

Chapter 684 Master of the Mind

“Hey, it’s me again. I’m just looking for some missing people that apparently went into your domain,” Ilea sent as she entered the creature’s mind magic range once more. Each of her steps resounded through the cavern as she advanced. *No answer anymore?*

The Elders walked next to her, Ilea keeping an eye on them with her healing but it seemed they were doing alright on their own already.

It’s so fucking subtle it might just manage to get into their heads if they stay long enough.

Both of them had abilities that would protect them in one way or another should the creature actually overwhelm them however. Ilea assumed it was similar to how her ash would likely protect her if her mind was taken over.

They walked for a few minutes, reaching the entrance to the actual shining caverns where fluorescent plants made the water shimmer with blueish light. Ilea could already see a variety of creatures lurking in the darker corners of the caverns, some hiding behind stalagmites, others crawling on the walls themselves.

“We’re going to have company any moment now,” Pierce said.

Verena looked around, her eyes burning with a bright flame. *“They’re directly controlled,”* she said.

“What do you mean?” Ilea asked. She could see a few of the creatures in her dominion.

“Look at their minds. They’re not damaged,” Verena replied through telepathy.

Ilea checked them with her healing and came to the same conclusion. The mind magic influence was obvious but it differed from the damage she had taken in her training sessions. *“What do you think?”*

“Easiest would be if you took one of them outside of its range,” Pierce said. *“And see what happens.”*

“Could be they just die,” Ilea said.

“Yeah, but none of us is a mind mage. And killing the thing would probably have a similar outcome,” Pierce answered.

“Hmm. I’ll give it a shot then,” Ilea said and transferred out of her armaments.

The first creatures were screeching now, among them various humanoids and monsters, different kinds of magic flaring up among them.

Ilea watched as nearly a hundred beings advanced on them. She waited until they were in her dominion and used Fabric Tear, a chunk of mana used to move all of the creatures away from the cavern. A few spells were loosed her way before she used the spell again. She could see the mind magic connection fade when the beings were bunched up in the tunnel, now out of the monster’s range.

She watched them look around in confusion, a few of them collapsing immediately, others rushing away in a panic. Some were about to attack the beings next to them.

Ilea spread her arms and released a charged up whistle. Monster Hunter froze near everything in the vicinity, a few of the beings resisting the effect. *“Do not be afraid,”* she said through telepathy, her monster hunter spell relaying the same sentiment. *“You were under the control of a mind magic creature. Don’t attack the beings next to you and leave this way,”* she said and pointed away from the shining caverns.

Most of the monster like creatures rushed away in a panic, none of them above level five hundred. Instincts coupled with the confusion of escaping the mind magic after however long they had been trapped pushed them forward.

A few of the sapient beings prostrated before her, speaking in different languages, some of them using Common. Different names were spoken. Most were dwarves but there were quite a variety of Dark Ones too, awakened beings of differing species. Some started getting gold, weapons, or other gifts before presenting it all to her.

“No, please. I’m just an adventurer. I’ll deal with the mind magic creature, just go back that way and to the Pit, you’ll find your way back to wherever you came from,” she said.

“What year is it?” one of the less fazed dwarfs said, looking around at the assortment of survivors as he touched his dirty beard. He piloted a war machine that seemed much more awkward in its movements than most everything Ilea had seen in the Pit.

“I have no clue,” Ilea informed them.

“I serve Garl Heinhall, king of Erlen,” another dwarf said.

“Erlen hasn’t been a kingdom for two hundred years,” another said. “Kanner Miel was the Champion of the Forged Dome when I came down here. I would like to send that creature to the depths myself,” he said and turned towards the shining caverns.

“Kanner was the third Champion of the Dome. There have been seventeen when I was last conscious,” another dwarf said and started laughing.

A hiss came from a wisp like being at level three twenty. “You are in the presence of a Great One, bow your heads!”

“Aye, she’s great indeed. Got us out o this mess,” another said. “I’ll be off then, feels like I haven’t had a good drink in a few hundred years. Cheers lass.”

“No need to bow your heads,” Ilea said, addressing the wisp being. “Just go without a slaughter. Dwarves, maybe make sure the other sapients get out without being splattered by the cannons.”

“Cannons? They finally built them, hah,” one of them said and waved to the group. “Come then, I’ll pay for a round of ale for all of you. If gold is still worth anything.”

Roars resounded from within the cavern, lightning and fire flashing in the distance. *“I should probably be off then. Good luck.”*

“Wait! Ashen one, please, will you grant us the honor of your name?” a heavily armored blob with three sets of eyes asked her.

“Lilith, happy to have a drink when I’m back up in the Pit,” she answered, watching the group of about forty sapients start making their way back through the tunnel. *“Ah the tomb is closed, you’ll have to break through.”*

“We know our way around, don’t ye worry,” one of them said, patting a crying dwarf on his back. “Ya made it out, quit crying.”

