

Chapter 99: Management

A spoon clanked against a ceramic bowl as an older, weary man slurped up the liquidy goodness.

The spoon was metal and wonky, clearly a rush job. The ceramic was marked with deformations and had an uneven lip. The wooden bench creaked as he had sat down, the sound reverberating around the relatively empty mess hall. The sun was barely high enough to reach through the windows.

Anere sat silently, chewing on her hard, stiff bread. She slyly looked towards the gathering of three people just to her right, talking together.

“You think it might happen today?” A young, spry man with embarrassingly long, brow, shaggy hair asked in between enthusiastic bites of bread.

“We haven’t been called for a whole week. Why would it suddenly happen today?” His friend asked, hair cut to the scalp.

“Never know what might happen,” The older fellow commented.

“Unprecedented, it is,” He said between slurps.

“What? Never been a war in your centuries?”

“I ain’t been alive for centuries, mate,” The man’s eyes narrowed at the youngsters. “But this has never happened as far as I can remember. A city is one thing, but a whole province...”

“It’s more than just a city?”

“Ain’t you been listening?” The short-haired man slapped his friend on the back of his head.

“Not his fault he’s deaf,” The old man chuckled to himself. “I hardly believed it until I heard it for the twentieth time, and only because a friend turned up, running for his life. Left his wears behind, he was in such a rush.”

This enraptured the young folk, staring at the man intently.

“What’s happened? Why did he run?”

“Riots. Fires. Lord set his own town ablaze.” Anere could almost see the fires reflected back in the young men’s eyes.

She chewed angrily, crunching down with more strength than necessary.

Sounds like her, She thought. Makes you think she's all friendly and then stabs you in your back.

"Didn't he come into power peacefully? Why'd he do that?"

The older man shrugged.

"Apparently, he wasn't happy with everyone moving out. Stupid to slaughter them, though," He grunted.

Anere stopped her eavesdropping. It was clear, they didn't have any new or accurate information to gossip about.

And now, it was time for her to do her job. She rolled her eyes as she stood up, quickly tidying up before leaving the mess hall.

The streets of Trotton felt eerily empty. Right outside the tower usually was a bustling hub of Chosen but it was practically a ghost town. A good proportion of people had been sent off to reinforce the border with Toila.

Their orders were nebulous and vague but that was all that was needed in the Chosen. Anere was lucky that she had other avenues of information, avenues that told her there were no actual signs of hostility from Toila to Moya yet.

Considering the reinforcement started the day after the peace agreement was made... She didn't know how to interpret that.

Ararth was standing proud in the stables, the other horses cowering from his humongous form. Anere couldn't help but smile as she saw him, him and all his big, glorious fur. Winter was her favourite season not because it was cold but because Ararth was so amazingly warm.

"Heya buddy," She said, walking up to him and ignoring the despondent handler by his side. Only Stefon didn't mind dealing with Ararth but that was only because he didn't seem to mind doing anything. He was a weird guy, Anere thought, glancing at him before hopping on Ararth.

Unlike some animals, there was no need to tie Ararth up while he waited; her pet taming skills made him both intelligent and loyal. When he was told to wait calmly, he waited calmly.

"Thanks again, Stefon," Anere smiled, and the man just turned away dismissively. That was fine; she knew it was nothing personal.

Ararth walked out slowly as the pair began to make their way out of the city. After an incident or two, Anere had learnt her lesson about having a giant great bear running through a highly populous area.

Needless to say, many people do not respond calmly to that situation.

Thankfully, it didn't take long until they were past the populated areas, the crowds of people a bit thinner than usual and what remained generally kept a wide berth of the pair, allowing them to seamlessly move up or downstream with ease.

Once the broken-down city walls came into view, the restraints were off. Anere's knees dug into Ararth's side as she leaned down, grabbing hard onto his thick fur, and told him to run.

Like that, he was off, his six feet pounding against the cobble road like thunder. The decrepit houses became a blur as she felt the frigid wind rush past her face, the world a painting as they flew out of the city.

The road soon turned to dirt and mud, following the contours of the mountain as they ran alongside it to Trottor.

As much as she hated having to work in such a boring little place, this part was always her favourite. A smile graced Anere's face, sinking even lower on Ararth's back. She could feel his heart beating, an emotional link between them. She knew he loved it as well.

