

Ilea appeared on the closest teleportation gate to Myrefield and spread her wings. The first teleport brought her up and out into the skies, kilometers away, the next one brought her closer, her wings moving three times until she saw the chapel in the distance.

The Praetorian was there, and right next to it a single figure she could barely make out from the distance. Aki had asked her to join, mostly to combat the obvious attempts of Helena to interfere.

Ilea focused on the ground next to Aki and used her third charge of teleportation, appearing a few meters away from the machine and instantly seeing a bright light in her domain. Too bright to make out a figure.

She felt complex arcane magic. Boundless and pure, radiant in her domain. She felt the magic increase in power as she absorbed some of it into her own, her auras up, and all of her spells ready. She could feel a slight push, purely magical in nature. Not a spell, but something more basic. As if an elemental greeted her with its chosen magic, but this was pure arcane, every fiber of magic in their surroundings adhering to this flow. The flowers and each blade of grass moving along with minuscule motions.

She had met enough strange and powerful beings to guess at its intention. A show of power, a greeting, a celebration of magic, a test perhaps, of her own power and perception. A peaceful one at that, just like the many times she had sent out her mental greetings, but this felt more universal. Ilea already planned to adopt something similar in the future instead of using words sent through telepathy. It just made sense, now that she saw and felt it.

She smiled to herself, then replied instinctively, using space itself to mimic what she had seen and felt. A ripple through the fabric that passed, knowing but not disturbing, showing, but not felt.

“Now that’s a surprise,” a deep voice spoke, calm and with a tinge of amusement.

The words made her look at what she saw instead of seeing what she knew was there.

A man. Dressed in wide robes of a dark blue cotton, layers overlapping with a white shirt below. His hair was gray and slightly scruffy, much of it bound in a single braid that reached his lower back. A thick beard covered half his face, various braids within, some adorned with colored string. His eyes were bright like none she had seen before, arcane power downright radiating, as if she saw his very soul. She blinked to see with her eyes only, finding light blue pupils looking straight back at her. Wrinkles showed near his eyes and brow, the man wearing thick leather boots, standing without tension as he took her in with interest. No rain fell on his robes or hair.

He could’ve been her grandpa, back when she had been a child. Sixty or perhaps seventy years old, but Ilea knew the truth. This being was ageless. It brimmed with the power of a god.

***[Scholar of the Arcane – lvl 1052]***

“Another puzzle presents itself before me,” the man spoke, then turned back to look at the Praetorian right next to him. “Quite an interesting development.” A pipe appeared in his hand, a flame coming to life before it set alight the contents. He dragged from the pipe and smiled. “And who might you be?” He spoke, the words meant for Ilea, touching the metal of the Praetorian like someone might appreciate a nice car.

“Lilith of the Accords,” Ilea said, then paused. She looked at him and smiled. “Ilea, nice to meet you. Eregar, I assume.”

He chuckled, then smoked from his pipe. “Right. One of the names. Your Lilith perhaps. Here in Elos. Erik, it’s good to see you, Dragonslayer.” He shook his head then laughed. “Seems a lot has changed over the last few centuries. Sources and the Architect, lifted from the distant past. The Meadow Accords. And a four mark human.” He smiled and looked up at the falling rain.

“Took you a while to get here,” Ilea said.

He pointed his pipe at her, then raised his brows. “That is true.” He smoked again.

“Mr. Anderson, we assumed you could be of help to prevent another possible Extraction. Your knowledge left behind in the Haven has instructed us on how to contact you,” Aki spoke.

“Marvelous. A machine controlled from farther away than I can perceive. Aki, you are truly something special,” Erik spoke and tapped the machine with his free hand. “I will want to hear your story,” he said, looking at the glowing green eyes above. He turned towards Ilea and walked over, offering his hand.

She shook it.

“And you. Ilea. A dragonslayer. That is a feat very few could ever dream of accomplishing,” he spoke then went in for a hug.

Ilea didn’t know how to react. She just lightly tapped his back and looked at Aki, the Praetorian shrugging slightly.

Erik let go and smiled, holding her shoulders as he looked at her. “Marked as a friend to the Fae, and the power I feel from you. Astounding and terrifying. To think a human like you would come along.” He took in a deep breath. “I’m proud of you.”

“That’s... thanks,” Ilea said, gently moving his hands away from her shoulders. “The Architect?” she asked.

“Oh. Yes. Ker Velor. Remember that one... sinister. Just, no heart. A perfectionist, I believe. Of course bent on controlling the very universe. Of the few I’ve seen, he may be the closest one to actually achieve such a goal given a few hundred thousand years.

“It’s difficult to find information on Navuun ancestry, but with Kohr it’s no surprise. A world of strife.” He shook his head. “If only his parents had taught him different.” He smoked from his pipe, the look in his eyes changing somewhat. “If the Architect is truly after another sun in this realm, there is nothing that could stop his plans. He would not use the mesh already present, and finding another one is near impossible. Finding him, even more so.

