the next fight and try to talk to him in the lobby...

The five minutes elapsed quickly, and I could finally twist the door knob. I went out of the room and walked toward the arena.

There were many people in the stands, and most of them were cheering and screaming.

Is it just me, or there are way too many people in the stands?

I kept walking and managed to catch a glimpse of my opponent from afar.

He was a tall, muscular person. The right half of his body was black, and the left side was white. He opened his eyes, and I felt a chill around me when he did so.

Oh fuck...

*

In a dark room, sat a Gnome, and he couldn't move at all. His whole body felt frozen, and his legs and arms were bound. He could only move his fingers and his eyelids.

The room's temperature wasn't to his liking either; he started shivering as soon as he fully regained his consciousness.

Where the hell am I?

Gnomes' eyes had above-average night sight, so he could distinguish some of the details of my surroundings after getting used to the darkness.

After scanning for a while, he noticed something. He, no, they were inside a very spacious room. He realized that he wasn't the only one there; many people were laying on the ground next to him but none of them moved or spoke.

He tried to speak, but he couldn't utter any words.

Suddenly, he heard the door opening.

Four silhouettes entered; one of them was a green Warhoog, and the other three were humans.

The Warhoog scanned the room before his eyes met the little Gnome's.

"Gotcha," he muttered as he walked toward the shivering creature.

The humanoid pig caught his left leg and held him in the air.

"This is the Gnome known as Ratska," he said, "I believe he's the one that you wanted to meet, Mrs. Stella."

The female human with long silver hair had an expressionless face when she entered the room, but she smiled slightly when she made eye-contact with Ratska.

37. Hypernova

How come my luck is so shitty? Me of all people facing Mr. too-powerful-to-be-true...

Everyone in the stands was shouting; they were excited to see Schweizz do his thing smash another random fighter. There was a great possibility that the wealthy people watching us made bets on who was most likely to win, and I knew that my perceived chances were close to zero.

Sigh... Too bad I'll have to smash this boy; he'll make for a very good stepping stone to becoming a fan favorite!

I had nothing personal against him, but I needed all the advantages that I could acquire to save Ratska, including popularity among the fans.

The Black-and-White fighter didn't have any equipment on, just like the way he was in the lobby. He stared at me for about a second, to which I replied by grinning and waving my right hand at him.

He closed his eyes and widened his stance.

"I bet you're fun at parties, Schweizz," I said, "One of us is going to die; some small talk wouldn't hurt, would it?"

He was likely from a planet that had the system for quite a while and he was quite strong, so he was bound to know a lot of information that might end up being helpful.

To be precise, I needed information concerning dungeon breakouts around the universe... The system shop only offered vague details, and I didn't want to ask Loki directly as he liked to play mental games and wasn't reliable unless he wanted to...

Schweizz crossed his arms in response to my proposal, but he didn't open his eyes.

"I guess that's a no in the place that you come from?" I pointed toward his crossed arms, "Well, I guess there is no

helping it. To be honest, all I wanted to know was some information concerning dungeon breakouts.”

According to my last fight’s timing, Karflel the Warhoog would appear at any moment to announce the beginning of the fight.

I might as well take my chances and ask my opponent... He might offer information if he’s belittling me and thinking my death to be inevitable.

Suddenly, Schweizz opened both of his eyes, then he nodded.

“Stay strong; trust none,” he said with a soft and calm voice, betraying his fierce disposition, “Breakouts might be devastating to mortals, but they’re there for a reason privy to those above. Those who benefit from the chaos do exist.”

Oh, that was unexpected... He really answered!

Still, it wasn’t that strange for him to give me an answer when I asked him directly. I had a high Charisma stat, which improved people’s impression of me regardless of circumstances, and my newly acquired Empathy stat allowed me to see a glimpse of the other person’s feelings, and I’d be able to see more of their feelings the longer our conversation got.

I sense a slight feeling of regret, but it’s unremarkable compared to the pride that Schweizz is feeling right now... I suppose he managed to survive one or more breakouts, although it must’ve taken its toll on him...

He implied that the breakouts were pre-meditated events, which was slightly surprising. I thought of such a possibility before, but I didn’t know how to feel after receiving a confirmation of that theory.

I had an idea about the possible culprits behind the breakouts, but it wasn’t a suitable time for me to start pointing fingers. My current priority was to survive and save Ratska, whether it was through winning the tournament or using unorthodox methods.

“Thanks, Schweizz,” I said as I smiled, “It’s an interesting theory, indeed. However, you advised me to stay skeptical, so I’ll have to confirm your words later on if you catch my drift. Of course, this means that I’ll try my best to survive; I have nothing against you, and I hope you feel the same.”

He closed his eyes after I finished speaking, but he didn’t react to my words in any obvious way.

Out of nowhere, the green Warhoog appeared in the middle of the area between us.

“Forgive me, I hope I didn’t interrupt serious business,” he said with a smirk as he bowed at Schweizz and then at me.

“Oh, hardly,” I said with a grin as I waved my hand, “It’s a pleasure to have you around, princess piggy.”

Karflel stared at me with squinted eyes, before a red crystal appeared in his right hand. He clasped it tightly and brought it closer to his mouth, then spoke.

