

Master 151

Chapter 151 - 151. Hungry

The elder had given them all one last lecture in their improvements and failings. Ending his talk by praising walker for educating the trainees about an integral part of a hunting party's success. Happy with himself the elder headed back to his tea and fire.

Gil Laurence and walker were all staring at Otis waiting for him to say something, eventually he did. "the elder seemed in good spirits today, he went easy on us."

"that was easy! Seriously we got dragged in to all that training and now I've got almost zero mana." Exasperated Gil raised and dropped his arms defeated.

"yes he often carries a few potions if he really wants to push. Or if someone isn't catching on fast enough. I believe he really liked the lesson walkers really forced home the dangers of poor timing." Some of the trainees had begun to head away but almost every single one of them kept looking at the shattered stone pillars as they walked away. Even the small crowd that had gathered was constantly taking peaks at the shattered pillars to remind themselves of the exploding fire flowers they had seen. Walker was a hit, the center of gossip for the tribe and if he tried to escape the questions at dinner he'd surely fail.

Tired and in need of cleaning up the three left Otis at the training field to do just that. After getting in to cleaner shape walker found midnight asleep by the fire as expected. It would seem the girls were still out wandering the tribe. Walker couldn't help but think how sad it would be when they needed to leave, this place was quickly becoming a second home.

""Hungry"" this intense feeling started to radiate from onyx. Walker was incredibly tired and had just begun to lay down for a nap before dinner. Without thinking he pulled the crate of all his light crystals from his storage. Onyx left walkers shoulder, slithering in to the crate. Walker didn't even have a chance to remove a few before his eyelids drooped and he was asleep. His fatigue had gotten the best of him.

This feeling of energy resounded through him. It was warm and light pushing in to his mind brining him back to the conscious world. "Hmnhgs" walker frowned having been awakened by this strange feeling, it was too cold out to feel this kind of warmth. His eyes fluttered open realizing this wasn't physical but a

mental energy coming from his bonds to onyx. Becoming more panicked walker began to shake himself away to see broken crystal shards all around him. What happened?

Small scratching sounds were coming from the crate which had tipped on to its side leaving even more crystal shards in the ground. Midnight was awake and staring intently at the crate the excitement evident in her eyes. Every time a crack or scratching sound was made midnights energy seemed to build, what's gotten her so excited? Walker was lost he remembered falling asleep needed a nap to get some energy back but what else had he done? Why hadn't he put away the crate with the light crystals...wait...where's onyx?

Jumping up he circled the crate to see the opening only to find something much different than light crystals. Inside the small crate was a ball of moving scales. The dark rounded body covered in scales twisted on itself searching through the broken shards of light crystals. Suddenly a head appeared with a light crystal held within its mouth, onyx! " you've eaten all the light crystals! You've grown huge! How did you do this!" Hearing walker onyx quickly finished off the light crystal he had causing it to shatter. Onyx unfurled his balled up coils revealing his length to now be three times walker's height. His body had become thicker and his scales seemed darker than they previously were. Looking past onyx's new large size walker saw that there were no light crystals left, every single one was broken and consumed.

"Master, I've done it" walker spun about in confusion, who the hell just talked to him? He looked everywhere but it was only him, midnight and...onyx.

" onyx did you just...speak?" Walker intently stared at the newly grown serpent in front of him. His hopes rising as the possibilities flooded his mind.

" yes master, I've unlocked my system and gained my skills. Thank you for leaving the food for me, it was enough to cause my growth spurt." Yes yes yes! Onyx had finally grown and not just a little it was a huge burst. Onyx must have been building up to this. Walker immediately checked onyx's stats to see what onyx had gained for him.

Onyx

Abyssal serpent system

Abyssal black serpent

Level: 1

Exp. 0/100

Hp-45

Atk-35

Matk-65

Def-35

Mdef-55

Agi-45

Mana-70

Walker was incredibly excited to see onyx finally at level one after growing. This was a momentous occasion to celebrate. Walker saw that upon unlocking his system onyx had gained a telepathy skill, this was an great surprise since now onyx could communicate much easier. " wait onyx I see you have a telepathy skill but how can you already speak so well?"

The serpent raised its head higher seemingly amused, " master I've been watching and listening. Waiting for the day I can speak at the equal you say I am." Walkers brows furrowed, a tinge of anger in his eyes.

" then stop this master stuff, like you just said we are equals. I am you big brother walker and that is your big sister midnight!" Onyx shrank away a bit not expecting that reaction from walker, onyx saw more than just a big brother due to their contract and how walker lead the party. " listen onyx we are family not some tamed beast and a master, no matter what so let's act like it." Onyx rushed forward wrapping himself around walkers neck and shoulders. Relaxing and letting his body drape over like a

scarf walker could feel the weight upon him. " onyx I think we'll need to rethink your favorite sitting spot because if you keep growing like this you'll be brighter than me!" Not afraid in the least walker only could feel the complacent happy feeling coming from onyx.

Delving deeper in to onyx's skills walker saw two that he started with that seemed incredibly useful

' decaying venom-10 mana

Injected through the fangs this venom eats away at the mana and stamina of the inflicted. Highly taxing to create and keep within the body it is a very potent trump card for some species of monsters.

Bind- 2mana

Using the strong coiling muscles the user wraps around a target. Each second the target is wrapped the coil will tighten forcing more and more damage eventually strangling the target.'

These skills were fairly impressive starting off skills for onyx, being a monster he was already born strong but would naturally reach the same wall midnight had. Experience, since monsters needed many more points over than other creatures they would often hit a bottle neck where it took years to level up. Being born strong due to their rare species midnight and onyx had an advantage over more common species like the snow imps or giant locusts. However once they hit a tough patch in leveling adventurers would overtake them with skills and gear being able to defeat them. This was how the world worked, a natural way of things. But this didn't take away from how impressive their stats were now and what they could become.

" midnight what do you think of your little brothers growth spurt? Pretty amazing isn't it?" Midnight huffed her eyes gleaming intently while taking in onyx's new appearance.

" brother she says she wants to take me out to fight." It was walkers turn again to be stunned. He spent all his time causing shock to those around him but was not used to being shocked himself. What in the holy lord did onyx mean that midnight wanted to take onyx out to fight!? Onyx could talk to midnight! Walker could finally hold a conversation with midnight properly instead of hoping that one day she would gain a skill to take human form or communicate like an ancient dragon does. Walker could cry, he's wanted to talk to her since the second they'd met.

" midnight! Onyx can tell me anything you want to say to me, we can finally talk!" Her eyes grew larger and larger while looking directly at walker, the energy seemed almost tangible between the three of them.

There was a silence between them asking to be broken as walker waited for onyx to speak. Midnight was struggling with what to say knowing that her words would finally reach walker. No longer would she have to fully rely on the feelings the two sent and the small mental messages they pushed back and forth that could only explain small things.

" brother, she says thank you for the newts they tasted good"

Chapter 152 - 152. Translations

Tears had started to fall from walkers eyes as he reached out a hand to midnight. I response midnight tackles him to the ground rubbing he face close to his. The understanding between them was deeper than it had ever been. The two could finally understand each other, sharing real words. Midnight hadn't understood at the time why walker and the party he'd lured her out with food, however as things progressed she felt safe with them and eventually understood her mother's passing. The more she observed and grew the more she realized that life as a monster was basically waiting for something stronger to defeat you. This was the case for her mother, who had left to find a place to raise her young but unintentionally came to close to a large human city. The natural reaction was to properly defend the city and get rid of threats, he mother being the possible threat. Learning these things midnight knew that walker had more than just rescued her, he had given her a home and an even bigger family when she would have instead been slain herself. Through their adventures she had even gained a title no monster known had ever gained before, she was walking a great path.

After the emotional moments had oases and the three had finally calmed down a bit walker stored away all the crystal shards, his collection of them had grown significantly. Walker couldn't help but wonder how much onyx would want to eat now, hopefully he could make the most of the sun during the day.

Wondering where everyone else had gotten to walker began to realize it what fairly late, maybe they had all headed to the square to join in the larger dinner. " hey midnight, onyx it would seem everyone else went off to the square without us, why don't we go get a little revenge and give them a shock." Midnight seemed happy about the food dinner would have but onyx did seem excited to now properly greet everyone, he had felt trapped the whole time waiting to have enough energy for his growth spurt.

