

Chapter 469 Aftermath

The cleanup only took a few hours, thanks to the help of the numerous guards. The corpses themselves weren't many in number either. A few hundred at most, compared to the ten thousands of demons they had killed in Ravenhall.

The gear brought more work. Stripping all the bodies, sorting everything and transporting it into the town.

Ilea didn't talk much, keeping her ashen armor active during the process. She knew that her display would leave a lasting impression on most of the onlookers. The atmosphere however was mostly celebratory, a combination of the won battle and the fact that many of the guards had already known her.

A powerful ally was something completely different than an unknown monster helping out on a whim. She did hear the whispers and comments. People thinking she was far enough away to talk about her. Rumors and speculation, mixed with admiration.

There were of course a few conspiratorial voices among the crowd but Ilea didn't mind. She had investments in Riverwatch so a connection there could certainly be made. It hadn't been the reason she had come but to an onlooker, she may very well have come just to cement her influence in the city.

Her knowing Alistair and Dale didn't necessarily help there. She was glad that the majority of voices were positive however. Another thing she didn't want to deal with. Plus the problems it would cause for both Alistair and Dale could have been disastrous. Kidnapping to accusations.

She sighed, watching the burning pits, the suns burning down from high above. No sweat or discomfort showed on her, nor did she feel any. Guards around her had tears in their eyes, likely more from the smoke than any form of sentimentality.

Ilea could be standing in the fire and it wouldn't have made a difference. *May you find rest, unfortunate soldiers of a backwards country*, she thought and looked up, forming a stream of ash that flowed up with the smoke, joining and intertwining with it until it dispersed.

A few soldiers looked at her but soon a mage shot up a spray of fire. More joined in as time passed.

A gesture to send off those who had fallen. On both sides. Human souls, lost to the whims of powerful men and women.

Ilea remained for a few minutes before she wordlessly walked back to the city. It wasn't even noon yet but the cleanup outside was already mostly done.

Within the city, mages, engineers, and guards alike were still working hard. Houses needed to be repaired, trapped people needed to be rescued.

Most of the work would be the management of all the slaves the city had just freed. They needed food, water, jobs, and a place to stay.

Nearly the same was true for the prisoners who had given up. In addition to guarding them.

Ilea had avoided killing those who lost to terror or those who had tried to defend them.

Only the men and women who still clung to their goal of taking the city were killed. That was the ideal case of course. She was sure many of them simply had not found the courage to flee or put down their weapons. Or they had found the courage to face the monster that had suddenly slaughtered the officers and nobles of their camp.

Slavery was a horrible thing but Ilea understood that not everybody in Baralia was a monster in turn. She knew that many of the soldiers she had killed just wanted to create a better future for their families, their loved ones, or maybe even their slaves.

The morality was complicated and she lacked the knowledge to judge it all. Her mood was a little dampened but she had given them a choice, multiple times. Ilea wasn't a saint, nor did she aspire to become one.

Harken had attacked Riverwatch and thus her allies. Be it for revenge or to save his own people from the war raging in Baralia. The conflict remained and she was the one who came out on top. Maybe the choice she had given them was one Harken could not have possibly accepted. And still, a large part of his army fled. They will return and live on, or die on the way.

She doubted the latter, knowing that they could easily regroup and return in a controlled manner.

Too much thought put into this, she thought and strolled through the city. *They attacked without reason and I repelled them*. Many of the residents had come out of their houses again, the conclusion of the siege spreading quickly.

She got looks from everyone. Some people cheered, others were terrified. Many thanked her or bowed in respect. Ilea didn't feel like putting away her armor of ash, being the only high level healer around. Many already knew how she looked like but now that she had literally become the savior of Riverwatch, she desired a tiny bit of anonymity.

Ilea strolled towards the main government buildings, unsure of what else to do at the moment. She enjoyed Keyla's cooking and soon jumped onto the roofs to avoid people calling out to her.

The city had their own healers to take care of the injured and the rest of the work didn't concern her. *Could visit Walter again*, she thought but decided to stay in Riverwatch. At least until most of the coming night had passed.

The Baralia soldiers could be foolish enough to form a strike force to get out Harken or just damage the city. She had certainly killed enough of them to warrant a response fueled by vengeance.

The cycle of human conflict, she mused and sat down on the roof overlooking a large square. Opposite her lay the center of the Riverwatch government. She stored her bone armor and cleaned herself with ash before changing into more casual clothing. Her ashen armor moved to her back as she sighed and continued eating.

