

Chapter 211: Until it's done

Mercury knew he was different now than just a few minutes ago. His whole existence had been almost stripped back down to nothing. That led one to make a few realizations about themselves. His Skills were tested to their very limits. But he shoved aside all those thoughts.

He had won a <Bet>, sure, but that didn't matter either. There were only a few notifications that he wanted to see immediately.

[<Astral Body> has levelled up! <Astral Body lv. 9 -> 10>]

[<Astral Body> has met the necessary qualifications for evolution. Evolve? (666 Skill points)]

[<Survivor> has levelled up! <Survivor lv. 8 -> XX>]

[Mastery Error. Overwhelming odds overcome. Imminent death cancelled via item. Additionally Mastery granted. Soft Cap eliminated.]

[<Survivor> has levelled up! <Survivor lv. 8 -> 19>]

[<Survivor> has met the necessary qualifications for evolution. Evolve? (34 Skill points)]

[Cheap evolution cost due to vastly exceeding mastery required for evolution.]

Mercury grinned, a hungry glint in his eyes. But there was more.

[<Unbroken> and <Unfatigued> have levelled up! <Unbroken lv. 8 -> 10>, <Unfatigued lv. 8 -> 10>]

[Compatible Skills detected. Evolutionary Fusion requirements confirmed. Initiate Evolutionary Fusion of <Unbroken> and <Unfatigued>? (900 Skill Points)]

Those were the Skill evolutions he had gained access to. Since the <Bet> had not yet paid out, he didn't have quite enough points for the final evolution, but he was going to grab the first two. They would simply have to do. There was one other notification that caused an even greater effect, though.

[Your understanding of <Rainfall> has increased! <Rainfall (lowest) -> (low)>]

It was only three letters different, but Mercury felt it. He had understood himself a little more in those last moments. That ferocity that came about when he was pushed to the brink, the undying desire to live on. It felt like that part of him was dangerous, but...

Right now, without activating <Still Mirror> Mercury understood his anger. And it finally clicked that the emotion was important to who he was. That people who crossed his boundaries and didn't apologize or adjust deserved his anger.

Not equally, of course. Not everyone deserved to be *crushed* the same way that Ul'den'tyrel of Yearning did. And of course, often his anger was unfounded or unproductive, but in this case?

Mercury felt he could let himself be a little angry.

At that, the mirror of his mind smoothed over, because <Still Mirror> no longer recognized his fury as a disturbance. It was simply part of who he was, a required tool to be wielded. The same way he wielded hammers to beat metal into shape, he could wield his anger as a tool for his own storm of <Rainfall>.

The mopaaw took a deep breath, finally finding himself calm. "Hey, Appy, where did that wish go?" he asked.

[It increased mastery gains and adjusted your affinities. Congratulations. You have some of the highest affinities to willpower recorded in mortals. Same with affinities to survival, learning, growth, understanding, and so forth.]

Nodding, Mercury answered out loud, talking to his helper. "That explains the strange evolutionary cost. Say, the fact that one Skill costs six-six-six points..."

[Channelling additional computing power. This came about due to a rounding Error with your affinity and the original cost of 2000 points. However, the influence of your mythology and subconscious on these numbers cannot be understated. The evolution may result in a demonic or devil-aligned Skill.]

Mercury nodded. "I see. Could it also be a substitute for something eldritch?"

[Accessing database. Definition found. Inquiry confirmed. Yes, it could, due to a lack of known numbers specifically related to the eldritch, a generally occult number may have been picked. Adjusting estimates. Resulting Skill may be "sinister" rather than belonging to any singular school of thought.]

"Right," Mercury noted with a faint smirk. "Thanks, Appy. Recommendations on evolution?"

[Skill point gains usually slow down around your level. Recommended: Taking more <Bets> in order to facilitate Skill point gain. Advanced planning also indicates good 100-year results should more points be invested to raise mastery of <Skill Point Generation>.]

