

# Reincarnated With A Summoning System

## Chapter 201 - 200

Once the Merchants get settled in, Triss quickly buys up a large portion of their spices, and all their remaining crystal dishes. Spices are expensive in Graska, and she wanted the dishes for special occasions. That's left the merchants basically empty for the final leg of their journey only a few items that are reserved for a buyer in Assah and the Dwarven made tools are left. That's a relief to the caravan, as they weren't expecting to find anything along this route, and now they've only got easy to sell items left.

During lunch the Merchants notice Princess Aramia, the Daughter of the Spider Queen in the Beastkin Dungeon of Graska, who is currently hiding from Triss, who caught her chugging a pot of coffee. Spiders get drunk off caffeine, so the Princess is pretty much wasted, but she's doing an alright job of escaping the frustrated bartender, whose coffee she drank.

"You've got an interesting bunch here. Say, have you heard about that Silk Quest in Behar? Your spider kin looks like one of the Royals, so it made me think of it. The King there has a Legendary Tailoring recipe, only usable by a Tailor over level 400. He's gathered everything it needs except Royal Moon Silk. Only a female Royal of the Spider Folk can make it, and it takes two full days.

They're extinct you see, you'll only find them in dungeons, but it takes too long to make the silk, so even if you have the talent to bring one out and get it to cooperate, you don't have time before the dungeon resets and the Spider Dissappears."

Both Lickity and Misha look excited at this, before the fact they'd have to be level 400 to craft whatever the item is finally sinks in.

"He's offering an unspecified reward, basically a name your price quest given by a billionaire with Castles on every continent." One of the guards elaborates.

Now that sounds interesting. Cain isn't sure their Princess can create any such thing, but if she can, the Guild might get some very good stuff out of the deal. Maybe some proper castle defenses. Cain can create a lot of puppets, but they're not great fighters, but with some magical Cannons or something they might be useful.

The two groups sit and chat until mid afternoon, when the temperature begins to fall and the merchants need to start getting ready to move out. Traveling in the middle of the day is too hot, but they don't want to rest a whole day when they're almost to Assah and out of the dangerous portion of their journey.

"They seem trustworthy, but I wouldn't guarantee they won't sell us out if they run into bandits." Maggie says. The otherwise gentle Orc is always serious about her duties as a Lieutenant.

"Neither would I, but eventually people are bound to find out the castle is here and not all of them will be friendly. Especially with the remnants of the Montauk Guardians out there." Cain agrees. For now, they don't have the manpower to constantly patrol trade routes looking for bandits, but given time the Guild members will get stronger.

That's not to say Cain can't go out now and mess with some bandits if he wants, but with two new Lieutenants and a new Companion he really feels like he should spend some time at the castle. Summoning them in just to ditch them seems a bit cruel.

"Does anyone know where we could find magical Cannons? I think they'd work well on the walls if we didn't need to stockpile ammo." Cain suggests as everyone gathers to explore the reconstructed ruins and look for new favorite spots to pass the evening. Being able to spread out and have your own space to relax is one of the great benefits of an underpowered castle garrison.

"You can get them at any port. Though buying them in Assah isn't the best price for them. If we could get to the eastern continent they've got some Pirate ports where you can get cheap ship parts." Carlos adds with a knowing smile. He's likely traded equipment there before.

"Well, for the moment, we have no ship, so that might have to wait. Any other suggestions?"

"Yeah, get that drunkard of a Spider to stop pining for her mother and make some Silk and you could trade it for one in Behar." Nila suggests, giving Aramia a pointed look. The Spider has a coffee cup in her hands again.

The downside to living with a bunch of workaholics, there's always a pot of coffee on.

"How about it Princess. Care to make us a bunch of Royal Moon Silk?" Cain asks, taking the coffee away from the Spider Princess.

"Why would I \*hic\* have to make it? Mother used to make me practice every day. I've got loads and loads of it in my inventory." The Spider slurs before going off on a tangent about how great her mom is.

Visiting didn't really pan out because of the dungeon resets, but Cain thinks he's got a solution. He can certainly spare a Summon when he's not in combat, and the Spider Queen recorded as a Supporter, so he calls her here into the compound, the appearance of her large, shiny black Spider body with its distinctive golden Lauren that denotes Royalty and Silk covered human upper torso, draped in a slinky black dress with a golden crown on her head startles everyone.

[Get this drunkard back on the straight and narrow. She misses her mom too much to function.] Cain instructs and the Spider Queen promptly grabs Aramia by one long leg and drags her behind a nearby building.

"Mama no! I swear I'm not drunk \*hic\* I just had one cup of coffee. Not the ear, not the ear! I'm sorry mama."

A mere ten minutes later the two return, a teary eyed Aramia sitting on the back of the Spider Queen. "Here's four bolts of Royal Moon Silk. I'm sorry I got out of hand, I promise I'll do better."

"I'm sure you know that version of your mom is a Summon, but I'm going to leave her with you for now to keep you sober. Just try to behave and you'll be fine. If not, I hear your mom can be very strict with discipline."

Most of the Guild chuckles at that and the Spider Queen smiles.

"Duke Cain, while I'm here, might I call forth just a few more followers? Spiders like to live in groups, and there's just the two of us."

As Cain recalls she can Summon a huge number of low grade worker Spider kin, as well as actual spiders.

"Sure, if you want to set up somewhere, the second underground level is unoccupied and won't see any visitors for a while. Call as many as you want down there, you've got free reign of the castle." Come to think of it, her spiders would make great defenders. They're not strong, or durable, but they're poisonous and fast, plus she can Summon hundreds of them, possibly more now that her level has increased.

Forget simple curses and hexes, a Poisonous Spider filled haunted labyrinth would really keep the enemies out of the basement.

"The Silk you make, will it disappear if you're dismissed?" Misha asks the Spider Queen with great interest.

"No, once we make it, it's made and no longer part of us. Why? Do you need new clothes? You would look good in Spider Royal fashion." Cain can't help but agree with that. The queen's gown shows as much skin as it hides, and it would look amazing clinging to Misha's curves.

"We've got a few Silk based recipes to try, and a minor shortage of materials you see." Lickity says, joining them.

Unless Cain's eyes are deceiving him, she's visibly larger than she was the day before yesterday. Succubus pregnancies are really something else. If she's going to get any baby clothes done, she had better hurry.

"That's totally cheating. Do you know how hard I tried to get Aramia to stop sulking after the last time the dungeon reset on her?" Triss whispers in his ear as the four find a spot under a tree to discuss Tailoring.

"Funny you should mention that. Cheap tricks and cheating are my specialty. In case you'd forgotten." Cain laughs.

Now, it's time to make a plan. Most everyone will be going home tonight, so they'll have residents at every Guild House to alert the Guild to problems. That leaves Cain free to do whatever he wants, and what he wants is a better furnished castle. So the first order of business is to get to Behar and trade this Silk for good stuff. If the King wants another bolt for a second crafting attempt, Cain intends to get Cannons for the walls, plus a ship, so they can go visit other continents, or even just go fishing.

He'll need to check his skills though. Fishing might not be their specialty.

[Skilled Constructs] grants constructs without existing ability in a Life Skill Apprentice 1 level talent in that skill.

There's a whole list of skills in the tool tip, and sailing and fishing are both on the list. If he can get a suitable boat, he can totally staff it with Puppets. They're up to level 15 strength now, so they should be even more capable than the average crew member.

His very own luxury yacht. Wait, do they have those here? Maybe his own Galleon?

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

## **Chapter 202 - 201 Visiting Behar**

Not wanting to leave the castle too defenseless, the next morning Cain decides to slim down his traveling party for the journey to Behar. He will take one copy of his Companions with him, and leave the other one here. They can get to know Evangeline, Maggie, and Sora while he gets supplies. What one clone knows, so does the other, so the half with Cain won't be missing out.

The difference in numbers might also make the trip a bit quieter, but given that he's still bringing a copy of each, he somewhat doubts it. Evangeline and Laura get along way too well, both loving to fly around at high rates of speed, while Nila has taken to teaming up with Vala to tease Nemu, who enjoys playing practical jokes on them when she thinks nobody is watching.

Misha isn't going anywhere anytime soon, being caught up with her work, and everyone else seems to have headed out already, so it's just Cain and the Companions.

"Alright everyone behaves and we will be back soon." Cain waves his goodbyes and summons a flight of Dark Phoenix to carry the group.

"No fears Commander, I'll keep these miscreants in line." Maggie insists, her musical voice holding a note of amusement as she watches the three flying members of the defense team playing aerial tag. They might not look serious, but from up there they can see quite a ways, so they're fairly decent sentries.

Cain doesn't have a watch, but he's pretty certain it's been less than an hour in the strange weightless void the Dark Phoenix travels through before he arrives at Behar. The city doesn't look like much, just randomly placed wooden buildings on stilts and a pair of long stone piers where the cargo ships are tied off.

The streets of Assah at least have some semblance of districts to them, but that's not so in Behar. The only building he can identify is the palace, a stone fortress set on a cliff overlooking the ocean, where most of the city is low enough to be in the storm surge, hence the stilts to keep them from flooding during heavy weather.

"Let's go straight to the Castle. I don't see a landing point anywhere nearby, but we'll avoid flying over the city just in case." Cain instructs their mounts, who turn in a wide arc, attracting attention from all over the city. Though city might be a generous description in Cain's opinion, as there seem to be only a few hundred permanent residents at the most.

Behar exists because the other villages in the area needed a Port, nothing more.

A heavysset man with gold embossed silver plate armor comes out to greet them, watching with interest as Cain dismisses the flight of Dark Phoenix. "Welcome to Behar, that's surely the most interesting way I've seen to besiege a castle, so you must have some business with me."

He might look past his prime, but the man is well over level 400, and Cain can't even get a proper reading on him with the system's identification utility.

"If you're the King of Behar, we certainly do. I heard a rumor you've put out a quest for Royal Moon Silk. Now, I just so happen to have a little bit of it that I'm willing to trade with you." Cain sends the King a friend request, and then a copy of the item description once he accepts, proving that he's got it available.

Now, a smart man would have put that in his Guild Bank so he couldn't be robbed of it, but very few have ever accused Cain of being a smart man, and the thought it might be on his person never occurred to the King.

"That's it, that's exactly it. How did you get that?" He cheers, happy to finally see the missing item for his recipe.

"The Guild got an oddball quest from the Beastkin Dungeon in the Beginner's Valley. As you can imagine, we were more than a little shocked at the outcome." Cain smiles back, ready to negotiate the price.

"Name what you want, and I'll see what I can do." The King responds, getting down to business.

"I've got two bolts. If I'm right, it's one per Quest completion, so I will ask two things of you. One, I would ask for fifty magical Cannons, the self-loading sort. And for the second, a fully equipped galleon, or another type of ocean-worthy merchant vessel."

"Those are both reasonable prices. And I've got both, though not a Galleon. I've got a forty-meter single deck schooner that I can offer you, traded to me from the Wave Rider Clan."

Nila looks very excited at this, so Cain is inclined to agree, despite the lack of onboard firepower.

"Deal." Cain agrees, opening a trade window and offering up the cloth. The King quickly grants him a stack of Cannons and a ship deed, that says the Schooner named Queen Rose is docked here in town.

"Pleasure doing business, I'm sure you understand, I've gotta go." The King says, running back inside.

The man is a true crafter Cain decides, so focused on making something new that nothing else matters. With that in mind, they head down to the docks, planning to check out their new vessel. Only Nila knows what she's looking at or how to use it, but one expert should be enough, right?

"Dock Master, we're looking for Queen Rose. I've got the deed to her here." Cain says, showing the paperwork to the man collecting the city entry fee at the docks.

"Hard to miss her, she's that bright pink monstrosity there." And it's pink, very pink. Though that seems to be the color of the wood, not paint, there are no signs of flaking. At forty meters on deck, the three-masted schooner is truly impressive in size, and to Cain's untrained eye, looks to be a fast vessel.

"Let me know what you think, Nila. I've got the Mining Puppets with me and they've got apprentice sailing skills, so we can sail her home if she's seaworthy."

Nila dutifully checks over the vessel, even climbing the rigging to inspect the mast. She checks everything below decks, raises the sails one at a time, and checks all the winches, blocks, and lines.

"I would love to say, she's immaculately seaworthy. Any Captain would be proud to have a ship this well maintained. But it's simply not true. She's been sitting for what looks like several years. She's seaworthy, but only barely, and could use some work." She declares, looking at the vessel in barely veiled disgust.

"Not a big fan of the color scheme are you?" Cain laughs.

"If you think this is bad, go below. It's like they had a paint fight. I deserve hazard pay just having to look at this thing. The Wave Riders must have been playing a practical joke on the King when they traded him this ship."

Intrigued, Cain goes below, and his senses are assaulted by neon colors. It's all neon with black lighting to make it glow. The mere fact such a thing exists is enough proof for Cain that psychedelic drugs do indeed get manufactured in this world.

"There's a merchant vessel full of silk in the next berth," Vala says hopefully, sticking her head through the companionway.

"Get us three bolts of gray or black. That might be enough to quickly wrap the small things like cushions and drape a few walls." Cain decides, going back topside.

"Is this a good design Nila? Fast, stable, seaworthy?" It looks like it, but she would know better than him.

"Very fast. It's designed off of an Elven warship, made to ambush other fleets using wind magic." Nila informs him with a smile.

"Good. We might be short on skilled wind mages, but I'm sure I can manage something."

Something being a walk around the pier to record all the crew members he can. There's bound to be a wind mage on at least a few vessels. He's even got one in mind. There's a Wave Rider vessel in Port, if they'll talk to him he's got a good chance of recording their wind mage, who might be better equipped for the job than Nila.

"Nila, let's go meet your kinfolk. I'm going to get a Wave Rider Shaman like yourself or one that is specialized in wind magic for the ship. Any good wind mages would do though." Cain explains and the Dark Elf gladly follows, the pink vessel seeming to offend her on a deeply personal level.

"I've got to know, what's with you and the color pink?"



"You know, I'm not even sure, it's just an instinctive reaction to seeing a vessel that color. It's all wrong like it has offended the sea by clashing with it." Nila shrugs.

"Could we repaint it, or stain it a different color?" Cain suggests, not exactly a fan of bubblegum pink himself. Who even knew this world had a tree with wood that color?

"The only color that will fully cover that is black. Which is usually reserved for pirate vessels and The Wave Rider Clan. We might be able to paint multiple layers over it though."

"Well, hopefully, they'll have an idea for us, we're almost to the Wave Rider vessel."

As they approach, Cain can see other sailors turning to watch him, losing interest when they see Nila with him.. Is going to visit the Wave Riders something that isn't done often by those who aren't part of the clan? Cain seems to recall sailors being known as sociable sorts, but that might be from his past life.

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

## **Chapter 203 - Side Story Misha's Troubles**

Evangeline and Misha are facing off across the living room when Lickity comes in with an armful of cloth, followed by Aramia and the Spider Queen. Misha has only just learned the story of Evangeline's arrival and she's not taking it well, much to the Seraphim's dismay.

"I don't see what you're upset about." Evangeline insists, clearly confused, her pouting face enhanced by her Aura is so adorable that Misha almost forgives her. For a second, before the memory of why she's upset returns.

"Of all things, you decided to show up naked, with an Aura that causes lustful thoughts cranked up to its maximum setting, and you don't understand why I'm upset?" Misha does her best to avoid shouting at the Seraphim.

"It doesn't do that to Seraphim. We don't feel lust at all. It just makes others friendly and encourages them to like you more. It's a highly valued talent among our people, who thrive off of being beloved by all. Plus, it's ridiculously hot here. If that stupid Demon would stop making fun of me for not knowing anything about mortals I wouldn't have clothes on now. How do you tolerate that? Especially as a human, who gets all sweaty in the heat?" The exasperated Seraphim responds, throwing her hands in the air and



spreading her wings, sending a gentle scent like sunshine and baby powder through the room. Being a Seraphim comes with a great number of innate advantages, like not sweating, or getting sunburned, even dirt and odors don't stick to them.

"She's got a point, flying around naked is very freeing. I do it all the time, it's not like I wear clothes in Dragon form." Laura agrees and Misha gives her an icy glare that the Opal Dragon thinks might actually cast a Blizzard spell one of these days.

"I'm just saying, we're not humans, why are human clothes such a big deal?"

Vala starts laughing at Laura's logic and decides to help out a little. "In Dragon form, you're naked, but obviously nonhuman. Possessing none of the secondary traits they're hardwired to find sexually attractive. Evangeline doesn't share that luxury. Other than the pair of wings, she looks like a young blonde pop star who has had her skin bleached and a load of plastic surgery to fit some innocent but sexy archetype. And that's before considering that her Aura makes human men want to fawn over her. She's even got the unnaturally perky chest that doesn't sag. Of course, Misha will be upset if Evangeline starts walking around naked like some porn star trying to steal her man."

"Technically I've got two pairs of wings. See, the little ones are slightly lower on my back?" The Seraphim starts before the Demon waves her off, not wanting things to escalate any further. The concept of human sensibilities just doesn't compute with the Seraphim, so she's going to have to explain some things later.

"So you're saying it's all a big misunderstanding and I'm overreacting?" Misha asks in a deceptively polite tone and Laura, hovering out of her line of sight, frantically signals not to answer that.

But of course, the Seraphim will. They're generally terrible at lying and it wouldn't fool Misha even if she tried.

"I wouldn't go that far. You're just taking me as a human, with human logic and emotions. If you'd like I can try to behave more like one? You know, blend in with the crowd? It might be a bit difficult if you've gotten used to the Demon though."

That brings a smile to everyone but Misha since all the Companions have been instinctively drawn to the unfolding drama. Vala is the least Demonic Demon they know. She's more like what they expected an angel to be than the out-of-touch with reality Seraphim they got.

"Alright. I will let it slide this time. But I had better not catch you doing anything strange." Misha agrees, still upset with the Seraphim, who promptly turns her Aura up another notch. There are only females in the area so that should be fine, right? She doesn't want anybody to dislike her, she's not at all good with rejection.

With that, the group disperses. The entertainment seems to be over, for now, so Lickity, Mythryll, and the spiders head for the Tailoring room. The Elven Mage doesn't sew but enjoys watching the others work, so she had originally decided to kill a little time there today. But now, she suspects that her friend might need a bit of comforting.

"Feeling better?" Mythryll asks once Misha makes it to the room they've set aside for sewing projects.

"Much. As upset as I was, it is too hard to stay mad at her. She's just so naturally likable that it annoys me to no end. Especially when I know she's alone with Cain and his Companions, and only has Vala around to provide common sense." The Healer says, throwing her hands in the air, unable to properly vent her frustrations.

"Why don't we skip the sewing today and go to the Library in Assah? We can look at the books, maybe pick out something that looks good and then get an afternoon snack?" Mythryll suggests, a trip to the Library has been high on her to-do list anyhow.

"That's a great idea. Let the others know, and we can head out."

With the portal system between their properties, it's only a few minutes to get to the library, waving a greeting at Red, who is debating the benefits of two different abilities with a cost-conscious visitor.

"So, where first? Shadow Spells?" They're very compatible with the Dark Acolyte class, so Misha might find something good there.

"That works for me. Maybe a new Skill will help, I just can't seem to focus lately with all these silly thoughts." Misha agrees.

"Silly thoughts?"

"You know, like that, I don't belong to him but the Companions do. That feeling of distance because he orders them but asks me or just does things for me instead. You understand, right?"

Mythryll nods and gives her friend a one-armed hug, realizing that the problem was an entirely different one than she imagined. Misha doesn't want to be a pampered girlfriend and brought presents, no, she wants something much more intimate. The Elf makes up her mind right then that she will help see this through, even if she has to straight-up tell Cain what his woman wants to get it to stick in his head.

