

Chapter 845 Normalcy

Ilea watched the dancing flames left behind in the wake of her battle with the Storm Elemental. She summoned a bottle of ale and removed the cap with a flick of her thumb. Her mantle receded from her head and hands, but she didn't change into anything else yet, her ice magic needed to keep the beverage cool within the heated and magic laden valley.

She looked up at the still dissipating clouds and raised her bottle slightly. "To an insane fight. May you keep on battling, wherever you are now," she said with a smile. A part of her was appalled at the senseless killing, a part she had lost more and more during her time in Elos. She had felt it, the meaning of their battle. The joy, shared by the Elemental.

It was one thing to kill those who did not want to fight, those hopelessly outmatched and simply trying to survive. But what she felt now was pride and joy, a sense of loss but only because the battle hadn't endured longer. She was happy that she had met the Elemental, and knew it was glad to have met her too.

"The Wind of Aveer," she murmured, watching a silver threaded hammer make its way towards her. *And the Silent Memory. Maybe we could've become friends, if we had met in different circumstances. Maybe if I was weaker, not a challenge at all for the being of storm. Or it would've just killed me instantly, who knows.*

I should inform the Meadow.

"Can you tell the Meadow that I'm fine. I won," Ilea sent to Aki.

"Done. I was wondering what that lightning was. I'll join you shortly," the Sentinel sent back.

Ilea sipped on her drink when the hammer slowed to a stop in front of her, the threads flowing back into it until it slapped onto the stone next to her. "Well done," Ilea sent to the hammer and touched her necklace. "You too," she sent, just in case. High level items were a little unpredictable.

Nothing was left of the Elemental by now, even the clouds above entirely gone. The battlefield would remain, for a time. A mark left by her and the being alike.

Well, mostly the Elemental. My magic is a little more environmentally friendly, she thought, seeing entire areas of the nearby mountains still unstable, some sections about to collapse.

Not that I'm not a tiny bit envious about that fact.

She pouted a little, setting down her bottle before she summoned a meal and ate.

When she was done, she summoned a second plate and looked through her notifications.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Storm Elemental – lvl 2285]'

'ding' 'The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 787 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 788 – Five stat points awarded'

...

'ding' 'The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 806 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Ashen Titan has reached lvl 782 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Ashen Titan has reached lvl 783 – Five stat points awarded'

...

'ding' 'The Ashen Titan has reached lvl 801 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Primordial Arbiter has reached lvl 781 – One stat point awarded'

'ding' 'The Primordial Arbiter has reached lvl 782 – One stat point awarded'

...

'ding' 'The Primordial Arbiter has reached lvl 800 – One stat point awarded – One Core Skill point awarded'

Now that's a worthy enemy. Turns out leveling after the five hundreds is easy, you just have to kill god like beings.

She smiled to herself, putting all her new stat points into Vitality. With all her bonuses, she was now sitting at a hundred and eight thousand points of health, and change.

Suppose I should invest into Wisdom and Intelligence again soon. But for now it just seems reasonable to extend my Fourth tier use.

And soon I should get my Fourth tier General skill. Already at eighty Core points.

'ding' 'Ashen Limbs reaches 3rd lvl 2'

'ding' 'Azarinth Barrier [Mythic] reaches 3rd lvl 27'

'ding' 'Bulwark of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 10'

'ding' 'Bulwark of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 11'

'ding' 'Meditation reaches 3rd lvl 29'

'ding' 'Monster Hunter reaches 3rd lvl 28'

'ding' 'Monstrous reaches 2nd lvl 20'

'ding' 'Spear of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 6'

'ding' 'Telepathy reaches lvl 20'

'ding' 'Warhammer Mastery reaches 2nd lvl 20'

It does seem like my Warhammer Mastery levels if I just have my hammer around. Guess having one that wields itself against my enemies is rather helpful, she thought and patted the silver hammer head.

‘ding’ ‘Blast Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 24’

‘ding’ ‘Lightning Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 20’

‘ding’ ‘Lightning Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 21’

‘ding’ ‘Lightning Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 22’

‘ding’ ‘Lightning Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 23’

‘ding’ ‘Wind Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 21’

‘ding’ ‘Wind Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 22’

‘ding’ ‘Wind Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 23’

Ilea considered investing into the third tier of her Warhammer Mastery but decided against it. She had two points at the moment, and the bonuses so far were related to actually using a war hammer in the more conventional sense. She was just lucky enough to have a divine artifact. One that seemed pretty much as indestructible as her storage necklace and the Azarinth Star.

Monstrous was another option, but again, she thought the bonuses of the skill not quite enough to consider investing a point that could instead go into a resistance skill. Of course if it would allow her to hide her title, she could more easily hide her identity, but at the same time it was kind of fun to see everyone’s reaction. Not that such a bonus was a given at all, should she advance Monstrous to the third tier.

‘ding’ ‘You have been challenged by the Wind of Aveer, and you have emerged victorious – One Core skill point awarded’

Seems appropriate. Worth two or three to be honest, Ilea thought as she ate and read. But then I suppose I did get an entire six from the levels already.