“Ladies and Gentlemen! It’s an important day for many of you; a long awaited fight is taking place today!” he shouted to the expecting fans, “Not only is it a fight between legends, one of the fighters is a myth in the making.”

Then, he pointed at Schweizz.

“Schweizz Velbas, the undisputed number one newbie in this edition of the Vivaldium Games! With a level of one hundred and ninety-two and a legendary class, he’s the strongest fighter on paper, and his first fight was sufficient proof of his powers in practice,” his voice was so loud and cheerful voice as if he was proud, “The hand of the hurricane, they called him, but no one really knows about the nature of his skills. Everyone is excited about his path to become a myth and enter the Vivaldium Hall of Fame; can his opponent achieve the unthinkable, and overcome all the odds? Truth be told, he’s a legend too, but a miracle is needed for him to walk away after the battle!”

Well, at least he’s a good fight announcer at least...

It was a good speech; one that was bound to fire up the crowd around us.

Then, the crowd in the stands around us erupted in cheers and loud screams. The voice was too loud, to begin with, and my enhanced hearing allowed me to pick on many of the minuscule details.

“Fuck the scrawny kid up, Schweizz,”

“I put good money on this fight; kill the human!”

“Kill him!”

“Don’t resist, kid! We put decent chunks of valuable items on the line; just accept your demise!”

It seems like the spectators already perceive me as the loser... I’d better change their perception of me before they hate me forever.

I didn’t want to do this, but I had to. I pulled my crown and cape out of my bag of holding and equipped them.

Suddenly, the crowd went quiet as they scrutinized me, and I grinned because the fun part was about to begin.

“To those who don’t know, this one’s name is Jason Stubbs,” said Karflel after the commotion died down, “His presence in the second round of the arena is a testament to his strength... I think.”

I took a deep breath and looked around the stands at the crowd with a smirk on my face.

It’s been a while, but I hope my bullshitting skills haven’t rusted yet...

“Halt!” I screamed at the fight announcer, “When did I permit you to speak about me? Besides, you’re going to spout nonsense anyway.”

Karflel tilted his head as he stared at me.

“Huh?”

I walked toward him at a brisk pace and started speaking when my mouth was close enough to the sound-magnifying crystal that the Warhoog held in his right hand.

“It’s yours truly, Jason Stubbs!” I blurted, “Each one of you is a piece of shit; if it wasn’t for you asking for a pre-meditated bloodbath, this fucked up organization wouldn’t have kidnapped people! Then I’d be on Earth minding my own damn business!”

Some people in the crowd started speaking, but I interrupted them.

“Shut the fuck up! Know your place,” I said, “I have a divine class called the God himself, and my level is Max if you’re interested in that. Don’t let the Warhoog delude you about my true identity; I’ll make sure to kill him when this shit is over, and I’ll also kill every piece of shit who insulted me during this fight!”

Suddenly, the crowd went quiet once again. Karflel was still stupefied, but I was glad because he didn’t pull the crystal away from my face yet.

“Yaaaah! That’s right!” I said, “You wanted a bloodbath; you’ll get one! However, you’ll have to pay for it.”

I had to change the spectators’ image of me. Everyone perceived me as a weakling who was about to get his ass beat, and I had to ruin that image completely if I wanted to increase my popularity among them.

People like crazy bastards, and I can act the part quite well; this will be an enjoyable ride.

Suddenly, Karflel pulled his hand away, and the crystal was far from my face at this point. He squinted his eyes at me, then resumed his speech.

“As I said, Jason Stubbs is an Earthling. He has a Legendary class with a level of ninety. He might do better than Schweizz’s first opponent, but I doubt it’d make a difference anyway.”

Then, he turned off the crystal for a couple of seconds and whispered at me.

“Lunatic motherfucker; I’ll speak with you in private after the fight.”

I grinned and crossed my hands.

Once again, he brought the crystal closer to his face, turned it on, and spoke.

“All right then! Let the battle begin!”

Then, the green Warhoog disappeared.

Schweizz is going to use the shockwave attack against me, and I am not sure about its full capacity for destruction...

I had many possible ways of avoiding it, but I didn't want to risk using one of the weaker ones only for it to fail against the attack.

I could also use [Zoom] to teleport away, but I wanted to save it in case of a real emergency because of its long cooldown.

As I thought, I have to use that feature of my thermal suit.

My thermal suit absorbed a good amount of the heat that my body unleashed when I used fire-based attack, and it stored that energy away.

The more energy it stored, the more passive boosts that I got; namely to my physical strength and the intensity of my flames.

I could also expend that energy to become invincible for a small duration of time, and that's exactly what I planned on doing.

I activated that skill, and a system screen appeared saying that I'd be invincible for a bit less than a minute.

All right, that should be enough to end him, provided that I survived the onslaught of attacks.

Suddenly, Schweizz opened his eyes and raised his right hand toward me, then he whispered.

“Soul Grasp,”

I felt the air around me tightening, but nothing more than that.

Schweizz squinted his right eye, then nodded his head slightly.

I grinned; my invincibility worked against him, which meant that I wouldn't die before landing a single attack.

“Hey, Karfle! Karfle!” I shouted.

