

"Tell me about your visit to the Nexus," Alexander asks Lin.

Alexander and Lin are the last ones left in the meeting room.

"I wasn't there for very long. I did as I was trained, and let my presence be known to Safyr. She met me and asked me my purpose for coming there. After my encounter with the dragon, I went in. The Nexus is an archipelago, and the Runalymo live on islands. They don't seem to be aggressive but are cautious of my presence; the only one to approach me was Alysara. Culturally, it seems like the Runalymo take great care in their craftsmanship, and they don't seem to regulate scryers, as I felt many of them when I visited one of their villages. I do wonder what kind of hardships they face to produce a scryer like Alysara, but I didn't see much before meeting her. Aside from that, the Runalymo have more advanced enchanting methods, which is understandable as the mana in the Nexus would strip the enchants faster."

"So you never had a chance to meet Kayafe?" Alexander asks.

"Unfortunately, no. I prioritized requesting Alysara's services," Lin responds.

The Emperor nods, accepting Lin's excuse; he had a duty and prioritized it.

"So, what are your impressions of Alysara?"

"To be honest, I don't know. I thought at first she might be a Mind mage, but I'm not so sure. She definitely has a skill for multiple minds, so she is trained, but I felt no Bond resonance. Rather, I think she has a Light or a Light-based Essence Bond of some sort; I recognized illusory powers during a later encounter. Alysara herself is an excellent craftsman and the one who made the airship. There were other airships in the Nexus, different from the one we used to travel here. As for who Alysara is as a person, she is very cautious. She doesn't directly lie, but she omits a lot of stuff,"

"I noticed. There is something about the Egg she isn't telling us, but I think you have greater insight on that.

"I do, Emperor. From what I can feel from her mind, she is downplaying the potential danger. However, she did tell me truthfully that our knowledge would make it worse under normal circumstances, so maybe she doesn't want to cause us unnecessary worry,"

"Normal circumstances?" Alexander raises an eyebrow.

"Your guess is as good as mine," Lin shrugs.

"Tell me about this 'later encounter.'"

"I initially tried to teleport us straight here and rest afterward, but when I cast the spell, we were caught in an anchoring trap set by extra-layer beings, the same ones that Safyr slew in the recent world messages. It seems that the Nexus is being sieged by them, but they comprehend us as much as we understand them, so it isn't yet a threat to them, especially with Safyr there. Regardless, I offered our aid should they need it."

"I see. You did well on this mission; you should be proud. We might be able to station an Oathbound in the Nexus as both an ambassador and defender from those extra-layer beings to fulfill your promise of helping them with the siege."

"Who will you send as ambassador?" Lin asks.

"Jordan. He has more diplomatic experience and battle expertise,"

"I see. I do wish I could go back and see more of the Nexus, but Jordan will better serve our interests and build positive relations,"

"Perhaps one day you will go back, but for now, rest well; you have a difficult mission ahead of you."

"I will, but, Emperor, you don't seem too concerned about the Egg. Why? You mentioned that you have a contingency, but how? That may very well be a Fabled tier threat."

"I told you about my journey with Kayafe; remember when I said we met with the Cosmic Dragon? He gave us an item with which we can call upon him, but it can only be used once. If the worst should ever happen, we'll use that and ask that he destroy the Cursed Being. He has the power to easily crush any mere Fabled Tier beings."

"Mere Fabled? Just how powerful is he?!"

"The absolute pinnacle, Lin. Mythic Tier. He's a being that defies all logic. He is as old as time and vast beyond measure."

With the meeting over, I am shown my room. I don't actually need it, considering my clone doesn't need to rest, but still, it is useful if I want to get away from the guards. Right now, that is exactly what I want to do, especially since Tk'Thalim followed me at what very conveniently happened to be the exact time I'd like to talk with him.

"I wish to speak with Alysara alone," Tk'Thalim says. The Oathbound nod and leave, shutting the door. "You wanted to speak with me?" despite no Mind mage using their language-translating abilities, I can still understand Tk'Thalim's words almost as if I was fated to.

I am really starting to see how versatile and powerful high-level Bonds really are. I wonder if I can eventually just be able to ignore language barriers.

“Yes, how did you know?”

“Fate, experience, and wisdom,” Tk’Thalim answers. “You want to know how I figured out you are the Archive of Eternity?”

I feel a chill. No one’s called me that before. Other than Yrania, only Safyr and the gods know that secret, and I don’t know if that’s good or bad.

“Yes,” I nod.

“I only started to have that dream after a world message saying Myrou found the Archive of Eternity and a Primordial Soul. From there, it doesn’t take much to put together that the Primordial Soul is the Archive. The dream about the Library must be referring to the Archive of Eternity, and about seventeen years ago, there was another world message saying that the Primordial Soul was reincarnated. You mentioned the Reality Eater, and the only way you’d know that is if you had knowledge of it. Given that you look the right age, the most plausible assumption is that you are the reincarnated Primordial Soul.”

Tk’Thalim gives me a reassuring smile.

