

## Chapter 812 Search

Ilea let her legs dangle as she sat on the cliff, eating a hot soup as she looked onto the landscape. She glanced down at the salt stone, hoping it wouldn't break again due to her weight. It was one of the best views she had found in Kohr after all, in months of being here.

She could see the ocean to her left, still kilometers away and exactly where she wanted it to be. Away from her. The landscape itself was cracked and broken, the occasional demon rushing or flying past in the distance. Hunting. Always hunting. Just like her.

Ilea smiled, raising the bowl to her mouth as she slurped the rest of her third breakfast. Fighting four marks was exhausting. Well not really, not with her regeneration, mind healing, and the sheer joy it gave her.

"Found anything?" she asked, seeing the silver machine approach through the air.

"I lost another two hundred guardians to this place," the Executioner complained.

Ilea raised her brows. "Oh, so that's an issue now? I thought you had resumed production."

"I did. But resources aren't infinite. I'm questioning if this is worth the investment," he said.

"A few hundred Guardians versus one or two levels for me. Of course it's worth the investment," she said with a grin. "Maybe you should send Hunters and Destroyers instead. They might survive a little longer."

"You're more than capable of finding four marks yourself," it said.

Ilea sighed, summoning a bottle of cold water. With no salt. Salt annoyed her. Five months it had been, since the talks at the borders of Nipha. Five months of searching, fighting, training, teaching, fighting, and more searching. Mostly searching. She missed Erendar at this point, though even there she assumed there wouldn't be unlimited Daughters of Sephilon coming to eat her.

"You know I'm looking for different four marks. Not the same types I've fought a hundred times by now," she said. To think creatures a thousand levels above her own would provide single or sometimes even no levels to her due to sheer familiarity. It was ridiculous. A meat grinder just to get to the level she was at. Anyone in want to achieve the same would first have to find another realm full of four mark beings.

"We both know where to find them." The Executioner's green eyes lighting up for a split second.

"I'm not going swimming," Ilea said. "It's cold. And wet."

"And scary. Lilith the brave. Lilith, war hero of the Accords. Lilith, savior and Sentinel. Scared of water," the machine spoke.

"How are you even capable of all this banter? I thought the Sphere couldn't reach here," Ilea said.

"An Executioner has a surprising amount of brain power, so to speak. Annoying you isn't taking up much of its storage," the machine said. Truly a machine now, autonomous and not capable of complex thought. Aki let her take one to Kohr, in addition to a bunch of Guardians for her to command. Apparently she had complained about finding worthy opponents for too long.

“Simulated banter,” Ilea murmured.

“Don’t be sad, little human. As soon as I return, Aki will know everything I learned,” the Executioner said.

“*Your Executioner is being a dick,*” she sent to Aki. The real one. Violence only visited sometimes, and for most others, Kohr was far too dangerous. There were plenty of dungeons and dangerous monsters in Elos. She just thought it reasonable to use this place for as much training as she feasibly could. No danger of luring a monster to Ravenhall or any other settlement. No danger of causing any wars. Well perhaps inter realm wars but the Architect remained the only Ascended she had met in this realm, and only due to the trap he had lain. Nor did she expect any major issues from Kohr, the Olym Arcena, the Unity of Ascended broken millennia ago.

What surprised her more than the lack of new four marks was the fact that she still hadn’t found any major facilities. The few she had come across by chance were already scrapped, dismantled, looted, or entirely destroyed. Weavy had no clue where exactly she was in the realm and Hereven straight up refused to go back to Kohr. Nes was the main reason Ilea found any facilities at all but Ascended were secretive, and didn’t like their bases meddled with. Masters of enchantments and metal magic. In a few places she found hundreds of meter wide chunks of steel, entire underground dens reduced to scrap. A lot of it, but still scrap.

Talking to the locals turned out difficult as well. Sure, she could’ve offered them a trip to Elos but she didn’t exactly trust any of them not to start a murder spree and demon plague as soon as they arrived. And imprisoning or forcing them to share anything didn’t seem right. She wasn’t in a hurry to find anything. *Ah the privilege of ethics,* she thought.

“*I had to leave some of that in there. Otherwise you wouldn’t know it was me,*” came Aki’s response.

She smiled, stretching as she considered going back to Hallowfort for a bath. She would see Felicia in a few days and there was the bi weekly Accords meeting coming up.

Ilea had expected them to call on her more but the situation in the Plains had calmed down considerably. There were of course occasional issues but nothing the related governments or organizations couldn’t deal with on their own.

“*Elves near Salia. Stalled by Shadows and Centurions. Report if available,*” Claire sent to her, Aki’s presence allowing them to coordinate the hourly messages to Ilea.

*Again?*

“*Sure, I’ll have a look. Be there in a minute,*” she sent and opened a gate to Iz. “See you,” she said to the Executioner who went to hide in a nearby crevice.

“If I’m still around. Leaving me behind like so-” the machine spoke before the gate closed.