He cares for her a lot, but he's pretty clueless about some things. Mythryll suspects he hadn't had any intimate interaction with the opposite sex during his previous life, and it wasn't because of lack of time.

After a few moments of searching through the spell description summaries under the tomes containing Shadow Spells, one catches Misha's eye. A Spell that both she and Mythryll might like. If they can use it.

[Corrupt] Rank C. Causes targets caught in the area of effect to be attacked by shadows of their surroundings, Causing [Slow] effect and 120 percent of Spell Power as Shadow Damage over 10 seconds. Usable by Mage, Warlock.

The Dark Apostle Class she gained can use both Cleric and Warlock books, so they're in luck. It's a bit odd for a Nature Mage to be using such a spell, but the effect fits in well with her Treants and Vines, both of which are control-type abilities already and should cause unpredictable and distracting attacks from the area Spell.

"Did you find something good? I'm on Library duty today, so I can give you a little helping hand if you don't want to pay full price at the Inscriptionist." Red says in a soft, conspiratorial voice. His presence startled Misha, but she holds up the book she found.

"This should be good for both me and Mythryll. She's a Nature Mage with Treants, so I was thinking haunted woods." Misha explains.

"Oh, that is a good one. But it goes very well with a Mage Spell by the same name as your idea. [Haunted Woods]. It adds Shadow damage to Nature attacks with a chance of causing Blindness." Red suggests and they hear light laughter from the next aisle.

"Found it. Yep, this is very good. Especially with Treants and their multiple low damage attacks and control bindings." Mythryll calls out.

"It's a Rank A book, but I've got everything in stock to make it. Just give me a moment and keep looking around. There are so many good things. Plus, there's a Dark Apostle exclusive shelf over in that corner. You'll see the label on top." Red adds, carefully collecting the books.

They both wonder what sort of interesting abilities might be available to the class, as it has been heavy on healing and Unholy Fire so far, but using Warlock books it should have at least something to do with demons and conjuring. It can certainly use the Warlock books that enhance their base Imp anyhow.

There is indeed an entire shelf for her class, holding 6 books in total. Three of them are healing or cleansing type spells, and not as good or mana efficient as the fully upgraded ones she got from the Cleric Class. They must be for the transfers who got the class while being a Warlock, however, they managed that, and came up short on versatility as proper healers. Two are attack-type Shadow Spells, but Misha likes the flames a lot, so she holds off on them. Finally the last one, which she pulls from the shelf, is a true Gem. At least for her.

[Greater Minions] Rank S. Increases the Dark Apostle's Summoned Demons by 1 Rank in quality.

The only Summon the class normally gets is a [Summoned Helper] that becomes available about 20 points in, a Greater Golem. Plus the Warlocks would still have their Lesser Golem quality Imp, which they could have two of if they fully specced into it while holding the Warlock Class.

So this book granting the class an Epic Quality Demon is already worthy of the S class designation, but Misha is Cain's [Lieutenant] with Lesser and Greater Golems to call upon and a Member of Darklight Host that all gain a [Personal Guard] of 2 Epic Golems.

With this skill and the latest upgrade to her Lieutenant Designation, she should be able to Summon Golems every bit as fearsome as Cain's. Well, almost, she's not geared like he is for a thousand percent extra construct damage, but she will have Legendary Demons. Actual Legendary Demons of her own.

Misha has broken down in happy tears, sitting on the floor clutching the class-exclusive book with Mythryll rubbing her back when Red comes back.

"Is it that good?" He whispers to the smiling Elf.

"Quality Rank upgrade for Summoned demons. Normally, her class only gets one, but you know."

Red does know. He's met the Puppet Master of Gillibrand and learned about the skills of a Lieutenant. The dragon also knows that the Dark Acolyte in front of him has a much greater advantage than most Lieutenants. With this book, it's now from her class, and from the dual-tree nature of her own Puppet Master and that ridiculously broken misuse of a Guild Skill. The Red Dragon might not know all the details, but he does know Cain's summons are far beyond the average and is determined to get him in one day to fill out a full diagram of the Skill Tree to add to the class data collection.

"I'll have that one made for you. On the house, it's good to see someone so happy about our Skills Library. Here are the first ones you ordered.." Red smiles, exchanging coins with Mythryll and walking away to let them learn and celebrate.

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## Chapter 204 - 202

Their vessel is much like the Queen Rose, long and elegant, three-masted in a schooner fashion. Intricate carvings of sea creatures line the toe rails and stanchions, and Cain can see that the deck full of Cannons on this vessel is likewise adorned. It's a full third larger than the Queen Rose, at roughly fifty five meters long and a deck taller.

Their newly acquired vessel only has the top deck available for defenses, where this one has a row of Cannons below that, behind hatches that can be sealed for heavy seas. Though the Queen Rose does have round port windows letting light into the lower deck, it would be much too close to the water for Cannons.

It's also decidedly not pink. It's made of what Cain believes to be a form of black ironwood, not truly black, but a very dark brown, and then stained to make it inky dark.

"State your business then piss off." The Wave Rider man at the other end of the gangplank greets them.

"I've acquired the Queen Rose, and I would like to purchase some information on weather routing to Assah and how to make it less Pink," Cain says firmly and the Dark Elf begins to laugh.

"What fool used Rose Oak to make a vessel I'll never know. Sure, it's strong and takes decades to begin to rot, but that doesn't make it a good idea. If you make it worth our time, I'll consider passing along your message." The First Mate, as Nila whispers that the man's position is, informs them.

"I've got an Epic Quality shirt, with a bonus to never get wet or dirty. And a few gold coins for your troubles." Cain hopes that this form of bribery is correct, as in his experience people with a lot of money prefer interesting things.

The shirt is one he acquired from the Seraphim Dungeon, called [Immaculate Vestments]. He's got another as well, they seem to have a fairly good drop rate.

A Dark Elven woman with a black silk ribbon braided into her white hair slides down a line from the crow's nest to join them and the First Mate nods a greeting to her.

"A shirt that is always clean and dry? Now you are a man that knows the way to a Sailor's heart. Come aboard with your navigator and I'll put on some tea."

The tea this captain has puts the Elven Tea from the Beginner Valley to shame. Smooth and slightly fruity, leaving a refreshed feeling, it has to be the high-end version of Elven Tea that the Landis Kingdom was embargoed from receiving.

"Excellent cup, that is. Even better than what the Elves in Beginner Valley make." Cain commends his host. Like all Elves, she's rather short compared to Cain, but she's strong, her whole body toned by hard work.

She's younger looking than he expected of a Captain and her skin has a gray-blue tone instead of the usual dull gray to the deep black of Dark Elves. The First Mate had the same tone but with a darker skin, and Cain wonders if it's unique to the Wave Rider Clan or if that's what a suntan looks like on Dark Elves.

"I do my best to be a good host. Now, tell me something. With a Wave Rider navigating, you don't need weather advice, so what did you need, other than a way to recolor your ship?"

Cain thinks a moment about how to answer that as the captain seems to look straight into his soul. That gaze of hers gives Cain the impression that lying to her is somewhere between pointless and idiotic.

"I'm not sure how familiar you are with the Puppet Master class, but one of our class skills can Summon a clone of a person I've seen before. They don't have all their memories, only essential ones, but that includes skills and spells. I needed a wind mage and some skilled sailors to make our journey safer." Cain says with a shrug and the captain gives him a calculating look.

"We do need to know how to make the Queen Rose not pink though," Nila adds.

"Not many stains will stick to that vessel for long. That's part of why nobody uses the wood for ships. It's a right pain to clean too, salt sticks to it unreasonably well." The Captain explains.

"But I am interested in the skills of your summons. Can they run rigging? Haul sails? Keep night watches?"

"In theory, all of the above. If you'd like I could call a couple of clones of crew members and they could have a competition with their twins." Cain suggests.

"That sounds entertaining. How about we give them a basic skills test? I've got a short run to do, they could run things while we go out and the real crew can bring us back."

"As long as we're back in reasonable order. I've still got friends at the Queen Rose after all." Cain agrees.

"No worries, we're just going to a Wave Rider vessel that doesn't like dealing with humans to grab some cargo. It's only about twenty miles offshore."

At the speed of this large schooner that's about an hour each way, if Cain's guess is right. But the combination of sails and magic may surprise him.

"Gather up to ten essential crew members for the competition and I'll create their opponents. I could create more low-level assistants if they're needed to run the ship, but ten core sailors are my limit." Cain tells the Captain as they move back to the deck.

The captain nods and turns to address the crew. "As you all know, we've got a short run to do, picking up trade goods from the Dax'Arach, but our Guest here has challenged you a stinking lot to a competition to help pass the time. His summons will take us out with me at the helm, and you will bring us back. I expect you to win against a mere Summoned shadow of yourselves, is that understood?"

"Aye Captain." Comes the instant response. There is only eight other crew on board, all Dark Elves which Cain quickly inspects, before realizing he's gained an early advantage. Four of them are here as deckhands, under level 50 and all Warriors.

As expected they've got a Wind Mage and the Captain is of the Wave Rider Class as well as Clan. But they've also got a War Shaman in the form of the First Mate and two Rogues that are both in First Advancement versions of their original Classes.

Cain calls the Eight matching Supporters out and the captain starts barking orders to them, the deckhands immediately pull the dock lines and push the vessel away from the pier while the Rogues nimbly leap about the vessel pulling lines and raising sails.

Five seconds after the first order is given, the sails are full and trimmed, with the wind mage creating a steady breeze and the First Mate carrying the vessel forward on the following wave.

They can hear the cursing from the Port Authority about harbor speed and a no-wake zone, but that doesn't phase the captain, who is ordering additional sails to be hoisted, and an adjustment of the water magic. As expected, the clones respond instantly, doing what they were instructed to the best of their abilities.

Forget being an entire hour to reach the other vessel, with this channeled form of the Tsunami spell moving the water underneath them and the wind mage, they're positively racing through the ocean towards their destination. If it weren't for the magic being used to create a following wind that's only twenty knots faster than the vessel is moving, none of them would even be able to stand up on deck.

Like trying to remain upright in a hurricane or standing on a fast-moving car, they'd be blown off their feet in seconds without something to hold on to.

Using the enhanced senses granted to him by merging with the Oath Breakers, Cain can see a similar, but slightly larger black vessel of the Wave Rider design in their path, and he's becoming concerned that they won't be able to stop this insane ride in time.



The captain knows what she's doing though, expertly ordering the modification of spells and the furling of sails to bring them to a gentle stop near the Dax'Arach, where the crew welcomes them with a heavy round of applause.

"Got the crew fully trained for blockade running I see. Good work young Captain Selah." The other Captain, a leather-faced middle-aged man, large for a Dark Elf and almost blue instead of gray in the skin with what Cain is now certain is the way their species tans, welcomes them as their Captain Selah orders the clones to load the goods on board.

The large crates are no problem for level 150 warriors and the job takes only a few seconds to complete. A single trip between vessels each.

"Do tell me, what's the rush? Get run out of another port?" The weather-beaten Elf laughs.

"I found something interesting. This man is what they call a Puppet Master. He can clone a crew that obeys instantly, doesn't complain or second guess you, and doesn't get tired. It's amazing, the clone of my First Mate channeled Tsunami until it was almost out of mana and we reached you, without a single break or falter in the spell."

The other captain looks impressed. "No fluctuating, surging, or dropped waves? That's an incredible level of control. Is it perhaps just because the Summon doesn't feel the fatigue of continued spell casting or other distractions that they don't make mistakes? You came in at an incredible rate."

"As fast as I've ever had her going. And from the Pier at that. You've got to give them constant explicit directions though, they're capable, but lack the memories to anticipate requirements."

"If you keep them active long enough they might get better, recalling the ways they've done it since they were Summoned. They're supposedly as smart as the one they're clones of." Cain suggests.

"Well, that explains the need for constant directions, they're all idiots." The older captain laughs, causing Selah and the First Mate to join in his mirth.

"Oh, I meant you too." Now it's the younger members' turn to laugh as if they weren't the brunt of the joke mere seconds ago.

"Well, we should be off. I've got extra cleaning rotations to assign to the crew when they lose this challenge." Selah waves, before ordering the regular crew into action, executing a sweeping turn back towards the docks as the living crew struggles to outdo their clones.

They're very good and require much less explicit directions and micromanagement but it's not quite as smooth and well-orchestrated as the runout.

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

## Chapter 205 - 203

"How do the summons even do that? I can't hear a bloody thing with the snap of the sails and the roar of the wind, but they know exactly what sail needs what trim the instant the order is given." One of the Rogues complains with a frustrated waving of his hands.

"They don't need to hear her. I can hear her, and they can understand her through me." Cain laughs.

"Unfair advantage Captain. Unfair I tell you." The wind mage, a lithe Wave Rider who could almost be the Captain's younger sister, given their similarities, insists.

"You just want out of cleaning duty. But it's happening either way. Now help the clones get the product unloaded and over to the warehouse." Captain Selah orders her crew and the summons, the identical pairs grabbing a lot of attention from the other Sailors.

The Wind Mages and the one pair of female Warriors in particular. Dark Elves might be a more common sight among the Port Cities, because of the Wave Rider Clan, but twin beauties among them are enough to turn many heads in appreciation.

As Cain had learned with his Companions, no matter where you go, twins will garner attention. Especially among the actual transfers, many of whom have an unhealthy fascination with the idea of twin demi-humans.

"Question for you Captain. Back in the Beginner Valley, they call everyone with a system interface a transfer. But that doesn't work for the people born here, does it? What do the Wave Riders use to make the distinction?" Cain decides to get a few answers to esoteric questions while they wait.

"Wave Riders are a bit different than most cultures. Our lifestyle essentially requires the System at this point, but we don't get any new arrivals from it, only those born with an Interface. So we send those rare few born without it to one of the Underground cities to be with the rest of the Dark Kin or to work at land-based businesses that the clan owns.

Unlike other groups, most of us do get an interface, we believe it's part of our blessing from the Spider Goddess.

Those without it are Classless, we're the Wave Riders. The Eastern Continent calls those born with access to the system the Blessed. The North and South both call them True Born. Transfer works anywhere until you know more about the person though."

That's an interesting take on it. They don't get transfers, because they're Elves changed by their Goddess, so it makes some sense they've got a different way of doing things than others. They might truly be blessed by their Goddess though, after seeing her influence in Muzz, and hearing that most Wave Rider children get an interface, it's easy to believe that the Spider Goddess keeps a close eye on her creations.

"Thanks for the explanation. Here I was worried I'd seem too much like a country bumpkin using the word Transfer as a general term." Cain responds with a lopsided grin and Selah gives him a look as if to say he's delusional if he thinks that's the only problem with him and his speech patterns.

Cain's supporters choose that moment to send a message that they're in trouble at the warehouse, something about Customs officers trying to break in. It sounds urgent, so he decides to relay it to captain Selah.

"The summons says there is a problem with customs." Cain begins as the First Mate appears from the water beside the ship, climbing aboard, followed by the others.

"Someone tipped them off. We got out, but the clones didn't know the secret passages." He says in a hurry and they can hear the smashing of wood in the distance as the officers breach the warehouse. Going on his first instinct, Cain dismisses his Supporters and smiles at Captain Selah.

"Problem solved. The clones are gone. But I'm afraid your cargo might be lost."

"Thank goodness, they looked just like us, we'd have been screwed. But the cargo is already gone. Swapped out for a legitimate crate of cloth." The First Mate says with a grin.

"Go change. Get dry before they get here and we can deny everything." Captain Selah informs her crew and pulls a bottle of Rum from her inventory that she hands to Cain.

"Drink up. When they ask, you bet me we couldn't make the Point Rock loop in an hour." They share drinks from the Rum bottle until the customs officials arrive, looking positively irate.

Cain decides he definitely needs more of this Rum. It's an easy liquor to drink straight, slightly sweet with notes of apple and something Cain can't identify. Not sweet enough

to be anything but hard liquor, but not so harsh he'd want to mix it with anything and risk ruining the flavor.

"Behar Customs, prepare to be boarded." The customs officers announce as they march down the pier.

"We have it on good authority your vessel has been importing illegal Frost Giant Vodka. We will be searching the vessel. Where are the crew?"

"Down below freshening up. I bet the captain here that she couldn't make the Point Rock run in an hour, so they got a good workout today." Cain smiles at the officers, the sweet smell of good Rum strong on his breath.

"And what might the stakes have been?" The lead investigator asks.

"One crate of assorted cloth from inland. I've got Guild Houses in Montauk and the Beginner Valley you see." Cain explains and the man steps back at the smell of his breath.

High-level transfers, especially the more durable classes, don't get drunk easily due to their constitution, and this Rum lingers on the breath so much that it's making the Customs officer's eyes water.

"His story checks out Detective, Darklight Host Guild holds three Guild Houses plus a Guild castle and one other property. His first order of business in town was trading Cloth with the King." A Customs officer with a clipboard says.

The crew has been brought topside, and the officers are using a checking device like the one used in Assah to verify that none of the prohibited items are in their inventory. The search of the ship also seems to be turning up nothing out of the ordinary.

They're not giving up yet though, hoping someone slips up. "Why might you be interested in trading vessel speed all of a sudden, Mainlander?"

"I traded high-end silk for the Queen Rose, there a few berths down. But I had never been on anything like it before." Cain shrugs.

"That thing is yours now? If you'll promise never to leave that pink monstrosity on my docks again I'd die a happy man." The dockmaster with the customs team grumbles.

"The idea of making it not pink did come up in conversation." Selah winks, discretely signaling her crew to play along.

"Aye, blood-red might be a good color for her. With some black sails. She'd be a beauty." The First Mate adds and the captain and Wind Mage both laugh, while the Dock Master growls unhappily. An odd noise coming from a human.

"Word to the wise boy, those are the Wave Riders raiding colors. If you don't want ports to think you've come to conquer their city, don't follow that idiot's advice."

Honestly, that just makes him want to do it more. It's a terrible idea, but the Oath Breakers have dozens of ideas on how it could be amazingly fun.

"I'm no Wave Rider, it just wouldn't work anyhow. Plus once they see the Seraphim in my crew it would blow our cover." Cain shrugs off the idea with a slight slur, doing his best to appear drunk and harmless. The Oath Breakers insist the effect he's creating is closer to just being a Buffoon, but that's still good enough for him. It doesn't give the Customs officers any additional reasons to doubt his story.

As if mentioning her Summoned her, Evangeline flew overhead at just that moment, carrying Laura on her shoulder. "Cain, are you done playing? We want to set sail, the other ships told us about a beach with coconut flavored crabs and we want to go."

"Miss, um HI." The young blonde customs officer who interjected needs to stop at this point to clear his throat. He's still in his mid teenage years and his voice cracked under the influence of Evangeline's Aura. Even at level two, the effects of the Aura are too much for the apprentice Customs worker.

"My apologies. As I was going to say, coconut crabs are coconut shaped, not flavored." He informs her apologetically.

"Well, that sucks. I wanted some coconut crab." Evangeline pouts, cranking her Aura up to about half.

"I know a good restaurant that has coconut flavored crab. If you just go down four blocks then turn left, you'll see it near the hill." Another officer says in an eager tone.

"Keegan's Crab Shack it's called." A third man adds helpfully.

"Thank you, lovely gentlemen. I'll check it out once we're all finished up here." She smiles at the lead investigator, who blushes from his nose to his ears under her gaze and his eyes keep dipping lower before returning to her face.

"I believe we're done here. Sorry for the trouble. Get a move on everyone, all this talk of food is making me hungry."

The investigators all pack up their equipment and make their way down the dock to check on another shipment, sneaking frequent glances back at Evangeline, who is now hovering over the dock with lazy flaps of her wings.

"I thought Seraphim were Paragons of virtue." Captain Selah says, giving Evangeline an incredulous look.

