

Chapter 646 Speaker

The flight to the southern mountains took longer than Ilea had expected. *I'm too used to my own awesomeness*, she thought, having to slow herself down behind the flying formation.

Around her flew about two dozen Paladins and Inquisitors, some carrying healers, others more warriors. A large part of the higher leveled members of the Corinth Order were here.

“What do you think?” Kyrie asked, flying close by.

“I don't know these people. You tell me,” Ilea answered.

Joel grinned, sparks flaring up on his lightning wings. “The Speaker is strong, but he's not a fighter. The Inquisitors he got on his side are who they should worry about.”

“There are too many unknowns. Bryce had to choose a frontal attack if they want to save the honor of their Order and any resemblance of pride,” Kyrie said, his shadow wings barely moving.

“Frontal attacks work,” Joel said. “Lilith just showed as much.”

“The Speaker isn't a mindless beast. He knows about everyone here and he knows this is not a fight he can win,” Kyrie said.

“His plans failed. The longer they wait, the longer he can prepare,” Ilea said.

“Yes. And yet a risk remains. I'm worried about the cards he has yet to play. Nathanael will be desperate. He isn't a man known to lose,” Kyrie said.

“Ah, you worry too much brother, as always. Bryce will slaughter anything the Speaker can throw at them,” Joel answered.

“Soon we'll see,” Ilea said. “How long until we're there?”

“Twenty more minutes at this pace,” Kyrie said.

She rolled her eyes.

“You didn't have to come, you know?” Joel said with a smile. “But to be honest, you're the reason I'm not worried in the least.”

“Why are you two even here? Shouldn't you be protecting the king? What if this is all a massive diversion and the city is being attacked instead?” Ilea suggested.

“It isn't,” Kyrie said. “Should there be a danger here to Halstein or Kroll, we will take care of it. And if we can't, we have the highest chance of getting out alive.”

“And someone has to keep these lunatics in check, right Bryce?!” Joel shouted, laughing when the Paladin didn't react.

“I thought you trained with him before,” Ilea said.

“He's usually not that tense and serious. That man was so ready to slaughter those demons with his group of holy warriors until you stole the moment. Brilliant fireworks by the way, maybe we should hire you for our next festival,” Joel said.

"I charge exorbitant rates," Ilea answered in a dry tone.

"We'll just pay you in food. I hear you ate up half our coffers worth," Joel replied. "Wish I would've been there for the betting."

"Betting?" Ilea asked.

"How much you would eat. I hear Kyrie lost a month's worth of pay," Joel said happily.

His brother frowned but didn't comment.

"Why weren't you there then?" Ilea asked.

He grumbled something and Kyrie replied in his stead. "He's banned from any event involving general nobility. For good reason."

"It only happened twice," Joel said, shaking his head.

"What about Jeanne?" Kyrie asked.

"Ah yes... Jeanne. Okay three times. No reason to be so strict. I've already missed dozens of events," Joel said.

"We're not allowed to participate anyway. You had your fair share in the kitchens, I'm sure," Kyrie said, his words figuratively cutting his brother apart.

Ilea smiled. "You've been at this for a while, hmm?"

"Our first battle was in our mother's womb," Joel said.

Kyrie just groaned.

The lightning mage grinned. "I won."

"Your poor mother," Ilea said.

"Yeah. She died," Joel said, dodging the knife thrown by his brother. "Decades later, in her own bed. Don't act like that Kyr, you know she despised us."

"And here you are, confirming her opinions," Kyrie answered. "Enough of this. Focus, we should expect an ambush."

The three were flying at the rear of the loose formation, Bryce in the middle and now gesturing for the troop to land.

"Attack on foot?" Joel asked.

"They will expect an aerial strike," Kyrie said.

"Just send in Lilith and be done with it," Joel grumbled.

"What could one helpless woman ever do?" Ilea asked.

The man chuckled to himself.

They all landed in the lightly forested area, mountains rising up in the distance, the chain that separated the plains from the Isanna desert to the south.

