

## A Request

The Dome location was decimated, and yet, it was now again occupied by something new. A tower rose from the ground at the bottom of the crater, a portal leading to another realm. The same thing that happened when Hastur was defeated.

They still haven't gone through, they didn't know what to expect inside, and so they've mostly decided to wait, at least until they had dealt with all the Domes. For now, the area was filled with activity as Hitor's people harvested the materials left behind by the monsters on behalf of the Twilight Melody Sect. The main reason for it was that Ryun's people didn't have any means of actually coming here and doing it themselves, they didn't have a big fleet to ferry them over, not yet at least. Having to pay Hitor's people 20% of what was to be harvest was a small price to pay to gain materials of the highest grade and transport to Twilight Melody.

They had obliterated many of the monsters, but there were quite a lot of corpses still laying around, some were partially destroyed, others whole. Not all had been killed by overwhelming power that vaporized them completely. And Nayra's attacks at the end had brought a silent death. Each of the corpses was completely immune to either **Fire** or **Oblivion**. It made Ryun almost giddy to think about, he had been struggling to find materials that could handle his Aspect, and now he had enough to experiment as much as he wanted. Already he had gathered a few tonnes worth of it and stored it in his territory.

And best of all the four big monsters, the ones that spawned the others were mostly whole. Ryun had promised one to Vitor, for his alchemical experiments, but the others were his. Somehow, those monsters had been able to spawn monsters with full immunity against Essences that they had encountered. Ryun wondered if he could figure out how to draw that power out of the corpses. He had already taken one of them for himself,

the other two he would give to Anrosh, with advice to sell one and give the other to Twilight Melody crafters.

That way he thought that they would be able to get the most out of them.

Tali landed next to him and spoke.

“We’ve loaded the ships, we should be able to head out soon.”

Ryun glanced in her direction then spoke. “Can you find Lesamitrius and tell him to move all personnel to the two ships and leave ours with minimal crew?”

Tali tilted her head. “Why?”

“I want to make a slight detour, and I want our hold filled to the brim with harvested materials.”

“Oh, mind telling me where to? And why you want extra materials?”

“I want to visit Eratemus, the materials are for trade. I... I didn’t like being unable to do anything against those monsters, I want ways to avoid that in the future.”

“You want to buy formations?” Tali asked.

Ryun shook his head. “Yes and no. I’m sure that I will buy some of them, but what I really want is rare and powerful materials that I can use to make powerful weapons, or maybe spiritual tools.”

Tali raised her eyebrows. “You think that you can make something that powerful?”

“I’ve been practicing my craft for a decade, and now that Selia is back... Yes, we can do it.”

“Do you have any ideas?” Tali asked.

Ryun shrugged. “I still have the materials I harvested from Hastur, now I have materials from these Dome monsters. And I’ve talked to Grey Horde this morning,” Ryun pulled out a Far-link Orb out of his storage.

As one of the main leaders of the Sects he had been given one by Hitor just before their trip here, though they were extremely expensive and hard to make, especially in the years since the war.

“What about?” Tali asked, intrigued.

“I want materials from her Dome monsters, hide and bone, more if I can manage. We’ve come to an agreement to trade our materials for hers. Equal trade. A ship’s worth will be going to the Triumphant Hive, and she’ll send her materials back. I need to ask Hitor a favor and have one of his ships facilitate the trade,” he grimaced. “We need to buy more ships, I hate having to rely on others.”

Tali sighed. “It is going to be hard, since the war all the shipbuilders are under contracts for the next few decades, everyone is building up their forces. Unless we pay a premium... selling some of these materials might be enough to buy a small fleet.”

Ryun glanced back at the people harvesting from the decimated landscape, they had to dig out some of the corpses. Thankfully Ryun was able to sense where the buried ones were and had been pointing them out for the dig crews.

“We’ll see. Perhaps we can invest in a flying animal wing in the mean time, I’m sure that there are breeders out there that specialize in that.”

Tali nodded. “Griffins or pegasi, wyverns get pretty big if you can find the right breed. Some can even be used as beasts of burden, to transport cargo, or people. Nothing like a ship though, but still.”

Ryun was still weighing his options. Then something occurred to him. “Actually, what about Eratemus?”

Tali frowned. “What about him?”

“Couldn’t he raise some undead for us? I’m pretty sure that he has an undead dragon.”

“Ryun...” Tali closed her eyes. “You do realize that most people would not want to be anywhere near the undead, right?”

Ryun drew back. “Why?”

“Because... you know what, just trust me on this one.”

“Hm, fine,” he shook his head. “Can you ask around for any good breeders? We might need to import some.”

Tali sighed. “I’ll compile a list for Anrosh.”

“Good,” Ryun said. “Tell the others that they can head back, you, me and Lesamitrius go meet with Eratemus.”

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The territory that Eratemus called home was a desolate place. Ryun’s eyes could see that death clung to the earth like a fog. There was no life here, and the very air seemed to want to drain it out of people.

“It is terrifying,” Lesamitirus said as they approached their destination, a massive citadel nestled in the mountains. A castle made out of black stone that shone brightly to Ryun’s sight. Essences were woven into the very fabric of stone here, protections layered over a thousand years.

“He doesn’t like visitors,” Tali commented. Ryun could sympathize, ever since the war, his home had been public knowledge. Everyone knew who Eratemus was now. He no longer enjoyed his anonymity.

“I can’t imagine anyone wanting to visit in the first place,” Lesamitrius said, then seemed to catch himself. “With respect, Eternal Master.”

Ryun had sensed that they were being observed from the moment they entered the territory. Undead birds followed them from the cover of the clouds above. Critters on the ground stared up at the sky until the ship passed over. All of them undead. He had also detected the army that slumbered around the castle, beneath the ground at the base of the mountain. The remnants of the army Eratemus had raised in the core. He had taken it here after the war, and by the time anyone had realized what

he had done, it was too late. No one wanted to risk angering Eratemus after his display. Though Ryun had felt that many of them had been terrified to find out what Eratemus could do.

Ryun hadn't been upset, of course, a dead body without a Soul was not the person. His people were upset though, understandably as he had learned. The families of those that died had come to Anrosh with complaints. Ryun had listened to what Anrosh said, and when she explained it had agreed. So, he had asked Eratemus to pay a reimbursement fee for the bodies of his people he had taken without permission. It had seemed right. Eratemus hadn't seemed offended and had paid the price without arguing.

As they grew closer, Ryun could see what his sense had noticed a while ago. A massive dragon rested on an open balcony near the top of the structure. The Essence his eyes saw was even more powerful now than it had been during the war.

Their airship slowed, then descended to land in the courtyard. They disembarked and were met by a human skeleton. Its bones were covered in tiny formations, as was the bone plate armor that it wore. Ryun could tell from the way the bones felt to his senses and his eyes that they were the bones of a Cultivator. The clue was that they were not made out of **Bone** Essence, but rather some metal variant. Ryun could also tell that the skeleton was a thinking undead because he could see the Soul grafted to the undead body.

The skeleton approached and then bowed.

“Greetings, guests. I am Antaro, be welcome to Castle Prideborne. My master awaits. If you will follow me, please,” he gestured, and they followed.