

Chapter 752 Twenty Eight

Ilea left the cleanup of the bodies to the Sentinels. She glanced at the corpse of the large demon that had been summoned. *Don't think I've seen one of those before. Was that once a Navuun as well? Or something different? Like an animal or monster that lived in Kohr?*

Nothing remained of the cultist woman her copy had killed. *And she won't be missed.* An insignificant blip on her radar, a group of rogues trying to cause harm to her people. She was done playing games with groups like that, or consider the deep moral issues. At this point she had killed for less, and she didn't exactly regret it. If even with her insane reputation, and the organizations currently present in Ravenhall, a group like that would still show up sacrificing people and summoning demons, her resulting answer would be the same.

She spread her wings and teleported up, glancing at the group of Sentinels handing out new clothing, food, and water to the scared and exhausted survivors. *Hostages.* Ilea grit her teeth. She decided not to clean off the mist of blood still sticking to herself. *Let them add to my reputation. Let them know what I will do to my enemies.*

The flight back was quick, the guards still on alert when she slowly flew past above. No demon would reach the city. And if more were summoned, they would be killed all the same. She landed at the entrance of the terrace, the guards avoiding eye contact as they stepped aside. She could feel their fear, even without a skill. Stepping inside, she returned to her part of the railings, ignoring the short glances or attempts to hide interest by the many present influential people. Many of them had seen her fight, more so had heard stories. Few had seen her in a serious capacity.

Michael and Velamyr mostly. And her allies of course. Ilea didn't exactly count the show she presented back in Kroll. *Way too easy to summon fucking demons.*

Two Sentinels were helping Pierce reattach mangled arms to her body down on the fighting grounds, the woman complaining about the small space the arena provided and the annoying barrier.

Kyrian had won. Unsurprisingly. She had seen them both fight. The man wasn't the tame Shadow Ilea had met in Ravenhall anymore. *Can't wait for him to reach five hundred,* she thought with a grin below her bloodied mantle.

"You might want to eat something," Catelyn said as she approached. "And get rid of all that grime. It stinks."

Ilea glanced at her, locking eyes with the fearless fox. They glared at each other for a few seconds. *"Maybe you're right."*

"May I?" Catelyn asked.

Ilea affirmed, orange flames flowing over her a moment later. She could've dealt with it herself but if Catelyn wanted to make some sort of statement, she didn't mind. *"Letting them know you have me under control?"* Ilea asked.

The fox's eyes sparkled with flame as she jumped up to relax on the railings next to her. *"Letting them know they're not getting murdered in the next two minutes. But I suppose it underlines our alliance. What happened?"*

"Cult, summoning demons. Sacrificing people to do so," Ilea answered.

“It is the way of things. It sends a message that you took care of it personally. To those fighting for you. While many of the present nobility will prefer to rule, you lead,” Catelyn said.

“You know I don’t want to do either,” Ilea said.

“Do you think I wanted to become a council member?” the fox asked and glanced at her. *“I wanted to do this.”*

“Watch tournaments and bother your grumpy friends?” Ilea asked.

“No. Lie down. Enjoy the suns,” the fox said.

Ilea raised her brows. *“The suns. With arcane storms raging?”*

“I had my ways,” Catelyn said in a self satisfied tone.

The fox followed Ilea’s gaze to the sand covered grounds, mages still repairing the damage done by the previous battle. *“The second finalist.”*

“Yeah,” Ilea said.

“You don’t like that the Destroyer won against your Sentinel,” Catelyn said.

“I don’t like Bob. Period. He had more than a hundred levels on Niram, It’s incredible that he got this far in the first place,” Ilea sent back.

“A testament to their power. But knowing you, it wasn’t a surprise to me. Many of these participants would do well to live in Hallowfort for a time, to survive the harsh landscape instead of being coddled by your luxuries and safety in the Plains,” Catelyn mused.

“The Sentinels will be happy to explore the northern lands as soon as the gates are opened to everyone. I would imagine plenty of others will try their luck as well,” Ilea said. She didn’t disagree. Comparing either warriors from Hallowfort or the Pit to human fighters just wasn’t exactly fair. The dwarves had in the end accepted their lack of tournament participation, but not without a lot of arguing. With their experience and downright home turf in the barrier covered arena, most adventurers would’ve been absolutely destroyed by even a mid level war machine.

They had agreed in the end due to the potential political damage, and due to future winnings once people started visiting the Pit. If everyone got crushed now, they wouldn’t ever consider going into the Forged Dome.

“We will be happy to accommodate them. Though you do have that cube already, and the Meadow will surely add buildings for them as well,” Catelyn said.

