

Ilea found the former Monarch in the Soul Forge. She saw the room through her domain, finding it strangely blurred and distorted, the runes etched into metal sheets providing a strange sensation. It was early morning in Elos, but she found the war machine made from black Niameer steel and housing the soul of Nelras Ithom to be working. Deliberate and small movements of his hands and an enchanted knife etched shapes into the set up metal plates.

His movements seem more fluid.

Knocking on the door frame, she leaned against the solid steel and smiled when the entire cube of the Soul Forge didn't tip over from her weight alone.

"Good morning," she said.

"Have the suns risen above our lands?" the war machine spoke. He finished the line he was etching before he turned and spread his arms. "Welcome, Monarch of Verleyna." He followed up his dramatic greeting with a cackle and a hiss.

"Word travels fast, but what's so funny about it?" Ilea asked.

"Oh, just my personal history and current circumstances compared to your new title."

Right, I didn't even get a title for becoming a Monarch. She smiled at the thought. "I blame the Sanvaruun."

"You killed him. Killed a Monarch," Nelras spoke as he advanced. "And more, you fought and grounded Verleyna, the flying fortress of the Sky Domain. Do you know what that means?"

"Enlighten me," Ilea said, though she had an idea of what he was getting at.

"You have opposed the Oracles. Have fought them. And you won, dragonslayer. A human," he said and hissed, though the sound was more contemplative than anything else.

"I don't think they really used everything they had," Ilea said.

"Did you?"

She didn't reply. She had used her Fourth Tiers, yes. She had used the Primordial Flame, but she hadn't really been pushed much. Compared to her fight against the Dragon of Calamity before her evolutions, it had been night and day.

"I take that as a no. Which means you may very well be as powerful or more so than the Oracles themselves. Something I had not ever thought possible. Not with all the creatures I had met and fought. Though I suppose my time here has provided... perspective. Not only on you," Nelras Ithom spoke.

"What is it that you wanted to talk about?" Ilea said.

The former Monarch paused and looked at her through the eyes of the war machine. "I had hoped to see the Sunlight Wastes one more time. To perhaps introduce you to the lands I once called my home. I had told you, that once you were ready, I would call on you, though you have been ready for some time. It was me, who was not prepared, to come to terms with who I had become, to come

to terms with my past, and the thoughts and challenges I have faced here, since you brought me back from the dead.”

“And you think you’re ready now? To return?” Ilea said. “You said they wouldn’t accept you.”

“I suspect they will not. And that is what I had feared. Just as much as I’d feared my loss of power. The battle against the Architect, broke me, I think. It shattered beliefs I’d had about myself and the world, though nowhere near as much as my exposure to the Accords. I have lived here, in the domain of the Meadow. I have talked, to beings I had once considered inferior. Beasts and pests I’d once thought.

“I had not been malicious, or gone out of my way to kill and harm those I had thought beneath me, but neither had I learned, nor shown compassion. A mere level one hundred war machine, and yet I have been treated with respect, by most, despite them not knowing who I had once been. What I was within. And those who did, did not curse me, did not come to kill me, now that I am weak. And in that, I saw a strength that I had never possessed.”

Ilea listened and waited as he paused to collect his thoughts.

“I’m not sure where I stand. And I’m not sure what it is that I wish to do. But I wish to see my ancient home, even if it may not be the same.”

“You’re not afraid anymore?” Ilea asked.

Nelras Ithom laughed, the sound strangely distorted through the enchanted war machine. “No, Lilith. I am afraid. And yet I choose to face this fear. I once battled great foes, but this may be the greatest of all.”

Ilea smiled. “I’ll take you there. And protect you. We could have a chat with the current Monarch as well. I learned that the title allows for quite a bit more decision making than I thought.”

“Then let us meet them, together. Monarch of the Sky Domain, and human. Accompanied by the forgotten remnant of an ancient elf.”

“So dramatic,” Ilea said. “Ready to go? Or do you need to make preparations?”

“I am as ready as I’ll ever be,” he spoke.

Ilea hissed, trying to get some joy into the sound before she opened a gate to Iz. “Let’s see if we can get a shortcut.”

A few minutes later, they appeared on a teleportation gate far out in the west of the continent. A cool breeze flowed through the desert, dunes as far as she could see. The suns were low on the horizon still, and the land lay exposed, no clouds in sight. A single Centurion sat next to the gate, half covered in sand.

The machine glanced up when they appeared.

Aki let her know he wouldn’t be sending any machines to accompany them, the elves likely to respond negatively to the sight of Taleen creations.

