

“I wonder if there’s an alternative account of these events,” Ludmila said. “The author of this book clearly has something against these people.”

“I know, right?” Lady Aura frowned, “Why do the villains keep losing? This isn’t realistic!”

I suppose this just means that propaganda is a thing wherever or whenever one finds themselves.

Crimes Against Humanity: Inuit Atrocities Against Miners in Greenland chronicled a conflict in a land once covered in ice. When that ice melted away, it revealed the largest source of rare materials in the world. This, of course, drew the attention of ‘foreign interests’.

The inhabitants of Greenland, the Inuit, at first welcomed foreign companies as an economic boon. When those companies refused to stop breaking the protective regulations limiting their industrial activities, however, the Inuit suspended their activities. Unfortunately, the foreigners refused to give up their foothold.

To resist the local authorities, the companies at first hired powerful mercenary groups for protection. Then, eventually, what was termed the ‘international community’ sent their armed forces to ‘stabilise’ the region and protect the world’s economic welfare. However, the hopelessly outmatched natives of Greenland didn’t give up. Instead of facing the forces raiding their homeland directly, they fought a guerrilla war using their ‘Arctic Rangers’ – a type of Ranger specialised for operations in frozen climes.

While the Inuit and their equipment were alien to Ludmila, the tactics that they employed were familiar enough. They targeted the vulnerable aspects of any invading force – namely, their supply lines, depots, and the camps housing the civilian experts stealing resources. It was similar to how any tribe or frontier territory would deal with dangerous raids and migrations.

“I wonder if anyone in their right mind would believe the narrative presented alongside this record,” Ludmila said. “You’re reading it the same way, right? These Inuit are trying to defend their home against raiders who are after the rare materials on their land.”

“Rare earths.”

“I beg your pardon, my lady?”

“The book says ‘rare earths’, not rare materials.”

“...what’s the difference? Is the term specifically used for rare materials extracted from the ground?”

“Who knows! Anyway, I think I know why the defenders keep losing.”

“Why is that?”

Lady Aura lay the book across her lap, pointing a finger at a paragraph.

“Their builds are all messed up,” she said. “They’re Rangers, but they use *guns*. Rangers and Gunners might occupy a similar niche in combat, but they’re *completely* different archetypes. You should be either one or the other and level up from there. Also, their pet choice sucks.”

“Didn’t it say they used some breed of dog?” Ludmila said, “It’s not an uncommon choice for foresters in our region.”

“The dogs look like regular Beasts to me,” Lady Aura told her. “They have better choices, like these Polar Bears. Why would you get a dog when you could have a *bear*? They even have aquatic capabilities and the raiders are coming from the sea.”

Ludmila nodded along with Lady Aura’s reasoning. The way that Polar Bears were described, she was certain that they could easily tear open the hulls of the invaders’ ships. Since the invaders seemed to be regular Humans, they would quickly die in the cold seas around Greenland.

“Ah~” Lady Aura sighed, “I hope I can get a bear soon. The ones in the Great Forest of Tob aren’t any good.”

“What do you think of the justifications provided in this book?” Ludmila asked, “For whatever reason, the raiders keep getting propped up as the heroes of the story.”

“That’s just what heroes are like, I guess,” Lady Aura answered. “They run in, screaming about you being the bad guy, then they kill you and take your stuff. The villains are the good guys, if you ask me.”

Her sentiment was probably one shared by any society being invaded for land and resources. In the case of Greenland, a huge international coalition had branded the natives defending their land as the ones in the wrong. They were labelled as any number of things, most of which Ludmila had no idea about, but the phrasing made the Inuit out to be monsters who spread suffering across the world.

Sometimes, they were framed as poor, ignorant people who clung to superstition and outdated traditions that denied business opportunities and a better life for future generations. Other times, they were violent cultists driving up prices for various goods and lowering the average person’s quality of life. The untapped resources that they denied the raiders access to represented countless jobs, so they were ‘logically’ also plunging countless innocent people into poverty.

Between the first book and this one, she could see why Fluder Paradyne had picked them out for her. The Baharuth Empire harboured the same broad sentiment when it came to opponents of imperial expansion. ‘Ranger’ and ‘Druid’ were synonymous with ‘enemy’ if they didn’t support the Empire’s development mandates.

