

## Chapter 380: Blow it up?

Derek and the others were escorted through the gates of Icecrest by the leaders of three of the most prominent noble families in the entire kingdom of Astrus. As they walked through the gates and entered the outer part of the city, their group was met by numerous lower-level guards with their weapons raised and uncertainty in their eyes. It seemed that the people of Icecrest didn't quite know what to make of the situation.

*How could they?* Derek thought. *I'm sure this kind of thing is unprecedented. Of course they weren't expecting to lose the king of the kingdom so suddenly or for the war they initiated to take such a sudden turn. Now, those same people who were likely responsible for the change had come to their capital and killed most of the leaders of important noble families... well, I'm assuming those that fought beside the queen and her father-in-law were leaders of noble houses.*

*On top of that, those same people were just escorted into their city by three more well-known noble families and their guards. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what is going on, but I'm sure they're all still in shock more than anything, and they just haven't quite comprehended the situation yet.* Derek's eyes landed on many of the flustered guards and citizens behind them as the three noble heads scurried forward to speak to them.

"Stand down, everyone," Diana, the matriarch of the Reeves family, commanded.

Again, the guards didn't seem sure what to do, but after one person lowered their weapons, the rest followed quickly. Finally, one guard, presumably whichever one was left leading the remaining guards while the stronger ones went out to fight, took a small step forward and saluted.

"Ma'am," the guard said, speaking directly to Diana. "What... what are your orders?" the man looked past Diana and onto the group of people from Indria and Cydaria before gulping and turning his attention back to the older woman. It looked like after some mental gymnastics from the impromptu guard leader, he made the decision to default to the leaders of the major noble houses—which was exactly what everyone was hoping for.

Diana turned back and looked at Osian and Edward before nodding seriously and facing the guard once again. "Please spread the word that there will be an announcement in three hours at the royal palace. Activate the teleporters and send word to each major city. It is highly suggested that each noble family—from high to low—be at the gathering. I will also send word to others to help in this. For the time being, teleportation will be free for anyone who wishes to attend. We will also be activating the backup teleportation circles to accommodate all of our guests."

The woman spoke very loudly so everyone in the surround area could hear it. The crowd of gathered people on the outer edges of the city was massive. There would be no problem getting the news out.

"Yes, ma'am. We will see to it immediately," the guard saluted firmly once again.

“Also,” Diana spoke again before the guard could run off. “Summon any available healers and support classes. I want them to go out and help the injured. The sooner everyone is healed up, the better.”

“Ma’am!” The man nodded, then turned to the other guards and began issuing orders to all those who were following. Quickly, multiple people ran past Derek’s group and out of the city— healers anxious to help the other wounded soldiers and guards. There were even a couple of regular citizens that took it upon themselves to rush out behind the guards to give their help.

*Looks like they’ve been communicating this whole time and already have some kind of plan ready, Derek thought as he stared at the back of the crown prince and king. And I’m sure that ‘highly suggest’ actually means mandatory. It will definitely allow Edward and Osian to get a feel of how the nobles view everything.*

“Follow me,” Diana turned and said to the group. “I’ll take you to the palace. It’s... well, it should be almost completely empty aside from servants and a few others. All the palace guards were in the battle.”

Everyone nodded and followed the woman. Surprisingly, instead of leading them through the city, she took them to a building not far away and brought them inside.

“It’s much too far of a walk, and I imagine you need time to prepare yourselves for your announcements later,” Diana said. “Icecrest has a number of teleportation circles connected to different parts of the city.”

“That’s convenient,” Derek said. “It would make rushing to the palace much easier.” He smiled at Edgar as the prince looked at him.

“We have weighed the pros and cons of doing the same back in Cydaria,” Edwin replied. “We always found too many cons in having such a system in place... though, after the last two years, it seems that many of those cons would happen with or without quick access to different parts of the city.”

“I told you,” Alanah said. “I’ve been telling Edwin to do this for ages. It should be a common feature within all major cities in a kingdom. Time is valuable, after all, and the extra income generated by people choosing to teleport over traveling by foot would increase the kingdom’s coffers.” Alanah grinned at the king when he looked at her. “You might even be able to use it to slowly dig your way out of the debt you have with Natalie.”

Edwin winces at that. “Maybe...”

“It’s certainly something we shall discuss when we get back to Cydaria,” Edward said. “Now, are we ready? How many people can be transported at once?”

“Oh, there’s plenty of room for everyone here, minus our house guards,” Diana replied.

“Speaking of which,” the matriarch of house Reeves pointed at one of the guards that had been trailing behind everyone the whole time. “Dustin, go back to the family and explain—in detail— everything that has transpired from the beginning of the battle until now. Tell my daughter that she is to meet us at the palace as soon as possible.”

“Yes, milady.” The man at the front of the guards bowed deeply, then gathered up the rest of House Reeve’s guards and left.

