Chapter 107 Book 2 Arc 2: Intelligence

The Windwhistler Family

The *Fractured Song* Index

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Author's note: I had to do a bit of a retcon. I mentioned an Alavari orc general called Antipades in earlier chapters. I kinda renamed him by accident to Antigones! He's from now on Antigones. You'll see why this is important.

"We're not heading back to the front?" Elizabeth asked.

Alexander and Elowise shook their heads, and both opened their mouths to speak, before realizing they were about to talk over one another. The centaur gestured with her hand and Alexand nodded.

"Thanks, Elowise. Yes, you're not going back. The Alavari have ceased launching attacks on our defences. They've taken part of the first defence line, but for the moment, they're sitting still. I suspect they're waiting for better weather so they can use their cannon."

Martin scratched his chin. "Maybe it's the weather. It certainly hasn't been conducive to an attack."

"That is certainly a possibility, but we think they're planning something." Alexander pointed to the Lightning Battalion's flag on the map of Erlenberg. "Your battalion's going to be reinforced tomorrow, but it'll take time to train your new recruits, so in the meantime, you've been relegated to rear guard duties. That includes guarding the Alavari prisoners we've taken. We don't have many, only about two hundred, but I need someone I can trust. There's a lot of anger towards them and these prisoners are valuable bargaining chips that cannot be harmed."

"We can use them to trade for prisoners the Alavari have taken, right?" Ginger asked, crossing her arms.

Alexander nodded. "Precisely."

Elowise coughed. "Also, I'm sorry, but the reinforcements you're getting consist of another company of convict soldiers. On the other hand, you're getting a hundred volunteers, and the

surviving company of the 12th and they're experienced soldiers. That should bring your numbers up."

Frances winced as her friends couldn't quite hide their frustration. Martin in particular was rubbing his temples.

"Is Erisdale sending us anything?" he asked.

Alexander shook his head. "Food and arms, but reinforcements have been tied up. The Alavari have advanced back into Vertingen and Earl Forowena's army is heading them off."

"If that's the case, sir, perhaps we should sally out and attack them," said Elizabeth. She pointed at the Alavari camp on the map. "We aren't going to change the situation by staying on the defensive. We need to try to turn the tables on them."

Frances nodded. "If we can attack the Alavari, raid their camp, destroy their cannon or supplies, we could buy ourselves more time."

"I agree." Elowise turned to Alexander. "We already are assigning them to guard the prisoners, maybe they can come up with something after interrogating them."

"You haven't interrogated them, dad?" Ayax asked, blinking in surprise.

"We have, but it's not been very productive. You all on the other hand…" Alexander nodded slowly, a grin spreading on his features. "Give it a try. I think you're going to surprise me."

"We'll try, sir," said Elizabeth, smiling.

Elowise clapped her hands. "Then it's settled, but be careful. The Alavari are driven and determined. They might not be attacking now, but I suspect they may resort to espionage or infiltrators." The centaur shifted between her hooves, her fists clenching tight. "I have personal experience with their operatives. They will try anything for victory."

It would not be appropriate to try to comfort a superior officer, but Frances felt she had to do something. So she curtsied, bowing her head. "Thank you for your honesty, commander Elowise."

To her embarrassment, her friends followed as best they could, with Ginger resorting to a bow.

Elowise had an unreadable expression on her face, but they could all see her lips wanting to form a bittersweet smile.

"If that's all, you're dismissed," she said.

The Alavari Camp Outside of Erlenberg…

General Antigones of the Black Banner Army sipped his flask of water, before stoppering it and carefully setting it beside his papers. Erlenberg's spring rains were proving to be quite the complication and so shovels, towels, and medicine to alleviate the disease spread by foul water all had to be ordered. He had clerks to draw up the base calculations, but he wanted to review the numbers himself before they were sent off.

He didn't mind desk work, but there was a lot and he wished was going for a jog around the camp. However, he wasn't as strong as he used to be. His once black hair and beard were grey. A run in the rain was possible, but it was damned cold and wet enough that he had to drape a heavy fur coat over his muscled shoulders. If he went out of his tent for a walk, he'd had to use one of the spare towels to wipe his clothes down. It was raining that badly.

Annoyingly enough, his guards could tell that he was bored as they stood in his tent, looking a little sympathetic at the stack of papers he was handling.

Antigones heard the squelch of boots approaching his tent and raised his hand to see a soldier open the tent flap. It was pouring outside and Antigones decided that moment that his army probably needed more towels.

The young troll saluted, rainwater dripping off a wide-brimmed hat he was wearing. It was not a standard-issue, but Antigones scribbled a note to look into getting some.

