

Attack

Naha walked down the corridors of the Fah Storrah tower. The pagoda at the top of their peak, the home to the Fah Storrah family. She wore their sect robes, orange and black in color, and she was in a female drake form. Over the last two weeks, she had been introduced to the regular guards and given a ranking of Commander. She didn't have any real authority, of course, it was all for show. Her job was to patrol the tower, moving around the different floors randomly while on the lookout for any signs of attack.

It was a boring job, but they had signed the contract. And in her mind it was worth it. Zach was still prone to spacing out, but at least she hadn't seen his state worsening. Being away from him for extended periods of time worried her, but there wasn't much that they could do. He was down in the city, on the walls, ready to respond anywhere in the city in case of an attack. At least she had convinced him to use one of the charges on his **Ring of True Recall** up in their guest house. If he needed to return to the tower, he could do it in an instant.

She glanced at her hand, and the bracer that she wore—given to her by the sect. It had seven communication formations on it, each housed in a crystal, and each paired with another crystal. Each of them had one that any of theirs could connect to, and then six others that connected to six of theirs. She didn't know why it had to be done that way, she didn't understand formations.

She pressed a finger on one of them, and spoke inside her head.

“Zach?” She called.

He didn't respond immediately, so she sent her voice again. His answer came after the third call.

“Yes, Naha?”

“How is everything? In the city I mean?”

“Calm... Slow...”

“Are you... ready?”

“Hmm? Ah, yes, of course.”

“You didn’t answer my call immediately,” Naha told him. *“You know that you need to pay more attention.”*

“There was no danger, it is... different.”

She sighed. It was as if he could sense when some outside influence was dangerous and when it was not. She had seen him react to danger nearly instantly, but anything else... it took him a while to stir.

There wasn’t anything that she could do, but hope that it would get better, that it was part of his madness and not just who he was now.

“Just be careful, an attack can come at any time.”

“Time flows as it wills.”

Naha pulled her finger away from the crystal. His responses had gotten more and more... weird of late. Especially when concerning time, but if his obsession with time was enough to keep his madness at bay, she would tolerate it, even accept it.

The floor beneath her feet trembled, and she frowned. One of her crystals flashed a moment later and she answered the incoming call.

“The city is under attack,” Ikris said. *“Make your way to the sanctum.”*

She didn’t answer, knowing that he would have to let everybody else know too. She started running down the corridors, heading to the outer rings of the tower. She reached an open section which allowed her to see in the city and she paused.

Three massive airships, or more like flying palaces, floated above the city itself. Bombs fell from the gaps in their hulls and lines of fire were falling to the city. They couldn’t have gotten so close without being seen, so she assumed that they had either teleported close or gotten here by some high tiered stealth capabilities. How didn’t matter, what did was that they were here.

Their attacks were lighting up the sky beneath the three peaks, directly over the city as their bombs and fire impacted the shield beneath them. No attack had yet breached it and fell on the city, but the shield was blazing with light, turning night into day, painting everything in the dancing shadows. The city’s defenses started firing back, hitting the flying palaces’ shields.

“Zach, where are you?” She touched his crystal.

“On the walls,” his answer came quicker now.

“I’m on—” she paused as her shadow sense caught something in the tower. The movement of the guards, the rush down the hallways, it was what she expected. People passing through shadows. A part of the tower just went dark, even to her senses. And then... movement, leaving the empty spot in her mind. It didn’t take her long at all to realize. The attack on the city was a feint, a distraction. The enemy had teleported directly into the tower, they knew where their target was. Or... at least that it was in the tower. She felt three teams leave, heading in different directions, each having four people. One team quickly dispersed as they encountered guards. In the two seconds since her **|Shadow Sense|** detected the intrusion they had arrived and blasted through the tower. They were quick, powerful, she felt guards dying.

“It is a distraction Zach, the real attack is in the tower,” she sent, then repeated the same thing to Ikris.

She started running. One of their groups had split for some reason, each person running through the tower on their own. She melded into the shadows with **|Perfect Shadowmeld: My Presence, As Shadow|** and headed straight for the closest of the intruders.

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Varney was part of the main attack team, and tasked with causing as much damage as possible in the tower while the rest struck at the Sect Head. He didn’t know everything about the attack, but he didn’t need to in order to execute his part. They couldn’t let the Dragon Heart Sect get a second Eternal Cultivator. They were already one of the strongest factions in the world, another Eternal Realm Cultivator would just increase their power. And someone like Retor Fah Storrah, who was already a monster, a High Ranker... no, the Collective couldn’t allow it. Already the Dragon Heart Sect had pushed the other factions around them too far. They had all but cornered the market on alchemy with their Eternal Sect Leader, and the wars had barely touched them while the rest of them had survived, but with scars aplenty. They couldn’t let a threat rise, not with the world tearing itself apart. The sects were planning something, they had obviously orchestrated their

wars just to make everybody else think that they had weakened themselves too. But they knew the truth, they were waiting to strike.

He found a squad of sect warriors heading his way. Their weapons raised. He grinned as he triggered his perks, then his ability. He flashed through the hallway, the air sizzling as it electrified. He reached the end in a flash, and then thunder followed cracking the walls and vaporizing the guards.

He was level 470 **Lightning Lord**, there wasn't much that could touch him. He was perfect for hit and run tactics that their plan needed. Sow confusion and distract from what the others were doing, that was him. No one and nothing could touch hi—

Pain pierced his back a split second before he felt pain in his neck. He lost feeling in his body, the ceiling was moving, his head falling back.

