

Chapter 815 Opportunities

Galgan breathed in the cold air. His eyes were wide open, staring up at the endless mountains. The expansive forests. Pines as far as the eye could see. A lake, glittering with light. He shuddered, feeling the cold winds whip at his warm cloak. And yet he smiled, feeling the warmth on his cheeks, his beard, his hands. The suns were more beautiful than he could've ever imagined. And they were bright! By the gods were they bright.

He had to squint just to get a glimpse, and now he could barely see anything. He blinked, looking at the lake, panic stricken for a moment as he considered the ailment permanent. Dots remained in his vision as the edges somewhat cleared.

"You're in the way," a grumpy voice spoke.

He saw someone clad in armor walk past, Galgan stepping aside as he heard a few chuckles from near the gates. Likely from the guards he had seen before. His vision cleared more and he made sure not to look at the two shiny orbs in the sky in a direct manner. The white stuff on the ground and on the mountains was bright enough as it was. Snow. Garath had told him about it a few times. When the surface was colder, snow fell from the clouds. Just water apparently, but in a different state.

Bowing down, he scooped up some of it into his hand, moving it closer to his eyes. He felt the cold. Galgan watched as the white flakes slowly melted, water rolling down his arm. He smiled.

"Welcome to the surface," another voice said, a smiling woman dressed in dark green leather armor, a bow strapped to her back. She was tall, like many of the people here.

"Thank you," he said, checking his helmet before he started towards the city walls. Machines designed by his predecessors stood atop it, their green eyes familiar to him. He gulped, stopping in his tracks for just a moment. *It's gone. They're with the Sentinel of Akelion now.* A deep breath and he continued, his smile returning as he looked at the massive five meter high cannons interspersed on the walls. Steel monstrosities, larger than an Executioner, surely filled with intricate machinery and enchantments.

He had heard about the technology in passing. From a few dwarves in Io. Stationary, which made them only useful in a defensive manner, but the power they packed was apparently strong enough to crack a Praetorian's shield. And those were just the ones in the Pit. He had yet to hear that Ravenhall had added them to its defenses. Looking up, he saw the mountain side, squinting to see more of the cannons built into the stone.

Galgan joined the people walking towards the city gates, glancing behind and onto the snow covered field, the road leading down into a valley, towards Morhill he knew. For a moment he imagined the demon hordes streaming out of the city, mages and warriors of the Shadow's Hand facing them right here. He imagined what these cannons would do to a horde of the monsters now, how well the walls would hold up against an army of Guardians, or even elves!

A hypothetical interest only of course. The defenses were there to protect the people inside the walls, and to caution anyone from attacking in the first place.

He couldn't see past the adventurers before him, the group equipped with massive swords and hammers. But soon it was his turn, Galgan reaching the open city gates. He glanced at the Centurions standing guard at each side, five people dressed in black armor, some in leather, some in

steel, talked to and checked the people going into the city. One of them motioned to him, an alert expression on the man's face.

"Name and reason for entering Ravenhall?" he asked, no weapons on his belt or back.

[Light Mage – lvl ??]

"Galgan Brefort," he said. "I... want to see the city."

The man raised his brows. "Enjoy your stay. If you need anything, ask the guard."

"I thought there was an admission fee?" Galgan asked.

"You're Taleen. You're part of the Accords," the man said and gestured for him to enter.

Right, I'm holding up the line, he thought and moved past. "Thank you!" he called out, glancing at the guard who now smiled slightly.

Galgan felt the air change slightly when he moved past the thick city walls. He could feel the magic. Enchantments, thrumming with power. Looking up, he saw the back of some cannons, straight lines and edges. This time he stepped to the side, letting the busy people of Ravenhall pass by. He had to press himself against the wall of a house as a wagon passed, several wooden crates stacked on it. The smells were strange, overwhelming even compared to the city itself, though he wasn't unfamiliar with busy places, loud chattering, and children running around.

It wasn't so different to the confines of Io, though the light of the suns changed everything. That and the fresh breeze of cold mountain air. He flinched when a group of black winged people flew past above, so fast he wasn't sure if he had really seen them. *Sentinels*, he thought, remembering the day when Lilith had flown down through Io. He had been lucky enough to see her descend, though only briefly. For many it had been a wonderful day, but he had been scared of what it meant, all the machines departing, and a being clad in ash descending towards the Guild Hall.

The Sentinels were one of the options. One of the places he considered. They would offer fantastic Classes for healing and fighting, but he heard few applicants were considered. The Shadow's Hand only let people above level two hundred join. Galgan was very far off that threshold. *Perhaps one day.* He smiled, walking down a random alley as he tried to stay out of people's ways. His stomach grumbled, reminded of the stew he had declined.

