

Trian looked around the underground domain. The cube like structure set into the stone ground looked interesting, especially compared to the few stone buildings that were present as well. He had of course known about the teleportation gates beforehand but he hadn't quite grasped the reality of it until he stepped onto the platform and appeared here. In the supposed North.

Aki's new form wasn't a surprise. It had only been a matter of time until Ilea would've found his colleague an upgrade to his previous form. *Necessary too, the students were getting off too easily.* He allowed himself a slight smile, looking at the large but slender form walk through the very air. Enormous power radiated from its form, a near invisible shield protecting the machine. He just hoped the other members of the Council didn't think to convince Aki to work for them instead. *He wouldn't. He's a Sentinel through and through.*

The floating form in the distance talking to a dwarf didn't stand out in the grand scheme of things. The smith Ilea had mentioned, he assumed. They had been informed about the various beings that lived here in Hallowfort, though the town itself would be located up above. He glanced at Kyrian and looked towards the black grass, a crystal tree visible a few hundred meters away. Pillars of stone rose throughout the vicinity, fireflies moving in serene patterns over the downright eerie meadow. Beyond, the cavern opened up, what he knew to be crystal light coming in from outside. The edge of a cliff suggested a drop, how far he didn't know.

Kyrian glanced at him and gave him a slight nod.

He straightened and bowed in a respectful manner, ignoring the looks he was surely getting from both the present representatives, the Elders, and his friends. "Greetings, Endless Meadow," he said in a clear voice. He waited a few seconds, almost starting to feel a little silly when he felt a magical presence connect to his mind.

"Greetings, young human. You are receptive. Do scream should this cause you any distress," the voice spoke, undefinable to any standard. A voice, commanding power. Almost mocking, patronizing, but not arrogant. Simply knowing.

"It doesn't seem to be an issue. And we have an arcane healer present anyway. I have heard a lot about you," he said, used to telepathy by now with Ilea's new acquisition. *Ready to meet another friend of hers,* he thought, squishing the feeling of being in the presence of a god. *Just treat it like you would Ilea.*

Navalis glanced at the Headmaster who had greeted what she assumed to be the overwhelming presence behind them. She gulped as she watched him move towards it, the others too preoccupied with the Taleen death machine to react. *Is he communicating through telepathy?* She turned to

Wayland but the man seemed focused on the Pursuer too, green eyes taking them in as the machine stepped behind the woman she had once known to be Ilea.

It irked her. She wanted to see, wanted to learn everything she could about this place and its denizens but she knew it was beyond her. Naval's ground her teeth when she noticed Ilea looking right at her.

"No need to freak out. Were you not informed?" the woman's voice appeared in her mind.

Telepathy. She's a mind mage too now? She had thought the arcane presence was her main magic, and with all the stories of ash, she assumed that to be her second. A general skill? Or another Class, if such a thing is even possible?

"You can reply you know," Ilea said. *"Come on, we fought Elves together, I'm still the same, just way, way more powerful."*

"Are you really? You don't feel the same," Naval's said, immediately regretting her words. It was so easy to slip with telepathy, the lack of air and movement of her mouth barriers not present. Her eyes opened wide.

"I'm above level five hundred. Don't tell the others. Plenty of evolutions and a third Class. I'll have to show you some of my magic later, the space stuff is super cool," the woman said and smiled, winking at her.

She's the same. No monster would be so nonchalant. Five hundred?

[Battle Healer – lvl ??]

Is she hiding it then? Her magic feels closer to that of the Pursuer, maybe even beyond. She gulped again. "Sorry, it's just a lot to take in. I didn't know what we were going to do. Sulivhaan only spoke of a meeting."

"Yeah, they were fucking with you," Ilea said with a smile. *"Though he seems just as freaked out as you are. Rock wants to fight it seems. Maybe you can dissuade him, I don't want to shatter his self confidence."*

She's genuinely concerned. Not a surprise with her power. The stories of Lilith were confirmed to her. Beyond even. Naval's assumed they were not exactly exaggerated, but more the opposite. Her acquaintance from a few years past had risen in power to the point where the entirety of the Shadow's Hand would fall to her. She had seen her sustain and heal from injuries back when she had been at two hundred, she couldn't even imagine what a healer at her level could survive.

The Elders didn't react much to the introduction of the Pursuer, but Lucas seemed curious as to the visitors and the surrounding people. *He's not in the know, not like the other Elders. I thought he had died years ago,* Naval's thought and bowed respectfully towards the three people.

Elder Quil nodded in response. Pierce seemed excited, watching the various people but mainly Sulivhaan and Wayland.

Does she know the man? Past dealings or an enemy? No, more the curiosity one would show to a friend, similar to how Kyrian watched Trian.

"Aki will return to the Headquarters soon, but we'll have to figure out how to hide him throughout the city to avoid a panic," Ilea continued. *"He's a three mark after all."*

So are you, Naval's thought.

