Chapter 123

The plane landed at the Hollywood Burbank airport in California.  A large limo was there to meet us on the runway as we taxied to a stop.  Reika was nearby with luggage as we walked down the ramp.  She was with a small Asian woman who was in her mid-twenties.  I guessed she was a grad student as her.  We pointed at the limo, and they were confused, “Charlotte, can you make sure their luggage gets on board?”

“Certainly, Mister Silverhorn,” she answered without hesitation.

I approached Reika and her friend, sizing up her friend.  She was wolfkin as well but had reddish fur under her guise.  With my enhanced senses and practice, I could now distinguish between a morphing disguise and pure illusion.  The illusion charm was simpler and fairly affordable at a few thousand dollars.  Morphing artifacts cost as much as a new car, twenty-five thousand on the cheap end.

Reika’s friend was using a morphing charm, which was strong as her true form was slightly fuzzy in my abyssal sight.  I smiled pleasantly, “We are going to lunch.”

Charlotte spoke, “I have made your reservations at The Ramp Restaurant and Bar.  It is highly recommended and close by.”  She wore her ever-present white smile, but her eyes showed did dart down for a brief second.

In the limo, I was introduced to Reika’s friend, “This is my friend from high school, Keiko Hirata.  Her brother works in Melbourne, and her brother’s wife just had a baby, so she wanted to visit.”  She indicated to Iris, “She said you wouldn’t mind.”

“There is plenty of room on the plane,” I said as we arrived after the very short drive.  As we stepped out of the limo, we got a lot of looks like we might be someone famous.  As we were seated, I ordered two rounds of appetizers for everyone; fried calamari, mango-habanero buffalo wings, fried zucchini, garlic cheese bread, and shrimp cocktail.

We talked as we ate.  Keiko was quiet to start, and Reika did most of the initial talking at the table,  “I have identified five investment sectors in technology that I want to start your portfolio on.”  We all listened at the table as she talked about AI, batteries, zero-gravity alloy manufacturing, hypersonic flight, and deep-space asteroid mining.  Almost everything sounded very sci-fi. She insisted these technologies would be at the forefront in the next twenty years. The question was, what companies in each sector should we bet on?  Her plan was to invest five million in five different companies.

Even though Reika was trying to get my input, I had nothing to offer.  I eventually said, “Send me all the textbooks for the college and graduate courses to my residence in Virginia.  I will peruse them.  But you can invest the twenty-five million however you see fit.”

Reika scoffed at my request, “Do you want the research articles too?  That would be hundreds of notes.”

“Distill it down to relevant information,” Bedelia interjected.  “He can handle it.”

Reika looked on in disbelief. “How fast can you bring things into your mind space?”

“I have not clocked myself recently.  Maybe 2000 pages an hour,” I said while munching on the garlic cheese bread.  Bedelia and Abigail, we’re smug at the table, Iris indifferent.  Iris’ core was not strong enough to form a mind space, while the other two already had nascent mind spaces.

Keiko was slack-jawed as well.  “You can...that means you must have at least a tier three core!”  She said it loud but then quieted.

Artica scanned the other patrons, and I had already checked to ensure there was no restaurant demis dining.  Our table was quiet as the entrees were being brought out.  I had the house salmon supreme dish.  It had mushrooms, artichoke, and salmon diced over fettuccine.  It was good, but I wished I had ordered that instead because Artica and Iris were moaning in delight at their bacon avocado cheeseburgers.  I stopped the waitress and asked her for seven bacon avocado burgers and thirty cannoli from their dessert menu.  It was a long flight, after all.

Everyone had ignored Keiko’s question about my core strength. Keiko had barely touched her food and was just studying me in a mix of fear, awe, envy, and desire.  Not sexual desire.  Just the desire to get close to someone so far beyond you in a wealth and power kind of way.  At least, that was how I interpreted her look.

After Reika’s business talk was done, the table erupted into girl talk.  Starting with the show Emily in Paris.  Maybe I would get a chance to watch some episodes one day.  I could get the DVDs and bring them into my mind to watch there.  The conversation shifted to movies, actors, and then a question if we would see any actors in the restaurant.  If we wanted to go, Reika knew where a sitcom was filming a pilot at an off-site location.  Keiko said, “Nine out of ten small-budget pilots never see time on TV.  If you want, I can bring you to a movie set my uncle is working on as the stunt coordinator.”

Abigail was interested, “What show?”

“Cop and Robber.  They are filming season one for HBO.  However, the name is cheesy. It a real-life drama similar to True Detective.  Each episode follows both sides of the law.  It tries to get you to understand the motivations of the main criminal while respecting the police officer.  I know the ending if you want, as my uncle had the whole script.”  Keiko was trying to impress everyone at the table.  When this adventure started, she thought she was getting a free flight.  Now, I could tell she was eager to please.

