A dwarf was clad head-to-toe in pitch-black armor that seemed to soak up the light of the midday sun. It was a splendid full-plate set of armor similar to the other five dwarves around him, except that it had blade-like decorations that ran along the crests of his shoulder pads and helmet. A more observant individual would then notice that they were not mere ornaments, but were more akin to actual war axe edges that were affixed to the armor. His helmet's visor had been pulled up, putting the dwarf's magnificent ginger moustache on full display. That wasn't why it was opened up though, but rather to let his beady black eyes get a better view of the three metal slabs in his armored hand.

"Vault-crackers, eh?" he remarked as he looked up. "Been awhile since we seen any of yer gullible lot 'round here."

Fizzy returned his snide remark with a pleasant smile and a tilt of her head.

"You know what they say - there's a sucker born every minute."

"If ye say so, lass. C'mon, let's get ye inside."

With a nod of his head and a wave of his arm, the outer wall's gates swung open and he escorted the golem and her two companions into the military base. He introduced himself as one Lieutenant Highstone, and the group gave him their names in return. Drummir then realized that dozens upon dozens of dwarves were poking their heads out of the surrounding buildings and tents as the four of them walked along the dusty path towards the inner rampart.

"Say chief, what's with all your lads?" he asked with a side-nod.

"Ah, don't mind 'em. Y'see, there ain't nothin' to do on this bloody rock but fightin' kobolds and beatin' the shit out of each other. It's honestly just a dead end post where the top brass send grunts they don't like."

"You refused to play their games, huh?"

"Ugh, don't get me started. Point is, yer comin' here's like a breath of fresh air, so don't be too hard on the lads if they seem rude, yeah?"

"So that's how it was. Still, they're staring kinda extra hard at us, aren't they?"

It was much more intense than simple interest. They were almost like a pack of starving wolves glaring at a herd of passing sheep that hat unwittingly stumbled into their territory.

"Well, duh. Anyone would stare if ye bring a fine piece of ass like that shiny missy along. Ah, no offense, lass."

"It's fine, it's fine," said Fizzy dismissively. "It's not like you said anything untrue."

"Hahahaha!" laughed the guard at the front. "Whatever ye say, lass!"

“Call me ‘lass’ one more time,” she said in a cold monotone, “and I’m going to shove my arm so far up your ass that I’ll grab your beating heart and make you shit it out.”

“Bahahaha! Yer a feisty one ain’tcha?!”

The dwarven soldier may have thought she was joking, but both Drummir and Moss swallowed nervously. They knew just how serious Fizzy had actually been with that threat. She often began saying things she wouldn’t dare utter normally whenever she was getting copious amounts of attention like this. Those outbursts, however, weren’t something innocent like her getting intoxicated from all the attention and spouting nonsense. Rather, it felt more like the case where her true self was starting to show.

“S-sir,” interjected Moss in an effort to diffuse the situation. “Could you please address miss Fizzy appropriately? She gets really angry when she isn’t shown the proper respect.”

“Aye, I figured she’d be the high-and-mighty type, what with that fancy frame of hers,” said the soldier without looking back. “Ye fellas some capital big-shots or somethin’?”

“You could say that,” chimed in Drummir.

“Figured as much. I’ve seen lotsa golems in my day, but your pal Fizzy makes them look like walking piles of junk. She’s also better than anythin’ those butter-fingered crackpots in town could come up with. Heck, I doubt any mortal man would be able to forge an intricate frame like that. And that’s without even considerin’ the whole ‘sentient golem’ thing.”

As a Paladin in service to Goroth, it was only natural that Highstone would admire the mithril golem’s near-flawless construction that put even masterful statues to shame. Fizzy really care for his attitude, though. Having him talking about her like she wasn’t even there irked her somewhat, but the fact that he was praising her so sincerely made it impossible for her to stay mad at him. Seeing her visibly relax made the other two breathe a small sigh of relief.

“So how you fellas planning on playing this thing out?” he asked in a more serious tone.