“Let alone invading his facilities. It would take me to survive such a feat, and there would be hundreds, if not thousands,” Erik spoke. “We would need a tremendous effort to find one of his facilities, and then we would need the help of another Ascended to find the entire mesh. All the while surviving whatever he prepared in there, not triggering any fail saves that would destroy or disconnect the facility, and if that all succeeds, he would start to interfere directly.”

“We’ve come to similar conclusions,” Aki spoke.

“I’ve fought him before,” Ilea said.

“I don’t know how that could’ve happened, but I believe you. And I understand what you are trying to say. I could likely face him too. But Ker Velor will not appear and fight us. He will slaughter the people in our towns, will poison every dungeon. He will destroy the logistics that keeps everything going. No means are beyond a being with no empathy and fueled by purpose, but compared to most everyone else, he has experience, has perfected his tools.”

“Even more reason to remove him from existence,” Ilea said.

“It would certainly be an overall improvement to all life everywhere. Finding him and destroying him, that may very well be beyond even killing a dragon. But then, you are proficient in space magic.” Erik said and thought. “This is quite a predicament.”

“We are far into preparations already,” Aki said. “Your knowledge may bring additional clarity and help. If you are willing to assist in this endeavor.”

Erik looked at them in turn, dragged from his pipe, then grinned. “From what I read and saw, I always thought him unbeatable. Perhaps not the worst of the Ascended, but certainly the most prepared. I’m interested to see what you two and those Accords have cooked up. Breaking those seals, you must’ve brought quite an assortment of beings together.” He smoked again and smiled. “And this is about Elos. My home realm. I will do what I can to help.”

*Sounds like he’s going on an afternoon stroll.*

Ilea watched him, trying to discern his Classes, his power.

“Then we will move north, for you to meet the Meadow. We have to ask you some questions to make sure we can trust you. Is that acceptable?”

Erik laughed. “Refreshing. Lead the way, I assume it will be a long flight.”

“Through here,” Ilea said and opened a gate to the northern landscape. “Mind the lightning.”

The old man stepped closer to the space magic, reached in his hand and pulled it out again. He repeated the process another three times before he looked at her. “Can we talk later? I would love to see what another four mark human can do. Quite exciting to meet you. A first, really.”

“I’m interested in a bout as well,” Ilea said with a smile.

His eyes went wide. “Oh no. Nonono. Not a bout! I’m too old for that. Far too old. And you have slain a dragon! Proof enough that I could not stand my ground. But we may exchange pointers.” He paused before walking through the gate. “Will this upset my stomach?”

“I don’t think so. Or nobody had the guts to tell me before,” she said.

“Yeah. I suppose talking back at the four mark is not encouraged. A curse sometimes, though there are spells that help,” he said and winked, walking through the gate with casual steps.

She looked at Aki, but the machine waved her off.

“I won’t use this one to talk to him. The Meadow is informed, and has asked for you to join. Just in case,” he said.

“I’ll be there in a second,” Ilea said when she saw movement in the distance. An entire group of armored people flying and running through the fields, ahead of them a singular woman clad in dark green scale armor. “Wait. Give me another minute or two. I assume Eregar hasn’t caused chaos yet in the north?”

“He has set up a small office near your anchor. Introductions with the Meadow are underway. We want to make sure he is not a danger to the Accords or the beings of Elos before we integrate him into our plans.”

“Great,” Ilea said and closed her gate, watching the armored woman land with an impressive impact.

She looked around before her eyes locked with Ilea’s. “You.”

“Me. Good to see you, Helena,” Ilea said and waved.

Helena didn’t approach. “What have you done with the Founder?”

“Oh. Right. The Lily. He’s being interviewed by the Meadow. Maybe he can help with our little problem.”

“That ludicrous tale of a sun plucked from the skies?” Helena asked, then sighed. Taking off her helmet, she glanced between the Praetorian and Ilea. “A dragonslayer, huh. How was it?”

Ilea blinked, then smiled. “Pretty crazy.”

“I couldn’t imagine. He’s working with you all, despite all the creatures you harbor?”

“I think because of it,” Ilea said.

“No. No I can’t believe that. But... if those claims are really true... about the sun.” She bit her lip and shook her head. “You are a member of the Lily still, despite everything. If this is a threat on the scale your people have described, I will offer to work with the Accords.” Helena glanced at Aki. “Send your representatives to Myrefield, if you wish to discuss possible options.” She looked at Ilea. “You win. I cannot compete with four marks and a dragon corpse displayed above Ravenhall.”

“I’m happy to try your next set of teas and cakes. I wonder if any could be enough to kill divinity,” Ilea said.

Helena snorted, her small army of assassins landing nearby, most of them using illusions and light magic to hide. “You will put me out of business.”

Ilea smiled. “I thought there would always be a need for assassins.”

Helena gestured to the Praetorian. She sighed and crossed her arms. “A four mark.” Shaking her head, she turned to leave.

*“Maybe you should focus on pastries instead,”* Ilea sent.

Helena didn’t look back. *“We’ve been doing that for months. Don’t think I’ll slide into irrelevancy. Because I won’t.”*

*“I’m sure,”* Ilea said.

