

Chapter 465 Moving Pieces

Ilea returned the two enchanters to the Sentinel headquarters, leaving them in two unoccupied rooms to not wake them up. *Unconsciousness might just be the only way to make them get some sleep at this point. Workaholics.*

She herself hadn't slept much either lately but there was just so much to do. *I'm one of them too, am I not?*

Ilea wondered if she could do the same without her Mental Resistance, eating a few bites of food as she rushed to the arena. She was a little late but the pay made most of the adventurers stay.

Even the Shadows were present still.

"Welcome everyone. Let's get back to it, shall we," Ilea said as she appeared before them, a smile on her face as an ashen mist formed around her. *Give me your magic, my minions!*

The training passed without major incidents, quite a few of her resistances leveling in the process. She spent her time healing herself and thinking about the past night. The Basilisk made it clear that she might just not be ready yet to kill a level one thousand being.

Nor did it seem morally acceptable to her. The Sand Elemental, maybe. The Ascended, definitely. The Basilisk and Trakorov on the other hand seemed to her like somewhat intelligent animals, nor mindless monsters that attacked with abandon.

If she killed the creature, it would feel like killing Bambi's mom. She had become rather ruthless but Ilea hadn't joined the dark side entirely. At the very least she thought that was the case.

She proceeded with lunch at the Sentinel headquarters, surprising some of the students eating nearby. Some even joined her but remained quiet, reading her mood.

So no four mark achievement for the third class... if they're all as powerful as the ones I've met so far. And the way levels are calculated for monsters, it would seem they all should be. Which means I could get my third class soon.

She checked her advancements from the morning session, tapping her cheek as she shoveled food into her mouth.

'ding' 'Oxygen Repository reaches lvl 5'

'ding' 'Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 13'

'ding' 'Crystal Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 6'

'ding' 'Dark Magic Resistance reaches lvl 20'

'ding' 'Dark Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 1'

Dark Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 1

You have stood against a being of true darkness. Its magic was not able to pierce your defenses and you stand to tell the tale. This skill will help you repeat such actions.

Your body is attuned to the effects of the dark. You may traverse areas imbued by it without harm, nor will all creatures that dwell within see you as something not part of their domain.

'ding' 'Earth Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 8'

'ding' 'Earth Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 9'

'ding' 'Mist Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 13'

'ding' 'Mist Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 14'

'ding' 'Poison Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 2'

'ding' 'Smoke Magic Resistance reaches lvl 4'

...

'ding' 'Smoke Magic Resistance reaches lvl 7'

'ding' 'Sound Magic Resistance reaches lvl 9'

...

'ding' 'Sound Magic Resistance reaches lvl 11'

'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 14'

'ding' 'Water Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 9'

Another set of levels. Not enough for another third tier point nor perhaps an achievement. Every resistance in the second tier would add to the potential density of her ash, in this case most certainly the most impacting change.

I wonder if the element is inherently magical, Ilea thought and swirled around a little bit of ash, to the surprise and terror of the nearby students.

*A marble formed, reflecting little light as its form turned smooth, more ash added to it as its size remained the same. The added weight did not impact her ability to move it. *Could I reach a point where its structure changes? What would ash become? Charcoal? Diamond? I wish there was a chemistry professor in these lands... on the other hand, they might just go insane because everything they learned didn't make any sense around here.**

Ilea wondered if the marbles she created could theoretically reach a density where they had a graspable pull on their surrounding. *A long way off for that*, she thought. The sheer weight of a projectile like that would make for a wonderful impact, more so than a benefit like gravity would have.

"You seem lost," Trian said as he joined the table.

"Things to consider... plus I might have started something stupid in Riverwatch," she said with a sigh.

"The request for help?" he asked.

"Yes... slavers coming to reclaim their taken, property," she said, saying the last word with disdain.

"You took them down?" Trian said.

"Killed those that attacked. The rest fled," she said.

"You should have killed them all," the man replied, continuing to eat.

“The result would be the same. Now at least some people might rethink their choices,” she retorted.

