

Interlude – War Camp

Lesamitrius sometimes wondered if his life was a dream. Once, so long ago that it almost seemed like a different life, he had been a promising young warrior in the Green Rain Sect. His father had been one of the distinguished members of the sect, someone who was close to breaking into the Immortal Realm. His family held much honor, and obligation in the sect. And Lesamitrius was the prime heir of his family, set to inherit a powerful family in a mid-sized sect on the edge of the Frontier. That had been such a high honor, a great achievement, once.

His father had reached Immortal, was a Sect Leader of Green Rain Sect, and Lesamitrius' life had taken a far different turn. Now, he was a warrior of a different Sect. A Heavenly Realm Commander, and enjoyed influence of a different kind.

Now, he walked around with legends. He walked around with Anatallien Far Solla-Woll, the Ruler of the Empty Sky. For all intents and purposes, he fulfilled the same role for her that Anrosh did for Ryun. He dealt with... everything that she needed. He shadowed her around, and he watched, he learned. He still couldn't quite believe it, but being in the presence of so many greats was... the Immortal Realm was more than a dream for him. It was almost a certainty. Just listening, watching, experiencing, had given him insights into his own Path, into his own inspiration. He felt like he could reach Immortal in the next few years, and he was not even forty!

It was madness. But... he wouldn't change it for the world. He had found a second family in the Twilight Melody Sect, and his father was proud of what he had achieved too. The Twilight Melody Sect had grown, and their relations and friendship with Lesamitrius' former sect had only grown.

And to think on who he used to be... how arrogant he was. Still, who he used to be had led him to who he was now, and that he wouldn't change either.

He stood in the corner of the large tent along with a few other warriors, staying at attention as legends discussed things just in front of him. The war planning was proceeding steadily. They had already gathered nearly half of their army here at the edge of the Sect territory bordering the

Classer territories, and would soon begin the march across the core. The way in which they would accomplish this was the topic of today's meeting.

"It will not take us months," Eratemus Prideborne, the Lord of Death, said. He wore a female drake body, pale of scales and milky blue eyes.

"We can't move that many troops that fast," Hitor argued.

"We can if we use the right powers," Eratemus said.

Hitor tilted his head. "Cultivators don't have... ah," he stopped himself.

Eratemus nodded his head. "We will use Classers, Commander Classes have required perks."

A woman with golden-red, almost blond, hair, spoke next. "My people have a few such perks," Eternal Master Karya Ornn-Dagda said. It had taken some... adjustments to having Classers in the sect. But they had adapted. They simply called them by the equivalent of Cultivator Realms, and since her Class has reached its final tier, she held the title of Eternal Master. Other Sects would probably have an issue with that, but Lesamitrius knew that Twilight Melody didn't care that much.

"But," she continued. "If we burn them on getting there, we will not have them available for the fighting. Being able to reposition in an instant across the battlefield is far more important. Besides, I don't have enough of them to move all of the army."

Eratemus nodded. "Of course, I was not referring to your people," he gestured at the blond man standing next to him, Sigmund Otensson. "Sigmund had managed to secure the people necessary for the task."

"They are willing to join the war?" Weir Fo Fol, Sect Head of the Reges Ahn Sect, asked.

"No, at least not all of them," Eratemus shook his head. "But they are willing to help transport the troops. For a fee, of course."

"You are talking about mercenaries?" Hitor grimaced. Lesamitrius shared the sentiment, mercenaries were... distasteful in Sect culture.

"Yes," Eratemus said. "But they will get the job done. We even have one that is willing to fight with our armies. And we are going to need everyone we can get."

"At least that much we can agree on," Awirren Goldenfeather of the Golden Sky Sect said. It surprised Lesamitrius to hear her speak, she only rarely spoke at these meetings. "I've read the newest reports," she said. "We've underestimated the number of monsters in the enemy territory."

We will be fighting through several monster swarms just to get to the taken.”

“What?” Henna Rai Tarun, Sect Head of the Starlight Call Sect asked. “I was not made aware of this.”

Hitor gave Awirren a glare, then turned to the human woman. “We’ve only just received word this morning, I was going to bring it up after this, but we can transition.”

He pulled out a large map and laid it over the map already on the table. It was the same map, only the new one had more notes and markings on it.

“As you can see,” Hitor started. “There are several monster swarms moving from here,” He pointed at the Tournament City, then traced a line down south across their planned route. “All the way to the Elder Kingdom and the Citadel.”

“They know?” Weir Fo Fol asked.

“It could be nothing,” Eratemus said. “They are always patrolling their territory. We’ve never known their exact numbers, and swarms such as these could be the reason why we don’t see much word getting out of those territories.”

“Or they could know about this army,” Weir insisted.

“There are no taken in the army,” Eratemus continued. “Someone betraying us is a possibility but unlikely, giving the army to the taken makes little sense for anyone but the most despised of focus holders. And I do not believe even most of them would agree.”

