

## Master 161

### Chapter 161 - 161. Catch The Rat

Seeing his arrow had no effect Gil realized he'd lost ground. Walker and midnight had caught up to Gil but the space between them and the rat was becoming too great. Not wanting to give up they continued running but failed To gain ground.

They were losing sight of their goal, they would have to settle for one of the eggs left behind. Even the large egg had been stolen by the field rats leaving only the basic eggs. Walker felt the crushing defeat of letting a friend down.

Ready to turn around and rush back to the nest in hopes eggs remained walker and company stopped. A Loud roar had stopped them in their tracks. Bengal Laurence's tiger had kept from the tall grass claws ready. Flames burst forth from its claws shredding the field rat into three pieces. The small egg fell from its mouth falling through the air. Fearing the sound of a breaking egg everyone winced eyes closed. The sound never reached their ears. Cautiously they opened their eyes only to see Laurence flat on his face arms outstretched and a small cursed crow egg in his hands.

" woaaaahhh yea where'd you come from Laurence!?" Gil was shocked, Laurence had seemingly appeared from nowhere.

Pulling himself up, Laurence wiped the ice and snow from his face. " well we were following Su's group but as soon as they pinned down that slipper crow those damn field rats rushed by. Those things aren't even worth using as fees for a monster but they had the audacity to stake out the cursed crows nest. Bengal and I had some problems with that." Raising his hands Laurence showed that he had actually caught every egg stolen by the field rats. One large egg, one small egg, and three normal eggs all unharmed. Bengal must be much faster than they realized.

Seeing that Bengal was so capable Walker realized that this difference in power between tamer and tamed beast must be why Laurence struggled to get Bengal motivated. However at this moment it seemed the two had performed a miracle. With all the eggs safe, Walker ran the four they did not need back to the nest. After carefully placing them he covered them with a bit of grass and retreated. Sending a message to Su they had finished up he went back to their previous camping sight.

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They had all seen the fire of rats run past them. Knowing where they were heading was a stressful reminder that they couldn't leave their jobs to help. Remey struggled even more against the shadow chains seemingly making progress as time went on. The chains did not have a strong long term effect and could be worn down the more the trapped creature struggled. Seeing this Elise took note for how she would battle with her own cursed crow one day. She realized she couldn't leave and help but she could learn more about the cursed crows abilities.

" Ha! My arms free" a single shadow chain seemed to turn in to ink and melt into Remey's shadow. She had freed one arm and would be able to hasten her full freedom.

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Laurence having seen the field rats at the time had run around preparing to cut them off. He witnessed their speed and knew Hyde wouldn't be enough to stop them. Sending Riley to help Remey he took off running, in a flash he had summoned Bengal from his beast ring. Hyde was not going to be fast enough to catch these pests.

Taking off on Bengals back the two circles at great speed. They reached the tall grass around the nest with ease. Just in time to see the field rats rush at the nest and claim an egg Laurence was already cutting off one's escape path. Bengal had cleaved it in two leaving the egg unharmed in its mouth.

Bengal saw how determined Laurence was to retrieve all of these eggs and respected him for it. In all the times Bengal had been summoned while he was Laurence's tamed beast he had never seen a renewed fire in his heart like now. Seeing the young hero's growing with each step spurred Laurence to do the same.

Cutting off two others which had run together they met the same defeat as the first. The eggs were easily retrieved. The fourth was greedy, it had stopped only a few feet in the grass to eat the egg. It left itself wide open for Bengal to step on it, the egg left resting peacefully on the snow.

Laurence could see walker, midnight, and Gil chasing the final one but their speed was not enough. " let's go we need to save the last one!" Laurence road Bengal in a half circle to cut off the field rat, he jumped off bengals back once they were close. With the two of them blocking its path it would not escape. Gil had unintentionally pushed the field rat even closer to them letting Bengal slice through it easily. However unlike the other rats it lost grip on the smaller egg.

The small egg was tumbling through the air, Laurence knew it would be an affront to him as a tamer if he allowed a single crack. His body moved in its own and he dove. Clearing the gap he elegantly face planted into the ground outstretched arms hoping to catch. The smooth warm feel of the egg landing in his palms. He'd caught the egg! Damn you field rats I win we win! His emotions boiled within as he held every egg safely. Walker and Gil showed a whole new level of shock seeing him having caught the egg. Even midnight did a small prancing motion out of triumph.

Walker took the non needed eggs to the nest to hatch naturally while he kept the smaller. Laurence was curious why but he knew that Su's team needed to release the cursed crow and then they could all talk.

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Su who was waiting intently saw the system message from walker to release the cursed crow. " Remy have you freed yourself completely? We can release the crow now." Waiting for Remy to say she was ready they would move.

Remy had managed to release every shadowy chain but for her left foot. The chain barely hung on and was broken after a few more moments of punching. No one was sure if this was the best method to break them but since it was Remy it worked. Seeing the last chain recede and feeling she had full control of her movements Remy stretched a bit " all good here, tell that stupid chicken to fly away fast or I'll make fried chicken." She played at being angry but her glances at Su proved she was actually thankful Su hadn't been hurt by the crow.

" alright onyx release the crow, Elise you and I will let it go as soon as onyx is back on my shoulders." Onyx quickly released its pressure causing the cursed crow to flap its wings trying to pull away. Onyx's tail had just pulled back up onto Su's shoulder " release!" The two let go and the crow dove into the shadows wanting freedom. Seeing the V shaped shadow darting farther and farther away toward the nest they knew it was unhurt from its capture. " Ok! Let's go back to the camp team! Nice job." Su was ecstatic that they had been successful on their end.

They were heading back but Su grabbed Remeys hand, " you did great". She was red faced, she had never had someone protect her like that. Remy herself just looked away indifferently.

" Pfft I was just stuck in the shadows the whole time, I didn't do anything." Su could swear there was a small smile forming on Remy's face but couldn't get in front of her to see it.

" come on you're all too slow! Stella let's go see our new friend!!" Elise yelled for the others before rushing ahead, not wanting to be left behind Su and Remey followed. Riley, who had been starting to fall asleep, realized he should catch up too. Ah how frustrating it was to run but at least he didn't have to work hard.

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Finding that walker's group and Laurence were already at their camp trying to bring the fire to life Elise rushed around. " where's my new friend?! Is it close to hatching? Ahh what do I name it? Shadow? Murder? Fluffy? What's the egg look like? Is it giant? Can it swallow an elephant?" Her excitement was pushing her questions to even stranger topics but the group just continued on as if nothing was happening.

"Walker, do you hear something? It would seem something flying around making a stir here."

" yes Laurence, how strange, I thought the wind was coming from the east. Maybe we are imagining things."

"Walker, Laurence, it's obviously just your minds playing tricks on you all that's here is us." Gil joined in their game.

" Oh wait you two," Laurence pulled out a small egg from his beast ring. " I have this cursed crow egg with me too. That must be it!"

Chapter 162 - 162. Avian Tamer Skills

" aaahhh it's soooo cuuutteeeee!!! It's so small it's going to be the most adorable nugget ever. Wait should i name it nugget!? Will it look like it's mother and be all shadowy. Will it be a shadowy fluff ball!" Elise and her hyper antics were completely ignored by walker's group who were laughing at their own little acting.

Stella landed next to Elise and started her own energetic dance. She seemed much more reserved than Elise but still her face and body showed how she was feeling. " Stella! Steelllllaaa, look, that's our cursed crow egg, it's sooo tiny and adorable. I want to hatch it now!" Elise latched into Stella trying to drag her closer, finishing their laughter Laurence saw that Elise was about to rush in to contracting immediately without learning any more information. As her senior he had the responsibility to make sure her decisions were informed.

His face fell into the strict stony look of a leader, "Elise calm down! Have you even asked walker why his group chose this egg? You yourself said it was tiny, does that seem normal for the research you did on the cursed crows eggs? And have you even thought that this specific egg may not be the exact one you were looking for? Have you even thought of any of this!?" His words slapped Elise in the face, she was easily excited but in her actions she had forgotten all her work.

Upon closer examination she could easily tell the egg was almost half the size of a normal cursed crow egg. However the strange aura of darkness around it seemed plenty strong, just like the mother cursed crow. Her eyes meeting Walker, she saw he was smiling in wait for her questions. "Can you please tell me why your group chose this egg out of those within the nest? I'm sure it wasn't the only one there." Her heart still pounding from adrenaline she held herself back waiting for his response.

