

148: Weight

Many thoughts crashed together in Rain's mind all at once, warring for his consideration, but he shoved them all aside. There wasn't time to think.

Purple light flashed, and an asshole puckered.

"Down!" Rain shouted, Ameliah's voice mixing with his as she yelled the same thing. He was already bending his knees to jump, but a push from Tallheart sped things along. As he tumbled through the air, trying to control his fall, he saw an enormous boulder crash through the branch where they'd been standing moments before. There was a ripping crash as the stone struck, and the branch disintegrated into jagged shards of shattered wood.

It was a quick trip to the ground, and Rain landed hard on his back, not having managed to get his legs under himself. He didn't let the impact faze him, however. The fifty meters from the canopy to the ground was nothing. He scabbled to his feet amid a downpour of rock and splintered wood, placing his shield between himself and the danger. He pulsed Refrigerate at maximum power to flash freeze the underbrush and started moving before his senses even returned. Frozen foliage snapped, then shattered as he sprinted for cover.

More stones hit, the impacts high above him, and Rain cursed, crouching behind one of the enormous trees. There was a purple flash, much larger than any of the others so far. The world darkened in a wave, and simultaneously, the saturation meters on his HUD jumped by over five thousand points. Shards of rock and wood pelted down on him like bullets, slamming into the ground and shattering the frozen underbrush into icy powder.

No, wait...

The foliage had been flattened BEFORE the impact of the debris. All around him, Rain heard the creaking and snapping of wood as branches were torn from the trees, but he couldn't spend even a second to process that, as he'd just seen something that made his breath seize in his throat.

Ameliah had hurtled out of the sky, crying out as she hit the ground with incredible force. Rain cursed, fighting to stop himself from running to her aid. He knew he couldn't. There was nothing he could realistically do to help her other than to stay out of the way. He watched helplessly as she pushed herself back to her feet, struggling against the same unseen force that was affecting the trees. Branches were still breaking, one after the other, and Rain raised his shield above his head, hearing alarming creaking from the large limb directly over him. It was bowed down as if weighted by an incredible amount of snow.

Ameliah took a few halting steps, then straightened her back with a grimace and looked up at a nearby limb. She jumped but got nowhere close to reaching it, landing in a crouch with a heavy thump that was much louder than it should have been. The frost that had been kicked up by her landing was sucked back to the ground like iron filings to a magnet.

Rain's eyes widened as the full implications of what he was seeing settled over him. It can control *fucking gravity!?* *Arcane bullshit!*

He looked around, then up. The air around him for about a meter was clear, but outside of that, the darkness extended as far as he could see, both through the trees and all the way to the ceiling. It wasn't like smoke, more like shadow—as if the light of the Fire Moss was just that much dimmer.

Just how big is this spell?!

Rain's attention returned to Ameliah as she rose, moving with more certainty now. She dashed forward, heading in the direction of the monster, snapping the fallen branches as she plowed right over them. Her footsteps were loud, a testament to the amount of force she was putting behind them.

"Hmm," Tallheart said from beside Rain, making him jump. He turned his head to see the antlered smith standing unbowed beside him at the center of his own, larger sphere of clear air.

He motioned to Rain, then began walking briskly after Ameliah. "Come. She will appreciate my assistance, and I cannot leave you behind." As Tallheart moved, the shadows seemed to flow into his armor, leaving a tunnel of clear air in his wake. What few branches hadn't been completely shattered by the impact with the ground sprung back slightly as he passed, the enchantment broken.

Rain stood, hurrying after him. *This spell isn't like an aura. It isn't replenishing itself. It's an AOE curse, probably with a set duration.* He shook his head, increasing his pace to catch up while making sure to stay as far from the darkness as possible. Tallheart's armor would have an incomparably higher saturation point than his own, given what it was made from.

A chill ran down Rain's spine as he considered what would have happened to him had he been unarmored. He'd have been subjected to the full force of the spell, which wouldn't have ended well for him.

It's affecting Ameliah, and her Arcane resistance is in the thousands... He glanced up. *The branches are bending despite how stupidly tough the wood of these trees is. Just how strong is this spell? Ten times gravity? A hundred?* His steps slowed as he neared the edge of the trees, then he stopped. *Maybe I should stay here.*

"Come," Tallheart said, turning to look at him. Firelight flashed from behind him. Ameliah had engaged the monster.

"But—" Rain began.

