Chapter 108

The Callistro Federation was a massive distance from Skyholme. If the series of maps I was looking at were accurate, 33,440 miles—give or take 50 miles. On a full aether crystal charge, we could make maybe 18,000 miles if we did not activate any of the extra systems on board. The problem with the crystals is you could not simply put more aether crystals in series on a skyship. The aether crystals needed to resonate with each other to be on the same runic grid. That meant using parts of the same crystal or getting all the same tiered crystals from the same dungeon that created them.

The Maelstrom already had dual crystals, but they were one crystal that had shattered. The sum of the parts did not equal the whole either. My saving grace was that the Maelstrom was such a small ship compared to a Harbinger or a Wasp so the two crystals worked relatively well. The problem was they took up to thirty-six hours to recharge instead of twenty-three hours like most crystals embedded in an environmental aether siphoning array. With my metal shaping skills, I could probably swap out the crystals, but when an average skyship aether crystal ran 100,000 gold, I was reluctant for the investment.

From my calculations, I needed a tier-six crystal with about 500 units to power the Maelstrom. A crystal that size would cost 320,000 gold if the market held true in the Callisto Federation. It would be the size of a child’s fist. A crystal this size could effectively power the Maelstrom indefinitely as it would recharge from the environment faster than we could drain it under basic flight operations.

While it was easy to charge a tier 1 or 2 crystal with your own aether, it got progressively harder with the higher tier of crystal. I could currently manage to charge a tier-five aether crystal, but it took massive concentrated effort, and it was just a trickle of aether. Eventually, when I became stronger, I would be able to charge even a tier six or seven crystal with my own aether. Even then, a five-hundred-unit tier-six crystal would have a capacity of 121,500 units of aether. My current aether core held just under 6,500 aether units and would mature upward of 23,000. I would not be powering a skyship with my own aether.

My mind drifted to the Heart Stone. I estimated it was a tier 7 crystal with at least 100,000 units. That was the equivalent of seventy million aether units. A crystal that size would cost more than three hundred million gold. But most likely, no one would sell such a valuable artifact. I briefly wondered why one of the powers of Sphere had not just come in and taken the stone from Skyholme.

If I was going to the city of Hakeam, I should be prepared to purchase the crystal. I examined my assets in my dimensional closet with my mind.

410 platinum coins = 41,000 gold

23 mithril coins = 23,000 gold

32 artificed short blades = between 4,800 and 16,000 gold

9 artificed long blades = between 4,500 and 18,000 gold

54 light globes = 2,500 gold in Skyholme but probably much less elsewhere

I also had no idea how well my blades would sell outside of Skyholme. My enchanting work and the blade construction were close to perfect from what I had researched and practiced. I had only sold two long swords through a shop in Aegis City, identical with just a durability enchantment. Both were priced at 300 gold, much lower than the shop owner said they were worth. Even at a lower price, selling the first one took two weeks. The second blade was obtained by a delver on a payment plan. The shop owner kept a 10% commission for the sales, and I never revisited selling more of my work in the city. With all the death in the capital from the Bricio uprising, I assumed the market was saturated with weapons.

I had prioritized creating platinum over mithril. The thing with mithril is it was not generally used as a currency. It was just too valuable in enchanting. The same could be said for adamantine. I had tried twice to create adamantine, but with no reference, I could not. I needed to study a sample for a time with my metal shaping and sense ability. Only ancient dungeons could produce the unique metal. I had not found anywhere that sold a sample, and I was not going to beg Loriel for a sample.

That is why I focused on creating platinum coins. I could make ten platinum coins for every one mithril coin. Since mithril was ten times as valuable as platinum, the aether expense was equivalent in terms of gold for me. Currently, I only needed the mithril for enchanting. With all the mirthil I had taken from the Heart Stone anti-teleportation array chains, I had not needed to create it. I was also trying to use at least a quarter of my daily aether to level up spells.

I concluded my best aether expenditure was making enchanted daggers using my mental shaping skill. A single runic enchantment on one of my daggers would sell for easily 100 gold in Skyholme on the capital island. Two enchantments would value the blade closer to 500 gold and only take an amount of aether I required to make a single platinum coin. Large blades were worth about three times that. My market in Syholme was limited, though. Not many citizens could afford my enchanted blades, and I could quickly saturate the market.

The profit math was about equal for creating blades. A two-enchantment dagger took me an hour, while a long blade with two enchantments took about three hours. I decided to focus on making short blades. We could test out the market in Llith since the city was within the extreme range of the Maelstrom. Then I could better prepare for the four-day trip to Hakeam. I also wanted the lightning elemental spell and knew a copy had been available in Llith Mage Academy. Hopefully, it was still there. I had enough funds to purchase it now.

