

Chapter 497 Ruins

“You’re still here?” Trian asked as he entered the office. “Survived the horrendous lessons?”

Ilea waved her hand lightly.

“Probably worse for you than fighting a Basilisk,” he commented, a literal spark in his eyes as he smirked.

“In a good mood today?” she asked.

“Of course. New students are always a good thing,” he said.

She had been informed that fifteen new recruits had joined the Sentinels, each interviewed by Trian and Orthán. Now that the fifty initial members had skills and classes to work on and train together, the faculty was somewhat freed up.

“Are you sure it’s a good idea to do ash and pain resistance training without me there?” Ilea asked.

“They’re doing it already. Just amongst those who already have Classes. It’s a fantastic way to train both defenses and healing,” Trian answered. “I’ll make sure to keep a vigilant eye out for any enmities that might arise.”

Ilea had met them briefly a few hours ago, introducing them to the order with Trian. He had insisted that she would at least meet the new students once. The Sentinels were in their infancy after all and some presence of Lilith was helpful. Her name was one of the main things that convinced new members to go through the gruesome training after all.

When they had made a name for themselves, that would change.

“Ah, something else. William asked me about the group you had him train,” he said.

“You mean Dany and her group?” Ilea asked.

“Yes. Three of them asked about the Sentinels. They want to join,” he said.

Ilea wasn’t sure if that was a good idea. William had seemed to enjoy teaching them and while they had endured some training with her, it wasn’t exactly the same regimen the Sentinels went through.

“Wait, just three?” she asked.

“One of them will stay with William. His personal student,” Trian said.

“You evaluated the others so I’ll leave it up to you. If you can squeeze them in, sure. I don’t see a major problem with them otherwise,” she said.

Trian nodded. “Then I’ll invite them. He did ask for a difficult evaluation. I’m not sure it’s because he thinks they don’t fit or if he doesn’t want to let them go.”

“Hard to read him,” Ilea said, thinking back on the drowning. She shuddered before standing up.

“Ready?” Claire asked, having mostly ignored their short conversation.

“Yep. And don’t worry. I’ll try to behave. Somewhat,” Ilea said, her armor expanding to cover her body.

“You do what you do, Ilea. I think we can take care of ourselves, either way. Do at least try not to start a war,” Claire said.

Trian just laughed.

“Politics is so very touchy though... I can’t guarantee it,” she said and winked at the man.

“I’ll make sure the Sentinels can help to heal soldiers if it gets that far,” he said, only a slight smirk remaining.

“Ravenhall won’t be taken that easily,” Claire said. “We’re prepared.”

“Are you seriously suggesting I’d start a war?” Ilea asked.

“Of course,” Claire said.

“Yes. Just try... try really hard to give us a week or two. Every day can make the difference,” Trian said and touched her arm, looking at her with a sad expression. “Think of the children.”

Ilea squinted her eyes and slowly stepped backwards and towards the window. “I’ll be back,” she said and opened it, the enchantments fizzling out before she jumped.

“Good luck!” Trian shouted.

He knew damn well she didn’t need it.

The flight took her towards Virilya, avoiding the city and keeping east of it. She followed the map Claire had prepared. She had left markings for landmarks, towns, and villages on the way.

Only the last half hour of her journey proved a little problematic.

Ilea had to fly low to avoid various troops and small camps she spotted in the distance, both because of the rising smoke and sometimes flashes of magic.

She doubted Baralia troops were fighting so far east but the wild lands remained just as dangerous as they had always been.

Might be refugees or soldiers who try to get away, she wondered.

The journey had taken her through a small part of Asila before she entered Baralia. She avoided settlements and focused on the landmarks mentioned.

The meeting place was an ancient ruin said to be cursed. Adventurers avoided the place due to the monsters in the dungeon below. Curse magic frogs.

The little buggers were mostly harmless to someone with a second tier resistance, both Helena and Claire confirmed, not that they liked to come to the surface at all.

A little risky. This would be exactly the place where I train my Curse Magic Resistance. If it weren’t as high as it already is.

It turned out that the main reason for it being the chosen spot was because it was easy to find.

The ruins were situated on a chain of forested hills, standing out in the landscape to anybody both flying or on foot.

Claire assumed a part of it was also the distance to any cities or towns. It was unlikely any of the armies would choose this as a forward base.

She flew the last stretch below the tree tops, blinking through the forest until she came close.

Ilea immediately spotted a few people within the ruins, all of them heavily armored in deep blue and gray gear, their faces covered by hoods or helmets.

Secret order business, she thought and grinned to herself.

One of them wasn't armored, the man dressed instead in dark leathers that seemed entirely out of place. There were so many belts and straps that she couldn't exactly discern their use. The most striking piece of attire was of course the large leather hat with a single red feather fixated onto it.

He had a rather meticulously cared for mustache that slightly twirled upwards on each end. The rest of his beard was just as impressive, long and black, braided in a more complex pattern than her own hair.

