Chapter 78 (Arc 2 Chapter 32) Serious Talk

The naval butler attendant led me to an office inside the richly furnished house.  Sebastian was at his desk, but my attention was drawn to the walls that were coved in the schematics of the Harbinger-class warship and the Wasp-class scout.

“Storme!  What a surprise!  Is there something wrong?  I never expected you to visit me in the city,” the older mage rose and cracked his back from a long period of sitting.  He then came and shook my hand with a strong grip.

“It has been a long time Sebastian.  I came to ask questions and seek advice from you,” I said after shaking his hand and returning to inspect the detailed drawings on his walls, comparing them mentally to my book on the *Wind Splitter*.

Sebastian stood beside me, “You must have grown three inches since I last saw you.  I didn’t see you fight in the Annuals, but Cilia said you were remarkable.  Thank you for getting her assigned to Loriel Miaden’s staff.  It relieved a burden on my mind knowing she is free of the influence of Abaddon and the Bricios.”

I turned and looked at Sebastian.  He looked much older than I remembered.  Dark circles lined the orbits of his eyes.  I spoke honestly, “I didn’t play a role in Cilia’s assignment.  I am here for information and advice. I also have a communication stone for you from Callem.”  I passed him the stone, and he looked at it in his hand thoughtfully.

“Thank you, Storme.  I will talk with Callem when I get the time. There has been a crackdown for fear of spies, but I think I can keep this.” He put the stone in his pocket and added, “Cilia has professed your friendship with Loriel is somewhat strained.”  I started laughing so hard I couldn’t speak.

When I regained myself, I offered, “Loriel is more like a thorn in my side.” I sighed, “But I will admit Cilia is probably in good hands. I think Loriel is selfish but will look after her own.” I pressed Sebastian for one of the reasons I was here,  “Loriel told me she is worried about the state of Skyholme and of civil unrest. She plans to put herself in a position to flee the islands.  I am ready to begin my own construction of a skyship, and I came here for advice and to ask you how fast I needed to build it.”

Sebastian looked thoughtful and directed me to the kitchen, and we sat.  He poured me a glass of his favored red juice and spiked his own drink with some of Callem’s vodka.  It took him a moment as he corralled his thoughts, “Civil unrest,” he focused.  “No.  I don’t think it will come to that.  Granted, I am mostly on the outside looking in.  They have me focused on getting eight new Harbingers sky worthy before the new year.  I am either working in my office or at the shipyards.”

“So there won’t be a draft for mages,” I asked, digging.

Sebastian sighed heavily, “That will happen.  We can barely staff the fleet currently flying.  We need six upper mages for each of the eight Harbingers I am building.” My confused face was resolved by Sebastian, “An upper mage has an aether pool between 70 and 100.  They are needed to keep the ship’s primary power aether crystal charged in battle,” he explained.  “I haven’t seen the official rolls, but I know a number of retired mages have returned to service after the Sadian attack.  Any mages forced into service are being given a dungeon essence and a healthy wage.  They shouldn’t complain too strongly.”

“So I don’t need to rush the construction of my own skyship?” I pressed.

Sebastian laid back and finished his drink in one go.  “I would say the next Sadian attack is years away.  We bloodied them, as bloodied us.  Their alliance with the beastkin has eliminated one of the threats to their kingdom in the lowlands, but they still border other threats. When their strength does rise again…if they have the same amount of ships…Skyholme may fall,” he admitted grudgingly.

“We lost some of the strongest and most brilliant captains to win this last engagement.  Our best hope is for the Bricios to be knocked from power.” He looked around like he suspected someone of jumping out and arresting him.  “They have placed their personal wealth and power above the security of Skyholme.  Good men like Callem Dregella have been pushed aside or assassinated.  We have been weakened, and only now is everyone waking up to the reality.”

“Isn’t this your best-case scenario?  People turning on the Bricios?”  I queried.

“Storme, a cornered wyvern is more dangerous than fighting a wyvern in the open sky.  The Bricios will not give up their wealth or power easily. They are entrenched deeply in other families.  The Bricio resistance to change is what is likely to destroy Skyholme.” He poured himself more juice without Callem’s vodka.

“It is not for you to worry about such things. It will be years, and we will have warning, Storme. You wanted to build a skyship? Let’s talk about that!” He forced a smile, obviously wanting to drop the current topic. “Are you going to build another *Wind Splitter*? And how is your progress coming on the two spells I gave you?”

I grinned, “I have imprinted both of those spells.”

“Fantastic, Storme! Callem said you were special!” He slapped the table hard in excitement.

Pride welled within me, but I stayed focused on the skyship, “What advice do you suggest for building a skyship? I have a concealed hanger in Aegis city. It is large enough for the *Wind Splitter* if you wish to visit.”

