Chapter POV Sana Velin

Sana Velin looked out onto the frozen wasteland of White Abyss dungeon from the safe zone.  Her companions were still sleeping as she watched the light snowfall start to pick up.  Changing weather in dungeons was rare, but this dungeon did it on all five levels.  This was their third run on the fifth level.  They were looking for a specific reward from the completion chest item from the dungeon.  It was a tier four spell, Summon Herald.  She wondered if this was the copy she was looking for.

One of her companions stirred and walked to her.  The massive seven-foot minotaur came and stood beside her.  His deep voice bellowed, “How many times are we going to run this floor, Sana.”  The minotaur had somehow added a whiny tone to his deep baritone voice.

She looked up at the graying minotaur, “Byron, the research said it appears about three percent of the time in the reward chest.”

“I do not want to be stuck doing this dungeon over and over for months, Sana.  If we fail this attempt, I will return to the coast.  I can get good work on the trade ships there as a guard,” Byron growled out.

Sana fumed and stood before the minotaur, unafraid of his bulk. “You still owe me for saving your brother!”

Byron did not back down, “This is the fourth time you called in that debt, Sana. I consider the matter settled, and I am getting too old to be delving into dungeons.”

Sana got frustrated. Putting together a team for this dungeon had taken months. She pleaded with the minotaur, “Getting past the guardian on the first level took longer than expected, Byron.  It was a new hybrid for this dungeon, and I did not want to commit to the attack until we were fully prepared. Things have gone smoother since.”

“It also took almost five days to cross the salt flats on the second level of this dungeon.  The third-floor guardian had a paralytic mist you did not know about. On the fourth level of this dungeon, we had to climb a bloody glacier! Nothing has been going according to your predictions, Sana.”

Another of her companions was roused and walked to join the conversation.  Sana eyed the approaching human man with spite.  It had been a mistake to hire Tynes and his crew. They were as good as they were greedy.

Tynes had a smirk, “I agree with the big boy. It is time to go. You said this was a thirty day expedition, and it had been almost two months.”

Sana quickly felt things spinning out of her control, “Tynes, you all have profited greatly from this delve.  Also, this dungeon has been virtually untouched for a century.  Of course, the records in the great library would not be completely accurate, and our progress has been slower.”

Tynes smiled with a slight grin that infuriated her, “Still, unless you extend payment, this will be our last run on the floor boss.”

Sana fumed. What Tynes’ party had already harvested from this dungeon was five times the value of what she had already paid them.  She had found this dungeon in an obscure text in her search for pages of the Codex. Now, Tynes and his crew would leave the dungeon and sell the dungeon’s location and harvestables from the first three levels.  In a week, there would be dozens of teams from the Adventurer’s Guild raiding this lost dungeon.

Tynes’ three companions stirred. This was a six-person dungeon. Hart, the only woman in Tynes crew approached, “Are we doing this?” The last run against the ice golem had been rough, and Hart had bailed them out. Hart spit out some sweet grass she had been chewing on. She pulled her bow from her back and tested the draw. It was not the bow that made Hart formidable. She had a quiver of artificed arrows, each identified by the different color fletchings.

The other two members of Tynes crew joined the group. Brock and Murph, two front liners. Both were excellent fighters but somewhat disgusting. It was a full-time job hitting them with her cleanliness spell. Tynes smirked as they approached, “One last run boys! We are heading home after this one.”

Brock scratched his ass and cracked his back. Murph was chewing some jerky he liked to keep in his pocket. Sana regretted her choice of help, but Tynes’ group was convenient at the time. The thing with the Sphere was calling in friends when they were one hundred thousand miles away was not that easy.

At least she had found Byron at the city’s Adventurer’s Hall. The large minotaur was not really a delver. He preferred to spend his time in the city, guarding nobles and merchants. His skill set made him a great person to have on a delve, though, as he was both a warrior and a healer.

The team quickly broke down their camp, and Tynes stored the gear in his small dimensional space. This safe area of the dungeon was close to the final challenge monster for the dungeon. The first two runs on the ice golem had yielded two excellent tier-two ability essences. Exactly what the runes on the dungeon arch indicated would be in the chest.

This time, the essence in the chest was going to be the tier-two ability that reinforced strength. Brock was in line to get the essence. He had been insufferable the entire descent in anticipation. The only thing Sana was entitled to were any spell books found. Even though their first two runs yielded tier-two essences, there was also a tier-three spellbook in each reward chest and a good amount of gold coins.

Brock and Murph swung their weapons to limber up their shoulders. Tynes was aready squinting at the increased snowfall. “Visibility is dropping, Sana. This takedown is going to be more difficult than the last two.”

