

“I guess so,” Ilea answered. “I doubt the Taleen reached levels close to those of their machines either.”

“They’ve been growing more powerful too, I believe,” Scipio said. “Or at least their high powered machines have become more numerous. Simply based on the glimpses I’ve seen when close to Elven lands.”

“There are thousands, yes,” Ilea said.

Scipio looked at her. “What will you do if you succeed?”

“With what?” Ilea asked.

“If you succeed in finding the source. Securing it. The Taleen, however you may view their continued attacks on Elven territory, have managed to protect it for thousands of years, against anyone that would’ve had an interest,” he said. “After our conversation and what I’ve glimpsed of your power, perhaps there is a chance that you will succeed where everyone else failed. I simply hope that you have a plan for what happens after.”

“There are many places and beings I’d rather see with that power source than the Taleen, but in any case, it won’t be a decision we’ll make lightly. The main goal will be to keep it concealed and hidden from the more dangerous interest groups. Of which I know of a few, but perhaps you could enlighten me as to who else may be interested. Who else would even know about it?” Ilea asked.

“The Navuun of course. Every single one of them would have hundreds of uses for a source. The Elven Oracles... I doubt would be particularly interested, but I’ve been wrong about them before. Their motives are as variable and changing as the weather in the plains. They follow some sort of logic, but I believe it to be magical in nature, and have yet to grasp it. Not that I invested much of my time and resources to learn about them,” he said.

“The Olym Arcena had difficulties setting up the various installations near and within the Elven domains. The Oracles never pursued us as enemies through the realms or outside of their domains but entire groups of even nobility were wiped out in their entirety when they set up preparations near them,” Nes added.

“More natural forces then. I wonder how they felt about what happened in the north, and generally when a sun was taken,” she said.

“It was the only time Elven males allied themselves in large numbers with not only other domains, but other species too, though I don’t know if that had anything to do with the Oracles themselves,” Scipio said.

“You mentioned before that the Navuun couldn’t have possibly lost the conflict, but I’ve seen an Elven Monarch fight, and I’m pretty sure he would’ve had a chance against Vor Elenthir,” she said. “Even if the latter held back considerably against me.”

“In a direct battle, as you would most likely conduct, perhaps you are right,” Nes said. “But the Navuun were not warriors like your kind. Magic is merely a tool, to create other tools. The bodies we granted ourselves are only one such creation. A war would never be fought in a direct manner. It is foolish, to waste energy on such matters when more efficient solutions exist.”

“Sounds pretty fucking boring, but hey. Hmm... do you have weapons like that still around? Or can you build them?” Ilea asked.

“I understand your wish to strengthen your allies, but I cannot allow creations that have already claimed thousands of lives to fall into any hands at all,” Nes replied.

Ilea smiled. “You misunderstand. I agree with you. What I want them for is resistance training. If there are Ascended out there not quite as open to talks as you are, I’d rather be prepared to face even their nastiest tricks.”

The Navuun seemed confused, glancing at Scipio who sighed.

“You can think about it. Maybe it could be part of a deal for me bringing you in touch with the Meadow,” Ilea said. “Oh and I’m sure my allies would be interested in any purely defensive technology, like shields, reinforcements, stronger materials for walls, or anything like that. For most humans, the monsters roaming the wilderness are plenty of danger, and a single high level creature could easily breach most city walls and kill thousands.”

“It’s a reasonable request,” Nes said. “We shall consider it.”

“Wonderful,” Ilea said and smiled.

“As to the key you sought to find here,” Nes said and summoned the item into her hands. “I believe a simple trade will be enough?” she said and looked to Scipio.

“I’ll be glad to be rid of it,” he said.

“What do you want? I doubt you’re interested in gold or cake,” Ilea said.

“Indeed not. We too have to consider enemies that may still be on the hunt, of my kind, yours, and others. The conflict between our two realms may be long past, but many beings age little, and forget less. And not all welcomed the changes brought to this realm by our interference. You are, a being of strife, are you not? One that finds enjoyment and purpose in the pursuit of... meaningful battle?” Nes asked.

“You make it sound like a bad thing,” Ilea answered. *Let people have their hobbies, man.*

“I admit, it is a philosophy I cannot truly comprehend. And yet perhaps it would align with what I wish to ask of you. Should we be found by our enemies, whoever and whatever they might be, I would ask for your assistance. In a more practical manner. A shield, and sword,” she said.

Ilea smiled. “Sure. Once you can call for me, and I’ll come.”

“Thrice,” Nes said.

She shrugged. “Alright, thrice. But I’ll make my own judgment. If you sacrifice half a species for some insight or experiment and the other half comes for you, I won’t be fighting on your side.”

Nes looked at Scipio. “Perhaps we shall revisit your concerns as to our current reputation.”

“She’s one of the few humans who even knows you exist,” he said. “I assure you, there is no reputation that remains.” The man glared at Ilea with an annoyed look on his face.

