**Earth**

**Hillside Lake Dungeon, Ontario**

**August 18, 2019**

**08:48 EDT**

[Nicely done,] I sent when we were safe from discovery.

“Thanks! I wasn’t happy about doing that to his wolf, but I needed to make it one on one. He was surprisingly tough.”

[I saw that you were pretty happy with your roll. You got a Tier S Skill Gem, right?]

She instantly had a sheepish little smile on her face as she nodded. “I maybe, sorta kinda cheated. I had Precognition up so I knew how it would land as soon as I let it go. I saw a six so I waited until the timing was right and tossed it. I still don’t know what it is, but he did say that it would benefit me and it is soulbound to me so I can’t give it to anyone else.”

“Eh, I don’t consider that cheating,” Ben said. “He didn’t say that you couldn’t use any of your skills while you rolled, right? What number did you get, anyways?”

“278S” she answered.

Ben took his phone out of his storage and then searched the number. He had a shocked look on his face as he looked back up to her. “Seriously?!”

She put a hand up to her hand to stifle her laughter before responding. “I wish! Nah, it was 010S”

“Ah, Ambush,” he said after a moment. “It camouflages you temporarily, giving you a massive speed boost that decreases over time. It’s quite similar to Omnislash in that way, but you don’t automatically attack enemies around you and it lasts longer. Since you have Stealth, you also get an extra bonus. If you use Stealth before Ambush it will increase the effect by fifty percent. Not a bad skill.”

[What about the weapons? Butterfly swords, right?] I asked.

“Yup!” she replied as they appeared in her hands. She flipped the two of them around until she was holding them by the blades and held them out to me.

It was my first time holding a pair of butterfly swords, so I was surprised by the weight, and the fact that the cutting edge started halfway up the blade rather than running the entire length. When I asked her about it, she explained that they are made that way to allow the wielder to effectively block enemy attacks without damaging the cutting edge.

Looking over the two swords, I could see that they were both identical. Everything from the blade to the leather wrapped around the handle to the handguard and quillon looked as if one of them was made and then duplicated. It made sense when I finally looked at the stats.

**Twinblade of the Attacker**

**Epic**

12 Weapon Damage

+12 Strength

+12 Agility

+6 Endurance

Set: (1/2) Successful attacks with either weapon grant the wielder a charge of Attacker. Once 25 stacks of Attacker have been accumulated, your next attack will deal [Melee Damage\*10] bonus damage.

**Soulbound to Anja Hansson**

**Twinblade of the Defender**

**Epic**

12 Weapon Damage

+12 Constitution

+12 Stamina

+6 Endurance

Set: (2/2) Successful blocks with either weapon grant the wielder a charge of Defender. Once 25 stacks of Defender have been accumulated, you will be granted a shield that absorbs the next [Max Health\*3] damage taken. Lasts 30 seconds.

**Soulbound to Anja Hansson**

[Very nice!] I said as I handed them next to her. [Were all the items epic?]

She shook her head. “There were rare items there too, but I was told I could pick any one item. There were a few others that caught my eye, but I was allowed to take both of these because they are part of a set.”

[What about you?] I asked, turning to Ben.

A ring appeared in his palm as he walked over to me, holding it out. I picked it up and examined it briefly before looking over the stats. It was a thin flat band that was silvery-white in color and had a number of different colored gems embedded in its surface.

**Mageband**

**Epic**

+20 Intellect

+10 Constitution

+10 Endurance

This ring acts as a vessel, storing a spell within it for later use. After use, another spell will need to be stored inside the ring before it can be activated again.

**Soulbound to Benjamin Collins**

I handed it back to him. [Damn, that’s pretty good as well. I imagine you’ll be using it to store a use of Meteor Shower or Summon Fire Elemental?]

“Exactly,” he nodded. “Perhaps a use of one of my skeletal summons, but the two you listed are probably the ones I’ll use the most. For now, at least.”

[Mind giving us a demonstration?]

“Sure!”

He concentrated for a moment before spinning in place, his hand whipping out as he did. Suddenly a Fireball appeared out of nowhere and hurtled towards the wall he was pointing at. It collided with the wall and was extinguished, doing no damage whatsoever.

“That was just a Fireball, but you can see what it can do,” he explained. “It doesn’t save any time; I still need to cast the spell, I’m just storing it inside of the ring until later. Still, it would allow me to cast Meteor Shower to start a fight and then instantly cast Summon Fire Elemental if we need it, or vice versa.”

