

The Axnay Rejects

EPISODE NINETEEN – CASTERS CAUSE DISASTERS.

At The Axnay Elite's grandiose base, at the beginning of a warm and sunny day, Countess Brilliance, Sir Mighty, Artful Shadow and Duke Thunder were all sitting around a table, enjoying a nice, refreshing pot of tea. There was also a selection of biscuits on the table. It was all so very civilised. The content of their conversation, however, was not.

THUNDER: Quite frankly, I couldn't care less if they all caught fire and died.

MIGHTY: Whilst squealing in pain from an aggressive genital disease.

SHADOW: And having their spleens poked repeatedly by an angry midget with a very sharp spear.

BRILLIANCE: Not to mention having their...

(She then paused and gave Shadow a sideways glance.)

BRILLIANCE: Why a midget?

SHADOW: Because nobody would mind if a *midget* stayed too long and died from smoke inhalation.

BRILLIANCE: Right. Well... I'm not sure what midgets did to incur *your* disdain, but...

SHADOW: One of them punched me in the nuts once.

BRILLIANCE: Oh. Fair enough then.

SHADOW: No, it wasn't. It was anything *but* fair. Those pint-sized nuisances have an unfair height advantage.

(Sir Mighty was astonished.)

MIGHTY: An unfair height advantage???

SHADOW: Yes!

THUNDER: Only for cock punching though!

SHADOW: And that's what we were discussing!

THUNDER: Oh.

(He nodded.)

THUNDER: As you were then.

BRILLIANCE: Actually, no. We need to move on from that and get on with discussing the big issue of the day. Those pesky Rejects.

THUNDER: We already were.

BRILLIANCE: No, we were just fantasising about them dying. We're *meant* to be discussing how we plan to destroy them.

SHADOW: She's right.

MIGHTY: Indeed she is.

SHADOW: So, what have you got in mind, Countess?

(Brilliance looked to him with wide and empty eyes for a moment then replied blankly.)

BRILLIANCE: Discussing it.

SHADOW: I see. So you don't have a plan then?

BRILLIANCE: None of us do. That's why we're here. To discuss it again.

THUNDER: Then discuss it we shall.

MIGHTY: Begin!

(They then sat there in stone cold silence for a good thirty seconds.)

MIGHTY: Really? Nobody? We've been thinking this over all week.

BRILLIANCE: Yes, but it's a tough one. If The Rejects see us sabotage them, they'll report it, Chi will confirm it and *we'll* be the ones in the shit.

THUNDER: So we need to do something that can't come back to us.

MIGHTY: Attack them without even being there.

SHADOW: A third party attack then

BRILLIANCE: No good. If they get attacked, the first thing they'll do is blame us. Like they always do. Chi will check and, again, we're screwed.

MIGHTY: Hmm... this is a tough one.

THUNDER: A conundrum some might say.

(Just then, the door flew open and Velvet Vortex glided majestically into the room. As always, her demeanour was that of a woman who truly believed herself to be something special.

VORTEX: Greetings, fellow rich people.

(She exhaled.)

VORTEX: Is that St. Jeremiah's Turmeric Island Tea I can smell?

(She sniffed the air before her.)

VORTEX: Unmistakable. I do love the smell of things poor people can't afford.

Especially in the morning.

(She beamed then headed for the table.)

VORTEX: Pour me a cup, Countess.

(A few moments later, however, she came to a complete halt. A suspicious expression then morphed onto her face.)

VORTEX: Wait a minute. Why are you all grimacing at me like that? Like I'm not welcome.

(She gasped.)

VORTEX: Come to think of it, none of you even said hello to me when I came in!

MIGHTY: It's nothing personal, Velvet.

SHADOW: Indeed. We were discussing The Rejects again, you see?

BRILLIANCE: And as you know, you can't be part of that conversation, because Chi always reads you.

VORTEX: I'm aware.

(She then sneered bitterly.)

VORTEX: But do you have to discuss it every minute of every sodding day?

SHADOW: What?

VORTEX: Every morning! And every evening this week! I've been shunned at morning tea and sent home early every evening. I'm starting to think you're trying to avoid me!

THUNDER: Now you're being ridiculous!

VORTEX: Am I? There's no way you could've been discussing it that much! You'd have come up with something by now.

SHADOW: Actually...

VORTEX: So, come on then. Let's hear it. What's your plan?

(An embarrassed silence ensued.)

VORTEX: See? You've got nothing! You *are* avoiding me!!!

BRILLIANCE: We're really not.

VORTEX: Don't flannel me, Countess.

(She sighed.)

VORTEX: I should have seen this coming. Even my own kind are so in awe of me, they can't bear to be in the same room. It's classic. I've lost so many friends because I make them feel unworthy.

THUNDER: That's what people tell you before they ditch you, is it?

VORTEX: They don't need to say it. I expect it.

(She shook her head solemnly.)

VORTEX: It's hard to make friends when you're this perfect.

(Sir Mighty rolled his eyes.)

MIGHTY: Yes, but all ridiculous fantasies aside...

VORTEX: Hey!

MIGHTY: We're still discussing it because we've literally got no idea how to proceed.

THUNDER: We've wracked our brains all week, but finding something that won't come back to Chi is like looking for a needle in a haystack.

SHADOW: And it's giving me a headache, so in stark contrast to your beliefs, I'm glad you're here, Velvet. Now we *can't* discuss it, I can give my brain a rest.

(Vortex nodded to accept his words then sneered bitterly.)

VORTEX: Quitter!

SHADOW: What?

VORTEX: Don't you dare give up! We need those Rejects to suffer.

(She then marched to the door.)

VORTEX: Continue. I'll be lounging on the sofa if you need me. And don't stop until you've come up with something!

(She then marched outside and slammed the door. Left behind, her team-mates could only sigh.)

THUNDER: Like it's that simple.

SHADOW: Indeed. Literally anything we plan *will* lead back to Chi.

(Brilliance mused to herself.)

BRILLIANCE: Unless... we *don't* plan anything.

MIGHTY: What?

BRILLIANCE: What if we just agree to do something spontaneous instead?

SHADOW: Like what?

BRILLIANCE: I don't know, do I? It wouldn't be spontaneous if I knew!

THUNDER: Hmm... interesting. Keep an eye out for an opportunity then strike when an unexpected opportunity arrives...

MIGHTY: It does feel like our best bet, but... it won't be easy. We rarely see them outside of the guild.

(Brilliance mused to herself.)

BRILLIANCE: Then we'll have to find a way to con them into hunting *near* us.

(The four of them pondered her words for a moment then nodded knowingly.)

SHADOW: We're onto something with this, chaps.

THUNDER: Indeed we are.

(They then sat there giggling fiendishly. The fact that their plan was to not *have* a plan felt like absolute genius after a week of coming up with nothing. It was anything *but* genius, but The Elites were, as always, uniquely themselves.)

Across town at this time, Sofia was in the throes of making her biggest mistake ever. Going clothes shopping with Leila, by choice. They were in Sofia's favourite boutique, and Leila was not a fan of what they had to offer. Sharing that fact liberally, she had the full attention of everyone in there, including the owner.

LEILA: Rubbish. It's all rubbish!

SOFIA: Leila...

LEILA: Clothing for life-sized dolls; that's what this is!

SOFIA: Dolls?

LEILA: Yes. All frills and lace. What's the point in that?

SOFIA: To look nice!

LEILA: I don't *want* to look nice. We have *you* for that. *I* want to look sexy.

SOFIA: Buy something sexy then!

LEILA: They don't have anything sexy!

SOFIA: Yes, they do!

(Sofia ruffled her neck.)

SOFIA: I buy all my clothes here nowadays and some of them are *very* sexy.

LEILA: Says who?

SOFIA: Rico.

LEILA: Hmm... we should have him investigated then.

SOFIA: What? Why?

LEILA: Because you dress like a child! If he finds *that* sexy, he needs to be locked up.

SOFIA: I don't dress like a child!

(She glanced away indignantly.)

SOFIA: I dress like a lady.

LEILA: You dress like a ten year old girl!

(Sofia pouted bitterly.)

SOFIA: No, I don't. And anyway, you're in no position to question people's choice of attire. *You* dress like a vampire!

LEILA: How dare you?

SOFIA: What? Truth hurt, did it?

(Leila glowered to her coldly then sighed with disappointment.)

LEILA: What happened to you, Sofia? You used to be so sweet and accommodating. I miss that.

