

1

Ain't no Sunshine When She's Gone

When: About a half an hour after being dumped

Where: A farm out the outskirts of the village

Lysanias sighed again and looked out over the pen holding the horses he had so recently been compared to. He had been led here so they could be used as an example, and had been leaning against the fence feeling miserable since then. The cause of his feeling was the annunaki girl Yttrius he had been traveling with. She had unabashedly told him, to his face, that her people considered people like him in the way he might consider a horse. Handy to have around, loveable, but not something to have a long term relationship with. She then turned and without so much as a “I’ll miss you terribly” went with her father to begin their journey back to their home deep under the earth.

And you would think, saving the entire town or possibly the entire world from that insane member of her own species would rate something. A kiss on the cheek at the very least. Not that I would really get much out of one with this stupid beard in the way. Anyone else would have been, ‘oh, Lysanias, you were so brave running off like that to stop the giant metal monstrosity’s mayhem and murdering. Oh no this flimsy cloth covering my body has somehow torn away! What shall we do about that?’ He looked around guiltily as if someone could be eavesdropping on his thoughts. *Get control of yourself. One no one would talk like that and two, you’re thousands of years old. Not fourteen anymore. Even if you went to sleep fourteen that was-* He suddenly stood up straight. *When is my birthday, anyway? Do they even use the same calendar?*

He shook his head. It didn’t matter. Nothing mattered. In defending the town from the war machine from a forgotten time his only keepsake from *his* own time had been destroyed. The sword his parents had, admittedly, stolen to at least provide him with something when he awoke was a twisted ruin. Sacrificed to contain and return the energy of darkness that annunaki had thrown at him, it had saved his life but now held no trace of supernatural ability he could detect. On top of that he had promised to help said war machine find a smaller body to inhabit

so it didn't have to be a war machine anymore. His own body had not weathered the years well, leaving him gaunt and easily winded, not to mention clumsy because he wasn't used to his huge hands or long legs yet. The girl he really liked had left him, the wizard in town had no love for him, and now that the crisis was over the two he had been traveling with, Don Fortress the dwarf and Everest the gnome would probably leave and go back to their own lives.

I think I could get by, selling wards or making things the blacksmith would find hard to make. Or even just turning things they do make into whatever metal the sword... what used to be the sword... is made of. But they were the ones to pull me out of that cave where my parents stuck me before the flood wiped everyone out. I think they're my friends, but I don't want to impose on them. Wait a second...

He looked around again, and it seemed the mayor and several people with weapons were approaching.

Oh, some kind of ceremony to thank me for saving their town? That would be nice.

"Ah, there you are," said the mayor crisply. "You're under arrest."

Lysanias stared blankly at the man. He was a bit shorter, much pudgier, and better dressed than Lysanias was. His hair was styled, not just somewhat shortened by someone who had never done something like that before. He obviously knew how to shave, something Lysanias didn't because when he had asked Don it had deeply offended the dwarf. With a somewhat round face and in his mid-forties Lysanias wondered how one became 'mayor' anyway. You certainly didn't have to be in shape for it.

"I'm what?" he asked, looking up to see what he was under. He could, of course, understand all languages due to his heritage of being born before there was such a thing as language, and spoke, if anything, the angelic tongue called Enochian. This did not mean he understood the nuance of what someone was trying to convey, for example talking to Yttrius had been trying at the best of times. She kept using words he had no concept of, like "teleportation nexus" *and what was that thing she mentioned when arguing against the invasion of the surface? Binary Load Lifters? I never did ask what those were.*

"Under arrest," the mayor repeated. "Specifically, for inciting panic in the villagers."

“Inciting panic?”

“That’s correct. If you’ll just come with me?”

“Where are we going?”

“You’re under arrest, where do you think you’re going?” He asked this as though someone had just asked him “why is there air?”

“I don’t know, you’re not making much sense.”

“I’m not sure how much more clear I can be. You’re under arrest, that’s the end of it.”

“You keep saying that but you aren’t explaining anything! Do you know what a binary load lifter is?”

“No.”

“Well no matter how many times I say those words, will you understand it any better?”

“Come now, you can’t be that stupid.”

