

283: Remunerations

A sharp, impressed whistle pierced the air beside Scarlett, causing her to turn her head slightly.

“Now *that’s* what I’d call a dragon’s hoard worth its salt,” Rosa said. “Well, a *small* dragon’s hoard, maybe, but it still counts.”

Before them, at the center of a room illuminated by an array of glowing green crystals along the walls, lay an impressive display of wealth and magical artifice. Tables were laden with chests, exotic reagents in colorful vials, and an assortment of artifacts that seemed to shimmer in the soft light.

“Dragons usually don’t actually have hoards,” Fynn commented from where he stood to their right, arms crossed.

Rosa shot him a small glare. “Well, maybe not the boring dragons *you’ve* encountered.”

The white-haired young man simply nodded. “Exactly.”

“...Fine, then let’s call it a veritable treasure trove,” Rosa huffed, rolling her eyes. “Better?”

“Doesn’t ‘treasure trove’ kind of imply we stumbled upon this by chance?” Allyssa asked, her head tilted. This earned her a half-hearted scowl from the bard.

Rosa turned to Scarlett with an expression of mock outrage. “Hey, Boss Lady, they’re belittling your new acquisitions. Are you really going to stand there and let them get away with it?”

Scarlett regarded the woman coolly for a moment before shifting her gaze back to the extravagant collection before them. “I do not particularly mind.”

Rosa clicked her tongue in disappointment at failing to gain an ally, but Scarlett wasn’t sure what she expected, honestly. Allyssa’s light laughter rang out while Fynn and Shin stepped closer to examine the host of treasures. A trio of wizards clad in rich brown robes stood off to the side of the chamber, having been responsible for assembling and presenting this generous offering.

Fynn lifted a peculiar crystal shaped like a teardrop, its surface pulsing with an inner light as he studied it with a perplexed expression. Meanwhile, Shin ran his fingers over the spine of an old tome, its cover adorned with intricate silver filigree. Scarlett also moved forward, coming to a stop before an ornate chest situated at the edge of the collection.

This grand display represented the rewards—or payment, depending on one’s perspective—that the Rising Isle’s council had promised Scarlett and her companions in exchange for revealing the secrets of the Astral Sanctum. Or at least half or so of the agreed-upon compensation.

While many of the items were those Scarlett had specifically requested, the Isle’s wizards had also included some additions of their own.

To start things out, Scarlett knelt down and carefully opened the small chest before her. A collective gasp rose from some of her companions as the lid swung open, revealing a glittering sea of gold coins within.

Another appreciative whistle sounded behind her as Rosa peered over her shoulder. “Any chance of any bonus handouts coming our way in the near future?” she asked, likely only half-joking.

Scarlett glanced back at the woman before returning her attention to the chest’s contents. If she were to make a rough estimate, there were roughly two thousand or so coins inside, each bearing the stamp of a hundred-solar piece. This chest alone contained somewhere around two hundred thousand solars, and with four similar chests nearby, the total sum approached one million. A fortune almost comparable to what Scarlett had received for the ashenwraith dragon and its parts.

Frankly, she was somewhat surprised that the Rising Isle had such a substantial amount of imperial currency at their immediate disposal, given that it wasn’t their primary medium of exchange. Although, considering their far-reaching influence, maybe procuring funds like this wasn’t as challenging for them as it would be for others. While this sum was certainly impressive to a minor noble like Scarlett, for a faction of the Isle’s calibre, it likely paled in comparison to the potential magical secrets hidden within the Sanctum.

Meanwhile, to individuals like Rosa and the others, this represented more wealth than they might hope to even get *close* to through several lifetimes.

“I believe your current compensation is quite generous,” Scarlett replied to Rosa’s earlier comment. “However... I may indeed consider some additional rewards in the near future, should circumstances warrant it.”

“Um, does that apply to the rest of us as well?” Allyssa asked from her position by one of the tables, which was covered in a diverse array of mainly alchemical ingredients.

