

Chapter 568 Reaping Rewards

“I understand. Then I think it was for the best that you removed its existence. Powerful creatures driven by instinct alone are dangerous to all those who are awakened. The mind must prevail,” Meadow said.

“Can you tell me about four marks in the area then? Would be a quick way to five hundred, and I could get a few more achievements,” she said with a smile.

“No,” Meadow said.

“You’re no fun,” Ilea replied. She realized a few of the Reapers had left, perhaps to get reinforcements. She hoped they would.

“You will get there in your own time and through your own efforts,” it said.

“Now you just sound like the Fae. I think you inter dimensional super creatures are just scared of what I could become,” Ilea said.

“You already killed a four mark. If such concerns would arise, it’s only reasonable. Not that I think that way. I will be able to squash you even if you reach my level. Not that such is possible for a puny human like yourself. You simply lack the brain power,” Meadow said.

Ilea snorted. *“That’s why I’m sucking up the Reapers’ mind magic,”* she said and tapped her temple.

Meadow was quite for a moment. *“That is not how that works.”*

“Well explain it to me then, mind magic expert Meadow,” Ilea teased.

“You actually have to eat their brains for yours to grow,” Meadow explained. *“Perhaps their eyes too.”*

“Aha. Yeah I’ll try that. Gotta let it all rot first, maybe then it actually tastes good,” she said.

“Hmm? Did you receive a new skill?” it asked.

“Rot Resistance in the third tier,” Ilea said.

“Oh? I had thought you’d prioritize other resistances... oh I understand. The four mark used rot magic. Pushed you to advance a defensive skill. That’s quite impressive,” Meadow said.

“Impressive? Didn’t you say I’m not ready to face a four mark?” Ilea asked.

“Offensively, yes. You already proved you could survive against even the Daughters of Sephilon,” it said.

“Against you too,” Ilea said in a dry tone. A mental dry tone.

“Yes, because I do not kill awakened beings. Well done, you just barely qualify as such,” it said.

“Yes yes,” Ilea said and watched as more Reapers joined their collective effort to bring her down.

‘ding’ ‘Mental Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 6’

You’re just making me stronger, she thought with a grin.

“How are the two inadequate enchanters doing? How long has it been anyway? I lost track of time when I fought the four mark,” Ilea said.

“It’s been close to one week, Ilea. And let us please not talk of them... while their progress... for humans, is surely impressive, it’s been challenging,” it said.

“Can’t you just present the solution and be done with it?” Ilea asked.

“A scholar seeks to understand, not to imitate. While you obsess over the power of your fist, these two seek understanding. For that at least, I have to praise them. Neither would I share my secrets with someone who simply wishes to use them for their personal gain,” Meadow said.

“Not like I wanted your tutelage to seek understanding, to be honest,” Ilea said with a smile.

“Though in a way I did, I suppose. But the main motivator was more power.”

“Yeah, but you’re different. We’re friends. With friends we can sometimes overlook fundamental flaws in their character,” it said.

“Like being a sack of meat with some blood in it?” Ilea asked.

“For example. Though you underestimate the changes you’ve gone through. Your body is hardly comparable to that of these two humans. And I’m sure the difference is even more striking to a lower leveled individual,” Meadow said.

“Hmm... I suppose you’re right. So maybe I can turn into a Meadow too at some point. We could even try to date,” she said and winked.

“You’re barely a century old. I think I need a more mature specimen,” Meadow said.

“Like the Ice Elemental?” Ilea asked.

“She was one of a kind...,” Meadow mused.

“There’s a Trakarov deep in the Descent,” Ilea said. *“He’s pretty hot.”*

“Temperature has little impact on these choices,” Meadow said.

Not going to take the bait.

“Also he is sleeping a lot. Just like the Enavurin,” it said.

“You’ve already made contact with both? That’s pretty impressive. What do you think of the Sun Spirit fuckers?” she asked.

