Chapter 130

I decided I wanted to finish all the weapons for Gareth this evening.  I did not want this final favor hanging over me unfinished.  I was partly concerned Gareth would also take his team in with inferior weapons.  He was still my friend even if we were slightly estranged right now.  I looked at the list:  Four swords, three daggers, a mace, and five hand axes.

The hand axes and daggers were all secondary weapons, and no specifications were given for them.  They would be quick, and I would just add a durability enchantment to all of them.  Smaller weapons were easy to add one enchantment. Adding two enchantments was much more difficult, enough for me. The four swords and mace were primary weapons, so I assumed Gareth had assembled a team of six, including himself.  The mace was lighter than typical, so I assumed it was for a mage or healer.  Each of the swords was different, with detailed specifications and sketches.

I went into the second bedroom in my apartment, and the cats were upset we were not playing tonight.  I had spent many nights in here making the long swords for sale in Llorth. I had purchased four posts wrapped in heavy rope that they could scratch and climb.  Each was topped with a platform at a different height, and when they figured out I was working, they took to playing with each other. They were getting larger every day and barely fit on the platforms, so they took to playing king of the hill with Kiara dominating.

The axes and daggers were done in under three hours.  The mace was simple to make, and all the work was the two enchantments, heavy blow and shocking strike.  When that was complete, I moved on to the swords.  They would all get the sharpness and durability runes.  It was early morning when I finished the last of the blades.  All the practice on the long swords had made the process go smoothly.

I just hoped the delvers he gave these weapons to did not flash them around.  They would be considered quite valuable in Skyholme.  Someone may think they could make better use of them.   I spent some time wrapping the blades and then made a note for Remy to bring them to Gareth at the Dungeon Academy.

As I walked to his room to slide the note under the door, the smell of the morning bread baking below was wafting up.  I slid the note and went to the kitchens.  It was still a few hours before the cafe opened, but half a dozen bakers and cooks were preparing for the coming day.  My personal chef was working on my breakfast as well.  I joined them and showed them how to make French toast with stale bread.

There are a few things to consider when making French toast.  Bread thickness as you want the outside browned but still have a gooey center.  Make sure to add milk to the egg to absorb the liquid effectively, and finally, top it with a dusting of powdered sugar and then the butter and syrup just before eating.  We did not have cinnamon, but maybe next time I was in Llorth, I could find someone to source it from.

When I returned to my room, the cats were angry I had left them for so long.  I fed them, and we went through our normal morning routine.  I met Bleiz in the training room, and we practiced against each other.  “You have improved,” I said in sweaty clothes.

“My time in the lowlands was well spent.  I learned in a few weeks what should have taken a year. You are still my better with your lightning magic,”  Bleiz said while wiping down his weapons.  “Are we leaving for the Black Spire?”

“Yes, I will need to be back later for lessons.  If you want, you can join me.”  I said, hitting myself with a cleanliness spell.  Bleiz did the same thing to himself.

As we walked to the hanger, the cats trailing, Bleiz asked, “When are we going after the pirates?”

“On the seventh day.  We have a party on the fifth day for the twins. The Progenitor Dungeon on the sixth day and then the seventh day, will head to the mountains where they are known to operate.  We will scout and then return.  I am not sure about engaging,” I explained my thoughts.

We reached the hangar, and Leda was loading some crates of food.  “Storme, are we heading to the Black Spire?  Remy wanted this food sent for the Wolfsguard, and we need to stop at the Gaskil’s farm to load furniture.”

“I forgot we were moving them.  They are already prepared?”  I said while checking on the cargo.

“Fera said they were ready last night at our dinner.  We were going there now, actually,” Leda replied.

“Drop Bleiz and myself off at the Spire first.  We will help you unload, and you can return to the farm afterward.  I plan to return to the Shiny Platinum after lunch for a tutoring session.”  I moved up to the bridge to find Cilia.  Leda rushed to get the last few crates of produce on board, and we were soon zipping toward the Spire.

We landed in the orchards, and the place was bustling.  The stone mage and his crew were working on a structure, and there were dozens of piles of stone around the site for the future village.  From the marker flags, the village looked a little bigger than I remembered the plans, but maybe that was because I was standing in the middle of it and not looking at a piece of paper.  Isla was not here, but after we helped unload the food, I talked with the stone mage.  He was directed to complete the general store first and town hall second before working on residences.  The town hall was just a gathering place for the Wolfsguard to hold community events.

Bleiz and I wandered through the orchards next.  A number of Wolfsguard were picking apples.  They looked at Bleiz with some suspicion, having never seen him before.  My destination was the aether fields.  That was the focus of the Asger and his people.  It would generate the most profit for me as well.  Aether-infused plants were used in alchemy and to create remarkable effects in dishes. Asger was directing planting, and the few Wolfsguard with plant growth ability were in the fields encouraging plants.

On seeing us, Asger walked to us quickly, “High Mage Storme!  Glad you had time to visit!”

“How is the progress?”  I asked, inspecting fields that looked mostly planted.

