Chapter 69 (Arc 2 Chapter 23)

Fera and Mera were already up and had been waiting for me to knock as they were dressed in their best clothes.  Fera asked, “Should we get breakfast here or in the capital?”

“We can get it in the Aegis city.  We have to go get Mia from her room,” I announced, turning, but I did see the twin’s faces frown a bit.

Knocking on Mia’s door and announcing myself, she answered with a big smile which quickly fell on seeing the twins behind me, “Ok, I am not sure why you are all unhappy with each other coming today, but we are going to have fun.  I am hiring some people today, and I need a woman’s intuition to know if they are the right people.”

They all seemed to buy my line of bullshit and seemed somewhat happier to be in each other’s company.  I wanted to enjoy the day off as much as possible, and I had just pulled an all-nighter making my new sword.  If it had not come out better than expected, I would have probably been extremely irritable.

We didn’t have to wait long for the skyship, and I paid for everyone.  Mia was going to protest, but I eyed her with a challenge, and she didn’t insist.  On the flight, the three women formed a circle to talk to themselves, and gratefully sat alone.  I closed my eyes and went into my dimensional space.  The sword was lying there, and very carefully, I made a generic clone of the blade in iron.  If I had time today in the city, I would leave the close to have a sheath made for the blade.

I was shaken awake, and my eyes flashed open in preparedness.  I jumped to my feet to see Mia in front of me with the twins behind her.  She said, “We landed.”  I had fallen asleep after I had made the replica blade.

I stood and gave a sly grin, “Ladies, may I escort you to breakfast?”

We went to a small inn not too far down the road.  The meal was forgettable, but my company was all questions about the restaurant.  They were confused when I told them we had already walked past it as we had not left the warehouse district.  When we returned to the docks, I turned into the first warehouse.  The large restaurant dining room looked great.  The floors were polished gray stone, and I counted 11 completed and installed artistic panels.  The artist, Tatem, was working on the 14th and 15th panels.  Heavy tables were stacked along one wall. The chairs must still be in the warehouse or had not arrived.

“Storme!” Tatem noticed me and waved me over.  The two panels he was working on were a pair.  The landscape crossed between the two paintings.  The one on the left was a large rock troll.  He was getting ready to fight the creature in the right panel, a manticore.  The two panels were sketched, and he was about halfway through the painting process.  If they came out like the other 11 images, they would be life-like.  “What do you think?” Tatem asked.

“Amazing work, as always.  How long till you finish all 23?” I asked while the woman looked at all the completed panels.

Tatem put down his brushes.  “I think I will finish these two soon, so that would be 14 completed.  I have sketched out the next two.  There is another completed panel waiting for clear coating over there.” He was beaming. “The wall is going to take me ten weeks or so. I have lined up three assistants for the work,” he said with satisfaction. I studied his paintings for a few minutes with Mia, Fera, and Mera. Tatem offered, “Isla is on the second floor if you are looking for her.”

I left the three women as they still had not had enough of the works of art. Since they were essentially life-sized, this was the first time they had to study these creatures.

Isla was in the corner apartment, the one that Loriel had reserved for herself. She was setting up furniture with Bylura. Bylura gave me an annoyed stare before going into the bedroom. Isla looked at me and said, “Loriel said I could use her apartment while I worked on finishing the building.”

I decided to tease her, “That explains why you are in here instead of working on the building.”

Isla didn’t like my comment by her furrowed brow. She ignored my comment and announced, “I have the projections for restaurant staff on that table over there.” She pointed to a piece of paper on top of her work folders. “I have lined up thirty-seven interviews for you starting at noon today.”

I suddenly didn’t want to be here. Spending my entire afternoon in interviews did not sound like fun, “We will interview the cooks and bakers first. Then I have errands to run. I have some friends downstairs who will interview the waitstaff for me.” Since I was paying their way today, I figured Mia, Fera, and Mera could do me a favor.

I picked up the paper and reviewed it.

