

**Story begins-23**

“How do I let him talk me into these stupid things?” Omar grumbles to himself as he trudged through the snow.

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“It’s simple,” Tuck said, barely containing his excitement. “You, Trev—”

“Omar.”

“You go get us the biggest local monster you can find and pull it to the city.”

“No,” Omar had exclaimed. “I’m not wandering alone just so you can set up some stunt.”

“One, it’s not a stunt, two—” Tuck ran his hands over Omar’s metal chest and smiled at him. “When this is all over, I will let you do whatever you want to me for twenty-four hours.”

Omar’s eyes narrowed until they were two metal lines on his face. “Forty-eight.”

Tuck grinned.

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Right, two days of Tuck at his mercy. The smile strained the brastok’s servos.

He stopped at the top of the hill. In the valley was a herd of... somethings. The way they grazed the snowfield they were the equivalent of herbivores, and by their sizes—that of two family hovers stacked on top of one another—their predators had to be large too. Hopefully, he wouldn’t have to wait too—

The snap of cracking ice made them all look around. Omar into the valley, and the herbivores—icyvovores?—around them. He cast a quick scan spell, which only required passing his hand before his eyes with a few whispered words.

The icyvovores lit up in the gray of neutral mobs with the names of Ice Eaters floating over each one. Taro had commented that whoever named the creatures here had to be running out of ideas, and he was beginning to agree. Looking around, a large form in the red of an aggressive mob crept ever closer through the trees. The thing was at least five times larger than the Ice Eaters and called The Eater of Eaters. Omar groaned at the name.

“That’s got to qualify as the largest monster here.” If not by the size itself, those ice picks of teeth would do. Omar checked his mana reserves, at his level they qualified as limitless under normal circumstances. He looked through his inventory for the few mana potions he’d accumulated over the years to slot them because this did not qualify as normal under any circumstances.

“Two days,” he reminded himself. “Two days of Tuck’s massages, his nibbles, his licks, his cock.” But more than anything else, two days of his brother being utterly silent. “That is all it takes for him to talk me into a stunt like this.”

This whole plan was insane. It was the kind of thing that people did for kicks, as dares, and to see who could rack up the highest body count with the least number of players involved. Omar didn’t keep track of those kinds of stunts himself, but it was impossible to step into a tavern or bar and not hear the stories or be assaulted by the videos being shared.

Maybe he should have Uncle speak with his AI friend and get them to add spam filters to the game.

He shook his head. “Focus. This now, game settings later.” He ran down the hill, not caring about the noise he made. He needed to get within aggro range of the eater, all of them, and he had no idea what it was. Every monster had its own range, which made working out how to kill one without being aggroed fun at times.

He threw one small fireball after the other at the large Eater, hoping it would take notice before he was so close he wouldn’t be able to getaway. When the large monster turned his gaze on him and his entire vision flashed red to announce he’d been aggroed, Omar skidded to a stop, found a patch of ice under his feet, landed on his ass, cursed, got to his feet, and had trouble running back up until he remembered that the point was for him to pull the monster.

“This is not what I signed up to do,” he growled as he came to a stop and faced the monster, throwing a fireball that barely did any damage. He backed up toward the town, thinking of the worse thing he could have his brother do during his two days, at times even contemplating full chastity before dismissing it as too cruel, which lasted until the monster revealed he had a sprint boost and Omar had to scramble not to get eaten himself.

Maybe chastity wasn’t too cruel after all.

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Marc walked among the city’s guards, careful not to bump into them. There was only so much his stealth could do. Of course, normally the point was to get in the position he was in now and then do the most damage he could, not just keep on walking.

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“Marc,” Tuck said, drawing surprised looked at having used his character’s name, “You need to sneak into the city and get us mounts. You said with those we can get into the keep, right?”

“I said that classed with mounts had an exploit that let them—”

“Exactly, so we’re going to do the same and we need mounts for that.”

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He wasn’t sure if Tuck was dense, had done his research, or just didn’t care because this was a game and he wasn’t as serious as the rest of them to rescue Bobby. Yes, anyone with a mount could try the exploit, but the kind of penalties they were dealing with meant only the most agile of them even had a chance of success. He looked at his agility and figured he’d manage it. The way Tuck moved around, he might too, but Taro and Omar? Neither of them were agility based.

He counted twenty-eight players at the lead of the guards, most of them on the city wall, waiting for their group to approach, since there was no way to reach the keep without being seen from the city, not unless they could teleport, and if they could do that, they would have, which would have been reported. That was always the downside of the Lands. Communications weren’t limited to inside the game, so anything done, or not done, was transmitted to everyone involved regardless of distances. He knew a handful

of groups who forced their members to treat the Lands as real—more than he and his group—and they tended to avoid getting into fights with other groups.

He passed the guards and headed for the military stables. Unlike what Tuck had thought, it wasn't any kind of mount that could allow the exploit. They had to be military mounts. The confusion came from players who had mount classes being able to have their mounts look like anything they wanted. So it was common to see someone on a small pony doing impossible feats. What players who weren't familiar with those classes missed was that even the pony had a military build under its small stature.

