

Reincarnated With A Summoning System

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Once all the books are copied out, Cain gathered his group together to run the Demon Raid. It's a bit repetitive to keep doing it, but they're really aren't any decent quests available, and they can't leave safely with Misha below level 100. She will likely end up as a Holy Priest, which isn't much more durable, but they get a lot of self healing effects added into their skills, making them very difficult to kill without stunning them.

A single step through the entrance portal brings the selection to count his companions as raid members and they're back in the psychedelic nightmare of a Demon Realm, looking at another feathery boss monster at the entrance. The Record Keeper.

Only this time, the dungeon has scaled way up. This thing is level 125, the cap for the Demon Raid scaling. Cain barely has time to call his summons before it's on him, forcing him into melee combat. Even when the rest of the group enters, it doesn't lose its focus and it seems immune to taunt type abilities.

Cain decides enough is enough, he's going to buy some close combat skills when they finish and is about to Crack a joke about it when a notification pops up.

[Priest Quest: Dark Devotion] is available.

[Quest cannot be declined]

Objective: Obtain [Spellbook of Devotion] from Record Keeper within this instance and use one spell from within.

"Looks like we're on an adventure early." Misha jokes while casting a long duration heal on Cain, as the Bird type Demon simply won't change targets.

"Did you do something personal to it? A sneak attack to the tender bits?" Laura asks, amused by the Demon's odd behavior.

"That's just the thing, it attacked me, not the other way around. Plus, I think I've been here before, in an instance that looked just like this, and that exact Demon but lower level was standing at the door." It take Cain a while to explain while he fights, not being an excellent swordsman, even with his speed incredibly boosted by the two merged demons. He's even set out all of his Totems, but the Record Keeper is so focused on him it hasn't even bothered to stomp on them.

The strikes he does land are doing huge damage though, and the Legendary Demons, half of them Oath Breakers, half of them Primordial Shamans again, are steadily

shredding it apart. Feathers and pools of blood are everywhere, but it's not giving up until the very last breath.

"That was new and exciting. Do you think it remembers you from last time? The Oath Breakers recall things from the previous times they were Summoned." Kone suggests.

"That would explain the attacking. I did almost all the damage to the last one personally. But hopefully nothing else in here remembers me." Cain sighs.

[Spellbook of Devotion] obtained. Use one spell from the book to complete Quest.

"So what sort of spells does it have for a cleric?" Cain asks as Misha is lost in the book.

"[Purgatory] is a Holy flame in either a beam or cone. Then there is [Treasonous Thought] which sounds like mind control. And [Infernal Gateway] which either pulls an enemy through or brings a horror out to fight for me, with random chance. There are more pages, but I can't open them, only these three are available."

"Sounds like a Shadow Priest Quest Line. Maybe hanging out inside the Demon Dungeon so long is limiting our options for class progression?" Kone suggests.

"Either way, they look like pretty good skills, and you know I've wanted to be able to deal some damage as well as heal." Misha shrugs.

"So, the Holy flame first and see what happens? The portal that sucks enemies out of existence sounds fun too."

The next group of demons they come across in this psychedelic maze are a collection of pink blob like creatures known as Mutated Imps that remind Cain of slimes. They even shift forms to gain arms to claw if they're attacked in close combat. Normally they use a weird ethereal flame attack though.

Misha decides that the cone of Holy flames is the most appropriate way to deal with the Imps and lights them all up with a dark blue flame that is very similar to the one the Imps themselves use, only on a much grander scale.

[Quest Completed]

[Experience Gained]

[Bonus Experience Exceeds Threshold Due To Skill Effect]

[Level Up]

[Level Up]

Cain knows those notifications, the quest was supposed to take her from level 98 to 99, but the increase in experience from his skill blew her right past that and into the class change option. She will likely be stuck in there a while, so Cain orders everyone to guard the area while Misha works out her Class Options.

[Class Options: Holy Cleric, Dark Apostle]

Misha looks at the class change screen in front of her, clearly showing she is now level 100, in amazement. She's done it, she's going to be an advanced class. First she brings up the description for Holy Cleric, seeing a generic white robed Healer appear in her interface. Extra healing, self heal based on healing done to others, less expensive healing. In short, it's all heals.

Bringing up the description of the Dark Apostle is a whole other experience. It's almost a support mage class with a side of healing, but it looks like the Spells are based on Unholy Magic. There's new types of healing spells, standard and over time, but with a chance to grant a random buff to the target, there's the Holy Fire type attacks, the portal with a 6 hour cool down, and the mind control type Treasonous Thoughts. The next rank of abilities she can see are all increases to those basic spells.

Misha saved a lot of her skill points, the ones she gained every level, because there simply wasn't anything relevant to her available. She didn't want to be a melee fighter, and she didn't need armor increases as a cloth equipment user, so she simply saved them.

This new direction looks like it will be a lot of fun.

Misha selects the Dark Apostle Class and gets a set of notifications.

[Cleric Skills Locked]

[Dark Apostle Skills Available]

[Remaining Points 36]

Increased size for the portal is a single point with no Progression Path, so she buys it first.

Then it's five points to maximize the rank of the Holy Fire type [Purgatory] and another five to fill the secondary skill to increase the damage modifier it gets. Ten points gives maximum rank of both new heals, and another ten for the next skill in the tree that adds area healing to all her healing spells.

Now she's looking at a single Rank Skill that costs 5 points, called [Boon]. All it says is it gives a ten percent chance that any spell cast will grant the Dark Apostle a Boon from the Dark Gods for thirty seconds. No further elaboration. She's fairly used to trial and

error with this interface, but once the Boon takes effect she will be able to clearly see what it does in the status window.

Having bought the skill makes the next rank of abilities visible. [Warping Flames] an area type Holy Fire attack that causes [Cripple], and [Devotion] a long term mind control that loses effect if the target takes damage. Misha thinks it's likely similar to a Mage's Polymorph except it only effects the mind. But she will have to use it to see exactly.

"Alright I am back. The Dark Apostle Class gets some attack skills, for now the fire, and new heals that cause random buffs, with extra area healing and a chance to buff myself." Misha gives the quick and dirty summary, looking eagerly to the unexplored area of the Raid dungeon.

"Why don't we start with a couple of heal over time effects? See what we can expect for buffs before we're in combat?" Cain suggests and an aura of Dark blue energy surrounds them both. It's a much stronger heal over time than her old one, and three ticks in, Cain gets a buff. 3 percent STR for 10 seconds. Just after him, Kone gets one as well, 8 percent Fire Damage done for 10 seconds.

"Well, they're pretty random, but if it gives you something useful it could be huge." They're taking a moment to think over the implications of this ability when an octopus looking floating creature known as a Horror spawns next to Misha and takes up a defensive posture.

"I take it that's your random benefit? An angry octopus?" Kone giggles and Misha laughs, petting it's head.

They move up to engage the next group of monsters and the Horror gets two pink fireballs off before its 30 seconds expire and it vanishes without a trace. This class is definitely going to be an interesting one.

But as they fight, Misha notices there is some stability to it. Once a Boon is in effect, further boons reset the time to thirty seconds instead of replacing it. The buffs granted by her healing stack, but only usually take effect one in ten times, so there's not usually more than one or two active on anyone unless they need an awful lot of healing. With Vala plus Kone and her healing aura, Misha only has to cast her large heals when the tanks take burst damage.

But the fire, oh how she loves these Dark Blue Holy Flames. They're very low mana cost, with great damage output, and Cain has started keeping his mana totem from the merged Primordial Shaman active, slinging it over his shoulder with a strap like Char does.. It's not as strong as hers, but it's certainly on the strong side of average for a Mana regeneration buff.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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For once, someone got a normal class upgrade. Cain's class only finished basic setup at level 100, Kone got Beast Lord which reset and replaced all her skills, but Dark Apostle is a classic Advanced Class, adding on to and taking over from your old class. So Misha has every bit of her skills as a level 99 Cleric, plus all these new ones, as most transfers would expect of their class advancement.

She is way too happy about that Holy Fire though. Even their Guild's Pyromancer isn't that enthusiastic about setting things on fire.

Speaking of whom, she's been mostly absent lately, rekindling her affection for the man she thought abandoned her, but who really just got captured here in Montauk, the Exit City.

The contracts the old guild forced on the transfers removed them from their Guild and cleared their friends list, preventing them from even contacting anyone they left behind. Then the enchanted collars kept them from running away.

They progress smoothly through the remainder of the dungeon, Misha gleefully setting everything she possibly could on fire to celebrate her newfound ability to deal damage. She's still not a dps class, but the Holy Flames are pretty respectable in output, though they don't get a bonus against demons like normal holy flames would, probably something to do with the Dark Apostle Class itself. It does have that 'I serve the evil gods' sort of feel to it.

Much of that is due to the aesthetic though. No longer are the Robes she was wearing pure white, now they're the same dark blue of her fire, with pink and orange flickering flames appearing at random like an illusions on their surface. They're also no longer the stuffy almost cassock style robe of a base cleric, they're more form fitting now and ornate, with a hint of cleavage showing and her gloves becoming black silk and elbow length with gold embroidery while the simple white hooded cloak she wore for so long is now a blue so dark it's almost black with more gold trim that seems to flicker pink and orange in the light of the dungeon.

They'll have to see what appearance it takes on in normal light to determine exactly what the outfit looks like.

The most notable change though, has to be her staff. It was a plain wooden thing before, with a few gems in it, now it's an engraved ebony shaft topped with a black

floating horned skull that is producing a flickering blue flame from the eye sockets. It would almost look like a Mage's staff if not for the Demonic Symbology all over the staff itself. Maybe something a warlock would use?

Cain is a big fan of the slightly more feminine look to the outfit though. The old cleric Robes were pretty boring. These at least give an impression of her well formed physique while still looking vaguely Religious with the short stole hanging down her front, the dark colored, hooded cloak and gold rope cincture dangling down from her waist.

They've finished the run and are going through the loot when Misha notices something odd. Armor is no longer locked out from her options. She's wearing cloth, but the interface says everything from leather to plate is also a valid option. To test the theory, she equips a plate chest piece and Pauldrons, which turn into warped black parodies of a warriors armor. But the clergy robe look still remains, draped over and under the armor pieces, as if they were ornamental and not functional.

Which, upon further inspection is exactly the truth. Her armor didn't increase to match the plate pieces she put on, instead they became mostly decorative bits of her outfit. Her listed bonuses changed to match the pieces though, so she really can use them, she just doesn't get an armor bonus from them.

They will have to experiment with her look later, but for now the equipment she was originally using is a good look on her, without the extra Demonic accents that the plate armor added. It did give a rather nice view of her cleavage though, so Cain has some hope for the future of Dark Apostle fashion.

They exit the dungeon, headed for the market to grab a celebratory cake before heading home. Sam and Sam, the local trouble makers are there with their parents, holding sacks of shopping and looking depressed until they catch sight of Misha. She's put her staff away as it's hardly necessary in town, but the two boys spot her almost instantly.

"Mum, can we go talk to the Dark Apostle? We just want to know how she got to that class. She's only level 100 so she might have just got it. Please?" The light haired boy asks.

His brother runs up and sees Cain along with the girl he's talking about and a large group of other women of various species.

"As long as she doesn't mind, you can. But don't you set down those bags, you're still being punished." Their mother agrees without letting the boys off the hook for their pranks.

"Hello Miss Misha. We're Sam and Sam, your friendly neighborhood Warlocks. We just wanted to know what path you followed to get Dark Apostle as a class choice." The dark haired Sam asks politely.

"Well, I was a Cleric before, but I got a Quest in the Demon Raid, the multicolored one with the Record Keeper at the door. Once you complete it, the class becomes available." Misha explains.

"So it starts as a Cleric and moves towards Warlock after a quest. We thought it might be the other way around, we've only met one before and they got it from the Random Character Generator." Sam says thoughtfully.

"Are they still around? It might be helpful to know more about the new skills of the class if I can." Misha says hopefully.

"He is, but he's been hiding since you guys got here. He was with team four and got pretty heavily injured before deserting and going into hiding. He doesn't believe us when we tell him it's safe to come out." Sam informs her.

"Well, if we can talk to him, we can help. Either to come out and live again, or get to safety if the people here are all still mad at him. Was he well liked?" Misha asks with a smile at the two boys who are discreetly trying to set the shopping down without their mom noticing.

"On your feet, not the ground, the bags are white, she'll notice the dirt if they touch the ground." Misha whispers and they smile back.

"He is pretty weird, but he ran an herbalists shop that everyone liked. It's closed right now, but he's hiding inside." Sam says quietly.

"Thanks boys, I'll talk to your mom and see if she can lighten your punishment." Cain says a bit louder than usual and their dad chuckles. Maybe winning over the strict mom won't be that easy.

Laura is the first to notice the odd nature of Misha's robe. Like her scales, it changes color as it moves. But unlike her scales, the effect isn't that of shimmering Opal, but of shifting reality, like the garment itself is actually changing color slightly. It's certainly unique and distinctive anyhow.

They reach the house and Misha heads to her room in Sunnybrook to shower, the extra spell casting having worked up a sweat, while Kone and Cain use their own ensuite showers here. Likely Misha has clothes in the closet there that she wanted to try on with her new class, but doesn't usually keep in her limited inventory space.

Cain sends out the celebration notification to the rest of the Guild, letting them know Misha has hit level 100 and picked an advanced class and everyone starts planning

their evening. The cooks plan a menu, the members prepare gifts, mostly sweets, given the short notice, and Gramps heads to the Hall in Graska to get Misha a copy of the Dark Apostle skill chart. The Dwarves have both warlocks and Clerics, so he's fairly sure they should have a copy of the full skill tree. Or at least most of it.

They've gotten a fine collection of foods made by the Guild's in house Chefs, and the cake is waiting for them to be ready when Misha returns, looking very different than usual. She's wearing a black crop top with an odd flaming eye symbol in it and cargo pants with chain mail hanging from the belt, tucked into combat boots. A black and pink zippered hoodie with many patches on it, is worn open, with her dark brown hair tied up in French braids with pink ribbons.

The look shocks everyone, they're used to Misha being in white cleric robes all the time, not this emo punk meets goth style. It almost looks like something Lickity would pick out, in fact, the Succubus Sorceress is giving her an enthusiastic thumbs up.

"My fashion options took a very drastic turn. Never fear though, I've still got a fine collection of dresses and Cleric Robes, but in blacks blues and pinks.." Misha laughs, sitting down next to Cain at the table.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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With Cain's black leather glam style and Misha's newfound fashion, they make an adorable couple in the eyes of the other Guild members. Her style holds enough soft and feminine in it that she compliments his bad boy aura instead of contrasting against it. Lickity is the most shocked by the change, she's been encouraging her friend to be more aggressive in claiming her man, but Misha has been relationship adverse until now, preferring a more friends with benefits level of commitment.

The biggest push that has been motivating her to change that is Nemu. The Felian views all sleeping spots on top of and beside Cain as being rightfully hers, which Misha can't help but take as a challenge, despite the Felian clearly being more territorial than amorous. Because what if she changes her mind and converts Cain to preferring his summons, like so many before him.

Vala told her about how almost all Puppet Masters who get the Ancient skill she comes from subconsciously or enthusiastically choose a Succubus. So Cain might be a rare case, but he can't be totally immune to temptation.

The cake they picked out is a massive thing, multi tiered and looking more suited to a wedding than a random party, but there are a lot of them now and they couldn't find enough of the same cake premade otherwise.

Misha wakes up very, very warm the next morning and worries that she's become sick, something that hasn't happened to her since arriving here in this world. Then she feels the furry arm around her and realizes that she's become the middle of a sleeping sandwich between Nemu and Cain, the heat is coming from the pair of bodies.

"What exactly are you doing?" She whispers at the furry bard cuddled tightly behind her in the big spoon position.

"This city is cold at night, and you're warm. Especially naked." Nemu states as if it's a simple fact, stretching and draping herself on top of the overheated Healer.

"Cut that out, it's time to get up." Misha says, activating her interface display to marvel at the fact her class really has upgraded. Turning the interface on also let's her see the status bar of the Felian in front of her, and it shows Level 106.

"How many runs did you guys do? Your level is going up so fast." She says softly, not wanting to wake Cain.

"Maybe thirty each? It could be more, we were moving through them pretty fast when we were competing for books, and we did them for a full day and two nights straight." Misha feels Nemu shrug on top of her before curling up around her to get more comfortable.

Now chest to chest with the Felian, Misha finds herself trapped by the tangle of limbs. When did she get so ridiculously strong? It's like trying to push a wall over to move this furry menace. A change of plans is needed, so Misha opts to tickle Nemu to get her to let go, causing her to jump up from the bed with an offended look before getting dressed with a thought and stalking away out of the bedroom.

"I should get up too, it's been a while since anyone caught her by surprise and tickled her, she's on guard against Laura and Vala." The other Nemu says in a light tone and chases after her sister in the light silk pants and crop top version of her outfit she prefers as casual wear.

Misha decides to go with a fairly similar look after her morning routine, a black and pink plaid skirt and a black t-shirt that gains the same strange flaming eyeball look as yesterday's crop top. A pair of black leather bracers, some fishnet stockings and the trusty combat boots compete the look and bring a big hug from Lickity when she goes down for breakfast.

"I knew you had it in you. After all that time creating outfits for others you've finally started wearing them yourself." The Succubus coos like a proud mother.

"Is not like I had an option before, everything I tried on was Cleric Robes. Or maybe summer Cleric Robes." Misha laughs.

"So, is it a full time look, or can you do others?" Cixelcid asks, joining them at the breakfast table and motioning for Misha to do a twirl so he can see the whole outfit.

"I can actually do a pretty good range of looks as a Dark Apostle, but blue, pink and black seem to be the only color options that I have."

"That's still not terrible though. You can finally do that little black dress, casual wear, even soft and frilly in pink if you want." Lickity suggests with a wink.

"I wish I had that much range." Kone laughs, indicating her green and brown motif. Most of her looks are pants based and in Earth Tones, as would suit the wilderness.

"Hey, we found you some nice comfy dresses, and you can go all black too if you like. But you look good in Green." Misha reassures the Spirit Folk Beast Lord. She also notices that Kone is slowly getting taller. The girl was really short when they first met, but she's grown at least 5cm since then.

Unlike Cain who seems to be growing and filling out to suit a powerful aura, Kone is simply beginning puberty in this body. Growing from childish into preteen. Misha wonders just how tall she will grow over the next few years, Spirit Folk are usually very large compared to average humans, though slender even when athletically muscled. Seeing Kone at an adult human height would totally change the way others look at her. Right now, she seems to be taken as the loveable young daughter, but who knows how appealing she will become to men once she begins to grow out of her childish figure.

Which brings up a second question. She transferred into the woods in a childlike body, but Misha doesn't know exactly how old she was before that. Elmira, the Pixie was a young child when she transferred, but that's not necessarily the case for the youthful looking Kone. There's really no polite way to ask a lady her age though, especially when you've known them this long.

Cain gives Misha's outfit an appreciative look when she comes down to eat before turning the conversation to travel plans. A camel caravan takes two weeks to reach the end of the desert, but they can travel much faster than that, especially if they're using Lamia as mounts, as their snake like lower bodies move smoothly across sand.

If they choose the Legendary Primordial Shamans, they can travel much faster than even the Lamia, and with just the three of them and their Companions going for now, it wouldn't be hard to accomplish.

They head out into the city together to pick up provisions for the trip, needing only consumables, as Cain has a well equipped yurt style tent that is perfect for desert travel. They gather some bundles of firewood, as they have a small outdoor cooking setup

already, a combination effort by Dimnys and one of the old Earth Mages from Graska. None of them is good with fire magic, though the Primordial Shaman might be capable of making a reliable cooking flame.

They gather ingredients, trail mix, drinks and a number of tasty cooked meals to go, knowing they will keep perfectly in their inventory.

The Companions have also ventured out into the city for their own version of necessities, gathering sweets, assorted teas and cakes to supplement their diet. None of them actually need to eat, but that's really not the point of food now is it? Food is to be enjoyed.

The last stops of the day are for Cain to pick up inscription materials and some low rank combat skill books. They're in the school supplies section of the store, as any melee transfer that came from the valley would already have learned such basic combat skills, except for Cain, who was happy simply shooting Arrows at things while his summons killed everything.

From these he can upgrade his inscription, plus use the copies he makes to learn the basics of melee fighting skills and increase his close combat damage output. Having merged with the Oath Breaker and Primordial Shaman puts him well above most transfers his level in damage output already, but stacked on top of a skill he should be even better.

Plus, the abilities teach the user the basics of a combat style when learned, in order to use them properly, and Cain has nearly zero sword fighting ability of his own.

The shopkeeper hears them talking about the need to learn advanced sword styles and gives them a bit of inside information. The Schaub Empire, now buried within the Killing Sands of the desert as the locals know the huge arid region, was once renowned for its elegant sword styles. If they can find one of the scattered portals that lead into the ruined subterranean empire, they might very well find a training temple and a skill book that will give almost any class a set of advanced combat skills.

One such book made it here when he was a child, nearly a century ago, and it gave a complete fighting style with over a dozen basic skills to the lucky winner.. Many were redundant, as he was a high level fighter, but the style was a dual wielding one, which made him a local legend in the Demon Raid for his twirling attacks and insane damage output.

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The news of a possible complete combat guide adds a huge amount of excitement for the trip. Wavering through the scorching desert was originally just a means to an end, but now it's a treasure hunt.

They will have the Primordial Shamans serve as their transport, as they're well beyond human sized, while the Greater Lamia Scourge Casters can search for portals into the lost empire. The shopkeeper says nothing horrible happened that ended them, the sands just slowly took over everything and people left, leaving behind entire cities full of anything they couldn't carry. In the end, one of their last great Sorcerers cast a barrier to protect what was left and then passed away, leaving the ruins to be buried by the sands.

It sounds a bit fantastical, but what tale from thousands of years ago doesn't? The stories get altered with time to stay interesting, or they get forgotten.

They're intending to head out late this evening, traveling all through the night while it's cooler and then sleeping during the mid day instead of scorching in the sun. The camel caravans stop at night for safety, since Camels can't see all that well in the dark, but the Primordial Shamans can. In fact, so can Vala, Laura and Nemu, as all three of their species have evolved advanced vision. So it's really just the three transfers that can't see much at night.

They take dinner early and leave just as the sun starts to lower in the sky. It's still hot from the afternoon sun, but the temperature is already dropping. By Cain's estimate the temperature is still in the low twenties Celsius, but Gramps was right, the heat of the forge makes the bones happy. Even this reasonably warm evening feels a bit cool to him after living in Graska.

All three companions merge with their clones for the journey, so that nobody has to walk. Kone and Su share a Shaman, as do Laura and Nemu, putting the lightest among them in pairs to fit on the five Shamans without needing to call more summons for the night. Once they're away from the city Cain decides he will likely call a larger entourage and maybe tomorrow they will spread out between the Greater Lamia instead.

The vegetation around the city quickly gives way to endless and dunes with patches of scrub grass and small species of cactus. The Shamans prefer to keep to the bare sands, for the sake of their belly scales, but the group is making incredible time.

"This brings back memories. The first time I went to a dungeon with you all, I had to be carried through the entire thing. At least there's no flood of notifications this time." Kone laughs as their rides slither through the dunes.

They were heavily warned to be on the lookout for roaming monsters that might attack while you were traveling or sleeping, but so far they haven't seen anything. Sure, they're moving pretty quickly, but to Cain it seems more likely that whatever is out there simply doesn't want to tangle with the Primordial Shamans.

If they're unlucky, they could see opponents up to level 140 in the desert, enough of a level difference that even with the legendary Summons they would be hard pressed to win against a large group of them.

As they approach morning Cain sends the Oath Breakers out to scout the area ahead of them, looking for anything out of the ordinary and calls the Greater Lamia Scourge Casters to surround their little convoy.

The sun is nearly overhead when the Oath Breakers bring good news, they've found a dungeon entrance, and it seems to lead to a ruined city. It's not far, so they alter course to set up camp near the entrance, with plans to enter once they're well rested.

The Companions release their twins from the Merger with some relief, as they've gotten used to the presence of another version of themselves nearby and it's a bit lonely without them. Unlike the demons Cain is merged with, their clones don't seem to talk in their heads.

Not long after setting up camp they're back outside again, busily adding extra securement to the tent, on the advice of the Oath Breakers who have seen a sand storm coming their way. Their first thought was to hide inside the portal, but none of them knew what would happen if the entrance was buried in sand. Would they be trapped inside until that entrance was exposed again? Would they emerge underground, or even be crushed to death trying to leave? It just didn't seem worth the risk.

The number of anchor ropes doubled and buried deep in the sand Cain releases the Lamia and brings everyone else back in to the tent, except the Oath Breakers who prefer to lurk about outside, despite the storm. It seems a bit crazy, since these storms are what earned the desert its deadly reputation, but even if they're proven wrong, Cain can just Summon them again.

The Primordial Shamans use their long, snake like bodies to Reinforce the tent walls as the Wind howls and the sand begins to pile up, layering themselves around the inside edge of the round canvas tent. Their effort also helps deaden the noise and the three transfers eventually manage to get some sleep, waking up to an unnaturally dark room and absolute silence.

"I'm pretty sure we've been buried in the sand." Kone says quietly, not sure if anyone else is awake.

"You are. But we kept the portal clear." Comes the voice of an Oath Breaker from right behind her in the dark, nearly giving her a heart attack.

"You've got to stop doing that. I almost wet myself." The spirit folk girl complains, making the Legendary Demon laugh.

"Did you clear the chimney as I asked?" One of the Primordial Shamans asks and the Oath Breaker makes an agreeable grunt.

The Shaman uses a wind spell to blow the remaining sand out of the chimney and lights a small fire in the wood prepared inside the stove, bringing a flickering light to the room. The Primordial Shamans still ring the walls, except one who had partially moved down to light the stove, and a single Oath Breaker is sitting beside Kone's bed, leaned over behind her so he could startle her.

"It's late afternoon now if you want to visit the ruins. We cleared the sand and rubble from the other side of the portal as well. It almost squished me when I first entered. If I couldn't blink away it would have been painful." The oath breaker informs her.

"Alright, clear the entrance and let's head out after breakfast. Leave one Oath breaker outside in case of another storm so we don't get trapped." Cain says, getting up and setting a coffee perk on the stove.

They're all so eager to see what the ruins have in store for them that they've almost finished eating when the coffee is brewed, despite their interrupted sleep. As they're eating the Oath Breakers dig them out from outside, making a tunnel of sand from the doorway. The effect reminds Cain of a snow fort, the sands are level with the top of the tent, and have created a drift effect with the wind, causing an overhang that the tunnel leads out under.

Collecting the tent will likely ruin the effect and collapse the sand dune, but Cain is prepared, tagging all the contents as one unit to be collected, so nothing is left behind to be buried in the sand.

The group steps out into the afternoon sun and Cain quickly collects the strained tent, finding that the sand holds more moisture than expected, and a hole remains where they sheltered the storm.

Only a few meters away the portal stands fully uncovered in a valley between dunes, the surrounding area cleared by the Oath Breakers for safe entry. The portal itself is just a plain black orb about four meters tall, as most of them are, but the base that it stands above is interesting. Dungeon portals form over bare land, but this one has a collection of pillars around it, carved with a language Cain doesn't recognize and made of an almost translucent obsidian. Cain could see they were all shattered and toppled when the group arrived but they're clearly standing tall now, freshly repaired.

"That your handiwork? Impressive, I didn't know you had architectural skills." Cain says to the pale skinned demons standing guard around the portal.

"They were built using shadow magic. All we had to do was stack them up and feed the spell. If you want, there was a whole building here that could be repaired." The demons say in unison, indicating the rubble strewn through the sands over the course of centuries.

"I don't think it's necessary, but we will leave two of you on guard, in case you're attacked by higher level travelers. This might not lead to a dungeon instance but an underground city, so it's best if you've got backup. If you feel bored you can begin to rebuild the building that was here while you watch the area.." They're easily bored, and Cain didn't want them in a bad mood if this turns out to be a dud and the group needs to travel in an hour or two.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 155 - 155 Schaub Empire Ruins

Cain steps through the portal, finding he is indeed underground, and there is none of the odd feeling that indicates he's in a dungeon instance. Two of the Oath Breakers guard this side of the portal, and he can see where they carried sand and rubble away from the Exit, moved here over time, something that doesn't happen inside a dungeon.

