

I had considered simply returning to the Admin Room after making the deal with the elven kingdom, but decided against it. Instead, I led Tsubaki through the Sky Citadel, towards the library. Bracken was clearing out a wide area when we appeared, clearly getting ready for the 'transformation' he wanted to attempt.

"Stop." I told him, causing him to look up at me in surprise, and a bit of disappointment.

"Sir... you said that you wouldn't stop me from doing this... please." He lowered his head as he asked that once again.

"Come with me... If you're going to do this, I'll give you the best chance that you have." I shook my head slowly, mentally pinging the training room where Tsubaki had performed her own transformation, following the path that had been laid out before me.

While I walked, it took a few moments before I heard Bracken hurriedly chasing me. With the system guiding me, it didn't take very long before we reached the hidden door. And in fact, Tsubaki rushed ahead of us, stopping at the empty portion of the wall so that she could open the door for us.

Bracken's eyes widened when he saw the wall opening up, having apparently not realized that there were hidden passages within the Sky Citadel. "Go." I told him, pointing down the passage. "This is the same room where Tsubaki did this, and it has the best chance for you to succeed... I wish you luck." Bracken turned to face me, his eyes beginning to tear up. He gave a sharp nod of his head and walked down the passage with determination, the door closing behind him.

I waited at the hidden door until I could no longer detect his presence, showing that he had already entered the room. Afterwards, I turned and began walking, once more moving to sit on the throne room. "You know that he won't be able to succeed, right, my Keeper?" Tsubaki asked from behind me in a worried tone.

I gave a small nod, agreeing to her concern. "I know... but if there is even the slightest chance, I want to offer it to him. This is the last thing that I can do for him, giving him hope in his last few moments."

Tsubaki's footsteps behind me briefly paused, before she rushed to catch up. "I see... I'm sorry for my rudeness. And, I know that he is grateful for being shown such consideration."

I didn't say anything else, waiting until I had arrived and sat down on the throne. I felt the smallest of tremors shaking the citadel, causing my hand to grip the arm of the throne, my eyes shutting tight for a moment. I knew that Bracken had just died. That he had just killed himself, in the attempt to save both his life and his failing mind.

"Would you like me to handle the cleaning, my Keeper?" Tsubaki asked with her head down, her ears flat against her skull. It was clear that she was also affected by the mood as well.

"Give him ten minutes. However slim, there is still the chance." I had considered using world sight to check the situation, but I was afraid that even that energy might disrupt the slim possibility of his energies being able to merge properly.

Tsubaki gave another nod, and we waited in silence for those ten minutes. Afterwards, I witnessed firsthand how a second Tsubaki suddenly walked out of the body of the first, moving towards the door and walking the way we came. And only a moment later, the one that remained shook her head. "I'm sorry sir..."

"It's fine... Please send one of your avatars to notify the elven queen." A third Tsubaki appeared and left through the same doorway, but this time I had been expecting it.

I had never gotten to know Bracken too well myself. Yes, I had lived in the Sky Citadel with him during my previous stay, but that was only for a month. I knew that he was fascinated by the very prospect of learning, that all of his passion went into his work. I didn't know him well enough to mourn the man. But I knew him enough to respect him.

In the face of losing that which he most cared about, he held onto the smallest sliver of hope. The one cure that may save him, even if it seemed impossible. And he was willing to gamble his life on that small hope. Because to him, that small hope of salvation was worth it. He would rather welcome death than see himself becoming an invalid, losing his lifetime of knowledge. But he did not simply welcome death, or he could have done so a number of different ways.

No, he fought for that last hope. And that is why I choose to respect him. He was the first elven representative. And because of his actions, I won't forget him.

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The High Queen of the elves, Lisandra, had barely been able to send out the orders to gather the druids and the architects after the Keeper's descent. She found herself on her throne once again when a voice spoke into her mind, one which she had heard before. *High Queen. It is done.*

Her voice caught in her throat for a moment, and she gave a small nod. "He... died?"

*He did. But know... the Keeper cared for him until the end. Bracken was a good man. I apologize for your loss.*

"No... there's nothing for you to be sorry for. We all knew that this day would come." The queen spoke quietly, lowering her head. Her guards glanced curiously in her direction, but none raised

their voices to speak. "I have already prepared the next representative, in the event that he failed. May I ask that you take care of her as you did him?"

*It is my duty. So long as they strive to be good, I shall tend to the needs of any representative who chooses to live in the Keeper's Palace.*

"Thank you, Tsubaki." The queen nodded her head briefly, thanking the familiar voice.