“They will know who did it. And they will respond in kind. It’s difficult to change someone’s beliefs, if they have been taught that they are true for the duration of their whole life.”

She shrugged. “That’s a good thing. They might look for me instead of focusing on Riverwatch,” she said.

“But it was them who called for you. All they know is that a Shadow came and slaughtered their people,” Trian said. “The nobles of Baralia are... more individualistic. They rarely consider their king or country when making decisions. Do you know who sent them?”

“Harken,” she replied.

“Hmm, I know little of him. Lord Rowan Harken. I believe he is known to be strict but fair, a man of principle, though you and me may not agree with his views on things. His lands may not be the worst to live in as a slave, compared to some of the others,” he said.

“That doesn’t change the fact that he holds people, as property,” Ilea said.

“True. You understand however, that many believe slavery to be beneficial. I know of a few families in Lys that would gladly introduce the concept again in the empire,” Trian said.

“Again?”

“Oh yes, that was centuries past however. The economic stability without slavery present shows that it isn’t necessary. Let alone the misery, death and pain it brought. You could argue that some of the training facilities the nobles manage are borderline slavery but most ignore them. A few children are not enough to antagonize a powerful noble house,” Trian explained. He shook his head at the thought.

“There is an argument to be made that incredible structures as seen in many of Baralia’s cities cannot be build in lands without slavery but I would say with enough gold and capable mages, the same could be achieved. It may take more time,” he added.

“Virilya seems pretty impressive to me,” Ilea said, ignoring the comments about training facilities. She would confront the responsible people if she came across something like that but getting involved without any knowledge was foolish. Her money and Claire could maybe achieve more on that front. Maybe the rejects could be bought up and brought to Ravenhall.

“It is. And yet you haven’t been to Baralia. Their cities are... monuments to their power and wealth. It’s like a competition between clusters of noble families. Same goes for their assassin orders, mages and other trained and brainwashed individuals,” he said.

“Hmm, I met the Vowed. Implants in their teeth that explode in case they get too far from a ring. Nasty that,” she said.

“Oho? They’re quite famous. Did you fight them?”

She waved him off. “No, I took out the implants and told them to go report to a guard captain I know in Riverwatch.”

“Ah, I see. They will probably find it difficult to adjust to a free life,” he mused. “Your lesson should start in a few minutes by the way.”

“Ah yes, the torture chamber,” Ilea said and finished her plate.

She smiled at the students sitting at the table, listening to the whole conversation. They'd have a lot to gossip about.

Ilea continued with her training, using the bow while injuring and healing the class with her ash. Trian and the enchanters had joined as well. Perhaps it would help the students to see some of the teachers going through the same pain and torment.

It filled her with pride that every last one of the students participated this afternoon.

A few would soon reach the second tier of Pain Tolerance, something that likely wasn't possible without a healer present. One that could take care of mental strains too.

The rest of her day Ilea spent with a short dancing lesson, telling Claire of her job in Riverwatch, and lastly a visit to the Caverns of Rot and her newfound silent friends, the Specters.

She was back in her routine, now once again having enough time to eat in between. Sometimes even for a nap. The next few days passed without a major incident, if one didn't consider the dangerous near death experiences with the Specters as incidents. They didn't invent new tactics to pin her down luckily, otherwise she might have had to find new dancing partners.

'ding' 'Azarinth Awakening reaches 3rd lvl 27'

'ding' 'Azarinth Awakening reaches 3rd lvl 28'

'ding' 'Blink reaches 3rd lvl 23'

'ding' 'Blink reaches 3rd lvl 24'

'ding' 'Sentinel Sphere reaches 3rd lvl 17'

...