“I’m going to try to repair the vault lock,” stated Fizzy.

“Ah, yer gonna try to be clever about it. That’s good. The last guys that came through here two years ago? They tried to punch a hole through it usin’ some fancy new explosive jelly they came up, despite me tryin’ to warn them not to do that.”

“Why? What happened?”

“They made huge racket that left a sizable dent in the door and even melted a good part of it.”

The dwarf looked over his shoulder for the first time during the walk.

“Then the Vault’s defenses came online.”

“D-defenses?!” stuttered Moss. “You mean the door fights back?!”

“Yep. These turtle-lookin’ things pop outta the floor and ceiling and pump anythin’ within 20 meters of the door full of lead.”

The Lieutenant reached under his helmet and pulled out a necklace of some kind. It was a fine chain made of silver, which had been hooped through a trio of metallic cylinders. They had a copper-like sheen, a length of just under 15 centimeters, were pointed on one end and flat on the other. The shape was actually somewhat reminiscent of an Ice Spike or a spear head, though on a much smaller scale.

“Don’t matter how tough ye think ye are, the Vault’ll shower you with these things until you either back off or stop movin’ altogether.”

Moss audibly swallowed. Even a newbie adventurer like him was able to tell how devastating a weapon like that would be. He also shuddered to think who it was that ‘caught’ those three projectiles in particular.

“Wh-what about the dent they made?” he asked nervously.

“Not even a scratch is left of it now,” said the dwarf while putting away his grim souvenir. “See, these tiny metal spiders come out of nowhere and start repairin’ the door’s outer shell every time it gets damaged. And since those watchdogs put holes in anyone that tries to get close… Well, we have no choice but to let them do as they please.”

“Couldn’t you just siege the place with human wave tactics?” asked Fizzy casually.

“Nope. Numbers won’t mean shit in that tiny corridor, so we’d just be throwin’ our lives away if we tried and pulled somethin’ stupid like that. Fortresses ain’t got shit on that bloody door, let me tell ya.”

The golem was starting to understand why the Vault Beneath the Mountain had remained sealed for so long. Ekaterina Dragunova was supposedly an Automata Artificer, so she could’ve set up any number of automated defenses. There were likely factories built into the Vault itself that produced all the ammunition and automata the place would need. Raw material also wouldn’t be a problem if she set up mechanical worker drones that could harvest fuel and metal from the depths of the earth.

Such complicated tasks were way above the automata of today, of course, but her technology was supposedly centuries ahead of her time, so it was definitely possible. The gigantic castle walls surrounding the entrance also began to make sense. No matter how much some people wanted to sugar-coat it, the Artificer Job was one that produced an overwhelming number of weapons. Therefore, it stood to reason that anyone with two bolts to rub together would be afraid of what sort of weapon might pop out of that Vault.

Now that she was practically right next to those fortifications, however, Fizzy suddenly realized something else entirely.

“How are we supposed to get on the other side of those?”

Forget things like gates or a portcullis - there weren’t even windows or ladders anywhere on that massive wall.

“We’ll be floatin’ ye over the top with a bunch of Wizards,” explained Lieutenant Highstone. “That’s partly why we gotta charge folks for each try, y’see.”

He then leaned back and spoke in a much quieter tone of voice.

“Otherwise them bathrobe-wearing twinkle-fingers get real uppity and start claimin’ we don’t appreciate ‘em.”

“Sounds like every girlfriend I’ve ever had.”

The soldier in front chuckled at Drummir’s remark as the group made their way up to the base’s headquarters. It was a relatively small stone keep about 7 meters high, which was built right next to the inner wall. He made them wait outside for a few minutes while he went to fetch the relevant people, and had five of them following him when he came out. Judging by the gray hooded robes they were wearing, three of them were the gnomish Wizards that were going to take them over the wall, while the other two were regular foot soldiers.

