

Chapter 505 Golden Boy

Felicia was dumbfounded when Michael quite literally split into two.

It looked like his very flesh and golden armor was torn on both ends before both individual parts stabilized and formed a perfect copy. Then he did it again.

Is he summoning more gold or is there just so much condensed in that armor to make three full sets?

He now wore a helmet too, one that covered most of his face with a pair of twenty centimeter antlers growing out above, also made of gold.

Are they independent entirely? she wondered, looking at one of the copies.

It looked back. "Ask," it said, surprising her.

Felicia glanced at the others. Either nobody cared or they didn't have the guts to ask themselves.

"I've never seen a skill like that. You're not an apparition, nor a summon. I think I'd be able to tell," she said.

He nodded. "I'm just as real as he is," the copy said, glancing at one of the others.

"We have work to do," the central one said before he summoned a large sphere of gold.

More people reacted to that but Felicia tried to seem unconcerned. *That's at least five hundred pieces,* she thought.

She had assumed he was at least as influential as Velamyr or Ilea, based on the people that she met near those ruins but this just confirmed it.

The General had informed her that he was below level three hundred still but that she should be wary of the man nonetheless.

She knew that Velamyr was at three hundred and five. If his words could be believed and she honestly doubted he would lie about that to her. Especially because he told her just to make a point about their allies.

Except for the Dawn Company and Felicia, each of them was at least as powerful as he was. Even the gold mage, he considered his equal.

Felicia watched as the sphere fanned out, bubbling with life as an intricate tool formed, one that would twirl and break the earth. She knew that gold wasn't the strongest metal but in the hands of a manipulator, it could surely reach new heights.

She thought for a moment about the possibility of him being a gold creator but quickly dismissed it. Any known gold, silver, and copper mages were closely watched by the various guilds and governments of humanity. It was well known that metal creation wasn't as easily achieved as say wood or fire.

The latter were rare but even just normal metal mages were rarer. The more complex an element was, the smaller was the chance of someone actually making a magical connection so deep they could manipulate it.

That was the extent of her knowledge on the subject. Edwin had talked about it at some point, entertaining the idea of gaining such a Class.

Affinities would go a long way but even extensive experiments with young children had yielded little results. At least that is what the reports said that were taken from the nobles they had killed in Virilya.

The reports were old too and only a few of the nobles had even tried. She hoped it wasn't common. She watched as the complex form started spinning, digging instantly into the earth below.

All the excess came out of the drill's back.

The one earth mage in the Dawn Company got to work too, levitating the excess earth and rock before he compressed it into small balls.

The mage extended a few thin strands of gold before the compressed earth vanished.

Velamyr was right. This is going to be easy, she thought with a smile, jumping down onto the golden platform and drill to join the mages on top.

One of the three gold mages glanced her way but focused on the drill again.

The earth mage was entirely absorbed by his task of compressing the excess.

Of course he's not digging a hole to crawl through. This is going to be a tunnel high enough for himself and his antlers.

Her time estimate had been off too. They had reached the city after a few hours of digging, and far deeper than she would have thought possible.

The group was now walking in the tunnel, a few specks of fire illuminating the surroundings as the golden drill worked through the hard stone with ease.

"Any major cities you managed to get into with this thing?" she suddenly asked, breaking the silence in the group. She had a feeling the rather reserved man didn't hate speaking of his exploits. He was a gold mage after all.

"Not recently," he said, neither confirming nor denying.

Of course it was obvious that this contraption could dig into most places. Virilya might be difficult but generally speaking, it was easier to just sneak into a city than digging in from below.

"It's quite an impressive design," she said honestly.

The man didn't react, nor did anybody else say anything. They were focused on their task alone.

She glanced towards Velamyr and back to the mages ahead.

What an absolutely boring group, she thought, wishing she would have gone with Ilea. Perhaps she would have leveled a little too, instead of walking through a damp tunnel somewhere down below Baralia.

Luckily, they were already ascending, slowly making their way up at a steep angle as the earth mage checked for structures with some kind of perception ability.

She herself had no way to see through stone. The winds would warn her of things around but down here it had little use.

“Stop,” the earth mage said.

“The enchantments are still a few meters ahead,” the gold mage said and pushed on, ignoring the warning.

A ripple went through the drill as it flattened and compressed, soon back to its spherical form before it was stored in a hidden storage item the man wore below his armor.

At least those couldn't be copied it seems, not that his wealth wasn't enough to give one to each of his copies.

“Clean away the stone,” he said to the earth mage.

The man nodded and did as ordered.

“They placed a base of stone so far below the city, just to prevent entry?” Velamyr asked.