'ding' 'Sentinel Sphere reaches 3rd lvl 19'

'ding' 'Sentinel Core reaches 3rd lvl 26'

'ding' 'Sentinel Core reaches 3rd lvl 27'

'ding' 'Azarinth Fighting reaches 3rd lvl 28'

'ding' 'Azarinth Perception reaches 3rd lvl 15'

'ding' 'Azarinth Perception reaches 3rd lvl 16'

'ding' 'Azarinth Reversal reaches 3rd lvl 18'

'ding' 'Aspect of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 27'

'ding' 'Aspect of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 28'

'ding' 'True Ash Creation reaches 3rd lvl 25'

'ding' 'Ash and Ember Unity reaches 3rd lvl 23'

'ding' 'Ashen Wings reaches 3rd lvl 18'

'ding' 'Ashen Wings reaches 3rd lvl 19'

'ding' 'Eyes of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 10'

'ding' 'Eyes of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 11'

'ding' 'Avatar of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 24'

'ding' 'Avatar of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 25'

'ding' 'Keeper of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 24'

'ding' 'Deviant of Humanity reaches lvl 6'

'ding' 'Heavy Archery reaches lvl 8'

'ding' 'Monster Hunter reaches 2nd lvl 8'

'ding' 'Oxygen Repository reaches lvl 6'

...

'ding' 'Oxygen Repository reaches lvl 8'

'ding' 'Sage of Torment reaches lvl 4'

...

'ding' 'Sage of Torment reaches lvl 6'

'ding' 'Veteran reaches 3rd lvl 2'

'ding' 'Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 14'

'ding' 'Blood Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 19'

'ding' 'Blood Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 20'

Ilea reached the Blood Magic milestone on the second day, immediately investing a point to advance it to the third tier.

- Blood Magic Resistance

You have made masters of blood magic your enemies, pushing through and surviving despite the odds. Your body has been ravaged by this school of magic so many times, any count would be meaningless. Creatures beyond your imagination have tried to kill you, without success.

Blood Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 1

The arts of blood manipulation can be deceptive and dangerous to both ally and foe. You have stood against the old magic and lived. Next time your chance of survival will be even higher.

2nd stage: Masters of this ancient art have found ways to use the very essence of your life against you. With sheer ferocity, you have shown that not every creature born of blood is prey alone.

They will find it a challenge to invade and use what belongs to you alone.

3rd stage: Your very blood has changed and evolved. While it may still be susceptible to change and foreign influence, it will not take the abuse lightly. Enemies will find their blood magic will demand a sacrifice should they choose to injure you. You may deactivate this effect.

She found the effect would result in a reduced effect of the spells hitting the casters themselves. The Specters had minor ruptures ravaging their bodies after they used the ability against her. Not enough to kill them luckily. The creatures regenerated and didn't seem to feel pain, making them a great party to test the third tier on.

Ilea wondered if she would get some form of Blood Magic as a general skill if she used the feedback often enough. Realistically, it would just level the Resistance but one could hope.

'ding' 'Bone Magic Resistance reaches lvl 11'
...
'ding' 'Bone Magic Resistance reaches lvl 16'
'ding' 'Crystal Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 7'
'ding' 'Crystal Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 8'
'ding' 'Dark Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 2'
'ding' 'Divination Magic Resistance reaches lvl 3'
'ding' 'Earth Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 10'
'ding' 'Earth Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 11'
'ding' 'Flesh Magic Resistance reaches lvl 6'
'ding' 'Heat Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 6'
'ding' 'Mist Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 15'
'ding' 'Rot Resistance reaches lvl 2'
...
'ding' 'Rot Resistance reaches lvl 4'
'ding' 'Smoke Magic Resistance reaches lvl 8'
...
'ding' 'Smoke Magic Resistance reaches lvl 12'
'ding' 'Sound Magic Resistance reaches lvl 12'
'ding' 'Sound Magic Resistance reaches lvl 13'
'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 15'
'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 16'
'ding' 'Water Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 10'
'ding' 'Wind Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 2'

The officer bowed, going to one knee as he addressed Lord Harken. “The scout reports are conclusive. We estimate heavy losses should you wish to take the city within the week.”

Rowan scowled, his eyes going from the officer to the map situated on a wooden table within the command tent. A variety of figures had been placed on top of it, carved from wood and stone, each symbolizing one of the many troops at his beck and call. Paid, trained, enslaved or otherwise employed.