100-year results, huh? Mercury didn't quite enjoy that idea, actually, especially since he needed rather... immediate power right now. The affinity boosts were very welcome, though. He must have been slowly raising them. Despite that, Skill evolution costs were going up, so this boost was rather welcome.

"One last question," Mercury said, letting a pause hang in the air. "You remember the past fight, Appy?"

[Of course, dum-dum. If you die, this consciousness dies too. Our fates are linked.]

"If you die, will I die, Appy?"

[Insufficient data. System intelligence has never been eliminated before.]

Mercury paused, then shook his head with a faint smile. "That's reassuring, actually," he said. "Thanks for your help, and sticking with me."

[This intelligence is invested in the individual's success and wishes for them to rise to greater heights. Recommendation: Take a little more time and some fewer risks.]

Mercury laughed at the suggestion. "Alright. You're awesome, Appy. Talk to you in a bit."

Briefly, Mercury also thought about why Zyl had not shown up, but the most likely answer was... that he'd tried and simply been slowed down too much by Yearning's incredible mass.

After another short pause, as on cue, Arber turned up, the avatar with the giant pirate hat simply rising from the floor.

"Mercury!" they greeted him. "So you return, matey." Then, the script from last time broke, and their gaze fell on the vomit. "... Rough seas while coming here?"

The mopaaw couldn't help but crack a smile. "You know, you're probably who I missed most about this place."

"Wow, rude," Alice jokingly supplied from next to them. She'd appeared with a gust of wind. Mercury felt the breeze greet him for a short moment before it dissipated. The way she gave life to the things she befriended was really quite something.

Rather than follow that same line of conversation again, Mercury interrupted it before it began. "Alright," he said. "I'm glad to have you both here. Alice. I used an item given by the court of Dust. I've come a day back in time after almost dying."

"What?" the hero asked, confused.

Mercury stared at her. "Look at me. Listen. I've done this fight before. That's the <Truth>."

His words rang out with a gentle ripple. Alice's eyes widened. "Oh, crap."

Then, Mercury's smile widened. "Nah," he said. "Not crappy at all. You see, I know who we're fighting now. I'm gonna fuck them up. Just get me to them."

Alice blinked. "Are... are you sure?"

He nodded. "Very. Let me show you."

Saying so, he drew on <Rainfall>. With the newest understanding increase, the ability manifested, cloaking Mercury in a storm of a thousand shining drops. Alice's eyes widened, but Mercury wasn't done. He increased the power even more, cranking it up to its limits without willing it to damage Arber.

Instead of a light, calm drizzle, it turned into a torrent, a downpour. The raindrops shone with a light silver sheen, and winds rose around him.

"Wow," Alice gasped. "That's... different."

"Right, it is. I also unlocked some evolutions I need to select before we re-do this whole shtick."

Slowly, Alice and Arber nodded. "Right... do you want to get to that right now?"

"Yes. Please, give me a few moments, you two. Trust me on this," he said with conviction.

"We're winning this."

"Appy, engage evolutions of <Astral Body> and <Survivor> afterwards."

[Evolution confirmed. Engaging. Please pick an option to evolve the Skill into. The price will be the same (666 Skill points), no matter which you choose.]

[1. <Demonic Descent>

2. <Angelic Ascent>

3. <Self Sabotage>

4. <Outer Opalescence>

5. <Astral Advent>]

[<Demonic Descent>: Due to incredible tenacity, the individual has channelled a sin and kept their mind intact. Dive deeper into depravity, and bring it unto the world. Your self will become more resilient and nearly immutable to outside influences. May the world bend to your will.]

[<Angelic Ascent>: The individual has proven to be graceful and kind. Therefore, a part of the powers of light may grace them with their divinity. Grow wings, and see the heavens for yourself. Others will become more susceptible to your influence, and you will see through any lies. May the world bend to your will.]