Sebastian’s face fell. He drank his juice, “The *Wind Splitter* was commandeered as a scout by the navy and was downed.” He laughed painfully, “Still waiting on receiving fair compensation.” Sebastian sat taller and said, “Let’s talk about how to go about building a skyship from the ground up.”

“You will need an engineer. Most of building a skyship is math. Lots and lots of math. You will also need an experienced foreman. Also, you will need a professional shaper to build the wooden skeleton. You could go with metal, but that is usually reserved for ships traveling outside of the Sphere. And you will also need an experienced enchanter. A few laborers would round out your build team.” Sebastian offered.

My mind went to Remy. He had affinities in math and engineering and seemed to be a perfect candidate. Isla wanted to be the foreman, and if I had no other choice, I would go with her. I planned to do the enchanting myself. The shaper was my biggest hurdle. A shaper was a mage capable of shaping and hardening wood.

Sebastian interrupted my thoughts, “You also need a large aether core to power your vessel. A ship the size of the *Wind Splitter* should have at least a tier 5 blue core. I would say at least 100 units in size. That is about 12,000 gold for the ship’s power core, Storme.” I nodded absently. Hopefully, I could find something better than the minimum when I was ready to finish my skyship.

When I didn’t reply, Sebastian thought I was concerned about the cost and offered, “An airship is much simpler and would cost much less he offered.” I shook my head. An airship was much slower and was assisted by the wind to move most of the time.

I brought out the manual from my storage space, and we spent the next three hours going over the plans in detail and Sebastian advising me on the materials. When we finished, Sebastian said he would talk to an old shaper for me. He had built civilian traders for over seventy years and was retired, but he might be convinced to join me on this project. I thanked Sebastian for his time and left.

I found Gareth sitting on the steps to the small villa. He looked up miserable, “Storme, you were right. She was not happy to see me. She was expecting coin after our night together.”

Gareth was quiet for a while as we walked back to the docks. He finally spoke, “I gave her my last two gold Storme. But you what? It was worth it.” I looked at my friend and could see him getting himself into lots of trouble in the future. “Can you do me a favor, Storme, and not tell Fera?”

“Gareth, we are as close as brothers. I will not tell Fera. But I will also not lie to her if she asks me,” I said solemnly. He looked at me and nodded.

“Thanks, Storme. That is fair,” he said while contemplating his life decisions.

When we landed in Hen’s Hollow I went to talk Callem.  I told Callem I gave Sebastian the communication stone and what we had talked about.  Aelyn and Ennet returned in the middle of our conversation.  Aelyn sat down and told me about the delve this morning.  They went in with Gimble, Sammie, Talia, Ullmark, Lana and herself.  Ullmark was the old delver I was trying to recruit.  Aelyn told me about him, “Ullmark was good to have along.  He served on the front with Sammie.  It felt more like we had two instructors with us, Ullmark and Gimble.  We didn’t harvest a lot of honey as Lana’s dimensional storage was much smaller than yours, Storme.”

Callem spoke, “Sounds like you got lucky, Storme. Ullmark sounds like a great addition to your team.”

Aeyln added, “He was just along to see us in action.  He hasn’t made a decision yet.  Remy paid him five gold, more than twice his normal fee, in order to get him to join us.  But I think Sammie might have won him over.  He was treating her like his long lost daughter while they fought on the front line, teaching her while protecting her.”

“Storme, do you want me to vet Ullmark?”  Callem asked, interested.  “Wynna, Ennet, and I are going to the Shiny Platinum on the 4th day to see the apartments.  I can talk to him then.”

“That is fine, Callem.  Ullmark used to delve the Bricio dungeon but quit because he was disgusted with working for them.  I thought he had decent morals and thought he could help the team on the lower levels of the *Frost Vault*,” I said, explaining my reason for asking Ullmark to be recruited by Remy and Gimble.

Callem left, and I talked with Aelyn alone in the kitchen for an hour.  She talked about her experiences in the *Frost Vault* this morning, and I listened and asked questions when necessary.  I left when Ennet came into the kitchen to make dinner.  Not feeling up to cooking, I escaped the house.

I went to the larder in the academy and made a few sandwiches, and locked myself in the artificing classroom.  Now that I was the only student of Aldon, I shouldn’t be disturbed.  I used an arcane lock on the door and windows.  I followed this by anchoring privacy screens by the door and window.  I brought out a few staves to practice my enchanting.  I followed this with material and the script for the instant change of direction runes.  This would allow me to instantly change the direction of a swing, but there would be a backlash to my body.  When these runes were installed on a skyship, the change of direction had an inertia sink, so the passengers didn’t feel the change.

The runes for an inertia sink were extremely large, and you couldn’t make them small enough to add to a weapon.  I had a cheat, as my lightning reflexes spell had protections for such rapid speed alterations.  The staff enchanting was a proof of concept for me.  It took an hour as I had to enchant both ends of the staff.