The others follow him through, leaving two Oath Breakers to stand guard outside and look around this underground space. They seem to be in the middle of an abandoned city, crumbling stone buildings, cobblestone streets, and some sort of bioluminescent fungus or moss in the roof, hundreds of meters above them that gives the whole area a light blue glow.

Cain looks into the building beside him, that appears to have been a shop of some sort and finds a few ragged cloth pieces hanging from racks, as if whoever was here last simply packed up everything worth taking and left. No sign of destruction, looting or anything else. Which seems awfully strange for an ancient ruin with a portal in the desert. Surely someone happened upon it before them, but why wouldn't they have taken or even damaged anything?

"Did you guys find anything strange about the entrance when you came in? Something that might have prevented this place from being looted?" Cain asks the Oath Breakers while looking around at the huge pile of rubble they've made.

"We had to teleport because it was blocked, if you didn't you would just be crushed on arrival. See the blocks there? The wind filled the gaps with sand like mortar."

That makes sense. The residents must have barricaded the Exit when they left, and without any time to cast a spell, anything without an innate movement ability that would let them shift past the rubble would be stuck in the portal and trapped for eternity or crushed to death by the force trying to expel them, then fall back in and be left on the other side.

"Alright, let's take a look around, but try not to damage anything. Some archeologist would love to find this place." Misha says, sticking her head through a nearby doorway to look inside.

Some of the buildings are mostly intact, the ones made of solid stone and not thin brick or wood. Their roofs have fallen, except a few spires the group can see, but they give the impression of exquisite craftsmanship.

There's a golden sign with writing on it in what looks like multiple languages laid on a black granite dias in the middle of a now dry fountain that marks the middle of the courtyard that the portal opens in to. Looking it over closely, Kone recognized Elven as one of the languages. It's a bit archaic, and her grasp of the language isn't perfect, but all Spirit Folk transfers get basic knowledge of it as part of their racial skills.

"Welcome to Schaub Empire. Then something I can't read because of the dirt, then Home of Engineering Academy and then something about Elves and war and dancing that doesn't make sense. I think this was written in the Dark Elven dialect, which is mostly understandable by anyone who speaks Elven, but any slang and obscure item names are just gibberish to me." Kone explains.

Cain calls for a pair of Dark Elven Clerics as his Epic Supporters, hoping they can speak a language he knows. The clones of Kone can talk now that they've been upgraded to Epic by his skill, so that shouldn't be the issue. And these ones should speak Dark Elven, they swore at the party in it continually when they met in the dungeon.

"Wow, you called me somewhere interesting. Is this one of the Lost Cities? It looks like it." The cleric to his left says, looking up at the glowing roof moss.

"Can you tell us what that plaque says?" Cain asks, before the chatterbox Elves can get on a roll. The one who spoke walks into the fountain and wipes off the plaque before reading the contents out loud.

"Welcome to the city of Muzz, and the Schaub Empire. Home of the Gnomish Engineering Academy and the Royal Elven War Dancer Regiment. That's what it says. This really is one of the Lost Cities." The Elf reads the plaque out loud before getting excited and running off to look in various buildings.

They're not expecting any trouble in here, as it's been abandoned for centuries, so Cain calls out the rest of his Supporters as Dark Elves to help them read any signs they find, receiving similar responses of excitement from all of them.

"Don't break anything. We're here to explore, not to destroy the place. If you find anything interesting or valuable, let me or one of the Guild members know so we can come check it out." Cain gives his general instructions and everyone begins to spread out, each group taking a Dark Elf with them to translate, leaving Cain with two Clerics and a Primordial Shaman.

"Where do you think the War Dancer Regiment would have been stationed? I'm in need of combat skills." Cain asks his partner, who points at a huge marble building with a black dome that hasn't collapsed yet due to age.

"That's the mark of a Dark Elven Royal facility. If it's not the barracks and training grounds, they should be near there."

"You recognized this as a lost city, do you know why it was abandoned? The entrance was barricaded when we arrived to keep people out, but the place looks immaculate, like they didn't leave in any particular hurry."

"Water. The desert started taking over the surface, and the surface Cities built dams and diverted rivers to feed their growing needs. But that caused the aquifers and ground water to dry up even more, speeding the advance of the sands. Usually the Schaub Empire refers to the cities on the surface, this one was a special city, one with both Dark Elves and Gnomes."

"So the whole Empire wasn't Dark Elves and Gnomes?" Cain asks, having thought that the legendary sword fighting styles he was looking for were Dark Elven. They were described as graceful and dual wielding, and he's seen them fight that way in dungeons, so it made sense to him.

"It was primarily Gnomes, their engineering made the advanced society possible, or so we're told. My Grandmother would know better, she was stationed here in her youth. But the surface cities mixed in the local races, mostly humans and Fae, while the only Dark Elves you would find on the surface would be the Royal Guards, who vowed to protect the Gnomish King." She elaborates as they look around what used to be an apartment building.

There's indoor plumbing, light bulbs, and what looks more like a garage than a horse stable. That's Cain's next target, he wants to know how they got around this huge city. The garage door has partially collapsed, dry rotted into powder, but the side door is entirely fallen, and was left open to begin with.

There is no car inside, instead a row of tire racks that look like they were for bicycles and a collection of wiring are visible through the ruins of the fallen roof. Carefully

exploring through the rubble, Cain finds a bunch of parts on a bench, a tire, some sort of battery and off in one corner, the battered frame of a moped that was clearly in an accident, as no roof parts have fallen on it. That means what he's seeing in the middle of the floor are storage racks to hold the mopeds, along with charging cables.

Gnomish technology appears to have been very advanced, even hundreds of years earlier when this city was abandoned.

"Where did they all go? You said your grandmother is still alive?" Cain asks and the Dark Elf smiles.

"It hasn't even been a thousand years, of course she's still alive. Old and cranky, but alive. She moved to the Underwood Empire, to the south of the Desert, underneath what used to be known as the Elven Woods. That's where all the Dark Elves that stayed on the continent are. Most of the Gnomes left for their homeland across the ocean, but some are likely still on the west side of this continent, across the mountains. We don't get much news from there, as we closed the entrances to Underwood to stop the attacks during the last war and never opened them again."

So they might find motorcycles and electric lights after they reach level 200 and head across the mountains? That's encouraging news, but Cain wonders how far technology would get in a world filled with Mages.

They've got mopeds though, which would be great for riding around town. It's unlikely, but if a textbook or repair manual survived, Cain wants it. The Dwarves would work wonders building custom bikes if he could find out how the Gnomes powered them.

Misha is on a much different adventure, along with her translator and one of the Primordial Shamans, who has decided that they need extra protection, or simply that they're too interesting to ignore. The duo has led her into the old shopping district. Magical clothing doesn't deteriorate with age, and in a city full of Dark Elves, they have high hopes to find something good. The cleric Supporter is convinced that Misha would look great in Dark Elven Fashion, and she's on a mission to find it.

Kone and Su, along with the majority of the Primordial Shamans are actually taking their exploration seriously, making notes, drawing maps and taking a rough inventory of each building they pass, under the assumption that everyone else is doing the same. Cain at least is making a mental note of the layout of the city around him, and Laura is starting a map as she flies overhead, savoring the cool underground air, but that's as close as her assumption gets to being correct, as Vala and Nemu both grabbed a cleric and disappeared somewhere.

That's fine, they won't get far in a sealed off city.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 156 - 156

Misha is the first to find something valuable, sending a Guild message that she's found an abandoned bookstore, and is carefully exploring in search of surviving texts. The magic in skill books might have kept them intact, and sometimes a double sealed case can preserve documents even without magic.

There is a glass topped case by the counter that has books inside that look completely intact, so Misha carefully heads behind the till to examine them. The case is latched shut with a locking latch that seems to seal the case, like a water tight door on a ship. The lock has been left off, so Misha carefully twists the latch open until, with a hiss of pressure equalizing, the case swings open.

The labels are in Gnomish, which none present can read, so Misha carefully removes the first tome and opens it to a random page in the middle.

It's porn. Gnome Porn to be exact.

Maybe the next book will be better luck, so Misha looks for a tome that looks different than the first one.

Also Porn. Of the human variety, but also with Gnomes.

Now she's starting to wonder if this case is the adult books section of the store, so she carefully places the tomes back in the glass case and seals the latch, which closes with a puff of air being expelled from the case. It seems the twist action also operates a pump hidden behind the frame that pumps air out of the case to keep the contents secure.

Moving through the store, she finds a collection of books with Elven writing on the spine and signals her translator to come over and check them.

"Children's books. This one's for learning to read, that's for math, the ones over there are all storybooks." The Elf points to the various books, which all look to be in pretty delicate condition, but doesn't touch them.

They search the area and find a bit of what they're looking for just one row back. School texts. They're all labeled as introductory, but they're enchanted and all look to be in fairly decent condition. Elven Children must be as hard on school supplies as humans are, Misha decides when she notices the enchantment. There's multiples of each, so

they collect one of each textbook and move back through the aisles, gathering books as they go.

None of it seems to be about combat, or trade skills, but they all still hold valuable knowledge. They've even got Gnomish copies, a true rarity as far as any of them know.

Other than the textbooks, very little survived the centuries, so Misha begins heading to the door before stopping and looking back at the first cabinet she encountered. What if the valuable books are also sealed in there and she just can't tell without checking them all?

Better safe than sorry.

She's about to open the case again to add a selection to her collection when she finds the entire case can be stored, books and all, as a container in her inventory. So that's what she does, hoping that it's not entirely some Gnomes Porn collection.

As she is leaving the bookstore, Cain and his group have found the courtyard of the Royal Guards facility.

"Don't you think this is a bit odd, it looks like someone has cleaned this area recently." Cain says quietly to his Supporters.

"They've definitely cleaned, there's no fallen leaves from the Dragon tree, and it should drop them every tenth year." The Dark Elf says, indicating a large one situated in a field of crystals, giving off its own white light. If Cain recalls correctly, Dragon Trees are named for the durability of their leaves, which the Elves use to make armor. Cain has never heard of a glowing white one though. They usually give off a soft green glow. You can see one from the Sunnybrook Guild House in fact.

As they approach, being sure to keep to the path for fear of traps, they notice there also is no collected dust or debris here, despite many of the smaller buildings like the bridge over the pond, which still holds water and fish, being in a crumbling state.

"Did they cast an enchantment to keep it clean maybe?" Cain wonders, looking around at the faded glory of this ancient facility. Well, ancient to him, since it seems there are still Elves alive who worked here.

"There, on the right, that should have been the recruit training facility. If we're going to find a combat manual, that's the most likely place for it." The Cleric points towards a sign carved of rock, indicating the layout of the facility.

This building seems to be in very good shape, the roof is intact not fallen, the entry doors are closed but look solid. Even the windows are intact, indicating the building hasn't shifted and settled enough to break them. They approach with caution, again noticing the lack of dust and debris. It's like the Royal Guards only left a few days ago.

"Shamans, you'll need to stay outside, I'm not sure these old floors can support you. Elves, with me, let's search this place for a copy of the textbook, and anything else that might be interesting. You know the drill." Cain says, gently pulling the entry door, which swings silently open.

Inside is like a time capsule, perfectly preserved, only this one is empty. There are desks, chairs and hard mounted training equipment, but no signs of books, tools, weapons and anything else easily removed. Maybe they actually packed up everything before they left, unlike the residents who took what they could carry and went looking for a new home.

"That's a full sweep of the training facility with nothing. Let's take a look through the main building, and if that's empty too, we can look for a fighter's training academy. If it's in ruins they might have left something behind, unlike this place." Cain suggests, looking at the large black building, looking somewhat like a mosque with its domed roof.

Inside the main building is just as spotless as the rest of the courtyard, but not as empty. A few paintings and other decorations still adorn the walls, faded with age, there are carpets on the floor between the clusters of comfortable chairs that line the walls and a guest book sits open on its stand by the door.

"What is your name, do you recall? Summons don't always have their memories." Cain says to the Summoned Dark Elf Clerics.

"Drazzit is my name." They say in unison. Cain looks down at the first book and writes both their names followed by 'plus escort' as the Primordial Shaman doesn't have a name of its own that can be pronounced or written by humans.

He looks over the sheet carefully, seeing that the previous postings were all people signing out on the same day, but he doesn't recognize the calendar system. The Beginner Valley used the calendars brought by the transfers, but this one is totally unfamiliar, the day number is 84, so clearly they're not dividing the year into months.

"It's the old Solar Calendar, divided into the four seasons. Each equinox and solstice begins a new quarter, with the new year being celebrated on the winter solstice." She explains. Well that's easy to remember, and efficient too, the calendar self adjusts without need to calculate leap years. Or maybe this world doesn't need them, Cain hasn't been paying close attention to such things.

They split up to move into the side rooms, finding them all to be well furnished sitting rooms, the sort you would expect to meet with government officials in, luxurious, but tasteful and boring.

They gather back together at the stairs and move on to the second floor, finding the door closed and a spell circle cast on it. Cain signals for Drazzit to be ready to heal him before passing his hand over the Inscription and adding a single point of mana.

"State your name and business." Comes a voice from the door.

"Cain and Drazzit, looking for information on the Royal Guard." Cain answers, assuming it's part of the spell.

"Feth off then, they're all gone." Comes an elderly and cranky sounding reply. That's definitely not a spell, who programs their door lock to tell visitors to bugger off? Okay, he might have done it if he'd had the option in his last life, but that's not the point.

"I want to learn the Dark Elves dual wielding combat style, and I'm willing to make a trade if you're able to teach me." Cain tries again.

"There's chocolate walnut cake and Elven Forest Tea." Drazzit tries when there is no answer.

Slowly the door opens and the two find themselves looking at an old Dark Elf in the Royal Guards work uniform.

"You'd best not be lying about the tea, I ran out years ago." He says suspiciously and Cain pulls a bag from the Guild inventory. The Elven Forest Tea is a favorite of the Guild, because it's got higher caffeine than coffee, and the cake is possible, he'll just need to send someone to the market for it unless his Companions are carrying one.

The man takes the bag of tea with a wrinkled smile.. "Lloran, High Captain of the Royal Guards, at your service."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 157 - 157

"So, I take it you remained behind to look after the facility when everyone else left?" Cain asks the wizened Elf who is looking longingly at the tea.

"Spot on young man. I am in charge here. I was then, I am now. So everything that happens here is my jurisdiction. I couldn't just let the place rot and be looted now could I?"

He's got a point, even if the city couldn't support a full population anymore, it can clearly support one single Elf. Who isn't nearly as crazy as Cain would have expected.

"I don't suppose there are any remaining skill books around on dual sword combat techniques are there? That's what we were hoping to find in the ruins. Instead, we found a whole city locked up like a time capsule."

"Of course there are training books. Excellent books and lots of them. But you'll need to be a member of the Royal Guards to use them. I might still have some of the other ones around, you know, the basic ones for adventurers and soldiers and such. Most of them are gone though, if the skills were junk I used them as toilet paper." Okay, maybe he is a little off, but that's somewhat justified. You don't want your fallen Empire's legacy to be some third rate skill book that just happened to survive the vagaries of time.

Lloran suddenly turns and starts wading down the corridor, possibly forgetting he's not alone right now. Drazzit smiles at Cain and follows behind him when he gives her an eye roll and chases after the ancient Elf, praying that they're going somewhere useful. Their guide leads them down winding hallway after hallway, then up and down stairs before going up again and opening a grand set of double doors.

Everywhere they've passed is immaculate, all well kept despite showing its age, and all in the same black and Grey theme with green and bronze accents. Even the stonework had been chosen from quartz and granite that matches the Royal Guards color scheme, unless it was created with Earth Magic.

The destination turns out to be a combination library and training space on the third floor and they follow the old man inside as he heads towards the shelves and pulls down a collection of books.

"Dual Wield, Parry, Offense Basics, Defensive Footwork. Maybe Cloud Dancing? Yes, that one will be essential. Oh and Blade Aura, you can't call yourself a Swordsman without a Blade Aura." He says mostly to himself as he collected books before setting them on the table nearest to Cain.

"There you go. Copy those out and learn them first, and I'll come back to you next week when I clean." Lloran nods in satisfaction before taking a gliding step across the room and leaving, locking the door behind him with a surge of magic.

[Guys? I think a crazy old Elf just locked me in a training room to learn combat skills.]
Cain sends in Guild chat.

[There's someone alive here? Do you need a rescue?] Misha sends back, wondering if she should send her escort to his location.

[No, there's a window, I can probably leave if I want, but there's a whole library here in perfect condition. Are you both alright to stay in the city for a while?]

Kone has hardly mapped one percent of the city, and she's already found cool things, so this is no bother to her, and the Summons want to play dress up with Misha, so she's fine with taking a little longer.

[Alright, but you owe us.] Misha sends back after a while, distracted by their search through the shopping district.

[Have fun. I found a working moped.] Kone sends back, making everyone grin. Just what they needed, mopeds. That does make Cain realize that he's woefully lacking in transport type summons.

Looking through the books chosen by the old Elf to determine what one to start trying to copy first, Cain scans through his Lesser Golem options. There's a few forms of Centaurs in there, they're almost horses. And a miniature Pegasus, but that's not big enough to carry him. Maybe some of the smaller girls could ride it though.

Really, the best option he has are Drakes and Dragons. It might be a little conspicuous, but traveling to the coast on the back of a Dragon would be really quick. Maybe a Drake instead to save a long argument with Laura about the ethics of using Dragons as a beast of burden. Once he's gotten all the essentials copied from this library, they're really no more need to stay at ground level and search for portals after all.

"Alright, time to work. Let's see here, first up, let's try [Dual Wield] then I'll move on to [Offense Basics]." Cain says out loud, making Drazzit give him a strange look.

[Book Locked: Create Copy To use]

[Insufficient Inscription Skill: Base 5 percent success chance applies]

This is going to be a very long day. Or a very long week, if he can't get his inscription skill up. Cain starts on the [Dual Wield] book, an amazing skill that increases offhand weapon damage from thirty percent of main hand damage to full damage. Warriors can get this at level 30, and most non tank ones do.

As he writes though, he realizes this isn't the Warrior Skill, but a separate version of [Dual Wield] that has additional ranks only unlocked when other skills are learned. Namely [Offense Basics: Dark Elven Blade Forms] and [Cloud Dancing]. The additional ranks improve attack speed and allow [Parry] without ending an attack combination.

[Inscription Failed: Try Again?] Y/N

Of course he's going to try again, insufferable system.

Late that night, Cain finally makes a breakthrough. His inscription skill moves from Apprentice to Basic.

[Insufficient Inscription: 10 percent chance of success]

That's twice what he was working with before, this seemingly neverending grind is really paying off for him. Plus, it's easy on materials, the desk holds everything he needs, and the supply appears to refill itself between attempts. If there's a chance later, he's totally going to steal one of these magic Inscription desks.

After midnight, Cain decides to get some sleep and rest his eyes, asking Drazzit to watch over him before making sure the rest of the non Companion summons are watching over the girls, except the two Oath Breakers guarding the portal. Focusing on them, he can see what they're doing, rebuilding the stone shelter that used to surround the portal. But because they are innately rather evil, they first blocked the other side, so anyone who attempts to sneak past them and enter the city will suffer a brutal death.

Cain mentally asks how they plan to get everyone out again, and they declare that they've fully tested their theory with a desert lizard, and they can successfully teleport in and out of the city with another living being.

They're proud of their accomplishments, so Cain simply thanks them for their hard work and leaves them to their own devices.

Vala and Nemu have split up, each sending a copy of themselves to Kone and Misha while Laura simply flies around in circles, enjoying the cool air and drawing her sketch of the city. None of them need to sleep, so it's possible the Dragon will continue to do that the entire time they're here.

The first attempt of the morning brings victory.

[Inscription Successful]

[Book of Dual Wield: Dark Elven Blade Forms] has been created.

So it really is a separate version of the skill. And limited to this one specific style, where the Warrior Skill is available for any one handed weapon they can use.

[Dual Wield] Unranked Skill. Part 1 of 3 Activated. Allows the use of specific weapon combinations at full damage. Paired Short Sword, Long and Short Sword, Paired Long Sword, Paired Scimitar, Scimitar and Short Spear.

Rather limited in options, but Cain has been using the same [Ice Bow] that never seems to proc its special effect, the one he got fifty levels ago, for ages. He's in no position to complain about being limited to a few weapons.

Next up, the book of Offense Basics. It's about the same size as the last book, so hopefully it's no harder to manage. In fact, he might even get it done a little more quickly now that his inscription skill has gone up.

[Inscription Insufficient: 10 percent chance of success]

Perfect, now to pray to whatever deity governs chance that he is successful. Was that RNGesus? Or is that only for drop rate in video games? The patron Saint of dice might be a good choice too, but do either of them exist in this world?

"Oh mighty System, please grant me success in my Inscription." Cain whispers wholeheartedly as he finishes transcribing the book over two hours later.

[Inscription Failed: Try Again?] Y/N

[Bonus applies: +5 percent success chance]

It worked, it really worked. Bonus success chance. Alright, he's got a good feeling about this next attempt. "Thank you system for granting me your favor. Book complete."

[Inscription Failed: Try Again?]Y/N

[Bonus Applies: +5 percent success chance]

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 158 - 158

Cain fails the book of Offense Basics a total of nine times, all with the bonus success chance before the system has mercy on him.

[Inscription Successful]

[Inscription Improved: Basic 2]

[Book of Offense Basics: Dark Elven Blade Forms] has been created

[Skill Learned] Open details to see available attack combinations.

There's a low, middle and high strike, plus a dashing strike and a retreating strike for each combination included in the offense basics. Learning them lets Cain clearly see that there's an advanced form of each as well as dozens of possible combinations available, but from another book, possibly two if the flowing combos and transitions aren't in the advanced offense book.

But even just with this, he's way ahead of where he was. Cain selects one single skill to see what they look like.

[Scimitar and Short Spear: Dashing Strike] 1MP deals 150 percent base damage.
Allows use of [Flow: Repeated Stab] [Not Known]

Well, that's not much damage, 50 percent more than knowing nothing at all, but it's something. Cain takes a Scimitar and Short Spear from the training weapon racks in the room and steps out into the middle of the green and Grey checkered floor to test the new skill.

Holding the weapons now feels natural in his hands, the Scimitar in the right, spear in his left hand. The knowledge of what he needs to do to successfully attack flows into his mind as he assumes a combat stance and he moves forward, extending the spear in a crisp strike in front of him. He can see how that could easily be repeated, but without the additional skill, he would be repeating this one attack over and over, and the draw back, place and slide of the technique would make it slower than he is certain should be possible.

For an hour he practices the basics of Scimitar and Short Spear before calling it a night and hoping tomorrow doesn't bring as many failures. There's a lot of books to learn, and he really doesn't want to spend ages in here just copying ancient techniques, though that might be inevitable.

Next on the list is [Parry]. If he can attack and defend he's at least got the most essential of essentials down, should the old Elf decide he's sick of having someone in his Library.

[Inscription Successful]

[Inscription Improved: Basic 3]

[Skill Learned: Parry - Dark Elven Blade Forms]

See, first try, that's how it's supposed to go.

[Dual Wield] Rank 2 of 3 Unlocked. [Parry] may be used without interrupting an attack combination.

That's great, fantastic, mind boggling, only Cain doesn't know any attack combinations. They're in the Advanced Offense book. He will have to get the old man to find it for him once all these basics are done. But he's on a roll now, and it's time to try the Defensive Footwork Skill. Then Blade Aura, and the last book will be Cloud Dancing, which has got a fancy purple cover, trimmed in gold that intimidates Cain. He's planning to get his inscription up as high as humanly possible before attempting that one.

[Inscription Insufficient 20 percent chance of success]

[Inscription Failed: Try Again] Y/N

[Inscription Improved: Basic 4]

Well, at least he got an Inscription gain out of his failure.

Guild Chat is lively today, after a day of mostly quiet as everyone explored. Laura found a shop that didn't look damaged at all by the passage of time and it turned out to be a tailors shop. No books or patterns were left behind, but a huge number of Party Dresses and Gentleman's Suits were. They're available in both the silk of Dark Elf fashion and the tiny sizes and Steampunk bronze and leather of Gnome Fashion, so they suspect this was either a high society shop, or a rental facility for petitioners visiting the King. The castle is just up the road, and there are a number of formerly exquisite hotels nearby, so it could be either.

They've loaded a number of outfits into the Guild Bank, insisting Cain try on a Suit and let them know how it looks. They're tagged as a costume item, so they're usable by anyone, and Cain picks two from the Guild Bank.

"What do you think Drazzit, white first or black first?" Cain asks the closest thing they have to an expert. The clones of the Dark Elven Cleric he has Summoned as a Supporter. The cleric runs a coal black hand through her curly white hair thoughtfully as she makes her decision, playing with her hair as if it will help in the answer.

"White First, with a black shirt. Then the reverse." She nods, satisfied with her choice.

As with all equipped items, the fit is perfect, but this suit is pure luxury and so comfortable to wear. It even comes with matching shoes and a matching flat cap that feels like rough woven silk and not wool. It probably is, given the distinct lack of sheep in the Dark Elven cities.

Even the bespoke suits that the billionaires back home wore have nothing on this outfit, Cain feels truly classy. He sees pairs of silk gloves in the Guild Bank and adds one of them to the outfit, black to match his shirt.

"Well, what do you think? Is it enough to impress the ladies?" He smiles at Drazzit who makes an exaggerated fanning gesture at her collar.

"Very nice. Switch that cap for a top hat and add a Spiderweb cloak and you'd be every woman's dream Groom." She assures him.

A top hat and a spider web cloak over a white suit is their marriage outfit for grooms? That's different. But it would probably look great, even though he's twice the size of any

Elf. Cain switches to the black outfit with a white shirt and gloves, giving a spin for Drazzit to see all of him.

"This isn't bad, more like a businessman. You look very elegant, but I like the white one better." She says, looking him over carefully.

"White would be hard to keep clean while I work, so I think I'll keep the black one on for now, it's just too comfortable to change back out of so soon." Cain tells her, sending both of their impressions in Guild Chat.

Kone is in full agreement, thinking that he would indeed look better in white, but Misha is reserving judgements until she sees it firsthand, worried that he might just look like some cheesy wannabe pimp in a white suit.

Since they're all costumes, and will fit anyone with an interface, Kone goes for a dark brown leather suit and heavy boots with bronze accessories, a matching tophat with goggles as a hat band and a bright orange shirt. Cain can't help but laugh at the mental image her description brings, the thought of her adolescent 145cm tall self and her perpetually innocent face in the Steampunk look is far more amusing than it should be. The Brown leather should go well with her tanned complexion and Dark hair though.

But her next announcement, that she thinks they've found a gun shop, almost makes him fail his inscription.

The Gnomes have great technology, but could they have made actual guns to replace any magical ability they were lacking? Kone has wanted pistols since the very first outfit she tried on after joining the Guild made her look like a gunslinger.

[Best of luck. Keep us updated.] Cain sends before getting back to his work.

Two more tries were enough to get [Defensive Footwork: Dark Elven Blade Forms] copied and learned. He even got an upgrade to [Inscription: Basic 5]

Combined with everything else he's learned, the Footwork let's Cain glide effortlessly around the training area.

[Defensive Footwork: Dark Elven Blade Forms] Passive. Allows free movement while defending using a specified weapon combination. Requires [Parry] [Dual Wield] [Offense Basics]

"That's incredibly smooth. How high is your Dexterity?" Drazzit asks curiously as she watched him practice with various weapon combinations, trying to find the one he likes best.

"125 right now, but I've got some extra points from my recent level increases I could spend. I've been saving them until I get my next skill unlocked, in case I don't meet all the requirements." Cain explains.

"That's a lot higher than I expected. But you're a broken class anyhow, so I shouldn't be surprised that you've got the agility of the finest of rogues." She shrugs off the surprise of his answer with a straight face.

Blade Aura is a short book to copy, but he has little luck with it, failing his first five attempts. It was definitely worth it though, the Blade Aura is much like the Oath Breakers area attack skill.

[Blade Aura I: Dark Elven Blade Forms] 5MP per second. Deals 10 percent of melee damage to all enemy targets within (Users Level/10) meters. Causes [Intimidate] effect.

[Intimidate] Causes enemies within Blade Aura area of effect to suffer a 10 percent reduction in attack speed.

