

Chapter 781 Allies

“The wreckage is cleared away, though there are some disputes between Riverwatch adventurers and the war machine pilots from the Pit. Some of the metals are apparently quite rare. Some of the merchants and smiths in the city are evaluating the materials right now,” the middle aged fire mage explained, the woman clad in a decorated light metal armor. The Riverwatch coat of arms was displayed on the chest piece, slightly marred.

Trian took a sip of his tea as he waited for the officer to finish her report. He had moved to Riverwatch for the time being, in case of another Taleen attack, and as a way to show how serious the Accords meant their support. Several teams of Sentinels, Dark Ones, and war machines had remained in or near the city.

“No functioning machines were sighted in the scouting efforts,” the officer spoke and looked to Trian, a few of the other present Riverwatch nobles glancing his way.

“That matches our reports,” he said.

“We have yet to determine the reason for their attack in the first place. It’s unprecedented,” one of the nobles spoke, a younger woman wearing a white two piece dress.

“The change in their behavior is not something we can possibly investigate,” another spoke.

“Is there any information you can share on that?” Alistair asked, looking at Trian.

“We are investigating the circumstances of the attacks ourselves. A split effort between protecting the affected settlements and finding a potential source of the attack. Sentinels are searching through the northern forest for Taleen ruins, though the information we have suggests there shouldn’t be one present,” Trian explained. He knew of course that Ilea was the most likely reason for the attack. She had started helping the Cerithil Hunters with the collection of the Taleen keys, and she had even attacked their capital. Alistair however had to consider his city and peoples.

He didn’t exactly look forward to the next weeks and months, depending on how many more attacks there would be. They could likely deal with the machines but every guard was on high alert, the entire city in lock down. With every passing day the political pressure would build, and Riverwatch would look to the Accords for a solution or an explanation. There would be no reason for him to dread these meetings but considering Ilea’s actions were the catalyst for the attacks, he would have to tread very carefully.

Mopping up after her adventures, he thought, suppressing a smile whilst under the scrutiny of the gathered nobility. They wouldn’t openly accuse Lilith or the Accords, but these could become seeds of discontent in the coming decades.

“Important talk, keep it somewhat under wraps. Meet me at Meadow, now if possible. Taleen are dealt with,” Ilea’s voice reached his mind.

Trian didn’t show a reaction, processing the little information she had sent as best he could. *Dealt with?*

“I need twenty minutes,” he sent back after some consideration. *She did include if possible. Important but not an emergency.*

The rest of the meeting concluded without any more surprises, the city remaining on high alert for the time being. Trian left towards the teleportation gates outside the town, changing into his battle armor just in case. He flew up and signaled for the Sentinel currently on guard duty. A young woman by the name of Heather. Light green feathery wings kept her in the air far above the bustling city, her yellow eyes taking him in.

“I will be away for a while. Act at your own discretion,” Trian said.

Heather nodded before she returned to her duty, Trian flying downwards and over the walls. He skipped the long queue to the Morhill gate and was let through by the guards without showing any identification. There had been a few teleports in the past week. He immediately made for the restricted gate leading into the domain of the Meadow. Most people going north would seek the Hallowfort gate, the requirements to use it far more relaxed than that of the Meadow.

Once again he was enveloped by white light, Trian moved through the fabric of space before he appeared on another platform, the mana around him instantly more noticeable. He could feel the presence of the ancient tree.

“Greetings, Headmaster. Ilea is waiting. May I teleport you?” the Meadow spoke.

“I told you, just Trian is fine. Go for it,” he sent back, still trying to get used to the instant long range teleportation and telepathy using beings of space. For the third time he was moved, his stomach lurching slightly but his high vitality preventing the sensation from lasting more than a second. He had heard the gates weren’t exactly the most pleasant experience for those below level fifty. Nothing comparable to a week long journey of course, but there were a few puke related incidents when the gates were first opened to the public.

It wasn’t enough to train space magic resistance, as many of the Sentinels learned in the days after.

Trian found himself standing next to Kyrian, Claire, and Catelyn. He saw Ilea leaning against a nearby pillar.

“He’s here. Care to tell us what this is about now? Either of you?” Claire asked, glancing between Kyrian and Ilea.

“Showing is better,” Ilea said.

“Why am I involved in this?” the fox asked.

“Because I trust both your opinion and that you won’t instantly attack everything,” Ilea said.

“Through the gate,” she said, motioning towards the strange fluctuation of space she tended to summon.

“Again,” Trian murmured under his breath. His beard generally helped mask his whispers but he knew everyone here could hear him regardless. He sighed and stepped through after the smiling fox.

And came out on the streets of a Taleen dungeon. He hadn’t seen many of them in his time but the design was instantly recognizable. The magic behind them vanished the moment he stepped through. He looked at the ashen clad Ilea, the woman twirling before she curtsied, no dexterity stat high enough to mask her lack of training. She looked at them with her piercing blue eyes. Trian knew her well enough to know she was just putting on a show, but with her overwhelming magical power it was sometimes difficult to forget who was hiding behind the dense ashen mantle.

