

Leveling up the World

#Chapter 381: Settling Dust - Read Leveling up the World Chapter 381: Settling Dust

Chapter 381: Settling Dust

For the first time since its creation, the festival ended halfway. There were no tournament winners, there was no guild competition, nothing but a speech from the countess conveying a dire warning to all cultists and enemies of the empire. The public accepted it surprisingly well. Despite everything, the city had been saved, after all, the Star cult had been driven out of Nerosal, and all the enemies of the empire were put on notice.

I should have expected this, Dallion thought as he waited for the vice guildmasters room.

He had seen more than enough back in his village to know how limiting echoes worked. If he were to guess, he'd say that every non-awakened in Nerosal had an echo of the overseer ensuring that they remained calm and didn't cause any disturbances while the arena was discreetly being rebuilt.

Well, Nil said after a while.

I know, Nil. Dallion sighed. *This is why you don't like the festival.*

Oh, that's a given, dear boy. What I was about to say is that at least you didn't lose in the tournament, which means that you get to keep your whip blade.

The attempt at humor was clumsy, but Dallion smiled nonetheless. Indeed, that was one thing that he had gained, along with an unexpected level and empathy stat increase. However, a lot more had been lost. Despite all the efforts, there had been casualties. Some had died due to permanent effects inflicted by the chainlings in the realm of the city. Others had died as a result of the destruction in real life. That was one of the things when doing massive damage to a realm and if someone wasn't careful, they could end up crushed by debris without any time to react. Unfortunately, that was precisely what had happened to the imperial visitor. As far as Dallion knew there were a few hundred casualties in total, and one of them was the person who mattered most. In a way another had been reached between Dallion and the Star. The city had survived, and the cult had been rooted out as far as anyone could say but the main target had been killed, and chaos was already starting to form as a result.

He's approaching, the door told Dallion, giving him a ten second warning.

Thanks. Dallion stood up and straightened his clothes. After everything that had happened in the last few days, he didnt want to antagonize the man any further.

Youre lucky, the man said upon entering the room. Sit down.

Dallion did as instructed. Once again, he felt as if hed been called to the principals office.

You should have been kicked out, the vice guild master said. At the very least. You went against guild interests, messed with a one-of-a-kind artifact, even went into a forbidden section of the city as one of our members

I know. If I were you, Id kick me out as well.

The man smiled briefly before taking his seat behind the desk. Piles of scrolls were all around him, although for some reason not a single sheet of parchment. From what Dallion had learned, the man took the role of administrator for the most part, running things in the guildmasters stead. That didnt mean he was weak, though. According to Nil, he was as strong as any of the captains, possibly a bit more.

Adzorg came to your defense, the vice guildmaster said. March and a few others abstained. All in all, that as well as you saving the city, decided the outcome.

Saving the city, Dallion repeated. I thought that might have an impact.

Of course, no one mentioned the obvious: that for a few brief hours, he had in fact become the new Lord Mayor or that after that period, he had relinquished his power to the countess herself. With the city becoming the countys second capital, it was normal that she would claim it for herself, leaving the Lord Mayor to remain as a sort of caretaker with no real power. As a sort of consolation prize, he was made owner of the palace, but everyone with power knew it was of no significance whatsoever.

So, what happens now? Dallion asked.

You keep a low profile. You wont be made an elite anytime soon. March will continue with her expeditions, but you wont be part of them. In fact, you wont go on any expeditions whatsoever for a while.

I see. Im back to being a packrat?

We wont go that far. Standard leveling up and repair will do for now. The city wont let you meddle in area realms, either.

That sounded reasonable. They were being a lot more lenient than Dallion thought they would be.

And what happens to everything else?

The vice guildmaster sighed. That was a considerably more difficult question.

The empire has declared war on a few of the major kingdoms, the man finally said. In response to the death of the imperial guest at the hands of foreign agents working alongside Star cultists. For now, all the attention is to the north, but theres always the possibility things could heat up here as well. After all, a member of the local Archdukes family had been targeted, not to mention Countess Priscord herself. An alliance between them has formed. Let us not forget you helped her become the owner of two large cities. The vice guildmaster looked through the window. Anything else?

Everything was set up in one neat bumble, far too neatly for Dallions taste. The city had almost fallen, several balances of power had shifted, and yet everything returned to normal. The general was still alive and well, doing his shady deals. He had openly admitted to Dallion that he had helped the Star on several occasions, at least, even if unwittingly, but clearly wouldnt get punished for it. The mirror pool had returned to their usual activities, taking advantage of the fact that a large number of awakened in the city guard were dead or injured. A lot of Dallions friends from the guild were likely to change their views about him. He might have saved the city, but he had also betrayed them in the process, especially after they had accepted him as family.

I dont belong here, Dallion stood up. Not anymore. He could feel the surprise emanating from the man. Quitting was a rare occurrence for an awakened, especially after they had proven their skills. I know you give second chances, but what if someone messes up their second chance?

You wont be the first one to have done something crazy.

I know. Dallion forced a smile, then took off his guild pendant and placed it on the desk.

For ten whole seconds the vice guildmaster stared at it, uncertain how to respond. Finally, he picked it up.

As far as I know, only half a dozen people have quit since the guild was established. The man opened a drawer in his desk and placed the emblem inside. Half of them were otherworlders. Different excuses were used, but it always boiled down to the same thing. They wanted to move on. The question is, where will you move on to?

I havent decided yet.

Well, whatever you decide, remember that the guild is always here. Just because youre no longer a member doesnt mean that you couldnt stop by.

Thanks. Ill keep that in mind.

Dallion nodded politely, then left the room. In theory, he could have gone through the armory or the guild auction to check for a few more items with hidden realms in them, but he chose not to. It was tempting to split into instances just to make sure that Dallion didnt bump into anyone while leaving. If he did, though, Vend would get a whiff of it.

Are you going to leave just like that, dear boy? Nil asked as Dallion made his way down the stairs. *Not even a word to Grunt, Espezol, Spike*

Not at the moment, Nil

, Dallion said.

And your old party mates? At least leave an echo or something for them.

Leaving an echo wasnt a bad idea, but Dallion wasnt in the mood even for that. Quietly, he rushed his way out of the guildhall. Outside, however, there was someone waiting for him.

Hey. Jiroh waved at him, sitting on a large wooden chest on the other side of the street.

Dallion shook his head. Of course, shed be here. The fury always had a way of finding things out. At times Dallion thought she knew everything that was going on, just chose not to get involved. Making his way through the thinning crowd, Dallion went next to her. Now that the festival was over, most of the visitors had started to leave. That went triple for anyone outside the province. Some things even limiting echoes didnt have the power to calm.

Welcome to the club, the fury said. I thought it fitting I pick you up, since I was the one who took you here in the first place.

And a fine mess I made of that. Dallion sighed, sitting on the chest next to Jiroh. You didnt need to pack my things, though. Id have done it myself.

The fury tilted her head.

How did you know? she asked.

Magic, Dallion laughed. In truth, the trunk had told him precisely what had happened. How did you know Id leave?

All of us felt that way. Thats what happens to all of us who come from other worlds. Hannah is always talking about how she cant forgive Eury, but I was the one who left first. Were always searching for something, and always cause trouble for all those around.

Good thing theres someone like Hannah. Dallion nodded. Hows she taking it?

She seems fine which means she isn't. That's the thing about Hannah—always puts on a brave front. I tell you one thing, she's happy to have Aspan back. The inn could start serving food again. Jiroh stood from the chest, lifting it with her innate air magic. So, shall we go?

You know where I plan to go? Dallion remained on the chest for a while longer. It felt like sitting on an amphibious vehicle. After a few more seconds, though, he got up.

It doesn't take a mind reader to know. With a slight thump, the chest fell to the ground. And I think you'd prefer to go alone.

Leveling up, everyone had kept telling Dallion that he shouldn't do things alone. In retrospect, they were right. If Dallion had been less reckless, and told someone what he was doing, a lot of things could have been avoided. His friendships wouldn't have suffered, for one thing. However, every case had its exceptions, and what he was going to do now was just that.

Tell her I said hi, Jiroh winked. And come around every now and again. There's always a spot open for you at the inn.

I'll think about it. Dallion grabbed the check with one arm and put it on his shoulder. Thanks, Jiroh. I owe you one.

In that case, try not to mess things up too much. Both of you deserve a chance.

I heard you, Dallion thought. All the distractions behind him now, he intended to focus on the things that were really important. For a while, at least, the world could wait.

Leveling up the World #Chapter 382: Griffin Nests - Read Leveling up the World Chapter 382: Griffin Nests Chapter 382: Griffin Nests

Blue light filled the chamber, causing part of the mosaic on the floor to glow. At some point in the past, thousands of nobles and merchants must have passed through here in order to show their respects to the ruling noble of the region and pay the toll of passage. Figures of fire bronze decorated it, serving as a symbol of wealth and authority. Now, all of them were gone, stolen by treasure seekers and melted down for weapons or trinkets. In their place, however, there were nests—nests made of countless strands of iron.

Maybe I shouldn't have taken you along today, Dallion said to the shield strapped to his left arm.

If I hid from all the threats out there, I wouldn't have lasted long in this line of work, the shield replied.

What you said doesnt mean what you think it does, Dallion whispered while he carefully examined the mosaic. All the valuable pieces had long been stolen, but from what he could tell, at some point, this must have depicted a natural scene. He was almost certain that he could see a hedgehog of sorts among what was left. Shields that avoid fights remain unscarred.

Shields that avoid fights are called decorations. Besides, the sheltered types like a few scars here and there.

Dallion tried his best not to snort in laughter. Even after all this time, the shield guardian still managed to provide a chuckle. Joking aside, he probably knew quite well when to be on guard and when not to. Before being banished, the shield had been a high-ranking officer in the dryad empire. Now, he was just a piece of companion armor, though even so, he had saved Dallions life several times.

Do you recognize the architecture? Dallion asked.

Its not dryad, and theres too much metal for it to be nymph. Id say dwarf most likely.

Dwarf ruins, Dallion thought. This was definitely a first. He had heard a lot about the race, although so far, he had never had the chance to meet any representatives. Supposedly, there were a few in the imperial capital, but even that was doubtful. Dwarves tended to keep to themselves. That wasnt the reason Dallion had ventured into the ruins, however. He had come in search of something, and that something had little to do with ancient civilizations.

As quiet as a clawless kitten, Dallion made his way to the nearest of the nests. Up close, it looked like an iron mesh, the same that would be used for scrubbing back on Earth. The major difference was that the shreds of iron had come from the armor of the unfortunate souls who had come here before. Thanks to his forging skills, Dallion was able to differentiate between the strands as well as assemble them in his mind, creating an approximate image of the item when in its previous state. The next in front of him was made mostly of swords, although there was the occasional gauntlet.

Good thing I didnt bring Harp along, Dallion thought. Given the exotic taste of the nests owner, the harpsisword would have been a prime target. *Are you sure a chainling didnt make this?* Dallion asked.

A wild chainling wouldnt have wasted all that precious material, dear boy. The echo inside of Dallions head said. *No, most likely youre looking at a Shade Griffin.*

Yeah, I fear as much

Unlike the name, the actual creature at least the ones found in the wilderness were rather vicious. Unlike the other griffin varieties, these liked to use cold metals iron, silver, platinum for their nests. Most often, they would settle in underground caves or old

abandoned structures they would turn into their lair. The fact that there were so many nests and none of them seemed particularly disturbed suggested that the ones here were quite old and quite strong.

Drawing his whip blade, Dallion gently touched the nest with the weapons tip.

Gleam, does that feel real?

Dallion asked.

Definitely real, the shardfly within the sword replied. Look for a nest that has lots of dirt, rot, and insects on it. If theres one like that, its most likely an illusion.

Hold on. Dallion tapped a small cylindrical device on his belt. Up to now, that had been his light source, glowing in a fine blue light. The moment Dallions fingers touched the metal surface, the light became brighter.

Theres at least a dozen of them, Dallion said mentally. All of them seem pretty alright. Why dirt, rot, and insects?

General reaction instinct, Gleam replied. Thats the problem with natural illusion. Theyre always too perfect. Want to give the impression of something being abandoned for decades? Add a few dead insects. No one will willingly live with those around.

Thanks for the tip.

