**Fangs of the Iron Maiden**

**The Hero group was continuing on with their mission. They were busy fending off some enemy monsters that had attacked them while traveling. As they tore through the monster horde they could only wonder how strong Infinator would get if he regained his true power.**

**Ryan sliced down a monster that looked like a black, red, and copper colored version of a Thunder Eye, asking, “How much time do you think we have before Infinator reaches his full power?”**

**Celtic bisected a cactus-like monster with fangs, tentacles for legs, and a single glowing red eye with Fighter Sword, replying, “We probably don’t have a lot of time left. While Bronwen managed to restore Infinator’s body, she said herself it was more of a stopgap measure and thus he needs to feed on pure energy in order to fully stabilize himself. But seeing how he devoured a King Gunthor Leviathan despite the fact that he needs to feed on pure energy more means his body might be more stable than we thought. If so, then time may not be on our side right now.”**

**Skye performed a roundhouse kick on a silver colored Egg Soldier, spilling its contest all over the place, added, “We still need to worry about Bronwen herself. I wouldn’t be surprised if she’s been siccing her Wrath Iron Maidens at the other search parties. While they do have the Eject Bracelets in case of emergencies, we cannot forget about them, as they’re more vulnerable to enemies like Bronwen and Kalaraja than we are. We, at least, have experience in dealing with Demon Generals and their tactics like summoning monsters to do their bidding. We can only hope that the other search parties are doing okay.”**

**Gram slashed a Jellyfish to bits, replying, “That’s a good point, Lady Skye. Hopefully they haven’t run into any major obstacles that would force the activation of the Eject Bracelets. We really can’t afford that right now, especially now that Infinator has been revived. We’ll have to hurry and find the next two planetary energy veins so we can force Infinator to play by our rules.”**

**After a little while the group had slayed the monsters. The Heroes took samples from the ones they hadn’t faced before to unlock new Legendary Gear powers before moving onward. They eventually reached a fresh water stream.**

**Viola turned to the group, “Let’s set up camp here. We’re not going to get much further today so we might as well rest and eat while we’re near fresh water.”**

**Celtic nodded, “Right. I’ll start making dinner. Let me just do my usual routine with Grass Bomb and take it from there. Grass Bomb. Bio Plant Shroud.”**

**The green capsule appeared in his hands followed by the Shroud transforming into the Bio Plant Shroud. A screen popped up and he began working on it. After a few moments he gently tossed the Grass Bomb in front of him, causing it to sink into the ground. Before long the giant grass blades appeared and wove themselves into a picnic area. Tyroe then used his powers to raise up a small section of earth, summoning rocks around it to act as a campfire pit. Celtic then started to make dinner, allowing everyone to take a seat while they waited. Celtic took out some of the Frostbite Rabbits and started making a stew with them. He then noticed that Heatblast was eyeing the remains, chuckling lightly.**

**“Okay, Heatblast, you can have the remains. Better you than the local monsters.”**

**Heatblast eagerly scarfed down the remains of the Frostbite Rabbits. Skye took out some bowls, utensils, and rolls as the group waited for dinner to be served. After a little while Celtic took a sample from the pot to see if it was ready.**

**“Hmm… yeah, we’re good to go. One Frostbite Rabbit Stew with Mixed Vegetables, ready to eat. Gather up.”**

**Everyone grabbed their bowls and eagerly lined up. Celtic gave each of them a serving, while also filling a large bowl for Heatblast. After everyone had gotten a bowlful of stew they sat down and began eating in bliss.**

**“Mmm!” Tyroe said happily. “Another excellent meal! And it’s been ages since I last had Frostbite Rabbit Stew. Great work, as always, Cel.”**

**“I’m glad you like it,” Celtic replied.**

**“Man, we eat really good when we’re with Celtic,” Jerry said.**

**Eric nodded, “I’ll say. Even though we’re on the road we still eat almost gourmet meals. I doubt the other search parties are eating as good as we are.”**

**Ryan replied, “Most likely that’s the case. But we’d best not rub it in, otherwise it might… complicate things between us and them. While we Heroes have managed to reestablish a foundation of trust and respect with the people of Zakota, we’re still not super high on their good lists. Except Celtic, obviously. So we’d best not jeopardize any relations we’ve managed to establish by gloating about things like having better meals. That might rub some people the wrong way.”**

**Gram nodded, “Yes, that’s true, Ryan. While the four of you have managed to redeem yourselves to the world it would be wise to not lose that trust a second time, as I doubt the people of Zakota would be willing to forgive you twice. It would be in your best interest to not jeopardize those newly forged bonds of trust through things like getting better meals, as you don’t need any more discord forming between you and the people.”**

