

Chapter 518 Road Construction

Ilea opened the heavy iron gate with her ash, prying the thing open as if it was made of cardboard.

The two pieces were pushed aside as she whistled, the first spells already hitting her without any noticeable damage to her ashen armor.

“Run or die,” she said, giving the frozen guards the same choice she had provided to those stationed in the four previous dungeons she had invaded.

The more people that joined this cause, the more information and detailed reports she got. Crimes were uncovered and their perpetrators pursued.

By now her name and actions had spread far and wide throughout Yinnahall, the nobility and army in shambles, split between those who wanted to end the conflict and those still standing with the High King.

Resolutions were being drawn up. Those previously in hiding came out with their evidence and accusations, the sudden opportunity not to be wasted.

It was utter chaos and after just about eight hours, Ilea was far gone from the center of it all.

She made it clear to everyone she got out of prison and every noble she confronted, that they were the ones to decide Yinnahall’s future. She just freed the path and demanded the abolishing of slavery.

Ilea didn’t really care if they found some way to become independent, as many hoped to do. She just felt obligated to interfere after seeing where the current road this city was on would lead.

Hector’s treasure sense was something quite valuable. Ilea found however that talking to political prisoners and amicable nobles trying to manipulate her to be just as good a way to find out where the treasuries were located.

Not their own of course. But those of their enemies.

Hector had already caused some chaos but it was nothing compared to the storm that had taken the city by now.

Ilea invaded the home of one of the last nobles on her list and found the man surrounded by guards in the large entrance hall.

“Lili-” he started, a dagger held close to a slave’s neck as he tried to negotiate.

Ilea had seen enough documents and heard plenty of personal testimonies to confirm his depravity. He was still pretty much on the bottom of the priority list which if anything, just proved that this city direly needed some kind of reform.

He wasn’t the first to try and negotiate, and surely he wouldn’t be the last.

However Ilea didn’t want what he was selling. The charges had been presented, and based on the evidence, the jury had deemed him guilty.

It was his misconception to think that he could negotiate with the executioner.

The dagger in his hand wasn’t magical, thus displaced without issue.

She slammed her ash through his barrier, armor, and finally through his skull.

“You can go or meet the same fate,” she said to the guards, healing the slave who looked at her with confusion and fear.

Many of these nobles were close to the capability of a low end Shadow. Enough perhaps to secure a portion of power in this city, enough to do what they wanted.

Ilea didn't really see herself as anything more than the consequences of their actions.

She was ready to meet hers whenever they dared to show themselves.

She watched the guards run off before blinking down.

The vault was right where it should have been. The noble had owned several businesses and made a name for himself with soap of all things.

It really came as a surprise to find out how much blood could be connected to such a product.

Her Absolute Destruction charged and was released with a heavy punch that spread through the enchantments like a wildfire through the twigs of a dried out Christmas tree.

She entered and cleared out all the valuables as a mist of poisonous gas spread from various openings in the walls. She took a step closer to the slowly spreading poison and took a deep whiff.

“Interesting, they could work on the flavor,” she said to herself as she continued her looting.

That makes what? Eight hundred gold?

She was back at over two thousand pieces. There was the option of just dropping the money out into the streets to the slaves and citizens but she deemed Claire to be the better solution.

Hector was right when he suggested that the Empire would just take the wealth if they didn't.

So now she just took his share too.

Ilea blinked a couple dozen times before she appeared in the temple hall. The place had come to be the base of operations for the resistance, the Order of Life, or the Independent Council of Yinnahall. Whatever they wanted to call themselves by now.

She could only compare the scene to an exaggerated depiction of a stock market company floor on a particularly bad day in the world of trading.

At this point the city was in their hands but there was still the problem of the Order's rituals.

Benedict and a few others had been tasked with looking into it.

“No, if he refuses then he will be detained until after a decision is made. I don't care if you have to set his temple on fire to get him out,” Ben explained to a group of soldiers before he noticed Ilea.

“So you are Li-” a man in fancy clothes said as he approached her before he was suddenly gone.

The people around her mostly kept their distance, the occasional interested party was simply displaced into the laundry room upstairs, making her stance on socializing clear.

She really liked the spell by now. None of her Classes or abilities had however leveled since the last time, likely to the lack of actual battles or challenges. The last noble she took out was the only one who actually managed to conjure a barrier. Likely because the others simply lacked a required spell to do so.

“How is it looking?” she asked.

“No rituals in the city. The opposition is getting weaker due to the provided evidence and the pressure from our coalition. Plus of course our more direct approach to clean out the city, in large thanks to your personal contributions,” he explained.