Out of nowhere, the Warhoog's projection appeared in front of me.

“Now, what the fuck do you want?” he said as he furrowed his eyebrows, “I remember telling you that giving up wasn't allowed, and if you're trying to waste time, then I'll make sure you get penalized!”

“Actually, I have an important question,” I said as I rubbed my chin, “Say, for example, if a hypernova were to take place in this area, would the spectators get hurt? If yes, then would I get in trouble for that?”

38. Last Dance of a Legend

“Why would a hypernova appear here out of nowhere?” he said in a loud voice, “Quit procrastinating and give the fans the fight that they’ve been waiting for!”

I wasn’t happy when the Warhoog sidestepped my question, but I needed verbal confirmation from him before blasting the arena and potentially hurting important people.

My opponent was inching closer to me by the second, but my suit still allowed me to be invincible for another fifty seconds at least.

I’m not even sure how strong the ‘invincibility’ is truly and if it measured up against much stronger foes, but I had to play the cards I was dealt anyhow...

My best option against my enemy was to go all out, but releasing so much power was a risky move. Caution was absolutely mandatory in such a situation, so I sat on the ground, folded my arms and closed my eyes.

“I’m not standing from my position unless you answer the question,” I spoke sternly, “You’re the one depriving the fans from the thrill of this fight. Just cooperate with me and I’ll stay in line.”

Karflel’s projection crossed his arms and sighed after taking a deep breath.

“Even if it did appear, it won’t put a dent in the protective field around the arena,” he said, “And even if it was obscenely powerful, there are many layers of barriers to ensure optimum protection for our important guests.”

“So, I wouldn’t need to be worried about accidentally killing someone?” I smiled.

“No,” He sneered, “You simply can’t.”

“So, no dire consequences are waiting for me regardless of the outcome of this fight?”

“You’re a lunatic,” he shook his head, “Don’t worry, we’re the ones organizing this even and we have insurance in case of unexpected events.”

I wasn’t exactly afraid of offending the wrong people as I had the protection of my sponsor deity, but there was always the possibility of them doing bad stuff to people that I cared about.

Just like what happened with Ratska in the first place...

“Alright man, I appreciate it!” I gave the Warhoog a thumbs-up, “I’ll trust you for now, and I’ll make sure to punish you if the barrier isn’t strong enough to handle what I’m about to do.”

He rolled his eyes, and disappeared without adding another word to the conversation.

Looking back at Schweizz, I realized that he was two meters away from me. He still hadn’t attacked yet, and seemed to be rather relaxed considering the fact that I came out unscathed out of his previous attack.

I cracked my knuckles, stretched my arms and jumped in my place as if skipping rope. Seeing that my enemy was still walking toward me with a tardy pace, I smirked.

“Let’s see how you handle this,” I said, “Don’t disappoint me.”

My opponent had a much higher level than me, and he likely had a class that was on par with mine or even better, not to mention the fact that it was incredibly unlikely for someone to reach his level without a deity’s support.

I need to be careful, but I won’t pass up such an opportunity to test myself without restraints.

I put myself on fire, and increased the temperature to a level that I was comfortable with at my current endurance. It wasn’t too painful, and the stat boosts were great.

My crown and cape were deteriorating rapidly after being exposed to such powerful flames, but I could always get similar items from other people that cleared the tutorial.

I crouched slightly, then charged at Schweizz head on.

He didn't even try to dodge my reckless attack, contrary to my expectations. I covered the distance between us nearly instantaneously, but he still had enough time to raise both of his hands in front of him to intercept my incoming attack.

Such frightening speed...

My forehead made direct contact with Schweizz's hand, and a loud bang echoed around the arena. Suddenly, I felt my feet leaving the ground, and my skull was under great pressure.

Schweizz grabbed my skull upon impact, and he squeezed it with great force.

It felt like a dull migraine, but nothing more. However, the fact that he managed to take my strike head on, diminish my momentum, and turn the tables, was nothing short of amazing.

And to add salt to injury, flames of this temperature don't appear to have any visible effect on him!

Suddenly, he mumbled three words of a language that I've never heard, but I understood them subconsciously. Then, a loud smacking sound filled the arena, and I was flung in the air like a ragdoll.

I fell to the ground, limp, without making any moves for about five seconds, but it was all an act. Out of nowhere, I started laughing hysterically.

"Heh! You call this the Almighty Soul Grasp?" I smirked, "What a stupid name for a feeble attack. If that's all you have then I feel so sorry for you parents, how do they sleep at night knowing they had such a failure for a child?"

I was provoking him, and it surprisingly worked.

"You shouldn't have been able to survive this attack even with your current buffs," he mumbled, "Invincibility, huh? No matter. Don't lose consciousness as I break you, and I'll make sure you take back all of your words."

Now that's exciting.

Suddenly, he charged at me, and his speed was much higher than mine. I knew that I had to increase the temperature of my flames if I wanted to keep up with him, and that's what I did.

We didn't use any flashy skills; it was a pure hand to hand battle.

Jab here, cross there. A low kick here, a high one follows. My attacks did some surface level damage to Schweizz, but he still hadn't scratched my skin yet due to my temporary invincibility. On the other hand, it was tough to keep up with my opponent's speed, and he had the superior martial arts' experience.

