

Chapter 450 Steady Climb

Ilea returned to Ravenhall the following morning. This time a little earlier to allow for a nice and extended breakfast as the sun rose over the mountains.

The luxury of a buffet served solely for her on a beautiful terrace certainly made up for the rancid smells and blight in the Karheim dungeon. A quick bath in the lake near the city helped clean off most of the dirt and blood. The ice was gone but the water hadn't been exactly warm. To Ilea, it hardly mattered.

She looked through the steady advancements in her skills with a smile, biting into a croissant.

'ding' 'Sentinel Sphere reaches 3rd lvl 13'

'ding' 'Sentinel Core reaches 3rd lvl 23'

'ding' 'Azarinth Fighting reaches 3rd lvl 26'

'ding' 'Azarinth Perception reaches 3rd lvl 12'

'ding' 'Ashen Wings reaches 3rd lvl 14'

'ding' 'Eyes of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 7'

'ding' 'Avatar of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 21'

'ding' 'Keeper of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 22'

Ilea was very much happy with the quick progress in her class skills. The undead was dangerous and quick, his fighting prowess nothing against her healing, defense and regeneration but if she simply let him come and attack, it was enough.

She didn't know how long this would work so well. Even with the high level of the creature, which she estimated to be in the late five hundreds or early six hundreds, at some point her skills would slow down. For now, she could benefit from the obvious experience the creature still retained.

The Vampire she had killed in the Descent really would have been a prime candidate for leveling. That thing could even take all of her attack skills without dying. She could have just returned whenever she had time. That option was gone now.

Ilea didn't regret it exactly, knowing that at the time the class levels had been beneficial. She just had to find an equivalent. The undead was a start but not a replacement.

Could inquire about Vampires. Might be able to find one or the other. Or that Werewolf thing I fought with Edwin and co. Hmm, might not be enough at this point.

She continued eating and read the rest of her notifications.

'ding' 'Monster Hunter reaches 2nd lvl 4'

'ding' 'Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 12'

'ding' 'Blight Resistance reaches lvl 7'

...

'ding' 'Blight Resistance reaches lvl 10'

'ding' 'Diamond Magic Resistance reaches lvl 10'

...

'ding' 'Diamond Magic Resistance reaches lvl 13'

'ding' 'Emerald Magic Resistance reaches lvl 6'

...

'ding' 'Emerald Magic Resistance reaches lvl 9'

'ding' 'Ruby Magic Resistance reaches lvl 5'

'ding' 'Ruby Magic Resistance reaches lvl 6'

'ding' 'Sapphire Magic Resistance reaches lvl 7'

...

'ding' 'Sapphire Magic Resistance reaches lvl 9'

'ding' 'Topaz Magic Resistance reaches lvl 7'

...

'ding' 'Topaz Magic Resistance reaches lvl 12'

'ding' 'Vine Magic Resistance reaches lvl 3'

...

'ding' 'Vine Magic Resistance reaches lvl 5'

'ding' 'Water Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 5'

Ilea nodded to herself, happy with the improvements. *I hope the Descent repopulates with non corrupted creatures. That would be great for resistance leveling.*

She wondered how long she should reasonably stay away from the place. The Ascended might not care to hunt her down but the dungeon itself was something it had considered its territory. *Might not be the case anymore with what it did to the metal in the end.*

Ilea thought a couple of months would be necessary at the very least. Then she could visit Hallowfort again and get some information from Catelyn. She trusted the Fae to inform the fox of her survival.

She finished the hot chocolate with closed eyes, uncaring of the scathing heat pouring down her throat. Some of it was absorbed by her third tier Heat Resistance to provide some warmth. Heart of Cinder could certainly be used for such a result but Ilea currently didn't have a way to safely get rid of the spell once activated. Sending a beacon of bright energy up into the sky wasn't something on her list. Especially with the flying guards and birds. Killing humans on accident wasn't something out of the question anymore.

She left several gold pieces in exchange for two hundred and ninety silver pieces. The waitress reassured her that payment wasn't necessary but Ilea had already vanished.

Once you're rich and influential, you apparently don't have to pay for anything anymore, she thought with a smirk. As if it was an affront to ask the famous Lilith to pay for services or goods provided. Ridiculous.

Jerry looked relieved when Ilea finally showed up, his expression quickly turning to fear as he approached her.

"What's the matter, Jerry?" she asked with a smile, ignoring the looks from dozens of people hanging around in the arena.

Some of them were trailing the attendant but their questions died down as soon as they spotted Ilea.

"Ah... yes. Greetings, my lady. Erm... it seems the session from yesterday has made its round. I am nearly done with categorizing. Claire informed me to lower the rewards from five silver to two per hour. Nobody left at the announcement so I suggest we lower it further tomorrow. Would that be agreeable to you?" the attendant explained.

"Sure. I trust you two on that so just do what seems appropriate. If possible I suggest we massively increase the reward for new magic provided. Enough to attract Shadows as well," Ilea explained.

