

Ilea flew with the Pursuer ahead of her out of the city. A void explosion was the last thing she wanted behind those walls. She ignored the blades cutting into her ash, void magic flowing around her defenses before they impacted the ground together. Trees splintered and broke as they came down, a furrow of earth, wood, and stone left in their wake before she released Embered Heart, breaking through the machine's shield with a single strike before she melted a part of its metal.

Burning ash flowed around its entire form, eating away at its regenerating shield and metal. Ilea watched it raise a flowing arm, a void cannon charging up with purple magic. She slapped the thing away in the split second when it fired, a row of trees disintegrated to their left. Arcane power flashed up as she slammed her fists into the being. She charged her space magic and pushed down from above, its legs giving way as its large form was crushed against the ground. Burning ashen limbs reached into the melting metal, ripping out the core before she struck it with several charged Archon Strikes.

The shield was done away before the core cracked, Ilea already gone when a spherical chunk of forest was removed in its entirety, the flash visible to her as she flew back to the raging battle.

Just three days after going to Kohr. Fucking shit robot. Couldn't stay down there and wait, could you?

Dale slashed his sword into the leg of a Guardian, blocking two of its blades with a third scraping against his armor. A shield bash pushed him forward, the machine stunned for a moment. Just long enough for him to ram his sword up and through its head.

He ripped out the blade and watched the lights of its eyes flicker out, the metal being hitting the ground with a clatter. One of hundreds, it seemed. He waved to a group of guards nearby, one of them with a limp arm, bleeding heavily. "To the stairs!" he shouted, leading them to a section of the wall, a fire spell exploding against a nearby building, glass shattering as the force rushed through the home.

He heard a ringing in his ears when he reached the top, two machines sliced apart by a spinning woman in black robes, strange orange and purple blades flashing with magical light, flames reflected off her mask before she rushed forward, clashing with one of the larger spear wielding beings.

Dale checked for his men, yelling to another group nearby to form a line on this section of the wall. He saw a dark armored healer appear on the stairs, helping the injured with their magic. One of their own healers joined from ahead, wide eyed as he glanced at Dale. The man's lips quivered but he didn't say a word. "Get down!" Dale shouted, pulling the man aside as he blocked an incoming

metal projectile with his shield, the thing deflected and impacting a nearby roof, tiles exploding outwards.

Out on the field there were dozens of battles going on, the small machines still moving towards the city, though their numbers seemed to dwindle. He glanced left when a bright flash came from above, a near white beam of fire lashing through the enemy lines, disintegrating all variants alike.

He saw a large scythe wielding machine defending against a group of black armored individuals, its shield shimmering with the spells all around it. Looking up he blinked his eyes against the sun, finding the source of the beam.

The small winged form flew down and towards the scythe wielding being, shattering the shield and impacting the machine behind, the momentum denting the creature's torso as it was pushed to the side near thirty meters. By the time it came to a halt, the metal had been entirely sliced apart by the many burning limbs moving on the woman's back. The remaining chunks appeared far above before an explosion rang through the vicinity.

When Dale's eyes adjusted again both the woman and any machines nearby were gone, a few Sentinels and war machines rushing away from the impact zone to find more targets.

"This section is clear! Eastward!" Dale shouted, leading his men and women to where they were needed, Sentinels appearing here and there to stop people from bleeding out or to reattach limbs. There were dead, those whose heads were blown off instantly or those whose bodies had been halved or damn near flattened by the powerful machines.

Dale focused, shouting for his guards, one of them puking down into the city. "The battle isn't over! Stand your ground! Keep moving, stay focused!" He deflected another set of projectiles before he pointed. "Mages, fire!"

A dozen spells rushed out from both behind the wall, on top of buildings, and from the people around him, all aimed in the general direction he indicated. Trees were ripped apart by fire and ice, chunks of metal falling out, unmoving. Someone raised their spear and shouted, others mimicking the call.

Burning spears rushed down into the forest beyond, explosions ringing out right after, the bright form of Ilea flying far above. She had stopped moving.

Dale watched something large appear in her arms before she aimed down. He followed the line of sight and saw a large shielded machine break through the treeline. The bright beam was focused this time, thin and fast as it sliced through the shield and machine in turn. There was no explosion, the glowing bits of metal falling apart in the next few seconds. The woman was gone when he looked up again.

"Lilith," a nearby guard stammered.

Yes. Yes, we get it, Dale thought. "Focus," he reminded the man, though didn't assume there were a lot of machines left with Ilea already gone from the vicinity. A Sentinel flew past with burning wings, watching the guards before he moved on to another section of the wall. Dale saw a massive Dark One walk through the battlefield below with a ridiculously large hammer on its shoulder, a floating spirit following the being.

"It's already over..." someone murmured.