Only one book remains to copy now out of the introductory set that the caretaker of this place left for him. [Cloud Dancing]. From the name it should be some sort of movement skill, but Cain won't get the details until he manages to successfully copy and learn it.

[Insufficient Inscription: Base 5 Percent Chance of Success Applied]

While Cain is struggling to complete his work the mood is completely different over at the tailors shop where most of the group has gathered.. Nemu has found a set of Dark Elven playing cards and their copies of Drazzit are teaching the Companions the finer points of their favorite card game, a 7 card variation of poker.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 159 - 159

"Well, aren't you looking particularly dashing today." Lloran greets Cain as he walks in the next morning. Cain has been working all night trying to get this book completed without any success. He has just reached Inscription Basic 10 though, and was hopeful that the next completion might take him into Advanced.

"This book seems to be a bit above my Inscription ability though, so it's taking longer than expected to finish the task you set me." Cain complains.

"When you've lived as long as I have, you'll learn, good things take time and practice. But once you've truly mastered your craft there is very little that is truly impossible." The old man takes a series of leisurely steps through the air with a hand on the pommel of his sword and picks two more books off the upper shelves.

"It only works with a weapon in your hands you see, but with a spiked gauntlet on, or your hand on your sword, you can use it to get around easier than any ladder."

Looking at him, he might not be able to climb a ladder at this point in his life. But he still gets around pretty well, so Cain wonders if he's just using a skill all the time. The two books he set in the table are exactly what Cain hoped for though, Advanced Offense and Offensive Flow, hopefully the only two books he needs to complete the Dark Elven Blade Forms combat skill to a reasonable degree.

"If you can finish all three of those today before I return, I've got a special treat for you." Lloran announces, before promptly leaving again.

[You know, when I was hoping for a complete skill manual from the ruins, I did not expect to have to copy every skill out one by one to learn them.] Cain jokes in Guild chat.

[How's it going? You've been at that last manual all night.] Misha sends back a few minutes later. They must have just gotten up.

[If you copied them, that means you can make more right?] Cixelcid sends right after, the sense of hope clear in his wording.

[Eventually. Right now I'm working with 5 and 10 percent success rates. That's an awful lot of materials and time to make more, and we'd have to get all the materials. This time, the old Elf is providing them.]

[Then you'd better get good. I know a lot of warriors who would love to have a set of specialty skills for dual wielding.]

Cain laughs at his guild mate and finishes up another attempt at the ornate skill book.

[Inscription Successful]

[Inscription Improved: Advanced 1]

[Skill Book Created: Cloud Dancing]

[Skill Learned]

Finally, he's made it past that hurdle. But what exactly does it do?

[Cloud Dancing] Channeled Skill. 20MP per second. Allows the user to step on the air as if it were ground while in combat. Being stunned, immobilized or leaving combat will cancel the skill. 15 second cool down begins when skill is canceled.

That's much more reasonably priced than he thought. With mana regeneration factored in, he should be able to keep it up for around a minute, even while using other skills. But with 15 seconds between uses, being stunned could be disastrous if you're relying on it.

More advanced warriors like the Royal Guards likely have multiple similar skills to account for this possibility.

Now for the final two books. If Cain is right, at Advanced 1 Inscription, he should have a 60 percent chance of making the first batch of books. He's not sure if these count as the same rank, since they're part of a set, but those odds are looking pretty good after the nightmare of the Cloud Dancing book.

He starts with [Offensive Flow: Dark Elf Blade Forms] which looks just like the first batch of books, with its sturdy binding and moderately decorated cover.

[Inscription Successful]

[Item Created: Book of Offensive Flow - Dark Elf Blade Forms]

[Skill Learned]

[Offensive Flow] Allows the use of attack combinations while using specified weapons combinations.

Simple, Safe, and effective. Just how Cain likes it. One book to go and he's home free.

[Insufficient Inscription: 60 percent success chance]

[Inscription Failed: Try Again?] Y/N

Well, you can't win every time.

[Insufficient Inscription: 60 percent success chance]

[Inscription Failed: Try Again?] Y/N

Sonofa...

[Insufficient Inscription: 60 percent success chance]

[Inscription Failed: Try Again?] Y/N

Seriously? Did he use up all of his luck already?

[Inscription Successful]

[Skill Book Created: Advanced Offense - Dark Elf Blade Forms]

[Skill Learned]

Again Cain is facing a Barrage of notifications about skills changing as the basic attacks he learned are upgraded to Advanced.

[Scimitar and Short Spear: Dashing Strike] 2MP deals 300 percent damage to target. Allows Use of [Multiple Stab]

[Multiple Stab] 10MP triggered by Dashing Strike. Deals the damage of Dashing Strike 5 times in rapid succession.

Now that's a skill. The sort of close combat ability you'd expect a warrior to have. Cain inspects his abilities and sees that they're are still just a low, middle and high strike plus a dashing strike for each weapon combination, but the [Offensive Flow] abilities stack the damage up, with each successive Successful ability doing even more damage than the last. Up to five abilities can be linked in a chain, should your target live that long.

Then he sees a new attack at the bottom.

[Decapitate] Deal 100 percent of a Target's Maximum HP in one strike to an immobilized or stunned target.

That's just a whole new level of brutal. Cain isn't sure how much armor and damage reduction skills like his Golems have would effect it, but that amount of damage is ridiculous. He's seen it in action before, come to think of it. The strongest attack of that Dark Elven Warrior Dungeon Boss looks exactly like what Cain understands the [Decapitate] skill should be. But that boss could use it without stunning his target first.

To elite warriors like that, these skills might be introductory, but to Cain and the warriors in his Guild? They're almost broken overpowered, largely because of the low mana cost and stacking combo damage.

[Is there a Dagger option to those skills? I can't use any of the weapons in the list except short sword.] Elmira sends in Guild chat, finally looking up what everyone else is doing.

That Pixie has gotten completely comfortable with her place in the world, somewhere between a pillow to nap on and a jar of honey. But she's had a rough life, she deserves some downtime.

[Sorry, no daggers in the list. But twin short swords is an option, if you want to learn them once I'm good enough to reliably make the books.] Cain sends back and receives a pouty face in response. She won't need Cloud Dancer, as she can fly but Dual Wield plus the Offense books and Parry would make for an interesting combination with her existing Assassin skills. She focused heavily on the Ranged and magic attacks that a Pixie Species Assassin can use, high damage single strikes, so she's also lacking in melee skills.

"Nearly finished yet?" Lloran asks, sauntering into the room.

"Yep, all done and learned, I just need to practice them a little to get the feel for the Flow ability." Cain explains.

"Only one way to practice properly. Show me what you've got." Cain is a bit concerned about hurting the old man, but he's at least 20 levels higher than the Puppet Master, so Lloran might be alright, even though Cain is still merged with the two Legendary Demons.

Cain picks the Scimitar and Spear that he's practiced the most with and faces off with the absorb Elven warrior who is now holding two training Scimitar with dull edges. He goes in for the dashing strike, only to be parried at the last second. So he tries the Multiple Stab attack, but the old man dodges and begins his own attacks, just simple, single attacks, but they force Cain to rapidly Parry with his one sword as he tries to cancel the stabs.

It ends up being easier to simply cancel them by moving on to another attack, in this case a low sweep with the spear intended to trip the opponent, followed by an attempt to attack with the Scimitar. But the old man blocks the spear with a sword and Cain is forced back onto defense.

No old man should be that fast. Cain has not one, but two Legendary Demons on his side, but he can't get ahead of the Royal Guard. As Cain tries Multiple attack combinations trying to get through, even going as far as adding in Cloud Dancing to try to attack from above and behind, he starts to realize that it's not all speed, the old man is just so much more skilled than he is that even a fresh batch of abilities doesn't make Cain anywhere near his equal.

Once Cain has exhausted every combination from every angle he can think of without managing to land a strike on Lloran he steps back, thinking that he should switch weapons.

"Not bad young man. You did indeed copy every one of the books successfully.. Don't feel bad about not landing a strike, I might be old, but I'm still more than a hundred levels higher than you are."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 160 - 160

"So, are you planning on staying here forever? Most of the city has collapsed now, and it doesn't look like the water levels have recovered too much, going by the sandy desert on the surface. Not much lives up there anymore, and most of the surface cities of the old empire are buried and forgotten." Cain asks Lloran, and the old Elf shakes his head.

"Since you've found the place, the entrance must be open again, so I'll be getting visitors. Looters, archeologists who are just publicly funded looters and some inquisitive travelers. So I'll have to either call for reinforcements or take care of it myself. I couldn't really leave even if I wanted to."

"We did block the entrance again with solid stone. I have a Summon who can teleport, so my group can come safely in and out, but it should still stop anyone else from successfully coming to bother you." Cain smiles.

"Well, that's good news, we should go check the other locations. You know what, I'll set you a quest for it. I haven't signed off on a quest in centuries."

[Quest: Verify the City's security] check the functionality of and rebuild the blockades at all three of the city's portals.

"There, now you young folks can take care of it and just come see me when you're done to get a reward. I left it up to the System." The Elf nods to himself as if mentally verifying his actions before walking away again.

"Laura, where are the other two portals? You must have seen them by now. Pick me up so we can go verify their destination and security." Cain informs his flying companion and can mentally hear them playing rock paper scissors to see who has to actually pick him up.

"Or you could tell me and I'll Summon a Drake instead." Cain suggests and can immediately feel the offense taken.

"Of course we'll get you. Flying on a smelly Drake all day? That's just icky." She declares out loud, landing beside him.

"The first one isn't far from here. It's covered in carvings of Spiders and such, so it's really easy to see." The winner of their competition, who thinks she won't need to carry anyone points with an outstretched claw towards the edge of the city.

Cain hops up on Laura, carrying the Petite Dark Elven Clerics and placing them on the other copy of Laura. "Alright, let's head out. And I must say, Laura, you're growing into a fine Dragon. We don't see this form very much, but you're definitely getting more powerful."

"If only I had grown when your skill upgraded me. What sort of Epic Dragon is this small?" Laura asks, looking at her wings. They're almost twice the size they were when she was first Summoned, but that's mostly due to the increase in levels. She didn't grow at all when [Advisor] upgraded her quality to Epic.

"Give it time. You'll grow into your station soon enough. You've already grown a lot in a short time." Cain scratches the sweet spot behind her horn, making her give a happy wiggle and Drazzit smiles over at him, seeing how he's consoling his friend.

They take to the air, flying towards the location Laura indicated that the portal should be while Kone and Misha, along with most of the summons are headed for the other exit. The portal is magnificent, a black and green stone courtyard, with a huge spider carving standing guard above the portal. Softly curved benches and tree like fungus decorate the area, clearly maintained by Lloran, while the presumed location of the portal itself is carefully buried with huge granite blocks on both sides.

It's beautiful in an Elven way, but with an underworld touch that makes it clear this is an exit to a Dark Elven location.

One of the Oath Breakers meets them there, ready for whatever task they require, and looking around with great interest at the multiple carved stone spiders in the area.

"I know this being. The Spider Queen is a Demon God. I didn't know the Dark Elves worshiped her." The Oath Breaker informs Cain when he dismounts Laura, helping Drazzit to the ground.

"She created us from the Wood Elves. We can't help but follow her." Drazzit says, distracted as well by the statues.

"Clear away enough of the barrier to access the portal, it might be blocked on the other side too. If you can cross safely, let me know what you see and return immediately. We don't want to let anyone know the city can be accessed." Cain instructs the big Demon.

It only takes seconds to move the blocks and create an opening for the Demon to pass through. He steps in, then straight back again with a smile.

"It opens to an abandoned ancient quarter of Underwood. I don't think anyone has been there in centuries, but the area around the portal is clear."

Drazzit is giving Cain the most pitiful begging look, begging to be allowed to go through the portal.

"I found you trapped in a Dungeon. I don't know when it formed or how long your group has been missing, or even if they are missing. There might be a much older version of you living in the city." Cain says, unsure how the Dungeons came to be.

"They're a time based spell, intended to be a maze to confuse and slow the Casters enemies, a remnant of the war between races a few hundred years ago. Everything you see in the dungeon is roughly where they were placed when the spell was cast, trapped for eternity in a day long loop and driven insane by the mind clouding effects of the spell. But after a while, we adapt enough to start remembering the days that are different, when someone shows up and does something unusual. That's the same time transfers started showing up too. The magical system created to bring reinforcements to the humans went awry and never fully stopped activating, but began sending them to all sorts of places and races."

"How powerful do you have to be to do something like that?" Cain wonders out loud, and the Oath Breaker laughs.

"It took all of the Human Gods who participated in the war to create the system, but only a single trickster God to break it and send reinforcements to everyone. That's why they started negotiating peace, because they couldn't win anymore." The Demon grins, his delight at their misfortune plainly evident.

"Alright, if you've been lost since the war between races, they might not recognize you, but feel free to head home for a while. I'll wait here and if you're attacked I'll cancel your Summon so you don't have to be killed by your own kinfolk." Cain gives in to Drazzit who cheers and runs through the portal.

"Do you think that's a good idea?" The Oath Breaker asks.

"Probably not, but I'm a sucker for a pouty face, just ask Laura here. It works on me all the time. Plus we will barricade the portal again when we're done, and I'm sending a mental message now, telling Drazzit not to let anyone know about it."

Across the city, the others have found themselves in a clearing on the side of a mountain. There's a ruined city all around them, and at the base of the hill, a thousand meters below them, a huge, modern city stands. They can see Dwarven Guards with pale skin and red hair, as opposed to the darker complexion of the Dwarves in Graska, standing guard around the ruins.

"Everyone quiet, that must be the Hill Dwarf capital, and they've clearly got the ruins of the old city cordoned off to prevent trespassers." Misha whispers and the larger summons duck down so they can't be seen.

The barricade on the lost city side was almost crumbled, but the one on this side was buried beneath a fallen statue of a Dwarven King. They had to get the Oath Breakers to

teleport them through so they could see the view for themselves. It was worth it though, this is spectacular.

"I checked, and those Dwarves are all over level 190. This isn't the Hill Dwarf capital in the Beginner Valley, it must be one somewhere else on the continent." The oath breaker whispers to Kone and Misha.

They didn't recall a Dwarven kingdom on the map. Just the desert, the humans, the Orcs and the Elves. Maybe they're deep in the mountain range, or even on the other side. But none of them are brave enough to go ask and risk being arrested for trespassing.

"Alright, we should have seen enough to verify the security of the portal, let's head back and go see what Cain is up to. You know that man has gone and gone something strange again, guaranteed." Misha says, looking at the Oath Breakers to carry them back.

When they get back the clones of Drazzit that were with them are giddy with joy, dancing and hugging each other.

"What happened while we were gone? Why the celebration?" Kone asks.

"Cain let our clone go through the portal into Underwood, and she found our Grandmother. She told her we're trapped in a Dungeon and not dead, so she can go visit the original version of us sometime."

"You didn't tell her how you got there, right?" Misha asks and the Elves stop dancing around.

"Well, you see, we didn't have to.. We accidentally mentioned Lloran and how Cain was learning new combat abilities and she knew right away."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

- Chapter 161 - 161 A New Friend?

Chapter 161 - 161 A New Friend?

"We should go warn Cain that he might have a Dark Elf army, or at the very least, an exploration team coming his way." Kone says, before turning to Su.

"Can you fly me over to his location? It would be way faster than running."

"Sure, I love flying people around." Su says, gesturing for Kone to hop on and immediately taking flight.

"Looks like we're finding our own way. Oath Breaker, would you mind? I know you can get there faster than running." Misha sighs, looking at the departing Dragon. Both of those girls are much too easily excited, they just forget everyone else when they find something new that catches their attention.

"Of course. Close your eyes, this might be unsettling."

Misha follows the Demon's instructions and feels a lurch of being shifted through space, then the rush of air that indicates they're moving, then another lurch, and again before they suddenly stop. The Oath a Breaker is right, the combination of lurching teleports and high speed running is stomach churning. Misha briefly wonders if having her eyes open might have helped orient herself or if it really would have made it worse with the changing locations.

"Alright, we're here, you can open your eyes. The other me is rebuilding the blockage at the Dwarven Portal into a solid wall." The Oath Breaker says, heading off any questions Misha might have had about the securing the city part of the quest.

Kone and Su are coming into sight already, the length of a city no major obstacle to a Dragon in flight.

"Drazzit slipped up and her grandmother knows where we are. When she mentioned Lloran the old woman knew right away." Misha explains in a hurry.

"She hasn't taken damage, or been restrained, I've got her status bar up on my display. Maybe I should go check and make sure nothing is coming?" Cain suggests.

"Too late young man. Where is that ancient deadbeat? We all thought he was dead, but he's been hiding here." Comes a powerful female voice as an elderly Dark Elf Priestess steps through the portal.

"Nobody else is coming I swear. I didn't know that Lloran was her ex husband and I couldn't stop her, she's like level 300." Drazzit pants, chasing her grandmother out of the portal.

"Oath Breakers, close the wall, just to be safe. We don't need surprises. Grandma Drazzit, he should be in the Royal Guard headquarters. But what do you need to see him so urgently for if he's your ex?" Cain tries to bring the situation under control.

"He wasn't my ex then. He disappeared during the evacuation of the Gnomes to the coast. Nobody knew what happened to him and we thought he'd fallen to monsters in

the desert, as unlikely as that is for one of his skill." She explains, stomping towards the training grounds at a rapid pace.

"Lloran you deadbeat, get out here before I have to go in and get you." The old woman bellows as she reaches the former Royal Guard courtyard.

"Go away crazy ghosts, don't you pretend to be my wife." The old man's voice comes from behind an out building. The ancient Priestess simply vanishes and then returns, holding the old man by the scruff of the neck.

[Quest Complete: Portals Verified and Secured]

"Secured my foot, who let this crazy woman in here? Don't you know that's against the rules you damnable system?"

"The system won't help you, old man. You owe me a debt from long before it existed." She smiles, still holding on to his collar.

"I can explain you see. I was assigned back here to take care of the grounds. I had to go, I didn't have a choice." He pleads.

"That's why you didn't tell anyone, and why you blocked all the exits so we thought the city had been destroyed? You owe me for 987 years of deception. Did you even know that this is your Granddaughter? Trapped with your oldest Son in a dungeon during the last years of the great war."

Kone hands Cain and Misha bags of caramel covered popcorn, no way are they missing or on this show. This is better than a daytime drama.

"Wait, they're trapped? But she's right here. Drazzit was it? Maude, darling, don't be so mad, it's bad for your health." Lloran pleads.

"Cain Summoned me. This me is just a copy of the actual me that he met in the dungeon in the middle of the Elven Forest." Drazzit explains and the old man pokes her, as if checking that she's solid.

"Looks like your days of hiding are over. But on the plus side, you've got reinforcements, and they're probably not going to loot the place." Drazzit adds with a smile.

"I know I said I'd likely die in here, but I meant of old age." Lloran mutters, before raising his voice for everyone to hear.

"Well, I guess that's that. If any of the Royal Guards still exist, they can take up the post and maintain the compound. Just let me work this interface, ah there it is. Quest Reward issued. Random Reward to be issued by the system." Lloran looks proud of

himself, and Cain realizes that he's only ever issued random quests to people in the surface that he would never meet, because the system was created after he locked himself in here.

[Generating Quest Reward]

[Reward Issued: Muzz City recall stone]

[Ability Category Unlocked: Lesser Dark Elf Companion 50/50]

[Greater Dark Elf Companion 100/100]

Epic Dark Elven Companion 180/250]

[Summon Companion to Finalize Creation]

"Cool, a recall stone for the city." Kone says, looking at her Reward.

"Usable once every 24 hours, no limit. That's a pretty good Quest reward." Misha agrees, having received the same reward as the other two party members.

"Not just that, I also unlocked Dark Elf as a companion. When I Summon it, the Ancient Spell that created the other Companions will create a Dark Elf to join our group." Cain adds and everyone moves to the benches, popcorn in hand tray for the show. Even Lloran and Maude have joined them.

The scattered remainder of their group has all assembled now, leaving only the two Oath Breakers who are on Guard duty outside without a front row seat. But they can get the details from their clones.

[Summoning Companion: Dark Elf]

[Calculating Requirements]

[Creation Complete]

A Dark Skinned Elf with long white hair tied in a braid at the back of the neck fades into view, before splitting into two identical copies. The Elf has on brown leather pants, knee high black leather boots with a low heel, a bright red silk shirt and a Grey coat that looks like it was taken directly from a soldier in the American Civil War. A Pair of Scimitar hang from each their hips and a black Bandana under a Tricone hat covers their head.

Cain inspects this new companion, but can't properly guess what sort of abilities it might have. Honestly, it just looks like a Dark Elf Pirate.

"Greetings, I am Nila. Dark Elven Wave Rider. A pleasure to meet you all." A musical voice greets them once the new companion is formed.

'Can't you just once give me a Male friend to hang out with?' Cain thinks, directing his annoyance at the system.

[System Notification: Summon Companion only Summons Companion type beings. User must find their own friends if they are desired]

Okay, now that was just rude and uncalled for.

"Welcome Nila, I am Cain and it is a pleasure to meet you. What exactly is a Wave Rider? Other than the literal meaning, which suggests you're a sailor or a water mage."

"I'm an Elemental Shaman of sorts, with some skill using paired Scimitar, as all Dark Elves except Priestesses learn. Water magic is my strong suit, but I can control the winds to sail and move easily, or create wind blades for combat. I can do most types of Earth Magic like Earthquake and Stone Rain, but they're not as strong as my water abilities. For water I can do blades, flying blades, waves, or even tsunami or a wide area pleasant rainfall to water crops. Plus I can Summon Elementals, with my Water Elemental being the strongest of them. I can also do solid water shaping, should we need a water staircase or something." She explains.

"So something like a Shaman of the Sea?" Kone asks.

"You could say that. Unlike our cousins who went underground, our kinfolk took to the seas instead. If you venture out far enough you might even find one of our flotillas. They're the size of a small town, built of captured ships." Nila answers fondly.

"Would they be related to the Corsair class? We've got one named Candia in our Guild." Cain asks his new Companions.

"We taught the first Corsairs after the system was created. They're more of a close range combatant, while the Wave Riders are much stronger in their magic with a greater range. As they say, imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. The Wave Riders you might see on the open oceans often work with Corsair led fleets to compensate for the fact Corsairs can only use water magic."

"Can you create Totems like a basic Shaman?" Misha asks, wondering about mana Totems specifically.

"We can't. We gave up that ability in exchange for Elementals. But it's a fair trade, they're very useful." Nila shrugs.

That's alright, as long as Cain is merged with the Primordial Shaman they've still got a Mana regeneration totem available when necessary. Plus, the Dark Apostle Class is a little easier on mana than Cleric was.. Unless she goes overboard with the Holy Fire.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 162 - 162

"Since you're my companion, you'll be gaining a few abilities Nila. One will make your quality Epic, another will grant you Bonded Forces. They're Greater Golems, normally from your species group, but Dark Elves don't have Golems, only Supporter Class summons, so I'm not sure what you'll be able to choose from.

"It seems I can pick from Dark Fae in general, so I've got some options. If I can change between them, then I'm not too worried."

"I can change the type of my Drakes, so you probably can?" Laura shrugs and Nila nods her agreement.

"Why not Winged Wolves or a Dark Phoenix?" Maude suggests, calling out one of each.

Cain quickly adds them to his listing before asking "How did you do that? Are you a Summoner?"

"Oh no dear, I just have a stable token. With the portal nearby, I'm close enough to call animals I have stored at the stables near my house. It's a little luxury of holding a high Rank in Underwood."

Kone is staring intently at Nila and mouthing the word 'Puppies' over and over, like a subliminal message.

"Alright, for now, Winged Wolves it is." Nila caves, calling out all eight of them. Kone runs over and hugs her, before doing the same to every wolf in turn. Puppy isn't the word for these things, they're eyes to eyes with Misha and must weigh three hundred kilos.

"She's a Beast Lord, and a huge animal lover. Don't worry, she'll calm down once she gets her fill of fluff." Cain explains, making Maude laugh.

You guys seem like a fun bunch, but I need to get back to my duties, and I'm taking this one with me so he doesn't flee again." She waves, dragging the old Royal Guard with her.

"I do believe we got what we came here for, and more. How was the fashion shopping?" Cain asks.

"Fairly productive. They didn't leave any patterns behind, but there was a fair assortment of clothing, beyond the fancy suits and dresses we found at the rental shop." Misha says, looking pointedly at Cain who is still wearing the black suit with a matching flat cap.

"What? You think I should change to white before we head out into the bright sunlight?" He jokes and Misha rolls her eyes at him.

"They're all interchangeable, you could do something like Kone has picked." Vala suggests, pointing at the bright orange shirt and dark brown leather pants on the Beast Lord.

That's when Cain notices something new on Kone's hip that looks suspiciously like a revolver. "Is that what I think it is?"

"Almost. It's a magical artifact that stores up to six spells and activates them when you pull the trigger. But I don't have much for offensive Ranged magic right now, so it's mostly decorative." She confirms with a frown.

"What about [Boulder Toss]? It is the Earth Magic equivalent of [Meteor] but it flies forward from you until maximum range or until it hits something it can't knock down. That might be suitable to your weapon." Nila suggests.

"It's better than empty for sure. If it doesn't work out we can always try a new spell next time." Kone says optimistically, handing over the magical artifact.

The charging process seems to take much more mana than any spell Cain has seen, dropping Nila to nearly half mana and lighting up only one of the six chambers. He quickly calls for a Mana Totem and asks the Primordial Shamans to do the same, creating an intense field of mana regeneration that refills Nila to full mana in under five seconds. By the time she's finished adding a charge, her mana pool has been topped off again.

Once the charge is complete a delicate line of script in the Gnome language appears on the charged chamber. All six are the same, so it's most likely the spell name, or a hazard warning. But it gives the artifact an elegant look, like it was engraved with fancy gold decorations.

"Hopefully I won't need this any time soon, but I feel better already with it charged and on my hip." Kone says, placing the weapon back in his holster.

"Is it time for our beach vacation now? How about we fly the remainder of the distance, since we've found something good already." Cain suggests.

"On what though? The Wolves might not do well under the desert sun, the Shamans don't fly nearly as fast as they move on land and we don't have enough Dragons to carry everyone else." Misha asks. Laura looks unhappy, clearly expecting Cain to ask her to call out Drakes, and she's already voiced her opinion on the smell of having everyone spend all day on a Drake.

"If our beloved Shamans can forgive me, I'd like to swap them for Dragons. You remember that Ice Dragon dungeon boss we faced to get the Ice bow?" Cain says.

"The defective one that never freezes anything? Yeah, I recall. That thing was huge, nearly fifty meters long if you count the tail." Misha smiles and the Shamans nod their agreement that such a thing would be a great mount. Laura looks intrigued, having not been Summoned yet at that time, and surely an ice dragon won't smell like Drakes do.

"Oath Breakers, can you take us all outside? Once we're there I'll switch things up."

That's all the prompt they need, and in seconds everyone is outside, looking at a freshly rebuilt granite gazebo covering the entrance portal to the underground city, again securely barricaded off from the surface world. Cain releases the Shaman he is merged with and then the rest of them before calling forth the Epic Ice Dragon, now a Legendary quality Summon.

If anything, it's grown even larger than when they saw it last, either because of quality or level. Two huge Ice Dragons, each over sixty meters long when stretched out, stand looking around the area before spotting Laura in her shimmering opal Dragon Form, now nearly twice the size of the average horse, long and sinuous with large wings glowing in a rainbow of color under the harsh desert sun.

"Oh Em Gee, she is adorable. Can I keep her? I swear I'll feed her and treat her well. Come over here lovely girl, let me polish your scales, you're all dusty." The closest Dragon cries in a high pitched falsetto.

"You found another weirdo." The Oath Breaker says deadpan, as if that doesn't include him.

Laura is giving Cain a desperate look, praying for help, and he decides to intervene before it becomes a fight between Dragons.

"Hi, I'm Cain. We were hoping you could give us all a ride to the coast." Cain says and the newly Summoned Dragons both turn to look at him.

"Oh my. You have amazing fashion sense, just a touch of eyeliner and a trim and you would be perfect for court. But where are my manners? I'm Danni, at your service noble Duke."

"We would appreciate it, we're headed north to Assah, I've got a map if you need."

