

Chapter 609 Ruins left behind

Shawn focused on the flickering flame of his torch. How many days had they been down here? Ten? Twelve? The darkness was getting to him. Their rations wouldn't last more than another few days.

An undead lay half frozen to his right, two arrows sticking out of its face. He aimed at the remaining monster and shot, his arrow striking the knight below his shoulder, managing to bite through below his plating.

Geoffrey deflected the undead's sword into the nearby wall of the cavern, the creature stumbling forward when a spear of ice shattered against its back. A quick swing of their warrior's sword cut into the undead's neck. He ripped the sword out, dark blood splattering to the ground before he let go of his shield, striking the creature with a two handed blow and taking its head.

'ding' 'Your group has defeated [Forgotten Knight – lvl 230]'

Finally... those things are entirely too strong.

Geoffrey winced, grabbing at his shoulder. "I think it opened again."

Philipa rushed over. "Let me have a look, don't move."

Shawn shot an arrow at a moving shadow, Geoffrey preparing his broadsword. Philipa shot a ray of ice in the direction of the movement, nothing to show for it.

They had known about the monsters of course, but undead were their specialty. The locals hadn't mentioned anything else about the dungeon. The warning they had received back at the Guild didn't seem quite as unwarranted anymore. *Not just undead. There is something else here.*

Shawn waited with another arrow nocked. These creatures were smart, more so than any undead they had faced before. Their group had faced Demons back in Lys, Cursed in Baralia, and now they were being toyed with by the creatures in this dungeon.

Vivian started crying, her magic flickering out before she fell to her knees. She sobbed a few times before she spoke. "I can't... I can't find a way out..."

They were stuck. Somewhere in the Weysin dungeon. Already they had killed a dozen undead but it hardly mattered if they couldn't get out.

Without Cris, their earth mage, they would've likely already died. She was asleep right now, regaining some strength while the others protected her. She was the only one who could effectively find the traps and hiding spots scattered throughout the treacherous mine shafts and caverns.

Vivian was usually well versed in mapping out dungeons, her divination magic allowing her to see threats long before they ever became relevant. Today it didn't work. Something was interfering with her magic.

"We're going to die down here," Philipa murmured, tightening the bloody bandage around Geoffrey's shoulder.

"Pull yourself together," Geoffrey said, the heavily armored man looking battered, his plate showing scratches, deep cuts, even melted in certain sections. He was at the end of his wits too.

“We could go deeper, find what is lurking below...” Shawn said.

“No... nonono...” Vivian said. “That’s where death lies.”

“But we’ll die here too if we can’t find the way out,” Shawn replied, his hands shaking as he let go of the arrow, unsure if the undead was just waiting around the corner, motionless and silent.

He quivered when a creature of darkness stepped out from the pitch black cavern in front of him. Black horns and blue eyes full of scorn. He shot his arrow, watching as the being simply closed its eye, the projectile impacting with a dull sound.

“What the fuck are you doing?” a female voice asked, catching the falling arrow with her armored hand.

“Die undead creature!” Vivian screamed and cast her area spell, enveloping the whole cavern ahead in burning light magic.

“Stop that,” the armored woman said and walked towards them. “I’m not undead.”

“Leave us beee!” Philipa said and formed dozens of shards of ice around herself.

Geoffrey brandished his sword and shield. “Come then, demon!”

Shawn watched with bated breath as the woman walked over to Geoffrey and simply grabbed his sword and shield before she ripped both out of his hands.

[Battle Healer – lvl ??]

Another few monsters came from behind her, one humanoid drake and one woodland being.

“What are you?” Geoffrey demanded.

The woman looked around. “There’s something here... fear inducing mind magic. Subtle,” she said, tendrils of black matter flowing out from behind her back before they grabbed onto everyone of Shawn’s team.

Shawn looked around in confusion, feeling a warm sensation flow into him

“They need water and food,” the woodland being said.

“How long have you been down here?” the woman asked, summoning a bottle of water and a plate of delicious smelling food.

“I don’t know,” Shawn answered, too tired to stay defiant before the high level adventurer. He felt his mind clearing as he grasped the bow in his hand with renewed strength.

Ilea displaced the whole group out of the dungeon, using the skill a few times in a row. She summoned more food and water. “Eat, drink, and sleep. Then go home.”

The man looked at her with wide eyes.

[Ranger – lvl 165]

“Good job surviving this long,” she said, seeing the man’s expression turn from fear to realization to shame in the span of two seconds. She vanished and joined her own team again.

Feyrair burned another undead, holding the creature’s throat with one hand as the white flames enveloped it.

“Level two hundred,” Neiphato commented.

Ilea gestured to the two enchanters. “Stay close to me.”

“These are peculiar. Someone is controlling them,” Fey said.

“I assume the mind magic is coming from the same place,” Ilea said, trying to taste the magic in the air. It came from deeper down in the dungeon. She displaced the group down, using her sphere to check for the many traps. A hundred meters further down, she stopped, rushing a robed undead mage who threw a fire spell at her.

