

The group stored everything they could before Ilea gathered them up close to her. She left behind two of her ash copies to prevent anybody else from entering the cube. With non lethal force, just in case any adventurers managed to get there in the span of half a day. The distance to the Pit wasn't particularly far and the survivors knew where the Shining Caverns were located at the very least. Now that the mind magic creature was gone, some of them surely wanted to come back and explore what lay beyond.

Transfer activated, Fabric Tear connecting the group to her long range teleportation before they were shifted in the fabric, all of them appearing in the domain of the Meadow.

"Sooner than expected," the being spoke. *"Greetings, traveler. Welcome to my humble abode,"* it added, the words specifically aimed at the Fae.

Ilea could see a complex mesh of space magic form all around them, a demonstration that seemed to serve as a greeting. *"What, you're a peacock now? Feathers all spread out to impress the lady?"*

"I am simply trying to converse. Ilea, I have no idea how these beings see the world around them. And this one has already said ten times as much to me than Baron Violence," it said.

"Before you get entirely lost, we want to bring back a massive steel cube," she said.

"The Fae has explained the circumstances, yes. The measurements seem reasonable. I'm already preparing a suitable section of my domain," the Meadow spoke as stone began to shift in the cavern, a large section between the corridors that led up to Hallowfort and down to the Descent. *"I assume you would like to claim the cube for yourself? Or the Sentinels?"*

Ilea smiled, patting the Fae on her shoulder with an ashen limb. *"The latter, though I guess I can reserve a room for myself. If the whole idea is alright for you of course. I don't want to force interactions on you that you might want to avoid. Or put anything in your domain that you don't want there."*

"I've been enjoying the life you've brought to this place. It's... refreshing, to be seen as... something else than a god or monster. And I'm sure I can help teach your Sentinels more than a few things. I'm a healer myself after all. And even you managed to learn something, which means anyone can do it."

"Hah. Well, I appreciate it either way," she said. *"I guess we can resume the training while you plan everything with the others. I've gotten enough Core Points for another skill enhancement too."*

"What is happening," Pierce murmured. The group stared at the shifting stone, large slabs folding out of the massive cavern wall. The floating material dissolved to nothing. Behind it the imprint of a sideways cube was carved into the high reaching section of the Meadow's domain.

"You may leave the furniture on the ground. I will take care of it," the Meadow spoke, eliciting a few looks.

"You already got the measurements?" Iana asked, summoning her notes. "I see... yes. Let's go over the runes again. We only have one chance or the thing will be torn apart."

Ilea left the others to their own devices. The Fae remained on her shoulder as she sat down near the crystal tree.

“Truly enlightening,” the Meadow spoke. *“Thank you, for bringing Twin here.”*

“Twin?” Ilea asked.

“Yes, it appears Owl has nicknamed it due to the situation concerning its soul,” it answered.

“Twin, you’re alright with the name?” she asked the creature.

Twin

Acceptable

“Good, Twin it is,” Ilea said with a smile. *Not exactly two of the same in there but I suppose it doesn’t matter much.*

“The King demands an explanation! What is this outrage!?” the being spoke, the outburst over again a moment later.

Owl joined them, likely communicating with the Meadow in an effort to rid the Fae of its problematic state.

Hmm, one skill to enhance...

Ilea ignored the bursts of soul and space magic flaring up around her, the Fae floating up as runic circles appeared on stone plates nearby.

Let’s go with Embered Form, she thought and used five of her Core skill points to enhance the skill.

‘ding’ Embered Form [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 1

Passive: Embered Form [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 1:

You are one with the fighting style of Ash. Damage inflicted is 70.5% [705%] higher.

2nd stage: Adds density to your bones, muscles and skin to increase strength, speed and damage. Base body weight is doubled. The abuse your body takes from your own strikes and their feedback is reduced.

3rd stage: Reduces stamina consumption by a static 35%. Mana intrusion attacks formed or charged within your arms, hands, fingers, legs, feet, or your head can instead be converted into a purely physical damage increase to the executed attack. Be aware that this increase will be heavily demanding for your body. Increases your base shock absorption by 5% [50%].

Category: Body Enhancement

Hmm, more shock absorption. Useful I guess. Ilea simply had no clue what her base shock absorption was and if the bonus she got from her Earth Magic Resistance was added afterwards, if any of it was multiplying or just in addition to each other. The change certainly wasn’t particularly exciting.

“Nothing good?” the Meadow asked, likely engaged in more than a few conversations at the moment. The cubical imprint it prepared was still under construction, more sets of runes cut into the stone walls with every passing second.

