

Offer

The world was full of something that Ryun couldn't quite identify. His eyes saw nothing, and he didn't dare expand his sense, not right now with their company. He couldn't risk being incapacitated. It didn't take him long to recognize that what he was feeling was coming from his Soul. It wasn't a surprise, he had noticed that his soul's sense had become a lot more sensitive since coming to the Ethereal.

If he had to give voice to the feeling, it would be simply anticipation. It was as if the Ethereal Realm itself was curling around them. He had felt something similar in the camp, though there it spread through all of the valley, and was strongest at the center where the Grand Spirit of War dwelled. That sensation was different in the way that it felt more violent.

This was different in its nature, if not its source. The two Grand Spirits stood before them, Transition and Mysteries. The Grand Spirit of Transition was a tall crane-like being, its head was crowned with wide feathers spreading behind it, and its beak was long and narrow. A bird spirit whose body was covered in what looked like multiple layers of feathers, though Ryun noticed that the feathers were made of an Essence type he had never seen before. It seemed to have elements of the Ethereal, Death, and Life Essences. Or at least that was the impression that Ryun got.

The Grand Spirit of Mysteries was, as the name suggested, a mystery. The Grand Spirit was shrouded in a cloak made out of a Light Essence that Ryun had never seen before. He knew that the light it was woven from was faint, since there wasn't much of it spreading beyond the Grand Spirit. But, the cloak of light covered it completely, shrouding what was beneath. Its hood was the only place open, and in it he saw an Essence of

such pure Darkness that it called out to him. It was not a Void or Oblivion, but it was kin. The Essences of the Ethereal Realm slipped around its form as if the spirit weren't there at all.

Ryun felt a tugging from that Darkness that resonated with the core of who he was, as if there was something within it that beckoned to him. He stepped forward unknowingly as if to reach out his hand towards the cloak of light. Nayra's hand on his stopped him, and snapped him out of it.

He shook his head and pretended that nothing happened.

"What kind of aid do you need, and why would we help you?" Ryun asked, pulling himself back from whatever it was that called to him.

"We do not know much of the chosen and your ways, most of us at least. So, before any requests can be made, we must know if you've pledged yourself to War's cause?" The Grand Spirit of Transition asked.

Ryun tilted his head at the question. Causes and pledges, he remembered the same from his conversation with the smith. It seemed like that was a big part of the spirit culture.

"We've made no pledges to any cause. We are here seeking aid, War has not yet agreed or offered anything."

Transition glanced at Mysteries, something passing before them, then nodded its avian head before turning to look back at Ryun. "Before we speak, we must have assurances, of privacy and confidence."

"And if we do not give them?" Ryun asked.

"We would prefer that you do," Transition said.

Ryun could hear the unspoken threat, not that he really cared. Actions were what he valued most. He opened his mouth when Nayra interrupted him.

"You didn't know who you would be meeting," she said slowly, and Ryun glanced in her direction. She was looking at the two spirits with narrowed eyes. "You just sought to intercept anyone new coming to the war camp."

Then, she turned back to look at Ryun. "They didn't expect someone like us."

Ryun turned his eyes back to the spirit, but spoke to Nayra. "What do you mean?"

"They didn't expect to need to ask for confidence, they expected someone weaker, that they could just kill if they didn't feel like they could get what they want."

Ryun blinked, then tilted his head. He was not nearly as insightful as most people were, but he trusted Nayra's instincts. "Is this true?" He asked.

The Grand Spirits looked at each other, tense even to his eyes now.

"Our concern is of great importance, for the future of both the Ethereal and the Real Realm. What we discuss cannot get back to War," Transition said.

Ryun shrugged. He didn't particularly care one way or the other. The time when he might've been worried about conflicts was long gone. There were few threats that he considered worthy of being cautious against. And with Nayra next to him, there were very few that could match them

in combat. Still, he was interested to hear what they had to say, keeping their confidence was not a big issue for him.

"Very well, you have my word that I we will not speak of this meeting to anyone affiliated with the Grand Spirit of War."

