

Chapter 884 Monument

Ilea spent the next few days reading and practicing with her new Fourth Tier. First she tried it alone, then against the spirits of Erendar.

The Meadow had contacted her about Garonoth on the second day, but she trained for a little longer, finally meeting her friend when she felt ready.

She appeared in the northern wastes and spread her wings, looking towards the lands under which she felt the mark left on the Meadow.

“I expected you to choose your fires,” the being spoke.

“You mean you hoped I would,” she said.

“Amusing. I was most curious to see either of those two.”

Ilea didn't wait any longer, standing in the wracked landscape of the north as she activated her Fourth Tier Primordial Shift. For once not an addition she could turn on or off, but a straight improvement to her spell.

Her vision remained clear as she felt herself detach from the true fabric, as if she had willed herself into a new pocket of reality. And still, she felt connected in some way, saw and could affect the fabric with her will and mana. The established connection with the Meadow through her telepathy cut off as soon as she activated the spell, unable to stay active through the barrier that now existed between her and the space she could see with her eyes.

She saw a wave move through the fabric. Something she had not seen before, not quite like this. It looked solid to her, though somewhat transparent. Ilea could see space magic within her dominion, but only as a manifestation of magic. This was different. She could see the spell itself, not just the mana within it.

Ilea raised her hand and stopped the incoming wall, with as much thought as she would displace an incoming spell with Fabric Tear. She could see the shock wave of air and debris spreading out as her own will clashed with that of the Meadow. She looked around herself and saw the threads sneaking in to rip into her reality. Again, she willed them to stop, and forced them back. A tedious task, and one she lost within the true fabric, but won as soon as the threads pushed into her own domain.

A massive set of roots burst out of the ground, rushing to impact her form.

She looked down at the creations and raised her other hand. She focused on the frameworks and forced them to stop. Air pressure rushed out when her magic crashed into the wood, inaudible to her within her Shift, the roots trembling in the air, halted by her will.

Ilea started to slowly move down towards the roots, pushing herself through the fabric as she tried to understand their make up. She pulled with her magic and saw wooden chunks ripped out with every minuscule motion of her hand, a chunk of mana exchanged for the unseen tearing power. A few bits and pieces, she focused on, and she willed them away, reduced to nothing but mana. She smiled, and exited her shift, once more hearing the distant noise of thunder, and the closer impacts of debris pattering to the stone grounds.

“A first test. Let us see how far you can go,” the Meadow spoke as soon as the telepathic connection was back up.

Ilea smiled, feeling her surroundings change, feeling her control of the fabric slip as the Meadow gripped reality itself.

She waited for her spell to become available once more, filling her mana pool back up before she unlocked her harmony. She freely spread out ash above her flying form, a massive cloud that blotted out the suns. Then she activated her Shift, then Reconstruction, and finally, her Meditation, the already calm fires hovering between her created reality and the true fabric slowing down even further. Her Fourth Tiers worked in tune as she now no longer felt but saw the Fourth Tier of the Endless Meadow.

All around, she could see the fabric change to the will of her opponent, as if a thousand shapes and wisps appeared and moved to distort reality itself. She could not quite comprehend what she saw, but she knew there was pressure on her own creation. Slowly, cracks formed but she willed them shut.

Piercing shards and snaking wisps burrowed into her reality, but she willed them back, the process much more draining than before, the frameworks difficult to grasp, difficult to move, and impossible to dispel entirely.

She could feel sweat on her brow, blue runes glowing bright as her Meditation let her focus the perception of space unlocked by the Primordial Shift. She blinked her eyes when gray and black flakes came falling from above, the disconnected ash finally reaching her altitude. It moved strangely, not quite like ash should fall, but distorted, moved, and pushed aside by the domain of the Meadow, much of it blocked, but not all. Ilea didn't mind. She sacrificed her health and let her fires spread, more powerful than they had ever been.

The vicinity lit up with white flame as the fires spread fast and wide, shapes and wisps pushing back against the inferno. A stalemate, the pressure on her Shift lessening as she willed her calm flames to surround her, carried by ash she no longer controlled.

White flame swirled in a bright sphere around her, slow moving but burning away the very magic of her opponent.

The untold depths of the Meadow's space magic, grappling with the immovable reality and control created by her Shift.

Fire and space shook as Ilea poured her mana and health into her creations. The light of her fires brightened, setting alight space itself as she prevailed within the domain of the Meadow.

They both receded in the same moment, her spells waning as the fabric all around returned to normal. A spectacle others would've perceived as an impressive spell of fire. Only Ilea and the Meadow would know the true extent of what had just transpired.

She breathed out, watching the remaining ash fall, scattered and spread out, like burning snow. She couldn't help but smile, then gulped. Ilea didn't exactly know how she felt. Excited to have pushed back against her teacher's ultimate control of space, perhaps a little frightened of what that meant, and happy with her choice, knowing that she could likely defend against most everything the world could throw her way at this stage.