Trottor was a small place and used to have only one Chosen member patrolling it—her—but after a recent *incident*, they had stepped that up to a couple, gaining a wider coverage of the surrounding area.

Ararth came sliding to a stop outside a fairly well-built and large building that was currently serving as the Chosen headquarters. Already, Anere could see three people standing outside, discussing something.

Two of them barely reacted the massive, lumbering great bear but the third, who was still somewhat new, stepped back instinctually before catching himself.

Anere smoothly slid off Ararth's back, landing on the ground gracefully. While not stone, the road was so well-trodden that the dirt was about as hard and firm as stone.

“Finally decided to join us, I see,” A tall, lean man said. A helmet obscured the majority of his facial features, except for his piercing, blue eyes, a rarity out here.

“It’s still morning,” Anere replied, but the man just sighed heavily. In his hands was a ledger, the gift of literacy only belonging to him and Anere in their little group.

“Marin’s still sick so you’ll be joining Jonzo and his friend for the day. They’re waiting for you,” The man tapped his foot impatiently.

“What a surprise,” Anere said under her breath. He didn’t seem to hear about it.

She didn’t waste any more time there, hopping back onto Ararth and racing towards the other end of the village.

There were numerous things the Chosen could do here but yet, for some magical reason Anere had yet to figure out, she was always assigned to the least populated areas, usually the forest.

She leaned down to whisper in Ararth’s ear.

“It’s alright, buddy. People just don’t know you.”

Although they didn’t announce it to the world, Jonzo and his ‘friend’ were a bit closer than that, a fact Anere ashamedly knew because of how long she had been working in Trottor for. It was kind of an unspoken thing.

They were a pair of loggers. They lived right on the edge of town and maintained parts of the forest.

Anere found their house quickly enough and slid to a stop right outside. It was essentially a log cabin, handed down through generations of loggers and woodcutters and carpenters. She could already see one of them working away on something. Unsurprisingly, they did carpentry on the side, seeing how wood was very easy for them to procure.

Hearing the crunching of dirt beneath Ararth’s large paws, the younger of the pair, Tonsy, loudly threw open the door, his face weary for just a moment until he recognised his visitors.

“Anere! Ararth! So lovely to see you,” He spoke loudly, drawing Jonzo's attention and stopping him in the middle of his work.

Anere greeted them from atop of Ararth and they quickly collected their gear. Although the harshest winter winds were thankfully dealt with, it still wasn't going to get warmer for a while so firewood was still needed.

Tonsy was relatively lightly equipped while Jonzo was carrying large bags and had a strange wooden thing on his back. While some loggers used horses and wagons to transport their wood, Jonzo was different. In fact, Jonzo had levels.

He was only level 5 but that put him leagues ahead of ordinary people.

Anere had gotten talking to him one of the previous times she accompanied the pair of them. Apparently, all his points were allocated to power. One day, out in the woods, he had encountered a vicious beast and managed to kill it with his axe. That happened a few more times, and this was the result.

The Dominion was infamous for its monopoly on magic and although that wasn't the case with the Chosen, they weren't too fond of people with skills acting unsupervised.

Patrolmen were a type of compromise. Those able to fight but unwilling to join the Chosen were heavily encouraged to join to protect their towns and villages.

Jonzo fit into the third camp. Although his power stat was incredible even compared to Anere, he had no offensive skills to speak of. That meant the Chosen were largely uninterested in how he applied himself unless it was particularly disruptive.

Off they went into the woods. Tonsy and Jonzo picked their targets and got to work while Anere stood back, sat on Ararth and wandering around in a loose perimeter, alert for anything out of the ordinary.

The tree creaked and snapped as the axes dug into it bowing and then falling to the ground with a heavy thud. Jonzo grabbed hold of it with a strange metal device and effortlessly pulled it away. He then took out a mattock and got to work removing the stump.

Ararth shifted suddenly, Anere grabbing harder instinctively.

"What is?" She asked quietly, with Ararth sniffing loudly in a direction in response.

"You smell something?" He did.

She looked behind her, seeing the pair hard at work, and sunk even lower on Ararth.

“Let’s go.”

Aarth practically charged through the undergrowth. Quiet, he was not. Trees shook as he rushed past, bushes trampled underneath his hefty weight.