The two spirits exchanged looks again, then Mysteries spoke. "I know the truth of your words, I see it wrapped around the pillar of who you are, this will suffice," the spirit said.

Ryun raised an eyebrow, that sounded very much like he could see the part of himself that Ryun had locked into his skill: My Word is my Bond. He was very interested to know how that worked, but for now it was a benefit.

He gestured with his hand for the spirits to continue, and Transition spoke.

"We have left eyes and ears in the camp, looking for newcomers. Many come to the camp, spirits, shades, and chosen. Not all stay and pledge to the cause, and so we have been trying to get someone close, someone who can act on our behalf. You are correct, we did not expect people like... you. We can tell that you are strong, which complicates things."

"How so?" Ryun asked.

"You said that your goal is to hunt the yeti, that aligns with us and with War. It would seem to you that War is a natural ally, we think otherwise."

Ryun tilted his head and Transition's small beady eyes bore into him.

"War is preparing this army for summoning to the Real Realm, he has made a deal with a chosen in your realm. An army and a war, in return for free passage to hunt the yeti."

That was... concerning. The Core was not yet fully recovered from the wars that had nearly consumed them, and if someone was planning on starting another one, especially if they planned on bringing the army the size of this one into it, that could be an issue.

"Spirits can't enter the Real Realm freely," Nayra commented.

Transition nodded its head. "Ordinarily, you are correct, the chosen that War is in contact with has great summoners at the peak of their power. We do not know the details, we parted ways with War before matters were settled, we know only that they are preparing a ritual to summon the entirety of War's army."

"You still haven't told us what exactly your issue with War is," Ryun interjected. "Even if what you say is true, the yeti is a greater threat than whatever conflict the other party wants. Everything you said just makes me want to align with War more, this is after all, why we've come here."

An army of spirits to hunt the yeti? That was power.

Transition shook its head. "No, it is trading one issue for another."

"Why? Is War planning on breaking the deal?" Nayra asked.

"No," Transition answered. "War intends to help whatever conflict it is asked to, and will then hunt and kill the yeti. What War has not made known, is that they do not intend to return to the Ethereal Realm, they intend to break all the rules."

Ryun frowned. "Why?"

Transition glanced at Mysteries and it was the shrouded spirit that answered.

"We are bound by our natures, and we draw strength from them. But our Realm, is a mirror image of yours. The conflicts and wars in your realm have... influenced War, they have changed and made them stronger. With every war in your Realm that strength grows, and this army is a tool by which War intends to transform your realm into a domain of never ending war, uplifting itself beyond its purpose."

Well, Ryun had to admit that was a lot different. "And what do you want from us?"

"War has a rotation set up between the Real and the Ethereal, chosen come and go from time to time, coordinating the execution of their plans. We intended to find a person on the inside, someone who can join the army and be our eyes and ears, relay a message to the chosen in the Real Realm of the danger and the duplicity of War's actions."

Ryun wondered if whoever the chosen was would even care, he was even wondering if he cared. This army was large, perhaps rivaling the combined army of the sects, but it was not larger than all the armies in the Real Realm. Even if War wanted to cause chaos, Ryun didn't think that the spirits would be a greater threat than the yeti. On the other hand, they had already made that same mistake once, thinking that the Dome monsters weren't a big threat, and that had caused a lot of issues too.

"Why not just find a spirit that is often summoned to the Real Realm?" Nayra asked. "Have them relay the message."

"The Ethereal is as vast as the Real Realm, no spirits in our domains, or pledged to our cause are summoned. The number of spirits that exist in this world is so great that finding one that has ever even heard of the Real Realm is rare. We know of none that are not pledged to War at least."

Ryun blinked, but then it did make sense to him. The world was Infinite, and if what little he knew about summoning in the Real world was true, then it was mostly done on random.

"There are rules," the Grand Spirit continued. "Rules that we cannot break. We cannot act against War ourselves, we can't impede its task until it threatens our domains, and War does not intend that. We need those unbound by our rules, that means chosen."

