

It came to no one's surprise that something unnatural was buried deep underneath the Nexus. Traces of unearthed Genesis Stones filled the cavern walls as Frost and the triplets walked down an oddly narrow corridor.

Gaping cavities that were once filled with large pieces of Genesis Stone riddled the walls like the honeycomb structure of a nest. Within each hole was a highly reflective mineral that Frost was unable to appraise despite her somewhat high Appraise Object level.

Res reached into the cavity and knocked on its surface. A resounding, dull thud filled the blue-tinted cavern. It was freezing. So much so that even they felt it bite into their bones. It was a psychological phenomenon associated with the Shallows of the Timeless Ruins.

"Looking Glass. An obsidian material that's said to reveal fragments of the unconsciousness. But depending on your Soul Rank, it ends up breaking. This is a telltale sign of the Shallows. We're in the Ruins. There's a place like this underneath the Nexus?" Res spoke breathlessly.

Indeed. This cramped space was one branching entryway that descended into the Ruins. Far from being spectacular as Frost imagined. There were no artefacts or hints of a world lost to time. Everything was excavated and drawn deeper into the Ruins to a place where Caldera Industries set up an ancient stronghold.

"The seabed is more than a kilometer deep. Did the Spatial Distortion send us that far down? Or do the Ruins cross some kind of higher dimension?" Frost let her mind be heard by the triplets who only shrugged.

They were used to the anomalies of the world by now. In some instances, it felt like they were walking in circles.

"Whatever it is, it's not playing well with my senses. It feels like I'm walking on air." Ber described, feeling a rush of wind ahead as the chamber widened.

The light-blue tint turned purple briefly, revealing a highly reflective space that shattered the moment Frost stepped foot. The reflections of the triplets also caused it to shatter, leaving behind a murky ink that could no longer reflect the light.

It seemed that they were not the first to have caused such a reaction. Interesting caverns also revealed the same exact fractures. Upon approaching them they turned into ordinary, unusable glass.

The cavern eventually opened like the maw of a great beast, with the texture of the walls becoming that of crusty sinew. The blue intensified until it became an unbearable light blue, requiring even them to wait momentarily until their eyes readjusted.

And when it did, pillars of steel rose to the ceiling, prying the ruins apart as steam vented from the base. Frost gazed into the grates from where the steam rose and caught a whiff of sulfur and earth. The steam turned out to be a powder as it clumped in the back of her throat before it was promptly dissolved.

"Brave of them to lay down a trap for us!" Cer cried, her voice echoing as the world quaked.

"It's not a trap. It's more like waste management. So that's why the walls look like someone poured concrete all over it." Frost described her surroundings, before moving onwards, following a methodical thumping from far ahead. "The Shallows is just this, huh?"

She was severely disappointed. However, she held her breath as she approached the light ahead.

"Fortunately for us." Ber growled. "Can't we just take a break from the anomalies for one day?"

"A break? What's that?" Cer playfully jabbed.

"The thing your neck will be if you can't behave." The strictness never died with the old Res. She said this with an eerily happy smile on her face, causing Cer's tail to fuzz up as it stood up straight behind her. "We're in Caldera Industries' territory. A place of the past."

"The present personnel work inside of the spires. I'm beginning to think that no one's here." Ber said, but Frost believed otherwise.

"Chapter: Three – One were kept in stasis somehow. It could be that the Ruins can preserve people. Kind of like a natural form of Prolonged Stasis." Frost pondered as she brought a hand to her chin.

"I have no idea what big bird is saying, but can you hear that?" Cer's ears twitched. "It sounds like metal being beaten. If this is Caldera Industries, then we're going to find Dwarves."

"And where there are Dwarves, there is a forge." Res added as the cavern now moved into a decline.

The walls shook. A haze of noxious particles blocked their sight as they ventured deeper within. The great thumping became better defined as it reverberated within their chest like the drums of war. And soon, as they walked into a chamber larger than conceivably possible –

"A-Are you seeing this too!?" Cer was the first to react, her jaw hanging in total disbelief.