Ilea smiled, taking in the fresh air after being in the city and stuffed halls for a while. Her armor active, she stalked the group of fast moving holy warriors, the same who would've likely tried to

kill her had the plan of the Speaker worked out. *Space magic to the rescue*, she thought, watching both Joel and Kyrie move to the side and farther back, their own orders likely suggesting they don't participate in the thick of the coming battle.

Ilea herself didn't have that restriction. She had shown her might against the demons, a part of it at least but based on the fear she saw in the warriors' eyes and the discomfort she felt all around, it was more than enough. They knew not to mess with her or hers, both Kroll royalty and the Corinth Order itself. *To think they were the ones going as far as hunting healers not associated with an Order*, she thought, looking at the backs of the armored people.

They didn't seem particularly impressive or dangerous to her but she knew her views were a little skewed. Based on her talks with Donnavon, Mateo, and Bryce, she could see the Corinth Order becoming a more progressive part of human society. No healer would have to fear them or any other Order anymore, not with the Sentinels around. Gael could likely take on Bryce already, and time would only increase their might.

Still have the Order of Balance to visit. But they seem less problematic overall compared to all the shit Orders I've met so far. The Azarinth weren't exactly anything more than just powerful either.

The Corinth warriors at least seemed disciplined and experienced, even those who couldn't fly not making a lot of sound as they rushed up the slope.

Naomi couldn't help but glance back from time to time. The royal guard had long distanced themselves from the loose formation but Lilith was right there, easily keeping up. She looked so different now. When she had first met her in the sewers, the woman seemed cocky and bored, a pretty normal adventurer besides the respect she somehow managed to instill in Bryce and Donnavon. Entirely justified of course, as she learned just a few hours earlier.

Her eyes weren't particularly focused, her entire body covered in the dark ash armor lined with now dulled embers. They had seemed brighter before, when she used those fire spells to slaughter the demons. A few of the Paladins who had faced the creatures before had warned the others of the savagery and resilience of the creatures. Naomi wondered how this woman managed to get the power she now wielded. A pact with a powerful creature? Some ancient class that allowed her to bypass dangers in battle? There had to be something. Some reason why the gods allowed for this to happen.

Perhaps she herself was sent to us by Hella herself? To guide us? To let us see the corruption within, to unearth the horrible plans of Nathanael? Is this what a god looks like? she wondered, glancing back again to see the blue eyes looking forward, almost bored. *Of course she would be bored, dealing with us mere mortals.*

Lilith's steps were loud. Her armor must weigh quite a lot, and yet she kept up without any discernible struggle. Naomi hadn't heard her complain or breathe louder at all.

Bryce signaled to hold.

Naomi stopped behind a tree, looking up at the steep slope, no obvious path leading up to the fort visible a few kilometers away. She had seen it before, but only inquisitors trained within its halls.

Lilith stopped in the middle of their formation, not hiding at all as she looked up to the fort, her eyes moving slightly as if she was scanning the walls.

“Eight people patrolling. They will see us approach,” she said.

Bryce looked back as if the woman didn’t just claim to see people that far away. “Understood. The plan was never to attack without being seen. This angle will make it difficult for their spells to benefit from broad impacts. Highest levels to the front, prepare for battle, brothers and sisters.”

Naomi unsheathed her two handed sword. She could tell that Lilith’s earlier presentation had taken the wind out of their sails, even Bryce not sounding quite as boisterous as before. *It is our own we will face*, she thought and steeled herself for the coming battle.

“Prepare for anything. Try to disable and capture where you can but don’t hesitate to kill. They are traitors to our gods,” Bryce added, his own sword in hand now. “Lilith, what will you do?” he asked, turning towards her.

Everyone else glanced at the woman. They knew what she was capable of and yet it was they who had to fight this battle. To prove that the Corinth Order wasn’t entirely without honor. Naomi would understand it if Lilith simply ignored their wishes. She had no reason to cooperate, and yet it didn’t look like she was particularly worked up.

She shrugged. “I move with your formation, and take care of enemy spells.”

