

Fayroll

Book Seven

Different Sides

Chapter One

In which the hero spends most of his time reading messages.

The game admin would like to congratulate you on being the first to visit the Tigali Archipelago and return to Rattermark.

To commemorate the event, you received the following rewards:

A cutless sling emblazoned with the words, Damn the Storm, Damn the Calm

A wide-brimmed hat topped with a feather from an exotic bird

Title: Wavecutter

Title: Stormbane

Note!

When you left the Tigali Archipelago, you lost the ability to return until it is unlocked for all players.

Note!

All the achievements, titles, reputations, and merits you earned in the Tigali Archipelago have been preserved.

Note!

You again have access to all the resources in Rattermark, including the mail, your personal room, etc.

That was underwhelming. A cutlass sling, a hat, titles... It was a bountiful bevy of delights. Those Raidion people really were stingy. They could have figured out something more impressive for me, given the occasion.

I stood once more in Ort Ashen's cave, where nothing had changed. True, I suspected that it had been centuries since the last change, or, at least, quite a while. I didn't see the cave's owner, which surprised me.

You have six messages from the game admin. Would you like to read them?

That was new, and six was quite a lot. *What could they have to write about?*

"Ah, my go-getter decided to drop by?" The outside door banged, and Ort walked into the cave holding a bucket of water. "And if you're here, you aren't empty-handed!"

"Yeah, you old...hmm," I said, cutting myself off when I saw Ort's shaggy brows shoot upward unpleasantly. "Whatever. You get what I mean."

"Oh, I got it," he replied amiably. "Stop wasting time; give me the key!"

"He wants the key," I muttered, pulling it out of my bag. "He sends me off into the kinds of places that could make you lose your mind, and all without a care in the world."

“But you didn’t lose it, did you?” Ort held out his hand. “You’ve never been that brainy to start with. A smart guy wouldn’t agree to the kind of adventures I send you off on, but you’re only too willing.”

“Oh, come on,” I replied, looking at him angrily. “You keep going, and I won’t give you anything.”

“So scary!” Ort chortled. “The only way you’re getting out of here alive is if you give me what you have. I don’t have much time, of course, but you can be sure that I can wait for the next fool to come traipsing along. Let’s be honest, too; you did pretty well for yourself over there in the heat. I’m not sure about the possessions you may have picked up, but it’s pretty easy to see the good luck you had.”

“What good luck?”

“Tiamat gave you her blessing. She’s an unpleasant goddess, but she’s gracious enough with her servants. You’ve always had her mark on you, but it’s changed now—it’s more a charm than a mark. That old rascal Onelegged marked you, too. You’ll find that pretty useful, though I’m not sure what you’re going to do with Mesmerta. You serve her, after all.”

“I don’t serve her,” I replied, frowning. “I serve Vitar. And, really, ‘serve’ isn’t the right word. We have a different kind of relationship.”

“Oh, yes, you have a lovely, wonderful relationship,” Ort laughed. “That’s why you’re off running around the worst places in Rattermark—just for the fun of it. No, my boy, she sent you off to do her bidding, and you have to report back to her. But as soon as you finish with all that, your best option will be to hide out under some snag in the most remote forest you can find; believe me. Once she sees your marks, she’ll figure out some especially unpleasant way to usher you out of this life.”

“You know, gramps,” I said, really getting angry, “are you even capable of saying something nice to me? Just to shake things up a little.”

“I am,” Ort nodded. “I made some really good millet porridge and bacon today. Want some?” I sniffed, realizing that the old buzzard was getting his laughs at my expense.

“Okay, okay,” I said, breathing in. “What are the marks I have? You promised to tell me about them last time.”

He flashed his white, young-looking teeth. “Oh, I’ll tell you, sonny boy. Just bring me the third part of the key, and you can ask me three questions. I’ll absolutely give you the answers, so long as I know them. Deal?”

“What if you don’t know the answers?” I asked with a squint. “Then what?”

“Then you can ask a different question,” Ort replied gravely. “So, are we agreed?”

The old man was digging his heels in; that much was clear. He was the fisherman, I was the fish, and he needed to sink his hook deeper to make sure I didn’t slip off the line.

