

Chapter 876 Golden Light

Ilea arrived to the thrumming presence of barrier magic. She perceived the bright shields still in place within the Haven.

The seals were all there, hovering in the air as they had before.

“She arrives,” Nes spoke, her white eyes taking her in. “And you have grown yet again. I don’t suppose you have found an easy way to power?”

“Still the same,” Ilea said.

“We should be grateful she’s still alive,” Iana said from the side. “We’re just waiting on Niivalyr and Myr Iva, then we can start.”

I could get them quickly, Ilea realized, but decided not to involve herself. Perhaps unnecessary and a short holdup, but they could handle getting here on their own. She smiled to herself and formed an ashen chair nearby, summoning herself the first meal and ale in what felt like thousands, perhaps millions of years.

And it tasted near as good as she had hoped for. A base of mashed potatoes with herbs and a buttery sauce, topped with seared and perfectly cooked fish. The first of four dishes.

She finished with a healthy serving of cake, sharing half of it with Myr Iva when she arrived.

Niivalyr joined them a few minutes later, blood and burn marks on his armor and skin.

“Didn’t care to clean yourself up?” Scipio asked.

Niivalyr hissed, though in calm manner that nonetheless depicted a ‘no’.

“You’re done then?” the elf asked, looking at Ormont.

The dwarf grunted, his arms crossed.

“Then let us start, we’ve been down here for long enough,” Iana said.

Ilea watched as all of them took their positions before the respective seals. She saw Myr Iva finish the remaining cake with a gulp.

Aki was ready, four Executioners now present, including a few Centurion variants waiting behind.

Ilea stood up as well, joining the others as her mantle spread onto her.

The hall was quiet beside the thrum of the near impenetrable barrier. Ilea wondered how she would do against it, with all of her Fourth Tier abilities.

“On my signal,” Iana spoke. “Ready your runes,” she said as they all spread their magic, a variety of spells flaring up, the seals brimming with power.

Niivalyr for the Elves.

Goliath for the Dark Ones.

Iana and Chris, for Humanity.

Myr Iva, for the Mava.

And Ormont, for the Dwarves.

“And release,” Iana spoke.

Five loud sounds of shattering noise reverberated through the hall.

Ilea watched as each of the seals faded, just as the barrier itself dissolved.

She prepared for traps or a fight, just in case. But nothing challenged them.

On the other side of the hall was a wooden door. Rather simple considering the location and the intricate barrier that had protected it. There were no sigils nor engravings. A simple door handle and no dangerous enchantments that Ilea could perceive.

The Executioners walked forward, one at a time as the rest of the group examined their surroundings.

Ilea added her awareness of space into the mix but found nothing strange about the hall, or the door for that matter. The only defenses in place that she could perceive, had the purpose of blocking perception spells like her dominion.

“Seems safe enough,” Iana murmured.

“Nothing here either,” Ormont added, giving the young enchantress a slight nod.

“Ilea, join me if you will,” Aki said.

She walked past the others, ready in case the machines failed to activate a hidden trap. *Though that would have to be quite the trap for the assorted mages to miss it.*

She reached the door while the others remained at a distance.

“Should I open it?” she asked, looking back at them.

“It would be safer if I do that,” one of the Executioners spoke, a smaller Centurion walking over.

Ilea was about to retort when she thought about her conversation with Trian. “Sure,” she said and stepped aside.

The green eyed machine grabbed the handle, and opened the door.

The hinges seemed well oiled, the entrance sliding open with barely a sound.

Ilea smiled when her dominion could finally perceive into the room. She waited for the machines to enter before she followed.

Magical lights flared to life on the ceiling, illuminating the spacious room in a cool hue. The left side wall was lined with book shelves, the right one with a variety of work benches cluttered with tools, gems, plans, and metal pieces. A few of the tools looked similar to what she had seen in Ascended facilities. The floors and walls were solid steel, the former covered by a royal blue carpet. A single round table stood a little off from the center, beyond were three stair steps that reached the entire length of the extensive room. The lower section of the room held a single wide wooden desk with a leather armchair. Behind were wide windows, bright light coming from beyond.

Ilea stopped in the door frame when she saw the propped up metal sphere near the desk, its surface engraved with hundreds of runes. *Seen that one before. "There is one of those Ascended spheres that can talk to you."*

"Let me have a look, before you trigger defensive measures," Nes sent as everyone moved into the room. For now they remained close to each other, various magics active for them to perceive the contents of the room.

"We will do that together," Aki said, giving her a glance.

"Of course," Nes said as they got closer.

Ilea walked past and looked out of the windows. *"There is another barrier out there."*

Ormont joined her, the old dwarf looking out as well. *"So all we did was get into this office. Let's activate the Varitan sphere and see what we can learn."*

Nes looked his way, her white eyes glowing a little brighter.

"I've had one of those things warn an Ascended before," Ilea said.

"Clear the room first if you will, of everything you can," Aki said.

