

# Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Six

With my surroundings covered with an indescribable flux of energy that defied every rule of nature, I didn't have a hope of finding my way back — and even if I did, I wasn't confident in breaching the dimensional barrier.

Another long round of experimentation awaited me. But before I could start that, I had two things to achieve.

First, I ignored the constant pain dancing on my skin. While my Divine Spark was successful in pushing back the Primordial Energy for a short while, it was a close call to permanent death, and left its mark, leaving my skin burned horribly.

And, without system-provided HP to automatically cure it, it stayed without being healed, painful. I wanted to cure it, but not at the cost of my shield suddenly shattering.

I focused on my shield first, creating a three-layered shield, the first layer soft and porous enough to allow some Primordial Aether to pass, while the second and third ones had access points that worked like taps, but they didn't overlap to make sure a sudden flare directly broke them down.

It was a simple yet effective layout, only made frustrating by the fact that it took almost an hour to set up successfully, with several spectacular failures that would have turned into a deadly disaster without the backup mana I was keeping in the storage.

Without the boost of my stats and skills, my ability to come up with genius structures was simply gone. What a horrible loss, and particularly frustrating that, all along the crafting, I had to force myself trying to ignore the constant pain filling my body.

“Now, to healing,” I murmured even as I pulled some mana from the storage, trying to cast a healing spell.

Trying, and failing horribly.

“Fuck,” I gasped in shock at the extent of my failure. I didn't fail to shape the spell, or cast the spell appropriately. No, I had failed at the simplest stage, transforming the mana into life energy, the raw state that was required to cast that spell.

It seemed that, even while blocking the assistance of the system, I had misunderstood the amount of assistance that the system had been providing. I closed my eyes, using my Tantric to

look inward.

Luckily, with Tantric still working, I didn't lose the ability to look inward, but the clarity of vision I had been enjoying was gone. I could see the skill and stat nodes sitting in my soul space, immobile, but with no reaction.

Even Tantric was immobile, without any improvement, but unlike the other skills, I could still use the abilities granted by it.

Other than Tantric, however, everything was immobile. The same applied to achievements, perks, everything... There was not even a spark in my soul space, just like the fake soul space I had maintained to trick the headmistress.

Fake soul space, including the fake companion node that hid a small Light Divine Spark, yet to be absorbed. "Let's see if you work," I murmured as I channeled just a couple points of mana, the purest I could manage, and watched it transform.

I nodded in satisfaction, even though despite transformation was far from being usable. The light spells were always unyielding and harsh, but with the assistance of the system, they were easily formed into various shapes, even integrated into wards, making it an excellent offensive option.

Without the elemental control to assist, it was like trying a red-hot sword as a weapon. Damaging, certainly, but more damaging to the wielder than the opponent.

"Still, better than nothing," I murmured. Arcana magic had its limitations when it came to dealing damage, a factor that was compounded by my limitations of shaping mana, and having the ability to add some Light Elemental would give me the edge.

And, luckily, light elements didn't just summon true elementals as basic elements did. Remembering the carnage the elementals were dealing with during my disappearance, I didn't dare experiment even with the weakest pure element spell.

"Maybe I need to try something else," I murmured even as I transformed another point of mana into Light energy, but this time, I immediately used Tantric on it, softening its structure.

The first attempt was a failure. Under the effect of the Tantric, the mana lost all of its quality, turning back to pure mana, which was hardly the greatest effect. The second and third attempts weren't any better, one not affecting it at all, the other once again completely purifying it.

“It’s hard,” I murmured as I continued repeating. Technically, it would have been easier to find the correct ratio if I was willing to convert more than a single point of mana with each repeat, but that would mean risking self-damage in case of an accident.

And, without HP, I was not willing to suffer any Light damage. It would have been humorously tragic if I died to my own spell after managing to find a way to survive in Primordial Aether.

Patience was the key, which only got truer the more challenging the situation got. And, my own situation was as challenging as it could get.

It took a long while for me to get even elementary control over light magic. Something between half a day and a day, but that was my best guess — I had no idea how the time worked in Primordial Aether, it might as easily have been a few hours or a couple days as well.

It was hard to keep track when the only thing I saw was a swirling mess of colors that were not colored.

“Still, it’s time to go back to healing spells,” I murmured, hoping the discoveries I had made while playing with the Light mana would still benefit me. Another half a day had passed, mostly fruitless as I tried to force mana to transform, just like how I once transformed the ordinary mana into heat, before I gained my first Elemental Magic skill.

Unfortunately, life energy was something much more complicated than the simplicity of heat, cold, or other fundamental elements. In comparison, healthy energy required a much more careful balance. Miss, and only pain awaited...

“It’s not working,” I groaned as I looked outside, catching a sudden solid presence outside, at the distance, but it was gone before I could react.

Still, it was a sign that I wasn’t destined to float in emptiness hopelessly. I just needed the luck that the next one had drifted nearer.

Meanwhile, I continued experimenting, trying to create healing energy, but I failed to achieve what I had been searching for despite the endless repeats, leaving me hopeless. Still, I wasn’t bored because...

“Shit, not again,” I murmured as I suddenly found myself in a chaotic tribulation of energy as the outer layer of my shield shattered, and the second layer cracked threateningly, forcing me to reinforce, even then the weak patch I was using as a tap shattered.

I recreated the shield in a hurry while I considered the merits of creating a fourth layer. The more I stayed in the Primordial Aether, the more I understood why it was treated as such a life-threatening environment.

I lost count of how much mana I had spent, but by the measurements of the system, I wouldn't be surprised if it eclipsed a hundred thousand. It was still not as impressive as the reckless rain of spells I had experienced while under siege, but it was close.

"Maybe I could approach it in a different manner," I thought with a sudden stroke of inspiration. I pulled some of my Divine Spark from my body — and immediately felt my body weakening despite the relatively little I had pulled — and channeled some of the mana through it.

The mana lost its pure state, transforming into something that was hard to describe. Soft as clay, and equally as useful. But, it allowed me to play around with it, and after sufficient enough attempts, it turned into something approximately close to HP.

"Let's try," I murmured as I let some of it touch my body, watching anxiously as my body slowly absorbed it.

"Success!" I gasped in excitement. Well, in a way, I corrected myself as I let my body absorb it, my burn wounds slowly fading away. My technique simply had a horrible conversion rate, almost requiring a thousand mana points to gain enough energy that could function as one point of HP.

It took hours to gather about a hundred HP equivalent that was required to cure my wounds, and it forced me to spend another hundred thousand mana points.

Luckily, neither time nor mana was things I was in short supply. Having some kind of method of recovery was more important than anything else, with the sole exception of a method to find my way, but even that was less urgent.

But, with my protection and recovery handled, that was my next objective...

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Seven

Unfortunately, finding my way proved to be even more difficult than the recovery, I discovered after a day of fruitless work.

The problem was that the Primordial Aether was both too chaotic and too confusing, stymying my attempt to find my way. In comparison, the confusion created by Aether was nothing, and even then, I had the advantage of feeling the direction of the other companion nodes.

Which didn't work while the System was unpowered — I knew it was a problem with my connection rather than the planar barriers blocking the connection, because I was feeling Aviada's faint presence up until I had been banished, but I couldn't feel any of the girls right now.

Still, I didn't lose hope, as I had occasionally seen the familiar presence of a planar wall in the distance, giving me a chance to once again step on the ground rather than floating in the emptiness of Primordial Aether.

I had long prepared a mana chain, waiting for one of the planes to get close enough that I could somehow hook myself, and spend my time practicing the throwing motion. Even as I waited, however, I wondered just how many planes there were, floating in the emptiness, because I was yet to see the same plane twice — the type and shape of energy that surrounded the place to create the planar wall were more than enough to indicate the difference.

It was also the reason why I had ignored the first real opportunity to actually get in, just treating it as a practice, because I could feel very familiar energy radiating.

Necrotic energy.

"Fuck no," I murmured even as I let the chain disperse, finally catching enough of a sample to identify its nature. The Primordial Aether worked excellently to block my senses to identify the nature of the energy, and only after I pulled myself halfway, I got a clear perception.

And immediately dropped the connection.

Dealing with Zokras had been enough of an adventure, and that was when I had the System to help. The last thing I needed was to fight through a world filled with those monsters without my ability to cheat.

I had to admit, that my determination was tested when I repeated the attempt twice during the

next day, only to end up finding two planes filled with necrotic energy. Was I that unlucky, or the planes were dominated by undead monstrosities, that was a question I had no answer to.

But, considering the chain of events that led me to my current situation, I wasn't willing to write off the unluckiness as a factor. Maybe I was just near a part that was near a region that was ruled by the undead.

It was certainly possible. The other option was that neither Janelor nor Mariel mentioned the greater world had been ruled by undead, which would have been a dangerous omission.

It had to be a bout of misfortune, I decided, but as the days passed while I floated, every attempt hit another undead plane, but either way, it was convincing enough that, when I finally hit one plane that was only partially tainted with Necrotic energy, I actually pulled.

It had already been more than a week, and I didn't have the luxury of delaying more.

Worst case, I could breach the planar barriers and throw myself back to the Primordial Aether. I continued to spend mana to pull toward the planar wall, squeezing my teeth.

The reason, the closer I got to the planar barrier, the stronger the sense of tribulation. As I pulled toward it, I had the opportunity to watch the show. Waves of Primordial Energy hit against the barrier, and most of it reflected back, creating a deadly turbulence that threatened to crack the shield and snap the chain, tugging me from all directions.

"I'm lucky that I had already stored some mana," I murmured. I certainly didn't have the opportunity to transform any mana under turbulence, even forcing me to repair the patches I used to get Primordial Aether.

Either that, or it would have shredded my shield into pieces, I thought grimly as I trudged my way through the great mess, ignoring the patches of void and shattered space. I had no doubt that, without the shield, it would have destroyed me in seconds, even with the assistance of my Divine Spark.

The difference between calm — if a word like that could even be used to that mess — Primordial Aether and turbulent Primordial Aether was that great. The difference between a lump of metal and a sharp sword.

Both were deadly, but one even deadlier.

It took all my preparation to even successfully approach, but luckily, right at the edge of the

barrier, the turbulence left its place to a certain calm, enough to allow me to crack open the shield and start working on the planar barrier.

I paused a moment to identify the mana flow, trying to understand its nature. I could sense that it was little more than raw mana, with little rhyme or control, but it rotated around the plane strongly, with all the strength of a raging river, still achieving a successful blocking effect.

It was weaker than what was around the Material Plane, but considering the intensity of strength, it didn't mean much. I could have still shattered it easily if I had the full range of abilities granted by the System, but that was not a possibility with my current abilities.

No matter how much mana I stored in my shield, because it was impossible to establish a ward in the chaos of the Primordial Aether.

Luckily, breaching was not the only way. I carefully reformed the shield even tighter before letting it swallow me, and I slowly sank of the dimensional walls, letting it swallow me just like it was swallowing the Primordial Aether.

And I started moving even faster than I did with the assistance of my fake elemental mounts, the sensation particularly horrible with the chaotic nature of the movement, which granted me an unexpected challenge.

Motion sickness.

I wanted to curse, but despite the emotional release such a thing would bring, I decided to hold my breath and split my attention between keeping the shield stable and keeping my stomach in place.

What a ridiculous challenge to deal with, I thought, though as the journey continued, I was aware that without the boost of the Divine Spark, the sudden turns would have been enough to kill me.

Inertia was not a joke.

Though, I welcomed it even as it intensified while I got closer and closer to the center, the intensity increasing a corresponding rate. It was a sign that the rules of physics were established once more.

Welcome, even as one strip of mana suddenly breached the shield, leaving a badly bloody laceration on my body. I bit my lip, ignoring the wound, as I didn't have the ability to actually

cure it. Unlike purified mana, the primitive HP I managed to copy was too sensitive to be stored.

Luckily, Divine Spark still increased my body's ability of natural recovery, the blood slowly stymying slowly.

I focused on the shield not wanting to experience another such mistake. If that mana flare hit my neck... I shivered, not even wanting to think about it.

I missed the protective sensation of HP badly, any wound, no matter how bad, recovering rapidly under its flow.

If there was one advantage to pain, however, the queasiness I had been feeling was completely gone. Nothing like a mortal danger to cure motion sickness...

I squeezed my teeth and continued deeper into the chaos, doing my best to ignore the constant, painful drain of mana, unable to be replenished — technically, I could steal from the barrier itself, but not without hopelessly shattering my own shield.

Luckily, my preparations proved sufficient, and quite a bit before my stored mana had finished, I had felt the trajectory of my movement change, throwing me into the sky like an arrow, before ultimately slamming on the ground.

I let the shield disperse, pulling its mana back to storage, a wide smile appearing on my face.

The sensation of the ground under my naked feet never felt that good.

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]



# Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Eight

“Finally, the ground once again,” I chuckled even as I enjoyed the sensation of standing, the wind on my skin, the great sensation of dominance.

So much that, even the subtle smell of decay couldn't ruin my mood. Nor could the state of the forest in front of me, lifeless and dead, clearly affected by the subtle necrotic energy in the air.

One problem at a time, and I had one problem that was bigger than everything else.

I was, once again, fully naked, and bleeding.

“First, the wound,” I murmured even as I pulled some of the stored mana from my storage, and carefully processed it through my own Tantric. After several repeats, the efficiency wasn't as horrible as before, though the difference between a thousand to one versus eight hundred to one wasn't exactly a great chasm.

It still cost me more than three thousand mana just to stem the bleeding completely, enough to resurrect dozens of near-death victims back when I still had the System.

I shouldn't be ungrateful, I decided even as I felt the sting of the wasteful operation. No matter how bad my situation, relatively, it was still leagued better than the times I had lived as the mule.

With healing done, I turned to my other survival challenges. “Should I try conjuring my clothing?” I murmured, but after a pause, I decided against it. Conjunction was not a simple spell, and I didn't trust myself to succeed without the system's assistance. I could experiment, but I didn't want to do so without creating a ward to block the resulting mana flares.

I was not in a safe location.

I walked toward the nearest dead tree, and broke off a large branch, tainted with a subtle yet persistent necrotic energy, more intense than the subtle energy in the air.

“What an interesting difference,” I murmured. Back in the great area of the material plane, such mana would have been long absorbed by the System, leaving it bare. Here, the mana stuck around persistently.

It wasn't only necrotic energy I could feel. I could also feel a great amount of ordinary mana, though its purity was significantly lower than I had expected, enough to make even the simplest

mana bolt a great challenge.

Regardless, it was an interesting challenge to have a great amount of free mana, floating freely. I could even identify floating particles of other types of mana — forms that were different from anything I had seen up to this point.

“Still,” I murmured as I let some of my mana dance across the surface, easily purifying the necrotic energy back to pure mana, “the difference between here and the System lands isn’t enough to justify calling that place material plane, maybe other than the size difference.”

I received the answer sooner than I had been hoping, before I could finish even crafting my spear. The dimensional barrier was miles and miles away from my current location — thanks to the violent throw of the barrier — but even with the distance, the sound of cracking was clear....

Maybe because it was not exactly a physical sound, but a physical effect.

At a great distance, a string of Primordial Aether started to invade the plane, distorting and disintegrating everything nearby. I shivered as I watched the scene, everything disintegrating into nothingness with the slightest touch.

The view itself wasn’t shocking, as I had watched the Primordial Aether invading the Material Plane, but back then, the Primordial Aether only spread for a moment even with the assistance of an elemental.

This time, maybe because there was no immediate basic elemental mana in the immediate vicinity — as there was no mage relying on that to cast spells, or any mage nearer than me, period — maybe because of differing elemental interest, there was no Elemental trying to widen the gap. So, the breach itself only lasted a second.

But even without constant flow from outside, the strand of Primordial Aether continued to spread, even growing stronger as it disintegrated everything it touched.

I was tempted to go close to breach, but I held back. With the rotating nature of the barrier, my own breach was unlikely to be the reason. If there were others responsible for fixing it, I would only come across them while trying to help.

Reckless assistance was not the smartest thing in a completely unfamiliar situation. Instead, I created a shield around myself, geared to block detection spells. It wasn’t perfect enough to avoid a dedicated search by an expert mage, but it was enough to hide my presence, especially since I stopped my crafting process.

I stood in place, watching the Primordial Aether slowly swallow anything in its path, but soon, I felt a magical presence at the horizon, before it was close enough to have a visual presence.

Considering the said presence was radiating necrotic energy, I decided that hiding was the most prudent option.

I crouched behind a tree to reduce my visual presence as well, getting even smaller as I saw a flying creature appear in my field of view. It wasn't a bone dragon, but it rivaled them in size, and on its back, several cloaked figures cast repeated spells.

A ward was around them, its intricacy clear even with the great distance, radiating a mixture of pure mana and necrotic energy.

Soon, they arrived at the breach, and used the ward to control the Primordial Energy. They threw the ward like a projectile weapon, and the ward settled around the energy, imprisoning it, though it smashed repeatedly against the ward, doing its best to break it.

I expected them to store it, or at least break it down using all the mana they had. Even if they lacked my ability to break it down rapidly, surely they were not entirely incapable of doing so.

They solved it differently. A flare of mana covered the ward, and suddenly, it disappeared in a manner that I found very familiar.

Teleportation.

They literally dumped the energy into Aether dimension, which was an interesting solution. "Can a great amount of Aether grind down a strand of Primordial Aether?" I asked, though the answer was probably yes.

The necromancers looked far too interested in maintaining their control of the plane to risk destroying it completely. I stayed concealed for a while as they moved away, even after they disappeared from my senses for a while.

I didn't know about their detection range, but I wanted to play safe. I was facing a completely unexpected reality.

I turned my attention to my spear once more, first making sure that I had erased any hint of necrotic energy — which I was much more reluctant to touch without HP to block its effects. I had invented my own energy that could technically be classified as proto-HP, but it wasn't exactly up to the challenge of necrotic energy.

A challenge for another time, I decided as I finished cleansing the spear, and started reinforcing its structure with my mana, applying all the crafting abilities I had in mind.

It worked much better than trying to copy the healing abilities, because there was no need for nature transformation to craft a good weapon. Of course, some clever implementation of different types of mana would have given the impromptu weapon a lot of extra power, but ultimately, that was extra.

What was fundamental to crafting was to understand the nature of the materials, and, enhance it appropriately based on the requirements. I missed the intense clarity of the vision granted by Perception, which would have allowed me to comprehend every little flaw in its structure, allowing me to reinforce its nature as needed.

Still, after spending ten minutes fully focusing on its nature, I had enough sense to understand its nature.

“Now, to enhance it,” I murmured, feeling excited. It was the first time I was crafting anything without the constant intervention of the System, hungrily draining mana from every single thing constantly, forcing us to focus on durability across all of the structure.

I started by creating a simple yet intricate scheme to ensure durability, doing my best to create a strong outer shell. Even without the System constantly devouring the mana, it was a rather necessary requirement.

Then, I turned my back to the internal structure, thinning the purified mana as smoothly as possible as I created a bunch of enchantments inside. My biggest focus was the sharpness, but I also added some spells to enhance ranged accuracy, and some tricks that could be used to trigger an explosion.

“Not bad,” I whistled as I twirled the spear, listening to the whistle it created. It was not the finest item I had created, not even close, but it took nothing from its impressiveness considering I used nothing but a tainted piece of wood to create it.

Then, I flared my mana, pulling some leaves and connecting them, creating just enough to cover my modesty.

“Now, it’s time to explore,” I murmured, determined to find a source of water. And, if I was lucky, even something to hunt.

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Thirty-Nine

I paused for a moment to expand my senses, trying to measure the thickness of the necrotic energy surrounding me, intending to pick a direction opposite of it. I didn't like venturing into the unknown compared to taking a known quality, but I was willing to make an exception when the known factor was the undead.

Whatever the unknown party, it couldn't be worse than the undead.

Or, I hoped so.

With a sigh, I started moving, deciding to trust my luck once more. After all, it was only a sign of my luck that I managed to survive after that deadly ambush — though it was easy to argue it was my bad luck that I ended up outside of borders.

I was tense as I walked forward, the limited range of detection making it a struggle to detect what was going on around me. The sudden loss of my Perception didn't only impact my crafting abilities, but also reduced the number of details that I could detect in my surroundings, like I had fallen into a dark pit while looking at the sun.

The difference was remarkable, and not in a good way.

"Maybe I should be glad for the undead," I muttered mockingly. After all, it was thanks to their efforts that there was foliage to block my view, giving me a relative sense of security in this unfamiliar environment.

I moved perpendicular to the dimensional border, still remembering the glimpse I had gotten from outside, with most borders already covered by necrotic energy. I wasn't completely sure, but it was safer to assume that whatever non-undead beings would have been found deeper into the landscape.

Fifteen minutes of walking later, I was yet to walk out of the dead remains of the forest I found myself in. Even when I climbed the remains of a particularly tall tree, I failed to see anything but the dead remains of a forest, with no hint of life.

But, the lack of life once again worked to my benefit, allowing me to notice a small stream that would have otherwise been concealed by the hulking trees. I climbed down and dashed forward, anxious to quench my thirst. Technically, I could stay alive for a long time even without water, relying solely on the proto-HP I could generate from mana for weeks, but it would have

been an uncomfortable sensation.

However, the closer I got to the stream, the stronger my frown got. The stream was radiating necrotic energy, thick enough to drown me even without touching.

Enough to force me to cast a shield. Luckily, while the radiating energy was strong, it was undirected, easily pushed away by a bubble of Arcana mana. I walked forward, undisturbed, and soon, I was at the riverbank, examining the stream.

It was cloudy and unappetizing, and not just because it was filled with necrotic energy. With every single living it touched dead, there was nothing to hold back the earth, allowing the water to pull enough particles to be technically defined as mud.

Yet, as I examined the water, I could easily feel that the thickness of necrotic energy was not accidental, or just a natural occurrence. The mana inside was packed too thick to be accidental. “The question, is it cast actively, or a ward is responsible,” I murmured.

The difference was not just technical. It was clearly weaponized to kill the forest — which was a task that had been accomplished with great effect — but it was still continuing. It didn’t matter much if it was just a ward that had been left intact, but was different if it was maintained actively.

It meant that they had something to destroy downstream, which would give me a potential direction.

Or a location to avoid.

Either way, I had a lot of time to examine the flow as I fashioned a large bottle out of the earth, using Arcana and my hands — which was considerably harder than just casting an earth spell to create one, but I was rather reluctant to rely on elemental spells after what I had experienced during my escape.

I didn’t know if the fragmented plane hold the same intense attraction for the elementals as the main material plane, but it was certainly not something I wanted to test at the current juncture.

After I crafted my earth bottle, I created a complicated ward, consisting of several layers alternating between Arcana and pseudo-HP, Arcana layers were responsible for getting rid of the mud and the dust particles, Tantric mana responsible for binding and breaking down the necrotic energy, with one last layer of pseudo-HP to keep it clean.

It was not a cheap structure, but I wasn't exactly trying to keep the mana spending minimal. The air was filled with mana I could catch easily, and the taint of necrotic energy was ultimately unable to resist the purification. I even tested pulling some Aether from the Aether dimension and breaking it down to mana.

It was harder to break down than the necrotic energy, but after dealing with Primordial Aether, it still felt particularly easy.

I had faster ways of cleansing the water, but I didn't use them. First, it was better to have a tool that I could use continuously rather than a one-off. Back in the material plane, the little delicate structure of interlocked wards would barely survive a few minutes without any external reagents, but here, I expected it to survive for days easily.

However, the real reason was my time requirements as I observed the river carefully. It turned out to be a useful decision, as after ten minutes, I noticed a sudden dip in the density of necrotic energy, which lasted a few seconds before returning to the earlier intensity.

I might have assumed that it was just a ward, but the shape of the necrotic energy changed. The function stayed the same, but there were enough structural differences to guess that the caster had changed — just like a letter, changing handwriting halfway.

It might be a ward, but they were clearly replenishing it, meaning there was a high chance that something interesting was downstream. Leaving me with the question of avoiding it or following it.

I was tempted to avoid it, and if my earlier lookout gave me any safer clues to follow, I might have done that. Unfortunately, I had no idea just how long I had to walk randomly, and time was precious.

While I hoped that the weird corrupted angel had bigger priorities than targeting Silver Spires, I didn't expect that to last forever. The sooner I could find a method to go back, the better.

I decided to follow the stream, which was the better of the two clues I had. The other was going reverse, and confronting the undead, which was hardly something I wanted to do as anything but the last resort.

I continued moving, my senses sharp, hoping to catch any kind of wildlife, failing continuously for several hours even as I walked forward. As I moved, the sun had set, leaving its place to darkness...



Which didn't exactly help me suppress the sense of discomfort I was feeling. I continued walking, using the spear as a walking stick — more of a distraction than a habit, though lessening the energy every step took was not a bad idea as well.

Not when I had no idea when I would have my next meal.

I wasn't exactly idle as I walked. I used my power constantly to tap into Aether, getting more and more mana to purify and store in the wards, until I had more than ten thousand mana in various wards. I could technically store more, but it was the most I trusted myself to control in combat..

I could just eject the extra, but a huge flare shouting my presence was hardly something I needed intensely.

The first sign that I was finally going to meet a difference was the changing thickness of necrotic energy, floating aggressively, searching aggressively for living beings, only to fail — with the sole exception of myself, but I had the ability to block it successfully.

It took another hour for those particles to float toward anywhere but me.

The target, a large tree, which was, for all intents and purposes, dead, yet the rush of the particles continued.

I walked to touch it, using my mana to dispel the thick necrotic energy that filled its trunk, to see if there was any sign of life, but the best I could find was remnants of flickers, showing it had been a while since its death.

Though, the tenacity of the energy showed that the size of the tree was not its only exceptional feature — which was towering over every other tree by a considerable margin, even as a naked trunk. The fact that even a flicker of energy managed to last despite the intense flow showed an intense magical presence when it was alive.

I wished I could see it then. No doubt it would have created a fascinating view.

I continued walking, but not too long after, I noticed the first sign of wildlife, charging forward.

Though, I quickly amended my thoughts as I looked at the rotting corpse of a wolf. It was certainly wild, but the life part was rather doubtful.

"Again, zombies," I thought as I raised my spear, preparing for combat.

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Forty

I didn't even bother casting a spell as the wolf zombie charged at me, ruled by the echo of its worst instincts without control, not even a hint of control. I didn't even bother casting a spell, just waited until it was near, when my spear flashed.

The zombies were famous for their abilities to shrug simple damage, but after all the enchantments I had loaded, my spear was far from being counted as simple. An accurate stab into the thickest part of necrotic energy was enough to disperse the cloud, finally sending the beast into the afterlife it deserved.

"This feels familiar," I murmured as I continued, aware that, as I continued, I would only face more and more such creatures. As I moved forward, the necrotic energy in the air got thicker, giving a suffocating feeling of oppression, the darkness further enhancing the feeling.

Luckily, I had my shield to disperse the energy. A gust of wind hit, moving reverse downstream, carrying much thicker death energy. My senses crawled, a deep feeling wanting me to avoid the repulsive necrotic energy.

Sensible. Too bad the situation forced me to ignore it and continue walking. My skin continued to crawl as I continued to walk, the routine occasionally interrupted by the same type of huge trees, still maintaining a sense of life after death, more than the initial tree I had stumbled upon.

Maybe it was because of the differing strength, but I was more willing to believe a moving invasion force, using the river as a magical battering ram to repeatedly slam against some kind of magical defensive line as they moved forward.

It wasn't hard to imagine those trees as a part of some defensive line — though whether it was natural or by design, it was another question. I lacked even the slightest information to actually guess that.

I prepared myself for another war, though luckily with enough mana to give me the confidence to escape even against what was supposed to pass as a strong opposition in a random fragmented plane. I was confident to escape Janelor or someone equivalent, and from what she had described — even discounting greatly her arrogance — she was supposed to be a peak combatant.

At least, she was important enough to be actively targeted through an inter-planar conspiracy,

which confirmed that.

The quality of one's enemies always gave a good understanding of their capabilities. Of course, the existence of gods and Janelor's respect toward them meant that while she was a peak combatant, she was far from the true ceiling.

But such a being would have created enough commotion that would warn me of their presence.

Hopefully.

Lost in thoughts, I had paid little attention to the zombies that continued to find my location, taking them down with a stab each. Some wolves, and others were even smaller critters. One thing I paid for about them was their quality, which didn't change.

But more importantly, their numbers stayed limited. Which, ironically, made me tenser than the alternative. With the density of the necrotic energy, I expected to find far more zombies, yet there were none.

Nor I could find any corpses, meaning someone either pulled back the beasts before the wave, or a necromancer actively raised and controlled most of them, only leaving a few lost scraps behind.

Either case, it was a sign that I would soon meet a more organized opponent.

It would be better to meet the opponent of the undead rather than the alternative, but not decisively so. I wasn't naive enough to think that they would be my allies just because they were fighting against the undead, especially when I was a completely unknown quality.

No, either way, I needed to stay hidden.

The denser the necrotic energy got, the slower I started to move, the shield taking more of my attention. It wasn't an issue of capability, but I was forced to reduce it to a thinner structure, afraid that it would be detected by another mage.

The stronger a shield, the brighter its presence shone against the senses of a mage, which was less dangerous than the occasional necrotic energy slipping through the weakened shield.

Then, I felt a flare in the distance, the thing that I had been hoping, for and was afraid of at the same time. The distinct flare of magical combat.

"Once more onto the breach," I murmured as I continued to move, suppressing my magical

presence even more as I moved forward, leaning down, a tense frown invading my face once more. Luckily, this close to the battle, there were no wandering zombies.

They weren't scary, but fighting against them would greatly increase the chances of getting caught, so their lack of presence was good. I was ready to fight against the enemy if they noticed my presence, but I certainly had no complaints about their failure.

And, as I got closer, I was able to get a better sense of the conflicting energies, the life energy battling against necrotic energy — through the life energy was different than I was used to.

It had a different feeling, green and immobile. It felt more like plants than animals, but with some difference than a simple biomancy trick I could pull off — could have pulled off when I had access to the System, I corrected myself as I suppressed the reflex of casting it to compare.

The differences were interesting, but not as interesting to delay me as I moved forward, more interested to see the scene of combat. Though, I first got away from the stream, where the fighting was clearly centered due to the thickness of the necrotic energy, allowing any necromancer to have an easy source of transformed mana.

A great strategic tool, but also makes their strategic deployment rather predictable. I walked away almost two minutes before I came across a convenient hilltop — the signs of a recent battle showing that I wasn't the only one that noticed its convenient location.

The side that was looking at the river was marked with signs of battle, mostly blood and broken pieces of enchanted wood — but absolutely no metal, which was rather interesting. Maybe they had recycled all of it.

There were no bodies as well, but that was less surprising. Either the defending forces had taken the bodies with them — which was the simplest strategic choice in fighting against the necromancers — or they failed to do so, and their comrades joined the enemy in their battle.

In either case, nothing outside the expectations.

I continued climbing, avoiding particularly dense points of necrotic energy until I neared the peak, and looked down.

Right at the battle.

The distance was significant yet not too great, almost about a mile, and the high vantage point gave me an excellent view.

The first thing I noticed was the fact that the stream was split into two, creating a small delta. I noticed that first because of the contrast. The upstream was still filled with necrotic mana contrasting with the delta, filled with that variant of life energy, with two sides filled with fighting figures.

I first focused on the mana sources first rather than the combatant — because one side was necromancers, which was rather similar to what I had been used to, while the other side was far too distant to get any proper details other than the fact that they were mostly using bows and cloaked thickly, their numbers few.

Also, the situation with the mana was much clear, enough to be resolved in a few seconds. The source of the variant of the life energy I was feeling was not hidden. Along the riverbank, there were a great number of those huge trees — far denser than the occasional dead ones that I had come across, radiating that life energy, which then tried to overwhelm the necrotic energy.

Too bad it was a desperate battle. One of the trees, the one that was planted right at the split, was almost two times as tall as others, easily a hundred feet, but most of its leaves had already blackened, showing the desperate battle it was giving. Other trees — guardian trees, I decided to call them — further along the bank were in better condition than the vanguard tree, but still, about a quarter of their leaves were tainted.

Their fate was not too different from the occasional guardian trees I had stumbled on my way.

Interestingly, there were no trees I could see on my side of the riverbank, but there were several huge holes, like several trees had been just pulled out several hours ago.

Maybe they had been uprooted and replanted on the other side to create the dense outlook I was seeing — making the small delta an intentional point of defense.

Not for no reason, as the guardian trees were still desperately pushing their mana out to fight against the necrotic wave rather than trying to cure themselves — which the energy seemed to be capable of if I was reading the collusion of free mana in the air correctly — which implied a certain strategic thought rather than just instinct.

It was likely that the cloaked figures were responsible for that, but technically, it wasn't a certain conclusion. A sapient tree would have been unexpected, but not technically impossible. After all, there were plant monsters back in the main material plane.

I could have concluded that if I were closer to the battle, or the constant flares of mana blocking any potential spell, but they were rather efficient barriers to my curiosity. Whether it

was the decision of the trees or the cloaked figures wasn't exactly the most urgent issue.

The imminent victory of the necromancers was much more urgent, inevitable unless I intervened.

Yet, rather than doing so, I first decided to waste a few seconds examining the cloaked figures, casting a spell that would replicate a working spyglass.

Curious about what I would find.

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Forty-One

As I used the simple Arcana spell to enhance my vision several times, the first thing I focused on was the cloaked figures, or more accurately, their physical natures, ones that looked human, with one great difference.

Their ears.

“Elves,” I muttered, though my shock was not particularly intense after facing another race that was supposed to be a part of the stories and legends. After all, after angels and true dragons that could transform, the existence of elves was not particularly ground-breaking.

Though my lack of impression was more about the unimpressive battle performance they had been displaying. There were almost fifty of them, trying to put a ranged resistance against the horde of undead that was trying to pass through the river, while about thirty necromancers — in various states of rotting — were sieging them with a number of spells, increasing the speed of the corruption.

Maybe I was being unfair, as lately I was used to fights of much higher caliber even by the standards of the System-empowered people, but still, I expected a better performance from one of the races that were supposed to be mythical.

They were barely good enough to be compared to an average level five warrior, with no apparent casting capability — though whether it was an actual lack of capability or strategic concern, I didn't know. The only reason they were able to resist the necromancers was the constant life energy emission of the guardian trees, battling against the necrotic mana invasion.

Their luck was that the necromancers didn't have a significantly higher display of ability, limited to galvanizing and empowering the horde of zombies — a mixture of animals and humanoids, mixed with various skeletal monstrosities impossible to identify — occasionally mixed with sending poorly crafted but overpowered bolts of necrotic energy.

However, it wasn't their skills that looked like it would determine the victory and defeat, but the difference in intensity between the energy carried by the river, and the amount of mana generated by the trees. Each second, the central tree lost more of its vitality, and it didn't take much to guess it would go down.

Elves had barely an hour, maybe even less.



I wanted to go and save them, even though their language represented a difficulty in communication. All I needed was to use create an offensive ward slowly from my battle position and take down the necromancers in one spell, before they could react.

Pity that it represented a great risk to me. I had already seen the lich that had responded to the dimensional breach, who was leagues stronger than anything I could see in this battle.

And, since the undead was sending a disposable army and set up a complicated mana delivery system to do so rather than just sending the lich to get rid of the threats, it was only reasonable to assume that what I was seeing wasn't the peak combat capability of the elves.

Intervening directly in a complicated conflict was not a good idea, especially since I might end up being hunted by both sides.

"Luckily, intervening directly is not the only way," I murmured with satisfaction. I might have lost my access to the Subterfuge skill, but at this point, I didn't need it to have dozens of plans competing in my mind, giving me different ideas to interrupt the battle to the favor of elves.

The decision to help elves was not a huge overreach. I wasn't certain that elves had the potential to be allies, but there was little doubt about the stance of the undead. Though, that didn't mean I would reveal that particular assistance to the elves.

First, I had created several wards on top of the hill, enough to hide my presence, as well as moving a few stones to create something that would keep me from being noticed. An illusion spell on top of it, and I was confident that it would keep me from the attention of anything but the most determined seeker.

Only then, I moved toward the river once again, staying quite a bit away from the battle, and started creating a ward. Essentially, it was a more complicated version of the purifying water bottle, but one that took almost half of the reserves I had collected, as well as some of the mana I had collected.

The real difference came from the last layer, which was not a ward but twin storage. One storage was filled with light mana, slowly adding some light mana into the water, converted by using the fake Chosen node I had created to trick the headmistress. The other was filled with proto-life energy I had managed to create.

The results were worthy of potentially revealing my hand. Not only the ward suddenly stopped the flow of the necrotic energy, depriving the necromancers of their fuel to cast spells, but the particles of light also hampered the necromancers. Not particularly efficiently, as the amount

was not enough to significantly damage the undead.

But enough to make it useless for necromancers to use — unlike pure mana, which I expected them to weaponize. And, the light mana made it much harder for them to focus destroying the proto-life energy I had slipped into the mixture, which was even more fragile than the energy the trees were radiating.

I retreated back to the hill as fast as I could manage once I activated the ward, not wanting to be on the range of detonation — a little gift I had added to the mixture, ready to go off at the first touch of an undead, both to get rid of any necromancer that might come to understand the sudden change in their battle, and to get rid of any evidence of my intervention.

If no one touched it, it would disperse on its own in five minutes, which I hoped to be enough for the elves to counterattack. Five minutes might as well be an eternity as far as a battle was concerned, and there was little hope for them if they couldn't convert such a great advantage into victory.

I preferred to keep my presence hidden as much as possible, especially since there was a risk that the explosion could get the attention of the higher rank combatants of the elves and undead, which was something I was reluctant to face until I could get more information and get used to the magic more.

Maybe even craft something more useful than a wooden spear.

Unfortunately, I didn't have the time to play absolutely safely. I didn't know how far the next defensive line of the elves was, but the undead forces looked determined to continue — why wouldn't they, when they had no concern for their lives, nor had any logistic concerns.

And, the deeper we went into the elven territory, the higher the chances of stronger combatants joining the fray, making the situation much more challenging to face.

Luckily, when I reached my hiding spot, the battle had already shown signs of turning. The sudden lack of necrotic energy had hampered the necromancers' attempts significantly, their magical bombardment ceasing immediately, their full attention to keeping their zombie horde intact.

The amount of life energy I managed to add into the water wasn't enough to demolish the zombies — limited both by the amount, and the purity I could manage without the assistance of the system, which was handling the conversion part.

The more I stayed away, the more I understood the true challenge of magic outside lay in having access to the correct type of mana.

And, with the ability of Divine Spark to forcibly convert mana, no doubt the gods ruled anywhere but the material plane under the System.

That left an interesting question, I thought as I ignored the elves' developing counter-attack, instead looking at the guardian trees, each drinking the mana I provided almost instantly. And the largest one, right at the edge, took the most mana, its leaves showing signs of recovery, even as it radiated a great amount of its own unique brand of plant-like life energy.

The trees could convert my own mixture of diluted life energy and pure mana with much greater efficiency than necrotic energy, it seemed.

Enough to actually arouse my attention, tempting me to take another risky action. I moved toward the river, though rather than the center, I targeted the edges that were far from the battle, where I could see the tree with little battle that was going around it.

A few measly zombies were hardly a problem, especially since the attention of the elves was grabbed by the breach they achieved at the center, necromancers falling one by one.

While they were distracted by their assault, I quickly dashed through the zombies. I didn't like wielding necrotic energy, but pulling enough around me on top of my shield to temporarily trick the zombies was still within acceptable limits.

I passed through them, putting my hand on the tree, sending a trickle of pure mana, doing as detailed of a diagnostic as I could manage, compressed in a few seconds.

Not the most detailed one, but enough to be a treasure trove. The first discovery was simple, yet expected. The tree was a magical entity, though the way the mana infused their nature greatly differed from the nature of the monsters. A looser and more delicate, but it might be about the lack of an entity dedicated to recycle every single scrap of magical energy from the environment.

Yet, the limited reaction to the mana that was penetrating its trunk was enough to confirm that it was not sapient — or even if it was, it was alien enough for me to catch immediately. Though, I still sensed a certain ... awareness, it wasn't enough to be called sentience.

Interesting, but not as interesting as my next discovery. At the center of the tree, there was Divine Spark.

Used to treating Divine Spark as the highest level of treasure, I had expected the guardian trees to be something similar to the river, a relay to transfer their transformed mana. The fact that the trees had Divine Spark was a surprise.

Enough to force me to redraw my plans completely.

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Two

It wasn't bad that my plans were ruined. I wasn't inflexible enough that a sudden change of circumstances that forced me to throw away most of my plans would leave me helpless.

Though, that didn't feel me from feeling a deep annoyance, one that I forced myself to ignore to the best of my ability. Redrawing my plans was not a big problem, but redrawing my plans while I was leveraging my short action window was much more annoying.

Especially since half of the necromancers had already fallen, and their reduced numbers made it even harder for the rest to defend. As they got defeated, elves would return, and I didn't want to trust my illusion capabilities to hide completely without the assistance of the wards.

I ignored the temptation of stealing the Divine Spark from the tree. The amount was not as important compared to my reserves, barely as much as I had put into the ward. And while the more Divine Spark was helpful, I preferred to keep the tree intact.

I had a feeling elves would react negatively to any harm to the tree, and it was not impossible for them to somehow discover I was responsible. After all, I had no idea about their magical capabilities, especially since I could see no mages as a part of the group.

It was a toss-up whether it was about the rarity of the mages among them, or the intensity of the battle they were suffering.

Instead, I started examining the Divine Spark in the tree, trying to understand how it was used. As far as I could see, the way the guardian tree used it somewhere between a solid node and a limited free flow, which positioned it right between a Chosen and Demi-God in terms of usage. It was not supposed to work like that, but clearly, being a semi-sentient plant had some impact on it.

I continued to examine the nature of the tree, measuring the merits of taking at least some of it, to try to create something similar to the fake Chosen node I had created for Light Divine Spark, which had come much more useful than I had been expecting.

I had no idea just how it could be used, but having options wouldn't have harmed me.

Yet, I was about to take the risk, when I felt the tree starting to feed its mana into one of its branches. A branch that was holding a fruit — one that had the smallest, weakest flicker of Divine Spark I had ever felt.

Still, much better than harming the tree for the first layer of experimentation, I decided as I pulled the small fruit with a simple magical tendril, which looked like an overgrown hazelnut. While I was busy taking that fruit, another three necromancers decided to do particularly convincing renditions of porcupines, telling me that my temporary adventure was over.

I retreated before elves could return to handling the zombies, but I avoided the hill I used as a vantage point. I wanted to do some experimentation, and no need to potentially waste such a strategic observation spot for that.

Pity that, with my limited observation abilities, I wasn't confident enough to establish a teleportation beacon, or it would have been very useful.

I left the elves behind as they gathered around the largest tree and shouted, which was no doubt a celebration of victory, traveling back the path I had taken — taking a few seconds to disperse the wards I had created, as the undead didn't have the chance to pull back after that, and I didn't want to leave a trapped ward for my potential allies to find.

Instead, I traced my steps back upstream, staying near to water, wanting to see if there was any undead party that was willing to follow. For a moment, I was split between prioritizing an ambush and experimenting, before I noticed my folly.

I could do both, especially by creating a very convenient target.

First, I put my hand on the ground, sending arcana mana underground, using it as a detection. My trusty detection trick wasn't as useful here, the natural mana interfering with the detection capabilities, but after several attempts, I discovered a natural cave, large enough to be temporary housing, yet close enough to the river to allow me to intervene or observe as necessary, and dug a tunnel.

It was a frustrating affair that took a few minutes, the Arcana much less useful than Earth mana to do so, but it was nothing compared to my other aim.

Creating several tunnels that would allow me to escape without being noticed, deep enough that the interference would keep me from being detected as well. It was supposed to be the priority, but I could feel the throbbing under my fingers.

The seed hidden in the fruit was slowly losing its life.

I didn't want to ruin my only tool of experimentation, so I decided to handle it the moment I finished the emergency escape tunnel. It was the first, and shortest among the tunnels I

prepared — opened right under the river, allowing me an express escape path — I turned my attention to the seed.

I used the original entrance to travel to the surface, warded the entrance for concealment, and then, I planted the seed, right at the entrance, directly on top of the cavern. A risky proposition, but I had a feeling that if my experiment was successful, the seed would show its presence, working as a beacon for both elves and the undead.

Giving me a chance to observe whichever arrived first from my heavily warded location. And, while it was risky to do so without completing all the escape tunnels I wished, once again I had to choose immediate results over perfect safety.

First, I purified the ground from any necrotic energy, not wanting the seed to die the moment it touched the ground. Then, I pushed a tendril of Arcana mana into the seed, maintaining tight control over it not to affect the way it worked, but enough to allow me to observe the changes slowly.

The seed worked even faster than I expected, a flicker of life appearing in its core as the surrounding protective layer cracked, and a thin tendril, the beginnings of a root, sank into the ground, searching for water...

And mana, I realized, as it pulled a very minuscule amount of mana from the ground, directing it toward its very small Divine Spark. For the seed, the Divine Spark was much more like a Chosen than a Demi-God, a crystallized core, inefficiently processing the mana.

I decided to help it a little bit, using my own abilities to purify mana, softening its structure to the point of uselessness.

It proved to be a good choice, as the seed devoured that over-purified mana easily, transforming it with much greater speed, the growth of its root hastening rapidly, and soon, another tendril appeared on the opposite side, determined to breach the little layer of Earth that prevented it from receiving any light.

Though, I doubted that they required light as much as an ordinary plant, especially when compared to their clear need for mana.

Unlike its grown counterparts, the seed didn't radiate any of its unique life energy, clearly using it for its own growth instead. Barely minutes later, it pushed its head through the surface.

I was carefully watching the state of its Divine Spark, hoping that it would get bigger. It wasn't a

big hope, but despite the limited probability, the potential implications were significant enough to make hope.

With my unique ability to break down Aether and Primordial Aether, I could easily imagine creating an amazing farm. Pity that turned out to be not possible.