She pierced the creature with a dozen ashen limbs, killing it instantly before she threw the body to the side, her ash barely affected by the scorching flames.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Forgotten Adventurer – lvl 264]’

Several traps were triggered when she reached another corridor, the walls here more even than before, definitely man made. Poisoned arrows, a splash of acid, and two large metal spears crashed into her, all breaking against her ashen armor.

“Come on, we’re getting closer,” Ilea said, feeling the fear based mind magic intensify. Her resistance was disabled, the effect just now starting to influence her mind. Her healing prevented her from turning back or being frozen in fear, her ashen limbs extending the benefits of her healing to the others. She could feel the presence now, just a few floors below, a few dozen meters away. If it was a being purely focused on mind magic, it wasn’t particularly impressive.

Two knights blocked her way but she simply walked on, their weapons deflected to the side with quick parries before she punched each of them once, her fist denting in their breast plates, throwing them back a few meters before they came crashing down.

“Greetings,” she sent to the being below, unsure if it had detected them already or if the mental attack was something it simply exuded. It didn’t feel particularly focused.

“*One receptive to the mind. Rarely do those so talented seek these chambers,*” a voice came back, a hushed whisper. “*You are not welcome here however. Leave, or face the consequences.*”

With contact established, Ilea could now talk freely. “*I don’t care about you. Only about the ruin that lies below.*”

“*I have claimed this place, creature of the mind. All within is mine,*” it said.

Ilea rolled her eyes and displaced the group down into the hall she now saw within her sphere.

Dimly lit, a few torches lined the walls and some candles sat on a large stone table at the center. Four armored knights stood near the walls, three robes mages nearby. In front of the table floated a skeletal creature with two bone arms and no legs, a deer like skull with two sets of antlers sprouting outwards. It wore a metal chest plate that looked like bronze, various enchantments shimmering with a dim light.

[Warythir – lvl ???]

Purple light flickered in its eye sockets. “Wait,” it spoke.

Ilea didn't mind, gesturing for Feyrair to stand down, the elf already standing close to one of the knights, his flame nearly touching the undead creature.

A wolf corpse lay on the stone table, various opened tomes nearby.

“You have proven your capability, Deviant. There is no need for battle. What you seek lies below,” the creature spoke, all of them seemingly hearing it. The being did a double take. *“Elves... fascinating. Long has it been. Cerithil Hunters I presume? Those they call the Cursed.”*

“Yes,” Feyrair said. “You know our kind?”

“One came before you, seeking to leave the ruin below. I granted passage, for his tale,” the Warythir spoke.

“What do you do here?” Ilea asked, glancing around the room. Bones and various monster pieces hanging from the walls. Some human too.

“That is none of your concern, righteous human. This den is mine and those who enter come to disturb, kill, and loot. All know of the danger. They had decades to learn of it. Now leave, your presence taints this place of death.” the being said and pointed to a corridor with a stairwell leading down.

“Apologies for the intrusion,” Ilea said, glancing at the creature one last time. It seemed above level eight hundred and it reeked of death.

Feyrair summoned a monster carcass and placed it on the ground.

“I accept your gift, hunter. It is good to see the old rites have not been forgotten,” the creature spoke.

“And they never will be,” Feyrair said and joined Ilea.

“What was that about?” she asked when they reached the stone stairs. She noted that Neiphato seemed just as interested.

“A gift for passage, through the Nar el Ceroth, a place of creation. Few intelligent beings roam them and many wield dangerous magic. It's a rite of respect for the places we supposedly defile, and just as much to make sure the beings let us pass without trouble. Not that I care much for either, but it seemed appropriate,” Feyrair said.

“I haven't heard of it,” Neiphato said.

Feyrair smirked. “The first hunters thought themselves honorable, still clinging to the teachings of the Oracles, seeking to retain some dignity in spite of their curse. Foolish, but practical now. That being was dangerous within its domain and we had already offended it.”

“Didn't think you'd say no to a fight,” Ilea said. She was glad of course. Protecting Iana and Christopher wouldn't have been easy. Though she would've likely just displaced everyone away if the creature had been too powerful.

“Never fight a necromancer in his lair,” Feyrair said.

“Sounds like there's a story behind that,” Ilea said. “What else are you supposed to do?”

“Burn everything down,” the elf said immediately.

“Makes sense,” Ilea mused, the group stepping into a natural cavern. It was cramped and she had to teleport the group a few times to get through.

They came out of the darkness and into a carved circular stone hall with a single entrance at the other side. Familiar dull green light shined from above. “The map was right,” Ilea said.

Christopher smiled, him and Iana exchanging a quick glance.

“You two stay back. They like their traps even more than that creature up in its own dungeon,” Ilea said and walked to the open stone door. She found a destroyed Guardian inside, deep cuts in its armor and the surrounding corridor suggesting wind magic or something similar.

