

Chapter 463 Quest

Dale blinked a few times before he burst out laughing.

“What’s so funny?” Ilea asked.

He shook his head as he calmed down. “It’s just... to attempt fighting a Basilisk, without a plan or preparation, nor a team. For the sheer sake of an achievement for one’s next class evolutions. It sounds ridiculous to me and yet when you said it with a straight face, I just accepted it.”

Dale lifted the bottle again but decided against it, putting it away instead after he glanced at her with a questioning look.

She declined.

“Theoretically, people like you should exist, should be out there. Hunting and fighting, improving so much that they are hardly recognizable as humans anymore. I just never thought I would actually meet someone like that. Now the most dangerous thing I’ve met is not an elf anymore but someone I call a friend,” he said and sat back.

“Life is full of surprises, isn’t it?” Ilea said.

“That it is. As to your question, I haven’t heard of a Basilisk. Not since your caravan encountered it several years ago. I suggest you check the guild to see if they have anything to offer,” he said.

“Is it open at this time?”

“It’s always open,” Dale confirmed. “You’re not the only one who sleeps very little. I for example just don’t exactly have a choice,” he said and got up.

“You’re going too?” she asked and followed the man.

“To Alistair, yes. I will report your success and the potential issue. I know you hate these technicalities,” he said.

“You’re a treasure, Dale. Really,” Ilea said to him took a deep breath of fresh air, only a tiny bit sullied by the smells of the city. Riverwatch luckily did have a sewer. *The marvels of magic.*

“And you are a monstrous killing machine that I am fortunate to call an ally,” he said and sighed. “When did you say the slaves should arrive?”

“A few days. It’s hard to say exactly how long they need. My flying speed keeps improving,” Ilea said.

“Way to make me envious of your power,” he said and smiled.

“Hey, a few weeks of dungeon training with me by your side and you’ll be the strongest in town. You say the word,” she suggested.

Dale crossed his arms. “Thank you. I mean it. I would rather do it the old fashioned way, lest I turn into a creature of ash too.”

“Are you calling me a monster?” she asked, her limbs fanning out.

The man wasn’t fazed in the least. “Keep your intimidation tactics to people that don’t know you. Good luck on your hunt, and stay safe.”

“I’ll do my best,” she said, tapping his shoulder before she vanished into the night.

The guild hadn’t changed much since she had visited. A few repairs were visible but only thanks to her sphere, otherwise well done. To her surprise, the guild hall was packed. Dozens of people drinking and feasting together, just as many waiting in line to get quests or get rewards.

It felt nostalgic, even though she had barely participated in this type of life. These were the adventurers of Elos, slaying monsters and taking care of the various problems that come with a life near the bottom of the food chain.

“Oy, healer! Ya lookin for a strong team!?” a very loud patron called out to her.

[Warrior – lvl 68]

Adventurers of Elos indeed, she thought and joined one of the lines.

“Didn’t ya hear me?” the man called out again.

“Leave her be, don’t wanna insult the orders, they’re a nasty bunch,” his friend said, a rogue of a similar level.

“Miss, I want to apologize for the behavior of my fellow adventurers. My name is Asher,” someone else walked up to her and introduced himself. He looked straight out of a romance novel, long blond hair and a charming smile.

[Mage – lvl 102]

“Hello Asher, what is it that you want?” Ilea asked as the line moved forward, the man dancing around her to avoid bumping into the others.

“It has come to everyone’s attention that you are a healer. Your kind is rare within these halls. I was wondering if perhaps you were looking to join a team?” he asked, getting straight to the point.

Ilea liked that he didn’t try to manipulate her at first. He simply greeted her and asked. “How surprising, you actually have manners.” she said. “Are you from Riverwatch, Asher?”

The name amused her.

“Not everyone here grows up in a gutter,” he said and winked.

Perhaps it would have had more of an effect on her if she hadn’t met Elves and powerful Shadows, a few of them rivaling the sexiest men on Earth in looks. Or perhaps it was all the blood and guts, all the death she had seen, that let her ignore his attempt at charming.

“I can see that. As much as I’m intrigued, I believe I’m looking for different jobs than you,” she said, arriving at the front of the line.

“Welcome. Your badge please,” the attendant said, a rather petite woman in her twenties.

“What kind of jobs are you looking to do? We can adjust. If we had a healer in our team,” Asher said.

“You’re...,” the attendant said when Ilea handed in her silver badge, identifying her as a level fifty healer. “Would you like an updated version? You are far beyond silver,” she said.

[Mage – lvl 110]

Ilea wondered how high the woman could identify. *Does she think I'm one fifty? Two hundred?*

"Sure, whatever is the equivalent of this," she said and summoned her Shadow badge, placing it on the counter.

Asher opened and closed his mouth before taking a step back.