“Yes, yes,” Ilea thought as her wings spread. She teleported through the bustling city, hearing music and street vendors below. She saw mostly dwarves and Dark Ones, most humans not keen on living underground, even with how extensive the ancient capital remained. She couldn’t spot a single adventurer either, the depths at which Iz lay far too dangerous for near all of them, and one of the reasons no Cerithil Hunter had made it this far in the past.

She found a gate hall that connected to the dwarven network, a Praetorian already present with its key. “Cheers,” she said before the gate activated, Ilea appearing somewhere in the wilderness near

Salia. She teleported up and spread her wings. Snow covered forests were all she could see, the sky gray, cold winds whipping at her ashen wings.

Aki was informed, his talen network spreading just as much as the Accord one did, and an option for their people and troops to move without the same restrictions on the other gates. The risk was deemed acceptable, with some general additions from Iana and the Meadow. With rogue gate technology around and both independent and paid enchanters working to improve them, the Accords didn't see a reason to prevent Aki from expanding even further.

She charged her wings and sped up, soon seeing distant explosions as the forests moved past. Ilea teleported one last time, appearing before a flying Shadow. She stopped the approaching Elf with her space manipulation, checking the surroundings. There were three of them, all hissing her way, all just above level two hundred.

*Bored children*, she thought. “*Anyone injured?*” she sent to the few Shadows around her. Two of the Centurions on the snowy ground were destroyed, an additional one damaged. *Not bad for their level.*

### **[Fire Mage – lvl 212]**

She looked at the young elf in her grasp, his anger obvious despite her restraining him.

“*We should be fine without additional healing,*” the Shadow answered. Someone she hadn't met before, his black plate armor obscuring his face and most of his features.

Ilea opened a gate and moved the elf through, the other two rushing her with their spells. *Not the brightest ones either*, she thought and opened the gate, this time right in front of them. One managed to avoid it but she instead teleported him into her hand and threw him into the opening herself. Not much value in talking to them, she had learned as much.

“Lilith, there were ranged light magic spells coming from that direction,” one of the flying Shadows said, pointing westward.

Ilea looked down, seeing an elf hiding behind a bunch of trees while looking towards them. *He did attack us. Technically.* She charged her wings and flew straight at him, his teleport not helping much as she simply used her own to track his spell. Two more and she caught up, Ilea grabbing the neck of his armor before she turned him around.

### **[Light Mage – lvl 217]**

The elf was pale and thin, his white hair falling nearly to his lower back. “Hello,” she said with a smile as the elf slashed at her ash mantle with his claws. “Don't injure yourself,” she said and healed the minor damage he had done to himself.

“Human monster,” he spat with venom, a beam of light shooting out at her face.

“Yes. I know. Are you done?” she asked in a bored tone, the magic failing to burn even into her eyes. *Not quite a monarch. Though I suppose I'm glad for that fact. Just kind of.*

“Kill me, I will not be taken prisoner by your kind,” the elf spat.

Ilea ignored him, flying up as she checked the surroundings before finally going through a gate herself. She found three separate barriers protecting the elves, their angry little faces staring at her as soon as she appeared. Hisses resounded.

She hissed back, enhancing her voice with monster hunter. Two of them froze.

“Oh, you are young ones,” she murmured.

“*I won't be able to protect them for much longer,*” the Meadow spoke.

“I know. Lads I'm sorry, but I think this is for your own good. It's going to hurt for a little while, but Isalthar does like his dungeon,” she said. “*Do it.*”

She deactivated her resistance before the five of them were moved down into the Descent. The tenth layer to be exact, and the home of a Young Lightning Elemental.

***'ding' 'You have entered the Descent dungeon'***

Neither the Meadow nor Ilea restrained the elves as they took a few steps and started screaming, hissing, and collapsing. She focused on her mark but decided not to bother the elf yet. It would take about an hour for the group to recover.

She sat down on the ground and kept an eye on the misguided youth, healing both the terror in their minds and most of the damage in their bodies. Her magic couldn't deal with the main issue however. That, they would have to get through themselves.

“*Hello there. I know you're terrified, very angry, and in pain. Know that at least the last bit will pass soon. I'll make sure you don't die,*” she said and checked on the mark. *Oh, he's coming back anyway.*

“*Got a few young ones who attacked a settlement, they're adjusting as we speak,*” Ilea sent.

“*I will be there shortly, Lilith,*” came the answer of the Cerithil Hunter, his voice joyous.

*Always so chipper. How Lutheran.*

The comparison was perhaps not apt. What Isalthar was doing amounted more to people getting others out of cults.

Ilea only had to wait a few minutes until the elf appeared, followed by the Lightning bird that lived on this floor. She gave the bird a look. *Never chose to hang out with me, but a white haired elf appears and suddenly you're game to have adventures together.*

The bird didn't look at her, flying with its head held high.

*I don't need you either. I have Fae friends.*

“I still do not understand your animosity, Ilea,” Isalthar spoke, looking at the ascending elemental. “It is such a peaceful creature. Truly beautiful.” He smiled and looked at the convulsing Elves. “So inexperienced. Where did they attack?”

