

“We’re getting close,” Ilea said, a few more Shredder corpses visible in the mine shaft.

Feyrair grunted suddenly. “Poison.”

Ilea waved her hand through the dusty air, taking a deep breath.

“Hmm, not poison. But it’s not air either,” she said.

The elf scratched his armored cheek. “It will be a problem for me if we stay here for a few hours.”

“Oh? The mighty elf is defeated by the lack of air in a mine?” she asked.

“You’re joking, I know. But Hunters have died to such circumstances, and I’ve come close too. Not all poisons are made by monsters, and not all are immediately noticeable,” he said.

As if on cue, Ilea heard a ding resound in her mind.

‘ding’ ‘You have been poisoned by carbon monoxide – You resist the effects’

Nice. I’m literally not human anymore, hmm?

Ilea smiled to herself and walked on, following the trail of faint magic she felt through her sphere, Huntress leading her in the right direction.

“I wonder how many explosion and fire mages have been buried in some random ass dungeon because they got spooked,” Ilea mused.

“Many,” Feyrair said. “We often found remains. Every species is prone to that. Even dwarfs. Especially dwarfs.”

“I mean they live underground, or so I’m told. Makes sense that they would be the ones dying underground. Survivorship bias. Well they didn’t survive in that case,” Ilea said.

Fey grunted. “That does make sense, but others explore dungeons too. It just saddens me how many die without a fight. So much experience, magic, and strength... and then they’re crushed by stone or poisoned by invisible gasses.”

“Glad I could skip the Classes on the those dangers and go straight to poison resistance and long range teleportation. I don’t even know if I could be crushed at this point, to a point that would kill me,” Ilea said.

The mine shaft opened up a little as they came into a more spacious natural cavern.

“With enough weight and momentum, only a paste would be left of you. I just don’t know if that would be enough to kill you,” Fey said. “We could try. Plenty of cliffs and mountains near your home.”

“I don’t see the point. No crushing resistance after all,” Ilea said and pointed ahead. “Found him. Or them, as it is.”

Ilea walked towards the wooden door set within the surrounding stone. She could tell there were enchantments active but nothing impressive or particularly powerful. Her sphere pierced without hindrance, showing a somewhat spacious room with tables, chairs, simple beds, and even a cellar

with plenty of room for storage. Various tools like pickaxes and torches suggested this had once been lodging for the miners.

Gael sat close to the door, very much alive and seemingly bored. He looked at his bent maul, occasionally trying to pry it back into shape.

On the other side of the room were about fifteen people dressed about as richly as Gael. Tattered rags, worn pants, and old shoes. They looked calm, many of them focused on the Sentinel. A few Shredder carapaces lay down in the storage room, the flesh stripped from them in a messy way.

Ilea knocked on the door and entered. She glanced at Gael, now sitting with ash armor covering his body, wisps of dark red energy intertwined with ash covered his damaged steel maul. The head on the thing was as large as her own. She found he still looked calm, just prepared.

“Hello Gael,” she said, herself wearing casual clothes as she glanced over at the group of humans, uncertainty, confusion, and fear obvious in their expressions. A few started crying. “I see you’re in some kind of predicament.”

The man breathed in deeply before he sighed, his armor receding as he looked at her with tired eyes. “I hoped someone would come. I didn’t expect you, but I’m glad,” he said and stood up. “I’m not good with people. One of the beasts destroyed a wall, couldn’t heal poison. But this place is safe somehow,” he explained.

“You could’ve gone to get help, no? Or was the poison too strong for you?” Ilea asked, Feyrair stepping in behind her.

“That IS a beast. Greetings,” the elf said as he took in the massive Sentinel.

They stared at each other for a moment before some kind of unspoken agreement transpired between the two.

“The Shredders followed me here. Two even tried coming inside. They were hiding, would’ve died, but I can’t get them past the poison,” Gael explained.

“Well I’m here now, so don’t worry. I’ve got some tricks that might help,” Ilea said and walked over to address the people. “Ex slaves from Baralia I assume? Anybody in charge?”

An older woman stepped forward immediately, defiance in her eyes. Her exhaustion masked the fear below, but not to the extent that Ilea wouldn’t notice. Her level was below a hundred.

“We won’t go back,” she said.

Ilea smiled. “There must be a misunderstanding. That man is a Medic Sentinel tasked with clearing out the Shredders in this mine. I’ve come because he didn’t report anymore. The only thing I intend to do with you all is bring you out safely and to Samethol, where you’ll be given clothing, a place to stay, and a job or something, if any are available.”

The woman laughed a bitter laugh, crossing her arms. “I’ve never heard of the Medic Sentinels. That man is strong but he’s more beast than human. His magic is evil. He was the one to bring the monsters upon us. We were safe here. And we will stay here. We’re close to the border still. Baralia doesn’t care about that. They have deals with the locals, to bring back escaped slaves. If you want to get the coin, you’ll have to bring them our corpses.”

“That’s a lot to take in,” Ilea said. “How long have you been down here?”

The woman didn’t reply.