Granted, Ilea didn't spend hours taking care of her hair every day. This man however, just might.

Black long hair flowed out from under his overly large hat, wavy and thick as it rested on his dark brown leather coat.

He looked like a pirate.

She found herself locking eyes with him, deep blue eyes staring at her own before he smiled.

Ilea mimicked the gesture, realizing in that moment that she floated two hundred meters away, her face covered in ash.

You're being unfriendly, Ilea, she thought to herself and slowed down, floating towards them before her wings dissipated and she continued on foot.

She blinked a few times to shorten the walk before she entered the decrepit ruin.

The stones did indicate that this place had once been claimed by sapient beings but other than that, she couldn't discern what its use had once been.

Just now did the armored people notice her, ever so slightly preparing for battle. Their postures tensed slightly, their hands going a little closer to their gear.

"Finally!" the man called out and spread his arms. His coat was dripping wet.

Ilea waved at them all, keeping her eyes on the pirate. He was missing the swords and guns but other than that he fit the image incredibly well.

She identified the people around her, finding all of them in the low two hundreds. Eight of them were present, each with their own weapons and feel to their magic. There were at least five perception spells she could perceive within her sphere, another ten or so other spells she couldn't quite place.

"How very tense," she commented, glancing at the group before looking at the pirate. "I'm Lilith."

He smiled. "Lilith! Of course. The ashen Shadow. The menace of Ravenhall. As much as I liked the songs I can't fucking hear them anymore," the man said, shaking his head in annoyance.

"And who might you be?" she asked.

"I am of course... the Destroyer," he said proudly.

Ilea noted that some of the others reacted to that slightly.

“Who?” she asked. The name was utterly ridiculous of course. She expected a legendary Dragon or other calamity to carry that name, not some wet guy.

[Mage – lvl 362]

The level at least was impressive. Most definitely the most powerful human she had ever managed to identify.

His posture seemed to sag a little. “The Destroyer... most famous pirate in the sea... the conqueror of the Wainu islands, caller of the deep, the bringer of war,” it sounded more like a question than anything else.

“Hey man. I’m really sorry. I’ve not been reading up on pirates. Your level supports the claim at least, I’ll give you that,” she said.

The man looked at her for a moment, his mouth opening before it closed again. “You’re shitting me, right?”

Ilea shook her head slowly.

He seemed almost dejected. “What has come to my great name,” he looked up and met her gaze. “Never mind that. Lilith... well I can say honestly that I’m surprised. My crew has been singing your songs nonstop... so much I had to restrict them to once or twice per hour. I expected you to be some puny upstart Shadow thinking themselves invincible because they’re a healer. You’ve nearly reached my level!”

“I need to go hunt again... do you have a third Class already?” he asked suddenly.

Ilea didn’t react. She didn’t exactly want to share that with everyone present, let alone him.

“A secretive one... uech... so boring. Just like these idiots. Hey, army man...,” he suddenly focused on one of the others. “Did Skorn tell you to be quiet? Can you not at least introduce yourself? This is the legendary Lilith! Surely you must want favorable relations with her.”

“We are not affiliated with this man,” one of them suddenly said, looking at Ilea.

“Skorn?” Ilea asked, going through her brain until she remembered. Walter had that name, or was she remembering wrong?

The man didn’t say anything.

“The great Nero Skorn. Filthbag, cocksucker, and as I hear, ruler of Asila. Self proclaimed of course as I doubt that old fucker could rule his own bathroom without the help of his groomed slave bitches,” the Destroyer commented.

Four of the gathered people drew their weapons. Two more prepared spells.

He just laughed out loud, choking suddenly before he coughed a few times. “It just doesn’t get old, does it?”

Ilea wasn’t sure what he meant, looking at him. *Nero... I’ll have to ask Walter about that. Might just be a common name but he’s old. Maybe there’s a connection.*

“What doesn’t?” she asked honestly.

“Weaklings like them trying to start fights with the likes of us,” he said and grinned at them. “Come on... make the first move... I dare you and your lousy piece of shit daddy.”

Ilea could feel the discomfort in the people around herself.

“You’re being unnecessarily aggressive, Mr. Destroyer. We only came to—” the same man who had talked to Ilea was suddenly interrupted by the pirate’s laughter.

“Mr. Destroyer. Ah I love it. Hey Lilith, before we die of boredom, care for a bout? My bones are aching and I hate being on land,” he said.

“Might as well,” Ilea said and shrugged, apparently surprising the others.

The man clapped once and smiled. “I’m starting to like you!”

A wave of water suddenly formed below him, pushing him backwards and towards the landscape below.

Ilea spread her wings and followed.

“Who are we waiting for anyway?” she asked.

“You, for one,” the Destroyer said. “I would think Velamyr is coming too. The old lightning lad calling himself General now. I really, really hope that’s it but with everything going on in this shit country, I’m sure others will come.”

