

248: Disruptions

Both Rosa and Fynn still seemed puzzled by Scarlett's sudden behaviour, watching her with evident concern as she turned to face them.

Rosa hesitated briefly before speaking. "Scarlett, mind telling us what's happening?"

Scarlett looked at her, finding that it took a moment to articulate her thoughts. "...I am fine, if that is your concern," she began. "I have just had an encounter with the remnants of an ancient Zuverian demigod, and it has left me somewhat disoriented, that is all."

Fynn nodded as if that statement made perfect sense, while Rosa's eyebrows climbed high on her forehead.

"...Excuse me, but what?"

Scarlett's attention shifted to the floating metal orb at the center of the chamber, her eyes lingering on it.

It was a strange sensation, having Thainnith's legacy within her mind. Apart from the headache she was currently experiencing, it felt like having an auxiliary repository of knowledge that she could draw on, though the information inside it was disorderly and hard to sift through consciously. Instead, the legacy seemed more inclined to volunteer pieces of information when it was relevant.

That's how it was when she was studying this orb. She knew it was designed by Thainnith to store the copy of himself that he'd left behind to pass on his legacy. She also knew that it drew power from the leylines beneath the Rising Isle, and since it had fulfilled its purpose, it was effectively inert.

Not that it was likely to have withstood whatever assault the Anomalous One performed anyway.

Scarlett had already sensed this when the Anomalous One pulled her into that strange space back in Crowcairn, but it really seemed as if the seal on the entity wasn't as intact as she'd originally believed.

What was it that Thainnith had said? Outside the confines of the realms, it was under fewer restrictions?

Unbidden, snippets of lore surfaced in her mind, informing her that the space between realms—which differed from interstitial spaces—was largely unknown and unexplored. The fragments of knowledge on it were incomplete, but it did give her a rough understanding of the concept.

She wondered if the fractured nature of some of the information was due to Thainnith's remnant not having enough time to complete his legacy. If so, perhaps she was lucky that he'd managed as much as he had.

“Hey, are we just gonna gloss over you claiming to have met a literal demigod?” Rosa asked.

“We can discuss the details later,” Scarlett responded, some of the fatigue she was feeling bleeding into her voice. “This is not the best location.”

She chose to keep the part about the legacy to herself at the moment. It would be better to share that with them at a time when they wouldn’t be as worried. There were also bits of knowledge that might be relevant to them then.

Raising her hand, she managed to gather enough of her focus to use her hydrokinesis, cleaning the blood traces from her nose and fingers. Afterward, she turned her attention back to the custodian, studying it for a few seconds.

She could tell that the clarity of the knowledge from Thainnith’s legacy varied quite a bit.

“*Thelmin beldor vaelinn sylth*,” she commanded, the words feeling foreign as they rolled off her tongue. She wasn’t even entirely certain of their full meaning, but she knew it would work nonetheless. “Relinquish the Glimpse of Eternity.”

The custodian stared at her. Then its elongated arm reached into the depths of its robes, producing a small, crystalline orb, no larger than the palm of a hand. Its surface was smooth and utterly flawless, yet within its depths was a swirl of mesmerizing colors that moved slowly, like ethereal mist.

It extended the orb towards her.

[Glimpse of Eternity (1/?)] (Unique)

{Essence captured, forever yearning for wholeness}

Scarlett briefly examined the orb, then accepted it silently. It felt surprisingly warm against her skin, and she could sense a faint vibration from within, like the heartbeat of the universe itself, resonating from within.

She stored it securely in her [Pouch of Holding].

Aside from gaining information on the Anomalous One, this was the main reason for her visit to the Veiled Library. The [Glimpse of Eternity] was a key component that powered the custodian, and in the game, one would obtain it by defeating the dungeon boss in battle. However, thanks to Thainnith’s legacy, Scarlett knew the passphrase to essentially order the custodian to hand it over willingly, making things a lot easier for her. Prior to this, she’d been trying to think of ways of getting this without causing a mess.

Her newfound knowledge also told her that, even without the [Glimpse of Eternity], the custodian should still be able to continue operating. It had been accumulating mana over centuries of seclusion in these chambers, and it had basically been a giant battery to begin with.

