

Chapter 700 Bets

“Here you go, all on Lilith,” Ilea said and took off her bracelet. She funneled in seven hundred gold coins, leaving seventy just in case. “How do I allow you to access it?”

“Need to touch me, then connect the mana flow with me,” he said.

She did as he said, the process mostly intuitive before she handed him the bracelet.

The dwarf rushed off as Grat the Destroyer greeted his rabid fanbase. He held up his mace to roaring cheers before he slowly turned towards his opponent.

Verena had left the shoulder, now standing next to Ilea. “So Class level is taken into account.”

Ilea nodded. “Seems like it, yeah. Can’t wait to find out who my opponent is. Kinda want to go against Pierce but she’d just leave her armor behind and annoy the shit out of me until I did the same.”

“You’re learning. Good,” Verena mused and sipped on her drink.

The dwarf returned thirty seconds later and handed back the now empty bracelet. “Back in time,” he murmured.

“Thanks,” Ilea said. “How are the odds anyway?”

“Ten to one,” Bralin said with a smile.

“They can pay that out if I win?” she asked, her brow raised.

“No. Probably not. But you’ll be able to get treasure, housing, or just debt with culminating interest,” he said.

Ilea nodded to herself as she watched Grat walk towards the Elder, each slow step menacing and supported by the cheers of hundreds.

Pierce seemed to be done with the games and raised her sword, a dozen floating bolts of lightning forming around her as she took flight, armor and all. Her speed wasn’t as ludicrous as without all the weight but compared to the large machine of her opponent, it hardly mattered.

She rushed towards him and slowed, moving to the ground where she landed with bent knees. Her bolts impacted the heavy armor, scorching a few bits as lightning dissipated.

Gravity, of course, Ilea thought.

Pierce had stopped entirely, her armor shaking lightly as she struggled to look up at her opponent.

Grat stepped closer and raised his mace. “Goodbye, Dragonkiller,” his voice resounded, the weapon coming down, pulled by gravity magic.

The woman stepped aside right when the mace impacted the ground, her movement still slowed but fluid. Stone was cracked and broken, bits and pieces flying out. Pierce touched the metal weapon with her armored hand. “Just kidding,” she said as lightning flared up around his mace, the energy traveling up and towards the large machine’s arm.

He let go before it reached him, taking a step back as Pierce advanced on his legs.

She evaded a stomp and cut into the steel with her blade. Flashes of lightning flared up, her laughter resounding as she increased the frequency of her strikes.

“I thought you were the berserker,” Ilea mused, watching the elder strip away steel from the machine’s leg bit by bit.

The crowd had calmed down, murmurs and complaints audible with a few now much louder cheers. Bralin was one of them, his voice bellowing through the vicinity, mixing in with the mad laughter of Pierce.

The leg nearly came off when the massive machine reached down with two swiping arms. He grabbed the smaller war machine and started pressing down, magic near visible around his grip.

Bad idea, Ilea thought as Pierce quieted down.

The Dragonkiller made her sword vanish, her arms restrained as she tilted her head to the side. Then her entire armored form burst into bright blue lightning. She pushed aside the hands holding onto her, the large war machine staggering back a step. Pierce raised her arms, all the energy around her now coursing through her own armor, bits of steel fell off, her entire form slightly squished by the gravity magic of her opponent. She raised her arms and brought them forward, a flash of blue light flaring up in a beam of lightning that cut into the chest of the large war machine.

She shrugged her shoulders, more pieces falling off. She flicked her wrist with sword in hand, lightning once more flowing through the steel as she advanced on the damaged machine. A single powerful strike severed the last bit connecting his leg to the foot. Pierce jumped on top of her falling foe and raised her sword towards the machine’s neck.

Grat raised both arms in response, one pierced by the sword and the other grabbing one of Pierce’s armored legs. Lightning coursed through him as he brought her war machine down on the stone ground. He flicked his wrist to get rid of the sword, the blade clattering to the floor as he turned around, unable to stand up due to his missing leg. He still held on to the lightning charged war machine. Raising his arm, he proceeded to slam her down into the ground. Again and again, more bits and pieces flying off.

Ilea looked to his shoulder and smiled. *That probably won’t make you very popular*, she thought, seeing the smiling Elder watch as her war machine got reduced to a crangled mess.

The woman waited until the large machine had worked down the stolen armor to an empty husk of bent and broken steel. She jumped up to his head and ripped the thing off with her bare hands. Lightning charged as he raised his arms, letting go of her armor’s remains before a bright burst of lightning burned down into the insides of his war machine.

Pierce stepped back onto his nape as the thing came crashing down with a loud clatter. She hopped off to boos and cheers alike. The woman grabbed the remains of her armor and dragged it along before she bent down and raised the massive sword without issue. She smiled as it once more flared up with bright and crackling lightning. Her armor vanished into her storage before she hefted the massive sword with both hands.