“Let’s hear it,”  I said, ignoring objections from the table.

“Well, the protagonist cop finds out who the criminal is and ends up planting evidence to get a conviction on the criminal.  In the entire series, the cop seems good, but then he breaks the law in the end. So the audience sympathizes with the antagonist going to prison,” she explained in a rushed torrent of words that only made half-sense.

After that, there were a dozen plot questions she could not answer, and finally, our takeout was brought, and we went to the limo.  I tipped the waitress $500 in cash for putting up with our table.  The return to the airport was quick, and I also gave the driver $100.  Charlotte greeted us, “The plane is refueled, checked, and ready, Sir.”

We boarded, and Articia used the bathroom.  When she sat down, she said, “They cleaned the bedroom!  Everything!  New sheets and blankets even.  You almost can not smell it!”

“Smell what?” Keiko asked, trying to worm her way into our company some more.

The hours of sex seemed to be a joke as everyone started laughing. When it died down, we did not answer her question. Instead, I asked, “So Keiko, what do you do.“

“I am a journalism student at UCLA.  I took two years off and will finally be graduating this year,” she said proudly.

“So, are you good at research and things like that?  Do you want to want for your friend, Reika?”  I asked, coming to a decision.

Abigail was hiding a smile as Keiko didn’t know what to say.  I added, “Rekia mentioned she needed to pull the research for the areas of tech she wanted to invest in.  It seems you are qualified to help.”

She had trouble thinking as the plane started its takeoff.  Finally, she asked, “How much does it pay?”

“Reiko is in profit sharing.  Ten percent of what she makes off my money is her salary.  For you, I would do two point five percent or two hundred thousand a year with health and dental,” I said smoothly.  I do not know why I was roping the wolfkin in. Maybe it was hopes of collecting life essence from her eventually. But I think it was my instinct. I thought she might bring something to the table that would help. Reika and Keiko got along well with each other and had been friends since high school from their stories at lunch.

Bedelia asked, “What, there is health and dental?”  She was serious, so I nodded.

“I assume there is.  Artica, you have health and dental, right?”  I asked casually with a wink only she could see.

She didn’t bite, though, “No, Caleb, there isn’t.  Perhaps we should set it up?”

Abigail interrupted, “When I become a medicus magicae, I can be the health and dental doctor.  I will be able to heal and restore bones and heal most injuries,” she explained.

Kieko was stunned, “You have a medicus magicae?”

“In training,” Abigail added, “I plan to do mundane medical school while learning to use my magic. I plan to get certified by the Magus Arcanum in about fifteen years. That is twice as fast as normal,” She humble-bragged.

We reached cruising altitude, and Iris went to take a nap, and Abigail and Bedelia joined her. Artica stayed with me, and I think she was keeping an eye on me.

Reika asked, “How does it work? If I work for you, I mean.”

“It is pretty informal. You keep my secrets, do your work as assigned by Reika, and get paid. You don’t keep my secrets,” I paused, “there is no need to discuss that path. If you have a problem, tell Reika. Tell me if Reika can not handle it, and I will.”

She seemed to consider, “Are all you employees young women?”

“Yes, they are. It makes the sexual harassment training so much easier,” I said flippantly. I was being cavalier because my incubus instincts told me that was what was reeling in her interest. She wanted to be part of something powerful.

She turned to her friend, “What should I take, the 2.5% or the $200,000?”

Rekia smiled, and her frecked face was adorable, “Well if you took the 2.5% you will probably have to live off your daddy’s money for another five years or so. After that, you could be making seven figures. But you know me, I am ever the optimist.”

“Where do I sign? I will take the $200,000 salary,” she affirmed. Either she wanted out from her father’s thumb, or she didn’t plan to work with us past five years.

Now, I had established a research and investment wing of Appollyon Consulting. We spent the rest of the flight working out the employment details, and the two friends started in on the research aspect. Artica worked to set up an office and cyber security while I figured out I needed to give them a budget of around $300,000 a year beyond the twenty-five million and paying them salaries. Reika’s living expenses were paid 100%, and her salary was a percentage of the profit.

When the plane landed, Keiko was off to get her connecting flight to Melbourne. We had two white SUVs waiting to take us to our hotel. It was not a hotel but actually a private residence outside the city. Iris said it was closer to Rincewind’s library. It was a very nice house with seven bedrooms and lots of large windows for natural light. The large pool even had a jacuzzi next to it under a gazebo. Artica was already doing a security sweep with devices, and Bedelia was doing the same with her abilities.

I just sat on the couch. Iris pulled out the itinerary. “Caleb, we are in the library from 5:00 am local time to 5:00 pm. Then we have a meal in the city, and I planned an outing for each evening. Did you still want to meet Ashley’s sister Lucy?”

