

## 126: Fieldtrips

Scarlett sat on top of a smooth piece of stone, idly flipping through a book on magic theory she had found in the Freybrook mansion's library. The book didn't cover exactly what Arlene had lectured her about back in Freymeadow, and a lot of its contents honestly went over her head using terms unfamiliar to her, but some of the concepts it discussed appeared to be at least *similar*. It was an interesting comparison, at least, considering that quite a bit of time would have passed since Arlene's days.

She glanced up from the book's pages for a moment to observe Adalicia's progress. They were currently on top of a small hill, and at its center, the wizard had been moving back and forth between several metal stands placed around the area—each holding irregularly shaped crystals emitting a soft light—for a while now. It had taken the woman at least an hour or so just to set up all of her equipment, and since then, she had been busy calibrating it all according to the data Scarlett had provided her.

Their group had left Faybarrow early this morning, before the sun had gone up, in order to reach their destination as early as possible. They had traveled along the coast eastwards for several hours until they reached a highland region that was surrounded by forest on all sides. Since the carriages couldn't traverse through that area, they'd had to make the rest of the trek on foot, carrying all of Adalicia's equipment along with them. Or, to be more exact, Fynn and Shin carried it.

Scarlett had only *vaguely* remembered where the Zuverian ruins they were looking for were in the game. All she had to go off was that there would be a rather distinct kopje—a tall, mostly flat, stone formation—nearby. But 'nearby' in the game was pretty different from 'nearby' in this world.

Fynn had been able to spot the stone formation itself relatively quickly, which had assuaged some of Scarlet's worries that they wouldn't be able to find the ruins they were looking for, but from here she didn't really have much more to go off of.

Thankfully, this was exactly one of the reasons she had wanted to get Adalicia involved in all of this to begin with.

She watched as the wizard leaned over one of the metal stands, inspecting the crystal at its head. In her left hand, she held her thick tome, opened so that she could look down at its pages now and then, while a white light shone above her right hand, which she occasionally held up to the crystal.

The crystals were a kind of surveying crystal, one that they were using to try to locate their objective.

Scarlett hadn't actually been completely sure how this surveying magic worked before she first discussed finding these Zuverian ruins with Adalicia. She just knew that it was a thing that had been used in one of the quests if you joined Elystead Tower in the game. Now she had a rough idea of the process, though.

Essentially, the surveying crystals that Adalicia had set up looked for different sorts of energies—in minuscule amounts—present in the surroundings. The way they were positioned was supposed to help triangulate exactly where the origin of those energies were. It wasn't too different from how many signal-detecting technologies worked back in Scarlett's world, though the range didn't appear to be as impressive as what she was used to.

These crystals were supposed to be incredibly sensitive though—not to mention expensive—which was a necessity if they were to be used to detect anything underground. According to Adalicia, the ground and soil in general were pretty good at absorbing most types of magical energies, so it was very much up to chance when enough would escape so that it could be detected. That was why you wanted to calibrate these crystals to as many types of energy as possible. Specificity was also key. It wasn't enough to just search for lumomancy-attuned mana or something like that. That was apparently unlikely to work when working with these tiny amounts.

Because of this, Scarlett had shared what information she knew with the wizard regarding exactly what type of creatures were present in the ruins they were looking for. It was basically only undead, but according to Adalicia, it made a difference exactly what type of undead it was, as well as the rough size ruins themselves. In addition, she has also provided some examples of the artifacts that might be inside the ruins, since those could also have unique signatures that could be detected.

Adalicia had seemed curious about the extent of Scarlett's knowledge but hadn't asked too many questions, despite that. Instead, the woman had immediately moved on to comparing the information with a magic database of some kind that she had stored in her tome before starting with her calibrations.

Scarlett wasn't quite sure how long it had been since then now, but it was well past noon, judging from the sun's position in the sky. Adalicia had said that there was no telling how long this step would take, but Scarlett was ready to wait the whole day if necessary.

“Gnublul!” Allyssa's voice cried out to her left.

She turned to look at the young Shielder, who was sitting on a rock a short distance away. The girl placed a card on the ground in front of Fynn and Rosa.

The three of them were playing a game called Imps & Worms, which was apparently based on a 'true' fable where an old farmer had to differentiate between the worms living in his field and imps that sought to eat his gourds. A strange fable, if you asked Scarlett, but she supposed most fables were.

