

Chapter 528 Meadow

As do many species, I found, the creature said with an amused thought attached to the words.

“So it’s a hobby for you? To help creatures awaken,” Ilea asked.

A hobby... a past time. No, it’s more meaningful than that. It is... what I am.

“Hmm... do you remember your own awakening?” Ilea asked.

Yes. Before the last darkening. I remember feeling the wind, hearing sound for the first time.

“That’s pretty cool... I don’t remember my own birth,” Ilea said.

Amusing. I am not a mammal. Your kind often needs time to develop fully. I was not aware in my development, nor was I birthed to a mother.

“Formed by mana?” Ilea asked.

I have not been able to determine the circumstances of my creation. An unexpected mutation is my best guess. Perhaps I was merely a particularly resilient growth of grass before.

“You mentioned the darkening... do you mean the eclipse still under way?” Ilea asked.

Eclipse... the process of a celestial body covering another?

“You know about planets and stars?” Ilea asked. “But yes, I think that’s essentially the meaning. When the moon temporarily covers the sun. But I don’t think it should last as long as this one has.”

I have learned some things about the astronomy of this realm. In this case it is not a moon covering the sun but the planetary body doing the very same. You are currently on the only moon of Sephilon. Erendar.

“We’re on the moon?” Ilea asked.

Yes. The Astral Spirits you have encountered came here from Sephilon, no longer unwilling to wander this moon.

“Because the sun is covered?” Ilea asked. “Wouldn’t they just come every night then?”

I don’t understand your question. What do you believe the sun does?

“Provide light and energy?” Ilea asked.

Yes. And stability. To that which you call mana. Your presence here is a testament to your achievements. I knew it would be difficult for the Pale ones to survive in your realm as soon as those three entered Erendar but I had thought it impossible for your kind to enter my domain.

“That still doesn’t explain why the spirits wouldn’t come at night,” Ilea said.

Energy does not dissipate instantly. It takes many orbits without sunlight to cause a collapse. The one you see here is only just in progress. Enough for Astral Spirits to deem our surface acceptable but perhaps not yet enough to prevent all formation of life.

“This eclipse has been going on for more than a day?” Ilea asked.

Orbits of the sun, not Sephilon. It is an exceptionally rare phenomenon. Few beings remain who have seen the last and fewer still remember it. I could predict it and tried to find a way to prevent the collapse of this civilization.

“Fleeing to another realm was that option you talked about?” Ilea asked.

I thought it impossible for a long time. The discovery of disconnected realms was surprising. A foolish hope turned into my only plausible option as our efforts failed, one by one.

“Yours and Zaiked’s? Who was she?” Ilea asked.

The Queen of the Pale ones. The wisest of them all. And one of few who could communicate with me. A high Mental Resistance is necessary to comprehend my thoughts, something their species struggled with.

Zaiked refused reason, attacking the unknown species from your realm, thus dooming the remaining survivors of her kind. It is understandable, her history one of warfare and struggle. She had never deemed communication a favorable trait. Those who had cooperated with me beforehand were slain when she came to power. Her strongest warriors failed to kill me, which allowed rare interactions to take place afterwards. If only based on respect and fear.

However even in the most recent orbits, she remained suspicious, without trust. Her very last actions were to fight an unstoppable foe instead of flight into a new realm of limitless possibilities.

She shared the possibility and those who wished to take the risk already went through the fragile fissures. I know now that they did not survive.

“Doesn’t sound like she was particularly wise then,” Ilea said.

Zaiked and her army fought the Spirits, both those of Death and those of Sephilon. They killed thousands but losses soon became more regular, Astral Spirits too much for most of her warriors to kill. For every one they slayed, ten more would take its place.

Children started freezing in their mothers’ arms. Those too weak to bear the changing mana went mad and attacked their own. Crops failed and hunger plagued even the most powerful of her kind.

I believe that she was already lost when you arrived. Because she had lost everything she had held dear.

“There are plenty of creatures still around,” Ilea said. “What about them?”

She considered them lesser. They have the strength to survive but not the will to fight.

“What do you think?” Ilea asked.

They are all Eyes.

“Eyes for what? You?” she asked.

Eyes that perceive existence. Existence cannot be with no Eyes to see, thus I seek to help awaken those who remain blind.

“I don’t really get that, but okay. You seemed to have more of a connection to Zaiked than just her eyes though,” Ilea said.

I am not immune to the effects of sentimentality. Empathy is a sure way towards awakening.

“And you don’t blame us for coming here? For killing so many of your... eyes,” Ilea said.

You are awakened, as are those who came here. I feel that I must try and prevent the deaths of those I sheltered for so many orbits but I will not fight Awakened to achieve that goal.

“And that’s why you’re talking to me? Why you didn’t eat me yet,” Ilea asked.

I determined that there was a possibility of your cooperation. Your kind has yet to kill any of Erendar’s awakened without reason. While the Queen thought diplomacy to be an admittance of weakness, I think it the only way for Awakened to cooperate.

