

Chapter 810 Rip and Tear

Ilea slowed to a stop, seeing two armed people search through a building, various survivors visible in three of the cellars of the surrounding homes. She teleported in just when one of the warriors opened a hatch. A golden shield formed above the covering people, cries resounding when the bolt struck the barrier.

“W-” one of them spoke before she smashed in his skull.

The second one slashed his sword at her, Ilea ducking before she deflected the blade with a slight motion of her arm, a fist slamming into his bare chest before a wave of arcane healing made his body explode in a shower of flesh and bone. She teleported out and through the streets, identifying more attackers before she sent reverse healing into them through her dominion.

People fell dead while she healed the survivors, more of them hidden away than she had expected based on the streets. There had been quite a few raiders here. A few hundred at least, maybe even a thousand. But the town wasn't exactly small either and the attacks hadn't started long ago.

Interrupted them right after they killed off the guards and started their looting.

She flew up and checked through the streets, finding the Paladin waving atop one of the buildings. *What does she want?* She planned her route and flew back down into the streets, killing a few more people on the way before she reached the woman. “*What is it?*”

“*Lilith. The invaders might consider attacking me if they see me, while they would try to hide from you,*” Varya said.

“*You want to be bait?*” Ilea asked.

“*Essentially,*” the woman said.

Ilea dismissed one of her copies and infused a new one. *Follow her at a safe distance and kill anyone who attacks her.*

“*This one will follow you around,*” she sent as she continued her search.

Ilea felt the town was mostly cleared out after fifteen more minutes of rapid flying and killing, her copies doing the same through various sections of the town. She flew up, seeing a group of armed raiders flee northwards through the river and towards the forests. Summoning her wyrm eye cannon, she aimed and considered. *They came here to kill and loot. Your choice,* she thought and sent a beam out, cutting a horizontal line into the landscape, most of the running people dead instantly as the white flames spread. Ilea aimed again and finished off the last two, if only to end their suffering.

She flew down and opened a gate to the Meadow's domain. Stepping through, she ignored the prisoners. “*I cleared out one of the towns in Kroll but there might still be invaders there. Do you have any teams available to help now?*”

“*Let me check. Yes. A Sentinel team in Riverwatch according to Aki,*” the Meadow answered.

“Let him know he should lead them to my gate location there. I’ll open it in a minute or two,” Ilea sent before she returned, searching for Varya. She found her half a minute later, the woman standing in a square with her bloodied sword in hand, several bodies on the ground around her. *“You okay?”* Ilea asked as she moved her mantle out of her face, dismissing her copies in the meantime.

The Paladin took in a deep breath and shuddered. She nodded. *“This…”* she said then shook her head.

Ilea raised her arm and opened a gate to Riverwatch, four Sentinels flying through immediately. Hunters.

“We will secure the city,” the leader spoke, giving Ilea a nod before their group flew up together.

“Thanks,” Ilea sent to them before she checked Varya. She healed her mind in case the experience had been too much for her. *“Think you can help me get to the other city?”*

“Kait… yes,” she said and shook her head, looking at the corpses before she turned to Ilea.

“Apologies, Lilith. I’m ready to go. We need to go west. I think based on your speed, it’s fastest if we fly.”

“Then grab on,” Ilea said as she spread her wings, the woman holding on to her arm before a few ashen limbs formed to stabilize her. Teleporting them up, Ilea charged her wings and flew westward, leaving the still burning city behind, mostly cleared of raiders. She hoped they had gotten most if not all of them.

Fields and forests flew past, Ilea constantly checking the Paladin to make sure she didn’t pass out. Her body was tense, downright locked against the pressure of the speed and air but she made it. *Now you can be an astronaut I suppose,* she thought.

“Over there,” Varya sent.

Ilea slowed and looked, unable to make out anything in the vicinity.

“The lake to our right. The town is beyond,” the Paladin sent.

She squinted her eyes, able to make out a dark patch beyond the lake. *Right.* She charged her wings and flew towards their second destination.

Ilea flew above the town, already hearing the familiar screeches of demons. *Fuck.* She put a set of her mantle onto Varya, flying down towards the streets when she realized most of the monsters were rushing away from her and in the same direction. She followed, her eyes opening wide when she came to the central square of town.

Atop a literal mountain of demon corpses stood a large man covered in ash armor, his arms swinging wide, claws cutting through the demons jumping his way. Guts were ripped out, skulls split and ripped off. Gael killed three more creatures and roared. The demons roared back.

“W… who is that?” Varya asked.

“We’re too late. Let’s look for survivors and make sure no demons escape this place,” Ilea said, flying down to the streets as she checked her dominion. She glanced to the side, seeing the wide eyes of the Paladin. *“He’s called Gael. I’m pretty sure he’ll pass even me. In five years, maybe fifty. But I doubt he will stop.”*

“That roar…” Varya said and shuddered. *“Are you not worried about his health?”*

“Against a demon horde?” Ilea asked. “No. And it seems like there’s nothing bigger here.”

“Bigger?” Varya said, more to herself than to Ilea.