However, Fizzy was far more interested in what the latter were carrying on their shoulders. It was a brass key that didn’t look particularly remarkable, aside from being easily over 2 meters long. Anyone could also tell it was extremely old with just a glance, as it was covered with a countless number of scratches and dents from being manhandled over the decades. It was unquestionably the key to the Vault, though its sudden appearance had caught her off guard. True, she did openly state she’d be attempting to fix the lock, but she wasn’t expecting them to bring that thing out right away.

This was hardly an unwelcome opportunity, though.

“Uhm, excuse me, but can I hold that key for a little bit?”

“No can do, lass,” said the guard that’d been escorting them for a while. “It’s the only one we have and we can’t risk it being damaged. I dunno what sort of grip a mithril golem has, but I’m not keen to find out.”

“I see. Just touching it with a finger should be fine then, right?”

“Uh…”

The dwarf scratched his helmet as he looked between the key and Fizzy. His colleagues seemed to have expression that stated ‘shouldn’t be a problem,’ which was his assessment as well.

“Alright, but no funny business, yeah?”

With a nod and a smile, Fizzy cautiously approached the key and pressed a finger against its tip. She channeled her Metallopathy through it, instantly confirming her suspicion that this was no ordinary key. While the outside seemed to be a solid shell with no seams whatsoever, the inside of it was full of intricate machinery she had never seen before. The construction was fine. Precise. Minute even. It was almost as if a thousand spiderwebs were interwoven with one another in a grand tapestry of unparalleled complexity and beauty. It was a construct so intricate that even her machine-like precision couldn’t replicate it, even after a hundred years of practice.

“You done yet?”

The golem ignored the guard’s urging as she continued to focus. It took a huge amount of effort to grasp the complexity of this device’s construction, but she kept at it because there was something about that guard’s story that didn’t sit right with her. If the Vault really did have those mechanical spiders maintaining its structural integrity, then surely they would’ve repaired something like a broken lock, right?

And then she saw it - the missing piece of the puzzle. There was a certain circuit pattern that repeated itself hundreds of times as it ran down the length of the shaft. She could only speculate at its function, but with so many examples of it she could easily determine the faults. Thirteen of them, to be precise. Thirteen instances where the metal wiring that ran along the inside of the brass shell had been melted through and ruined, most likely as a result of a nasty short circuit.

“So it was like that,” she mumbled with a small smile. “It’s not the door that’s broken, but the key.”

Obviously neither the guards nor her companions knew what she was talking about, but she didn’t let that stop her from doing what she came here to do. What she was about to do probably wouldn’t go over too well with these military types, but in the end it was easier to ask for forgiveness rather than permission.

“Holy Light!”

A bright yellow light enveloped the device masquerading as a bloated house key. Fizzy was just barely able to perceive the circuits mending themselves when she was suddenly forced back with a harsh shove.

“Oy! What did I say about funny business!” shouted the Lieutenant.

The tone of his voice and the way he was reaching for his sword were ample signs that he was none too please with this unauthorized use of magic. The other men around them hurriedly surrounded the outsider trio, almost as if they had been waiting for her to make a suspicious move. Some of them looked like they were raring to go right away, almost as if their blood was about to boil over.

“I just fixed your key!” hurriedly explained Fizzy with her hands in the air. “Just look at it if you don’t believe me!”

The head guard shifted his gaze towards the object in question and was momentarily struck speechless. The countless scratches, dents and tarnished spots along the key’s outer shell had all but disappeared, leaving behind nothing but flawless, gleaming brass. The golem’s magic had mended both its interior and exterior, making it look more like it was brand new, rather than being nearly a century old.

“… Stand down, men,” he commanded, “and get your asses in gear! We have a Vault to open!”

The soldiers all around gave a rousing cheer, though their enthusiasm was born more out of the need to alleviate their boredom rather than faith that the door would actually open. With that minor uproar out of the way, Fizzy, Drummir, Moss, the restored key and a total of 20 guards including Highstone were flown over the wall one after the other. Hundreds more took their positions atop the ramparts, manning various siege weaponry and pointing it down at the massive cavern entrance. There was a very real chance the door might actually open, and none of these men wanted to be caught unawares by what may or may not pop out from the inside.