“That works,” I said, handing him the part of the key I had. “The Gods will witness the deal, and, in particular, the goddess Tiamat and the god Tekhosh.”

Something boomed up in the skies, and Ort looked at me angrily.

“What are you doing, moron?” he hissed, his benevolence wiped away in an instant. “Who are you calling?”

“I don’t believe you, old man, not for a second. You’d cheat me without blinking an eye.”

The old guy muttered something into his beard and grabbed the key out of my hand.

You completed a quest: Second Part of the Key.

Reward:

2000 experience

1000 gold

Active ability: Spot of Light

Passive ability: Grinder

The names of the abilities didn't do much for me. Had they been something like "Slashing Whip" or "Bloody Vortex," I would have felt better about my chances of getting something good. *I should have gotten my reward before I got all principled with him.* Although, on the other hand, I assumed I'd just gotten whatever was programmed for that quest.

The old man dumped the second part of the key into the same box as the first one and only then did the smile return to his face.

"Well, my boy, we're almost done, aren't we?"

"Ah, pops," I replied with unfeigned angst, "I shudder to think where you're going to send me next, if where you sent me last is any indication."

"Calm yourself, this will be simpler. Or maybe not..."

You unlocked Third Part of the Key, a series of quests.

Task: Find the third part of the key.

Reward for beating the whole series:

6000 experience

7000 gold

An item matching your class, the quality of which depends on how fast you beat the quest series.

Accept?

That sounds lovely—let's have some "higher, faster, longer" Olympics here. Regardless, I didn't have much choice. The the quest was an odd one. I'd accepted a quest series, but where was the starter quest? Where was I supposed to go?

"Well, have a good trip," a very happy Ashen said. He was about to open the portal, but I stopped him.

"Hold on a second there. About where the key is... I mean, will it be on the map or do I have to run off to who-knows-where again?"

"It'll be there, it'll be there. Don't worry, it'll be fine. See you!"

A hefty kick sent me sprawling through the portal Ort had opened with a snap of his fingers.

I sneezed, my nose full of sand. It looked like the old bastard had sent me off to somewhere warm yet again.

Without even picking my head up, I listened and heard waves splashing. It was a familiar sound, washing in and washing back out.

"Seriously?" I looked up and gazed at the marine blue. Swallowing a bit nervously, I glanced in the other direction and sighed in relief—there was a desert and some kind of ruins, apparently from yet another once-great, forgotten city; I'd realized in my time in the West that there were quite a few of them. As far as being in the West, I didn't have the slightest doubt in my mind that that was where I was. They didn't have deserts anywhere else, after all. At least, I wasn't aware of any.

I stood up and looked around carefully. There was nothing there except for the ruins. No oases, no players, no NPCs, no aggressive bots. Just sand, wind, and tumbleweeds rolling across the deserted landscape. It was exotic, in a word.

Pulling up my map, I saw a large white area covering territory I hadn't been to before, with a small yellow spot labeled *Al-Albane*. On the other side was the sea, which was helpfully labeled *Sea*. It looked like that was where I was.

I looked around on the map and found the place where the third part of the key was supposed to be. It was also part of the white-colored terra incognita, and it was nowhere near where I was. I scratched the back of my head, trying to figure out why I'd been sent off into the desert a good two or three weeks away from the artifact I was looking for. There had to be some hidden meaning, of course.

The sand under my feet rustled, a small crater appeared, and a large, cockroachy whisker popped out to sniff—the only way I could think of to describe what it did—my leg. Then it ducked back into the crater, leaving me to quickly walk off in the direction of the ruins. I knew some creature down there had just checked me over and decided that I was juicy and edible. Judging by the size of the whisker, it was probably a large creature with large jaws...or mandibles, which was even worse.

There was a sudden loud noise behind me, and I picked up my pace when I looked back. The sand where I'd been standing and identified as dinner was fountaining upward, and I could clearly see two chitin whiskers poking through the yellow sprays.

"Damn," I cried hoarsely, spitting out sand. It was hard to run, as my feet were sinking into the stuff. *I made it through the archipelago, and I'm going to die here in the desert next to some lifeless city...*

Something snapped behind me, like an enormous bug clicking its wings. *What is that thing?* I turned around again and stopped stock still. I'd seen a lot, but that...