Sadly, her own presence would likely cause the same. She hadn’t been able to change her title back to anything else yet, though she didn’t have a way to prove to the Elves that she was the Monarch of

the Sky Domain anyway. Arriving as a Val Akuun would at least give credibility to her words, and judging by the Sanvaruun, she would simply have to beat down any hostilities. With this Domain at least, she didn't have any animosity.

"And you think there's a chance that they'll at least listen to you, or me for that matter? I am a Val Akuun," Ilea said as she looked out onto the desert.

The war machine looked at her and hissed. "You are Monarch of the Sky Domain. It is rare for Monarchs to travel to other Domains, but I have met a few in my lifetime. Never was my status questioned."

"You are an elf though," Ilea said.

Nelras just laughed. He stepped onto the sands and crouched down, then grabbed a handful of sand. He made a fist and opened it again, letting the sand trickle down. For a moment, he remained before he slowly stood up. "The Domain is this way," he said and pointed.

Ilea spread her wings and added a few layers of her armor to the war machine before she picked him up. "I'll slowly increase in speed. Let me know when it becomes too much."

"I will do so," the being spoke before they flew off into the endless desert.

Ilea enjoyed the cool air, no storms or dangers in sight as they made their way towards the supposed Domain. One she didn't know much about. The Light elves mostly stayed in their territory, as far as she was informed, unlike those of the Fire Wastes, and now the ones of Verleyyna. She wondered how much of that simply had to do with the current Monarchs and the decisions that they made.

A few times, she slowed to check where they were. The war machine only looked at the suns before he pointed yet again, adjusting their course until some time later, he spoke up.

"We will arrive shortly," Nelras said.

Ilea saw a glint of light in the far distance and slowed. She squinted her eyes as they continued onward. "Is that something reflecting the sunlight?"

The former Monarch did not reply.

She slowed further as they advanced, the single glinting light slowly turning into a few dozen, soon a few hundreds. Bits and pieces of the faraway structures reflecting the rising suns. Winding spires of sand and glass reaching far into the sky, winding walls and structures reminding her of natural formations like the Grand Canyon, as if something had raised the desert itself within a storm and frozen it in place. Perhaps something a child would've built on an earthen beach, but scaled up to reach enormous size. Abstract shapes, seeming natural, but there was artistry to it all. She could tell that this expansive settlement built from sand and glass had not come into existence by chance. Somebody had built it, and she had an idea as to whom.

Her eyes could see the structures clearly now, some single ones the size of Verleyyna itself. She slowed yet again when she saw a group of flying creatures come their way. Already, she removed the ash armor from her companion, to at least make sure they weren't seen as the same being, him some sort of spell. A moment later, she landed in the desert, to allow Nelras both a way to move himself, but just as much to protect him in case of a scuffle.

Compared to the recent attack on Riverwatch, Ilea didn't plan to kill anyone here. Not if they didn't give her a really good reason.

They didn't have to wait long, five elves clad in what looked like dark blue armor made of glass, the design flowing and strange, just like the structures Ilea assumed they inhabited.

They're sparkling, she thought, the light of the suns playing across their armor pieces like the light of cavern crystals. Below their armor, they wore clothes of hide, simple designs but incredibly well cut. They had the same pronounced ears and sharp teeth, hissing just like all the other elves she had met before. The only other difference seemed their bronze skin and golden eyes, only one of the five with a shade of green in his. Two of them carried spears of silver, one a large mace of bone, the other two no weapons at all.

A quick identify offered her nothing above six hundred, four of them below the three marks.

"Val Akuun," the highest level elf spoke. One of the spear wielders. A warrior at level six twenty. He hissed, a complex sound Ilea couldn't quite decipher.

She hissed back, her own more meant as a general greeting. Nelras hissed next to her, his sound different as well, though distorted somewhat by his war machine.

I suppose I should introduce myself.

"I am the Monarch of the Sky Domain, and I've come to visit."

The elves looked at each other, expressions of confusion and apprehension. One looked hateful, but her title seemed to confuse more than aggravate.

"You are... not of our kind? What does this mean?" the elf spoke.

Nelras stepped forward and spoke. Elven words eliciting hisses and even more confusion.

"You will come with us," the main elf spoke.

"What did you tell them?" Ilea sent to Nelras Ithom.

The war machine glanced at her. *"That they better respect the presence of not one Monarch but their former ruler as well. I suspect they haven't attacked due to your four marks and your title."*

"Do you know any of them?" Ilea asked.

He did not reply.

With moderate speed, the group flew towards the structures in the distance. A strange settlement, Ilea thought, though she had seen stranger. In some ways it felt similar to what the Druned had built for the Mava, though whilst the golem constructions stood out in the desert like forgotten pieces of art, the Domain of Light felt entirely alien to her. Light now reflected from a thousand pieces embedded into the frozen sand formations. She could tell that some of them were windows, but many just seemed like pieces of glass. Now that she was closer, Ilea could also see the difference in color, though the variety was subtle, and favored blue and yellow.

