

Chapter 783 Talks

Ilea decided to move her mantle out of her face at least. She already had enough people thinking she was some kind of ashen god being. Rocking up in an isolated Taleen city with a Fae on her shoulder and ashen wings on her back probably wasn't the first impression she wanted to put forth.

Then again, I should probably not try to come off as some random adventurer either. But isn't that what I am?

She assumed the wanderer title would be received in a somewhat neutral manner at least. Ilea decided not to activate Monstrous. Three marks would mean she was at least worth talking to, no matter how casual she behaved. She stopped in the middle of the small square and watched how the dwarves would react.

A group of them walked forward and down a broad flight of stairs, the leading three a history of generations. First a young dwarf with short black hair and a clean shaven face. She had a neutral expression on her face, green eyes taking her in. She was the tallest of them at around one meter forty, her shoulders broad with defined muscles visible on her bare arms. She wore a dark metal chest piece that had a slight blue sheen to it, dozens of runes etched into it in barely recognizable enchantments.

The middle one was slightly smaller but quite a bit broader, the dwarf wearing silver plate armor with a large hammer strapped to his back. His brown hair was long and braided, the braids in his even longer beard quite a bit more intricate however. He glanced at Ilea before looking up, a slight frown on his face.

The last one of the three had a gray beard braided into something that may or may not be alive itself. Ilea assumed he would get a title for that if he ever unlocked those. The hair on his head was full, gray in color too, thick eyebrows adding to the already shrouded and wrinkled face below, two black eyes taking her in.

[Machine Engineer – lvl 215]

[Paladin – lvl 228]

[Machine Engineer – lvl 262]

I suppose I might've gone overboard with the three marks, Ilea thought as she watched the others approach, an assortment of somewhat strange classes. Smiths, hammer masters, cooks, various mages, and enchanters.

“In the name of the Guild of the Makers, I greet you, Wanderer,” the gray haired dwarf spoke.

“We would prefer no Violence too,” the youngest one said, glancing at the Fae with slight interest.

The middle one wanted to say something when a sharp gesture from the gray haired one interrupted him. Another frown, but he did not speak.

“I'm Lilith. And I suppose you are the leaders of the Taleen?” she asked.

“What is your purpose here?” the middle one now said, to the obvious displeasure of the gray haired one. His voice didn’t sound hostile but similar to how a guard might address an unknown intruder to their town.

I guess they would be a little on edge, hmm. “My purpose. To meet the Taleen, I suppose. I don’t know if you noticed, but you weren’t really around up there for a few thousand years.”

The youngest looking one smiled.

“I am Ormont, Guild of the Makers, of the Taleen. May we ask what is happening to Io and its protectors?” the oldest one spoke.

Ilea could tell he was considering his words carefully, if only by his heartbeat, the tension in his muscles, and the intense look in his eyes. “I suppose. Are you familiar with the One without Form?” She sensed the reaction. Not on the old dwarf’s face but through everything else. He knew the name. As did the others. *Very different reactions. Interesting.*

The Fae giggled.

“We are familiar with the Guardian of the Taleen, yes,” Ormont spoke. Again his words were slow and deliberate.

“Guardian? Well... I suppose, kind of. You weren’t allowed to leave... as far as I understand?” Ilea said. Again, she noted the differing reactions. *Oh this will be quite a bit more chaotic than Aki assumed.* She smiled.

The young one now outright grinned, raising her brows as she glanced away from the Paladin.

“We remain here, protected by the One without Form, until the holy purpose is fulfilled,” the middle one said.

“Holy purpose being the slaughter of young Elves and everyone else that might go against the core directives?” Ilea asked. She heard him grind his teeth, but he was smart enough not to say or do anything else. If only because of her obvious power.

“Then, have the core directives been fulfilled or changed?” Ormont asked. His voice was almost shaking, though barely recognizably.

“The One without Form has been relieved of its position as the Guardian of Iz. You are free to do what you like, but there are plenty of options me or various allies could provide. If you’re willing to have a conversation,” Ilea said.

“Relieved... this is... nonsense. The Guardian will remain, until the holy purpose is fulfilled,” the Paladin spoke, his eyes glancing between Ilea and some of the other dwarves. There were a few in the back with similarly confused reactions. Some seemed relieved.

“Do you have proof of those words?” Ormont asked.

Ilea summoned a few of the keys and made them float in a circle before she put them back into her domain. “Is that proof enough? Or do you need to see all twelve of them?” She didn’t want to get Aki involved just yet.

“The keys...” the old dwarf murmured. “What... Wanderer, do you... and the new Guardian plan to do with Io and our people?”

Ilea felt genuine concern in his demeanor. The emotion was barely hidden now, the dwarf wrestling with various at the moment. "I'll be honest, I learned about half an hour ago that the Taleen were still around. Io is your city of course. And otherwise I'm not sure. You can probably do whatever you want... of course I wouldn't suggest going on an instant invasion or something."

"That... you didn't even know," Ormont said. "We do not plan an invasion or any hostile actions towards you, the new Guardian, or any faction associated with either. I call for a vote of the Guilds. Raise your hand if in favor."

