

## Chapter 802 Dealings

“The gates aren’t exactly a competitive product to our own. Their range is limited and the use is highly dangerous to individuals below a certain Vitality. Healers need to be present for anyone else to even use them. Let alone the atrocious mana efficiency. It’s an insult,” Iana spoke, her voice agitated.

“They’re not supplying the same people,” Helwart said. “They’re supplying those we would not openly support. And I’m sure there’s plenty of those.”

“A widespread reaction, information gathering, executions, or even war would only push more potential allies to our enemies,” Aki said. “The funding of this operation has been kept meticulously clean. The names of minor nobility and merchants from all over the Plains that we have won’t help us get rid of the core issues at hand.”

“We could have them all killed. Send a message,” Helwart suggested.

“That would violate seventeen individual treaties. Nor is it in our long term interest,” Aki said. “We have the means to overwhelm these nations with prosperity, if they cooperate. In time those who conduct such operations will be removed by their own governments, with the necessary diplomatic pressure. Without hunting and murdering individuals. The Accords are not a crime syndicate.”

“How many treaties were violated by your invasion of Nipha and subsequent apprehension of all those prisoners?” Elana asked. “The trust in any treaties with the Accords will be damaged by those actions.”

“Treaties were violated by the systematic gathering of information on the gates. Laws were violated by the substance trade and slavery conducted by those responsible. Our reports will include the death of two Medic Sentinels, including Lilith’s reaction. The teleportation location being Nipha is a gray zone, but I suspect most will accept what we did as reasonable,” Claire said.

“Reasonable or not. If treaties were violated by us, then more could be violated. We’ll have to tread carefully,” Elana said before she looked at Ilea. “Your involvement has caused a devastating strike to an enemy operation, but I suggest you refrain from further rash actions.”

Ilea looked at her with a slight frown. “People were trading slaves. Be glad I didn’t kill everyone there.”

“You’re emotional,” Elana said.

“Yes. Of course I am,” Ilea said as white flame flowed over her armor. “Two Medics were killed by slavers. And we’re sitting here discussing diplomatic measures. I understand, but I’m allowed to be pissed off.”

“There is a lot to consider,” Catelyn said, giving Elana a look. “What we know is that this enemy faction has lost a major part of their operation. It is likely the related governments will ask for a return of these prisoners, and I suggest we oblige, with detailed reports of our findings. The treatment given to those individuals by the respective authorities will help us gauge our current diplomatic standing.”

“You want to just set them free?” Ilea asked.

“Slavery and the trade of various other goods is forbidden by law, not only within the lands of the Accords but all the involved nations. We do not have jurisdiction within Nipha, and you have killed those that have fled Nara. That perhaps is negotiable but we have to return the prisoners, to be judged by their own juries. Such is stated in the Accords. I believe the limited trade of illegal goods and even people without official decree from the respective governments is not due cause for war or conquest,” Catelyn said, looking at Ilea.

“What about their cooperative efforts to steal gate technology?” Sulivhaan asked. “I do not wish for war either, but these nations have either looked away or funded massive efforts to undermine the treaties they have signed with the Accords.”

*“We lack sufficient proof,” the Meadow spoke. “What we do know is the location of several gates, and the people that have control of those lands. I’m sure their cooperation in our investigation will be sufficiently extensive.”*

“They won’t sell out their own,” Sulivhaan said.

“No, but pressure is pressure,” Catelyn said. “This won’t be solved in the span of a week or two.”

“I request permission to extend our spy network, including formal requests to operate in various related locations,” Wayland said. “I know Nipha. They’ll allow us there, under supervision.”

“You won’t find anything,” Elana said.

“No. But I’ll make a lot of people a lot more paranoid. I still have a reputation in the Empire of Nipha,” he answered. “I intend to use that.”

“I believe such a request is reasonable. Any vetoes?” Catelyn asked, nobody objecting.

Ilea sighed to herself. A part of her wanted to ask Aki to just take over the Plains by force. *“Why is all this shit so complicated?”* she sent to Trian.

He glanced her way. *“I think we can leave the rest to them. Should we join Kyrian?”*

*“This seems pretty important,”* Ilea said, listening to the representatives discussing the next steps.

*“To you? Or to the Accords?”* Trian asked.

*“I’m part of the Accords,”* Ilea said.

*“Yes. And they were set up with laws and principles. Cooperation instead of conflict. They can operate without you. Without any individual here,”* he said.

*“I could just go there you know? To Nipha. To their palaces. Find those responsible, or ask nicely for them to be found,”* she said.

*“You could. And perhaps one day, you’ll be asked to do so. But not until we have proof and due cause. I want to see them pay for what they allowed to happen, just like you do. We’ll need patience, and we’ll have to trust in the Accords. Blind slaughter will only bring more death and warfare,”* he spoke. *“If you want to go see Kyrian and the Sentinels instead of being here, we can.”*

*“I appreciate your concern. But I will stay. And listen,”* Ilea said. *“I’m a council member, just like you are.”*

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Fania found the estate reasonably guarded. Not nearly enough to keep her out of course. Few places in the Plains had that kind of security. Way too expensive, when powerful people could just keep their secrets stored away in some ring or necklace. The world really wasn't fair.