“How would the Sorcerous Kingdom approach a scenario like this?” Ludmila asked.

“We’d destroy the invaders,” Lady Aura answered. “People who come in thinking that they have any right to your stuff should just do the world a favour and die.”

“That’s good to know,” Ludmila said. “I think I’ve had my fill of this book – what’s the last one about?”

Lady Aura closed the book on her lap and picked up *Bushwalker’s Guide*. She gave it a glance before looking across the fire at Ludmila.

“This is a Job Class promotion item,” Lady Aura told her. “It gives you the Bushwalker Job Class.”

“It sounds Ranger-ish,” Ludmila said.

“It’s a Ranger Prestige Class specialised in brushland environments.”

“What does it add on top of the basic Ranger benefits?”

“I don’t have it myself, so I’m not sure. The details are probably inside, but I don’t want to accidentally use the item by reading it.”

What a fearsome item.

Ludmila wrenched her gaze away from the book. People could accidentally have their builds contaminated just by looking at the thing.

“Is there a safe way to access the information within, my lady?”

“Mare’s been learning about that stuff for the Adventurer Guild. Mare–hey!”

A few metres away from Lady Aura, Lord Mare was dozing in his blanket. Maybe two fish was too much for him.

“Mare!”

“Mmh...Lord Ainz...”

Lady Aura picked up a pebble and flicked it at her brother. The tiny projectile flew straight into Lord Mare’s ear.

“Hyah!” Lord Mare squealed, “N-Not the ears, Lord Ain—eh?”

The Dark Elf Druid peered groggily at them, then shied away from his sister’s cross look.

“Ah, uh, M-Mountain Pass Materials Corporation...”

“We gave up on that book!” Lady Aura told her brother, “We’re on the last one now. It’s a Job Class promotion item. How do we get the information out of this thing without using it?”

Lady Aura sent *Bushwalker’s Manual* spinning at her brother. Lord Mare bounced it from palm to palm in a panic several times before catching it.

“Um... to use promotion items,” Lord Mare said as he clutched the book, “you have to fulfil the prerequisites for the Class it gives.”

“Does that mean you can access the information safely since you’re not a Ranger, my lord?” Ludmila asked.

“Th-That’s probably not a good idea,” the book in Lord Mare’s hands fell to the ground. “Most Prestige Classes don’t require specific Job Classes as prerequisites. It’s just that having certain Job Classes make it easier to reach the required prerequisites for certain Prestige Classes.”

Ludmila frowned at the implications of his statement.

“That sounds hazardous for one’s build, my lord.”

“It depends,” Lord Mare said. “A lot of Prestige Classes are beneficial for multiple class archetypes. For instance, big sis is a Ranger and Shizu is a Gunner, but they both have Sniper. Sniper doesn’t specify what sort of ranged weapon you have to use – it’s more like a supplementary Prestige Class that improves a person’s long-range combat capabilities.”

“I see,” Ludmila said. “Are there any similar Prestige Classes that I should consider?”

“Your build is tricky, so I’m not really sure. There aren’t many Captain-like Job Classes out there and the archetype itself seems to be a local speciality. The only one I can think of that might work is Dragoon. They have good offensive buffs for allies nearby.”

“Ah, I think I’m already a Dragoon.”

“Y-You are?”

“The non-caster officers of the Imperial Air Service refer to themselves as Dragoons,” Ludmila said. “I appear to share many of the same abilities.”

“What have you been using to differentiate your advancement in Dragoon from your other Job Classes?”

“They have the ability to fall from great heights without taking damage, so I periodically check to see how far I can fall before I hurt myself.”

Lord Mare and Lady Aura exchanged a look.

“That probably doesn’t work for you,” Lord Mare told her.

“If my lord is referring to my damage reduction as a Revenant, I do account for it.”

“No, it’s just that fall damage thresholds are calculated using a variety of athletic skills. Jump, Acrobatics, Tumbling...Rangers have all of that. Y-You’ve seen big sis jump down from high places, right?”

She had, but no one had ever mentioned that Rangers could mitigate fall damage, so she had simply assumed that the damage was negligible relative to her health. At the same time, no one in the region was crazy enough to find out how far they could fall before breaking their bones.