“They’re rude. And already threatened to kill me should I come to their domain,” Meadow said.

“Absolutely ridiculous.”

“I’ll pay them a visit too at some point,” Ilea said with a smile. *“Hey, can you see to the very bottom of the Descent?”*

“The Descent being the layered dungeon below? Yes. Though some of it is protected by enchantments. A mediocre space mage has set up defenses. Nothing I couldn’t break into but aggravating an awakened being of such power could be troublesome for the settlement I promised to defend,” it explained.

“The Ascended, yeah. I wouldn’t fuck with things down there. Can you see the building at the bottom? Below the mana collector dome,” she said.

“It’s... well I’m not sure I would categorize it as a building. It’s steel I believe, but molten and without an entrance,” Meadow said.

“What? Can you show me?” Ilea asked.

An image invaded her mind, showing the remains of the palace where she had first met the Ascended. It really was just a glob of steel now, little symmetry remaining. It gave up the dungeon? Or did it try to destroy whatever information was left down there?

Maybe it just kept the facility connected to whatever teleportation and warning network it had because of the mana that sat above the last layer? Now that it’s gone, there’s no reason to keep the facility connected?

The corrupting agent was deemed a failure after all.

“It’s certainly an interesting facility. If you meet the creator, I’d like to have a conversation with them,” Meadow said.

“Sure, if it doesn’t kill me first,” Ilea said.

“I would be impressed with a space mage below my power capable of killing you,” Meadow said.

“It wields blood, steel, and void too,” she said.

“More mana to feed you,” Meadow said and chuckled. “Just like these Blue Reapers. They don’t understand that their efforts only make you stronger.”

“Well yeah, that’s the point. Otherwise I wouldn’t be sitting here,” Ilea said.

She felt the load on her mind increase once more, another five Reapers joining the cavern ahead. About twenty were clinging to the tunnel ceiling and walls by now, shooting their lightning at her with decreasing efficiency.

“Do you know why they do that? Are they protecting their home? A Queen perhaps? Or are they just hostile monsters?” she asked.

“Their young reside deeper in the nest. Reproduction and the protection of their offspring is often a high priority for living organisms,” Meadow said. “This specimen is particularly interesting. Their defenses and magical prowess isn’t very impressive but with their linked mind magic, they’re capable of fighting off much stronger predators. Such as yourself.”

“They’re not doing a great job to be honest,” she said.

“I can perceive that. Can you explain why you would attack an otherwise peaceful nest?” Meadow asked.

“They sent some of their members out into what is now your domain. Dark Ones died. And they nearly killed me at some point. Granted I was exploring their tunnels. Just because your presence and my power push them back now doesn’t mean they’re peaceful creatures. They attack immediately. The question is, are they protecting Hallowfort from something more dangerous?” she said.

“You are aware of the varied influence organisms have on others in their region?” Meadow asked.

“We learned about it in school back in my realm, called it ecosystem. Removing these monsters would lead to other monsters maybe spreading out more, or dying out because they don’t have any

food anymore,” Ilea said. “Not that I’m overly concerned about all that. I’ve decimated whole dungeons before.”

“Creatures of this power rely more on mana than anything else. I found it’s more about a power balance. But I’m still learning. The sheer variety in both levels, abilities, form, and thoughts is staggering in this realm,” Meadow said.

“I’m glad you like it here,” Ilea said with a smile. “I thought you would.”

Meadow sent happy thoughts. Literally.

“No species that are a thorn in your eye?” Ilea asked.

“Mere thorns would not be able to pierce my skin,” Meadow said.

“It’s a saying. Something that’s an issue for you,” Ilea said.

“Oh. Well. There are so many beings. I’ve yet to learn what drives them all, how much territory they claim as their own, what they fight, kill, and eat. I will let you know when I deem some culling necessary, though only in extreme cases would I suggest such drastic action,” Meadow said.