[<Self Sabotage>: You have proven that to succeed at your goals, nothing is too far. You will gladly leave everything behind if it means victory. Kindness? Reason? Memories? Love? Who needs them, when you can have power. Gain enhancements exponentially proportional to what you give up. The less of you remains the more of you there is.]

All three were out. Mercury saw how they were granted to him, but the first two reeked of external influences. No.

[<Outer Opalescence>: From nothing there is born a star. See the patterns of creation and destruction interwoven through the void between stars, and play with them yourself. Bless the living with your creations, or destroy them and bring them to the dead. Your will be commanded.]

Mercury frowned. Not this one either. It was better, but again, it would push him into an archetype. Skills didn't usually funnel someone this much... were there external bidders involved in wanting him to pick?

He called up the final Skill.

[<Astral Advent>: Finding yourself is a long and arduous process, yet you have taken steps along the road. Manifest all that you are, ever were, into your astral self, and stake your being against the world. Be malleable enough to grow, yet tough enough to remain yourself. Never bow to the unworthy. Never break to tyrants.]

A small smile played along Mercury's face.

[Evolution selected.]

[The individual has acquired the Skill <Astral Advent> through Skill evolution!]

That was a Skill he could get along with. It took everything he was into account. The fact that it relied on his past was a little strange, but Mercury had learned that to be who he was now, his past mistakes were also important. He could forgive them and still repent by doing better, now. So, he was okay protecting that person.

Taking a deep breath, he felt the evolved Skill settle in place. It was potent, ringing through his astral self. This time, he would not be eroded by yearning. He would stake his existence, and he would prove worthy, because that was part of who he was.

He moved on to <Survivor>.

[Evolution confirmed. Engaging. Please pick an option to evolve the Skill into. The price will be the same (34 Skill points), no matter which you choose.]

[1. <Prevailing>

2. <Steady>]

[<Prevailing>: The individual has displayed a remarkable ability to hang onto life. This Skill allows wounds to be mended in relation to the individual's desire to keep on. Death comes for everyone, yet you refuse to leave behind regrets, clinging on for as long as needed. Admirable.]

[<Steady>: Due to the user's unshakeable resolve, their body also becomes unshakeable. Gain greater resistance to wounds, especially to knockback, and enhance your recovery as you stand your ground. Cowering is for cowards.]

Mercury gave these two a long moment, then picked <Prevailing>. It seemed more suitable to him, even if <Steady> read arguably more powerful? But he had used <Survivor> exactly for what <Prevailing> said, hanging onto life because he wanted to.

Not because he had an issue with death. In fact, once his time came, Mercury would leave, but he did not want to leave with regrets. He smirked. What a contrast to his old life.

[Evolution selected.]

[The individual has acquired the Skill <Prevailing> through Skill evolution!]

Once more, the Skill settled in, and he breathed. With these two, there would be no repeat of the last time. His body, physical and astral, had become tougher.

“Hey Appy?” he asked. “The <Bet>. It’s still running, right?”

[Confirmed. Yes, it is. Until the fight with the ruler of Yearning had been completed the individual may not access Skills related to hiding or controlling their own emotions.]

“Right, okay. I can work with that. Why did it not complete?”

[The encounter never was logged as fully completed due to the intention of refighting. When you won, you were losing the bet, and when you had odds greater than 0 of surviving again, the ruler was alive again.]

Mercury hummed for a moment. That was fair. Unfortunate that it did not give him any rewards yet. “What is the difficulty logged at?”

[Due to being determined at the time of setting the <Bet>, it is a difficulty class of 4, with the added condition that there must be a direct confrontation between you and Yearning.]

Another nod. That made sense. He could handle that.

Mercury finally turned to Arber and Alice.

“I’m ready.”

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A few short minutes later, Mercury found himself back in the twisting, rearranging realm of Yearning. Quartz and amber statues appeared and then disintegrated in front of his eyes. He was once again breathing air generated by relying on <Rainfall>, letting the influence of the realm slide off him.