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell others or take advantage of you; I can see that fate would shift in an unfavorable direction if I were to. I just want to know what it all means.”

Should I trust him? He’s almost as powerful as Alexander and even Yrania. He can be a powerful ally, plus his Fate Bond seems to be really useful. Trust isn’t a one-way street; I can only receive it if I give it. I suppose I need a leap of faith in this instance.

“I’m still not sure what being the Archive of Eternity really means, but my soul had been lost in the Void since the first realm, since before mana and even the system. I can’t easily recall all the knowledge since it’s compressed in an effort to help me remember them safely, but there are some details I can give. The most notable is that every world message, starting with the very first one and until my reincarnation, is stored in my memory. I remember the birth of the first monsters, beings so great they are at least Fabled Tier, of which several still exist. I also remember the first message of the Reality Eater consuming a realm and witnessed it consume all realms, over, and over, and over again. That is why I said there is nothing we can do; it is simply too powerful.”

“I see. The Reality Eater consumes eternity; that’s what the dream is warning me about. How did those first monsters survive? Surely we can escape the Reality Eater somehow.”

“They fled,” I shrug. “They escaped beyond the Void or made their own realm that is beyond reach. Fafnir, the Cosmic Dragon, tore a hole in reality and left; but Kayafe says she met him, so I guess he comes back after each time the Reality Eater wakes up.”

“Then perhaps we need to find Fafnir. However, there are other details of the dream we need to discuss first. I assume the Eye watching over the Library refers to you?”

“Yes, I won’t go into specifics, but that sounds exactly like what I can do.”

“There is no room for any other interpretation?” Tk’Thaim asks. “If I may, I would like to feel the weight of your gaze. I will not retaliate,”

Well, since he asked. I don’t see any harm in doing so.

I focus my sights down only around him and crank my perceptive pressure as high as I can, even trying to push my limits further as I strain myself to try and crush him under my gaze. I use several of my perceptive eyes that aren’t doing anything important, but I get diminishing returns for using multiple eyes for perceptive pressure.

Tk’Thalim staggers and utters a single swear.

“Dear mother Ok’Kovalon! Just how high is your Skill?! The dream does not do your vision justice! Are you a Gaze Caster, too?” he asks.

“I have one gaze Skill, but I haven’t had the chance to really study it.”

“You should train it. Gaze skills scale well with perceptive pressure, and if you can use it through that skill, you’ll be a major threat to beings more powerful than you. If you train enough, then you can easily match an Oathbound. Lots of beings tend to focus on their Bond at the mid and upper Legendary power levels, but that’s only because most stagnate in their Skills, and the Bond eventually overtakes their Skills in terms of power. You, on the other hand, I would strongly recommend putting your efforts into developing and improving a Gaze Caster Class. Once you are done with Alexander’s request, come to me, and I’ll take you to someone who can teach you. They will want payment, of course, but you can easily make it worth his efforts.”

It’s actually quite nice for someone to encourage me like this. Both Kayafe and Safyr are so sure their way is better and don’t consider my other talents.

“I will consider it,” I say. I’ve pretty much already decided that I will take him up on that offer.

“So, how does your gaze play into the dream?” Tk’Thalim asks. “Are you defending the Library? What does the beautiful soul mean, and why does it lead me to the Cursed Being?”

“Defending the Library? Does that mean I will end up fighting the Reality Eater? Or perhaps...”

Perhaps it is the gods. They have already shown interest in my memories. If the soul could be Myrou, who I promised to show my Archive memories, and the reason why the soul leads to the Reality Eater is that the memories reveal its existence, not that the Reality Eater is threatening me.

If I can threaten to match the Oathbound as I am now, then if I become Legendary, I may be able to defend myself from the gods if I develop my Gaze Skills. But if the dream is right, I should show the memories to Myrou; but what happens next? Or maybe it’s saying that Myrou learning about memories will lead to the Reality Eater waking up early?

I tell Tk’Thalim my thoughts.

"The Spirit Gods, huh? It makes sense they will be interested in you. I think you are right, that the soul is referring to Myrou, and that your concerns are valid. There is a risk that revealing these memories to Myrou may lead to the awakening of the Reality Eater, but I don't think she is that stupid... Unless she thinks that her earning a Mythic point means she is strong enough to slay such a being... That might actually be it. Perhaps the threat comes from the gods waking it up."

Tk'Thalim fingers one of his horns as he goes into thought.

"I believe we should deny the gods the memories until we know more. However, there are a lot of gods, and while Alexander and I may be able to hold our own against one of them, we'll need more allies."

"I'm not so sure," I disagree. "If Myrou is the one to wake the Reality Eater, then it may be best to talk to her and the other gods about the potential danger. If the Cosmic Dragon is also Mythic tier and didn't fight the Reality Eater, then we can convince Myrou that trying to defeat it is a bad idea. Of course, this all assumes that our interpretation is correct, which it may not be. Alienating the gods is a huge risk for me since a group of them has openly stated a desire to use my soul to craft powerful items. Myrou is on my side, wishing to protect me from them."