“Adequate,” she sent and slowly flew down towards the ground, watching the falling wisps of ash.

“Adequate indeed,” the Meadow sent back. *“I'm proud of you.”*

Ilea grinned. *“Give me another fifty levels and you’ll be more than just proud.”*

“Don’t you go and turn into an elemental.”

“I’m still very much happy being human,” Ilea said. *“Despite my god like abilities.”*

“Careful with those words, you’ve killed plenty of them to turn into one yourself.”

“I’d still assume I get a choice into what I want to evolve,” she said with a grin.

“Yours will be the first set of data when it comes to such an evolution.”

“Surely not the first of my firsts,” Ilea said and smiled. *“You mentioned Garonoth?”*

“Aki and Fey have found the location. You still want to meet that creature. Are you sure? You could continue to fight spirits for another few days or weeks. You could reach your four marks long before another Dragon sets its eyes on you.”

The Meadow paused as Ilea smiled.

“No. Of course not. You have to take the risk,” the being spoke. *“He may not wish to fight you.”*

“I’m not going to force him to fight, but the least I can do is ask for a bout,” she said. *“Either way, I’m sure it’s a worthy achievement. Added to the pile.”*

“Perhaps, though rousing a creature like that...”

“We both care for the Accords, Meadow. I would not lead him here. Whatever that takes.”

“The most powerful healer in all of the Plains and the Northern lands, and yet you remain incurable.”

“Might be the constant replacing of my destroyed brain,” she said, tapping her temple with a fist.

“You have not stopped all the way through demon hordes, Ascended, Elves, and even Erendar. I did not expect for you to stop now,” the being said. *“You are battling in leagues now, where even I can no longer protect you with certainty.”*

“That’s why I chose my Shift,” she said, summoning her many layered mantle.

“Good luck out there, as always,” the Meadow sent.

“Call for me when anything comes up. And thanks for the bout,” she answered, feeling a slight shift in the fabric when a small metal sphere appeared. The machine itself was made of a silvery metal, its size around as large as her head, a single green and round eye set within, moving to face her.

[Sentinel Watcher – lvl 300] – [Flying]

She raised her brows. “Can you talk?”

“There is a voice module included, yes. Telepathy as well, if a connection is received,” the machine spoke. “I am directly connected, similar to many of the higher leveled machines.”

“So you’re setting up a surveillance network now as well. Wonderful,” Ilea said with a dry tone.

“The surveillance network has existed for a long time now. The watchers just add an airborne component when no Executioners or Destroyers are nearby,” the machine spoke.

“The all seeing, all knowing,” Ilea sent to the machine and went to grab it. *“I don’t suppose you can keep up with me.”*

“No, and I ask you to shield me on the journey, there are only a few hundred of these machines made as of yet. Quite a complex task to cram this many enchantments into such a small enclosure.”

“I’m sure,” Ilea sent. She felt a little apprehensive. Flying eyes just added a strange layer to the machine army that she felt hadn’t been present before. The only reason why she didn’t mind was knowing that everything was controlled by Aki himself. If she trusted anybody to uphold the laws of the Accords, it was him.

“Feyrair has confirmed the scouted location,” Aki said. *“I have prepared a gate in Iz, except you have a way to go farther north than the Taleen had ventured in the past.”*

“Let’s find out,” Ilea sent and activated her third tier of Transfer, focused on the anchor left near Nes Mor Atul and Scipio’s facility. Her spell manifested and she connected the machine, waving towards the distant location of the Meadow before they appeared in the far North.

She let go of the machine and looked out onto the expansive landscape spreading far below, hundreds of tiny storm clouds visible. Ilea felt the dense mana in her surroundings, and the light air due to the altitude.

“I believe it should be close enough,” the Watcher spoke.

“The range?”

“Oh no. The closest Taleen gate. The mountain range is quite a long way off. And you should fly low, lest you get into ten battles until we reach it.”

“That just depends on how interesting the monsters seem,” Ilea said and decided to spend her Core points before she continued on her journey. Still unsure which Classes she should focus on, she decided to add one additional modifier to each one.

First for her Arcane Eternal Class.

You may infuse any barrier, wall, or magical armor with arcane energy

Ilea tried it out with her Mantle, a few walls of ash, and the golden barriers of the Azarinth Star. Each one brimmed with arcane power. She would have to test against willing subjects to find out how much of a difference the addition made, but every little bit helped.

Your heat generation is increased by 100%

Hmm. Not bad, suppose I hoped it would synergize with my Fourth Tiers, but oh well.

She tried it out, finding that her base heat generation was much faster now, though nowhere near what her fully charged Titan Core provided. *More uses of Embered Heart.*

Let’s see what the last one does.

Your skin grows more resilient

Ilea poked her skin, not exactly feeling a change. *It’s... something.* She spread her wings and grabbed the machine. *“Which way then?”*

“North.”