Head Cook Low 20 silver/week High 90 silver/week

Cook Low 10 silver/week High 25 silver/week

Server Low 2 silver/week High 10 silver/week

Bartender Low 5 silver/week High 30 silver/week

Baker Low 5 silver/week High 20 silver/week

Dishwasher Low 1 silver/week High 3 silver/week

I had not asked to hire a bartender, but it was on the list. Seeing me study the list for a long time, Isla relaid, “I had a few people go around to the restaurants, taverns, and inns in Aegis city and get the information. They hit up almost every place that sold food.” She had been very thorough. On the backside of the sheet listed the places she had her minions go and what each place was paying. She added, “Most places also give the benefit to employees of taking home leftovers as well, usually by seniority.” I nodded, took a blank page from one of her folders, and wrote out my needs.

The bakery would have one shift of 9 hours in the morning to do breakfast. The restaurant would have two shifts, one for lunch and one for dinner, each about 7 hours, longer for the cooks.

Bakery…2 bakers, 1 cook, 2 servers, 1 dishwasher

Restaurant…2 head cooks, 6 cooks, 6 servers, 3 dishwashers, 2 bartenders

Adding up the cost, if I paid everyone the high end, that would be 5 gold and 47 silver per week. I adjusted the head cook’s wage down to 75 silver. The menu was simple, and they were just essentially kitchen managers. I increased the dishwashers to 8 silver. They cleaned the facility and did the dishes and were usually young adults who decided not to attend the academy and were desperate for work. The servers I increased to 12 silvers a week. I added two more servers and two more dishwashers. This brought the annual salary to just under three platinum. I would have Remy do the accounting, but I still needed a manager as well to keep everyone on task.

I handed the completed sheet to Isla, who reviewed it and nodded. “You shouldn’t have too much trouble hiring your staff with these wages. Why so much for the dishwashers?”

“I don’t know what it costs to live in the city, but I want my employees to have a livable wage,” I said with a nod. “How is the plumbing going?”

Isla was still looking at the staffing sheet and absentmindedly dug into a folder and handed me a different sheet. It was the plumbing diagram with piping estimates and enchanting requirements. Her engineering plans were not too difficult to understand, but the length of copper pipe required was immense. “Just focus on getting the plumbing to the kitchens for now,” I informed her. “I hope to open the bakery in two weeks and the restaurant the week after.”

Her eyes went wide. “That is…that is ambitious. When are you opening the apartments?”

“If you can get the first-floor bathrooms working, then at the same time the bakery opens. It will be a few weeks before the apartment plumbing is completed,” I said, reviewing her plans. They were good, using as little copper pipe as possible. I could save a ton of pipe if I enchanted a heating element in every unit. Keeping those twenty aether stones charged would be a full-time job, though. Best to stick with just one hot water tank on the roof. Maybe I was trying too hard to give the apartments hot water. “There is not going to be any hot water feeds to the first floor. That should save you time and resources. The cooks can heat water if they need it warm or hot.”

I handed the papers back. “I am going to the kitchen to start on artificing the ovens and stove tops. I do not like to be disturbed when artificing. When it is time to interview people, let me know.”

I was in the kitchen below. We had two banks of ovens, one for the bakery and one for the main kitchen. I had enough materials in my storage to complete the ovens today. I set up a privacy screen and started. My work would be good but not exceptional. I was also just going to use tier 3 aether crystals to power the devices. They were large enough to only need recharging once a week. I would need to have the stone mage sink them in the walls so they couldn’t be easily stolen. I finished with the ovens and looked at the rest of the kitchen. The stove tops would be easy, but I also wanted a large griddle and four deep fryers. All of these devices would be aether hogs. I was still sketching it out in my mind when a soft knock let me know it was time.

We had 14 cooks applying for the job. They all thought it was just one opening. I just needed cooks who were open, willing to learn, and had good attention to detail. I didn’t plan to spend more than three days teaching them to cook everything on the simple menu. The bakery side was just breakfast sandwiches and pastries. I was not planning on spending any time in this kitchen as a cook myself.

Of the 14 applicants, I hired seven cooks and one baker. All were on the younger side. After each interview, I listened briefly to Isla’s, Mia’s, Mera’s, and Fera’s opinions before deciding. Everyone’s pay would start immediately and they could come in and help set up the furniture in the bakery/ café and the restaurant until we officially opened.

