

Chapter 629 Priorities

“Quite the new arsenal you have available,” Kyrian said when she landed.

Ilea felt her weight slowly subside, the magically added density reducing at the same pace as it had built. She grinned, looking at her friend before she glanced at Neiphato.

“What’s the plan?” the elf asked.

She sat down on a nearby rock and summoned a bottle of ale, absorbing heat from the surroundings to keep it at an acceptable temperature. “Good question.”

“This was the goal, right?” Kyrian asked with a chuckle. “Your evolutions.”

“Not just mine. You and Feyrair are close too. Neiphato maybe, if you’re getting one at four hundred,” she said.

“Possible, but unlikely,” the elf said.

“We’re a hundred levels away still, Ilea. It’s not going to happen anytime soon. And neither of us can kill four marks,” Kyrian said.

“Not yet. But you can kill level six, seven, eight hundred monsters, maybe even higher if you take more of a risk. That’s not the point though. These islands are wonderful for training but there are plenty of other places too. You should probably get your third tier resistances and work on them for a while before facing stronger monsters with the respective magic types,” she said.

The man grunted. “What about the keys you mentioned?”

“What is waiting in Iz can’t be defeated by what we are now,” Neiphato said.

“Yeah, that too. Even if the keys give us some kind of edge, I doubt we’ll get around fighting those hordes anyway. And I’d rather be prepared to do so. There’s no specific time limit anyway,” she said, glancing back. “Got your prey?”

Feyrair’s armor looked undamaged but his gait alone suggested the fight hadn’t been quite as one sided as he had likely hoped for.

“There is no fixed time limit. But the longer we wait, the more our enemy might learn of us,” the dragonling said.

“Only if we use the key or attack their dungeons,” Ilea said. “I doubt they have a network of informants and spies out to sabotage our mission.”

“Don’t underestimate them. Plenty of traps have been set for our kind over the years,” Feyrair said, rolling his shoulder.

“Not enough to get you,” she said. “I don’t think we’re ready, that’s all I’m saying.”

“I agree,” Neiphato said.

The dragonling hissed but it didn’t sound like he disagreed. It just annoyed him.

“So you get your third evolution and we storm their capital?” Feyrair asked.

“I have to work on my skills first... one of them especially will probably take... quite some time. Next we have to find the keys. I doubt that will be simple either, if all are even still in this realm,” she said.

“What if they’re not?” Kyrian asked.

“Then we just don’t get to find out what they are and what we can do with them,” she said. “In the end we’ll storm Iz once we’re ready. With the keys or without.”

“I don’t know if we should remain here with you gone,” Kyrian said. “Just in case we walk into something we can’t defeat or escape from.”

She drank from her ale and smiled. “Don’t you worry metal boy. I’ll set one of my teleportation points on these isles. I can be here in a few minutes.”

“You got more then? That changes things... a few minutes sound manageable,” the man said. “Though resistance training will take time.”

“No way to lower your resistances?” Ilea asked.

He shook his head. “Hardly needed with the monsters here. I’d like to take a day off every week. How often can you teleport around?”

Ilea summoned the modified gate key and handed it to him. “I can use them several times a day each. Take the key though, just in case I can’t come back for some reason. Think I’ll ask the enchanters to make another one anyway. So I can scout the locations of the keys already.”

“You’re not exactly a scout,” Feyrair said with a grin.

“Flying and enhanced eyes will be enough. I won’t storm any dungeons without you, don’t worry,” she answered.

“Good luck in that case. I will be back to hunting. How limited is the communication through your mark?” Feyrair asked.

“Ten words once a day,” Ilea replied. “Is the Serpent still around?”

“It left a few minutes ago,” the dragonling said.

“Just wanted to get the tails. I’ll be gone after that,” she said. “We’ll be in touch through the marks. Good hunting.”

“To you as well,” Kyrian said.

The Elves hissed in approval.

Ilea vanished, flying towards the Wyrms corpse she and her temporary ally left behind in the cavern. Already she saw several monsters gathering around it. A swarm of winged shades sat where the Serpent had eaten its full. A few stone specters tried to cut away pieces of the thick armor, three of them gathered near the tails.

She walked up to them, ignoring the monsters as she started to cut into the thin tails with her ashen limbs.

Two of the specters noticed her and started chucking rocks her way, summoning spikes that shot out of the ground.

Ilea looked their way, hissing with monster hunter as their spells shattered against her armor. “Go away,” she murmured, displacing the creatures when they didn’t stop. She finally got through the tails when the specters came crashing down, slightly disoriented from the impacts.

[Scorching Wyrms Tail – Rare Quality]

She took five of them with her, one already quite damaged. The ash around her hand either protected her against the petrification magic or the effect was gone now that the Wyrms itself was dead. A quick check revealed that the effect remained, Ilea ripping off her arm after letting the magic spread onto her skin.