“Very nice!” Anja said. “What about the Skill Gem you got?”

“Ah. I got a Tier C Skill Gem, but it should come in handy,” he replied as he spun around again.

Holding his staff in the middle, he pointed the head away from him. A second later, a jet of sustained fire was projected forward, spreading out as it traveled. It wasn’t unlike my fire breath.

“Flamethrower,” he said after he was done demonstrating the spell. “It’s a channeled ability, not having a cast time or a cooldown, but it drains quite a bit of mana.”

“Sweet, we could’ve used that on the pillar room. Should be pretty handy in narrow corridors like this one, too,” Mason said, looking around.

[Speaking of which, should we see what’s on the other side of that door?] I asked.

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**Earth**

**Spectre Base, Canadian Rockies**

**August 18, 2019**

**05:48 PDT (8:48 EDT)**

“Not bad, indeed,” Alexandra said while taking a sip of her coffee.

Today was one of those rare days where there wasn’t much to do. The dragons had everything well in hand loading their eggs into shipping containers and then moving them into the warehouse in Toronto. They also had an army there defending them until they could be loaded onto Abi and taken to their new home.

Huge warehouse-like spaces around the world were very busy with technicians coming and going as they installed row upon row of simulators. The simulators that would get their new recruits up to speed, to familiarize them with the systems and machinery they would be operating long before the fleet actually got to Earth.

That’s not to say that the simulators would do all the work. Even as advanced as the Pygmaeans are, a simulator is a poor substitute for the real thing. When those six hundred ships arrive on Earth, then the real training would begin. They had four months at minimum to teach what most navy personnel learned in two years.

Tich was confident he could do it, however. He had been developing a training regimen for decades in preparation. The result would be that each recruit would spend twenty-two hours per day training. Fourteen hours separated by two one hour breaks would be dedicated to the important stuff; physical exercise, martial arts training, and practical experience actually doing their job aboard a ship. The remaining hours would be spent in a simulator while they slept, going through scenarios that couldn’t easily be replicated without real ship-to-ship combat.

The goal was to start the training as soon as they got back from the trip to Pygmaean space. That would give them just over a month to start getting into proper shape before the ships arrived. Until then, there was nothing to do but wait. Gabriel had his people out secretly recruiting the adventurers who would end up manning the ships, but that didn’t require his constant attention.

The result of this rare day where there wasn’t much to do was that Alexandra, Gabriel, Thomas, Tich, Selalea, Yuki and Omar were all relaxing in a breakroom while they watched Jonathan and his friends deal with the latest boss. Or Ben and Anja, rather.

Alexandra looked around the room and noticed the smiling asian-looking woman sitting on an adjacent couch. “What are you smiling about?” she asked.

“She’s going to be damn good,” Yuki replied without looking over. “She’s already playing with her opponents and Precognition hasn’t even reached rank thirty yet.”

“What do you think about the weapons?” Gabriel asked.

“We have entirely different styles, but they should be very good when she is fighting humanoid opponents and can use them to their fullest. I am surprised that items with such good effects are available at their level, though boss fights like that do typically have higher quality equipment than regular boss fights.”

“I never understood that. You would figure that a boss that requires an entire team to kill would drop better equipment than one that doesn’t.”

“Eh, it’s pretty random. Sometimes there isn’t anything special, but occasionally there is a gem that can be found. I’d say that she found a gem, especially because she got two items, rather than the one. Ben’s ring isn’t half bad, either. I imagine he’ll be using that one for a long, long time.”

Gabriel laughed. “You can say that again. I would’ve killed for a ring like that when I was his age. There were a few close calls because my spells took so damn long to cast in the middle of a fight. That’s not even taking into account the potential military applications. He could teleport in, cast a big spell and then teleport out again before anyone even knew he was there.”

“If they don’t have someone with Precognition, that is,” Yuki said. “If he tried that there would be a jammer active before he could get back out again.”

“They’d need a lot more than one soldier with Precognition. Even you can’t cover an entire battlefield.”

“True. It’s still a risky endeavour either way.”

“She’s had formal training, hasn’t she?” Omar asked.

“Both of them have,” Alexandra answered. “Their father was an army brat growing up so he spent a lot of time in Asia following his father around to wherever he was stationed. He was fascinated by martial arts so his parents enrolled him in classes wherever they went. I think he’s a black belt in five or six different arts and has some knowledge of others. He started teaching them when they were six. Sonja is actually the better of the two, though she prefers the bow.”