**The other four Heroes nodded in agreement before returning their attention to dinner. After everyone got another serving the food was gone. Leon and Viola stepped up, took the bowls and cooking equipment and washed them in the stream, putting them in Celtic’s Tek-Pak afterward. Then Celtic modified the Grass Bomb spell to create beds while also setting up the E-Shield so everyone could rest safely. They all turned in for the night, knowing they had more work to do tomorrow.**

**Around midnight Heatblast raised his head up, his eyes gleaming in the night, and started growling. Celtic, realizing what it meant, quickly jumped out of his grass bed. Leon’s eyes also snapped open as he detected something.**

**“Everyone, wake up!” Celtic stated. “We’ve got company!”**

**Although a bit dazed from the sudden awakening the Hero group quickly stood up. They looked around the dark night, trying to find the source of the threat that Heatblast was detecting.**

**Leon said, “We’ve got a powerful enemy nearby. I can sense its aura.”**

**A voice floated down, “So, your pet Weyr and the Templar Knight were able to detect me? Doesn’t surprise me.”**

**They all turned to the east to see Bronwen suddenly appear out of thin air. Everyone primed their weapons for battle, with Heatblast climbing out of his nest and snarling.**

**“How’d you turn invisible?” Lucas asked.**

**Bronwen replied nonchalantly, “Your little sexy elf isn’t the only one who can use Illusion magic. I, too, can use Quick Hiding, although it appears that my scent and aura could still be detected. Doesn’t matter, as I’m here to put an end to you all and finally get you out of Master Infinator’s hair.”**

**Jerry primed his Bow, stating, “You can’t touch us in here, Bronwen, so we’re free to pummel you.”**

**Celtic replied, “Actually, no, Jerry. I’ll have to lower the E-Shield in order for us to attack her. It doesn’t matter which side of the E-Shield the attack is coming from; it’ll still damage the shield. If I had the time I would’ve modified the E-Shield to allow us to attack freely from within it but I didn’t, so we’ll have to do this the old fashioned way. Everyone, get ready. E-Shield, offline.”**

**The E-Shield dropped, with Celtic quickly snatching up his Tek-Pak. Bronwen raised her hands up into the air.**

**“Let’s see how you mongrels handle this!” she said. “My fellow beings, come forth!”**

**Several Wrath Iron Maidens, a few Wrath Steel Maidens, and what looked like a handful of a new version appeared. The various Wrath Iron Maidens cackled as they saw the Hero group prepare for battle.**

**Zuzu stated, “So, we not only have Wrath Iron Maidens, but also Wrath Steel Maidens and a handful of Wrath Titanium Maidens.”**

**Bronwen nodded, “That’s right, Succuryn. Let’s see if you can handle my fellow Wrath Iron Maidens.”**

**“This’ll be like taking candy from a baby!” one Wrath Steel Maiden laughed.**

**“Yeah, we’ll make sure that they’ll regret fighting Master Bronwen,” a Wrath Iron Maiden smirked.**

**“I’m all for a late night snack!” a Wrath Titanium Maiden cackled. “Let’s get them!”**

**The various Wrath Iron Maidens floated toward the Hero group. Celtic immediately started channeling energy.**

**“This’ll give us some help!” he said. “Aura Boost!”**

**Everyone in the Hero group was coated in powerful boosting energies, giving them strength.**

**“All right!” Eric said. “A full stat boost! This’ll make picking these metal monstrosities off much easier!”**

**Zuzu started channeling energy, “Just to be safe, eat this! Mega Guard Crush!”**

**The various Wrath Iron Maidens and Bronwen were hit with debuffing energies, causing their defenses to drop.**

**Bronwen said, “Not bad, but it won’t be enough to topple us. Time for a midnight snack!”**

**The Wrath Iron Maidens started to channel energy, stating, “You’re not the only one with magic! Observe! Nightmare Blast!”**

**The fired their attacks as a group, causing powerful Dark energy to strike the Hero faction. However, the Deluxe Guard Barrier Charms activated, protecting them from the attack, much to the Wrath Iron Maidens’ surprise.**

**Bronwen merely said, “I had forgotten that you got custom-made accessories from the Chaos breed Shroud Hero. But I also know that those Deluxe Guard Barrier Charms need some time to recharge. Now’s your chance, girls!”**

**The Wrath Steel Maidens floated up, charging energy, stating, “Gladly, Master Bronwen! Airstream!”**

**The fired their attack, creating several swirling vacuums of wind that raced toward the Hero group. Tyroe slammed his hands onto the ground, causing a wall of rock to appear in front of them. The Airstream attacks struck the rock wall but were unable to penetrate it, causing it to disperse harmlessly. The rock wall then lowered back into the ground; its task complete, allowing the Hero group to begin their counterattack.**