“Hire some bards. I didn’t even hire them and I’m known throughout half the plains as some kind of ash monster,” she said.

Nes nodded slowly. “Minstrels would surely be helpful. But it is a consideration for the future. I will add it to the plans for the next two centuries.”

“Then it is decided,” the Navuun added, a branch of steel growing out of her hand to deliver the key.

Ilea welcomed it with an ashen limb, quickly identifying the object as soon as she touched it.

[The Copper Key – Ancient Quality]

“How will we be able to contact you?” Scipio said. “And how will you arrive in time?”

“I suggest marking one of you. I’ll be able to track you and we can exchange ten words between each other every day,” she said.

“I’d prefer not to be tracked,” Scipio said.

“I do not mind such a mark,” Nes said.

“I’m sure you two can figure out a way to suppress the tracking. I honestly don’t care where you go, if you don’t invade my home or follow me around,” Ilea said. “As to how I can get here in time... let that be my concern.”

Scipio squinted his eyes slightly. “If you plan to set any anchors, do so outside of the enchantments placed on this facility. Better do it a reasonable distance away, in case someone finds it or looks for you instead.”

Already knows what I plan to do. Well I guess it would be obvious to another space mage.

She didn’t exactly want to set up one of her two remaining destinations for them, but the location provided a lot more options than just fulfilling her part of the deal. This was the north north after all. *The supernorth? Meganorth? The real north? There was another north after all? Is there yet another north further north?*

Ilea dismissed the thought and smiled. “Yeah, I’ll be here within a minute or two I guess. If something wipes you out faster than that, I doubt I’d be able to make much of a difference.”

“Yet,” Nes said.

“Someone has high hopes,” Scipio mused.

“It’s perfectly observable evidence. You’re aware of her young age too. If anything your pride blinds you, and here we both believed our kind the ones more prone to that failing,” Nes answered.

“A devastating blow,” Ilea murmured.

“You’re supposed to think your thoughts within your mind,” Scipio said to Ilea.

“What’s this golden eyed dickhead on about now? I should ask Nes for the cookie recipe, they were really quite delicious. Should I tell them that dragon can track my location at all times? I’ll better leave before it arrives,” Ilea murmured.

Scipio didn’t react.

“Here is the recipe,” Nes said and formed a thin sheet of steel, engraved within the ingredients and a descriptions as to the making process.

And so woman was given the holy recipe, Ilea mused, receiving the Ascended artifact with great care. “I shall treasure it.”

She stood up to leave, wondering what she should tell the waiting group. “Hmm. Ah one last thing, you mentioned Eregar before? I was just curious.”

“The founder of your Shadows,” Scipio said. “When their selection in new members was a little more expectant than a simple level.”

“And you both knew him?” she asked.

“In passing,” Scipio said. “Most human factions of any resemblance of power were involved in the conflict during the perceived war.”

“The Azarinth Order?” Ilea asked, sitting down again.

“Ah, yes, now I remember. That’s where I’ve seen your magic before. Though I’m glad you’re not an actual member,” Scipio said, Nes nodding in a thoughtful manner.

Ilea grinned. “How can you tell?”

“I assume you’ve met some of the Healing Orders currently in power?” Scipio asked.

“A few,” she answered.

“That should resolve the questions you had,” he said.

“Not fully, no. They were super strong no? With their healing classes I’d assume they’d be able to take on most other groups in the plains,” she said.

“And they did,” Scipio said. “But the human lands were more vast at the time, both in the north and south. The Isanna desert hasn’t always been quite as far reaching or uninhabitable as it is now. There has been a decline in humanity’s power, since the bordering lands have become this hostile. Any undertaking to push out is unreasonably expensive and dangerous now, where it had been a simple thing for any group of adventurers back in my younger years.”

“I mean you were still just humans though,” she said.

“Yes. And if we’re good at anything, it’s digging ourselves into dangerous territories and multiplying faster than most local beings. Walls might be crude but they work, just not against a lack of food or the arcane storms now ravaging the north,” he explained. “The human armies of this age would hardly be accepted as allies by the ancient Taleen or Elven males. Perhaps they’ve grown complacent.”

The man didn’t sound accusing, merely observant.

“With the Elven attacks in the west, the demon summoning in Ravenhall? Blood rituals in Baralia?” Ilea asked.

“All within the last century. Humanity has enjoyed long lasting peace for millennia, excluding wars amongst themselves, but you would know how little that benefits the overall strength of our species. We have perfected life within walls, most humans today not even seeing a level two hundred monster in their lifetime. A lifetime that could be so much longer, if only they would dare reach out for more. But stability and safety are powerful arguments,” he mused.

“I don’t blame them,” Ilea said.

He smiled lightly. "Oh neither do I, Lilith. I merely observe and theorize."

"Do you know what happened to the Azarinth order? Why they're not around anymore, or if they really aren't around anymore?" she asked.

