

Dragon's Peak

The city was not as the name suggested—a single peak—it was actually three peaks. From the distance they looked as if a three-pronged claw was reaching for the sky. The mountain peaks were thin and narrow near the top, widening as they went down, until the three peaks joined into a single mountain. The city was... magnificent. Grander than anything else that Naha had ever seen before. Greater than the Tournament City, greater than Dal'dvor, and even the Jewel of the Empire. It was a sight that took away her breath, that made her mind, heart, and soul filled with a sensation of greatness. It inspired a whisper of glory, and it instilled fear, a sense of power. She felt the shadows on the airship tremble, and for a split-second it was as if she was part of the shadows.

“Even such beauty, all... nothing is timeless,” Zach whispered and she turned to glance at him. He was looking at the city in the distance intently, his eyes widening. And that made her realize it a moment later as well. She didn't imagine it, he was affected too. She remembered echoes of a time when she had a Cultivation Path, the sensation she felt was the same as when she gained inspiration long ago. The realization amazed her; she had heard stories and rumors, that the sects knew how to craft objects—art—that could trigger inspiration in people, that could increase morale or terrify. But this... it was on a whole other level.

The city itself was a piece of art.

Each peak was covered with towers, built into the mountainside, carved into them, and each peak had a different style of construction. One was swarmed with pagodas, with dark green roof tiles and white walls, tall and short, with the nature surrounding them. Pink trees grew out of the side of the mountain and on top of the peak gardens were arranged around the edge of the peak with a single large pagoda stretching to the sky, at least ten stories high.

The second peak had buildings made out of gray stone, blocky towers and buildings with small windows, on top, something that resembled a castle resided, looming over everything. The last peak was... beautiful. Crystal

spires rose from the sides, six around the peak, the side of the claw was striped with crystal, purple and white and blue, its color changing as light hit it. The top had a twisting structure that resembled a fire made out of crystal.

It was obvious that the three peaks were the seats of the sects leading family. And the city below them, at the base where the three peaks met was a mix of all three styles. The distance between the peaks was substantial, enough that a city that could house millions was nestled between them. Thick walls surrounded the city, with three sections, each in between the two of the peaks, protecting the city behind them. In front of the city were roads, winding down the sides of the mountain on each of the three sides.

The city itself had tall towers, but none that reached the towering heights of the three peaks looming above them. Buildings set in precise lines, some twisting, others straight. From afar, even the way that the city was built up was art. She couldn't look at it without thinking how beautiful it was. Airships flew around, going to and from the city, following orderly lines. Great caravans rode the up the winding roads up the mountain sides. It was greater than anything that she had ever seen or even imagined before.

Naha glanced back, to the steering station.

"Hiro," she called. "Head for one of those lines." She pointed at one long line of airships heading into the city.

The young ravzor tore his gaze from the city, blinked, and then nodded. Quickly, they started making their way into the city. The procession went by quickly, and before they knew it, they were landing on a side of a tall building with long landing strip-like platforms on several levels of it. They took the next free slot, on one of the mid levels. The strips were filled with people, guards and workers unloading boxes from the other airships. Their ship was small compared to most of them. But the berths seemed able to accommodate any size. Hiro docked the ship, only slightly rocking it by hitting the side of the birth. He yelled his apology as four guards walked up to them, flanking a single tall drake wearing elaborate sect robes with white and blue colors.

The three of them disembarked and stepped on the platform as the man greeted them.

“I’m Dockmaster Killu, names and purpose of visit?” He said in a bored tone that told her that this was a man that had done this exact same thing countless times. The guards behind him looked ready though, and on a second look she realized that the Dockmaster was only appearing to be bored. His stance told her that he was ready as well. The guards had their eyes on the three of them, each held a long halberd in their hands and wore blue armor similar to what she had seen their warriors wear during the tournament.

Her sense took in their surroundings, and she noticed that people were gently encouraged to move around them. The platform was still filled with people, but somehow the small area around the berth where they landed was kept clear. She also noticed a dozen more guards nearby.

She didn’t think that they were there for them specifically, this felt more practiced, and they couldn’t have anticipated their arrival. No, this was a standard response to something. A response to unknown visitors? She doubted that, this place had to have many such visitors. Something about the three of them set them off. Her **|Capability Awareness|** told her that the guards were strong, not quite immortal if she was reading them right, but tier 5 in their main focus at least. Heavenly Cultivators, the Dockmaster was lower and... there was someone stronger nearby that she couldn’t quite find, someone who was at least Immortal Realm.

She tried to think of the reasons why this could be happening, and only one thing made sense. They had something that could give them a sense of people around them, a sensory power or item. She didn’t think that they had read their screens, that Illuiy would’ve noticed—their bond had increased and he could now protect her from such things. But... something like her **|Capability Awareness|** was certainly possible, and probably very smart for a busy port like this one.

