

Chapter 595 Visiting the Sentinels

They found Trian in his office down in the Sentinel headquarters, Ilea knocking on the door before she entered. “You called?”

Trian looked at the group of young healers before he stood up. “Lilith,” he said and looked at the three healers. “I’m afraid we’ll have to continue this at a later time. I’ll call for you, take the afternoon to work on your spells.”

The three glanced between Ilea, Feyrair, and Trian as they left in a nervous hurry.

“What’s happening?” she asked.

Trian waited until the door closed behind the last healer, enchantments activating as soon as the room was sealed. He glanced at Feyrair with interest but turned back to Ilea. “It’s about one of the Sentinels. Gael, if you remember him. He might be in danger, or may be endangering others. If you have matters more pressing, I’ll send another team to check the situation but with his growing power and the job he was sent on, I thought it best to see if you’re available.”

“No, I have time. What’s happening?” Ilea said and appeared on one of the chairs facing Trian’s desk.

The man sat down. “Are you not going to introduce your friend? Or did you learn how to make high level golems?”

“Ah that would be useful. He’s much more annoying than that,” Ilea said and gestured for Feyrair to sit down too. “He’s a Cerithil Hunter. An elf. And who I’ve been fighting with for the past few months.”

“I see. Was wondering when you’d introduce the first of them. Well it’s not any more unusual than Weavy. Welcome to Ravenhall. Trian’s the name,” he said and smiled at the elf.

Feyrair revealed his face and bowed respectfully. “Feyrair Kaa, always a pleasure to meet associates of Ilea.”

“The same,” Trian said with a smile. “I’m sorry but I have to ask. Do you eat humans?”

Feyrair hissed as he sat down, Trian not reacting in any visible way. “I won’t now that I call one of them an ally and friend. The hunt is usually quite boring too, which spoils the taste I find.”

“As long as you refrain from eating our students. Otherwise, make yourself at home. Drinks? Meat?” Trian asked.

“I’ve already eaten, thank you,” Feyrair hissed.

Trian copied the sound and sat down in his chair. “So, Gael. He-”

Ilea stopped him. “Wait, wait. You hissed? What just happened? Have you met Elves before?”

“I haven’t, no. But it’s obviously a gesture their species uses in a complex manner. I simply tried to be polite. I hope you didn’t take offense,” Trian explained and looked at the elf.

“Not at all. Your efforts are appreciated, Mr. Trian,” Feyrair said.

It's like they're different people. Shapeshifting diplomats.

“Wonderful. Gael received several monster subjugation jobs in the border regions of Lys and Baralia. The area is somewhat turbulent right now as you can surely imagine. We received confirmation that he completed two of the jobs last week but haven't heard since then. Our inquiries with the local Adventurer's Guild suggest he went into the wild near the village of Samethol, in an effort to deal with a Shredder sighting in a nearby mine. However he hasn't returned or reported,” Trian explained.

“One week isn't that long, is it? Probably just exploring still,” Ilea suggested.

“We have protocols, Ilea. Especially with Sentinels who work alone or in teams of adventurers. They are to report every three days to a local guild or someone in the last settlement they visited. I understand your interpretation but despite his disposition, Gael has not missed a single report since he started taking on jobs,” Trian explained.

“Did anybody investigate already?” Feyrair asked.

Trian didn't miss a beat. “No. The locals have refused because of the aforementioned Shredders. The distance and lack of available Hunters made me think of you. Also... well, many of the Sentinels are not exactly comfortable with Gael. I heard from Claire that you received an invitation to Yinnahall and thought that you may be in the region anyway. I hope I'm not wasting your time.”

“You would never, Trian. Don't worry. Right, that was next week I think?” Ilea said and summoned the letter. “Yeah. I mean sure. I can check it out, see what happened. Might be he discovered a dungeon or something. We could benefit too. Do you still feel like joining Fey?”

The elf glanced over and smiled. “Of course. It sounds exciting. And if I can help out in any way, I'll gladly do so.”

