

Ilea felt a pulse of magic as she approached. The air pressure around her increased as her momentum was slowed. Her wings pushed against it but she failed to slip through. She turned her head when she felt the shadow magic form around her, the source an empty spot near the ground. *He's trying to stop me too... and... oh, interesting.* The shadow mage had cast some kind of anti teleportation net around her, one that fluctuated in what felt like random patterns. It wasn't overly complex but the fluctuations were something Ilea had only seen with the Meadow.

He's changing it manually. That's pretty impressive for someone without space magic. She let him have it, the only reason she could likely break out her extensive training sessions with the Meadow, not exactly a fair comparison. She wanted to see what they had planned.

Thunder roared above, thick clouds flowing into existence as the air started to move around her, a whirlwind of vibrant power, her vision already covered in darkness. The air pressure alone would be enough to crush most low three mark creatures but it failed to exert the same force on her due to her high resistances. *The storm is cooling.* Ice started to form on her ash mantle, her resistance preventing any of it to seep deeper into her body but her wings had difficulties against the cold and fast moving air. Lightning cracked and struck.

Ilea's head whipped back as she smiled, the energy flowing through her as she pushed against the combined magical effort. *Not quite northern lightning,* she thought but found the effort frighteningly close. *The storm mage. Wasn't she barely above three hundred? What kind of spells has she made up?* The storm picked up too, more lightning flashing out with each passing moment. *All you're doing is return mana to me,* she thought with a wide grin.

Then the rain started. At first Ilea thought it strange but it only took a second to realize what was wrong. The droplets reflected the light from the magical flashes around them, they clung to her form as the whirlwind pushed them to the very center where her form resided, firmly kept in place by the various spells coalescing on her. A few seconds later she was covered in liquid silver, the lightning empowered as the acid like substance burned into her ash.

Ilea strained against the spells, managing to raise her arm to see the silver eat through her mantle. Her healing was slowed, crippled, and distorted. The first bolt of lightning hit her skin. Ice covered every bit of newly formed ash, burned away once more by the collecting silver.

"None have survived what you experience. Tell me once you wish to stop," the voice of Syrithis entered her mind, calm and confident.

Ilea smiled, half her skin gone with her muscle exposed. She rebuilt her form again with her third tier healing, the effort costing her considerably more than usual, not an issue with the continued lightning and her massive mana reserves. She cracked her neck with considerable effort.

Valarienne continued to fuel her spells, ice to slow and lock, lightning to stun and damage, clouds to distort and hide. Syrithis and Heron did most of the work, their target so far unable to move or teleport. She glanced at the flying Empress, continuous droplets of silver floating into the large whirlwind of death. It was the pinnacle of their power, the combined efforts of years of experience and training. An answer to near all abilities they had found in wild monsters, and a last resort in case their combined efforts behind their melee fighters failed to overwhelm a target.

“So this is the power of the Immortal Guard,” a voice reached her mind. It wasn't their own half elf but the woman stuck inside the storm. She sounded... excited. *“Then let me show you, how I have survived the wrath of Elementals.”*

A white glow appeared within the storm, spreading outwards as the very clouds were consumed. Revealed was the burning form of Lilith, twenty white flaming limbs moving on her back.

“She's still stuck! Continue!” Syrithis sent.

Then the woman vanished. Valarienne found her near the ground, one hand extended towards nothing. A second later the form of Heron appeared in her flaming hand.

“Shadow mage,” Lilith sent to them all. The fires did not touch him. She raised her other hand and flicked his head, a burst mana visibly flowing through his form before she threw him aside.

The man landed and coughed, struggling to get up as blood splattered to the ground. He took in a wheezing breath, one of his eyes popped and leaking blood.

Lilith vanished yet again. She appeared in front of the half elf, her burning limbs lashing out against shields of compressed air. She advanced, ignoring the blades thrown at her, the two of them flying through the air with increasing speed until she gestured forward. Syrithis was pulled towards her, a punch sending her flying. Lilith landed at the same time as the half elf did, more shields shattered as she slammed her fists down.

Retribution and Malkorn ran at her, both of them vanishing through invisible gates before they appeared around sixty meters away. Silver spears vanished and struck the walls instead, the ground shaking as her punches now struck the half elf directly. Lilith stood up from her crouch and shook away the burning blood from her hand, the wind healer left to recover in a bed of shattered rubble.

She flew up and towards the Empress, dodging silver spears until she reached the retreating woman. The melee fighters were by her side a moment later when a beam of near white energy flashed out and cut off the Bone Bruiser's legs, his torso falling to the ground as Lilith grabbed the lizardman whose claws had dug into her armor. She simply held him for a moment before she threw him aside. His body twitched before he tried to get up, unable to lift his form before he spat blood.

Lilith raised her hand as Alyris formed a silver shield, a spear in her other hand as she braced herself. An invisible force shattered stone in its wake, the Empress sent flying until she impacted the wall a few dozen meters behind her. She fell to her knees where a punch to her face sent her upper body backwards and once more into the wall, her silver helmet stuck in the stone.