“No, it’s good. Just purely defensive. Shock absorption. Testing?” she said when a chunk of stone the size of her head appeared a few meters away before it shot forward and impacted her face. Her head won out, the chunk deflected and flying to the side before it hit the ground a few times and rolled to a stop. A bit of her skin was slightly scratched, already healed when she glanced at the tree. *“Verdict?”*

“A noticeable improvement. Your head barely moved,” the Meadow spoke. *“I believe you’re more durable by now than most four marks I’ve seen. If we take your regeneration, healing, resistances, and mana absorption into account.”*

“I mean I can kill them. But I’d love to be strong enough to just ignore their fourth tier abilities,” she said.

“You simply lack the base resilience and health for such a feat. But that will change as you level and increase your Vitality,” the Meadow said. *“You might enjoy the fact that most four marks wouldn’t get away unscathed by the fourth tier magic of another similarly powerful being.”*

“That does make me feel just a little better. Leveling will only become harder though. I can’t just make myself some high level machine to put my soul into or have a ritual turn me into something better,” she said.

“Well. Options would exist, I’m sure you’re aware of that. You simply cling to your human form. Something I very much support, it’s interesting to see your growth. And so far you’ve had no difficulties finding large amounts of high level creatures to battle. I’m sure that won’t change now,” it said. *“At the very least you can work on your skills with me. While you collect more Core Skill points to enhance the rest of your skills.”*

She cracked her neck and jumped back. *“True. So let’s continue.”*

Ilea spent the next few hours training with the Meadow until Iana and Chris were ready to go back to the Soul Forge.

She only managed to level a few of her skills with the intense and literal gutting experience.

‘ding’ ‘Archon Strike [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 2’

‘ding’ ‘Mantle of the Titan [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 2’

‘ding’ ‘Wood Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 3’

Every level will help against Audur, she thought and cracked her neck. The enchanters packed up the prepared materials and made them vanish into their storage devices.

Twin suggested helping from the side of the Soul Forge, in case any of the space magic runes caused unexpected fluctuations. None of the mana suppliers had the necessary control to make sure the ritual would be perfectly stable after all, even Ilea with her Space Manipulation.

The Meadow had gathered and categorized all the collected materials, books, shelves, tables, and everything else from within the Soul Forge, ready to place it all back where it belonged. Granted they succeeded with the large scale transfer.

“*See you later,*” Ilea sent and activated her spell, connecting everyone to her long range ability before they vanished.

“Should probably get up to the Dome soon,” Ilea said and looked around the cavern. *No adventurers so far.*

Her copies were still standing guard close to the entrance, now aided by Aki and Owl. Or rather replaced. As powerful as they were, they wouldn’t be able to match the two high level beings.

“You’re coming up with us I assume?” she asked, looking at Bralin.

He nodded and joined her. “Indeed. Your precious tree prepared all the runes already. Nothing I could ever match with my humble skills,” the dwarf said and laughed.

“At least you’re not a tree,” Pierce said as she joined with her war machine.

Ilea chuckled to herself. Even with all her perception, she could barely comprehend a part of the Meadow’s form. The joke wasn’t lost on her and she did it often enough herself, but hearing the words out of Pierce’s mouth just sounded ridiculous.

“You’re part of its cult already,” the Elder said whilst stretching.

“Envious as always,” Verena said, crossing her arms. “Let’s leave them to their work, our banter isn’t helping.”

Iana raised her brows at that and nodded lightly.

The Shades remained with them, helping where they could.

“*Call for me if something comes up,*” Ilea said to the enchanters as she spread her wings.

“*Will do. Enjoy your arena thingy,*” Iana said.

“Good luck,” Christopher said with a thumbs up.

Ilea summoned her armaments. “Luck has nothing to do with the destruction we’ll bring,” she said in her booming voice before she made the thing vanish again.

The Fae giggled as the group departed on their journey back to the Pit.

Bralin didn’t exactly know what he should think of his new companions. Perhaps even friends? Ilea had introduced herself with the name Lilith but her allies had quickly mentioned her apparent real name. Not that she seemed to care about it in the slightest. He had wondered if it meant something but in the end she seemed to act rather impulsive.

The fact that they even managed to get into the Soul Forge was one thing, what impressed him more was the short time it took the enchanters to prepare. And the three mages who took part in the enchantment disabling just casually learned the sequence in a few minutes. *Talks to the Fae, and*

now she wants to move the entire fucking thing to wherever this god like tree being has its lair. What did you get yourself into, Bralin?

He watched the two humans run with their war machines, one stolen and the other made by none other than Goliath himself. Bralin once again bit into the side of his mouth to wake himself up from the delirious fever dream his life had turned into. Nothing happened and all the evidence suggested it was real.

Just roll with the punches. And you're sure to come out on the other side with a few insane stories. The only issue he saw with that was that even the drunkest fuck wouldn't believe half of the shit he had seen in the past few days. His eyes opened wide as a few memories came back to him, ridiculous stories told by people under the influence, tales of Dragons, Fae, and Unicorns, of bright shining Elves facing down flying Taleen war machines, and steel clad beings of space tearing through hordes of Shredders with single spells.