Her assumption was that the word Allyssa had just spoken was supposed to be the name of one of the imps, which would hold power over the demon. What she wasn't sure of was how it had become part of the game to begin with. The fact that names held power over demons didn't seem to be common knowledge. At least not from her experience.

“I'm afraid that was a worm,” Rosa said with a grin. The bard leaned forward to turn over another card that was lying on the ground.

Allyssa let out a groan as Rosa triumphantly grabbed a couple of pebbles from a pile.

Next to them, Fynn was staring down at his own cards with knitted brows. He had been intently focused on the game this whole time, not that Scarlett understood why. He'd won most every game up till now since he could always tell when the other two were lying. Why they continued playing with him was also a question she lacked an answer to.

Shaking her head, she looked over to where Shin sat on his lonesome, closer to the middle of the hill. Like her, he was also reading a book, but he was also acting as an assistant of sorts to Adalicia whenever she needed help. There was a pretty large age difference between the two—the woman was more than twice his age—but surprisingly, they'd seemed to hit it off pretty well and had had several 'interesting' conversations about certain pieces of literature and the Kereq tribe during the carriage ride here earlier.

Scarlett returned her attention to her own book, rereading a few passages about certain concepts that she was planning on asking both Adalicia and Arlene about later.

She finally looked up again after a while as sounds of activity rang out from ahead of her. Shin had gotten up, and Adalicia had rushed over to one of the surveying crystals that had turned a bright yellow. Soon enough, four other crystals lit up in the same color.

Adalicia moved between them all, performing some form of confirmation with her magic, before eventually turning to Scarlett with a nod. "It appears we have found our location."

Rosa and the other two stopped their card game at the announcement.

Scarlett stood from her seat to walk over to the woman. "Are you certain?" she asked.

"Reasonably so. Three of the surveying nodes detected energies that are likely to belong to a lich, and the remaining two have matched it to another type of energy that has been confirmed to be common in Zuverian ruins."

"Then let us depart. If we make haste, there is still a chance that we can return to Faybarrow before it becomes too late," Scarlett said.

Together, they helped pack things up and left the place where they'd made their temporary base. The surrounding highland consisted of rolling hills and slopes with dense forests nestled in the valleys, so trying to find the hidden entrance to the ruins by pure luck would have been extremely difficult. Even with Adalicia guiding them along with her magic, it still took them up towards forty minutes of arduous journeying before they reached their destination.

It was a natural quarry of sorts, situated below a narrow ridge that concealed it from above. The nearby vegetation also made it hard to spot from a distance.

At the center of the quarry, the ground held a steep decline towards a small basin of water, and there were several cramped cavities etched into the nearby cliffs. Some were large enough to allow a person to pass through.

Scarlett scanned across the area. The hidden entrance *should* be inside one of those cavities. Probably along with a puzzle of some kind to open it. That would have been the main way of getting inside these ruins in 'Chronicle of Realms', at least. But, well...

This *had* been a game, after all. There were few things players hated as much as backtracking through an entire dungeon after finishing it, so it wasn't too uncommon for there to be more than one entrance.

She looked down towards the bottom of the quarry. "Fynn. See if you can find an underwater path in that basin."

The white-haired young man sat down the equipment he'd been carrying and set off without a word, effortlessly climbing down the rather treacherous-looking decline. He only stopped for a moment to look around before then promptly diving into the water.

"You think they would put the entrance at the bottom of a small lake?" Allyssa asked, squinting down to where Fynn had disappeared beneath the surface.

Scarlett shook her head. "I do not. But it is not the entrance that I am searching for."

"Zuverian ruins are a rather well-documented subject," Adalicia said. "A factor that is commonly shared among most of the ones that are hidden away in this fashion is that they have a test of some kind that must be solved in order to enter. I don't think it's likely that he will find a path of any kind down there."

Scarlett turned to the woman. "While you are not wrong in what you say, Miss Mendenhall, there is one other factor to take into consideration here."

"Oh? And what is that?"

A small smile wound itself onto Scarlett's face as Fynn's drenched head appeared above the water seconds later. "Laziness," she said.

"...You're saying the Zuver would have added another entrance out of *laziness*?"

"Something along those lines, yes."

"Let me remind you that this was a civilization that had society-wide access to teleportation magic."

"When you think about it, isn't that just the epitome of laziness?" Rosa asked.

Adalicia looked at the woman for a moment. "...I suppose you're right in that." She chuckled, turning her gaze down to Fynn as he climbed out of the water.