“Then what about the Dragoons in the Imperial Air Service?” Ludmila asked, “They all agree that being a Dragoon allows them to free-fall from great heights without taking damage. I’ve seen them perform many such feats firsthand.”

“Dragoons have access to the *Safe Fall* passive skill,” Lord Mare answered. “It’s significantly more effective than the other thing I was talking about. What I meant to say before was that any increases in safe fall height may not necessarily come from gaining Dragoon Levels. If you get any small increases, those should come from something else.”

Ludmila produced a small notebook from her *Infinite Haversack* and leafed through it to find her personal falling records. The greater the distance one fell, the more damage they took, so her ability to avoid falling damage felt like it would provide useful options for personal combat. Since she now knew that Rangers could do it too, she would have to start throwing her trainees off of cliffs to check on their progress.

“Based on my records,” Ludmila said, “I’ve only gained one Dragoon Level and four other Levels since I started recording my fall heights. Since I made that erroneous assumption, what else are Dragoons supposed to do?”

“They’re basically mounted heavy infantry,” Lord Mare told her. “They’re not a real Rider archetype, but they still have some cool cavalry Skills.”

She flipped to a blank page in her notebook.

“Such as?”

“Pretty much the stuff needed for them to succeed at their role,” Lord Mare said. “They’re heavy shock troops, so they have defensive skills that allow their mounts and themselves to survive contact with or penetrate enemy formations. Their qualities also make them excellent raiders and rapid-response units. That should be especially true around here since few powers use dedicated aerial forces.”

“The Dragoons of the Empire have fully embraced that aspect of their role,” Ludmila nodded. “Overall, it’s considered a glamorous, high-profile assignment even without imperial propaganda. What else do they do?”

“That’s already a lot for one Job Class,” Lord Mare said. “Especially since it’s a first-bracket Prestige Class. There’s a whole line of even higher bracket Dragoon Classes, but I’m not sure if that’s something you want.”

“I should still look them up. Do you know of any other options, my lord?”

“Mmh...I can think of one other off the top of my head, but it’s a Racial Prestige Class for Dwarves. If you work hard, I bet you can manifest Captain classes that other people have already figured out.”

“What about the Weapon Master thing that you’ve been agonising over?” Lady Aura asked.

Ludmila shifted uncomfortably on her blanket.

“I know that the Adventurer Guild staff considers me a Weapon Master and I’ve often thought of myself as one,” Ludmila said, “but must it be the case? As far as I can tell, every Class in my build contributes to my focus pool for Martial Arts.”

“It’s not so much your Martial Arts capacity as it is everything else,” Lord Mare said. You act as a Weapon Master and everyone can see that. There’s also your understanding of Martial Arts. The Adventurer Guild veterans say that only Weapon Masters have that.”

“I’d rather we not resort to such vague measures for something so important. Is there an aspect of Weapon Masters that we can quantify through experimentation?”

“Uh...you’re better at wielding your weapon? We can’t test that unless we have a copy of you without Weapon Master, though. The most showy thing is that Weapon Masters score critical hits more often and their critical hit multiplier is higher, but you probably don’t have enough Levels in the Job Class for that yet.”

“What is a ‘critical hit multiplier’, my lord?”

“It’s the damage multiplier for a critical hit,” Lord Mare told her. Most of the popular weapons around here only do double damage on a critical, but they score critical hits more often. Weapons like glaives and longbows do triple, as do axes and hammers. Scythes do quadruple, but I haven’t seen anyone use one as a weapon yet. A-Anyway, those stories where you hear about strong people getting one-shotted by their opponent are likely the work of a Weapon Master. It’s why Mister Cocytus’ combos are so deadly, even against pure tanks like Albedo.”

Ludmila pursed her lips, silently staring into the fire. The perks of being a Weapon Master did seem attractive, but that might have been because she was showing her bias as a Weapon Master.

“A-Are you going to kill yourself?” Lord Mare asked.

“I thought I would easily be able to in any case,” Ludmila answered, “but this is an unexpectedly difficult decision. If I *am* a Weapon Master, then it must be the result of my training as a child. The combat school passed down to me is a piece of my heritage and I am loath to abandon it.”