It was safe to say that he had the upper hand and that I couldn't get as many clean hits as I would've hoped for, but it didn't last for more than ten seconds.

To keep up with him, I kept increasing the temperature of my flames. And as it rose, so did my physical attributes.

After a couple of seconds, I overwhelmed him with pure strength and agility.

Suddenly, he disengaged and leapt away from me. He clasped his hands together, and lowered his head. Then steam came out of his skin, and it started glowing with a silver taint.

Oh no... This might be bad.

He charged at me once more, but this time it was different. Just like the difference between an attack from an amateur and a professional boxer; everything was better, strength, technique, agility, perception, all of them improved exponentially as if I was fighting someone else.

I kept boosting my flames to improve my stats, but to no avail. He threw me around like a ragdoll, and I couldn't even resist. The attacks were much more painful than before, but no damage occurred because of my suit's special ability.

I tried to drain my enemy's mana by putting his skin on fire, but whenever it caught on, he shed the burning area and another patch of skin grew in its place immediately.

I can't even activate Unlimited Fire Works at this rate...

After twenty seconds of gradually increasing the temperature of my flames hoping to match him, the pain from the fire itself became unbearable.

Shit, I better end this quick while the invincibility is still in place.

I still had many trump cards in my pocket, but the situation was serious.

As soon as Schweizz threw me away once more, I stood up and shouted.

“It’s been a pleasure to fight against you,” I said, “but today’s your unlucky day.”

Then, I took a deep breath and whispered.

“Shut Down.”

*

Back on earth, a certain woman was holding five tree logs on her right shoulder. Though she managed to keep them steady, her struggle was obvious.

It was Petra Lehmann, and this was another day in her new life.

She integrated into the Dwarven community that occupied the central area of Munich, though she still faced problems and harassment.

After hand over the bundle of logs to Daken, she went back to chop another tree. He gave her an earful and criticized her slow pace and uncoordinated movements.

“With a body as tall as yours, we had optimistic expectations for you as an errand runner,” he mumbled, “Too bad, reality is rather disappointing. If not for your class and your better than average stats, you would’ve had a really hard time around here.”

Just because he’s a leader, he thinks he gets to reprimand me whenever he wants... And our team is small to begin with so he has no real authority around here!

However, she didn't have the courage to vocalize her thoughts. She had a hard time due to lacking a soul identity, and she wasn't willing to blow up her current lifestyle just because of slight disrespect from a dwarf.

It was true that she lacked the efficiency of the other dwarves, but that was a given. Many of them had an uncommon class called Rugged Lumberjack, and it allowed for incredible boosts when its user cut trees or handled them in anyway.

Not to mention their incredible levels, even children here have levels over fifty!

She copied their class using her unique skill, and this allowed her to blend in and act as a helper. However, her version of the Dwarves' class was quite worse than the original, and she had to help with other chores to meet her daily required workload.

They provided her with food, shelter and companionship; all of which she valued considering the dangers that lurked out and about.

Overwhelmed with fatigue and anxiety, she sat on the ground and sobbed as she recovered her breath. Her clothes were tattered, and there was nothing but dirt beneath her.

Oh, how have I fallen... I'm pretty sure everyone that I know would've laughed at my current state, and none of them would've helped.

Out of nowhere, she felt someone patting her on the back.

She turned around, and she found it to be Tamira, the dwarf lady that protected her on her first day in the settlement.

“Oh, don't worry, young lady! You'll gain nothing but wrinkles on your face, and you don't want that,” she said in a soothing voice, “Daken is a dickhead, and don't take his opinion of you as the majority's. He would throw a fit if he heard what I'm about to tell you. He acts tough around people but he's a softy inside. Give him time and he'll warm up to you.”

“I’m sorry, Lady Tamira,” Petra wiped her tears, “Even children can do triple my workload, so I’m not even mad at mister Daken. I just felt so useless, and so spent. I mean, my productivity in our settlement is improving at a rapid rate by the hour, but the anguish is still just the same.”

“In any case, our people have done laborious jobs for many years and their levels are much higher than yours, so you shouldn’t compare yourself based on the short time you had on your hands to improve your skills.”

“Thanks for your concern, Tamira,” whispered Petra as she bowed her head, “However, I have a feeling that it’s entirely something else that’s bothering me.”

Petra heard previously from Tamira that most people in the settlement had an average level of sixty five, which was quite high among immigrants to this planet.

They told her that people with non-fighting classes didn’t have to pay as much to get access to new worlds, so they took this opportunity to leave their home planet for greener pasture.

I wonder if Jason and the other people from my tutorial are doing well... At least, I hope that Jason drowns or something.

Tamira stared directly into Petra’s eyes, then she nodded with understanding after a couple of seconds.

“In that case, then it might be something else entirely that’s draining your energy,” she said, “You can always confide in me if you need to unload, but I advise you to take time to think about the reason why you’re out of your element.”

Suddenly, Petra had an idea of the cause of her psychological distress.

“Say, Tamira,” she smiled slightly, “Remember what I said about having failed in the tutorial?”

“Yeah, you said that the first returnee sabotaged you,” Tamira nodded, “What an outrageous fellow! Now, you have to deal with the mess of lacking a soul identity. However, maybe you’ve done something to upset him?”