“Better?”

Alexandra nodded. “They competed for a few years and did very well. They met a few times during tournaments and Sonja won more often than not.”

“Huh. It’s too bad they aren’t Scyftan. I bet they would take to Ikwar Kun like a duck to water.”

Alexandra nodded once again.

Named after the man who created it, Ikwar Kun is a form of martial arts that was created for the Spectres, and a rather unique one at that. It is impossible for most races to learn, as they need to have at least some telekinetic ability to use it. Scyftans don’t have telekinesis naturally, though there is at least one animal that they can scan to be able to use it.

It works by wearing metal bands around the body to increase the power of strikes and kicks, as well as move faster in general. The strength and speed varies depending on how strong a person’s telekinesis is, and those who are particularly powerful can perform stunning acrobatic feats and even levitate or fly for short periods of time.

“Ikwar Kun? Why does that sound familiar?” Thomas asked.

“He was a commander in the navy for a time,” Omar answered. “He was also the one to develop a special form of martial arts for the Spectres by request of Derech Kidravia.”

“Really? I’ve never heard of it.”

“You wouldn’t have, it was need to know,” Alexandra replied. “We didn’t want any potential enemies to know how we fought.”

“I see. I don’t suppose I can get a demonstration?”

“It’s not exactly something that is easy to demonstrate, in fact it would look like any other martial art. The difference is that we use telekinesis to augment our strength and speed, moving faster and hitting harder than our opponents. It does allow us to do stuff like this, though,” Gabriel said as he got up, throwing two objects to the floor and stepping onto them.

He took a few steps, rising with each one as if he was walking up an invisible staircase. He stopped when he was about a meter off the floor and turned to Thomas.

“Fascinating. I never would have thought to use telekinesis in such a way.”

“Most people don’t, they just use it to move objects around. You can’t normally move your body using telekinesis, but that’s what these are for,” Gabriel said, lifting up his foot and showing off the stirrup-like object that was fixed to his foot.

“Why can’t humans and other races learn Ikwar Kun? Telekinesis is a Tier S skill. Surely it would allow them to do what you do.”

“There is a very simple reason for that, that being the fact that the Telekinesis skill can only lift a certain amount of weight, and requires mana to operate. It would require someone weighing no more than one hundred pounds to do what we do. You know of Suprelar?

Thomas thought for a moment. “I heard Derech mention the word once or twice but I don’t know what it refers to.”

“They’re highly intelligent animals that are naturally gifted when it comes to both telepathy and telekinesis. The biggest and oldest among them can rip trees right out of the ground when they get angry, but the most common use is picking fruit from the canopy high overhead. Scanning one of those animals is what allowed me to do this.”

“How are people not flocking to the planet they are on?”

“Because few people have actually been there. It’s well outside of Scyftan space, and any other civilization’s space for that matter. It was actually one of the planets that Jonathan proposed to your people,” Alexandra said, looking over to Selalea.

“Oh? Which one?” she asked.

“Bryke-8”

“Ah. We would have picked that planet if not for Mezotis 3 and 4.”

“Huh. Jonathan was under the impression that Gnara-3 was the runner up.”

“It would have been, if not for the massive birds that live on the planet as well. We would have had to constantly keep tabs on our young to make sure that one of them doesn’t swoop down and grab one of them.”

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**Earth**

**Hillside Lake Dungeon, Ontario**

**August 18, 2019**

**09:42 EDT**

The twenty-first floor wasn’t nearly as exciting as we thought it would be. In fact, it seemed like we would be going back to the hallway-room formula that seemed to be very common. There were a few surprises along the way in traps and hobgoblin assassins, but they barely slowed us down. When we got to the first room, all that was waiting for us were a large group of hobgoblins and goblins, their numbers not much bigger than what we had faced in the pillar room.

We had made quick work of them, and were surprised to find four Skill Gems and a rare ring from that one group alone, as well as a hundred or so Mana Crystal Shards. Gathering them up, we made our way down the adjoining hallway and soon came across another near-identical room. There were a few more hobgoblins in the group, but it wasn’t any harder to deal with them.

We cleared that room, and three more, before finally arriving at the floor boss room. Inside, there were three large groups of hobgoblins waiting for us. Behind them were a group of hobgoblins sitting around a fire, three warriors, one archer, two druids, and one shaman. There were also two axe-wielding hobgoblins, but it was impossible to tell if they were axe throwers or berserkers without engaging them.

