

## Banhammer

*Avendesora dances with TheChosenOne, TheChosenOne dances with Avendesora*

The hammer strikes the heated metal, sending sparks dancing amongst the tools hanging dormant around the shop. The messages appear to follow the rhythm of my forging, barraging me with unneeded distractions. The stream of useless information is unending, but that's what I get for picking a hub city. Don't get me wrong, Heimili is a wonderful place. A vibrant and restless collection of people, and a main stop of the infinite adventurers. My shop is here for two reasons: a steady income, and my hobby.

As the monotony of the day drones on, I look out upon the residents and adventurers alike. They shuffle through my armory's street like herds of lost cattle. A mishmash of all manner of races and genders, the crowds blend together into a multi-colored river. In most cases, one can easily tell an adventurer apart from the inhabitants of the city. Something about adventuring must attract a certain kind of person. There's no in-between: either people who look like works of art, or people born with horrible disfigurements. Always go by strange names too, names nobody's ever heard before. I'm no stranger to these adventurers, and they always have me wondering what kinds of gods are out there customizing new life.

The sound of metal footsteps greets my store. Concentration is unwavering, I continue with my work. Judging by the sound of the armor, this adventurer is no fledgeling. He impatiently browses my wares, making it very obvious that he is vying for attention. Minutes pass, and the tension becomes more palpable. I hear the signs of a crowd gathering outside the shop.

“Are you kidding me? THIS rude old man is the famous blacksmith!?” He jumps into an offensive rant, full of vulgarity, on the terrible state of the shopkeepers in the city.

I turn to my apprentice, handing her the responsibility of forging my current work. Inspecting his gear, it is obvious that he is very well off, and only the best gear is deserving of his use. Platemail sabatons from the famed Iron Cobbler; a breastplate forged of elemental gems, no doubt from a dungeon; and a cracked greatsword. Something tells me that he is looking for a new weapon.

The greatsword refuses to leave its scabbard with ease, "I'm guessing you noticed the condition this junk is in." He drops the sword and stomps on it, shattering the beautiful handiwork of another smith. "I'm the renowned Nimbus Battle, AKA 'He who Carries'. I need a new weapon that will show off how awesome I truly am." He fumbles around in his inventory momentarily, producing a large bag of gold.

I look him over once more, a perfect representation of my usual clientele. My business is very simple: bring me a request, provide the funds, and I will forge it. Grabbing the bag, "What did you have in mind?"

These adventuring types are all the same: vulgar, conceited, and completely inept. I'm sought out for my unique creations and the ability to customize a weapon. No armor or weapon is too ridiculous for me to craft. After payment, Nimbus takes a few minutes to deliver me his blueprint -- a crude drawing of a double-sided blade. The sketch leaves much to be desired, but nothing is impossible. The outcome is essentially unusable, being three times the size of the user, but he accepts it happily anyway. This is where the real fun begins.

I close up the shop in time to follow the blockheaded adventurer. Sadly enough, the sword isn't the gaudiest thing within sight. I spy many adventurers passing with gear that is just as ineffective, thankfully no others of my own creation. Nimbus eventually meets up with the

rest of his team, who cheer at the sight of his new weapon. They discuss what dungeon to run, and of course they settle on the deadliest.

I've been fed up with these kinds of adventurers for years now. Day in and day out, it's the same "Did you know that I'm the chosen one?" and "I should get a discount 'cuz I'm saving the world." Nobody seems to mind the arrogance, must run in the adventuring blood. My hobby is the only thing keeping me sane. Falling into my old routine, I make my way to the same dungeon as the adventurers. A fine way to spend a few hours, watching a group of idiots try and use gear that will never work.

The dungeon starts off fine enough, Nimbus is able to clear through most of the trash mobs without any worries. His friends watch in awe as he is able to fight two monsters at once. Their hide and wooden armor are nothing compared to my master craftsmanship. After a few minutes, the group arrives at the first boss. An animated monstrosity built from the gear of fallen adventurers. With each group it slays, the stronger it gets. In fact, I recognize a few of my own works amongst its body. Nimbus, of course, tells the group to hold back. He is confident that my weapon will slay the beast with great ease. Now the fun can really start.