“I just got here! You have no idea what I’ve been through! I have no idea what being ‘under’ arrest means. I’m not under anything!” He pointed up.

One of the men snickered but the mayor’s look cut him off. “You don’t know what it means?”

“No, I don’t.”

“I see.” The mayor regarded him. Lysanias wasn’t trying to run away, he was just standing there. The mayor saw no magical circles, these being indicators of spellwork, or any other indication of power that could be used to get away from the city guard. He didn’t seem to be stalling, in fact seemed genuinely upset about something. His eyes were red and puffy like he had been crying, and by all reports he had just been standing here, looking at horses of all things, for the past half hour. “Say I believe you,” the mayor hedged. “Perhaps you could come with me and I can explain it to you. Standing around here isn’t exactly the best place.”

“Very well, I don’t suppose I have anything better to do.” *I can’t train in the sword anymore, that’s for sure.*

“Fine, fine. Just come this way then.” The men with weapons surrounded him but didn’t say anything, and he followed the mayor back into town. They did not go to his office, as he expected, but to a sturdy looking building made of brick. It was rather stark inside, and gloomy as there were no windows as such. There were small slits, but they were covered by bars. “Right, have a seat in there,” he said, pointing to a section of the place. Lysanias looked around. There were some people

already here, in what looked like cages, and the mayor was pointing at an empty one. It was empty apart from a wooden bench, some cots, and a cabinet that had a pitcher and a bowl on top of it.

“Okay.” Lysanias did as instructed, expecting the man to join him. He did not, simply slammed the gate to the room shut and the man next to him inserted a key and turned the lock. The man then nodded and both turned to go.

He got a few steps before Lysanias shouted “Hey, I thought you were going to explain!”

He stopped and said over his shoulder. “I think if you sit there a few minutes the explanation will come to you.” He turned away again. “Come on, let’s go get the dwarf and the other one.”

“Wait, what?” Lysanias sprang up from the bench and rattled the gate, but it was locked. “Hey, am I being locked in here?”

“Quiet down!” shouted a man at a desk some distance away.

“But I don’t understand what’s going on!” he pleaded.

“I don’t think getting hit by my ‘clue bat’ here is going to help you any,” he guffawed, holding up a stout cudgel. “But it’s what’ll happen if you don’t shut up.”

Lysanias was bewildered, and staggered back to the bench where he heavily sat down. He looked over at the other cages, each holding one or two people in various states of sobriety and dress. Less women, if that meant anything, but all were leering at him.

“You just walked right in there!” exclaimed one in the cage right next to him. “How stupid are you?”

“I don’t understand what I’m doing here,” he explained.

“Yeah, neither do I! Hey warden, why don’t you let me out?”

“Shut up, all of you!” He brought the cudgel up again.

“Don’t hit me with that, I don’t know where it’s been!” The others in the place laughed and one made a rude looking gesture.

“Is that so?” said the man, getting up. “Want to know where it’s going to be?”

“Hey, now, I didn’t mean anything by it!” The man backed off a little.

“Should have thought of that before you mouthed off!” He brought up a thick ring of keys and tried several before the door to the cage sprang open.

“Honestly, warden, I was just joking around, you know, with the new guy! There’s no need for this!”

“Oh, but I think there is. He looks like a troublemaker, and you know it’s best to make an example straight off so they don’t get any ideas. You just got picked.”

“But if he’s the troublemaker why I am-”

The man didn’t get to finish his sentence as the guard roughly knocked him in the head with the stick, knocking him over. He then kicked the man a few times for good measure and stalked out of the cell again, smiling. He looked over at Lysanias, who was staring, horrified, at this treatment.

“You want the same?” he growled.

His options flashed before his eyes. The man was big, and it seemed far stronger than he was. Lysanias didn’t know how to fight, not really, and only then with a sword. He had his wards still, the mayor didn’t seem to know what the dispenser at his belt contained, could he bring one to use before the man could knock him unconscious too? He didn’t think so. “No,” he said, lowering his eyes.

“That’s better,” said the man, going back to sit down. “You just stay like that and we’ll have no problems at all.” He went back to some kind of metal puzzle made of two interlocking rings he was trying to get apart.