Tallheart cut him off by grabbing his hand and pulling him forward as he turned to continue. "You must remain near me. We do not know what else it can do."

"Right," Rain said, shaking his head. *If it has more AOE's, hell, even if it just casts this one again, I could be in trouble.* He glanced at his HUD, where the saturation bars were decaying incredibly slowly. *If my armor saturates, I'm done. Pancaked.*

They passed through the final trees, then stepped out into the clearing. Here, too, shadows hung in the air, the normal crimson cast from the Fire Moss darkened to a bloody red by the Hababa's spell. Ameliah was sprinting along the ground through the flattened remains of the colony. As Rain watched, she suddenly changed direction, dodging a car-sized stone that the Hababa had sent hurtling toward her. She retaliated with a trio of Fireballs, and a detonation rocked the cavern as the cloud of stones surrounding the monster was blasted away. Gravel pelted the ground like hail, only the largest stones remaining aloft.

The Hababa's health bar was down by a tenth. Ameliah had been busy.

"Hmm," Tallheart said, stopping near the edge of the Meteor crater, the walls of which had slumped down under the gravity. He released Rain's hand, then bent to pick up something that glittered metallically in the ruddy light. Rain recognized it after a moment as a jagged piece of a Hababa blade.

Tallheart straightened, turning the shard over in his hand as he inspected it. He looked up, then pulled back his arm and whipped the chunk of metal like a Frisbee so hard that there was a blast of wind from the motion. The shard flew too fast for Rain to follow its motion, but he did hear it shatter as it struck its target.

"EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!" Ahbahabam shrieked, blasted backward by the force of the impact. The path the shard had taken was visible as a thin line of light through the shadow. It didn't curve in the slightest, telling of just how *fast* the shard had been moving. The metal probably hadn't even had *time* to saturate.

"Hmm," Tallheart said, sounding satisfied.

Holy shit. Rain could only stare. The monster had already recovered, swooping as it dodged another blast of fire from Ameliah, despite the way the missiles curved to follow it through the sky. *I am so out of my league.*

"Find more shards," Tallheart said, laying a hand on Rain's shoulder. "Use Detection."

Rain nodded, doing as ordered, then pointed. "There."

"Come," Tallheart said, moving in that direction. "We must— One moment." He leapt diagonally, intercepting the boulder that the Hababa King had sent hurtling straight at Rain's face.

Deepstone shattered before the might of Tallheart's kick, but he wasn't able to block the boulder completely. A large shard struck Rain in the shoulder, exploding into powder and sending him stumbling back. His armor had easily withstood the hit, though its durability dropped by a few hundred points.

"Ah," Rain gasped, raising a hand to his shoulder.

Tallheart skidded as he landed, then reversed direction and placed himself between Rain and the Hababa king.

"Hmm," he said, straightening and dusting himself off. "That was unexpected. Its retaliation should have been toward me, not you."

A Fireball detonated, and the Hababa screamed again. The sound was just as piercing as ever, but not nearly as rattling to Rain as the realization of how close he'd just come to death.

If that had hit me, I'd have been paste... He lowered his arm, marveling that his shoulder didn't even feel bruised. *Actually, maybe not, but still. It would have HURT.*

"Come," Tallheart said, tilting his head forward. "We must retrieve the shard."

Rain nodded. *Worry about that later.* He moved, careful to keep Tallheart between him and the fight.

Ameliah was doing quite well, in his estimation. Ahbahabam clearly wasn't king of dodging. Its flight was rapid, but not agile. Each change in direction was signaled by a sweeping gesture by one of its arms, its fingertips glowing with Arcane power. It wasn't flying, so much as falling, he realized, watching as Ameliah used one of the monster's gestures to pre-aim her next spell. She only had to curve the missiles slightly to intercept it, though it moved a boulder between itself and the blast.

The stone shattered from the impact, some of the pieces plummeting down to the floor, but most falling horizontally with the monster as it shot toward the trees. It gestured upward, changing direction and falling into the sky. The cloud of shards fell with it, under the influence of the same local gravity field. Among them remained only three large boulders, which the monster was directing separately from the others, using one hand for each. As he watched, it fired one of them at Ameliah, who jumped over it, leaving it to slam into the ground. The impact sent a tremor through the cavern that Rain felt even from this distance.

This is insane!