I stood, “Isla has my list for the rest of the staff. No need to hire everyone today. Just get good candidates that have a positive attitude and willingness to do the work. The only extra benefit they will receive is one meal from the menu during their shift.”

Mia stood, “Where are you going? I will go with you.” Mera and Fera did the same.

“No need. I am going to talk with my dungeon team leader.” The three women had had fun. Being in control of a person’s fate gave you power, and they seemed to like it. The two hours of interviews were more than enough for me.

I stopped on my way to the Adventurer’s Guild Hall and dropped off my facsimile sword so I could have a functional sheath made. I should have given the business to our Hen’s Hollow resident master, but I was here now. Seventeen silver for the custom work, and I would be able to pick it up the next seventh day.

I found Gimble in the common room, and we talked about the team’s progress. Since he was not able to leave Aegis city, the team went to Hen’s Hollow to train with Callem, Aelyn, and Gareth. “So, do you think they are ready to attempt a delve?” I asked.

Gimble slowly nodded, “If Gareth is on the team, then yes. I don’t think Remy has any business being in a dungeon, though. His utility is limited, and he doesn’t have the awareness required to be in such dangerous situations. You probably don’t know, but most of his debt was penalties assessed by his dive team for failures.” I sighed.

I liked Remy, and I was paying the young man a huge salary. “Is there an available slot next seventh day for the Icy Vault?” The Icy Vault dungeon had the bees and berries that I wanted to harvest.

Gimble finished his cup and went to the counter of the guild hall. He returned shortly, “The overnight slot is still available. Do you want me to purchase it?” I thought and slowly nodded. Gareth and I would be done with first-year academy, so there would be no rush in getting back.

“Yes,” I produced the coin for Gimble. He went and registered the delve and came back with a bronze-stamped token.

“Are you sure you don’t want to replace Remy on this first delve? See your new team in action?” Gimble was smiling, and his eyes twinkled. This must be his leadership ability at work. I felt…wanted. It wasn’t an influence ability, as my mental training would have countered it.

“No. I may change my mind at the end of the week, but no.” I stood and left the adventurer’s hall. I was curious about dungeons but didn’t want to take the risk.

I slowly walked back to the warehouse. I didn’t want to get back before they finished all their interviews. I stopped and purchased some new simple clothes. I had been wearing Gareth’s old clothes, with my frame filling out quickly. They fit well, and my *cleanliness* spell made the idea of wearing his clothes bearable. I had the coin to get new clothes and the perfect opportunity. I moved from shop to shop, filling a bag, paying, and then dropping the linens into my storage before entering the next establishment. I would spend time later organizing the mess I was making.

In all, I spent 26 gold and could now wear something different every day for two months. With my cleanliness spell, I didn’t need a lot of clothes, but I did tend to damage my outfits when practicing all out, a disadvantage when your opponent knew you could heal yourself.

As I walked into the warehouse, I found seven people still waiting to be interviewed. I thought about not rejoining the women but ended up walking into the current interview, “I thought you would have finished by now!”

A young woman was seated across from Isla with the others flanking her. Isla retorted, “We did, but news has traveled, and more people keep showing up.” She pulled a sheet to herself. “We have hired seven dishwashers, two bartenders, and seven servers!” she said proudly.

I squeezed in between Isla and Mia and looked at the list ignoring the young woman being interviewed. I looked at the list, “You hired an extra dishwasher? And most of these names are women.”

Mera defended the group’s extra hiring, “She looked so miserable. She was too young to be a server and is taking care of her younger brother, who is sick. You will like her Storme. She will work really hard.”

“It is fine.” I waved my hand. “Please finish up quickly.”

I sat quietly and watched the interviews. Everyone had a reason for wanting to work here. They didn’t make enough to support their family, their current employer abused them, they had to work 12-hour shifts, and they didn’t get to see their family. I was not good at discerning if they were telling the truth, but the four women as a group seemed to be able to puzzle out what they agreed was the truth. At least Mia and the twins seemed to be getting along well.