Next to the crater stood the oddest creature I'd seen in Fayroll. The whiskers were gigantic, and they belonged to some overgrown caterpillar-centipede mix. It looked hilarious. It was purple, and it even had a bony tail that had made the noise I'd heard. I thought it was about the size of a dog, and, given the fact that it was trying to figure out where its food had run off to using its radar-like whiskers, I assumed it was blind.

"So, what am I supposed to do with that?" I asked myself in surprise. It seemed pointless to kill such a comical monster.

As I thought about what to do, the caterpillar-centipede figured out where its grub had gone. It looked about ready to come after me, though it had a hard time getting going—it lifted first one front leg, then another, its blind head dipping toward them. *Is it trying to figure out how to start walking forward?*

"I'll let you live," I snorted, taking my hand away from the pommel of my sword. "You won't give me anything, and there isn't any point in killing you for no reason."

Ten minutes later, I'd gotten to the ruins and stopped near what centuries before had clearly been the city wall. I leaned an elbow on some kind of stone column and looked around at the remains of houses, the wreck of a minaret, and, especially, the impressive remains of what looked to have been the abode of the local emir or padishah. *Maybe even a sultan*. The palace roof had collapsed in several places, and the windows were gaping holes, though the building actually wasn't in terrible shape.

I didn't doubt for a second that it was a bad place. There were definitely all kinds of different beasts just waiting to come after me, and the only questions were when they'd come out to hunt and where exactly they lived. It was possible they only came out at night, for example, or maybe they scurried around underground in holes or some kind of qanats in the ground. *Maybe they just sit at home waiting for travelers. One way or another, they are here, and there are probably a lot of them. I, on the other hand, am by myself. I need to get out of here before I find myself dumped in an unmarked grave.*

Still, ignoring my inner dialog, I took a step forward.

Al Albain, once a trading port and pearl of the East.

As they used to say, you haven't seen beauty until you've been to Al Albain. The continent's largest market bustled away four times a year, an excellent spot to meet Western aristocracy, harsh Northerners, business-like dwarves, refined elves, nimble gremlins, and annoying pixies. From age to age, the city was a retreat for those who wanted to buy and sell.

But everything in this world comes to an end, and the same was true of the peaceful existence Al Albain enjoyed. An evil necromancer named Ffarg the Wicked, for some unknown reason, decided to wipe it off the face of the earth. The peaceful inhabitants were caught unprepared for the undead invasion, barely putting up any resistance as they were cut down in their own homes.

When the forces collected by the ruler of the East arrived at the dead city, they were met by the necromancer's announcement that these were now his lands and that death would await any who tried to trespass on them. He, Ffarg the Wicked, laid no claim to any other lands in the Eastern Mark—these were enough for him.

Nobody knows why the ruler of the East didn't hurl his troops at the impudent necromancer in a fit of rage, but he didn't. Instead, he pulled them back from the accursed place.

Ever since, Al Albain...

I wasn't interested in reading any further; it was obvious what happened next. The curses were still alive and well. *Oh, and there's one of the locals.*

Shoulders rattling, a short, Level 60 skeleton equipped with a curved saber and round shield pulled himself up out of a dune.

"Hi there, my restless friend," I said, a bit of affection in my voice, even, as he wiggled his head and leveraged his shield to pull his leg out of the sand. It made sense that I was happy to see him since all I'd been dealing with, out across the ocean was pirates and ghosts. The skeleton reminded me of home.

Finally, out of the sand, he clacked his jaw, probably annoyed with his creator for sticking him in such an uncomfortable spot, and charged me.

I met him with a direct hit strengthened by Memory of the God, and then, as usual, I threw myself at his legs. A few strikes later, and the first local I'd come across was history.

I didn't get an action—the skeletons probably counted toward a different quest than I was working on. That wasn't a big deal, regardless.

Bones rattling and sand rustling told me that the first walking skeleton was far from the last. I looked around the dead city to see that my suspicions were right on the money. Here and there, the dead citizens of Al Albain popped up out of the sand, some in helmets, others with bare skulls shining in the sunlight.

