



BARRIER LV 3 ♦ SUMMONER LV 1

THEY/ANY | APPLICATION

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When Desembra went to Phantom’s Keep that morning (how often can you peruse an underground market, after all?), they had hardly expected to be conscripted by the Fangs for guard duty, of all things. They had thought it was a tasteless jape until the Fangs explained the Keep’s tenuous food situation and their current attempt at a supply relay that needed protection from the elements and other hungry beasts. Desembra had no love for Godmother or her goons... but couldn’t stomach the idea of letting the people of Phantom’s Keep starve. Even the goons were just residents trying to keep their collective together, really.

Ugh. Desembra just hoped the snake wouldn’t try to thank them personally. Talk about not being able to stomach something.

By the nearest exit to the Aurora Fields, they waited with a handful of Fangs for the other guildmates that agreed to help with the venture. They were already dressed for the cold weather, but they were making further preparations in case anything went awry on their tundra field trip. [Dutch](#) was patient as Desembra loaded her saddlebags with a fire starting kit, and the cat reached over to stroke her long ears with a soft smile.

“Been a minute since we went on a hike together, huh?” they commented to the dog. **“I think it’ll do us both some good, stretching our legs like this. And you get to be a little hero!”** Desembra stood on the tips of their toes and gave Dutch’s head an affectionate ruffle.



STR +0

DEX -3

INT +2

CHA +2

+5 Magic | +3 Nature | +3 Survival | +2 History | +1 Insight | +1 Perception | +1 Medicine |
+1 Stealth

◆ SUMMARY

Desembra waits for the rest of the party to show up, making their final preparations for the trip.



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By Roan's account, it had been a lovely walk through the Aurora Fields. She'd set out with the sun cresting over the treetops, painting the world in rays of pastel pink and blue and gold that bounced between the snowdrifts, lighting her path forward. The snow came up to her belly, and now two winding trails stretched behind her and Todge up to the edge of the Star Lookout. She shook the clumps of snow from her coat, quickly dried the woolen lining of her leathers with a burst of magic, and was promptly interrupted by the Fang stationed on top of the old shack, trying to assign her guard duty.

Her mission, should she choose to accept it—and she had half a mind not to—was to safeguard the transport of a shipment of food across the Aurora Fields. For the residents of the Keep...no different than the kids she'd come across, probably. She sighed inwardly.

"Oh. All right." She turned to face Todge, who was heedlessly rooting around in the snow for ice-bugs. **"Wonderful sharing the world with you, old friend. Let's get you back to the stables. C'mon!"** Roan called cheerfully, bending into a play bow. Todge didn't move, instead digging deeper into the snow. Heaving a sigh, Roan placed her paws on the pangolin's side and shoved, but she didn't even seem to notice. **"Come on."**

Slowly, with lots of stopping and sighing, the pair trekked back to the open maw of Phantom's Keep, where Roan was to drop off Todge and pick her up again when the mission was done. There she

caught sight of another familiar cat—Desembra Gray, who she'd met briefly back in Greendoze, and their beautiful black-saddle sausage dog who stood well above her master's head.

"Desembra," she nodded to the brown tabby. They'd met briefly back in Greendoze, though it took Roan a second to recognize them in such different scenery. **"That's a beautiful dog. I've seen her out and about, you know, helping Shirley with the critters—didn't know she was yours."**

"Anyway," she continues, trying to remember whether Des was one of the cats who activated the Godmother's strange machine, **"what brings you to the Keep?"**

STR -1 DEX +1 INT +2 CHA -2

+3 Perception, Magic, Animal Taming || +2 Survival || +1 Nature, Stealth

■ SUMMARY

Roan stops to rest from a long walk through the Aurora Fields with her beloved pangolin before getting herself roped into guard duty. Begrudgingly, she makes her way to Phantom's Keep to drop off Todge and await further instruction, where she runs into Desembra. She greets them and happily appraises Dutch before asking Des what brings them to Phantom's Keep.



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Desembra alerted when a familiar voice said their name, and they turned around to face Roan with a pleasantly surprised smile. **“Oh, hello Roan,”** they greeted back. Their expression brightened more as she complimented Dutch and patted her again.

“I’m pleased to hear she’s on her best behavior!” The dog eyed Roan, but her demeanor was muted and she looked elsewhere at some other movement buzzing around the entrance. As a service animal, it was her job not to be distracted when on-duty.

When asked why they were here, they gestured towards the direction of the stalls. **“Window shopping, mostly. I wanted to know if any other magical artifacts from the Scientist’s lab are still floating around. If we’re forced to be *buddy-buddy* with the Godmother, I may as well take advantage of what little perks that comes with it.**

“But, you were recruited for the little missions as well I see. Doesn’t it tug at the heartstrings?” Desembra grinned as if they were teasing, but there was a plaintive edge to their smile.