I tested the staff at full force and broke my left wrist. I swore and was glad I now had the lesser restoration spell to heal the broken bones.  After I healed the damage, I worked to figure out the issue.  After two more tests, I found the issue.  The change of direction was magnified to two twice the expected speed because both ends of the staff activated on each strike.  The torque from the first strike had been so high it easily overcame my *lightning reflexes* spell defenses.  Now that I understood the issue, I started to practice with my new toy. I just needed to make sure I was prepared and had my hands positioned properly.

I returned to my room to find Gareth lamenting on the bed.  “I told her, Storme, I decided I couldn’t hide it from her.  I told Fera about Nina.  She slapped me and isn’t talking to me again.”  I shook my head at my friend and patted him on the shoulder.

“You did what your conscience told you to do,” I said, consoling him.  I then produced a sandwich from my storage and handed it to him.  “Food always makes you feel better.”  He munched away, spilling crumbs onto his bed, knowing I would clean up after him with my spell.

I set the alarms and arcane locks, and I crashed heavily on my bed and set up a privacy screen.  I made some mithril and then summoned two spell books.  I had been working on *thermostatic aura* spell but now held *tissue extraction* as well.  Both spells were tier 3 and in the healing sphere.  I felt like I was getting extremely close to imprinting the *thermostatic aura* spell, so I put the *tissue extraction* spell away and continued to study it.

The next day Gareth’s self-inflicted misery had me eating all meals with Mia, Fera, and Mera.  The meal conversation all centered on Gareth’s wandering lust.  Then in the evening, I had to listen to Gareth bemoan his own idiocy. I was making a concerted effort not to get involved or take sides.  This was how my week proceeded socially.

My personal progress in magic was much better.  I imprinted the *thermostatic aura* on 2nd day and moved on to imprinting the tissue extraction spell.  The *thermostatic aura* had two primary evolution paths. The first was controlling the temperature, and the second was increasing the area of effect. On learning the spell, I only controlled the temperate three inches from my skin. I could adjust that temperature by 50 degrees C in either direction. My evolution at level one was to increase the temperature range to 150 degrees C. Each progressive evolution invested this was increased the range by another 100 degrees but drew more aether. I would need about ten evolutions to be about to walk through fire unharmed. The spell book noted the adult dragon fire burned around 4000 degrees C, so I knew I could not stand in front of such a nightmare.

The other tract for this spell was to increase the range to encompass other people. My next four evolutions would focus on increasing the aura bubble out to four feet. That would allow eight people to surround me comfortably. I would be happy to travel the *Icy Vault* dungeon now without layering up my clothes.

During the week, I leveled up and evolved a number of spells. Lesser restoration reached level 7, and I added the evolution *perfect skin*. This was a huge improvement over the scar removal and body sculpting evolutions from my *mend flesh* spell. Now I could handle old burns, birthmarks, body hair, and slight body imperfections could be corrected.

My *cleanliness* spell had reached level 20, getting closer to the level 23 goal. I had been investing a lot of aether into this spell and was eager to be able to use it on another person. When my dimensional closet reached an evolution and level 17 I decided to expand the height of the space by 2’. When my aether core finished its development, I would have a cube of roughly 19’ in dimension. I planned to build a deck inside the space. The second floor would have an 8’ ceiling, while the first floor would have a 10’ ceiling. When I started construction on my skyship, I would funnel material into my space for this effort.

My *alarm* spell reached level 17, and I increased the volume of the sound. It was about as loud as a gunshot. I would need to add one more sound increase to get the flash-bang effect that I was seeking. I also needed to protect my own ears from the loud sound with an evolution.

My heavily used privacy spell reached level 14, and at level 13, I added the air recycling effect to my containment bubble. Between my *thermostatic aura* and *privacy* bubble, I could survive in extremely harsh environments. That is as long as my aether didn’t run out.

On the 5th day, Callem talked to me about his visit with Ullmark during his visit to Aegis city the prior day.  Apparently, he was much older than he appeared, as he had a slow aging ability.  He was a fan of Callem and was joining the dungeon team for a few sword lessons from Callem.  Callem had never displayed hubris before, but now I could see a flicker of it.  Ullmark had watched Callem win all his titles at the Annuals.  Ullmark would talk with me when I visited the *Shiny Platinum*.

Before the 7th day, I had made some surprising progress on my aether core.  I managed to stir the core, stirring the vortex.  It was not stable and settled when my attention wandered, but I found when I focused, I could increase my aether core filling by about 50% while I meditated on the movement.  The goal was to stabilize the vortex, so it was natural and done subconsciously. Since my aether core was still expanding, that was going to be extremely difficult, according to Selina.

Early in the morning, Gareth, Aelyn, Fera, Mera, Mia, Callem, Wynna, Ennet, Freya, and I boarded the transport to Aegis city. Freya had convinced me to see the *Shiny Platinum*. I knew it was so she could brag to her friends, but I was ok with that. While I was in the dungeon, I would task Wynna and Ennet with keeping an eye on her.