His snout led the way, twisting and turning as he navigated through the forest until, eventually, he came to a sudden stop, Anere bouncing forwards from the momentum, able to see what was in front of him: a very surprised person. No, *tarny*.

They were taller than Anere, dressed all in leather and with a strong, muscular, androgynous stature. Hair was cut short, just below the ears, and brown. Their eyes were blue and cat-like, as all tarnys were.

Anere was surprised as well; as far as she knew, any tarnys near Trottor had been wiped out by Death.

So, the question was, what was one doing here?

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A flower bulb pushed its way through the leafy carpet, finding the sunlight above as it blossomed into a beautiful flower. Its petals stretched out, red and vibrant, as it absorbed a lifetime of light in seconds. Its roots absorbed the moisture and nutrients from the ground, nourishing its plant body.

And then, it started to wilt. The petals browned, its stem bent, and leaves began to fall off in seconds.

Before even a minute had passed, the strength of the stem was too weak to hold its decaying body aloft any longer, snapping in two as the grey head fell to the ground, giving way to another plant to replace it.

All around Riza, as she was crouched in the crater, hands on the body of a beast demon corpse, she could see the circle of life happening at a thousand times speed. It was a truly magical and mystical sight, and got her wondering how essence-saturated environments might turn out with other aspects.

Would water be a perpetual rainstorm?

She needed to focus. [Resurrection] energy was being pushed through her fingertips, connecting with the corpse below her. Neurons were filling out as

electrical sparks began jumping between them, the energy pounding the heart as it forced it to pump blood once again.

She was a few levels higher now, having grabbed the oh-so vital skill.

Not only that, it was augmented as well. Her nest was smaller, her culling of demons to supplement her own power. Two more skills were under her wing: [Acceleration Mastery] and [Word of Brevity]. That brought her total level now up to 40, and all of her stat points had gone into essence, bringing her total essence up to a staggering 77,985.

[Resurrection] (6/10) -Learned

Bring an entity that has died within the past 33 days back to life

Casting Time: 28 minutes

Cost: 75610 es

Requirements: [Resuscitate] (10/10)

So far, she had resurrected this same beast demon twenty times. Many hours had passed, since the initial casting took an hour. Even now, with both [Acceleration Mastery] and [Word of Brevity] at level 10, that only cut the casting time in half, down to twenty-nine minutes.

Looking at Nesity's essence regeneration, her alone meant Riza regained enough essence for another casting of [Resurrection] in just thirty-two seconds, so essence was not a problem.

Unless she wanted to level up more, she had 32 days left to fix every issue with free, unlimited resurrection *and* to resurrect everyone.

If she was being generous, and fixed everything today and tomorrow, that would leave 30 days. She didn't want to cut too much into her sleep, so she'd still have 6 hours of doing nothing. That left 18 hours per day for a total of 540 hours. With two resurrections per hour, that would be 1,080 people.

She hadn't counted all the bodies but she had estimated them in the low hundreds at most, which meant she had effectively a few weeks to fix the problems.

That gave her some relief.

For the entire time, she was thinking about solutions.

Selection was not a problem. Riza doubted that population growth would be so explosive she would not be able to handle it in the near-future.

That meant, the biggest issue was people simply not *wanting* to be resurrected. She had encountered this problem with the batch that included Tanniya and Klannar and really did not want to go through that ordeal again. Not to mention, she doubted it would do good for her popularity, something she actually cared about because she didn't want to rule with an iron fist.

So, how do you find out if someone wants to be resurrected? The obvious answer was to ask them, but if they're already dead, you can't ask them.

Therefore, a pre-emptive answer. Riza was reminded of old 'do not resuscitate' cards, back when the government allowed that type of thing.

In theory, if everyone carried a card that said whether they wanted to be resurrected or not, then, problem solved.

However, you could then run into another problem of people never wanting to die. What do you do then?

Riza doubted it would become a problem. For one, as powerful as [Resurrection] was, it wasn't perfect. [Heal] was a great example; it could satiate hunger and thirst but not sleep. She needed to understand *how* a biological process worked to have magic replace it.

Therefore, she could extend this towards diseases and illnesses. She was familiar with germ theory. She knew how bacteria worked. If someone got ill, she should be able to use [Cleanse] to cure them.

But there were other quality of life issues she wouldn't be able to fix. Terrible, dreadful things like dementia, Alzheimer's, cancer. Riza wasn't a doctor; she didn't know how they worked and so wouldn't know how to cure them with magic.