Dozens of soldiers and officials rushed over the square, in and out of the surrounding buildings as they worked to deal with this crisis and its conclusion. One of the inns had already opened its doors again, loud and cheerful guards celebrating their victory as they commented and joked with the people rushing past.

Ilea wondered how many of them would have died if she hadn't been there today. If she hadn't met Dale a few years ago in the nearby forest. If she didn't have the ability to mark someone and have them call for help.

Alistair would have called for assistance at some point but Harken had only just made his declaration. A prolonged siege would have been problematic, to say the least.

She knew Dale was somewhere to the east, working hard to sort this mess. *Might be dangerous if people know about the mark. They could leverage it against me or him.*

She let go of the dark thoughts, hoping that the respect he had in the city would counter whatever danger could arise. The man himself wasn't a pushover either, having reached level one fifty thanks to the battle.

Ilea just had to make sure Riverwatch would get the resources necessary to make it unreasonable to challenge. The tale of this victory would spread far and wide, likely leading to more credibility for both this city and Ravenhall.

"Hey! You're not allowed to be up there!" a guard called out as he walked past.

Ilea spread her wings briefly and smirked at the change of his expression.

He bowed deeply and apologized profusely before being on his way, looking back a few times as if a predator was hunting after him.

She looked through her messages for a little while, quickly skipping all the ones telling her about defeated enemies.

Only the small group she had killed in the beginning had people above level two hundred. Her skills hadn't leveled much, as expected.

'ding' 'Sentinel Huntress reaches 3rd lvl 5'

'ding' 'Ash and Ember Unity reaches 3rd lvl 24'

'ding' 'Deviant of Humanity reaches lvl 7'

'ding' 'Monster Hunter reaches 2nd lvl 9'

Only one level for Monster Hunter. So despite not being able to freeze high level creatures, just challenging them provides more experience than using it against a damn army?

Not a single level for her resistances, despite the heavy bombardment. She was happy to see the additional mark. Likely for Trian or perhaps even Walter.

Maybe the latter. Claire already has one and she's much harder to pin down than Dale is.

She finished her food and jumped down to the square, once more covering herself in ash. A few blinks brought her in front of Alistair's office, expecting the man to be inside.

The guards nearly jumped, skills and magic flaring up as they reacted to her sudden appearance.

"Lilith," one of them whispered.

"This is already getting old," Ilea whispered as she shook her head. *It's Lilith! Oh my god!*

"We get it, can I see the man?" she asked.

"I will get him at once," one of the guards said and ran off.

Ilea remained, looking at the guard who hadn't said anything so far. The woman just stared at her with wide eyes behind a full plate helmet, her spear still held in a defensive stance.

"Guarding an empty office. How much do you get paid?" she asked.

The woman moved her spear back, as if shaken awake by the question. "Guarding the governor's office is an honor. One with history going much further back than Sir Alistair Gallian."

"I see," Ilea said and glanced away. "Sorry, didn't mean to be offensive. Fuse is a little short today."

The guard just looked at her.

"Did you really fight the army alone?" she asked after a while.

"Most of them ran away or laid down their weapons," Ilea said.

Alistair luckily came to stop the awkward conversation, the man joining her with a brisk walk, accompanied by the guard.

"Good to see you, come in," he said and opened the door for her.

Ilea blinked inside and formed an ashen chair, letting her armor move back as soon as the door was closed after him. She was aware that any of the guards could have a skill that let them perceive through the door or the stone walls, just like she could but there was only so much she was willing to do to protect her identity. An interested party would find her at this point, without too much digging.

"I didn't expect you so early," he said. "We are still negotiating with Lord Harken. He is a... stubborn man."

"Cleanup is mostly done already. Do you think he won't agree to our terms?" she asked.

"He weighs every little bit. A smart man and potentially not the worst of rulers. As much as it annoys me to say. We talked on the definition of slavery for nearly two hours. I suspect it will take some time to reach an agreement," Alistair said.

"Good thing his men are safe at home and not running through the wilderness of Nipha," Ilea said.

Alistair leaned back and allowed himself a smirk. "He is aware of his situation. But I can understand the frustration after being defeated by one single Shadow."

"Oh me too, but I have little sympathy left for a man who advocates the ownership of people," Ilea said.

"I concur. Now while you're here, I have some suggestions. As to your reward for both your help with the initial problem and its quite unexpected escalation," he said.

She gestured for him to go on.

"Many of my colleagues find it troublesome that external persons own large parts of the city's establishments and houses. You are one of very few individuals that could even be categorized as such."

"The Gray Company owned a rather sizable number of businesses, goods, land, and property. As we have struggled to find someone both willing and deserving to receive, manage and take over such assets, I can't think of someone better than you. Or the Administrator back in Ravenhall you have put so much trust in," he said.