“Some people are serving them willingly,” Karya Ornn-Dagda said.

“Those who had nowhere to run,” Eratemus added. “Regardless, we’ve always known that we would have a fight on our hands. This isn’t a quick battle; this is a war.”

A young drake opened the tent flap and entered, quickly running over to Hitor and offering a small piece of paper. Hitor read then waved the boy away. “It seems like our Warden friends have just arrived. I suggest we take a break and gather in a couple of hours. I am sure that the Wardens will be able to give us the information we need, in order to plan the Elder Kingdom’s campaign.”

Everyone grumbled their agreements and started leaving the tent, Lesamitrius waited as Tali exchanged a few words with Weir Fo Fol. After

a few minutes, the tall minotaur left. She turned to him as they were left all alone in the tent.

“So, bored weren’t you?” Tali asked as they started heading out.

“Of course, not master,” Lesamitrius said immediately, and it was the truth. Seeing the way that the powerful talked with each other and how they planned the war was fascinating. “I’m learning a lot.”

Tali glanced at him, and for a moment he thought he saw satisfaction, but then her face turned amused. “Oh, I am sure that listening to a bunch of old arrogant fools is interesting.”

Lesamitrius didn’t answer, he had learned a lot while serving Master Anatalien. Like when she wanted to make him say something... less than honorable.

“You’re no fun,” Tali added. Then she stopped as they rounded a corner around a small supply tent. Her eyes narrowed and Lesamitrius noticed the reason for their stop.

“Awirren,” Anatalien said with what Lesamitrius recognized as a fake smile. “I’ve wondered when you were going to... *ambush* me. Took you long enough.”

“Anatalien,” the golden feathered karura said, flanked with two karura warriors standing at attention. “We’ve all been very busy, there was a war to prepare for.”

“Of course,” Anatalien nodded. “I’ve been wondering why you haven’t talked with.”

“You... you must know that I was... unwell,” Awirren Goldenfeather said.

Anatalien didn’t respond immediately, she took a few seconds to watch the Sect Head carefully. “Oh,” her face softened. “I know old friend. It is a terrible thing.”

“You...know?” Awirren asked.

“Of course I do, but some wounds take... centuries to heal,” Anatalien said. “We’ll talk more in time,” with that Anatalien walked around the karura and Lesamitrius hurried to follow.

He didn’t know what it was about, and if he was honest, he was a bit afraid to ask. They walked through the camps until they reached the area designated for Twilight Melody Sect. It was surrounded by the sects allied

with them, many smaller ones from the Frontier, and adjacent to the Midnight Reign Sect.

Tali made a straight line for one of the bigger tents near the center. They entered and found Ryun sitting on the floor, a shah table in between him and Kri.

She sat down next to them without a word spoken, and Lesamitrius took a position behind her.

“Tough meeting, huh,” Ryun said, neither he nor Kri raised their eyes from the board. But then again, they didn’t need them to see.

“They are annoying, I wish I could throw you in them, see how you like them,” Anatalien said.

“I know war, I don’t know planning,” Ryun told her.

“You know how to drop down on an army and make a mess, that is what you know,” Anatalien shook her head. “Sorry, didn’t mean that. They frustrate me. We are united in purpose, but... everyone wants to gain something.”

Ryun nodded, then moved a pawn forward. “It is the way of some people.”

“We are going to split the main army again,” Anatalien said.

Lesamitrius blinked, that hadn’t been discussed, he wondered if he missed something. They already had three fronts. The Tournament City which will be attacked by the Triumphant Hive. The southern city of Insil, which was one of the enemy staging points and which would be hit from the river. That part of the army was gathering south on the Golden Coast. And the third being the city of Emaros, in the Elder Kingdom, the home of the Warden Citadel.

“The enemy has more troops than we thought,” Anatalien continued. “It is the only thing that makes sense. If we hit Emaros first, any siege we make will be surrounded and destroyed. We need to tie down their armies somewhere else.”

“I thought that Helse was supposed to be that?” Ryun asked, then moved his rook.

Anatalien shook her head. “They have more troops, even if our attack south draws away half of them, there is still enough to make any siege difficult.”

“And what do you think the answer is?” Ryun asked.

“Two armies, one hunts down the largest monster swarm, or several if we can draw them together, and the other continues to Emaros and lays siege.”

“I guess that we’ll see once it is decided,” Anatalien said.

A sect warrior entered the tent, interrupting their discussion. “Pardon Sect Head, two wardens just arrived at the camp.”

Ryun raised his head for the first time and looked at the warrior. “They want to meet with me?”

“Apologies, but no Sect Head, they are asking permission to speak with Eternal Master Karya,” the warrior said.

Ryun blinked, and then closed his eyes. A few moments later he opened them and spoke. “They have it, lead them to Dagda camp.”

Once the warrior left Anatalien turned to Ryun.

“I wonder what that is about.”