"We will see what he has to say about it," Scarlett said as she started climbing down towards the man. All of them took it slow—so as not to injure themselves—and soon they all stopped a short distance away from Fynn as he shook his head like a dog, gusts of winds aggressively blowing away some of his wetness.

Scarlett noticed a glint of interest in Adalicia's eyes, but the wizard didn't bring it up for now.

"What did you find?" she asked Fynn.

“There was a thin passage leading further in to a small cave,” he answered. “There was a spot to stop for air as well.”

It was like she expected, then.

She turned to the others. “Are there any of you that cannot swim?”

Allyssa gingerly raised her hand. “...I’ve never even tried it before.”

Shin smirked at the confession, which promptly earned him an elbow to the side. With his armor on, it didn’t have much effect, nor did the glare Allyssa sent him.

“Fynn, will you be able to aid her?” Scarlett asked.

He nodded his head. “Sure.”

She then looked at Adalicia. “Will you be fine?”

The wizard glanced down at the clear water in front of them. “You appear confident that this passage truly leads into the ruins.”

“I am experienced in the matter.”

“I am not questioning you. Since we’re already here, I am rather inclined to trust your word.” Adalicia looked down at her robes, gently pulling at them. “Although, I will admit, it has never crossed my mind to enchant these in order to be prepared for underwater activities of any kind. Perhaps I should have.”

She reached for the tome attached to her waist, pulling it up and opening a certain that was covered in columns. As she tapped on the page, it lit up and a thin bracelet appeared in her hand.

“Is that a spatial enchantment?” Scarlett asked.

“It is, though its size is nothing to brag about. I had the Vice-Dean of the Elystead Tower help in making it, and, well... You’ve met the man.” Adalicia put on the bracelet. “I had almost forgotten I had this item. It allows the wearer to survive without breathing for almost ten minutes.”

“Then I take it you will manage on your own?” Scarlett asked.

“I would hope so,” the woman replied.

Scarlett eyed the bracelet. Perhaps she should try to get her hands on something like that as well. She turned back to the others. “Then let us not delay.”

People started removing the equipment that would be in the way, placing it into the [Bag of Juham]. Shin took off his armor. Allyssa, her cape and bandolier — which was now the **[Alchemist’s Potion Belt (Epic)]** that Scarlett had decided to lend her. Rosa placed away her klert, and Scarlett used her [Charm of Expeditious Change] to slip into another set of clothes

that she had prepared just in case. It was relatively light clothing that still protected her modesty.

The others gave her curious looks at the sudden display of the artifact's magic, and Rosa even let out an envious whistle.

Fynn was the first one to jump into the water again, followed by Allyssa and Shin. Then it was Rosa's turn. The bard let out a small cry as she hit the water, complaining about the cold, but she soon disappeared under the surface after the others.

"Shall we?" Scarlett asked, looking at Adalicia as the woman set up some sort of barrier around the surveying equipment they had brought with them. It was too large to fit in the [Bag of Juham], so they would have to leave it here.

As Adalicia finished, she gestured for her to go first. "I think I'll be a bit behind the rest of you. I'm not as spry as you younger people, and I did not think to bring another set of clothes that was more suitable. Don't worry, I won't take too long."

Scarlett gave the woman a nod before turning back to the water.

The thought of jumping in with her clothes still on honestly irked her a bit, but there was nothing to do but clench her teeth and get it over with. She would *not* be removing them.

It had been years since she last went swimming, but she used to be decent enough, at least. And she wasn't quite as physically weak now as when she had first arrived in this world.

Taking a deep breath, she stepped forward and let herself drop into the pool.

It was *cold*. Her head was quickly submerged as her feet soon reached the bottom, and she almost wanted to use her pyrokinesis just to warm herself up. But she pushed those thoughts to the side as she opened her eyes and looked around. The water was clear enough, and there was enough light coming from above that she could spot the passage that Fynn had talked about.

As she began swimming towards it, she realized that the clothes slowed down her movements a lot more than she had expected. It was like swimming with weights around her limbs, even when she had purposefully changed into a lighter set.

She hadn't swum with clothes on since she was a kid, so she had underestimated how annoying this was.

It took her several heavy motions to reach the opening of the passage, and her lungs were already starting to strain. Had she overestimated how strong she had gotten? How far was it to the first air pocket? The passage quickly turned darker, so it was hard to know, but she could see a faint light a bit ahead and above her.

Kicking her legs to move forward, she stopped for a moment as a thought came to her.