SOFIA: You mean you miss the days when I was scared of you.

LEILA: Exactly. See? You get it.

(She sighed.)

LEILA: These days, all you do is answer back or ignore me. The nice you never did that.

SOFIA: I'm not going to apologise for having some long overdue confidence, Leila.

LEILA: Well, you should. You've ruined our friendship.

SOFIA: Friendship? Barely a day has gone past without you telling me you hate me!

LEILA: Yeah, but that's just constructive criticism.

SOFIA: How is...

LEILA: Anyway, that's enough nattering. Let's go home.

SOFIA: Already? You've only perused two racks.

LEILA: And that was more than enough to know that this was a complete and utter waste of time. Your taste in clothes is embarrassingly dreadful and expecting me to partake in such foolishness was a mistake of gargantuan proportions.

(Sofia nodded solemnly.)

SOFIA: I see. Well... okay. We'll go then.

LEILA: Yes, we will!

SOFIA: And don't worry. I won't tell anyone.

(Leila gave her a baffled glance.)

LEILA: What?

SOFIA: I said your secret is safe with me.

LEILA: What secret?

SOFIA: That you're scared.

(Leila scoffed so indignantly, she almost choked.)

LEILA: Scared? What the hell? Bloody... scared???

SOFIA: Yeah.

(Leila looked through her emptily.)

LEILA: And what is it you think I'm scared of exactly?

SOFIA: Taking the plunge, like I did.

LEILA: Plunge? What bloody plunge?

SOFIA: Trying something new. Like *I* did when I let you give me a makeover.

LEILA: That wasn't a plunge. I improved you.

SOFIA: No. You changed me and I felt really uncomfortable. But unlike you, I was at least brave enough to give it a go.

LEILA: Bravery has nothing to do with it.

SOFIA: Certainly not in your case.

(She smiled.)

SOFIA: Shall we go then?

(Leila just stared at her anxiously. She'd never felt so uneasy in all her life. There were two things she *really* didn't want to do. One of them was to dress like Sofia. The other was to let Sofia think she was too scared to try something new; especially when Sofia had already faced and passed that very challenge. Now she just had to figure out which one of those nightmares was worse.)

LEILA: Um...

SOFIA: What are you waiting for? Let's go.

(Leila hung her head in defeat.)

LEILA: Wait.

SOFIA: What for?

(Leila ruffled her neck indignantly.)

LEILA: I accept your challenge.

SOFIA: I didn't offer to you a challenge.

LEILA: Oh, shut up. You did and you know you did!

SOFIA: Well...

LEILA: I'll buy one of these stupid frilly dresses. But not in white.

SOFIA: They have black ones over there.

(She nodded across the shop.)

SOFIA: If you're feeling brave enough.

(Leila sneered at her.)

LEILA: Oh, I'm feeling brave enough, alright. I buy one of those dresses and I'll wear the hell out of it!

SOFIA: Cool.

LEILA: No. It's *not* cool. It's uncool. It's whatever you are.

(She shrugged.)

LEILA: Actually, uncool had it covered.

SOFIA: Why do you...

LEILA: But know this, woman. Your clothes are rubbish and today is going to prove that fact.

SOFIA: How?

LEILA: That obvious, isn't it? I'm sexy and men compliment me all the time. They wolf-whistle and they drool. Well, I can guarantee you that none of that is going to happen while I'm wearing something from this shop! And that will prove once and for all that you do dress like a child! Oh, and that Rico should be ordered to stay away from schools.

(She then swaggered away towards a wrack of black dresses. Having watched her go, Sofia could only hang her head and sigh.)

SOFIA: What the hell was I thinking? Why would I invite *her* to go shopping with me?

(She shrugged.)

SOFIA: I can only pray she chooses quickly, so I can go home. This nightmare can't end soon enough.

At just gone midday, with Sofia still recovering from her ordeal, The Axnay Rejects headed for the warrior's guild. A messenger had arrived a few minutes earlier, inviting them to a free lunch, courtesy of the state, in recognition for their success in the team of the year contest. A big fan of receiving free food, Max had accepted the invite on everyone's behalf without even consulting them. Naturally, nobody minded. Except one. LEILA: All I'm saying is, you don't speak for *me*! At least, I don't *remember* going gaga and having to hand over my power of attorney.

TOMMY: Well, you wouldn't, would you?

LEILA: Sofia! Tell Tommy to shut up.

SOFIA: No, thanks.

LEILA: The point is, Max; ask me first. For all you know, I might have had plans.

MAX: You *did* have plans! Going to the guild for lunch! The only difference is, I accepted a free one!

LEILA: Yes, well... I've made my point now, so we can say no more about it.

(She nodded.)

LEILA: Instead, we should all critique my dress.

RICO: Why would we want to...

LEILA: Because Sofia needs to learn that fashion tomfoolery is not a valid lifestyle choice. Airy and frilly things like *this* are ridiculous. We need to educate her to that fact. And with that in mind... begin.

(Everyone looked at her emptily for a moment then shrugged.)

MAX: It's not what you want to hear, Leila, but I think that dress suits you.

RICO: Yeah, it looks nice on you.

LEILA: Yes, well, you *would* say that. You *like* it when women dress like little girls.

RICO: Excuse me?

LEILA: Absolutely I will. You *need* to be excused on the ground of bias.

RICO: Bias?

LEILA: Towards Sofia and her terrible dress sense.

RICO: Right. So what you're saying is, I can't take part in your debate about whether that kind of thing looks nice, purely because I disagree with you?

LEILA: No. Like I said. You're biased. *That's* why you need to be excused. And arrested, if we're being honest.

RICO: Fucking... arrested?

(Rico furrowed his brow.)

RICO: Sofia? Help me out here. What the hell is she talking about? Arrested?

SOFIA: Believe me. You don't want to know.

MAX: She was calling you a paedo, mate.

RICO: What???

LEILA: No, I wasn't. Not in so many words.

RICO: Paedo is *one* word!

LEILA: I'm just saying, you like Sofia's childish dress sense, so... just to be on the safe side, the authorities should keep an eye on you.

RICO: What??? I can't believe I'm hearing this!

SOFIA: Relax, Rico. It's just the latest in a long line of weird rationalisations that her mind has conjured up in order to put me down.

RICO: Put you down?

SOFIA: Yes. Today she's saying I dress like a child. You're just getting bombarded in the crossfire. But it's fine. She'll have moved onto something else tomorrow and we can all forget about it.

RICO: Not in any bloody hurry though. I've never been so insulted in all my life.

SOFIA: Try being me for a week.

LEILA: Can you two pipe down? There's still two opinions, I want to hear.

(She nodded.)

LEILA: Sofia, Fart Face, speak.

TOMMY: Fart Face?

LEILA: Stick to the topic!

(Tommy rolled his eyes.)

TOMMY: You look fine. Very feminine, in fact. But... I personally prefer your sexy leather get up. Not that you actually *care* what I think.

LEILA: I do. When you're being precise. And you're right. My dress sense *is* superior in every way. Thanks, Fart Face.

TOMMY: You...

LEILA: Let's hear your two coronas worth then, Sofia.

(Sofia just looked to her and smiled.)

SOFIA: You look gorgeous, Leila.

LEILA: Liar!

SOFIA: You do. You look like a slightly older version of me.

LEILA: How dare you?

SOFIA: So much sexier than normal.

LEILA: You fiend!!!

(She then gasped.)

LEILA: Wait! Stop. No way.

(She then gasped again.)

LEILA: You're deliberately baiting me!!!

SOFIA: Yeah. A little bit.

LEILA: You don't *do* that!

SOFIA: You mean I never *used* to. Then I met an evil monster called Leila and she taught me bad habits.

(She then proceeded to giggle into her hand, leaving Leila shaking her head, bitterly.)

LEILA: Yeah... the new, self-assured and confident you has to *go*.

(She then marched on ahead, bounded around the corner and head into the warrior's guild. Her teammates followed on, giggling to themselves gleefully. Leila getting her comeuppance was always a joy.

Upon assembling inside the guild, The Axnay Rejects immediately made a beeline for their usual table. Before they could even sit down, however, Chi called them over to her desk. Somewhat miffed about that fact, they groaned in unison then headed over to see what she wanted. Much to their astonishment, Chi then called for Rico's Girls and The Axnay Elite to join her as well. Baffled as to why the three teams would all be called over together, they shared a series of stumped glances. Unsurprisingly, the perfectly innocent exchange of nonthreatening gazes lead to Leila, Velvet and Saki, the three female magic-casters, all scoffing and scowling at one another. Mercifully, none of them were angry enough to cause a scene in front of Chi, so the moment passed without violent incident.