My plan was to make some blades over the next few days and then test the market in Lloth. I had some familiarity with the city. I walked down to the hanger, and the two cats followed closely on my heels, not letting me out of their sight. I found Remy and Rippon working in the hangar. They were building a new version of the small one-person skyship. The first version was scrapped for reasons I was not entirely privy to. Both Remy and Rippon were perfectionists. They were carefully layering various types of wood together for the beams on a vehicle. I had not been following this version of their plans too closely, but they were trying to reduce the mass enough to make the design feasible. They had dropped the inertia sink from the design, meaning the pilot would feel the acceleration and deceleration.

I had promised to do the enchanting work for them once they had completed the final build. I watched them work, and we talked about the anti-gravity enchanting I would be doing.  The steering was an issue since they removed the inertia sink.  Taking sharp turns would put lateral stress on the pilot.  It had a lot of limitations, but it looked like it would be fun to use.

“Remy, I need to fill the cargo with trade goods for the city of Llorth,” I said, getting to the reason for coming down here.  The cats were chasing a rat among the crates on the far side of the hangar.

Remy looked confused, “Do you want the Frost Mead loaded?  We only have seven casks, and that will only last the restaurant three days.”

Magical alcohol would sell well, but I did not think it was also not going to pull in more than a few hundred gold.  Even Callem’s tobacco would not bring in nearly enough.  Fera was actually working Callem’s fields now that he was in the capital.  I had suggested it with her ability harvest. With Edel in Hen’s Hollow drying the leaves and Lana bringing aether-infused soil to the farm with her dimensional closet, they had managed to maintain the harvest. I sold the tobacco in the Shiny Platinum store, and they were a hit. The cigars had a small magical effect of increasing the smoker’s reaction speed. My father had gotten hooked on the cigars when he got his raise.

I finally answered Remy, “No, something simple.” I was not going to tell Remy I was doing this as a decoy to throw off Loriel. “Just find something that will fill the hold and weighs less than six thousand pounds. You can spend up to five hundred gold,” I said, doing the mass calculations in my head.

“Six thousand pounds? That will not even come close to filling the hold,” Remy was still confused.

“Those are my limitations, so work within those guidelines,” I said before collecting the kittens and telling a guard to get rid of the two rats they had killed and presented to me proudly. The kitchen and restaurant had anti-vermin runes. Maybe I should do the hangar as well. But the two cats had had a lot of fun chasing them down, so I would hold off for now.

The next two days, I fell into my routine. I would give the Ley Line Theory class a few more classes before I stopped attending it. The instructor was not too insightful and was spoon-feeding the knowledge. I could get the same benefit by reading the material on my own. I left the class and went to my required session, helping my advisor heal during the combat class.

I met Neelan at the training yard after my theory class.  He had a tent set up with cold water and simple snacks.  It was obviously more to fuel the fighters practicing than for me, but I sampled some honey nut clusters as I sat with him.  I asked, “So what class are we healing for?”

He pointed, “The dueling class over there and the two-on-one class over there. All should be in their third year or later,” he pointed to the two groups as he pulled out a book to read.

“Dueling?  That does not make any sense in a dungeon,” I said, munching on the nuts.  There was some spice I couldn’t place in the nuts.

“In dungeons, there are humanoids, even humans, not just monsters.” A chill ran up my spine, thinking that there were humans in dungeons you had to fight and kill.  Seeing my apprehension, headed, “It is rare to see human creations, but they do exist.  A lot of the floor bosses also fight with weapons,” he finished his explanation and returned to his book.  I remember the first level of the Frost Vault had the hobgoblin chief.  Copying Neelan, I pulled out one of my bestiary texts to get a head start on future classes.

It was twenty minutes before a call for a healer rang out in the yard.  Neelan stood, and we fast-walked to where a red-haired woman was breathing heavily with blood trickling out her mouth.  Neelan motioned for me to do the honors.  I assessed her injuries with my spell. She had a puncture to her left lung, a torn ligament in her right knee, and eighteen contusions.  I relayed to Neelan what I found, and the young woman frothed some blood as I was guided on healing practices to minimize aether expenditure.

When I was done she said, “Thank you, but could you work a little faster next time?  I don’t like the feeling of drowning in my own blood.”  I think she was trying to be funny, and I recognized her as the woman who had given Gareth’s tour on the first day.  She had a rough prettiness to her.  Maybe if she was cleaned up?  I used my cleanliness spell on her and cleaned her skin, clothes, and hair.  She was pretty under all the grim.

