

## Chapter 15 — High Ground

“So, don’t try to negotiate?”

“No, that’s incredibly stupid,” Raine told Cato.

“I had to ask,” Cato said mildly.

His first thought, even after all his experience with the high-rank psychopaths the System created, was to try and talk to the Bismuths. Threaten them, perhaps demonstrate that he could harm them, pressure them one by one and use the capitulation of one to convince the others. But he’d at least had enough foresight to run the idea past both the Platinums and the sisters, after they’d emerged from the dungeon, and gotten a unanimous response.

Any attempt at that sort of finesse would backfire. Giving them time would result in the offworld Bismuths wreaking havoc: taking hostages, calling in reinforcements, destroying infrastructure, or maybe even pulling in higher ranks. They couldn’t be dealt with softly, so the plan had to be straightforward as it was simple. Hit them all at once.

Three of the four, the ones living in the previously-Sydean towns, were outright murderers. They expelled the native townsfolk with extreme violence in order to have a base of operations while completing the quest — securing a Cato-scout for themselves and their wards. The fourth Bismuth was less objectionable, the miniature bird-person having simply ignored the natives to head out to the mountains, but at her rank she was not going to listen to anything a Platinum had to say.

Cato spent long hours worrying over how to balance the ruthless demands of prosecuting his crusade with satisfying his own conscience. It would be far safer in the short term to simply target everyone and everything with the most powerful weapons he had available to him, but if he did that then he wasn’t much better than the System psychopaths he hated so much. So the last Bismuth was at least owed a chance to leave of her own accord.

He had some doubt she’d actually listen to him, considering that even his most impressive warframes were low ranked by System standards, but he could try. If she didn’t he was confident he could deal with anything short of her fleeing headlong. The neural networks had been running analysis of the Bismuths through all the surveillance he had available, and he had a complete profile on them. Their habits, their methods of speech, their preferred Skill use, everything that could be determined from observation.

Even a dozen of his warframes had no chance in hell of actually doing any damage to them. He just couldn’t put out the force required to scratch anything at Bismuth rank, not unless they were careless enough to let him pull the Sneeze of Doom trick. Perhaps not even then; the Bismuths seemed to have the ability to alter their bodies fully into System-stuff. As potent as kiloton-scale blasts were, he didn’t trust they were sufficient to deal lethal force.

If he could go toe to toe with System folks, like he had with Arene, it would be a lot easier to make them listen. It was a culture that respected only individual power and the ability to apply violent consequences. Some would say that was true of every culture, but it was very literal for the System. Unfortunately, he was restricted to mere orbital weapons.

“If you gave us another year or so, we could probably hit Bismuth,” Leese said, readjusting the pack she was still wearing. “Maybe even less! Being able to fight a tier up makes it almost effortless.”

“Peak Silver from one dungeon delve,” Raine muttered. “Almost feels like I’m cheating.”

“If you’re not cheating, you’re not trying,” he told them. They’d still taken several days to clear the dungeon, which was long enough that he had started getting worried, but Onswa had assured him that the Roloch Depths dungeon was an extended affair. It was a good thing that he’d packed supplies for the sisters, calorie-dense and perfectly tailored for their metabolic and nutritional needs. Also tasty, when he’d tried it with his Sydean frame.

“Gold rank is going to be harder, even like this,” Raine said, making her spear disappear. He suppressed a startled jump and canceled a reflexive framejack, as seeing the real world behave like the digital one always disturbed him. “We’re at Peak Silver, but we still have to go off-world and find a [World Elite] to take down.”

“I have enough surveillance and mobility that locating particular targets shouldn’t be a problem,” Cato said, gesturing to himself, or rather, the large war-form he still had parked nearby. He’d fabricated a sort of saddle arrangement for the massive bioweapon, not only for Raine and Leese and the supplies, but for the smaller warframe. Upon reflection he’d decided against trying to destroy any more dungeons until he was ready to make a serious push on destroying Sydea’s instance of the System, but the small version could still get in many places the forty-ton warframe just couldn’t. “However, offworld needs some thought.”

“You’d certainly draw attention,” Raine agreed, as Cato unrolled the rope ladder attached to the saddle for them to climb up. There were some who would have objected to acting as a mount, but Cato thought it was better for the warframe to be as useful as possible. Even if he was quite comfortable in that form, he still considered it merely a temporary tool. “We need to stop by a town first, though.”

