

## Chapter 434 Negotiations

Ilea chuckled. “And why would I take your word on that? Already you have wasted mana and time to come and deal with this intruder.”

*“You will not tell me. Have I misjudged you perhaps? And yet I have not sensed a presence apart from yours.”*

She didn’t answer, back near the exit by now. *Is the Fae safe? Teleported out maybe? Or in hiding. And yet it had been captured before.*

*Gone?*

*Safe?* she sent both words towards the Fae, wherever it may be.

*Tell*, the word came into her mind as if it was muffled.

*Survive*, it sent.

Ilea ground her teeth.

*No*, she sent back.

*Why?* the Fae asked.

*Ally*, she sent back.

*Serious!*

*Tell!*

*Leave!*

*Safe?* Ilea simply asked.

Nothing came back.

The being would capture the Fae and kill it, or worse. She knew it. A decision had to be made. Either her or the Fae.

Ilea had faced death before. Hundreds of times. If anyone had a chance to get away, it was her. What was the point if she couldn’t even protect an ally from an interdimensional metalhead? *Not the good kind of metalhead.*

*Leave*, she sent.

*Please*, the Fae sent back.

*Both*

*Die*

Ilea rolled her eyes.

*Violence*, she sent.

*Leave*, she added.

*Stupid!*

*Stubborn!* the Fae sent.

*“You are communicating with an ally... tell me. This is your last chance.”*

“I won’t give you the information you seek,” she said and prepared to fight.

*“A regrettable turn. Come then, human. And show me the last embers of the Azarinth,”* the being said.

“Humans are stupid and selfish, little one. Better get used to it. Now get the fuck out of here while I distract the mage,” she said and formed her ash into spears.

*I will show you the Azarinth, Ascended. At least I have the satisfaction of wasting a bunch of energy you collected over centuries,* she thought and rushed at the creature.

The Sand Elemental had been more powerful, the first Drake she had faced more deadly. And still, she felt a finality in this decision, to attack this ancient and cold being. It wouldn’t hesitate, wouldn’t stop. Until every last bit of her would be destroyed.

*Let it try,* she thought, watching the dome erupt in motion.

Hundreds of steel limbs rushed out, thousands of pieces of shrapnel. Void and Space magic laced the very air as she weaved through the attacks, limbs ripped off and body parts exploding.

She kept her focus on the creature, her ashen spears vanishing or slamming into invisible barriers. She felt the space magic around her, pushing past with all the strength and power she could muster.

It felt good. Like a challenge. Insurmountable to her past self and yet she had stood against Elementals, had felt the streams of concentrated mana as they flowed through her. Her body had been pierced, burnt and destroyed as many times as this creature had years. She roared in the midst of it all, feeling her body regenerate and break at the same time as she pushed off the ground.

Her wings were in tatters, her left arm missing and her legs pierced by a dozen tendrils of steel. They bent and broke as she was slowed down, only a couple meters away from the being.

It watched her, thousands of steel pieces flowing around it.

Ilea smirked and released Heart of Cinder, charged by five thousand points of health and all the time their conversation had taken.

A beam of fire, heat and energy erupted from her arm, far more powerful than the spell had ever manifested. The third tier of Heat Resistance and the second tier of Lava Resistance had allowed her to charge it far longer than before.

It rushed out and slammed into an invisible wall, breaking through and crashing into another wall, this one made of steel. A small hole was melted at the center, showing the being behind.

It lifted a hand and brushed off the few embers that had reached it.

The arm extended towards her and moved the steel below.

Ilea was ripped apart by dozens of spikes, unable to blink. Her head looked up at the sharp pieces. Thousands of them slashed into her ash, flesh and bone. She was shredded entirely, her sphere the only thing that informed her about what was happening.

Her brain was pierced and exploded into bloody pulp, turning off that part of her as well. She came to consciousness once more, her third tier healing overwhelming the continuous stream of damage for a moment.

She felt the void around her and formed a single dense limb of ash with a sharp blade. It slashed into her neck, severing her head. She continued to control the ash as all of her was punched through by shrapnel.

The ash formed a cocoon around her head and shot away to the side. Her body, neither pierced nor halted by the steel, reformed and she slid to a stop, ash covering her once more. She saw the empty sphere missing in the ground and the spikes where she had been a moment earlier.

Ilea didn't stop, ignoring the shrapnel slashing into her body. Her meditation was active through it all. She felt no pain. Could regenerate her body near instantly.

The shrapnel stopped coming, all of it flowing into the ground instead. She dodged several hundred spikes shooting out of the ground until one of them pierced through her, digging through her leg from the side and piercing her lungs.

She tumbled to the ground and was immediately pierced by fifty more. Her head too.

*He left my brain intact*, she thought and looked for a way out. The ash she formed was shredded apart by steel and pushed away by an invisible force.

Ilea's perception slowed down as she looked at the creature, her own body reminding her of a hedgehog, hundreds of steel protrusions sticking out of her back. *This is it? No was to escape?* she asked herself.

