

## Chapter 572 Training Considerations

He crossed his arms and sighed.

“Can we borrow your enchanters? I think it’s best if we keep this under wraps,” he said.

“Sure, as soon as they have the time. You’d have to pry them away from Meadow with more than orders or words right now. I suggest you have this dungeon walled off. Just in case,” she said.

“Of course. We can risk having an entrance right into our underground. It was only a matter of time with our fast expansion,” Sulivhaan said.

“Well the gates are off right now. Let’s just hope the Defenders were just used for their intended purpose,” Ilea said.

Sulivhaan had the aura of a frown.

“And I thought we were getting close to high security,” he murmured.

“You are. And if things go south, we can contain whatever comes out of these gates down here. Worst case we collapse it all and destroy the gates. They probably won’t be fissures that sustain themselves, otherwise there wouldn’t be any structures. At least I hope so,” she said.

Sulivhaan nodded after a while. “Can... I ask you to stay here for a few hours? Not for what may come out but what may come down here. I don’t trust Finnley’s team.”

“I don’t mind,” Ilea said and sat down, keeping track of the cats. *Four and six seem to like each other*, she noted with a smile.

“Good. I’ll be back soon. Thank you for your time and help,” Sulivhaan said and bowed.

“Don’t you bow to me. We’re friends, even if we may have differing opinions on some things. Don’t you forget that,” Ilea said.

“That we are. It’s been a joy to see you grow in power but lately I admit, the joy has been joined by a hint of fear. You’re likely more powerful than even the Elders by now,” he said.

“Even better to have me as a friend then,” Ilea said with a broad smirk. “I’m not going to become a queen or dictator, Sulivhaan. Don’t you worry. Our council is secure, no matter how strong I become.”

“Words spoken, promises made. I give you the benefit of the doubt, Ilea. And I trust you based on your actions. But even you must see the corrupting nature of power,” he said.

“Oh I certainly do. Which is why I need friends that are a little more grounded than me,” she said.

“Not you though, you’re pretty out there too.”

The man allowed himself a chuckle. “I won’t deny that. I’ll get to work then. Get help from the guard should it be required.”

“I will, thanks,” Ilea said and focused fully on her cat lady endeavors.

*Now that I think about it. Elos has quite a few interesting cat lady options. Summoning, taming, maybe even turning into a cat oneself. Plus there are species out there a little more frightening than a house cat.*

Ilea spent the next four to five hours down in her dark cavern. None of the gates suddenly activated and spewed out monsters or demons, neither did any opportunist rogue or Shadow sneak in to steal anything or try to study the ancient structures.

Utterly boring.

At least she had her cats.

***‘ding’ ‘Sentinel Huntress reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 21’***

*A surprisingly quick method*, she thought. Even without danger, focusing on all the cats proved enough of a challenge to bring her skill to the next level in just a few hours of focused training.

Sulivhaan finally appeared next to her.

“Nothing?” he asked.

“Nope. Not a single cosmic horror trying to slither out and devour me,” Ilea said. “Very disappointing.”

“I can imagine,” Sulivhaan said. “Thanks for your sacrifice.”

“Everything for council and country,” she said. “Are we a country now by the way?”

“A city state at the moment, though the existence and growth of Morhill will soon suggest otherwise. An alliance of city states perhaps, counting Riverwatch and potentially Hallowfort in the future,” he said.

“Huh,” Ilea mused. “Anything else I can help you with?”

The two teleported through the dungeon until they reached a newly formed stone wall with various enchantments placed on it. The structure blocked the exit.

“Let me deactivate the enchantments,” he said.

“Anything against space magic?” Ilea asked.

The man glanced over. “No. We have few people who can set that up. I didn’t think it a priority.”

“It isn’t,” Ilea said and displaced the two of them through the structure. Four more walls followed before they appeared in the underground where they had started the little expedition.

“The barriers are quite intricately planned out. It should be enough to hold even a demon invasion for a time. More measures are already being implemented but for now we consider the risk acceptable,” Sulivhaan explained, unfazed by her teleportation.

“Good to know. Call for me if something gets through anyway,” Ilea said and winked.

“We will. Though our first priority will be to prevent such in the first place,” Sulivhaan said.

“Will you be in town for a while?” he asked.

“Another five days or so. Let me know if anything else comes up,” she said.

“I will. Thank you,” Sulivhaan said. “It’s good to have you.”

“Damn right it is,” Ilea said with a smile. “See you around.”

Ilea continued her cat training, adding more critters to her little network with each level in her skill.

Her other focus was Ash Magic Resistance.

She spent the next few days in the Sentinel Headquarters, both helping the students train and training herself.

The initial pain tolerance training was something only few of the students had worked on in her absence, the lack of mental healing quite daunting.

Now that she was around, they could repeat their sessions a lot more regularly, without working through everything on their own and through counseling.

Trian was on the lookout for arcane healers or other healers with the ability to heal recent damage to the mind.

The peer pressure many of the students were under forced many of them to push further than may have been healthy. The degree of high risk and long term damage was near impossible to pin down however.

