

164: Deluge

"And then, after the fight was over, we spent the next few days poking around the cavern and some of the lower tunnels. We didn't find any way to get further down. It looks like the hive chamber was as low as it goes. So that's it, basically."

Rain scratched at his beard as he finished speaking. He was sitting in Vanna's office, which had been the equipment storeroom originally. There was still a good bit of stuff piled in crates behind her desk, limiting the available space and making the room cramped. It was just him, Vanna, and Tarny in there at the moment, Ameliah having gone to organize an expedition to the third chasm. They wanted to retrieve the materials they'd left there before night fell and the monster population began to recover.

"What about the lair?" Tarny asked.

"Keep your voice down," Rain said, looking up at the ceiling. Vanna's office was unique in the compound in that it had a roof not of glass, but of metal sheeting, installed to stop anyone from spying on important company business with Scrying Pool. Rain tapped his fingers beside his helmet, sitting innocuously on Vanna's desk. The Facade enchantment was active, making it look like slightly-battered steel instead of what it truly was.

"Sorry," Tarny said.

Rain nodded in acknowledgment, finishing a sweep with Detection. There were people around, but none with an ear obviously pressed against a wall, so he turned to answer Tarny's

question. "The Lair is valuable, and that makes it dangerous if word gets out. Its existence is eyes-only and need-to-know."

"Okay," Tarny said, glancing at Vanna, then back to Rain. "Why tell me, then?"

"Because I trust you, Tarny, and you're my adjutant," Rain said, looking at him. "I didn't make the position official just because I liked the sound of the title. If you're going to help me be a good captain, you need to know certain things. Just like Vanna does as quartermaster."

"About that," Vanna said. "It's 'commander' now. I decided that 'quartermaster' fit better with what my brother's been doing as chair of Logistics, so I had it changed. I hope you don't mind. 'Commander' implies that I'm in command, not you, which trust me, I don't want, but I couldn't think of anything better."

Rain smiled. "It's perfect, Number One."

Ignoring the confused look this got him, he turned back to Tarny to continue. "The lair is Arcane, as I mentioned. When we checked its level, we knew that there was no way we were going in there. It's thirty-six, which is basically a death sentence. I'm sure you already know this, but Arcane lairs are infamous for not letting you out until you finish."

"I didn't know that, actually," Tarny said.

Rain shrugged, leaning back to stretch. "I didn't know either until I started asking questions." He tapped his temple. "I've got Common Knowledge: Lairs all ready to go in here. I just need to write it out. On that note, Vanna, do you have a piece of paper? I want to jot my class options down, including the unlock requirements. We're going to start building up a list of

them so everyone can benefit. We can talk about this later, but I'd like to have Ascension start offering to buy information like this from people."

"Didn't you just say that some information was dangerous?" Vanna asked, raising an eyebrow. "And now you want to write it down?"

Rain nodded. "It's a risk I'm willing to take in this case. Hells, this is basically the reason I founded Ascension to begin with. To keep the Watch happy, we'll make it known that we don't intend to publish anything outside of our organization. I'm thinking...we'll let Aspirants get info on Common and Uncommon classes, but Rares and Legendaries we'll restrict to Trusted and higher. Maybe Entrusted for legendaries. I haven't decided yet. I need to look over the updated codes before I decide where to draw the line."

Vanna nodded, opening a drawer and rummaging inside.

"Are you still planning on staying with Dynamo?" Tarny asked.

Rain nodded, glancing at him. "Dynamo is the clear winner of what I've got available, but I don't have all my skills maxed yet, so I haven't picked it. Oh, if it wasn't obvious from the lack of panic when I walked into the camp, my soul issues are..." He cleared his throat. "Without getting into detail, the patch isn't the strongest thing in the world. I need to be careful about how much mana I spend, which is why I haven't just power leveled myself."

Rain closed his mouth. He had been vague at points in his retelling, and his soul was one of those areas. Some information really was need-to-know. It rankled that he had to stay silent out of caution, but there it was.

"Here," Vanna said, handing him a pen. Rain blinked as he took it, looking down in surprise. It was heavy, made of metal, and instead of a fountain tip, it had a tiny ball set into the point, darkened with ink.