“Even if you can’t give me infinite Divine Spark, you’re still good bait, I suppose,” I muttered as I prepared to move down the cave while continuing to feed the tree from my concealed spot, not wanting to take the risk of accidental discovery, when I decided to test another trick.

I stole half of the Divine Spark the seed had, only to watch its growth come to a standstill, even starting to lose its life. Yet, that didn’t last long before I ‘softened’ the Divine Spark, replicating the same trick I had pulled with the Headmistress, allowing the seed to bond with its Divine Spark more efficiently.

Then, I repeated the same trick again with the rest, even sacrificing some of my own Divine Spark to double the initial amount — after all, I could always take it back before leaving — until the sapling had passed the state of the other tree I had observed, handily reaching to Demi-God status.

I wasn’t surprised to see the tree absorbing the mana with an even greater speed, though amusingly, its growth slowed down. But I could see its structure getting stronger.

I was supposed to stop there, but sometimes, curiosity was hard to beat. I continued to replicate the trick, allowing the sapling to continue bonding with the Divine Spark even easier.

Until it turned into a God. An extremely weak one, but still a god.

What harm could it do, I thought as I continued to feed it purified mana, moving underground.

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]



## Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Three

I kept most of my attention on my surroundings, and only a portion was still focused on the growth of the small sapling, which slowed even more after the latest adjustment, but I could see many changes in its nature, enough to justify that.

I sensed it carefully, ready to intervene in case of a weak undead response — and evacuate in case that scary lich that repaired the dimensional wall arrived. I was still confident in myself in a desperate fight, but I had no intention of putting myself to it unless absolutely necessary.

My latest experience with that corrupted angel was a good way to remind me just how many trump cards an enemy could reveal during a fight.

I focused on my other aim, slowly digging a tunnel deep underground, one that went almost a mile, opening to a naturally concealed pit — which I reinforced further with several more wards. And, on the way back, I had carefully covered the tunnel with wards as well, split between concealment, and explosive wards that were filled with the purest light mana I could convert through my fake light node.

A nice present in case the undead discovered me.

It took more than an hour, and when I returned, the little sapling had grown noticeably — from one inch to two — but its growth had stopped after finishing all the mana that was inside its protective shell.

Which was not too surprising. What surprised me was that there was a sense of taint in its leaves, the tip of one of them already blackened.

“Is there something wrong with my ward?” I asked myself even as I started examining the protective shell I had established to protect the little sapling from the necrotic energy. I was extremely focused, and not just because I was worried about the fate of the sapling, which was something between bait and an idle experiment.

I was more interested in why my ward failed. It might be my failing, or there might be something critical I was yet to discover about how mana worked in lands outside the purview of the system.

Either case, it had some great implications for the defensive quality of my temporary residence and my future plans.

However, even after sinking a great deal of time, I was yet to discover the source of the leak. And, before I could go deeper, I noticed a movement at a distance, coming from an upstream direction.

Another band of undead, though smaller than the first party that was sieging the elves earlier. The limited number of zombies that were brought along suggested that they were just reinforcements rather than ones that were expected to restart the siege — suggesting the undead were yet to discover my little intervention.

It was clear that the party was not there to understand the unexpected defeat either, as a horde of zombies — even a small one — was hardly something that could be kept hidden.

Among them, I could see two necromancers herding the rest. I cast two spells. First, an illusion, one that showed a large tree in place my little sapling, growing brightly. The horde to a stop after noticing its presence, and I used my second spell then.

A wave of light mana, infused with some proto-HP, enveloped most of the horde, taking them down in a single hit.

A hit that didn't target one of the two necromancers, who was busy retreating.

I wanted the seed to work as bait, but with its growth hampered, I wasn't above cheating a little.

Only after making sure the necromancer had retreated outside the visual range, I dispelled the illusion and focused on examining the ward once again.

No matter how much I searched, I failed to find any sign of a problem. Even worse, I could see the leaves continuing to darken slowly despite my attention.

My frown got bigger even as I decided to turn my attention to my little god-sapling, and created an intense flood of proto-HP, flooding its structure, spending more than a thousand mana in the process.

Not that it was a problem. I could easily tap into the Aether for more, and the results were impressive. The leaves gained their bright green coloration, and even the growth of the sapling quickened, reaching four inches.

“So, you can process proto-HP even faster than pure mana,” I murmured idly. I was aware that I was talking to a plant, but it was better than losing my mind in silence. “Now, if only I could find

your problem,” I added, watching it.

Only for the same blackness appearing on the tip of the leaves, even faster this time. I frowned, and was treated with another flood of proto-HP, non-stop until it finally reached the height of a foot, finally looking like a proper sapling.

Yet, the leaves darkened even faster. “You should be more resistant, little buddy,” I muttered as I cured it once more, unable to understand why it was struggling that much.

Until I felt a stirring of necrotic energy, centered at the sapling itself. I immediately sent a tendril of mana through its structure, this time pure, carefully examining it.

Only to realize it had an additional set of roots, in addition to the physical one, made of mana. No wonder its growth was much slower than I expected. Most of the pure mana I provided was used for that purpose.

And, just like the physical roots were slowly spreading into the ground, those roots were slowly spreading into the Aether dimension, catching the small pieces of Aether, broken down enough that I called them impure mana.

No wonder it was struggling. The more roots its established, the more impure mana it tried to deal with. And, even worse, the Aether dimension was long tainted with Necrotic energy. I ignored it, because it was nothing against my own purification abilities, but clearly the same didn't apply to the small tree.

Maybe it would have been b

I wondered whether it was a problem for every tree, or if I somehow intensified the problem by enhancing its merging with its Spark.

An interesting question, but under the circumstances, theoretical enough not to matter. I could always experiment on that the next time I stole some seeds, ideally a dozen or so so I could test impacting variables even more.

For now, I focused on the more immediate needs. First, I pruned most of the mana roots that were spreading into the Aether. With its limited Divine Spark, its transformative capabilities were extremely limited, and a few points of mana that it could convert every minute would hardly matter compared to the generous flood.

Then, I flooded its structure with a mixture of pure mana and proto-HP, both its roots and its

leaves drinking the mana thirstily, just like a little lamb that discovered a cold spring in the middle of the summer.

Curious enough to watch its growth with my eyes, I climbed out of my cave, confident in my detection capabilities to catch any interloper before they could notice my presence.

I was glad that I did so, because its growth was a phenomenal experience, one of the greatest shows I had enjoyed. The little sapling continued growing at a shocking speed. First, two feet, then three. Soon, it was as tall as me, with its branches getting larger and larger, its emerald leaves thick enough to bend them.

There was only one problem. When it reached double my height, its growth slowed down significantly. It didn't take long for me to catch the responsible. Its mana roots were continuously expanding no matter how much I worked to prune them, trying to replicate the size of the physical roots.

"Such a needy little tree," I muttered as I decided to apply another solution, and encased its roots with wards, hoping that it would be enough.

It turned into a little disaster. Aether particles were destructive enough on their own, especially against wards I had deliberately designed as soft. Still, I was confident that I could come up with a solution if I worked enough.

But, my little project decided to react aggressively to the threat of being confined like that, lacking any advanced thought and limited to basic reflexes, and started attacking the ward from the inside.

Its mana roots weren't the most excellent tool to do so, but the internal structure of the wards was defenseless as well, easily destroyed. Creating a bigger ward was out as well due to the nature of the Aether dimension, making the distance a confusing attribute.

"You win, you annoying plant," I decided, surrendering my attempts to keep its mana roots short, instead of focusing on its growth.

It wasn't like I was short of mana.

I continued to pump it full of easily digestible mana, its limited Spark working wonders to digest it, while my proto-HP worked hard to keep it healthy. Its height reached the mark of twenty feet, when its growth slowed down once more.

This time, the reason was more obvious. A flare of nature-life mana radiated out of the tree, and suddenly, the dead ground around it showed signs of life, a thin layer of grass appearing to cover the gray earth, pushing for life.

It was a fascinating view, one that I enjoyed seeing as I continued to pump mana, ready to get the attention of the undead as they sent more of their forces, the existence of the tree an excellent culprit to keep me hidden.

Unfortunately, this time, the next ward that triggered came from the opposite direction, downstream.

Elves were coming.

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Four

I was quick to move back to my cave at the warning of the wards, and even took down the ward that was protecting the tree from the necrotic energy. At this point, it was strong enough to handle the radiating necrotic energy with my assistance — especially since I didn't place it right next to the river, but put in some distance, limiting the impact of the constant flow of necrotic mana.

Unlike undead, I knew little about elves, and it was better for me to stay concealed, with no sign of my presence at the surface, rather than testing the limits of their detection.

Luckily, not only I had warded my cave greatly, but also, as the tree grew, one of the roots reached the cave, allowing me to continue feeding it with mana while staying hidden. I watched from my hidden spot, assisted by several wards, as several cloaked figures arrived at the opening I had chosen as my hidden spot.

Admittedly, I was annoyed with the development. Based on the aggressive expansion of the undead and the defensive state of the undead, I expected the undead to arrive first. I had stayed close to the territory of the elves, because I hoped that the signs of battle would be the thing that received their attention.

Their aggressive scouting surprised me.

As they got closer, I realized that it was a small party of four, each armed with bows and arrows — and I noticed that none of the arrows had fletching, and the arrowhead was just the thickness of the branch that had been used as well. They looked grown rather than crafted.

It was a comment at a distance, but I felt rather accurate in my expectation.

I didn't have the slightest idea of their language, but their shocked cries weren't particularly difficult to decipher, nor their heated gestures as the group split into two, pointing between the tree and their encampment.

In the end, three of them stayed with the tree, tense, with their bows raised as they looked in the upstream direction, while the last one rushed back with great speed. Their reaction was not too surprising, making sure the news was delivered safely was important, but defending the sudden appearance of another guardian tree was clearly more important for them.

And, as I watched the elves, I realized that I might have misunderstood the importance of the

guardian trees, even after what I had watched them in the battle. The battle itself was chaotic, with many things to focus on, but the current circumstances were much safer.

Enough for me to observe the elves more in detail. At the first glance, they were not too different than humans, but then I noticed them absorbing the nature-life energy that was radiating off the trees.

At first, I thought that they were preparing to cast the spell, but then I realized it was a passive, one-way absorption, eerily similar to breathing, implying a certain level of dependence on the guardian trees — though, I had no idea whether it was something of a luxury like a good dessert, or something truly vital like water.

I needed to observe more — preferably with more invasive methods than secret tendrils of mana — to make a definitive conclusion, which caused me to temporarily abandon that track, focusing on feeding the tree.

And, in response, it continued growing, the amount of nature-life mana getting more and more significant. When elves returned fifteen minutes later — this time as a group of twenty — the tree already gained another foot of height, with a corresponding increase in the mana that it constantly radiated.

I turned my attention to the elves. Out of the twenty, nineteen of them were archers, dressed in similar garbs, with the signs of battle still in their bodies. However, one of them was considerably different.

A man, wearing a different cloak, carrying a staff, its robe carrying several silver inscriptions that looked completely alien to my gaze. I didn't need to feel the mana gathering around him, following his commands to detect that he was a mage.

I still used my detection capabilities to examine him. After all the times I had practiced that particular trick, examining others' soul spaces, it was one trick I was truly confident in applying, easily invading his being before he could notice.

I noticed a great difference between him and the other elves immediately. A crystallized piece of Divine Spark, almost exactly like the Light Node the headmistress had created for me and Titania, though made of Nature Spark rather than Light Spark.

Still, the amount was small. Not as small as the minuscule amount the fruit I had stolen had been carrying, but still smaller than the tree had been carrying. It was enough to allow him to transform some mana, but I didn't want to imagine just how long or exhausting such a process

would have been.

I might have wondered why he hadn't been a part of the earlier battle, but his face, etched with exhaustion, told me the story. The way he stumbled toward the tree just further confirmed the extent of it.

One of the archers approached to help, only to be dismissed with a harsh bark.

Interesting, but not as interesting as the ward that he started creating ... or growing, I corrected myself, because the way he cast his spell was significantly different than anything I had seen, even when I included Janelor's tricks.

Instead of using the mana to create a node and surround it with an outline and building the additional nodes one by one, he created — for the lack of a better term — a seed, and started gently supporting it with the nature-life mana he was supplying, and the ward started to grow slowly, just like the tree itself did under my assistance.

An interesting casting strategy, and one, in certain aspects, could probably generate a lot of advantages, but the disadvantages were equally clear. It was impossible to use it in any kind of direct confrontation.

Maybe his exhaustion wasn't the only reason he wasn't a direct part of the battle.

Another disadvantage was the lack of control during its growth phase. I had the ability to subtly break and take control of other wards as well — a skill I had applied against a great number of enemies. And while I could imagine such a different ward would have been harder to interfere with than a similarly-powered ordinary ward, the exact opposite was true while in the growth phase.

Making it trivial for me to intervene while keeping myself hidden.

I didn't have the ability to transform nature-life mana directly, but with the tree helpfully providing a lot to me, all I needed to do was to gather some from the air and form it into the exact shape of the tendrils the tree had been extending into the astral dimension, and change the shape of the ward.

Just like that, the ward had changed shape. The initial intention was to create a protective layer around the roots. After seeing their other attempts, it was clear that they wanted to uproot the tree and bring it back to their encampment.



Too bad I didn't trust myself to stay hidden as they brought it along. And even if I was confident, I had no intention of traveling to an area firmly under their control. So, under my intervention, the protection ward changed shape, and turned into an ordinary defensive ward that would protect the roots.

The protection such a ward would offer compared to anything I could create was negligible, but it didn't mean that it was worthless. It created another layer to hide my intervention when they tried to dig around for my intervention.

An intervention I expected. After all, he was a mage — a terrible one, but a mage nonetheless — and it was only natural for him to start digging around why his ordinary spell had failed.

But his reaction proved that I might have misunderstood the extent of their difference. He cast another spell, but, rather than for it to travel down underground to explore the ward he had cast, it wrapped around the tree, then, connected to every single elf around the tree.

He barked another order, and all elves — except two of them that continued to guard — gathered around the tree, and started some kind of ritual, reminding me of an elegant dance, yet extremely serious.

I expected some kind of mana pattern to appear around them, ready to break it up, expecting them to use a more forceful method to move the tree. I was prepared to redirect their clumsy spell, or even break it directly if necessary.

I didn't want the bait I had worked so hard to establish to be broken.

No spell appeared even as their ritual continued to build up, which surprised me. I expected them to charge a stronger spell, but then I realized there was no excess mana for that.

With nothing to do, I split my attention between observing them and feeding the tree, waiting for the undead to arrive and finally interrupting them.

Yet, it was not the undead that interrupted me first, but a flare in the depths of the tree. A flicker of Divine Spark.

My first reflex was to blast every single elf into pieces. Who were they, daring to try to steal the Divine Spark under my control, just because I didn't let them move it.

I pushed my mana into the tree, ready to pull that flicker of Spark back, only to realize the Divine Spark of the tree was still intact, and it was an additional flicker.

How intriguing.

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Five

As that new fragment of Divine Spark floated in the trunk of the tree, dancing against the rest, yet to be sublimed — which wasn't surprising considering how little Spark the tree contained originally — my first reflex was to check the crystallized Divine Spark of the mage, expecting him to sacrifice a portion of it.

Only to see it completely intact.

“Can worship actually create Divine Spark,” I thought with fascination. I was shocked, though I had to admit, it wasn't supposed to be that shocking. After all, gods were obsessed with worship, and assuming that it was just about pure ego with absolutely no benefit had been prejudicial.

In my defense, I neither had a direct interaction with god. The closest had been the headmistress, and she had shown no inclination of organizing such a thing — admittedly, her problem never had been finding enough Divine Spark, but controlling what she had in possession.

And, that was assuming such a thing was possible with the System greedily devouring anything in the first place.

While I was lost in my thoughts, the spark continued to dance in the soul-equivalent presence of the tree, conflicting against the Divine Spark, even causing some damage — that I repaired without significant side effects — showing that, a worship ceremony was not exactly something simple.

I continued to observe them, and fifteen minutes later, another flicker of divine Spark joined the first. The amount of newly acquired Divine Spark was almost as much as the seed originally had — thought it was less about the great efficiency of the ritual, and more about how little Divine Spark the seed had contained in the first place.

I could have helped the tree to absorb the Divine Spark, which would have been much more easier than actually repairing the damage, but I waited, wanting to see if the elves had the ability to detect it. To this aim, I didn't even let it crystallize into a safer state, but forced it to stay moving.

The elves continued their ritual-dance, unaware of the danger that was brewing at the target of their worship. Fifteen minutes later, another sliver joined the mixture, this time intense enough

to fight against the tree.

The elves started to look exhausted, which was not just a physical failure or mana deficiency but something different, showing that the ritual was not a trivial affair.

I continued to observe them, but my attention was on Divine Spark, examining its nature. As the amount of Divine Spark grew, I started to realize that its structure was more chaotic than all other Spark I had touched.

Every other spark I had touched — which wasn't a great list, but still included the headmistress, the princess, and most recently, the guardian tree — had been, for the lack of a better term, pure.

Sharp.

Even when I used my Tantric abilities to purify it to destroy their hardness, it only stripped that intent further, turning it into something soft and pure.

In comparison, the one that was provided by the elves was chaotic and without direction. It still had the same general essence of Nature, but there were differences to it, like two different artists, drawing a picture from some description. No matter how well they practiced before, they couldn't just put their halves and create one flawless picture.

Only in this case, there were multiple artists with slightly differing visions, their creations conflicting despite the spell around them — which was affecting their mental state, allowing them to focus on the same thing.

Elves continued, unaware of the risk, which confirmed that they had no idea of the risk they were creating. Their ritual would have created no problem for the other guardian trees, which had enough Divine Spark to sublimate the little amount their worship had generated.

They had no idea my tree was cheating.

Luckily, my cheating was not limited to just transforming mana. I was experienced in helping others sublimate Divine Spark. I pulled the amount they generated, and after some processing, I let the tree absorb all of it.

Enhancing its godhood, not that the mana it could generate had the slightest significance against what I was providing at the moment.

Then, I turned my attention to the elves, trying to understand how they could generate Divine Spark. I spread my mana to the immediate surroundings, which would have been a very alarming affair if it wasn't for two things. They were distracted by their ritual...

And that mana was coming from their guardian tree, therefore absolutely trustworthy.

Yet, even with such a thing, I had little progress with the source. I poked, pulled, and occasionally detonated my magic, but all was useless. I even checked the Aether Dimension, but with nothing out of ordinary.

Well, not technically useless, I corrected, as it gave me one very important conclusion. Whatever was going on, it was certainly not mana, pure or transformed.

Sometimes, eliminating the possibilities was as important as finding the clues of the correct path.

Still, I wasn't discouraged. I enjoyed delving deep into the mysteries of magic and existence, and the importance of the topic only made me more interested. My mind was already filled with different experiments I could conduct...

Only to be distracted by a warning from one of the wards upstream.

The undead really had terrible timing.

Elves proved that they weren't a slouch in detection, by discovering the undead barely a minute after, their sentry barking in alarm. The ritual stopped, which was unfortunate as I would never say no to more Divine Spark, especially, for all intents and purposes, it looked like it was being generated from the thin air.

My first real discovery about the source.

The elf mage replicated his attempt to cast the spell again, and once again, I used that to create another protective layer around the tree. It surprised him more than his first attempt, showing that he expected their ritual to work.

Maybe it worked like taming an animal, feeding them to make it calmer. If that was, it was a pity that it wouldn't work.

He attempted it twice more, but the warriors around him started to act restless. One of them said something sharply, and the mage responded with anger. It didn't take long for it to turn into

a heated argument, showing the apparent control of the mage wasn't as strong as it had implied.

Elves might be a mystical race, a part of the stories, but their reaction to danger had been refreshingly ordinary. A pointless battle for power among a few, while the rest watched ineffectively, risking their lives with inaction, yet unable to intervene directly.

I examined the archer that started to battle, and noticed a few differences. For once, his bow was different. Not just more intricate, but also in a different style, giving me the impression that it was created by a different expert.

And he had a dagger, wooden just like the others, but with a large, intricate emerald on its hilt — with no hint of magical energy, suggesting more of a status symbol.

If it wasn't for the fact elves had just given me the key to continuing growing stronger, I wouldn't have cared much about anything other than aggravating the undead. After all, after I had destroyed more and more undead while disguising my actions, the higher-up of elves would inevitably join.

Yet, after their performance of generating Divine Spark, I changed my mind about keeping them as incidental participants. I needed to impress them more.

“Sorry, old man,” I murmured as I stretched a tantric-filled mana string to the mage, and invaded his crystallized Divine Spark, taking half of it before he could realize it, and transferring it to myself. With the mage distracted, and without the System constantly trying to devour every free particle, it was very easy to succeed.

I had to admit, I felt slightly guilty at doing so, but under the circumstances, a lot more than a slight guilt was necessary to keep me from acting.

I created another fake soul space to prevent interaction between two fake Chosen Nodes. I had no idea how they would react, but remember the first time I tried to mix different-natured mana, I had no intention to test it casually.

The amount of Divine Spark I had taken was not significant for me, but it was still significantly more than what the tree had. And, more importantly, converting the mana directly was much easier than letting the tree do it — not because I was more efficient while using the same mana, but because it helped me to control the results.

And, I used the resulting mana to feed the tree directly. Just like that, its growth, which had

been stunted due to the instinctive priorities of the tree, picked up speed once more.

Thirty feet turned fifty, which, in seconds reached sixty, then seventy...

I expected the elves to watch in shock, their argument was forgotten, but, against my expectation, it got more intense the faster the tree grew. And, even more surprisingly, it was the mage that was getting more subdued, while the archer started to act brazen, a smug smile on his face.

I was prepared to intervene when the mage admitted defeat and started walking, only to be surprised when he moved in the opposite direction I expected, followed by most of the archers. Rather than retreating, they started establishing a defensive perimeter, while the archer stood in the middle, smug.

Then, he gestured to two archers, and talked with them quickly, his attitude implying a certain amount of authority — though not a welcome one, if the stiff attitude of the other two told.

Their stiff attitude didn't prevent them from listening to his orders, and one of them took running, following the river, directly toward the encampment I had just seen. Yet, the other was more interesting. He took the dagger with the emerald the other presented, and took running.

Toward a different direction, confirming that I had misunderstood the nature of their argument.

"A happy misunderstanding," I thought with a smirk, continuing to feed the tree with forcibly converted mana — with a speed that was getting exhausting — while the mage and the remaining others worked hard to create a defensive position.

The mage spread some seeds and cast a spell, which immediately turned into a thick wall of vegetation. He didn't show any hint of noticing his loss of ability, which was to be expected considering he was using the generous amount of nature-life mana that was filling the opening rather than trying to do it on his own.

They worked hard to establish the position, with archers taking position all along the new wall, the tree continuing to grow behind them.

When the undead finally appeared over the horizon, the tree had already broken the height of a hundred feet, radiating an aura of security...

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]



## Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Six

The undead horde approached quickly after their appearance, showing the benefits of their lack of concern, not caring about the lives of their soldiers — a meaningless description when zombies were concerned — or their stamina.

Still, the horde was more impressive than the previous force. Not just the numbers, but also the mana radiating off them.

It didn't take long for them to enter into the range of the elves, their arrows flying with impressive accuracy and speed. I kept monitoring them even as I continued to feed the tree, only to notice that, with every arrow that flew, some of the mana that was a part of their body disappeared.

Making their arrows almost a spell, though a dangerous one. No wonder they were treating the guardian trees with such reverence and worship. Their dependence was even stronger than I had realized before.

Luckily for them, with my ability to convert mana from the Aether, I wasn't lacking in some extra I could pump into their defensive encampment, pushing them to peak performance.

More than one elf had sent glances filled with worship as they turned back, looking at the tree, which they assumed to be responsible for their victory. I didn't care much about the credit, just glad that they maintained to keep their focus on the battle rather than starting to worship the tree again.

I turned my attention to the undead force, and noted that the necromancer force chose to stay behind quite a distance, already establishing a defensive perimeter of their own, a staggering number of wards appearing.

By the number of nodes that were being built independently, I could sense that the number of necromancers was much greater than I expected, and their competency was greater as well. The biggest signal was the amount of mana they were using.

As they established their wards, they used all the mana the stream had been carrying, leaving the water as nothing but a muddy flow.

I used the tree as a medium to send a bolt of life energy, strong enough to crack the defenses they had been busy establishing, but weak enough that I was sure of its failure before sending

it.

I had no intention of routing their serious attack, because if I did so, there were two options for them, abandoning the battlefield, or sending an overwhelming force...

And, at the moment, neither was to my benefit. I much preferred to slowly pull the focus of the battle to my location, with both forces reinforcing to allow me to focus more.

And maybe gather even more Divine Spark in the process.

The realization that the tree could be used to gather Divine Spark was nice, but stealing some from Elven mages promised much higher returns. Especially if the sole mage that was busy establishing the wards was not their strongest in terms of the Divine Spark they possessed.

However, while the prospect of increasing my abilities was nice, I suddenly found myself facing a different problem, this time with a personal nature.

I lacked the ability to numerically track the increase in my capabilities.

Technically, it wasn't supposed to matter, as I could easily sense the increases and decreases on an instinctual level, but after a life spent looking at an illusionary screen, I found the lack of numbers telling my growth unsettling.

Like it wasn't real.

It was ironic considering the effort I had put to find a path alternative to the System, but ultimately, my problem with the System was not the numbers, but the realization that it could be taken as easily — a concern that turned out to be the truth, as evidenced by my current circumstances.

It wasn't too difficult, especially since I had the time.

The first challenge was determining the unit of measurement. What better way to measure that rather than stats, to do that, I turned my attention to my stats.

I had used my purified Divine Spark rather accidentally at first, which, in effect, spread the effect of the stats rather evenly. I used my own mana to diagnose my body more in detail, carefully measuring the various capabilities, and crossing those capabilities with what I remembered from my own growth and what I observed from others.

Only to conclude with the point, a simple self-targeting illusion spell, creating the familiar

burning letters...

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 7

Precision: 7 Perception: 8

Agility: 7 Manipulation: 8

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 8

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 8}

Admittedly, the numbers were a little lower than I had previously expected, but I realized that, once again, the even distribution of the abilities worked wonders, and my casting capabilities had benefited greatly from the unlimited mana I could generate, with different structures as needed, optimized for the spell in mind.

Not the mention, the lack of a system, constantly devouring every single scrap of mana that was generating also helped. That, and casually spending thousands and thousands of mana with no concern of waiting for it to regenerate.

I turned my attention to the next stage, the relationship between the stats and the purified Divine Spark that was necessary to enable it.

And, to do so, I first focused on my stats, playing around a bit until making sure I could change only one stat.

As I tried, I made sure to pay attention to the battle, occasionally sending blunt bolts of nature energy toward them, other times intervening at the last second to save the life of an elf — not wanting to lose any precious source of Divine Spark.

After playing with my stats for an extended time, I succeeded, but not great. I wasn't able to push any stat significantly higher than the others, a few points of difference enough to give me a sense of imbalance — along with a sense of danger.

Still, playing around a bit was enough to understand the relationship between the Spark and the Stats. There was a quadratic relationship, with each increase costing more and more.

I decided to mark the smallest unit, one that required pushing a stat from zero to one, as a unit of Divine Spark, while pushing a stat from one to two, occupied four points of Divine Spark, and from nine to ten took a hundred points.

Of course, it meant that, increasing from one to ten required three-hundred-and-eighty-five...

And, my old score of fifty points of charisma would require a whopping forty-three thousand points — well, forty-two-thousand, nine hundred, and twenty-five if I were to be exact, but a mere seventy-five points of difference was not that great.

A great, suffocating number, especially when compared to the other sources around me.

The amount that was currently in the tree was barely half a point even after the worship ritual, while the elven mage's Chosen Spark was barely more than four points before I stole half of it.

Of course, it was enough to put the capabilities of the System to a suffocating level in comparison. Either the System had a different way of supporting the stats — which was likely — or had an unbelievable amount of Divine Spark stored in its unknown depths.

Which was scary...

“One thing at a time,” I murmured as I slapped my cheek, distracting myself from the oppressive feeling of helplessness. It didn't matter how strong was the System as long as I didn't fight against it.

Which I had no intention to do. What I wanted was to find my way back — and escape again with my girls if things reached a dangerous point.

After all, after faking my death, the mysterious faction of the Eternals that targeted me had no idea I was alive — and with my performance, had other priorities to deal with.

And, the System itself ... was a problem for a later time. Much later...

I turned my attention to measuring my capabilities. After a few more spells, a new line joined the rest, representing the amount of Divine Spark I had been keeping in reserve to aggressively break down the Aether to match my excessive mana usage.

{Purified Divine Spark: 43}

“Excellent,” I muttered. It wasn't a great amount I had in storage, not enough to boost any of my stats by another point. If it was one disadvantage of my numerical adjustments, it allowed me to directly compare my current state with my previous one.

And the difference was suffocating.

Of course, the power from the System was just borrowed while my strength belonged to me, but it was a bitter consolation.

“Spending borrowed is not smart, but it is fun,” I admitted with a murmur before I shook my head, focusing my attention on the next stage rather than lamenting about my lack of metaphorical wealth.

{Pseudo-HP: 450 Mana: 7220}

Since I added others, I decided to add a real-time indicator of the converted mana and pseudo-HP I had in my storage as well, allowing me to keep an eye on my reserves at all times.

Then, I turned my attention to the next aspect. My fake Chosen nodes. It wasn’t as helpful as the others, but still, it was better to be comprehensive about such things.

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 2.1}

“All complete,” I murmured as I put my hand on the solitary root that was passing through the cave, about to turn my attention to the battle. Then, it hit me. “Oh, how can I forget you, little buddy,” I murmured in amusement as I added another category, along with a mana link.

{MINIONS

Guardian God Tree - 0.6}

“Now, it’s complete,” I said as I turned my full attention to the battle that was going on above the ground.

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{Strength: 8 Charisma: 7

Precision: 7 Perception: 8

Agility: 7 Manipulation: 8

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 8

Endurance: 8    Wisdom: 8}

{Purified Divine Spark: 43}

{Pseudo-HP: 450    Mana: 7220}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 2.1}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Tree - 0.6}

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Seven

Processing the current state of the battle didn't take long, as even while I was busy creating my self-System, I was taking occasional glances, to see if there was any great change.

The undead continued to entrench themselves along the river, slowly expanding their wards to get closer while sending a continuous wave of zombies, and the elves continued to rain their arrows.

At first, I expected elves to have some logistical trouble, but when their mage used another spell, continuously taking branches of the wall they had created, manipulating them with simple spells, and turning them into arrows.

Rather efficient, I had to admit. I preferred explosiveness over sustainability, of course, but it was clearly a philosophy that wasn't shared by my new friends.

Elves got surrounded tighter and tighter as the undead magical encampment spread, but that did little to damage their morale, because, even when I was lost in experimentation, I didn't stop feeding the tree with mana, fueling the wild growth of the tree further and further.

Of course, I knew that, even with its Spark completely merged to its structure it would take seconds for it to burn completely the moment I stopped feeding it mana, but elves lacked the ability to discern that.

Luckily for them, I planned to stay for a while more. The discoveries I was making were simply too important to abandon the location until it became too dangerous for me to handle.

But, with the battle going slowly, I decided to make some more preparations, to make my stay more stable.

My first attempt was to create a large array surrounding the root of the tree, connected with an opening that constantly provided mana, then filled the storage with enough mana to continue supporting it in case I had to move.

{-2103 Mana}

I didn't want the tree collapsing the moment I moved around, looking for some convenient targets.

My next aim was to make sure I didn't kill myself accidentally, and started converting some

more pseudo-HP. It was harder to store than mana, but considering the next step of the plan, it was a reasonable choice.

I didn't want to die to an accidental burst of necrotic energy. It would have been a pathetic way to go.

{-1428 Mana}

{+419 Pseudo-HP}

Then, I moved to my next plan, and started digging another tunnel, deep through the floor, passing right under the undead encampment, barely digging a couple feet every minute, more focused on filling the tunnel with numerous wards that would reinforce the walls and keep me hidden.

For that, I didn't use my stored mana, limiting myself to the speed I could convert from the Aether. Even then, I prioritized supporting the growth of the tree and keeping the elves alive rather than speeding up the tunnel.

As I passed the line of fortification and arrived at the undead side, I started adding a great number of small wards, each pointing upward, filled with nature-life mana. I would have preferred to fill it with light mana instead, which was significantly more deadly against the undead.

But it would also shout to both parties that there was a third party playing with them, which was a bad trade against the possibility of victory.

Digging the tunnel was a long and laborious activity — not the digging itself, but the number of wards that I used on the path. But, while the labor was difficult, the rewards were equally delicious.

As I continued to dig, the number of elves started to increase. First, another squad of five elves joined, followed by a larger squad of ten soon after, all coming in the direction of the small delta I had discovered earlier.

I didn't know if the numbers I had seen them fighting were their full force, but if it was, it meant that they had committed almost four-fifth of their fighting force to here.

A shockingly serious commitment, though I felt like it was more a sign of their desperation rather than incompetence.



Their arrival was welcome, making their defensive line much stronger. Especially since the undead was more occupied by trying to create a strong defensive encampment than attacking, concerned with the potential of the tree — a concern that I fueled by raining more and more nature-life bolts against their defenses.

Their defenses stood strong, giving confidence in their defenses — unaware that I was putting finishing touches to the great trap right under their base.

It took hours for me to finish the trap, and when I finished, it was dawn once more. The undead continued to gather their forces. Of course, the only reason that they did so despite that, was whenever they sent a zombie force that looked strong enough to overwhelm the little force of elves — exhausted despite the constant absorption of nature mana — I used the tree to intervene whenever they were close to death, sending another concentrated blast of energy to destroy a critical part of their attack.

And the elves pushed back the attack without a loss.

Yet, the repeated failures didn't make the undead retreat, but instead receive more and more reinforcements. Their magical messages of communication weren't subtle enough to avoid the detection wards I had sprawled around.

And while I didn't know the language they used, considering they were receiving more and more reinforcements during the night, with monsters that looked much stronger than the hastily-raised zombies from forest animals, I was confident enough to bet some Divine Spark to my comprehension.

However, as the sun started to rise, the undead decided that they had finally gathered enough force. Another zombie horde rushed forward, with enough members to make the ground shake, but my attention wasn't on the ordinary members.

My gaze fell to the center, where I could see a small group of four, walking with a fascinating elegance, their black armor gleaming despite the mess of rotten flesh and bones that surrounded them.

Death knights, I recognized as they passed over one of the hidden detection wards, allowing me to detect their nature — which survived only because the undead didn't even bother searching for them before setting their wards, the interference only helping to keep them hidden even better.

I was glad that it survived, because it gave me a chance to plan against the death knights.

Technically, I didn't know whether they were death knights, which might as well be a construct that was only useful when combined with the system.

Not that accurate description mattered much. The passive necrotic energy they radiated, leagues above any zombie left no doubt that they were magically potent yet lacking in intent to direct it externally, while every step revealed a dangerous combination of strength and elegance.

And, their blades, black enough to devour the light around their surroundings, left no doubt about their preference for melee combat.

Even if they were not technically death knights, from a battle perspective, they were similar enough not to matter.

It left me with a great challenge. How to handle them ... or more accurately, how to handle them without revealing my presence. I knew from experience that several wide-area explosion of light energy was a good way to deal with them, and it could be always followed by several more targeted spells as they inevitably get slowed down.

Unfortunately, such an ability was clearly not a part of the departure of the elves, and would reveal my presence.

I needed a better way to handle them, I thought as I watched their steady approach. Halfway to their approach, elves noticed their presence as well, and a few of them focused their fire on them.

Unfortunately, deflecting these arrows was trivial for Death knights. The one at the front pulled his sword, a wave enough to deflect all the arrows that were flying toward them.

The display was enough to make the defenders shout in alarm, and more of them focused on the target, raining arrows to take them down, only to fail spectacularly. Not only none of the arrows hadn't touched them, but the volley didn't even slow them down.

"It's your turn again, buddy," I murmured as I touched the root once more, flooding its structure with mana, both pure for it to digest, and nature-life to cast a spell.

This time, however, it wasn't just a clumsy bolt of loose mana, but something more interesting. I used my mana to etch small wards on the leaves on the edge, which gathered nature-life around them.

Yet, the nature-life was just the outward, hiding small, sharp needles of pseudo-HP in them, which was much deadlier against the undead. I used it rather than light mana directly, because of the similarities between the two energy, it had a much better chance of avoiding notice.

The rain of leaves was much more effective than the arrows. Thanks to the great amount of mana the tree had already swallowed during its growth — easily above a hundred thousand — each leaf were already magically-dense enough to threaten a zombie in the first place, and the enchanted rain of explosive leaves worked much better. It get rid of all the zombies trying to breach the defensive front, and left the four death knights alone, without logistical support.

Unfortunately, they were much stronger than the zombies, and my attack barely slowed them down as they continued moving forward, uncaring of the loss of the zombies.

The reason turned clear a moment later, when one of them raised their sword, and a wave of necrotic energy exploded, erasing the life energy I pumped into the field, the horde rising around them once more.

Fighting undead was always a frustrating affair...

—

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 7

Precision: 7 Perception: 8

Agility: 7 Manipulation: 8

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 8

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 8}

{Purified Divine Spark: 43}

{Pseudo-HP: 869 Mana: 5460}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 2.1}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Tree - 0.6}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Eight

Against the renewed march of the undead, I responded with another wave of magically-charged leaves, which, unfortunately, didn't work as well as I had hoped. The reason was a lich that moved forward before casting a spell, and expanding the protective ward over the army.

"Amateur," I murmured in disdain. By the mana emanating from his spell, it was clear that the lich was strong, but his strength did nothing to the horribleness of his decision. By extending the wards forward, he created a barrier that was impossible to breach by the rain of leaves, no matter how many times I had repeated it.

But it came at the cost of damaging the integrity of the ward they had spent all night creating. Ultimately, the strength of any ward depended on their structural balance, and extending it carelessly was dangerous, leaving many vulnerabilities to be exploited.

I was annoyed, because I had to hold myself back to maintain my concealment, letting his ill-thought response stand.

I turned my attention to the elves, whose morale was plummeting as they started to argue once again, their language still a mystery. This time, several of the elves that belonged to the original encampment started to shout at the other warrior, who rejected their words dismissively, continuously gesturing at the tree, showing his intent to stay and defend.

The others looked ashamed, but I noted more than one of them shuffling toward the back, showing the signs of a rout.

Before they could make a move, a sharp sound filled the air, sharp enough to actually reach my cave. It was the sound of an eagle, but amplified a hundred times, to a deafening degree. Yet, as that sound reached, it changed the attitude of the elves completely.

The argument was cut short immediately, leaving the elf with the different bow with a smug smile as they focused on their defensive efforts with a renewed passion. Reinforcements, I deduced, which turned out to be a reasonable assumption, as a giant eagle appeared on the horizon.

The undead reacted to the presence of the eagle in two ways. One, a group of necromancers appeared all along the ward, already targeting the eagle with wide-area necrotic spells to slow his approach, their spells getting amplified by the wards.

They were prepared, showing it wasn't the first time the elves chose the path of aerial reinforcement.

While most of them focused on targeting the aerial reinforcements, trying to keep them away, the lich that was responsible for casting the ward moved forward, reinforcing the army with several spells that intensified their speed.

Still, their choice left me curious, because they still had a great number of forces hidden in the base, unused, making me wonder if I was the only one that was deliberately baiting a bigger fight.

Admittedly, from a strategic perspective, it did make sense for them. Not only the battlefield was located right next to the stream, which they were using as a core part of their magical logistics, but also they were battling in a location that was very important to their enemies, triggering a defensive response that was strategically unsound.

Not just because the undead spent all night entrenching the defensive location with both magical defenses and an endless number of extra resources, but it was far into their own defensive line, making the location hard to reinforce and easy to envelop.

Which was a horrible decision. Not that I blamed the elves too much for trying to defend the position. Up until now, every single thing that I saw showed that they were losing, and losing rather spectacularly.

And, while drowning, even the flimsiest rope was worth grabbing. A guardian tree, appearing from nowhere magically, radiating far more mana than the others they had in possession, certainly qualified to trigger hope among despair.

Death knights marched forward, their blades raised, the necrotic energy they radiate enough to encourage the zombies to move faster and hit harder. Yet, I noticed a detail that encouraged me.

They weren't just channeling the energy of the river, but actually pulling the remnants of the nature-life mana I had used against them. I sent a small tendril of Tantric mana for detection, still maintaining the connection to observe their structure.

And found what I was looking for. Right at the center of their chest, was a crystallized piece of rotten energy.

Necrotic Divine Spark.

“Not bad,” I thought with a smirk, my intention to take them down suddenly intensified with the sudden appearance of benefits. And, the amount was certainly not small, almost ten units in my new scale.

And, three more tendrils showed that the other death knights were in possession of a similar amount of Divine Spark. Four of them represented enough Divine Spark that could almost add another Stat point.

A great reward for a simple battle. All I needed was to find an easy way to take them down.

Elves proved smart enough to abandon the first line of defense as it turned untenable, allowing me to focus my attention on the death knights rather than trying to save their lives.

I had to admit, I was curious about the amount of Spark that the lich possessed, as he seemed stronger and more important. Pity he was not only a caster, but also too far away, making it very difficult to subtly infiltrate his being like I did to death knights — who made my job much easier with their effort to transform the life energy.

Luckily, I had one tool I could use really efficiently against the growing threat. I flooded the structure of the tree with my mana, but this time, rather than discharging it, I started to take control of it more directly.

Unaware of the threat they were about the face, the death knights rushed forward, confident in their upcoming victory. And, not unfairly so, I decided, as their performance was clearly over an average level fifteen warrior, while the elves could barely match a level five one.

Most of the elves moved forward, but the sole mage among them surprised me by raising his hand, and suddenly filling his body with nature mana.

He started to grow with a shocking speed, turning into a giant over twenty feet in an instant, but the moment did so, his body transformed completely.

A clearly suicidal attack, killing him before I could even attempt to intercept it — though, it would be a lie if I said that I was torn up about the result, not when he had granted me the tool that could be used to hit back the undead without revealing my position.

The treant that appeared in the place of the elf lumbered toward the death knights, swinging its arms with each step, destroying dozens of zombies with each swing of its wooden arms, destroying the empowered zombies easily.

The pause it created allowed the elves to create another defensive line, but I decided to make their lives closer. Their unique way of warding was rather weak, but easy to copy, so I used nature mana to seed another wall of thorns they could use, but this time behind the trunk of the tree, to allow the undead to approach unimpeded.

The treant rushed toward the death knights, but only two of them moved forward to meet its charge, while the other two rushed toward the trunk of the tree, determined to take it down.

A little faster than I expected, which surprised me, as I felt that they wanted to take down the reinforcements as well. However, when I turned my attention to the sky, I saw that they had already solved the problem

There were three giant eagles in the sky, two of them made of bones and rotting flesh, each carrying a lich on top, raining spells against the eagle. Worse for the elves, they didn't arrive from the base but appeared behind them, waiting for the reinforcements to arrive before cutting their path.

Leaving the elves no choice but to land. They defended desperately against the attack, packing enough magical power to barely defend themselves, rushing toward the tree. Only to meet with another rain of necrotic energy from the wards, enough to overwhelm their defenses before they could land.

The sacrificial spell of the elven mage wasn't faring any better. The treant was strong, but only temporary as the remains of his will directed the living will of the treant mindlessly, trying to target the nearest death knight. It was strong enough that, even a glancing hit might have damaged the death knights significantly.

Unfortunately, the death knights looked proficient in handling such tactics. One of them stood in front, dodging the attack while the other used the opportunity to deliver a devastating hit, leaving a devastating taint, shortening the already limited life of the treant even more.

A devastating counterattack, one that made me question the merits of just writing off this as a defeat and searching for a more equal battlefield.

Under the circumstances, it was clearly hopeless to expect the elves to defend anything around the perimeter.

But, before I could make the decision, one of the death knights arrived near the tree, and stabbed his sword through the trunk. I didn't care much, more than confident enough to cure any damage he left if I decided to fight more. And if I decided to retreat, such an attack would



be a good excuse.

But then, a surprising change happened when he flipped open a crystal, glowing emerald green.

It was accompanied by a sense of tugging, one that I had felt before — in a fashion — though in a way that I didn't expect to affect me in this fragmented plane.

I might have written it off as an illusion, a paranoia, but it triggered my new, hand-crafted system.

{-0.1 Spark, God Tree}

—

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 7

Precision: 7 Perception: 8

Agility: 7 Manipulation: 8

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 8

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 8}

{Purified Divine Spark: 43}

{Pseudo-HP: 869 Mana: 5460}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 2.1}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Tree - 0.5}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Forty-Nine

The only thing that prevented me from exploding in panic was that I could sense the source of the pull was the crystal that the death knights holding in hand, rather than something mysterious and over-encompassing.

Dealing with another System was the last thing I needed.

With that fear squished, I turned my attention to my current problem. Under the circumstances, Divine Spark stealers were not something I expected to deal with.

I didn't appreciate the potential competition.

Though, maybe I shouldn't be surprised by their ability to trap Divine Spark. After all, I could easily do so, and Mariel did so with amounts that were shockingly higher than the scraps that the guardian tree contained.

Moreover, while I had the ability to purify it, it seemed that it was a rare ability to have — if not unique — and I was yet to feel any of it being destroyed. It was very likely that they were capturing it not to use, but somehow deprive the elves of a potent weapon.

I remembered the destroyed guardian trees on my path. I had assumed that the Divine Spark was lost in the Aether after their destruction. But maybe they had suffered from the same fate, their Divine Spark captured and stored rather than let float freely, free to be caught by other trees.

Of course, I had no idea what was their next step with the Divine Spark. Maybe they had a method — even if it was potentially slow and cumbersome — to convert it, or maybe a god with millions of units of Divine Spark could somehow browbeat different natures.