The place was quiet now, and Lysanias looked over at the man sprawled out on the floor of his cage. The brutality of it had shaken him, and he felt sick and light headed.

What is going on? Why have I been left here? Can that man just club another and none will go to his defense? Why are these other people even here? None of this makes any sense.

He looked over at the other cage, the man hadn’t stirred. He was clearly bleeding from the wound left by the attack, but these cages weren’t all that large. Lysanias went to the edge of his and tried to reach the man.

“Hey, what are you doing now?”

“I just want to make sure he’s still alive,” Lysanias softly called back, not wanting to provoke the warden further.

“Ah, he’ll be fine,” he scoffed, but gave the matter no more attention.

This let Lysanias touch the man and will his flesh back together. The bleeding slowly stopped as the wound vanished, and Lysanias breathed a sigh of relief. The man wouldn’t die while he was around at least. A moment later the man got up, touching his head.

“What happened?” he asked, confused.

“He hit you and you passed out.”

“Who did?”

“That guy.” He pointed to the warden.

“He did? Why? And for that matter who are you?”

“I’m Lysanias. He hit you because... I don’t even know, but he seemed to enjoy it.”

“Don’t recall that at all. I don’t doubt it though.” He went and sat down without introducing himself.

“You’re welcome,” Lysanias said crossly, somewhat miffed at all these instances where people should be thanking him but not doing so.

“For what?”

“Oh, never mind.”

“Quiet down!” the warden roared again.

Lysanias sat in silence and looked over his new surroundings. He still didn’t know what was going on, but it seemed the mayor was going to keep him there. He hadn’t really done anything to deserve such treatment, had he? And where were Don and Everest? Would they come looking for him? Could they explain things to the mayor so he could be released? He didn’t know how long he had sat there but suddenly there was another commotion by the door, and the prisoners all looked up again. Don and Everest were being led in, and looking none too happy about the situation.

Lysanias ran to the door of the cage, thinking he was finally to be let out, but the warden stuck his stick through and snarled “back, dog!” to him. He backed away and both were roughly shoved into the cage with him, which was locked again.

Oh no! Don’t tell me-

“So, got you too, eh lad?” Don asked, standing up again. He helped Everest up.

“What do you mean, got me? Don, what’s going on? I thought you were here to come get me! The mayor said I was ‘under arrest’ but wouldn’t explain and then they put me into this cage and that guy was almost murdered and I was afraid you would never come and-”

“Slow down,” scolded Everest. “We’ll figure this out, don’t worry.”

“Figure what out?” he wailed. “What’s going on!?”

“Near as I can figure,” Don answered, dropping into the bench,

“the mayor doesn’t like us very much at the moment.”

“What?”

“Were you arrested for ‘inciting the townspeople’ or something similar?” Everest asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe? He said something odd, it could have been that.”

“That’s what he got us for. Near as I can figure we embarrassed the man a bit and this is his retaliation.”

Lysanias spread his hands helplessly.

He sat next to Don and looked up at Lysanias. “Take it from his perspective. We show up and start raving about some kind of threat to the town. He didn’t take us seriously, says the thing the annunaki are digging up is a rock. We make trouble at the doctor’s office and rile up the town wizard. Finally our warning is proven correct when the rock turns into your friend out there. So he starts evacuating the town. Then we go out there and convince the thing to not flatten the village and now he has to get everybody back and tell them it was a false alarm. So his credibility takes another hit.”

“So he takes his frustrations out on us,” Don finished. “Locking us up in here is a good start.”

“He can do that?”

“Here we are, lad.”

He looked over at Everest. “His title is mayor, but he’s more like a lord,” he explained. “He commands any military forces in town, so he has the power. In theory he would have to justify locking anyone up to his superiors, but how often do they ask? They’ve got their own concerns to worry about.”

“So we’re stuck here?”

“For the moment. What about your girlfriend? Did she get away?”

“Oh, the girl that sees me as a horse? Yeah, she’s been gone for a while, I doubt the mayor will send his forces after a hundred annunaki just to get her back.”

“Wait lad, did you say a horse?”

Lysanias explained what she had said to him.