"That's fine, I know the way from here. All aboard and let's get up and out of this insufferable heat." He calls before they both lay down for their passengers to board.

Cain dismisses everyone but his companions and the Dragons, Laura returning to human form and joining the others in waving goodbye to Drazzit before Cain merges with all the extra Oath Breakers. The Companions all reluctantly agree to merge with their clones, other than Su, who prefers to stay as one person at all times.

There's an arched section of scales at the base of the neck in front of the wing joint that serves as a saddle, but Cain pulls a collection of silk ropes from the Guild Bank and makes simple harnesses anyhow.

"Good call, those ropes smell of Succubus and herbal oils. It's very pleasant." Danni says as Cain ties the harnesses. That's not a phrase he was expecting to hear, and he decides it's best not to think about what they were being used for last. He will buy Lickity some soft new ropes if he needs to.

A simple loop for every waist is enough to hold them on the Dragon, though Danni assures them they would be fine just relying on his magic to hold them in place. With them all securely aboard, the Dragons take off, rising quickly to just above the sparse cloud cover, where the scorching heat has faded to a light chill.

Not enough to be unpleasant, but enough that a coat is a good call, like riding motorcycles in the spring. In fact, riding a Dragon is a similar experience, except you just ask it to change directions instead of having controls. The same breeze on the face, not fully mitigated by the wind magic the Dragons are using as they race through the sky at incredible speeds.

Riding on a Legendary Dragon is an amazing feeling, with the added bonus of having a good excuse to hold Misha, who is seated in front of him, all day long.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 163 - 163 To The Beach

As they fly the odd system notification keeps repeating in Cain's mind. The system has done many strange things before, but this is the first time it's openly insulted him.

'Oath Breaker, you know a number of things about the System and its creation, do you know why it would give a notification like that? Or what exactly the trickster God you mentioned did to it?' Cain thinks to the demons merged with him, knowing they can hear his thoughts and respond.

"We called him the Laughing God, not a Demon God, but something close to it. The humans considered him evil, but he wasn't really, he just viewed the entire world as a game. One big slice of entertainment to be shaped for his amusement." The Oath Breaker responds.

"You speak of him in the past tense, is this Laughing God dead then?"

"Not dead, just missing. After he changed the System spell to do more than just equip and Summon human Reinforcements, he disappeared so nobody could make him change it back. It's been centuries and none of the Gods have seen any sign of him, and they're all searching. Some to protect him, some to force him to alter the System. The Spider God for instance wants Reinforcements for her children. The system counts them as Elves, so all the transfers that get an Elven designation go to the Elven Forest Transfer Point."

"The message I got felt a lot like it was deliberately NOT giving me male, only female companions. Do you think that's something the Laughing God might have put into the system as a practical joke?" Cain mentally asks.

"Is not impossible, but that level of interaction sounds more like a direct intervention. The first part is normal of an answer from the system, on the rare occasion it gives one, but the dig about making your own friends is classic. I'll have to remember it in case there's a chance to use it at some point in the future."

"Do you think he could have merged with the System itself? That would explain why it plays evil practical jokes on people like Elmira, and why it seems to have a level of sentience." Cain suggests.

"It's not entirely impossible, and you're not the first to suggest it, but there's no way to verify if it's correct or not. The Human Gods tried ending the spell entirely but couldn't change it or stop it. Whatever he did is strong."

"I'll keep it in mind, because I'm pretty sure that System is actually enjoying messing with me."

"Can you blame it? Your responses are so great even I enjoy messing with you, and I usually only enjoy bloodshed and despair." The Demons joke.

It's only been a few hours, but already they can see the ocean on the horizon from this height, so they're getting close to their destination. Hopefully. Cain doesn't have any guarantee Danni actually knows where he's going, but they are flying north, and approaching the ocean, so even if they get the wrong city they'll still get to visit the beach.

Laura is thoroughly enjoying herself, loving to fly even more than most winged creatures do, and the speed of the Legendary Dragon is multiple times faster than her usual.

"One day I too will be this huge." She cheers, making Cain smile.

"Maybe? I've never seen an Opal Prismatic Dragon this size. In fact, the size your dragon form is at now is mostly mature for the species. They're often mistaken for juveniles of other species until they tear apart the one who underestimated them." Danni says and the little dragon gives him an evil look.

"I WILL be huge and magnificent." She repeats and the fashionista bows his head in agreement.

"If all else fails, I'll learn a spell to let you grow to whatever size you want." Cain calls over to her, unsure if she will hear him or if the conversation is entirely in his head and not being picked up by his ears. It's hard to tell sometimes when his summons are talking to each other.

"There, see the sails on the horizon and the port city? That should be Assah." Both copies of Danni say in unison, letting everyone know they're near their destination.

Soon after, the air starts to smell of the sea and they descend to a much lower altitude and slow down to take in the scenery. Assah isn't a big city, only a few thousand people, but there are a lot of trade caravans in the area, so it must serve a number of inland smaller villages. Cain didn't see any though, so he sends a thought to the Dragons for clarification.

'They build into the hills, the towns are mostly underground. Assah is only on the surface, because it's so close to the water.'

That makes sense, why bake in the sun when you can hide in the cool sand for steady temperatures all day round.

"Land there, south of the city. It looks like a proper landing pad for flying creatures." Cain points and Danni nods.

"Yes, that's a Dragon Weyr. A place for travelers with flying mounts and Dragon Lords to spend their nights." The Legendary Ice Dragon agrees. They might not be big enough for something as huge as him, but Cain will just merge with him anyhow, or maybe have him take human form, if he can get along with Laura.

As they approach they're greeted by a guard on a small fire Drake, smelling of Sulphur and Ash, even to Cain's less sensitive nose.

"Land there and proceed to city security to check in, Dragon Lord." The flying guard greets them in an aggressive tone. Not the warmest welcome, but Dragons are dangerous, so maybe they're just being careful.

The looks they're getting as they land are a mix of awe and open hatred, with many flirtatious glances from a group of scantily clothed women who have gathered between the landing area and the city walls.

Misha doesn't like the look of them, they're definitely trouble in the way loose women always are for a relationship.

"Name, rank and number of possible Dragons and Drakes that could appear in the city, Dragon Lord." A hostile soldier welcomes them when they land.

"Duke Cain. Maximum combined Dragons and Drakes would be about 34, maybe?" Cain answers, unsure of exactly how many could possibly appear if he Summoned all Drakes, plus clones of Kone, with their copies of Su. Plus the Bonded Forces of Su and Laura.

"The guard's look is priceless. It's like you kicked him in the face and then shagged his sister." The Oath Breaker chuckles in Cain's mind.

The description isn't far off, the security force has exactly zero idea how to process that information.

"Uh, number of Dragons and Drakes currently in your party, noble Duke?" The guard finally gets out.

"Four Dragons, no Drakes at the moment." This seems to be bringing them back to reality, 4 is much more manageable than 34.

"Name, Quality and Age of the Dragons?" They're really taking the Dragon thing seriously.

'It's how Dragon Lords are ranked. Either they see a lot of them, or the city Lord is a Dragon Lord.'

"Su, age 47. Epic Quality." The Forest Dragon says helpfully, still in her tiny Nymph looking form.

"Laura, age 19. Epic Quality." The Opal Prismatic Dragon says proudly.

"Danni, age three thousand, two hundred and seventeen. Legendary Ice Dragon. And we're twins." Cain's mount says and the guard actually passes out.

Cain sees guards running for the city, so they're probably going to get a bigger welcoming committee for Danni. Or at least that's what he thinks, but within the minute they are already returning with a well dressed man accompanied by two large Dragons, so they might have gotten the city Lord or a nearby Captain who has Dragons.

The Darklight Host waits patiently for the next group to arrive, looking them over as they're approaching. The man with the Dragons looks more than a little intimidated, despite being higher level than Cain by quite a bit.

"Greetings Dragon Lord. I am Earl RhickJaymz, you are Duke Cain if my guards were correct? How rare, a Duke at such a low level, you must have transferred in as a Dragon Lord, correct?"

"Close, but I am actually a Puppet Master by Class. The Dragons are mostly my Summoned Companions." Cain says, as the Earl could easily find that information out by inspecting him with his interface. It's a pain to do, and takes a while to complete, but it will give you species, class and an estimated or accurate level for the one you inspected, depending on your relative levels.

"Anyone who can Summon or control Dragons is considered a Dragon Lord by the coastal alliance, not just the actual class. It helps with organizing relative power levels for unbalanced classes." One of the Dragons, a greater Black Dragon that accompanied the Earl explains, looking at Laura and Danni before noticing that Su is a Dragon as well and turning a curious gaze at her deep red companion.

"Legendary Ice, Epic Opal Prismatic, and an Epic Forest Dragon? If you weren't already in a Noble Class I'd feel offended to be shown up like that." The other Dragon, a male Greater Fire Dragon if Cain's guess is right laughs with a deep rumble and a snort of fire. Unlike fire Drakes, this fire doesn't smell of Sulphur and Ash, instead it smells like Dragon and Roast Meat. The Draconic equivalent of dog breath.

'Noble Class?' Cain asks the merged Oath Bringers, hoping for an answer.

'Certain Classes get titles or jobs in their progression. Kone is a Beast LORD' the Demon emphasizes.

So there is some sort of ranking system to just how broken a class has gotten. Thinking of it that way, his entire class is the systems version of a Pay to Win title that lets everyone know he's overpowered, if they can just recognize it.

"The Forest Dragon isn't mine. It belongs to the Beast Lord Kone." Cain informs the Fire Dragon, now that he knows the titles are important.

"Interesting. Tell me human, do you collect cute things the way I collect shiny things?"

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 164 - 164

"I can't confirm or deny that without knowing how you collect shiny things." Cain jokes, making the Dragons laugh.

"It seems the Guardian Dragons don't feel that you're a threat, so if your group can just sign in, I will welcome you to the Port City of Assad, home to white sand beaches, an exquisite class skill library, and the largest deep water Port East of the mountains." Earl RhickJaymz finally says, motioning an assistant forwards with the sign in book from the landing area.

They all sign in quickly before the Earl speaks again. "Where did you come from? Your fashion is unfamiliar, but yet, I feel as if I've seen it before."

"We came from Montauk, the Exit City at the north of Beginner's Valley, but we made a short stop over in Underwood, the Dark Elven city to update our wardrobes." Cain replies, giving his companions a pointed look to keep up the story and not reveal that they found one of the Lost Cities.

"It's a bit outdated, but that's definitely a Dark Elven suit. Now I see it. That's not something I come across every day. The Gnomish Leather on the Beast Lord Kone we see more often. Who might the final transfer in the group be?"

"Misha, a Dark Apostle. It is a pleasure to meet you." She smiles at RhickJaymz who gives her a wink.

"Now I understand the Guild Name. Light Fae and Dark Apostles, with a mixed army of summons. Darklight Host. Good choice."

Another assistant has just arrived with a book in hand, open to a particular page to show the Earl. Looking down at it, Cain can see its a description of his class, RhickJaymz must have sent someone to get information on what a Puppet Master could do. Either he's really diligent about his safety, or he's going to be trouble sooner than later.

RhickJaymz looks it over and nods few times before looking back up at them. "With all the sailors, we get a lot of incognito Second Advancement classes and high level visitors. Everyone who enters the city gets power ranked by an artifact, but for classes like ours, they can be deceptive, because we can call multiple summons. I just had to delay you a little until I could verify you wouldn't be able to actually level the city alone."

"The orb that everyone places their hand on as they walk in is the power level ranking artifact. Anyone who rates over a 5.0 out of 10 for level 200 gets a red bracelet that lets the guards know they're a high level visitor." The Black Dragon elaborates, making Laura look at Cain with concern and excitement at the same time.

"Yes, Opal Dragon, you can get a ranking too." The Black Dragon laughs, not fully understanding Laura's concern. Cain releases all but one Oath Breaker from his Merger, dismissing them. He can call them back with a thought if he's in trouble, but keeping one with him at all times should prevent him from being seen as a weakling who relies on his summons.

"We will ask that the Dragons either transform before entering the city or return to the resting area, space is limited in the streets. Even my two beloved friends live at the city walls." The Earl explains and Cain nods before Danni transforms, becoming a tall and slender man with shocking white hair and pointed ears with ridges at the back that somewhat resemble his wings. Wearing a medium Grey suit with an Ice white shirt and carrying a walking cane, he looks like a perfect noble gentleman.

"Oh very nice." The Red Dragon says, becoming a stocky man with a flushed looking skin tone as if he were constantly sunburnt. Standing about Cain's height, he is taller than average but a bit shorter than Danni. He's wearing blue jeans and a black shirt with short spiky red hair the color of his scales. The black transforms into a short woman with thick thighs and a heavy chest, her skin and hair the same deep black gloss as her scales, hair braided and hanging to her waist. She's the more formal of the two, picking a green evening gown for her human form.

"Now they're all just showing off. I don't know how you deal with having more than two around at a time, Dragons are a handful." RhickJaymz says ruefully as his Dragons have already started wandering towards the gates along with Danni and Laura to check their power. They're discussing local cuisine, so Cain fully expects them to do their own thing for most of the day.

"Just let it go man. They're Dragons, not Golems. If you just let them do their own thing, except when you really need them it's much less stressful than trying to force them to do things they don't really feel like." Cain shrugs and Su laughs.

"If you didn't know his companions were Summoned, you'd think they were just Guild Members. Most everyone thought they were transfers anyhow." Su laughs, making Kone giggle.

"They don't even bring him along to do dungeons most of the time, just deciding between themselves what they want to do for the day." Kone jokes and Vala sticks her tongue out at her.

"Just remember, if they're in trouble, you're in trouble. But they seem pretty well behaved. Other than the two that stole my Dragons. Seriously, how did they even do that? Summons are supposed to be attached and loyal to their Summoner." The local noble complains.

"They're loyal. If you order them they'll come back right away. But they'll complain about the fun you made them miss out on. That's how Dragons are, as far as I know. Just scratch their head behind the horns, it puts them in a much better mood."

They've made it to the lineup for the city gates, which is parting in front of them, many bowing respectfully to the Earl, who waves back, greeting many who he knows personally. He seems to be well liked, but Cain is still getting dirty looks from most of the men, and a lot of the women are making a point to pose as they approach, even taking off layers of their light but covering clothing intended to protect from the sun.

"Shameless I tell you." Misha mutters, moving closer to Cain, staking her claim. It doesn't seem that the women are deterred though, even Danni, escorted by Laura and the local Dragons isn't immune to their advances. Laura got one single fellow being overly friendly with her, but the threat of Ice Fog breath she gave off deterred him, and anyone else, from flirting with her.

"You get used to it. There are a lot more women in town than men, because of the dangers of a life at sea, or adventuring in the desert. Quite a few dungeons exist within a half day of here, if you're staying a while, and the class book said you can gain new Summon Forms by defeating opponents, so you might find the variety to be beneficial." RhickJaymz brushes off the wealth of attention they're receiving.

"Next group." The gate guard calls and the Dragons step forward. He looks momentarily confused, then recognizes the Earl's Dragons in their human forms.

"Welcome. Who all will we be testing today boss? Everyone or just the transfers?" The guard asks.

"Me first." Laura says, fluttering her wings in excitement and then man motions towards the device, which up close looks more like a metallic half orb in the middle of a silver platform than the crystal ball Cain first thought it to be.

Laura waves her hand as she flies over the device and a set of numbers lights up on the guard's side of the device. "Average strength equivalent at level 165. The device factors in your true level, abilities, bonuses, gear and skills to come up with an equivalent based on the average first advancement transfer in rare grade gear. See, these numbers here are your level, your total stats and the modifiers it applied to come up

with the final score. Most of your extra levels equivalent comes from your durability and a surprisingly high damage output."

That's not surprising to Cain, she is merged with her clone, gaining additional Stat points after all.

Laura isn't sure yet whether that is good or bad, having gone first. It's still almost sixty levels higher than her actual level though, so she's a bit happy. Nemu, Nila and Vala go next, all getting identical scores, being merged with their clones, under the effects of the same abilities and created by the same spell. This makes Laura much happier, she's no weaker than the others, despite looking younger.

Next up is Su. "Average strength equivalent at level 161. Very impressive little Nymph." The guard commends her.

"That's actually a transformed Forest Dragon." Kone laughs, getting her own reading, which comes out somewhat lower than her Dragon at level 141. The guard looks shocked, first at her words, then at her relative strength compared to her true level.

Misha goes up without great hopes, after all, she's not under any significant buffs, like Appointed Companion, and most transfers over level 100 have an Advanced Class.

"Average Strength Equivalent at level 119." The guard nods, having expected a more normal score to come along eventually, even among this group, whose scores say they're very well geared.

"Alright Danni, you're up. Let's see the difference Between Epic and Legendary." Cain says and the dapper Dragon passes his hand over the device.

"Average strength equivalent at level 194." The guard says deadpan, looking at the level 106 true level listed next to the power rating calculation on the display.

"You guys are seriously overpowered, you know that, right?" RhickJaymz laughs, patting Cain on the back.

"You're last, no sneaking around the reading for you my friend."

Well, it's the moment of truth, how much will that device be able to calculate. If it can calculate the maximum possible damage output of all his summons if they were merged with him, or the maximum possible damage output of [Might of Many] then this score is going to be positively ridiculous. If it only calculates his current personal strength and doesn't include his summons he should be right by the borderline for level 200.

The fact it includes skills and gear into the calculation might be bothersome though, he just learned a whole Dark Elven combat art, he previously unlocked the hidden skill of [Lesser Demon Army] and he's got some pretty good gear on.

Cain passes his hand over the device and it turns bright red, likely the warning that he breached the level 200 equivalent average.

"Well, that will be a bracelet for sure. Bit surprising at level 106, but it must rate some of your skills as extremely powerful. The device uses the system to calculate, and you know how unfathomable it can be." RhickJaymz shrugs.

"Well, what's the verdict?" Cain asks the Guard, who frowns at his machine.

"Average strength equivalent at level 231 and a bit. Boss, I think he might have glitched the device, look at the modifier for stats." The guard says.

"I see, your total Stat points should currently be around 1000, unmodified. Wait, that can't be right, I've barely got a thousand Stat points. It must be Calculating them based on a skill modifier, and then adding in the calculation for skills on top. Either way, you've got two Dragons at level 194 equivalent, and four other Companions at level 165 equivalent. I would say that's over level 200 without counting yourself, no matter what it comes up with."

The guard hands everyone a metal slip with their name and power level on it, before motioning for Cain to extend his wrist. The Red metallic bracelet simply reads "Cain 231" and forms into a smooth loop once closed.

"If you're looking to join groups that power check, just show them your city entry token. If a guard asks for your passes, please show it to them. It's also an offense to take off the red bracelet within the city. They're easy to break for anyone who needs to wear one, but shouldn't be damaged by anything else short of combat. If you need a new one, just ask on the way in the gate.." The guard gives a well practiced lecture before motioning them away so the next group in line, a group of merchants on Camels that just arrived, can enter to be checked.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 165 - 165

"What are your plans for your stay in Assah?" The Black Dragon asks as they walk through the gates.

"The beach, new snacks, and the beach, and maybe later some dungeons?" Laura answers, getting distracted at the end by a hotdog cart.

"Well, we can help you out there. Red has a massive sweet tooth, so he knows all the best places in town to get dessert." The Black Dragon informs them.

The Red Dragon shoots her a dirty look, but does point the way towards a plain looking shop with a picture of pie and coffee as it's sign.

"No words? I take it not everyone who visits speaks the same common language? Everyone we've met so far has." Misha asks from her place under Cain's arm, subconsciously in full defense mode against the women of this city.

"Mostly everyone will speak the human language, but we do get some merfolk, selkies and others who aren't great with it. There are 5 great continents in total, this one being Central." Red informs them.

"All but West have a significant human presence. If we get visitors from West, which is rare on this side of the continent, they'll speak Frost Giant instead." Red continues with a bit of annoyance. Either for the language or out of an innate dislike of Frost Giants.

"That's a relief then. Learning a new language to travel to new cities would have been a pain." Misha smiles, looking at the shop, which appears to be a Cafe.

The Dragons lead the large party in and take a pair of tables to push together into one. The whole place is 50s retro diner and reminds Cain a lot of the one in the very first village they transferred to. There is a sitting counter at one end for solo visitors, as well as more seating at a long table that looks out the large front windows, in addition to the tables and Red vinyl clad booths.

The important part is what's on the counter though. Dozens of cakes and pies, for sale by the slice, sit within glass domed cases waiting for someone to order them. They're easy to see from the tables the Dragons picked, and they're the only ones in the place at the moment, other than a waitress in a yellow dress and white apron that just hurried out of the back.

"Welcome dears, what can I get you started off with today?" The aging Spirit Folk waitress asks with a big smile, her dark brown hair streaked with white and carefully curled and pinned.

"Let's start with a round of coffees, and a large sample platter of the cakes." The Black Dragon says with a nod of her head. That must be a thing because the waitress simply smiles back before disappearing to go get the drinks.

"I feel bad for not asking earlier, but what are your names?" Cain says, as the aroma of fresh coffee fills the Cafe.

"I'm Red, I know it's cliché and all. But it's easy to say. This is Cupcake, but most people who value their lives call her Black." The Red Dragon smirks, before getting smacked in the head.

"My name is not Cupcake. It's Blashamarial. Which is hard to say, so people call me Black." The other Dragon corrects him.

"Can I call you Ariel instead? I like that better." Laura asks, shamelessly assigning a new nickname to the other Dragon.

"Not bad. Like the play about the mermaid. Years ago one of the transfers got a group together to do a lot of the plays and movies he had seen in his past life, that was one of them." Ariel tells them with a smile and Kone gives Cain a 'we are seeing that' type look.

The waitress is back with their order, a large pot of coffee, including an assortment of flavored creams is placed in the middle of the table and everyone gets cups, then a half dozen smaller trays are placed around it, each with ten different small round cakes on it. Forget about a light snack, there's at least three full cakes worth on the table right now.

None of the Dragons have an issue with that though, confident in their ability to finish off any amount of sweets. The little cakes are on paper doilies, so they can be picked up and transferred to a plate and everyone grabs an assortment until the trays are empty.

While everyone else is taking alternating bites of their cakes to compare flavors, Laura has placed hers in a circle around the edge of her plate and seated herself in the middle, surrounded by a wall of cake. She's working her way across, cutting slices with a tiny sword and eating a portion of each cake to build her own fluffy fortress on the table.

The waitress is smiling at her antics in amusement, but seems reluctant to ask the obvious question on her mind.

"Yes, she uses this form instead of a full sized human so she can get more bites out of every cake." Cain tells the waitress while Laura pointedly ignores him in favor of carving a row of windows through her mostly finished miniature cakes.

"These are amazing. Ten flavors of tiny cake reminds me of the cupcakes they made for you during that level up party, but these are even better." Laura finally speaks as the first section of her cake wall has been devoured.

That was a pretty good party too. So many of them leveled up at the same time.

"Want to see the skill library after this? It has got a full skill tree for most classes in the first and even second advancement, and you can pay to have books copied if you want a skill they've got in the shelves." Ariel suggests.

"Yes, I need to work off some of this sugar, keep my svelte figure." Su jokes, swinging her short Nymph legs under her seat.

"Dragons transformation changes to whatever they want it to be, with a little practice. Would it be rude to ask how you two ended up with such strange forms?" The Black Dragon asks, indicating Su and Laura.

"I tried a human an Elf and a Spirit Folk form in the past, but I missed my leaves. At least a Nymph has a few. But Laura really did pick that form to get more enjoyment out of cake." Su teases.

"Seriously?"

"Have you ever seen a whole cake when you're ten centimeters tall? It's glorious." Laura confirms.

Now fully loaded with caffeine and sugar they pay the bill and head towards where Red indicates the Skill Library is. It's a grand building, carved limestone with stained glass windows depicting myths of the sea. Even been the door the building smells of old books and Misha gets a happy, vacant smile as she takes in the distinctive scent of an ancient library.

"Why don't we split up a while? We've all got different interests, so staying together would be a waste, Cain suggests only a half second before everyone starts doing it anyways.

He's going to find that book with information on the Puppet Master and see what exactly he's got coming for skills.

The class skill outlines are all in the same area of the library, sorted by Class type. Cain is saved the search though, when he sees the assistant who brought the book to Earl RhickJaymz coming in with a large leather bound tome in his hands.

"Does that book have a full skill tree for the Puppet Master Class?" Cain asks as he approaches.

"Unfortunately no, it's a second progression class, and normally only unlocked by a restricted quest, so details on it are limited by the low numbers. It's got a general outline of the expected abilities, but as you've been one for a hundred levels now, you should be familiar with it by now. I'm told you picked Lord Path first, so your summons are much stronger than usual, the next would be General, increasing the numbers by a huge margin and supposedly allowing you to Summon entire armies to fight for you.

Most of what we know of the class comes from a Northern Continent Lord. At level 320 or so he simply founded an entire city. His summons run everything from government to the banks and the Adventurers Hall. Every city worker is one of his summons or

puppets. The way he uses them though, made a lot of people think his city should be avoided. One of the early General Path skills lets him appoint Lieutenants, which gain extra strength. But he can also give them orders, and with an S Rank Skill he found somewhere, he can make those orders mandatory, basically enslaving them."

Cain thinks a while on this information, it makes sense, he already got Appointed Companion in the Lord Path, so Generals should have Lieutenants. Mixed with a mind control type skill, like the Succubus ability [Suggestion] you could make the Lieutenants into living puppets.. Not his style though, micromanagement isn't for him.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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Looking through his skills, and what the book tells him of the class, most of it based on one single example who should have only just started down the Lord side of the skill tree after finishing the General side and not choosing to try for a more advanced class right away, Cain comes to a realization.

The next skill he will be able to get is [Lieutenant] which the book says is in two parts. Either Summoned or Appointed. Summoned doesn't have details, other than that there are two to start with, but Appointed ones, the version the city leader uses are like his own Appointed Companion skill. They get the bonuses from his Summon related abilities.

It would be nice if there was more information, but with only one sample used in this book they were limited to what he could or would provide.

Off in one corner of the library Cain sees a book under glass with an attendant. That's different, and this book doesn't have much he didn't already know, as the man who gave it to him feared, so he goes to investigate instead.

"What might this book be that it needs security?" He smiles at the burly Librarian.

"It's our library Challenge. It can't be used, only copied, and it gives an unspecified Guild Skill. Only one attempt is possible, starting to copy it begins a quest that is non repeatable. But if you want to try, you can. Materials are 10 Gold if you need them.

"Sounds like my sort of Challenge. Has anyone succeeded?" Cain asks.

"Two so far. One got a Guild Skill that grants everyone 20 percent bonus expertise, one got a Guild Ability to make Guild members Resurrect at the nearest Guild House. It's got a month long cool down, but there's no doubt it's an S Ranked Guild Skill."

That's an incredible ability. Preventing their members from being murdered or dying in dungeons? Who wouldn't want to be in that Guild?

"I'll need materials, but let's give this a try." Cain says and the big Librarian, probably enlarged by a barbarian or berserker class, going by his size, hands him a stack of enchanted paper and an ink well with a special silver pen.

[Quest: Copy Ancient Manual] 0.01 percent chance of success.

[Rewards one Random Guild Skill]

Here goes nothing "Oh mighty and benevolent system, grant me your blessing as I attempt this quest. Seriously, I'm really going to need it."

[Bonus Applied: +5 percent chance of success]

The Librarian is laughing quietly at his antics as Cain starts writing, carefully duplicating the text he sees come up in his system display like a holographic projection. Not only is the language incomprehensible and runic, there's a time limit, the display fades with time before the next page appears.

Cain is keeping up though, barely, and he's sweating heavily by the time the final page disappears.

[Attempt Complete. Verify Text?] Y/N

[Attempt successful]

[Inscription raised to Advanced 3]

[Quest complete: Determining Reward]

[Please Spin wheel]

This is Cain's lucky method, the random generator. It hasn't failed him yet.

[Benevolent Leader] Rank C. Allows Guild Master to select one Core Skill that all members of the Guild may use as if it were their own.

The notification also appears on the glass above the book, making the Librarian Gasp.

"You bloody did it. Only the third one in a century. Shame it's only a Rank C skill though."

"Yes, that is a shame, but I'm certain I can find a Core Skill that everyone would appreciate, though I'm not sure which skill that might be." Cain smiles, thinking of his utterly broken skill tree.

