

Chapter 701 Deals

Ilea watched the storm of blades in her dominion, the image reminding her of a blizzard. Blinding not because of the light magic but the mana infused in all the moving parts. It was mesmerizing. The performance of a master mage, his dance of death, acted out with flying blades of light and steel. A rhythm flowed through it all, an overpowering might, inevitable death. He had her where he wanted her, had her where he would've thought an enemy to be at the end of their battle.

But her war machine still stood. It stood with a thousand cuts. The slit that allowed her to see was closed once more, his attempts to get in razor thin sheets of sharp steel wouldn't do and her dominion had more than enough range to keep an eye on his moving form. He had never stopped, constantly moving to keep her at a distance and with enough space behind his back to maneuver.

Doesn't that go against the whole idea of a direct approach? Or has there simply not been anyone left standing once this storm of blades actually reached their armor? She admitted he was better than Kyrian. Her friend's attacks felt savage in comparison, but so did her own ash manipulation for that matter. A difference in sheer experience but ultimately inconsequential against her. Omdir simply didn't have the required power to take her down.

She stopped moving and lowered her blade. His storm went on, shaving off bits of steel on her knees, neck, and shoulders. Weak spots he tried to capitalize on. *Let's make this a little more interesting then. The people want a show after all.*

"Are you done with your games?" she asked, her booming voice echoing through the dome. The crowd quieted down after the first few words in an attempt to hear her. "Or is this the extent of your power?" she asked and raised her blade.

He reacted. Likely not because of her provocation but in answer to the waiting crowd. A spear of metal formed above his machine's head, both arms raised as magic flowed into the creation. The tip had a drill bit added to it, the whole thing four meters in length and nearly thirty centimeters in diameter.

The projectile glowed within her magic perception. Ilea opened the slit of her helmet to see the creation, the storm around her still cutting into her defense.

"Are you sure about this?" her opponent asked through the present telepathic connection. *"I do not intend to kill you,"* he added, the words neither mocking nor full of pride.

Ilea layered her mantle below her armaments. She watched the spear as it started to spin, more mana flowing into it with every passing second. Her sword vanished. She spread her arms in a welcoming gesture. *"If it gets through all the way, it's your win,"* she said.

He didn't hesitate, the spear shooting out with incredible speed. A boom resounded when it reached halfway to her war machine, the drill bit penetrating her weakened steel defense with ease before it crashed against her mantle and came to an immediate stop.

"You know," she mused and grabbed the spear, ripping it out as the steel reformed below. *"I expected more punching when I entered this... competition,"* she added, throwing the bent and broken piece away. *"But it's just the same magic tricks. Time and time again,"* she mused. Her arms still spread, she used her space manipulation to push on all the blades around her. They spun out of

their choreographed dance and clattered both against the ground and barrier above. Some people in the crowd jumped back in case the defense broke.

“I fight to win,” the dwarf said and jumped back yet again. Another spear formed above his head as he landed.

Ilea charged the open bit in her massive boots with Tempered Seal, adding heat and mana for several seconds. She aimed her left hand at her opponent, her sword appearing in her right one. Molten rock formed at the edge before two simultaneous explosions propelled her up and forward. She controlled her fall with space manipulation, as well as she could considering the weight. Just barely, she managed to land on her feet with a loud crash a few meters away from Omdir’s war machine.

The spear above him had charged up, spinning with increasing velocity before it shot down, aimed at her armor’s neck.

Her arm still raised, she used her charged up space manipulation to push against the incoming framework. A shock wave rushed out with a deafening boom, the spear stopped in the air and crushed into itself. It bent and splintered into several bits, Ilea moving past with faster steps than before, her glowing sword slashing upwards and into his right shoulder from below.

The impact lifted his war machine by a few centimeters but failed to cut through the entirety of his arm. He seemed slightly dazed from the impact nonetheless, enough for her to close her left fist before she punched. Her intrusion spells converted into pure physical power, the speed of her fist increasing several fold before it impacted his chest with a dull crack. Bits and pieces of metal flew to the side as his larger war machine was sent flying, impacting the stone below three times before he crashed into the wall of the arena with an explosion of sound and debris.

She walked towards the downed machine, checking his vitals with the crowd entirely silent. He had gotten injured, but his machine had taken the brunt of the force. His and her own. The converted mana intrusion attack wasn’t exactly made to be used from within a set of living armor. It strained both her body and the armaments around. The damage was healed before she had taken a single heavy step.

“Alive in there?” she asked.

He didn’t reply. Instead he coughed, the sound dull from below his many layers of enchanted protection. Several bits had broken from the single punch but he forced himself to get up, new layers already forming as the damage was repaired.

“Stop toying with me, Lilith,” he said, blades with glowing edges coming to life around him. He favored his right leg and one of his hands looked limp, despite the armor on top. It was still him who controlled the large monstrosity after all.

