

“Brielle, please take over and watch the front for me,” Seinnador said to one of the women working the half-finished gear. She nodded, smiled at me politely, then quickly headed off to her new task. Seinnador continued through the shop, giving the men at the forge a wave as we headed toward the area that looked like the magical equivalent of a munitions range.

“Oy!” one of the men at the forge called out. “We ‘avin a party today, eh?”

“No demos scheduled,” said a second, scowling as he wiped a soot-covered hand across his sweaty brow.

“Me ears can’t take it!” yelled the first.

“Not going loud,” said Seinnador, which seemed to placate the men. “Well... *probably* not going loud.”

“Ack!” spat the first, tossing a hammer down onto his work-bench with a clatter. “Ya know we need to know! I got sensitivities!”

“Cannot be forgin’ Madrin and black-iron when ya gots three types of hells sending mana fluctuations all over,” the second grumbled.

“Sounds like it’s break time to me, bros,” said the third, standing up straight and stretching out his back. Unlike the other two men, who were mundane as far as I could tell, the third was a level eleven silver Delver.

“Fine, fine,” said Seinnador. “A rested man reaps no folly of the weary. But Luidis, please stay and assist.”

“Ah, shit,” said the third man, Luidis. The other two clapped him on the shoulders and gave him wide smiles before meandering through a door at the back of the shop. Luidis walked over to us, pulling a pair of steam-punk style goggles down from his forehead and over his eyes.

“Luidis, this is Arlo,” Seinnador said, handing me a similar pair of goggles and donning a pair of his own. “Luidis, we’re doing a demo of an immutable weave.”

“Ok, boss man. We don’t have any immutables in the works, though.”

“This one is customer supplied,” Seinnador said, waving a hand at me and bowing like a stage magician.

“What? The vest?”

“And the boa.”

“Why weave immutable onto *those*?” He looked at me as though he was offended at the fact, then seemed to remember I was a customer. “No offense, bro.”

“None taken,” I said. I couldn’t help but smile at Luidis’ informal attitude, especially when contrasted by Seinnador, who took the man’s attitude in stride.

“Alright, no problem,” said Luidis. “Gonna’ need you to strip though, bro. Unless you wanna get got.”

“Just the vest and boa,” said Seinnador, “if you don’t mind. Please keep on your other attire.”

I raised an eyebrow, but took off the vest and boa, handing them both to Luidis. Just another afternoon spent shirtless with new friends. He took them in his darkly-stained hands and tossed them onto the ground in a pile. Then he stomped on them both with a heavy work boot, grinding his heel into the stone floor. A floor which was covered in all the dust, debris, and likely rodent feces that one normally finds on the unswept floor of an industrial workshop. He even jumped up and down on top of them a time or two, then gave the pile a kick.

I watched with a sense of stoic detachment, unsure of whether the man was having a sudden mental breakdown.

“Good enough for round one, boss man?” Luidis asked. Seinnador was massaging the bridge of his wide nose with the double-thumbs of one hand.

“Thank you for your enthusiasm, Luidis, though I wonder if perhaps there was a portion of the demonstration that you forgot?”

“Wazzat?”

“The portion where it is explained to *Lord* Arlo that his items will not be harmed, despite the vigor with which we will test his unique and irreplaceable items?”

“Why did you say Lord like it’s a big deal, boss man? You know my pa’s a Firelara out in Ghashlain. I can see he’s a Delver, so what else would he be? But, I didn’t forget. Bro looks like a guy with a sense for the dramatic. He’s got a feather boa, right?” He turned to me. “You gotta’ like theatrics to wear a boa, yeah?”

I frowned and nodded. He had me pegged on sight.

“So I figured I’d go for the shock and amazement routine.”

“There *is* no shock and amazement routine.”

“Well, there should be.” Luidis bent down and scooped up the vest. I expected to see a layer of dust and dirt slide off of it miraculously, but nothing of the sort happened. The vest was completely unharmed and entirely clean, as though the violent display had never occurred. The same was true for the boa. “At least I didn’t throw them in the forge, eh?”