A Fang from somewhere at the head of the group called for mobilization. Desembra perked and, with practiced ease, mounted Dutch. **“I don’t suppose you need a ride? She can fit two.”**



STR +0 DEX -3 INT +2 CHA +2

+5 Magic | +3 Nature | +3 Survival | +2 History | +1 Insight | +1 Perception | +1 Medicine |
+1 Stealth

◆ SUMMARY

Desembra is pleasantly surprised to see Roan and explains they are at the Keep for window shopping, highlighting their distaste for the Godmother. When the Fangs start rolling out, Des asks Roan if she wants to ride on Dutch as well.



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If we're forced to be buddy-buddy with the Godmother, I may as well take advantage of what little perks that comes with it.

Roan hummed a wordless assent, grateful to know where Desembra stood—for conversational purposes if nothing else. **“Yeah, I’ve no love for her myself. Always glad to know others feel the same way. But the folk living under her auspices have naught to do with it.”** She pawed lightly at the back of her head. **“I’ve been coming by to help the teenagers we met rebuild the old guy’s house we all kind of accidentally destroyed. I figure this mission is like an extension of that—we’ve helped a few, but there have to be more.”**

She was grateful to have not only a traveling companion and their dog, but a Barrier user to protect them. As fascinated as she was by the wolves and bears and moose she tracked in her free time, this place was *dangerous*. It was ill advised to enter the Fields without some measure of protection. Between the two of them, Roan could be the offense and utility support—Des could play defense.

And Todge, much as Roan didn’t want to admit it, wasn’t built for this kind of mission. Maybe if they were back in the Scorchsands, they could hitch a cart to her and lure her all the way to the pickup point with a dried mealworm on a string, but snow and sand were different substrates, and though the desert pangolin had no natural predators out here, that wasn’t to say some animal might not think to try—and she’d be far too slow to get away. A bit wistfully, Roan turned to pat Todge on the side.

“You stay here, friend. Don’t go on any unauthorized adventures—I’ll be by to pick you up in a bit.” Todge barely turned her head, snuffling around the permafrost before curling into a tight ball, dense and still as a stone. Roan sighed. *Why do I even bother?* she thought as she climbed atop a more biddable animal, resisting the urge to rustle the dog’s soft tresses. That was one of the first rules of engagement she learned at Unity Ranch—don’t distract a working critter.

“Thanks for the ride,” she said to both Dutch and her master as the hauling party prepared to set out. **“I don’t mind hopping off if she gets tired. I’m good at walking on snow.”**

STR -1 DEX +1 INT +2 CHA -2

+3 Perception, Magic, Animal Taming || +2 Survival || +1 Nature, Stealth

■ SUMMARY

Roan is pleased to find out that Desembra doesn't like the Godmother very much either, and agrees that the people of Phantom's Keep deserve all the help they can get. She's grateful to have a Barrier user as a companion to shore up her weak defense, and reluctantly admits that Todge is unsuited for the mission and leaves her in the relative safety of the Keep. She happily accepts the offer to ride on Dutch, and the group heads out into the wilds.



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“A whole house? My, that’s a bold escape strategy,” Desembra teased with a toothy smile. **“I never took you for a homewrecker, Roan.”** They purred a laugh, but chased the humor with something more sincere. **“Maybe you can convince the Fangs to take some of these supplies to the old man and teens yourself. I’m sure they’d appreciate it.”**

They eyed the pangolin curiously as she curled up into a ball. Des snorted as Roan mounted, **“It seems like she’s a good listener too. And no worries—we’re packed light enough where it shouldn’t be an issue.”** Urging the dog forward, Dutch padded to the group’s flank as they began to head out. Having Roan with them meant they had even more of an excuse not to chat with the Fangs.

“How familiar are you with Winterway, Roan? You know what to expect out here?” Desembra wasn’t doubtful of Roan’s capability, but the guild did skip the tundra’s harshness when they rode the owls to the lab.



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“Technically it was the kids that did it,” she replied, her already cold-flushed nose turning a deeper cherry red, **“but then we had to clear the rubble, and there were three Mattershifters on the team. It was a whole mess.”**

“Maybe you can convince the Fangs to take some of these supplies to the old man and teens yourself. I’m sure they’d appreciate it.”

“That’s...actually a good idea.” Roan blinked in genuine surprise that she hadn’t thought of that the whole bitter way she trudged back to the Keep after accepting the mission. **“I-I’ll see if I can make that happen. Would be better for them than trying to find more of the Scientist’s things to hawk.”**

As they flanked the party on Dutch’s back, Roan savored the occasional kiss of snow on her paws and tail-tip, and as she closed her eyes to scent the air, the cold tickled all the way down to the base of her chest. She willed her fur to thicken around her wrists, ankles, and haunches like a poodle, to middling success—it seemed that whenever her concentration wavered, the extra padding disappeared and took some time to re-summon.

“How familiar are you with Winterway, Roan? You know what to expect out here?”

“Well, I’ve seen my fair share of snow when I worked at Unity, and the town I stayed in was so close that sometimes you could see the aurora. So...not very,” she finally admitted. **“I’m really from the savanna.”**

She leaned back to scent the air again, the scent trails of passersby unfurling in her mind's eye—rabbits, foxes, wolves, the occasional bear, and something that was deerlike but sat heavier on the nose.

