

## Chapter 634 Old Acquaintances

Ilea and the young elemental both remained motionless for a moment, lightning pulsing around the creature while fire clung to the human.

Ashen spears formed touching her back, quickly charged with heat as the Elemental started circling her, sending out bolts of lightning that crashed into her with little reaction.

She made the spears move, surprised at the increased speed. A few crashed into the wall behind the dodging bird, exploding in showers of heat and flame. Ilea managed to veer the rest to the right, her eyes on the elemental as she slowly turned, keeping the spears locked on to the bird.

A few lightning orbs formed around the flying creature, shooting out and crashing into the spears, static, flames, and heat exploding out where they impacted with her projectiles.

*Should've expected it to have some kind of anti guided missile technology,* she thought and summoned her Wyrms eye, ash spreading around her right arm, forming the cannon like extension with the draconic artifact set within. "Dodge this."

A beam of flame shot out, grazing the elemental's wing.

*My aim sucks,* she thought and slowly increased her weight, heat charging as she watched the elemental tumble lightly, turning her way with glowing eyes.

*Yeah, just stay there,* she thought and formed a small crosshair made of ash at the front of her cannon. She leaned her head against her arm and released the heat within her.

The beam flashed out and crashed against a bright blue shield, sparks flying to the side before the defense shattered, the elemental screeching as its body was enveloped by flame.

Ilea watched the dull blue spot on its chest when the magical debris had cleared, sparks flowing in to cover the section once again. "Like that?" she asked, sending another wave of heat, this time using her left hand, the chaotic beam spreading out to envelop a large part of the plateau they stood on. She grinned when the elemental teleported away, its form condensed to a small spark before it expanded beyond the range of her beam.

"Seems like our roles have reversed, doesn't it?" she asked, sending heat charged and burning ashen spears at the creature, smiling as she watched it dodge through the continuous bombardment.

"*You do like to gloat,*" Meadow spoke.

"*Let me have my fun, old tree,*" she answered, sending another focused beam at the creature, burning one of its wings.

The Elemental tumbled through the air, flying down into one of the cracks.

Ilea grinned, starting to run with her still increasing weight, heat gathering within her as she absorbed ambient mana, her auras pushing her stats and abilities further. The ground shook as she ran, each step sending tremors through the rock, a few cracks forming where the plateau couldn't support her weight.

Three smaller birds made of lightning shot out from below, rushing towards her with increasing speed.

Ilea didn't use displacement, nor did she try to burn the creatures, running through as they impacted her form. Lightning coursed through her, each bird ripping a chunk of armor away, the ash reforming near instantly before she jumped off, her wings unable to keep her afloat. She charged them instead, waiting until she found the Elemental hiding in a nearby crevice. She aimed her cannon when the monster released its prepared attack, their magic crashing together to create a shock wave of heat and sparks.

The healer came shooting out on the other side of the debris, her wings pushing her heavy form forward, a drill of ash spinning ahead of her, seemingly part of her body. She activated space shift when she got close, preventing the elemental from teleporting.

It barely managed to dodge aside, one of its wings caught as ash and white flame dug into its defensive layer of magic. The creature only managed to resist for a split second, Ilea's weight and momentum pushing her through, sparks turning to splatters of blood as she drilled through the wing, ripping up the monster's tissue before she dug into and through the stone, coming to a stop about twenty meters later.

She heard the descending screeching. *Music in my ears*, she thought and reformed the drill into two of her copies. *Tank its clones*, she imbued and turned around, walking through the small tunnel as her copies rushed forward, stopping the smaller birds that came flying towards them. Each managed to survive one, the ash dissipating on the second.

Ilea came out of the tunnel, looking down where she saw a glint of blue light, a beautiful beam coming at her. She jumped down, taking the attack head on as she healed her dissipating mantle, finally slamming down on the stone nearly a hundred meters farther down.

Her legs dug into the ground, a quick use of displacement getting her out. "How are we doing?" she asked, looking at the Elemental floating ahead of her, its blue eyes leaving a trail behind as it slowly moved up and down, its wing apparently back to normal. *Glad you're not entirely useless as a training partner*, she thought with a grin.

"*I apologize for the interruption. There is a creature here who claims to be your friend,*" the Meadow sent.

"Hold on," Ilea said and turned away slightly from the Elemental. "Call," she said in an apologetic tone and touched her temple. "*Yes, a friend? What's their name?*"

"*It calls itself violence. A Fae,*" Meadow sent back.

"*Ah yes, I called for it to come,*" Ilea answered.

The Meadow didn't say anything for a few seconds.

"*Are you still there?*" she sent. "Sorry, just a second," she said to the Elemental who had landed.

***[Young Lightning Elemental – lvl ???] - [Excited]***

*No longer hungry? Figured. You eat mana. Just like me.*

"*I am... why would you want to bring that creature here?*" Meadow asked.

"*Because he's my friend? And I found it here, first time I explored the Descent,*" she explained.

"*Can you beam it down here?*"

*“But... Ilea, I was tasked with the protection of Hollowfort, by you. I don't think it's a good idea to bring a being such as that into this territory, even if it is merely a small part of a whole,”* Meadow said.