"Hmm," Tk'Thalim hums in thought. "Then perhaps a compromise. Give the memories to Venaro, the God of Knowledge and Wisdom, and let him confirm if our fears are warranted or not. Venaro has the wisdom and the ability to keep Myrou away from any dangerous knowledge should he deem her a threat, but we'll need to inform him of my dream. The problem is that the Spirit Gods spend a lot of time in the Void or in their favored realm, so they can be rather hard to contact."

"How would you normally try to contact them?"

Now that I think about it, why do people even worship them if they don't do anything for people? Maybe there is a benefit after all? Myrou statues give the impression that she is ever present in the Nexus, but how do other gods interact with their worshippers?

"The most common way is to undertake one of their trials and successfully complete it to get their attention, but that's not the only way."

"Perhaps a statue of their likeness that is connected to them?" I ask, remembering the Likeness of Myrou. Apparently, she can use it to communicate directly to people.

"Not usually. The more a Likeness is like them, the more of a connection to it they may have, but these are spirits, beings made of mana. Trying to replicate their form would be exceedingly difficult and impossible without meeting them in person."

"I know of a Likeness that should be good enough for communication," I say, referring to the Venaro statue at the bottom of the gargoyle section of the dungeon, "but I don't want to talk to the Spirit Gods just yet. We have time to think things through and consider our course of action."

Venaro's Likeness was made at the same time as Myrou's, so it should have the same function. The only problem is there's a Mind Eater there, and I don't think my own mental defenses are up to par to fight it just yet. I suppose I could use Varath's; he's on my side too. However, am I ready to meet them? If I tell them now that I have the memories, it could spark a war between the gods since there is already a split of opposing factions between them. Urolon promised not to tell anyone about my memories, so maybe we can talk to him? But we don't have any way to directly contact him. I have three more years before they'll start asking for the memories anyway, so it's best to prepare; I don't need to tell them anything *right now*.

"Very well," Tk'Thalim said. "When the time is right, I'll come to you. For now, enjoy Alexander's hospitality, for he means well despite his failings."

With that, Tk'Thalim vanishes like dust drifting upon the wind.

Clone POV:

I observe my new cored inscription with intrigue. It is an adaptation of my realization inscription, but instead of producing a spell effect, it is instead forming a cluster of mana crystals. It isn't a perfect mana crystal; it still has lots of impurities, but that in itself can be used. I want to develop the inscriptions in both ways and see what happens. I also want to see what happens when I mix both a crystallization inscription and a realization inscription. Will it produce a spell crystal?

I get to work on developing more efficient inscriptions. It is always a long process of trial and error, a method of producing hundreds of different variations and seeing which ones improve the design, then using that as the base for the next set. Generational evolution. It can take weeks, even months, to find the most optimal inscription for the desired effect, but I will eventually find it.

I wish I knew more about how inscriptions work. It is using magic, that's not only evident by the burning of mana, but also by the shimmering magic visible only to me. However, one troubling question is: why does it always produce a consistent result? The magic should be rebelling, so the obvious answer is divinity is being involved somehow, which makes sense. Inscriptions are based on the Magic Framework of Skills, and while they aren't true Magic Frameworks, I think they are sort of a pseudo-Magic Framework, kind of like a proto-Skill.

I wonder what I'd see if I had [Sense Divinity]? Well, there's no point in 'what-ifs', this is just something I'll have to wait for until Kayafe can get [Sense Divinity]; she should be close. The last time I asked how close she was, she said she was having difficulty getting a knowledge point on one of her breakthroughs. Even with access to my notes, Kayafe is still struggling to understand how the MM force works on a fundamental level. I've explained it to her several times, but she still doesn't get it.

Despite the name, Mana Magnetic Force, it's more like a mix of magnetism and gravity, but that gravity part of it is selective and kind of, but not really, a warping of space. I suppose it'd be hard for even modern people to wrap their head around. The problem is that not even in Runalymo is there a way to fully describe the phenomenon. The best way I can describe it is that there is a non-spatial MM field that is warped by the particles, like how matter warps space. Each component of the mana particle interacts with this field in different ways, so some are repelled by the warping effect, and some are attracted.

Kayafe will get it eventually; until then, I just have to wait and use trial and error to develop the inscriptions.

After several days of experimentation, I not only find one inscription for better-purified mana crystals but several. Slight variations in the inscription forms differently-structured crystals, and after several more days of tests, I found one that produces a cluster of mana crystals roughly in the shape of a flower.

Having just finished the tour of Helikan, I'm a little inspired and want to see where these mana crystallization inscriptions can go. Maybe I set up some sort of garden of mana crystals where people can contribute different designs, although for that to happen, knowledge of inscriptions has to be commonplace.

It has to happen eventually; I shouldn't hoard this knowledge for myself. When I get back from Lunaley, I should start thinking about how to spread knowledge of inscriptions. I don't have a lot of designs yet, but the few that I do have should be enough for a start.