“Got any other jobs in the region just in case?” Ilea asked Trian. “Or dungeon locations, I suppose.”

“I'll check, give me a moment,” Trian said and summoned a large book. “Southern Baralia... yeah there are a lot of requests, but you're more than overqualified for most of them.”

“They sent all those requests to us?” Ilea asked, looking at the loose pieces of paper between the pages of his book.

Trian smiled. “No. We're not that popular quite yet. Contrary to the Shadow's Hand, we work with the Adventurer Guilds too, those who agreed to the terms that is. Which... a lot did actually. But that's another topic. You'll have to meet whoever put up the jobs or visit the respective Guild first to make sure it's still available. Like this we can send the Hunters on somewhat low risk jobs to gather experience. And to spread our name.”

“Hunters... is it a rank?” Feyrair asked.

Trian smiled. “Indeed. Those above level two hundred who have passed a set of tests are granted that title. However it's mostly used internally. Our members are normally called Sentinels or Medic Sentinels. It's in no way comparable to your own title, Cerithil Hunter.”

“I hadn't meant to imply such,” Feyrair answered. “Merely curious. It seems to be a prevalent rank, no matter the species or allegiance.”

Ilea pictured the two sitting at a table drinking tea, gossiping about the latest news from the local nobles. Maybe they could join Helena at some point. *Throw in Elana and you've got a murder.*

“Give me the juicy jobs you have. I could certainly do with something else than machines for a change, no matter the power,” she said.

Trian leafed through the many forms and handed her three of them. “Slavers hiding west of Mothine. Imperials posted the job in the town’s Guild. I’m not sure why they don’t deal with it themselves but they must have their reasons. Next one is further north, closer to Nara. Unknown monsters in the area that attack villages and farms. Might be interesting because they specified Emerald rank or higher.”

“What level is that?” Ilea asked, summoning her crate and displacing out her own adventurer badge, looking at the shimmering metal.

“That one, yes. Two hundred,” Trian said.

“Why don’t they hire Shadows?” Ilea asked, putting it back.

“They might’ve sent a request too, but the Shadow’s Hand isn’t exactly overstaffed,” he said. “They would likely take lower leveled adventurers too if they were interested. Plenty of desperate folk trying to make a living in Baralia. And plenty of monsters and bandits around.”

Trian handed her the third note. “Last one is farther west. A large group of those cursed in the blood ritual in Mophis have apparently wandered into a massive quarry west of the city. I don’t think the enemies in any of these requests will be particularly challenging for the two of you, but I’m sure the locals would appreciate a swift resolution. None of these are likely popular for the adventurers in the region, but I could be wrong.”

Ilea took the note and looked at it. “Why a quarry?”

“I don’t know. Maybe they followed someone who fled there, or a beast,” Trian said.

“No I mean. There are earth mages around. Why would they need quarries?” Ilea asked. “I don’t know if I’ve seen a quarry here or in Lys.”

“Earth mages still need good stone. Only few are ever creators. We have plenty of mountains nearby and even in Lys, the empire sends out high level mages and architects to help set up city walls, buildings, and whatever else is necessary. But when you add slavery... well if the human labor is free, quarries can make sense again.”

Capitalism, following me everywhere I go, Ilea thought with a slight grin. “Makes sense, I suppose.”

“You humans,” Feyrair commented.

“At least we don’t eat each other,” Ilea said. “Most that is.”

He hissed. “And wasteful too.”

“Cannibalism is generally seen as an offensive practice. A cultural difference, I suppose,” Trian said.

“I understand,” Feyrair said, looking at the man.

“Sure you don’t want to stay here? Maybe go on a date together with Trian?” Ilea asked.

“Jealous?” Feyrair asked her.

“Oh no, go for it,” Ilea said and glanced over the three notes before she made them vanish. “I’ll check on Gael and make sure he reports back. Hope he didn’t lose to his berserker rage.”