“That’s harsh,” Everest commiserated.

“Sorry Lysanias,” Don agreed. “That was going a bit too far. But cheer up, there’s other fish in the sea!”

“But we’re nowhere near the sea!” he protested. “And what do

fish have to do with my feeling worthless because the girl I thought liked me actually saw me as a pack animal the whole time I knew her?"

"It's just a saying."

"Oh."

"Let me put it another way; There's other horses on the farm!"

Everest glared at him. "Too soon, Don. Too soon."

But Don wasn't listening because he was chortling away to himself. "Other horses. Heheheh."

He sighed and turned back to Lysanias. "She was a fool to let you get away. I mean look at that beard, right Don?"

"That's right!" He stroked his own. "A beard like that doesn't come often on a man with as much greatness in him as our Lysanias. You rushed out there against something that could have crushed you flat. And you held off that darkness wielding annunaki long enough for the real hero," he put his thumbs against his chest, "to arrive and save the day. Not many would have done that. If she can't see who you are just from that, well, she's chasing a dream!"

Lysanias couldn't help but feel a little better, the two were smiling at him and did seem genuinely concerned about him. "Thanks guys."

"Now," he lowered his voice and the others leaned in to hear him. "I say we blow this wall here to pieces with magic and leave this dump of a town behind!"

"Or," cautioned Everest, "we could not get the town guard after us, avoid having wanted posters put up in every nearby settlement, and just see how this plays out."

"I hate it when you talk sense. Oh sit down lad, we're gonna be in here a while."

"You really think so?" he asked, sitting next to the dwarf.

He shrugged. "We all have means of escaping at any time, right? Even if we got put in separate cells, it's no big deal. Everest is right, let's see what the mayor has planned for us and go from there. Maybe he's planning some kind of celebration in our honor and wants us out of the way while they prepare the parade."

"Could that really be it?" he asked excitedly. *What's a parade?*

There was a pause. "Er, no, not really."

"We need the rest after the day we've had anyway," reasoned Everest. "We needed a place to spend the night and this is cheaper, if not nicer, than an inn. We'll see what the morning brings and make some plans then."

After a moment of sitting there Lysanias spoke up again. “The warden there knocked that guy unconscious before you came in.” He pointed to the man he had healed. “He was close enough that I could heal him but he claimed not to remember it happening.”

“You did say something about someone almost being murdered. That’s the one, eh?” asked Don. The all turned to look at the man, who stared back at them.

“It’s no surprise about his attitude though,” Everest said with a nod. “Humans tend towards short term memory loss after a sudden blow to the cranium.”

The others looked over at him. Don rolled his eyes. “I think he’s trying to say if you get knocked in the head, you tend not to remember why,” he translated.

“Whatever, shouldn’t we report it or something?”

“To who? Besides, you healed him so we have no evidence. Believe me, I’m sure that sort of thing is common in here.”

“What? But that’s... How does the Allfather... How does anyone...”

Everest held up a hand. “I know. You keep seeing them at their worst today, I guess. Not that I make apologies for humans, of course, but your race doesn’t have the cleanest history to begin with. At least my ancestors had the excuse of being *actual* demons.”

“I guess.” *The Allfather wiped us out for reasons I can’t imagine, but this sort of thing goes on and He just allows it? How bad were we to deserve what happened to us?*

And silence descended once again.

With nothing else to do, Lysanias took the time to sit and think about a long range weapon he could learn to use. *A bow would be nice, but maintaining arrows is probably a pain. But you know what would work just as well? Stone darts. I already know how to move stone around and you can find it anywhere. Heck, I could make stone darts tipped with the sword metal. I only need a bit of stone to move them with the ability I learned from Everest. And I already know they can go pretty far and be very accurate; I watched Everest hit Yttrius in the head from down a hallway. I wouldn’t have to learn anything new. I would need practice to be that accurate, but it’s a useful skill by itself, so why not? I could “unroll” them and put ink in the middle, turning them into wards, and*

I can easily make other things into rock if I didn't have any handy. That sounds perfect.

The night passed uneventfully, and just as the sun was rising a tremendous crashing was heard outside the town and sirens blaring startled everyone in the town out of their beds.