He selects the skill to see what he can select and his skill tree appears with most of the skills greyed out. Including [Advisor] which would have been his first choice. Everyone getting a Laura or Vala with retinue? Oh yes. He's not sure his sanity could survive them creating 30 possessive and cuddly copies of Nemu though. Summon Supporter is also out, that's a shame. Wait, [Personal Guard] that calls 2 epic Golems, and [Lesser Demon Army] that would triple the demons called by the Guild Skill [Demon Army] are both valid options?

Maybe the system secretly hates everyone and wants the Darklight Host to destroy the world? Because both options are disgustingly good. 54 lesser Golems for an all Guild Party, or 2 Epic Golems per member. En Mass that's a lot of dungeon bosses. They wouldn't get all the bonuses his summons get, and they'd be epic not legendary, but still, disgusting.

[Personal Guard] selected. 72 hours before skill can be changed.

This has made Guild chat go insane. Everyone just got the notification that they can use [Personal Guard] which has a 1 minute cool down and costs 150 mana. Not all the members have that much, but everyone who is a decently high level does. Even in the level 30 range most of them do.

[Guild Master is this a joke? We can Summon your Epic Golems?] One of the new members in Graska, a young Earth Mage, asks.

[Not a joke, I just finished a Guild Quest and got that Rank C skill, [Benevolent Leader] , letting me share one single skill with everyone. That just happened to be an option.]

[OMF, we're in the Naga dungeon right now, and there's six epic Ice Dragons. We just picked the last used from the list.] Lickity adds. Cain isn't sure who she's with, but that run just got very easy.

[I think you just broke the Guild System. I swear I heard it crying just now.] Cixelcid jokes.

Misha comes running over, followed by a pair of small girls in blue Robes with glowing eyes. Their hair crackles with blue energy, the color of Misha's flames and they're both holding an open book.

"Look, I got my own disciples." She giggles. Now Cain recognizes them, mysterious disciples, an Epic Quality caster from that accursed psychedelic dungeon. If you look closely, only the face is human, their hands have three fingers and are leathery like a reptile with thumbs and they've got whip like tails. The books are part of them, when they attack it bursts into flames and lashes out at the enemy.

Paired with the Dark Acolyte and outside the dungeon, they look pretty normal though, like fire haired church attendants. They just need incense censers.

The Earl comes running in, looking at the book table, still showing the skill generated, then the disciples.

"Of all things, it let you share a Summoning skill with your entire Guild?" He sighs.

"Do you think it'll change their scores?" Red asks, coming over to look at the screen.

"It won't, it's a Guild Skill, not personal. But we'll need to make a note in the logs about Darklight Host members all being secretly overpowered. At least the Summon it allows doesn't look too powerful." Arial, the black dragon tells him.

Cain decides not to tell him, but Misha almost does before Danni silences her while his clone moves to hide her from sight.

"You've got a point, they're almost cute. But I suspect that spell could call something very dangerous. We don't have a skill detection net like some places, but combat type skills aren't allowed to be used in town, please put the cute little Demon away." RhickJaymz says, giving Misha a dirty look.

"Sorry, I got excited." She mumbles through Danni's hand and blushes, making the Dragons laugh. She dismisses the little Demons and all the Companions start coming over.

"We can't take you anywhere can we? Always doing strange things." Vala laughs.

"Next time can it be puppets? Everyone would make a whole load of puppets and we could create our own town." Nemu suggests, thinking of an entire city full of little Felian Nemu puppets.

At the multiple user's level worth of puppets they could create a thousand or more of them in total. Low level, but they'd have an entire, silent, Puppet town. Maybe for Halloween, if this world celebrated it.

"You're called a Puppet Master, but you don't actually use Puppets like we expected. Is there something wrong with them?" Arial asks.

"Not particularly, but the Lord Path doesn't give the skill much of a benefit. I think the skills to make them more than automatons must be in the other side of the skill tree. Mine are level 10 and don't even understand complex tasks." Cain shrugs.

"They clean the house well though. They did well at clearing rubble too, once everyone understood how to give them directions." Laura adds.

"Maybe I can program them like a video game npc? Limited interaction abilities and preset responses? Mine still aren't really at that level, but with a few upgrades or if they didn't need to speak they could be." Cain suggests.

"That could work. If you're planning to run a shop or something you could set them up and watch them try. But I don't really know how they work either." Earl RhickJaymz says noncommittally.

"Puppets are nice and all, but where do I get these skills copied? They'll make my Turtles a force to be reckoned with." Kone says, holding a pair of books in her hands.

[Bestial Might] Beast Master Exclusive. Increases Quality of Beastkin type [Golems] by one Rank.

[Abundant Companions] Beast Master Exclusive. Doubles number of [Bestial Companions] from 4 to 8.

"We had such a thing here? They're both S Rank Exclusive Skills, so they'll be very expensive to actually create, but the Scribes are just in the next room there." The Earl points up the stairs towards a pair of double doors between the Summoner and Exotic type class skill books.

Kone runs off happily, willing to pay any price needed to get these skills. Cain and Misha follow after her while the others chat down on the main floor. The young Spirit Folk Beast Lord is arguing with the Scribes when they arrive, who are unwilling to believe she isn't wasting their time.

"Listen girl, the claw of an ancient Legendary Dragon costs a hundred thousand Gold and you need two per book to make the ink for those books." The Scribe says as they come in.

"How old is ancient?" Cain asks as he enters.

"Over two thousand should do for the recipe. But we don't have any." A nearby scribe shrugs.

[Danni, we need 4 claws. Maybe clip your nails or something?] Cain sends a thought to his dragon.

[They'll disappear when you unsummon me you know.]

[That's fine, she's going to use the book right away and it'll disappear anyhow.]

Danni comes in a moment later with four very large claws.. "We have the materials. Can you do it now?"

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 167 - 167

"Yes, of course, let me bring out my tools." The Scribe says, eyeing the claws greedily. Once Danni hands them over the Inscriptionist uses an Earth Magic spell to grind them to a fine dust and begins mixing in other ingredients to create the ink.

[He pocketed 3 of the 4.] The Oath Breaker merged with Cain notes.

[Jokes on him, they're going to disappear.] Cain sends back with amusement. As soon as Kone learns the skills he's going to dismiss Danni. The odd Dragon has been complaining about the heat all day, and they're about to go to the beach. Cain is sure he would prefer not to come with.

It takes twenty minutes, with one failure and almost all the ink used up, but both books are finished successfully. Kone pays the 500 gold per book fee, making Cain realize just how lucrative Inscription can be, even without skimming rare materials. She learns both skills, doing a little happy dance as she gets the notifications, before bowing to the rude Inscriptionist and leaving the room, followed by Misha.

The Inscriptionist looks like he just won the lottery, and Cain is looking forward to crushing him mentally.

"We're headed to the beach next, so I'll dismiss you to rest." Cain tells Danni who bows politely and gives the Inscriptionist a smirk before vanishing as Cain dismisses him.

Cain walks out after dismissing Danni, waiting to hear the sound of anguish when the man realizes the Dragon Claws he pilfered have disappeared.

Being merged with the Oath Breaker grants him a number of advantages, including increased hearing, and Cain can hear the other senior Inscriptionists congratulating the man on his profits, before the celebration is interrupted by a wall of anguish.

"That damnable dragon stole them when he left. Grab the Summoner, make him bring it back." Comes the voice of the Inscriptionist.

Cain takes advantage of the incredible speed provided by merging with an Oath Breaker to run back downstairs and go see RhickJaymz.

"Would you care to come to the beach with us? Or are you busy?" Cain asks, startling the Earl with his sudden appearance.

"Unfortunately I should get back to work. I'll try to join you and the lovely ladies another day." The Earl says sadly, looking at the collection of city staff waiting around the room with messages and other work for him.

"Alright, we're off then. If you need us, we will try to find a hotel near the beach tonight." Cain says, mentally instructing his companions to usher everyone out of the building.

They're not quite quick enough, the irate thief has made it to the door guards before Cain, who was the last to leave thanks to his detour to talk to RhickJaymz.

"Halt there. This man says you stole from him. I'll have to ask you to display your inventory." The guard says. Wait, is that even possible?

"Hand on the device and it will display the number of items with the specified description in your inventory." The guard says, seeing his confusion.

That makes sense, you have to give an exact item name to claim theft, and then the guards can determine if you have it before determining the truth of the accusation.

Cain extends his hand, knowing that the materials simply vanished along with Danni.

"What is the fee for an S Ranked Inscription? 500 Gold plus materials, right?"

The guard nods agreement, waiting for the device. "Nothing with Ancient Dragon, Dragon Claw or Ancient Claw title in his inventory. Now, explain to me what exactly happened."

Other workers from the library have gathered with a malicious look, not for Cain, but for the Inscriptionist. It looks like Cain is about to get caught up in office politics. Especially now that an old Elven woman in Robes with the library emblem has arrived with a scowl and what looks like a modern tablet, though it's likely a magical device.

"We needed Ancient Dragon Claws for the Inscription, and he pilfered the remainder of our stock after I ground what was needed to create the books." The man explains carefully.

A younger woman in the crowd gets an evil grin at this "But manager, his dragon provided the Claws, we didn't have any in stock, did we Madam?"

The last is directed at the Elf, who is clearly in on whatever drama is occurring.

The Inscriptionist has now realized he's about to get railroaded by his coworkers and he's thinking fast to come up with a plan. "They came in just today, and I didn't have time to add them to the inventory yet madam. Isn't that right brothers?"

The other Inscriptionists who were in the room at the time mostly nod in agreement, except the woman who brought the big boss Elf here. She instead smirks and gestures to the tablet in the old Elf's hands.

"Fortunately for us, I recorded the entire interaction for learning purposes. I'm a mere intern and I've never seen an S Ranked skill book created before."

The Inscriptionist takes off running at this and the Elf laughs, gesturing for the guards to follow him.

"Sorry about that. You know how politics are. Meet my great Granddaughter Symbia, my undercover investigator and an accomplished sculptor here in Assah." Going by her tone, the old lady is definitely playing matchmaker.

"Symbia was it? It just so happens I have need of a Sculptor. My Puppet creation, unlike Summoning, requires actual puppets. Preferably long lasting and somewhat realistic, for easy interaction with other people." Cain says, wondering what sort of sculpture she specializes in.

The younger Elf blushes "Um, you see, I think I can help you with that, if you've got an open mind. Thanks grandma, I needed some new clients."

The old woman just smiles and waves then away, returning to her office and sending everyone back to work with a glare.

"Everyone else in my group is headed to the beach, can we walk and talk?" Cain asks.

"Sure, my work here is done. The Inscription Guild Leader was looking out for his nephew, so we needed a solid reason to fire him. Catching him stealing at work was perfect, and he even made himself a public spectacle of himself trying to get the Dragon Claws back. Even his uncle wouldn't dare do anything against you now and risk running his reputation. His position is elected after all." Symbia agrees, following Cain towards the beach.

"Your grandmother said you're a sculptor, but what medium do you specialize in? Wood, stone, clay?" Cain asks.

"Actually, latex. You see, I make love dolls. Ultra realistic ones. They have an internal hinged metallic skeleton, covered in a soft but durable latex rubber produced here in town." Symbia answers without hesitation then waits for Cain's response.

That's actually one of the best options he could have hoped for. They look human, they are easy to repair, and with some luck, she can make them in bulk.

"Is your shop nearby? If not we can come visit this evening after we leave the beach. My abilities will Reinforce them enough to be practical, and a realistic Puppet would make a good domestic helper, where they don't need to interact with people." He says thoughtfully and his face lights up at his acceptance.

Telling people you make love dolls as a hobby doesn't always bring the best responses.

"I've got one with me, dressed in casual clothes." Symbia says, bringing it out.

It's a generic Elven Female, 150cm tall, blonde hair, exaggerated assets, exactly what Cain expected, except that the detail is amazing. The fingernails are hard and painted, the hair is high quality, the eyes look real, even the teeth are made of something solid and not just rubber. The doll holds the pose she puts it in, every joint that should be adjustable is.

"Do you mind if I animate it for a moment? I want to see how it interacts with my ability." Cain asks when he finishes looking it over.

"I don't see why not. Maybe set it a task and see how well it can function?"

Cain animates the Puppet and thinks about what to instruct it. "Puppet, follow behind me between 1 and 4 steps, staying out of the way of others until further notice. Carry any items that myself or Symbia hand to you until you are directed on where to place them down. In addition, follow any other instructions given directly to you by Darklight Host Guild Members."

The Puppet bows slightly, in acknowledgement of the order, and moves to stand behind Cain.

"Now, let's grab dinner and more snacks for the beach. I hope you're not busy today." He tells Symbia who is fascinated by the Puppet.

"For this, I've got all day." She laughs, moving over to a street cart selling drinks.

"These are a local specialty, made from a sweet cactus juice and ice. Mildly alcoholic, but not enough to get most people drunk." She says, handing the bag full of drinks to the Puppet, which holds on tight and lets them hang by its side.

The blank and vacant look it adopted when animated is a bit disconcerting though, like it's deliberately ignoring everyone. "Puppet, additional direction. If personally greeted or given an instruction by an approved authority, respond with a closed mouth smile and a small mood of the head in the speaker's direction."

The Puppet does exactly that in response to his order and Cain smiles in satisfaction. That's much better, just a small addition to make people comfortable.

A few blocks later they find a kebab shop and add a few dozen kebabs, then at another shop, some cupcakes. The Puppet doesn't seem to be having any problems with the weight, being a level 10 equivalent according to the skill description, and hasn't been damaged by carrying the bags, due to its durable design and Cain's abilities enhancing it. It's so realistic looking that a number of people have done a double take, thinking it was a silent third person until the latex skin gave it away.

Despite his instructions to smile and nod at people who greet it, Cain is secretly very glad that the puppet's expression changed to a stony faced neutral one when he animated it.. Having his Puppets give everyone a wide mouthed orgasm face all day would crush any hope at a decent reputation.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 168 - 168 Relaxing On The Beach

These puppets have a distinct advantage over the [Voodoo Dolls] spell not only in that they are permanent, but they can also be added to inventory. Cain isn't sure if he'll need to reprogram them when taken back out, but the option is there to store them for easy transport.

The basic instructions he gave this one seem sufficient for the day, the Puppet is carrying a full picnic and following them around silently, staying out of everyone's way. They can see the beach now, and a large crowd gathered, so the girls are likely at the center of that. Cain changes to beach wear, shorts and sandals, enjoying the afternoon heat on his skin, while Symbia enjoys the view.

"Incognito was never really an option for your guild was it? It's like you naturally attract attention everywhere you go." Symbia laughs, pointing to where Laura has flown up in the air to wave at them.

Red and Arial have set up umbrellas in the sand and laid out blankets while the girls have released their clones. No wonder they're getting attention, twins. Nemu has also put her costume skill to work, shifting to a Neko look, mostly human with cat ears and

tail. Her coloration is still roughly the same, platinum blonde hair and pale skin with black ears and a black tip on her cream colored tail.

The ladies have all changed in to various colors of bikinis while Red is in a long pair of shorts and a shirt. Even as a fire dragon he shouldn't be cold, it's scorching out here and Cain is sweating from the sun. He must be body shy.

"I hope you've got beach wear. It looks like everyone has settled in already." Cain laughs as Vala spreads her wings, reclining in a chair and Laura moves to use them as a sun shade.

"I did, but do you think it's alright to keep the Puppet out?" Symbia asks.

"The shirt and skirt don't look too out of place, let's have it serve drinks and snacks to see how the programming holds." Cain suggests.

"You found even more women? Oh, that's a Puppet. So lifelike." Misha says, coming over to look it over.

"I could use one of these when crafting. Mannequins don't move to show you if things are hard to move in or bunch up in strange places. Is that what you made it for?"

"Not exactly, but it would work. They're anatomically correct after all. Except the ones specifically ordered in exaggerated dimensions."

Misha looks confused, so the Elf leans in close and whispers something in her ear that makes the Dark Apostle turn bright red in the face.

Any response she might have made is interrupted by an argument from the direction of the other girls.

"Don't you know who I am? Turn over the cat girls and I'll spare your miserable lives." A nasal voice shouts and Cain can hear Vala laughing at him. Not good, as the city guard said, if they get in trouble, he's in trouble. Cain quickly calls out nine more of the Oath Breakers, merged with him instead of free to roam. That should be enough to deal with any sort of trouble he's likely to find.

"Fine, we can do this the hard way. Don't say I didn't warn you." The voice shouts of enough everyone nearby turns to look.

[Area Notice: Nut Up Guild has declared war on Darklight Host Guild]

[Guild Notice: Guild Master Odin has attacked Guild Master Cain, instigating a Guild War for the next 24 hours.]

"Everyone run, Golden God has attacked the Dragon Lord." Someone screams and the beach rapidly clears. Symbia gives Cain a sympathetic look before she too turns to run.

Summons are appearing all over the beach as everyone calls forth their Bonded Forces. Vicious looking Snapping Turtle Kin, shell backed humanoids with Turtle heads and heavy shields, have surrounded the Darklight Host members and the sky is filling with Dragons and Drakes as Cain calls forth all his summons, then the Nut Up Guild starts filling the other end of the beach, charging in to assist their Guild Master.

"Last chance scrubs, give me the twins and I'll let most of you live." The Guild Master Odin sneers.

"You see, that's just not going to happen. I'll thank you in advance for the new Guild House though." Cain laughs, looking him over. He's wearing a red bracelet that says "Odin 271". Many of his other members have them too, but all low 200s.

Cain calls the final two Oath Bringers and directs them to merge with each other. That should put them well over level 200 in strength, with the durability and damage of a raid boss.

The Wrath Bringers, both his and Vala's, lead the charge into the Nut Up Guild, the Lamia greater Golems right behind them and the Drakes overhead preparing a breath assault.

"Kill everyone but the twins." Odin commands, charging Cain.

"In Formation, we all know the drill. Guard the healers." Cain calls, bringing out a pair of Scimitar to meet Odin's spear.

Cain can hear the city guard blocking off the beach to allow the battle to proceed uninterrupted. Odin is charging him, but he's so slow to Cain's senses it looks like he's almost frozen in time, the benefit of a ridiculous amount of DEX Stat.

[Dying Last is still dead. Let's play with the others first.] The Oath Breakers merged with Cain suggest into his thoughts.

That's an excellent idea. In these few seconds [Might of Many] has given him a huge damage increase on top of what he can do merged with the demons, so a little fun wouldn't be out of order.

Cain sidesteps the spear attack and charges a nearby Paladin, a backhanded strike with the flat of his blade shattering the tank's shield and the area damage effect granted by the Oath Breakers red lining every Nut Up fighter within ten meters, except Odin, who Cain excluded.

"Are you sure you want to do this? Next time I'll use the blade. Fair warning." Cain teases, quickly recording every new combination in the area, including Red and Arial who are still here, guarding Misha.

Odin rages and charges him again, but can't move nearly far enough to catch Cain, who even has time to check his merged stats.

[Name] Cain

[Stats]+60

[STR] 125 (+1000)

[DEX] 125 (+1500)

[CON] 125 (+2000)

[INT] 125 (+1000)

[HP] 1000 (+75000)

[MP] 1250 (+35000)

Oath Breakers only have ten thousand HP? He thought they were tougher, but maybe that's just because of the damage reduction effect granted by being Legendary quality Dungeon Boss.

Cain stuns a Healer with a strike to the back of the head, suppressing the damage from might of many to not kill everyone in the area.

The area damage effect still drops most of them below half health.

"Boss, we can't keep this up, there's too much damage coming in and we can't kill these accursed demons." Someone shouts.

"You'll never find another Guild on this continent if you flee, coward. Now get me my prize while I deal with this insolent upstart. And someone call my father."

"I'm already here." Comes a booming voice. Cain looks up to see a wing of Gryphons with riders, all wearing matched blue Tabards over silver armor. His title declares him Duke Lancelot, Knight Commander of the Landis Kingdom. That would be the human kingdom south of the desert and east of the Orcs Ghazzul Kingdom.

They're a long way from home, but the son seems to have a Guild house here, so the Knights might be vacationing here. The fighting calms as the Nut Up Guild disengages

to regroup and Cain told his summons to retreat a little, hoping to end this without turning the beautiful yellow sand to red mud.

"Not so brave now are you? How dare you stand against the Son of Duke Lancelot and the Landis Kingdom." The boy sneers and Cain starts reconsidering his aversion to mass murder. But thinking of it, shouldn't he be more bothered by killing people? Certainly in his last life he'd have been panicking right now. A lot of Nut Up members were killed in the last minute. But somehow it's hard to care, like the system affects the mind to help deal with trauma.

Cain sets his title bar so the Duke title and Terror is the Naga title are visible. Maybe that will help someone see sense.

The Gryphons land in a circle around Cain, the riders dismounting in unison, making an impressive show of military discipline.

"In the Landis Kingdom, we have a tradition of duels to solve such problems between Nobles. Until concession, unconsciousness or death. Would you agree?" Duke Lancelot asks.

"What are the terms?" Cain asks.

"If you lose, Odin gets the twins, if you win, you may claim reparations for the insult." Duke Lancelot informs him.

"Should I win, I will ask for all properties affiliated with the Nut Up Guild here in Assah. Or his life, should that be too steep a price." Cain says resolutely, watching the answer flash in the other man's eyes.

[What are you doing? He's like level 300] Kone sends in Guild chat.

[We've got this. Oath Breaker is virtually immune to status effects] Cain sends back and the little Beast Lord rolls her eyes at him.

"If both parties agree, on behalf of Earl RhickJaymz, the local Lord, we shall referee the duel. Anyone interfering will be summarily executed under local law." Red says, stepping forward with Arial.

The boy is gloating, but his father looks grim as he grits his teeth and nods his head.

"Agreed"

"Agreed"

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 169 - 169 Or Not

The spectators form a ten meter circle around the combatants, Cain in shorts and sandals, shirtless and covered in sand. Lancelot in shining armor and a royal blue tabard with his kingdom's livery on it, armed with sword and shield.

The contrast is dramatic, but Lancelot saw Cain's last attack and won't underestimate his speed. The Knight settles into his defensive stance and activates [Flawless Counter Attack], which has a 100 percent hit rate and cannot be parried or dodged. Against a nearly naked man, that should be fatal in the first exchange of the duel.

he has seen it firsthand, this is far from the first Duel that Lancelot has fought, in fact it's his duty, part of his position as Knight Commander.

The sword in his hand is a mark of office, a magical item that ignores armor, not that his opponent has bothered to wear any, and his shield is a mighty defensive artifact that absorbs a huge amount of damage, consuming its durability. With these two artifacts in hand, victory has always felt assured in the past, but something about the unconcerned attitude of this Summoner named Cain is giving him an uneasy feeling.

Fearing his idiot son has inadvertently set him up to be assassinated, he equips an ancient Legendary necklace known as the Phoenix Tears. It prevents a killing blow once every 6 hours, then summons a Phoenix to heal him. He gained it in a dungeon not long after he arrived in this world and it saved his life countless times over the years.

His plan is ready, once his flawless counter attack is triggered he will follow it up with the special skill [Force Multiplier] gained by all Knight Commanders. It repeats the damage of the last attack three times without needing to physically strike. Between the two skills he can do thousands of damage in a split second to even the mightiest of bosses and challengers.

For his part, Cain is also making a plan. One of the flows in the Dark Elven Blade Forms is carried shield Breaker. It does double damage directly to an opponent's shield with a chance to disarm him. Only two moves long, it is perfect for this duel. Cain settles into an attack stance with his swords hanging low and nods to Arial to start the fight.

"I hope he'll be alright." Kone mutters and the Snapping Turtle next to her snorts in amusement and pats her head, sending the mental impression she should try to [Merge] with her now Legendary Summon. What could it hurt, there's lots of them. She can call 16 now, fully buffed by Cain, and so can all 6 of her clones that were called as Supporters.

Kone briefly considers that Cain might only be helping her get stronger because it makes him even more overpowered, but puts that thought aside and merges with the Turtle.

[They're THIS strong, and Cain merges with ten of them at once? That Lancelot guy is screwed.] Kone directs the thought at the Snapping Turtle and gets the same amused noise in response. Maybe their species can't talk? The other Legendary Summons can.

The feeling of immense power is addictive though, so Kone decides she will stay merged just a while longer. Everyone should know this feeling at some point in their life.

"The duel will start in 3, 2, 1 GO." Arial calls and Cain springs into action.

The first stroke of the Shield Breaker technique is a crossed strike to the shield, driving Lancelot back and to his knees. Cain sees victory and then panic in the knight's eyes as a strike hits his bare chest and the pain spreads, but his swords are already moving downward for the second half of the technique, a double downward chop.

The mighty shield artifact splits open like torn paper, falling to the ground, while Cain's swords both shatter, the flying blades cutting deep into the Knight's armor. Cain follows up with a kick to the kneeling man's chest, sending him flying as his life bar collapses to nothing but a tiny red sliver, a Phoenix appearing over his body protectively and healing him back to half health, but Duke Lancelot is still decidedly unconscious, with a [Dazed] debuff.

The only sound on the beach are the waves and the concerned Phoenix protecting the fallen man as everyone else stares in awe.

Some because a simple kick in sandals nearly killed the Knight Commander, some because of the attack that shattered his shield. Those who have fought alongside the artifact didn't even consider that a possibility.

Cain drops the hilts of two broken swords into the sand with a soft thud, breaking the mood and everyone begins to panic except the Knights, who move to surround their fallen Commander.

"Challenge over. Winner, Guild Master Cain of the Darklight Host." Red calls over the noise, calming the chaos as everyone waits to see what's next. Will they lose every bit of property their members have in the city, or will the Duke sacrifice his son, their leader in exchange.

There are other Guild branches, but many members have shops in town and live here full time, while the leader and his friends were just visiting.

Cain waits patiently for Lancelot to recover, the knights relaxing a little when they realize he doesn't intend to continue the fight. They're not sure what sort of broken ability he has, but the Nut Up Guild was suddenly outnumbered by Legendary Snapping Turtle kin even before the Dragons showed up. Plus, the absolute physical domination he managed against someone 3 times his level just shouldn't be possible.

Lancelot slowly comes to and takes in the tense scenario before sitting up.

"The Beach house was a gift from the King of Landis, I can't let it leave the family." The Knight Commander sighs.

"Name your Price."

Cain considers for a moment, not sure exactly what he stands to gain from this agreement, as the system still calls the Guild War active.

"Market price and you can keep the Beach House." He finally says, deciding that selling it back is reasonable enough.

"Fine, I've got the coin, but the house is irreplaceable." Lancelot looks relieved, so Cain must have made the right choice. Laura is celebrating their financial victory in Guild Chat though, so the house must not be cheap.

"Retract the declaration and we will sign the documents." Lancelot says, getting to his feet and petting the Phoenix that saved him before it merges back into his necklace.

"That's all on you Odin. The aggressor needs to be the one that calls for an early end." Red says and the knights all glare at the young noble.

"I'll uh get right on that." He stammers, flinching under their glares.

"While he does that, I've got a question for you. I'm certain both Flawless Counter and Force Multiplier hit you, unarmored, but your health never dropped. What sort of a skill is that? Does it ignore the first attack? Is it a timed immunity?" Lancelot asks, curious how he lost and almost lost his life.

"It's actually an ability from my summons. Damage Reduction that doesn't get ignored." Cain stretches the truth to avoid telling the Knight he's got nearly eighty thousand HP right now. Plus, the Healing Aura from Kone and Su is based on maximum HP, so his healing is off the charts.

Lancelot considers this information for a moment. "So something like a raid boss, where they take extremely little damage but their stats don't look overly scary to rogues with [Investigate] type skills?"

"Yes, exactly like that. In fact, I believe it's exactly that." Red answers on Cain's behalf, giving Cain a look like the Dragon is investigating him. Cain isn't sure what will show, Merger is hidden by default, but the Dragon saw his displayed stats when they entered the city. He could be basing his conclusions off of that and what he observed during the fight.

[Area Notice: War Between Nut Up Guild and Darklight Host has ended. Flawless Victory to Darklight Host.]

"Flawless victory eh? The boy bit off much more than he could chew this time. I saw the recording from the Guards who closed the beach." Earl RhickJaymz says, strolling on to the beach.

"Afternoon Duke Lancelot. I hope your injuries are fully treated?"

"They are. I think you might need to upgrade the scanning system though, his power level shows lower than my actual level." The defeated Knight grumbles.

