

Chapter 637 Paths

“The training and hardship required to reach higher levels of magic tend to contain valuable lessons, both about responsibility, death, and pain. Tools and magic circumventing such can lead to individuals who cannot understand the value of life, let alone the might they wield,” the Meadow said.

“Not like those who trained it can’t be assholes though,” Ilea said. “Elves for example are born at level two hundred. Literally kids with magic guns.”

“Of course. Individuals are just that. Suggestions are not rules and experiences rarely have the same impact, though patterns can be observed. The highest level dark ones in Hallowfort are those who start the least fights for example. Though I have only observed them since my planting here. The same is true for the Feynor who have roamed the outer parts of my perception. Officers tend to be more careful, considerate of the life around them,” it explained.

Ilea sighed, crouching down near the forge. *“Power can get to your head though. I’m sure my self from three years ago would be horrified by the things I’ve done.”*

“And yet you consider these decisions. Burdens you will carry for the rest of your existence, lessons learned. Only when you stop valuing life outside of yourself have you lost the path,” the Meadow spoke.

“What path? You’re starting to sound like an actual god,” she said, charging her heat.

“The path of life, of continued existence, growth. All other paths will lead to death, destruction, and the end of all creation,” Meadow said.

How did we go from armor to existential questions? Ilea asked herself.

Fire, the Fae spoke, appearing on her shoulder.

“Don’t get to close, you might get burned,” she said.

Armor!

A set of stone armor formed around the giggling Baron, its arms outstretched, eyes barely visible behind the small slit of its knight helmet.

Thank

“You will be protected,” the Meadow said. *“Not that I believe it necessary.”*

Armor? Violence asked, pointing at the ashen copy climbing up Ilea’s back.

Stone formed around the ash as well, done when it sat down next to the Fae.

‘ding’ ‘Deviant of Humanity reaches 3rd lvl 12’

Yeah, this situations is pretty fucking weird, Ilea thought with a smile, sending a first beam into the forge. The stone closed up to make sure none of the heat escaped. She continued sending in beams every couple seconds, the wood within burning up as new fuel formed. The openings provided by the Meadow were now only small enough for her hand to reach in.

“It’s heating up,” Goliath said, touching the forge from the outside.

“*Touch the stone before I open up,*” the Meadow said.

Ilea did just that, her hand sinking into the stone, her spell released into the forge before she took her hand out again. “Damn,” she murmured, healing her burnt hand, her armor unable to stop the whole thing. “Can I stay inside? This seems like good resistance training.”

“*Heat generated by yourself, no enemy or danger present. Bothering the Trakorov seems like a more reliable option,*” the Meadow said.

She continued sending in heat. *Right.*

“The scales are melting,” Goliath said about fifteen minutes later, his voice vibrating through the vicinity, the smith speaking faster than he usually did.

“It’s just going to be rock sludge. Are you sure you can fill a mold with that?” Ilea asked.

“I have not worked with the material before,” the smith said.

Fireee, Violence exclaimed, dancing with the ashen clone on Ilea’s shoulder.

“Are you trying to summon a flame elemental?” she asked.

“*Please don’t. Everyone here except Ilea and me would die instantly,*” the Meadow spoke.

“Eh, you could just make barriers for everyone,” she said.

“*That depends on how fast everyone will burn up. It’s a risk I would like to avoid,*” the tree said.

Goliath touched the drain connected to the forge. “Open it.”

Ilea saw the liquid Wyrms scales flow into the mold through her dominion.

“Goliath, if you’re hanging out around her anyway, can I dump some materials here that might be interesting for you? My storage items are a little cluttered,” Ilea said as she stepped over to the smith’s workshop. *Meadow really just made a copy of the entire thing. Could’ve saved the gold I paid those architects.*

“I am always interested in rare materials you find on your travels, embered healer,” the smith said, barely focusing on her as he downright hugged the outer part of the mold, his head pressed against the stone.

