

Interlude - Trap

Karya and Vanessa floated above the city of Emaros. Both wore their full battle regalia, her the red and orange scale armor and winged helmet, while Vanessa her robes and staff. Their fire spilled from them in a combined attack that splashed against the city's defenses. Their shield was holding, for now. But the flickering of light that it gave off told Karya that it wouldn't hold for much longer under their assault and the attacks from the rest of the army. The sun was obscured by the thunderclouds above, which robbed Karya of her full dawnfire boosts, but even without it she was more than enough to shift the scales. She wished that she could touch her strongest powers, those that came from her two last Class Evolutions, but most of those had been inactive ever since the Ethereal Realm was sealed away. Karya was a Valkyrie specializing in fire and souls, and a big chunk of her power was unavailable to her for years. It hadn't mattered that much so far, she didn't need those powers to deal with the endless waves of monsters and taken, but it still nettled her.

Hitor stood on his fortress, watching and waiting for his chance to attack. They were being careful about it, kept some of their other powerful individuals in reserve. They didn't know what taken were in the city, they had the lists of those that were considered lost, but they couldn't know which were dead and which had been taken. The lists were too large, filled with millions of names, there was no way that they could prepare for all their powers even if they knew them. And they didn't, a few people had some of their powers known—like Yirrel Annsi who they suspected was in the Citadel. She was a Warden, and most of her powers were geared toward defense, protection and nullifying of damage, but also toward catching lawbreakers and upholding the law. And they didn't even know half of what she could do. Those who did know were contract bound

not to reveal it. Still, even if they took what was known, millions of possible threats were too much to try and prepare for. It was why wars were fought by keeping their strongest away, why they waited for the opponent to overextend.

The great lengths that people went to in order to hide what they could do from others outside of the Empire surprised Karya, she had forgotten about it. The Empire had been forced to adapt in order to survive.

The enemy was firing out of their city, from their walls, their attacks hitting hard. Karya and Vanessa were being protected by the army, flashing shields and walls of light would constantly get in between the attacks meant to take them down.

They had to be careful, they didn't want to do too much damage to the city once the shields failed, so Karya was keeping a close watch on them. Or trying to at least. The rain was starting to pick up, and the raindrops hitting their attack were causing them to turn into steam, which obscured her sight, and her senses weren't precise enough to tell her the exact situation with the shield.

Karya put her trust in the people around her, hoping that they would keep watch. It was all that she could do.

* * *

Yirrel watched the assault on Emaros, waiting with five of her strongest fighters. All had been High Rankers before they had seen the truth, now they served an idea, just as she did. Vergal Highmight, a minotaur wielding a bow as tall as he was, called the **Mountain Piercer**

for his act of shooting an arrow through a mountain in order to kill his target, stood to her right. Minea Leoas, the human woman, known as the **River Witch**, a caster of great power stood with her hands crossed over her chest, her two focuses glistening around her palms. Kanie Easra the demasi blademaster, renowned as the **True Cut Blade** for the name of one of his best skills, and one of the greatest masters of the blade in the last five hundred years, kept his hands on top of the pommels of his swords. Reao, a cthul, the **Aspirant**, the man who had traveled the world and learned many different combat styles, even gaining a special Class because of his accomplishments, he stood motionless, his combat robes immaculate and his fists wrapped in blue bandages. And lastly, Hebbes the **Pillar of the Forest**, Champion of the Blue Forest Hive—formerly, of course.

They all stood ready, waiting for the moment to strike.

And soon it came. She felt it even from so far away, it affected her too.

—Vault of the King—

The Elder King's ideal, it touched her, and then moved away, seeking others. After all, her equipment was stronger than what it could provide. Still, down in the Citadel, and in Emaros, every one of the Hastur's Chosen that didn't have powerful gear, suddenly found themselves wrapped in stronger, better armor. They held better weapons, better rings. It replaced each piece of equipment that they had with something up to two rarities greater.

Yirrel gave the signal, and then she activated the teleportation pad beneath her feet. In a moment they were teleported. She and her five

fighters appeared in Emaros, beneath the city in a small cavern that was shielded and prepared in advance.

Through the link that they had all shared with Hastur, and which now she controlled, she sent the signal to the Elder King. She couldn't do as much as Hastur had been able to. He could instill terror through his minions, could reach through them and attack, but also command each of them individually. Yirrel could only give them commands that they followed. And to the other Hastur's Chosen she could send short messages that weren't really words, more... impressions.

She felt the Elder King's power rise, his oath filled the city, granting them greater fortitude, her included. Then he allowed it to spill out and his oath announced itself.

/Oath of the Prime: Grant Fortitude/

His power stretched and increased the defenses of every being on their side, Hastur's Chosen and monsters both.

Yirrel looked back at her group.

"Get ready," she said as they spread out around the center of the room. She keyed the wards and suppression arrays, then started layering her powers on them all.

