

## 60. Blackthorn's Rickety Walkways

Torrential rain rhythmically drummed on the car's roof as Damien watched people scramble off the street in a desperate search for shelter; some covered under walkways while others hid within various houses that doubled up as shops. Lighting illuminated the dark clouds in flashes of white as thunder rumbled through the sky.

Damien drummed his fingers on the car seat as he crossed his legs, "Walter, did you complete your task yesterday?"

Walter turned his head slightly, and his elven ear brushed against the headrest, "Yes, young master. I took a trip around town and have memorised the most important locations."

"Very good, take us to the square with the job centres, or guilds as they like to call them around these parts." Damien turned his gaze from the outside and looked around the car, "Also stop referring to me as 'Young Master' I am older than your ancestors."

Walter's aged elf face showed surprise, "Oh my apologies... My... erm... Lord? I never knew about Vampire's way of ageing." His back straightened up, and he suddenly seemed nervous.

Thar and Varn also showed surprised expressions, but Fay just smiled.

*'Although I don't act the actual age of this body, as I go through more of the memories and grow as a person, my personality will inevitably change. I have already noticed a few differences over the last few days in my mindset. I originally had no issues being referred to as young, but now that feels ridiculous.'* Damien waved his hand in dismissal, "No worries, just focus on your task."

The car began moving forward with a slight jerk as Walter carefully navigated through the swampy streets. The grooved wheels of the car

had terrific grip as it waded through the mud with little effort, much to the resident's jealous glares.

With the chaotic drumming of the rain echoing through the car, Damien attempted to calm his mind. *'I should have done more research on the Wiki or even paid more attention in the game.'* He activated his *Perception Field* and observed his surroundings, *'Do these people look any different to the game? No, they look the same. Actually, wait. Aren't there far more women walking around than in the game? I remember the distribution favouring men, but more women are walking around...'*

*'I hate this feeling of uncertainty. I know what will happen in a year but not right now. Are those events even fixed to happen, like they were in the game? This is the real world now. If I exposed the Prince's plan to unleash an artificially created pandemic, would the event still occur as it did in the game every time?'*

In the corner of his *Perception Field*, Damien noticed the walkway up ahead was sagging from the rain and threatened to break; there was a single girl with her brown hair tied up in a bun who looked incredibly tired and defeated attempting to cross while actively avoiding the holes due to missing planks. A sudden gust of wind threw her off as she slipped on a particularly slippery plank.

Damien watched in his outline world as her outline half fell through a hole, a single leg dangling, helplessly stuck.

With the sudden weight, the walkway gave in and snapped.

"Ah-" Walter exclaimed as he watched wood fall from above.

Damien debated letting it fall, the car could easily handle such a minor blow, but the impact would break the girl's leg. Damien sighed mentally; magic was not a simple thing to perform and required a lot of effort.

Within the split second as the walkway came tumbling down.

Damien's vast mana supply surged through his Psychic mana circuit towards his brain. Through his *Perception Field*, he debated isolating the most troublesome pieces of wood and the girl and then using *Psychokinesis*, but he found locking onto moving targets without a direct line of sight challenging.

Deciding it wasn't worth the effort, his mana funnelled out his brain and back through his Spatial magic circuit. Although Damien can use spells from two different elements simultaneously, it is wildly inefficient. Since Damien planned to use his [F] rank skill *Spatial Movement* he needed all the mana and control he could muster.

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Mary's drenched clothes weighed her mood down, and her damp hair clung to her forehead as she attempted to cross the unstable walkway between Sues Bakery and Timmys Clothing store. She clutched the bread roll in her hand and tried to cover it from the storm.

"Old Timmy needs to get this-" almost slipping, "-shit-walkway repaired, his store is exploding in sales since he invented that hoodie thing, why does he refuse to put in the effort to repair his walkway? Just because Sue is his ex-wife, that does not give him the excuse to implicate his customers!" Mary cursed again as she nearly lost her footing while navigating the haphazardly placed planks.