Maybe they would just throw those crystals into the Primordial Aether, to float for eternity.

Regardless, it was a problem for the future. For now, I was content to change the fate hidden in that crystal.

And with, my strategies.

Under my control, the roots of the tree lashed out. Two of the roots burst out of the ground, right underneath the feet of the death knights. They were fast enough to avoid it, but a well-timed rain of leaves gave them a more urgent target to avoid.

They swung their swords to push. They were wearing helmets, but the contempt they felt against my trap was clear from the casualness of their swing as they batted away the leaves.

It was a strategic mistake, but I couldn't blame them for it. After all, in everything I had seen up until the moment, the guardian trees lacked sentience, and along with it, the ability to develop strategies.

Unfortunately for them, not blaming wasn't equal to giving them a chance to adjust their thinking. The roots wrapped around their legs, immobilizing them. They tried to desperately cut the roots, each swing of their blade delivering enough rotting energy to completely destroy the tree —only to clash helplessly against my own wave.

Then, a third root jumped out, snatching the Crystal off his hand.

A little pressure was enough to crack the crystal, and a mana flood drained all the spark let out from the crystal.

An incredible amount, I realized, wondering just how many trees their group was responsible for destroying as the pure, crystallized clumps of Divine Spark were absorbed by the tree. A little touch of my mana, and the tree absorbed the energy rapidly.

{ +205 Nature Spark, God Tree }

I let the tree absorb all of it, as the obligation to continuously feed it mana was getting rather troubling. While I could use wards for that purpose, the tree's divine spark worked much better to convert even more nature mana.

Freed from my obligation to assist the tree to converting pure mana into nature mana, I turned my focus to purifying mana and breaking down Aether. The difference in output was stark, almost increasing ten times, pushing against the necrotic mana like an out-of-control flood.

The lich that commanded the enemy army didn't appreciate my move, exploding in anger as he delivered several orders. I might not understand his words, but reading the moment of his whole army, charging forward, was rather obvious.

It was an all-out attack.

The other two death knights ignored the treant and rushed forward the tree, trying to destroy the tree before it was too late.

Unaware that they were delivering me exactly what I needed. I delayed dealing with the two captured Death Knights for a moment not to scare the other two, turning my focus on the rest of the battlefield.

The biggest benefit of the order came from the reinforcements. After the order of the lich, the forces that were supposed to keep them away turned their attention to the tree, the most notable being the sudden absence of magical arrows.

The eagle flew toward the ever-growing branches of the tree, in a hurry to join the battle, though even with their speed, it would be a while until they could join the battle. It would be too late before the bulk of the zombie army could achieve their aim, their reckless charge enough to close the distance. I prepared to change my focus to change it.

Then, stopped, realizing a nice surprise.

The treant, lumbering toward the upcoming army, grew larger with each step as it absorbed the almost unlimited nature mana that was in the environment, getting stronger. The mind was already gone after the sacrifice, but the remaining instincts were enough to remind his enmity with the undead.

It smashed against the first line of the charging zombies, each blow making the earth shake as it destroyed many zombies. Panicking, some of the necromancers turned their attacks toward the tree, ignoring the order of the lich.

That angered the lich, but his repeated orders fell wayside as the necromancers desperately tried to eliminate the threat first. Yet, their attacks turned useless as the treant absorbed the nature mana to recover.

I wondered just how long the treant would last. Seconds, or whether it would manage to resist a minute. The constant cycle of decay and recovery was leaving some dangerous instabilities in its structure. Its nature as a wild growth that was never designed to reach this size only quickened its fate.

Yet, it managed to tangle all undead forces into battle, which was far more than what was supposed to be possible before the unlucky elven mage had sacrificed himself in a desperate rush.

Since the undead had kindly committed to the battle I had no reason to keep myself back. I turned my attention to four death knights, desperately hacking the tree in the hopes of destroying it. Unfortunately for them, it was a desperate hope. Unlike the treant, the tree didn't

need to rely on nature's mana to cure the havoc created by the undead energy. It could just assimilate and convert the mana without even my assistance.

The lich might have been more successful with some well-crafted spells to resist that, but the uncontrolled blasts of death knights had no chance.

I stabbed the first death knight with roots, draining it of its mana — and along with it, its divine spark. This time, I didn't feed it to the tree, but absorbed it myself, quickly purifying and absorbing it.

{+ 21 Pure Divine Spark}

"Thanks for the meal," I muttered as I observed the undead army, trying to see if the lich reacted to the trick. But, since he was more occupied with trying to bring down the tree rather than trying to resist the invasion, I was willing to believe that it was not the case.

{+ 72 Pure Divine Spark}

And since that was the case, I let absorbed the other three rapidly as well, their desperate last stand might as well not exist under the circumstances.

The dense background mana made it an impossible victory for them, reversing their initial advantage completely. The eagle used the opportunity to land behind the tree, using its huge — and still growing — trunk as cover.

Still, their faces were grim, recognizing that, even with their recent advantages, a desperate battle awaited them.

Luckily for them, they represented a renewable source of divine spark for me, each death an unfortunate loss. I wanted to end the battle as soon as possible, in a spectacular manner.

The treant gave me an excuse to do so. With its desperate hunger for nature mana, it was easy for me to take control of it, and move it forward in a desperate charge right in the middle of the undead formation. It received attacks from all sides, each second hastening its inevitable demise, unable to attack back...

But I didn't care about the limited damage it created. All I cared about was to see if it could reach its destination... The traps I had laid under the undead army.

The moment it touched, I used the connection to destroy it in one last explosive energy, each

splinter filled with nature mana to make a destructive weapon, taking a small yet significant chunk of the army.

The rest was destroyed by the traps going off, with the sole exception of the lich that was leading to the army, its soul detached from its body to escape.

Too bad for him that, before he could escape, a surreptitious ray of light jumped out of the ground and stabbed its soul, draining its divine spark. It was not the first time I had fought with liches.

It took a while more than draining death knights, as not only it had much more dense energy, but also the spark was absorbed enough to reach demigod standards.

Too bad that it didn't matter in his helpless state, as it disappeared unglamorously.

{+ 104 Pure Divine Spark}

With the battle finally won, I turned my attention to the elves.

It was time to make some new friends.

—

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 7

Precision: 7 Perception: 8

Agility: 7 Manipulation: 8

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 8

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 8}

{Purified Divine Spark: 240}

{Pseudo-HP: 869 Mana: 5460}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 2.1}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Tree - 206}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Fifty

As I returned to the cave under the tree, I was satisfied with the gains I had made from the battle. Not only I had destroyed the most immediate threat of the undead assault, but I achieved that without revealing myself.

The giant guardian tree in the middle of nowhere was not any less inconspicuous, but for all intents of purposes, it belonged to elves, which the undead was already fighting against. They had no idea there was a meddler in their battle, nor they had the ability to actually give chase without identifying me.

That didn't prevent me from creating a new plan for my underground base, one with several more escape tunnels. If the worst happened, and the undead decided to attack with a force that I couldn't push back despite my abilities, I could always drain the tree of its divine spark and leave.

The battle already netted more than four hundred points of Divine Spark, which was far more than I had hoped, enough to improve all my stats by another point.

A rather excellent gain for a day's battle.

When I arrived back at my cave, I split my attention into two. Most of my attention went to digging new tunnels and crafting new wards, with much greater speed than I could push ordinarily. The undead was already gone, I wasn't afraid of them.

I avoided the attention of the elves in a different manner, and directed the physical roots of the tree to spread around, the constant mana output hiding my own tunnel spreading deep into the ground.

A thick root moved toward the river in particular, and created a complicated web, and I had created a ward on top of it to channel all the necrotic energy into the tree. I even wasted some Divine Spark to create the ward, softening the necrotic mana before it was devoured by the tree.

{- 5 Pure Divine Spark}

A waste, maybe, but after the gains of the battle, I was more willing to treat divine spark as a resource than a treasure that needed to be kept hidden desperately.

The tree started converting all the mana the undead continued to provide into its food, which,



combined with the impressive amount of mana it could get from the Aether, created a wave of nature mana.

Curious, I even poked my head to observe my surroundings. As the mana spread, the dead land regained its vitality rapidly, desolate turning alive.

On the other hand, I continued to observe the movement of the elves. Most of them were already worshipping the tree, and only a small portion of it going through the battlefield to find a clue or work to prepare defenses.

Normally, the lack of practicality would have annoyed me, but considering their action was already generating benefits for me, I was more than happy to forgive the strategic stupidity of their actions.

{+0.7 Nature Spark, God Tree}

All that remained was to make a decision about whether to communicate with them directly or indirectly, and what would be their method of communication.

After some consideration, I decided to choose a mixture of the two in, a direct, but restricted manner. And, the best target was the priestess that was currently leading the worship, which could be the best way to communicate.

Of course, it was a completely practical decision, and had nothing to do with her beautiful strawberry blonde hair, or the way the furs she wore wrapped her body in a way that showed an extremely curvy body.

Not at all, as I was never a person that would compromise my strategic decisions based on attraction.

Never...

No matter how delicious was the glimpse of flesh I received whenever she moved.

I chuckled even as I cast a spell, and several branches moved down toward the priestess, and roots burst out of the tree as well. Just like the attack I had delivered on the death knights, just much slower, enough to show that it was not an attack.

It triggered a discussion between the priestess and the others. Even without knowing their language, the situation was clear. The priestess was willing to follow the mysterious direction of

the tree, while some argued against it.

It seemed that the priestess had some power. She was able to dismiss their arguments quickly and let the roots and branches gather around her, until it created a chrysalis around her, cutting her from the outside.

The nature mana gathered around the wooden chrysalis, thick enough to make any probing attempt completely useless even if the elves stopped worshipping.

Meanwhile, the tunnel deposited the beautiful priestess to my lair. She looked at me with panic — understandable — as she took a step back, her arms raised.

Her alertness reduced as I raised my hand, letting a great amount of nature mana filled the room. She said something.

I shrugged before I cast a spell, and several pictures appeared in sequence, the magic allowing me to draw those pictures in a very detailed manner.

The first picture showed me fighting against a group of undead, and the second picture showed the same, but against many more undead, enough to make it a desperate battle. The third one showed me floating in a complicated device as the undead destroyed my plane — as I didn't want to casually reveal my ability to travel unaided through primordial Aether.

The fourth one showed me landing in their plane, and the fifth one showed elves and zombies fighting. Then I added several more, each detailing some of my more visible contributions to the battle — though I had positioned more as some kind of alliance with the tree rather than directly controlling it.

Naturally, the pictures didn't show my real origin, but a fictional origin of another dimension fighting against the undead, populated by humans that also used nature mana to fight against the enemy.

A good explanation for my current status.

She tried to say something, but I failed to understand, and she draw a picture. One that asked me to go upstairs.

My answer was ready. With another picture, I displayed that, if she actually told me about my presence, I would just leave.

She nodded hesitantly.

I smiled as I flared my mana, and a wooden chair grew next to her, and she sat down, thoughtful, trying to come to a decision.

I used the opportunity to examine her in a more detailed manner, taking note of her beautiful almond eyes, bright green enough to rival the leaves of the guardian tree, her flawless skin that contrasted interestingly with her wild aura, her pouty lips that curled in indecision.

After some long consideration, she drew another picture, with her talking with the other elves while pointing at me, then crossed, then draw a large square, empty.

Asking what to say if she stayed silent.

I didn't find her decision too suspicious. The undead invasion was a desperate situation, with their defeat certain, making such a trust less reckless and more hopeless.

I drew another picture, this time showing two of her, one showing her casting a spell, with limited impact, the other showing her casting a much bigger spell, even more ease, with the shadow of the tree behind her.

She looked at me, her question clear without drawing a picture.

I summoned a small fruit, glowing with energy.

Her panic was clear. She quickly drew a picture, of eating a glowing fruit, with power. Then, she drew another picture, this time someone eating two fruits, and dying.

The rather expected result of different Divine Sparks clashing. There were many ways of stopping that, but all required a significant amount of mana control. For all intents of purposes, that level of mana control was not accessible for elves, at least for the ones I already met.

I responded with another picture, first similar to hers, two fruits killing someone. Then, I followed with the picture of a ritual, treating one of the fruits with some kind of ascension, and the next picture showed someone eating two fruits, one ordinary and one special, and getting powerful.

She looked at it, thoughtful.

I threw her the fruit. She grabbed it in panic and reverence mixed, then turned to look at me, her expression sharp.

I couldn't help but chuckle as I caught her expression, surprisingly similar to what Helga wore whenever she noticed me treating the books with disrespect.

That didn't last long, however, as she turned her attention to the monumental decision in front of her, trembling in hesitation. I said nothing, giving her a chance to make her decision without interruption.

After several minutes, a determined expression appeared on her face, and she ate the small fruit in one bite, showing her decision.

The fruit was completely empty except for some nature mana, just there to give me an excuse to meddle with her. I let my mana invade her body, checking her current strength.

She was stronger than the mage that sacrificed himself in terms of Divine Spark, almost four points in my new measurement scale, but the divine spark was even more solid and less integrated.

That changed rapidly under my control. I increased the integration with the divine spark to the demigod level, while also transferring some spark from the tree to her.

{-6 Nature Spark, God Tree}

{+6 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

It took a while for her to adapt to changes, but I was getting rather proficient in helping the merger process, especially for such small amounts.

As a result, not only did her Divine Spark increase more than double, but her flexibility increased significantly... A nice meeting gift.

As she looked at me in fascination, realizing just how powerful she had become, I drew another picture, this time showing a group of elves digging guardian trees from other locations, burying them around our god tree.

She looked at it a bit before nodding. After communicating with her a bit more, I sent her back to the surface.

I would have loved to seduce her immediately, but we had a lot of work to do.

—

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 7

Precision: 7 Perception: 8

Agility: 7 Manipulation: 8

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 8

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 8}

{Purified Divine Spark: 235}

{Pseudo-HP: 869 Mana: 5460}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 2.1}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Tree - 201}

Elven Priestess - 8}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-One

After the disastrous chain of events that left me helpless in the new world that was going through a hopeless undead assault, the last thing I had expected to have a...

Holiday.

It certainly felt like a holiday with everything that was going on. The area was a gray hellscape when I had first visited, and right now, an area of several miles was covered with a lush, beautiful forest, one that filled me with relaxation as I walked, my feet wading through thick grass.

There were forests as thick back in the main material plane, of course, but I could never fully relax back then, not with the ever-present risk of monsters attacking. Here, the growing forest was safe enough for me to drop my guard for a moment and enjoy the clean air, nature mana surrounding me gently.

Of course, I wasn't having a moment to relax because I decided to avoid my responsibilities, a fact that was reminded me by an alert from a ward at the distance. I smirked as I moved toward the flicker, not even bothering to go to my tunnels, just pulling a simple illusion spell around me.

After a week spent hiding among elves, I had long realized that they relied upon their affinity with nature mana even more than their sharp eyes to notice any possible interloper. An excellent method to catch the undead, or even another elf, but not so good against someone with a greater competency of manipulating magic.

I passed hundreds of elves on the way to my destination, some caring for the trees, some preparing food, some going to a patrol with bows in hand... But most were busy worshipping, each moment creating another divine spark for me to enjoy.

Their presence was the reason I was spending time here rather than not moving. I didn't need to move, with the elves migrating to my location in droves.

Already, the number of elves that were living around the tree were counted in tens of thousands, not just warriors, but also children, more than happy to move to a location that promised more safety over whatever little defense they had in their own tribe.

Luckily, they didn't come empty-handed.

They brought their trees with them.

The presence of another guardian tree was what I felt, and I started moving toward the edge of the land, passing hundreds of other trees, and arriving at another robed mage — this time a young man — casting a spell to allow the trees to root.

I flared my magic, and the roots of the central tree wrapped to the guardian tree, flooding it with its presence, stealing two-thirds of the divine spark that was in the newest guardian tree that joined to the ever-growing forest, split equally between me and the main tree.

{+16 Nature Spark, God Tree}

{+21 Pure Divine Spark}

Well, almost equally.

I didn't feel any guilt robbing the guardian tree of some of its divine spark, because, in exchange, its structure was flooded with nature mana, with purity and an amount that was impossible for it to reach on its own.

The tree was already tall when it was first brought, larger than a hundred feet, but it still looked at the edge of death, half of its leaves yellow, and the rest already brown and dried, outer branches showing signs of rotting.

Yet, the moment it merged into the forest, that reversed. Under the flood of nature mana provided by the tree, every sign of decay disappeared in seconds, and the tree started to grow with a visible speed.

Triggering another ceremony of worship for the elves.

It didn't matter how much it grew, I thought as I looked at the center of the growing forest, to the original tree that was just a seed a week ago.

Now, hovering above the forest like a small mountain, already taller than a thousand feet, a giant radiating a sense of protection.

Most of the elves were encamped around the tree, dancing and worshiping the giant miracle that had given them hope against the ever-growing threat of the undead. They had seen the effectiveness with their eyes as undead sent several probing attacks, only to be destroyed under the flood of nature mana.

Not even able to reach the outer perimeter.

Unfortunately, those were probing attacks, without any necromancers to lead, or death knights to support, giving me only a few points of divine spark to me.

A point that would have saddened me greatly if it wasn't for the hard work of the elves, constantly providing me with more and more divine spark, both as a burst by bringing their guardian trees with them — most having somewhere between twenty and a hundred based on their maturity and the amount of worship that had gone to them — and the constant worship, tens of thousands elves enough to generate more than a hundred divine spark daily.

After I had completed the integration of the guardian tree into the growing forest, I added several wards, one to channel the necrotic mana back to the main tree to be converted, the other to transfer large amounts of nature mana as needed.

By that, the forest was not only a generator for divine spark, but also a surprisingly effective defensive structure, capable of not only defending against the growing threat, but also creating a surprisingly effective fortress against the undead attacks.

To the point that they had temporarily changed their strategy, probably gathering their armies while they tried to rely on harassment techniques.

Pity their biggest tool, the river that they used to deliver mana, was not working, a fact that they were unaware of, if the intensity of mana was any indicator. The water carried an amazing amount of mana during their earlier attack as well, easily measured in hundreds per second.

After their probing attacks failed, they increased it to thousands per second, unaware that they were just granting my god tree more mana to convert.

Forcibly converting one mana into another was difficult, but not as difficult as breaking down Aether.

With that task done, I had returned to the underground, to my little residence — one that I had turned into a beautiful hovel of several comfortable rooms — if I was going to live underground, I was going to do it comfortably.

I returned, ready to rest after a long day...

Only to realize that I had an uninvited — yet certainly not unwelcome — guest.



My elven priestess. “I can’t believe that idiot, daring to say I don’t deserve the touch of nature...” she muttered in anger.

“Tough day, Seldanna?” I asked, enjoying the benefits of learning the language enough to have a casual chat. With my intelligence — finally increased thanks to all the Divine Spark I had gained during the week — and my hard-working tutor, I progressed a lot.

And as a nice side benefit, I also learned her name.

“Yes,” she growled in shock. “Another feud between tribes, this time about an insult three generations ago..”

I chuckled, listening to her angry spat, making no attempt to stop her. It was not the first time.

Apparently, before the undead invasion, most of the elves lived as insular tribes, with little to no connection other than occasional spat about hunting grounds and other ordinary spats, which turned into long-lived feuds.

Until now, more than fifty tribes had joined our growing forest encampment. And with it, thousands and thousands of feuds, some between tribes, the others between individuals. As a consequence, my priestess, as the never-seen-before chosen of nature that was essentially a prophet for the elves, had to spend most of her day trying to break fights and mediate arguments.

Rather than spending time getting used to her radically-enhanced magical abilities.

The result was a great deal of frustration. She knew that I was busy reinforcing the defenses much better than she could achieve while she was busy keeping order, but that didn’t remove the feeling of annoyance from dealing with pointless activities again and again.

“It’s tough to change the way they lived, give them time,” I said, trying to sound more compassionate than smug, more than happy that I wasn’t dealing with that repeated nonsense. I loved to trick and tease people, but that was when I managed to get a sense of progress. I didn’t enjoy repeating the same tasks, again and again, with no progress.

“I know, but it’s so frustrating. Against a disaster that already swept most of the border, while that arrogant morons at the Great Tree were willing to bury their heads to the ground...”

The Great Tree and the strongest tribe, a reveal that didn’t surprise me a bit. I had already assumed that there would be stronger elves than the occasional tribe that was easily destroyed

by the undead, and the fact that they chose to ignore the growing threat due to some unknown internal reason didn't surprise me even a bit.

I had seen that movie many times.

"I wish that there is something I could do," I said with a shrug. "But a massage is best I can offer, but you seem to be rather reluctant," referring to the times I had offered to help her relax, only to shut down quickly.

But this time, the answer didn't come instantly...

—

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 10

Precision: 8 Perception: 9

Agility: 8 Manipulation: 10

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 10

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 9}

{Purified Divine Spark: 520}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 10460}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Tree - 2106}

Elven Priestess - 14}

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-Two

I watched as her exotic face turned confused, then reluctant, before admitting. “What kind of massage?”

“I was thinking of a simple palm massage,” I said. “It sounds simple, but works well on humans. Elves shouldn’t be too different.”

She looked thoughtful, her blush invading her face slightly as she considered it. “Maybe it wouldn’t be too bad,” she muttered.

“Good, come here, then,” I said as I cast a simple spell to reshape Earth into a large slab — once again using Arcana to do so rather than direct elemental, still reluctant to test them. I was yet to see anyone else using them, and I didn’t want to take the risk.

[-138 Mana]

My homemade System sent a notification, showing the relative inefficiency of such a move, but I ignored it, instead channeling nature mana to grow a thick slab of grass on the surface, comfortable to sit down — or lie down if she preferred.

I didn’t care about the mana expenditure, because that much mana was nothing compared to all I had spent trying to get a sense of the location of the girls, easily measured in millions. The best I was able to get was a vague sensation about their safety — and I was almost sure that was not due to the System, as that was all I was able to feel about Aviada as well.

She was at a distance and safe, but that was the extent of the information I was able to acquire as I found myself stranded.

Still, I didn’t consider that as a waste, as it allowed me to maintain my current position without taking absurd risks like going back to Primordial Aether. Instead, I stayed here safely as more and more elves gathered, bringing more and more Divine Spark with them.

With that, more power to make my ultimate journey safer.

As I thought that, Seldanna sat on the platform I created and raised her hand. I grabbed, wasting a bit more to coat my fingers with proto-HP, hiding that behind a thin layer of nature mana.

[-29 Mana]

The combination worked spectacularly. Her eyes widened the moment I dragged my finger over her palm, shocked by the sensation. I ignored the following shocked gaze as I focused on her palm, acting like I hadn't noticed it.

I stayed focused on her hand for the next minute, letting my mana penetrate through her body to loosen her. Tantric might have been revealed as a true miracle that was able to purify all kinds of mana and Divine Spark, but it didn't mean that its initial function as a massage aid was lost.

I had no problems using it to the limit.

I could feel that she was relaxing enough to pull back, which was not something I wanted. I decided to remind her about one of the stressful points. "Any news from the central tribes," I asked, probing her about one of the more important topics.

My week wasn't just filled with magical experiments, I also spent some time learning about the political state of the plane. It wasn't as useful as I had hoped. Elves turned out to be even more insular than I had expected, their communication rarely extending further than their neighboring tribes — and that was not always positive.

Their information about the tribes farther into the plane was sporadic and contradictory, though there were some points that were more aligned. One of those points was what I had already concluded, that they were considerably stronger than the border tribes.

Seldanna informed me that the border tribes had sent several messengers to communicate with them when the undead proved themselves too strong to handle, but received no response.

"Not really," she answered, her stress back at the mention. "They should have returned already even if there was no help was in the horizon."

"And even if they failed to reach, the central tribes should have already noticed the undead invasion and reacted," I completed her words, completing her concerns.

"Yes, and now, they have another thing to complain along with every ridiculous problem they bring, expecting me to rule in their favor," she complained, her lips getting looser as my fingers steadily destroyed the stress she accumulated.

She sent me a warning look as my fingers climbed up to her arms, but as the mana flooded through her body, her complaints about that were suspiciously absent. Pity teasing her about that was not possible without scaring her.

Instead, I listened to her arguments about the difficulties of her job while I continued massaging her, flooding her body with mana. As a welcome side effect, it gave me a chance to observe her internal structure more in detail, examining how she was handling the additional Divine Spark.

The results were ... interesting. Even in the demigod state where the impact was limited, I could see that it was somehow transforming her body. Some of those transformations were clearly beneficial, a stronger body that could not only perform better in battle but also channel the mana better.

That was not a new finding, as I had long detected it, along with the fact that natured Divine Spark empowered them much more than the purified spark I used.

Now, I was trying to understand how it scaled up by feeding more and more Divine Spark to her, empowering her further — subtly enough that she would assume it was just the after-effects of the fruit she had consumed rather than my active management.

{-1 Nature Spark, God Tree}

{+1 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

The results were ... complicated. It was hard to measure that, but I was almost sure that the growth trajectory of the natured Divine Spark wasn't as steep as my unique technique. It wasn't linear, but it wasn't directly exponential as well, falling somewhere in between.

Not the best news I could get, especially when I contrasted her capabilities with the god tree I had created — now more of a god forest as I continued to enhance the connection — and the trajectory it was displaying.

It showed that, for the same amount of Divine Spark, they had a much more significant display of power. The gap was even steeper for the gods than for demigods, and to make things worse, the higher the power level, the bigger the gap would be.

I was jealous ... but also I was not. They might have a much steeper curve of improvement, but they lacked one important thing in comparison. My ability to take any type of Divine Spark and absorb it.

I had seen what a great challenge for to actually absorb Divine Spark. Even after turning it into a God Tree, the little guardian tree would have died under the addition of the new Divine Spark if it wasn't for my assistance.

That would be less of a problem the stronger it got, but still, that was a great impediment. Properly absorbing and bonding with Divine Spark required not only time, but also some kind of compatibility — even with my assistance.

The priestess that was currently mewling under my hands, for example. She was able to merge with Nature Spark easily because they were already attuned to nature mana to a significant degree.

I doubted things had gone happily if I tried to bond her with Light Spark — or worse, try to give two different Sparks at the same time.

I still remembered just how much trouble to mix mana of two different natures. It was spectacular enough to dissuade me from experimenting on Divine Spark until I reached a much higher place.

“You should give yourself more time,” I murmured to her ear even as I shifted higher, putting my hands on her neck, rubbing gently, each caress making her tremble a bit. “You’re too tense.”

“What can I do ... with everything going on,” she murmured with a sigh, leaning back slightly against my chest as I stood behind her. “The constant raids, internal conflicts, the reinforcements trying to arrive...” Then she turned toward me, her expression frustrated. “And you had to go and pick me to handle that mess. Couldn’t you have picked someone else?”

I could have rightfully pointed out that the amount of power my choice granted to her was more than a good deal for the little troubles she was dealing with, and things like undead raids would have happened regardless of my intervention, only worse.

However, I wasn’t stupid enough to do so, not when she was just trying to find an outlet for her frustration, her new role preventing her from talking with anyone else.

“I could have, of course, but who else could have handled everything as amazing as you, and keep all those tribes under control. Would you trust anyone else to handle it as well as you without it turning into a mess,” I murmured softly, stroking her ego.

Not the most clever of words, but worked amazingly well when combined with the masterclass massage she was receiving. She leaned against my chest..

... and I felt some kind of connection between us. A subtle connection, almost nonexistent, and easily written off as an illusion.

If I wasn't familiar with the sensation of the Companion Process. It wasn't exactly the same, but the similarities, however faint, were unmistakable.

However, before I could push forward, I felt a strong sense of warning from the outer wards.

Another undead attack. Just in time.

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{Strength: 8 Charisma: 10

Precision: 8 Perception: 9

Agility: 8 Manipulation: 10

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 10

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 9}

{Purified Divine Spark: 520}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 10123}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 2105}

Elven Priestess - 15}

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-Three

“We better pause our little treatment, undead is attacking again,” I said.

She jumped up to her feet, the urgency of the situation enough for her to think that she managed to hide her awkward expression from me. “I — I better go join,” she said after a while.

I was going to send her away with a chuckle, but as I used the various wards I had implemented around to detect the attackers, I realized that something was suspicious about the attack. Namely, the number I could detect..

And their strength, or more accurately, the lack of it.

The number of zombies I could detect was significant, enough to be counted in tens of thousands. That didn't worry me much, as, after some point, it was easy to deal with such groups, especially if they were kind enough to gather into one convenient target for wide-area spells.

It was their weak presence that made me frown suspiciously. At this point, there were thousands of elves already. There was no logical reason for sending such a huge number of zombies and nothing else.

Meaning, they were just a distraction from the real thing. I continued examining their structure, trying to understand what was being planned. The formation was the first thing that gave me the clue. Strong in the winds, weak at the center.

If it was an ordinary army they were facing, I would have assumed that the center was the bait, inviting the shock troops of the enemy before they enveloped that. But that didn't work against elves because of their preference toward ranged combat.

A surprise through the center was the most likely outcome, probably through some kind of shock attack through the center, enough to overwhelm our strength and attack the central tree itself.

A simple plan, but not a bad one. Pity that it was destined to fail, for several reasons. The biggest reason was always my presence. Even without all the traps I had established, spreading miles across every direction, I alone could take down both the army and whatever surprise they prepared.



Near-unlimited mana was extremely convenient.

That was only the last resort, of course, as revealing myself would mean abandoning my biggest advantage. My anonymity. Still, there were other advantages.

Like the fact that destroying the central tree actually meant nothing. At this point, every guardian tree was connected to each other, acting as a singular operative, and the Divine Spark danced freely among them. Destroying the largest tree would impair the mana conversion ability of the forest significantly, but only temporarily.

Their formation suggested that they were not aware of this little fact.

Of course, the tree represented morale for the elves, and unless there was no other option, I didn't want it to be demolished.

Luckily, I already had the weapon to prevent that. A sexy, beautiful weapon...

"You need to be careful, it's going to be a strong one," I said. "I could detect a strong army, several times the one that had attacked us previously."

"It doesn't matter, we can handle it after everyone that joined. The forest alone..."

"Exactly, that's why I'm not feeling well about that attack. They had already lost an army when there were barely dozens that were trying to defend. Now, tens of thousands are here, and their little trick with the river was completely useless. Yet, they are still attacking..."

She paused for a moment, her lovely face contorted in doubt. "Because they are hiding a weapon."

"Exactly, and my best guess is that it's coming through the center, and attacking here," I completed.

"You expect them to take down the tree."

"Exactly," I said, displaying more accuracy than I had been feeling — but even if I misread the situation, I could just intervene directly if the worst had happened. "I need you to leave the zombies to the others and wait at the center..." I explained, then paused.

It was a good opportunity for me to present her with another power-up.

"What's wrong?" she asked as I displayed my worry.

“Maybe...” I murmured morosely, even as I pulled another glowing fruit from my pocket. “Maybe it’s a good time to take another risk.”

“W-what’s that?” she asked, even as she flinched at the radiating mana with shock, not sure whether to take a step forward, or slide back in panic.

“Another empowerment fruit. One that I was hoping not to use for a while, waiting for the previous fruit to bond with you properly, but this attack is giving me a bad feeling. I think we should take a small risk and empower you further.”

“T-that’s an option?” she asked, shocked at my nod.

“A dangerous one, but this attack is giving me a bad feeling,” I explained.

My explanation was partially correct. It was true that their tactical layout was giving me a bad feeling, but the part about fruit and the risks were complete nonsense. I just wanted to sell the situation while maintaining the mystery of the situation.

And, if her display could trigger some panicky undead response, even better. They would eventually attack the full force, that much was obvious from just how much undead presence I could detect from my surroundings, and the earlier they attack, the more disorganized their forces would be.

Not to mention lots and lots of Divine Spark I could gather from their failed attacks.

She didn’t take long before coming to a decision. “If you think the risk is acceptable, I’m willing to take it,” she said, not asking any more questions.

“Really?” I asked, surprised at the speed of her acceptance.

“I trust you,” she responded, which was too pure of a statement. Though, considering everything I had been doing to protect them, it wasn’t as absurd as I first thought it to be.

I just nodded as I passed her the fruit, which had even more Divine Spark hidden in its structure, but this time. As she bit into it, I channeled Divine Spark to mix into her body. It was a pity that I couldn’t use her Divine Spark for enhancing her Stats — which was the major drawback of using the natured Divine Spark — but to compensate, I

{+55 Divine Spark, Elven Priestess}

[-55 Divine Spark. God Forest]

“It’s — too much,” she gasped as she felt Divine Spark invading her body, her beautiful almond eyes widening beautifully. “I don’t think I can handle it,” she tried to complete, but I pressed my finger to her mouth and silenced her beautiful argument.

“Don’t worry, sweetie, I’m here to help,” I said even as Tantric mana flooded her, reinforcing the structure of the barriers that kept the Divine Spark from spreading freely, still keeping her in Demigod state, any dangerous spread prevented before it happened.

The endless sessions I shared with my beautiful headmistress were paying great dividends. After many sessions we shared, I developed a great sense of how to handle and manipulate Divine Spark, which was helping me greatly.

Though, even as I did so, I doubted I could have replaced that attempt easily on another human. Just like how Mariel was directly aligned with the Light mana due to her nature, elves were aligned with Nature Spark, and as a Priestess that had been already Chosen, she was even better aligned.

I had no doubt that, even without my assistance, she could have eventually absorbed and controlled the great amount of Divine Spark I was presenting to her, but it would have probably taken days, maybe even months.

With my assistance, the required time period constricted into a lone minute, Divine Spark gathering obediently into her body, giving her not only the ability to convert mana much more rapidly, but also increasing the potency of her magic significantly.

I could even feel her body getting stronger, but it was a rather limited effect compared to the other impacts.

“This power,” she murmured as she raised her hand, and my cave residence — though much more luxurious after all my adjustments — was filled with beautiful flowers. “I can just go and destroy all of the zombies, alone—” she tried to say.

“Not so quickly, sweetie,” I said. “If you go along and swing your magic like a careless lumberjack, you’ll scare our dear enemies, and we don’t want that.”

“We don’t?” she asked, genuinely surprised.

“Of course we don’t,” I explained to her with a smirk. “They had gone through such great trouble to arrange a trap for us, why should we let them pull back. Instead, let them pay for the information about our strength...”

“And since I’ll be the one to fight, they’ll still be unaware of your presence, and when they attack again, even stronger...” she muttered.

“I’ll be there to solve it,” I said with a chuckle. Of course, I didn’t mention to her that, with every repeat, the undead would be bringing me more and more of their power, which would increase my combat capabilities further.

I couldn’t wait to bring my stats back to the range of twenties, or maybe even higher...

“You’re our savior,” she whispered as she looked at me, her gaze filled with worship. “How can we repay you?”

I smirked, never one to miss a beautiful opportunity even under the immediate danger of a battle. “How about a kiss?” I whispered.

“A ... kiss,” she gasped, her blush beautiful as she avoided my gaze. “Just a kiss.”

“Oh, my beauty, your kiss is too glorious to be classified as just a kiss,” I answered, enjoying her spreading blush even more. “But, I’m willing to wait until the end of the battle to receive it. Why don’t you go ahead, and teach those useless things the mistake of trying to trap us,” I said, once again triggering the tree-elevator.

She left, a beautiful blush on her face...

—

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 10

Precision: 8 Perception: 9

Agility: 8 Manipulation: 10

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 10

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 9}

{Purified Divine Spark: 520}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 10123}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 2050}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-Four

If there was one disadvantage of great planning before the battle, it was boredom...

I used the great number of magical detection wards I had spread underground to get a real-time view of the battle. As I predicted, the zombies were attacking from the wings, rushing in with a recklessness that was exaggerated even for disposable corpses of undead beings.

Some of the elven archers panicked at the unexpected strategy, but the numbers were simply too far apart for it to make any difference, especially with nature mana filling the forests to the brim, both allowing them to cast much stronger spells, and giving them a natural barrier to weaken any undead spell before they were even cast.

However, soon, the reaction of the elves disappointed me. They reacted to the attack rather more obviously than I expected, splitting into two to meet with the attack, and left the center almost completely empty.

I wasn't afraid of the consequences, as I had already arranged for Seldanna to stay in the middle, ready to defend against the trap, but it was annoying to see elves not only missing the trap, but also reacting to it exaggeratedly.

They were excellent archers and decent mages in their sphere ... but their tactical acumen was nonexistent.

A topic for the future, I decided as I continued to watch the assault. Five minutes into the intense assault, I finally noticed a stirring in the middle...

And the monster came strolling in. I didn't recognize the monster. It looked like a dragon, but with many weird changes on its body. Whether the beast had been a natural chimera when it was alive, or had been adjusted by the necromancers to create a very effective battering ram was a mystery.

But, since the battle was enough to distract the elves, I used the tree-elevator to go to the surface as well. I wanted to watch the battle with my own eyes, though more as a leisure activity than an actual need. With my Divine Spark-infused forest as my focus, my magical senses were much more useful than my eyes to catch anything extraordinary.

I just wanted to watch Seldanna throwing down against the great monstrosity.

Though, I had to admit, the monster rather looked intimidating to the naked eye. A hulking

beast, a hundred feet tall and five hundred feet long, it was already scary enough without its skeletal dragon head open, displaying its teeth, each bigger than a sword.

Even at a distance, its roar was dangerous, radiating a huge flood of focused necrotic energy, an ugly facsimile of a dragon's breath, the thickness of the necrotic energy intense enough to cut through the passive shield of the nature mana.

That was far from the full extent of the defenses I had created, but I was deliberately keeping them hidden — ready to appear only in case of mortal danger — as I let my beautiful priestess a chance to shine.

And, shine she did. "You dare!" she shouted as she raised her hands to the sky, and the mana that surrounded her answered, touching a little seed — one that turned into a huge tree to block the necrotic flood, absorbing it to its structure, rotting as the necrotic mana clashed with nature mana.

But, the elves surrounding Seldanna survived, looking at her with shock as she casually rewrote what was possible to do with nature magic. Understandable, as the strongest elf that visited the forest barely had five points of Divine Spark locked in Chosen form, limiting both their output and their control significantly.

What Seldanna did in a second, a coven barely replicate in a minute.

However, that only made the monster pause for a moment before it continued charging. Seldanne rushed forward as well, doing her best to meet with the monster without it could reach the first guardian tree at the perimeter.

She didn't know that it didn't matter to actually defend them and I could pull back its energy and spread along the other trees — though, considering the cultural importance of the guardian trees, I doubted that it would have mattered in the first place. She would have still done her best to defend them.

If there was one thing she was, she was earnest in her desire to defend the land.

The monster charged forward, uncaring of the small figure that it could easily squash standing in front of the first guardian tree — which was enough to confirm its lack of intelligence, and also confirmed that there was no necromancer that was directly controlling it.

Interesting choice, I decided as I stretched a little mana stream inside the beast. Ordinarily, using mana for diagnostics would have been very difficult from such a great distance, but

another advantage of the forest was that I could manipulate mana in the forest almost as well as if I were standing next to the beast.

Surprisingly, the moment it slipped into the beast, I lost control of the mana, like it was lost to a raging tornado.

Interesting, I thought, and rather than pushing, I waited for an opportunity.

It arrived soon after. Seldanna cast a spell, and a horde of roots exploded from the ground, wrapping around the limbs of the beast. A single root was weak enough not to slow the beast down, but hundreds of magically-enhanced roots were enough to stop it momentarily.

And gave me an excuse to slip a much more invasive probe.

[-183 Mana]

“No wonder it disappeared instantly,” I murmured as I felt the mana disappear into the beast. Inside the beast, there was a chaotic dance of mana going on, and not just necrotic mana. I could sense different types of mana, each swirling in a different body part. The necrotic mana and nature mana were the most prominent ones, but occasionally, I could sense other types of energy as well.

Purer mana that reminded me of Janelor at the head of the dragon, arcane mana that radiated from a weird-shaped grafted wing, some purer healing energy coming from a shell ... and some other energies that I could barely recognize.

Each of them was contained by a crystal that was buried in the middle, one that was containing a crystal filled with Necrotic Spark, and one that clearly contained more than a hundred points of Divine Spark.

No wonder no necromancers were actually defending it. It was not a vanguard, but an explosive trap, and the creature was just there to isolate the different types of mana as they brought it deeper into the center.

An interesting gambit. In its nature, it was very easy to defeat the beast, just immobilize it and push it away, and watch it destabilize as the different types of mana started to react violently. With no necromancers controlling it — no doubt afraid of the backlash, a phenomenon I flirted with during my own attempts of mixing energies — it was almost trivial for an accomplished mage.



Yet, that required a reasonable tactical response, which the elves were lacking significantly. As the beast appeared in the center, most of the elves rushed toward it in panic, arrows flying desperately as they wanted to take down the beast before it could reach the first tree.

Arrows themselves weren't a threat against any undead, but the nature mana these arrows delivered was a different thing. It started to infuse the beast, triggering its chaos. The beast pushed to move forward as its mana started to destabilize, but the hold of the roots was too strong for it to move.

A fact that the few necromancers that were a part of the army didn't miss, and aimed their spells at the roots that were holding the beast in place, the necrotic energy enough to destroy them.

I could have intervened to keep the roots, but instead, I decided to let them snap, curious how Seldanna would react.

My aims were twofold. I wanted to test her tactical understanding of the situation — as we had many discussions about magic and its strategic applications for the last week — and I wanted to give her an opportunity to display her true power in front of the other tribes.

I didn't miss that more than one was grumbling about her authority, and a little reminder about true power wouldn't be amiss.

For the first attack, Seldanna attacked the beast directly with several spells, trying to take it down as quickly as possible, but a flare of mana made her realize something was wrong.

"Get away, and continue protecting the edges, something is wrong," Seldanna ordered them, shouting as loudly as she could manage, but even with her incredible displays of magic, not all elves listened to her orders.

The majority listened, but a significant minority did not — and some I recognized as the latest arrivals, and the guardian trees they brought along were right at the edge, risking destruction.

As far as disobedience went, it was not a terrible reason, but that didn't change the fact that it made Saldenna's next move extremely difficult. She started casting two spells at the same, another horde of roots to pin the beast in place, and a wide shield that would not only protect her, but also the elves that surrounded the monster, some stupid enough to try and flank the beast.

Their presence made Seldanna's job much more difficult. Creating a half-circle shield was

relatively easy, because it only needed to deflect the explosion, leaving it to spread to the other side. It was not trivial by any means, but it was still doable for her after the power-up, even with the roots taking some of her attention.

Unfortunately, the same didn't apply to a full shield, especially when she made the mistake of covering the top and making a half-circle, impossible to contain. And, ironically, even if it did, there would have been only one direction for Necrotic Spark to escape; underground, and it would have damaged the forest just as much.

Luckily, I was there to help her. Just as the explosion was triggered, I took control of her shield, opening a gap at the top to channel the explosion away safely, while reinforcing the ground to avoid disaster from there.

{-2949 Mana}

Right in time, as the explosion happened hard enough to imitate an earthquake. I watched as Seldanna collapsed due to exhaustion, pushing herself to the limit to reinforce the shield, which showed she was too distracted to actually notice I had taken over the shield.

The elves rushed toward her, some in panic, but even from a distance, I could sense several of them had some bad motives — one even had his knife out already — showing that generations of tribal hatred weren't just gone, but simmering underneath.

"How fun," I muttered sarcastically even as I cast a spell, and roots appeared around Seldanna and pulled her into the ground. Since I had such a convenient excuse to intervene, I just did so.

Luckily, I was able to steal most of the Divine Spark the necromancers hid in the beast, making it not only a beautiful teaching moment, but also profitable.

{+192 Divine Spark}

—

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 10

Precision: 8 Perception: 9

Agility: 8 Manipulation: 10

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 10

Endurance: 8    Wisdom: 9}

{Purified Divine Spark: 712}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869    Mana: 7352}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 2050}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-Five

I pulled Seldanna underground even as the cheers exploded on the surface, celebrating their victory, unaware that just how close to disaster they were after their spectacularly bad intervention. I kept my attention on the surface, dealing with the nearby undead scouts, but not even for a second I believed that I was able to deal with all of them — or even a significant minority of them.

The attack was too calculated for them to just have a few observers close in, and the explosion itself was too spectacular to be missed. My best hope was to hide the details of the victory.

However, as I pulled back, I noticed another interesting thing.

Small particles of Divine Spark, flew toward my victorious priestess, just like the forest had been receiving them constantly. However, her current Divine Spark wasn't reacting as I had expected.

With the tree, the reaction had been simple. Then it was weak, the sparks were absorbed violently into its tiny collection of Divine Spark, like trying to add more coal to a fledging fire, about to extinguish. Only my intervention kept the tree alive and absorb the energy smoothly. But, as it started to get stronger and stronger, the absorption capabilities turned much more substantial.

At this point, I didn't need to intervene to help it absorb.

Yet, with Seldanna, it was different. Rather than being absorbed by her Divine Sea — which I decided to temporarily name — they floated around like fireflies, with no intention of merging. As if she was pushing them away.

No wonder there were no notifications warning about the absorption.

I watched as those sparks danced around her magical presence, not going away, yet not merging. Curious, I let that continue even as I turned my attention inward, putting the gift from the undead to work.

{-302 Divine Spark}

{+3 Perception}

"Fascinating," I murmured as I enjoyed the difference the increased stats were made, enough to trigger a significant difference in my senses. It helped that I was getting more proficient in

assigning stats, allowing me to extend the difference between them somewhat.

With my enhanced perception, I could see that what was going on was not a simple issue. Somehow, the layer around her Divine Sea was rejecting the infusion of the spark, like a magnet pushing different polarity.

Maybe it was like the difference between having and not having Sapience, maybe it was something completely different. I lacked the information to understand it.

Luckily, I thought as I cast the spell to awaken her. I had sufficient time to assess that.

“Where am I —“ she gasped before she raised her head and looked at me. “What happened in the battle.”

“We’ll talk about that in a moment, but to not push you too much, the battle is completed successfully, with no loss,” I explained to her as I caught her gaze. “Now, tell me your biggest mistake.”

