

Chapter 713 History

Ilea's head would've probably hurt if it wasn't for her constant healing, her high tolerance for mental exhaustion, her super human body, and high stats. In a way it felt wrong, to be so perfectly aware and calm after hearing so much articles of law. Granted, the wording wasn't exactly as complex as what she'd seen back on Earth, but a lot of details and eventualities had to be covered. Most of it focused on Awakened beings, as defined by the Meadow in the first few articles.

"You outdid yourself," Ilea mused, eating a piece of cake with her legs on the table. Twin had left at some point to talk with the Meadow, Violence sleeping on her shoulder. Some of the people had left to refresh themselves or sleep, teleported of course by the Meadow.

"I had a lot of examples to look through. Most of the considerations as to what to include was done by the others. I mainly focused on adapting it to all species," it explained. *"You're the reason everyone is here. This wouldn't be possible without you."*

Ilea puffed, eating a fork full of cake. *"Says one of the main people responsible for the creation of the gates. We quite literally wouldn't be here without you."* She didn't miss the quick glare from Catelyn and addressed the fox. *"You can take a break you know?"*

"And devour a cake like some savage beast?" Catelyn asked. In a tone that suggested that yes, that was exactly what she wished to do.

"Can you help her out Meadow? Shield her from perception, bring a cake, and let her go ham," she sent.

The fox vanished, including one of the cakes from the buffet.

"Thanks," she said.

"Political considerations are an interesting concept. I'm learning a lot from this meeting," the Meadow spoke.

"For your eventual world takeover," Ilea mused, closing her eyes as she savored the sweet taste.

"Of course. Yes. That," it spoke.

Ilea opened one eye as she looked towards the tree. *"You seem distracted."*

"Twin is providing... stimulating concepts," it explained.

"Hey, good for you," Ilea said and pointed. *"Just make sure to use protection."*

"Any resulting magical creation will be placed under great protection and examined until its safety is assured," the Meadow reassured.

I'm not sure we're talking about the same thing, Ilea thought, guessing by the tone that the being wasn't being a sarcastic shit for once, but truly mistaking her joke for genuine concern.

"Just let me know when it convinces you to kill all humans," she said.

"Ilea, you know my nature. No being can change what I am, just like nobody can change humans at their core. Which is of course why they must all be killed," it said.

“Good,” Ilea mused when Catelyn reappeared. The fox looked the same as she had before, but somehow more *happy*. “You’ll be able to eat those all the time when the gates are done.”

“I’ll have to consider that a manipulation of my mind,” Catelyn answered. “Well done. You successfully infiltrated Hallowfort.”

“Easy. We’re the same you and I. You just prefer sweets,” Ilea said and patted Violence when it woke up.

“I haven’t seen Twin sleep,” Owl whispered as she leaned in a little closer.

The Baron vanished and appeared on top of her head, spinning its arms when it started sinking into the ethereal being. A continuous giggle went through their minds.

Owl reached into her head and gently pulled out the creature with her large purple hands.

“They’re as different as they come,” Ilea said when Violence floated away, trying to find something with a little more action. He would succeed in the dome the Meadow had set up for Doravin and Rock, the two warriors already being observed by Pierce and Verena.

“When are we moving on?” Ilea asked Claire.

She looked up and smiled. “Just another ten articles and we’re done. The rest shouldn’t take as long. We’ll continue in half an hour.”

“You probably need a break too,” Ilea said and stood up. “Trian, you too. Let me show you something.”

“Meadow, can we get a teleport up, should be night right?” she asked.

“Indeed. Here you go,” the Meadow answered and moved them all up to the northern landscape, seas of mist all around them, moonlight shining down from above. A near cloudless night.

Ilea stretched and sat down on a chair made of ash, a cold bottle of ale in hand as she sat back and relaxed, two additional chairs forming next to her as she watched her friends frozen in awe, a smug grin on her face.

She let them be, until they eventually joined her.

“No wonder you like it here,” Trian said, refusing the bottle she offered.

“You should see it by day,” Ilea mused. “You might even survive the lightning due to your magic.”

“I understand it’s arcane in nature. I’ll try, but not without supervision,” he answered.

Ilea pointed down. “Still the domain of the Meadow,” she mused when a dome like shield flickered to life around them for a split second. “Nice, great timing. Proud of you.”

“Thanks. I think they’re suitably impressed. And a little terrified,” the being replied.

“I might be interested in some barrier magic discussions with the Meadow. At a later time,” Claire said, sighing as she sat down.

“What’s your feeling so far?” Ilea asked.

“It’s going really well. There’s less resistance from the more problematic members of both parties than we expected,” she said.

Trian smiled. “Good preparation and even better opportunities help smooth things over. Even the worst enemies would find a way to agree under these circumstances, and we’re not enemies. Far from it.”

“Acceptance from the citizens of our cities will be the more difficult task, and that of other countries,” Claire said.

