

Chapter 84: Preparations

That day certainly wasn't coming anytime soon, though. For now, I was busy trying to keep myself from dying. I used my Qi to copy some healing patterns from the twins as well, when they used it on the other refugees, though the Divinity did a large chunk of the work, and thus my imitations didn't work nearly as well.

Knitting flesh back together was unbelievably complex, after all. That was why healing was usually within the realm of Divinity. Different types of tissue demanded different ways of manipulating the energy - essentially frequencies. And they needed to be regenerated within the right framework, with the ability to replicate themselves, and no damage...

It was difficult. Instead of trying to mimic that aspect, I copied and enhanced other bits. Namely, the stimulation of regular recovery. That was something Divinity excelled in as well, and the aspect I copied. The patterns were still complex, but I could reasonably substitute Qi.

The newly made flesh wasn't always perfect. Sometimes, there were small defects or it broke apart. But the enhanced regeneration could largely keep up. Essentially, it looked as if my wounds scabbed over more than once, with skin building and shedding.

Was it a little gross? Yes, for sure. But I was finally recovering, rather than just subsisting.

Of course, the journey still continued on, and so I cultivated, too. My mirror well advanced another step first, the jump coming to me rapidly. Apparently, killing the assassins left a pretty big imprint on the future.

Voyage took a little longer to raise, almost a week. But as I lazily drifted through the air, held aloft by Ann's floating spells, the sensation was quite similar to being underwater. It meshed well with the... slightly strange turn my voyage had taken.

The thought brought a smirk to my lips. Yes, voyage hadn't progressed the way I'd planned for it to. But then again, if a journey went entirely according to plan... that was a pretty boring journey, wasn't it?

So, I leaned into it. Leveraging my new sensation to explore deeper and deeper into the golden depths. What I found was... calm. Quiet. Beauty. Ferociousness.

It felt like those depths were a reflection of myself. And what I truly ended up finding and advancing was my impatience. That was when I began to slightly crack through the barrier.

Then, bit by bit, I crept closer. And, eventually, with a week and a half's worth of persistence, as I floated along, carried by Ann, I broke through to the second step of voyage.

With the breakthrough, I also noticed the depths becoming a bit lighter. My purity had increased. It would do so slowly now, since I could refine my Qi, and my well would produce more pure one than what was in there.

So, bit by bit, as I used it, then refilled my core, then used it again, the purity would increase. For now, it jumped from Intermediate purity to Greater purity. Which would do wonders for any abilities powered by it.

These were, however, my only breakthroughs. My Qi cycling improved by leaps and bounds, and with it my manipulation, but I had not called up the seven basic stats. I wanted to wait until I'd healed before. Watching them in the middle of training was bad, or so Rae had taught me. Even if that training was knitting my body back together.

Another week passed before we finally arrived at the next city. And, luckily, this one was still standing.

... Barely.

My vision was quite good now, with me being able to see through the eyes of the others. This meshed especially well with Marie, since her eyesight was incredible. Synced up with her, I saw the monsters.

The city walls still stood but were veritably covered by critters. Torins were tearing down from the sky, being shot down in droves by balls of fire, and cut down by warriors standing in the sky.

Shields of Mana and Divinity lit up all across the city stopping blow after blow. Seems like this city's arrays had failed as well. How wonderful.

Seeing the danger, Marie returned and reported. It was disheartening, really. By now our group was quite large, with hundreds of Edians, and two dozen total reflectors. Somehow, Marie remained in charge of it all. But with the news of the monsters, hope almost drained out of the peasant's faces.

I smiled, faintly. Fine, then. Maybe it was time to do my job then.

With a groan, I lifted myself upright. The wound on my chest was scabbed over, my clothes bloody and filthy. I sported new smaller scars all over, and a large one on my forehead that was still not fully healed.

These people all had seen me lay on my back for over two weeks now. Time to show them.

With a swift use of mirror Qi, I appeared next to Marie, jumping through a bit of reflective dew. I smacked my spear onto the ground, Letting a golden wave travel through the group. The murmurs of despair quieted.

Matt appeared on the other side of our leader, flashing me a radiant smile. Ann laid a hand on my shoulder, concerned, but I gave her a light kiss, then shook my head. With some effort, I turned back to the crowd.

“Stop cowering,” I said. I projected my voice using Qi, just to make it louder. It wasn’t like Liam’s technique which only the person he spoke to would hear, my words simply sounded out across the whole camp.

“This world is overrun with monsters, isn’t it? You all have faced this threat every day of your life. So now they’re here, in front of you, and you can’t hide behind those walls anymore, right? But the city is standing. There are people out there fighting. / will be fighting - hole in my chest and all.”

That got a few nervous chuckles.

“Your city fell because you were unlucky. Caught on the back foot. The monsters killed a lot of people. So, how about we start killing ‘em back?!”

And that got a tentative couple cheers. I took a step back again, standing next to and behind Marie. She gave me a thankful nod, then continued speaking. Hers were more practical terms, with a little bit of inspiration mixed in.

But most of the speech focused on distribution in the group. Where would the Reflectors go, where the Edians? Apparently, we were to be the tip of the spear, in a fanned out triangle formation, while the Edians would be in the middle. Hopefully, they’d be safer there.

For a few moments, I zoned out, choosing to focus on my heartbeat instead of the situation. The organ thumped loudly in my chest, and I could feel Qi bubbling forth from my wells with every heartbeat. It flowed through me, through my blood and my muscles and my tissue. Bits and pieces of it were turned malleable, connecting with one another and mending.