“Plenty of survivors still hiding too,” Ilea said, making sure the few demons who missed Gaels challenge dropped dead as she passed, reverse healing killing them in mere moments. She searched through the streets, checking the city gates and the fields beyond. She found a few demons running in seemingly random directions, taking them out with short bursts of Embered Heart through her wyrm eye cannon.

“Two towns in Kroll will be secured soon, please inform Aki. I’m available,” Ilea sent, this time to Claire.

She shot another two demons, flying in a wider arc around the town and into the lake to make sure none had escaped. As best she could at least. She heard coughing when she reemerged from the water. “Right. Sorry, kind of forgot you were there.”

Varya coughed again. “It’s fine. Don’t mind me.”

“Clearing remaining settlements. No further need at the moment. Thank you,” Claire sent back.

“What do you mean, no further need? That’s it?” Ilea asked. *I’d join in with Gael but he seemed to have so much fun.* The main reason was the fact that she could clear a demon horde like that in less than a minute. Faster if she used her third class and Embered Heart.

“The cities are secure?” Varya asked.

Ilea flew back over the town. “Seems like it,” she said, making a few more rounds just in case she had missed something before.

She hadn’t, Kait considerably smaller than Bervon. *Guess this one’s yours, Gael,* she thought and opened a gate to the domain of the Meadow, to both stay in the loop and be available in case anyone needed her to deal with something.

“Can I get a teleport to my room,” Ilea sent to the Meadow.

“With the Paladin?” the tree asked.

“Make it the lobby,” Ilea said and deactivated her space magic resistance. They appeared in the Soul Forge.

A war machine looked out from an open doorway, the only current occupant of the structure. “Greetings,” Nelras Ithom spoke.

“Hi,” Ilea said.

“Can someone tell me why everyone left all of a sudden? Are we under attack?” the former monarch asked.

We? Already that familiar? “It should be dealt with soon.”

“Elves or Ascended?” Nelras asked.

“Just human politics,” Ilea answered.

“Oh. Why bother me then? I have work to do,” he grumbled and returned to his metal sheets in the room apparently dedicated to the Ascended rune work.

You're the one who came to bother us, Ilea thought and rolled her eyes.

"Who... what was that?" Varya asked in a quiet voice.

Ilea stretched. "It's better you don't know, trust me. I need a bath. Thanks for showing me the way and helping out."

The Paladin bowed. "It was an honor. Is it... possible for me to leave to Halstein from here?"

"Sure. Just ask the Meadow," Ilea said.

"Who is-" the Paladin said and paused. "Oh... I... I see. Yes. Until next time, Lilith."

"See you," Ilea said when the woman vanished. "*Plucked from the fabric, just like that,*" she sent to the tree.

"*I hear the Accords have left quite an impression in Virilya,*" the Meadow said. "*The Kroll towns are clear?*"

Ilea teleported up to her room, activating the enchantments to fill her large bath. "*They certainly did. I'm glad Alyris accepted our help. The towns should be clear soon, Kait was swarmed by demons but Gael is taking care of it. Survivors hiding in their cellars and attics.*"

"*So much senseless slaughter,*" the Meadow sent. "*Hundreds of awakened beings, dead for pride and gold alone.*"

"*You know it's more complicated than that. A message has certainly been sent, to anyone that would antagonize us,*" she said and relaxed herself into the water, using her ash and heat to bring it to a boil. She sighed and closed her eyes.

"*An emergency motion has been prepared by Catelyn, Claire, and myself. The respective leaders have already approved. There is cause for war. Demands have been prepared and will be sent to the Emperor. Aki will be sending an army to their western border to build pressure. Those responsible will be delivered, but we shall abstain from mindless slaughter. Now that the attacks have been averted, we have time to go over the books. All the books, both ours and those of Nipha,*" the Meadow sent. "*You retain your right to veto. Let me know if you wish to go over the details, otherwise the majority vote of the Ravenhall representatives will be sufficient for your faction.*"

Ilea nodded absentmindedly. *My faction.* She breathed in deeply. "Sure. Hit me with the details."

"*I didn't expect that,*" the Meadow sent.

"*I don't feel like banter,*" Ilea said. "*But Meadow...*"

"*Yes, Ilea?*"

"*Give me the short version.*"

She perceived a strange giggle, as if the fabric itself was amused.

Ilea soaked in her heated bath, soon full of lava, thanks to her minor manipulation skill. She sent a message to Felicia as soon as she could. "*Give my thanks to Alyris. And an apology. I'm aware of the political implications but it wasn't my intention.*"

“I know, dear. I’ll let her know. Things are still a little chaotic here. See you later?” Felicia sent back.

Why not, Ilea thought, planning to surprise the woman when they were done with the remaining issue of Nipha. Though she didn’t expect any conflict to last particularly long. The demands were reasonable and both Wayland and many of their sources confirmed the Nipha nobility was already tearing itself apart because of the potential conflict.

Glad I’m not one of them right now, Ilea thought and summoned herself a meal, the food catching fire but she simply didn’t mind right now.

“What will happen with the prisoners?” she asked.