Maybe... Maybe not...

There was only one way to find out, and that's she planned on doing.

He was quite a famous person on Earth, and almost everyone knew his name. She knew for sure that he'd strike gold and become one of the most important people on Earth.

He said something along the lines of helping me find a job if I had none...

She wasn't so stupid as to trust him, that's why she'd been working this whole time with the dwarves. She planned on gathering funds, improving her skills and levels and perhaps gaining some trump cards in case her meeting with him went wrong.

Who knows? Maybe he'll feel bad for me and give me a handsome allowance!

Though she knew that it was unlikely, but she could only hope.

39. Vivian

It was a skill that I rarely used. It had incredible potential and synergy with my skillset, but it could destroy all the surrounding environment if not used with caution.

Besides, the last thing I need is to become reliant on it...

It gave me five seconds of precious time, time which I wouldn't feel any pain.

As I activated it, my opponent was already getting closer and closer. I had to end things as soon as possible, and I didn't have the time to fool around.

Five...

I already started increasing the temperature of my flames as fast as I could, but there was a long way to go. In addition, the hotter the fire got, the stronger the stat boost that I acquired became.

Four...

Perhaps feeling the alarm, Schweizz increased his pace and was already half a meter away from me before I realized it.

He picked me up from my arms and pulled in opposing directions with great might, trying to tear me apart.

However, I didn't feel any pain courtesy of the skill that I just activated, and the invincibility of my suit was still holding up.

Three...

The flames were already spreading around in the arena, and the current strength that I've had was more than enough to get away from Schweizz's grasp.

Two...

My opponent caught fire, and no matter how much skin he shed, the newer one got burned once more. The surroundings seemed more like hell than a fighting arena.

I charged at Schweizz, and he couldn't get away from me at this point. I was much faster, and he was in a terrible condition.

After tricking him with a well calculated feint, I successfully got him in a neck choke. As soon as wrapped my arms around his neck, his skin started sizzling, and I tightened the grip even further.

He was still fast enough to try shaking me off, but he was helpless.

"I'm sorry my friend, you seem like a decent person, but I don't have a choice," I whispered, hoping that he still had consciousness to interpret my words, "Checkmate."

With that, his neck snapped in half and his head fell to the ground. I still had one second before my pain-numbing skill ran out of gas, so I extinguished the fire burning in the direct vicinity.

[**Wanderer:** Schweizz] (Legendary) (Level: 192) defeated! Host earned 106580000 EXP.

-Host leveled up x16!

-Host reached Level 90! 64 MAG, 64 END, and 320 free stat points acquired.

Too bad, I would've wanted to see more of his abilities in a friendly spar if not for these circumstances...

The air was still scorching hot, but the flames were disappearing gradually.

On the other hand, the corpse of my opponent was still on fire, and his scorched head had only stopped rolling away from his body.

I raised my head, looking around the stands. I was hoping for a passionate reaction to my display of prowess, but there was nothing of the sort.

Silence. Yes, absolute silence that didn't belong in a rowdy place like an arena full of fans.

Not even Karflel had anything to say, he had appeared next to Schweizz's corpse, and was looking at it with a stupefied face.

It seems like this battle had a hell of an effect on the fans, but unleashing this much power will come with a steep price.

Loki had already advised me against going overboard with my abilities as I still suffered from an unstable body-soul connection, but I had no choice.

My life was on the line in this fight, and I still had unfinished business to take care off.

Karflel looked at me, at the corpse, then back at me.

He cleared his throat, then gave me the widest smile I've ever seen someone pull off.

“Ehem! How frightening, this is a miracle!” he said, “for a moment, I thought the gates of hell had opened in the arena, I wonder if a true hypernova could've rivaled it! Even the barrier around the arena suffered a little damage during this fight, and that's unheard off.”

He made sure to whisper when he spoke about the effect my flames had on the barrier; the fans would've been outraged if they doubted their safety for a moment.

“So?” I said with a slightly tired voice.

I really needed some rest, and for that to happen Karflel had to announce the winner of this fight and take me back to

the lobby.

My hands were shaking ever so slightly, and this hadn't happened before.

I really hope I didn't cause permanent damage to my body-soul connection...

“Yes! Indeed!” said the Warhoog as he clasped his hands together, “The winner of this bout is Jason Stubbs! What a one-sided clash, I really feel bad for the people that had their money on the other guy!”

Suddenly, everyone in the stands started clapping.

“What a champion! Now I understand, the other guy was a fraud all along!”

“Yeah buddy! That's what I came to see!”

“Utter domination! This new guy is a devil! A harbinger of doom!”

“The harbinger of doom! The best rookie!”

“The harbing...”

“The har...”

What is this? Am I hallucinating?

A hazy sight was the last thing I remembered before everything went dark.

.

I woke up, feeling a cold sensation in my back. I realized that I've been laying on a metallic platform, one which had a silver sheen to it.

I must've been sleeping for a while, I wonder where am I?

I recognized my current location to be the lobby inside which the fighters gathered. However, what stood out to me was the considerably lower number of people.

I wonder what would happen to the hostages that the dead fighters came to save?

