Chapter 127 The Adventurer’s Guild

I walked side by side with Relik, and the congestion of people parted in front of us.  He wore his black delving armor with his guild symbol on the chestpiece.  As we moved down the roads with a slight incline, Relik asked, “How did you and Bleiz become friends?”

I was just as tall as the dark elf at six feet, three inches.  He had a stronger presence, though, not just from people recognizing him.  I was almost intimidated by him, “He was assigned to me by one of the leaders of Skyholme as a bodyguard.  I am not sure if he told you, but the Wolfsguard used to be bred by Skyholme’s elite to guard the islands.”

“So you do not consider him a friend then?  He speaks highly of you.  He even said I might have some difficulty facing you in a duel,” he left the last word out there as if it were a challenge.

“It is a developing friendship.  I do see him more as a friend than a bodyguard,” I added.

We walked in silence as I took in the varied races and buildings in the city. The Adventurer’s Hall was much more impressive than the small one I had been inside Aegis City.  The common room had a thirty-foot high ceiling and a second level with a wrap-around balcony.  It smelled of sweat, ale, and leather.  “You will need to present your Adventurer’s Guild card.  I can get you a meeting with Abraham.  He will be responsible for upgrading it to skyship captain card so you can access requests that involve a skyship.”

I pulled my metal card out of my dimensional space that I was given when I registered my delve team.  Relik noticed it, “That is just a team token.  Do you have your personal token?”

I was a little embarrassed as I was unfamiliar with the process, “This is all we need in Skyholme to delve into the dungeons up there.”  I flipped the card in my fingers anxiously.

Relik nodded, “We have those as well, but they are only for dungeon access to Guild-controlled dungeons.  The Adventurer’s Guild does a lot more than just delve dungeons.  We escort people, transport goods, find items, hunt monsters, harvest materials, and explore.  We can stop by the front desk.  It will only take a moment.”  There was a long line at the front desk, but as Relik approached, they all moved aside to let us get to the front.  Even the young dark elf woman currently being helped stepped aside.

The old grizzled human male with a balding head behind the desk looked up, “Relik, what can I help you with?”

“This man needs his Adventurer’s Card,” he tapped my shoulder.

The old man behind the desk looked me up and down, “Did he lose his card, or is this his first?”

“My first.  I only had this before to delve dungeons,” I held up my card from Skyholme.

“Not like you to bring the newbies in here, Relik.  Is this one special?”  The old man said as he pulled out a copper plate with unfamiliar runic markings and a small aether gem embedded in it.

Relik grunted, “We are actually here to see Abraham.  Didn’t know the young man didn’t have his card yet.  They don’t use them in the floating islands where he is from.”

“Skyship captain, then.  Well, my name is Clyde,” he held out his hand, and I shook it.  “This is your Adventurer’s Card.  We link it to you with a drop of your blood.”  He handed me the card to look at.  It was as large as my palm, and I sent my metal sense into it to look at the runes.  They were tired of the aether crystal to glow if the linked person was holding the card.  They were also a block of dots, ten by fifty.

“What are the five hundred dots for?  They are not linked to the runes,”  I asked, looking up.

“This is just a bronze card.  You can only take bronze postings with it.  Each bronze posting can earn you punches on the card.  When you fill in all five hundred, you can upgrade to silver,”  he patiently explained, even though several people were behind me.

“Is there another card after silver?”  I asked.

“Well, it is actually silver-plated.  Then, it is a gold-plated card.  You fill the gold-plated card, and you get the platinum medallion.  That only requires you to complete twenty-three missions of the platinum difficulty to get your mithril medallion.  Your escort here has a mithril medallion,” he pointed at Relik.

Relik grunted, “And I had had it for almost fifty years.  Not many mithril-ranked postings come about in Llorth.”  Relik looked at me, “After mithril is the adamantine medallion.  That is the highest ranking in the Adventure’s Guild.”

Clyde placed the card into slot on a machine. “I need you to sign your name here. It will be inscribed on your card. I suggest using the common script. Then you need to prick your finger here,” he indicated. “Drop of blood here, and your card will be complete. You can use it any Guild Hall after that.”

I started the process and asked, “What if I lose the card?”

“The first card is ten gold, and it is also ten gold to be replaced. If you have progress toward your next rank, you need to go to the Guild Halls where you received your punches to get your progress verified.” I put a large gold coin on the counter as the card was inscribed with my signature and took my blood.

“Excellent,” Clyde said, inspecting the card. “Looks good. Now, when you turn in a posting, they will confirm this is your card and that the job was completed and then punch your card.”

The card was shiny copper and felt heavy in my hand as I turned it over. Relik put his hand on my shoulder and guided me away from the desk as the line had doubled since we had cut to the front, “Let us head upstairs to see Abraham. He can get your captain’s stamp on your card.”