"General, we found a half-orc woman who claims to be one of our agents. She gave the right password, but we find this highly unlikely given her garb."

The orc general's almost moustache-thick eyebrows inched together. "Well, bring her in."

The soldier nodded and marched in along with two others, a goblin and an ogre. The ogre was holding onto a half-orc half-troll, also known as a trorc, woman in her mid-twenties. That meant she had an orc's green skin and eyes with black sclera, but a troll's pointed ears and tail.

Most noticeably, she was stripped down to a sodden linen shirt and lingerie that left nothing to the imagination. The only other accessories she had were a bizarrely crooked wand in a wrist holster and a rope bracelet with dark pebble-like stones.

The trorc winked. "Hey General. How are you doing? Like what you see?"

Antigones sighed, one hand stroking his beard, which ran down his shirt to his waist. “Soldiers, this is Aiva, she is one of ours.”

The soldiers’ gazes slowly fixated on Aiva, who cackled and shook her head. Droplets flew all over the soldiers from her black hair.

“Oh! Sorry sir, miss. I’ll get you some clothes—”

“She stays. You’re dismissed.” To emphasize the point, he swept his hand toward the door.

The soldiers let go of Aiva and scurried away. The guards saluted their general smartly, smiling only slightly, before leaving as well.

Aiva sauntered up to Antigones, sweeping aside the papers before leaning over his desk. “Want some private time with me, eh, general?”

The trorc female yelped as Antigones tossed a towel at her head, but long-honed reflexes caught the cloth against her face. Aiva pulled the cloth over her hair to see Antigones rising from his desk. She was tall, but her head only just reached his broad shoulders.

“What are you doing in that getup?” Antigones asked, taking the towel and gently working it against Aiva’s soaked hair.

The trorc sighed and wrapped another of the spare towels around her chest. “I had to go for a swim through the moat. They’re not guarding the city’s western side closely and so that’s the escape route I chose.”

Antigones lightly touched the back of his hand against her forehead, before continuing to dry Aiva off. “You’re going to catch a cold.”

“I thought you liked it when I’m wet.” Aiva shivered. She tried to hide it with the towel, but Antigones noticed and took off his heavy fur cloak.

“You get grouchy when you’re sick.” He laid the cloak over her shoulders and tilted her chin up with his fingers, smirking as he did so.

“You’re grouchy all the time.” The trorc grabbed her husband’s shoulders, levered herself up onto her tiptoes, and kissed him. “I’ve missed you.”

The orc, holding onto his wife, leaned into her. “I’ve missed you too, Princess.”

Princess Titania “Aiva” Greyhammer, daughter of King Thorgoth of the Alavari, let go of her husband and crossed her arms.

“Antigones, stop it.”

Sighing, the orc stepped back, hands raised. “Alright, Titania. Just lie down on the couch and relax. You have had quite a long mission.”

Titania rolled her eyes and turned her back on Antigones. “Dear, you need to hear my report. It’s important.”

Antigones put his arms on her shoulders and gently ushered his wife to the rather large lounging couch off to the side of the tent. “You need a care session after infiltrating enemy lines.” Pausing, Antigones pursed his lips. “If it makes you feel better, you can make your report while I help you with this.”

Titania stood for a moment in front of the couch, lips petulantly curled. A second later, she whined, “Oh fine!” and flounced onto the couch. She threw off the wet shirt and lay down, face-first, chin resting on the arm of the couch.

Antigones retrieved a bottle of massage oil and sat down beside his wife. Pouring some onto his hands he put the bottle next to one of the tent’s many lamps to warm up, and rubbed his oiled palms together to heat up the oil on his fingers. Only when he was quite sure the temperature was sufficient did he slowly begin to massage Titania’s shoulders.

“There, doesn’t that feel better, Titania?”

Titania merely hissed, but her fox-like tail was writhing with rather obvious pleasure. She opened her mouth, trying to get the report out, but the scent of the flower-perfumed oil filled her senses, as did the sensation of her husband’s callused hands rubbing against tired and sore muscles.

“So, what’s so important that you have to tell me now?” Antigones asked.

Titania exhaled and with her expression hidden from her husband’s eyes, smiled. “To start with, Alexander Windwhistler commands the defence.”

Antigones didn’t pause in his ministrations, but his eyes did widen. “A Windwhistler put up such a defence?”

“You probably know him as Alexander Blacktail of the Half-sword Mercenary Company. His second-in-command is ex-Baroness Elowise Fields,” said Titania.

The orc hummed, strong fingers rubbing his wife’s neck. “So that’s where Elowise went. Hmm, that explains why their dispositions have been excellent. They have experienced commanders.”