“It goes very well.  There are forty Wolfsguard at the Spire.  I think they are waiting on you if you have not stopped there yet,” Asger relayed. Since I was walking from the orchards, it was reasonable to assume I had not met them yet.

“It is my next stop.  Remy sent the crates of food you requested.  The human farmers are moving into the farmhouse later today.  They are just to be working the white barely field,” I informed him.

“We met them last sixth day.  Nice people, and I am sure we can all work in harmony,” Asger stated with a wolfish smile.

“Glad to hear that.  Are the Wolfsguard at the Spire from Stonefell Island?  And this is Bleiz, my friend.  I am going to leave him with you, and you can introduce him around,” I talked with Asger a little more about their progress with the fields. The orchards were shipping five bushels of apples a day back on the Maelstrom.  I left Bleiz with Asger for a more complete tour and to be introduced to the Wolfsguard.

The cats snuck through the brush alongside me as I walked to the Spire.  The Wolfsguard had landscaped the grounds and were looking a lot better. The path to the dungeon also looked to have been widened and cleared.   As I approached the Black Spire, many Wolfsguard were training outside.  It was clear to see the number was half females by their curves.  These were the first groups that had chosen to utilize my offer for use of the dungeon. A large black-furred Wolfsguard met me as I approached.

“Pakkam, I was not expecting you to be in the first group,” I greeted the familiar Wolfsguard.

“Nor I.  Fate has it’s own will.  I thank you again.  We have forty-one here and seven children with Jaesmin in the village,” he shook my wrist.

“Are you wishing to go into the dungeon this cycle?”  I looked at the array of Wolfsguard who studied me carefully.

“Five pairs are ready, yes.  The most anxious of us to see if it will work,” Pakkam admitted and pointed out the pairs planning to go. The entire group had stopped training.

“How many will serve as guards, and how many will serve as trainers?”  I also noted they looked like they had been camping on the grounds, “Are you all sleeping outside?”

“We are.  Do you wish us to take residence in the town?  We thought we would be responsible for guarding the tower.  All of us are prepared to serve in whatever capacity you need us.  Do not worry about those who come with child.  They can still fight better than most men,” he smiled with a toothy grin.  A few Wolfsgaurd females who heard him nodded and grinned as well.

“That is impressive.  Isla is going to build the barracks between the two skyship cradles there,” I pointed. “Until then, you can all reside in the Black Spire itself,” I waved at the massive structure towering over us.

Pakkam looked up at the monolith of a building, “Are you certain?  We talked with Isla, and she said the builders were coming to work on the building and to stay out of their way.”

“Sleep on the fourth floor then. It is the first and second floor being remodeled.” I said looked up to see that the glass had been replaced on the fourth floor that was destroyed months ago in our fight with the Bricios. “It has a good view and will protect you from the elements.” A lot of nods of appreciation came from the Wolfsguard at my offer. “Also, those with children will live in the village after the birth.” I explained further, “I want them raised away from the dangers that might find me here and educated in the village as well.”

“It will be as you request.  You still require fifty guards for your Spire?”  Pankam noted.

“I do.  I am also requiring a skyship.  I have three weeks remaining to procure one, and I plan to take a pirate ship in the lowlands soon,” I revealed to him.

Pakkam asserted loudly for all to hear, “Then you need a crew familiar with skyship combat.  How many of us do you request?”

I had not considered taking any Wolfsguard with me.  I looked them over before addressing them, “It is not in the scope of our agreement. But if ten would volunteer, I would welcome you.”

One of the silver-furred Wolfsguard women quipped, “I am the only one you need to watch your back, High Mage.”

Pakkam rolled his eyes, “Neoma, you are not even a match for the High Mage in combat.”  Pakkam winked at me.  He had observed me defeat Bleiz during the bonding rite.  Clearly, he was giving me a chance to prove my fighting prowess among the Wolfsguard to solicit volunteers.

Neoma scoffed, “Mages can not fight.  He would not even accept my challenge for dominance.”

“I accept.”  A challenge for dominance was not mating but establishing hierarchy in the pack.  I materialized my falchion and walked forward.  A circle of interested Wolfsguard formed around us.  Neoma had a shield and a curved short sword.  I was not aware of her fighting style, but I would find out soon.  We face off in the circle, and she flashed forward.

My lightning reflexes had been active, but I had not been in overdrive mode.  An aether shield hindered her for a breath as she quickly found her way around it.  Neoma definitely had some type of speed enhancement, probably a tier-two ability.  I went into overdrive and exceeded her speed.  She used her shield as a good distraction in the engagement.  I did not want to embarrass her, and we exchanged four times in seconds before separating.

Her eyes narrowed, “High Mage, I think I do not need to hold back.”  Her muscles swelled, and she flexed bulging veins.  This was a strength enhancement spell, not an ability.  She came at me again, this time with strength and ferocity.  She was still no match for my speed and skill.  I used my aether shield liberally. Not because I needed to but in order to train it.  Maybe I could gain some valuable training with these warriors.