"He's a Dragon Lord, it's unavoidable. The system only counts his personal ability, not factoring in summons for the most part." RhickJaymz shrugs.

Odin looks like he knows he's in trouble, and this doesn't seem to be the first time, based on how RhickJaymz greeted Lancelot. The Earl looks around carefully, seeing that the Healer the knights brought has revived all the dead already, leaving only blood on the beach.

That's a relief, cleaning up after a Guild War can be a real nightmare if they didn't leave final wills, or if one side is completely annihilated.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 170 - 170

RhickJaymz has a list of all properties in the city belonging to the Nut Up Guild, and it's not a small list. Other than the Beach House that Lancelot wanted back, there is also a house near the commercial wharf, west of the public beach, five store fronts on the west side of town and a smithy on the east.

Honestly, Cain has no use for any of them except maybe the house near the wharf, depending how big it is. Darklight Host simply doesn't have the manpower to need 6 stores in one city. One maybe, but not six.

"Duke Cain, might I inquire as to your rental rates?" A burly Dwarf with a fire Red beard but black hair asks. Call him biased, but Cain is almost certain that's the Smith.

"What are you paying before? Or did the Guild provide the space free of charge?" There's a round of quiet laughter at that, so the space was certainly not a free perk from the Guild.

The Dwarf comes over with a piece of paper in his hand, a lease agreement from Nut Up Guild, charging 150 gold monthly for the rental of the space. Cain is shocked, he knew rent would be expensive in higher level towns, but that's years worth of wages for his Guild. He's going to have to rework his pay structure to hire staff here if they're keeping a vacation property.

"Arial, is this considered reasonable locally?" Cain asks, gesturing for the Dragon to come over.

"Yes, that's about right for a large Smithy. Rent prices are structured in the city to avoid gouging. The agreement includes the magical device that powers the forge as well you see."

"Alright, everyone who wants to discuss continuing their lease, come talk to me later. What is the deal with the house by the wharf though? If the Beach House is the Guild House, why a second property?"

"Spoils of war. It belonged to a Guild that attacked Nut Up a few years ago and they forfeited it as part of the peace agreement." The Dwarf who was interested in the rental rates informs Cain.

"It's being used as a storage warehouse at the moment, filled with random stuff that didn't sell and winter season stuff that isn't needed right now." Another Guild member adds.

That makes sense then. And that also means it might be big enough to qualify as a Guild House, and not just a vacation property. Which would be awesome, because the transfer runes Cain got from Graska and installed in the other locations only work in Guild Houses, you can't just drop them anywhere.

Red seems to know what Cain is after, and brings out the property information for Cain to look over. It's definitely not Guild House sized, it was a shop with living space above it before being turned into a warehouse. That might still be the best use for it too. They'll eventually have good enough items to sell that someone here is bound to want them. It is a trading port after all.

"It looks like our beach day has been cut short." Misha pouts, looking over the blood soaked sand.

"The tide will wash everything clean tonight. The entire battle took place below the high tide mark, and I know you're not planning to leave us already." Arial counters.

"We should find a hotel then, call it a day." Kone suggests.

"Follow us then. I know a good spot by the wharf, not far from here. Stay there tonight and the Guild should have all your properties ready for tomorrow." Arial tells them.

"RhickJaymz said he will tell everyone to see you tomorrow about their shops. I suspect some might want to buy them outright, since you're not attached to them. If you're lucky you might even get some cool stuff in trade." Red adds.

With rent being that expensive every month, Cain can only imagine what the properties are actually worth. Certainly enough for them to live like kings in the Beginner Valley. Even in Montauk, the Exit City they would be considered extremely wealthy. But with many in the city near level 200 and a steady stream of ships coming in, Assah doesn't want for much.

In fact, Cain doesn't even know what is in demand here. Certainly not skill books, since they've got that massive library, and not seafood, or sheep, he's seen plenty of both here.

"Hey Red, what are the major exports from Assah? All I can see are deserts and oceans meeting, not much being produced." Cain asks as they walk towards the hotel.

"Dungeon loot, precious gems and metals. But those are technically also dungeon loot. There's a Stone Giant dungeon nearby that adventurers like to mine for the wealth of gems and raw ore, then smelt it here and ship the ingots off for trade. There's also a Lizardmen dungeon that is level 200 exactly, so it's top tier gear for most first advancement fighters. It's harder to do for most, usually only full parties of Red armbands will attempt it, but you shouldn't have too many problems." The Dragon says thoughtfully.

That sounds like an excellent money making scheme. "Do you know where to find Symbia? She ran off when the fighting started, but I want to buy a lot of puppets from her. They would be perfect for mining the Stone Giant dungeon. With dozens of miners it should go quickly."

"That it should, normally only 5 can enter, and not all will be suited to mining, due to having other life skills already, so they take what they can and return. But if you can animate dozens of puppets strong enough, you could likely clean the place out." Arial laughs.

The Dragons must have her in their friends list, because she's waiting at the hotel when they arrive. "Is it true you want more? They're a bit expensive, but the best you can buy."

"I'll be selling off the stores tomorrow if anyone wants to buy them outright, so I'll have money. Ideally, I'd like to have a hundred matching puppets. We're going to use them as household staff and a mining crew in the Stone Giant dungeon, if you can equip various ones for the two tasks."

"Does the form matter? I mean, if they look strong will they be strong? Because I don't have many of the large male ones, but I do have some." Symbia informs them.

"I don't think it matters, they all get raised to a level 10 default setting, which should be strong enough to swing a pickaxe. They might not be great at it like someone with the skill, but they should be able to do it."

"There's a book for that. I know there is. It gives Summoned creatures a base skill level. There's a Druid in town that used it to teach his bear to cook. It's not great, but it doesn't burn the pancakes. I'll find it tomorrow when the library is open." Arial says.

The hotel they're approaching is a simple thing. Stone block walls roughly cut out of the local limestone, as most buildings in town are, with a wooden shake roof. The hanging sign simply has coins and a bed, leaving no doubt it's a hotel, and the name "Wharf Front Inn" is carved into the sturdy light oak doors.

"Greetings and welcome to the Wharf Front Inn, I would be Sam, and you must be Duke Cain and the Darklight Host. To think an up and coming local legend is staying at my humble inn." A Dark Elven man wearing the same pirate looking garb as Nila greets them.

The two ocean loving Elves greet each other silently, but Cain is sure the change in body language means something. A secret language maybe?

"So, that will be rooms for a whole crew. Don't worry, we've got the space, not many Wave Riders or Water mages in the Anchorage tonight." The innkeeper continues.

"That makes a difference? Or does every fleet just have their favorite place to stay?" Misha asks.

"The various nations fleets mostly keep to their own to avoid troubles in the city. If they upset this lovely lady she will punish them with a No Disembark order, and nobody wants that when there's drinking and socializing to be done, if you catch my meaning." The Elf says, nodding his head at the curvy ebony form of Arial.

"The Water Mages, Wave Riders, and the Corsairs they travel with are the only ones who don't believe it's bad luck to have women in the crew, and it can take over a month

between ports, so things can get a little rowdy when they do finally see land." Red jokes, mostly seriously.

This is the first Wave Rider male Cain has seen, and he's much larger than Cain expected of an Elf. Lloran was tall for an Elven male, but it seems that trait is common to Dark Elves, because Sam is slightly taller than Misha's 5 foot 6, and muscled in a lithe way, not burly as would be expected of a human in the same physical condition.

"You'll be busy in the morning too, we're expecting visitors about property sales and rent, so I'll apologize in advance." Cain says to Sam, who just laughs it off.

"Aye, I'm looking forward to seeing them grovel. That punk has been a thorn in my side for years, but his Daddy challenges anyone who gives him trouble, and the old man has too much power in the Holy Landis Kingdom to have him snuffed out without starting a war.." The innkeeper answers, as if having annoying people assassinated was definitely an option to him under normal circumstances.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 171 - 171 Making A Deal

True to his word, the innkeeper found them a spot among a group of large rooms, looking like they were each designed for the majority of a ship's crew to all be bunked in the same area. Instead of the expected beds, there were hammocks, the more familiar sleeping location for most sailors, as they remain mostly stationary as the boat rolls. Cain decides he might need to get one for himself, that was one of the better nights sleep he's had.

"Those things are great. They're soft, flexible, and perfect for cuddling." Kone declares, stretched out in a hammock with Su. Misha considers pointing out they're usually intended for one person, but since she and Cain also shared one last night that would just be hypocritical.

In fact, she believes everyone did. Vala and Laura shared one, the Demon enjoying the cooler skin of the Dragon and the Dragon enjoying the warm Demon wings, while the Nila clones each grabbed a copy of Nemu, still in her mostly human looking Neko transformation. Half the hammocks in the room were never used at all.

"If you're up and about, the sun is up and you've got visitors." Sam, the innkeeper calls after a quick rap on the door.

"Well, time to work. Let's see what we can get for those extra properties. I'm hoping for a transport circle that doesn't need to be in a Guild House. If we can go from here to Montauk, everyone can enjoy a beach vacation without risking their lives in the desert to get there." Cain says hopefully, his body language saying he'd rather stay in bed with Misha.

"I just hope they've got good alchemy supplies. I'm really low now, and the old potion recipes I know are mostly irrelevant at this level." Kone suggests. It is a trading town, alchemy supplies should come in fairly regularly.

"So we're hoping for Alchemy and Tailoring recipes and materials? Maybe some blacksmith ones to send to the Guild? Anything else?" That covers the essentials, other than materials for Cain's own Inscription Skill. But many of them are extremely expensive, and particular to the book he wants to copy, so getting them in advance might not be practical. He doesn't know what he will need for whatever higher level books he might manage to find.

What he does need though, are the ones for the Dark Elven Blade Forms. At least three copies, as both Candia and Cixelcid will want them, plus one copy for the Guild Library. The thought of the two Vampires using the delicate but lethal looking style somehow just seems right to Cain. In the legends from his past life they were supposed to be unnaturally fast and graceful, but here, that largely depends on their class.

With that in mind, Cain writes out the needed materials, skipping the ones for [Cloud Dancing], because that skill was just evil to copy. That's still quite a collection of materials, and a small library of books to complete the essentials of the style. Dual Wield, Parry, Offense Basics, Defensive Footwork.

Then the advanced version of Offense and Offensive Flows, plus Blade Aura. Because, as Lloran said, you can't be a proper swordsman without a Blade Aura. It's also a very good area damage technique. Only ten percent spills over to the area, but it all adds up and the [Intimidate] effect it causes slows enemy attack speed.

None of the materials for it were too ridiculous, but Cain wishes he'd remembered to take one of the Inscription Desks. Though they might have a limitation he doesn't know about, a time limit on the conjured materials or something similar. Still worth going back to get one when he's got a chance. Now isn't the time though, the token they got as a Quest Reward will take them to the hidden city, but he'd have to spend all day flying back to Assah.

They make their way down to the dining room, the hotel doesn't have a tavern in it, though there's one nearby, and are greeted by six members of the Nut Up Guild and Duke Lancelot himself.

"Greetings. It's good to see you well this morning. I've got all the paperwork plus the payment ready for your signature." The Duke announces, getting right down to business.

Cain nods and takes a seat, picking up the tea and wincing at the flavor. Has Elven Forest Tea spoiled his taste buds? This stuff is godawful.

"Sam, can you bring me some hot water? I've gotten used to Elven Forest Tea, so I'll make my own." Cain calls, knowing the Dark Elf will be listening in.

"Exactly how much of that Tea do you have? The Elves of the Sarrah Woods in the far south have placed a trade embargo on theirs and we haven't been able to get it for years." Lancelot asks.

Cain looks in the Guild Storage, finding that someone has bought an entire bulk tote of it, a full ton of tea. Maybe they're using it to trade?

[Can we get more Elven Forest Tea? I need a bunch of it in Assah.] Cain sends in Guild Chat.

[Use as much of that bag as you need. Sunnybrook Council traded it for higher level gear I made, and I can ask for it as partial payment again next week when the next shipment is ready.] Dimnys responds in seconds.

"I think I could spare a few hundred kilos of Elven Forest Tea from the Beginner Valley. I'm not certain it's the same as what the higher level Elves produce though." Cain says carefully.

"That is close enough. It's hard to get, even if not enchanted like the Sarrah Woods Tea, but it's still worth it's weight in silver to sell it to the trading ships." Sam says, bringing out the hot water and a teapot.

Cain nods his thanks and adds leaves to the tea ball and puts them to steep before looking back up at Lancelot.

"200 kilos of Elven Forest Tea for 200 kilos of Silver Coin?" The proposal makes the assembled members of the Darklight Host turn pale at the staggering amount of money, but Lancelot nods and pulls a chest from his inventory, then a large sack and a scale.

The chest opens to reveal a huge pile of silver coins, which Sam runs his fingers through to verify it doesn't contain blocks of lead or any other artificial weights.

"It's good. The chest is 6 kilos itself, and the sack is 1, so we add five in weights to the scale and we're ready for the tea." The innkeeper has clearly done this before. Possibly a great many times before he settled down to run an inn. Cain has a hard time telling

Elven ages apart until they get truly old or very young, so he can't really tell how long Sam might have been around.

The tea is in bundles within the bulk tote, so Cain pulls them out one after another, dumping them into the sack until the scales balance.

"Perfect. That's one deal done, now if you'll sign off on the house transfer I'll pay you for that and be on my way to discipline my dimwitted heir." Lancelot smiles, happy to have obtained rare, high quality tea for his kingdom.

"How much money is that anyhow?" Laura says, looking into the chest.

"They're quarter ounce silver coins, so about 141 to a kilogram, and 28,200 in the chest, give or take, the coin weights aren't always precise, and they wear down with use, so weight trades will have a few extra coins." Sam tells the curious Opal Dragon, who is already mentally celebrating.

"If you're impressed by that, maybe I should have gotten all silver to buy off the smithy with." The Red bearded Dwarf from the Nut Up Guild laughs.

"Why's that?"

"You see, it's ten silver to a Gold Coin, and purchase price is set at fifty times a months rent, so I'll be paying 7500 gold today to buy out my shop, if your boss is willing." The Dwarf explains.

"A huge mountain of silver coins." Laura says dreamily, making everyone chuckle at her priorities.

"I see no problem selling off the shops. My Guild isn't big enough to need all of them, and we're keeping the house by the wharf as a trading post." Cain explains and the Nut Up members nod in understanding.

"The other shops rent at a hundred gold each, so that's five thousand from each of us." A gnome from the Nut Up Guild adds.

"If you prefer to trade items, we need Alchemy, Tailoring and Blacksmith Recipes, as well as the materials associated with them, and this list of Inscription materials in the listed quantities." Cain says, setting the sheet with the materials for the Dark Elven Blade Forms books on the table.

"Making a Dark Elven Skill book are you? Maybe a couple from the quantity. I've got everything there in stock, but it's not expensive. In total, barely a hundred gold." A human member of their group frowns.

"I'll need more materials later, but not knowing what I'll need if I find the books I am looking for in the library, I can't really prepurchase them.." Cain shrugs and the girl nods.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 172 - 172

"I've got a recipe for you, if we're bargaining. The Legendary Five Tiger Spear. Its damage is incredible, plus I think it would fit your style. It can grant your group a portion of your damage as an attack power buff. How much depends on the item's creation. But from 5 to 20 percent." The Smith says, pulling it from inventory while the others stare in awe.

"I am guessing this is incredibly valuable, as are the materials?" Cain asks.

"The recipe is. But the materials are simple. I would ask five thousand Gold for the recipe, but only a hundred gold per attempt worth of materials are required for making the spear."

That's pretty reasonable, so Cain links the recipe in Guild Chat.

[Dimnys, do you have the skill to make this?]

[Just barely. But if I equip all my smithing bonus gear and use an enchanted hammer I have a reasonable chance at making it to a high standard.]

[I'll send you enough for 5 attempts. Show me what you manage to make.]

"Deal. I'll take the recipe plus 5 attempts worth of materials for our Guild's Smith, then the rest in Gold. She's a very accomplished Dark Dwarf, so I've got high hopes she will make me something great." Cain smiles at the Smith, completing the deal and signing over the forge to its operator.

"If you're not hard up for Gold, I run a Tailor's shop." An older looking Orc smiles toothily, his dark green skin heavily scarred from a lifetime of battle. Normal wounds heal smoothly with magic or regeneration, but ones with curses or debuff effects, plus those that cause massive damage often scar, and the Orcs don't bother to use magic to remove them, seeing them as a badge of honor.

"What have you got? Misha here is a Tailor, so she can tell you what she needs." Cain says and the Orc nods, then gestures to an open table, so they can look over his inventory while the others bargain.

"I'm a general goods trader, I buy ship loads of mixed goods and resell them. If you don't mind, I'll just pay you out in Gold. It's a rare opportunity to buy a shop here, most of them pass down in Guilds and families for generations." A fancifully dressed Gnomish girl smiles at Cain.

"Don't tell me that, I might have to jack up the price." Cain teases, making Sam, the innkeeper laugh.

"The Earl Passed a law against that, to stop land prices from skyrocketing. We can't build much further out without the new developments getting blasted by the desert winds above the ridge line that surrounds the port, and at one point prices for a shop were getting near a hundred thousand Gold, just for the chance to do business here. Afterwards, joining the right guild or marrying into the right family became the way to get ahead, and those with power got more powerful." Sam explains.

Which means he himself has some clout, because a large Inn by the wharf is prime real estate.

"The city is equal distance from the closest ports on the eastern and northern continents, and closer than either of them to the Holy Landis Kingdom, so it's a gathering spot. We get a fair number of ships from the western side of this Central continent too, if you need something really high level, or a ride to new places to level up."

"I'd have offered to marry into your family to get my shop free, but I think the Dark Apostle over there might strangle me for suggesting it." The Gnome who just bought out her shop jokes quietly so Misha doesn't hear her.

"She's got a point, politics are a tricky thing. Getting out from under them will be a relief far beyond the cost of the shop." A hooded woman adds. Cain can't tell exactly what species she is, but she's tall for a human, so not an Elf, Dwarf or gnome for sure. That doesn't really narrow it down though.

"I run an alchemist shop. Various potions of all sorts. If you're in need of alchemy recipes, I've got those too." She says in an amused voice, but her features seem to be shrouded in shadow.

"Kone is your go to girl then. She advanced a bit too quickly for her alchemy skill, so she's in need of a number of recipes to catch her skill up to her level." Cain says. Unlike gear, potions have the same effect no matter who created them. Meaning you need new recipes to build your skill so your potions do enough to matter at your level. A minor

healing potion is great at level 20, but healing 50hp is pointless at level 100, where you would regenerate that every second in a close combat class.

Like Misha and the Orc, they head to another table and Sam brings them breakfast. That leaves only two more. The Inscriptionist and this very large berserker. Unlike the others, Cain doesn't see a Guild tag on his name, , which Cain assumes means Carlos, but he isn't flagged as a deserter either, so he was possibly an independent shopkeeper, which seems unlikely, or he was kicked out by the Guild Master Odin.

"I have an alternative proposal for you. I've been in this city almost a hundred years now, and after a minor argument yesterday I was removed from my Guild. I would like to join yours, both for my own peace of mind, and to assist you in doing business in the city.

Myself, I trade armor to the ships, everything from top quality level 200 gear, to bulk low level items bound for the low level zones near the coast on the Eastern continent."

Joining the Darklight Host would protect him from others trying to force him to join them to take his shop, should he buy it out, or lock him in a contract if he doesn't, to gain control of his connections.

"We have some experience in trading already, and a Wave Rider with us as a connection to the fleets. How much benefit can you offer?" Cain asks.

"The difference between finding a ship through a connection and finding the best deal on a ship is about fifteen percent of the price of shipping. Plus, history matters a lot in this city, and I've been around a long time. Finding a full ship worth of space lets you sell a lot more at once than piecemeal bargaining."

Cain wonders a moment why they don't just load every crew's inventory with goods instead of the ships, but then it occurs to him. The sea is supposed to be full of dangerous monsters. Losing crew overboard or having them eaten is always a possibility. If you can't recover the body, everything they're carrying is lost with them, so a few lost crew could be a financial disaster for a fleet operating that way. Losing the whole ship is presumably less common.

"We've got the space for another member, if the group approves of you, but the question is why were you kicked out of your last Guild and do you want to buy your shop or rent it from the Guild? Trust is important to us, the Darklight Host is one big family you see." Cain informs the Berserker, who begins to laugh, drawing everyone's attention.

"I had a bit of an argument with Odin about him being reckless is all. He doesn't take criticism well." Carlos begins, before the last member, a human woman named Niki, cuts him off.

"Best to tell them everything, like the fact you broke a table over his head, called him a mentally handicapped, inbred donkey fucker that hasn't had two brain cells working together since the day he was born. That part might be important."

"Yeah, he took that part personally you see. He was born a twin, but only one survived the birth." The Orc adds from where he's negotiating with Misha.

"And the table was a family heirloom." The Gnomish girl adds.

"Carlos is really a decent fellow, he just never got along well with Odin. The Duke brought him into the Guild back when he was running it, but as Knight Commander he had to give up his position." Niki explains.

"I should also mention, that both of his little sister's kids are mine as well. But I don't hold a noble title, so her father wouldn't let us marry." Carlos adds.

"And you let Odin know? That seems like the sort of thing folks keep hidden." Misha comments dryly.

"He might have caught us in the garden at his father's house one day." Carlos says sheepishly.

"Is she here? Or still home in the Landis Kingdom." Cain asks.

"She's here. She travels with her father, who doesn't trust her unattended for long periods of time anymore." Carlos says with a smile.

Looks like even short periods of time unattended are enough for those two lovebirds.

"And the children?" Cain asks.

"Both are enrolled in the Landis Royal University.. They'll be graduating soon as some of the finest Holy Clerics in the Kingdom."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 173 - 173 Welcoming Carlos

The frozen age thing has again misled Cain. He thought that Odin was a mere boy, still in his teenage years. But if he's got nieces about to graduate university as first

advancement Holy Clerics, he can't possibly be that young. In fact, he's likely been holding in that grudge against Carlos for well over a decade.

[He should fit right in. Funny, morally questionable, loyal to the one he cares about.] Kone sends in Guild Chat.

[Did we find a new friend?] Cixelcid asks.

[Yeah, a Vampire Barbarian that got a Duke's daughter pregnant. Twice. Kicked from his Guild for breaking a table over the Guild master's head, and because said daughter is the Guild master's little sister.] Misha adds.

[Well, he's brave, I'll give him that.] Cixelcid responds.

[Aren't we collecting a lot of Vampires though? Get a cute gnome for me to cuddle.] Char adds.

[Yeah, get the cute gnome too.] Kone chimes in and Cain tunes out the message notifications.

"So, what does the Guild say?" Carlos asks, recognizing the vacant look of someone checking the text chat.

"The girls were hoping for a cute Gnome, not a huge vampire guy, but you've got their seal of approval." Cain laughs and sends the invitation.

[has joined the Guild]

[User nickname set to Carlos]

A chorus of welcoming messages come in from the other locations as Carlos looks over the Guild information, seeing the locations of the Guild Houses.

"How do you keep up membership in the Beginner's Valley? I heard once you leave you can't go back." He asks Cain.

"We've got a method to send members between Guild Houses. We just need a way to get them from Assah back to Montauk and everything will be linked." Cain smiles at their newest member.

"I can help you there." Niki, the last to make a deal for their shop, and the Inscriptionist supplies dealer suggests.

"What have you got for us?"

"I've got a general purpose transport Inscription. Can go between any two properties owned by the same person or Guild. The materials are ridiculously expensive, but the range is long enough to go from one end of the continent to the other. From here you could even reach the very edges of the North and East continents if you got one made by an Artisan level Inscriptionist."

That's way beyond Cain's level, but a possibility in the future. Maybe.

"How much are they worth?" Cain asks cautiously.

"About 2500 Gold." Niki shrugs and Sam nods his agreement. That's half the price of her shop, and more money than they'd ever spent at one time, but worth it to keep their Guild in contact. Most Guilds break up because they're in different areas and don't ever see each other, so they drift apart.

"Deal. That, plus the supplies for the books, and the rest in Gold?" Cain suggests.

"That works for me. Come back anytime and I'll make you a good deal on supplies for your next project. Much better than the con artists at the Library, they overcharge for everything. Plus they skim off the top. Did you hear about the one who tried to steal entire Legendary Quality dragon claws?" Niki laughs.

"Hear about? It was their Dragon that provided the Claws. I was coming back from the docks when it all went down." Carlos laughs.

"You'll have to fill me in on the whole story later. But here are your supplies, and your coin, and now I need to go open my shop or I'm not going to be able to afford lunch. I'll have that circle ready for you tomorrow." Niki laughs, waving as she leaves.

"How are the other deals coming along?" Cain asks.

"Recipes, supplies and a thousand Gold is our deal." The Orcish tailor with Misha calls back and Cain nods, going over to sign the finalized deal.

"I've got materials, recipes and training plus three thousand Gold." Kone says hopefully. Sure, she's the only one that benefits from the training, but they'll all benefit from her potions when she's done.

"I can live with that. A trained alchemist is always good to have."

That's the final deal done, and with a round of handshakes, everyone leaves but the Gnomish trader.

"If you're still taking in members that belong in the Beginner's Valley, I have a deal for you. I've got two daughters at level fifteen that just finished their primary school training

as a Warlock and a Warrior. If you'd like to take them in, they're super cuddly." She grins.

"Don't worry, we can fix their levels in a hurry. In fact, we sort of specialize in it. Call it the trial by notifications, if you will. I'm certain our Shaman would love to have them. She's got an abundance of mom energy, and is currently still in the Beginner Valley, though she's got to be almost level 100 by now."

"Once you get that circle up and running I'll bring them by. Maybe day after tomorrow?" The Gnome suggests.

"That works. We'll see you then."

[Char, we found you a couple young Gnomes to cuddle. Or power level, whichever. They'll be ready in a couple days once we get set up here, and you can come collect them.] Cain sends in Guild chat.

[Excellent! The Dwarves are not at all cuddly sorts, but they're coming along well in the levels. It's not as insane as when you were here, but it's still very fast. Give it half a year and the orphans we took in will be ready to move on to doing Demon Raids or joining a group in Montauk that can partially carry them.] Char sends back.

If they're that close, she must be weeks from graduating out. It's a good thing they can return as they wish.

Checking the Guild Roster, Cixelcid and Lickity are also very close to level 100. They've also recruited a half dozen Elves from Sunnybrook without Cain noticing. At least they didn't forget that part, building up a legacy in every city is essential to Cain's newly forming ambition to have a Guild that truly encompasses the continent.

A full path from birth to level 200 or higher. After all, you can't build a Guild family if members are forced to leave to level up or can't join until adulthood.

The problem they'll eventually run into is the member cap. Unless Cain can find a way around it, once they get to 100 members they'll have to form branches, which are just affiliated Guilds and don't share the main Guilds skills and benefits.

"Hey, uh, about these Guild Skills. WTF am I looking at?" Carlos asks.

"Well, first up is Summon Ogres. They're kind of trash, and can only be called once a day, it's a random group from 1 to 6. The next is [Demon Army] a group of 2 or more that only has Guild Members can call 18 Demon type Lesser Golems with a cool down of 30 minutes. Pretty much every Guild Group calls them every dungeon run. The last one is [Benevolent Leader] which lets every member Summon two Epic Golems. Technically it allows me to pick one Core Skill to share, but that's what I picked. They're

a bit mana intensive to call, but you can do it pretty frequently if they happen to die." Cain explains.

"How tough is a Lesser Golem and how tough is an Epic Golem?" Carlos asks confused.

"Without buffs, Lesser Golems are about as tough as random small dungeon mobs their level. Epic Golems are mostly clones of Dungeon bosses."

"So you're saying every group gets 18 trash mobs and 2 dungeon bosses their level to help them out?" Carlos says, shocked.

"Technically 4 dungeon bosses. Because you need 2 members in the group to use [Demon Army] and they can both use [Benevolent Leader] if they have the mana." Cain explains.

"No wonder you guys are so disgustingly overpowered. Just flooding every dungeon with summons and letting the healers carry the run."

"If you want, you can Summon the healers too. There's a Dark Elven High Priestess among the Epic Golems that does an incredible job of healing. Pick her and a Tank type Epic Golem, like the Snapping Turtle Kin or a Wrath Bringer and you can go with just DPS classes." Kone suggests.