“My ... mistake,” she muttered.

“Well, I was forced to intervene against an enemy you should have been able to handle alone, so there was clearly a mistake,” I said, and to her shocked expression, I continued. “There’s no guarantee that I will be here able to help you during the next battle,” I suggested.

“You’re leaving,” she gasped in shock.

“Not yet, but ultimately, that’s on the table,” I reminded her. “But not immediately, and not until I’m sure that we’re secure here,” I said, and she relaxed. “Unless there’s an emergency,” I added, and she was tense once again.

“Then, what?” she said.

“We don’t know about the scale of the next attack,” I admitted. “I’m sure that that beast was an attempt of last resort, but not from their leader. I’m sure they are much stronger. No, this was the last resort from the unlucky lich they tasked to defeat and secure the borders before they could move inland.”

“And now, their true elites will arrive,” she gasped, afraid. “Maybe we should send another courier to the other tribes. Maybe they would come.”

“Oh, don’t worry about that, they’ll arrive,” I said with a chuckle.

“They didn’t, at least not yet. What changed.”

“Well, two things. First, we’re able to defend this spot far longer than anyone could expect, even though they abandoned it as a sacrifice,” I explained, doing my best to frame their lack of attention as negative — not that I needed to work hard for that with their all historical baggage.

“And second?” she asked.

“Second, I’m sure that the spectacular explosion would be more decisive than any message we can send. It’s proof that we’re standing here, with more power than they expect. And if there’s one thing the rulers don’t like, it was the others gaining the same power.”

“We don’t have a ruler,” Seldanna declared decisively, yet with her pretty face, it came across as petulance. “Tribes are independent of whatever they have there, even if they dare to name it as the capital.”

“Sure,” I answered. “But are you sure they would answer the same if I asked them?” I countered, and she fell silent. “Exactly,” I said with a chuckle. “But enough about that. Let’s go back to the question. What was your mistake?”

“My ... mistake,” she whispered. “I wasn’t very familiar with my power,” she said.

“No, that was just something forced by the circumstances, that’s not your mistake,” I corrected her.

“Then, what was it?” she asked hesitantly.

“You pushed yourself too much, trying to protect stupid people against their own mistakes. You have already ordered them to retreat, but they ignored your order and did something incredibly stupid. You can’t risk everything to protect them. Not when it was at the risk of killing anyone.”

She ducked her head shyly.

I chuckled. “But you knew that, didn’t you,” I asked, and she just nodded hesitantly. “But you did it anyway, because you knew that I was there to protect you...” I continued, and she nodded again, blushing even more.

“Naughty...” I said with a chuckle, letting my voice earn a throaty tone as she shivered. “Such a

naughty move, using me, are you willing to pay the price, then?"

"Yes," she answered, which came much quicker than I expected, making me shiver in anticipation. "Yes, I am..."

It seemed that I wasn't the only one that was frustrated by our massage being interrupted halfway. "Good, first, your punishment," I said, and patted my lap. "Come here."

"Punishment..." she gasped, surprised, but that surprise didn't prevent her from walking forward steadily until she stood in front of me.

"Now, lay on my lap," I whispered, my tone suggestive. She shivered, but the arousal in her eyes was unmistakable. Not that I blamed her. I was not only her savior, but also my massage skills were spectacular.

"Well, you're the ... leader," she whispered as she followed my direction and lay on my lap, her robe thick enough to cut the feeling significantly, even as I put my hand on her back. "Are you —" she started, only to be interrupted by a gasp.

A gasp came after my hand landed on her hips.

"Am I ... what?" I asked with a chuckle as I raised my hand and landed on her bottom.

"That punishment," she gasped. "Maybe something else..." she whispered, managing to sound throaty as she did so.

"Something like what?" I said as I chuckled, acting like I didn't understand what she was leading toward. It wasn't believable, of course, but she was too shy to point that out. Instead, her eyes fell on the floor demurely.

The next spank landed, and her chin clenched as she tried to keep her moan in. Which wasn't too difficult, as my spanks were more playful than painful, and her thick robe further blocked the pain. "I ..." she whispered, but that was all she was able to say.

"Well, since you can speak, the punishment is clearly not effective," I said with a chuckle, and grabbed her robe. "I should work hard to dissuade you from such dangerous gambits."

She said nothing for a while, losing herself in the sensation as I slowly pulled her robe up, slowly revealing her beautiful legs to my view, with curves to die for. "Thank you," she managed to say as the robe continued to climb, which surprised me. "You're a very selfless hero."

After a week, I must have made an even greater impression.

“I am a hero, right,” I said with a chuckle, though it was certainly not inaccurate. After all, I was doing most of it as a mixture of powering myself up and experimenting on Divine Spark, but that didn’t change the fact that I was their savior.

And, from her perspective, I did so selflessly, without even revealing myself, letting her take all the credit.

Not to mention, empowering her in the process.

She was ready to reward me for it, if her silence as I slowly peeled up her robe was any indicator, revealing her surprisingly perky ass considering the plumpness of her hips...

It was going to be fun, I decided as I spanked her ass once more, this time only her underwear to block my touch...

Her moan was simply beautiful...

—

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 10

Precision: 8 Perception: 12

Agility: 8 Manipulation: 10

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 10

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 9}

{Purified Divine Spark: 410}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 7352}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS



Guardian God Forest - 2050}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-Six

When I had started teasing her, I hadn't expected much, but her absolute lack of protest as I rolled up her robes had done quite a bit to change my mind about it. I spanked her once more, enjoying the way she trembled on my lap.

In a way that had absolutely nothing to do with fear.

Only anticipation.

I spanked her again, and this time, a whisper escaped her mouth. "How much longer?" she whispered.

Her question earned me a big smile. Pity, she couldn't see that from her current position. "Well, do you want me to stop?" I asked with a chuckle, a question that she left without an answer decisively. "Excellent," I added, and spanked her once more. "After all, your tactical failure needs a big punishment."

She didn't answer, silent as my hand stayed on her ass after the spank, dancing on her skin. Curious, I decided to push a bit more. A flare of mana, and two vines burst out of the ground, one wrapping around her wrist, the other around her legs.

"W-what's going on," she gasped.

"Well," I said, intentionally extending my murmur as I did so. "A part of your failure is about your abject failure to control your mana, so I have a little control exercise for you. You need to free yourself from your impediments, but you're not allowed to flood it with your mana and destroy it. You need to overcome my control."

"I..." she whispered. "What if I can't... Will I be ... punished?" Her tone left no doubt about what she was asking about.

"Of course not," I answered with a smirk, and pulled my hand away, stopping to touch her. "I'm not going to touch you ... at all."

"At ... all," she said, her voice starting from a whisper and turning into a panicked gasp halfway.

"Of course not, you have been already punished, this is the training part. Aren't you happy that you have such an enthusiastic helper, priestess?" I said with a chuckle as I crossed my hands behind my head.

But the state of her robe was enough to convey my true intent without the slightest doubt. After all, why would I leave it rolled, breaking the whole point of her conservative robe to reveal her surprisingly toned legs?

Which was a truly glorious sight, even with the monstrosities she wore as underwear.

“I see,” she whispered, but that was all she was able to say as she froze on my lap, unable to act.

Her inaction lasted a full minute, frozen with indecision, no doubt overwhelmed by what had just happened. She had already accepted my implied invitation, but the following twist was enough to freeze her.

Passively accepting was different than taking an active role.

It took a while until I felt her mana. Her magic gave her a lot of options, some allowing her to cut herself free from the vines, or at least fix her dress, but she ignored all of those possibilities, and soon, her mana danced in the vine, probing against my mana.

I responded to her tricks to take control, treating that as a fun way to experiment with controlling nature-mana, which was a great way to kill time as she tried to process the situation.

As we battled for control, both of us experienced a significant jump in mana-related abilities, and we were surprisingly balanced. I had the advantage in terms of pure power, but she was certainly more familiar with how nature-mana interacted with actual plants. I was just brute-forcing control most of the time — though, it was more the equivalent of wild bribery in vegetation terms.

She managed to steal control of the one around her arms after a while. I might have tried to steal it back, but when I felt it wrap around my arms instead, I decided to let it slide, curious about where she would go.

I smiled, but I was unable to hide my curiosity as she managed to push herself off my lap, instead ended up in front of me, kneeling due to her legs, still wrapped. Our little competition stalled with her focus shifting to keep me bound rather than trying to pull back.

Curious, I let that happen, enjoying my height advantage as she looked up silently. She was already a bundle of nerves, which gave me some nice ideas about how she might follow the situation, but I didn't dare to ask.

I didn't want to scare her off — not to mention, I wanted to see what she would do of her own volition.

"It seems that we're locked in a stalemate," she whispered, her soft tone promising a lot of interesting things about the situation.

"It seems that way," I answered with a chuckle as I shrugged and raised my hands, highlighting my helplessness. It wasn't an intense situation, especially since I could get rid of my bindings a dozen ways, and I suspected she knew that as well. "What are you going to do?"

But she didn't say anything, busy biting her lips while avoiding my gaze. "I guess ... I have to cheat a bit, then," she whispered. Her words were ambiguous, but the way she put her hands on my thighs certainly was not.

I had several words on top of my tongue, ready to go out to tease her about her choice, but since I wasn't a complete moron, I held them back to see what she would do.

"Let's see if you can ... handle it," she said, this time louder like volume would give her confidence. It worked, though only until her hand landed on my lap, and felt the hardness underneath. "This is ... wrong," she whispered.

"It's fine to admit it if you can't handle it," I said, giving her a little help. With my teasing, her anger flared. Not the softest of emotions, but an excellent way to suppress her hesitancy and push her toward an ill-advised decision.

The anger wasn't enough to completely cure her hesitancy, but it was enough to let her hand continue its climb rather than stalling, and soon, she was pulling my pants down. "See ... I can handle it," she whispered, her voice dreamy as she looked at it.

I used that opportunity to counter-attack her, and the vines around my arms loosened for a moment. "Hey," she gasped as she remembered to control them, and soon, they were once again tight.

"Well, as you said, distraction is a fair game. I can't do anything if you can't handle it."

Her frown of frustration was simply beautiful, especially since it was accompanied by a twitch of her pointy ears. "I'll show you distraction," she gasped.

"Excellent decision," I whispered as she dragged her hand up once more, this time touching my pole to remove any ambiguity about what was about to transpire.

She said nothing as her hands started to dance on my length, hesitant yet impressive, though her lips parted open in shock as she realized one important detail. "It's ... growing," she whispered.

"That's how it works when it's ... being used as a tool of distraction by a gorgeous beauty, honey," I said with a chuckle, enjoying her shock.

"I'm gorgeous..." she whispered dazedly before focusing on its size. "But ... it's too big," she whispered as she leaned back, her face contorted with shock.

"No, sweetie, just big enough, don't worry about it," I answered, enjoying her tremble, but her conviction proved stronger as her fingers started moving, her fingertips unable to touch.

"If you say so," she whispered, doubtful, but too focused to care. As her hand danced, our magical struggle continued, though with less intensity. I could have used that to reverse the situation, but with her hands picking up speed, I decided to let that go.

It was nice to see her passion growing slowly. The attraction was a dangerous weapon, especially when combined with the rush of a near-death experience. She said nothing, but her moans lingered as her hands danced.

I said nothing, enjoying the sight. With her on her knees in front of me, her fingers wrapped around my erection, squeezing slowly with an intense look of concentration on her face. A little more forward than I expected of her, but certainly more attractive.

She looked at me occasionally with rapt attention, slowly squeezing her hand, while watching me for signs, her skills developing rapidly as she put her phenomenal perception abilities to the limit, her pressure soon reaching a perfect degree.

It was nice to see her newly improved abilities to excellent use. To her credit, she didn't forget why she was trying to distract me in the first place, her mana battling against mine, and suddenly attacked with a mana rush.

"A good attempt," I said with a chuckle as I blocked her. "Pity you failed to distract me enough..."

"Oh, I failed to distract you enough," she whispered, the way her lips curled in challenge simply spectacular...

—

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 10

Precision: 8 Perception: 12

Agility: 8 Manipulation: 10

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 10

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 9}

{Purified Divine Spark: 410}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 7352}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 2050}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-Seven

I said nothing as a soft blush covered every part of her visible skin while she reconsidered her strategy to distract me, her attention once again slipping away from the magical aspects of the battle. I wondered if her whole body was covered with that blush.

Then, as if she read my mind, she decided to show me that. Her hands reached to her front, and one by one, she started unbuttoning her shirt, shivering with each step, the revealed skin just as blushed. Soon, however, I was more interested in the peek of her cleavage, showing the expanse of her breasts...

She tried to keep her expression serious, but it was a challenge that got stronger with every button. Soon, her robe was completely parted, revealing her underwear... Yet, when she grabbed her robe, her hands trembled, like she was wondering whether it was too much.

That would not do, I decided, and manipulated the vines to move once more, the distraction proving enough to focus her back on our ... game. "I'll show you," she growled as she get rid of her robe, leaving her effectively naked.

"A daring play," I commented. "Now, are you going to continue with your fingers ... or something more?" I said.

"Something more," she whispered before she realized where I was looking at. "W-with my lips?" she asked, her cute eyes shining with shock, yet desire was not too far behind.

"Well, that's one option, but certainly not the only one," I reminded her, letting my gaze dip down to her spectacular breasts that challenged the ability of her underwear to stay whole.

"You —" she gasped, but another magic assault to the vine that was keeping me bound was a good way to distract her from the shameful nature of the event, letting her focus on the present instead.

Though, the shameful nature of the event didn't keep her down for long. She didn't lose much time before her gaze fell on my shaft, which was already throbbing thanks to her earlier treatment, and the show only made the situation more intense. Soon, she leaned down. Slowly, hesitantly, her gaze jumped everywhere.

Yet, ultimately, her lips captured the head of my shaft, her mouth even warmer than her fingers — which returned to the base almost immediately. It felt like velvet. Then, she moved, slightly,

her shivers enough to kill a weaker man with a heart attack.

Yet, the true effect only started when her head started bobbing. Slowly, hesitantly, yet with an intense erotic tone. As she did that, she slowly caressed the base, unsure of her movements like it was a puzzle she was trying to resolve. When her head pulled back, I was afraid that was the end, but then, her tongue darted out as she hesitantly started her task, giving a lick.

I attacked my bound hands once more, which finally earned her gaze, frustration battling with desire. “Well, you need to work harder to distract me,” I suggested.

She murmured something unintelligible, probably not too nice. Then, her beautiful ruby lips parted, swallowing a third of my length in one smooth move, surprising me with her initiative.

I let my magical attack fade, abandoning the ground I acquired, giving her some advantage in our little game. The positive reinforcement worked better than I expected. Her eyes glowed — literally, with mana — as she pushed herself deeper on my shaft, managing to swallow more than half, and only letting out one gag in return.

It was a spectacular view with her lips caressing the base while the crown started to experience the tight grip of her throat. The sensation was equally nice.

Certainly a unique experience. Spectacular, even, especially when she continued to look at with her pretty eyes colored with victory. I didn’t argue against that, as we were playing one of those rare games that her victory didn’t mean my loss... A mutual victory was certainly on the table.

I watched passively as her pretty little mouth tightened around my girth, my length disappearing into her depths. Then, things escalated even more. She started alternating her pacing, her lips tightening further as she quickened.

It took everything I had not to comment on it, letting her continue to explore her self-assigned path to victory. She mumbled occasionally, but with her mouth occupied, it was difficult to decipher her words.

She surprised me by continuing her magical attack, and I felt her magic invading the vine that kept her legs immobile. I was tempted to act like I hadn’t noticed that trick, curious how she would follow up, but then decided against it. I didn’t want to make her overestimate her abilities to cast concealed spells, that kind of thing was dangerous.

Luckily, that didn’t mean I had to sacrifice my fun to teach her the lesson properly. As she delivered her covert attack, I copied one through the vine that was around my arm, loosening



its grip, enough that I could pull my hand out of its tight hold. She didn't notice it.

"You lose—" she whispered once the vine loosened around her legs and wrapped around mine, which was the moment I grabbed her hair and pulled her down using my freed hand, cutting her words.

I didn't plunge her down immediately. "Think again," I said, using my distracting attempt as leverage to wrap the one that was around my arms to hers, forcing her arms behind her. "You need to be more careful about counter-attacks. Now, you can blink twice and I can take it as a surrender—" I commented, only to receive a growl instead.

A very clear negative response.

"As you wish, then it's my turn to distract," I said as I plunged her head down, invading her throat mercilessly. It had been a while since I properly tasted the warm touch of a beautiful woman with everything that was going on, and changing that felt incredible.

For a while, I stayed merciful — relatively — and maintained a pace she enjoyed as her head bobbed outside her control, her lips gliding over my steely shaft.

Her attempts to attack with her mana stopped for a moment, and I used the chance to move the second vine on her as well. Bound both ways, she lost the ability to react as I ripped her top off, finally leaving her breasts free.

"Now, that's a distraction," I chuckled as I squeezed her nipple, which just brought a suppressed moan, but there was no mistaking the arousal dancing in the depths of her gaze. She shivered, showing she barely had a minute to resist this pace.

If I hadn't been going through the biggest dry spell of my recent history, I might have slowed down.

For this time, I had a different method in mind.

I tightened my grip without a warning and pushed her down even faster, while simultaneously raising my hips, occupying her throat aggressively. Her beautiful blue eyes widened in shock as I rammed my cock even deeper into her throat, cutting her breathing. Her throat muscles tried to resist my invasion, but I was merciless, not allowing her a chance to succeed.

Despite wheezing and gagging, she managed to maintain her gaze on mine, with a look that was just asking for more.

“What a naughty little priestess,” I said with a chuckle, though I didn’t find that inappropriate. After all, she was worshipping something that effectively I created, making me her ... grand-god. A little worship of my trunk was nothing inappropriate.

While I was fucking her throat mercilessly, she gagged and wheezed, adding another layer of enjoyment to our little game. She did her best to act obediently as she swallowed my behemoth to the best of her ability. Her mouth opened as wide as possible, trying to swallow me down.

“There’s a good priestess...” I murmured as I let her pull back to catch her breath, just before she climaxed, her nipple still between my fingers. “Now, do you want to stop our training, or do you want to continue.”

At the edge of a climax, she didn’t say anything for a moment, trying to catch her breath. Which wasn’t easy, with my hand digging into her tits, the rush of pleasure working excellently to distract her from the more immediate aspects of our little game.

“No,” she managed to whisper after a long while. “Don’t you dare to stop...”

“As you wish, my dear Seldanna,” I whispered as I pushed her down once more, her mouth fully open under my firm assault. My full length disappeared into her mouth and down her throat again, while she did nothing but gag and choke obediently.

I closed my eyes to enjoy the sensation as she started trembling, enjoying her first orgasm ... of many that we would eventually create. And, as a first-time bonus, I let her pull back as she trembled badly, her bindings working excellently to keep her from collapsing.

Bit by bit, she recovered, and her gaze found mine. I expected confusion, maybe a soft vulnerability.

I didn’t expect a vindictive smirk.

Suddenly vines wrapped around my arms and legs.

Oops.

—

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 10

Precision: 8 Perception: 12

Agility: 8 Manipulation: 10

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 10

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 9}

{Purified Divine Spark: 410}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 7352}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 2050}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-Eight

“Well...” she whispered as she stood in front of me, trembling in excitement, but that didn’t prevent her from leaning forward, her hands on my knees, her lips just inches away. With her mana filling the vines that she used as chains, she looked like she was in control ... almost.

Her plan was ruined by her chest, desperately rising back and forth as she failed to control her excitement.

Still, that didn’t mean she wasn’t wearing an absolutely maddening smile. “I guess someone was mentioning punishment for failure. How about now?” she whispered throatily.

“I was the one that talked about attention, yet I lost. Why don’t you tell me what you have in mind as punishment?”

“Good question,” she whispered, her smile getting wider as I played along. Still, she didn’t say anything immediately, just let her finger caress my body, climbing up all along, giving me a chance to drink her beauty, wearing only her panties and nothing more.

Almost enough to feel like a reason to avoid such a disaster.

She looked like her heart was about to explode in excitement, so when she pulled back coyly, I knew that it was less about teasing me, and more about her trying to control herself. Still, that didn’t mean she didn’t enjoy the attention as she turned halfway in and bent over, the angle hiding the most interesting aspect as she slowly pushed her panties down, leaving her naked.

“I ... shouldn’t be naked,” she whispered as she raised her hand, and suddenly, another vine pulled out of the ground, this time thinner, much more elegant, and filled with colorful flowers. It wrapped around her slowly, and soon, she was dressed in a beautiful collage of reds and yellows.

Looking godly.

“Isn’t this a shocker,” I whispered.

“Well, it’s not appropriate for a priestess to be naked while she’s busy with punishment duty,” she whispered, getting steadily used to the process.

As she closed in the distance, each step was sending shivers down my body, showing that her elegance was not only for battle. It didn’t help when she started swaying to an imaginary song,

her voluptuous figure forcing her new dress, making her look like an excellent dancer.

I wanted to adore her and punish her in equal amounts, so I let her continue playing. The flowers danced in her wind as she twisted and turned, enhancing her striking beauty even further. Her innocent beauty combined excellently with her enthusiastic seduction, I decided as I enjoyed the contours of her body, my mouth watering in anticipation.

It had been quite a while. Yet, I could see her desire just as fast — and she had even less experience controlling that. I could wait until she cracked.

“Punishment,” she whispered, but it felt like anything but that as she sat on my lap, the flimsy magical flowers the only thing between us. Her smile grew as her hips danced, riding me rapidly, my shaft teasing her core with each step. “How’s this as punishment.”

“Positively evil,” I whispered, which was true. Her magical variant of a dress was beautiful, but at this point, it was just an impediment, blocking our fun and nothing more.

She didn’t say anything, but her moans, along with the way her back arched, were enough to confirm that she was not too far from my direction.

I waited, enjoying her close dance as her shivers got more and more intense, curious about just how long she would maintain her punishment excuse. Pity my hands were empty, I was unable to caress her body like she had been doing.

Then, it clicked with me. I had a way to do so without cheating. She was doing her best to keep the vines around me under her control, and I couldn’t steal the control back without ruining the game ... but the same didn’t apply to her dress.

I let a sliver of mana infect it, dancing along her body as she moaned seductively, and soon, her whole dress was under my control, and she was too distracted to notice. So, as she danced, I decided to make some subtle changes.

The dress started to get thinner in certain places, revealing more and more of her beautiful bosom, for example, or subtly getting thinner around her waist to reduce the dampening effect. The thinner the dress, the more apparent the heat of her parts against my shaft.

She closed her eyes and enjoyed the sensation, too distracted to notice the intentional nature of it. Her legs parted, intensifying the sensation even further ... making it a very dangerous situation with my control over her dress.

I could have brought things to completion, but I didn't ... not yet. Instead, I focused on the top side of her dress, ordering the petals to rain down, each petal increasing the show further. Soon, her tits were once again naked, this time in an ocean of flowers, her nipples showing just much she wanted the next step.

Luckily for her, I was at the end of my patience as well.

[-21 Mana]

Taking complete control over her dress was trivial. Her eyes widened as I took control of the vine and ordered it to abandon her body, her eyes widened. A beautiful sight, just not as beautiful as her body, completely naked. "As I said, you need to be careful..." I whispered even as I used the vine around her wrist to raise her up, aligned against my presence. I gave her a second, one that she could use to argue against the situation if she wished so, but there was only anticipation.

Who was I to leave her desires unfulfilled.

I let her sink down, her warmth wrapping around my girth spectacularly as her lips parted, filling the room with beautiful cries. She closed her eyes to enjoy the feeling, and I used the opportunity to extract my hands from their bindings.

I had played with her enough. Now, it was the time for the real deal. My hands ran up to her hips, ending up on her plump ass, disappearing into her softness soon after, enjoying the texture even as I assisted her movement. Up and down, but deeper with each repeat as she sacrificed her first time for me.

As her body adapted, her head shook, messing her hair, making the moment even more exotic than it had any right being. The feeling was intense. I enjoyed the sight, alluring yet magical, even as I picked up speed more and more. Her cries rose as well, making me glad we were safely underground, with no risk of alerting anyone with her spectacular cries.

"A fascinating way to train, isn't it?" I asked her even as I continued the show. Her eyes opened, showing her surprise that I was talking, followed by shyness as the realization of what she was doing hit her. "Why, is there something wrong," I said as I stood up, raising her as well. Her legs wrapped around my waist desperately, but she didn't say anything.

She was too busy moaning.

"Excellent," I commented as I walked toward the bed, happy with my encumbrance.

When we arrived at the bed, I lay on my back, but did so without allowing her to pull out, and she found herself on the top. A position of control, or at least, it would have been if it wasn't for the state of her arms, still bound behind her. I loved it, not just because of the control it afforded to me, but also, by forcing her arms back, enhanced the sight of her breasts even more.

Which, when combined with the position, looked even more spectacular.

"Ride me," I ordered, and her hips rocked, not wasting even a second. She rose up, but only to sink deeper with a more intense passion than I expected, melodic moans rising non-stop as she traveled toward her first orgasm. She might not be experienced, but her enthusiasm was certainly peak-level.

Crossing my hands to enjoy the perkiness of her tits was one option, but I chose to reach and grab them, earning a lost cry in the process. "They are ... too sensitive," she admitted.

"How about the nipples?" I asked with a chuckle as I twisted them. The resulting mindless cries answered my question, along with her hips, picking up even more speed. Along with her tightness...

Signaling that she finally climaxed, and since it had been a very long time, my own explosion wasn't too far away. I exploded into her, filling her with my seed...

And then, something weird happened. A connection, like a bridge, building between us. It was similar to the companion process, yet also different. It felt less controlled, more intense... But also, somewhat more substantial.

Like walking through a beautiful garden rather than looking at the same garden from behind a window.

She seemed unaware of that, if the dazed yet calm look she had as she collapsed against my chest, her hips rocking lazily... Her tightness was a prison, one that I was happy to stay in while throbbing, even as I tried to understand what had been going on...

Whatever just happened was magically too complex to understand, at least in just one attempt.

Luckily, there was nothing preventing me from repeat experimentation... Not when no one would be alarmed by her disappearance while she took a well-deserved rest after her spectacular victory...

—  
{Strength: 8 Charisma: 10

Precision: 8 Perception: 12

Agility: 8 Manipulation: 10

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 10

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 9}

{Purified Divine Spark: 410}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 7331}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 2050}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]



## Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-Nine

“It was a good warm-up,” I whispered. “Now, are you ready for the real punishment?”

The way her almond eyes widened was simply divine. Her lips parted open. “Real punishment —” she tried to ask, which died as my tongue invaded her mouth, and my arms closed on her back, which kept her in place as I twisted and turned.

And she found herself looking at the roots of the tree above us, pointing from the roots. A nice, comfortable position for her to enjoy the show ... while giving me absolute control over the process.

I wanted that to get a better feeling of the connection. A connection that was, even at its weakest, complicated enough to overwhelm me if I allowed that to flow completely.

I was not in a hurry to let that connect fully. Instead, I pushed, a cute moan escaping Seldanna’s mouth despite my tongue, the position allowing me to invade her fully at my own pace. With my tongue in her mouth, she lacked the ability to say anything...

Not that she was trying to say anything in the first place, not when she was more than happy to let me take control. As she abandoned herself to my touch, I enjoyed the feeling — pity I couldn’t fully enjoy it, not when I could feel our connection growing slightly, but enough to matter.

Pity I lacked the necessary stats to understand the fluctuating, confusing nature of the connection.

I was familiar with splitting my attention, so even without the full force of my old stats to support me, balancing the carnal and magical aspects of our little dance was not a challenge — especially since my innocent priestess seemed to be happy with the repeated invasions, not looking for any frill.

Ecstatic even, I corrected myself after pulling back from the kiss, and her cries exploded enough to strain my ears — a beautiful strain, naturally, especially with the rhythmic dance of her breasts, as if they were musical instruments to accompany her cries.

I had to admit, elves — at least, the spectacular example of her race in front of me — had a natural sense of grace, so even as I invaded her repeatedly, the rhythm of her cries and the sway of her breasts stayed synchronized.

A beautiful private show, I had to admit. Or at least, that was what I had thought ... then, her mana started to get wild.

My little hideout was already drenched with a lot of nature mana, which was an inevitable consequence of the position at the center of a magical forest that was doing its best to convert an incredible amount of mana from Aether...

Which meant, there was a lot of mana for Seldanna to use. When the vines burst out of the ground, for a moment, I thought that we would repeat our earlier dance — which was not something I was entirely against it — but then, every single vine burst out flowers, with colors that I had struggled to imagine, covering every inch of the room.

A little cosmetic change, I thought at first, about to ignore, but as she used that, I felt our connection tremble, strengthening slightly once more. Interesting, I thought. I tried to make sense of it, which was rather difficult while being distracted by pretty colors and even prettier cries.

“Someone is feeling naughty,” I said as I rolled off the bed, our bodies still connected. It would have been painful, but the floor was already covered with flower petals thanks to her out-of-control spell.

“S-shut up,” she muttered. “It was an accident. I was ... excited.”

“Oh, really,” I said with a chuckle, and reflexively sent a little sliver of magic into her. I was glad about it, because I noticed a little change, where her little sea of Divine Spark was resting. It was a subtle change, one that I might have failed to notice if I wasn’t watching in real-time, but I could see the borders of the energy, getting subtler.

For a moment, I was afraid that the border had been weakening, which certainly wouldn’t have ended nicely. I was ready to stop and help her recover — even if I had to take back most of her Spark, but the collapse I expected didn’t happen.

I was afraid, because the Divine Sea was similar to the Soul Space of the System.

For Soul Space, the borders were everything. The stronger they were, the higher the limit, and there was less chance of a collapse — which was deadly, as the experimentation on my enemies had shown.

Yet, Divine Sea acted differently. As the borders had weakened, I could sense her control over it was strengthening. Not an incredible jump, but then, the changes in the borders weren’t

significant either. Just a change that could be measured by percentages...

The impact was clear, making me glad that I didn't try to elevate her to the next level by using the same trick of the God Tree on her. I already had the idea such a thing might be bad — as the situation of my dear headmistress and her attempt showed — but still, having evidence was nice.

As I examined the way she interacted with Divine Spark, I could see that there was a fundamental difference between the Guardian Trees and somewhat with the soul. Compared, it wouldn't be unfair to classify the Guardian Trees, or the current God Forest, as artifacts.

Artifacts were capable of autonomous activities, even decisions, but there was a gap between that and sapient beings.

I took a note not to let Seldanna absorb more Divine Spark before I get a sense of what was going on...

Then turned my full attention back to the fun side of my experiment, and continued impaling her in a thick bed of petals and flowers, her face contorted with pleasure, unaware of her slowly growing power.

“So, what do you think, is your punishment working as intended?” I asked. Her answer came in the form of a beautiful moan, loud enough to create a spectacular scandal if we weren't conveniently underground.

“Mmm, not as good if you are failing to answer,” I said, chuckling at the panic on her face as she suddenly found herself empty. Luckily for her, I wasn't in the mood to tease her. I paused just enough to grab her legs and bring them to my shoulders, giving myself an even better angle. “Let's try something more interesting.”

Her moans got even more intense as the new angle allowed me to invade her even more aggressively, her moans filling the place spectacularly.

A beautiful and memorable event for a beautiful first time. Playing with my shy priestess was certainly fun even without the surprise magical advantages and disadvantages... I picked up speed even more even as I decided to turn the sensuality up a bit more. I leaned down and pressed my lips against her neck, her moans rumbling against my neck. Her back arched as her legs wrapped around my waist tightly, helping me to pull even more.

I couldn't help but smirk in satisfaction as she started to get more and more intense.

Her moans intensified as I moved down. First, I nibbled her collarbone, earning a sharp cry. Then, I arrived at her gloriously round breasts, assaulting her nipples with my teeth to add some edge. As the red marks on her breasts increased, so did her cries.

The magical side of things got even more interesting as she climbed toward her second climax, as I could sense some of my Divine Spark being pulled.

{-1 Purified Divine Spark}

It wasn't an intense pull, certainly not something I couldn't prevent if I wished so, but I let it move, and feel it settle in between her and me. A soft line, flickering and almost invisible.

But most importantly, not in the material plane. No, the connection actually extended between us through the Astral plane.

Interesting, I thought even as I flipped her on all fours, her back arching erotically while her tits swayed with each hit, the slaps invading the room. My thrusts were aggressive as her moans filled the room once again.

"A good finish, right!" I whispered as the pleasure started to get too much for me, and exploded inside her. I pulled her hair back even as I did so, filling her insides with my energy...

And feel the connection get even stronger...

{-10 Purified Divine Spark}

"Yes, yes, yes," she started moaning as another climax hit her, the unfamiliar pleasure enough to push her to the land of unconsciousness.

"Beautiful," I murmured as I carried her back to the bed, enjoying her graceful looks in the room filled with flowers. I wanted to stay and enjoy it, but after some thought, I decided against it.

The undead had just attacked us with a renewed attack, and I expected them to come toward us with an even bigger strength in a few days. Going to scout was risky ... but the benefits were tempting as well.

Especially since I finally had a safe-spot for to teleport back...

—

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 10

Precision: 8 Perception: 12

Agility: 8 Manipulation: 10

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 10

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 9}

{Purified Divine Spark: 399}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 7331}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 2050}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Sixty

It was good to be moving around once more.

Even if I was going through a long stretch of ruined land, necrotic mana getting more and more intense without the forest I had built up to prevent that. It was not the whole world filled with that mana — at least not yet — but that didn't mean it wasn't an unpleasant feeling.

Especially since I couldn't just plant one of the seeds that were with me and transform the whole area, not unless I wanted to be swarmed by a horde of disposable zombies. I wasn't afraid of them, not with all the tricks I had developed since my arrival, but that hardly meant that I wanted to face them on unfavorable ground and ruin my preparations.

The river gave me a route to follow, and I moved upstream, though I made sure to stay half a mile away. Close enough to see anything that was going on easily, but far enough to avoid the occasional patrol that was following the river.

The patrols were getting more and more common as I moved upstream. A few zombies walked around aimlessly at first, but soon turned into disciplined squads that were made of skeletons wearing armor that was forged for their bony bodies, accompanied by a necromancer.

It was much harder to avoid necromancers, but that didn't mean I was unhappy seeing them. The number of patrols and their strength meant that they had something to defend.

"It's better to be worth my time," I murmured as I hid under the shadow of another dead tree as waited for a large contingent to pass me, ignoring the smell of death. "I wonder if I could set up a secondary breach," I murmured as I slipped a seed, but the mana that followed didn't go to its growth, instead covering it to create a field that would protect it from necrotic mana.

Along with a beacon that would allow me to teleport there if I wished.

[-583 Mana]

{-1 Nature Spark}

It was difficult to put that much Divine Spark in seed without destroying it, but luckily, I had enough time to fiddle while I waited for a particularly large patrol to pass me.

I even had enough time to reach Aether Dimension to grab some Aether, efficiently breaking it down to more usable mana.

[+9210 Mana]

Though, as I delved aggressively, I could feel the density of Aether was dropping. Not significantly, but enough to be noticeable.

I had a feeling that my forest had a role in that change.

Soon, the patrol moved away, and I continued my depressing trek, toward the border of the plane once more, though stopping more and more due to patrols.

Until I came across a fortress. One that was even more depressing than the desolate landscape, as the fortress was carved from the remains of a huge, broken tree, the kind that would be measured in miles rather than yards.

I didn't know how tall it had been when it was alive, with its branches reaching toward the sky, but considering even its broken state it was taller than two miles, I had a feeling that the term touching the sky wouldn't have been too much of an exaggeration.

Pity that was not only completely dead, but was also carved into an imposing fortress, spitting out undead every second.

The imposing nature and the density of the undead already revealed that it was my destination, and I didn't need to see the river that I was following was coming from the roots of the tree, probably born from an underground spring.

Now, all I needed was to decide how to sneak into the place. I was tempted to use my usual underground trick, but unfortunately, I was quick to realize it wouldn't work. The closer to the tree, the more the ground was infused with necrotic energy.

"Annoying," I murmured as I realized that it was probably not an intentional strategy, but a side effect of corrupting that huge tree. It was the roots spreading the necrotic energy in a wasteful manner.

I could have tried to cut through the necrotic mana, but the density of mana would effectively blind me.

The river was facing a similar problem. Diving sounded like a viable strategy, but considering they were using the river to constantly pump for mana, it was also risky. I didn't know how active they were in managing the process, but the risk was unacceptable.

Luckily, there was an easier solution. A few choice illusions, some tailoring, and a hunch later, I was just another zombie, walking forward. It was a simple disguise, yet effective, for one simple reason.

I could manipulate necrotic mana to stick around me.

It was hardly a pleasant feeling, even though I was careful to maintain the distance and my Proto-HP was there to block any harmful side effects. Unfortunately, it was a vital part of my disguise.

With that, I waited until I noticed three groups of zombies merging together under the guidance of several necromancers, and slipped into the group, acting like a part of the flow. It was not as simple as it sounded, but luckily, all the times I had disguised with the assistance of Subterfuge taught me a lot, and I managed to slip in.

I could feel the energies of the necromancers spreading around and controlling the zombies, and a tendril also reached me, convinced by my fake connection.

And, I just acted like I obeyed their command as they patrolled around their fortress, occasionally slipping between patrols to drive closer. Luckily, the necromancers were occasionally stealing zombies from the control of each other, which made my switch rather innocuous.

Once I mixed into a new group, I waited for an opportunity to change my concealment method, sometimes looking like a skeleton, sometimes as a zombie. The closer I got to the fortress, the stronger I made my necrotic-mana shell.

However, the closer I got, the more I started to notice interesting stuff.

For one, the dead tree was not just filled with necrotic mana, but also Necrotic Spark. I couldn't be sure how much unless I probed directly, but even at a distance, I could feel thousands of units would have been an understatement.

Fascinating, though that brought the question, of why the river contained so little mana — at least relative to the potential it represented. Some were clearly being used to create a bigger undead army, but unless I was significantly miscalculating, that didn't explain it either.

I had a feeling that the answer was in the Aether dimension, but even as I took a quick peek — which was a risk — it ended with a failure. Not unexpected, as I was still far away from the tree, and I doubted it would work, not with the way the distance worked in the Aether



dimension. Without a beacon to help me find my path, it was near impossible to find the tree.

Temporarily shelving that objective, I turned my attention to my more immediate problem. Sneaking into the fortress successfully.

It took five hours for me finally to arrive at the huge gate of the fortress tree, and another hour to find a group actually entering the fortress to slip in. Hardly an efficient use of time, but much less risky than trying to penetrate the layer of magic around us.

Six hours later, I was finally inside the fortress.

The inside of the tree had been carved into a huge entrance, every inch filled with undead, with stairs that were going both upstairs and downstairs.

The upstairs seemed even more crowded, so I chose downstairs as my first direction. Another half an hour, and I managed to slip down, and even find a nice corner to change my disguise once more, walking around as a low-level necromancer.

I even conjured a large pile of paper, walking around in a hurry, hoping to give the impression I was a man with a task.

After taking another set of stairs that brought me even deeper, I finally came across the source of the river. A huge spring, bubbling fresh, and some kind of mana I didn't recognize — similar to nature mana, but not the same.

Pity that was the only glimpse I could get before it was drowned by the constant necrotic mana that was being pumped into the water by a necromancer, using a corrupted root filled with runes to achieve the objective.

It accounted for some of the mana the corrupted tree was generating, but not all of it.

Luckily, that floor had several nooks I could use to draw teleportation beacons. Even better, the constant conflict of mana as they fed the river made sure that the energy in the room was chaotic enough that the beacons could stay concealed for more than a temporary glimpse, which would allow me to teleport into the fortress directly into the future.

Risky, but safer than trying to dig a tunnel, and more preferable than half a day of constant disguises, alternating between skeletons and zombies while suffering the suffocating aura.

With the beacons done, I climbed the stairs once more, looking for a safe corner I could use to

peek into the Aether dimension.

—

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 10

Precision: 8 Perception: 12

Agility: 8 Manipulation: 10

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 10

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 9}

{Purified Divine Spark: 399}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 16831}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 2049}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-One

I had to climb two floors before I could finally come across smaller rooms I could use to hide. Most of the floor was dedicated to a forge, with several zombies constantly forging swords while an impressive number of necromancers pumped necrotic mana into the forge to ensure the weapons would end up tainted.

It was painful to watch. I was hardly a professional forger, and I had my own shortcuts, but still, watching their horrible waste was annoying.

I didn't let that annoyance stop me from slipping into one of the storage rooms, piled with weapons that were radiating cold energy. If it wasn't for my layers of protection and Proto-HP, just standing in this room would have killed me.

As an advantage, the mana they radiated was enough to conceal my own spells as I looked into the Aether dimension.

Once again looking at the confusing dance of Aether and mana, I searched for my beacons. The beacons were weaker than I would have liked, but combined with the physical proximity — which assisted, but not as much as I would have liked — I managed to find the magical presence of the tree after a minute in the confusing mess of Aether and mana.

“What a pity,” I found myself murmuring. Unlike the physical part of the tree, which was broken and destroyed, the presence in the Aether dimension was still whole, just corrupted. There was no hint of nature mana or Spark in its presence, instead, the whole structure was doused with Necrotic Spark, pumping Necrotic mana to the Aether dimension...

I couldn't help but wonder where, and I started trailing the mana tendrils. It wasn't an easy task without fully phasing into the Aether like I was teleporting, but luckily, the constantly shifting nature of the Aether dimension helped. I didn't need to move to trace that. As I waited, the destination drifted closer at one point, and I finally came across the other end of the connection.

The border of the plane. Or, more accurately, the chaotic, rotating shell of mana that was rotating endlessly, surrounding the plane, made from more mana than I could imagine.

No wonder it was a mixture of necrotic and nature mana battling, and why it was the undead trying to make sure the outer shell stayed intact by responding to the breaches.

It was clearly a lengthy affair.

I guessed the fortress tree I was in wasn't the only focal point for the ongoing corruption — likely not even the strongest one — but ultimately, it was just a guess. I needed to explore much more to ensure it worked flawlessly.

With that, I left the armory, and started climbing upstairs, glad that the preferred fashion among necromancers was thick robes and cloaks.

I continued climbing up the stairs, each floor dedicated to a different kind of operation. However, I had seen the signs of a change on the tenth floor, with four death knights standing guard at the entrance. Combined with the lack of traffic, my constant disguises wouldn't have worked.

Luckily, that was not the only trick in my bag — my admittedly large bag. I went back two floors down, and found another empty corner before casting several more spells, changing the dark robe into a patterned brown to match the color of the dead tree.

Then, in the absence of convenient windows, I carefully cut an exit at the outer layer, and started climbing the outer layer, the dead branches and an illusion to camouflage helped me to sneak in.

Though, even cutting had been a challenge, as the dead tree was containing a great amount of Necrotic Spark. My own manipulation abilities managed to keep it from turning into a disaster — though suppressing the temptation to drain the tree was big.

I could have tried to cut an entrance, but instead, I climbed toward the upper side, where there was an opening large enough for a dragon to land — and that was not hyperbole, considering I actually watched an undead dragon lift off.

It was dangerous, but not as dangerous as trying to cut open an entrance to end up facing a wandering lich or an overenthusiastic death knight.

Their private entrance was the less risky option. Still, I made sure to adjust my face slightly to look like an elf in case I got caught. That way, even if they enhanced their defenses to prevent another breach, they would focus outward.

Luckily, they relied on magic rather than active observation for defenses, which was easily dealt with. Once again, I was inside...

The upper floors lacked the chaos of the lower floors, which made it a pain to move around. Only Death Knights and Liches were there, forcing me to cast several spells to hide in the shadows. Their numbers weren't high enough to trust the anonymity of their disguise.

I didn't know where to go and was exploring randomly, so when I felt a flare of Arcana Mana. A good destination, I supposed as I followed it, only to see a death knight leaving a room empty-handed.

Clearly not an ordinary room, I decided, though matching the clues was not exactly challenging. For once, the room didn't just use the dead tree as walls, but was actually made of metal. And, considering the number of runes that surrounded its walls, they weren't just relying on the strength of the metal.

Another clue about the importance, the room was guarded by an impressive group. Two liches, and eight death knights, none of them particularly weak as shown by their presence.

Which meant sneaking the room was impossible, at least with my current stats. Concealing my presence while unraveling the Arcana defenses and pushing back the suffocating necrotic energy would have been challenging if I had access to full Stats and skills granted by the System, let alone now.

Even cracking it without destroying whatever was inside was a challenge in my current state.

Luckily, that didn't prevent a more blunt approach.

But, I didn't launch that strategy immediately but waited for someone else to arrive and use the vault — which clearly was — to see what kind of material that was hidden in its depths. I waited at the edge, slowly creating a few arrays that I pumped with mana -- nature mana I converted from the surrounding Necrotic energy.

I stayed as mobile as I could be for the next half an hour, away from the vault, filling several wards with nature mana to the brim, waiting for another undead to use the vault. It happened another half an hour later — a tense, stressful half an hour. The death knight was carrying a crystal.

The same kind they had used against me, to drain Divine Spark from the trees.

A good find, as from their lack of ability to convert the Spark, I expected them to just dispose of them into Primordial Aether. But maybe I was wrong, and they had the ability to convert it, just not as portable as I do. Or maybe they had some alternate usage.

Either way, they had something that was worthy of me to plunder, the same thing that I was in desperate need of. Fascinating.

Fascinating enough that I was willing to change the objective of the mission significantly, especially since the amount of Necrotic Spark that was locked in the tree made it a good target. I couldn't steal all of it, not without defeating all the undead that was currently here — let alone the potential reinforcements — but the same didn't count for the little amount that might get lost during the battle.

After all, even a percentage of the thousands of points I could feel locked in the dead trunk meant a stat point or two — and I was not at the point of turning my nose.

Still, I didn't launch my attack immediately. If I was going to turn that into a more convincing assault, I needed a reliable excuse.

