

## Chapter 362 The Word of a Shadow

“Sure you don’t want to come?” Ilea asked, looking at the group of necromancers still tinkering with Green’s body.

“It did sound interesting initially but this is so fun. There were so few of us in Rhyvor, most just criminals trying to get to power quickly by murdering old people.” Maro explained and looked at her with sparkling eyes.

“It’s fine. Just thought you might need some fresh air.” Ilea said. “I’ll get you once I’m done.”

“Do that.” He said, already lost again as he read through the runes proposed by Indra.

Neeto was arguing with the lower leveled necromancer while Eyn rushed back to Maro as soon as he heard their talk ending.

*Bunch of nerds.* Ilea chuckled and closed the door, happy for their shared hobby of dissecting corpses and investigating bones with powerful death magic.

“Not coming?” Walter asked, wearing a beautifully embroidered black robe and black leather boots. His hair and short beard were in pristine condition.

“No.” Ilea said and looked him over. “You look... different.”

He smiled. “Lucia insisted I take care of myself before meeting the governor. I agree of course, those people care about appearances.”

“Not if you’re insanely powerful.” Ilea said and smiled. Her casual clothes or aggressive gear hadn’t led to major problems with nobles or officers so far.

“Well, it’s not a negative at least.” Walter said with a grin. “How do I look?”

“Good. Not my type but good, professional. Dark Sorcerer vibes.” She said and gave him a thumbs up.

“I’m not sure what to make of all that, Ilea.” The man chuckled and shook his head. “Ready to go?” Bone armor appeared over her clothes before she nodded.

“Sure you don’t want to fly us in?” Walter asked as they approached the western gate of Riverwatch.

A thin mist lay over the city and surrounding forests. The air was cool but not as cold as it had been even just a couple days earlier.

“I got in with a necromancer. You won’t be an issue.” Ilea said, the two walking up to the closed gate.

Two guards were stationed at the top of the wall, torches lighting the surrounding area as well as providing some warmth.

The trees coming close to the wall had been cut down to make sure the guards had enough time to report monster or other enemy activity.

“Gate opens in two hours.” A guard said. “You can camp out. Shouldn’t be any monsters coming close.”

Ilea glanced at Walter and rolled her eyes. She vanished a second later and appeared next to the guard on top of the wall. “I’m a Shadow and here on a mission. Directly working for Governor Gallian.” She summoned her badge and held it up.

The two men had jumped back, hands on their weapons and ready to fight.

**[Warrior – lvl 81]**

**[Mage – lvl 60]**

“Show me that.” One of them said and caught the badge she threw his way. “Seems fine. Mana signature and all. Can he jump up or teleport through?”

Ilea waved to Walter, the man appearing next to her.

He nodded to the guards. “Thank you.”

“Come on.” Ilea said and jumped down, landing on the muddy road, frozen patches of dirt and puddles cracking below her boots.

Walter chose to teleport once more. “That went smoothly.” He said after they had crossed some distance into the city.

Some people were already awake, going about their business while others were sleeping off their hangovers or simply had no place to live in.

Ilea wondered how many people died each winter. A population of one hundred thousand was huge. Getting housing for all of them within the city walls without skyscrapers or underground expansion was certainly difficult.

The city did stretch far and housing could be provided rather easily with the help of magic. Stone mages, the rare metal mages, water mages and many others would likely work together to provide a more modern infrastructure than a first look would suggest.

She already knew there were water and heating runes in some inns, easily providing otherwise pretty difficult to acquire commodities. There was also a sewer, she had traveled through it back when the elves had attacked during the tournament.

“Do you have a clue where the main government buildings are?” She asked Walter after a couple minutes.

He chuckled. “I do. It’s not guaranteed that he’s there or has time to see us though.”

“He will have time to see me. Plus, he’s above level two hundred. Doubt he sleeps through the night. Not with the position he has.” Ilea added and motioned him to lead the way.

The sorcerer obliged, continuing onward on the main road leading towards the city center from the gate.

A few wagons were loading up, groups of adventurers loitering close by. Protected caravans to other cities or perhaps dungeon expeditions preparing.

Some of them glanced their way. One warrior at level one twenty even approached Ilea. “Excuse me, miss?”

She kept walking and looked his way. “I’m on a mission.”

“Understood. We would be willing to wait for a healer. Dungeon expedition around three days west from here. We are well prepared and know the monsters. You would get a third of the pay as well as first pick on anything we find.” The man added, walking with them.

Ilea smiled. “I’m on a Shadow’s Hand mission.” She added and winked.

The man paled immediately and nodded. “Apologies. I didn’t mean to disturb you. Good luck on your mission, Shadow.” He even bowed and quickly retreated, scratching the back of his neck before he shook his head in the direction of his waiting teammates.

“You could just walk around in black.” Walter commented with a smile. “Missing people mission. Do you not think it could have been connected to the criminals you already took care of?”