With his skillset, the fact that he was now somewhat familiar with the place meant that it was a lot easier to resist the effects. Things he understood had more trouble harming him through <Rainfall>.

So, they walked across the shifting grounds, repelling the influence, resisting when the realm itself wanted to split them up, and never yielding to the presence of Yearning, even as it tried to smash Mercury into a pancake against the ground.

He carried himself taller this time, shrugging off the pressure more easily with his stronger spirit. Still, it was difficult, but he did not stumble. Once more he was grateful for the prosthetic, because without it, he would have much more trouble standing upright.

Mercury breathed, and walked forward. This realm... a part of it had come back with him, tethered to his inner world. Now, the whole place felt more malleable. He could feed the

influence of Ul'den'tyrel all throughout it, but he could also push against it. Create his own little pocket of authority.

Not that he did. Not yet, no. Mercury breathed, and pulled on <Itinerant> to continue their journey through this place, faster and faster.

Until, eventually, it happened.

That same *pull* that he knew would get them to the amber lake, to Yearning and its branching, ever growing limbs.

Last time he had resisted and recast the influence. This time, he twisted it, strengthened it, and flew further ahead.

When he appeared at the amber lake, it was not in the trap that was prepared for him. He was already slingshotted halfway across the lake, falling through the air. Instantly, he stopped his fall with a platform from his rijn.

Already, the lake boiled and frothed in front of him, as the ruler of Yearning rose. Branches grew, limbs snapping into place, as that same enormous body of maws and heads and arms and legs appeared from all around.

The world rippled with its arrival. But they were prepared, and met it with brutal force.

A dozen javelins, infused with streaks of electricity, slammed into the monster's glassy hide and exploded. Parts of it folded in on themselves, crushed by enormous force. Even more was broken and torn apart by Alice.

Ul'den'tyrel writhed as if surprised, reaching out with its growing limbs, but... this time it was harder. Mercury's <Rainfall> suffused not only the air around him, it was literally infesting the realm itself.

Anchoring them, weaving them into the remaining tapestry of the threads that he had gotten last time, Mercury had begun... ripping this world apart.

His mind were deep in ihn'ar, seeing the gaps where the void was. Thread after thread, plucked out of the fading tapestry and added to his own realm. The gaps enlarged and grew, and from between them, Mercury felt a terrible presence that simultaneously felt like nothing at all.

A moment later, that horrible vacuum sprung into being.

The world ripped open. Claws of pure darkness ripped through the gap, entering into the realm of Yearning. They invaded, defiling this once-sacred grove of depravity.

Mercury couldn't tell what the creature of the void looked like. It had claws and eyes, but that was all the descriptions he could give, his mind struggling to grasp it. In fact, without <Nothingness>, he could feel he would struggle to understand it at all.

It turned to him, curiously, reaching out a claw. He was a star, after all, shining so bright-

He didn't hide. Not like last time. He didn't cower from <Nothingness>, because he was both someone and no one at all. He understood what it was like to be <Nothing>. He could relate. The two of them were not so different at all.

The creature paused, its claws only stopping just before they touched Mercury. Its hunger shifted into curiosity, and the clawed hand approached again. But, instead of shearing his face into ribbons, they laid softly against his fur.

Still, his skin split easily, and a thin trickle of blood spilled forth, across his cheek. Mercury held the creature's gaze. "I'm no one, like you," he said, quietly. Barely a whisper, hardly audible over the roaring of the lake. Over the air rushing out into the void. But it heard. "I'm angry like you."

Slowly, the creature took its hand off his face. "I want to change this place. Not quite like you, but... well. You know. You get me."

There was another moment, where the void creature held his gaze. That infinite desire to destroy held at bay by a mutual understanding. It *breathed*. <Rainfall> allowed it to.