Trian nodded. “Yes. But a suitable show of wealth and power will be convincing enough. And before they know it, the world will have changed already.”

Kyrian appeared next to them. His armor gave off a different sheen, similar to that of the Warden blades Ilea had collected after the battle in the Pit. “Leaving me out?”

“You’ve seen this before,” Ilea mused.

“Not with all of you,” the man answered and formed a chair made of metal.

“Sorry,” Ilea said.

He waved her off. “It is quite a sight. If you would’ve told me a few years ago that this is where we’d be by now…”

They were quiet for a little while, watching the endless dance of mist in the starlit lands of the north.

“Quite a journey,” Trian said.

“Hmm,” Ilea mused. “Team thirty four,” she said and looked behind herself, a part of her expecting Eve to deactivate her invisibility. But the woman remained gone. Her gaze went up. *You would’ve loved the view*, she thought and raised her bottle.

Kyrian touched her shoulder with one arm.

“So this is where you fought a Dragon?” Trian asked.

The conversation in regards to the universal laws finished without a single major argument. Catelyn had expected at least some issues but their previous communication and the additions from the Meadow made the whole process rather smooth. Not as smooth as that strawberry cheese cake she had been given earlier. It had been a mistake. She had to focus on the tasks at hand. *Don’t be so hard on yourself. You’ve worked enough in the past weeks.*

She stretched, sitting on her chair. The movement was lost on the humans, her small and strange form protecting her from the usual issues that came with political meetings. In regards to the body at least. Catelyn ignored the look from Elana, the woman always schooling her in these matters even though she herself didn’t adhere to those principles. *Hypocrite*, she thought with a slight smirk.

The woman smirked back before she changed her expression back to her usual face. Arrogant royal would describe it the best, or perhaps side lined protagonist. Catelyn wasn't sure which one she'd choose. The latter had come from the Meadow. To be fair, Elana had plenty of lovely names for the tree as well. Perhaps in a way to balance out the near reverence the being received from most of Hallowfort's denizens.

A reverence well deserved, she thought. Catelyn had met a few high level beings in her time, the Meadow being the most powerful of them, or perhaps the Fae, though she knew the ones present on Ilea's shoulders weren't their true form. Their motives perhaps misunderstood or differing from most awakened beings, she knew they were just that in the end, awakened beings. The fact that they wielded world changing magical power was useful but to call them gods? Creators perhaps, makers, protectors, destroyers. *To think I would arrive at questions like that.*

She glanced at Ilea, the woman on her own way to become something akin to a goddess. Would she consider her a god? If she reached level one thousand? When she can build entire cities made of ash? *Probably not.*

"What is it?" Ilea asked without looking her way.

All seeing, Catelyn mused.

"Want more cake?" the woman said.

All knowing. The fox smiled. "I'm satisfied for now. But once these arrangements are set, I will want to visit the maker," she sent. *For they are the only true god. The creator.*

"Discussions went well. Unsurprising with my incredible additions," the Meadow sent.

"Of course. Your intellect is unmatched great one," Catelyn deadpanned. "It is thanks to you. Thanks to your protection, that we could focus," she added. The arrival of the Meadow had been an uncertain time. Trusting Ilea's judgment had been the right decision of course but even those who knew of her heroics in the Descent had reservations about inviting a four mark into their midst. A few days was all it took for the Meadow to convince them, a few weeks for some to nearly worship the creature. And now they knew peace like never before, both monsters and the factions in the area simply unable to get past its perception and magic.

"I'm grateful to be of help," the Meadow said.

"As are we," Catelyn answered. Peace like never before and now an opportunity to go to the southern lands, to see and live in places unharmed by arcane storms, cities built in the safety of low mana density, untouched by the constant threat of miststalkers, on the surface and below the very suns. They welcomed the opportunities. It would be somber to see them go. Warriors, smiths, brothers, and sisters. Survivors. Beings she had known for years, some for centuries.

She sighed, reminding herself that with the gates, she could always visit. And their town would flourish with new faces, young and old, adventurers looking to explore the lands of the north. She was especially excited to see the Sentinels. If they were anything like Ilea, the entire region could be affected. *So many ruins, treasures, forgotten crypts, waiting to be uncovered.* Catelyn glanced at Elana. She knew the former queen of Rhyvor had plans, not just for Hallowfort but for all the lands she had once called her own. Perhaps she will manage to revitalize a part of it after all.

"In case of war, all parties will attempt to help those under attack," Claire continued, going through the details of their agreements. "An unlikely event based on just the present people but we all know there are beings out there even we cannot handle."

“What happens after an enemy is defended against? Say the Feynor. They would retreat, regroup, and try again. A preemptive strike against their strongholds and holy sites would likely prevent a lot of issues in such an event,” Elana said.

“For scenarios like that we’ll simply have to come together and discuss. Universal rules for such matters make little sense. These treaties are meant to be joined by more than the present settlements but the extent of our cooperation goes beyond a simple defensive pact. We will build towards prosperity with trust,” Claire answered.