When we were ready, we started walking forward and were surprised when all three groups of hobgoblins charged at us, rather than each coming in waves. We adapted quickly, Ben activating his new ring to immediately summon his fire elemental while I turned and completely roasted one group of hobgoblins.

It was cleanup after that. The eight hobgoblins were shocked into silence until one of the warriors charged towards us, triggering the rest of them to follow suit. The warrior didn’t even get close. As he was running, he suddenly cried out in pain and then fell to the floor before separating into two pieces.

That was Anja’s newest ability, and an unnerving one to say the least. She had been standing behind me and I didn’t even see her move, but she rapidly closed the distance and cut the warrior down before appearing again. The rest of the hobgoblins saw the warrior fall and the blood coating her blade.

Arrows, spells and axes immediately started flying towards her so I had to Blink twice and interpose myself between her and the goblins while activating Mana Shield. I noticed that one of the incoming axes was glowing red, so I reached out and grabbed it before activating Unerring Throw and throwing it back at the one that threw it. He caught it... in his chest. Just like that a quarter of the advancing hobgoblins were dead.

I took a deep breath and then exhaled, but nothing happened. That’s when I realized that I was still in my human form. Luckily everyone else was busy, so no one noticed. We had taken a quick break to grab a drink and snack on something when we arrived on the current floor. Since I couldn’t manipulate small packages or water bottles with my big clawed hands, I had switched to my human form and forgot to switch back.

Shrugging, I channeled mana into my swords instead. Blinking forward, I quickly dispatched the shaman. When I turned back around, I saw that everything was dealt with except for the two druids who stood back to back and had summoned dozens of vines.

Normally the vines are pretty easy to deal with, but that’s when they’re few in number. Mason and Anja were cutting away the vines as quickly as they could, but as soon as one was cut down, another would take its place. Even Sonja’s arrows weren’t able to get through to the druids, as one of the vines always moved in time to intercept them.

[Back off, guys. Ben, you wanna take care of them?]

[Sure,] he replied.

Mason used Whirling Leap to get away while Anja disappeared into a cloud of smoke. Ben started walking directly towards the vines while holding his staff out in front of him. He activated Flamethrower when he was close enough, and kept advancing as the vines burned. The two druids tried to run away when they saw the incoming flames, but a quick flurry of arrows and a few attacks from Anja stopped that pretty quickly.

After picking up the shards left behind, we made our way to the stairs leading to the next floor.

“Jonathan didn’t think any of us noticed, but I did,” Ben said from behind me.

I didn’t react, but I knew my friends would get a laugh out of it. I probably wouldn’t live it down anytime soon, either.

“Notice what?” Mason asked.

“It seems that Jonathan forgot that he was in his human form. I saw him take a deep breath and then exhale. It was pretty amusing to see his face when nothing happened.”

“Like this?” Mason asked, turning around and breathing in a large amount of air and then releasing it, like a kid blowing out candles on their birthday.

“Exactly that,” Ben replied, laughing. The other three followed suit and there was a good thirty seconds or so of laughter before they recovered.

“Jonathan, your dragonkin form has the same abilities as your dragon form, right?” Anja asked.

“Besides being able to fly in one form and not the other, yeah. Why do you ask?” I answered, wondering what she was getting at.

“Up until now, you’ve always shifted back into your human form when there is a risk of someone seeing you in that form. Why not just activate your camouflage so they can’t see you?”

My eyes widened a bit at that. I had forgotten that that was even an option, despite having used it on a boss fight recently. It would certainly reduce the downtime by a little bit.

“How good is that camouflage, anyways?” Ben asked.

“Good enough that the dragons have been able to stay hidden for millennia. I can’t believe I didn’t think about doing that sooner. I really need to learn how to take bits from different species and combine them into a different form, similar to the one my mom helped me with,” I replied, referring to my hybrid form. *Perhaps I can modify my human form to allow me to camouflage myself and use my breath weapons.*

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As soon as we got to the twenty second floor, I shifted into my dragonkin and camouflaged myself repeatedly to see how fast I could do it. It turned out that it didn’t take long at all, so Anja would keep an eye out for any teams coming up in front of us or behind us, so I could hide myself before they saw my form. It turned out that it wasn’t needed, but it was a good precaution to take if I wanted to use my different forms.

