

Chapter 743 Contestants

Ilea aimed for the chest. She pulled back the string, her enhanced eyes showing her the details in her target. A steel plate armor held up by a metal base, filled entirely with straw.

The crowd was silent, waiting in anticipation as she prepared her shot.

She let loose, the string vibrating as it came to a sudden halt. Ilea watched the arrow fly and strike its target.

A loud boom resounded as an explosion enveloped the entirety of the dummy, heated steel shrapnel flying in all directions.

“Yes!” she exclaimed and raised her fist to a roar of cheers and applause.

People chanted her name in unison, the archers gathered nearby looking on with varied expressions. None of them met her eyes.

That’s right! she thought with a grin under her ash armor.

“Is that allowed?” one of the judges asked in a whisper. An old ranger with quite a majestic beard.

“Technically... it is a bow,” the woman sitting next to him answered. She smiled towards Ilea and waved.

“Yes but the arrow...” the third judge said. She didn’t finish her sentence when she locked eyes with Ilea. “I’m sure it’s fine. The latter targets require accuracy anyway.”

Triumphant yet again. All enemies slain, Ilea mused in her mind, raising the massive greatbow to the cheering crowd in the admittedly quite small arena.

It should’ve been the least popular tournament next to the weapon throwing one but word got around that Lilith would be participating. And so the stands were packed. A few other tournaments were going on at the same time, including preliminaries for the main ones. Apparently a lot of people had signed up.

She watched a few of the archers take their shots at the newly set up targets, clapping whenever one of them managed a good shot. It seemed she was the only one present who didn’t have an actual archery Class. However what she did have was a massive ass bow. And exploding arrows. That had to count for something.

Ilea stored her bow and teleported out, using the skill a few more times until she arrived in the main arena. She had agreed not to bypass the anti teleportation enchantments set up around the main viewing terrace. Doing so may invalidate the defenses set up by the Accords, and it would piss off a bunch of the dwarves.

The Shadowguards and Sentinels guarding the entrance let her through without issue, Ilea joining the nobility of the Plains. She realized that many of them weren’t particularly interested in the fights themselves, instead using the opportunity to talk with other important figures. Ilea was just there because it was the best view, and she didn’t want to take away any attention from the participants by sitting on the walls of the coliseum like structure.

She summoned herself a meal and leaned against the stone railing. A team of adventurers was facing off against a group she near instantly recognized. *So they did it. Guess they were out until today*, she thought with a wide grin on her face. The three people were clad in battered stonehammer and bone armor.

One floated above ground with ash wings spreading from her back, a bow made of ash in her hand as she aimed for one of the remaining targets. Her red hair flowed freely, falling down her back, green eyes taking in her surroundings. She looked more focused than Ilea had ever seen her. Dany's hand was calm, waiting as the dust clouds moved through the arena. She let loose an arrow right when an opening presented itself.

The full plate wearing adventurer from the other group staggered back, blocking the projectile with his shield when the arrow exploded into a mist of heated ash. He staggered back, roaring as a sphere of fire pushed out to get rid of the dust and ash.

Ilea raised her brows as she watched Cornelius reform in the cloud next to the adventurer. He floated a few centimeters above ground and moved his hands in a calm manner, the entire dust around them condensing into a small storm. His magic entirely enveloped the man, chunks of armor ripped away with flesh and blood joining soon. He stopped the spell when his opponent collapsed to one knee, coughing up blood, both his axe and shield falling to the side. What was left of them.

That might just be enough to help my resistance, Ilea thought and watched him turn into a cloud yet again. *Even worse than sand.*

Their last opponent was a void mage, teleporting around to avoid both projectiles and clouds of magic.

Roots broke out of the ground a split second later, catching the legs of the void mage. The whole arena shook as more of the ground exploded, chunks of debris flying to the side with heavy impacts. From the crack stepped a three meter tall and broad creature of wooden roots and ash. It moved its arm, pulling the mage closer. Void explosions flashed out but she was enveloped nonetheless. Her movements stopped right before she was slapped against the stone floor, several bones breaking in the process.

The crowd cheered at the demonstration of power.

“And with that, we have the last group to join the main team tournament. Raphia, Cornelius, and Dany, representing the Medic Sentinel Corps in this category!” the announcer said, her voice booming through the enchanted device.

Not quite the clumsy team of optimistic adventurers anymore, Ilea thought, sipping on her ale before she ate a little more.

Raphia downright grew out of her wood and ash powered war machine before she jumped down to heal the woman she had just brutally splattered onto the stone floor. “I’m so sorry!” she exclaimed as she knelt down with her hands extended towards the barely breathing adventurer.

Ilea could see the woman stare back, the pain soon relieved as she closed her eyes.

Dany did the same, healing the two adventures that had been downed even before Ilea had joined to watch. Cornelius just waved towards the stands, a slight smile on his face until he looked towards the terrace. He grinned and waved when he saw Ilea.