The Fae had started battling with its ashen copy, stone armor protecting each as they fought with wooden swords and shields.

Eldritch daycare, Ilea thought, going through her necklace.

Cliff Wyvern corpses, Varass drowner corpses, Basilisk egg shell pieces, kinda want to keep my arrows still... though I could try ashen ones now. Hmm... barely a need to use the heavy bow with my spears and homing capability. Kinda sad. I’ll still keep it just for the flair points. Haven’t used my warhammer in some time either.

Ah, yes, she thought and summoned one of the Wyrms tails, touching her arm with the petrifying body part.

“*May I study that after you’re done turning your body to stone?*” the Meadow asked.

Ilea summoned another one and displaced it towards the creature, the tail appearing in the air and staying there. “You can have it.”

She summoned one of Popi’s cakes, looking at the entirely absorbed Goliath. “Is Catelyn busy at the moment?”

“She is in her shop, creating... oh no... why... no don’t use wyrdroot with a shell crystal... it says it in the description of the potion...” the Meadow said, sighing a thousand sighs. *“She is in her shop.”*

“Alchemy,” Ilea murmured, remembering the potions the fox had in her Hunter’s Den. “Can you teleport this cake up to her? And give her my greetings.”

“I shall do so,” the Meadow spoke, the cake vanishing. *“Oh... is that?”*

“You sound confused,” Ilea said.

“I am merely... sexual experiences do normally require the use of genitals, do they not?”

“What is she doing with that cake!?” Ilea blurted out.

“I don’t think anything unusual. It’s gone already. Very... aggressive. Perhaps you should not enable her in this... whatever it is,” the Meadow said. *“She extends her heartfelt thanks and offered a potion in return. I have disposed of it for you.”*

“It might’ve helped with resistance training!” Ilea said.

“No. Except if you have some sort of taste resistance. I don’t want to clean up your puke,” it answered.

Puke! The Baron exclaimed, parrying its ashen brother before its sword was deflected by stone armor.

Ah, speaking of offensive tools, I never used the explosive devices Claire made for me. Doubt I’ll need them at this point. With displacement and Embered Core, she thought, going through the rest of her necklace before she continued with her bracelet.

Shade shredder shell pieces, she thought, dropping everything onto the growing pile.

Ilea grinned, her wings spreading as she flew up over the nearby stone walls, a heavy bow appearing in her hands before she summoned an arrow.

Can Chekhov’s bow kill a god?

The arrow shot out, vanishing a moment later.

“What are you doing?” the Meadow asked.

“Trying to pierce your plot armor, Meadow,” she said.

“You’ll need more than that bow for that. Since when do you read anyway? I thought it was beyond your capabilities,” the tree said.

“Hey I know my letters, all twelve of them,” Ilea answered.

“Maybe we can teach you another two or three in the coming decade,” the creature said.

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves here,” Ilea said, looking at one of the tunnels leading into the Meadow’s extensive lair. *“Did you summon him here?”*

"I did not. He usually resides in the fifth layer. I took the liberty of informing the local wildlife of his intentions, though most did not mind his presence either way," the Meadow said.

"He talks to you?" she asked.

"Hardly. Believes me a figment of his imagination," the Meadow said.

The Elder walked closer, waving when he reached the group. "Greetings, Ilea. A long time it has been."

"Lucas. Nice to meet you. How've you been?" Ilea asked, landing near him.

"Well... very well. The Descent is a treasure trove, I tell you. I'm not sure about the tree that appeared here however. Peculiar that you would choose this spot to do... is that a forge?" he asked.

"It is. The Meadow and Goliath are making some gear for me," she said.

"Hmm, I felt the burning of wood and thought I'd investigate. You didn't remove trees from this region I hope, you know how difficult it is for vegetation to grow here," the elder said.

"No, Meadow made some for us," Ilea said.

"Who is this Meadow you speak of?" Lucas asked.

Ilea pointed at the crystal tree and black grass.