“Other Lily Members you mean?” Ilea asked.

He glanced at her, his wave moving through the forest unhindered, carrying the man above the trees with surprising speed. “Yes. And others, like that elite order back there. Don’t mind them. Nero is too busy coming himself.”

Ilea nodded slightly, slowing down as he did. “You’re a member too then?”

He waved her off. “Kind of. I mostly stay to annoy some of the others. Helena asked me to come today and so I did. She doesn’t contact me without reason. You should really think about getting involved in this crap. They think themselves very important and most of them don’t possess a shred of honor.”

“Says the pirate,” Ilea said and giggled.

“I don’t pretend to be an upstanding citizen at least. Not like this order of self proclaimed gods of humanity. However I’ll have you know that the cities who tolerate me have been doing rather well in the last decades. I mostly focus my raids on monsters,” he said.

“Why’s that?” Ilea asked.

“Because humans are too weak,” he said with a grin. “You however... might be interesting. It’s nigh impossible to annoy the others enough to cause an actual fight. You’re the first who accepted so quickly!”

Ilea shrugged. “So you have a third Class?” she asked.

“I do. The seven fifty kill was laughably easy... if you find the right creature. Just took me a while to find a four mark with enough people and monsters around to actually take it down. That took weeks! What a battle it was!”

More water formed around him, flooding the forest nonstop.

Ilea was reminded of that one spell Aliana had used but this seemed on an entirely different level. Nor did it stop.

“So you reached that rather recently? With your level where it is,” Ilea said.

“Two years I think?” he said. “You know how it is. Destroyer, we’re starving, please help. Destroyer, our city is under siege, please come and help. Destroyer, your expenses are astronomical, please bring some treasure to pay the bills. Destroyer, your ship was stolen by fishmen! It all eats up time that could be spent on hunting.”

Ilea couldn’t help but laugh. It just seemed too ridiculous for him to be acting.

“Don’t you have people for that?” she asked.

He nodded. “Yes. Yes. They’re annoying too of course. I do try to make time! I know my level is inadequate but compared to land, it’s not that easy to find creatures and new islands in the ocean. If you don’t plan to sail alone... and what self respecting pirate wouldn’t have a crew with him?”

“Why not fight on land then?” Ilea asked.

“I’m a man of the sea, young Lilith. I do not concern myself with matters of the land,” he said.

“But... you’re here,” she said and laughed.

“I do occasionally dabble. Only if a cleanup is necessary or old friends ask for my help. However when it comes to monsters, I try to search them in the deep,” he said.

“Let’s start. We can talk during if you really want to. I’ve missed company after spending half an hour with those damn mutes,” he said as magic flowed to his hand. A sphere of water near instantly formed around him, spanning three meters.

“Now come, show me the legacy of Lilith!” he said, his voice in no way muffled by the water around him.

Ilea smiled and charged, ashen limbs expanding behind her as a few spears formed.

She shot them at him, watching with fascination as they were stopped entirely as soon as they entered the sphere of water. Her ash dissolved within.

Question is, do I want to enter that? she thought. Ilea was sure the man was dangerous but she wouldn’t back down against a human on her level.

A thin stream of pressurized water suddenly shot out of his hand, reaching her fast enough for her precognition to take over.

She dodged to the side but found him following her movement with the stream.

Ilea blinked instead and kept approaching.

Four more streams formed out of thin air and slashed towards her.

No need for his hands. He’s not even looking at me, she noted, moving through the water beams with practiced ease, adjusting her movements and blinking whenever necessary to react to the changes.

Ilea reached his small sphere, her limbs slashing inside.

Her ash was slowed and finally stopped, unable to reach him as she started to deliver reversed healing magic.

The pirate looked at her with a grin before seven beams of water slashed into her.

Ilea couldn’t dodge without letting go of her ash, instead just taking the hits heat on.

Her resistance tried to redirect the beams but they simply came too quickly for it to make a noticeable difference.

Ilea felt her ash slowly washed away.

Heart of Cinder released through one of her limbs, the explosion of heat and energy pushing through the inside of the sphere. It looked too small and slow to her eyes but still managed to get to the pirate.

He watched with fascination and a wide smile as the fire reached him. He moved a hand closer to the energy, the skin visibly burnt before some of the fire went over to his body, as if he could control it.

“Third tier Heat Resistance?” she asked with a smile, the water now cutting into her flesh and slowly past her skin and muscles.

“Oh yes. It’s been a while since someone could even hurt me. A human that is. It’s quite ridiculous how powerful the magic of some monsters is,” he commented. “Your Water Resistance isn’t in the third tier yet, I see. Maybe I can help you there. Your defenses are however... incredible. Most others even in the low three hundreds would be chunks of meat now,” he said and laughed.

Ilea ignored the comments, not disinterested at the potential of a third tier Water Resistance but focusing on pushing her ashen limbs further into his sphere.