

Romall Smith  
superheroripped@gmail.com

About 1600 words

# Ninth Level

Romall Smith

In an explosion of white and blue energy a column of light erupted from the ground. A rodent was expelled from the light. The fog clung to his grey fur like a wet blanket. He breathed deep, but the stench of decay that permeated the thin air caught in his throat. The thumping in his ears grew. His chest tightened. The poor rodent's heart, desperately trying to pump oxygen to his muscles.

“Clerent fra,” Gryn timer said holding up his hand.

Embers of red and white arose from the ground. The swarm of energy illuminated the area with their soft glow. Peaking just above his head, they drifted back to the forest floor with a sizzle and a pop. Gryn timer inhaled crisp air till his tunics rough stitching cut into him.

“Finally,” he said no longer struggling to breathe. “Where in Korintah am I?”

The night air was cool against his wet fur. There were plenty of moss and mushrooms but little else. The clearing was bordered by a forest. Its trees wider than the towers of Westing Castle and taller than the monuments of Akarak were a sight to behold. Near the base of the closest tree, there sat a boulder surrounded by smaller stones. Gryn timer walked over to the damp, moss-covered rocks and took a seat.

“Unbelievable. I must have used the wrong crystal.”

He reached into his satchel and produced a ragged book. Silver runes etched into the cracked leather binding glowed a hazy blue against the moisture in the air. Gryn timer flipped through the journal. Edges of yellowed pages flaked till he came to a sketch of a man being torn asunder by a celestial dragon.

“Here it is,” he said tapping a clawed finger on the page. “I needed blue quartz, not sapphire. ‘Just ride the star dragon, you can make it to the party in no time.’ I am going to ring his neck when I get back.”

Gryn timer was used to the occasional mishap but this was different. Teleportation is one of the off-limit spells of the Xynax order. It had been classified as a dangerous seventh level spell. Although only a third level wizard he was a Nexilin. Their little bodies were conduits that flowed with magic from birth. That didn’t make his attempt teleport any less dangerous.

The soft edge of Gryn timer’s round ears tingled. He lifted his head up from the book as the ground trembled. In the darkness marred by fog was something moving. Gryn timer squinted, the shapeless mass started to take form as it neared. He jumped to his feet thrusting out a free hand.

“Tirrent Fra!”

Red specks of energy swirled together in his palm. The collected inferno exploded forward. A beam of searing heat ripped in to the tree. Through the hole

created was an incandescent spot. He had hit something in the darkness. The red glow of the spot faded as it continued toward him. He hadn't stopped it. Cracking and splintering echoed as it's lumber turned to sprint. He hadn't even slowed it down.

"That can't be good," Gryn timer said throwing the spell book back into his satchel.

Gryn timer backed away from the rocks and into the clearing he had arrived. He did not know what was coming for him, but when a Nexilin's ears tingle that is a clear sign of danger. A creature smaller than the trees but ten times Gryn timer's size careened out of the forest. The ground shook as it stomped into the clearing. Its body adorned with silvery plates of armor riveted together, was covered in spots of moss and vine. Its head, shielded with a three-horned helmet, looked down at Gryn timer.

"No, no, no not today," Gryn timer said. "Why must it be today?"

Gryn timer's minotaur had found him again. This was the second time he had encountered this creature on an errant journey. The last time he had borrowed the school's airship and end up two kingdoms away. No one believed him when he said a giant minotaur was chasing him, they thought he made it up so he wouldn't get in trouble.

"Kirrin tra," he said holding out both hands.

An uncomfortable buzzing sensation rolled from the back of Grynix's neck to the tips of his fingers. The smell of ozone wafted from the collar of his tunic. A brilliant flash pulsed out of his hands, then a crack of lightning descended from the sky and impacted the creature. It stopped mid stride. Purple electricity cascaded from the horned helmet to its armored feet.

“That should put you down,” he said dusting off his hands.

The Electricity dissipated into the ground with a shudder. The charred mark created by the lighting faded. Steam hissed from joints beneath the plates of armor as the creature continued toward him. Mouth gaped open Grynix blinked several times.

“This can't be happening, that would have killed a dragon.”

He scurried left and right then turned to face the metal minotaur. His only way out was to teleport home or go through the creature. Unfortunately, he was all out of sapphire.

“You picked the wrong wizard to follow,” Grynix said vibrating the air around him amplifying his voice with magic. “I am a ninth level master, now be gone!”

The metal minotaur did not move away. Instead, its joints made a clicking noise. The giant creature lowered itself to the ground. The three horns separated revealing a compartment full of lights surrounding a chair.

“We don’t have a great deal of time master Gryn timer, can you please take a seat in the compartment,” a voice said emanating from inside the minotaur. “They will be here any moment.”

The little rodent stared at the metal minotaur for a moment. The dense fog started to ease its way back into the area he had cleared away. Its incorporeal essence still had a gravity that pulled his face and tail. The construct seemed to be friendly, but the tips of his ears were still on high alert. Before he could ask any questions, two pillars of blue light erupted behind him. Giant constructs stepped out of each pillar. A head taller than then the one in front of him, these ones were different. Their armor was red with ornate golden markings across the chest and each arm. Their heads did not have three horns like the metal minotaur. Instead, they were smooth with webbed ears to each side. Each of the constructs held a long spear with a crystalline tip.

“We are out of time.” The voice said with and echoed from the compartment.

The horned construct released a burst of steam that tightened its armor. It went from its knees to a sprint toward Gryn timer. The little rodent locked up and his eyes darted all around. The construct reached out with a metal hand as if to crush

him. Instead, it scooped him up and dropped him into the compartment. The three horns closed just as they ripped into the closest red construct, jolting it up into the air and letting it fall. The other red construct threw its spear at the metal minotaur. The pointed tip deflected off the armor plating of its right shoulder. The minotaur clenched its left hand, drawing in moisture from the fog. Blue and white particles of energy gathered on its armored knuckles until they were white hot. Steam released from the constructs elbow and its arm projected forward. The impact shattered the red and gold helmet. The smoking debris rocketed into the nearby trees. All of the lights flashing, and instruments beeping were nothing compared to the view in front of Gryn timer. It was some kind of window to the outside. He could see everything in front of the metal minotaur.

“Who are you?”

“My name is NX-1,” said the construct.

“What are you?” Gryn timer asked, his hand pressed on the window.

“I am a Ninth Level combat construct,” NX-1 said his voice echoing in the compartment.

“There is no such thing.”

“There will be. We have got to go; more will be arriving shortly.”

A stream of blue energy ejected from NX-1's chest. The particles gathered one by one into the shape of a door. When the last particle was in place they ignited, burning a hole in the fabric of reality.

“Where are we going?”

“We are going where you are needed most.”

NX-1 walked through the glowing door. Once passed the threshold, the window in NX-1s compartment was filled with bright colors that swirled about. Grynxs claws gripped the rough leather arms of the chair. The gravity of a star passing pressed him deeper into the seat. It could have been fear or wonder but his unknowing brown eyes were the size of wagon wheels. Planets and stars zipped past faster and faster till suddenly there was darkness. Then with the brightness of a supernova, they stepped out into the real world again. Blazing light poured through the opening as the three horns once again opened. A blast of air streamed in with the arid smell of heat and a salty taste of sand. Grynxs brought a sweaty hand up to his brow. The attempt to block out the sun was admirable but, there were five of them. He walked to the edge of the compartment taking slow and deliberate steps. The low rumble of voices built till Grynxs was greeted with a thunderous roar. A crowd of spectators filled a granite and steel coliseum chanting in a foreign language.

“What are they saying?” Grynxs asked.

“Welcome home.”