She stopped walking and raised her arm. A look up at the spectators was enough to make them part out of the way. *“You don’t want that, Omdir Stonewirt.”*

The blades came flying, all blown away when a wave of space magic shook the ground and crashed into the war machine, the wall, and a part of the barrier above. A part of it shattered, the stands behind shaking. Omdir was sent flying once again. He hit the wall right behind him, cracks sent through the stone. The dwarf was compressed within his own creation, his body about to give when he teleported out. Just before Ilea would’ve attempted the same for him.

He fell to one knee, coughing up blood as he stared at her. Metal formed around him before he was pulled towards the large machine, now once again unblemished, a thin slit revealing blue eyes below.

She caught the dwarf with one large hand and held the glowing sword to his neck. The heat alone burned his skin but he simply stared her down.

“Surrender,” she said, her booming voice moving through the silent dome.

The dwarf allowed himself a grin, his eyes locking with hers when a set of sharp needles formed right before her face.

Her precognition picked up the attack but she simply let it happen. The steel needles cut into her eyes, penetrating several centimeters as the dwarf formed moving blades and armor all around him, still held by her hand.

“*Dirty tricks after all. Well, I don’t blame you,*” she said to him.

His eyes went wide as her blade vanished, her right hand grabbing his leg before she slammed his form down into the stone. Metal bits went flying, the few blades he had managed to sent into her armor stuck and ignored.

She brought him back around and slammed him down again. This time she heard cracks, his leg broken at the very least. He remained conscious and it seemed pain didn’t much bother her opponent. *Good. I don’t want to hear him screaming.*

Another strike left his body messed up, the shock enough to render him unconscious. She let go of the leg, an eye on his vitals to make sure he didn’t die. He was only at level three hundred after all.

Ilea raised her lava sword to the crowd, the barrier coming down as the first cheers resounded, soon changing to a torrent of screams. *Surprising, for a group who had just lost a shit ton of gold. It’s for the show after all,* she thought and looked at her beaten opponent.

He twitched, two healers landing nearby, their area spells quickly stabilizing the bleeding dwarf. He would be fine. A headache maybe, but at three hundred he likely had plenty of skills and resistances to deal with that himself.

Ilea stored her armor, her cloaked form revealed to the masses as Omdir coughed.

“I’m fine,” he murmured to the healers, gesturing for them to leave with blood soaked and ruined clothes. They were replaced in a flash, the dwarf cracking his neck as he stood up, stumbling on a broken leg before he stabilized himself.

“Well fought,” she said and started pulling out the needles from her eyes. One by one they clinked to the ground.

“Who are you? And what do you want from us?” Omdir asked.

She smiled at him, pulling her hood a little closer to her nose. “What do you mean? I’m Lilith, and I came to fight in the Forged Dome.”

A set of impacts resounded behind her, a group of seven large and decorated war machines landing in tandem.

“She’s a three mark, Helwart,” Omdir said. He remained where he stood. Calm but ready to fight again.

“Aye, I can see that Om. And she beat the shit out of you,” said Helwart, the current champion of the Pit and its current leader. Or the closest thing they had to something like that. “Now get the hell out of this fucking pit or I’ll finish what she was too merciful to do.”

Omdir ignored the comments. “Well fought, Lilith,” he said and walked away.

“Don’t give me that cold fucking shoulder you git!” Helwart shouted. His war machine made the ground shake as he took a few steps after the dwarf. “If you kill your next opponents, consider yourself banned for a year!”

Ilea had taken a step to the side in an attempt to avoid the large leg of the machine.

Helwart piloted a war machine painted in dull orange, cuts and dents visible on dozens of parts. His was about as tall as her armaments and just as broad. “So, three mark. Ready for a fight?” he asked, turning towards her as a large mace of the same dull orange metal appeared in his steel hands. The head of the weapon housed seven saw blades still covered in dried blood.

She grinned. “Against all seven of you?”

[Saw Berserker – lvl 345]

“Not enough space for that here,” Helwart said. “Kall’s magic gets in the way too, and when I’m excited, you’ll need all six of em to stop me. Just me, Lilith. Just me. And none of that space shit. Just your fists.”

One of them sighed, two others looking at each other.

“You’re the Champion of the Pit, right?” Ilea asked.

Conversations had started again in the crowd, many still cheering. Her name that was.

“Aye, some call me that. But I don’t much care. Pit needs a strong head, these fucking idiots would start murdering each other in a heartbeat if it wasn’t for me. Not that I like the bloody job,” he complained.

“Helwart, you hardly do any bloody work,” a dwarf in a stonehammer war machine said in a defeated tone.

The champion shook his head. “See, just complaints. I do the fucking work when it’s necessary. Shit’s running well, isn’t it? Until the Soul Wardens that is,” he said, turning his head back to Ilea. “So? Up for another fight? Your living armor can regenerate eh? And I can tell you’re not satisfied at all.”

She shrugged. “I want one artifact from the city if I win.”

“Be specific lass, none of those political games. What do ye want?”