“Bold of you to assume a Sentinel needs a place to stay,” Ilea said, smiling to herself. She had spent plenty of nights in trees or caverns. Though the weak wooden branches would likely no longer be able to keep her up there. Another great loss due to her overwhelming power. *Well. Not that great. I do have fantastic beds now, any my ash is probably more comfortable anyway. Wait. When’s the last time I’ve even slept?*

She tried to remember but was interrupted by the announcer.

“What a brilliant fight! I’m still out of breath at that incredible display of magical power. An Elder of the Shadow’s Hand, beaten by a Shadow of her own order. Later today we will be seeing the finals play out. The Cursed against the Destroyer. And now everyone, we’re getting to the finals of the team competition. Please welcome the two groups that have made it this far.” The announcer

got louder with the last few sentences as the crowd started cheering. The ground opened up as the groups were raised onto the level of the arena with the enchanted elevator.

“Semi-finals for the main tournament, winning the pre two hundred tournament. And finals in the group competition. I thought the idea was that the Sentinels don’t get quite this far,” Catelyn said.

Ilea couldn’t help but grin. *“Everyone else is just weak.”*

The fox rolled her eyes.

“Hard to win against a healer in a competition where killing isn’t exactly allowed. They have a massive advantage. I suppose it will show the importance of healers. Plus most of the powerful people in the various human countries are either having meetings in the city, in Hallowfort, or they’re on this very terrace. Not exactly smart for a kingsguard or General to participate in a tournament and show off all their abilities to a group of potential enemies,” Ilea said.

“And yet they still do. Not all of course. I understand what you mean. Most of the participants are adventurers and Shadows,” Catelyn said.

“It would be more interesting, admittedly. To see how well Ryse would do. Or what the deal is with Cecila Veyer,” Ilea mused.

“You felt it too. Indeed. I don’t think she’s human at all. Or not anymore,” Catelyn said.

“Think she can take me?” Ilea asked, watching the participants greet each other. She was familiar with both groups.

The Sentinel group was comprised of three Hunters, one of the few teams made up of less than four members. The first ones to take the Hunter exams as well. Some people assumed the group was chosen because of them being only three, as a way to either show off or give others a chance, depending on who one asked. Ilea knew they just played a few rounds of cards between the teams that wanted to represent the Medic Sentinel Corps in the group tournament. Vienna’s team happened to win. That of course caused a few friendly bouts and discussions as to cards deciding instead of actual fights.

Even if the group was just comprised of three people, they had proven to be incredibly well coordinated and very deadly. A few of the fights they had against high level adventurers were decided in under fifteen seconds.

Vienna was their de facto leader, clad in a misty ashen armor. Her Ashen Sentinel Class had evolved into an Ashen Warden variant, both focused on healing herself but with various additions specifically aiming to improve her teamwork with others. Instead of choosing a Sentinel Class to replace her second Class, she had worked on it with the goal of a related evolution.

With her Ranger Class reaching the two hundreds, she became the first Huntress of the Corps, not to be confused with the rank of Huntress upon passing the exam. She held up her hand where her signature ashen bow formed from thin air.

Next to her stood a somewhat small but muscly woman with long brown and braided hair. She waved at the cheering crowd with a bright smile on her face before she glanced at one of her foes, her neck straining as she tried to meet his eyes. She wore the usual bone and stonehammer Sentinel armor but her set looked more battered than most, and there seemed to be more bone added to it. Her broad arms were partially uncovered as well.

Chana disliked wearing helmets, claiming that her skull was harder than any other material. She did usually cover it with stone during battles, if only to satisfy her team leader. The girl's main Class was called Bulwark of the Sentinels, mostly working with resistances, shock absorption, strength, and high regeneration. Her second one was related to earth magic and enchantments, similar to what Ilea thought Brolin's Class was.

Chana wasn't close to meeting the size of a war machine, but if there had been any participants in the tournament that could be compared to the dwarven creations, both of them were now standing on the battlegrounds. Ilea heard some of the dwarven enchanters and guards had already invited her to fight in the Forged Dome.

Last in the team was Elias, the young man floating a little to the side, covered by both ash and air armor, his eyes taking in the opposing team. He was the first Medic Pursuer, his second Class being Wind Executioner. High self regeneration, wind magic with intrusion properties, and an uncanny ability to adapt to enemy abilities and tactics. The man could've been the team leader of any other squad, both Shadow or Sentinel, but with Vienna in the group, they had decided she should take the lead.