All of this meant, eventually, if someone stayed alive long enough, their quality of life would eventually deteriorate to the point where they'd no longer want to be alive. They would likely happen around a hundred years of age, Riza would guess. Nothing extreme or unmanageable.

If the future wasn't going to be a problem, what about the past? If she resurrects people that died from the rioting and looting and fires, what about people who died the day earlier? Or two days earlier? What was the limit?

Of course, the most obvious limit was what she would be physically capable of, but Riza didn't want anyone knowing about that. It would be far too easy for an enemy to kill someone and only let Riza get to them once it was too late for her to resurrect them.

So, whatever the legal limit ended up being would have to be significantly shorter than her real limit.

The common person doesn't know how magic works. The easiest solution would be to have everyone that died in the riots to be the earliest deaths I could revert. They don't know it's based on a time limit and not more nebulous criteria.

Which would mean, legally, the amount of time between the riot and the last resurrection would be the legal limit going forward, irrespective of how much my real limit may increase.

Let's say that the mechanics are sorted. I can resurrect everyone who wants to be resurrected in the future and it won't get out of hand. Now, what do I do about those currently dead?

Some of them won't want to be resurrected. I can just resurrect them and ignore their hatred of me for that but that sounds risky. They could spread dissent and lead to another riot. Not to mention, people will inevitably die before I can institute a 'do not resurrect' policy and I'll have the same problem with them.

Well, we need to identify the source of the problem. Why are people against resurrection?

Primarily, it's religion. Resurrection is seen as evil, that it taints the soul, ruins their reincarnation. It's not a personal moral but an organised belief...

So, if their same religion actually accepts resurrection, people should be fine, right?

Okay, let's come up with a plan.

Firstly, cultural opposition. I need to get people to accept resurrection as fine. To do that, I'll need the religion to state as such. I'll need to talk to some people to understand just how the religion works but, after that, it shouldn't be too hard to find a representative to change minds? At the very least, I can just make one up. I'll workshop the idea.

After that, healthcare. That's very important, not only because it prevents death but it'll be how I teach and institute my 'do not resurrect' policy. For one, it has to be free so everyone can access it. Two, it has to be effective. Since most people are non-levelled, they don't have much health so the a basic [Heal] at level 10 for 10 essence would basically solve everything. That and [Cleanse].

But the person doing the healing would need to understand how the body works and germ theory and just so much, so education also needs to be prioritised.

Riza groaned as the same head that had been hanging over every problem reared itself once more.

Nobles. The aristocracy.

Everything Riza wanted to do would be greatly aided by an educated individual and only one class of people in the city were consistently educated.

While Riza had been grinding up her skills, she had also been conversing with the rest of her group in the city. Daven had returned earlier, along with Tiffany. All their demons were following the tunnel and should be arriving shortly.

Tiffany was currently stationed at the Lord's Manor, acting as a communication relay. Andreyra was sleeping, as she very much deserved, so Riza was communicating with Tiffany who allowed those without psyche skills to talk back to Riza, since Riza's [Message] couldn't reach the entire city.

To begin, as soon as she had arrived, she had been covered head-to-toe in armour and levelled up. She was acting as a replacement for Andreyra and so, accordingly, she had taken [Detect Truth] as another skill. Perhaps niche, it did still boost every other psyche skill due to [Expansive Mind].

Various members of the nobility had been brought in to be interviewed by Tiffany. As much as the nobility weren't involved in politics—since that seemed to be relegated to only the Lord—there were plenty of families who wanted to get on Riza's good side, no doubt due to her power and position.

So far, people had been selected to delegate a lot of Andreyra's work. Decisions would still solely reside with those of Riza's inner circle but the collecting and collating of information no longer fell on Andreyra and whoever she pulled in to help, which meant she could focus on bigger things and actually get some time to rest.

Riza wasn't too happy to be giving jobs to the already wealthy and educated, furthering their own power and influence even more, but there wasn't much else she could do; there was no denying that they were currently the most suitable candidates.

And they were effective. Meren was accompanying one as a supervisor, finding groups of workers who would help with rebuilding the city. Daven had already gone round and set up temporary housing but it was woefully inadequate as places to live.

And they were effective. Daven had gone round as soon as he arrived and set up some temporary houses but they were just that, temporary. They were not insulated, nor pretty, nor comfortable.

