

Inspiration
Tuesday – 11.27.62

I WOKE UP FAST, MY HEART BEATING HARD. THE FIRST THING I saw was light falling on one of my posters, Mostafa Martinez, without a doubt the coolest Diver of all time and an inspiration. Which helped slow my heart rate.

The lingering fear, on the other hand... shadows with red eyes coming my way. I rolled off my bed and stood up, only to notice my notebook of Zilena's teachings. I still couldn't get the fear out of my head, but it did help me focus. Especially because she said she would help with these kinds of things.

The prayer helped, a lot more than I thought. The scent of the incense shifted to something that really calmed me down, but I couldn't place it beyond a slight feeling of nostalgia. Probably a scent from childhood. The result helped me relax even more, and I felt like Zilena was here in with me.

The nightmare had clearly been about the Lurkers, which were really the scariest thing I'd seen in the dungeon. And obviously it was coming back to me when I went to sleep. I just didn't know what to do about it. Yet I also got the impression it was a normal struggle for people in this profession.

In fact, given that Zilena offered subtle guidance to anyone suffering from such events, it was almost guaranteed to be more common than not. Standing up, my

fear was all but gone, though I was still wide awake. More importantly, I wasn't going to go back to sleep any time soon. Apparently I'd been kneeling at the alter for an hour.

I felt better, but not at all perfect. Which reminded me of something I remembered from the mental health classes back in high school. Healing trauma wasn't an event but a journey. Apparently not even the gods could bypass that reality, though it felt like they could sit in as a substitute for a counselor in the right situations.

Unwilling to sleep, I headed for my computer. Might as well get some research in. A part of me wanted to become a priestess, but despite the easy answer for getting stronger, I didn't feel like it was the best choice for me. I doubted I'd be able to be forward about my beliefs and convince others to join a religion. I didn't have much of a problem talking to certain people, but I wasn't sure how to start such confrontational issues.

I still felt like I owed it to myself to be 100% certain it wasn't just social fear that was keeping me away. Of course, it could still be the main reason, but pure fear wasn't a good way to deal with these things. So I spent some time looking into "things you should know" and "how to advance your job" type of resources for priest jobs.

And I had to say, yes, I shouldn't become a priestess. Unfortunately, Charisma was an important part of the job description, and that wouldn't work well for me. Even being a follower of Zilena I knew I couldn't really press the job forward, it just wasn't in my personality. Almost everyone with a priest or priestess job stalled out, I'd probably hit level 7 and never continue. Combat jobs

required you to tackle stronger foes, and the priestess job was no different. Instead, it required you to tackle larger and larger efforts that helped push your deity's agenda forward. And that meant more people, whether winning converts or becoming a community leader.

I didn't feel like I had those kinds of chops. I couldn't deny that I had somehow gotten involved in setting up the mages' guild thing we were doing, but I didn't feel like a leader, more like a specialist. I already had access to a good lawyer, and that meant they could count on me getting good information.

So yeah, I couldn't really see myself being happy or even that effective at the job of priestess. So I needed something else. Something that would work for me. I just didn't know what. Witch would be a good match for Necromancer, after all, it was a support combat job. But I had to wonder if it was the right support combat job, as it would burn through my mana even faster, and that could cause problems.

I just didn't know of any other jobs that focused mostly on sustained spells. Honestly, I could dip into the negative temporally mid fight to give myself a boost. That would work fairly well, but again no known job. Thinking about it, I turned back to my bed, finally tired again. Hopefully some sleep would help.

I woke up later than normal, unsurprisingly, but better rested. Thinking more clearly over breakfast, I considered my options. I had no idea what job to go for, but I did have one thing I wanted to do.

Heading back to my little alter, I sat down. The alter was on the ground because I never got around to getting a table or anything like that and now it felt like a good move. I didn't know any kind of prescription for this, so I decided to simply pray.

