

"By the gods, what did you do?!" Kayafe says.

"I didn't think it'd be that powerful!" I say, panic setting in as a powerful shockwave sweeps across the sea, churning up a massive wave.

I may be familiar with advanced physics, but that doesn't mean I know everything. I knew that matter and antimatter reactions would be powerful, but I didn't know just how powerful. I suppose I could have done the math to get an idea, but at some point, a high number just doesn't mean anything without something to relate it to. I don't have the internet to see just how much power I was dealing with.

"Nevermind that, we need to stop that blast wave!" I shout and use whatever power I have left to cast a Magically enhanced shield spell over the coastline, stretching from one horizon to the other, but even then, it's nowhere near enough to protect everything.

Fatigue washes over me, and a sharp pain assaults my mind as I nearly collapse to the ground. I manage to make it to Lanya's carriage, but since Kayafe is not near my body, she has no idea.

"You used so much mana there's barely any for me to use," Kayafe complains before raising her hand and channeling a spell, pulling mana from nearly all of the Lunaleyan Island. "It seems like I, too, need to get used to my title boost," Kayafe mutters before unleashing the spell.

A barrier made of thousands of hexagons forms, stretching across the entirety of the coast, just a few hundred meters offshore.

The shockwave and tsunami crash against the impenetrable barrier, bouncing off and leaving the land unharmed.

Kayafe is *far* stronger than I am. Even if our skill is around the same level, her stats, Classes, title, and specialization give her way more power than I thought. Is she on the same level as Safyr now? Probably not, but now I am starting to wonder if Safyr was holding back against the eldritch and Cursed Beings. I suppose that makes sense, though. The Nexus was pretty much destroyed when the dragons fought the Fallen Legacy, so if that wasn't their full power, then the Nexus may not even exist anymore if they had not held back.

Just how much power do legendary beings really have? I'm starting to see why many consider them gods, for who could do something like this other than a god?

"I know for a fact that you don't have the power to do that," Kayafe accuses me. "But I saw you making matter, so I assumed you used advanced knowledge from your past life."

"Correct." I nod. "Matter is pretty much a bundle of energy, a *lot* of it. Matter can also exist in an opposite form called antimatter that is identical in all ways, even how it behaves, except it has an opposite charge. When the two meet, the charges cancel each other out, and that releases energy."

"It doesn't revert back into mana?" Kayafe asks.

“Apparently not” I shrug and swish my tails. “Matter, energy, and mana are all different forms of... existence? I don’t know what you’d call it.”

“So mana makes matter, and matter makes energy... or not...?” Kayafe appears to go into deep thought. “Matter is made of energy, so mana is compressed into that energy, but since we can’t see that energy, we don’t know what we are doing, or even recognize what we are doing until we accidentally make matter....”

Kayafe would have noticed the depletion of mana regardless if her sense mana was high enough, but since it wasn’t, she didn’t even realize what she was doing, which disqualified her from getting a breakthrough. I was strong enough that turning mana into matter wasn’t hard, so I went straight into that, not realizing if I held back, I could have gotten a potential breakthrough in turning mana into energy.

“We can practice that later,” Kayafe says. “The more important issue is the use of antimatter. As you know, it is very... potent, but it’s not actually useful in most situations. You don’t always have the opportunity to fight in an unpopulated area, so the collateral alone makes it not worth it if you are in places you care about. It is not mana, nor is it a Skill meaning you have no control over it, and generally explosions waste most of their energy potential.”

“That’s why I adapt my spells to explode only once it enters the body; that gives it the maximum amount of damage potential,” I say, showing that I already know the weakness of explosion-type attacks.

“Well, to illustrate my point more, most legendary beings would be far more destructive if they didn’t raise the efficiency of their attacks, so you need to too. In your fight, you were mostly using explosion-type attacks, and while you were doing it smartly, it also led to a lot of waste when the Cursed Being just regenerated. That’s not how you fight regenerators.” Kayafe crosses her arms like a disappointed teacher.