"Why are you even opposed? You can't care about the Real Realm that much," Nayra asked.

Transition looked her in the eyes when it answered. "Because that is in my nature, Child of Death. I am the Grand Spirit of Transition, I govern over those who pass from the Real Realm to the Ethereal and then into the Afterlife, what War intends is to pervert that order. Spirits are not meant to fully transition to the Real Realm, this will have consequences beyond what you can understand."

Ryun tilted his head, he didn't understand the rules of the Ethereal, or what the consequences could be. But consequences didn't always mean a bad thing.

"How did War then get in contact with someone in the Real Realm?" He asked instead.

"We are all part of the Ethereal, but we are also connected to the planes of our natures. War was able to get in contact with someone who has dwelled deep into the plane of War."

That would mean that they were very powerful, they had to at least have a Glimpse of Aspect, if not Grasp.

"Do you know who that chosen is?" Ryun asked, wondering if he would recognize the name.

"They are called Grey Horde."

Art and Form

"Is this really what you want to be doing now?" Nayra asked, trying to hide her frustration. The conversation with the two Grand Spirits didn't go far after they dropped the name that they had no frame of reference for. She doubted that they even realized that Nayra and Ryun had recognized it. Instead Ryun had asked for a few days to think about their offer and they had returned to the war camp.

"We came to find power, did we not?" Ryun answered. "I am very much interested in how spirit smiths work their art."

Nayra sighed, she wasn't quite sure what she was doing here. Her plan had been to head to the Afterlife, to seek power and understanding of her Aspect there. Instead, she ended up following Ryun around. True, he did need her, his sense was incredibly limited in the Ethereal and he needed her hand while he figured out how to overcome that weakness. But, she was also somewhat impatient. Her father had died, and she felt the seething anger inside of her at the one who had taken him from her. It was growing with every passing day, as she kept trying to keep it from spilling out and turning into anger at the world itself.

"And what about, you know, the thing?" She pressed him.

Ryun shrugged. "War is yet to talk with us, I'll hear her offer first."

Nayra opened her mouth, then closed it. She couldn't be talking openly about the two Grand Spirits or what they told them. True, she didn't swear an oath, but Ryun had and he was still her Sect Head, his word was her word, she wouldn't break it.

"You are not concerned at all about this army coming through to the Real Realm?" Nayra asked.

Ryun glanced at her, then away. "What are armies before you and me?"

Nayra couldn't really find anything to say to that. Even if she tried to be modest, in the end she knew the truth. The two of them were made to demolish armies, especially when they fought together. Why would they care if this Grand Spirit wanted to remain in the Real Realm? The world was Infinite, there was room. And if they turned out to become a threat, well, there were few that could rival them in strength in the world. The yeti probably being the prime amongst them, and that was only because he was alone, with no army to support him. And because he was an insane shade that was older than the Infinite Realm, of course.

They reached the smiths tents and were quickly noticed by the smith spirit nearby. Nayra focused on its stocky seven limbed body, trying to see if it was the same one as they had talked with before, but ultimately gave up. She couldn't discern between the spirits at all.

"Ah, new friends, you are back! Good, good, the clan master is free for a meeting," the spirit said.

"Eager Smith," Ryun greeted and bowed his head.

Nayra took a deep breath and followed. Smithing really wasn't her favorite thing to do, but she would endure.

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Bright Star rose in Ryun's hand, Qi burning through his body, his {Mantle of Gathering Twilight} accumulating Qi into his arm and increasing his strength and dexterity. He was so focused on the piece of metal held on the anvil by his {Avatar of the Twilight Reaper} that for a moment he forgot everything else. Not just his mind, but his soul as well. For a split moment, the intent of his soul, the unconscious part that held his entire being in the form he usually inhabited, slipped. His right arm, bulged and the Essence that pretended to look like skin burst to reveal Oblivion beneath. His hand turned into a limb made of complete darkness with flashes of violet and silver throughout. He could feel his regeneration working, keeping his body whole as every movement threatened to tear him to pieces, his skill enhancing the effect. He didn't let his attention go to it, though it was hard. He could feel the cracks spreading in his skin further, traveling over his shoulder and neck, over the side of his face.