“Caribou or moose,” she surmised as she reported her findings to Desembra. The pack slowed from a canter to a walk, signaling them to prepare to dismount and load the caravan for the return trip. **“I don’t know where you’re from, but I hear you’re smart. Can you tell the difference by scent alone?”**

STR -1 DEX +1 INT +2 CHA -2

+3 Perception, Magic, Animal Taming || +2 Survival || +1 Nature, Stealth

■ SUMMARY

Roan thinks Desembra’s suggestion to make sure supplies go to the folks she met on the expedition is a great idea! Why didn’t she think of that? Much as she loves Winterway, she has to admit that she’s not all that familiar with the place—but she tries to make up for it with her knowledge of animals, testing the air to see who’s been around to visit. She can identify most of the local critters, but a large cervid eludes her. As they prepare to dismount, she asks Desembra if they know the difference between large deer species by scent alone.



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“Three? Now I feel guilty for stealing Altair away for my own team. Imagine having the whole Mattershift set on hand.” As if Desembra had any hand in the team compositions.

They let out a pleased hum as Roan took a shine to the idea, content that things appeared to fall into place. What a nice change of pace. Desembra anticipated the blast of cold air as the company exited the cave, but had little else in the way of keeping warm outside of their puffy jacket. They longed to draw the hood over their ears, but they wanted to stay alert as they conversed with Roan.

Desembra didn't seem all surprised when Roan admitted her lack of experience but they were not disappointed either. They were about to remark on it before Roan tested the air and shared her findings. Desembra slowed Dutch to a stop as they arrived at the rendezvous and helped where they could; while they couldn't lift any heavy crates, they could help with securing them.

“On scent alone? Tracks are more reliable, but maybe, depending on the season,” they answered with a surprising lack of flair or humor. **“Moose are solitary animals while caribou herd, so if you're able to discern more than one animal, it's probably the latter. But given that it's rut season, bulls of both species can be wandering around by themselves...”**

Desembra trailed off thoughtfully. **“Hm. Either way, caribou or moose, it's something to keep an eye on,”** they concluded lightly, not terribly concerned. They grinned. **“I hope that's a smart enough answer.”**

The rest of the cargo was loaded and the convoy began their return journey back. It was going to be easier and faster, having carved out a safe fresh trail to follow. **“Earlier, when you said savanna, do you mean the Grassbeast's Expanse? Do you have any experience with the Scorchlands—?”**

Dutch came to an abrupt stop and the jostle surprised Desembra, cutting off their small talk. The whole caravan of cats were still. They were about to ask what was wrong but were silent instead as it became pretty clear why: a towering beast lumbered from the nearby treeline, legs as spindly as trunks, and slowly approached them. It was no Boundless but the sense of uneasiness was no less palatable. The Fangs were also unnerved by the size of the animal and uncertain of what to do.

“It's a moose,” Desembra stated quietly, as if it needed any elaboration, but at least Roan got her clarity.



She/Her ☐ 25 ☐ Mattershift Lv. 3 ☐ Shapeshift Lv. 1 ☐
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Roan chuckled at the idea of all four of her known Mattershift buddies on one team. Having three of them was enough to weird out the likes of Lune and Toskr, but four seemed to be the tipping point into entropic anarchy, like having one too many froufrou dogs in your house. To say nothing of the others she'd heard rumor of since the expedition. Together they'd rip the world apart just to put it back together again.

She listened with a gentle hum as Desembra explained what they could about how to tell apart moose and caribou, which wasn't much help, given that it was rutting season. Roan tried to scent the air again, but she was more focused on hefting wooden crates from ground to caravan, and on answering Desembra's question.

"Yeah, I grew up in Ridgetown. I went out searching for the Grassbeast myself a few times," she said, neglecting to mention that she didn't get more than an hour outside of town before she had to head home, lest her parents find her late for supper. **"I never found it. As for the Scorchsands, I—"**

She took a breath to recount that sad six months in Horizon's Bloom—the lonely trek there and back, the barren apartment, the fake university attendance, everything. She'd been trying not to overshare with strangers lately, but Desembra's conversation was breezy enough that it all bubbled up unbidden behind her teeth—but those she kept locked tight, and her claws reflexively found the bow strung across her back. They all stood frozen as the towering beast crept out of the shadows to look at them—not a Boundless, but this was only a marginal improvement.

"It's a moose," Desembra intoned. Good to know.

There were a great many dangerous animals that Roan would rather tango with than a moose, and especially not a rutting bull, as this appeared to be. Its hooves were as big as she was, and its broad antlers looked like they could send her flying like a rubber ball. Her mind leafed through hundreds of pages on wildlife, replayed countless hours of David Cattenborough's *Wild Waywardia* on the radio—if you find yourself in close quarters with a moose, you should make your presence known.

“Hey-ho, moose,” she bellowed, singsong. **“We’ll be on our way now, moose.”**

Not taking her eyes off the moose, she muttered to the surrounding cats, ***“Back away as slowly as you can.”***

STR -1 DEX +1 INT +2 CHA -2

+3 Perception, Magic, Animal Taming || +2 Survival || +1 Nature, Stealth

