

## Chapter 608 Follow the White Rabbit

“Good luck,” Ilea said and stepped onto the platform once more. “*Send me back please,*” she said.

“*I will. Do let me know if I can help in any way,*” the Meadow said.

“*I just need some time. I appreciate it but don’t worry,*” she replied.

“*I could try one of those hugs, but I’m not particularly warm or comfortable,*” the being said.

The gesture made her smile a little before the teleportation spell manifested and sent her back to Ravenhall.

She quickly flew to the city and landed at the gate, her badge in hand.

The guards didn’t make a fuss, letting her in immediately.

Ilea teleported through the city, appearing in the Sentinel Headquarters and reaching Trian’s office. He wasn’t there. Instead she found him in one of the training halls, working with a group of Sentinels. “Trian. A word,” she said after appearing, a few previously fired spells crashing into her armor before they could reach the vampyr and lightning mage.

“Emergency?” he asked, gesturing for the students to stop.

“I don’t know. Kind of,” she said, her voice cracking before she burst into tears.

The man immediately hugged her. “It’s okay. Come on, it’s okay,” he patted her back and motioned the Sentinels to leave. “What happened?”

She shuddered, pushing him away lightly as her ash brushed away the tears. “I know who killed her.”

“Oh no. Did you tell Claire already?” he asked.

Ilea shook her head. “Wanted to get you on the way.”

“Then let’s go,” he said.

Claire tapped her drink, stopping her pacing before she sat back down. “I think it was wise not to attack the copy. Not more than you already did... but I think it will be clear to him that it was just a reaction in the moment.”

“The copy didn’t do anything anyway,” Ilea said, leaning forward as she sat in one of the armchairs.

“I can help with Orthán to set up defenses against a ritual,” Trian said.

“The walls should already do that much. But setting up more than one ritual wouldn’t be an issue for someone like Michael Elyse. Nor hiding it. We’re expanding fast. Detecting a high level intrusion like that is going to be difficult,” Claire said.

“I could bring Meadow here,” Ilea said.

“Out of the question. You said yourself that it needed a higher mana density. And as much as we trust you, the council isn’t ready to host an unknown four mark creature within our city. Your vote alone won’t be enough. I’ll prepare contracts. With what you told me and the little information we have, I doubt he will risk too much. Especially not outside of Kroll. If he attacked Ravenhall, he would have more than just you hunting him down,” Claire said. “I’ll ask Dagon to set his eyes on Kroll.”

“He saved Felicia. I already told him that I wouldn’t be seeking revenge. But that means little to you,” Ilea said.

“He had his reasons,” Claire said. “But I won’t risk our people or our lives for this. Rest assured that I will be aiming for him in legitimate ways however.”

“He will strike if he’s too desperate,” Trian said.

Claire shook her head. “Don’t underestimate a member of the Lily. From all that I heard, I doubt he’s overly emotional either. He will fight back but not directly and not in a way that would warrant a direct intervention of the Hand, the Lily, or Ilea. Not even when he’s left with only the gold of his armor. I’m fairly certain.”

“I will focus on Ravenhall and the Sentinels,” Trian said.

“What about Kyrian?” Ilea asked.

“He’s alive. But we don’t know where and we don’t know if he will ever manage to return,” Claire said.

*We’ll see about that*, Ilea thought, tapping her leg before she stood up. “I have to leave again. It was good seeing you.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to stay for a while? Wind down a little. Maybe train with the Sentinels?” Trian asked.

Ilea shook her head. “I need a little more than that right now.”

“Just don’t do anything stupid,” he said and smiled.

“Do I ever not?” Ilea asked without the usual bite.

She was back in the North a few minutes later, looking at her group. Feyrair and Neiphato, clad in dangerous looking armor of scales and wood. Iana and Christopher, looking like proper adventurers too. Their low level meant they were a liability but for now they would manage.

Ilea glanced at Neiphato. He was still at level three hundred and twenty. She hoped he wouldn’t fall behind too much in the coming operations. He could however heal himself and contrary to Ilea and Feyrair, he wouldn’t rush in against ridiculous odds. It would do.