CHI: Right. Thank you for coming over, teams.

RICO: You're welcome.

MIGHTY: I concur!

THUNDER: So, why have you called us over, Chi?

(Chi blinked at him nonchalantly.)

CHI: Why would you feel the need to *ask* me that?

THUNDER: Well... I'd like to know.

CHI: And you feared I wouldn't tell you?

THUNDER: No, I...

CHI: Like I was just going to call you over, thank you for coming then promptly forget why I did it.

THUNDER: Um...

CHI: Or maybe you thought I was pranking you. Is that it? Did you think I called you over here with a view to doing absolutely nothing when you got here; just to see the hilarious looks on your faces?

(Thunder whimpered.)

THUNDER: I feel bullied right now.

CHI: Well, if you don't like being bullied, I suggest you shut up, or you'll find out what bullying *really* feels like.

(She rolled her eyes. Before her, The Rejects and Rico's Girls were desperately trying not to laugh. Seeing an Elite get belittled was something they'd never get bored of.)

CHI: Okay... *this* is why I've called you over.

(She looked to Thunder.)

CHI: In case you were worried I wasn't going to tell you.

THUNDER: Touché.

CHI: The Minister of Defence has a mission for you.

RICO: Really? I thought he got suspended for a month for having two written warnings.

(Chi sighed ruefully.)

CHI: He did *indeed* suspend himself for having two written warnings, yes. But as the minister in charge of his department, he decided to be lenient on himself and reduce his own suspension to three days. The following morning when he *thought* about the kind favour he's done himself, however, he promptly wrote himself another warning for corruption then suspended himself for another month. But... during his one day in work, he drew up an order for me to pass on.

(Everyone grimaced uncomfortably. Government job orders were never requests for *pleasant* tasks to be undertaken.)

CHI: You look thrilled, I see.

MAX: Ecstatic.

CHI: I hope so too, because, the order has the government seal on it. So, no; you *can't* wriggle out of it because the minister isn't around.

(Everyone groaned.)

CHI: Don't be like that. As orders from the top go, it's not too bad.

RICO: Fine. Let's hear it then.

CHI: Very well.

(Thunder pouted.)

THUNDER: How is that fair?

CHI: Excuse me?

THUNDER: When *I* interrupted to ask about something you were clearly *already* going to tell us, I got ridiculed. Rico, on the other hand, gets an approving "very well".

CHI: And your point?

THUNDER: Well... like I said... not fair.

CHI: Fine. I'll even the score. Rico?

RICO: Um...

CHI: Your girlfriend is a numpty.

SOFIA: Hey!

CHI: Take it up with Thunder; he made me say it.

SOFIA: Aw. Stupid Thunder.

THUNDER: Excuse me?

CHI: Anyway!!!

(She rolled her eyes.)

CHI: As the top three teams in the team of the year contest, you lot have been selected to visit a rural island where a new infestation is desecrating the crops.

ALYSSA: Really? You're sending us to a different island?

CHI: No, the island is coming here.

(Alyssa hung her head,)

ALYSSA: Point taken.

THUNDER: I would ask which island, but I fear I'd be asking for trouble.

CHI: You would, yes.

(She smiled.)

CHI: So that's your assignment. Head to the port and find the ship reserved for the guild. They'll take you where you need to go. And don't worry, you'll be back tonight. The infestation is on one of the tiny islands off the coast.

(She nodded.)

CHI: So... any questions?

(Nothing was said until a mumble rose up from the middle of the assembled warriors.)

SAKI: Sounds like that's the islanders problem, not ours.

(Chi glowered into the assembly.)

CHI: Who said that? Leila???

LEILA: It wasn't me! It was Velvet!

VORTEX: You bloody liar! It was you! I could tell from the raspy voice!

LEILA: Why, you...

CHI: Enough!

(She smiled.)

CHI: I'll let it go for now.

(She smirked.)

CHI: Then read you when we get back and find out that way.

SAKI: Shit.

CHI: So, yeah. Off you go. Happy sailing.

MAX: Fair enough. We'll head out just as soon as we've finished that free lunch.

CHI: Ah, yes. Speaking of which. Kiki made fifteen packed lunches for you to take with you. Enjoy.

(Having expected to order a hearty meal of cooked meats and other delights to eat in the comfort of the guild, the fifteen warriors were furious.)

TOMMY: Our free lunch is some random sandwich box???

LISA: What if we don't like what you've put in there???

(Chi furrowed her brow.)

CHI: Ungrateful bastards! We promised you a free lunch and you're getting one.

(She chuckled.)

CHI: The fact we made the invite sound like something grander in order to lure you here is neither here nor there. It wasn't a lie. The lunch is free!

(Sofia sighed.)

SOFIA: I feel cheated.

CHI: Well, you weren't. If I'd sent you letters asking to come here this lunchtime in order to do a government job, you'd have made yourselves busy elsewhere. On purpose. So it had to be done. Now go! Leave.

(She pointed to the door.)

CHI: Get your arses to the port. And hurry! Your boat leaves...

(Suddenly remembering the ship wasn't on a set timetable, she shrugged indifferently.)

CHI: When you're on it.

(She snarled.)

CHI: Just make sure you *are* on it, because you don't even *want* know what the punishment will be if you're not! Now scoot!!!

(She then smiled with satisfaction as the fifteen warriors headed away to collect lunchboxes from Kiki on their way out.)

CHI: There. Sorted.

Some two hours later, on a ship bound for the tiny island of Tarragon, Max, Rico, Leila and Tommy were relaxing in the sunshine. The spacious deck was strewn with small crates, and with a little bit of rearranging, they'd make the perfect place to sit down and relax. Sofia, however, wasn't with them. She was pacing up and down on a walkway at the side of the ship, chewing on her fingernails. She may have come a long way in recent times, but some things still made her nervous. Seafaring was one of them. And so, back and forth she went, trembling and whimpering like the Sofia of old. She was so uncomfortable, she'd even spurned the chance to sit with Rico. Leila was with them and if she'd spotted her discomfort, she'd have had a field day with it.

Sofia wasn't the only one suffering on the boat that day either. Upon entering the ship, The Elite had helped themselves to a cabin. They'd then ejected Vortex again; but not without good reason. They were away in a strange land with The Rejects. A place where spontaneous mistakes might happen. Now they needed to think of a spontaneous mistake to instigate and their plan to destroy The Rejects could finally begin. Unfortunately, once again, no idea was forthcoming and they were starting to get frustrated. Standing by the door, Sir Mighty looked particularly fed up.

MIGHTY: This is starting to get ridiculous now, chaps.

THUNDER: You don't have to tell *me* that, Sir Mighty. We've been struggling for days to come up with the merest *hint* of a plan to get those pesky Rejects. And yet, today... this happens. We're sent to a small island *with* them. A place we've never been. Unfamiliar terrain. Undoubtedly, therefore, a place where mistakes are much more likely. Despite having been thinking along those lines for days on end, however, we still can't think of a mistake to make them fall foul of.

(Brilliance sighed to herself.)

BRILLIANCE: I think we were right before, you know? This could well be the impossible task.

SHADOW: No. No way. I refuse to believe that. There *must* be a way.

(He nodded.)

SHADOW: No, no. There *is* a way!

(Everyone looked to him with hope in their eyes.)

SHADOW: We just haven't thought of it yet!

THUNDER: You cock!

BRILLIANCE: Fuck sake, Artful!

SHADOW: What?

BRILLIANCE: I thought you'd thought of something then!

SHADOW: Really? Why the hell would you think that?

THUNDER: Because you said...

(He puffed out in frustration.)

THUNDER: Let's just shut up and think.

MIGHTY: Yes. Let's.

(They then sat there in total silence for a full thirty seconds, concentrating hard on coming up with something.)

MIGHTY: Nope!

BRILLIANCE: What?

MIGHTY: Concentrating is hard enough *without* that bloody racket out there!

THUNDER: What racket?

MIGHTY: Sofia Not-So-Nice.

(He sneered.)

MIGHTY: She's been pacing up and down, past this door every bloody fifteen seconds; whimpering and sobbing. It's driving me to distraction. Nope. Not having it! I'm going to say something!