By now she had covered herself with ash. The Healer tag was one thing but she didn't exactly want every adventurer in the area to know her face.

"Of course. I will discuss the changes. I have listed the main elements for today. Please mark those you do not wish to include," Jerry added and handed her the book he was carrying.

Ilea glanced through, happy to find a few rarer schools. She scratched the ones she already had at the end of the second tier and added a plus to the rare schools. "Pay the ones I marked with pluses a little better."

He nodded and took the book back. "I will. If I may add another suggestion," he said and waited for her to nod. "I suggest we pay those of a higher level with an increased rate. It would both potentially entice some of them to increase their personal power and might attract stronger adventurers."

"Sure. We can introduce all that gradually. It's only the second day. Let me know if you have any other suggestions. Discuss them with Claire as well," Ilea said and stepped to the center of the arena, people stepping aside.

One rather large and heavily armored warrior didn't step away.

[Warrior – lvl 128]

"Excuse me. That's my spot. You're here for the magic training?" Ilea said.

"And you are the one offering it? To level your resistances for sure... I can't believe a rogue healer would be involved in such a scam. Oh well... when is the noble coming that we will attack?" he asked with disinterest, looking past her.

Some of the people cringed back, others just shook their heads.

Ilea noted that most of them didn't care either way. She sighed and casually grabbed the man's arm. She twirled and threw him to the spectator stands, his form crushing several benches in the process.

"Shall we begin then?" she said and clasped her hands together.

Several hours later, she bid farewell to the large group of adventurers.

The undesirables hadn't been terribly offended when Jerry informed them, merely disappointed that they were not allowed to participate in the lucrative endeavor.

The reduction of the reward proved if anything that the initial sum had been ludicrously high. Only those that had participated on the day prior reacted with more than minor disappointment. Smug more than anything, to have found this gold mine before everybody else.

Ilea questioned their capabilities as adventurers or whatever else they considered themselves to be. There were many ways to increase one's monetary funds, especially if one could hunt and kill monsters.

There were reasons of course, that Shadows were considered the best of the best. Most everyone else would prefer a safe environment to earn gold, pushed to their adventuring ways by lacking opportunities or a youthful spirit that has waned a long time ago.

If only they had more healers to go with them.

She did note that there were few participants younger than herself or even close to her age.

Ilea checked through her messages as she strolled through the city, towards the headquarters of the Sentinels.

'ding' 'Blood Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 16'

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

'ding' 'Crystal Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 3'

'ding' 'Dark Magic Resistance reaches lvl 16'

'ding' 'Dark Magic Resistance reaches lvl 17'

'ding' 'Earth Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 6'

'ding' 'Heat Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 5'

'ding' 'Mist Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 11'

'ding' 'Pain Tolerance reaches 3rd lvl 3'

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

None of her class skills leveled but at least she found Pain Tolerance to be manageable here compared to the blight dungeon.

She didn't turn it off, nor removed the resistance altogether but instead let it help her focus. It was still a painful experience but it let her see the spells move within her sphere, let her try and trace the magic. To understand how it formed, how the projectiles impacted her and how her body regenerated.

Her face had been covered by ash but as soon as the attacks started, it was hardly a necessary precaution. The various explosions of elements both prevented her face from being seen, nor from it actually being present most of the time. The combined effort of around seventy mages of various levels proved enough to at least injure her with her resistances and armor deactivated.

So far it kind of came as a surprise that none of them had any new magic to show her. Ilea hoped the increasing rewards for special abilities would be fruitful. She doubted her current skill set already protected her from every adventurer out there.

She reached the headquarters and opened the door, feeling the magic of several enchantments dissipate as soon as she channeled her mana into the entrance. It fell back into place behind her, the defensive magic activating once more.

Fascinating, she thought, once more joyous to have employed the smith's daughter into her organization. Her potential would have been wasted most everywhere else.

Swords and armor when she can work on teleportation and defensive structures, she thought and smirked.

Ilea waved at Aki who sped out from one of the entrances, checking on the commotion he had either felt or had been informed of by one of the enchantments.

Greetings, she sent through the mind magic she had gotten from her third tier resistance.

"What? How did you do that?!" the dagger turned Taleen machine asked in confusion.

Secret, she sent.

"You defy logic, Ilea. Welcome back. You are early," he said as his eyes glowed a bright green.

Ilea smiled, thinking of the Praetorians and the danger they had posed. By now she was eager to fight some of them alone. Not that it would prove to be lucrative for her but after the Ascended, she was definitely interested in smashing her old nemesis. Just to feel a little better... a little more in control perhaps.

"Says the sentient dagger controlling a Taleen war machine. I am neither early nor am I late. Lilith always arrives on time... or something like that," she said and remembered her light staff too late. Not that Aki would get the reference anyway.

"Still clinging to your otherworldly references, I see. It is good to know that at least your mind has not changed too much," Aki said and turned back to the stairwells.

"What's the point of life if you are not having fun?" she asked and followed the machine. "I'm here to see Orthan and Iana. Do you know where I can find the former?"