**“Meteor Slash!” Ryan stated.**

**“Meteor Thrust!” Lucas roared.**

**“Meteor Slam!” Eric yelled.**

**“Meteor Shot!” Jerry shouted.**

**The four Meteor attacks raced in and struck various targets. However, the female monsters were largely unhurt, although some did show signs of damage.**

**Skye started channeling energy into her arm, stating, “You need something with more oomph, boys! Like this! Libera Dragon!”**

**She fired her attack, creating a pure white translucent energy dragon. The dragon roared as it charged at the various Wrath Iron Maidens. It then struck two Wrath Iron Maidens and one Wrath Steel Maiden with tremendous power. When the smoke cleared the two Wrath Iron Maidens had been destroyed, only their lower bodies remained, which also showed signs of heavy damage, while the Wrath Steel Maiden survived, albeit badly damaged.**

**Gram started to channel energy into his arm, stating, “Follow Lady Skye’s lead! Libera Dragon!”**

**He fired his attack, creating a mud brown translucent energy dragon. The Libera Dragon struck Bronwen, causing her to shield herself from the attack as it exploded. When the smoke cleared Bronwen looked largely unhurt. However, to her annoyance, she was stuck, as part of her lower body was now trapped in heavy mud.**

**“Not bad, pretty boy,” she said. “Your Earth variant of Libera Dragon has locked me in place. It’s also sealed my iron maiden lower body shut for now. But I’m far from defenseless. Observe!” She started to channel energy before stating, “Dark Meteors!”**

**Dark energy meteors rained down upon the battlefield, causing the Hero group to take evasive measures. This diversion allowed the various Wrath Iron Maidens a chance to retaliate.**

**Rupert began channeling energy into his arm, stating, “You’re not getting the drop on us! Libera Dragon!”**

**He fired his Libera Dragon, creating a forest green translucent energy dragon. It struck a handful of Wrath Iron Maidens. When the smoke cleared it revealed that they were now trapped in thorny energy vines, unable to move. This maneuver allowed the Hero group to launch attacks unopposed, destroying the handful of monstrous maidens.**

**A Wrath Titanium Maiden started to channel energy, stating, “Big mistake. Eat this, ‘Heroes’! Icicle Missiles!”**

**Giant icicles rained down upon the Hero group. Celtic jumped in front of the attack.**

**“Rook Defense!” he shouted.**

**Two Rooks appeared and positioned themselves in front of the attack, creating a barrier in between themselves. The giant icicles hammered away at the Rooks but were unable to penetrate it, much to the Wrath Titanium Maiden’s surprise.**

**Leon started to channel energy into his arm, stating, “I’ll make sure they’re all washed up! Libera Dragon!”**

**He fired his Libera Dragon, revealing it to be the same as Eric’s. It roared before striking the Wrath Titanium Maiden. When the smoke cleared the Wrath Titanium Maiden felt her stats drop harshly, making her snarl angrily.**

**“You’ll pay for that, pretty Templar boy!” she spat.**

**Leon loaded up an energy arrow, stating, “You’re about to find out why I’m such a lady killer! Sacred Arrow!”**

**He fired the attack at the weakened Wrath Titanium Maiden. She was unable to block the attack in time and it pierced through her stomach. The Sacred Arrow then exploded, destroying her entire upper body, leaving only a heavily dented lower body behind.**

**Bronwen started to channel energy, stating, “Not bad, but let’s see you stop this! Moonshadow Cannon!”**

**She summoned a black energy sphere before firing a powerful beam at the Hero group. Celtic positioned the Rooks in front in order to shield the group from the attack. The Moonshadow Cannon struck the Rooks but were unable to damage them, much less penetrate them, causing the attack to disperse harmlessly around them, making Bronwen grit her teeth.**

**Zuzu then started to channel energy, stating, “I’ve got a little surprise for you, Bronwen! Shadowalk!”**

**She vanished like a phantom, much to the Demon General’s surprise. A moment later she reappeared and struck Bronwen with a powerful Dark attack, making her scream in pain, before Zuzu vanished again and reappeared back in her original spot.**

**“Didn’t like that, did you?” the Succuryn smirked. “As you know, Shadowalk ignores the target’s Defense, allowing it to strike at full power. And since you Wrath Iron Maidens and your ilk are very heavy in the defensive power it makes for a good move against you.”**

**Ryan started to channel energy, stating, “Time for me to perform a follow-up! Shadowalk!”**

**He vanished from the spot before reappearing in front of a Wrath Steel Maiden. He gave her a powerful slash with Dark energy, making her scream before vanishing and reappearing in his original spot.**