(He then cast the door open outwards. Having been just about to pass, Sofia shrieked then leapt backwards.)

SOFIA: Careful!

MIGHTY: No, *you* be careful!!! And stop with all the whimpering and blubbing!

(He then paced back into the cabin and slammed the door behind him.)

MIGHTY: That told her!

(He nodded then looked to where his teammates were staring at him in wonderment.)

MIGHTY: What? What's going on? Why are you staring at me with love-struck eyes?

(He gulped.)

MIGHTY: Thunder? Shadow? What gives?

(He shuddered from head to toe.)

MIGHTY: You didn't have a funny turn all of a sudden and decide you fancy me, did you?

THUNDER: No, you fucking...

MIGHTY: Thank fuck.

(He beamed.)

MIGHTY: Countess, I don't suppose *you*...

BRILLIANCE: Never gonna happen!

MIGHTY: Shit.

(He then shrugged it off.)

MIGHTY: So why are you staring?

SHADOW: Are you stupid or something?

MIGHTY: Define stupid.

(He flinched.)

MIGHTY: I mean no! Why?

SHADOW: The door! Sofia!

MIGHTY: Okay...

THUNDER: Stop being dim! You threw open the door and almost battered her with it!

MIGHTY: Yes, and...

(He then looked enlightened.)

MIGHTY: That could have been the glorious accident we were hoping for.

SHADOW: Finally.

BRILLIANCE: Right?

THUNDER: Yes, well, never mind that, we have work to do. Or indeed, Sir Mighty, *you* have work to do.

MIGHTY: Indeed.

(He then turned to face the door.)

MIGHTY: As soon as I hear her whimpering again, I'll quickly throw open the door.

BRILLIANCE: As hard as you can! If you time it right, she might fly over the side of the ship.

MIGHTY: Oh, my.

(He beamed.)

MIGHTY: Let's make it happen, shall we? Keep schtum, people. As soon as I hear her outside the door, I'm making my move.

(In that moment it fell deathly silent, but for the sound of Sofia blubbering. Realising she was right outside, Sir Mighty gasped then quickly cast open the door again. Just like last time, Sofia just about managed to dodge.)

SOFIA: Why???

MIGHTY: Why what?

SOFIA: Knock next time!

MIGHTY: Knock to come *out* of the room?

SOFIA: Um... leave me alone.

(She then paced onwards. Frustrated, Sir Mighty went back in and slammed the door.)

MIGHTY: Another close call.

THUNDER: Keep going, old chap. We'll be on this ship for a few more hours yet. You're bound to get her eventually.

MIGHTY: Indeed, I am.

BRILLIANCE: Unless she takes your advice to stop blubbering. In which case, you'll never know *when* she's passing.

MIGHTY: Then I'll just have to keep taking wild guesses until I get it right.

(He snarled.)

MIGHTY: I don't care if it takes the rest of this trip. She's flying overboard!

Two hours later, once the ship had docked in Tarragon Island's tiny port, the fifteen assigned warriors, headed down the gangplank and assembled on the cobbles. There was nobody there to greet them. Rather perplexed by that fact, they all glanced about themselves with furrowed brows.

RICO: Where the hell is everyone?

THUNDER: Good question.

TOMMY: There has to be somebody around, surely.

TIKA: Unless the infestation was worse than we thought and they all got eaten.

(Leila shook her head at her.)

LEILA: You're really don't *need* an IQ test to get into Rico's Girls, do you?

MAX: Nope. You've just got to buy them a drink.

(Everyone burst out laughing, except of course, Rico's Girl's and Sofia. Sofia wanted to laugh but was too polite.)

LISA: You're so not funny.

AMIE: Unfunny and uncool, that's you.

MIGHTY: Yes, well, never mind bickering.

(He shrugged.)

MIGHTY: Ow!!! Fuck! Shouldn't have shrugged. My shoulder's still sore from bashing that cabin door open five hundred times!

SOFIA: You kept doing that?

MIGHTY: Yes!

SOFIA: Blimey. Good thing I went back to my teammates after you did it the second time really. That would have been annoying.

(Mighty stared at her in dismay.)

MIGHTY: You did what???

(Sofia shied away from him.)

SOFIA: I went back to my team. Why? Shouldn't I have?

MIGHTY: No! You should have kept pacing.

SOFIA: No chance. You might have bashed into me and knocked me overboard. Only an idiot would stay and risk that.

MIGHTY: You...

(He glanced towards Velvet Vortex and seethed.)

MIGHTY: She did that on purpose. She knew what I was trying to do, so she decided to make me look a fool by bugging off and leaving me to it.

VORTEX: Sure. That's *one* way of looking at it.

(She shrugged.)

VORTEX: The other way being, it was a stupid plan, and expecting her *not* to move out of harms way was ridiculous.

MIGHTY: Velvet...

VORTEX: I mean seriously. When you first told me what you'd spent the entire trip doing, I thought my ears had been possessed by Leila. I thought they were lying to me.

(She shook her head.)

VORTEX: So annoying. I can't believe you kicked me out of the room so you could hatch a dastardly plan then spent three hours doing that instead! You really are a bunch of arse clowns.

MAX: Look, when you lot are done nattering among yourselves, can we come up with a plan of action, please? Somebody needs to take charge of this situation!

(Everyone turned to face him attentively.)

MAX: What?

(He stepped back.)

MAX: No. Not me. I'm not taking charge. I'm just saying someone should.

THUNDER: Indeed.

(He beamed arrogantly.)

THUNDER: And I think we all know who the best man for the job is!

(Rico chuckled.)

THUNDER: What are you laughing at, idiot?

RICO: You said jobbies!

THUNDER: No, I...

(Just then, a small voice rose up from behind them.)

ROBERT: Um... hello?

(At once, everyone turned and spotted an unimpressive man in tatty clothes and cheap glasses, approaching from the port's only building.)

THUNDER: Not now, yokel. I'm...

MAX: Shut it, Thunder!

(He looked to Robert.)

MAX: You're the welcoming committee, are you?

ROBERT: No. I'm afraid not, no.

(He sighed.)

ROBERT: They got eaten.

(Tika punched the air in delight.)

TIKA: Yes!!! I was right!

ROBERT: Um...

TIKA: What? Oh... yes... sorry. Insensitive.

ROBERT: A tad. My mother was their chairwoman.

(He smiled.)

ROBERT: Still. Easy come, easy go.

RICO: What?

ROBERT: Now I have a wife. She can be my mum.

(Sofia whispered to her right.)

SOFIA: I'm keeping *away* from that creepy guy.

LEILA: Me too. We should make him pair up with Velvet.

ROBERT: Anyway, that's enough of my matriarch fixation.

(He nodded.)

ROBERT: I believe you've come to kill all those horrible Empies for us.

ALYSSA: You believe correctly.

SHADOW: Indeed. Just tell us, sir. How big *is* this infestation?

(Robert sucked his teeth.)

ROBERT: Oh, it's huge, sir. Far too many for us islanders to handle, anyway. We've only got one sword between us. Not to mention that fact that, after the committee got eaten, we've only got a population of thirty people now. Eighteen of them are getting on in years. And five of them are kids. Yeah... there's way too many Empies for us humble farm folk, sir.

SHADOW: I see. Troubling. So it's big then?

ROBERT: Very. Why, I reckon there must be about a hundred of the buggers.

(An icy silence ensued.)

ROBERT: Um...

(He scratched his neck.)

ROBERT: Why are you all scowling all of a sudden. And the growling...

MAX: A hundred of them???

ROBERT: Easily! Maybe even a hundred and five!

MAX: And you've got three fucking teams in to do the job? Rico could kill that many Empies on his own.

RICO: Fucking Tommy probably could!

MAX: Yeah!

(They paused.)

MAX: Come to think if it, maybe not, mate.

RICO: Yeah. Not sure what we were *thinking* there.

TOMMY: Not cool, guys. Not cool.

LEILA: Yes, well, never mind discussing what's cool and what isn't. Not that you'd even know, Tommy.

TOMMY: Great...

LEILA: We can't go home until we've wiped them out, so that means we've got work to do.

(Vortex scoffed then bundled her way to the front.)

VORTEX: You mean *you* 've got work to do.

LEILA: Excuse me?

VORTEX: I always do.

LEILA: You...

VORTEX: Empies, for fuck sake! We stopped bothering to kill them years ago. Such lowly kills are beneath us. Okay, we'd get stuck in if the island really was infested, but seeing as this is basically an entry level job, you can count the mighty Elites, well and truly out.