“Mmhmm, oh!” Titania gritted her teeth and sighed. “That’s the spot. Oh, and I know your next question.”

“Oh?” Antigones asked, an eyebrow arched.

“You’re wondering how their troops are holding.” Titania grinned, glancing over her shoulder. “That or you want to know the state of the supplies in the city?”

Antigones nodded somewhat absentmindedly, his attention still focused on Titania’s shoulders. “Indeed. I am aware we haven’t cut their supply lines yet, but it’s annoying we have no idea what their supply situation is.” He suddenly blinked and winced. “Ah, they’re not running out?”

Titania shook her head. “Unfortunately they’re not, dear. Erisdale is sending Erlenberg very few soldiers, but a lot of food, gunpowder and ammunition. They also evacuated a large portion of the city’s civilian population after Aijin Fields.”

Antigones stroked the end of his beard. “Blast. So the army will have to surround the city after all.”

“Yes. At least then we can force them to just rely on being supplied by ship.” Titania hummed as her husband pressed against a sore spot on her back. “As to the troops, it’s a little more—Oh, there, please. Oh, yes.” Coughing, Titania winced. “Sorry, dear. You’re just so good at this.”

“Don’t apologize for feeling good, Titania.” Kissing his wife’s shoulder, Antigones whispered. “Your father’s not here.”

Titania exhaled slowly and closed her eyes. “I know. Thank you.” Exhaling, she opened her eyes and found she was able to smile again. “Right, as for the troops. They’re recruiting more from the remaining populace. Their security was pretty good, but I managed to sneak into their map room and counted how many battalions they have. They have twenty-three battalions of varying strengths.”

Frowning now, and not just because his wife had a lot of tense muscles on her back, Antigones muttered, “Twenty-three battalions is a lot, even if not all of them are full-strength. They could have anywhere from seven to almost twelve-thousand soldiers. How many of them are newly raised? By my estimate, we had to have caused around four thousand casualties to the twelve-thousand they first fielded, in addition to the thousand we captured.”

“That was apparently just a portion of their total force and they’ve been recruiting from the population. I’m sorry, dear, I can’t tell you how many battalions are newly raised. They did raise at least five, but they’re putting a lot of new recruits into existing battalions,” Titania explained.

“Hm. That’s not good news.” Suddenly, he chuckled. “But I’d rather kiss the messenger. She’s brought very valuable intelligence.”

Titania giggled at that and glanced over her shoulder. “There’s more. Alexander and Elowise have set up multiple defensive lines in the city, essentially creating isolated areas they can quarantine if any one part of the line is breached. I recorded where they are in my storage gem, but essentially, the army is facing a fortress built in the city.”

Eyes sparkling with interest, Antigones briefly paused in his massage. He had to put some more oil on Titania’s back anyway. “Hmm, damn. That explains how they held up our advance. I wonder how did they build such lines so quickly?”

“I am not certain, but I suspect Erlenberg has been consulting with Erisdale. The plans seem to have been proposed by Eleanor Windwhistler, who is smart, but no strategic genius. However, her daughter is the Firehand.”

Snapping one’s fingers when covered with scented massage oil was not easy, but the older orc managed. “And she sits on the War Council with Earl Forowena and of course Eleanor acted rationally. It certainly explains why supplies are being organized so quickly. They knew about Erlenberg’s weakness.” Antigones began to rub Titania’s lower back, making her purr again. “But why not send more troops? All my scouts report that all they’ve sent are convict troops.”

“I think it’s the human kingdoms being selfish, but then again, my father’s deployed his armies on all the other fronts. There’s also a final complication you might want to consider.” The trorc met her husband’s eyes again. “You lost one of your war mages recently, didn’t you?”

Antigones nodded. “We did. It was Carlena the Exploder.”

“That bitch?” Titania asked, smiling much like a cat who’d caught its prey.

Frowning, Antigones stopped massaging his wife, much to her eyebrow-raised displeasure. “I prefer not to speak so ill of the dead, even if she is—was a pain.”

“She worships the ground my father walks upon and bullied Aralik at the academy. You know, your son. Sweetest healer-mage, who somehow likes me even though I’m his step-mother?” Titania squawked, tail standing on end.

Antigones’s frown vanished, a scowl taking its place. “Ah, I stand corrected. Yes, that *bitch* is dead and has my officers tails’ a wagging about a lightning-wielding mage in the city.”

“Luckily for us, I have some information on that.” Titania flipped herself over onto her back, gave him a pointed look and lifted one long, muscled leg toward her husband. Antigones slid down the couch to begin on her thighs. “The mage that killed her is Frances Windwhistler, an Otherworlder, and the adoptive daughter of Edana Firehand.”

