

Adventurers Get No Respect

“Shit, ShitShitShitShit! Shiiit!”

Iris Stuart was hauling *ass*. There had to be a god of luck or something hidden in this world because she had to have pissed the bastard off somehow. That was the only explanation for how much the world seemed to hate her.

There were oversized lizards literally everywhere as she fled with as much speed as her enhanced stats would allow.

Why couldn't this quest be easy? Of course, there wouldn't be just one predator in the forest. Nope. There were so many.

Iris couldn't catch a damned break.

Focus.

Movement. To the right.

Her hand shot up and a **Chain Lightning** launched from her fingertips directly toward the rushing drakkyd.

She jumped over it with her increased capability as it collapsed into a smoking heap of charred flesh.

A swing of her **Mana Conduit**-imbued sword brought down another that sought to catch her unawares.

Iris channeled more and more mana through herself, using **Arcane Capability** while pumping her arms as she *sprinted* toward the edge of the forest, and Mocha.

She could hear them running after her. The monsters crashed into brush and trees as they sought to devour their next meal. Roars and growls assailed her ears from all around.

Falling, hell even slowing, meant death.

She weaved and darted her way through the forest. What had taken her hours of slow careful movements now took her no time at all. Her determination rose even more as soon as she saw the sun's brightness beyond like a comforting wall of safety.

It wasn't.

As Iris burst through the tree line, she caught sight of Mocha. With a great whistle, her horse reared up and then shot toward her like a bullet.

She angled toward the direction they should be heading and drove herself harder. Her horse let out a powerful neigh and bent her head down.

Iris didn't hesitate.

Hesitation killed.

She leaped.

A hand grabbed hold of the saddle and she swung herself up onto her horse's back, taking care to both keep hold of her sword and not hurt her *most amazing friend*.

"Hurry! Gogogo!" Iris cried out to her horse.

Mocha launched herself at a speed that would make the horses of the Kentucky Derby seem like newborn fowls.

It was then that Iris stole a glance behind her. Her eyes widened and the cold grip of fear finally started to inch its way around her spine.

At least twenty drakyyds exploded from the forest and *seemed to be catching up*.

"Mooooocha!"

Her horse must have also looked back because Iris could have sworn that if she spoke 'neigh', Mocha was cursing her the fuck out. She could hear it now.

Again, Iris? You have another horde of monsters chasing us? You dumb bitch.

The sad part was... she couldn't disagree.

Iris leaned close, finally sheathing her sword, as her horse lowered her head and sped up. No damn lizard was going to catch this thoroughbred. Not that Iris would know anything about that.

In what had to be a world record, Iris saw the gates.

And they were closing.

"No, No... Noooo." She raised her voice and screamed. "Open the gates!"

Mocha powered on and Iris kept yelling for the town to open up. The bells were ringing and soldiers were lining the walls. When the loud crash of the gate closing sounded, they had almost made it. The drakyyds were maybe two minutes behind her.

Plenty of time.

"Open the damn gates! Let me in!" she yelled.

"No! We will not put the town in danger for you!" a soldier called out.

She knew that voice. Her adrenaline was pumping, her heart racing, and now she was getting angry.

"Damn it, Morek! Open the damn gates! I swear to whatever god you like most that I will punch you in the damn face if you don't let me in, right this instant!"

"Do not open that gate!" the captain of the Town Guard yelled at his men.

She caught sight of another guard that stood on the walls. An elf. One that now had clothes. They made eye contact...

and he looked away.

Her eyes narrowed. "You too?" she yelled.

He did not look down.

She wanted to shock him right then and there. She let out a scream of frustration and directed Mocha to turn around.

She grabbed her sword and got down from her faithful steed. She patted her horse as she pulled off her shield from where it was strapped to the saddle. “Mocha, girl. I need you to get somewhere safe. Maybe the Orlen Farmstead, eat their corn or something. There are too many lizards, and while I know you’re a badass. Momma needs to show all those assholes a lesson.”

Her horse neighed and then, after giving Iris one last look, rushed off to safety.

Iris took a deep breath. Let her nerves settle.

You can do this. Mister Cute Butt will rue this day. Morek is gonna get a punch.

Just gotta take out twenty monsters. No big deal.

As the drakyyds came in sight, she sighed and pulled magic through her. **Mana Conduit**, again, settled into her sword. She would need both her sword and shield, her spell would let her sword become an extension of her. Let her cast *through* the blade.

She glanced one more time at those on the wall. Morek was staring down at her as if he was watching someone about to die.

Adventurers get no respect.

The sweet comforting smell of ozone filled the air—ah who was she kidding, it stank. With it, a sphere of electrical energy surged into being as her **Storm Armor** settled around herself. Arcs of lightning occasionally lashed out into the ground, and a bit of tension released from her.