Instead, he finished his task. He brought his hammer down, his |Essence Manipulation| and |Smithing Mastery| skills singing in his mind as he did so. Air ignited around him from the speed of his arm, the Oblivion of his Aura consuming it before it could spread. The {Field of Twilight's Calm} around him shuddered as it stopped the spread of the shockwaves from the sound barrier breaking apart.

Bright Star hit the metal and transferred all the force he could muster onto the target held with the pliers firmly in the hands of his Avatar, and because Bright Star was connected to his soul, carrying with it Ryun's will and intent as well. The strike hit with enough force to sunder earth, if his Avatar and Bright Star's anvil weren't there. Instead, all the force focused into the metal.

For a moment there was silence, and then the metal bent, collapsing in on itself as it was being pressed by the force of the strike pushing in on it from all sides, and perhaps more importantly, Ryun's and Bright Star's will.

For a moment Ryun was surprised to feel how much easier it was here, in the Ethereal Realm, yet it did make sense to him. This was the Realm that reacted to intent and will more than any other. The metal that had been the size of a person shrunk as it was pressed in on itself, shaped with his will and skill, until it took the form he intended it to.

The world calmed, and the metal took the rough shape of a spearhead, the size of Ryun's palm. He used his skill and Aura to shape it further, to shear away and smooth its surfaces until it was a perfectly shaped piece. With Oblivion he sharpened the edges to perfection, creating a thin line of Essence that would cut through anything. Already he could see Sharpness Essence coming into being around it from just the act of him creating the edge. He switched focus and used |Essence Manipulation| on the new Essence, pushing it closer to the edge, narrowing it and forcing the Sharpness into it, imparting on it intent to cut better, to split all in its way.

He was lost in his work, unaware of the passage of time, or anything beyond his small sphere of influence. And then he was done, and reality came roaring back. He flexed his arm and Essence around it bent, the Oblivion receding and returning to the shape and appearance of an ordinary arm as the meaning of his Soul exerted its influence.

He became aware of spirits spectating from a safe distance, some of them keeping the effects of his work from impacting the environment. Nayra stood nearby, keeping the heat from escaping.

A big spirit with seven limbs and body made out of fluid metal walked up.

"That was impressive, and very strange," the clan master said.

Ryun inclined his head. "Thank you, Great Artist Who Shapes Life With Metal."

The clan master's name, in the chosen way of thinking about such things at least, was a bit of a handful.

"I see that you have a much different way of going about creation," the spirit said as Ryun offered the spearhead. It took it in one of its hands and turned it over. Ryun was surprised that it could hold it in one hand. The spearhead was small, but it held much greater mass, if it was dropped on the ground it would've probably dented it. He had compressed it with his will and pure physical power. It was something that he had been experimenting with as a way of covering up some of his weaknesses. Ryun lacked many of the finer and more delicate skills that a smiths usually had. But he had his strengths as well, in this case literally. He was yet to push himself to the limit, but in the perfect conditions his stats could get to really monstrous size. He wondered if perhaps he could compress a mountain to the size of a weapon, and if he could, what it would even look like? He stored the thought away for later, that was something that he was going to try someday.

"Your way is that of force," the clan master said as he studied Ryun's work. "Overwhelmingly so, I do not know a smith of our kind that could do the same."

It was high praise, especially from someone like the spirit. The spearhead was not yet part of a weapon, but its qualities could be seen. It didn't give any stats, that part was usually enchanted into a handle of a weapon. But what it did do was amplify the force of any strike by 10x, it also had a great increase to penetration.

"Now, it is time for me to demonstrate my art," the clan master said as he passed the spearhead back to him. "As I have pledged."

Ryun inclined his head, that was the deal they had made. A demonstration for a demonstration.