Lucas' eyes widened. "It's... real?"

"Yes," the Meadow spoke.

"It is. I brought it here from another realm. Would appreciate it if you don't share that knowledge with others," she said.

The old man sagged down to his knees, tears welling up in his eyes. "A god... of creation... so close, and I ignored its presence. How foolish could I... of course, I shall guard this secret. And I shall work to expand the forests within the Descent, as an offering to the great Meadow."

"Great," the Meadow said to her.

"Hey that wasn't me," Ilea answered. *"It's not my fault you're so goddamn powerful."*

"I don't remember damning myself," it said.

"See, some people don't get sarcasm when they're faced with incomprehensible magic," she answered. *"No wonder you were declared divine before."*

"Are you, its acolyte? A speaker for the great tree of life?" Lucas asked.

"You can speak with it directly. You heard it say yes just now, didn't you?" she said.

"It would... deign to speak to me? I thought the voice an imagination. I am truly blessed. I shall pray to it. Good luck with your... endeavors," he said and stumbled away, dazed by the whole experience.

"You just gained a follower," she said to the Meadow.

"Do I have to entertain him?" the Meadow asked.

"I'm not your boss, Meadow," Ilea said. *"Do what you want."*

“I help your allies and friends,” it spoke.

“He’s not a bad guy. Just keep an eye on him and help out where you can, if you feel like it,” she said.

“I will do so,” the creature spoke. “He’s been expanding the fifth level forest. A dedicated wood mage. Though I wasn’t sure about him as he ignored my communication so far.”

“Not that weird. I’d have questioned it too if a new voice suddenly appeared in my head. Not anymore of course,” she said. Thought he would’ve experienced that before. Then again the range of Meadow’s telepathy is insane.

Ilea watched the Elder leave, a globe of light floating ahead of him. As long as he’s doing alright. Didn’t even comment on my three marks. Either he doesn’t care or was so overwhelmed by the Meadow he forgot to identify me.

She shook her head and returned to the forge. At least he didn’t comment on the Fae, she thought, looking at the ongoing battle, both warriors covered in dirt, dents in their armors. Ah Meadow, you really are a good kindergarten teacher.

“The mold is done...,” Goliath said. “It will take a few days to cool down and harden. I will work on a design for the... rifle tool you requested,” he said, going to his new smithy. “Endless creator, I require a few of my spacial storage containers from my abode.”

“Just tell me what you need and I’ll move it here,” the tree answered.

“Thanks for the work, you two,” Ilea said, creating an ashen blade before she joined the battle of the Fae. They teamed up against her of course, Violence wielding its blade with surprising technique. Though she questioned the reach of its arm.

“To challenge a Fae in battle. Your bravery truly knows no bounds,” the Meadow said. “I shall write down this glorious adventure for the generations to come.”

“Please do, it’s downright mythical,” she said, deflecting a few blows, teleporting away only to be caught by the Fae where she appeared.

She stopped a few minutes later, returning to her space awareness and resistance training. The Fae occasionally floated nearby, pointing at certain floating rocks or pieces of wood, giggling whenever she was hit by projectiles, most of them displaced and set alight with her third class skills.

‘ding’ ‘Space Awareness reaches 3rd lvl 5’

‘ding’ ‘Earth Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 2’

‘ding’ ‘Petrification Resistance reaches lvl 5’

...

‘ding’ ‘Petrification Resistance reaches lvl 7’

‘ding’ ‘Space Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 6’

“That’s enough for today, I think,” Ilea said with a sigh, glad she had gotten a level out of the frustrating training. She didn’t really feel like she had made significant progress with her understanding but the skill had gone up nonetheless. “I’ll be in Ravenhall for a while,” she informed everyone.

Leave?

“To Ravenhall, yes. I’ll train a bit with the Sentinels there,” she said.

Sentinel?

“Healers in the organization I helped found,” she explained.

Violence?