Heading towards the square midnight pranced about around Walker more excited than ever to see everyone. She may be food driven as always but knowing she could ask for onyx to get her words across she was even more energized. Walker on the other hand began to developed a unique fear, he had

often paired Remey and midnight as the strongest offensive attackers. The fear was plain as day that the two may get even closer and commit to only rushing in to battle. He'd be keeping an eye out.

" I know you already know this but Elise is going to freak out and ask a million question. You two won't have to answer every single one but don't let her overwhelm you. Onyx I know you get along with Hyde well but be careful not to frighten him, you grew pretty large all the sudden. Also you may be able to really help Laurence get Hyde more comfortable with crowds and combat, I'm sure he will rely on your assistance." As the three came in to view of the nightly bonfire walker tried to tighten up some loose ends.

"Brother I know Hyde is often frightened but his ears are sensitive and even footsteps are too loud. Sister says she will ask a million questions to Elise in revenge." Naturally midnight would choose to but heads directly. The interesting part was that onyx already learned that Hyde was sensitive to sound, this was definitely a fact Laurence didn't know and would be extremely helpful.

Remey was the first to notice them coming, before even getting sword out her jaw had hit the floor. Having onyx not many times larger trapped around his shoulders and neck gave walker a much more intimidating appearance.

Noticing the extra silence from Remey not speaking Gils attention was drawn next, his reaction was much the same but he did manage some words, " soo umm really embracing the evil villain kind of look huh?" Onyx raised his head not sure why Gil thought he would look evil, this was just the way he grew.

" brother is not evil, he is kind." Yup that was it Gil was now frozen.

" onyx I think you broke gil with your new skill. He's stiffer than the icicles." Looking at su and Remey walker smiled. "Now that onyx has had his growth spurt he gained a telepathy skill, I'm not sure if it's normal for his species but it's amazing. Midnight why don't you say hello as well." Thinking midnight would flat out start talking they got stuck as well, anything could happen now who knew what crazy stuff happened every time the blinked.

" sister says she's going to beat up more monsters than you Remey. She says you are very warm Su and always share the best food. Sister thinks Gil has good eyes but needs more brains." All eyes fell to midnight Gil however was a bit more shaken.

" what do you mean more brai-.." Gil started to rant back at the words onyx translated but caught himself.

"WHATTTTT!!???" Su Gil and Remey all cued out in unison. They had just realized what walker had been shocked by before, not they could communicate with midnight.

" yup not only can onyx communicate with you but he can also tell us what midnight wants to say. I'm still struggling to believe it." Proud would be an understatement to how walker felt saying all this. The final barrier between them and their final party members had finally been broken.

Remey in her own energetic fashion did her best to crush midnight in the biggest bear hug she could manage. Midnight of course struggles to break free but they all knew it was only for show. Su was naturally more reserved giving midnight a pat on the head but showing more emotion than most on her face.

Kneeling down Gil looked right in to midnight's eyes, " I need more brains huh? I'll show you brains next time we train I'll show you who's boss." With a decisive snort midnight stood there trying to individuate Gil.

" sister says she'll crush you from the shadows, bring it on." Onyx chimes in with the translation, he was really getting in to this finding that it was only him who could take this task.

" onyx you really are becoming a great brother, I can already see how much happier everyone will be with your contribution to the party. You're already part of the family but now that you've grown, welcome to the omnipotent party. You're the sixth member!" As the others heard walker welcome onyx to the party their chatter increased. The overwhelming feelings of happiness radiating from them drawing attention.

" well you are all surely loud and in high spirits tonight, did you get another quest?" Laurence had seen them all grouped up wondering what the commotion was, knowing them it could be anything.

"Oh you know same old same old, onyx had a growth spurt and now he has telepathy to speak to us and translate for midnight." The nonchalant manner of walker's comment put Laurence at ease without fully realizing what walker had said.

" Ah I figured something like...wait" as he caught up on what walker had just said Laurence trailed off. " telepathy, you mean onyx can speak now! And he can translate for midnight!" Yet again the tamer was learning something new and wondrous from the party.

" yes it's nice to finally greet you. I am onyx, can you please summon Hyde for me, I'd like to show off my new growth." The soft voice in his head threw Laurence of just a bit but instead of freezing in shock all he could do was laugh. The fact that walker now had his own abyssal black serpent translator that doubles as an intimidating scarf was too much.

Retrieving his breath Laurence finally managed to reply, " yes yes sorry I just needed a minute, it's just too much you're all so amazing. Let me bring Hyde out. Does this mean you can translate for Hyde as well?" Bobbing his head up and down onyx showed his willingness to do so.

With a small flash of red Hyde had appeared in Laurence's hands. Rolling in to a spiky ball immediately seeing at everyone was gathered around. Onyx repositioned himself small hissing sounds trying to get Hyde to relax. Moments later Hyde had poked his head out, jumping up in happiness they could only imagine that Hyde was excited for his friends growth spurt. Soon the two grew silent and instead onyx had turned to Laurence, " Hyde says everyone hurts his ears so he curls up to cover them. He likes when you whisper to him."

Laurence wasn't entirely sure how he felt about this, this whole time he had believed Hyde to be afraid not sensitive to sound. " thank you very much onyx, I might just have a solution."

Chapter 153 - 153. Onyx Goes Hunting

Laurence pulled a small bandana from his pocket, digging around more He pulled more bits of cotton for fire starting as well. " I may not have the perfect pair but..." tying the bandana and cotton around Hyde's head a makeshift pair of earmuffs came to be, " hopefully this make things easier." Hyde bounced around visibly excited.

" Hyde says he loves them, they are perfect." The widest smile anyone had ever seen on Laurence graced their eyes.

The energy began to grow again as onyx started to translate full conversations between Hyde, midnight, and himself. They were all excited to hear answers to questions they'd always wondered. Midnights favorite food as toasted chicken but she would eat any meat. Hyde enjoyed sunny days near the mountains. Onyx couldn't stand it when it's rained because it made him cold too fast. The cracklings of fire was most relaxing to midnight. The questions could go on and on forever.

" Is that onyx?! He's so big, what happened? Did you over feed him? Did you use a time spell? Is this his real size and you've just been hiding it!" Ah and there was Elise full of energy as always. Stella was glued to her hip as the two ran up to the group.

" Stella how is your wing?" Onyx asked Stella immediately. Elise went silent, she'd just heard a voice but saw no mouth move. She thought she had finally lost her mind.

" brother Stella says he won't is still sore can you heal it again?" Having gotten his reply onyx asked walker to heal Stella again, her wing was still a bit swollen and had seemed in need of the next treatment.

Stepping behind Stella Elise watched with wide eyes. After Stella had been healed again she seemed visibly more relaxed. "Brother Stella says that's enough, she thinks after another treatment tomorrow she will be ready to fly again."

" that's great! I'm glad you're feeling better Stella. Thanks for translating onyx, a great job." Realization flooded Elise as she connected the dots. Onyx could not communicate with others through their minds and hold full conversations. It was a miracle skill not many tamed beasts could develop.

" y-you developed the ability of telepathy after growing. You've unlocked your system as an abyssal black serpent. Can you translate for me, I need to tell my sister something." Quickly being reminded about her fear that Stella held it against her when they collided and injured Stella's wing, Elise asked onyx for a favor.

Seeing his head bob up and down Elise focused herself on Stella. " I am so sorry for breaking your wing. I never meant to hurt you, but if you hate me I'll understand..." her voice shook at these words, if Stella hated her for it she would need to accept the greatest pain in her life this far.

Stella listens carefully and soon moved her Face in front of onyx. The two were still as stone until Stella seemed to become a bit happier and even brushed onyx in the head. Returning to stare back at Elise Stella awaited onyx to send her reply.

" Stella said, I have loved you since the day we first met. You're my family and I can't wait for you to show me your wings." The words were simple enough but the emotion in her eyes shown brighter than

any fire. The two embraced as more pent up stress left Elise. These past days had been extremely emotionally taxing in the two and now they could finally let it all go.

The night continued with much the same, onyx translated constantly and seemed to really enjoy his new central position in the party. Instead of just watching and learning he could now participate. No longer would he sit and watch while he hid, no he would hunt.

" brother please take me hunting tomorrow, I wish to catch up to you and sister. I know I lack the title but I will work harder." The resolve clear to walker there was nothing to argue.

