

Chapter 699 S P O R T S

Ilea watched the war machines near the entrance to the Forged Dome, their faces covered in heavy steel plate helmets. She would've been terrified to face one of them back when she had arrived in Elos. By now she couldn't quite keep the smirk off her face, excited to join the Dome with her very own living armor. The performance wouldn't be quite as much of an embarrassment anymore either. Both the nature of the armor and her high stats had helped get her to an acceptable level of control. And the sword would be a nice touch. She'd sadly have to leave her ash and fires of creation out of it for now, if she wanted to keep the somewhat lower status of a high level human and acquaintance to Bralin.

Their group was getting some looks, but not to the extent where it was a bother. Or worse even, cult like. She could fool near all of them with Monstrous, passing as a simple high level battle healer.

The massive iron gates opened up into an expansive circular space, the dome above carved into the cavern ceiling and made entirely of a dull silver metal. Steel supports went along the whole structure, the parts within her dominion shining with the magical light of enchantments. Simple stone stairs all around the near three hundred meter long arena provided space to sit or stand. While Ilea would've considered the stands and platforms simple at best, it seemed the dwarves of the Pit wanted flexibility more than provided comfort. Most of them had brought their own seats.

Ilea could see two dwarves in fine clothing, both sitting in old leather armchairs while smoking cigars. They were discussing something amongst themselves, not giving attention to the cheers around them or the battle below. Nearby she spotted a group of dwarves who had set up a mobile forge similar to what Bralin had summoned down near the Soul Forge. Two damaged war machines were propped up with a few people arguing, one of them tapping a damaged section before he raised three fingers.

Farther back were entire stores made of wood or stone, buildings added to the uppermost level of the stands. Many had tables and benches set up in front of them, barrels of ale and bottles of various liquor standing between the plates of roasted meat. Songs flowed into each other as various groups celebrated, others intently watching the battle in the pit below. The smells of fresh food and hot steel overshadowed the sweat and heat that gathered in the overcrowded Dome.

Ilea turned right when she heard the sound of bone breaking in between the shouts, cheers, and live music. Two dwarves were fist fighting each other with no shirts on, a loud circle of people around them holding up coins to a floating Dark One with an open book in its two hands, two additional hands taking notes with quick and precise movements.

She spotted Pierce among the mob. The woman added her bet, holding up several gold pieces with a broad grin on her face.

"I thought she was broke," Ilea mused with a glance to Verena.

The Elder had poured some Whiskey into a small glass, a light smile on her face as she took in the sights. She took a sip and looked at the bottle. "Not bad."

"She won a bet earlier," Bralin supplied from below, his face shield open.

Ilea nodded to herself. “So when we’re up? I assume we can just jump down?” she asked, not seeing any doors or areas that would suggest changing rooms or really anything associated with a serious sports arena back on Earth.

“Yeah,” the dwarf said. “Just looking for a spot.”

“I can see well enough from up here,” Ilea said, tapping his shoulder as she turned her attention to the pit.

Two dented and scratched war machines faced each other on the stone grounds. The fighting area was entirely flat, a few sections scorched and cracked. The close to two meter high machines circled each other, one wielding ice magic, the other a war hammer with a dented tower shield mounted to their left arm.

Ilea could tell from a glance that they were evenly matched, though she couldn’t identify their levels from the distance. The pit was about four meters lower than the stands, a low steel wall preventing the cheering people at the bottom from spilling over. She could see the detailed work right below the wall. “Barrier enchantments?” she asked, looking down at Bralin.

The dwarf led them through the crowds, navigating the sea of people and war machines with practiced ease. He said a few greetings to various people on the way, throwing banter at those who commented on the two women on his shoulders while he dodged questions. “Yes. With stronger fighters,” he said. “Plenty of accidents anyway, but the people close to the fighting grounds know the risks. Quite a lot of gold in that area too.”

“They bet more?” Ilea asked.

“No, bets about how many people will get injured in the fist few rows during any given fight. There’s also bets about how much ale is drunk, and pretty much anything else you can measure,” he explained.

“A lot of potential to forge the numbers,” Ilea said.

Verena puffed. “I thought you better than that.”

Ilea healed the woman’s mind. It was only right.

Bralin grinned. “That’s what makes the whole affair so very enjoyable. The profits can be good, but if you’re caught...”

“You say that like the risks are a good thing,” Ilea said.

“The thrill is half the benefit,” he mused, finally finding an open section with a good view. Another much larger war machine had just left, Bralin filling in the space with a smooth motion.

Ilea kept an eye on the battle. She assumed the two compared to humans at around level one fifty. The war hammer user was both stronger and more experienced but he failed to corner the ice mage.

Already there were some people booing the proceeding fight. The mage focused too much on defense, their demeanor mostly reactive and always at a distance.

