

Chapter 487 Fame and Confusion

“What is she hiding that not even her ally shall know? The feud surely with the secret power behind Dawntree, perhaps even the Elves?! She is protecting us, that much is clear,” Levi said as he stepped into the dark cavern. Flickering lights from floating leaves illuminated the way.

Ilea could see the two idiots from hundred of meters away. She even heard them as clear as day, thanks to the acoustic of the cavern and her enhanced senses. *Of course they followed me.*

She had floated and teleported only, hoping to avoid them.

The other man didn't make a sound but instead sniffed the air.

My smell? Really?

Ilea was sure there was nothing she left behind. She wasn't sweaty nor did her magic leave anything discernible in the air that she herself perceived. She knew that she wasn't the best tracker, not by a long shot. One with more specialized skills would surely be able to follow a recent trail, even one left by her.

My wings would get me out but if they keep following me, they'll be inside the Taleen Dungeon. Two Shadows won't stop a Praetorian, let alone two.

“I suggest you leave,” she said from where she hid, close to the ceiling of the vast cavern.

“Hah! She was watching us all along! Nothing less from the one to stand alone against the dregs of Baralia,” Levi exclaimed.

Ilea blinked towards them, appearing right in front of the two.

Levi remained with spread arms and a large smile.

The other Shadow had summoned daggers to his hands, appearing a few meters back and ready for battle.

[Warrior – lvl 228]

“You don't want to fight me,” she said to the man before turning to Levi. “Now please, can't you just leave me alone?”

“Of course not!” Levi exclaimed. “Now that you've finally come, I want to know how you plan to take the city!”

Ilea rubbed her brow and sighed. She glanced at the other Shadow, the man having wisely put down his weapons, now just shrugging as he listened.

“I don't plan to take the city, alright?” she said. “There was no plan. The Administrator sent funds and resources to support Dawntree, that's all. More influence is good and maybe even an alliance with Ravenhall and the Shadow's Hand but if anybody wants to take over the city, it's not me.”

Levi shook his head, the words apparently not making much sense to him.

“But... the songs... they arrived, perfectly timed. It had to be planted. Not to mention the girl... she was not the only one vouching for you, the contracts accepted near without consideration!” Levi said.

"I agree," the other Shadow said.

Not a very talkative one but certainly the one she preferred right now.

"What girl? I don't know of a girl. I'm here to go into the Taleen dungeon," she said.

Levi's eyes lit up again. "The Taleen Dungeon! Surely to face the enemies so long hidden, their threads of control cut, deceit and lies finally brought to light!"

"No," Ilea said, infusing her voice to shut the man up for one fucking second.

"There is nobody there. Nothing but machines. Machines that nearly killed me when I've last been here. I came both for revenge and training, nothing more and nothing less," she said and sighed.

"You are Shadows, like me. And I tell you that it's too dangerous down there for the two of you. Nor would I want your company if it wasn't," she said.

"She bears the same spells," the higher leveled one said.

"Who are you anyway?" Ilea asked.

"Hayden," he replied.

"Hayden. What the fuck are you talking about?" she asked. *It was such a nice day so far.*

"Alice Forkspear. She is a healer too, just like you. She fights in a way I have only seen once before," Hayden said.

"Let me guess, the fields of Ravenhall?" Ilea asked.

He nodded.

"And you believe I was involved with this rebellion here? Well I wasn't. Alice fucked me over a long time ago. I thought her a friend but it turned out she was a shit ass noble brat who used me for her own gain."

"And yet," she continued. "I guess I felt bad for her. There is some history we share and a few requirements allowed her to get the same Class. It didn't have anything to do with Dawntree. I didn't even know people weren't happy with whoever ruled before."

Hayden blinked. "You don't even know who ruled the city?"

"I told you. I'm here to train. Frankly, if they don't pile up people in the streets to sacrifice them, I don't care," Ilea said.

"I was wrong then. Apologies, Ilea," Hayden said.

She smiled. "You know me?"

"Most Shadows do, I think. You do not mind me using your name?" he asked.

"Whatever. How did you guys even find me?" she asked.

"We are not here for the same reasons, nor for the same employers," Hayden said.

It seemed Levi was still stunned by the newfound information.

"I believe he paid guards to inform him of a high level healer arriving here. I just paid a few to have them watch him," Hayden said.

"And why are you interested in me?" Ilea asked.

He seemed to consider for a moment before he talked. "I plan to settle down. Made a name for myself with the rebels and I've got a nice mansion with plenty of establishments waiting as payment. I just wondered if there was more in it for me. Or if I had to silence you, in case you were really here for the reasons he stated before."

Ilea chuckled at the thought.

"I know, I know. Last time I saw you, you were less... terrifying," Hayden said.

She liked him. Straight to the point.

"Well if that's all you're here to do, then I won't be bothering you," the man said.

"But the songs..." Levi murmured.

"It's okay. You did help the city, I'm sure of it," Ilea said and looked towards Hayden for help.

The man raised his arms in defeat, telling her that he's her problem.

