Chapter 126

The flight to Lloth was relaxed.  Lana and Remy remained on the bridge with Leda and Cilia while we cruised about three miles above the surface of the Sphere.  They pointed out interesting features below and tracked flying creates with the aetheric radar.

I went back and forth to my cabin to train the cats and worked on the comprehend languages spell.  It was the last I would imprint before saving up enough spell slots for the lightning elemental spell. All my free aether and time had been devoted to leveling spells and artificing.

When we finally reached the city, Leda sent out docking signals, and we moved to land on pad eleven in the port as directed. I took out my communication stone and pressed the second indicator to connect to Bleiz’s stone. It was only a few moments before a voice emitted from the stone, “Storme, you are back a day early. I am outside the city hunting with some people. I will be back tonight.”

“Good to hear your voice too,” I said, sounding disappointed he was not more excited to hear from me. “The Maelstrom is a few pads from where we landed last time. We will do some trading and probably leave in two days.”

“We are tracking a giant black elk. I do not have time to talk,” he said, disconnecting the call.

“Guess he is having fun,” I muttered to everyone. Looking up, I announced, “Ok, I will go with Remy and Lana to drop off the blood marble in our dimensional space and start that transaction. Lana should be able to come back to the Maelstrom and get the rest with Remy. Then Lana and Remy can work on selling the frost mead.

Leda asked, “Are we staying with the ship and watching the cats?”

“Yes. After Bleiz returns, you can journey into the city with Cilia.” I made sure the cats were fed and comfortable before leaving with Remy and Lana.

Remy led us through the city to the trade distrinct and into a merchant hall for a trading company. I stayed back and let him do all the talking as we were eventually greeted by a smiling middle-aged dark elf, “Remy! You have returned. Do you have the unique marble?”

Remy shook wrists with the man, “Master Merchant Dylan, we have it as promised. This is the owner of Shiny Platinum Trading, Storme Hardlight. And this is my associate, Lana Forestfang. They have most of the promised marble with them. Shall we go to a warehouse?”

I was a little surprised by Remy’s professionalism. We followed the elf to a small warehouse, and he directed us to spread out the marble and stack it two high. That way, he could easily inspect each piece. After I emptied the marble from the storage, I addressed Remy, “You have this well in hand. It looks like Dylan is trying to renegotiate by finding fault with some of the pieces.”

Dylan was walking with a pad of paper and taking notes as he inspected each block. Remy responded, “Do not worry. I will make sure he does not take advantage of us.” I left Remy and Lana

I pulled out my communication stone and pressed the number seven on it for Lorae. An excited voice came back, “Storme, are you back!? Did you bring the cats?” The excitable young was loud across the stone.

I smiled at her enthusiasm. “Yeah, I already talked to Bleiz; he is outside the city. We are doing some trading, and I hoped to hire you to help negotiate with Tallot.”

Lorae seemed to think with a pause, “Ten percent of sales.”

I laughed into the stone. “No, I think you will be happy with five percent or one hundred gold, whichever amount is higher.”

It only took her a heartbeat to reply, “Agreed! Where can I meet you?”

“I remember how to reach Tallot’s Fine Weapon Shop. I will meet you there,” I said and started walking. If I was correct, then Lorae would negotiate a price much higher than I could. I was relaxed as I made my way through the city and noted a number of different races in the streets. Most were the dark elves, but humans, gnomes, lizardfolk, and a wide array of beastkin were present.

I wondered if Skyholme would ever show this same variety. We were not raised to be racist, but I assumed the culture with only humans on the island and enslaving the beastkin would have left some residual resentment toward other races. That was probably the intention of the Triumvirate policies. I reached the shop to find a heavy-breathing Lorae already there. She must have run.

She smiled, and we entered the shop together. Tallot was taking care of three humans who appeared to be selecting a suitable blade for the youngest of them. Lorae and I walked around examining the weapons in the racks. The selection had changed some since I was here last. Lorae asked, “How many long swords did you bring?”

“Over one hundred,” I replied. Her eyes were wide. Tallot was finished with his customers and joined us.

“You have returned!” He gestured to the shop, “Business has picked up recently. We have two wars brewing nearby, and a new dungeon appeared about five hundred miles from here that allows an unlimited number of delvers in! Every young warrior with dreams of treasure is trying to clear the bottom floor, but it is massive.”

Lorae added, “My father is even considering pulling together all his Guild to take a crack at it.”

Tallot laughed, “That would not be fair to the others! But I heard the first level was over a thousand miles across! And the challenge beast at the other end is a white dragon. No one has defeated it yet, and a huge number of delvers have died.”

“Could everyone not just attack it at once to kill it?” I asked.

Lorae answered, “The more people in proximity to a challenge monster, the faster it heals.”