2

Don't Know when I'll be Back Again

When: Sunrise the next morning

Where: Jail Cell

“Attention people of this town!” The magnified voice of the war machine sitting just on the outskirts rattled widows and scared small children into crying. Some grown men as well. “The human Lysanias has promised to aid me but did not return. Send a representative to explain this treachery. Or else I will consider this town hostile to me and respond accordingly. You have one hour. This message will repeat at ten minute intervals until that time.” The siren resumed for a few seconds and then went silent again.

“Do you hear something, lad?” Don sleepily asked, one eye open.

“I think the mayor is going to be a bit angrier with us today than he was yesterday,” Lysanias reasoned.

Soon enough, only half dressed, the mayor dashed into the prison and demanded that the three be released.

“It’s about time,” Lysanias told him, getting up from the cot.

“Not so fast, lad,” Don cautioned him. “I think this would be a good time for a lesson in economics.”

“In what?”

“Are you mad?” the mayor screamed. “That thing out there is shouting gibberish at us! Go and see what it wants!”

“We would, of course,” Don agreed. “But we’re in here, and not out there.”

“That’s why I’m letting you out. Where are those keys?”

“Before we go anywhere, we would like certain, what’s the word? Assurances. Yes, certain assurances.”

“What?”

“Everest?”

“First,” Everest began, counting off on his fingers. “We want a

signed apology and pardon written in your own hand for any crimes, real or perceived, that we have supposedly committed in your town.”

“We do?” Lysanias asked.

“Oh, at a minimum,” Everest assured him. “We don’t want a repeat of this situation, do we? Nor do we want to have our pictures up on wanted posters in nearby towns.”

“I’m still not sure what that is.”

“Believe me lad, it would make our lives a lot more difficult.”

“Secondly,” Everest went on. “We want our possessions back. All of them. All money, all weapons, not a copper coin should be missing.”

“I’m sure your stuff is around here somewhere.”

The man with the key opened the door and Lysanias was about to step out, but Don grabbed his hand and shook his head.

“Third-”

“There’s more?!”

“Third, we want to be compensated for the night of wrongful imprisonment. I’m somewhat certain a small sack of shining silver shall soothe our souls.”

“You want money!?” He was clearly becoming outraged.

“Fourth-”

“I don’t believe this! It’s extortion!”

“You were the one that put us in here,” reminded Don. “You didn’t ask how we had stopped the war machine. You just assumed it wouldn’t show up. Well, it did.”

“If I may continue? Are you writing this down? Well, I’m sure you’ll remember it. Forth, we will go and soothe our friend out there and make sure he doesn’t flatten this town, but we’ll be back to buy a few supplies before leaving for good. We will not be harassed by any city guard.”

“Tell him I want a small horse,” Lysanias whispered.

“And a... cream colored pony.”

“That’s totally out of the question.”

“I tried.”

Lysanias tried to look crestfallen but it was all he could do just to not giggle uncontrollably.

“You better get busy writing up that apology,” Don cautioned. “I don’t think our friend out there will wait very long.”

The message was repeated twice, but finally Lysanias and the others walked out to the war machine with their gear and some extra coins in their pouches.

“Query: Why did you not return as you had promised?”

“I said I would help you find a place to get your brain installed in a smaller body, I didn’t promise to do it that day!” Lysanias called up to him. “We need to prepare for a journey like that!”

“Yes, don’t tell it about our night in jail,” cautioned Don. “Might not sit too well with it.”

“The error was mine? I must apologize to the townspeople. Attention people-”

“It’s okay,” Lysanias shouted, waving his hands. The machine broke off. “They realize it wasn’t your fault.”

“They are very forgiving. I also apologize to you, I should have asked for clarification after our initial consultation.”

“That’s quite all right. In any case, we’ll be leaving...” He looked to the others.

“Before noon, I would think. We don’t need to get that much stuff together, do we?” Don asked.

Everest shook his head.

“Around noon today. Please wait patiently for us here until then.”

“I will wait. Thank you for being more specific this time.”

Can a machine use sarcasm? That must be my imagination. “We all learn from our mistakes.”

