

Chapter 910 Defenders

Rain rippled against the broad windows of the college of magic as Jaime wrote the answer onto the blackboard. "Eighteen gold and twelve silvers." He turned around to find his students not quite as attentive as they usually were. He sighed and leaned against his desk. "Care to clue me in on what's going on?" He looked at one of the teens and smiled. "Vela?"

She looked at him, then to the windows. "Nothing, sir."

He had taught the Heirs of the Forkspears for decades. And he knew when something was going on. "Bell?" he said, relaxing his posture, the tone of his voice no longer strict and demanding, but kind.

The young woman looked at him, her head propped up with both hands, a bored expression on her face. "They found out what studying in Ravenhall costs."

"Bell!" Viktor shouted.

"So that's what this is about," Jaime said as he set down the piece of chalk.

"We wouldn't switch, sir!" Vela claimed, but he could tell when someone was caught.

He leaned against his desk and looked at his students for a long moment.

"I'll be honest. The Academy isn't just on your minds," he admitted.

With the cheap cost of teleportation, all the benefits, and the higher pay that Ravenhall provided, a few of the faculty had already changed jobs, and more were thinking about it. He himself didn't really consider the option. He had always been in Dawntree, and here he would remain.

And at the same time, he wouldn't blame the teachers or the teens from choosing another option. If anything, he was waiting for the first to go, knowing full well that more would follow.

"My cousin said they can train with Guardians. Whenever they want," Viktor admitted. "And you don't have to hold back like in spars. And there's competitions for who can fight one the longest."

Jaime smiled. He remembered the reputation of Taleen Guardians just a few years back. Ancient dwarven machines, largely unknown and highly dangerous.

And now here they were.

Even in Dawntree there were a few hundred of the machines present at all times, running errands and transporting goods.

"There are often different paths to take in life," Jaime said as he looked out towards the open yard beyond, a line of houses bordering the college grounds.

He glanced back at the students and smiled. "And the choices we make, are not always easy, nor simple." He stepped to the blackboard and erased the equation, then wrote down the words college and academy. "Which is better?" he asked. "Viktor?"

The boy was sixteen, unsure of both himself and most of the decisions that he made, as far as Jaime could tell. He knew his parents were builders, their family likely struggling with the cheap machine labor the Accords now provided. It didn't surprise him that he thought about joining the Academy, but he questioned if the boy wanted to do so for himself or to relieve his family.

Viktor seemed uncertain. “I don’t know,” he said finally.

“Very good,” Jaime said and wrote down a few more words below each option. “I believe both the College of Magic and the Academy of Ravenhall are opportunities. Each have their upsides,” he said and pointed at a few examples. “And downsides,” he said and pointed again. “Ravenhall is a very sought after place, as is its new Academy. The faculty is not yet experienced in how the school is handled. The Sentinel of Akelion does not entirely change that fact. Nor that there are thousands of students applying every month. Competition will be fierce, but, you might benefit anyway.” He paused. “What does all that mean for you?”

Vela rolled her eyes. “That we should make our own choice?”

“That is a given,” Jaime said. “I think both are valid options. But they remain mere opportunities. It is where you actually invest time and energy, where you will see those opportunities blossom into actual results. The Guardians won’t magically make you a good fighter. And neither will I. If you want to gain a Class and level it up as fast as possible, you all know where you can do that, and how.”

The class was quiet.

“If you wish to make a decision, then decide. Maybe you’ll choose wrong, but there is wisdom to be gained in that too. However, I’ll be the first to tell you, that indecision and a lack of energy spent on either opportunity will lead to nothing at all.” He paused. “Does that make sense to you?”

He waited for an answer when a bright flash from outside lit up the drab and overcast afternoon.
Fire?

The glass windows shook. Jaime activated his magic. There had been no bells, no warning. What was going on? Figures flew past above, a bright beam of blue light flashed out from the west.

His eyes went wide. *A castle cannon.* “Stay calm, everyone,” he said. “And gather your things.” He did so himself, the pack below his desk and the sword he kept locked in the nearby wardrobe, ignoring the excited and fearful chatter of his students. “No speaking, except for important information, you know the drill,” he said in a commanding tone, not too loud or shouting, but making sure they all heard.