Once they were finished, Garrett and Finn proceeded to make their own arrangement with their guards. Soon, only Cydaria’s group and the three heads of the noble houses remained. It could be seen as a gesture of good faith that the three leaders sent their guards away while they remained.

“If everyone would gather on the platform,” Diana said. Once everyone stood on the platform, she spoke to a lady who had been standing off to the side behind a counter, curiously taking everything in. “If you would be so kind as to send us to the Central District.”

“Yes, ma’am,” the lady said.

“Oh, and you may want to call in some extra help. You’re soon to receive a notice, and all the teleporters in the city are going to be very busy over the next few hours. I’d hate to see you fall behind.”

“Of course, ma’am.” The lady bowed and soon, she had the teleporter activated. “You will be transported in 3... 2... 1...”

With a flash, everyone vanished, then reappeared on a platform identical to the one they were just standing on. This time, they were greeted by a man standing off to the side behind a counter.

“Lady Reeves, Sir Rivia, Sir Barro... welcome,” the man said with surprise as he scanned everyone with his eyes. “Is there anything I may help you with?”

“No, we’re fine,” Diana said, then went on to explain the same things to the current attendant that she had the previous one.

The man bid them farewell after her explanation, then pulled out a communication crystal in a rush and began making his own arrangements.

“The palace isn’t far from here,” Diana said, then led them out of the building.

Outside of the building, there actually weren’t very many people around—at least, there weren’t nearly as many people as there were in the outer part of the city. *I guess everyone was gathered around the gate area because of the fighting just outside of it. That would be the best place to get information. Though, I’m surprised there were so many people. Actually...*

“Hey, uh... Diana,” Derek said.

“Yes?” the older woman turned around and answered.

“If you knew we were coming, why didn’t you evacuate the city? Wouldn’t that have been the smart thing to do? You know... just in case we weren’t friendly after the battle.”

“Another thing me and the royal family didn’t agree with,” she replied. “I suggested we do just that, but Traven and Cassandra refused. Actually, not only did they refuse, they shut down all teleportation to outside the city.”

*Oh, so that's why she told the guards to activate the teleporters. They had actually been deactivated by those two. "I see..."*

"The hubris of that family. I don't know if they actually had confidence or just didn't care," Marrick spoke from his position in the group. "At least they truly got a fitting end."

Diana nodded, but didn't say anything to the old elf. Instead, she turned back around and began walking. From where they were, it would have been a piece of cake for anyone to get to the palace, as it stood out like a sore thumb.

Though it was behind multiple buildings and still a bit far away, the palace towered over everything in its surroundings. If Derek had been looking hard enough, he would have been able to see the palace from in the air when they first arrived—instead, he was just distracted by the pure size of Icecrest.

They walked down a street, then turned onto what could be called the palace street—it was a wide street that led directly to the palace. The palace was the same tacky dark blue of the ice that the noble family used. On either side—connected to the walls—was a guard tower. The courtyard itself was at least double, if not triple, the size of the courtyard in Cydaria.

"Yeah..." Derek said. "The dragons would have had plenty of room if we would have brought them with us."

"You're not joking," Avery replied, then he glanced at Alanah. "You just thought Edwin's palace was gaudy."

"They've definitely added on to it since the last time I was here," Alanah said. "It was just as ugly, but only about half the size back then. I wonder if it was Traven or his father who did it."

"So you're saying that seeing this palace doesn't change your mind about getting one of your own?" Avery snickered.

"Again... if I ever truly suggest building or buying a palace, you have permission to slap me across the face as many times as you need to get me to change my mind." Alanah shook her head.

If not for the color and guard towers connected at the front corners of the massive palace, Derek would say that it looked almost like a certain palace in London back on Earth before the system came. *Well, it's wider and taller... I think.* He'd never actually seen that palace in person—just pictures.

"We're here," Diana said to the group as they opened the gates and let themselves in. As she had said, nobody was left guarding the place. "What would you like to do?" she asked Edward and Osian.

"Blow it up? Wipe it off the face of this planet?" Derek answered and got a side eye from everyone. "What? I just said what everyone else is thinking."

"That may be so, but I think she wanted to know how we would like to prepare for the upcoming... event," Osian answered.

“Indeed,” Diana replied, and Derek shrugged.

“Really?” Alanah asked in a whisper, but being so close, everyone could still hear if they tried.

“Blow up the palace?”

“Hey,” Derek replied in a whisper back. “The war’s basically over. No need to be serious all the time anymore. You can relax now... maybe blow up some ugly palaces while you’re at it.”

“If only...” Alanah replied with a sigh, then looked up with a smile. “The remodeling alone would cost a fortune, and I’m definitely not going to pay for it.”

“We’re not blowing the palace up,” Edward cut in. “We need to gather all staff and anyone else who is residing in the palace, then we need to prepare to receive all the nobles who choose to come. I want everything done outside so the civilians can hear, too.”

“Great,” Diana replied. “Garrett, you gather all the staff. Finn, see if the remainder of the royal family is still here or if they fled, you shouldn’t have any problems. Everyone else, follow me.”