Many eyes were on us as we crossed the floor and headed up the double-wide stairs to the second floor. The balcony that circled the lower floor had tables of people eating and talking. They paused to watch us as we entered a long hallway. Relik stopped at an open door and entered. A lavish office with shelves of books was inside. A young elven male with short red hair was behind a desk.

“Relik? Finally decided to spread your wings a bit?” The elf smiled in greeting.

“No, I am fine with doing the same dungeon every day. This is Storme. He is here for his captain’s stamp,” the elf behind the des studied me for a moment.

“Please sit. The captain’s stamp is one hundred gold.” Relik stood behind me as I took a seat and put a platinum coin and my recently acquired card on the desk. “Excellent,” he picked it up and studied the card for a moment. He placed the card in a press powered by a aether crystal. He activated it, and the press came down and marked the card with a pair of wings in the corner.

He handed me the card, and I asked, “Now that I have this, can I see postings? I want to hunt pirates.”

“A privateer’s license as well?” He reached into a drawer and pulled out a paper. “That will be an additional one hundred gold.” My eyes narrowed as I paid another platinum.

“What do I get for all this coin?” I asked skeptically.

Abraham smiled behind the desk, “Quite a bit as your captain’s license allows you to get cargo insurance through the Adventurer’s Guild and take job postings for passenger and cargo transportation. The letter of marque allows you to capture and sell other vessels that have broken local laws.”

“Where do I find these postings? And do you have information on pirate ships?” I asked, feeling slightly better.

Abraham smiled with his pearl-like teeth. “That is the biggest benefit of your captain’s license,” he stood, “Come with me.” I followed him to another room with six desks. At each desk was a massive book.

There was no one in the room. Abraham walked to a desk and opened the book, “This book is magically updated with job postings.” I looked over his shoulder, and looked; it was indexed by cargo, passengers, threats, and privateer. “Threats are typically monster extermination requests.” He started pointing at the spots on the page, “This is the city that the posting is from. This is the suggested captain’s rank, reward, and number of pips earned on completion.”

The job listed was a transport from Llorth to a city called Requiem. It was for eighty tons of lumber. The difficulty was copper, and the reward was two-hundred fifty gold and one pip. It also noted insurance through the Adventurer’s Guild was twenty gold. I asked a question, “Can I accept silver-ranked postings?”

Abraham answered, “Yes. Let me show you how the process works.” He pulled his own Adventurer’s Card and placed it on a space at the bottom of the page clearly marked for the Adventurer’s Card. The aether gem lit up on his card. He took a piece of paper from a stack and placed it over the page. “Now all I need to do is channel a little aether…” The page from the book was transcribed. When he took the paper, the page below was blank.

He handed me the paper, “You bring this paper to the address to pick up the cargo. I will add this job back to the registry after you leave.” I could now see why the captain’s license cost so much gold. The magic network to maintain all these books was impressive and complex.

“And this job would no longer appear in any other books? That is amazing magic!?” I asked, kind of amazed at the magic involved.

“Precisely, but it is a mix of magic and technology. These terminal books draw from a central hub. Do you have any other questions?” Abraham said, smiling.

“Since I am only a copper-rated captain, can I request a silver or gold-ranked posting?” I questioned.

Abraham nodded, “Yes.” He turned to a silver-rated delivery posting. “No one is preventing you from doing so. But you can see here the insurance for a copper captain on this silver mission is ten times that of the silver captain. Only if you rank higher than the mission, can you forgo purchasing the insurance.” He answered a question I had not thought of next, “Even if you are a copper and complete a silver posting, you still get the same number of pips on your Adventurer’s card.”

“So what if I do not pick up the cargo or just fail to deliver it?” I asked, studying the page.

“You have twenty-four hours to pick up a cargo. Other missions are also time-sensitive. Your contract will dissolve, and it will be reposted. Lost cargo means the Guild will pay the consigner if you paid the for the insurance. Otherwise, you are responsible. But I caution you that you can lose your captain’s license if you fail to complete the posting too many times and utilize the insurance claim,” Abraham explained patiently. Relik also waited nearby, waiting on me, and started paging through one of the books on the table.

“And what about bounties for pirates?” I asked.

Abraham laughed at my interest, “They are here as well.” He flipped to the back of the book that seemed to have an infinite number of pages, “Unlike cargo and passenger contracts, they will not disappear when copied. Once they are confirmed completed, a Guild Master will remove them from the central hub.” He looked at me seriously, “You need to understand that you can only sell a captured skyship in the city in which the bounty was posted for the pirate.”

Relik turned and said, “Or in any pirate city.”

Abraham pursed his lips in distaste, “Yes, there are pirate cities in the Sphere, but none would have an Adventurer’s Hall. And eventually, they are dismantled by the Guild.” He looked at me and waited for more questions that I did not have at this time. He bowed and left, leaving me and Relik in the room.