Morek, the insufferable guard captain yelled for his men to hold. Maybe he didn’t want them to hit her? She rolled her eyes. *Fucking peanut gallery.*

Iris spread her **Arcane Capability** throughout her body. The spell used mana to enhance her physical strength and power of her spells. It would last as long as she could maintain it, which for her, meant about an hour of combat.

Her sword raised, she pulled the mana through her and **Focused**. She calmed down and settled her breathing. The monsters were coming. She was ready.

As soon as they reached her range, she unleashed her **Arcane Torrent**, using her *alteration* to combine the impact with her **Static Discharge** spell which ensured every attack burst with even more electricity.

The cascade of arcane projectiles channeled and launched through her outstretched sword and at the approaching reptiles. It wasn’t the most accurate spell, but everywhere it hit released two piercing sparks of energy on impact, each flying in a random direction, creating a chaotic scene of electrified death.

Still, the slow speed of the projectiles allowed the reptiles to close even as a number were shocked, paralyzed, or killed outright. She mentally toggled her **Rushing Wind** passive, increasing her speed, jumping ability, and protection from falling all at the cost of a constant mental drain while sustained.

She narrowed her eyes as the first got close enough to leap toward her. Iris lashed out with her blade as she jumped to the side, the movement enhanced by her spell. Her electrified blade connected with the side of the drakyyd with a shower of sparks and a bestial cry of pain, simultaneously ripping open the animal and launching several sparks toward other monsters.

Two of the monsters jumped back to avoid the dangerous softball-sized electrified spells darting toward them, but another ran headfirst into one. The damn thing actually tried to *bite the ball of lightning*.

Darwin quickly laid claim to the reptile.

She used their hesitation to launch **Lightning Bolts** at each one. Both fell in a cacophony of electrified bursts of energy.

Iris turned.

One more leaped at her and she brought her shield up and planted her feet. The reptile slammed into her. Her enhanced strength barely kept her from toppling over from the hit of a tiger-sized dinosaur. With a roar and a flurry of claws, the thing tried to get through and around her shield.

A war cry sounded from deep in her as she shoved the beast away enough to lash out with her sword in a **Charged Strike**. The blade pierced deep into the thing's shoulder and then electricity flooded its nervous system, paralyzing the beast as it fell to the ground.

The remainder of the drakyyds instantly became hesitant. What they had seen as prey, was now hurting their pack. Most of the monsters were dead, and with a few remaining, it seemed they finally decided to play it safe. They began slowly prowling toward her while spreading out around her.

Waiting for any sign of weakness to strike.

She would give them no reprieve.

Iris pointed her blade toward a group closer together, she pulled deeply at the mana around her. A great surge of electricity transformed her into a capacitor of death. A feeling of overwhelming power flowed through both her and her sword. Bright arcs of superheated plasma lashed out from her in great flashes of light and she knew her eyes looked deadly as they did when filled with an abundance of mana.

She could feel it. It was as if she were Lady Thor, herself.

A Goddess of Thunder.

One of the monsters lowered itself.

With a smirk, Iris targeted the monster and launched her overcharged **Chain Lightning**. The bolt connected her blade to the drakyyd and sat there for a moment, superheating the monster before it suddenly jumped to the nearest four other beasts.

In a burst of gore that would likely have her throwing up later, the first drakyyd's head exploded followed by large holes blowing out in its companions.

A rush of energy filled her for the third time since leaving town that day.

Her smile was predatory.

That seemed to be enough for what remained of the monsters.

They turned tail and started bolting away.

Iris launched **Lightning Bolt** after **Lightning Bolt** at the retreating reptiles, managing to bring another two down before the remaining three survivors escaped her range.

When she was sure none remained, she let go of her built-up mana and sagged slightly, exhausted. She could tell she'd used more of her stamina than expected.

That wouldn't deter her fury, though.

She rounded on the wall and narrowed her weary eyes on her spectators.

"If you don't open this gate, I swear to whatever god that's listening that I will blast it open," Iris yelled up at them.

There was a moment of hesitation before she heard someone yelling to do so.

With a loud thump and the sound of chains rattling, the gate creaked open.

That was worth the three rushes.

The guards immediately gave her space when she walked through the gate and glanced around. Her gaze made more than a few of the Guard avert their eyes in shame.

When Iris saw him, Captain Morek seemed to tense up. She strode toward him with a sense of purpose.

The man had his hands raised in surrender as she approached.

"Iris! Look—"

His eyes went wide as he realized she wasn't going to stop.

As soon as she got into arm's reach, she hit him.

She put as much force as she could into the punch, using her not-inconsiderable strength that remained buffed to express her displeasure.

The man's head snapped to the side as he stumbled to stay on his feet. His hand instinctively covered his face as he winced in pain.

Several guards rushed forward, but a look shocked them into submission.

"I fucking told you that I'd punch you. You were really going to let me die? *And just watch?*" she yelled.

