Chapter 105 Dungeon Academy

It was actually my first time at the Dungeon Academy in Aegis City.  There were only two dungeon academies in all of Skyholme, one in Skyhold and one in Aegis City.  The one in the capital was rated slightly better than the one we were attending.  I broadly selected our focus when I registered everyone under Callem and Wynna’s names.  Today we will confirm the registration, choose classes and meet our classmates.  It was more informal than the Guard Academy, closer to a military school.

The building was a massive old blue-gray stone and had two stories.  There were two large training yards to the right and a large warehouse to the left.  We entered the lobby, and maybe sixty young men and women were milling about, with more entering every minute.  We were early, and registration had not opened yet.  Even with Fera standing right next to him, Gareth was scouting the others in the hall and spending more time on the half dozen women.  Mera and Fera were getting a lot of looks as well as the ratio looked to be about six men to each woman.

Finally, four doors opened, and instructors came and yelled out what each door was intended for the academy’s branches.  I moved to the mage door with Fera and Mera.  Only about a dozen of us entered the mage door from the crowd.  Mera asked, “Is this all of us?  Not many mages.”

“Registration check-in is four hours long, so more people will trickle in.  Not many people awaken cores, and even fewer want to pay gold to learn how to risk their lives in a dungeon.  I am guessing most of the mage enrollees here are sponsored by various delving guilds,” I thoughtfully advised Mera.

Mera asked somewhat accusatorially, “Are you sponsoring anyone besides us?”

I huffed jokingly and smiled, “Sammie is taking some martial classes, and Lena some porter classes, but neither are actually fully enrolled.  But if you see anyone who is good enough for Ullmark’s team, let him know.” Ullmark had seven new delvers now. All of them were pretty raw in terms of experience but were quickly growing. He estimated it would be another four or five months before the delves started to break even, and they would be doing two delves weekly to accomplish this.

I waited for my turn to register.  The person behind the desk was an old man with a shiny bald head and blue eyes.  His eyes brows were graying, and he spoke,  “Welcome to our Dungeon Academy.  I am archmage Gregor.  Your name mage aspirant?”

“Storme Hardlight,” I responded, and he quickly found my name.  “I would like to switch from support to damage.”  Gregor looked up at me.

“You listed *cleanliness, alarm, and mend flesh* spells on your admit form.  Have you learned any offensive spells that you will be disclosing today?”  Gregor asked.

I considered my response and hedged, “*Lightning spear* and *lightning sphere.*”  Gregor nodded appreciatively at my response.

“Excellent, two tier 2 spells.  The transfer is completed,” he checked some boxes on the sheet and handed me a course selection sheet. Gregor then asked,  “Are you staying in the bunk rooms, renting a private room, or have you found other accommodations?  Bunk rooms are four silver a week and include breakfast and lunch.  Private rooms are twelve silver a week and include three delivered meals ordered through the kitchens. The private room also has a side servants room for your own servant, or you can hire one of the academy’s attendants for two silver a week.” Judging my clothes, he looked up and offered helpfully, “The academy servants, just clean your private room and gear and fetch your meals.”

“I have other accommodations,” I said, and he checked a box, slightly disappointed.

“Very good.  We will have a quick meeting for the mages in about four hours, and then the headmaster will address everyone.  Turn in your course selection sheet before then,” Gregor nodded for the next mage to come forward.

I went and sat with Mera and Fera.  For the mages, there were three periods for the week’s 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th days.  Each was three hours long.  On 3rd day of the week we had combat training and conditioning, each three hours long.  That left the 6th and 7th days off.  The number of hours was about down from sixty hours a week at the Hen’s Hollow Academy to about forty hours a week.  Of course, it was expected that mages needed more free time to study spells.

I looked at my suggested class choices.  First period I could choose from *Dungeon Creatures Tier 1*, *Dungeon Creature Tier 2*, or *Mage Tactics for Combating Floor Bosses*.  Second period my choices were *Firebolt Spell, Arcane Dart Spell*, and *Acid Splash* Spell.  The spell classes were to help the mage imprint the desired spell, level it up to evolve, and then use it in combat.  All were tier 1 spells.

I sighed as none of the spells struck my fancy.  I moved on to my options for the third period.  The classes offered were, *Defensive Magic, Dungeon Ley Line Theory*, or *Introduction to Alchemy*.  All the classes appeared to be basic but important foundations for the mage delver.  There were books on a table nearby with course descriptions.