Ilea had only seen them fight a few times and never in a particularly serious manner. The tournament however had made it clear why they had advanced to the finals. Their levels hovered at around two sixty. Impressive, but lower than some of the teams they had taken apart.

Each of them alone is an absolute monster.

Catelyn took her out of her thoughts. *"Veyer? Take you in a fight? No. I get the feeling she's dangerous. Dangerous to me as well, but it doesn't feel the same as when I try to gauge you."* Both returned their attention to the fighters.

Opposing the Sentinels was a Shadow squad Ilea had faced some time ago near Riverwatch. In a series of bouts that was. Two of them she had known for longer, Charles and Petra two of the Shadows that helped defend Virilya against the demon hordes charging at the gates. The former used sunlight magic and devastating explosions, the latter a defensive brawler with lava magic as her preferred ability.

They were close in level to the Sentinels, older and more experienced but also lacking the same high recovery of the other team. Capable Shadows but not quite enough to get to the finals of such a prestigious tournament.

Ilea smiled at the absolutely massive beast of a man now crouching down to look at Chana. He wore battered metal armor that looked more like an assortment of random heavy plates. His arm alone had more muscle and mass than the entire form of the Sentinel smiling up to him and waving.

Miller. A monument to strength, and muscle. Ilea remembered his fighting technique was surprisingly refined, using both brute force and a lot of grappling style maneuvers.

Last in their group was the woman floating at the back of the three other Shadows. Half her face covered by a black mask, she wore a set of light plate armor, raven hair falling down her back.

Ilea heard the woman had breached the three hundreds and it seemed she had taken their bout seriously, the higher focus on defense obvious. Rivka had worn a blue dress back when they had their bout after all. In the entire tournament, her astral magic had proven incredibly devastating.

Ilea wondered if anyone besides her even had a resistance against her type of magic. *Let's see if it's enough to get through the defenses of a well coordinated Sentinel team in the mid two hundreds.*

The teams made more distance between each other as the announcer called out each one of them, not a single one with their real names.

Ilea noted that more of the high level nobles and leaders were now moving closer to the railings to see the fight. For most normal spectators, a fight at this level meant mostly shock waves, flashing lights, and loud explosions. Only experienced warriors and mages would be able to follow what was happening on the battlegrounds. And even then the magic used often obscured visibility, people taken out in split seconds because of single mistakes or powerful spells.

They made sure to warn the spectators about those facts but the stands were still full, many of the previous participants watching as well.

Ilea relaxed when the announcer shouted for the fight to begin, the crowd cheering as the Sentinels and Shadows spread out, their magic flaring up in an instant.

Chana's body was covered in stone from one step to the next as she started running at Miller.

The massive human barreled forward with bellowing laughter.

Petra and Charles moved closer together, the former covered in lava while the latter sent beams of concentrated light at the two airborne Sentinels.

Vienna dodged the insanely fast spells before they had even been cast, stepping through the air as a set of arrows shot out from her bow, exploding in ashen mist. She vanished when a beam of astral energy broke through the clouds. Wind blades and arrows flashed through the air, lava projectiles, beams of light, and astral energies answering in turn.

The two charging brawlers crashed into each other with a boom, the ashen mists around them pushed aside as they exchanged dozens of blows, charges, and throws. Chana teleported around the massive man and aimed for his legs, not reacting in the slightest to his large fists impacting her head and armor. He growled with an excited sound as mana flowed around his body, his movements picking up speed.

Chana was punched into the ground, the floor cracking before she burrowed and broke out between his legs, a heavy kick eliciting a groan from the people who could perceive their speeds.

Miller didn't seem to care, instead falling backwards with a twirl to catch the small woman. He slammed her into the ground seven times with growing spears of stone cutting at his hand and arm with every impact, the summoned magic ground down by his body with each impact.

Chana managed to rip one of his fingers back and broke it, spinning free as a spear appeared in her hand. She shook her head lightly and staggered back a few steps before she charged, the blade of her weapon slashing into the man's wrist as she danced around his fast and calculated steps.

The magical battle in the air was growing more desperate in the meantime, the Sentinels unable to hide themselves in the small space against the high level Shadows. They charged through the little ash that remained in the air, the five contestants casting a dozen teleportation spells in the next few moments, appearing in different places while the melee fighters duked it out on the ground. Magic flared up all around the arena, some spells cutting into the ground, others exploding against the barriers. Miller and Chana dodged or ignored the ones that came their way, Petra protecting Charles with her likely higher defense, the two working together nearly as well as Vienna and Elias.

