

Arrival

“We have an airship?” Ryun asked as Lesamitrius led them to the subject of his question.

“Of course we have one,” Anatalien snorted in his direction. “I made Anrosh buy one, we can’t be a proper sect without also appearing as one.”

“Why did you then make me walk all the way to the Midnight Reign Sect?” Ryun asked.

“What? You wanted to train, and besides, fuel is expensive. Before you arrived, we barely had enough to purchase food. I wasn’t about to waste Sect funds on fuel.”

“But... I... whatever,” Ryun seemingly gave up.

Erdania just blinked at the exchange. She was standing next to a figure from the old stories, Anatalien Far Solla, someone who had been there for all the major events of history. Who was one of the people that created the Sects. She was an icon.

“It isn’t that impressive,” Anatalien said. “It is an older model.”

“Master Far Solla is correct,” Lesamitrius interjected. “It was purchased through my father’s contacts in the Oken Eye Sect. It is a solid vessel, but it isn’t anything special compared to what the Sect Heads in the core have.”

Erdania glanced at the wooden ship and agreed with the assessment. It looked like a terrace, with a house on it. Or perhaps a house and a small courtyard. Regardless, it was made out of dark brown wood, and it had yellow clouds stuck at the bottom. The house was square and small, probably having only a few rooms, and the courtyard was maybe ten meters across.

She had seen much larger airships or flying fortresses. Still, it was a good thing that they had it. Erdania wasn’t the best at traversing long distances.

They boarded it, and Lesamitrius went inside to start their trip, with Anatalien following behind him, leaving Ryun and Erdania alone in the courtyard as the airship slowly started to rise.

“So, how does it feel?” Ryun asked as she leaned over the railing.

She glanced at him and tilted her head. “It is strange, it almost feels like it doesn’t want to change states. As if it wants to stay in the solid state.”

She had taken the Worldstone Aspect after a long discussion with both Ryun and Selia. Her Path was that of Gravity, making her heavier and hobbling her foes as she brought her greater mass to bear, or used gravity to enhance her attacks. The Worldstone Aspect... it spoke to her. Ever since Ryun described the monster she felt something like a... a nagging inside her head. She had to take it. It was a part of her that she had kept quiet for a lot of her time in Zenshuen. Letting herself be guided by the Sect and more experienced Cultivators had become the norm. But now, she was free. They all were.

Zenshuen builds were good, they were great. But the more she spoke with Ryun the more she felt... like a Path was a thing that one should walk on their own. She understood why Zenshuen’s builds were good, why they were the proven thing and why she probably should’ve gone with it. And yet... seeing him just reach and take more and more power, awakened something in her too. She wanted that, she had always wanted that.

“It was extremely powerful in the solid state as the skin of the monster,” Ryun said, bringing her out of her mind. “But perhaps... maybe it has some pieces of a concept in it too? It does feel somehow... grand.”

Erdania understood what he meant. He had told her that the Essence had some kind of anti... everything, aura around it. A weight to it. She could feel it inside her core, in the Qi of Worldstone. She just hadn’t figured out how to manifest it quite right. It did feel somewhat like Sanguine Silver, as if it was sensitive to willpower.

“I’ll figure it out, we have time,” Erdania said with a smile as their airship rose to the clouds and started moving away from their sect. She didn’t know exactly why they were going, neither Ryun nor Anatalien would say. But an invitation to Dragon Heart Sect was no small thing. She didn’t care for politics, but she was very interested in why they invited Ryun. Anatalien she could understand, though she wasn’t sure how they would know that she was still alive. Ryun... perhaps they just wanted to see

someone who had been part of the team that defeated Hastur, but then... why weren't Selia and she invited?

She would learn what it was soon enough. She could wait.

"How does your Qi feel?" Erdania asked.

"It is... I don't even know how to explain it. An emptiness? Can you imagine feeling like you were nothing? That there was no substance to you? The Oblivion Qi is somehow like that, and yet... It can reach out and touch anything. I am still only scratching the surface of what I can do."

"And how are *you* feeling?"

"What do you mean?" Ryun asked.

"You said that your body changed too, but I don't see many changes, at least outwardly."

"Ah... yes, I am a being made out of Oblivion. What you see is... kinda of a shell I guess, crafted by my soul's intent. I guess that it acts how anyone's body would act because my intent wants it to. I feel pain, I feel touch, I can hear and see and smell. All these things should be irrelevant, but they are not. Soul Essence interacts with the Essence of my body and my surroundings to bring into being this... gestalt form. Essence interacts with Essence."

"So, *everything* still works as it used to, huh?" Erdania raised her eyebrow.

"Well, yes," Ryun frowned. "Oh."

"Yes, we should probably make sure though, right?" Erdania smiled. It had been a while, she grabbed him and pulled him toward the house. "Let's make sure."

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They arrived at the Dragon Heart Sect's great city at dawn, a few weeks after they set out. They saw the Dragon's Peak through the morning sun, through the mist that was slowly fading as they rose higher and higher. The first thing that they saw was the hole in the wall.

"They were attacked," Anatalien said.

Were, she said. Erdania looked closely, and saw no signs of conflict, people were working on the wall, repairing it. Then, as their ship rose she started to see a lot more ships around them, coming out of the mist all around the peak. The winding road leading up the mountainside was filled too. And then, they rose above the walls and she saw...

“Heavens,” Lesamitrius voiced her thoughts.

There were so many airships above the city. An armada of airships presenting Dragon Heart’s colors watched over each of the three peaks, but it wasn’t what really caught her attention. It was the towers in the city, the docking berths that were filled to the brim with ships, each bearing a different banner.

“Lesamitrius,” Anatalien said, and the ravzor moved instantly. He entered the house, then climbed up to the roof and hung the banner of the Twilight Melody Sect.

Erdania saw it all and realized that this was more than she assumed it was. This was... a gathering of Sects, of Sect Heads. Instantly she realized why both Ryun and Anatalien were so closed mouthed. They... they were part of the Council of Sects.

Erdania wasn’t, she wasn’t even supposed to know about it, but... the League had acquired the information. They had always wanted to get someone on the Council. How had they...

But this was far more than just the Sect Heads that were part of the Council. It was... they had called everyone. Of course, only a small group was actually a part of the Council, but this way... they could hide their gathering among all these Sect Heads that weren’t aware.

“We should make way for the third tower,” Anatalien said as Lesamitrius came back. “I see some empty room there.”

“Of course, Master Far Solla,” he said and adjusted their course.

“So many Sects,” Erdania said.

“Yes,” Anatalien added. “I wonder what Dragon Heart is planning. This is... it will make the rest of the core nervous, no matter what the actual reason is.”

Erdania nodded, she agreed with her thoughts. The wars between the Sects and the other core factions had been over for a long time, but

there was always a... mistrust between both sides. They had to know about this gathering by now, she knew that they had spies in all the great sects, the League had them too. And especially now, after all this chaos in the Settled Territories.

Just knowing that the Sects gathered like this was going to be troublesome.

“Can they do anything though?” Ryun asked. “The rest of the core had been in more wars than the sects had, they lost more than this side did. At least that is what you told me.”

“That is exactly why this might set off something. They are weaker, they might see this as the Sects trying to take advantage of that weakness,” Anatalien answered.

“Regardless,” Ryun shrugged. “We have been invited, just as all of these other sects had. There isn’t anything that we can do about this now.”

“You’re right,” Anatalien sighed. “I guess that we’ll find out what this is all about soon enough.”

They remained silent as their airship docked, and then they readied themselves to disembark.