All I did was inform her of my reason for not wanting to be a priestess. And that I was waffling over the effort to find a new job. It was stupid really. I mean, gods had more pressing reasons to do things than listen to us jabber on about minor things. And given it usually took a year at the quickest to pick up a secondary job, when built from scratch, it wasn't like this was something I really needed an answer for right now.

Yet I still asked it as a part of this prayer. It wasn't the smartest decision to obsess over this. Yet it's what I did.

And then something changed. I wasn't sitting on carpet any more, I was sitting on stone. Opening my eyes, I looked around, shocked.

I was sitting on a massive stone pillar raised above what could only be described as the Valley of Dust. Despite the fact that it should have been impossible, I could see spirits moving inside the dust. This lazily blowing, slow-motion storm slowly and carefully seemed to peel small pieces of the spirits away.

For a moment I thought it might be painful or terrifying, but that thought was interrupted when a powerful glow broke through a hole in space that hadn't been there a second before. A tornado of dust rose up and engulfed it, still moving at a rather lazy speed. Something changed, and it was like the glowing light grew more pure,

not necessarily brighter, just more white. As the tornado dropped back down I saw another spirit go with it. This one was more complete, filled out looking almost exactly like a person, except I could see through it without a problem.

The light, which had to be a soul, passed back through the hole, which instantly disappeared. Looking around carefully, no longer focusing just on the valley below me, I could see a ton of magic, many other lights appearing in the distance, and slow-motion tornadoes.

“Beautiful, isn’t it.” The voice was musical, and I turned to my head to my right. Standing on nothing, or the dust, was Zilena. Seeing a goddess in person was nothing like you could expect. She wasn’t blindingly brilliant or perfectly formed. Or any of that. Maybe it was because of her position as a goddess of death, but there were imperfections.

Her skin was a little too white to be healthy, and her hair, though in a careful ponytail, wasn’t set just right. She was wearing a simple T-shirt with her own raven symbol on the front of it in place of any logo. Tight jeans revealed a rather normal figure, which somehow seemed surprising. I’d expected a more skeletal appearance.

Normally I didn’t care about how people looked, but seeing a goddess look so human was kind of weird. But deep down in my soul was a feeling I had never felt before, I knew I was looking at a goddess. It was a knowledge that went beyond instinct or even intuition. It was so deep rooted I couldn’t put words to it.

The compulsion to bow or something was there, but the bit of land I was sitting on was quite small, and Zilena didn't want excessive worship and bowing. Found it annoying.

I looked back at the valley. "It is. Though not the first word I would use to describe it." Intriguing, confusing, informative all seemed better.

"True enough." Zilena turned to me, and I had to clamp down on my desire to bow again. "Seems you're taking in as much as you can."

That was an understatement, the mana in this area twisted into both runes and knots, and I was doing everything I could to memorize everything, in the presence of my god or not.

"I'm fine with you not becoming a priestess. Things might change in the future, or other options will become available. But you should consider all possible jobs, not just the combat ones."

I frowned, trying to figure out what she was talking about. It even distracted me from the mana. "You're saying there are non-combat jobs that will work better with Necromancer, probably at some future point, than a combat job."

"Yes. Though you shouldn't neglect your Necromancer job when you make your choice." The look Zilena gave me made me blush a little bit.

"Of course!" Shit, that sounded bad. "I'll remember it."

Zilena looked amused, which made me relax. Right, a god. Probably understood what I meant. I turned back to

the area around me, wishing I could somehow observe more of the mana surrounding us. "I do have a question. Why talk to me now? Even if I'm not going to become a priestess?"

"We talk to people for reasons other than their jobs. Besides, no one said I wouldn't be offering you something in the future. Priestess was just a bonus, one that I never would have offered if you didn't request it."

I frowned, what the hell was that supposed to mean? Looking over at Zilena, I didn't see anything to give me a hint. Not even a small one. I sighed, kind of wanting more information, but my research was clear on this point.

"I'm assuming that's all you're going to say?"

"Yes. Events haven't become locked in yet, others can make decisions to alter their fates. No need to make a move on what might not be."

I nodded. "Thank you for showing me this. But I have to ask. What's with this column, and the others spread around?"