Luidis handed the boa back to me, then walked the vest out into the no-man’s-land between us and the wall. He tossed the vest into the air, where it became suspended by an invisible force. He walked to a rack of weaponry next to the forge and pulled down a crossbow half as long as he was tall. He loaded it with a bolt, muscles bulging as he drew back the string while keeping the end of the crossbow on the ground with a boot in its stirrup. He walked back and stopped a couple feet ahead of us, then aimed at the vest.

There was a deep *twang* followed near instantaneously with a *chock* and the vest fluttered slightly. Luidis set the crossbow down and placed his hands on his hips.

“What mysteries await us, bros?” he said, then began walking downrange. Seinnador and I followed him.

The end of the bolt was lodged deep into the stone wall beyond the vest. The vest itself was, once again, unharmed.

“Did it... go *through* the vest?”

“I don’t think ‘through’ is the right word,” said Luidis. “Unless you think of the vest like a tunnel.”

“The purpose of this part of the demonstration is that the item, though seemingly indestructible, will not prevent an amount of harm that would normally bypass the materials from which it is made,” said Seinnador. “My wishes are but ash, burned by the prayers of my enemy.”

He seemed to be full of tangentially-related adages.

“The description *did* say it would stop an agitated chihuahua, but not much else,” I said.

“What’s a chihuahua, bro?”

“A small and bitey canine,” said Seinnador. “According to the tooltip, at least.”

“It told you that?” I said.

“*System Insight* grants me context for unfamiliar terms.” He looked at me gravely. “Whether or not that knowledge is better left unknown.”

“So...now you know what *rawr* means.”

“I do, Arlo. I do.”

I considered the length of the item descriptions. From what I remembered, they were both pretty long. One even involved a massive scrawl of legal jargon that referenced the CIA and the FBI. Seinnador had only inspected the items for a few seconds. Did his ability allow him to digest all of the text, *and* the context for a dozen or more earth-related expressions in such a short length of time?

“Alright, back to the line,” said Luidis, and we walked back up range. “Flamethrower next, boss man?”

“I’d rather not. It is an inelegant spell that does not deserve its popularity.”

“Yeah, but it looks cool though.”

“Those who see me never do,” said Seinnador, looking away wistfully.

“What’s wrong with the flamethrower spell?” I asked. I also thought that would be pretty fucking awesome.

“Fire is the least useful element, in my opinion,” said Seinnador. “It cannot be used close to allies, it has an incredible potential for collateral damage when the drapes and such catch flame, and it rarely kills with any expedience.” He tilted back and held his hands toward the ceiling. “The screams, Arlo, the screams.”

“I see...”

“But, very well. As you said Luidis, shock and amazement!”

Seinnador removed his suit jacket and rolled up the sleeves of his dress shirt. He began by rotating his arm in a circle in front of him, which caused a shimmering dome of force to surround the three of us.

**You have observed the spell *Magic Shell***

***Magic Shell***

**Cost: 10 mana, plus an additional 10 mana per minute.**

**Cooldown: 10 minutes**

**Requirements: Dimensional Magic 10**

**Create a stationary dimensional membrane in the form of a dome that causes entities inside of the dome to be partially protected from physical and magical forces occurring outside of the dome. Amount of physical and magical attenuation scales with Intelligence and level in Dimensional Magic.**

That seemed pretty handy.

Seinnador then thrust his palm forward near the edge of the shimmering field and orange energy pulsed down his arm. A massive gout of flame erupted from his hand and spread out into a concentrated cone. It traveled the entire distance from where we stood to the wall beyond my vest in an instant, engulfing my leathers and crashing against the stone, billowing out in a large circle. I still felt the heat through the membrane, but it was more like a gentle space heater, whereas a fire of the magnitude I was seeing should have begun to singe my beard from this distance.

**You have observed the spell *Flamethrower***

***Flamethrower***

**Cost: 5 mana per second**

**Cooldown: None**

**Requirements: Physical Magic 15**

**You create a giant freaking flamethrower. Size and intensity scales with Intelligence and level in Physical Magic.**

Seinnador kept up the spell for a few seconds, then canceled the cast. A small waft of smoke rose from his palm and he dispelled it with a gentle puff, like he was blowing out a candle. The wall beyond the vest now sported an enormous new scorch mark, but the vest was completely unaffected.

“And now for a more refined spell. One befitting a gentleman of your caliber.”

Seinnador raised a hand, snapped his fingers, and the world shook.