Most of the present dwarves raised their hands.

"Forty three in favor," one of them said aloud.

Ilea noted that there weren't that many people present. She assumed some of them had different amounts of votes, though she didn't know the total.

"The motion is passed," Ormont spoke.

"This is unacceptable," the Paladin spoke. "We cannot make such a decision with so little information. She is a human, talking about replacing the Guardian of our kind!"

"Watch your words, Joori," Ormont hissed, anger and frustration quite obvious. A plead too perhaps.

"I'm happy to provide more information. Maybe in a more comfortable setting? I can see some of you are cooks," Ilea said, nodding to a few people standing on the far back.

They seemed a little confused, one of them bowing lightly.

"The Guild of Cooks is honored to provide a feast for the Wanderer," one of them spoke, a gray haired dwarf wearing an enchanted black apron. He smiled.

Ilea raised her brows, seeing the reaction from some of the others. *Not used to having the cook speak up in this kind of setting? Well I suppose they didn't have this kind of setting in a long while. Not that most of them look a day over three centuries.*

"I'm always up for a feast. And I did smell some very interesting spices whilst flying down here. How's your brewing?" Ilea asked.

"The finest in all of Elos," the same dwarf said with perfect confidence.

Ilea grinned. "Sure. I'll be happy to try. Feel free to add some poison if you want to spice things up."

"I... am not too familiar with that kind of cooking, I'm afraid. But maybe we can try. An interesting challenge," the dwarf murmured and tapped the dwarf standing next to him, starting to whisper something.

"There will be no poison in any food," Ormont spoke, slight confusion in his words as he looked at Ilea. "Except of course, you specifically... request it."

"It's fine. I'm happy with any food," Ilea said.

Weird, the Fae sent.

"What do you mean weird? You don't even eat or understand the concept of food."

Understand

Weird

“*Shut it or there will be some violence after all,*” Ilea sent, schooling her face when she noticed some of the dwarves staring at her with uncertainty.

Try

Ilea ignored the provocations. For now. She turned to the Fae and squinted her eyes.

“Then we shall welcome you in our Guild Hall. As the first guest in a long time,” Ormont spoke. He gestured towards the entrance, the gathered dwarves splitting to either side of the stairwell to let them through.

“You were certainly busy,” she said as she followed them, noting the Paladin and a few others choosing to walk beside or behind her. She smiled at that. Ilea knew she could wipe them all out in mere seconds. And she knew they knew. Certainly a way to push negotiations forward.

“To... has changed, from the time of its inception. Yes,” Ormont said.

“It looks like a Centurion manufacturing plant I’ve seen before. Is that a common design?” she asked.

He glanced at her, Ilea noting the various reactions at her mentions. “A good eye. Though it was not a common design, no. Perhaps the One without Form chose to make it one.”

“Maybe. You’ve been around since before all this happened then?” Ilea asked.

The old dwarf nodded ever so slightly, though he averted his eyes as he walked up the stairs.

“*I’m sorry,*” she sent to his mind, seeing him tense up slightly though he didn’t speak up. “*I’m not sorry for some of the things your people have done. And the things your decisions have led to. But I’m sorry for what happened here.*”

“*Our failures are our own to bear,*” the dwarf sent back as they opened the door.

The inside of the building was far more spacious than Ilea had initially thought, her dominion unable to pierce through the walls, pretty much every room heavily enchanted. Lamps of warm yellow light shined on from various strange designs. Enchanted blown glass, some of them resembling animals and monsters. The walls and floor were stone, though there were a few paintings displayed. Dwarfs standing with their Guardians and scenes of war.

Ilea stopped next to a large painting, ignoring the tense murmurs between the dwarves that walked ahead and behind.

The young dwarf that had stood at the front with Ormont and Joori walked over to her. “An alliance, struck between our kind and humans like yourself,” she said with a smile.

Ilea recognized the landscape, recognized the monsters. She saw the Praetorians, in the midst of battle. She saw the blue robes and smiled, a part of the painting depicting someone in close quarters combat. Using their fists. It was quite a piece of art, several meters in length.

“The Azarinth,” she said, noting the reaction in the people that heard her.

The dwarf looked at her. “Yes. Are you familiar with them?”

“A very safe question,” Ilea murmured. “They’re not exactly around anymore. The war in Kohr apparently weakened them enough for other factions to wipe them out. I hear they weren’t exactly liked,” she said with an exaggerated smile.

“I... yes. Indeed, though their power was well known,” the dwarf said. “I’m Hatta, of the Makers. It would have been rude to interrupt with a personal introduction.”

“That is fine,” Ilea said, noting that the entire committee of dwarves had stopped, now waiting. She gave the painting a last glance and moved on, establishing a telepathic connection with the dwarf. “Hatta. I do wonder where the Elves are in that depiction. I believe you were not the only ones to have fought the Ascended. Or am I remembering wrong.”

The dwarf gulped. “I... have heard of telepathy. Lilith, those words. Do not speak them lightly. There are those who would not like these truths to be known. I am... impressed, that you know of Kohr at all, though I do not know what has happened outside of Io since that time has passed.”

