

Chapter 712 Arrangements

Ilea watched as a circular table made entirely of wood grew from the stone ground, various detailed imagery at the edge of the surface depicting bits of history the Meadow had been informed or a part of in both Ravenhall and Hallowfort's past. She particularly liked the depiction of herself carrying the tree away from the Daughters of Sephilon, the bit rather small compared to more prominent events.

Chairs appeared next to the massive table, each member of the respective council including the guests taking a seat as the negotiations commenced.

Ilea would've liked to have a phone with her to take a quick picture. Posting it in the Sentinel group would've surely been a hit amongst the students. She too took a seat, even though the buffet looked much more interesting than the stacks of paper, books, and folders appearing on the table. A glance to the side showed Navalis looking around with a bit of an uncertain air about her.

"Sit next to me," she sent to the woman and repeated the same to Owl, the Lich floating between the buffet and the large circular desk. *You're a four mark Lich. If anyone's invited, it's you,* Ilea thought. Looking at her own lack of notes, she knew her main reason for being here was her high level. That and the fact that she knew most of the people present, better than they generally knew each other.

The Lich and Ranger sat down, both sharing a quick glance before they focused on the details on the table.

"Nice touch," she sent to the Meadow when Twin appeared on her shoulder. The left one.

A few of the attendees glanced over, mainly the representatives of Hallowfort looking at her for a long moment.

"I've done extensive research before this meeting. Unlike some people," the Meadow answered.

"See, that's why I appreciate you so much, darling," Ilea answered.

"Important meeting. Join? Violence maybe later," she sent to the Baron, giving a glance to Rock and Senia, the two Shadows sitting besides Wayland, both stressed enough they'd surely want to blow off some steam once this was over.

The music had stopped and relative quiet returned to the area, a cool breeze flowing in from the caverns.

Catelyn and Claire glanced at each other and opened their books at the same time.

The fox started. "Welcome everyone. To the first official talks between the representatives of Ravenhall and Hallowfort. As the members of each council were informed, we will go through the previously established sections first, by their importance as evaluated by both me and Claire. Endless Meadow will document all that is said for future reference and documentation," she said, thin sheets of stone appearing in the air with the words written down as they were said.

I wasn't informed. Tragedy.

Claire gave the fox a nod and stood up. “Claire Russel, Head Administrator and council member of Ravenhall, member of the Shadow’s Hand, am here in person, sound of mind and at my own will,” she said and sat back down, looking to her left where Trian had already started standing up.

This is gonna take fucking forever, isn’t it, Ilea thought with a sigh and glanced over to Navalis.

Navalis could feel the attention of Lilith next to her, the gaze like the lazy look of a disinterested predator. She stopped herself from gulping and looked at her for a split second before she turned her attention back to the detailed etching before her in the wooden table. *She’s obviously not very interested in the talks. I can’t take sides.* Not disrespecting any of the powerful individuals including Ilea would surely prove difficult, but she would try her best.

As a Shadow and ranger, her specialty was hunting monsters, but she’s been a part of her fair share of social events. Nothing quite as important as this, but the other attendees would’ve often thought as much about their downright mundane matters. Compared to even just the woman sitting next to her.

To her left sat Senia, the rogue glancing between the various attendees, her main focus still on Wayland.

He would be a fool and instantly dead if he tried anything here, Navalis thought but she didn’t say or signal anything. Few movements in the face of dangerous monsters. The introductions commenced, all around the table with most of them repeating a variation of the words Claire had used.

Navalis didn’t particularly like the Fae sitting on Ilea’s shoulder, the creature sometimes giving her a look that made her feel like a child. It didn’t help that a second one of the beings appeared on Ilea’s other shoulder a few minutes later. The creatures looked more or less the same but even without her perception abilities, they felt like day and night. Only based on their body language and her instincts. Neither of them talked. At least not to her.

Ilea summoned one of the wine bottles onto the table and poured herself a glass, more appearing near some of the participants. Others had mugs with steaming liquids or entire bottles appear. Navalis couldn’t tell if everything came from the Meadow, Ilea, personal storage devices, or through some other magic. Nor did she know if any communication had happened before. *Telepathy.* She wondered if the people here had more conversations going on than just the ones talked out loud. It was easy to read Ilea’s expressions to know she was communicating with the Fae on her shoulders, Claire, Catelyn, and with the direction of the Meadow. She seemed the least serious of everyone present, the mood and now drinks positively affecting the others.

A deliberate effort? Or just something that came natural to her? Navalis didn’t know. She would’ve guessed the latter based on her previous interactions with Ilea but a lot had changed.

“... former Queen of Rhyvor. And I’ll want to know where this wine was made,” the woman called Elana finished, sitting down with a look towards Ilea.