“It's a common approach by some of the northern tribes. They locate vaults and important buildings before robbing them. Looks like Harchat was hit before,” a woman said and snickered.

“And you decided to share that information now,” Velamyr said.

She looked at him. “It was still the most promising way. There's a reason they do it. Enchantments are never perfect.”

Velamyr just grunted and joined the gold mage who stood below the freed section of the stone.

“Can you do it?” the General asked.

“If you warn me. It will take a while, they invested entirely too much time and wealth into this,” the gold mage said as a spike of gold appeared.

The thing wasn't larger than her thumb but looked intricate in design.

It flew upwards and slowly pierced the stone.

Felicia watched with her magic perception active, seeing the glowing spike enter the mundane stone. A flash of light flared up, one enchantment broken. She hoped they knew what they were doing. As far as she knew, this could have already informed the guards.

“Halt,” Velamyr said. “That one is dangerous.”

The mage didn't react, pushing the small spike into another direction entirely.

How does he know?

The little display continued for the better part of half an hour until the spike finally came back out.

“Dig out the rest,” the gold mage said to the earth mage.

Felicia joined Velamyr's side and glanced up. “I didn't know you're an expert enchanter too.”

“I'm not,” he said, smirking a little.

She didn't give him the satisfaction of further inquiry.

“I'm a time mage,” he said nonetheless.

And what does that have to do with anything?

“Some things are more certain than others,” he said, guessing at her questioning look.

Could he predict which enchantments would activate? She couldn't see another way for his comments to be relevant. Her perception confirmed that the gold mage had a way to push mana into the existing net of enchantments but while a powerful mana intrusion spell could certainly overwhelm enchantments, they had to be much better if countermeasures needed to be avoided.

All in all, she was more than a little impressed by the casual display of their abilities. Especially because she doubted either of them were exactly known for their thieving capabilities.

The wall opened up and they all teleported inside.

No guards or soldiers came to intercept them.

“Will these work?” Velamyr asked, summoning a variety of armor sets and cloaks.

One of the Dawn warriors checked the gear quickly, pushing away a few of them with small comments on why they could be identified as unusual in the area.

A few of them had already fanned out into the underground of the city, returning shortly after to inform the group about potential cellars and hideouts they could use as a base for their operation.

Everyone changed into the provided gear and moved to one of the hideouts where a map was quickly put onto one of the walls.

They needed information first and foremost. Everything they knew about Harchat came from before the war had started. The Order of Truth still operated in this city, that much they could already confirm.

“Ritual sites, high level priests, central temples, and hideouts. That's the main thing we should focus on for now. We meet back here in two hours. Get familiar with the city. They're expecting a frontal assault of Empire troops but don't take too many risks,” Velamyr said. “Teams of two.”

The gold mage split again, creating an additional two copies. He gave each of his four copies a ring before their golden armor seeped away, surely more condensed and somewhere under the new attire they wore.

Each of them looked a little different, two with hoods covering most of their faces, two with helmets and the last one, the original she assumed, without anything.

He joined Velamyr, one of the armored ones walking towards Felicia.

“We're an adventurer team who stayed in Harchat to take part in the war,” the copy said to her from behind the crude full plate helmet.

Felicia nodded. “Let's add some more details to make sure it holds up. You have a badge I assume?”

He summoned one and showed it off, summoning another one that he gave to her. “We need to seem like locals.”

She inspected it and nodded. A quick glance towards Velamyr showed that he was discussing with the original already. The members of the Dawn company had already formed up and left, as did the other copies.

“My name is Michael. I'll be interested to see how you lead House Redleaf,” the armored man said.

“Suddenly so talkative,” Felicia said.

“Come,” he said and pointed in a direction. He vanished and she followed.

They walked through the sewers for a while before he pointed up. “Should be abandoned up there.” Again, she followed up and found herself in a decrepit and empty house.

“We meet here if we’re discovered,” Michael said. Or his copy did.

“Is Michael your name or the copy’s name?” she asked.

“I dislike the thought of you dismissing me as a mere copy. I’m just as capable as the original,” he said.

“I didn’t mean to offend,” she said.

“It’s quite alright, Felicia. Is it acceptable if I call you that?” he asked.

“Of course,” she answered.

“Good. Michael is his name as much as it is mine. Knowing that my existence is limited, my body merely a construct of blood magic, well I wouldn’t be surprised if the others are more talkative too,” he said.

“Blood magic... it’s frightening to know such a spell exists. I’m sorry about the realization. It must be difficult to accept,” she said, trying to treat the man the same way she would anybody.