An even denser woman, he thought.

“Welcome to Iz. The capital of the Taleen,” she spoke.

Trian looked around and saw smoke rising behind some of the four and five story stone buildings. He heard sounds from all around, suggesting there were others here, though it all seemed metallic, some of it monotone. The street they stood in was cobbled and clean, pale crystal light shining down from above. He assumed it was a massive cavern, similar to the one containing Hallowfort. But the capital of the Taleen? Ilea had mentioned the city before, the swarms of machines, the keys she went to collect. *Wait. Is that why...*

“And do welcome the new Guardian of said capital,” she added, gesturing to a silver machine slowly moving over one of the nearby buildings.

The machine jumped down, landing in a smooth motion. It did not touch the ground, instead standing just above it. Green eyes looked down at the group, two silver arms extending in three fingered hands. It wasn't a Pursuer, but something quite similar.

“You got him a new body,” Claire said.

Trian gulped and tried to look past the machine. He saw a group of smaller Guardians rush past into a side street, those not hovering but running on the ground with their six dull green metal legs. He glanced back at the green eyes that now looked at him. “Not just one. Or am I wrong?” he asked and allowed himself a slight grin.

“You are not,” the machine spoke. “I am just one of many, though commanded by the same mind.”

Claire raised her hand and rubbed her eyes before she walked aside and sat down on a small stone wall in front of a building.

Catelyn glanced between them all. “Ilea. Are you telling me the Taleen machines in Iz are now under Aki's control?”

Ilea smiled.

“Not just Iz,” Trian said as he walked towards the machine. He stopped a meter in front of it and looked up to meet its eyes. “Does that mean you're no longer a Sentinel?”

“Of course I'm a Sentinel,” Aki said. “And I will remain a Sentinel. There are some things we have to discuss. I believe the current group is a good starting point. Please follow me.”

Trian smiled as he turned back to Ilea, the woman touching Claire's head with magic flowing between them. He glanced at the fox instead. “You seem largely unfazed.”

“That is because you humans have difficulties gauging my expressions,” Catelyn said. “What about you?”

Trian chuckled and joined the silver machine's side. He wanted to think it was Aki, but he knew his friend was just controlling the being. Or was he all of them? It hardly mattered. “I'm just proud how far you've come,” he said, glancing over to the machine.

“This has nothing to do with me, Trian. I was simply given control,” Aki spoke.

“You were ready,” Trian answered.

The machine was quiet for a time before it nodded ever so slightly. “Thank you.”

“He's been strangely cryptic about what he wants to tell us,” Ilea said, helping Claire get up. “I still think there's a small chance of him trying to murder everyone. Oh most of the Cerithil Hunters are still around by the way. Just so you don't attack anyone.”

“Elves and Taleen,” Claire murmured. “I’m feeling a pounding headache coming. It’s gone... it’s coming again.”

“I’ll keep healing you, don’t worry,” Ilea said. “Oh and look at this neat thing,” she said as the ash around her neck receded slightly, the yellow crystal amulet glowing with power.

Trian looked around when he noticed the shimmering barrier around fifty meters away, a golden dome covering everything.

“Can’t move while it’s active,” Ilea said. The barrier moved closer to about half the distance before it dissipated once more. “It’s pretty fucking durable too.”

“Where did you find that thing?” Catelyn asked.

“Ancient vault,” Ilea said, as if that specified anything at all.

“Not quite as impressive as an entire Taleen army,” Trian said.

Ilea crossed her arms. “Right. True. But it’s still very cool,” she said. The fact that she could activate and deactivate the barrier near instantaneously made her more than happy. There was a cooldown after using it, but the same was true for the earlier tiers of the mythical skill connected to the Azarinth Star.

“I do not plan to murder anyone,” Aki said as he lead them through the city. “And please refrain from drawing any Hunter attention. There is a reason I requested a small group of trustworthy members of the Accords.”

“Right, right. Sorry. Lots of adrenaline today, and near death experiences. Just glad I made it through,” she said.

“I take it the battle was quite extensive?” Trian asked.

Kyrian chuckled.

“Quite,” Ilea said.

“I’m not sure any measurements you utter have meaning in the normal world,” Catelyn said.

“Says the talking fox,” Ilea said.

“Humans... there’s more than your own kind out there,” the fox replied.

Violence!

“Exactly,” Catelyn confirmed.

“Stop trying to destroy my eyes,” Ilea said to the Fae, its form shrouded within space.

“No, you may not destroy mine instead,” Trian murmured.

“He likes you,” Ilea said.

“Violence is male?” Kyrian asked.

“I don’t think the Baron has a gender, or cares about it overly much,” Ilea said.

“So you’re saying men are more violent?” Kyrian asked.

“Let me see if arcane healing can cure your injured masculinity,” Ilea said, extending her healing to the mind of her friend.

“I think I’ll survive,” the curse mage said.

Aki led them down a flight of broad stairs and towards what looked like a set of steel double doors. It reminded Ilea of a bunker entrance more than anything else. A green magical light turned on above the gates before the heavy steel started moving, a seam opening at the center.