Screaming over the howling wind while shaking her fist towards her destination, "Oi Old Timmy, you bastard, don't you know your store is part of a vital walkway network? I use this one every darn day and have a terrible experience every time!"

Almost slipping again due to a gust of wind, she cursed, "In fact, I'm so angry I will visit the Mayor after this... wait, is the Mayor still here after the Duke arrived?"

Lost in her thoughts, she didn't see a new hole in the walkway that hadn't been there yesterday, and muscle memory caused her to miss the step. She yelped as her body fell downwards, leg trapped between two planks and splinters painfully cutting into her thigh. Freezing cold water dripped on her wound, making it sting.

The whole walkway creaked under her weight, and she gulped as she stared daggers at the entrance to Old Timmy's shop; her teeth were chattering due to the cold, "I-if I d-die h-here, I will h-haunt you, o-o-old m-man!" But her words were drowned out by the roar of thunder and the loud ambience of rain.

She quickly looked around while trying to free herself; she was alone except for the people watching her from the comfort of Sue and Timmy's stores, gritting her teeth in pain as she tried to free herself to no avail. Finally, in frustration, she lightly punched the plank trapping her leg but stopped in horror; the old rusted nails holding the wood together snapped under the load, and the entire walkway collapsed.

While in freefall, seeing her life flash before her eyes, she noticed the most beautiful black carriage wading through the filth of the street below. She closed her eyes in fear as the ground rapidly approached, she wouldn't die from this height, but it would be excruciatingly painful.

Her whole body was tense, and her eyes clamped shut in anticipation of the pain, yet it never came. Finally, after a few seconds, Mary opened her eyes in confusion. The wind had vanished, and the feeling of rain pummeling her body had ceased.

Around her, everything had paused like time had stopped. Water droplets hung in the air, bits of wood suspended in motion, and even her body couldn't move an inch.

Time had simply... *stopped*. No. Mary could see the people's gasping faces and change of expression, the rain outside of her area continued as usual, and the roar of thunder persisted in announcing its presence.

In the corner of her eye, she watched as the black carriage casually continued under her, and through the window, she saw a handsome man with his eyes closed in concentration.

Once the carriage passed by unimpeded, she felt space *move*. She was falling towards the floor but very slowly. Everything moved in perfect sync; she felt the muddy ground under her leg, although it was filthy and her leg hurt. She was fine. While lying on the floor, shivering as the rain resumed its assault, she watched as the black carriage continued on its path towards the central square.

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Damien lowered his hand and relaxed his mind. *Spatial Movement* was a quirky spell to use. First, he had to designate a three-dimensional box, and then everything within that area would be *paused*. Next, he tried to move individual parts within the box, but it was impossible; the spell only allowed him to move the area as a whole. 'Could I place that spell around my car and move at the speed of light?' It was a ridiculous thought but entirely possible, assuming he had unlimited mana somehow.

There was so much to do and think about, how will the narcotics be transported, how should security be maintained within the town, should he collect taxes or only make money through the drug trade?

He had ideas, sure. But they were from Earth, where everyone was the *same*. Some had weapons, but one guy with a gun couldn't take over a city, but a single A grade mage in this world could. They were walking nuclear weapons that could appear as an ordinary civilian. How does one even plan around that? What kind of contingency plan would save Blackthorn if the Dean decided he didn't like it? Or even Prince August with his A grade necromancy and undead army.

**He was trapped and running out of time.**

Damien knew he had enemies lurking in the dark, potentially waiting to strike. But he didn't know *when* or *how*. Duke Henson was a potential threat; Prince August could move at any time once he discovered his men failed their mission.

That's terrible enough, but that's not even including the assassins his brother may or may not send since he never actually discovered why they were after him.

As the guild resembling a tavern came into view, Damien steeled his resolve. He needed to act quickly and get Blackthorn onto his side and develop its people and infrastructure as soon as possible. He needed spies, mages, craftsmen and most importantly, soldiers.

*War is coming, and he is on the losing team.*