“As to information on other potential rituals... well there are reports from an uprising in Valstadt. Wynehold has declared its independence and is supposedly in talks with both Nipha and Lys. Borena was attacked by northern tribes. They seek aid from the more southern cities. Mothine to the south has reportedly been taken by the Empire. Refugees and soldiers who managed to get out before the siege have reached the slums just this morning. We deem it unlikely that the city would hold out for long.”

“Landort is under siege too, according to the troops who arrived a few days ago by both Nipha and Baralia troops. It’s unclear who they are but we assume Wynehold origins. It’s a little chaotic at the moment,” he said and continued immediately. “The High King has been suspiciously quiet. There are no news from the capital itself. We’re informing trusted associates of the Order of Truth, guards, military, nobility, and businesses alike of our discoveries and a call to seek out and destroy the rituals, should any have been set up in the various cities.”

“Harchat has reported invaders battling a group of Order members before leaving a temple entirely destroyed. That was four days ago,” Ben said.

“Hmm. So they succeeded,” Ilea said.

“Your associates then? Apparently they didn’t find the bodies. The report included a warning to other temples and help in the search of Elder Zion,” Benedict said.

“I see. You think he’s a driving force behind the rituals?” Ilea asked.

“Elder Zion, known blood mage and his associate space magic expert were in the process of setting up a ritual to make contact with the realm of life,” Ben said, holding up a letter as he read. “Yes. I think the answer to your question is yes.”

“What’s that place anyway? And where do you think the Elder is going now? Are there more Elders involved?” she asked.

“It’s a topic shrouded in a lot of secrecy. There are theories about it being the origin of healing magic, some say it’s the place where life itself came to be, while others yet claim it’s a demonic force trying to manipulate our Order into chaos. And that information is just from the records held by Barrett, a few other priests, and of course the High Priest of Yinnahall,” he said.

“Did he not have anything to share on the topic?” Ilea asked.

“We found him dead in his study,” Ben said.

“Fuck,” Ilea said.

“As to your question on the other Elders, most should be in the capital currently. I haven’t had the pleasure of ever meeting them myself but some of the other priests did. It’s unlikely that they would execute such a ritual in the capital itself,” he said.

“Why? They were willing to do it here and in so many other cities,” Ilea said.

“Baralia... we don’t think of this country the same way the Empire thinks of theirs. An attack on Yinnahall wouldn’t necessarily mean the country would go to war. An internal issue like Wynehold’s independence is not something the other cities would immediately choose to intervene

in. Those who have their roots in the Capital would never sacrifice all of its population, no matter how large the gain. That's also why only the High Priest here was even informed. The choice was death or exile in the capital. It seems he had friends in high enough places. Still he chose the former," Benedict explained.

"But the Nobles in Nara were informed beforehand," Ilea said. "They fled because of the High King's warning," she said.

"Because the relationship between the nobility of Nara and Baralia is different than that of Yinnahall and Baralia," Ben said.

Ilea understood a little more now why the capital had the same name as the kingdom itself. It really was more an alliance of city states forced together because of the surrounding powers.

Claire had already informed her that the cooperation between the various cities had worsened in the last few decades under the current High King's rule. The theory that the war against Lys was just an attempt at keeping the kingdom from falling apart became more and more plausible.

An attempt that backfired hilariously. From an outsider's perspective that was. It wasn't quite as enjoyable for those dying in the cities or in battle.

"And to where the Elder currently is... well we can only speculate," Ben said. "However based on everything we know, that speculation is more accurate than you might think."

He showed her a map, pointing first at Yinnahall before he moved his finger westward.

He indicated a small lake and a name written in the native tongue.

"Gyffold. It's not a very large city but its defenses are well known throughout both Baralia and beyond. Their relations with the High King weren't good to say the least. It's one of the few remaining uncontested cities and it lies between Harchat, Yinnahall, and Baralia. One last test perhaps or the true extent of this ritual. Baron is brazen and thinks himself nothing lesser than a god but he would still not risk doing this in the capital. Not with his culminated power there," Ben said.

"That's if your high king is a reasonable man. What if he went down the deep end?" Ilea asked, seeing the confusion in the man's face. "What if he's crazy?"

"Then the capital is doomed," Benedict said. "Gyffold is on the way however. We already sent riders and one of our elites who can fly."

"I don't know if warning them is the best idea," she said.

"Had a trusted priest from another city warned us as we warned others, your intervention would not have become a necessity," he said.

"You have a surprising amount of trust in your peers, especially considering the things we've learned today, and what you learned about the ritual," she said.

"Lust, torture, and murder are failings, one worse than the other, but you are wrong to assume even a handful of Order priests would be willing to sacrifice their whole city," he said with a firm voice.