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"Tsubaki." I spoke up after a few minutes, lifting my head to look at the nearby maid.

"Yes, my Keeper?"

"I'll be heading away for a little while. Please take care of things while I'm gone." Just as I was closing my eyes to prepare to ascend, I heard Tsubaki's voice speak up from next to me.

"If it's not too much trouble... could you perhaps wait a few minutes, my Keeper?" Tsubaki asked, making a rather reluctant expression as she voiced her request.

"May I ask what for?" I turned to face her curiously.

"The new representative for the elves will be arriving momentarily." She bowed deeply as she said that. "It is my wish for you to allow her a meeting before you go."

"I see... very well." I nodded my head, easily accepting the request. I had simply wanted to return to the Admin Room for a little bit to relax and take a look at Fyor, but I could postpone that for a few moments.

"Thank you." As Tsubaki said that, a golden mist rose up from the floor, Aurivy's handiwork of bringing the new representative to the Citadel.

The person that emerged from the mist was quite young. Not nearly as much so as Anna had been on her first appearance here, but she still seemed quite a ways from adulthood. However, given the rate elves age... that still probably meant she was at least fifty years old.

"Hello, Keeper." The elf, Soreya, offered a respectful bow towards me. "My name is Soreya. I'll be in your care."

Well, at least her apparent age didn't cause her to be a troublemaker, it seemed... Though, her level was surprisingly low, only hitting thirty-five. "Hello, Soreya. I'm sure everything has been explained to you?"

She tilted her head in a brief moment of confusion, before nodding it. "I think so... You're Tsubaki, right?" She asked, turning her head to look at the nearby maid, who simply nodded her head. "I was told to ask you if I had any questions here, is that okay?"

Tsubaki gave another nod, her face the same stoic expression she typically showed. However, that seemed to be enough for Soreya, who beamed a smile at her. "Okay! Then... uhm... can you help me meet anyone else living here?"

Tsubaki glanced towards me, receiving a silent nod. She stepped down from the throne, walking over towards the elf and guiding her away. This gave me the chance to ascend as I had been aiming to do before.

Once I was back up in the Admin Room, I sent a message to Bihena and Aurivy. *How's it coming with you two? Ready for the second tier yet, or have they not caught up with the first?*

As I asked that question, I fell back on the bed, closing my eyes and sprawling out. It took a few minutes before they got back to me, so I guessed that they were discussing the topic among themselves.

*No harm in getting it now, I think.* Bihena replied eventually. *But, I don't think we'll be giving them access to it for a few more days. They've only gone through about two thirds of the words we left behind already.*

Nodding my head, I went ahead and spent the six hundred points to get the second tier of words. The current budget that the two of them had was already enough to afford that back when they created the world, so I didn't feel any need to wait too long. *It's been bought, feel free to come pick it up whenever you're ready.*

There was a mental sigh over the communication. *I'll be there shortly, Dale. Anyways... the world has a level limit of ninety still, but they have unlocked the layer that has the next level limit orb. You can either give us a couple days for people to find it naturally, or...*

I gave an amused smile at that suggestion. *Or I can go do it myself, and experience this new world of yours?*

*Only if you want to. If you use your full Keeper powers, the creatures of this level should not be able to pose any threat to you. But be warned, there are only sixteen classes currently available in the world, so your powers will not be as overwhelming as you are used to.*

Hearing Bihena's warning, I gave it a bit of thought, before nodding my head. *I'll do it. I wanted to see this new world of yours anyways.*

*I'll pass that along, then. On the map of Fyor, you're looking for the outermost layer, and we've marked the location of the orb you need.*

I nodded my head, lifting myself up from the bed and moving to the computer. Opening up the map of Fyor, I saw that a total of ten layers had been unlocked so far, with the last layer appearing roughly half the size of the original Earth that I had grown up on. While flipping through the map, I wondered just how the two of them had marked the location of the orb...

That was, until I saw a giant patch of red along the green grass. Zooming out, I found that it formed an X on the map... and sure enough, when I zoomed in on the center of that X, I found a small blue crystal sphere. *Well... that's one way to mark the map.* I thought to myself with a shake of my head, choosing to descend to that location.

As there were only two races this time to choose from, I opted for halfling once again. I wasn't sure how long this would take to bring the orb back to the first layer, but I knew that halflings were notorious for being swift. *Though, I'll probably be using magic to speed myself up as much as possible...*