I went into a sitting position, and after ensuring that I had no injuries, I examined my equipment because I still needed them in my future ventures.

There were no signs of my crown and cape, and this was a bummer even though there was no realistic way they could've survived the onslaught of the battle.

I shrugged, and looked at my fingers. I felt a weird numbness in them, and it seemed like they were ever so slightly shaking.

Eh... It must be my imagination, it'll go away when I'm fully awake.

I still had my storage ring and everything inside it seemed to be intact after running a preliminary check, and my special suit (which currently took on a black color) was still covering my whole body.

At least the most important stuff is still here, now let's find what's going on...

I stood up on my feet, ignoring a slightly uncomfortable that pervaded my whole body.

After searching for Karflel, I've finally found him at the other end of the room. He was standing alongside a group of fighters, making small talk with them and laughing.

As we made eye contact, he smiled widely and spoke to me.

“Good job, Jason! I'm glad you're awake!” his voice was loud, “Now, take all the time you need to rest properly for the next fight, but I'm sure you're already well-rested anyway. By the way, the fans really like you! Keep up the grind.”

I nodded, then walked around the lobby. People weren't as talkative as the last time we've been here, and many of them had downcast gazes.

I approached the nearest table, and filled a glass with cold water. As I grabbed it, my fingers felt numb and I could hardly control them.

I had a foreboding that I might drop the glass, so I drank its content in one go and put it back on the table. My right hand felt numb, and the left one's fingers were twitching repeatedly.

This might be bad actually...

I used the InterGalacticLine feature of my system to call Loki and ask for insight, and he didn't elaborate too much on my problem as he was busy at the time and his attention was on something else.

What I understood from the short conversation we had was that my previous problem, my weakening body-soul connection, had exasperate to a dangerous level and I was at risk of permanent damage.

When I was about to inquire for more about the subject, I spotted a certain someone among the crowd around me so I had to cut the call short.

That Glitcher... So, she survived the last round as well.

This time, she didn't have her hood on. Her robe and cloak were unmistakable on the crowd, but I was slightly surprised after seeing her for the first time.

She had snow white hair that flowed freely, caramel skin, and hazel eyes. She was eating a brownie and drinking what seemed to be orange juice.

When we made eye-contact, she nodded and waved at me with the hand she held the brownie with.

She seems oddly normal, I wonder what's up?

I was used to the weird vibe that Glitchers gave off, so the current situation threw me off for a bit. To ensure the identity of this woman, I pulled out my Glitcher radar.

It was my first time using it, so I expected to face difficulties. However, it was incredibly straightforward.

It started beeping as soon as I pulled out of the storage ring, and there was a red dot in the area which corresponded to the cloaked woman's location.

As I moved toward her, the beeping got faster and faster, till I was a meter away from her.

A little hologram appeared on top of the radar, and it had a miniature copy of the lady in front of me.

“That’s cute,” she said as she scrutinized the gadget that I had in my left hand, “I wonder where you got this item, would you be interested in giving it away for research?”

“Do I want to give a prized possession to a stranger because she asked nicely? I wonder,” I grinned, and carried on with the conversation, “Maybe I would if we knew each other better. I am Jason Stubbs, and you?”

After confirming that this person was indeed the Glitcher that I’ve wanted to talk to, I put my radar back inside my storage ring. I had many questions that needed answering, and it was very likely that I wouldn’t get a chance to speak to a Glitcher face-to-face like this again in the near future.

Besides, with my current body-soul connection problem, losing in the next battle isn’t out of expectations...

She smiled warmly, put away the food she’s been eating, and clasped her hands together.

“I am Vivian, and the leader of our organization appointed me to be your guide, companion, or whatever you need help with. If I can do it realistically, then I’ll get you sorted out,” she said with a soft voice, “I am sure you’re distressed, and you have many questions in your head, but for now, I need your help. I’ve finally found where these nutcases took the hostages, and I might be able to save them all. Will you help?”

40. Secret Mission

What?

“Wait a minute, let me get the hang of it,” I rubbed my left temple, “We only introduced ourselves to one another, and you’re asking me to follow your lead and participate in what could possibly cause my death? Not to mention that dangerous people might be spying on our conversation!”

And I don’t trust you yet, though I kept those words to myself.

I was already on a steady path to save Ratska, and even though I didn’t want for meaningless casualties to occur, I still valued my life. If she wanted my cooperation, then she had a lot of convincing to do.

“Don’t worry about anyone eavesdropping, I have an ability that can counteract such things. Anyway, can you please hurry up and make your final decision?” she spoke softly, “The hostages might be suffering right now, waiting for anyone’s arrival. But here you are, a perfect chance for you to save all the hostages, not just one, and you’re being skeptical.”

“Because it seems too good to be true! Even if you found where they took the hostages, what are we supposed to do? I am not entirely sure how many people you have on your side, but the fact you asked for my help implies that you’re all alone, and I don’t think I’d be of much help against an enemy of unknown power.”

The Intergalactic Troopers were still a mystery to me, but I knew that they had to have great power. That in addition to the support of people that were too dangerous for me to deal with at my current level.