“The circumstances are logical and our goal doesn’t change. All life is fleeting. I’m glad to be a copy here and now,” he said, some of the joy showing in his eyes. “Shall we?” he said and opened the door out into the city. “Ah... let me do the talking, if you don’t speak the local tongue that is?”

Felicia shook her head. Her education was good but not this extensive.

“Good,” he said and looked back once again. “I met you in Asila.”

She just nodded and followed him out into the city.

The atmosphere was tense. A storm was coming and the people felt it. Their mission was to make sure the storm came from the Empire of Lys and not from within their own city.

Ilea sped through the city one last time, Hector by her side as they finished off the last large groups of Cursed. No monsters should remain and the few thousand Cursed they had surely missed would be taken down by Empire troops.

The high level monsters reacted well her Monster Hunter taunts, coming out from nearly a kilometer away to confront her. It took nearly half a day to cover all of the city but their combined efforts were efficient and thorough.

The Cursed of course tried to confront her too, frenzied and instinctual as they were, but a level fifty human, no matter how angry, had a hard time breaking through a closed door or getting out from roots or rubble that held them down.

Ilea didn't take the time to find every last one of them. She trusted that the level three to five hundred insect creatures didn't have the same limitations. If they did, the empire strike teams would have no issue taking them down.

"They must have realized there are no guards on the walls by now," Hector said as they slashed through another group of corrupted.

Ilea scanned the section of the walls closest to them as she displaced and burned the Cursed that rushed her, stepping over wet rubble, grass, and roots.

She spotted two eyes looking at her through the leaves of a tree whose roots had penetrated the side of two buildings, now holding together the crumbling rubble.

Magic really is something, she thought with a smile and waved towards the man watching her.

The group didn't approach until all the Cursed in the area were taken care of.

There were six of them, five wearing imperial armor. Scouts, Ilea believed they were called.

All were in a range between level one fifty and one ninety. One of them wore a more intricate set of armor, not necessarily of higher quality but it was clear she wanted to stand out.

Most of the woman's face was covered by a white cloak with some kind of enchantment that made it difficult to see her eyes. She was just above level two hundred.

[Mage – lvl 203]

"Finally grew the balls to enter this shit hole?" Hector asked, taking charge of the conversation immediately.

Ilea knew he was terribly bored. And slightly annoyed.

The nobles had emptied their vaults. All of them.

They had failed to gain more wealth and treasures in the past day, leaving them with *only* hundreds of gold coins, dozens of gold bars, whole crates of treasures, expensive metals, storage items, and otherwise enchanted gear.

She could totally see why the Pirate was majorly unhappy. Her growing enjoyment of his terrible fate didn't help with the mood either. Ilea couldn't give a rat's ass about this city's wealth. Claire would be happy with whatever she added to the pool but Ilea knew the woman was busy already.

Whoever was managing Hector's wealth couldn't hold a candle to her Head Administrator and she was being *very* smug about it.

"You're talking to a noble of Lys. Show some respect, pirate," the woman said, so very foolishly.

"Don't kill her please," Ilea said.

He just glanced at her. "Why not?"

"You literally let that fucking asshole live and now you want to kill a noble of Lys?" Ilea asked.

They both ignored the growing irritation of the woman before them. The scouts reacted differently, some preparing for battle and others to flee.

Hector rolled his eyes. "He insulted You, not Me. I would have ripped his head off in your place."

Now it was Ilea's turn to roll her eyes. "If insults like this get to you so badly, then maybe you should work on grow the fuck up."

“There’s a reason I’m called the Destroyer, and it’s not for reacting calmly when I’m insulted,” he said.

The woman was repeating their names in stutters by now, taking a step back as the scouts exchanged uncertain looks.

“You wanna go then?” Ilea asked, her ashen limbs fanning out.

“Ah fuck off with your shit magic. We barely made a dime in the last ten hours. Let’s at least rob them,” he said and focused back at the group.

Three of the scouts already got out whatever coins they had with them.

“Put that away again. He’s not going to attack you,” Ilea said.

“You’re starting to annoy me,” Hector said.

“Because that would mean trouble for those who work for you. Repeat after me, Destroyer. I, the head pirate of my ship, will not cause problems for my first mate,” she said, starting to chuckle when a wave of water formed and took him out of the city.

He knows I’m right.

She grinned and focused on the small group of people, seeing them flinch at her look.

“The city should be clear. Mostly. Take care of the remaining Cursed and wait for the army to arrive,” she said as her wings spread.

“Thanks Lilith!” one of the scouts said, annoyed when one of his mates hit his back.

Ilea smiled and blinked, following the wet path left behind by Hector.