The next four hours or so were spent clearing the highest concentration of monsters yet. There were only five or six chambers per floor, but each of those contained at least a hundred goblins and hobgoblins, at minimum. The former ended up becoming nonexistent as we went deeper and deeper, and though it did increase the difficulty slightly, it wasn’t overly so. Oddly, we didn’t encounter any new types of goblins over the next four floors. The goblins we did fight were just a bit tougher than their earlier counterparts.

That high concentration of monsters also meant that there was a fairly high concentration of loot as well. In total, we got six more Skill Gems and an assortment of equipment, including three uncommons, one rare and three epics. There wasn’t a big rush to dole out any of it, so I stored stuff in Abi’s storage whenever something dropped.

Before we knew it, we were standing in front of another set of double doors with an intricate carving on them. It was probably the most ornate of all the boss doors we had come across so far, with gold and gemstones being found all over it.

The carving itself was of a massive, fat hobgoblin in the middle as he lay down on plush pillows. He wore a jeweled gold crown on his head and had rolls upon rolls of fat… everywhere. There were a large number of regular goblins who stood around him, some fanning him while others were carrying platters filled with food and drink.

As I pushed the double doors open, I saw the exact same scene that had been carved into the door. It didn’t do him justice. He had a quadruple or quintuple chin, and had folds of fat on his arms, chest and stomach. His legs weren’t visible, but I imagine they would be the same. It really made me wonder how he was the last boss of the dungeon. If a human was as fat as he was, I doubt they would ever be able to stand.

He was reaching down with one of his hands when I opened the door, intending to pick up the comparatively tiny poultry leg that a goblin was holding up for him. He looked up when the door opened, but didn’t stop his action, his goblin-sized fist sending the food-bearing goblin flying. The rest of the goblins around the room froze when the goblin cried out in pain, and looked up to the boss before looking at us. There were some shouts and all the goblins dropped what they were doing, literally, and then ran through the doors all around the room, closing them behind them.

The boss was none too happy at the interruption, as he looked down to the floor where the poultry leg had fallen and picked it up. Tossing the entire thing in his mouth, he crunched down a few times and began getting up. He didn’t have any difficulty in the slightest, and that may have been in large part to his size. He was at least as big as I was in my Seotross form, if not a bit bigger.

He turned and made a show of scratching his ass through his loincloth before bending down and grabbing something. When he stood back up, he was holding a massive poleaxe that was taller than he was.

“Well, food. What are you waiting for?” his loud deep voice said as he turned back around.

[Give me a minute, guys,] I sent.

When I was done shifting into my Seotross form, I took the Beacon out of my inventory and withdrew the four eight-foot-long crystalline swords that were stored within it.

“Interesting…” the boss said.

Ben started us off, summoning his Fire Elemental and then immediately following it up by an instant cast of Meteor Shower.

Shocking all of us, the boss tumbled out of the way of the incoming meteors, grabbing a fallen spit with a roasted animal on it before getting back to his feet. He calmly ate the small morsel and then his hand shot out towards Ben. The spit closed the distance in an instant, only for Ben’s mana shield to absorb it.

[Uhh, guys? Don’t let him hit you. Absorbing that drained nearly all my mana.]

That really surprised me considering that Ben’s mana was many times higher than the rest of us, as well as the fact that such a small object did so much damage. It would definitely pop my shield or Mason’s, and would definitely do a lot of damage to either of the twins.

Keeping that in mind, I started running towards the boss, my long strides eating up the distance quickly. I knew Mason and Anja were both on my heels, but I would need to make sure to keep his attention on me. I was confident that Anja could dodge his strikes, but Mason wasn’t nearly as fast, nor did he have Precognition like she did.

I used Blink when I was in range to do so, raising two of my swords high overhead while keeping the other two ready to deflect any potential strikes. I brought the first two down on him, but he stepped to the side with unnatural quickness and batted them away with the butt of his poleaxe. Stepping back, he spun it around and attempted to take out my legs. I jumped over to top of them and then activated Omnislash. He was amazingly able to parry some of the attacks, though plenty of them did get through. Cuts appeared on his arms and legs, but they weren’t very deep. They also seemed to grow smaller, albeit slowly.

Mason and Anja arrived a moment later, the previous exchange having happened in mere seconds. Anja had been throwing Ice Shards as she ran, but she used Omnislash as soon as she got in range. All of her attacks got through since her smaller form was harder to deal with. They did a lesser amount of damage, however, and probably felt like nothing but insect bites. Her nodachi soon disappeared and she reached to her waist, picking up the two butterfly swords that were sheathed there.