“It’s not exactly a prerequisite, is it?” she asked the faculty.

“No, but the benefits are too much to ignore. Both from our perspective and theirs,” Trian said. “There are many ways for them to work through the experiences of pain tolerance training and generally resistance training but your healing is the best method we’ve found so far.”

“I can help out whenever I’m here but I assume that won’t be enough,” she said.

“It’s just more efficient. It’s not impossible to handle without your presence. What I’m more interested in is a way to replicate what your skill does to the mind,” he said.

“It’s arcane healing, right?” Sidney asked.

Ilea nodded.

“Can’t someone else get a Class like that? Or do you dislike the option?” she asked.

“I don’t care. The problem is the elixir is rare and dangerous. Kills a large percentage of those who eat it. Alice Forkspear actually survived it and should by now have gained a Class similar to mine. Finding her, let alone convincing her to join the Sentinels for the purpose of mental healing is downright impossible however. Nor do I think it a good idea,” Ilea said.

“Do you know where the elixir is found?” Orthan asked.

“I stumbled upon it before getting a Class. Ate it all though and it’s growing very slowly,” she said. “Do you have a map?”

The man pointed to the map hanging on a nearby wall.

Ilea formed an ashen arrow and showed them the location of the Azarinth temple. "It's not perfectly accurate but you'll find it."

"We have plenty of experienced mages that could help cultivate the elixir," Orthan said.

"But we won't use it if the danger is as high as Ilea suggests," Trian said.

"And how would we even test it? If we manage to modify it at all," Lyza asked.

"Feed it to animals or monsters?" Orthan asked. "Or sentenced prisoners of war. There should be plenty in the Empire by now."

"I won't stand by that," Trian said.

"You could ask Lucas for help once the gates work. He's close to Hallowfort," Ilea said.

"The Elder?" Sidney asked.

"Yeah. He's really into trees. I'm sure he could offer one or two useful tips on cultivating the Bluemoon grass," she said. "But honestly... the Azarinth order is very old. If they couldn't figure out a way to make the elixir safer... I doubt we could. Maybe... maybe with the knowledge of Meadow and Lucas combined."

"Who says they couldn't?" Orthan asked.

"What do you mean?" Ilea said.

"The Azarinth Order... a high death rate on elixirs would make sure their members are very dedicated to their group. And it would potentially even allow them to get rid of those they deemed unworthy, regardless of a success. It wouldn't surprise me if the elixir was safe to begin with. A modified version could've been used on their lesser members. This is just an assumption based on what we learned about present Healing Orders," he explained.

"There is a possibility of that," Trian said. "If it's alright with you, we'll investigate the location and the elixir."

"Sure. Just make sure to be discreet. We definitely don't want that stuff to circulate. Not with the current death rate," Ilea said.

"Which brings us to the next point. Rumors continue to spread both in Ravenhall and beyond. The missions have made more noise than we had expected. Soon both Lys and Kroll will start to ask questions," Trian said.

"Then it may be the time to declare our position officially," Orthan said.

"It would allow our members to join adventuring and Shadow teams. Though I wished we had another half a year, if not longer," Trian said. "What do you think?"

"There are already members in the two hundreds. The Order of Truth, or whatever they are now will support us, at least those from Yinnahall. As will Stormbreach and Riverwatch. Anybody else I'll deal with personally, should they cause too much trouble for our existence," Ilea said.

"It's not just the Orders. What about the Empire and the Kingdoms?" Orthan said.

"What about them? I think both Ravenhall and me personally have enough pull with Lys to make sure something irrelevant like a new healing organization is welcomed with open arms. If any of the

other kingdoms have an issue, we simply won't operate in their territory. To their detriment. As time passes, we'll come to an agreement," Ilea said.

"How very optimistic," Lyza murmured.

"No, she's right. We're not a direct competition to the Orders. They may still oppose our existence but we're based in Ravenhall. There's little reason for any of the kingdoms to take action. And even then. Nothing less than a full mobilization of their armies would be an issue. If that happens, we have the support of the Shadow's Hand and Shadowguard. Neither of which is a force easily ignored or antagonized," Trian said.

"Maybe it's even better this way," Ilea said. "Now that we seem vulnerable, the vultures would be more willing to strike. Better to find out who stands against us now than find them sneaking into our organization ten years down the line, when they think a direct confrontation is too much of a risk."

Trian smiled. "We'll announce our existence officially. I'll work with Claire and whoever she can spare to document everyone that is openly or passively hostile."

Ilea smiled. "Sounds good to me. Agreed?"

Everyone raised their hand.

"Suggestions?" Trian asked.

"The details of the announcements and who to contact should be discussed," Orthan said. "We have to make sure the close Adventurer guilds aren't antagonized."

"I'll leave you to the details," Ilea said and gave them a thumbs up. "Good work everyone."

She displaced herself twice and appeared in the training hall again.

"Alright, where were we?" she murmured, looking at the thirty or so students fighting each other.