“Outings?” I took the schedule of events. We had eight days to squeeze as much knowledge into my mind space as possible. I was not sure about having fun. I would sleep in my mind space if needed. I was not going to get another chance at this knowledge. Rincewind said it was the larger of his two collections. The Paris library only had two thousand books. There were over ten thousand in Sydney, according to him.

Iris looked hopeful, and she had worked so hard on this. “Iris, I think I can do two. And invite Lucy to both. You can decide which two, though.” She nodded, disappointed but understanding.

I did not want to wait but let everyone settle in before the two SUVs drove us to the library. We found ourselves in a small, secluded house surrounded by gardens. An old Asian man approached with a small. It was not Rincewind, and I could see this was an elf of advanced age with pitch-black skin and white hair in my abyssal sight. “My name is Maivas Draldaal. I am the caretaker here,” he bowed. He had a strong lower-tier two-core, and I could sense his magic potential.

“Are you a drow? A dark elf?” I asked, not holding in my curiosity.

His smile never waivered, “I am. If you follow me, I will bring you to the library. Rincewind said you would be anxious to get started.” We all followed inside to the back of the small house. We walked through an illusionary wall and down a circular concrete staircase. “This was built in 1933. Rincewind saw World War Two coming and wanted to secure a few things safely. Then he was off on an adventure, forgot to return, and missed the whole damn war.” He muttered, “Left me here alone to take care of the place.”

We descended over a hundred feet and came to an open vault door. Maivas said, “The room temperature, atmosphere, and humidity are magically controlled.” He walked into a well-lit library straight out of the Victorian Era with beautifully crafted wood shelves around a stone fireplace with a merry fire going. There were only three reading chairs and one desk in the room. There were a lot of books. Even if I worked non-stop—if each book had 300 pages—that would only allow me to scan 1400-1500 books into the mind space in my short time.

“How many books are there?” I asked the dark elf.

“Eleven thousand five hundred and eighteen,” he replied promptly.

“Are you here to help?” I asked, not seeing any organization of the books apparent.

“I am. I know exactly where every book is on every subject and cross-referenced. What do you need?” He replied evenly. He reminded me of Dexter, who I imagined more like Alfred from Batman. Maivas seemed like the stern and haughty librarian guardian.

I thought about my needs, “I will start with everything you have on projecting mind space constructs into the real world. Then, I want to everything for learning basic through intermediate magic. After that, I want every spell book you have from the basics increasing in difficulty. Then we will work on the bestiaries. She,” I pointed at Reika, “Is looking for all the information you have on transits, the Great Descent, and anything on planets being cut off from the Source. She,” I pointed at Abigail, “wants all books on Medicus Magicae.” I also looked at Iris and Bedelia uncertain of their preferences. They asked for some focused bits of knowledge.

I took the desk while they took the chairs. Artica helped the dark elf bring books to their respective parties. I started in on the books.

I found I was slightly faster—around 2200 pages an hour. Less than half a second of focus on a page and it was added to my mind space. After six hours of straight work, I developed a massive headache and needed to slow down to about 1600 pages an hour. Everyone else was already exhausted, and I told them to head back.

Maivas retreated for the night as he needed sleep. He left the next twenty books for me on the desk. It took two hours to the stacks, and I collapsed onto the chair in the room, closed my eyes, and retreated into my mind space to see what my efforts had wrought.

Everyone was in the library in my mind space. Calypso, Casper, and Nashima did not have access to the knowledge in the books. Only Lilith and Pandora could review the knowledge in the books. Nashima spoke first, “Quite the collection you are compiling.”

“Thank you. I hope to be getting enough background on projecting mind space constructs. I may be able to give you one of your wishes sooner rather than later,” I replied cockily.

“You have the hubris of a demon, that is for sure. Turning knowledge into practice is much harder than you think,” Nashima retorted.

I ignored her, “I am going to sleep in her to rest up before continuing. What other knowledge should I be seeking?”

Lilith put down the book she had been engrossed in, “Higher demons and higher angelics. I—request knowledge on them if it is in this library. Also, any records of the demonic—angelic wars, the outcomes, and locations. If there are any maps of this galaxy in his collection, I would appreciate that as well.”

Pandora joked, “Any books on how a construct can take over a mind space from the creator would be appreciated.” Casper barred his teeth and growled at her, “I was joking, fluffy.”

Nashima also had some advice, “Do not just focus on the bestiaries. Also, try to get as many sociology books on the variety of races in the cosmos. Whatever is available anyway. If you would allow me to read them as well.”

I nodded at the suggestions and went to the bedroom. My eyes burned, and my head throbbed. I hoped the mind space nap would alleviate it. It didn’t take a moment before the soft bed cradled me into dreams.