Nimbus raises the blade high above his head, and begins to spin it. The construct shambles towards him, raising its own weapon. Nimbus lets out a small grunt, and the sword in his hands begins to rapidly grow. Eventually it reaches the size of the construct's weapon. The adventurers watch in horrified awe as it continues to grow. Meanwhile, I am having a wonderful time on a safe ledge overlooking the battle. Moments later, the sword crashes to the ground.

"Looks like it was a bit heavy for you, eh 'He who Carries'!?" I spill some wine as I laugh up on the ledge.

The construct's weapon becomes part of its body, and it grows a few inches taller. It bends down, taking Nimbus' weapon for its own, and proceeds to collect more spoils from the rest of the adventuring party. I watch the group continue to re-try the fight numerous times, Nimbus now equipped with a weak shortsword. Eventually they give up, having lost nearly all their gear to the beast. With the fun over, I pack the remainder of my lunch, and head back to the store.

On the trip back, I reminisce about previous clients. Once, I crafted a suit of armor for another 'great adventurer'. He came to me amongst a group of women, all wearing nearly no clothing. He offered the horrifically terrible explanation that the women were more effective with less clothing. Of course, I took his request, and forged a great set of armor. When he first set foot in a dungeon, it immediately shattered to fit the image of effectiveness that he had for his female compatriots. It was a great riot to watch him equip other armor, only to have it be completely destroyed. The only downside to this was watching so much lovely armor be destroyed. His new 'effective' armor offered as much protection as it should -- making him all but useless as a tank.

Why am I still so sought out, even with many stories like these? Creating useless gear is no way to make a living, obviously. The adventurers have many theories, and have given me many titles. They claim everything is 'Up to RNG', which is their foreign way of saying that everything I make is chance. Many think that I was made with skills that only work based on this kind of luck, and that it's not my fault if the gear is useless. On the contrary, luck and chance have nothing to do with it. The Forgers of the World may have intended it to be this way, but I turned out differently than expected. You see, I have always been a fan of ironic consequences.

Everyone who comes to me will get what they deserve. Some of the most famous adventurers still wield my gear to this day, pieces that have lasted for years without any signs of age. They slay great beasts, rule magnanimous kingdoms, and represent the epitome of adventuring. Some even revisit me many adventures later, only to return my work in hopes that it will help someone else as it helped them. These pieces adorn my shop, a fitting resting place for such beauty.

I return to the city, just as chaotic as I had left it. It takes me a while to return to the armory, as my street has filled to the brim with more adventurers than usual. I push my way through the crowd, only to find Nimbus and his cohorts waiting outside my shop. Looking ridiculous in half their gear, they berate me with all manner of insults. I ignore them completely, moving towards my shop. The sign flips to open, and the interior returns to the world once more.

Nimbus once more steps into my shop, and impatiently grabs me by my shirt. He looks me dead in the eye, “You sold me broken gear. You knew it wouldn’t work! I’ve already contacted a GM and they’re going to make sure I get my money back AND a working piece of gear from you!”

GM, an adventurer term for the avatars of The Forgers. The most powerful beings in the universe, who hold the power to create and destroy on a whim. A few seconds pass with me in Nimbus’ grip, and the GM appears. A being without form, the GM takes in the information surrounding itself. Finally it addresses Nimbus, “Hello there, Nimbus Battle. I am Miskunn. I read your bug report and am here to see what I can do to help!”

Nimbus rolls his eyes, “Jeez that took forever! You better fix this fast.”

Showing no signs of distress at the rude comment, “I’ll see what I can do. If you could please drop the NPC.”

I fall to the ground, confused about why the GM is even here. Suddenly, everything fades to black. All around me is an infinite void, in which my body is floating. The GM appears before me, and envelops me in a blinding light. “Hmm -- I can’t seem to find anything on this guy. You got anything?”

Another GM appears beside me, “Not in our logs. He’s a famous blacksmith amongst the players. He takes... Requests?”

“Requests? How is that possible?”

“You got me, man. I don’t remember that being designed. This is crazy complex code.”

“I guess he makes faulty gear... Got some bratty kid killed and made him lose most of his gear.”

“Should we just wipe him out then?”

My heart skips a beat, “Please oh great Forgers, hear my words!”