“Not a problem,” Cato assured them, pivoting about and aiming for the nearest town — one which was not solely a System town anymore. Over the past couple days he had dropped thousands of tons of buildings onto dozens of towns, in order to alleviate the strain of the inflated prices Sydeans were suffering from in addition to housing the refugees.

“What in the names of all the gods are those?” Raine asked as the town came into view. Unlike the white, blocky, and boring structures of the System towns, Cato’s supplemental housing was curved and domed, made out of a quick-assembled synthetic somewhere between wood and quartzite. He’d colored it with blues and greens swirled with cream, relying on the analysis he’d done of the cities the System had preserved as Conflict Zones. The spectral analysis of remnant paints and dyes, as well as the building materials themselves, had given him some idea of what the various cultures of Sydeans had preferred and so he’d done his best.

They did, however, stand out from the standard System design quite a bit. Some of that was due to wanting a more aesthetic design, but quite a bit was simply the required shapes for airflow and illumination. He couldn’t use either electricity or System-provided power, so everything used clever design to take advantage of light pipes and passive thermodynamics to make it livable. Photosynthetic biomatter threaded through the walls and floors fueled System-

jamming neurons to keep the buildings clear of monsters, artificially extending the safe zones just a little bit more.

“My contribution to keeping people safe,” Cato answered modestly. “You missed a lot while you were down in the dungeon.”

“Clearly,” Leese said, more amused than Raine had been. “I don’t suppose we can trade in drops there, or upgrade our equipment.”

“Sorry, it’s all System-free,” Cato told them, somewhat annoyed that he couldn’t just completely replace the System on Sydea, at least not yet. He knew that he had to exercise patience, and that he needed more time to bring overwhelming force – not to mention a foothold on other planets – but it still irked him.

“We’ll try to be quick,” Leese said, looking over the buildings with interest as Cato slowed to a halt just outside the System town. The big warframe still took up most of a street, and it was impolite to block traffic. Though there wasn’t much, small as the town was. “How long do we have before you have to go take care of the Bismuths?”

“This body doesn’t have to go anywhere,” Cato reminded them.

“Oh? I thought you would need a lot of your selves to overpower a Bismuth,” Leese clarified. “If you’re at Platinum level.”

“I won’t be using these,” Cato told them. “This won’t be a fight. The only reason to actually *fight* any of these people would be to change their minds. No, I’ll be using a far more potent weapon. Something that’s far too dangerous to have anyone else around.”

“Too dangerous to use in dungeons?” Raine asked, suddenly interested. “If we had Bismuth-level weapons...”

“Using it in a dungeon would result in no more dungeon, and no more you for that matter,” Cato said, shaking the warframe’s bulky head. “I’m not sure if there’s an equivalent Skill, but it devastates everything nearby. It’s something best watched from a distance.”

One of his other bodies was, in fact, watching from a distance, accompanied by Onswa and Arene. For obvious reasons they wanted actual proof that Cato had the ability to remove Bismuth-rank opponents, though they’d been reasonably polite about it. Their presence had been useful to evacuate a pair of towns too close to the targets for comfort, as well. Cato was trying to help the Sydeans, not make them collateral damage.

Another set was closing in on the one Bismuth that deserved a warning. Or really, it was a mutual approach, as the small birdlike being had spotted the descent pod for the warframes, and could move far more rapidly than anything on the ground. He had lobotomized Sydean frames riding along, in the hopes that the presence of a familiar race would inspire the Bismuth to talk before attacking. If not, that was what the railguns were for.

The rule of industrial automation was to decide how many machines were needed to accomplish a goal, and then make double that number. Better yet, add a zero. Accordingly there were twenty massive railgun platforms in orbit around Sydea, which was merely a half of the final goal — less for the firepower as for covering a space as enormous as a planet.

Each one was a bulky cylinder, a million tons of silica for an inertial sump wrapped around a far smaller set of machinery and the rail barrel that ran the length of the gun. In accordance with the ancient traditions of artillery, each of the railguns had a phrase inscribed somewhere in the loading chamber, from the classic *Ultima Ratio Regum* to the slogan of the long-collapsed Summer Civilization of Annitaria, *All Things In Immoderation*. Every one of the railguns was accompanied by several hundred square miles of solar panel to support the supercapacitors needed to hurl the one-ton projectiles at a full percent of light speed.