The crowd shouted obscenities as she proceeded to cleave off chunks of her enemy’s armor, with all the grace of an experienced butcher. Her sword vanished too before she reached into a cut open section and dragged out the body of Grat himself, a large and muscly dwarf. She threw him aside and raised her fist in triumph.

Bralin grinned, the show apparently just enough to change the overall mood of the crowd.

Healers jumped down to check the dwarf but Ilea had already made sure he was fine. They were in range of her dominion after all. And as it turned out, Pierce could be surprisingly moderate in her application of magic.

“She did well,” Bralin said.

“Her war machine was thrashed,” Ilea mused.

“Yes. It added to the show,” the dwarf said. “I might even get my winnings.”

All about the show, hmm?

The announcer started up again about ten minutes later.

“And now for another spectacle. A newcomer to the arena, one taking the name of a southern myth from human lands. Lilith herself,” the speaker said.

Most everyone just talked amongst themselves, sharing what they had heard or thought her to be.

Ilea couldn't hear a single conversation suggesting that she was the one to fight the Soul Wardens.

Just that hard to believe hmm?

She stood up and downed the rest of her ale. The jug vanished as she cracked her neck.

“Do you want to know anything about your opponent?” Bralin asked. “You just bet a ridiculous sum of gold on winning.”

“If they manage to beat me, they deserve the gold,” Ilea said and vanished. She summoned her armaments in the split second she appeared in. A few observant watchers would've surely spotted her hooded form but she didn't much care. After this fight was over, the name of Lilith would likely spread one way or the other. And she planned to somehow get the Taleen key through these arena battles. *Just gotta win until I beat the current Champion. That should do it.*

“... will have the unfortunate task of facing none other than Omdir Stonewirt!” the announcer finished, the whole Dome erupting in cheers when the name left the sound enhancing enchantments.

Ilea looked around through the slit in her helmet. Her weight increased slowly as she prepared for the fight. She didn't plan to cast any of the flashy spells she had used to fight the Soul Wardens, but if the guy managed to push her far enough to force her, she wouldn't hold back.

“In celebration of the Soul Warden defeat, Omdir will once again grace us with his magic and expertise. The first battle of many, so make yourself comfortable and feast on the might that is living steel itself!”

Ilea watched as a dwarf casually flew down onto the stone grounds. He wore well made clothes but nothing flashy, emerald eyes taking her in as he landed. Long braided black hair and a trimmed but thick beard adorned his face. The dwarf nearly reached her height, muscles clearly visible despite his modest attire, scars on his face well hidden but present. The way he landed alone already told her quite a lot about the control he had over his body. His heartbeat remained calm, none of the loud cheering, the excitement of battle, or the opponent in front of him fazing the dwarf in the slightest.

“Lilith of the south, I greet you,” he said and bowed his head.

She did the same in her armor. “Omdir of the north,” she said.

The look in his eyes turned curious, then cautious. Changes so slight she could only tell thanks to both her enhanced eyes and her dominion. *Feels like I can judge his expertise but he can tell which shoelace I prefer to tie first*, she thought with a smile.

They were too far away from each other for identify as of yet but they both had learned quite a bit about the other already.

He spread his arms, a thrum of magic spreading out with him at the center. His eyes turned serious as dark steel formed around him. A creator. He floated up by a meter, the steel turning into arms and legs, a helmet. Chunks of enchanted tech appeared from a storage item of his, all of it incorporated into the growing form of a war machine three meters in height but somewhat slender in design. Compared to most others Ilea had seen so far at the very least. It reminded her more of Terok's design.

The armor came together, links flowing into each other with perfect seams, his vitals covered in several layers of enchanted metals that glowed bright within her dominion. Before it was all covered by another layer of dark created steel.

He raised his open palm to the crowd. Everything went quiet.

Not just a dwarf. A legend, Ilea thought with a broad grin. *What a perfect first stage*, she thought, unable to crack her neck within her living armor but the thought was there.

The magical light of the Forged Dome reflected off his armor in mesmerizing patterns. Parts of it seemed to absorb the light entirely while others shimmered with brilliant flowing motions. He walked towards her with slow steps, his demeanor not yet suggesting battle.

Ilea mimicked his behavior, her steps slow and heavy compared to his light and downright nimble ones. *Speed could be a problem. Him being a creator and all, his suit isn't just plates of steel but comparable to my mantle. Ah well. It'll be a good show anyway. And I can slow him down if it gets too annoying. Not like many would recognize let alone connect space manipulation to anything I did back with the Wardens.*

They stopped a few meters opposite each other. His machine had no eyes, the helmet a design of links and plates.

