

## Chapter 571 Defenders

“Now if that doesn’t sound ominous,” Ilea said, stepping onto the sand in the coliseum like structure. Dozens of armed and armored statues, likely golems of some kind, littered the spacious ground. Some even hung from the ceiling or clung to the walls.

*Stone or metal maybe? Hard to tell,* she thought, squinting her eyes at the humanoid statues. Most pretty much just looked like rather large humans, smooth even at the joints. Spears, large curved swords, halberds, and even large morning stars were their preferred weapons. Or more likely, the weapons they were given by their creators.

“There are about thirty statues scattered around the place, and something tells me they’re not just there for decoration,” Ilea said, seeing the Thresher corpses strewn about here and there.

*I should lure one of them to see what they can do,* she thought.

“Any idea about their level?” Uriah asked, twirling the sword in his right hand.

“Too far away,” she said.

“I can’t even see them,” the man said.

“I could get their attention,” Finnley suggested with a smile.

“Please refrain from brash actions, you’re not alone with your team,” Uriah said.

Makai stepped forward. “I shall sacrifice myself to lure one of them here,” he said and bowed.

*What did I do to deserve this?* Ilea thought with a sigh. *Is this how Meadow feels? Maybe it’s some kind of curse it put on me.*

“I can target one with a small scale light beam,” Josie said.

*Finally, something useful. Ash projectiles would have an audible impact... and so far they haven’t reacted to the torches we have.*

“Yeah, you go for that,” Ilea said, looking at the woman.

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Josie only saw the outline of a few statues, it would be enough however to attack one.

“Now?” she asked.

Lilith gave her a thumbs up. “I’ll engage it alone once it comes. If all of them converge on us, you guys retreat and observe. I’ll let you know if it’s safe.”

Nobody complained to Josie’s surprise. *Maybe they finally understood who we’re dealing with here.*

She aimed carefully, taking a few more seconds just to make sure she wouldn't embarrass herself in front of the ashen healer.

Mana pooled on her index finger before a thin beam of light hit the statue she saw in the distance. She stopped the beam before the creature showed a reaction, just to make sure she wouldn't overdo it and alert more of them.

A few seconds passed.

*Maybe they're not gole-*

Just when the thought ended, the creature burst into motion.

Josie watched as its long legs changed into a sprint, charging right at them with massive strides. It had a slight metallic sheen, perhaps a little rusted.

The golem reached nearly three meters in height, its legs ending in single spikes of steel. In its three fingered hands, it held a steel battle axe taller than even Uriah. The weapon looked dull but threatening nonetheless, its cutting edge lost perhaps but turned into a bludgeoning nightmare. Its head featured neither eyes nor mouth or nose. Simple in design and made for one purpose only.

**[Ancient Defender – lvl ???]**

“Three mark,” Josie said, knowing her identify range was a little higher than her team's.

“Prepare,” Uriah said, his auras exploding outward as he took a step forward.

Their team got into position behind him, far enough away not to stand in each other's way or be struck by an attack targeting another.

Finnley and his group fanned out too, their magic surging.

*This won't be easy. That thing doesn't look like it has an obvious weakness.*

“Whittle it down with ranged attacks and avoid counters. I might not be able to take a direct hit. Focus on its legs. Retreat at half mana,” Uriah said.

“Welcome me to the end!” Makai said as he spread his arms wide, two curved blades glowing with dull purple light appeared in his hands.

Sulivhaan remained standing next to Lilith, glancing at her.

She started walking towards the running golem, her steps as casual as can be.

*Is she seriously just going to face it directly?*

Lilith neither stopped nor did she change into a sprint.

*She'll use a teleport at the last moment.*

“Prepare to support her,” Uriah said.

The golem swung its axe at her in a horizontal arc, the speed far exceeding what Josie thought possible for a creation of that size.

She nearly yelped when Lilith didn't teleport.

Instead the woman just slapped the weapon aside, the metallic sound reverberating through the vicinity.

She took another step and slammed her fist into the golem, cinders and mana flashing up with dull light. Two ashen limbs lashed out, cutting through the thin legs at their base.

The creature fell, trying to angle its weapon towards the woman.

Lilith grabbed it by the handle now, ripping it free before she twirled the oversized axe above her, bringing it down in a straight arc. The air parted before the dull steel crashed into the golem's steel chest.

The axe won out, digging deep.

Its arms tried to grab the woman, the golem still not giving up.

Lilith stepped over it, kneeling down before she punched its head a few times, too quickly for Josie to count. A final metallic crunch had her dig deeper, her fist now inside the golem's head.

She pulled her arm back and took the head with it.

The woman twirled the head in her arms, the thing as large as her chest. "Quite durable," she commented as she walked back to the group, throwing the prize at a silent Makai.

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Ilea smiled as the robed man caught the head, staring at it with intense glazed over eyes.

His hood hid his face in shadows but her enhancements allowed her to see through that effect, mostly.

