Chapter 129

I relaxed in my room at the Shiny Platinum and ignored the knocks on my door.  My alarm spell told me the first knock was Delphia by the image flash.  Although I was curious how the delve went in the Progenitor Dungeon, I was not in the mood to deal with her. I reset the alarm.

The second knock was Mera and Fera, and I assumed it was for moving their brother’s family to the Black Spire.  They must have assumed I had my privacy screens up because they left after I did not answer.   I could talk with them tomorrow at the dungeon academy.

After the cats, I was focused on the bounty sheets.  The individual crew bounties and the bounty for the ship, The Night Jewel.  The ship itself was 100,000 gold delivered to the Principality of Marstom with Maggie the Siren dead or alive.  Maggie the Siren was 1,000 gold in addition, and then there were the other crew bounties.  I studied the information I had on The Night Jewel.  It was a very large ship, 210 feet in length and 50 feet at the widest beam.  It was a trader, and from the additional information Leda and Cilia had uncovered, it used to belong to the Principality of Marstom.

The Night Jewel looked more like an ocean voyager sent to the skies with masts for sails and rudders.  I guess it was very slow-moving but might also have a large aether crystal powering it.  The two small skiffs were the real danger.  I kept going over the sheets and thinking about how I would handle turning the pirates attacking us against them.  My biggest weapon was my exchange ability.  I could switch places with the pilot and then freeze the controls with my metal shaping skill.  Then, I could do the same to the other skiff.  While the two skiffs were adrift, the Maelstrom could move in on The Night Jewel.

My thoughts were their best fighters would be on the skiffs, so the large trader would be easier to handle.  I took notes late into the morning and did not realize it was morning until the cats reminded me it was time for the early day routine.  I fed and did their training and then went to do my own training before showering.  Instead of using my cleanliness spell, I just felt like a shower this morning.

I grabbed my breakfast from my cook in the kitchen, and as I was walking, Mera and Fera flanked me.  “Storme,” Mera started excitedly, “We brewed two new ales.  A honey-apple and a dark stout.  Do you want to try them?”

Fera added, “We got the apples from the Wolfsguard on your compound.  My brother went with the delve team and surveyed the white barley fields.  He wanted to talk about expanding the fields but was excited.  Can we have the Maelstrom bring their belongings to the farmhouse?”

“Talk to Isla.  She knows the order things have to happen.  The farmhouse was due to be renovated, but the number of building projects she has to manage is growing,” I told the twins.

“The farmhouse has not been renovated as of two days ago. Just cleaned out by the Wolfsguard,” Mera said, “But my brother and his wife are ready to move anyway.  He wants to start turning the field for the next growing cycle.”

“That is fine.  Talk to Cilia and Leda then about finding time for a transport trip on the Maelstrom,” I said, finishing my breakfast quiche.

We walked quietly until Mera said, “Storme, will you be my escort to my 14th?”

I was caught off guard and realized the twins had reached their fourteenth birthday and were, therefore, adults.  “When is it?”

“Sixth day, but we plan to celebrate on the fifth day since I know you have to manage the delve team,” Fera added.

“Will Gareth be your escort then?” I asked Fera.

“No, my escort is one of my classmates in mage support,” Fera retorted harshly.  So that meant she was still angry with Gareth.  We approached the Dungeon Academy, and there was a large crowd outside.  They did not appear threatening, but Headmaster Ilium Louan was addressing the crowd.

Mage Neelan appeared at my shoulder.  “They are here for you, Storme.  They came to seek the free healing of the High Mage,” he indicated to the crowd. “They practically stormed the gates when we opened,” he chuckled.  “Many of them are from all over the islands.”

This was excellent as I would not have to travel all over the islands to find people to heal.  I could tell that the Headmaster did not think this was a good situation with the disruption the crowd was causing.  I turned to Neelan, “Tell them I will start healing at lunch and work for just a few hours.”  Neelan went to talk with the Headmaster while I went to my first class, Tier One Creatures.

