

After Charles left, we watched as a procession of people filed out of the teleportation nexus. The first were a group of fifty men and women in black robes led by an elven male with a starry cloak. He offered a curt nod as he approached, before bowing deeply. "King Advent. My name is Cedric George, the Archmage of Space. I understand the financial benefits to be gained by having the full Twisted Eye traverse the nexus," he began, glancing back to the mages with him. "However, given the limited throughput of the building, it would take most of the day for our full guild to arrive."

"With your permission, I would like to perform a grand summoning with my spatial mages to accelerate the process," Cedric gestured to the group behind him. "With the fifty of us working in concert, we can summon at least a thousand of our members at once."

I hesitated briefly, having overlooked that the nexus might not be able to handle everyone at once. "Sure," I agreed readily. We were bound to get the travel funds from them going back and forth anyways, so I was fine with losing the short term investment to maintain stability in Fallcry. "There is a large open space in the square that should be able to accommodate everyone."

Cedric let out a sigh of relief, nodding and gesturing for his group to follow behind him. "You have my thanks, my King," he said as he left.

I couldn't help but feel sorry for Cedric. Given the sheer size of the city, they were likely going to need to set up various teleportation enchantments throughout the seven islands. Although the roads were big enough to drive a car down them easily, anyone walking on foot would take at least a full day just going from one island to another.

*I suppose that's what makes this such a grand city,* I thought to myself, shaking my head and looking at Diane and Bella. "Everything should be taken care of here for now. Do you two want to go exploring? We haven't actually had the chance to test Bella's chaos bullets on a live target yet."

When I pointed that out, Bella's eyes went wide with alarm, as if just realizing this herself. "Yes, please! Should we go to one of the dungeons here, or would you rather go back to Fallcry and explore one of their dungeons?"

I thought about that briefly, debating the options. The dungeons around Fallcry were safer, as we already knew their levels and loot. However, aside from the mimic dungeon, the other two were just undead dungeons, so the loot was pretty terrible. "Let's at least take a look at the dungeons here first. If they're under level two hundred, we can consider using them to train. If they're not, we'll head back to Fallcry."

However, Diane stared up at me, her face a stoic mask. "With the Twisted Eye added in, do we have enough population for the knight system yet? Also, are there higher noble ranks available now?"

I blinked, checking the system. "I'm not seeing anything yet for the knights. We're still listed as a County in the management window. As for the noble ranks... you two wanted to be kept at the same rank, so I could upgrade you from Lord to Viscount at most. Although the Count and Marquess ranks are unlocked, there's only one of each."

Diane looked at Bella silently, but Bella shook her head. "Let's just stay at the Lord rank for now," she said with a smile. "Now that such a large group of people are here, it should just be a matter of time before more migrate."

Diane hesitated, but ultimately agreed. "Alright. Let's investigate the dungeons. Martial island first, I assume?"

"Right," I confirmed, already summoning the car. "The southeast island of purple coral is the Martial training area. After they move everyone here, their first stops will either be the Magic or agricultural areas. The Martial dungeons will likely be little more than an afterthought for completion's sake."

The other two quickly climbed into the car, and I drove off above the city. Each island had its own coral color, and this coral could mostly be seen along the island's edge, or if you were to dive under the water. Thus, as I flew the car higher, we saw seven large bands of colorful coral wrapped around the city-sized islands below.

I flew us towards the purple coral island without delay, having already memorized the layout of the city while I was building it. There were two dungeons, one on the northern side of the island and the other on the southern. Since it was closer, I drove us towards the northern one and disembarked, allowing the other two to get out.

Once the car was put away, I took a deep breath, activating my Ghost Zone and stepping into the dungeon portal. As soon as I was through, I found myself in a humid jungle, surrounded by tall trees. I could hear the piercing cries of monsters above the canopy, so I gestured for the two behind me to stay still.

Focusing, I projected my vision up above with Hawkeye-X, finding herds of monstrous birds with stone-like armor over their bodies. In a way, they reminded me of Wyr, but much, much meaner. They also reminded me of the sad truth that Diane was probably going to need to release Wyr soon, since he was simply unable to keep up with us anymore. We never properly trained him, after all.

However, I put that thought aside for now, focusing on appraising one of the nearby birds. As soon as I did, my eyes widened. "Back through the portal, quick," I told them, backing up as a sharp cry sounded from above.

The bird I had appraised sensed the appraisal, and was now scouring the area. Thankfully, we were only a few steps from the entrance of the dungeon, and could leave before it found us. I *immediately* locked that dungeon again, while Diane raised a curious brow. "How bad was it?"

"Level three hundred and forty-five," I answered grimly. "The guild might be able to handle it with their human wave tactics, but we're not such a big group that we can throw hundreds of bodies at the problem just to kill a few birds."

