

Chapter 446 Purpose

Ilea came out to find the suns already rising. *Damn, spent quite a long time down there.*

“Hey! You there!” the man in the small bunker like structure called out.

“How much is it to enter?” she asked, already knowing what this was about.

“Fifty copper,” he said. “Did you sneak past!? You shouldn’t go in there alone, woman! It’s dangerous.”

Ilea rolled her eyes and summoned a single gold coin, finding that she didn’t have any silver coins on her. “This should suffice for the next couple of weeks,” she said and put the coin into the slit like window.

“Wh... that’s gold! Why a-”

Ilea vanished, blinking several times until she was out of sight of anybody that would be near the dungeon, spreading her wings before she charged them and shot off.

She aimed nearly straight up and towards the mountains.

Should have left earlier to relax for a little while, she thought, not about to be late to her first resistance training session in the arena. It would make a very bad impression, even if she was a Shadow, let alone if people knew she was Lilith.

Some might even leave or not come back, the potential loss of resistance points would be devastating.

So much productivity and potential free time with my little need for sleep. She grabbed a couple street food dishes as she walked to the arena complex.

Does it still count as breakfast if I didn’t sleep?

Or does the fact that this isn’t breakfast food change the answer to that question?

Ilea finally reached the arena after many thoughts on food.

A dozen adventurers were already waiting, their levels ranging from eighty to one fifty. *Doesn’t look too promising, oh well.*

“Welcome everyone. You’re here for the magic training?” she asked.

“Yes ma’am. The notice said five silver coins per hour, was that correct?” He obviously couldn’t quite believe the offer.

Both Claire and Ilea had thought it beneficial to provide a rather good reward. There was even a bounty out for a whole gold coin, in case someone gave her a new resistance. *Maybe I should up that to twenty or fifty gold. Then some Shadows might be interested as well.*

“Why are you following me?” she asked, turning to look at the attendant that had registered her entering the arena.

He nearly jumped, taking a step back as he collected his thoughts. “Ehm... the administrator has instructed me to manage the gold aspect. People will register with me and I will check the time they actually spend attacking. Don’t worry, I have several perception skills.”

“Also, you won’t have to spend your own gold on this. The payments will be handled separately.”

Claire really is a saint, she thought with a smile. “Perfect. Hear that? You register with this guy, what’s your name?”

“Jerry, ma’am,” he said.

“With Jerry. Also I decided you get paid for the time you are here, not your active mana use only. I expect powerful spells and understand that you can’t keep those up all the time. I won’t hesitate to boot you out if you are wasting my time, understood?”

All of them nodded, either respecting her more than she had expected or simply not ready to fuck up such a well paid and easy job.

“Perfect, then let’s start,” she said and formed ashen clothing, deactivating her armor as she focused on copying the look of her casual clothes. She left her stomach, arms and most of her legs exposed to provide a better target.

“She’s for real... I told you, I heard that someone did this before. Been a while though,” one of the adventurers whispered to his friend.

The other man shook his head in disbelief. “I was sure it was a scam. You win,” he said and gave him a couple pieces of silver.

“You’re going to get that back in less than an hour,” the first one said again and laughed.

“Just attack me. I’ll dodge or block attacks I deem too powerful. Be vicious. Think of it as a way to advance your own skills,” Ilea said.

So I guess tomorrow might be different in terms of participation.

Ilea hoped as much at least. Otherwise she might just choose the Golems to train with instead. The magic here was much more diverse however and would likely help more against both people and creatures, fire and ice simply more common than the gem magic mainly used by the Golems.

She let the spells rain into her, all twelve people attacking at the same time with her defenses down. Ilea found them even less effective than the creatures she had fought earlier.

If you think that these people are even considered a somewhat high level among humans. I could shred through them as if they were made of paper.

She didn’t voice the thought of course, simply a little worried about the city and humans in general, knowing what was out there.

They had survived for a long time already and would likely do so continuously but whenever a powerful creature or sapient decided to attack humans, hundreds if not thousands would die.

The elves were a good example, young ones even, inexperienced and weak. And still, several cities had fallen to them.

Travel time is a major issue, otherwise the hand could have taken care of it. The corruption however, just doesn't seem possible that even the Shadows could have dealt with all that. The Elders themselves, maybe. Normal members at two hundred or a little higher?

With time, range, preparation and traps, maybe. Now however, she knew how powerful the Ascended was. How much damage it could cause.

Good thing I can be contacted now, and I can be here in a couple minutes if my third tier Blink is ready.