What? I can't feel anything, a power? An attacked.

The last thing he saw as his head fell back to the floor was a shadow standing over him.

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Tarkash fired a wave of stone spikes at the group of guards running toward him. They shrouded themselves in shields of fire, the main path of their sect branch, but they were all just Heavenly Realm. Their shields couldn't protect them against his attacks, not when he boosted them with his perks. The four guards died and he glanced behind to check on the others.

They were deep inside the Fah Storrah peak, beneath the tower, in a large cavern like room with streams of lava falling into pools at the side of the cavern. At the end was a large door, leading to an area where the Dragon Heart Sect Head was currently in seclusion. Or at least that is what they were assuming. The fact that the main team was currently battling Merin Fah Kutah, as well as Ikris and Hiandrin Fah Durrah, meant that they were probably right. Their battle was shaking the cavern, and his side was winning, he could tell. The only question was how long it would take them to get through. Barely a few minutes had passed since their arrival, and they didn't

have time. They were few, and inside the heart of the sect. The Cultivators were powerful, these ones more than most.

Tarkash wanted to help the rest of his team, but his job was to make sure that they don't get flanked. To keep the sect warriors from overwhelming them, buy time. His sense suddenly flared, and he turned around, his staff raised high and ready to fire his abilities. An intruder had just appeared, walking into the cavern.

He nearly fired when he saw a demasi man walk into the cavern.

"Varney?" Tarkash asked. "What are you doing here, you were supposed to distract above—"

"I cleared the lower floors," he said as he kept walking toward him hurriedly. "I figured that I should help here."

That wasn't part of the plan and Tarkash realized that something was wrong, only he was too late.

Lightning flashed, Varney's movement ability, and then he was in front of him. Before Tarkash could react a black dagger the size of his forearm cut across his throat. He felt weaker as he stumbled back, his staff coming down he fired.

A spike rose from the ground where Varney stood, but the man just stepped back, his body turning dim as if it was just a shadow of itself. Then he dropped into his own shadow. Tarkash reached up with a potion to heal himself, triggering his defensive perks. His skin turned to stone, the ground around him rippled and shook, as he triggered an earthquake. Before he could drink the potion, Varney appeared in front of him attacking with two daggers.

He sent spikes at him with his staff and then stumbled forward as a pair of hands grabbed his left hand and pulled. His eyes widened as he saw another Varney next to him, pulling him off balance even as the first one was impaled by his spikes. Then a flurry of strikes hit the back of his neck, cracking stone. There was no time to use any of the perks that might've saved his life, two daggers pierced his stone skin and sunk deep into his neck. With a twist, his head was separated from his body.

As his head flew through the air, tumbling around, he saw a third Varney standing behind his decapitated body, rising from his shadow.

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Lireeya was getting frustrated. Three minutes after they arrived, and they were yet to accomplish their mission. They were supposed to be in and out in less than two. The first issue was that they had been dropped on the wrong floor, of course, they had allowed for such miscalculations. Using spatial ability to breach into a protected area was hard, they had known that even with all of their planning they might not reach the targeted location.

Still, the second phase had gone smoothly. They separated and her team found their target, the sanctum. They had assumed that it would be protected, and they had known the most likely people that they might encounter. They prepared for that, but even still. The two metal scaled drakes were annoying, they were tough, but they were slow. Lireeya and her team might not be able to kill them quickly, but they could slow them down and just ignore them.

The main issue was that there wasn't much room to maneuver, the three were protecting the entrance to their Sect Head's sanctum. And Merin Fah Kutah was the biggest threat. The man was nearly unkillable, and they just didn't have the time to continue this fight. They had planned for them, but the reality was different. They might be able to win and get by them, but... Soon, others would arrive and then they would be overwhelmed.

Their mission was to get as close to the Sect Head as possible, secure his death. Getting into the sanctum was preferable, but not necessary. They had no time.

The ground shook and Lireeya blinked away from a swipe of Ikris' axe that nearly cut her in half. She turned and looked for the source of the earthquake that nearly killed her and saw Tarkash's death. Killed by... Varney, three Varney's. That wasn't right, the demasi man was supposed to be above them in the tower, and... He couldn't be in more than one place at once.

She might not know what was happening, but it didn't matter. They had no more time. She disengaged from the fight, leaving the rest of her team to keep the three defenders occupied. As two of the Varney's turned to her and stepped in her direction, Lireeya pulled out an object out of her storage.

The large metal chest hit the ground with a loud noise that grabbed everyone's attention. Her team saw and knew what she planned. They used their greatest powers and sent the three defenders back, getting space for themselves. She saw them pull out spatial arrays and she did the same.

She glanced at Varney or the person wearing his skin and showed him her teeth in a wicked grin. Then she placed her hand on top of the metal chest and triggered the array. A moment later the array twisted space and sent her away, as far away as possible. She did not want to be anywhere near the Dragon Heart Sect.

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Naha saw the ravzor woman touch the chest and then disappear along with the rest of her people. She didn't know why they would retreat now, but she could guess. The chest lit up, lines spreading all over it. In a corner of her eye she noticed Ikris running toward it, his eyes wide and filled with fear. His wings beat sending him forward, Naha could step through a shadow, get close to it faster than he could, but there was nothing that she could do either.

She felt the power building.

She thought about Zach, about what he was going to do without her, her hand reached for the crystal on her wrist, her mind reached for her True Link perk, she had an awareness of him, but they couldn't talk through it. She didn't have the time to use the crystal.

The Reaction Engine triggered, and the world ceased to exist.