At first glance, all the nests seemed quite shiny and well kept. After taking a closer look, however, Dallion noticed another set of nests hidden further back, forming an entire second row. One of them in particular looked quite messy, more than it should have.

Slowly making his way between two giant meshes of metal, Dallion reached into the nest in question. Once there, he tapped it gently with his whip blade. Within moments the silver that seemed to compose the nest fell off like dust, along with all the dirt, revealing a nest made of pure gold.

Fancy, Dallion thought.

Id call it average, Gleam grumbled. Sun griffins have always been big show offs. Even when they hide, they choose a spot that is close to treasure. Most likely, theres a chest of goodies buried underneath.

Im sure there is.

To many, this would have been of extreme interest. Given the size of the nest itself, the hidden treasure, if true, had to be enough to set some for life. Dallion wasnt here for that, though. All he wanted was what was hidden inside the nest.

Putting the whip blade back in its sheath, he drew a dagger from his belt. The dagger appeared normal in any single way. As it touched the golden strands of metal that made the nest, they broke in two. Layer by layer, Dallion kept cutting until he ripped an entrance to the inside. So far, so good. Now the tricky part began. Removing his shield from his arm, Dallion used both hands to widen the opening. Three large golden eggs were visible inside.

Damn it! Dallion thought.

He had been told that there would be one. Now he wasn't sure what to do. Taking one egg would have been difficult. Three pretty much guaranteed that he wouldn't be able to fight.

You can always carry them out one by one, the shield suggested. Or just juggle them as you go.

Very funny

You have the skills, why not take advantage?

Ignoring the suggestion, Dallion carefully reached in and took one of the eggs out. It felt a lot warmer than he thought, also happy, as if he were holding a bubble of laughter.

Pure emotion, Dallion thought as he tucked it in his shirt.

The second egg felt identical. The next egg was similar, although he could feel a hint of mischief as well.

With all the golden eggs carried awkwardly in his shirt, Dallion slowly took a step back. This was the point at which he had to make his way out of the ruins and back to the surface. Unfortunately, before he could do that, a loud screech filled the hall. A silver feather, the size of his arm, split the air, flying directly towards his head. Moments before it could reach it. The body of the whip blade extended, twisting through the air in spiral fashion just along the correct trajectory to deflect the feather, sending it off into the ceiling.

Immediately, Dallion split into a dozen instances of himself. Each instance was a possible future occurring simultaneously while doing something completely different. More feathers appeared from the other side of the chamber, targeting Dallion's general area. Some flew through instances of Dallion, slicing through them like grass.

Careful not to harm the eggs he was carrying, Dallion grabbed the shield from the ground, covering as much as he could of his torso. Several seconds later, Dallion split again.

Blind them, Lux! Dallion shouted, closing his eyes.

The object on his belt flashed incandescent white. Screeches filled the chamber. Cracking one of his eyes open, Dallion was able to see two fully grown griffins flapping their wings furiously. Unused to light of such brightness, the creatures were clawing at everything nearby in a bit to protect themselves. For one thing, they were definitely a lot less majestic than Dallion imagined them to be. Back on in the fantasy novels back on Earth, maybe that was the case. Here, they were more vicious and aggressive than intelligent, and definitely not in a mood to converse.

So much for knowing Zoology, Dallion thought as he rushed at full speed towards the tunnel that had brought him into the chamber. The sound of screeching behind him continued for a few seconds more, after which it was replaced by the flapping of wings.

Theyre after you, Gleam said as she extended the whip blade behind him. *Im not sure how good Ill be against claws.*

Toss me on your back, the shield said.

Dallion did so without thinking. Normally, this would have ended with a certain miss, but the shield managed to twist and turn in exactly the right fashion so as to be caught by the end of the whip blade.

Just be careful,

the shield added. *Im not as indestructible as you are.*

Gleam growled. She didnt particularly like dryads, but since the shield was part of Dallions gear, she was going to make an exception.

Lux, go for another flash! Dallion shouted, splitting in six instances.

A sad chirp coming from the firebird let him know that the creature didnt have the strength to light up the tunnel just yet. While it was possible to use its power in the real world, emitting such an amount of light wasnt at least not all the time.

Screeching behind, the leading griffin flapped its wings, releasing a dozen more feathers at Dallion. One of Dallions instances turned around to look back. The action caused him to slow down considerably, but that didnt matter since Dallion had the information. Taking advantage of the fact, all other instances leaped in the direction of the walls, twisting in acrobatic fashion.

Guard and acrobatic skills combined. Twisting and turning, Dallion evaded all the feathers one after another and, in doing so, completed a full guard sequence. As a result, time slowed down slowly. It wasnt much, but enough for him to combat split again and have the shield deflect one of the feathers, sending it flying back towards his pursuers. An ordinary person would have relied on pure luck. Dallion relied on his awakened skills and combat splitting to achieve the same result, the feather hit the

griffin in the wing, causing it to abruptly lose speed, blocking the path of the one behind it.

Aggression ran wild. Already in an agitated state, the griffins found a new target for their viciousness each other quickly engaging in a fight that filled the corridor with sparks as their wings and claws scarred the stone walls. Dallion didn't even look back.

I must say that was rather sloppy, dear boy, Nil said from within Dallion's realm. I thought you would be far better prepared.

Not the time, Nil! Dallion kept on running. Corridor changed into chamber, then stairway, then cave. On and on he went, not pausing to look back. Every now and again he would combat split to see if there was anything behind him, but with each next combat split, the number of instances decreased.

By the time Dallion reached the surface, the pain in his temples was too intense for him to split at all. Thankfully, he didn't have to. Shade griffins detested the sun. There was no way they were going out in the next six hours and by then Dallion was going to be long gone from here.

Took your time, a female voice said.

Sitting on one of the many rocks in the valley were a group of five. Each of them was dressed in common adventurer clothes and unimposing leather armor. Most of the people were human, but one the same one who had addressed Dallion was a gorgon.

What happened? she asked with a smile. Did you decide to take a nap?

Very funny, Dallion managed to reply as he tried to catch his breath. You didn't tell me there were three.

Three griffins? the gorgon asked.

Three eggs. Dallion tapped his shirt. All of them in the same nest.

What do you know? The gorgon mused out loud, the snakes on her head moving about. Shade griffins are thieving creatures. Guess they took a few more than were expected. We were only hired to save one, so we'll have to renegotiate the deal. The gorgon stood up. I'll let Jiroh take care of that. By the looks of it, I need to take care of you.

At first Dallion didn't know what she meant. When he looked at his hands, he saw that he was bleeding. Clearly the nest had done more damage than he thought. The sensation of joy while holding the eggs must have masked the feeling.

I'm fine, he lied. Lux will take care of it.

Not if you need stitches, the gorgon approached. We cant have you go back to Dherma in such a state.

Yeah

Despite still holding three griffin eggs, it was clear that Dallion wasnt too thrilled to be going back. Or rather, he was afraid. It had been a while since he had last been here, not to mention hed had a rather nasty argument with his close friends from there.

Four months real time was a tremendously long period for an awakened, ranging decades or more. However, he still wasnt sure that it was enough. Even so, he was determined to go back. There were a few things he needed to do in his home village before he moved on to what was next.

Itll be alright, the gorgon said. Besides, you dont need to go if you dont want to.

Thanks, but Ive delayed it long enough.

The gorgon nodded.

Dont worry, Ill only be there for a few days. You go ahead and release the eggs. Ill catch up to you in Halburn.

Two weeks, the gorgon said. If youre not there in two weeks, go back to Nerosal. Ill come back as soon as I can.

Two weeks. Got it, Dallion said, then looked down at the golden griffin eggs in his shirt. It was fun getting them, though now the less enjoyable part of the day was to follow.

Leveling up the World #Chapter 383: Back Home - Read

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Leveling up an area was always unexpected, but some cases were far more unexpected than others. Normally, when a house was leveled up it was only basic features that were changed: the walls were of slightly better materials, there would be a few new technological improvementswell within the general understanding of the periodand maybe a new room. When it came to settlements, however, there was no comparison.

There was no comparison between the Dherma that Dallion left and the one that he had come back to. Even when he first awakened in this world, he saw the place as a hamlet of pretty much sheds and huts. Now, there was a bustling city of Mediterranean architecture: nice, large houses of white stones, wide paved streets, adequate shops, even a tavern or two. In the past, no one would think of visiting a hole such as this.

Even merchants and travelling monks were rare, and quick to leave. But the greatest change wasn't the buildings, it was the people themselves. There was no trace of the bleak fear that used to stifle everything in the village. Things were normal. In fact, they were better than normal. Dallion could sense as many emotions as there were in Nerosal. What was more, the sense of hope and joy emanated even brighter.

So, this is your home village? Nil asked. *It's nothing like you imagined it, dear boy.*

It's nothing like it is now, Dallion replied. *There were half the number of buildings and twice as much dirt. And there definitely wasn't a lake...*

Leveling up an area doesn't only affect the buildings within it, the echo said. *Mountains, rivers, forests, they all change for the better. I suspect your crop fields will be doing better as well.*

They aren't my crop fields.

Dallion made his way towards the village gate. That, too, was new. In the past, little protected the village from wild animals. A few old wooden fences were placed here and there, though even they hadn't been maintained since Dallion's birth. Now, a fine if not overly large stone wall separated this part of the Dherma from the wilderness.

The moment Dallion got ten feet from the gate, he felt the area take effect. This marked the start of the domain.

Hey! a guard popped up from somewhere. He was well kept wearing a standard, though well-maintained, set of guard armor. Looking closely, Dallion recognized the man. Just a year ago, he had been one of the people guarding the village chief's mansion, with the arrogance to match. The only reason he wouldn't actively bully people was because he had been too fat and lazy to care.

Urio? Dallion asked, uncertain if the person before him was the one he thought he was. He had definitely lost weight, transforming it into muscle, and also appeared to have grown a few inches higher although that probably was due to him no longer slouching as much as before. More surprisingly, the man seemed to be an awakened.

Dallion Seene. The guard grinned. I always thought you'd come back one day. What took you so long? Having fun in the big city?

Yeah Dallion wasn't sure how to react. Thanks to his music skill, he could tell that the man wasn't pretending but was genuinely happy to see him. Coming from a person who actively despised him in the past, that was astounding, to say the least. Something like that. I see the village has gone through a few changes in the last year.

The last year. Good one. The guard laughed. It feels like twenty. With everything we've been doing, it's been that long at least. Now, we all love the princess and the young

master, but they're ruthless when it comes to work. I won't tell you how many houses we had to destroy, only to have them rebuilt. It's no longer just about mending and maintaining. Things must be well organized if we're to become a town.

Dallion found himself nodding. The guard's vocabulary had increased substantially as well. If there was any need of proof what awakening could achieve, this was it.

So, what brings you here? Come to see the princess?

Sort of, Dallion remained evasive on the topic. That was indeed one of his key objectives, but even so he felt reluctant to admit it. I just wanted to see my family again. As you said, it's been a while. Half a century, give or take to be precise. You've awakened, I see.

Yeah. All thanks to the Order of the Seven Moons.

The Order established a presence? Dallion wondered.

It's a common practice, dear boy. The Order is constantly expanding, even beyond the boundaries of the empire.

Since he had joined Eury as a hunter trainee, Dallion had learned a bit about the world's politics. For the most part, he kept his focus on events taking place in the province, but even so, he was well aware of the actual power the Order held. If there was anyone to challenge the Imperial family, it was the Order of the Seven Moons. Their influence stretched into foreign lands and territories, even parts of the wilderness that were completely uninhabited. According to Nil, that was one of the chief reasons that the emperor hadn't punished Countess Priscord for the death of his relative to use it as an excuse in front of the Order.

I know, Dallion replied. *I just didn't think it would happen here.*

I'm here to see my family, Dallion said. Any changes there?

Just a few. The guard tried to maintain a calm expression, but his internal emotions were loud enough for Dallion to get a pretty good idea. Something dramatic had no doubt taken place, something that the guard thought Dallion would be pleased with.

Okay. Same house?

Err, actually no. Your old house was knocked down. We built a warehouse there. With all the merchants from the nearby villages coming here to trade, it was easier to"

I get the idea, Dallion interrupted. Where are they now?