She appeared in the well adorned garden and flew towards the three story structure. Stone and wood aligned with middle sections between the continuously smaller floors. The roof was tiled and colored in a dark orange barely visible in the moonlight, moving up from all four corners and ending in a single point. With a little silver or gold here and there, perhaps a more striking color like red or blue, the mansion could very well be seen as a palace. Even so it didn't fail to show off the wealth of whoever owned it, even more so when one felt the enchantments thrumming within its walls.

Nothing to keep out someone like Fania, but it would keep whatever was talked about between the walls very much inside. She didn't bother with knocking or informing any of the guards of her presence, instead slowly floating past them with her magic up. They failed to note her presence. Operating in Navetihin had the side effect of both guards and everyone else adapting to the Fading. Fania had no illusions about their prowess. The Heavenly Sweets had the numbers, but within Nipha, those who trained in Navetihin had a reputation. The Accords were one thing, but she assumed there was quite a bit of conflict between competing assassin orders, now that the gates allowed for ridiculously faster travel.

A good thing that she wasn't exactly part of any Orders anymore. *I should contact them soon, just to see how things are.*

She found the top floor to be the only one occupied, oil lamps lit along the outer corridors, nothing getting in or out of the central room. This time she did knock, a set of seven sounds in quick succession. A simple sign but one switched up every week. Kerthin and her closest mercenaries were the only ones who knew it.

The door opened, a large man in heavy silver plate armor taking her in. His face was covered by his horned helmet.

**[Brawler – lvl 293]**

He stepped aside, letting her past before he closed the door, the enchantments flaring up again as the runes were returned into place.

Oil lamps illuminated the room with warm light, the ceiling rather low, a single broad wooden table standing at the center. Two other people were present. One was Kerthin, the tall woman sitting on a chair with a set of documents spread out on the table in front of her. The other one was a man Fania had seen a few times in their base. Marcos. One of the scholars and a void mage.

She didn't like the man, having heard some of the rumors.

"You survived. What about the others?" Kerthin asked, not giving her a look.

"Lilith killed them," Fania said. She didn't miss the increased pressure of Kerthin's pen on the piece of paper.

“Hmm. Wish I would’ve seen it,” Marcos said as he looked up at her. He sat with one knee pulled towards his chest, the man rather scrawny, most of his hair gone despite his otherwise youthful appearance. It didn’t look shaved off either. His eyes were a strange black, almost purple.

**[Void Mage – lvl 194]**

“You wouldn’t be alive if you had,” Fania said.

He seemed to consider for a moment before he nodded lightly to himself. “Right. That could’ve been an inconvenience.”

“I hope you have your report prepared,” Kerthin said without looking up.

“I remember what happened, yes,” Fania said. She locked eyes with the woman for a split second before Kerthin returned to her writing. So used to authority she was confused when someone showed even the slightest bit of rebellion. Fania had worked with plenty of people like her, and she knew when she could push or ignore things. She was far too important for Kerthin, even more now with the others dead. An increase in pay would follow soon, though she wouldn’t start a negotiation right here. That would just be rude.

She took a seat and summoned herself a warm soup and some wine, if only to distract herself from the fact that Lilith could very well show up in this room at any given moment. She activated a few of her spells as she ate, just in case.

*That woman really did a number on me. And today didn’t help.*

She felt the heat travel through her body as she ate the soup. Coupled with the wine, she realized how tense she had been. *I’ll need a few dozen men to help me recharge from this adventure.* She thought about a few of her recent sessions, biting her lower lip before she refocused. *All in due time.*

“Are you concerned? You are hidden,” Marcos asked, looking her way.

*How are you not?* She didn’t ask him. The man was of little interest to her. She finished her meal in the next fifteen minutes, drinking a bottle of wine before the door opened again, the large man stepping aside to allow two people entry.

The first was a pale woman with fiery red hair, freckles accenting her face, brown eyes taking in the occupants of the room as she stepped past the large man. She wore an intricate near black leather dress made as it seemed for both traveling and attending balls. A single thin sheath hung from her brown belt. She raised her hand, several nondescript rings reflecting the warm light in the room. Magic pulsed from one of them before her eyes locked on to Fania.

“I would appreciate it if you didn’t hide,” she said with a bright smile, though her eyes seemed slightly strange.

Wild in a way that Fania couldn’t quite place. She hadn’t seen many expressions like that in her life, and those that were comparable, she would’ve liked to have forgotten. She did as she was told, removing her magic as she poured herself another glass of wine. *Elizabeth Pierce*, she thought, taking in the woman she had only seen from a distance so far. Not one that concerned herself with assassins and trade. Or so she thought.

**[Rapier Master – lvl 285]**

The second person to enter was a young man with shifty eyes, his back bent a little and his hands wringing. He wore a fine set of leather armor, in the same dark brown and near black color as Elizabeth.

**[Blood Mage – lvl 209]**

*Those are the people Kerthin dealt with?*

The door was closed behind the two before they took their seats opposite of the survivors.