[Nulram Steel Mage – lvl 330]

“Impressive,” she sent to him through her telepathy. *“And you seem to be some kind of local legend.”*

The crowd remained quiet.

“A three mark human. I didn't dare hope you would live up to the tales. But it seems I was mistaken. Let us show them what it means to do battle, Lilith,” the dwarf sent back, his voice steady.

Is that a hint of excitement? She raised her arm and summoned her Blade of the Warden, the steel glowing with heat before lines of molten rock formed on the length of it.

“Ready when you are,” she sent.

The large war machine bent down and jumped back, landing with barely an impact nearly thirty meters away. Dense magic flowed around his arms as he prepared his spells, blades of steel appearing from thin air all around him.

Barriers flickered to life at the edge of the stands, finally connecting above to cover the entire field.

Guess we can let loose, Ilea thought and looked at her glowing lava blade. It wasn't quite as impressive as her fire one but it would do. She considered using her ice and earth manipulation to send a few projectiles his way but seeing the dozens of blades floating in unison above his machine made her pause. She didn't want to insult his ability. He knew she was a three mark.

And so she pointed her sword at him and started walking.

The crowd stayed quiet until Omdir raised his arm. A bright sphere of light formed in front of his massive steel palm. It glowed with a sun like radiance before a beam expanded outwards and struck her leg near instantly.

Ilea raised a brow. He was testing her defenses. *How considerate*, she thought with a smile. *But you will learn, Omdir of the Pit*. The spell he used reminded her of the Elven Monarch she had encountered.

His beam barely managed to leave any noticeable damage. He moved the ongoing spell to her chest and put more mana behind it.

She kept her steps slow, her healing now occasionally activating to repair the slight damage from the powerful sun beam. She watched him add his other hand, the intensity of the spell doubling. Ilea didn't slow. Neither did she raise a hand or form a shield.

"This one really challenged the current champion?" Verena asked. She swirled her glass and took another sip, a third of the bottle already gone.

Bralin nodded, his arms crossed in front of him as he watched the ridiculous display. Everyone around them was shouting and cheering.

The barrier barely obscured the fight, Omdir starting with his usual single beam against opponents he had not fought before. Anyone who failed against it would be deemed unworthy to be his opponent. Evading the spell entirely was nearly impossible, only a few in the Pit even capable of such a feat.

Bralin wondered if Ilea could dodge the spell with speed alone, without her armor that was and he had only seen her fighting without it once. The flying stone and debris the Meadow had summoned had certainly been fast but he was somewhat sure that light magic moved faster. It didn't seem to matter either way, the living armor advancing with casual steps as the beam continued to intensify.

Some of the people around them were questioning her decision not to create or summon a shield of some sort, just to avoid a part of the damage.

They have no idea how terribly outclassed Omdir is in this battle, Bralin thought when the dwarf stopped his beam. His evaluation was done, Lilith was an opponent he would face with everything he had. The crowd knew it too, excitement palpable as everyone who had watched with a hint of interest now switched their whole attention to the fighting pit.

Ilea didn't stop her approach, her opponent now moving too. He kept the distance between them the same as the flying blades above his machine started to glow with light. He sent them flying, dull impacts resounding a moment later when the projectiles clashed with the heavy living armor.

Some were deflected, but nearly thirty managed to gain purchase. None sunk in quite to the hilt but some managed to get about halfway there.

"Not bad," Verena murmured. "He's around our level you said?"

"Yes, but his blades are notoriously dangerous. Everyone who fought against him either evaded or blocked his steel with their own magic. Nobody has just... taken them in such a direct approach. Well, Halwart did... to an extent," Bralin explained. The reaction of the crowd was amusing, but he couldn't quite share the same wonder. Not after having seen her fight with everything she had.

Omdir raised his arm in an attempt to lift her up by the blades stuck in her armor but the effort seemed to fail. Ilea still walked towards him, her left hand now ripping out metal stuck within her. She threw them aside, the steel clattering to the ground before it started floating once more.

"What is she doing?" Bralin asked, watching as the blades now moved in horizontal patterns. The edges glowed with light, cutting into the living armor in a storm of steel. The whistling sound of hundreds of impacts was audible even through the barrier.

Verena glanced his way before she once again appeared on his shoulder. "He was testing her before," she said. "Now it's her turn."

Ilea ripped out another six blades, their power diminishing greatly once the light magic stored within was gone. She could absorb a part of it with Sentinel Core once they were close enough. None had managed to get to her mantle yet but she assumed it was just a matter of time. There were simply too many attacks happening at the same time for her to repair the whole of her massive armor.

Compared to the monsters she faced below, Omdir would go for the throat. He wouldn't melt half her armor or try to cut through her entire helmet. He would try and get to her real head, heart, or spine. Already she recognized the concentrated effort to find weak spots as he cut away on her regenerating defense. *But you'll need more than that.*