At that point, I remembered the seed I had buried, which was a good excuse for me to push. Creating a connection of mana was not expensive, but it would have been impossible to do.

Luckily, I wasn't the only possible source of mana. Instead of connecting to me directly, I connected the seed to the God Forest, creating a stable connection that could be used to channel mana.

{-30 Nature Spark, God Forest}

Not a cheap connection, especially since the Spark that was assigned would get lost if the seed would get destroyed. Yet, that was not without its advantages. I used my permanent connection to the God Forest to modify the tree, so, when it started growing wildly, it didn't grow as a tree.

But as a treant.

I assigned not only more than a quarter of the mana the forest was generating — the most I could afford without pushing the elves to panic — but also allowed it to access a few mana storages I had been keeping for a serious siege.

The amount that I channeled was significant. Almost two million points of mana... Enough to destroy everything.

But, not for nothing. I didn't need my indirect connection to feel the approach of the treant, destroying the hordes on its path...

The way the ground trembled with each step was evidence enough...

—

{Strength: 8 Charisma: 10

Precision: 8 Perception: 12

Agility: 8 Manipulation: 10

Speed: 8 Intelligence: 10

Endurance: 8 Wisdom: 9}

{Purified Divine Spark: 399}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 16240}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 2009}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Two

I wasn't sure what to expect as the huge treant got closer to the undead fortress. I didn't expect panic, at least not the blind kind if such a monster attacked a city filled with people. Zombies lacked the sentience to be affected by their oncoming end, and liches could always retreat.

However, even when counting that, I was surprised by the reaction the sapient undead was displaying against the battle. Reading a bunch of bones wearing robes or armor was not exactly simple, but I was almost willing to say they were...

Excited.

The reason didn't take long to understand. Half of them dashed into the vault, and when they left, each was carrying crystals, their lack of glow showing that they were empty. And the ones that stayed back were clearly unhappy.

I already knew they were using it to capture Divine Spark, and probably for an important objective, but the intensity of their reaction and the incentive they were displaying that they were somehow benefiting from captured Divine Spark.

And, considering their speed to join a potentially dangerous battle, they not only benefited from it, but they also benefited from it significantly. Which was curious, forcing me to reexamine most of my assumptions about the battle. Clearly, something else was going on.

Luckily, I had the time to examine that. Just as the first wave of zombies was dashing toward the treant I started examining my strategy, curious whether I could attract the remaining group as well.

First, how to handle the first wave. There was no chance the zombies could damage the treant even a bit, but even at a distance, I could feel the excessive amount of necrotic mana filling every zombie. They weren't going there to damage, but to deliver some mana.

Smart, too bad I had no intention of allowing that to happen. I sent another magical order, and the treant raised its wooden arm. A swing distributed hundreds of seeds, and a small horde of smaller treants rose, moving faster to meet with the zombies.

One horde against the other, while I watched through a remote spell. As they crashed, chaos appeared under their feet, grass and flowers blooming and dying repeatedly in a spectacular display of the circle of life. Zombies died, and treants got injured, even as I slowly started to tap



into the core of the situation.

A glamorous battle slowly covered the plain in front of the tree fortress, balanced even as the sky started to get covered by the fluctuations of mana.

However, the balance didn't survive for long. As the number of necromancers on the field increased, they started to support the treant from a distance, slowly chipping the smaller army of summons.

Pity there were still many guards at the vault. I wondered if I could actually trick them. I let the huge treant radiate even more nature mana even if it started tapping into the reserves I had created.

Yet, it was effective for two reasons. First, it allowed the treant to rush forward faster, taking down more and more zombies, and doing so rather rapidly as the horde got closer and closer to repurposed remains of the previous tree. Second, and more importantly, it implied that the treant had even more Divine Spark than they had first thought.

The temptation didn't take long for the work. A few more lichs rushed into the vault and left with empty crystals, and after some argument, they left, leaving only two Death Knights to guard. Not willingly as I could feel they were the weakest ones. Their reaction confirmed that even with the extra juice, they didn't see the treant as a threat but as an opportunity.

I understood their approach, certainly. Pity, it was a horrible decision.

Since the threat of the casters was no more, I approached the vault much easier, and relaxed as I suppressed my magic. I started gathering my magic, sharpening the nature mana into two deadly spears, and soon, I let them loose.

{-1290 Mana}

Two death knights went down immediately, before they could even react. I created a cage of mana, preventing the remaining mana in their structure from dispersing, and drained their Divine Spark.

{+29 Purified Divine Spark}

Now that the threat of the death knights was no more, I started working on the Vault, quickly unraveling the security layers, enough to allow me to enter. Luckily, the defenses were more focused to prevent unauthorized access than actual protection, which made the problem much

simpler than otherwise. Soon, I was inside.

“Wow, that’s a lot of crystals,” I murmured as I examined rows and rows of crystals, though I noted that once one crystal was placed, a magical defense activated to prevent it from being removed. Not a huge problem, but harder than the entrance — especially since, at the same time, I had to keep my attention on the treant and make sure it was giving a valid defense.

The challenge got bigger since I couldn’t actually let any of the liches or death knights approach, because, unlike what I was faking, the treant only had a few points of Divine Spark, and most were about trying to maintain the connection. So, I used the reserves to aggressively blast any that approached — even if it destroyed a few death knights and ruined the opportunity to steal all the Spark they had.

Luckily, I didn’t care much about a few dozen points, not when I was looking at the hundreds of crystals that were in the vault.

Two minutes later, the first row was successfully unlocked. It wasn’t a huge amount of time, but unfortunately, not little either. Not with a battle going on outside, each second costing a dangerous amount of mana.

{+529 Purified Divine Spark}

“Amazing,” I murmured, but before starting to work on the next row, I decided to make a little adjustment.

{-442 Purified Divine Spark}

{+2 Intelligence}

{+2 Manipulation}

The immediate boost not only allowed my mana to dance much more smoothly, but also allowed me to understand the intricacies of the situation even better. Soon, the second of the ten rows was unlocked, and it took about a minute and a half.

{+621 Purified Divine Spark}

Excellent, I thought even as I applied the next wave of improvements, even as I started to feel the weight of the unbalanced attributes. Luckily, there was still some margin to push.

{-432 Purified Divine Spark}

{+1 Intelligence}

{+1 Manipulation}

{+1 Perception}

With those three increased as well, each row took less than thirty seconds to unlock, which meant, the remaining eight rows barely took four minutes.

{+5210 Purified Spark}

A fascinating amount of Divine Spark.

It was still a challenge to balance the battle outside, but the treant managed to both keep the illusion that it was packed with Divine Spark, but also drove much closer toward the fortress than I had been expecting.

It surprised me. I was already planning to let the treant retreat a bit to maintain the illusion, but the magic of the necromancers had been much weaker, and the defenses were much more chaotic. Then, I realized the problem.

The necromancers were manipulating the defenses, and they were doing so to allow treant to approach much easier. For a moment, I was surprised, as while the existence of the traitors wouldn't have been shocking, it was a weird location to reveal that.

Then, I realized that their trick was a bit different than I had predicted earlier. Instead of weakening the defenses of their opponents, they were weakening theirs ... only to draw the treant closer, clearly hoping to take the biggest share of Spark once it was taken down.

A fascinating show of selfishness ... though maybe not, considering I was dealing with a bunch of people that sacrificed their lives for a cursed existence.

Regardless of their drive, it gave me a rather interesting opportunity. But, before taking that opportunity, I needed some more improvements. First, some physical boost to balance the weight of the stats.

{+5 Strength}

{+5 Precision}

{+5 Agility}

{+5 Speed}

{+5 Endurance}

{-2550 Purified Divine Spark}

“Finally,” I murmured as the familiar warmth spread into my body, one that gave me the necessary physical improvement to allow me to push for more and more.

Next, I wanted to top off the Wisdom and Charisma to match the other stats.

{+4 Wisdom}

{+3 Charisma}

{-746 Purified Divine Spark}

And just like that, my stats were fully balanced, and with a great amount of Purified Spark available to be leveraged for the next stage or to be converted to Stats if necessary, but converting and absorbing all that Spark took another few minutes of me.

Enough time to get the treant even closer... which stopped me from improving my other stats. Getting even stronger was nice, but not at the cost of ruining my opportunity.

It was showtime.

—

{Strength: 13 Charisma: 13

Precision: 13 Perception: 13

Agility: 13 Manipulation: 13

Speed: 13 Intelligence: 13

Endurance: 13 Wisdom: 13}

{Purified Divine Spark: 2618}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 12140}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 2009}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Three

I was feeling much different as I planned to leave the vault, lighter and stronger.

No doubt, considering the amount of improvement I had just experienced. Pity I didn't have time to use the rest of the Purified Spark I had managed to score. I could have stayed to improve more, but at this point, the treant was already being surrounded, and I didn't want to ruin things until things collapsed.

And, I didn't want to miss the opportunity.

I had drawn several runes into the vault, and dumped enough nature mana to make it dangerous, before I teleported down to roots, using the earlier teleportation beacon I had created.

With the increase in Stats, the jump was even more trivial.

The moment I arrived at the basement, I lashed out with a magical bolt, which was enough to take down the necromancer imbuing the water with his cursed mana.

{+50 Purified Spark}

Not a waste, but only the start compared to what I had in mind. First, I rushed toward the bubbling mana source, and created a huge ward around it, one that used both Purified Mana and some Nature Spark, and suddenly, the river had changed from necrotic mana to nature mana.

The sudden change of mana flow affected the battle outside significantly. The undead lines, surprised by the change, retreated more than necessary. And, it allowed the treant to rush forward, and connect the huge dead tree...

A mental order later, the treant sacrificed itself, and all the mana that it was on its structure infused on the tree... A significant amount, but not enough to leave anything but cursory damage. Luckily, that was all I needed. At the same time, I triggered the explosive wards I had in the vault, and rushed toward the edge of the tree.

Neither was there to actually create damage, just a distraction.

The real trick came in the form of an aggressive release.

{-2000 Purified Spark}

{-10000 Mana}

A huge, spectacular risk, but also, it was the fastest way to take down the tree. My purified spark spread along the tree, converting every Necrotic mana and Spark they touched. First, I split the wave into two. One wave channeled upward, to ease the path of the mana that came from the sacrificial treant.

The second, bigger wave traveled down, converting all the mana and Divine Spark they had invested to the tree ... every root started to convert from a neutral entity.

At this time, the lichs were panicking against the sudden tyrannical mana fluctuation ruining their fortress much worse than they were expecting. They realized that their arrogance, probably from their overwhelming success against ineffective elves, put them in a horrible position.

They attacked the treant both with their crystal and their spells, which was another mistake. After channeling all the mana and spark inside, the treant had already turned into a useless relic.

Their erroneous judgment made their small chances even more horrible. If they had been using the dead tree as a casting focus, they could have thwarted my assault, but they didn't, giving me a chance to actually follow.

Soon, the wave of mana and Spark I had sent to the roots finished its job. I sent the mana toward the trunk, but devoured all the Spark from the roots.

Soon, the Spark from the upper trunk arrived as well...

{+6801 Purified Divine Spark}

Another spectacular gain, enough to trigger another huge stat boost, one that I desperately needed to meet the next upcoming battle.

{-5900 Purified Divine Spark}

{+3 All Stats}

Fantastic...

I opened my eyes to focus on the control, this time the Aether dimension. I could sense the connection with the outer shell, but the constant flow of Necrotic mana toward the shell had stopped. It didn't cause an immediate collapse, but I doubted it would stay like that for long.

"I found my way to trigger an urgent undead response," I murmured happily. Not only this dead tree was more important for their strategy, but also I didn't risk any valuable elven lives as a trap.

But, before any response, I needed to do a lot more things.

I grabbed the ground, and pulled some stone on me, turning into a shiny, obsidian armor, and a huge, beautiful sword. Completely useless, but enough to look distracting.

But, before going outside, I had to do one more thing. I threw another small seed, and created a small tree, one that was connected to God Forest, right at the river, converting the watery mana into pure Nature mana, and sending it upward.

I could have tried to connect it to the huge tree, but I was afraid that it might trigger an adverse reaction. I could feel that the huge tree was not something simple.

Then, even as mana started to fill the underground cave, converting from the river — which was much easier than the challenge the necromancers experienced due to similarity — I created a tunnel, and went out.

Appearing from right underneath the remains of the tree.

Risky, but after the great stat boost, a risk I could afford easily.

The sacrificial explosion of treant had been useful for two reasons. First, it dealt with most of the zombies, which would have slowed me down. Second, and more importantly, as the distraction went through, a great number of necromancers had gathered around, trying to be the first ones to take the Spark of the treant.

A few of them were already fighting against each other.

I couldn't say that they had no justification as far as what they could read, but it didn't change the fact that it was a mistake.

A deadly one.

I rushed forward toward the closest lich before they could even register my presence, my newly



enhanced speed more than enough to cut it mercilessly. A deadly slash was all I needed to deal with it, though the slash was just there to cover the huge burst of pure mana, eroding its divine spark.

{+95 Purified Divine Spark}

That changed the situation significantly, but they lacked the opportunity to react before I started mowing them down. I dodged under a hurried blast of necrotic mana and took another necromancer.

A fascinating start.

As they started to gather their defenses, I put my hand on the ground, and a small forest appeared around me, and appeared rather rapidly, enough to conceal me from their view as I dashed around...

The trees turned into treants while I cut down necromancers one after another, while the invasion of mana started to wreak havoc in the trunk of the dead tree, especially since all necromancers had recklessly walked outside, and were too distracted by my assault to even notice that.

Another flare of mana, and a huge number of leaves rained down from the trees that appeared freshly, destroying the hordes that were attacking. I was showing a bit more than I had initially intended, but after all my gains, I was willing to reveal more.

After all, I had some other interesting tricks I was ready to use.

What followed was fifteen minutes of non-stop battle, which was surprisingly boring. Especially since it was one against a necromancer army. If they had been attacking me using a proper formation, things had been much more difficult...

But with their vulnerable elements, the only ones with the ability to actually threaten me, facing me directly, the danger had been lost almost immediately. And, after the disappearance of the risk, what remained was a large army that couldn't threaten me, one that I cut easily.

With amazing benefits. Even though it was lesser than my other gains, it was still significant nonetheless.

{+728 Purified Divine Spark}

While I had dealt with the outside, the constant infusion of Nature Mana already handled the internal defenses, and destroyed the inner side, killing the remaining undead.

That didn't mean I stopped the rest after the battle was over. I dashed around the dead tree, using my new stats to create a very complicated defensive ward that could be leveraged against the assault.

The defenses were much stronger than the other settlement, and not just because of the increased stats. Unlike the settlement, I didn't need to keep my defenses subtle or hidden.

After all, I had just taken down a huge undead army, and the lack of any growing defense would have been more suspicious than the alternative. I dared to do so, as, if the worst came to worst, I could just teleport away...

With that done, I started waiting. And, since I had nothing to do, I turned my attention to the Aether Dimension once more. Not just to replenish my mana storage, but also to finally examine the structure of the outer shell...

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 16

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 16

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 16 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 2392}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 4140}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 2009}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Four

The Aether dimension was much calmer without the constant flow of the Necrotic mana pumping toward the planar shell. Interestingly, the connection between the dead tree and the shell persisted...

No, not just persisted, I realized as I felt a small flicker of nature mana flowing toward the shell.

The tree was still functioning.

Fascinating, I thought as I followed the connection back to its source, and soon, I realized the tree wasn't as dead as I had first assumed. I had no idea from where, but there was a little Divine Spark possessed by the dead tree.

Then, a notification popped, warning me about the source.

{-1 Nature Spark, God Forest}

The delay was rather suspicious, but before I could pay attention to that, I had a more important thing to do. I dashed inside, using the same tunnel I had used earlier, to the underground cave with the spring.

Only to see one of the roots of the border tree already burrowing against the first tree, taking control... It was definitely not good news, and I was ready to cut the connection ... but not before a little experiment.

{-199 Nature Spark, God Forest}

A bit wasteful, maybe, but after the great haul I had attained, a few hundred points looked like a much more acceptable amount. After that, I destroyed the tree I had created in the underground cave, only leaving the ward to assist the tree.

Then, I went outside once more, leaving the tree to recover. The carved sections were already recovering as the tree devoured most of the mana. Once outside, I tapped into the Arcana dimension once more, creating a similar ward around its magical roots to fasten its conversion rate — this time, with several traps of light mana in case any undead might decide to fiddle with it.

Once that was done, I turned my attention back to the outer defenses, creating a layer of trees to conceal the wards. Once that was done, I started adding several beacons, some inside the

defensive line, some hidden away, ready to give me the mobility I needed.

The lack of constant mana drain was certainly useful.

However, as I started establishing the detection wards, I noticed a trigger. Not from here, I realized, but back from the God Forest.

It didn't feel like the undead, but still, I teleported immediately, right into my basement outpost.

Seldanna was gone, but I could sense her outside, and the rest of the camp was reacting to her movement as well. Curious, I went to the surface, confident my invisibility would hold up without a problem.

The great improvement in my stats made me feel much more confident in the situation.

On the surface, I met with a surprising sight. A great flock was flying toward the camp, consisting of large rocs, and the elves had gathered to greet, with the priestess at the center. The leading bird was a bit different. At first, I assumed it was another roc, but further examination revealed that it was not the case.

No, it was some kind of majestic bird I failed to recognize, but somehow radiating nature mana. As they got closer, I could see a dozen or so elves on top of that majestic bird, each wearing gleaming golden robes, and the rest wearing silver metal armor.

Altogether, there were almost a hundred elves split along a dozen beasts. A great response.

However, I didn't need to hear the suspicious glances the elves throwing toward the birds to know that it was a bit excessive for reinforcements — especially since, even at a distance, I could feel their strength.

It was hard to perfectly identify the power of the elves from such a great distance, but it got easier once they passed the second layer of detection wards I had established for this exact purpose, allowing me to check their mana potential.

Of course, it was a cursory assessment, difficult to pin down, but still, I could make an educated guess. The silver-armored elves were more or less as strong as a death knight, though since I had no idea about their true combat potential, it was hard to pin their exact combat potential.

Still, at least they were solidly in Chosen territory.

Golden-robed figures were stronger, but it was hard to guess just how strong they were. For the

sake of safety, I would assume that they more or less had the combat potential of a regular lich, but that was hard to make sure.

A dangerous force, and certainly not a casual amount of reinforcements. If the elves had enough forces to reinforce each defensive position with such forces, the undead would have a much harder time getting a beachhead in this plane, let alone making such great progress.

Even with my new stats, the power they represented was scary enough that I wouldn't dare to fight against them in an open field. Luckily, I had long turned my forest into a veritable fortress that I could use from a distance.

Not to mention, the trees were just as capable of draining nature mana as pumping it, which would limit their combat capabilities significantly. If it came to a fight, I was confident in taking them.

It wouldn't be an easy battle, but it was a winnable one.

Soon, the birds landed outer edge of the camp. First, the silver-armored figures jumped down, their weapons raised, pointing at the other elves, their dismissal easy to read.

And not just for me, if the reaction of our camp was any indicator. The relationship between the outer tribes and central tribes was even worse than I had expected ... though, based on the detailed style of their armor and their refined attitude, I was starting to think that the inner tribes were less wild and more urban.

Interesting distinction, though they had hardly cared about it.

“Disgrace!”

It was the first word that left the mouth of the golden-robed figures, though, unlike the warriors, they didn't even bother leaving their seats — luxurious-looking seats, more of a carriage than a saddle.

The camp fell silent. Well, that was not entirely accurate. The more accurate statement would be that no one in the camp had spoken. The silence was cut by the bows being raised.

“Stop! Lower your weapons,” Saldenna ordered before one of them could actually use their bows. I just watched as she sent a scary glare to the camp commanders, who started working to calm the camp.

Good call. The newcomers were outnumbered one to fifty, but without my assistance, the camp would lose, and even with mine, it would have been a bloody affair. And, a few smirks I could see on the silver-armored figures told me that they were more than happy to start such a massacre.

“We have reached you in the hopes of an alliance between our tribes against the undead—” Seldanna started, only for one of the golden-robed figures to raise their hands.

“Stop, wildling,” the old man declared. “What kind of dreams of grandeur you’re living in to think that you can ask the alliance of our glorious city.”

That was enough to challenge Seldanna’s control over the camp. She couldn’t retaliate against them directly, afraid of their power, but her lack of an answer was already impacting the rest of the camp, which was shuffling in panic.

The golden-robed figure was brash and antagonistic, but I had a feeling that it was not a reflex, but something calculated. The whispers of the others behind him reinforced that idea.

Probably a politically expedient reaction, unhappy with the sudden gathering of the outer tribes. Understandable. One by one, they were hardly a threat, but together, they might have some impact.

Especially when supported by a mysterious forest.

“Hurry up,” one of them whispered. “We still need to go to the boundary to assess the changes,” one of the golden-robed figures said, unaware that I was listening.

“I don’t know, this forest gives me a weird feeling. I don’t want to leave this place as well. Maybe it’s linked to whatever that was going on.”

As they argued, I quickly sent a magical message to Seldanna, telling her to accept whatever they had in mind unless they started killing. She didn’t say anything, waiting for their discussion to end, aware that they were outnumbered.

“Enough, we don’t have time to waste,” their leader suddenly bellowed, and a magical pressure radiated off him, which relied on his Divine Spark, which was still in Chosen form, but almost about five hundred points.

A fascinating amount, enough to scare all elves — except Seldanna, but I was quick to send a message to her, to act shocked.

“As per the rules of the silver city, we declare this patch of forest ours. All of you, disperse!” he ordered, then, pointed his finger to Seldanna. “And since you’re the leader of this rebellious band, you’re going to go to the capital for trial.”

Even as they gave the order, two of the golden robes stepped down, staying in the forest with ten soldiers, while two other was already moving to arrest Seldanna.

A fascinatingly quick reversal.

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 16

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 16

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 16 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 2392}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 4140}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 1809}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]



## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Five

I stayed hidden in the camp as I watched the elven reinforcements split into the three groups — the smallest escorting Seldanna and the biggest going toward the border — fascinated by just how quickly things could change in a few seconds. It wasn't a lesson I was learning for the first time, but it didn't make it any less fascinating.

Once again highlighting that, personal power was more important than any kind of fortified establishment.

My first aim, I followed Seldanna, communicating with her through our connection. "Go with them and act obedient. I promise I'll save you. Also, ask the elves to establish a camp downstream and stay put for a few days. Promise them a solution, I'll handle it," I said.

I didn't want random elves to ruin my observation.

Seldanna just nodded, not daring to use magic while surrounded by others. The arrival of the elves from the central tribes was actually not that problematic. It was annoying in the short term, sure. I didn't want my defensive bastion that could be used to farm Divine Spark ruined, that was true...

But I wasn't unaware of the advantages either. I wanted to learn more about the central elves, and trying to do was rather dangerous. And, even if they sent some reinforcements, they would have been reserved as a part of a larger group,, making it harder for me to detect anything.

Yet, they were kind enough to split into three groups, one to escort prisoners, one to defend a set location, and one to explore the camp where every inch of it was filled with defensive wards.

A perfect way for me to observe what was going on.

My first focus was following Seldanna. The wards allowed me to observe the camp from a distance, and the larger group could be temporarily dismissed. Undead might attack them, but defending them was not my responsibility.

I was glad for the recent improvement of Speed, allowing me to dash behind the group rapidly to make sure things weren't problematic. I could try to use Seldanna as a beacon for an emergency, but it was not something I wanted to risk.

Still, chasing after a flying beast wasn't exactly simple, especially since I was on unfamiliar

ground, challenging me to the limit while forcing me to use a great number of spells to avoid occasional tribes.

Deeper into the territory, there wasn't much undead presence. However, that didn't mean none. An hour into our little adventure, just as they were flying over a mountain, a motion burst from the ground, followed by a familiar necrotic blast.

It hit the wing of the roc, forcing the beast into a freefall.

Elves reacted, but even with their rapid response, before they could shoot their arrows, another necrotic blast rose, along with some bone arrows. Just one lich, and a group of skeletons. Not a weak lich, as its aura suggested, but not a strong one either.

I watched as the Roc landed. One elf stayed with Seldanna, watching her carefully, while the rest attacked, making quick work of the skeletons and the lich. The lich tried to retreat, but the mage of the elves was strong enough to prevent that, showing that the lich was there to handle weaker targets of opportunity.

Altogether, it would have been a boring combat event, but I noticed that before the lich reached its unfortunate end, one of the warriors rushed forward, pulled some kind of large acorn, and pressed against the bones of the lich.

Absorbing the Divine Spark.

I frowned. I was too far away to get a true sense of what was going on, but from what I could have seen, it had been suspiciously familiar. There was no visual connection with what I saw, but that wasn't enough to write off my suspicions.

Luckily, I had a chance to observe. While the elves were distracted by the combat, I circled their combat and approached from the other side, targeting the roc with a twisted healing spell, one that forced the beast into a coma while healing it at the same time.

I could have killed the beast directly, but keeping the beast unconscious had the potential to keep them there even longer.

Success, I thought as I watched them argue for a while before their caster started working on the roc — not a dedicated healer, I noted as I felt the clumsy nature of his spells, not to mention nature mana was not purely conducive to healing as my Proto-HP — and twenty minutes later, the rest started to set up a camp.

Excellent, I thought as I set up a teleportation beacon. Since the camp had been set up, I wanted to check the other hot spot.

I teleported toward the border. The largest group of elves had already arrived there, and a small forest had grown around it, though, unlike mine, their trees were more ordinary kind, filled just with mana rather than divine spark.

They were not just using the environmental mana, but some kind of liquidized version, pouring them for the trees which grew them rapidly.

The mages were busy with that, but the warriors patrolled the perimeter, dealing with the occasional undead attack. The undead incursions were weak, but clearly, they were meant to be, They were just using probing attacks, while the others were actually using the attacks of opportunity for the situation.

I watched the battle for a long while, which gave me a better sense of their combat capabilities — enough that I wouldn't have wanted to tangle with them in my situation unless necessary — and the undead response — gathering at the horizon, but promising to be spectacular.

Yet, before I could make a move, a notification appeared in my vision.

{-5 Nature Spark, God Forest}

It was enough of a reason for me to teleport immediately back to the main camp, expecting an undead attack. I neither wanted to lose the tribes Seldanna collected, nor did I want to lose my own defensive beacon.

Even as I did, however, I was frowning. I had enough detection wards there to make sure such a slip was impossible, and the fact that the undead somehow managed to arrive there was not good news. Not in the slightest.

Yet, when I appeared in my underground chamber and used the detection spells, I felt no undead presence. There was only one ward around the main tree, established by the elves and containing them, but with no undead presence.

Something was seriously wrong, and I didn't have a lot of time to detect what exactly was that wrongness.

{-5 Nature Spark, God Forest}

Something was still stealing my Divine Spark, something I had no intention of allowing, so I went above the ground.

Only to see all but one of the elves dead, and the mage currently using the same kind of acorn to drain the tree. Treason, how interesting.

Not all of them were dead, I realized a moment later when one of the warriors gasped. “Why?” he whispered in his dying breath.

“Why? You dare to ask why. This world is doomed, brother, and I have no intention of letting that succeed. I want to escape this forest fire, and to do that, I need some leverage.”

As he said that, he kept the acorn connected. I ignored the emotional aspects of their little play, and instead focused on the acorn that he was using to steal Divine Spark, one that had functioned very similarly to the crystal that the undead used.

A mana sliver of mine was all I needed to follow the flow, and I started examining the internal structure. Despite the similarities in function, the outer layer of the two pieces of equipment couldn't be any more different. The acorn was a living thing, while the crystals were inorganic.

Maybe, if I was a less suspicious man, I would have made a conclusion. Yet, the differences at the outer layers were too much to be coincidental, so I started examining.

A good decision, I realized quickly as I deciphered the outer layer, and found out that most of the outer layer was actually a very elaborate self-destruction mechanism, primed to go off at an intervention.

Luckily, my mana was pure enough to mix with Divine Spark and follow the source, and my stats were significant enough to allow me to keep a tight leash.

And then, I got a glimpse of what was inside, and a big frown appeared on my face. A crystal, not just similar but identical. Worse, as I examined that, I realized it wasn't just the working principles that were the same. No, I could see several signs of habits that would belong to craftsmen that had been trained by the same master, working together, using the same equipment.

Elves and undead were using the same crystals to capture Divine Spark. More importantly, someone had gone through a significant amount of trouble to actually hide that fact. I only realized it, because I was a mage, an expert on Divine Spark, and a crafter at the same time...

Maybe I was being paranoid, but I smelled a conspiracy...

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 16

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 16

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 16 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 2392}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 4140}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 1799}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Six

I watched the traitor as he slowly drained the Divine Spark from the forest, trying to process the implications of the betrayal.

Not the betrayal itself, of course. I had long learned people were willing to sell others for their benefit, and concepts like honor and loyalty were mostly transitional.

I was more interested in the possession of the acorn, and the crystal buried inside to steal the Divine Spark, the exact copy of the one that Undead possessed, but with some organic layer to cover up the similarity.

I didn't react, because I wanted to check something first. While the traitor was busy stealing my Divine Spark, I started to examine the remains of the elves that had been betrayed. Particularly, their bags.

I wanted to see if that crystal acorn was something unique. A tendril of mana that sneaked into their bags soon discovered eight more, confirming that, no they were not unique. Moreover, five of them were filled with Necrotic Sparks, gathered from the undead.

I drained them.

{+145 Purified Spark}

{-5 Nature Spark, God Forest}

Not exactly a treasure, but nothing to be scoffed at either. Far more than I was losing.

Once I finished purifying those, I turned my attention to the real issue. Why they were working hard to gather Divine Spark. I had initially assumed that the undead was stealing the Nature Sparks to protect their dominion, but what the elf had mentioned while bragging to his dying friend suggested another option.

They were selling them to others. For a good price as well, considering the timing of the traitor. The existence of a buyer was troubling, adding another layer to the ongoing battle, not just in the current plane, but also in other planes.

It explained why I was seeing many planes being invaded by the undead. Some mysterious group was supporting them — of which I had some suspicions, but I didn't want to overreach and miss something important.

Worse, that mysterious group was probably playing both sides, providing them with identical containers, and absorbing the Divine Spark from both sides as payment for their services. I needed to target those buyers.

I just needed to ascertain the identity of the buyer and make sure they were who I was suspecting. Luckily, I had the target to question, a target that probably have the buyer prepared if the intensity of his betrayal was any indicator.

The perfect target to tail. The only problem, I didn't want him to drain all of the divine sparks I had on the forest. Easy to solve, I thought as I flooded the crystal with my mana, and triggered its limiter, giving the signal it was full.

At the same time, I ordered the forest to stop radiating nature mana, and instead channeled their production to the underground storage wards. Together, it gave the sign that all divine spark was stolen successfully.

"Huh, I expected the forest to have even more," he said, then shrugged. "Maybe it drained faster than I expected."

I said nothing, and waited to see if he would try to create some kind of fake battle. He did not, confirming his intention not to return. Instead, he climbed to the roc, and took flight.

I didn't follow him immediately, but instead pulled some necrotic mana from the environment to create a fake battle scene at a small distance and dumped the bodies there. I didn't want the other elves to get suspicious. Not because I cared about the life of the traitor, but because I didn't want them going around and blaming the tribal elves.

I still needed them.

Luckily, creating a fake battlefield just took a minute, and soon, I was caught up with the traitor.

His path was interesting. Rather than going toward the center, was going toward the planar edge, which reinforced my initial suspicions about the source.

After an hour of the persistent following, and soon, and soon, I watched him stop in front of a magically protected area. It was just the first layer, some kind of identification layer combined with an assault ward if the first one triggered. I deciphered it in seconds ... because I recognized the magical tradition the wards had been constructed...

A very familiar tradition.

The Eternals.

“Hello, my old friends,” I said, a dark smirk appearing on my face as I came across the source of my trouble at such a great distance from home. I was getting suspicious due to signs of someone purchasing any kind of Divine Spark regardless of the type, as the System had the ability to absorb them — while the Gods either lacked it completely, or their method was inefficient enough to necessitate a trade.

Either way, an ambitious ploy.

Unfortunately, entering there was not exactly an easy job. If it wasn't for my familiarity with their unique brand of warding, I wouldn't even dare to try, and even with the experience, I couldn't just make an attempt.

It was not a bunch of undead I could just destroy before escaping. They had much more flexibility. “I wonder if they forget to defend underground again,” I murmured as I started to dive down, slowly creating a tunnel. It was the method I had used the previous times I had fought against them with great impact, and I saw no reason for it to suddenly change.

Unfortunately, the process was much slower this time. I lacked the assistance of my skills and my exaggerated stats, but the wards were still as strong as the ones they had used during their training exercise. Worse, I didn't have access to Earth mana, which made digging a much slower process.

Still, I resisted the temptation to hurry up. I slowly dug through the wards, not caring about the fate of the traitor one way or another. Though, once I had reached deep enough, I set up another warded teleportation beacon, and even teleported to check Seldanna. Through our connection, I could feel that she was safe, but I didn't want to take the risk.

Luckily, her escorts didn't have any traitors — or if did, they didn't have a reason to attack.

Once ensuring there was no immediate danger, I returned to my long and thankless task of digging a tunnel deep into the underground. A long, exhausting work. Not the physical kind, but the attention I had to constantly pay. I held back any possible complaints, and kept my attention on the task.

“So complicated,” I murmured once I reached the ward, examining the mana flow. One advantage, I was almost sure that the ward was not established by a caster, but through an item. Even better, it was not as overwhelmingly strong as the defensive wards they had used for the training, nor it had that constant detection feature.



Together, it allowed me to slowly unravel the weaker defenses underground string by string, creating an entrance that was just big enough for me to stumble through. Once passed, I used the earlier trick, and followed the shell of the ward, moving miles and miles inside.

Until I finally came against a secondary ward. It was much stronger, and it was trickier to bypass as it was physically integrated into the foundations of the fortress I had found myself in. Still, bypassing was equally straightforward, just required more time. Half an hour rather than a few minutes, but I had enough time to exchange some for safety.

After some careful magical tinkering, I was inside, in the basement of the castle. I dared to push without more preparation, because the fortress didn't prevent teleportation — well, it tried, but nothing that couldn't be penetrated by wasting a few thousand points of mana.

And, if there was one thing I wasn't lacking, it was mana.

Once inside the second ward, I found myself in the bowels of their fortress. Bowels that were protected by layers and layers of wards from the inside. Too bad that my access had ruined most of their access. For a moment, I wondered about the benefits of using copious amounts of explosive wards to ruin their life. Though it was more of a fantasy than an actual objective.

It didn't take long for that desire to lose its allure, because soon, I felt a unique pull, one from the System, trying to steal my Divine Spark. However, it was much weaker than the usual pull, a shadow of its endless devouring. Ignoring that had been trivial. Yet, that barely took my attention....

I had a much more important issue. I felt a stirring in my soul space, the connection once again alive. And, just like that, I had access to the System once again.

What a surprise.

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 16

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 16

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 16 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 2537}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 4140}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 1794}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Seven

The emotions awakened in me as I connected to the System again were... complicated.

On the one hand, it was an excellent opportunity, one that shouldn't be squandered. Having access to my skills again, even in a reduced capacity, increased my abilities significantly, and I could use the fortunate access to solve some of the questions I had about magic. A great opportunity.

Yet, even as I used the information access to parse through the information, a part of me couldn't help but be dissatisfied with the access. I felt like it was damaging my growing independence, and, at this point, I was enjoying my independence significantly.

"Less time pondering, more time focusing on practical concerns," I murmured. Self-assessment of my emotional state might not be a waste, but it was certainly not the time. Not when I could suddenly come face to face with enemies I couldn't rival.

I turned my attention to the connection between the System and the environment. The first thing I noticed was that, the connection itself was hampered. It was draining Divine Spark from the environment, but at a much slower degree compared to back in the mainland. It didn't even drain any mana.

Though, the reverse was also true. There was no convenient mana or HP recovery, and the skills were ... for lack of a better term, faded. The mana conversion feature, for example, was not working. Stats weren't working either, but they were not just dead like before. Classifying them as half-awake was a more accurate definition. I had a feeling a push would awaken them.

I didn't dare to experiment. Instead, I turned my attention to an even more important aspect. Companion module. Interestingly, that was just as dead as the earlier.

"Isn't that interesting," I found myself murmuring, my smile getting bigger. I had already assumed that the Companion process was something like an alternative System, and what was happening here just confirmed it. The connection here with the Main System only...

And it implied, if I could understand how such a connection cut through the primordial aether, I could replicate it for my unique brand.

Or even better, create one that was completely under my control...

With the assistance of my skills, I was already coming up with some really interesting methods

such a connection could be created. It would have been weak and ineffectual compared to the main system, but it would be under my control, and my control only.

What a fascinating possibility.

I wanted to go upstairs, and find the source of the connection... The only problem, I wasn't confident enough to deal with the Eternals. Not with my current capabilities. It would have been different if they didn't have the System, but they did, possibly with a method to keep their Stats at least partially active.

It was not a situation I was willing to face in a hurry, not without something pushing me. I had already received the answer to my question. The crystals were coming from the Eternals, and they were using the System to devour the Divine Spark.

I might have thought differently if the Eternals weren't using the connection with the System to devour the Divine Spark. If that had been the case, raiding their storage, which would have probably held tens of thousands of Divine Spark for my benefit, would have been an incredible strategic benefit.

Unfortunately, wishing didn't make it a reality.

However, just because I didn't want to go upstairs didn't mean I wanted to escape either. The sudden connection with the System was convenient, and I started resolving my problems. My first target was Proto-HP, using Biomancy to develop a better understanding, using it in tandem with Tantric — which I always had full access — to examine the internal structure of Proto-HP, to understand how it could be used better.

I stayed in the basement for three hours, carefully examining the structure, and soon, I attained two important benefits. One, I managed to increase its efficiency.

Two, I discovered a way to safely put some to someone else. It was not completely solved, and it certainly required some experimentation to understand the limits and drawbacks, but it was a start.

I might even stay longer, but I felt the wards between the basement and the upper floors flicker, and decided to beat a retreat.

It was not the time for a confrontation, not yet.

However, just because I didn't seek a confrontation didn't mean I wanted to leave them alone.

First, I pulled a mile away — though, for a chance, I didn't leave any beacons, afraid of those getting detected — then pushed toward the surface.

I examined the castle from a distance, examining its structure. The first thing I noticed was the towers, five of them, one at each corner, and a taller one at the center. Each tower had a crystal at the top, creating some kind of magical cage to protect the castle, but even at a distance, I could see that it was too complicated for it to be the only purpose.

I was willing to bet those crystals were responsible for the System access. The mana usage was too intense to be just for the defensive effort.

Unfortunately, intimidating walls and magical towers weren't the only things I had noticed. I could see dozens of people at the walls, confirming that not trying to breach the castle was the better idea.

"It's time to retreat," I said I retreated back to my tunnel, and as I moved back, I collapsed the tunnel behind me, until I had reached the outer layer.

I pulled back another mile, then created myself a barebones shelter, just enough to teleport, hold a few detection wards, and other fundamentals, with no care for comfort. Then, outside, I started building a subtle detection ward that was hard to detect.

Ward, I built even farther, because I didn't want to alert the Eternals. No, for that purpose, they were the bait...

I didn't need to wait for the first bite. Barely two hours since I started establishing that ward, before I even finished, I felt a tug at the ward. I went out, magic around me enough to keep me invisible, enough for me to detect a procession of the undead. Five liches, twenty death knights, and a thousand zombies.

Not a small army, especially since I could sense the liches were even stronger than I expected. I could have attacked them directly... But I wanted to try something different.

They were trusting the liches to protect the crystals, their presence glowing against the detection ward. I moved underneath them, until I was near them, and let a thin string of mana toward the crystals ... draining slowly.

It would have been a hopeless task if they had the ability to actually sense Divine Spark. Luckily, none of them actually had that ability, and used the crystals to bypass that. That inability allowed me to act like a thief, and when they finally stepped out of the range of my wards and

entered the range of the Eternals, half of the Divine Spark with them belonged to me.

{+1480 Purified Spark}

A fascinating amount. Of course, I would have loved to take all of it, but I doubted the Eternals would just wave as those groups got attacked. One or two, I could get away, but more attacks would bring attention that I wouldn't want.

Instead, I was happy with the fascinating amount of Divine Spark that I was able to steal with next to no effort.

I waited for a sign to leave, but before I did, I saw a familiar face. The unlucky traitor, left the wards with a huge frown on his face. "I'll burn that cheating forest down," he murmured as he moved toward the forest.

My wild guess, the Eternals measured the crystal he had and realized it was empty, not giving him what he was hoping for in exchange for his betrayals. I might have let him go away, but I didn't have any need to be a traitor.

Instead, halfway in, I attacked him. Before he could even realize my presence, I stabbed him with a pure mana line, and pulled it to steal his Divine Spark.

{+21 Purified Spark}

Not exactly strong, but not weak either.

"W-what's going on!" he gasped, shocked as he tried to summon mana. If the environment he was in was generous with Nature mana, he might have put some kind of useless defense, but in the middle of a desolate land with more necrotic mana than nature mana, he was just helpless...

I appeared in his sight, wearing an illusion to make me look like an elf. "We have a lot to talk about, traitor..." I said, the churning of mana around me enough to turn me into an intimidating sight.

"I'm not a traitor!" he tried to argue, but a flood of pure mana was enough to intimidate him to keep silent. Of course, it was suspicious for an elf to use pure mana, but I didn't care about that.

It wasn't like he would survive after the interrogation...

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 16

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 16

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 16 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 4038}

{Pseudo-HP: 2869 Mana: 4140}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 1794}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Eight

“I don’t have time to discuss the nature of your betrayal,” I said as I flooded his body with my mana, creating a drunken effect even as I destroyed certain parts of his mind, forcing him to speak truthfully.

It was near-irreversible, but considering I had no intention of keeping him alive, it was not exactly an unfortunate trade-off for me. Instead, I turned my attention toward my target. “First question. Tell me how the war started..”

That launched an interrogation that lasted for almost an hour, and gave me a lot of answers I had been searching for.

Apparently, what I had learned from Seldanna about the start of the war had been misleading. Her guess had been a few weeks at best, but the traitor claimed that it had been almost a year since they had first come across first undead presence, only to be destroyed immediately...

This launched a long campaign of hide-and-seek, where the undead fought to establish a stronghold where they could spread their power, and the elves from the central city doing their best to squash it — without even bothering to inform the border tribes, apparently, treating them more as a nuisance than potential assistance.

He had summarized dozens of battles to me, each incredible success against the undead... Yet, even as he went through the battles, something was tickling my mind... The battles he described were incredible, worthy of stories, requiring heroics, bravery, and sacrifices... If I hadn’t already used magic to strip him of his ego, I might have assumed he was trying to exaggerate the battles he was in, but that was certainly not the case.

More importantly, only two names were coming across as heroic repeatedly, and he was not included... Prince Arun, and High Priest Ivasaar.

“Suspicious,” I found myself murmuring.

I had fought against the undead many times, and the way those battles unfolded didn’t sound reasonable in the slightest.

“And when you discovered you can trade Divine Spark in that fort?”

“What?” he asked.



I realized we might not be sharing a name. “What you had in that acorn,” I said.

“Essence of Life,” he corrected, which sounded interesting. Maybe it was another valid name, but it was almost like they were deliberately cutting the link between the Gods and the energy they were trading.

“Good, tell me when you heard about that?” I ordered.

“I heard two subordinates of High Priest conspiring to steal some of the acorns and bring them directly for a trade,” he said. “They were talking about a mysterious group trading Undead Essence for a miraculous version of Essence of Life, and for a price, they even extract already absorbed Essence to allow improvement...”

“A good service,” I muttered. The profitable nature of that little offering was certainly fascinating. From what I had seen, it was impossible for the others to absorb two different sources of Divine Spark without conflict, so they wanted to get rid of their weaker source first before replacing it.

And, here they were, Eternals, offering to absorb the weaker source, something they already wanted, for a steep price, and from there, they were offering some kind of exchange service between different Divine Spark — and I doubted they were just doing some equal exchange.

A profitable trade, enough to make me question whether they were here just to profit from the battle ... or their presence actually predated the battle and they were the ones that fueled the battle in the first place.

After all, my memories of Zokras were there to remind me that the Eternals were not above using undead as convenient patsies for their purpose.

“I wonder if the undead is their only ploy,” I found myself murmuring. After all, the victories of the elves, particularly the High Priest and the Prince, didn’t make much sense either. It almost gave a sense of a choreographed fight.

Pity that was not something the traitor would know. Or would he? “Tell me where you get that acorn from?” I ordered.

“It’s the great invention of the High Priest, allowing us to prevent the undead from resurrecting,” he answered.

Which gave me the answer I was searching for. High Priest had some kind of connection to the

Eternals. Probably a willing accomplice, but I couldn't just assume that with certainty. There were other possibilities, trickery, magical control, blackmail, or they might even succeed in convincing him that it was a way to strike back against undead, and they needed to hide the origin of the invention...

Regardless of the extent of his willingness, however, it was clear that the Eternals had infiltrated the Elven Capital to a dangerous degree, highlighting the need to act carefully.

"And, I'm guessing that you're under strict orders to bring back those Acorns back to the High Priest, and never use them on anything else, am I right?"

"Yes, and any contamination has the risk of creating an explosion."

I thought of another question. "And, how did you discover you could use those Acorns on the trees and not just undead," I asked. I had a feeling that he wasn't as smart to come up with that trick.

"I have caught one of the soldiers of Prince Arun sneaking around the Tree of Life, sapping its energy," he admitted.

"Why didn't you try the same?" I asked, even as I wondered if some naughty elves walking around, stealing the divine spark of important guardian trees explained the fall of that border tree. After all, even its remains were impressive. But I abandoned that track for the moment.