“Got everything?” Ilea asked.

Iana touched the storage ring Ilea had given her and nodded. “Ready to go, boss,” she said, her blue steel armor glittering with dozens of enchantments, rapier at her side.

Feyrair cracked his neck, spitting out a few bloody teeth before he glanced back at the Meadow and hissed.

*“You’ve got a long way to go, little drake,”* the ancient tree said.

“Next time we meet,” Feyrair said, hissing again. “So where are we going?”

Ilea stepped onto the platform. “A small Taleen dungeon on the Isle of Garath.”

*“Good fortune on your journey, Ilea,”* the Meadow said. *“Return my pupils without damage, if you would.”*

*“I will,”* Ilea said, the gate activating before it transported all of them to the counterpart near Ravenhall.

“Incredible,” Christopher said.

Iana cleared her throat and walked off the platform.

“Oh... oh no, what did we do? Iana... this is... embarrassing,” the enchanter said.

“Don’t look at it, just... don’t look at it,” Iana said as she already stepped into the small side room where a ladder led upward.

“What’s the matter?” Neiphato asked the man.

“We didn’t come back to enhance this side and well, it was what we could manage without the help of Meadow,” Christopher explained. “Let us just say that we’re lucky to arrive here without being ripped apart.”

“I was ripped apart plenty of times during the testing,” Ilea said, the sarcasm not really coming through.

The man gulped. “I didn’t-”

She waved him off. “Ignore me. I’m not in the best state of mind.”

Feyrair glanced at her but didn’t say anything.

“If you-” Neiphato started but the other elf hissed.

“Let her be,” Fey said.

Ilea touched his arm lightly and displaced all of them out onto the snowy side of a mountain.

“Space magic... did you learn that from Meadow?” Iana asked.

“No. Surprisingly not,” Ilea said and spread her ash. “Come on, I’ll fly the lot of you.”

Neiphato glanced at Feyrair with a questioning expression but didn’t comment on it, everyone quickly grabbed by ashen limbs before they were surrounded in protective cocoons.

Ilea spread her wings and charged them, shooting off northwards a few seconds later. She made for the ocean and followed the coastline as she had before. *When we hunted Arthur. Nearly two years ago, before the siege of Virilya, before Erendar, and Iz. At least we know Kyrian is alive.*

The latest paintings from Cless showed him clad in thick armor fighting unknown creatures in a mountainous or castle environment. It hadn’t been a known castle in human lands, nor were the

mountains known to any cartographers or adventurers in Ravenhall. But the Taleen had spread their teleportation gates throughout who knows how much of the continent, perhaps even beyond.

*But we'll bring you back, old friend,* Ilea thought, focusing on the task to mask the vile feeling she carried with her. *We'll bring you back.*

The journey was quiet, storms raging on the eastern ocean, strong winds and rain plaguing most of the coastline, keeping away critters and beasts. Ilea made sure to keep her distance to any human settlements on the way. She spotted a few ships traveling southwards, unable to spot the flags as she entered the lands of Asila.

The group of isles was easy enough to find, the only ones so close to the coast in the area. She slowed down and opened the cocoons, Neiphato and Feyrair taking flight as she woke up the other two with healing magic, still holding on to make sure they wouldn't plummet into the ocean.

"Where is the dungeon?" Feyrair asked.

"Under that fort. Seems like someone took over in the meantime," she said. *Don't let it be pirates. I don't want to see Hector.*

"No flag on the ship or roof," she added, approaching the isle with no intent to talk to any inhabitants. "Keep quiet, we'll go directly to where we were teleported away."

The bad weather helped in their approach, the heavy clouds and strong winds leading to low visibility. Ilea spotted a few people on the ship, working to take down the large sails due to the approaching storm. She displaced her group into the fort, the side wall still collapsed with nobody waiting immediately inside.

