

## Chapter 786 Power

“Dwarves. Lots. The Taleen were still around, protected or imprisoned by the One without Form, depending on who you ask,” Ilea explained.

*“An interesting revelation indeed. And yes, Hunters in the Descent will be interesting. The current ecosystem lacks roaming predators. It will help many find awakening,”* the Meadow sent. *“What do you plan to do with the Taleen?”*

“Their cities are still around, though I suspect many will choose to remain in Io. They have built their life there, though surely there are those who would wish to expand their horizons,” the Executioner said.

Iana and Chris appeared nearby, teleported by the Meadow.

“Aki?” Iana asked immediately, looking at the silver machine.

“It worked,” the Executioner said and bowed. “As you assumed.”

Iana jumped and pumped her fist towards the ceiling. She laughed and hugged Chris, kissing him before she ran to Aki. “Can we go to Iz? I need to see it. The Sphere, and the sphere guardians.”

“Can she approach without the keys?” Ilea asked.

“Not too closely, though the surface of the Sphere won’t be interesting. I have plans and blueprints however. We should discuss that first, but I promise I will answer all your questions,” the Executioner said. “And call in a meeting of the Accords. The Sentinel of Akelion would like to join your efforts,” he said with a glance to Claire and Catelyn.

“Of course,” Claire said. “I’ll arrange it. Can we use the soul forge to meet? There are too many people around outside.”

“Go for it,” Trian said.

“Thank you. Too much to consider. Cat, get your council,” Claire murmured before she vanished.

“Sure, sure,” the fox said. “Meadow? Can you get me to my den? I’ll see you all soon.” She smiled and vanished.

“I will check on Riverwatch and the Headquarters,” Trian said. “Ilea, let me know if the meeting starts and I’m not around. If you’re staying of course.”

“I’ll be here,” Ilea said, waving at the man.

“Great, see you then,” Trian said. “Oh wait, you have a gate to Riverwatch?”

She summoned it and pointed.

“Thanks,” he said and stepped through.

“I need a bath,” Kyrian said.

“Need a gate?” she asked.

“No. I’ll use the public ones,” the metal mage said.

“You want to be there for the meeting?” Ilea asked.

He looked at her and shrugged. “Kind of done with world changing events right now, but sure, let me know when it starts.”

“Will do,” Ilea said with a smile, walking towards the black grass of the Meadow.

Aki left with Iana and Christopher.

“Finally. Some peace and quiet,” Ilea murmured, patting the Fae that was drooping over her shoulder.

*Violence?*

Ilea teleported to the crystal tree and sat down, leaning her back against it. “Right. There has been a lack of fighting for a while now. Don’t think I’ll get back to it for a few days or so.”

The Fae looked at her with its large lack of eyes.

“You’re not a puppy. You’re a terrifying eldritch space being. Don’t try to look cute,” Ilea said.

*Resistant*

*Find*

*Violence*, the Fae sent and floated up.

“Good luck on your hunt, little one,” Ilea said, smiling as the Fae waved and vanished.

She could see the direction it moved to, the spell residing for a while. *Might be interesting to follow it around.*

“You’ve changed,” the Meadow sent. *“I did not want to mention it in front of the others.”*

“I walked through a pretty intense hallway,” Ilea said and summoned a meal. *“Should I read you the skill description? Something about astral magic.”*

“Ah, that would explain it. Arcane and now astral as well. Remaining relatively human through it all. It’s quite interesting. I did meet a human astral mage recently, but your change feels more subtle. Downright natural,” the Meadow spoke.

“You make it sound alright,” Ilea said. *“I don’t feel too different. But I’m open to look into some training. Now that the Taleen are dealt with, I think I can focus on abilities and magic again. In between killing Kohr demons of course.”*

“You don’t plan to slow down?” the Meadow asked.

“The Architect is still around. He hasn’t made a move yet but I don’t want to be caught at a lower level than I could be. Plus with the Hunters free of a purpose, it’s only a matter of time before some higher leveled elves make their move. And then there’s the Source. If anyone finds out about that, we’ll have to be ready,” she said.

“I thought you didn’t want to be some kind of guardian,” the Meadow said.

“It’s not like I don’t enjoy the training and fighting. Aki should be able to deal with most things now, if he’s accepted and all. Low level elven attacks, monster attacks, summoned demon invasions. At least if he’s as capable as I think he is,” she said.