“Okay, okay, I get it,” I told them before quickly leaving the city for the desert. At least, I stepped out past the remains of what was once the city wall. The skeletons froze in the middle of climbing out onto the ground, though they didn’t stop looking around and clacking their jaws.

Yep, the story about the city was right. The necromancer had claimed it, and nothing else, as his domain. One step in, and you had only yourself to blame if they killed you; get out alive, and you were home free. I figured he was there, himself, somewhere down in the cellars beneath the palace. He was probably saved for the last level, sitting on a pile of gold and other useful goodies.

It didn’t add up. The necromancer was there, I was there, too, but the key was somewhere else. The logic didn’t make sense. Although, on the other hand, if it had been as straightforward as just jumping in and taking the key, it wouldn’t have been any fun. But what was I supposed to do?

You took damage from a strong poison! You’ll lose 10 health every second for the next minute and a half.

I had no idea what that was about. *What damage?*

You took damage from a strong poison again! Because you’re already poisoned, the effects will be combined: you’ll lose 15 health every second for the next two minutes.

It was that nasty, blind beast. While I’d sat there thinking and fighting, the mustachioed bundle of unpleasantness named Purple Mantilda had somehow found its way over and slashed me a couple times with its cavalry decorations. The bastard was about to do it again. *Oh, no, you don’t!* Seeing as how the thing had its own name, I decided to see what I might have that I could loot.

“I summon the warriors of the Shadow Brigade.”

The gentleman who came to help—there were five of them that time—did a pretty good job polishing off the devious creature, who turned out to also have a revolting green liquid it could spurt out to paralyze its attackers. One of the warriors found himself covered in the stuff. The beast could also regenerate its whiskers, instantaneously, in fact, and it had a Jackie Chan-style leap that took it straight up into the air and nearly killed another of the warriors.

But the truth, steel in hand, won the day, and Mantilda gave up the ghost just before my warriors melted into the hot, Eastern air.

I was glad I didn’t try to keep my troops in reserve, realizing that I would have been digesting in the creature’s stomach somewhere under the sand if it hadn’t been for them. It would have taken forever to find my things, too. Anyway, I dumped the loot I got from it into my bag and pulled out a portal scroll. Everything was great there, of course, but it was time for me to finally read what the admin had been writing. I also needed to see what mail was waiting for me. The symbol in the interface was red, rather than the usual green, and so I assumed quite a bit had built up. I had to dump everything in my room, as well; there were still PKers out there just waiting to rob the honest and upstanding of their hard-earned gains.

I decided to head to Selgar. It might have been a more logical move to go somewhere quieter like Fladridge or even the sparsely populated city under the Sumaki Mountains, as the risk of being recognized by someone I knew would have been lower. But something told me that my arrival on the continent wasn’t much of a secret anyway, and Selgar at least offered plenty of exits. There were also

larger crowds that would be easier to get lost in. In Fladridge, you always knew who was there. Long story short, I decided to make my way to one of the larger cities.

I made a beeline for the hotel, ducking inside as soon as I could.

“Do I owe you anything for the room yet?” I asked the clerk, though he just waved his hand as if to tell me that everything was fine. Then, he handed me the key.

I trudged up to the third floor, found myself, finally, back where I belonged, and plopped down on the bed.

“Damn, this really is like coming home from a business trip,” I said aloud before pulling up the messages I’d gotten from the admin.

Player, the game admin informs you that, due to your absence from Rattermark, you lost...

They sure loved making a mountain out of a molehill. I’m aware, thank you very much.

You unlocked a new quest: Debt of the Elder. Would you like to read about it?

That sounded interesting, but I wasn’t sure what it was about. I decided not to turn it down outright, though I wasn’t in a hurry to jump on it, either. Quests are quests. *Although, if the admin is offering it...*

Please note that you unlocked a new quest: Debt of the Elder. Would you like to read about it?

They sure were being pushy about it—that letter had been sent two days after the first. There was another one, too.

Dear Hagen,

The game admin informs you that you triggered the MacLinds Clan scenario while completing the Eye for an Eye quest. Would you like to read about the Debt of the Elder quest right now?

The more they insisted, the less inclined I was to actually take them up on their offer. But even that wasn’t all.

Your mailbox is almost full. Read the letters in it.