Ilea shrugged, separating every single framework while ignoring the furniture itself. Her ash spread out before she used Fabric Tear to move it all a little closer. A moment later, the room was barren, its contents stored into her domain. Most of it had come from the bookshelves. *"Stand closer to me so that I can open a gate in case something shows up."*

"No way to check for defenses?" Iana asked.

"Only obvious ones. This one is active, and not in a defensive state," Nes said and looked to the others, waiting until they confirmed.

She raised her arm and touched the object. Instantly, the sphere started shifting, rectangular shapes moving out of the spherical surface before it stopped.

A light magic spell flickered to life, originating from the sphere.

Ilea raised her shields as the Executioners stepped in front of the others. She saw a silhouette depicted in near golden light. It remained unmoving, depicting what looked like a man dressed in layered robes. He wore broad pants and thick boots. His hair was long with a slight wave and certainly not particularly well kept. A beard adorned his face, not too long and with small braids added within. She squinted her eyes slightly to see the hint of a scar on his mostly exposed neck.

"I think I know that man," Scipio murmured.

"Hello. Hello everyone! Welcome welcome. Just fascinating, this technology. But before I go on, I should probably clarify that you are not seeing me. Well. That is. Not me in the flesh!" The voice was that of a man, speaking in Elos Standard. It emanated from the enchanted sphere but the depiction of golden light moved as if it itself was the one talking.

The man of light started laughing, bending backwards slightly. *"Oh. Yes. I should take this a little more seriously, considering the circumstances in which this would be used. The seals are broken."*

"I am Erik Anderson, human of Elos, born within its lands, and known by most as Eregar, Founder of the Shadow's Hand, should the Order still persist."

“You are in the place called Eregar’s Haven. A quite pompous name, but it seemed reasonable at the time of construction, to choose it. Within this facility, deeper down and shielded by several layers of the most powerful barriers that you will likely find within this realm, is what is known as a Source. The concentrated power of our third sun, taken by the Ascended of Kohr. And here it remains, protected within human lands where neither elf, nor dwarf, nor Ascended, should expect its presence. And here, it must remain, for the balance of this realm, and for all the creatures living near our remaining human lands, and those beyond.”

“*I knew it,*” Scipio said. “*It’s been ages but he looked similar.*”

“*The Shadow,*” Ormont murmured, grinding his teeth. “*He had the Source?*”

“*You had one too,*” Elfie hissed.

“This place. How is this possible?” Nes murmured.

“Can we talk to him?” Ilea asked.

The golden man turned vaguely in her direction. “Yes. There is some interaction, as there would be with any of these devices. However this is not me, which means I don’t hold all the answers to everything. Then again, my real self would not hold all the answers either, but more. More than what is here.”

“You interrupted it,” Scipio said.

Elfie hissed.

“*He doesn’t seem hostile,*” Aki said.

“*Varitan spheres have complex functions. Depending on what we say or do, there may be consequences,*” Nes sent. “*I must add that this light magic depiction is not a standard function, let alone the fact that it did not initially speak in the tongue of the Navuun.*”

“I have not received a further question. Do you have a specific question or should I continue with my purpose here?” the being of light spoke.

“Please continue,” Aki spoke.

“Very well. Very well. So how to summarize the complex mess all of this is.

“Perhaps you have sought treasure here. Or you have sought a weapon. Perhaps you’ve merely looked for energy. I apologize, that this extensive search ends here. The knowledge I bear shall guide your way, but do not attempt to remove the Source from the Haven, or the lands we deem inhabitable, the lands where our many species can thrive to the fullest, could face the same fate as the wracked environments of the far north, the western isles and mountains, and the southern deserts.”

Ilea formed an ashen chair and sat down as the others broke out in discussion.

“*We should ask more questions, exhaust what we can know before we reach any conclusions,*” Aki spoke.

Goliath grunted as Myr Iva sat down next to the ashen chair.

Ilea smiled as she looked at the unmoving light magic hologram. *I wonder if he’s still alive. And if he is, could I take him in a fight?*

“We would like to know how you got into the possession of the Source,” the Executioner spoke.

The light magic Eregar turned towards the machine. “The Source was taken by the Ascended. A council as I was told, called the Olym Arcena. I do not understand the full extent of this alliance, this purpose, but the effects of gathering a Source once devastated their own realm of Kohr. It is where the beings we call demons come from, previously their non ascended kindred, changed by the process of Source Extraction. Kohr had a single sun, and Elos had three. After many years of debate and further magical and technological advances, the Olym Arcena chose that they would once again strive to gather a Source. And Elos became their target.

“However many within the Olym Arcena did not agree to this resolution, but were outvoted. Their preparation and analysis concluded that the realm would not deteriorate in the same manner as Kohr had, mainly due to its solar constellations, though advanced fabric theory and the mass of the respective planets played a role as well. And still, their data was incomplete. They had too little experience, but the majority of the Olym Arcena was eager to proceed.

