

Chapter 585 Dungeons and depths

Ilea reached the gate room and found the one on this side destroyed entirely. She took a deep breath and calmed herself down using meditation and healing.

A fucking monarch.

She reeled back and laughed. “What a fucking joke. He didn’t even vaporize me instantly...,” she said and grinned. *Just another Drake. One with a shit character.*

He had looked down on her from so far up, she wouldn’t question it if he had already forgotten about her. *But he came all the way up north... for what? Isalthar? To gather the two traitors? Will he kill them? Or take them in? Or were they just working for him from the start?*

Isalthar will know him. Thank fuck these idiots don’t step into dungeons, she thought and calmed down, sitting on an ashen chair as she summoned a meal and some of Walter’s ale. “And that armored asshole was too fucking much to handle too,” she murmured, taking a swig of the wonderful drink.

Is he gonna send the two after me? she thought, glancing at the entrance to the gate room. In a way she hoped he would. *Can’t believe I had sex with that moron.*

His magic was... overwhelming. Even with third tier resistances. Another few seconds and he would’ve burned away my very bones. What if I hadn’t had Meadow’s training... he could’ve just moved me out of there.

She relived the encounter as she slowly ate her food, Keyla’s creation bringing her back to some semblance of comfort.

That pole... I think he could manipulate the weight of that thing. Maybe gravity or metal magic that activates on a whim. His control of that weapon was impressive to say the least. The way he navigated around me, always in perfect range.

It had helped the elf that her attacks simply didn’t seem to have a lasting effect but the fact remained that Ilea hadn’t been so thoroughly outclassed by a combat practitioner for a long while. Even the Queen wasn’t quite as insane.

Not just faster and stronger but more experienced, more nuanced, more visceral, she mused, questioning if she could maybe ask the elf for some training. The idea was quickly discarded, his lack of communication certainly in the way, let alone his alignment.

He even broke my bones. Just shattered them.

She smiled, adding the two to her imaginary list of beings she had to beat the shit out of. Either seemed impossible to defeat for now. *I wonder who’d be harder to fight. Probably the warrior. I literally just have to get better and tougher than him. With the monarch, I can already survive his magic. More resilience and healing should be enough.*

But he used a space magic barrier... just straight up space. I don’t know if that is even breakable.

The possibilities excited her a little. Could she conjure something like that? Could she get a pole weapon like the armored one had? Or fist weapons maybe? Could her ash gain similar properties?

Her third tier blink would be on cooldown for quite some time, allowing her to think about various options and possibilities. She wouldn't risk flying south the normal way or going to Hallowfort, lest she lead the Elves there or get killed on the way.

Meadow will take care of Hallowfort. I'm more concerned about the human plains... the damage that one monarch could do. Would Virilya's shields even hold?

The thought was absurd. A single person powerful enough to challenge the most densely populated human city. She smirked at the thought of the whole Golden Lily getting slapped around by a single elf. *But that's how it works, isn't it? I could probably destroy entire settlements too before anybody strong enough to stop me even shows up.*

We need more enchantments and group spells to prevent shit like that. Or more Meadows. Maybe it can clone itself.

Ilea supposed nukes could do the trick as well. Technology as a deterrent, or just a few insanely powerful people. *Hold up a minute... am I a nuclear warhead?*

She wasn't sure. Her aoe wasn't exactly comparable but that didn't exactly invalidate the idea. Ilea was glad the other races, especially the Elves, didn't seem obsessed with Imperialism and constantly expanding territory.

At the same time we'll have to make sure humans don't get that kind of power. Otherwise everyone else will be wiped from the map in the next few centuries.

She tapped her finger on the ashen chair, thinking about her next steps. The mark she had left on Elfie was in her mind. She had to go and find them again, inform Isalthar about what had happened here. Helping them fight the Taleen seemed like a good idea too. Both for training and leveling purposes, let alone just helping out a few friends.

If the monarch went after humans, there was admittedly little that Ilea could do to stop him. She highly doubted it but for the future, it was important to know their power. It felt inevitable that they would clash again at one point or the other and if she made him mad enough, he would go after those she cared about. She had to be able to kill him, same as she had to be able to kill the Ascended.

Ilea just hoped there wasn't a deadline to reach the necessary power. She felt like she had to be a little more considerate with which factions she fought, knowing how comparatively weak humanity was. *I need time to grow, need time to grow the Sentinels. And we have to make sure humanity gets their fucking shit together, otherwise we'll get stomped at one point or the other.*

She relaxed in her chair, taking a sip of ale as she considered. *How probable is it that no faction ever decided to just destroy our cities on some random whim? Who would come and stop them? It had to have happened before. And there simply have to be humans that could intervene.*

Ilea started eating her second meal. She summoned her map and made it float with a bit of ash, tracking the various marks she had left in the lands. Elfie's was located far south of Ravenhall, right in the Isanna desert.