He stepped into the stables, which were empty since the players had overridden the city's normal functions to have all guards ready to stop his team. Without anyone here to find him out, he could take the time to *steal* four mounts. Stealing wasn't his specialty, but early in the assassin's class, he'd had to learn how to break into places, since he didn't have any abilities to sneak into places back then. Raising his stealing skills has been part of his survival, and fortunately for him, those skills didn't get rusty within the Lands.

Stealing the mounts simply means taking care of them until the *ownership* switch to him. If there had been some stable hand watching over them, they would have noticed the change, even if they hadn't known he was there. Of course, he'd have killed them before starting on it, but that would have run the chance of someone being alerted.

"Small favors," he told the mount, a horse looking creature, like everything on Sibera, its body opaque ice and snow.

With the fourth one now owned by him, he sent the ping over the network to alert Taro it was time for him to make his entrance.

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"This is just a game," Taro reminded himself, as he walked toward the wall. "Just a game." This was insane. It wasn't a game anymore. His friend's life hung in the balance.

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"And how do you expect me to get out of the city with four mounts in tow?" Marc had asked Tuck.

"That's where Taro comes in," the monkey replied, "he is going to get the city guard to attack him."

"I'm going to do what?"

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The guards noticed him, Taro could tell by the ones pointing at him, but they weren't moving from where they were. How was he going to get them to open the gates?

"What are you waiting for, morons?" he yelled. "It's just me, come capture me so you can force me to reveal our we're going to defeat you!" Could he sound any more pathetic? When one of them raised a fucking large bow and pointed it in his direction Taro smashed the protection potion at his feet. He hadn't agreed to do this as a suicide mission.

Well, Tuck had basically drafted him, pointing out there was no one left. When

Taro pointed out Tuck could do it, the monkey had gotten the kind of grin that had made Omar step away, and had convinced Taro this was the safer of whatever other parts of the plan there was.

The woman next to the archer had him lower the bow, and they spoke, pointing at him.

“Oh, that’s how it is?” Taro yelled. “I’m not even worth being fired upon? What are you? Some kinds of goody two shoes? Just what kind of criminals are you? Come on, I can’t be scaring you.”

The argument between the archer and the woman intensified. In the middle of it, the city gate cracked open and a contingent of guard streamed through. Twenty of them, armored and armed, for poor old little him. He waved at them. So, what was he supposed to do now? Tuck hadn’t been all that clear beyond, make sure Marc could get out of the city with the mounts. There was no way he was going to fit four horses through that.

Something roared in the distance and immediately after, Omar appeared, backing toward the city and firing fireballs at something. Something big, with sharp teeth, that was running in their direction.

Taro stared. Orders sounded from the wall and arrows flew, accompanied by magic of a variety of sorts. A few arrows hit his shield, and he turned to look at the archer with the far too large bow. Taro blew him a raspberry.

The city gate burst open and guards poured through. That was a lot more than Taro expected. He thought the guards on the wall were all there was. With the numbers he saw, the monster Omar was drawing toward them wouldn’t last long.

And of course, not all the guards were going for the monsters, some of them were heading toward him. He lobbed poisons and his lightning in a bottle at them while trying to come up with something. Taro wasn’t built as a front-line fighter. Sure, death here wouldn’t be final, not even for Taro, but he didn’t know if the four of them were needed for whatever waited for them in the keep. He couldn’t—

Marc burst through guard on the back of an ice horse, with three in tow. Taro received a request to accept an ownership transfer, accepted it, and he now had a mount. He canceled his shield as Marc approached and jumped on the back of the horse highlighted as his. He followed Marc as he turned toward Omar, guard running after them.

“Have you heard from Tuck?” Marc yelled. “We’re not going to be able to stay ahead of those guards for long once they get their own mounts. And that monster isn’t going to last long against all those people.”

As they reached Omar, he grabbed the reign of a horse and climbed on it. “Head for the Keep,” he yelled.

“Tuck?”

“No idea,” the brastok replied, “but that was the plan, he’s still alive on the party screen, so at least his stupid idea hasn’t screwed everything up, yet.”

“It’s only stupid if it doesn’t work!” Marc replied.

“It’s my brother, it’s always a stupid idea. Especially if it works, because it’s just

going to encourage him to do something more reckless the next time.”

“So,” Taro began, “Just how are we going to know if his part of the plan worked?”

And then the ground shook.

“I think that’s the signal,” Omar said.

The ground shook again, and in the distance, a head became visible. A large ice head, male, bearded, with shaggy hair and a crown of darker ice, almost black.

“That’s,” Marc began and faltered.

The ground shook and bare shoulders became visible; corded muscles and bare arm raised, holding a club larger than the last transport ship Taro flew on.

“We are so dead,” Marc said. “Where the fuck did he find a Titan?”

“Wasn’t it on the maps you shared with him?” Omar asked.

The ground shook, and the bare chest was now visible. Tora licked his lips. So maybe that thing was going to kill all of them, but fuck, the designers knew how to build a good-looking guy.

“I don’t know,” Marc replied. “Those maps are decades old, it isn’t like I remember everything that’s on them. But do you have any idea the kind of armor an Ice Titan has? It’s a fucking world boss, not just a local one. We’re never going to get through it.”