Everyone moved to your grandfathers house. That had grown a bit as well since you last saw it. All buildings at the village center have. Just one more of the requirements on the way to full townhood.

Right. Full townhood, Dallion nodded absentmindedly. Thanks for the welcome. Ill be off.

Be sure to pass by the chiefs mansion. The princess will be very happy to see you.

Im not sure about that,

Dallion thought as he continued onwards.

Thats a bit harsh, dear boy, Nil said. The man was clearly delighted to see you. Why should it be different with Gloria? After all, you saved her life on more than one occasion.

Things arent always what they should be, Dallion said as he kept on walking.

Walking along the cobbled street felt quite strange. Not a moment passed without Dallion staring at the buildings around him, like an absolute tourist. Every few steps hed look at a building trying to figure out what it had replaced in the past. Sadly, in most cases, he wasnt able to figure it out.

Compared to Nerosal, the walk was brief and uneventful. A number of people recognized him on the way, but compared to the crowds of the Nerosal Festival, it was almost as if he was incognito. However, his grandfathers house wasnt the first place he went. Guilt made him go to the city square where the main well was instead. The space had changed quite a bit, appearing like a smaller plaza. The fountain well was still there, probably the only thing that had remained unchanged since last time.

Good to see youre doing well, Dallion said to the well. *I was afraid that with all the changes something else might have taken your place.*

As if that would happen, the guardian replied in an amused voice. *Im one of the city guardians after all, and the only one whos not been improved by the Luors.*

I thought they were taking care of the village.

They offered, but I refused. If anyones going to level me up, its you.

Dallion remained speechless. He never thought that the well would be so sentimental.

When you leveled me up for the first time, you were weak, the whole world was against you, yet you fought against the odds, and at the end kept your promise. The old Luor was strong, the new Luors are likely to get stronger, but I tend to value things beyond

strength. Everyone can become strong, but it takes will and determination to keep your word.

It sounds like my grandfather built you.

Dallion smiled, tapping the edge of the well with his hand.

He didnt, but he saved me. Just as you did.

Not wanting to get into a deeper conversation, Dallion was about to say his goodbyes with the well guardian, when a yell prevented him from doing so.

Brother! a somewhat familiar voice was heard throughout the square, and possibly the entire city. You're back!

Combat splitting out of habit, Dallion had a few instances jump to the side, as another turned around to see what was going on. It turned out he was right to do so. A boy had charged at him in a deliberate attempt to push him in the water. In one of three instances, he even succeeded. Of course, Dallion chose one of the other two as reality, resulting in the prankster splashing in the outer basin.

Nice try, Lin, Dallion said, keeping at a safe distance from the water. Next time, you might actually get me.

You bet I will! the boy laughed, then quickly got out of the water. In the year that had passed, the boy had grown a full head taller, making him look lankier than before. I knew you'd be back, Dallion's brother said with a cracking voice.

Im sure you did, Dallion said, arms crossed. And what do you know, you were right. Where are mom and dad?

Dad's out hunting. There've been a lot of wild boars lately, so a group went out to deal with them.

Boars, boars, and bears. In the past, those were the scariest things known to the village, kept at bay by the former village chief and the Luor family. Every hunting party was led by a Luor, and most often they were the ones to kill the beasts. After facing high-level guardians, crackling settlements, and quite a lot of monsters in the wilderness, boars no longer seemed as impressive as before.

And mom?

She's home. She gets tired easily.

That didnt sound too good. From what Gloria and Veil had told Dallion during their visit, their mother was supposed to be fine. At the time, Dallion hadnt felt any lies, but the way his brother said it made him slightly concerned.

You must stop thinking the worst, Nil said. For all you know she might work a lot. And even if theres something slightly wrong, you have Lux.

Hold still for a moment, Dallion said, ignoring the echos comment.

Taking the artifact from his belt, he tapped it twice, then pressed it against Linnors hair. A blue glow surrounded the item. The boy instinctively tried to pull away, but Dallion grabbed hold of his shoulder faster than his brother could blink.

Hold still, Dallion said.

Whats that?

A kaleidervisto with a firebird in it, Dallion said. Itll dry you up so you dont mess up the house.

It was a titanic effort, but Dallions brother somehow managed to remain still for a full minute. That much time was enough for Lux to dry the boy up, but also heal wounds there could be. Thankfully, the boy had only managed to get a few scrapes and bruises as most children his age would. One done, Dallion moved the kaleidervisto away. The glow faded.

All set, Dallion said. Anything else interesting happen while I was away? An unusual guest?

People from the nearby villages come here all the time, Linnor said as he moved his hand through his hair to check whether it was completely dry. Merchants, monks messengers from Countess Priscord come from time to time.

Nothing out of the ordinary, Dallion thought. For whatever reason, Falkner had not been here. Potentially that was a good thing, although it would be made clear when Dallion had the talk with Gloria. Before that, though, he needed to exchange a few words with his mother and his grandfather.

Leveling up the World #Chapter 384: Music Resonnance - Read Leveling up the World Chapter 384: Music Resonnance

Chapter 384: Music Resonnance

So, youre the grandson that Kraisten keeps talking about, the building said the moment Dallion stepped inside. *Good to know that the awakened line is strong.*

Thanks, Dallion replied. He was used to chatty objects, though buildings usually gave him enough space when he needed it. That was one of the reasons he spent so much time in the wilderness lately it was much quieter there.

Wait till you see my room! Lin rushed up the stone staircase. We got a new floor last month. Veil made it for me. Its really cool!

It doesnt take much to keep you happy. Dallion wondered since when his brother used words like cool. If there was even the slightest indication that Linner had awakened, Dallion would have wondered whether another soul from Earth hadnt merged with the boys being. Since that wasnt the case, most likely his grandfather had a hand in this.

Linners room was on the fourth floor. However, upon reaching the second one, neither of the brothers were able to continue. Standing in the corridor, dressed in a set of simple clothes, the type she used to wear back when Dallion was still in the village, was Gertha Dallions mother.

For several seconds, mother and son looked at each other silently, and during that time weeks of conversations were exchanged. Only they werent conversations using words, but rather emotions. Each could feel the other had a high level of music skills. Emotions flashed, almost oscillating between the two. Just by standing there, Dallion knew that his mother was alright, that she had leveled up to a double digit, and even had increased her skills beyond that. The growth of the village, the changes that occurred within it, even the songs Gertha would sing every day all that and more became instantly known to Dallion, as if he had witnessed it in person. The experience was both unusual and relieving, as if he had a years worth of feeling associated with past events, but not the memories of them.

Dallion, youre back, Gertha finally spoke.

Dallion nodded. There was nothing he could think to add.

Youre just in time for lunch.

Im not hungry, Dallion lied. A split second later, he felt the resonance of his own lie within his mother. Despite all his skills, this was one person whod always known if he were telling the truth. Sure, he added. Where are the fishes?

Lin will get them.

Mom the younger brother said, with the annoyance only someone nearing teenage could. I was going to show him my new room.

You can do that after lunch, the woman said. She didnt use any music skills in the process, but still managed to convince Linner to do as he was asked. Lets go to the dining room.

Sure. Dallion waited for her to lead the way. Hes not awakened? he whispered, making sure that she was the only one to hear.

No. We tried using the awakening shrine, but it wasnt meant to be.

I see. Ill look into it.

Theres no need. The woman was smiling, but Dallion felt the momentary ring of sadness that came from within her. I tried, so did the monk of the Order. The Moons have refused to accept him, so hes to remain as he is.

That was rather unfortunate. Being an awakened, Dallion couldnt even imagine returning to his previous life without the skills he had amassed it would be like going to a world without smell, taste, or color. For Linner, it was all he would ever know.

The dining room was slightly smaller than the one in Dallions old house. Then again, back then, it was considered the only room. The kitchen had been small, barely enough to have two people inside, and the bedrooms werent much different either.

Dallions grandfather was already sitting at the table, drinking a cup of alcohol that Dallion had smelled since entering the building. Seeing his grandson, the old man greeted him with a grunt and a nod, then took another gulp from his cup.

Dal will be joining us for lunch, father, Gertha said before filling the mans cup to the brim again.

Mhm, the old man said. He seemed unusually cold for some reason. Given that he too was from Earth, Dallion expected he would be happy to see him. Instead, he could tell the man was quite disappointed. I think well need more fruit now that theres one more person.

Of course. The woman agreed. It was obvious that the man wanted to discuss something with Dallion in private. Ill be right back.

Getting the hint as well, Dallion sat in one of the free chairs. The food smelled quite nice. Spending time in the wilderness, Dallion had become accustomed to eating non-awakened rations, but even so, he could tell when something was prepared by someone with the ability. That was probably the reason he enjoyed his mothers cooking so much as a child even sealed, she had retained her sense of taste.

Why did you come back? the old man asked.

I thought you'd be happy to see me.

Why? Kraisten frowned. Because I wanted to have someone to discuss the good old days from Earth? I have Aspion to reminisce about the past. Now that he has no power, it's all he does.

There was an awkward moment of silence. It was clear that the man couldn't or wouldn't talk about any topics of the past, so Dallion had to take the first step.

Aspion's sister says hi, Dallion said. She's doing well. As well as was possible, given the circumstances, at least. She told me to ask you about what happened when the time was right. Is it right?

Probably not. If that's the reason you're here, you've wasted your time.

It's not the only reason. There's something I need to discuss with Gloria.

That ship has sailed long ago. Maybe things would have been different if you had stayed, but all your interest ended the moment you awakened and came to this place. All you're doing now is chasing guilt and that never ends well.

You should know. It was guilt that had driven Dallion here, but not the kind the old man was implying. Dallion already knew that there would be no romantic involvement between him and Gloria.

Before the conversation could continue, Gertha and Dallion's brother returned. On cue, Kraisten went back to assuming the role of local village elder. The conversation quickly shifted to talks of the village, events in Neros although not the catastrophic ones and reminiscing of memories before Dallion's departure.

I saw that the Order is in the city now, Dallion said casually. Does that mean they've repaired the awakening shrine?

It was faster for them to build one in the village proper, Kraisten replied. There are always a few monks here now. They're making sure that everyone has the potential to become an awakened. Quite a few have joined the monastery.

That's good.

Mostly, they're here because of your mother. As Dhermas only double-digit awakened and with music skills, they want to steal her from us.

I doubt that, father, Gertha said in diplomatic fashion.

You can see it better than me, the old man grumbled. They just want to make you a nun, so you go about from place to place and convince the world of the Orders good intentions.

Your grandfather has a rather sharp tongue, Nil said. After the events in Nerosal, it had become impossible for Dallion to keep his family history secret, from his echoes and guardians, at least. *Did he always hate the Order?*

Hes not hating on the Order, Dallion replied. *Hes just warning me about them in the only way he could.*

Wise words, indeed.

What about you? Kraisten shifted the topic of conversation. What have you been up to? Working in a mending shop in the big city?

I was part of a guild for a time. It didnt work out, so Im training to become a hunter.

A hunter, eh? the old man remained unimpressed. Been out in the wilderness a lot?

A fair amount.

Please be careful out there. A sense of fear emanated from Dallions mother. Especially since you have a girlfriend now, she innocently let the word slip into the conversation. This definitely caught the old mans interest. In contrast, Dallions brother had become exceedingly annoyed that his mother had hijacked a perfect topic of adventure in the wilderness, for something so trivial.

Yes, Im with someone now. *Thanks, mother*, Dallion thought. Shes a hunter, and a forger like you. Dallion decided it wasnt appropriate to mention that she was also a gorgon. We were on a job nearby, so that gave me the time to come visit.

What did you do? Lin grasped his opportunity to get the conversation back on track.

I was hunting griffins. Dallion smiled.

Griffins?

Large birds with the body of a lion. Well, half lion, half eagle.

And you caught them?

No, Dallion laughed. The point wasnt to capture them, just to get something from them. You see, I was in a shade griffins lair. These are creatures that used to be sun griffins, but were Dallion paused a moment. It had become so normal for him to discuss matters relating to chainlings and the Star that up till now hed never considered how touchy the

subject really was. Just mentioning the words could be potentially harmful, all the more so in a small village such as this. changed into something scary. In their current state, they could no longer have young, so they steal the eggs of other griffins so they can raise as their own.

Wow! The boy beamed. Can you fix them? Make them sun griffins again?