They were visible from the surface as little glints or the occasional occlusion of actual stars. He hadn't designed them to be completely stealthy, especially not by technological standards given the vast amount of heat they had to vent, but they were clad in matte ceramic to keep them from being too bright. Someone of Bismuth rank could probably still spot them, but only after thinking to look in the first place.

The barrels of the weapons tracked the Bismuth as it approached his warframes where they stood in the mountain fastness, the being's iridescent feathers glittering in the late evening sun. Cato had orbital footage of the being, of course, but seeing it through organic eyes was different, especially since his Sydean frames seemed quite entranced by the display. There had to be some System nonsense at work, since there was nothing about the display that *should* have been hypnotic to Sydean neurology, let alone human neurology running in a Sydean shell.

"Your pardon," Cato said, once the Bismuth had drawn close enough. The words took subjective minutes to the warframes, but that sort of disjoint was part of normal life for Cato. "Sydea is being closed to offworlders," he told the hovering Bismuth, uncertain of how to read its expression. The body language, matched to orbital surveillance, was not aggressive, but any subtler emotion was pure guesswork.

"What is it I see before me?" The Bismuth tilted her head, beak clicking as her eyes focused on the frame that had spoken. "I have been searching for the ultimate source of this quest, and here are mere Coppers riding on things the System itself cannot categorize."

"Yeah, I guess it's pretty obvious," Cato admitted, not seeing any point in dissembling. "I'll be happy to discuss it with you at a later date, if you give me a name and location. But not on Sydea. I'm afraid it is a rather strict deadline."

"You expect me to take direction from a *Copper*?" The Bismuth scoffed, but still refrained from attacking.

"I am not just a Copper," Cato said from all four throats. A theatrical approach, but the best way to provide instant evidence of his assertion. An odd sound came from the Bismuth, something metallic, as the iridescent feathers took on a grey sheen. A Skill activation of some sort.

"Clearly," the Bismuth said, head twitching slightly, her feathers ruffled. Cato waited, checking and double-checking the targeting on the railguns. If she was reasonable, she would recognize something was wrong and leave. If not, he'd have to ensure his targeting was extremely good. "I am Yaniss, and I may be reached through the Planetary Administrator of the world Ikent."

"Then I will be certain to reach out to you when I get to Ikent," Cato replied, almost daring to believe she'd take him at his word.

“Perhaps you will, but I wish to be certain.” The Bismuth blurred forward, and the warframes juked sideways to avoid the charge. The part of Cato not focused on avoiding the Bismuth wondered why she had decided to attack, since it made no sense, but that question was answered with another Skill invocation.

The warframes were fast, but the Sydean frames were not, unaugmented as they were, so they dropped off the warframes when Cato moved. Ironically enough, it was one of those lobotomized frames that was the Bismuth’s target, steel coils erupting from the ground to truss one of them up and hurl it back to the being. She caught it in a bizarre and impossible way as she hefted a person nearly twice her size with a weight of metal to match, and then pointed one talon at the other Sydean frame.

“I will keep one of you to ensure that you do,” she said, and then gestured with another talon. A heavy metal door rose from the ground, and the Bismuth opened it and stepped through. Cato made no move to stop her, as the spectral signature from the slice of landscape on the other side of the door didn’t match Sydea’s suns. Nor did he much care that she was kidnapping a version of himself; she would soon find that was less useful than she thought. But he did appreciate that at least one of the Bismuths had left of their own accord.

With that resolved, he pulled the metaphorical trigger on the other three. In the distant orbital structures, motors tilted each rail and aperture to track the targets with extreme precision. With targets merely the size of people at a range of over a hundred thousand miles, even the smallest fraction of a degree would result in a miss. Each facility loaded in the one-ton, precision-engineered rod and enormous superconducting switches clicked over. Capacitors discharged, accelerating the projectile toward the planet below at speeds measured in thousands of miles per second.

A kinetic impactor was not like a bomb. Unlike the Sneeze of Doom, where energy was wasted in unfused deuterium, in sounds and light and heat, almost every erg was transferred to the target. With the forces involved that still resulted in something like a conventional explosion, the sheer impact flash-vaporizing and igniting matter, and that was the reason Cato had asked for the nearby towns to be evacuated. Even if it wasn’t a bomb, a railgun impact made for a hell of a lot of collateral damage.

And an even better show.