***'ding' 'You have defeated [Ancient Defender – lvl 515]'***

*They really are quite durable for that level. I thought a single punch with my spells would be enough. At least my ash is enough to cut through them.*

"They're pretty low three marks. Would do your levels good if you faced them," she said to the mute and motionless group of Shadows.

"Three marks are beyond our current capabilities," Uriah said finally. "The rewards aren't worth the risks."

Ilea glanced at him and nodded. *An expected reaction*, she thought, still perhaps a little disappointed. She understood of course. The safe way to level up was not facing three marks at level two hundred.

*When did I kill my first three marks? The Undead Knights? I was close to three hundred then. Maybe I'm expecting too much. Shadows aren't exactly Sentinels after all*, she thought with a smirk.

She summoned her map again and tracked the cats.

"I have to agree, as much as it pains me. That demonstration was enough to know I won't be able to stand against them for long," Finnley admitted.

“I shall... fight them all,” Makai said and looked at her with a broad grin.

“No you won’t,” Ilea said, shaking her head before she focused back onto her map.

“I won’t,” Makai agreed.

*Good boy.*

“Can you clear out everything?” Sulivhaan asked. He looked the least fazed. Perhaps because of the mask.

“Mhm, give me a minute,” she said, feeling herself progress with the cats. By now she could near instinctively feel in which direction they were walking. Neither did she need any time to differentiate between them.

***‘ding’ ‘Sentinel Huntress reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 20’***

*Oh? And that without being in danger. Well, to be fair, it has somewhat limited appliance in a battle. Hopefully I can get it to thirty in a reasonable time like this.*

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Josie looked at the woman and her map, trying not to breathe or make an unnecessary noise.

*She killed a three mark so quickly... what level is she at? No wonder she fought an entire Baralia army. They never even stood a chance. A three mark monster might’ve fallen but a human who could match that raw power? With healing, flight, and teleportation?*

*What kind of beings did she fight to get to this point? Who trained her? How much pain and injury did she suffer through?*

*What would drive a human to do that?*

She yelped when Lilith looked at her.

“What?” she asked.

“How... ?” Josie sent, unable to finish her thought.

“How what?” Lilith asked, storing her map.

“How did... you get this powerful,” Josie asked.

“Oh that. If you get the expansion pack, there’s a Class you can get for fifty gold. Then just buy a few booster packs and you’re golden,” she sent and gave her a thumbs up.

What?

*“Seriously though, it takes months of fighting monsters that could kill you in one or two strikes. Dancing on the edge of death for hours on end. I wouldn’t suggest it if you don’t enjoy that idea. A healing Class is definitely necessary too, otherwise you’ll be a sliced up chunk of minced meat*

*before facing your second challenge. Pain Tolerance in the second tier is a must too I found. Distractions cause mistakes, and those cause death,” Lilith explained.*

*She actually... did that?*

“Why?” Josie couldn’t help but ask.

Lilith cocked her head to the side. *“Because I enjoy it. The thrill of battle, knowing that the monsters I face want nothing more than to see me dead, not knowing if I will prevail, and doing so regardless. It fuels me, just like good food and the flesh of a virgin like yourself.”*

“I.. eh... wh,” Josie stammered out, taking a step back.

Lilith laughed, the rest of the group glancing between the two. “I’m kidding. About the last part that is,” she said out loud.

*“But do let me know if you’re up for a drink sometime,”* she added and winked.

*To... eat my flesh? Or... what?*

Before Josie could form a coherent thought, Lilith had vanished, appearing in the distance.

A loud whistle resounded, coming from where the healer stood. *No... she’s flying.*

Black wings spread out behind her back, ashen limbs moving silently between the two large extensions.

***‘ding’ ‘You have heard the challenge of a powerful healer – You are paralyzed for three seconds’***

***‘ding’ ‘Veteran reaches lvl 18’***

“She’s not human, is she?” Sivya whispered.

“Lilith shows us what humans can be,” Sulivhaan said, nothing in his voice betraying his thoughts.

Their group watched as the many golems moved into action, weapons at the ready and focused on the dark floating creature that dared invade their sanctuary.

Josie squinted her eyes, seeing some of the creatures disappear. *They’re teleporting...*

The hall lit up with bright light when a sphere of fire appeared amidst the beings.

Uriah put up his shield, a wave of heat reaching them a moment later.

Flames clung to some of the creatures, many of them on the ground or near fully incinerated by now. The fires allowed Josie to see a little more.

She caught glimpses of fast moving ash, her eyes darting around to catch the teleporting Lilith among the surviving golems.

*She’s not getting hit at all.*

The woman flowed through the creatures with ease, dispatching one after the other. Occasionally some of them vanished and appeared high up above.

*It’s her... she’s teleporting them. But I thought her Classes were healing, fire, and ash. I never heard about her doing anything like that. Maybe she had an evolution? Or did she get an additional Class? Maybe a general magic skill?*

Every option but the evolution seemed unreasonable but witnessing the slaughter first hand, Josie couldn't help but be curious.

She focused again when one of the golems turned towards their group, moving quickly as it angled its spear at Uriah.

The creature never reached them.