He saw fighting in the distance, a few of the Taleen machines battling a warrior with a glaive tipped with white light. He had never seen the spell or anything quite like it. *Are the Accords turning on us?* He focused and waited at the door, hand close to the hilt of his sword. “Help those who aren’t done,” he said but found the teens ready faster than during even the drills. He could already hear the chaos in the halls, not everyone managing to keep the same calm attitude. He hadn’t expected them to.

I hope you keep safe.

With a glance back, he held up his hand and opened the door. “Single file,” he said and led his students towards the stairwells, looking at the other teachers and students. Most managed to form orderly lines, many of the faculty more or less experienced former adventurers, soldiers, or guards themselves. Enough to offset those who panicked. Down the stairs they went, Jaime staying on the ground floor as the students and non combat teachers filed down into the cellar and shelter.

Students asked confused and fearful questions, the teachers hushing them and reminding them to stay calm.

“We have the door. One minute until we close it,” Jeremy said, the Paladin and teacher glancing down the hallway and out to the main doors.

Jaime gave him a nod and rushed down the hall and to one of the windows, crouching as he looked outside. The machines he had seen were gone, flying mages shooting spells down towards the line of houses as people fled away and towards the college. Impacts rattled the ground and windows. A blue cannon beam illuminated the dark skies, a figure flying past above, clad in black armor and wielding a silver pole that reflected the light. The humanoid ran on red platforms before it rushed down and landed in the yard with a twirl, his pole weapon cutting through the screaming humans as if it was a blade, everyone struck cut in half or crushed to sure death.

Jaime crouched low and sped back, making as little noise as he could and staying hidden from the being’s line of sight. He reached the stairwell leading down. “We go in and close the door. Now.” His tone was commanding despite the other faculty present being more senior, at least at the college.

“We don’t have all of the students here,” Jeremy said. “Another Thirty seconds.”

“There is one of them outside. The Guardians are gone already,” Jaime insisted. “We should protect and hide those already here. I believe they are elves.”

“Inside of the city?” Naia asked, the mage walking towards the hallway and glancing out towards the entrance hall.

Jeremy gave Jaime a look before he nodded. “We prepare to close the door, come on.”

They rushed down, Jeremy glancing up the stairs one last time before he shut the door, enchantments coming to life that would keep them hidden, the doors and walls reinforced.

Whispers went through the room as the first students started to panic, others crying to themselves while most were starting to speculate.

“To your classes, keep them cal-” Naia said when a loud impact came from the steel doors, dust falling from the crates and ceiling, the enchantments flaring up with visible magic as the oil lamps on the walls swayed.

Everyone fell quiet.

Another impact rattled the door and walls.

Jaime drew his sword, Naia and Jeremy stepping next to him, magic flaring up. Someone sobbed behind them.

A third impact broke through the enchantments, magic sizzling out as the heavy iron door fell to the ground.

A hiss resounded.

And so they are here, Jaime thought, his blade lighting up with fire. He watched as the dark figure rushed in, too fast for him to even raise his weapon. The only thing he glimpsed was the silver pole. A beautiful weapon, the clean surface entirely unmarred, reflecting the light of his burning sword and the oil lamps in their shelter.

He stood there and twitched, looking at the figure clad in black armor. The strike should’ve already reached him. But it hadn’t come.

[Blood Mage – lvl ???]

Jaime gulped, watching the elf turn, a low hiss resounding through the shelter.

“I thought this thing would be heavier,” a voice came from behind the elf.

Jaime blinked. An impact. A loud sound. The elf hit the wall to the side, stone cracking. The ceiling shook.

Before them stood yet another being in black armor, this one with horns on her helmet, shimmering black scales protecting her arms, chest, thighs, and shins.

[Dragonslayer – lvl ???]

She held the silver pole as it thrummed with magic. “You already have a master,” she said and let go, the weapon flying over to the elf.

He caught the pole and vanished, his weapon mid strike as he stood frozen next to the Dragonslayer.

Her hand shook slightly as she held him back with an invisible force. “Then I’ll use mine,” she said, a silver war hammer appearing in her other hand, a red gem gleaming with power, silver threads rushing out before the both of them vanished.

Silence fell in the shelter.

An explosion from upstairs brought them back to the moment.

Jeremy rushed to the open doorway, raising up the steel door before he summoned earth to wedge it into the entrance. Naia moved to help.

Jaime stood, the flames of his sword flickering.

That was her. He glanced to the wall, a deep cleft where the elf had impacted.

“That was Lilith,” one of the students murmured, another started laughing.