Hidden in the middle of nothing. I wonder where Iz is located. Is it really the central hub for the Taleen?

The place had been absolutely massive and crawling with powerful machines. Ilea just wondered if there were more places like that. *Maybe there's one just called I.*

She smiled at the thought, already bored with the tracking. She added another few layers to the map, made entirely of ash. That way she could try and gauge the height difference between the various mark locations. The differences were minuscule but she had gotten pretty good with the skill.

There were a few notable differences in altitude. Meadow and Iana were incredibly high up compared to the others, both of them located in Hallowfort. Elfie on the other hand was far below ground, or the desert sloped down from Ravenhall, something Ilea doubted based on her one time foray into the southern sands.

Violence was fucking *somewhere*. Ilea had no way to place that mark, at all. She tried, for quite some time, but failed to gauge any useful information. It was certainly possible that the little critter was just fucking with her somehow. Ilea was pretty sure the Fae was the authority on space magic, even if she considered Meadow.

Far less cooperative and much more chaotic perhaps, but Ilea was glad she knew Violence at least. *Maybe my third Class will evolve me into a tree. Finally, some peace and quiet. Freed from worldly considerations. I could grow a garden or something, give horrible advice to travelers, summon unsuspecting high schoolers into dangerous dungeons.*

She huffed, sitting in her ashen chair. “How fucking dare that asshole. Making me hide here like some common Shadow,” she spoke out and stood up. “Might as well explore this place a little more. Maybe Elfie’s group missed something. Or I can use a random teleport gate to get me somewhere else.”

The next few hours made her realize that the Elves hadn’t exactly missed anything. And for some reason, Seviir and Heranuur had destroyed not only the gate to the facility in the south, but the few others that had been nearby too. Likely just to prevent her from having any fun.

Ilea instead worked on her ash, walking around the large corridors and halls as she formed various people, places, maps, and tech with the dark material. While keeping track of her marks of course. She realized that this was a justified time to relax and enjoy some me time but it didn’t feel right, if only because it was forced upon her.

It made her even more pissed that she knew for a near fact that the monarch was long gone. But a near fact simply wasn’t enough in this situation.

She had lost track of time, simply trying to activate her third tier blink every few minutes. *What if he sees and follows somehow?*

Ilea dismissed the thought. Traveling via her third tier was both faster and safer. If the elf wanted to find her, a description of her abilities and looks would already bring him to Ravenhall. If he followed her to her house, it would at least allow her to find a nearby dungeon to hide again.

Would they like the lower mana density in the plains or would they dislike it?

She wasn’t sure. Ilea knew the Elves had a rough time entering a dungeon for the first time, the north itself a little too much to bear without a bit of acclimation. But she didn’t think they had the same problems when it came to a lower density. *Maybe it feels off to them? Could their lack of aggression against any settlements east of Riverwatch be explained so simply?*

Ilea doubted it. In the end it could just be that they disliked the energy around more eastern towns. *It’s so much more complicated when the enemy isn’t just a mindless monster with simple motivations.*

Her spell finally activated, Ilea sighing as she waited for the runes to manifest. “Fi na lly.”

She appeared in her house with her spells and auras ready, but nobody followed. No ripples in space or hiding Elves she could perceive. Just her little old home. A home she spent much too little time in for her tastes.

But as Ben constantly said, with power comes responsibility. She wasn't exactly Peter Parker but Ilea wanted to protect her friends and allies at the very least. And for that she had to get stronger. Also she just really wanted to cave that light elf's face in.

Ilea blinked out of her home and sped up along the cliffs going south. Storms raged in the distance, harsh waves crashing against the rock below. She saw dark clouds move towards the land, bringing rain and lightning with them. Normal lightning at least and the arcane kind of the north.

She soon veered to the right and onto the rocky terrain steadily growing flatter, until the first sand started to show.

The Isanna desert stretched far and wide. Massive dunes soon stretching for kilometers into the distance, Ilea a single black speck in the vast nothingness. It was warm but not particularly bothering or dangerous to her.

Elfie's mark was still distant but she was gaining quickly. No creature showed itself right until she reached the mark.

Well, the mark was far below ground. Ilea crossed her arms while floating in the air, looking at the dune below her. She had expected a temple, an oasis, a mountain, or *something*.

It was literally just sand. Without the mark, finding this place would've been impossible. Ilea couldn't help but wonder if the Taleen had somehow dug down somewhere else and then made tunnels to reach this place.

Or so much time has passed that the sands simply moved?

With magic, there could've been many possibilities but the fact remained that she was looking at a metric fuck ton of sand between her and Niivalyr.