Not everything can be fixed, Dallions grandfather said firmly. Sometimes the best thing is to move on. You father doesnt try to fix the boars who are attacking our livestock, is he?

No? Linner wasnt sure what the proper answer was, but had a good idea what his grandfather wanted to hear.

Its the same with life. The old man stood up. Ill go rest a bit. How long will you be staying?

A few days at most, Dallion replied. Ive got another job I must do.

Life as a hunter must be interesting, the old man grumbled, and left the room.

Things havent been easy for him, Dallions mother said once the old man had left. The changes in the village were faster than hes used to. And then, theres his condition

I know.

Dallion still had trouble understanding the old man. When things were bad, he did everything in his power to help Dallion as much as possible. Now that Dallion had actually made it, he didnt want to have anything to do with him.

He just wants the best for you, dear boy, Nil said. And in his view, the best is not being here.

So, he did everything possible to help me escape this place? I thought that he wanted me to be free and not get sealed.

Apparently, not. Only he could say for certain, and by the looks of it, he doesnt intend to tell you.

So, want to see my room? Linner urged Dallion once more.

I will. Is there a place for me to sleep here? Dallion turned to his mother.

Theres a room for you. Father was against it, but I always kept a room ready, in case you ever came back. Ill show you.

I can do that! Linner said.

Well, have it ready for me. Dallion winked at his brother. I just need to go see Gloria for a short while and will be right back.

Aww. Linner crossed his arms.

Dont be like that, Gertha chuckled. Your brother is an important hunter now. Of course, hed want to see the village chiefs. After that, youll be able to show him everything youve found.

Promise? Linner looked at Dallion.

Promise, Dallion said. Ill be back before you know it.

Leveling up the World #Chapter 385: Gloria's Realm - Read Leveling up the World Chapter 385: Gloria's Realm

Chapter 385: Gloria's Realm

A cloud of whispers always surrounded Dallion wherever he went. News about him being an empath had spread among the items of the village, and like anywhere else, there were guardians who wanted to talk. It didnt help that Dallion had increased his empathy to nine. As much as he felt for them, though, Dallion kept on walking, barely responding with a single word. That was the problem with inhabited areashe still was getting used consciously blocking the noise. Sometimes it just happened without him even thinking about it. Others, he couldnt manage no matter how much he concentrated.

There were no guards in front of the mansion, unlike in the past. However, Dallion felt the emotions of someone else.

You saved our lives back there, Veil said, coming into view. That still doesnt make you welcome here. He wasnt joking.

I came anyway, Dallion said.

Gloria said you would. I hoped youd have more common sense.

Im not here to fight, Veil. Not that there was any issue. Given that both of the Luors had refused to go beyond the second trial, Dallion would have no problem defeating them. I came here to help.

Veil looked Dallion straight in the eyes. The Luors platinum blond hair shimmered slightly in the sunlight, almost making it seem he was an otherworlder as well. Emotions

conflicted within him, emitting faint sounds that Dallion could pick up. After several seconds, the emotion of acceptance gained the upper hand.

Im just here to talk to her, Dallion decided he needed to give Veil a slight push. And you.

Lets see if she wants to.

The current village chief turned around and walked into the inner garden. There was a time when this structure had seemed beyond magnificent to Dallion. Back then, it was the epitome of wealth, worth more than everything else in the village combined. Now it didnt even look like a place a Nerosal minor noble would use for a home.

I heard you left the guild, Veil said as he led Dallion through the corridor towards the great hall.

It was the best for everyone. I needed my space and it would have been awkward if I had stayed.

So, just being you.

The hall was the same it had always been, just empty. Veil made his way to what passed as a throne and sat down. At first Dallion thought that Veil had changed his mind after all, and this was all he was willing to give. Soon enough, though, he heard steps. They were faint, but audible enough to hear. Then Gloria entered the hall. She was dressed as a noble ought to benot the rough adventurer outfit of her brother, but a fine blue dress of improved silk and a love sleeved shirt of sapphire threads. There was little doubt that the clothes had been a gift from Falkner, though based on her reactions, she hadnt deliberately put them on to spite Dallion.

Dal, she said with a polite smile, making her way to the seat next to Veil. A pleasure to see you. I didnt think youd come to visit so soon.

That was a clear lie. Apparently, Gloria was picking up the behavior of being a noble.

What did you expect, dear boy? You didnt exactly give her a reason not to treat you coldly.

Im here to fix things, Dallion went straight to the point. For both of you. After that, Ill be gone.

His sincerity managed to pierce through the fake pleasantries, causing both the twins to react. Even so, Gloria maintained her calm.

How exactly will you fix things? she asked.

Ill open the gate in your realm, so you can become double digits.

Thats impossible! Veil stood up, a hurricane of emotions raging within. Once the gate is sealed, theres no way it to be reopened.

Theres a way, but itll require me to enter your realms.

This was the tricky part. The first thing an awakened were taught was never to allow others into their realms. Once inside, they were vulnerable to attack. At best, all their secrets regarding skills and abilities would be revealed. At worst, they could end up with a limiting echo and become puppets to anothers will.

Under normal circumstances, Dallion wouldnt have even offered. But the three of them shared a deep bond, one that even recent events wouldnt dissolve or so he hoped.

No way, veil said, even if internally he remained conflicted. Id rather"

Is there a real chance, Gloria interrupted. If you enter, is there a real chance that you might succeed?

Yes, Dallion nodded. Its real. You saw how I unsealed the powers of my mother. This should be similar.

The Luors looked at each other. Dallion could sense that they were discussing something in a whisper, but his perception level wasnt high enough for him to hear what it was about. In future he was going to have to increase that as well.

Alright. Gloria turned at him. Start with me. After everything youve done, I trust you enough to let you try.

Of course, Dallion knew that if he messed things up, hed have Falkner and family to deal with. Slowly, he made his way to the woman and placed his hand on her forehead.

Ready? Dallion asked.

Gloria nodded.

PERSONAL AWAKENING

The hall, and the rest of reality, disappeared, replaced by a far smaller room made of white marble. There were white columns in every corner, making the place a lot more sophisticated than Dallions own awakening room. Frames of skills covered the walls, like paintings. At a glance, Dallion could see that Gloria had gathered a lot more acrobatic skills than him.

YOU ARE LEVEL 10

BODY: 10

REACTION: 10

PERCEPTION: 10

MIND: 10

A blue rectangle glowed, indicating her level. As expected, she was capped at ten, meaning that no matter what she did, she'd never improve beyond this point. Her skills were no different, all ending at that level.

Amused? a copy of Gloria asked.

This caught Dallion off guard. He could see that this wasn't an echo, which was rather unusual. Last time he had entered someone's realm, the person in question hadn't been there. Then again, the person in question was merely a semi-awakened.

It looks much different from mine, Dallion said. More artistic.

Of course, you'd say something like that. Gloria's lips moved in a semi-smile. Is there anything I must do, or just wait and watch?

Take me to the gate, Dallion said. Or rather, take me to where you thought the gate would be.

Gloria didn't move. Despite having invited him into her realm, she still felt uncomfortable by the fact.

I don't need to see any of the other rooms, Dallion reassured her. I just need to see the corridor.

This way. She went towards the nearest entrance.

Dallion followed her into a curved corridor that wrapped around the awakening room like a ring. The layout was nothing like Dallion's own realm. There was truth to the saying that everyone's realm was the same, but unique in their own particular way.

You're staring at the walls again, Gloria said.

It just reminds me of something.

Dallion only saw two doors along the way—nothing but the basic setup as it were. Gloria still didn't have the ability to add rooms on her own. It was possible that she hadn't understood Dallion when he had asked about the gates location. A short while later, he saw that he was half right. The place Gloria had led him to was a dead end. If Dallion were to guess, he'd say that the combat arena was located on the other end of the corridor, leading her to expect the gate to be in this one. Interestingly enough, that

turned out to be correct. Dallion was able to see the outline of a door, the same way he could see hidden realms. The faint shimmering was a lot fainter, though, and whitish in color.

Stand back. Dallion drew his Nox dagger. Ill cut through the seal.

Wait. Gloria reached out. Give me a moment.

You want to remain sealed? Dallion asked.

I just want to be ready. The last time I went through the gate, I didnt know what would be on the other side. Now I do and

Shes afraid of admitting to a Moon she wants to change her mind, Nil explained to Dallion. Frankly, I dont think theres a more appropriate reaction. One shouldnt be able to unseal a door.

I guess Im an exception to the rule.

Dear boy, you are a stack of exceptions woven together in one giant impossible rug. Ive long stopped counting how many statistics youve broken.

Take all the time you need. Dallion lowered the dagger and waited.

Clusters of fear and regret formed within Gloria, like grapes. Slowly, they faded away, replaced by wonder and hope. Then, she nodded.

Go ahead.

Dallion slid his hand along the wall, stopping at the corner of the door outline. There he pressed the tip of the dagger, pressing it inside.

Nox is quite useful, Gloria said as she watched Dallion slide the knife down, ripping the wall.

Hes become a real rascal. All of my familiars are.

Thats right, you have more than one. Even Falkner was a bit jealous.

Thats not what he was really jealous about, Dallion thought.

Bit by bit, the outline of the door was formed. As Dallion moved the knife towards the final connecting point, something made him split into instances. It was a good thing too, for the moment the entire gateway was cleared, a massive mace broke through the stone, crushing two of Dallions instances.

Lux! Dallion shouted in the remaining instance. Wings of blue flame emerged from his shoulders, propelling him and Gloria away from the opening seconds before the section of the wall was smashed to bits.

COMBAT INITIATED

What the hell is that?! Gloria shouted, summoning her bladebows. Dallion followed suit, summoning his harpsisword.

I dont know, he said, playing a chord of charm focused both at her and himself. This didnt happen last time.

Last time, you didnt break into the chamber of a Moon, Nil said.

The giant mace pulled back. Through the doorway, a room was visiblethe exact same room in which the trial had taken place. From this distance the details were unclear, but Dallion thought he recognized the stone furniture. A tall man in shimmering white armor and an enormous mace calmly stepped out of the chamber and into the corridor.

MOON ECHO

Species: ECHO

Class: Emion-spawn

Statistics: ???

Skills: ???

Weak spots: None

Seeing the white rectangle was enough to make anyone feel afraid. Dallion had never seen a Moon Echo, he hadnt even heard the term, but even so he knew perfectly well what it represented. Of course, it was naive to expect that breaking a gate would be as easy as a simple unsealing. The Moons had created all the rules in order to maintain some sort of balance in the world. Of course, they would step in if someone abused it. If not, the Star would have ruled freely over the world by now.

Taking a few steps forward, the echo looked at Dallion, then at Gloria.

Its not here to punish us, Dallion said. Its only here as part of the trial. Since you refused before, now you must prove your resolve.

And youre here to help me, Gloria said. Just like in the good old days.

It was funny how a years time was referred to as the good old days, but Dallion got the point. Back then, Gloria had asked him to help her level up by joining forces against a sandstorm dragon. Now it was no different.

Dont worry, its probably level fifteen at most, Dallion said. Well take care of it.

Im just a level ten, Gloria replied.

Lux, onto her.

The blue flames jumped from Dallion to Gloria.

Now youre more than level ten, Dallion winked. Now, lets get you unsealed.

Leveling up the World #Chapter 386: The Safeguard - Read Leveling up the World Chapter 386: The Safeguard

Chapter 386: The Safeguard

Green, Red, and white markers appeared everywhere. It had been a while since Dallion relied on those. The sight made him feel nostalgic. In this case, the markers werent his, they were Glorias. After becoming a Seer, Dallions markers were the ones trying to catch up to him.

A green ellipsoid cone emerged starting, from the Moon Echos mace arm and continuing along the corridor. It marked the area of attack. With his current speed Dallion could easily evade it even without using combat splitting, but for Gloria, it was a different matter entirely.

Without hesitation, the woman made a series of somersaults, shooting bolts between each flip. As expected, the enemy blocked them with no issue.

Dallion didnt delay either, letting go of his harpsisword and summoning his whip blade instead.

Slice him, Gleam, Dallion whispered as he swung the weapon forward.

The blade extended, breaking up into sharp metal fragments. Noticing the attack, the echo reacted, though far too slowly to put up an adequate defense. While the initial strike was avoided, that only gave enough momentum for Gleam to swing the weapon around and fly back, slicing the echo in two like a ball of hay.