"They, much like other factions who invaded Kohr lost many of their members. You know the environment if you've been there. Now imagine the occasional Ascended defending against the invaders, coupled with Elven mages and Taleen with little regard for collateral damage. Everyone hoped to scavenge the technology of the Navuun. The bloodbath only grew more intense as the remaining Ascended retreated or left," he said.

"The Azarinth were healers? Arcane in nature I believe," Nes said. "I remember a battlefield outside a facility owned by Sehl Naroth. Thousands of humans, elves, and dwarves were slaughtered by his creations and traps. Like many of our kind, he scrambled to gather his research and possessions before leaving to a realm of his choice. I was surprised not by the slaughter but the ensuing battle after he had left and his weapons were no longer a danger to the gathered forces. They instead fought each other to obtain what he had left behind, or so I believe."

"And you watched all that?" Ilea asked.

"There were those of us who were invested in more than our possessions and knowledge, not ready to leave behind our home realm at the mere sight of inconvenience and a broken Unity," she hissed. "As little as remains within Kohr, I still deem it an important place, though my home now is here. Partially because I did not merely consider the species coming to claim what was taken from them as unworthy creatures invading our lands."

"Sounds like a pretty eventful time," Ilea said with a smile. "Kohr seemed pretty desolate when I was there."

"It is," Nes said. "The surface is barely able to sustain life, and the waters are near devoid of nutrients. Only high level creatures of magic remain in the depths."

"The conflicts starting in Kohr spilled back into Elos once the Ascended were deemed defeated," Scipio said. "You're aware of the ongoing conflict between the Taleen and Elves, but while most of humanity has forgotten that long past era, their factions and countries were not without struggles. I'm sure more lives were lost in battles between natives than to the beings of Kohr."

"Except for the sun of course," Ilea said.

"Of course. All of Rhyvor was destroyed, including several other nations. Other species too," Scipio said.

Ilea nodded. "I've been wondering. Nobody in the plains seems to remember the sun's taking. It seems reasonable to assume that at least some records would remain."

Scipio glanced at Nes. "Strange indeed."

"Are you responsible for that?" Ilea asked.

The man chuckled. "No. I believe knowledge should not be destroyed. It should be preserved if anything, nor do I see a reason why anyone would care about humanity remembering the disappearance of a sun."

"Yeah, but you've noticed the same thing?" Ilea asked.

“I still remember the event. Nobody who had experienced it could ever forget. But while we do write down many things, knowledge does get lost. One magic is deemed heresy, one king has a grudge against a certain hair color, a librarian dislikes women, or men, a hero turns out to be all but heroic. It takes effort and time to gather and preserve knowledge, and so very little to destroy it,” he said. “You’re right however, for the extent of the event, there is little knowledge that still remains. The same however is true of the northern and southern kingdoms.”

“So you’re saying it’s just chance? Erosion over time?” she said.

“I don’t know,” Scipio answered. “But while perhaps strange, I haven’t looked into it enough to say for sure that it’s unnatural.”

“I see,” Ilea answered. “How likely is it that any Ascended would take more suns from this realm?”

“This one, unlikely,” Nes said. “It’s known, with too much history. And the beings of this world are not as blind to our presence and technology as they had once been. Elves, dwarves, and humans would be the least of an Ascended’s concern should they wish to restart the process,” she said.

“We swerved off before, you mentioned other factions that would be interested in the source. The same could be true about the technology to obtain one itself,” Ilea said.

“On this continent, Elves, Humans, and the Vampire courts in the northwest, beyond the dead patch of frozen land. I doubt the Feynor would care to learn about Navuun technology, nor would the Mava, or the Orcs. As to the Dark Protector, I’m not sure, but if any faction besides the Elves has members that remember what happened, it’s the Dark Ones in the North. Though most did not come into existence before the sun was taken, the environment not as favorable for their kind before,” Scipio said. “Any individual high level sapient being would surely be interested. Dragons, Fae, Unicorns, and the like, but I doubt any would actively pursue a search. Or they would’ve long since succeeded, or wiped out enough people for someone to take note.”

“Unicorns,” Ilea murmured and chuckled.

“I suggest you hide or flee. When the Fae are peaceful, Unicorns are the very opposite,” the man said seriously. “And I say that having seen Dragons.”

“Note taken,” she answered. “So the source is basically some legendary tier magical item that every creature with a brain or without would like to have, if they had the chance. Good to know. Sorry for all the additional questions, I do appreciate the information from you two. I’m sure the Meadow will be able to compensate your time ten fold. You mentioned other continents as well? I’m interested in that too.”

“Of course you would be,” Scipio said, his voice taking on a bit of a smug edge, much like at the beginning of their conversation.

Yes, golden eyes, you’re old and knowledgeable. Now share more of it with me.

“I’ve ventured east, where I encountered storms similar to the northern territory. The mists there reach much higher and are vastly more dangerous. I was forced to retreat when the first creatures I encountered already near caused my death.” he said.

Ilea noted it down. “Sounds like a nice holiday destination,” she mused.