She saw no metal or stone.

There were no streets, but simply dunes between the single standing formations. There were no walls or houses. There didn't seem to be anything deliberate, but she assumed she simply didn't understand the purpose of it all, or the artistry behind it.

One thing she could admit however.

"It's beautiful," she said out loud. "So this is your home."

Two of the elves glanced at her as they flew. Nelras remained silent.

They were led to one of the highest reaching spires, various platforms protruding out from the thin central part. Ilea raised her brows when she saw that entire sections of the sands were moving. A slow trickle here, a strong river like flow there. Constant motion, pulsating with dense magic that she instantly knew came from an Oracle.

They landed on top of a strange extension from the tower. Solid sand, as if someone had spilled a handful and frozen it in place, before it was attached to the spiraling tower. An incline led upward and to a round entrance made of glass.

She felt a pulse. A greeting of sorts perhaps? It felt as if it had come from the tower itself.

The elves around her hissed, their eyes wide as they looked at both her and Nerlas Ithom. All but the highest level one flew away.

The last one looked at them with golden eyes wide open. He bowed his head. "Monarch. I apologize for my behavior." He looked at Ilea as he spoke the words, then glanced at the war machine. His mouth opened, then closed. Then set his spear down into the sand. "The Ressanoov was called."

"*What does that mean?*" Ilea sent to her companion.

"The Monarch of the Sunlight Wastes. The Ressanoov. Speaker of the sands," Nelras spoke, each word pronounced with deliberation.

They didn't have to wait long. Half a minute passed before she saw glints of light approach. Dozens at first, then hundreds. Single elves, all of them, flying in the air or moving on the ground below, reaching the spire or stopping in the air dozens of meters away, their glass armor glinting in the sunlight.

A single figure landed on the sand extension, the previous spear wielder falling to his knees before he vanished and joined the flying onlookers.

[Sand Mage – lvl 1095]

Bronze skin and long silver hair, a flowing white long sleeve shirt and white pants. The elf wore no armor, nor did he wield any weapons. A scar showed on his neck, another on his brow. His eyes were a bright golden color, flowing with magic.

Ilea could feel the wealth of power, the being unquestionably beyond the Sanvaruun. She found it difficult to gauge, his control over his magic exquisite. He felt apprehensive and intrigued. Neither friendly nor hostile.

"Do you speak our tongue, Monarch?" the elf asked, looking at her.

"I'm afraid I don't. I've only recently come to this position," she said.

The elf hissed with a grin. "You are human, though your power is undeniable. You raise a lot of questions, but I will honor the customs. I am the Ressanoov of the Sunlight Wastes. Welcome to our lands, Monarch. For which Domain do you speak?"

"Verleyna," Ilea said. "The Sky Domain." She heard a few hisses and saw the slightly strained look on the Ressanoov's face. "And I am Lilith, of the Accords."

"And who is your companion?" the elf spoke, his attention turning to the war machine.

“Nelras Ithom,” the machine spoke, all the hissing sounds silenced in an instant. “Former Speaker of the Sands.”

The Monarch before them raised his brows, then hissed. A deep sound. “You would tarnish that na-” He was interrupted by another pulse. More aggressive and present.

Ilea felt it come from below. From the desert itself.

He spoke a few words in elvish before he glanced at Ilea. “You are... how is such a thing possible?”

“When the sun was taken from our skies, I sought to find and defeat the one responsible. But I was deceived. My power was not enough. A shameful defeat, but our enemy did not kill me. He imprisoned my very soul,” Nelras spoke and took a step forward. He glanced back at Ilea before he once again turned towards the Monarch.

The wind flowed around them, not a single elf hissing or speaking.

“Lilith, found me. And the Accords brought me back, with ancient dwarven machines, leaving me, here,” he said, his words slowing. The war machine raised his chest, a flicker of light appearing just above his metal palm. He was silent for a long moment, before he spoke, in elvish. Seven words in total.

Emotion flickered over the face of the Monarch, until he looked determined. He closed his eyes, and opened them again. “If that is your wish, Nelras Ithom. It is an honor.” A thin curved sword made of bone appeared in the Monarch’s hand. “Your name will be remembered.”

“Hold up a minute, what the fuck did you tell him?” Ilea asked, grabbing the war machine’s shoulder.

He raised his arm and touched hers. “You have freed me, Ilea. From the clutches of Ker Velor. I have seen and learned of the world beyond my home, and for that, I am grateful. You have brought me here, back to my home, now, that I am ready.”