A single hit would have been enough, Dallion sighed.

I wanted to make you look a bit impressive, Gleam said.

COMBAT INITIATED

MOON ECHO has increased a level

Two red rectangles appeared in the air.

What? Dallion summoned the armadil shield, taking a defensive stance.

Before his very eyes, a new Moon Echo emerged. It was identical to the previous one in every single detail, with one notable exception: its level had gone up.

Interesting, Nil said. Ive heard theoretical speculation on the topic, but I never thought Id see it in person. Sometimes, dear boy, you make the most extraordinary things happen.

Tell me whats happening, Nil. Dallion moved backwards, splitting into instances as he did. That turned out to be a good move, since the Moon Echo rushed forward at full speed, directly doing a multi-attack. Apparently, the Moons werent bound by the standard rules and could perform stat specials without even completing a sequence.

You might have triggered the trial, but youre not the target. Thus, until Gloria defeats the challenge, it wont be considered a success. The only thing youre doing is making it more difficult for her.

Great

Dont you see how fascinating this is? The Moons have created safeguards to ensure their rules function even in the face of exceptions.

Gloria, youll have to win this, Dallion shouted. I can help, but I cant kill it.

For a moment, it seemed as if he were acting like a guardian. Maybe this was what they felt? Both the armadil shield and Dallions harpsisword were far stronger than him, and yet were forced to watch him struggle against weak enemies while not being able to help out. The fact that they had done so on a few occasions was almost a wonder in itself.

Four more bolts zipped past Dallion aimed at the echo, and once again they were easily deflected.

Whats wrong? Gloria asked. Cant deal with him?

I can, but each time I kill it, it levels up.

The echo spun the mace, then let it fly at Dallion. Instantly, he split into five instances. Three of them suffered minor damage as a result. Two didnt.

At least its attacking me. Take advantage of that and"

Gloria rushed past Dallion. Leaping straight at the echos head, she spun mid-air, attempting to kick the echo while also shooting at it from close range. It was a good plan. Unfortunately, the echo had realized exactly what she was doing. Its speed, now slightly faster since its level up, was enough to evade the bolts while also hitting Gloria with a series of punches.

Five red rectangles stacked above the womans head as she was thrown back. The only reason there werent more was Lux, who had pulled her away fast enough to escape the brunt of the attack.

Immediately Dallion jumped between the two, preventing the echo from continuing with its attack. One question came to mind why was the echo silent? Dallion knew from personal experience that the Moon avatars were quite talkative during trials. Even if they werent, thanks to his new stat he was supposed to be able to hear them.

The mace disappeared from the floor, reappearing in the echos hand. It didnt seem to be in the mood for talking.

Nothing to say? Dallion asked, adding slowness to his words. Usually, it would take a lot more than a sentence for the music skill to take effect. In this case, Dallion knew straight off that it wouldnt. The blue thread markers of his voice snapped almost the instant they were created. I guess you dont need to.

Dal, down! Gloria shouted behind him.

Using his standard method, Dallion split, leaping both left and right, while also turning around to see what was going on. The instance that turned was instantly pierced by Gloria, who was flying at extreme speeds, the edge of the dartblade held in front of her. The suddenness was enough to startle Dallion, even as he switched to another instance. Fortunately, the Moon Echo was just as surprised. By the time it was able to move, the blade had already gone into its chest.

Glorias momentum suddenly stopped. The echo looked at her, then disappeared in a cloud of white particles. Moments later the green rectangle emerged. From his current position, Dallion couldnt see what was written on it, but he had a pretty good idea.

I think Ill Gloria said, letting go of her weapons and covering her mouth with both hands.

Lux can get that effect on people. Dallion stood up. Shallow breaths. Give it a while.

Thanks, all, Dallion said to his familiars. *Have fun at the beach.*

Unsummoning all but Lux, who was still restoring Glorias health, Dallion went to the woman.

Feeling better? he asked.

Not sure.

It takes getting used to. Also, Lux has a good idea how to gage his speed now. When he was just a chick, hed be pretty reckless.

I bet. Gloria looked at the entrance. There was nothing blocking the way now. Even the opening had fully transformed into a normal door. However, the big question beyond it remained. Lets finish this.

Straightening up, Gloria went forward. Dallion, however, didnt.

Not coming along? she glanced at him, confused.

Ill wait for you here. I think you need to be alone for this.

Right. Holding her head high, Gloria went on. The moment she stepped through the opening, it quickly reverted to the wall it had been before.

Wise move, dear boy. Theres hope for you, yet.

Without warning, Dallion found himself back in the Luors hall in the real world.

What happened? Dallion removed his hand from Glorias forehead and looked around. *I didnt leave the realm.*

Its her realm, Nil reminded. Her realm, her rules. For the most part.

Only a moment had passed in the real world, yet it was easy to tell that Dallion and Gloria had ventured into the awakening realms. As long as one knew where to look, they would see the moment of stillness, the confusion in their eyes as they looked around, trying to get their bearings, even the sudden tensioning of the muscles. It was as if they had been plucked out of water and left standing in the hall at a moments notice.

Well? Veil asked, looking at Gloria.

Tears sparkled in the corners of her eyes, then trickled down her face, beyond her control.

It worked, she said, standing up slowly.

Words were incapable of describing a better picture, but they didnt have to. Gloria seemed to beam, as if an inaccessible future had been opened to her. Dallion could feel all the happiness and joy emanate from her like a chorus of bells. There was also a lot

coming from him as well. Looking at her knew that he had done the right thing. Maybe this wasn't enough to fully make up for the past, but it had put his mind at ease.

Show me. Veil went up to Dallion.

Dallion placed his hand on Veil's shoulder and entered the blond's realm.

Things went much easier this time. Dallion knew what to expect, so he didn't go through the same mistakes. It also helped that the structure and appearance of Veil's realm was much closer to Dallion's. Having just seen that items and familiars didn't affect the outcome of the trial, as long as it was the correct person who defeated the echo, Dallion lent Veil his armadillo shield and Lux. He also offered to act as a distraction to help out, but Veil had adamantly refused; he was an attack focused after all, not to mention it wasn't in his nature to let others win his victories.

The fight had been faster, but messier. Even before the Moon Echo had broken through, Veil had charged at it as recklessly as a freight train at full speed. His actions had caused him to suffer more than a few wounds, but that hardly mattered, since one hit was enough for the trial to be over.

Thinking about it, Dallion could see the extent to which such trials were in the awakened's favor. Had this been a serious battle, every sliver of health and every useless action would be punished. When dealing with echoes, there were nearly no consequences. One hit and it was all resolved.

Soon enough, Dallion was back in the real world again. Only this time, exhaustion had set in. Apparently, unsealing required a lot of energy, even if it only showed in the real world.

Guess I showed you? Dallion attempted a smile, as Veil stepped away dazzled by what had happened. On the outside, he seemed far more reserved compared to his sister, but his inside emotions were exactly the same.

Congratulations, dear boy. You kept your self-imposed promise to yourself, Nil said.

It would have been nice to gain a level or two, Dallion said. But yes, I'm happy with the result. *Now, it's all up to them.*

The same could be said about you. With your mind at ease, maybe you'll finally be able to break your next barrier.

As much as Dallion hated to admit it, he had been in a sort of slump lately. It was all fine explaining that he was getting used to the wilderness in order to become a hunter, or that he was focusing on his real-world forging experience, but all those were just excuses. There was another reason Dallion had only leveled up a few times in the past few months, and it had nothing to do with his skills or the Star.

What do you know? Veil turned to Dallion with the same attitude he had before the festival. You're not a lost cause.

And you're starting to act far too much like a noble, Dallion laughed. What's next? Local tournaments?

Hardly, Gloria said. But a theater is possible.

This wasn't something Dallion thought he'd hear. While Gloria was in the Nerosal, he had helped her join a troupe, but it had quickly become obvious that she lacked the skills to become anything more than a backstage performer. The only reason she was accepted other than Dallion's arrangement with the city underworld was because of her pure-blond hair.

Did Falkner suggest this?

No, but he agreed to support it. The only reason I didn't pursue it was because I knew I wouldn't have the skills. Now, things are different. As you said, it all depends on me.

I know, but Dallion struggled with words. It takes more than one person to open a theater.

That's true. But two can start it.

Two?

Me and your mother. There isn't a village in the area unaware of her music skill. As long as I put in the effort I could match it, which will help us establish the first theater in the entire area. Entertainment is power after all, and through it we'll have the village grow into a town.

Dallion shook his head. Knowing her grandfather, he should have expected something of the sort. The current generation of Luors weren't as vicious or spiteful as the old man was. They had put in a lot of effort to raise Dharma's living standard, and the village itself. People liked them Dallion liked them, but they had always been born to govern.

You don't approve? Gloria asked, a ring of concern sounding within her.

It's not that. I just I tend to spend most of my time in the wilderness now, he avoided the answer. I'm training to become a hunter now.

With Eury?

Yes, but that's not the only reason.

You just don't like feeling contained, Veil said.

The description was good enough to make Dallion nod.

Your grandfather used to say that at the time. At least if my grandfather is to be believed. And it seems youre following in his footsteps. When Dherma became too small for you, you went to Nerosal. When the city became too small, you started roaming throughout the wilderness. What happens when the wilderness is too small for you? What then?

Another good question to which Dallion had no answer. This time, however, he had no intention of even trying.

It was good seeing you, Dallion said, turning towards the exit.

You can stay here as long as you like, Gloria said, taking a few steps forward.

Maybe I will sometime. Dallion walked on, not even looking back. Say hi to Falkner if you see him.

Leveling up the World #Chapter 387: A Brother's Promise - Read Leveling up the World Chapter 387: A Brother's Promise

Chapter 387: A Brother's Promise

The stay at Dherma was far less pleasant than Dallion had hoped. Seeing that his friends and family were doing great had momentarily put Dallion at ease, but no sooner had that happened, he wanted to get back out into the wilderness. There was plenty of time for him to join Eury, but that wasnt the issue. The place was just too foreign. It wasnt only the guardians constantly talking to Dallion, not even people reminiscing about the past it was the domain itself, feeling so polished and secure like a lie.

Bubbles in the wilderness. Thats how Euryale had described settlements, and thats precisely what they were. The events in Nerosal had shown that. Regardless of the number of awakened inside, regardless of the guardians strength, the city had remained one big bubble, always a hair away from popping.

Youre going to do something dangerous, Linner said. The boy had managed to drag Dallion to his room several times, showing him all the things Lin had found and brought home. For the most part, they were pebbles, weirdly shaped twigs, and the occasional animal bone. Though talking to them, Dallion had learned far more about his brother than anyone could tell, even his parents.

Despite what everyone believed, the boy was quite the adventurer, even if he didnt tell anyone about it. All of Lins treasures came from the wilderness, and not the one near to the village. Despite not being an awakened, the boy enjoyed sneaking out of the village

domain and exploring on his own. One of the chunks of natural crystal was even from the cave in which the old awakening shrine was located.

Yes, Lin, Dallion said. Something very dangerous. But dont worry. I wont be alone.

The boy didnt say anything, instead rubbing a pebble he was holding in his hand.

I found you that, Dallion said, looking at the stone. That time Gloria took me to

Took you to the shrine, Lin finished the sentence for him. Ive been there. Ive been to lots of places. Grandpa doesnt approve, but I still sneak out. He gets upset when I tell him and keeps on going that Im not an awakened, so I should stay here. But I dont want to stay here.

I know what you mean.

There are so many interesting places out there. Most are not far from the village, but no one bothers to go there, even the monks dont.

Oh?

I asked one about the valley of ogres and he said he didnt know anything about it. And there are far more interesting places. I can show you. We can"

I know you can. Dallion ruffled his brothers hair. But I cant go. There are other places I need to be at, other interesting places. Maybe next time when I get back.

You keep saying that, but you always set off doing other things. The boy pouted, crossing his arms.

Yeah, I do that a lot. I promise Ill try, okay?

Linnners attitude remained unchanged.

Tell you what. Since you told me about your secret, Ill tell you a secret of my own. That way, youll know what Im doing. *And hopefully that you can trust me*, Dallion thought. The reason I must go away is because I promised to help a friend find something.