Aki nearly glided down the stairs with lethal precision, his six legs in perfect control. "He is teaching a class at the moment. I shall take over if you wish."

"You have improved considerably, even though your level remains the same. I hope my display didn't dishearten you too much," she said.

The machine turned its head to look at her. “I appreciate that you worry about me but remember, I have been a dagger for millennia. It still fills me with joy to finally have a body to move around in, especially one so powerful. My debt to you is immense and while it is disappointing to see that the gap between us has increased instead of lessened, if anything it makes me proud. To have been owned by you. And to serve you now, in this new form I have taken.”

Ilea tilted her head to the side. “Feels like you changed your tone as well. Where’s the snark?” she laughed.

The machine laughed as well, the sound unnerving and unnatural. “This body provides me with ambient mana... I have found my mind is more stable than before... less inclined to shift to better suit my wielder. I appreciate the sarcasm you have bestowed on me but find it rarely useful when teaching inexperienced students,” he said.

“I see. It’s good to know you’re finding yourself. Maybe you could write a biography about your life at some point. Coming of age of a Taleen war machine. Bet it would sell. Also yes to your earlier question, I’d appreciate talking to Orthan now,” she said.

“My sword arms aren’t particularly suitable for writing. Perhaps I could find a large rock to carve my story into?” he asked in a dry tone, confirming that the Aki she knew was still somewhere in there.

He led her to the fourth floor down where several training halls were located.

She stopped him before he entered. “Aki, just to make sure. You don’t have to serve me and just because you have this body now, I don’t think of it as a debt. Just a favor for a friend. If you wish to pursue your own adventures or endeavors, you are free to do so.”

His eyes glowed a little brighter. “As always. Too kind for your own good. As I said, I like it here. Very much so. Should I ever wish for something else, I shall talk to Trian about it. I consider myself a Sentinel as much as everybody else here. Do not mistake my devotion for obligation. I have seen and judged you with my own mind. I choose to serve you, Ilea.”

She sighed and nodded.

The machine laughed again. “Still that uncomfortable with praise and loyalty? You should get used to it. The way your students think of you will soon be revealed, when their fear and respect is overcome with sheer reverence.”

“Oh god, please no,” she whispered and watched him enter the hall.

“There is no god,” he whispered back in a menacing voice.

Orthan joined her a minute later, closing the large wooden double doors behind him.

She could see some of the students trying to glance out.

More rumors to the pile, she thought, unsure if Maro would remain the only one to form a cult in Ravenhall. Too much familiarity and I will be expected to stay... too much mystery and I will become a myth.

“You seem in turmoil. Greetings, Ilea. Or should I say Lilith?” the old man said. His age didn’t show in his movements or the way he held himself. A dangerous senior for sure.

“Whatever you prefer, Orthan. I have been thinking but that is a battle for myself alone,” she said with a chuckle and walked back to the stairwells, sitting down on them.

The man surprisingly followed suit, sitting down next to her with a sigh. “What can I do for you then?”

She felt the distress slowly grow within him through her sphere and wasn’t exactly sure where it came from.

“I can feel your fear,” she said in a voice as deep as she could manage before she laughed. “Sorry, that was weird. Seriously, there’s no reason to be distressed.”

His eyes opened wide as his heart rate accelerated. He calmed down again in a few seconds. “You can peer into the mind? Or have my abilities to hide my emotions truly deteriorated that much?”

“I can perceive a general feeling of distress. This concerns your abilities and a few suggestions and requests I have,” she replied.

He nodded. “I had feared you wished me removed from the Sentinels,” he said and smiled.

“Trian trusts you and I have no reason to doubt him,” Ilea said.

“I see. He is a good man. I truly enjoy being a teacher, especially in an organization as prominent as this one. I assure you that my experience is worth your while,” he said. “So what is it that I can help you with?”

Ilea nodded and leaned back. “I’m sure you’re doing a great job. There are two main things... you’re a bone mage, right?”

He nodded. “Bone and blood magic are my main tools, yes.”

“That’s good. I thought about potentially supplying the students with bone armor. Maybe mixed with metal but I’m not entirely sure yet. Can you shape bone?” she asked.

His eyebrows quirked up as he considered. “It is unusual. Bone is rather sturdy... just not easy to come by. Its various uses in alchemy and other sectors often make it less profitable to sell to the few armorers that are interested.”

“I doubt my capabilities are enough to produce full fledged armor but perhaps if I work together with a smith or leatherworker, we could figure something out. Metal is easier to come by however, especially if you are looking for a uniform design,” he explained.

“I see,” Ilea nodded. “I can regrow my bones so I thought mine might be suitable. They lose a lot of resilience once removed from my body but I suppose they’re still much stronger than much of the nearby wildlife could provide.”

The man looked at her before he started cackling, turning into a cough before he calmed himself. “To think I challenged you on our first meeting... I thank you for your mercy. It may be possible. With enough bone we could outfit everyone,” he said and nodded.