" then it will be so, in the morning be ready I'm goi to partner you with midnight. She will sneak you close and you can do what you do best." Appeased by walkers plan the night continued in until everyone had headed home to rest. Naturally Riley wasn't eager to have onyx translate for him, his tamed beasts were wild and reasoning with them would be the same as talking to a wall. However he did congratulate onyx and midnight which surprised them all since he was of few words.

The morning seemed to rush at them since they had stayed up much too late conversing. One of the most surprising things walker had gleaned from the conversations was that midnight had made a bit of a rivalry with Remey. This seemed to be since they were the two most capable of front line combat. Remey may be more charging in and midnight more sneaking but front line combat indeed. This was a bit worrying but maybe a good motivator for the two to put more in to training.

While thinking on the day to come walker realized he was the first awake. Being so he stoked the fire and started some food. Once the light had began to pick up Remey followed however something weird happened.

Noticing Remey had woken up walker turned to greet her but instead of the usual good morning she fell to her knees laughing too hard to breath. "You-...hah..hah- your face-hahah" completely lost walker began to look at himself, his left hand seemed fine but as his eyes trailed to his right the black top of a tattoo showed on his palm. Following it the tattoo wrapped his arm all the way to his shoulder, he could only imagine where else it traveled until walker found the head on his chest. Onyx had gone in to tattoo form to sleep wrapping himself around walker giving him an incredibly amusing appearance.

Looking back at Remey who was still doubled over on the ground walker couldn't help but feel defeated. He wouldn't get angry at onyx for sleeping but it was still rough that he had chosen this particular position to sleep. He would definitely be having a few words with onyx on how rude it is to sleep on someone's face.

Everyone soon began to stir and as not to fully embarrass himself walker woke onyx as well. The serpent felt it was too early for a lecture but could understand why walker was a bit upset over it. Remey of course told everyone of what she saw first in the morning making walker the target of a few hoodlum jokes.

" so no that the bandit member has done the cooking are we planning on hunting the same way as yesterday?" Gil wanted to join the same group he had before because he had been their only long range attacker which gave him the practice at long range sniping.

" yes same way as yesterday brainless." Walker shot him a glare in revenge. " although onyx will be going with midnight. Midnight I want you to hide away in your shadow wrapping and sneak up on monsters. Once close enough let onyx use bind on them and jump in when needed. It will be your job as the older sister to help him along." Midnight stood tall growling with anticipation. Her and onyx would be an invincible team!

The second Otis arrived things went much like they had the day prior. Otis was leading midnight and onyx after some snow imps that had been moving too close to the walls. The sneaky monsters didn't know to stay away and would always try to ambush the returning foragers.

Quickly coming in on a group of three midnight headed walkers plan disappearing from sight. Onyx was coiled on her back ready to launch at any target when midnight was ready.

The sickening crunching of bones alerted the two imps who reacted in terror as Otis crushed their third.

This was a perfect distraction for midnight who had circled around behind the imps. Creeping one foot after the other she watched for any sign they may notice her, however one had already rushed off to fight Otis. The second was perfectly distracted trying to make ice needles to hit Otis from a distance. Midnight was not having that.

Giving onyx the signal she oozed forward giving him the perfect striking distance. Onyx flung himself from her back and began to wrap around the snow imp. The imp didn't even have a chance to claw at him or bite, its legs and arms bound to it and its useless the imp whined for freedom. Its struggle didn't give onyx much trouble as he slowly began to tighten. Seeing that onyx had things handled she stepped back slightly watching her younger brother work.

The sound of air being forced from the snow imps lungs gave way to shallow breaths. Its bones began to creek while its mind faded. The skin turned more and more blue until final large cracking sounds were heard. The system immediately notified him of his victory over the snow imp. Realizing the imp to see that it had taken a strange shape Otis approached holding his two defeated imps.

" congratulations on your first hunt onyx. Midnight did well getting you to a surprise attack." With that they were off after another prey.

Chapter 154 - 154. Last Day

The pair did not hunt down as many snow imps as Otis however after the fourth battle the two had become very efficient in their sneak attacks.

Onyx had fully grasped the power he had to bind and slowly crush monsters. He already understood that his main weakness would be time, the sooner he leveled up and discovered faster attack or support skills the better. So far he had refused to use his venom for fear that it would drain away too much mana. He also found it redundant in smaller monsters like the snow imps, if he was close enough to bite and didn't need to retreat he would rather just bind them.

Midnight proudly watched her younger brother defeat four imps in a row. She was only needed the third time since the imp had managed to keep an arm free, in anger midnight had torn the imps arm off before it could even try to scratch onyx. It was her job as a big sister after all.

Luckily Otis had brought a small sled with him to easily carry his quarry. Adding on midnight and onyx's was no problem at all, for Otis it was just more weight for training.

The others were having similar good luck, Su and her foraging group had found a new area plentiful in winter root vegetables. The sheer amount was so much that they planned to make three trips in the day. Once they returned with the first load the next group would be sent to the same location. Su was excited to be able to take some as her but knowing the vegetables would be much needed in their journey to the beast kingdom capital.

Remey had the honor of fighting ice wraiths today, she hated the things. Their ice body's would create a jarring crunching and scraping sound. Even after being defeated they'd start to put themselves back together to fight again. It was incredibly frustrating for her. Naturally she went berserk on all of the ones she encountered smashing the bodies to crushed ice. Her fellow warriors retrieved the water crystals

that had been created in the ice wraiths body as they went. The group wasn't upset to avoid battle for fear that Remey would punch them too.

Laurence and Hyde seemed the most changed over night. Hyde was completely different, his aim when firing quills was leaps and bounds better. Now that he wasn't covering his ears by curling up a ball he was able to see better to aim. This resulted in a high number of pin pricks and small burns on a group of snow imps who were easily crushed in their distraction. It was simple to say that Laurence was rather happy.

Walker had ended up tasked with a very different job than his hunting. Instead he was asked to shore up some defenses since too many snow imps were patrolling the area. Using his elemental manipulation he was the perfect person to incorporate earth in to the base of the walls for added stability. To many of the detesting warriors the one eared elder even left the square to drop off some light mana potions to keep walker on the job. This was fairly profitable for both the tribe and walker.

As he worked he was understanding the mix of elements in the earth, especially the combination of water and earth. The tribe was gaining more protection for the end of winter for a small investment. The end of winter was always the toughest because the monsters that had traveled south from the mountains now migrated back as fast as possible. In the next month the plains would become much more active for monsters. There would also be territory battles for the normal orcs and goblins that liked to roam the area. All in all it was a huge undertaking for the village every year but they loved it. The tribe had been doing so for many generations and had no intention of changing.

Riley was the odd man out, he had opted to go with a group of two who were I trusted to stay behind him at all times. The reasoning was clear, for when he released his demon boards they trampled the ground in front of him crushing ice wraiths and snow imps alike. The three demon boars had been kept up a bit more unable to run to burn energy. This was the ideal situation, space to run? Check. Enemies to crush? Check. What else could they need?

Hunting a bit longer than the day before reverting returned just a bit after noon. Their bounties much bigger than before which reminded the tribe of the warm weather to come in the next one or two months.

Midnight and onyx returned, onyx on midnight back. The two looked rather energetic still and seeing Otis with such a large haul it was evident that they had great success. Walker was low on mana having done all he could to his section of wall so when he saw everyone approaching he went to greet them.

" looks like you three took down every snow imp in the plains!" Midnight stood a bit taller while onyx bobbed his head aggressively. " I'm glad you enjoyed your first hunting trip, midnight did anything of note happen?" Midnight huffed lifting her head even taller.

" sister says your worry isn't needed, the blue things were too weak for us. I agree with her, my coils easily crushed them. I will need to fight more to level up and get better skills." Onyx was intent on this his emotions bubbling up within him. He refused to be the weakest in the party, he wanted to stand next to everyone not behind them.

Seeing that onyx was exceptionally motivated walker made a promise to himself that he would find more light crystals to help him out. "I'm sure Otis must have been impressed as well, what did you think of his first time out?" Years of training young warriors Otis Ha sling given up sugar coating his words.

" midnight's sneaking is better every time she uses it, it's the perfect skills for when the main attacker is distracting an enemy. Onyx takes advantage of that very well but his skills are slow to finish a fight, he needs a long range skill or a more powerful one. Together they work very well, onyx is able to speak in peoples minds which keeps things silent, if you're ambushing someone it's an ideal communication method." Walker had expected that the bind skill and the venom would be too slow, he was worried sending onyx out the first time without every party member but being with midnight another monster may be easier. Not to mention they were all family in the end of the day and if something threatened onyx midnight would do more than defeat it.

