

“What’s that... oh! A Taleen Centurion, quite interesting. Don’t they explode upon destruction?” Christopher asked.

“Arthur fought Centurions?” Ilea asked.

“There are always a few in the Taleen dungeons. They lack regeneration, which allowed us to take them out from a distance... with... minor losses,” he explained.

“I... see. I managed to overcharge it with damage, I guess it was dead before whatever switch was flipped to activate its self destruction. I sadly failed with the Praetorians,” Ilea said.

“Praetorian? That would be quite ridiculous. They were the only ones we couldn’t face at all,” Christopher commented.

Both of them approached and checked the machine.

“It’s still active,” Iana said.

“It’s alive?” Ilea asked.

“No. The self destruct enchantment. Let me... hmm... the sixth layer?” she asked, looking at Christopher.

“I believe it should be on the sixth, yes. You can simply remove the feedback rune and... yes, that’s it,” he said.

This is like shitty science fiction, Ilea thought as she watched the two. “Well I’ll leave you to it then. Put Aki inside if you can,” she said, looking at them again. “Maybe do it inside of a bunker. We wouldn’t want him to accidentally trigger that.”

Iana nodded. “We’ll remove that part entirely, don’t worry. The first three layers are completely fried... we’ll have to replace them,” she said.

Christopher stepped away. “We can use the schematics we took from the Guardian body. I have a lot of incomplete notes on Centurions too. The pieces often had remaining enchantments.”

“Good. Let’s get to work then,” Iana said.

“When should I come back?” Ilea asked.

Iana looked at her, a little confused. “Ah, the teleportation gate. Yes. Whenever you want. Give me a few hours to calm down though, I just want to rip it apart right now.”

“I understand,” Ilea said and chuckled, stepping out of the opening gates.

‘ding’ ‘Space Awareness reaches lvl 7’

...

‘ding’ ‘Space Awareness reaches lvl 9’

Quite successful for just a few hours, Ilea thought, wondering if the second tier could help with the gate even more.

She decided to use one of the training halls to work on her Armaments of Trials in combination with all her perception abilities and newfound Space Magic.

A few hours later, she asked Trian for some sparring help to increase her third Class skills, continuing to switch between training methods until she took out a group of Sentinels.

The next few days were spent on teleportation gate testing, training with both Trian and her Armaments, or simply with her Space Magic itself, and of course excursions with the Sentinels.

Now that they had their Classes, she had to interfere far less often than before. Even dangerous injuries could be healed, the mobility of early teleportation spells allowing the low level Sentinels to escape more often than not.

Whenever they couldn't, Ilea would swoop in to save the day. The constant protector lessened the experience her students gained but it was still valuable either way.

Trian took them out too, often with Claire in tow. He planned to have the first missions for the Sentinels quite soon. Missions where no guardian was present. Only perhaps a Guardian Medic.

Ilea relaxed on the terrace of the Golden Drake, enjoying a rich breakfast as she checked the gains of the past few days.

'ding' 'Force reaches lvl 16'

'ding' 'Force reaches lvl 17'

'ding' 'Space Shift reaches lvl 20'

'ding' 'Space Shift reaches 2nd lvl 1'

Passive – Space Shift – 2nd lvl 1

Space wields easier for you, allowing you to unravel its mysteries. Teleportation abilities can be used again 60.5% faster [121%] and you can travel 30.5% farther [61%].

2nd stage: Interrupt or stop an enemy teleportation spell within a distance of 10.5m. Cooldown and efficiency is affected by available teleportation spells. You cannot teleport while this skill is active.

Category: Space magic

Ilea had tested it briefly in one of her training sessions. The spell could be used whenever either Blink or Displacement were available. Neither skill could be cast while the disruption was in use.

The potency was quite high, Ilea managing to prevent Trian from teleporting entirely. She assumed it had something to do with Blink being high in the third tier. She did wonder if her having two spells increased the power of this ability, or if it would work against her own spells and resistances.