There was nothing she could do. Her blink didn't work. Her ash was pushed away. Heart of Cinder did little against the steel, charged for less than a second. Healing kept her alive but she was trapped.

She remembered the feeling from earlier. Her soul and mind ripped apart by the torrents of the arcane. She remembered the wolves she had fought outside the Azarinth temple, remembered running from the Elves back in Riverwatch. Some of it had blurred. It was a fitting end, to die against a creature like this. A being she did not understand.

Many might call her foolish, to risk her own life to protect a being like the Fae, one perhaps doomed either way. And yet she felt at peace. Her eyes were cold and defiant as she stared at what she assumed to be one of the Ascended. A being that perhaps could have been her ally, had they met a thousand years ago in different circumstances. Their paths had crossed and even if the Fae hadn't been here, their meeting could have led to this outcome.

*Always another Drake*, she thought with a smile as the void started to manifest. She closed her eyes.

And opened them again. The magic was pushed aside, dissipated.

*Mana!* the thought reached her mind and she immediately disabled her drain resistance.

The Fae had appeared on top of her head, arms outstretched as a barrier lit up within her sphere.

Ilea groaned, pushing against the steel with all she had, ashen limbs cutting and bending as she healed against the blood magic seeping into her body.

"*Fae,*" the being exclaimed with interest. "*I see.*"

Shrapnel and steel started slamming into the barrier, the little creature pushing against it as cracks formed.

*Teleport?* Ilea asked with a broad grin, pulling free of the steel below her. The Fae somehow prevented the being from manipulation the metal.

She placed the Fae on her shoulder and jumped back, more and more mana flowing into it. The barrier shattered and Ilea continued her game of evasion.

She could tell the being was throwing everything it had at them. Its space magic had much less of an influence now, her wings, precognition, speed and maneuverability working against all the projectiles as well as the void. The shrapnel was deadliest against her brain while she had to avoid the larger pieces and spears.

The Fae had a way to separate the connection between the steel on the ground and the being, allowing her to move more freely on the floor of the dome like structure. Mere seconds had passed since her capture before she felt a powerful surge of mana from the Fae on her shoulder.

She looked at the being in front of her, its assault still ongoing. “Until next time,” she said with blood dripping from her mouth as she waved with one remaining arm.

It spread its arms, the structure around them starting to disintegrate.

Ilea kept her eyes on the two white shining eyes of the being, protecting the Fae as her body was ruptured by blood magic.

It nodded ever so slightly before her surroundings changed entirely.

The Fae on her shoulder collapsed, caught by Ilea’s hands as it fell.

She stared at the two moons of Elos shining down on them. Lakes of mist showed far below as her wings reformed and kept them steady.

Healing flowed into the Fae as Ilea charged her wings. She had no doubt the being had a way to follow. The question was if it would. *It nodded. Does that mean it is inevitable that it will come and finish the job? Or was it glad that I escaped? Fucker gave me a chance after all. I need to find void and blood mages to get trained and reach the third tier.*

“And you saved me, little guy,” she murmured. Ilea had been sure that time. It hadn’t come in an unexpected way or brought by some super powerful monster. Just a being that overpowered her entirely. A being that she opposed, perhaps underestimated, even in the end.

She would have paid with her life. *I was ready to die, hmm? That’s an interesting revelation, eh, add it to the pile. Guess I score high on loyalty and stupidity. Pretty sure the Fae being so cute and mostly defenseless helped in that regard. I was sure I could at least survive a minute or two and make an actual attempt at escaping.*

She sped up as soon as her wings were charged, choosing a direction at random, clouds and blizzards making the visibility limited. She was in the north still, that much she knew.

*Another being to add to the list,* she thought. Either that or she was on its list now. Somehow she doubted the creature cared enough to hunt her down. She hadn’t revealed her knowledge about the

Ascended to it. As it stood, all they did was drain the mana in the twenty fourth layer and fight the creature. *No clue how annoying that was to it and more importantly how resentful of a person it was.*

*Pretty fucky either way. He completely destroyed me. Knew how to deal with all my skills and I couldn't even land a scratch. My blink so easily disabled... I have to find a counter for that. Third tier Space Magic Resistance is definitely a good first step. I got away with my head, let's try not to make the same mistakes the next time.*

It was a sentient four mark creature after all and Ilea was barely at level three fifty. She didn't look back, speeding above the lands with her charged wings.

The level difference was huge, comparable perhaps to her fighting a level two fifty elf back in Riverwatch. She had much more tricks up her sleeve and with all her general skills and healing, Ilea could certainly punch above her weight class. *Not a four mark. Not yet.*

The whole experience reminded her mostly of the Young Lightning Elemental. She had no clue how durable the Ascended was but she doubted it reached Trakorov levels. *I would be dead otherwise. The Sand Elemental and Trakorov just shredded my defenses, easily.*

The adrenaline slowly set as she sped over the landscape, her mind sharp and prepared with all her skills flowing through her body.

Ilea wondered if she could have escaped without the Fae, had she tried immediately, right after she had appeared in the dome. The whole thing was made of metal and the shrapnel completely minced her. The added spikes from the ground and ceiling pinning her with the aid of space magic made for a deadly combination against her.