*“The Sentinels are getting quite a bit of work done too, as are the war machines of the Pit. I was surprised with their efficiency. Greed is a powerful motivator it seems, and quite a few of them are at least as risk loving as the Sentinels,”* the Meadow informed.

*“Oh really? I haven’t kept up with the reports to be honest. There’s so much of it,”* she said, sighing.

*“Of course. The teleportation gates dramatically raised both the efficiency of reporting as well as the efficiency of non space magic adventurers. They are all moving, exploring, and fighting,”* the Meadow said. *“I believe a meeting of the Accords was due anyway. A few major points added to the list to be discussed. As to the Source. Aki is sharing quite a bit of information with me and the enchanters right now. I believe it to be more than adequately guarded. The keys are the only reasonable way to challenge him.”*

*“Right, speaking of. Which metal do you prefer?”* Ilea asked.

*“I’m quite fond of iron,”* the Meadow said.

*“Great, here you go. I bestow to thee, oh great Endless Meadow, the Iron Key. May you keep it safe for millennia to come,”* Ilea said and summoned the artifact.

*“These are not only meant to guard the Sentinel of Akelion, they are also a sign of great trust. A diplomatic gift. Do not give them easily,”* the Meadow spoke and made the artifact vanish.

*“Of course not,”* Ilea said. *“I’ll put a lot of thought into who gets them. One for you. One for violence. One I’ll bury in Kohr. Some I’ll try to destroy, three for the elven kings, six for the dwarves, or was it more?”*

The Meadow slapped her with space magic.

It wasn’t particularly effective.

*“I’m starting to get resistant to your shit,”* Ilea said.

*“Maybe I should get up and hunt some monsters then,”* the tree spoke.

*“Please don’t. You’re terrifying enough as it is,”* she answered. *“Don’t think it matters much who I give the rest to now that you have one. If you fall, I don’t think Aki can stop whatever is coming.”*

*“I’ll be honest, burying one in Kohr doesn’t sound like the worst idea,”* the Meadow said. *“Perhaps within a device specifically made to interfere with the enchantments that allow for its detection.”*

*“Knock yourself out. You have one key to experiment on,”* Ilea said.

*“We will try. Beside the three dozen new projects Aki is suggesting. Modifying the Taleen teleportation network to meet our security standards is the first step, excluding the destinations near the elven domains,”* the Meadow said.

*“Why exclude those?”* Ilea asked.

*“Someone has to go there and modify the gate. It’s not a simple process. Aki’s Centurions can do it but it could arouse suspicion. We would like to keep the Domains in the dark about all of these changes for as long as possible,”* the Meadow spoke.

*“Sounds reasonable. I met one of them by the way. An Oracle,”* she said. *“I think you would like them. Their magic is... fucked up. But I don’t know if they travel much.”*

*“If you ever get the chance of setting up a meeting, though I don’t know how well I could contain such an entity here. If it impressed you, I would imagine their very presence could wipe out the people in this domain,”* the tree said.

*“Probably, yeah. Suppose you’ll get some interesting people to talk to anyway. More of them. Ancient elves and dwarves,”* she said.

*“Another step towards my total control of the realm,”* the Meadow said.

*“Your hearts aren’t in it,”* Ilea said. *“What’s wrong?”*

*“I... please don’t laugh...”* the Meadow spoke.

*“What? Of course I’ll laugh. What do you expect from me?”* Ilea said.

*“Then I won’t tell you,”* the Meadow said.

*“Out with it, old tree,”* she said and knocked her knuckles against the crystal.

*“Very well. Between all the beings around, all the questions, the conversations, the research of Twin, Owl, and now everything Aki is sharing... I believe I have... found my limits,”* the Meadow said.

Ilea snorted. *“Endless Meadow. More like... limited meadow. Vast expansive but not quite endless meadow. Off brand endless meadow. Ending Meadow,”* she murmured, getting more amused with each idea. *“Really just a normal Meadow.”*

*“I suddenly think you could use some more resistance training,”* the finite being said.