The man's eyes remained downcast and he didn't respond as he rubbed at his jaw.

Iris let out an exasperated groan. "Tenera take you, bastard," she spit out, using the preferred local curse. "Give me my pay for killing them. Only three made it away out of twenty-one, your men can chase after them."

The man just nodded.

I'm done with this place.

She'd get paid and get the hell out of town. It was time to head north. No cute butt was worth the headache.

I don't think I want to leave Lehelia quite yet, though. So, time to visit Brightburn...



Finished with packing her things, Iris gave one last look at the room that had been her home for nearly a year. She would miss Helda, the crotchety telv innkeeper. The woman had been about as ornery as a hornet, but she meant well.

Always trying to look out for me.

Iris would miss the woman.

She walked downstairs with her stuff and over toward the counter. She had already eaten breakfast before heading back up and gathering her meager belongings. Now it was time to face the woman who had hosted her for so long.

Innkeeper Helda stood there with her arms crossed.

"So, you're finally leaving," the woman said. Her brunette hair was down, the hints of grey betraying the woman's age even if her skin was immaculate.

Lucky genes.

Wait, is it a spell?

No. I've never seen her use mana.

Physical stats?

...Whatever.

"I am. This was the last straw for me, Helda. Morek could have gotten me killed," she said.

The telv shook her head. “He means well, Iris. The man was upset all night and kept coming to check on you.”

Her anger simmered just below the surface. “He *left* me out there. Then they just *watched*.”

Helda sucked in a breath.

Iris just shrugged. “So yeah. I’m leaving. Although, I’ve decided to stay in Lehelia. Going to head north to Brightburn. See what I can figure out there. Maybe look into the whole Guilds thing.”

The woman gave her a sympathetic look and nodded. “I understand, dear. I hope you know...” She sighed. “I hope you know that I only wanted to look out for you. You’re a young woman, and you have not been handling your circumstances well. I truly wish you the best.”

The wannabe adventurer couldn’t help it. She stepped forward and embraced the woman. “Thank you, Helda.” She lowered her voice. “Free container of root tea for the road?”

Helda pushed her away and scowled at her. “I’m not that fond of you, girl. Did you not just get paid?”

“But I need that for my traveling!” Iris whined.

The telv huffed and turned around. She reached behind the counter and grabbed a sack and a small pouch. “Here. Fresh supplies, and the leftover coin. If you recall, you paid for an entire two weeks. It’s only been three days. *And don’t go wasting it on alcohol, girl*,” the woman said as she handed it all to Iris.

The terran’s eyes lit up. “You do care! Thank you, Helda.”

Helda shook her head. “Good thing you’re leavin’. Can’t have you spreading that around and ruining my reputation.”

That made Iris smile.

“Now, head to the Merchant Guild—”

“Don’t worry, Helda. I got this. I’ll go to them and find a job as an escort. Fear not!”

The woman nodded.

They spoke their goodbyes, and soon enough, Iris found herself walking toward the door.

“And don’t go chasing after pretty boys anymore. You hear?” Helda called out.

Iris just laughed as she stepped into the bright daylight.

The inn’s stableboy stood there holding onto Mocha with such dedication it was as if he were a knight defending his queen.

Her horse let out a soft nicker and nudged the boy away. The little telv's eyes went wide, but when he noticed Iris he let the horse go. Mocha stepped up to her and nudged her in the chest.

"Hey, girl. You ready for a trip?" Iris asked.

Mocha blew some air out of her nostrils right into Iris's hair sending her red hair flying everywhere.

"Hey! Rude. Come on girl, let's head to the Merchant Guild. See if they have anything for us."

Iris placed a foot into the stirrup and pulled herself up onto the saddle. Her horse nodded her head and the two partners turned around away from the inn.

With a final glance at what had been her home, she clicked her tongue twice and they were off.



The Merchant Guild wasn't too busy, which wasn't especially surprising seeing as how Narsland was not a particularly large town. Still, it took a few minutes of waiting in line to be called to the counter.

A high elf man stood there expectantly as she stepped up. His long blonde hair was pulled into a bun while his beard of a matching color was professionally groomed. The man's brown eyes were soft and framed by light freckles.

He was adorable.

"Good morning, Miss Iris," he said.

She was immediately thrown off.

"Y-you know who I am?" she stammered.

The man let out a pleasant, soft laugh before nodding. "Of course! Everyone knows about the woman who fought off a whole pack of beasts outside the gates. And how that same woman punched the Captain of the Town Guard," he said with a wink.

She blinked.

"Oh."

He smiled. "Now, what can I do for you?"

"Oh. Uhm, right." *His eyes are so pretty.*

Wait. No! Bad, Iris.

She sucked in a breath and spoke quickly, forcing herself to stay on task. "I was hoping to sign up as an escort for any merchant heading to Brightburn. Is there anyone leaving this morning?"