“Maro approved,” the woman replied with a wink which seemed to both irritate and amuse Elana.

Hard to read that one. She’s obviously a noble but it feels like she simply doesn’t care about schooling her face. The training was there, both in her posture and the way she moved her hands. Just her face, and eyes. Navalis looked away slowly when the woman met her gaze. *Look at the engraving. Yes, winged and many armed being fighting monster hordes.* She knew it was Lilith. *Depicted like some kind of deity. Was it how the Meadow thought of her?* She hadn’t gotten the impression that Ilea would like that but people could put on masks.

“Ilea,” the woman said and stood up. “Or Lilith, whatever you prefer. Very resistant to mind magic, forced to be here by my good friends Claire, and Catelyn,” she added and sat back down.

“No titles?” Catelyn asked after giving a glance to Claire.

“I doubt the famous Lilith even requires an introduction,” the Head Administrator said.

“I want some credit in forcing her to be here too,” the Headmaster of the Sentinels added, writing something into a leather bound book before he glanced up at the ashen myth. He wore a vest embroidered with both the family crest of the Aymie clan from Virilya and the wing of the Medic Sentinels, neither of which Navalis remembered seeing on any clothing or armor before. His black eyes were focused, long brown hair falling to his back with a well trimmed beard on his face. She would’ve respected his presence, his obvious status of nobility, and the magical power he wielded at his high level, but today he simply paled in comparison to his surroundings.

“Trian receives no credit,” Ilea stated in a more formal tone than she used before, an amused look in her eyes as she glanced at the tablets of stone where the said was imprinted. The woman glanced at Navalis a moment later.

Shit. My turn.

Done with the introductions, the two administrators started with the first point of discussion. The mood seemed a little less tense now, though Navalis didn’t feel particularly more relaxed herself. An obvious outcome based on the incredible display of power all around her. She tried to activate some of her skills now from time to time, slowly getting used to the various presences. Still she couldn’t even glance in the direction of the Meadow, but the rest were fine. She could tell there was more to the Fae on Ilea’s shoulders but they either concealed a part of what they were or her abilities simply couldn’t comprehend the full extent of their nature. She assumed it was both.

Ilea herself definitely used something to hide her level. She felt like a being at the very least at level seven hundred, perhaps higher. Some of the information Navalis got from her didn’t feel like anything she’d dealt with before. Unconventional. Different. *Might just be because I haven’t met a human at her level. Not knowingly or with my skills active.*

What she knew was that Ilea could likely challenge most everyone here in a pure display of magic. Everyone besides the Fae and the flow of near endless power she felt from the direction of the crystal tree. *She fits in with the monsters.*

“The extent of our cooperation is based on the limitations our settlements and peoples will put on the use of the teleportation gates provided by the culminated efforts of the Meadow, Iana, Christopher, Ilea, and resources gathered and provided by Ravenhall. Every council member should be familiar with the preliminary draft of the agreement,” Catelyn stated. “Between the settlements

of Ravenhall, Morhill, and Hallowfort, all teleportation will be free. Approval of teleportation shall be limited to the respective members of the Shadowguard, and the Guardians of Hallowfort. Each respective member shall receive a key tuned to their respective mana signature. Limits apply both in frequency and amount of people or goods teleported. Said limits are higher for members of the council and other important individuals as defined by the respective councils. Keys will deactivate every week upon which the respective authorities have to evaluate and reactivate the device,” Catelyn explained.

Claire nodded and continued. “Internal mechanisms document basic information of how many times the respective gates were activated, which key was used, and how much mana was expended. Iana, can you inform us as to the security measures?”

The enchantress stood up, her eyes glowing with a strange power Navalís had never seen before. “Of course. As you know, much of our first prototype is a mere imitation of what the Taleen had already built thousands of years ago. Improvements mostly based on what the Meadow has taught us have made this model more robust and easier to both build, maintain, and use. As to the security, we decided to simply exclude a lot of capabilities present in the Taleen model. It’s possible the ancient civilization never expected anyone to be able to intrude on their network but we won’t make that same mistake. Two respective gates are only linked to one another. A gate cannot lead to another destination than its twin. This will allow us to prevent an attack on our entire teleportation network.”

“What about the technology itself? Can it not simply be stolen once someone owns one of the gates?” Haiden asked, the cat like being purring lightly after it had spoken.

“Not without a mind like that of the Meadow. The Taleen believed intrusion impossible, for good reason. Their measures to prevent imitation were just as impressive, and we improved on that. With the twin setup we have additional measures in place that would require a potential thief to need both gates for a complete enchantment matrix. A task made more difficult by the internal destruction set to happen one hour after a connection between gates has been lost. Though perfect security is simply not possible. We will have to trust the guardians and measures in place,” Iana explained.