"Thank you for your input, hear that onyx? That means we get to hunt more and since we're leaving for the capitol tomorrow we should have plenty of monsters to practice on while we move!" Otis wasn't happy still to be reminded they were leaving, he had taken a strong liking to walker and the party since they brought so much value to the tribe. " oh by the way otis, since it's my last chance to show the trainees my skills I have something a bit rough to put them through. I'll need some help with it." While walker had worked he thought about the greatest values for adventures to have to survive. These may all not align with what the tribes warriors needed to have but some rang true no matter what.

Su, Remey and Elise had all headed to wash up, Su was much more dirt covered today than the other day but seeing the back of vegetables walker couldn't find any downside. So what if there was more dirt? She found us some great food for the journey. Midnight and onyx were still bonding as midnight ate one of the snow imps they had hunted. Surprisingly even onyx ate small pieces. None of them had expected him to want to consume anything but light mana however he had the ability to do so and after prodding from midnight he'd tried some of their prey.

Walker had made sure to use some healing spells on Stella who didn't really seem to need it but it was better safe than sorry. With the help of onyx Stella was able to confirm she felt no stiffness or soreness. In fact she said she felt better than she had before and even considered resting more often in the future. It would seem Stella learned a lot from her mandatory rest.

Walker had no idea where Gil, Riley, and Laurence had disappeared off too but after listening in on a few gossipers around their camp he had an idea. Apparently the three had beat him to their camp only to be snagged by a group of children dragging them to the slide. They may not be able to manipulate the earth in to new things to play on but they sure could join in races down the slide. Walker could only imagine Gil being talked in to a race over and over by telling him he would be too slow.

"so walker, what's your plan for this afternoons training?" Otis had walked in through the little entrance without walker even noticing. With a devilish smile walker replied.

Chapter 155 - 155. Run Run Run

"fear" the one word was all he wanted to place in the trainees. Otis had no idea where asker was going with this but he had grown to trust him and his process.

Otis walked along listening to the plan completely understanding it's goal. This was a hard lesson to teach but if the two worked together their strength could be enough.

Arriving at the training field the trainees seemed eager to start. They knew the elder hadn't planned on watching and critiquing their actions. Seeing them all talking, enjoying their time walker almost felt bad for the lesson he had planned. He placed his hand on the ground willing a large pillar to rise from the earth. Five smaller pillars rose around it surrounding the large one like guards. Otis and walker both came forward, walker leaning on the large pillar and Otis on a smaller pillar.

Walkers had attracted the attention of the trainee warriors who were now silent waiting for them to speak. "listen up, today is the last day walker will be joining us. Due to that we will be having a special training session. Your goal is to survive and destroy each pillar here. Our goal is to defend each pillar and destroy you. Do you understand? Your goal is to survive! Whatever means possible to survive you may take however if we crush every single one of you expect to be banned from sleeping within the walls for one week." The penalty had been Otis's idea, he had used it in the past for those who had refused to focus properly in training, however the penalty had only ever been a day not a whole week. "during this penalty you will not be allowed to bring food, or water with you. You will rely on your own two hands is that understood!" They had all gone pale now, Otis had put a large amount of force in to his words. He was often tough with his training but this was a whole other level.

" get ready! If you aren't ready to fight in five seconds I'll kill you faster!" Walker began to manipulate the snow on the ground in to medium sized ice arrows. Soon four footed around him. " five!" The arrows began to spin and Otis crouched. " four!" Some of the trainees began to fall in to position. " three!" Walker send an ice arrow toward one of the unprepared trainees. It sliced the rabbit girls cheek cause of a dribble of blood to fall.

Otis pounced forward next, his punch knocked another unprepared to the ground, their breath forced from them in a loud hiss. " Ha! Look at these weaklings! They thought a monster would count down the start of a battle." Otis laughed smiling wildly and he began to move in a pattern, the dance of the wild rabbit had started but the trainees knew it could build up in an instant.

Shaken from their shock the other trainees moved immediately. Falling in to a broken formation since they were missing two ally's already defeated their attacks started. They had gotten together after their last training to work on timing wanting to prove the elder and their teachers that could do it. This was their demonstration of that practice.

Two attackers began moving toward the smaller pillars while another started to yell at Otis. The remaining of walkers ice arrows flew at their feet trying to hit their legs, but the trainees dodged. Two solid metal balls few towards their target easily breaking one of the putter pillars. Seeing this walker showed anger in his face. " You pathetic wastes of space broke my creation!!!!" The two attackers running forward were blown away by a gust of wind from walker. They tumbled backwards but landed on their feet. The ranger attackers now decided attention one aiming for Otis the other for more pillars. " Otis crush their friends!" Hearing this the standing trainees didn't know who the target was. However Otis rand to the already wheezing trainee he had punched and lifted him with one hand. Spinning around he tossed the trainee head first at the ranged attackers. Not expecting the dirty tactic they were totally knocked to the ground. They were stunned by the sudden blow.

The girl who had gotten cut before had pulled daggers from her sheaths and tried cutting around to walkers back. Sensing this walker waited for her to get close. Once she was five steps behind him about to burst forward the earth canes in trapping her in a sinkhole. All that was above the ground was he head, her body trapped by the earth. Walker had stepped forward. " Otis leave the trash to me! Toss those others back in to the fright!" This was the signal for Otis to back off. He ran to those ranged attackers who had barely recovered to their feet and gave them a kick to the backside. Stumbling closer to the pillars walker ignored the two main attackers that had just come forward shattering another pillar. " you think any of you can beat me! I don't even need these damn pillars!" Walker had been building a mix of energy with his elemental manipulation. He had practiced this once before and hadn't risked using it again since the situation wasn't right. Not to mention the noise would attract more monsters if he had used it in the plains. However here it would be safe behind the walls, it was also for training.

Having heard the signal and seeing the amount of energy walker had gathered it was time for Otis to act his part. "no walker not that spell! You'll kill them! Stop!" Otis started to move forward faking a trip to the ground. The trainees seeing that Otis was fearful instantly lost their bearings. Never had they seen him with fear in his face, never had Otis once panicked and fallen. This was serious. They all felt the hairs in the bodies standing up as the energy built.

"I'll destroy you all!" Walker released the energy he had built. "BOOOOMMMMM!!!!" A massive explosion took place as a lightning bolt flew from walker's outstretched hand toward the large pillar. The sound defeated every single one of them. The large and small pillars were bombarded by his attack shattering and crumbling away. Debris flew everywhere and most of the trainees collapsed clutching their ears. Walker had used most of his mana but wasn't done he forced the earth he'd just destroyed to rise up, the sharp shards ready to fly around shredding the trainees. Those that saw this immediately ran, they turned and sprinted away. Some grabbed the nearest ally who hadn't started to move and drag them away.

Walker watched, Otis stood and smiled. The shards of stone dropped. Otis and walker met in the middle laughing with each other while they clapped each other on the back. Walker released the girl stuck in the ground. The trainees that he started to sprint away slowly stopped, completely stunned. Why were the two demons laughing and patting each other's backs!?

"I'll destroy you all!!!! Ahaha" Otis was cracking up recounting walker's words. "did you take that directly from a children's story book?" A tear fell from his eye as he laughed even harder.

"woah there, haha you're students fell for it hook line and sinkers. Did you even teach them what a bluff looks like." The two started all over again laughing until they wheezed. They slowed themselves forcing their laughs down and the air back in their lungs.

Once walker was able to stand upright properly he took out a mana potion he had received from the elder earlier. Drinking it his mana was almost back to full. He headed to the injured trainees quickly casting light heal in all of them. The girl who had just barely crawled from the hole she had been trapped in flinched as he healed her cheek. He scratched his head as she touched her face lost as to what to do. Walker used his remaining mana to create a large circular bench.

Sitting themselves down walker and Otis waited patiently. Well walker waited patiently Otis seemed more energetic. "get your butts over here now! Sit down and listen to your score!" The trainees slowly

inched closer and closer, some couldn't sit and were too tense. They still weren't sure what was going on.

"oh come on I'm not going to bite, that was part of the test, I even healed some of you. You all know if Otis wanted to really crush you that first punch wouldn't have just knocked you out of breath. Also my arrows wouldn't have grazed you or missed your feet." Walker knew he and Otis would definitely give them a shock but he knew this was a solid way.