Once the preparations were ready, the golem and her armed escort entered the 20-meter tall cavern. After about a full 3 minutes of walking down the steadily narrowing yet strangely straight stone tunnel, they finally happened upon the Vault itself. It was a massive circular door that looked like a 4-meter-wide cog wheel, embedded inside a solid wall that was 5 meters tall and almost twice as wide. Its surface gleamed with a lustrous silvery sheen, though it was quite evident by its alleged durability that it was by no means a mundane metal like silver or steel. It was perfectly smooth, aside from the very obvious keyhole to the right of the door itself.

The defenses Fizzy had been warned about were nowhere to be seen, but it was a safe bet to assume they’d pop out of the ten large metal tubes embedded in the cave’s walls, ceiling and floor. Traces of those weapons’ ferocity could be seen in the surrounding gray rocks, which were riddled with holes and cracks. The most clear signs of the lives lost in this place were undoubtedly the puddles of decades-old blood that had seeped into the stone itself. The dancing light of the group’s torches and lanterns also highlighted the hundreds of tiny metal debris lying around the place. Some looked like pieces of those odd projectiles Highstone showed them, though most of them seemed to be chewed up equipment fragments.

“How’s that bad feeling of yours, Drummir?” whispered Fizzy as the group cautiously approached the Vault.

“There’s no mistaking it,” said the dwarf, who was clearly on edge. “This is the source of it. Whatever’s killing this mountain is in there.”

“Wonderful,” sighed Moss. “And here I was hoping it would be full of rainbows, kittens and candy.”

“Halt!”

The unit stopped at the Lieutenant’s word, who then turned towards the golem.

“How about it? Want to do the honors, miss Fizzy?” he asked with a jerk of his head towards the massive door.

“Yeah right, ‘honors,’” she sneered. “You’re just worried we’d trigger the defenses.”

“Hey, gotta look out for the boys, y’know?”

“Sure, you do. Well, it’s fine.”

“Hmpf!” scoffed Plus. *“As if we’d let some no-name punk like him take our moment of crowning glory!”*

The fuck?! blurted out Fizzy internally. *Damn it, Plus! I almost forgot you were there!*

“Wait, what? Really?”

You’ve just been awful quiet lately!

“Oh yeah, I got a bit bored with all that walking so I took a small nap.”

… You can do that?

“Apparently. Don’t worry though, I’m all caught up to speed thanks to your memories. Great work on the key, by the way.”

Heh. It’s only just beginning though. Wanna help me run a quick check on our gear?

“With pleasure! Alright, let’s see - one impenetrable shield-arm?”

Fizzy looked down at her left hand as she made a fist with it.

Check.

“One skull-cracking wrench?”

She then tightened her right hand’s grip around the handle of her favorite weapon.

Check.

“One Masterwork-quality electric charge pack?”

She checked the large rubber belts securing the metal box to her back.

Check.

“One Superior-quality Hidden Blade?”

She glanced at the weapon strapped to her right forearm. She triggered it with a precise application of Magnetize, causing the dagger-like blade to pop out of its casing and stab the air above her fist.

Check…

She let out a slightly nostalgic inner voice, as this was one of the last mementos she had of Boxxy.

“Two Bags of Holding with emergency supplies and parts?”

Shaking her head slightly, Fizzy confirmed that the magical containers were indeed securely strapped to her hips.

Check.

“Two gullible meat shields?”

The golem glanced at Drummir and Moss over her shoulders, who nodded resolutely in response.

Check.

“One ass-kicking golem of unparalleled beauty and filled with righteous fury?”

Finally, she struck a cocky pose by throwing her chest out, lifting her chin up high and placing her free hand on her hip.

Check and double check!

“Alright!” she said aloud. “Let’s get this show on the road!”

