

Chapter 512 Myth

“The woman upstairs, she did this to you?” she asked, a few people waking up by now, thanks to the healing. She didn’t care about the smell by now.

The girl nodded weakly, too tired and broken to fight the sudden questioning.

“Who are you?” one of the men asked. He was old, scars telling of a dangerous or hard life. The room was entirely dark except for the little light of her aura, showing her eyes only. A stairwell led up to a locked door.

“I’m Lilith,” she said without hesitation. The man sounded desperate and scared. He was waiting for death but she was the one to appear.

He mouthed the name.

“The name they whisper... the one who repelled Lord Harken... who made him free the slaves. I must be hallucinating, to think I would finally find my end, lost in drowsy hope,” he chuckled to himself.

“I’m not an illusion,” Ilea said and looked at the girl again. “What’s your name?”

“She doesn’t speak your language, foreigner,” the man said. “Your questions are lost on her. Why are you here? Who are you? If not an illusion.”

“I told you who I am,” she said and used Flare of Creation to light her ash on fire.

The man opened his eyes wide before he quickly recited something in the native language.

“It’s true...,” he stuttered. “Why have you come? Why now? Why here?”

“It was the closest city. Have you heard of Odiah and Seyna? Of Nara, and Mophis?” she asked.

“Whispers only,” the man said. “Hushed voices talking about evil magic, the Empire striking back for the lives we took.”

“It’s not the Empire, it’s the Order of Truth,” Ilea said.

“They... they would never dare... killing their own people,” he muttered.

“I saw the rituals myself. And I’m here to stop it from happening again,” Ilea said.

He chuckled again. “All hope is lost one way or another. A daemon of ash and fire appears but there is nothing she can give. You are outnumbered. Soon they will find you, they will find and kill you, foreigner. Leave this city while you can. Our lands are doomed.”

“The woman of this house, she wears rimmed glasses and a revealing dress. There is a mole on her left cheek and she likes to caress a dagger shaped in the image of a griffin. Did she do this to you?” she asked.

He glanced at her, a flicker of madness in his eyes as he grinned.

“She is the owner. If you talk about the injuries, the rot, and the dead you see before you. Yes, it was her or might as well have been her,” he said. “She is untouchable, her gold keeping the guards from taking another look, from investigating the deaths in this mansion.”

“She has to pay someone off?” Ilea asked. She was surprised that was even necessary, with everything she’d seen already.

“Murder is a crime. It’s merely easier to kill slaves without repercussions. A few silver coins are enough I hear, perhaps gold for especially heinous sins and rituals,” the man said.

“Leave foreigner. We are lost here. The slaves will starve in the siege to come, and then the same will happen to the owners,” he said and cackled to himself, finding joy in the thought.

“Not if I can do something about it,” she said.

“Lilith... but a myth, a name that means nothing in these lands. Leave before they slaughter you,” the man insisted, his eyes losing focus as he talked.

Ilea vanished.

She appeared in the room above, her ash moving out with speed and force, impaling the guards through heads and hearts as her hand closed around the woman’s neck.

Her dagger stabbed helplessly into her ashen armor, gargles leaving her throat as her eyes bulged and panicked.

Ilea grabbed the dagger and stabbed it into the woman’s heart, her healing confirming that they all had died, none of them above level one thirty.

The two men had stopped fighting, their wounds healing with unnatural speed as they glared at the woman who put down the corpse and ripped off her head.

She blinked back into the cellar and dropped the head in front of the man, igniting it with burning ash.

“Let’s make the myth a reality,” she said with a grin on her face.

Felicia closed her eyes and listened to the winds. The flow was steady, assured. Their preparations had been extensive and now was finally the time to make their move.

It had taken nearly two days of investigation to find the ritual preparations within the Order of Truth temples. Their secrets were well guarded, their priests and warriors high leveled and experienced.

She thought it impossible to infiltrate their bases but the Dawn Company had proven invaluable, showing creativity and experience when it came to information gathering. Felicia definitely had to get a few mercenaries of similar ability for her House too.

Maria was good at what she did but the woman was difficult to control, even just sending her towards the right direction took work. *It doesn’t help that she’s known me for this long. Doesn’t take me seriously,* she thought.

Their group had uncovered all sorts of secrets, plots, and horrific rituals in Harchat. She doubted it was the only city in Baralia that revealed its monstrous head upon even slight scrutiny. Felicia had

thought the Empire's nobles deplorable but perhaps there was still hope, if these were the depths of human depravity.

Perhaps she should have known, some of her hope still remaining even today, that the world wasn't what she had confirmed it to be, what she herself had experienced. Just an outlier, one unfortunate soul. It was foolish of course and still she found herself saddened.

Felicia didn't know what the plans would be once the ritual preparations here were disrupted, the priests and mages killed. The incriminating circumstances they had unveiled needed to lead to judgment. Either their group would do it, or she would hire someone to do so.