“My king...” he wailed.

“You’ll find another,” a snake like creature said with a hiss, slithering past the two before it gave a slight nod to Ilea.

She noted that there weren’t any humans in the group, their armor the only indication of how much time each had spend down in these caverns. *And all are above two hundred... probably had to be or they would’ve died of old age? Did the mind being sustain them somehow or did it make them eat and drink? Where did it get the food?*

She shook her head, deciding not to think about it too much. *Ah well, probably more down there to get out.*

Ilea teleported a few times, appearing within her armaments less than a second later. Heat and mana flowed into the machine, much faster than her first activation as she looked around within her dominion. “*Did you give them haircuts?*” she asked, addressing the creature she knew to be there.

Pierce and Verena were engaged with five large rock worms at level six hundred, the beings slow and bulky, stone defenses preventing damage from the ranged spell attacks coming their way.

“*Why did you take what is mine?*” a voice answered.

Ilea faced the rock worms now all turning towards her.

“*They are their own, I just set them free,*” she answered.

She could tell the worms weren’t awakened based on her healing. It would take more than one Meadow to help them get there. Rifle in hand, a beam of near white flame and energy flashed out from the titan. Chunks of smoldering worms fell to the stone ground, some falling into the underground lake instead.

“*Why do you fight?*” the being asked, confusion eminent in its voice.

“*I’m starting to think your intellect doesn’t quite live up to your mind magic abilities,*” Ilea said and looked around. She couldn’t find any other enemies in the direct vicinity, the cavern quieting down with the last rock worm that died.

The creature didn’t communicate with her anymore, instead doubling down on its attempts to take over her mind. Now quite a bit more direct than before.

“I’ll retreat for now,” Verena said. “Call if you require help.”

Pierce ground her teeth and followed her fellow Elder, their defenses cracking now that the creature wasn’t trying for subtlety anymore.

“*Suit yourselves. I’ll go see what this thing actually is,*” Ilea replied. More tunnels and crevices led deeper into the ground, the healer simply following the mind magic constantly coming her way. “*You know, you could just stop your attacks and agree to a few rules. I’d consider leaving you alone even with everything you’ve already done.*”

The reply was even more mind magic.

Ilea actually had to start healing against the constant damage. When she reached a set of broad crevices, she could finally locate the source of the spells. Another group of controlled beings ambushed her when she jumped down.

This time she simply left her armor and raised her arms. Space Manipulation froze the thirty four beings in place. Ilea added Monster Hunter for good measure, noticing her control increase greatly at the sudden lack of struggles. She stored her armaments for a while and used her upgraded Displacement to move the creatures back up and away from the source. Once more, she stopped in the tunnel and outside of its range where she kept her manipulation active.

It seemed the beings here were even older and at a slightly higher level than the ones she had brought out before. *I hope this thing didn't leave any more permanent damage or control within their heads.*

"I think you're freaking them out," Pierce said, eating a piece of cooked meat while sitting on a nearby rock.

Ilea glanced at the thirty sets of eyes staring at her with a mix of admiration, terror, confusion, and most concerning, reverence.

"Ah. I don't feel like giving them the talk again," she said and set them all down. "Don't start killing each other. And go that way," she said and pointed.

"I can take care of that," Verena said and looked at the beings. "Some of you need a bath."

"I agree," one tall spindly humanoid with white skin said and summoned a sphere of water before drowning itself. "Aaaah... finally."

"Mind magic..." another said. "It... it had us trapped... how long have we-"

Ilea waved and vanished, leaving the rest of the aaahs and oohs to Verena. *Like collecting a class of children in a dense forest.*

A few teleports brought her back to her last position, her armor summoned again as she jumped down again. She came out in a mostly dark cavern, a few streams of partially fluorescent water flowing down on the walls.

Her dominion picked up a few moving beings. Larger than the ones that had attacked her a moment earlier.

A growl resounded from a dark part of the cavern, followed by a few more. A chill wind flowed past. Ice gathered on her ash.

[Glacial Frost Hound – lvl ???] - [Frenzied]

The creatures were as tall as she was and twice as long. Nearly pure muscle with four white eyes on their large heads. Spikes grew out of their pale blue skin, visible frost exuded by their presence alone.

Ilea could see five of the beings within her dominion, the creatures close to level nine hundred, their clawed paws freezing the ground they tread on. *I might be dealing with a four mark after all,* she thought and raised a heavy steel arm.

The hounds rushed her, mana gathering around them. They were slowed by her space manipulation. All five struggled against her hold, her arm slightly shaking as she tried to freeze them in place entirely.