Walking through the city, he saw street vendors shouting about their wares, humans and dark ones cooking at their stalls with interesting smells intermingling. Few of the stone houses were colored but there were some. Still it felt to him the architecture was alive. He deemed the effects of sunlight had not at all been exaggerated. Soon he reached the second set of walls, passing without any of the guards taking note. Once more he felt the magic, once again he saw cannons atop the high reaching defenses.

The streets remained busy, but there were fewer stalls here. Restaurants and stores dominated the main road he was on and he quickly found a nice looking place with a few tables outside. The only other patron was a large dark one covered in full plate armor. He wondered how the being ate and drank but decided it would be rude to bother them. Instead he sat down, soon ordering something off the menu.

A hearty dish with potatoes covered in herbs, a sauce made of what he assumed to be cheese, and small bits of green vegetables he had never eaten before.

Full and ready to explore more, Galgan made his way to the most central wall, soon coming onto a massive square. He stepped aside when a group of armed and armored people landed, wings and magic vanishing as they started making their way towards a large four story building made of stone and wood. Letters etched into a long wooden board informed him that it was the local adventuring guild. He looked away when something shiny caught his eye. Three people were casting spells near the center of the square, illusion and water magic, sparkling light accompanied by music, chatter, and the sound of steel hitting steel.

Quite a few people stopped to watch, more simply passing by, towards one of the government buildings, the guild hall, or one of the many stores and smithies. Galgan watched the show as he passed, stopping in front of an open storefront. Weapon racks were set up, everything from daggers, to spears, to war hammers was present. Four adventurers and one woman dressed in black were browsing the wares.

“You look a little lost,” came a voice. A broad woman wearing a leather apron. Her skin was black, her hair long and gray. “Need advice?”

“I... I’m just looking,” Galgan said and smiled. “Thank you.”

She nodded. “Nice helmet,” the smith said and moved her gaze to someone else.

Galgan grabbed a shortsword and looked it over. Well balanced, he knew, though not the best for his height, and not what he wanted to use anyway. Not a sword. Maybe an axe. Or just magic. *Magic never fails you. Weapons can be lost in a fight.* He remembered the words of his grandpa. The smith hadn’t been wrong however. He was lost, walking aimlessly through the central part of the city.

He found a small park after ascending a few sets of stairs, sitting down on a bench before he looked out onto the rooftops. Leaning forward, he could see a large space cleared out, fresh earth and young trees covered in a light layer of snow. At the center of the space, he saw a large three story building, at least a hundred meters long and near as broad. Perfectly cut white marble made it stand out even more, each floor smaller than the one below. The roof was flat and he could see people standing near the railings. Glass windows lined the walls in regular intervals but he couldn’t see inside from the distance. Galgan squinted when he saw flashes of red light from one of the windows. Magic, though he didn’t know what kind.

He heard steps from the right, glancing over to see a group of three young humans sit down on a bench. One of them glanced his way and smiled.

“You’re Taleen, right?” she asked.

[Nature Mage – lvl 45]

He nodded. “Is it that obvious?”

“It’s the excitement on your face,” the woman said and pointed. She had bright red hair, like fire, her eyes green like the forest. She wore leather armor, a small curved knife strapped to her belt. “Dwarves from the Pit aren’t that impressed with Ravenhall, or the Academy for that matter.”

“I thought that was it,” Galgan said and glanced down at the building. *The Ravenhall Academy.* Another option. Perhaps a more realistic one. He was part of the Accords after all, and admission wasn’t expensive for those who didn’t come from a rich family. “Do you study there?”

The woman stepped over and sat down next to him. “I do, yes. About trees, grains, herbs, that kind of thing,” she said. “I’m Melina. Nice to meet you.”

“Galgan. The same,” he said.

“So, you came to study as well? Or will you join the Shadowguard?” she asked, an inquisitive look in her eyes.

“I’m not sure yet,” he said.

“A free spirit,” she mused. “I like it. Well, if you join the Academy, you can check out a few basic classes. Tons of people come and go, looking for the subjects and magic schools they actually enjoy. I’ve seen so many would be adventurers become architects or enchanters. Some even smiths,” she said.

“There are smithing classes?” he asked.

“Yes. There’s pretty much anything you could want,” she said.

“There’s no smoke rising, and I can’t hear any hammers,” he said, trying to find anything on the building that would suggest there really was a forge in there.

She chuckled. “Most of it is underground. I could show you around later, how about it?”

“That would be great, thank you,” Galgan said as he checked his helmet. He relaxed, knowing he didn’t have to make a decision instantly. There were a lot of opportunities around, he wanted to make sure he had a glimpse at all of them.