Valarienne had tried to keep up, her lightning striking where the woman was and would be but all of her efforts were ignored, blue eyes appearing first fifty meters away and then right in front of her. She raised her hands and summoned a gust of wind. The magic might as well have been conjured by a child. *“Is this really necessary?”* she asked with a smile before something grabbed onto her leg. *Oh well.*

Ilea slammed the storm mage into the ground until she was unconscious, her vitals generally in an acceptable state. The Bone Bruiser had already recovered his legs and both Alyris and the Half Elf were regrouping. Healing magic from Syrithis helped with all their injuries.

“That was fun,” Ilea said and threw the mage towards the group. “You want to have another go?”

The Empress raised her hand. “I think that is enough.”

Brittle pride... there are so many resistance levels here for you.

She shrugged and checked through the few notifications.

‘ding’ ‘Fabric Tear [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 2’

‘ding’ ‘Deviant of Humanity reaches 3rd lvl 26’

‘ding’ ‘Monstrous reaches lvl 11’

‘ding’ ‘Bone Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 19’

‘ding’ ‘Lightning Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 11’

‘ding’ ‘Shadow Magic Resistance reaches lvl 5’

‘ding’ ‘Shadow Magic Resistance reaches lvl 6’

‘ding’ ‘Silver Magic Resistance reaches lvl 2’

...

‘ding’ ‘Silver Magic Resistance reaches lvl 6’

‘ding’ ‘Wind Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 11’

‘ding’ ‘You have single handedly demolished the Eternal Guard – One Core skill point awarded’

Useful little bout, Ilea thought and approached the group, all of them already healed up. She decided not to add her mental healing to the mix. Perhaps it was good to leave a memorable impression.

“You’re an absolute monster,” Valarienne said as she approached. “I was curious about your punches, some of them were fueled by magic and others weren’t.”

“You’re quite impressive yourself. I don’t remember anyone below level four hundred pushing me to this extent. Lately not even anything below eight or nine hundred, but awakened at our levels are exceedingly rare,” she answered. “I generally use mana intrusion spells.”

Maybe they’ll have some better defenses next time. “But I can hit hard in a physical manner too.” She gave Retribution a nod.

He nodded back.

“Awakened. You’re talking about non monsters? Beings capable of complex thoughts?” Heron asked. He didn’t seem bothered in the slightest by what had happened.

“Yes,” she said.

“I’m aware that you’re a capable space mage. May I ask of your opinion?” the Shadow mage added.

“Your spell was well done. Some of the most versatile I’ve ever seen. I assume it’s manually cast and not a simple spell activation?” Ilea said.

He smiled ever so slightly.

“There is only one I know who is better,” Ilea answered, though the difference was more than a few world’s worth.

“My silver did not slow your healing?” Alyris asked.

“No it did. Quite considerably. I just have really high resilience and resistances to most of the magic used. Especially wind, lightning, and ice. And I have some recovery options that are more extensive than simple healing,” Ilea said. *Some information for a future ally. Or for an interesting fight once they choose to betray me.*

“I have no idea how to stop you. You seem more difficult to pin down than even my father,” Syrithis said.

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that. Though he never really participated in any fights. I doubt your little stunt could kill Feyrair though, and with Isalthar being a wind mage you’d be hard pressed locking him down,” Ilea mused.

“Indeed. But wasn’t Fey hovering around three hundred? Did he finally decide to take the time and evolve? He certainly enjoyed battle, and he had the resilience to face high level creatures, even alone,” the half elf said.

“Yes. I think my fast growth pushed him on a little. I honestly don’t know why he wasn’t already higher,” Ilea answered.

“He was afraid of the attention, Ilea. High level Elves are very competitive. My father is well known, even to the Monarchs. And he is hunted in turn. If Feyrair ascends to higher levels, he too will garner such attention,” Syrithis sent.

He did make some decisions back when we first returned from Iz.

“I think he’s ready now,” Ilea answered.

“We appreciate your candor. Is there anything else we can do for you?” Heron asked. “If I may, there is something I have already checked,” he added and looked to the Empress.

“Some silver and shadow magic resistance training would be nice, but I doubt either of you has the time to spare,” Ilea said.

“I’m afraid not,” Hector said after the Empress had signed something. “But if you are looking for more artifacts much like the one you have received here, there have been mentions of something similar in the Foundation of Glass. If you’re aware of the location?”

“I appreciate it. Yeah, I think I have an invitation somewhere,” Ilea answered, looking through her domain but giving up after a few seconds. *Wasn't there a letter?*

“Good, then I wish you good fortune in acquiring what you're looking for. We can't convince you to share anything on said devices? The enchantments were some of the most complex we have ever encountered,” Heron said.

“I'm afraid you'd have to force me. But I'm sure there's a lot you can learn during the tournament in Morhill, and from the Meadow once you meet it. That old tree is an insane source of magical knowledge,” Ilea said. She assumed the tree didn't have a problem sharing his musings with others, especially those that could communicate with it.