Saying that, she accepted the key from the armed dwarves and strode up to the door while the rest of the group backed away slightly. It seemed like any worries they had about her handling it had been alleviated when they saw her restore it to pristine condition. Either that or they were far more terrified of those automated defenses making an appearance rather than letting a one-of-a-kind relic get potentially trashed. Fizzy had none of those worries as she gallantly strode up to the keyhole and deftly inserted the large key, which fit snugly inside with a small click.

CLUNK

She didn't even need to try turning before the Vault responded by letting out a sound that could only be produced by having two heavy metal objects collide with each other.

CLUNK CLANG CLUNK CLANG

There was a whole bunch of those sounds, actually.

"Vnimaniye! Vnimaniye! Dver otkryvayetsya!"

A distorted male voice resounded within the cavern, speaking in a language nobody present had even heard of. It was so loud that the echo of it probably carried all the way to the entrance of the cave.

"What's that about?!" shouted Fizzy. "It's not the warning for the defenses, is it?!"

However, the dwarves were too busy staring agape to offer a coherent response. Not that they could offer anything resembling an answer anyway, since nothing like this had ever happened before.

SHKA-TUNK SHKA-TUNK SHKA-TUNK SHKA-TUNK

Next came another series of heavy sounds, followed by an ear-splitting grinding noise as the cogwheel-shaped door began receding into the wall. Ten centimeters, twenty centimeters, thirty, forty, fifty - over half a meter later, the door finally cleared the outer wall, allowing a gust of air to seep out of the Vault in the form of a thick white fog. This sudden rush of wind turned to be incredibly cold, as evidenced by how the temperature in the cavern instantly dropped down to freezing levels. The frigid burst of air washed over the flabbergasted meatbags, blowing out their torches and lanterns and plunging the area into total darkness.

Or at least it would have, were it not for the soft glow that seeped out from the cracks around the Vault's door. The giant sprocket then rolled to the side noisily, allowing a pillar of serene white light to fall upon Fizzy's frame, which reflected it brilliantly and bathed the entire cave in her radiance. It was an odd, almost ethereal scene that when coupled with the unexpected chill made the dwarves and gnomes present feel like they'd entered another world.

"C'mon lads!" shouted Drummir. "Let's hear it for Fizzy, the Rustblood Juggernaut! Hip-hip!"

"Hurrah!"

Spurred on by the Bard's well-chosen words, the men immediately celebrated the historic moment with a loud cheer.

"Hip-hip!"

"Hurrah!"

“Hip-hip!”

“Hurrah!”

And they did this not once, not twice, but thrice. Their blood was pumping so fast they barely even felt the dreadful chill that now permeated the cavern. They didn’t even notice that the crafty dwarf had already managed to tie Fizzy’s name to this momentous event and made sure they all knew it was her doing that did all this. It wouldn’t be long until the notion spread to rest of the military camp, then to the city of Dragunov, and ultimately envelop the entire nation. This sort of thing was pretty much the entire reason she brought Drummir along, and he was quite confident the mithril golem would be satisfied with his work.

However, Fizzy didn’t say anything, despite getting so much of the attention and praise she always sought after. Instead, she was simply standing in front of the entrance, twisting her waist left and right with her arms up and elbows out. Her body made cracking and grinding noises as the ice that had formed on her outer shell began to fall off her like broken glass. She then crouched down on her left leg while stretching the other out as far as it would go. She did the same with the right, then the left, then back to the right and so on as she alternated between them every few seconds.

The cheerful atmosphere somewhat dissipated when the people besides Drummir also realized she was behaving oddly.

“Say angelface?” he called out with a forced smile. “That’s an odd way to celebrate, isn’t it?”

“I’m not celebrating anything. I haven’t even taken a step inside yet.”

“Okay, that’s fair. But then, what is it you’re doing right now?”

“Warm-up exercises, what does it look like?”

The golem that had now moved on to bending over and touching her toes replied with another casual remark.

“Seriously, you need to stop asking all these pointless questions with obvious answers. It makes you look like a moron.”