The man nodded. "There is! However, let me see if any are looking for last-minute additions to their escort."

She smiled. "Thank you."

He tapped a finger to his cheek as he flipped through his ledger with his other hand. "Ah, here. Yes. Sera Timrel, merchant for Fenren Merchant Company. One of her company's guards took ill and will be spending some time here under the care of a physician. She is paying..." His finger fell to the page and pointed at a column. "One large, two small silver. With a note that one should be expected to... fight off any drakyyds they encounter," he said with a chuckle.

She smiled. "I should be perfectly qualified to help then. Where do I meet her?"

The man gave her directions and a slip of paper that would prove she had been given the job by the Guild. She paid a small service fee of a few coppers and made her way out of the guild, happy to have the interaction go so smoothly.

Much simpler than dealing with Morek.

Retrieving Mocha, the two made their way to a small plaza near the entrance of the town where many traveling merchants like to set up. Being the morning, many people were out and about in town and more than a few people waved at her as she passed. It appeared that the clerk at the guild was right.

Everyone knew who she was.

Huh. Maybe adventurers can get a bit of respect around here.

With a peek down at the paper, she quickly read the description the merchant had left with the guild for any prospective guard to find her.

Iris looked up and scanned through the gathered wagons until she found one that was being loaded and matched the description. The wagon was a well-made merchant wagon of fairly standard build that had one of those big windows on the side along with a small door, then a set of double doors in the back.

In gold lettering along the side was Fenren Merchant Co. which matched the listing, so clearly, she was in the right spot.

There were two people hard at work to get the wagon ready to leave. A high elf woman in a bright tunic and trousers was passing boxes to another high elf man that stood in the back of a wagon. The man wore a set of light armor and a small short sword at his waist.

Iris hopped down from Mocha and walked toward the two. The man gestured toward her with his head and the woman paused and turned.

"Hello! Are you Miss Timrel?" Iris called out.

The woman handed the box in her hands up to the man and quickly wiped them together before turning toward her fully. "I am. May I help you? I apologize but we are packing up to leave, but I may have a few items easily accessible," the woman said.

Iris lifted up the paper. "I'm here about your posting at the Merchant's Guild! It said you were looking for a last-minute addition to your guard for the leg to Brightburn?"

The woman glanced at the man and reached out for the paper. Iris smiled as she handed it to her. Sera read the bottom where the clerk had written Iris's qualifications and her eyes widened before looking up at her. "You're the woman that fought off the drakyyds?"

Iris nodded. "Yes, ma'am. I just so happen to be heading to Brightburn, myself, and would like some company."

"And you can use magic," the woman stated.

Iris nodded again.

The man hopped down from the wagon and chuckled. "Well, that should make things easier." He stepped toward her and held out a hand.

She grasped his and shook, a bit shocked at the firm grip. *He must have a few levels. More physical build. Hmm. Not too bad.*

"Nice to meet you," she said.

"You as well. I am Tanith."

Iris smiled.

Sera seemed to recover as she looked up at Iris. "Well, then. Welcome. I see you have your own horse, which is beneficial. I will take that into account and ensure it remains well-fed. We will provide your food, but you will also have to take turns cooking. You will answer to Tanith, so please follow his lead." The man gave her a warm smile and a nod.

"Sounds good to me! When do we leave?" Iris asked.

The woman looked around, noticing that everything was packed.

"Now. Do you have any business you need to take care of before departure?"

Iris took a deep breath.

"None."

The woman nodded.

"Then let us depart. Thank you for joining us," the woman said.

"Of course. Thanks for having me. I can't wait to get to know the two of you!"

Sera turned and inclined her head to Tanith before heading toward the front of the wagon.

The man watched her walk off before turning to Iris. “Don’t worry. You are obviously the better fighter between us, so if you see or know anything... speak up. I have no issues following your lead if the situation calls for it. I’m not one to get stuck on formalities. While there shouldn’t be any trouble, it doesn’t hurt to be prepared. With that, I’ll be driving the wagon, so you’ll be quicker to respond to any issues. The main response to trouble is to get Sera into the wagon before we deal with anything that comes up. If it’s bandits we’ll try and pay them off. Company policy is that our lives are more important than the goods,” he explained.

She nodded. *Sensible. I like him already.*

Sera called out Tanith’s name and he chuckled. “She’s itching to leave. Ready to get away from any chance of another beast attack. I hear you got almost all of the drakkyds, but she is afraid of the ones that got away. We’ll talk, but for now, just ride alongside us and keep your eyes out.”

“Understood. Thanks, Tanith.”

He smiled before turning and joining Sera on the wagon.

Iris turned and walked back toward Mocha, getting settled just in time for the wagon to start moving.

She took a deep breath.

Brightburn here I come.