" I'm glad you asked, when we found all the eggs in the nest we had no clue which to grab. We didn't even know if they would be different. Gil asked me which one to take and I decided to give my all around appraisal skill a shot. Most of the eggs were average size, they had been laid four weeks and approaching the hatching phase. They mostly had weak affinity for the darkness element. The two outliers were a larger egg and that smaller egg." gesturing with his hands to the size of the large egg and pointing to the small egg Walker continued, "my appraisal skill told me that the large egg had consumed a large amount of nutrition from its mother. This meant it would be stronger when it hatched, however, it had very weak darkness elemental affinity. Thinking on that I assumed it would not have strong skills to use the shadows to trap a target. The small egg lacked nutrition so developed less meaning it was less likely to survive hatching with its siblings. The positive is that the egg had a strong dark elemental affinity, it even has a second affinity, a weak wind affinity. Not only should it be able to use shadows better but it should be able to move faster in the wind as well." looking rather proud at his thorough evaluations Walker sat himself down waiting to hear what Elise was thinking.

Elise was staring at him eyes wide, she had wanted the cursed crow to join her for its unique ability to use shadows as a form of restraint. The fact that walker could use his appraisal skill to find one egg out of many that could develop that skill better was incredible. Furthermore he had found one with a second affinity! The wind affinity was a common affinity for monsters with higher agility, yet for an avian type monster the wind affinity was more valuable. Having the affinity an avian monster would be able to fly higher, fly faster, and often grow faster overall. "It's perfect! You couldn't have chosen better! Who cares if it's small when it hatches, it will just be cuter." she turned her head to glare at Laurence who was still holding the small egg, she desperately wanted to form her contract. "Can I have my new friend now?" Giving in now that Laurence also understood the reasons behind choosing the small egg he handed it to Elise.

Elise carefully cradled it in her hands loving looks on her face. " I haven't shown off many skills but today i get to show off my way of contracting. Maybe a bit more too." She stuck her tongue out slightly teasing the party who was still fairly in the dark when it came to the intricacies of the tamer's specific classes. Elise had only used her contracting skill once, with Stella, however it was second nature to her. Holding the small egg up to her face a soft wind began to blow. Visible green wind mana started to flow around her with the increasing wind. Soon her hair danced about taking on the green wind mana coloration. The mana traveled through her body focusing on her lips, the intense wind mana causing the snow around them to fly though the air. Sounds of grass rustling increased until all the mana was focused, she rested her lips upon the egg. The wind mana flowed from her into the egg causing a glowing green wing pattern on its surface, Elise withdrew her lips causing the wind to instantly die down.

" All done! So what did you think? Pretty cool right?" Snow that remained in the air slowly fell around them, her contracting skill truly leading to an elegant sight.

" More than cool! I'm not sure i have ever seen anything more beautiful." Gil was entranced by the way the wind mana had flowed through her. He had drawn many conclusions by experimenting with his new bow and wind element affinity, however, seeing the way it flowed in the air to condense was enlightening. Shocked by the sudden compliment Elise was slightly red faced but she couldn't deny that the dancing mana was beautiful.

With a sharp whistle Laurence teased Gil, " so you're flirting with my junior is that it Gil?"

The chorus of oooo and ahhh from Remey and walker was enough to cause Gil's face to turn bright red. He stumbled over words trying to explain himself. Yet there was no escaping the teasing no matter what he tried. After giving up he instead decided to think on the way the wind was moving, if he was lucky he may learn more. Increasing his own understanding of how wind elements worked he could improve his archery by leaps and bounds.

" Don't you all get distracted now! I've got much more to show off, this is where things get good." Unhappy that everyone was losing focus Elise started to prepare herself for her next skill. " I can only use this skill when a monster is close to hatching, most tamers can. With a bunch of our mana and the right touch, " Elise wrapped her hands around the egg, warmth starting to radiate around them. Her face visibly became pale as the waves of warmth wrapped the egg. Small shadowy wisps came off the egg and everyone could swear they felt a soft breeze. This skill..is called..." her focus was leaving her out of breath.

" It's called incubation." Laurence cut in to allow Elise the proper focus. " The skill speeds up hatching, it's not a perfect skill since it can only bring an egg closer to hatching. But seeing as Walker's appraisal

said it was four weeks old and nearing the hatching phase i think we will see something much more amazing." Quiet tapping sounds seemed to be echoing from the egg. Their frequency increased until the egg began to shake.

Small cracks started to bow out from the inside of the egg, the tapping increasing every second. Elise had stopped her skill opening her hands fully showing the cracks growing larger. Chips of shells fell into her hands. "Cheeep, cheep" the tapping became accompanied by the small chirps of a bird. Just moments passed and the shell finally broke open revealing a small black chick. The cursed crow chick had wisps of dark mana flowing off its fluffy black feathers. Its eyes were barely open but easily identified as green instead of red like its mother. Normally a hatched cursed crow chick would fight its siblings trying to get into the shadows, however this one that had bonded with Elise did not.

The chick looked about taking in the faces of what may be its parents. Stella had come close next to Elise her feathers in plain view. The Chick began to chirp hesitantly but then louder trying to hop towards Stella. Stella seemed to understand its chirping reaching out to it with some feathers. The two met with a soft touch, they already shared a connection through Elise but the chick had identified Stella as a mother figure.

#### Chapter 163 - 163. Mama Stella

Elise was using all her remaining strength to keep from snuggling the small chick. She was not at all upset to see that it had identified Stella as a mother figure. It made sense, they both had feathers. "Guess instead of big sis stella she will call you mother Stella." Elise softly bumped Stella with her shoulder. With her newly formed connection she could easily tell the cursed crow chick was female, another girl in the family.

Afraid to frighten the chick everyone whispered, "Congratulations. Do you two have a name in mind yet?" Su broke the whispers with her question. She couldn't hold back and wanted to hear what Elise and Stella had brainstormed.

Giving Each other a look Elise and Stella had already decided on one during their night watch. Often as a child Elise's parents told her many stories. Learning fairy tales and some history she had been enthralled by an angelic hero. The hero had pure white wings that could influence any being, her beauty was said to silence wars in a heartbeat. Known as one to stop conflict she quickly became revered by the people. Wanting the chick to follow her footsteps and have the ability to stop any violence they decided to name the chick after her. "We decided to name her Avela after the angelic hero."

"Hello cousin Avela, welcome to the world." Onyx greeted the new chick, it looked for the voice. Seeing onyx it jumped off Elise's hands and onto the ground, it quickly fell into the shadows at Elise's feet. Small chirping sounds came from here she was hiding in the shadow, onyx coiled up more a small his coming

from him. " No I will not eat you, I'm not a predator." His pleas don't tone had broken any hope of whispering as everyone broke into laughter.

The chick rose from the shadow behind Stella still making small chirps. Stella just shook her head at it knowing it was completely convinced Onyx would eat it. Sadly it wasn't aware midnight was also next to Stella. Midnight moved slightly alerting the chick, this time it completely fell over in shock. " No sister Midnight will not eat you either, no one here will eat you." Clearly exasperated, Onyx unfurled from Su's shoulders, he slithered into the ground and wrapped around Walker. Slowly turning into his tattoo form it would seem he gave up.

"Awe I'm sorry Onyx, Avela was just born, I'm sure she doesn't mean anything by it. It's natural to be afraid of the world when you're little." Walker was trying to comfort Onyx but received no reply, he was sulking. The stream of chirps wasn't stopping as midnight was still sitting looking at the chick confused. Having enough of it steal used her wing to put a blocker between them, more head shaking.

"That's right Avela we are your friends and family. No one will eat you here." A hesitant chirp from the chick followed, "Yes you, your name is Avela, and I am Elise. That is Stella, she's my sister." Pointing to everyone else in turn, "This is Laurence my senior and Riley my equal. This is the party protecting us, Midnight who you think will eat you, Onyx who you made feel bad." She paused on this giving the chick a stern look. " Remey, Su, Gil, and their leader Walker. We will all protect you so no need to worry." No one was certain that the chick understood a word but it started to chirp happily. At the very least it felt the positive energy Elise was trying to portray.