*Humans, and they're drunk,* she thought, hearing the music from deeper within the fort. One man lay passed out to the side of a nearby stairwell, the smell of puke mixing in with the salt of the ocean. He wore simple clothes and was unarmed.

### **[Smith – lvl 38]**

*While the others are taking down the sails outside,* she noted, displacing the group further down and into the dungeon itself.

Her skills suggested that nobody had entered here for quite some time, a few weeks perhaps. It seemed the reputation of the Taleen kept out even the people who now called this place their own.

*Well it could also serve as a temporary haven for any cargo ships or pirates in the area.*

She appeared with her group inside the same hall they had all been teleported out of. "Here we are."

"There's no platf...", Christopher murmured before he gingerly touched the walls.

Iana joined him, her eyes glowing a tinge of blue. "Ilea, your intrusion key?"

She summoned the thing and threw it towards the woman.

Iana caught it, nearly tripping. "Don't throw it! It's not made of Ilea," she chastised. "Months of work...", she added in a murmur before she walked through the corridor.

"Transportation?" Christopher asked. "Why else would they build it like this? It's less practical and has to be activated from outside its range."

"Probably," Iana said.

“Prisoners,” Feyrair supplied, pointing at a section of runes on the walls. “They used this to transport prisoners from the land into their cities. Prisoners or slaves, I don’t know.”

Iana walked over to him and looked at the section. “That one means guard?”

“Guards accountable for prisoners. Report upon arrival,” he said, moving his finger along the runes.

Neiphato joined them and looked as well.

“The control is here,” Christopher called out to them from where Arthur had stood the last time Ilea had been there.

“Then let’s see what we can do,” Iana said and walked over, manipulated key in hand. “First, activation,” she said and gestured the others to stand close by.

“Any chance of a few Executioners coming out from that corridor?” Feyrair asked as he glanced back.

“We never tested it on a real Taleen gate. Anything could happen,” Iana said in an excited voice, Christopher nodding next to her with big eyes.

The elf burst into white flame. “Perfect,” he said and crouched a little, likely grinning.

“Do it,” Ilea said to the enchantress who seemed to wait for her cue.

She smiled and inserted the key into the ancient socket, a pulse of mana flowing into the thing before the area seemed to glow a little brighter, only to magical perception.

Iana giggled like a madwoman, carefully considering the runes that now glowed a dull green on the same panel where she had inserted the key. “We’re in...,” she whispered.

Ilea expected green letters to come down from the ceiling but nothing of the sort happened.

“Feyrair, can you check the runes. I’m pretty sure I know them but I don’t want to make a mistake,” Iana said.

The elf appeared next to her. “Mana, destinations, activation, enchantment check, warning,” he read out.

Iana touched the rune for destinations, a small slit opening before a three dimensional light magic illusion flickered to life, hundreds if not thousands of dots spreading out in the immediate area.

“Here. We. Go,” Iana said. “Probably easier if we do it in the map device set within the locator directly, what do you think?”

“No way to extract it?” Christopher asked, magic lighting up within his eyes as well. “I see. We should figure out a way around that feature.”

“We will. But for now it’s enough,” Iana said. “No coordinates but we can infer that if we assume the naming is correct, specific distances won’t be needed with the locator’s range.”

“What are you guys doing?” Ilea asked.

“The key locator,” Iana said and stretched out her hand.

Ilea summoned it and gave it to her, watching more spells activate as the metal sphere flickered and hummed, runes lighting up before an opening revealed a small square.

“This is insane... how much land did they cover?” Iana asked.

“Do we have enough space?” Christopher asked.

“Should be fine. It’s just the first version anyway,” Iana said and elaborated before Ilea asked again. “We’re copying the layout of destinations with the related names. It will allow us to locate all the destinations on a conventional map including the names given to them in this device. We’re using a multilayered matrix of metal alloys to manually enchant the specific locations into a similar light magic illusion.”

“I don’t follow, but sure,” Ilea said, watching the two work, their hands and eyes moving as if they were plugged in straight into the internet.