"Be careful how much you pull through, because with only one tank you might take damage to everyone else too." Misha adds and Carlos shakes his head as if they've got an unrealistic expectation of what it means to enter a dungeon.

"It might be easier to show you in person. We've got to go look at the new house we obtained, and set up the travel Inscription, but after that we're free to head out into the desert and do a quick dungeon run. Maybe the Lizardmen dungeon, since you export gear for a living.

We usually drop everything into the Guild Bank, and members take what they need, then let the Smith and tailors rework the stuff with lousy bonuses. It sells better if it gets reworked into better bonuses, and if it doesn't we usually break it down for materials, or you can sell it overseas. Both work to fund the Guild."

"So gear is a free for all?"

"Sort of. Take only what you're using and put the old item in its place has been working so far. I'm certain we've got some seriously over geared newbies in the Guild, since a lot of items don't have restrictions on them, but there's lots still there as you can see."

"Yeah, just the stuff that's already been reworked and unclaimed is enough to fill a couple ships. It's not terrible gear, just a bit wonky in the combinations, so the Eastern Continent would love to get their hands on it." Carlos agrees, looking over the items.

Nothing there will really help him, he's level 193, but anything they get out of the Lizardmen dungeon might. Plus, working with gear much higher level than you both grants experience and quickly increases your crafting skill. They might get a lot of failures and ruined gear, but they should get Guild members to Master level Tailoring and Smithing in a hurry.

"The Lizardmen dungeon is half an hour out of town by horse. Or jogging if you prefer, they're about the same at level 100. If you think you can manage it, I'll gladly join you.." Carlos laughs, eager to see just how powerful his new Guild is, since he arrived just before the duel during yesterday's fight and only saw the numbers, not the ability.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 174 - 174

The walk to the new house is a short one, and after only a few minutes they're looking at a rather run down limestone building with slate roof tiles. It looks sturdy, but like nobody has cleaned or maintained it in years. The grass out front is thoroughly trampled though, so Nut Up must have collected their belongings from inside.

They did, but the inside is worse than outside. Hardwood floors with peeling and worn out varnish, holes in the interior walls, light fixtures that don't work and trash. Trash everywhere.

"I think we will need a renovation crew before anything. I should have looked at the place before finishing the deal." Cain sighs.

"Don't forget, I've been here a century. I'll get someone in to begin fixing this up this afternoon, furnish the upstairs rooms and have it ready to start working as a trading post sometimetomorrow if you want." Carlos says, inspecting the damage.

"Go ahead. We will be a while before opening a trading post, I want to build up higher level supplies first, but having rooms available would be for the best." Cain agrees.

"With hammocks." Kone and Nemu say in unison.

"Greetings Darklight, oh this place is a disaster. Hey Carlos, what you doing here?" Symbia greets them from the open door.

"I got kicked from Nut Up and worked a deal to join the Darklight Host. What brings you here?"

"Guild Master Cain wanted puppets for his class ability. Enough to buy up all my stock and then some. So I came by to bring him what I've got." The Elf giggles, knowing how ridiculous the proposal would sound to someone who doesn't understand.

"Are you opening a specialty brothel?" Carlos asks confused.

"No, I can animate them as level 10 constructs. You need to give them specific instructions, like a computer program, but they can be used for domestic help, personal assistants, mannequins, or even mining the Stone Giant dungeon."

"How many are we talking about? Enough to make a difference in mining speed?" Carlos asks.

"I have sixty in stock, at twenty gold each." Symbia says and Cain hands her a heavy pouch full of coins before she opens the trading interface to send him all sixty dolls.

She wasn't joking about not having many male ones, only 5 of them. But this should be enough to get them going on anything they need. They just have to wait for Arial to find the book that should give them basic skills, so they can actually do the mining without micromanagement.

Looking them over, they're all dressed in the same uniform, maid outfits, even the male ones are in the same dress.

"Did you have anything for the mining crew? Or should I go look for it?" Cain asks.

"Oh, yeah, I have them right here. Fifty pickaxes and outfits. I thought you might want the male dolls on the mining crew, so I made 5 male miner outfits and 45 female." Symbia smiles happily and passes the items over.

The dolls stack in inventory, using only 2 spots, the same with the outfits. That's excellent for Cain, he can bring them everywhere without losing all his inventory space. Cain swaps the outfits on his mining crew and takes out the remainder of the dolls in Maid outfits. They're all identical, big breasted Elven women in black and white maid outfits.

There was an industrial sized garbage bin out front when they arrived, so Cain sets the dolls to work.

"Puppets, remove all garbage and debris from the building and place it in the bin outside. Avoid collisions with each other and any other people. Return to this point and await further instructions once the task is complete." Cain hopes that's specific enough, and the dolls get to work, taking one piece of debris per hand to the bin, regardless of size. Maybe not the most efficient, but there's ten of them, they'll get it done.

"There are brooms and dustpans in that closet." Carlos points out, looking at the chaos and Cain chuckles.

"Additional command, use available brooms to fill dustpans with debris to bring to the bin. Do not discard the dustpans." Cain opens the broom cupboard and the tools are quickly put to use, the puppets filling a pan then dropping the broom and going to empty the pan. By the time they get back to where they were, another Puppet has started using their broom, so they drop the pan and go looking for debris. This is even more amusing than last time, but it's working, so Cain lets it go.

Now, all that's left is to find Arial.

"I should go to the library and find Arial, she was going to look for a book that gives Summons basic skills." Cain says, hoping that cleaning is among the skills.

"Oh, like the cooking bear guy." Carlos says in understanding. It seems the Druid is a minor local celebrity.

"No need to find me. I've brought you the book. It's a D ranked skill, so it cost me nothing to make it. What are the puppets doing? Did you set a random cleaning description?" Arial asks from the street out front.

"No, I just gave them all the same directions and it caused minor confusion." Cain shrugs.

"Here, use the book. It might help." The Black Dragon in human form laughs, handing it to Cain.

[Skill Learned: Skilled Constructs] Passive. Basic life skill abilities set to Apprentice 1 for all of the user's constructs without a higher level in that skill.

The effect is immediate, the cleaning becomes organized, they spread out between rooms, 3 sweeping small debris into piles while 3 run pans to the bin and 4 take out the large debris chunks. Within ten minutes, the house is tidy. In rough shape, but swept clean.

"We should be ready for the renovation crews now. I'll pack these up so they're not in the way of distracting anyone." Cain says, collecting the puppets that have gathered in the front room now that their tasks are done.

"I'll call them now. You want to come with us to the Lizardmen dungeon Miss Black?" Carlos jokes.

"Tempting, but RhickJaymz is already a bit upset we've been spending time with other people. You know how lonely he gets."

"He's just used to always having two Dragons at his side to run all his errands. When they're gone he's got to do things himself." The big Vampire jokes.

"How about the Stone Giant dungeon instead? Try out the new puppets? I really want to see how they do now that you've learned a skill to give them the knowledge." Symbia suggests.

"We can do that. I take it you would like to come along?"

"Oh, yes please. Only 4 of you are transfers, right? So there's a spot left?"

"That's correct. How far is it to that dungeon?" Cain replies, smiling at her enthusiasm.

"Only about fifteen minutes from here. It's closer than the Lizardmen. It just doesn't have great loot unless you raid it."

The long term members eyes light up at that.

"So, you can raid the Stone Giant dungeon can you?" Cain says innocently and Carlos gets a concerned look, but Symbia continues oblivious to the overtone.

"Yeah, it moves it from level 140 to level 180 and you get a whole lot more gems and precious metals. Plus, higher level gear. That's how the mining Guild does it."

"You know a way to raid with only 4 people don't you?" Carlos asks and Cain gestures around the room.

"The dungeons that can be raided allow you to count Companion type summons as group members. So in their eyes, we've got 9 more valid group members."

"This is going to be awesome. I totally ran away from the last fight, but I've heard amazing things. Sorry for ditching you, but I'm really not a great fighter." Symbia says.

"What is your class anyhow? I see you keep it hidden." Carlos says, being the only one who bothered to look.

"Master Artist. It's a life skill class with about zero combat capability. I'm only level 47, But I gain bonus experience from drawing, sculpting and an assortment of other art related life skills." She says happily then sighs.

Yeah, that might be an issue in everyday life. Sure, you can level up without risking your life, but you've got to find buyers for your art if you ever want to survive on your own. And this is a very expensive city to live in.

"You'll get a few experience points with us today. I can guarantee it." Nemu teases her, knowing exactly what's going to happen once they enter the dungeon. Trial by notifications.

"You could accompany us more often if you like. Unless the Sculptors Guild you're in prohibits it." Misha suggests.

"Oh no, they don't mind. It's more of a trade association, we banded together to get bulk discounts on supplies, and to be able to afford a Guild House to use as our workshop. With the help of my grandmother and a few other parents." Symbia says.

Kone is just standing there with an evil smirk.

[I wonder what happens if we drag someone through a dungeon 130 levels above their own..] She sends in Guild chat and the others all have to stifle their laughter, even Carlos, who doesn't know about the bonus experience.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 175 - 175

[Boss, boss. I did it. I made THE spear.] Dimnys sends in Guild chat and links the item. It's good to see her so excited about a smithy success, it means she's not getting bored with her trade.

[Five Tiger Spear] Legendary Quality. Damage equals 437 percent of DEX. Chance on hit to grant all party members 20 percent of damage as attack power for 5 minutes. Does not stack.

Great, now Cain needs to look up how attack power is calculated. Alright, it's not too hard, STR plus level. Then the base damage of your weapon is added to that to get your maximum possible damage range, before modifiers and skills.

Now, looking over that, with a plain, non magical sword in hand, that skill would buff everyone by about 5 percent if Cain's hit landed against a reasonably armored target. Up to 15 percent with a solid hit from one of the advanced Dark Elven Blade Form skills. But merged with the Oath Breaker, and using the spear that scales damage with DEX, it should be much more.

If it happens after Might of Many has stacked up for a while, it could be entirely unbalanced.

Cain approves.

[437 out of a possible 500 percent of DEX as damage, but a perfect roll on the group buff. If I could use spears I'd be begging you to make me a copy.] Carlos sends in Guild chat.

[And it scales with DEX, so it didn't need to be replaced or upgraded, until you find something with better scaling damage.] Dimnys adds.

[Now I just need a good offhand weapon to go with it. The pair of Scimitar I broke during the duel were the best I had.] Cain puts in, smiling at the memory.

[I'll see what I can find. If not, there's a few more Scimitar in the Guild Bank with decent stats.] Dimnys sends before returning to her work, proud of her days accomplishment, and keeping the fact she outright failed the first 4 times to herself.

"How about we go talk to the Smith? The one you sold a shop to yesterday I mean. He's bound to have something good for a Scimitar. I don't have any in my shipment inventory right now, I loaded a boat just a few days back." Carlos suggests.

"If we're all ready to go, we can stop by his place on the way out of town." Cain agrees and Laura leads the way out the door, holding a spoon in front of her like a baton or sword to signal a charge.

The smithy is on the far side of town, but the Stone Giant dungeon is out that way as well, so they don't lose much by going to visit, and take the time to try to understand what sort of logic went into this city's layout. Houses and commercial districts aren't separated, industrial shops are scattered at random, and none of the streets are straight. It's like they started at the water and just built wherever.

"Guild Master Cain, welcome. How did your Smith do with the recipe?"

"Not too badly." Cain says, laying it on the counter for the Dwarf to inspect. The spear is beautiful, a short spear a little over 2 meters long, polished white shaft with gold inlaid tigers and a flat black blade, the edges curved into an elegant leaf shape with a solid looking cross bar.

"Not bad at all. Perfect bonus is far more important than perfect damage." The dark haired man nods his head happily, his red beard swaying in a leather sleeve he must be using to avoid burning it off while he works.

"What I need is a good Scimitar to go with it. I use a Dark Elven Blade Form, and that's the only option that goes with spear." Cain informs him.

"Well now, I might have something that compliments it. How about one of these?" The Smith places two Legendary Scimitar on the counter, both level 200 items.

[Scimitar of Pain] chance on hit to apply a [Cripple] debuff. Deals 180 to 240 damage.

Good, but Cain already has cripple in his summons arsenal and it doesn't stack. The second is a rusty looking thing with some sort of thick yellow fluid oozing out of it. A weapon recipe from the Plague Demon dungeons, made by a high level Smith.

[Pestilent Scimitar] Increases all Pestilence Damage by 100 percent and causes [Pestilence] on hit. Deals 250 percent of CON as damage.

Now that's more like it. The base damage might be lower than his spear, but doubled Pestilence damage is huge. With both Cain and Vala applying it, and the Scimitar doubling the damage, Hordes of monsters won't be an issue at all.

"How much for the Pestilent Scimitar?" Cain asks and the Dwarf gives it a disgusted look.

"It's been here a while, nobody wants a weapon that disgusting, even if it is disgustingly good. I'll give it to you for materials plus ten percent, eleven hundred gold coins." That's not cheap at all, but oh, the damage output.

"I'll take it." Cain agrees, handing over the coin and picking it up to check the balance.

"Are you familiar with [Pestilence]?" The Smith asks.

"Yeah, one of my summons gets it as a passive. Too good to pass up, and even better the more overwhelmed you get." Cain nods and Vala gives the Smith a toothy grin. Her Pestilence was a nightmare for the Nut Up Guild's healers during the brief fight. They had lots of cleansing abilities, but they wasted huge amounts of mana dealing with it.

"Well, this should be messy." Carlos cheers, eager to get into combat and very happy with his new choice of Guild.

"Will our composition be alright? I'm not entirely familiar with everyone's abilities, they're all uncommon classes. Me, I went from Barbarian, to Barbarian Warlord, nice and simple, just smash things." Carlos asks the group in general.

"Yeah, we've got 2 healers, and I will Summon more to balance things out. I think this time I'll have most of my summons merge at least once, durability will matter more than numbers when we're this far under level."

"I understood about half that. But if you say it's good, it's good."

Kone is feeling pretty tough, merged with her Snapping Turtle, but Misha is rather concerned, being the softest one there.

"Soon we will fix that." Cain says, seeing her concern. 14 more levels until he can hopefully get the first skill of the General side of the skill tree and unlock [Lieutenants] which are basically Appointed Companions from a class skill. That will let Misha merge with the Golems from Benevolent Leader and greatly increase her health and durability.

"You should think about what sort of Golems you would like before we get there. Something to help deal damage, spell Casters, a cute bunny girl, it's your call." Cain jokes with Carlos.

"Do you have any snake girls? I've always been a sucker for snake girls."

Both Misha and Kone burst into laughter at that. "You didn't see them during the fight? Cain uses over a dozen Lamia all the time."

"I say go for the Primordial Shaman. Six armed, Winged snake girl with mana and healing Totems, as well as Elemental spells and decent close combat. The ability is for Epic Golems, so you're working with dungeon bosses." Misha suggests, always a fan of more mana Totems.

"What will you fine ladies be using?" Carlos asks.

"I'll be using demons called Mysterious Disciples. A Holy flame user with really good damage." Misha says and Cain nods, expecting that.

"I'm going for a Lord of Decay. They grant bonuses to healing done, and MP regeneration, plus they're really, really tough." Kone giggles.

"So you're the tank type Summoner then. I was told the Turtles also start with you." Carlos nods his understanding.

Kone, being the Appointed Companion, gets a better version of [Benevolent Leader] summons than everyone else, benefitting from Cain's buffs to Summons. So she plans on merging with two of her demons to increase her own durability, leaving her Snapping Turtles available to fight.

"When we get there, all the Companions are to merge. I'm also going to merge all the summons at a 4 to 1 ratio to increase their durability. That way we're not overcrowding the dungeon, and we shouldn't be losing summons." Cain says as they jog towards the edge of town, with Carlos carrying Symbia, who didn't stand a chance of keeping up.

That should also put them well above the effective level of the monsters. But since their actual level won't change, they'll be getting a huge bonus for being under level. Cain

isn't sure what merging summons does to his bonus though. Will it be cut to a quarter? Do they all still count despite being merged?

But the better question is, does he even have any way to find out, without going back to an easier dungeon and running it twice?

He's not sure he does, so this run will be a bit of unknown for them all.

The entrance to the dungeon is on the beach side of a cliff, a short hike outside of town, at least at their level, so they decide to prep themselves before entering. The Companions call their Bonded Forces, merging them to two each, and then the Companions merge with their clones.

There's still 4 of each species worth of Bonded Companions, so Cain takes that as a good sign that all the summons might still be counted, despite sharing a body. Cain calls all his other summons out and merges them to a quarter of their previous numbers, looking at the 5 enhanced Wasps, the last of his Lesser Golem equivalents. They might still be relatively squishy, but they should do great individual damage now.

The others follow suit, Kone combining 2 of her Lords of Decay into one but merging with the other two. It's a massive being, immensely fat and putrid looking like it had been decaying in a swamp before being Summoned, standing a full five meters tall, and she's glad they're going to be facing giants. Low roofs are not that thing's friend.

With the abundance of Legendary Turtles, Cain decided to merge with Eight Oath Breakers, leaving the last four to merge into one. Then he merges the six Kone clones into two groups of three, before doing the same with the Su clones and looks over the assembled force. That should give them enough summons to deal with the raid, over two dozen Legendary Summons in all, and still have room to move.

"At the start, Symbia is going to get a lot of notifications and be basically immobile. Carlos, you're responsible for carrying her, don't let anything hit her, because she'll probably die before her stats have time to grow." Cain says and Carlos nods in understanding.

Finally, it's Raid time.. It's been too long and Cain was beginning to miss that unique feeling that passing through into a dungeon gives.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 176 - 176 Stone Giants

Cain turns on and prepares his interface for this dungeon, something he's never done before. The health and mana globes appear in the bottom corners of his vision, party member status down the left side, almost in his peripheral, Summon details hidden, and a spot for active buffs high and centered in his line of sight. That should let him know how Might of Many and the attack power bonus from his spear are doing.

The final part is to turn off titles and Guild tags and turn on detailed life bars. They hover over everyone's head and show health and mana levels. That should be enough to see at a glance that everyone is safe. Now save that as a preset so it comes up the same way every time he enters an instance, but returns to normal when he exits. No need to know if random people in the street are mildly injured or low on mana. But seeing their name, title and Guild tag is important sometimes.

"Call out if a Summon goes down. Everyone follow me in." Cain says, stepping through the entrance.

On arrival he is immediately attacked by a pair of Stone Giants guarding the entry, huge gray hands swinging stone clubs at his head. That's a bad spot for clubs to be landing, especially with others coming behind him, so Cain activates [Cloud Dancing] and gracefully leaps behind the giants to attack their backs.

It has the desired effect of turning them away from the entry, and does a surprising amount of damage, taking a quarter of their health in a few seconds. Cain also sees a buff active. [Might of Many] but he's the only one here so far, so it must count the extra damage from merged summons as Summon damage, increasing his attacks lethality with every strike.

The first giant is almost dead when the rest of the group enters, and the second drops almost immediately after to the combined attack power of the summons.

"Notifications, so many of them. And closing them opens more." Symbia wails and Misha laughs.

"The next pull is six of them, all elite." Misha says, pointing at the group to explain her amusement. Symbia is going to get it bad right from the start.

The dungeon looks to be placed in the badlands. The steep cliffs of rocky outcrops and plateaus surround them at irregular intervals, with very few trees and yellowed sun scorched grass. They've entered into one of the ravines, so it's not beating directly on them, thankfully, but it is almost desert afternoon hot in here.

They move out in their usual formation, but with a few changes from the usual. Wrath Bringers and Snapping Turtles are in the front, softer summons behind with the Drakes and Dragons airborne. Cain is now in front with the tanks and the merged Lord of Decay has taken a defensive positron in front of the other transfers, a huge club that looks like a rotten log in hand.

From the front you can barely tell the others are even present, the disgusting Demon is just that wide.

Even merged four to one, there's still a lot of summons in this dungeon, greatly outnumbering the groups they're about to fight. Cain hopes that makes up for any level based weakness, but like this they should actually be stronger than their opponents.

The tanks attack the elite giants and the giants are shredded in seconds, Might of Many stacking up in a hurry. Cain leads the charge, Cloud Dancing still active, as the buffs he's getting regenerate mana faster than he's using it. His strikes are taking large chunks out of his target's health now, and the area effect and Pestilence are steadily burning down the others, even without considering the Summoned army.

Then the Five Tiger Spear procs the damage increase effect and the remaining giants simply die under the next wave of attacks. Cain continues moving, leading his forces at a fast walk through the dungeon, wiping out the initial groups of giants.

"Did we get the wrong dungeon? I don't recall this being something a level 106 can simply jog through twirling a spear." Carlos asks rhetorically.

"It's 107 now, this level gap bonus is insane." Cain jokes, an arcing swing of his Scimitar removing a giant's head.

"Keeping everything healed is rough though. Cain mostly parries, but anything they hit, they hit hard." Kone sighs, sending out more heals as the Turtles pull in another group to fight. They recover ten percent of their health a second, the damage must be just unreal to a regular group their level, likely killing someone with every other hit.

A giant Boulder flies past Cain towards the group before he can even shout a heads up, but with a resounding Crack it comes streaking back at his head. Cain dodges the rock, which strikes a giant in the chest, and looks back.

The Lord of Decay is turned sideways, club up like a baseball player and simply shrugs at Cain before smashing another Boulder back towards the giants.

Who knew Plague Demons were good at baseball?

After that group is eliminated they find themselves facing the first boss of the dungeon. An extremely large Granite Elemental with six smaller Earth Elementals.

"Hold up, I've got a bad feeling about those Elementals. See how they've got their hands on the ground? I'm thinking they're going to start the fight with earth spikes." Carlos tells the group.

"I'll go first, gotta keep the buffs up. Stay back and out of sight." Cain agrees, running on air towards the boss.

Carlos was right, the second Cain enters their range, spikes begin to shoot up from the ground in waves.

"Lava dance, do the lava dance." Cain sings a song from a video game meme in his past life to himself as he dodges spikes, chopping into the nearest Elemental. Might of Many has begun to face from the delay, but the buff from the spear is long lasting. A tenth of the smaller Elementals life fades in one strike and Cain calls for the majority of his summons to advance, leaving the Companions to guard the humans.

Or, well mortals. Since neither Kone or Carlos are technically human. His species is Vampire, which looks human, but might not have been, since it gets its own designation by the system.

The waves of spikes start overlapping each other as the Elementals go berserk due to the influx of attackers. Keeping the squishy ones away was a good call. At best they'd be doing nothing but running. That Granite Elemental is not taking much damage though, so Cain inspects it and discovers that it has no debuffs on it. No Cripple, Pestilence, armor reduction, stun, poison, bound, nothing at all.

The earth Elementals weren't as lucky, Cain's Dread Spider bodyguard has tightly wrapped one in a cocoon while it and one of the Wrath Bringers repeatedly Stab the Elemental in the face. That's not actually a vital point, but they look like they're having fun. Even the Wasps have given up on the boss, stinging the Earth Elementals instead. They're immune to poison, but most of the other effects still work on them.

Cain makes sure both of these variants are recorded, that status effect immune boss especially, while the summons have learned the system to the spikes. They won't appear too close to one of the boss monsters, so the Lamia have wrapped the Earth Elementals up, to attack their heads and upper torso, and the others are standing close to the Granite Golem, despite the damage they're taking from its stomping and crushing fists.

The smaller ones are almost dead, but even with the majority of damage being leveled at it, the big boss is still over 80 percent health. That Granite Golem just does not want to die.

It doesn't seem to have a weakness though.

Certainly not physical attacks, or Water. It's also not poison or dark magic. Maybe Fire? Cain swaps the Plague Mages he's using for Sorcerers to Fire Elementals, as the system considers them and their icy cousins a mage type creature. They're doing more than the Plague Mages were, but the boss is immune to the burning effect, so it's still not perfect.

The change should make Misha happy though. Cripple is an invisible effect, but burning is not, and she loves setting things on fire. Besides, Cain still has [Cripple] from the remaining Oath Breaker available.

"Carlos, any idea how to kill this thing?" Cain calls out.

"Slowly? Most mining groups stop here and mine the entrance, because that thing just won't die. It's immune to pretty much everything. This is the fastest I've seen a group deal with it, he's usually a two hour long fight."

Compared to the giants, it does very little damage though. It hits hard due to the level difference, but most of the damage was coming from the now deceased Earth Elementals.

Thirty Four minutes. That's how long it took the group to hack that stupid Granite Golem to death, and it didn't even drop anything decent, at least not as far as Cain can tell. Just a bunch of basic mining materials and a Granite Core, an Epic crafting material. It was at least a pretty impressive amount of materials though.

Beyond the first boss the Giants change a little. The Stone Giants become Mountain Giants, paler gray in the skin and even larger than their cousins, built wider in the body too. The big change is in the ground though, Cain can see many more shiny deposits waiting to be mined than in the entrance section.

"Everyone grab a snack here and we'll let poor Symbia recover for a little while. The boss fight was long enough she finished her notifications, but she still looks woozy." Cain smiles, pulling a picnic blanket from the Guild Bank.

"That's evil I tell you. If it weren't for the fact they were all level related notifications I would probably strangle you for doing that to me.." The sculptor laughs.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 177 - 177

"Is it just me, or is this dungeon giving an inordinate amount of experience? Seriously, I've gotten most of a level, I'm certain of it. I usually only get a single percent a run." Carlos says while they're enjoying lunch on the body of the fallen Granite Elemental.

"Doing dungeons with me gives an experience bonus. Just a small one, but it can really add up." Cain says around a mouthful of sandwich.

"Yeah, it adds up to a lot. Looks like I'll be leveling up sooner than I thought."

"Please don't mention leveling up. I think I've been traumatized. Doesn't the under level bonus get higher for every level under the dungeon you are too? Because this is insane. By the time we finish I'll be ready to pick a first advancement class at this rate." Symbia laughs.

"Have you got any skill books? What you know affects what you can choose. The more specialized you are, the more interesting your options. We learned this from Kone, who specialized in Summoning as a Druid, including some book skills, and got Beast Lord as a level 100 option." Cain asks, explaining his logic.

"All the books I could use are art based, and class specific, since I can't use any base class skill books. But I've got skills for rapid creation, increased realism and the like. I took smithy and Tailoring as life skills to make skeletons and clothes for my dolls."

That all seems sensible, but Cain isn't sure what it might lead to. For her sake Cain hopes it is something amazing. Being stuck as a mediocre non combat class must be a nightmare, even if she enjoys the method of leveling up.

"Everyone ready? Symbia, you're still a hundred levels below the dungeon, best get comfy, because there will be notifications." Even Cain has gotten multiple notifications this dungeon, but he's minimized them all to check later. With practice he can now do it with a thought, hiding them the instant they appear.

The Mountain Giants that come after the first boss are much more durable than the stone giants were and use earth magic, causing a large amount of area damage. So much that the copies of Su have to stop attacking and heal when the big spells land. Fortunately they're not immune to stun, only resistant, so the tanks interrupt most of them.

"You must never see an enemy spell cast in a dungeon your own level. I'd do some stuff for two dozen interrupt effects when tanking a raid." Carlos jokes from his spot in the middle of the back lines, holding Symbia.

"That's a big part of why running dungeons is so easy with him. That and the overwhelming numbers." Kone agrees.

"Up ahead we should, oh crap, Symbia passed out, I almost dropped her there." Carlos says about the Elf held on his large hip like a toddler, making the others laugh. Even the Lord of Decay makes an amused noise.

"She's level 100. It must be the class change." Cain says and Misha gasps.

"By the Dark Gods. Look at all that experience. That's all we needed, just higher level dungeons to power level in instead of cruising through ones our level." Misha cackles like a mad woman.

She's got a point. No matter the level, it takes roughly fifty dungeons your own level to level up. But experience between levels doubles every level, with a couple larger jumps. So experience from a dungeon a hundred levels above you is far more than just the under level bonus. Cain hasn't been watching the changes, but he's just sure he'll be level 120 or higher before they finish. Possibly much higher.

But first they need to finish. Process has ground to a crawl. The Mountain Giants have such high resistances that it's taking them 5 to 10 minutes to clear a group. It's got to be a form of level scaling. It's not something Cain has encountered before, but then, the entire Beginners Valley is barely the level gap he's fighting against in here, and he didn't go for the level 80 Demon Raid the moment he left the transfer village.

