

## Chapter 825 Gods

Any sign of the forest was gone, dunes and outcrops of rocks visible all around. Strong winds blew, flying sand limiting visibility, even the mountain ranges to the north gone from Ilea's vision. The temperatures were rather cool, sand and clouds above obscuring the moonlight, though she could see nonetheless. She flapped her wings one last time when she saw Octavia slow down at the crest of a high reaching dune. Ilea could see silhouettes behind, the angles suggesting some kind of structures.

"Did we arrive?" she asked when she came up on the fur covered and floating woman. She grinned when she reached the top, seeing the stone structures reach out of the sands. Towers, domes, some structures reminding her of cathedrals, others with angles and shapes that made no sense to her. High reaching angled bits with not roofs, feathers made of stone, tens of meters high and delicately crafted. There were stone spheres the size of entire houses, all of it scattered throughout the dunes but somehow connected and set up in a way that seemed planned to her. "Is this... an art installation?"

Ilea couldn't see the entire thing, but the number of structures could easily be the same as that of a small town. Her dominion suggested the stone reached far under the sands.

*"The Druned have a flair for... aesthetics. What they build for the Mava is not as practically inclined as the cities of humanity. Both are far beyond covering any basic needs,"* Octavia explained.

"I did hear the Mava and Druned have some kind of relationship. Is this it? The Druned build for them?" Ilea asked.

*"I suppose you could summarize it like that but their connection is far deeper, far older. Maybe your suggestion of an art installation comes closer,"* Octavia sent and touched her chin in a thoughtful manner.

"There's nobody here though, or they're really good at hiding," Ilea said.

*"No. I don't think there's anybody here."*

"What do you mean? Is this just a ruin then?"

*"The Mava do not settle in one place, Lilith. They move. And when they rest, the Druned will build. It is their way. This is as much ruin as it is a shelter,"* Octavia said and looked up to the clouds.

*"How good are your eyes?"*

"I don't really have anything to measure them against. I can see pretty far," Ilea answered.

*"Can you pierce the sands and clouds?"*

*"No. Not yet,"* Ilea sent back.

*"Then we should find shelter here. Day will break in less than three hours. Enough time for me to prepare a few spells. Maybe I can find the direction of their current settlement,"* Octavia said and started floating towards one of the more rectangular buildings.

Ilea followed, landing on the near twenty meter high structure. She found it was solid. Just a block of stone. Sitting in the sand. “Funny,” she murmured, sitting down on the edge with Octavia floating cross legged at the center of the plateau. She cocked her head back to look at the woman.

“*You look curious. Ask your questions,*” Octavia said.

Ilea smiled, turning back to look over the edge. Powerful gusts of wind carried sand to brush against the stone farther down. She could see the wear through her dominion and wondered how long this slab would remain here. A hundred years? Perhaps a thousand? *How long has it been here already?*

“I don’t have a question. I just thought you looked funny, floating cross legged,” Ilea said.

“*How so?*”

“Even if identify wasn’t a thing, I could probably guess at the kind of magic you wield.”

“*Physiological training helps with focus. The control of one’s own body is a key skill taught to all Mava. I learned from them. Coupled with breathing exercises and the observation of mana within one’s body, and soul,*” Octavia explained.

“Sounds like meditation,” Ilea said.

“*Yes. I suppose the skill is similar in results, though using a skill does not mean one truly understands what is happening. These practices are meant to study magic, and oneself. Through that, understanding can be reached, and thus advancements in magic. Though that is more consequence than purpose.*”

“Consequence?” Ilea asked.

“*Yes. You will find the Mava do not much care for competition or their personal power, though they remain in this territory, after all this time. Consequence,*” she said.

“What do they do all day?” Ilea asked.

“*Hunt. Magic. Eat and sleep. They lounge, laze, and play,*” Octavia said and looked to the nearby structures for a moment.

“So you’re telling me that I’m a Mava,” Ilea said as she smiled. *And I guess they’re not too different from Elves either. Wait... maybe the Monarch was right.*

“*You are here on request of the Accords. I do not believe that is a type of behavior they would associate with.*”

Ilea could see flickers of magic as Octavia moved her fingers through the air. No changes to the fabric, but she could see magic manifest. “How does it work? Your magic I mean. Divination.”

“*Asking a mage for their secrets. You certainly are unconventional,*” she answered.

“It’s been a while since someone told me off for asking a question like that. I feel like we’re beyond that,” Ilea said.

“*I suppose that is true. My magic is broad, difficult to pinpoint and use. Compared to the magic of my second Class, many of the skills are less defined. It provides me with simple divination passive abilities like a feeling for dangerous beings nearby, for how beings near me feel. More active components allow me to intrude and gauge certain things. More specific if I have certain questions in mind, and if I know the being well. Much of it can be done instantly, though rituals with runeworks and extended casting allows me to extend the range and duration,*” Octavia explained.

“Can you find people as well? I know a divination mage who can paint people she knows, no matter where they are,” Ilea said.