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Arene stood next to Onswa and one of the Cato-beasts, fifty miles away from [Eschar Town], where a Tornok Clan Bismuth had killed dozens of lower ranks just to clear out a few buildings for herself. Between them, Arene and Onswa had been able to evacuate the rest, but it had been a tense and tail-twisting operation. Fifty miles seemed more than enough room to be safe from whatever Skill Cato intended to use, but he called it *minimum safe distance*, and even then only for Platinums.

At such a distance, even with her best efforts and Platinum-rank perceptions, she would have difficulty discerning much. From the small mountain she had chosen as a vantage point they could see the town itself in the distance, a small huddle of white buildings in the middle of a rocky scrub. Her tail lashed from side to side as she stared at it, wishing that Cato could hold down the Bismuths so she could get her claws around the Tornok Clan’s throat.

“Ten, nine, eight...” The Cato-beast quietly counted down beside them, clearly talking – somehow – with the other versions of himself. She knew she still hadn’t quite wrapped her head around how Cato existed, even after the explanations he’d given, but it seemed that no matter where he was, he knew everything every other version of himself did.

“Three, two...”

Arene stretched her perceptions, focusing on the town. If she couldn’t kill the Bismuth herself she could at least get the satisfaction of witnessing the execution. As the countdown finished, she herself braced to see some great clash as Cato’s weapon battered down Bismuth-level defenses.

Between one instant and another, the town ceased to exist.

A line of pale, glowing blue appeared in a fraction of an instant, drawn from the height of the heavens straight down. Arene knew fire, and that single line screamed to her that it was the hottest thing she had ever seen, something more powerful than she had ever imagined — and yet, it wasn’t Cato’s weapon. The blazing trail was merely the wake of its passage.

Where the town had once been, an expanding sphere of fire and smoke rose from the ground. A shockwave was visible in the air, forming and erasing clouds as it expanded, but long before there was any sound the ground beneath them trembled and bucked. Rock groaned and snapped, landslides beginning all along the mountain ridge. Plumes of dust appeared all throughout the scrublands, rising into the air only to be shredded from the oncoming shockwave.

“By all the gods,” Onswa swore, as they watched the destruction spread outward, smoke and dust beginning to plume upward as the blue fire faded. Arene just exhaled slowly, not having any words to describe what she was seeing. She had seen Bismuths fight before, and such power was terrifying, but it was at least the sort Arene could understand. Such beings could have destroyed [Eschar Town] just as easily, but only in person, not thrice over, on targets scattered across the world.

The sound reached them minutes later, more of an impact than an actual noise, a whipcrack followed by a deafening roar that battered at her scales. Smoke and dust still plumed up from the place where [Eschar Town] had once stood, but Arene knew that there was nothing left. Perhaps Bismuth-rank materials could have withstood the force of Cato’s weapon, but none of the cities on Sydea were anywhere close to upgrading even to Platinum-rank, let alone Bismuth.

She couldn’t help but think about how Cato could have destroyed every single city – every single *person* – on the face of Sydea, but had never come close to even hinting he would threaten them like that. The demonstration of this so-called railgun would be more than enough to bring most frontier worlds into line, whether it was demonstrated on a System town or not.

Arene was thankful that Cato had insisted on evacuating the nearby towns, as they were almost certainly in ruins after the way the earth had moved. Something which was less of a worry than before, with the not-System town additions that Cato had provided. She didn’t feel at ease in them herself, but it was better than trying to crowd people into buildings that were not made to support so many, especially the youngest.

A clean, dry, warm – or cool, depending on the town – room, with plenty of light and proper furnishings, did wonders for people’s health and outlook. It also meant that people could focus on buying food rather than paying for upkeep on System housing, though Cato claimed he could address the food supplies as well. Arene wasn’t certain. If nothing else, she didn’t like the idea of relying on Cato for everything.

“Let’s go check,” Onswa said, tearing Arene’s gaze away from the Cato-beast, and she grunted agreement as she extended [Wings of Khuroon]. While she doubted that even a Bismuth could survive such devastation, it wasn’t impossible that some defensive Skill had kept the worst of it at bay.

The two of them reached the still-roiling destruction in only moments, leaving the Cato-beast to catch up. She still found it strange and amusing that for all that Cato could do, its beasts still were slower than any Platinum over long distances. Not that it was any slouch, but without being able to fly the servants were quite limited.

