Chapter 99 Pandorium

I spent my evening on my computer going through the auction items from the vamp estate.  The seller was listed as D. Emon.  Not very creative on De Roy’s part.  Over half of the items already had bids, and some of them had already doubled from the minimum acceptable bid.  I was actually quite surprised at the zeal for some of the artwork.  I was just paging through to make sure I had not missed anything….  I went back to the items that were receiving exceptional bids.  They were the noted aether artifacts.  I checked my original document from De Roy with the inventory.

The artifacts’ nature had made them more curiosities to me now.  That was if De Roy had been truthful in his assessment of them.  I slowly paged through them again before closing the screen.  I could get all of these enchantments in the Bazaar.  I researched online for city-based tactical warfare to try and get ahead of Lilith.  Monday morning came too soon.

Hockey practice and classes passed uneventfully.  At lunch, Mandy tried to sit at my table but was asked pointedly to leave by Jade.  I did get a text from Rob asking to meet after school.  He wanted to meet at the little league field a few blocks from our houses.  I guessed he didn’t want Yuki or his sister to see him talking with me.

I waited in the dugout for Rob, and he didn’t disappoint.  He walked across the field and sat next to me.  “Hey, Rob,” I greeted him and waited for his decision.

Rob finally spoke after a pause, “Do you really have magic?  I know what I saw, but it could have been some sleight of hand or…. I don’t know a trick.”

I wasn’t going to do anything out here in the open, so I just confirmed, “It is real.  I have had actual magic for about three months.”

Rob looked constipated, “I told my priest. I told him about you, and he knew about magic.”

I stood sharply, “Rob!  I told you not to tell anyone!” I started to think about how I would contain this.  Maybe it would be charming Rob and the priest to forget.

“He told me magic was real,” Rob defended himself, “I believe you.”  I was pacing and angry, trying to contain my fury at the betrayal.  Rob continued, “They are sending a recruiter to meet you.  I wanted to give you a heads up.”

“From the Magus Arcanum?”  I asked heatedly.

Rod looked confused, “No, he said from the Vatican Inquisition.  Don’t be angry. They are not like the Inquisition in history books.  Father Fitzpatrick explained they recruit and train mages to hunt dangerous creatures.”  Rob was standing now, trying to salvage his betrayal of my secret.

The Magus Arcanum, the Purists, and now the Vatican Inquisition.  How many hidden human organizations are out there?  “I’m not interested,” I barked at Rob and started walking away.

He caught up to me, “Here him out, please!  I have learned more in the last few days than I ever wanted to learn.  You can help do good for the church Caleb.  Exorcise demons, hunt werewolves, capture rogue witches, and just do good protecting normal people,” he implored.

I spun on my heel.  “What they told you was probably not the whole truth.  There is more than one side to a narrative.”  Having been in the wider world, I knew that werewolves were not all bad.  Demons…well, I was not evil…maybe not good…definitely not evil.  “Rob,” I said solemnly, “we can no longer be friends.  You broke my trust.”

I turned and continued walking.  That stung a bit.  I felt like I had given up too easily but didn’t have the time or energy.  And now I had to prepare for whatever representative of the Vatican Inquisition showed.  I got to my house and found it empty.  A quick check of my texts showed that Artica and Beledia were headed to the climate-controlled warehouse.  They were meeting movers to sort things out of the steel shipping containers.

I decided to call Iris and invite her over to find out more about the Vatican Inquisition.  She, of course, brought Abigail, Vida, Kiri, and Eilina with her.  The group invaded the cabin and swarmed over it like locusts.  I managed to get Iris into the study, and she told me what she knew of the Vatican Inquisition.

“I didn’t study much Arcana history Caleb, but I know the Inquisition is an arm of the church that technically doesn’t exist.  The church and Magus Arcanum don’t really get along.”  I looked at my Apollyon phone and searched in the Magus Arcanum database for the Inquisition.  It didn’t have much detail but did have general notes of the history of the Inquisition.

It was not always called the Inquisition.  It started as a military organization that specialized in dealing with dangers that escaped the transit, but over time, the church administrators used it for personal grudges.  The best news was the Magus Arcanum seemed to think the Inquisition was not a very powerful entity in the magical world.