Tallot was nodding, “Same with the other creatures on the first level. Frost bears and ice mephits. There is even a werebear village, but it is not hostile unless you attack. Some delvers have found the shops in the village trade goods for body parts from the bears and mephits.”

Lorae looked at him, “I did not know you were so into dungeons?”

“You need to know your customers. Also, I have had to listen to delvers talk about their fights non-stop for the last four days. I am going to close the shop so they do not disturb us.” Talot went and put up an **Out to Lunch** sign.

“Now, what have you brought me?” He asked anxiously.

I started by pulling the adamantine-edged dagger out and then an assortment of ten long swords. He held up the dagger and turned it in his hand before getting his magic eyepiece to inspect it. I only had the durability rune for hardness on the small weapon. He looked up, “Excellent work on this. Not much adamantine. The metal mage used what a quarter of what you purchased last time you were here?”

“I do not know. But you said you might have commissions if you knew he could work adamantine, so this was a test piece for him. He said it was not easy,” I answered. That was true. Even with a tier four shape metal ability, the adamantine was difficult to work.

“Is this for sale?” Tallot asked, and I nodded yes. “Fifteen hundred for it. Some monsters can only be injured with adamantine, so the small weapon has value.”

I was about to agree when Lorae interrupted, “Tallot, you are going to sell that dagger in a day for two thousand. Anything less than eighteen hundred is stealing!”

He narrowed his eyes good-naturedly at Lorae. “If your father was not Relik, I would have the nerve to be upset with you.” He looked amused but agreed at the price.

I stood back and let Lorae agree to prices for the ten long swords. Tallot inspected each one before offering a price between 900 and 1500, and Lorae would get him to come up at least one hundred gold each time. The sword with the durability and quickness enchantments sold for the most at 1800 gold.

I brought out another twenty swords, and Tallot held up his hands in surrender, “I can not afford to purchase more blades. The best I can offer is a consignment contract, Storme.”

“What is that?” I asked, stopping the addition of more long swords.

“I will sell the blades and keep fifteen percent of the sale,” he explained.

“Ten percent is normal,” Lorae countered.

“Yes, it is. Fifteen percent for the first five and then ten percent for each one after. Selling your blades will cut into my own sales. And the city tax of five percent on sales is coming from my portion.” Tallot explained.

I looked at Lorae, who nodded, “Agreed.” I kept pulling out blade after blade, stacking them on the table. Lorae was giggling at Tallot’s eyes got wide at the collection of over one hundred long swords on the table. He shook his head like he had just been taken advantage of.

“Fine. I will get your coin for the dagger and the first ten. It is going to take me two or three hours to inspect all these blades and create an invoice for you.” Fifteen minutes later, he handed me five thousand in platinum coins and a voucher for nine thousand six hundred gold. He then began to catalog the remaining swords.

“Here you are,” I counted out seven hundred and thirty gold for her. She was a bit shocked.

Lorae added slyly, “What about those?” Indicating the long blades Tallot was inventorying.

“They are going to sell for between twelve and fifteen hundred, but it is going to take me months to move this much inventory. Even with the new dungeon and the wars brewing,” Tallot muttered.

“Lorae, is fifty gold each good enough? I will pay you when I collect from Tallot,” I asked.

“That is over five thousand gold!” Lorae said, amazed.

Tallot grumbled, “I am the one doing all the work selling them.”

“Can I collect them as they are sold from Tallot?” She asked both of us. We both shrugged. Lorae got a look in her eye that she already had plans for the coin. I just hoped whatever she planned, I would not have an angry Relik Fadrae coming after me.

Lorae treated me to lunch at her favorite restaurant in the city. The balcony was a hundred feet in the air and looked out over the city. The food was terrible as it did not meet my taste buds. Overseasoned white fish and some charred vegetables with a blue sauce. The ale was good at least. Lorae asked, “Is there anything else I can help you with?”

“I do have one more task in Llorth. I am looking for pirate ships. More specifically, I am looking to hunt them,” I said, pushing my plate away and Lorae taking the sign to steal my vegetables.

“You plan to do some privateering?” She asked.

“Yes, if that is what it is called,” I responded, trying to use the ale to clean my tongue by swishing it around.

“That would be the Adventurer’s Guild. You should probably talk with my father. I am sure he knows which branch of the Adventurer’s Guild to contact. Can we visit the cats now?” Lorae ate only the red and green vegetables and sat back contentedly.

“Maybe after. Is your father free? I might have another proposition for him,” I said.

“Storme, you are amazing and all, but I am too young to marry. Maybe in thirty years, he might listen to your proposal. And then I will be old enough to make my own decisions anyway,” Lorae retorted.