“I’m surprised you’re even considering it,” Ilea said.

“Most beings are not awakened. And if their chance to reach such state is low to begin with, I would not like to see them kill everything else in the region,” Meadow explained.

“Makes sense, I suppose. So you’re like a magical defender of biodiversity,” she said.

“Lending my power to a thriving environment is part of what I do, yes,” Meadow said. “And before you joke, Erendar was a very difficult environment. Even before the eclipse.”

“I’m sure it was. It did feel like a galaxy far far away,” she said.

“Are you referencing a work from Elos?” Meadow asked.

“Nope. One from Earth,” Ilea said.

“If only I could gain access to their culture. Elos has plenty to explore too however. Once they understand the gate technology and figure out a way to use them without bursting their weak human bodies, I’ll be swimming in literature,” it said.

“Hey if you can figure out how to reach Earth, I’d be up for a visit. Could even go with you, though the mana there is nonexistent,” she said.

“No mana would be a problem for me,” Meadow said.

“What about me? I have plenty of spells too. Would I lose them in a manaless environment?” Ilea asked.

“Humans start at level zero, which means you slowly empower your body to supply what it needs. External mana sources can help if you learn to use them, such as your absorption skill, but generally speaking, you produce mana yourself,” Meadow said.

“Does that mean humans aren’t magical creatures?” she asked.

“You may not depend on it as many other species would. But you can use its power, you are compatible. A slow acclimation like that is the best way to make sure you can survive in many

different environments but for most creatures, that is simply not a necessary trait to have. More power at birth or creation is beneficial to most.” Meadow said.

“That makes sense. It’s how we became the apex predator on Earth. Because we were smarter than the other creatures. There are physically stronger, faster, and more durable animals on Earth,” she said.

“You were the only species with sapience?” Meadow asked.

“Maybe? At least we couldn’t have a complicated conversation with another being. Though there were animals that showed some form of intelligence,” she said. *“The same is true here. Some monsters run away from me when they sense my presence.”*

Ilea quickly scrolled through her messages since leaving to the north.

‘ding’ ‘Sage of Torment reaches 2nd lvl 2’

‘ding’ ‘Teaching reaches lvl 4’

‘ding’ ‘Ash Magic Resistance reaches lvl 2’

...

‘ding’ ‘Ash Magic Resistance reaches lvl 5’

‘ding’ ‘Divination Magic Resistance reaches lvl 8’

‘ding’ ‘Flesh Magic Resistance reaches lvl 9’

‘ding’ ‘Mental Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 7’

“Thanks for helping to set up these gates. I appreciate being able to come here on a whim,” Ilea said.

“I understand. A part of me agreed to help in the hopes of more visits,” Meadow said.

Ilea smiled. *“I’d hug you but I’m a little busy at the moment.”*

“I would hug you too but last time you didn’t seem to like it,” Meadow said and sent a mental image of roots absolutely shredding through her body.

The curse of this world, having to gain a sheer indestructible body just to hug and pet these unfathomable beings.

Ilea stood up after an hour or so, ready to be a little more proactive in her training endeavor.

‘ding’ ‘Mental Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 8’

She displaced the nearby reapers towards herself, Heart of Cinder releasing in a sphere around her.

The heat and energy incinerated the creatures on the spot, a dozen of them dead in an instant.

Ilea charged her next attack and walked towards the cavern ahead, pushing back against the combined mind magic of the swarm.

“Exterminator is here, heard there was a problem,” she said, appearing in the midst of the creatures.

Dozens of lightning spells shot into her, welcomed with open arms and a guiding sphere. Her skin was seared, little of the energy managing anything more than superficial damage.

Heart of Cinder released again, burning most of the close monsters and leaving many more injured.

Ilea fanned out her ashen limbs and slashed through the survivors, Displacement bringing those out of range closer towards her.

Who's the Shredder now?

