

There was a burst of energy within Udonas palace, causing the God-Queen herself to open her eyes wide. She had been reading through some important documents that had been presented to her, so she had failed to pay attention to what was going on in her own palace, a place that was considered one of the most secure facilities in any world.

With a thought, she appeared at the source of the disturbance, and underground training room where she found her chef surrounded by six distinct spell arrays. Each one was incredibly complex, though she vaguely recognized them as requirements to prepare for his new energy that he had devised.

Aznod himself was standing in the very center, a red glow emanating from his body. Aznod's eyes were closed, as if taking in the information of the new energy that he had managed to achieve. Of course, there was only so much that he could do without testing it himself, but there was quite a bit that he could learn, even from simply feeling it like this.

"You managed it?" Udonas asked, her eyes wide and hopeful. If Aznod had managed to complete this new energy, she wasn't quite sure herself what the final result would be.

"I appear to have, yes." Aznod answered, only belatedly realizing that Udonas was in the room with him. He turned, offering her a deep bow. "Apologies if I caused you any disturbance. Such was not my intention."

"It's fine. So, shall we see what you can do?" Udonas asked with a wide grin. She was quite looking forward to this, as it was meant to be an energy that could utilize cooking in combat.

Aznod gave a small nod of his head, and the pair quickly vanished from their positions. No doubt Udonas had contacted Aurivy secretly, as the golden mist that engulfed them deposited them atop a mountain seemingly made of solid crystal. Aznod blinked in surprise, looking around as he felt an intense gravity weighing down his body. "Are we on Fyor?"

"That's right." Udonas nodded her head. "We needed a proper opponent for you to test your new abilities, and there is one here that has been causing a fair bit of trouble for those brave few that have managed to settle in this area."

Aznod thought about it for a moment, before nodding his head. "Very well, please instruct me on what I must do."

"It's quite simple. You merely need to use your new energy to fight this creature. At your level, it should not be a problem even if you can't figure out the specifics of how to wield the energy in combat. At the very least, you will be able to escape with your life, or kill it with one of your other powers."

Aznod gave another nod. "In that case, may I ask where the monster is located?"

“You’re standing on it.” Udonā said with a playful smile, causing Aznod to look down. It took him quite a while to recognize that the surface of the crystal mountain that he was standing on was merely the furled wings of some giant creature. Focusing his eyes, he could see the shadow of a serpentine figure within the wings, allowing him to guess the identity of the beast beneath his feet. Or at least, a general description of it.

“A crystal dragon..? I’m not sure if such a thing would prove edible, but I shall try my best for you.” Aznod said, taking a deep breath as he began to generate more and more of this new energy, which had a dark red color to it.

As he did not know the proper method to utilize the energy yet, he simply pushed it into the crystal wing of the creature, finding that it scorched the crystal hide like an incredibly intense flame. His brow furrowed, sure that there was more to it than that.

However, his action had caused the ‘ground’ beneath his feet to shift, the crystal dragon recognizing his presence. Though the burn mark was absolutely miniscule compared to the size of the creature itself, it had still proven to be annoying. Aznod quickly pulled his energy back, allowing himself to fly in the air while the dragon awoke.

As he did, he felt something *e/se* within his energy. Something that hadn’t been in there before. Information, like a small list in the back of his mind. While the dragon stirred, Aznod focused on tapping into that information. Almost immediately, a pile of crystal scales began to fall from the lump of dark red energy, causing the energy itself to shrink.

Udonā’s eyes widened, knowing that he had produced more scales than what he had burnt away. “You are able to create items which you have sampled? I suppose that was one of the uses of void energy in the formula.”

Aznod nodded his head in agreement, though he could feel the information deteriorating as he produced more scales, not to mention the cost of the energy itself. As an experiment, he grabbed one of the falling scales, as large as the palm of his hand, and pushed it back into the mass of dark red energy.

The scale was burned away, and the information was restored. However, there did not seem to be any recovering the energy that he had lost, unless he did so manually. “Interesting.” He could begin to see how this might relate to cooking, at least to a degree.

Beneath the two of them, the dragon had finished waking up, its massive head shifting from side to side as it looked for the pest that had bitten its wing. When it saw Aznod in the air, its crystal eyes seemed to glow. Its jaws opened, and a burst of white light emerged from its mouth, sweeping towards Udonā and Aznod.

Udona simply waved her hand to stop the blast from hitting her, 'killing' the attack before it could reach her. However, she did not offer the same protection to Aznod, wanting to see what he would do.

As he was still testing his new energy, Aznod created a wall of in before himself, using it as a shield. He had judged the attack as something that he would be able to survive even if his defense failed, so he was not particularly worried.

To his surprise, the energy released by the dragon also seemed to be absorbed into the wall that he had created, though the wall was beginning to shrink as it absorbed more and more of the blast. This forced Aznod to create more of the energy to reinforce the wall until the blast had ended.

When he sensed the information within the energy now, there was an additional item on the list, which he could guess was the blast that he had just obtained. *Cooking is all about mixing things together to achieve the perfect balance... if that is the case, maybe...* He focused, and felt the two items in his energy merging together.

