WILL WIGHT

NEW YORK *TIMES* BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

KICKSTARTER BONUS SCENE!

UNCROWNED

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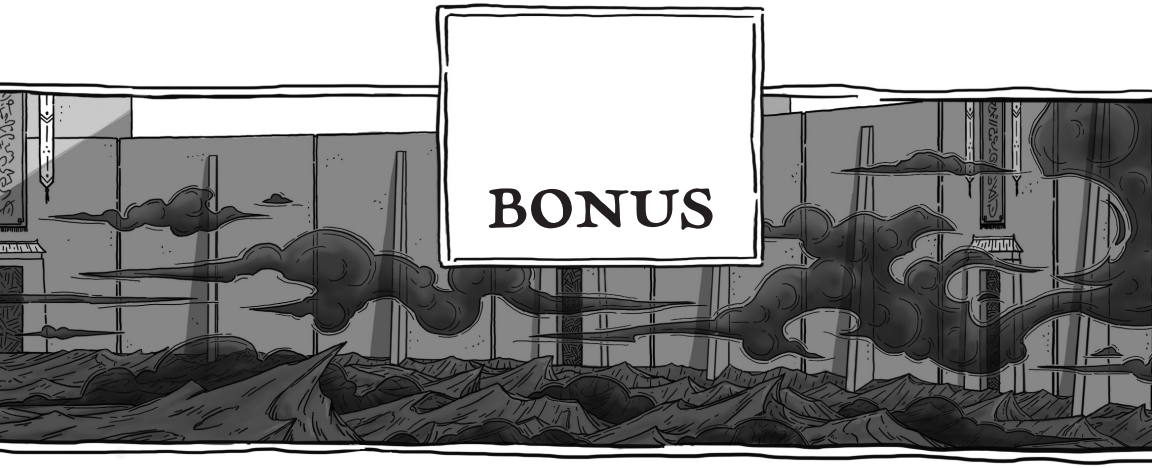

BONUS

***Uncrowned* Kickstarter Bonus Scene: Spoiler-free!**

Location: Just before Chapter 15 of *Uncrowned*

The Archlord treasure vault of the Ninecloud Court was not hidden. Everyone knew where to find it: atop a ruby tower ringed with scarlet clouds.

Of course, despite its public location, the vault didn't lack security.

Lindon had checked.

He and Akura Fury stood on a platform of cloud high up on the gemstone tower, waiting for the vault door to open. At the first sign of intrusion, the cloud would vanish, but that was the least of the protection measures; anyone who dared to break into a vault of

Archlord weapons could certainly manage levitation.

At the four corners of the roof covering the vault itself, guardian puppets of many-colored metal waited. They resembled uninhabited suits of armor with inhuman, pyramidal heads. At the moment, they were dormant, but they still gave Lindon an oppressive feeling.

Fury scratched the back of his head and yawned.

Lindon had to restrain himself from dashing forward out of pure excitement as the complex metal door slowly, painfully, opened one segment at a time.

The entrance reminded Lindon of the doors the Skysworn had used back in the Blackflame Empire, though these were made of materials that could keep out even Archlords.

[Better than that,] Dross corrected him. [The most likely thieves for a facility like this are Sages and Heralds. There are security measures you can't sense or imagine.]

Lindon found that fascinating. *Really? How do you know?*

[Do you not remember that I was the construct in charge of Ghostwater security?]

No, you weren't. You were at the bottom of a well.

[I *absorbed* the security constructs, so that should count. In fact, it does count. I'm the one counting.]

"Finally!" Fury said, as the last piece of the vault door unlatched itself. Lindon wholeheartedly agreed.

The interior of the vault was hidden behind a curtain of shimmering, nine-colored rainbow light. To hide the contents when the door was open, given that the vault was otherwise open to the air.

Lindon wondered about the design. As the building was perched

on a tower, even ordinary citizens could see any time the Archlord vault was open. Why?

"They're showing off," Fury said, in response to Lindon's questioning look. "They can hide the whole building if they want, but they're trying to show everyone how generous they are." He rolled his eyes. "We can head in now. There aren't any more traps or anything—"

At that confirmation, Lindon leaped through the screen of light.