“Depending on where they’re from and possible treaties that will come to be, they may be transferred to the respective countries. I’ve been talking to frequently visiting scholars about the issue of imprisonment and the treatment of those incarnated. We might be able to work out a solution with Aki. With the resources available to us, we may find out why people were prone to commit crimes and how we can bring them back into society. Depending of course on the offenses they committed,” the Meadow sent.

“Another Io?” Ilea asked.

“No. We believe that keeping the prisoners in an environment where they are free to interact with each other without outside influence is not conducive to possible change. However I have little data so far,” the Meadow spoke. *“The machine army has gathered, if you wish to join. Some representatives of the Accords will be present.”*

“Do you think that’s a good idea?” Ilea asked. *“Wouldn’t there be too much focus on me?”*

“The actions of Aki and other Accords factions in the past hours will be remembered, however Lilith is already a myth. I believe your presence could be beneficial to the outcome of the negotiations. As an additional warning, I suppose,” the Meadow said.

“Then I’ll go,” Ilea said and stood up, stretching as a shroud of ash cleared off the remaining lava from her body. She formed her mantle and cracked her neck. *I needed that.*

“Claire is present already,” the Meadow spoke.

“Thanks,” Ilea said and warned Claire with a message before she used her third tier transfer to teleport to Nipha.

She appeared on a hill surrounded by a sea of Taleen machines. Torches and magical lights had been set up nearby, an enchanted two story stone structure behind them, Executioners and war machines guarding the building, various mages standing atop.

“Quite a view, isn’t it,” Claire said, the woman standing out in the open, a dwarf excusing himself and returning to the stone structure when he saw Ilea.

Ilea looked eastwards, seeing the machines waiting in the darkness. Neat formations with Hunter Praetorians at the back, Guardian units led by Centurions at the front, Executioners patrolling through the lines with normal Praetorians standing in their own units at each flank. *“How many?”*

“Eighty thousand,” Claire said.

Ilea whistled. *“That’s a lot of experience.”*

“Not for you,” Claire said. “A reasonable amount for the task of intimidation. Aki has enough to spare.”

“They’re going to run out of mana out here,” Ilea said.

A nearby Hunter Praetorian glanced their way. “I added twenty gates to the Taleen network. Higher level machines are rotating through Iz.”

She nodded, silent for a while as she looked over the fields, Destroyers flying above with their floodlights illuminating parts of the near endless army.

“Why the formations? I’ve never seen the machines set up like that,” Ilea said.

“We’re negotiating with nobles and Generals. An unstructured horde will seem wild and unpredictable to them, whereas an ordered setup like this will seem both reasonable and dangerous. It has no influence on the battle effectiveness. If anything it would be lower in many scenarios,” Aki explained through the Hunter.

“I see you managed to teleport the Destroyers too,” Ilea said. “They seem a little too large for the gates.”

“They fold,” Aki said.

She shook her head lightly. *That seems a little too simple.* “How is Virilya? Do you need help getting the machines out of there?”

“Alyris agreed for us to use the gates to Morhill. It will take some time for the entire battalion to return to manageable areas but I didn’t want to bother you again,” Aki said.

“It’s really no issue,” Ilea said.

“It is. I am a part of the Accords, and aim to be an asset to its purpose. Requiring your presence to deploy large amounts of machines in a fast and reliable manner is a problem I aim to solve. The help request for Virilya was an emergency, and your gate allowed for an impressive entrance in addition to the instantaneous connection. Moving the troops out of Virilya is not an emergency,” Aki said.

“Fair enough,” Ilea answered. “I did enjoy my lava bath.”

They stayed outside for a while, a warm summer breeze flowing through the open plains the Accords had chosen for the showcase of their army. Ilea soon started to see torches in the distance, the torchlight reflected off the silver armor of the Nipha troops. Thousands marched towards their location but their hastily gathered troops seemed irrelevant compared to the machines standing before them. Even more so if one knew about the true power of a single Executioner or Hunter Praetorian.

The difference in power was laughable, but Ilea supposed that was the point.

“How many?” Claire asked after a while, the single torches growing into a sea.

“Around twenty four thousand. Fewer than I expected. Emperor Fallant should be present according to our scout reports, including most of the nobility,” Aki said.

“Good. It’s over in that case. Let’s get the formalities over with,” Claire said.

“How is it over?” Ilea asked.

“The nobility would not meet an army like this in the field if they expected a battle,” Aki said.

“So it’s just a dick measuring contest?” Ilea asked.

“Precisely,” Claire said and started towards the stone structure. “Care to join the procession?”

“Sure. I’m so ready to go back to hunting once this is over,” Ilea said.

“And so tremble the monsters in the wild, for Lilith will return,” Claire said, arms spreading as she grinned.

Ilea raised her brows. “Since when are you a bard?”

“It’s a quote. You should read some of the stories that have cropped up. On second thought... maybe don’t,” Claire said.

“Why not?” Ilea asked with a smile.

“Our enemies have aimed to use libel to defame your person and the Accords. Much of it has been caught and destroyed,” Aki said.

“I was more thinking about the sexual content,” Claire said.

Ilea grinned. “Now I’m even more interested. There’s porn about me?”