**Celtic turned to Lucas, “Lucas, didn’t you learn some anti-demon magic?”**

**Lucas nodded, “Yes, I did. Specifically Demonsbane and Sacred Lightning.”**

**“Then use it here, as they’re also extra effective on Lesser Demons like Wrath Iron Maidens!”**

**The Spear Hero nodded and started channeling energy, stating, “Eat this! Demonsbane!”**

**He fired a powerful blast of Holy energy that took the form of a spear. The attack struck a Wrath Steel Maiden, making her scream before the attack blew her up, leaving a badly damaged lower body behind. At this point Bronwen managed to dislodge herself from the mud that had trapped her and opened and closed her lower body a few times to ensure that her iron maiden half was now free. She then took out a chunk of crystal and looked at it, eyes narrowing.**

**She stated, “You lot certainly are quite a problem. No wonder Master Infinator wants you dead. Sadly, I’ll have to have my midnight snack another day, as I just got a call from Kalaraja requesting my help against one of your stupid search parties. I’ll leave you with this parting gift.” She started to channel energy before stating, “Giga Volt!”**

**A massive thunderbolt rained down upon the Hero group. Fortunately, the Deluxe Guard Barrier Charms blocked the attack, annoying the Demon General.**

**“Very well, then, but now your Deluxe Guard Barrier Charms need recharging, so that grants my younger sisters an opening. My fellow Wrath Iron Maidens, I’ll leave these goons to you. Farewell for now, Heroes. Teleport!”**

**Bronwen vanished, leaving the remaining Wrath Iron Maidens behind.**

**“Let’s devour these chumps for Master Bronwen!” a Wrath Titanium Maiden stated.**

**“Yeah, and I’m getting pretty hungry,” a Wrath Steel Maiden nodded.**

**Jerry started channeling energy into his arm, stating, “The only thing you’ll be eating are our attacks! Like this! Libera Dragon!”**

**He fired his Libera Dragon, revealing it to be a whitish-blue translucent energy dragon that had wind swirling around it. It roared before striking one of the remaining female monsters, destroying her.**

**Ryan started to channel energy into his arm, growling, “My turn! Libera Dragon!”**

**He launched his version of Libera Dragon, revealing it to be an electric yellow version that crackled with energy. It roared before striking a Wrath Steel Maiden, destroying her upon impact.**

**Celtic started to channel energy, stating, “Time for one last boost! Aura Boost!”**

**Everyone in the Hero group gained more power as their stats increased again. Now with much more confident smirks the Hero group charged in. Before long the last of the Wrath Iron Maidens was destroyed, leaving their broken bodies scattered about. Everyone took a moment to ensure that their enemies were defeated before sighing in relief.**

**“Whew…” Eric panted. “Those various Wrath Iron Maidens sure are tough nuts to crack. Even with our stats getting boosted by Celtic’s Aura Boost and their defenses getting lowered by Zuzu’s Mega Guard Crush they still gave us quite the workout.”**

**Skye gained a worried expression, “Still, we now know that Bronwen is going to attack one of the other search parties alongside Kalaraja. I hope they’ll be okay. While they have the Eject Bracelets to send them to safety I still worry they might get knocked out of commission because of being ganged up on by two Demon Generals.”**

**Celtic nodded, “Yeah, that’s true. And that’ll complicate our mission. The Eject Bracelets will protect them from life-threatening damage, but it will still knock out one of our groups from the mission, thereby giving Infinator more opportunities to regain his strength. And since we don’t know which group is getting ganged up on we cannot go and assist. Hopefully Uncle Duskbane will have a backup plan in case that group ends up in the hospital.”**

**“We can only hope,” Viola said solemnly.**

**May yawned, “Man, I’m exhausted. Let’s get back to bed before anything else happens.”**

**Ryan turned to Celtic, “Hey, Celtic, mind putting up that E-Shield again? Now that the enemy is gone we can rest more easily.”**

**Celtic nodded, “Yes, I will. But first we Heroes should collect samples from the various Wrath Iron Maidens for new powers. Then we’ll hit the sack.”**

**Nodding, the five Heroes gathered up some samples from the various Wrath Iron Maidens and fed them to their Legendary Gear, gaining new powers in the process. Afterward Celtic activated the E-Shield again, allowing everyone to curl up in their makeshift beds and they quickly fell asleep. They were worried about the search party that was under attack but they had no choice but to leave it be, hoping that the Eject Bracelets will be enough to protect them from death.**

**Next Chapter: *Fear and Loathing in the Dark Forest***