"Man, Staavo's on a roll," Rain said, grinning as he set the pen to the paper to test it out. He had to give it a little scribble to get the ink flowing, but that was par for the course.

"Mmm," Vanna said. "The old man's been busy, sure enough. Myth's not happy about those, by the way."

"Why not?" Rain asked, summoning his class options for reference, then beginning to write in earnest.

"He says they're cutting into his market," Vanna said with a shrug. "Apparently, he and Reason make Alchemical quills that don't need ink and can write on anything. Never mind that they can't make them without Arcane Crysts."

"Ah," Rain said, pausing and looking up. He remembered Meloni trying to sell him just such a quill. He smiled. "Well, we've got Arcane Crysts now." He gestured at his bulging pack, sitting between his chair and Tarny's.

The pack was ugly, smaller than the Double Gamgee, which had been deconstructed to make it. Even layered, the crudely re-stitched canvas was barely up to the task of holding so much weight. Rain nudged it with a toe, making a crunchy sound, as if it was filled with gravel. His smile widened.

"How much is in there, exactly?" Vanna asked.

Rain shrugged, looking up. "We stopped counting. It's a lot, I can tell you that. I need to talk to Smelt. Maybe Atyl, too, for Finance, now that that's a thing. We've got some sorting and counting to do, and I have to figure out how to avoid destabilizing the entire economy." He paused, checking with Detection. "Oh good, they're both out in the tavern."

"Want me to go get them?" Tarny asked.

"Please," Rain said, nodding. "See if you can find a scale for Tel, too, and some...like...bins or something. We should count in here, and sooner, rather than later." He pointed up at the metal roof. "We'll want to be under cover for this."

"Right now, though?" Vanna asked, raising a hand for Tarny to wait.

Rain nodded. "No reason to wait. We need to settle up before our crafters can start using what we brought back. We need to calculate the credit value of everything, then subtract the fee for the two blues and work out a rate for the use of the..." he paused, checking with Detection, then continued, "...accolades. I've got to talk to you about the plan for those, by the way, but one thing at a time." He tapped his helmet with the end of the pen, making a metallic ring. "Tallheart made a bunch of equipment, and he needs credit for that, accounting for the cost of the materials used. Ameliah and I need to pay him for it, and..." Rain trailed off, then smirked at Vanna. "It's gonna be a whole thing. Did you finish that book on Osaran tax law yet?"

Vanna rolled her eyes. "What do you think?"

Rain chuckled, then nodded to Tarny. Tarny nodded back and left on his mission while Rain returned his attention to the paper. He scribbled furiously, determined to finish before Tarny returned with the others. As he filled out each page, he spun it around to face Vanna, glancing up at his interface from time to time to make sure he didn't inadvertently skip anything.

Select a Class

High Worker (+)

- Common
- Primary Requirements
 - None
- Effects
 - 200% boost to non-combat skills
 - Up to 2 Specializations
- Notes
 - **Warning:** Experience may no longer be gained through combat

High Warrior

- Common
- Primary Requirements
 - Strength greater than Endurance and Focus
- Secondary Requirements
 - At least 500 kills by physical means
- Effects
 - 150% boost to the effects of Strength
 - 50% boost to the effects of Recovery
 - Up to 2 Specializations

High Mage

- Common
- Primary Requirements
 - Focus greater than Strength and Endurance
- Secondary Requirements
 - At least 500 kills by magical means
- Effects
 - 150% boost to the effects of Focus
 - 50% boost to the effects of Clarity

- Up to 2 Specializations

High Defender

- Common
- Primary Requirements
 - Endurance greater than Strength and Focus
- Secondary Requirements
 - Absorb at least 50,000 total points of damage
- Effects
 - 150% boost to the effects of Endurance
 - 50% boost to the effects of Vigor
 - Up to 2 Specializations

Remedial Jack (+)

- Uncommon
- Primary Requirements
 - Strength, Endurance, and Focus equal
 - Not a Jack
- Secondary Requirements
 - At least 5 kills by physical means
 - At least 5 kills by magical means
 - Absorb at least 500 total points of damage
- Effects
 - 40% boost to the effects of Strength, Endurance, and Focus
- Notes
 - Functions as High Jack for level-50 class evolution
 - Hidden class, revealed by meeting primary requirements