She waved back. *“Well fought. You’ve grown considerably.”*

Cornelius raised his brows but quickly adapted. *“Y... yes. A lot has happened. The reputation of the Sentinels and their training is... underrated.”*

“I hope you weren’t treated badly,” Ilea said.

“Not at all. It’s just that your training seems like a comfortable afternoon bout compared to what we went through,” the replied. *“I think the results speak for themselves.”*

“That they do,” she said and waited for them to leave into the facilities reserved for the participants. Ilea finished her meal and left the terrace, teleporting through the arena until she came out behind the group of Sentinels that had just fought. *“You didn’t think you could get away so easily, did you?”*

She spread her limbs to envelope them all but Cornelius turned to dust. Dany and Raphia she managed to gather in a bit of a messy group hug. *“Good to see you,”* she said, letting them go.

“Il... I mean Lilith!” Raphia exclaimed and jumped up as soon as she was freed.

“It’s good to see you too,” Dany said. *“We heard a lot about your adventures. Some of the songs were hard to believe.”*

“I’m still not convinced they’re not all entirely made up,” Cornelius said.

Ilea grinned. *“Just as your expectations of the Sentinels, I assure you, young dust mage, they don’t even come close to reality.”*

He looked at her with a doubtful look but didn’t retort.

“I heard you’re taking part in the archery tournament,” Dany said. She had a bit of a smug smile on her face.

“Yes,” Ilea said and summoned her greatbow.

Dany smiled. *“That’ll do it.”*

“And explosive arrows too,” Ilea said with a wink.

[Battle Healer – lvl 163]

[Dust Mage – lvl 168]

[Wood Mage – lvl 156]

“No interest in ash, Cornelius?” Ilea asked.

He locked eyes with her. *“Dust Sentinel. First of its kind,”* he said with a bit of the element swirling around him.

“I’m sure you’ll get far with that,” Ilea mused.

“I will,” he said.

“I’m sure you will,” she said.

“Further than you,” he said.

Ilea raised her brows and deactivated Monstrous. *“Better catch up faster then, boy.”*

“Ooooooh! That’s three!” Raphia exclaimed. She jumped up and pointed at Ilea. *“Three!”* she showed three fingers to her team mates.

“Yes. We can see it too,” Cornelius said through gritted teeth. “You must’ve gotten lucky, again.”

“Of course. It’s my hidden stat,” Ilea said. “Have you guys eaten anything?”

“I’m starved,” Dany said. “We arrived earlier today and Trian said we had to join the team tournament because most everyone else signed up for guard duty.”

Raphia nodded to herself. “Conscientious. But we will represent the Sentinels well!”

“Using big words again?” Cornelius said.

A wooden root slashed through the man, two dust clouds reforming into one right after.

“I can read, unlike some people,” the wood mage said. She shook her head.

Ilea teleported them out and towards the Golden Goose. She grinned when all of them spread their wings. Well all but the dust mage. He just straight up floated.

“We’re not even at two hundred. Which means we won’t get far. Not with the competition that’s supposedly around,” Dany said.

“Trian isn’t stupid. We’re the perfect group to show off. We can handle low two hundreds, maybe even higher if they make mistakes. Seeing how powerful even we are will lead a lot of credibility to our organization. And the nobles will note that we’re not putting our best in the tournaments while we’re supposed to protect the events. It’s just another way to show off power,” Cornelius explained.

Ilea nodded. “Sounds plausible.”

“You’re not involved in that kind of planning, I’m sure,” he said. “Too busy fighting things as dense as you are.”

“I didn’t remember you quite as bold,” Ilea said.

“I’ve seen everything, Ilea. You don’t scare me. Not anymore,” he said.

“Ah, I see. Why don’t you have a look around and come to the Golden Goose via teleportation gate,” Ilea said and opened a portal to the domain of the Meadow. She used her space manipulation to push the man made dust cloud through and closed it again.

“What was that!” Raphia exclaimed, flying around the area where the man had vanished.

“Space magic,” Ilea said with a smile.

“That’s very nice,” the woman whispered, nodding to herself. “I wish I could do that to him.”

“Who knows. Maybe he learns some manners before coming back,” Ilea said as they landed near the restaurant in question, a queue present despite the start of the tournaments.

Dany snorted. “You underestimate his stubbornness.”

“And you underestimate the Meadow,” Ilea said.

Two waiters appeared nearby and bowed. “Lady Lilith. Are you here with guests?”

“Yeah, us three for now and a fourth one in... let’s say fifteen minutes,” she said.

“Excellent. Please follow me,” the woman said and vanished.

She teleported in and brought the two Sentinels with her.

“This is rather strange,” Dany admitted. “To be teleported against one’s will.”

“It’s pretty rare,” Ilea said.

They got a separate room, the waiter having summoned a table for four with the respective chairs and tableware.

“Drinks and appetizers to start?” she asked.