Seeing the boss’ wounds slowly disappear made me wish that I hadn’t switched to my Seotross form. His regeneration wasn’t nearly as good as the dragonewt’s was, but we would need to cauterize his wounds to prevent him from healing. Fortunately Ben had a new ability that could help with that.

With the boss distracted by Anja’s speed, I quickly took out the Beacon and put two swords back inside, taking out two spears, instead. Activating Barbed Spear, I thrust towards the boss’ midsection with both spears.

The massive hobgoblin bellowed out in pain while spinning in place. The action tore both of my spears out of his back, and also sent a back-handed fist towards my face. Knowing that Mana Shield wouldn’t be able to prevent the strike from hitting me, I used Blink to get out of the way.

The boss continued to spin, loosening his grip on his poleaxe until he was holding the but end of it, and used it’s length to sweep around him. Anja deftly moved out of the way, but Mason wasn’t as fast. The haft of the poleaxe dropped his shield instantly and collided with his lower leg. I could hear a couple of snaps as Mason went end over end before landing roughly. He shouted in pain and instantly clutched one of his legs as he curled into a ball.

The boss smiled evilly at that, and reached down to grab at Mason. I used Blink again. My swords were already being brought down, and the boss wasn’t fast enough to move out of the way in time. My sharp crystalline swords cut through his arm in two places, sending several hundred pounds of goblin crashing down to the floor.

Ignoring his bellows of pain, I reached down and grabbed Mason with two of my arms and then Blinked a few times in quick succession to deposit him by the door.

[Ben! See if you can’t do something to stop his arm from regenerating!]

[You got it!]

Turning my attention to Mason’s injuries, I saw that his right leg--the one that was hit by the poleaxe first--wasn’t in great shape. There was a small hole in the armor and his bone was sticking through.

[Jonathan! The suit won’t administer the healing agent built into his armor until his bone is set in the proper place. You’ll need to straighten out his leg and push it back inside.] my mom sent to me.

I nodded, straightening out both of his legs and then placed my large thumb directly on top of the bone. [This is really going to hurt,] I sent, looking right at Mason.

He tensed his jaw and nodded slightly. [Do it!]

With a quick motion, I pushed the bone back through his skin and then held onto his leg as he reflexively tried to pull his leg away. He cried out in pain when I pushed the bone back through, and then again when the suit injected him with the healing agent.

[Alright, he should be fine, though he’s out of the fight. It’s up to you four, now,] my mom sent again.

I turned around and saw that Ben seemed to have pulled it off. The boss’ arm was a blackened mess, though that didn’t stop him from fighting. He thrust, chopped and swept with his poleaxe, but Anja was always two steps ahead of him, none of the strikes even getting close to hitting her. I did notice that the two wounds from my spears were gone, which meant that he was no longer affected by the secondary effect of Barbed Spear.

Seeing that Ben and the twins had things well in hand, I began shapeshifting back into my dragonkin form. It would make me about half the boss’ size, but would give me the ability to either burn the boss to death, or freeze him. Or…

As soon as I was done shapeshifting, I pulled out my two regular swords and activated camouflage. Striding right up to the boss, I waited for the right moment and then slashed with one sword after the other. The first strike cut about halfway through the boss’ fat thigh, and the second one finished the job. After warning Anja away, I breathed in before unleashing a jet of flame directly at the boss’ severed leg.

I ignored his cries as the room started to smell of roasted meat, intending to finish off the boss once and for all. Just as I brought my swords down on him, he disappeared. Looking around the room, I could see that he had appeared at the far end of the room. He used the wall to get back to his feet, and then something started happening.

His skin began rippling as he slowly shrunk in size. At the same time, his severed arm and leg started rapidly regrowing, until he was standing on two legs and flexing his new arm. When the process finally finished, the boss was just as tall, though he was now covered in pure muscle, rather than the layers of thick fat he had previously.

He began laughing maniacally before raising his arm out towards me. I heard a clattering behind me, and turned as his poleaxe lifted off the ground and started flying towards him. I had to use Blink to get out of the way, otherwise I probably would have been skewered by it. As soon as it was in hand, the boss looked around the room and spotted Mason. With a grin on his face, he began running towards him.

He was much, much faster than he was mere moments ago, and I never would’ve been able to get there in time if I didn’t have a movement skill. I used Blink three times in quick succession, and interposed myself between them.