After working this out the camp liveliness began to die down. Elise had settled by the fire chopping up dried meat into very small pieces to feed to Avela. The little chick was greedily snapping up the small pieces as if it was starved. Walker could understand this may be a result of its lesser nutrition as an egg and maybe it would have a growth spurt sooner due to its voracious appetite. Letting his thoughts wander Walker was fairly happy with their actions today, the splitting up of the team worked well and the plan was solid. The part that put him off was the field rats that had obviously been watching the territory. If there was any reason the warriors had warned them that the cursed crow was a bit more aggressive it was because it knew those field rats were there.

Hunting the field the cursed crow must have noticed them at some point. However as Su had told Walker they rushed past them the second the crow was disabled. Meaning they constantly must have tried to enter the territory to steal eggs. These pests were definitely something they should exterminate when they see, too smart to rush in and get hunted by the crow and too fast to be caught easily.



This experience showed how even their fastest party members were too slow. They needed to level up more! Leaving off on that thought he took his rest, waking up only for the last watch of the night.

The morning came fast as always, however this time everyone was greeted by the enthusiastic chirping of Avela. She had made a home on top of Stella's head, she was basically a black dandelion. Elise was already awake preparing meals for the two, seeing how serious she was about caring for her new cursed crow family member Walker could only smile. It would seem that through the night Avela had gotten more comfortable with all of them. Her fear being diminished after seeing them all sleeping near her without any attempt to eat her, a fear that was justified due to the fact that when cursed crows hatched they instinctively fought their siblings.

Conferring with Laurence, Walker mapped out the journey to the demi-human kingdom capitol, the city of Ordist. They should only need another two days of travel, one of which Walker was determined to use to take quests in the area. The tall dried grass that stuck out of the snow would be the only obstacle they faced when it came to terrain. Many monsters may hide away in it trying to ambush prey, however Walker planned to use that as motivation to improve his senses. Midnight would be the biggest advantage with this terrain because she could enhance her sneaking ability with the shadows. The tall grass and shadows combined would put her in the perfect position to crush any monsters the group managed to spot first.

Once they had eaten a good breakfast the camp was easily broken down. "Let's get moving!" Giving the go ahead to move forward Walker had everyone fall into the same formation they had been in previously. The only change was that Midnight was free to scout ahead instead of Gil.

The mornings in the plains were peaceful, the wind would blow softly and grass would rustle against icy snow. If monsters didn't roam them on the hunt it would be almost serene, but that was exactly how it was, monsters.

Midnight had snuck forward a few feet through the grass, her goal to find something to fight first. Lucky for her she succeeded, with a loud growl to alert the party she pounced on the back of a snow imp. The screech it let out as she shredded its neck caused its two fellow imps to rush away, directly to the party. Gil focused on the grass as the imp pushed it out of the way to flee, there was no need to hesitate so he used quick shot barely knocking its leg. The imp stumbled face first into Su's waiting shield. With a hearty clang and a bit of force Su managed to crush it in one smash.

Remey was after the second. The imp was unintentionally running towards where Elise was carrying Avela, this pushed Remey to move faster. "nobody touches our new fluff ball!!!!" Her battle cry piercing

the air she used her hammer fist skill to rocket the imp's head into the ground. Her anger taking over slightly she repeatedly stomped it until the system notified them of a defeat.

Standing in slight horror Laurence only had one thought, "let's not threaten cute things in front of Remey."

"Agreed" everyone who was witnessing this said in unison.

Midnight was dragging her prey back towards them, it was still barely alive only enough so to twitch. "sister wants to give the kill to Avela as a gift. She says she wants to see her grow strong so she can fly with her after her wings grow more." Onyx immediately translated.

For a human this would have been a strange gesture but for monsters this was indeed a great kindness. Seeing this any residual fear Avela had for the young dragon before her melted away. With midnight using her strength to perfectly pin the snow imp down Avela kept from Elise's hands. The chick pecked and chirped her own battle cry. Seconds later the imp stopped breathing completely, surprisingly the party still gained experience, this was a nice way to share some with their friends. Avela let loose a mighty chirp after defeating its first enemy, it may have been due to a lot of help but she was extremely proud. Stella and Elise could barely contain their gratitude to Midnight for being so kind.

Chapter 164 - 164. Quests Galore

"Hey Onyx can you tell what Avela is saying?" Walker had been curious for a while but wasn't sure if there was actually a dialogue there yet.

"Sadly no brother, it is all mostly instinctual chatter. Her chirps basically translate in to; kill defend crush strong strong. She's much like a child, I'm sure the more we speak around her the more she will learn." This made a lot of sense, a baby could really only follow its natural desires after all.

"Ooooh nice job little Avela you did so well. Our little guardian, I can't wait for you to get big and strong!" Coddling the little chick Elise threw out compliments, this would give the chick the proper drive to help in battle later on.

While everyone fawned over Avela and Midnight's good will Walker saw the opportunity to check out what quests have been sent to them by Clara. He had neglected looking lately due to how busy the rabbit tribe had made the party, but with his determination ignited he opened up the system.

The list went on and on, Clara had really been working hard. She had not sent any gathering quests because she knew that by the time they returned someone else could easily have completed it. Taking gathering quests was just selfish and rude in this respect. Looking in to the slaying quests it was plain to see that some winter monsters had been causing trouble. The Plains were fairly easy to traverse unlike some other areas in the winter, thus many merchants would still make the trek. Coincidentally, migrating monsters ran in to them often causing problems. Three quests seemed to line up fairly nicely.

' Quest: Slay snow imps

A group of five snow imps have been sighted along the trade routes ambushing small merchant groups and running off with food. Slay them to maintain a safer merchant crossing.

Requirements:

Slay five snow imps

Rewards:

40exp

60G

Quest; slay frost penguins

Two frost penguins have made a small stretch of the plains their nesting territory. Travelers that encounter them have been harmed and chased off.

Requirements:

Slay two frost penguins

Reward:

20exp

40G

Quest: Snow golem menace

Snow golems are an elemental monster often found in the mountains, one has traveled down in to the plains starting fights with any traveler. Defeat this pest to increase the safety of the area.

Requirements:

Defeat one snow golem

Rewards:

80exp

125G'

These three quests issued by the guild were all in line with the groups planned path of travel. The others Walker had ignored either required hunting down specific monsters to capture or adding time to their travel, both which he refused to do. The other bonus with these choices was that the party could fight two new monsters. The frost penguins were monsters often found in children's novels, the romantic idea that they mate for life paired with their ability to slide on the ice made them popular. Remove the romanticism and the frost penguin was much less lovable, it had a sharp icy beak that it used to pierce through tough defenses. Often it lived near the icy rivers flowing off mountains but in the winter it took advantage of the snow to look for a mate and hunt large amounts of prey. It had a very tough stomach and could eat just about any living thing, something that made it exceptionally annoying.

"Hey I am setting up some quests for us to do on our travel path, has anyone read up on snow golems before? All i know is that they normally live in the mountains and like to fight." Walker had yet to find information on one in the mansions library so asking the others was the best bet, who knew what they may have learned by chance. Not to mention Laurence may have battled in his prior travels.

"Wait Walker did you not hear about the one that wandered all the way to our kingdom last year?" Surprisingly Gil was the one with an answer.

"Huh?"

"You really didn't hear it, wow." of all the people who had not caught wind of the story Gil wouldn't have picked Walker, he himself had always been running around by the gates after all. "Well last year there was a snow golem that wandered down the mountains, apparently some adventurers encountered it and ran because they couldn't beat it. Since snow golem's are barely sentient snowmen that absorbed too much water mana it followed them. The adventurers not realizing snow golem's only knew how to follow basic instincts to, well, fight and lead it right to the outer walls. Luckily that court ian was there, the woman with fire melted it to a puddle. Nobody was hurt but it was a big deal that one was all the way to the walls." He rambled off the story like it was everyday gossip.

"Well that was common gossip for those in the fields since a few farmers saw it lumbering through their resting fields but for the average person it wasn't that common." Remey was the one to stand up for Walker's lack of knowledge but they all suspected it was just her desire to mess with Gil.

"So it sounds like it is weak to fire, leader, do you think you can learn a faster fire attack? It may come in handy for this battle."

' Daily quest: playing with fire

Requirement:

Using elemental manipulation to teach yourself three fire skills.

Reward:

+1 matk.'