She walked towards the next tunnel, bits and pieces of Blue Reaper still splattering to the walls and ground behind her.

A few teleports brought her deeper into the complex before she came out in an expansive cavern.

Three Reapers were sliced apart the moment she appeared, likely the respective guards placed on this exit.

The crystal from the hallowfort cavern grew in here too, water flowing in from a few fissures in the distant walls to her right.

She glanced up, finding the ceiling about fifty meters above. Large stone pillars lent some stability to the cave.

Ilea saw a blue glow coming from hundreds of eggs, both located on the ground and the lower sections of the walls. Twice that number of Blue Reapers moved through the cavern, some carrying monster carcasses.

She picked out a few larger variants, their height reaching about one and a half meters. They seemed to have a more extensive carapace and large claws.

A challenge?

Ilea only took a few steps before a large portion of the Reapers turned towards her.

Mind magic, I see, no way to hide.

“Alright, show me what you got,” she said and spread her arms. Her retreat should be safe, just in case the mind magic overwhelmed her after all.

There are a few hundred, if they can combine their collective power, it may just be enough to shut me down.

She grinned, waiting for the monsters to make their move.

They didn't let her wait for long. The whole cavern exploded in motion, the Reapers moving in a coordinated swarm until they could use their spells.

Lightning and mind magic surged up from the many creatures, each stopping at a safe distance to deliver their spells.

Ilea went to one knee, feeling the pressure on her mental defenses. Third tier healing and Flare of Creation pushed against the spells as the lightning bolts crashed into her armor.

She grit her teeth and endured the pressure, slowly standing up again as her eyes focused on the larger versions waiting at the back of their formation.

“You... ll... nee... d... more... th... an... that,” she spoke, the words coming out disconnected.

Ilea staggered back slightly but held her ground, feeling her mind slowly lose against the combined effort of the swarm. She could just teleport in there and kill them in the span of perhaps half a minute but that was not the way she wanted to win.

She had been able to fight the Queen because she could endure her magic. If she couldn't do that again level three hundred monsters, what would she do against a similar monster closer to her level?

Phaseshift activated before she had to retreat, in a hope that the spell would affect mind magic in a more fundamental way than Astral magic.

Ilea felt the pressure lessen immediately. It remained, but dulled and weakened. She could see the magical strains connected to her mind slip past from time to time, as if it was more difficult for them to even grasp at her.

The damage to her health had been low to begin with, the attacks more geared towards incapacitating her than anything else. From a purely damage damage perspective, a few dozen level three hundred monsters just didn't have the power to overwhelm her.

Not with all her resilience bonuses, resistances, and healing.

There was a reason she could withstand four marks.

So just phase in and out. I can do that, Ilea thought with a smirk, the spell deactivating once more.

The bundled power of the Reapers' combined mind magic slammed into her, making her reel back before she could catch herself again.

There was no capacity left in her mind to form a coherent thought, not without Phaseshift active. She had no lack of health or mana, absorbing much of the incoming spells.

Ilea spent the better part of five hours in the cavern, the enemy power fluctuating as they too needed to regroup and regenerate their mana.

The monsters weren't intelligent enough to understand their situation. They tried different spell combinations and intensities but as long as Ilea didn't move from her spot, neither did they.

It wasn't the first time a monster species didn't quite comprehend the danger Ilea presented. Perhaps it was because of her small form, a lack of perception on their part, or simply an instinct that drove them to attack without further consideration.

Her high level in Veteran and Deviant of Humanity should've been enough to deter many a creature. With the Blue Reapers, her level alone should've done that, let alone her continued survival against their efforts. But neither led to anything.

Ilea was quite glad, happy to accept the efficient mind magic resistance training. The lightning wasn't half bad either, as long as she kept the resistance off.

'ding' 'Lightning Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 6'

'ding' 'Lightning Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 7'

'ding' 'Mental Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 9'

...

'ding' 'Mental Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 12'