Ilea ascended and looked at the cragged mountains ahead. *“North it is,”* she sent and charged her wings.

The landscape beyond the storm riddled north proved to be even more barren. Ilea didn't find a single living creature in the increasingly mana dense territory. The air grew more frigid, snow and ice covering the high reaching mountains. It was silent too, the arcane storms no longer reaching the still increasing altitude.

Ilea started to question if she was still on Elos, the landscape reminding her more of a desolate world like Erendar or Kohr. *Maybe that's what it would've been without Eregar and the Haven.*

She started to glance behind herself after some time, almost hoping for a random monster to attack.

"Slow down," Aki sent after they had flown for at least a few hours. *"Do you see the four peaks ahead?"*

Ilea slowed. The suns were high on the horizon by now, the snow covered mountains almost glistening. She saw the four peaks, towering above the surroundings like a fortress built for all to see. *"I assume that's the place."*

"According to Feyrair, yes," Aki said.

"Should I bring you? Might be interesting to see."

"If you can get me close to one of those peaks to hide me. I wouldn't say no," Aki said, some excitement in his voice.

Still the same dagger after all, Ilea thought, twirling the metal sphere up into the air and casually catching it with her space manipulation. *"I'll see what I can do,"* she said and flew towards the mountains.

She reached the closest peak and landed, slowly moving forward to see what lay beyond.

The mountain she stood on cast a long shadow into what looked like a crater. Jagged rock reached up and away from the mountain sides, the fourth summit she had seen from a distance was located on the other side, higher than the rest and kilometers away.

She raised her head towards the sky, feeling the dense mana and heat from below.

"I think this spot is fine," she said and set the silver metal sphere onto a nearby outcrop of rock.

"I will be watching," the machine sent.

Ilea nodded absentmindedly, spreading her wings before she slowly flew into the crater.

Deep below, she saw the creature nestled between rocks and dunes of sand. The shadows didn't impair her sight.

Dark red wings sat on its back, each wide enough to cover half of Riverwatch. Thousands of scales the size of her entire form lined the jagged protrusions. They moved ever so slightly with every breath of the creature. Four legs were tucked under its colossal form, each adorned with dark claws as broad and wide as her entire house, its body so massive it may as well have been a part of the landscape itself. Dozens of black horns protruded from its draconic head, two main ones reaching up and back towards its wings. Its eyes were closed. The creature was asleep.

Where Audur had been a sleek hunter covered in green scales, Ilea felt like this thing was a sculpture chiseled from dark red stone. A monument set into these mountains. Something that was not supposed to live nor move. A sleeping titan. Breathing and alive. Brimming with untold power.

She could feel the heat now, finding little remaining air to breathe.

A flying calamity.

Ilea landed some distance away from the creature's head, impacting the ground with a crouched stance. She straightened and summoned a bottle of ale, cracking it open as she stood there.

[Garonoth – lvl ?????]

The dragon was beyond the Meadow. Beyond Audur. Maybe even beyond the Fae itself.

She took a sip and frowned, trying to form some ice to put into the beverage but she found the process more time consuming than usual. *Not enough moisture around?*

She finally succeeded, though found the ice quickly melting. *Guess it could be worse*, she thought and drank from the bottle.

When she looked up, she found two enormous slitted yellow eyes staring back at her.

Raising her hand to wave, she smiled. *"Greetings. I hope I didn't intrude."*

The massive dragon snorted, a wave of hot air flowing past, a golden barrier appearing to block the incoming wave, dust and sand pattering against it.

"Bold you are. To intrude my lair, and to wake me. Do stop with that ice magic, it's giving me a headache," the creature spoke into her mind, its voice deep, rumbling, as if the mountain itself had chosen to talk to her.

"Really?" Ilea asked, raising her brows. *"That little bit? I just have a minor general skill. But sure, didn't really help with the ale anyway."*

The dragon moved its head slightly closer, rocks and sand shifting at the motion, debris falling from its head.

"I don't like the smell of ice magic, young human. Though the scent about you is quite complex. So much possibility within your kind. So much magical contradiction."

Ilea smiled. *"The last dragon I met said something similar. Me supposedly going against the natural order. Didn't like my ash either."*

"The natural order... words of one caged by fabricated concepts. Perhaps one day, they shall find wisdom. Few dragons would find ash distasteful, but then our kind is diverse. Know that not all share such thoughts."

"I appreciate that. My name is Ilea, it's nice to meet you," she said. It just felt right to use her real name. Ilea finished the last bit of her ale as she looked at the eyes three times as large as her entire form, the jaws so large they may have been the entrance to a cavern, each tooth she saw stood taller than her, a breath of heat and brimstone. She couldn't help but like this one.

"And I am Garonoth," the dragon spoke, not adding any titles or descriptors. *"Tell me, human. Why have you come here?"*