“You were there too then?” Ilea asked. She saw the hint of a smile.

“And here I thought I looked my age. No. But there were those who remembered. Some still do, and others choose to believe the lies of our Jailer,” Hatta spoke. Her heartbeat picked up as she spoke. She glanced towards a few of the other dwarves. “Is it true then? Are we free?”

“As far as I know. But it’s all very recent. I came here as soon as the new Guardian informed us about your existence,” Ilea sent.

“Why were you chosen?” Hatta asked. “You do not strike me as a conqueror, or a diplomat. Though you are powerful... beyond anything I have seen. Perhaps you could even face an Executioner.”

Ilea grinned. “Maybe because I’m the kind of person who has telepathic conversations about a painting, instead of whatever a diplomat would do in this scenario.”

Hatta chuckled to herself. “I’m very interested who those allies of yours are. And why they would take such incomprehensible risks.”

Ilea left it at that, following through the corridor and into a rather large circular hall. The ceiling was a painted dome, dozens of enchantments providing lighting to the hall that reminded her of a comfortable summer day. *And here I thought they’d prefer the green lamps they used everywhere else. Or did they choose the different colors as some way to rebel?*

Everyone took their seats around the circular space, four stairwells leading down to the round space at the center. It looked a little like the Forged Dome, just a lot smaller. Ilea supposed the battlefield in this case was meant to be one for words and not war machines.

Suppose I could be wrong, she thought with a smile, following Ormont.

He gestured for her to join the three Makers at the bottom.

“Don’t think they really got what I meant with *more comfortable*,” she sent to the Fae, the little creature climbing down from her shoulder and jumping into the hand she held out for it.

“Serious”

“Powerful”

“Civilizations”

Ilea could feel the quotation marks, the Fae's mockery translated into her mind without trouble. "True. They don't understand the beauty of popping someone's eyes. Or being melted."

Violence, the Fae sent and nodded in a sagely manner.

I guess we can talk here for a while until we move on to food. Maybe I should've gotten some take away on the way down. Hmm. Do they still use gold as currency? Oh shit, I basically jump started all of Claire's investments with their money. Oh well. Not like they were doing anything with it.

"Lilith. First and foremost, I think everyone here would like to learn who exactly you represent," Ormont spoke.

"Right. Well, most of them you wouldn't know. Because they didn't exist in your time. You know of Ravenhall and the Shadow's Hand?" she asked.

"Ravenhall, yes. The Shadows... of Eregar?" he said.

"Yes. I don't know what they were thousands of years ago but now they're just a mercenary organization, dealing with monsters and the like. I formed a Healing organization recently too, based in Ravenhall. The Medic Sentinel Corps. Ravenhall, the Sentinels, and the Shadow's Hand are part of a larger alliance between a variety of independent cities and peoples. Humans, dwarves, and Dark Ones. What we call the Meadow Accords. I suppose the new Guardian of Iz, is part of those Accords too now," she explained.

"Can you speak for them?" Ormont asked.

The Paladin squinted.

"No. But I have a vote. And I'll be the first one to tell them what I learned in Io," she said.

"Any further questions on representation?" Ormont asked into the hall.

Joori cleared his throat. "Are there any elves in these... Accords?"

Ilea glanced at him and smiled. "Not yet. Diplomacy with elves isn't exactly easy. And they don't think too highly of humanity."

He frowned but gave her a nod.

"You would consider relations with elves however?" another dwarf asked.

"This is not a question in relation to representation," Ormont interrupted. "Now. Would it be possible for you to recount the events that lead to your... relieving of the One without Form?"

Now this one might be tricky. Oh well. If I withhold too much here, they'll freak out later. Might as well go and see what happens.

"Sure. I'll have to expand a bit on that though, if you haven't learned much about the outside world?" she said.

"We have received reports from the One without Form," Ormont said, giving her a meaningful look.

"Right. So I suppose it's my word against its," she said and shrugged. "The first time I met an elf... they attacked Riverwatch, a western independent city of mostly humans. I just barely escaped a massacre, and learned then that they don't enter any dungeons for whatever reason. Now... the One without form had the directive to wipe out all of elven kind."

"That is not what the Holy purpose was. It was to end the war," the Paladin spoke.

“Well that is what the One without Form told me. I don’t really care,” Ilea said. “What it did essentially is use a shit ton of resources to build machines and hunt elves. Because you didn’t populate your cities anymore, many turned into dungeons. Now as elves can’t enter dungeons, that proved a bit of a problem for those of them that wanted to fight, seeing many of their young die to the machines you left behind. Long story short, I met one of those elves. Not yet fully convinced, but later deciding to join the Cerithil Hunters. A group of exiles, declared as cursed and hunted by their own kind. All in an effort to end the ancient war the One without Form kept on fighting,” she explained, gauging their reactions.

Some annoyance, a few seem angry, but it seems like most of them don’t really care too much about elves. I suppose it’s hard to stay angry for so many centuries. Or the One without Form was just shit at propaganda. Not that that would be a massive surprise.