She formed a gate in front of her, the second above the creatures when three of them sent white beams of ice magic her way. The spells left a trail of frozen stone in their wake before they vanished into the slightly shimmering space, appearing above the beings before they were struck by their own attack.

I could face a level two thousand creature of this intellect without trouble, Ilea thought and formed another set of gates, her left hand still raised to keep them where they were. Her ability to make them hover a bit helped tremendously. None of the hounds could get any resistance on the ground to push against her magic. More beams came, once more vanishing into the same set of gates. Ilea released Embered Heart where she stood, a good chunk of the energy flashing out into the gate next to her, the fires coming out on the other side.

She heard a sizzling sound when she deactivated her gates, letting go of the hounds as the strain on her mana became difficult to maintain. Ilea watched two of them roll on the ground to put out the white flames clinging to their bodies. The other three charged ahead, another set of beams shot out towards her.

Fabric Tear made both of them appear above them, the creatures struck by the spells they had just formed. She could see her armor freeze over by the sheer presence of the hounds. Ilea formed two gates just before they reached her, the three hounds vanishing into the portal before they appeared about fifty meters above. Ignoring the falling monsters, Ilea walked forward, her gathering heat getting rid of the ice as she formed a mist of burning ash. She froze the two still burning hounds again and covered them entirely.

Her reverse reconstruction activated now, all five of them within her dominion. The flame of creation burst out from their mouths and eyes, roars resounding in the cavern as spells were shot in random directions. Ice spikes exploded outwards from the five monsters. Three of them fell and slapped against the stone floor, their hide and bones protecting them from any damage.

Ilea increased her weight and gathered heat, burning ash continuously forming and covering the struggling creatures, her space manipulation pushing them down whenever they managed to stand up. She targeted their eyes specifically, getting better results than her previous attempt at simply ripping them in half. Aiming her rifle at the first creature she managed to blind entirely, she sent a beam of charged heat into its open maw. Glowing white energy punched into it before it exploded in shattering chunks of thawing meat.

This is even less of a challenge than the Bluetails, she thought and shot the next one. Three more and she was done, silence returning to the cavern. *Space Manipulation is more than just a gimmick, and the gates are just as good as I thought they would be. Only their aura managed to even damage my armor. And even that was kind of laughable for a bunch of eight hundred beings.*

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Glacial Frost Hound – lvl 859]

...

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Glacial Frost Hound – lvl 873]

Not even twice my level. You’ll need more to stop me, mind king in the dark. She wasn’t surprised to see not a single level up from the battle. *Probably a good chunk of experience but the challenge just wasn’t there. Even with the constant mind magic.*

“*I do not understand,*” the creature whispered, now much closer.

Ilea walked through the darkness until she found a small crevice in the cavern wall. Within she perceived what looked like a beating heart. The mind magic here was enough to push even her

defenses. *“What’s so hard to grasp?”* she asked and aimed her charged up rifle, healing her mind as wisps of white flame floated around her armored form.

“You should not be this dangerous,” the creature said.

Ilea didn’t feel like waiting any longer, her defenses struggling against the continuous stream of mental bombardment. She sacrificed a few thousand points of health and released Embered Heart into the Wyrms eye within her cannon. The spell manifested and lit up the darkness. Something quivered inside of the crevice before it stopped moving.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Necaloph – lvl 609]’

The mind magic ceased instantly, the pressure gone and the shining caves now only that. Ilea checked the body with her healing but ultimately left it inside the crevice, most of it turned to ashes. She stretched, her eyes opening wide when she noticed her casual movement in the heavy armor.

Nothing about it had changed but she simply felt more comfortable using it. There were more tunnels leading down into the dark but she decided to return for now. Looking up, she frowned at the impossibility of getting back up with her armaments around her. Her wings tried, but even helped by her space manipulation, the efforts were in vain. *Ah well, can’t have everything,* she thought and made the set vanish before she flew up to rejoin the others.

Verena had managed to convince most of the survivors to leave by now, however not quite as effectively as Ilea had been. Three dwarves and two armored beings of shadow had remained.

“We must join the hunt of this ghastly creature. For centuries has it enslaved our very minds, it is unacceptable for us to remain here without our honor,” one of the dwarves said. His argument wasn’t helped by the ancient dried blood on his rusty armor coupled with his frayed and graying beard.

Ilea landed and summoned a meal, forming an ashen chair before she relaxed.

“Killed it?” Pierce asked.

“Yeah. Necaloph or something,” Ilea answered. *“Pretty low level for what it managed to do.”*

“That sounds familiar,” Verena said and gave her a look.

“True,” Ilea said with a smile and started eating.

“You already killed it?” the dwarf said, one of his eyes twitching.

“Yes, now go away, I’m eating. Good luck,” she said and made him vanish.