She frowned at the thought. As if she was the sole protector of Ravenhall and its people, or even humanity itself. It hadn't been the goal and neither was it now. And yet she couldn't deny the power she had accumulated.

Even now, she was watching these powerful human adventurers look on in disbelief as the wounds they inflicted healed in mere moments.

It was one thing to call yourself a protector, a guardian or sentinel, to dedicate your life to a cause. It was another to watch by as thousands died when you alone could have defeated the army or horde that caused all that destruction.

So that's what I am now? Involuntary knight? She chuckled at the thought, smiling as some of the adventurers took a step back. Fear perhaps or confusion.

Maybe the Fae was right all along. I could just become a hivemind too, living with myself somewhere in the north. Problem is that I'm not a cook. And I definitely care about people, even though I like to pretend that I don't.

Just have to get the Sentinels going, help them level up, put them into random teams and the world will be a better place. For some at least. Humanity as a whole perhaps. And I jump in when there are bigger problems at hand. Like demon invasions caused by humans.

"Come on people, show me what you got," she said and clapped her hands.

The spells did pick up for a couple minutes but all of them had to pause to regenerate mana by then.

Sentinel Core really is ridiculous, as is the third tier of Meditation. I bet I could just keep going against a thousand mages of this caliber. If they don't combine their efforts like the Sun Sprites did, or use combined spells to inhibit my healing and movement.

Even then... I can't really see a group of adventurers killing me. Not at this level. How did the Ascended feel I wonder? When he ripped me apart. Was he happy, to have finally found something that didn't instantly die to its whims? Was it angry for the same reason? Or did it feel nothing at all?

I've been thinking about that one a lot lately. Makes sense. I should talk to someone about this. Trian maybe.

She continued the training, getting a little bored of the process. There was no danger involved, no pain and struggle. Even with the sense turned on, all it really did was to make her focus more on the moving spells, the unbelieving faces of the mages, thinking their attacks should have more of an effect on her.

The Golems at the very least had tried to kill her. And still she deemed the process necessary, the skill levels important. *I need to slow down for a little while. Am I addicted to the thrill of highly dangerous situations by now? I guess I am, because this shit is boring.*

She sighed and focused on her meditation, the time passing much quicker that way. When noon came, she thanked the people and made sure they would spread the word about the next day.

Avatar of Ash still made sure the time hadn't been wasted entirely.

'ding' 'Earth Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 4'

'ding' 'Earth Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 5'

'ding' 'Water Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 4'

An underwhelming result for the time invested. There had been fire too, arcane, wind, corrosion, ice and poison. All of them either stuck at level twenty in the second tier or the damage was just not enough to grant her a level in the third tier.

Can't believe this is how some nobles do it... without Avatar of Ash. I'll try it for a week. If it's still that slow I'll much rather go to more dungeons, at least let things attack me that have an intent to kill.

"You're grumpy. What is it?" Trian asked with a smile, following her down to one of the lowest floors of their headquarters.

"The training was pretty boring and unsuccessful," she said.

"No success in the dungeon? Or did you not find it? Told you, you should have used a guide."

"No, the dungeon was fine. Interesting new skills there. Level two fifty Golems with various gem based magic. No, I'm talking about this morning. Only twelve people showed up," she said.

"Only twelve..." he murmured and chuckled right after. "Give it some time, alright? You've been in such a rush," he said and walked to the nearby stone wall, activating a hidden rune that disabled the anti teleportation enchantments in the floor.

Both of them disappeared, appearing in the stairwell below, leading to the seventh floor down.

"Ilea," he started and looked at her, stopping on the wooden stairs as he touched her shoulder. "You have reached such enormous power in such a short while. I remember when we went toe to toe... and now look at you. You should be proud! And you should give yourself a break. Your adventures in the north were insane from what you have shared of them but now you are here. You can relax."

"The Ascended would have come for you already if it really cared, those are your words. And we are doing everything we can in case something of that level in power attacks. Remember, the highest level demons were nearly four marks too. And the Hand took them out."

"He would have killed me, you know?" she said. *What am I even talking about.*

"It's ok," Trian said and suddenly hugged her tight.

Ilea didn't fight back. She didn't really get what was happening but it didn't feel bad.

"You're back now, safe and sound. You were bound to stumble upon something insurmountable at one point or the other. Maybe pick up a hobby that doesn't involve fighting dangerous beasts?" he suggested.

"That's not it, Trian," she said and pushed him away a little, the man letting go.