"Tell me more about the capital, how it works, and its social structure of it," I said. I said nothing as he gave me the breakdown of their societal structure. An immobile social structure with a strong caste system, with almost no mobility — not helped by their incredibly long lives — between the groups. Royals, nature priests, soldiers ... and servants were collected from the tribes.

Or, as the way the traitor was framed, given the chance to serve their betters and make something out of them.

No wonder the tribes were antagonistic against them.

The capital was clearly smaller than I would otherwise expect, but the power difference — provided by the tree of life, if his words to be believed — allowed the city elves to easily bully the tribes, and squash any attempt of building alliances — not that it was particularly difficult if the way they reacted to extinction events was any indicator — and maintain their monopoly of power.

That monopoly didn't help them as the undead slowly yet inevitably invaded their home.

"Goodbye, little traitor," I said as I delivered my final blow after I had learned everything I could in short order. I did so, because I felt the wards I had left with Seldanna signaling movement once more. I wanted to go and protect her.

Not to mention, I liked the mentions of the Tree of Life, and the capabilities it boasted. I wanted to see how it worked. I had a feeling that I would learn a lot from how it worked. And, the combined objective of protecting Seldanna and sneaking around left me with one option.

It was time to wear a disguise once more.

But, before that, I needed some assistance.

If I was going to go around concealed, once more disguised, I needed my relevant skills as optimized as possible.

Even if it burned all of my purified spark storage, even tapping into the Guardian Forest.

{+6 Charisma}

{+6 Manipulation}

{-3800 Purified Divine Spark}

{-342 Guardian God Forest}

"Not bad," I murmured as I stopped for a second, once again enjoying the feeling of getting stronger. My mana suddenly flow stronger and softer at the same time, but also it gave me confidence that I could easily conceal myself as a servant once more.

Even in a society as structured and xenophobic as the Elven capital.

"But, one more thing to be done," I murmured as I closed my eyes once more, reaching to Aether Dimension to pull Aether, breaking it down to pure mana, converting it to HP and mana, just in case I met with an emergency.

God Forest had hundreds of thousand of points of mana hidden, of course, but the distance meant that it took a while to reach it. Worse, if anything blocked my access to Aether Dimension, it would also block my access to that stored mana.

I wanted to bring some more.

{Pseudo-HP: 8000}

{Mana: 15000}

With that done, I teleported, ready to shadow Seldanna once more.

It was time to step onto the elven capital.

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 22

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 22

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 16 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 338}

{Pseudo-HP: 8000 Mana: 15000}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 1452}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Nine

“Fascinating...”

That was the word that escaped my mouth as I scaled a mountain while my mission was to follow Seldanna and her escort closely — to make sure they didn’t have another traitor that might decide to freelance for personal benefit. I knew I was close to the capital, so, finding a city when I climbed over a mountain hadn’t been surprising.

The nature of the capital, however, was very much a surprise.

At first glimpse, I found myself thinking that I had just come across an ordinary meadow, a large tree, surrounded by some shrubbery. But with my senses, it took a second to realize it was just a scaling error. The city was far more distant than I realized, and what I took for shrubbery was trees. Huge, intimidating trees that on average, taller than a mile... There were thousands of such trees covering the huge plain, with houses on the branches...

Then, there was the tree at the center. Tree of Life.

I would have said a huge tree, but that would have underrated it to a criminal degree. No, huge were the trees that surrounded it, most taller than a mile, with houses on their branches.

The wooden titan at the center made them look like shrubbery, almost fifteen miles tall, its branches cutting through the clouds and touching the sky — and that was not an exaggeration. Enhancing my senses with magic, I could see that the branches were actually touching the planar border.

It was not hard to assume that it was responsible for providing most of the mana that was responsible for maintaining the constant cyclone of mana that protected the plane from the ravages of the primordial aether.

Fascinating, I thought even as I flexed my magic to create another hideout, this time smaller, with a beacon but with little defense. Here, the nature mana was much denser, and I didn’t want the risk of getting caught. The stronger the defenses, the easier for it to be detected.

That also went for my disguise attempt. If it wasn’t for the hundreds of elves entering and leaving the cover of the trees — both by flying and by walking — I might even have abandoned my mission and just saved Seldanna before she arrived in the capital.

Instead, I sent her a subtle magical message saying that I was about to enter the city along with

her, and that she shouldn't worry too much.

Creating an outfit for myself based on the elves that were entering the capital didn't take long. I based my outfit the way their civilians — or, what I assumed to be civilians, walking around with no visible weapons — before I climbed down the mountain, dashing while concealed in magic, slowing down only when I got closer to the city.

I should be able to teleport to Seldanna in an emergency, but it was better to have alternative paths in case of an emergency.

Yet, even as I passed through the first line of trees, consisting of the smaller ones that were merely around a thousand feet tall, a smile found my face. In a world under the siege of the undead, I wouldn't have thought I could find a peaceful neighborhood like this.

Unlike their tribal counterparts, the elves in the capital moved with a very distinct lack of hurry that I had only seen the noble scions back in the main material plane. Not that I blamed them — much — as the streets were not only lined with huge magical trees that constantly radiated nature mana, but also with huge treants that were slumbering under the trees, with huge weapons made of wood and silver next to them, ready to act.

One thing was certain, the security here was not a joke.

Pity it was completely geared for defense, and wouldn't matter once the undead covered the rest of the land.

I ignored the greatness of their strategic mistake as I moved deeper into the capital. The inner parts were richer, both in mana, and in material wealth — evidenced by the decoration and the way the elves were dressed.

Also in security. I had to change disguises three times, and used the underground tunnel trick twice before I could even take a step into the inner city.

There, I could see that the trunks of the trees were decorated with silver, gold, gemstones, and other precious materials, enough to equip an army with top-tier weapons. It wasn't to say that they were completely useless, as they enhanced the magical potential of the guardian trees somewhat; but from any practical perspective, the effort was not aligned with the final impact.

Arrogant.

As I pushed my way through another security point, this time manned by some serious figures

that were decked in the same kind of armor that was worn by the commander of the strike force, disguised as a servant — and didn't that awaken some nostalgic memories — when I finally left the trees behind.

All but one.

At the innermost circle, there was no tree but the Tree of Life. The shadow it cast underneath, and the roots that no doubt dug deep and wide, left no chance of survival — especially if my guess about its astral presence was at least partially correct.

Without the numerous trees to be hidden, sneaking into the tree was much more difficult. Luckily, the lack of trees didn't mean the lack of plant life. The place was filled with all kinds of smaller plants, shrubbery, flowers, and tall grass.

And, to my convenience, maintained by an army of servants.

It was another sign of decadence that every single servant had some Divine Spark inside them. They were firmly in the Chosen territory, with Spark fully crystalized, but even a careless observation put their potential around ten points on my measurement scale.

A great waste, as the mages of the tribes weren't as strong ... and even the soldiers that were sent to the border weren't as uniformly strong.

The signs of decadence were getting even more obvious, to the point of getting blinding. They were fighting a war that probably risked all their lives, yet they had the luxury of letting their mages work as gardeners without worry.

I sat in the tall grass, pulling nature mana to hide as I continued to observe, trying to see maybe I was missing something, that their gardening had a bigger importance ... but no, it was just gardening, to make sure everything was perfect.

It looked perfect. Not only every single blade of grass gave a wild yet cultivated look, but also their magical presence was the healthiest I had ever felt.

I rolled my eyes as I took a step further, walking around the perimeter to find a safe path toward the tree. Just like the other houses, the titanic tree had many buildings located on its trunk, connected with bridges of wood and crystal — another beautiful yet excessive display of decoration — and I just needed to find a path for myself.

That proved to be more challenging, as the elves that had the right to step there preferred

flying rather than walking, but the presence of the bridges convinced me otherwise. And, by juggling between a servant and a soldier outfit, I finally managed to find a bridge that was unattended by the soldiers, ready to climb.

But, before doing so, I put my hand on the trunk of the Tree of Life. I remembered the traitor admitting that other traitors stealing Divine Spark, and I wanted to examine it. I was careful in my probing, sending a slow and steady tendril to breach the outer layer ... the only problem, it didn't work as well as I had hoped.

Inside the tree was a veritable storm of mana and Divine Spark. Not the most confusing or intimidating storm — as I swam in Primordial Aether, which had been a much scarier experience. The Tree of Life reminded me of my own God Forest somewhat, but the nature of it was much more chaotic.

My guess, it was having trouble absorbing the constant new Divine Spark generated by the elves that surrounded it, locking it in a weird state. It prevented the tree from having any kind of sentience...

But also, it was enough to block my measurement capabilities to a significant degree. There were ways to bypass that, a few wards to support my sensing capabilities while sending a stronger probe would give me what I needed ... Too bad it would also ruin my disguise.

I needed to find another way. Luckily, the spy revealed that the other traitors had been using the acorns to steal divine spark, and there was no way for them to succeed with the current level of protection. Meaning, there were spots with weaker natural resistance

I was already pushing my luck, and I didn't want to get caught worse.

With a sigh, I started climbing the stairs, toward where I could feel Seldanna's presence.

I had a beautiful elven priestess to save.

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 22

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 22

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16



Endurance: 16    Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 338}

{Pseudo-HP: 8000    Mana: 15000}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 1452}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy

I left the questions about the chaotic nature of the Tree of Life behind as I climbed the stairs, once again disguised as a servant. Their habit of using Chosen as Servants might be wasteful, but it was beneficial for my purposes.

It gave me an excuse to surround myself with nature mana, creating an outer shell that would hide any illusion I might need to cast underneath. With that assistance, I picked a faster pace, climbing the stairs.

Seldanna finally stopped moving, suggesting she was finally imprisoned. I needed to make sure she wasn't suffering from any kind of problem. The connection didn't show her distress increasing, but better safe than sorry.

Even with all my advantages, an hour later, I was still searching for her, unable to find her. My ability to sense her was distorted, which was an achievement.

Even more interestingly, I could see several elves discreetly running around, their discussion implying panic. Curious, I slid closer, listening to their discussion. "Any clues in the cell?" one asked.

"Not yet. Not even our best magical tracker could find her. She somehow disappeared from existence. No mana presence, no life energy, nothing," the other answered.

"We need to find her. The prince already relayed his intentions to speak with her. I don't want to tell him that I failed him ... not in such a critical time."

The first one sighed. "Why does he want to talk with a savage in such a time in the first place? I thought we had bigger worries."

"I don't know, and I'm not stupid enough to ask such questions," the second one said. "Why don't you take that as a lesson and focus on searching, so you don't get demoted for losing the savage that the prince needs."

Interesting, I thought as I listened to their discussion about the disappearance of the prisoner. It wasn't hard to guess that they were talking about Seldanna, though. From their whispered discussions, I could hear that Prince Arun suddenly developed an interest in her...

My guess, it was about the report about the God Forest. Probably they realized something extraordinary, and they probably linked it to the Eternals ... or, as they knew, the mysterious

merchants.

Either way, they might send another force to that. I used the connection to send an order to the trees, and the whole forest used nature mana to turn into treants, and started moving. I ordered them to join the tribal elves, before starting to migrate — with orders to take any other elven tribe they had seen with him and move to the inner parts of the plane.

Hopefully, their numbers would allow them to absorb the other tribes without Seldanna's assistance. Though, even if they failed, the moving forest should be enough to confuse the Prince ... and whoever was responsible for making Seldanna disappear.

I watched the soldiers search Seldanna for a while, only for them to fail. They had been using many mundane and magical means, but none worked.

Luckily, I didn't rely on just mana. I used Divine Spark to create a path between me and Seldanna, tracing it toward the prison. To my surprise, even that didn't work as smoothly as I hoped, giving an accurate read only when I managed to get a lucky break, and got closer to the entrance of her new prison.

"Fascinating," I murmured as I realized the entrance of the prison was actually carved into the Tree of Life itself, which, from everything I had seen, was a heretical behavior for Elves. Though, while heretical, it was extremely useful. The chaotic dance of mana worked excellently to hide anything inside the prison, to the point that they didn't even assign any guards, trusting the tree to keep the intruders away.

And, not for a wasteful reason. The secret path was actually filled with the same chaotic flow I felt earlier, threatening to erode me. It would have been scary if I didn't experience much worse when I first arrived.

The elves weren't traversing the chaos every time they walked, of course. On the wooden walls of the tunnel, I could see many etched wards, capable of temporarily protecting the tunnel. However, activating those would mean alerting the others.

Luckily, as a constant source of Nature mana, I could easily merge with the dance of nature mana, and the occasional Sparks that I collided with were easily dealt with.

{+4 Purified Divine Spark}

My objective was not to drain the Divine Spark, but I wasn't going to bother trying to avoid every single scrap when absorbing was easier. And, it didn't even harm the tree, as the floating

crystallized pieces were clearly harmful to its general health.

And, the deeper I moved, the more I started to feel that the assistance was necessary. I was not in very deep compared to the general thickness of the tree, but still, I could feel something was wrong... I didn't have any direct evidence ... just a general feeling.

Before I could analyze that, I came across a door. barely a few hundred feet deep. Unlike the tunnel, the room was protected by active wards, ignoring the storm of mana that raged around. The wards were strong ... but with my enhanced stats, barely enough to delay me for more than a second.

I found Seldanna alone, worried. "You —" she gasped as she turned. "You're here!"

A wave, and the chains that were holding her fall apart. She dashed forward immediately, hugging me. "Don't worry, sweetie, I'm here," I said, patting her back to calm her down, her arms tight around me.

I wasn't in a hurry to make her move, as we were in the safest location. The one that imprisoned her here was confident that it was impossible to find the location, and ignored other disadvantages.

Including the fact that they couldn't observe the location.

I felt safe, as even if they walked in, they wouldn't send a big force, and I would have the absolute advantage. Worst came to worst, I could try to drain the tree of Divine Spark to get stronger. It would be risky, as I could feel the tree was already giving me a bad feeling, but it was not a concern I would take if I suddenly faced a deadly situation.

I hugged her for a while, letting her calm down, until I spoke. "Now, why don't you tell me what happened since you arrived?"

"Really? Shouldn't we escape first?" she said.

"No," I answered as I waved my hand. "Believe me, this place is much safer than anywhere else we can find in the capital. And, since we're here, we shouldn't waste the opportunity to look around a bit."

She looked doubtful, but she still said. "If you think that's for the best," she whispered.

I chuckled as I waved my hand, and a chair appeared in the otherwise empty room. I sat down,

and pulled her down to my knee. She continued hugging, not wanting to avoid the proximity. “Now, tell me what happened since your arrival,” I said.

“That was confusing. First, some kind of commander tried to question me about the forest and how it suddenly managed to appear, and didn’t believe me when I explained it. He kept asking about a group of merchants,” she said, looking at me at this point.

“I know who they are asking about, but I’m not one of them,” I explained quickly. “The merchants are the ones that are supporting the undead. I discovered it very recently as well.”

She nodded, blushing slightly as she questioned me, but I let it slide. She had her concerns, viable ones. “Then, they mentioned one of their useless princes, and left me in my cell...”

“Not this one, right?”

“No,” she answered. “I was suddenly attacked by a magical rush, and I was immobilized. Then, a robed old man appeared, and for some reason, asked me which god I was working for, and why I was betraying them.” She stopped, snarling in anger. “Like I owe those smug entitled monsters any kind of loyalty in the first place.”

“Any idea why he asked you that?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” she said. “He just used some kind of crystal on me, and based on the results, he started questioning.” In other words, he tried to drain her Divine Spark, but the amount of spark she had was the same. So, either he failed to drain, or stopped halfway intentionally. Either way, the mysterious interrogator — probably the high priest — used the crystal to assess the state of her Divine Spark, only to realize it was somewhere between Demigod and God — though the exact nature of the latter was still a mystery for me.

“Then, what happened?” I murmured as I found myself frowning. I suddenly felt a flicker, another line of Divine Spark connection establishing with her. It was soft, vague, and impossible to notice if she hadn’t been sitting on my lap.

“He mentioned something about sacrifices, forced me to eat some kind of fruit, and dragged me here. I was afraid of being poisoned, but I don’t feel anything like that,” she explained.

“I don’t know what it was, but I’m sure it wasn’t poison. I suspect it’s something much more interesting,” I murmured, letting my smile widen. “I think I need to check it carefully, without anything to intervene,” I said.

And pulled off her robe.

“H-here,” she stammered, shocked, not expecting. But it didn’t last long as she realized what her exact state of undress would lead to.

It was time to use Tantric once more.

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 22

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 22

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 16 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 342}

{Pseudo-HP: 8000 Mana: 15000}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 1452}

Elven Priestess - 70}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-One

“Well, we’re in a safe location, and I have established several alerts to make sure we won’t be ambushed,” I said with a smirk. “Do you have something more interesting in mind to kill some time while we waited for the idiot who dared to imprison you?”

“Well, no...” she whispered. “But, this is Tree of Life, the holiest place for us elves...”

“I need to make sure nothing is wrong with you, and the closer we are, the better,” I answered with a smirk. “Your clothes would only get in the way. And, what’s the problem. You venerate nature, and can you imagine anything more natural than what we’re about to do?” I said even as I got rid of the remaining fabric on her body, leaving her completely naked.

“But...” she whispered, which melded into a moan as I put a gentle kiss on her neck, making her tremble.

“Don’t tell me you’re not excited to do it at the center of the Tree of Life. Can you imagine somewhere even more appropriate...”

“Well, no,” she whispered, trembling on my lap as she said that. “But, still...”

“You know, I’m not exaggerating when I say it’ll help me to examine you.”

“Really?” she asked.

“Yes. Would I lie to you?” I said as I put my hand on her chin, my tone husky enough to make her shiver. The blush that covered her whole body was not a surprise, as Seldanna was innocent enough to be extremely vulnerable to charm, her inexperience and social status working against her.

My recently boosted Stats helped greatly as well.

“I... Still...” she murmured, trying to find words, only to fail spectacularly. She was silenced when I raised her head to meet my gaze, her lips parted slightly. I didn’t bother saying anything else, and just leaned forward for a kiss.

She responded, her tongue invading my mouth readily while I reached to her chest, enjoying the softness of her breasts. “Damn, girl, I missed it,” I whispered as I pulled back for a breather.

“Shut up, and start your examination,” she said and leaned forward to continue the kiss, while

her fingers moved along my body, getting rid of my clothes. Her initial hesitancy was quick to disappear, leaving its place for pure arousal, one that was enflamed further by her close encounter with deadly danger.

While she got rid of my shirt, I leaned forward, adding some very necessary hickeys on her beautiful tits. “Naughty,” she gasped, but considering she fell on her knees and got rid of my pants right after, it was not exactly an insult.

“And I missed this,” she whispered before capturing my girth between her lips... I wanted to focus on her body, but I wasn’t exaggerating when I said our closeness would allow me to examine her situation better.

The first thing I noticed was that the connection I had felt that led to her was not an illusion or a mistake. There was truly a thin connection of Divine Spark connecting her, and the Tree of Life was the other end of the connection.

“Fascinating,” I murmured, and Seldanna’s gaze found mine even as her head continued to bob. I smiled at her, acting like she was the intended target of my words.

The true target was the connection itself. It wasn’t a strong connection ... nor it was particularly stable. My first thought was that it was poorly made, which wouldn’t have been surprising.

The proper ability to manipulate the Divine Spark was a rare ability, after all...

Yet, the more I examined the weak connection, the more I realized my initial assumption was wrong. The connection was not poorly made ... or even actually made artificially in the first place. The more accurate way to define it was to say it was growing organically, no different than a tree.

However, the growth was very slow, which was why it took a while for me to realize that. I didn’t question why such a connection was growing. It was clearly a ploy from whoever threw Seldanna in this special prison — probably the High Priest.

Similarly, I wasn’t panicking about the connection itself, not when I could easily snap it off. Yet, I did not.

Such a connection was not necessarily harmful. Oh, I had no doubt that whatever her captor planned was careful about her safety ... but with my constant observation, things were different.

A sharp hint of pain brought me back to the present. “Pay attention to me,” she warned, leaving



teeth mark on my shaft.

“Someone is pushing her luck,” I answered, my throaty tone putting a smirk on her face. I smirked back even as I grabbed her waist and pushed her onto her back before crouching between her legs, assaulting her delicious folds with my tongue.

Circling around her knot, it triggered a rather loud moan, but from the way her legs tightened, I could feel that she was satisfied by the action. “You’re the one that pushed your luck,” I said.

She failed to come up with an answer against my satisfied smirk, and soon, it was impossible for her to actually do so, because I let my tongue free, raiding and invading every sensitive spot between her legs, teaching her a new meaning of the pleasure.

I expected her to retaliate by grabbing my hair, twisting her body, or retaliating in some other way. Yet, she did not, just accepting it passively as I invaded her core with my tongue. She might not be the most experienced lover, but still, there was a certain ego boost in stripping the rebellion from a sexy blonde with a few brushes of my tongue.

She gasped and moaned as I pushed her steadily toward a climax, so much so that she didn’t even bother to comment as I removed the rest of my clothes, matching her in nudity. She did gasp in shock when I added my fingers to the assault of my tongue, dancing at the entrance aggressively.

Moans filled the prison as the climax finally hit her, opening her soul even more. While she gasped for breath, I turned my attention to the magical details once more.

The first thing I noticed, the growth rate of the connection increased several times. Soon, the soft connection turned into a magical root, one that reminded me of the ones the Guardian Trees stretched through the Aether Dimension to gather and convert mana, only stronger, and it started sending tendrils through Seldanna’s Divine Sea.

My first assumption, it was a method to drain Seldanna of her Divine Spark, one that would strengthen the tree. But that didn’t make much sense, not with the crystals on their possessions. Why bother doing that.

Then, I notification popped into my view, showing my first guess was wrong. Diametrically so.

{+1 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

“Okay, maybe they are not trying to steal her spark,” I murmured as I examined her soul space,

ready to address the problems. I expected her Divine Sea to turn chaotic, as foreign Divine Spark required quite a bit of effort to suppress and absorb.

However, I expected a weak wind from just a point of Spark ... but what I found was a raging storm, threatening to destroy her Divine Sea. Without my help, it would take barely a minute for a point of Spark to destroy her sea.

It was not about potency ... but control. The Divine Spark she received was moving with a deliberate movement, thrashing to destroy her sea.

I had many ways of resolving that, including purifying that lone point of Spark, but I chose to apply an indirect method.

{-300 Nature Spark, God Forest}

{+300 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

The sudden influx of Divine Spark calmed her Divine Sea, preventing a dangerous rapture, and giving me a chance to examine the nature of the connection. The foreign spark continued to rage inside her, trying to find a way ... which gave me the impression that, while it was being controlled, the intelligence behind it was animalistic rather than sapient.

Which explained why the connection continued to grow despite my intervention. I was ready to intervene and reverse it, but it was better to watch without taking action. Divine Spark was a complicated issue, so, the more observation, the better.

“Is something wrong?” Seldanna whispered suddenly. “I can feel something weird with my magic ... it’s fluctuating.”

“It’s complicated,” I answered. “They cast some kind of spell on you, one that’s supposed to drain your power, but I managed to block it.”

“It doesn’t feel like that’s the end,” she said, worried.

“Technically, it could be. I could stop the process easily if you want...”

“I’m guessing there’s a but,” she said, catching on to my implied point. “Why don’t you tell me rather than dawdling?”

“It’s an opportunity. I can let the process continue and do my best to control it. If it works, you’ll be much stronger.”

“How much power, and how stronger?” she asked.

{+1 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

The notification was a warning that I shouldn't delay the treatment. “A tough question. About the danger, I'm quite confident that I could terminate the process if it goes too badly ... and about the power, we're talking about a significant amount.”

“How significant,” she asked.

“Potentially,, enough to make you the strongest person in the capital by a wide margin,” I said. It was a guess, but considering the source of the connection, a pretty safe one.

She waited for a moment, then her expression solidified. “Do it!”

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 22

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 22

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 16 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 342}

{Pseudo-HP: 8000 Mana: 15000}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 1152}

Elven Priestess - 372}

—  
[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Two

“Open your legs, sweetie,” I said as I positioned myself above her.

“You need a better connection ... of course,” she murmured, a little annoyed, but mostly aroused. Her core glistened as well, showing she was ready for my invasion.

“Brace yourself, and try not to use any mana,” I suggested as I slipped into her wetness. She hugged me, her arms tighter than necessary. She was afraid ... not that I blamed her.

I started moving, slow and tender, even as I closed my eyes, focusing on the magical side of things.

Her Divine Sea was churning chaotically as another point of foreign Divine Spark joined the mix before the previous one could have been assimilated. Left without intervention, I could easily imagine a few more points erasing Seldanna from existence.

Which begged the question ... what they were trying to do. I doubted it was a fancy execution, especially since Seldanna was, for all intents and purposes, a peasant that could be killed without any political implications.

Meaning, they had a different objectives. Pity I didn't have the time to go around and search for that answer.

{+2 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

Not with the process getting faster and faster, as my homemade System warned me. I turned my attention to Seldanna's Divine Sea, our connection at the maximum level, which was necessary as I interacted with the new Divine Spark through her Divine Sea — as my Divine Spark would have just purified it, destroying the point.

As I touched the Spark, memory fragments rushed into my mind. Memories of war and disaster, the sky itself splitting, rains of fire mixing with raging tornados, the very ground disintegrating.

{+10 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

The memories flew too fast for me to pin them down. The only thing I could understand was that the view was from the perspective of a forest, made from trees that dwarfed the Tree of Life that we were currently in.

The intense flow of the Divine Spark forced me to add some of my Tantric Mana to the mixture, softening the foreign Spark to make it easily absorbed by Seldanna.

Just in time.

{+10 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

As I saw the memories, I realized that I wasn't sharing the perspective of the trees ... no, I was sharing the perspective of an incredibly strong being that was using the trees as a medium to fight against those beasts ... only to fail horribly.

{+10 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

Shocking, as the being was channeling an incredible amount to channel directly, wasting more than a million points each second — maybe even more, but lost in the fragmented memories.

I had a feeling that I was getting my first experience of what a god was ... and it scared me, even worse than I did when I realized the power of the Eternals.

{+50 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

Yet, despite all their powers — no, all his power, I corrected, the memories giving me a better understanding of his identity. Just to be on the safe side, I wrapped the Divine Sea of Seldanna with a layer of mana, and over it, a layer of my Pure Divine Spark. It prevented Seldanna from using any mana, but it also prevented those memories from touching her.

{+50 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

I could isolate myself from those memories easily. My stats helped to strengthen my mind, and even without that advantage, I had a better advantage. The memories came buried in Nature Spark, which was distinctly not me. Seldanna, as a Nature-Spark carrier, would have a more difficult time.

Still, a few days of meditation were all she would have needed to cleanse those memories, I thought as I continued to decipher the fragments. The battle raged, as I saw the glimpses of other Divine Sparks, sometimes used against the trees, sometimes allied. Fire, light, Healing, Martial ..., and others that I couldn't recognize.

{+100 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

Yet, there were other concepts, like pure elements and undead, that constantly fought against

the trees, cutting the reach of the lone god of nature that tried to stem the tide more and more.

Soon, I found myself revising Seldanna's capability of keeping the memories isolated from hers. The intensity of the memories got stronger, which made it much more unlikely that Seldanna could have handled those memories even if she meditated for years.

Even for me, they were impossible to isolate. I wanted to process them ... and if I still had access to System, I might have succeeded, but without it, it was a hopeless affair. The more intense the memories got, the harder they were to comprehend. Soon, I had to cut the connection with the memory, and start destroying them.

{+100 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

Either that, or they would pollute Seldanna's Divine Sea.

Luckily, the memories weren't the only thing that came with the flow. I also received a lot of magical knowledge, and I did my best to save some, separating them from the others. For them to be safely recorded.

Yet, I could feel that, the flow was not slowing down but getting faster, making me fear that I would have trouble controlling the flow. Luckily, I was prepared for that.

{-1000 Nature Spark, God Forest}

{+1000 Purified Divine Spark}

The amount of Divine Spark I took from the forest left the tribes in a dangerous position, but the forest already stored enough mana to keep them safe for a few days, so it should be alright. And, if we were still trying to deal with the connection a few days later, we had much bigger problems.

I focused on helping Seldanna metabolize the Divine Spark, feeling the most recent rush would have been enough to contain it. Unfortunately, another notification was quick to steal that confidence.

{+200 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

I squeezed my teeth, focusing fully on the mental state while my body continued to move, a part of me annoyed that I couldn't enjoy the beautiful, desperate embrace of Seldanna even a

bit, missing a special moment. Luckily, my reflexes were fully trained in the art of lovemaking, and even with my wandering attention, Seldanna was moaning ceaselessly...

{+500 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

The next burst of Divine Spark was enough to destroy my confidence that I could actually suppress the flow. Luckily, I had other methods to cheat. A bit riskier, but it was still better than cutting the connection that offered such incredible benefits ... or worse, letting Seldanna burn out with an overflow of power.

I dived down into her Divine Spark directly, letting my Divine Spark mix with hers. My Divine Spark formed a scalpel before cutting a generous portion of her newly acquired Divine Spark. I didn't have time to ask for her permission, but I was sure that she would forgive me.

And even if she didn't, I could earn it the fun way.

{-200 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

{+200 Purified Divine Spark}

So, I was shocked when a voice echoed in my mind.

“HOW DARE YOU STEAL MY POWER!”

The voice echoed in my mind ... no, not my mind, I realized. In my Divine Spark, particularly the newest part that I was in the process of purifying completely. And, it was certainly not Seldanna.

I didn't try answering. Trying to answer angry incorporeal voices didn't seem to be a good idea ... especially when the voice in question tried to hide his presence as harmless memory fragments, creating a trap.

I bit my lips as I focused my Divine Spark, purifying the amount I cut far faster than any other attempt. Just as well, as the flow suddenly increased.

{+5000 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

He was playing for the keeps. The sudden infusion of the new Divine Spark not only threatened to kill Seldanna, but also destroy our surroundings completely. Her Divine Sea was ruined completely already, losing all coherence.

Unfortunately for the incorporeal being that was trying to drown us, that was all that did. The



two-layered protection, the first layer mana, the second layer Purified Spark, was especially effective against the tactic.

I would have pitied the guy if he wasn't trying to steal the body of my lover. An amazing ploy, yet somehow, his minions picked a target that was uniquely equipped to prevent it by a complete accident.

I decided to attack back.

{-1000 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

{+1000 Purified Divine Spark}

“STOP, MORTAL!”

I expected the being to either stop, or attack harder. Yet, it did neither.

{+4000 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

Weird, I thought as I focused on the connection, only to realize it getting stronger, despite the flow lessening, and the realization hit. The being didn't have the ability to stop the flow ... not at this point.

He was a god, I realized, and the memory fragments were from the war between Gods and the Eternals — though the memories confirmed the war was certainly not that simple — and he was probably sleeping in the tree for centuries, one last relic from the forests that he once commanded.

Unfortunately for him, I had no intention of even trying to speak. The god was knowledgeable and strong ... and also desperate. A horrible combination to face, and now that I had the opportunity, I had no intention of allowing him to succeed.

Ironically, killing him was too simple. I just followed the strengthened connection with a line of Purified Spark, and reached the center. I found his soul at the center of the tree, hibernating to protect himself with his lack of power — giving me the realization that, true godhood required a lot of Divine Spark to prevent fading away.

The power that I isolated from him ... making him die ignobly. I destroyed the rest of the memories as quickly as I could manage, prioritizing speed over perfection. I had dealt with such problems too much to assume that it was the end of it.

Especially not in a plane that was dealing with elven traitors, undercover teams from the Eternals, and an ongoing undead invasion...

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 22

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 22

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 16 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 2542}

{Pseudo-HP: 8000 Mana: 15000}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 152}

Elven Priestess - 9104}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Three

It was a weird moment, I had to admit. On the physical side of things, I was doing the most intimate dance with Seldanna, our bodies sweaty as they slapped against each other, while, on the magical side of things, I was protecting her from the death throes of a slumbering nature god...

While trying to make her a full-fledged god.

A very simple task, right...

“What is my life,” I murmured, pausing for a moment to consider the situation. It was a pity that Seldanna didn’t have the full picture to answer that ... or was aware enough to actually hear in the first place. She was in a dream trance as she merged with the Divine Spark that was escaping from her Divine Sea.

At this point, it was inevitable. There was a limit to my purification and containment efforts. Especially as the connection continued to send more and more.

{+4000 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

A very useful reward, and I reached to take more of it. It was useful to purify her Divine Spark ... it was useful to help Seldanna, and the more spark I had, the better.

{-300 Nature Spark, Elven Priestess}

{+300 Purified Divine Spark}

I was planning to take much more, but as I started to take it, I felt a dangerous shift.

I wouldn’t have cared if the shift came from the soul of the god. He was about to be killed in any case.

I would have been more careful if the shift came from Seldanna, but ultimately, I would have continued and used my extensive healing abilities to stabilize her. That might cost her the nebulous opportunity to become a true goddess, but I was sure that she wouldn’t complain too much if she became an extremely strong demigod instead, and in time, I was confident I could come up with a way to elevate her...

If the source was the Tree of Life, it would have been a more difficult question. After all, it

wasn't just cultural importance that helped elves ... many of them actually lived on top of it. Massacring thousands was not something I wanted to do, even for power.

Still, I could try to find a workaround if that had been the case as I assumed for a moment...

Yet, the problem was none of them. It was the plane itself that trembled, not only the rotating planar border, but the very ground ... giving me the feeling that the Divine Spark of the slumbering god intersected with the existence of the plane in a deeper way than I had expected.

Stealing more spark was not a good idea ... not if I wanted to keep the plane in one piece.

Pity, as the additional Divine Spark would have been useful ... and, if what I suspected about the impact of our little situation was even halfway accurate, it would be immediately useful.

I was tempted to convert my Spark into Stats ... but a little examination showed that was not possible. Not unless I was willing to sacrifice Seldanna. Most of my available spark was occupied with cleansing the memories of the slumbering god.

I just needed to maintain my touch to help Seldanna, so I pulled out, using magic to dress us both. As much as I wanted to keep her naked for my enjoyment, I chose otherwise.

As Seldanna slowly absorbed the Divine Spark from the Tree, its ability to block my senses had weakened significantly, and I could already hear the signs of growing chaos outside. I could sense not only flares of nature mana, but also necrotic mana, clashing against each other ... with an intensity that surprised me.

I used a detection ward outside, to check how much time passed. "Wow, it's already night," I said, loudly despite knowing there would be no answer from Seldanna. The passage of time surprised me. The mental battle with the slumbering god must have taken much more than I initially assumed.

I decided to take two actions. First, to deal with the tree. As Seldanna continued to absorb the Divine Spark, the mana production of the Tree of Life was dropping. It was yet to reach a dangerous point, still supplying both the planar border and the elven capital with their mana needs, but it would eventually happen unless I intervened.

A problem to deal with, but not immediately. I had a more urgent one. As Seldanna pulled the Divine Spark of the Tree, the chaos that tortured the tree for a long time was quelling. Technically, it was good news, as it meant the tree was suddenly free of one disease that had

been torturing it for centuries, freeing a lot of mana it had been using to prevent its death free, boosting the combat capabilities of the elves. Unfortunately, it wasn't good news for me, as it made it much likelier for the outside forces to realize what was going on. I needed to solve that immediately.

I started creating a ward, one that would fake the mana cyclone right under the bark to block any detection. Hopefully, with the battle going on, no one would pay attention to the tree.

As I built the ward, I started to pay attention to the progress of the battle, to understand when the elves would be victorious. They had to, considering the most recent mana boost they had received. Still, building the cyclone ward required some time, giving me a chance to observe the battle.

Only to realize elves were losing ... badly.

That surprised me at first, especially since I could feel the elven presence was stronger than the necrotic mana I could feel immediately around the capital. Due to the sudden nature of the battle, the undead had been lacking the most effective part of their arsenal. Their hordes and hordes of zombies and skeletons, create the necessary curtain for their dangerous members to handle the work — while also absorbing hostile mana and corrupting the environment as a welcome benefit.

Even without that advantage, the undead was steadily gaining ground ... which was surprising.

Then, I realized the problem, which was twofold. First, the capital, at least most of it, had been already evacuated rather than joining the battle, which was a big loss considering a majority possessed Divine Spark they could use to defend the capital. It was a waste, but not a decisive one, as the capital still had a significant army.

There, I noticed the second problem. Most of the army had been fighting against each other, leaving only a portion to defend against the undead.

A vicious civil war.

"Damn it, they are even more useless than I expected," I murmured even as I examined the layout of the two armies, their armor distinguishing them. The first group was wearing predominantly robes, and defending the tree, while the ones that were attacking them were leaving heavier on the armor.

Also, the armored ones were the ones that were busy evacuating the city ... through a stable

gate, one that cut through Aether. Teleportation on that scale was not important, but very, very difficult; especially if they had been maintaining it for as long as I suspected. It relied on some kind of artifact.

A lot of things to respond to... and I needed to decide what to do first ... before that, I needed to make sure Seldanna could stay safe.

Since the elves managed to defend for that long, a few minutes were acceptable. I pulled my own Divine Spark, and used that to establish a more stable ward around Seldanna's Divine Sea, to make sure to handle the conversion, and with a persistent connection I maintained to alert me to any irregularities.

{-2000 Purified Divine Spark}

Luckily, the Tree of Life no longer interfered with my detection.

As I put the finishing touches on the ward, I could still feel the death throes of the god, but at this point, they were more of an echo. Whatever that was driving his awareness, it was finally gone. It was time to take action.

I could have dashed out immediately, but before that, I wanted to pull one last trick. What should I disguise myself as? And, while I could disguise myself as anything, it worked the best when a disguise both fit my immediate requirements, and was served in a way the audience found believable.

Quickly, I made a list of requirements. I needed to look in a way that kept my real identity and my core secrets hidden. That was nonnegotiable, especially with the Eternal presence I managed to detect.

Second, I needed a disguise that gave me an excuse to throw around as much power as I could handle; which was not a lot right now after I had drained my God Forest to save Seldanna. But, there was a civil war going on, and I could gather a lot of Nature Spark to replenish that.

Third, if possible, I needed a disguise that prevented the elves from attacking me desperately — though, when a pinch, a portion would do, considering they were in a civil war.

A smirk appeared on my face as I went through them again, a flash of inspiration giving me a very appropriate disguise.

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 22

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 22

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 16 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 842}

{Pseudo-HP: 8000 Mana: 15000}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 152}

Elven Priestess - 12804}

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[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Four

I decided to disguise myself as the God of Nature.

Was disguising myself as a true divine being disrespectful, certainly. However, I wondered if the fact that I had just killed the said divine being made it more respectful ... or less.

Either way, it was just an idle question while I finished creating my outfit, using the fragments of memories I had experienced. I let my body slowly be covered with some kind of grown robe, and a living branch throbbing with Nature Spark appeared in my hand, and a hood covered my face.

Just like the way his memories showed him to act.

My first target was the elves. Or, more accurately, the civil war that was going on. The robed ones were already struggling to defend the tree, and I didn't want someone to breach the defenses and kill Seldanna while I was busy with dealing the undead.

When I went out, I didn't attack immediately. Instead, I cast a concealment spell as I flew down — the battle was mostly on the ground level — to understand the exact nature of the battle. I could see that the armored ones were gaining a lot of ground, with chants shouting the name of Prince Arun.

Which made the defending side the supporters of High Priest Ivasaar.

The battle was interesting, as both sides desperately used crystals to capture the Divine Spark of the fallen, allowing them to store more and more. They were desperate to generate some currency for their trade with the Eternals.

The army of the Prince was already close to victory, but the defensive wards of the priests were too strong, preventing a direct confrontation. And, to their credit, I was impressed with the wards, they looked weak, but had a deceptive strength. The High Priest had been clearly preparing for his ploy for decades — and my guess, only to be forced to pull the trigger early due to a sudden undead invasion.

No wonder he desperately tried to use Seldanna as a host.

A part of the reason for the battle was clear, but I wanted an even better picture. And luckily, there was an easy way to achieve that little trick, one that would put me in a good position.



I carefully manipulated the defensive wards, weakening them. Not all across their defensive line, but creating a path between Prince Arun and Priest Ivasaar, pushing them together.

“Push forward!” ordered the Prince as he rushed forward, thinking he was the one that brought down the defenses, and High Priest pushed forward at the same to block his path.

As I watched them approach, I started to stretch my mana tendrils outside, hooking into the Cystals that held the Divine Spark of the elves that had been slain during the battle.

None of the crystals I managed to find at the edges held a lot of Divine Spark. A few points here, a dozen there ... but the combination was rather impressive. Half a day of battle cost a lot of elves their lives, and even a portion was able to help my God Forest recover most of its losses.

{+755 Nature Spark, God Forest}

A welcome change, as moved around the Tree of Life, and placed sixteen seeds in a rough circle, preparations for a defensive bulwark, one that I was yet to trigger ... because while I was dealing with those two aspects, the prince and the high priest was finally face to face.

I just watched even as they started to fight, even though the High Priest was at an immediate disadvantage. I didn't feel any guilt doing so, as neither the High Priest nor his men were my allies. They were just enemies that were conveniently blocking the path toward what I cared about.

“It's not too late, my prince,” the High Priest shouted even as he summoned a horde of roots and targeted the prince, who used his sword to chop them off easily. “You can still change your mind and go back on the right path.”

The prince laughed in derision. “Nonsense, old man. You want us to return to a distant path, where we were the servants of a tyrant monster. Why would we, when I hold the keys of fate in my hands! I will not be a slave.”

“No, you'll be a weapon in the hands of our enemies, and take down the very thing that allowed us to survive. Do you think we could have survived the Great Disaster without his sacrifice? Yet, when it's time to pay back, you're choosing to betray him.”

“Old tales, you can't be serious to believe them! I'll burn that damn tree if I have to. It's the only thing that holds us back from our full potential.”

The priest laughed derisively. “Don't you mean you'll sell it to those damned foreigners, like I

don't know what your men were up to! Die!"

Their heated discussion gave me everything I needed to make a decision. I could go out and kill them both, but that was hard. I could see them fighting passionately, and neither of them was any weaker than me in terms of pure combat capability.

And each had an army.

Luckily, neither paid much attention below ground. I didn't blame them, as the roots of the Tree of Life were not a joke, ready to destroy any attacker — unfortunately, I had a rather good relationship with its new owner, so I was spared of that fact.

I started moving through the underground, and I positioned myself underneath the two. A few more careful changes of the defensive wards, gave the prince another chance to rush forward, and soon, the high priest ended up skewered.

The other priests immediately started to pull back the moment that happened, their courage faltering without their leader. I ignored that, making my move ... in the form of a root that wrapped around the high priest.

{+1518 Nature Spark, God Forest}

He had an impressive amount of Divine Spark in possession, explaining his impressive magical combat. I didn't even realize keeping that much Divine Spark in chosen form was possible, but somehow, he achieved it.

I needed to copy that method.

The prince kept his sword buried in the priest's heart after taking off his head, confident in his victory. "Your leader is dead. Surrender—" he shouted, which was cut short when the deceased high priest suddenly exploded with nature mana, his remains to turn into a mindless treant.

And, just like that, the prince was skewered with its roots, which drained him completely.

{+618 Nature Spark, God Forest}

Both sides pulled back, trying to understand the sudden shift as their leaders had fallen simultaneously. Some of the higher-ranking officers were trying to make a point, but the double defeat was too sudden for them to react.

I didn't react, which gave me time for the panic to spread. It wasn't my intention, as I was busy

integrating the sudden infusion of Divine Spark into my forest, but it was certainly welcome.

When the integration was complete, the forest was stronger than ever, and its mana generation capacity was significantly enhanced. And, before the two factions could decide what to do, the trees I had planted started growing with a shocking speed.

“You dare to hurt my loyal servant, traitor!” I shouted as I burst out of the ground, radiating an intense amount of nature mana, while sixteen trees started growing with a shockingly glorious speed.

It wasn’t just my appearance that shocked them, but the trees, each looking like smaller versions of the Tree of Life. Of course, the similarity was just cosmetics — changing the color of their bark and leaves was much easier than copying a divine tree that a god used as a weapon, yet still impressive enough to convince a bunch of elves.

“Impossible, that’s an illusion,” shouted some of the higher-ranking commanders of the prince while the others were just shocked, showing that their true objective wasn’t completely spread or understood.

“It’s true, we’re saved,” gasped the priests, elated with the sudden reversal even if it happened after the death of their leader. Though, the respectful way they had looked toward the treant I summoned was any indicator, some actually believed his sacrifice made it possible — my apparent anger confirming it.

I might have accidentally created a new myth of sacrifice, the heroic and loyal priest sacrificing himself to awaken his god. I thought about correcting them, but looking at the state of the priests, I decided against it after a shrug.

I had too much work to focus on something that was working. I still needed to subjugate the prince’s army, deal with the undead attack, and check where that teleportation gate was leading.

... so that I could start working on the real problems...

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 22

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 22

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 16 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 842}

{Pseudo-HP: 8000 Mana: 15000}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 3043}

Elven Priestess - XXXX}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Five

“Your little tantrum is over, my sons and daughters, drop your weapons!” I shouted as I started radiating even more mana. Charisma came useful to make that order effective, but not as effective as the sixteen trees still growing despite the presence of the Tree of Life, similar in appearance, already taller than half a mile.

Growth magic was convenient.

“It’s just a trick, we can still —“ one of the commanders started, only for a root to burst out of the ground to skewer him. He tried to defend himself, and was successful in cutting the root. He was even successful in cutting the next three. “Come on, fight, we can—“ he tried to encourage the others, but the next chain of attack, two dozen roots, was enough to take him down.

{+128 Nature Spark, God Forest}

All it took was a second, before the others could even react, and his incompetent display proved to be enough to break the courage of the rest. Which was good, because if all of them tried to retreat, I could have taken down only a fraction of them. Focusing only on one target made it much easier.

Not to mention, I didn’t want to kill them, not when they were useful against the undead.

“Bow down to your god!” I shouted like a megalomaniac, enhancing my voice with Arcane magic — even adding several illusions around me to make me more intimidating. Amusingly, it worked much better than I expected, and they started to fall to their knees.