Iris was still talking, “The Inquisition mostly operates in Europe.  They keep a relatively low profile.  I think they might have tried to recruit my mother, but she only mentioned it in passing.  I don’t think you have much to worry about, Caleb.  When the recruiter shows up, just tell him you are not interested.  You can always call in a favor from Rincewind.”  I soured at that suggestion.

I talked with Iris as the others played air hockey in the gaming basement.  That stung a little as I had procured the air hockey table because I enjoyed playing with Rob.  Abigail came up, was shocked at how empty the fridge was, and went out for groceries.  I gave her cash and asked Vida and Eilina to go with her so she didn’t only get healthy food.  Right now, they were just buying groceries for Artica and Bedelia.  I was still living at home but planned to spend my afternoons here.

To her consternation, I played Kiri in air hockey and won four of five games.  “Caleb, you have a nice place here.  I hope you do not mind, but I repaired some of the wood beams and hardened them with my magic.  Strengthened and filled in the cracks.”

“Not at all.  Thank you, Kiri,” I didn’t realize there were any issues.

Kiri shrugged, “Not really.  Maybe in fifty years or hundred years.  But this way, you will be fine for at least three hundred.” Kiri walked and looked at the signed hockey jerseys on the wall in the game room, not understanding their significance.  Kiri turned and asked, “So when are you going to take Eilina?  She is getting impatient.”

I sighed, “I want it to be special.  The winter wolf pelt in front of the fireplace—I thought that maybe there,”  I revealed to her.  This conversation felt awkward.  I was talking about having sex with her sister.  But sex was not as taboo in elven culture.

Kiri’s eyes were lively, “Really?  She definitely would remember that.  Maybe you want to test it first?”  She moved to stand in front of me, but a car door closed outside, interrupting us.

We walked outside, and they had returned from shopping. They spent the entire $500 I had given Abigail, and we had a merry time filing the cupboards and fridge. Abigail then made dinner. Chicken Marsala with coconut rice and strawberry and walnut salad. It was all fabulous, and it felt nice having everyone at the kitchen table breaking in the new dishware.

When everyone left after ten pm, I was left alone. I checked, and Bedelia and Artica were just leaving now and would be back in a few hours. I went home and got ready for Tuesday.

Tuesday was much of the same, except I didn’t see Rob at lunch. He was in school and avoiding me. Should I be the one who felt guilty? It had been him who had tanked our friendship. Granted, I had been the one growing distant over the last three months. After school, I had an uninspired quick aether core session with Bedelia in her room. She had taken the second bedroom on the second floor. There were two bedrooms in the basement, but one of those bedrooms would be converted into a library/study.

The library study was going to have some very expensive furniture and shelving coming from the containers. The entire set was made from African Blackwood, and De Roy made sure to send it as he noted it was worth nearly half a million dollars. I couldn’t believe it, but the furniture was made in the early 1900s, and the shelves in the late 1930s complement the desk, drafting table, chair, sofa, and cellarette. The shelves had carved reliefs of the Greek gods, supposedly by some famous artist. I just thought it would be nice to have somewhere to study.

I had a massive collection of antique books coming as well, and the room was not going to have enough space to store them. I thought I could scan them into my mind space and sell them off after. Many of the titles were not in English, but I was sure Lilith would appreciate them anyway.

Wednesday morning I went for a run with Abigail. I got caught up on all the gossip. Vida and Eilina were studying to take the AP exams. I wasn’t sure why Eilina was doing it, but Abigail explained she wanted to get out of high school sooner rather than later so she could go to college. She was looking forward to the party scene. I guess that made some sense. Surprisingly, Abigail had not heard about Eilina pressing for me to raise her core.

“But you know what, Caleb? Bedelia checked my aether core today and said it had stabilized!” She was smiling and excited. “I can start working on my magic again!” She jumped on me, wrapping her legs and arms around me, “And we can start helping you get stronger!”

It was a chilly morning, and we were pretty far from the parking lot, so I did not think we would be disturbed. We moved off the trail into the woods, kissing while I applied my vortex. Abigail was wearing running shorts and ground her hips into me as we walked. When I stopped, she went to her knees and aggressively pulled my shorts down. After she got me aroused she asked, “Caleb, can you go demon for me?” Her eyes stared up at me pleadingly.

I looked around, and we were not that far from the trail. “No, I don’t think so. If you want, we can pick this up at the cabin?”