I started paging through the bounties. Relik came and sat across from me, “Pirate and Raider hunting is a very dangerous game. You never know what to expect.”

“Are you offering to help?” I asked while finding all the bounties were for gold and higher captains.

Relik laughed deeply, “No. I spent time tracking beasts, both man and monster, in the Sphere. I am done with that. I was just trying to offer some friendly advice.”

“I think I am okay without you if you have things to do. I appreciate your time,” I said seriously. Relik was respected and feared from what I had seen today in traveling with him. I was sure that had rubbed off on me today, as many people had seen us walking together.

“Besides training and delving, my days are pretty open.” He paused and considered, “I plan to offer Bleiz a spot on a delve team for the Dusk Hunters,” Relik said, getting to his reasoning for helping me today.

“That would be his decision and not mine,” I stopped looking in the book. This would be a blow if I lost Gareth and then Bleiz.

“I just did not want to ask him before telling you. He has an impressive skill set, and Jasper thinks he can become an excellent dungeon scout for us.” He looked at the book, “And our way of life is much safer than that. You always know what to expect in a dungeon.” I know that was not entirely the case.

“You are free to ask him,” I finally said.

“Good,” Relik said, standing. “I will leave you to this. Just know whatever you find in these pages is usually not the complete picture.” Relik left me alone in the room, and I felt a pit in my stomach. I almost reached for my communicator to talk with Bleiz first, but this was a decision he would have to make on his own.

I started copying a number of the bounties to paper. They had a description of the raider ship and the region of the Sphere they operated in. There was very little about the crew other than a few names, including the captain. I would need to update our maps—more coin the Adventurer’s Guild would be getting from me. An older dark elf entered the room as I was copying the bounties.

He did not pause to take a free table and open another book. I assumed all the books did the exact same thing. He had no interest in me, but I asked, “Do they sell recent maps of the region?”

He did not look up as he answered, “The quest books only show jobs within ten thousand miles or so. If you want anything further afield, you will have to talk with the Guild Master.” From my position, I could see him paging through postings for cargo. He stopped on a posting for a silver-ranked captain and read it a few times before pulling out his silver card and copying the contract to parchment. He continued to page through the book.

I introduced myself, “I am Storme. I just joined the Guild as a captain and plan to do some pirate hunting. Any advice?”

He finally looked up, interested. After studying me for a moment, he returned to the book, “Captain Hiram, My advice is to focus on cargo and passengers. The maps can be purchased from the guild shop downstairs and will show the dangerous regions where pirates are currently operating.”

I thanked him and took the twenty or so bounties I had copied. It only took a quick search downstairs to find the guild shop. It was a large room off the main common room. One wall was full of hundreds of postings for copper and silver requests. I spent time perusing them with other adventurers. The most common request was for monster parts from the local dungeon.

A few adventurers tried to start a conversation with me, but I was not for making new contacts. I went to an open woman, and a young male human smiled, “How can I help adventurer?”

“I am looking to purchase skyship maps for the entire region,” I replied.

“Very good. Your badge, please.” He pulled out a large map, “The maps are divided by the ley lines.” He pointed out Llorth, “This is where you currently are.” I handed him my copper card, which he returned after confirming it was mine. “Each region is fifty gold for the most recent survey.”

The Sphere was immense, and I began to note regions all around Llorth and all the way back to Skyholme. We already had a number of these maps, but most of the ones Leda used were outdated. The Adventurer’s Guild maps were also all in the same format, making it easier to go between regions. I ended up purchasing forty-nine regions.

I waited almost half an hour for them to be retrieved and sent them to my dimensional closet. I walked slowly back the Maelstrom. Not because I was taking in the sights but because I was dreading what Bleiz’s decision might be.

Remy was in the cargo hold, and dozens of various wood planks were stored here: “I sold the frost mead and bought material to finish the skybike with my own funds!”

“That is good, Remy. Is Bleiz back?” I briefly looked at the multicolored planks.

“He is up with the Adrial and Kiara. They missed him. Or at least harassing him,” he chuckled.

I made my way up and found a happy Bleiz in the cabin wrestling a puppet away from Adrian. He looked up, “Storme, sorry about earlier. We had been tracking that elk for hours. I have a few steaks as a gift for you.” Bleiz never looked this happy in the time I knew him.

I got right to it, “You look happy. Did Relik ask you to join the Dusk Hunters?”

Bleiz looked at me, “He did. I told him no.”

I visibly relaxed, “That is good news. I hope is was not because of our bond.”

“Partly, yes. But not entirely. Relik asked if we were friends, and I did not hesitate to respond, yes.” He smiled, “Besides, being around you is interesting.”

“Glad to hear it. Now let me tell you what has been happening in Skyholme since you have been gone…” I looked forward to telling him about the Black Spire and the Wolfsguard residents.