Antigones frowned. “A powerful mage. Odd that she’s adopted by the Firehand, though. I thought the Otherworlders mostly wanted to leave Durannon and return to their families.”

“I’ll look into that next time I go in. It is an interesting question. More importantly, she’s easily the most powerful mage the city has to offer. She’s perhaps not as good of a duellist as Ophelia Voidsailor, but I saw her lightning spell during the Winter Tournament. She’s only sixteen but is a veteran and was at Vertingen, Westfall Pass, Kwent and Freeburg.”

Antigones froze. “She’s the mage that stopped us from taking out the Firehand!”

Titania nodded sagely and nudged her husband with her bare feet to get him to keep working on her thighs. “Yes, she is. She’s also the second-in-Command of the Lightning Battalion, one of the quick response forces that has been causing the army trouble. This Lightning Battalion of hers is led by Elizabeth Windwhistler, an Otherworlder Warrior, and has amongst its commanding staff, Alexander’s adopted daughter who is also a mage, and an Erisdalian knight. By all rights, this kind of force should fail. They’re all very young, the battalion’s cobbled from fragments of other battalions, and they have an entire company made up of convict soldiers.”

“Except, they’re the bane of my army right now,” said Antigones.

Titania nodded, lips breaking into a grin. “And I figured out why. All of them, including the convicts, have been trained. They’re loyal and they have an amazing degree of initiative. That and they have two mages and an entire cavalry company. The good news is the last battle’s been rough on them and they’ve been rotated to the rear for rest. More than half of them right now are wounded.”

Antigones’s eyebrows shot up. “And you’re completely confident of this?”

“Yes. Once the weather lets up, you have an opening—mmph!” Quickly getting over her surprise, Titania closed her eyes and leaned into her husband’s kiss.

When they did part, Antigones had an eager light in his eyes that looked a little out of place for his age. “Titania, my officers have been in a complete tizzy about this Lightning Battalion, and because they didn’t exist until after Aijin fields, the prisoners we’ve captured have no idea what they are. You have quite possibly saved this siege. What would you like to do tonight because I’m going to pamper you.”

Cheeks reddening, Titania whispered, “Y—you really don’t have to.”

“I want to, but that’s up to you, as always,” Antigones said, gently caressing his wife’s cheek.

“After all that I’ve done, even after all the people I’ve had to sleep with, and still do, how can you love me so?” Titania asked.

Antigones chuckled. “You make it easy, my fierce princess. Besides, it’s your father’s fault for sending you on these missions.”

Sighing, Titania embraced her husband, pressing her head against his shoulder. “I don’t deserve you.”

“I really hate hearing you say that. Can I convince you by saying that Galena is throwing you a bone after giving you a terrible father and an idiot brother?” Antigones asked, semi-teasingly.

Titania shrugged and let go of her husband, lying back on the couch. “Maybe. Though, it’s not really Timur’s fault. Timur has no idea what he’s done to me.”

Antigones, frowning, moved down to massage his wife’s feet. “That’s not what you said before.”

“He’s still an idiot, but he’s become… less of an idiot.” Titania frowned, one hand scratching at her pointed ear. “I’m not sure how or why, but he’s been looking at my father differently. Admiringly still, but more carefully.”

“Hmm, someone knocked something into his thick head.” Antigones pushed his knuckle into his wife’s foot, making her groan in satisfaction. “I also have some news. We’re getting reinforced. Prince Sebastian and Megara made it very hard, but the Lapanteria’s Grand Legion was driven back and we’ve occupied their border province of Resthan.”

Titania's eyes half-lidded, bit her lip as tingles shot up her feet. “There’s some kind of catch.”

Antigones blinked. “How do you know that?”

Titania giggled. “Darling, you’re grouchy, but you’re very rarely unhappy, and you sound like it now.”

Shaking his head, the orc stroked his beard. “We’re getting Helias and the 2nd Corps. They’re arriving tomorrow.”

“So that means you’re still in charge of the siege.” Titania frowned, her toes curling. “Which begs the question of why did my father send him to you? He knows we both hate him. Ow!”

“Sorry, dear. I think you scratched your feet. Must have been when you were clambering out of the moat.” Antigones got up and fetched a tub of unguent, dressing and bandages, which he started to dress the wound with.

“I was wondering why it was stinging—” Titania hissed as the unguent touched the scratch “—Ah, yeah there. Thank you, dear.”