And the pieces that came back were more suffused with the magical substance. Tougher, by a major realm. My endurance, too, was higher now. How long could I keep fighting? And... I looked at the city with trepidation. Would it be long enough?

Then, Ann bumped her elbow into me. “You’ll be fighting, hm?” she asked with a mischievous smirk. “I wasn’t aware of that.”

I gave her a grin. “Seems like I’m full of charming and tantalizing mystery.”

She snorted in reply. “Oh yes, so charming,” she said, giving me a kiss. For a few moments she stared into my eyes, happily. Then, her smile faded, replaced by a more serious expression. “Make sure you live.”

“Always.” I nodded, holding her gaze. We would live, no matter what.

For a few more seconds, she looked at me. Eventually, her lips curled up into a smile. Ann gave me a hug and I squeezed her tightly, ignoring the small pinpricks of pain it caused in my chest. Then, she let go, giving me a strong nod. “Always.” And she was off, to wherever she would be needed.

I swept my gaze over the Edians. A ragtag band of people, some kids, some old, most in their adult years. There were hundreds. Some seemed afraid, some enraged, others again hopeful. I didn’t know what it took for them to receive the Divine Gift, but if none of them got it after participating in the battle, I would have been surprised.

They needed weapons.

This was something I could help with. Another one of the Reflectors in our group seemed to have the ability to shape wood to a degree, with a strange mix of magic, Qi, and singing. I approached them, Soren, and they looked up from their meditation.

“Can you make me some spear shafts?” I asked.

“What, you want throwing weapons?” they returned, tilting their head a bit. It made their hair bounce slightly, shoulder long and bright.

I shook my head. “No, I want to make spears for the Edians.”

They paused, regarding me once over again, scrunching up their eyebrows. “... Metal Qi?”

“That’s right,” I nodded.

“Hm. Sure. I’ll make you those, they said. Couple hundred... ah, it might take me... fifteen minutes?”

“Sounds good, thanks,” I said, receiving another nod from Soren as I walked off again. The Edians had huddled together a bit, to where they would eventually be in the formation. I

called out to them. “Anyone who wants a weapon, hand over some metal! Cooking pots, pans, belt buckles, anything from solid steel will do! Silver, too!”

Using silver wasn’t exactly optimal, as it wasn’t the strongest metal, but some monsters were weaker to it, and it was certainly better than nothing. I spent the next half hour making more weapons.

Some of the Edians carried daggers and wanted something with more reach. So, I would push my Qi into the metal, then force it to take on the shape of a speartip, firmly attaching it to the wooden shafts Soren provided.

Sometimes, when we had especially little metal, I made my partner in smithing form a wooden spearhead, then simply covered it. The weapons were of poor quality. They were sharp, sure, but not sharp enough, since I couldn’t exactly make edges that smooth with metal Qi.

Shaping it with my Qi also meant that there would not be as much hardness from tempering and quenching and whatever other things blacksmiths did. But they were still poky metal things, and Liam was handing out dozens of whetstones each minute.

... Why the heck did he carry that many whetstones?

I shook my head, quickly getting rid of that extraneous thought, instead focussing on my task again. The manipulations I performed were small, but somewhat frequent. It drained my resources, but at a slow, manageable pace. My capacity and manipulation had increased, too, so I was handling my power with greater skill than ever before.

Minute after minute ticked by. Plans were finalized, people went to their positions. I got stationed with Matt and Emilia, Ann a bit further behind. Reya was closer to the middle, there would not only be one spot needing healing today, and we were short on healers.

A warrior cleric of Ru stood a little ways to my right, and a duo of mages a little ways to my left. They would pull their weight, I hoped. Trevor was on the other side of the wedge formation, but one of us would most likely save the other when chaos broke loose. It always went that way.

With a glance, I looked over my party members where they stood. Liam was close to the front, on the other side and a bit further forward than us. We would face the horde, holding them back, the other side would have to carve the way through the monsters into the city.

The rogue was bouncing in place, staying warmed up, shadows swirling around him as he tested them. Reya was already patching up small injuries that would be troublesome in a fight, trying to remember all the Edians. Eric stood by her side, looking nervous, but still outputting just as much Divinity.

Marie was close to the middle as a leader. Her bow glowed with green magic, a spell she had most likely woven herself. Her eyes, too, glowed faintly, surveying the battlefield ahead. Emilia was to my right, steadfast and calm. Her mace slung over her shoulder, the battered shield in the other hand.

She gave me a glance. "It'll be a long day, princess. Let's stay standing at the end of it all."

I nodded, turning to look at Matt. He was characteristically silent. I saw it in his eyes already. The way his lips faintly curled up, the way his fingers held onto the grip of his sword. He breathed, deep and hard. That same manic glint was in his eyes that he always had before a fight.

He would be fine, I knew that much. Lastly, I turned to Ann behind me, and she gave an encouraging wave. Somehow, her robes seemed brighter, now. She'd probably applied temporary enchantments during our bit of prep time. Mana regeneration or something similar, if I interpreted it correctly.

I waved back, flashing her my brightest smile, then turned forward. The monsters were still coming for the city, crashing against the wall and barely being held off in a trade of blood for blood and flesh for flesh. If I focussed, I could hear their screeches.

Expanding my lungs, I drew in a deep breath of air, despite the ache it caused me, then slowly let it out.

Let's see just how much they could screech.