

Taste of Idyll

After the meeting, Alicia was making her way back through the forest grounds.

'That girl has an... active imagination. Plucking information straight from someone's thoughts... I may have underestimated Cold-reader. Now, I need to finish up the rooms by tomorrow so they don't have to sleep on the floor, again. And while I'm gone I'll have to leave them in care of Llynbel and Dryssia. Llynbel is... not quite ready, while Dryssia could be a better fit, she can be too shy sometimes... Again I'll have to ask for Faenas's help... I should bring back something like a souvenir. Well that's one hell of an overtime, not like it's that different from my usual Saturday night... What day of the week is it anyway?'

Alicia had managed to figure out the rhythm of her construction. Working tirelessly throughout the night without a single sound or a drop of sweat, in just an overnight the hostel rooms had been completed. It was a splendid accomplishment for the timespan given. Of course the success could not only be attributed to her, aid from her two covenant spirits helped her make it possible in the end. Girls residing within the very building were picking up their jaws from the floor in the morning. They were somewhat formalistic, appearing repetitive like that of hotel rooms due to Alicia's intensive streamlining to save time they were well serviceable for the standards of the current world.

Every room made for two was planned with ample space for each resident to prevent them from feeling confined. With windows to let natural light in, furnished with wooden beds, personal dressers and puzzling objects called a wardrobe which was a storage furniture with triangular gadget that could keep one's clothes straight and easily accessible. An obvious deviation from the commonly used method of storing clothes folded in a chest. Some of the rooms and furniture didn't have their veneering, rendering them vulnerable to scratches and other types of wear damage. Amending this problem was delegated to Dryssia as even without Alicia's guidance she could carry it out. Interestingly the tree nymph seemed to have taken a particular interest in the process, treating it as sort of a game of dress up for the wood beneath. Thanks to her efforts every

room and furniture, despite being of the same design, had a distinct identity and feel to them.

Before setting out to work on the construction Alicia had contacted Faenas to keep an eye on the two spirits being left behind as she didn't totally trust in the abilities to protect the girls. Later someone from the troll village would come too, to deliver some catch and arrive as a temporary ambassador of their kind. Rather the girls might need protecting from Llynbel. And Dryssia herself is someone who might need the protection, though her bodyguards - the soldiers bees - seemed to have increased their numbers to a few dozen in response... The other favor Alicia asked from Faenas was for her to see how they were getting used to their new lives and help them along if she could. A few days ago they were malnourished, enervated and absolutely hopeless. As well as to keep Llynbel from causing casualties...

- "Hey, you there!"

Faenas called out one of the girls carrying a bucketful of dirty water.

- "Me? What is it Captain Lyrrea?"

- "Yes, and just Faenas or captain is fine. What is that you're carrying?"

- "The slops from the laundry."

Warily Faenas asked:

- "And where were you taking it?"

- "Was just about to strew it in the river-"

Panic quickly overtook the ranger, as she suddenly clutched her. Some of the liquids spilled on the ground and the clothes from the abrupt movements.

- "STOP! If you have a death wish, at least do it where we won't get swept up along with it!"

The intensity of Faenas's actions and the tone of her voice frightened the clueless girl.

- "And I promised to keep you alive until Alicia. So just dump it anywhere you want, as long as it's not going into a river or its affluents."

She could only quickly nod as she was let go to dump the water elsewhere. Though there wasn't that much left to dump seeing as how both of their clothes had soaked most of the water...

Having met up at the elven village before dawn, two were already at the edge of the forest by early noon under some ranger cloaks borrowed with the help from Faenas. Weaving in hoods for privacy and lengthening it was a trivial task. Considering Rosalia's poor stamina, Ramiel was brought along to serve as her mount until they exited the forest. Having consulted the map their destination was the city of Kostranald. The path to there was anything but straightforward as Alicia's map was not accurate enough for her to pick the most optimal route. Forcing the two to go from one landmark and minor settlements to another to keep on track so as not to get lost.

- "Well here we are." *'Ramiel you can return now, thank you.'*
- *'Am obliged to be of assistance.'*

After letting down the human girl, Ramiel turned back around to the forest and faded into the foliage soon after.

Without the trees to provide wind shielding, the gusts of wind could rage as they pleased. After reaching the top of a particularly tall hill that blocked sight, the two could see grasslands, wetland fens, hills and lone trees. Seldomly travelled paths of dirt and thin vegetations implied the presence of some fringes civilization. Following a stream of river flowing out of the forest by sight, Alicia could even make out human dwellings in the distance. Although it would seem only two of them were on the journey, a brood of Araneae moved with them. The Huntresses moved ahead and around of them as scouting wayfinders chosen for their excellent detection, eyesight and mobility. Not known to Rosalia, Alicia carried a large number of hex weavers within her hair, a few of them conjured just for the occasion. Most of them were evolved Araneae assuming a smaller, much more portable form through mimicry, ready to return to service at a moment's notice; Brides of death, Webslingers, Crypts weavers, Cave crawlers all, each able to wreak havoc in any town...