Remedial Scourge Beacon (+)

- Uncommon
- Primary Requirements
 - At least 4 skills at or above rank 5 in Offensive Auras
 - Not a Scourge Beacon
- Secondary Requirements
 - At least 50 kills with Offensive Auras
- Effects
 - Increase Offensive Auras skill cap by 3
 - 50% boost to the effects of Focus
 - Up to 3 Specializations
- Notes

- Functions as High Scourge Beacon for level-50 class evolution
- Hidden class, revealed by meeting primary requirements

Remedial Warder Beacon (+)

- **Uncommon**
- Primary Requirements
 - At least 4 skills at or above rank 5 in Defensive Auras
 - Not a Warder Beacon
- Secondary Requirements
 - Mitigate at least 1,000 total points of damage for self or allies
- Effects
 - Increase Defensive Auras skill cap by 3
 - 50% boost to the effects of Clarity
 - Up to 3 Specializations
- Notes
 - Functions as High Warder Beacon for level-50 class evolution
 - Hidden class, revealed by meeting primary requirements

Remedial Logistics Beacon (+)

- **Uncommon**
- Primary Requirements
 - At least 4 skills at or above rank 5 in Utility Auras
 - Not a Logistics Beacon
- Secondary Requirements
 - Over 500 hours of Utility Aura usage
- Effects
 - Increase Utility Auras skill cap by 3
 - 50% boost to the effects of Clarity
 - Up to 3 Specializations
- Notes
 - Functions as High Logistics Beacon for level-50 class evolution
 - Hidden class, revealed by meeting primary requirements

Remedial Meta-Beacon (+)

- **Uncommon**
- Primary Requirements
 - At least 4 skills at or above rank 5 in Aura Metamagic
 - Not a Meta-Beacon
- Secondary Requirements
 - At least 5,000 mana spent through Aura Metamagic enhancements

- Effects
 - Increase Aura Metamagic skill cap by 3
 - 30% boost to the effects of Clarity
 - 20% boost to the effects of Focus
 - Up to 3 Specializations
- Notes
 - Functions as High Meta-Beacon for level-50 class evolution
 - Hidden class, revealed by meeting primary requirements

Remedial Utility Meta-Mage (+)

- **Uncommon**
- Primary Requirements
 - At least 4 skills at or above rank 5 in Magical Utility
 - Not a Utility Meta-Mage
- Secondary Requirements
 - At least 5,000 mana spent through Magical Utility enhancements
- Effects
 - Increase Magical Utility skill cap by 3
 - 25% boost to the effects of Clarity
 - 25% boost to the effects of Focus
 - Up to 3 Specializations
- Notes
 - Functions as High Utility Meta-Mage for level-50 class evolution
 - Hidden class, revealed by meeting primary requirements

High Dynamo (+)

- **Rare**
- Primary Requirements
 - Dynamo
 - Clarity at least 5 times greater than Focus
- Secondary Requirements
 - Recover at least 50,000 total points of mana
- Effects
 - 800% boost to the effects of Clarity
 - Up to 4 Specializations
- Notes
 - **Warning:** **Rare** classes have higher experience requirements
 - Hidden class, revealed by meeting primary requirements

Legendary Dynamo (+)

- **Legendary**
- Primary Requirements
 - Dynamo
 - All stat points invested in Clarity
- Secondary Requirements
 - Recover at least 1,000,000 total points of mana
- Effects
 - Personalization
 - 1,600% boost to the effects of Clarity
 - Up to 5 Specializations
- Notes
 - **Warning:** **Legendary** classes have higher experience requirements
 - **Warning:** Future attribute points may only be invested in Clarity
 - Hidden class, revealed by meeting primary requirements

Rain carefully closed the window, then flexed his hand, which was quite cramped after all that.

Looking up from the page she was reading, Vanna snorted. "Your handwriting is atrocious."

"In my defense, I was in a rush, and I *am* wearing gauntlets." Rain smiled, holding up and wiggling his fingers to demonstrate.

"Fair enough," Vanna said, spinning the final page around to face her. A moment later, she raised an eyebrow. "There are two versions of Dynamo?"

Rain nodded. "Yeah."