It would certainly come in handy against enemies constantly running away with teleportation.

'ding' 'Body of the Valkyrie reaches lvl 19'

'ding' 'Body of the Valkyrie reaches lvl 20'

'ding' 'Body of the Valkyrie reaches 2nd lvl 1'

Passive – Body of the Valkyrie – 2nd lvl 1

The flame of creation flows through your veins, increasing your resilience by 25.5% [229.5%].

Increases your physical damage resistance by 7.1% [63.9%]. Increases your magic damage resistance by 7.1% [63.9%]. You won't be fazed anymore by heavy damage or powerful sources of light and sound.

2nd stage: Your body has withstood incredible damage, endured the hardships of battle. The fires flowing through you have hardened your bones and muscles. Your health is increased by 5.1% [45.9%].

Category: Body enhancement – Space Magic

It had been quite simple to level the skill, Trian using his lightning against her without resistance or auras present.

In the second tier however, the progress had been nonexistent so far.

The health bonus was incredible of course, mostly thanks to the multipliers her Class provided.

‘ding’ ‘Space Awareness reaches lvl 10’

...

‘ding’ ‘Space Awareness reaches lvl 12’

Sadly, the leveling of her perception skill proved difficult, the progress they had made with the Teleportation gate slowing down steadily until she hadn’t gotten a single level in several hours.

At least the enchanters were getting closer, understanding the issues more as her perception increased. Even minute changes and fluctuations were now visible to her but she felt that like with her Ash manipulation skills, Space Awareness could not simply be brute forced.

Body of the Valkyrie had surprisingly provided the largest obvious change but Ilea hadn’t focused on her third Class alone.

‘ding’ ‘Soul Perception reaches lvl 3’

...

‘ding’ ‘Soul Perception reaches lvl 5’

‘ding’ ‘Deviant of Humanity reaches lvl 10’

Claire waved as she came out of the open doorway leading down into the Drake.

“I knew I’d find you up here,” she said, a smile on her face.

“The Administrator leaves her office. For what reason am I bestowed such honor?” Ilea asked, spreading a little bit of cream cheese on a halved bun of bread.

She smiled and moved one of the chairs to sit down. “Am I not allowed to visit a dear friend without reason?”

“You always have a reason. I’m the one visiting you without one,” Ilea said.

Claire frowned. “Yes. Disturbing my schedules every. Single. Time.”

“With world shattering information or artifacts,” Ilea retorted.

“That just makes it worse,” Claire said and sighed. “How do you like your resistance training free days?”

Ilea took a bite of the bun, chewed, and swallowed. “It’s quite relaxing actually. Feels a little like vacation. Experimenting with the new skills is quite interesting too. And I’m So close to a breakthrough with that damn armor, I can feel it.”

“The armor from your smith in the north?” Claire asked.

“Mhm,” Ilea said and continued eating, gesturing for the woman to help herself.

Claire smiled and took a plate, piling some bacon, cheese, grapes, and bread onto it. “Appreciate it,” she said.

[Mage – lvl 260]

“You progressed too I see,” Ilea mentioned.

“A little. We’re getting better. The idea with bringing Sentinels is quite efficient too. We can stay longer in the dungeons, injuries no longer cutting our stays short.”

“They did before?” Ilea asked.

“Not often, we’re generally quite careful. You out of all people should know though how dangerous it can be to face creatures far above your own level,” Claire said.

Ilea smirked, not saying anything as she continued eating.

“Something you might want to consider... your Sentinels are usually taken out in groups, both by you and us. They train in groups, spend their free time in groups. The bonds they share are a valuable thing,” she said.

“You’re talking about the plan to send them out with adventurer teams?” Ilea asked.

The woman nodded, eating a few grapes.

“It’s not set in stone. If they want to stay in their groups, why not? They can join expeditions or just do jobs themselves. I’m pretty sure half of them or a little less would be happy to work alone though,” Ilea said.

“Then you just have another mercenary order,” Claire commented.