That said, the custodian’s capabilities would probably be reduced because of this. Maybe it would struggle to fend off intruders as effectively as before, but it should still be able to manage its other duties.

Scarlett was satisfied as long as she had what she wanted. The artifact wasn't of immediate use to her, but when she had collected all of its pieces, it would be.

Footsteps echoed from the entrance of the chamber, and Scarlett looked there to find Allyssa, Shin, and Yamina entering. The trio paused, surveying the place with some confusion, though Yamina mostly just seemed intrigued by all the runes adorning the walls and the assortment of magical devices scattered throughout the space.

"What is this place?" Allyssa asked as they approached.

Beside Scarlett, Rosa briefly glanced over at her. Then the concerned expression on the bard's face disappeared only to be replaced by her usual carefree demeanour.

"Well, it's the Veiled Library's hidden area's forbidden section's secret chamber, of course," Rosa said. "I thought that much would be obvious? Scarlett found it."

That earned her a slightly peeved look from Allyssa.

Yamina, peering over her gold-rimmed glasses, turned her focus to Scarlett. "So, this was place concealed, and you uncovered it? Can I ask how? From just a glance, it appears several of the arrays in this chamber are intended to hide its presence, and they seem quite potent."

"The chamber was concealed behind a section dedicated to Thainnith," Scarlett explained. "It was empty of texts, however, and when I interacted with it, this laboratory was revealed. From what I can tell, this belonged to the Zuverian diviniarch Thainnith, and its purpose was likely to be discovered eventually."

Wrinkles formed on Yamina's brow as her gaze shifted to the metal orb at the center of the chamber, examining it. "And that is...?"

"I do not know."

The woman's eyes remained on the orb for several seconds, then she looked back at Scarlett. "I see."

Having said that, she wandered over to a long stone table near the wall, scrutinising the various arcane implements spread out on it.

Scarlett observed her for a moment, then decided it was best to let the wizard satisfy her curiosity before initiating any serious discussions. Instead, she turned back to the others.

"I have obtained what I primarily came for," she said. "But we still have time before we need to depart, and there are no imminent threats, so you may all feel free to explore the library as you wish. I do advise caution in the forbidden sections and suggest using the custodian for guidance, however, as some texts here could indeed be dangerous."

From what she could tell, Thainnith's legacy hadn't provided any detailed catalogue, but Scarlett did get a strong sense that there were things here better left alone.

Both Allyssa and Shin seemed excited by the prospect of getting to explore more of the library, though they quickly tempered some of that enthusiasm.

“Are you sure that’s fine?” Allyssa asked, the blond-haired girl now eyeing Scarlett more closely. “You don’t look too well.”

“I am fine,” Scarlett assured her.

Both Allyssa and Shin exchanged a glance.

“I’ll stay with her,” Fynn said.

Rosa flicked a lock of curly hair over her shoulder nonchalantly. “Me too. Just in case she gets lonely.”

Scarlett gave them both a mild frown. Out of the corner of her eye, she even spotted Yamina pausing at the end of the chamber, glancing their way as well.

Did they really think she looked that tired? She was pretty sure she could go on for a few more hours at least, though.

Suppressing a sigh, she merely offered a slight shake of her head, though she immediately regretted the motion as it worsened the headache a bit. “Very well, but Allyssa and Shin should both take this opportunity to explore what interests you here. I cannot guarantee that we will have such free access to the library’s contents again.”

The two of them stared at her with slightly widened eyes.

“...What?” she asked.

Allyssa blinked, a slight blush appearing on her cheeks as she punched Shin on his armored arm. “Stop staring. So what if she used our first names for the first time in Ittar-knows-how long? You’re embarrassing us.”

The young man gave her a flat look.

Allyssa cleared her throat, a hint of a smile tugging at the corners of her mouth as she turned away. “Rosa, I’m counting that you and Fynn will keep an eye on things here.”

With that, the girl tugged on Shin’s arm, leading him out of the chamber and leaving Scarlett watching them go with slightly narrowed eyes.

“Not sure if I should feel proud or sad,” Rosa mused to the side. “I kinda liked being the only one you addressed so casually. At least on occasion.”

“She’s always called me casually,” Fynn said.