Rain's heart was pounding in his chest as he dug through the dirt for the shard. Finding it, he tossed it to Tallheart, who snagged it out of the air and whipped it at the monster in one smooth motion. The razor-sharp chunk of sword flashed in front of the creature's face, missing by a hand's breadth. It turned its head, following the clear streak back to them, then screamed its horrible piercing scream. That scream turned into a strangled cry as a trio of Fireballs exploded against its back.

"Ameliah says to continue," Tallheart said mildly as the noise faded. "Apparently, we are a good distraction."

Rains eyes widened as the Hababa pointed a long finger directly at him. "Look out!"

"I see it," Tallheart said, summoning his helmet. The darkened light of the moss glinted off his antlers as he calmly walked between Rain and the monster, which fired *something* at them moments later. It wasn't a boulder, but something else. Something new—a spherical distortion, about a meter across, sliding through space toward them and warping it like a fisheye lens.

Rain covered in Tallheart's shadow. He raised his shield, not that he thought it would seriously help. The impact, when it came, was underwhelming. The magic was simply swallowed by Tallheart's armor with not so much as a whisper or a gust of wind.

"Hmm," Tallheart said, his voice echoing. He glanced over his shoulder at Rain, the metallic features of his great elk helm visible in profile. "Powerful. We will dodge next time." He looked back up at the monster, crossing his arms as he watched it hurl its remaining stones at Ameliah. "Is there another shard nearby?"

"Yeah," Rain said, shaking his head. He moved to stand beside Tallheart, then pointed. "That way."

Tallheart nodded and started moving, orange light reflecting off his silver antlers as yet another of Ameliah's spells detonated. The Hababa King had lost over a quarter of its health now, and only had one large boulder remaining.

Ameliah skidded to a stop, not far from where Rain had sensed the next shard. She was holding a trio of Fireballs at the ready, but she didn't launch them, merely tracking the

monster with them as she panted to catch her breath. The monster, to Rain's surprise, didn't immediately blast her when she stopped. It slowed in the air, coming to a standstill as it hovered with the large stone between itself and Ameliah.

Maybe it doesn't want to get rid of its shield?

The silence stretched, but Tallheart didn't stop walking, clearly intent on reaching the shard. Rain followed, and, realizing that Ameliah was now in range, he activated Essence Well to send her a trickle of mana. She was facing away from them and didn't look back as the blue rings appeared around her. Her gaze remained locked on the monster hanging motionless in the air. The monster, for its part, did react to the spell, but only by shifting its gaze to Rain. It sneered at him with a mouth full of crowded teeth, then licked its lips.

Well, that's not unsettling.

"I think it likes you," Ameliah said, still not looking back. Ahbahabam snarled, returning its attention to her, and she laughed. "That's right, dum dum. Eyes on me."

"I think it wants to eat me," Rain said. "It looks hungry."

"It doubtless is," Tallheart said with a snort. "It is starved for essence. Ameliah deprived it of its meal when she obliterated the Fatbird. This area cannot sustain it for long."

"I'm not so sure," Rain said, again looking at the depth gauge. "I think the depth gauge might be broken." He shook his head, then pointed at a spot just to the left of Tallheart's feet. "The shard is buried right in front of you."

“Hmm,” Tallheart rumbled, looking down.

The moment Tallheart took his eyes off of the Shaman King, it snapped up an arm and fired another of the strange distortion blasts from the tip of its finger. Tallheart had clearly been expecting something like that, as he was already moving by the time Rain and Ameliah shouted out warnings.

Rain grunted as Tallheart crashed into him. He found himself being swept off the ground, carried along for the ride as Tallheart dashed away from the path of the missile. The magical distortion curved to follow them, but not sharply enough. It struck the ground, and Rain had trouble making sense of what happened next despite having a good view from his position as baggage.

The energy sunk into the dirt, warping it as it had warped the air. A moment later, space itself seemed to churn, the distortion quadrupling in size before abruptly crashing back down on itself. As the magic faded, a perfectly spherical crater was revealed, as if everything within the volume had simply been deleted from existence. There had been no sound.

Well, that's fun, Rain thought as Tallheart stood him back on his feet. “Nice dodge, Tallheart. Hey Ameliah, don't get hit by those.”

Ameliah snorted. “Good tip. See if you can get it to take another shot at you. If it runs out of mana, this will get a whole lot easier.”

Rain nodded, dropping Essence Well. He'd transferred two-thirds of his pool over to Ameliah by this point. If this was a battle of attrition, it was a battle that they would win.