“You’re welcome. Now, I suspect he’s sent Helias and his 2nd corps to us to help his new favourite make a name for himself. Helias did take Freeburg, only to be foiled by an Otherworlder counterattack. Aside from that, he’s not held command of a large force.” Antigones wrapped the bandage and glanced up. “How’s that dear? Too tight?”

“It’s good.” As Antigones did the knot on the bandage, Titania hummed. “He could be sending him to keep an eye on you. Or even worse, he could have sent Helias to you as part of a plot to try to make you look bad.”

Antigones paused, narrowing his eyes. “It is a favoured strategy of your father to send someone to constrain our movements. That’s what he intended when he married you to me.”

“In a sense. He was more trying to control you rather than monitor you through me.” Titania giggled and nudged her husband with her feet again. “I think that’s the only thing I will ever thank him for.”

The orc grinned. “Perhaps I should do so to his face the next time we meet.” Getting up, he grabbed cups and the wine bottle on his desk and poured two cups. “So, what do you think I should do next?”

“Don’t you have a plan already?” Titania asked.

Antigones sipped from his glass. “Yes, but as you know, I always want to hear your ideas first because you often give very good ideas.”

Titania smiled widely. “In that case, send Helias’s army forward into the northern part of the city. Batter down their weakened defences and destroy Helias’s credibility in one fell swoop.”

“I was actually thinking the same thing. The problem is that I would prefer not to lose more good Alavari. So if you have any ideas to make this plan better, I’m all ears,” Antigones said.

Frowning, Titania sipped from her cup, resting her cheek in one hand. “Hmm, give me a team of your best and I can go in and take their leadership out.”

“That I don’t like,” said Antigones, shaking his head.

Titania arched an eyebrow. “You know I could do it.”

“I don’t like that you have to do it because of your father.” The orc gave his wife a meaningful glance. His was none-too-amused.

“I’m choosing to carry this mission out, Antigones, not because I want to but because we might not win if we don’t. The Black Banner Army’s already taken a lot of casualties and lost a battalion of Zwei-solders.” Titania snapped her fingers. “They’ve got two hundred of them prisoner by the way.”

Antigones sighed, eyes on his glass. “Titania, I’m sorry for being grouchy. You know my feelings about the deal you made with your father.”

“It was the only way to keep things from escalating,” said the trorc, putting her cup down on the ground.

“I know, and I don’t hold it against you. You putting yourself in danger worries me.”

Antigones felt a hand on his arm and turned to find his wife pulling herself beside him, leaning her head against his shoulder.

“You have made yourself a bit too clear on the subject, dear, but I accept your apology. I won’t go in, yet. By the way, why don’t you trade the Zwei-Solders with some of the prisoners you have.”

“Thank you, sweetie.” He didn’t bat an eye as Titania kicked her legs over his so she was sitting on him, using his arms as a couch. “As for that idea, I’ve considered it, but I’ll wait a few days. If I propose a trade too early that would imply weakness. I don’t want them to think that we’re letting them off yet.”

“Are you taking a page out of my book?” Titania asked, making herself comfortable.

“It’s more that you reminded me of a page in what I’ve learned,” Antigones replied.

Titania smiled, hands stroking her husband’s beard. He had to have oiled it this morning because it smelled quite nice. “Hmm. To take a page out of your book, have you considered what you pulled at Vertingen?”

“Get their attention and then hit them where they don’t expect?” Antigones asked, one hand’s fingers twirling his wife’s hair.

Titania nodded. “Using Helias’s army to get their attention in the south of the city so that you can then take the glory.”

“Hmm. I like that idea on paper but we’ll have to go through what you’ve got in detail. I don’t want to throw lives away needlessly.” Antigones slid-carried his wife onto the couch and settled over her, hands on either side of her head. “In the meantime, I think you’re too well-clothed at the moment.”

Titania rolled her eyes. Nevertheless, she wrapped her hands around her husband’s neck, pulling him towards her. “Antigones you are incorrigible.”

“And you love me despite it.” He winked and she locked lips with him. “Besides, I… Mmph—I know you’ve missed me.”

Titania guided her husband’s hands down over and past her shoulders. “Oh, I do. Now rip these off already.”

Author’s Note: Patreons, I do hope you enjoyed this look into the antagonists and the Alavaria muahahaha.

Question of the Update: Best couple of *Fractured Song?*

General Antigones and Princess Titania
Prince Sebastian and Megara
Martin and Ginger

XD

But in all seriousness, what’s your favourite romance story and why? I think my favorite is *Titanic*… and I’ll admit, because of the ship sinking, but I also did like Jack and Rose. I also typically like romantic subplots because they provide a bit of drama to a story. I do remember quite liking the fanfic *Spirit of Redemption* and the romances within.