*“You better be! If killing is going out of style, I’ll conquer clothing and food instead.”*

Ilea smiled before she stepped through a new gate. From rain to arcane storms. *I suppose that’s one way to win against an assassin queen. I hope she’s smart enough to go through with the change.*

*“Claire, can you secure investments in anything food? Helena might be making a move,”* she sent through her mark.

*“Hah. She’ll find it difficult to compete. But if she wants a fight, she will get it,”* Claire sent back.

Ilea wondered what Helena's goals would be, but she was almost certain the woman wouldn't go as far as Elizabeth. She had issues with the Accords, but she would have to find her way in this new world. With the gates, clinging on to specism would become increasingly difficult from a logical perspective. Seeing the machines built by dwarves, the magic wielded by Dark Ones and Mava. But then she assumed someone like Helena might see that as confirmation that humanity has to fight back and isolate instead of seeking cooperation.

*We'll see how it goes in the future,* Ilea thought. She had views on Helena and her business, but she could see the complex reality of having someone like her in the position she was in. *Might even be beneficial for the world at large to work on my ties with the Lily, or get someone else in who could talk to the people in charge.*

She focused back on the moment, when a bolt of lightning crashed into a set of bright barriers. Two of them in fact. One golden and one a bright blue.

Erik sat at a beautiful and massive wood table, the legs reinforced with steel contraptions that made sure the thing was even on the northern grounds. His chair looked modern even compared to what Ilea remembered from Earth, the material not leather but something that looked synthetic. He laughed and pointed in the direction of Hallowfort right after the barriers had stopped the lightning.

“Beautiful execution! The mesh of a true master. No inconsistencies, angled perfectly against the ground, and the color!” He stood up and clapped a few times, then looked at Ilea. “Oh! Ilea, you have arrived. Solved that squabble with the assassin's guild?”

Ilea looked at the scene and thought herself stuck in some sci-fi movie where office equipment was placed in an empty hellscape. Then again, she had taken a lava bath in Kohr, so perhaps this was more normal.

“Helena, of the Golden Lily. You know her I presume?” she said, not hiding how she felt about the whole thing.

“I remember Maureen introduced her to me. Young, incredibly ambitious, but smart too. She didn't know who I was back then, and still she listened to me, offered her views and time. To think she's grown to become the leader of such a massive organization. Impressive, to say the least,” he spoke.

“And she's continuously interfered with the Accords,” Aki spoke. “Due to her views on most of our allies. The Golden Lily is supposed to protect humanity, and to keep chaos and war from destroying the Plains.”

Erik nodded and leaned against his table. “A problem. I admit. There was a lot going on after the Olym Arcena broke. People needed stability. They had to focus on their own. Their families, their cities, their countries. It would've been impossible to bring those in power together without a common goal. Stability for the Plains, and for humanity, that was what we offered, and many found such a thing compelling. I do not excuse any actions taken by individuals or by the Lily itself. I was there when the original Order was founded. The Blue Rose then, but there were a few more iterations throughout the millennia.”

“Why not stick with one?” Ilea asked.

“Oh, they killed each other. Massive wide scale conflicts. One of those conflicts wiped out the Empire of Havat. From the maps. Incredible efforts and a genocide worse than many I've seen before. I believe that region is called Nipha by now. I merely tried to find solutions and offer insight, but we remain human. I'm interested in the developments that led to the formation and

acceptance of the Accords. If such an acceptance truly exists. I have yet to talk to those living in its cities.”

*“Citizens of the Accords experience more wealth and opportunities than ever seen before. Mostly due to an addition of teleportation gates, the availability of high level healers and enchanters, and the security provided by the former Taleen army,”* the Meadow said.

“I never did manage to convince the Taleen of cooperation. How did you do it?” Erik asked.

“We didn’t do anything. They pretty much did it to themselves,” Ilea said. “Made a massive machine thing called the One without Form, had it defend them and destroy Elven kind. It decided to imprison the entirety of the Taleen people in an underground city, thus protecting them, and it has since fought a war against the Domains, one we managed to bring to an end.”

“And I’m the new one in charge,” Aki said. “Of the machines that is.”

“Meadow helped crack the problem of teleportation gates before that however,” Ilea added.

“I did not yet ask what the Meadow actually is, and how it got to this realm,” Erik said.

“Found it in another realm where it wanted to save the last of the awakened beings it had harbored. I managed to bring it back here where it started to provide stability in this region. Now the Meadow and Aki are essentially the pillars on which the Accords are built. Without them, I imagine the same iterations of colored flowers would follow in the centuries to come,” Ilea said.

Erik smiled wide as he looked at her. He huffed and nodded to himself.

“What?” Ilea asked.

“Oh I do look quite self satisfied right now,” he said. “You did what I could not.”

“I had my part to play, but most of it is happenstance. Being in the right place at the right time,” Ilea said.

“That may be the case. But I’ll make up my own mind,” Erik said. “I don’t assume you’re done with your questions?” He glanced at the Executioner nearby.

The silver machine shook its head.