She didn’t know how the two of them would appear, but both of them were very strong, their combined tiers high.

Naha glanced at Zach, and saw him blinking slowly, trying to take in everything around them. She sighed and stepped up to answer.

“Greetings,” she said slowly. “I am Nahamassa Plainrunner and this is Zacharia Gardner. We are here on a personal matter.”

She didn't use their warden titles, even if the sects valued them, the wardens were so diminished that they might not even exist anymore. The Dockmaster opened his mouth to speak, but then froze, after a few seconds he blinked and looked at them with a different expression, one that she couldn't quite recognize.

"Follow me please," the drake said and turned while the guards spread out to allow them to pass through. Naha was... confused, but there wasn't much that she could do. They followed after the drake.

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It was so hard for Zach to grasp, to keep himself in the now. Everything happened too fast. It seemed to him as if just yesterday he had escaped the prison and fought, and now... here he was, in a city grander than anything else that he had ever seen. He blinked and everything changed. It seemed to him that it was happening constantly these days. And he knew, it was because he had grown used to the monotony of his life, thousands of years of peace and silence. These years since Hastur had passed him by.

He had made an effort, tried to speed himself up, and for the most part he had managed to keep up, but only just. Naha and Hiro helped a lot, their presence forced him to adapt. But when he was in crowds, with so many new things vying for his attention... it got harder. Everything around him triggered his flaw sense, his skill perk tried to keep him focused on a single thing, but... not even it could contend with everything around them. The city itself the people, everything was... too much.

They stepped down from their ship and it took all that he had to keep the noise out of his mind, both physical and skill induced. There were too many people around them, too many sources of noise, weak, filled with flaws. He focused on Naha, her body was flawed but he had learned those flaws, they anchored him as the storm of noise tried to break him.

The time it took him to center himself was enough for Naha to speak with the people that stepped up to greet them and then they were following them somewhere. Zach had missed the entire exchange. Hiro walked next to him, his eyes opened wide and looking around.

They were led into the building that anchored the platforms, then down the stairs. Being inside helped a lot, enough that he could focus on the people around him. The armored guards were... weak, but then most people were compared to him. The one without armor might as well not exist as far as Zach was concerned. The walls around them were filled with flaws, points where he could strike and bring sections of the entire building down. He pulled his mind away from those thoughts, they were here to seek help, not to fight.

They led them to a door made out of black material that was... nearly perfect, and that drew Zach's attention. The armor-less drake exchanged a few words with Naha that Zach missed, and then they were inside. The room was large, and completely made out of the same material as the door, black and with few flaws, which made it easier for him to think. His eyes immediately fell on the sole occupant of the dimly lit room, a tall winged drake, with scales made out of metal, a True Body. He was... strong.

He moved first, he bowed deeply at the waist and then spoke.

"Honored guests," he said as he straightened. "I am Peak Commander Ikris Fah Durah, and I welcome you to Dragon's Peak. I apologize for the disruption, no disrespect was meant. We screen all arrivals since the wars started, a necessity, even though it lowers our eyes. Your presences were strong and we did not know who you were until you named yourselves."

"You know us?" Naha asked, surprised.

Zach tilted his head, trying to keep up with the conversation.

"Of course," the drake nodded. "Everyone in the world knows your names. You fought and killed a Dome Leader, doing a service to all of the Infinite Realm at a time when many looked only for their personal gain. You gained much respect for that among the sects. We are honored that you have come to visit our home. We offer you shelter of stone, and guest rights of the sect, if there is anything that we can do to help, you need only ask."

Based on how Naha was reacting, Zach suspected that she didn't expect anything like this.

"I... we thank you," Naha said, inclining her head in a show of respect, or at least he thought it was. "We've come because of a personal matter that we've been told your sect might help us with."

“If it is within our power to help, we shall do so, for the heroes of our world we can do no less,” Ikris said.

Naha glanced at Zach, her eyes hopeful, and then she turned back to the drake.

“We were hoping to get an audience with Sect Leader Vitor Fah Storrah, we are in need of his skills,” Naha said. “It is a matter of some urgency.”

Ikris blinked, clearly surprised. “Oh,” he said, then continued after a moment. “All our Sect Leaders are currently... indisposed. Though, I will inquire, perhaps an exception could be made for such distinguished guests as you. In the meantime, I can set you up in one of the peaks, have people show you around the city, there is much to see in our sect.”

Naha looked like she was about to argue, but then she bowed her head. “Thank you,” she said. “We would appreciate it if you could let your Sect Leader know that we are in great need and are willing to pay just for an audience.”

Ikris nodded. “I shall let him know.”

With that, the man led them out of the room, then called an attendant to him and started talking with him a bit away from them.

“Just a little bit more,” Naha squeezed Zach’s hand. He gave her a small smile, hoping that she was right.