*Even something with less raw power could have been a problem. Maybe even a team of level three to four hundreds with abilities like that. Enough to keep me at bay, counter my movement and pin me down. As soon as I'm stuck and can't teleport, I'm pretty much fucked.*

"The joys of fighting alone..." she murmured. Glad that this time, she had someone to rely on.

*The level one hundred Fae standing against a level one thousand Ascended... if it even was an Ascended. Maybe it just used the facilities or it's not related at all.*

Ilea doubted that and decided that without proof against it, she called the being an Ascended. The implications weren't quite clear yet. Catelyn knew that the Descent had been used or visited three hundred years ago. For a Dark One, that time frame didn't mean much.

To go and warn them wouldn't change anything. Hallowfort was on the defensive either way. If the Ascended went and attacked them, there was nothing she could do, nor anything Hallowfort could do, to stop it.

*Pretty fucking stupid if you ask me,* she thought and frowned, looking at the little Fae in her hands. It was acceptable to think that powerful creatures existed, threats to whole cities and maybe even all of humanity but they were monsters, not reasonable sapient beings.

*Eh, just like the elves with a bigger punch. They were the same when I was level one hundred. This one will become manageable too, with time, patience and levels.*

*As well as resources. Don't let it get you down. It was inevitable that this world holds beings far beyond your power, even now that you have reached such heights. They're not out to get you and*

you're not exactly pressured for time. Survive, fight and gain power. Protect those you hold dear and escape if all else fails.

Ilea grounded herself by looking through the gains from the battle.

**'ding' 'Sentinel Reconstruction reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 29'**

**'ding' 'Azarinth Awakening reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 26'**

**'ding' 'Blink reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 20'**

**'ding' 'Sentinel Sphere reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 11'**

**'ding' 'Sentinel Sphere reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 12'**

**'ding' 'Azarinth Fighting reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 24'**

**'ding' 'Azarinth Fighting reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 25'**

**'ding' 'Azarinth Perception reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 10'**

**'ding' 'Azarinth Perception reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 11'**

**'ding' 'Armor of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 28'**

**'ding' 'Aspect of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 25'**

**'ding' 'True Ash Creation reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 23'**

**'ding' 'Heart of Cinder reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 16'**

**'ding' 'Ash and Ember Unity reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 21'**

**'ding' 'Ashen Wings reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 12'**

**'ding' 'Ashen Wings reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 13'**

**'ding' 'Eyes of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 6'**

**'ding' 'Avatar of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 20'**

**'ding' 'Keeper of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 21'**

Alright, maybe it wasn't so bad to nearly die... again.

**'ding' 'Meditation reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 2'**

**'ding' 'Monster Hunter reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 2'**

**'ding' 'Veteran reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 17'**

**'ding' 'Blood Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 14'**

**'ding' 'Blood Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 15'**

**'ding' 'Space Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 15'**

**'ding' 'Space Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 16'**

**'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 10'**

**'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 11'**

*Nothing against that fucking metal... it's just like my mana intrusion. Damn asshole has a cheat.*

She sighed and kept flying. *On the one hand, I should go down and fight Miststalkers right fucking now, get every level and ounce of power I can get. On the other, I just want to go home and sleep, lie in bed, read books and eat some nice fucking food.*

*The latter would actually be the better fuck you, wouldn't it? Not giving in to the fear. Let him come to me. I like that.*

“Come on little one, I still need some space magic resistance levels before I decide to take a break from all this violence.”

The Fae woke up as if it heard the cue word.

*Safe?* it asked, looking around at the icy clouds that flew by with insane speed.

“No idea little one, you tell me,” Ilea said.

The Fae giggled.

*Survived*

“Yeah, thanks to you.”

*Stupid*

*Close*

“Been close before... I'll try not to make it a habit. Overestimated my resilience.”

It bonked her head with its small arms.

*Stop*

Ilea did so, slowing down as they came out of a massive cloud. A massive forest spread far down below. She could see creatures move in the dark. *Damn, my eyes are scary. How fucking far did I fly?*

*Fast,* the Fae sent.

“No shit, where are we?”

It shrugged.

“How do we get back? I could use my teleport but I can't take you with me,” Ilea said and looked back. “Do you think the Ascended will follow?”

*Ascended?*

“I think their race or group is called that. Read it in a book,” she explained.

*Safe*

“It didn't follow?”

*No*

*Difficult*

“Yeah but did you see that thing? Fucking ripped me to shreds.”

The Fae giggled.

*Ye*

“Did you just ye me?”

It nodded.

“Thanks for saving me by the way.”

The Fae hugged her face from the side.

*Saved*

*Me*

“I guess we saved each other, hmm? How very cheesy of us.”

*Food*

*Always*, it pointed at her and shook its head in mock disappointment.

Ilea smiled and rubbed the creature’s head.

She took a moment to take in the sight. The forest and mountains, the lakes and rivers. It felt serene. Once more flying in the skies after having been underground for weeks.

“I’m glad we made it,” she finally said.

The Fae nodded in silence.