And it's good that it is. Without all of them here... He didn't want to think about it. Though he had a suspicion the machines didn't exactly attack for no reason either. Had they angered them with the

teleportation gates somehow? Had they pushed into the wilderness too far? There were a few new settlements north of Riverwatch by now but it would be too dangerous to check on them at the moment. He assumed the worst.

“Return to your units and officers,” Dale said when nothing else came out of the forest for a few minutes. War machines were already looking through the spoils, some of the shrapnel still glowing, smoke rising from entire sections of the forest, reaching kilometers to the north.

We didn't even see the real battle. He gulped and took in a deep breath, glad to live another day. *I do wonder what crazy story she'll get out of this one. Taleen machines attacking Riverwatch.* He shook his head and started giving out orders. Many of the new recruits were bumping into each other. Most of them wouldn't sleep tonight. He had to make sure they'd be back and ready for the next shift. “Get a move on. You heard me!”

Ilea flew far above the city, checking for any moving bits and pieces in the forest. She teleported down and landed in the central square. “Can't find anything else,” she said.

“We'll handle the rest then,” Trian said, Alistair giving her a nod. “We received a report that Stormbreach is clear as well, but no news on Dawntree yet.”

“I'll be there,” Ilea said.

“Second gate to the right,” one of the nearby Shadows informed. “Lilith.” He added with a respectful nod.

“Appreciate it,” Ilea answered before she vanished, flying the short distance to the wall before she landed in front of the gate.

The group of adventurers and Shadows split to let her through, some of them saying her name as she passed. She joined a group of somewhat uncomfortable looking fighters and mages before the gate moved them through the fabric. Immediately upon arrival, she transferred out of the enchanted bunker and glanced at the mountain town. There were no spells, no Taleen, nor did she hear any fighting. *Strange.*

Alice set down her last runes before she stepped back behind the defensive lines. The banging was getting closer, the last few walls they had set up at the entrance to the Root being broken through by the emerging Taleen creatures.

“Why now?” Jaime asked. “They never came up from the depths.”

“Who knows,” Alice said. There were sometimes problems with dungeons too close to settlements, monsters coming out to attack when they didn’t have enough space anymore. This however felt different. It had been sheer luck that an adventuring team had spotted the approaching machines, rushing back through the tunnels and caverns they knew well, to warn the city guard. Well known and trusted enough to be taken seriously too.

A defensive perimeter had been set up in the city. The damage to the buildings would be substantial, and potential non combatants dying was an option, but their chance of winning the fight was higher out here. Their advantage of flying and longer ranged spells would make a massive difference against the machines.

She had never faced them herself, but she could heal at the very least. Alice gulped, looking at the Sentinels who had taken positions at the front lines, itching to get into battle. She focused forward and to the massive stone wall blocking the tunnel down into the caverns of Karth. She may not have become like her. She may have failed at times, in character, and in ability, but she was here. And she would fight.

Ziva rode to the front of the formation, the woman raising her greatsword, sunlight reflected off the blade. Heavy plate armor covered her form, perfectly polished, a few dents and scratches visible. “Whatever may come through these walls! Stand your ground!” Her shout echoed through the lower part of the city as she turned her horse towards the encroaching enemies.

A leader through and through. Alice had once been envious of the woman, the way she talked to people, the way her presence demanded respect and authority. Now she strove to mirror the qualities she saw in her.

Shouts echoed from the warriors and mages, magic lighting up as spells were being prepared. Enchanted cannons aimed downward from the high buildings of the former ruling Houses of Dawntree.

Alice took in a deep breath before her shout joined the others.

A heavy impact resounded, a single arrow fired before they realized the walls hadn’t yet broken. Instead a figure clad in ash had landed next to Ziva. Black wings spread out as the woman straightened.

She cracked her neck and glanced back, blue eyes looking at Alice.

“*Well contained,*” she heard the familiar voice in her mind. “*I’ll take care of it.*”

“Our defensive line is here, Lilith I assume,” Ziva spoke, her horse stepping forward to block the woman’s way. “We can’t let anyone go in there, it’s too dangerous. Besides, there are enchantments in place to block teleportation.”

“I’ll make sure to be careful,” Ilea said as she walked past the horse and woman without a concern in the world. Ziva tried to follow when Ilea’s form burst out with white flame and she vanished.

“Where... she got past?” Ziva asked.

The sounds changed instantly, the heavy impacts gone and replaced by more frequent but weaker vibrations.

Ziva jumped down from her horse. “We can’t let her face that horde. There were hundreds!”

Alice took in a deep breath. “She’ll be fine.”

“Alice?” Ziva asked, the woman glancing her way.

She had rarely offered a contrasting opinion, mostly in agreement with what the experienced Paladin did and said. But if she knew one thing better than Ziva, it was Ilea. She had gone and fought Taleen monstrosities long before her name was known throughout the Plains. Alice only had a glimpse at the power of Azarinth magic, and yet she was one of the more powerful fighters in the council, despite their higher level.

