

Ritual
Tuesday – 11.1.62

EXITING MY TENT, I STRETCHED UP TO THE HEAVENS. I'D learned to sleep fairly well in the dungeons, and I think it was because I could mentally check up on my skeletons whenever I wanted. As a result, I felt fairly fresh. Oddly, this time I couldn't see any Styires, but you never knew.

Miles said he drinks coffee, as does Dot, so three cups worth of boiling water were made. I didn't carry a percolator due to the weight, and none of the others appeared to have brought one. So instant coffee it was.

Miles was, unsurprisingly, the first of my companions to get out of their tent. Dot was always slow in the morning, and this seemed to be the result of a driving need for caffeine, so I wasn't too bothered.

I set out making a breakfast for me and Miles, if he wanted any, as I knew Dot had her own stuff. I liked to do breakfast hash in the dungeon, adding a small section of hash browns to leftover monster meat and whatever small amounts of veggies were cheap enough to grab. This time I added a little bit of crab meat, because it was actually kind of good in this.

Once Dot was up, and giving Miles a weird look for complimenting my cooking, we started breaking down camp. Dot was a little behind each step, but we were all ready to walk as the streams of water had drained down to a comparative trickle, although Miles managed to stumble

in the surprisingly strong current of the first one he stepped in.

It took us about a half hour to get to the cliff wall between the Scraggs and the plains below. Even then, it was still a breathtaking view. The plains below were still glistening from the retreating water and the sun was behind our heads, throwing sharp lines of shadow across the plains and forest just beyond.

A few of the drainage streams hadn't completely emptied either, meaning we had a nice spray of water coming from a few waterfalls as well; the rainbows thrown by these streams of water were gorgeous as well, creating the rare opportunity to see a rainbow below you and upside down. Altogether, it was a spectacular view.

"Wow," Miles said quietly. "Pictures really don't do it justice, do they?"

"Nope," I agreed. "One of the dangers of this dungeon," I said as I turned around to scan the Scraggs behind us.

Personally, this view wasn't any less awe-inspiring for me. The few scraggly bushes, so rare in this area, dotted an area of stony hills against a backdrop of massive mountain. And when the rivers of water were blowing through the area it was rather impressive, all things considered.

It must have taken a moment for that to register in Miles' head, because after a bit of silence his head snapped around. "What?"

I just pointed at a group of Styires charging toward us. Oddly enough, it was the largest group I'd seen this early in the day. Ten full Styires. "People entrapped by the

beauty don't see the danger coming from behind." I didn't mention that something like this happened yesterday; it was still early and we were now far from the cliff.

The fight wasn't anything special, except possibly a teachable moment for Miles. I'd given up on Dot putting as much attention to her surroundings as she should. Even when it was just us around.

We then headed back toward the entrance. Dot was back to her usual shenanigans. About the same time as we could spot the entrance canyon over top of some hills, we heard some gunshots.

Normally we wouldn't do anything like investigate because the solid rock of the Scraggs was surprisingly good at ricocheting bullets, but after thirty seconds of shooting there were sudden shouts of fear and pain.

So I turned toward them immediately and picked up our pace. My skeletons weren't coordinated enough for a flat-out run at this point, but they could definitely do a light jog. We made it to the top of the hill about the same time as the shooting stopped. I looked down. Below was a group of four Divers and a group of Styires, along with a single Cliff Hugger that told the story very clearly.

Shouting a greeting, we headed toward the group, who were all gathered around a single individual. As we got closer I called out a second greeting, I didn't want to frighten a group of armed and worried Divers.

The first thing I did was put up a perimeter of my skeletons. They wouldn't warn us of an incoming threat but could definitely absorb the first attack. The blood also led me to push Miles to keep an eye on the cliff wall, in

case of another ambush. I then turned my attention to the wounded.

“Do you need some help? I’ve got a couple years of medical training on top of all the first aid jazz.”