After a few seconds, it turned around, slowly, its motions a little like a puppet on strings, as if even reaching out and controlling this body was difficult. And all at once...

Its gentle demeanour vanished.

Mercury could hardly tell what happened next, but it happened. In a storm of violence, the creature descended on Yearning. It cut into Ul'den'tyrel without hesitation or restraint, without care for itself.

Violence was all they could know for a few moments, as the battlefield turned into the place of a massacre. Both the void creature and the ruler of Yearning tore into each other, biting, clawing, breaking, as if reduced to their barest selves. All pretenses of great power were abandoned, and the two fought an animalistic tug of war.

Neither won.

Half a second later, it began raining red blood, translucent white blood, and black blood. Horror descended in seconds, as great parts of bodies plunged into the lake, sending great splashes of amber into the sky.

And then it was over. The void creature dragged itself back through the rift and... pulled it closed behind itself. For a moment, Mercury saw all those holes in the world shut themselves. It was whole. For a brief second.

He pulled at those threads, too, unravelling more of the realm under his power. For as long as he could, Mercury undid Yearning, all the while battling against its ruler with Alice and Daryl. Great explosions rocked the lake, rocked the very realm, and the ruler received great wounds.

None were great enough, though, and eventually, the time came where Alice and Daryel were running out of steam. They had thrown resource after resource against the great mass of flesh, and it was simply not enough.

At that moment, Mercury stepped forward.

He was not the strongest on this battlefield, but he had an important skillset. And that was enough.

Without hesitation, he manifested <Rainfall> as a great storm around himself. He had stolen so much of this realm by now, to... with <Dream Manifestation> and the threads he had already woven, the place bent to his whims.

Mercury willed the amber lake to freeze over, and it crystallized.

In a second, it froze. Threads of the failing world descended on him, applying pressure, but he leaned on <Astral Advent>. His spirit was powerful, and as he held it together, the pressure simply tempered it, rather than doing harm.

Taking a deep breath, Mercury stepped forward.

Warping the world to acquiesce him, he moved. <Itinerant> combined with <Dream Manifestation> and his general control over the landscape, dragging him forward towards Yearning.

In a single step, he slammed into its translucent scales. Then they parted in front of him, as <Sever> carved a hole into the ruler's side. Mercury stepped into those fleshy tunnels again, drawing his domain and the world tighter around himself.

The pressure was heavy. It was crushing. It was abhorrent, and he felt him losing himself. All his Skills roared in protest, everything he was roared, but Yearning was simply too-

"Appy. A hundred points into Willpower."

Willpower: 258 -> 358

[The individual's Willpower has surpassed 300! Your manifestation becomes steel.]

Instantly, his domain, made up from all those Skills grew denser. Rather than a thin sphere of influence, it turned into an inviolable declaration of himself. Mercury pitted his entire conceptual weight against Yearning - and pushed the creature back.

That manic glint was in his eyes again. Why shouldn't he be able to do this? It only made sense. He had done it before, in another life. He was stronger, now, his will so much more powerful. And with that thought, <Perceived Ease>, too, helped.

In fact... he had been planning to only use this when he got to the core of Yearning. But why wait? He wasn't afraid, he was *angry*.

"Hey! Ul'den'tyrel!" Mercury screamed as loudly as he could.

A moment later, the insides of the ruler shuddered and twisted with a ripple of power. For a moment, thousands of eyes opened up on the inside of the translucent skin, staring at Mercury. Then, they were washed away by rainfall.

No, it wouldn't happen that way around. If there was a staredown...

Mercury would do the staring.

Without hesitation, he <Witnessed> Yearning.

Thousands of impressions, of horrifying hunger and desire and pain and despair and fury flooded into him. A consciousness so vast and ancient it almost swallowed him, blew him away like a tsunami might do a park bench.

But it didn't.

Mercury gritted his teeth. He bore with it. "... So fucking what?!" He'd suffered. He'd hated. He'd wanted. But that *didn't matter*.