“This cube thing is going to be the northern site of the Sentinels, Trian already knows about it. You can inspect it whenever,” Ilea said.

“I will, thanks,” the man answered in a slightly absentminded way. He had sat down on a nearby stone, a thoughtful expression on his face as he looked towards the distant tree.

“Over there is Goliath, the floating Dark One, and an excellent smith from Hallowfort. Claire, I’m sure you can figure out some projects that might interest him enough to actually work on it. Bralin is the dwarf next to him, he’s from the Pit, another settlement closer to the Naraza mountain chain. We can talk about that stuff later, their leader... well the closest they have to a leader, is interested in potential relations with us as well,” Ilea explained. “Don’t be alarmed by the various beings here, all should be awakened, meaning they’re capable of thought and communication. Let’s get this out of the way then, Owl?”

Navalis froze when she felt the presence of death intensify, the power overwhelming despite her lack of perception abilities. All she could do was fight against her instincts. A four mark wielder of magic. They had specific procedures in place whenever they encountered such a being. Standing in one place was not part of that. She saw Rock raise his hammer and immediately touched his back to try and dissuade him.

Senia gave them a glance before she looked at Sulivhaan but the man stared forward instead.

The presence appeared next to Ilea, floating a meter above the ground. Humanoid in shape but entirely different in every other way. Its body had an ethereal quality to it, a purple sheen to its form with two glowing eyes and a line that suggested a mouth in its head. Navalis held her breath, her hand shaking lightly as she resisted the urge to teleport away. She saw the hand sign Senia gave her, the woman as tense as she was. *Teleportation restricted.*

[Greater Lich – lvl ????]

Navalis could feel the fear now. Everyone present was a veteran, the only reason nobody had tried to flee the calm presence of both Ilea and the Elders. Claire and Kyrian seemed mostly unbothered as well.

“Uhm... hello everyone,” an ethereal voice spoke as the Lich raised a hand in a wave like gesture.

What?

Navalis watched the being glance at Ilea, the latter giving a reassuring smile and nod. *Who... what...*

“Hello Owl,” Claire said. “It’s nice to meet you.”

The Lich seemed relieved by that, the tension broken in an instant.

Rock started laughing, Senia giving him an annoyed glare.

“How is this possible?” Wayland murmured, taking a step forward.

“Found her in a dungeon far north, some rituals happened millennia ago, killed a monster and a problematic undead, and here we are,” Ilea said and shrugged.

That doesn’t explain anything!

Wayland nodded to himself, turning around as he glanced at his three shadows. “This is real, right? You’re seeing this too?”

All Navalis could do was give him a confirming hand sign, one only her team would understand but she didn't really consider it in the moment.

"Yeah, it's real alright. Or some high level illusion spell... mind magic maybe," Rock said as he looked around with his hammer in hand.

That thing won't help you here, Navalis thought.

"There is nothing like that here," Sulivhaan said in a calm voice. "Greetings, Greater Lich Owl," he added and bowed. "Are you a representative of Hallowfort?"

"I... no... I just..." the Lich said and looked at Ilea, her eyes glowing a little brighter.

Aki stepped over and touched her ethereal back with his morphing silver arm, long fingers ending in spikes.

Navalis gulped at the sight.

"She's just a resident. The Meadow teaches her to handle her overwhelming power. So that she doesn't just kill people with her presence alone," Ilea explained.

The Meadow... teaches a four mark? Navalis didn't dare look towards the grass.

The edges of the domain were clear, usual travelers moving through the hidden crevices in the lands, lightning distorting the perception of the all seeing Meadow where it truck into the ravaged stone. The day had come like any other and yet it felt significant. More so than most others.

Life was brought into the world, and taken away. New beings would awaken, others forever gone, their chance at enlightenment snuffed out by the cruel hands of reality. Civilization as known to Elos would soon reach another stage, long range teleportation capable of bringing together species and peoples of distant lands. Their values and history would clash and grate, the comfort of their walls breached by the ways of the fabric. The fate of thousands lay on the scales of time, and the Meadow saw those at the very center.

The potential of endless wars and unprecedented death was a reality, and still it trusted the one being at the center of this new age. She herself neither considered the true significance of her character in the weave of relations nor did she want the responsibility that came with such a position. And precisely because of those facts, was she the perfect initiator. Those she had gathered around her were beings from different pasts, species of all kinds of make, beings that would fear and fight each other for a sheer lack of similarity.

Ilea had enjoyed the title given to her, the position of Primordial Arbiter, yet she failed to grasp the significance of its existence. Even the Meadow was impressed at the trust given to her, not just by itself but by the beings present in this historical event. An undead Lich, feared by those who had encountered such, cursed by others. A Taleen machine, accepted by Elves. Humans in the North,

about to meet the Council of Hallowfort, awakened beings they would've considered monsters without the presence and significance of Lilith.