"Su you're great! You just caused the daily quest for me today to get three more fire skills! And the reward is a attack point!" Walker was practically bouncing as he shouted in glee. The daily quests had all been the same lately, revolving around helping the rabbit tribe. They hadn't even been worth mentioning they had been so mundane. Finally he had a good one.

"Yes I got a good quest too! Midnight you're going down!" Midnight growled in response to Remey's taunt, it would seem their daily quest was one where they would be competing.

"Sister says she dodge every punch you throw at her." Onyx translated the growl with ease. It sounds like the two would be doing some battle training.

"Hey Riley, let's give your demon boars a good workout. I need some pressure to work on a new skill." Gil barely dragged Riley in to the open plains. Riley didn't even have a chance to protest.

"Leader, I will need your help with my quest. I need to defend against your spells. My reward is weak resistance to fire, it will be invaluable to the party." Su had already gained a poison resistance and was not working on some fire resistance, she was slowly but surely going to become resistant to everything.

"Well Elise, it looks like we are taking a break to train...I swear i never can tell what will happen around all of you." with a sigh and a shake of his head Laurence started to set up a small resting camp. Luckily he had some tea he could boil up while he waited. As much as he wanted to reprimand them he knew that if these monsters were in their way they would battle them anyways, so it was better to accept quests and benefit more. Not to mention now they would have more strength to make it to their destination. Losing a little time was well worth the gain and further peace of mind.

Laurence's words were lost to the wind as Walker had already started cutting down some of the tall grass around. He planned on making space for him to create a small fire to manipulate. After only a few moments Walker and Su had cut a sizable area, safe enough to start a fire without accidentally catching a large portion of the plains on fire, easily controlled and extinguished.

Having made a safe area Walker started a small fire, using his elemental manipulation he began to guide the fire. Last time he managed to learn a new spell he had condensed the fire, however, that led to a spell that took too long to create and to have an effect. It was also dangerous to use around an ally. His

personal goal was to have spells that he could use around the party, the fear he had of accidentally harming those he cared for was ever present. One spell that haunted his dreams most was the mana desolation skill he had used, it had completely destroyed the mana system of a living creature, he was terrified what it would do to others.

Taking a deep breath Walker began changing the shape of the flames, he couldn't create anything with fine details but interestingly enough he could make some rough shapes. Trying to force the flames to take on the shape of a small cat he could not help but giggle. Even Su joined in pretending to play with it, they were completely entranced for over an hour doing so.

#### Chapter 165 - 165. FIRE!

The two had completely lost sight of the goals here, instead Su tried to feed the flame cat that had slowly been changing shape pieces of dried grass. The benefits of the fire were great, even sitting on the ice they were warm. The two had no care in the world, Walker had begun to shape the ears better so they looked as if they moved up and down. The paws began to develop rudimentary claws and a waving tale. Finding that the more Su fed it the more the flames would bristle out almost like fur.

Making the fire cat swipe at Su with its paw she blocked it with the back of her arm guard. Small black soot spots showed up but caused no damage to her or to her arm guards. "Leader, can you make it bigger? Maybe we can have a new pet!" Su was normally serious but when adding in something cute Walker often saw the facade fall apart. Not wanting to disappoint her he used a free hand to grab a handful of grass, Since the flames were something that came from burning grass he only needed mana to manipulate it and not create it. This in pair with the pieces of gear he had that helped him regenerate mana made him able to manipulate it for a fairly long time.

Not using even a fifth of his mana the growing fire cat had reached a foot tall. Su was even more entertained by this and began to play with it again, the cat's paws causing more soot marks on Su's armor.

' The skill flame doll has been taken from the puppeteer system. The skill has been automatically learned due to user experimentation.

Flame doll- 2mana cost

Creates a doll of flames in the desired shape by the user. The doll will be able to follow basic actions as instructed by the user. Attacks from the doll will deal fire elemental damage often causing burns to a target. When destroyed will cause a loud bang to disorient its assailant.'

The system showed Walker the skill he had just learned and without hesitation he used it. The cat he had made from the flames took a denser shape and no longer constantly drained his mana. Instead it walked over to the pile of grass consuming some of itself.

"Oh! How'd you do that? It's different now, did you learn a skill?" Not letting the change escape her Su wanted answers. The fire doll was playfully rolling about acting just as a normal cat would, it had been directed by Walker to do so.

Smiling at Su Walker explained, "that's the first skill I just learned, its name is flame doll. I can make flames change in to any shape I want and issue them orders. I directed it to act like a cat, and even better when it breaks it makes a loud noise to disorient whatever destroyed it. Here watch, kitty cat take a swipe at Su, she needs to block some attacks." The flame doll stopped acting like a cat and instead rolled on to its feet, its tail sweeping up more grass in to its body. The flames bristled around where a spine would be on a real cat just as it bounded forward. The flame doll cat swiped forward the soft playful swats long gone. Instead small bursts of flame came from its claws reminding Walker of Laurence's tiger Bengal.

Su raised her arms not holding her shield and she was forced to try and deflect the claws. The hits were not very heavy and did not cause her damage, However they were fast enough that she was forced to take every blow. Fair to say she was on her way to finishing her quest. Walker himself was deep in thought, nearly two hours of complete distraction had yielded one of the most interesting spells he had.

The flame doll did not need to be a cat, what if he made a dragon? A snake? A bear? There were so many possibilities, the only drawback was being able to provide its fire with enough fuel to burn. This fact was constantly reinforced by watching the cat flame doll use its tail to pull small pieces of grass in to it.

"Ugghhh I'll worry about the possibilities later i need two more fire spells! Little kitty cat please keep your flame burning and wait over here. I'm going to need your help forming some more spells." Walker intended to use the flame doll as a source of constant flames, it would feed itself so he could experiment with his manipulation freely. A bit disappointed for the sudden stop Su pouted a bit but soon found herself more excited at the potential to see two more new spells.

"Why don't you try doing what you did with that earth spike you made? Isn't that an earth spell?" Su like the others had just been assuming it was another spell Walker had learned, however it was not the case.



"Actually it's just me forcing two elements to work together with my elemental manipulation. I had hoped it would become some sort of spell after the fire flower but that doesn't seem to work. I have no idea on the requirements to make a skill to completely become learned." This was one thing Walker had partially been avoiding but now he could not avoid it. For the quest!

"That court ian that Gil was talking about has a few stories about her. One is that she can create giant fireballs the size of a meteor, why not try that?"

Walker left a quizzical look at Su, "you want me to make a meteor? Su you're usually very down to earth, you do know that would destroy like a lot." He definitely thought she had broken something in her head for wanting him to do something so dangerous for everyone around him.

"No not that, do it smaller like the size of a watermelon!" Her glare was enough to tell him he was overreacting.

"Well i guess i can try it, just watch and see what i can do." trying to play off his awkward overreaction he focused doubly on his next attempt.

Holding his hands above the flame doll he pulled a small amount of fire between them. He imagined the fire rotating in a small ball the speed slow but dense. Constantly pushing the thought of it condensing in to a seed from his mind was his main focus. He refused to end up in the same place he had before, he needed something new.

"Leader try making it in to a teardrop shape, if it spins like that it might get too small." The idea was fair, with the spinning he was creating an inward pull but if he forced it to pull out he would create a more aerodynamic shape. He would also cause the rotation trying to condense would lessen.

"Su get ready, I will let this fly, we will see what it does." Grabbing her shield Su took her stance ready to block whatever came at her. Walker raised his hands and willed the flame forwards. The teardrop moved at a fairly steady pace. Halfway to Su it started to fade, by the time it reached her nothing but a match flame brushed her shield.

"Tsk" Walker began to form another this time letting it condense just a bit more. The second one he released got even closer this time but still pattered out. "TSK" his annoyance grew and so did the rate of condensation, the side of the teardrop condensed to almost half. Releasing the third he felt much more

mana drain from him than before. The smaller teardrop fireball shot much faster slamming in to Su's shield, a burst of flame slightly pushing Su back appeared upon contact.

' The skill Fire bolt has been taken from the fire mage system. The skill fire bolt has been learned through the user's experimentation with elemental manipulation.

Fire bolt- 3mana cost

Condensed flames form an aerodynamic shape shooting off at a target. Upon contact a small burst of flames causes knock back and burns.'