She looked at him for a moment before she gestured to the people around him.

“Leave us be,” he spat. “And move the schedule.”

The six other war machines voiced their complaints, three of them throwing insults at him that he countered with his own.

Ilea waited until they jumped, flew, or climbed up to the stands before she spoke. She didn’t use telepathy. She had an inkling he wouldn’t like that. “An enchanted key. Taleen made.”

“Ah. Been wonderin when that old thing would come in handy. One of the more obscure treasures lying around,” he mused.

“Come in handy? I was told I’d get it if I succeed in the Dome. Barely anything higher than a fight against the current Champion, is there?” she said.

The dwarf chuckled to himself, shouldering his large mace. “You destroyed the Wardens. Woulda been a good fight, but ye, many would’ve died. Yer a healer, Lilith. Helpin us, a choice many would not ave made. I respect that. Fucking stupid, but I respect it. And I appreciate you not stealin what you came to find. Plenty of high level pricks forget their manners. Elves’re the worst, but humans aren’t great either. Ramblin ramblin, I am. Iron key is yours if you beat me. Fair n square. I’ll be usin me magic and mace, you be usin yer healin an fists only.”

Ilea smiled at him. “No restrictions for you, and I get reduced to half my arsenal?” she asked in a dry tone.

The dwarf cackled. “Can’t exactly face a bloody fukken god, eh? White flame of old and space magic of all things? Give me a break. I couldn’t even reach ye.”

“Fair enough, I accept your terms. Only fists and healing,” she said with a smirk.

He pointed a finger at her. “No offensive healing either.”

“You’re no fun,” she said. “How did you even know I had that?”

“I do now,” he said and raised his mace, the saw blades within starting to spin as an armor of stone formed around his war machine. The whole thing grew by another meter, grinding sounds coming from the stone as it became more dense. “Now get this thing started!” he shouted through a voice module.

“The Champion has taken to the pit,” the announcer said, his voice a bit shaken. He did sound more excited than before. “I’m told he’ll be fighting Lilith herself. In a brawl to unconsciousness, death, or until one of them surrenders.” The announcer talked to one of the war machines previously behind Helwart. “Only personal bets on this one, as we’re starting right now.”

The chaos started immediately. Everyone ran around to make high stakes bets with others.

Bralin would have to sit this one out. Already they had made a ridiculous sum on both Pierce’s and Ilea’s fights. He was already on very thin ice, with very heavy boots. If he bet on this one too, he would have a few assassins on his ass by tomorrow. “Where’s Toll?” he murmured and started wading through the frantic crowd of idiots.

“Is this normal?” Verena asked from atop his shoulder.

“Some high ranking dwarves interrupt the proceedings from time to time. Helwart can do whatever the fuck he wants. Toll!!” he said, shouting the last bit. He finally spotted the golden war machine in the distance. He had to make this one count.

“Willing to bet, you old fart?” he asked when he reached the dwarf in question.

“With you, always,” said Toll.

Bralin had lost the last eight bets against him, which would only play into his confident arrogance. He had to admit the dwarf was good with his predictions but today he had two things on his side. One, the absolute confidence Toll had in Helwart and two, his knowledge of what the fuck Lilith really was.

He made the deal, adding gold from the projected winnings of the previous two fights. A risk, sure. But what was life without risks?

“Are you guys for hire?” he asked Verena as they walked back to their spot. Ilea and Helwart still seemed to be talking, the barrier up again in preparation for the fight.

“No really,” Verena said. “Why?”

“Hmm. Gonna be a rough few weeks for me after this bloody mess is over. And I’ll be a whole lot richer,” he mused.

“Didn’t think you cared much,” Verena said.

He grinned to himself. “Dear, human. It’s not about what I have. It’s about what they lose.”

She smiled and poured herself another glass.

“Let em finish their bets or I’ll never hear the end of it,” Helwart said, using another voice module that was considerably less loud.

“Sure. Hey while I have you here. Interested in a potential alliance with Hallowfort, Ravenhall, and Riverwatch?” Ilea asked.

“Hmm. Human cities, those? Hallowfort I know. Don’t see why not, but the distance... ah. Hence the key. Ye figured out the gates?” he asked.

“You’re quick for a mace wielding berserker,” she said with a smile.

He laughed. “Ye ye, they all call ole Helwart stupid until I smash in their brains. No reasonable town in all of Elos would refuse a deal if it meant reliable long range teleportation. If what ye have is real, you got them alllll by the balls. We’ll find an arrangement too. Pit owes you anyway. Heard ye saved a bunch of old farts too. Me great grandad came knockin. Never thought the fuck was still alive.”

“That’s why the Wardens attacked. Mind magic thing kept them down there,” she explained.

He nodded. “Aye. Explains yer quick return. Another minute?”

Ilea summoned her war machine and teleported up to sit on its shoulder. “A minute, sure,” she said and flicked open a bottle of ale.