Chapter 135 Shared Dreaming

We all started to get accustomed to the persistent cold as it became the new normal.   We sealed the doors to the small library as best we could and kept the five fires going in the offices.  Part of my duties was to watch over Scholar Favian as he paged through the hundreds of books.  I also finished going through the entire herbalism and apothecary section.  Each night, I added another ten books to my dreamscape collection, and I think I was getting better at handling the migraines on exiting.  They were fading much quicker.

I also made trips with Maveith to the floors above to search for viable books in the mess for Favian to look at.  The third floor still had its doors intact, but a rafter in the roof had fallen, exposing a portion of the room to the elements.  The room was half filled with snow; no tomes remained other than some tarnished silver bindings.  We stacked those dozens of black plates together.  If we escaped the city, maybe we would pack them out—or they might find their way into my storage.

The second floor held more promise.  The shelves had collapsed, and one of the quartz windows had buckled, leaving a wide crack.  It gave me access to see how really cold it was outside.  Sticking my hand through the crack, I found it colder than anything I had experienced before, and my hand was prickled with needles of pain immediately from the cold. Maveith commented after replicating my act, “We wouldn’t last an hour outside. The summoner doesn’t need to send any creatures after us to finish us off.”

I tried to cheer up the morose goliath, “The Summoner can not hold back spring.” I handed him a ration bar from my storage. “Eat this, Maveith; you are looking a little thin.” The truth was all of us were thinning rapidly after just four days in the city on the forced diet.  Maveith more so, even though he was getting twice as much as everyone else at meals.  He looked at the bar uncertainly.  “I have a few more in my storage.  Eat it.  It is fine, and just don’t tell anyone.”

His hand slowly extended to take it, his hunger winning out.  Maveith had trouble with lying, but I thought he would keep this secret. He snapped it half and tried to hand me half.  So far, I had been suffering with the others, not eating from my dimensional space.  It had been difficult to overcome the urges.  My mouth watered, looking at the bar, “No, Mavieth, it is all for you.”  I turned my back on him, resisting the temptation, and continued searching the second floor.

I heard him slowly crunching away guiltily on the bar as I dug through the debris.  These upper floors held no offices to search as they both only held shelving.  We dug through the mess and stacked books to be brought downstairs for Scholar Favian to review.

According to the Scholar, the second floor appeared to be focused on all types of metal smithing, from household goods to armor and weapons.  There were lots of techniques with instructions and images by elven master smiths within the pages.  Of course, it was all in Elvish, and useless in our current circumstances.  No one in the company was foolish not to think these books would be worth thousands of gold if recovered.  The problem was recovering them.

After I had paged through the herbalism and apothecary collection, I started helping Scholar Favian sort the books.  He had resumed teaching me the Elven language.  It was a lot easier to speak the language than it was to read it.  This was made doubly so by the fatigue from slowly starving my body.  My mind just did not want to focus for more than a few minutes.  I had no idea how the Scholar kept going so strong but guessed his thirst for knowledge outweighed his hunger pains.

I did make rapid progress on the language, though, as I cheated.  I spent four hours in the dreamscape amulet every evening.  So far, no one had requested to use the artifact.  I was most surprised that Mateo had not made another request.  During my time, I added ten books and then tried to sort the ones I had as I worked on my slow mastery of the language.  Having Scholar Favian with me in the dreamscape made the process even easier.  Creating a copy of him allowed the amulet to draw on the short daily lessons he taught me during the day.

Learning inside the amulet was also much more effective than in the real world.  I found that recall and muscle memory were much sharper from sword practice and studying the books.  My best guess was the amulet focused all my efforts on learning the current task.  I could see why these amulets were so valued.  Scholar Favian thought that with my rapid improvement, I should become a master linguist.  The funny part of all this was I could not speak Tsinga.

On the fifth morning in the tower, I noticed that only Konstantin and I seemed well-rested when I woke up.  Everyone else was lethargic and took more time to get active.  I used the amulet and Konstantin had a spell form to shorten the needed rest.  I planned to tell Castile my suspicions.  I spent that night cleaning up the space in the amulet.  I moved everyone and everything to the scorpion room, walled it off, and reset all the monster rooms. I felt some guilt locking Oscar with the constructs, so I altered their disposition to play with him.

I was never part of Castile’s small group that went every morning to the underground complex to kill specters.  I did hear of the stories of how they would spend time trying to attract the attention of only a few at a time.  Then they would lure them back toward our tower and slay them with runic weapons, and Castile would use the kettle of souls to end them permanently.   When they returned this evening, the group was missing a person.

