

Chapter 371 Potential Allies

Ilea finished eating too, exchanging some stories about the north with them. She decided not to mention Elfie and his crew yet, not before she talked to them about this new group of Cerithil Hunters.

She sat back and smiled, crossing her arms. "So, you're a dragon or what was that?"

The elf laughed, showing his sharp teeth now that he wasn't wearing his helmet anymore. "Perhaps one day... one day I'll be one of them." He looked up with longing red eyes.

Ben laughed. "Keep dreaming. Shapeshifting is all you'll ever get."

"Possibilities are unlimited." Isalthar commented, drinking from a beautiful white porcelain cup.

Ilea thought it was tea, the smell at least reminded her of herbs.

"We're talking about dragons." Ben said, rolling his eyes. "There are limits. He's a fighter, he's not going to be as old as you are."

"I sadly have to agree there." Feyrair sighed.

"So you're shapeshifting into one? How did you get the class?" Ilea asked with interest. "Did you meet one? Fight one?"

Feyrair laughed. "That, dear human, is not something I would tell to someone who couldn't defeat me."

"I defeated you though." Ilea said, squinting her eyes.

"Who couldn't defeat me at least twice." The elf changed the requirements.

"You're going to raise that once I slap you around again, aren't you." She commented.

"He is." Ben said.

"I'll go check with my associates then but if you're staying for a while, I'd love to train some resistances and have more bouts. I think it'd be beneficial for all of us." Ilea said and got up. Her Heat Resistance hadn't leveled in a while and just a couple attacks from Feyrair were enough.

She wanted to know what the story behind his classes were, that dude packed a punch she wouldn't expect from anyone below three hundred.

Ilea thought he was perhaps stronger even than Maro and that guy had been a king, studying for ages and out there fighting dangerous monsters. If anyone had a good class it was him. *The white fire reminds me of that noble. What was his class called again?*

She didn't remember but she knew it had been powerful for someone at level one hundred.

"You do not intend to give us the goods we need right now?" Isalthar asked.

Ilea looked at him and smiled. "You do not trust me?"

"Would thou trust an elf on their word?" He asked.

She shrugged. "Probably. But I know I'm too trusting."

“Your words prove the truth inherent.” Isalthar replied. “Go then, human, Guardian. I have decided to trust you.” He said.

Ilea bowed lightly and smirked. “I’ll be back in a couple hours hopefully.”

Ben raised a mug to her.

Feyrair showed his teeth and hissed, an approving challenge. Or something like that.

Ilea was still learning her hisses.

The last elf hovered, empty plate in hand before he bowed, a warm smile on his face.

“Hope you liked it.” She said and spread her wings, shooting off into the tunnel she had come from.

Ah fuck, I’m not going to find back, am I?

Using her magic perception and Sentinel Huntress, she could reverse engineer the path she had come from. An extended ashen limb cut lightly into the walls from time to time, marking the way for her latter return.

The first city officials and guards were already present in the smuggler’s den. Heavily armed soldiers with massive metal shields led squads of rogues as they dismantled the hidden traps one by one.

Ilea glanced at them and got a couple scared looks.

The guards reassured each other, many having seen her before in her ashen armor.

She didn’t find Dale but was directed by a waiting guard whose job it was to inform her about his whereabouts.

“Miss... Shadow.” The man called out when he saw her exiting out into the warehouse.

Ilea landed next to him, her wings snugly folding on her back. “Yes?”

“Captain Dale informed me to inform you about where he is.” The man stuttered out and got a small piece of paper from his pocket. “With the girl, he said. I hope you know what that means.” He laughed awkwardly, sweat forming on his hands.

“I think I do, thanks.” She replied and spread her wings once more, flying up and blinking through the ceiling before she headed towards the house Walter and Vin were staying at.

She landed a couple minutes away and ran the rest on foot, blinking into the stairwell before she slowed down.

A knock on the door notified the others waiting behind.

“Come in.” Dale said. He had glanced her way even before she arrived.

“You didn’t want to join the search?” She asked, looking at the captain.

Walter was there too, as were Vin and Kevan. Another man too, one of the survivors she had freed. An officer.

Vin rushed her, tackle hugging Ilea as the air was pushed out of her lungs. Like running into a tree.

"I'm Eli by the way." The man said and chuckled at the sight. Olive skin, black short hair and brown eyes. He had several noticeable scars on his neck and right cheek. A rapier was fastened to his belt.

"One of the missing ones. Good to see not all of you died." Ilea said and patted Vin's back.

The girl was in tears, hugging her with all the strength she had. "You came back... you did it..."

"I did, I did." Ilea replied. "Kevan, you're still here too."

The man grumbled. "They didn't let me look through the hideout. Because I'm not an official. Even though I saved his ass."

"I thanked you." Dale said. "We will inform you if there is anything related to you."

"You heard that fucker, Nolan. He said they tried to set me up. I want to know who did it." Kevan hissed.

"Yes, yes." Dale said. "Your foraging went well?" He asked, glancing at Ilea with a glint in his eye.

"It did." She said simply.