Spirits gathered around the forge and the clan master and prepared to do their work, while Ryun walked over to Nayra to watch. What followed was more of a choreographed dance than it was what Ryun did when he worked.

The clan master and the other spirits began to work on the metal that had been brought from another tent. An exotic metal material that had bluish Essence to Ryun's eyes that was very densely packed with the Essence grains. They heated it up to its melting point, then poured it into a mold. Spirits of cold moved over it, cooling it down enough so that it could be worked. A spirit picked it up and brought it over to the anvil where the clan master waited. Then, it started its work. Seven hands changed shape into various tools, hammers came down in quick succession that seemed almost unending. The blows a lot gentler than Ryun's, but still packed with the intent of what the finished product had to be. Ryun could tell that even that intent was a lot softer than what he did. It wasn't as if it ordered the purpose of the Essence, but more like it convinced the Essence to change, to become something else. The Essence flowed, flickering in his sight as it transformed. It intrigued Ryun. Then, when it started taking shape, it pulled out a piece of its own body, just a tiny sliver, and mixed it with the item being worked on. Reflections of lights danced off its surface with each movement, creating a beautiful display that could be seen even by Ryun eyes, though perhaps not in all of its glory.

It was similar to what Ryun did when he created a spiritual tool. Ryun gave a piece of his soul and meaning to create it, and the spirit here gave a part of its body in order to do the same. He knew that what it gave was not the same as a soul, obviously, as then the result would've been a spiritual tool. Yet there was something else that the spirit did in giving part of its body away, something that translated to greater quality in the work.

Ryun continued to watch, thinking about ways that he could incorporate what he was seeing into his own work. Wondering how it would change it, if at all.

Ryun knew he still had much left to learn before he would get anywhere close to what he was seeing; What the spirit was doing was a carefully practiced art form, Ryun was a lot more brutish in his work. That knowledge made him smile because there was something comforting in knowing you will never run out things worth discovering about your craft.

Once the work was finished, the spirit picked up the spearhead and walked over, offering it to Ryun.

He inclined his head as he took what was offered, then he inspected it. The difference was clear immediately. The spearhead was lighter, and perhaps even weaker than Ryun's. It wasn't as compressed as Ryun's work had been, so there was no bonus to force of attacks, what it did have was a larger bonus to penetration and bleeding. That made Ryun frown, he was pretty sure that he had made the edge as perfect as it could be. True, his work was cruder, but this one shouldn't be able to achieve what he could perfectly carve out with Oblivion. Yet somehow it did. He had an idea how, but he would need to do some tests.

"Thank you for the demonstration," Ryun said, he had still learned much.

"It was agreed," the clan master said.

He wished that they could do more, but the spirit had a busy schedule, it was supplying the army, and creating more spirits. So, Ryun bowed and then gathered Nayra, leaving the smiths to their work.

"Was that worth me standing around for a day and doing nothing?" Nayra asked.

Ryun raised his eyes from the spearheads still in his hands. He was comparing the two.

"Very much so," Ryun said.

"Really?"

"Yes," Ryun said, just looking at the two pieces side by side he could see where he could improve. "What kind of a tool do you want?" He asked.

Nayra blinked at the change of topic, she frowned, not answering immediately.

"I already have Resav, as a weapon," she said slowly.

"So armor?"

"My way of fighting might not be conducive to that," Nayra answered. "Unless you can make it turn to mist with me."

Ryun chuckled, and then paused. He had just seen the spirit smith somehow ask the Essence to change, to become something else. The spearhead in his hand had a core of metal Essence, some material that he wasn't familiar with, but the edges were something else. Almost as if they were a blend of pure Sharpness Essence and the Metal. In his eyes, they were solid, indomitable and refusing to change. As if the world itself had decreed that the Essence was going to be what it now was. As if it was completely natural. Could he do the same? Force the Essence to change its nature when needed, turn to mist or fire?

"I'll need to think about that," Ryun said after a while.

Nayra was about to answer, when they were interrupted by a a tall spirit that looked like a suit of armor.