“That thing could think... could talk, communicate with me. It wasn’t some weird creature like the Trakorov or the Fae, something unconcerned with us. It was here for a reason and it tried to kill me. That thing could wipe out this whole city if-”

The man zapped her with a bolt of lightning that would have killed any of their students. “Look at me,” he said.

Ilea rolled her eyes.

“If it’s that powerful, why worry? If it could just come and kill everyone then there is not much we can do. So tell me, Ilea. What is it you want?” he asked.

“I don’t know. Have a life where I don’t have to think about protecting whole cities?” she asked.

He smiled. “I get it. You want it back, the freedom you had back when you joined the Hand. Traveling the lands without a concern on your mind other than the next hunt. I could tell you know? The way you enjoyed it, loved the fights, the blood. I was scared of you for a time, not because of what you were but of what you could become.”

“And here we are,” he said and spread his arms. “You are even more terrifying than I ever dared imagine.”

“After I got my revenge... hollow and... meaningless as it was... I had a lot of time to think. About how I joined the Hand, became powerful enough to challenge most every noble in the capital. It didn’t help in the end. They died all the same. I thought about how you got me out, had found the only survivors, had helped me find the people responsible.”

“We always knew there were dangers out there. Elves, Taleen, Demons unimaginable creatures capable of large scale destruction. And still we live our lives. We walk around in our little cities, build our little homes, trade, eat and fuck. You know about the war in Baralia. It’s not the only conflict among humans and you know that very well. Hundreds if not thousands die every day because of us. Because of humans.”

“Even if there weren’t any monsters out there, we would still do the same. Worse probably. Even if you had the power to defeat any creature out there, you cannot change what we are. Don’t think yourself the center of the continent, Ilea. And don’t assume the Ascended is needed to destroy us. We are quite capable of that ourselves.”

“Great. That definitely lifted my mood,” Ilea said.

Trian shrugged. “It’s the reality of it. Demons, caused by us. The elves... well I guess that could have been avoided. All the wars, slavery, murders... that’s on us. And even if you do everything right, things don’t always line up. People die for little reason and cities get razed for even less.”

“However, you made a difference. You came and got me out when I was in a dump, thinking on the meaninglessness of life. You showed me that sometimes I just have to focus on what I can do. That sometimes it’s better to ignore the larger threats lurking in the dark and instead focus on the light you hold, however meager it might seem,” he said.

“Now you sound like a cleric,” Ilea said with a smile.

“Cleric, mage, scholar... I’m human. You already provided so many people with work, your investments and the values you demand leading to a lot of tangible prosperity. Why not enjoy it? Be grateful for what you have done and are still doing?”

“You want the freedom back that you had? At the same time you don’t want to abandon everyone. So what can you do?”

Ilea shrugged.

“Well first things first, you can trust in us a little more. In me, Claire, the leaders of Ravenhall. This city is stronger than it has ever been, its defenses rivaling the capital of Lys. And we are far from done. The Sentinels will grow, will learn. We will slowly build and increase our strength. You are a part of that and perhaps you are right and at the moment we would have to rely on you too much. So focus on what you can do to change that,” he said.

“I could just leave and never come back,” Ilea said and chuckled.

“You could. The seeds you have sown will surely flourish. Or perhaps we will be wiped out by another power. But even you might not be enough to stop them, so why worry?” he asked.

“Are you telling me that nothing matters anyway?” she said.

“No, Ilea. I’m telling you that you matter, that the Sentinels matter. That Claire and I, matter. That all the lives we changed here matter. Just as much as all the people that died during the Demon summoning mattered. What I’m telling you is that you should focus on what you can do, what we can do. Instead of focusing on the unknown and what we cannot possibly achieve,” the man said.

Ilea snorted. “That makes a surprising amount of sense. You made all that up under that tree in the Haven?”

“No. I was taught about some philosophy back home. Back then it was boring and meaningless to me. Only power mattered, my eyes focused on the capital, other nobles. Blind to the size of the world and the scraps humanity fights and dies over. It just made sense to me. After all that has happened. All I could do was take the next step.”

Ilea took a deep breath and closed her eyes. She opened them again and lightly punched the man’s shoulder. “Know what? I’ll try that. It doesn’t sound too bad.”

Maybe I didn’t quite get how big the world really was either. Might as well enjoy the ride before a random wormhole farts out a level one million world ending creature.

“I like that look on you,” he said with a smile, walking down the stairs.

“What look?” Ilea asked.

“You’re hungry,” Trian said.

“No I’m not. I just ate,” Ilea answered.

Trian just laughed. “Come on, you wanted to see Iana. Our torture lesson starts in half an hour.”