" Leader that must have worked, that attack had some good power." Lowering her shield Su had her answer, it was written all over Walker's face.

That was the second spell done and done but there was still one more to figure out. The flame doll had great use in providing fire to manipulate, it could also cause perfect distractions during battle. The fire bolt would cover his safer to use fire spell goal easily. It was fast and caused some knock back, that could really come in handy to throw off an opponent.

With attack and distraction taken care of Walker was thinking he should focus on some defense, the real question was how could he make fire protect him. The best part was he had their party's defender right in front of him, it was time to pick her brain.

Chapter 166 - 166. Wrapped Up

"Su what do you think i should do about defense? Do you have any ideas about how i could use fire to defend myself or someone else?" This was the right person to ask, as their group's defender she would have the best ideas of what shape to make the flames take.

"I would have said to use the fire like you make the earth rise in to a wall, but you said it doesn't just become a skill that easily. Hmmm...." Closing her eyes to focus on her thoughts she took a few moments. "What if you tried to copy Midnight, she wraps herself in shadows to sneak around better. If you wrap yourself in flames the ice attacks from snow imps probably won't get through. You'll need to figure out the not burning yourself part though, i have no idea how to control flames." Well at least Su was blunt, her inspiration from Midnight was perfect, but the disappointment in realizing how many burns walker might get while figuring it out. Lucky he had a healing spell.

The distant grunts of Remey unleashing punches and kicks over and over could be heard. The only response were the sounds of Midnight's growls. If Walker focused he could even hear the stampeding demon boars breaking snow and ice. His party members were pushing themselves to the limit to complete their daily quests and he was afraid to burn himself? Was Su afraid of his flames as he directed them at her? How pathetic! Walker stood up tall he would push harder, he needed to give it everything he got.

Instead of just focusing on the flames he focused on the flow of mana within him, not only would he need to control the flames but he would need to control the amount of mana used to keep them from burning him. Starting small he took a small lick of flame trying to get it to form around his hands, The heat was too much for him causing a lack in focus. The flame dissipated completely leaving nothing behind but reddened skin on Walker's hands. Using his light heal skill Walker fixed up his hand and started over. Another bit of flame intertwined itself around his hand. This time he put more focus on the mana he used to manipulate the flame, the heat was slightly less than before. Biting his lip he pushed the flame to grow little by little, his entire hand becoming covered.

The flames began to overtake his control blazing up his arm, he dropped the mana letting it dissipate yet again. The damage was more this time he needed to use light heal twice to fix the damage. "Leader, stop trying to make armor. If you make armor it will fit too closely and burn you, maybe make it something more loose fitting."

Su was right, he had been imagining a suit of flaming armor that would perfectly defend him. Was that out of his league? Would a suit of flaming armor made with his elemental manipulation be at the level of a mastery skill? What if he did think smaller? He could take some inspiration from Lisa, she had designed his cloaks. Within his mind he thought of every stitch and detail he could remember from the first cloak Lisa had made for him. The flames would become his thread and his mana would forge the needle. Strings of fire began to weave around him becoming something new. There was no burning or heat, just gentle warmth.

Su stood as far back as she could avoiding the flame threads that seemed to weave themselves. Walker standing arms out at his sides not moving an inch. Threads taking form in to a billowing cloak of crimson fire appeared around Walker. Seemingly alive it draped over him not causing a single bit of harm. Even onyx who was still on his shoulders showed no sign of fear or damage. Instead onyx only watched, wanting to take in every second of Walker's new skills.

' The skill crimson cloak has been taken from the phoenix king system. Due to the users experimentation with elemental manipulation skill the skill crimson cloak has been automatically learned.

Crimson cloak- 6mana cost

Uses the fusion of the users mana and flames to create a cloak of flame. and physical attacks that come in to contact with the cloak get burned up to varying degrees. Using additional mana the cloak can be expanded to block large area attacks. The larger the expansion the more mana consumed.

Quest: Playing with fire

Requirements:

Learn three fire skills using elemental manipulation has been completed.

Reward:

+1 matk point'

The moment the system sent this notification Walker fell to his knees, " I really need to start paying attention to how much mana I have left when I train" He had burned through all but two mana.

"Leader, that was amazing!" lifting Walker back to his feet Su gave walker a shoulder to lean on. "You'll make Lisa way too jealous if you let her see that. She will spend years trying to make a real cloak just like it."

"Haha maybe it would be a good challenge." with both of their daily quests completed the two headed back to rest, Walker had dispelled the flame doll letting his mind wander on what else he could shape it in to.

Most of the day had already passed being completely sidetracked by their daily quests. The others still seemed completely set on finishing up so Walker took the opportunity to rest.

Remey flung a punch as fast as she possibly could toward Midnight. Jumping backwards she tried to flap her wings to add a bit of height. She may not be able to fly yet but her daily quest was to learn to use

her wings to dodge and attack Remey. Remey had a similar quest which was to use her speed and wits to land fifty hits on Midnight who was faster than her. The two had been sparing as much as possible Midnight wanting the experience from her quest to push her growth farther. She couldn't get the idea of flying in the air to get above her prey out of her head. She would be the most deadly dragon ever, flying in wrapped in shadows suddenly dragging off a deadly enemy.

Remey was pushing herself for an attack stat point. For Remey, she attack power in the form of the attack stat would be incredibly important. She naturally did not want to get hurt but, she feared the party would one day run in to an enemy she was too weak to even damage. If this ever happened she would be the reason they didn't survive, she was the main frontal attacker after all.

Gil was in a much different situation than the others, his daily quest had coincided with a system quest unique to his ranger system. Gil's father was able to use a skill called double shot which allowed his father to shoot two arrows at once. This was very useful for group battles because Gil would be able to snipe two targets at once. More importantly if he could master this skill he could then start to learn triple shot. After that quad shot and furthermore a skill called multi-shot which fired a whopping seven arrows at once.

When it came to mastering the skill it wasn't enough to just be able to use it, he also needed to be able to fully understand how it worked. How the aiming of the two arrows fit in to the way he held the bow. How his wind elemental affinity could enhance the speed or direction of the two arrows. What to do when using the skill under mental pressure or cornered. These were all things he could work on under the onslaught of Riley's demon boars. Unfortunately Gil could only survive training with two at the same time, however to Gil's surprise Riley had the third assist in his own training. Seeing everyone in the party become super motivated Riley felt he was being left behind. Naturally this feeling was intensified by not being useful in capturing the cursed crow egg.

Laurence had jumped in to save the day with his best tamed beast Bengal. Then there was Elise who had Stella and now an equally impressive double affinity cursed crow chick. It was time he learned to make these wild beasts bend to his will. Utilizing skill after skill Riley slowly tried to make the single demon boar bow to him in either fear or respect. He would have his work cut out for him seeing as the boars were all extremely stubborn.

The remainder of the day went on like this until every single one of them had returned exhausted. The only two unaffected were Laurence and Elise who had leisurely spent the day with snacks and tea enjoying the show. Stella had been caught up playing mother to the cursed crow chick. Tomorrow would be much different, tomorrow was for guild quests and travel.

Chapter 167 - 167. Feeling The Heat

Not a single member of the party was late to rise in the morning. Every single one had been spurred to action by their daily quests the previous day. This may not have been in their plans but was most certainly not a setback. Instead it should prove to be beneficial, having greater attack power could speed up their three planned quests on their way.

Gearing up and putting out their fire, everyone was in their formation and heading toward the last known location of their first targets, the five snow imps causing trouble for merchant groups. The plotted travel path intersected with multiple mercantile routes. These routes were often well up-kept meaning they were easy to traverse, that went for merchants and Monsters.

Elise was hesitant to expose Avela to so much battle so early and had made the decision to keep her in the beast ring. This idea was supported by every member of the group, not a single one of them wished to see the new fluff ball come to harm. This was naturally a rough lesson for little Avela, however she took it in stride, soon accepting the temporary arrangements. Stella had taken some time to coax her along but this was part of her job seeing that Avela had imprinted on her. The adorable scene had started everyone's day off on a bright note, truly setting the mood.

Gil was sent out ahead of the group to scout out the mercantile routes, his goal to identify where the group of snow imps had recently traveled so that they could cut them off. Since these snow imps had been ambushing merchants there was worry they would try to do the same to the party, but with Gil scouting them out the imps wouldn't expect their ambush to be turned on them.