"Why would anyone ever take the Rare version? It's not even half as good." She tapped her finger on the page as she looked up, adopting a sarcastic tone. "Pfft. Only eight times Clarity, not sixteen, and without the fifth specialization." She shook her head, tscking as if in disbelief.

Rain grinned. "The Clarity multipliers are nine for Rare and seventeen for Legendary, actually." He pointed. "It says 'boost', so you need to add one. My current class was like that too. It said 'boost by 200%', so it's a times three."

"Oh," said Vanna, looking back down the page. "Mine aren't like that. They're written a little differently." She snorted, taking up the pen. "And with much less ridiculous numbers." Glancing up at something Rain couldn't see, she grabbed a fresh sheet of paper and began to write. "I might as well add these before I send this over to Romer. I'll have everyone else do the same, and then Romer can recopy all the pages. I don't want Ascenion's first class compendium to look like the scratchings of a drunken chicken."

Rain snorted, ignoring the barb. "You still haven't picked, then?"

"No," Vanna said, still writing. "Nobody else has, either, as far as I know. We're hoping to unlock better options as we keep leveling skills. Winter should help quite a bit. It's been tough for us mage types without you around. Evonna's probably the closest to maxing everything out. Stupid stamina users." She sighed. "I tell you, I should have picked a physical class. I don't know what I was thinking. I was a laborer. That's what I'm good at, and mana overdraw really sucks."

"How are you doing that?" Rain asked.

"Huh? Doing what?" Vanna asked without looking up.

Rain pointed. "Writing and talking at the same time. That's illegal."

Vanna finally looked up, giving him a quizzical look. She set down the pen, finished.

Rain shook his head in amazement. "Just recently, I was working on some notes, and Ameliah interrupted me to ask if I wanted lunch. I didn't notice I'd listed 'lunch' as an elemental affinity until over a week later. Seriously, how did you *do* that?"

Vanna snorted, spinning the paper to face him. "I guess I don't know. It's never been a problem for me." She leaned back in her chair. "What's taking Tarny so long, anyway? Did he get lost?"

"They're in Engineering," Rain said distractedly as he read the page in front of him. "They've been going all over. Must be looking for the scale or something."

"Ah," Vanna said. "I was wondering why Winter kept cutting out. You're tracking them?"

"Mmm," Rain mumbled, too absorbed to properly reply.

Common Worker

A Worker's non-combat skills are 1.5 times stronger, but monster kills no longer provide experience.

Common Warrior

A Warrior's Strength is multiplied by 1.5, but to select this class, Strength must be your highest primary attribute and you must have killed at least ten monsters by physical means.

Common Mage

A Mage's Focus is multiplied by 1.5, but to select this class, Focus must be your highest primary attribute, and you must have killed at least ten monsters by magical means.

Common Defender

A Defender's Endurance is multiplied by 1.5, but to select this class, Endurance must be your highest primary attribute and you must have taken or blocked at least 1,000

damage.

Uncommon Elemental Enhancer

An Elemental Enhancer has an increased cap of 13 for Elemental Enhancement spells. Additionally, as a derivative of Mage, an Elemental Enhancer's Focus is multiplied by 1.5. This class is hidden to those without at least four Elemental Enhancement spells at rank five. To select this class, you or your allies must additionally have killed at least 50 monsters while under the influence of your spells.

Rain looked up to ask a question, but before he could, the door opened and Tarny entered. He was carrying a stool and had Atyl and Smelt in tow. Filing the question away for later, Rain stood to greet them, and after getting the pleasantries out of the way, there was a bit of logistical chaos as everyone shuffled around, trying to cram themselves into Vanna's cluttered office. Rain ended up squeezed into a corner with his heavy pack perched precariously on his lap and his helmet stashed under his chair. Vanna's desk was cleared of the papers, which Tarny grabbed to pore over from his position atop one of the crates. The tabletop was now occupied by a small bronze scale and a stack of wooden bowls for the sorting. Smelt had taken the chair where Tarny had been before, and as for Atyl, he was lucky he was so small. He was perched on a stool, squeezed between Rain and Smelt, with his back pressed against the door. To his credit, the former noble hadn't complained about getting the worst chair.

"Okay, let's get going," Atyl said. He flipped open a notebook, bracing it against his knee with one hand, then looked up at Rain's pack. "You have a sack or something in there? Just dump it out on the desk."