Everyone in the class was staring at me.  The crowd was disruptive, but I was the focal point of the disruption.  I walked to Instructor Mathis before the class started, “Instructor Mathis, I truly enjoy your class and am learning a lot of useful knowledge.  I just wanted to ask if I could hire you as a private educator.  Sometime in the evening.  I would pay whatever the Academy pays you to teach this class.”

Mathis was a skilled illusionist who studied dungeon monsters as a hobby.  He considered and looked over the classroom, “High Mage Storme, I would feel privileged to tutor you.  No coin is necessary.”

“No. I insist.  Four days a week at four, at the Shiny Platinum?  The evening meal is on me, and bring your family as well,” I said quietly.  His bushy eyebrows rolled in thought.  He again looked at the class.

“Thank you, High Mage.  I accept your generous offer, and my wife will thank you for not having to cook!”  We clasped wrists and shook.  I took my seat in the class for the last time.  I just needed to make sure the line of sick and injured did not interfere with Shiny Platinum in the future.  I might have to shift my residence to the Black Spire more permanently.

Class finished early as there were fewer questions about the illusionary monsters Mathis created today to go over the readings. My classmates spent most of the time staring at me instead.  I did the same thing in my spell craft class and approached Mage Instructor Rainer before class started, “High Mage Storme, I appreciate your situation, but I teach three spell classes at the Academy.  I just do not have the energy.”  She had a sympathetic look. I did the quick math. If she taught three classes, that meant she was in class forty-eight hours a week.

“Mage Instructor, it is fine.  I will attempt to continue coming to your class because it is so informative.  I do not want to disrupt the Academy, though,” I said, taking my seat.  As we practiced spells during the three-hour class, she had a change of heart.

“High Mage Storme, I can find time on the third day to work with you—four, maybe five hours.  It is my off day,” she offered.  The student next to me, who had just learned to cast his arcane web spell, was shocked.  I realized Mage Instructor Rainer just wanted to stay associated with the High Mage. If my title gave me this preferential treatment, I would take advantage of it.

“That would be amazing.  Is right after lunch and until dinner acceptable?  You can meet me at the Shiny Platinum and get lunch prior and dinner after on me,” I said, sounding relieved.  It was less than half the instruction time I would have in class, but Mage Instructor Rainer was very good, and this would be one-on-one instruction.

After class, I started healing the crowd that had grown.  Mage Neelan and two other healers from the Academy came to help heal and organize the crowd.  We had over five hundred people waiting and more arriving.  Neelan and the other two quickly ran out of aether, and I kept going.  Neelan remained and guided me on healing.

I asked him, “What do instructors get paid to teach each class?”

Neelan laughed, “Does High Mage Storme want to teach?”

I laughed in return, “No, Mage Instructor Rainer and Instructor Mathis are tutoring me at home so I do not interfere with the Academy.”

Neelan looked at the line of people, “The Headmaster will appreciate it.  Rainer earns twenty-five gold per class.  He teaches two a term.  Rainer receives forty gold.  So one hundred twenty per term.”  I thanked him and continued healing.  After the last of the crowd was serviced, I went to find Headmaster Ilium.  We talked briefly, and I was able to get credit for the classes I was being tutored in.  I also left forty gold for each teacher with him to pay for the tutoring through the Academy.

There was still a large benefit I could get from the Dungeon Academy, and getting my classes done on my schedule would help a lot.

I walked back to the Shiny Platinum later than planned and found Bleiz and Freya working with the cats.  Freya hugged me as it had been a few days since I had seen her.  “I can feel it, Storme.  I know I am getting close.  My awakening is soon!”

“Oh, really,” I rubbed her head and messed up her hair. “How much chocolate have you been eating?”

She looked indignant, “I pay for it myself! I can have as much as I want!”

“Well, you still have some on your face,” I laughed and asked Bleiz, “How did Freya’s weapons training go?” Freya was cleaning the chocolate smear off her face.