Gil stayed lower to the ground as he headed forward to keep his head from rising above the dried out grass. His footsteps silent he went completely unnoticed. Without the others constricting his pace Gil easily made it to some of the first routes. Well maintained with almost no outlying tracks he came up empty, no signs of snow imps. Instead of following the route like merchants would Gil made the decision to travel parallel. This would give him a new viewpoint of what the imps may see while they attempt an ambush. Following this Theory he traveled parallel to the route for some moments still finding nothing out of the ordinary, this was until he had turned around to report back to Walker. His foot was just about to step directly on to a strange looking scuff mark in the snow.

Kneeling down he could identify the unmistakable shape of a snow imp's foot, it seemed the tracks were heading farther parallel down the route. Following them a little ways he soon saw a strange clearing. For some reason the route had been poorly widened just large enough for a small group to stop and rest. Snow and grass had been piled on to one side obviously from the learning of the small area. Seeing that there weren't any other fresh tracks heading toward the clearing on the main route Gil knew it was all too suspicious. Taking this chance to retreat Gil returned to the group with haste.

Upon his arrival the group stopped for a short rest, "Walker, I was able to find some tracks. Following them I came in to view of a very poorly made clearing. The route had no fresh tracks so it obviously was not made by merchants. Also the snow and grass from that clearing were all piled in the same spot, I suspect that is the trap laid out by the snow imps."

Elise furrowed her eyebrows, " Are you saying the imps cleared the area to bait and ambush merchants? That doesn't seem right." She couldn't believe snow imps were smart enough to set such a trap.

" The definitely don't seem too smart I know, but how many times do you think they saw merchants do just that then settle down to rest for the night? The snow imps constantly saw easy prey setting itself up on a golden platter." Even the wildest beasts could learn hunting strategy, this was just slightly better strategy.

Elise started to see what Walker was saying and decided to believe Gil's theory, worst case the run in to a lack of enemies. "Then what is your plan, do we get to do the ambushing." Raising her fist punching the air Elise showed off a habit she had picked up from Remey.

"Yea ambush!" and Remey was punching the air too...

Shaking his head and pulling the other towards him Walker started their planning.

...

Walker, Su, Laurence, Elise, and Riley walked down the route towards the clearing. They all took in the view of the roughly made clearing. It looked like an animal had rolled around tearing up the grass and throwing it in to a pile with dirt and snow it could grab. It was most certainly as Gil had said, not made by merchant hands.

Once at the clearing Su positioned herself so that she would easily be able to defend any attacks coming from the pile of grass and snow. Walker was by her side equally prepared for any attacks. The others feigned preparing camp to rest. Stretching his arms with his staff in hand Walker pointed toward the pile. This was his signal.

Gil had led Remey, Midnight, Onyx, and Stella to the side of the pile ready to perform a pincer attack against the Snow imps believed to be waiting inside. Once they were all ready Stella took off out of the tall grass flying up to gain an aerial view. Her disturbance had shocked the snow imps inside the pile causing them to move slightly showing the groups exactly where they were hiding within. "There they are, let's move!" Walker shouted his order and with it came his new fire bolt spell.

The fire bolt tore through the air encountering the pile, pieces of snow and ice were thrown about. Grass fell around them burning from Walker's attack. The snow imps screamed in anger as they felt the hot sparks on their skin, they burst forward after Walker. "Come at me you weak toads!" Su taunted them controlling their motion towards her instead. The three snow imps farthest from Su started to throw ice needles towards them. Walker had been prepared for this, he immediately created his crimson cloak skill. The flowing crimson flames that created the cloak sizzled as the needles came in to contact. They melted almost instantly, not a single one making it to Su's shield let alone touching Walker.

The snow imps were completely focused on Walker's group which was now fully mobilized for battle. Stella had started her speedy descent closing in on the snow imp farthest from Su. Swooping down her talons locked around her target quickly dragging it in to the sky. The party had seen her do this before and did not desire to see the results yet again.

Gil's side of the pincer had moved forward, Midnight did not utilize her normal sneaky strategy but instead rushed forwards to pounce and claim her own prey. The third snow imp that was previously letting loose ice needles tried to free its brethren from Midnight but was met by an angry Onyx. Onyx had used his tattoo skill to hide on Midnight back, but seeing the enemy approach he revealed himself using his bind skill to stop the imp in its tracks. The Snow imp couldn't even scratch.

Walker and Su were about to focus on the remaining two snow imps when they suddenly collapsed just a few steps in front of them. Two arrows were lodged in their backs. The imps still twitched on the ground making Walker and Su take steps back, but before they could move in to finish it, two more arrows pierced the imps at the same time. Walker had seen Gil fire two arrows at once. He has mastered double shot.

Walker and Su had completely become the distraction not even having the chance to join the fight. Walker had planned for them to join in and defeat the five with teamwork but obviously they were all powerful enough to optimize the distracted state of the snow imps. The result was a complete shutout for their enemy.



Coming up a bit hesitant Laurence got Walker's attention, " so not exactly to plan but I think Gil stealing the show with his fancy arrows was pretty neat. Although I don't think we should tell him that. Right fire boy?" Laurence laughed a bit at his joke as he headed to check on Stella with Elise.

Walker would definitely be rethinking his strategy when it came to larger battles, the fact that Gil could now take down two targets or at least disable two was excellent. Instead of unsteady at this realization he was instead finding himself excited, the party had more options now.

Chapter 168 - 168. Slip And Slide

" Hey brainless, thanks for the heads up you would take two down at once. All my hard planning fell to pieces." Walker approached Gil punching his shoulder.

" Oh yea it's my fault your new spell that we've never seen made every single one target you and Su. what was it I heard Laurence say? Oh, right, fire boy." Gil returned Walker's punch with one of his own.

"Ugh stop flirting you two, Walker you need to get the snow imps stored away, I swear they are still looking at me." Remey shrank away from the nearest snow imp hiding behind her.

"This is a brotherly bond, you're just jealous we get along so well while you are too hot tempered." That was when Remey started chasing Gil around. The two were definitely going to tire themselves out before the group even got near the two frost penguins.

"Leader Midnight has dragged the Imps in to one pile, please store them away. I will make sure those two stop their trouble." Su as reliable as ever took the pressure from Walker as she put on her scolding face, those two were in for a good lecture. Su also may have been a bit jealous that Gil had shown off his new skill and she had no way to show off her new fire resistance.

Elise was cleaning off Stella's talons, the snow imp she had dropped was hardly recognizable at this point. No matter how many times this happened Walker could never see himself being used to it. However the fact that avian type monsters had this fighting style opened Walkers eyes to a wider world of combat.

Monsters of different elements would obviously play to their strengths, as would anyone in a life or death battle. Stella was an avian type monster, she could fly, because of this she was able to drag enemies in the air and let gravity do the work for her. This must be the same for earth based monsters as well, they could create quicksand or something similar to drag in prey to their demise. Water type elemental monsters could most likely use water to drown and trap enemies, The possibilities were all there just waiting for Walker to analyze and create countermeasures. This was one of many moments that remind him of just how young and inexperienced the party really was. They may have come far in such a short time but that seemed to hold them back more than help. They could easily fall victim to a situation an older adventurer knew to avoid.

While he stored the snow imps bodies away Walker thought on this. Meanwhile Onyx and Midnight were doing their own bonding. " Sister I did exactly as you said, I hid on your back then crushed the the prey. It didn't even scratch me." a few growls and huffs from Midnight later Onyx replies, " No sister i would never doubt you. I just feared if I did not capture the other prey it might try to harm you". Midnight blew a slight bit of steam from her nose after hearing this, "Yes sister I understand no one will ever beat you. When I grow bigger I won't need to bind them, I will crush them for you with a swing of my tail." This answer seemed to excite Midnight who started to prepare for the next fight.

The two were having their bonding moment so Walker decided to let them be. Instead he decided to make sure all the embers from his fire bolt spell had gone out, it was not any of their intentions to start a fire. Just because it was cold did not mean the grass wouldn't burn.

After they had all taken a short rest they focused on to their next target, the frost penguins. They were occupying an area not too large in size but was well traversed causing a significant amount of trouble. Normally if they were just nesting in the area they could have been chased out with force, however since the pair was actively defending the territory and causing injury they needed to be slain.