Her answer was no, as she resumed her administration of my shaft. She almost seemed rushed as one hand stroked my shaft while she kept adding more and more saliva. Her other hand was working her running shorts off. She stood when her shorts were off and pressed her bare ass into my lubricated shaft. I dribbled some saliva onto my shaft but left her to reach around and guide my member into herself.

The saliva worked as my glans found her heat and spurred her tempo. I used both my arms to support her as she turned her head back to kiss me while our hips did the work. Her first orgasm was soft as I felt her channel convulse. I started adding saliva to our kissing to help her reach a stronger climax for her second.

It worked as her entire body convulsed, and I needed to hold her up as her body got weak. Her core looked fine in my aether sight, so I continued. My glans retreated and penetrated her over and over. One more orgasm from her was what I wanted. I turned off my control and focused on my pleasure as her warm and slick vagina caressed my shaft over and over. My release was a blank, but I had forgotten how much that was. I filled Abigail, and it triggered her third. When I released her, she stepped forward and was dripping from her opening but had a massive smile.

“Caleb, how did I do? Did that help you?” She asked quickly. It was like her pleasure was my pleasure. I quickly checked for her. 216/220. I had enough to do an advancement.

“Abs,” I moved to her and kissed her, “You helped a lot.” I was excited to advance but quickly dressed with Abigail. Back at the car, she grabbed some baby wipes from her backpack.

“Came prepared!” She grinned and me some.

I dropped Abigail off at Iris’ house and showered at the cabin. Artica was not in the master suite. Maybe she and Bedelia were getting along extremely well? I stepped into the shower, turned the water to cold, and went into my mind space.

I stumbled backward when I arrived in the pedestal room. Pandora was staring at me. She looked different, but slowly that sex smile I remembered graced her face, “I’m back! Did you miss me?” Lilith walked out of the library, and Pandora frowned, “Damn. Go on a little vacation, and you get replaced!” It was said in jest. The two constructs representing my subconscious went and stood before each other. “Damn it, she is prettier than me too!” I wasn’t sure if that was a jest or not.

Lilith responded with passion, “Are you kidding? You are the sexiest bitch in here!”

Pandora considered for a moment, “Ok, I like her.” She held out her hand, “I’m Pandora, the problem child.”

Lilith shook her hand, “Your reputation precedes you. I am Lilith, the only adult in the room.”

Wow, that was a slam on me! I shook my head, not quite grasping the significance of everything. I asked, “Where is Andromeda? And why wasn’t I aware you had returned? And how the hell was Andromeda able to take you in the first place!?”

Pandora put on her cocky facade, “She just brought me into her mind space. When she visits you her, it is just one of her constructs. Actually, all of her constructs look exactly like her. You must be repressing your feminine side with us.” She stood next to Lilith to face me in solidarity. Lilith rolled her eyes.

I asked again, “How did you get back without me knowing?”

“Because I am not an anomaly. I was created here. This is my home,” Pandora said. She looked at Lilith, “Are you wearing my clothes?” I rolled my eyes at that. She was clearly joking, though. Pandora got more serious, “Andromeda is busy. Her fleet is approaching Mercaneous, and she expects some heavy fighting.” Pandora tapped her chin, “You know you should get yourself a spaceship too.”

“Well, what did you learn on your vacation?” I asked expectantly.

Pandora froze for a second, and her face lost all mirth, “I learned my place. Not that I would have ever done anything to harm you.” I remember Andromeda had said Pandora was a free spirit that might have tried to take over my consciousness if left unchecked for a few decades.

“We can talk later. Lilith, why don’t you give her a tour of the new digs,” I waved the two women away and focused on my banner. Andromeda had told me to raise abyssal eyes first. I focused and felt the burn behind my eyes when the pain receded, and my vision cleared the banner read.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Abyssal Eyes | Upper | Tier 2 | 400 life essence | see in low light and see a sapient’s core |

Shit, the life essence cost had doubled to reach lower tier 3! My life essence cap had increased from 220 to 240. So every 100 life essence I spent raised my cap by 10. My growth was fast but too slow. Kind of an oxymoron. I needed more life essence. I needed to accelerate my gains before the conflict with the aboleth.

