

Wardens

Zach sat on the prow of their airship as they made they left the Dragon Heart Sect. They had accomplished all that they had set out to do there, but now they were needed elsewhere. Hitor Fah Storrah had asked both Zach and Naha to join in their war, and they had agreed. The taken and the dome monsters had to be dealt with.

They had been tasked with finding the Wardens and trying to have them join the fight as well. At the very least getting someone who knew the city of Emaros intimately. They were heading to a city near the coast, one where the Wardens had an outpost. Neither of them knew if it was still there, or the situation in the kingdom that it used to be in, but it was the closest one that they could check.

Naha was currently teaching Hiro about surviving, how to hide, how to be aware of his surroundings. They were going to try and give him a Class that was tied to shadow, at least for his first evolution. Zach still wanted to try and replicate his own Class with him, and he suspected that the early evolutions didn't matter that much, only that they were focused on different things or aspects. Taking Shadow as one of his Aspects wouldn't be the worst things. Naha was very effective.

Zach's thoughts were occupied by his own trails. He wanted to advance his understanding of other Aspects, he needed to in fact. He knew that the need to understand them would always be there, it was the influence of his Class, but his obsessions were better managed when he took the reins and guided it. Better that he start learning more on his own, instead of his mind narrowing down on something random that he encountered.

For now, he was putting the most effort into Soul and Mind Aspects. Which had proven to be a lot more difficult than he anticipated. There was not really a lot of such Essence around him that he could try and study. Which left him only with trying to study himself and his own Soul and Mind.

"You can always use your spirits," a voice from his sword said.

Zach grimaced. His sword was slung at his waist in a custom-made scabbard. The soul inside of it was that of the yeti that had been brought as a test in the event against the Dragon Heart Sect. Ra'vallim Helinos

was... a being from a different age. From a time when power was not bound by framework, where it was innate and wild. The two of them had made an agreement, knowledge in return for life. Such as it is. Sealed inside his blade, Zach could slowly gain its mastery and knowledge. In practice though it was... difficult. Zach suspected that the origin of the yeti interfered somehow with the process. He was pretty sure that he could drain the soul and take everything forcibly, but he was of course not going to do that.

Still, there was much that he could teach either way.

“I am not going to experiment on the spirits of my old world,” Zach said. The spirits from his perks were in fact souls, somehow transformed so that they qualify as spirits, but they were inside of him. Or at least inside the framework or the connection it had with him.

“You don’t need to experiment; simple observation can provide results. All power requires understanding,” Ra’vallim said.

Zach didn’t comment. What he said made sense, and it was harmless, for most people. Zach couldn’t risk losing himself and going beyond simple observation. He didn’t even know if the spirits could be destroyed, but he was unwilling to risk it until he got a better handle on his urges.

Which left the other Aspect, Mind. He reached through his shirt and unclasped an armband from his right arm and pulled it out. It was silver, his reward for the event. It was nothing compared to what Naha got, of course. He hadn’t done anything close to what she had. He fought a few of the monsters and then left to deal with Ra’vallim whom he had sealed inside his sword while Naha killed her opponent. The Framework obviously didn’t consider the two equal at all.

Still, his reward was useful.

Band of Memory’s Hall	Allows for storing and retrieval of memory. The first person to place memories inside will have the band attuned to them. The owner may
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	impart their will to the item. To anyone else, the band would look and feel like a simple and worthless item. Anyone attempting to read the memories without the permission of the owner will have to overcome the owner's will.
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It was an item that would probably not be useful to just anyone. But it was useful to him because he understood living so long that you forgot. And there were things that he wanted to remember.

Slowly he reached out to the band and started placing memories inside. First about Naha, she was the most important thing in his life, and he started putting all of his memories of her in there. He wouldn't want to forget her again.

All the while he focused his mind, his skills, and monitored his own mind and the process. He couldn't see the Essence, but he could feel it in the world. His will could make the world bend, and so it could also let him feel. It wasn't precise, but he could tell that things were happening inside his own mind. What was happening outside of it though... Perhaps it was drawing the Essence out? Or perhaps it was copying it? Creating new Mind Essence that then duplicated his memories. It was fascinating, and there was much to learn. He lost himself in the process, as he slowly put the memories of his life inside the small band.

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They arrived in the city of Fellkor a few weeks later. Naha and Zach headed out into the city as soon as they landed, leaving Hiro to guard the

ship. Not that there was any need for it with the guards at the docks, but it made him feel useful, and that was important at that age.