Lilith appeared next to it, tackling the massive body as its spear scratched past her armor. They tumbled to the sandy ground, her ash shredding through it entirely. A beam of energy and heat formed on the palm of her hand as she stepped onto its form, the flames burning deep into the golem's chest.

She vanished before the beam had fully burnt into the creature, joining the remaining monsters.

*She's far more dangerous*, Josie thought, glad the woman was on their side. She hoped it would remain as such.

*I wonder if she's fought Elves before.*

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Ilea finished off the remaining three golems, the slow moving creatures barely posing any danger to her. They were somewhat durable but they moved unimaginative and clunky compared to Taleen creations.

*No wonder their machines are feared as much*, she thought, knowing that even a lower level Elf would have little difficulties dispatching these three mark beings. *If they have the necessary damage that is.*

*Hmm... eh, maybe they'd be too arrogant to avoid the golems' attacks. Who knows.*

The three Elves working under Elfie might've somehow gotten themselves hit. *Not Neiphato but the others for sure. It's a miracle they're still alive.*

The last golem fell in a mist of ash, reverse arcane healing burning through its magical body.

Her wings vanished as she landed amidst the burning debris.

"Should be safe now!" she said, checking the messages she had received.

**'ding' 'You have defeated [Ancient Defender – lvl 510]'**

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**'ding' 'You have defeated [Ancient Defender – lvl 512]'**

**'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 407 – One stat point awarded'**

*How very lucrative,* she thought with a smile, watching the group carefully advance through the darkness. Finnley and his group with a lot less emphasis on being careful.

“Well done,” Sulivhaan said. “I do wonder who built these creatures.”

“I’ll keep exploring, feel free to check the parts for anything useful,” Ilea said.

“Are you certain there are no other golems hiding?” Uriah asked.

Ilea took another look but didn’t find any other monsters. “Not visibly, let me check for anything hidden,” she said and flew around the coliseum, checking within the walls with her sphere. Neither golems nor any enchantments or traps stood out to her.

“Just be careful,” she said when she landed. “I couldn’t find anything but I’m not exactly the best at uncovering these things.”

“We will, thank you Lilith,” Uriah said.

“I’ll check on the next area, wait for my signal to advance,” she said, getting a nod from Sulivhaan before she vanished.

A single exit lay at the other side of the underground structure, currently shut and enchanted.

Ilea didn’t bother with the defenses, instead cutting through the stone in which the steel door was set. She ripped the whole thing out a moment later and threw it to the side.

*Being able to do that is really the main reason of reaching this kind of power,* she thought, stepping through and triggering a few traps.

Fire, steel, and light struck her armor in various ways and levels of intensity. Nothing quite managed to leave more than minor scratches.

*Very disappointing. Level five hundred guards and then you have these low quality traps.*

She stepped through the long stone hallway and came out on a small platform. This area contrary to the previous halls and coliseum wasn’t man made. Instead she found herself in a spacious cavern, more than a kilometer long with various outcrops of stalagmites and their ceiling counterparts adding to the ancient aesthetic.

A broad stone stairwell with decrepit railings led down a few dozen meters and onto what looked like a bridge. Various similar stairwells led away from said bridge and towards a variety of platforms quite like the one she stood on now.

*Bridge doesn’t lead to anything either,* she thought and flew to the closest platform. *Now if that doesn’t look like some kind of teleportation node.*

Each platform had a circular structure placed on it about five meters in height and just as broad. Hundreds of runes had been etched into the stone that positively reminded her of popular portal depictions in old sci-fi movies and shows. The center was empty, likely where the magic would let someone step through.

Right now she didn’t feel any distortion in space coming from the structures but Ilea was sure they had something to do with long range teleportation or perhaps some other kind of passageway. *Hence the dungeon name,* she thought and snorted.

Ilea didn't have the illusion of figuring out what the hell any of this was nor how to make it work, so she got out her map of Ravenhall and tracked the cats, casually flying back to the main platform and calling for the rest of the group.

"The passageways?" Sulivhaan asked her when he appeared, taking in the sights.

"I can't see anything," Finnley said, lighting a torch himself.

"Probably. Whatever they are, they're not active at the moment," Ilea said. "That's pretty much the extent of my knowledge on the matter. I don't know the runes."

"We'll investigate it," Sulivhaan said. "Everyone, return to the Shadowguard and wait for further instructions. We'll have to extend our defensive system into these catacombs."

"Understood," Uriah said and stepped back towards the coliseum.

"We can't even have a look?" Finnley asked with an annoyed tone.

"If you want to risk causing another demon invasion, feel free," Sulivhaan said.

Finnley raised both arms. "Alright. I get it, come on guys, let's fuck with the guards."

"Lilith. A word?" Sulivhaan said.

She kept her focus on the map. "Of course, I'm here."

Sulivhaan waited until the others were gone, their torches barely visible in the distance. He vanished and returned a few seconds later.

"This was the opposite of what I hoped to find," he said.

"You know what it is?" she asked.

"No. Gates of some kind obviously. Which raises a lot of questions that right now I don't want to find the answers to," he said. "I had hoped for a few monsters or treasure."