I took a copy of the catalog and sat with it.  I looked up each course and selected *Dungeon Creatures Tier 1* as my first course.  The course reviewed over two hundred of the basic tier 1 monsters found in dungeons within 5000 miles of Skyholme.  Although tier 1 monsters were simple, they were still dangerous.  This was not a game; a simple acid slime could crawl into your mouth and burn out your lungs in under a minute.

My second-period spell class did not offer any appealing spells.  I paged through and found other spell classes were offered during the second period.  I asked Gregor when he had free time if I could select a different second-period class, “Certainly.  You are paying us to teach and prepare you to earn a living in a dungeon.” He took the course catalog,  “These notes here on the courses indicate what year they are offered and during what period in that year.  You can select any spell class for the second period.  You already have a pair of offensive spells, so you could take an academic course if you wish.  But most spell classes are offered in the second period.”

I sat down and looked for another offensive spell to learn.  All the spells were tier 1 and tier 2 spells.  I finally found something I was interested in, *arcane web*.  A tier 2 spell that created a sticky set of temporary thick threads to slow and restrain a target.  The area of effect was small to start and could be enlarged with evolutions.  I did not have a good non-lethal spell yet and could see a lot of utility in this spell.  I wrote it into my second-period selection.  The spell book was 50 gold, or I could borrow a spell book to learn the spell during class.  I was still working on imprinting my *invisibility* spell.  I had gotten slightly sidetracked in learning that spell with training Kiara and Adrial.

Happy with my first two course selections, I moved on to the third period.  *Dungeon Ley Line Theory* was interesting, focusing on how dungeons embedded themselves into the ley lines and created their portals.  It was an in-depth study of how the environments were formed and recognizing dungeon borders within a dungeon.  It seemed useful if I planned to go into unknown dungeons.  I was already paying an alchemist named Lachlan Cade, but knowing more about harvesting ingredients in dungeons might be useful.  Defensive magic would be useful, but I decided to choose Dungeon Ley Line Theory.

All these courses ran for the full year.  A few more advanced and focused classes were only half a year.  I also overheard two others saying that only one mage taught all the basic attack spells in the first period.  It made sense as the book I was holding only listed twenty-three instructors for the mages at the dungeon academy.

Using the course description book, I quickly found my second period would include students working on two other spells, *tissue extraction* and *levitate*.  I already knew the tissue spell, but perhaps I could get some additional insight into its uses.  The levitate spell was useful, but the tier three flight spell was more useful.  *Levitate* would cost me two spell slots on my matrix, while the *flight* spell was four spots.   I was too low on available slots to invest in either right now.

*My next three spells would be invisibility, comprehend languages, and arcane web.* The twins sat next to me. Mera and Fera were going to be in all their classes together.  They selected *Harvesting Skills for Dungeon Environments*, the *Cleanliness* spell, and *Strength and Conditioning for the Dungeon Porter Specialist*.  Mera asked, “What do we have to do to pass these classes?”

“Nothing.  It is not like other academies.  You learn at your pace, and how much information and benefit you get from classes is up to you.  They can withdraw your enrollment if they think you are not vested enough, but that is unusual from what I understand,” I said, leaning back on my bench and scanning the room.

Everyone looked young and awestruck by where they were.  No, that was not true, there was a group of four at a table talking.  Their cloaks bore the same guild symbol.   I didn’t know the guild symbols—maybe I should commission a guild symbol for my delving operations.  The artist Tatem was still finishing the hydra on the side of the *Shiny Platinum* and had dozens of commissions lined up, but he wouldn’t mind letting me jump the queue as his fame was due to his work for me.

I watched the four guild members, three young men and one woman, for a while.  They all knew each other by the familiarity they showed.  Other mages aspirants joined the waiting room as they arrived and registered.  The room was slowly filling up much faster than I had thought. A few young men came and talked with Mera and Fera.  The twins had chosen to dress the same today, so some questions if they were twins.  Some were even bold enough to ask them on dates.  Fera was still involved with Gareth even though he lacked fidelity.  She chose to ignore it as Gareth was a good husband prospect, but I could see her patience running out.

I looked at Mera.  She had an athletic build and was average looking but had a great smile.  She smiled at me as I focused on her.  I smiled back and looked away.   Mera had mostly given up on me.  She worked in my brewery, which also housed my alchemy lab.  Lachlan ran the alchemy lab.  Lachlan had been trying to win her over for months now, and they had become friends.

A young man came in and asked for completed course registration sheets.  They were getting a head start on compiling classes as we still had a two-hour wait.  A few of the instructors came in and looked over us as we waited.  I was looking at Archmage Gregor, who was talking with another instructor, when a young man with dark eyes and black hair asked me a question, “Storme Hardlight?  I watched you fight in last year’s pre-Annuals.  You were amazing.”