Suddenly, the cloud of darkness hanging over the cavern broke. Rain tensed, but nothing else seemed to happen. Either the duration of the Hababa's gravity spell had expired, or the monster had dismissed it. It grunted, the noise conveying annoyance, meaning it was likely the former.

Round two began with no warning as Ameliah launched herself into the air, giving herself an angle over the protective stone. She loosed her spell, and at first, Rain thought she'd missed, the magic flying high above her target. He saw the truth of it as the Fireballs hooked tightly around to strike the monster from behind. The Hababa had attempted to move its stone to intercept them, but it hadn't been able to keep up. It howled in anger, writhing in pain as the blast sent it flying forward. It recovered quickly, then flung the stone at Ameliah, but she dodged through the air with contemptuous ease, freed of the crushing gravity. She was already chanting as she prepared her next spell.

The Hababa made no further attempt to chase after her. Instead, it began drifting slowly downward, shifting into a cross-legged position in the air and bringing both pairs of hands together in front of its chest. It wove its long fingers together, locking them into a pair of arcane sigils, then closed its eyes.

Rain cursed. "Something big coming!"

"We shall see," Tallheart said. They weren't near the shard anymore, but there were plenty of boulders around. Tallheart stooped quickly, coming up with one the size of his head. He pitched it overhand at the meditating Shaman King, and with the gravity field gone, there was nothing to disrupt the path of the nonmetallic projectile. It struck the Hababa directly in the forehead and exploded into powder, though the effect on its health bar was underwhelming.

Ameliah's next spell did quite a bit more, partially absorbed by the crown as it was, but the Hababa didn't even flinch.

"Hmm," Tallheart said, lifting a larger stone. Before he could throw it, the Shaman King's eyes snapped open, burning with Arcane light. It whipped two of its arms up and the other two to the side. Its crown blazed to life, wreathed by purple flame, and darkness exploded outward—the same gravity-increasing spell as before. Rain's relief at recognizing the known threat was short-lived. His saturation had increased again, but that wasn't the problem. Outside of a small radius around him and Tallheart, everything that had been on the ground had flown into the air as if fired by a cannon, blocking his view and deafening him in the process.

No...that's not...

Rain's eyes widened as the air rapidly cleared, and he corrected his assessment. The ground *ITSELF* had been fired into the air. Everything had risen in a great wave faster than he could believe—rocks, branches, trees, the dirt itself, even the river of lava in the distance. It was as if the chamber had been upended like an hourglass within the radius of the spell. He gasped as the ground suddenly slumped beneath him. The dirt was spreading out, then streaming upward like a curtain as it came into contact with the spell. The veil that this formed wasn't thick enough to stop him from seeing Ameliah as she tumbled into the sky. She was falling more slowly than the former ground had fallen, but it was still fast. Very, very fast.

Rain cried out wordlessly as she struck the ceiling at speed, leaving a crater in the puck of dirt that was glued there by the spell. Rain heard the impact loud and clear over the sound of Ahbahabam's laughter. The monster was spinning slowly, turning itself over so it could fall feet-first into the sky. As Rain watched, powerless, it pointed one long finger at the site of her crash, then fired a sphere of void.

Brace!

Ameliah managed to activate the spell moments before she slammed into the ceiling, but even so, the impact was far from painless. The dirt had been packed down under its own weight, and it was filled with jagged chunks of broken wood and stone. She grimaced as she pushed herself back up, her body feeling several times heavier than normal under the influence of the spell. Moving with urgency, she flipped herself over, struggling to dig out of the crater. Staying still was a good way to die, and she was proven correct as she spotted one of the monster's void spells warping its way directly toward her, glowing brilliantly to her magical eyesight.

Shit.

She kicked off as hard as she could against the packed earth. Her jump carried her not nearly as high as it should have, but she'd expected that and was already in the process of compensating.

Airwalk.

It took three more rapid jumps to get out of the crater, but she managed it with almost a second to spare. The void spell seemed dangerous, but it wasn't fast, which was likely why the Hababa hadn't been using it more often. The distortion slammed into the ceiling where she'd been lying, and as before, the spell detonated in a wash of turbulence, erasing dirt and stone alike.

Ameliah landed heavily nearby. She looked up, searching for the Hababa, and her stomach flip-flopped as she beheld the entirety of the cavern laid out above her.

This spell is bullshit. It's like Levitate, but enormous and undodgeable. It's no fair.

She shook her head to clear away the momentary disorientation, then stood, ready to dodge again if needed. She was used to sudden changes in perspective thanks to Redirection, just not on this scale.