“Indeed. Please do not hurry on my account, I know you biological beings have many needs that must be met.”

“Biological beings?” he asked Everest.

“Things that are alive.”

“Oh. Yes, that’s correct. We’ll be back later.”

“I will await your return.”

The group breathed a sigh of relief and went back into the village.

“That crisis was averted,” Everest said with a shake of his head. “An impatient machine. Who would have thought?”

“The fact is we’ve traded one slip of a lizard girl for an enormous rolling bunker,” complained Don. “We can’t understand it any better, and it won’t fit into a ward should we decide we’ve had enough of it!”

“You couldn’t- oh my goodness,” groused Lysanias. “I’ll make you up some translation wards before we leave. You may have to talk to it, after all. What are we getting, anyway? We can use magic for food and water.”

“Thought you might like more than one set of clothes, now that we have a human town to buy from,” Don suggested. “Plus a new weapon for you, maybe? Better sleeping bag? Tent? We have coin and lots of it. Let’s stimulate their economy a bit.”

“Now who’s using big words?” Everest joked.

“I was thinking about that last night, actually. Not... whatever you said Don. About weapons. I didn’t want to bring it out in the middle of that cage, but I bet I could at least straighten the sword out. It wouldn’t absorb attacks the way it used to, not until I figure out how to put that sort of power into it, but it saves me buying a new sword.”

“They are sort of expensive. Can you do it, lad?”

“It might take a few days, but I don’t see why not. The metal is twisted and blackened, but I bet I could make it serviceable with a bit of effort. My parents went to a lot of trouble to give it to me, I should at least try to put it to rights again.”

“That’s a bit of good news! Well, anything else you want to get, let’s do it and be gone from here.”

“So much for settling here.”

“You’d want a larger city anyway,” Everest told him. “More potential customers.”

Their first stop was to get *even more* money. Lysanias had a few things in mind and wanted to be sure he had coin for the next town they went to as well. So the group stopped into the blacksmith’s.

“Greetings!” said the Sumash brothers cheerfully.

“Quite a ruckus outside earlier,” Peter said, stating the obvious.

“We were hoping you would come back,” Paul added. “We’ve been talking about how best to use this amazing metal of yours.”

“Swords and such are fine, but they’re such a small part of our normal business,” explained Peter.

“You are still willing to help, right?” asked Paul.

“I don’t have much time, but yes, what did you have in mind?”

“Know what we hate making above all else?”

“What?”

“Nails,” the brothers answered together.

“It’s so tedious,” complained Paul.

“But we thought, what about a sort of mold, made of your metal, that we could pour molten metal into?”

“Like a candle maker,” explained Peter, getting the lump of metal he had previously turned out. “We wouldn’t have to worry about it deforming over time, because your metal doesn’t seem to deform. Ever.”

“We’ve heated it, whacked it with every heavy object in here, and there’s not a scratch on it.”

“But if you can make us various sizes of nail molds, we’d pay you a lot.”

“Like so much! If I didn’t have to pound another nail in my life...”

“So what do you say?”

“Sounds like I came to the right place. Paying me ‘so much’ is music to my ears.”

So the group went over the plans for the molds, and both Don and Everest had some ideas as to how to construct such a thing as well. The mold could be fairly thin, and made in two parts simply clamped together. So Lysanias concentrated on the lump first, making it long and thin, then putting “dimples” in it where the nails would ultimately be. Then he made the second piece and they tried it out. They poured molten metal into the holes on the top (where the head of the nail would be) and gently lowered it into a quenching bucket. When it was cool they unclamped it and out tumbled even, regular, standard, nails.

“This is great!” exclaimed Peter, looking one over.

“Let’s try them,” agreed Paul. Both grabbed a hammer and some scrap wood and slammed them through. Then pried them back out again. “They hold up!”

“You have *no idea* how much time and effort this will save us,” Peter thanked him, shaking Lysanias’ hand.

“It’s easy enough to be done by apprentices, while we work on more expensive projects. But we can churn out a hundred a day! We’ll be the nail capital of the realm!”

“Now, about making some in different sizes?”

“What about needles?”