“I assume you are familiar with what happened to much of this realm. Arcane storms, our surface destroyed, near uninhabitable, with spiking mana density. The Taleen had found out about the Ascended threat, well done to you,” Eregar said, and pointed forward. “Even Elves got involved when the Extraction had already happened. An alliance, between the peoples of Elos, was formed, like none other had before. To fight a war against beings we did not know nor understand, in a realm not our own.”

“While many prepared for war, others, me included, were far more concerned about the rapid changes happening all around. Instant in some areas, stone splitting and entire cities swallowed, magma bursting from the ground, entire species turned to ash,” he spoke, his voice deep, turbulent now. “Ravenhall was not swallowed by the earth. The mountains remained after everything had shaken. But we knew there was more to it. We could see the changes. The very balance of our realm had been uprooted. A war would not change that.”

He calmed down somewhat. “And the war was not needed. For better or worse, the effects of the Extraction on our realm split the alliance of Ascended, and I was found by one such being I had briefly encountered in the first weeks of the war. An Ascended, bringing with it the Source taken from our realm, and the beginning of plans to not only hide it within our lands, but to use it against the very changes imposed by its Extraction.

“Much of the surface was destroyed and changed, thought I don’t expect all of those present to remember how it all had looked before. What we have now, remains because of the Source, a part of this creation. The Haven.”

“Who... who would have chosen to bring it here?” Nes spoke.

“I will not share the name of this Ascended,” Eregar answered.

“And this Ascended built the entire facility with you?” Aki asked.

“The construction took decades, long past the split of the Olym Arcena, and the breaking of our own alliance. All the changes, the people, animals, and monsters seeking habitable land caused chaos not only in our human lands alone. I used what influence I had on the Hand and both ancient and emerging countries to hasten and hide this plan. From most everyone. Beings I trusted and other Ascended were involved as time went on, adding their expertise while swearing their silence, both to me and the one who had brought the Source.”

“Why did the Ascended help?” Nes asked. She sounded agitated.

“The Extraction on Elos, and the plans implemented to slow and stop the emerging changes yielded valuable data. While the losses were... unimaginable, these beings wanted to learn from their mistakes. Some of them at least. They agreed to hide the Source here, in exchange for information. And perhaps out of an obligation, to at least prevent further destruction.”

“And you trusted them? After what they had done?” Ormont asked.

“I did not trust them. They came to me with a plan to save my home. To save this realm, or what was left of it. They explained runes and theory to me, showed me the stages in their plans. And I verified, with the beings and scholars that I trusted most. We could measure the changes that were occurring. And after years, we knew this was our only chance we had to stop it. And so we helped”

“And the changes were halted?” Aki asked.

“Entirely,” spoke Eregar, with some relief.

“Can you elaborate on what exactly was happening?”

“You should find it documented within this device, and within *Extraction Mana Fluctuations and Density*, a book that should be in this office,” he answered.

“So the Source was brought here and this facility was built to prevent further changes to our realm,” Iana said. “So why have these seals? Why not hide it deep underground?”

“That is a very good question,” Eregar said and pointed in her direction. “My main purpose here is to inform those who break the seals, to tell them of what they had found, and why they should not interfere. Why You should not interfere. We intended to hide the Source from all. From Ascended, from Humans, from Elves, and everyone else. Even knowing what would happen to this realm, we believed there would be those who would seek it still.

“Mava, Dark Ones, Elves, Dwarves and Humans. An alliance in Elos, beyond even what the Extraction had brought into fruition. I speak these words, not believing that such a thing will come to pass. And yet the possibility exists, no matter how small. I knew that neither I, nor the other beings involved with building the Haven were infallible, or all knowing. The Source we consider safe, and hidden, but the fabric is vast and always changing, threats lurking in every realm. You have found reason to cooperate, and I will do what I can, to help.

“Tell me then, Alliance of Elos. What is it that you seek?”

Aki gestured to the others.

“*We were looking for answers here, not questions,*” the Executioner said.

“*The knowledge we found will be invaluable,*” Iana said.

“*It will be,*” Nes spoke. “*I wonder who decided to help them. Marva could not have known, or I would have been involved. We will have to study the data and this facility, to make sure what he shares about its purpose is true.*”

“*I ask that this knowledge remains with those of voting rights in the Accords, until we have verified the security of this Source,*” Aki spoke.

“*I can't believe we fought to secure the Source, and all this time, they had brought it back to Eregar,*” Ormont murmured, chuckling to himself. “*And a human would be the only one to ally themselves with one of theirs. To even consider their words.*”

“Saved your kind as well,” Iana said. “If what he says is true.”

Ormont grunted. *“Eregar was many things. A liar was not one of them.”*

“Was?” Ilea asked.

“You think he’s still alive?” Chris asked.

“Ormont is as well,” she said and nodded towards the dwarf.

The dwarf sighed. *“I’m starting to get a headache.”*