“Just keep it distracted, and I will handle it,” Sana barked at Tynes, who continued to smirk at her.

The party moved out with Brock and Murph in front and Byron directly behind them. Tynes and Hart were in the back with Sana in the middle. The snow crunched under their feet as they moved to the location they knew contained the final monster for this dungeon.

They approached the small frozen lake. Even with the snowfall, the surface was mirror-like. Everyone had added ice spikes to their shoes so they would not slide on the ice. Sana looked down in the water beneath the ice. The pale sapphire water had massive fish swimming beneath it. She knew those fish were one of the premier harvestables for this dungeon from her research. She had not told Tynes, or he might have spent time trying to fish.

The ice suddenly cracked, like a broken mirror, and the ice rose up to form a twenty-foot ice golem. It was difficult to see it fifty feet away, but the ice beneath them reverberated with each stride when it started to race toward them. An arrow exploded into the chest of the monster from Hart.

Sana started to cast her concussive balls at it. It was a tier-three air spell. They had learned the hard way in their first fight with the ice golem that it was immune to fire attacks. The fire actually created water on the surface, which it absorbed and used to replenish its mass.

Sana’s balls shattered against its surface, blowing off the ice from the golem. That was how you defeated this creature. You whittled it down, making it smaller and smaller until you reached its core and could destroy it.

The golem reached their front line, and Murph took the first blow on his shield. The runes flared and allowed him to withstand the tons of ice trying to crush him. “Does it seem a little upset this time?” Brock asked after the blow.

“I think he just does not like the way you smell,” barked Hart behind her.

Tynes commanded, “Do not lose focus, or you will be red-paste on this ice, Brock.”

Brock swung his maul into the leg of the golem, causing shards of ice to fly off. The ice golem groaned in anger and directed his next attack at Brock. Byron sent an aether shield to slow the hand of the behemoth. The shield shattered but slowed enough for Brock to move out of the way.

Explosive arrows started to hit the massive golem in a steady cadence. “Enough!” Sana yelled at Hart. “It will rush you if you damage it further!” She also knew Hart only had twenty of the arrows remaining.

Sana’s own attacks were targeting the shoulder joint of the living ice sculpture. They learned on their second takedown of the creature they could break of limbs to speed up this process. The golem stomped his feet, causing the ice to to briefly phase out. Everyone except Brock had managed to jump before it hardened again. “Demon’s Shit! I am caught!”

Sana heard Tynes mutter, “Idiot,” before rushing forward to help Murph keep the attention of the golem while Brock freed himself. The first time they fought the ice golem, this surprise had nearly gotten them all killed. Fortunately, Murph had been able to hold its attention while everyone else had freed themselves.

Tynes warhammer slammed into the golem’s leg, spraying himself in ice chips. He deftly moved in between the monstrosity legs as he attacked and kept the attention on himself while Brock smashed the ice around his feet to free himself. When he was free, Tynes retreated to the back.

Hart asked, “Is the snow picking up?”

Sana scanned the skies, and it did look heavier the further up… “Damn it! The falling snow is being funneled to the ice golem to heal itself!” Everyone was confused, but Sana could clearly see the funnel of falling snow being directed at the golem. “We need to increase our attack rate, or we will exhaust ourselves!”

The first time they fought the golem, it had taken nearly five hours to bring it down. The second time, they did it in three, but that was because Sana had blasted off one of its arms. Tynes asked, “Do you think the dungeon is learning?”

It was not unheard of, especially for the last challenge monster in a dungeon. That would make getting the spellbook that much harder. “Yes,” she yelled to Tynes. He grimaced slightly and raced back into the melee. Tynes preferred to hang back and only add his fighting prowess when needed.

An hour later, the left knee joint of the golem gave way. The golem’s movement was greatly diminished, and it had difficulty in its attacks. It was only a matter of time before it would be finished.

“Cyclone!” Hart yelled, and Sana scanned the skies. A tornado of snow was descending. It was another attempt for the golem to heal itself. Sana smiled as she launched a fireball into the forming snow. She could not use the fire on the golem as it would have no effect, but breaking up its attempt to heal itself should work.

The large explosion of fire burst the cyclone and ended the threat. The golem slammed its fist, trying to capture the party in the ice again, but this time everyone jumped at the right time, and it had no effect when the ice hardened again.

That was the last push as Sana finally took the right arm off at the joint. It was now just two hours of chipping away the ice. When the golem was down to ten feet tall, it suddenly crumbled into large chunks of ice. Everyone was breathing heavily with large smiles. Finishing a challenging dungeon always did that for a person.