Elana rolled her eyes and puffed. “Do you know how many soldiers die when you delay war preparations by even a single day?”

“No. And I won’t need to know. Because we don’t plan to go to war,” Claire said.

“If I may,” Wayland said, receiving a nod from Catelyn.

She had been informed about his inclusion, a potential spy whose loyalty was as of yet in question. And yet it wasn’t him she worried about. Sulivhaan and some in her own council she considered more likely to undermine their talks. Transgressions they could handle in the future, once everything was signed. She hoped it wouldn’t come to that but reality had a way to disappoint.

“I would agree with the notion of former Queen Invalar, if we were talking about conflicts between traditional human nations. Resources and numbers are relevant mostly because the higher level nobility would generally not risk a direct confrontation with an enemy city. Not before they weakened it with armies or siege weapons. You may have heard about Lilith’s confrontation with Lord Harken’s army. I would imagine the results would be similar with her increased power,” the man explained.

“I’m not a weapon, aimed and fired at whatever army is causing issues,” Ilea said.

“No. But you could aid in the destruction of infrastructure, the apprehension of important individuals, or simple intimidation. If the intelligence gathered manages to convince you,” the man added.

Treading dangerous ground. She doesn’t like responsibility, Catelyn thought, giving the woman a glance.

“Look, I’m happy to defend a city under attack, but I don’t plan to get involved in anymore wars,” Ilea said.

The man nodded. “I understand. Apologies, Lilith. The point is, this potential alliance will not work with conventional means. Conventional rules will not apply.”

Elana gave him a considering wave of her hand.

So very condescending in nature, but she just manages to make it come off as an honor. Catelyn never really questioned how the woman had become a Queen.

“I believe with the defenses in place and the high level beings part of our alliance, we can allow ourselves a few days of consideration before we decide on a potential offensive strike. And in case of a worst case scenario, the respective individuals would’ve already intervened anyway,” Catelyn said. She noted the light nod given to her by Claire. “We do not want war.”

“What would constitute a worst case scenario?” Elana asked.

“Elven Oracles, Monarchs, or something like Audur,” Ilea said.

A few whispers were exchanged.

“At least the Meadow could show off its expertise,” she added with a smile.

To think she’s challenged a Dragon, Catelyn thought, remembering the first time they had met.

“We prepare for what we can,” Claire said. “Our resources aren’t unlimited. We don’t know when the next crisis will come or what it will look like but it’s my conviction that we have a better chance at surviving it together.”

Well said. “Already we have fought and survived,” Catelyn said, gesturing to the many engraved scenes in the table. The Descent, the demon summoning in Ravenhall, what had happened in Erendar. The two latter she had only heard of but knowing the dangers, it was certainly preferable to face them with allies.

“We will pause the talks for five hours in which I ask you to go through the full treaties again,” Claire said. “After that we will hold the vote.”

Catelyn turned to her council and gave each of them a glance, a few likely not very much in the mood to read through the treaties again. *If only they knew the work it took to get them all set up.*

They had to sign off on the teleportation gate treaty, a trade agreement, the universal laws, and the treaty in regards to cooperation, defense, and war efforts. Elana had called it a wonder that all of it had come to be in just a few months, a benefit of the small number of people involved. She had voiced her concerns early on in regards to that but as time went on it became clear that the people Claire worked with were more than just experienced. The former Queen being one of them.

More reading. But cake is nigh.

Ilea gave everything a read as well. She remembered some of the university registration process being more dry than this. Maybe it felt different because she was involved with it all. Not just meaningless text written for an administrator far removed, for scenarios that would never come to be. She had fought in the Descent, had trained with the Shadows, she had seen the benefits of long range teleportation, and she knew what the Meadow could provide for a settlement, even in a harsher environment than the north.

For the first time in these talks did she truly realize what this all meant. It was the start of something massive. Something that could shatter the foundation of the status quo. And they were at the center of it all. She remembered arriving in Riverwatch, a city that would surely join into this agreement soon enough. She thought of Dale, the expedition to the west, to Dawntree. The Elven attacks, her arrival in Ravenhall. Her journey to the North. The Ascended corruption left behind by an ancient enemy of this realm.

If they planned to survive monsters like the Ascended or even worse, they had to cooperate. The Azarinth Order was gone, but they had the Sentinels. The Elves remained in their domains, but the Cerithil Hunters fought on, in long forgotten dungeons. The Taleen were gone, but with the help of

the Meadow and a few gifted enchanters, they would take and improve their ancient technology. Available to all.

She finished reading through, waiting for the rest to do the same.

“There will be time to discuss any additional agreements afterwards,” Claire said. “As the speaker of these first talks between Hallowfort and Ravenhall, I ask you all to speak your vote on the first treaty, the teleportation network agreement. I Claire Russel, head administrator of Ravenhall vote in favor.”