“Weren’t you just talking about not clinging to the past?” Lady Aura said.

“I didn’t say that one must discard their past, my lady,” Ludmila replied. “It would be foolish to cast aside the accumulated work of our forebears.”

“Well, maybe it’s not such a bad thing,” Lady Aura offered a supportive smile. “If it doesn’t work out, we can always kill you later!”

“It’ll be a good experiment,” Lord Mare said. “Commanders usually have good stats and special abilities to enhance their allies, but they’re poor at personal combat. Going into the Weapon Master line would make a Commander suboptimal, but the Captain archetype is a completely new thing. We don’t have enough information to definitively say what’s good or bad for Captain builds.”

“Unless it’s something like Tailor,” Lady Aura said. “...or is there a Captain-Tailor build?”

“I don’t think so...”

She could see the benefits of being a Weapon Master as a Captain. In fact, it made perfect sense for her circumstances. Much like tribal Demihuman Lords, Martial Nobles were Human Lords who tended to be the strongest combatants around. Being able to defeat the strongest enemies came first, as one’s home and people would be stolen away without that capability. Leadership was a luxury relative to that...but was that the case any longer?

Though she thought its appearance premature, the rise of the civilian aristocracy in Re-Estize likely represented the natural development of leader-type Job Classes. When a civilisation advanced to a certain stage, its leaders were better positioned as force multipliers for domestic affairs. So long as strong institutions evolved out of their tribal iterations, matters of security could be handled without needing to rely so heavily on singularly powerful individuals.

This was certainly the case in the Sorcerous Kingdom. Her personal strength was nothing compared to so many of the Sorcerer King’s vassals and trying to catch up to them felt futile. As far as contributions to the country went, her friends accomplished much more than she did.

In a way, she herself recognised how unnecessary Martial Nobles were in the Sorcerous Kingdom. She was training Rangers and Commanders from the common population to fill essential roles in the army; she didn’t train Martial Nobles. At best, Martial Nobles made for good military governors and even the necessity of that was in question.

Ludmila Zahradnik fought a desperate struggle to prove herself useful in a situation where she suspected that she was already obsolete. She tried to stay positive about it, but her visit to Nazarick made her painfully aware of how far behind she was in everything...and that was with the kind assistance of the Sorcerer King and his vassals.

“On the subject of Weapon Masters,” Ludmila said. “Would levels in the Job Class be of any use to conventional Rangers? The ones training under me, for instance.”

“Based on what we’ve learned in the Adventurer Guild,” Lord Mare said, “probably not. Almost all of our members hit a wall by Level Twenty and there’s no reason to think it won’t be the same for everyone else. That’s not enough levels to work with to create a good build using Weapon Master...at least not for the role that you’re training your Rangers for.”

“In what way would they work under those level restrictions?”

“Mmh...as a damage dealer, I think. For example, you could have someone with Five Levels in Ranger, Ten Levels in Longbow Master, and Five Levels in Sniper. As far as local standards go, a company of those could slaughter entire armies, but they won’t be anywhere near as good at acting in force reconnaissance roles as a full Ranger build. It’s honestly better to have Archers or Gunners instead of Rangers with that build if you want a pure ranged damage dealer.”

“I see. Then another question: who can become a Weapon Master? It feels like anyone can become one the way you’ve described them.”

“Um...that’s because they can,” Lord Mare said. “Even a magic caster can become a Weapon Master if they meet the prerequisites. There are a bunch of Prestige Classes that multiple archetypes can benefit from. Elementalist would be another example. It’s a Class that offers elemental mastery, so anyone who can work with the elements may benefit from it. It doesn’t matter if they’re a Wizard or Druid or Cleric or something else.”

“In the case of the Weapon Master,” Ludmila said, “can the Skills and Martial Arts that they develop be passed on to any Job Class?”

Lord Mare put on a troubled look as he considered her question.

“That’s hard to say,” he said after a few moments. “Didn’t you mention that how one learns Martial Arts is dependent on their martial foundations?”

“I believe that it is a crucial factor, my lord,” Ludmila replied. “Comparing the progress of the Adventurer Guild’s members seems to prove the notion.”