*“Are you scared of the little fellow?”* she teased. *“Really? Old ancient Meadow?”*

*“Don't be ridiculous. It could wipe this entire settlement away on a whim,”* it replied.

Ilea rolled her eyes. *“So could you! Good thing then that you're both friends, so don't be rude to our visitor and beam it down. Please,”* she said.

*“I will want to have a talk with this one... at a later time,”* the Meadow said.

*Vi o lence!* the baron sent when it appeared next to her, twirling as it extended its small arms in joy.

*“Hey little man,”* Ilea replied, extending her ash in greeting. *“How've you been?”*

The Fae twirled around within the ash, giggling before it came to a stop. It held its head for a moment before shaking it, getting rid of the confusion.

*Stronger!*, it said, pointing at her.

*“Indeed. New evolution. I'm just testing it a little against our friend here,”* she said.

The Fae giggled again, near manically this time around.

*Domination.*

*Not*

*Testing*

*“Well,”* Ilea said, scratching her armored cheek a little.

*Violence,* the Baron said.

*“I suppose you're right. Care to watch?”* she asked with a smile.

*Show*

*Magic!*

*“Sure,”* she said, lowering her weight again as she turned back to the Elemental. *“Just keep your distance. It hasn't gotten any less dangerous,”* she said and ran forward, her dominion pushing destructive mana into the bird as soon as she got into range.

This time she displaced a few beams, letting the last three hit as she formed a few ashen copies. *Hunt that bird. Don't kill it. Stay careful,* she imbued, watching the three ashen beings run off, circling the Elemental who split into several copies as well.

Ilea vanished, appearing next to the Elemental, her fist moving out to hit the creature when a sphere of concentrated lightning flashed out, scorching the ground. She pushed through, the first two layers of her ash healing when her fist connected with the being.

It floated away from the impact, no wound or negative reaction showing.

She was sure her intrusion had easily gone through its defensive layer but if anything, the bird seemed more energized. *You're kidding me right?* she thought, shaking her head as she laughed.

“Guess I’m not the best one at absorbing damage, hmm?” she asked, locking eyes with the creature which seemed to have a smug expression on its lightning beaked face.

The bird shook lightly when its side erupted, flames surging out from where the mana pockets had exploded in fire. It screeched, stabilizing itself as a sphere of lightning spread out, disintegrating two of the ashen clones who hadn’t been able to distance themselves in time.

*I wonder if I can overwhelm its absorption with charged strikes. Nah, wouldn’t want to kill it. It has to reach true Elemental status after all. Can’t do that when it’s dead,* she thought and rushed it again. She smiled when the bird barely moved away to avoid her, Ilea’s fist crashing into its chest with pure physical force. Her wings pushed her forward as ashen limbs moved around the Elemental, keeping it close while she punched against its chest, shock waves going through the monster’s flying body until a sphere of lightning burned away Ilea’s limbs.

She released space shift, stopping her attacks as she watched the Elemental crash against the stone ground, its chest looking dented, blood evaporating when it touched the lightning.

Ilea herself felt her healing take care of the soreness in her arms, the slight internal bleedings and ruptures already taken care of during the continued magically enhanced pummeling. She looked at her hand and formed a fist, back to full power again besides the mana she had used.

The Fae giggled, floating behind Ilea when the Elemental glared at it, standing again with its chest recovered.

*That creature is nearly a four mark. And I just fucking destroyed it,* she thought, watching the young elemental bow its head. “Don’t bow to me, I don’t like it,” she said but the creature remained.

She felt a pulse of mana from the Fae now sitting on her shoulder.

The Elemental looked up and spread its wings, screeching before it flew closer.

“Can I feed you with my reverse healing?” she asked the Elemental before glancing at the Fae.

It just shrugged.

*Try*

She did.

The bird screeched at first but seemed to calm down again a moment later, its form pulsing just a little more, the change visible within her dominion.

“I thought it’s just destructive healing magic,” she said.

*Arcane.*

“Yeah, I suppose,” she answered. “Though I guess I could overwhelm it anyway. Just need enough. Same as that Wyrms did to me with fire.”

“Hey Meadow, can we get a lift to the fifteenth layer?” she asked.

“Already done with the Elemental?” it asked.

“I’ll visit again for sure, but right now I want to see how far I can go. You might have to show me those fourth tier skills sooner rather than later,” she sent.

“I’ll be looking forward to it,” the Meadow said and teleported both of them down to the staircase leading into the fifteenth layer and where the Storm Griffin had resided.

Ilea sat down near the entrance, looking out onto the tundra either created by the Ascended or somehow forming naturally down here. *Might be the creatures summoned, put here, or born of mana influenced the area after some time had passed?*

~~non-human~~

*strong.*

“You think so?” Ilea asked. “You’re talking about Meadow, right?”

*Meadow.*

*Maybe.*

“Tree thingy with a thousand eyes. Eldritch abomination, space mage, and local protector of life,” she said.

*Yes!*

*Violence!*

“No, it’s kind of a pacifist actually,” she said.

The little fae looked to droop a little.