She shrugged. “Possibly. If it’s obvious then I don’t think there would be a separate job for that. Riverwatch is a big place. A group of what, fifty criminals is not the sole problem they have.”

“I’m well aware of that.” Walter said and chuckled, turning into a big square with structures towering over the adjacent houses. He pointed at one of them. “That should house the main governor’s office. At least it did a decade ago.”

The building looked similar to the city hall in Ravenhall, albeit smaller still. Ilea nodded, taking the lead again as the dark sorcerer followed. She could tell he was getting a little nervous. Only thanks to her sphere at least.

The man was an experienced veteran it seemed, as much with fighting as he was with politics.

They passed the few people on the square, soon reaching the broad stairwell leading up to the stone hall.

The fountains both on the square and in the big entrance hall weren’t running, likely due to the season.

No guards obstructed their way inside, a small line of people waiting in front of the counter. Two people took care of them.

“Seems like our best bet.” Ilea commented and walked towards the queue. If they didn’t get what they needed here, she could contact Dale again too. Or simply ask a random guard to show the way.

Walter followed.

It only took a couple minutes until they stood in front of an attendant. “I’m the Shadow working on the remaining mission placed by Riverwatch. I’m here to talk to Alistair Gallian about the details.” She summoned her badge and put it on the counter.

The simple fact that she had a storage item, coupled with the badge seemed confirmation enough.

The attendant checked the badge and nodded quickly, motioning them to the side. “Please follow me.” She said, changing into a brisk pace as she led them to closed double doors.

“The Shadow wishes to speak with Governor Gallian.” She informed one of the two guards.

The woman nodded in turn and took over, black and gold armor clinking as she opened the door. "Please follow me."

**[Warrior – lvl 132]**

Walter glanced at Ilea with an impressed expression as he followed.

Ilea rolled her eyes at the official feeling it all had. *They all shouldn't take themselves so bloody seriously around here.*

They were led through a long hallway, marble like stone reflecting the magical light from above. Spotless. Pillars reaching to the ceiling sectioned off the small courtyard to their right. Benches and even some trees had been placed inside, no real sunlight reaching them.

A magical device above simulated the warmer light shining down.

Ilea took a moment to check on it, smiling at the installation.

She did get a curious glance from the guard. Either the woman tried not to be offensive or she was truly confused at the antics of the Shadow.

Finally, Ilea nodded to the guards standing in front of yet another set of wooden double doors. She knew both of them from the previous day's bet testing, even with their full plate armor and closed off visors.

**[Mage – lvl 163]**

**[Mage – lvl 170]**

"The Shadow is here." One of them said.

"Another beating?" The other one asked.

"Most likely." The first one said again.

The woman who had led Ilea and Walter rolled her eyes. "She's here to see the governor."

"Who's the sorcerer?" The first guard asked.

"Dark magic swirls around him." The second one said.

"A ploy at deception?" The first one again asked.

Ilea smirked. "Do you really want another beating?" She asked. "He's a friend, also here to see Alistair."

"Another bout would be interesting." One of them said.

"Us together this time. Against you." The other one said.

"We don't want to ruin this beautiful building, now would we?" Ilea asked.

Magic surged from the two as their power was released. "Indeed. An unwise decision." One of them said.

Ilea's ash armor formed as her limbs fanned out behind her. "Unwise indeed." She grinned.

Alistair opened the door and hit both his guards at the same time. "Stop it."

Walter patted Ilea on the shoulder. "You too, please?" He chuckled as he looked at the woman who had brought them, her sword halfway out of its sheath, her face pale.

"Relax. She's not our enemy." Alistair said, stepping past his guards to greet Ilea. "Welcome back. Earlier than I had expected." He spoke with a warm voice.

The guards had immediately stopped their antics and Ilea too was moving her armor back to the rose form on her back and below her clothes. "Alistair. Nice to meet you."

"The same. Your work yesterday was splendid. I wish I could pay you more but the bureaucracy only allows me a certain power over our budgets." He turned his head to face Walter. "Welcome, dark sorcerer. I assume you are with the Shadow?"

Walter extended his hand and shook the governor's. "Governor Gallian, Walter Skorn. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I am a friend."

"A friend." The governor replied, inquisitive eyes looking over the sorcerer. "Well, do come in." He walked back into his vast office.

Ilea smiled once again at the two guards and blinked past them.

Walter walked in the normal way.

The door was closed by one of the guards as soon as they were in the room.

She saw the enchantments fall into place and smirked.

"I got the reports." Alistair said and walked around his desk, sitting down on the big armchair and resting his elbows on the dark wooden table.

Walter looked around, taking in the bookshelves, the different maps as well as artifacts and monster pieces displayed in various ways.

"Impressive work in Stormbreach. An escaped demon from Ravenhall?" The governor asked.

Ilea grabbed a horn and looked it over.

### ***[Alpha Drake Horn]***

*Knew that seemed familiar.* She smiled. "THE escaped demon. An intelligent Spawn variant that forced Mind Weavers to work for him. Mind Weavers are those normally controlling the weaker and more ferocious Spawn version." She explained.