The woman nodded and checked the badge. "This is real. Let me see if we have any emerald badges. Ah... as you are a Shadow, I'm not sure how many jobs you did for the adventurer guild. If you didn't reach a certain quota, the badge will cost you one gold piece and thirty silver. Is that okay?"

"Why do I need an updated version then?" Ilea asked.

"It may provide entry to certain dungeons, cities, inns and other establishments. Granted, your Shadow badge opens most of those doors but not all of them. Do you wish to have it?" the woman asked.

"Sure, why not," Ilea said and summoned the money.

More than a few people were looking her way by now, the conversations having died down.

Asher chuckled. "Apologies for wasting your time, Miss Shadow," he said and bowed.

Ilea smiled. "Don't worry about it. I appreciate the way you asked, compared to the dolt over there," she said and nodded towards the man.

"What did ya say!?" he said and stood up.

"Don't!" his friend called out but it was too late.

"I said that you lack manners," Ilea said to the low level warrior.

Asher took a few steps back, trying to get out of the way. A wise choice.

"I don't give a fuck what shit order you're a part of. Shadow or noh-"

A slap sent the man sprawling on the floor, a few teeth missing and blood dripping from his mouth. He was knocked out cold.

"Apologies," Ilea said when the attendant returned.

"Oh, no worries. It's not the first time he has ended up in a similar situation. I will put the cleaning cost on his tab," she said and handed over the new healer badge.

It looked the same other than the metal it was made of. A dark green that didn't reflect much light. She paid and made the thing vanish.

"Anything else I can do for you?" the woman asked.

"I'm looking for information on a certain creature," Ilea said.

Ilea soared through the skies, trying to identify the landscape. Sadly there had been no new information on a Basilisk in the area. The attendant could however pin point the area where Ilea's caravan had encountered the creature last on a map.

She would have perhaps found it anyway but the process was much faster this way.

A few skeletons showed that she had found the right place. *Nazarks*, she thought and kicked a skull away. *Not decayed, chewed off.*

“The ciiiiircle of liiiife,” she sang to herself and strolled towards the cavern entrance.

A few creatures moved by in the nearby forest, doubtlessly aware of her. It seemed they deemed her too dangerous to approach.

Lucky for them, Ilea thought and found parts of the caravan still sitting untouched within the cavern. Ripped apart wood, wagons, spoiled goods, weapons and destroyed armor.

Most of the Nazark corpses had little remaining on their bones but it did look like only the brave had come in here to feed.

It seemed bizarre to her, that after all this time, this cave remained mostly untouched. *Why would it be any different? It's not like a city was struck by a natural disaster and had to be cleaned up.*

She grabbed a sword that had been missed or deemed cheap enough to be left behind, twirling it in her hand as she looked for any traces.

The tracks were old. No traces of magic either, nor a massive winged creature.

Ilea spread her own wings and flew through the cavern, speeding up as her senses didn't pick up a single thing.

She chose the largest rift she could find and entered. The tunnels were large, dozens of ways leading away from the main one, naturally formed or created by the denizens of Karth.

She stayed in the main tunnel, the walls moving farther away by the minute. Bones and a general absence of living creatures gave the area an eerie atmosphere. *Not quite as eerie as the presence of rot and Specters.*

Ilea found herself in darkness but kept flying, speeding up as time went on.

A hiss resounded in front of her, making her stop in her flight. Her skills were ready, the sound expected this time.

'ding' 'You have heard a mighty being's cry, you resist the effect'

Not quite the same as last time, she thought with a smirk and moved in the darkness. The buildup of mana was graspable, permeating the air as the spell manifested.

She turned and faced the creature, unable to see it, nor close enough to perceive it in her sphere. *Something is wrong.*

The spell manifested, a wave of air moving her way.

She saw it come within her sphere and rushed backwards, blinking to the side twice as the powerful magic rushed by.

What is this?

The whole cavern rumbled when the spell impacted the opposite wall a moment later. Quite a powerful attack. *But I avoided it so easily.*

Ilea rushed at the creature, reaching it moments later.

Large wings and a head that reminded her of a dragon and snake mix. A wide maw with crooked teeth as wide as her head. Scales lined its body like armor, its eyes looking right at her.

[Basilisk – lvl ????]

Found you!

And then she was there, ashen limbs smashing into the monster's head, most glancing off but four finding purchase.

It lashed out, the attack avoided with a quick twirl to the side as more limbs smashed into it.

Ilea closed the distance, her fist slamming into its skull with a full load of her destructive spells. She watched as it opened its maw, releasing a lightly charged Heart of Cinder into its throat.

The Basilisk veered back and started charging another spell.

She stopped, floating in midair as she closed her eyes. *This is all wrong. It veered back. The Trakorov barely moved. I remember it too, the ice mage injured it as well.*

Its spell was charged and released, another wave of air.