Below her, a bare patch of stone on the floor corresponded to the circle of dirt around her. The two circles were connected by a pillar of shadow that made making out details difficult. The darkness was partly from the spell and partly from the simple fact that the Fire Moss below—*above?*—her feet was now buried. Outside the circle, the rest of the moss was still glowing brightly, and her eyes were quickly adapting. The river of lava was visible below her as a crimson snake winding through the trees. Where it touched the boundary of the spell, it fell into the air in a torrent of glowing droplets—droplets that were now raining down all around her. The molten stone had spread as it fell, and with a thought, she activated Shrouded by Flame to protect her clothing, though it was already ripped practically to shreds after her passage through the rising ground.

Damn bullshit spell.

Ameliah's eyes latched onto the Hababa king, tracking it as it smoothly descended toward her. The monster was glowing clearly in the magical spectrum, despite the gloom. *Good. It's coming for me. Looks like it's at half mana.* She shifted her gaze, searching for Rain and Tallheart and finding them standing on a small island of dirt, upside down from her

perspective. The area around them was brighter than the rest of the circle, clear of the spell. She nodded to herself, relieved, though she already knew that their armor would have protected them.

They'll be fine. I need to worry about myself. I'm on my own until this expires, but as long as I'm careful... Oh shit, it's going to expire.

Quickly, she used Message, forming a connection to Rain.

[I'm planning to stall until this spell wears off. Make sure you're not standing where you are when it does.] She paused, then recast Message, judging it worth the extra mana. *[Oh, and I'm fine, by the way. This is some major Arcane bullshit, though, for sure. Did you know that you're standing on the ceiling?]*

She let the connection close, focusing once more on the Hababa Shaman, which was falling quite quickly now. She tensed, watching as mana built in its fingers. The signature appeared to be similar to that of the void spheres, yet subtly different. Wary of what that might mean, she dodged backward, but when the monster loosed the magic, it didn't aim it at her. Instead, the spell struck the stone directly below its feet, creating a perfectly circular hole through which the Hababa vanished.

Oh. Ameliah blinked. So that's how it dodged my Meteors. Void tunneling. She shook her head. *This thing would be a nightmare if it was a higher level.*

A tremor ran through the stone, and Ameliah jumped away just in case the Hababa was able to tunnel horizontally. The ground erupted while she was in mid-air, though not below her as

she'd feared. Ahbahabam had emerged right where it had entered, just as it had done the first time. Also as before, it was surrounded by Arcane energy and countless chunks of debris.

Ameliah narrowed her eyes, waiting for the trick as she prepared herself to dodge. *It can't be just planning to do the same thing as before, can it? It doesn't strike me as being that dumb. It has to have realized by now that it can't hit me with one of those.*

"EE!" The monster screamed, releasing a pulse of magic. The stones around it shattered into a cloud of tiny shards, about the size and shape of arrowheads. It whipped its arms around, the stones trailing after its hands and forming four spinning rings around its body. The magic built further, the individual stones beginning to glow independently of the magic field surrounding them.

Ah. Something new. I'm guessing it's going to spray them at me, and they'll explode on impact. Dodging that's going to be tricky.

The Hababa smiled, pulling back its lips to reveal its jagged yellow teeth.

Ameliah crouched down, preparing herself. The glow was getting brighter as the monster's mana continued to drop, and concern started to worm its way into her heart. *That's...quite a bit of mana it's using there. It must be trying to finish me off. Don't tell me they're homing. That would be just unfair. Damn it. Should I just run out of the field? No, I can't do that. It might go after Rain and Tallheart.*

Ameliah looked up to check on them, then smiled. They'd come up with a plan, it seemed.

Brace.

The Hababa's magic flared, but just before it launched its spell, a boulder the size of a black bear landed on its head. The stone was moving with ridiculous speed after its fall through the weight-altering spell. Ahbahabam was hammered out from the center of its rotating stones so quickly that it seemed to vanish, leaving the spinning rocks behind. The ceiling shook beneath her feet from the force of the impact, and tiny explosions of magic peppered the air as the rings broke apart, each stone detonating impotently in the air.

Ameliah smiled. *That looked like it hurt.* She sent a quick message to Tallheart. *[Nice shot.]*

Walking forward carefully, she began chanting the incantation for Fireball. She'd have prepared a Meteor instead, but she wasn't sure how the spell would function inside the Hababa's field. Meteor normally appeared high above the target, and it wasn't clear how that would work given her present situation. Besides that, she didn't think Tallheart's improvised version of the spell had injured the monster badly enough to prevent it from dodging. Meteor was slow.

