

Chapter 911 Blinding Light

Ilea watched the ongoing evacuation from above. The streams of people going through the streets of Riverwatch looked like an organized ant colony. She could imagine the disaster this whole ordeal would've brought without Aki and his machines. The defensive line reoriented itself according to the scouting information from the Watchers. By now there were hundreds of mages with perception and illusion breaking abilities present in and around the city, making sure another surprise attack would be much more difficult to accomplish.

Light rain still drizzled against her armor and wings as she waited. Owl had joined her side, the Greater Lich floating with an aura of death magic permeating her surroundings.

“Erik has returned from the Courts. He just arrived and is preparing barrier rituals collaborating with mages and enchanters of the Accords,” Aki sent to her. *“To all the Accords. Verleyna is approaching and will be visible in five to seven minutes. Our efforts are focused on evacuation. Remain at your designated defensive position and focus on destroying enemy spells and personnel that enter our territory.”*

“Do not engage. Be aware of provocations and tactics to undermine morale. We do not tolerate acts of war against our peoples. The Accords will stand. No matter the enemy. No matter their strength.”

Speeches of all things, Ilea thought and squinted her eyes. She saw a dot on the horizon, brighter than the dark clouds all around and the distant forests and mountains. And brighter it became.

Flashes lit up as beams of light and white lightning lashed out into the clouds, sent out from the distant speck in the skies.

Shock and awe, I guess, Ilea thought. *“Should we show them something too?”* she asked Aki.

“Let your strikes be real and no mere illusions to elicit fear,” the Executioner near her sent. *“Let them come closer.”*

A group of mages flew towards them, black masks covering their faces. They were accompanied by two Watchers. They split off towards different groups and positions, a few of them keeping their pace towards Ilea.

She identified the group and smiled. *“A little last minute, don't you think?”*

Feyrair hissed. The sound was one of respect, and one of anger. *“We are here to fight. Dragonslayer.”*

“Good,” she said and glanced at Isalthar. *“I guess he's finally going to get that fight.”*

The elf looked her way for a moment and focused back towards the flying fortress.

It closed in faster than she had thought, and it was much bigger than anything with any right to fly.

“The Sanvaruun is bringing our people to a fight that will bring nothing but death. And Verleyna with it,” he said. *“I hope that your barriers hold and this Eregar lives up to what he has promised.”*

Ilea now saw the outlines of the flying city. Circular with two dozen disk like platforms made of white stone that varied in diameter and width, a single spear like protrusion reached out of the

bottom like the tail end of a spinning top, entirely golden. She saw entire forests within the various layers, as well as buildings and lights, the highest level topped off with palace like buildings. All of it looked overgrown and as the city got closer, she could make out destroyed walls and dead trees, fissures in the platforms themselves, and missing windows that did not reflect any of the light.

“If this is where Verleyyna should fall,” Isalthar spoke and hissed, the elves nearby hissing in tune. “Then so be it.”

The lightning from the clouds around them paled compared to the bright white beams flashing out around the city, the daylight hidden behind the heavy and dark clouds replaced by the magic before them.

It really was a shame that she didn't have the opportunity to explore it all.

A single Destroyer moved away from the formation and from Riverwatch. An emissary perhaps, to what she thought was a lost cause. *“Why even send it out. It's just one more machine that gets destroyed.”*

“We are not the only ones watching,” Aki sent back. *“This is not just a battle to win, but a test and show for the Accords. Let the world know that we are not the aggressors. And let them know that even an Elven Domain will not impose its will upon us.”*

They watched the single Destroyer close in on the flying fortress, a broad beam of light flashing out to hit its hull. Soundless, the machine lit up and burned away, debris falling down towards the forests.

“The barriers are ready. Twenty thousand people left to evacuate,” Aki sent.

“Want me to help now?” Ilea asked.

“If you wish. But I'd rather have you closer to that fortress, stopping their spells. Wait with counterattacks until the evacuation is done. If you feel up to the task of countering Verleyyna itself.”