If the stories were true, and she had no doubt in her mind that they were, it was not Ilea they had to fear for. It was whatever stood in her way.

More fighters joined their line in the next ten minutes, some telling of a large scale battle in Riverwatch, others hailed from Stormbreach. Why so many had come to their aid was as of yet unclear. Dawntree had dealings with the Accords but they were not yet a part of it.

Alice assumed there was a reason Ilea herself had come to deal with it. Perhaps she had roused some ancient evil deep below the mountain, or one of her dungeon delving adventures had released a set of ten thousand machines. She didn’t know, though she would be lying if she said she hadn’t been glad to see her.

She tensed up when the wall broke inward, the stone crumbling with chunks flying into the tunnel.

Out walked Lilith, her form covered in ash before she spread her wings, the last signs of white fire dying down in the tunnel behind her.

“*All clear,*” her voice resounded in Alice’s mind before she flew up and away, teleporting out of the city and towards the gate bunkers.

Alice looked down the tunnel, a few magical lights flickering to reveal the bits and pieces of dull green metal left behind. The entire floor was covered. Some machines hung from the ceiling or walls, half embedded, their bodies dented, heads flattened or melted.

“She seemed angry,” Jaime said.

Alice glanced over to the man before she looked back down into the devastated tunnel, an entire wiped out Taleen army littering the depths. “You think so?” she said, raising a brow.

Ziva motioned for them to move forward, her sword raised as she called for light mages to help illuminate the tunnel.

“Don’t half of those explode when you destroy them?” a nearby Sentinel asked as she and her team walked down towards the entrance.

“Not if you destroy them fast enough. Mana intrusion destroys some of the enchantments,” another said. “I’ve done it before.”

“No you haven’t,” their third member said.

“I would’ve shown you, but you see, our enemies are already dead,” the man said again.

“Shut it,” the woman said and made a few gestures with her hand, the team quieting down instantly before they moved down into the depths as one, alongside groups of adventurers and guards.

Ilea returned to Riverwatch, joining up with Trian, Sulivhaan, Alistair, and plenty of officers, administrators, and people associating with the Accords.

“Yeah. I think it’s time,” she sent to Trian.

“Did you do something with those keys you’re collecting?” Trian asked.

“Not in a while, no. Maybe they just figured out who I am, or where they could find me. At least it seems likely that this has something to do with me. I doubt they suddenly consider all humans their enemies,” she said. “How many died?”

“I’ll spare you the numbers,” Trian said as he looked at her. “They defended their home against an invader. It’s not your fault.”

Ilea took in a deep breath. “I’ll finish the job.” She gave a nod to the others before she activated her third tier transfer, appearing next to Ben a moment later. “It’s time.”

“I... what happened...” He considered her for a moment before he hissed. “Never mind. Then let us be on our way,” he answered, hissing once more as he joined her.

A gate formed next to them, the two stepping out on a mountain overlooking the Still Valley. Ilea summoned her locator and looked at the arrow coming to life as she activated it. “Nobody has escaped before?” she murmured the words.

Ben remained quiet for a few seconds, a thoughtful expression on his face as he regarded the expansive valley. He looked at her. “None I would know of. But then you are human.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Ilea asked.

“I know none like you,” the elf said with a smile.

“Not the time to hit on me,” Ilea said. “Any last suggestions?”

“You know what I know, and you learned from the Hunters. I don’t suppose wishing you good luck will benefit your chances of survival,” he said.

“Been lucky enough to survive thus far,” Ilea said. *If it’s a hidden stat I might as well have it at the max.*

At least the last few days in Kohr had provided a chunk of levels for both her Classes and skills. She had managed to fell four additional floating mind magic void tentacle island fortresses of flesh. Enough to get to level six twenty one in her main Class.

Might as well use the core points then. And see what I can do with it.

‘ding’ ‘You have unlocked [Mythical Title]’

Right. So what's available? And how do I choose?

'Available titles for [Mythical Title]'

- **Wanderer [You may go unnoticed when in places unfamiliar to you]**
- **Giant Slayer [Large beings may fear and avoid you]**
- **The Seen [Your aura instills madness over time]**
- **Realm Traveler [You learn languages in other realms at a 100% increased rate]**
- **The Beheaded [You do not experience fear. You instill it.]**
- **Friend [You may seem more friendly to other beings]**
- **The Survivor [You gain 15% more resilience]**
- **The Enduring [You gain 1% additional resilience for each resistance skill you have unlocked]**
- **The Immortal [You gain 2% additional resilience for each resistance skill you have unlocked]**
- **Queenslayer [Rulers are more wary of your presence]**
- **Deviant [You may learn to understand previously incompatible magics]**
- **Gourmet [You learn to spot ingredients that would suit your tastes]**
- **The Violent [Beings will know what will happen if they piss you off]**
- **Living Flesh [You may seem different. Strange. Eerie.]**