“Good, now, you five, lead them to the defense of the capital,” I said, and five roots burst out of the ground once more. They panicked for a second, but the sudden flood of strength was enough to change their attitude.

“Thank you, my god,” they shouted as their Divine Spark melded into a Divine Sea, turning them into demigods. Then, since I had the connection, I broke the crystals they had in their possession, and pushed that amount into them as well, so each of them had about five hundred Divine Spark.

I didn’t exactly want them empowered, but I could always take that power back. As long as I kept an eye on them, it should be alright.

Their sudden empowerment worked better than I expected. I was trying to create some capable

commanders that could hold the undead back, but I had forgotten most of them were ready to betray their kind for power — the existence of a god that could grant power made things much simpler.

“Now, go forth and fight for your land!” I ordered, and all elves knelt.

A fake god wielding punishment and distributing rewards was very effective, especially to a group that was already dealing with an existential crisis. I decided to push my luck a bit more.

“Before leaving, drop those crystals and acorns on the ground. They are cursed, and anyone that uses them, I’ll punish them with damnation. That made them freeze, and I had no doubt that, if it wasn’t for my earlier display of empowering the five priests — who were still showing off their newfound power — they would have protested a lot.

Instead, most of them dropped their crystals on the ground, and roots appeared, devouring them. Some had Necrotic Spark, but most were filled with Nature Spark. Enough that it would take me a while to actually absorb...

{+13592 Nature Spark, God Forest}

[+2128 Purified Spark}

I planned to repurpose some of the Nature Spark, but not immediately, not when I could use all the nature mana they generated to grow more and more guardian trees — a necessity against the constant undead attack.

Still, being rich was a convenient feeling.

And, speaking of being rich, I could still sense some Divine Spark imprisoned in Crystals. “You have three breaths to drop them, or...” I shouted.

Some believed me, dropping their crystals. The others didn’t, and ended up skewered in roots, injured and bereft of their spark — just a flicker left to prevent them from absorbing a new one.

Giving me another convenient burst of Divine Spark.

{+1420 Nature Spark, God Forest}

[+301 Purified Spark}

“Now that the traitors are dealt with, go and destroy the undead, my sons and daughters,” I

said, raising my hand to pump a wild wave of nature mana, one that destroyed most of the advantage the undead strike force managed to collect.

They rushed forward, ready to show off to their seemingly omnipotent new god, and I flew above them, unaided,, radiating mana and providing courage. While I flew, however, I cast a spell to bring one of the remaining commanders with the highest rank.

The commander looked shocked, not by the fact he was flying — which was not impossible, even with nature mana — but by the intensity of mana that wrapped him. It was a wasteful move by me, but intentional as well.

I wanted them scared. I was too busy to deal with a rebellion.

“Where’s this portal leading, explain,” I ordered.

“M-my god,” he stammered. “T-that’s the arrangement of my priest, a tool that’s acquired from a group of mysterious merchants, leading our people into safety.”

“The same merchants that are buying the crystals,” I asked.

“Y-yes, my god, but you have to believe me. That was all Prince’s idea, and we tried to argue but he never listened,” he argued, doing his best to cut the connection with it. I didn’t care much either way ... not like I actually planned to rule them in the first place.

Too much work.

Instead, I split my attention. Part of it, I kept making sure the counter-attack against the undead didn’t cost any life — knowing that a flawless victory would do wonders to handle it. However, I limited myself to casting a few wide-area spells that would renew the dead zones around the capital to destroy the strategic advantage of the undead. Then, just to be safe, I summoned a few treants and linked them to the God Forest. “Go forth and destroy the undead, my children!” I shouted. “I’ll go and save the citizens from the betrayal of that rotten noble!”

With that, I turned my attention toward where the last few citizens were still using the portal to leave. Admittedly, while I cared about the fate of the citizens, it was significantly lesser compared to the attraction of the portal itself.

It was an ingenious production, just the capability enough to allow me to design half a dozen spells on the spot.

The ability to open semi-stable connections between two points, not just to teleport but also to allow the movement of the others was a very interesting concept. Unfortunately, despite the cursory similarities with teleportation, even a distant glance was enough to show the working principles were completely different.

Teleport just required shearing of the space barrier to allow a step into the Aether dimension, and using another beacon to navigate toward the other destination, the constantly shifting nature making the destination much shorter.

However, while that fluid nature made it easy to traverse great distances, it worked reverse on any attempt to build a semi-permanent pathway through it.

Luckily, while the elves were spoiled and arrogant, they weren't entirely stupid. The moment I started flying toward the gate, they pulled back and started worshipping — one that already started to yield benefits.

{+1 Purified Spark}

Not much, but reminding me that saving them had important implications. I arrived at the artifact that was keeping the gateway open, stretched my mana, and started examining it. The first thing I noticed was ... the artifact was a masterpiece, the kind I had to work on for years even to have a hope of copying. It was incredible, elegant ... yet recognizable.

The touch of the skills was unmistakable. It was heavily reliant on Arcana, but it was not the only thing that it was relying on. I could see the traces of Darkness, Light, Elemental, all carefully separated by the ingenious applications of crafting to prevent a cascading failure.

Then, after a minute of studying, I realized that it wasn't even the real artifact. It was just a marker, not unlike my own beacon wards, just more advanced, guiding the pathway to here. The real task of maintaining the pathway was done from the other side.

And, there was no reason to build something that magnificent, that strong, just to move people in the same plane. It might have been a move of luxury, but while the Eternals could be wasteful, it was not to this degree.

No, I just needed to stretch my mana inside the gateway to feel the immensity of the distance it was traveling. The other end was not somewhere that was in this plane. For a moment, I wondered if the other end led back to my home.

If that were the case, I would have found myself in an important dilemma.



But,, after examining the ephemeral tunnel, I felt that it was not as strong to resist the chaos of the Primordial Aether. Tracing, I felt the other half of the artifact right at the planar border, cutting through the swirling mana shield, uncaring of the long-term damage it was leaving.

Then, before I could decipher more, I felt the artifact on my side growing chaotic, far too sudden and intense to be accidental. I could feel the different types of mana mixing together, about to explode.

I infused it with Tantric immediately to calm that mana down, which also ruined the device without any hope of working again — but not only it prevented the explosion, but also it saved the device for further study.

However, as much as I wanted to ignore everything else and study the structure, I wasn't able to do so. Not when I could already feel the destabilizing tunnel being flooded with Necrotic mana. It was a good way to prevent me from following them.

Unfortunately, it was very effective.

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 22

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 22

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 16 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 3272}

{Pseudo-HP: 8000 Mana: 15000}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 18183}

Elven Priestess - XXXX}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Six

Even as I gathered my mana to respond to the sudden flood of necrotic mana, I was thanking my luck that I hadn't converted the Divine Spark I had collected earlier into Stats but left it with the Divine Forest.

If I hadn't, I might have been forced to create a shield around the Tree of Life and retreat inside to protect Seldanna and abandon the rest of the plane.

It sounded absurd,, but the amount of Necrotic mana they were channeling using the tunnel was simply that suffocating, the kind that was counted in hundreds of millions by the measurement of the System.

Ironically, the only reason it didn't obliterate everything immediately was the structure of the magical pathway. It was strong enough to survive the stress of the planar border, therefore it was strong enough not to shatter under the great flood of Necrotic mana, limiting their throughput.

Still, it was enough to be measured in hundreds of thousands for each second, a huge version of the river that I had dealt with when I first arrived. Naturally, the response was the same. I did my best to create a huge ward. It was a crude one, but against an unrolled wave of mana, elegance was not what the ward was supposed to display.

Resilience was.

Even though it was simple, the ward had three layers. First, the outermost layer; made from a mixture of Nature Spark and Nature Mana.

{-500 Nature Spark, God Forest}

The outermost layer was deliberately weak, not even attempting to block the flow of mana and just letting it flow inside. After all, the only function of it was to hide the second layer from the watchful eyes of the Eternals.

I had no idea how much detection capability they maintained under the suffocating deluge of Necrotic mana, but better safe than revealing my greatest secret.

The second layer was made of Tantric mana. Luckily, unlike Divine Spark, Necrotic mana was much less resilient against manipulation of the Divine Spark, especially when it was used like this, without any shape or form of destruction.

And, my great reserves of Purified Spark allowed me to achieve that very rapidly.

I had pulled a lot of nature mana from the environment to kickstart the process, the elves around me crying in fear at the sudden draught of mana, their nature too aligned with it not to care about its absence. Busy saving the world, I ignored them as I shaped Tantric mana into a huge sieve, forcing the necrotic mana to pass through its gaps and purifying it in the process.

Then, the third part, a strong funnel made of Nature mana, connecting the purified flow into the God Forest, taking the purified flow and storing them in the depths of their structure.

I could have let the purified mana flood the Aether dimension, but that would be harmful in two ways. First, as it flooded the plane, it would give the undead some easy targets to exploit. And it would make the Eternals suspicious, making them question why a Nature God was producing pure mana rather than nature mana.

Instead, I let the God Forest devour the flood, even going as far as to force their leaves to suddenly turn brown, like they were straining under the great flood of energy. It had an immediate impact on the morale of the elves, especially when combined with the absence of the Nature mana, but I wasn't in the mood to coddle them.

Revealing my secret to Eternals would have been much worse for them. Eternals were willing to destroy the plane behind them just to keep their presence a secret. I didn't want to imagine the lengths they would go to catch me if they realized the true nature of my abilities.

Even just as a competition for their hunger for Divine Spark, they would target me, and the less said about my true identity and how they would react, the better.

I stood still, straining myself to the limit as I made sure the ward worked as intended, turning their devastating attack into nourishment for the forest.

Even as I did so, I couldn't help but think about what had caused them to respond in such a devastating manner. Maybe they had noticed I had been fiddling with their artifact on this site and decided to prevent me from learning their secrets.

Maybe they were alerted by my fake god role and decided to retreat, not willing to face a god.

Or maybe, it was much simpler. They had just realized that the elves stopped arriving, and moved to the next stage of their plan. It wasn't unlikely, especially since the sudden flood of necrotic mana was hardly something that could be put together at the last second.

It must have been planned beforehand.

“And, that answers whether they were just here as an accident or not,” I murmured. I was already suspecting that, but the nature of their response was further evidence that they were the ones leading the undead invasions — though whether the undead invasion force was aware of that fact or they were just unwilling puppets was another question.

One that didn't have any important implications in the short term, especially since I was determined to hide my true nature regardless. I couldn't be sure that the Eternals would stop observing the dimensions after that.

I was hoping that it would be enough, but soon, I noticed a shift in the pathway. Strong as it was, under the constant rush of necrotic mana, it was shattering slowly. I would have felt relief if I was having trouble handling the rush.

Unfortunately, the situation was the exact opposite. After the shattering of the pathway, the necrotic mana would spread around the Aether dimension, giving the undead a decisive advantage. And, while I could protect the capital, the same was not true for the rest of the world.

Luckily, I had some time to respond. I floated upward, opened my hand, and made a show of throwing seeds into the air, which glowed with a blinding green before they spread around four corners of the world.

It was just a light show, and at the same time, I reached Seldanna. She was still in a dreamlike state, and while our connection was mutating, it was still enough to use her as a conduit, which, in turn, allowed me to reach the Tree of Life.

And, there, through the roots, I connected with the plane ... I wanted to celebrate, and I wanted to hurl in disgust, the sensation of being one with a tree not exactly the sanest of sensations. However, it was not a waste.

The Tree of Life was a unique entity, one that was connected to not only every living being living in this plane either directly or indirectly. It even linked to the plane itself... Enough for me to use it to give every living being one order.

It was not something I was trying to pull blindly. I was trying to copy a feat that I had seen in the memories of the unfortunate god that I had slain earlier, a method that he had used many times during his desperate battle to give commands to his forces regardless of distance or loyalty, accompanied by overwhelming compulsion.

## RETURN TO THE CAPITAL!

It was an order that reverberated through the mana itself, accompanied by a great amount of mana — one that emptied all the mana my God Forest had been storing. The mana radiated across the plane, not only carrying my order around the plane, but also empowering all the trees and other immobile beings to react.

Some uprooted and turned into treants, dashing toward the capital with great speed. The plants too weak to handle it forced their Divine Sparks into their seeds, seeds that birds flew down and grabbed before they started their migration toward the center.

Small or large, every being started rushing toward the center. Elves could have rejected that call, their sapience giving them the chance to reject ... luckily, they were not stupid enough to do so when every single plant, insect, and beast was desperately rushing toward the center of the plane.

“Success,” I murmured as I cast a large illusion around me. It was necessary.

I didn't want the elves to see their new god collapsing on the ground, puking blood as he struggled to stay conscious.

Hardly a divine view.

Trying to pull that trick despite the conflicting nature had been challenging. I realized that, if I tried to pull that off without the Tree of Life as a medium, I would have extinguished my soul. Even under the circumstances, the damage was not inconsiderable. Luckily, the impact was blunted enough that I could feel my soul was still whole.

A little bruised, maybe, but nothing a little push wouldn't cure.

The same couldn't be said for my body.

{- 3200 Pseudo-HP}

Even as the healing energies rushed into my body, I could feel the structure slowly collapsing. Desperate, I grabbed my Purified Spark, feeding it into my Stats to enhance my Endurance.

[-3084 Purified Spark}

{+8 Endurance}

As my body slowly got stronger, the collapse of my body stopped, and slowly reversed. I wanted to do nothing but lay down and sleep for a day ... or a week. Unfortunately, I could already feel the necrotic mana filling the Aether dimension.

The undead was about to receive an incredible boost...

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 22

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 22

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 24 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 188}

{Pseudo-HP: 5800 Mana: 15000}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 18183}

Elven Priestess - XXXX}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Seven

As much as I wanted to lay on the ground and slowly recover after casting my first proper godly feat, that was not something I could do.

Not when the undead that surrounded the capital received an intense boost to their abilities as the necrotic mana continued to fill the Aether dimension of the plane. It was yet to reach a point of diffusing into the physical plane, but I wasn't the only one that could reach the Astral plane and pull some mana.

They just lacked my ability to break down Aether into mana, which limited the effectiveness of such a move significantly. But, at a point where the Aether was still being filled with an incredible amount of necrotic mana, that was not needed.

The first thing, I had given an order to the God Forest, and a great number of treants rushed forward toward the outer line to reinforce the battle, to get rid of the advance undead force before they could get even stronger.

I would have intervened directly, but creating a ward around the capital was more important. I rapidly worked, ignoring the strain in my body as I built a barrier between the Astral plane and the physical side, one that would block the mana flow — and, as an added benefit, teleportation as well.

I was copying another trick that I had seen in the memories of the nature god, which didn't make erecting the barrier any easier. If I used just the principles of such a concept and focused on building a barrier, it would have been much faster...

Unfortunately, it would also risk shouting my true origin to the Eternals, who were still busy pumping the plane with necrotic mana. I didn't know just how intensely they were observing now that they were about to leave.

They wouldn't miss a ward that was larger than a mountain.

I squeezed my teeth as I focused on building the nature ward all over the capital, leaving only the roots of the Tree of Life defenseless, letting them die temporarily. If I had the opportunity, I would have saved them, but with the whole plane suffocated by the necrotic mana, doing so would give my enemies too many chances to attack, and I doubted I could stop those even if I revealed the full range of my abilities.



I was still far from the peak of my power and injured; not to mention a full-fledged necromancer assault confident enough to deal with a god was not a trivial attack.

Especially since it was still being supported by the Eternals.

As I continued to build the wards, I couldn't help but think whether the Eternals pulled the same trick every plane they had intervened, or it was something they were forced to do because of my sudden intervention. I hoped that it was the latter, because it would mean their current attack was forcing them to waste some valuable resources.

I knew they were strong, but imagining them treating what had just happened as a disposable resource was too hard to comprehend. The necrotic mana in the Aether dimension was still growing, and the planar border had already changed its nature.

Before the attack, it was a relatively even mixture of necrotic mana and nature mana, conflicting at the edges, but as the Aether continued to fill with necrotic mana, the balance shifted. The nature mana was demolished until it turned into a small point right at the top, a helpless small circle continuously supported by the Tree of Life ... while the rest of the border turned necrotic.

I was tempted to cut the connection completely, but I could sense some thin connections between that border and Seldanna. I had already cut the roots of the tree which slowed her Apothesis significantly. I didn't dare to do that last part.

Instead, I stretched a connection between it and the God Forest, ensuring enough supply of mana to prevent its collapse.

And, just like that, the preparations were complete... It was time to hunt some undead.

I stretched my attention along the border, and noticed that, at several spots, undead had been already reinforced. Interestingly, that reinforcement came in the form of lichs and death knights using their flying mounts — bone dragons and other impressive beings — rushing toward the defensive line, which, despite the addition of the ward, already buckling down.

It was an impressive showing ... but my frown was more about confusion than fear. Their approach was rather more chaotic than I expected, and actually reduced the impact of the force they could bear.

"Of course," I murmured a moment later as the realization hit. They were not attacking ... but they were racing forward. Now that they believed their success was imminent, they were more

interested in stealing the most Divine Spark they could rather than making their victory perfect.

They clearly didn't care about their losses but their individual benefit.

At a distance, I even saw a necromancer killing another, using the crystal to trap his essence. It didn't surprise me. Even the elves were more than happy to betray their kind for power.

Necromancy wasn't exactly an art famous for kindness and self-sacrifice.

I wasn't complaining. Their habits worked excellently to my benefit. That meant, I had the space to pull a little trick. I cast an illusion spell, one that created a floating, wooden copy of the god, the same gold and white coloration of the Tree of Life — another trick from the memories — and sent it toward the most intense spot of the battle.

The speed of it was impressive, and the constant nature of mana it radiated was enough to entice the elves to fight harder. The undead looked hesitant as they pulled back, but rather than fully retreating, they sent hordes and hordes of undead toward it, while the strongest liches connected to it.

Yet, the moment some necrotic energy landed on the surface, a crack of diseased energy and rotten wood appeared. The treant let out a display of pain before it let out a huge flood of nature energy, recovering from the damage and empowering the nearby elves at the same time.

During that display, a group of leaves disappeared permanently, like the treant had made some permanent sacrifice for that burst.

The undead was too smart to miss that sign of weakness, and they rushed forward, unaware that they were attacking an empty puppet connected to God Forest, just a conduit for all the mana I had stored from the earlier attack.

That addition ensured that the most important defensive point wouldn't collapse. Another illusion spell, and I had turned into an ordinary elven warrior, and rushed toward the weakest area... Once I arrived there, I cast another spell, and turned into a mere skeleton warrior, radiating necrotic energy.

The chaos of the battlefield was perfect as I rushed among the horde of zombies, not many people paying attention to the movement of the undead. Soon, I reached the first necromancer, who was yet to take his step into the lichdom. A swing of my sword was enough to destroy him as I pressed a crystal into his corpse.

Of course, both the swing and the crystal were unnecessary. Just a small invasion of mana was all I needed to steal his divine spark, and purify rapidly.

{+34 Necrotic Spark, Chosen}

“Nice,” I murmured as I measured the amount of strength he granted to me, even though it had come with a sense of disgust. Holding Necrotic Spark inside my soul, I could already feel a sense of corruption radiating, showing just how unnatural its existence was.

Not something I wished to do, but the circumstances forced me to do so. The sight of a poor necromancer, fighting with his peers behind the battle lines was much less attention-grabbing.

Especially when I could already see dozens of duels going on.

With my body injured, I wasn't in a position to just fight against the undead, and I doubted they would be still fighting against each other if I managed to assassinate them from a distance. It might force them to gather their forces together and deliver a coordinated assault — which was not something I could handle in my wounded state.

Worse, any hint of success might trigger the Eternals to act even more overtly. Ideally, I didn't want to see what else they had in store, ever, but if I was going to see it, I preferred to delay it until I could completely recover.

First, I cast a spell on myself, changing my disguise from a skeleton knight, then, gathered some necrotic mana from my environment, and raised a bunch of skeletons that were under my direct command. Giving orders to corpses didn't feel nice, but I ignored the disgust and ordered them to spread around...

I had a lot of undead to hunt.

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 22

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 22

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 24 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 188}

{Pseudo-HP: 5800 Mana: 15000}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Necrotic - Chosen 34

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 18183}

Elven Priestess - XXXX}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Eight

Unfortunately, just because I looked like a necromancer didn't mean that I could just destroy them. Indiscriminately. The way the necromancers acted showed that they had a complicated web of alliances between them, and while the betrayals were common, I could also see several that was not being touched despite the chaos around them.

Considering they were not particularly strong among the necromancers, it was not hard to guess that they were servants of the stronger beings. For the moment, I left those alone as well, looking for more appropriate prey.

As my skeleton knights spread around, I started looking around, looking for prey. Soon, I found my first one, a necromancer that was rushing back, chased by two mounted skeletons, his wounded state proving just how badly he had been defeated.

"Aner!" he shouted desperately as he shouted at a distance, probably to the controller of the skeletons, who had been doing his best to retreat. "Do you think you can just kill me without consequence? The others will make you pay!"

"Only if they survive," Aner shouted back, several hundred feet away while his minions rushed forward, one of them carrying the crystal. I sent a skeleton forward, doing my best to empower it with speed...

But the skeleton shattered halfway.

"Okay, better be careful," I murmured, realizing necromancy might be a tad more complicated than I had assumed. I didn't have necromancy as a skill, so I was roughly copying the way I had animated the treants, using the necrotic mana to enhance the skeletons.

However, I had missed one important detail ... treants were still living beings, and the excess nature mana just made them grow and strengthen.

Necromancy was the exact opposite. Necrotic mana corroded even the remains, and the excess mana hurt the skeletons. The true strength didn't come from the physical power of the shell, but from the soul, whose power was forcibly plundered through the connection.

And, since I had no intention of mutilating the souls of the poor dead elves — I had my limits — I needed to find an alternative path.

Luckily, unlike the necromancers that were using the opportunity to kill and massacre, I had

different options. The skeleton shattered after the empowerment, because it was weak, which meant, there was an easy answer.

Use a stronger skeleton.

Luckily, I didn't need to go around with a shovel and dig to find a stronger skeleton. Instead, I just targeted one of the shattered and abandoned zombies, and cast a spell to separate the flesh from the bones. Then, I targeted the bones with a flood of mana, using my full range of biomancy abilities.

The treatment cost me a pretty chunk of mana, but considering the ordinary bones soon received a strength that could rival bone dragons, it was acceptable.

"Arise, my minion," I muttered as I chuckled, finally raising a skeleton that could rival a strong skeleton warrior.

Though, I had no doubt that any necromancers would have been maddened by watching me waste such an absurd amount of mana, easily touching ten thousand barriers, just to raise a weak minion. It went against the whole principle of necromancy, its greatest advantage was its absurd mana efficiency.

During my experimentation, the skeleton knights had already managed to deal with the escaping necromancer, and captured its spark into a crystal container. They were already returning back to their owner, when they were ambushed by my new skeleton knights, and smashed.

And, before the necromancer could even react, it covered the distance and brought it to me.

"Thanks for the crystal," I shouted happily as I used my mana to repeat the same process on the bones of a horse, and started running away.

Predictably, the angry necromancer chased me. "Stop, you bastard!" he shouted, but as I ignored him, he continued to chase me.

"Catch me if you can," I shouted, a little absurd, but the allure of the crystal in my hand was enough to anger him. A good excuse, I decided as I used my empowered skeleton to steal a few crystals, and soon, I was being chased by a large group of necromancers.

The first few that joined the crowd were the ones that lost their crystals, but after a few, some greedy necromancers joined the mess without needing me to anger them.

Of course, I wasn't idle while running. First, I drained the crystals I had stolen until I had empowered my fake Necrotic Spark, until it reached a reasonable limit, allowing me to control a small horde of skeletons with ease, but not corrupting my soul any further.

{+65 Necrotic Spark, Chosen}

Once I had gathered enough Necrotic Spark to give a convincing outlook of a strong necromancer — necessary for the next step of my plan — I had drained the rest of the Crystals I had stolen, empowering myself.

{+562 Purified Spark}

Not a huge amount, but every bit counted, especially since the next step was going to be pointlessly difficult.

I ran, until I saw a nice small valley that would work for my benefit. It was clear that it had been a beautiful vista just a day ago, but the undead attack had already trampled it to destroy most of the vegetation, and the remaining plants were already dying due to the increasing density of the necrotic mana.

As I entered the valley, I was already crafting some destructive arrays, mixing Necrotic mana with Arcana to create some necrotic bolts that would be effective against other undead.

"Finally—" one of the necromancers exclaimed as he charged with a burst of speed after noticing I slowed down, enthusiastic to get the first hit, but two of my skeletons ambushed him, killing him easily. They didn't even carry a crystal, so I used my mana connection to absorb his Spark before he could react.

{+81 Purified Spark}

"Not bad," I murmured even as I noticed the amount of Divine Spark he possessed, enough to make him a significant enemy — at least in the context of the amount of strength I was revealing — if he didn't act too greedy.

Unfortunately, the necromancers might be greedy, but they were not idiots. After watching the fate of the first one, the others slowed down, while a few of them rushed forward to cut the sight of the valley.

Not exactly a problem since I had no intention of retreating. Instead, I ordered my skeletons to rush and destroy what the other necromancers had brought in. The amount looked impressive

at first glance, but only because I could count almost fifty necromancers that had been split from the main group.

With that fact considered, the horde was relatively small, the majority of their horde too slow to follow up with the chase.

“Good,” I said as I watched my skeletons stand against the mismatched army of the necromancers that chased me, their job made even easier by the fact that the necromancers had no idea how to cooperate with each other. None of them worked together with each other, they were just some that attacked me randomly...

A few of the smarter ones tried to retreat. The first one succeeded — as I needed a bait — but the second one hit against a ward, bouncing back. “It’s a trap,” he shouted.

“Smart, but too late,” I said as I waved my hand, casting another illusion, one that, paradoxically, looked like I had just broken my illusion. I looked like an ancient lich, radiating necrotic mana to reinforce the. View.

“Just attack together, he can’t destroy all of us,” one of them shouted. “We just need to resist until the rest of our horde catches up, and destroys the wards from outside—” he tried to explain, but that was all he was able to say until a necrotic bolt hit him.

He didn’t even try to dodge, feeling that the bolt was not a threat. The necrotic bolts still hurt them rather than benefit them, but their resistance was strong enough to treat that as a nuisance. Unfortunately for him, I had used the necrotic bolt just as an anchor, and the real work was done by the Arcana mana in it, exploding to destroy its whole structure.

{+34 Purified Spark}

Not as strong as the previous necromancer, but still better than nothing.

“We should attack,” one of the other necromancers said, but he stopped when I waved my hand, and an army of skeletons rose from the ground. As the army marched toward them, most of them decided to break the wards was the smarter choice.

Pity, as only the first line of skeletons was actually real, the rest was just statues of colored earth just giving the aura of the undead. However, without thousands points of mana to reinforce each of them, they would have shattered at the slightest touch... Making them only useful as tools of intimidation.



However, the selfish nature of the undead worked well, and fifty necromancers that had been happily chasing a great harvest turned to try and run ... allowing me to easily harvest them.

{+3190 Purified Spark}

“Not a bad harvest,” I murmured as I took down the last necromancer. Not a bad one indeed, especially since I just stole their Divine Spark, and not the crystals they had carried. I had rapidly absorbed the Necrotic Spark first, turning it into Purified Spark, absorbing it easily, while I channeled the Nature Spark they had captured into God Forest.

{+2420 Purified Spark}

{+5128 Nature Spark, God Forest}

“They had been working harder than I expected,” I said with a frown, realizing that I still need to protect the tribal elves that had been retreating back. But not immediately.

I first needed to deal with the large chunk of the undead army reacting to my latest move...

—

{Strength: 16 Charisma: 22

Precision: 16 Perception: 16

Agility: 16 Manipulation: 22

Speed: 16 Intelligence: 16

Endurance: 24 Wisdom: 16}

{Purified Divine Spark: 6475}

{Pseudo-HP: 5800 Mana: 15000}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Necrotic - Chosen 99

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 23305}

Elven Priestess - XXXX}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Seventy-Nine

I could sense the movement outside the barrier getting more intense as a significant part of the Undead Forces started focusing on my little 'rebellion' rather than the ongoing siege.

I was confident in meeting their charge, but that didn't mean I wouldn't turn my nose down to some extra insurance. After a quick calculation, I started feeding my Stats with more Divine Spark, and soon, I felt the familiar and welcome burst of energy filling my body and soul.

{-6083 Purified Spark}

{+3 Strength}

{+3 Precision}

{+3 Agility}

{+3 Speed}

{+3 Perception}

{+3 Intelligence}

{+3 Wisdom}

And, as an added benefit, the improvements helped me to handle the technique I had used prematurely, finally feeling like I could cut loose without risking the destruction of my soul. The improvement wasn't as intense as the Endurance, but under the circumstances, it was still welcome.

This time, I needed to give an explosive display.

And, while the state of the Aether dimension, slowly filling to the brim with Necrotic mana, was horrible news, it did give an excuse about how a previously unknown lich among them could explode with such explosiveness.

I wanted to leverage the opportunity as much as possible, displaying greater competence than the other necromancers to destroy them, and then hopefully writing it off as some kind of accidental display of capability.

Just to make it more convincing, I started building a horrible, butchered version of a

teleportation ward, one that would just create a temporary breach between Aether and Physical planes, one that would flood this side with intense Necrotic mana.

Of course, there was a reason most didn't do such a silly thing, because aether particles that weren't broken down into mana were very dangerous. There were ways of pushing them back to Aether Dimension, but it was enough to occupy a qualified mage for a decent time.

A rather explosive method, but considering I could even deal with Primordial Aether, hardly a scary proposition.

Soon, I turned my attention toward the next stage, and started transforming the wards, which were already buckling under the constant attacks of the elite. "Oh, they are strong," I murmured as I took note of the intensity of the attacks, glad that I didn't confront them directly.

Their empowered state was no joke. Even with the God Forest constantly filling me with mana, I doubted that I could win against them.

That made me change my mind about the nature of the attack. It might have been a bit more suspicious than I preferred, but I started using my crafting to create a huge number of earthen arrows, easily shattered, each holding a small flicker of light mana combined with Proto-HP inside.

Despite its low mana requirement, I wasn't able to create a lot, as the little amount of Light Spark I had showed its limits even with the perfectly purified mana I was feeding to quicken the process. I barely managed to concoct a hundred of them before the wards finally reached their limits.

The moment the first ward shattered, it triggered an explosive reaction that spread through the undead forces, and I used the chaos to target several stronger death knights among them, hoping that it would slow them enough, while their relative lack of magical capability would cause them to miss the trick.

I wasn't afraid of the liches noticing my trick, not from a distance while all that chaos was going on. In this particular case, the influx of necrotic mana actually worked against them, easily destroying the light mana before they could start assessing the reason for their death knights' intense injuries.

Of course, they rushed forward, racing to destroy me before taking back all the Divine Spark crystals I had gathered, unaware that they had been long absorbed and turned into my stats.

There, the second part of my plan started. I triggered the ward I had prepared, and the wall between Aether and Physical weakened, a veritable flood of Necrotic mana and unbroken Aether hitting the arena.

The telltale sign of a suicide attack. The fastest ones found themselves in the Aether dimension, before I could even steal their Divine Spark. I used the opportunity to change my disguise and teleport.

Just like that, I was in the middle of the undead horde ... while they were blinded by the necrotic mana. The intensity of Necrotic mana was supposed to help them, but such an intense amount was enough to blind them.

I set up a ward around myself to protect myself, then I started dashing among them, a huge sword of necrotic energy in my hand, every swing taking down a death knight or a lich.

Of course, there was no way pure necrotic mana could kill them easily. It was just a bridge for me to hide the flow of Tantric mana, rapidly draining their Spark for my purposes, the numbers rising more and more.

With their own spark and the crystals they had carried with them, it was an incredible harvest.

{+2040 Purified Spark}

{+3153 Nature Spark, God Forest}

Not a bad harvest, and it was just starting. As more and more leaders among the undead fell, it left their horde without a controller, and the flood of necrotic energy didn't make things any easier — especially with occasional Aether particles preventing them from making easy use of that mess.

I was about to continue making use of the chaos, when a bone dragon rushed forward toward us from the back of the line, already casting spells, and the breach I had created started to close down.

A familiar face, I realized — well, metaphorically, as lichs hardly had any identifying features in their actual faces.

It was the lich I had seen when I first arrived, the one that had closed the breach at the outer wards. The speed at the breach closed despite the pressure off the flow showed that he was not a weakling. Ordinarily, the smart thing was to pull back and disappear while the strong lich

dealt with the troublesome breach.

Unfortunately, his appearance meant that he would soon join the main attack, and considering I was the one that was handling the defense until Seldanna could wake up from her Apothesis, it was better to deal with him.

The question was, how.

I thought about challenging him as another lich, an extension of my current ploy, but after some consideration, I removed that. It was believable to have a rogue, overlooked lich could make an arrogant move to kill the rest, but there were limits to his abilities.

I had already faked the death of a lich, and if I appeared again, not only I would reveal the death was fake, but also I would have burst with enough power to overcome a top-tier lich.

Especially since I didn't know I could actually take him down while acting as a lich. Using necrotic mana was not a simple thing. Even now, I could feel the strain of the cursed effect of wielding the energy anathema to life, and that was only when I used it for effects of trickery.

Facing a strong lich in a direct duel was not a challenge I was confident while restricting myself to necromancy.

Especially that, against a competent caster, I couldn't easily slip tricks like my disguised light arrows. He would notice that immediately. And, a necromancer that could use the light magic was too much of a curiosity, possibly enough to inform the Eternals — especially if the extent of their cooperation was as intense as I suspected — ruining all the effort I had put into disguising myself.

Luckily, that was not my only option. I didn't need to stay limited to necrotic magic ... not with the convenient presence of a huge avatar. I focused on my connection with the God Forest, which had been recently beefed up by our connection.

As I tried to indirectly cast a complicated spell, another death knight attacked me at the same time with three skeletons, realizing that the ward around me marked me as a point of suspicion — that, or trying to score some easy Divine Spark in the chaos. I absentmindedly dodged it and counter-attacked, my retaliation dealing with him.

{+33 Purified Spark}

Not a huge reward, but better than nothing.

Before another death knight could notice me, a huge root suddenly burst out of the ground, and a huge flower exploded from its center, spreading hundreds of seeds, and the moment they touched the ground, they started turning into a small horde of treants, attacking against the horde.

The god forest had supplied them with a great amount of nature mana, but with every inch of air filled with necrotic mana, that would be only enough to keep them alive for a few moments.

Not that I cared as I stepped on top of the root and changed my disguise once more, once again donning the outlook of the nature god.

After all, what was absurd about an actual god taking down a lich, no matter how strong.

—

{Strength: 19 Charisma: 22

Precision: 19 Perception: 19

Agility: 19 Manipulation: 22

Speed: 19 Intelligence: 19

Endurance: 24 Wisdom: 19}

{Purified Divine Spark: 2465}

{Pseudo-HP: 5800 Mana: 15000}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Necrotic - Chosen 99

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 26458}

Elven Priestess - XXXX}

—  
[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]



# Chapter Two Hundred Eighty

The moment he noticed my approach — on a rapidly growing root — the lich stopped his attempts to seal the breach completely and started moving away, not willing to deal with an unknown enemy.

Unfortunately, he was just too tempting a target for me to let go. Not just because I wanted to get rid of a tempting target, but also because I noticed that with the breach still open, the undead army had to stop their attack and focus on dealing with the spreading Aether particles, banishing them back to their rightful place taking a significant dimension.

A good excuse for my huge treant to suddenly move faster and start dealing with the undead.

{+54 Purified Spark}

A death knight pulled late from the frontlines, turning into my food as I used the treant to absorb the spark once more.

A profitable endeavor all around, giving me another reason to chase the lich even as he tried to escape back to the main army.

He was fast enough to escape me if I relied on the root to follow him ... so I cast another spell. From the halfway point, the root broke, but before it could fall, it sprout two thick branches, growing in opposite directions. Soon, those branches sprouted further, followed by leaves. The main root transformed at the same time...

And, soon, I was perched on top of a huge wooden dragon, one that was flying even faster than the bone dragon the lich had been using, each flap of its wings spreading a thick rush of mana, enough to momentarily suppress the necrotic mana.

It was another trick I had learned from the memories of the god. Apparently, gods loved to create draconic mounts — much to the distaste of actual dragons, if the scraps I got were any indicator — and even better, my memories had much more impressive specimens of the same spell...

Which meant, my fake draconic mount was not suspicious when cast by a diminished god who had just woken up from his long slumber.

Of course, the memories showed that such a beast would have required a sentient center and a lot of Divine Spark to function properly — and mine was essentially a pupped linked to my God

Forest — but the show was sufficiently impressive.

“Being challenged by an actual god. As a little demigod of Necrodes, I’m honored,” the lich shouted even as I closed in the distance.

I chuckled at the dig the lich threw, trying to trigger the pride of a god to create an opportunity for himself.

And, amusingly, based on the memories I had watched, I could see that such an attempt actually had a high chance of working. The nature god had been a prideful creature, and he might have actually stopped because chasing a demigod was beneath his glory. The memories showed that, even as the battle that forced him to slumber turned desperate, he rarely took the role on any battlefield that didn’t have a ‘worthy’ foe.

Instead letting his worshippers die in droves.

“Do I need to bother horror when I slap down disgusting mosquitos that had disturbed my sleep,” I shouted back, my magically enhanced voice exploding in the opening, the mana radiated turning into mana arrows and destroying the zombies underneath us.

Along with that, I sent several wooden bolts dense with nature mana to the lich, but he easily dodged them. Nature mana was hardly the most fitting choice for a high-speed flying chase. I wished that I could use my light mana without raising too many questions, as it would have worked excellently during a desperate chase.

A good way to deal with them while still acting the arrogance of a god.

The lich didn’t answer, continuing to escape, though I had noted that he had already changed his direction, likely trying to bring me into a trap.

I was tempted to turn back, but seeing that the first stage of the undead siege was finally broken and elves were trying to recover from the intense battle, they could use the time to heal, rest, and erect some wards.

The wards I had established kept them safe from the ever-increasing density of Necrotic mana, while the sight of a god counter-attacking should be enough to temporarily dissuade the remnants of the undead from attacking — especially with the constant Aether particles making their lives more difficult.

That would change if they tried to counterattack, but I used my treant to give them another

order, asking them to create a stronger defensive line.

Of course, even at a distance, I could see a few arrogant ones ignoring those orders and moving forward, but I ignored them. With the necrotic mana getting denser and denser, such an attempt was equivalent to a suicide attempt.

And I was too busy to save the lives of morons.

I ignored them and focused on my counterattack. My rush was valuable because it made the forward undead force shatter and retreat — which would be critical if I ever wanted to create a safe corridor for the tribal elves to arrive.

I continued following the lich deeper into his territory ... but then, I felt a flicker from inside. I was about to write that off as another sign of damage, but another flicker followed ... and I realized where it was coming from...

The necrotic spark.

It was suddenly far more livelier, moving with an intent, outside my control.

That was not good news, not at all.

{+90 Purified Spark}

{-99 Necrotic Spark, Chosen}

I immediately followed it in two moves, which explained the mismatching numbers of the notification. First, I immediately converted the most into a pure spark, keeping it separate from the rest for a moment to make sure that effect didn't continue before letting it be absorbed into the rest of my purified spark reserves.

At the same time, I pushed the remaining necrotic spark into the crystal, carefully watching its movements. It started to shuffle more as I followed the lich, for about twenty seconds, then stabilized.

If I hadn't been familiar with a necrotic spark — both with using and storing — I might have been convinced that it was just a momentary magical effect, of the increasing necrotic mana intensity around me, but I was able to notice it.

The necrotic spark was ... for the lack of a better term ... obedient.

That couldn't be good news, especially with the subtle route change of the lich. I was being led by a trap, clearly, but I started to feel that the trap was not just there to delay me while the lich retreated. Luckily, testing was easy.

I pulled back the mana output of my wooden dragon slightly, as if I was slowly reaching my limit as I got away from the capital. A good display of fake weakness that explained my sudden slowing.

The effect was not too pronounced, as I acted unaware as I sent another wave of wooden projectiles toward the lich, the kind that he easily dodged several times. Yet, this time, one of them clipped the wing of its bone dragon, and it slowed down slightly.

Just to make sure I still had the hope to catch him.

It gave me all the evidence I needed to confirm my guess. Whatever trap he had was not about saving his life — well, unlife — but taking me down.

Whether it was to disable, injure, or kill, I had no idea. I wished I could cast some diagnostic spells to check, but unfortunately, at this point, the increasing density of Necrotic mana worked against that option, ready to disperse anything but the strongest and structurally-sound detection spell.

And, any such attempt would shout that I had detected their trap, making them act earlier. I could turn and retreat, and the distance would make their planned ambush much less effective ... but unfortunately, that option was blocked due to another reason.

The arrogance I had displayed earlier.

It was a beautiful tool. The pointless arrogance of a god provided a convenient explanation for many of the seemingly stupid moves I had done, preventing my allies and enemies alike from digging too deep. It was too convenient to lose.

Instead, I decided to double down, and suddenly ordered my wood dragon to stop and dive. The lich took a second to react to that sudden change, and at that moment, the dragon had already landed on the empty field, the plants already dead — and a few hundred zombies easily demolished.

"I don't have all day chasing a useless pile of bones," I said as I waved my hand, and a forest started to grow around me. It was something an arrogant nature god could do, creating a new forest rather than chasing the enemies further, like they could be dealt with any time.

Of course, the fact that a growing forest around him could be weaponized very aggressively against an attack was just a coincidence.

Certainly.

The only thing that saddened me was the inability to draw some of the Divine Spark of the Forest to ready myself for the upcoming battle. With the forest split between two locations, it was tempting to bring all of my lagging stats to twenty.

Would that make a great difference ... no, but it would have given me some psychological confidence.

Pity.

—

{Strength: 19 Charisma: 22

Precision: 19 Perception: 19

Agility: 19 Manipulation: 22

Speed: 19 Intelligence: 19

Endurance: 24 Wisdom: 19}

{Purified Divine Spark: 2600}

{Pseudo-HP: 5800 Mana: 15000}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 26458}

Elven Priestess - XXXX}

—  
[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Eighty-One

As I watched the lich come to a sudden stop after realizing I was not following anymore, I realized another drawback of fighting against them, one that was worse than their endless numbers.

They didn't have proper facial expressions, which sapped the enjoyment I would have felt from shocking him with my current stop. He observed me for a moment as I stood in the middle of a forest, my wood dragon long mixed back into the forest.

"I would have never thought that a god would have been a coward," he shouted, his voice enhanced magically. A childish taunt, which was made worse by the fact that everything I had seen in the memories suggested that the deceased god would have fallen for that.

I didn't even bother to answer as I raised my hand, and the forest that grew around me started spitting out acorns. Only a fraction of it targeted the lich, forcing him to escape, while most of it spread between me and the capital, a forest growing around the undead force.

The guardian trees were quick to attack them, demolishing them easily once the thick necrotic energy was destroyed by the growth of the forest, the trees sapping the mana and replacing it with nature mana. The lack of strong liches and death knights — that already retreated the moment I pushed forward, smart enough to realize the initial assault failed and not willing to risk themselves — made the destruction even easier.

Unfortunately, it also meant that the fruits of the rapid success were meager. I had managed to break thousands of crystals that were in the possession of the weaker zombies. Unfortunately, there was a reason those were left under the control of the zombies, the amount of Spark they contained was truly meager, most not even reaching the mark of one point.

{+219 Purified Spark}

{+2153 Nature Spark, God Forest}

Still, strengthening the god forest had been a nice benefit. Before I could enjoy it, however, I saw the lich I had been chasing turn back, and soon, five other liches appeared around him, teleporting.

I examined the necrotic spark I kept imprisoned, trying to if there was any increase in its weird movement. There was not, at least not yet, meaning the liches that joined didn't bring whatever

trap they had planned with them.

I could play with them while they struggled.

“Let’s hunt ourselves a god,” one of the lichs shouted as he cast a spell, and necrotic bolts started to rain. I didn’t even bother looking at him, continuing to expand the secondary layer of the forest until it turned into a shield around the capital, battling with the necrotic mana. The branches of the trees cut them off.

The constant supply of mana provided by the God Forest kept the trees healthy, but I still made a point of staggering slightly as the attack got more intense,, selling the idea that their attack was successful.

The more they committed to their ineffective strategies and gave me the time to recover, the better. I was much better compared to that mad attempt to summon all the elves, but still not at my full performance.

Under the assumption that their necrotic attacks were effective, the demigod-level lichs triggered a rain of necrotic energy together, determined to weaken the forest around me, while, at the same time, a horde of weaker undead wars attacking me.

As more and more lich. joined the attack, it soon turned into something that would rival the earlier siege against the capital, enough to challenge me.

A dangerous strategy, one that would have a chance to succeed if they rushed together, forcing me to retreat at a minimum ... maybe even managing to cut my path completely.

But, since they were undead, they were selfish enough to play safe, sending weaker hordes of undead, supported only by their weaker necromancers.

“Daring to challenge me just because I had just awakened from my slumber, you pathetic pieces of bone skin!” I shouted, letting my voice be enhanced with mana to turn into an attack that would destroy the weaker zombies, but this time, the necromancers among them were ready for it, countering the attack.

I let out an angry cry, triggering an attack that used almost a quarter of the mana I had converted earlier, the rain of explosive leaves and acorns destroying a significant part of the undead army. Another spell from the memories of the dead god.

I knelt the moment I cast that spell, and this time, it wasn’t entirely for show. The difficulty of



the spell was comparable to the earlier summoning call, but with my most recent improvements, the impact on my body and soul was significantly lesser.

And, the rewards were equally impressive.

{+7219 Purified Spark}

Time to boost my stats once more.

