

## Chapter 374: Watch

“As you can see,” Edward’s voice sounded out, once again, he projected it so that all could hear over the remaining crackling of the dying dragon flames. “We came prepared. The dragons? They’re all for show. The real threat is in those we brought along. Mr. Hunt has proved time and time again that one person, if strong enough, can outdo armies... Speaking of armies...” Edward looked over at Osian.

“Speaking of armies,” King Osian took over from Edward. “Our combined army...” he gestured at Traven and the queen. “Was nearly destroyed by just Mr. Hunt and his companion. After that, he took out my brother, Tevarian, then Terrin. And from the reports I’ve seen, he didn’t even break a sweat doing it.”

*That’s not true, Derek thought. Silvi’s fire that took out the king was really hot. Surely I broke a sweat then.*

“Along with Mr. Hunt,” Osian continued. “You have no doubt noticed the attendance of Mr. Marrick, too. Now, I’ve not had the pleasure of seeing him in battle, but I have heard stories—specifically, stories of your father trying to ambush him and barely escaping with his life. And, I’m sorry to say Traven, but you are neither your father nor your son, and Mr. Marrick has had many years to grow even stronger since then.”

“And you, Queen Cassandra,” Osian directed his words at the woman standing next to Traven. “I’m sure you haven’t let it escape you that Ms. Alanah Swan, also known as the Dawn Siren, has been nice enough to provide us with her help. I understand that you may hold a grudge against her, but do you really think that grudge is worth more than just your life?”

“So, former King Traven... Queen Cassandra,” Edward began. “Think of your kingdom for once. Surrender now so that the others may live.”

“Surrender? You want us to surrender our lives?” Queen Cassandra yelled. “Without my son and husband alive, I’d rather see the kingdom burned to the ground than surrender to you. No! I will not surrender! WE will not surrender. So what if that man and his pet have strong auras? Aura means nothing without strength. And you think we’re scared of a little fire? How much mana did something like that take? How long is its cooldown? Don’t think we don’t that it was all a show.”

“We’re not going to believe your stories either,” Traven continued after the queen. “They are just three people and a pet. You think you’re one of the exceptions?” The former king pointedly looked through the crowd until his eyes landed on Derek and Silvi. “That’s true for everyone of us you see standing here, too. Exceptions are all around you. You can manage to beat three exceptions? Then we’ll send six or eight.” The man turned his attention back to Osian and Edward. “You should have brought more people.”

“Do you all truly believe that?” Osian said, speaking to those behind the former king and current queen. “Do you believe that Indria would ally with Cydaria so easily after waging war against them if there was another way? Even a kingdom such as Astrus is getting the opportunity to survive, just as Indria did, yet you’re throwing it away. If Cydaria wanted to, they could just take and destroy everything without you being able to do anything to stop them, yet Crown Prince Edward is being magnanimous.”

“We will give you one last chance,” Edward said. “Back away. Take yourselves out of this battle and you may yet live. You needn’t fight for Cydaria and Indria, but you must not fight for Astrus.”

“The time for talking is over!” Traven shouted.

The former king seemed to know that if he allowed anymore discussion, he would lose much of his support. Unfortunately, he was too late to realize it, and as he shouted, a few people broke away from his group. With them, Derek noticed that—through the lessening smoke behind them—many soldiers slowly backed away, too.

It seemed that those soldiers really must have been guards and employees of some of those up front. He could only imagine the relief that those soldiers were currently experiencing, and the sorrow of those whose employers seemed to choose to fight alongside Traven.

“Garrett! Finn! You dare betray your kingdom?” Traven turned and yelled at some of those who had decided to withdraw. “When this is over, I will personally see to it that your house is removed from the roots if you don’t come back.”

*That’s smart, Derek thought. It’s always a great idea to threaten someone’s family who is apparently quite strong if everything that the former king has said holds weight. It’s especially a great idea if they had decided to just not interfere instead of actually turning on you. That’s a great way to get them to fight for you instead of against you.* Derek rolled his eyes as he watched the childish former king throw a fit.

*I wonder if he’s normally like this or if the pressure is getting to him, he thought. Or maybe it’s just because of Marrick’s earlier words that have him riled up and not thinking straight... probably a combination of both.*

“Enough!” Queen Cassandra shouted and grabbed the former king on his shoulder. “If you do not wish to fight alongside us, then go!” she said to the retreating figures. “Your families will be safe.”

It seemed that at least one of the leaders, though still raging mad, had some sense left in them. The queen realized the situation Traven was putting them in and was trying to lessen the damages. Nothing would be worse than being attacked from behind once the fighting began.

“Traitors...” Traven muttered under his breath, but allowed the group to leave, nonetheless. In fact, after his outburst before, another two members of their ‘exceptions’ chose to withdraw themselves from the battle as well. Traven’s fists clenched into tight balls and the man was shaking in anger, but said nothing else.

“So, the rest of you refuse to surrender?” Edward asked lightly.

“Attack!” Instead of answering, Queen Cassandra tried to take advantage and catch everyone off guard with a surprise attack.

