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“Where is this going to drop us?” the monkey asked, looking at the forming portal.

“Anywhere Taro sets it to,” Marc replied, watching it too. He was always impressed with how different each class’ travel portal differed. This was as forming from the vapors emitting out of the ingredients the bat had set within the circle on the floor.

“Which means it would be good for someone to tell me where we’re going,” Taro said, standing with more ingredients. “I don’t have any reference points for how to get there.”

Marc highlighted the outpost on the map and sent it to the bat. “That’s where we’re going.”

Taro walked around the circle and added ingredients to it. Colored vapors rose and mixed in with the portal. “In a minute or two the destination should appear. We’ll be in sight of the outpost but far enough they shouldn’t notice our arrival.”

As predicted, the center of the portal went from black to transparent, showing an icy field.

“I don’t see the outpost,” Tuck said.

Taro looked at the ingredients within the circle. “It should be there. Marc, how accurate is the map?”

“As accurate as it can be.” With a decade or two of time difference. “Maybe the orientations if off?”

“Not according to how I have everything set up.” He shrugged. “But it should be close by, anyway. It’s not like we have a choice. I barely have any work tokens left. If we don’t take it, it’s going to take a long time for me to set up another one.”

“So long as it doesn’t land us on the other side of the map, we’ll still be closer.” Tuck stepped through the portal. He appeared on the other side, before vanishing into a puff of rising snow. His head appeared from the hole in the floor, white with snow, and he said something they didn’t hear.

“Sound doesn’t carry through a portal,” Omar said.

“I’m guessing he’s warning us the snow is loose and high,” Marc said, approaching. Once Tuck moved out of the way, shoving snow with him, he stepped through and dropped three feet before hitting solid ground.

“That first step is a dozy when you don’t expect it,” Tuck said with a grin.

Marc stepped out of the others way, pushing more snow. Omar and Taro joined them.

“How long will the portal last?” Tuck asked.

“I put enough ingredients for a few hours,” Taro replied.

“So not enough for one of us to return then,” the monkey said. “He looked around. So, where is this outpost?”

Marc did the same. They were on the side of a hill, so he pushed through the snow until he reached the top and looked around. Not seeing it, he took out his map. According to it, it should be down the hill, only he was looking at a pristine field of

snow.

“They changed the map.”

“Why would they do that?” Taro asked. “Isn’t it a bit much to do this close to releasing this world to the public?”

“It’s not—” he closed his mouth. He couldn’t reveal anything linking to the colonies. Still, Marc hadn’t expected Constellation to make changes to any of the worlds. He hadn’t noticed any on the other lands. *Like you went around comparing them to your maps*, he chastised himself.

“So are we at least closer than before going into the portal?”

“We’re in the Mithirdal region, but this is clearly not the ice forest.”

Omar pointed in the distance, to a white forest. “I’d say that’s it. I’m not seeing any kind of settlement, so it must be on the other side.”

“So a few hours instead of a few days,” Tuck said. “It’s an improvement.” He began walking, with only his head above the snow. “I just hope the snow doesn’t get any deeper, I’m going to disappear completely.”

“And then we’re going to have to worry about a surprise blow job,” Omar whispered.

“General rated area!” Tuck yelled.

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Taro cataloged the item he could use as they walked through the forest of ice trees. The name was warranted. An ice forest. Studying some of those could reach without straying from the group, they opened up brand new trees of potion-making, not only adding to the ice-based tree, but one called Icidecalon. With the first one being the Icidecalon control potion. The details didn’t tell him what the Icidecalon was, and all subsequent potions were hidden into that one was mastered.

When the world opened up, he’d have to find a way to travel there and get those recipes.

“Oh, that’s going to be a problem,” Omar said, and Taro hurried to rejoin them at the edge of the forest.

The ground sloped down and in the clearing was a settlement that was closer to a small city than a town. Beyond it, he could just make out the walls of a keep.

“That shouldn’t be a town,” Marc growled, looking through something only he could see. “This outpost was barely supposed to be a camp.” More searching. “Why did he change this?” he grumbled.

“So we need to go through this city, then find a way to muscle through the keep’s entrance?” Omar asked. “Does anyone have a site to site teleport spell at least?”

“How did Paul even manage it?” Taro asked.

Marc shared an image with them. That of a keep with high walls. He turned it until they looked at one of the heaxgon’s side. The wall looked to be cracked.

“He didn’t have to. This type of keep was built with an exploit in it so mount based classes could sneak in.”

“Mount classes don’t do sneaking,” Tuck said.

“Call it whatever you want. They can ride along the wall, and if they get the timing right, they can jump off their mount in the middle of it leaping and get in through that crack. Anyone on a mount can attempt it, so if we can buy some, we can too.”

“I can climb it,” Tuck stated.

“Climbing isn’t my thing,” Omar replied. “And getting mounts isn’t going to happen with our enemies controlling the outpost.”

“But you can count in it being how Paul got in,” Taro said. “He loved the tricks he could perform on his horse.”

“So,” Omar said, “we need to get around the town. Then find a way to force the keep’s gate open before the people in the town notice what we’re doing and come to stop us.”

“Oh, it gets better,” Marc said bitterly. “It turns out this outpost has a few bonuses for the controlling faction because we’re deeper into this land. They have an Iceronus under their control.”

Taro gaped, and Omar glared. “Please tell me that isn’t what it sounds like it is.”

“Basically, a dinosaur made of ice.”

“You have got to be fucking me.” Omar turned to Marc. “Why would Bobby force us to go through this? It’s only the four of us, it’s not like we can take on a town to start with, let alone if they also have some boss-level monster under their control.”

“I doubt Bobby knew the server would remain here. By the time we got his message, it should have been on its way to Mercury. Considering how long it took us to figure out what it meant, it would have been installed there and active. Sibiral would be filled with players, so this town wouldn’t be controlled, or if it was, it wouldn’t be by people who want to kill us.”

Omar let out a steaming breath that whistled in annoyance. “We can’t do this. We’re going to have to wait for Uncle to get more people in to back us up.”

“Hey Marc,” Tuck called, looking out not at the town or the keep but the wilderness to the west. “You said we’re deep within the server, that means this is a high-level area, right? That’s how it works, the deeper we go, the higher the difficulty.”

“Not exactly,” Marc answered and prepared to give the monkey a primer on difficulty distribution, but the serious look Tuck fixed him with, stopped him. He swallowed. “But yes, this is fairly high, in the sixty to seventy level range.”

The serious expression broke, and the monkey smiled.

“No,” Omar exclaimed. “Whatever you’re thinking of, we are not doing it.”

Tuck beamed. “I have a great idea.”