A small handful of Adventurers had chosen to learn the use of polearms under Ludmila, while another small handful had adopted the use of shield and warhammer under Alessia. Another much larger group was learning swordsmanship under Ainzach and Moknach. The Rangers trained under Merry and everyone else didn't have a 'master'.

The results were telling. Those who trained under Ainzach and Moknach – who were in the process of establishing a fencing school for the Guild – did better than those who had to learn independently. The members who trained under Ludmila and Alessia, who were both considered Weapon Masters of their respective schools, progressed the fastest by far.

“So you're proposing that Weapon Masters can also serve as instructors,” Lord Mare said.

“I was also considering doing the same for the base in Warden's Vale. Our institutions are still sorely lacking in many of the things that they need to function. Raw power is the main factor keeping us afloat.”

“Is there something wrong with that?” Lady Aura asked.

“It's not always the best nor the most efficient path to take,” Ludmila answered. “In the case of the Adventurer Guild, it avails its members nothing. Our expeditions do not employ the Royal Army, after all.”

For such powerful individuals, it was probably difficult to understand. Additionally, as maturely as they acted, they were still children. It would probably still be a while before they were old enough to have a proper debate over the topic.

“So,” Ludmila said. “how can we safely obtain the information from this book and others like this?”

“The best bet to keep them from being accidentally consumed is to have someone with a build as far away from the Class as possible read it. For this *Bushwalker's Guide*, maybe one of the librarians. The Elder Liches in your territory would work, too.”

“And what shall I do if we want them to be 'consumed'?”

“...”

It felt as if they were more worried about that than anything else. Were the books so precious that they weren't to be used?

“If one is to become a Bushwalker,” Ludmila said, “they need to use that book, do they not?”

“Not really...”

Not really?

The answer didn't make much sense. Wasn't the tome the key to obtaining the Job Class?”

“I'm afraid I don't understand, my lord,” Ludmila said. “I don't intend to use the book for myself, but shouldn't a suitable candidate use it at some point?”

“They don't need it,” Lord Mare told her.

“But—”

“Weapon Masters have a book too. So do Dragoons. Did Lord Ainz give you those books?”

“...no, my lord. But what does that mean?”

“What does it sound like?” Last Aura said, “You people don't need these books to gain more advanced Job Classes. You might not even need them to evolve into a higher form of your Racial Class line.”

“E-Evolve?”

What did they mean by that? Was she going to wake up one day with a pair of wings? No, as an Undead being, she was more likely to wake up ethereal.

“Un!” Lady Aura grinned, “Evolve. I wonder how many limbs you'll have in a few years...”

“I'd rather *not* have an evolution like that, my lady,” Ludmila said. “Surely they aren't such an extreme thing.”

“Albedo has Imp Racial Class Levels.”

“...Imp as in the Imps that the Elder Liches employ?”

“Yup!”

From what she had seen, Lady Albedo was shorter than Ludmila was, but only by about half a head. She didn't have a tail of any sort, either. Furthermore, Lady Shalltear mentioned that Lady Albedo was at least five times as massive as Lord Cocytus.

That was far more extreme than waking up with a new pair of wings. Was it possible that Lady Aura was joking around? Just in case, she would have to observe the Prime Minister more closely during her arena matches.

*This world truly has terrors beyond comprehension. Gaining Job Class Levels unknowingly. **Evolving** unwillingly. It would be better if we needed books.*

Ludmila looked up through the branches of the twins' home, wondering what would become of her. The sun – or whatever it was – had climbed far overhead. She wasn't sure when the afternoon's tournament match was, but it was probably unwise to linger any longer.

“We should make our way over to the arena,” Ludmila said. “Thank you for setting aside the time to entertain my queries. I have one last question, if I may.”

“Sure,” Lady Aura shrugged off her blanket and rose to her feet, “what is it?”

“Those who fulfil the prerequisites for one of these books risk consuming them...is that correct?”

“That's right,” Lord Mare said.

“What about those who already have the Job Class that the book gives?”

Lord Mare stared down at the tome near his feet.

“I-I don't know,” Lord Mare admitted. “But it wouldn't make much sense if they were consumed.”

Ludmila brushed the leaves off of her dress and doused their campfire. She knew exactly what she would be doing on her next visit to Ashurbanipal.