Unfortunately, this surprise attack didn’t work as well as she believed. A rapidly rotating arrow suddenly appeared in the chest of one of the men who rushed forward with his weapons drawn, and he fell to the ground. He wasn’t dead, but the Drill Shot would have him feeling the wound for some time. The man would no doubt be out of the battle for the foreseeable future.

As Osian, Ryven, Edgar, and Edward clashed with the other group, Derek turned and looked at Avery. The man was standing with his bow held loosely in his left hand. “Just had to land the first attack, huh?”

Avery shrugged. “I’ve been waiting all this time. I was actually hoping the old man would throw another ice spike at someone... planned on answering back. But I guess this works, too.”

Derek smiled and shook his head. It seemed someone else had a case of an itchy trigger finger, as well. *Not going to lie, though. I was pretty close to attacking after he threw an ice cube at me, too.* For now, though, Derek sat back and watched the clash to figure things out.

If he were being honest with himself, he believed that with Alanah, Avery, and Edgar—and now Marrick and Osian—that Cydaria and Indria wouldn’t have a problem dealing without him. If they needed it, they also had plenty of reinforcements to call on if necessary. The dragonkin would make quick work of everything, but, other than Lyra, they may also cause more destruction than is necessary.

After being used as a deterrent, Derek felt kind of odd letting everyone else fight and staying back, but for now, he decided he’d watch over everything and provide assistance when needed, or wait until the remainder of the army joined in. He was sure they would have second thoughts if he and Silvi showed up in front of them just as they began to move. At those thoughts, a flurry of needles shot past him and at Alanah.

Derek began to move, but it wasn’t needed. Alanah dodged every needle easily, then looked over at Derek. “I guess that’s my cue,” she said. “I knew there was no way the battle would start without her trying to attack me.”

“Don’t go easy,” Derek laughed. “The sooner you finish it, the better.”

With a nod of her head, Alanah all but disappeared from his sight. In the next instant, the half-elf with the beautiful emerald green armor appeared in the middle of the battle, directly in front of Queen Cassandra. The queen, in her black robe with blue trim, had activated all the runes outfitted on her robe.

The runes were glowing a sickly green color, and the same color bled down through all the runes etched in her sleeves and into the back of her hands. The sickly green then spread out like veins and eventually found its way to the needles that the woman was holding between each of her fingers.

*Is she using poison needles?* Derek wondered. He wasn’t a big fan of fighting poison, toxin, or acid users—especially acid users after his encounter with the ghouls from the Undying Dungeon, and the massive whale from the raid dungeon. He had back luck with them ruining his clothing and armor. It was even worse now that he was running low on the majority of the clothing items he’d brought from Earth. *I’m definitely bringing it up with Brandi once this is over.*

As he was watching the two powerful women face off, Derek felt a cool breeze from beside him and saw that Avery had made his move as well. He appeared in the back of the battle between two men that Derek hadn’t gotten the names of. He’d already put his bow away in exchange for daggers, and he was going to work on his opponents.

Just then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw a man with ice wings take off into the sky. Following the former king was the old man, Marrick. He had his hands laced behind his back and continued to stand hunched over, but under his feet was a cloud of sand lifting him into the air.

Soon enough, everyone else went their own way so not to interfere with each other's battles. It seemed that the poison queen didn't have the ability to fly, so Alanah had been kind enough to charge into her and carry her a great distance away from the center of the battle.

Another two people focused their combined efforts on Avery, and he slowly moved backwards, bringing his four opponents with him. As for Edward, he was standing beside his father—not currently embroiled in any battle. It wasn't because he wasn't prepared or was running away, though, instead, Ryven and Osian were working together to contain ten men and women themselves.

Which left Edgar. The young prince was having a field day. It seemed he'd gotten used to his previous tactics during the war, and he was flashing between multiple enemies, peppering them each with bits of lightning, one at a time.

However, the other side wasn't kidding when they said that their people were exceptional. The remaining elves and humans on Cydaria's and Indria's sides were all fighting one on one, and being pushed back from the opposing forces. And that still left a handful of fighters on the opposing side that were free to fight whomever they wished. If they did it right, they would easily be able to take care of Cydaria and Indria, one by one.

Beside Derek, it seemed like Tara had come to the same conclusion, so she quickly raised her hands in the air and began casting her buffs on everyone who looked like they needed it. With her buffs cast, she looked over at Derek. "I'm going back to the dragonkin so you don't have to protect me. I'm useless in a battle like this once I've done my job."

"Go to Lyra," Derek said. "She's smart. Just tell her what you're doing."

"Okay," Tara said, and began her run to the dragonkin.

After watching the support mage to make sure she arrived at Lyra's side safely, Derek turned back to the battle. It seemed the remainder of the army was preparing to make their move. *If Queen Cassandra was Alanah's cue, I guess that's mine.*

'Silvi, you remember back by Torith when fought an army, and I told you not to kill those that didn't attack?' he sent.

'Yes?' she replied.

'Try to hold back a little more this time.' With that, Derek took a step forward and disappeared.