“Thank you.  But I am not interested,”  I was loud to be heard by everyone close by, “I have a sponsor and do not plan to take a new sponsor or join any guild team.”  The young boy frowned and walked away.  I figured I would have to do the same thing a half dozen more times before people stopped trying to recruit me.

Only a few more people showed up before we were shuffled to a lecture hall, about forty-seven mages in total.  The twins sat on either side of me as an ancient-looking woman went to stand before us.  Her voice was modified by magic, and she went into the welcome speech, “I am Archmage Hilda Shatterstone.  And yes, my last name is from my signature spell.  You are all here to learn how to survive and profit from a dungeon in the role of either a spell damage specialist or spell support specialist.”  She looked over the mage aspirants.

“You are all considered adults.  We will not grade you or say you pass or fail a class,” murmurs started to ripple through our number, but I already knew this.  “But in order to get the Adventurer’s Guild badge, you have to complete all seven years here and complete any dungeon with a team.”

That statement was misleading.  An Adventurer’s Guild badge could be purchased for 25 gold or by completing a specific Adventurer’s Guild quest for a badge.  This was kind of a back doorway to get entry.  Both the dungeon academies in Skyholme had ties to the Adventurer’s Guild throughout the Sphere. It might have been better to seek out a better academy in the lowlands, but I decided to follow through with Skyholme stabilizing and our families located here.

“Our instructors will prepare you to succeed, but you NEED TO DO THE WORK!”  She made eye contact.  For the next few minutes, she introduced the instructors and their specialties.  “Now that you know the instructors.  You will have to select an advisor in the first week of classes.”  Shit.  I had only been paying half attention during the introductions.  I would have to check the registry of the instructors later.

“Now, the second and third years are behind those doors.  Go and find one, and they will give you a tour of the facilities at the academy.  After the tour, there is a welcome party, and the headmaster will speak.  When you come back tomorrow, your classes will begin.”  She gave us a long look and then spun and left.  Two massive doors opened, and on the other side, a number of young men and women were milling about, drinking from cups.  My fellows rushed forward to find the perfect tour guide.  Whether that was by competency, attractiveness, or just gut feeling was known only to the person asking.

I waited till the group started to shrink.  Mera and Fera were approached by male students and followed them away.  It also appeared there was a lot of meaning to wearing a guild cloak.  Those that did found tour guides finding them instead of having to ask.  I was looking for someone who would make this process quick and only show me where my three classes were.  My target was a young male student reading a spell book in the corner of the room.  I walked to him and looked at the spell forms he was studying.

“Huh, looks like an *arcane shield* spell from these pages.  Are you available for a tour?”  I asked, showing my knowledge. It was a tier 1 version of my own tier 2 arcane shield spell.

He still looked up, annoyed, “There are a number of others available.  I need to learn this spell this year and cannot buy a copy, so I have to study one of the copies in the library.”

“I just need to know where the classrooms are for *Tier 1 Creatures, Arcane Web Spell,* and *Ley Line Theory,*” I offered.

“Arcane web?  That is a tier-two spell.  How did you manage to get into that class?”  He stood, now clearly interested in me.

“I already have imprinted two tier two offensive spells, so I was free to select an advanced spell.  So do we have a deal?”  I held out a large gold coin which should be enough for the young mage to buy a copy of the arcane armor spell if he so wished.  “A token of my appreciation for your help and any future help I might need.”

I was subtle as I handed him the coin, “My name is Gypsum.”  We shook hands, and he began the tour.  There were two large lecture halls.  The large classrooms numbered thirteen.  The smaller classrooms numbered eleven.  Everything was in one wing of the complex.

Gypsum pointed out where the dining hall was. He held up a necklace, “These are the meal tokens. White is breakfast, green is lunch, and black is dinner. The tokens are twenty silver for each forty-week term. Or you can pay a large copper for a meal. The food is plentiful, and it is a good time to talk with other students.”

He showed me the direction of where the three other wings of the complex were located.  We didn’t do much walking, and the tour was over in fifteen minutes.  Gypsum did not talk about himself, but he was clearly eager to spend the coin.  The spell emporium in the city had copies on hand of the forty-eight common spells taught at the dungeon academy.  Since my tour was so quick, I followed him to the emporium, *Kali’s Spells and Cantrips*. I had shopped for spells here before. We talked for a while on the walk, and Gypsum finally told me some personal information.

Gypsum was the son of a baker outside of the city.  He worked at night for his father and went to the academy during the day.  He was paying his way and hoped to strike it big on the dungeon team.  Like many at the academy, he had a small magic pool and a small spell matrix. So far, he had learned three tier one spells: *pocket space, arcane missile*,and *light*.  I admired him, but he didn’t have much to offer my dungeon team.