*“I can find clues and I can get a general sense, though for it to be even remotely reliable, I’d need to be in the vicinity. The same city perhaps. But generally speaking, the more time I put in and the more specific the goal, the better the results,”* she sent and paused. *“And it helps with training others.”*

“I see. So you could help with finding Ascended facilities or Ker Velor himself,” Ilea said.

*“I will try. My magic is how I navigated the first facilities I have found. And how I learned of Kohr,”* Octavia said. *“May I ask you a question in return?”*

“Sure.”

*“You seem familiar with the Mind Weavers of Kohr. How so?”*

Ilea looked up, the sky clearing a little to reveal one of the moons, sand brushing against stone below her. “I followed your father, back when he ripped open a tear to the Great Salt. Went through with a friend. We fought a lot of demons. One of them I spoke to. It wasn’t a pleasant experience but we finally convinced him to reconsider his behavior. Weavy. He’s a friend now, lives near Riverwatch.”

Octavia looked at her with wide eyes. *“Near Riverwatch, how? Has he not been discovered?”*

“There’s a somewhat hidden necromancer group hidden within Karth. I convinced them to take him in. I believe he summons fish for them, and he teaches one of the boys mind magic. He’s... decent, and learning some human behavior. Much better than the rest I’ve met,” she said. “I know another one too, but not as well. He’s in Hallowfort now.”

*“If he manages to summon fish, he is quite a capable mage. They are difficult to grasp, though perhaps from this realm it’s easier. I’m glad you have found and saved one of them. Life in Kohr... is not easy. It often took weeks and months to convince even single Mind Weavers to join me. Without divination magic, it’s impressive you managed to get through to two of them, though I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised, having seen all those beings in the North.”*

“I’ve not been too fond of humanity for a long while,” Ilea said.

Octavia smiled, her fangs showing. *“I understand.”*

“Are you a vampire by the way?” Ilea asked.

Octavia cocked her head slightly, confusion apparent. *“I’m not. I suppose you ask because of the fangs?”*

“Yeah,” Ilea said.

*“My body changed slightly after one of my evolutions in these wastes,”* she sent and gestured to the dunes. *“When you’re around other species for extended periods of time, I suppose those options appear. But you’ve probably seen plenty of those.”*

“Some,” Ilea said with a slight smile. “Have you met any vampires?”

*“From beyond the Frozen Wasteland? No, though I had considered going north.”*

“Why didn’t you?”

*“I had reached the marshes, but my magic warned me of danger within the bog, far beyond my capabilities,” she said. “Going through the mountains proved too dangerous as well, too close to the domains.”*

“Interesting. Think you could go there now? The marsh I mean.”

*“I inquires afterwards, and even the Mava do not tread into the cursed marsh,”* Octavia said.

Ilea grinned. “Now I’m intrigued. Any clue what’s in there?”

*“Mava stories tell of ancient elven beings. Forgotten by their kind. Forgotten by the world. One of the stories... if I remember correctly, told of Oracles. Are you familiar with the term?”*

“What do you know of them?” Ilea asked.

*“Mothers. Female elves, more powerful than the men and more attuned to magic. To a point where some words in the stories I’ve heard suggested some of the Mava considered them gods.”*

“What do you think?”

*“Nobody I’ve met has seen or talked to an Oracle. The few stories I’ve heard that mention them could just be exaggerated legends, but there are many powerful beings out there in the realms. What have you learned of them? You ask as if you knew more.”*

“I’ve met one of them,” she said. “You know, the Meadow has been considered a god before. If that’s the baseline, then I can imagine beings considering Oracles the same. I haven’t fought one before, but maybe going to those marshes is worth a trip.”

*“You have met an elven Oracle... that is hard to believe, but with everything I’ve seen, I will have to accept it as truth. What was it like?”* Octavia asked.

“Pretty overwhelming, but the same could be said about many of the beings I’ve met. It’s difficult to describe,” Ilea said.

*“Do you remember it well?”*

“Yeah, it was somewhat recent,” Ilea answered.

*“If you focus on it, and I do too, I may divine an impression from you. If that would be acceptable,”* Octavia said.

*Or you could find whatever else you want to know,* Ilea thought. *Then again what would I want to hide from her?* She didn’t consider Octavia incredibly trustworthy, but she didn’t fear her either. Ilea believed her stories about growing up in Ravenhall, about finding purpose in Kohr. She could empathize with her desire to help the Navuun, and she was here now, trying to prevent the plans of the Architect. Even if she could be wrong about everything, Ilea didn’t doubt her conviction. And there was something else.

“Do what you like with your magic. I’ll even turn off my resistance, so you can help me level it,” she said with a smile.

*“I could do more than just help your resistance. Many have I guided before. If you would be open to such a thing.”*

“What exactly do you mean by guidance. Telling my fortune? Divining my future?” Ilea asked.

Octavia smiled. *“No such thing. I do not believe in fate or destiny. I believe we make our own, however there are insights to be learned. Knowledge we may already have, solutions right in front of us yet we are blind to see them.”*

“Sure, as long as my resistance benefits.”

