

Chapter 756 Scrambled Eggs or something

Ilea sat on a mountain peak with Claire and Trian. Various Shadows and Sentinels had chosen the same mountain for the close vicinity and wonderful view of Morhill. Most of the nobles had chosen to remain in a less adventurous environment to watch the closing fireworks.

Impressive displays of pyromancy and alchemy as Claire had informed. And an apparently particularly wasteful manner to throw out rare ingredients.

Ilea didn't really mind. They looked nice, and something enjoyed by thousands of people couldn't be an absolute waste. What she did instead was compare the displays to various spells she had seen from monsters in the wild. She judged them lacking, but there was something nice about not having to dodge everything or worry about one's life. From time to time.

"What are your plans now?" Claire asked as she looked over from the rock she was sitting on.

Ilea glanced at her before she returned her attention back to the yellow sparkling light exploding above Morhill. *Now would be the perfect time to attack, hmm.* She knew that Wayland and plenty of high level individuals were taking care of security. She assumed seeing all those devastating rituals and summonings left more than just an impression.

"Further into Karth and I still need two more keys. I hear there's an entire committee planning the distribution of gates. To get the most efficient coverage. I suppose I can help with that too, it's going to be a busy time for a lot of people," Ilea said.

"I wanted to ask if you could lend a hand. I assume once a few important gates are set down, others can take over. It should save us weeks or even months if you're the one placing those with Iana and Chris. A few Shadows could at least try to match your speed but we can only trust people so far," Claire replied.

"Talking business again? Why don't you two relax, at least for one evening," Trian said as he swirled a glass of wine.

"You look like a noble," Ilea said, adding ash to the rock she had chosen to make it far more comfortable.

Trian shrugged. "Can I get some of that too?" He gestured to the ashen rest supporting her back.

"Sorry. Old noble," Ilea corrected as she added to his seating situation.

"You're ruining the entire point of being in the wild. It's supposed to be uncomfortable and cold," Claire said, another set of fireworks exploding above the town below.

"You'd need a little more to make me feel either uncomfortable, or cold," Ilea said.

Claire waved her off. "Can you even feel cold?"

Ilea nodded slowly, remembering the Ice Elemental. She had changed since then, that much was true, but she still assumed the being could affect her form. At least to the extent of her feeling cold. *Might take most of my body being frozen though.*

"Where's Kyrian?" Trian said. "He's not been around since you flew off with him."

Ilea smiled, summoning a bottle of ale. "He's fine."

"It sounds like you know more than that," the headmaster said.

"He's probably with Aliana," Claire said.

"Oh? Ah right, she was around," Trian murmured.

"Well informed, you two, aren't you?" Ilea commented.

"He's mentioned her before. Once or twice, maybe ten times," Trian said. "It's either that or his birds. Only two things he seems to enjoy talking about."

"Well you go on and on about your Sentinels," Claire mused. "I do wonder when you'll finally fall for one of them."

"That is not a consideration. Besides, a lifestyle like that is far too dangerous for my liking," Trian said. "Plus my entire authority would be shattered."

"What about Sidney?" Ilea asked, a smile on her face.

"Far too obsessed with battle. Our conversations die beyond combat evaluations and strategy," he said. "She's competent, but as far as romantic interest goes..."

"Wasn't there another one in the faculty?" Claire asked, looking at Ilea.

"Lyza, yeah. She's a little... hmm... direct and... unorthodox," she said. Crazy would've been the word she had chosen but then who was she to talk?

Trian remained suspiciously quiet.

So that's how it is.

"Did she reject your advances?" Claire asked.

"She... there were no advances," Trian said.

"Doesn't sound like that's everything to the story," Ilea mused. "Noble."

"I have made... attempts. To show my interest in courting her. We always have wonderful conversations but I believe she is not exactly interested," Trian explained.

"Describe the attempts," Ilea said.

"Why?" he asked.

"She's... well let's just say she reminds me of myself a little. In some ways. Depending on what you did, she might've just not been able to pick up on it," Ilea said.

"I see. But... isn't it obvious if I wear deep red colors in her presence? And we shared harniss tea, which is seen as a sign of deep affection in the..." he slowed down as he explained, eyes locked with Ilea until he glanced away. "Yes. It seems. I have made some miscalculations." He stood up and straightened his vest. "I... will see you later."

"Good luck," Ilea said with a grin.

Claire waved and the man vanished.

Ilea looked at the woman as she shook her head. "Anyone you fancy, besides me of course."

Claire leaned forward, supporting her chin with both hands. “Who could match up with Lilith? But no, I’m not looking for anything at the moment, however there are a few Shadows I would take an interest in, if I made the time. Right now, it just doesn’t fit into my schedule.”

“Workaholic,” Ilea commented.

“I have my ways to relax and take time off, Ilea. Don’t you worry about me. I’m not the one out there, fighting unfathomable creatures,” Claire said.