"If you say so," Ilea said, honestly hoping that the man was right.

"How likely do you think is a ritual taking place in Gyffold?" Ilea asked.

"It's either Gyffold or Baralia. Any other city and it would be too late already. If another ritual had taken place, we would hear of it in a few days at best, weeks if the city was remote. However it's unlikely that they were intended as weapons against invaders. A side effect if anything," Ben said.

“They could’ve also just transported a large enough number of slaves to a random location to conduct the ritual there,” Ilea said.

“Then we have no way to stop them,” Ben admitted. “The patterns make sense however and I doubt Elder Zion would risk success now by forgoing the protection of the Order and an entire city,” he said.

Nor would he use fewer sacrifices if he has them available. He’s killed so many already, why not another city? More fuel is always better.

Ilea cracked her neck.

“You’re going?” Benedict asked.

Everyone close by who had pretended not to pay attention was now openly looking at them.

“Yes. I wish you luck in the coming times. Don’t disappoint me,” Ilea said to the man.

“You have saved Yinnahall, Lilith,” he said and stood up, bowing to her.

Many of the others followed suit.

“I prevented a ritual. The city is yours to save,” Ilea said with a smile, grabbing his map and blinking up and out of the temple.

Her wings spread and charged. She caught an arrow flying at her with surprising speed before she snapped the thing in half. People still thought they could change something by having her killed. She just hoped the Empire could prevent an extensive civil war in this kingdom.

She shot off in the direction of Gyffold, leaning forward as she increased her speed.

The flight took her over the elongated lake connected to Yinnahall, the forest beyond, and finally back to open plains.

Her map would be enough, knowing that Gyffold was apparently located in the middle of a rather large lake.

Ilea barely noted the various beasts in the wilderness, some running through the high grass below her without a care in the world. It really was a world unclaimed by humanity, even in their self proclaimed territory.

The birds trying to intercept her were simply displaced before their beaks could injure her or their bodies could slow her flight. She didn’t have time for small fry that didn’t understand her power.

While many wildlife creatures instinctively sought shelter upon her arrival, others lacked the perception to think past the modest size of her body. The absence of any warning colors or loud roars added to this confusing individual some could only logically place into the prey category.

The ashen being was luckily too preoccupied with a mission these creatures likely failed to comprehend, saving them from being ripped apart.

Ilea found the indicated lake a little while later.

The messengers from Yinnahall would not reach Gyffold for another day or more.

She slowed down as soon as she came close to the water. A quick ascent coupled with a few blinks let her get a better view of the city itself.

The walls were dark stone, seamlessly flowing into the rock below before it all vanished into the lake itself. Two thin perfectly straight and heightened stone roads led from the shores to the city island. The two to three thousand meter long constructs were most certainly not natural.

Pretty safe... attackers would have to come from the air or with boats. Any force coming over the roads would sacrifice any advantage their numbers would have provided.

Ilea thought about the potential of ice mages simply freezing the water for an army to cross.

She quickly found that the roads were closed already. Not really a problem for her however.

Ilea simply blinked into the water and approached the city that way. She was surprised to find the lake much deeper than she had anticipated.

The middle island itself extended far below too, the walls above just one of its defenses. Submarine monsters willingly patrolled the lake, some of them trying to have a bite of her but none finding success.

Most were below level one hundred but there were a few outliers. If anything, it didn't seem like Gyffold had over fished its surrounding waters, either willingly or because the prospect simply proved too dangerous.

She found that the base of the island was rough rock, broad enough to make her sphere unable to reach through.

Instead she went close to the walls and displaced herself through and into a random cellar. The walls here did have anti teleportation enchantments but nothing to prevent her perception or space magic. She wondered how expensive such defenses really were. It was possible the city just lacked the necessary mages or they considered the risk of a space mage too low to justify the expense.

Ilea had made sure Ravenhall didn't make the same mistake. Perhaps she should request the same from Allistair, if only to prevent infiltration. *Not that their walls could even compare to Gyffold's or Yinnahall's.*

The obvious competition among Baralia cities had likely led to the necessity of such high end defenses. Either that or the local governments simply prioritized walls to feeding citizens and slaves.

Ilea blinked up to the roof of the building she had arrived in and quickly assessed Gyffold.

The walls reached high on all sides, wild and sturdy defenses that looked almost natural at their base, growing into high structures obviously shaped by man. The streets were perfectly carved, a slight incline leading towards the city center and likely the wealthier districts.

Its size rivaled Stormbreach or Seyna, though not quite coming close to Ravenhall or Riverwatch.

The streets were busy despite the late evening hour, the same tension that she had felt in Yinnahall permeating the hushed voices and brisk moving citizens.

Now, where do I start?