“You need to bleed them of their mana or whatever is powering their supernatural healing so they can’t regenerate anymore; by using costly explosions, you just drain yourself of your own power and will eventually lose. If you didn’t have that Antimatter, what would you have done? Can’t attack with your clone because it’s made of mana, can’t use spells for the same reason, and throwing rocks isn’t effective enough. This is when you rely on other things. Allies, non-mana items, skills. You can empower your own body and fight physically. I shouldn’t have to tell you that Cursed Beings counter mages. Yes, we mana manipulators also counter Cursed beings, but that advantage goes away if we also can’t do anything!”

I hang my head. I was too anxious about the fight, and I completely overlooked some things until the middle of the fight. However, Kayafe wasn’t done lecturing me.

“Explosions are high-powered attacks, and they do have their uses, but you can’t just hope to end all fights in one attack; you need more practice fighting normally! But,” Kayafe pats my head with a smile. “You did a good job. You did think outside the box and found a solution to your weakness. It was excessive, but Cursed Beings often require desperate and excessive

measures. You did everything you could to lessen the consequences and even tried to fix your mistake. You should be proud.”

I can’t help but feel some warm fuzzy feeling at Kayafe’s praise. Yes, I did make mistakes, but I don’t have the same fighting experience as her. It doesn’t help that my Classes are low-level and tier, so I pretty much had to rely on casting, which Kayafe admits is weak against Cursed Beings.

However, despite the handicap of weak Classes, I still defeated the Cursed Being on my own. Well, Lanya helped too, and it was a weak Cursed being, not worth a legendary feat, but I still defeated it without Kayafe’s or Safyr’s help.

If I had been stronger, had more fighting experience, and had more developed Classes, I might not have needed to take such drastic actions. Kayafe’s right; seeking safety by taking Klamán’s offer is just running away... Metaphorically. It is also running away literally, but that did have a purpose.

More importantly, I learned that I can’t just wait until the perfect time to evolve my Classes. I keep putting it off for ‘better options’ later, but the world doesn’t wait for me. It’s not like I could just ask Jetlin not to turn into a Cursed Being for another month. I have to take any power increases I can get so I am most ready for whatever the world throws my way. If that is still insufficient, then I can at least have a clear mind in that I was the most prepared I could have been.

Meanwhile, back in Lanya’s carriage, she noticed my sudden exhaustion.

“Are you alright?” Lanya asks.

“Yes, I just used the rest of my power to try and deal with the consequences of that explosion,” I explain.

That leaves me with one question, though. Why do I feel so tired? It’s not like I exerted my real body, nor did I overly exhaust my mana reserves. Plus, Skills are powered by Magic. They do burn mana from my reserves, but I still have mana left, so why the exhaustion?

After several minutes of thought, the best answer I can come up with is that it is a Magical backlash. Magic doesn’t like being controlled; however, in a Skill, it is dominated by Divinity, so it has to do as I command, but it seems overly using it still has consequences.

“Skill exhaustion?” Lanya guesses.

I nod. It seems that it is a common phenomenon.

“What do you think causes it?” I ask.

Lanya looks at me as if I were stupid.

“Using your skills too much, of course,” Lanya says.

“Thanks, Queen Obvious,” I say sarcastically. “What I meant was, what do you think is the underlying cause of it? Yes, using Skills is related, but correlation doesn’t always equal causation.”

“Sorry.” Lanya apologizes, looking ashamed of her inelegant behavior. “I don’t know. No one has asked that question before.”

Most people don’t have [Sense Magic], so I guess they wouldn’t even have a hint of a clue, but there’s always the chance my speculation is wrong, or that I’m not seeing an obvious answer.

If using Skills too much leads to exhaustion, then what would overly using my title lead to? Is the title Divinity or Magic? It doesn’t seem to be a Magic framework since I’d be able to see it, or maybe I’m just not looking in the right place. Anyway, The fact is I haven’t seen any indication of myself, Safyr, Kayafe, or anyone else having a title by looking at their frameworks or stored Aether, so what exactly is it?

