

Chapter 52

Ais Wallenstein

A week later - Twenty-nine and a half months since joining the Freya familia

Recently, Lady Freya had told her that one of the two most powerful deities in Orario, Hera, was likely to challenge their familia to a wargame at the next denatus in order to poach her. Ais didn't really know how to react to that. Anger, maybe? She quite enjoyed her place in Folkvangr and Freya's familia. Everyone here was nice, and they were all helping her grow stronger at a very quick pace. She didn't want to leave them.

When she said as much to her goddess, the woman smiled, before telling her that both Calliphone and Mia had been working quite hard in preparation for the possible coming wargame. Her desire to stay with them would provide some excellent additional motivation, in addition to the general desire to spite Hera.

Now, Ais just had to get stronger so she could actually be helpful in the possible coming challenge. As she was, she wouldn't be much help in the wargame. By the standards of a regular eight-year old, she was incredibly strong and deadly, but she was still eight years old. Her spells, falna skills, and general skill level would help, but she couldn't go all-out against other mortals without shredding them to pieces, which was an outcome to be avoided, according to Freya.

Her goddess said that nothing good would come out of killing people during this theoretical wargame. The only thing that would result from that would be an escalation of hostilities. So, Ais had begun expanding her practice on blunted winds. It was something that she had been working on for a long time, but more so as a way to practice safely with live weapons, while also training with her spell at the same time. She could wrap her weapons in blunt winds, as well as surround herself in it, but she couldn't replicate the same acceleration that her razor-gale armor allowed her.

That was fine. She simply had to make the impact of the unsharpened winds stronger. Turn it from a dulled blade into a hammer, in order words. She knew that the reverse was possible, as Calliphone had managed to turn the explosive impact of her bale-eye hammer into a burning edge with her new sword. If that was possible, then surely turning her sharp winds into a hurricane that struck like a hammer could also be done.

With that thought, the girl grabbed her new saber and walked to Folkvangr's training yard.

Mia Grand

She hadn't given much thought to the reason behind the wargame that Cal was hired to be a part of over half a year ago. Now that something similar was likely to happen to them, though, it felt like her blood was both boiling and turning to ice in her veins. It was as far from a pleasant feeling as could be, but it worked very well as motivation.

All of the power of red-tinted fury with none of the aimlessness, and all of the direction of black hatred, without any of the pointless sadism. She had been feeling it for weeks now, and Laurent had noticed. He helped as best he could, providing her with an unsurpassable wall to throw herself against when Cal wasn't there, and he took part in more of her training. It was almost a shame that she had to practice with her spell alone. It was simply too dangerous to mess around with when people were near.

After all, what would something that could turn monsters from the deep floors into dust with a mere touch do to a mortal, blessed or not? It was dangerous, almost as much as Cal's own spell, and more difficult to turn to non-lethal purposes as well. She had tried to limit the corrosive and weakening properties of Eitr, to somewhat decent results. The ice that resulted from those attempts was tougher and colder than normal, but that didn't mean much on its own.

She had to be able to manipulate it, in order to make it more useful. Cal's smithing abilities had proven quite useful for that, as she had made her a pair of not-quite brass knuckles out of that incredibly heavy red metal from the unknown floors. Avernite, she called it. The weapon she made was like a pair of knuckle-dusters, but designed to be worn over her gauntlets, and with a series of quarter-inch long studs on each 'knuckle'.

When she channeled her non-corrosive ice into them, it was like wearing a glove made of incredibly durable ice. Mia could feel a slight chill from it, but was otherwise unaffected, while the time that Cal touched it, she had almost suffered frostbite. If it could do that to her, then it was definitely good enough for Hera's second-class adventurers and below. The smart ones would be wearing armor or clothing anyway. If any of the parasites ended up losing extremities from the cold, then that was their own fault for wearing almost nothing at all.

It wasn't like they could complain, after all. It would be their goddess' fault for trying to poach Mia's cute little junior away from her familia.

Calliphone

In the three days of solo exploration that she had had in the past week, she hadn't been able to find Satha again. Not until today, she thought, hearing that familiar sound of obsidian shearing through flesh. This time, the seemingly thinking monster was carving its way through a dozen of the largest monsters that appeared on floor one-hundred and forty-seven.

It seemed to be handling them without issue, so she didn't interrupt the fight, content to simply stand by the entrance to the chamber with the still-nameless sword and Paradoxica in hand. Satha didn't try putting on a show this time; instead, it carved through each monster in instants, moving faster than even that old lady from Hera's familia. In seconds, all of the regular monsters were on the floor, in pieces, and Satha was scarfing down their magic stones almost as fast.

"So, we meet again, Calliphone," it said, not bothering to stand up or turn around from its meal.

"Hello, Satha. How about that duel, if you're not too full from your meal?"

The blue-eyed monster laughed. "I am never full, and I am ever-ready for a duel. It has been an age since the last time I fought a proper opponent. Please, give me a good fight," Satha said, rising to its full height.