*“From you? The definable horror? You’re really just a scary tree, not the fathomless unknown I had taken you for!”* Ilea said, looking up at the crystal branches. She could feel the winds move through the cavern, through the black grass. Her friend was annoyed. *“I’m kidding, you know that, right?”*

*“I do,”* the tree said. *“And I... know that it’s a sensation you’re very familiar with. But I... have never felt this way before.”*

Ilea smiled. *“Good. Means you’ll learn something new. Maybe you’ll get a new skill or something out of it.”*

*“Hmm,”* the tree sent, a complex emotion sent along with the sound.

*“You’ll figure it out, I’m sure,”* Ilea said, closing her eyes before she leaned her head against the crystal.

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Navalis sat down on the chair. The meeting room in the cube was rather packed. The councils and various representatives of Ravenhall, the Pit, Riverwatch, Hallowfort, and the Sentinels were present. She had been teleported here by the Meadow, her detection skills unable to break through the Sentinel outpost’s walls.

*The second major session of the Accords.* It had been months but the teleportation gates already left more than just an impression. She didn't know what exactly this meeting was about, and according to the expressions of everyone present, she wasn't the only one. There were more Sentinels too, the outpost of course their base here in the far north. Too many interested eyes and ears were now present in the domain of the Meadow, making a secure hall like this an absolute necessity.

She glanced at the silver machine, feeling as if something was different about it. Previously it had acted as a guardian, but now it sat with Ilea, Claire, and Catelyn. She thought it impressive how the six legged machine managed to sit in the comparatively small chair at all.

**[Executioner – lvl ???]**

*No longer a mention of Akelion?*

“Everyone is here then?” Claire asked.

“Yes,” the machine confirmed.

“Then let's not waste any time,” Catelyn said. “Aki, you may speak.”

The machine looked around the table with its green eyes, taking in every member of the Accords with voting rights. “Representatives of the Accords, I greet you. Some of you may know me as the Pursuer of Akelion, a magically manufactured mind that managed to control a Taleen machine. Similar to the one I am controlling right now. The Taleen Guardians some of you may have encountered, including the ones responsible for the recent attacks on western settlements in the Plains, were all controlled from their capital. Iz. Through events including Lilith, and a party not yet associated with the accords, we have managed to take over control.”

*What.*

Navalis shook off the confusion, seeing the faces of the other representatives. Some seemed shocked, most simply confused.

“I remain a member of the Medic Sentinel Corps. However due to this change, I suggest an integration into the Accords, in a more direct manner. As the Sentinel of Akelion, I shall guard and support the efforts of the Accords and every settlement that would accept the presence of my machines. I shall communicate with all of you separately on the specific integration of Guardians and higher level machinery, based on your requirements. For now I ask formally, to join the Meadow Accords.”

Navalis watched as people looked around.

“You may ask questions before we vote on the formal inclusion of the Sentinel of Akelion,” Catelyn said.

Helwart Maulstroem, the champion of the Pit moved his large war machine, ignoring the comments of the others behind him. “Sentinel. When you say control of the Taleen machines. What exactly do you mean?”

The Executioner looked at the armored dwarf. “Every facility. Every machine. I am still taking count.”

The dwarf seemed to slump down a little. “How... how is this possible? This is... it comes out of nowhere.”

“I've been working on this for a few years,” Ilea said.

“Who is this not associated party?” Alistair asked.

“We will get to that after the vote,” Catelyn said. “It is a separate matter to be discussed.”

“Very well,” Alistair said.

“How many machines are we talking about?” Sulivhaan asked, the man sitting next to Navalis.

“I am still taking count. At least five million machines, of various kinds. Though most are Guardians in the lower hundreds and two hundreds. The production facilities are currently offline until the inventory is completed and decisions are made as to the usage of these assets,” the Executioner said.

*Five million killing machines.*

Navalis gulped. She had fought them before. A few times. Ten Guardians were enough to challenge a team of lower leveled Shadows. And there were stronger variants. Far stronger.

“And you... have complete authority over this horde?” asked No of Hallowfort.

“Indeed,” the Executioner said.

Navalis felt the weight of the being change. The previous Pursuer had been a powerful asset, but this thing was just one of an unknown number that the Sentinel controlled. She was glad to be sitting already. Based on the expressions, quite a few others felt the same.

She had to close her eyes for a moment, not realizing how much time had passed.