A tea set appeared in front of Elizabeth before she poured herself a cup. “Now. I just traveled several hours instead of using a convenient gate of the Accords. I take it you wouldn’t call me here if it wasn’t urgent, right Kerthin?” She sipped from her cup and smiled, almost lecherous but nothing quite sexual.

Fania avoided looking at her brown eyes. Two people to scare her on the same day. It really was an interesting time to be in her shoes.

“I’m done with my report,” Kerthin said and moved the papers closer towards Pierce.

“Assassin, tell me what happened,” Elizabeth said instead, looking at Fania.

“A group of Sentinels found and infiltrated a trade location in Nara equipped with one of our teleportation gates. We killed two of them and destroyed all the evidence, left via the gate after activating its self destruct sequence. We arrived and destroyed the other gate,” she said then gulped. “The Black Death appeared less than a minute later, followed by silver machines and teams of high level healers. I had already hidden, leaving as soon as the fighting had started.”

She could see Elizabeth’s right eye twitch before she slammed her fist into the well made teapot. Liquid and bits of porcelain spread over the table. She raised one finger and pointed it at Fania. “Ilea. Her name. Is Ilea. Not Black Death. Not Lilith. Not Head Sentinel. Or anything else. It’s Ilea.”

Fania just nodded. *Oh, this one has issues. Better behave or I’ll end up skinned and dying in some hidden prison.* The eccentric tea and theatrical shattering reminded her of quite a few powerful people she had met before. That combined with everything else she had seen of Elizabeth so far painted a dark picture. One she enjoyed observing, from a very safe distance.

“How did she follow?” Elizabeth asked a moment later, wiping her face with a white piece of cloth.

“I don’t know,” Fania said.

Pierce looked to the others.

Kerthin shook her head.

“It’s fascinating. She reveals new ways to be unpredictable yet again,” Marcos said before he snickered. He smiled at the frown on Elizabeth’s face.

*Another lunatic.*

“It may be possible, that she can somehow perceive space magic. Much like Danvarin’s awareness, just more advanced,” he said. “Seeing it may allow her to somehow find the destination.”

“She’s not a scholar. She’s just a brute. How could she even start to understand something like that, or develop such intricate skills?” Elizabeth asked.

“She has trained with the Meadow, and other ancient beings, all masters of their schools of magic. Even a brute like her will benefit from such fortunate tutelage. I myself have found new ways to see my magics thanks to the Endless Meadow,” Marcas said.

“Meadow here, Madow there. It’s a tree,” Elizabeth said and sighed. She planted her face down onto the table, crushing some of the porcelain pieces with her skin and getting more tea onto her skin. Both her hands moved up and slid away some of the remains. “Have they found our connections in the Pit?”

“It’s only a matter of time, now that they know about the gates,” Kerthin said.

“Annoying. Annoying. All these monsters,” Elizabeth murmured. “If we can’t use the gates to hide, then they’re of no use to us anymore. Kerthin, leak the information. Let everyone have fun with what we have developed. Maybe the other nations won’t be quite as easily swayed by the Accords if they can tinker with their own gate technology.”

“Are you sure? All of the funding... all of the work...” Kerthin said.

Elizabeth raised herself and shrugged. “Fucked. Fucking. Fucked. By Lilith. In the span of what? Ten minutes? Well those are the monsters we deal with. Humanity is at its end. Soon there will only be machines, Dark Ones, and dwarves.” She spat on the table. “Leak the information. And a few of the rumors we prepared. And I want some mayhem. Use every connection. Make sure it’s untraceable.”

“Any specifics?” Kerthin asked.

“Death. Injuries. Hit them in broad daylight then hide. Cities of the Accords. Their allies. Anyone that accepted gates. Some frontier settlements. Just... really... push them,” Elizabeth said. “I’ll fund what I can.”

“Eli, we’re going to run out of gold,” the man next to her said in a whisper.

“Either we will run out now, or we’ll run out in ten years from now, because everything we built, everything we OWNED, was taken by Ilea and her gang of freaks. I want them to suffer,” she said, the last bit in a whisper, once again cleaning her chin with the cloth.

*Desperate people, pushed into a corner.* Fania thought, keeping her expression schooled. Elizabeth was more powerful than she had thought, perhaps the main driving force behind the Pierce family. *To see her fall will be a delight. Oh how she will scream and thrash.*

Fania poured herself another glass of wine, pleased to be witnessing at least a piece of local history. *Maybe I should write about all this at some point, like Synria suggested. She always liked to write.*

“This won’t be pretty,” Kerthin said. “And we may just cause a war.”

“That’s the point,” Elizabeth said, pouring herself another tea from a new set of utensils. “Or are you getting scared?”

“Our homeland was taken from us. Baralia vak revin gash,” Kerthin spoke, spitting out the last words.

*How patriotic,* Fania thought. *And here I thought she was more self serving than that. I suppose it’s honorable in some sense. But considering the people sitting at this table, perhaps she chose the wrong side after all.*

She was quite aware of her own position, but everything she heard from the inner circles of the Accords was just a little too... boring for her tastes. Facing one's fears, fighting an insurmountable adversary. It just felt exciting. *After this is over, I'll have to go hunt again. Can't have her kill me the next time we meet.*