“But they’re healers, doing adventuring work. There’s no rule against going into a dungeon with ten or twenty people. Or tackling the harder jobs with that number. I doubt it will be an issue. Plus, Trian will figure something out, I’m sure. Did you check on the Dawntree healers by the way?”

Claire nodded. “I suppose you’re right. It just bothers me a little... the lax way in which you treat your organization. I did check the names you mentioned. Not much came up in the search but I’ll find places for them. We will make sure they’re trustworthy and fitting before any are offered to join the Sentinels.”

“That’s good,” Ilea said. “Well I mostly just fund the organization. Or is this about the Hand? And your inability to use them as a personal military?”

Ilea laughed at the expression and the rolling eyes.

“I have the Shadowguard for that. Nor am I interested in a personal military. I’d rather rely on my own strength and that of those close to me. The new Classes... and the way you’re training them. These people aren’t ordinary, nor will their impact on the world be that of a measly adventurer or even a member of the Hand,” Claire said.

Ilea smiled. “Trust Trian a little more. We’re not just creating soldiers or powerful rogues. The ideals of the Sentinels are clear and as far as I know them so far, the students share those ideals. There will be those who seek personal revenge or go a little nuts, I’m sure. Nothing that a bit of disciplinary action can’t remedy.”

“A lot of them were wronged. I can’t fault them for potentially doing some selfish stupid shit. I did that too,” Ilea said.

“Hundreds could die,” Claire said.

“The keyword is could. I’d rather risk it with a more relaxed atmosphere, trusting them to have good judgment instead of using rigid rules and control to keep them in order. There are plenty of organizations around that do that already,” Ilea said.

Claire tapped the table with her finger, taking a sip of juice. “You’re not wrong. Doesn’t mean I entirely disagree. It’s your organization however. I just hope you’re ready to take responsibility if some things go wrong.”

“I will, and you know that,” Ilea said.

Claire looked at her, nodding slightly. “I apologize. I know you will. Of course I do. I just know how rash you can be. And I know that you have a soft spot for them. Now is the time to prevent a hunt for someone you once deemed a student or even a friend, because they were corrupted by their own power.”

“I appreciate your concern, Claire. But I’m not the same girl anymore that you met years ago. And neither are you the same woman from back then. I trust Trian. I trust his judgment and his feel for people. And still, I know the scenario you think of is not entirely impossible. Nor do I think it would be easy. Perhaps it’s rash but I like the way everything is structured right now. I’ll deal with it once such problems arise.”

Claire smiled, perhaps a little bitter. “And I’ll be there to support you. No matter what”

Ilea smiled. “Thank you.” She lifted a glass of juice. “To Ravenhall, a city that wouldn’t be the same without us.”

“It’d be a bloody ruin without you. Though I suppose I can give myself some credit in its prosperity,” Claire said, murmuring the last part.

Their glasses clinked together. Both ate in silence for a little while until Claire cleared her throat.

“I’m glad we could talk about this, Ilea. It is however not the only reason I came to see you,” she said and summoned a letter.

The paper itself looked expensive but what caught her eyes was the golden seal. A lily.

“It seems the name of Lilith has gained enough weight to warrant a reaction,” Claire said and handed the thing over.

“Interesting, so they finally write. Is it authentic?” she asked.

“I have no idea. It looks official enough but even we don’t know much about that organization,” Claire said.

Ilea formed a small dome of ash just in case the thing was some sort of assassination attempt.

Claire chuckled a little at that.

“What?” Ilea asked, opening the letter with an ashen limb.

“Nothing,” Claire said and drank some more juice.

Ilea took out the letter and looked at it. *Beautiful and steady handwriting.*

“Do you want to hear?” she asked.

“Of course,” Claire said and activated a few runed plates she casually threw around the table. Just in case someone was listening in.

“Esteemed Lilith, the Ashen Shadow of Ravenhall.