A massive explosion, centered on the vest, tore through the range. There was no fire, only an eruption of force which sent all the dust and debris on the floor raging through the air. The pressure wave that made it through the dome was enough to cause me to take a step back, and the wind sent my hair whipping. The sound of the spell was loud, but fortunately not enough to leave my ears ringing.

*They should really be handing out hearing protection with these goggles,* I thought. I could only imagine what it would have felt like at this distance without the dome, much less at the epicenter.

Again, the vest was untouched, though the floor and wall now had several new cracks in it.

**You have observed the spell *Explosion!***

***Explosion!***

**Cost: 10 mana. This spell can be charged at a cost of 10 mana per second.**

**Cooldown: 1 hour**

**Requirements: Dimensional Magic, Physical Magic**

**Waga na wa Megumin!**

**Range: 30 meters. Size and intensity scales with Intelligence. Range scales with level in Physical Magic.**

The spell's description told me everything I needed to know.

“How can I pick up the Physical Magic skill?” I asked.

“I see you have an eye not only for fine equipment, Arlo, but also for cultured magics,” said Seinnador.

“Blowing shit up is a culture I can get behind, bros,” said Luidis.

“As with any magical school, being granted the option to acquire it as an intrinsic skill by the System requires you to have an appropriate attunement, and then to spend time studying the nature of the magic and observing its effects. There are a number of tutors that I can recommend.”

That didn't really sound like anything I had done, and I'd already picked up both Dimensional Magic and Mystical Magic.

“That's the hard way, bro. Tell him about the easy way, boss man.”

“There is no easy way,” said Seinnador, furrowing his nose at Luidis.

“It's easy if you survive it,” said Luidis.

“What's the easy way?” I asked.

Seinnador sighed.

“Again, you must have an appropriate attunement. However, if you are sufficiently...exposed to the effects of a magical school, you *may* be offered the option to acquire it.”

“What kind of exposure?”

I thought I understood, since I'd gotten Dimensional Magic from having my body torn through space and time to get to Arzia, and Mystical from undergoing the Xor'Drel tribal ritual which channeled enough magical energy through me to alter my physiology. Still, better to ask the question than to assume.

“You get shot up with elemental spells, bro.”

“There are less painful spells that might be used,” said Seinnador. “But the more...invasive, the more likely you are to be offered the skill.”

“I see,” I said. “Can you shoot me with some elemental spells then?”

“I...” Seinnador paused and gave me an appraising look. “The egg shall crack its own shell. Yes, yes. I presume you have an appropriate attunement?”

“Dimensional,” I said. “I already have Mystical, so it would complete the set.”

“Hmm, going for a mage build?”

“Something like that.”

“Well, I am afraid that it might be difficult for me to help you in this matter. In my heyday as a Delver I was focused rather heavily on very aggressive attack magic. I fear a level one Delver would be unlikely to survive a single spell.”

I paused to consider my words.

“How much Fortitude would I need to survive you hitting me with something?”

“That’s a complicated question. Unarmored and undefended, I assume?”

“Yes.”

“Then...” I watched as he did some mental calculation. “Perhaps, twenty?”

“I’m good to go then.”

“Really? What difficulty was your Creation Delve?”

“Platinum.”

“And you already have a Fortitude of twenty?”

“Pretty much.”

No reason to volunteer that it was in fact slightly higher.

“I thought you were going for a mage build?”

“Not dying seemed like the right move when I spent my points.”

“Well, it’s not the worst idea. Still. Does a level one platinum even have enough points to get to a Fortitude of twenty?”

“If bro went with Fortitude all the way, he’d get to nineteen, boss man.”

“That still isn’t twenty.” Seinnador tilted his head and narrowed his eyes at me. “You were here to buy some equipment, yes?”

“I was. Still am.”

“I see, I see. In that case, perhaps we should discuss some purchases before I accidentally kill you.”

“I can also draft you a will, bro,” said Luidis.



“I thought you were a smith,” I said.

“I’m a complex man with many talents and interests.”

“As is your right. Alright then, let’s look at some gear.” I took off the thick goggles and rubbed at my eyes where the metal had dug in. They hadn’t *hurt*, but they had been pretty uncomfortable. “You know, I might be able to give you some design ideas for new eye protection.”