"There will be songs written about you, think about that instead," she said and summoned a gold coin. She glanced towards Hayden with a questioning look.

He showed her five fingers.

Ilea summoned four more coins and threw them towards him.

They vanished in his fast moving hands. "Very well," he said and bowed. "It was a pleasure meeting you again, Lady Ilea," he said and stabbed the other Shadow.

"What? I didn't mean you should kill him," she said and rolled her eyes.

Foam came to Levi's mouth as he murmured something.

"It's a fast moving toxin. It would kill a lesser man but Levi over here will just be knocked out for an hour or two. I'll get plenty of drinks and a few women ready for when he wakes up. I'm sure that should get him off your back until his eyes cross your path again," he said and lifted the man up.

Ilea checked him with her reconstruction, making sure Hayden hadn't lied.

"Thanks," she said and spread her wings.

"Thanks for the gold. Let me know if you need someone to take care of your vast wealth," he said before walking away.

Ilea vanished into the darkness, following the path she knew well, towards the Taleen dungeon that could have very well been her grave.

Maybe I should think about that Shrouding spell... if every fucking idiots knows my name, annoying shit like this will keep happening.

A ball of ash, moved through space around her kept her mind focused, meditation helping to calm her down. There was nothing more terrifying than groupies.

A morbid part of her thought about meeting the man again, if only to level her Fear Resistance.

Not worth it, she thought and rushed through the darkness, the lack of light meaningless to her enhanced eyes.

Ilea found the entrance caved in, only her memory letting her know that there had even been a way in the first place.

How many forgotten cities lay hidden in rubble? Especially in the north... there were whole kingdoms there.

She wondered if Maro could redraw a map or something. To dig things up. *Probably all crawling with unspeakable horrors.*

A shudder went through her, thinking about the Soul Rippers. *Could I kill them now? Hmm..., no, focus on your new skills.*

She assumed the distance and blinked into the stone mass. And appeared within the Taleen dungeon.

‘ding’ ‘You have entered the Iztacalum dungeon’

“First try baby,” she whispered. *It’s too late anyway. I’m sure Elana had Catelyn dig up everything of value already. I really fucking hope the Ascended didn’t wipe out Hallowfort. Or the Feynor. Or that Dark One army.*

Do I miss them? she wondered. It was possible. *Especially Goliath. He probably forged Narsil by now.*

She looked around and found what she had been looking for. A Taleen Guardian.

One of the ranged variants, either unaware of her or waiting for an opportune moment.

Ilea waved at the thing when it finally released its payload.

Force activated but hardly did anything against the fast moving steel slug.

It impacted her armored face without dealing any damage. The projectile itself had flattened considerably.

Ilea caught it as it fell from her face, looking at the thing. *It IS harder than some metals.*

Sometimes it was easy to forget how much stronger she was, usually looking for creatures that could still hurt or even kill her.

She remembered struggling against these machines, fighting single ones for ten to twenty minutes, longer even. “How cute you have become,” she said with a smirk, slowly approaching the machine as it kept spewing out projectiles.

Force and Displacement tried to stop or move the spheres, neither able to do anything about them.

Finally in range, she displaced the machine towards herself, entirely covering it in ash before Flare of Creation activated. Force added to the hold, not that it was necessary.

It took barely a second for the machine to melt sufficiently for destruction.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Taleen Guardian – lvl 150]’

‘ding’ ‘The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 6 – One stat point awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 7 – One stat point awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Body of the Valkyrie reaches lvl 2’

I knew this was the right place to visit, she thought with a grin.

The level difference was huge but if she were honest, the normal Guardians or even the Centurions hardly proved to be a challenge at all.

Easiest levels of my life, she thought and left the hunk of metal behind, entering the city.

It's been a while, she thought, memories of the Praetorians chasing her down flashing through her mind.

Her ash moved around her in a lazy manner, covered by pale flames as she casually walked through the street. The Guardians had spread out again it seemed, one of them entering the other end of the street, its green eyes flashing as it looked at her.

“Did you miss me?” she asked as her ashen limbs spread behind her.

Ilea smiled as the Guardian sped up and slashed its blades against her armor, stopped entirely. Her ash lashed out, cutting off the machine's arms.

“I'm back,” she whispered, infusing her voice.

The Guardian remained frozen, its green shining eyes lifelessly staring at her.

Absolute Destruction charged up as she positioned herself, sacrificing one thousand points of health to infuse her attack with all the power she could muster.

Her arm lashed out, hitting the creature square in its chest, denting the metal with a dull clunk. Cinders, Destruction, and her Flare exploded into it, frying every last bit of its innards before the energy exploded out of the bent seams connecting its intricate parts.

The Guardian remained in the air for a moment, her space magic willing it so.

She looked at the cracked eyes, the green light gone entirely.

Ilea grabbed the machine with her ashen limbs, twirling before she threw it as far into the city as she could.

The sound of its landing traveled far as she charged her Monster Hunter skill.