My title has control over rituals which are inherently Magical in nature, so I just assumed it might be related to Magic, but Divinity also makes sense. The issue is: How is Divinity controlling the Magic? Also, there’s the issue of what happens if it tries to control too much Magic.

The simplest answer is that titles are packets of pure Magic, and since it’s Magic controlling Magic, there’s no backlash from Magic rebelling. As such, at least theoretically, I can cast as many rituals as possible. However, I also have to consider what happened with my swordspears.

Breakthroughs require a minimum amount of knowledge— knowledge that it is at least possible. It was easy early on since I didn’t need to know whether or not liquid mana was possible since I had a sample to work off of. After that, it was building off my previous knowledge and theorizing possibilities. Sometimes it wasn’t exactly according to my theories, but at least I was aware of the possibilities of something more.

So what are titles? Why can’t I see them? Is it because I am not even aware of what they truly are, or is it related to divinity in a way that is outside of what [Sense Magic] can see? I can’t do anything if it is the latter, but the former I can at least try to get.

My musings are interrupted when Lanya suddenly speaks up.

“Did you [Analyze] the Cursed Being?” She asks. It seems that something is weighing upon her thoughts.

“During the fight, yes.”

“What did it say?”

“**Mutant**,” I answer. That was all I got from it. No levels, no Bond, nothing except that one word.

“Is there perhaps a peaceful Cursed Being?” Lanya asks. “One that, instead of destroying things, heals or something of the like?”

What is she trying to get at? There is definitely something she identified before with similar results, but it wasn't a Cursed Being? If that's the case, then it might have been a Magic Being. I only heard that they exist from Safyr and Kayafe, with the Dungeon Core being an example.

Now that I think about it, Helikan has a dungeon, right? She must be referring to the Dungeon Core.

"Although I have never seen one myself, what you probably saw was a Magic Being. Both Magic and Cursed Beings are made of Magic, but behave differently. As long as it isn't aggressive, you probably don't need to worry about it."

"You seem to know a lot about Magic, and you did help us without first naming a price, so can I trust you with a secret?"

"You barely know me," I say, a little confused as to why Lanya is giving me so much trust.

"I can't take the risk of not knowing if there is going to be a powerful Magic Being that will one day turn against Helikan; I *need* to know if it is truly safe, and you are the only one I know who is an expert in Magic."

"I already know about Dungeon Cores; as far as I am aware, they aren't even interested in anything but their Dungeon."

"Dungeon Cores are also Magic Beings?" Lanya blurts out, surprise on her face.

"Yes," I say, even more confused, "What were you talking about if not that?"

"I think It is better to show you," Lanya sighs. "But since it is Helikan's greatest secret, I will have to count it as payment for helping us or for your earlier knowledge."

"That's fine," I say. The opportunity to study a Magic Being up close is more than worth it. I can finally target some of my harder-to-level breakthroughs and potentially get a new one!

Clone POV: Miasma Study part two

Ting! Sense Magic has met the requirements for a breakthrough and will continue leveling past level 1040!

52nd Breakthrough: You have detected ambient Miasma in the air; this will help you study this form of Miasma.

Ambient Miasma is different from the stuff in the ruins. It is much more vibrant and saturated in color. It swirls about, wafting in the directions people walk as if it were fog following tailwinds. It seems to react to people in some way, but not in a dangerous manner, almost as if it is too chaotic. It can't cause any dangerous reactions because it's not focused enough. This means that it relies on social symbolism and significance to focus it and make it useful.

I don't like the implication that there might be good reasons to use Miasma because that means I might need to experiment with it, and I don't want to follow in Jetlin's footsteps. I'll only stick to observations; it's the only safe way to study Miasma. Poking around with it is just asking for trouble, considering how related to Magic it is.