With the buffs he has, Cain should one shot everything here but bosses, but he's barely hurting these giants. Even with the merged summons. The damage definitely scales with huge level gaps.

Once again Cain curses the "no explanations, no second chances" system for not having a full explanation of the scaling system. Only a simple note that it exists.

"Carlos, do you know much about the damage scaling system? Even as tough as these things are, we should be doing more damage." Cain asks.

"I know it only applies to monsters. Damage to transfers and others with systems scales differently, as you might have noticed while fighting Lancelot. But a hundred levels above you, monsters take no damage. I'm sure someone graphed the curve, but that someone wasn't me. To us mere mortals it is mostly irrelevant, as a monster that strong would simply kill us."

Cain thinks of a couple different options for a non linear scaling system and decides he's glad they didn't go to the Lizardmen today.

Symbia returns to consciousness just as they get to the second boss. An enormous Diamond Elemental surrounded by six Granite Elementals the size of the last boss.

Forget that. Nope, not happening.

"How does anyone finish this? That's just ridiculous. It's been what, 6 hours since we started?" Cain complains.

"About that. Everyone just gets to where they can, then mines the ores and goes home to let it reset so they can come back next week. The regular dungeon is much less insane.

Cain would love to see what's beyond this boss, but it's likely to be a 5 hour fight, and his arms are already getting numb from exertion. Six hours of fighting giants in close combat is quite the workout, and he's gotten used to just casually flinging poison Arrows.

"Puppets, time to put in work." Cain smiles, pulling all the ones in mining gear from inventory. They're all wearing leather speedo type underwear, chaps and a leather vest with work boots and a pickaxe.

"Seriously Symbia, that's workwear?" Misha laughs as Cain sends them to mining out the area, with directions to pile any ore or precious items they find at twenty meter intervals, while avoiding any monsters they might come across, which will keep them out of the boss room.

"I'm sorry, it's the best I had for a pattern, I don't usually make construction worker dolls." She pouts, knowing what Misha means even though she can't see it as she fights to remove the rest of the notifications.

"How did you do on the class upgrade little Elf?" Carlos asks, bouncing her on his hip.

"It gave me a couple options, the expected Master Sculptor to replace Master Artist, but I also got Doll Witch. According to the description it gains bonuses to experience for sculpting and additional ability creating dolls, plus it comes with spells related to them, but I can't open the skill chart until I am finished these notifications."

"So you did pick the oddball class then?" Carlos laughs.

"To make better dolls, was there ever another option? Ah there. Finally finished the notifications, let's see what I've got." Symbia shifts to a more comfortable position on Carlos's hip and her eyes go vacant again as she looks through the skill menu.

"I have so many points right now it's ridiculous. Well over a hundred, thanks to that final push through the Mountain Giants. I had some saved before, because I only cared about Sculpture." That makes sense to everyone, she is very obsessive about her craft.

"First up I've got [Duplicate Doll] that creates a permanent doll exactly like one I've got near me. Max that out. Then [Artisan Sculptor] to increase my skill at making them by hand. [Doll Eyes] sounds weird, why would I want to see through the eyes of a Doll I've created? But it's needed for the next step. [Possessed Doll] puts my body in stasis in a pocket dimension while I possess a Doll I've created that's, uh, interesting? [Haunt] curses a dwelling with strange noises. [Eternal Loop] makes doors open to a random room. I think this class is much more witch than Doll Sculptor so far." Her sad tone makes everyone smile at the Elf.

"Look at it this way, you're a one woman horror movie. Bringing the dolls to life, chasing people around a house they can't escape. Does it get any combat skills?" Cain consoles the upset Sculptor.

"I can use Shaman type books now, which is pretty awesome. If I can afford the books I could turn dolls into Totems, or have them shoot lightning at people, like a built in taser." Even when asked about combat, she considers updating the dolls first.

"Now you're on to something. With a hundred points, you should be able to get almost the entire skill tree worth of abilities, right? I only got a hundred more points worth of skills when I went to the Barbarian Warlord path." Carlos says, making Cain consider his own class.

Maybe you're only ever intended to take one side of the skill tree before hitting level 300 and choosing something that might be even greater or that compliments your Puppet Master skills? Every 100 levels options come available, according to the books in the library, though you don't always want what you can pick from, so some people wait until they can do better.

"Yeah, I can get the everything, I think. Oh, there's an option for that. Fill all available options, there we go. Wow, the top skill here is awesome. Most of them after the basic haunting abilities make better, stronger, more detailed dolls, even mimicking real people, but the top few give them warrior options. Like a version of your puppets ability Cain, it lets me animate my dolls to first do tasks on their own, then without me near, and finally, create warrior dolls to curse and haunt a specific location. They can't wander around like yours, but I could build a treasure vault and fill it with booby traps, all the curses and skills are here, even to make the statues come alive and attack."

"Is there a limit?" Cain asks.

"Only by location. No more than a third of my level per square kilometer. But I could go into business creating treasure vaults once I get a few more levels. A Minimum level for the region treasure vault would just be lame. But someone would likely still want it."

"How strong are the warrior dolls?" Cain asks, thinking of creating a security force for the Guild Houses.

"It says [Lesser Golems] my level. How strong is that?"

"About the same as wandering desert monsters your level. Small creatures up to about sixty kilos." Carlos shrugs, making the Elf bounce again.

"That's great. And plenty strong against lower level transfers. Listen to me, talking all big, like I wasn't lower leveled this morning."

"Maybe start with two to guard your Guild House like hired sentries. Put them in armor and give them a sword and they'll keep out unwanted low level visitors." Misha suggests.

"Combat Maids. I vote combat maids.." Kone laughs, making the Elf blush at some off track thought and Carlos smile at her reactions like he's making mental notes.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 178 - 178

"By the way, where did the puppets go? I wanted to see them work." Symbia says, looking around.

"Just around that rocky outcrop. They've been mining since you started coming to and just finished the first digs." Cain says, pointing at the small pile of ore.

"They're only level ten, but they're pretty quick. Maybe just because there's so many of them. But rocks are easy to break with the right tools, so level doesn't matter as much." Symbia says before turning to look up at Carlos.

"What are we waiting for, let's go see the puppets."

She's gotten so used to being carried that she's not even trying to get down, just directing her ride.

Carlos dutifully carries her to where the puppets are working though, making Misha smirk at Cain, who is trying not to laugh.

"They really are cute together." She whispers, moving to follow them.

Cain gathers the pile as they go by, finding that it was a Mythrill deposit, totalling fifteen kilograms.

[Hey, where did this ore come from? Did you rob a national treasury?] Dimnys asks in chat.

[Mined it in a level 180 raid dungeon. There will be a lot more ore coming, I just don't know what types. I sent the puppets to do it.] Cain responds.

[I'll get back to you. I've got a Legendary recipe that needed some of that mythril ore.] Everyone knows that means they won't hear from the Dwarf for the next half day or so, but at least she's happy.

The next few piles are mostly Shadow Iron, a glossy black metal often used for armor due to the appearance. Not particularly strong like Mythril, but in high demand according to Carlos. There's a lot of it too, almost a ton by the end of the first hour. That's when they strike Gold. Literally. An entire vein of gold is exposed along one wall of a cliff face and every Puppet is going wild digging it out.

"Looks like we pulled the Legendary Treasure Raid. The mining Guild speaks of dungeons like this as if they were a gift from the system. Most Raids drop tons of iron, coal and copper, with a few hundred kilos of Precious metals, split twenty five ways between the crew. What you pulled out of the first pile was worth more than most runs, but this Gold Vein makes you a truly wealthy man." Carlos laughs, giddy with success.

The agreement is you keep what you get, as always, so that technically means this is all Cain's but Carlos doesn't mind. The Guild Master seems a generous sort.

"I've got a spare pickaxe if you want to smash rocks." Cain laughs and Carlos looks at the Elf in his arms.

"Nah, I'm good, I'll get my cut when it's time to ship everything out. I got a lot of gear drops today. Like I'm not the only one with an Iron Man title here."

"We've all got at least two. Some of them upgraded titles. So expect a LOT of drops in the future. That's why the Guild Bank is so full, we can't sell it all in the Beginner Valley without destroying the market." Cain responds.

"You guys seem like a lot of fun. I didn't know dungeons were like this, I've never been in one before." Symbia says, making everyone chuckle.

"They're really not. This was the strangest dungeon I've ever been through, and the mining loot is highly irregular." Carlos informs her.

"They're really good miners though. That reminds me, I should try my new spell to duplicate them. I'll make your other forty puppets right now if you'd like."

"No objections here. Make another ten maids though, I'll send them to Montauk to take care of the house there once I've finished up a task script for them." Cain says and Symbia nods, pulling out a maid doll to cast her spell.

"There's ten maids. That took a lot of mana, but in only a few seconds, they're ready. This class is great. I'm totally making a haunted house treasure vault." Cain stores them in inventory as the Elf finally gets down from Carlos and goes over to create more miners.

She has to stop a couple times to wait for her mana to refill, but soon enough Cain has eighty puppets mining.

The Snapping Turtles want in on the fun too, joining the lineup at the wall and using their shields as huge shovels to rip free large amounts of debris and gold that the puppets smash into small bits and move to the growing pile.

"Good thing we've got you, Symbia, we're going to need our own Fort Knox at this rate." Misha laughs, but the Sculptor looks confused.

"Sorry, forgot you were born here. It's a fortress on my home world that's used to warehouse entire nations worth of Gold reserves." She shrugs.

"Oh, makes sense. You've certainly got a lot of it. Are Raids supposed to give that much Gold? The miners should be much more rich than they are."

"No, this is not normal at all. An armful of gold split between the group is normal. We've got enough to fill entire rooms to the roof sitting here." Carlos frowns.

At that moment all the puppets start running, before starting to dig on the other side of the area. Did they find something alive? He told them to avoid monsters.

[Legendary Quest: Gold Elemental] Defeat the Elemental to escape the dungeon with your ill gotten gains. Exit portal disabled during quest.

"Carlos, grab Symbia. Everyone else in formation." Cain yells as the huge Golden Elemental smashes a merged Snapping Turtle to the ground, taking most of its life. That's not good, Cain has gained a lot of levels this dungeon, even with the experience cap limiting the amount he gains per monster.

He's much tougher now than at the start, but even the mighty Snapping Turtles are no match for the Gold Elemental.

[Form Added: Ancient Gold Elemental] Legendary Beings cannot be Summoned at your current level.

It's Summoning smaller versions of itself out of the vein in the cliff face though, maybe Cain can get those ones.

[Form Added: Epic Golden Elemental]

Sweet. He's not sure what they can do, but they look amazing. Nearly three meter tall golden statues, angry that they've been disturbed. A level of swag any transfer would be proud to walk through town with.

They don't seem to be truly solid, cuts mend soon after being made, and dents from blunt weapons pop right back out. It's the Oath Breaker that finds the trick to destroying them, piercing its claws deep and penetrating the chest of the Elemental, causing it to crumble into a pile of ore with a shattered metallic orb stuck to the Demon's claw.

It makes sense now, the orb is their body, the statue is just a collection of animated golden ore. The great question is if they Summon it or transmute it from their surroundings. Isn't lead to gold every alchemists dream?

With the technique to their destruction now known, the Epic Golden Elementals are dropping at a rapid pace, enraging the Ancient one. Unlike them, it doesn't quickly heal from attacks, instead it is looking much more battered than when it began. Cain and the clones of Kone are Summoning new Tanks on a regular basis, as they're getting killed faster than they can be healed, while Misha and Symbia have retreated to a safe distance.

Symbia is hiding behind a Boulder but Misha has her head up, casting healing spells from near maximum range while Carlos guards the two more vulnerable group members.

"This is as bad as that bloody boss fight." Cain pants, trying to get a spear strike to go deeper into the Elemental, hoping to take it down by more than a sliver of its health.

"At least it's dying. Not like we can leave while it's active, the quest said it blocked the exit portal." Carlos sighs ruefully.

Cain steps back for a moment, leaving the summons face the Elementals Wrath alone for a while.

"What a time for a Legendary Boss fight quest to spawn. Everyone's already beat from the raid and it gets us on the way out." Cain frowns and Kone flops against his side.

"Is there time for a nap? Healing is hard work, and he keeps squishing everything. Even with the Aura regenerating ten percent at a time, he's still crushing them."

The boss has a level of self healing, so they can't slow down the damage too much. Without Cain in the mix and that huge bonus to his damage from Might of Many, they're barely keeping ahead of the regeneration to bring this boss down.

"Take five and grab a snack. I'll use Arrows for now, less damage but much less work." Cain agrees, switching to his bow and leisurely firing off multi shots at the boss, three Arrows at a time slamming into the huge Golden target.

"Bite." Kone says, holding a sandwich to his mouth between shots.

"Thanks for that. He's below half health now, we've got this. How's everyone's mana holding up?"

"All good. Both me and Misha plus the healing type summons are enough to conserve mana while still keeping up on the healing. We know some summons are going to die, so if they get too injured we let them fall and just call more once we're getting low on tanks. It's more mana efficient that way."

Cain looks over the buffs and sees that the Spear buff is active with a ridiculous bonus number, so it renewed with a full stack of Might of Many, but the timer is getting low by the time he finishes eating.

"Time to get back at it, the spear buff will be wearing off soon and we need the damage."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 179 - 179 Land Of Plenty

They cycle out for the next hour, everyone getting a break when they can until finally the Ancient Gold Elemental crumbles with a shriek of tearing metal.

Cain gathers it all, plus the bodies of the Epic Elementals into the Guild Bank, seeing them collected as several piles of gold in various alloyed colors. A total of 302 tons of it.

"Well, since we're ridiculously wealthy now, I think we've earned a day off tomorrow. Who wants to sleep all day?" Carlos suggests and every hand goes up.

The only thing they're expecting in the next day or two is the circle to link the new house to the Montauk Guild House, and possibly the Gnome bringing children by to level up in the Beginner Valley instead of sheltering them and letting them grind experience on training dummies.

It's a valid way to level, but it doesn't lead to experienced fighters, only basic skills with no combat instincts.

[Quest Complete] exit now available.

[Experience Modified Beyond Limit by a Skill]

[Title Gained: Struck Gold]

When the notifications come in the whole hill collapses, revealing a huge amount of Gold Ore in every known alloy variation. White Gold, Rose Gold, Black Gold, even Golden Mythril, a light blue colored Legendary Crafting Material according to its description.

"I take that back. NOW we're ridiculously wealthy. In theory anyhow, because I don't know anyone who could afford to buy all this. We'd just collapse the price of gold trying to sell a continent's worth of Gold Reserves." Carlos corrects his assessment.

"We will just keep it in storage and use it as needed to buy stuff for the Guild and craft Legendary items." Cain shrugs, unsure what to actually do with a small mountain of Gold.

"The puppets finished mining out the place as well. Lots of Mythril this side of the first boss, lots of copper and silver on the other." Symbia points towards the Exit where the puppets are returning, their task finished while everyone else dealt with the boss.

"Total value of the pure gold is fifty million gold coins. The other alloys come up as 'unfit for coinage' when I inspect them to value my hoard." Laura adds, looking at the piles of metal.

Alright, that's crazy, but manageable. Fifty million Gold Coins would buy them a dozen castles, but the pure gold only makes up a tiny fraction of the total, most of it being alloys. A crazy thought comes to Cain's mind at this calculation.

"What if we built a castle for ourselves. Maybe in the desert near the ocean. We could staff it with Puppets, and build a labyrinth underneath to hide treasures. A home fortress for the Guild." Cain suggests.

"If the system recognizes it as a castle, you'll get a Guild level increase that lets you bring in more members and hire staff through the system. But why? You'd need an army there to defend it." Symbia frowns.

"Is there somewhere like that? Somewhere we could build our own castle without being under another jurisdiction or kingdom? Pretty much everywhere must be claimed, right?" Misha asks.

"The desert is a free for all. The cities only claim the areas within sight of their walls, everything else is just the desert. There's more than a few permanent camps hidden in there, though I don't think anyone has tried to build a castle yet.

"What about at Muzz? We could build one by the gate." The Oath Breaker suggests, looking happy. He really enjoyed rebuilding that gazebo over the entry to the lost city.

[You're all insane. You know that, right? I'm in.] Char immediately answers when they suggest it in Guild chat.

[Will there be enough water to even support life? It was abandoned for a reason, right?] Mythryll asks.

[Never Fear. I have a solution. With the rapid increase in levels, I should have some extra skill points. And with them, I should be able to create a Guardian for the Castle that can take care of the essentials.] What Cain is thinking is to use clones of Symbia to set Curses of Drowning, which create large amounts of water to fill a space, in an underground cistern. That would give them all the water they need perpetually, as long as mana is supplied to the curse regularly. It's either that or Summon water Elementals and leave one there to take care of the place.

With water they'll be able to plant trees for shade, grow fruits and crops, a Land of Plenty hidden in the desert to match the one they found in a dungeon.

[Normal thought just doesn't compute to you lot does it?] Belle, the werewolf Ranger asks.

[Nope, but it sounds awesome doesn't it? Put in some everbloom and I can get pixies to keep your enchantments fed with mana.] Elmira chimes in.

Cain is starting to feel like a normal Guild Master lately, aloof and off doing his own thing. But maybe with a central base for everyone to visit they'll be able to hold full Guild meetings, so he can at least talk to all the new members, and not just be some semi mythical being that provides insane Guild Skills.

A handful of members from the Mining Guild are waiting by the city gates when they make it back, filthy and tired from their day.

"Clearing out the Ore deposits really takes it out of you doesn't it?" Their self appointed leader laughs and Carlos smiles back.

"It's that good burn though. We found a Gold Vein in the dungeon this time, so we dug deep to get the very last of it." He taunts them, knowing how rare decent sized Gold veins are.

"Beginners luck. We'll see what you pull out next time." He huffs and leads the group away.

"I take it the Stone Giant dungeon is their turf?" Cain asks.

"Yeah, they get cranky if someone else gets good stuff, and they like to taunt the groups coming back tired and broke with only a few kilos of Silver for all their hard work." Carlos nods.

"Just don't cause yourself any troubles on our account. We'll need you to move a lot of product for us in the future, so burning too many bridges would be a real hassle."

"They'll get over it. A single gold vein isn't enough to upset the higher level members, and the Dragons keep them from causing too many problems without declaring war." Symbia responds with a smile.

"You make it sound like the Dragons and not the Earl are the ones in charge." Laura asks and the Elf laughs.

"Aren't they though? Pair of busy bodies are everywhere if they sense something entertaining might happen." Just as she says it, Red and Arial come into view, proving her point perfectly.

"We heard you found a Gold Vein. Good job, glad your first dungeon in the city was worth it." Arial congratulates them with a round of hugs.

"Yes, it was very enlightening. Though the big level gap did give us a few problems at the start." Misha laughs.

"Not so many I see, you gained forty levels in one run didn't you?" Red asks, impressed.

"We did the raid, up to the Diamond Elemental boss. With the under level and the experience scaling between levels we advanced extremely quickly. I am just waiting until I get home to clear all these notifications and set up my skill points." Cain agrees.

"Next run should go better, but not so heavy on the levels. You know how it is." Carlos says.

"Yeah, 140 to 150 takes as much or more experience than 100 to 140, plus you won't be getting under level bonus added in the regular dungeon, so it really slows down." Red agrees

"The Puppet Master didn't disappoint us. He really does have power over level 200 to take a group like this through the raid to the second boss successfully. Without epic and Legendary Gear, even level 200 groups struggle with the durability of the Giants. Lizardmen are individually much easier to kill." Arial adds with a smirk.

That's a relief, the dungeon is just evil, his summons wouldn't normally struggle so much, even with the damage scaling.

The house still isn't renovated enough to sleep in, so the Darklight Host heads back to their hotel room, with Symbia in tow, finding the Inscriptionist Niki waiting for them.

"I've got your travel circle, as promised. But you guys look beat, so I'll leave it and the book materials with you and come visit in the morning." She waves her goodbye and is gone before the exhausted group can even form a full sentence.

"You need dinner first, or just to bed?" The innkeeper asks, wiping his hands dry on a towel from behind the reception desk.

"Dinner for sure, we'll take anything that's hot and ready. And coffee, lots of coffee." Symbia sighs.

"Coming right up."

"Congratulations on level 100, miss. Did you get a good class option?" The waitress greets Symbia, setting plates of stew and a pot of coffee on the table.

"Doll Witch. An interesting class, and still strong enough in the artistic skills that the Sculptors Guild won't kick me out." She smiles back, pouring herself a straight black cup of caffeine.

"Oh, I saw one of those before. With the traveling fair. Runs the best haunted house I've seen in my life. Worth every cent of the entry fee." The waitress nods.

"Anything else for you all before I go?" They shake their heads and the waitress heads back into the kitchen.

"Well, this has been a great day, and I thank you all, but I need sleep." Symbia sighs when her plate is empty.

"We've got extra space in the room, if you'd both like to crash here." Kone suggests, giving Su headpats, the short, Spider Plant like hair on the Dragon's dryad looking humanoid form swaying from side to side.

"Deal. Anything more than twenty steps and I might fall asleep." Carlos laughs, picking up Symbia, who is already nodding in and out of consciousness with a coffee cup still in hand.. The effects from rapid leveling really take it out of you, even if you've been physically carried all day.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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The next morning the foreman of the renovation crew comes to inform them that the house is ready. The bedrooms upstairs have been equipped with the essentials, including hammocks, and the main floor is left bare to be used as a store.

That's good enough for Cain, all they really need is a spot to place the travel Inscription so everyone can go back and forth. That's the best part about linking the houses, you don't need a huge amount of space in any one location for everyone to have a chance to enjoy it.

Leaving everyone else alone, Cain goes to inspect the work that was done and get the circle set up so that the others can come visit, and so the Char can come collect the Gnomish children when they show up.

He's only been there a few minutes when the neighbors come to say hello. Well, the word hello might have been involved anyhow.

"So, you think you can just beat people up and steal prime real estate do you? Understand this, punk, there's no way any shop you open in town is going to survive. We'll make sure of that." The merchant next door, an old human man with an extremely large gut sneers.

"Yeah, we've had our eyes on that property for years, ever since the Nut Up Guild took it from those upstarts who thought they could muscle in on our jewelry business." His equally hefty wife agrees, draped in Gold and layers of gaudy clothing much too heavy for the day's heat.

According to the sign on their shop, they belong to something called the Port Rattle trade alliance. It isn't a Guild, and neither of them has an interface, but it might be influential.

[What can you tell me about the Port Rattle Trade Alliance] Cain sends in Guild chat hoping Carlos is awake, but on the outside he simply smiles at the sweaty merchants.

"Oh, hello and good morning neighbors. There's no fear of that. I was thinking of using the place as a mercenary hangout. You know, to hire security and extra bodies to do dungeons with. I know a lot of demons and Dark Fae you see, and they're not as strict on the morality as some others are. I'm certain the city has at least some need for them." Cain responds to their threats happily and their faces turn even more angry.

"You don't sleep here do you? Mercenaries tend to party to all hours of the night, it might get a little loud." Or if he has his companions play the part, they don't need to sleep at all.

[They're a small trading alliance from the Northern Continent. Don't even bother walking in, they're just scam artists, using a description altering ability to make junk look valuable, taking advantage of the fact system modifiers are hidden.] Carlos responds in chat.

[Would anyone miss them? They're kind of rude.]

[Probably not, except their own ship, but they use shopkeepers without a system so you can't declare war on them]

Carlos has a point, becoming wanted criminals in the best strategically located resort town would be a disaster for them right now.

The neighbor across the street, labeled as a mercantile store, which to Cain looks like a convenience store, has come out to watch the entertainment.

"Watch your mouth, transfer. We've got connections too if you know what I mean." The man makes an odd gesture like he's flashing gang signs which perhaps he is. A small group of traders selling fake gear is a good candidate to be part of a low level gang.

The gesture has brought over a couple rough looking types from a nearby alley, and the mercantile shop owner brings out a lawn chair to get comfortable. Cain isn't sure what side he's on, but he doesn't seem eager to get involved.

"Good morning gentlemen. If you're here for the hiring board, we're not set up yet." Cain smiles at the gangsters, noting they're both poorly dressed, but with expensive looking jewelry, and flagged by the system as being more than 50 levels lower than him.

With that in mind, Cain rolls up his sleeves, showing off the red bracelet required by the city guards and stretches to highlight the fact he's significantly larger than either of them.

"Shaping up to be a lovely morning though isn't it?"

[More information for you boss. The shop they're in is rented from the Northwind Fleet. A multinational group that buys up properties everywhere. To the point most nations limit how much they're allowed to purchase. They're also insufferable White Knights. No criminality or mistreatment of women in their rentals is tolerated.]

Well, it's good to know they're just tenants, and not a long standing local family.

"Say, that's a unique accent you've got there. Where's it from? The northern continent? You're certainly not local." Cain turns and smiles at his neighbors, like he's just making small talk.

"They've been here round about 8 years now, innit right cuz?" Comes a heavily accented drawl from behind Cain. If he recalls correctly, that's a bakery supply store, selling all sorts of imported dry goods, due to the lack of local production in the desert.

Looking over his shoulder, Cain sees a large Orc with a scar across his mouth and one missing front tooth, the big one that's more like a lower tusk should have been beneath that scar. The effect gives him a permanent half smile, but it looks genuine at the moment.

"Morning, I'm Cain. Guild Master of the Darklight Host." Cain smiles back at him.

"Ghazzul. You sound like you're from the Beginner Valley. Do you know my grandson Ghaz? I hear he's a right important person there these days." The Orc asks Cain curiously.

"Ghaz Senior, the mighty leader of the Yellow Tusk Guild? A friend of mine actually, and he made quite a name for himself during the last War with the Ogres, but it's his wife who's the scary one." Cain jokes, making Ghazzul laugh.

"Ah Gillian, what a woman she is. How's their boy doing?"

"Found himself a woman named Morgan, who is shaping up to be just as formidable as his mother. They're a good pair. If you want to go see them one day, let me know and I can get you near them." Cain informs the Orc, watching the two overweight humans get more and more upset that they're being ignored.

They stomp back inside their shop, waiting for customers, and the two young thugs disappear back into an alley, seeing the confrontation end.

"What I wouldn't give to have a Record Keeper handy." Ghazzul snorts, spitting towards the jeweler's shop.

"What good would that do? I've got plenty of sources of Dark Holy Flames if that's what you need." Cain suggests.

"Nay, that damnable feathery Demon can cleanse all effects, not just buffs. One range of its hand and their entire shop would be worthless." The Orc gives a nasty laugh and the man across the street joins in, before nodding at Ghazzul and going back inside.

"Looks like I got in the middle of an ongoing feud."

"Only a little. You know how it gets near the docks, plenty of business brings plenty of crime and the scammers with their hired stooges. I'd put something around the property, a ward or some such if I were you. Keep the wannabe gangsters from breaking in to steal, since these shops don't get the protections a Guild House does."

He's got a point. Maybe Cain should try out the new abilities that Symbia got, to create a guard force and curse the property. Even a few Lesser Golems his level would be plenty of deterrent. But the thought of messing with his neighbors is irresistible. A few Golems on Guard is only the beginning.

[Misha or Lickity, can I get some Guard Uniforms? I want to try out Symbia's ability to create a protective curse on the property, with some guards and such.]

[Want me to send some armor for them too? I've got Elven Guard Armor here in the shop] Carlos suggests.

[Sure, 4 sets should be enough. And 4 uniforms, if someone can buy or make them right quick.]

[Symbia says she's got them in stock, we'll bring them over.] Carlos sends back. They must have been having breakfast at the inn.

"I'll come see you in a bit, we'll need some supplies for our other Guild Houses we just can't get locally." Cain nods to Ghazzul, who grunts his agreement and heads back inside.

Cain isn't waiting until the others show up to mess with the scammers though. He calls for a cloned pair of Record Keepers, which have to crouch to fit in the front room.

"Well this is uncomfortable. What might you need Summoner?" The two headed, blue feathered and winged humanoid asks.

"I want you to dispel all spell and skill effects in the shop next door. Including the ones changing item descriptions."

"The ones on the shopkeepers too? They've got a charm effect on them that draws people in and makes them seem trustworthy."

"Definitely including the ones on the shopkeepers. And if they bring them back up right away, do it again until they stop trying." Cain instructs the Demon.

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