At close range, she could sweep the area with her sensory Skills and found there was a still-molten crater at the center of it, but nothing living. Of course, there was no lingering essence residue, nothing to tell her what had caused the devastation. Cato had mentioned the basic principle, but even an Azoth hurling a projectile wouldn’t cause something like that.

Arene still had doubts about Cato’s campaign to destroy the System. About what would replace it, and how anything would work without it. Yet it was obvious that something *did* exist, as everything Cato did worked in ways she couldn’t understand. She still wished those things extended to bringing back her grand-niece, especially since she found Dyen to be unpleasant company. It was hard to blame him, after losing his wife, but his precise combination of bitterness and arrogance was going to get him killed.

At least *Dyen* didn’t have access to Cato’s weapon, a thought that made her shudder. She fully supported his campaign against the Tornok Clan, and would be perfectly happy to see them wiped from the System, but with a weapon like this he would turn entire planets into smoking ruins. If that was the kind of power an ordinary person had in Cato’s reality, it would cause enormous problems. Not that it was far different from what an Azoth or Alum could do, but a Copper certainly couldn’t. Cato had agreed to improve Dyen if possible, something that was still being prepared, but Arene might have to talk to Cato about it if what she was seeing was the end result.

“I’m certain the Tornok Clan is dead,” Onswa said, while she ruminated over the cracked and blasted ground that had replaced the town. “There’s some essence still dissipating, but I don’t know if there is even a *piece* of corpse left unfortunately. We could have traded in that equipment for *Bismuth* essence tokens.”

“Maybe we can ask him to tone it down some,” Arene sighed, taking in air suffused with the scent of scorched ashes. “I hate seeing towns destroyed when we have so few to begin with, but with those buildings he provided it’s less important.”

“I’m not sure how much I like relying on him for so much — though if he’s to be believed, relying on the System is the same.” Onswa glanced over at the speck of the Cato-beast making its way toward them and still some minutes away. “Either way, I admit that we’ve done well by him so far. I just worry it won’t stay that way.”

“I just can’t see what he could possibly want that he hasn’t told us,” Arene said, waving her hand at the slowly-cooling crater. “Why would he need us? Why would he need Sydea, even? He seems to be able to conjure entire cities from thin air, can just create all the soldiers he could ever want. I’m sure there are limitations we don’t understand, but I don’t think we could stop him.”

“That’s such a terrible reason to believe him,” Onswa sighed. “But he contests gods, and for people like that I suppose there’s never any other.”

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“I’ve done simulations, but I have no idea how long this will take,” the Cato-beast said. Dyen shrugged, not at all worried about any of the minutiae that seemed to concern Cato. The being had brought him back to life once, so the worst that could happen was that it would have to repeat the process. Not that he had enjoyed his first time dying.

The moment had been seared into his mind forever, of seeing the light fade from *her* eyes just as he himself fell into darkness. He knew what it was to have everything taken from him, to die, to be dead. Yet he lived still, a ghost in flesh and blood. There was little about such a life that he could praise, save for the chance to visit pain back upon those who had wronged him. Tornok Clan first, and then Cato would be punished for its own role in the death of Dyen’s wife — somehow. Dyen had no idea how that would happen, not with how powerful Cato seemed to be.

After seeing enormous containers falling from the sky with pieces of buildings within them, and the strange amorphous beasts that had slotted those pieces together, Dyen was fairly certain that Cato could do whatever it wanted. Most of what it was doing was a performance of some sort, which only made him more determined to punish the being for its role in his wife’s death.

He had no fear of the strange room in the middle of the so-called Systemless buildings that Cato had erected, though most would. The System itself was almost entirely blocked, with even his own Status being difficult to pull up and read. Rooted into the floor and ceiling of the perfectly cubic room were a number of strange, sleek organisms, thrumming with some kind of profane life. Each of them was the black of night, those that didn’t have transparent skin to reveal inscrutable processes within, some being low, table-sized platforms and others being small globes the size of his fist.

Dyen had no idea what any of it was, as he didn’t even have [Appraise] thanks to having to start all over. Even if he did, they likely would have reported nothing more than [???], as Cato’s creations were intrinsically incompatible with the System. All that mattered to him was whether Cato would give him the power he needed. The two women had claimed it was like having a Gold’s body at Copper rank, but had only been interested in the usual activities of running dungeons and killing monsters.