“They’re gonna lose if they try anything else,” Ilea said, summoning one of Keyla’s meals before she started eating. Her domain luckily had the same benefits of keeping her food at near the same state as when it was stored. Otherwise she would’ve upgraded her necklace to a pure food storage item. *I might do that anyway. Just for added comfort in case I have to stay somewhere for longer.*

“It’s the name of the game. The Forged Dome does not pit assassins against each other, but proud warriors of the Pit. Many of the better Divers rarely or never participate here. Masters of evasion, trapping, explosives, cave ins, and stealth,” he explained.

Ilea gulped down a bite, watching the ice mage finally stand their ground, walls and spikes forming in front of their armor. “Would probably be some of the most interesting fights to watch though,” she mused.

Bralin puffed. “Agreed. But most of the rabble here wouldn’t be able to appreciate it, nor could they even comprehend what was happening. There are special occasions and funded battles with paid entrance only, but as is in the nature of things... people like that generally prefer to explore ancient ruins than showcase their abilities in the Dome. A shame, but direct battles between higher end war machines are quite enjoyable to watch as well.”

“*You participate too? With your real machine I mean?*” Ilea asked, using her telepathy.

“*No. I’m quite content with the responsibilities and position I have. I’m done with the constant feuds,*” the dwarf replied.

She smirked and opened a bottle of ale. “*Understandable.*”

A shield charge broke through the remaining barriers of ice, the war hammer impacting the armored mage first against its chest, then its head. They staggered back, before a third strike made them fall. A heavy impact resounded as the crowd first cheered, then went silent.

The downed mage raised a hand with two fingers pointing upward.

Cheers erupted again, cheers and curses as gold was exchanged between hundreds of people. The war hammer user jumped up onto the stands, welcomed by a group of celebrating dwarves.

Mages jumped down into the pit and evened out the few cracks left by the battle, earth magic easily getting rid of the indents.

Ilea kept an eye on the downed mage, their arm falling to the side before they sat up and removed their helmet. She laid her eyes on a female dwarf, blood on her brow as she stood up with staggering steps. She looked young, three braids of brown hair falling down into the neck of her war machine.

“No healers to check on them?” Ilea asked.

“Should be a few around, but they only go down there if it’s bad,” Bralin informed.

As usual, she thought while drinking her ale. “Is Pierce next?”

“Fifteen minute pause, there should be another fight before hers,” he said.

She leaned back, just barely stopping herself from forming an ashen chair. At least she had a shoulder, though she did note the strain her weight put on the dwarf. *What a gentleman*, she thought and slid off, sitting down on the stairs instead. A group of dwarves in front of her blocked the view but her perception provided more than enough range to show a few interesting things.

The amount of spells in the area was downright blinding. Infused war machines, weapons, small easily overlooked spells hiding cards or coins, manipulating dice. *Fixing hmm.*

“I’ll be getting some food,” Ilea said and stood up.

“Didn’t you just eat?” Bralin asked.

She smiled and vanished, appearing near the top of the stands. She found an empty spot on the long table and glanced at the dwarf behind the counter. “*Can I order from you?*” she asked, her telepathy cutting right through all the music, talk, and song.

He didn’t react too surprised, his brown eyes going over the customers before they landed on her. His brows raised, he nodded and pointed up.

“*Your choice. Three plates,*” she said. “*And ale.*”

The other dwarves sitting at the long table moved a full jug down until it landed in front of her, their conversation not interrupted by the gesture in the slightest.

She drank deep from the jug before she set it down and wiped at her mouth. A sigh escaped her as she smiled. Ilea definitely preferred a more quiet and personal restaurant experience but for one evening, she didn’t mind the change of pace. She could even see most of the fighting pit at her outermost position on the table.

Her food arrived when the cheers picked up again but she didn’t care much about the two war machine wielding mages that went at it like some of her resistance training partners. She supposed it looked impressive, but after her many encounters with four mark beings and her recent training with the Meadow, she certainly cared more about her food. A plate of greasy meat covered in spices, quickly devoured before the next one arrived.

“New in town?” a dwarf opposite her asked, fighting off his friend that tried to stop him.

Ilea looked at him and continued eating. She nodded as she finished the second plate and moved on to the third.

He laughed. “Haven’t eaten in days eh?” The dwarf at least had the courtesy of not bothering her again until she was done.

Good. My human brain is satisfied by this grease, fat, and salt, she mused. “Still going at it,” she murmured and finished her jug with one long swig.

“Too weak to join the battle against the Soul Wardens, so now they’re trying to show off here,” the dwarf said. “Hodir’s the name.”

[Explosion Mage – lvl 212]

“Ilea,” she answered, likely a better choice with the potential of her other name already being spread. “You were there?” she asked.

“Aye, tough machines. Saw the king meself, white wings of flame,” he said and drank.

“He was rather impressive. Even from a distance,” she said. “Glad he took care of the invasion.”