Desires, needs, and goals differ greatly among the various awakened species I have met. I have found no evidence to suggest that animosity is the only possible result however. And yet we remain in part influenced by the instincts that once drove us. Most awakened would not be able to accept my existence, either responding in terror or aggression.

You have met many powerful beings and thus you stand here with a more complex understanding of my existence. Yet still you remain suspicious. I can feel it. But you are here, willing to communicate with a creature that is not of your own kind.

“So your goal is to get the others into our realm. The problem is that there simply isn’t enough mana there to keep them sane. I’ve seen it happen,” Ilea said.

Yes. That is a problem. I feel however that mana is flowing through the spacial tunnel, spreading into your world.

“Into a populated city that won’t respond kindly to the invasion of another species,” Ilea said.

You do not have the power to convince them?

“I don’t think so. There are too many parties involved. I’m inclined to help the weaker beings here, seeing the evidence of your fucked up world but you yourself are way more powerful. I don’t think I can trust you without good reasons,” she admitted.

I understand. It is the logical conclusion.

It remained silent for a moment.

Erendar is not a static place. Are there places in your realm where the mana density would be enough to sustain the creatures that remain within this palace?

“Yeah,” Ilea said. “The problem is getting them there.”

You have a way to pass into my domain. Do you not have the power to move them into such a territory?

“No. You also understand that I can’t just accept the mana leaking into our realm followed by other species that may or may not be hostile,” she said.

It is true that I cannot speak for the survivors. I merely wish for their continued existence.

“Can you close the gate?” Ilea asked.

It would require an incredible effort but it is possible for me to close the tunnel. I do however see no reason why I should do such.

“The creatures here will fight the creatures on the other side. Eyes will be lost one way or the other,” Ilea said.

That is no certainty. You admitted you cannot speak for them, nor can I speak for those still in Erendar. Understand that if I shut the gate, my whole focus will be needed. All efforts to prevent Spirits from finding this location will cease, nor will I be able to fight them off should they arrive.

“And you can’t just form another gate somewhere else?” Ilea asked.

You underestimate the efforts that went into its creation. Opening another such gate would bring the Astral Spirits upon us just as much as closing the present one would do. It may also be impossible to do so in this city. The spacial fabric is fickle as it is. I cannot be sure of the consequences should I interfere in its natural state once more.

“Hmm...,” Ilea said when the stone gate behind her exploded.

“Fucking fiinally,” Hector exclaimed. “Hey creature, where are you keeping all the gold?”

“Shiny metals held no meaning to most of Erendar’s awakened species,” the being replied.

“You taught it Standard? Well fucking done,” he said and rolled his eyes.

“I have learned from you as I have learned from her,” it said.

“Is there anything worth looting here other than the trash in those vaults?” Hector asked.

“What you call trash are memories of ancestors who died in battle. Each holds value both historical and sentimental,” it explained. “I do not know what you deem worthy to call treasure, water mage, but I suggest you look for it yourself.”

“Maybe killing the remaining monsters here might at least get me some experience,” he said and stepped onto the grass. “Or I could kill you, you’re just a bloody meadow after all.”

“Amusing. You are welcome to try, mage. I won’t hold a grudge for your baseless confidence,” the being said.

Ilea laughed.

“Come on, if we work together, we might get a four mark kill!” Hector said.

“Even if that thing was obviously weak and near death, I’d protect it from you,” she said. “But I agree with it, I think it’d be quite amusing if you tried.”

“I agree,” Hector said with a grin, shooting a beam of water at the tree.

Nothing intercepted the beam and it hit the tree without a visible impact.

“You are no longer welcome here,” the being said before Hector vanished, including his water sphere and a part of the floor he had stood on.

“Did you kill him?” Ilea asked.

“I do not kill Awakened beings. I merely placed him close to the exit,” it said.

“So he’s right and we could just try and kill you? You wouldn’t kill us even if we injured you?” Ilea asked.

“Correct,” the being said.

“I don’t think I could do it,” Ilea admitted. “Can you try that spell on me though? I want to see if I could resist.”

She felt the attack coming, a surge of incredible power pulling on her very being. Ilea appeared a few meters away.

“Impressive. Your resistance is high, but your abilities cannot stop overwhelming power,” the being said.

“Did you try to move me here?” Ilea asked, gesturing around herself.

“No. I aimed for the entrance,” the being said.

Hector’s voice came from the tunnel “Listen here you shit! I won’t just be dismi-”

“You moved him again?” Ilea asked, smiling both at Hector’s inability to even approach the creature and the fact that she was only halfway towards the entrance.

I resisted partially.

“That I did. We seem to have found ourselves at an impasse, young Lilith. I deeply value your willingness to cooperate but it seems my involvement ends here,” it said.

Ilea sighed.

“What will you do once everyone is dead and our realm is as infested with Spirits as yours?” she asked.

“The possibility of Spirits choosing to enter the tunnel remains small. I shall examine my failings and await the end of the eclipse. My efforts during that time will be focused on those who remain blind but refuse to fall to the beings who have invaded this land,” it explained.

“There are creatures that survive all that?” Ilea asked.