After a few inquiries at the docks, they learned that the Warden Headquarters in the city had been shut down and re-purposed, but there were apparently still some wardens that occasionally stayed at the Adventurer's Guild, so they made their way there.

It didn't take them long to get to the large red stone building that was the headquarters for the city. They entered and navigated their way through the crowd, heading to the counter behind the far wall. The people in the room mostly gave them a glance or two before dismissing them as inconsequential.

They reached the counter and flashed their badges.

"I am Warden Nahamassa Plainrunner," Naha said. "We were wondering if there are any Wardens currently present in the city?"

The woman at the desk looked at their gold badges and then with a sigh responded.

"There should be a few around," she answered. It seemed that she wasn't going to volunteer anything more than that.

Just as Naha was about to say something more, someone yelled out.

"Zach! Naha!"

They turned and saw a tall minotaur walking their way.

"Okim," Naha said, surprised.

Zach didn't know the name, but that wasn't a surprise. He approached them and then clasped Zach's shoulder.

"I can't believe that I ran into you here," he said. "After everything I've heard you've done, I had imagined you would be back at the fort."

Both Zach and Naha tilted their heads at that. "The Fort?"

"You don't know?" He asked, surprised, then he noticed their badges. "Gold? You didn't... we need to fix this. Come with me."

Confused, the two of them exchanged looks, and then followed after the man.

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An hour later, they were sitting in a private berth in the Adventurer's Guild common room, holding their new badges. They were made out of

adamantine, and granted them the highest ranks in the guild among both the Wardens and the Adventurers. The moment they had touched them, both of them had gotten a notification, and a new title; **Wardens: Great Name**. Zach wasn't sure how that was all tied into the badges and the faction, but he was interested in finding out, but later perhaps. He turned his attention back to the conversation.

“Commander Bera sent out the word to all guildhouses as soon as the notification for the Dome Leader kill arrived. We were all very much so impressed,” Okim Rockhands said.

Who, Naha informed him, had been the leader of the Wardens team that Zach had been a part of during the Tournament.

“It was not an easy endeavor,” Zach said slowly.

“I can see, it has changed you both,” Okim said.

“It has,” Naha agreed.

“So, what have you been doing since?”

“Making our way back to the Settled Territories for the most part. Then we visited the sects,” Zach said.

“The sects?”

“Yes, that is why we came looking for wardens, we have a message for the leadership,” Zach added.

“Well, the Fort will be where you want to go. It is our home now, since the Citadel fell,” Okim's expression darkened.

“What happened? We only heard that the taken took it over,” Naha asked.

“Aye,” Okim nodded. “They assaulted with overwhelming force, too much for us to fight off. We lost a lot of lives there. And, many were taken at the siege.”

“How is the faction still standing? Our faction Interface was there, wasn't it?” Naha asked.

“Commander Bera is how,” Okim said grimly. “One of her perks it seems like, she could switch the master interface for any other she had access to. I guess that there is some value to having an assistant-type Class.”

Okim looked around, as if trying to see if someone was listening in, and then he leaned in. “I am not privy to everything, of course, but apparently the Warden Commander Yirrel was taken.”

Zach narrowed his eyes, he knew of the woman, what Naha had told him. He wouldn't wish such a fate on anyone.

"Bera had switched the Interface as soon as they found out," Okim added.

"That was smart," Zach said, admiring the foresight.

"Yes, sadly it didn't save us, not really," Okim sighed. "Most of us are barely hanging on. Commander Bera is doing all that she can from the Fort, but... The ideals that we once held are... well, when you see the entire world go mad and break all the laws that they agreed to, it is hard to remain faithful. Many of us had abandoned the faction and turned to adventuring to survive. The few factions that still require our services are barely enough to cover our expenses. The Wardens are struggling."

Zach glanced at Naha. That didn't sound encouraging, but they had to try and get the Wardens into the war. Perhaps that would be something that could give them hope, getting their Citadel back.

"This Fort," Zach started. "Where is it?"

"Red Forest Territory, up North," Okim said. "You plan on going."

"If Commander Bera is in charge, then that is where we need to go," Naha said.

"Well," Okim started. "I was just about to head back myself. You mind if I come along?"

"Not at all," Zach said.

It seemed like they had their next destination. Now all they had to do was convince a failing faction to go to war.