“The war is over. Baralia is no more. But I don’t really feel like trying to convince you for the next two hours,” Ilea said and whistled, using monster hunter to freeze the group. She spread her ash and pushed healing mana into them. “My name is Lilith, and I’m a Medic Sentinel. I promise to get you out of here and to Samethol where you’ll be safe. More so than here that is. And I’ll personally pay for food and lodging until you can figure out what to do in the future.”

“You really want to deal with all that?” Fey asked, glancing over at her and the still frozen people.

“Of course. Everyone deserves a chance at least. They would run out of food down here and they can’t get out. Good thing we found them now,” she said and smiled at the group. “But I don’t feel like being doubted by you.”

“You would take our choice?” a man asked, one of the first to free himself from the paralyzing effect. He didn’t sound defeated but Ilea doubted he would try to fight her.

“I’m not a saint,” Ilea said. “But I’m sure you lot will forgive me. Now please hold your breath everyone,” she added and moved them together with her ash, being careful not to injure any of them. “I said hold your breath,” she said again, the whole group now shrouded with ash. “Your life depends on it.”

Her healing really helped, getting rid of the panic and fear welling up in their minds, replaced by confusion. They all managed to hold their breaths in the end, Ilea not wasting the few seconds she would have and teleported everyone through the caverns and out of the mine. Displacement had quite the range at this point.

A few uses were enough and soon they were all standing outside in the sunlight, the refugees rubbing their eyes at the sudden exposure.

Gael stretched before he cracked his neck, his ash armor forming as his spells flared up.

Feyrair burst into white flame and spread his arms.

Ilea displaced them away from the group and glanced at the woman. “Take a moment to breathe, I’ll bring you to the town in a few minutes.”

She summoned a meal and started eating, watching the Sentinel try and fight the powerful elf. To her surprise, it wasn’t quite as one sided as she had expected.

He’s at two sixty now. But he’s a fucking monster, she thought with a grin on her face.

“Is it true... the war is over?” a young woman asked, trying to cover herself as best as she could with the rags she had left. She received a look of scorn from the old woman but ignored it.

“Mhm. The High King is dead I hear. There are still slavers around so I’d avoid traveling north for now. And a few cities aren’t exactly the same anymore,” Ilea said. “You can learn about that in Samethol though.”

Some of the people started murmuring now, showing cautious optimism. It seemed her ability to teleport them out of the mine counted for something.

“Why would you help us? What are we to you but slaves to be sold to the highest bidder?” their leader asked.

Ilea sighed, crossing her arms as she kept her eyes on the fight. A few trees had now been destroyed and Feyrair was apparently trying to start a wildfire.

“Look, I don’t care. I said who I was and why I’m here. But please shut up or I’ll teleport you back into the mine,” Ilea said.

She just planned to relocate herself if the woman kept on being a cynical old fart. She understood of course and even thought it wise to think along those lines but she knew the woman would be convinced in time. Not by her and maybe not today, but that really wasn’t Ilea’s problem.

One good thing about people knowing my name is that I can show up and they won’t doubt my intent like that. I do hope I don’t have to hunt down Lilith impostors in the future. Ah the joys of being famous.

The same would be true for the Sentinels themselves. At least their signature ashen armor was not something people could easily fake. She had only met a single ash mage outside of her organization so far.

Did he even have an ash armor? she questioned. *Well he led me to Fey and his group, so at least he helped me there. Absolute shit otherwise though.*

“Are you like a Shadow? The ones from Ravenhall?” someone asked.

“I’m a Shadow too, yes. The Sentinels are just a healer organization though. We aim to support adventuring teams and do monster subjugation jobs ourselves,” she said.

Feyrair spun the massive form of Gael in a circle before he sent him flying through the trees.

Ilea watched as the massive man twirled in the air, using the trunks as steps to keep his momentum. He rushed back at the elf with predatory grace, his maul landing with a devastating blow on the dragonling’s armor. Without a visible effect.

“You lack her intrusion. Without it, you won’t be quite as dangerous,” Fey mused, the ground around him set alight as the Sentinel jumped back, his armor burnt away as he reformed the skin on his face.

Ilea saw a man comfort a crying child who had watched the exchange. Some of the others were glued to the fight with disbelieving eyes. She walked to the girl and touched her hair, soothing her mind with healing magic.

“Thank you,” the man said. “I was... too absorbed.”

“Maybe not something a child should see, yes,” Ilea said with a slight smile. She made a few ashen horses and let them run around in front of the girl, quickly distracting her from the horrifying sight she had just witnessed. “Are you all ready to go?”

“Have my pack ready,” the man in front of her joked.

“Alright,” Ilea said and displaced the group through the forest, keeping them close together in case the local wildlife made trouble.

Nothing showed up however and she quickly got them to Samethol, displacing them into the town and to the inn she had already visited. Checking inside with her sphere, she moved the group into an unoccupied room upstairs before going there herself.

Ilea thought about displacing Haya up to them but seeing the woman bent over her drink at the bar, she refrained. “I’ll get someone local. Wait here for now,” she said and walked out through the door. She went down the stairs and leaned on the railing. “Hey Haya.”

The woman spit out her drink, making a weird sound based on the swallowed shriek.

