

## PRESENT – Zach Vault

Zacharia followed behind Gemheart as he was led deep into the main complex of the High Ranker's headquarters. Zach had enjoyed a lot of access in Gemheart's faction, but he wasn't a part of it, and some areas had been off limits. Today, was their last day here, Naha and Zach had already said their goodbyes to the people they had come to know. She had recovered from using the vial, and her Cultivation was now gone. It had taken her a few days to fully become herself, and Zach had been worried that there were going to be lasting side effects. Thankfully, it seems that the worst part was over, losing a True Body seems to have been the cause. He couldn't tell yet if Naha was better, but he was hoping that with her no longer being imbalanced she would recover faster.

Now, they were ready to leave for the Citadel, but before that, there was one more thing that they had to take care of.

Gemheart led him to the large ornate door made out of blue stone. Arrays lined the walls all around them, in lieu of guards the hallway and the door was guarded by large golems. Each was sculpted from marble, in a shape of a warform kreature, almost as tall as Gemheart himself.

The High Ranker paused in front of the vault, and then stepped to the side, he grabbed a large stone wheel that was divided into eleven sections, each with a symbol on it. Zach could read them, as he could any language in the Infinite Realm. Nine of the sections corresponded to a rarity, and the remaining two had symbols for *Formation* and *Array*.

Gemheart turned the wheel to the symbol for *mythic*, then he walked to the vault doors and they started to open. The loud sound of rolling stone filled the hallway, followed by several thumps of something heavy falling, and then the door started to slide open, allowing them to see a sheen of white and silver light.

It looked like a curtain that had been dropped over the entrance, with Zach only barely being able to see inside. Gemheart gestured with his hand, and then entered. Zach followed, stepping through the curtain. The sensation

of passing through was unpleasant, as if walking through heavy rain, but only for a moment. As he finished his step he was someplace else.

They found themselves in a large chamber, filled with items, neatly arranged on racks, shelves, tables, or in open chests.

“I’d assumed that you would keep your item in spatial spaces,” Zach commented.

Gemheart mandibles clicked in amusement. “This is a spatial space,” he said. “One that can be accessed by a few items linked to it. The vault is a gateway for us to enter into it physically.”

Zach blinked, it hadn’t occurred to him that one could enter a spatial space. He had never encountered anything similar.

“So, have you given thought as to what kind of an item you wish as your reward?” Gemheart asked.

Zach looked around, seeing so much treasure. It was more than he could count, stretching far into the distance. The reward that the High Ranker offered for opening a way into the Ethereal had included a mythic grade item. And that was the last thing that Zach hadn’t received, on his own insistence. The last year had been... great, in many ways it had been peaceful and productive. It had allowed him time to acclimate to this world better, to find his place with Naha and figure out his powers. To train and understand them. His **Last Heir of Terra** had been invaluable for that, and he had spent every possible moment speaking with various masters from Earth. Training and improving his combat style, incorporating his powers into it. But also learning how to fight together with Naha, how to be a better team.

Picking a powerful item before he knew what his style was would not have been prudent, at least in his opinion. He wanted to solidify his basics, not add something that he would need to train with and base everything around. He did not want to rely on the item, but use it as a supplement.

Because of that, he was certain that he didn’t need a weapon or even armor. His own armor had been repaired and slightly improved. It wasn’t anything truly special, but it served its purpose. And getting an armor wouldn’t bring him that much of a benefit. If he could get a set... that would be a different story. There were three types of armor; a single unique piece, which could be powerful. A full armor, an item in several parts—like his

**Greater Armor of the Silver Sentinel** which included every part of the armor—but was still counted as one item. The last, and the most powerful were sets of armor. Several pieces that were each powerful on their own, but together gave out even greater bonuses.

Naha had explained it to him when he had been trying to decide what to take. The lowest grade of sets started at legendary rarity, and they only got better after. But Zach had been offered a single mythic item, not a full set. So there was no point in thinking about the armor, his own was good enough for now. If he was going to upgrade, he would go for a full set.

Nor did he need a weapon, with the **Shade Reaver** and his **Ethereal Sword** he had that covered. Plus, he had purchased a few low grade weapons that he could use if necessary. No, what he needed was something else, something that would support him and his kit.

“No weapons or armor,” Zach said.

“A ring then?” Gemheart asked.

Zach looked around, not even knowing where to start. “Perhaps, I need something that is... that will support me.”

Gemheart turned around, looking at his treasure trove. “Well, there are many items that give flat bonuses here, perhaps one of those?”

Zach grimaced at that.