She patted it on its head and formed an ashen copy of the little creature.

*Play with it,* she imbued.

The Fae looked at each other, one entirely black and the other close to. Her ash didn’t come quite close to the near absolute darkness inherent to the magical creature.

She watched the two taking a few steps to one side, the fae lifting a hand and her ash copying the movement. Violence giggled, her ash copying the gesture but failing to produce any sound.

*Friend!*

“Sure,” Ilea said. “It’s part of me, so I suppose it should be your friend as well.”

The little fae hugged its new ashen friend, taking its hand before it walked next to Ilea.

*Violence?* it asked, looking up at her.

Ilea smiled, seeing her ash being nearly in exact sync with the Fae. “It’s right there,” she said, pointing up at the distant ceiling of the layer. “Can’t see its eyes but the way its body is positioned, it might’ve already seen us and is just waiting to strike.”

*Protect Baron,* she quickly imbued into the ash before forming another clone, this one of her. She imbued it with the same command. Just in case. She knew the little fae had adequate protections on its own, even against a four mark attack.

“Think you’re stronger than Meadow?” she asked. The true Fae had a higher level, that much she knew, though when it came to actual fighting prowess? She had no idea how things stacked up. Both beings were sapient, just like her. And Ilea could fight non awakened beings of twice her level.

*Stronger?*

Baron put a hand to his chin, thinking carefully.

*Older.*

*Maybe.*

*Fight*

*Unnecessary*

“Because you don’t have an issue with it?” she asked.

The little Fae nodded.

*Pacifist*

“You’re not a pacifist though,” she said with a smile.

*Violence.*

*Yes.*

*Fae*

*Less*

“Less violent. Yeah, I mean it didn’t kill or eat me when I visited. I’m training with the Meadow at the moment. Would you be up for some help with that? I’m working on my Space Awareness, I’m sure you have plenty of ideas on how to get me to understand the intricacies,” she said.

Violence looked at her and put a hand to where its heart would be, if it were human.

*Honored!*

She laughed. “Thank you,” she said and copied the gesture. “Sure you don’t need to be doing something else? I didn’t take you away from an important task, did I?”

*Exploration*

*Dangerous!*

*Exciting.*

“That sounds more interesting than watching me fail at comprehending space magic,” Ilea admitted.

*Maybe*

*Friend*

*Help*

“I appreciate it. Know that you can call for help anytime as well, if you’re ever in need,” she said.

“Just use the mark.”

*Appreciation!*

*Violence?* it asked again.

Ilea stood up, cracking her neck as she checked her armor. Her ash capacity was at about two thirds with her improved armor and the copies protecting Baron. “Getting impatient, are we?” she asked, stepping out into the open.

Her wings spread, her tail forming as she ascended. The weight from her armor layers alone was hardly an issue, minimally slowing her down but it was nothing compared to the five hundred

percent increase from her Titan Core third tier or even just the straight density increases her evolutions had provided.

*Titan core doesn't actually increase the limit of my heat storage, just its generation, she thought, looking at the still unmoving Griffin in the distance. I wonder if I can reach that thing from here.*

“Just need to charge a spell,” she said, using her core abilities to form heat, embers appearing around her from which she absorbed heat with her third tier Lava resistance. The latter was a minimal bonus but everything would help. *I'm fucking resistant to heat now, holy shit,* she thought, feeling the power within her.

She looked down to find a few dried up blades of grass catching fire. *How long until the ground literally melts at my presence?*

It took about half a minute to get her heat generation to overwhelm her healing, sweat dripping down her brow. Flames clung to the ground around her.

She formed her cannon, with an added crosshair. Looking through, she frowned. *That's way too fucking far away. Four maybe five hundred meters. I need an actual scope or something. And something perfectly aligned to the eye within. My hand is just resting on it right now. No clue if the beam comes out straight.*

“Oh well,” she whispered, pushing a few thousand health into her aura and releasing the heat.

The chaotic torrent flowed into the eye in less than a second, focused by the body part she had taken from the Wyrms and released in a beam of heat and energy on the other side.

She found the distance to be far enough for her to see the beam advance. It traveled fast. Faster than her charged flying speed at least but not quite something unavoidable. *Downside of not being a light mage,* she thought, adjusting her arm slightly in the near second it took for all the heat to be pushed through the focus.

Ilea saw the Griffin drop when she stored the eye again, a trail of fire visible where her spell had cut into the ceiling, fires clinging to the creature as well, its path down more a fall than a controlled flight.

*Now that's some range,* she thought with a grin. Without the eye, Embered Core reached an effective range of forty to maybe sixty meters. The heat would burn up everything beyond for maybe another thirty to forty meters but against the kind of shit she hunted at this point, that hardly mattered.

*Let's see how you're doing,* she thought and rushed off, her wings moving as she roared, copying a Cliff Wyvern, whose level seemed close enough now for Monster Hunter to imitate their call somewhat convincingly. To her ears at least. *Even though I could disintegrate one of them by now.*

The Griffin sent its own call, obviously more than a little pissed.

“Aw don't be like that, I was just the one to attack first this time,” she said and pushed onward.