THUNDER: Agreed.

MIGHTY: No argument here.

SHADOW: Or here.

BRILLIANCE: Motion carried by a unanimous decision.

ALYSSA: Pathetic.

AMIE: Right?

SAKI: Typical bone idle nobles.

LISA: You're an embarrassment to the guild.

TIKA: And to your species!

(Leila held up her palm.)

LEILA: Go easy on them, Rico's Bimbos.

TIKA: Hey!

LEILA: They're not bone idle.

THUNDER: Correct.

(Leila then started to chuckle.)

LEILA: They're scared!

MIGHTY: What???

LEILA: It's been so long since you fought an Emphy, you've forgotten how. I'm right, aren't I? You don't know what to do and you're scared! Literally soiling the undies you inherited at the very *thought* of taking them on.

(She then paced back and forth, bobbing her head like a chicken, just to mock them further. It did not go down well. Especially with the least stable of the bunch.)

VORTEX: Pack it in, you poor person in cheap clothing!!!

(Leila was aghast.)

LEILA: Cheap???

VORTEX: You heard me. Thunder's *socks* cost more than your entire outfit. And he never even washes them!

(Everyone cringed.)

LEILA: That's disgusting!

VORTEX: I mean, he throws them away and puts on a new pair every day!

(Everyone looked enlightened, not to mention relieved.)

THUNDER: That misunderstanding was so avoidable.

VORTEX: Point being, Leila. Your team are cheap and tacky and my team are all things elegant and desirable. So remember your place and shut up.

(Leila growled.)

LEILA: I already *know* my place!

(She beamed menacingly.)

LEILA: I'm the magic caster for the team of the year; best team at the guild. Thus, I'm great and you're shit!

VORTEX: Fuck off, you. I won the award for magic caster of the year!

LEILA: Kiki obviously miscounted. There's a reason she's only the assistant!

VORTEX: Behave, you silly person. I'm easily the best one here!

LEILA: Wrong! I am!

SAKI: You're both wrong!

(They gave a belittling glance.)

SAKI: *I'm* the best by a mile.

(Everyone instantly fell about laughing.)

SAKI: Wow. That's really mean, guys.

LEILA: Yes, well, casting Saki's silly fantasy aside, let's find out who's the best shall we, Vortex?

VORTEX: We already know!

LEILA: The hell we do. But we will. Because I'm challenging you to a contest.

(Vortex raised a quizzical eyebrow.)

VORTEX: Go on.

LEILA: You and me. Just us two against the Empies. She who kill the most will be the winner. Me.

MIGHTY: Oh, like she's gonna take part in...

VORTEX: You're on!!!

MIGHTY: I stand corrected.

SOFIA: Um... girls...

LEILA: Butt out, Sofia. This is my fight!

RICO: Well... no, actually. We we're *all* charged with clearing the island.

VORTEX: You twats can clear a different island! This one's ours.

LEILA: And by ours. She means mine!

VORTEX: Oh, it so on!

(Max sighed.)

MAX: This is ridiculous, but... you know what? Fuck it. Let them have their silly contest. I'm gonna go and chill out on the beach for a bit.

AMIE: Ooh. Now that sounds like fun.

SHADOW: Actually, it sounds like a gross dereliction of duty.

BRILLIANCE: Yes, but on the other hand, these two silly buggers have made up their minds, and if we don't butt out, they'll spend the entire home journey complaining.

(Everyone shuddered.)

THUNDER: Well, in that case, consider me sold. Let's go, chaps.

(With a series of shrugs, everyone with the exception of Rupert, Leila and Vortex headed away towards the quiet stretch of beach near the port. Watching them go, Rupert was stupefied.)

ROBERT: What's going on? Just two of you to deal with an infestation this huge?

(He then flinched at the sight of Leila and Vortex charging towards the exit from the port, desperate to reach the Empies first.)

ROBERT: Right... so...

(He sighed.)

ROBERT: I'll just assume you know what you're doing and bugger off then, shall I?

(He then turned and skulked away, back towards the small building he'd emerged from.)

Back at the warrior's guild, at this time, Chi was glancing at a map and shaking her head. Not liking what she saw, she sucked her teeth then made a very audible pondering sound. Having heard her, Kiki glanced to her enquiringly.)

KIKI: You okay there, Chi?

(Chi looked to her and puffed out.)

CHI: Yeah, I'm okay. But I think the minister may have made a ridiculous miscalculation.

KIKI: Really?

CHI: Yeah. I just found that Tarragon island on the map. It's only two miles wide. In *both* directions. It's tiny!

KIKI: And that's a problem, is it?

CHI: Well... not on its own, no. But it does mean an entire wasted day for the three teams we've sent there.

KIKI: Because the infestation on an island that small can't be that big, right?

CHI: Not to warrant sending fifteen warriors, no. In an area that size, by nature, Empies will start fighting each other if the population goes over a hundred and fifty. It'd become a mad scramble for food. A battle for resources. May the best Emphy win.

KIKI: Survival of the fittest.

CHI: Yeah.

(She bit her lip.)

CHI: I need to speak to that minister when he comes back from his self-inflicted suspension. Sending three teams to fight a hundred and fifty Empies is not a good use of our resources.

KIKI: Yeah.

(She smiled.)

KIKI: Chi?

CHI: Hmm?

KIKI: That minister's an idiot.

CHI: Yes. I know.

On Tarragon Island, Leila and Vortex's race to reach the Empies first was starting to heat up. Female magic-casters notoriously refused to get along, but the animosity between these two was on a ridiculous level. There was no way in hell they'd hunt like

professionals in order to prove they were the better warrior. In fact, within fifteen seconds of them sprinting out of the port, that ship had already sailed. Instead of professionalism, they'd opted for pettiness and childishness. Sprinting side by side through a meadow, they been attempting to trip, kick and push each other over almost from the get go.

VORTEX: I can't *believe* you tried to trip me!

LEILA: And I can't believe you didn't fall over!

VORTEX: Then you're an idiot. It takes more than some moron who can't even admit to being thirty to knock *me* over!

LEILA: Why would I admit to being something I'm not!

VORTEX: Thanks for proving my point!

(She flinched.)

VORTEX: Actually, that *wasn't* my point. My point is, stop cheating!

LEILA: Cheating? I'm not cheating!!!

VORTEX: You've tried to trip me three times!

LEILA: Only because you tried to trip *me*! And you kicked me!

VORTEX: That was accident! I mistimed my trip!

LEILA: Ha! See? You started it!

VORTEX: No, I didn't! I was merely getting you back!

LEILA: You bloody liar!

(She shook her head.)

LEILA: Chi should have left you in jail!

(Vortex gasped.)

VORTEX: How could you say that? That's too cruel!

LEILA: No. Letting you out again was cruel.

VORTEX: You're vile! And way too mean!

(She then shoved her in the side. Caught off guard, Leila staggered sideways then managed to right herself and keep going, albeit at a thirty degree angle from Vortex.)

LEILA: I'm going this way now! By choice!

VORTEX: Choice??? I shoved you!

LEILA: No, you didn't! Not well, anyway. I opted to go this way because...

(She beamed fiendishly.)

LEILA: I don't consort with criminals.

(Vortex was outraged.)

VORTEX: How dare you?

(She then raced off after her.)

VORTEX: I'm gonna thump you!

LEILA: Awesome! Make my day. You'll back in jail by nightfall.

VORTEX: No, I won't! You provoked me! That's mitigation!

LEILA: Probationers don't get mitigation, dumb arse.

VORTEX: You don't know that!!!

(Just then, they heard the all too familiar cry of a hoard of Empies echoing through the sky.)

VORTEX: A-ha!

LEILA: Empies!

(She chuckled.)

LEILA: I bet seeing a hoard of Empies charging at you reminds of visits from your family, doesn't it?

VORTEX: What's that supposed to mean?

LEILA: It means they're ugly little buggers with gargoyle-like faces, like you.
(Vortex growled at her.)

VORTEX: Stop being excessively mean! Channelling Sofia isn't fair!

LEILA: Like *you* wouldn't do it if *you* had a mean healer to quote.
(She giggled to herself then spun around, desperate to see where the Empies cry had come from. Much to her bewilderment, there wasn't a single Emphy in sight.)

LEILA: What the hell?

(Having also stopped to spot the enemy, Vortex grimaced.)