She soon saw a few Hunter Praetorians climbing down from a nearby peak. Fast moving machines made to hunt and kill elves. By now she regarded them as little more than Guardians. How could she not, after her recent fights.

“That is, quite a scene,” one of the machines spoke.

“You weren’t watching?” she asked.

“I tried to get close but lightning bolts damaged one of my Hunters,” Aki said. “What was it?”

“A Storm Elemental,” Ilea said. “Let me know if you find more suspicious cloud patterns somewhere in the wild.”

“I have no data on the beings.”

“I’ll tell you what I learned later,” Ilea said. “It was hovering above the dome structure that still remains. Most of the Ascended facility seems flooded and overgrown by now.”

“I will investigate it,” Aki said, two Hunters already rushing towards the entrance, one more towards the dome. “I suppose this one was part of the original mesh.”

“Probably. Any progress on the search?” Ilea asked.

The machine shook its head. “No. Dungeons, crypts, forgotten cities form before the Extraction, but no new facilities. The leadership of the Accords assumes we’ll soon have to change the flow of information to indicate this is an extensive training exercise.”

“Why?” Ilea asked, finishing her plate and storing it in her domain.

“We’re allocating an extensive amount of resources to a threat that may or may not be legitimate. Our information remains vague, though we are still in agreement that the potential risk outweighs the cost of our efforts,” Aki explained.

“I guess it would still make sense as a training exercise, as you say. Even if Ker Velor has no further interest in Elos, there are other beings out there just as dangerous, if not worse,” she said.

“I hope you’re wrong about that. But it won’t hurt to prepare either way. And having a common goal is beneficial, we found. Even secondary projects are progressing faster than we had anticipated.”

Ilea smiled. “That’s good to hear. Anywhere I’m needed right now?”

“There are four mark targets I have found, but considering the power I saw from these spells, I’m not sure how beneficial a hunt would be. As a friend, I would also suggest a small break. You’re in a certain mood I have seen before.”

“A mood?” Ilea asked, raising her brows.

“Yes. A dangerous one. I can assume why you had me inform the Meadow of your victory. It was not certain, was it?” Aki said.

Ilea avoided the green eyes staring at her, instead glancing at the burning mountain sides. “It wasn’t.”

“Do I have to say more?” Aki asked.

“I’ll take a break,” Ilea said. She refrained from a grounding pun, not about to sully the Elemental’s memory. “Sometimes I forget that you traveled with me for some time.”

“Don’t flatter yourself. You’re hardly difficult to figure out,” Aki said. “That’s part of your diplomatic success.”

“Oh? Back to the banter already?” Ilea asked.

“Influenced by my wielder, remember?” Aki said.

“You’re in a sphere of metal, powered by a sun,” she retorted with a grin.

“And how do you think that makes me feel?” Aki said.

“Powerful, I imagine?” Ilea suggested.

“Terribly lonely and secluded,” Aki said, but his tone suggested he wasn’t entirely serious.

“Right, maybe I’ll find another metal sphere or elven soul copy dagger so you can make friends,” Ilea suggested.

“Please do. And I’ll find some battle maniacs so obsessed with thrill they forget to value their own life.”

“A little too personal that one,” Ilea said as she stood up and stretched, storing her hammer in turn. “You should try it sometime, maybe you’ll understand.”

“I would not have become a dagger if I did,” Aki said in a dry tone.

“Maybe not, no,” Ilea said.

“And do talk to the Meadow. I’m not sure it is quite as familiar with your tendencies,” Aki said.

“Are you suggesting that eldritch tree cares about my well being?” Ilea asked as she summoned a gate.

The Praetorian did not speak, instead its eyes glowed for a moment before it made its way towards the half destroyed dungeon entrance.

Ilea sighed and stepped through the gate, appearing in the domain of the Meadow. She felt a pull and deactivated her space magic resistance.

The Meadow moved her close to the tree. *“I am conflicted,”* it spoke into her mind.

Ilea didn’t speak.

“Is this what a parent feels when a child leaves on its first adventure?” the Meadow asked.

“Hardly my first adventure,” Ilea said with a smile.

“I know. It is just, that I have seen many go and not return. You are who you are, and I am glad that you came out victorious,” the being spoke and paused. *“What I am trying to say, is that it will be sad when you die.”*

Ilea grinned. *“You should be happy, that I found something powerful enough to kill me.”*

Now I sound like that Elemental.

“I get it,” she added. *“I’m not always this reckless. It just... felt right. I don’t know what to say. Audur or the Architect weren’t the same. This was... more.”*

“I’m not sure I am meant to understand, but I will accept your words. I feel it was not a wish for power that compelled you to be reckless,” the Meadow said.

“No,” Ilea said with a smile. *“But maybe I’m this powerful exactly because of that. I guess if I just sought power, I would be afraid to lose it.”*

She looked at the crystal tree and crossed her arms. *“Are you done scolding me?”*

“I have no right to scold you. I am just a friend, worried for a friend to die.”

“You’re actually going to make me feel bad if you keep this up,” Ilea said with a slight smile.

“Got anything good?” the tree asked.

One of the best fights of my life.