Afterwards, a crystal scale fell from the energy, into Aznod's hands. However, this one was glowing with an intense light, clearly ready to release its power at a moment's notice. *Unlike physical items, energy can only be spent to the degree it was taken in. This one scale contains half of the blast that I absorbed, so...*

Aznod held the scale between two fingers, and threw it at the crystal dragon. The dragon did not seem to pay any mind to the glowing scale, letting it fall on its body. When it did so, though, there was an eruption of white light, earning a pained groan from the dragon as part of its shoulder melted away.

Aznod nodded his head in satisfaction, though he felt that there was still more that he could learn with this new energy. He tilted his body, flying down towards the creature while absorbing the energy back into himself. From his first experiment, he knew that it would not allow him to burn through the dragon's hide fast enough that he could freely fly through its body.

Instead, he gathered a small amount of the energy into the shape of a knife, slashing it down to strike the dragon's neck. The energy cut sharply into the dragon's neck, piercing it several meters and causing a translucent liquid to flow out. However, it was not enough to kill the monster.

Just as Udona was thinking of killing it herself, and that there wasn't much more to be learned here, Aznod produced a much larger knife of dark red energy. He took advantage of the dragon's slow movements making it unable to respond to him, quickly flying to the other side of its neck and lashing out with the larger knife.

This time, the knife expanded even as it cut into the neck of the dragon, until it had cleaved all the way through to the other side. The head of the dragon froze, before starting to fall with a deafening crash. The rest of its body soon collapsed, unable to properly operate without its head.

Udona nodded her head in satisfaction, moving over to Aznod. However, before she could speak, she noticed him looking intently at the massive body of the dragon. "Is something the matter?"

"Hmm? No, I was just concerned if I would be able to take back a body this size. If I were to do so with my new energy... I would need at least twenty times my current capacity." That wasn't to say that his energy was weak, but that the body of the dragon was simply that massive. Udona seemed impressed already that it would only take so little energy to completely devour the body of the dragon.

"For now, just take samples of the important parts. I'll have one of my people come and dismantle it soon." She nodded her head, not wanting to waste any potential ingredients. Had this been on Deckan, she could have simply turned the entire thing into a card with her level of strength, though it may have taken considerable effort.

Aznod nodded his agreement, proceeding to sample various organs and muscles from all across the dragon's body, ranging all the way from its tongue to its heel. As it was a crystal entity, he still wasn't sure if such a thing was properly edible, but he saved the information within his energy nonetheless.

Only once he had finished, and there were tunnels dug all throughout the massive creature, did Aznod decide that he was done. He exited the tunnel where he had taken a sample from the creature's heart, nodding towards Udona. Then with a burst of golden mist, they were transported to the kitchen within her palace. "Now that we've seen its combat applications, shall we test how it works in the kitchen?"

Aznod smiled, much more eager for this experiment. He walked over to the pantry, grabbing different cards from the shelves, and released the ingredients within them onto the counter. Afterwards, he absorbed those materials with his new energy, feeling how they came to rest as information.

Since he was able to merge the energy from the dragon's blast with the scale, he decided to see if he could do something similar with these other ingredients. Closing his eyes, he focused on merging together a long strip of muscle from the dragon's flank with the beef of a flaming bull. To his surprise, he felt that the two could be merged rather easily. Moreso, he could choose *how* they were merged, which characteristics to use from each one.

Thinking about it, he decided to use the texture of the flaming bull beef, but the vitality of the crystal dragon. Then, he siphoned some of the energy from the dragon's breath into the meat.

After cutting it into a small cube, he focused on cooking it within his energy itself, adding in several different spices throughout the process.

Once he was finished, he grabbed a plate, generating the energy above it and dropping a medium-rare steak onto the plate itself, sauce dripping from the steak. There was still steam rising from the meat, and Udonā licked her lips as she looked at it. The meat had a faint blue tint to it, and seemed to glow on the plate.

Aznod passed the plate to Udonā, taking a step back to allow her to be the first taste tester. The kitsune goddess happily complied, cutting into the steak with surprising ease. When she put the first bite in her mouth, her eyes went wide. Her mouth opened, a thin stream of white light emerging, though it died out a few inches away from her mouth.

Both Aznod and Udonā were surprised by this action, as it was quite similar to the action taken by the dragon when it initially released the attack. "I hope that it did not take away from the taste, at least?" Aznod asked, somewhat nervous about that aspect.

"Oh no, not at all!" Udonā shook her head. "If anything, it actually made it better? It's like... you made it spicy, but a type of spicy that works through energy." Aznod contemplated those words, and then nodded his head. He grabbed a spare shaker for pepper, and focused on infusing the rest of the blast's energy into that pepper.

Afterwards, he recreated the steak again, but this time he used the new pepper that he had created. When he added it to the rest of the meal, he was again able to sense how he wanted to merge them. He discarded the destructive properties of the blast, choosing only to add the taste.

This time, when Udonā bit into the new steak, her eyes went wide for an entirely different reason. She let out a soft gasp, bringing one hand up to her cheek. "Oh, this is just right..." She nodded her head in approval, earning a smile from Aznod.

"It seems that the energy is capable of absorbing the attacks that it intercepts, and then I can prepare them as ingredients for my dishes. If I use too much energy at once, it will simply explode... but if it is properly moderated and prepared, it appears that I can create a dish that allows one to release the same attack." Aznod was quite satisfied with this, and even Udonā nodded her head.

"That's right. Did the system tell you the name for this information?" She asked, looking over at Aznod, who smiled.

"Philosopher's Flame. That is the name that the system told me when I finished creating this energy."