Her two best weapons were already in her hands, and that was what saved her. In an instant, Satha was in front of her, obsidian scimitar descending towards her, only stopped by Paradoxica, though the black blade seemed to bite into her sword's edge, if only slightly. That was worrying, though it was manageable. She had countered with a thrust at the same instant with her new straight sword, only for it to be beaten aside by the thinking monster's second scimitar, though the black blade also chipped slightly.

The next few exchanges went similarly, with Paradoxica suffering a few nicks, and whichever blade he used against her other sword also took damage. After two dozen clashes, Paradoxica's blade snapped in half, leaving her with about two feet of blade to work with, and Satha's second scimitar also broke, shattering as stone tended to.

With a sigh, Cal pulled her damaged saber back into her warskin, leaving the snapped-off blade on the ground for the moment. Instead, she drew from her small collection of titanite daggers, this specific one having a twenty-inch blade. Satha, on the other hand, simply placed a hand on his hip, changing his stance to be more side-on, limiting the areas she could strike at.

They continued, and Cal moved faster than she ever had before, parrying the massive demon's lightning-fast slashes with her dagger where she could, while targeting whatever she could reach with her sword, leaving shallow cuts and gouges along Satha's lead leg and arm, along with a light slice on its hip. Satha's flesh and sinew didn't part under her sword like everything else had. Admittedly, she wasn't using her spell, because this wasn't a deathmatch, but it was still a surprising discovery. The odd monster's absurdly tough hide and dense armor of muscle prevented any serious damage.

Eventually, the second obsidian sword broke, and Satha shifted into a hunched grappler's stance. With a laugh, Cal absorbed the titanite dagger back into her warskin, and made a show of doing the same with her sword, before taking her own stance. She had the odd feeling that the monster would be more dangerous unarmed than with weapons in hand.

With a roar, it launched itself at her, going to grab her by the head, but a punch to the wrist turned it into a spasming palm strike. Her other hand grabbed him by the thumb, and she pulled it to the ground, before quickly forcing it into an awkward elbow-lock, on account of all the spikes jutting from its arms, shoulders and back, as well as its massive wings and spiked tail.

"I would like to fight you with less fragile weapons," Satha laughed, "Your blade reminds me of Siegfried's own, albeit longer. To other blades, it is like Balmung was, a wrathful destroyer. I thank you for the fight."

The massive monster effortlessly freed its arm from her hold, outmuscling her own considerable warskin and leverage-enhanced strength, before pushing itself up off the floor and back onto its massive hoofed feet.

"Your blade, who made it?" Satha asked, a monstrous parody of a thoughtful look on its visage.

"I made it myself, with materials from this area and the one above," Cal said, smiling behind her mask. The pommel of her sword, or 'Balmung' now, she supposed, was already extruded into her hand, ready for her to pull the whole thing free, if necessary.

"If I bring you enough ore for three blades fit for a being of my stature, would you forge a pair of swords for me?" it asked.

"...Sure. Bring me enough ore for three swords, sized to you, and I will make you a pair of fine blades," she agreed, not quite able to hide her skepticism.

"Then we have an accord. The next time we meet, I shall have the materials ready for you," it said, before it left the chamber.

She collected the other half of Paradoxica, before resuming her exploration of the avernic labyrinth. By the time she found the passageway down to the fifth floor of the area, the saber had been fully repaired by absorbing monster blood, meaning that she would probably be able to make something for Ais or Mia out of the piece of saber in her pack. Maybe a boot blade for each of them? No, they didn't wear boots outside of the dungeon, and a boot blade was for everyday wear.

Oh well. Perhaps a dagger for Mia and a new saber for Ais would be better. She already had made a new sword for Ais, but one out of orichalcum would be better, especially considering the looming threat of a wargame from Hera. She had made an excellent weapon for Mia already, in addition to the amplifying knuckle dusters. Ah, and Laurent's birthday was in about a month and a half.

All of that, in addition to the agreement she'd made with Satha. Oh, she was going to be swamped with work, making all of these things in addition to a new hammer for herself. She quite liked the previous design, so it wouldn't need much changing. The new one wouldn't be

nearly as plain as her first one, though. She should probably start working on Mia's dagger first, then Ais' sword, then Laurent's new machete.

Idly, she considered what to make it out of. Probably titanite or adamantite. Most likely adamantite, as she had a good supply of high-purity ingots already, and it had been imbued with her warskin's self-repairing ability. ...Also, she was currently reserving any titanite she found for her armor. With the exceptions of her gauntlets and boots, which she had already made out of avernite, with titanite reinforcement, she intended to make the rest of the armor out of the dark gray metal.

Not only was it the toughest thing that she'd found so far, she was convinced that it could bear the 'durandal' property and a drop item infusion, potentially making it actually unbreakable. If she had an entire suit of armor made like that, she probably wouldn't have to upgrade it anymore. Hopefully, at least. All she had to do was figure out how to apply 'durandal', which she had been attempting ever since she acquired the 'blacksmith' developmental ability.

If she could figure it out in time to make her armor before the potential war-game, their victory would be almost assured, if the conditions were direct combat, at least. That was more than enough reason to keep banging her head against that particular wall.

With that thought, she stepped into the tunnel leading to the next floor of the sulfurous area.

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