Your hunter girlfriend, Linner said, the disappointment of betrayal filling his voice.

Its a hunter, but not my girlfriend.

These words made Linner look at his brother from the corner of his eye. The sense of betrayal within him was replaced by curiosity.

Its adorable how he tries to hide things. Gleam chuckled within Dallions realm. Hes really bad at it, but thinks he can pull it off. He reminds me a bit of July.

The echo in question coughed in order to show it didnt agree. Dallion ignored them both.

You see, shes a fury, Dallion went on with the story. Do you know what a fury is?

Linner shook his head, already hooked on the story

Furies are creatures of the sky. They are born in great cloud fortresses that roam the skies. It is even said that when you see thunder its because two cloud forts are fighting each other for dominance over that patch of sky.

Thats not true! the boy said, although Dallion could see that deep down he believed it. And it was easy to believe such a story, since at one point it had been true. Of course, that had happened ages ago, when the furies were more than the battered kingdom remnants they were now. According to the few historical records Dallion had come across, sky battles were common to the point that all major races feared the day the furies would conquer all due to their military strength and violent temper.

Oh, its very true. Dallion smiled. Ive seen many furies in Nerosal. They can control the wind, giving them the ability to fly and smack people on the head from a distance. But even among them, my friend is special.

How?

Shes a thunder fury. That means she can also control thunder. Once she got very upset and

What? Linner leaned closer, as if they would help him learn the answer faster.

And she threw a customer out of the inn I was at.

Come on!

Im serious. Dallion laughed. She grabbed him by the collar and threw him out like a scruffy cat. So, she asked me to help find something for her. Something very, very important.

Her teapot? Linner narrowed his eyes, feigning disinterest.

Her home.

This got the reaction as one would expect. Lin looked at his brother, then for some reason at the floor. A sense of sadness formed and grew within his chest.

Lin? Dallion asked, confused. Whats the matter?

Grandpa told me, the boy said. He told me that this place isnt your home.

It is my home. *Damn it, grandpa, why did you have to tell him that?* Youve known me your entire life. You know"

Its not your only home. As it isnt his. The first time Grandpa took me to the shrine to awaken, he warned me that I might change, but also not change. He said that the thoughts of someone in another world far, far away will merge with me, but I wasnt to be afraid. It was all going to be alright, because thats what happened to you.

There was no explaining around this one, Nil said. Not only had the old man given a quite detailed explanation, but the boy seems to have understood it. Frankly, Im surprised at how well he handles the whole thing.

Grandpa is right. Thats what sometimes happens when you awaken. Dallion had no choice but to play along. Is that why youre worried about me? You think Im searching for my way home? To my other home?

The boy nodded.

Dont worry, I dont plan on leaving. This wasnt a conversation Dallion wanted to have at all, let alone under such circumstances. And neither is my friend. I promised to find her home here. You see, she was born in a cloud castle, and needs my help to find it.

Linner remained silent. Dallion could see, thanks to his music skill, that the feeling of concern hadnt left his brother.

Hey. I wont be going off anywhere, Dallion said. And even if I wanted to, theres no way back. So, dont be like this, okay?

It took a while, but Linner nodded again. There was no telling whether he believed his brother or had simply accepted the fact that Dallion would just disappear one day.

Ive still lots of things to do here. Besides, I must help my friends.

I guess

But Im glad you told me. Not many know about this, so itll have to remain a secret, alright?

Grandpa told me about that.

Yes, but this must remain a secret, even from him. Its better if people dont know about it, or theyll start behaving differently. This was far from the best explanation, but it had to

do. It also helped that Dallion added a bit of trust in his words. We dont want anyone to worry more than they have to, right?

Another nod indicated that Linner agreed. It also put an end to the conversation. The topic was never raised again. Even so, Dallion felt he had stayed longer than necessary. The very same day, after finishing dinner, Dallion wished his family a quick goodbye, left a few gold coins just in case and left.

I thought you liked your village, Nil said as Dallion looked at the sky. Night had just started and with it, the Moons made their appendence. Normally this would be the time people remained in their settlements, but for a hunter, it was the best time to move. The Moons provided light and protection from Star spawn.

I liked what it was, Dallion said. *Now its become too noisy.*

Thats just you getting used to your empathy stat. Youll get used to it. Give it a bit more time.

Its already been several months.

And you think thats enough? The echo laughed. *How long did it take you to learn to use your music skill properly? And your forging? This is an entirely new attribute, one that has been kept from humanity for centuries, at least. Of course, youll have problems.*

Turning slightly to his left, Dallion continued walking. By his estimates he was five days from Halburn, more if he paused for some sleep. Given that the rest of the hunting party was waiting for him, Dallion preferred to get there sooner rather than later. His zoology skill told him that there were quite a few critters about hiding from view. His travelers emblem made them keep their distance.

So now that youve scratched Dherma off your list, whats left? You plan to go hunting for the generals item?

After Halburn, Dallion replied.

The town is nowhere as important as it tries to make itself out to be. There are far better libraries in the heart of the empire.

Strictly speaking, that was correct, but they wouldnt have any specific information on the area, and for the moment that was precisely what Dallion and the other hunters were after. Even with the vast number of traders and treasure seekers, fresh ruins remained difficult to find. It was no wonder that a third of all hunter missions received maps in the form of payment. Just like in the pirate days back on Earth, maps were more valuable than artifacts. Of course, that was partially true. All discovered ruins had an expiration date. The fresher a set of ruins was, the more likely there would be artifacts inside.

Being at the outer border of the Empire, the town of Halburn was a place at which merchants and hunters exchanged goods and information. From what Eury had told Dallion, they were going to exchange the reward of their last few missions for several ruin maps of the region. The important bit was that, as Dallion had told his brother, one of the maps was supposedly linked to the cloud fortress on which Jiroh was born. It remained a longshot, but both Eury had agreed to go along with it, as always. This time, Dallion had also joined in.

The whole night Dallion spent walking. At the crack of dawn, he entered his awakening realm to get some sleep, then once he was adequately refreshed went back to the real world and walked on. Day after day, night after night, Dallion kept walking. When his food rations ran out, he engaged in a bit of hunting animals only in order to procure himself some meat.

Finally, nine days after he had last spoken with Euryale, Dallion arrived at his destination.

Welcome to the southern watchtower of Halbrun, dear boy, Nil said. From here on, you're officially on the Tamin-Valeido border. I'd suggest you don't do any unnecessary actions once you get near the tower. People here tend to be a bit overcautious.

Even to hunters? Dallion asked.

Until you get your hunter emblem, you're nothing but a traveler, dear boy.

Leveling up the World #Chapter 388: Two Furies - Read Leveling up the World Chapter 388: Two Furies

Chapter 388: Two Furies

Half a dozen guards stood at the base of the watchtower. They were nowhere as clean or tidy as those of any city. However, what they lacked in appearance, they made up with skill and experience. One look was enough for Dallion to tell that these weren't the sort of people to mess with. All of them were double digits, with a few likely reaching his level. Standing on top of the watchtower, a trio with crossbows kept an eye on the area, ready to let all hell rain down, given an excuse.

Hey, Dallion said as he went up to the guards.

Business? the man said, not wasting time with niceties. Thanks to his music skills, Dallion could see that he was vigilant.

Meeting up with a group of hunters in Halburn, Dallion went directly to the point as well. After that, depends on the jobs.

You're a hunter? A spark of interest appeared within the guard.

Trainee. My group might have passed through here a week ago. There was a slight pause. None of the guards were willing to volunteer information, waiting to check whether Dallion's story was valid. There was a gorgon among them.

This piece of information was enough to get some of the guards to relax. On the outside nothing changed, but Dallion could see they had pretty much made up their minds to let him pass without issue.

Lots of hunters gathering here lately, the guard said. It didn't seem he was testing Dallion. Anything special going on?

Not that I know. Might be related to what happened in Nerosal.

Behind one of the guards swore and spat on the ground. The latest events were all fun and games for the cities in the heart of the empire. All border territories, however, were on high alert. Places that had remained calm for centuries now had to face the prospect of war even if it was likely to be one-sided. From the few glimpses Dallion had seen of Aspion's memories, war wasn't particularly fun for either side, no matter how powerful a person was.

Go on, and don't cause trouble, the guard waved for Dallion to continue, which he did.

Not the friendliest lot, the armadil shield said. *They must have seen all sorts here.*

They're probably tense because of current events.

I doubt that. I think it has more to do with the hunters gathering. Come to think of it, are you sure there isn't anything special going on?

Guards always tend to be suspicious, Dallion replied, but deep inside he was asking himself the same questions. Maybe there was some sort of gathering, or convention, or whatever the equivalent in this world was. It would also explain how Jiroh had found someone to sell her information on something that had eluded her for years.

The town itself was an hour's walk from the tower enough for it to prepare in case of a warning from its watchtowers. The outer walls seemed crude, though massive. In some aspects, they reminded Dallion of the crackling village he had seen in the sword realm.

Did Euryale tell you exactly where to meet? Nil asked. The echo knew perfectly well she hadn't, but this was his subtle way of voicing his disapproval on the matter. Even now, after everything, Nil had remained slightly disapproving of Dallion's choice of girlfriend.

Somewhere in the city, Dallion replied. *How difficult can it be to find a gorgon hunter?*

Once inside, Dallion felt like he wanted to eat his words. This was the first time he had been to Halburn, and it showed. What was worse, every scammer and two-bit merchant seemed to see it as well and flocked to him like flies to honey. Barely a few steps in, and already Dallion had been offered ten uniquely rare artifacts, half a dozen maps, seven uniquely good inns to stay at, an assortment of suspicious foods, and clothes he wouldn't be caught dead wearing. His music skills helped him see that all of the offers were bull crap, but that didn't discourage people from trying. Even most of the innkeepers were less than honest, assuring him that there was a gorgon staying at their inn. Dallion saying that he was a hunter, only made things worse. In nearly all cases, Dallion felt the desire for profit balloon within them at the prospect of having him as a guest.

I guess I'll have to rely only on my eyes, Dallion thought. Like him, Euryale came from another world, which would allow him to see her shimmering in the crowd.

Most hunters are otherworlders, Nil reminded.

It's better than the alternative, Nil.

That's what happens when people don't exchange echoes. Honestly, dear boy, it's completely unnatural. There's a reason the Moons gave awakened the power to create echoes that way we could stay in touch with others through huge distances. Being superstitious doesn't suit you.

Dallion sighed mentally. While Nil was right and an echo of Eury would have been helpful right now, the gorgon absolutely refused having or making them. Most of the time she even spent with a blocker ring on, so that no echoes or guardians could sense her. At first Dallion thought that this was a hunter's quirk, but after meeting the rest of the Nerosal group, he had found that it was unique to the gorgon alone.

I've seen a gorgon, a voice yelled from a nearby stall.

Glancing in the direction, Dallion saw an old woman selling finely crafted wooden bowls. However, it wasn't the woman who had offered to help, but rather one of the bowls.

Buy me and I'll tell you where she went, the bowl continued.

Even the items in this town are scammers. Dallion sighed.

Then you know exactly why I want to get out of here, the item persisted.

How much for the bowl? Dallion pointed at the item in question.

Twenty silvers, the old woman said without blinking. The price was high, but she seemed determined that it would be bought. Despite her looks, she had better instincts

than anyone Dallion had seen in the city so far, mostly because he could tell that she was an awakened.

Without even bothering to haggle, Dallion counted the coins from his pouch and put them on her stand. Then, he picked up the bowl.

It has a dryad guardian, the woman said. A bit perky for my taste, but Ive seen worse.

Thanks for the warning. Dallion nodded. Hunter?

Just an old woman whos come here for her retirement. Its easier to make money off youngsters like you.

I guess. Dallion looked about. Do you have a backpack?

Ten silvers, the woman said without hesitation. And as before, Dallion instantly paid. Its not a good idea to go through the wilderness without a backpack or a good emblem.

Im traveling with a hunters party, Dallion explained. I just need something in the meantime.

Its your life. The woman shrugged.

Most likely shes had her name erased, Nil said.

Why not go to Nerosal, then? Dallion asked. *There are lots of guilds that would take her in if her skills are half decent.*

Only if shes from the empire, dear boy. Remember, there are two sides of a border.