After a minute, Neoma was panting and tired.  The spell she used enhanced her strength but also drew on her reserves.  She bowed at the waist, “High Mage, I acknowledge your skill over mine in combat.”

Pakkam laughed, “Our High Mage subdued the loudest mouth among us in minutes!  Nice show.”

I was disappointed the fight was so short, but Neoma had gone all out, “Is anyone else going to challenge me?” I encouraged the pack.

Pakkam smiled and explained, “Neoma was third among us, and I am not going to challenge you.  Amarok is too wise after seeing your display.  So, no.  We accept you as a warrior among us.”

“I wish to get some exercise, Pakkam,” I announced loudly.  “If it is not too presumptuous, I would ask for two opponents at once.”

The Wolfsguard stirred at my challenge.  Pakkam quieted them, “Two it is, High Mage.”

The circle remained, and Pakkam selected two male Wolfsguard.  They worked well together, trying to get one behind me, but I had my aether shield and incredible speed.  They did not succeed.  I let the contest go for a few minutes while I frustrated my opponents before ending it.  The next pair that Pakkam called on landed a strike on my calf from an illusionary attack that fooled me.  I healed it quickly and ended the fight after that. The others were learning my weaknesses by watching.

Pakkam then called two forward and joined them as a third, “We have to show the High Mage the Wolfsguard have some pride.”  I nodded, accepting the increased challenge.  These three circled, and I could tell they were familiar with each other.  They launched a coordinated attack and pressured me.  I figured Pakkam had a combat foresight ability, seeing my attacks before I made them.  This allowed him to keep me occupied while the other two harassed me.  I probably could have ended this quickly, but I let it play out. I noticed Bleiz approaching the tower with Asger.

The clash of steel and the grunts echoed under the tower as I fought three skilled opponents at once.  I moved into a mental zone and missed Bleiz joining the three in the attack on me.  I barely cleared his swing.  And then it was four-on-one.  As if Bleiz’s addition was a sign, I was soon fighting five Wolfsguard as Neoma joined.  A strike hit my back, and I rolled forward in some pain.  Pakkam yelled, “Halt,” and everyone retreated.

Bleiz and my four attackers were smiling at finally succeeding.  Pakkam was happy as well, “High Mage, we would welcome you back to train with us any time.  Although your magic aids you, you are a skilled swordsman.”  I bowed to them.  It was a compliment but also insinuated that they would have won without my magic—not that they did not have their own magic as well.

I used my cleanliness spell as I was sweaty, dirty, and quite ripe from two hours of training. I produced a keg of Mera’s frost mead and drank with the Wolfsguard.  I talked with Pakkam about getting potion belts and a typical array of potions for everyone in Llorth.  The quality was much better in the lowlands, and the cost was much cheaper. Pakkam also selected himself and nine Wolfsguard to go with me when I went pirate hunting.  This would give me more confidence to engage.

The Maelstrom landed as we were drinking, and four women and two men came down the ramp I did not recognize.  Leda rushed behind them, “We dropped off the farmers and their things.  These are the new servants for the Black Spire!”

Isla came down the ramp shortly after. After introductions, Isla said, “Storme, I will show them around.  I have four landscaping specialists coming as well later in the week. The staff’s families will be relocated in a few weeks. I just wanted to make sure of the quality of their work.”

“Excellent.  I am headed back to the Shiny Platinum.  The Wolfsguard here can stay on the fourth floor,” I cleaned all the Wolfsguard with my cleanliness spell before ascending the ramp onto the Maelstrom with Bleiz and the cats.

On the bridge, Bleiz spoke with me, “You really impressed them.  Not just the warriors but all the Wolfsguard on your land.  I think you have won them over.  Just follow through on your promises.  I did not find signs of the four missing Wolfsguard.”

My eyes snapped to Bleiz, “Nothing?”

“No one has seen them since your first visit.  They were loyal to the Bricios and may be hiding in the surrounding woods. I suggest you have them searched with mage sight,” Bleiz couciled.

When we returned to the Shiny Platinum, Remy said Gareth sent his thanks back after he delivered the weapons.  The fact that he did not thank me in person hurt a little.  Then again, I did not deliver them in person.  My instructor for tier-one creatures was here, and he brought his family for the free meal.  His family ate in the restaurant, and he taught me in my apartment while we ate. Bleiz joined us and had more questions than me as he had not read the text beforehand. I gave him coin to buy his own copies in the future.  We got through three creatures in the time he had.  He thanked me for the food and the bonus coin.

The rest of the week, I went to enchant the wasp skyships for Sebastian and then did my personal tutoring afterward.  I did not have time to cross blades with the Wolfsguard. My evenings were spent trying to design an aether cannon for the Maelstrom. It was one of the more frustrating projects I had worked on. The amount of aether required a lot of math and trying to balance aether, range, power, and shot frequency was not easy. The Maelstrom was a small ship, and if the cannon drew too much aether, it would interfere with other runes on the ship.

Before I knew it, it was the fifth day, and I had to escort Mera to her fourteenth coming-of-age party. A large group of us boarded the Maelstrom, and we returned to Hen’s Hollow.