Debris exploded upward, and Ameliah leapt back. The Hababa King was bleeding, and its health had dropped, but the damage was even less than she'd expected. Its mana was the real casualty. The disruption of its spell had left it with only a quarter remaining.

Not seeing a reason to wait, Ameliah launched her Fireball. The Hababa raised a protective screen of debris with a wave of a hand, then tossed a rock at her in retaliation. She dodged easily, smiling.

Got any tricks left?

Apparently, the answer was no. After a half dozen more exchanges, interspersed with two additional gift boulders—neither of which hit, unfortunately—the Hababa King seemed to decide that it had had enough. Its mana almost empty, it turned, then flew toward the edge of the field.

Ameliah jumped—not after the Hababa, but backward, out of the magical field. Watching it flee, it had occurred to her that there was another explanation for its sudden departure. She was proven correct seconds later as the field expired and the circular slice of dirt dropped.

[Get out of the circle!] she screamed to Rain with Message as she began to fall. Quickly, she reoriented herself, then used Airwalk to leap after the Hababa. In the corner of her eye, she caught a flash of white light from off in the trees.

That's Purify. Ameliah smiled as the falling dirt crashed into the ground below, happy in the knowledge that Rain had heeded her first warning. She wasn't worried about Tallheart. He'd obviously been the one who'd remained in the area to do the boulder chucking, but he wouldn't be hurt by something as minor as a tidal wave of dirt. Worst case, they'd just have to dig him out.

She began chanting up a Fireball, dismissing Shrouded by Flame as she locked her eyes onto the fleeing monster. It was angling for the treetops, which was unacceptable. She kicked herself after it with Airwalk, shoving against the air as if climbing stairs two at a time, only horizontally. Landing would be interesting, but that was a secondary concern. *You are NOT getting away.*

The Hababa king crashed into the treetops, breaking branches and ricocheting off a tree before thudding heavily to the ground. Ameliah arrested her own fall with considerably more

grace, surprising even herself by landing adroitly on a branch. The Hababa was just getting to its feet below her, so she promptly blasted it with the Triplicate Fireball she had at the ready.

Without a stone to block, nor the mana to raise one, the monster took the full force of the spell right in the back. It was slammed roughly into the ground as the surrounding vegetation was blasted away, burning from the flames. The monster got to its feet slowly, limbs shaking as it looked around. After a moment, it tilted its head to snarl up at her.

Ameliah paid it no mind, busy preparing her next spell. The monster seemed to be having difficulty standing under its own weight. *Looks like it's done. I can't see its stamina, but there's no way it ran out. This has to be essence starvation.* She finished chanting and immediately fired. *Too bad, Ahbabawhatever. You'll get no mercy from me.*

It took more than one cast to finish things, but Ameliah didn't move from her branch as she ruthlessly hammered the Hababa with Fireball after Fireball. There was no need to use anything else, and soon enough, the Hababa King died. According to the system, her contribution was eighty percent, and she was sure that some of the remaining twenty percent was Rain's. The boulders had probably been his idea, and even if they hadn't been, he'd given her mana. That was more than enough.

She dropped to the ground, then walked over to the charred body of the Hababa. Its crown was lying nearby, having finally tumbled free during her barrage. The silvery metal was glowing to her eyes, saturated with magic but apparently undamaged. She knelt to pick it up, finding it warm to the touch, but not unreasonably so.

She raised it to her head, then sighed. It was far too large, of course. Besides that, the system had nothing to say about any enchantments that it might hold. She was reasonably sure that monsters couldn't bind items, which meant there was nothing there. It was only metal.

Oh well. Tallheart will want it, I suppose. Is it silver, or something better? It's heavy, I can tell you that. After another moment of consideration, she shrugged, then looped the band of metal over her shoulder. She turned to face the corpse, then activated Purify and watched as it began to dissolve away.

Level twenty-four, huh? Poor Rain. She smiled. I guess this just means we need to keep going. If this is the kind of thing we'll be fighting, though, I'm not sure how far we'll get.

Light glinted from within one of the monster's evaporating bones, and she looked to see a purple crystal about the size of a robin's egg fall to the ground. She smiled, adjusting her grip on the crown.

That should help.