Have you seen a gorgon pass by? Dallion asked as he put the bowl in his newly purchased backpack. Like everything else in the city, it was rough but sturdy. The woman must have maintained its quality by mending it often.

Five Eyes Tavern, the woman replied. Go to the palace square, then continue to the other side of town. Youll know it when you see it.

What she said, the bowl guardian shouted from within the backpack. As most guardian items it had the ability to cast its voice further away, in part because it had the empathy stat as well.

Thanks, Dallion said. Take care.

You really have to stop picking up strays, the armadil said in somewhat joking fashion. *Youve filled half of Eurys workshop with useless items.*

Hey! The bowl shouted. She wasn't particularly happy with the description. *For your information, I'm extremely good at what I do!*

And what's that?

Poison tasting!

You're both extremely useful, Dallion said, putting a quick end to the argument. *Now just give me some peace, okay?*

No one said a word.

Thanks. Dallion walked on.

The town palace ended up being more a fort than an actual palace. Apparently, the word was used loosely to mean the place where the city noble lived. Two barracks were placed on both sides of the square, replacing the usual inns and merchant shops. That didn't stop people from doing trades in the square itself, or maybe that was the point.

Nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live here, Dallion thought.

So far, the only types of people he'd seen were merchants, soldiers, and travelers like him. It gave the feeling of the place being quite transitory. According to its past, the settlement had started as a trade stop, where caravans could take a rest before moving east or west. An awakened with a good eye for profit had improved the area several times until it had become the town it was today. The only difference was that it wasn't only used by merchants anymore.

The further Dallion went from the palace square, the more hunters he came across. There was a certain unmistakable air about them, that separated them from ordinary people of even awakened. Euryale liked to joke that hunters were merely non-sheltered awakened, and in a way she was right. The average awakened didn't risk their lives during their jobs, hunters risked them every day.

While walking, Dallion caught a glimpse of someone with an otherworldly shimmer. It wasn't Euryale or Jiroh, but rather a human. Large as a bear, the man had noticed Dallion as well. The two kept looking at each other, each continuing in their own direction. No one stopped or said a word. A simple nod was all the acknowledgement necessary.

There was a time back in Dherma when Dallion would have given everything to meet someone back from Earth. Now, he found that he didn't care much. After all, he had already gotten to know the world to the point he could consider himself a local. There was no point in talking about a place that was, especially since there was no going back.

You could have said hello, at least, Nil said.

Maybe next time.

The Five Eye Tavern turned out to be an inn frequented by hunters. Like all establishments for awakened, it was impeccably kept, although judging by the smell, there was a bit to be desired when it came to food. A girl still in her teens was at the bar, rearranging the shelves with exotic looking bottles. However, she was doing it while sitting down, for the simple reason that she was a fury.

Hey, Dallion said, walking up to her. Im looking for a gorgon.

Youre Eurys boyfriend? The girl glanced him all over. Dallions music skills told him she was curious, though also not impressed.

Thats what Id like to think. Dallion smiled. I take it shes here.

Yes and no. A glass and bottle made their way from a shelf to the bar plot. Unlike Jiroh, this girl wasnt shy about using her innate ability. There was a beast sighting, so most of the crowd left to get a piece of the action. She should be back by evening.

That explains why the place is empty.

The place is always empty, the girl smirked. Hunters only come here to sleep or deal. Both those happen in the evening.

Oh well. I guess this isnt the morning sort of town, Dallion said. The joke wasnt too good, but it earned him a chuckle, along with a passing grade. How much for whatever that is? Dallion pointed at the red liquid that was being poured in his glass.

Ten silver, the fury replied. Comes with your room.

You mean Eury didnt pay for me?

The girl laughed again.

Thats a good one, she said.

This isnt that sort of inn, dear boy. Rooms are shared between all. By your room, she means your bed.

I know, Nil

Oh.

You running the place on your own? Dallion asked and took a sip of his drink. It tasted like strawberries and chilly peppers.

Its my place, the girl replied. To Dallions surprise, she wasnt lying.

Your place? Thats impressive. When I was your age, all I had was a set of clothes. Howd you get it?

The person who had it before, died, so I got to keep it. Hunters' rules.

Youre a hunter?

No, she isnt, a familiar voice said next to Dallion. Looking to his left, he saw that Jiroh had appeared and was now sitting next to him. She just takes care of it for one. Hi, Dal. Id like you to meet my sister Diroh.

Leveling up the World #Chapter 389: Halburn Dealings - Read Leveling up the World Chapter 389: Halburn Dealings

Chapter 389: Halburn Dealings

She has a sister? Dallion asked.

He had known the fury for quite a while, he even believed to know her well. Apparently, that wasnt the case. Ever since Dallion had joined the hunter party, he had learned a lot of things about her, and Eury, that he never suspected. However, he never expected to be so out of the loop regarding this.

Nerosal is a place for new beginnings, dear boy. Nil said. Everyone has a history, and it usually is left at the city gates.

That was true. Nerosal was considered one of the cities for second chances, or the places where nobles were sent to be banished. Either way, it used to accept people from all over the empire and beyond, no questions asked. Soon things were about to change, though.

I didnt know you had a sister, Dallion said, taking another sip of his drink. She doesnt look anything like you.

Because of my skin? Diroh frowned. Cant humans learn that"

Di, Jiroh interrupted.

The younger fury pouted, then turned around, pretending to arrange the shelves. She was only a few years older than Dallions own brother, but the difference was immeasurable. Living pretty much in the wilderness had made her grow up a lot faster to the point she could run a hunter tavern. Dallion strongly suspected that the hunters were helping out as well, not to mention providing protection, but it was impressive nonetheless.

Thunder furies are like me. The others arent. Jiroh explained. Di, check the beds. Make sure the floors are clean.

Fine, Ill go so you two can have a talk, the young fury said, then disappeared in the blink of the eye. Using his focus, Dallion caught part of her movements, though not all.

Shes a good kid, just not used to being nice. Too much of a hunter without being one.

Must have been tough, Dallion remained at a loss. Did this belong to a relative?

Might have. I found it a few years ago. By then it was already Dis place.

You didnt know you had a sister?

Theres a lot I dont know. One thing was for certain she wasnt around when I left. A second glass made its way from the counter to the bar plot. Once there, the fury poured herself a drink and downed it in one gulp. I found out about her through a map. The merchant said he knew about my family and for a few artifacts for the information. When I paid, he gave me a piece of paper and the news that I had a sister.

Dallion felt the sound of anger coming from within Jiroh. Even after all this time, she still resented the merchant. In her place, Dallion probably would have as well. To learn the location of a relative in such a way was unfathomable, but also the perfect way to describe the life of a hunter. There always were deals, some of them good, some not that much, and one never knew what they might find at the end of the map.

Does Hannah know? he asked.

Of course. Jiroh shook her head. Theres little that Hannah doesnt know. She offered to take her in, even help her with the Gremlins Timepiece. I was against it. I didnt want to take a sister I didnt know existed from everything she knew to put her in a place at which shed be unhappy. As the saying goes, we furies make our own families, and she has made hers here.

Furies made their own families Several people had used those words, including the general. The sleazy snob, to whom Dallion was still indebted, had given that as an explanation for the loyalty of his fury servants and bodyguards. From what Dallion had seen, the man had a dozen under his employ, several constantly at his side.

Whats this about a beast sighting? Dallion changed the topic.

Flame tongue lizard, Jiroh said. Very nasty, very rare, and for those who want to pay, very expensive. The Order still hasnt made its mind how to classify the creature, so there are always a few nobles willing to pay a lot for capture. Of course, most just want to kill it.

Know anything about that one, Nil? Dallion asked.

Its more or less as the name suggests: a lizard that can melt anything it eats, the echo replied. Theyre omnivorous, so they can get annoying when they grow too much. Oh, and by omnivorous, I mean they eat absolutely everything. Stone, livestock, soldiers in full plate armor

So, a perfect weapon for war.

A very chaotic and uncontrollable weapon. Think of it more as a status symbol.

How much money is involved?

Enough to get everyone out there. In the case of Eury, though, she does it mostly for fun and bragging rights.

That sounds like her. Dallion finished his drink. Ill go get some rest. Only slept in the realms this last week.

Go. Jiroh poured herself another drink. First floor. Well wake you when its time for dealing.

Dallions bed was the one closest to the window, right next to Eury. Eury could easily tell by the stack of armor pieces surrounding it some of which were Dallion's own. Apparently, the gorgon remained the groups mender even when she was out of Nerosal.

In theory, no one dared steal from a hunter, but just in case, Dallion put all of his possessions that fit in the chest next to his bed. Just the shield was put leaning in the corner of the room. Taking off his top clothes and putting them to the side, Dallion got in the bed. Although they seemed rough, the blankets were incredibly soft. That was one of the advantages of hunters since they spend a lot of their time hunting creatures in the wilderness, they had access to materials fit for nobles. Fur of the cloud beaver, in this case, provided unmatched warmth and softness.

It seemed that the moment Dallion closed his eyes, someone shook him. Next thing he knew, it was already evening and Eury was leaning over his bed, trying to wake him up.

You sleep like a log, the gorgon whispered as Dallion cracked his eyes open. Get dressed. The rest are waiting downstairs.

Dallions initial reaction was to close his eyes and sleep some more. However, he had the wisdom to enter his realm first. Two hours later or a moment in the real world he stood up and got dressed. He considered taking his weapons along, but ultimately decided to leave all but the Nox dagger.

The room downstairs was completely different from what it had been earlier. Hunters were everywhere, making the place seem packed to bursting point. Despite that, the only noise heard was that of Dallions steps as he made his way down the staircase. Unlike ordinary awakened, hunters used taverns to conduct business, and while conducting business, they always whispered so that only the other people at their table could hear.

Euryale and her group were sitting at a table in the far corner of the room. Jiroh was also there, as were five more of the usual members. This time, though, there was one more person: a middle-aged woman dressed in rather expensive clothes. One could tell at first glance that she was a merchant; the clothes and the necklace made of travelling medallions gave her away. To Dallions surprise, she was also an awakened.

When Dallion reached the table, one of the hunters shifted along the bench-like chair to offer some space. The gorgon didn't move an inch. There was no secret that she and Dallion were an item, but when it came down to business, Eury was the leader and Dallion just a trainee.

This is a surprise, the merchant whispered so no one outside of the table could hear. The hero of Nerosal. I didn't expect to see you here.

I'm no hero, Dallion said, more surprised that she was so well informed than annoyed.

While a number of people had seen his actions during the battle at the arena, the countess and other city authorities had made sure not to discuss his involvement openly. As far as the city was concerned, the countess had taken over the role of the Lord Mayor, becoming the third most powerful person in the entire Wetie province. Dallions involvement was barely mentioned, even within the Icepicker guild.

We're not here to discuss him. Eury's tone was calm, and yet sharp enough to bring the conversation back on point. Make your offer.

Usually, it happens the other way around, the merchant says. You make the offer and I decide whether to accept it.

Not this time. Show us what you've brought and then we talk price.

Haggling at its best. Dallion could sense that the merchant was using music to influence the talks to her advantage. It was quite subtle, but he had grown accustomed to noticing such things. Also, her music level was rather low. The gorgon, of course, had a blocking ring on, making the attempt doomed to failure.

I have two maps and a name. The merchant had no intention of quitting.

A double scroll case was placed on the table. Combining his music and forging skills, Dallion was able to sense that the case was made of a silver steel alloy. More interesting, it seemed that scrolls within were made of metal as well.

I bought these off a hunter during hard times. Apparently, he found something so terrifying that he wanted to quit his profession. He was selling off everything he had gathered: weapons, artifacts, gems all for gold. I was lucky to come across him first. If hes to be believed, these two beauties were found in the ruins of a nymph settlement.

Nymphs? Dallion put in a lot of effort to remain calm, but deep inside he was everything but that. The nymphs were the second race that had tried to take over the world, after the copyettes. Unlike the copyettes, though, all of their cities had been destroyed, making them exceedingly rare.

A nearly intact nymph settlement, the merchant added.

There are no nymph settlements, one of the group said.

Apparently there was at least one, the woman smiled. Perfectly preserved underwater. Id give you the location

But you dont think we can afford it, Euryale finished for her.

No. The hunter refused to tell me. The items he found there were real enough. I had them authenticated twice.