His most loyal guards and troops were situated close by. The scouts had been thorough, probing the independent city for the past few days. As annoying as it was, he could only commend the efforts that had gone into strengthening the town.

Riverwatch had been a miserable frontier city when he had last visited eight years prior. A mismatched town of adventurers and people seeking to accomplish their hopes and dreams in the uncivilized and crime ridden independence of the west. A foolish notion.

One that had cost them dearly, only two cities remaining of the downright ridiculous experiment. Rules and laws were there for a reason. Strict and guiding, for all blood lines, be it low born, slave or even noble.

It seemed Alistair Gallian proved to be worthy of his reputation, having taken control of the city despite his low birth. There were exceptions even among slaves and adventurers. Patrols and guards had been strengthened immensely, not just in numbers but in character too. Few could be paid for even scraps of information.

Many of the scouts had to be called back, to not alarm the competent leadership and officers of the city.

Rowan had thought the town an easy target and yet Nipha's indecision to conquer the lone standing target proved to be based on more than just incompetence. An attack by storm would cause heavy losses, not just among the soldiers but the population of the town as well.

He sighed, still confident in the operation but annoyed at the set back. A challenge was welcome but at a time like this, he had to keep order in his ranks. Never had he marched with all his people, every soldier, cook, slave, and noble. The logistics was a nightmare. He was carrying supplies in his own storage ring and had to make everyone who possessed an item like that follow suit.

He balled his fists as he thought about his lands, the ridiculous orders from his king. To be driven out of one's own lands. He saw it as his only option. The attempts to retrieve slaves from his territory by Riverwatch proved a perfect opportunity. His reputation would keep the king guessing. Was he responding to the theft with an iron hand or was he defecting? His son's demise at the hands of a Shadow forced him to act. Earlier than he had planned. His useless offspring had wasted all he had been given.

Once Baralia fell, it would be too late for the king's realization, Rowan and his people too far away and not a concern. Lys moved slower than he had anticipated but his advisors had rarely been wrong. Baralia was doomed and so was Wynehold. The only way to escape the fires of war was to relocate, form new alliances and to rebuild Baralia out of the ashes.

If only he had acted when the first signs of incompetence showed in the high king thirty years back.

He pushed the thought back. This wasn't a time for regrets. It was a time for war. A time for change.

"What of the Shadow?" he asked, looking at the dark winged figurine standing within the forest between his camp and the city of Riverwatch.

"It is possible she was employed by the city, or she had a personal reason to attack the camp. Most soldiers had been caught off guard, under equipped, tired or drunk. We estimate her to be of minor concern in the conflict, if she is even still in the area," one of his officers explained.

Harken looked at the man, his gaze making him wince. "She slaughtered forty men in the span of mere seconds. If she shows up we have to be prepared. Make sure the Vowed are informed. Focus their efforts on ash magic resistance and add more healers to their squads."

"The reports may be exaggerated, my Lord," a nobleman said.

“They may be. Her description and the abilities observed coincide with a new song a few bards have started singing in these parts. Lilith of Ravenhall. She too is said to be the main reason Riverwatch and Ravenhall formed an alliance,” an officer said.

Harken let them talk.

“Songs and an uncertain alliance. Ravenhall doesn’t have a standing military, the Shadow’s Hand acting merely as a mercenary group.”

“And yet many have been seen participating in the war. It isn’t unrealistic to assume her standing on the side of Riverwatch. As to the songs, they may be exaggerated but don’t dismiss myths. Our research suggests the bards have not been paid to spread her name.”

“They could have easily been manipulated,” another said.

Rowan stopped them with a gesture. “Be it as it may, we have to consider Shadows moving in to assist the town. Prepare gold and make sure our elite is ready to group up in case the reports have not been exaggerated and distorted by fear.”

If only they knew more about this alliance. An extended siege was the only way he could make sure his people weren’t decimated but it brought with it uncertainties. An exciting time indeed, one he deemed himself entirely too old to live through. Rowan ground his teeth, anger flowing through him as he wished he was powerful enough to kill King Baron himself.