Now, which creature should I imitate.

Ilea smiled, unable to think of anything better than herself. Fear, fury, a challenge. Her scream exploded outwards, carrying far and wide.

Come to me, she had said. *Come to me and face your end.*

And the Guardians came.

Ilea had fought these creatures for hours on end, had known their movements, their weapons, reach, and speed by heart.

She wouldn't waste them. The first one had been a message. But she was here to test out her newfound power. A power that was still weak compared to her true arsenal. One that needed to grow.

One she needed to learn about, feel out, and understand. A new Class that needed fuel to grow.

And what better fuel than long forgotten machines made solely for war. War and slaughter.

She had no qualms about destroying them.

Force kept them at bay, displacement made them appear far above, the machines landing more gracefully than the Reaver and still they took damage.

Her ash moved as an extension of herself, a dark fog clad in white fire, its energy melting away the power that fueled her enemies. The farther it reached, the more health it demanded.

Ilea had health to spare.

Azarith Fighting made her step back and to the side, steel slugs rushing past, unable to even reach her as the ranged Guardians tried to bring her down.

Displacement moved her closer, Force slowing them down as her fire consumed all.

She took her time, even letting some of the machines hit her directly. Their blades could not pierce her armor, their slugs may as well have tried to penetrate city walls.

More of them came, more came to the forge that would melt them down to nothing.

And soon the street was clear, dozens of Guardians laying destroyed and half molten on the stone ground, piling on top of each other.

Ilea used Displacement and her ash to move aside the scrap metal as she stepped towards the lone Centurion waiting for her.

[Taleen Centurion – lvl 303]

A Guardian to Iztacalum, purged of the human explorers and blocked off to everyone who might enter.

She didn't know how much the creatures understood, how advanced or alive they truly were. Only the Praetorians had shown a slight sliver of Intelligence, all others simply following a predetermined schematic of orders left behind by a creator long gone or in hiding.

Ilea watched the creature as it lifted up its spear, throwing the weapon with blinding speed.

Her hand rushed up and caught the weapon, holding on to it as the Centurion tried to summon it back.

She held on for a second before the weapon slid through her hand, caught by the creature as it went into a more defensive stance.

Ilea summoned her hammer and spread her arms wide. "Come, Centurion."

Monster Hunter conveyed her meaning, making the machine once again change its stance.

She smiled as it approached, speed and grace in its movements as it assessed her, uncaring for the truth of its own inadequacy.

Force and Displacement slowed and pulled on the being, its attacks dodged with practiced ease.

The warhammer crashed into its side, sending it stumbling. She followed it, another strike dodged as she broke the stone of the road.

She ignored the spear, its blade scratching against the ash protecting her face, the metal catching fire as Flare of Creation activated.

Ilea ripped out the hammer and swung, watching the Centurion jump back, confused as it waved its spear around.

It threw the weapon, but not at her.

Ilea watched as the spear slammed into a nearby wall, the flames slowly dying out.

A new weapon appeared in the machine's hands as it once again focused on her. The dent of her hammer strike remained.

She twirled the weapon and teleported. She slapped away the hand that reached for her, blocking the spear with her hammer. Flames spread as the being retreated, slowed by Force and stopped by her ashen limbs closing around it from behind.

The limbs fanned out as more ash came into existence, the pale flames spreading as they enveloped the machine entirely.

Ilea lifted her hammer, one ashen limb deflecting the spear rushing at her heart. Quiet met the Centurion's head, denting in one side as its right eye flickered out, cracking as the fires deformed the green steel.

She lifted the hammer again, screaming as she brought it down. The entire head caved in, joining the chest piece before it all burned.

Energy gathered as she formed a cocoon of ash around the remains, the construct connected to her body.

The explosion was dull and contained, smoke and smoldering steel hitting the ground.

A ding resounded in her mind as the hammer vanished.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Taleen Guardian – lvl 205]

...

'ding' 'You have defeated [Taleen Centurion – lvl 303]

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 8 – One stat point awarded'

...

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 15 – One stat point awarded'

'ding' 'Force reaches lvl 3'

'ding' 'Force reaches lvl 4'

'ding' 'Flare of Creation reaches lvl 3'

'ding' 'Flare of Creation reaches lvl 4'

'ding' 'Flare of Creation reaches lvl 5'

'ding' 'Flare of Creation reaches lvl 6'

'ding' 'Displacement reaches lvl 3'

'ding' 'Displacement reaches lvl 4'

'ding' 'Displacement reaches lvl 5'

'ding' 'Space Shift reaches lvl 2'

'ding' 'Space Shift reaches lvl 3'

'ding' 'Body of the Valkyrie reaches lvl 3'

'ding' 'Space Awareness reaches lvl 2'

'ding' 'Warhammer Mastery reaches lvl 6'

It was clear that the Guardians were neither a challenging enemy nor one she had no knowledge of. And still she had gotten eight levels out of it.

Ilea didn't feel bad about depopulating this dungeon. Quite the contrary. It was the reason she had come.