“Just levels. Guess it’s something. Another fifty for my next Fourth tier,” she said. *“But I promised Aki that I’d take a break. At least for a short while.”*

“He does know you well,” the tree said.

“Envious?” Ilea asked.

“No. I don’t envy his traveling with you. Much too violent for my tastes,” the being spoke.

“Sure, maybe one day you’ll believe your own lies,” Ilea said as she stretched. She ignored the Meadow’s attempt to teleport her away. *“I can leave on my own, thank you.”*

“The child thinks itself an adult,” the Meadow spoke. *“Perhaps we’ll have that bout after all. In due time.”*

Ilea grinned as she formed a gate behind herself. *“In due time, my friend.”* She spread her wings and covered herself in her mantle, flying backwards through the spatial rift.

Her wings moved once more as the gate closed, Ilea ascending above the hill near Riverwatch. The town she had once known best in Elos. It felt more distant now. The walls higher, enchanted and protected, dwarven machines she had once feared walking on the battlements.

Wagons arrived at the open city gate, smaller versions that could be moved in the teleportation network, pulled by Guardians or people. There were scouts moving nearby, machines looking out for monsters. She saw Sentinels flying past above the many houses, inspired in part by no one else but her. *Lilith. The Godslayer.*

She smiled. *Guess you were right after all, Aki. I think I could do with some normalcy. My kind of normalcy.* Ilea turned around and flew into the forest, teleporting past the trees she had once ran by. Towards the dungeon where she had slain her first undead. When the world had felt more vast, and quite a lot more simple.

She was glad that the people had remained.

Knocking on the hidden door, she waited for a minute until it opened.

“Mistress. You have returned,” Weavy spoke into her mind. He wore a ragged black tunic and a cape. On his terrifying head sat a straw hat.

She couldn’t help but smile. *“Good to see you. Nice hat.”*

“Oh! Yes, it was a suggestion by one of the humans. To make me more, approachable. I am still not sure why such is necessary, but Celene seemed joyous,” Weavy explained.

Ilea grinned. *“That does sound like her. Can I come in?”*

“The Mistress does not ask. She owns all within this mountain, and beyond,” Weavy said and bowed, stepping aside with the gesture.

Ilea may have been slightly annoyed at his words in light of her recent conversations, but the hat really did make him more approachable.

She walked past whilst shaking her head ever so slightly.

“Mistress,” Weavy asked when they had reached the bottom of the stone stairs.

“What is it, Weavy?” she asked.

“What god have you slain?”

Oh. Right. “A big lamp fish in Kohr,” she answered. *“More interestingly, I fought a Storm Elemental recently.”*

“Splendid! Will you share your stories?” the demon asked.

"I'm supposed to take a break. Maybe later. What have you been up to in the past months?" she asked instead, walking next to the floating being.

The stone hallway looked just as drab as it had the first time she had stumbled upon it. Though there were a few more defensive enchantments. Nothing particularly dangerous, and the undead they met on the way let them pass without a fuss.

"Teaching the boy. And I've been asked to help in the west. Clearing out monsters. Well, until the machines arrived and took over that task. Far faster than I am. Green menaces. At least we still have the mountain," he spoke.

Ilea didn't want to tell him that the very core of the ancient Taleen army was right below them, under the very mountain he spoke of.

"Is Eyn here?"

"No, no. The boy left to receive basic studies in the Ravenhall Academy. Not that I agree. I can teach him all he needs to know," Weavy said.

"I'm sure a broad education is helpful. We're not in Kohr after all. There are quite a few things here that you know little about, and socializing is important," she said.

The demon grumbled something to himself, in a language she did not speak. *"You sound like Celene and Walter. What possible benefit is socialization to a mind mage? We bend the wills of others, and destroy the minds of those who would stand in our way."*

"And you sound like some of my class evolution descriptions," she said. *"Didn't you get to come here because we became friends?"*

"You showed your power, mistress. I had no choice but to follow," Weavy said.

"I'm not sure we'll find a consensus here," Ilea said with a smile. *"How's fishing?"*

The navuun lit up, as much as he could with the dark lack of eyes. *"The fish, are plenty! Mr Bones has recently excavated an underground cavern with his many gem blessed skeletons. I am trying to acclimate the fish from Kohr but it's proving difficult."*

"You could ask the Meadow," Ilea suggested.

"No. No. I shall find my own way, here in these caverns," the Mind Weaver said, touching the stone wall with an almost gentle hand.

Ilea found the sight peculiar, though she got the impression he was genuinely happy. She was glad he found something beyond killing and conquering, same as those brought here by Octavia.

She smiled to herself and looked away, continuing to follow the hallway towards the common room.

The same two undead protected the door, but she found they had gotten an upgrade in both armor and weaponry. They looked almost passable. She tried not to make a comparison to the knights she had fought earlier that day. It just wasn't fair. Ilea took in a deep breath and knocked on the door.

She entered and smiled at Walter, the man sitting at one of the tables with Indra and Lucia, the initiates occupying another table and engaged in a card game Ilea had played before, down below the city of Dawntree.

Six heads turned her way, brows and hands rising as greetings resounded.

It felt good, she found, to be back. Once again, with more stories, and a few more corpses.