

## 261: Be thou my flame

Scarlett paused before the grand obsidian altar inside the Sanctuary of Flames, her gaze fixed on the colossal flame burning with a blinding white-hot intensity at its core. The fierce heat from the flame created shimmering waves that distorted the air around it, casting an unearthly, dancing glow on the obsidian beneath, while the statues of the fire goddess encircling the altar reflected the flame's brilliance in their own fires, filling the space with an aura of faint divinity.

Standing this close, Scarlett had to actively employ her pyrokinesis to withstand the heat. She signaled for her companions to stay back, inching closer to the flame with deliberate steps.

### [Sacred Flame (Legendary)]

{This eternal flame embodies the fury and grace of the Fire Goddess, its unending blaze a source of both awe and dread that once bestowed blessings upon the faithful and fiery retribution upon the unworthy }

The item description materialised as she halted a few steps away, feeling the violent heat even through her magic. Her eyes lingered on the flame, considering it closely.

From what she remembered, the [Sacred Flame] was a valuable artifact in the game. Most legendary-tier items were, to some extent. It was probably of particular worth to her, given her affinity for fire. That said, it wasn't on the same level as Arlene's [Eternal Flameweaver's Athame], nor was it the primary reason Scarlett was interested in this place. It would have just been an added boon, comparable to her [Tiara of Lost Benediction (Legendary)], but nothing ground-breaking.

At least, that's what she had originally thought. Now, seeing it in person, her perspective had shifted slightly.

Now, she could simply take the flame for herself, and it would enhance both her fire resistance and overall pyrokinesis damage. That wasn't anything to sneeze at, frankly. But thanks to the knowledge she'd inherited from Thainnith's legacy, a new plan formed in her mind, one that happened to align well with what she had already been doing.

Turning around, her attention fell on the Emberling. It was fixated on the [Sacred Flame], but it wasn't bounding towards it recklessly like it did with normal fire.

Scarlett conjured a small flame to coax it closer. As the fiery fox moved closer, settling beside her, its form seemed to shimmer with a newfound brilliance in the artifact's presence.

Unlike the fire elementals and the [Lava Hydra], there wouldn't be any point in having the Emberling try to absorb the [Sacred Flame]. It was neither an elemental nor a true spirit, and despite appearances, it didn't actually have the power to consume fire. Instead, as an Etherialias and pseudo-spirit, it acted more as a magical conduit for elemental energy, capable of storing the essence of true elemental spirits.

This was information Scarlett knew because of the legacy, and she also knew that, in the Material Realm, such entities could act as stabilisers and channels for the raw elemental

power around it. That was why it amplified nearby fires. She had been slightly uncertain whether this ability extended to elementals, but her earlier experiments confirmed that it didn't, or if it did, the effect was minor.

What this meant, though, was that having the Emberling absorb defeated elementals stored their energy inside it. In other words, she was using the Emberling as a mobile elemental battery.

Exactly how she was going to utilise this stored energy had still been somewhat of an unknown to her. The Emberling's power didn't increase with more absorbed essence, and Scarlett had no direct method to channel or access the stored energy. However, she'd believed there had to be some way to make use of it.

And according to Thainnith's legacy, the [Sacred Flame], it seemed, presented one such opportunity.

She couldn't make the necessary preparations here, though. That would require someone with a bit more experience than her. Fortunately, she had someone in mind. If she was lucky, they were even in the capital tonight.

Raising her hand, she extended it towards the undying fire, slowly moving closer. The temperature rose precariously with each step, quickly surpassing mere discomfort, but she didn't stop until she reached the flame. Her palm touched its searing white surface, yet instead of being reduced to cinders, the flame was the one to change, immediately shrinking to a condensed version that hovered above her hand.

Now, it was emanating an almost pleasant warmth.

Scarlett studied it for a few seconds, then tried willing it away. It flared, then disappeared.

The Emberling beside her was left staring at her empty hand, and if she didn't know better, she would have thought it looked perplexed.

"Patience," she said, mostly to herself. "We will get to you, eventually."

She brought out the [Foxfire Charm] that housed the little pseudo-spirit, using it to dismiss the fox entirely. She then shifted her attention from the now empty altar to the massive slab of stone covered in intricate etchings and runes at the chamber's far end.

The possibilities presented by the [Sacred Flame] had been a pleasant surprise, but this stele was her true objective. Ironically, though, it was of far less immediate practical use to her.

She walked towards it, retrieving a notebook from her [Pouch of Holding] and stopping a few meters in front of the slab. Her eyes traveled across the dark stone, observing the vast array of glyphs and channels carved into it. It was, without a doubt, the most confusing piece of inscription she had seen yet during her time in this world. The fact that it was all interconnected to form a single design spoke a lot about its complexity.

Still, perhaps unsurprisingly, all the symbols were familiar to her in some way or other, even if the entire construct was far too involved for her to comprehend. Opening an empty page in

her notebook, she used her pyrokinesis to begin copying down the array, starting from the left of the stele until she had filled the page, then moving on to the next.

“What’s that?” a voice soon called out behind her. Scarlett glanced back to see Allyssa and Shin approaching her, while Fynn had stayed back with Rosa.

“...An instruction,” Scarlett replied, returning to her task.

“For what?”

“Presumably a spell,” Shin said, stopping close to Scarlett to study the etchings. “I’ve never seen a spell that requires an entire wall just to fit in before, however.”

“You are correct in that it is for a spell,” Scarlett confirmed, her brow creased in concentration. “Specifically, a primordial spell.”

The young man fell silent.

“...Is that something important?” Allyssa asked.