The moment he was through, he was almost blinded by even more colors. There were no plain treasures in the Ninecloud Court.

A reflective orb larger than his head hovered over a platform, with light constructs shining into it from multiple angles to show off its shine. A pair of golden axes clashed with one another inside a case made to resemble a transparent diamond, and each time a blade struck the other, gold lightning flashed against the inside of the case.

A spear larger than his whole body, and so thick he wouldn't be able to wrap both his hands around it, was suspended from wires in front of a long painting of a swimming dragon. The painting glowed, and the dragon within shifted position every second or two.

There were dozens more.

Lindon stared around in awe, mouth open, trying to make sense of everything his eyes were telling him. The containment scripts on the treasures were so efficient that he could hardly feel anything with his spiritual perception, as though the weapons were powerless.

He traced the few visible portions of script with his eyes, but that could hardly hold his attention compared to the weapons.

[Huh,] Dross said. [I expected there to be more.]

Lindon pressed his palms against a protective net, which seemed to be made of emerald spun into threads. It kept him away from a bladed wheel bigger than his torso, its center forged of bronze with an obsidian black cutting edge. In the bronze was the face of a snarling demonic creature that resembled a Remnant.

The inscription on a nearby plaque told him enough to ignite his greed.

Circle of Fated Death
Soulsmith: Nelvann Bronzeweaver, Sage of Singing Metal
A seamless fusion of earth and death madra, this weapon strikes with the weight of a landslide and carries a curse of corrosive death that erodes the lifeline of opponents. Its embedded technique, derived from a Sage's Remnant, can cut through all but the most extraordinary defenses of the Archlord level or below.

If Lindon won the tournament, maybe he could come back and get *two* weapons.

Fury strolled up behind him, in no hurry, and tapped the emerald web. "This is an impressive one, all right. It's not easy to get earth and death madra to play nice together. Xorrus used something like this against me once, and it took me ten years to get rid of the wound."

Lindon dragged himself to the next display. "I don't believe this suits me, though please correct me if you think otherwise."

"Well, that depends. Why doesn't it fit you?"

"I intend to find a weapon suitable for Blackflame. Like *this* one."

Lindon was already shoving his face against the next display,

a burning two-handed hammer as large as Ziel's. One head of the hammer was carved to resemble a horned animal skull with sapphire flames pouring from its eye sockets, while the other head had a red-hot spike.

Night-Fire Hammer
Soulsmith: Ninecloud Court Royal Foundry
This hammer was forged from the dead matter of an Archlord Remnant on a pure fire Path. It carries two linked bindings, one a Striker technique that sends a ring of flame in all directions from the user, and the other an Enforcer technique that greatly magnifies the physical impact of the hammer itself.
Highly compatible with any fire Paths.

"Another good one," Fury commented, rapping his knuckles on the shining scarlet cage that contained the hammer. "But they all are."

He waved a hand to indicate the whole room. "Archlord weapons aren't easy to find anywhere. Archlords don't tend to die, you see, so it's tough to source materials. Even the Ninecloud Court only has a few. Probably...five or six rooms like this one."

Lindon almost tripped on his way to the next weapon. "Five or six? When can we see the rest?"

"No need. This one is the best. The Sha family doesn't want us to think they're being cheap." Fury rolled his eyes, though Lindon wasn't quite sure why. "If it's in here, it's a masterpiece. Any of these would make you much stronger...if you can handle it."

Lindon's attention was stolen by the next weapon, an armored black glove displayed on a golden statue of a bearded man.

Hand of Devastation
Soulsmith: Akura Malice
A weapon of shadows and destruction. Its core binding contains the Nightbreaker Palm technique, which deals devastating damage to the spirit. Additionally, the weapon is exceptionally good at conducting authority related to the mind, and it was carried for many years by the Sage of the Silver Heart.

"This was your daughter's?" Lindon asked. He felt uncomfortable referring to the Heart Sage so casually, but he suspected Fury wouldn't even notice.

The Herald gave a short laugh. "Charity didn't outgrow it, exactly, but her fighting style changed. She doesn't use her hands if she can help it. Takes after her mother."