The injured individual looked like a magic type who was bleeding from a wound on the side of her head. Currently all that appeared to have been done was the gauze being held to the side of her head. The main person helping was a dude whose weapon, discarded to the side, looked like a full machine gun. Such heavies were amongst the rarest of the martial jobs but also one of the most powerful.

So the massive panic on his face wasn’t helping anyone else in the group. “Please. It’s not stopping!”

I nodded and knelt down. The gauze pad was clearly soaked through with blood. Fortunately, this wasn’t too different from one of the triage situations we trained for in the medical program. I grabbed the already opened medical kit on the ground and pulled out another gauze pad, however, the kit was kind of basic and didn’t have everything I thought you needed for monster attacks. So I grabbed my med-kit from the base of my backpack.

I pulled out something called “medi-gel” and applied a thick layer of the clear shit to one side of the gauze pad. I then looked the panicking heavy in the eyes. “On the count of three, you remove your gauze pad and I will apply mine. Do you understand?” Head nod. “Now, it might seem like it’s sticking because of all the blood, but you just have to remove the pad anyways. Understand?” A second nod, but you could tell this wasn’t something he liked.

I settled opposite him and got ready, holding the pad above the injured woman's head. The swap worked well enough, but starting at the top of the injury to apply my gauze pad showed that the pad wasn't quite big enough. Thankfully, the medi-gel layer I applied was too thick and spread out from under the gauze pad.

This sealed off most every part of the injury and allowed me to apply more gauze and wrap the lady's face more easily. It also let everyone see the bleeding stop before bandages got in the way.

Medi-gel was apparently inspired by some video game or other. It was an advanced compound that was goopy and dried to a flexible-but-solid substance a few seconds after coming in contact with blood. It was used to seal injuries in the field, and being biologically natural was safe to apply to any kind of wound. Its main use was to seal injuries in the field, allowing better-trained personnel to do all the difficult stuff, so focus was put on making sure it didn't cause more damage but kept things from getting worse as well.

It was one of the coolest inventions in medical technology, and unfortunately more expensive than was practical for basic medical kits.

Once that was done, everyone relaxed a bit. "Ok. Now we need to see if you can move on your own," I said, trying to remember all the diagnostic tests I could run for head wounds.

The test result was what was fairly normal for combat jobs. While she was suffering from a concussion, she wasn't so far out of it that she shouldn't move. A Cliff

Hugger bite to the side of her face should have done damage to her neck, but given that she was sitting up and looking around, and in a lot of pain, we were probably well enough off for this kind of thing.

Turns out she was a Geomancer who had moved into pyromancy giving her better defensive spells compared to the average spellcaster. Fortunate for her, as she likely had some protective magic that let her survive the ambush. Otherwise it was unlikely a magic user would survive the first hit to the head like that.

The trip to the entrance was a lot slower and much more tense than normal. Dot was getting a lot of negative looks with her usual antics. This didn't help her mood at all, though I had to wonder if her annoyance was more due to having to deal with members of other guilds.

Still, it was only an hour later when we made it out. I never did get the names of the people we were helping, it didn't seem like an important point at the time. Still, exiting the dungeon with an injured individual resulted in a more complex exit process. Basically, the Guard wanted to know what had happened.

Dot gave an explanation of what we witnessed, which I added a few things to while I was removing the secondary memory cards for the cameras in my suit and backpack.

"Right," Captain Lawrence said as he finished the last of his notes. "Now I just need to collect your video evidence and we're done."

"What? My word isn't enough?" Dot sounded scandalized, causing me to roll my eyes so hard it "hurt."

Captain Lawrence just gave her an odd look like she was insane. “Eye-witness testimony is the single least reliable form of evidence. People miss things, misunderstand things, and just forget. This doesn’t include filling in details they don’t actually have and incorporating data learned after the fact without reason into their testimony. So no. Not legally it’s not.”