Looking at several towns and cities, I get an example of what I assume is a 'healthy' state of ambient Miasma. Too young and unfocused to cause trouble, and when it is focused on something, it's part of a minor and harmless social ritual and safely burned away. Ruins show an example of 'unhealthy' Miasma, which is allowed to enter a state of low chaos, so it can easily assume the ruinous symbology of what the ruins used to mean, and fear of ruins probably doesn't help either.

This finally gives a clear explanation as to how Cannibals are made. There's residual Miasma in the flesh, and just like the cursed elixir Jetlin drank, it curses them. The one difference is that the worldwide fear of Cannibals is so great that even a small amount of Miasma can cause a lot of damage because it's being focused. One Cannibal that results in a word message spreads fear of them over the entire realm, making it more potent; it's a self-perpetuating cycle.

I suppose that superstitions act as corrupt rituals in a way. If normal cultural traditions can safely burn Miasma, then fear and superstitions can amplify Miasma in a bad way. The Nexus is lucky in that there aren't a whole lot of superstitions, but imagine a society that believes that one must burn incense before they sleep or they will have bad luck the next day. The belief itself may be enough to make it true, and if the Lunaley cities are a normal example, then there should be enough Miasma around to latch onto it.

I report my findings to Safyr. She listens and doesn't speak until I finish explaining everything.

"I forbid you from any active experimentation," Safyr says.

"I know. I wasn't going to try," I answer.

"Good. Now, what you learned is actually very useful, but I believe that this knowledge shouldn't be spread carelessly."

"Why?"

"Because it won't change anything. We've lived all our lives without it, but with this knowledge, there can be damage. If people realize that their superstitions can only cause problems, then will it be effective in burning Miasma? What if people want to make their traditions more effective? Even your bathing traditions have minute positive effects on your people, so many may want to empower the positive effects."

In other words, people may want to control Magic by making cultural rituals with selfish desire. Magic will eventually rebel, and that will cast doubt and hate on me. Even if I warn people not to

control Magic, many will still do it, but others may question what the point of even telling them is if they can't do anything.

"So what you are saying is that no harm can be done by keeping others ignorant, while telling others is a risk for little or no benefit."

"Exactly," Safyr nods.

Safyr speaks sense, but rulers can do something about it. With subtle influence, they can try to introduce certain traditions, fads, or something along those lines if they need it. However, that also means that while most don't know anything, it would be started with a means to control and use Magic which may backfire anyway.

"What about telling influential people who can introduce traditions and other cultural rituals to ignorant masses? Do you think the chance of Magic rebelling is the same, less, or more?"

"Hmm," Safyr hums, but she doesn't spend too much time thinking about it. "It depends on how you look at it. What is a nation if not its people? A King rules over the nation, so it's a direct and personal benefit or desire to control Magic and the processes in which Magic works. If anything, it'd be more likely for Magic to rebel. However, if you look at the population, then it's only a few people seeking control, so it'd be less likely. You can think from an influence point of view, in which case it might be about the same. All are valid points, but what is even the gain for you to tell them? Unless the society is in such a bad state where Miasma keeps building up, you don't need to say anything."

What Safyr didn't mention is that if it is considered that the king owns his kingdom, and Magic decides to rebel by destroying what he owns, then the destructive potential also increases.

No matter how one looks at it, there is no benefit in telling anyone, with the exception of an unhealthy society that can't burn Miasma fast enough.

"Have there been cases where a kingdom was destroyed because they had too much Miasma?" I ask.

However, Safyr just shrugs and says, "Maybe. I wouldn't know. However, it would explain one or two cases in which powerful and strange Cursed Beings inexplicably came to be and destroyed a few kingdoms."

Powerful and strange? If Safyr is the one saying that, then I fear just how powerful they really are. Perhaps there's something special that happens, or maybe it's just a case where there is an unusual amount of Miasma, which leads to a more powerful Cursed Being.

In any case, it's best I keep quiet about all this; there's nothing to gain and everything to lose by telling others.