

Chapter 84: Reporting In

Raimie

It took me longer than I'd like—my body was loudly crying for sleep and any delay in getting it couldn't be healthy for me—but I eventually found Marcuset and Eledis on the beach.

The two were sparring with practice swords. I wasn't sure why they'd chosen to fight here, where the footing would be loose and treacherous, but it was an impressive display.

With sand flying as high as their hips, they were showing an impressive mastery of the blade, which somehow didn't surprise me. I'd expect it from the commander, of course, but for my grandfather, if I'd learned anything in the last few months, it was that my family was never what it seemed.

Watching the two, I stripped off my armor, leaving me in a loose tunic and pair of trousers, before piling it, Silverblade, and my pistol at the feet of a nearby audience member.

"Watch that for me, would you?" I said.

I waited to get a nod before trudging through the sand toward the older men.

Marcuset caught sight of me first. Hesitating with a block, he got jabbed as a reward, and I winced.

I probably should have announced myself earlier. Oh, well.

"Commander. Eledis," I said, nodding to each as I stopped. "May I join you?"

I planted my staff in the sand with a smile. Sure, I was tired. Sure, I should tell these two what had happened last night before finding a bedroll, but how could I pass up the opportunity to test myself against the commander of Ada'ir's armed forces?

Or former commander, I supposed.

"Your Majesty! You're back," Marcuset said. "How did your visit with the locals go?"

Making a face, I said, "I had mixed results. Can we discuss them in a minute? I'd like to work off some frustration."

Lifting the staff, I got in a ready stance, but neither of the older men moved.

“You want to fight us?” Eledis said.

Although the way he’d put that made it seem more like a statement than a question.

“Yes. Is that a problem?” I asked.

After a moment of consideration, Eledis shrugged.

“Not for me,” he said. “Marcuset?”

As always, a hint of sarcasm had infected his voice when he’d spoken the commander’s name, but instead of ignoring it like he typically did, Marcuset winced this time.

“If it’s what you truly want, I won’t protest, Your Majesty,” he said.

“It is.”

Shaking his head, Marcuset raised his practice sword, followed by Eledis, and after a breathless pause, the other two blurred. Even having raised my staff to block, something walloped into my chest, and stumbling away from it, I tripped, scrambling backward until a shadow fell over me. Blinking to keep sand out of my eyes, I huffed when I saw that Marcuset had stopped Eledis from bringing his sword down on my head.

With a cocky grin, my grandfather said, “I think you might need a new weapons tutor. Taking you down was far too easy.”

Marcuset pushed him back while I got to my feet, brushing myself off.

“Not at all. Rhy’s doing very well, thanks,” I said, “but he can’t teach me in the same way that practical experience can, which is why I asked to join you. I’ve fought with two people at once, back when Dath was training with me, but I’ve never defended myself on such loose footing before. So, let’s go again. Get me the experience I might need to avoid death in a true fight.”

Drawing even with Marcuset, I lightly tapped the back of his head with my staff.

“And stop shielding me. I don’t need it.”

Scowling at me, Marcuset nodded while rubbing his head.

“All right, then,” Eledis said, lifting his sword. “Once more.”

I did better this time, but that wasn’t saying much, considering I’d near instantly landed on my back during the first clash. Still, while I took a few blows on my knuckles and arms, I managed to land some too.

For some reason, this frustrated Eledis, as evidenced by his eagerness to take advantage of any openings he saw. After Marcuset and I got a series of strikes through his defenses, he retreated for

a moment, watching me attack my once ally, before leaping back in.

“What happened with the Audish natives?” he grunted. “You said you had mixed results?”

He wanted to get into that, did he? Was it meant as a distraction, something upsetting enough for me to make a mistake?

“I did. Some among them seemed neutral toward us, but others, most notably this group’s leader...”

Catching the cross guard of Marcuset’s sword on my staff, I grabbed his wrist before twirling my weapon, and the commander’s blade went flying. Disarmed.

As he backed off with his hands raised, quickly retreating to the line of people watching the fight, I snapped my eyes to slits. That had been far too easy.

A glancing swipe at my thigh drew me back to the fight and my grandfather’s question.

“They hate us here, Eledis,” I said.

With his face twisting, my grandfather jabbed at my face, a blow I barely avoided, and I couldn’t argue with Nylion when he sent anger surging through us. When sparring, one didn’t go for such a debilitating hit unless one knew their opponent well. What the *hell*, Eledis?

Backing off, my grandfather said, “Are you sure it wasn’t you they disliked? You can be off-putting at times.”

This, coming so soon after what he’d done, froze me solid, and with a fierce smile, Eledis lunged for me.

As he came at me in slow motion, I wasn’t sure what fell over me. Maybe Nylion took over. I could see that being the case, considering how often he’d done it in similar circumstances, but it didn’t feel like I’d handed him the reins. No, this felt more like a hand... or maybe instinct had moved me.

Much faster than I should have been able to, I swayed sideways, letting Eledis’ blade pass a breath from my arm, before slapping a hand to his chest. The barest puff of light aided me in shoving him backward, and as he stumbled away, I swept my staff behind his knees, pulling it free when he fell. I used it to hop over him before driving it toward his neck. It stopped a hairsbreadth from his skin.

Panting, I blinked at my grandfather’s popped-wide eyes for a moment, working through what had happened.

White light. Had I accessed Ele? But Bright-

Clearing his throat, Eledis lifted his hands above his head, and I jumped, removing my weapon from him before offering him a hand. Once he was on his feet, though, I maintained my hold.

“It wasn’t my fault,” I said before letting go.

Rotating in a circle, I looked for Marcuset, wondering where he’d gone. Everything I’d told Eledis? He needed to know it too, and I didn’t trust my grandfather to share what I’d said without skewing it.

“Where did you learn that move? It was impressive!” Eledis said. “When I’ve had time, I’ve been watching Rhylix’s lessons, and he hasn’t taught you anything like that yet.”

Was he trying to make up for the shit he’d just pulled? Gods. He should know that sort of thing didn’t bother me anymore, not from him at least.

“I must have picked it up from a book at some point,” I said.

Facing camp, I noted a flurry of movement not far into the tents, and when it resolved into Oswin, sprinting free of them, I raised an eyebrow. What had him in such a panic?

“Mastering a skill takes more than reading about it,” Eledis said.

Clicking my tongue, I said, “What can I say? Maybe Nyl practiced it in our mind after I saw it in a book. He doesn’t have anything better to do right now.”

Stopping at the edge of the crowd, Oswin furiously waved at me, and I frowned. What-?

“...Nyl?” Eledis asked.

Panic jolted through me from my other half, and on reviewing what I’d said, I slammed my eyes closed, fighting to keep my breathing even.

With carefully feigned cheer, I said, “Mmhmm! You know, nil as in nothing? There’s nothing in my brain?”

I’m so sorry, Nyl.

“I... see,” Eledis said.

Why did he sound troubled? He didn’t know about Nylion...

Did he? Gods. What if he’d torn me and my other half apart?

Making a face, I shook my head. My relationship with my grandfather might be antagonistic at times, but he’d never hurt me like that.

I could feel him working up to ask another question, but not only did I not want to hear it, but Oswin’s frantic antics on the crowd’s edge had become troublesome.

“Excuse me, Eledis,” I said, “but I should see what has the spy in our midst so agitated.”

Revision #2

Created 27 August 2024 04:12:58 by FatalisticFable

Updated 7 September 2025 21:36:49 by FatalisticFable