"well if that's how close you all are going to get then fine don't sit. Those of you who ran when you realized you couldn't win pass. Those who continued to attack failed." Otis lost patience again blurting it out. "Ah and if you were trapped or I unable to move we will allow you to pass as well."

Chapter 156 - 156. Feast

"So pretty much as Otis said everyone passed. We wanted you to learn to run away. But since you've never faced someone trying to actually kill you we decided to try out our acting skills." Hearing that they wouldn't be kicked out in to the plains for a week helped them relax. More so knowing that they weren't actually going to be mortally wounded some were able to sit down to join them.

"Now running away from an extremely dangerous opponent is not shameful. How else would the village know ranger was outside out door?" Otis made a good point, the logic was sound.

"Furthermore I saw some of you try and get the others moving, rescuing and getting your allies to safety is also a good reason to run. Living and surviving lets you learn. Once you learn you become stronger, sooner than later you'll beat the opponent that tried for your life." Walker had wished he could have run from the jade locust once upon a time. Yet seeing where he'd made it having not run and instead stayed to hold it off. Maybe it was the right situation but others wouldn't be so lucky, knowing when to retreat was a valuable skill to have.

"Someone tell me what you all should have done when we ambushed you?" Otis was looking for those who hadn't prepared themselves instantly but instead lagged behind. If they didn't know what they needed to change he would be whipping them in to shape the hard way.

The girl who had been grazed by walkers ice arrow was the first to raise a hand. She was still standing farther back than anyone else but had found the courage to answer after feeling the piercing gaze of Otis. "we should always be ready and not expect a warning. Your ambush was successful because we weren't serious yet. Instead of falling in to disarray, we should have moved in to a defensive formation to intercept." She had already thought through what their actions should have been. She seemed fairly

unsteady after the encounter with the ice arrow and being trapped in the earth for a bit but her mind was still sharp. In a few more years she would definitely be a group leader.

" Exactly, when would an enemy ever give you a warning they were going to attack? Not to mention what would happen if you were out on a foraging mission and found yourself surrounded by snow imps? That's exactly the dangers you may face outside these walls." Walker wanted to drive home the idea of being as prepared as possible. "Next, who can tell me why it was wrong to just leave your ally hurt on the ground near Otis?"

This was a much easier question to answer and the trainee that was thrown raised his hand. "If they had managed to get me behind them safely I wouldn't have been open to an attack. A monster would have killed me not just thrown me like a weapon." His voice was dejected but his words were two.

" That's exactly right I wouldn't have thrown you, if I was like that greater ice imp the other day I would have crushed you with my club and moved on to the next insect. Covering for each other's weak moments is a never ending issue. You will never have a team of warriors working together flawlessly, eventually, someone will be hurt and it's better to save a warriors than lose them." Even Otis had been the one protected before, it may have been some years since the last time but he remembered every second of the experiences. They were driving factors in his personal training.

"Analyzing your opponents' strength is a tough skill to learn, but if even one person in a group can do it the chance of survival multiplied." Wrapping up their goals walker decided it was time for the warriors to work on their own to share their ideas of this experience.

Otis and walker gave them space to do just that, " so do you think my plan was good enough to leave an impression?" Walker had been worried he over stepped by making such a dramatic performance.

Otis thought a moment scratching his head, " you definitely scared them for sure. You seem way too polite and nice, the personality flip was enough. Then you went and threw some lightning which was crazy itself. Lightning in the plains is dangerous alone, always strikes the tallest thing so using it was definitely something to cause them fear. I'll have to go over environmental safety again." Chatting idly as they walked the two soon reached the little camp where everyone else seemed to have gathered after cleaning up. " since you are all leaving tomorrow we'll be having some extra food tonight, make sure to come and eat your fill." Saying their temporary farewells walker went inside.

" So did you have to be as loud as possible? We all know that thunder was you." Remey was not the happiest camper being awakened from a nap after cleaning up.

"I couldn't help it I was helping teach with Otis." Not liking the excuse walker was forced to dodge Remey's punches. Although missing just made her punch more.

" Hey Su check it out, walker and Remey are putting on a play!" Sitting on his but snacking with Riley Gil was watching the two fooling around, however, his words bit him quick as Remey sent her next punch to his arm. " ahh!! That's my good arm what if I can't draw my bow?" Feigning a broken arm Gils' acting hadn't improved.

" Leader I'm sure your use of noise was necessary but next time you need to warn others. A fair amount of shock went through the village." The sweet voice of reason was reprimanding Walker.

"I'm sorry Su, I'll apologize to the elders when we get to the square. Otis said there's going to be some extra food tonight." Overhearing them midnight was already in her feet. Riley had even spared a glance up from his own snacking.

Taking his time to clean up himself walker was soon ready to head to dinner with the tribe in the square.

Coming in to the light of the bonfire they noticed the multitude of food and drinks. More tables had been pressed together to hold large plates of roasted meats. Towering fire roasted vegetables from their foraging were always within reach. The bonfire was constantly stoked higher and higher keeping everyone warm and bright. This was a massive feast!

Approaching the elders, Walker was more nervous knowing the one eared elder could put him through the wringer in training. " ehm excuse me elders, I've come to apologize for my noise earlier. I hadn't thought to warn you of my training proposal with Otis."

Lifting a mug the one ear elder replied quickly, " no need to worry, Otis is currently working that off as we speak. He should take full responsibility for bringing in an assistant." The evil grin was directed at the bonfire where Otis was constantly moving logs. He had been set up to stoke the fire all night. Throwing an apologetic smile at Otis, Otis only waved his hand not minding. He had supported the idea after all.

" In any case, thank you for the hospitality. Unfortunately, we plan to be back on our travels early in the morning." The slight tug at his heart over not wanting to leave was not avoidable. The tribe had been

very welcoming, the time spent lively. However even if they stayed as soon as the snow melted the tribe would be back on the move, it was inevitable.

" we've been glad to have you and your party. Seeing the next generations promise is always pleasant for us elders. If you happen to meet that stubborn lion in the capitol tell him Ribald send his regards. Now off you go, get a real meal in before you head out in the snow tomorrow." The elders all began to shoo him away wanting to return to their own meals.

Jumping in to the festivities Walker was dragged table to table. Understandably the trainees he happened to see avoided him for the most part. This must be how Otis feels all the time. This thought was fairly constant through the night.

Midnight was busy making sure Onyx tried some of everything she liked. The two bindings only lead to heighten Walker's mood. Gil seemed to really hit it off with his hunting group, they had claimed a little table and playing a card game shouting every so often.

Elise and Stella had found the desserts quickly recruiting Su and Remey in an attempt to clear the table. It was no surprise to see Riley right there too trying to claim some of everything before the girls got to it. Laurence was bringing Hyde around to say farewell to those he had met prior and was again offering ways with. Seeing Hyde being more open with his makeshift earmuffs was uplifting. This was a pretty amazing send off from their new friends.

Chapter 157 - 157. On The Road Again

The morning, as always, crashed in to their lives. Rubbing the sleep from their eyes everyone began to pack up. Walker storing what he needed so they could move faster. The night had gone late until the bonfire became just embers. Almost every tribe member had made time to visit the party to say farewell. Some of the parents had nearly forced Walker food not wanting him to be unprepared for his trip. He had definitely made a lasting impact on them by making that slide.

" everyone looking geared up and ready to be on the move?" The party was back in to their winter gear warm as could be. Onyx had wrapped himself in Walker's shoulders underneath his cloak. The tamers were bundled up, Stella had been put safely in to Elise's beast ring due to the strong winds buffering the plains.

Using elemental manipulation Walker willed the walls he had created to fall back in to the earth. The spot they had called home for a few days had returned to the open area in a line of igloos. The sun had just started to break the horizon sending the village in to a glittering jewel.

Not many of the rabbit tribe were up and loving other than the normal hunters and foragers who were already out or on their way out. Reaching the exit to the snow walls the silhouette of a buff rabbit Demi human was clear.

Otis was standing tall a rolled up paper in his hands stone faced as always. He wanted to be the last to see his new and old friends off. "Sleeping in before you're adventures continue I see, and here I was up early trying to put together this report for you." Shaking his head at Laurence he passed over the paper.

" you saw your tribe dragging us all here and there last night, there was no way we could rival your early to rise motto." Laurence gave Otis a pat on the shoulder. " thank you for this, it will definitely help our next goal. It was good to see you again, don't get any bulkier by the time I visit again." The two laughing as they said their goodbyes spurred the desire to get in the move.