“Is that a challenge or a joke?” Ilea asked as she teleported forward, kilometers until she hovered between the two cities. *I tried dragonfire before,* she thought to herself as she saw the distant lights flash up, her precognition informing her of imminent attacks. *Let's see what this thing can do.*

Dale watched from atop the walls as the elven city drew ever closer. He could feel his stomach churning at the very sight of the flying wonder. Lightning flashed up into the skies, nearly blinding him, the heat felt despite the kilometers of distance. Machines and fighters of the Accords and Riverwatch were beside him, many of the lower leveled guards unwilling to forfeit their duties despite the risks. He knew that no place in the city would be safe, but fleeing to another town was out of the question. For him, and for many that he knew.

A beam of light slashed down towards the city, stopped by the bright blue light of a barrier covering the entirety of Riverwatch. Sizzling light burned against the thrumming barrier, until the light was

gone. Cheers and shouts came from all around. Another beam was stopped in mid air, long before it reached their home. Dale squinted his eyes, thinking he saw a tiny silhouette of wings before the beam, but the light was too bright for him to make sure.

He gulped, seeing the hundreds of lights flashing up throughout the layered fortress in the sky. A storm followed in the next moment, dozens of beams and arcs of lightning burned through the forests and into the bright flashing barrier. Seconds later, the skies darkened yet again, his eyes adjusting to find only darkness where the flying city had been.

Dale rubbed his eyes when he saw a single beam of light burn a hole through the darkness, a few more following in turn.

“Is that ash?” someone called out.

His eyes went wide. The cloud reached as far as he could see. Kilometers in each direction and growing still. Entire sections were burned away, weakened beams slamming down into the barrier or leaving trails of glowing heat and fire in the earth and forest. Pockets in the ash burned bright, punched through a moment later, only to reform.

“Is that her?” someone called out.

“Lilith!” a woman shouted, followed by cheers and shouts of her name.

“Dragonslayer!” another called out, shouts and laughter echoing over the walls as the fighters vented their pent up frustration and the stress of the sudden battle.

Dale took in a deep breath. “Order!” he shouted, his voice enhanced by his second Class. Other officers repeated the same throughout their ranks. Morale would remain high with all the power on display, but his guards had to remember where they stood, and who it was that attacked them. A single elf could cut through an entire station’s worth of fighters. If they planned to contribute anything at all, they had to work together, and stay focused.

So that is what you can do now, Ilea, he thought, wondering how he had ever seen her as just a lost young healer. All the fighting has paid off. He allowed himself a slight smirk, knowing that one of the friends he had made along the way was holding off the power of an Elven Domain.

Ilea grit her teeth as she pushed her ash and fourth tiers as far as she could go. And still, some of the beams made it through. Past her space magic, her gates, and the pyroclastic flow.

Two cards she had yet to play. Her Fourth Tier Meditation.

And the Primordial Flame.

So far she had not seen any of the elves fly out from the city, but she could see them waiting, preparing. Were they worried at all, she wondered? Had they expected no resistance at all, entirely confident that their marvel of a flying city would strike terror and fear into the creatures they deemed beneath themselves?

Were they afraid by now, manipulated or forced to fight by their Monarch? Or did they choose this as well? She wondered how many had started questioning the reign of the Sanvaruun since the start of this battle. None at all? Some? Or many?

She would've liked to talk to them. To convince them that this was all a bad idea. A misunderstanding of sorts. Nobody had to die. They could all go back to their own homes, could work together and find peace.

Ilea smiled to herself. She could appreciate the thought at least.

"The evacuation is done. Riverwatch is clear," Aki's voice spoke into her mind. *"You're free to let loose."*

Ilea took in a deep breath. She charged Monster Hunter and hissed, out and towards the flying city of the Sky Domain, the sound echoing past the spells, her ash, and the falling rain.

A single word of warning.

Flee.