The Meadow couldn't help but feel pride. To have come here, to be part of it all, to have helped her reach further understanding, as resilient to learning as she was. This world held promise after all, the beings full of hope and potential. It considered the wasteland of Erendar, the spirits of death and the sky, roaming long forgotten lands, civilizations of hardened warriors unable to survive the harsh existence of their realm. And yet their descendants had remained. Saved from extinction by Lilith herself. In all but power, it would seem the woman was closer to divinity than the Meadow itself.

Its eyes moved west, always on the lookout for her enemies. Should they choose the path of violence, the Meadow would respond in kind. Hallowfort would stand, against those who would seek its destruction.

At the same time it watched the frozen humans, fear and confusion obvious as they were introduced to creatures beyond their comprehension. The conversation with Trian had shifted to practical matters of the Sentinels, the man both polite and responsible, though a slight distance remained, the common fear or reverence present just like with most awakened creatures that came in contact with the Meadow. Instinctual perhaps, much like a young Star Chaser would avoid the Miststalkers of the northern night.

Few were entirely uncaring. Ilea of course, her immunity to risk and inability to sense danger most certainly correlating with her fast growth in magical power. Her ability to heal the mind was likely the only thing that had kept her sane, a foundation now to her grounded state. Human and yet so much more. Even the Meadow could not grasp the potential future of its... friend. Verena and the self proclaimed Dragonkiller were close in the way they treated its presence, though a deep seated instinctual fear remained. *"Perhaps Ilea is really just too stupid to understand my true power."*

"Hey, I heard that. Your true power is fucking terrifying by the way, you're like multi fucking dimensional," the woman replied.

Amusing. A simple conversation of course, compared to the eighty three threads of thought it currently discussed with the Faen fragment that called itself Twin, and yet it couldn't help but enjoy the simplicity of its human friend. A genuine connection, perhaps something deeply rooted before even its own awakening had fully come to be. Something it had fulfilled with the connection to traveling Elementals and beings of similar power. It considered itself a being of guidance, but there was enjoyment in the perceived equality it felt towards Ilea, though her assumption was preposterous. Never could she be as glorious a Meadow as itself. A part of it knew the day would come, and it hoped it would, for if it didn't come to be, it meant the death of either one or both of them.

New possibilities opened up as the Fae explained in simple terms the complex weave of this realm. Its mind was limited still, and yet the Meadow remained its student. Still it felt pride in the fact that it could offer at least some considerations the being had not yet had the opportunity to decipher. A direct meeting with the true Fae would not come to be but perhaps a conversation, through the fabric itself. First it had to prove itself, to the boundless source of knowledge and magical power of the primordial being. Unlike Ilea, it couldn't impress it with a few simple physical attacks, though perhaps that approach would've been more successful with the Baron. An opportunity squandered, but here it was, communicating with yet another of the ancient kind. It thanked Ilea once again for the opportunity, keeping a few of its eyes on the confused and overwhelmed humans, impressed with so little, entire new worlds opening before them as they were introduced to the beings living in

its domain. Time moved, ever onward, life vibrant in all of its perception. It was a good day, under the northern suns.

“I guess those are the strangest people around. Well Elana is gonna give some of you a few headaches too, but she’s at least human,” Ilea said as she looked at the group.

They were still a little overwhelmed but at least there hadn’t been any magic thrown so far. *Likely because I didn’t yet invite the Elves. That can wait for another day I suppose*, she thought. Ilea had refrained from healing their minds, she knew at least Sulivhaan would be offended at the gesture. He would want to process everything himself.

Enjoyable in a way, because while his mask prevented her to see his face, she could gauge quite enough with the rest of her perception. The team of Shadows was on guard, Navalis at least calmed a little with her telepathy. Rock was Rock, and Senia was ready to stab something, not that it would do her any good with her level in her mid two hundreds.

“*When are the others coming down?*” Ilea asked the Meadow.

“*About twenty minutes,*” the being replied. “*I can inform them if the humans require more time.*”

“*I think they’ll be fine. The important ones at least,*” Ilea replied. “Last and least important is the Meadow,” she said and gestured in the general direction of the being.

“Wouldn’t it be the most important?” Kyrian asked with a slight smile.

“We’re far too uninteresting for the multilayered eldritch being,” Ilea mused.

“*Untrue,*” the Meadow spoke, half the people in the group turning towards it, those capable of comprehending its telepathy trying to find the source. “*Greetings, representatives of Ravenhall. I welcome you into this domain. Whatever the outcome of these talks, I guarantee your safety and a way back, should the corresponding gate not be damaged in the duration of your stay.*”

A large stone plate with the same greeting scratched into it appeared before the group. “*Should you have any questions or concerns, simply ask and I will try my best to satisfy your curiosity.*”

Ilea snorted. “*Very mysterious, well done,*” she said and clapped slowly.

“*I am merely trying to set them at ease,*” it said to her.

“*No mention of your world domination plan?*” Ilea asked.

“*It’s supposed to be a surprise, Ilea,*” the Meadow replied.