I decided to introduce myself, “My name is Storme.  I am out here helping and learning from Instructor Neelan,”  I held out my hand to shake.  She grasped my wrist and smiled as I helped her to her feet after shaking my hand.  Her teeth were a little crooked and off-white.  She still sported a genuine smile.

“Namira Cloudhunter,” she shook my hand. “I actually know who you are.  Your partner, Gareth, pointed you out on the first day of classes.  I am a third year.”

Shocked, I quickly responded emphatically, “Gareth is not my partner.  I prefer women.”  I was too shocked but planned to get back at Gareth for spreading this rumor.

She had a soft laugh, “Not partner as in lover.  Partner in terms of your delving team.”  Again, I was stunned again.  Was Gareth spreading the rumor that he helped run his own dungeon-delving team? We definitely needed to have a talk.

I corrected Namira firmly, “Gareth is just a member of the delve team I sponsor.” I should not have voiced that statement so loudly in this environment. A number of the Dungeon Academy students nearby gave me a look, some in disbelief and some in interest. A perplexed look appeared on Namira’s face, but she was called back to the practice.

The rest of the class proceeded, and I healed a half dozen students under Neelan’s direction. I learned a number of shortcuts and quick assessment skills. When the class was over, Neelan smiled, “Quite the aether pool you have there. I thought I would need to help you, but you handled everything on your own.” I figured I had used only about 100 aether healing this afternoon. It was not a large amount for me, but it was enough aether to match the capacity of an archmage in Skyholme.

“Yes, I was pushing myself today to impress you,” I deflected. Neelan just smiled, patted me on the back, and walked away. I liked Neelan, but he was too observant and too wise. It was like he was figuring me out without trying overly much.

I started my walk back to the Shiny Platinum, and Namira caught up with me. “Hey,” she started. “Thanks for cleaning me up. Can you hit me up again?” She was smiling as we walked. I cast the spell and used the vanilla scent this time. She inspected her clothes and smelled her pits in a very unladylike manner. “Damn,” she muttered. She continued to walk with me, “So, Gareth said he would get me a delve. But if you actually run the team….” She was waiting for me to answer and call out Gareth.

“I do not decide who goes on delves. That would be my team leader Ullmark. He is always looking for talent and lives at the Shiny Platinum,” I told the young woman.

“Shiny Platinum? The over-priced restaurant in the docks?” she retorted.

Should I have been offended? A meal was costly at a silver coin, but we could have charged more with the traffic we were still getting. The add-ons like ale and ice cream could push the meal to over two silver coins. That would have been a huge sum for the common person. “The food is good. If you want, I will treat you,” I said to her.

She locked her arm inside mine. Her long sword swung between us and almost tripped us, so she quickly switched sides to my other arm. When we got to the Shiny Platinum, I found the hostess doing the seating of patrons and told her Namira was to be allowed to order whatever she wanted on me. I turned to leave, and Namira shouted, “You are not going to eat with me?”

It was the reaction I had hoped for, “Maybe next time. Enjoy your meal, and let me know if you still think it is overpriced.”

I walked up to my room as the cats had been left alone for three hours more than normal. Opening the door, I found the living room full of feathers. The leather sofa had been shredded, and the stuffing, a mix of feathers and some type of sponge, was everywhere. Adrial’s head popped up from inside the damaged cushion. It would have been cute, except that sofa was fairly expensive. At least she had only destroyed a single one of the couches. She jumped out, bringing a storm of stuffing, happy to see me and mewing her happiness and hunger together.

I was shocked and expected Kiara to pop up as well, but I found her sleeping on the bed. The bedroom had no evidence of the destruction in the living room. So it was all Adrial. I ignored the cat’s attention and followed the guide to behavior conditioning while cleaning the mess by hand. It would have less effect if I just used my spell to clean up.

I was definitely a dog person. As I was finishing up, Bleiz knocked and entered. “Are we leaving soon? The Maelstrom is ready, and Gareth thinks he is going.” He paused, looking at the damage and Adrial unhappily circling from inside her crate while Kiara got a treat of goat’s milk. I think Kiara was lapping it slowly to make her sister jealous.

“Yeah, we are leaving soon. It was time to talk with Gareth anyway,” I said heavily. I collected the two mewing displacer kittens when the milk was finished. “I will feed you two once we get in the air. Stop whining.” I walked with Bleiz to the hangar.