“That’s fine. I know it’s too much to ask you to trust a stranger, but I can hold my own against whatever’s going to face us,” she said in a soft voice, with no irritation in her tone of speech, “In fact, I could probably get the job done on my own, but I want to maximize my chances. Even if the big shots

gained awareness of our little mission, I can get away safely and save you at the very least.”

Now that's a strong claim.

I crossed my arms, and tilted my head to the side.

“Really? You can do all of that by yourself?” I asked skeptically, “I get it that your strong; I’ve seen the highlights of your first fight and I was impressed to say the least. However, you’re claiming to be strong enough to mess with a big trafficking organization on your own, and get away with it on top of that! You should have some form of proof to back up such a claim.”

I knew for sure that she was a great fighter, and that she could hold her own against mighty foes. However, I needed more details to assess our chances of achieving what she proposed.

She smiled without replying, and kept steady eye-contact with me.

All of a sudden, her eyes turned completely white. Her hazel iris and black pupil just disappeared, completely.

Having to look at her eyes made me slightly uncomfortable, so I tried to move my gaze away. However, I couldn’t.

As if my eyes were stuck at their current position, and I couldn’t even close my eyelids or move my head drastically.

She has me trapped... Though I wonder, why didn't she get punished for using such an ability here? I thought Karflel said that using system abilities was forbidden inside the lobby.

“Try opening your status window, or using any system feature.” Vivian spoke with a slightly deeper voice than before.

I tried using multiple system features, but none of them worked. I even felt like my strength left my body, and I returned to being a regular human.

Even though my body was still physically the same from what I could tell, but it felt heavier, slower, and overall

weaker. I wasn't sure whether Vivian's ability affected my mental faculties as well, but the sure thing was that now I had a brain fog that I didn't use to have.

On the other hand, I felt like I had better control of my fingers and hands. The numbness was nearly gone, and the convulsions stopped happening.

However, I knew for sure that defending myself in my current state would be a challenge, the negative aspect of my current state far outweighed the positive.

So, I can't access the system, can't think clearly, and can't even look away from her eyes...

I even tried to conjure some flames, but my attempts were futile.

Thankfully, I could still speak coherently, so I asked her politely to turn off her ability.

She obliged instantly, and her eyes returned to their natural lovely form. She seemed concerned for my wellbeing, so she apologized for using her ability on me abruptly.

"I'm sorry, Jason, but this is the best way for me to demonstrate my ability."

I was completely powerless under her ability's effect, so I was more confident in our chances if we agreed to save the hostages on our own.

However, there was a small problem.

It was true that the ability worked on me, but I was merely a human with a level of one hundred and five. Sure, my class was of legendary grade, but I knew for sure that many people with greater skillsets than mine were members of the Intergalactic Troopers.

"It seems incredible indeed, and I'd be lying if I said I could do anything about it. I'd be frightened if I had to face you in combat," I was genuinely surprised, "What does it do? And how can you use it here without being punished by that Warhoog?"

Karflel made sure to dissuade us from using our system abilities in the lobby, and I didn't doubt that he could tell when someone used his abilities even if they tried to be discreet about it.

Out of nowhere, she giggled, then beckoned for me to bring my ear closer to her lips.

When I was close enough, she started whispering.

“To keep things simple, I can disable the system when the conditions are right. For example, I can prevent someone from using his abilities as long as we held eye-contact.”

Oh?

My eyebrows shot up, and I quickly moved my head away from her.

“Wait, is that for real?” I was perplexed, “So basically you'd be facing a regular person with no system skills to back himself up, and that's the closest thing to cheating that I've seen in a while!”

“Oh, it's not that impressive,” she seemed elated after seeing my reaction, “It has many merits, but onn the other hand, I can only disable system access for one sentient being at a time, and when it comes to inanimate object, they need to be close if not in direct contact with me. I can also cut-off an entire area from the access of the system, but the radius isn't big at all.”

My expression turned serious quickly, and I was already seeing the possibility of her plan working.

“Is that your ‘latent ability’?” I doubted for there to be a class that allowed its user to disable the system in a certain area, and I already knew that this person was a Glitcher. It doesn't take a genius to figure such a thing out.

Besides, I know from personal experience that latent abilities can be crazy... Though I hope she can control it at the very least.

“Yes, it is. Quite a special one, right?” she crossed her arms, closed her eyes and nodded with a smile on her face,

“How about you? What does your latent ability do?”

“In fact, I was hoping to learn from you guys more about it,” I said as I raised my left eyebrow, “It won’t be of much use anyway, so we’d be wasting precious time discussing it right now.”

“Alright then, I guess we’ll have to rely on your class,” she seemed deflated, “I was actually hoping to see what your latent ability did, our leader Albert seemed especially interested in it.”

Too bad, I guess.

I still wasn’t sure whether our success was guaranteed or not, so I gave Vivian some ideas.

“What about the other fighters? Shouldn’t we approach some of the more trustworthy ones? I am sure the mission will be easier with numbers on our side.”

“It would be easier if we were going to launch a frontal assault, but we’re doing a sneak attack,” she said, “The commotion caused by a huge crowd of fighters isn’t worth the trouble.”

Suddenly, a loud voice interrupted our conversation.