"We are, but both patience and punctuality are virtues and I'm not a fan of being late to dinner." She shrugs.

The Wave Rider Captain laughs and shakes her head. "You lot are naturals at this I tell you. I've got to go now, but if we meet again, feel free to call on me."

"Thanks for the advice, and the forms for the crew. I'll see if I can find you some good Rum next time we meet. Since it sounds like Vodka is hard to get."

"Only the good stuff. Cheap Vodka is all over the Northern Continent, but the Frost Giants make theirs differently. It's not a liquor at all, but a potion that makes you immune to cold, with the added benefit that it will get even a Dragon hammered in a couple of shots." The First Mate says solemnly.

No wonder they restrict the import.

"We'll be off then. Good luck with your next shipment." Cain says his goodbyes to the crew and hops back to the dock to go reinspect his new pink ship, now that he's had a while to watch a similar vessel under sail and see the basics of what is needed to operate such a ship properly.. Watching Captain Selah in action really let Cain know how much he doesn't know about sailing.

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

## **Chapter 206 - 204**

"First order of business. Search through the Shipwrights to find someone to paint or stain that ship. Second order of business, The Crab Shack." Cain announces, getting dressed for dinner.

"Third order of business, stop messing with that belt. A randomly appearing and disappearing extra me is getting annoying." Evangeline adds. So the belt does affect her she's simply using Merger to absorb the extra copies.

"Do we have to totally repaint the ship? I love the pink. Everyone does black and blue and white. Ours is just naturally more awesome." Nemu declares.

"She's got a point. You'll always know that this is the vessel of the Darklight Host." Vala agrees.

"We could just buy some sails that aren't matching pink to contrast?" Evangeline suggests now that he's picked an outfit.

Wait, even the sails are pink? What sort of colorblind monster designed this thing?

"How about we just have them paint and stain the inside of the ship, and leave the outside alone? They did say it's naturally durable without stain, you just need to scrub the salt off, and you can have the puppets do that." Nemu offers a compromise.

"Alright, for now, we find someone to make the inside not so hard on the eyes. We can deal with the outside later after we sail it back to Assah." Cain agrees. That will give him more time to look for long-lasting options as well.

There is a Sailmaker at the foot of the pier, next to the place that makes enchanted rope for ships' lines and rigging, which begs the question, what color sails does he want to put on this ship?

Cain explains his dilemma to the shopkeeper, who understands in an instant. "Even if you liked the color, they're due to be replaced. They have been on there for years, out in the sun. It weakens the cloth even if they're not used much."

Nila nods that he's right and then frowns. "I should double-check the rigging too, it's likely no better, just harder to tell at a glance how much sun damage it has taken."

"It isn't going to be any better. That eyesore hasn't moved since the King won it, other than to switch berths a couple of times." The sailmaker declares.

"Go get new rigging made and installed. Tell them we're taking it away as soon as all the work is done." Cain instructs Nila, who is happy to help, having been too long away from the sea.

"If you trust me, I have a suggestion." The sailmaker says after a moment's pause.

"Merchant type Guilds often run multi-colored sails. The clash of color keeps them from being mistaken for a military vessel and it will help break up the mass of pink. Put down some black nonskid on the deck to protect from splinters and only the mast, railings and hull sides will be visibly pink. Plus, if I can mix and match, I can have your sails ready tonight, using ones I've already got in stock for the fleets."

"So we'll look like a sailing carnival?" Cain laughs.

"A little bit, I'm afraid, but most merchants do, see the one coming in?" He's right. Their sails used to be red, blue, and orange, but they've been patched in dozens of different colors, giving the whole thing the look of a low-budget carnival.

"I see. How about you at least include some matching patches so we don't end up like that?" Cain suggests.



"Not a problem. I'll get right to work, I've already got the measurements for your vessel on hand, and I'll hang the sails once I'm done. Anything you want to be done with the scrap sails?"

"Since they're faded pink, maybe give them to an orphanage or something, let them make clothes for the girls out of them," Nemu suggests.

That's right, the Orphanage in Graska often made clothes from the scraps of cloth the tailors donated. Sailcloth might not be the best, but if they can't afford to dye them, the pink might be a nice change.

"I can do that. They're happy to get almost anything they can. Plus, they run a couple of small fishing boats. Your sails might be too worn and old for a high-speed schooner, but they're just fine for the kids to catch fish in the bay." Going by relative sizes, just the better condition parts of the sails would likely redo a fleet of small 5 to 7-meter fishing vessels and still have enough left to dress the crew.

"I can also arrange for the decks to be done today if you'd like?"

"Certainly. We're thinking of having the whole interior done as well, though that might have to wait until we get to Assah, where the Guild has a beach house." Cain says, considering his options.

"We can do that." Comes a young voice from the door.

"We've got tools and manpower, you buy the paint. It takes two hours to dry, but we can have it all ready to go by morning." The boy says proudly.

"Meet Jessop, from the Orphanage. He lurks around the docks whenever he's looking for work. I thought you were working for the fishmonger today?"

"I was. Small catch today, so we're already done. I heard something about some crap cloth for the girls?" The boy asks, likely planning to carry it back with him.

"I'm doing all new sails for the Queen Rose, and they're donating the old ones to the Orphanage. They're a bit old, but they're not in terrible shape."

"Just very pink. They'll love it." Jessop laughs.

"Alright, where do we find interior paint or stain? Do what you can to make the ship look decent inside and I'll pay you going rate." Cain agrees and the boy grabs Cain's much larger hand with both of his own for a handshake.

"They'll let me grab it on credit once they find out you're getting sails. It's his brother's shop. Don't worry, we know all the tricks to hide the pink oak. The shops just give it away when it comes in as crates for their shipments."

With that, he's off, presumably to go get supplies and other kids to help, his mood considerably improved.

"Since everyone's so very helpful today, why don't we go straight to the crab shack for dinner and then find a hotel to stay in while they work? We can leave in the morning?" Cain suggests.

"Sounds good to us. Lead the way, oh mighty Summoner." Evangeline declares with a hint of sarcasm, making the others chuckle. Cain can't decide if she just loves to tease people, or if he's broken some sort of cultural taboo among Seraphim by Summoning her as a companion.

He would just ask, but he wants to try to figure it out himself first. Understanding his Companions has become important to Cain since he keeps them active all the time and with him for most of it. When it was just Vala and Nemu, he only had to worry about them teasing each other. Now with Laura, Nila and Evangeline, there's bound to be a clash of personalities eventually.

Already he notices that Evangeline and Vala mostly ignore each other, while Evangeline and Laura like flying around together and Vala prefers to walk, but Laura prefers to cuddle with Vala because the Demon is warmer.

Cain watches them interact while they walk to the crab shack, where the owner seems to have been informed that they were coming. He's waiting by the door for them and already has an oversized booth ready and set up for their party, including a Pixie-sized cushion on the table for Laura.

"Welcome, welcome. I heard you are the proud new owners of the Queen Rose. I know what she looks like, but don't underestimate that ship. The one who built her for the Wave Riders was a Shipwright in his past life too, and she's got a unique shape to her, not like the regular merchant vessels. She's fast, even without using any sort of magic on her." The restaurant owner greets them, getting them seated and sending for drinks.

Strangely, there are no menus visible anywhere in the building. So you must either just tell him what you like, or eat what you get.

"Any allergies? Things you won't eat?" He asks, solving Cain's mental menu conundrum.

"Nope, we will eat about anything. Bring us something good, and drinks to match." Evangeline smiles at the owner who seems to gain even more bounce in his step.

"Coming right up." He cheers, headed back into the kitchen as the Seraphim looks around the crowded restaurant.

"That's impressive, he managed to reserve us a table before we made it across the wharf." She says, looking fondly at the food on the neighboring tables.

"You don't sound surprised?" Cain asks, trying to figure her out.

"Seraphim can hear thoughts about them. They use it to pretend they're almighty and omniscient." Vala informs him in a dry tone.

"Don't be like that. You can do it too. You just don't use it outside of combat." Evangeline cuts back in a sweet tone and Nemu gives a disgruntled feline noise.

"That's why I can never catch you off guard to tickle you? That's cheating." The Felian complains and Laura bursts into laughter.

"We all thought you already knew and were trying to find a solution." The Dragon snorts while the cat girl pouts. She's still in that mostly human Neko form with the cream colored hair and black tipped ears and tail, and has been in that form for a while now.

"Why the change in forms?" Cain asks, curiously indicating her distinct lack of fur, except for her ears and tail.

"It's too hot in the desert for fur. Plus, I still look fantastic." She responds, arcing her back to stretch out with her arms over her head, showing off her lithe body in the short black silk top while winking at the man at the next table. He is obviously trying to hide the fact he's looking, due to the presence of what is most likely his wife, but he's not fooling anyone.

"As long as you don't get sunburned or anything." Cain smiles, not worried about what shape she picks.

"Natural healing takes care of that. I regenerate faster than I can sunburn, and Felians don't tan, so I don't need to worry about not matching my fur."

That's something Cain hadn't considered.. A Dark-skinned Nemu, with her very light fur, except for the tips of her ears and tail, would look rather odd, almost Gyaruu style.

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

## **Chapter 207 - 205**

The cook comes out with two large platters and a pot. "We've got baked ones here, fried ones there, and our house special, Seafood Gumbo. I've brought you a collection of wines and Dwarven ales to match. Please, enjoy, and tell your friends, when they visit Behar, to come to eat here." The last seems mostly directed at Nila, probably under the hopes that she will bring more Wave Rider customers to his shop.

They're frequent visitors, from what Cain understands, and generally wealthy, so they're the perfect customers. Though, from the look of things, he isn't doing too badly.

"This is good. We should bring some of this home with us." Laura declares, tipping the last of a bowl of gumbo into her mouth.

"It's not that hard to come to visit. You could fly over from Assah anytime you wanted." Cain points out and Laura gets a thoughtful look.

"You've got a point. If we leave at first light, we could get here, get gumbo and get back before breakfast." She says nodding to herself.

"Small problem little one. We don't open until near lunchtime. We've got to clean and cook the morning catch first." The chef points out, replacing the already empty trays of food.

"Minor technicality. Maybe I could fly over between the morning dungeon and lunch?" She says, thinking of options that lead to more seafood in her diet.

"You could do that. At your speed, it's only an hour or so from Assah." Nila points out and the man who was checking out Nemu almost chokes on his food.

"Did I just hear you say that Pixie can make it here from Assah in an hour?" He asks once he regains his composure.

"Don't let her appearance deceive you. That's actually a Dragon, transformed into a smaller shape to better enjoy her food." Nemu smirks, amused that nobody ever recognizes the Dragon when she's transformed, despite the Opalescent Dragon wings on her Pixie-sized body.

"That's quite the crew you've assembled. I heard you bought the Queen Rose, are you planning to run the Independent Ports trading routes then? A mixed crew like yours would be perfect for the job."

"I don't know much about it, the ship deal just kind of fell in my lap. Why would a crew like mine be good for whatever the Independent Ports route is?"

"That's what they call the small towns along the three coasts. The closest kingdoms in the Central, North, and Eastern continents are all primarily human. But there are several smaller cities in all three that aren't. If you've got the guts to run the trade route across

the ocean, they're always in need of goods, and they're a safe harbor for those who don't like too many questions." The old sailor behind Cain explains with a toothless grin.

Ah, they're the Pirate Cities and Free Ports. The old sailor has got a point, this crew might have a lot of fun with that.

"It sounds profitable, but I'll have to think on it. The Guild has recently built a new Castle, so getting it operational and defended has been taking up most of our time lately."

"Aye, a proper Guild Castle takes a lot of effort to maintain. The biggest problem is usually defending it against other Guilds. If they think they can claim it and add a hundred men to their roster, some are foolish enough to try. So you end up hiring guards, and patrols, and before you know it, a single fortress is taking up all your time and attention." The old sailor nods as if he's found the wisdom of the ages.

"Fortunately, we've got some Summoners in the Guild, so we can help even up the numbers with just a few stationed at the castle. Plus, the King was good enough to sell me some more magical Cannons."

"Good things those. And right nasty from a Castle wall, where they're not rocking in the waves." The old sailor agrees.

"So, how many do you keep at the castle? I don't recall ever seeing your Guild name before." Another man asks and Cain can see the old sailor roll his eyes at the obvious bait.

"Not many. Just the five groups that are over level 180 and want to do the dungeon we built it around. And then the Orcish Mercenaries." Vala shrugs. That was enough for the man to instantly lose interest in their castle. Looks like his Guild isn't up for that sort of fight.

Anyone who attempts to raid the castle is in for a shock. The Illusionary Army that Sora, the Tengu Lieutenant can Summon is only as strong as Cain's puppets, but as illusions, they all appear to be her level and Epic Quality. Until you fight them, they would be incredibly intimidating to any attacking force.

They might be fairly tough though. Cain gets a lot of bonuses to his summons, and the Summoned Lieutenants get a double dose of the Knight Rank bonus to Summon damage and durability, both for themselves and their summons.

That thought leads Cain on another tangent, Sora is the first Youkai designated creature he's seen. What other sorts of them are out there, with amazing abilities that mimic his own. Sure, Puppeteer isn't his strongest ability, but being able to use it without the actual puppets like Sora and get Illusionary Army do is pretty awesome.

"Question for you all. I came across a being known as a Tengu, designated as a type of Youkai by the system. Do you know where I might find more like them? They said they didn't know the skill I needed, but others would."

"Not anywhere easy to reach. They're from the East side of the Southern Continent. If the storms aren't enough to keep you away from that coast, the level 400 sea monsters should about do the trick." The old sailor laughs and the others turn pale.

"That's the territory of the Kraken. Faster than a flying Dragon and large enough to eat a whale in a single bite, nobody risks traveling that route. If you need to deal with the hidden realm, you cross the mountains from the west and hope they're feeling friendly." One of his tablemates agrees.

Alright, call that a long-term goal then. But it does give Cain hope that he will be able to smoothly level up in the future. A whole ocean full of level 400 sea monsters makes for quite a grind zone. You know, if they don't sink your ship and eat you.

That turns the conversation to the various dangers of the known world. The chaotic kingdoms of the western side of the central continent, where you never know who will be in charge the next time you visit. The level 300 to 400 Forests of the inland portions of the Eastern continent, the Giants of the Western Continent.

The last one is interesting, as they've supposedly got a link to their homeworld on the continent, and can call for increasingly high-level reinforcements if they're attacked. Almost the entire western continent belongs to the Frost Giants, but there are other types there too, as well as Dragons.

The North is the most stable continent, according to the connoisseurs of fine seafood at the Crab Shack. It's ruled by the Barbarian Tribes, full of dangerous dungeons and wild Beasts, but without the predictable zones of the central and eastern continent. There is no smooth progression from city to city, even along the coast, adjacent cities can have over a hundred levels difference in their dungeons and wildlife, though the coastal areas are mostly filled with low level creatures and residents.

With all that going on, plus monsters in the oceans, sailing looks like it's not for the weak of heart, though Nila assures him that Sea Monsters are quite rare until you get south of the Central Continent. Even the old sailors, who love their stories, agree that a ship seeing one a year on the routes between here and the northern continent is about normal.

"What about the Eastern Continent then? Assah gets regular trading vessels from there, is the continent at war or something that the North is more stable?"

"The East is airways at war, has been for centuries. That makes them a great trading partner though because they're always hungry for gear. Their battles seem to stop short of the kingdoms overthrowing each other but the traders all agree that if you get to a

Port and it's under siege, you either turn and leave before you're noticed, or you sell everything to whoever gets to you first and then you leave before the other side decides to vent their frustrations on you."

That sounds like it might be worth visiting in the future. Their descriptions of the dangerous forest made the continent sound much warmer than the frozen northern continent, and the power levels of your opponents won't vary as wildly.

One of the legends they heard today, chatting over a steady stream of drinks, said the far north hides a clan of Barbarian demigods that are supposedly near level one thousand, with hundreds of Legendary champions. How true it is, Cain doesn't know, but it was a really good story, and the sun has set before they're done drinking.

Vala, ever the reliable one, has found them an Inn near the docks and informed the sailmaker where they'll be found, so the party turns in for the night, eagerly awaiting the renovations of their new ship.

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

## **Chapter 208 - 206**

First thing in the morning, Jessop and the kids from the Orphanage come to show them their freshly renovated ship. They got all the work done last night and it's now had time to dry. They're especially proud of the nonslip paint on the deck, as it's the hardest bit to apply right, being a textured surface.

Heading out to the docks, Cain finds the Sail Maker and his crew hanging the new sails, two Gray and one Mint Green mainsails, with two mint green and one gray headsail, plus a small collection of gold-colored square topsails. Gaff-rigged, the sailmaker calls it, indicating the four-sided shape of the mainsails. In all, there are a lot of sails to this ship, many more than Cain expected, having thought that there would be a total of four, with one for each Mast and one in front.

Nila seems impressed by the new sails though and is checking the rigging carefully, as it was all replaced yesterday. It doesn't look like she's found any mistakes or damaged attachment points, and nods happily at some blocks and pulleys that have been replaced with new ones. Going by how impressed she looks this wasn't a cheap refit.

It's not like they can't afford it so Cain heads below decks with Jessop and a few of the children to see what they managed and decided to do with the interior situation.



The neon interior at the entrance has been muted to a collection of neutral tones, with only a stripe of neon blue left down the sidewalls of the main saloon as a homage to what it once was, and an accent color. They've done an amazing job of it, even washing the dust from every nook and cranny as well as washing the hammocks that serve as most of the beds.

There are two small and one very large cabin at the aft of the ship, the Captain's, cook's and Mates quarters according to the kids, but there are quite a few hammocks hung towards the front, bunk bed style and away from the walls so they can swing freely.

The very front also contains a chain locker for the anchors and four small cabins, two of which have been left neon blue with gold accents, and two that are neon pink and mint green. They've each got a small built in desk with an attached chair that can pivot front to back so you're sitting upright when the boat is heeled over under sail. Other than that these rooms are empty, though there are hooks on the wall to hang child or Dwarf sized hammocks.

The kids point out the entrance to the storage deck under the cabin floor and how the central area can be cleared of seating and the floor lifted when you want to load the vessel with cargo from a large set of top hatches that take up most of the deck space between the fore and center masts. From the looks of it, cargo is loaded with slings and pulleys mounted to the mast, lifted from the dock, and lowered into the hold. Unless you have big, strong transfers to do the job that is.

The cargo hold was made for Elves though, with a 170cm roof Cain can't stand upright in it. The living quarters are at least a little taller, enough he can walk through normally, though not by much.

Being on board and moving around highlights just how large this ship is at 8 meters wide, clearly intended for more than simply ferrying a bored Guild Master around in search of adventure. Maybe he will have to take some cargo with him, or some passengers going the same way he is.

The Wave Riders did everything with a crew of nine and thanks to the increased speed and strength of higher level transfers, for the most part at least two of them, maybe even four, were only necessary for moving cargo as far as Cain could tell.

Once the vessel was away from the dock, most of the work was done by the two spell casters and the two agile Rogues who took care of the sails with the Captain directing them.

Then it occurs to him, they're not on board for the functional sailing, they're still learning that. They're on board for maintenance. Someone has to clean, maintain the equipment and cook the meals.

That can be easily done with puppets, Cain decides, he'll only need to call Supporters for the four essential crew, replacing the Captain with Nila. Technically he doesn't need to Summon anyone. All his constructs have apprentice sailing skills, including the Companions, so he could still sail without magic, but he suspects it might be wiser not to sail while using the Companions in this way unless necessary.

The merchant vessels he saw with the tattered and patched rainbow of sails do it that way, and they looked like they had a much worse time of their crossings, as well as being an easier target for Pirates.

"It looks fantastic. Excellent job, you've earned every cent of your wages." Cain tells the kids, who high five in celebration.