I handed over my memory cards, as did everyone else. The result was a sputtering Dot who didn’t seem to understand what the problem was. Once we received our cards back, the data copied off them, we left the conference room in the base’s administration building. The other team gave a short thanks and headed toward the hospital to check up on their friend.

It was at that moment that the captain stepped out of the office. “Are you Kathrine? From NecroDive?”

“I run that channel, yes.” Well, this was new. No idea how to respond here.

“My name’s Erica, and I just wanted to say it’s refreshing to see a woman posting solo dives in these things. My guild likes to pretend we’re unable to do so.”

I grinned at her. “I take it you’re a part-timer then? Well, I’m not certain that Necromancer counts as any kind of normal.”

“Probably true, do you think I could do it?” she asked.

“Why the fuck ask her? She’s a fucking twinkle finger pansy bitch who depends on some idol gods to fucking do anything.” Dot stomped off. Another slight twinge of danger that disappeared rapidly as she left.

“Well, I kind of expected that, but what is she worked up about?”

I pulled up my Holy Symbol. “I just made this as my Holy Symbol for Zilena. I guess she didn’t realize I’ve been sacrificing for blessings since the beginning and has decided that ‘if it weren’t for gods’ I wouldn’t be here to annoy her or something.”

Erica ran her fingers along the bone. “You made this?”

“Uh, yeah. Felt like the right way to do it.”

“Does asking for blessings help?”

“Yes, they do. However, the gods don’t give out blessings that remove all problems. I’ve still been injured. I would also suggest researching a little into the teachings or what the gods represent before you sacrifice to them.” I couldn’t really give any other advice at this point. It had worked out for me.

“So, Zilena?”

“She governs all those who put themselves in deadly situations deliberately, with a heavy focus on combat roles,” I answered as I checked the time. We had about thirty-five minutes before the bus came. “She gives rules and laws on how to interact and deal with different people who work in that situation. Not the best explanation. I really have to figure out what to say about this, now don’t I.”

Erica quietly chuckled, causing me to blush. I figured she wasn't trying to be mean, but really, did we need to make fun of my awkwardness?

"Anyway, can I ask you a legal question? Not sure if you'll know the answer or not," I asked.

"Shoot. But I'm really focused on the dungeon and situations that arise there."

"Can I post video of the rescue online?" I was really wondering about this.

"Easy question. Yes. The Social Contract idea is that we all expect to be videoed when in a public setting. And the dungeon is considered public. It would be different if you berated her, as it could be seen as 'kicking them while they're down,' but otherwise it isn't a problem. Kind of rude if you don't at least try to make a good faith effort to seek permission, however."

I nodded, that sounded about right. We continued to talk for a few more minutes before I headed out. I stopped by the hospital and left a note with the front desk, including my channel contact information and a request to use the video of the rescue in my next post.

That out of the way, I made my way home. First task was replying to all the people I mass-texted 'I'm out' to. All my friends replied slowly and weren't really bothered. My parents, on the other hand, still seemed to sound like they were waiting on baited breath for me to claim I was out.

Then it was a shower for me. I got a glass of whiskey and sent a quick sacrifice to Syaos, seeking support in my analysis. I made it back to the computer before realizing I could, and probably should, add something else to my wind-down ritual.

I took a second to flip to the part of Zilena's scriptures that focused on sacrifices, found the prescription I needed, and offered a sacrifice/prayer of thanks. I figured I should put a little more effort into building a relationship with her if I was going to be serious about following her.

That done, I sat down at my computer and started my first review of my capture videos. Mostly this was marking parts of the video for combat review and for the channel. Those two were often the same, but not always.

I found something relaxing in noting down every good and bad thing I did during the fight. Things I needed to work on and all that. I had no idea why, but it could be the simple thrill of being able to do research without needing a ton of outside sources. Not that I didn't use other sources for this as well. Just not today and not now.

I'm sure the alcohol helped as well.