

Changes
Friday – 10.08.62

THE THREE-RING BINDER I HAD PLACED MY PRINTED version of Zilena's scriptures in sat in my lap as I sat on the bus, waiting to arrive at the Sanctified Devils. This way I could mark it all up while looking into it. Zilena had asked that I study her teachings in exchange for the help in the dungeon last time, so I would do it right. It wasn't just a selfish desire to avoid pissing her off either. Reviewing the video from my dungeon dive showed just how much I'd missed because of my exhaustion.

Unfortunately, there really wasn't anything I could do to change things. Well, except not getting so exhausted that a feather could have knocked me over.

As the bus pulled up at the guild, I hopped out and headed inside, a little worried about why I was called in. They might have found out about my excursion into the Rat Way. It was also possible that they'd realized I wasn't spending much time in the guild anymore either. What little worth the guild had retained after I'd been cut off from the databases disappeared when the general population seemed to turn a cold shoulder at me. I assumed Dot was responsible.

So I wasn't really surprised when half the people took one look at me and deliberately turned away. This was another possible reason I was being called in. I'd been reprimanded twice already for "anti-social" behavior. But they didn't really seem to care if the rest of the guild made it impossible for me to socialize with them.

This time I was headed for Mathew's office. Seeing Mai sitting next to him didn't do my nerves any good. Though I doubted she'd be a part of the proceedings. Probably just here for silly reasons like procedure and technically being in charge of new members.

"Kathrine Baulcom. Welcome. We have much to discuss," Mathew said, no emotion in his voice. "We know you went into the Rat Way without guild permission or escort. Are you aware you violated guild policy?"

"Actually I didn't. Legally speaking, as long as the expedition isn't done as a member of a guild, and in this case we're talking about using guild resources to fund the expedition including contracts procured through the guild, it is not subject to guild rules or regulations," I answered smoothly. "Also, I'm not an officer, so I can't be seen as a representative of the guild.

"We could fire you with cause because our policy states that no member may go on personal expeditions."

"A policy that violates the Freedom of Action act, which basically states that no employer may restrict their employee's actions outside of paid time. Given that we're only paid through contracts, guild policy only covers time under contract."

"That is immaterial. Our policies are clear," Mathew said, a small frown on his face.

"No, your policies are written to make it sound like you have more control than you legally do," I explained. "Or they were written before several important modern laws and never updated," I completed as I thought of a more legitimate reason their policies would be what they were.

Mathew continued to frown. I didn't know why he was having a problem with what I was saying. "Kathrine, do you believe that we make the choices we do for entirely no

reason? That we're attempting to hold you back? Why do you believe we wouldn't assist you so that you can be the best Diver you hope to be?"

"Because at no point have you attempted to assist me where it really matters. The database from IAS was a nice touch, but you admitted to removing vital parts of the database *for the purpose* of holding me back. Your every policy has made it more and more difficult to hunt the dungeon often enough to actually reach my obtainable goal of level 10 before I run out of money. Most notably, the difficulty of putting a full party together when both me and Dot are in it."

"That's because reaching level 10 before you've spent at least a full four months hunting is extremely poor for your health. I prefer at least five or six months in most circumstances."

I was more disappointed than angry at this point. "That should be a part of your recruiting information, one less month is barely worth complaining about. Besides, it's my health, and I can ignore it for the short-term if I want."

I turned my glare on Mai. "On top of that, I have no realistic method to extend the time I can stand on my own. It would be wrong of me to just expect people to give me money without taking a realistic chance of not needing it."

Mathew scoffed. "And that includes ignoring the fact that you're objectively wrong? Morality isn't based on one's own whims and desires."

"I'm not," I said carefully. "If we're going to ignore the existence of multiple gods, which only seems to prove relative morality, we can also look at the 'increases survivability of the species' goal for humans. In that version, being the best Diver I can hope to be and being able to continue to pay the taxes I need to support the

defense of the city would be morally reasonable. Thus, yes. What I am doing is morally necessary in my position.”

“By your own admission you would be able to pay taxes as long as you were working a second job.”

“Did you miss the part where I don’t have a realistic chance to support myself with a side job? It would take between two and three years to pick up a secondary job, if I was even able to use that secondary. No, the superior choice is also the only one: making enough money to fully support myself through my primary,” I was quick to get in.

Mathew continued to assert his version of morality as if it was 100% true. He didn’t even bother attempting to appeal to a god for his position. Something I found amusing, since this was still a position people had a hard time refuting these days, as long as you acknowledged that other gods held other positions. But people still somehow claimed their god’s morality was objectively right.