“Right,” Ilea mused.

Claire looked at her for a few seconds. “You’re thinking about them, aren’t you?”

Ilea looked away. “Maybe.” She didn’t know if her interaction with Felicia had released stress or if it had excited her more. A bit of both probably, but she could tell seeing all those fights in the tournament made her itch to get out there again. To find a suitable challenge, or ten.

She stayed until the fireworks came to an end, until the suns rose on the horizon and the visitors started to leave through the teleportation gates. Many were hesitant at first but as more people came and went, the benefits soon outweighed the prospective arduous journey. Some of course couldn’t be convinced that the magic was safe. Still, the queues in front of the teleportation gate buildings reached far into the road, a system soon added where people could reserve spots for specific times. Many remained in Morhill for the better part of the day or even another night as the stalls continued to sell food, one group of Shadows even managing to organize their own tournament.

Ilea heard about some Sentinels gathering adventurers for resistance training, a practice that would surely become more common as the battle healers started to move out into the world more and more. The successful festival, reveals, and tournaments already lent them a whole lot of credibility, the nobility from the large countries and cities now familiarized with the organization. Trian apparently had to deal with dozens of requests for Sentinels to join high level Shadow and adventuring parties. New applications weren’t scarce either.

She wondered how many Sentinels would actually join up with another team in the end. The ones who decided to stay alone did so for many reasons, working in a team suddenly would kind of defeat that. However she could see the benefits of a Sentinel joining a group for a particularly dangerous dungeon or exploration. Priority offers for expedition spaces were already coming in as well.

All of it meant a lot more work for the administrators of the organization, next to everything else they had to manage. Trian however was in a great mood, for various reasons.

The gate to Hallowfort currently had a requirement of level two hundred, same as the Shadow’s Hand. At least until knowledge of the areas there spread more and adventurers realized how much more dangerous the north was compared to most of the Plains.

Merchants from all over were scrambling to adapt their businesses and products, selling off their carts and renting out store rooms and potential production facilities in previously uninteresting remote towns and villages. Hundreds of offers from both nobles, merchants, and even various military officials came in for gate connections, but they were all refused, as was previously discussed within the Accords and with the rulers of the various countries. Once finished, the teleportation network plan was shared and approved. Complaints and change suggestions were of course plenty but only those which improved trade or accessibility were considered for now. There were enough veterans of more than a few wars and battles within the Accords to quickly realize when a suggested gate offered nothing but a military advantage to the country it resided in.

Three days in, there were already reports of thirty nine attempts to steal, blackmail, or otherwise extort information about the gate technology. The corpses soon reduced Wayland's work, likely to pick up again once the larger players started their schemes. Most of the early attempts were independents smelling a particularly lucrative opportunity. They either ended up with fees, in prison, banned from the territory of the Accords, or outright killed if they tried something more direct than breaking into a teleportation hall.

The new buildings and arenas in Morhill were to be extended over the next months as adventurers and travelers would use the hub to both visit the south or stop by to prepare for their journey. Other hubs with in country connections would be added to the various capitals, each gate of course still only connecting to one other corresponding platform.

Some very aware individuals now sold their store of metals and materials used to create the gates, at an absurdly increased price of course. Others straight up looked for and opened mines to gather the required ores.

A rippling shift of possibilities and interests moved through the Plains and beyond as everyone scrambled to adjust or get their piece of the cake. Small scale conflicts flared up here and there but with how well informed and prepared the various rulers were beforehand, nothing escalated to substantial levels. At least not officially.

In the coming weeks, Ilea and her group of enchanters traveled through the Plains at ridiculous speeds, adding core gates from where other groups would embark to connect more remote locations. Morhill continued to expand, both above and in the underground. Smiths, tailors, tanners, inn keepers, brewers, courtesans, and all kinds of merchants scrambled to rent out or build more space in the growing hub of the new central adventuring town. Connections to all kinds of frontiers led away from the city, with potential unknown dungeons, monster parts, untapped resources, and undiscovered lands waiting to be found. The entire risk and cost calculations changed with weeks and months removed from the journey. Injuries, deaths, and disappearances increased sharply in turn, not something that managed to dissuade many adventurers.

Hallowfort soon saw their first entire groups of adventurers from the south, Shadows and high level teams, traveling nobility or high level people hired to buy and sell goods. Most Dark Ones coming south preferred to stay in Morhill or Ravenhall, the high amount of adventurers and general acclimation to powerful individuals letting them blend in near seamlessly. The same was true for the frontier cities in the west and near the northern Plains. It would take time for particularly safe cities in the central regions of the Empire, Kroll, or Nipha to get used to the presence of the Awakened. Many were still being stopped or outright attacked by guards, soldiers, and even local adventurers. Not that the experienced northern survivors had much to fear in terms of a dangerous fight.