"All pay goes to the Matron, and then she holds it for us until we move out. She's already got the old sails laid out and inspected, ready to be worked into replacements for the fishing boats and new clothes." Jessop informs him with a smile.

"You will be really easy to spot in the bay now with bright pink sails. And well dressed too." That makes the kids laugh ruefully at the thought of eternally pink outfits.

"We've made a good bit of coin today, it's not often we all find work, so we might even have enough for cloth dyes, then we're not all uniformly pink." Jessop laughs as they head back above deck.

The top deck is mostly flat and open, except for functional fittings and some thick windowed hatches to let light in, but there's a wheelhouse at the back for the Captain and a large horseshoe-shaped seating area in front of that, the only thing he can see that indicates they tried to modify this to be more luxurious than the purely utilitarian cargo vessels.

Exploring the hatches and the wheelhouse he does find a bunch of folding chairs and tables, as well as cushions though, so the deck can be set up for entertaining guests.

"Has everyone gotten paid?" Cain asks, seeing Vala over with the adults.

"All paid in full, and the old bits are collected." The Orphanage Matron agrees, indicating a pile of lines and miscellaneous items cleaned from the vessel.

"Perfect. It is time we got headed back to Assah, who knows what kind of trouble the others have gotten into while we were gone." Vala smirks at that while Evangeline looks sheepish, so their clones have been up to something. These clones get along decently though, so hopefully, they haven't been fighting back at the castle.

With everyone else back on the dock, Cain calls for a nondescript Elven wind mage and Water Shaman, as well as two Rogues. They're all clones of various crew members

from the other ships, should anyone happen to notice, and they've all got excellent skills.

"Nila, you've got the helm, take us out to sea," Cain says happily and the Wave Rider steps into the Wheelhouse, locking all the windows open so she can more easily be heard before beginning to shout orders at the Summoned crew.

They push away from the dock smoothly, and a gentle breeze catches the sails as they're raised. Only a few at first to get them away from the harbor, then a full complement that comes with increased wind and a following wave. The Mage and Shaman have both taken seats on the U-shaped bench, resting their feet against the central table for support. Sitting like that they can see their work and remain stable, but relatively comfortable.

On the Wave Riders vessel, they did it standing up, balancing against the rocking of the ship. These two aren't quite as smooth, or maybe it's because of the difference in ships, but it's still not hard for any of them to walk around the deck, even with the expected lean they've got going on. The ship is moving steadily, but not with the extreme speed of the previous trip, so Cain goes over to ask Nila about the performance of this vessel.

"We can go quite a bit faster, and totally overwhelm the natural conditions for a smooth ride, but with just one mana totem out, this is the intensity of channeled spell they can keep up constantly without running out of mana." The Dark Elf explains, helping Cain understand their choice of speed.

They're still overtaking the other cargo vessels in the bay with relative ease though, as most don't have the luxury of two high-level casters to speed them along at the same time.

"How long to Assah, following your chosen route?"

"About 6 hours at this rate. We're going to swing wide of an outcrop where the waters are shallow and the currents are harsh, so it adds a bit more time. But we will still make it there in half the time a regular bulky freighter takes or less."

Wind in their hair and the salty air makes for a pleasant change for the group, now all lounging about the deck, getting some sun. Except Vala and Evangeline, who have disappeared below decks, citing the need for an information exchange. They're down there half the trip, only finally coming up around lunchtime to see what sort of snacks have been prepared.

Evangeline has a look on her face like she learned she made a mistake, but after nearly three hours, Vala certainly must have already chastised her and informed her of how things are usually done in the group, so Cain is willing to let it slide without asking too many questions.

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

## Chapter 209 - 207 Sailing To Assah

"You know, you should have gotten a skill that taught yourself how to cook, instead of all of us." Laura laughs, watching Cain struggle to make himself lunch. They packed lots of ingredients for sandwiches and a bunch of premade snacks, but with the rocking of the ship, he's doing a horrible job of slicing anything.

"There's a trick to this, I'm certain of it. Once I figure out how to properly stabilize myself I will be fine." Cain replies, almost cutting his fingers as they crash over a wave. His agility is keeping him upright and unwounded, but he's far from being able to say he's gotten his sea legs and he can't seem to predict when the next big jolt will come.

Just as lunchtime approached, a section of rough sea, where the current changes direction and the water gets shallow came into view. The crashing waves the transition creates would make any surfer happy to visit, but even here in what should be the deepest and calmest part according to the charts, it is far from a pleasant journey inside the ship.

They could have avoided it entirely, but that would add over a hundred knots to their journey, and Nila is certain they can navigate this channel safely, going by the information in the charts that came with the ship.

It looks to Cain like Laura is flitting back and forth across the wide cabin, but, since she's flying, it's not her but the ship that's moving like that.

Nemu comes down as he's finishing the first tray of lunch, walking into the galley with light steps and bracing her foot against the cabinets behind her, pushing her front against the counter while she's got food in both hands. Was it seriously that easy? The area seems to have been created to be narrow on purpose, it could have been much larger given the available space, so Cain leans back and braces his foot against a low round railing that runs the perimeter of the galley, finding that now he moves in time with the vessel and can work properly.

"See, just a lack of experience in rough seas. Once we're through this portion I'll bring the snacks up to serve lunch." Cain declares proudly while Vala and Nemu try not to laugh at him.

"How about I'll deal with delivering lunch and you can go topside and see the cliffs? It's a great view, we actually came down to get you, so you didn't miss it." Vala suggests.

That sounds like an excellent plan, so Cain goes to join Nila in the wheelhouse, looking out over the pillars of red rock jutting from the sea.

"According to the chartbook, this all used to be one huge peninsula, with an island at the end. We're passing through what used to be the channel between them. The island is eighty Kilometers wide or was before the entire area collapsed due to an unstable iron mine that was overworked for the war effort then bombed. The pillars you see jutting out of the water are the old mine roof supports after everything collapsed around them."

That's both amazing and terrible at the same time. That mine complex must have been huge, but to collapse an area that large into the sea, there must have been horrendous casualties. The coast is usually well-populated, and thousands of square Kilometers of flat land wouldn't have just been vacant.

"What's with that current though? I don't think I've ever seen two different currents meet like that before." Cain asks, indicating the center of the channel they're about to cross, where waves are traveling in two different directions and creating one big turbulent area. That's not going to be fun to cross unless their spell casters intervene.

"They used to flow around the peninsula, then both head out to sea together, now they meet and create chaos here, while most of the current still flows along its original path," Nila says, pointing at the notes in the book in front of her.

"We're getting into it, Captain." The wind mage informs them.

"Full output on the Following Wave, smooth out the transition, and keep the wind speed up, let's get through this as soon as we can," Nila instructs their casters and the ride immediately goes glass smooth, with the following breeze picking up a little, sending them skimming over the churning waves caused by the currents mixing at a high rate of speed.

It's a bit disconcerting with the pillars of rock all around them, but the path in front of them is clear as far as Cain can see. After a few minutes of their high-speed run, the water Shaman reduces the output of his spell back to normal, recovering from the exertion and the wind mage slows the wind back down to what it was before.

Cain can't tell how fast they're moving, maybe thirty Kilometers an hour? It certainly feels fast in a boat though.

Right at the point where the seas calm down again and the casters would naturally be at their most exhausted, Cain notices sails coming their way fast, emerging from behind a pair of rocky pillars. Two vessels, three decks high and they're running out their Cannons. The side hatches have popped open and a black flag with a skull on it is being raised.

Bonafide stereotypes of the Pirate stories Cain knows from his past life.

Cain immediately calls for the First Mate and the Mage from Captain Selah's ship and their clones to replace the crew they already have, giving them a fresh crew with full mana. Two of the new Supporters take over the spells the instant they appear before Cain releases all the old Supporters and Nila gives a grim smile.

One of the First Mates clones climbs the mast for a better view and starts calling back something Cain can't comprehend. It's in the common language but it seems to be a coded system using numbers, so Cain can't tell if it's coordinates, a threat assessment, or something else entirely.

Nila casts a trained glance across the gap between their vessel and the Pirates, increasing excitement for the upcoming fight becoming visible as a twinkle in her eye and a happy smirk on her narrow Elven face. "Are we fighting or running Sir?"

Cain focuses on the crew, gathering as much information as he can through the system. They're all between level 220 and 300, at least the ones on deck are. He can call for 6 clones of Kone at this point, with the casters and the Spider Queen summoned already.

"Everyone to arms. Flying Forces where possible, or ones that can jump well. We will run the gap between the battleships as fast as we can while you take care of the Pirates."

They're designed as sailing vessels, but Cain can see that they're metal hulled in a modern fashion, so they're going to be much sturdier than his wooden ship, and his crew hasn't ever used the magical Cannons before, so a firefight isn't a great idea.

"Captain, there's a gap in the pillars ahead on the starboard, if we cut it just right we should be able to dodge and run, then cut back into the channel." The First Mate relays the information from his clone and Cain nods his assent.

The deck is full of Dragons, Seraphim, and assorted other creatures now and Cain can see the confusion among the Pirates.

"Attack crew engage. Nila, get us free of this trap."

The wind spell driving the ship forward easily lifts the flying units into the air and spells from the Pirate vessels begin to fly up to meet them. The Pirates aren't taking any chances on this one, and they've gone all out, nearly stopping their ships to attack the flying intruders. Even the deck Cannons are being hastily rolled onto wedges to aim them into the sky as the ships tack away, the tilt of the vessels making it easier to point the Cannons upwards.

Explosions light up the sky and Cain can see several Drakes fall, their wings in ruins, and wounds covering their bodies. The Forest Dragons that have a Kone clone on top have gone low to the water, hiding behind pillars to get closer to the Pirates. Once



they're in range, huge clouds of withering Dragon Breath cover the ships and hide the appearance of Snapping Turtles for a moment before the clouds are dispersed.

Given their much higher levels, the Forest Dragon Breath only caused minimal damage to the crew and it doesn't harm inanimate objects like the ships themselves. The same cannot be said of the Legendary Quality Turtles. They do cause serious damage, both to the crew and the ship. More transfers are coming up on deck now, charging the durable Turtles, trying to either kill them or knock them overboard in hopes that they won't be able to catch up again.

Whether that is a valid tactic or not remains to be seen, the Snapping Turtles can move quite quickly when they want to, but the crew is doing a decent job of saving their vessels. At least for the first few seconds until more Dragons arrive, drowning them in area attacks and reinforcements. Then the Seraphim begin dive-bombing then and all semblance of order is lost.

By Cain's guess, each vessel has about thirty crew on board, plenty to attack and conquer the average merchant vessel, especially one with a level 150 crew. Their advanced levels are a major benefit to them, but dealing with dozens of Raid Boss difficulty summons even half their level is too tall of a task to ask of any crew.

First, one mast is snapped, then a second, then one from the other ship, before a pair of white flags are raised and weapons are thrown down, prompting Cain to call off the attack.

"Nila, what is the usual policy on surrendered Pirates? I never asked before, because I didn't think it would become an issue so quickly."

The Wave Rider Companion throws her head back and laughs, her shoulders shaking as she doubles over the wheel. "Depends where you are. Wave Riders give them fifty lashes each for stupidity then loot them and leave them with their damaged ships."

That sounds like a plan to Cain.. They might be thieves, but they did surrender.

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

## **Chapter 210 - 208**

"Take us to them then, Nila. We can sort this out in a hurry if they don't do anything unusually dumb."



That's all the direction the Wave Rider needs to bring the ship back on course through the channel, gently gliding to a stop in front of the two pirate vessels.

"We surrender. Call off the monsters and we'll face your judgments. What laws do you follow?" One of the Captains, a large, swarthy human with curly hair and black eyes calls across the distance between the ships.

"The laws of the Wave Riders." Nila declares, striding out to the bow with a confident swagger. The announcement makes them look both defeated and hopeful. Nila already said the Wave Riders don't usually kill Pirates, only whip them and loot them, so they'll likely live to see another day, just penniless.

"We understand Wave Rider. Send your men across and we'll empty the holds to you." He's got a point, the Snapping Turtles don't fit below decks.

Cain motions for the First Mates he Summoned to head across to gather anything of value, keeping the rest either on the Queen Rose or in the air aboard Dragons in case the Pirates decide that a hostage situation might get them all emotional and change their minds about the looting and whipping.

Nemu sends the Felians she Summoned, and Evangeline sends the Seraphim. She also flies over herself, landing in the rigging, her Aura calming everyone down.

They don't take the food or fresh water and have the crew turn over the equipment they're wearing, leaving them in their underwear.

They've likely got more gear in their inventory, but there's no good way to make them turn it over without a lot of extra work, so Nila decides it's best to just let it slide. Half their crews are dead anyhow, they've paid a pretty heavy price.

On the second ship, they find one very teary-eyed Elven pirate, cradling the body of a young adult female, that was likely his relative. The others have taken the deaths in stride, even if they were lovers. His grief is much greater than usual for those in his line of work.

"Please, can't you do anything? I'll do anything you want, my life is yours if you can save her. It was her first trip away from home, her mother never even got to say goodbye before she sneaked out to join the crew behind my back." The man asks, looking at Evangeline, who looks helplessly at Cain.

"I don't have a resurrection spell until after level 200. Can you do anything? Make her a Puppet or something?"

Neither ship has a surviving Healer visible, the Summons are very meticulous about getting rid of them, but Cain does have one option.

"I can use a spell, that will resurrect her in a way. But the price is high, since I'm no cleric. It will bring her back to life for a time but as a Supporter. Like a Summoned creature, she will be entirely bound to my will until I release her."

With some luck anyhow. It's taken a while to loot the ships, and the spell has a time limit after death.

The pirate grits his teeth, hating the idea, but unwilling to see her die like this, here in the ruins of an ancient battle. "Do it then. As promised, I'll pay any price for her life."

Cain activates the skill and the body of the girl jerks upright, quickly healing under the influence of Kone and Su's healing Aura now that she belongs to Cain. She immediately falls to her knees, hugging the older man tightly before turning to Cain.

"Leafen, level 213 Forest Stalker at your service Sir. That is my father, Hallem."

"Greetings. My name is Cain. You should understand in advance, this pseudo resurrection might not be permanent. I don't know what will happen when I release the spell, but until then, I will take you to Assah, so you can say goodbye to your family properly and then we can discuss the rest."

"That's fine. I knew the risks when I signed up. We attacked a vessel we couldn't take, it's a risk of the job. More than a few militaries disguise special forces vessels as merchants to hunt Pirates." She's misunderstood what sort of vessel they attacked, but that's also understandable, given the circumstances.

Nila gestures for the Dragons to bring the two Elves to the Queen Rose before addressing the pirate crews. "We've gotten our spoils, now I'm sure everyone knows the price for attacking a Wave Rider Crew and failing."

Fifty lashes each. It takes more time than expected, as the only ones with a whip are Vala, and Nila after Cain gives her the one from the Demon dungeon he had in his inventory. But in the end, the punishment is served, and they'll have to heal the slow way unless they've got potions stashed somewhere in their inventory.

Nila orders the crew back to positions and gets the ship moving, while Cain waits until the Pirates are on the horizon and no threat before releasing the extra summons.

The younger Elf is still staring at herself as if she's not convinced anything is real at the moment. "This is a strange feeling. It's my body, but there's something in my brain that says I must serve you. Even if you give a suggestion, or look like you want something, it forces me to want to do my best to please you and help you. It's the strangest thing I've felt in my life. If this still counts as being alive."

"You've got a pulse, and that's your actual body, not a clone of it, so I would say you're alive. But what happens after the spell ends, I have no idea." Evangeline looks curious to find out, looking the Elf over as if she might change somehow without warning.

"Your level changed as well, to match the Summoner. But you've still got your second advancement class." Her father has a confused look on his face, but is doing his best not to release her from his arms while she inspects herself to see if there are any visible changes.

"Your mother will meet us in Assah. We can have one last dinner together as a family then I will ask the Summoner to release you. I'm glad to have you as long as I can, but seeing you living as a slave to a merchant hurts too much to watch."

"It's not that bad. The spell makes me happy to help, I don't think I've ever been this content with my life. But I did die and it might upset the natural order if I remained alive too long afterward."

Cain has The Supporters rush them back to Assah at full speed, switching clones when they get low on mana. This technique more than doubled their rate of travel and soon they're tying off to the docks, a collection of onlookers gathered to see the strange pink ship that moves with such incredible grace, like a Wave Rider Raiding ship.

That includes one distraught Elven woman who rushes out to meet them, their two passengers disembarking before the ship is even stopped to take her in a family hug.

"Come back later and we can talk." Cain waves them away with a flick of his hands and steps onto the dock to greet the Harbor Master.

A small fee is paid for the city entry and the bureaucrat leaves them to their own devices, namely dealing with inquisitive dockworkers and sailors.

The pink oak of the ship attracted a lot of attention, especially with the mint green, gold, and gray sails making her so distinctive coming into the harbor. Carlos has come over to check her out and inspect their haul of goods from the Pirates, laughing at their misfortune to pick on the one merchant vessel they should never have attacked.

All afternoon they chat and visit with the other Sailors, having the nearby restaurant deliver them a dinner to go with the abundance of alcohol they gained today. They drink and share stories until nearly midnight when the sailors all head to bed and the Elven family of three returns with somber looks.

Leafen steps forward with a serious look and kneels before Cain as if she's planning to beg him. "I've made my decision and said my goodbyes. Will you agree to release me and call my father's debt paid?"

The parents both look distraught, and Cain isn't sure if it would be worse to say yes or no, but it was her choice, so after a few moment's deliberation he reluctantly agrees.

"It has been a pleasure meeting you Leafen. I see no reason you need to remain as a Summon, you've made amends with your mother, and I'm certain your father will agree to my terms that he doesn't return to piracy." The older Elf nods his agreement and Cain continues.

"So, consider your debts paid and clear." With that, he releases her from the [Eternal Solace Denied] spell effect. Only, she doesn't fall dead. She's still kneeling there, looking at him.

Cain looks at the Elf, and she falls over with a solid thud, but then she begins to laugh incredulously.

"I'm not dead. I'm still alive, and Free. I'll never forget this, I thought it was the last day of my life." She dances happily around the dock, almost falling into the water before Nila grabs her.

"If you're not careful, it will be. Look at your status."

"Leafen, Species Elf, Forest Stalker level 1. I am level 1. I have 40HP. If I bump myself wrong I might die. You saved my life."

"What did you do?"

Cain doesn't know how to answer that, he just ended the spell.

Evangeline comes to the rescue for him. "If I can suggest a theory, when he brought you back, it was as a Supporter, matched to his level. You were alive and in your own body, but an [Supporter] in every way. So when he released you, you simply became Leafen again, but you didn't have a master whose level you could match anymore, so your body kept working, but your level reset to 1."

"You might be right. I don't have access to any of my previous skills. It's like I'm a Random Roll transfer that just arrived in this world. Level 1 with a second advancement class."

"If you'd like, we know a nice lady in the Beginner Valley that specializes in training new arrivals. You've got experience, so you should do well in her care, and moving you away from the sea might help keep you out of trouble." Cain suggests with a smirk. Char would have a great time with a transfer who has already gone to level 200 once before and had to start over.

Sure, they could power level her, but then how would she learn her lesson?

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

## Chapter 211 - 209

The three Elves huddle in a family hug, discussing their path forward. The mother lives in a village just inland of Assah, as did the father before he turned to piracy. In a stroke of luck for job-seeking, the father was the ship's cook and a good one at that, so he thinks there's a possibility he could get a legitimate job here in Assah.

He's grown to be quite a bit higher level than his peers here in Assah, a benefit of sea battles against monsters and with a higher level crew, so he'll have to wear the red bracelet, but that might actually help him get work if the shop owner doesn't want to hire security.