Bryce nodded lightly, looking up towards the fort before he turned to her again. He seemed to consider before he turned back forward. “Warriors of the Corinth Order. Today we prove our worth. A time for grief will come, but not today,” he said and paused, stepping out into the open with his sword held high. “Charge.”

Naomi rushed forward, spells flaring up within her, strength and speed surging as her steps crashed against the stone. Magic flared up within her weapon, a dull white glow visible as she advanced, wings of magic appearing on her back in case she needed to dodge upwards. To her left and right her brothers and sisters ran, no shouts and screams announcing their charge. There would be no glory today.

Magic lit up on the distant and high walls of the fort, spheres of fire coupled with large chunks of stone rushing out to hit their position.

“Brace!” a few people shouted.

Naomi was ready to dodge when the projectiles stopped in the air, flying back towards the fort instead. *What?*

She looked around, still running. The other warriors were just as confused. Her eyes fell on Lilith, her black wings moving silently. *Was it her? Who else could it be? The kingsguard? Did someone get a spell she didn’t know about?*

It didn’t matter, Naomi allowing herself a smile. The gods were with them, one way or another.

Ilea displaced a few more rounds of spells flying towards the group, her aim on the return fire not particularly good. *Practice makes perfect*, she thought, watching a few fireballs and stone projectiles impact the still distant walls. She couldn't see the people atop the defensive structures particularly well, but their red armor stood out enough for her to make them out.

She considered sending a few ashen spears at the defenders, blasting their entire fort to bits with her gathered heat but she stopped herself. The way Bryce had asked her to let them fight, it had been desperate. Hopeful. A chance to redeem himself. Yes, they had tried to kill her, but the Paladin himself had nothing to do with that. She would respect his wishes. As far as they were informed, their group vastly overpowered the defensive side, making the choice for her far easier.

Let's just help prevent unnecessary deaths here and there, she thought, keeping herself in the middle of the formation.

They reached the Fort less than a minute later, the high leveled humans pushing forward with magically enhanced bodies and wings on their backs.

Paladins carried Inquisitors, all landing on the walls with their weapons and spells at the ready, clashing with the defending side as blasts started to impact the Fort from within. Steel hit steel as people shouted and screamed.

Ilea caught a warrior who had taken a fiery blast against his chest right when he had landed. She healed the confused combatant and threw him back, watching him land with a practiced roll before he slashed into the mage who had gotten him before.

He looked up and saluted her way before he jumped down into the yard below.

Both sides had their own healers, not direct participants in the battle but taking care of the injured. It seemed neither side targeted them. Not intentionally at the very least.

Ilea appeared in front of a young woman clad in a white robe trying to heal an Inquisitor's severed arm.

The healer looked up and nearly stumbled back when a large boulder impacted Ilea's back, deflected to the side before it crashed against a set of stone stairs.

She checked the people around her with her dominion, but found it unnecessary. Bryce's force entirely overwhelmed the defenders in a matter of a few minutes, most of them severely injured and captured, some even laying down their weapons when they saw the Head Paladin charging towards them.

He really was a different beast compared to everyone else present. Moving faster, hitting harder, white lightning spells disabling entire groups of Inquisitors. Bryce didn't hesitate, giving orders here and there as his paladins dismantled their foes.

Mostly Inquisitors, Ilea noted. Few of them were above level two hundred, and those who were, Bryce took out with quick teleports and flurries of attacks. They knew their own, and who would pose a danger.

Ilea saw a hooded figure appear below them, within the storage halls of the Order's installation. She transferred herself down and grabbed the man's hand, stopping his attempt to set something alight with his torch.

"No... you mustn't!" he shouted.

Ilea looked at the crate next to her and found it covered in dark powder. "Explosives I assume?" she asked.

"Friede, welcome me within your arms..." the man murmured as magic gathered around him.

They both appeared up in the yard in the next split second, a surge of fire flaring out of the man's left hand, aimed at where the crates would've been a moment earlier.