Since the party wouldn't need to worry about a possible ambush like with the snow imps Gil was positioned in the back. They also remained as one group so they would not be easy targets for the frost penguins piercing beaks. Walker did not want Riley, Elise, and Laurence jumping in to this battle. He was worried that the penguins could utilize their speed to quickly take them down or seriously injure them. Tamers had the great benefit of not being alone but the huge downside of not using other gear to defend themselves. Therefore the three were told to strictly remain behind Su, Laurence would bring out Bengal in the worst case scenario.

Easily making their way to the area the penguins were the party mostly took merchant routes. It was obvious to see that the routes were being bypassed due to the frost penguin threat. Narrow paths in the grass and snow had been flattened, these would be the trails the penguins often slide around on while patrolling and attacking. They had oil coated feathers that repelled water so sliding around was often

very fast for them. Add on their ideal body shape which had very low air resistance they could build up decent speed to pierce an enemy.

"Eeewwwaaa" The group had just started to approach a wider part of the route when a loud cry drew their attention. Just a little away from them two monsters were just seeing them group approach. This was the pair of frost penguins, their blue black feathers shining reflecting the sun. Their dull orange beaks were incredibly pointy being covered in a clear layer of ice. Yellow wispy feathers came off one of them differentiating the male from the female. Walker would have taken more time to analyze them but after just a moment the two flopped on to their bellies and started picking up speed towards the group. Using the water mana in the snow to build it up faster.

"Su get ready they are building up a lot of speed." Using his multi buff skill Walker made sure that Su had the proper backing to block both of the frost penguins attacks. "Gil can you slow the one in back down?"

"You got it." Gil notched an arrow tracking the penguin with the yellow feathers. Releasing the arrow it flew the distance to the penguin but just as it would have landed in to it's back the penguin took a sharp turn. They were fast and could dodge! Gil refused to give up and started to prepare another arrow, he may have missed his target but he had created some distance between the two penguins.

"Remey you'll need to be fast, the second Su stops the first hit get in there with a hammer fist to try and knock it down. Midnight you're her back up, if it's not knocked out in one hit crush it." The pair needed no more encouragement, they had trained together for their daily quests previously and had gotten extremely comfortable fighting together.

The first frost penguin picked up intense speed heading right for Elise, Su was already in position. The sharp beak slammed in to her shield with a sickening crack. The frost penguin he hit so hard that Su stumbled backward slightly, however the penguin had no chance to take advantage of this, its beak had splintered due to the intense force. This was a losing battle for a strong spear against an impenetrable shield. Flailing in pain the frost penguin was left wide open, Remey took the advantage and jumped up wards letting her clasped fists home down with extra force. Her hammer fist left her equally vulnerable but had devastating blunt force.

The thud of her fists on flesh made the ground tremble slightly, the penguin became completely stunned. The second penguin with yellow feathers tried its best to turn and attack Remey but it had been forced off course by Gil's steady assault. Midnight fell in to her roll supporting Remey, Using her claws she shredded through the penguins surprisingly soft feathers. The frost penguins gave up plenty of defense to gain speed and attack power, this now put them at a massive disadvantage in close combat.

Gil finally managed to properly land an arrow on the approaching penguin which squawked out in pain. This gave Remey and Midnight the notice they needed to return to Su's protection. Walker sent a fire bolt toward the oncoming penguin which was now enraged by its injury and the loss of its mate. Increasing its speed to a much faster pace than the first penguin had Su knew Walker's attack would miss. She placed herself in front of Walker who had drawn the attention of the penguin. Walker's fire bolt flew past its target, bursting with a small pop on the ground. Su slammed her shield in to the ice and snow on the ground, she wanted to use it as a base for support. She put all her weight behind the shield for the next oncoming attack.

Chapter 169 - 169. Big Oaf

The frost penguin struck dead center on Su's shield, she was pushed back leaving skid marks in the snow. The penguin brought to a firm stop, "haaaaaa!" putting all her strength in to it Su pushed back raising her shield more. The penguin was not expecting such a counter and flipped on to its back. Two arrows sprouted from its exposed belly right before Remey came down with another brutal hammer fist. Midnight swooped in landing a devastating bite to its neck finishing the second frost penguin. The penguin had not expected Su to be so prepared to counter it after being pushed back so much.

After using her strength in her block and sudden counter Su had fallen to one knee catching her breath. To be safe Walker used a light heal spell not wanting Su to have any small injuries. She had demonstrated why she was the sole defender of the party. She refused to be outdone by the others, they all had improved their skills and so did she.

"Su that was amazing! That penguin rushed in like swooooooshhhh then slammed your shield down and it smacked in to it like a wall. I thought it was going to hurt you when it pushed you back but then you were like haa and it flipped over. You were so cool, I didn't know you could do that!" Elise had been captivated by Su and her fancy shield work, to Elise Su was an unbreakable wall. The overwhelming show of defensive prowess really spoke to her, the strength that radiated around her was inspirational.

In turn the others praised Su as well, Su on the other hand who was not used to such copious compliments turned vibrant red. Shrinking away behind her shield they got to witness the rare sight of an embarrassed Su, a turtle shrinking away behind its shell.

While the others fawned over Su, Walker was about to store away the second frost penguin body when he found himself wondering what in the world it could be used for. Utilizing his ever trusty all around appraisal skill he checked up on the frost penguin body.

' Frost penguin body

The body of a frost penguin is often held in high esteem for chefs. The highly concentrated fat within its meat makes it incredibly tender. The light bones are used to create flavorful stocks for soups. The sharp beak is too brittle for use in crafting and is often just used for display purposes. The feathers are sought after for jewelry and pillows due to the oils produced by the penguins, they deter water.'

This was a pleasant surprise, Walker had expected more utility in crafting but instead it was a better food item. Thinking that his mother would rather enjoy this as a fun ingredient to cook with he stored it away with the intention of giving it as a gift. The feathers would most likely go to Lisa who could best utilize them in some form of clothing or blanket. Happy with his discovery Walker made a thorough check of the area to make sure they didn't leave anything behind. Finding the area was all clear he pushed everyone to continue on, there was one more quest waiting for them to complete, they couldn't stop until the snow golem had been dealt with.

With some encouragement Walker was able to get everyone on the move again, the protesting from Riley who wanted to take a break to eat again was one of his rare moments of speech. Yet Laurence was always prepared for it and was able to get him back on track with a little tough love from a senior.

The tall grass became more sparse opening up to a flatter more snow covered area, the wind seemed slightly stronger as well which would explain why the grass wasn't able to stand tall above the snow. The stronger winds caused Elise to give up on participating in the next battle, Stella would have too much trouble staying on course. It was not worth the risk of additional injury.

Riley would need to sit out as well, the fact that his demon boars were wild was a constant risk. Walker often found himself wondering why Riley was grouped up at all, but seeing that Laurence was the more experienced member leading to lesser experienced members the theory was that Riley needed guidance on how to operate before he went out solo. Of course Riley was not opposed to sitting out again since he could be lazy and relax.

Laurence had made it clear that he would only participate if needed in the last fight, this time he wanted the same, however, he did mention that Hyde would be out of the beast ring to watch. This would be valuable learning for Hyde who would almost always be smaller than his opponents. Dealing with larger opponents often had their ups and downs, they were an easier target for long range attacks but they also hit much harder in close range. Since Hyde could fire flaming quills at a distance Laurence had hope

he would see the value in keeping distance as a ranged attacker, Laurence wouldn't always be able to hold him after all.

The expanse of snow was almost blinding to their eyes but the group pushed forward, the snow golem had recently been sighted near here and should be easy to hear or see when they got close. Knowing this Walker began to focus on his hearing, a snow golem was a large enemy and would definitely make a bit too much noise lumbering around. He soon began to pick up a very quiet thumping in the distance. "Walker, there's something way out there moving, I can't pin it down it's like a shift in the snow." Gil's sharp eyes were the reason Walker had opted to focus on hearing, whatever Walker didn't hear Gil would see. They were the perfect pair of sight and sound.