*“You are easy to please. First however, the Oracle,”* Octavia sent.

“Sure, go for it,” Ilea said as she thought of her encounter. The floating being, ice so cold it froze even her. Magic so powerful even the Primordial Shift moved aside in part. A true being a magic, a creator of the elves. The power of a god.

A pulse of magic emanated from Octavia, her eyes closed for a moment before she twitched and recoiled, her eyes wide. *“Th... that... how did you... how.”*

Ilea smiled, seeing the change in the woman’s eyes. *And that’s why I like monsters more. They don’t judge me for being one of them myself.*

“My disguise is good enough to fool even a three mark divination mage,” Ilea said with a grin. She didn’t care in the slightest how Octavia perceived her.

The woman remained quiet for a few seconds, then a minute. The look in her eyes remained cautious but it softened a little over time.

“I’m sorry,” Octavia sent finally.

“For what?” Ilea said.

*“For not seeing you,”* she said.

“What do you mean by that?”

*“I knew you were powerful, I knew you were connected. But you are so much more. To stand in the face of what others see as gods, some would argue it makes you the same. Though you are so very human, and your mannerisms, and words, seem contradictory,”* Octavia explained.

Ilea grinned. “You’ve not met a lot of four mark creatures, have you?”

*“No. Who would claim that they have?”*

“Fair,” Ilea mused, thinking of the Trakorov and Violence. Though most four marks she met were monsters, incapable of thought, or unable to convey anything to another being. “Go ahead then, I don’t want to waste time.”

*“Very well... I will tell you what I learn of you, and what insight I may bring,”* Octavia said as she closed her eyes, glowing blue runes appearing in floating circles around her. Pulses started moving out, slow, fast, weak, and powerful.

*“You seek danger. You indulge in it. The abyss entices you, like nothing else in the world. It looks back at you but you jump down to face it. You have fought... a dragon... you have hunted the great Devourers in Kohr... have... killed them. No longer do they prove a challenge. Though there are things you fear. Not the monsters of this world... to lose what you have built, to see those you love, taken from you. You fear the dark, the dread, the loneliness.*

*“Paths you have taken, resources you have allocated, to ensure the safety of those you hold dear, to ensure your own freedom. There are... many ways forward... though one that you avoid. One place you fear, and one place that you must go. One frontier you have yet to conquer.”* Octavia opened her

eyes, the look on her face terrified. She shivered slightly. *“To rise once more, you have to delve into the deep. To seek those who have seen. Those who remain.”*

***‘ding’ ‘Divination Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 16’***

The magic ceased, Octavia slumping down slightly as she gasped for air. She looked exhausted, glancing at Ilea while biting her lower lip. She opened her mouth and closed it again.

Ilea watched her. The words had hardly troubled her, though it was impressive how much the woman could gauge with such a short use of her magic. Then again Ilea supposed she wasn't the most complex being in existence. *The deep. To seek those who have seen.* She sighed. Had known the day would come, and it was true, she had avoided it. There were other paths to power, other creatures she could hunt. But there were monsters right in front of her. She just had to go and face them.

“What did you see?” she asked, extending her reconstruction to heal the mind of Octavia.

She sobbed once, collecting herself as her lips quivered. *“Eyes... watching...”*

“That doesn't quite narrow things down,” Ilea said, though she knew where the deep was, knew what she had to do according to the divination mage. *Dammit. And I know she's right.* She cracked her neck. *Well if it's for the return of the Architect, I should risk it.*

*“They are different. Otherworldly. One large eye in the deep. Hundreds of eyes, connected to roots. And light... light that calls to you.”*

Ilea smiled, wondering if Octavia had understood that she had just seen a glimpse of the Meadow. The other two were likely not quite as conversational.

“Thank you. I think I'll follow your lead,” Ilea said.

*“Your magic... it's helping, thank you,”* Octavia said, visibly relaxing a little.

“Up to delve in again?” Ilea asked.

The divination mage looked at her and shook her head ever so slightly. *“I... no. I don't think so.”*

*Now that does make me feel a little smug. Well on my way to become an eldritch horror myself. Just trapped within a human form. As it should be.*

Octavia soon started focusing on her runes again, setting up intricate patterns in the air around her, Ilea eating a meal in the meantime. Sunlight soon rose on the horizon, painting the dark sands in a golden hue.

The runes around Octavia set before they all lit up simultaneously, a pulse of magic flowing out before the runes faded once more. She floated up and opened her eyes.

“Got anything?” Ilea asked.

*“A vague direction. Enough perhaps to find one of their skal,”* Octavia sent.

“Skal?”

*“A tribe, group, settlement, whatever you wish to call it, it is the name they have chosen,”* the divination mage said.

“Skal it is. Fly off then, I’ll follow,” Ilea said, her wings spreading wide, casting shadows onto the sands below. The air was dry, the temperature cool but not cold despite winter. *Let’s see what these foxes are like.*