" Otis it was a pleasure to meet you, I hope that my party and I can come again one day. I'm sure we will be seeing much of the world." Saying his own goodbye the others echoed walkers words.

" I'm sure we'll see each other again, don't worry I'll make sure my trainee warriors are up to snuff for when you visit. Maybe they'll get some revenge." With his own bump to walkers shoulder Otis headed back inside the village. Now all that my before them were glittering plains.

Whipping wind was bringing in darker clouds far off in the distance. Falling in to formation the party was making their way forward yet again. " so Laurence should I assume the paper Otis put together for you were important?" Everyone had been wondering this but had yet to take the chance to ask.

"Ah yes I asked if he could send some warriors to scout the territory the cursed crow is nesting in. Apparently it's shifted slightly which is good for us since it's closer. Although it's also become more aggressive so we will need to be much more careful." It was good to find their distance shortened, but hearing their target was more aggressive was worrisome. "Even more good news it would seem other monsters have more or less chased from the area around the nest. We will only need to focus on keeping the mother cursed crow occupied." This was another piece of news that could really enhance their chances of success. Elise seemed to gain more energy from this picking up her pace, unable to argue against her enthusiasm everyone else followed her lead.

The ever increasing wind made moving forward much tougher but if they were to get to the edge of the cursed crows territory they couldn't stop. It seemed even the monsters were finding refuge from the wind refusing to get out hunting today.

"Let's all tighten together, if the wind picks up more the snow will get blown around. We can't have anyone getting separated in the poor conditions." The group pulled together all within at least an arms length.

"Stupid wind...grrr cold...mmrrrg" gils grumbling was now easy to hear for everyone. It was easy to see how was not a fan of the current weather. A sharp kick to his leg and Remey had shut him up for the time being.

The conditions soon worsened as a fine snow began to fall. Whipped up by the wind the snow became blinding. " hey everyone let's stope for a moment!"

Walker wasn't sure what to do and decided it best to confer with the group. This was becoming more dangerous by the minute.

"Leader I think we should stop and wait out the storm." Su was right it was the best move to make given the danger.

"No! We're finally getting close what if the eggs hatch before we get there? There will be no point if I miss it." Elise had been more than patient due to Stella's healing wing. Now that they were in the move all the pent up determination was forefront in her mind.

Thinking seriously about how they should proceed it was Laurence who had a compromise "what if we linked arms and kept moving? We would stay together safely and could keep moving forward. It would be slower but still progress."

" I agree we would be able to remain together without being lost. We also won't need to worry they will hatch without you Elise." Walker made the executive decision to move forward with Laurence's idea.

Everyone linked arms creating a strange human chain. Taking steps in unison they moved forward again. The wind pushing back against them constantly. Snow slapping them in the face at every step. The party

was constantly thanking Lisa in their heads because their winter gear was doing an amazing job. She would be drowning in praise when they returned home.

Gil stopped suddenly his head cocked to the side listening. " I think I just heard someone crying?" Hearing this Su wanted to immediately investigate.

"Leader what if someone is lost out here? We could be the only others to pass by during the storm." Knowing Su only had good intentions walker almost agreed instantly but he was wary of someone else being out in the storm as well as them.

" who's over there!" Laurence yelled out trying to get somethings attention. In a hushed voice " I just saw something move to our right." The sounds of a woman crying reaches the others ears as well this time.

Everyone was frozen in their steps, the crying didn't feel normal but they did want to know where it was coming from. An outline of someone crouched in the ground seemed to come in to view before a gust of wind blew up more snow to blind them.

" did you see it! There was a person collapsed in the snow! It must've them crying." Su tried to pull away front he group but Remey and walker had steeled them grips. " come on we need to help them!"

" there's more movement behind us!" Laurence had started to gaze around seeing that more than just one figure was hidden by the snow.

" I think there's more than one person crying now..." gils voice tempted slightly, this situation was putting him on edge.

Su was still pulling slightly on walker and Remey but they weren't letting her go. " Su stop, something not right! Why would three different woman be out in this storm?" The question was enough to make everyone think. Su had acted in instinct to try and help which wasn't a bad thing but in this case it could be.

More figures seemed to be moving around their right side the crying increasing in volume. Small glimpses of women on the ground seemingly injured would appear when the wind stopped for a moment but quickly disappear. Chills rose in their bodies as realization began to creep up.

Remey was the first to breath their silence, " walker of I remember right you told us about a monster called a snow woman? She would lure people to a trap and feed off their mana to survive...I think we may be near something dangerous."

This was one of the monsters known to roam the plains in the winter, they couldn't attack in any harmful way but could cause illusions. They would utilize storms to lure in adventurers to dangerous places. The edge thees would become trapped or perish leaving behind mana for the snow woman to feed on.

The crying had turned in to loud wailing, even knowing the danger they all wanted to rush towards the sound to save those in danger. Their emotions were screaming at them to act and not be heartless. Tightening both his arms walker prepared to get the group moving, they needed to escape!

Chapter 158 - 158. Illusions

" we need to head left! If we get to close to the right side we may get stuck." Pulling on Su's arm Remey pushed. Su still wanted to go check to be sure but couldn't disobey walker, she held too much respect for her party to ignore the danger.

The wailing grew even louder in their ears with every step away they took. " don't look back to your right!" Gil had been surveying the area to make sure nothing had come to near and begun to see other things in the distance. A women with a broken leg hobbling along hands outstretched for help begged him to stop. The wind would blow replacing her with a woman collapsed on the ground holding an infant who's skin was turning blue.

"Heeeellppp ahhhhhg" calls for help came from the blinding snow behind them. Gil pushed from the end of the chain to move faster. His eyes never leaving the area behind them.

" mmyyy babbby"

"My ankle is broken my ankle"

" I'm trapped in the ice help me"

" monsters monseters help please help"

" ahhhgg hheaaaa"

" someone save me ahhhh save me"

The sounds became tormenting them, Su realized beyond a doubt no one but them were in danger. The more they moved away from their previous position the more the shouts for help and wailing came. The snow became fierce in front of them almost trying to drag them back towards the sounds. Gil was watching more of the harmed women behind him but their faces were pale and expressionless as they cried out. The injuries became less and less to the point they were just standing still wailing.

" ignore the sounds and push through!" Shouting encouragement walker pushed against the wind. No longer was Su putting up a fight trying to pull away towards the voices but she pushed with him away from the sounds. Linked arms everyone stepped forward combatting the incessant wind.

" push!" Laurence and Gil toward the back gave the last spurt trying to get fast tiger from the emotionless figures behind them.

"Ahh"

"Oof"

"Fwpfff"

With a myriad of sounds and some thuds everyone landed in a pile on the ground. The wind was soft. The sun shone through some clouds warming them up.

"Get your butt off me Gil or I swear I'll beat you senseless!!!" Remey pushed Gill off her while midnight snuck under Su to push her up as well.

" what the heck just happened? Where's all the wind and snow?" Elise was looking around completely confused on where they were and what was going on.

" take a look behind us" staring off the direction they had come walker had spotted rushing water. They had gotten all too near the rushing river that cut through the plains. Ice floated down crushing in to the banks. Three flickering ghost like women floated around the edges before completely vanishing.

" we almost went for a not so warm swim." The deep frown on Laurence's face spoke volumes to how dangerous their potion he'd been. " it was only a small storm and a soft breeze but those three fooled us good. We were basically blinded by their illusions." Shaking his head Laurence helped Riley stand up.

" leader I'm sorry...I almost doomed us all to an early grave." Su had seen the snow women vanish. The icy cold waters rushing along sent shivers through her very core. If she had rushed off she could have died and brought everyone with her.

" no su you aren't wrong to want to help those in need. That's why you're part of the party, your heart is pure. Walker won't hold that against you." Remey comforted her knowing Su would beat herself up constantly about it.

" Remey is right, if I didn't know something was off I would have rushed in to help too. I'm just thankful we did our research before venturing out." This was their first encounter with illusions and it had almost ended them. They would need preventative measure in the future.

" Laurence do you have any idea how close we are now? After that I think we may be better off resting." Looking at Gil's face walker knew he most of all needed some time to relax. Gil had been the last person in their chain and kept watch if their backs the entire time, meaning Gil had seen the illusions first hand.