“She improved while I was gone,” he praised.  “Not as much as she should have, but her progress is steady.”  Freya relaxed as she had been tense waiting for his assessment.  Mia had worked with Freya for the weeks that Bleiz had been gone.

I spent dinner with Bleiz and Freya.  When Isla knocked, Freya left so I could discuss the Black Spire.  After Freya left, Bleiz noted, “She wants to impress you, Storme. I suggest you do not beat her too soundly when she challenges you to a fight.”

“As long as she does not want to do something stupid like join a delve team, I will be easy on her,” I stated seriously.

Bleiz thought for a moment, “I think she just wants to travel the Sphere with you, Storme.”

There was silence, and Isla, sensing the conversation was ended, started with progress updates, “The plans for the building holding the portal stone next to the Shiny Platinum are finished, but I am reluctant to hire teams to start work on it.  I have everyone focused on the Wolfsguard village.”  I produced an assortment of gold and platinum, totaling almost ten thousand gold from our trading.

“Will this be enough to hire additional teams?” I asked.

Loriel shook her head, “No, but this might be enough to source all the stone for the Wolfsguard village.”

“How much do I need to cover the farmhouse renovations, the Wolfsguard village, the Black Spire renovations, the barracks by the skyship cradle, and the Shiny Platinum park and portal building?” As I went through the list, I realized I had a lot of coin to generate for Isla.

Isla was prepared and pulled out a sheet for me. She noted, “Material costs are down a bit, and labor costs are slightly down, but I suggest you get this all done before trade opens. Loriel is expecting there to be a flurry of outside investors from the lowlands. If Skyholme becomes a safe port city in the sky, then dozens of merchant companies will want to purchase buildings.”

I started reviewing her numbers, and the cost was staggering, most of it focused on the Wolfsguard Village. Bleiz looked over my shoulder and whistled. The Wolfsguard Village, with everything Isla had laid out, was over one hundred thousand on its own. If all the swords I had left with Tallot sold, that would cover the village. Of course, looking at it, I had chosen to focus on stone structures.

Isla got my attention, “The prices in Aegis City are starting to rise. If we wait, we could end up paying twice these estimates.”

I added two thousand more gold in platinum coins to the table, “Okay, Isla. I will make some more trade runs. Put everything in motion. The coin will be ready as you need it. How long to finish everything?”

“We are talking months, Storme. Four for the village, everything else can be done in a month’s time as long as I can hire building crews,” Isla stated.

“Okay, you have done a good job. See if you can purchase another warehouse in Solaris City,” I said.

“What? Why?” Isla asked.

“If ships are going to be coming here for trading, traveling thousands of miles, then having a warehouse just 125 miles away is not that much further to travel. Actually, plan to buy as many as you can,” I said.

Isla was looking at the paper in front of me with over two hundred thousand in gold itemized expenses. I nodded, “Just get me the prices, and I will find the coin.”

I mentally groaned internally as Loriel had convinced me in all her ramblings that Skyholme was worth investing in. After Isla left, I was left with Bleiz. “We can travel to the Black Spire tomorrow. My class schedule has changed. There are a few Wolfsguard from the Bricios that are unaccounted for on the estate, so be careful.”

“Do you want me to hunt them?” He asked, suddenly interested.

“Not yet. Talk to the other Wolfsguard. Please give me an honest assessment of them. I am getting close to being able to regenerate their missing limbs. My lesser restoration increased in level again today to twenty. I will be able to make the last evolution at level twenty-three,” I stated.

Bleiz was impressed, “Word of your healing prowess is on the street. Everyone is singing the praise of the great High Mage.” His tone indicated he was more amused than praising.

“Go get some rest, and we will leave in the morning. And, Bleiz. Thank you for staying with me. I value you as a friend,” I said seriously. He nodded, smirked, and left.