So with high hopes for the future, their decision is made. "If you'll give me the reference, I'll gladly join your friend and start over. Like a fresh start at life, I'm level 1 again; I need to do better this time and not chase my father into a life of crime."

Her dad looks more than a bit sheepish at that point, and her mom clearly blames him for their daughter's delinquency.

"Once you get your level back up, we can see about finding you a legitimate sailing job if you like the sea that much. The Guild has a little money, enough to add a small merchant vessel to the fleet if you want to once you're ready. With the benefit of having been a pirate, you'll likely also know where to avoid and not make a blunder like mine and sail right into a trap."

Leafen laughs at that, and her father tries to his amusement. "The spot we were sitting, whether you went through or around, you'd still likely have gotten hit. You'd have to make a significant detour to stay out of our sights, which would take you hours off course. It's rare to see anyone there because the coastal passage ships aren't high-value cargoes. The Captains were simply greedy today, and it cost them dearly."

In that case, maybe it won't be a recurring problem heading up and down the coast. Since they've got a ship, they should at least put it to use, not leave it to rot like the King of Behar did.

Leafen's parents head back to the hotel they've rented for the night, intending to go home in the morning, and Cain leads their recruit back to the beach house.

Looking around at the freshly refinished exterior with the guards on duty and the old Orc next door who comes out to say hello despite the late hour, Leafen wonders what type

of Guild she has fallen in with. They're powerful and seem well-liked by the community. They also have a wide variety of species and classes in the Guild, which usually means merchants or crafters, but what one of those Guilds could fight off a Pirate attack twice their level?

"Tell me, Leafen, what sort of class is the Forest Stalker? It will matter to Char when we introduce you later, as she guides low-level members through dungeons in groups and arranges for them to do quests together."

"It's a Second Advancement class along the Hunter path. It gets a lot of bonuses to stealth-type spells, as well as huge increases to accuracy and range with Bows. One of the innate skills is [Predictive Targeting], an advanced version of [Hit Box Targeting] which not only gives you the location your strike will land but calculates the most likely position of moving enemies to help you critically hit moving targets."

Now that's a valuable skill. There's a good chance she was responsible for a number of the Arrows that managed to drop Drakes during the attack.

"Do you still have your book skills? Or did you fully reset?"

"It's all gone. I've got the basic skills of a Forest Stalker, with nothing that came before it, but I was still saving for book skills, so I didn't lose anything too good except the previous class bonuses. I boarded the ship as a level 27 Hunter, and they took us out sea monster hunting on our first voyage. The crew is a raid party for the purposes of healing and such, so I just climbed the levels over the next few months while stuck below decks, cleaning and helping dad cook. It was half a year before they let me join the battles and now here I am."

That's no different from what Cain did with most of his Guild. Just bring them along to dangerous places and let them level up.

"I should explain a few things about our guild before inducting you. First up, we've got some unusual Guild Skills. I'm a Summoner, as you learned the hard way, and the System gave the Guild two related skills. One lets Guild only dungeon groups Summon Lesser Demons to assist them. The other allows every member to Summon two Epic Quality Golems of their own.

The Shaman who trains the rookies doesn't usually let beginners use those skills until they're competent and confident in their class, but she might make an exception for you since you're not a newbie. I wouldn't count on it at first; she's pretty strict."

Everyone present waits for the moment of realization after what he said sinks in. It's always fun to see, and this time they'll get a double viewing once she's in the Guild and reads them in person.

"Epic Golem... like the Drakes I was shooting down? How did the system allow something like that? That's beyond S Rank, giving such an ability to the entire Guild." There's the shocked and incredulous look they were all anticipating. It won't ever get old.

"How about we get you a Guild Contract signed, and you can see them for yourself. You'll understand more completely afterward."

"Yes, please Sir." Leafen's happiness is contagious, and a great cheer goes up after she reads through the contract and accepts.

"I like that. You guys should use the phrase Please Sir' more often." Cain jokes with his Companions, making Leafen blush when he says it.

"I'd like to say yes, as your true and loyal Companion. But it's just not going to happen." Evangeline chuckles.

"What she said."

"I would oblige, but your wife might hurt me." Vala teases him back, making Evangeline choke on her laugh and nod along in agreement. What exactly did they talk about when Vala said she needed to give the Seraphim vital information?

Leafen shakes her head, wondering how such a man became Guild leader unless it was by raw power. "You're a weird bunch. You know that, right?"

Laura flies over to land on Leafen's shoulder. "You have no idea. It gets incredibly strange once all the twins are in one place and excited."

"Twins? There are more, just like you?"

"They're all Summoned Companions, and one of my skills duplicates my summons, so they all have identical twins. Same appearance, stats, gear, everything." Cain explains.

"I take back my words. You're right; weird doesn't even begin to describe you accurately."

Cain hears footsteps coming down from upstairs and realizes the building wasn't empty; the people here were sleeping.

"What's all this then? It's Dark O Clock in the morning, and you're all yelling and laughing in the front room?" Mythryll says sleepily, her eyes locking on Leafen.

"Sorry, we thought the house was empty. Meet Leafen, a Forest Stalker who recently reset her level due to unforeseen circumstances, and our newest Guild Member. But what brings you to the beach house tonight?"



"Misha was feeling stressed, so I brought her to the library. We both got some new skill books made, with the help of Red, and I was going to learn them in the morning, then return to the library and look for more good stuff until it let me pick a better class upgrade."

Misha joined them while Mythryll was explaining, leaning up against Cain, half asleep and in a nightgown. "Come to bed. You're too loud."

"Alright, everyone finds a bunk. The only rooms claimed in the house will be those with people in them. This is our beach house of sorts, the only one we have near the ocean, so it's mostly used for vacationing and relaxation or when we need to ship things out that we can't sell inland."

Mythryll pulls Leafen behind her, showing the disoriented elf the rest of the house's interior. That's something Cain probably should have done first thing, so the newcomer could at least find the bathroom in the morning. He follows Misha upstairs while most of the group turns in for the night, except Vala who has gone to the living room to read.

Entirely too early in the morning, a cheerful Red and Arial are at the door, eager to see what Mythryll made of her new skills and to bring her to find more if they're not enough to trigger an acceptable First Advancement class.

They've also come with news.. The Traveling Merchants Association has put a Quest out for bandits along the trade route, and the System has assigned it an increased amount of experience for completion.

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

## **Chapter 212 - 210 Mythryll Advances**

"Alright, the first Skill I'll learn will be [Corrupt] a Shadow type spell that causes enemies to be attacked by shadows of their surroundings. Misha also got a copy of this one, and it looks like a pretty good area of effect control ability. Plus, it darkens the area for attacks that benefit from Shadows." Mythryll uses the skill book with no visible effect. Though that's not surprising, they're waiting for her to get distracted by a new class option notification.

"Next up is [Haunted Woods] it will give enemies near my Treants, and Vine whips a reduction in attack and spell power."

That one was the winner, her eyes have gone vacant, and she's not moving, clearly in one of the menu options of the Interface. A smile is slowly growing on her face as the seconds pass, and everyone gets ready to congratulate her when she returns to reality.

Inside the Class Selection Screen, Mythryll is overjoyed. The new option looks fantastic, like an anti-Druid. It has damage over time abilities instead of heal over time; it has corrupted versions of the Druid's summons and comes with a base bonus to transformations that will extend her Demonic Form duration enough she can keep it constantly active, with an upgraded version available later in her skill tree according to the description.

It's called a Fallen Warder and uses both Mage and Cleric-type books, so she will be able to learn some healing from books. It doesn't come with any healing spells. Only a damage version of the primary Druid heal over time. It can still grow mundane plant life like the Druids, but it gives a Shadow Damage bonus to nature spells.

The fact that it increases the duration of Demon type Transformations right from the start without spending points suggests that such an ability is a prerequisite and the most likely reason she couldn't choose the Druid or any similar class, despite being a fully nature spec mage.

Mythryll finalizes her selection, her icy white gown gaining black embellishments instead of the previous white on white look, while she puts her few saved skill points into the new class. Maximum bonus Shadow Damage for her nature spells, plus [Shadowed Minions], that grants her Treants and another summons an additional Shadow Damage bonus and unlocks [Corrupted Forest Friends], a modified version of the ability Kone could use to Summon bears when she was a Druid.

She's not ready to try that one out yet, though she bought it with the last of her saved points, because she doesn't know what will appear and they're indoors.

"Fallen Warder. The opposite of Druid. As I recall, you should have an adorable Demon form now." Arial says, and Mythryll looks over her skills.

[Demonic Affinity] increases the duration of Demonic Forms by 300 percent. Demonic Forms are now more suited to the Forest.

Well, that sounds interesting. Overcome by curiosity, Mythryll decides to change right then and there, shifting to her new Demonic Form.

She's no longer exceedingly short; at least that's her first impression. In the Demonic Form, she's now about 180cm tall, judging against Cain's height next to her. Her skin has turned to a dusky peach tone common among Succubus-type demons, with black streaks through it on her arms, turning to a Swirling pattern on her lower forearms and hands ending in long, clawed fingers.

Her outfit has become a high collared dark green sleeveless jacket that extends to the back of her knees, with the feeling of being cut from a giant leaf. Worn open over a form-fitted top that seems to be made of nothing but black wood in a branching pattern starting from a central trunk up her sternum, it is covering the essential bits of her chest, but not much more, leaving a great deal of skin exposed between the branches.

There are no gaps that she can see; the branching pattern might be part of her body and not a top.

Leaning forward, she can see that her legs are covered in a pair of leaf like Capri pants, with branch-like lower legs that roughly mimic a human leg and foot, in the same nearly black color as the designs on her arms and her chest, lightly textured like birch tree bark the same as the others.

Her head feels heavy as if she's wearing a crown, and she looks around for a way to get a better view of herself. She recalls that just behind Cain there should be a large mirror on the wall. She steps around him as he moves aside to inspect her transformation, letting Mythryll take in her new form in all its glory.

Looking at herself from a distance this way, she seems more like a Fallen Dryad than a regular Demon. Her pointed Elven Ears have turned ragged, and her hair is gone, replaced by a collection of half-meter-long and shorter trees with roots like black streaks extending from her new hairline down her forehead and cheeks.

Counting the branches extending from her head like a miniature Forest, she's now taller than Cain but still slender in the way of Elven women. A scattering of dark green leaves with blackened streaks adorns the branches of her hair, completing the impression that this new form is, in fact, a Fallen Forest Spirit of some sort.

Cain runs a curious finger over the branches, finding them solid but highly flexible similar to very green new growth wood. The patterns on her arms give a similar result, though they seem to be recessed below the softer flesh like they were carved in, or the flesh has grown over a wooden base, leaving behind patterns where it hasn't filled in. Her eyes are a striking gold color in this form, giving them an entirely inhuman look as if the rest of her wasn't enough.

Mythryll gasps at the touch, having expected the wooden-looking areas to be desensitized, but they're just as sensitive as the flesh; she can even feel his fingers through the branches of her hair.

She calls for her sword when he backs away, his curiosity sated, and gets a black wooden double-sided blade, with branches from the handle enveloping her hand as if the weapon had grown from her body. It lights up with the familiar Demonic Flames, and Mythryll begins to relax. It's still the same ability, just with a new look and a duration that will allow her to remain indefinitely transformed, automatically refreshing the ability as long as she has the mana when it expires.

Arial looks her over even more closely than Cain, turning her side to side, even running a hand across her chest to compare the feeling to some notion in her mind. "Odd, I thought this was a mage and Cleric combination class, a spell caster like the Druid, only more combat and less healing-oriented, but that sword looks more like a melee combat class."

"The Sword and Demonic Flames are from a transformation ability I already had. The one from this class comes much later in the skill tree. I only had enough points for the most basic of upgrades."

Feeling the Black Dragon's intimate touch, Mythryll understands what Lickity went through. She's showing far too much skin for her own peace of mind, even if it looks like she's mostly covered.

"But for the more important reason that we came so early—the quest for the bandits along the trade routes. We were hoping to catch you before you left. It's an excellent experience, and the first half of the route is along the way to your castle in the desert. If you could take the quest and clear a good portion of the roads from here to Montauk, the Merchants would be overjoyed." Red cuts in before they can get sidetracked again.

"We could do that. Send Leafen home with Char and then walk our way to the Exit City. It would take a while, but I don't think we're in a rush to do anything else right now."

"Since I'm level 1 again, I could be the bait. Leave a low-level woman out in the open to tempt the bandits." Leafen suggests, but Mythryll shakes her head, the branches rustling in the wind.

"No, we don't want to risk you getting killed. We can use Puppets for that; they're level 15, and Cain can create quite a few of them, so it's less suspicious."

"Plus, I'm already here. Did you get an upgrade? That new Dryad form is adorable." Char's voice sounds from the basement door, jogging over to give Mythryll the same thorough inspection Arial did.

"Um, if you don't mind, the wooden-looking bits are part of me, not clothing." The Elf stammers when the excited Shaman gets a bit too handsy.

"Sorry about that; I thought it was armor." Char shrugs, unrepentant.

"Leafen, meet Char. She's in charge of our new member training. Char meet Leafen, formerly over level 200, but she had her level reset to the beginning and her accumulated skills wiped out. She's got plenty of combat experience though, and good Archery skills, so you can move her through the early levels a bit faster than usual if you like."

"Well met. Now follow me, young lady; there's a group waiting for a damage dealer ready to go into the dungeon. Do you have equipment?"

"I've got my backup gear still. It's not great, but it should do." She confirms.

"Wait, I'll return your original equipment. You're one of us now, so there's no point in keeping it from you." Cain declares, opening a trade window and handing over the bag of stuff he's pretty sure came from the Forest Stalker. If not, the person was an Archer of some sort with decent gear, so close enough.

"Thank You Sir. I'll take good care of it.." Leafen smiles and waves goodbye, following the Shaman, who has already begun heading back downstairs.

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

## Chapter 213 - 211

Red hands over a scroll with the seal of Earl RhickJaymz on it and a dangling blue tassel bearing the mark of the Traveling Merchant Association, the official quest listing. Placing his hand on it is enough to trigger the quest, a simple and open-ended one, giving a bonus experience for every group of bandits eliminated based on their combined level.

A few high-level ones or many low-level ones were the same in the quest rewards, encouraging mission takers to eliminate as many as possible and not just cherry-pick the high-value ones.

Most of the caravan merchants don't have a system, so even relatively low-level bandits can be a problem. The first few levels they're nothing a skilled fighter can't deal with, but by level 30, they're so far beyond those without an interface that the battle would be hopeless.

"So, are you fine ladies coming with me for the quest? Or are you busy?"

"Let's go. Being cooped up in the house is boring, and a nice journey might be just the thing. Maybe with a smaller group, so we make better targets?"

Mythryll has a point. Bringing along a half dozen or more First Advancement fighters would make most low-level bandits run and hide. But with just the three of them, it

wouldn't be nearly as noticeable, especially if someone was in the wagon. Maybe it's time to change up his traveling style?

"How about four? Four isn't too many, right?" Elmira asks, flying in the front window.

"Sure, that should be fine. Everyone needs a Pocket Pixie."

The question is, what to do with the Companions. In combat, they're often essential, so Cain doesn't want to leave them somewhere else. Maybe just a Merger to cut down the total visible numbers? The combination of voices in his head might be interesting. That's the solution for sure. He will merge with the Companions instead of keeping Oath Breakers merged. Who knows, he might even get something cool out of it.

Cain calls the single copy of his Companions currently accompanying him to Merge with him, reducing their group size. The effect is somewhat disorienting, as they all decided to take the opportunity to have a conversation in his head.

[Skill Gained] Wrath Aura

[Skill Gained] Troubadour's Transformation

[Skill Gained] Ice Fog Breath

[Skill Gained] Water Affinity

[Skill Gained] Grace of the Seraphim

That last one Cain needs to turn down in a hurry. Misha has her hands in his pants before he's finished quieting the conversation in his head enough to focus, and Mythryll is looking at him like he's a new form of candy.

"Sorry about that. When I merged with them, I gained the Seraphim Aura, and it defaults to full blast."

Mythryll shakes her head as she comes to her senses, while Misha gives him one last jiggle before removing her hand and blushing.

"This might be the smallest group we've had since I met you. It's strange seeing you without all your supporters around now." Elmira says with a musical giggle, fading from sight then reappearing when she lands in Mythryll's tree-like hair.

"Oh, this form is good. It's got branches and a Pocket and is extra warm like a Demon." The Pixie declares. Where does it even have a pocket, though? Inside the sleeveless coat, maybe?

"I'm not sure I'll stay transformed all the time. It stands out. Being an Elf feels more natural and better dressed."

"That's fine; Elves smell good too. So when are we going? Should we make our own caravan? Maybe join one?"

"How about we make our own? That way we're not risking innocent bystanders when we hunt for bandits?" Mythryll suggests.

"If you'd like, I can get you a carriage like the Lesser Nobles use. With that and some mounts, you should be all set." They had almost forgotten that Arial and Red were still in the room until she spoke.

"That would do, but what would we use for mounts? Camels?"

"How about Nightmares? They're a form of Demonic Horse that I can Summon now, and they're immune to the desert heat. Would they be fine or too out of the ordinary?"

Red ponders Mythryll's question for a moment before nodding his agreement. "They'll do. If you can call enough of them. The carriage needs four, and you'll need at least that many guards to be believable."

That's too many for her to manage. But if she calls one, Cain can call them instead. "The boss can call the ones for the journey. They're Lesser Golems of the Demon Variety; he can call enough."

Mythryll calls the four that she can manage, and Cain records them, then calls for a dozen of them while Mythryll releases hers. They're Greater Golems when he does it and level 150, but they still look the same, large black horses with flaming hooves. A bit over the top, but from what he knows of Nobles, that's expected.

"Those are perfect. Just flamboyant enough to make the bandits think what's in the carriage is valuable but weak in combat skills, so they're not overly threatening. Follow me to the carriage house, and I'll find you a good one for sale. Plenty of people sells them here before traveling to other lands when they've leveled out of this side of the continent."

They make a quick stop to grab some black leather armor, swords, and clothing for the puppets who will be doing Guard duty, and Cain reassigns eight of his Mining Puppets to guard uniforms. That makes a nicely matched entourage color-coordinated with the mounts. Now all they need is a carriage.

Since they'll be sitting inside it quite a bit, Cain doesn't want to get a black one and bake in the heat. Fortunately, there's a silver one with black accents and a white roof that should be tolerable in the desert sun. The plan is to have Cain pose as the carriage



driver and lead guard while the girls sit inside and wait for the bandits to ambush them, then engage and wipe them out.

This carriage has a unique enchantment on it, one that blocks the scan function of the Interface, known as a camouflage enchantment. That way, the girls can keep the windows open and not give away their relatively high level. Bandits will only see a pair of good-looking women with a low-level female entourage and one strong guard—hopefully, the perfect disguise.

Only one more thing is needed, a disguise for Cain. If someone from the former Montauk Guardians recognizes them it will be a real nuisance. He doesn't want his primary targets running away from him. But while merged with Nemu, he has [Troubadour's Transformation] available, which lets him turn into a variety of cat type Beastkin or Felian forms, even a house cat if he wants. That should keep them from recognizing him until it's too late.

Cain transforms into a strapping Lion-type Beastkin and changes into the Dark Elven Suit, looking every bit the part of a Beastkin Noble while watching as his Nightmares are hooked to the carriage and the freshly equipped Puppets choose their rides.

"That should be enough to confuse anyone we come across, at least for a moment." He declares, opening the carriage door with a grand gesture to usher the ladies inside, making them both giggle at the show.

"Interesting, it doesn't hide your Guild Tag, but it creates a fake name for you while transformed. Sambar of the Darklight Host Guild." Red looks over the Transformation with a keen eye, always interested in new abilities.