Shaking my head, I pulled the car out again, driving us towards the southern portal. That said, I didn't have too much hope for this one, not after what I had just seen.

When we arrived, I opened the dungeon for us to enter, making sure to maintain my stealth as I did. This dungeon was a frozen tundra, snow pelting our bodies. The abrupt change from humid ocean to a blizzard shook me for a moment, my eyes scanning the horizon for monsters.

However, no matter where I looked, I couldn't see anything. Nothing moved, and there were no silhouettes walking around or flying in the air. Only when I activated Detective Analysis did I notice that the snow was unnatural in patches.

"Snow slime, level... two hundred," I let out a sigh of relief when I read this, though Diane and Bella both looked troubled by the news. "It's barely within the acceptable scope for our training, but they are very well hidden. This would be a good way to train your perception skills, too."

Diane blinked, but seemed quickly convinced. She took a deep breath, walking forward with a relaxed posture. Her hands held her daggers at her sides, and she seemed to be completely oblivious to her surroundings. Despite this, I could see the concentration hidden behind her gaze. She was leaving herself open to provoke an attack, her body in a constant state of readiness to respond.

As she passed by one of the hidden snow slimes, it shot out a ball of ice. The moment it stirred, her right hand gripped the dagger tight. She ducked low, taking advantage of her small size to avoid the attack while twisting and striking at the slime.

Her dagger struck true, cutting the slime open, but it quickly began to heal. Diane's eye narrowed, her blade wrapped in dark energy as she swung it again. This time, the slime was cleaved in two, its white core exposed.

Without skipping a beat, Diane's left hand slashed out with her other dagger, stabbing into the core and shattering it. Only then did the slime fall limp, its body dissolving into snow.

"What do you think?" I called out once we were close enough to bring her into the Ghost Zone again.

Diane mulled over her own thoughts for a moment before speaking. "I could take two of them on at most. Any more, and I wouldn't be able to dodge while attacking. Given its level, one solid strike could be a serious injury, even with your buffs."

After listening to that assessment, I looked at Bella. "Your turn. Do you want to find one yourself like Diane did, or should I point them out for you?"

Bella pursed her lips, a spark in her eyes at the challenge. "I'll find it myself," she said, pulling out a long, sleek rifle. She dropped down to one knee, a shooting stance that Diane had taught her when she first gave Bella the gun, and took a deep breath.

She looked down the scope of her gun, scanning the landscape. At first, nothing happened. She spent more than a minute staring through the scope before her eyes narrowed. "Got one," she whispered, adjusting her stance to properly brace herself. "Drake, we still under stealth?"

"We are," I confirmed, knowing that she was worried about the noise her gun produced. I was sorely tempted to give it the same stealth enchantment that I gave one of Diane's pistols.

Bella gave a small nod, careful not to ruin her shot. She took two slow breaths, before inhaling and holding her breath for the third. With a loud crack, a black bullet was fired from her gun, drawing a straight line into the distance and crashing into a far-off hill of snow.

I had to focus my gaze to find her target, which was almost completely shattered by the shot. Its body was struggling to reassemble itself, as the core hadn't been fully destroyed. However, green smoke emerged from its body, causing it to shudder before dissolving. Only after the slime perished did Bella release her held breath, lifting her rifle. "Okay, I really like this," she said with a bright smile.

"Well, it looks like both of you have your own ways of being able to spot the enemies," I pointed out with a small smile. "Do you want to handle the hunt, then?"

"What about you?" Bella asked curiously, turning to look at me.

"He doesn't want to steal the experience from us," Diane answered in a knowing tone. "If he participates in the battles, we'll get less experience. And, since he is locked at level one, there is minimal benefit to him getting the experience from kills. After all, his strength grows purely by training his skills."

"She's right," I confirmed with a nod. "In most of our recent fights, the enemy has been too strong for you to handle without me acting as either a tank or control. However, as long as we're here, you two can kill them on your own."

"That's wrong," Diane suddenly interjected, surprising me. "Our efficiency would improve if you joined us. We might lose a portion of the experience, but we would more than make up for it with

the added speed. After all, you can find the enemies faster than either of us, and your control skills would allow us to fight more freely.”

Bella looked at Diane with wide eyes. “It feels weird listening to you talk like this again after so long...”

Diane blinked, a sheepish smile hidden behind her mask. “Sorry. Seeing Charlie and the others got me back into ‘roleplay mode’. Force of habit.”

“No, it’s fine,” I smiled, looking down at the halfling girl. “If you like to roleplay, feel free to. You don’t roleplay the super eccentric, mysterious mage type like Charlie. It’s a lot easier to talk to your ‘character’ than it is to talk to his.”

“Thanks,” she said, and I could see her expression shifting back to her roleplay mask. “I’ll keep that in mind, then.”