Alicia travelled with speed and confidence using the information fed by her leaping Araneae ahead of her, a confidence not quite shared by her partner. However soon Rosalia realized an uncanny calm was around them, following them. She thought for sure that she heard the whining of canines in the distance but without any affirmation from Alicia and the sounds ceasing immediately thereafter she dismissed it as her mind seeking meanings and patterns in the whistles of the wind. It appeared as if they were on the trail of destruction as they walked through tall grasses hiding

the bodies of recently eliminated threats. Where Alicia led an eerie spectre of death seemed to make way for their path, paving a way of blood.

They drew near a small settlement the size of a hamlet where even Rosalia could see it in the distance without any perception enhancing skills. On the map, this place didn't exist, meaning either it was a recently established community or more likely a minor settlement of little significance that the map maker couldn't bother to notate. Small field of crops, a couple of fowl wandering about clucking, and, most importantly for Alicia, the miasmic odour of dung from livestock and poor hygiene completed the perfect image of the countryside. Taking a deep whiff... *'Smells like shit, not even exaggerating...'*

- "Stick close to me..."
- "I understand..."

Although there wasn't any explicit danger that dwelled within the hamlet as far as Alicia and her Araneae were concerned, regardless she wanted to avoid making a commotion and to the average bystander they were some strange girls travelling alone. From beneath her cloak few Hex crawlers rappelled¹ down and spread out while some of the Huntresses made their way on top of the buildings, assuming overwatch. The Araneae - though not as proficient as Alicia - were proficient at using stealth and the idea of cloud watching wasn't fresh on the mind of people carrying out their daily chores. The residents largely ignored the two with the men either busy on the fields tending to the grain crops and watching their livestock grazing the nearby pastures or resting under the shade of trees. In the Kingdom of Pyrinia where they were at its fringe right now, hamlets were the small detachments from villages.

Near the edge of the hamlet there was a dirt road with wagon tracks leading to the village center and along it's wayside was a large thatch roof building, merry laughter and the scent of ale hung near the structure. It was a tavern for the residents and travellers alike to grab a cool drink after a long day under the sun. Much of the country consisted of scattered towns and villages and Pyrinia wasn't an exception in its case. Peddlers, merchants and travelling adventurers alike relied on these villages dotting the lands for food and lodging as packing such provisions were both tiring

¹ You have no idea how much I struggled to remember this word.

and unnecessary, family owned inns and taverns provided these to the people. Especially for business oriented merchants who were stingy with space on their wagon caravans, these pandocheions² and caravanseraï³ were the lifeblood of their businesses.

- "Hungry?"
- "Not at all."

Naturally she was lying. Their early departure was before she could put anything in her stomach but her days of undernourishment had hardened her against hunger that would break a person of lesser will.

- "Keep low, I'll see if we can't acquire a transport."

Due to her high constitution Alicia had the stamina to travel day and night without stopping on foot but the same could not be said of Rosalia. Alicia had hoped to hitchhike a wagon to the next few towns and villages. The concept existed however it wasn't that widespread. Crackling flames of the hearth welcomed in weary travellers. Behind the tables the patrons imbibed their frothing ale and shared their overblown stories to one another in good humour, in the background sounds of clinking cutlery. None paid attention to Alicia's entrance, if they even noticed her arrival at all.

Alicia approached who she assumed was the innkeep sitting behind a low bar table-esque counter. The man was lean and physically fit, even so it was apparent that he was past his prime with hints of silver streaks poking out from the root of his hair. He didn't even acknowledge Alicia until she started to knock on the counter to grab his attention and when she did he glanced over finally to see her. While surprised, he quickly recomposed himself to greet her.

- "Hail stranger. These eyes and ears of mine seem to be getting old, I did not recognize you were standing here. What will it be?"

'I thought every barkeep was supposed to be polishing a mug with a cloth or something like that... whatever.'

- "Heading towards the city. Need transportation, know something?"
- "A traveller seeking fare I see. I've no rumors of carriages going heading straight for Kostranald.-

Kneading his neck a little the man seemed to remember something.

² Greek for Inns.

³ A type of inn most commonly seen in desert areas originating from the Islamic world. A roadside inn.

- A merchant's carriage is moving in an hour or so, bound for the town of Viveria. You'll have a better chance there."
- "Thanks. What's on the menu today?"
- "Spelt porridge, Charky, Grassbird skewers, always got bread."

'No to the porridge and the brick... Charky... what was that again... a bag of beef jerky if I recall correctly. Grassbirds are similar to quails... Right then.'

- "Two skewers, a charky."
- "Anything to drink?"
- "Got anything other than ale?"
- "Hrm... one of those abstinents are we... I think we have a barrel of cider somewhere in the cellar..."

〈 Void Vault 〉

Alicia pulled out an empty bulbous bottle from beneath her cloak, along with a few coins to cover the fee.