The two GMs are taken aback, “Did he just...talk to us?”

I hold my hand over my heart, “I swear on the proud lineage of the 19 previous Doviennyas that I am not a mistake. I craft only that which my clientele deserves. If that so happens to be some form of punishment, then my creations will deliver. However, those who are deserving of my craft receive nothing short of perfection. Look at the history of the items that are in my shop, they were once owned by some of the greatest adventurers the world has known! I do not ask for your help, but merely to continue my work.”

The silence that follows is the longest of my life. Eventually, both GMs disappear without a word. I am left alone to my thoughts, and the void. My mind wanders to the adventurers I have helped, and those I have punished. Do the Forgers consider my punishments too harsh? I fear the repercussions that my work will have. I think of my shop, and my

apprentice. My years of training will allow her to replace me well. I only hope she crafts works far greater than my own.

After what feels like days, the GMs reappear. With them, comes an old man. He wears nothing but rags, and is obviously homeless. “This is the one. He doesn’t show up in any of our logs, and has functionality that was never designed.”

The old man studies me, saying nothing. He snaps his fingers, “Oh I remember him!” The old man breaks into a chortle, “Before I bought him out, my co-founder used to be heavy into design. D20 here was a concept for the game that was never really finished.”

I cringe at the sound of my most hated title. “So what do we do with him?”

The old man ponders for a moment, “Well we can’t have any more players complaining about his broken gear... On the other hand you were saying he seems to be sentient in a way.” He rubs his lengthy beard, “How about this, D20. We let you keep on keeping on -- but you can’t go making any more of that broken or overpowered gear for anyone. No more requests.”

Realizing what a gift this sentence is, I nod, “Thank you so much, good sir. I do not understand your strange language, but I will no longer take it upon myself to do your job.”

The old man smiles, revealing many missing teeth, “That settles it then! You’ll get a list of what you can sell soon, and we’ll be keeping a close eye on you.”

The shop’s interior reforms around me, evidently it’s been hours since closing. My apprentice has since gone home, and all is quiet. I look around at the great works on my walls, and it is with a heavy heart I know that I cannot create any more. The walk home is solemn and lonely.

Early the next morning, a shrill voice breaks through the murmur of the street, yet only some of the crowd notices. “GUYS I THINK I FOUND THE PLACE!!!”

“Stupid noob, get off trade chat!”

This voice seems to come from somewhere across the city, echoing amongst the buildings. I usually like to keep an ear to the trade chat, mostly to keep my prices competitive. More voices begin to flood the air from all corners of the city. More and more join the conversation, either with actual business propositions or mindless dribble. As arguments begin to brew, I decide that the chat will handle itself and ignore it for the time being.

After a few moments I hear the familiar sounds of new customers. They marvel at the various armor and weaponry that adorns my shop. I greet them, “These are gifts from kind adventurers. They found it in their hearts to return my creations to me once they had finished with them... By no means am I a young man. I have collected them over many years of hard work. Nor am I unknown, taking jobs from even the most elite of guilds.” My hammer strikes the hot iron. “Some may even call me infamous, but that is up to interpretation. I am known by many titles: Angel of Misfortune, The Godsmith, Forger of Luck, among others.” The sparks fly into the air, along with my anger. “These are all pure rubbish given to me by those who have known the scorn of my craft! To think, a master smith is not even known by his birth name! A name passed down for generations. I have taken it upon myself to not allow this injustice to continue, these petty adventurers will learn to respect--”

“Dovienya the 20th, honorable master smith, we beseech thee.” The ring of the hammer meeting the anvil echoes through the armory.

I pause and slowly look up, actually inspect the group standing before me. A tiny group of only ten, clad in a variety of arms and armor. I slowly respond, “What did you call me?”

The small faerie lets out a small yelp, “Ohmigosh I’m sooooo sorry! I read online that you hate your nicknames.... I just thought you’d like a formal greeting!” She bows apologetically, and the rest of her group follows suit.

“I wouldn’t have expected such respect from a green group of adventurers.”

One of the members, a rock golem, quickly snaps up, “What d’ya mean green?!”