Instead the flames enveloped Ilea, a flick to his head knocking the man out as his body slapped backwards and against the stone ground.

"Bryce, explosive powder below the yard. Expect the worst," she said, loud enough that the Paladin would hear her.

He nodded her way. "Gather the prisoners. The ten highest Veterans with me, everyone else retreat to the treeline!"

The warriors followed his orders immediately, gathering up all the survivors and healers before they rushed to jump over the walls.

Bryce moved towards the large double doors leading deeper into the structure, charging at them with his shoulder forward.

A loud impact resounded when the gates exploded inwards, wood splintering and crashing against the stone walls within.

Ilea followed the remaining paladins, staying behind them to make sure they wouldn't shit their pants at her presence alone.

She felt the attack coming when she passed the threshold, turning her head back.

Oh.

The entire stone yard exploded upwards, fire intermingling with wood and stone as debris and heat shot out.

Ilea displaced their entire group down the hallway and deeper into the structure, deflecting incoming stone bricks and half a stairwell with ash where they appeared.

The paladins stumbled and caught themselves, a few of them unfazed by the experience as they checked the hall for threats.

"Entrance is sealed," one of them reported.

"No shit," Ilea said, looking at the ceiling that seemed to hold on to structural integrity with its dear life.

"Move," Bryce said, the group rushing forward and deeper into the installation.

Ilea remained for a moment, hearing dulled impacts as half the Fort came down onto the mountain side and whatever remained of the structure itself. *Wish I could've seen that from outside*, she thought, wondering if she had just seen black powder in Elos.

A few teleports brought her back behind the Paladins who methodically checked every room.

They soon reached an expansive carved out hall deep in the mountain, what seemed to be the last defensive line of Nathanael's Inquisitors waiting for them. And perhaps the man himself, standing behind a loose line of twelve warriors.

He wore the white robes of the High Clerics, a short gray beard covering his chin. His blue eyes immediately fell onto Ilea, despite the large armor of the Paladins ahead.

"Just as I preached. The demon has turned our brethren against us," he said, his voice deep, laced with disappointment. His eye twitched as he turned his attention to the Head Paladin. "Bryce. Has her magic poisoned your mind?"

"You have conspired to murder High Cleric Donnavon, to kill Lilith, and spark a conflict with Ravenhall. To think you would steep so low as to summon demons," Bryce said, his eyes focused on the man. "Former Speaker. And Inquisitors. Lay down your weapons and be judged before our gods. Or forfeit all that you swore to be," he said and readied his sword.

"We stand with you, Speaker," one of the Inquisitors said, the warriors ready for battle.

Ilea noticed the Speaker was looking at her again, the battle erupting as both sides clashed. He remained where he stood, still focused on her.

[Pure Healer – lvl 258]

One of the Inquisitors appeared next to Ilea, his rapier stabbing at her eye.

The attack failed to penetrate, confusion apparent on his face as she grabbed the weapon and threw it to the side, watching him retreat before he suffered a deep wound to his leg by one of the Paladins.

"Truly, a monster like no other," the Speaker said in a quiet voice. He grabbed the top of his robe and ripped it open to reveal his chest. Carved runes covered his flesh, pieces of steel stuck deep within as magic surged around him. Two inquisitors died, keeping the Paladins away from him, the rest either injured or dead by now.

Nathanael kept his head high, looking at Ilea with tired eyes. "You murdered my daughter. May the gods strike you down."

Magical power flared up as the Paladins jumped back, the Speaker's body bulging out as silver plate armor formed on his now two meter high body. Powerful muscles showed below, claws and teeth resembling a wild beast growing out as the creature howled. The Speaker no longer had eyes, all but his extending maw covered in smooth silver, his hands gripping a spear of the same material. The tip of the weapon flared up with radiant energy similar to the lightning Bryce had used beforehand.

[Vengeful Beast of the Corinth – lvl 382] – [Frenzied / Dying]

"Lilith," Bryce said, appearing in front of her. "This is our battle."

I murdered his daughter? she thought, watching the Paladins charge at the howling monster.