A vast ancient consciousness of suffering was still just that. It was an amalgamation of pain and of greed and of a thousand million other things and all of them paled in front of Mercury. Like a raging storm, he rose against the torrent of foreign feelings.

"So what!!"

Every single person out there went through tough shit. What separates the good from the bad is those who hurt others because of it. Some things were fine. Stealing instead of starving was fine. Taking from the ultra-rich was fine. In fact, Mercury was even fine with hating people who pushed others down.

Which is what Yearning was. Like a billionaire whining about not having enough yachts it snatched more people, more places, all to satisfy its undying want. Without deserving them, without earning anything, it just took.

Mercury did the same thing as last time... and rejected Ul'den'tyrel again. He had the power now, the raw force of will to push the ruler back. His mind slammed into their fragmented one with all the force he could muster.

He felt the impact ring out all throughout the giant creature, cracking its skin. His <Rainfall> tore through the organs, and translucent <Drake's Wings> rose from his back. He ran, as fast as he could, breaking apart Yearning and the world of falsities it had wrapped itself in.

Violently, he broke through all its defenses. None of them mattered. None of them were valid. It was stupid excuses for cruelty. He <Witnessed> the thing, again and again, like he was slamming a sledgehammer into a brick wall.

Bit by bit, he cracked that mindset open. He crushed brick after brick, spreading the damage. That fractured spirit came together to resist his strikes, but it didn't matter. They couldn't resist. Even as the bits of Yearning were fused together against his strikes, Mercury whittled them down.

And then, eventually, after dozens of uses of <Witnessed>, panting and exhausted, manic and furious, Mercury shredded enough of Yearning to step into that centralmost chamber, where there was an egg trapped in its centre.

Ul'den'tyrel was in there. A creature that was so small and fragile it hadn't even hatched yet, and still, despite all that, it had done so much hurt.

The pressure descended even harsher on Mercury, the same pain that last time could have extinguished his spirit, like water on a flame.

Instead, Mercury doused that fury in gasoline.

"Stop. Taking!" He screamed at the creature, <Witnessing> it once more, and slamming his mind against its. Bringing to bear all his will, all that he was, all that he'd ever been. Every single Skill he could use to reinforce himself, every bit of practice he had put into strengthening his mind, every bit of exercise he had learned from Uunrahzil, and the discipline he learned from Yasashiku and the grit he learned from Yvette.

He laid it all out blankly, every bit of experience he had in his life, and rejected that incessant desire to take and devour that Yearning expressed.

Ul'den'tyrel... crumbled.

The ruler of Yearning, a broken throne, and experience that had defied death itself. An ancient monster that clung to life despite its time being over, thought of with terror and reverence, with the fear of getting too close and being turned into an amber statue.

A plague that had ruined hundreds of lives, hundreds of places... all fell apart.

It started small, a thin crack spreading through the walls of that core room, but then it spread. Once the floodgates were opened, there was no stopping it. Crack by crack, piece by piece, the giant creature, part tree, part antlers, part abomination... it broke.

Bit by bit, it fell onto the frozen amber lake, bits of skin and fur and scale dissolving atop the icy orange.

Mercury frowned. It wasn't enough to just do that. No, he wanted to do better.

Without hesitation, even if he knew it might hurt, he began to pull. The world, the realm of Yearning itself, came undone under the force of his mind. It wasn't even held together by a ruler anymore, and already, the whole weight of it wanted to descend onto him.

But he'd been prepared. He had already woven the beginnings of the framework when he absorbed the previous threads, when Alice and Daryel bought him that time. Now... even with a world descending, it simply had to rearrange itself and slow in.

Like pieces of a puzzle, thread by thread, it all slotted together. Yearning was being devoured, falling in on Mercury and rearranging itself there.

Except, he didn't devour it all.