I took the cats with me to the middle of the large building. I wanted to sample Mera’s two ales tonight. If they were good, we could add them to the production run. I had not expected Mera to be here, but she was, “Storme?”

“I came to sample your new ales,” I said and she rushed to four casks.

“Which do you want first? The honey-apple or stout?” She asked excitedly.

“The stout,” I replied. Mera’s ability to ferment alcohol with aether was amazing. The stout she poured me was dark, almost black. It was definitely a strong and hearty brew.

She said excitedly, “It is a double malt. It has twice the alcohol of the pale.”

I drank the glass and could not taste the alcohol. The beer was thick and left my tongue saturated with flavor. “This is really good,” I said. “We can definitely add it to the menu. What is different about its ingredients?”

“The barely is dry roasted, and I used different hops,” she said, pushing the honey apple brew into my hand.

Even before I sipped it, I could smell the apple. The taste was tart and sweet with the alcohol extremely noticeable. Mera was waiting for my opinion. “Wow, this is amazing.” I thought it was almost sweet enough to be a dessert beverage. I drank some more as Mera pushed another sample into my hand. “You can start producing both. Are we bottling?” An issue was getting a supply or reliable glass jugs to preserve the fizz.

“No supplier yet,” Mera noted while pushing a third drink into my hand. She was watching me as I sipped. “Storme, someone offered me twenty gold a week to go and work in the capital for him.”

I stopped drinking, “What? Who? I will match any offer you get!” I said and realized I was slightly drunk.

Mera had her bright smile, “I already turned him down. I just wanted you to know.” She moved in close, and I realized she had been trying to get me drunk. I used my neutralize poison spell to eliminate my intoxication. I sidestepped her advance into me.

“Mera, I value you as a friend. If you ever need anything from me, just ask,” I put down the glass and retreated. I left a disappointed Mera. It would be wrong to take advantage of her, I told myself. Delphia was in the room adjacent to me, and I had planned to… Now, I couldn’t, or Mera would get jealous. I don’t know what I was waiting for—or who I was waiting for.

I found Talia and Delphia talking in the hallway outside the rooms, and both walked purposedly to me. I asked, “Talia, why are you here? Are you not supposed to be at the Mage Academy?”

“I am splitting classes now between the Dungeon and Mage Academies,” she admitted. “I have the delve report from the Progenitor Dungeon and Frost Vault,” she said, smiling.

I took both sheets, “Remy normally gives these to me.”

“He helped compile them. We lost a little bit of profit because the Maelstrom was unavailable, and we rented a skyship,” she said, waiting.

I looked over the sheet and looked up, “You went to the second level of both dungeons? Any problems, and what are these slippers from the Progenitor Dungeon reward chest?”

Talia was beaming, “The dungeon rewards comfort items, and those are enchanted for comfort. Worth twenty-five gold in the capital.”

“Excellent work. You are doing a fantastic job, and the delvers are in good hands,” I opened my room door, and cats scurried inside. Talia and Delphia stood as I followed them and closed the door behind me. Talia was too obvious. And Delphia…ugh.

My mail was on the table. Bleiz must have put it here. The first one was from Admiral Sebastian. I opened the letter, which basically informed me the Wasps were ready for the artificing work. Nothing too important. I read the delve reports in more depth, and Remy noted the bottom line at two-hundred and seventy-seven gold. That included all expenses—food, apartments, and Academy fees. The delve teams were becoming profitable.

The second letter I opened was from Gareth. It was a list of weapons and their specifications for his delve team. I had forgotten that I had promised to make weapons for his team once he assembled them. Four swords, three daggers, a mace, and five hand axes. I shook my head. I could do a half-hearted effort on the weapons, but then that might put Gareth in danger. I decided to give his team excellent enchanted weapons.

I needed to work on an aether cannon for the Maelstrom as well. I was silently hoping Gareth would rejoin me. I told myself was the last thing I would do for him, but knew in the back of my mind if he asked for something in the future, I would help him.