“Are you seeing this?” Feyrair asked, looking over to Neiphato, the two elves hissing a few times without saying another word.

“A full map,” Neiphato murmured.

“And it turned out to be humans who did this,” Fey said.

“I would like to take credit for this but without the Meadow, we’d be stumbling in the dark for another few millennia,” Iana said, resuming her magic. “Now be quiet, we need to concentrate.”

Feyrair joined Ilea at the back and sat down on a chunk of rubble. “How do you feel?”

She shrugged, not looking at him. “It’s good to do something productive,” she said after a while.

The elf hissed affectionately.

“How long will you need for this?” Ilea asked.

“Another hour, maybe two,” Christopher said.

Ilea sat down on the ground, leaning on the wall as she closed her eyes and started meditating, trying to focus on her soul. It seemed so very small, just a wisp but she could feel the strength, could feel the scars left behind from her training, healed stronger than it had been before. She tried to change her perspective to the other side and found herself floating, as if she had left her body, her mind staring at her core and yet unable to see.

“Ilea,” the voice resounded, ripping her out of her meditative state.

She rubbed her eyes and looked up, seeing Feyrair glancing at her.

***‘ding’ ‘Soul Perception reaches lvl 9’***

“We’re done,” Iana said, the tiny cube floating back into the spherical key locator. The thin seams closed with a quiet sizzling sound, runes flaring to life before they died down. “The full Taleen teleportation network documented.”

“The destinations available from this gate,” Christopher corrected. He smiled and raised his hands when Iana stared at him.

“More than our kind ever managed,” Feyrair said before he laughed. “Well done, you two.”

Iana was already back at the controls. “We’ll want to copy this at some point, Ilea. Just leave it with us for another few hours whenever you can spare the time,” she said and activated another one of the runes. A new illusion flickered to life, the dull green light easily visible in the somewhat dark hall. The woman sighed. “Feyrair, I’ll need translations again.”

“As you wish,” the elf said and stood up, walking over as he looked at the hologram.

Ilea wondered if the Taleen stole this technology from the Ascended, or if they both just used something similar. *Probably set up the gates long before they met an Ascended.*

“This is what we’re looking for,” Iana said and pointed at a small list written in the Taleen script. “Last activated without a set destination, emergency mode, random locations chosen. There are three,” Iana said.

“Me, Zoy, and Kyrian,” Ilea said and stood up too, walking over. “I suppose we can look for the woman too if she’s lost out there.”

“We can’t tell who was sent where,” Iana said and touched a rune on the locator. “This one opens the map,” she said, showing Ilea and the Elves. “These four to go closer and move around. What do you think Chris, based on this gate... that’s probably Iz.”

“Neither of the others are anywhere near Karth,” the man confirmed.

“So we have... Izvanata, main gate it seems. And Iznakor, main gate. Both far in the north it seems, the latter far west as well,” Iana said.

“Far is an understatement,” Christopher said, gulping as he looked at the map. “To travel that distance... instantly.”

“Can we go back using the gate there?” Ilea asked.

“If we’re not detected, I don’t see a reason why not,” Iana said.

“Then let’s go, to the first one,” Ilea said.

“Someone has to activate it. This isn’t a normal gate,” Christopher said.

“And we need the key to get back,” Iana sighed.

“Where’s the closest dungeon? Let’s find another one then. I don’t feel like flying around for days collecting everyone again,” Ilea said.

“Good idea,” Iana murmured and moved the map closer to their current location.

“That one,” Christopher pointed. “That’s a high level dungeon south of Arntrop,” he said and continued seeing the confusion. “Southern city in Asila, the kingdom we’re in. We had looked at potential Taleen ruins in the area but that dungeon was deemed too dangerous and it wasn’t confirmed to hold a ruin. The reports were wrong it seems.”

“Or they never went deep enough to find it,” Iana said, pointing out the height. “Is it really worth it to go into an unknown dungeon just to get a gate we can all use?”

Ilea and Feyrair looked at each other and she couldn’t help but smile just a little bit. “Let’s go.”