Ilea watched the fighting commence, spells flying all over the hall as the inexperienced students tried to handle both the stresses of a bout and the presence of Lilith and Kyrian. The higher level Sentinels didn’t give much of a shit anymore who was watching, only interested in testing themselves against higher leveled beings to get pointers.

“You can tell how excited they are,” Kyrian sent through the established connection. *“It’s a different energy entirely to the other three new groups.”*

“Right. There’s something... carefree about them. Reminds me of myself,” she sent, a smile on her face.

“Lots of applications lately. One thing many of the most successful Sentinels have in common is their background as refugees of some kind. The Baralia war and subsequent split, the demon summoning here, Elven attacks in the west. Anything that left them with little to lose,” he said.

Ilea looked at him. *“Sounds like we’re some assassin order buying up orphans.”*

“They found a new family here, and all of them came here with a purpose, something that pushes them through the grueling training and pain. Many of them have lost everything. Helping them find confidence in themselves and expertise in their magic is why I’m here,” he said.

“So what’s different about this bunch?” Ilea asked, seeing both dwarves and a few dark ones in the group of twenty four students, most of them watching from the sidelines.

“They just really enjoy fighting each other, fighting monsters, and training their resistances. Most of them don’t come from a background that pushed them towards more. They simply wanted to find excitement. The interviewing process was much longer however. Hard to gauge someone’s character if all they want to do is train,” he said. *“We did base most of the admissions on how well we know you.”*

“Me?” she asked.

“Yes. Trian calls them the Battle Unit,” he sent. *“Really more inclined to fight and train than to become healers. But send one of them into a dungeon and they either die down there or clear it out.”*

“Wonderful prospects,” Ilea said.

“You would know,” he said.

She thought about it and shrugged. *“I suppose I would.”*

“There’s something else I’d like to show you,” Kyrian said as he pushed himself away from the wall and vanished.

Ilea latched on to his spell, the two moving down until they came onto the lowest floor.

“If you would,” Kyrian said, pointing downwards.

Ilea raised her brows before she transported them into the previous research facility of Iana and Christopher.

The Core remained as they had left it, some mugs even still on one of the tables. The lights were out.

Kyrian touched one of the enchantments on the wall, light flooding the facility a moment later.

Ilea walked past the white halls, finding various large chunks of metal, crates with monster parts, herbs, metals, and dozens of other materials. “Did you take over?”

“Not just me. It’s a nice facility, and private. Claire comes down here sometimes, Sulivhaan and Dagon too. And some of the Sentinels if they need a well enchanted space to test something,” he explained. “Nobody here today.”

“So what did you want to show me?” Ilea asked, walking to one of the large metal slabs. She put the palm of her hand against it and pushed a little, lifting it off the ground slightly.

Kyrian walked over and summoned something into his hand. “This.”

Ilea let go, ignoring the loud impact as she looked at the root held out in his hand. The slight shimmer was familiar. The magic she felt from it was familiar. It looked a little like ginger, but with a blue tinge and much less voluminous.

[Bluemoon Root – Ancient Quality] – [Arcane Elixir]

“They did it,” she murmured. “Why did nobody tell me?”

Kyrian offered for her to take it. “There’s been versions before. The Meadow has been working with Lucas and Christopher. The problem with everything so far was that they couldn’t determine the danger it posed. This is the first iteration that *should* be safe.”

“Should be?” Ilea asked.

“That’s the thing. Testing it poses significant issues. Compared to the Healing Orders and nobles who have developed Elixirs in the past, nobody here wishes to test one on someone below level thirty,” he said. “The Meadow said it should be safe, but a risk remains, with everything that would incite change to the same degree you went through.”

“Why can’t I just eat it?” Ilea asked.

“You can. And it would be a mild poison to you at worst. For an elixir to take effect, the user has to be malleable. Weak enough to be affected. I got this one yesterday. You were out hunting, and I suggested I’d tell you about it myself. I talked to Trian a few hours ago. We’re... not sure about what to do.”

Ilea looked the root over. “We could just not use it at all. If there’s a risk.”

“There will always be a risk. Even the Meadow says so,” he said. “It’s not the Elixir itself, it’s the impact it has on someone’s body.”

“I don’t think either me or you should make that decision. Let’s meet up with Trian and the rest of the faculty to have a chat,” she said, handing the thing back to him.

Arcane healers. We’d basically be resurrecting the Azarinth Order, or at least the power they used to wield. She made a fist, feeling the magic of her auras flow through her before she teleported the both of them up and out of the facility.

They appeared in front of Trian’s office, the man himself still out on an exercise. She sent him a message through her mark, receiving an answer a few seconds later. “He still needs some time. Should we join him?”

“We can, if you’re teleporting,” he said. “Let me get the others.”