Her own power was limited, she knew that much, and an outright war against the city nobles would be dangerous even with Velamyr and Michael present. They needed to focus on preventing more rituals at all costs. *More names to add to Maria's list. I doubt she'd want to stay in Baralia after the army returns.*

Deals would be made with the locals, agreements to exchange wealth with life. However she herself would not sign such agreements and thus didn't see a reason why they would have to be honored by her and hers.

Their search had wielded that one of the minor temples in a poorer district had been chosen to host the ritual. The thing that stood out in the end were the locals talking about being refused treatment by new healers they had never seen before.

Before the war, very little changed in the schedules of the members but lately it seemed the temple was much more busy.

A targeted search by the Dawn Company had shown that nearby inns had rooms occupied by healers and high level mages, which was deemed a little strange considering the surrounding district.

One of the healers finally confirmed the preparations for an expansive ritual currently underway in a secret underground hall. That was twenty minutes ago.

Now it was time for the three heavy hitters in the group to show what they could do.

Velamyr wanted to make it count.

The temple was lacking heavy enchantments, either because the Order was confident or because they simply didn't have the time, or mages to set them up.

The General appeared by her side, brimming with power.

She had only seen him fight from far away, knowing that the man chose safe engagements over taking risks. The fact that they were here, planning to assault the central ritual hall with three people showed just how important he deemed their mission.

There were just the three of them, but more bodies were present. Michael had split into five people, preparing his spells.

It was the middle of the night.

The Dawn Company was waiting in ambush close to the temple, ready to kill everyone that tried to escape. They couldn't risk any loose ends.

"Now," Velamyr said, sparks forming around him.

Everyone vanished.

Felicia activated her auras, infusing her magic with power as her health dwindled. Her speed and strength multiplied as her defenses rose, her vision narrowing. She kept her mind focused on the winds, the whispers keeping her from losing control.

She appeared in an occupied hall, a storm of wind blades slashing through the robed healers and mages of the Order of Truth. She didn't wait for them to fall apart and die, vanishing again as a few quickly thrown spells brushed against her wind armor, deflected into the nearby walls.

The secret hall was quite large, covered extensively in runes. Even in her enraged state, Felicia saw hundreds of lights with her magic perception. The complicated runes formed a beautiful painting weaved by magic, the construct not yet completed but already trembling with power.

She ignored the shouts, the magic coming to life as Michael and Velamyr appeared, their spells of blood and lightning slamming into the mages and healers with incredible speed.

Her own construct manifested, a thousand points of health leaving her as she tried to contain the storm within her hands.

Felicia aimed, looking at the largest cluster of people, shields and spells already forming, people shouting in the foreign language. A shield made of solid gold formed in front of her, deflecting a few blasts and projectiles.

The sphere she formed stabilized and rushed forward. A gust of wind brushed against her hair, as if the spell she created brought with it a summer breeze.

It reached the enemy shields after a few twirls, golden spikes slamming into the shields before something started to eat up the energy that supported the defenses. A single near straight bolt of lightning spread into the shield, collapsing the thing before a tiny sphere of magic cracked and burst.

Felicia stood with enraged glee, the cutting winds moving past her as if she was part of the storm, her enemies shredded apart as her spell expanded, a flurry of a thousand invisible blades. Screams resounded and were silenced.

She vanished.

And appeared close to one of the survivors, a healer regenerating a lost arm. She wouldn't give him the time he needed. Two blades of air formed as extensions of her arms, cutting into the man's throat.

He stopped the blade with a raised arm, the wind cutting deep into his bone.

One of Michael's bodies appeared behind the man, a spear of blood slamming through the healer's skull with an explosive thrust.

Felicia rammed her second blade into the man's heart, recognizing a faint noise in her mind as she moved on to the next target.

The hall had turned into complete chaos, Michael moving through the survivors with experienced and decisive motions, Velamyr making up for his lack of duplicates with insane speed, chaining lightning, and precise teleportation.

Enemy spells and projectiles slowed down around the General as he kept his insane pace up, the blue light in his eyes and around his body creating a blur.

She didn't let up herself, her thrown blades cutting through armor and flesh.

Three enemies remained amidst the carnage, one man clad in white armor, a woman in robes, her face covered, and a bald man wearing similar robes, his eyes closed as he focused on his magic.

Felicia sent a few blades of wind at the group, watching tiny golden shields deflect each of her spells.

Lightning surged and slammed into another such tiny defense, the stream of energy deflected before it cut into the nearby walls.

The man in white full plate armor raised one arm, moving it horizontally. There was no weapon in his hand.

Felicia felt the familiar magic and ducked. The others did the same, except for one of Michael's copies.

The man seemed to embrace the incoming spell, a shield of gold forming before a large chunk of his mid section suddenly vanished. He collapsed in a heap of blood and gold.