Maybe she could make things easier for her?

With a mental push, she tried using her hydrokinesis to control the water around her, moving it along with her. She almost let her breath escape when a stronger current than she expected grabbed hold of her, pushing her forward. A few seconds after, she reached the light she'd seen, surfacing in a small space a little larger than her head, illuminated by a patch of glowing moss.

She took several deep breaths, trying to ignore the chill that was invading her bones.

Using her hydrokinesis here felt easier than usual. Did that have something to do with the fact that she was surrounded by such a large body of water? Most of the time, she only conjured her own or used existing water in small amounts, so if there was a difference, she had missed it.

Perhaps it was something she should look into later, when she had the chance.

For now, she took one last breath before diving again. Fynn and the others were probably already on the other side.

Using her magic to move herself along—slower and more controlled this time, since it had gotten darker and she almost had to feel her way forward towards the end—she made her way forward, eventually reaching what looked to be the end of the passage. There, she broke the surface, finding herself in a small cavern lit up by the pale yellow of a lamp.

The others sat on the stone nearby, all turning towards her.

She swam over to the edge of the water, climbing up onto the rough stone before looking at the others. Their hand and clothes were completely drenched as they stood next to a lump of red goo that emitted waves of heat from it.

Allyssa must have brought out one of her concoctions.

As she started shivering, Scarlett pushed down the urge to snap at the others to stop looking at her. She waved her hand, and masses of water rose from her and the others' bodies, floating through the space as she returned it to the small pool behind her. Then she used her pyrokinesis to start heating up the air in the cave, breathing out as the chill slowly faded.

"I didn't know you could do that," Allyssa said in an appreciative tone, arms hugged around herself.

"It's convenient, I'll tell you that," Rosa chimed in. "You could make a business out of this."

The woman leaned over as she started squeezing out the last bits of dampness lingering in her hair. "This'll be torture for my curls, though. They get all frizzy when hot."

"Would you prefer if I refrained from warming you?" Scarlett asked.

The bard showed a smile. "I'm fine, thank you."

Shin looked behind Scarlett. "Is Miss Adalicia not coming after you?" Shin asked.

“I believe she might take some time, still,” Scarlett answered. She then shifted her attention to the other end of the small cave, where there was a narrow slit in the rock, beyond which was what looked like a smooth stone wall. A crack in the wall revealed a dark room.

“There are undead that way,” Fynn said. A frown appeared on his brow as he looked in that direction.

“Yes, we will deal with them soon enough. For now, you should all prepare yourselves as we wait for Miss Mendenhall.”

Scarlett continued using her pyrokinesis to warm them up—it didn’t take *too* much mana using it like this—as they waited for Adalicia. Eventually, the older woman appeared, her dark hair clinging to the sides of her face and shoulders as she surfaced and hurriedly swam towards them.

“I must say,” she said, with a slight quiver to her voice, as she climbed up on land. “I never quite expected that this would be what I was agreeing to back when we first met, Baroness. Never before have I heard of someone that had to *swim* to enter a Zuverian ruin.”

Scarlett raised an amused eyebrow. Wonder how the woman would react when she learned of Beld Thylelion’s existence.

“I hope it did not prove too uncomfortable an experience,” she said as she used her hydrokinesis to remove most of the water from the woman and warmed her with her pyrokinesis.

Adalicia paused for a moment, studying her curiously. “That’s an interesting use of hydrokinesis and pyrokinesis. I was under the impression that you weren’t a mage?”

“I am not. Or, at least, I do not believe most would class me as such. However, that does not mean I do not have a few tricks up my sleeves, so to speak.”

“I would like to meet those who would consider such a masterful application of magic a mere trick,” Adalicia said. “I know several Master Docent Wizards who wouldn’t be able to replicate what you just did. At least not as effortlessly.”

“I suppose that is a consolation to the fact that I do not know any spells.”

The woman gave her a surprised look. “Truly?”

Scarlett nodded. “Truly. You could say I have a natural affinity for pyrokinesis and hydrokinesis. The same does not apply for spells, however.”

“That’s...” The woman frowned. “That is certainly strange. I can scarcely comprehend how you learned the one without the other.”

“Some trial and error was involved, but it mostly came naturally. That is all I can say.”

Adalicia observed her for a while longer. “Curious...”



Scarlett eventually turned away and gestured towards the opening that led to the room beyond. “Leaving that aside for now, we can continue whenever you feel sufficiently prepared.”