“Apologies,” Ilea said and walked over. “Found a bunch of Baralia refugees hiding in the mine. Gael was protecting them, why he didn’t come out.”

“Refuge... in the mine? How? Wh... it’s been closed for months!” Haya spoke.

“Yeah, you can ask them that yourself. Apparently had enough supplies too. I didn’t see any human skeletons down there,” Ilea said.

“Damn squatters,” one of the men at a nearby table said. “Eating our supplies.”

“How much was all of that worth?” Ilea asked, apparently surprising the man with her attention. “Speak.”

He glanced to his friends, sobering up quickly. “Ah, miss. I meant no offense.”

“How much for the supplies?” she asked again.

“Not much... food and drink alone maybe a hundred fifty silver. Not that we can get them with them Shredders around,” the man said.

Ilea summoned two gold coins and displaced them onto their table. “Payment for their squatting,” she said and turned back to Haya. “They’re getting agitated. Don’t even know about the war ending.”

Haya finished her drink in a single swig. “I’ll come with you then. The mines?”

“No, upstairs,” Ilea said and pointed.

“Up... what?” Haya stuttered.

Ilea glanced at the innkeeper, his face slightly pale as his hand hovered near the massive blade below the counter. “Can you prepare a hot meal for them? And get a tailor, they’re wearing rags. Fifty silver still left, that should be enough for something simple. Fifteen people.”

He nodded slowly, pushing his hand back from the weapon with his other one.

“Smart move,” Ilea said, showing a wicked grin for a split second before she summoned herself a bottle of ale, walking upstairs again. “Haya, come on.”

Overwhelming power, nearly unlimited gold, and space magic really made life easier, she found.

Haya stepped into the room behind her, her eyes opening wide yet again.

“There will be clothes and food soon. I’m not sure if you need a bath, I’ve just been in a mine slaughtering Shredders, no the best judge,” Ilea said. “Can I leave you with this?”

Haya glanced at her before she focused. “Of course... yes... I’m the guard captain... after all. Yes. And yes, you do all need a bath. Clothes will come shortly, as will food... she already said that. I’ll... eh... I’ll figure things out. We’ll need to get the mayor. Plenty of refugees in the past months, yes.”

“Great. I’ll be back in a while, need to make sure your forest doesn’t burn down,” Ilea said and vanished.

Haya nearly broke down when the woman was gone. “By the gods...,” she murmured. “She’s gone...”

Fifteen pairs of eyes were one her. How did she even get them in here? How did they get into the mine? Johnson was looking for more hands on his farm and the guard was terribly understaffed, and Frank could surely use a few more apprentices. *Yes, that will work out.*

“You’re in charge?” she asked, back to her usual self as she evaluated the frightened and malnourished people in front of her.

The older woman looked at her. “Who was that woman?”

“I think that was Lilith,” Haya said. “But I’m not entirely sure. Her power certainly matches.”

“We’ve been in hiding for a long time... but you say her name as if we should know it,” the woman said.

Haya rubbed her temples. “Well yes, she single handedly defended Riverwatch from Lord Harken’s army, killed dozens of high ranked nobles in Yinnahall to pave the way for those who defied the High King. I don’t know what else she did in the war but I wouldn’t be surprised if she was the one who killed King Baron himself.”

The woman’s lips quivered lightly. “And why... why is she here?”

Haya touched her shoulder. “I’ve been asking myself that all day. Now come on, I need names and experience. Lys has ordered a quick integration of refugees. Lodging and food for the first month is paid for by the Empire.”

Ilea landed near a growing bush fire, using her ash to deal with the flames. The heat itself had caused leaves and wood alike to burn.

She found Feyrair sitting on a rock with his hand supporting his chin, eyes staring at the regenerating form of a creature that seemed to be sort of human like.

“Having fun?” she asked, her wings dissolving when she landed.

“This one is quite impressive. Lacks experience but his magic is promising. Reminds me of young Fire Wastes warriors, but with potent healing and impressive defense. Granted he won’t be burning down entire mountain sides,” Fey mused.

“Not our goal anyway,” Ilea said, helping her student along with healing.

“The refugees should be alright now,” she said, looking through her necklace.

Ilea summoned the storage ring she had gotten from the Order of Truth elder, or well, Hector really. She threw it at the naked Gael. “Here, it’ll help with the clothing problem. Also maybe you should wash yourself sometimes, making at least a somewhat good impression can help with your missions.”

“Ash and blood covered helps too,” the man said. “Less talk the better,” he added and looked at the ring. “I cannot accept this, Ilea. This is expensive.”

“You take that. It’s a gift. Might solve your maul problem too, that thing is absolutely wrecked,” she said, looking at the weapon lying next to him.

He perked up at that. “You can store weapons too?”

“Of course, it’s a storage item, it stores things,” she said.

He grinned from ear to ear. “Wonderful. Then I shall accept it, Lilith,” he said, stood up, and bowed, at least having the decency to cover his junk with ash. “And I will work hard to repay this debt.”

“No debt. It’s a gift. Just don’t lose to your rage and remember what the Sentinels stand for,” she said.