The boss just grinned in response as he continued forward. I knew that if I tried to block him then I would just get sent flying, so I needed to come up with a different plan. It took me a second, but I came up with something that might just work. Activating Precognition, I watched to see where the boss’ feet would land. As soon as I saw that, I raised both of my hands towards him, one pointing towards his face, while the other was pointing at his feet. When the time was right, I used Portal.

Not expecting anything like that in the slightest, the boss went to plant his foot on the ground only to lose his balance. As he did, the opening of the portal opened directly in front of his face. Suddenly, the boss went flipping end over end, almost like someone who had been clotheslined.

I heard laughter from behind me, and saw that it was Mason who was the one laughing. He was sitting up now and tears were falling down his face as he looked towards the boss. I couldn’t help but smile, but turned my direction from the boss. He was already leaning on one arm as he shook his head to try to ease the dizziness, but I didn’t want to give him the time.

Breathing in deeply, this time I projected a jet of extreme cold directly at him. He howled as he tried to get to his feet, but three arrows impacted his right knee, one right after the other. At the same time, Anja appeared directly beside the boss and used her butterfly sword to strike at the boss’ other knee. It seemed like Anja had been counting her strikes, because the boss’ left knee exploded with the strike. She immediately disappeared again, likely wanting to get as far away from the cold as possible.

Knowing that walking away was impossible, the boss rolled onto his stomach and crawled away as quickly as possible. It wasn’t fast enough, as I was easily able to keep pace at a slow walk, raking the freezing cold air over him the entire time. His legs began changing color first, but it slowly spread up his body until his entire lower half was frozen solid. In fact, his toes began to chip away as he crawled. Soon, his movement ceased entirely, but I continued to breathe the frigid air as long as I could.

By the time I could no longer sustain it, ninety percent of the massive hobgoblin was frozen solid. There was a crashing sound to my left, and I looked to see that a large chest had appeared in the middle of the room. Relieved that the fight was over, I began shifting back to my human form before joining the crowd around Mason.

He seemed pretty out of it, still giggling a little bit as he sat there. I bent down, wrapping his arm around my neck before lifting him back to his feet. “You three want to go grab the loot before we leave? I think his legs are fine, but I want to get him back to the base just to make sure.”

They nodded and ran over to the chest while I turned and began leading Mason towards the doors we came in from. There was a small room containing a waygate just adjacent to the boss room, so I began leading him there. As I pushed open the doors, another group of adventurers got to their feet and began heading towards us.

They were a group of five with two men and three women. The men were both clearly warriors, one having a large round shield strapped to his back and a sword sheathed at his side while the other wielded an axe in one hand and a hammer in the other. Both were dressed in heavy armor, though the man that was dual-wielding kept his arms bare, only having a pair of bracers to block with.

The women were all dressed in leather, one of them in pitch black armor while the other two were garbed in lighter colors. The woman dressed in black had two daggers on either hip and there were two more handles peeking over her shoulders, making her out as something like an assassin. The other two were harder to judge, as each of them carried a staff. One of their staves had a white crystal embedded in it, while the other had a yellow crystal.

“Greetings! I’m Don and this is Jason. These lovely ladies are Katie, Theresa and Hailey,” the man with the shield said, gesturing to each in turn. “Together we form Reckless Oblivion. Would you mind sparing a few minutes to let us know what to expect from this boss?”

“Big, big hobgoblin… very fat… very fast,” Mason said from beside me.

I had to suppress a laugh, but looked at the man. “Don’t mind him, he’s a little loopy from pain meds, I think.”

“Pain meds?” one of the women in the back asked.

I nodded. “He’s right about that. The boss is a massive hobgoblin. He’s also incredibly fat. Don’t let his appearance fool you, though. He’s very fast, and very strong, with an incredible reach thanks to his twenty-plus foot long poleaxe.”

“What can you tell us about his abilities?” Don asked.

“He didn’t seem to have many. In our fight, he relied on hitting us, but any attack that hit did an incredible amount of damage. He teleported away after we cut off one of his arms and legs and it seemed almost like he used all of his fat to regenerate at an incredible rate. When the regeneration was complete, he was a lot skinner and was heavily muscled. His speed also increased a lot.”

“Interesting…,” Don said. “Any other tips for us?”

“Don’t get hit!” Ben said from behind us.