"Guests," it greeted them. "The Grand Spirit of War wishes to speak."

Ryun and Nayra exchanged a look, and then they followed. He was looking forward to hearing what War had to say.

Second Offer

They made their way through the camp quickly, arriving in the center and the main tent. As soon as they stopped before it, two sentinels stepped out from either side and silently drew back the curtain revealing the entrance. They were led through the same way as last time, going in a circle until they reached the room that was in the center.

The large room was still the same, and Ryun allowed his sense to spread, trusting that the effect that had been there last time still held. He was rewarded by his awareness expanding, and he noted everything that was happening in the tent. The Grand Spirit of War sat on her throne, still looking the same, as a female drake wearing armor and weapons.

"Chosen, welcome again," she said.

Ryun inclined his head, and met her eyes. "Grand Spirit."

"I've given some thought to our last conversation," the Grand Spirit said. "I am willing to allow you to join my army in battle against the yeti. I always have need of strong soldiers. Provided you do me a service."

Ryun tilted his head, thinking. "We have come here seeking power, or ways to obtain more of it in order to face our common enemy. Joining your army does not grant us that," Ryun told her.

The Grand Spirit narrowed her eyes. "Do you not wish for the death of Ra'azel?"

Ryun nodded. "We do, but you ask for a service, yet what do we gain by joining your army?"

The Grand Spirit paused, then said slowly. "You get to accomplish your goal, the death of our enemy."

"You will attempt to fight him anyway," Ryun waved his hand. "This army will hunt him with or without us. You are the one that gains from this agreement, you must be able to tell, our power is great, rivaling your own. It is you who will have a greater chance of winning with us by your side."

The Grand Spirit leaned forward in her throne. "You are in the heart of my domain, you should be careful with your words."

Ryun shrugged. "I've fought beings greater than you in the hearts of their domain, they are dead now and here I am," he said. "You need something from us, and you want us in your army, that much is clear. I want something in return."

"What?" She bit through clenched teeth.

"You have gathered a great army of spirits, I wish only the chance to speak with those of them who can offer us insights into our own power. Spirits of Death and Oblivion," Ryun said. He had tried to find the spirits and talked independently. But apparently the spirits of Death were not known for being chatty. And the few he and Nayra had found were not open to any deals or exchanges like the smiths were. Perhaps, if their leader ordered it would be different.

Before the Grand Spirit answered, his sense caught something moving through the tent. A spirit, one that shifted and twisted constantly making it hard to keep track of. He was pretty sure that it was the same spirit that the Grand Spirit of War had been meeting when Ryun and Nayra first arrived. Who Ryun suspected to be the Grand Spirit of Change.

The Grand Spirit of War looked at him for a long moment. "I have Spirits of Death in my army, yes. Spirits of Oblivion are some of the rarest in the Ethereal Realm, there are none in my army."

Ryun resisted the urge to smile, so the spirits of Oblivion did exist, that was good to know.

"Spirits of Death will do," he said, at least Nayra would learn something.

"Before I accept any deals, I want to know what it is that you want from us?"

The shifting spirit got closer, just a room away, probably listening in. Ryun didn't mind, yet.

War glanced to the side at a large table, where the four spirits stood the same as last time, then she looked back at him. "There is a delay in the Real Realm, I need it dealt with."

"I don't know, one of your chosen matters," the Grand Spirit said in a way that oozed frustration. "I've been waiting, gathering this army, for a long time. I am running out of patience. I need us summoned in the Real Realm, time only allows Ra'azel to grow stronger."

"And why do you think that we can help with that?" Ryun asked, wondering how it was that she didn't know what the issue was.

"I don't know your chosen ways, you either can help or you cannot. If not, then you will not get what you want. If yes, you get your conversations and an army at your side against Ra'azel."

That was intriguing enough for him to consider it. "I shall think about it."

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"Change," the Grand Spirit of Mysteries said. "I shouldn't be surprised, its nature is to seek imbalance and change, usually the rest of us are a counterbalance to it, but we Grand Spirits have been split as of late, out of touch with each other. Still, a change of this magnitude is..."