Note that you can always increase the size of your mailbox by speaking with the appropriate trader.

I’ll read them, I’ll read them. What else was I going to do?

Dear Hagen,

The game admin has already sent you multiple notifications about the MacLinds Clan scenario you triggered while completing the Eye for an Eye quest.

It’s a social scenario, and so the game admin strongly recommends accepting the starter quest.

If you don't do that in the next three days, you may have penalties assessed against you in keeping with paragraph 12.3.3 of the Player Agreement.

Would you like to read about the Debt of the Elder quest right now?

Oh, you devils! The letter had been sent, at least, two days before, so I was in time. *That Valyaev really is a bastard, isn't he?* He couldn't hide behind that "game admin" label, especially since whatever that scenario was about had nothing to do with the main line I was working on. The penalties the message talked about were probably pretty severe, too. *He could have at least warned me.*

I decided to still hold off on the quest, figuring that I'd have time to come back to it later, and opened my chest. Quests like that were the kind of thing that you had to jump on as soon as you accepted them—and they didn't leave time for anything else. Then you had to jump through all the hoops, wiggle, dance, kill some bots, and maybe even polish off a few PKers. And what I had on me right then was awfully valuable, and not even in terms of the in-game currency. I was planning on earning a pretty penny using what I'd picked up in the archipelago—my pension fund needed a boost.

I needed to start thinking about that, after all. When you're twenty, you don't really have to think about tomorrow so long as you have enough to drink. By the time you cross into your thirties, however, you're forced into a more thoughtful attitude toward things. Our government, obviously, works tirelessly to care for the working man, thinking and worrying about us, and that's why they're always modifying and codifying pension law. The only problem is that new laws don't often match up well with old ones, and so the savings you might have built up under an older system is lost irretrievably every time there's a new reform. Of course, "irretrievably" isn't exactly the right word: in some old Russian town with just ten or twenty thousand people, another Pension Fund mansion goes up. It's the new largest building in the town, a local attraction, and where all wedding parties, school graduations, and the rare tourists go to visit.

To be fair, the buildings the Pension Fund throws up really can be called wonders of modern engineering. And they may not be cheap because they're made out of nothing but the best materials. But at least they're gorgeous, accessible, convenient for the people who work there, and always on one of their town's main streets. The grand openings are always fun and beautiful, with the red tape cut by someone from the federal center. There's a banquet for the city administration complete with a concert, even. I think there should be a photo album called *A Selection of the Best Pension Fund Buildings*. It would be very enlightening, as people should see where their taxes go—nobody's stealing them, after all. What beautiful buildings!

Anyway, five years before, I'd decided to give up on the government and its pension tricks, figuring that I'd set something up myself or just kick the bucket before the time came when I'd need some money to live on.

And the time had come to get to work on my own fund. I could sell off what I'd brought from the archipelago, even throwing in some of my old reserves—Krone's Signet Ring, for example. The most important thing was to take my time, not be greedy, and wait for just the right moment. It would be tricky to pull off if I wanted to avoid catching the eye of those government bureaucrats, only this time from the tax authorities...

It looked like Mantilda had given me a bunch of junk, with just one thing that caught my eye.

Purple Mantilda Whisker Extract

Rare reagent

Used in a number of alchemical potions.

The blue liquid could have been worth a few tin coins, or it could have been worth a couple kilos of gold coins—it was hard to say. And so, with that in mind, I dumped it in my chest, returning the rest of what I'd gotten from Mantilda to my bag. The purple beast had a name, so I assumed there was someone in the Eastern expanses who wanted it dead. I hoped I'd find them.

The witch's sickle also went into the chest. It was unusual, and I wanted to find an inquisitor and figure out what was going on with it. I thought I might get a quest for it, too.

Happy with how empty my bag was and how full my chest was, I decided to see about that debt I was supposed to take care of.

Dear reader! Thank you for reading my book!



[The Fayroll 7 \(Different Sides\)](#) release is expected on January 22nd!

I hope that you will be carried away by an excerpt from the future book.
And if you've already read Fayroll 6 - please leave a review. I really appreciate
every comment and review on [Amazon](#).

Thanks for the feedback.

Stay tuned and be informed!

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