“If no further questions remain, we shall vote on the inclusion of the Sentinel of Akelion. As a full member faction of the Accords, with all responsibilities and privileges that entails,” Catelyn said.

Navalis looked at the faces. She already knew not a single one would reject. It would be lunacy. *How did they fucking do that? How did Ilea...*

She looked at the woman.

**[Wanderer – lvl ???]**

*Of course. I should really stop being surprised by these happenings. But to think these ancient machines are part of the Accords now. This is at least as impressive as the teleportation gates. She had to shake her head.*

“The vote is over. Welcome to the Accords, Guardian of Iz,” Catelyn said, applause briefly sounding through the outpost of the Sentinels, many of the faces still seemingly in slight shock.

“Does that mean the attacks were a response of some kind?” Alistair asked.

“That’s probable. Yes,” Ilea said. She looked at him, tapping the table as she ground her teeth. “I’m sorry.”

“You were there to defend our city, as were the Accords,” Alistair said, giving her a nod.

“Why were we not informed about any of this?” Sulivhaan asked.

“That question brings us to the next point,” Catelyn spoke. “Lilith?”

“Yes. The party not associated with the Accords that played a major part in the finding and defeat of the Taleen capital is a group of exiled Elves. The Cerithil Hunters,” Ilea said.

Navalis glanced to Sulivhaan, his face hidden behind his mask but the tension was obvious. Plenty of others reacted in a similar manner, especially the human representatives.

“Please... explain,” Sulivhaan spoke, his hands forming fists on the table.

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Ilea watched the man, gauging the tension in the room. *So far so good. No spells flying yet.* She continued with retelling her meeting with Elfie, what she learned from him, her meetings with Isalthar, the Hunters, her first accidental venture into Iz. The One without Form, and the core directives. Just the one for now.

“The Cerithil Hunters are individuals. I would hardly describe them as a faction, especially now that their ancient purpose is fulfilled,” she said and looked to Aki.

“And each one is enormously powerful. It would be foolish for us to ignore potential ties, especially with the removal of the constant Taleen threat to the elven Domains,” Aki said.

“Meaning you expect more elven attacks?” Dagon asked.

“No. What we expect is change,” Aki said. “And as of now, we know very little of how the Domains operate, who their high level fighters are, and how they will react to the changes introduced by the Accords since their inception. The teleportation gates alone should create a reaction, in time. I would like to be prepared.”

“Elven invaders have slaughtered our people for centuries,” Sulivhaan said.

“Humanity has slaughtered our kind for longer,” Alistair said. “Would you dismiss our entire kind?”

“You don’t understand them. They are monsters,” Sulivhaan said.

“Not all of them,” Ilea said and looked at him. “*We were there in Salia. You and me.*”

“And you saw what they did,” Sulivhaan spoke.

“Yes. I did. And we answered in kind,” Ilea said. “I would do the same today. I’ve killed hundreds of monsters. Some of them were elves, some were human.”

He shook his head. “You know I cannot accept their inclusion. I trust you, Lilith. But I cannot.”

She nodded.

“The current suggestion is their relocation from Iz to the lower levels of the Descent. The Meadow would both protect them and make sure none of them moves against the Accords,” Catelyn said. “And while they’re here, we can learn from them, and perhaps build ties. That is the entire extent of our association. For now. Isalthar has agreed to consider this suggestion, and many of the Hunters seem agreeable.”

“Why don’t we just let them go wherever they want?” Helwart asked. “Let them find a purpose, fight their Domains. What does it matter to us?”

“The Monarchs are unpredictable,” Ilea said. “I’d rather have the Hunters on our side if they decide we’re a nuisance. Some of them I consider friends. I will not have them slaughtered just because of specism. What possible harm could they do in the Descent? If anything, we know where they are,” she said and looked to Sulivhaan. “The Meadow will watch over them.”

“The Domains may consider us their enemies, if we hide their Cursed,” he said. “The risk is too high.”

“I don’t fear the Domains. And neither should you,” she said and stood up. “I have survived the Sky Monarch, and I plan to meet him again. The Taleen hordes are on our side. We have a four mark Greater Lich, the war machines of the Pit, the Shadows and Sentinels of Ravenhall, and the Awakened of Hallowfort. I don’t want war with the Domains, but if it comes to a confrontation, they will learn that it is us they should fear.”