“Yes, Miss Astrey,” Scarlett answered.

A barely contained smile of excitement spread across the young Shielder’s face.

“I knew there was a reason I stuck around,” Rosa said, nudging Scarlett’s shoulder lightly. “Who would have thought it’d be the promise of riches?”

Scarlett merely shook her head in response, closing the chest and moving to examine the items on the nearest table. Her gaze swept across the assortment of vials and other containers that held various rare reagents and materials, with tiny, neatly written labels identifying their contents: Glimmerrot Sap, Embervine Resin, Dragonscale Powder, Frostleaf Petals, and more. Some were familiar to Scarlett from the game, while others she recognised from her research in this world.

Each item was relatively difficult to obtain through conventional means, valuable enough to be coveted by various professions. All of it was part of what she had specifically requested from the Council. Her plans for these materials differed, ranging from reagents she believed could enhance the Loci to components for crafting powerful equipment in the future.

Though she couldn’t pinpoint an exact value for everything on this table, Scarlett wouldn’t have been surprised if it rivaled or exceeded the worth of the gold in the chests.

The next table held the alchemical ingredients that had captured Allyssa’s rapt attention. While they weren’t quite as numerous or as rare as the materials on the previous table, Scarlett had made sure to consult with Allyssa about potentially useful components before presenting her final list to the Council. That included certain ingredients that they’d had trouble procuring themselves and which were essential for some of the alchemical recipes Allyssa had found in the Veiled Library. Scarlett could practically see the wheels turning in the young alchemist’s mind as she imagined the experiments she’d soon be able to conduct.

Moving past Allyssa's table of wonders, Scarlett approached the next display, which held a selection of enchanted items. Her attention moved over each piece, taking in their appearance and reading the small placards describing their functions.

It would have been foolish not to request anything enchanted when given the opportunity to ask for nearly anything from one of this world's most advanced magical factions. This table likely represented the bulk of today's value, which said a lot.

[Amulet of True Sight (Epic)]

{Illusions weave their deceptions, but this amulet guides its wearer to see the world as it truly is, unmasking the tricks of those who hide reality}

The first item was a delicate silver chain supporting a teardrop-shaped crystal that seemed to shift colors as Scarlett examined it. According to the placard, it allowed the user to see through most illusions and invisibility, and it was something that Scarlett had specifically acquired for Fynn to further enhance his perceptive abilities.

[Whispering Cloak (Epic)]

{The wind carries many secrets, but none hear your footsteps when wrapped in this cloak. Silence is the first step towards invisibility}

A shimmering cloak that seemed to absorb the light around it, with the edges blurring slightly as if trying to fade from view, was the second item, muffling the wearer's footsteps and sounds while making them harder to perceive. While it wasn't quite invisibility, which was very challenging magic to get your hands on, this would be good to have if any of Scarlett's party members needed to be stealthy in the future.

[Belt of the Iron Stomach (Epic)]

{The road is long and fraught with hazards, but this belt steels the body against the world's poisons and venoms, fortifying the wearer's resolve}

The third item Scarlett inspected was a pair of sturdy leather belts inlaid with metallic designs that pulsed with a faint green light. The placard explained that they gave resistance to poisons and toxins while allowing the wearer to consume most organic substances. These could be useful for a range of situations.

[Pendant of Breathless Seas (Rare)]

{The deep is as treacherous as it is vast, but with this pendant, the seas part some of their dangers and welcome you as one of their own}

Another item was a collection of small azure gemstones suspended on fine silver chains, their surfaces appearing to ripple like water. They allowed for breathing underwater as well as increased mobility, and Scarlett had wanted to make sure she had several of these just in case.

Beyond these pieces, there were many other remarkable items present on the table. This included numerous rings imbued with various protective enchantments and beneficial effects, such as resistances and stat boosts, which Scarlett planned to distribute among her party members. Additionally, there were a decent number of quality-of-life items. Examples were an extra pair of spatial bags that could hold even more than the [Bag of Juham], an intricate earring that allowed the wearer to project and amplify their voice, and a small trinket that could erect a barrier preventing outside sounds from passing through.