In the end we got nowhere. Mathew’s position was that it was immoral to ignore the guild, but he couldn’t force me to hold that position, especially after I hinted that I would report any attempt to physically force me to fall into line to the police and pointed out that every piece of clothing I owned had cameras built in, so of course I would keep the cameras in my armor. So my continued use of recorded data was both expected and no one could really claim to have been caught off guard.

I left the office with the feeling that more social pressure would be put on me from here on out. The problem being, I found out I just didn’t care. Most notably because the position I pushed in the office was basically the position of Zilena. And it was one I could support. It had more nuance of course; such a basic premise was only a starting point, and there were of course points where

you'd do more damage to yourself or others than you were able to help out. But it was important to note that Zilena's position was to enhance the survivability of the largest number of people.

Not only was it a position I could understand, it was one that needed me to make only a few minor modifications to be able to align my personal beliefs to. I had a few minor squabbles over dealing with assholes, like not letting my frustration lead me to throw out insults and derision with Mathew. If I'd been caught off guard I would probably have argued back with "if the guild told you to jump off a bridge..." style rebukes. Something I knew I had to keep a handle on. Zilena was big about not being the one to burn bridges if at all possible.

This had been the result of a day's worth of study on Zilena's teachings, as requested by her answer to my prayer. I wanted to look into the deeper and more nuanced teachings, but I was pleasantly surprised at this point. We'd see how this continued.

Before leaving the building I headed to the computers and checked the contract board. This was the program that held all the contracts you could take as a part of the guild. I was unsurprised but suspicious that there were no personal requests for a Necromancer escort. Some comments on my videos had suggested that requests for escort had been turned down by me. Now I had reason to believe the guild had been turning them down on their own.

Why? I had no idea, but it couldn't be because I had to work with Dot. She was annoying, but I couldn't believe she'd turn down the chance to prance around in front of clients.

No, I think it was something about “fairness” or whatever. Though I had no proof of it, fortunately I already had a way around the problem. I wasn’t sure how this would affect my finances, but hopefully it would be enough to shorten my timeline.

Kathrine: I’ve conformed that there are no pending personal requests. I will definitely need that contract. Thank you, Mr. Witt.

Mr. Witt: It’s my job. Just make sure you actually run those background checks. You don’t want to assume that it won’t find anything just because you say you will. Some people will try for it anyways, or hope the check picks up nothing.

Kathrine: Thank you anyways. I have no idea how to make a contract for a personal dive into the dungeon.

Mr. Witt: It’s not that bad. I am sending two to you. One is for escorts and the other for retrieval contracts, so don’t get them mixed up, it could cause problems if someone gets hurt.

Sighing at the reply text, I headed out of the guild toward the next meeting spot, a cafe I’d never been to. This was for my first “study session” with Sandra and Adam. I hoped this was a regular thing and that more people joined. After all, I could point to these sessions as “socializing” with the guild and it would hopefully help me advance my knowledge of magic. Even if it wasn’t fully helpful, it would be good to just talk to other magic users.

Sitting down at the table both Sandra and Adam were at, I grinned at them and they seemed a little confused. "To be completely honest, Kathrine, we're not sure what you wanted to do here."

"Compare notes mostly," I answered Adam easily. "The fact that in Golem Creation you mix both elemental and runic magic tells me that the two magic types are related. If we can work out some of those relations, we might be able to learn things we'd never know otherwise."

Sandra and Adam exchanged looks, and it was Sandra who spoke first. "It makes a certain type of sense, and I've read of similar opinions. I guess it would be a fun project that we can do while we relax."

"Do you think you guys can teach me Golem Creation? I wonder if I can create a golem." Adam was a little excited at the idea. "Plus, that might make it easier for me to help out."

Sandra snorted. "I don't have Golem Creation either, remember?"

I grinned, "Well, no one said you couldn't learn at the same time. I still struggle with the knots, but I'm hoping to pick up a few cool tricks. The difficult part is finding out what is known as the 'gate' rune for your golems."

I then explained about gate runes and the important parts of how to discover new runes. At the same time Sandra and Adam showed me a trick for discovering new knots and helped me improve my general technique.

It wasn't long before the conversation turned from magic to other things and we just spent time hanging out. Next time we met we'd probably do the same thing. Start with some swapping of magical knowledge but mostly hang out.