“Long range teleportation gates, yes. You have secured an asset at great risk. I just hope it remains on our side,” Alyris said.

“You're just scared because it's ten times as powerful as your entire Imperial army,” Ilea said with a smile.

“Which means it's a reasonable fear, don't you think?” the Empress asked.

“Not to me,” Ilea answered. *Because I trust that old eldritch creature more than I trust you.* “And I find it quite amusing that you think of it in such a way, when you have a Fae in the very midst of your group.”

Ruler appeared and giggled, bolstering its moderate space magic in a non aggressive way.

My right shoulder will remain with Violence. You don't even pop eyes.

“It is knowledgeable, yes, but in no way a threat,” Valarienne said, holding out her hand on which the Fae landed.

Ilea just smiled.

Heron ground his teeth. “You're not willing to share that one either, are you?”

“Hmm... probably not. But I suggest you ask Ruler about it,” Ilea said. “Maybe it's willing to show you what I cannot put into words.”

I do kind of want to visit again, with all my space awareness. Hmm. Might not be the best idea. I may even go mad. The Meadow already freaks me out plenty.

Heron glanced at the Fae with an interested look, touching his beard with one hand as he considered.

“I should probably be off then. More letters to deliver,” Ilea said with a smile. “Thanks for the food and the fight, I quite enjoyed it,” Ilea said.

“It was our pleasure,” Alyris answered. “To have hosted the mythical Lilith, and you did impress. Will we see you at the tournament?”

“I should be there, if nothing more important comes up in the meantime,” Ilea answered and waved her goodbyes.

Lilith vanished after they said their goodbyes, ignoring both the enchantments of the hall and any security that would prevent her exit above.

Valarienne pat the Fae on its head. *What secrets do you hold, my little friend?*

“Malkorn, go and make sure she isn’t stopped or pursued,” Alyris said. “Return to our hall afterwards.”

The lizardman vanished.

“Heron, increase the threat level of Lilith to Catastrophic,” the Empress added.

“I already did that,” the man replied.

“She’s far beyond even the Lily,” Syrithis murmured.

“Maybe,” Valarienne said. “My mother did mention there was one more powerful than her.”

“Neither matters. They’re cooperative and so is Lilith. We will have to evaluate the Meadow and any other allies they bring to Morhill. Gather the nobility, we have a lot to prepare for. If the gates are as functional as Lilith believes, the entirety of human trade and warfare will change overnight. Lys needs to be prepared, and we need to reestablish our position with this new technology. I also suggest increasing the penalty for any aggression towards Ravenhall and its allies. We cannot risk antagonizing them, even less now than before,” the Empress said.

“We cannot bow to them,” Syrithis said.

“And we won’t. But while we fought our wars and increased our territory, they have developed technology and power that is beyond our match. I want a team of the best enchanters and engineers that can be found in the Empire. Heron, find me capable space mages. We need to work on our understanding and resistance to that magic,” Alyris added.

“Even I failed to contain her,” Heron said.

“Then we better get to work. Our defenses are outdated if a mere three mark human can teleport into the very heart of our Empire. Think of what would happen if a Monarch tried the same,” the Empress said.

Syrithis looked thoughtful. “I don’t know. She is not an Elf. We don’t know how they would match up.”

Valarienne smiled, tapping the head of Ruler. “Am I the only one who is glad humanity has a warrior like her?”

“I agree. She is more trustworthy than the unknowns we may face in the future. And she holds no interest in political power, merely rules she seems to have set for herself. We must find out what they are and adhere to them if we wish to keep her uninvolved. But if we do so, we may find an ally in her unmatched by any of our armies,” Heron said.

“I hope you’re right,” Alyris said. “Come then, we have a lot of work ahead of us. And I was looking forward to one day off.”

“Just think about all the travel time we’ll save with working teleportation gates,” Valarienne said. She smiled off the groan she received in response. *Sore losers.*

Ilea stumbled upon some heavily armored guards on the way out but it seemed her casual demeanor caught them off guard. They let her know where she could find the exit before even realizing what had happened. The yells behind her were dulled after one use of transfer and silenced with another.

She sped through the city and stopped in an attic with a nice view of one of the central streets. Performers were showing off all throughout the night in the capital but she was more focused on the her map. *Few cities west... and Riverwatch. Seems doable in an hour or two.*

“Visit in a few hours? Midnight dinner?” she sent to Dale. Nothing came back for a few seconds until she spread her wings and started towards the western gates.

“You interrupted. I. Yes. Of course. At my place,” the man sent back. He sounded out of breath for some reason.

Wonderful, Ilea thought and sent a message to Claire. “Met Empress. Have Fae and Half Elf. Must stay allies.”

“Good news. Tell me more when you’re back,” the woman answered.

The night was clear when Ilea flew past the city walls, not a single squad of guards following her. She assumed it had to do with her little visit, Virilya had never slacked with their security.