I have heard much about you in the past months, your name traveling to the inns of my town and beyond. Your exploits in Riverwatch are most impressive, as are your endeavors in the retaking and subsequent rebuilding of Ravenhall and its order of Shadows.

The Golden Lily is interested in making your acquaintance.

I formally invite you to join me for cake and tea in Myrefield, whenever it is convenient for you to do so.

In anticipation of our future cooperation,

Helena Pierrot”

The letter burst into bright golden flames as soon as she was done reading, the fire neither harming her nor creating any heat. The paper vanished nonetheless.

“I’m intrigued,” Ilea said.

Claire seemed thoughtful. “Because of the cake?” she asked absentmindedly.

“Mainly, yes,” Ilea admitted, watching the woman summon a booklet, flipping through pages until she found what she had been looking for.

“Helena Pierrot. The sole owner of the Heavenly Sweets, a baking business and unofficially an assassin guild,” Claire said. “Neither is deemed a threat to Ravenhall or the Shadow’s Hand it seems... based on past interactions and their general behavior.”

“Hiding an assassin order behind a bakery business... seems a little eccentric. Kind of funny though,” Ilea said, thinking of a baker coming to kill her. Weapons hidden within cupcakes.

“That isn’t really the case...,” Claire said, already with four books on the table. “Assassin guilds aren’t necessarily forbidden in many countries. This isn’t a front, it’s the main part of their business.”

“Really?” Ilea asked, trying to think back if she had ever seen one of their stores. Her memories came up blank.

“It’s the major provider of cake and baked goods for large parts of the whole human plains... there are even records of sales and connections to the northern planes, dwarven kingdoms, the independent cities of the west... however Ravenhall is suspiciously free of their services.”

“There are no records as to why they’re not in Ravenhall,” Claire said in a disappointed tone.

“Turns out our worst enemy is a bakery,” Ilea murmured.

“The information on the assassin part is scarce. With how successful their bakery business is, it’s very much possible that the same is true for the shadier part. Perhaps it IS just a front after all but I don’t want to think about the implications that would have,” Claire said.

“What do you think?” Ilea asked.

Claire looked at her. “It’s suspicious of course. And we have no clue what they want from you and Lilith. Them avoiding Ravenhall for one reason or the other would speak for apprehension of either the Elders or the Shadow’s Hand. You are beyond most of them, if not all,” Claire said.

“Arthur Redleaf was a member... and he wasn’t exactly at my current power. I think it’s safe to have a look at least. I can dispel the mark on your hand in case things get dangerous,” Ilea said.

“It could be a trap... perhaps we should be nearby. Myrefield is in the southern part of the empire but it’s not exactly close either,” Claire said.

“They’re an assassin order... if they wanted to kill me, there were hundreds of opportunities to do so. What if she really just wants to talk?” Ilea asked. “What reason do we have to think they know I’m looking for them? Or why?”

“It’s just sensible. With the Heavenly Sweets being behind just one person in their organization, we don’t know who else is part of it. The information network they must have is larger than anything else out there,” Claire said.

Ilea thought about it. “Then it’s in their interest to cooperate with me. If they know what I can do.”

“Or they prepared an elaborate trap, enchantments, and groups of mages countering your abilities just to take you down,” Claire said.

“Arthur was an asshole but he had a clear goal in mind. Getting the technology of the Taleen for humanity. Your records about this Helena don’t mention her as a threat. Which means either she’s too weak to be constituted one or her goals don’t collide with those of the Hand,” Ilea said.

Claire nodded. “Getting you as an ally makes much more sense, you’re right. I still want to have a team nearby. Just in case.”

Ilea nodded. “Four hours away, get a bunch of people that can fly. If I dissolve your mark, you come in. If I dissolve Trian’s mark, everything is alright.”

“That sounds reasonable. When do you want to go?” Claire asked.

Ilea thought about it. “I want to focus on the armor for a little while. A few days maybe. How long of a notice do you need?”

“Twenty minutes,” Claire said.

Ilea smiled. *So I’ll finally meet them.*