Laurence withdrew a map from his cloak and surveyed the area. Using his finger and thumb to draw lines while looking at the horizon his face showed surprise. " seeing that we got this close to the river if we travel a bit more east we should be right in the edge. Judging from the speed of the river we are just west of the rapids. We can make camp here and head to the nest here in the morning." Gesturing to a space a short distance away walker nodded. Quickly traversing the light winds and partly cloudy sky they easily reached their desired camping spot. The sun was nearing setting so lighting a fire became priority.

" Gil take a break for a while, we'll set things up and get the fire started, you need the rest." Seeing that Gil hadn't spoken since they got away from the snow women's illusions walker knew he was shaken. Gil smiled softly and set up his bed roll to take a nap. Hopefully some sleep would get their emotionless faces out of his head.

The camp came together quickly and within the hour a roaring fire was warming them. Onyx had freed himself from underneath walkers cloak only to coil up on top of midnight who was already dozing by the fire. The two seemed one of a kind now that onyx had gone hunting with his sister. Remey and Su had giggled with Elise on how cute they were promoting some embarrassed words from onyx who refused to be cute but instead fierce like midnight. Sadly that made him even cuter in the girls eyes.

Sharing the night watch everyone was able to sleep uninterrupted. Monsters seemed to be avoiding the cursed crows territory just as Otis had gathered. Walker had taken gils shift to let him rest more, he deserved it after being subject to the most illusions.

Watching the sun rise onyx had made his way to trap around walkers shoulders. " you know you need to take advantage of your favorite spot before you get bigger."

Letting out a frustrate hiss was onyx's only reply. He would find a way to shrink if he could, how could he ever loose his sitting spot and have to slither around himself. On the other side of things if he did get bigger he could participate more in battles. It was all worth pondering. Taking in the new sunlight walker got up from his watch and stoke up the fire, today would be an interesting day so they might as well start it off with a good breakfast.

Going all out walker pulled some meats and vegetables Su had procured from the tribe. Setting up the vegetable to roast and the meat to warm the smells began taunting everyone still sound asleep. The first to show signs of movement was midnight and Riley. It was almost a perfect tie as to which stood first, however Riley had managed to beat the ever hungry dragon by a second.

Going around nudging everyone else awake walker went to Gil last. " hey archer guy get your butt awake we've got some food to eat." Not the best wake up call but this wasn't a fancy inn.

" ummmnggg not now, those stupid headless snow women kept me tossing around all night. Let me sleep." Walker had expected Gil to have a few nightmares, gils pale face after seeing some of their illusions was a dead giveaway.

" well do what you want but if midnight or Riley gets to your dried jerky don't complain to me." The thought of losing his food was more than enough to get him up. Walker may have felt bad for him but not enough to protect his food.

Now that everyone was up it was time to start the planning for their main goal in coming here. " Elise is there any way you want to go about distracting and grabbing the cursed crow egg?" This was Elise's request so letting her take the lead was only fair.

Putting in her most serious expression Elise told them her plan " we stop the mother from getting to the nest. Someone sneaks in and grabs an egg. We retreat far far away, to the tamers guild headquarters." Laurence reached out flicking Elise in the head.

" we have days of travel, and weeks before that to plan this out and that's all you have for us?" Laurence wasn't even surprised by this but it was still annoying.

" well ya know I have the general idea laid out now we just have to try it." And another delicious to the head. " ggrrr fine anyone else have a plan?" Pouring she used her best puppy dog eyes in walker in hopes he would take over.

Seeing this walker brought his hand to his chin completing a thinking pose, " hmmm...hmmmmmmmm...hmmmmMMMMM....." Elise leaned forward every Hmm wanting to hear it. " yup! I've got a plan." He said it just loud enough to get Elise to jump a bit. After a slight chuckle it was time to get to it.

Chapter 159 - 159. Lure

" here's what I think we should do; split up in to two groups. The stealers will be Gil, myself, and midnight we three have the best ability to sneak. The distraction will be Su, onyx, Remey , and Elise. Elise you and Stella can lure it from the sky, Su will taunt it and once it's close onyx will use his bind skill to trap it. Remey you're going to protect onyx so the cursed crow doesn't flail it's talons and hurt him, just be ready to help hold it. Riley and Laurence you'll be back up, who knows what other monsters could be around trying to hunt for the eggs or go after the cursed crow when it's incapacitated. Not to mention your tamed beasts may be a bit of a poor matchup for this situation." Laurence knew that having Hyde send his fiery quills at the crow could harm it too much and letting Riley's board rampage would hinder all of them so he didn't argue at all, this is why they needed help.

It was a simple enough plan to follow the only trick would be getting to the nest without alerting the mother before she was temporarily trapped. " Laurence do you have the specific location of the nest?" Laurence pulled out a small map of the area. The nest was in a small rocky clearing surrounded by high grass. The territory was clearly marked in a rough circle. " if we can attract the cursed crow to the edge of its territory here it should be far enough for it to get back to the nest fast enough. Elise you or Stella can fly up in the air to draw it out of the shadows and attack, just be ready for a sneak attack. Su keep an eye on them so you can taunt it at any moment. Onyx you know what to do, you'll have to settle for Su's shoulders for now."

Onyx uncoiled himself and slithered over to Su who lowered her arm to allow him up. " thank you cousin Su, I look forward to our debenture."

" cousin? Well I guess if midnight and walker are you siblings then I can be your cousin. Welcome to the team cousin onyx." At her worlds onus could himself a bit more on Su's shoulders and raised his head just like midnight would to show off her scales. He was already picking up some of midnights traits, next he would be rushing for kitchen scraps from hilda.

" alright one last warning, keep an eye on the shadows, if the crow manages to ambush you things will be rough. It's skill to stop your movement upon it causing you injury will be our main concern. If you aren't confident in your dodge then do your best to block." With the final warning said they split up, Su's team headed in a roundabout path to the farthest reach of the estimated territory. Walkers team started to head the opposite, he would await Su or Remey to utilize their system and notify him they had trapped hl cursed crow.

Laurence and Riley slowly trailed behind Su's party, Riley was more than happy to be left out so he could relax more. However Laurence felt useless even though to was logical he couldn't help. Deciding it was best to keep his eyes open to be ready as backup than dwell on it he took a deep breath and did just that.

Su was leading her group following the territory line established by the warriors from the rabbit tribe. The stretch of plains claimed by the cursed crow had grass that stood tall even through the snow. Building a nest in the area was most certainly a wise move. Finding it must have been like finding a needle in a haystack.

Elise had brought out Stella from her beast ring, she had taken flight immediately after being told their plan. Stella may have been excited to be out in the open sky again but she focused herself knowing how important this quest was to Elise. Stella would have to be the only one in the air, Elise only had a previous few moments before her soaring integration skill would run her mana dry.

Approaching their destination to start the plan Su had noticed even the average animals like squirrels and range rabbits avoided getting close to the taller grasses. Since even the average animals knew to stay away the crow must be very adamant about finding threats to its nest, hopefully it showed itself easily.

Forming up Su took the front with onyx coiled up to jump at an time. Remey and Elise were both evenly behind her. Stella kelts herself above them awaiting a signal to move forward to lure out the crow, she would need to remain lower to the ground in case it caught her with an attack. If it did manage to land one she would be paralyzed by shadows for a time causing her to fall from the sky.

Sending a message with the system to walker that they were ready she awaited her leaders response.

...

Walker had let Gil take the lead, he had the lightest foot steps and could naturally discern which spot was the safest to place his foot. The tall grass was apt at hiding icy spots that could alert any monster in the area, small holes and puddles were common due to the roots in the ground. Using silent gestures to help those following him he couldn't stop thinking how useful it would be if onyx was there to use his telepathy for this.

They hand not fully begun to encroach in to the territory but instead position themselves in the fastest path to the nest. If they went in too soon and drew the attention of the crow the other team would not be able to get in and out with the egg fast enough.

Crouching down to remain hidden the group awaited Su's notice that they had proceeded and lured the crow.

Feeling the tap on his shoulder walker signaled that Su's team had started to bait the crow.

....

Stella had started to fly in to the territory staying low. She glided side to side avoiding any shadowy patches where she could easily be ambushed. A soft breeze rustled the grass around the ice and snow. It

was too quiet. Su and Remey had a sharp eye on Stella following slightly behind. Elise's nerves were threatening to boil over.

Su raised her hand and lowered her stance, Stella had just turned sharply to the left. A shadowy V shape seemed to shoot from grass patch to grass patch. Stella was spinning in the air avoiding shadows on the ground, the slight breeze causing them to move slightly making things harder. Stella locked on to the shadows movements and began to slowly pull back towards the others.

