



The driving snow was relentless, the cold air sharp. Hoka's shaggy paws crunched into the snowy drifts, never tiring and never bucking. Seventeen years now, tracing rumors and coin trails of oriel gates out there in the abandoned wilds, and not once had the shaggy beast even hesitated a step. Following the account of a lone miner claiming he'd stumbled across ruins and a broken statue out here below the White Mountain, this was day four of finding nothing.

Hoka was born in a concrete cell and spent most of his life not even seeing the sun. His rider grew up apprenticed to a merchant of medicines supplying apothecaries, endlessly flattering shopkeepers and lying to them for the sale. When the rider stole Hoka and first got him out in the open wilds, they both knew they would never return to such nonsense as they'd endured before.

Finding something out here was beside the point.