Though they weren't always obvious, there were many other such columns spread across the area. Some larger, some smaller, some below the dust. Instinct told me they weren't just decoration. Or maybe it was the mana running through the stones beneath me.

The pause made me look over at Zilena, and something I never thought I would see caused all thought to stop. She had an amused smile on her lips, as if she was about to play a prank. "The one you're sitting on and all the others are related. And I didn't make them."

That caused my eyebrow to quirk upward, I had no idea what she was talking about. Only to then find myself sitting at a restaurant surrounded by the study group. The others all jumped, proving I'd just appeared there without any obvious reason. The near-invisible dust that disappeared when it got too far from me caused a shiver to run up my spine.

"Uhm. Kathrine?"

"Just a goddess making a point." I swallowed. It was more than a point, it was a hint. I just didn't know of what.

The others all looked at me with raised eyebrows.

"Well, you going to tell us what happened?" Zak ended up the spokesman.

"I'm not sure how best to explain." I tilted my head to the side. "This morning I decided I didn't want to be a priestess of Zilena and decided to inform her in a prayer. Apparently she felt the need to inform me that it had no effect on our relationship. And she hinted there was a deeper reason for reaching out to me," I said slowly, thinking through the encounter. I also got the mental image of a thumbs up which caused me to wonder about so many things.

"Also, there was a hint at a good secondary job for my skill set." Looking around, I frowned. "We have things to do, right?"

"You're not going to explain why she teleported you here?"

“Miracles like this only happen for the favored of a god or goddess.” We all turned to Alex, who was looking off to one side, clearly deep in thought. “I would bet it was because I’m here, so Syaos now knows the nature of your relation with Zilena.”

Alex was a priest of Syaos, so it was likely he had picked up something from Syaos. More surprising was that Alex was here at all, given he weren’t the most common member of the group. Maybe I wouldn’t have gotten the teleport otherwise. Especially if it was a bit of showboating for the other divine.

Either way, I pulled out my notebook and began sketching the knots and runes I remembered, explaining to the others what I was doing as the meeting progressed. Most of them were far too complicated, well above the level I was at, and many were only partially remembered. But it was honestly better than it otherwise would be.

Kathrine’s Status, Spells, and Skills:

< Kathrine Baulcom / Human(Female) / Age: 20

*Necromancer Lvl 9.23 / Bone Walker / Organizer /
Poisoner*

*STR: 10 | END: 13 | DEX: 15 | SPD: 12 | WIS: 15 | INT:
18 | CHA: 11 | MNT: 18*

Minion Control: 11

*Stamina: 125/125 | Mana: 845/845 | +2.1 stm/min |
+25.8 mana/min*

Mana Conversion: 75% >

< Necromancer Spells >

< Poison Bomb

Ball of weak poison. Can be detonated in the air for reduced poison concentration.

+ Focus to Expand +

Miasma Bomb

Ball of poison wrapped in a thin sack of flesh to increase pressure.

+ Focus to Expand +

Toxic Breath

Exhale cloud of potent poisons.

+ Focus to Expand +

< Skeleton Creation >

< Command Undead

Control undead.

+ Focus to Expand +

Create Skeleton (Varied)

Creates a skeleton at range that will be armed with a variety of weapons.

+ Focus to Expand +

Create Weapons (Varied)

Creates weapons, to be used by skeletons or not, from corpses independent of any minion.

+ Focus to Expand + >

< Other Spells(Major) >

< Casting Light: Creates a ball of light that can be anchored above a person or object or launched to anchor above distant objects and surfaces.

Runic | Light >

< Necromancer Skills >

< Runic Magic (Poison) X | Runic Magic (Flesh) IX | Runic Magic (Bone) X | Runic Magic (Contact) VI | Runic Magic (Spirit) III | Golem Creation X | Magic Accuracy VI | Mana Channel XIX | Mana Control XX | Magic Mass VII

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< Other Skills(Major) >

< Runic Magic (Light) II | Polearms (Bone-Forged) IV >