I could read the faces of everyone; someone had died. I tried to recall who went with them this morning. Konstantin stood in the doorway, his face blank. Castile went into the room she slept in and closed the door. Delmar gathered everyone around, “Men, come close; I don’t want to repeat myself.”

Delmar’s face was thin, and his eyes were sunken and dark. He waited as a group was coming back from gathering wood. With everyone present, we listened to him, “We encountered a wight.” A lot of confused looks had him explain. “A powerful type of undead zombie. We were surprised, and it got Lysander. Castile was able to restrain it subsequently, but Lysander is dead.”

There was a quiet shock. Lysander was one of the youngest men in the company. Not even twenty-one, if I remembered. He was also a terrible cook, but no one has made a joke about it now. Firth asked the most pertinent question, “Are there more of them? The wights?”

Konstantin answered, “More than likely. We entered a different part of the underground complex. It was a barracks or refuge for important citizens. It had a slew of specters and poltergeists. We had drawn out five of them and the wight with it. Lysander was paralyzed as it stabbed him and then bit his neck, ripping out his throat.”

Konstantin handed Brutus’ sword to him that Lysander had been using. Konstantin walked into the room, “We can not become complacent. This undead city most likely has more surprises.” He placed a new elven blade on the table Scholar Favian worked at. “The wight had a runic weapon. Lysander fought well; remember him well.”

Delmar broke into Konstantin’s speech with a flat tone, “There is some more good news. We found a storeroom full of elven wine. If it is not vinegar, we will have it with our meals.” Even the promise of alcohol did not break the somber faces. There were twenty-one of us left, not including Maveith, the Scholar, and Castile.

Delmar gave Lirkin two bottles from his pack and went to join Castile. Adrian followed him but had not been part of this expedition to the underground complex. I knocked on the door shortly after it had closed. Castile’s sharp voice answered, “Enter!”

I walked in, and the three of them looked at me expectantly. I told them my thoughts, “I think everyone is being prevented from dreaming and recovering mentally when they sleep.”

Delmar responded, “Everyone is sleeping just fine, Eryk.”

Castile held up her hand to stop Delmar, “Explain, legionnaire.”

I gathered my thoughts, “I have noticed everyone is more irritable and has a short temper. I have had to calm more than a few men down. I have been using my dreamscape amulet, and Konstantin has his spell form to help him sleep. We appear to be the only two acting normal.”

Delmar harumphed and said dismissively, “Normal? We are eating a quarter of what we should be eating. Most of the men are making a new notch in their belt every day.”

Adrian finally said something, “I agree with Eryk. We have been in more dire situations before. The men seem to have given up too easily.”

Castile nodded as well, “I think Eryk is right, too. We should confirm it by having others use the amulet.” She looked me in the eye, “With your permission?”

I had known this was going to be the outcome. “I think it is necessary. Two people can enter at once; they just both need to be touching the amulet.”

Castile was nodding slowly, “Tonight then. I will use it with you here, and Adrian and Delmar can stand watch.” I left the room feeling slightly awkward, but I knew that had to be done. Maybe the men were being blocked from just getting a deep sleep, but I felt it was more. Maybe some type of slow-festering corruption.

A few hours later, I was on the floor, in front of the fire, with Castile on bedrolls. The plan was to stay in the dreamscape for six hours and see if it made a difference for Castile. Delmar was currently on watch in the outer room. “I will channel aether and enter first,” I told Castile, who nodded. Adrian was seated, watching intently as my consciousness left to enter the dreamscape.

I was in the entry room of the dungeon. Castile appeared a moment later. She turned around slowly, “The dungeon?” I nodded. “The others will figure out where you got the amulet if this is your created space.”

“I didn’t create it. It was like this the first time I entered,” I said while creating a table and tables and sitting. Castile stepped back, surprised, before relaxing.

She sat opposite of me, “How does it work?”

“I just think what I want, and it creates it,” I explained while filling the table with a Thanksgiving feast. “I know it is not going to give your body any sustenance, but it takes good.”

Castile took the mashed potatoes and cranberry relish. She tried the relish first and spit it out, “Sour!” I laughed.

“It is tart, not sour. Give it a chance,” I said, and she tried it again and nodded slowly.

“What is it?” She asked, trying the mashed potatoes, which were much more to her liking.

“Cranberries from the south,” I replied. I watched her as she ate. She tried a little of everything before stopping.

“You are right. I think the cursed souls in the city are affecting us. Because there are so many of them, they are creating an aura,” Castile moved the food around on her plate, not making eye contact.