The ground shook and the bare midriff was visible, chiseled six-pack an all.

“What if he’s naked?” Taro asked, eagerly waiting for the next quake to see what the giant was packing.

“What?”

The ground shook, and the underwear covered hips appeared. The disappointment almost crushed Taro. Of course, he wasn’t actually naked, this was the open world, nudity wasn’t allowed.

A leafy monkey was now visible, running on all four, something large flapping out of his mouth. Clothing? Underwear? “How does he have the titan’s underwear in his mouth if it’s still wearing them?”

The ground shook, bare thighs were visible.

“The same way you change your appearance,” Omar replied. “Character design, it’s the visualization of his armor breaker talent. My brother has spent more time making sure he can steal people’s underwear on the Lands than actually playing the game.”

“Someone tell me we have a way to record this,” Marc said. “Do you have any idea the kind of money we can make selling this battle?” he looked over his shoulder. “When the titan gets here, he’s going to aggro everything that isn’t a player.”

The ground shook as the bare feet landed and sent snow flying into a cloud that momentarily hid the naked calves.

“And the players are going to have to deal with it too to get to us,” Taro said.

“It’s going to be amazing.” Marc was grinning.

“Too bad we can’t stick around and watch,” Omar said.

Tuck said something unintelligible around the mouth full of icy looking fabric as

he jumped on the back of the last horse. He was grinning like the maniac Taro was beginning to suspect he was.

“Didn’t you listen to dad when he said not to speak with your mouth full?” Omar asked.

Tuck took the underwear out of his mouth. “That only counts when I have a cock in my mouth, talking ruins the blowjob, you know that.” With a gesture, they vanished.

The ground shook and now screams accompanied it.

“Well, if you want us to understand what you said, underwears count too.”

“I said on to part 4.” The grin was back and he hurried his horse ahead of them.

Marc caught up to him, and Taro hung behind with Omar. “I don’t think I’m going to be able to do this part.”

“You and me both,” Omar grumbled. “It’s just like my brother to forget not everyone is as crazy as he is; or has the same insane build he does.”

“He’s all agility, isn’t he?”

“Yeah, with only the minimum in the other states to let him use the traits he feels he needs.”

Taro looked over his shoulder. The titan was now fighting the city’s army. He looked ahead as they rounded the keep’s side. He saw the break in the wall Marc had told them about, and Tuck was now standing on his mount.

Taro looked through the mount’s menu, looking for the option. “Fuck, what’s it called? I forgot what Marc said.”

“It’s under the dismounts, class restricted, leaping,” Omar replied calmly.

Tuck leaped off the mount, did a somersault, and landed on the broken part with a flourish.

“Show off,” Omar grumbled.

Taro found the option, got the warning for not being the right class, and stared. “Omar, I’m going in the negatives with this modifier.” Fuck, how was he going to pull this off? “I’m going to stay out here and—”

“You have to do it, we need you inside with us. At this point, we need to trust Tuck, as scary a thought as that is.”

Marc’s leap was as effective, if more straightforward.

“Omar, I’m going to fall off the horse.”

“You won’t, that part is just a visual. Success is about landing where you want, so target the ledge and do it. I’m going to back off so I’m not crowding you.”

Swallowing hard, Taro looked at the ledge and activated the option. A targeting reticule appeared, and he had a hard time keeping it lined up on it. Even with fighting the urge to look behind him at Omar or the fighting, the reticule was all over the place. Then he stood on the saddle and he wanted to sit back down, but this part was out of his control unless he hit the cancel button. Which was fucking tempting.

He was in the air, flailing, he was off, he wasn’t going to be able to reach the ledge, fuck, what kind of damage was the landing going to—

Something grabbed his arm and yanked him in the air. “Upsy-daisy,” Tuck said,

and Taro flew in the air, to landed in the monkey's arms. "Do I get a reward for saving you?"

Taro swallowed his fear down and grinned at the hand squeezing his ass. "As soon as we find an area, we can set to adult."

"Tuck!" Marc yelled. "Omar's coming, I'm not strong enough to pull him by myself."

With a yelp, Taro was on the floor, the money at the bull's side. "So much for romance," the bat chuckled. He stood and dusted the snow off himself. There was a humph, the sound of protesting gears, and clatters of bones.

Taro failed to stop the laughter as he looked at Omar sprawled over the bone bull and leafy monkey. "Couldn't catch him in your arms like you did me?"

"As heavy as my brother is," the monkey said, "I was trying to get out of the way."

"Did you just call me fat?" Omar asked, his eyes turning red and steaming as he glared at his brother.

Tuck knocked on the brastok's arm with his knuckles, emitting a metallic knock. "It's not fat, it's mass. Metal is a lot heavier. Now get off me, or get me off, you decide."

"This is still a general area," Omar replied, standing.

"Then let's hurry inside, so we can change that," Tuck said, running through the crack and into the keep.

Omar looked at the city, the titan fighting the army. The monster he'd pulled was nowhere to be seen. Dead or run off. Taro couldn't tell.

The brastok sighed. "At least the worst of it is done."