"This – *all* of this was underneath the Nexus!? In Atlas!?" Ber was beyond stupefied as she rubbed her eyes as if stuck in a dream.

"Machines of the pre-War in Heaven. But we don't even know what Caldera Industries even uses today." Res rationalized the scenery, but even so, she could not help but to be gripped by its mechanical majesty.

Even Frost was not immune to it. She felt its power. Pillars filled the world as far as the eye could see. They stood kilometers above and they could only just make out the top of the pillars, which were sharpened like giant stakes.

Beneath was an industrial complex where tens of thousands of Dwarves hammered away with tools more than ten times larger than them. They beat down metal made hot by a

colossal, magnetic coil. Slurries and refineries powered by gravity alone streamlined the process to a terrifying degree.

Things were superheated in an instant. Compressed in the blink of an eye. A molding press larger than five hundred meters could be seen in the background, slamming away to mass produce components of war.

All of it – every single thing – was powered by Caldera Industries' tech. And in the center of it all, floating in the sky was a singularity where raw materials were drained from. The walls did not need to be mined. Material did not need to be outsourced, for it all was generated by the chained black hole that hovered above, its accretion disk being scooped by giant nets.

Frost didn't know what surprised her more. The primitiveness of the forge despite using technology beyond Earth's capabilities, or the chamber itself. It was vast, blue and the ceiling could not be seen no matter how high she looked.

And yet exotic flora and fauna existed in the fields beyond. Frost could not believe that what was the equivalent of a civilization thrived beneath Atlas. She gave her condolences to the Minu Auditors, for she could not even begin to fathom how difficult it would be to monitor an industrial complex of this scale.

Rime, rust, snow, and water dripped from the nonsensical machines as the sealing Chains of the Chained Theocracy were torn apart by their own personnel. Several machines exploded as a result, shredding dozens, perhaps hundreds into thin ribbons.

But no one ever dared to stop. The production must go on. In fact, the Dwarves began chanting to the beat of their hammers, drowning out the wails of death.

Safety was not a priority, and she drew parallels to the industrial revolution where it was impossible to tell whether it was people that ran the machines, or the machines that ran them.

Production ramped up before their very eyes, as though they had only just awakened moments before their arrival. Interestingly enough, only a small section of the complex was left in pristine condition. It was the only place where no frost or rust coated their crudely made, yet perfectly operating machines.

This was likely the only section that remained active whilst the others went into stasis. Frost still could not believe her eyes, and further into the distance she could see the outlines of even *more* structures.

Whether they belonged to Caldera Industries or to the Shallows was yet to be determined.

"... Frost. Frost. FROST!" Cer nudged her, causing her to jolt back into her body as she found a black, floating eye hovering just meters away from them.

"Huh!? Oh... Sorry. I'm... I'm not going to sugar coat it. This goes beyond anything I was expecting. I based it solely on what the Archivist saw in Chapter: Three One. I didn't think it was anything like this." Frost gushed exasperatedly. "ImpulseWorks operates on a scale like this too. I should've known that an Atelier as old as Caldera would be more than the Sites."

“Neither did we. This is only one of their forges too. The main one resides in the heart of Dwarhelven.” Res reminded, causing Frost to nod to herself.

“Plus this is one for the pre-War in Heaven days. Makes sense for it to be under the Nexus considering that *was* where the war happened.” Ber added.

“And by the way, what’s this eye doing here?” Cer resentfully pointed her nose at the miniature black hole.

### **Eyes of the Architect**

< Derelict Foreman >

**Soul Rank:** Nil | **Atelier:** Caldera Industries

**LEVEL :** 100    **ORIGIN :** Golem    **HP :** 500,000    **ATT :** 1,200    **MAG ATT :** 900

**ATT DEF :** 1,500    **MAG DEF :** 1,500    **MP :** 20,000    **RESIST :** 200    **AGI :** 50