{-8414 Purified Spark}

{+3 Strength}

{+3 Precision}

{+3 Agility}

{+3 Speed}

{+3 Perception}

{+3 Intelligence}

{+3 Wisdom}

The reason I received such a high boost was the last-minute decision to purify both the necrotic and natural sparks at the same time. The god forest was already capable of creating more mana than I could wield safely, and there was no harm in prioritizing my Stats.

“Attack him while he’s weak,” the shout came, and the undead horde continued attacking, easily shrugging the loss that would have broken the resolve of a sentient army.

Though, I had noticed the necromancers and death knights made a point of staying farther back. Smart, and it would have been enough to save them ... if it wasn’t for one detail.

I had been paying attention to the Necrotic Spark I had kept in the crystal, and it finally stirred violently.

The trap was finally arriving.

“You cowards,” I created as I used the same attack again, but this time, aiming at them, the divine spark they represented was far too valuable to be ignored. Still, I didn’t want to alert

them to my most important ability, so I revealed a huge crystal floating above me, one that immediately started to glow black in various spots, as if it had many slots, each filled with a Divine Spark I had just stolen after my attack.

Naturally, I consumed all but a slice that remained to maintain the excuse.

{+13280 Purified Spark}

Another boost, this time all nine lagging stats, bringing them back to the level of Endurance.

{-9117 Purified Spark}

{+2 Strength}

{+2 Precision}

{+2 Agility}

{+2 Speed}

{+2 Perception}

{+2 Intelligence}

{+2 Wisdom}

{+2 Manipulation}

{+2 Charisma}

Another boost, one that brought me even closer to my peak. I stayed on the ground, moaning in genuine pain even as the forest handled the rush of the undead. I watched them approach, though slowly, I started to notice a change.

The undead started to show a renewed sense of strength, one that was much stronger than the others. At first, I thought it was just another effect of increasing density, but soon, I realized that was mistaken. It was their divine spark that was getting more active ... almost consciously.

It was a subtle change, one that I wouldn't have noticed if it wasn't for my familiarity with the Divine Spark and all that was related to it. But how, I was not sure. I could only feel that it was coming from the six leader lichs that floated above the rest, content in sacrificing the rest of

their army.

There were two ways of examining that. Either I could try to get close, and confront the lichens without the protective presence of the forest ... or I enhance my stats even further.

I chose the second option, especially as they kindly continued to attack me, even more uncaring of the losses; at least a part of their newfound recklessness about the crystal that was floating above me, representing a great fortune that could be exchanged later on.

Unaware it was just empty bait.

After waiting a few seconds to recover as much as I could manage, I cast a spell, a basic light spell that made me glow green, faking the side effect of another spell I had picked from the memories, continuing to feign weakness. "What a big disgrace, thinking that an army of dead ants could face my greatness!" I shouted as I used the spell again, this time taking down a smaller portion of the army.

{+4214 Purified Spark}

{-5760 Purified Spark}

{+1 All Stats}

I was supposed to feel safer and safer as my powers got enhanced, but that didn't seem to be the case, not when I was able to feel the way the Divine Spark showed more and more movement with each round of absorption.

It felt similar to the earlier trick I had pulled, ordering all elves to retreat back to the capital, but rather than a one-time effect, it was a continuous one.

Luckily, after my latest round of improvement, I was able to detect what had been affecting it. It was the leading lichens...

No, it was a shadow of Divine Spark that overlapped with them, slowly getting stronger while still staying hidden.

I had a feeling that I was about to face my first true Avatar.

—

{Strength: 25 Charisma: 25}

Precision: 25 Perception: 25

Agility: 25 Manipulation: 25

Speed: 25 Intelligence: 25

Endurance: 25 Wisdom: 25}

{Purified Divine Spark: 4151}

{Pseudo-HP: 2783 Mana: 9210}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Guardian God Forest - 28611}

Elven Priestess - XXXX}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

# Chapter Two Hundred Eighty-Two

I felt myself split between excitement and fear as I found myself about to face my first proper Divine opponent, even though I was feeling that the powers it displayed, even in the half-gathered state, were strong enough to impress me.

Unfortunately, fighting against an Avatar directly was not a good idea. Not because I was particularly afraid of myself, confident in my ability to defend myself if I revealed some of my secrets ... but I was reluctant to trigger such a battle this close to the capital.

I could retreat back to the capital, the wards giving me the chance to retaliate against them ... but after a moment, I decided against it.

I could feel the connection the Avatar slowly building with the rest of the Necrotic Sparks ... which gave me an interesting opportunity. I could easily locate the locations of the other Necrotic Sparks. Even better, from the shape of the connection, I could sense whether those sparks were currently passive or active...

"I see I have a cowardly god that wants to delay me while you hunt for my innocent elves. You are too young to trick me," I said as I suddenly teleported toward one of the larger gatherings of the undead that was currently in a state of active battle. I found an elven tribe, surrounded by the Guardian Trees that had currently turned into treants, desperately fighting against the undead that surrounded them.

It was a large tribe, about ten thousand strong, struggling against the undead attack. "Go and worship me, my children," I shouted even as I waved my hand, and a huge tree appeared, growing to reach a hundred feet of height in just two seconds, and another second later its center shattered, revealing a gate at its center.

A portal for the elves to travel — a new ability I developed after examining the device of the Eternals — leading it to the capital.

The portal itself was made of pure Arcana mana, but I made sure to create the connecting tunnel through nature mana. It was far less effective in terms of mana efficiency, but mana was much less precious than my secrets.

The tree itself was unnecessary as well, just another layer for my deception.

While the elves retreated, I consumed the Nature Spark of the Guardian trees, and the

attacking undead.

{+3882 Purified Spark}

The amount I got wasn't enough to enhance my stats once more, but before I could lament about that, the Aether plane was breached once more, and six liches appeared in front of me.

With one great difference. This time, six of them stood side by side, covered by the shadow of a dragon made of necrotic spark. A shadow that gave me an intimidating feeling ... containing far more than I managed to steal despite my extended battle.

And, considering the relative benefits they drove from the Divine Spark were far superior to mine, it didn't feel like a battle I could win.... "Let's see if the ancient gods truly deserve their reputation," the shadow spoke, the voice alone radiating power...

"I don't have time to waste with you, dog," I called as I teleported, just as the huge necrotic bolt passed where I had been.

I expected him to follow me to the Aether dimension immediately, which was the reason I appeared in a relative opening, but he appeared several seconds later. "How dare you insult me despite being a coward," the Avatar shouted, the desolate landscape shattering under his cry...

"Do you think you deserve to fight with me? A coward that doesn't even dare to show himself and sends an Avatar to fight me," I said. "Here, a worthwhile opponent for you."

With that, I raised my hand, and a huge treant appeared in front of him, attacking him recklessly. I connected him with the remaining stored nature mana, which made him grow to a threatening degree as it rushed toward the Avatar.

I doubted that it would hold it for more than a minute, but then, that was all I needed. I created an illusion of myself before slipping away, and started hunting the undead forces that were currently fighting against the retreating elves — though luckily, most of them were already close enough to the capital to make my involvement unnecessary.

With my attempts to facilitate their escape getting faster and faster due to repeated practice, the Avatar failed to catch up with me. And, luckily, he was arrogant enough to chase me rather than attack the capital to force a confrontation.

With Seldanna still going through Apotheosis, the last thing I wanted to disturb that, especially with the great gap between the direct might we were capable of applying. Technically, I had a

dozen ways to equalize the situation in a direct confrontation, especially from a bunch of safe wards, but that would only reveal my secrets.

And, while the Eternals finally stopped pumping necrotic mana into the Aether Dimension, that didn't mean that they were still not spying.

I continued bouncing around, transferring more and more of the tribal elves back to the capital ... which had an interesting, but welcome, side effect. After being saved by their 'god' they were more than willing to worship the Tree of Life, which currently belonged to Seldanna.

Through the portals, I took the occasional glimpses, and noticed a similar connection between her and the nature spark that was held between elves was occurring, showing the process was getting even faster.

All the while, I continued to get stronger by hunting undead while saving more and more elves.

{+18291 Purified Spark}

{-20300 Purified Spark}

{+3 All Stats}

Soon, I realized that I wasn't the only one that was trying to use tricks. Occasionally, the Avatar of the Undead God showed speed fast enough to trap me ... but he did not, probably still assuming that I was trapping the Necrotic Sparks for his convenience and exhausting myself at the same time.

Pity that was a lie.

As I continued my escape, I felt Seldanna's reach touch at my God Forest. That didn't surprise me. I could have fought for control, but I needed her awake as soon as possible, and not to mention, she would be able to use its power without constant soul damage.

Divine Abilities were not jokes.

I let the chase continue, even after I managed to save all tribes I could find, dealing with smaller and smaller undead clumps, unprepared for my attack.

Ironically, the presence of their god sealed their defeat. Without his presence, I could never have discovered them with such ease, each discovery empowering me further, until I felt that I could finally rival my old self.

{+17291 Purified Spark}

{-16250 Purified Spark}

{+2 All Stats}

I still didn't have access to the convenience of Skills, of course, but the near-infinite mana was more than enough as a substitute.

And, finally, I received the message I had been waiting for. "I'm awake!"

Seldanna was back.

"Excellent. We have your test here already," I called. Even after her Apothesis, I could feel a faint connection with her. I felt that she could snap it if she wanted, but she maintained it, and from that, I could feel her state.

She was strong enough to contend against an avatar...

"You want me to fight against a god!" she gasped.

"Come on, sweetie, You're a goddess, you can handle it," I called. "And, feel free to cut loose, I'll make sure both the dimensional wall and the capital is safe."

With that, she rushed forward, soon appearing next to us. "Wait, why there is a goddess here!" the Avatar gasped, his shock almost enough to make me pity him.

I disappeared, and focused on repairing the dimensional barrier. The memories of elementals invading a plane were still fresh in my mind, and while they didn't seem to be caring that much about the planetary fragments, that didn't mean they wouldn't invade the place ... and I much prefer not to deal with them without the assistance of the System.

Instead, I watched as the Necrotic God fought against Seldanna in a hopeless battle ... but just because it was hopeless didn't mean it was quick. The battle lasted for days, the Avatar's ability to create endless hordes matching Seldanna's life-creation abilities.

I ignored many opportunities to strike, for one simple reason. Seldanna had the adjusted memories of Divine Abilities, but using them required practice.

In contrast, the Necrotic God was much stronger, but the difference between having an avatar present versus being present directly was much stronger. He tried to retreat several times, but



each time, I blocked him, not willing to let go of that much Divine Spark...

Worse, the more he drained the necrotic mana from the Aether, his biggest advantage started to disappear. As the Divine battle consumed more and more mana, the Aether Dimension turned even more sparse, like a deflating balloon.

I had a feeling that, without my intervention, the plane would have collapsed, but I worked hard to support the planar barrier with a constant feed of Nature Mana I had hidden away...

“You win this time...” the necrotic god suddenly shouted. “But don’t think that it’ll be free.”

With that, I felt his body, made of Divine Spark, ready to explode. I waited until his hint of consciousness finally disappear, then before the spark could disperse, captured it with a cage of Tantric mana, first stuffing it into a crystal, then absorbing it.

A fascinating amount ... far more than anything else I had got.

{+230490 Purified Spark}

I had just received a fortune...

Now, it was time to celebrate, I thought as I looked at Seldanna’s Divine visage...

My first time with a goddess.

—

{Strength: 30 Charisma: 30

Precision: 30 Perception: 30

Agility: 30 Manipulation: 30

Speed: 30 Intelligence: 30

Endurance: 30 Wisdom: 30}

{Purified Divine Spark: 237555}

{Pseudo-HP: 1103 Mana: 2410}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Elven Goddess - ???}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Eighty-Three

As I stood in front of Seldanna, I said nothing for a moment, focusing on assessing the differences between an Avatar and the actual presence of a god ... and found the difference suffocatingly different. No wonder that, for all her inexperience and her lacking power, Seldanna managed to defeat the Avatar easily.

Without my latest burst of Stats, her presence would have been suffocating ... and even then, the only reason I wasn't collapsing was because she wasn't using her power on me directly.

At her current state, I would have no chance of winning ... now that we were face to face, even escaping her would have been challenging. Luckily, even if she decided to suddenly go crazy and betray the man who had not only saved her people from certain extinction but also helped her to ascend to divinity, I could have used the incredible amount of Divine Spark I had collected from the defeated Avatar to increase my stats...

And with that improvement, I should be able to escape successfully.

Of course, the fact that I was making various plans to escape as I faced Seldanna told nothing nice about my state of mind ... but after living as an utterly powerless being for most of my life, I was not comfortable facing someone that outclassed me significantly.

Luckily, the long battle between the two, combined with the scraps of memories I had received, gave me a better understanding of how they fought. Both the undead and Seldanna were overly reliant on their environment, without abilities that could deliver a burst of damage.

If it wasn't for my experience with different types of Divine Sparks, I would have assumed it was a weakness that was shared by all gods ... but I knew that sparks like Light certainly didn't have that vulnerability.

A problem for the future, I thought as Seldanna landed in front of me in her real form, letting me take the differences. The biggest was her clothes. Gone were her robes, replaced by a living dress made of leaves, each brimming with enough mana to make a weaker mage go blind. And, that was the most minor difference.

Her hair and skin had also changed. Her skin maintained its flawless quality, but turned green. Luckily, it was the soft, soothing green of flesh leaves, somehow adding to her beauty than distracting from it. Her hair was a darker shade of green, living flowers peeking through its lushness.

Just by standing, the surrounding aura of decay and destruction disappeared, replaced by thick grass and the most beautiful flowers I had ever seen, their smell alone more intoxicating than a strong drink.

I didn't need to feel the way she connected to every being with a Nature Spark — except mine which I kept locked behind a tantric ward — to be assured of her true divinity.

"Someone had been being a bad boy, lying quite a bit," was her first words.

I smirked, amused by the direction she chose, which was far better than the alternatives, showing that her new power didn't destroy her sense of humor. "Well, I wouldn't say lying. More like creatively re-interpreting the truth rather than flat-out lying."

"Very creatively. You should be a storyteller rather than a ... mage," she said, though the last part hesitant. I could sense that she wanted to call me something else, but lacked the words to define me. Which was not exactly unfair, as I lacked them as well. I was not a mortal, but I also wasn't a god, not the way the other gods functioned, at least.

Though, considering I could feel Seldanna being linked to the very land, which empowered and imprisoned her at the same time, I wasn't sure I wanted to be one. Not with the Eternals inevitably poking around. They were not an enemy that I could just bunker down to defeat.

"I'm a man of many skills," I said, letting my smirk turn salacious. "As you very well know."

She avoided my gaze, even turning away to hide her face to hide her blush. I chuckled, amused that divinity didn't prevent her from blushing. She followed it with a spell, and a bunch of plants appeared around her, hiding her from view. When they disappeared, she was sitting on a throne made of plants.

Which would have been more impressive if the only reason she went to that trouble was to hide her shyness.

"So, what were your plans when you arrived?" she asked, desperately trying to change the subject in order not to destroy any gravitas of her first true showing as divinity, unaware of the fact that trying that hard destroyed any hope of it succeeding. "Were you aiming for the slumbering god from the beginning?"

Despite the sensitive nature of the question, she didn't have a hint of anger in her voice, and that was not because she was an amazing actress. Though, it made sense, as regardless of the answer, she didn't have much to be concerned about, considering she ended up being a god

rather than ending up as the minion of an ancient god with little care about the lives of his minions — a fact that Seldanna was aware of thanks to the memories she had received.

I delayed answering, letting my smirk widen as I did so. Instead, I waved my hand, creating a throne made of bare stone, just a bit larger than hers, making her eye twitch slightly. She fed it slightly more mana, which increased the size of her throne to pass mine.

“Truthfully, nothing,” I answered. “My aim wasn’t to arrive here, but to escape the group that was using the undead as a tool to expand their forces. The only reason I picked this plane among the others was that I could feel the undead invasion was ongoing rather than complete, giving me a chance to recover. Anything else, including our fortunate meeting, was just luck.”

I chuckled even as I let my throne grow to pass hers in size. “Don’t tell me that you’re unhappy about meeting me,” I said with an exaggerated needy tone. “I don’t think my poor heart could handle it.”

Her eye twitched in annoyance, making me wonder whether it was about my teasing tone, or the fact that my throne was higher than hers once more. “I don’t know, it’s hard to think that my innocence was taken by such a liar,” she answered, her throne growing further.

“Oh, it hurts, after everything I sacrificed,” I mocked her, my throne growing even bigger.

She smiled, trying to let it grow more ... but only to experience a snag. An artificial one, in the form of a ward, refined her nature mana into pure mana, reducing the strength of her throne, and making the flowers that covered the surface fade.

“Oh, that’s how you want to play,” she growled in mock anger, and suddenly, several roots burst out of her throne, digging into my earthen one. I might have been able to defend if I had elemental mana to actually reinforce, but considering I was still using Pure mana as a proxy, it was impossible to win against natured mana.

Especially when said natured mana was used by an actual goddess.

Instead, I created a floating throne made of Arcana mana, but with a touch of light, enough to make her widen at the sudden trick. I was revealing a secret to her, and she knew enough about me to guess it was not accidental.

I was extending my trust toward her, which made her react favorably, and I abused that trust by...

Creating an even bigger, floating throne. “It seems that I’m the victor,” I declared with an exaggerated laugh.

“You bastard,” she growled, playful anger replacing her emotional state, and a veritable forest burst out of the ground, their branches trying to grab me. I dashed away in my floating throne, and she chased, creating the most impactful tag game imaginable.

I chuckled as she chased, going toward the destroyed landscape. And, as she chased me by creating more and more trees and other plants, we left behind a huge, growing forest ... it would take a while for the animal life to return, but it was a start.

I escaped and she chased for hours, making it a fun but exhausting game out of reforming the plane after the undead assault, the most critical aspects of the land recovering under our incredible chase. However, as she chase me, I could see significant signs of exhaustion on her...

And that was with her using the God Forest as some kind of weapon to spread life. Without it, even for a goddess, it would have taken weeks and months of hard work. Combined, it was a good, fruitful activity, not only entertaining, but also repairing the worst of the damage that was delivered to the undead.

I slowed down, letting her trees surround me and cut off my path. “You’re surrounded, I win,” she declared.

“Oh, really,” I answered with a chuckle, and teleported behind her, hugging her from behind. “It seems that you’re the one that got caught..”

—

{Strength: 30 Charisma: 30

Precision: 30 Perception: 30

Agility: 30 Manipulation: 30

Speed: 30 Intelligence: 30

Endurance: 30 Wisdom: 30}

{Purified Divine Spark: 237555}

{Pseudo-HP: 1103 Mana: 2410}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Elven Goddess - ???}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Eighty-Four

Seldanna said nothing as I wrapped my arms around her divine being, not that words were necessary to convey her feelings. The way she trembled under my arms was enough.

I said nothing as well, just leaned down to snuggle to the nape of her neck, taking a deep breath, enjoying the novel nature of her new smell, which was a mind-bending mixture of the most beautiful flowers imaginable, intoxicating in its nature, enough to reveal her divine nature.

I delivered a soft, lingering kiss on her neck, and she shivered helplessly. I enjoyed her warmth against my chest even as I felt the beautiful texture of her skin, her beauty was truly unmatched. Admittedly, even the dress of leaves she had conjured for herself had an unmatched softness, adding a nice texture, yet not blowing her body from my touch.

It seemed that godhood had other perks that were near unlimited power and dominion, one that was even more interesting for me.

“So, my goddess,” I whispered after I kissed her neck again, enjoying the way she reacted to my barest touch, showing that I wasn’t the only one enjoying the more carnal benefits of her transformation. “We have played enough. Do you think it’s finally the time to celebrate your successful elevation?”

She shivered, catching my gaze, her desire burning even more than I expected. “Yes, worship me,” she whispered, though her needy tone contrasted with the haughty nature her words tried to reflect.

“As you wish, my goddess,” I answered. I was tempted to teach her the mistake of trying to order me around — the fun way, of course — but after some thought, I decided to follow her direction. After all, not only she had become an actual goddess, but also she defeated the Avatar of an enemy god.

More than enough to earn some rare preferential treatment.

“Wait, really?” she whispered, showing that even with all the power, she was unused to her authority. It was good, as I had no intention of letting her get arrogant.

Playful obedience, however, was a different matter.

“You’re a goddess, Seldanna,” I whispered as I tightened my grip around her waist, pulling her



closer. "Who am I to reject your holy decree?"

She let out a dismissive chuckle at the misleading nature of my words. Understandable, as my full erection was leaning between her cheeks. Hardly a move that conveyed respect.

However, while Seldanna mocked my words with a giggle, she made no move to extract herself from that position; unless the way she was moving her body slowly up and down was a way to slowly free herself from my domineering grasp.

While I played with her, I cast a spell, slowly lowering us to the ground, where a huge bed made of leaves appeared. I let her go from my hold, and she lay on her back immediately, her rapid movement revealing her desperate desire, enough to destroy the dignified aura she wanted to cultivate.

And, if her blush was any evidence, she realized that after she ended up on her back. "Undress me," she ordered, trying to sound haughty to compensate for her earlier slip, but it made her look even cuter instead.

"As you wish, my goddess," I said as I leaned above her, and put my hands on her dress that was made of thousands of leaves, and removed one piece. Then another, and another... each enhancing her impatience further.

So, before I could even reach two-digit numbers, her dress suddenly parted open, timed to look like my touch had removed a critical piece, revealing her breasts, which looked even more incredible after her transformation.

Alluring enough to change my mind about slowly teasing her. I leaned forward, enjoying her gaze filled with excitement getting more intense as I got closer. Unfortunately, that eye contact didn't last long.

Fortunately, the alternative was even better. I buried my head into the glorious valley between her breasts, licking them slowly, their taste more spectacular than the most amazing nectar imaginable.

Seldanna let out a moan of pleasure ... which had some interesting effects. Some of the effects, like the ones that had on my body, were perfectly understandable. As her needy moan hit my ear, I felt my body burn with an intense desire. It almost felt like a magical compulsion, and if I didn't know my own body intimately when it came to that subject, I might have actually believed it.

But it was my own body, treating her moan as a delicious sustenance. At first, I thought that it was just an illusion, but as I closed my eyes to feel the energies of my body — without stopping the dance of my lips over her amazing breasts, naturally — I realized that it was actually the case. The Divine Spark in my body building a connection with hers.

It was a soft connection, with the potential to grow further. But I didn't panic, as I recognized the unique nature of the Companion bond. The details were different without the System to modify it ... but I could feel deep inside me that it was the true form of Companion Connection, and the System-Assisted version was a watered-down variant.

A nice finding, I thought as I continued licking her breasts, my fingers caressing her stomach to make her tremble sexily. She moaned again, and the effect triggered once more.

This time, I turned my attention to the external effects, which were not about me, at least not directly. I had already detected that, as a Goddess, she had some kind of connection with the land itself. It was the same kind of connection that the memories of the old god showed.

I just didn't know if it was something unique to Nature Spark, or something that was integral to every god, my information was extremely limited. The avatar of the necromancer god didn't have such a connection, but that didn't mean much.

In the end, one thing was certain. Seldanna's connection with the land getting stronger was a good thing. It would allow her to use her power remotely with much greater efficiency, which was the greatest advantage of the gods and goddesses. Even I couldn't do that.

I had my own tricks, like the one that I used with the God Forest, but I realized that it only worked because there was no god in the fragmented plain at that moment. If I tried to replicate the same trick while using Nature Spark, Seldanna could block it easily, and even if I used another Spark, it would end up with a bitter struggle where she held a great, incredible advantage.

Since I could still be confident in escaping if Seldanna ever changed her mind, rather than doing the silly thing and interfering, I helped her further by creating a hidden ward in the Aether dimension, one that would convert Aether particles into pure mana and feed it to her — while also conveniently getting rid of remaining necrotic mana in the Aether Dimension.

Well, I didn't feed it to her but to the God Forest, not willing to distract her from her amazing state, but practically, it was the same thing. It quickened her bonding with the land several times without interrupting her fun.

And, speaking of her fun, she let out a spectacular moan as I took her nipple between my lips, my tongue teasing it. The resulting moans were spectacular enough to convince me to focus on our pleasure, ignoring everything else.

My fingers danced more aggressively on her stomach, making her tremble under my fingers. She opened her mouth to say something, but only a moan escaped her pretty lips. "So, my goddess, are you enjoying my worship?" I whispered as I started moving up, kissing her collarbone.

"Stop speaking and start working, you insolent mortal," she said, her attempt to sound angry dying a quick death as she immediately followed it with an explosive moan.

"How about if I start like this," I said as I started moving lower down, kissing her stomach as I moved lower. "Do you think you can handle it?"

"O-of course I can handle it. I'm a goddess," she moaned, which would have been more convincing if she had been able to keep herself from stammering as the pleasure invaded her divine senses.

And, I was yet to reach her wetness.

When I finally reached there, she let out an even more explosive moan, and with her pleasure, the forests around us got even stronger. Her taste was beautiful, tinged with overwhelming arousal as my fingers danced around her knob, my tongue dipping to her wetness, bringing her divine qualities to the surface.

"It's good that your pleasure is useful for growing even more forests," I said as I chuckled, taking a small break.

Her blush thickened further as she examined the surrounding area. "T-then, you better start working faster," she whispered shyly. "The forests need all the help they could get."

"For the environment," I chuckled as I lowered my head...

—

{Strength: 30 Charisma: 30

Precision: 30 Perception: 30

Agility: 30 Manipulation: 30

Speed: 30 Intelligence: 30

Endurance: 30 Wisdom: 30}

{Purified Divine Spark: 237555}

{Pseudo-HP: 1103 Mana: 2410}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Elven Goddess - ???}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Eighty-Five

“So, my goddess, does having a divine communion feel good?” I asked.

“N-no, of course not,” she stammered, her tone telling the exact opposite as my tongue continued to tease her. I smirked, entertained by her shyness.

“Then, how about we change the pattern, maybe you’ll like it better,” I suggested and changed position. Before she could react, I was on my back, and she was above me, looking the other way. I continued teasing her wetness with my tongue, while she found herself looking at my raging arousal.

“Come on, sweetie, we don’t have too much time to waste,” I said, another brush of my tongue making her cry once more. It was a beautiful cry, tinged with overwhelming arousal as her pleasure got more and more dominant.

“I-if you say so,” she murmured in rapid acceptance rather than calling off my absurd argument, her blush thickening as she lowered her head, her excitement reaching a new level.

She said nothing else, as her mouth soon busied itself with a more important task. Her warm lips enveloped my girth, giving a new meaning to the divine sensation, just the presence of her lips was enough to bring me near my limits.

“Fascinating,” I murmured, enjoying the way she shivered against my body, but it didn’t prevent her from going deeper, and soon, my shaft was doing something quite heretical, pushing against her throat.

She gagged even as she pushed down, showing that even divinity wasn’t enough to solve all of her physical ailments — not that I was complaining. The moans that escaped her mouth were heavenly despite their muffled state, her chest rubbing against my stomach with each desperate push, soon falling into a hypnotic pattern.

Never too one to leave such a spectacular thing without payment, my tongue started exploring her entrance, quickly turning fast and aggressive, circling her knob again and again. Her moans turned even louder, showing how much she was enjoying me spoiling her.

Another gag escaped her mouth as she lowered herself even more, enough to cut her breath completely ... which was, technically speaking, not particularly critical at the moment. She was strong enough to survive without breathing for a long time — maybe even permanently —

though that took nothing from the spectacular tightness of her throat.

As she treated my girth to a divine journey, she pushed her hips down, her beautiful, plump thighs tightening around my head as if she was trying to suffocate me in turn.

If someone else dared to do so, I would have reacted rather aggressively, but Seldanna earned that leeway after her spectacular performance of ascension and the battle that followed. I continued to lick her core as her hips moved in response, her wetness grinding against my face aggressively. Her movements were forceful and choppy, showing just how familiar she was with even a hint of domination, but her inexperience just made it sexier.

“It feels amazing,” she murmured dazedly once she pulled back to take a deep, desperate breath — showing that while she didn’t need to breathe, the habit was still there — while tightened my hold on her plump ass, making sure it was impossible for her to move away to get a reprieve.

She moaned several times under the combined assault of my tongue and my fingers, giving me time to enjoy the softness of her beautiful hips. “A ... break,” she whispered soon.

“Not until you finish your own job,” I warned her. After all, my poor shaft was once again without anyone to tend, lingering alone. It was not fair.

“I ... just a few seconds,” she begged.

“No,” I answered, the time to form the word the only break I took, determined to continue teasing her for an hour if she wanted to surrender.

Slowly playing with her until she turned into a delicious puddle of joy was just too tempting. Especially since, with every immediate danger resolved, we had time to waste.

“A-as you wish, my lord,” she whispered, her voice conveying surrender as she lowered herself, showing that the confidence she had received from suddenly becoming a god hadn’t changed her inherent submissiveness.

Amazing.

She went down once more, this time her head moving with ruthless efficiency, taking me deep into her throat, tightening mercilessly... Enough to trigger an explosion, and while I could have rejected the call and continued, I let myself go instead, painting her throat.

She deserved that reward.

{+1 Endurance}

A gasp of shock appeared in front of me at the sudden, unexpected notification. Seldanna didn't react, busy catching her reward, giving me the time to dig and understand what had just happened.

My first guess was that I had somehow used my storage of Purified Spark, but a quick check showed that it was not the case.

It didn't make me feel any better. I was afraid that I had somehow stolen some Divine Spark from Seldanna, and while the amount was not high enough to make a difference, the way it happened accidentally was not a good sign. Also, at his point, it required almost a thousand points of Divine Spark to increase a point ... which was not entirely a small number either.

Yet, as I turned my attention inward to see how much Spark I had pilfered from her accident, I met with another surprise.

The amount of Divine Spark I had assigned to support Endurance Stat was still the same as the others ... but then, where did that extra point of Endurance come from...

A hand distracted me from my musings. "Don't tell me you're tired already," Seldanna said playfully, which was followed by a gasp as I immediately pulled her to my lap, a delicious gasp escaping her mouth as I skewered her.

I made sure she was pointing the other way, making it easy for me to spank her. "Ride me, my goddess," I ordered as I landed a loud spank. She followed it immediately, giving me another dose of pleasure.

"So impatient," I murmured, unable to keep a wide smirk from covering my face. However, that was all I allowed myself to feel before I dug down back to my soul, trying to understand what was going

At first, I expected Seldanna's distraction would make it more difficult, but instead, the opposite happened. As she rode me desperately, I felt another flicker in my Stats ... and realized that, it was the nascent connection between me and Seldanna responsible for it.

I had initially assumed that it was just a connection between the two of us, but as she rode me desperately, I soon realized that the connection was actually between her and my Endurance

stat.

{+1 Endurance}

As my stat increased again, I was able to observe directly ... and I made another fascinating discovery. The reason my Endurance increased was the efficiency increase.... And, it was an incredible benefit, as the square relationship between the divine spark meant that while I only needed a hundred spark to increase a stat from ten to eleven ... I needed a whopping ten thousand points just to increase from a hundred to a hundred and one...

Which had meant that it would have been impossible for me to directly compete with any god, the best I could achieve was to escape back to Primordial Aether, where I had the advantage.

Of course, I had been planning to explore ways to increase that efficiency ... but I certainly didn't expect that to happen in such a smooth manner. I could feel the connection between us increasing the efficiency, giving me hope that I could reverse it.

I analyzed the connection more, and I realized it was not just about her power, but also the way she was connected to the Plane inherently. It wasn't the Divine Spark of hers that was increasing my efficiency, but the land itself.

She was just a conduit. Which was good, as it meant I wasn't stealing anything from her.

However, it was also bad, because it meant there was a limit to it ... unless I found a way to increase the size of the planar fragment ... which I doubted to be a simple challenge.

Another problem, I could already feel that the way she was connected to Endurance was inevitably tight, resonating with her Divine Spark in a fundamental manner.

Meaning, I needed more goddesses if I wanted to spread that effect into the other stats.

Oh, no! I needed to seduce more goddesses! The horror!

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{Strength: 30 Charisma: 30

Precision: 30 Perception: 30

Agility: 30 Manipulation: 30



Speed: 30 Intelligence: 30

Endurance: 32 Wisdom: 30}

{Purified Divine Spark: 237555}

{Pseudo-HP: 1103 Mana: 2410}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

Elven Goddess - ???}

—

[Level: 36 Experience: 631374 / 666000]

## Chapter Two Hundred Eighty-Six

“I had just noticed someone triggering the planar wards, and it’s not the undead,” Seldanna muttered, but considering she was locked between my body and a Tree of Life — one of many we had grown during our attempts to erase every sign of undead invasion — each hit of our bodies allowing Seldanna to resonate stronger with it.

A fun method to enhance the plant growth of the area we had discovered.

“Talk about horrible timing,” I murmured, blur tare then stopping, I quickened the movement of my hips, hastening our journey to the explosive end.

It had been three months since the end of the battle and my latest discovery ... which had some interesting outcomes in terms of my stats.

{Strength: 45 Charisma: 45

Precision: 45 Perception: 45

Agility: 45 Manipulation: 45

Speed: 45 Intelligence: 45

Endurance: 60 Wisdom: 45}

Pity that, after three months, Seldanna’s connection to the plane had reached a state that wasn’t easy to improve further, which meant that the gains I received from that hit a limit after a month.

Still, that didn’t mean the other two months were a waste. We had caught several attempts of undead incursions, some blunt, the others subtle, suggesting that they had no intention of stopping to target the region.

Considering they weren’t dissuaded by their earlier decisive defeat and still dared to probe a plane that hosted two divine beings — at least from their perspective — it meant that they had a plan.

It didn’t take a genius to guess it had something to do with the Eternals.

It was why I stayed with Seldanna for two more months even after realizing I had hit a limit in

terms of my direct benefits.

The most visible benefit I had generated for her was to help her with the revitalization efforts. While that, in her current state, she had no trouble converting any type of mana into Nature mana, she was still limited by the amount the plane could generate by slowly breaking down Aether — which in turn was limited to the slow decay of the primordial aether that slipped through the planar barrier.

The greatest advantage of my unique skillset was to break down Primordial Aether into mana directly, hastening the process that would normally take years into days.

The other benefit was subtler, but still useful. We have studied a lot — though with frequent breaks to ... revitalize the land — to integrate some of the principles of Arcana detection wards into Nature Spells she could cast, so that she didn't have to rely on the Arcana wards I cast.

I wasn't going to be here for long.

I still needed to return back to my home. I could still feel that my girls were alive and well, but that was the only thing I could feel, the rest of my connection already faded. I would have been afraid that it was targeting something outside my control ... but then, it coincided with another effect.

My original System, disappeared.

When it happened, it came as a shock, and only the fact that I could still feel the presence of my girls — through a far more faded manner — prevented me from panicking badly.

Still, no matter how much I expected it to happen, it still came as a shock. Luckily, I still had Tantric completely embedded into my existence, still with me even as the System faded.

The loss of the skills was unfortunate, but that was the only practical challenge. With my stats already at a point that could rival the earlier state, and with the chance to improve more, I was not in a position to miss it.

I couldn't be more glad that I had designed my own System, impossible to be taken from me, or I would have returned to my earlier meaningless existence ... and not for long, not with the enemies I had collected in the process.

While my mind wandered, my body continued its steady movement, and soon, I exploded into Seldanna, filling her to the brim once again.

“Do you really have to leave?” Seldanna murmured. “Can’t you just stay here and we can defend against them.”

“I have to,” I answered. “Our enemies are too strong for us to stay in a fragmented plane forever and hope we can resist them. Just look at the things we could do because I managed to steal mana storage from them...” I said. “We can’t afford to wait until they realize I’m not just an old, feeble god.”

During those three months, I explained some things to Seldanna about my power, but during that process, I also made sure to conceal some fundamental aspects. Ironically, this time, it was to protect her rather than myself.

The secret I was hiding was immense, and if it was discovered, I could run away ... but bound to the plane by her nature of existence, she could not.

And, I strongly doubted a small, fragment plane could resist the full attention of the Eternals, who seemed to pull yet another interesting trick whenever I encountered them.

“Still, I don’t want you to go,” she said.

“I don’t want to leave you either...” I answered as I caressed her hair. “But that’s the only option we have.”

And, unlike my earlier misdirection, that was completely true. I had to travel outside the planar border several times during that journey, but no matter how much I tried, I failed to find a way to navigate the Primordial Aether.

I could not only survive but also thrive in the Primordial Aether thanks to my limitless mana generation — though without a plane to base myself, it was rather boring — but the same thing didn’t work to my benefit.

There was only one thing that worked to my benefit, and that was my ability to return to Seldanna. With my connection to her, no matter how far I traveled in Primordial Aether in our expeditions, I was able to return back easily, allowing me to take a daring step forward.

So, I stayed to help Seldanna strengthen the plane — while avoiding some of the crazier ploys I had planned not to alert the others — waiting for the Eternals to make another trip.

I was confident that they would visit to understand what was going on at a minimum. Not to mention, I had made such a big show of capturing and imprisoning all the Divine Spark from the

undead army, which, to their knowledge, was completely useless for me, so I should have been willing to trade it.

Trying to sneak into their ship was a risky plan ... but it was the best way for me to find the way back home ... and if all went well, maybe even discover a way to navigate repeatedly.

With a sigh, I cast a spell, activating the giant avatar I had created for that purpose. "Ready for teleportation," I asked her.

"Not yet," she said, fixing her hair and changing her dress into armor — well, a wooden, grown equivalent of armor, with rose thorns growing, making her sexy yet dangerous at the same time.

"You remember the plan," I asked. It was unnecessary, of course. We had gone through several times, but I was feeling tense as well.

"Yes, once your confrontation is over and you sneak into their vehicle, I'm going to bring the avatar back to the valley you prepared, and make it look like you're meditating to further adapt your power, while I act like I'm intimidated by you."

"And, what will you do if the Eternals come to you with an offer to help you defeat me," I asked.

"Can't I just kill them," she pouted, and I looked at her with a teasing glare. "I'm going to do my best to look like I'm tempted with the idea, but still intimidated by the process, while I'll use the treants you prepare to destroy any ship that tries to sneak in, so they'll assume you're the one destroying them. And, if I face anyone that I'm not confident in defeating, I'm going to trigger the emergency beacons you prepared."

"Good goddess," I said with a chuckle as I leaned forward and kissed her, amused that, after all that time, it still made her blush spectacularly. "Now, are you ready to confront our uninvited guests?"

She nodded, and we teleported...

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{Strength: 45 Charisma: 45

Precision: 45 Perception: 45

Agility: 45 Manipulation: 45

Speed: 45 Intelligence: 45

Endurance: 60 Wisdom: 45}

{Purified Divine Spark: 32920}

{Pseudo-HP: 1103 Mana: 2410}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

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GODDESSES

Elven Goddess}

## Chapter Two Hundred Eighty-Seven

I teleported us to the location of the breach, only to see a large ship breaching through the planar border with shocking ease, causing almost no chaos. “Stay back and look intimidating, while my avatar handles the talk,” I warned Seldanna even as I gathered my mana around and cast the strongest invisibility spell I could manage.

At the same time, I let my avatar radiate a flood of nature mana and create two roots that grabbed the ship before they could retreat — impressive, but clearly not offensive. The avatar acted just like what I had seen in the memories, arrogant and reckless.

The amount of mana I spent on that display could destroy a city in seconds, a great display of power, yet it didn’t turn offensive.

The ship didn’t try to run away, recognizing that it was a display to impress rather than attack. I was glad, as I had no doubt they had many tools that would help them escape. While I had a plan in place to slip into their ship if that was their strategy, I much rather sneak in slowly.

Soon, the front of the ship opened, and someone appeared. “We are mere merchants between planes, great one,” he shouted even as he fell onto his knees. “We didn’t know that this dimension was under the control of a great being such as yourself. Please forgive us.”

My avatar didn’t answer immediately, and I used the opportunity to slip out of the plane, slipping out of the planar border. It was only the thick cover of nature mana that was constantly radiating off the avatar that allowed such a thing.

Once in the Primordial Aether, I drew the weakest protective layer I could draw around me as I moved toward the ship, betting for the chaotic nature of the Primordial Aether shielding me from their detection capabilities.

“And what do you trade that would make you daring enough to travel through the Primordial Aether,” my avatar spoke.

The self-proclaimed merchant pulled a box, and revealed a crystal, one that was stuffed with a Nature Spark of shocking quality, around two hundred points, a piece that would be challenging for even the gods to create, as absorbing and splitting them created significant challenges.

A considerable gift, and a very important strategic resource for a god that was just setting up his forces, allowing the creation of a strong and loyal warrior cadre quickly. Too bad for them it

was completely useless for me.

“How daring, mortals daring to touch the blood of the gods,” my avatar spoke, the voice alone triggering an earthquake. “I remember a bunch of meddling kids during the great betrayal. It seems that those bunch of rats didn’t die off yet.”

I continued to swim even as I used my avatar to observe them, getting tenser as I did so.

The attitude of the Eternal was interesting ... for all his surface-level subservience, he was arrogant. And, more importantly, he was not showing any sign of fear, as if despite being caught, he was confident that he was still in control.

There was a chance that his attitude was just unfounded arrogance, but that was hardly a risk I could take under the circumstances.

“You’re lucky that even a dragon might parley with rats under dire circumstances,” my avatar declared loudly.

“We’re glad for your wisdom, great one,” the merchant declared. “We offer you a great trade. An equal trade between the essence of those cursed undead. We want nothing more than the destruction of those abominations, and we will support you as much as we can.”

That was an interesting choice, I thought as I finally reached the outer hull of the ship, and connected myself using a tendril of mana. Carefully, I started examining the surface, but didn’t find a way that I could slip inside ... luckily, I didn’t need it, not when I could just continue to hang on the surface.

Luckily, that was not needed.

“Acceptable,” I declared. “I have thousands times more of that cursed essence ready to be exchanged,” I added, and noted the expression on the merchant’s face. Not greed, like I expected, but victory.

Clearly, they had a different plan than just an equal exchange. I decided to interrupt whatever plan they might have.

“However, even a dragon could be brought down by the poison of the rats. You’re going to leave what you have here, and I’m going to examine it carefully. You can visit six months later for trade,” the avatar declared as it waved its huge tree hand. “I would love to leave my home defended while I go and destroy those undead for daring to invade my land,” I added.



An arrogant statement that seemingly revealed my strategy, combined with a small time request. Together, they would be enough to make the Eternals wait patiently.

At least, that was what I hoped ... though I had quite a number of defensive measures if that was the case.

“That is more than acceptable, great one!” the merchant declared.

“Good, leave,” my avatar declared, once again accompanied by a great explosion of nature mana. “Come here three months later. A day earlier, a day late, and I’ll destroy you before attacking your pitiful organization.”

With that declaration, the ship started to move ... dragging me along as I stuck on the outer shell ...

Which triggered a long, boring journey.

In terms of monotony, it was even worse than the first time I had gotten lost. At least, then, I was struggling for my life, which meant I had to constantly pay attention to my surroundings. Here, I had nothing to do but wait.

I didn’t need to struggle to hide myself, because the ship was unable to extend any detection wards out of its structure as no mana other than Tantric could resist the intense bombardment of Primordial Aether for long, which they didn’t use.

Unfortunately, the same applied to me as well. The structure of the ship was incredibly solid, made of thick, interlocked mana and material, impossible to analyze without destroying. And, I couldn’t destroy it, not without actually breaching the surface.

So, I got stuck on the surface as they traveled in the primordial aether, visiting certain planes on the way.

Interestingly, every plane they visited actually had some kind of magical port allowing them to approach, suggesting some kind of semi-permanent access. Out of the eight planes they visited, six of them belonged to the undead, showing the extent of their spread.

Yet, two of them belonged to different entities. One of them was more of pure mana, suggesting a heavier Arcana usage, and the other, the current one, interestingly, light.

I wanted to try my hand at breaching the two, but considering their strong relationship with the

Eternals, I decided against them. Still, the rapid succession of visits suggested that they were having a far better time finding their path in Primordial Aether.

Pity I was yet to acquire their method.

Maybe I should attempt to sneak into the dimension. Of course, to do that, I first removed my own Light Spark and put it behind several Tantric wards. I still remembered how the Necrotic god was able to affect it.

Then, I moved away from the magical construct the Eternals were using as a port, and moved toward the other side of the plane. Then, I brought a crystal from my hidden spot, one that was holding Necrotic Spark, using it to convert a great amount of necrotic mana.

In the depths of the Primordial Aether, generating about a million mana only took a few seconds. I could have converted more, but replicating the divine spells took a lot from me, even with my new endurance.

That was just insurance.

I approached the planar border, created a mana capsule, and pushed inside, which was as small as I could manage. It was a buried detection ward, one that would be able to slip through the current detection capabilities of my own planar border.

It allowed me to detect the interior — which was filled with harsh light mana. It was impossible for an ordinary human to survive there for even a second. Worse, I detected a greater problem. Only a few seconds of detection, and they reacted, bombarding it with long-range light magic.

Wanting to destroy my mark, I smashed the necrotic mana I prepared, breaching the planar border.

The magical alerts exploded around, and immediately, an army of angels teleported to the border, ready to attack.

Worse, I could feel that Divine Spark was active and aligned, suggesting the presence of a god.

Which was enough for me to abandon my attempts to push for more and retreat back to the port. This time, the Eternals stayed for a bit longer, no doubt exploring the reason for the sudden undead presence, but that was just an extra half a day.

Soon, we were on the way once more...

And, a day later, I was finally looking for a plane that was thousands of times bigger than the fragmented planes I had been encountering.

Home...

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{Strength: 45 Charisma: 45

Precision: 45 Perception: 45

Agility: 45 Manipulation: 45

Speed: 45 Intelligence: 45

Endurance: 60 Wisdom: 45}

{Purified Divine Spark: 32920}

{Pseudo-HP: 1103 Mana: 2410}

{ADDITIONAL SPARKS

Light - Chosen 7.4

Nature - Chosen 10}

{MINIONS

—

GODDESSES

Elven Goddess}