They found more of the machines, pieces of dull green metal covered in dust, lit in an eerie green light. A few simple corridors led further into the complex, Ilea making sure to spring every trap. Spears and fire lost against her resilient armor, bent out of shape or simply running out of steam. The ashen limbs trailing behind her cut deep furrows into the walls, ripping out the mechanisms, never to be used again.

She assumed the elf who had once escaped this place had somehow arrived with a teleportation gate, the fact giving her hope that a functioning one had remained here. “How high do you think is the chance that they destroyed the platform?”

“There is a chance, always. But so far this doesn’t seem like a production facility or anything particularly important,” Feyrair said. “We’ll see.”

They reached a large entrance hall with counters, tables, and chairs, two large tunnels leading further in. “A city,” she remarked. From then on, no more traps plagued the way. She found the first working Guardian half a minute later, on the other side of the tunnels.

It turned towards her, six blades at the ready as its green eyes zoned in on her.

[Taleen Guardian – lvl 200]

She continued walking, letting the machine approach with its blades brandished. A single ashen limb rushed out and pierced its torso, lifting the destroyed machine up before it was flung to the side.

“Wow,” Christopher remarked quietly, glancing between the destroyed creature and Ilea.

Feyrair just chuckled. “Easy to impress.”

“I’ve seen whole teams struggle against these types,” the enchanter said.

The elf chose not to remark on that, his opinion obvious regardless.

“We should find the Great Hall, if there is one here,” Ilea said.

“This way,” Feyrair said, pointing down a road.

Homes had been carved into the stone here, much like in Iztacalum. Not a natural cavern but dwarven made.

Ilea glanced at the faded sign post and smiled. *That would’ve made the first delve into one of these ruins quite a bit easier*, she thought. If only she could read.

The group followed the stone road, green near ambient light shining on from above, magical lights set into the high ceiling. Only few Guardians showed, many more laying destroyed. Feyrair torched them the moment they showed themselves, sometimes before.

Soon they reached a bridge over a deep crevice. This time she could see the bottom, her eyes quite a bit better than last time. "Very imposing," she commented, thinking the effort entirely wasted. However it was difficult to say how long a dwarven mage needed to dig out a trench like that. In a battle it would hardly make a difference, anybody who couldn't fly or teleport over inconsequential against even a simple sword guardian, let alone a Centurion or Praetorian.

Ilea did wonder if the machines had gained higher levels at some point, much like the knights in Tremor. She assumed however that such wasn't the case, the dwarfs wouldn't have risen to the power they had come to call their own with weaker machines, let alone their ability to apparently face the Ascended.

The gate to the Great Hall was open, just slightly. "You two wait outside for a moment, just in case," Ilea said and blinked through, now about to squeeze herself past the tiny opening.

Neiphato remained with the enchanters while Feyrair followed her inside.

"Familiar sight," she said, looking at the turning Centurion twirling its spear.

"Ah and here I expected something a little more challenging," Fey said.

Ilea glanced over at him. "Really? Here?" she asked, deflecting the thrown spear with a flick of her hand. "Do you want to destroy it?"

He took a step back and gestured for her to go on. "I believe if someone has the need to destroy something, it's you," he said with a smile.

Ilea shook her head lightly and walked towards the machine. "I need a little more than this thing," she said and sped up, closing the distance before she dodged a thrust, sliding past the blade. Her fist slammed into its core, denting the steel and digging in. She spread her fingers and dug deeper, finally ripping out the core as it cracked in her hand. Ash formed to cover the thing before it exploded, the sound dulled as the blast broke through the small ashen barrier.

Ilea absorbed the heat from the flames sticking to her arm, the fire dying down before she shouted. "Clear."

Feyrair stepped next to her and looked at the large gate before them. It remained closed.

"Throne room?" she asked.

"Yes. The gates should be this way," Fey said, pointing at one of the closed stone doors.

"Want to see what they have in store for us?" Ilea asked.

"Praetorians at most," the elf said.

"I might enjoy Praetorians," Ilea replied, her armor bursting into flame as heat started forming in her core. She quickly distributed her sixty five remaining stat points into Vitality and Intelligence, the latter getting fifteen. Just in case there was something more dangerous waiting for them.

She walked up to the large gates and touched the thick steel. *Enchantments*, she thought and charged up Absolute Destruction. Her fist slammed into the gate, a ripple of mana flaring out from

the impact, destroying every magical charge that had clung to it. Another punch resounded, followed by several more.

She finally broke through, digging her hands in before she pulled with all the strength she could. Steel groaned, sliding over the stone floor before the large gates were flung open, sparks flying as they skidded over the ground and finally slammed against the walls.

Ilea walked through, her white flames leaving a trail on the ground.

“Nothing against teleportation, let alone space magic,” Feyrair remarked with a smile.

She didn’t reply.

The throne room was smaller than the ones she had seen before, the ground opening regardless. A single Taleen Praetorian climbed up, whatever mechanism was supposed to push the platform upwards apparently broken.

“*The throne room is breached,*” the machine said, brandishing its scythes when it had reached the ground floor.

“It is indeed,” Ilea said and rushed it.