“That would be problematic. And also a reason why you checking in may be a good idea,” Trian said.

They got up, preparing to leave.

“Feyrair, if you’re ever in the area, feel free to check in with me. I’m sure your experience with magic would be most beneficial to our students,” Trian said.

The elf smiled. “As would be my cultural knowledge and the information I could share on your Elven enemies.”

Trian smirked. “An added benefit. I’m sure an adequate agreement could be found.”

“I’ll remember. But to be honest, I doubt I’ll be frequenting these parts. Good fortune in your dealings,” Fey said and walked towards the door.

“And to you,” Trian said with a hiss and bowed slightly.

Ilea rolled her eyes at Trian and reapplied her mark. “Don’t overdo it.”

“Why. Potential allies are potential allies. Can you imagine? Elves within our ranks?”

“Yes, we would be hunt down by the collective human species,” Ilea said.

Trian kept his smile and sat down again, summoning a few letters. “Thanks for the help. And do check in again when you have the time. Too many students haven’t met our founder.”

“You’re a founder too,” Ilea said as she left.

“Not the one who has songs written about them,” Trian remarked.

Ilea closed the door and found Feyrair stare at the stairwell leading up. She watched him raise a hand, heat gathering before he formed a spell of white flame. Her hand rushed out to slap his spell into an nearby wall. “What the fuck are you doing?”

Feyrair hissed, his eyes fixated on the Centurion staring back at them with green eyes.

“That’s Aki,” Ilea said, spreading her ash to put out the flames.

“Everything alright?” Trian asked, looking out from his office.

“Yes,” Ilea said. “Apologies for the destruction.”

“You paid for all this,” Trian murmured and closed the door.

“I’m confused,” Aki said as he stepped down towards them. “Did I offend in any way?”

Feyrair glanced at the machine and back to Ilea. “It can talk? What’s the meaning of this?”

“Aki is a friend. And you’re insulting a Sentinel within his home, let alone attacking it without cause,” Ilea said.

The elf looked at her with wide eyes, most of his face covered by the scale armor. He turned back to Aki and bowed. “Apologies for my behavior, Sentinel Aki. I had mistaken you for a Taleen war machine.”

“An understandable misunderstanding,” Aki said and chuckled. He paused and looked at the elf for a few seconds. “I’m... reminded... of something. May I ask if you’re a... Cerithil Hunter?”

Feyrair glanced at Ilea.

“He is,” Ilea said. “Your old wielder was one, right? Couldn’t have been a normal elf down there in a dungeon.”

“Perhaps... I’m not sure anymore. Thought the name remains and I something about you reminded me,” Aki said. “It’s an honor, to meet one so brave as to defy... defy who? I can’t recall.”

“The Oracles, or the Domains,” Fey supplied with a grin. “What a peculiar being. I’m intrigued. Are you a Centurion who has gained independence?”

Ilea displaced the three of them into an empty training hall, seeing a few students closing in from above. While she didn’t care that much, it would cause a lot of issues for Trian and Claire if it became known that an elf had visited the Sentinels.

Neither of them reacted to the displacement.

“The... Oracles... yes. It’s barely a memory. I’m not. Our friend Lilith here has provided a suitable body for my form. It turned out that I could control machines left behind by the Taleen,” Aki explained. “I’m far beyond the capabilities of a normal Centurion.”

“You can talk, that much is already impressive,” Fey admitted. “Are you interested in a bout perhaps?”

“You’re not a foe I could beat. I can tell that much,” Aki said. “Nor am I inclined to wait for my repair enchantments to reform myself afterwards.”

“I’ll bring you a Praetorian body next,” Ilea said with a smile. “Just couldn’t disable one yet without having the core detonate. They’re well made.”

“You’re inside the decide then... sticking from the back of the machine?” Fey asked.

“Yes,” Aki confirmed.

“Have you tried on a life one? If he can control Taleen machines, maybe we could get an Executioner on our side,” Feyrair said with a bright smile.