“That’s because you basically go by one name. Unless we’re including that ‘Grehal-something’ — but let’s face it, that’s just too much.”

“My real name is Fyntrarth, though.”

Rosa went quiet for a moment, then shrugged. “...Still doesn’t count.”

Scarlett, who had been listening with a small frown, shifted her thoughts away from the matter and looked towards Yamina. “While you are here, we will be searching more of the library. Though I trust your judgement, be heedful of the time. Remember that we must leave before dawn.”

“I will find you later, then,” the robed woman nodded in their direction, her attention returning to some runes etched into the wall. “Do be careful not to get lost.”

Leaving the laboratory, Scarlett, Rosa, and Fynn paused in front of the first aisle. She assumed Allyssa and Shin would make their way back to the first chamber, since that was the most convenient place to find specific books in this place.

“Are you sure you shouldn’t rest for a bit?” Rosa asked quietly.

Scarlett glanced back at her. “If you wish to explore in my stead, feel free.”

The woman looked at her, then flashed a confident smile as she tugged at a non-existent collar. “Alrighty then. What am I looking for?”

Having to avoid shaking her head because of the headache, Scarlett simply turned away instead. “I was not being serious. I will manage, so you can cease with the questions.”

Despite feeling worn and not minding a good night’s sleep right about now, looking through the Veiled Library without restrictions wasn’t a chance she could pass up on. Although its vast collection of knowledge probably held less value to her than most others, and her time was limited, this was an opportunity to look up and confirm some information she remembered from the game.

To start with, there were still things she wanted to check here in the forbidden section.

She directed her attention to the custodian, who had followed them out of Thainnith’s laboratory as if awaiting her instructions. “Let us begin, shall we?”

She had it guide her to sections relevant to her interests. This included Beld Thylelion, the Tribute of Dominion, the Forgotten Tower, the Rising Isle itself, and other significant locations within the empire.

Previously, without Yamina or another expert fluent in Zuverian, she would probably have had a hard time understanding any of the texts here. Now, thanks to the legacy residing in her head, the script became increasingly comprehensible over time. This included even some runes and other arcane symbols that had been like Greek to her before.

It wasn’t quite to the level where she could magically understand how to use and arrange runes to create enchantments and complex arrays—at least from what she could tell—but it was still very surprising, not to mention surreal. It was the kind of hack that any college student would have killed to get.

While in the forbidden section, she took meticulous notes of what she found, making ample use of Rosa and Fynn's presence for that. The type of information contained in this section seemed to primarily concern potent—or dangerous—spells and arrays, secrets concerning the constructions and hiding of treasures, and things like that. There wasn't too much detailed knowledge on the subjects themselves, yet it was still probably invaluable.

After some time, Yamina joined up with them briefly after having concluded her own investigations of the hidden laboratory, but the woman soon ventured off on her own again. Eventually, Scarlett and the others left the forbidden section and returned to the first chamber to peruse the more general volumes along with Allyssa and Shin, leaving the custodian behind.

Scarlett found that, with a bit of practice, she could manage to coax whatever book-conjuring mechanism controlled the Veiled Library's initial chamber to yield some of the texts she sought. The process wasn't precise, and sometimes the library's choices baffled her—she certainly had no use for treatises on social interactions written by wizards with personalities even worse than her own—but it was effective enough.

There did turn out to be a limit to the number of copies the library would provide, a fact Shin had apparently found out to Allyssa's amusement when he attempted to amass a stack of historical tomes and triggered the disappearance of the first book he acquired. From the look of things, no more than five copies were allowed.

This restriction did force Scarlett to prioritise her own selections somewhat, and to take even more extensive notes than she already had. Fortunately, her current mastery of pyrokinesis made it pretty easy for her to write, and she had enough helpers where most of the interesting stuff could be recorded.

The one annoying thing was that, as the hours passed and she pored over more and more text, her headache intensified, making it increasingly difficult to concentrate at times. She made sure to maintain a composed exterior, though, not exactly feeling inclined to have the others fuss over her every move.

She *was* slightly worried that the headache was a sign that something had gone wrong with the legacy Thainnith had left her, but she wasn't going to jump to any conclusions. It seemed far more likely to her that she was simply overexerting herself, and she doubted the man would have attempted anything that could seriously put her life at risk.