“No, no, no! This is clearly weird, isn’t it?!” protested the dwarf. “Do you even have anything that needs warming… up?”

No sooner did he utter those words of disbelief that he realized that Fizzy appeared to actually be sweating. After rubbing his eyes and doing a double-take, Drummir realized that the water droplets running down her back, neck and arms were just that - water. The patches of ice that clung to her radiant skin were slowly but surely melting, sliding down her glorious form in an almost sensual way. A small cloud of steam then began steadily rising from Fizzy’s frame as her Engine of Destruction Skill steadily heated her up.

Once she was confident she was running hot enough to fight off the ambient cold, Fizzy stopped pointlessly moving her body around and did another cursory check of her equipment. After confirming everything was in working order despite being soaked, she then held her right hand out towards her side. The wrench she had left on the ground leapt up into her open palm, and she spun it around with a flourish before resting it on her right shoulder. She then looked over her left with a cocky grin, thoroughly pleased that all eyes were firmly locked on her and her alone.

“I’ll be going in first, boys!”

She gave them a backwards two-finger salute with her left hand before hopping into the Vault, disappearing somewhere beyond that pure white light in the blink of an eye. With the gnome-shaped reflective surface out of the picture, the frigid cavern suddenly became much, much dimmer.

“Form up, lads!” shouted Highstone. “We’re not gonna let some shiny lass take all the fun!”

“Wooooah!”

The dumbfounded dwarves rallied around Highstone and rapidly formed ranks around him. Moss and Drummir were a bit quicker on the uptake and were already rushing over to the door.

KWEEEHN KWEEEHN KWEEEHN KWEEEHN

However, they were suddenly stopped in their tracks when an obnoxiously loud siren sounded throughout the cave.

“Oh, shi- Retreat! Everyone fall back!”

The regulars here knew what this sound meant, but the two outsiders left behind had no idea. Still, seeing those professional soldiers scatter in a very un-soldier like fashion made it painfully obvious it was not a good thing. The distinct grinding noise of the Vault door closing itself made Drummir instantly give up on following Fizzy, as evidenced by how he retreated away from it. Moss, on the other hand, had made the opposite decision and charged towards the oversized cog with all his might.

“You bloody fool!” spat the dwarf over his shoulder. “You won’t make it!”

“I don’t care!” insisted the gnome. “I’m sticking by Fizzy’s side, even if it kills me!”

Thankfully, the young boy was much quicker than he looked, so he managed to duck into the vault mere moments before the door slid back into place and sealed him and Fizzy inside. Drummir breathed a sigh of relief, but immediately felt terror wash over him when he saw a trio of metal domes pop out of the metal platforms in the ceiling. A short barrel popped out of each of them, almost like a turtle poking its head out of its shell.

BUDUBUDUBUDUBUDU

The otherworldly sentry turrets then began spewing fire, thunder and lead as they opened fire on the dwarf that still hadn't made it past the 20 meter rank.

"Sanctuary!"

"Shield Wall!"

"Mana Shield!"

"Ice Barrier!"

"Rock Wall!"

Thankfully, rather than sit and watch him die, the soldiers covered for him by using a myriad of Spells, Skills and Martial Arts. The high-caliber machineguns mercilessly ripped through all their defenses in turn, but it proved to be enough. The dwarves and gnomes had managed to buy just enough time to drag Drummir out of their tracking range without any casualties, though not without injuries. One bullet had pierced clean through the dwarven Shaman's right thigh, while a stray shot had managed to punch through a Paladin's heavy shield and hit him in the left shoulder. They were nasty injuries to be sure, but the healers present at the scene were able to patch them up immediately.

"Don't get any wild ideas, mate," said Highstone, cutting off whatever Drummir was about to say. "The defenses have been triggered. That means we ain't gettin' anywhere near that place for the next six hours. Got it?"

"… Yes, sir."