We filled out our roles, reaching 10 servers when the final person was interviewed. With 30 employees starting tomorrow, I had no idea how Isla was going to keep them occupied. “Next seventh day, Isla, I will return and stay for the week. Make sure the furniture is in my room. I have to see my dungeon delve team off that day, but I will start teaching the cooks the following day. We still need another baker and chef. Try and find someone I can work with during the week.”

I stood and stretched. “Mera and Fera, do you want to see your rooms? They are up on the third floor. Mia, you can accompany us if you wish.”

They eagerly stood and were stiff themselves. Mia asked, “They have rooms?”

As I led the way to the large stairs, I answered her, “Yes, Mera is going to be my brewmaster and Fera, my horticulturist. The roof is going to be covered in gardens.”

Isla was trailing us, “The stone mage is up there right now making raised beds and setting up the windscreens.” I wasn’t sure why she was accompanying us.

We stopped on the third floor and showed them their room. It faced the adjacent warehouse but their windows showed the rooftops heading toward the city. Not a bad view. They were excited, and it was a nice place to live. We didn’t have any glass yet for the windows. Isla started to go into detail about the apartment’s features. Mia seemed a little jealous as the twins talked about how they planned to decorate the apartment.

When I mentioned the room across the hallway was mine, the twins got really excited. I just told them it would be just like the first-year academy. We walked through my apartment, and the two bedrooms had no walls. I told them I was going to install a floor-to-ceiling window there with one-way viewable glass. I had a great view of the skyships coming and going, and we all watched a few landings before heading back down.

Fera spoke, “I can not believe how awesome this building is Storme! I can’t wait to attend the academy in Aegis city and live here!”

I took all four women into town for dinner, and I was mostly left out of the conversation. Mia looked like she felt left out and I had actually come up with a job for her while I had been enchanting the ovens. “So, Mia I hope you liked the building. I wanted to ask you if you also wanted to work for me,” her eyes popped, and the twins were grinning at the announcement. The twins liked everybody…at least as long as you were not competing with them.

Mia eagerly asked, “Do you want me on your delve team?”

“No. I need someone to hire and run security for the warehouse and restaurant. There are going to be quite a few valuable enchantments throughout the structure, and the warehouse is going to hold a skyship and serve to hold our dungeon harvests. I need someone capable of hiring and managing a small group of guards. I am currently paying for security from the Miaden’s, but I am sure we can find competent guards for much cheaper in Hen’s Hollow and Solaris city. I would even be willing to sponsor them through the city guard academy here in Aegis city while they worked,” I explained.

I could see a worried look on Isla’s face. The Miaden guards were tied to Loriel, and I wanted to break that chain as soon as possible. “How many?” she asked.

“I was thinking of you and nine others. Three shifts of three. Pay would be 25 silver a week,” I said, speaking off the cuff. As the guard captain, you would be paid the same but get an apartment for your use as part of your compensation.” Her eyes went wide, and she was nodding yes before her mouth caught up.

I was going to need guards, so this worked out well. Mia was smart and a capable fighter. Maybe I should have offered this position to my brother, but I felt Mia would be a good fit.

After dinner, the woman had an hour before the skyship returned, and they went shopping while I walked with Isla back to the warehouse. I gave her a few large golds to start paying the new employees and told her Remy would be taking over accounting shortly. I had enough time to add heating runes to the largest griddle and start on the walk-in freezer unit. I would need to talk with Aethon during the week to get more enchanting materials.

With Mia and the twins, I returned to Hen’s Hollow.

As I was leaning on the railing, Mera came up to me alone and unsolicited, leaned into me, and kissed me. I was a little shocked but started to return her efforts. After a few moments, she broke the kiss, said, “Thank you,” and walked back to her sister, who congratulated her sister. Mia was not on the deck, so she missed the display.

Maybe it had been a mistake on my part to return the kiss, but it was enjoyable. I watched the twins talk animatedly 20 feet away for a while before returning to my own thoughts. I needed to focus on my own development. Building the skyship was still my first priority. Maybe I would take up Isla’s offer to manage its construction. Just one more week of the academy and then an entire week in Aegis city. Maybe exploring the dungeon would be a nice break for me.