"If any of the Guardians are out there, it should draw them like moths to a flame. They don't get the chance to ambush our Guild members often, especially alone."

That's a point nobody would disagree with, the remains of the Montauk Guardians are getting scarce, and they're becoming even more angry and desperate with every loss they suffer. They're even having a hard time getting mercenaries now, their resources mostly depleted, turning them into petty bandits when they used to live like kings.

"We're off. I'll come back and visit once we're done. It won't be long, and I'll be looking to explore the west side of the continent. Plus our ship is here. Take good care of her for us if you've got the time." Cain gives his farewell to the Dragons, and the Demonic Horses start carrying the convoy out of the city with a brisk stride.

The fancy carriage and guards have everyone giving them a nice wide berth, reassuring them that the disguise is working and everyone thinks they're just some snooty nobles who didn't want to pay the hefty fee to take the travel portal to wherever they were going.

115 Gold would be the portal cost for this size of group, which is a lot of money for a one-way journey, at least to most people.. A thrifty noble would save the coin and use the extra time and these fast horses to get where they're going instead.

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

## Chapter 214

The Nightmares are an excellent choice for moving through the desert. Their flame-covered hooves don't seem to sink into the sand at all, smoothly stepping in to of the soft surface even when the carriage wheels have fallen in. This carriage has been modified for desert travel, about a hand width above the ground, skis are mounted at each corner, keeping the whole thing from sinking to the axles while traveling on soft sand.

"Now, this is the way to travel. Walking directly between houses in different cities just doesn't have that same feeling, you know? This is like we're on a real adventure." Mythryll, back in her small blonde Elven form, declares out of the blue.

Misha thinks a while, staring out the window with a pensive look. "She's right. We're crossing the desert on the ground, like normal people. It's weird now that she mentioned it."

It's certainly a first for Cain. Dragons, Dark Phoenix, transport portals, he's done everything but crosses the desert on the ground. He made it partway once, to the ruins of Muzz, while riding on a Primordial Shaman, if that counts.

"We've completely gotten used to being the broken characters if even just traveling places can seem mundane and beneath us." Cain laughs at the girl's assessment of what is expected and normal.

They're not expecting trouble during broad daylight so close to a big city where guards regularly patrol the trade route, so the group sets up camp just as it's getting dark. The Puppets don't need to sleep, but they string ropes between scraggly desert trees with a large canvas cloth over them to form simple tents before lighting a campfire. To anyone passing by, it will look like half the guards are sleeping, along with the residents of the carriage, while the coachman sleeps on the roof, standard practice if he's also a carriage guard.

Everything is quiet that first night, and they quickly pack up camp in the morning and get on their way. They've decided to cheat a little on meals while on this mission; Mythryll was craving waffles, so she asked the girls in Sunnybrook to make her some, which turned into them agreeing to put fresh meals in the Guild Bank, so there would always be a supply of food available to Guild members who are away from the houses.

Vala and Nemu made quite the racket in Cain's head when they heard that, going on and on about how he can't cook even on dry land until he finally tuned them out entirely. At this point, he was almost convinced they were quieter when out on the open. Inside his head, with only him and each other to bother, the Companions seem to feel no inhibitions about cheerfully narrating their entire existence.

They didn't make it far the second day when Cain's sense of smell, enhanced by the Beastkin transformation, picked up multiple unwashed bodies. The wind had suddenly shifted, and the distant scent was carried to him. They're behind the group, so Cain couldn't be sure if they were bandits or merchants, but after catching another whiff of them, closer and more apparent this time, he was sure they were gaining on the carriage.

A typical merchant caravan wouldn't be doing that; they use steady camels but are not often driven to a high speed. The Nightmares being used to pull their carriage are traveling at twice the rate most merchants would.

"There's a group gaining on us. Get ready in case they're hostile." Cain whispers down to Misha and Mythryll, hoping they're awake.

Only a few minutes after Cain caught the scent of pursuers, the scrub and stunted trees of the coastal desert give way to open sand, making the route both more accessible to bandits and harder to follow. It's regularly traveled and reasonably well marked, but the blowing sand often wipes out all traces of those who have come before you when a group has passed between dunes. That's where they are when they meet the first ambush of the journey, in a hollow between two dunes of this deserts slightly reddish tinged golden sand, following the markers that indicate solid ground.

Fifty men come out from behind a ridgeline in the sand, well-armed and mostly around level one hundred. The leader says nothing for a half minute, letting Cain stop the carriage and order the Puppets to encircle the wagon as if they were preparing to fight. That's long enough that the group behind them can now be heard, the second group of bandits that had been tailing them all day.

"Good timing, boss. You caught up just as they reached us." The greasy haired group leader in front of them shouts back at the second group.

"You didn't think I'd let you have a Noble carriage and all those pretty Elves to yourself did you? I set out the moment our spies informed me that a high-value target had left the city."

His tone is full of mockery either for his subordinate or for Cain and the carriage, but it's the content of his monologue that interests the Darklight Host members. The bandits have spies reporting targets to attack as they leave Assah. They should probably let Red and Ariel know about that once they've cleaned up the bandit problem.

"We will take the back, you take the front." Misha whispers just loud enough to carry to Cain's sensitive ears, and he taps the carriage twice to acknowledge he's heard her. He's not sure what's the best course of action, if they've got spies, they're organized, and it might blow their cover if he goes all out and they recognize him.

Instead, he opts for a more subtle sort of response, Summoning a group of Rattlesnake patterned Epic Naga-type Golems just out of sight behind the dune on their right and a pair of Primordial Shamans on the left. They all blend into the desert reasonably well and should give the impression that the bandits have themselves been ambushed.

Lightning arcs across the sand from Cain's left as a wave of fangs and steel flies in from the other direction, two dozen snake-bodied monsters striking from concealment to take out a large number of bandits in a surprise attack. Most don't die instantly, but the poison applied by both blade and fang weakens and slows them, leaving them open to deadly follow-up attacks.

Cain raises the alarm, shouting about Desert Naga attacking before jumping down from the carriage with Scimitar and Spear in hand. The bandits can see he doesn't intend to help them, only defend the horses from attack, so the group that has been following them circles around the Darklight Host position, avoiding the carriage and guards to rescue their allies.

After a brutal counter charge and a number of single use magical items being deployed, over half the Rattlesnake patterned Naga are dead, but so are most of the front group, with their reinforcements locked in a vicious struggle. None of them are in good shape when the Primordial Shamans step into view.

Cain pretends to panic, turning the carriage away from the battle and out of sight while also Summoning another dozen Naga warriors to replace those who have fallen.

"Damn you, coward. You'd better run because if I live through this, I'll kill you." The bandit leader screams as they leave, desperately fighting against the Legendary Summons.

He knows it's a lost cause, they're faster than anyone in his group, plus higher level and with their hidden tricks used up the bandit group is far from comparable to a well-gearred raiding group that could challenge Legendary bosses. There is no escape.

The bandits were also short on healers, having only one among the fifty stationed here and one with the leader and his group. There's too much poison for them to have a hope of survival.

Not long after fleeing to let his summons do the work, Cain gets settled into a shady spot with the Carriage turned back down the trail in the direction they wanted to go. Only a few minutes of waiting in that sandy but comfortable hiding spot pass before the Summons rejoin the group, giving him a thumbs up that means no survivors.

Being a proper gentleman, Cain returns to the battle scene, looting the bandits before having the Primordial Shamans use their magic to dig a large grave and bury the bodies away from the road. Whoever passes by in the next few days will know there was a fight here, but for the most part, they've cleaned up their mess, and they're ready to move on.

Cain keeps the summons active, refreshing the Naga to full strength and tripling the beastkin looking but Demonic Primordial Shamans. Each group of three takes half the Naga warriors and goes hunting along the path in front of them, with directions to report any bandits they find both to the other group of summons and Cain while being careful not to get spotted by anybody else.

He doesn't know what strength they might meet out here in the desert, but he doesn't want to spook the merchants that are still brave enough to risk the route by leaving behind tales of Legendary monsters roaming the area, so stealth is critical.

With the patrols silently sent out, the rest of their day is quite relaxing. Hot, but relaxing. As the sun sets, they have already set up camp near the oasis marked as an overnight spot, their increased speed bringing them to the oasis ahead of schedule. It's also noted as a frequent attack location on the map included in the quest, so none of them fully relax right away.

The Puppets all come to attention, and the Nightmares begin stamping their feet when they're alerted by the sounds of a merchant caravan headed north over an hour after what Cain would have called full dark, silencing the group's conversation in favor of getting a better idea of what is coming.

"Hail to the camp." Comes a confident male voice, calling from the dark over the rhythmic footsteps of camels and the squeak of carts.

"Hail and well met. Come join us by the fire; we've got fresh roasted chicken." Mythryll calls back, and the camel-drawn wagons slowly pull into the radius of the firelight before the beasts of burden are unhitched and led to drink from the oasis.

"You've arrived later than most would travel," Cain notes, wondering what drove them to travel in the dark instead of stopping in the desert.

"The camels got spooked. They do a particular thing when there are monsters around, so we keep moving. Better to move slow in the dark than risk a monster attack.." The merchant responds, coming over with a jug of what smells like a fruity Elven wine.

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

## Chapter 215

"You're right there. Nothing worse than getting caught out in the open by a monster attack. They've been active lately, too; we saw signs that might have been another attack between here and Assah, but whoever it was, was long gone by the time we arrived. Could have been the Guard Patrol putting down some bandits as well I suppose, but we didn't see a patrol." Cain tells the merchant, striking up a conversation.

"Doubtful that. Most guards are bought and paid for; they don't bother the bandits. They just tell the bosses that they never saw a thing while they were out. If you saw signs of a battle with no bodies it was most likely monsters. But if it's an old sign, they will have left. They don't stay in one spot long; it makes them too easy to hunt."

The jug makes it around to Misha, who looks a bit shocked at the fruit punch level sweetness of the drink, followed by the harsh aftertaste of strong liquor. It's definitely not Elven wine, it's just a cheap knockoff. "Did you see many signs of bandits along the way?"

"Far more than we'd like to. It normally takes us ten days from the mountains to Assah; we're twelve days in the desert now. For you lot, I'd say it's usually five given the speed of the Nightmares, but this trip, we've detoured almost every day, avoiding signs of bandits. Just cutting straight through the desert crossed our minds a couple of times, but the going is so harsh that we might not have made it anyhow."

"That's a pain. We were hoping to make a decent time across the desert. If we've got to detour that much, we'll have to push hard to make it up on the safer stretches." Mythryll sighs.

"The desert is never an easy crossing. Even if you go with a military expedition, you're still liable to run into trouble, plus the bigger the group, the slower you move and easier you are to target. I heard that some merchants now have given up the wagons entirely and are just using pack animals to make it easier to avoid trouble and harder to track them. The problem is the wheels, especially on a carriage like yours. They leave easy-to-follow tracks. If you block up those skis, though, you can lift the wheels out of the sand entirely and make it much harder to track you until you get back to solid ground."

"Not a bad idea; if we start seeing signs of bandits, I'll change the wagon over, maybe the change in the tracks will make them think we're headed the other way, and the wind



just blew in our tracks." Cain smiles at the merchant, pulling a bottle of sweet Rum, procured from the Pirates, from his inventory.

"Sailor's Grog? That is a bit hard on the head for this old merchant. But there are plenty of guards here so I can't see why a little sip would hurt anything." The merchant should have gone with his first instinct, he's a severe lightweight, and a few pulls from the bottle later, he's snoring peacefully next to the fire.

Once he's ready to retire for the evening, Cain does the same while the ladies head back to the carriage. The fire is central to both camps, so if they're attacked at night, Cain will be equally close to a battle from any direction.

Elmira finally made her presence known again once they arrived. Startled awake by the noise of the door opening the Pixie almost attacked them when the ladies came in to sleep.

"Elmira, you've got to stop going invisible. You scared the crap out of me, and I almost forgot you were with us." Misha complains.

"Sorry, sorry. It's just habit, you know? But I'll try to stay visible most of the time during the day instead of sleeping. Did I miss anything?"

"Were you awake for the bandit attack? There was that. But everything else went pretty smoothly. I think Cain might have sent out patrols without telling us because the quest said that merchants were reporting multiple groups a day no matter what route they tried to take."

"Yeah, I was up for the fight; I just stayed invisible, though, and tried not to get squished by the Naga while picking off the casters." The stealthy Pixie informs them proudly.

"Well, we need sleep. Are you joining us?" Mythryll says, stifling a yawn.

"I'm good; I just woke up. I'll take the first watch. That way we're not having everyone's safety rely on the Puppets and a couple of merchant guards." With that, the Pixie disappears again, and Mythryll shakes her head. That girl's too used to being alone. She doesn't even remember to become visible while traveling with friends.

The first thing the following day, Laura was driving Cain insane, so he released the Dragon from the Merger to let her fly around for a while. Every other creature he's merged with either relaxed, went into a sleep like a state, or completely vanished from his mind after the Merger, but not the Dragon. No, she just got more hyper and stir crazy until even the other Companions were begging Cain to let her out.

Once she was free, she immediately went hunting for Elmira, wanting someone to play tag with, finding the invisible Pixie asleep on a cushion in the carriage. That was enough



to get the Pixie to stay visible, and the air was filled with laughter while both groups got breakfast ready and packed up their camps.

"Pixies, is it? They're better guards than people expect. The size and the flying let them get right up close without anyone being able to catch them." One of the merchant caravan guards says in appreciation.

"Yeah, they might not be able to win a wrestling match, but when it comes to a fight, they're second to none." The merchant laughs, grilling sausages over the newly stoked campfire.

Their good morning doesn't last long, though. The Primordial Shamans have reported multiple groups of bandits headed for their location. They stopped two of them, but there are still signs of more.

"Elmira, Laura, why don't you make a quick sweep of the area while you play tag? I've got a feeling like it's going to be important." Cain calls out, not knowing where the two tiny flying creatures are.

"Premonition or Beastkin senses?" The merchant asks, indicating Cain's burly Lion kin form.

"Bit of both, I think. Hopefully, it's nothing, but I feel we're not alone."

"Incoming. Two groups of bandits. One of them must have Montauk Guardians in it because they're looking for us in particular, not by name but by Guild." Laura reports, flying back.

"Look out for Elmira, make sure she doesn't do anything silly and get herself hurt. Some higher levels can see through most forms of invisibility." Cain instructs as the groups get ready to move.

"No fear of that. Pocket Pixie is here." Elmira announces, settling into his shirt pocket.

"Welcome back. What way are the bandits?"

"Both are south of us and coming fast."

Cain looks at the merchant, who nods in agreement. They're after Cain, not him, so he will take his caravan and flee, hopefully avoiding being attacked. They're ready and moving on in an impressively short time, out of Cain's hearing range before the bandits enter it from the other direction.

This time Cain calls for Kone clones, instructing Su to stay in her Nymph-looking form, so she's not recognized, and to Summon snake kin instead of Turtles. If the bandits communicate, they should have heard about Naga attacks by now, so finding more of

them out in the desert won't surprise them. The Beastkin are quickly Summoned and sent away from the oasis to stage an ambush on the bandits.

Just by pure numbers, the bandits won't stand a chance, but still, he orders some of the Summons to block the escape routes north to protect the merchants.

"Misha, would you mind coming out of the Carriage? I've got an idea. They're organizing to attack because they've seen me here. If they see you, one of the Lieutenants here as well, and can identify you, it should draw most of the brave Bandits in the area to us without any extra searching."

"How will they know I'm a Lieutenant? It's not like we've advertised that particular ability."

"Easy, once they're in sight, you call out a group of your Summons and make a show of it. They will realize it's not me, and they should know about the Lieutenant ability from the other Puppet Master in the region. Then we have to hope they're bright enough to put it all together and decide the escort is to take you across the desert."

It is not a terrible plan, and with the bandits coming fast, there's no more time to improvise, so Misha decides to play along. The first few dozen bandits gather just within sight of the oasis, an intimidation tactic intended to scare the travelers with their numbers.

Once enough are gathered that she feels they'll get the idea, Misha calls out a mass of Lesser Acolytes, small flame casting demons from the psychedelic type Demon dungeons, and Warped Scribes, a Greater Golem level Demon that is upgraded to an epic by her new ability. She keeps a pair of Record Keepers merged with her at all times now for safety but doesn't see the need to let them loose just yet.

"You think you can take me? Keep dreaming.." She taunts the bandits, and Cain can see some recognition, they've been updated on who is essential in the Guild, and they're relating the message to their allies.

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

## Chapter 216

Now that they've identified their target, the bandits aren't holding anything back. They've started attacking the demons Misha summoned with everything they have and they're sending Rogue-type classes forward to try to ambush her and claim whatever reward they've been promised for taking down an officer of the Darklight Host.

"Keep your eyes out for rogues; I'm certain you're not the only one around that can turn invisible, and if you can flag them, with Pixie Fire or something similar, we can eliminate them in seconds." Cain directs Elmira, who is happily resting in his pocket.

"You got it, boss, I can detect invisibility pretty well, better than almost any other class, and if all I need to do is just hit them with a spell that makes them visible, that's no trouble."

Mythryll has joined in the fun as well, calling out her treants, probably unrecognizable by their enemies at this point, with the Shadow Aura they've gained and the change in appearance from vibrant green Fae forest to Haunted forest level gloomy and dark. Still, they're even more effective than before.

They also care little about invisible things, the thick roots, as well as Mythryll's Vine whips, grab anything they come in contact with, which includes one very unfortunate rogue, who has his invisibility canceled by the binding and is immediately burnt to ashes by the combined fire of a dozen demons.

"No wonder you said I just needed to make them visible. That was such a quick kill it didn't even look painful; he just vaporized."

A cry of victory goes up in the beleaguered Bandit force as their reinforcements arrive, another hundred bandits, all first Advancement level have reached in a group.

What they haven't realized yet, is that they didn't come alone. The snake kin that the Kone Clones called are right behind them, their light brown scales blending in smoothly with the sand of the desert, only the motion giving them away as an attacking force and not part of the desert itself.

"Don't get too happy yet; you're about to be ambushed." Cain teases the new arrivals, who ignore his taunts as the last hurrah of a man who knows he will die. They do respect his bravery, though. Even in the face of death, he's still joking about and not cowering away from the enemy.

Mythryll has finally been forced to exit the Carriage to get a better line of sight to cast from, distracting the bandits at the vital moment when the Snake Kin launch their attack. They're all focused on a third member of the Guild they hate so much having appeared that their backline dies without anyone noticing or raising the alarm. It's only when the bodies start to fall that they realize the giant Lion kin that Cain appears to be wasn't joking; snakes are ambushing them.

The clones of Kone are hidden behind the Nightmares since the size of the flame-hooved beasts is more than sufficient to protect the identical Beast Lords from view. The sight of them would be a dead giveaway to most that Cain himself is here somewhere. But with Su also in a small Forest Nymph form they're unfamiliar with

instead of the much more recognizable Forest Dragon form, the attack has somehow managed to fool the attackers so far.

Bandits are falling faster than they can regroup; the combination of Holy Flame from Misha and her summons with the Venom of the Snake Kin is a devastating synergy that leaves no survivors. As for Cain himself, he's still playing the part of the carriage guard, standing in front of Misha and Mythryll as if blocking them and the carriage from attack. In reality, he's standing there to give Elmira a better view of the battle as she throws the occasional spell out and marks anyone who tries to sneak away, ensuring that they're targeted and destroyed.

Unlike the Pirates, these bandits are mostly all lower level than the summons, standing very little chance with even numbers and genuinely minuscule odds of survival now that they're outnumbered.

As the last of the holdouts fall, the Primordial Shamans report in again, no more signs of bandits in the area, so they're moving forward again to scout the road and surrounding dunes ahead for new targets.