“And I still don't understand why you always want me to talk to them instead of the Meadow,” she said.

Isalthar approached in a floating manner, touching her shoulder as he hissed in an appreciative manner. “To be defeated by a human. It is humbling. It already shatters their beliefs and makes them more receptive to more.”

“How manipulative,” Ilea said.

“The goal remains to free them of the Oracles and the ancient ways. They should be free to make choices, but I wish to inform them adequately. Knowing their lack of power in comparison to one such as thee, it is a boon,” the elf spoke. “Thank you, for bringing them.” He bowed.

“Sure,” Ilea said. “They attacked in the west. Salia. A city that was destroyed years ago, by elves from the Fire Wastes. Or so I assume.”

“Salia. I remember, yes. Humanity is expanding quickly once more. It won’t be long now, until Chosen or Ancients will take notice,” he spoke and gave her a long look with his white eyes. “Though I see you have not been idle.”

Ilea grinned. “No. I haven’t. Though I wouldn’t say no to a good fight. You still don’t think an entire domain will move to fight?”

“It is unlikely, if you do not incite the Oracles. Though the closer you get to the Wastes of Fire, the more will be interested,” Isalthar said.

Elfie and Feyrair appeared nearby, closing in as they looked at the still convulsing Elves.

“I can see your smile,” Ilea said, pointing at the ancient elf.

“I had not expected this cooperation to be quite as fruitful, after our venture into Iz that is,” Isalthar spoke.

“Was that a pun?” she asked.

He raised his brows. “I do not know of what you speak.”

“Feigning ignorance, sure,” Ilea said. He wasn’t wrong. Kidnapping young elves from their territories was apparently not an easy operation. Not for the Hunters at least. For Ilea it was another story altogether. Of course she refused to just steal random elves from their domains. Even though they were living under ancient oracles, she didn’t wish to impose her own views on them, or those of the Cerithil Hunters. With the Taleen machines no longer a threat, the moral high ground they had stood on was shrinking as well.

What she didn’t have an issue with however, was transporting elves that attacked settlements to the domain of the Meadow, and subsequently to the Descent. If they chose to go and hunt much weaker humans, they were ready to face the consequences.

*I am the consequences.*

Ilea just wasn’t entirely sure if bringing them here was actually better than killing them on the spot. Horrible pain, followed by an existential crisis on a level she couldn’t quite comprehend. They were cursed as soon as they entered a dungeon, but in a way she thought of it as forced therapy.

At the end of the day, they had attacked human settlements. And now they had to either adapt, or die.

“Another four,” Fey said, glancing at Ilea. “Might be word is getting around.”

“Word of missing elves?” Ilea asked.

“Word of a worthy challenge to the east,” Feyrair spoke.

She would’ve long delegated the task of elven defense to the Cerithil Hunters but the common people living in the Plains had yet to learn of the elven presence. Most of them at least. Slow acceptance and change was required. Bringing any allied elves into the public remained a political nightmare.

“Yeah. I’m still waiting for a worthy challenge from the west,” she said.

Feyrair hissed. "I told you we could go and attack a domain. Plenty of high level elves just waiting to be challenged."

"I don't want to step on any insecure egos, Fey. The damage they could do is catastrophic," she said.

He hissed again. "You're not the same woman I met. Humans change so quickly."

"You should see the monsters I fight," she said with a grin.

His eyes lit up. "Bring me then."

"I'm not going to babysit you, Fey. You've got enough challenges in the North," she said.

He hissed, showing his teeth, more frustrated than anything.

*I'm winning*, she thought, glancing at Elfie, the barrier mage crouching down next to one of the mages she had brought.

"Thank you, Ilea. For saving them," he spoke.

She gave him a nod, not about to start the discussion again. They had talked about it plenty. "Have fun trying to convince them of your ways," she said.

He smiled, showing his sharp teeth. "Many have already listened. These here will learn to be free as well." He hissed.

Ilea hissed back, supportive, though she was perhaps not quite as hopeful as he. "I'll inform you when more of them attack." She hoped the sky monarch wouldn't take interest anytime soon. "Good luck with them."

"Thank you, Ilea," Isalthar said and bowed again.

"Pleasure," she answered, looking up before she vanished.

The Meadow had brought her back to its domain where she pointed at the cube and vanished again, this time appearing in her room. "*Thanks*," she sent as the bath started filling with water.

"*Of course. Any success in Kohr?*" the Meadow asked.

"*The usual. I moved to a new area, will train a little in Iz before I go back though. Let me know if anything comes up*," she said with a tired sigh.

"*Maybe sleep a few hours before. You look exhausted*," the Meadow sent.

"*I told you it's just the missing sun in Kohr. Doesn't help that it's winter here*," she answered, thinking if perhaps meeting the Sanvaruun wasn't the worst thing that could happen. Perhaps he could provide some sunlight.