“Quiet!” Naia hissed. “The enchantments are gone. Wilroy, Gaier, can you spin something up. We have to stay hidden.”

The two faculty reacted and moved to the door, their magic glowing as they tried to enchant the steel and stone, Jeremy stumbling back before he stopped next to Jaime, his hands shaking.

Jaime blinked his eyes, willing his spells to cease. “You should sit down,” he said to the man but Jeremy shook his head.

“It’s not... I think I know her. Can’t believe it was her back then... the Taleen dungeon, remember? She was there.”

Jaime took in a sharp breath. He had hoped he had misheard. “Ilea,” he murmured.

Ilea followed the teleporting elf, another push of her reversed healing eliciting a hiss from the monster, her hammer already entangled with the high level blood mage. She slammed into him, punching the both of them through one of the large buildings before they crashed into the ground, leaving a furrow in the earth behind them. She punched down, two waves of Deconstruction dissolving his insides, the elf regenerating quickly, his blood exploding outwards and melting into her armor. He pushed away, slipping out before she caught his foot and slammed him back down into the earth, his pole striking her head with the weight and momentum of a god like beast. She kept her balance, heat gathering within her before she grabbed his face, his next strike slowed by the threads of Silent Memory.

“Not the rematch you wanted,” she said and activated Volcanic Source. “Goodbye, Noro.” The chaotic beam disintegrated his entire head and upper torso. Ilea sent another wave of reversed Reconstruction into his body, assuming that just taking his head would not be enough. She was right, another strike of his pole rushing towards her. This time, she used Fabric Alteration to stop it once more. Burning smoke and ash circled around his regenerating remains as Scorching Intrusion flowed into him, three more spells and she was done, a melted piece of armor falling to the ground, bone and flesh returned to ash.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Beast Cleaver of the Sungod – lvl 838 / Undying Champion of Blood – lvl 832]

She teleported the pole into her hand and stored it away, to be examined later.

A spell came from her left, absorbed into her pool as she turned to look at the group of elves, their eyes uncertain as a few glanced at the pile of ash.

Ilea saw the slaughtered dead lying on the grass, and charged.

One minute later, Ilea hovered above the city. Aki had sent reinforcements through her gate, including his own platforms, fighters of the Accords now scouring through the burning city along with its defenders. The sounds of battle had died down as a Watcher stopped near her.

“Noro’s presence confirms our suspicions. My Watchers are now spread near Karth, but with the illusions they’ve displayed, we must be ready for another instant strike,” Aki sent.

“Why don’t I go and look for them?” Ilea asked.

“Ilea, we don’t know what this is. Not for certain. Be patient. I need you where I can reach you.”

She slowed her breathing and focused on her Meditation, without using the Fourth Tier, her other spells deactivated as well. She set an anchor above Dawntree and teleported back to Riverwatch, using Dale’s mark as her destination, a quick warning sent before she activated her spell.

Ilea found the man standing before a broken section of the city walls, rubble all around, a tree trunk deep within the first floor of the closest building. The pouring rain had reduced to a drizzle.

Dale closed the eyes on a dead guard, the man’s lower half entirely gone. He looked at Ilea, then lifted the dead man and walked into the city. “Always Riverwatch,” he murmured.

Ilea touched his shoulder in passing before she teleported up to the fleet of flying machines. She glimpsed a few figures she knew, Kyrian, Owl, and a few Sentinels among them.

“Good work in Dawntree,” Aki sent, his many Destroyers hovering at different altitudes. An entire army was present.

“Were any other cities hit?”

“Two targets only,” Aki sent back.

“Where are the Hunters?” she asked.

“They are returning here as we speak,” Aki sent back.

She watched the dark skies and moved her wings.

Ilea waited as the defenders formed into groups, walls rebuilt with powerful earth magic, and thousands of machines preparing in the surrounding forests, the city streets and houses, and the air above. Guardians and guards guided the population of Riverwatch towards the many set up teleportation platforms and the already present gates.

“Should I help move them?” Ilea asked.

“Not so long as there is no panic,” Aki sent. *“An evacuation takes time. Let us hope we have enough.”*

“They could target any other city or settlement while we wait here,” she sent.

“We will be ready,” Aki answered. *“But it seems their main target is Riverwatch.”*

“How do you know?”

“I see it now. You will too, in a few minutes.”

“See what exactly?”

“The flying fortress of the Sky Domain. The city of Verleya.”