I purchased the *arcane web* spellbook and returned immediately to the academy.  Gypsum was trying to negotiate the price of his spell book down by exchanging an ancient-looking copy of the light spell.    
  
Back at the academy, groups were still wandering the grounds from the four specialties.  I saw Gareth being led by a tall, lean woman with red hair.  I hoped Fera didn’t see them, as I didn’t want to deal with any drama.  But then, of course, I knew it was inevitable.  I found the dining room again, which led into one of the training yards where tables with an array of food and drink were set up.  Two large dungeon boar were roasting in their constituent parts.  Only a few other students and guides had reached the food.  That made sense, as many students would need to be brought to the bunk rooms or private rooms.

I wandered among the food tables and filled out a plate while asking what things were.  Many of the offerings were from the two local dungeons.  I sat and ate while some of the instructors wandered in for food.  The final class period was over, and a mass of students followed the professors for the free meal.  This was a large social event to kick off the new year.  The dungeon students looked rugged and attacked the food like hungry piranhas.  I didn’t see Gareth yet, but the twins arrived and sat with me with plates of food.  Their guides still followed them like puppy dogs hoping for a treat.

I met the two young mages and encouraged the twins to mingle and meet other people.  If they were going to live at the *Shiny Platinum,* then this was a good chance to make friends.  I finished my plate and did the same thing, walking and talking with a number of people whose names I would forget immediately.  I was constantly mistaken for a fighter rather than a mage, as my thick 6’2” frame was still lean and muscled.  Most of the time, I did not bother correcting them.  Archmage Gregor came by, and we talked about finding me a mentor.  With his help, we narrowed it down to Mage Instructor Neelan or Mage Instructor Rainer.  Neelan was a healing specialist, and Rainer was a ranged single-target specialist.

I did ask what qualified as an Archmage title in Skyholme. He pursed his lips but answered, “A mage is considered an Archmage if they have an aether pool over one hundred units and have leveled three spells to level 23. The sum of the tier of those spells must be over seven.” I nodded. I had two spells over level 23, cleanliness and lightning reflexes. A tier 4 and tier 1 spell. So that sum was 5. I would just need a tier 2 or higher spell to reach level 23 to be considered an archmage in Skyholme. And my 13th birthday was still a month away. Granted, my physical age was close to 15 since there were more days in a Sphere year. And my body’s maturity was nearly 18 since people mature faster in an aether-rich environment.

I thanked Archmage Gregor and decided to talk with Neelan first to improve my healing.  I had let Gregor know I also knew the *lesser restoration* healing spell, a tier 3 spell, and he agreed that healer Neelan would be very interested in mentoring me.  He also said I would be invited on testing delves with the lesser restoration spell and could even be paid to serve in the academy’s infirmary.  At first, I was going to say no, but then I remembered a lot of the spell leveling for my healing spells came from healing my fellow students at the First Year Academy in Hen’s Hollow.

Instructor Neelan had already left the free food buffet, so I would have to find him during open office hours after classes.  Gareth finally arrived and smartly ditched the redhead who had given him the tour. “How was your first day?”  I asked my friend.

“Amazing!  I am going to like it here.  Twenty people must have asked me to join their guild or help them with training.”  Gareth said, beaming.  He was a monster of a man at 6’7” and filling out.  I only noticed two others as tall or taller than him.

Even though I was not really wanting to know the answer, I asked anyway, “What took you so long to get here?”

“Oh, that.  I got a private room here.  They were cheap at just twelve silver a week, and I did not know if I would need to take a nap or something between classes.  I also have a lot more time in classes than you. I might get tired or need somewhere private to study,” he said unconvincingly.  The *Shiny Platinum* was a fifteen-minute walk to the other side of the city.  He did not need a room here.  I shook my head and didn’t comment on Gareth’s secret room when Fera and Mera joined us.

Finally the headmaster gave his speech, “I am Headmaster Illium Louan. Welcome to our little dungeon academy! We have three hundred and seventy-five new first years!” A lot of people clapped at the news. “Now that you are settled in, let it be known the library is reserved for quiet study. The combat yards close before dinner. Classes run for forty weeks. Every evening on the fifth day, we will have a social meal like this,” he indicated the spread on the tables. “You still need to present your meal chip, or you can pay the large copper on arriving. We will have guest speakers at these meals. Thank you for choosing our academy to prepare you for your life as a dungeon delver!” People started to leave after the short speech.

My group all walked back to the *Shiny Platinum,* talking enthusiastically about our future classes.