"Whelp, only one way down," she thought and covered her eyes with ash, forming a massive drill she angled downward. *How hard could it be. Point it at the ground and turn it on.*

She chuckled to herself as her wings charged and the drill started spinning. Her auras flared up before she shot into the ground. Her momentum brought her down over a hundred meters before she slowed. She hit a stone wall before her initial burst of speed ran out, her ash slowly burrowing itself into the thick barrier.

Her wings and a truckload of ash kept the sand from rushing in around her, trickles of it running past as she broke into the Taleen facility with ashen limbs. When she could see the hall below within her sphere, she vanished.

And appeared in the dimly lit dungeon. "I'm back," she said to the Guardians patrolling in the vicinity.

Ilea ignored the projectiles clashing against her armor and simply sped through the facility, her teleportation and wings bringing her through the many corridors and halls. She alerted plenty of Praetorians and special variants on the way but ignored them all, not even the Executioner she found managed to keep up with her.

It was good to know that there were more of them. She wasn't quite over her fuck up with the first one. Feyrair and herself had joked plenty but she really wasn't sure what would've happened without the Elves present, let alone Isalthar's intervention in the end.

Taking one down without help would right the uncomfortable feeling. Though she wasn't sure she was ready for that quite yet.

She had to travel longer than expected, the dungeon reaching deep into the ground. If she hadn't seen Iz and the Descend, this might've been the largest dungeon so far. Ilea wondered how many Praetorians this place pumped out every week. *Ten? A hundred? More?*

It didn't matter in the end. Soon the facility wouldn't be producing any.

Ilea closed in on Elfie's mark and appeared inside of a production hall, finding him and Neiphato fighting a group of Praetorians with the help of Farhorn, Ben, and Asay. She assumed Feyrair had continued alone.

She appeared next to the arcane mage floating a distance away from the battle.

"You have returned after all. Impressive," he said with a slight smirk.

"Can you call for Isalthar?" she asked.

He blinked a few times. "Certainly," he said with a slight bow. He raised a hand towards the battle, an arcane barrier forming where a scythe would've hit Neiphato's wooden defense.

"Progressing well?" Ilea asked.

"We are... progressing. Yes. Our team composition is more efficient like this," he said. "Did you find them?"

Ilea glanced at him and then back to the battle. "Yes."

He hissed in an intrigued way. "You will wait until Isalthar is back?"

"Mhm," Ilea mused. "But maybe I can share some things with you beforehand... I'm sure you would value such a favor."

Asay giggled. "Oh certainly, what is the mind but memories and knowledge. Surely there are treasures I hold that may interest a young healer like yourself."

"I met a monarch," she said.

His eyes opened wide before he hissed and moved a little closer. "You did? How do you know?"

"Core skill point. I got one for surviving the encounter," she said.

"How did he look? Did you see?" Asay asked, his smile showing teeth as his eyes sparkled with purple light.

"Blond, near white long hair, black clothes with silver runes. Space magic, and light, or something close. He's basically a firefly on steroids," she said.

"Was he alone?" Asay asked, downright holding his breath.

"Seviir and Heranuur were there. As was an elf at level eight hundred or so, black armor and wielding a silver metal pole," she said.

His grin broadened as he clasped his hands together. "You have fought Noro? The armored one."

“I did,” Ilea said and chuckled, a core explosion spreading through the hall as the elven group retreated, focusing onto the next enemy. “He bashed my bones in. An absolute monster that one, have you fought him before?”

Asay looked at her before he started laughing, a hand in front of his mouth as he snickered, nearly choking.

“What’s so funny?” she asked.

He turned back towards her and smirked. “No, Ilea. I have not fought the Noro, for I would no longer be here, amongst the living.”

“Is that his name?” Ilea asked. “He didn’t seem particularly talkative.”

“Noro bears no name. The word means beast, and nothing else. A fitting title, wouldn’t you say?” Asay asked. “The presence of them means this wasn’t a mere coincidence. The misguided fools,” he murmured the last part and shook his head.

“What do you mean?” Ilea asked.

He glanced at her and smiled. “Little care have those of power for the Hunters of Cerithil. For we are mere beasts lurking in the shadows, fighting in places deemed holy. Cursed and exiled. But there are those even a monarch would seek. The Val Akuun is one of them.

“It is said that great power awaits those who would deliver those deemed enemies of the domains and their long standing monarchs. Yet their foolishness is apparent when they choose to trust a monster.”

“The monarch? Who is he?” Ilea asked.

Isalthar appeared with Seithir in tow, taking in the surroundings before he hovered over to Ilea.

“You have returned from beyond. Have you found your friend in safety?”

Ilea smiled. “I did. And brought him away.”

“May I?” Asay asked, looking at her.

“Sure,” Ilea said.

Asay grinned. “This human... has met the Sanvaruun.”

Ilea saw Seithir float back a little, his whole body wincing at the call of the name. She felt the air freeze around Isalthar, only visible due to her sphere. His face betrayed nothing.

“Tell me, all that you have found,” Isalthar said.