Wonder if Mauro's ring holds any evidence in regards to Kevan. The ring was safely in her bracelet, just like the rest of the loot she had taken from the Gray Company. She had worn it on her finger, unclaimed until she killed the man.

The fight with Feyrair forced her to either claim or store it. The latter was faster and actually worked. Likely because nobody had a claim on it anymore.

"Will you talk to Alistair? I could report to him too. We will be covered in paperwork for the next week either way." Dale suggested.

She sighed and nodded. "I'd appreciate that. Let him know the pay for the job can go to Walter."

"What?" Walter asked, stepping away from the wall he had been leaning on.

"I have a proposal for you. We'll talk about it later." Ilea said and smirked.

"What did she plan this time?" The sorcerer grumbled and stepped back again, exchanging a knowing glance with Dale.

"Don't act like I didn't see that." Ilea said but that was exactly what they did.

Vin finally let go and walked back to Eli. Her young age really showed then, a stark contrast to the young rogue from before, clutching her knife behind her back.

"Eli, can you get in contact with Alistair. I could get you three a house somewhere in Riverwatch. And you could stop taking dangerous missions." Ilea suggested.

The man laughed before he shook his head. "I'll look into an apartment in a better area for them. Yet I won't stop going on my missions. Vin is already independent and next year she can join the Hunters if she wants to." He explained. "You won't stop doing Shadow missions either, just because they're dangerous. Will you?"

I don't have two kids at home. Ilea thought but kept it to herself. She knew that Vin would grow up to become a feared hunter, with her help or without. Maybe one day, she would become a Shadow too.

If Eli didn't want her help, then that was his choice. "Make sure you have healers around next time."

"Of course. We'll be closer to a guard station. Dale already chewed me out, Miss." Eli said and gave the captain a nod.

"Good." Ilea said and winked at Dale.

"I'll be taking my leave then. Is it alright if I check back in on the Gray company hideout in a couple hours? I wanted to look through some of the lower tunnels, there were some interesting poisons I want to test on myself." Ilea said, stepping over to Walter.

"I'll be there again shortly. Of course you're free to come and go. Most of the guards know you already anyway. It's going to take a couple days or even weeks to go through all that." Dale said, sighing.

"You know you can leave some work for others. Like Eli." Ilea suggested and watched him shake his head.

"This has priority right now. At least until the brunt of it is done." Dale rejected her idea.

If you want more work on your desk. She smiled and shrugged. "Then I'll see you around. Walter?"

They said their goodbyes, Vin hugging Ilea once more and thanking her profoundly.

She wasn't sure about them, about Eli especially. The man would take another mission and there was a possibility that he would die. At one point or the other. Ilea just hoped Vin was old enough and prepared enough by then.

"What are you thinking about?" Walter asked, the two walking back to the western gate.

She hadn't yet explained any of her intentions. "The question Eli asked me. If I would stop doing missions. If I had a little girl that needed me."

He huffed and glanced her way. "It's difficult isn't it. You're pretty rich by now so you could just get a house and someone to take care of them."

"And not be there?" Ilea asked. "No."

"What if there's an important mission, someone needing your help?" He asked as they reached the gate.

Exiting was a much simpler affair than getting into the city.

"Fuck them. I'd stay. Probably." Ilea said. She didn't have a kid, the decision seeming uncertain to her. Perhaps if she did, it would be easier.

"I would stay." Walter said after a while.

"We should fly now." Ilea said, her wings appearing on her back as she ended the conversation. She didn't want to think more about Eli and his adopted kids.

Walter nodded and started hovering as well.

They went back to the Vultures hideout, a couple minutes of flying away from Riverwatch.

“What did you want to talk about? You know that I can’t take that gold from you.” Walter said when they landed, the two walking towards the cave entrance.

Ilea sighed and shook her head. “I thought about giving you guys some gold anyway. Now I have something that I believe nobody is quite ready for yet, no one but you. You and your necromancers.”

Walter glanced at her, uncertainty showing on his face. “What do you have in mind? I don’t want to expose the Vultures, I don’t want to put us out there.”

“You already did by agreeing to meet Alistair.” Ilea said with a smirk. “But of course in the end, it’s your decision. I think it would benefit humanity, you, me and perhaps even all of Elos.” She chuckled and shook her head. “I sound like a naive idealist, don’t I?”

Walter looked at her and smiled lightly. “I don’t even know what you’re talking about yet. You do, a little. Then again, you just convinced the governor of a whole city with nearly a hundred thousand people living in it to meet a necromancer and look at a trade deal.”

“That I did.” Ilea agreed. “I want Lucia there too, her, Harthome, Celene, Indra and Neeto. Maro will push his way in too of course but I suppose it’s good that he likes you lot. His protection could mean a lot.”

“You’re starting to scare me, Ilea.” Walter said. “What did you find down in that smuggler’s den?”

“Some new... potential friends.” She said and smirked, watching the man frown and open the door to the brotherhood’s hideout.

“I’ll get them together.”

It didn’t take long but the necromancers were of course annoyed about the interruption to their tinkering.