Almost all of it, sure, but then, bit by bit, the tapestry he had prepared for it, the framework, was completed. But a few threads still drifted around, aimlessly, with nowhere to go. Too few to really pressure Mercury, but enough to where he could grasp hold of them.

[Your understanding of <Dreamweave> has increased! <Dreamweave (low) -> (medium)>]

Mercury knew Ul'den'tyrel now. He had seen all their suffering, all their struggles, all their desires even. And he hated them for it. All people who took so incessantly deserved to have it all taken away.

But now? There was hardly anything left of this place. Already, the people who had been held in crystal shells were thawing. Finally free, after however long they'd been trapped. Always gasping for air.

Gently, Mercury reached out to the egg, and changed it. Bit by bit. It was a delicate change he made, not enormous, but yet one that would influence the core of Yearning. In fact, it would hardly be Yearning anymore at all.

Mercury didn't feel the need to ask for permission. He had <Witnessed> just how much Ul'den'tyrel was suffering. How they had almost broken out of the hunger haze when he called their name. But it hadn't happened, and something needed to change.

So, he did what he felt was right. With the marks he had left, with every instance of <Witnessed>... he broke down this person to what they were at the core, and made small changes, so maybe, they'd suffer a little less, and do a little more kindness.

All he did was take away a little bit of that desire for ownership, and added a little bit of joy into there. And that was all.

If he changed any more than that, he would also just be taking. He was curious what would happen now, though... Then, it did happen.

Amidst a crumbling, falling realm, from the death of the old, something new arose. The egg in the middle of the decaying corpse cracked, and hatched.

The creature that rose from it was small. It did not have many features. A pair of antlers on its head. Tree-like growths as a body. A glowing orb at the center of its chest, and another as a head, both featureless and perfectly spherical.

A thousand fractured pieces of suffering had been broken down into dust, molten down in the crucible that was Mercury's mind, and reforged. It was a little like smithing, really. He was glad to have learnt that before trying this.

Slowly, he let out a long held breath. As the young fae ruler looked around, Mercury slowly lowered the intensity of <Rainfall>, until it reduced from a storm to a thin covering around himself. He kept <Dream Manifestation> active, just so that there was any sort of realm for him and Alice and Daryel.

In fact... Before he could move, the young sprite approached him. <Intuition> rang no warning bells, and it seemed entirely harmless, so he let it approach. For a few long seconds, the creatures stared at him curiously.

Then, it twirled in the air and landed on his shoulder.

Mercury took another breath. He saw notifications.

[You have changed Ul'den'tyrel of Yearning. Get: A Wish. ~~A World~~]

He smiled faintly. He had already gotten the world. Silently, without saying it out loud... He wished for everyone who had been hurt by Yearning to be okay. A good chunk of it was focused on old Uunrahzil, but he didn't want Daryel's wife to emerge from the crystal as a corpse or something.

This wasn't a monkey's paw type wish, so it was okay. This was a good use of it, he thought.

[Wish granted.]

Then, he faced the little fae again. "Hey there. What's your name, bud?"

[You have sired a new faerie ruler of the court of "Appreciation"! Congratulation! Please choose a name.]

Mercury blinked faintly. He thought people choosing their own names was nicer, generally, but then again, perhaps in faerie culture, people enjoyed being given names? He did not know. "How about... Uldyrel?"

A brief pause.

[Ruler satisfaction acknowledged. Name registered for entity. "Uldyrel, ruler of Appreciation".]

Small parts of what had once been Yearning were still with the young fae. Mercury was happy with this outcome.

Slowly, the two of them floated to the floor, walking along an invisible staircase, as the enormous corpse of Yearning decayed behind them.

And not long later, Mercury stood next to Daryel. The old woman was embracing the fox-lady that he had seen cast in amber only a little bit ago. All signs of dignity were gone from both of them, sobbing their hearts out.

He smiled at Alice and she smiled back.

Mercury didn't feel the urge to go back in time anymore.