“Alright everyone, you’ve had enough rest and joy for today,” it was Karflel speaking through a voice magnifier, “As a reward for surviving thus, we’ll give you twelve hours to prepare for the next fight inside your personal rooms. Use this time freely and carefully, and make sure to give the fans a good show later!”

With that, he concluded the speech and clapped his hands multiple times.

Vivian leaned in and whispered in my ear.

“When you get back to your room, keep tapping the wall opposite to the door gently, I’ll find you.”

I nodded, then each one of us walked in a different direction. When I was a fair distance away from Vivian, I closed my eyes as I waited for the Warhoog to teleport me to my personal room.

As usual, the process gave me slight dizziness, but it was improving.

When I opened my eyes, I was inside the cramped room that was assigned to me on my first day here.

A system screen appeared.

[Vivaldium Arena Service]
Your next fight will take place in five minutes.
12:00:00

I hope Vivian finds my room soon...

I sighed, and threw myself on its bed.

I was already lamenting the fact that despite my current strength, life was still throwing me curve balls all the time. My life would've been incredibly smooth if Ratska wasn't smooth, and we would've made a lot of money from his potions.

It is what it is, I guess...

I moved closer to the wall opposite to the room's door, and started tapping gently.

After five minutes of continuously repeating the same motion again and again, I was bored.

However, Vivian was nowhere to be seen. I had no choice in the matter, so I kept going.

Many hours passed by, and I was bored as hell.

Suddenly, I've heard a loud thud coming from the wall that I've been tapping.

I tried tapping it once more, but my hand went through. When I looked at the 'wall', I realized that it was no longer there.

Pale white light filled the room, and a refreshing breeze of cold air passed by. I was glad to find out that I could breathe just fine, but I wasn't sure if it was safe.

Standing outside the room was a humanoid figure covered in a black hooded robe that covered all of her features.

“Vivian?” I prodded.

She took off her hood, and it was indeed her. A wide smile was covering her face, and she placed her hands on her lips.

“Impressive, isn't it? I demolished the wall, and it was an easy feat after disabling the protective spells that were preserving it. From here on, follow me and don't make unnecessary commotion,” she said, “Actually wait a minute, can you do something about your face? We don't want them to find out who's doing this operation.”

Actually, it might be possible...

I asked her to wait as I played around with my special suit's settings, until I found out how to use its camouflage feature.

All of a sudden, my whole body turned invisible, as if my body was made of glass that allowed light to pass through seamlessly.

“How about this?”

“It's wonderful, but I don't think your suit prevents sounds and smells from leaking out,” she pointed out, “Here, wear this on top of it.”

She pulled out a robe from her storage ring, and it seemed to be identical to the one she currently wore.

It's the same robe that the Glitchers in my dream wore too...

It seemed to be of a smaller size, but it readjusted to my physique when I put it on.

It covered all of my body except for my hands, which were invisible thanks to my suit anyway.

She said that the robe muffled any noises that I made, any smells, and made it harder for inexperienced people to track me.

I thanked her for the free gift, to which she smiled and said that it was the least she could do to a junior.

“It suits you perfectly,” Vivian gave me a thumbs up, “You’re now a member of the family, congrats!”

“Even though it’s a bit abrupt to accept me as a member so fast, but I appreciate the sentiment,” I smiled and gave her a high-five, “Now, where should we go?”

She nodded silently, put her hood back on, then led the way.

I examined the area around us, and realized that my room was one of many, and they were cluttered in an area reminiscent of a labyrinth.

More than hundreds of rooms; I wonder how they keep them all connected to their respective arenas at all times?

I didn’t give it much thought, because magic seemed to be the explanation of all weird phenomena in this new world.

“Hey, Vivian,” I wanted to ask her something, but I didn’t know whether it’d be appropriate, “What would happen to the hostages whose fighters died in combat? And why didn’t you approach me to save them before the fights started in the first place?”

We could’ve saved a lot more people, and many fighters wouldn’t have needed to die needlessly...

“It’s true, but I’ve only managed to find the place where they hide the hostages. Vivaldium is a big place, and I didn’t have much time on my hands,” her voice seemed apologetic, so I didn’t press for further details.

Vivaldium was a large and beautiful planet, but this side of it seemed like an industrial area straight out of a dystopian futuristic world.

When we got close to a large building that stood out from the rest, Vivian stopped.

She approached a random area in the wall, and touched it. Suddenly, a large part of it collapsed and what was left was a rectangular hole in its place.

“This is a useful tip to keep in mind,” she raised her finger as if lecturing a student, “When you try to rob an armored place, go for the walls. They usually have weaker defenses than doors ahahah!”

I chuckled at her joke, but she giggled even harder.

It seems like this isn't her first time doing a mission of such scale...

Suddenly, my expression got serious when I saw what was inside the room.

Many people were lying on the ground, either unconscious or restlessly sweating as their eyes darted around the place.

There were hundreds of hostages, but I checked them one by one as Vivian eased the ropes that bound them and calmed them down.

There were almost no gnomes among the hostages, and the ones that I found didn't resemble Ratska.

I made sure to double check everyone, but to no avail.

I was starting to have a bad feeling about this whole thing, as I couldn't find the hostage that I've come to this wretched planet to save.

Where the hell is Ratska?