That will be useful, she thought and started teleporting through the cavern, quickly returning to the tunnel they had used to come down. The others had left at that point, staying somewhat close together in case they required help from one another.

Stay safe friends.

Ilea returned out into the open, looking around to find a few groups of Bluetails in the distance. She flew to another isle, somewhat close to the volcano but in reasonable distance to the valley of death as well. *Seems like a good place. So, thirty two hours to change each destination. A little more than four and a half hours to teleport to each.*

She chose the destination, standing atop an otherwise unoccupied hill, her anchor set within the fabric of space itself. *And the third one will probably just go to Meadow’s lair. Can’t be bothered flying to the teleportation gate all the time.*

The spell set, she activated her third tier of transfer, now with two destinations available to her. The activation time by now took a little more than thirty seconds, likely due to her increased mana. It still used up half of her maximum mana anyway.

With the runes formed, the spell manifested, transporting her to the living room of her seaside home.

Ilea stretched, yawning as she turned around to face the balcony. She winced when she heard the wooden floor crack. *Better not walk around here*, she thought and transferred herself up to her room, not about to take a swim after her recent experience. She let her armor recede, her wings spread to keep her from touching the floor before she very carefully landed on the bed.

This is ridiculous, she thought, sinking into the mattress to a degree she hadn’t thought possible. *I need some legendary feathers or something. This stuff doesn’t cut it anymore. How much did my weight change from those evolutions? At least that means my punches will only hit harder.*

She grinned, teleporting outside before she flew along the cliff side, a light shower of rain brushing against her armor. The suns hadn’t quite started to rise, the horizon slowly brightening up. She smiled at the rain, actually feeling the drops roll down her ashen mantle.

Her limbs slammed into the stone wall, keeping her steady against the steep cliff as she charged up Archon Strike within her right fist. *Hmm, maybe I should start a little lighter.*

She dismissed the spell and simply struck the stone with her uncharged Archon Strike, the energy converted into physical damage instead. Her arm seemed to vibrate before her fist came down, a loud boom resounding as her limb dug into the stone, a wave of force sending chunks and pebbles down into the ocean below.

Light bruises. That's quite a fucking punch. Might actually need to heal myself if I use this with more than a thousand mana.

Ilea couldn't really think of an application where purely physical damage would be better than her mana intrusion, or just an arcane wave. It felt good however, to just have the option available. Her wings spread, taking her up and towards the valleys leading to Ravenhall.

Still have some stat points.

She put forty nine into Intelligence, leaving her with nine that she chose not to distribute at the moment.

Ilea had planned to go straight to the Meadow for some help with her third Class skills, and to gloat a little of course, but now that she was so close to Ravenhall, she simply couldn't resist going in for a quick visit.

Monstrous – lvl 1

You have achieved level 500, reaching the realm of true monstrosity. Those of your kind may not find it easy to accept your newfound nature. You can choose to mask your power to those considerably weaker than you [250 levels below your highest Class level]. Specialized abilities or enhanced Identification may breach this ability.

So everyone above two fifty will know my real level? That's hardly anyone...

“Still haven't found anyone for your team?” Nathan asked, sitting down on their table.

“No,” Phoebe replied and glanced at Mila. She sighed, looking at her empty plate before she locked eyes with the man. “Look, Nathan. I know you mean well, but we're fine. Your attempts to get friendly are starting to become a little annoying.”

Mila winced, the small woman quickly gobbling up the last bits of food on her plate.

Nathan just smiled and stood up again. “Message received. Just let me know if anything comes up,” he said.

Acting like he's some kind of founder just because he was part of the first generation.

She gulped down her opinion, only because she really did think he was one of the good guys. Most people here were, but most kept to themselves or their groups, not constantly meddling. She welcomed silent support and help during training or lectures, but she wasn't here to make friends or join a happy adventuring team just to lose everyone in the first mission.

“What's on your mind?” Phoebe asked, looking at her sole companion. They were one of only a few Sentinel teams with just two people in it. Not an optimal setup, they knew as much, but neither of them wanted to work with people they deemed incapable, beyond or below their own ability, people they couldn't fully trust, or those who simply didn't fit.

“He means well,” Mila said in a whisper. The girl barely ever spoke out against anything anybody did, to her or others. Only with Phoebe she seemed to have the courage to disagree.

“Are you falling for him?” Phoebe teased, enjoying the blush on her companion. “I know he’s just being nice. I just think he’s being a little too nice. As a being.”

Mila slowly blinked her eyes. “I don’t understand. What’s bad about being nice?”

Phoebe sighed. “It can be exhausting, you know? Also remember what I taught you?”

“People who are nice to you usually have an ulterior motive to do so,” Mila repeated.

“Exactly. With him... I don’t actually think that’s the case. I think that’s just how he is,” she explained.