She whistled, freezing the whole group. Her ash began to spread through the hall, those who could move again stepping into the mist.

Their cries and moans weren't something she enjoyed but with her healing, it was better that she was present. She spotted Willa, the girl waving at her with a tired but determined expression on her face.

*This really is the most fucked up thing I've ever done*, Ilea thought and focused on the many students. Too much reversed healing and they could die, too little and it wasn't efficient training.

She herself focused on the cats too, letting the students attack her with their own ash in the meantime. Those that had already unlocked one Class or the other.

The only way Ilea could justify all this to herself was the fact that she herself hadn't turned into an absolute monster. Well, in many ways she had, but she didn't kill sapient beings without reason, nor did she eat humans or torture them for fun.

*Better they learn to deal with pain here than in a dungeon when they could be saving their companions.*

It wasn't easy still, despite her extensive experience. Many of the students were younger than her. All above sixteen at least, most older than twenty.

Ilea just like the students let her meditation take over somewhat, the healing to their minds applying to herself just as much.

She wasn't too worried about those who had trained without her presence, knowing that experiences couldn't just be erased entirely, their impact on the human mind both a warning and valuable experience. Issues started to arise when the impact was long lasting, debilitating, or traumatic in nature.

Neither Ilea nor her peers had the ability to perfectly diagnose and differentiate between these states and she was sure that some of the students would have to deal with more than they anticipated. In the end however, the benefits would outweigh these problems. For a Sentinel didn't dream of settling down in a safe environment but strove to battle monsters that filled humanity with terror.

They would find themselves challenged with terror, pain, and fear. Learning to deal with all that was part of their training.

Ilea made sure to talk to each of them, trying to gauge how far their efforts were chosen by themselves or influenced by their peers or even external people like it had been the case with Milena.

A Sentinel going through this gruesome training without personal conviction and drive would surely either break or grow deep resentment for those who had subjected them to it.

Seth had already been a difficult case but all they could do was try and prevent more.

The days passed by, leaving many of the newer Sentinels with quite a bit of growth.

Ilea hadn't invested the time just for them either, her own skills benefiting reasonably too.

***'ding' 'Sentinel Huntress reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 22'***

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***'ding' 'Sentinel Huntress reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 24'***

***'ding' 'Sage of Torment reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 3'***

...

***'ding' 'Sage of Torment reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 7'***

***'ding' 'Teaching reaches lvl 5'***

***'ding' 'Teaching reaches lvl 6'***

***'ding' 'Ash Magic Resistance reaches lvl 6'***

...

***'ding' 'Ash Magic Resistance reaches lvl 20'***

***'ding' 'Ash Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1'***

***Ash Magic Resistance – 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1***

***You have found a being similar to your own, wielding magic you are not just familiar with but have mastered. A small increase in your resistance but perhaps a new insight into your own connection to Ash itself.***

***2<sup>nd</sup> tier: You have faced wielders of ash and found their power lacking. You will find it easier to***

***strip them of that which they deem to control. At the same time your experience will make it harder for enemies to do the same to you.***

***‘ding’ ‘Ash Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 2’***

Sentinel Huntress was coming along nicely. Ilea decided to keep the cats marked for now, tracking them whenever she had the mental capacity to do so.

The bonus to her Ash Magic Resistance was minimal for now but she welcomed it anyway. Perhaps it would make the difference if she ever faced an ash wielder more powerful than herself.

*Alright, time to pack up and visit the Cerithil Hunters, she thought when the last day had come.*

*I really hope Feyrair didn't disappoint with his evolution and level gain. Our battle shall be legendary.*

Ilea informed Trian and Claire before she left towards Riverwatch.

Charged wings propelled the ashen healer out of the southern mountain chain and over the human plains.

She watched the suns rise on the horizon, the forests below her rushing past as she broke through clouds.

*I'm a little too fast for an enjoyable flying experience by now, she thought, only able to pick out some landmarks thanks to her heightened perception. Maybe I should just fly higher.*

She reached the area around Karth soon after, continuing at a much slower pace to take in the scenery. Riverwatch she avoided entirely, veering left and into the forest. She herself wasn't in danger but if anybody followed her, it could cause issues for the Vultures.

Ilea entered their hideout with her map in hand, tracking the now distant cats. Their movements were minuscule when perceived from Karth but she had gotten good enough to notice some changes anyway.

“Hey Weavy,” she murmured, walking past the demon.

“Welcome, to our abode, mistress,” he said into her mind. “Your mental defenses continue to impress.”

The boy Eyn followed close behind the demon, bowing to her when she passed.

***[Mage – lvl 105]***

“Speaking of impressive. You're already past level one hundred. Well done,” she said to the boy.

He smiled lightly but didn't meet her eyes.

“Thank you, mistress,” he said.

She ruffled his hair and smiled. “Just don't turn into a demon yourself.”

Weavy waved her off. “The human shell is vastly inferior. Don't listen to her boy.”

Ilea laughed and went towards the common room, where she could already see Walter. And breakfast.