Chapter 7 Welcome to the Legion

I looked at the door a few times before deciding to go for it.  The forty-foot-long corridor had two wide aisles and deep shelves packed with gear.  A lot of the gear had a layer of dust.  I grabbed two large Legionnaire backpacks and went to the provision aisle first.  My dimensional space was immune to the passage of time, but all these items already had a long shelf life. The shelves were neat and orderly as I started filling the two packs.

One 5 lb sack of peppercorns, three 5 lb bags of sea salt, five jars of berry preserves, six 5 lb sacks of flour, two large bags of dried mushrooms, two large bags of potatoes, a bag of onions, two massive blocks of hard cheese, a dozen thick links of hard salami as large as my forearm, two 10 lb bags of sugar, four sealed jars that I was fairly certain were yeast

After checking the door, I moved both of the stuffed and extremely heavy food backpacks to the dimensional space. Then I grabbed two more backpacks and went to the clothing aisles.

Two heavy black oiled cloaks used as rain gear, Two heavy black wool cloaks with soft linen linens used for warmth, two heavy wool blankets for horses, six underwear, one dozen pairs of wool socks, six light undershirts, four linen pants, six leather belts, two pairs of boots that were already broken in

The clothes were bulky and filled the two backpacks, so I sent them to my dimensional storage after rechecking the door.  At the end of the aisle, were large twenty-gallon casks.  Most were marked as water, but a few were marked as rum or whiskey.  I looked at the doorway again.  It was still closed.  I shifted one rum and one whiskey cask into my dimensional storage and then two water barrels.  I only had enough remaining mana to open my dimensional space one more time. I thought it best to conserve it even though I wanted a lot more in this warehouse.

I suppose I should actually carry something out as well.  I grabbed a satchel and a few more things, a black leather bound book with lined sheets to use as a ledger, small vials of ink and quills, a bag of apples, and a large bag of candied nuts to snack on.

I walked down the weapon aisle, adding some knives for cooking and two nice short swords, when the soldier poked his head in, “You ready?  The horses are out front.”  I nodded and hustled to him.

“Do I need to show what I took?”  I asked, indicating the room.

“Nah, not out at a crappy outpost like this.  Most of the shit in here is spoils of war.  The legion patrols the trade routes north of here, and stuff just finds its way here.  In the larger cities, you need to be more careful.  Marta just lets us take whatever when we come through here.”

“I thought her name was Elaina,” I asked, walking out with him.

“Elaina and Marta both run this outpost for the Legion. Marta is a retired legionnaire. Elaina is her daughter,” he informed me.

I followed him outside, and the other legionnaire was already mounted.  The man who had come to get me mounted a horse, leaving me a large red mare.  Two large empty saddle bags were draped across the rump.  The two soldiers started laughing as I tried to mount the horse, still wearing my backpack, and satchel, and holding my spears.  Finally, the older of the two said, “Wylie, help him, or we will never leave.”

The younger man came off his horse and helped me fill the saddlebags and secure my spears, and three short swords so I could mount the horse. Wylie said, “This is a fine mount, well trained.  I sense you are not familiar with riding.  Firth will not have the patience to wait, so I will do the best I can to teach you as we go.”

I was soon uncomfortably in the saddle and trotting out the fortification.  I asked Wylie, “I didn’t know the legion rode horses.”

“Most don’t,” he replied. “You need to move with the horse, become one with it. Otherwise, you are going to have a miserable ride.” He spent the next hour teaching me on the ride how to handle the reins, move with the horse, and guide it with my heels. The horse was definitely well-trained. He picked up the earlier conversation when he thought I looked somewhat capable on the horse.

“The legions are not real fighting units. We are more guards for the royalty and mages. Our charge is Master Mage Castille,” Wylie paused, considering what to say, “She has a bit of a chip on her shoulder. She takes on the dirty missions and gets things done.”

I decided to broach a concern, “I heard that the fatality rate among her legionaries is high.”

Wylie winced, “Yeah, you could say that. There are twenty-six of us. The veterans have been around for a while, but the raw recruits tend to get themselves killed or severely injured. You don’t need to worry, though. With your ability, Castille will keep you out of the most intense combat—maybe.”

I shifted in my saddle, starting to get uncomfortable and finding no way to alleviate it. Firth turned to us and had a grin I didn’t like, “Let’s teach the boy a light canter.” He spurred his horse forward, and Wylie shook his head and followed.

When I got my own horse moving, I was bouncing around like crazy. I could not find the new rhythm. The weapons, although secured, were swinging slightly and tapping my back. When Firth mercifully stopped, my inner thighs were burning and cramping. He motioned for us to get off and walk. I collapsed to the ground, unable to hold myself up as my legs cramped uncontrollably. Firth chuckled, and Wylie smirked slightly, “Don’t worry. You will get used to it. Firth isn’t the bad sort. That was just over an hour. He will let you walk it out and do it again.” And we did.

I fed my mare an apple from my satchel every time we went walking. I named her Ginger after her reddish-brown coat. She was definitely well-trained and seemed to like the name.

The swamps began to fade into scrub plains, and mountains appeared in the distance. Firth turned and said, “Sorry, recruit. We are going to push to Formica to get there before dark.”

The town was a sprawl of buildings with no wall surrounding it. A large pen of horses were on the edge of town. That was where we went. Firth commanded, “Show the recruit how to care for the mounts.” He then turned and left for one of the larger buildings.