I questioned Castile, “But you have made progress in the underground complex? The more specters you kill, the less the evil aura?”

Castile couldn’t hide a pained look, “It is much larger than we thought. There are two levels and even a sewer system underneath. Konstantin thinks it was built to hide the citizens when the Legion attacked the city. The Legion never entered the city, instead filling it with a powerful and deadly gas that seeped into the complex.”

“So you have made no progress?” I asked confused.

“We kill more than a hundred specters and poltergeists a day. We learned the undead are not tied to their body but to the city itself. It means they can all wander anywhere in the city. And now that we encountered a wight? Wights are powerful undead, and there could be wraiths, or maybe even banshees,” Castile admitted.

“Was the wraith we encountered heading to Sobral from these elven ruins?” I said, remembering that terrible night.

“It was definitely an elf in a past life, but it was more interested in Konstantin’s runic weapon. Some undead have connections to certain objects from their life…” She trailed off not talking further on it.

“Do you want to fight any monsters?” I offered with an uncomfortable smile.

We walked into the ankheg chamber but didn’t fight them. Instead, Castile practiced manifesting objects and creatures. She was able to do it, but it took much more of an effort than me. She was the second person to enter the dreamscape.

Castile offered a guess, “I know at the Mage College, only two people used them at a time. My speculation is any more would overload the amulet. The first person in the dreamscape amulet also has primary control of the environment. Even though I tried to stop you, you could make the gnolls I created disappear.”

I was happy to be learning more about how the amulet functioned. I had another question that I wanted answered. Could I get others to create books in here with their knowledge? And would those books remain after they exited the dreamscape? I smiled encouragingly at Castile, “You can create books that you have read before. Try it.” Castile arched an eyebrow at my sudden eagerness but focused, and a thick tome appeared in her hand. It was a spellbook.

She slowly opened it up, and her eyes widened as she rapidly paged through it. “It is the complete book? I read a long time ago at the Mage College. I learned shadow chains from it.” She was in disbelief, “It looks the same. Even the page where I left a drink to hold it open has the watermark.” Castile’s thoughts were spinning.

“What are you thinking?” I asked her.

“There are dozens of spell books I looked at. There were spells I couldn’t learn at the time that were too complex. I thought I would never have the opportunity, too,” Castile said excitedly as she continued paging through the book.

I created a shelf in the entry room for her, and she studied for the last few hours while I practiced fighting her manifestations of gnolls. When we exited the dreamscape, Castile moaned in pain and held her head sitting up. She rolled over and dry heaved a few times. “I should have warned you, Castile. The more things you create in there for the first time, the more it taxes your mind. How many books did you recreate?”

Castile continued to dry heave for a minute. Adrian was handing her a canteen of water. She laughed harshly, “Almost all of them, thirty, maybe thirty-one. Every spellbook I read at the Mage College.” She took the canteen and pushed Adrian back, “I am fine. Just some nausea and a headache.”

Adrian gave me a harsh look as he helped Castile stand. Castile wobbled on her feet, and it reminded me of the first time I had overextended myself in the dreamscape. “I don’t think we will find out if it protected you from the undead city’s aura,” I said while returning the amulet to my storage.

Castile regained herself, “No, it did. Even with the aftermath, I can tell. My aether core is easier to access, and my thoughts are clearer.”

Adrian looked a little skeptical, “Are you sure? You look much worse than before you used it.”

“I am sure,” Castile said firmly.

“Do we have the whole company use it then?” Delmar asked from the doorway, clearly agitated. Castile looked at me, and I nodded. “Well, I will go now, then.” Delmar moved and lay down next to me. I felt slightly uncomfortable but produced the amulet and entered the dreamscape.

The last book Castile had been reading was still here. She must have made the others disappear rather than put them on the shelf I made for her. I tried to manifest the books she had created, but none appeared. That was disappointing. The three gnolls she had created were still here. I made one of them vanish and made it reappear a minute later. So, if she left creations behind, I could control them.

I was thinking about this when I finally wondered where Delmar was. I waited a few more minutes before exiting the dreamscape.

The three of them watched me as I got off the ground. “It didn’t work,” Castile said.

“What didn’t work?” I said, confused.

“You have to be able to send your own aether into the amulet to activate it,” she clarified. I let out a chuckle, and Delmar’s face contorted into masked fury. I was chuckling that I had not lied to Benito, not Delmar’s inability to manipulate aether.

He didn’t give me a chance to explain. An irate Delmar ordered me out, “Go back to your room, Eryk.” I left the three of them as they started to discuss what we had learned.