"I came to help out Dale and the city. You can inform Claire about the rewards. I'm sure she will find a good use for them. Let her know that jobs and housing should mostly go to the newly freed people from Baralia," she said.

"And as an additional payment, you can make sure they are well fed and integrated into the city. They should get the same rights as everyone else here," Ilea said.

"Certainly. Those things weren't in question in the first place," the man said and hesitated.

“You know... I’m aware of the reasons you came. And I know that for someone of your power, it may not seem like much. But today, you saved the lives of tens of thousands. You saved the whole city. It seems... inadequate to give you so little in return,” Alistair said.

“Let Claire invest into defenses here. And make sure I’m exempted from any restrictions to foreigners. Don’t worry about inadequacies. I am your ally and so is Ravenhall. Our suggestion to get out slaves was what caused all this in the first place.”

The man waved her off. “I would have launched something similar too, if I had the resources to spare. I’ll make sure everything you asked for will be taken care of.”

He twirled a pen in his hand and just stared at her for a moment.

“What is it?” Ilea said.

“Just seems... a little like a dream. We were prepared for a month long siege,” he said and shook his head. “I won’t keep you any longer then,” he said and stood up.

Alistair bowed to her. “Riverwatch will forever be in your debt, Ilea of Ravenhall.”

“Stop it with the praise, I mean it. I just happen to be a bit of a killing machine,” Ilea said and stood up too.

“The fact remains, as does our debt and gratitude. I wish you good fortune in your endeavors, Ilea. Whatever it may be you are working on,” Alistair said.

“You too, have fun with all the work this put on your table,” she said with a smile and left, blinking out of the building as soon as she had reached the hallway.

Ilea spread her wings and flew outside of the city, finding a tree with a good view and settling down. Ash made it considerably more comfortable than back when she had camped out here without the convenient creation skill.

She sighed, turning in her makeshift hammock as she watched things happening in the city. The slightly elevated position let her observe quite a bit. Her Eyes of Ash allowed her to see the expressions of guards patrolling on the walls, the spells and efforts of those cleaning up and rescuing people.

The exhaustion of the past few days started to add up, making her close her eyes slowly.

Ilea fell asleep on top of the tree, neither dreams nor monsters disturbing her.

The suns had moved considerably when she woke up, shining down on her as she slowly opened her eyes. She didn’t have to blink, looking straight at the celestial bodies. Courtesy of her Light Magic Resistance.

She assumed it was late afternoon. *Four hours maybe*, she thought and sat up. On the ground.

Ilea looked up and found the tree branches she had used to hold her hammock. *The construct broke as soon as I fell asleep*, she thought and found the ash piled up around herself. Contrary to her armor or sphere, the things she made with her manipulation didn’t last through her sleeping mind.

She smiled, amused at the fact that falling from a tree didn’t even wake her up. The disturbance so minor it hadn’t managed to rouse her. She would have been concerned about monsters creeping up

on her but her sphere worked differently. If even level ten wolves had shown up, she would have woken.

“That was nice,” she murmured and stretched, her wings lifting her off the ground as she extended her legs.

She summoned another meal and casually floated towards the town when rapid movement to the south caught her attention. *Monsters?* She wondered but quickly saw two squads of dark armored people rush towards the city, half of them flying.

Reinforcements? Seems like Dale wasn't the only one who called for help. The defensive war only decree of Ravenhall's forces and the Shadow's Hand obviously extended to Riverwatch too.

She knew that many a Shadow was in Baralia at this very moment, working for one employer or the other, or perhaps just looking for valuables or powerful foes to fight on their own volition. The Elders didn't have the authority to command members.

They wouldn't try to mobilize Shadows for offensive war efforts however. The same wasn't true for defensive ones. Surely a well paid assignment if it attracted two squads on such a short notice.

Or they have some connection to the city too.

She sped up a little and kept her eyes focused on the Shadows. They landed near the southern gate and quickly entered the city.

Ilea wasn't stopped by anyone when she slowly flew over the west gate, low enough for the guards to identify her.

The looks she got made her less uncomfortable than the way Alistair had treated her. She was glad many of the guards had known her already, stories of her early interactions with the city surely spreading like wildfire by now.

Alistair and a group of officers and guards met the Shadows on the square she had overlooked earlier that day.

She landed on a nearby house, looking at the groups. Ilea recognized a few of the people. The guy using sunlight magic in front of Virilya and his lava magic partner. She had forgotten their names.

And that one... hmm, seems like his presence here wasn't a coincidence. Oh, noticed me, have we?