Rain grinned, reaching for the pack's flap. "You misunderstand. It's not that I've got a sack of Tel in my pack." He shifted, struggling with the awkward position as he tried to untie the bindings. "This is the—"

Suddenly, a voice boomed from outside the room, muffled by the door. "Say wha?!"

Heavy, determined footsteps became audible, growing louder along with the voice, immediately recognizable as Carten's. "He's back, an' he's jus' hidin' in Vanna's office!? Didn't even look fer his friends?! Oi! Rain! Come outta' there! It's time fer drinkin'!"

Without warning, the door was ripped open, revealing Carten in full armor, splattered by blood, doubtless that of monsters encountered on patrol. Jamus was there too, his orange hat visible over Carten's shoulder. That was all Rain had time to take in, as Atyl had started toppling backward, owing to the sudden removal of the door's support.

Flailing, the tiny nobleman grabbed for anything to steady himself. His hand found Rain's pack. There was a ripping sound.

The pack failed catastrophically, splitting open to unleash a veritable waterfall of Tel and Crysts. Atyl squawked, having been saved from falling by Smelt only to take the full force of the deluge. Crystals ricocheted everywhere, pelting the room's other occupants. A good number of them escaped out into the company hall as well, Carten and Jamus staggering back from the flood.

The room fell into stunned silence, save for the tinkling sound of crystals falling from people's clothes. Carten's reaction was the best of them. His face was contorted in marvelous, slack-jawed, bearded stupefaction.

"Oi..." the big man finally managed, looking down, his normally boisterous voice hushed.

There was another long, silent moment, and then Rain began to laugh.

Many hours later, well past the fall of night, Rain was sitting alone in his office. He sighed, rubbing at his neck. On the desk in front of him sat a bound copy of the codes beside a guttering candle. The flame was weak, the candle's wick badly in need of a trim.

Rain snorted, pinching it out and closing the book. *I didn't even know that you HAD to trim wicks a month ago. They make special scissors for it and everything.* He sighed, glancing at the light bulb glowing on the wall. It would be enough to prevent spawns, but it didn't provide adequate light for reading. *I need a desk lamp. Problem for tomorrow.*

Rain stood tiredly, then stretched. It had been a long, long day. They'd slogged their way out of the depths that morning, and after the Tel incident and the following accounting marathon, he'd been all over the camp, meeting members new and old. He'd had to recount his story endlessly, simultaneously trying to get back up to speed with everything he'd missed. Then, after a full afternoon, Ameliah had returned with a second load of resources. Rain had helped her bring them down to Engineering, where they'd grabbed Tallheart for supper. Thanks to Carten and Val, what was supposed to be a quick meal had turned into basically a party, lasting for hours.

Finally, when it was over, Ameliah and Tallheart had retired to their rooms. Rain, however, determined to lead by example, had elected to stand a watch instead. Only once his full shift had ended had he returned here.

To read.

He snorted, glancing at the door that led to the bedroom he shared with Ameliah.

I know she's asleep, but still, I decided to read first? I am such a nerd.

Blearily, Rain picked up his helmet, then walked over to the door, opening it softly and stepping through to close it behind him. The light in here was dim, coming from a pair of shaded bulbs set on either wall. To his surprise, the bed lay empty, the covers neat and seemingly undisturbed. He was about to use Detection, but Ameliah spoke softly before he could.

"Down here."

Rain moved forward, skirting the bed to see her laying on her side on the ground, using her rolled-up cloak as a pillow. She was still wearing her armor, but she'd removed her helmet, which was sitting beside her.

"I couldn't sleep," she said quietly, apparently sensing his presence, though she hadn't opened her eyes. "The bed was too soft."

Rain nodded, setting his helmet on the bed and moving to lay down beside her on the dirt, facing the same direction. Ameliah shifted, making room for him, and he snaked his arm beneath hers to pull her body against him. He could feel the softness and warmth of her back against his chest through his breastplate.

After a moment, Ameliah sighed and spoke. "This is weird with the armor."

Rain smiled. "Yeah." He waited for a few seconds. "Do you want me to let go?"

Ameliah shook her head slightly, then pulled his arm tighter around her. "No."