In this day and age, there were several ways of authenticating artifacts. Dallion, however, chose to use a shortcut.

Hey, he said. Metal scrolls, were you created by nymphs?

An empath? a voice asked through dozens of others striving for Dallions attention. *And human, at that. There arent a lot of you.*

Thanks. There arent. So, were you?

No, a second voice nearly identical to the first replied. *We were forged by dwarves.*

But we were held by nymphs.

Discreetly, Dallion nodded. That was enough for Eury to get the signal. She still didn't know all the details, but was one of the few to be aware of part of his skills.

Real nymph maps, the merchant said. You don't come across that every day.

That wasn't the arrangement, Jiroh said sharply. The purse for information.

Information that could lead to a deserted cloud castle? The merchant smirked. I told you I had a name, but I won't give it to you just for a pouch. The merchant leaned forward. So, do you want the maps and the name, and what are you willing to offer?

If the maps are so valuable, why sell them to us? Nobles can pay more than hunters.

None of the people she hired were able to read us, one of the scrolls said to Dallion. Several even entered my domain trying, but all they managed was to get hurt.

That explained a few things. There was nothing nefarious in the merchant's behavior, she simply couldn't afford to be at a loss. The goods she was offering, while authentic, were bad. If she cheated a hunter, all she might get a few people upset for a few years; cause a noble to save face, however, and there would be serious consequences to pay.

How much are they worth to you? Dallion asked, causing everyone but Eury to turn his direction.

Not a bad question. The gorgon took the lead. You know me well enough, so just tell me what you want.

Emotions burst like flares. This was the second time Dallion had seen the color and shape of emotions outside of the realms. Normally he would feel and hear the sounds that conveyed what people and guardians were feeling, but now for a single instant he saw them all in color: anger, stubbornness, anger, greed. The hunters didn't want to be taken advantage of, and the merchant had no intention of backing down. However, it was Liandra who had the most unusual reaction of all. Despite pretending not to want the deal, she was desperate for the information, and ready to pay whatever price was asked.

The hero's harp sword, the merchant said. Now it was Dallion's turn to sound surprised. The weapon had been a source of interest, but no one so far had openly wanted to buy it. There are a few interested parties that"

It's linked, Eury cut the merchant short before Dallion had the chance. Choose something else.

Another weapon. The merchant didn't miss a beat. Something old, something nobles would like to play with.

Ill take care of that. Is that all?

And the pouch.

Several of Eurys snakes moved towards Jiroh, indicating it was her call. A few moments later, a velvet pouch appeared on the table in front of the merchant. Dallion wasnt sure what the contents were, but knew they had to be worth a lot. Apparently, a lot less than his harpsisword, though.

Always a pleasure to close a deal. The merchant took the pouch and stood up. Fevre Dorr, she said, handing a small piece of paper to Eury. He was last hiding in the Glass Mounts off west. I expect hell still be there, until the weather gets better, at least. Good luck.

Leveling up the World #Chapter 390: Scroll Reading - Read Leveling up the World Chapter 390: Scroll Reading

Chapter 390: Scroll Reading

Hunters were always on the move. Unlike guild awakened, they couldnt afford a celebration after every successful event. Time moved differently for themall missions occurred in real time, travel included, and whenever possible sleeping as well. Only mending took place in the awakened realms, and it too had to be done as efficiently as possible, since food was limited on the road. That was the reason that hunter inns were places for rest, resupply, and business. After all, the faster they got their next job, the better for everyone.

The moment the deal with the merchant was done, the party gathered their things and set off. There were no long goodbyes, no discussions which location to tackleall that could be done on the roadJiroh simply left a stack of coins on the bar counter, and told her sister shed be seeing her later.

Since he was the one with a new backpack, Dallion was tasked with carrying the newly purchased scrolls. That turned out to be a mixed blessing. Finding itself in the proximity of a pair of ancient unknown items, the bowl happily chatted away about the past and chances that had occurred in the last few ages. The issue was that Dallion could also hear the chatter.

Maybe increasing your empathy stat so fast wasnt such a good idea, Gen asked. Being Dallions first echo, and the one that knew him best, he tended to discuss leveling strategies from time to time. I think you should focus a bit on reaction next. Youre getting sluggish.

Ill look into it, Dallion replied, still unwilling to go through his next leveling up. Eury had advised him not to level up while on the road. Dherma village would have been a perfect place to do so if Dallions mind wasnt focused on other things.

You know youre having issues, right? The echo continued. *Youve been reluctant to use the realms lately. The more you do this, the more difficult your next trial will get.*

I know the theory and will do something about it. Just not now.

The party made their way to the west gate of Halburn. Much smaller than the other gates, it was used by travelers to quickly enter without delaying the caravan wagons. In the last few decades, though, the gate had become better known as the Hunters Gate. Not that hunters specifically used it to enter; quite the opposite that was the gate through which they had been granted permission to leave at any point in the day or night.

Seeing Jiroh and Eury, the guards didnt even bother to ask to see their hunters emblems, but opened the side gate and waved them through. Once outside the city, the discussions began.

Which job do we take? Largo asked. If hunters were given specific roles, he would have been the tank. Scrolls or Glass Mounts? Or the place the scrolls were found?

We go on for what we set out for, Eury said. We check the scrolls at light to see if theres anything along the way. If anythings close, its Jirohs call.

Sure.

Dallion could feel annoyance, sadness, and understanding fight for control within the man. While all the hunters in the party were close, they remained work for hire. Doing favors for one another was common, but not at the expense of profit, and even Dallion knew that in the last few years the party was doing Jiroh a lot of favors, and although some of them had paid off, others not so much.

Are there any creatures in the Glass Mounts? Dallion asked, aiming to change the topic.

There always are creatures, Largo said, although like everyone else, he wasnt fully aware.

The truth was that the Glass Mounts, while fairly well known, wasnt a place that hunters went to. According to the rumors it was a mountain chain composed predominantly of crystals earning it the name. It remained unclear how it had come to be. Theories ranged from the ancient city predating the seven races to a powerful spell gone bad. Neither nobles nor the Order of the Seven Moons were able to provide many details, making it one of the unexplained curiosities in that part of the world. What was known was that the mountains were located in the territory of the Aplicio kingdom a small country of minor significance that neighbored the Tamin empire. The kingdom was

known, among other things, for its friendliness towards traders, mercenaries, and the Order of the Seven Moons. The weird mix of values had made its rulers relatively wealthy and secure so as not to worry about imminent attacks. Recent events in Nerosal, however, probably had them worried. It was no secret that certain nobles, including the Archduke of Wetie province, had been eying the territory, even going so far as attempting political alliances through marriage.

By dawn, the hunting party stopped for a bite and some rest. Everyone had enough travel rations they had bought from Halburn, so there was no need to resort to hunting animals. During that time, Dallion took out the scroll case from his backpack and opened it.

The scrolls resembled the pages of a book more than actual scrolls. It was as if someone had torn them out, then rolled them up, and slid a leather band so as to keep them in place. The funny thing was that according to the scrolls themselves, they hadn't been anything different.

As the merchant had claimed, the contents definitely showed maps of some sort. However, given incomprehensible scribbles that passed for writing and the unfamiliar legend, Dallion wasn't able to make anything out.

They're maps of some sort, he said. I don't recognize what they're made of. Silver and something.

Euryale who had chosen not to eat for some reason went up to him and slid a finger along the edge of the metal scroll.

Silver, iron, and a small amount of sky silver, she said. It's been treated quite well.

Let me take a look. Largo joined them. As the only one of the party with writing skills, he served as the group's scholar and interpreter. Dwarven, he said. Very old dwarven.

Dwarven? Dallion asked, surprised. Any appraiser should have been able to read that.

That's not the issue. The scrolls protected.

In what way? Dallion looked at the symbols etched on the thin sheet of metal.

Labyrinth cipher. Someone needs to enter the labyrinth and mend it in such a way so that the writing makes sense. The man took a bit of his ration. Dwarves used them a lot back in the day.

Why would nymphs use dwarven script? Gleam asked from within Dallion's realm.

They wouldn't, Dallion replied. *They had the dwarves cipher what the information they wanted. At least, that's what I would have done.*

Does that mean this is a big catch? Dallion asked.

It might be. The other hunter nodded.

How do you decipher it?

If you find a way, let me know. Largo laughed and moved away.

There are creatures in the realm, Euryale said. The dwarves use their abilities to turn most of the labyrinth into creatures. As they move about, the original message is transformed into gibberish. The only way to make it legible again is to rearrange the creatures, which is pretty much impossible. Mages might have a few tricks, but they are out of most peoples price range. The only other way is through the reader keyan item containing the echoes of all the people who are allowed to read it. When the key comes in contact, the echo gives the order for the creatures to rearrange, which they do. Then, once the echo is gone, the scroll returns to being gibberish.

The process sounded fascinating. It also ensured that only certain people would be able to see anything cyphered in such a way. That also explained why the merchant had failed to read the scrolls in question. The moment the nymph race was banished, all their echoes were destroyed, rendering all key items useless.

Quite a sophisticated method, Dallion said. Is it still used?

People prefer using echoes directly nowadays. Not that it matters. Eury rolled up one of the scrolls. The Academy is always interested in buying them, so we wont be at a loss.

We wont be at a profit either, Largo grumbled.

What if we try to read it? Dallion said. Everyone looked at him, as if he had made a poor joke. It wont take any time at all. I can go inside and see if the guardian wont help. My harpsisword has a nymph guardian, so they could come into an arrangement.

That was only half true. Dallion planned to ask the guardian directly, and that was only if he wasnt able to convince the creatures to decipher the scroll on their own. Thanks to the empathy stat and zoology skill, he was able to do that easily. However, it all came down to whether the party would let him try.

Let me have a go, Dallion said.

Go ahead. Largo waved his hand. Its not like well see any action anytime soon.

Jiroh? Euryala asked.

The fury looked at Dallion, then shook her head.

Ill be fine, Dallion insisted. I wont challenge the guardian and Ill be out if I see theres no point.

He has to start going solo at some point, Eury said. Who knows, maybe hell learn something.

Dallion could feel Jirohs hesitation. Her fear wasnt directed towards him. She knew that he would be fine. She was terrified that if he succeeded, that might make the party might convince the rest to change their destination.

Go ahead, she said at last.

The same instant, Dallion entered the scroll he was holding.

SPHERE ITEM AWAKENING

Dallion found himself surrounded by silver walls on all sides. At first glance it was similar to most of the awakened items Dallion had visited, with one major exception: there was no roof above his head, but an endless blue sky.

Lux, Dallion said, realizing the obvious. Dallion hadnt appeared in a room that would take him to the labyrinth. This was the labyrinth.

The firebird promptly appeared, covering Dallion with blue flames. Moments later, blue wings formed, lifting Dallion up.

You are in an enormous silver labyrinth domain.

The SCROLLs destiny has already been fulfilled.

So much for increasing a skill, Dallion thought. Whoever had made the scroll had made sure that the cypher couldnt be broken by leveling up the item. Most people would leave it at that, however, Dallion felt quite intrigued by the prospect. Sphere items that were leveled up werent supposed to have guardians. As far as he knew, Dallion was the only one who possessed such items, by linking them to his familiars. Clearly, he wasnt the first to have come up with the idea.

Lux, Gleam, he said. Better get ready. We might have company soon.

Technically, you are the company, dear boy, Nil said. *But your reasoning is otherwise correct. However, it also puts you in a tricky situation. If the guardian defeats you, youll be ejected from the realm. On the other hand, if you defeat itthe item itself will crumble, leaving you with nothing.*

Thats perfect. Dallion smiled. *Ive always preferred to settle things with a draw.*

Lets hope the local guardian agrees with you.

Just then, a giant glittering eel emerged from a distant part of the labyrinth and rose up to the sky. Even from this distance, Dallion could tell that it was covered with sapphire scales that glittered in the sunlight. Clearly, Dallion wasnt the only one able to fight, and most likely, he wasnt meant to be.

Well, do your best, dear boy, Nil said. Im sure youll come up with a good explanation to excuse your blatant cheating. Just remember you cant defeat the guardian. Even illegible, the scroll costs quite a lot of money.

Thanks for reminding me, Dallion frowned.

This wasnt a good way to start off.