"Good job, everyone; let's get this all cleaned up, and we can start our day. Can either of you dig holes well? Once we've looted the battlefield, I would prefer to give everyone a proper burial, even if it is just in the sand."

The treants are happy to help, using their roots and vines to scoop away large amounts of sand, making a roughly hewn pit down to the sandstone base of the desert. This area has a surprising amount of clay before reaching stone, but it's all bone dry, where in a normal situation, it would hold moisture very well.

The desert doesn't get much rain, but it must get some, so Cain wonders what is causing the area to be so unnaturally arid. Could it be a spell gone wrong? The aftereffect of something used as a weapon during the war, in the way that the dungeons are just time-based magic run amok? The thought keeps his mind and the Companions currently residing in it occupied throughout the cleanup.

The sun is nearly overhead by the time they're ready to go, so they settle back under the trees of the oasis, unwilling to push out in the midday heat without good cause and no longer in a hurry. With luck, the enemy will now come to them instead of hunting them all down one group at a time.

They move out mid-afternoon, deciding to follow a branch in the trade route that runs further west. It's less patrolled and, in theory, a better spot for bandits to hide out, so they've got high hopes that they might manage to find a few more groups before they reach Montauk, where they'll turn in the Quest to the Traveling Merchants Association and collect their experience rewards. If Red was right about the bonus being better than average, they should be able to wrangle at least a level or two out of it.

They're about to settle down for the evening when they get a message from Maggie at the Guild Castle. The scouts have reported an increasing number of people gathering roughly ten kilometers away from the walls. They haven't verified their identity yet, but they suspect they're bandits, along with a couple of smaller Guilds, who intend to work together to take the Castle and then merge into one large Guild. They're still waiting on someone or something, and they look settled in for the moment, but they've been arriving all day long now and may not stay that way past tomorrow morning.

Tomorrow morning seems to be a bit hopeful to Cain, who thinks it's more likely that they'll see a night raid tonight to attempt to take the castle under cover of darkness. The location is a good one, without any form of cover for nearly half a kilometer around the walls, so trying to get as close as possible before being detected is the best bet they have to survive.

And worst of all is that he forgot to turn over the Magical Cannons to Char, who would have been headed back through the castle anyhow, so they're all still in his inventory when they should be on the Castle walls ready to defend against this attack.

"What do you think about carrying the Carriage with a dragon and flying back to the Castle in a hurry? I've still got all the cannons that I picked up to reinforce the wall defenses in my inventory, and they'll be short on proper defenders." Cain asks the others once he's finished explaining the details of his chat with the Orcish Lieutenant in charge of Castle defense.

"That works for me; if they're bandits, they're still part of the quest reward, even if we kill them at the castle. It's got to be better than all this baking in the sun; Pixies are not desert creatures."

"Make that two votes; I'm up for a castle defense fight. Plus, I'll get to try out my new abilities, upgrading the plant life inside the castle with the growth abilities my new class gets."

"That's everyone then. Are we taking dragons or those Dark Phoenix?" Misha adds the final voice to the motion to help defend the castle, and Cain mentally calculates the travel time needed and when the Bandits are likely to attack.

The best time is about 3 in the morning, so that the battle will be ending as the sun comes up, letting them attack in the dark, but have the advantage of the light to help them clear out the remaining defenders should they succeed, with time to retreat before the sun is up if they don't.

"I'll call Danni to bring us the Carriage, but we can all go back on the Phoenix, which is much harder to detect while it's traveling. I don't know who all else is there, but hopefully, Cixelcid has gotten Lickity to Sunnybrook, and they're not hanging out with the Spiders still.. She's got to be extremely pregnant by now, and the stress won't be good for her or the triplets."

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

## Chapter 217 - Under Siege

The flight of Dark Phoenix gets them to the Castle within an hour, giving them time for Cain to start setting up all the magical Cannons he's acquired and assigning Puppets to the defense force. With the extra Cannons they've gained from the pirate ships, he's got just over a hundred now, enough to give constant covering fire at every point along the walls. You don't need to be particularly strong to operate the Cannons; you need bodies, an area where the puppets excel.

Cain releases all his Companions from Merger and has them and their clones Summon their Bonded Forces, while Cain calls out the rest of his summons, including six Oath Breakers, since Danni is taking one of his base Legendary summons. That pair of Legendary Dragons won't be here for another hour, as they're flying high above the cloud cover to avoid detection.

The night is overcast, thin clouds giving the light from a half-moon a dim glow in the sand. Enough for those with decent night vision to fight by, but Cain doesn't want to leave anything to chance.

"We need flares. The ones with parachutes that will light up the area for a half-hour at a time if that's possible. Can we get them or make them?"

"I have a Flare Burst spell." Misaki, the half Dryad fire mage, declares.

"Long time no see. How have things been?" Misha pulls the tiny mage into a hug before noticing her sad look.

"Relationship troubles, you know how it is. But I'm better. I was going to do the Dwarven dungeon here at the castle with Cid and a few others tomorrow, but I don't think they're here yet." Cain looks through the Guild roster at the mention of relationship troubles, having suspected that she and Lysander were broken up last time he saw her, and notices he's no longer in the Guild.

So it's irreconcilable then.

"We're avoiding notifying the rest of the Guild about what's happening at the castle in case the other houses get attacked. We don't want anywhere left undefended. As long as there's a decent force at Montauk to back up the guards that Symbia left there, we should be alright."

"I was there this morning; there's a half dozen of us living there full time now since the desert is too hot for most of us to move here before the underground is finished. The keep is beautiful and all, but not optimal for Fae who are used to the mountains and Forests."

That's plenty. Lickity might be out of action due to pregnancy for a while longer, but even a handful of members, plus their summons, is plenty to defend a Guild House inside of a major city.

Laura and Elmira have gone out to scout since their small forms are most difficult to spot, especially with the Pixie using her abduction skill to make one of the Dragons invisible as well.

Their initial scans find that an actual army is forming all around the castle. Dozens of bandit groups, as well as small Guilds and mercenaries, have gathered.

Many of them are low-level, unsuited to close combat, but good for trying to take over Cannon emplacements and infiltrate buildings, things usually staffed by beginners or employees without systems. Locking the defenders outdoors and turning their defenses on them works very well in most sieges.

The Darklight Host is ready when Danni shows up with the Carriage, dropping quickly from the clouds to place it in the courtyard by the portals before Cain thanks him and swaps the Dragon for more Oath Breakers. Their short-range teleport should cause chaos among the attackers during a night raid. At least Cain hopes so.

Evangeline reminds him to get back into his combat gear instead of dressing like a Beastkin noble, smirking when the belt doubles her and her Bonded Forces of Seraphim Crusaders. Within seconds 128 armored Seraphim are in formation and waiting for the command to attack. It's quite the sight to see, even with many Dragons and Drakes around the castle grounds.

[They're beginning to Summon reinforcements now. Elementals, Treants, I see a few Wisps.] Elmira sends Cain a private message after a few more hours of waiting and watching.

It's time then. Cain sends out a Raid Party invitation to everyone who is currently in the Castle, making them all easy to monitor and allowing party messaging. The Sculptors are here underground and join the raiding party, but note that they're lousy fighters and will hide underground after securing the entrance.

Which is probably for the best, the underground levels need security too, and he can't leave it all to the Spider Queen. Plus, Symbia is First Advancement, so she can Summon pretty decent Epic Golems with the [Benevolent Leader] Guild Skill to help them out.



All is quiet for a moment before Elmira, and both Laura clones come flitting back in at a high rate of speed. "There's a Lieutenant here. We didn't see another Puppet Master, but at least one Lieutenant of Gillibrand is here."

That was his response to finding out about Cain? To send his subordinates to attack? Cain wonders if it's possible he wants to be the only Puppet Master on this side of the continent, maintaining his power base as arguably the single most influential transfer, politically if not physically, though that might also be close to accurate. Others might call themselves mayor or King, but they still rely on others to run their Kingdom. Gillibrand is run by one single person, plus his summons.

"What level was it? He went General first, so I need to know what else they've gained."

"Level 317. They can call a lot of Summons, but I think you might have more still." That's good news as it means the Puppet Master Gillibrand, who named a city after himself, hasn't made Knight yet to increase the durability and damage of his summons.

"Master Cain. I have found the Puppet Master. He is merged with ten of his Greater Golems, and he is hiding to the west, opposite his Lieutenant in the East, along with a mercenary force of humans." One of the Oath Breakers reports, having taken the initiative to search the battlefield.

"Do we have total numbers yet?"

"Counting low levels and the reinforcements we've found, the count comes to roughly five thousand."

This is no mere bandit raid; they've gone all out to attack the castle. The question is, why? Anyone who understands siege warfare knows it will be a bloodbath, but still, they're attempting it.

[Class Quest Initiated: There Can Be Only One] when a Puppet Master kills another Puppet Master, they gain additional Lieutenants equal to the number possessed by the defeated Puppet Master, as well as knowledge of all Summon Types kept by the defeated party.

Additional Lieutenants plus all the forms he knows for his summons? No wonder Gillibrand wants him dead. He must have received this message earlier than Cain did and moved to eliminate his rival while he still had a significant level advantage.

Cain has also begun to understand why it's such a rare class. Because the moment one finds out that another has been spotted, they most likely hunt and kill them. That also makes it imperative that Cain builds up his level as quickly as possible. Who knows when he's going to run into another Puppet Master.

The Flame Sisters that Maggie, the Orcish Lieutenant, has stationed in the walls report signs of movement, a report soon seconded by the Oath Breakers who are keeping tabs on the armies. They've started to move in, now that their Forces are gathered.

"They should be at the ridge soon," Maggie reports moments before Cain's enhanced hearing can also pick up the sounds of an army moving through the desert.

"Send up the flares all around the perimeter; I want those dunes bright. Once the enemy commits to the attack, all Cannons and Hwacha fire at will." Cain gives his orders only seconds before a tide of giants becomes visible from the East and West, while humans begin rushing into view from the north and south.

Cain wonders what's with the lack of creativity in Summons. There are no enemy flying units, no nearly indestructible wall Breakers, no teleporting assassins. Just giants and humans. As far as Cain can tell, Gillibrand hasn't even Summoned any other Summoners. Is the man possibly an idiot? Or is the ability to record additional forms a hidden skill?

Cain gained it, or at least was informed of its existence at the same time that he got the Ancient Quality skill book that allowed him to start Summoning Companions. Did Gillibrand never notice its existence? Or does he not have it? Either way, the limited use of potential has greatly hindered the attacking forces.

"Fire at will. Dragons, to the sky, watch for arrows. Supporters, ride the Dragons out and Summon the Snapping Turtles into the middle of the armies."

With a roar that shakes the sand, the mighty army of Dragons and Drakes take to the sky, being met just beyond the walls by dozens of flying demons, the first flying summons Cain has seen. They might have been waiting for Cain to make a move before Summoning exotic creatures, not wanting to give the rookie any ideas that might help the defense.

"Seraphim, you get a bonus versus demons. Go assist the Dragons and happy hunting." Evangeline and her three clones are more than happy to oblige, streaking out of the castle in a burst of light.

Concerned about an assassin-type Companion, as Gillibrand should have at least one by now, even if he didn't get a high grade additional skill for them as Cain did. Equivalent skills for other classes are found in the Assah Library, so Gillibrand must have something that can compare by now.

The [Bonded Forces] ability his Companions gained when he obtained the Duke Rank also gives Cain an advantage in this situation. His smartest summons get very durable summons of their own, giving him the ability to have them command portions of the defense without him and without fear of incompetence or betrayal.

Out of an abundance of caution Cain merges with ten of his Oath Breakers, leaving only two to roam the battlefield.

Misha has merged with two Record Keepers, so her Holy flames should be incredibly fearsome, plus she's got a formidable army of Demons herself, making her well suited to Eastern defense against the other Lieutenant or Lieutenants and the bandits they're leading.

"Maggie, head north and organize the battle there. Sora heads south. Misha, you've got East. Each wall, bring two of the Kone clones and their Dragons for fire support and healing Aura. Laura, you can head to the south to assist Sora. Nemu, you're with Maggie. Nila, and Vala, head to the East walls with Misha.. I'll be staying out of sight by the west walls until we can isolate Gillibrand, and I can take the head off his insolent shoulders."

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

## Chapter 218

"Oath Breakers, find and kill the Lieutenants. Both of you go together since they've got a level advantage and their defenders." Cain instructs the last two Legendary Demons he's not merged with.

They disappear instantly, and Cain hopes that their assassination skills will be enough to take care of the Lieutenants. If the big boss is here, he should have brought both of them unless he was arrogant enough to leave one behind at home to run the city in his absence.

If he organized this attack himself, he might have been gone a while arranging all the mercenaries, which would be great for them, with one fewer dangerous targets and a reduction in total summons.

Cain had just reached the west wall when a cheer went up in the East, loud enough that even over the roar of the Cannons, it carried across the castle. Hopefully, that was a sign that an important figure had been killed. There were a lot of attackers coming that way.

"Summon me again," Vala calls out to Cain, her voice audible in his mind despite the distance. Cain immediately summons her, the twin Demons appearing at his side with a roaring laugh before running back to her position along the East wall.

He's not sure what that's about, but she seemed happy, which is all that matters.

"Need a fresh Summon." Laura also requests a moment later, Cain again calling his companion to his side, the Dragons flying away without a word.

"Me too," Evangeline adds in a sad tone. She was the first into combat, though, so she didn't do too badly.

After the Companions are done with, Cain calls a fresh batch of Supporters to assist them. Many have fallen in battle, and the rest are getting low on mana, so it's best to call them back a few at a time, so no area ends up totally empty of Snapping Turtles and healers for long. The Legendary Summons are incredibly hard to kill, which is helping to keep the enemy away from the walls.

The western front is relatively quiet compared to the others. There are enemies out there, but they've stopped beyond the sand. Only a few probing attacks have been sent and met with a hail of Cannon fire after the first waves of giants were dealt with. They must have sent most of their summons north and south to help the attackers because Cain's combat log is nothing but a wall of death notifications.

To keep them from resting and regrouping, Cain is sending waves of Demons, Wrath Bringers and Lesser Plague Knights who were chosen for their durability, into the Western Front attackers. Joined by a pair of Kone clones, with their companion Dragons and hordes of Turtles, the fact that the Western Front has mostly remained out of sight and Cannon range is not saving them.

On the other fronts, the cannon fire is constant, the booming of the big guns and whistle of arrows from the Hwacha is a steady beat, as if the battle has its own rhythm, or heartbeat.

Depending on adjustments needed and mana supply, the magical Cannons can fire every six seconds or so. A thousand total rounds a minute being fired almost sounds like a hail storm at some moments, a crash of Thunder at others when a group of them coincidentally fire at the same instant instead of slightly staggered.

The number of Forest Dragons and Supporters is getting low again, so Cain calls a fresh batch of supporters all at once to save mana, the diminutive forms of the Summoned Beast Masters climbing on the backs of the Su clones, ready to bring out more Snapping Turtles and spread as much healing as they can.

Gillibrand must have thought they'd killed someone important because the moment the Snapping Turtles disappear, the western front charges. Unfortunately for them, all the Supporters are currently here.

"Two supporters to each of the other fronts, don't leave them without Turtles," Cain shouts, turning to see the situation and calling another wave of demons to meet the charge.

The East wall is still holding well. Mythryll has joined Misha on the wall, her control abilities slowing the attackers while the summons rip them apart. North and South are now fighting near the walls, with some needing to be knocked back off in the northern regions.

In the South Sora head just sent out another Illusionary Army. The enemy now mostly understands that they're less dangerous than they look, but for the low level attackers it doesn't matter. The Illusionary Seraphim are real enough to do significant damage to them, and there are so many ground troops that the fighting in the south becomes a stalemate as the enemy struggles to clear themselves room to move.

It's a losing battle, more summons are incoming, along with Supporters with full mana. By the time they've dealt with Sora's chaos, they'll be facing even more of a threat.

There seems to be an additional Summoner here, at least as Capable as the Lieutenant.

Wave after wave attacks Cain in the west, whittling down the defenders and Cain's mana despite an abundance of Totems from the Flame Sisters that Maggie stationed all around the castle.

The enemy Summoner has called a genuinely savage form of Demon on the western front now, a high level Greater Golem that easily keeps up with their Epic Quality opponents before being slaughtered by the Legendary Turtles, so Cain decides to add it now, thinking he might swap some of his Golems around.

[New Forms cannot be learned while Quest: There Can Be Only One is in effect]

Crap. Well, at least that means Gillibrand won't be calling for a load of Kone clones and creating a mirror match with an added dose of confusion.

The south walls are cheering now, and Cain can see the sand is suddenly mostly deserted, where a moment ago, they were in danger of being overrun. The Oath Breakers must have killed another Lieutenant. With the East and South now facing far fewer summons than a few minutes ago, that's Cain's cue to get to work before their replacements can make it from wherever Gillibrand is to the other fronts.

[Oath Breakers, take me to Gillibrand. He needs to die before he can replace those Lieutenants.]

In a single stomach-turning leap through the void, Cain faces his rival Puppet Master. Gillibrand might be twice his level, but Cain has [Might of Many] and the [Five Tiger Spear] on his side.

Gillibrand's Bodyguards, a pair of wolfskin Rogues, intercept Cain as he appears, thwarting the first strikes, but one dies to the spear. At the same time, the other falls to a combination of the Scimitar and the Area Damage effect from the Oath Breakers Cain is merged with.

The Puppet Master himself is fine, losing over a quarter of his health, even with his level advantage and merged summons. He doesn't have Legendary Summons though. Not even Epic ones, as far as Cain can tell. He certainly hasn't gotten them from his class skills yet.

He also isn't a melee fighter, constantly trying to retreat to be able to fire his bow, but Cain is all over him, the increased speed from the Oath Breakers, as well as [Cloud Dancing] making him impossible to escape from.

The two he isn't merged with are doing their best to keep Cain safe from the army around them until Gillibrand panics as a spear thrust grazes his neck and calls all his Lieutenants to defend him. That would be the greatest, if not final, mistake of his life.

Three new humans appear and Cain turns his attacks away from the Puppet Master, chopping into the Lieutenants with rapid swings of his Scimitar before he uses Cloud Dancing to leap up high enough to spear a giant through the heart.

Gillibrand seems biased towards certain summons, his Lieutenants are all humans, nothing unexpected or tricky, and certainly nothing like Laura and Sora working together to create a flying headache for the lower level attackers who were intended to seize defensive assets.

The increased damage effect of the Spear takes effect as the Giant dies and Cain gives a happy smile that makes Gillibrand's blood run cold.

The increased damage applied in that strike should make every hit a single strike kill if it weren't already. A group of healers, summons by Cain's estimation as their level matches the Puppet Master's, is frantically healing him to full health after every blow Cain lands. But the damage has stacked again, and it proves too much for them to bear, all six of them die to the area effect caused by Cain's next strike against their master.

Gillibrand himself is in terrible shape, under a quarter-life, his mana exhausted from the need to bring back summons to defend himself, thanks to his lack of melee combat skills. With no Shamans left alive in the area to create a mana totem, his plight was just getting worse and worse.

He falls to his knees in exhaustion, clearly knowing what comes next. "Do it then. I've had a good run, almost since the very beginning of the System." He says wearily, and with a silent swipe of a Scimitar, Cain removes his head from his body.

Now, for the critical part.

[Puppet Masters cannot be Summoned]

Cain roars in anger, mimicking the Tiger whose form he had only recently taken "Sonofa... that dirty, low down, good for nothing spawn of a discount whore."

The Oath Breakers give the jumbled expression of rage a round of applause, while the few enemy targets still alive in the area stare in horror at the loss of their leader. All the summons are gone, except the few that their surviving mages and Druids called, and the change in power balance was too sudden for them to adapt.

