

## [Adam C. POV]

A single moment ago, I had been standing in the middle of Magnolia, before the vortex above the city wrenched me from my reality, forcibly thrusting me into another. Now, I found myself in the middle of a vast, featureless desert, with nothing but sand as far as the eye could see.

The sand beneath my boots was loose and warm, while the air was thin, crisp, carrying a distinct sense of aridity. Above me, the sky was a vast expanse of cobalt blue, void of clouds, starkly contrasting with the golden expanse below.

Closing my eyes, I kneel, feeling the hot sand through the fabric of my pants, as I try to gather my thoughts. "I wonder why it dropped me here."

I might not remember a lot from the Edolas arc. However, I was pretty sure there weren't any memories which involved anyone being dropped off here.

Beyond that.

I felt weak.

Feeling my power was a struggle. It felt like I was reaching into an abyss, a hollow of vast emptiness. The powerful magic that once swirled within me like an endless torrent was now nothing more than a mere trickle, compared to the roaring river it once was.

If I had to give this sensation a number, I would estimate that I had lost somewhere between an 89% and 95% of my strength.

Maybe more, I needed to run a few tests before being sure of that.

I sighed. "So, their spell worked against me?"

It hadn't managed to seal me in a Lacrima, but it had taken a good chunk of my power away, which I suppose was almost as good as sealing me.

I needed a plan.

As I was right now, it wasn't in my best interest to rush into enemy territory without first assessing the situation, evaluating the risks.

Before that, however. It would be best to take advantage of the situation and run a few tests to see what I'm working with. That way, I would have a better understanding of how much I can deal with, and how to proceed.

"Ye lord! Mask of blood and flesh, all creation, flutter of wings, ye who bears the name of Man! Inferno and pandemonium, the sea barrier surges, march on to the south!" I muttered, my right hand aiming at the desert. Hado #31. Shakkaho."

With those words, a wave of heat surged through my body and with a silent burst, a crimson orb of flames exploded from my open hand, flying through the air into the desert.

The blast arrived weaker than I had expected, exploding with a feeble impact that had barely caused a ripple in the vast expanse of sand.

I stand there, momentarily disheartened.

I don't believe I've ever used anything this weak in my life before.

I sighed.

As disappointing as this experiment was, I now had a solid idea of what I was working with.

Meaning that right now, my Shikai was my trump card, as it would boost my power significantly, though considering the situation I was in, and the amount of power I had lost, I needed to use it wisely.

The atmosphere in this place felt pretty much devoid of Ethernano, meaning recharging would take a lot more than it would normally take.

Thankfully, my body, thanks to the bizarre nature of my existence, was able to recharge on its own to a certain degree, seeing most of my power was Reitsu being converted into Magic Power. That being said, this process was not what some would consider, fast.

Regardless of how fast or slow this was, it meant I had an advantage most didn't.

I just had to use it properly.

I sighed, looking around at the barren desert landscape before me. "First order of business, finding the city."

My sensing abilities, which weren't the best to begin with, had also been muted by my current situation, meaning I had no other option but to wing this shit out.

"Well, I might as well start walking," I muttered, before starting to walk aimlessly, hoping to find any sign of life or civilization in my path.

One thing was sure though, I would kick Mystogan in his royal balls whenever I found him. That alone would keep me alive.

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**[A few hours later.]**

After several hours, the blistering heat of the sun and the vast monotony of the desert began to wear on me, in more ways than I could've expected. My clothes were soaked in sweat, and my throat was painfully dry. The endless expanse of sand started to feel like a prison, its golden, coarse walls closing in on me.

"I will start carrying water with me," I muttered to myself as I continued to trudge through the seemingly never-ending desert.

Suddenly, my eyes caught a glimpse of something, a small but welcomed change. A few meters away from me, the uniform expanse of sand was broken up by tracks. The tracks were still fresh, the edges sharp and uneroded by the wind.

I was not alone in this vast desert. "Yes!"

I wasn't an expert in this kind of thing, but seeing the wind hadn't wiped the tracks yet, it meant whoever had come across this place, wasn't far.

Jumping high into the air to gain a good vantage point, I followed the tracks in a straight line with my sight, soon spotting something, vague shapes moving in the distance.

"People," I smiled, hoping it wasn't a heat mirage I was seeing.

Eager to escape this hellhole, I quickened my pace, without wasting any power in case something happened, my tiredness and thirst momentarily forgotten.

Thankfully, my fears of this being a heat mirage had been unfounded, seeing that I eventually found myself face to face with a line of colorfully adorned camels plodding steadily across the sand. Wooden carts, draped in bright textiles, teetered behind them as men and women, dressed in vibrant robes, laughed and chatted, their voices rising above the desert silence.

As I approached, a large burly man at the front of the caravan spotted me, his weathered face turning to me as I approached them. He squinted, shading his eyes from the harsh desert sun. Seeing my apparent state of distress, he signaled the caravan to stop as he dismounted his camel and approached me, curiosity and caution etched on his face.

"You lost, stranger?" He called out, his voice gruff yet not unkind, as he eyed me warily, taking in my dust-covered appearance and the sheathed weapon at my side.

"In more ways than one," I replied, stepping forward to meet him. "Can you point me to the nearest city? And while we are on that, could you spare some water?"

The burly man assessed me for a moment longer, then jerked his head in the direction the caravan was heading.

"Follow us, it's a day's journey at most. We are going to the capital."

I smiled in relief, grateful for this stroke of luck. "Thanks."

"It's what any decent person would do," The man replied, turning to mount his camel. "I am Jamal, leader of this caravan. You can ride with us, but you'll have to earn your keep."

"That means no water, I presume," I said, a hint of amusement in my voice.

"You catch on quick," Jamal chuckled, gesturing for me to climb onto the back of a cart. "But we have plenty of work to be done, and if you're willing to lend a hand, I'll make sure you get your fair share of water and food. I know it doesn't sound ideal, but we can't give anything away."

Fair enough.

"Very well," I replied, grabbing onto the cart's side and hoisting myself aboard. "Just tell me what to do, and I'll be happy to assist."



Jamal chuckled again, "You have a good spirit, stranger. I like that." He then gestured towards one of his men, a small, burly man, with a stern face. "Musa, give our new friend some water, and show him what needs to be done."

Musa nodded, handing me a flask of water. "Before reaching the capital, we need to sort some merchandise in the carts. Nothing too complicated, just separate the silk by the color, most of it it's already sorted, but the employees that usually work on this task are not here today, so we need to double-check everything just to make sure."

I nodded, taking a swig of the water and feeling the cool liquid soothe my parched throat. "I can do that."

I honestly was expecting them to ask me to serve as their bodyguard or something, but then again, seeing nobody knows me around me, they have no way of knowing whether or not I'm a good fighter, so it makes sense they aren't going on that route.

Musa nodded, his eyes stopping at the blade sheathed at my waist. "You carry a weapon. Are you capable of using it?"

Then again, I might be coming to conclusions too soon. "I know how to defend myself if that's what you're asking."

"Good," Musa said, nodding in approval. "We have unfortunately encountered bandits on our journey here, so it's always better to be prepared. But for now, let's focus on the task at hand."

I nodded, taking another sip of the water before starting to work on the task given to me.