Stella on her way Su had Elise and Remey step back, they still hadn't laid eyes in the cursed crow which was staying in the shadows. " avoid shadow patches, I'll taunt it the second I see it leave the shadows." Stella was approaching faster now still moving in a zig zag pattern to avoid betting close to shadows. The V shaped shadow still following. She was soon over top of Su, the second the two met eyes Stella took a sharp upward turn. As she rose higher she hoped the crow would show itself.

Not easily tricked the cursed crow noticed the others in the ground and began drastically shooting from shadow to shadow. The V shape darted past them not showing itself yet. It's speed was too much making every single one of them loose sight.

Only the soft wind made a sound. Glancing here and there trying to catch a movement Su turned about. " Su!" Remey pushed Su from behind.

"CAAWWWWWW" a defiant cursed crow had burst from Su's shadow narrowly missing Su but grazing Remeys ear lobe. The tiny scratch wasn't even enough to be felt but for the crows skill it worked. Black shadow chains sprang up anchoring Remeys limbs to her side.

"Ggrrrraaa" Remey struggles against the shadow chains trying to break free. They refused to break and instead became tighter. Su straitened her self seeing Remey trapped, she wanted to rush forward but holding itself above Remey was the cursed crow.

It's black feathers shined slightly almost dripping shadows. Small wisps of black smoke fell with each flap. It's red eyes were trained on Su waiting for any sign of movement. Beak and talons were sharp as a razor. It was almost taunting her, knowing it was out of her reach.

Inching her feet slowly Su nagar to fall in to a defensive stance. The crows gaze never faltered. Moments felt like hours with each small movement until she was ready to shout her taunt. Su took in a deep

breath about to shout, that movement was enough to push the crow to love itself. It's darted down towards Su it's talons spread to scratch her face.

Chapter 160 - 160. Holding Shadows

The cursed crow darted down towards Su, it's talons outstretched trying to scratch her exposed face. The speed it had was much faster than Su could dodge or block, her heart skipped. Her eyes closed as she expected the feelings of shadow chains pulling her down but instead a strong gust of wind blew past her. "Great shot Stella! Keep those softer wind blades coming to keep it off balance!" Elise was cheering on Stella who had descended down behind the crow while it focused on Su.

The cursed crow was pushed off target and forced to take a large arc around su. Recovered from her instability Su faced the cursed crow now standing in front of Remey acting as her shield. "get over here you good for nothing chicken!" The cursed crow may not have understood her words but the effect still took root. This was a challenge to its territory; it must defeat this enemy!

The crow's attack directed at Su, it sped towards her again, talons ready to strike. This time Su was completely prepared with her shield already in motion. Screeching metal filled her ears as the crow's talons scraped along, its momentum nearly stopped barely holding itself in the air. Flapping its wings had the cursed crow doubled its efforts attempting to break through her shield. Trusting her gear Su prepared for her counter attack.

Waiting until the cursed crow came at her again Su pushed forward into its attack. Taking the crow by surprise she reached it with a shield bash. She held back as not to harm the crow but the effects were perfect. Falling toward the ground the crow was stunned, "onyx now!" Signalling Onyx to move he sprung off her shoulders. Faster than expected he reached the crow spinning himself around it. The crow couldn't even take time to struggle as its own wings were forced close to its body. Onyx made sure not to continue to crush it but instead maintain a steady pressure.

Wiggling side to side the crust crow was red to stab at onyx with its beak but found Elise had closed its beach shut. Realizing its talons were its only choice it tried to move them but Su had already grasped them tightly. All three of them were pinning it down without fail. It was comical to see the three of them taking such effort to hold the bird but Remey didn't laugh at all.

Luckily Su could still utilize the party chat option in the system, thanking the world for giving him leadership skills she sent him a message.

Rustling sounds came from the grass around them, a group of small long rodent-like creatures sprinted past them. High pitched whines coming from their mouths as they ran toward the nest. They had been waiting.

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Seeing Su's message through their system walker gave the signal that they didn't have to sneak anymore. Since Su had told them her group was entering the territory walker's group had begun to slowly creep toward the nest.

" Alright that was Su's message, We are good to move along. The faster we grab an egg and retreat the sooner the crow can be released." With a nod Gil stood tall and began moving quickly, midnight following up the rear.

Their increased pace quickly brought them to the nest. The open area had been cleared of snow which was pushed up into a bowl shape. The tall grass was noticeably cut down most likely by the cursed crows beak. The nest itself was made of the grass and some smaller twigs blown into the area most likely. Feathers and small animal bones were around the nest itself, obvious meals it had caught while protecting its territory.

Nestled in the middle of the nest partially covered by dried cut grass laid twenty two pale white eggs. Streaks of black trailed down the sides along with a slight shadowy aura.

"Does it matter which one I take? Should I grab more than one?" Gil was standing over the nest unsure of which was most important.

Walker wanted to get this done quick, he was worried the cursed crow would become too stressed by being bound for too long. "I'm not sure, I can try using my all around appraisal and hope that I get something interesting but they all might just be the same."

' cursed crow egg

The four week old egg of a cursed crow. It's nearing the hatching phase of its lifespan. Weak affinity to dark element.

cursed crow egg

The four week old egg of a cursed crow. It's nearing the hatching phase of its lifespan. Weak affinity to dark element.

cursed crow egg

The four week old egg of a cursed crow. It's nearing the hatching phase of its lifespan. Weak affinity to dark element.'

Walker read through the notifications as fast as he could looking for anything different. Only two stood out,

' large cursed crow egg

The four week old egg of a cursed crow. It's mother consumed large amounts of nutrition while it developed leading to its larger size. Nearing the hatching phase it will most likely be born stronger than its siblings. Very weak affinity for any elements.

Small cursed crow egg

The four week old egg of a cursed crow. It's sibling consumed most of the nutrition it was meant to have causing it to lack in size. Nearing the Hatching phase of its lifespan. Extremely high affinity for darkness element. Weak affinity for wind element.'

Seeing that one would be born stronger it was obvious that one would be able to fight off its siblings and survive in the wild. However Elise had said she was after the cursed crows ability to incapacitate targets for a long time. Knowing the cursed crow used darkness to do so, Walker thought it better to choose the small egg. Not to mention it had a second affinity for the wind element, this would definitely show in its flying speed.

"grab the smaller egg, It looks the most promising." Gil gave Walker a funny look but started to bend down toward the egg nonetheless.

His fingers about to grasp the egg, a chorus of whines and chittering alerted them. The grass rustled as something moved within. Standing tall everyone had become tense and fell into ready positions. Midnight let out a soft growl, she was unsure what enemy was approaching but she planned to take it down.

In an instant six slender rodents flew from the tall grass aiming for the nest. These rodents were long grey haired pests. Gil recognized them from his childhood. Field rats. They would group you to steal grain, vegetables, small game, and even smoking meat if left unattended. They were a plague anywhere for anyone.

"Stop the field rats! They're after the eggs!" Gil screamed out the warning knowing that they would each take an egg and run. They must have been waiting for a moment when the mother crow was first racers to come in.

Using quick shot Gil was able to fire an arrow piercing one of the field rats heading toward the nest. The other five had been too fast each snapping up an egg in their mouth and rushing off. Walker had seen the small egg grabbed by one and immediately chased after it.

"Midnight get in front of that one! It has the egg we are after!" Walker was sprinting through the grass after the field rats with the small cursed crow egg in its mouth. Midnight sped forward trying to get ahead of it and cut it off. If walker could manage it he sure as steel would get Elise the best cursed crow egg he could.

Clenching his fists walker tried to gain momentum, if he could only get closer then he could manipulate the elements to trap it. However the field rat made up for what it lacked in attack and defensive power with speed. It was pushing faster and faster, extending the distance between walker and midnight.

The two pushed as hard as they could to catch the fueled rat but were only rewarded with more space. Gil had caught up to Walker and was trying to catch up but even he was outpaced by the field rats. These pests had always caused him frustration in life and he refused to give up until they were dead.

He had the advantage of firing arrows in front of it to direct it side to side. Using his quick shot skill he was able to push the field rat to the left but it still was yet to slow. Trying one more Gil landed an arrow directly in front of the field rat. His training was showing, his aim while moving and under pressure was much much better. However the field rat was a step ahead, as the arrow impeded its path it took a large leap passing over the arrow and continuing on its escape path.