"I'm so not done with this guy yet." The icy voice coming from Cain causes the few who were still brave enough to approach him, hoping for a kill while he was distracted, to turn tail and run for their lives.

[All summons. Clean up the battlefield. Gather any who are smart enough to surrender, and we will deal with them afterward.]

Cain looks down at the body of Gillibrand, and a note of inspiration strikes him.

[Eternal Solace Denied]

The look of horror on the man's face after his head reattached itself to his body and his heart started beating again with a sudden lurch is priceless.

"What have you done? This isn't life or even undeath. The Unholy rituals a necromancer performs don't come close to being this wrong. His summons don't have their minds intact."

"I was a bit unhappy, you see. Puppet Masters cannot be Summoned. Even after I killed you and ended that Quest, I still couldn't Summon your clone. But now I have you in person, and I can vent my frustrations."

"Please don't." A gentle voice comes from the distance, carried by magic, and Cain sees a dark-haired human woman in a red gown flying in on a shining white Pegasus. Two more additions to his collection. Oh, she was already known. Gillibrand must have had them recorded.

"And why not?"



"Release him to me, and I'll make sure he doesn't ever try such a foolish thing again. We've been together for over a century, don't make me live without him."

"Over a century together, and you didn't see this coming? Surely a few years penance is in order?"

The flood of deaths in Cain's combat log has all but stopped; the battle for the castle is essentially over with only cleanup left and hostages to deal with.

The woman, an Arch Priestess by class, and Momo by name dismounts and kneels. She falls to her knees, face to the sand, imploring Cain. "If you wish, I shall whip him daily until he learns, just please, release him to me."

[Yes, RELEASE him to her] the voices of the Oath Breakers in Cain's mind laugh, and Cain can't help but smile at their marvelous suggestion.

"Alright, Momo, I shall release him, and you shall whip him daily until you're sure he's learned his lesson. To never again accept that quest. I won't refuse him the right to defend himself, but I don't want to ever hear of Gillibrand attacking anyone."

The woman nods eagerly, seeing hope that her beloved won't be kept from her. She's high enough level to resurrect him, but as Cain's Supporter, there is nothing she can think to do short of killing him herself to bring him back, which might not be possible with Cain nearby and protecting him.

"As you wish, he is free. A punishment and a gift. Your beloved is yours now; treat him gently; he's fragile."

The way Cain smiles makes Momo immediately check Gillibrand's status, seeing that he is now a level 1 Puppet Master. That's, well, she doesn't have a word to describe what she's feeling, but a smile slowly spreads across her face as she considers the possibilities.

"Is he truly level 1? A freshly transferred Puppet Master?" She asks.

"Yes, and he will need to work his way back up however he can. Any skills he had gained from classes he previously held and most likely from books as well have been erased." Cain verifies.

Gillibrand breaks down at this point, silent tears of anguish falling to the ground as he realizes centuries of his life have been removed from him. In the face of death, he had hopes of resurrection. In the brief moments of slavery as a Supporter, he had hopes of freedom. But now, as a level 1 Puppet Master with no skills and only his starting Stats, what can he hope for?

Gillibrand had followed a path of power, advancing his class from Politician to Cult Leader to Puppet Master while having others fight his battles and relying on his abilities to influence the minds of the crowd. Now that's all gone, and he's nothing but a level 1 Summoning type class. No more mass mind control, Dominating Aura or anything else he has relief upon for centuries to maintain his political power.

"It's not so bad, darling. Come home with me and I'll dress you up, feed you well and play with you all that you'd like. Doesn't that sound wonderful, my pretty little pet?"

With that, Momo loads Gillibrand's crying form on her Pegasus and flies away, leaving Cain speechless and the Oath Breakers joking about how his life of suffering had only just begun.

Who would have guessed his wife was a closeted Sadist? Perhaps he always knew, but his skills kept him from being her target?

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

## Chapter 219

With Gillibrand demoted to level 1 and sent to the life of a pet for the woman he once called his wife, Cain turns his mind to more pressing matters. There are a load of prisoners being gathered up now, and he's not sure how his Guild members fared.

[Report. Any casualties?]

[None, at least none that weren't Summoned. Things got a little hectic there for a while and I'm not sure how many of the Companions are still standing.] Misha sends back, so Cain orders the Oath Breakers to take him to her.

She's with Mythryll, who is still in her Dryad like Demon form, and Misaki who just sent up a fresh batch a Flare bursts, as the sun has only begun to peek over the horizon.

Elmira arrives a few seconds later, covered in blood, but immediately sinks into the pocket of Mythryll's coat, as the tunic and shorts look Cain is currently sporting has none. A little over a hundred survivors have gathered here, spread a fair distance apart, possibly afraid of the Pestilence Debuff returning.

"Is this everyone left?"

Mythryll nods at Cain's question but points towards a spot in the distance. "The last battles were over there, and once you brought out the spear, everyone died in seconds."

She's got a point, it grants that insane damage bonus, as a percentage of his damage done, to the entire group. Anyone caught fighting in an area effect or against multiple target spells didn't stand a chance.

"Alright then. Guilds to my left, unguided to my right. Think long and hard on why I should let you live after attacking my home."

Most seem to have no answer to that, having been drawn in by greed and the promise of a better life in a powerful Guild. Then there are the few who did it for personal vendetta, wanting to get back at Cain either for Montauk or their friends that he'd killed elsewhere.

"Can we offer an apology payment? My Guild isn't large, especially not now, but we've got crafting materials from the Giant's Dungeon in Assah. Nothing personal, it was just the chance for an alliance with a Guild powerful enough to run a city." One Dwarven Paladin offers.

"Yes, we do accept bribes, I mean apologies, as long as they're sincere." Cain agrees. That moves them quickly through the small Guilds, leaving them with only one Guided member, a level 22 Werewolf Cleric, Guild Master of the Red Moon Pack.

"Well, little werewolf, what's the decision?"

"I, um, I don't know where the rest of my Guild is. I don't really do these things, I just came because they needed a Healer. Can we wait for them?"

Ouch, she hasn't realized, or hasn't accepted, that all her friends are dead. The only time Cain can think of that a Guild Master title would be passed automatically would be to the last member in the Guild.

"How about you come over here and wait by me? If they show up, you'll be able to see them right away." Cain suggests, pointing at his feet and the shell-shocked Cleric comes over and sits down in the sand.

"Now, for the rest of you. Some of you are bandits, orange and red flagged as criminals and murderers. I'm not the sort that lets that go lightly. But as there's only about a dozen of you, turning you in to the authorities should suffice. The Traveling Merchant's Guild is more than a little upset with your recent antics."

That's a serious understatement. A good chunk of them would likely be hanged if they were arrested, but that's not really Cain's concern.

"For the ones without criminal flags, I'll offer you the same deal that Wave Riders offer Pirates. Empty your inventory and your gear onto the ground and walk away in your skivvies. It's half a week north to Assah, so keep your food and water and one blanket or cloak." Cain indicates North and the bandits look glum. Even taking up their old profession would be hard without a sword to threaten people with.

"I'm just a petty thief, with 2 days left on my flag. I don't suppose I could walk as well?" One bandit asks.

"You know what? I'm feeling generous. Anyone not flagged a murderer can walk away if they leave everything behind. The Red flags will be going to Montauk for trial."

Every one of the Orange flagged criminals takes up that offer, dropping at least enough on the ground to look like they complied before walking away to the north in their underwear. That leaves just four behind. You've pretty much got to kill someone without an interface, by surprise or in their sleep to get the Red Flag, as mutual combat doesn't trigger it, so most bandits are just flagged as criminals.

Cain releases two more of his Oath Breakers, making it one for each remaining bandit.

"These fine Demonic gentlemen will take you to jail. Best of luck to you and I hope you can prove your innocence."

The Oath Breakers each take one person into their arms and Cain motions them away, causing the werewolf beside him to sigh in relief.

"Anyone you know?"

She shakes her head "No, I'm just glad you're showing some mercy. I doubt they would have if they won."

"We're not a bad group, just misunderstood sometimes." Cain smiles back, trying to reassure her that she's safe.

[Oath Breakers, take those four into the desert. Kill them and bury the bodies.]

"I don't know a kind way to say this, but I believe your Guild is gone. They either died in battle or left the Guild." Mythryll says gently.

The werewolf nods. "I checked the logs. They're all gone. What do I do now though? Can I go home to the Pack house with just me? Are we even still a Guild with only one member?"

Cain looks up the Guild information for the Red Moon Pack and sees that they're registered in Montauk with one Guild House.

"You could sell the house if you don't want to recruit more members, maybe join another Guild? Do you know another one you trust?"

She shakes her head again. "I was born there, in that house. That's all I knew."

Well now that's just depressing. The aftermath of Guild Wars always tugs at the heartstrings, even with whatever effect the system has applied to the transfers that makes them so numb to death and their own mortality.

"Why don't I introduce you to someone? A really friendly werewolf I think you'll get along with?"

[Belle, can you come to the Castle? I need you to meet someone.]

[Do you have any idea what time it is? I'm on my way anyhow though. I was going to do a dungeon with Misaki and some others.]

"Mythryll, can you head to Montauk and turn in this Quest while we're all still in a Raid group? If we do it now, everyone will get the full completion."

"No problem, I'll be back in a couple minutes." The mission hall is very close to their house in Montauk after all, going there and back isn't much of a trip.

Belle comes out of the Keep just as Mythryll enters, pointing the werewolf to the spot outside the walls where everyone is gathered. Belle has no idea what just happened here of course, as they kept it out of Guild chat, and nothing was damaged that would trigger the Guild wide notification. Oddly, they also didn't get a series of Guild War notifications either, as Cain had expected.

Cain is not sure if it's because they were organized as a combined army, or because they were representing Gillibrand, who was Unguilded, but that answer will have to come later, since he has no way of finding out right now.

"What's all this?" Belle asks as she reaches the top of the wall near the remaining Guild members with her Summoned Second in Command Xander following her.

"Laura, kindly go grab them would you? One each. We had a minor incident here last night, nothing to be too concerned about. But we've got a lone werewolf, last of her pack that I thought you should meet. She definitely needs a friend right now."

The Dragons set the two down next to the young Cleric who is staring at them in adoration, a side effect of Belle's Pack Leader Class.

"Hi, I'm Ginger, from the Blood Moon Pack. Our at least I was when there was a Blood Moon Pack." The Cleric begins before turning melancholy.

"I'm Belle, and this is my Second, Xander. It's good to meet you Ginger. You said there is no more Pack? What happened?"

Cain facepalms at his oversight. He should have mentioned that they just finished killing them all. Hopefully this can be recovered.

"They were with a group of bandits and a con artist who tricked them into attacking the Castle. She's the last one left from her Guild, so it gave her Guild Leader automatically." Misha explains softly.

Belle walks over and pats the ginger orange hair that the wolf was likely named after, before pulling her to her feet. "Let's see what we can do. You look like you need a long hot bath."

She then turns to Cain with a forced smile. "Tell the others I'll be missing out on this dungeon run. Maybe next time though."

"Thanks Belle, I had a feeling she needed the help of a werewolf, and you came to mind first. See if you can get her settled and decided what she wants to do moving forward. She's always welcome to join us if she wants."

With a curt nod she drags the Cleric away to where Laura is waiting to carry them all back inside the castle instead of walking all the way around to the gate.. With their departure, the desert goes silent except for the gentle wind and the sound of shifting sand.

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

## Chapter 220

The moment of peace is broken by a system notification.

[Quest Error: Total Deaths are above stated parameters.]

[Experience modified beyond limits by Skill or Ability]

[Class Quest Awaiting Calculation of Ongoing Quest]

[They say the quest is bugged. They'll try to fix it right away though.] Mythryll sends in Guild chat.

[Come on back then and we can have breakfast. No need to watch them work.]

After a few minutes Mythryll returns to the keep lost in thought and drops down into a chair beside Misha. "Do you think it's because that other Puppet Master attacked us in the desert and the System counted the entire battle as part of the quest like we killed thousands of bandits?"

"It's possible. But Cain seems to specialize in system errors, so you never really know." Vala jokes, cutting an apple and popping bits into her mouth as she thinks.

"If you have to use your hands to speak, put down the knife first," Elmira complains before stealing half the demon's fresh-cut apple.

"If you were visible, people would stop waving knives at you." The Demon has a point, and the Pixie considers it for a few seconds before discarding it as not happening.

[Quest Error: Invalid Quest Parameters]

[Level Up]

"Now it's really broken. Even the error messages give levels." The Pixie laughs, dunking her stolen apple slices in honey.

[Quest Error: Completion target Invalid. Target is already dead.]

[Level Up]

"Who did we beat so severely they died twice? Do you think [Pestilence] killed someone in the middle of a resurrection?"

[Quest Canceled after completion. Compensation Calculating]

Misaki smirks at the others when that particular notification comes. "That sounds fun. Do you think we will all get something good?"

"As long as we didn't upset the Laughing God, we should do alright. I hope they appreciate the irony of a city leader gathering an army only to become part of a bandit quest reward."

[Reward Calculated: Claim Now?] Y/N

"Do the thing. Do the thing!" Elmira cheers, waving a bit of apple around on the end of a dagger.

Cain laughs at the enthusiastic Pixie and selects yes to collect the quest rewards.

[Reward Granted] Advancement Token. Unlocks unique additional class options. Usable from level 200.



"What is this? Unique class options sound even more broken than things already are." Misha says, looking at her copy of the quest reward.

"It's got a clown face on it; that's pretty cool." Clown face for the Laughing God? He must have enjoyed the show.

"Well, we've got something good to look forward to anyhow. It might be more valuable than any amount of Gold and gear." Cain declares, satisfied by the result. Two levels and a gift are plenty for him.

[Can anyone tell me why I just got two levels and a quest reward? I just woke up.] Kone sends in Guild chat, making Cain burst into laughter.

[We broke the Quest system a little. There were a bunch of clones of you here when it glitched out, and the System must have awarded you for their participation.]

[Break it more often. That's the most excellent way to wake up ever.]

The Guild Chat logs have caught everyone else's attention, who all want to know exactly what sort of quest could break the system itself. However, Cain is holding off on telling them for the moment, so he can understand it and explain it coherently, instead of the random bits of information the others are giving out to specific questions.

[Guys, I hate to spoil the question session, but Lickity just went into labor, and she wants a bunch of you there.] Cixelcid cuts them all off with that one simple sentence. The very first baby born of Guild members is on the way, and they're all eager to find out what a Succubus and Vampire mix turns out like.

Lickity is waiting at the Guild House in Montauk, having opted for a midwife with an advanced Cleric type class to assist the birth at home. Supposedly Succubus births are straightforward due to the unique nature of their bodies but it seemed much better to be safe than risk a need to panic and rush to find a talented obstetrician.

"I'm glad you're all supportive, but I'll need everyone except the father to at least clear the room." The midwife announces as the Wave of Guild members comes rushing to congratulate Lickity.

"Fine. We will be in the next room cheering you on." Misha laughs, helping the woman push everyone back out into the living room of the Montauk Guild House.

Almost immediately afterward, the swearing begins, followed by cursing Cixelcid's very existence. No more than ten minutes later, there are a baby's cries, then a second and a third. In total, Lickity went from starting labor to three children successfully born in under an hour, causing every other woman present, even those not planning to have children, to feel a pang of jealousy.

The Guild waits anxiously until the midwife gives them the all-clear to come in. They can hear baby noises and a freshly healed Lickity apologizing to Cixelcid for what she said during childbirth while he tries to calm her down and assure her that he didn't take them personally.

Once things have settled and the all-clear is given to enter a few at a time, they begin filing into the far side of the room while a very bedraggled Lickity smiles at everyone, holding her warmly swaddled children in her arms.

"Let me do the introductions. We won't know if any blending of powers has occurred until they've grown up at least a few years, but we can tell a few things about them now. The Firstborn is our son, Samuel. Born a full-blooded vampire."

He's adorable, a blonde haired, red eyed miniature Cixelcid, with the icy white skin typical of Vampires and black fingernails that Cain assumes, are normal for an infant Vampire since that's what they usually look like a vampire is ready to attack, claws out as a natural weapon.

"Next up, and second born is Azalea. The older of our daughters and a half Succubus."

Her black hair is grown in more than expected, making an entire hairline instead of being scraggly like most newborns, while her baby blue eyes hold nothing but innocence and wonder, unable to focus on anything further away than Lickity as is expected of a child her age.

Cain can see the tip of her tail poking at the sides of her swaddling and wonders just how adorable and expressive a baby Succubus tail will be, given Lickity's difficulties controlling hers.

"Our youngest is Nefertiti, born as neither Vampire nor Succubus. The doctors assured us that this is normal; demonic Children of exceptional abilities often evolve in the womb to most closely fit their personality and powers. So they'll be born as a different type of Demon than either of their parents though not often in an entirely different category. We don't know what form she evolved to yet, though; she looks, unlike anything we are familiar with."

That's an understatement. Little Nefertiti has icy white hair with black tips, contrasted against ash-gray skin to look almost Dark Elven. Only she has white furred cat-like ears on her head, flicking happily against curled white ram horns. Her eyes have neither pupil nor iris that Cain can discern, being nothing but glowing golden orbs, and he can see that her feet have hooves. Her fingers keep cutting their way free of the cloth wrapping with tiny sharp claws the same gold as her eyes, and she's staring at Cain with an intense look, almost a grimace of concentration.

After a few seconds of staring at Cain, the cloth encasing her body bursts into flame, causing panic in the room. Cixelcid almost instantly douses the fire with water from the

bedside, but Lickity lurches back, her arms full of babies. At the same time, Cain catches the tiny form of Nefertiti, so she is now free of her burnt bindings and rolling down her mother's legs.

The baby Demon makes a happy noise, waving her four bare arms around, and Cain can see that she has no wings, but a leathery tail that ends in two spikes of horn, or perhaps they're a claw? They're Snapping against each other like grasping hands.

He cradles the newborn to his chest, checking for damages but finding not even a red mark from the flames. Misha casts a healing spell on her anyhow, and Nefertiti gives a gurgling noise, and what Cain takes as an appreciative wave of her tiny hand but doesn't stop staring at him.

"I think she likes you. But she must be mighty if she can instinctively use magic like that. Most of the Demon Lord's children don't manage any sort of instinctive magic until their first birthday." The midwife laughs, looking at the happy baby who has now wrapped her tail around Cain's arm and is chewing on his finger with the pincers.

She drapes a fresh blanket over Cain's arm, not wanting the girl to get cold but afraid she will set it on fire if she's wrapped up again, and the Guild begins to move forward one at a time to get a better look at these adorable babies.

Unlike most newborns, they're not oddly proportioned, red-faced or wrinkly; their advanced growth moved them past that before anyone came in, or possibly before their birth.

Cain moves over beside the bed, where Lickity can see him and the others can see the babies without obstruction, ignoring the feeling of a wet mouth chewing on his arm. Lickity will certainly feed her in a few minutes anyhow. At least, he ignored it until the feeling turned to a sharp poke, and he realized the tiny creature had fangs.

"You sure you want to breastfeed them? Neffie already has fangs." Laura laughs, pointing at the signs of blood on Cain's arm.

"I'm so sorry; I'll take her back." Lickity begins, but Cain waves her off.

"No harm done; if she wants to chew on me, she can. We can have Symbia make her some teething products when she wakes up, she already makes a bunch of similar items."

Cain almost thinks the baby Demon has fallen asleep after the first minute, her mouth falling away and letting him wipe her face clean, but her tail pincers are still playing with his hand.

Then, with a triumphant squeal, she removes the ring from Cain's finger, and a soft chiming sound fills the air, leaving everyone born on this world stunned, for they all know that particular sound.

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