VORTEX: Where the fuck are they?

LEILA: *I* don't bloody know.
(She shrugged.)

LEILA: Call them by name. They're *your* family.

VORTEX: That's not funny!

LEILA: Actually...

VORTEX: Stop it!
(She sneered.)

VORTEX: We heard them. We definitely heard them. So where are they? I want to get this charade over and done with so I can rub your nose in it.

LEILA: Why would you rub *my* nose in *your* failure?

VORTEX: Leila!!!
(She gave an exasperated sigh.)

VORTEX: I've had enough of you. I'm going to start killing things.

LEILA: What things?

VORTEX: Empies!

LEILA: Yeah, but where are...
(She then noticed that Vortex was staring at a high cornfield.)

LEILA: Right... in the corn.

VORTEX: Hey! Don't steal my ideas!

LEILA: Yeah, right.
(She then raced off towards the cornfield. Not to be outdone, Vortex charged after her.)

VORTEX: When we get there, I'll obliterate the lot of them!

LEILA: No, you'll obliterate the handful I haven't got round to.

VORTEX: Actually, no, I won't.
(She beamed gleefully.)

VORTEX: You see, unlike you, I have level fifty skills. Including... long range, homing blasts!
(She then stopped running, held out her arms and fired her magic into the air. A split second later, several blasts came down in various places within the cornfield.)

VORTEX: Got the buggers!

LEILA: Oh, how do *you* know?

VORTEX: It homes in on living creatures, stupid.

LEILA: Fuck.

(Fearing she'd been done, she sprinted as fast as she could until she was in range of the field then let loose with her magic. Sending out blast after blast, she peppered as much of the cornfield as she could.)

LEILA: Please, please, please, let it be enough!

(Vortex chuckled as she slowly paced to catch her up, continually firing off magic of her own.)

VORTEX: Why did you think you could challenge me, Leila? I'm way out of your league.

LEILA: Shut it, you deluded upper-class, cock thimble!

VORTEX: Stop quoting Sofia!!!

(Leila giggled.)

LEILA: You're so easy to annoy. You'll be back in jail in no time with or without my help.

VORTEX: I don't like you.

LEILA: Well, consider me surprised.

(She then flinched at the sight of smoke billowing upwards from the cornfield.)

LEILA: What the fuck?

(Vortex gasped.)

VORTEX: Oh, my god! What did you do?

LEILA: Me??? I just killed Empies!

VORTEX: No, *I* just killed Empies. *You* set fire to the field!

LEILA: But...

VORTEX: Same old Leila, eh? The guild's infamous black-haired arsonist strikes again.

(Leila furrowed her brow.)

LEILA: Shut up. We heard Empies so I shot them.

VORTEX: You shot the field!

LEILA: It was the only place they could have been hiding! And besides, you fired into the field too, so you can't say...

VORTEX: I used targeted magic, numb tits. *You* just did a Leila. Blasted blindly and hoped for the best.

(She sucked her teeth.)

VORTEX: I'd hate to be in your shoes when Chi finds out.

LEILA: Because I wear adult sizes?

VORTEX: No, because you, missy, are in deep shit.

(She smirked.)

VORTEX: But speaking of things people wear, what the fuck's with that dress? You look like someone stripped a porcelain doll and rammed its dress on a fat mannequin.

LEILA: Fat? Fucking fat???

VORTEX: Yup. Fat!

LEILA: I'm not fat! And I'm wearing this hideous dress to prove a point so Sofia!

VORTEX: What point?

LEILA: That no matter how sexy you are, dressing like this will turn you into an unattractive moron.

VORTEX: But *you* were an unattractive moron to begin with.

LEILA: Oh, fuck off! I don't have to explain myself to you.

(She then stomped away in a different direction.)

LEILA: I'm going to see if there are any others to kill.

VORTEX: Cornfields?

LEILA: Empies!

(She sighed bitterly.)

LEILA: I hate that bitch. I really do.

On the beach next to the port, at this time, nowhere near where Leila and Vortex had run off to, the other thirteen warriors were casually laying waste to the island's beast population. Having spotted what they'd mistakenly considered to be a collection of ready made snacks, laid out on the sand just waiting to be devoured, every Emphy on the island had charged in. It turned out to be quite the pathetic display on their part. Saki had spotted them first and had put paid to a third of the pack with her first blast. Thunder and Rico had then charged in to kill the rest. The others simply waited in readiness to leap in if called upon. Tommy, of course, just stood there with his hands in his pockets. For experienced fighters like The Rejects, The Elite and Rico's Girls, their challenge felt like an insult. Twenty seconds after they'd appeared, the last one fell to its death with Duke Thunder's blade impaled in its torso.

THUNDER: And don't let me catch you bipedal fuckwits partaking in such an act of tomfoolery ever again! Ridiculous creatures.

RICO: Right? That was rubbish. Clearly they have no sense of embarrassment.

MAX: No, but, fair play, you certainly can't say they were cowardly.

SOFIA: Or intelligent.

BRILLIANCE: I'm with the rude girl on this one.

SOFIA: Rude girl?

BRILLIANCE: Yes. You. My first thought wasn't about how *brave* they are. It was something along of lines, oh, good god, how fucking dim *are* they?

SOFIA: Why did you call me the rude girl?

MIGHTY: Probably because you're female and notoriously rude.

SOFIA: I can't help that. It's an affliction.

BRILLIANCE: An affliction that makes you a rude girl, so the name stands.

SOFIA: It's makes me nothing of the sort.

(She ruffled her neck.)

SOFIA: If anything, I'm a rude *woman*.

SHADOW: Yes, well, never mind nattering, you lot. That's the island cleared; let's fuck off home.

TOMMY: Actually, mate. Don't you think we ought to wait for Leila and Velvet to come back before we go?

(He then furrowed his brow at the sight of his twelve colleagues giving his point some serious consideration.)

TOMMY: Seriously? You can't actually be considering leaving them here!

MIGHTY: Oh, we can.

BRILLIANCE: You can have no idea what Velvet's like to work with.

MAX: Yes, we fucking can. We've got Leila.

RICO: And we don't just have to work with her; she fucking lives with us!

MAX: It's a nightmare.

(He nodded.)

MAX: So, fuck it. Let's go home.

THUNDER: My sentiments entirely.

SAKI: You won't hear any complaints from me either.

(Sofia grimaced.)

SOFIA: Um... I'm pretty sure you haven't thought this through, guys.

BRILLIANCE: We have. No Velvet, no earache. Bugging off just makes sense.

SOFIA: Sure. No earache. Until they make their own way back a few days later.

(Rico shuddered.)

RICO: They'll be furious.

MAX: And raging!

RICO: With justification!

MIGHTY: The earache will multiply tenfold.

SOFIA: Exactly. And as the person Leila picks on the most, I'm not going to be party to giving her an excuse!

BRILLIANCE: Again. Rude girl has hit the nail on the head.

SOFIA: Rude *woman*!

(She flinched.)

SOFIA: I mean, stop calling me that!

TIKA: So we're going to wait for them, are we?

MAX: I guess it makes sense to, yeah.

SOFIA: It does.

(She shrugged.)

SOFIA: For a start, without a fifth, we won't have a team.

TOMMY: No team, no hunting. No hunting, no wages.

SHADOW: Yes, but when weighed against no Velvet, no earache...

MIGHTY: Nope. Sorry, Artful. No Velvet, no earache is a temporary stay of execution. Two days of peace, followed by a lifetime of anger and complaining.

SHADOW: Yes... well... I guess you're right.

AMIE: Then it's decided. We wait.

THUNDER: Correct. And in the meantime...

(He nodded heroically.)

THUNDER: I'm going to build a sandcastle.

(He then wandered off towards the beach. Left behind, Max looked to Tommy then nodded.)

MAX: Good shout on the Leila dilemma, mate. Leaving her behind would have definitely been a mistake.

(He grimaced.)

MAX: I'm amazed that *you* were the one who stuck up for her though. After the way she's treated you, I'd have thought you'd have been champing at the bit to leave her behind.

(Tommy sighed.)

TOMMY: Well... what can I tell you, mate? Despite everything...

(He winced.)

TOMMY: I still like her.

(Max nodded understandingly.)

MAX: I see. Then, you my friend, are an unspeakable bell end.
(He nodded towards the beach.)
MAX: Come on. Let's go and help twat features with his sandcastle.