“Nor is it our only way to prevent theft,” Claire said. “Ravenhall intends to set up a gate hub in the town of Morhill, from where travelers and adventurers can reach destinations all throughout the Plains and beyond. The same will be true for the first layer of the Descent, below the very grounds we stand on. Deals will be reached with the various countries, settlements, and beings, with the goal not to profit directly from the gates themselves but from the emerging commerce and political influence we have with the control of said devices. Theft will still be attempted but political support and funding will be limited because of our mutually beneficial terms. At least in the human plains, the presence of quickly accessible Shadows, Adventurers, and soon Sentinels will be far more popular amongst the people than their wish to own the technology itself,” she explained.

Wayland cleared his throat. He received a gesture from Claire. “The emergence of teleportation gates will change up the entirety of the established flow of information. I suggest gathering everything we can on experienced enchanters, space, and void mages... everywhere we can. Watching those individuals move will give us a lot of insight into who is investing how much into the acquisition of this new wonder. How long until the talks begin?”

“After our contracts are signed,” Claire said.

The man nodded and summoned a set of books and papers, starting to write furiously.

“I understand correctly then, that the goal of this teleportation network is not to send reinforcements to settlements in times of need?” No asked, the leader of the guard in Hallowfort speaking with a deep and vibrating voice, full plate armor covering up his features.

Catelyn turned to the being. “The limitations of the keys will allow for plenty of reinforcements, should they be necessary. A limit to quantity is in our favor, even should our potential enemies take control of the gates.”

“The Meadow protects Hallowfort,” Elana said. “And Ravenhall houses the most powerful known institutions in the Plains. Any conflict directly related to our settlements will likely be lost already should the need for reinforcements arise.”

Navalis gulped, looking at the quiet group exchange glances.

“A few core teams of Shadows, Sentinels, Guardians, or single individuals like Ilea, Kyrian, Owl, or Aki will be more effective than whatever armies we could send,” Claire confirmed.

Navalis looked at the engraving again. The winged individual felt different to her now. She remembered the song about Riverwatch, Lilith challenging an entire army by herself. It hadn’t seemed outlandish at the time, she knew how powerful even a single Shadow could be against a group of lower leveled humans or monsters. But now, now that the reality of teleportation gates settled in her mind, she could only imagine the destruction a single high level being could bring. *Destruction or protection, from a terrifying being traveling to distant lands in mere seconds.*

Ilea alone could bring entire nations to their knees in the span of a day. She didn’t dare think of the possibilities with all the mentioned factions and beings. Navalis glanced at Sulivhaan, her tension lessening a little when she looked at him. Even with his mask on, she could tell more than enough. He was calm. Serious but calm. *He must’ve given all this weeks or months of consideration. I never thought he would trust anyone quite as much as this endeavor must require.*

“As our military agreements are purely defensive in nature, we will focus on reinforcing that aspect of our respective settlements. The same will be true for anyone that joins these agreements,” Claire moved on. “Which brings us to the next issue, unified law between the beings of Ravenhall and Hallowfort. Dozens of people from our respective towns have worked together to create a universally usable set of laws. The Meadow will now present the revised version approved of both myself and Catelyn.”

“We will go through every paragraph until every present member of each council is in agreement. The talks will be paused whenever someone requires sleep or sustenance,” Claire said as a large book appeared before her.

Navalis glanced at Ilea.

“*That doesn’t include you,*” the woman sent via telepathy. “*Good for you. This is gonna take days.*”

She thought the estimate rather optimistic but felt it dangerous to mention that to the tired looking woman, the Fae on her right shoulder tapping her cheek in an enthusiastic manner.

“*It’s an important text. I don’t think anything like this has ever existed,*” Navalis said.

Ilea shrugged. “*Must have. I doubt the Taleen, humans, and Elves would’ve worked together without settling on at least some general agreements.*”

The what?

Navalis tried to process that but just shook her head lightly. *Elves? Working with humans?*

She glanced at Sulivhaan before she listened to the fox like being talk. *A defensive agreement between species, involving teleportation gates. Could we defend against an all out attack by the Elves? Is that why he seems so calm? A way for us to fight back?*

She thought about asking Ilea but the woman was listening too by now, quite focused actually. *Sure. None of this is new to her. And she did strike me as at least somewhat responsible. She must be aware of the power she wields, the importance of her presence here, and throughout the Plains. Could she alone defend us against the Elves? If the gates do come to be.*

Navalis started to think about the enemies of Hallowfort instead, wondering what kind of monsters lurked in the lands around them. How far away were they really? How different was life out here compared to Ravenhall, Kroll, the Empire? Did they have regular wars? Her questions would have to wait. She just hoped at least some would be answered.