"You should accept War's offer," the Grand Spirit of Transition interjected.

They had spent two days in camp, with Ryun staying with the smiths and learning more about their art. It was a very good time for him, not so much for Nayra who was bored out of her mind, but she had endured.

Then they had come back to the glade, at their prearranged meeting.

Ryun looked at the two spirits, thinking about what he should do. He wasn't good at doing politics, he wasn't good and doing things that were in the shadows. Though Anrosh had tried to get him to at least try. The spirits, at least from what Ryun had seen so far, seemed largely ignorant of chosen matters. Which was a benefit to Ryun.

"Or at least pretend to," the Grand Spirit of Mysteries added. "You chosen are always duplicitous in your words."

Their opinion of chosen aside, Ryun was still unsure what to do, or if he could even trust any of the Grand Spirits.

"You want me to convince this Grey Horde not to summon War and the army?" Ryun asked, trying not to give away the fact that he knew who

they were talking about. He and Grey Horde weren't great friends and allies, but they had crossed paths in the great faction gatherings. He didn't know much about her, other than what was widely known.

"Yes," Transition answered. "Inform them of what War plans."

"And if she doesn't care?" Ryun asked in return.

The spirits exchanged a look. "What do you mean."

He had the feeling that the spirits would be hard pressed to understand why chosen might not care about what War planned.

"Grey Horde might not have an issue with War remaining in the Real Realm, the consequences of such an act might not be a big issue for us chosen. We do not live in the Ethereal Realm."

Transition blinked. "The Ethereal is intrinsically linked with your Realm! Any changes to it would have consequences that would echo through all realms. Removing one of the pillars of the Ethereal from it would have grand repercussions, that not even us can predict!"

Ryun grimaced. "I'm just trying to prepare you for that possibility."

"We need War's attempts stopped," Transition stressed.

"I don't see how you will achieve that without removing War from the board entirely," Nayra added.

The two Grand Spirits rounded on her.

"What? It's the truth," she shrugged. "Even if we successfully warn Grey Horde and convince her to abandon whatever plan she has, what is

to prevent War from just finding someone else and attempting the same thing again?"

Transition glanced at Mysteries, then answered. "We believe that the constant conflicts in your realm have had an effect on War, and that with time those effects will subside. That War would see reason eventually."

"So you are hoping that War gets better?" Nayra said, her tone almost mocking.

"We have other plans, but we are hopeful, yes," Mysteries said.

"None of this accounts for Ra'azel," Ryun interjected. "From where I am standing it seems like supporting War is the best bet for us to deal with him."

The bird spirit took a step forward. "You do not understand the gravity of the threat that War can pose. Conflict makes War stronger, and if this army was in the Real Realm, they could cause a lot of it. Make War stronger than even Ra'azel. And that would allow them to shape your Realm in their image. Do you want a world filled only with conflict and death? A world where only the strong survived?"

That already was the reality of the Infinite Realm, but... they were trying to make it better. He did understand some part of what they were saying.

"As I said," Ryun started. "We still need what we came to you, the Grand Spirits, for; We need power. You wanted to make a deal? Well, give me a way to make sure that War doesn't ever return to the Real Realm, and give me a way to combat Ra'azel," then he decided to give them something more. "I know Grey Horde personally. I have some influence with her. If you can give me what I need, then I will do as you ask."

The two spirits looked at each other, something passing between them, then Transition looked back at Ryun and Nayra.

"I can sense a touch of my nature in both of your power. I can offer my guidance, if power is what you wish. As far as War is concerned... There might be a way of making sure that they are barred from the Real Realm permanently, a way that wouldn't upset the balance of the Ethereal Realm. Something that might even help you against Ra'azel."

That made Ryun raise an eyebrow. "I'm listening."

"Have you ever heard about Felldown, the Prison of Ages?"

Ryun blinked, he had, in fact, heard about it.

"Tell me more."