“Few but yes. You are not the only being with the power to face Spirits,” it said.

“Interesting... hey... maybe you could teach me Space Magic, help me advance my skills,” she said.

“You know that fighting will advance your skills the most. There is an untold number of spirits out there, willing to cooperate,” it said.

“Yeah but they won’t help me with Space Awareness. You can. You’re limited by Classes and skill slots too, aren’t you? No matter how high your level reaches. Or am I wrong?” she asked.

“There are limitations to all beings,” it said. *“It would take many orbits to reach meaningful change or progress. Orbits we do not have.”*

“I got my Space Class somewhat recently. Most of my spells aren’t even in the third tier yet. But they’re close though,” she said.

“You suggest there may be a way for you to support my goals should your power reach sufficient heights?”

Ilea shrugged. “Who the fuck knows?”

I already have a way to go back to Elos. Displacement already lets me form a gate between two places. Might just be there’s a possibility somewhere in there.

“That is true. Even I cannot grasp at the potential slumbering within your spells. May I ask why you would cooperate with a being such as I?” it said.

"I empathize with your situation, I guess. If what you said was the truth," Ilea said. "Your power and expertise in space magic might help me personally but mainly I think that an ally such as you could be the difference between our species' extermination and our long term survival."

Hey maybe I AM the ashen knight of humanity. Damn you Maro.

"You deal with me as if I were your equal. That is an incredibly rare phenomenon. Fascinating. Your high level in Veteran suggests it is not a deception," it said and paused. "I would give much for the survival of those I lead to awakening. A haven within a safer realm may be the best I could ever hope to achieve. I have failed to prevent the eclipse or remedy its effects and I doubt the next five thousand orbits will lead to a different result,

"I shall humor you, Lilith. Know however that whatever deal we strike in the end, I will not kill an Awakened being. Never," it said.

Ilea grinned. "What about teleporting them away again and again? Or creating an impenetrable barrier between the enemy and for example a city?"

"That would be possible. If my will suffices. I am far from the most powerful being, even in this realm," it said.

"I think you're plenty powerful," Ilea said with a smirk. *My new level two thousand Meadow friend and space magic instructor!*

"First... I think it's necessary that the survivors make camp down here. Otherwise the humans coming from the other side might just kill them," she said.

"They lack the mental fortitude to hear my words," it said.

"Then write it down, or do they not have writing?" she asked.

"There are... symbols. It doesn't suit complex instructions but perhaps it is possible," the being said, the tone of its voice decidedly energetic.

"Use this," Ilea said and summoned her notebook, opening it to an empty page before she summoned her pen.

"A local space chamber... impressive. I had not thought you this advanced," the being said.

"I didn't make that myself," Ilea said and showed how the pen worked.

She didn't have to hold the notebook as both items started hovering, the pen moving over the page with precise and quick movements.

"Make sure they understand that the other side doesn't have enough mana," she said.

"Tschush, who do you believe you're talking to, young human?" it asked.

"Did you just shush me?" Ilea asked. "How do you even know about that?"

"I am more aware than most. More humans have entered this realm and they share information quite freely," it said.

"How should I call you anyway? I have no clue what the identification says," Ilea said.

"I do not believe in the concept of such a definition," the being said.

"Is Meadow okay?" Ilea asked.

"I prefer Endless Meadow," Meadow replied.

“Sure. Meadow. Short for Endless Meadow,” Ilea said with a grin.

“*Your attempts at humor are falling flat, Lilith,*” it said.

“Yeah, yeah. Everyone’s a critic,” she said and received the notebook.

Scribbles and unidentifiable sketches covered the page. Hopefully enough to convince the survivors.

I really care about them, she thought, waving at the Meadow before she vanished. *Weird insect creatures from another realm. Maybe because I slaughtered thousands of their brothers and sisters. No, they were already monsters.*

For a moment she considered some kind of spell cast by the Meadow to make her cooperate but her Mental Resistance didn’t support such a theory. Her healing didn’t find anything physical and her soul perception didn’t inform her of something strange either.

She decided that maybe she just tried to help whenever possible. The benefits were definitely present but she could have just as well not given a fuck. She just hoped the Meadow wasn’t some unimaginable horror trying to deceive her.

She did had a good impression of it so far and if anything, she’s made better experiences with powerful monstrous entities than most humans. *Humans are the real monsters, yadda yadda.*

Ilea appeared in front of a group of insects. A few of them she even recognized as the ants she had met in the throne room.

Most of them shied back.

She just stood there and held up the notebook, opened at the page used by Meadow.

They made clicking noises, obviously arguing with one another before a few of the creatures walked closer.

“You understand?” Ilea asked.

They replied in clicks. A few of them rushed out into the nearby tunnels but most remained.

Ilea turned and walked back towards the Meadow’s area. *They’re following me. Good.*

She met Michael on the way, his eyes darting from her to the insects behind.

“What...,” he got out and joined her.

“You can communicate with them?” he asked.

“Just one of them,” she said as they continued down into the same hallway she had entered with Felicia.