“And that is annoying to you?” Mila asked.

“Yes. His comments suggest that we’re doing something wrong, or that we need help,” Phoebe said.

Mila thought about it for a while, pushing her plate aside. “I think you’re interpreting too much into his behavior.”

“Probably. Told you he seems genuine. It still annoys me,” she said, following the distracted Mila’s gaze until she found Trian standing in the mass hall. He seemed a little tense.

“Everyone who joined in the last month, please gather in training hall eight in the next fifteen minutes. Lilith wants to meet you,” he said and vanished.

“Lilith?” Phoebe asked, turning back to Mila as the hall erupted into chattering.

The woman smiled. “We can finally see her.”

Oh no, please not you too, Phoebe thought, stopping herself from rolling her eyes as she stood up. “Let’s get it over with then,” she said. Compared to the Healing Orders she had tried to join in the past, Lilith was the only thing that seemed obviously dangerous when it came to the Medic Sentinels. The others had long initiation processes, no ability to choose the temple, downright cult like requirements, and no easy options to leave.

Phoebe wasn’t rich or particularly powerful, but she had traveled her fair share, and she had talked to plenty of people, plenty of healers. She wanted to learn the magic, wanted to be able to mend the wounds of others. She wanted to help, wanted to prevent... more shit, from happening. That goal seemed difficult if she had to stay in one temple for years or even decades at a time, in some city where hardly anybody truly needed a healer. All while a war was fought with thousands of casualties, people losing limbs and bleeding out in the field.

What the Sentinels offered seemed entirely too good. Which is why it had taken her some time to get comfortable with the idea of even going to Ravenhall. After talking to a few members, she finally let Mila convince her to at least talk to the faculty. It had never been a question of her getting a spot. The question was if she wanted to join them or not.

The stories and reports had all turned out true, almost to a terrifying degree. Something had to be wrong and by now, the only thing she could think of was Lilith herself. Maybe she was a powerful mind mage somehow creating a personal army of battle healers, maybe she was a demon left behind after the attack. All the songs and tales were almost unbelievable, even after she had seen the faculty and higher level Sentinels.

The ones she dared to question either got offended or dismissed her worries, stating that she just had to meed the woman and make up her own mind.

Her reputation is that of an unquestioned monarch, an overpowering tyrant that controls what the bards sing and her employees tell of her. Either that or she's just genuinely nice. But when does someone like that ever get to a position of power?

She hadn't been mistreated by the Sentinels, all the resources, equipment, knowledge, and even Classes were taught and given to her in an efficient way. No questionable fees or anything else. It reminded her of a military unit, just that they were fighting monsters instead of people. And nobody was forced to stay. Supposedly.

"Are you okay?" Mila asked, lightly touching her hand as they walked towards the training hall. "You're... tense."

"How could I not be. We're about to meet Lilith. The one and only," she answered, not looking at her friend. People either revered Lilith or they were scared shitless. Though in Ravenhall, the majority seemed to be in the former camp. Phoebe wouldn't back down now. She would face the beast and stand her ground. "Promise me to run, if there are any signs of mind magic or some kind of blood ritual."

Mila looked forward. "Lilith was there. In Baralia. She wouldn't do that."

"Just promise me," Phoebe said. She knew the stories but right now she had to be pragmatic. Too many people were influenced by high tales and reputation.

"I promise," Mila said.

They reached the hall, the doors open.

A few people had gathered outside, none so far having the balls to enter.

"Why are you waiting?" Phoebe asked.

"Trian isn't here yet," one of the Sentinels said.

"He said Lilith wants to meet us, not him," Phoebe said and walked inside. She immediately focused on the single person standing at the other side of the hall, a woman clad in an ashen veil. People could mistake her for Lilith, but the same was true for any female Sentinel with ash magic, and some of the men.

Phoebe smiled, noticing a tense Mila following behind her. *No fear.*

She stopped a few meters away from the woman.

"I think we have to get better materials for these training halls," she said, turning around to face the two.

Phoebe looked at the two piercing blue eyes, her voice stuck in her throat as she blinked, unable to process what she had just seen.

[Healer – lvl ???]

"Lilith," Mila said and went to one knee.

The woman took a step back and waved her hands in front of her. "Oh no, please don't bow to me. I'm just a Sentinel like the two of you."

She's kidding, right?

“Are you stupid?” Phoebe blurted out, her hands immediately going to her mouth as her whole body cringed in a weird combination of embarrassment and fear. *Am I stupid?!*

“Stupid? I wouldn't say so. I'm definitely not the sharpest mind but I've seen some pretty stupid fellas. I haven't seen you before. How long have you been with the Sentinels?” the woman said, a bowl of food appearing in her hand as she sat down on a chair made entirely of ash. Her legs crossed as she started to eat, her eyes focused on the two women.