An hour or so later Lysanias walked out with a much fuller pouch and some very happy blacksmiths were gleefully filling their quota of

nails for the month. "Not exactly what I had in mind when I went in there," he admitted, making sure his money pouch was secure. He felt better than he had in a long time, at least about himself. He was somewhat exhausted from making the molds, but he felt it had been worth it. "But they seemed happy. Imagine being that happy over a way to make nails."

"Hopefully you can make me a set of those," Don suggested. "When I get home I can put them to good use. You know how much regular, consistent nails would go for? Twice what standard nails would, and they're much easier to produce!"

"Wonder if you could make candles the same way?" mused Everest. "Give them different shapes and whatnot. It would take a blacksmith a lot of effort to make a completely round candle for instance, but you could make a mold for one very easily."

"Probably. Come on, we're heading back to the library."

There, Lysanias bought all the paper and ink the place would sell him, plus another empty book he wanted to start using as a journal. He wasn't the last of his kind, but he felt he should write down the things he had done and seen for those that might be interested. *Plus I should write down how I do things like alchemy and sensing spiritual energy. Maybe if someone had done that, I could just pick up some books about it instead of struggling along with just what I learned before. Or can pick up from others in this time.* He looked over at Everest. *Wonder if he knows any other people like him, maybe an air gnome? Wonder what they're called? I would love to be able to manipulate all four elements like I can with earth. Ah well, master one element at a time, I guess.*

Leaving with a sack of paper and many bottles of ink, Lysanias did go and get some clothes (and a stout pair of boots at last), his own camping stuff so he didn't have to keep using his friend's stuff, a trunk to put it all in, and packed things away. He put it all into a contain ward, and asked if there was anything else he should get for the road. He had an empty quiver at his side, his (ruined) sword and sheath in wards stuffed into his book, which was in a pack on his back. In the pack was his metal pan and bedroll, fire starting stuff, the usual rope all adventurers seem to carry, utensils, etc.

"Considering what you started with lad? I'd say you've made a good start."

The group then ate a fairly early lunch, Lysanias slapped two translate wards on his friends, and they marched back to the war machine that was patiently waiting for them.

“It pleases me to see your safe return,” it greeted them.

“I’m glad to see you too. Shoot, we didn’t get a map!”

“That will not be necessary,” the machine told them. “I have attained access to a satellite with sufficient capabilities to contact other machine intelligences. They have provided me a path towards facilities that can perform the transfer.”

“How far away is it?” Everest asked cautiously.

What’s a satellite?

“The path is not linear. The other machine intelligences I contacted cautioned that I should avoid human settlements and cause as little damage to the ecosystem as possible. Therefore I must not take the most direct path but instead follow a route that is the most clear of obstacles as it can be. I regret to say some destruction of flora is inevitable as there are no clear paths for certain portions of our journey.”

“Er...”

“He means he might have to smash some trees down on the way to the place because there’s no clear route. But he’s going to take the clearest route he can.”

“Ah!”

Suddenly the mayor ran up to them, followed by more people with weapons.

Oh great, this better not be another ‘arrest.’

“You’re back? Good. Now leave! Go on! Off with you, and don’t come back!” Don stepped over to the man, who nervously looked down at him. “What?”

“You’re welcome,” Don told him, then spun on his heel. “Come on, let’s head back to the staging area, it’s the most clear, then you can tell us about this ‘non-linear’ route you’re taking us on.”

“Affirmative.”

The mayor watched as the war machine carefully backed over any trees it had smashed down and the others followed after it.

“Don’t come back,” he muttered, and went back into the village again.

“Are all humans like that? I mean the blacksmith brothers seemed to be fine, but I was helping them out rather directly.” The group was fol-

lowing some distance behind the war machine, as it made a pretty loud racket as it moved. Crushing fallen trees, climbing over rocks, and just the general rattle of the armor and loose parts the annunaki didn't see fit to repair made it difficult to be near and talk at the same time.

"I pretty much stay to my own kind," Don admitted. "So I can't be sure."

"I think they're all different," Everest told him. "From what I've read there are good ones and bad ones, always have been."

"Why else would the demon world exist?"

"Good point."

"I hope he enjoys his stay there!"

The others laughed and agreed.