Sixteen seconds had passed with dozens of hits landing on the flying mages, the three Shadows showing cuts and dents on their armors but holding on. Another set of teleports happened with Rivka getting a perfect timing, a bright beam of astral magic slamming into the ashen defense of

Vienna, burning through the armor and wiping away the flesh of her legs, burnt bone visible below. She didn't hesitate and continued her attacks while the Sentinel vanished, her legs regenerating as explosions rang out around her, Elias moving in to defend the woman with well chosen spells and positioning.

Chana had managed to get through the legs of Miller, dozens of cuts finally reaching the bone. She stabbed her spear into his throat and ripped it out, two fists slamming into her armored chest in turn, pulverizing the rock before she landed and reformed her defenses. She vanished and appeared before Vienna to block the beam of astral energy aimed for her injured teammate.

Walls of stone formed and were burnt away as she screamed, defiant against the magic that burned away her armor, skin, and muscle. Elias and Vienna moved behind her, all three of them healing each other as the spell intensified and finally wore off.

Nearby Sentinels had entered the field of battle to make sure the three wouldn't die but none had used their magic to help, which would've ended the fight then and there.

Chana collapsed to one knee as her muscle reformed. She looked up with regenerating eyes when Miller reached her with stumbling legs and a hand to his throat. Three arrows slammed into his chest before explosions of light and lava sent all four of them flying.

Rivka appeared above the still regenerating Vienna with glowing eyes and power flowing around her raised arm. She shook her head and the Sentinel closed her eyes, laying back down.

Elias continued, his flight stabilized as he deflected and dodged a dozen beams of light and lava projectiles. The explosions pushed him back until he vanished, sending a slew of wind blades at the two mages after him. Rivka soon joined them, the three slowly overwhelming the man with their combined attacks, more and more of his armors stripped away.

Miller in the meantime hammered his obsidian knuckles into Chana, the girl moving into the earth after a dozen punches had struck her burnt form. She broke out a few meters away, rolling on the ground with stone covering her bleeding and regenerating body. Remaining hidden in the ground wasn't allowed after all.

Spear in her hand, she rolled once more when the man landed next to her and grabbed her leg. She was slammed into the ground but managed to slash at his eyes and throat as she was moved through the air.

The man stumbled back as she landed on her feet, looking at her second teammate that was forced to surrender, Petra grappling his injured form while covered in lava, the other mages with their beams at the ready.

Chana twirled her spear and vanished, rushing instead at the three mages that now turned her way and teleported out and away. She followed Rivka, a spherical blast of astral magic striking her stone armor right when her spear scratched against the woman's plate armor. Light magic burned into her back before Petra appeared and grabbed onto her arm. The two tumbled to the ground where the injured Miller was waiting.

This time he tried to break the woman's other arm, straining against her strength before a loud snap resounded, the limb ripped off at the shoulder. Chana managed to stomp his right foot into the ground, hitting Petra's face with her other arm after letting go of her spear. She stumbled forward where she met a beam of astral magic. Chana vanished but Rivka simply raised her other arm, the first spell replaced by the second. The stone covered form was pushed back, her defenses burned away as light magic joined in.

She burrowed and appeared next to Miller, the two exchanging four more blows before she was surrounded entirely, the two melee fighters once more grappling onto her one armed form. She still resisted until the two mages appeared in front and behind her, their magic close enough to burn her hair and eyebrows.

“Twenty eight seconds,” Ilea remarked. Based on what she had seen from the two groups, she had expected the result, though both Rivka’s team and Vienna’s had improved vastly since the last time she had fought them.

Chana sighed before she went to collect her mangled arm.

Miller followed her and was about to punch when the girl raised her arm. She pointed towards the nearby mountains and the man nodded. A nearby Sentinel was chosen and made to fly them away.

The others went to talk as well, shaking hands as they exchanged words. Likely congratulations or pointers.

“She’s going to get very popular with the Sentinels,” Ilea said, looking at Rivka.

“Her magic. Haven’t seen anyone else use something like that. Astral, is it?” Catelyn said.

“Yes. It’s insanely powerful,” Ilea said.

“They would’ve lost without her,” the fox said.

“Yeah. I was afraid Vienna’s group would actually manage it. If Rivka had made a single mistake in that fight...”

Catelyn glanced at her. *“You didn’t want your Sentinels to win?”*

“Learning experiences are more valuable here. Winning only matters when life is on the line. Let them know they’re not invincible,” Ilea said.

“Rich. Coming from you,” the fox said.

“Just because I’m one of the founders doesn’t mean they have to be as stupid as I am,” Ilea answered.