Half an hour later, worn out and thoroughly fed up, Leila and Vortex staggered back into the port looking the worse for wear. Having charged around the rest of the island without finding anything to fight, they were not in the best of moods.

LEILA: Stupid island.

VORTEX: Worst island ever.

LEILA: It's rubbish.

VORTEX: Total garbage.

(She shook her head then glanced up and saw her teammates staring back at her emptily.)

VORTEX: Finally, intelligent people to talk to.

LEILA: Actually, I think you'll find that's The Axnay Elite.

(Vortex ignored her then stepped up to her teammates.)

VORTEX: It's done. I killed the buggers while they hid in a cornfield.

LEILA: I also...

VORTEX: She randomly shot a load of corn then pretended she was being helpful.

LEILA: Fuck off, you...

(Just then, an anguished cry rose up from atop the port's only building.)

JEREMY: Our crops!!! The cornfields are on fire!!!

(Vortex shook her head.)

VORTEX: Oh, what have you done, Leila?

LEILA: Me? You shot into the field first!!!

VORTEX: With homing magic!

(Thunder bit his lip.)

THUNDER: So you saw them, did you?

VORTEX: Well, no. You couldn't see them for corn. They were hiding. But my magic homed in on something. And seeing as homing magic targets living entities, it could only have been Empies.

BRILLIANCE: Or any *other* living thing. Like moles. Or insects crawling on the corn.

VORTEX: It was the Empies!

(Max winced.)

MAX: Actually, the Empies were over here. They attacked us.

RICO: About a hundred all told.

AMIE: And according to that local fella, that's roughly how many there were.

VORTEX: So, what are you saying?

TOMMY: You two silly cunts set fire to their crops for nothing!

LEILA: Ignore him; he died six months ago.

(She ruffled her neck.)

LEILA: But in order to counter his ghost's ridiculous point. We heard their roar echo across the field.

RICO: Yeah. From the beach.

THUNDER: Where myself, this ridiculous person and one of the slags from the team that bears his name, culled them all with our eyes closed.

VORTEX: Why would you do it like that?

THUNDER: Not literally.

LEILA: Wait. So are you saying... we went out there...

(She pointed to the port exit.)

LEILA: But the Empies came here.

SOFIA: That's right.

LEILA: So all we did was shoot up a field for no reason?

MAX: Setting fire to the crops in the process; yeah.

(Leila and Vortex shared a deeply troubled glance then glowered at one another.)

LEILA: You idiot!

VORTEX: Me???

LEILA: They're in that field, you said. Let's shoot them, you said.

VORTEX: No, I said I was going to shoot them. In what sort of weird and twisted reality would I need your help?

LEILA: Good point.

(She smiled.)

LEILA: She didn't need my help. Velvet set fire to the crops all by herself. You all heard her.

VORTEX: That's not what I said, you bloody...

(At this point, Robert came storming out of the port building with a face, reddened by rage.)

ROBERT: Why? Why would you do that???

(Leila just pointed him at Vortex then skulked behind her teammates.)

ROBERT: You we're supposed to cull the Empies so we could reap our harvest safely! You weren't supposed to cull our harvest as well!

ALYSSA: We're aware.

(She shrugged.)

ALYSSA: That's The Axnay Elite for you. There's a reason they only came third in the team of the year contest!

MIGHTY: You bitch!!!

ROBERT: *You're* a bitch!!!

MIGHTY: Excuse me!

ROBERT: Quite. Sorry. I'm very angry and my composure seemed to abandon me there for a minute.

(He nodded.)

ROBERT: Shouting at you is not a productive way to go about things.

(He snarled.)

ROBERT: The right thing to do is to go back to your guild with you and demand compensation. And food supplies; thanks to *you* useless... bastards.

(He then stormed onto the ship. Left behind, the warriors all grimaced at one another.)

TOMMY: Right... so...

LISA: Going back, are we?

SAKI: We should really.

MAX: That said. It might be funny to stay here for a bit and see how long it takes Robert to realise we haven't got on the ship yet.

(As one, the rest of the warriors gave him a sideways glance then started to head to the ship. Feeling quite the fool, all Max could do was sigh.)

MAX: Right... just me then, yeah?

(And with a roll of the eyes, he headed after his teammates.)

Upon returning to the guild that evening, the three teams who'd travelled to Tarragon Island, headed straight for their usual tables to enjoy a drink. None of them could even be bothered to report their kills to Chi. The reward simply wasn't worth the effort. A hundred Empty kills between fifteen people wouldn't even buy them a pair of socks each. Chi wasn't spared from hearing about the debacle however. Having travelled to Axnay with them, Robert, the irate Tarragon Island local, marched straight up to her desk as soon as he arrived and started to share his thoughts on the matter.

ROBERT: Disgraceful!!!

(Chi looked up at him and smiled.)

CHI: No, I'm Chi. Mister Disgraceful is my uncle.

ROBERT: What?

CHI: Doesn't matter. Who are you?

ROBERT: An appalled citizen, that's who?

CHI: Okay. Appalled by what?

ROBERT: Not what; whom! I'm appalled by your warriors.

CHI: I see. Me too.

(She nodded.)

CHI: Now if you'll excuse me...

ROBERT: Not until I've had some kind of compensation acknowledgement.

CHI: Compensation? For what? The fact you feel appalled?

ROBERT: For setting fire to my people's crops!

(Chi bit her lip.)

CHI: That sounds like something Leila would do.

(She sighed.)

CHI: You're from Tarragon Island, aren't you?

ROBERT: Correct.

CHI: I see.

ROBERT: I demand...

CHI: Put a sock in it.

ROBERT: Excuse me???

(Chi ignored him and glanced to The Rejects' table.)

CHI: Leila!!!

(Leila looked at her and gulped.)

LEILA: Yes, Chi?

CHI: Your arse; over here; now.

(Leila sighed.)

LEILA: For pity's sake.

(She then upped and headed over to Chi's desk.)

LEILA: What have I done now?

ROBERT: That's her. That's one of the miscreants!

LEILA: Miscreants?

ROBERT: You set fire to my crops!

LEILA: Actually, I'm pretty sure that was Velvet Vortex. But, just in case, I may have erred too, I'd like to point out that the cornfield was merely collateral damage; accidentally inflicted whilst in the heat of a fierce battle.

ROBERT: A fierce battle??? The bloody cornfield was on the other side of the island to the Empies!

LEILA: And you only have to look at a map of the tiny place to know, that's not very far away at all.

(She smiled.)

LEILA: Can I sit down now?

CHI: Sure.

LEILA: Result.

CHI: As soon as I've read you.

LEILA: Aw.

(She sighed then stomped her way over to the marble.)

LEILA: Fine. Let's get it over with.

CHI: Good idea.

(She nodded to Robert.)

CHI: Please wait here, sir.

ROBERT: While you go over there and whisper about me? I should cocoa.

(He folded his arms angrily.)

ROBERT: Nope. Not having it. You can stay here and make me a compensation offer.

CHI: I can't do that unless I know how much...

ROBERT: Ten million coronas!

CHI: Ten million???

ROBERT: That's right. It was a lot of corn!

CHI: And was this corn gold plated?

ROBERT: Well... no. But it is gold in colour.

(He sighed.)

ROBERT: Fine. Maybe that was a bit much. I'll take five million and be on my way.

CHI: You'll get bugger all until I've read my warrior and found out what happened.

ROBERT: But... oh... well... fine. Just don't whisper about me.

CHI: Don't worry. From what I can see, you've got nothing that women would want to whisper *about*.

ROBERT: Very well.

(He then watched on as Chi headed over to join Leila at the black marble.)

CHI: Right. You know the drill.

LEILA: Uh-huh.

(Robert's hard-done-by voice then rose up from behind them.)

ROBERT: Hey! What do you mean I have nothing women would want to whisper about. That's just mean!

(Chi just wafted a hand at him then proceeded to read Leila. Moments later, she stepped back then guided Leila back to her desk.)

CHI: Okay. Apparently, you were right.

ROBERT: About the ten million?

CHI: No. You were right about the cornfields being nowhere near the fight.

LEILA: I'd say that's a matter of opinion personally.

CHI: And sadly for you, your opinion doesn't count. You and Vortex acted with utter foolishness and a blatant disregard for the property of others.

(Leila sighed.)

LEILA: Guilty. You should fine me. And tear up Vortex's probation agreement. She clearly hasn't changed a bit.

CHI: Don't be a cunt.