Another dwarf turned around from the table ahead, nearly bumping into Hodir. “Oi... twas a woman, I tell ya. Thick armor, but I saw the curves. Queen Nessa I tell ya.”

“Nessa was a water mage, you daft fucking shit,” someone else said.

Ilea smiled into her freshly filled jug.

“None of ya heard of em southern thing called Lilipf? Ash an all, fire too,” one misguided individual suggested.

“No white fire there, she’s using ash armor, dark, near black,” another voice chimed in.

“It was ash, I could tell,” Hodir said, now looking behind himself. “Who’s that Lilipf?”

“One with that name up to fight soon,” another said before drinking.

“Bards in the south sing of her. A human I think. Said she fought an entire army on her own,” one said.

A few of them laughed. “Army of humans.”

“Could you fight an army of fucking humans?” another said.

The dwarf in question raised his mug with a grin. “Bring me one and I’ll show you.”

Ilea was sure he couldn’t, but she commended his bravery. She nearly used monster hunter to see how quickly he would shit his pants but decided to keep to her subdued roll of high level healer human.

“Healer too that one, battle healer some say,” another said. “High level, none know what it is,” he added with a mysterious voice.

Hodir turned back to Ilea but he found nobody there. A few coins had appeared on the counter and one of the jugs was gone.

She enjoyed watching the ensuing chaos through her dominion, most of the dwarves laughing at Hodir who stood up and argued with them vehemently. She did note that some were on the lookout for her too, but a quick teleport and change of clothes would make it harder to find her. She added a dark green cloak and covered a part of her face.

“Good food?” Verena asked, still sitting on Bralin’s shoulder with a glass of whiskey in her hand.

“Greasy,” Ilea mused. She drank from her jug and watched two dwarves pry a screaming individual out of a half molten war machine, his injuries healed by a third individual who asked him repeatedly not to scream so loudly.

One of them had to give, she thought when an announcer called out the next participants.

“Now we have... is that right? Yes? Well... I suppose... a newcomer to the Forged Dome. Another one, but going by her name she must be pretty impressive. The Dragonkiller!” his voice boomed out through the dome, cheers and boos sounding out right after he had called the name.

Ilea noticed quite a few people remaining quiet within her dominion, some glancing around right after or sharing a whisper with others. She smiled, drinking a bit more ale. *Suppose I’m not the only one who’s met a dragon.*

“*How does this usually go in the plains?*” she asked Verena.

“*Pierce is banned from most tournaments. I’m surprised she’s not known here,*” the Elder replied.

The Dragonkiller appeared in the air about thirty meters up and above the stone pit, her armor blinking into existence around her before she fell and landed.

“She practiced that,” Ilea murmured.

Her armor crackled with blue lightning, her hand raised towards the ceiling when a broad bolt of blue energy slammed down. The spell died out in crackling wisps to reveal a blade of steel, lightning flowing through the length of the weapon as the woman swung it to the side.

The crowd burst out into cheers and shouting, some figuratively losing their minds.

Ilea checked to make sure they weren't actually being attacked by mind magic but it turned out that she was just more used to showcases like that. *But really? For Pierce?*

The Dragonkiller spread her arms wide and turned around herself.

"Yes... impressive. It seems we have the first owner of a Warden's blade participate in the Dome. Your opponent needs no introduction. Come forth! Grat the Destroyer!" the announcer shouted over the cheering crowd.

Ilea formed small beads of ash within her ears to dull the noise a little. She had enjoyed the magic shows back in Riverwatch much more than this testosterone filled brawl pit. Watching that was. She very much wanted to jump down there and rip apart the dark blue war machine of her friend.

'ding' 'Monstrous reaches lvl 7'

Did someone identify me? Or is it just because I'm around other beings? she didn't show a reaction and quickly checked the skill. The new value showed at a hundred and ninety below her highest Class level. Which meant everyone below level three twenty couldn't identify her. Without another spell or maybe the third tier.

There had been quite a few people in the crowd above two fifty. She assumed the lack of reactions were explained by her skill.

Grat the Destroyer looked the part. He jumped down with his enormous war machine, towering above Pierce's already large armor by nearly two meters. His had a solid core with added bits and pieces that jutted out in rusted edges. In his arms he held an oversized mace ending in a solid ball of steel. His movements were slow and strained, the eyes within his helmet glowing a deep red as steam flowed out from a set of exhausts on his back.

"Is that really the speed he moves at?" Ilea asked.

Bralin had a broad grin on his face. "Yes," he answered in an enthusiastic tone.

Ilea raised a brow. "You know he's going to get ripped apart by her, right?"

"Yes. Lost me a lot of gold the last two times he fought. I bet a lot on Pierce. The rate was eight to one when I bet," he said.

Ah right, I forgot to bet anything, Ilea thought. "What's the rate at now? Or are they closed already?"

"Too late now," Bralin said. "But if you want me to bet on your fight, I could still do that."