The black-haired Shaman had no choice but to give up on following in after them so soon. He chastised himself for abandoning them in the first place, but that was just his mercenary sensibilities taking over. He had gone through life while always looking out for number one, so his reaction was only natural. In a way, he almost envied Moss for being so simple-minded. Trying to follow Fizzy under those circumstances took a level of conviction he didn't think the chicken shit had in him.

"Everyone regroup back at base!" hollered the Lieutenant. "We'll get another crack at it tonight, so look lively!"

The way this historic moment had developed left a sour taste in his mouth, but it was hardly the end of it. The miraculously working key was still in its slot, and they now knew the Vault was a frigid space that did not stay open for long. Therefore, all they had to do was regroup back at the military base proper and wait for the Vault's security system to calm down. It would give them just enough time to make a round trip to Dragunov and stock up on elixirs and magic

items. Once they were properly supplied and prepared, they would challenge the Vault once again.

Highstone's plan was calm, logical, and rational, and the best course of action available to him and his men. If everything worked out, then they'd be able to save those two citizens and figure out exactly what was going on within that icebox within the span of a day, maybe two. Unfortunately, he was feeling conflicted about whether he should report this to the higher ups right away. Those worthless mongrels would probably try to muscle in and lay claim over this discovery as if it were their own. They'd drag the expedition out by weeks, possibly even months while they bickered pointlessly over who would be the first to ransack the place.

It was a notion that didn't sit right with Highstone. Much like the loud Shaman had stated earlier, this achievement belong to that shiny Paladin, and he'd be damned if he let those bastards take credit for it. Allowing them to spit in the face of Goroth's teaching like that would disqualify him from being a Champion of Stone, not to mention it would be a slight against his fellow holy servant. Admittedly he didn't ask which deity Fizzy followed, but it really didn't matter to him at that point.

The problem was that doing as he liked would surely be the end of his career. If his higher ups found out he was keeping such a monumental event from them, they'd have him put on trial, take all his belongings and jail him for a long time. Heck, it'd probably be better to skip town and leave the country as quietly and quickly as possible. Either way, he'd have to sacrifice either the life he'd built as a soldier in service to the Horkensaft Kingdom, or compromise his moral and religious beliefs just to appease to his bosses.

These sort of thoughts plagued him on the walk out, up until he and his men made it out of that tunnel.

At which point it became clear he had more pressing matters to attend to rather than some moral dilemma.

"Lieutenant!" shouted one of the guards atop the inner wall. "We got a situation out here!"

"Situation? What situation?!" he shouted back.

However, as he looked up, he was immediately made aware of what his subordinate was talking about. A solid beam of purple light was clearly visible over the wall. It shot straight up into the air, like a spear that was trying to stab the sky itself. He barely even had time to register it was coming from the same direction as the city of Dragunov, when this mysterious beam began to demonstrate its effects.

The cloud that the beam had punched through turned from white to charcoal-black in an instant, then began expanding at an unimaginable pace. It blocked out the sun and rapidly devoured the blue sky in a matter of seconds. Thunder and lightning began to rage within it, and a harsh wind the likes of which this mountain had never seen began howling without warning. Hail as big as

eyeballs began pouring down on the military base, rattling incessantly against the stone buildings and bouncing loudly off the soldiers' helmets.

"Your orders, sir?"

The men gathered around the Lieutenant looked at him expectantly. The officer's gaze drifted from one grim face to the next, after which she pointed it up at the falling sky. He then looked back towards the Vault entrance, before finally settling his eyes on the outsider Shaman that was cackling to himself with his head between his knees. Highstone sighed deeply, envying these simple men for how they weren't the ones that had to take responsibility for this debacle. What was it that they expected him to do about all this, he wondered. Still, as leader, it was up to him to deal with the situation to the best of his abilities.

"Alright, lads, listen up!" he shouted with all his might. "Here's what we're gonna do! We're gonna gather everyone in the main keep, we're going to bust open every keg, barrel or cask we can find, have a pint, and wait for this whole thing to blow over!"

Really, what else was there to do?