Still, she might need to tell Gaspar that she was ill or something the following day to rest and recover.

As the time to depart approached, Yamina met up with them again, her arms now laden with several tomes and scrolls reminiscent of the first time they met.

Scarlett raised a brow at the sight.

"Something tells me those aren't props this time," Rosa remarked, eyeing the items.

"In a manner of speaking, they still are. Simply more tangible ones." The wizard soon stashed them within her robes, where Scarlett assumed she had some sort of spatial enchantment

placed. “It’s a habit of mine, you could say. I always feel that repositories like this call for a certain presentation.”

Scarlett wondered if the woman was actually planning on snatching those items from the library. Even she herself hadn’t gone that far. Beyond not wanting to provoke the Rising Isle more than necessary, it felt somewhat irreverent.

Although she supposed Yamina would have unrestricted access to this place and could return the items at her convenience.

As they gathered in the center of the underground chamber, Scarlett approached the statue in the corner clutching a quill in its hand. She retrieved the book she had previously given it, which triggered the closing of the entrance to the library’s deeper sections. After placing the book back on one of the veiled shelves, she rejoined the group.

[Quest completed: Visit the Veiled Library]
{Skill points awarded: 9}

A quest competition message appeared before her, which Scarlett promptly dismissed. That much she’d already been expecting. The only thing that she noted was the lack of any mention of her encounter with Thainnith.

“I will return you to your accommodations first,” Yamina said, and Scarlett turned her focus to the woman. “Rest assured, no one will know we were here. Baroness Hartford, should you choose to share the secrets of this library with the council in exchange for something in the future, I would like if you could consult with me first so I can make the proper preparations. It would be best if our visit tonight remained a secret for now, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Of course,” Scarlett replied. She then regarded Yamina for a moment. “...May I ask, though, why you chose to come with us tonight? Surely the council would have granted you access eventually if I informed them of this location.”

Yamina paused and tilted her head, a strand of her dark purple hair falling across her face. “You’re right. I hadn’t considered that.”

Scarlett eyed her skeptically.

A slight smile formed on the woman’s lips. “Sorry, that was an attempt at humour. Though it’s true that I would have gained entry eventually, the Isle tends to be overly cautious with access to sensitive areas such as this, and official permissions can be slow. I found this approach more expedient.”

“Is there something specific you needed to learn quickly?” Scarlett asked.

“Perhaps,” Yamina replied cryptically.

The two of them observed each other.

Scarlett wasn't entirely sure what the wizard came here for, other than that it was related to the Tribute of Dominion. The information Scarlett herself had uncovered on the topic here hadn't clarified things either, nor was it clear if Yamina had found what she sought.

What reasons could she have to be in a rush? Even if she was looking into Beld Thylelion and all of that, the place wasn't opening *that* soon as far as Scarlett knew.

There was also the matter of the Orrery's reaction to the woman. Scarlett still wasn't certain whether that was a cause for concern or not. However, since it was Yamina who had facilitated her visit here today, and she'd been pretty helpful and cooperative in general, Scarlett would give her the benefit of the doubt for now.

"Prepare yourselves," Yamina instructed as she brought out the circular artifact she'd used to transport them here earlier, positioning it on the ground before them.

Just as she was about to activate it, Scarlett felt a vibration on her wrist.

"Hold for a moment," she interrupted, glancing down at the Orrery.

Yamina paused her casting, and the others turned towards Scarlett with curious looks.

Scarlett raised her arm to get a closer look at the Orrery, and then she froze. Her eyes locked onto the metallic globe at its center, which had begun to stir. The copper bands encircling the globe were now slowly starting to rotate.

"...What is that artifact?" Yamina's voice sounded out in front of her, but Scarlett's gaze remained intensely focused on the Orrery as it grew more and more active. In the back of her mind, she recalled Thainnith's words.

'The Orrery is intimately linked to fate's fabric, and while it cannot alter it, the device will alert you if there are any significant deviations or monumental events that defy the expected course.'

It was clear that something was happening right — something that deviated from the predicted path of fate.

Something big.