[Inspire: Area of Abyssal Defense]

[Inspire: Shield of the Depths]

[Inspire: Power of the Shield]

Greater Strength

Greater Power Regeneration

Battle Roar

Hastening Presence

Inspiring Presence

Increase Resistances

Strengthen Defense

True Link—Armor of the Depths

Then she reached out with her senses outside of the city, to the sky she felt the shield fail—or rather the Elder King turned it off, and then she slowly started executing her plan.

* * *

All around the battlefield, the monsters fighting against the lines of the Sect Army were suddenly emboldened. The oath of the Elder King settling in around them, granting them greater durability. Strikes that

once cut deep now only left scratches, arrows bounced off their flesh and powers that killed only staggered. The battle across the lines changed in an instant.

* * *

Nayra stabbed a monster and felt resistance that wasn't there before. The oath that she had felt, it had empowered them. All around her, she started to feel death as her power increased. Screams and signs of tearing flesh intensified and she sensed the battle lines buckle under the monster assault.

* * *

Karya felt the ideal and the oath come from the city, but she didn't allow it to bother her. Others would take care of that. She had never met the Elder King, though she did know of him, but only what the Empire's spies could learn though, which wasn't much. He had never been in the spotlight, and he had been old when he got his Immortality. That usually meant someone who wasn't that powerful, but she had felt the strength of the ideal and the oath even if she didn't know exactly what it did.

And then, the shield around the city failed. Their beam of fire continued forward, and before she could stop it a defensive power interjected itself, absorbing the attack. The battle intensified as the taken on the walls were now able to fire at their forces fully, and she saw sect

warriors charging at the walls. She turned to look at her daughter, who looked a bit drained, which was understandable, she had shouldered most of the strain as the channel for their power.

“The gate, now,” Karya told her. They had to take advantage of the moment.

Vanessa raised her staff and channeled her most powerful perk—**Blossom of Flames**. Vanessa’s fire blossomed into existence above the gate to the city. With the defensive array down it manifested fully. Like a flower, the fire unfurled its petals, first they were yellow, then moved to orange and red, and finally white. The fire hit the gate and the enchantments on the wall itself flared. The stone heated up and turned scorching.

Karya saw the enemy screaming and jumping off the wall to get away from the heat. Attacks from the Elder King’s position came at them, but the nearby floating fortresses defended them, shields flashing in existence to cover them.

Then, the gate faltered, and Vanessa’s white fire fell on top of it, melting through the stone and metal, opening up a way into the city. Together, the two of them flew down, the sect army following behind them.

They reached to float above the ruined gate, and a group of taken flew in their direction, their power flaring as they unleashed attacks in their direction.

Karya spun her spear and used [**Wall of Dawning Flames**]. Their attacks were stopped cold, and she dashed through her wall with [**Flame Dawning Haste**] then as she hit the wall she triggered [**Immolation of Dawning Flames**].

The fire of the wall was consumed and added to the immolating flames growing around her. She hit the enemy group and just the heat around her made one spontaneously combust into flames. She swung her spear and cut another, fire boiling his blood the moment she opened up a wound. The third she speared through as his sword glowed and he tried to attack. The fourth was a water user, he summoned a river of fish made out of water that swam through the air in her direction. His attack hit the immolation aura around her and evaporated, turning into scorching steam that spread rapidly around her. It hit the taken and he screamed as his own attack's result scorched his skin, turning it red and filled with blisters. Karya finished him off by cutting his head off.

She turned, and saw Vanessa laying waste to the buildings around the gate, creating a large area for their army to more easily maneuver. A group of taken attacked her, and Vanessa took them down by lashing out with a petal of white fire that now lazily floated around her.

Karya landed just as she saw a fortress move above them, and sect warriors start to enter the city.

“Keep your strength,” Karya warned her daughter, they didn't want to overextend yet.

“I know,” Vanessa said.

Then, something happened, she felt the world around her twist and something grabbed hold of her body and soul. She tried to fight it off, on instinct instilled over centuries of fighting she tried to reach her **Ethereal Vanish** perk and was again reminded that it no longer worked. A moment was all it took, the power wrapped around her and Vanessa. She heard shouting, felt someone teleport near them and their power try and interfere. Karya glanced back at a sect warrior that she didn't know. His power held it for less than a moment, he was too weak. Then Karya and Vanessa were caught, and pulled somewhere else.

* * *

|My Will Is Law| to establish her rule over the city, her domain and her law.

And then Yirrel reached out to her **Warden's Law: Bring the Criminals to Me.**

Space in the middle of the room twisted and bent.

* * *

Before Karya could say anything to Vanessa, it was done. A power wrapped around them, and they were yanked somewhere else. Space warped and the air and light was replaced by a dimly lit room and the ground. She hit hard and heard her daughter hit the ground next to her as well.

“What?” She heard Vanessa speak and saw her white fire flare. Karya stood and readied her spear, she saw shapes all around them, holding weapons. Before the two of them could recover, something activated and she felt something trying to stifle her power. Karya fought for a moment, unleashing as many perks as she could all around them. She saw shields and arrays flare and some melted beneath her feet. Attacks came and hit her from the side, and the arrays around her flashed. Her fire wings

winked out along with her daughter's power. She felt the silencing effect push down on her, and then the dark shapes attacked.