She waited. Five seconds as more beams and lightning burned into her ash.

Then, she raised her arm and her storm of ash, smoke, and black glass moved forward, like an avalanche towards the city. Three spears the size of city walls formed within and shot out towards the fortress, one struck by lightning and the other two crashing deep into Verleyrna, trees and elves flattened alike. Her storm moved on, past the wind and past the lightning arcs, bright light coming to life when her ash touched the city, the light protecting its people like a mantle, born from a creator as powerful as her. She sent out heat stored and generated within her, ten thousand spears now flying out as the first elves rushed her, glowing up in embers when they entered the pyroclastic flow.

Dale watched the ash clouds slowly surround the massive flying fortress, light glowing within to illuminate the small spells cast by the defenders, their forms like small dots flaring up in the storm, as if mere cinders floating out from a campfire. The burning smoke was stopped by the light of the elven city itself, and still, it wrapped around like an unending avalanche as waves of heat flared up, singeing even the trees past the city walls, the blue barrier glowing brighter with every flare of heat.

A voice resounded in his mind. The voice of Aki.

"I have received a warning from Lilith herself. A warning to all who are watching this battle ensue. And I must ask you all to follow through. Your life may depend on it."

Dale gulped, seeing the light become more subdued, now that the entire flying city was surrounded by ash.

"Everyone," Aki sent. *"Close your eyes."*

Dale raised his brows but did as the being asked. He shut his eyes and waited.

He waited.

He took a breath.

He gulped.

And then he felt the heat. More than that. He knew it to be there.

Fire.

It felt like his very mind was alight. As if something, more, something, else, had appeared and looked at him. Not the gaze of a creature, but the presence of something not meant to be seen. He staggered back, raising his arms to cover his eyes as he sobbed. Someone nearby screamed but he couldn't focus on the voice.

Machines shuffled towards the screaming voice. *"Keep your eyes shut!"*

A distant rumbling noise came from somewhere in the skies. Explosions and faraway screams reached Dale's ears.

The presence was gone.

He felt the stone floor of the wall. Was he on his knees?

He puked, retching up his dinner and still he kept his eyes closed, on the off chance that whatever he had felt was still there.

"The spell has passed. Open your eyes," Aki sent, his voice slightly different. Had he not felt this before either? Something that Lilith had done?

He opened his eyes now. Careful, as if an enemy was waiting, one that could only strike at him if he saw. On his knees, he looked up and saw the fortress, burning in a thousand places, forests reduced to ash and buildings blackened. The light was gone. Stone once white splintered and broke off as the entire flying city came careening down.

Towards Riverwatch.

His eyes opened wide as he prayed to gods he did not know.

Ilea took in a deep breath. She had extinguished all her flames as soon as she felt the light magic of her enemy fade. She had won the battle.

And still, the fortress now flew down and towards the blue barrier cast around the city.

Probably shouldn't take any chances, Ilea thought as she summoned a wall of ash behind herself.

"Aki, I'll use a bit of fire again. Make sure nobody weak flies past and sees me."

Her hands raised, Ilea watched Verleyyna fall and activated Sunbound Creation. All of her Fourth Tiers were active now. She could see the frameworks all around. Could see the fabric of space, in all its intricate perfection. She saw the flying city of Verleyyna, and focused on its entire form.

And then, she pushed. Sweat burned away on her brow, the weight and momentum of the fortress pushing against her form within her own creation. She could feel her muscles tense, her every cell burning with cosmic energies, the Primordial Flame ever present.

The city slowed and yet it did not stop. But it didn't have to.

She pushed back and let it all descend onto the forests bordering Riverwatch and the mountain itself. It felt slow to her, senses enhanced with every spell that she had. And still, a shock wave of debris shot out as the city grounded, the golden tail cutting deep into the earth and stone before it snapped and shot aside, cutting down half a forest before it crashed. Entire layers of the city were crushed below its own weight, surviving elves flying out to save themselves.