As Shadows started to explore the north, Awakened started exploring the southern wilds, the first mixed party forming only forty two hours after the gates were opened to the public. After a drinking contest escalated into a fist fight of ridiculous proportions.

It didn't take long for the first new settlements to spring up on the various frontiers, some simply there to accommodate the adventurers that chose those gate destinations, others founded by parties or brave settlers that discovered favorable locations, either due to an abundance of resources, lucrative dungeons and ruins, or simply for the potential defense capabilities. What had taken hundreds of people and just as much gold to organize just a few weeks prior now required a few determined souls. Material and people could be transported through the gates, meaning a single person could buy a load of bricks, transport them to Morhill, then to the Frontier, sell them there or transport it further to wherever their new camp, home, settlement, or lair would be. All that before

they could return and sleep in a warm bed in Morhill, Virilya, or wherever they chose. The fees were low enough for most everyone to be able to use the gates several times a day, or even paid for entirely by the involved countries themselves.

The Accords assumed the first territory claims by existing or newly founded cities, countries, or even individuals would soon lead to small scale conflicts. The frontier gates themselves and a certain area around them were however declared neutral ground by all parties involved. Morhill and the Accords of course profited the most due to said gates only being accessible from the southern city.

The Forged Dome went from an unknown, to one of the most sought after entertainment venues in a matter of weeks. The many tournaments and competitions in Morhill didn't let down either, soon connected to allow participation in the Pit if certain rounds or fights were won in Morhill. The technology and gear from the Pit of course spread into the Plains like a wildfire, the first imitating war machines cropping up about one and a half months after the festival, the creations of course leaving much to be desired.

Ilea spent her days bringing the enchanters to where they needed to be, her own gates allowing her to get back to Karth or the Meadow in between, training both her skills and Classes. The frontier gates started helping her with resistances as well, dozens of different monsters she had never encountered before near the locations. The issue remained of course that most surface dwelling creatures in the Plains, even near the frontiers, didn't have the necessary power to severely damage her. One such frontier was the same stretch of forest she had arrived in, north of Riverwatch. The area was mostly designated as such because it technically belonged to the Navali forest, most humans unaware that the main forest was located far west of Karth and that few Elves cared to make the trip. The risk of encountering a young fighter from the Fire Wastes remained of course, though the chances were rather low.

The delve into the depths of Karth was slow going, the group fighting through copious amounts of dangerous creatures, most of the caverns leading to dead ends, territories of four mark creatures living in the dark or within the lakes of lava. They discovered a new section after Ilea had dived through one particularly large body of molten rock with the depth of nearly one kilometer. Of course not without being interrupted by a dozen four mark eel like creatures made near entirely of lava themselves. That pool alone took nearly two weeks to clear.

Of course her focus wasn't entirely on Karth. The weekly bouts with Evan continued, as did some help for the Accords, occasional monster infestations at gate locations or recovering a lost team of adventurers in a newly discovered dungeon. When she was in the area that was, and had the time.

Felicia became another focus, Ilea not exactly considering them an item but she did visit more than a few times. With all their projects and busy schedules, both were glad to spend some time together in between. Ilea learned exactly which nobles in Virilya were supposed to go fuck themselves, were dimwits, imbeciles, incapable, incapable but nice, capable, too capable, arrogant, and too controlling. She was happy to listen to some drama after long hours in the wilderness or fighting monstrosities below Karth.

The last thing she invested time in was her search for the last two Taleen keys. It didn't prove easy, one of them uncomfortably close to what she considered Audur's potential domain, and the other deep within Elven territory. The former at least was below ground, her ability to hide from the Dragon likely increased due to that fact. However it added yet another unfathomably large underground system of cracks and crevices for her to search through. This one in the northern lands.

The Fire Wastes themselves, she found didn't stretch quite as far as she had expected. Barely the size of a small country, she moved along the edge and far above ground on the Naraza mountain chain, always westwards as the key locator guided. Ilea observed more than a few large scale battles between Elves and Taleen, some between Elves themselves, and others between Elves and monsters from the forest, the creatures fighting back against the ash and fires. The surface of the wastes didn't offer any insight into the Elven dwellings, some black mountain like shapes visible in the distance from time to time but along the northern edge, she couldn't find any discernible structures. Burnt husks of trees, blackened bones, and entire stretches littered with dull green steel.

It was a relief when she found the locator still pointing westward after she had passed the domain of fire, past Audur's domain northwards and soon past what she could see of the Navali forest itself. High reaching mountains surrounded her on all sides as she checked the locator. She was in what she considered northern territory, but farther west than she had ever traveled. Besides the Krahen Isles of course. Ilea considered if the key was within Vampire territory when she reached a mountain peak, looking down on the largest valley she had ever seen, a serene mist covering its entirety. Veins of ice occasionally broke out, climbing up the nearby mountains like roots of a tree looking for purchase. She could see her breath, the suns unable to warm the surroundings against the cold air coming from the Still Valley. The Domain of Ice.