“What? No!” And she started laughing as I had fallen for her joke. I narrowed my eyes but broke into a smile. “You are much too young for me anyway. I prefer my woman more mature.”

She kicked my shin hard enough that I had to heal it, “I am twice your age human!” Calling her immature was too far, obviously. I should have realized that, as my sister Freya would have been upset with the comment anyway.

“We can see the cats before seeing your father, then,” I surrendered. That got her a smile and to forget the comment.

When we arrived at the skyship, Bleiz still had not returned, and Remy and Lana were working on selling the frost mead. “Cilia and Leda, you can go into the city. I will watch the ship.”

“You two are going to leave me alone with this barbarous man!” Lorae mockingly said.

“I called her immature,” I explained. She is angry with me.

Leda commented, “Well, you can rest assured your virtue is safe with this one.” She patted my shoulder and left the bridge. Cilia nodded and followed. I got the two cats from room, and we all went to the cargo hold.

Lorae then stared at Kiara and Adrial, and they immediately sat. A huge grin broke on her face. Their tails started to switch excitedly, and their appendages as well. Lorae looked at me with a huge smile, “Kiara only likes raw red meat. And she likes small cubes. Adrial does not care what meat you feed her just wants more of it.”

“Are you talking to them?” I asked, perplexed.

“They are a little young for talking. It is more like a series of images pieced together into sentences. I have been practicing with other creatures as I have a new ability to communicate with beasts,” Lorae said smugly.

“What else are they telling you?” I asked, fascinated.

“They like you. Well,” she pointed at the black one, Adrial, “She adores you and plans to protect you and be your mate.” She pointed at the white one, Kiara, “Her thoughts are much more complex. She knows you killed her parents but forgives you and will be your friend. She is smart enough to know you are two different species.”

“Mate?” I asked.

“It is normal for beasts to think that way. She probably means companion and not mate. They think in terms of food, mating, and hunting mostly.” She looked at the cats again, “Kiara is different. My ability is new, but her intelligence is closer to a person than a beast.”

I looked into the two cat’s glowing eyes. The red eyes of Kiara did seem to have some depth to them, while the green eyes of Adrial seemed more feral. But maybe it was my imagination. I just knew I was going to treat them differently from here on out. “Is there an artificed device I can get to do the same thing that you are doing?”

“The closest thing I know is the tier three nature spell, commune with beasts,” Lorae said. I frowned as that would take four spell slots on my aether core. “I can ask Master Enchanter Gorsch. If it can be done, he will know how to do it.”

“Yes, please do. Let us go see your father,” I moved away.

Lorae tried the puppy-dog eyes, “I didn’t even have time to play with them! And you would leave the ship unattended.”

Bleiz started walking up the ramp of the ship at that moment. He looked more confident and happy. He moved to me, ignoring Lorae, and gave me an unexpected hug, “Storme, it is good to see you after so long. The time and distance apart have strained my bond with you. I feel relieved to see you again.” Lorae looked upset, and I think she craved Bleiz’s attention.

“Bleiz, you can watch the ship and the cats while I talk with Relik about the Adventurer’s Guild. You can tell me about your training and the hunt for the giant elk.”

He put on a toothy smile, “Good. I have some loin steaks in my storage. I was hoping you could cook then for me…I mean us back in Skyholme.”

“Agreed. I have a few more errands in the city, and we will return. There have been a number of changes,” I smirked as the Black Spire should be a surprise as well as the Wolfsguard and the dungeon.

I left with Lorae, and she seemed agitated with me. I guessed she had a crush on Bleiz and was angry I was taking him away. Her father, Relik, was in the Dusk Hunters Guild Building. We found him in the yard training new members.

Seeing us approach, he stepped away from the two human men and two dark elf women. “Lorae visiting me in the Guild Hall? What has she done to get into trouble this time?” He was all smiles, and Lorae just rolled her eyes.

“Nothing, Relik,” we clasped wrists. His students were trying to figure out who I was by their stares. “Lorae said you could help me. I am looking to hunt skyship pirates.” His eyes opened a little wide at that, “Also, I wanted to hire some delvers for my own delve team and thought you could point me in the right direction.”

He appraised me. He then spoke to his trainees, “Continue with the second and ninth sword forms. Iona is in charge. Turning to me, “I will take you to the Adventurer’s Hall. You will need to register with Adventurer’s Guild as a captain and apply for a privater’s license. That will give you access to the bounty board.”

“Lorae, you can return to the Guild Shop and apologize to the staff for leaving and not telling them where you were going,” Relik said, scolding his daughter.

“Storme, you are with me. We can talk on the way to the Adventurer’s Hall.” Relik did not wait for me and started walking, so I fell in beside him.

Relik adventurers

Blood marble, first mead sales

Pirate activity

Sword sales