"Will you be heading back? Going this way takes you with me, towards wherever P05 is going and away from the cave."

"Do you not want us around?" Don asked, somewhat crossly.

"What? No. I just didn't want to imply you had to come with me. You have your own lives, your own desires. You don't want to shepherd me around the world."

"We're with you, all the way," Everest assured him. "Thought we had made that clear."

"What he said. You've been awake a couple of weeks and already we've had more adventure than most have in a lifetime. You've made things, defended a whole town, I think you're just getting started."

"I was just reacting to stuff," he protested, cheeks reddening.

"Sure lad, sure. But what else are you going to 'react' to on this journey? It's a long way to our next stop, and I have a feeling sticking with you is the place to be."

"And not only because he wants to wait for you to get better at making gold so he can return home with a whole chest full of it," Everest assured him.

"You'd have earned it," he replied with a laugh. "Thanks you two. I'm glad it was you that found me. Both of you."

"Yeah, imagine if you'd been found by those *elves*. Ugh!" He shuddered and then all of them were laughing.

As he walked, Lysanias picked up promising stones and dropped them into his empty quiver.

"What do you plan to do with those?" Everest finally asked.

“Shoot, now that I think about it, I should have gotten you one of these!” Lysanias regretted, shaking the quiver. “I think you’ll like this, and be able to use it yourself. Eh, I can make you one with this as a guide probably.”

“Use what myself?”

“Watch and learn.” He took a stone and reshaped it, making it have a sharp point at one end. It had gone from being a simple stone that would fit in his hand to a narrow cylinder as long as his forearm. The now pointed tip he turned into metal and then levitated the entire thing above his hand. Making a pitching motion he slammed it into a nearby fallen tree, making it quiver and stick. He hadn’t “let it go,” his power was still controlling it so he wiggled it until it popped loose again. He brought it back and let Everest look it over.

“I do sort of like that, actually,” he admitted. “What an amazing use of my ability to command the earth to move.”

“It works for me,” he admitted. “There’s various styles I came up with last night. It could be a thin disk with a razor sharp metal edge, or a more knifelike design with a stone handle. Or this, which is more like an arrow. I’ll have to see what fits best into the thing I carry so they’re easy to get to, and what flies best. Who knows, maybe some odd shape I haven’t even thought off flies best. Hopefully as we go you can give me some pointers on accuracy. I was, uh, actually aiming for that stump over there.”

“I never thought of it because I can’t make the shapes you can,” he went on. “But a small bag of rocks would be something to keep handy, just in case.”

“You can just empty your coin pouch into mine, that’ll give you plenty of space to put rocks.”

Don laughed. “Oh no, Lysanias is starting to make jokes now! We better watch out!”

The other two joined him.

“Seriously though, this is really neat,” Everest said after a moment, hefting it. “Mind if I give it a try?”

“You can’t blunt the end, go right ahead!”

So he swirled it around and smacked it into trees while Lysanias picked up more rocks. He noticed Everest got the point in far deeper than he had, and realized he had a ways to go both in accuracy and throwing strength. He finally handed it back and took out the daggers that hung at his sides.

“Think you could turn the hilts of these guys into stone?” he asked, passing them over.

“I don’t see why not. I haven’t totally exhausted myself quite yet.” He did, also turning the blades into the special metal because why not, then passed them back. Everest now sent them spinning through the trees, controlling both as if one with each hand. Finally they came back to him.

“Now we’re talking,” he allowed, putting them back. “I’m more familiar with the dagger, so I think it would work best for me just keeping hold of them and swinging them about that way.”

“Whatever you want, I live to serve!” He gave an over the top bow.

“You two are having all the fun it seems,” Don grumped.

“Figure out how to make rock move and I’ll be happy to make the wooden handle of your polearm into stone.”

“I suppose you helped me out first, making that halberd for me. I did cut that guy’s head clean off with it...”

“After I shot fire and darkness at him with my sword! You just did the final blow.”

“And I got us up there!” Everest reminded him.

Don laughed. “We make a great team, I admit it! And with the war machine blazing the trail for us, what could possibly go wrong from here!”*

*He really shouldn’t have said that.