“That would be great, thank you,” Ilea said and smiled at her before she sat down. *Enchanted wood inlaid with steel. All four of them. Well played. They prepared.*

The soon received the first drinks and plates, Ilea sharing some of her adventures with the two wide eyed Sentinels. Their time it seemed had mostly been occupied by harrowing training and dungeon explorations guided somewhat by the faculty and sometimes even higher leveled Sentinels. Whoever was available.

“Some of the dungeons are off limits at the moment,” Dany said.

“Yes, because we killed nearly everything in them,” Raphia said and continued eating.

“Well not us specifically. Just the Sentinels,” Dany. “I hear it’s been a bit of a problem finding new training grounds in the area. At least there has been a sharp decline in travelers being attacked by monsters.”

“Don’t think that’s a problem anymore, honestly,” Ilea said.

“The gates. Yes,” Dany commented before drinking a sip of wine. “I’ve been wondering how it tastes.”

“From the haven, right?” Raphia asked.

“Yes. I think some are made with techniques from an ancient civilization,” Dany mused, swirling the liquid in her glass.

Their Queen and King are in the city, Ilea thought with a slight smile. She hadn’t seen them on the terrace earlier but she assumed they were around somewhere.

The door opened slowly, the three occupants glancing over at the noise. Entering with slack shoulders did the previously banished dust mage. He took a deep breath and looked up, the previous arrogance gone entirely.

“Forgive me, Lilith. I doubted you,” he said in a slightly shaking voice, then bowed.

Dany raised a brow, glancing between him and Ilea. Raphia just kept eating with a happy expression.

“We’re all just little drakes, living in a world of dragons,” Ilea said.

The man walked to the table and sat down, taking in a deep breath before he sighed. He wanted to pour himself a glass of wine when a waitress appeared and did it for him. She waited for him to down the glass and refilled it. Thrice.

“How’d the meeting go?” Ilea asked.

He didn’t reply for a few seconds. He raised his hand but lowered it again when he realized it was shaking. “I have a lot to learn.”

“What did you see?” Raphia asked, moving closer to him with a broad smile. “Tell me.”

“A being beyond anything... I thought possible,” the dust mage spoke.

“The Meadow is nice though. There are worse things out there,” Ilea said. “On the other hand, I’m not sure if there’s anything more sarcastic out there.”

“How is that relevant?” Dany asked.

“You will understand once you meet it,” Ilea said.

“I see,” the woman replied.

“And the Lich... how... why?” Cornelius asked, looking up from his plate.

“I was looking for an artifact. That was funny... interesting void creature I fought there,” Ilea started, retelling the story while omitting certain bits, mostly about the companions with her and the artifact in question.

Lunch went by quickly and the group had to prepare once more for their next fight. Ilea too would have to prove herself once more in her chosen competition.

Lily had chosen a lone bench near one of the corners of the large hall. She made sure nobody could sneak up on her, and she made an effort to check the other contestants. These were still just the preliminaries for the pre two hundred singles tournament but there were plenty of people she considered capable.

Some were casually talking to others, confident and calm, others were scouting out their competition just like her. Nobody revealed anything about their magic or abilities, though many were carrying weapons. She knew not to judge someone’s skills based on the quality of their equipment. She was her main example.

Lily looked down at her knife, the blade in its makeshift sheathe, the original one long gone. She had seen better ones. Harder metals, enchantments to enhance the sharpness or durability of the blade. But it still worked. Still did its job. If she ever changed to something else, it had to be a major upgrade, and for a good reason too. The first things she would get were a place to stay somewhere in Morhill, then more comfortable and clean clothing, light metal armor, and finally she would think about weapons.

“The next fight will start in three minutes. Contestant Geronimo and contestant Nelson please enter through the gates. Remember, killing an opponent will lead to instant disqualification. Good luck,” an excited voice said through an enchanted speaking device.

She had seen something similar before but never with a quality quite this crisp. Lily assumed it had to do with the Accords. A lot of the technology around seemed strange and new. The teleportation gates she had heard about of course, but not just that. She had seen people in magic powered suits of armor, walking around with ease despite the massive weight. She had listened in on a

conversation between three adventurers who said the suits were so called war machines, operated by dwarves.

Lily had wondered about what to do after the tournament but the more she learned about these southern cities and the true reason behind these festivities, the more options presented themselves. For now, she planned on becoming an adventurer. With the teleportation gates in Morhill, the choice was obvious. She could easily explore large parts of the Plains, go from city to city, and take whatever jobs took her fancy. Other options existed of course. Once she reached level two hundred, she could join the Shadow's Hand, but the fee to become a full member was quite hefty. And she would likely be pushed towards joining a team. Not something she was too keen on at the moment.

She had considered the Medic Sentinels as well, but with every snippet of information she picked up, she thought herself less fitting. Lily wasn't interested in the torturous training they went through, nor did she see a reason to become a healer to help other adventurers or random villages and towns. She already had a healing spell for herself and her pack. That was all she needed.

She allowed herself a slight smile, watching the combatants walk towards the gates. For the first time in years she felt excited. The tournament was just the first step. *I can do it. I don't need anyone.* She looked at her knife again and squeezed the handle.