“You shouldn’t look down on such items, they are useful, and often more efficient than something with an effect,” Gemheart said.

Zach sighed and nodded. “I know, I’m sorry I just don’t know exactly what I want.”

“You can look around, that’s why we are here,” Gemheart said, then he led him deeper into the vault. Zach was completely taken aback by just how many items were there. And all of them were mythic, each worth a fortune, he wondered why they weren’t using them. Perhaps they used them only when there was a need, or perhaps they sold them when they needed Essence. He didn’t know, and he doubted that Gemheart would tell him.

He brought him to the section filled with amulets and circles. They were arranged on long tables, sitting in small cushioned boxes. Each had a small note in front of it that said what it was and what it did. Zach approached one and took it up in his hands.

<p><b>Amulet of Hidden Walk</b> (amulet mythic)</p>	<p>+60 to all stats, holds five charges. Spend a charge to turn invisible to all forms of visual detection for 1 hour. You will also be hidden from any scrying powers from those who are on a 7 or lower tier of power. Charges replenish at a rate of 1 per day.</p>
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The window in his vision was the same as what the note said. It was a good item, useful and powerful. But he wasn't looking for anything like it. He had a power that could hide him from sight with his **Shade Reaver**, and while it wasn't the strongest, it was enough for him. Using stealth was more Naha's thing than his.

"Invisibility?" Gemheart commented.

Zach shook his head. "No, I just wanted to see if the notes were correct."

Gemheart chuckled, his mandibles clicking together in a pattern that meant that he was amused, but he didn't comment further.

Zach continued walking and reading the notes, looking for anything that caught his eye. The amulets were all mostly utility or defensive in nature.

<p><b>Shield of Elor</b> (amulet mythic)</p>	<p>+360 to endurance, holds five charges. Spend a charge to summon a shield around you to protect you from harm. The shield will last for exactly 1 second and will stop any attack that deals damage that is less than the power of 5000 of any stat. Attacks stronger than that will have some of its power reduced based on how powerful they</p>
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The defensive item was something that he added to his mental list. His survivability was one of the things that he was lacking. He usually relied on avoiding damage, or surviving one big lethal hit. His **Time Blade** allowed him to fix small mistakes, but overall he wasn't as tough as some of his opponents had been. If he got hit with something that he couldn't avoid he was screwed. Even if he had to rely on **Second Chance**, what happened if he couldn't avoid a lethal attack twice?

He continued on and they moved over to the rings, where he saw a few more items that were interesting. There was one ring that just increased his regeneration by a flat amount, which could be useful. Another stored kinetic energy like his **Consequence**. Many items synergized with what Zach had, but none really clicked. Then he came on to one that was an inspecting ring. Like the ring that Naha had given him, this one would allow him to see people's stats, at least those who didn't have protections against that.

It was a great utility item, as Zach had learned. But it, like the other ring that he had lost in the dungeon to the yeti, showed the information that Zach couldn't always understand. This one showed the names of persons perks in addition to showing their tier of power. If Zach knew more perks, and what they did, it would've been more useful to him. As it was...

"An inspection item is always a good pick," Gemheart added from the side. "Knowing your opponent is half the battle. Even if just the names of the perks. That too holds great insight."

"I agree, but I don't know if I can get much use out of it."

"That is on you to decide," Gemheart said.

He had offered some advice, but ultimately he was right, this was Zach's decision. They continued walking.

An hour later, Zach had found three items that were interesting to him.

The first was the amulet that he had seen previously, the **Shield of Elor**, it was a great item that he could use well. He lacked defense, and it would cover that weakness. The second and the third were incredible as well.

<p><b>Wagren's Snare</b> (ring mythic)</p>	<p>+360 to intelligence, the ring will automatically catch any spell type power that would hit you. Only attacks that do not hold power greater than 5000 of any stat can be absorbed. For the next ten seconds you can activate <b>Rebound</b> and use the ability yourself. The effect can't happen more than once every 4 hours.</p>
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<p><b>Renish's Third Sight</b> (circlet mythic)</p>	<p>+60 to all stats, allows for detection of hostile monsters or people. Will detect people only if they are not on a higher tier of power than you and are not hiding their bloodlust. Range 200 meters.</p>
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He didn't know exactly why he took the last one. It was close to a danger sense skill, which was probably what it was meant to replace. It wouldn't give him much of a utility, but it could help him detect an ambush. The only reason why he wasn't exactly sure about it was because Naha had it. Except that he wouldn't always have her near him to keep an eye out. He could always take the skill once he had a free slot, if he managed to evolve more skills. But...