Minutes passed as the wave crashed against the bright barrier around Riverwatch, the elves flying or remaining on the higher layers of the city, unmoving and watching the burning speck of light hovering above their ancient city.

Ilea released her spells and took in a deep breath. It smelled of fire, dust, and ash. Looking back, she saw the hovering army of the Accords. It was calm.

Flying down, she landed on the flattened battlefield, burnt and splintered wood, rocks, and debris covering the dug up earth.

Verleyyna remained, now unmoving, sitting against the mountain of Karth, one part just about touching the walls of Riverwatch.

She waited on the ground and looked at the elves hundreds, some thousands of meters away. None of them moved as an Executioner came down next to her, followed by representatives of the Accords and the Cerithil Hunters.

Helwart slapped his saw weapon into the large hand of his war machine. "Is it done then?"

"Not quite," Isalthar said and floated forward, their attention moving to a single figure burning with bright light and fire, flying down from the uppermost layer of the fortress city. A roar of magic came with him.

The Monarch landed with a crash, spitting out blood before he raised his chin and glared at Isalthar. He hissed, hate and vitriol almost palpable, his sharp teeth bared with his magic permeating everything around them with light and heat.

Flowing blonde hair, near white, and golden eyes. His black shirt and pants were ripped in places, regenerating wounds showing below.

Cuts and scratches? Blades and... claws, Ilea thought as she focused. She felt instantly that this was not who she had faced just now. She felt powerful magic from the Monarch, but not something that remotely compared to the power of Verleyyna.

She realized he wasn't looking at her.

"The Val Akuun," the Monarch spit. "Finally, showing your face."

"Is this what you wanted, old friend?" Isalthar spoke, his voice traveling far, infused with his winds. "Our city in ruins. Our people, injured and dead."

The Monarch grinned and hissed once more. “Humans and dwarves, and machines... you stand with beasts, Val Akuun. You have nowhere to run. Face me.”

Ilea saw Isalthar move. She stepped past him.

“You don’t have to do this,” she said.

He looked at her and touched her shoulder. “This battle has always been inevitable. His hunt will not subside until a victor is decided. And for what I have done, I will take responsibility.”

“You’re being ridiculous. They lost,” Ilea sent, to all her allies.

“Look at them, Ilea. They are waiting. None have joined to fight beside their Monarch,” Isalthar sent into her mind.

Ilea looked at the white eyed wind healer. *“Then let me fight in your stead. I’ve done the same that you have. If he’s declared you his enemy, I sure as hell qualify.”*

Isalthar looked at her for a moment. “You would take this fight upon yourself?”

“Gladly,” Ilea spoke.

“Deviant. This is between me and the Val Akuun,” the Sanvaruun spoke, no recognition in his eyes as he glared at her with hatred.

“I know,” she said, and changed her title.

He looked at her, a low hiss resounding as light and fire glowed bright around his form.

Isalthar hissed. “I do not wish to shed the blood of my kin. So be it. Lilith, of the Accords. Guardian of Cerith, and Val Akuun,” he said, his voice infused to carry far. “May you be victorious.”

“You don’t have to do this alone. He’s a Monarch. Our position is superior,” Helwart said.

“The elves of the Sky Domain are watching. Many more will die if he is not faced by one alone,” Feyrair sent. *“And she has the best chance of winning.”*

Ilea cracked her neck and walked towards the Monarch. “Besides,” she said. “I’ve been waiting a long time for this.”

“What have you done? Child of death... and... ash... Val Akuun,” the Monarch spoke, his eyes going wide. “You?”

“A human,” she said and locked eyes with him.

[Light Mage – lvl 1028]

The Monarch hissed as magic surged around him once more.

Ilea teleported everyone else back towards the city, standing with gritted teeth as she held her ground against the space magic slamming into her.

“I hope that’s not the extent of your power, Monarch,” Ilea said. She hissed, the sound infused with Monster Hunter. “I expect you to live up to that title.”