"We are aware of some of the specifics. Lys had to deal with some Mind Weavers themselves. I'm glad the problem has been taken care of before it escalated. Demons are incredibly dangerous to a mostly non combatant population." Alistair said. "Of course killing the Baralia officers earned you my trust already. We are working out a deal with Vincent at the moment. To keep his operations in check but to give enough leeway for him to not betray us."

"Vincent Halligan?" Walter asked. "He's the one you brought back from the rogue camp?" His voice didn't betray the way he felt about the man.

"Yes." Ilea said. "He threatened to kill a child. Other than that, he didn't seem like the worst guy. I didn't tell you Alistair but if he makes trouble, feel free to contact Claire or me if I'm around. It would surprise me however."

“It would be my failing as the governor if he rebels. As I’ve told you before.” Alistair said and nodded towards Walter, a questioning look on his face.

Ilea opened a nearby chest, knowing what was inside thanks to her sphere. Cold runes kept some of the things inside fresh. She took a bottle of ale and opened it. *I probably would have a problem if alcohol did anything to my body still.* She smirked and closed the chest again. “Feel free to talk about what we discussed in secret. He’s a dear friend that helped me out quite a bit.” She smiled at Walter and lifted her bottle. “A good man.”

The sorcerer smiled at her, genuinely.

“I finished the letter. Would you like to go over it now or later? Your signature as well as mana signature will be needed. The contents cannot be altered after our mana has been placed on the paper. Feel free to examine the enchantments.” The governor explained.

“I can have a look in a minute. Walter, can you check the enchantments as soon as I’m done?” She said.

“Of course. Lucia has taught me quite a lot in the past years.” The sorcerer said.

“Should we talk about the last mission or is the sorcerer’s presence the reason you’re here?” Alistair asked.

Ilea smirked and grabbed the letter on his table. “Both. I’ll let you two talk while I read through this.”

Alistair looked at Walter and nodded.

Ilea in the meantime walked back to the chest and formed an ashen chair before sitting down. Her legs crossed as she started reading.

“I suppose it’s time to formally introduce myself.” Walter said. “I’m Walter Skorn, leading member of the Vultures Brotherhood. We are a group of mages practicing various forbidden and dark magics, necromancy as well as dark enchantments and sorcery.”

The governor smiled and glanced at Ilea before he sighed. “The Vultures Brotherhood. Now we can place a name to your little group. A peculiarity. You operate near the abandoned Calys mine, don’t you?” He asked and gauged Walter’s reaction.

Alistair chuckled. “Were you part of a court perhaps? You betray nothing. The trade has been noted but according to our investigation, none of the goods were poisoned or in any form dangerous. Nor were there abductions or murders associated with your... brotherhood.”

“Many have still advocated me or the guard to take care of it. To few for it to matter. What is it you propose?” He asked.

Walter got out a small rolled up paper with a seal on it. “We are merely practitioners. In no way do we endanger the population nor anybody but ourselves. There are services we can provide as well as goods I’d like to trade without having to pay off guards. Neither do I want to worry about... as you put it, being taken care of.”

Alistair motioned him to come closer and accepted the paper. He broke the seal and started reading.

Ilea was mostly through her letter too, mostly suggesting cooperation and official recognition of each other’s independence. Some law suggestions, humanitarian rights and ground rules were mentioned but it all seemed reasonable and in line with what the Ravenhall council had in mind.

Mentions for direct support in case of war were little but present. A discount on Hand mercenaries and support in case of a large scale invasion or imminent destruction of either city. Alistair apparently didn't want to ask too much. Or he assumed Ravenhall would be the city to catch the kingdoms' and empires' eyes more so than Riverwatch.

"Reasonable demands." Alistair said as he put away the suggestions from Walter. "I need a couple days to check it and perhaps have it revised slightly. In case we get the support of Ravenhall, I think I can easily get this through without much of a headache. How should we communicate?" He asked.

"Have a message placed for Skorn with the adventurer guild in case you would like to meet." Walter said. "Thank you for the consideration."

The governor nodded. "I understand your situation. Know that this goodwill is only possible because of Ilea's word. I would have you thoroughly investigated otherwise. As much as I believe simply practicing a school of magic doesn't have an influence on a person's morals, I do know that some schools are more dangerous than others. As long as you keep your experiments to your cave and don't kill people related to Riverwatch, I will accept the Vultures and will officially recognize them as a trading partner to the city."

Walter bowed his head.

Alistair turned to Ilea, noticing that she had stopped reading. "May I use your name officially to back the Vultures? The connection will quiet most if not all opposing voices."

"Use Lilith's name." Ilea said. "More investments are likely on the way too." She said and stood up, giving back the letter. "Walter, enchantments." She added and smiled.

The sorcerer complied and checked the letter thoroughly before he nodded. "What he said is true."

"Perfect." Ilea replied. "Where do I sign?"