He looked at the three items for a while, and in the end decided that he wouldn't go with the detection one. It was great, but he really needed to fix one of his other weaknesses first. Ultimately, the reason why he didn't go for armor, even though he needed more defense, was because he wanted a more utility defense than something that would increase his survivability slightly overall.

And that left him with the ring and the amulet. Both offered protection in different ways. One allowed him to absorb and then release an attack, which could be incredibly powerful. The other one would block damage, and

reduce anything stronger. It could also allow him to use the shield more often, in quick succession if needed even with its charges.

It was a tough decision, one offered him a way to go on the offense, which he did like. The other was a pure defensive option. Unable to make a decision he turned to Gemheart for advice.

“What would you take?” Zach asked.

“What I would take is not the same as what you should take, young warden. I am not a fighter, I can fight, but I do not excel at it,” Gemheart said. “Being a High Ranker means that I am more powerful than most, but that is because you do not get to reach such high tiers of power without being unable to cause great damage.”

Zach nodded his head. He didn’t know what Gemheart’s tier of power was, he didn’t know much about his power at all. But if it was anything like Genissa’s it was probably tied to mining, a geomancer’s power, focused on helping his team dig. But he obviously could use weapons. Although, Zach knew that the cannons he had used in the Ethereal were actually mining ones. Genissa used similar ones. Still, there wasn’t much difference between something made for combat and for mining, not at the level he was on.

“I am leaning toward the ring, but... I don’t think that it is the right choice. It would protect me once, and while it might give a chance to surprise my opponent, it isn’t ultimately what I need.”

Gemheart was silent, leaving Zach to talk it through himself. The vault was filled with a lot of items, many that had similar effects. Few were really something unique, but Zach guessed that the higher rarity had a much better effect. Still, he had picked the items that would most suit him.

He took a deep breath and reached down, picking up the amulet. The **Shield of Elor** would be a great addition to his kit. It would help him survive any type of damage, within limits, of course, and reduce anything else. Even with his few ways to survive, he didn’t really have many means to avoid damage. His **Rewind** qualified, but if he ever encountered someone who was powerful enough that not even 1 second could save him, then he was going to need more defense.

“It is a good choice,” Gemheart said.

“Thank you, sir, for everything that you have done for us. For... not asking questions,” Zach said.

The knowledge that Naha was a shapeshifter was known here, but they didn't pry. Zach knew that it was unlikely that anything that they knew would ever reach the Citadel. They had no reason to suspect Naha, and Citadel records were confidential. But Zach was also aware that Gemheart was smarter than most. He probably had suspicions, but his gratitude outweighed his curiosity.

“You did your part of the bargain and more. You saved my daughter, and for that I am forever grateful,” Gemheart said as he led them back out of the vault.

“I did what anyone else would've done,” Zach said.

“No,” Gemheart shook his head. “Not what anyone else would've done. Few would've put themselves at risk for someone they did not know. You did not know that she was my daughter at the time, you could not have known that you would've had my gratitude. It speaks well of your character.”

Zach bowed his head, not really sure if he believed what the High Ranker thought. Zach had always tried to do good, to help others, to keep them safe. Yet somehow, it seemed like he always made the wrong choice. Like the world conspired to turn everything around him to shit.

He needed power, so that he could make the rules. So that he could protect everything that he cared about. Right now, things he cared about included only Naha, which was already too much for him to handle.

The two of them made their way outside of the building in silence. As they stepped outside, Zach saw Naha, in Nyathulla's body, standing next to two mounts and waiting for him.

Zach turned to Gemheart and bowed. “I guess that this is goodbye, sir.”

“And so it is,” Gemheart said. “Remember what I said, you will always be welcome.”

“Thank you, sir. Until we meet again,” Zach said and then turned away from the High Ranker. He reached Naha and stopped.

“What did you pick?” She asked.

“This,” he showed her the amulet. “As you advised.”



One of her mouth tentacles twitched, in what Zach had learned was a smile. “Ready to go?” She asked.

“Yes, let’s,” Zach said and got up on the strange mount that looked like a cross between a bull and a camel.

The two of them turned them toward the teleporter compound at the edge of the territory. Teleporting directly to Emaros was expensive, so they’ve decided to head somewhere nearby. It meant a week of travel, but it would give them time to see if there were any more side effects for Naha.

Zach turned around and looked at the heart of Gemheart’s territory, taking it in one last time. He didn’t know when or if he would be able to visit again, but he was going to miss it. He turned back around and thought about what was ahead. The Citadel and the Tournament, and whatever waited for him there.