LEILA: Um...

CHI: I mean it. Try to get me send her to jail again, and you'll go in her stead.

LEILA: Aw.

ROBERT: So, about my compensation...

CHI: I'll need to read you first.

ROBERT: Read me?

CHI: Yes. The black marble is an infallible mind reading device. It helps me see what's really happening with my warriors.

ROBERT: Right... and if you read me...

CHI: I'll know how much compensation you're due.

ROBERT: I see... in that case, I'd be remiss if I didn't admit it was more like three million.

CHI: Let's find out, shall we?

(With that, she led Robert over to the black marble. A few seconds later, having briefly read his thoughts, she nodded to herself then headed back to her desk. Robert hurried after her.)

CHI: Okay... here's my verdict.

(She then called out to The Elite's table.)

CHI: Vortex. Get your arse over here!!!

(Terrified of crossing Chi and being sent back to jail, Vortex arrived a few seconds later, in a thunder of hooves and panicked whimpers.)

VORTEX: Here, ma'am!!!

CHI: Good. Very prompt. I like that.

VORTEX: I live to serve.

(Leila giggled.)

LEILA: You're pathetic.

CHI: You're both pathetic. That debacle today was entirely down to you two.

(She nodded.)

CHI: So, today, I'm going to break from protocol somewhat. Normally when a team member makes a mistake, the entire team have to pay the price. Well, not today. Today I'm making an exception. Why? You weren't acting in relation to your team; you were acting like morons and went off on our own. So you can pay the bloody fines on your own too.

(Robert beamed.)

ROBERT: The fine being?

CHI: One million coronas.

ROBERT: One?

CHI: Yes. And if you lie to me about the damage again, I'll half it!

ROBERT: I...

(He sighed solemnly.)

ROBERT: Fine.

CHI: That's right. Fine. A fine of half a million coronas each for Leila and Velvet here.
(Vortex beamed.)

VORTEX: A pittance. A mere drop in the ocean. I'll pay in full right away.

(She looked to Leila, faking sympathy.)

VORTEX: You'll probably need to come up with a payment plan for that amount, won't you?

(Leila gave her a deeply unimpressed glance for a moment then looked to Chi.)

LEILA: The terms of your punishment are both just and fair, Chi. The fine is thoroughly deserved. I'll *also* get it paid right away. In fact, allow me to pay the whole thing.

CHI: What?

VORTEX: Huh? Why?

LEILA: Because it's the *cool* thing to do. And I'm *easily* the coolest and most generous magic-caster in the whole of Axnay.

(She then about turned and headed away.)

LEILA: I'll just nip home and get my cheque book.

(Chi and Vortex watched agape as she marched to the door then headed outside.)

CHI: Did I just see...

VORTEX: Why would she do that?

(She then gasped in horror.)

VORTEX: Oh, my god! She's trying to show people she's cooler than me!!!

(She growled.)

VORTEX: Like I'm going to stand around and let her do something like that! I'm not an idiot!

(She then yanked her cheque book out and thrust it on the desk.)

VORTEX: I'll pay the entire amount right now!

CHI: Um... Velvet...

VORTEX: Not now, Chi. I'm doing my civic duty; as expected of the coolest magic-caster in the whole of Axnay.

CHI: Actually, Velvet, I think you'll find...

VORTEX: Just a sec.

CHI: Right...

(Vortex then tore off a cheque and handed it to Chi.)

VORTEX: Consider the fine paid.

CHI: Are you sure?

VORTEX: Yes. Now process it before Leila comes back!

CHI: And you don't want to take a minute to think about what just happened?

VORTEX: No. Just process it. Quick!

CHI: Fine.

(With that, she stamped received on the cheque then slipped it in her fine log.)

CHI: Done.

VORTEX: Yes! In your face, Leila.

(She turned and marched away. Chi watched her go then shook her head at Robert.)

CHI: You saw that right? Tell me you saw that?

ROBERT: If you mean, did I just see that Leila person con the other one into joyfully paying her fine for her, then yes. I did.

CHI: Uh-huh. And that, my friend is the sort of dumb fuckery I have to deal with on a daily basis.

ROBERT: You have my sympathy.

CHI: And *you* can have your compensation payment. And why not?

(She rolled her eyes.)

CHI: It's already been paid in full, after all.

Some ten minutes later, having had a brief and leisurely stroll around the block, just to kill some time while Vortex paid her fine for her, Leila headed back into the guild.

Before she could even get her bearings, however, Vortex charged right up to her.

VORTEX: Too late!

LEILA: What?

VORTEX: I already *paid* our fine. In full! The whole million!

(Leila giggled.)

LEILA: Brilliant. Worked like a charm.

(She then headed away towards her teammates. Left behind, Vortex just scoffed arrogantly.)

VORTEX: Yeah, right. Pretend to be unfazed. I'm the coolest, Leila!

(She clenched a triumphant fist.)

VORTEX: Yes!

(She then skipped away gleefully. Giggling to herself joyously, Leila sat down then exhaled.)

LEILA: What an awesome day.

RICO: Awesome how? Did you dodge a fine?

MAX: And where did you go?

LEILA: Yes; I dodged a fine. And where did I go? I literally just strolled around the block.

(She then sat there giggling fiendishly.)

RICO: What so funny?

TOMMY: Dare we ask.

MAX: You probably shouldn't, actually.

TOMMY: Good point.

(Just then, one of the other warriors walked past their table and nodded to Leila.)

KEVIN: You look nice today, Leila.

(Leila gasped.)

LEILA: You take that back! I look like a moron.

KEVIN: Well... yeah.

(He shrugged then went on his way again.)

KEVIN: A moron in a pretty dress though.

LEILA: Shut up. It's not a pretty dress!

(Two other warriors then glanced over from another table just to check her out.)

LORENZO: Sorry, Leila. I disagree. You look dead sexy in that.

SALVA: Sexy *and* cute. The perfect combination, if you ask me.

LEILA: Nobody did! And nobody ever will.
(She rolled her eyes.)
LEILA: Is everyone here blind?
SOFIA: Well... it *could* be that.
(She smiled.)
SOFIA: Or it could just be that that dress looks great on you. And that my taste in clothes isn't the disaster you wish it was.
LEILA: Poppycock.
(Just then, Chi strode past.)
CHI: Nice dress today, Leila. You should wear stuff like that more often.
LEILA: You...
(Her head dropped onto the table.)
LEILA: I hate you, Sofia.
SOFIA: Because I was right?
LEILA: Shut up.
(She then sat up and shrugged.)
LEILA: But I can't be bothered to sulk. Not today.
(She then looked at Vortex and burst out laughing.)
LEILA: Today has been a *good* day!

That evening, upon returning to their base, Max found a parcel waiting for him at the front door. His new, personalised tunic had been delivered. Excited to see it, he hurried into the living room to unwrap it. Tommy simply went upstairs to bed. Sofia went into the kitchen to make some tea and Leila headed to the toilet. Rico just made himself comfortable on the sofa and watched as Max tore open his parcel.

RICO: Calm down, mate. You'll rip the tunic to shreds.

MAX: Like I'm that fucking clumsy.

(He exhaled.)

MAX: Wait until you see it, mate. It was my own cool design. It's even got my name embroidered on the back.

RICO: Nice.

MAX: Yeah. It's gonna be the bollocks, mate.

RICO: Right...

MAX: I got a good deal, an' all. That Emmy took a job there recently, and she got me a ten percent discount.

RICO: Emmy? My old landlady?

MAX: Yeah.

RICO: Oh. So she's forgiven you for promising her daily seeing-to's then bugging off and not delivering, has she?

MAX: Apparently, so.

(With that, he yanked the tunic free of the parcel then beamed with delighted.)

MAX: There you go! Look at this bad boy!

(He then flipped it over and froze.)

MAX: Huh?

RICO: What's wrong?

MAX: What the fuck???

(He turned the back of the tunic to face Rico and growled.)

MAX: That's supposed to say "Max".

RICO: Right...

(He grimaced.)

RICO: It doesn't say Max, mate.

MAX: I know that, you cock!

(He spun the back of the tunic to face himself then snarled.)

MAX: What sort of cunt embroiders the word 'twat' on another person's tunic.

RICO: Yeah...

(He sucked his teeth.)

RICO: Maybe Emmy's not as forgiving as you thought she was, mate.

(Max looked at him then cringed.)

MAX: You know what, mate. I think you might be right.

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