He shook his head. Was it all true? With what he had seen in a single day, he could believe it. *Am I losing my mind? Did that mind magic creature they mentioned get me?* Bralin had tried everything in his power. The only thing he had left was to simply believe the state of affairs. *The world is bigger than I thought,* he mused with a wide grin.

"Doing okay?" Verena asked, the woman sitting on his armored shoulder.

The space was barely sufficient for her but he didn't think to dissuade her. "Just... well."

"God like creatures all around?" the woman said with a smile.

He nodded lightly. "Pretty much. And I've seen a lot."

Verena puffed. "I've been an Elder of the Shadow's Hand for over half a century. She's ridiculous, but there's a lot of that out there. Maybe you should travel the realms a little more."

"Realms. You say that like it's just a Thursday afternoon walk," Bralin mused.

"To some it is," she said. "The Meadow isn't native. She saved that thing from another realm."

He glanced at her and kept on walking. "She? Saved the Meadow?"

"Hard to believe, I know. Easier to get back to your own realm than to breach another. And you've seen that she can take people with her," Verena said.

"Finally here," Ilea said, sitting down on a chunk of stone before the caved in tunnel. Her spell brought them through.

Bralin had gained a resistance a few hours earlier but it didn't seem to make a difference at all. Not that he tried to resist her spell in the first place. Her casual behavior was disarming. He knew his own power, and he knew he could perhaps survive against either of the two women, but Ilea? How quickly could she kill him if she wanted to? Somehow it was easier to accept the Lich, the Pursuer, and even the Meadow. They were monsters, beings beyond anything a human or dwarf would ever reach. Or so he thought.

He summoned a bottle of Whiskey and took a swig. Bralin closed the bottle and put it away as ashen limbs moved out to gather everyone but Pierce.

Ilea waited for them to confirm that they were ready before she flew up.

The stone walls of the pit flew past, repeated teleports moving them up even faster. They slowed down after a few minutes, coming to a stop somewhere along the climb. “Let’s continue on foot. Bralin you can climb right?” Ilea asked.

He nodded, the stone extending from the wall until he could stand on it. He winced when Ilea landed on his other shoulder, his machine nearly brought off balance by her weight. *What is that woman made of?* He was wise enough not to ask, instead shifting his balance and quickly moving over to the wall before the stone bridge broke below them.

“Don’t want to reveal yourself?” Pierce asked when she appeared. “Cannons are ready but the celebrations seem to still be ongoing.”

“Directly to the Dome?” Bralin asked. They still had a few hours until Pierce’s fight but he assumed the Forged Dome was rather packed after the Soul Warden attack.

“Sure,” Ilea said.

“Are there any fights going on?” Verena asked.

“Yes,” Pierce said. “I had a look at the schedule.”

Bralin formed a thick stone platform and pushed up, the impromptu elevator moved them along the pit walls at an impressive speed. Nothing close to Pierce’s or Ilea’s flight speed but enough to get them to their destination in a reasonable time. It had taken him years to perfect this climbing method after all. *Don’t start comparing yourself to what may or may not be actual gods*, he reminded himself. A smile blossomed on his face as he took another swig from his bottle. *And now you get to watch one of them demolish the fools fighting in the Dome.* “It’ll be glorious,” he murmured to himself.

“Got another bottle?” Verena asked.

He summoned one and handed it to her. “Eighty years old,” he mentioned.

“I’ll get you something in return,” the Elder said.

“Don’t mention it. Just want you to give it the appreciation it deserves,” Bralin said, his platform sliding to a stop when a massive tunnel opened up before them. They were located a few hundred meters down into the pit, the Forged Dome set deep into the stone to make sure the fighting wouldn’t destroy their settlement ten times over. Already they could hear the cheers. Most of the tunnel itself was lit with magical lights, a few war machines on guard duty standing around and watching those walking past.

“So how does this work?” Pierce asked as she stepped off the platform, taking in the broad hallway.

Bralin walked ahead in his war machine, motioning the others to follow. He led the group towards the open gates at the end of the long descending tunnel.

More people landed behind them, shouts resounding as they poured each other more ale from the barrels they had with them.

“No entrance fee?” Ilea asked. There was no booth near the open gates.

“No. Gold is made through bets. Organizers get a percentage of it all. If there was an entrance fee, people would just find a random spot down in the Pit and fight there,” he said. “It’s more... based on mutual understanding,” he added as he entered with two women sitting on his shoulders. He

might've felt good about that if it weren't for the fact that one of them weighed what felt like a ton and was a near literal god besides. Verena he didn't mind. Sadly, she was not a dwarf.