Wylie showed me had to unsaddle and groom the horses. Also, where to look for chafe marks to treat with a salve. It took almost an hour to do the three mounts. I gave Ginger an apple which caused all the horses to line up requesting one as well. I had to cut the apples into quarters to get all of them, and I only had three apples left when I was done. Wylie had left me after he had trained me.

It was late in the evening, and I guessed I should head for the large building that Firth and Wylie went to. Entering it, I found a large common room. Legion soldiers were lazing about and drinking. I did not see either of my road companions, so I asked the nearest legionnaire where I could find mage Castille. He looked me over and pointed to a door in the back.

I knocked on the door, and a harsh female voice said, “Enter!”

I opened the door to find a middle-aged woman hunched over a map on the table with two legionnaires flanking her. She gave me a hard stare, “Yes?”

“Legionnaire Eryk Marko reporting,” I said somewhat uncertainly. As my training had been cut short, I had never gone through the protocols or etiquette for someone in the legion.

“About time. Adrian, go get the company’s potions.” One of the men left the room and the mage paged through some sheets on the table. She finally stopped at one. Looked at me and said, “Fourteen inches?”

I assumed she was referring to the size of the space. That sounded about right. I nodded. She continued, “Good. Your most important job is to hold the potions for the unit. They will not lose their efficacy in dimensional storage. Also, you will hold the unit’s funds and accounting logbook for unit pay and expenses.”

The man she had called Adrian returned. He had a small black wooden chest and placed it on the counter. He opened the chest and pulled out wooden slotted trays. The potion vials were round with a large cap. On the cap was a lot of script. I didn’t have time to examine it before I was ordered to place the two trays with 25 potions each into my space.

I did so, and after they disappeared Mage Castille smiled, erasing the age lines on her face, “Excellent. Adrian, get the unit’s ledger and chest.” The man left once more and returned with a much heavier chest. “Eryk add these,” she ordered.

Much like the potions, the coins were seated in trays, like poker chips. One tray was full of large gold coins, and the remaining five trays were small silver coins. I did my best to estimate how much a 16-inch cube could hold and not get over that amount. The thin ledger was last, and Castille watched me hawkishly as I added the book.

With everything in my space as a tight-fitting cube, I looked up at the smiling mage. “Excellent, now retrieve one of the blue-green potions,” she ordered. She held up her hand, “Just the one potion.” I thought about it, and she gave me a hint, “Search your dimensional storage with your mind. Choose just the item you want to bring out—highlight it if you will. I can tell you are opening your entire dimensional space every time you put an item in. That is a massive waste of your stored aether.”

I was getting a lesson in magic. I only had about 12 aether and had used two aether every time I accessed my space. I did as she asked and focused on the tray of potions and then just the single potion. I reached out and willed that one object out of the dimensional space. It appeared in my hands.

I smiled brightly, realizing I had done it and used only a fragment of the aether, much less than before. Before, it was like I was opening a closet and routing around it. This was closer to just reaching it and taking the object off a shelf. Much more efficient.

Mage Castille smiled as well, “Good work. Practice removing and placing potions. In battle, you should not hesitate in pulling the correct potion.” Her face went serious, “Adrian, here is our logistics officer. If anything is missing from the unit funds or potions, then you will be accountable.”

“Come, kid,” Adrian said. “I will get you settled.”

I was almost twenty-five, so I would not say I was a kid, but I did not argue. He introduced me as the unit’s new porter in the large common room. A lot of eyes studied me. I had the unit’s money and healing potions, so I was definitely a person of interest.

We went upstairs and into one of the rooms. Two bunks were in here, “The army usually uses this building, but Castille kicked them out. Get some rest; we leave at first light.”

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“We are looking for a Baron’s son in the mountains. His little adventuring group was hunting for a griffon nest. Wanted to give his father a griffon egg for his birthday. Instead, we are probably looking for his remains,” Adrian told me truthfully. He smiled, “Don’t worry, only one nesting pair was spotted in this region. It’s not like we will have to deal with a flock of the buggers.”

He left, and I went and picked up my backpack and got my bedroll. The bunks were just planks, no mattresses. I rolled it out and undressed. My thighs were raw from the ride, and the muscles knotted. I tried to rub them out, and two fellows entered the room. Their things were already on bunks.

“Damn, mate, if you need some time alone, we will be back in half an hour,” one of the men said.

The other guy laughed, “Half an hour, Felix? I bet this one just needs five minutes.”

“I am just trying to loosen my muscles. It was my first time riding. Name is Eryk,” I tried to end the banter.

“Just joking. I am Mateo, and this is Felix. We are to keep an eye on you and help you settle in. Adrian said you were raw and even pulled before you finished training?” He sat on the hard bunk.

“Yes, I was shipped off as soon as I got my dimensional space,” I continued to stretch while talking.

Felix spoke next, “Well, you got into a fine unit. It has a bad rep due to our high mortality rate, but that is mostly the new recruits,” he put his hand over his mouth like he was saying something secret. “Don’t worry, Eryk. We will keep you safe and sound.”

They set up their own beds and were soon lying down. I took out the candied nuts and started eating. It was late, and no one offered me a meal. My two roommates took liberties, and soon the nuts were gone.

We talked about the unit; the best part was that Mage Castille had her own siphoning shield for the essence. She kept all the magical essences for herself but rewarded the men of the legion with all the physical ones and some of the mental ones. The men were also paid six silver a week instead of the normal five silver and forty copper. Although, Felix seemed to think that was mostly due to Adrian wanting to make his bookkeeping job easier.

I ate an apple before falling asleep and wondering what tomorrow would bring.