Overall, the collection represented items Scarlett had identified as potentially valuable assets, as well as gear to enhance her party's combat effectiveness. There was a noticeable lack of heavy armor or equipment, but Scarlett found they were already well-equipped in that regard, and the Isle's wizards weren't blacksmiths or the like anyway.

A small, content smile played across Scarlett's lips as she finished inspecting the last of the items, taking one final sweeping glance over the tables and chests. Considering that the Isle had managed to procure all of this in a relatively short time, she found herself looking forward to what they might be capable of given more of it. Especially if she were to grant them access to more of the Isle's secrets beyond just the Astral Sanctum.

She had yet to divulge any information about the Veiled Library, for instance, and she doubted Yamina had done so either.

Scarlett turned to address one of the wizards standing at the edge of the room, who had been quietly observing her party's enthusiastic examination of their new acquisitions. "These will more than suffice for the time being," she said. "Please convey my gratitude to your superiors for this generous offering, and if possible, extend my thanks to the artisans responsible for crafting these items."

She then shifted her attention to her companions. "Feel free to continue exploring the collection at your leisure," she declared. "Fynn, I entrust you and Mr. Thornthorn with the task of organising and storing these items once you have finished your examination. I have another matter to attend to, so I will take my leave for now."

With that, Scarlett exited the room, stepping into the hallway where a grey-robed wizard stood in wait. She gestured to the woman that she didn't need any guidance as she made her way towards their current accommodations. Since the wizards had brought their rewards directly to them, it didn't take long for Scarlett to reach her quarters.

As she entered the room, crystals embedded in the walls automatically illuminated the space with a warm, ambient glow. Scarlett's eyes flicked to an ornate clock hanging beside the bed before she made her way to a sturdy wooden table tucked away in the corner. There were still a few minutes to spare.

Settling into the chair, she placed her [Pouch of Holding] on the table's surface and reached inside, retrieving a slender band of pale white metal. It was just large enough to fit comfortably around her head, its deceptively simple appearance belying its true nature.

[Crown of Flame's Benediction (Unique)]

{Born through ancient forgotten rites, this crown harbors the unified essence of sacred and elemental flames, its true power waiting to be discovered}

As Scarlett held it, faint crimson runes ignited along the circlet's circumference, and a subtle wave of mental clarity washed over her. While the items provided by the Isle were undoubtedly valuable, none of them could truly compare to this.

At least, that was her assumption. She'd had little time to actually test the artifact since Mistress had created it for her, so its exact capabilities remained somewhat of a mystery, even if she was aware of its basic features in theory. She *had* been planning to explore its potential in Freymeadow when she next visited, but that idea had been set aside due to this unexpected detour to the Rising Isle.

She supposed she would simply have to discover what it could do in the heat of real combat when the opportunity presented itself. Scarlett had to admit, a part of her was looking forward to that moment.

For the next few minutes, she idly toyed with the artifact, conjuring small flames to test its fire-based body enhancement magic while her mind wandered to possible applications. Eventually, a flash of light at the center of the room caught her attention, and Scarlett carefully set the circlet aside, turning to face the materialising figure.

The apparition consisted of shimmering blue light, reminiscent of sunlight filtering through deep ocean waters. As it coalesced, familiar features began to take shape, traces of color

becoming visible through the blue luminescence. A flowing robe of what was likely rich emerald adorned with golden accents came into focus, topped by a head of dark purple hair that fell just above the shoulders. Intelligent eyes peered out from behind a pair of round, scholarly glasses, their gold chains glinting in the magical light.

The image of Yamina Ward stood before Scarlett, blinking a couple of times as she glanced down at her blue-tinted form before finally meeting Scarlett's gaze. "It seems I've kept you waiting, Baroness," she said, a hint of apology in her voice.