The reward chest formed from the ice of the golem into a large solid white ice chest. The golem’s palm-sized tier 5 aether crystal lay nearby as well, another valuable reward that Hart walked over and scooped up with a smile. Tynes went and opened the chest with Sana standing at his side. She held her breath, hoping. On a bed of gold coins were three objects. The first was the tier two essence in a glowing vial. The runes on it identified it for what it was—a strength enhancement.

Tynes grabbed the vial and tossed it to Brock as promised, who greedily consumed it. The second item was a blue-green potion. Sana scanned the identifying runic script, and Tynes waited for her to identify it. “It is a trait aspect potion…I think it is cat claws…or maybe cat fangs.” Tynes frowned, picking it up and pocketing it. Most people refused to take aspect enhancements as they messed with a person’s racial aspect. In some cases, they would no longer be able to have children.

The third item was a spellbook. Tynes did not need to know what it was and started scooping out the gold coins while Sana took the spellbook and deposited it into her dimensional bag. She would look at it later with the expectation of disappointment. If this golem got more difficult with each attempt on it, she would need a better team when she returned.

“Sana, I am heading out of the dungeon,” Byron announced. Sana nodded and moved with the minotaur toward the icy arch that had formed to give a quick exit. She did not think Tynes would betray her but still did not want to be left alone with his team. The minotaur passed through the gate with her.

They emerged in a hot, steamy jungle with vegetation covering everything but the small clearing. The dungeon arch had vines wrapped around it, looking to strangle the black stone arch. The canopy of large leaves above effectively hid this dungeon arch from above. It had been difficult to find it even with the references she had found in the great library.

Byron pulled out a portal crystal. It was a single-use teleportation that would bring him to the nearest portal stone in the network. Sana took one out as well. They knew the crystal would bring them to the City of Avarice. It was a dwarven city high in the mountains. They nodded and crushed the crystals.

The air changed from hot and humid to dry and cold, causing goosebumps to run across her skin. She cast her thermostatic aura spell and instantly relaxed. Twenty-three dwarven guards with icicles forming on their beards watched them closely before relaxing as Sana showed her medallion. The medallion bore the Dwarven Mage Guild symbol. Sana had become a member of a dozen different mage organizations in the Sphere over her time in the lowlands.

Byron spoke, “Thank you Sana. I enjoyed the delve, but please consider me retired unless you want me to guard a cask of ale and fail at the job.” The large minotaur stepped away, his hoofs clacking on the stone as he left. Sana had used up all the goodwill she had with Byron and sighed. She made her way to the nearest inn. After a few days, she would put together a new team and attempt to retrieve the spell again.

The old dwarf caretaker at the inn gave her a room, and she soon fell onto the soft mattress. One thing dwarves were good at was making a soft bed. She fell asleep, exhausted.

When she woke hours later, Sana took the spellbook from her bag and reluctantly opened it, not expecting to get the Summon Herald spell. She had put off her disappointment long enough. The aetheric language was not difficult to read if you learned all the runes, and her heart rate increased as the spell title was Summon Herald. She had found it!

She slowly paged to the back of the spellbook. The last page was blank! It was as her mentor had described. She went back and reviewed the spell to confirm the function of the spell. It created an ethereal ghost of the caster that could instantly send a message to anyone in the Sphere. The spell needed to be evolved as it just sent a single word when it was first imprinted.

It was an incredible tier-four spell. But that was not why she wanted this tome. She went to the blank page once again and slowly tore the page out. When the page was free of the binding, the rest of the book turned to dust. She held the page in her shaking hand. He was right! She knew no matter what she did to the blank page, it would not reveal anything to her.

Sana reached into her bag, pulled out her mentor’s notebook, and spent some time writing where she had found the page. Archmage Mercurian had passed this notebook to her on his deathbed. It was the sum of all his research over nearly a millennia into something he called a Codex of the Sphere.

He did not know what this Codex was as he had only collected three pages himself. He called himself the Instructor of the Tertiary Codex as a jest at his futile actions to complete it. The codex was just three blank pages that no one could read. She pulled out the binding that held those three pages, and the page she had just retrieved rippled in anticipation nearby. She brought them together, and the page flew into the others. The tertiary codex was now the quadrant codex, she mused.

She eagerly paged through the four pages, all still blank. Still useless. Archmage Mercurian had theorized that the codex required 23 pages to be completed. Each page was located in a different dungeon that offered the spell, Summon Herald. What the codex did when it was completed was one of the Great Mysteries of the Sphere. Over the centuries, she had learned there were other codexes as well—all requiring 23 pieces found in twenty-three different dungeons in the Sphere. An almost impossible task to complete. Still, she now only needed 19 more pages to complete her codex. Maybe she would get closer in her lifetime or pass it on to an apprentice as her mentor had done.