“Even if that would work, my place is here with the Sentinels. The... war... is no longer of relevance to me,” Aki said.

Ilea looked at the Centurion. “Hmm... I mean. You can do whatever the fuck you want Aki... but the prospect of an Executioner... holy shit. You could fight even me...,”

Aki now looked at her with a different glow in his green eyes. “Even you?”

“Even me,” Ilea mused with a smirk.

“What are those Executioners?” Aki asked carefully.

Feyrair hissed. “They’re a special variant Praetorian. Can regenerate and use void magic, also they can run through the air.”

Ilea smiled. “Level eight hundred.”

Aki whistled. Somehow. “And you two fight those things?”

“No,” Feyrair said. “We destroy them.”

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. We can only take them on together,” she said.

“We’re getting closer to fighting them alone. I barely needed your help with the last one,” Fey said.

Ilea laughed. "Oh really. What about that time I deflected its stab into your eye?"

"Eyes mean little," Fey insisted.

"Yeah, agreed. But the brain behind them is a little more important," she replied.

"If a body like that is a possibility... I could certainly protect the headquarters more efficiently, let alone train the few Sentinels who already match my capabilities. But you would have to take the risk," Aki said, thoughtfully turning his spear.

"Not a risk really, she just stabs you into the core when it's exposed and unshielded. We kill them the same way most of the time," Feyrair said.

"But what if the One without Form takes control of Aki instead? Or if he's not powerful enough to take over the Executioner? If the body reforms around him... well it's gonna be a nightmare to remove him again," Ilea said.

"A nightmare but not impossible. How durable are you?" Feyrair asked, looking at Aki.

"You really like the idea of having an Executioner as an ally," Ilea said with a smile.

The elf hissed. "Do you not? We could train with him. And how satisfying would it be to watch him destroy other Taleen?"

"As I said, I have no interest in the conflict you are a part of," Aki said.

"Fair enough, but I do agree it would be badass," Ilea said. "Trian is around... maybe we can ask Meadow and the rest if it's possible? Maybe they could reinforce your enchantments or something."

"Iana already said that a living Taleen would be necessary to understand how I would interact with their enchantments," Aki said. "It's safest to use disabled machines."

"Yeah but we can't disable a Praetorian," Ilea said. "I don't think even Isalthar took them out without exploding cores, right?"

Fey hissed. "Yes. You're right. I've never seen it happen."

"At least with the Executioners we can expose the cores somewhat efficiently... and if Aki can take over from anywhere, then directly from the core," Ilea said. "If working machines are necessary to test it, we can provide some. Guardians are no issue. Just need to get to some random dungeon and grab a few."

"The prospect sounds promising, however the risk is substantial too," Aki said.

"Either way we should wait for now. Iana and Chris already have enough on their plate but it's worthwhile to look into. Especially with the Executioners," Ilea said.

"Well, I'll be here. A few of the students have lost the respect they should be showing the faculty. Your suggestion would surely solve that issue, coupled with a few enthusiastic bouts," Aki said, looking at his spear in a thoughtful manner.

"What a peculiar being," Fey said. "Who would have created you? Do you remember?"

"No," Aki said. "Thought the compatibility suggests the Taleen themselves. However I assure you that both me and Iana have made sure that my loyalty lies where I place it."

Fey looked at Ilea. "You should have the tree look at him too. Just to make sure. Before we create a thinking Executioner in the hands of the enemy."

“If Aki agrees,” Ilea said. “Meadow may know more. I hope it’s not keeping book of how much it’s helping out, otherwise I’ll have quite an assortment of debt to pay back.”

“I doubt it cares about such matters. You somehow won its trust. Perhaps your greatest achievement,” Feyrair suggested.

“And you can tell that from your long and deep conversations with the Meadow?” she asked.

He hissed. “We fought. You learn more about the other in an even battle than you could ever grasp from conversation.”

Ilea laughed. “Even,” she said in between breaths and laughed some more. The confident stance he remained in only added to the comedy.