My life essence cap was going to increase no matter what abilities I spent it on by the same rate. Still, I hoped to focus on getting more abilities to upper tier 2. I returned to the real world and used the device on myself. 4.017. My aether core had increased again. I went to the mind space and checked the park’s outer wall. Yes, it had increased by about an arm’s length.

I thought about talking with Pandora but maybe tonight after the hockey game. It was going to be a challenging opponent, according to the coach. The school day was annoying as I had two exams and had to keep going back and forth to my mind space. Pandora and Lilith were not as helpful as I had hoped. They just referred me to the book in the library for each question rather than giving me the answer outright.

I knew I had aced both exams, but the effort to do so irked me. I was actually thinking of bypassing my two colluding constructs and making a third construct that was eager to please and wouldn’t make me work for things. I would try to reason with them first before making a third construct.

After school, I had a session with Bedelia scheduled. But she canceled on me. She was going to look at properties with Artica. I thought Artica was my bodyguard. What the hell was going on?

The game wasn’t even close. We won 7-0. I only had two goals and one assist. The other team had no demis and was dealing with an outbreak of the flu. Our team was inching toward the playoffs. Only two teams in our conference of 8 teams made the playoffs. Surprisingly, we only had one loss, which was a forfeit, as Wednesday’s game was a rescheduled game that would have been our second loss due to forfeit.

My entire crew was in the stands; my parent, Amelia, and all the girls. Monsoon and Frost stood behind the group as Jade and Anya were with them. I didn’t see Mandy anywhere in the stands, which I had a bad feeling about. Her twin brother was on the team. I was also surprised to see Traci and the gymnastics team as a group in the stands.

My parents wanted to celebrate, so I texted everyone I was out for a late dinner with them. The conversation was focused on college once again. I was even shocked to learn they were willing to pay for college if I didn’t want to play hockey. I didn’t want to disappoint them, so I told them I would start looking at colleges over the summer. The truth was if I could pass all the AP exams in May, I would have enough credits to graduate.

But if I was going to take the AP exams, then I needed Lilith and Pandora to be more accommodating with the correct answers. What was I having a battle with my subconscious because I thought I was cheating somehow? Ridiculous!

Thursday morning after hockey practice, I was walking to my car, planning to shower at the cabin. There was a young woman late 20s or early 30s leaning against my car. I instantly went on alert and read her with my abyssal eyes. The upgrade was amazing, like Andromeda had said it would be. I could clearly see a person’s core and even had a rough estimation of their tier and how much aether they currently had.

Her core was weak in upper tier 1. I guessed maybe 0.60 just by looking at her. I could also make out aether devices on her person. A concealed aether handgun, her belt, both earrings and….her necklace had a crucifix on it that glowed in my aether sight.

This had to be the representative from the Inquisition. I was confused as this was a woman, and she was…well…hot. I had only slowed my walk to my car as I had examined her. She looked like a normal hot model in pedestrian clothes. I had puzzled out that the church had sent her to seduce me as I got close, and she offered a bright white smile, “Great game tonight. I was hoping we could talk.”

“No thanks, I am an atheist,” I said. That was not exactly true. I believed in god before all this shit happened to me, but I had not had time to ponder everything. With what I actually knew now, there had to be an all-powerful being somewhere in some form.

The woman’s smile faded, obviously caught off guard. “Huh, those bastards told you I was coming. Figures. Make my pitch that much harder.” She was talking to herself, which definitely deflated some of her sexy aura. “Well, Caleb, you are at least going to hear me out. We can do this here or go sit down somewhere. She looked around.”

“Sorry, miss, you have me at a disadvantage. You know my name. I don’t know yours,” I said, calmly. She did not have any illusions going, so she was actually this hot. No, she had an aura going from one of the earrings. I blinked and filtered it—nope, she was still hot, just not sexy hot.

She held her hand for me to shake, “Magistra Aurora Esposito, High Inquisitor Magus.” She seemed to lack social etiquette beyond being attractive enough to be a runway model.

“Fine, we can talk at the Panera downtown. I will meet you there,” I said, calmy. This was going to be interesting.

Floor plans for cabin house

<https://www.houseplans.net/floorplans/03900662/lake-front-plan-4603-square-feet-5-bedrooms-3.5-bathrooms>

Garage Apartment at cabin house

<https://www.houseplans.net/floorplans/96300770/craftsman-plan-1453-square-feet-2-bedrooms-1.5-bathrooms>