Ilea was a little intrigued in what exactly they were cooking up with the remains of Green. However it could wait for after her announcement and the connected suggestion. She didn’t know how long exactly Isalthar was willing to wait.

“Glad you’re all here. I’m gonna make it quick. We found the missing people in Riverwatch, some of them at least. A smuggler organization was responsible and we took them out.”

Some murmurs went through the room but nobody interrupted. Maro was looking on with a big smirk.

“Now. There were some associates that I got introduced to before I killed one of the leaders. Associates that are desperate to trade with Riverwatch.” She paused. “With humans.”

Maro laughed out loud.

“Who did you find?” Walter asked, one hand massaging his brow.

“A group of Cerithil Hunters, elven warriors and mages.” Ilea said.

“What? So close to the city?” Lucia blurted out.

“You want us to trade with them?” Harthome asked, a terrified look on his face.

“Why?” Walter asked. “Why not Alistair? You could convince him, I’m sure of it.”

Ilea looked at the man and smiled. “I don’t intend to keep this something small. I intend to help support the hunters, strengthen and organize them, have them find shelter and support in human lands.”

“Why?” Lucia asked. “They’re monsters, they see us as ants.”

“Because that’s what they were taught. The hunters want to end the blight that are the Taleen, they want to protect their people. I think at one point or the other, they will prevail. Either that or we have a couple hundred thousands or however many Taleen machines there are, roaming the forests. We should worry about the elves in the domains. Do you think the Hunters would care for humanity once the oracles look our way?”

“I don’t want either of those things to happen without us having better relations. They’re incredibly powerful, could likely teach us a lot about a ton of magic schools and they could help protect humans in case something worse comes up.” Ilea explained.

“Like demons.” Celene said.

“That still doesn’t answer the question I asked.” Walter said. “Alistair has more resources.”

“Not more than me.” Ilea said simply. “Not with Ravenhall and the Hand, with Claire. That’s not the point though. The point is you. You have necromancers here, a living skeleton, a Mind Weaver, a demon and you still manage to respect each other. Why not add elves to the mix? It could just be a trading proxy, between the elves and Riverwatch. They will see humans that don’t see them as monsters and perhaps, they won’t see us as ants in turn.”

“You’re trying to change a whole people’s perception of a whole race.” Harthome said.

Maro chuckled. “Wrong, two peoples’. But honestly, most wouldn’t give a shit if you told them that elves weren’t actually as one sided as they believed. Some would revolt, sure but who cares? The same is true for the elves. I met the hunters up north and they were alright enough, a little crazy sometimes, sure but not worse than anything I’ve met with a human head on their shoulder.”

“The domains will flip their shit as soon as they realize the cursed elves are supported by humans. It would be interesting to see for sure. If we help them now, now that they have this issue, in a thousand years, they will remember.” He added.

“We are talking about a war that has been going on for thousands of years already. Do you think some traded goods and organization will suddenly turn the tides?” Walter asked.

“Of course not.” Ilea replied. “It might take another thousand or even ten to finish the Taleen and their endless assault. Do you want to face the surviving elves who went through that afterwards? Or even have them close by? With their oracles? Or do you want to know that humans have helped the Cerithil Hunters for hundreds of years, the hunters that are now perhaps their own people, separate from the oracles or who knows, even overthrew them?”

“It sounds good in theory, yes. Then again, we could just leave them in their endless cycle of war. Let the elves fight against the machines, let the hunters try and stop it. Maybe they will succeed, maybe they fail. Humanity will find a way to antagonized them.”

Maro snorted. “And have them think we are all ants? I’d rather they know the Vultures, Riverwatch and maybe the Shadow’s Hand supported them. I won’t be part of those conversations once we get there but Ilea has something very special here. Something not me nor any of the powerful people I

knew could achieve. She knows powerful elves, dark ones and humans. All of them trust her. It would be a waste not to try at least.”

“They need food, ropes and lanterns for fuck’s sake, not our secret tech and knowledge. Plus, we’re just talking about a trade agreement. The Vultures helping out those four hunters. That’s it. Anything else that might come of it will be tackled as soon as it comes up.”

Walter crossed his arms. “And I will have to deal with it.”

“You deal with the Vultures and your trade. The main elf in that crew will deal with their shit, I’m sure of that. I on the other hand will make sure that someone who wants to will step in as soon as things expand. Claire maybe, or someone else.” She said and glanced at Maro.

“No. Fuck no, find someone else to do your shit job.” The man said and smiled. “I do want to meet them though.”

“Fair enough. I don’t want to do it either.” Ilea said with a smile. “Walter, they really don’t need a lot. Meet them at least before you make a decision. Alistair and Ravenhall could get involved too at a later time but for now I think it would be great to have you.”

The man shook his head and sighed. He looked at Lucia, the woman giving him a slight nod. The same confirmation came from the others before he sighed again. “I’ll meet them. But I swear to you, Ilea. If in a hundred years, I’m stuck with managing a trade empire, I’m going to use all that gold to hunt you down and sit you on that management chair. Do you understand?”

Ilea smiled brightly and nodded.