“Here we are,” Aki said, the silver form of the Executioner moving inside.

Ilea followed with the others, entering a large dusty hall with crates stacked up all over the place. She glanced back to see the gates closing again, structural and privacy enchantments flaring up as the gates closed. Green light flickered on above, the storage facility reaching several hundred meters far.

“It’s not the Guild Hall, but I suppose we have some privacy in here,” Aki said. “And we won’t have to talk using our respective limited telepathy.”

“I don’t think the Hunters are all too interested in your secrets, green eyes,” Ilea said as she tried leaning against one of the crates. Well made but the creaking sounds made her hesitate. She chose a stone pillar instead.

Catelyn jumped onto a crate and curled up slightly, resting her head on her front paws.

The others remained standing.

“You have a lot of trust in beings you do not know. Isalthar is an honorable elf, and I trust those you have known for some time. There are others looking through Taleen records as we speak, some few even looking for loot. One of them is Feyrair. He doesn’t count,” Aki said.

“No he doesn’t,” Ilea said. “But fair enough. I don’t know all of them.”

“The Accords will have to consider dealing with the Hunters while they are here. Gathered, and ready to negotiate as a faction, if they can be called that. I do not know what they plan to do, but what I’m learning about elves is that they don’t exactly like staying in groups. If the Cerithil Hunters are to become allies, it should happen quickly,” Aki spoke.

“I’m not sure most humans are ready to accept any negotiation with elves,” Trian said.

“They will if the Accords stand behind it. If Lilith and the Sentinels stand behind it. I suggest an announcement after my reveal,” Aki said.

“Reveal?” Claire asked.

“Of course. I am an ally to the Accords, and I shall guard it. And I shall guard every settlement that requires it. Mana density in the Plains will not allow for prolonged Executioner or even Praetorian presence, but Guardians are more than enough for most areas. I will require access to modern maps,

monster density, known dungeons, resources, and Taleen ruin accessibility, but after that I should be able to protect most of the Plains,” Aki spoke.

“The Plains... the entirety of it...” Claire murmured.

“What about Hallowfort?” Kyrian asked.

“The Meadow is more than enough for a single settlement. I will talk to the dwarves of the Pit, but I expect their interest to be low to non-existent,” Aki spoke.

“And you just plan to send out... entire swarms of Guardians into the Plains? It’s going to be chaos,” Claire murmured.

“Once everyone is informed. Yes. Guardians are highly complex machines, capable of fulfilling more tasks than just fighting. It’s just what they’ve been doing for the past few millennia. They can hunt, build, fulfill simple errands, provide combat training, and most importantly, they can transport goods. With the existing teleportation network you managed to establish, and a few additional contracts, the efficiency of logistics within human settlements should increase ten fold. At least. And I would have eyes and ears in every settlement that accepts Guardian presence. I estimate it will take three admittedly chaotic weeks for most people to not only accept but welcome these once feared Guardians,” the Executioner explained.

“You’re a few steps ahead with your planning,” Claire murmured.

“Indeed. And I have only scratched the surface. The archive stored within the Sphere is extensive. There is so much knowledge here that could prove useful. The Taleen technology and rune work is... fascinating. Far more intricate than everything else at the time... and even now. Only the Ascended were ahead. We have a second teleportation network available with the one already set up by the Taleen, and production facilities strewn throughout the lands. The One without Form was a waste of potential,” he spoke.

“Eyes and ears? Do you mean you can see through every Guardian?” Trian asked.

“No. Only some higher leveled machines can be directly controlled. But Guardians can be used to specifically look for certain things, to observe and report. They are not comparable to experienced Awakened spies, scouts, or rangers, but there are a lot of them. And when I say a lot... I don’t think you understand the extent of these resources. The previous Guardian had complete control over the Taleen resources, perhaps at the height of their power, or a few decades after. And all it did was build more machines. Build machines and send them out to destroy elven kind,” Aki said.

“Lunacy,” Kyrian said.

The Executioner glanced his way. “It was made for that purpose after all. And it tried to fulfill said purpose. It will take weeks for me to look through the ruins, cities, and facilities left behind. Much of what the Taleen have built has been lost to monsters or Hunters, but they did build things to last.”

“This is going to be a lot of work,” Claire said. “And here I thought we could sit back and relax for a little while. Now that the gates are set up and the Accords are known.”

“A time of erratic change. When else is there a better time to introduce an alliance with an ancient elven Order?” Aki said.

“You are adamant that that’s a good idea in the first place. Why?” Claire asked.

“You have not seen them fight,” Aki said.

Ilea smiled. “Yeah. Some of them might be close to as strong as me.”

“Ilea is being Ilea. The point is that I wish to protect humanity. The Cerithil Hunters have fulfilled their purpose with me replacing the One without Form. They can become a reliable ally to the Accords, or they can become an unknown of single elves, cursed and hunted by their own kind. Now that the Taleen threat is gone, it’s uncertain how the Domains will react. The knowledge, experience, and sheer power of the Cerithil Hunters will be essential in an effective response.” Aki explained.