“Guys, these are our other team members; Ben, Anja and Sonja,” I said, pointing them out.

“Don’t get hit,” Ben repeated. “I have Mana Shield and a lot of mana to work with. The boss threw a rotisserie spit at me that almost brought my shield down, and he broke both of Mason’s legs when he swept his poleaxe around. Unless you’ve got some serious defensive skills, I’d suggest forgoing your shield to use something else.”

“Broke his legs?” another of the women asked. “Should he really be walking?”

“We got a healing potion into him, and injected him with something for the pain. He should be good until we get to a hospital to get him checked out,” I said.

“If one of you has fire or ice spells, I would suggest using those to prevent his natural regeneration. His regeneration isn’t as powerful as the dragonewt’s, but it’s still enough to keep him in the fight for a long, long time,” Ben added.

“Alright, thanks for the tips, we’ll keep them in mind,” Don said. “We’ll let you go so you can get your friend to the hospital.”

I nodded. “Good luck, and remember, don’t get hit.”

We let the members of Reckless Oblivion pass before walking into the waygate room and stepping on it. After arriving at the surface we quickly made our way outside, where, surprisingly, my mom was waiting.

“Nicely done!” she said as she walked towards us before looking at Mason. “You need to start putting some points into agility, mister!”

He raised his left hand and performed a sloppy salute, “Aye aye, ma’am.”

She laughed. “Alright, let’s get you back to the base to get looked at.”

As she turned around, a portal opened directly into the medical center with a pair of doctors waiting on the other side. They took over for me, each putting one of his arms around their neck before leading him into one of the rooms. After the door closed behind them, the windows turned opaque, preventing us from seeing inside. I turned to my mom with a questioning look.

“They need to strip him down to put him in the med chamber. He’ll probably only need to spend an hour or so in there before he’ll be allowed back out.”

“And he’ll be fine?”

“It’ll be like it never happened,” she replied. “They’ll scan his leg first to make sure that the bone was set properly and then the machine will do it’s thing.”

“Good. It really would’ve sucked if he sustained a permanent injury from that. Do bosses normally hit that hard??”

“Not at your level, no, but it’s the norm as you level up more and more. Even higher quality armor will have a tough time holding up, but spells will prevent more and more damage,” she answered

“I see. So does putting points into agility really help?”

“Absolutely. Increased agility will gradually increase your reflexes so you can react faster. He’s been neglecting it so far, but I imagine that he’ll start leveling it up slowly now that he’s taken an injury. Both of you should as well,” she said pointing to Anja and myself. “Yours isn’t much better.”

“What about him?” I asked, pointing over my shoulder with my thumb. “He’s only got like eleven points in Agility.”

“He doesn’t need it as much as the rest of you do. You saw him tank that rotisserie spit and Mana Shield will only get stronger as those of you with it use it. If it was at max rank, Ben would be able to block something like eighty thousand damage. Of course by the time Mana Shield reaches that level, he’ll also be many levels higher and have a much larger mana pool.”

“Well I definitely can’t wait until this trip is over and I can start putting points into Intellect again.”

“It won’t be long now. Anyways, it’s not even 14:00. Did the five of you have anything planned for the rest of the day?”

“Not really,” I shrugged. “We were going to decide whether we wanted to go into another dungeon or not, but I’m guessing that’s out with Mason’s injury. Why do you ask?”

“Why not take it easy tonight? I’ve got an idea for some fun we could have. We’ll wait for Mason to get out of the med chamber and then we’ll head over.”

“Head over where?”

“I’m not telling, it’s a surprise,” she replied with a smile.

“Well, do you mind if we grab some lunch first? I also really need to get out of this armor and take a shower.”

“Sure, I could eat as well. I’ll meet you guys there.”

She opened up a portal and stepped through, leaving the four of us alone.

“Well, I guess the rest of our day is planned. How about we wait until later to roll off all the items? What did we get from the boss, by the way?”

“It’s fine with me,” Ben replied. “We’re probably not going to be delving into a dungeon for a while, so it can wait.”

“We got a rare chest piece and an uncommon ring from the chest, alongside two Tier E Skill Gems,” Anja replied, pointing to her sister who held the leather chest piece in one hand and the ring and Skill Gems in the other.

I took out the Beacon and put both items inside of it, and then took out the Skill Gem pouch so Sonja could drop the two she had into it. With that sorted, we all teleported to our rooms and took a shower before we headed to the cafeteria.

I wonder what my mom had planned...