A sigh left Shin, as if apologising for his companion’s apparent ignorance. “Primordial spells are among the most powerful ever created, dating back to the days of the Zuver. They are supposed to be incredibly rare.”

“Oooh, I thought those symbols looked different from before. So that’s Zuverian. Did you know it would be here, Scarlett?”

“I did. I have known about this place for some time, but I did not have a means of accessing it until recently.”

“I see. So you’re going to learn how to cast this spell?”

Scarlett paused her transcription, shooting the girl a brief look, then let out a small chuckle. “No, I am not. This spell is far, far beyond my abilities. It would require someone of Dean Godwin’s calibre to cast it.”

Or Arlene, in this case, given the spell’s school of magic.

Allyssa eyed her curiously. “What do you need it for, then?”

“There may be others who are interested in it,” Scarlett said. “Information is power, as they say.”

And even if she couldn’t technically cast it herself, she had long since considered other ways of utilising it.

The two Shielders soon left her to her work, allowing Scarlett to place her full focus on jotting down every single detail of the spell. It took her considerable time to accurately copy it in all its complexity. In fact, it took so long that she nearly expended all of her mana just maintaining her pyrokinesis to write with.

That wasn't to mention the nasty headache she developed, likely due to the combination of being near mana exhaustion while using Thainnith's legacy to interpret the myriad signs and symbols in the spell. While her goal had been merely to copy it, recognising most of the glyphs made the process easier and allowed her to make some interesting observations based on what Arlene had recently taught her about arrays.

Finally, after what was at least three hours of intense mental focus, Scarlett closed her notebook, having double-checked her results and feeling reassured that they were as accurate as she could get them. Rubbing her temples to alleviate some of the headache, she returned to the others. They had relocated to the mouth of the chamber where it was cooler, sitting on the steps and talking amongst themselves. To Scarlett's slight surprise, Rosa was still awake, even though she looked like she'd just run a marathon twice over.

"Are we done here?" Allyssa asked, looking up at Scarlett. Spread out on the ground in front of the girl were several alchemical flasks and vials that she had been fidgeting with, her protective goggles lying on her lap.

"We are, yes. We will now be taking our leave," Scarlett replied, walking past the group and starting the ascent to the dungeon's second layer.

She hadn't been too worried before, but copying that primordial spell took much longer than expected. They might actually be running short on time. The conclave was in the evening, and they had already spent several hours down here. Scarlett still had to make it back to the mansion and complete any preparations before leaving for Dawnlight Palace.

...It was going to be an annoying evening, she could tell.

Not only wouldn't she be able to regain most of her mana or energy in time, now she would also have to deal with this headache while interacting with a bunch of nobles, most of whom probably disliked her in some way or other.

Far from her definition of fun.

But she had been the one who decided to squeeze this dungeon run into her schedule before the conclave, so she couldn't really complain. She would have saved it for tomorrow, but there was no guarantee that she'd have the time, depending on how things went. Better to just clench her teeth and power through it.

Offending a couple of nobles should be fine, right? She already had a reputation for being arrogant and standoffish. Besides, Lady Withersworth would be joining her, and the woman might be able to smooth over any minor missteps or ruffled feathers.

Still, Scarlett would have to ask Allyssa about any stamina-boosting potions the girl had. It might also be wise to have someone refill the mana in her [Depraved Solitude's Choker], just in case. She wondered if anyone at the mansion could handle that? Rosa was the only one in the party with a significant amount of mana, and the bard hardly had any to spare at the moment.

She'd have to look into it.

Gradually, the group made their way back through the numerous chambers in the dungeon's second layer—with Fynn carrying Rosa—until they returned to the first chamber. There, they passed the statue of the fire goddess and moved through the corridor that led to the underground temple's entrance, where they began climbing back above ground.

The passage they had originally taken had now closed itself, but it reopened as they approached. Soon, they were back in the back room inside the House of Fire. Things looked much the same as when they first got here, with the fire goddess' statue at one end and the braziers in front of it now unlit.

**[Side-Quest completed: Beat the fire goddess' forgotten trials]**  
**{Skill points awarded: 4}**

**[Quest completed: Cleared The House of Fire]**  
**{Skill points awarded: 9}**

Scarlett raised a brow. She wouldn't have thought clearing the trials to be a side-quest unto itself. That was interesting.

Searching around, she looked for any signs of the acolyte they'd met before. Presumably he would have returned here at some point to check up on them after they didn't return after a while. She could only guess how confused and worried he would have been after realising they had disappeared. From his perspective, he'd allowed a group of strangers into the back of his temple, only for them to vanish without a trace.

She wasn't really in the mood for it, but the least she could do was thank him as they left. Or at least try to.

Changing into one of her dresses with her [Charms of Expeditious Change], she waited as the rest of her party removed their gear and returned it to the [Bag of Juham]. From here, Rosa had to walk on her own, but they wouldn't have far to go to reach the carriage.

They exited through the lone door into the main vestibule of the House of Fire. Scarlett spotted the masked acolyte sitting by the podium to the side, a hint of shock appearing to pass over his demeanour as he noticed them approach.

In the corner of Scarlett's eye, a glint of bright blond hair caught her attention, and before she could react, a cheerful voice called out.

“Why, if it isn't my quondam companions and dear compatriots? What a propitious coincidence that I would happen to run into you here!”

Scarlett felt a small part of her tense as she turned her head to see a man with a broad smile standing up from one of the pews at the center of the hall, his long, lustrous hair gleaming under the light as it fell over his gold-embellished red robes in a *far* too extravagant manner to have been a coincidence.

“...Father Abram.”