A beam of lightning struck the armored void mage near instantly, no shield intercepting the spell.

A scorching hole remained but the wound within healed quickly, the woman next to him focusing with a hand extended towards him.

Magic rippled out from the bald man but Felicia couldn't quite place it.

Velamyr vanished and appeared in front of them, lightning arcing outwards in all directions as he slammed against a golden barrier.

Spikes of gold hit the defensive fields, starting to eat through when the armored man slammed his hand forward. There was a small break in the barrier, his spell pushing past Velamyr's lightning armor before a chunk of his torso vanished.

The General answered in kind, his lightning spreading through the man and the healer, both of them groaning as they went to their knees, the shield nearly collapsing. A moment later the bald man opened his eyes and the three of them vanished in a powerful surge of mana.

Felicia's hands twitched before she went to one knee. The fight was over, she needed to focus.

Her eyes closed and she listened to the whispers of the wind. A few seconds passed before she opened them again.

Velamyr, she thought and teleported closer.

He was focused, mana flowing through him as the missing part reformed with increasing speed.

It wasn't healing magic, she noted.

"Considerable power for someone below three hundred," he said with gritted teeth.

Michael had spread around the room, his gold collected again as he studied the runes and enchantments, the copy already rebuilt.

"Void magic can be deceptive. He enhanced the spell, sacrificing a large portion of his own life," Michael said as one of his bodies approached.

"Blood magic," Velamyr spat.

"You knew the risks," Michael said.

"Can we follow?" the General asked.

Michael shook his head. "I'm certain the teleportation was space magic. It's interwoven into large parts of this ritual. We can only hope they don't want to give up on this ritual site and come to us."

"Not with their numbers and levels. We overwhelmed them quickly enough. They know now that we exist, and they know what we can do," Velamyr said. "This is the right place?"

"It is," one of Michael's copies said from a little farther away. "The preparation is... extensive."

"Space magic?" Felicia asked.

"The bald man in robes. We're lucky he isn't even above level two hundred. Otherwise I'd think they could set this up much quicker. The blood magic parts are well done. With little to no mistakes. Though sloppy and uncultured," Michael said.

"What do you mean?" Velamyr asked. "I don't see an issue with the runes I know."

"They're powered by the blood of human sacrifices. You could get a similar result with a few level four to five hundred creatures," Michael said.

"They're using whole cities...," Felicia commented.

"They are... but for what I'm seeing, it's entirely unnecessary to use this much power. I would think they're compensating for a lack of space magic understanding. A sloppy and quick solution that will lead to unpredictable results. But perhaps that's what they're aiming for," the gold and blood mage explained.

"You could recreate this?" Velamyr asked. The tone suggested more than a little annoyance.

"I have no reason to use this, though it seems their testing has led to some creative solutions," he said.

Probably the only reason he's here. To get the information thousands died for. At least he's not doing said testing himself, Felicia thought.

The General seemed to think the same. "Do you have what you came for?"

Michael glanced at his copies. "May I have another ten minutes?"

"This place will be swarmed with soldiers soon," Velamyr said.

"Your army is at war, is it not your duty to fight and kill the enemy?" Michael asked.

"You're stalling," Velamyr said, his lightning arcing out as it cut through the runed stone.

Michael sighed, his copies dodging out of the way but continuing their research as the General destroyed the ritual site.

"Major, see if you can track them," Velamyr said offhandedly.

She nodded, teleporting up into the reception hall.

A few members of the Dawn company were killing the last remaining members of the order, executing them without impunity.

Felicia teleported again, out of the temple, moving quickly to a roof a few hundred meters away. She nodded to one of the Dawn members who intercepted her and moved on, realizing she was an ally.

She was surprised when she saw Michael appear by her side.

“You don’t want to study the runes more?” she asked, listening for the winds to guide her. Teleportation was a very common ability among people in her range of power, if she ever thought about fighting and killing such people, she had to have a way to track them.

Now however, the pessimism from her companions might have been justified.

“He destroyed everything notable. Without the mages present, I won’t be able to learn more. Can you track them at all?” he asked.

“I’m still searching... are you a copy?” Felicia asked. She had no way of telling.

“I’m the same one you worked with. Though that could be a lie,” he said and chuckled. He wasn’t wearing his armor, probably to move faster and more efficiently in case they did find the enemy.

“The Dawn company will have ways to track them but we have to make sure they’re not in the city,” he added.

“You can copy that ritual, can you not?” she dared asking. The man had been pretty open with her so far, and Felicia had been careful not to overstep her questioning. *The copy was open with me*, she reminded herself. A copy with orders it couldn’t refuse. If she triggered something, the man could attack her immediately, she was sure of it. Or it wasn’t a copy at all she was speaking with. Her interest was real however.