He pointed to Lindon. "So what's your lesson there? I'll tell you. Compatibility doesn't just mean you pick the same aspects of madra. Especially not for you, since you could just switch to pure madra and use anything in here, once you're strong enough."

That thought almost trapped Lindon in a sweet dream of carrying all these weapons at once.

"You can already hit hard," Fury went on. "What do you need the most?"

Lindon and Dross had considered that question at length. "As I see it, one of my biggest advantages over my opponents is my mind-construct." Fury already knew about that, he just didn't know the *extent* of Dross' capabilities. "If I had a weapon I could control independently, it would be like having an extra pair of hands in a fight."

"Sure, that'll work. There are a lot of right answers to that question." He lightly kicked the golden statue's shin. "So why not the glove? It would make your Empty Palm into something *really* scary."

That statement alone, coming from a Herald, pushed Lindon very close to picking the Hand of Devastation.

"I'd be honored to take the glove," Lindon said, "but I would like to see my other options first."

Fury waved a hand. "I'm not trying to talk you into it. You're right to look for something else. But *why?*"

Lindon considered. *Dross, could I activate this glove?*

[Tough to say without a better sense of it, but...it's an Archlord weapon. I doubt it. Not without exhausting yourself, anyway.]

"Apologies, but I don't believe I could bring out its full potential yet."

Fury's red eyes gleamed and he threw his arms up in triumph. *"That's it!"*

Lindon flinched. His shout had echoed in the vault, painfully loud.

"You've got plenty of techniques," Fury went on. "Your Blackflame already hits hard enough, and you've got tons of room for improvement in your Paths already. Why complicate it? You need a simple weapon, one that you can get the most out of now, but that you can keep using long after the tournament."

With that, Fury pointed to the ceiling.

Lindon looked up, where another brightly colored illusion formed a sapphire sky and diamond clouds. Weaving in and out of those clouds was a flying sword, smooth and beautiful.

He looked around for a plaque, but Fury threw a hand around his shoulders and explained verbally instead.

"It's a standard flying sword, so even a Gold could use it. But it's a genuine Archlord weapon. In fact, it might be the sturdiest one in here. Minimal maintenance, easy to control, and simple to grasp; you'll get the hang of it in hours."

Lindon's eagerness rose by the word. "And its core binding?"

"Doesn't have one," Fury said cheerfully.

Lindon's expectations crashed back down.

"I see," he said carefully. "Gratitude. I will consider it, but first I should look at the other options..."

Fury rubbed his palms together. "Let me show you."

He flicked a finger upwards, and the script containing the flying sword's power was temporarily disabled. Lindon could sense it for the first time, and he was pleasantly surprised.

The weapon felt balanced, constrained. It had the force of an Archlord weapon, but smooth and restrained. Strangely comfortable.

Fury took control of it, and the sword flew down to hover in front of him. "Watch this!"

The Herald drew his fist back, and Lindon braced himself.

Shadows gathered around Fury's hand, and the sheer might radiating from his fist caused many of the protective scripts to light up. The air suddenly seemed many times heavier, and Lindon ignited the Soul Cloak before he was pushed off his feet.

Under Fury's control, the flying sword flashed toward Fury's own chest. It was a silver blur.

A dark punch collided with the weapon and the room exploded into shadows.

Lindon was temporarily blinded. When he could see again, the flying sword was flipping through the air.

It clattered to the ground a moment later.

Unharmed.

"You know how many of the weapons in here could take a punch from me?" Fury asked. "One."

He shrugged. "Pick what you want, but this is the easiest to learn, and it will last you at least as long as any of the others. How much do you want to win the next match?"

Lindon's next opponent was Naian Blackflame.

Before he could respond, a shimmering rainbow cloud condensed over their heads, and the Ninecloud Soul's voice came out in a gentle rebuke. "Herald Fury, we request that you contain yourself. Several Golds at the base of the tower were severely frightened by your display."

"I thought your scripts could handle it," Fury protested.

"There were injuries."

"Only minor ones!"

"You were permitted to enter our vault under strict conditions. Please allow me to remind you..."

The Ninecloud Soul went on, and Lindon snuck off to the next weapon display.

He'd already made up his mind, but that didn't mean he couldn't keep looking.

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