The faerie slaps the golem’s hand down, “I apologize for her rudeness. We’re just a group of friends that came together from various failed guilds...” She trails off, shifting uncomfortably, indecisive about what to say next.

“One second.” I move away from my tools and towards the door. I touch the sign outside and set it to busy. Immediately, the outside world fades to black, and the noise of the busy street is silenced. I let out a relieved sigh, “Peace and quiet at last.” Looking up at the group, “Now what can I make for such a fine group of adventurers like yourselves?”

Their eyes light up. I cannot remember the last time I had seen such a kind and honest look. I glance back at my former works, and make a final vow. The group brings out a meager bag of gold, barely enough for one of my creations. I hold a hand up, “Trust me, this will be on me.”

I have each member describe for me a piece to craft. I pray the GMs do not notice my absence for such a time. I get the details in writing, and reopen the store to let the group depart. Once the final member leaves the store, I shut myself off from the world, close any open chats, and begin my final work. My walls of trophies plundered for the perfect materials. I pour years of experience into each piece. I bar my apprentice during this time, to avoid her receiving the wrath of the Forgers as well. The armory fills with heat and smoke. Molten steel and iron drip from the anvil as I hammer away.

Another swing of my hammer, and the metal bends to my will. Completing my final works, I summon the young adventurers once more. As they fawn over their new gear, I look back at my shop. Left barren by my work, I leave to find my apprentice. Handing over ownership to her, she seems to forget me completely. Almost mindlessly, she brushes past and heads for the shop. This is how things should be.

Seeing the adventurers, I ask their permission to join them for a journey. They happily oblige my request. We take a long route through the country, a trip I have not made in many years. Time seems to slow down as we head toward the dungeon. I am in constant fear of the GM's interference, and my own mortality. However, the trip is uneventful. I hear stories of the adventurer's time in previous guilds, and the pain they have gone through. I regale them with stories of those punished by my craft, much to their amusement. Worries arise that the same fate will befall them, but I assure them that those days are over for me.

The dungeon looms on the horizon, ruins of a long-forgotten kingdom. The keep now ruled by a lesser dragon and guarded by its minions, it has been challenged by many adventurers in the past. For every time it has been conquered, a new dragon has risen to retake the throne. Fearful, the group presses onward toward their goal. They aim to use my creations to take the keep for their own. Hoping to oust the dragon and its forces once and for all, they prepare themselves for the oncoming battle.

The first few rooms are conquered easily. Corrupted soldiers and young dragons are no match for the adventurers. My gear now seems as powerful as wood next to this young group's ambitions. The clear waves of trash mobs as if they were sweeping a floor. From each encounter, they gain new experience and amass great wealth. Finally, they reach the chambers of the first boss. The spawn of the keep's owner: a great half-dragon, half-lion. The battle proves to be a

challenge for the group, as they have not faced this creature previously. The group barely avoid powerful attacks from the beast, almost as if the adventurers could see where they would land.

With the battle over, the adventurers decide on who to give the spoils to.

A sense of being watched falls over me as the dungeon progresses. As the beasts grow in power, so too does my fear of the GMs. Surely, by now, they have noticed my absence from the shop, and fear my interference in the world. We enter the final room, only to find it completely empty. Suddenly, a great roar pierces the silence, and the dragon swoops down. On its back, rides the old man clad in rags. His face is that of a devil, full of rage and vengeance. The adventurers seem confused, but ready themselves anyway.

The battle is nothing the young adventurers have faced before. Time and time again they are beaten down to exhaustion, only to be saved by the skills of their healers. The old man's interference is obvious, and infuriating. He glares at me with a smug look of victory, and whispers something to the dragon. Much to the group's surprise, the dragon takes off, and begins breathing fire in a vortex around itself. The adventurers begin to panic, claiming the attack in unavoidable. The dragon begins to dive rapidly, targeting the group, and I run from the battle.

I think back to my years at the shop, wondering how many people I have actually helped. How arrogant it was to try and do the work of a god, deciding who to punish. My final works completed, I accepted this fate. It is a good end for an arrogant man. My legacy will live on in those who did good things with my creations. This small group of adventurers will move on, and they will forge the land into something better than I could. I traverse familiar hallways, where I have watched many fall for my own amusement. Finally, I reach my ledge, and leap forth.