Meren was currently accompanying a noble as a supervisor, making sure he didn't do anything untoward. They were finding groups of workers who would agree to repair the city for a reasonable price. Riza ordered them to accept a price in the end, and that she would find the funds somehow at a later date.

As for the rest of the group...

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The night was falling, and it was becoming clearer to Daven that once they arrived in the next village, they'd be making a stop there. No doubt, Adric would be scrambling to find a suitable place to put his feet up.

Daven smiled to himself, thinking about the young noble's reaction to finding that life outside his little world was nowhere near what he was used to.

Tanniya had accompanied them as well, looking very bored throughout the entire thing. It was clear that her purpose here was purely as muscle. Before, Daven would've been a bit unhappy with that; sure, his skills weren't entirely offensive but he thought could still hold his own in a fight. However, with some of the enemies Riza had faced recently...

But with Tanniya? He had to admit, he had a low opinion of her at first although he didn't really know her. He had met plenty like her before, brutes only interested in fighting. There was an unfortunately high number of those types who join the patrolmen. It was less about protecting their homes and more about fighting.

Tanniya was different, or, that was the sense that he had gotten. She wasn't interested in the boring stuff, no, but that didn't mean she was dim. He had

gotten talking to her, hearing about her thought processes and what she did when fighting the Jormy and the Demon Lord. It was clear to him that there was an incisive intelligence to her.

Unfortunately, that intelligence hadn't come out to play all day. They had only passed through three villages since they left, and the four would be their last for the night. The cart driver they had hired asked no questions, reasonably quietened by the very obvious presence of a noble on board.

Like all of them it seemed, he wore exclusive Ancient clothing. He was wearing what Riza had called a 'full *denim* outfit', whatever that meant. He looked cold.

"What does Lord Riza want this information for?" Adric asked, having tried to make conversation for the entire outing together. He was young, and a little nervous, and from what Daven had heard, his family eagerly volunteered him to help Riza, no doubt to get in her good books.

Tanniya didn't answer, merely watching as the countryside passed her by in silent contemplation.

Daven turned to look at Adric, the boy's frame disturbingly thin. Brown, patchy facial hair only worsened the ensemble.

"Something about revolutionising it," Daven answered him. They were meant to cooperate with the nobility, after all.

"That's why she also wants to know how many people live in the villages, to get a sense of how much the food feeds," Adric nodded, looking over the notes he had taken. A whole bunch of gibberish to Daven, when he looked over the boy's shoulder. There were even little pictures.

"How does she plan to do it? There's plenty of food for everyone after the rioting," Adric said with an unemotional tone.

Daven's face hardened a little at the words.

"I don't know how but I have my suspicions. Whatever she will do, it will be far beyond whatever you expect."

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Piles of paper and books were laid on an earthly bench, some of them yellow with age and of an unusual material, while the rest were the familiar paper that could be found in the books in the Lord's Manor.

Before them, hunched over uncomfortably, was a humanoid demon, once called Gas Tank but now going by Rosetta because Riza couldn't stick on a name.

Both Lefie and Klannar were in the same room, waiting. They had long forgotten about Rosetta, working quietly in the corner, while they absent-mindedly made floating shapes out of ice and water.

"It is done," Rosetta suddenly said, startling the pair of them from the sudden sound. Immediately, they were at the bench, looking over the work he had done.

Lefie was completely lost, not knowing how to read, but Klannar was one of the rare people who did know, and eagerly shuffled past Rosetta to pick up the translated documents.

He returned to his seat without so much as taking his eye off the thing, flipping through the pages.

"What does it say? What is it about?" Lefie asked enthusiastically, wasting no time.

"It's... I don't know. It doesn't make a lot of sense." Klannar's brow furrowed as he skimmed through it all.

"What does it say?" Lefie asked again, insistently.

"Just... rocks. It talks about rocks and stones. I-I don't understand most of it.

"But you can read it, right? It's translated?"

"Yes," Klannar nodded, "I just don't have the knowledge to know what it's talking about."

"Why would there be writing about rocks in a relic of the Ancients?" Lefie mused to herself, while Klannar just shrugged and put the papers down.

It was fine if this one was a bust—now that Rosetta had translated one, he should be able to translate the rest at a far faster pace. Maybe one of those contained something interesting...