This time she trusted Azarinth Fighting, feeling the attack coming and letting it wash over her. It barely scratched her armor, the wind moving to each side as if she split it in half.

Illusion? She sent the thought towards the being. A question. One she did not expect an answer to.

And yet, she received one.

L ea ve

Broken sounds spoken with an inhuman voice that transcended the material.

She felt her very soul shake. *Not very reassuring. Maybe I should listen to the ancient creature.*

"You killed half of that caravan, I'm not leaving," she said, quickly realizing that it wasn't exactly the reason she was here.

Ilea hadn't known many of the adventurers that died on that day, nor had she cared much back then, let alone now. No, she was driven by something different than justice or even revenge. Merely curiosity and a potential achievement.

Was it enough to challenge such a being? Perhaps not, but curiosity would find it difficult to kill Ilea, just as everything else did.

She rushed the creature once more but found nothing.

It had vanished entirely, as if it had teleported away. Only traces of its magic remained.

Only one way to go, she thought and continued down the tunnel.

A few more wind magic spells disrupted her journey but the Basilisk itself didn't approach anymore. The charge time for its attacks lessened and the power itself increased with each spell.

The tunnel led into another cavern, this time in a bowl like shape, a few crystals growing from the ceiling providing enough light for her to see.

Hmm, not good, I think?

Ilea reached the center and with it the remains of the largest egg she had ever seen.

Baby Basilisk, no wonder she was so pissed back then. That healer guy was right.

She remembered the druid had sensed something, telling them to flee from the cavern.

Is this worth something? she wondered and broke off pieces of the shell, storing them in her necklace. The egg was already broken, so she dismantled it with her ash and took it with her. Not everyday do you come across a four mark creature's hatched egg.

Now I feel like a scavenger, she thought, wondering if the residents of Hallowfort would look for discarded egg shells themselves. She wouldn't say no to Trakorov shell armor.

A definite exit to the cavern revealed itself when she looked up, a large circular shaft expanding up into the unknown. *I wonder if it's still here, or if that thing I saw before was just a remnant of its power. A dormant spell to protect its spawn.*

Her wings moved and she was taken up, soon back in near complete darkness. A few cracks and tunnel entrances showed up within her sphere from time to time, testament to the intricate underground network that was home to native creatures unknown and dangerous. Many had likely never seen the light of day.

A nightmare to most and yet exciting to Ilea, finding a fascinated joy in exploring the unknown. Something perhaps intricate to any human, muffled by fear and the need to survive. Or perhaps she truly was a deviant, her interests and joys so far removed from human, she could hardly be defined as such anymore.

The question did not have an answer, not one she would accept, even if an all knowing being deemed her worthy of the knowledge. Despite her changes, her power and the experiences she went through and would continue to live out, she knew that she was human. And she would remain such forever, no matter to what twisted forms her body, her magic, and her mind evolved.

The flight was long, considering the speed she was traveling at.

When she emerged out into the open, the air had thinned, the moons seemed closer, shining bright. Cliffs and boulders grew around her in towering shape and size. The way oceans made her feel small and insignificant, the mountain of Karth came quite close itself, formed over millions of years through shifts deep below the ground.

The plateau she found herself on was located far above the clouds dotting the sky below, only faint colors visible of what amounted to forests, lakes and plains.

Bones littered the area, flesh and organs still clinging to some. Creatures larger than most living things Ilea had ever seen or fought. The sheer logistics of bringing these creatures up here seemed ridiculous to her but when she considered the Basilisk's size, impossibilities turned feasible.

The gaping abyss behind her led to where its spawn had hatched. She didn't know why the being had laid it deep underground instead of up here, above the clouds.

Ilea remembered that the skies above belonged to beings far above humanity. Those were the words of the librarian she had consulted back in Riverwatch, when she had known nothing of the world. Now, while she silently moved through the graveyard of bones, she felt like she had learned precious little.

Already she could see the green scales in the distance, moving with tremendous ripples of muscle. The creature lay surrounded by stone, its eyes closed, unaware of the ant within its domain.

This was not the Basilisk she had seen. In many ways.

It looked smaller, less vicious. And still, its sheer presence shined bright within her sphere, despite being outside its influence. Like flames whose heat could be felt before one's eyes could find it.

Identify worked from this distance, either because the being was immensely powerful, its aura inhibited or because its sheer size demanded it.

[Basilisk Hatchling – lvl ?????]

This is probably the best chance I'll ever get, she thought, wondering if she would really kill a baby, for the chance of a better class.

A hiss came as the answer to her moral dilemma. It flowed over the mountain like a wave crashed into the seaside cliffs.

'ding' 'You have heard the challenge of a Basilisk. You resist its effects'

Ilea found the creature hovering in the night sky, its shape unmistakable and its power unquestioned. She wondered if there were a few Trakorovs and Fae in the area to recruit in her endeavor.

But this time, she was alone.