- "Here fill this up with it then."
- "Hold up now, the crowns ain't enough, gonna need a few more copper or a bronze."
- "Ah, pardon."

While pretending to pull more out of her cloak she procured a few more coins from her vault, careful not to reveal that she didn't actually have pockets on the insides of her cloak. Though hidden pockets were popular, especially as they can be used to hide some of your money in case you are mugged, her magician's trick of pulling a coin and a bottle out of nowhere would draw some curious gazes if it were known.

〈 Cold Reader 〉

'Fifty copper equals a bronze, fifty bronze more and you get a silver. Now if you can get a hundred of those you are a proud owner of a shiny gold coin. Thanks for the tip, innkeep.'

Most of the peasants dealt with copper and bronze for most of their lives, but sometimes there are arguments with the authenticity of the currency thus bartering with whatever's on hand was the status quo, the most preferred currency after crowns seem to be food. Hell seems like some of the wealthy farmers seem to pay their servants with bags of salt or grain as payment. I'll give it to those brigands, hundreds of silver is nothing to scoff at, until you get caught I guess... Thanks for the inheritance.'

Her order arrived shortly but the cider took some time before the innkeeper came back with her bottle. Alicia made excuses to deflect the chatty innkeeper's invitations and quickly made her way to the exit, while motioning Rosalia standing in the corner to leave. The Huntresses had already located the Merchant's carriage preparing to depart. Sampling the jerky wincing at its saltiness, she then took a bite out of the skewer. Thankfully it tasted a lot better than the jerky so she handed the food to Rosalia as she briefed her on where they were headed now. The spread out hex weavers returned to her while the Huntresses opted to follow. It seemed that they were confident in their ability to keep up with the carriage. After some persuasion with coins and a little help from Whispers, Alicia managed to secure their position in the carriage ride to Viveria...

Originally, Stealth would have functioned a lot like [Caveira's](#) Silent step and [Nøkk's](#) Hel Presence Reduction abilities, with it taking effect only when actively used. This was shelved for it's more basic counterpart that has yet to be featured. Stealth functions by tampering with cognitive perception of the observer. Technically Alicia or any user of stealth doesn't become invisible, transparent or anything, rather any person looking at her will see her perfectly fine as long as their eyes are functional. But they won't recognize that they're looking at a person or an Araneae unless their perception rolls nat20. So what do they see? Basically everything else around her. The effect is similar to the [Filling-in](#) phenomenon that occurs in humans for objects in response to their physiological blind spot. Take some time to read up on it. Tl;dr Alicia is basically a walking optical illusion when using stealth. This skill works even on digital recordings or any recording that faithfully records what it sees and hears because it is so faithful, the illusive effects of the skill are also recorded. Because of how stealth works, if one steels their mind against the effects they gain a resistance to its influence which is why its effects are halved when the opponent is aware of her, if she were to break LoS, then the skill regains its full potential again. Even advanced robots and synthetics are not safe from it. Only few things can overcome the power of stealth, motion sensors and tripwires laser or not as they detect physical interference and don't have cognitive potential for stealth to interfere with. However anyone manning the apparatuses will not be alerted any further than must have been a random misfire. You see, I flesh out how the things in my story works in my head but then forgets to properly showcase it.

Did you know Alma was inspired by the nanosuit A.I from crysis? The suit was a hell of a wingman if you've played that game. You felt like a one man battalion and the suit was there every step of the way by literally making you invisible to deflecting bullets and absorbing explosions and even defying the all powerful fall damage that kills oh so many gamers. I've tried to recreate the suit's speech pattern as an homage to it. Another A.I I really liked and probably influenced me was the Cyclops onboard A.I and the Neptune rocket A.I from Subnautica. I simply really liked their voices, I didn't know which one to pick so I basically made Alma's voice into androgynous and having that hint of professionalism from service speech. But Alma can have any kind of voice modulation. It's just Alicia interprets Alma's voice as feminine but sometimes as a masculine entity. Obviously

Alma has no gender, but you can have it be whatever you want it to be. Even an attack helicopter armed with hydra missiles or your favorite Vtuber if that's your kink, I won't judge, however I will be severely disappointed...

I believe in the very first drafts of this story, Alicia would instead be called Sylviana - shortened to Sylvie and her last name would have been Dagenhart. Whereas Sylviana's equivalent of Alice would have been Silviana. I stead switched to Alicia for a specific reason. Also in the early version Alice (The spider) wouldn't have existed and Alicia (Deadboi engie) would have had the name Alice instead. I decided that the current setup that's going on has more potential and is more interesting story wise. [spoiler] Alice and Alicia's dynamics are one that mimics Talion and Celebrimbor except no megalomaniac backstabbing from a control freak. No replacing a bright lord with a dark one. Only the lullaby of the Void...[/spoiler]

Wow I hate university already, not as much as usual but still hateful. And it's my third year. Fuck. Recovering from what I call, 'post semester break hangover' is hard.