

# The Perimeter Fleet

The airship, named Burning Talon, was incredibly fast, especially when one took into consideration its size, and they would be arriving to their location shortly. Zach looked over the top deck as he waited on the balcony in the central tower. His people were training, sparring with the warriors from the Twilight Melody Sect.

Anrosh had lent him ten warriors to help operate the airship, led by Reki Ra Jhan and Eari Ji Van, of house Ekoa. The sparring was light, but Zach was glad to see Hiro pushing himself. He was learning a lot about different styles of sword fighting, and even Zach could see that he was getting better.

He turned his head to glance at Kri, who was standing next to him. She too had been getting stronger. He could see that she had taken to heart what he had taught her about the idea behind one's power.

She had even started carrying a small formation that turned the air around her colder and created a small artificial cloud above her that trailed snow down on her. It looked... ridiculous, the snow didn't survive for long, and she trailed water everywhere, but Zach had to admit that he was impressed. She had done more than he had even thought about. He had gotten many insights, and had reached far, but that hadn't occurred to him. It gladdened him to see though, it only proved that there was still much for him to learn, and that even a teacher can learn from his student.

He could see how living as an embodiment of an idea would help shape a firmer idea of one's being. He would have to think and come up with a way to do the same.

"Are you nervous?" Zach asked, and Kri turned to look at him.

"A little bit," she said after a moment's pause. "Thank you for taking me."

Zach smiled. "Of course, it is a good opportunity," *and a safe one*, he added to himself. He understood that both she and Hiro wanted to do more, to be of use.

"Do you think that we'll see actual combat?" She asked.

Zach thought about then shrugged. "It is a swarm type Dome, so it is possible, especially with the amount of monsters estimated to be in that Dome. Some might get by the main force, which is why our role is important."

He didn't think that it was likely, but he didn't want to come out and say it. He knew that she was looking forward to it, that she wished to have something to fight. Ever since she and Hiro fought the monster that Ra'azel unleashed in their city, both of them had been looking for ways to get stronger.

"We'll be ready," Kri said, and Zach felt a pang in his heart.

He wished that he could teach and help people get stronger without putting them in so much danger. It was his ultimate goal, and the sooner he started on making it a reality, the sooner people like Kri and Hiro would be able to grow in safety.

By learning from teachers, and not by learning from life and death battles.

He was going to do it, create a place where he could both teach and learn the secrets of the world.

The ship rose above the mountains, and Zach's eyes were drawn to what lay before them. A cry went out somewhere below, and people moved quickly to the front of the ship to look ahead.

Kri leaned on the balcony and her eyes widened.

"That's a lot of ships," she whispered.

Zach agreed. The last time he had seen anywhere near that amount of people gathered was during the war a few years ago, and he had only seen the aftermath.

The valley in front of them was filled with airships and floating fortresses. Many were even docked on the ground, with tents set up and people walking or flying around.

It was a great assembled host.

Quickly, a flyer headed their way, a karura that landed on their ship. Zach walked down to meet with them.

The woman bowed to him, then spoke. "Warden Zacharia Gardner, welcome! We have a place set aside for you, the Commander of the Army is looking forward to speaking with you."

Zach nodded, he knew that she referred to Sigmund, he was the one in charge of this gathering of armies.

"Of course," Zach said. "I am at his disposal. You may direct my pilot," he gestured back at the sect warrior that directed the air ship.

She inclined her head and followed up to the control room.

Zach glanced back at the army assembled and took a deep breath. It seemed that his life is constantly filled with conflict. And... it had started to weigh on him. It also only served to embolden his resolve, he had to get his plans into motion as fast as possible. He was tired of this world and its tendency for violence.

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Zach walked into a large tent, guards moving aside to let him pass. He was led to the center where a big table was placed with a map spread over it. Anatalien and Sigmund stood next to it, looking it over and signing to each other as they moved pieces over the map.

Anatalien raised her head as Zach walked closer and smiled.

"You're here, that's good, I was worried that you might not make it in time," she said.

Zach waved his hand. "I've agreed to it," he said.

"Was your trip fruitful?" She asked.

"In a way," Zach said, not really even sure how to answer that. He had gained power, though it was not in the way that he had imagined.

"And the others? Ryun?"

Zach shook his head. "They're still in the Ethereal, pursuing their own paths."

She tilted her head, but didn't press. Sigmund raised a hand, then signed something. Tali nodded, then spoke. "Well, Sig is right, there will be time for us to talk about that later. We've called you here for the planning the perimeter."

Zach tilted his head. "Don't you have someone else to help with that? I am not that familiar with large army movements."

Tali nodded. "We do, but none are as powerful as you. Regardless, there isn't much planning involved with this, most of it was already decided. And with so many different factions, we need someone in charge who everyone will agree to follow, or rather who they can't say anything about."

Zach blinked, then frowned. "In charge?"

"Oh yes," Tali said.

"I thought that Sigmund is the one in charge?" He narrowed his eyes.

Tali and Sigmund exchanged a look, then looked back at him. "He is," Tali said. "But Awirren has asked for us to provide a bit more direct support. It will leave the perimeter fleet without direct leadership. We believe that you would be a good fit for it."

Zach tilted his head. Snippets of insight came through the firm block he kept in his mind. He was pretty sure that they weren't fully truthful, he just didn't know about what.

"Here," Tali moved a piece over the table. "We'd like you and your people to take a position here, at the mountain pass. Some of Sig's people will be there as well, and you can send orders to other factions through them."

Zach leaned on the table, putting his hand on the map. Instantly the knowledge of what the map was supposed to represent flashed inside his mind. Positions of troops, of the fleet, in a circle around the dome, everything. Raw data, without any understanding. He grimaced and pushed back, fortifying his block.

He looked down at the map, and realized that Tali and Sig were planning something. It was obvious, but he didn't have any interest in that. People always schemed, it was one truth he had learned. His job here was to make sure that people survived and that the dome was dealt with.

He didn't need to know their schemes.

"Tell me what the plan for the fleet is," he said.

He couldn't control what other people did, but he had agreed to this, and he could make sure that he did everything in his power to keep people as safe as possible.