They didn’t seem to realize how much someone would underestimate a Copper with that kind of power. Dyen had every intention of taking advantage of that perception, because killing monsters wasn’t the only way to gain essence and rank up. People gave a reward too, and killing someone a rank or more above could, according to rumor, pay out quite handsomely indeed.



“Right, go ahead and lie down,” the Cato-beast said, this variant barely coming up to Dyen’s waist. It was hard to take something that size seriously, but of course that wasn’t Cato. It was a puppet, a piece of a greater whole, just like the strange things populating the room. Dyen eyed the narrow coffin-like bed with disfavor, but climbed in regardless. It was strangely soft and uncomfortably warm, but he found himself dozing off within a few heartbeats.

He awoke with a snap, awake and alert in an instant. Unlike the first time he’d awakened from Cato’s ministrations, he was in the same room, even in the same coffin-cot, still fully clothed. But he could feel the difference, a clarity as if muck and mud had been wiped from his mind, as if all the thousand weaknesses of the flesh had been drained from his body. He sat upright, flexing an arm and a hand, feeling incredibly powerful inside his own skin.

The degree of finesse that he had over his motions was something that he’d never have considered possible at his previous rank of Silver. He could move his arm and shoulder through exact and tiny fractions of a rotation, and hold it there without any trembling or wavering. Steady as if he were made of rock.

“Could you check your Status for me?” Cato’s voice came from the same miniature beast as before, still standing next to the cot-bed. Dyen grunted and accessed his Status with a reflexive thought. It took a moment to appear, and when it did, it wasn’t the same one he’d gone to sleep with.

Gone was the single Skill he’d gotten, gone was the essence he’d accumulated within Copper rank. He was a fresh Copper once again, but he certainly didn’t feel it. At a guess, he was stronger and faster than he had been at Silver, but it was difficult to know without actual combat.

“I don’t have any essence or Skills,” Dyen informed the Cato-beast, which sighed.

“That’s what I was afraid of. Too many changes,” Cato said while Dyen clambered out of the cot and crossed to where the Cato-provided armor was still lying on the sole piece of ordinary furniture. The spear was there too, but that wouldn’t do for what he intended. “I’ll get you a glob to pop and get your Skill.”

“I’d like weapons that are good for dueling, as well,” Dyen said, taking the opportunity to immediately get a B-tier Skill as just his due. He had no compunctions about leveraging Cato’s sentiments against the being, to get as many advantages as possible.

“Changing your build?” Cato asked, the small beast following along behind Dyen as he left the room and emerged into open air. A light rain spattered down from overcast skies, but Dyen barely felt the chill.

“My first build was meant to support my wife,” Dyen said shortly.

“Of course,” the Cato-beast said, its tone apologetic. “I have plenty of options here already.” The beast skirted past Dyen and preceded him between two of the curved stone buildings Cato had provided. The rain’s patter became a steady stream, and Dyen pulled the hood of the cloak Cato had provided up over his horns. Annoyingly, even the fabric that the creature could create was as nice as Gold-rank materials.

The beast ushered him into another building that had a door made of Cato-materials, something nobody short of Gold or Platinum could break through. Within it, rows of weapons gleamed, rack upon rack of blades and poles and metal contraptions shining under the pale light filtering

from above. Fortunately for Dyen they were labeled, as there was only so much he could tell about the weapons in question without [Appraise].

“I’d suggest a main gauche and either a saber or rapier, depending on your preferences,” the Cato-beast said, easily skipping over to the proper sections, as if it had perfect knowledge of the contents. Which it likely did. “I would suggest a crossbow as well, as range is *a/ways* king. And the high ground, if you can get it.”

Dyen had only handled the weapons in question a few times before, but that was something Skills could fix. Besides which, Cato’s equipment was nearly Gold rank by itself. Far better than anything that he could normally wield at Copper, and the sheer power would make up for his lack of Skill support at first.

He removed one each of the weapons, attaching the rapier and main gauche to his belt and clipping the crossbow and quiver to a shoulder strap. By the time he had finished equipping himself, there was a small pot with one of the blobs on it just outside the door. With a single prick of his main gauche, Dyen felt the rush of essence and accepted the Skill token from his rewards — and chose [Piercing Strike]. At B-tier, with his improved body and Cato-provided weaponry, it would make him incredibly deadly.

It was time to hunt himself some Tornok Clan scum.