“Probably, but nothing quite as spectacular as the four marks around here. They’re mostly below level two hundred.”

Join?

“If you want to. But you’ll have to stay hidden until we get to the headquarters. Don’t want you to get captured by someone,” Ilea said.

Violence

Behave

Ilea squinted her eyes at the creature. *No you fucking won’t. But I have my mark. And I’m Lilith.*

“Alright, get on my shoulder,” she said and activated her third tier transfer.

The Fae appeared on her shoulder, sitting down before it started dangling its legs.

Murder!

“No, no murder,” Ilea said.

The Fae looked at her.

No

Murder

“Just training. Maybe some broken bones,” she said.

“I will be perceiving you later,” Meadow sent, the others absorbed by their work.

Ilea appeared in her home, displacing herself when the wooden floor cracked slightly from her weight. Her wings spread as she slowly started to get rid of the additional weight.

Fat

“You little shit,” she said, her wings unable to keep her afloat before she transferred herself out of her house, her hands digging into the cliff side as she slowly slid downwards, pieces of rock falling to the ocean below. It seemed to be early morning.

The Fae appeared behind her, giggling to itself.

Ilea switched into casual clothes and leather armor, summoning a hooded cloak she put over her head. “Take that back.”

Apology

Weight

Good

“Why do all non humans think that way?” she asked.

Mass

Power

Ilea moved the ashen Fae into her hood, suggesting the Fae do the same. “Don’t call me fat again.”

Apology, it sent, drooping a little.

“I know what you’re doing, stop it,” she said, squinting her eyes.

Violence giggled again, vanishing into her hood.

Ilea blinked her eyes. *What?*

She knew the Fae was there but it wasn’t at the same time. “What did you do?” she asked, feeling its presence with both her dominion and space awareness, the latter input more confusing than anything.

Secret

“Alright then,” she said, her weight now down enough to allow for comfortable flight again. “If you ever feel like it, I’m sure an explanation could help with my space class. Thanks for that one by the way. It’s literally called the Faen Valkyrie.”

Valkyrie!

Violence.

“It’s battle focused, yes. But did you really expect anything different from me?” she asked, flying up towards the snow covered valleys of the southern mountains. “Let’s see if we can do anything interesting with the Sentinels that you’d enjoy. At the very least you’ll be able to make some eyes explode.”

Yes!

“Just ask them first, okay?” Ilea said.

Yes

Training

“Exactly. With you there... we’ll be able to help provide space magic resistance to a bunch of Sentinels. Might be helpful. And if they meet you, they might get space related classes too. You adorable eldritch god creature you,” she said, flicking her hood.

The Fae giggled, the sound moving through the hood as a few ashen hooks kept the clothing in place against the winds.

“Headmaster... I know you mean well, but me and Mila don’t need to work with others. We’re fine on our own,” Phoebe said as she followed the man to one of the lower training hall levels.

They stepped aside when Aki rushed past.

Phoebe couldn’t help but look after him. They learned about the Taleen machines in their lessons but seeing a Centurion move past is just something else than looking at drawings. *War machines made to fight Elves of all things. Insanity.*

“You’re free to take the Hunter exam alone, with Mila, or in a four to six Sentinel team. Are you ready for the Hunter exam?” the mage asked.

Phoebe looked forward again, seeing the Headmaster waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs. He had started to grow out his hair, the short beard in combination really suiting him. In her opinion that was. She could believe the rumor that Trian refused any advances from fellow Sentinels and wasn’t about to add to his plight. *How can people even think about that when we’re monster hunters who might die on every mission.*

“I’m not,” she answered truthfully, knowing what would follow.

Trian smiled, choosing not to lecture her today.

As long as you’re within these walls, you will take advice from your teachers. No matter your background, previous status, or level of power.

She knew there were always ways around rules, especially ones so arbitrarily applied. But Trian meant well, as did the other teachers, most of the time. Phoebe chose not to complain, glad he respected her enough not to go into a monologue.