"I can hear a sound of heavy footsteps in that direction as well. I would bet that it's the snow golem, it's made of snow after all so it makes sense it would blend in from a distance. Let's see if we can get it to come to us." Walker removed some of the dry grass he and Su had gathered from their daily quest the previous day. Knowing his fire doll skill would need fuel he wanted to have something on hand. Easily starting a small fire Walker willed the fire doll to take the shape of a cat yet again, he wanted a speedy form to be able to dodge any attacks from the golem. The others who were witnessing this spell for the first time had their eyes glued to the fire as it took shape. Seeing Walker feeding it grass to build up its fire they were even more enthralled, "Alright now kitty cat, head over there and lure that big oaf here then when your close jump at it head on to distract it for us." With its order the cat pulled some more dried grass in to it and rushed off. Noticing that everyone but Su was fixed on him Walker couldn't help but tease a bit, " It's just my new fire doll skill, it's nothing much." with a wink to Su, she joined in.

"What leader is saying is right, it's not all that grand. You all look like you've just witnessed a miracle. Let's focus now we have an enemy heading our way." Su and Walker shared a mischievous grin as they prepared to hunt the snow golem.

The sounds of large steps making their way closer caused the rest of the party to snap in to attention. The once small looking difference in snow was approaching. Now that it was closer the shape had been defined, The snow golem was about seven feet tall and thicker than a large tree. Its hands and arms were rudimentary without joints or defined features, but something told them that it could still grasp and crush them. Each step slightly shook the ground easily demonstrating the sheer amount of snow compressed to create its body. The goal would be to separate the golem's body from its core which would break its flow of water mana. Once this was accomplished it would be unable to maintain a shape and break apart. The challenge lay in chipping away at the compressed snow that made up its body to actually get at the core, using Walkers fire bolt they should stand a chance of whittling away at it.

"Gil, keep your distance and try to push it off balance. Su deflect its attacks only if you need to, no head on defense it will hit too hard. Midnight and Remey, you two are on hit and run tactics. We need to get

as much of its body broken apart as possible, once we see the core we will go all in on separating it. Onyx stick with me, you can't use ranged attacks so it's too risky right now." The plan was set out and the snow golem was near.

#### Chapter 170 - 170. Shaved Ice

The flame doll cat was darting around in front of the snow golem, the golem was too slow to grasp the small cat in front of it. If it could manage to grab on it could crush this annoyance and be victorious. The size of its hands firmly in fists were like two giant hammers waiting to pound an enemy in to the ground. With its long stride the golem had come in to range of Walker and Gil, knowing this the flame doll cat turned and charged in at the golem, the golem reacted by swatting at it. Its massive fist slammed in to the flame doll no problem causing it to break, a loud bang rang through the plains causing the snow golem to step back uneasy with what just happened.

With the distraction set Gil had begun to target with a wind elemental arrow. He was aiming for its arms so that it would lose some fighting power, if he managed to damage it enough the party could focus attacks on one side to reach the core. While Gil built up his wind elemental arrow Walker released three consecutive fire bolts to take advantage of the temporarily stationary golem. The fire bolts rushed through the air colliding in to the golem's left shoulder. Bits of snow and ice fell from it while steam rose from the golem. There was barely any damage but this was expected. The small bit that fell from the golems body was enough of a start, Walker had also given Gil more time to finish preparing his arrow.

Gil released the wind arrow pushing it to increase its speed before impacting with the golem. Having seen where Walker's attacks landed he aimed for the left shoulder as well. The wind on the plains seemed to mix well with the arrow giving it an extra boost, upon impact the arrow was unable to pierce through the golmes shoulder. But it lodged in to the shoulder causing whipping wind to explode from it, pieces of snow were flew off the golem leaving a decent crater. The shoulder was missing about half of the snow that made it up. This progress was nice but unfortunately to keep it up would cost more mana than they had.

The golem was not very happy about being attacked from long range and began to take larger steps to approach the group. Seeing that its pace increased Walker hurried to create another fire doll, the same cat form of flames began to come in to shape. He wanted to use it to assist in Remey and Midnights hit and run strategy, if the golem was about to land a blow on either of them the flame doll could jump in to take the hit while the other retreated. Gil was forming another arrow but the golem had come too close, Midnight and Remey moved out to start their tactics. Su remained near Gil and Walker, if the golem targeted either while they prepared attacks the fight was over.

The snow golem noticed the two coming towards it and lifted its large fists to try and crush them. Yet as soon as the fists started to come down on them they slit opposite sides. Midnight when towards its damaged left side using her claws to sheer away more snow. Remey ran around it trying to draw its

attention. The golem spun following Remey just as she wanted. This left Midnight another chance to strike. The two continued this switching off, however as they were about to try for their next attack the snow golem began to raise a foot. Once its foot was in the air it stomped downwards causing the ground around them to vibrate. The two lost their stride and were forced to take quick steps away from the golem, Walker had just finished his second fire doll sending it in to start up the distraction again.

Remey and Midnight were glad to see this since they had nearly become easy targets while off balance. Returning to close combat the two waited for the flame doll cat to draw the golem's attention, the cat zipped under the golem causing it to reach downward exposing the damaged shoulder. Remey and midnight took this as a good time to unleash a dual attack. Remey came forward with a large right hook aimed at the thinnest part of the shoulder. Midnight came from the opposite direction her claws cleaving away a part of the shoulder as well. Their combined efforts were rewarded by the shoulder giving way, the large left arm of the snow golem collapsing on to the ground. " Walker, while we distract it more, get over here and store this arm! I'll tell you why later!" Remey shouted at Walker who had no idea why she would want to keep a compressed pile of snow, but he dashed forward anyway keeping a sharp eye on the golem.

The snow golem was completely focused on the tree running around and attacking it. Having lost an arm it was aggravated so much so that no other thing than crushing its enemy was its focus. Walker was able to get to the golem's severed arm and store it away, surprisingly the arm had already started to melt leaving a small puddle on the ground. Since the golem was distracted Walker stayed where he was taking careful aim. He sent two more fire bolts at the golem easily striking its left side. Larger pieces of snow were not being broken off since it was constantly building damage to one area of its body. More and more steam rose from the left side of the now enraged snow golem.

Gil began to aim his next arrow at the golem's legs so he could slow its movements even more. Expanding a large amount of his mana the arrow was released, since the golem was closer the arrow reached it much sooner. Lodging itself in to the golem's left foot the arrow tore through bits of snow. The remaining bits of snow that could barely be called a foot made the golem very lopsided, it now leaned down to the left letting Remey and Midnight more easily target the weak side. The two began to dig deeper with each strike breaking larger chunks of snow from the golem each time. This dance went on for some time before the actions of the golem changed.

Acting much more erratic the golem began to swing in a wide arc with its remaining arm. Raising its legs to kick downwards and force the three that ran around its feet back became a constant attack. The golem had sensed its core becoming exposed. Gil had always had a sharp eye and was able to spot the darker blue coloration in a crater of the golem's left side. "Walker see that blue icy spot? That has to be it's core! We need to get that out of its body!"



Easily finding the spot Gil was talking about Walker prepared himself to jump in at the right moment. Midnight and Remey also heard this decided to pick up their pace. Pushing closer to the golem they were met with frantic attacks. The golem knew it was in danger and its instincts to survive took hold over it. The next swing of its arm was not the same attack as before, as the arm was going to miss them it spontaneously detached from the golem. Flying toward them the arm made heavy contact rocketing the two tens of feet away. Walker was instantly moving and his body was acting faster than he could think. Speeding forward he knew if he didn't stop the golem this second it could easily move forward and stomp Remey and Midnight to death.

Walker released multiple fire bolts trying to draw its attention but the golem did not even flinch. The golem knew this was a critical moment, it's instincts screamed to defeat the enemy in front of it or else. Walker witnessing this used all his speed to reach the left side of the golem, plunging his hands forward he wrapped them around the extremely cold blue ice core of the golem. Pulling as hard as he could it refused to budge, the golem continued towards the still stunned Midnight and Remey dragging Walker with it. He braced his legs on the golem's side itself trying to gain leverage to pull the core free, the pain of the core freezing to his palms completely ignored. No matter how hard he pulled the core refused to budge, the golem was painfully close. Walker couldn't help but think of how bad he was failing as a leader, he should be able to protect his companions at any turn. "Come on you stupid oaf!" His entire body jerked tearing at the core, he may not be the strongest person in the party but he would do anything to make this happen. Walker was pulling himself closer prepared to release a fire bolt right in front of himself, he knew if he did so he would be damaged as well but it was worth the risk.