

Chapter 561 The very capable and cool divine tree that is awesome and definitely hasn't taken over as the true author of this sto- retelling of history as it happened

Ilea made her way to the secret underground location near the city, blinking down into a room filled with old gear. Swords, halberds, spears, armors, all propped up on various racks and workbenches. It was just a ruse of course, in case somebody found this location. Strewn about silver coins would likely make this quite a find for most adventurers who would stumble upon it, just in case any information had leaked. The last thing they wanted was someone continuing to dig.

She felt the mark left on Iana about thirty meters below, despite the many enchantments that blocked her sphere and teleportation. It took her nearly twenty seconds to figure out the overlaid enchantments preventing space magic.

"She did it again," Iana said when she saw her, squinting her eyes. "I was sure this one would be impenetrable."

"I doubt there's anything truly impenetrable," Ilea said. "How is the project coming along?"

The facility was quite large. A near copy of the Core they had build within the Sentinel headquarters. Stone and various metal plates covered the outside, each holding enchantments against various spying, perception, and teleportation abilities. There was plenty of shock absorption, anti heat, self repair spells as well, all entirely too expensive to consider anywhere else.

Here however, they had the enchanters themselves.

Two gates had been prepared, both looking somewhat streamlined by now. Not as large as those the Taleen used but supported by enchantments and runes on the spherical walls surrounding the platforms.

A few tests had resulted in more failures, even Ilea's newfound space magic discoveries not helping in the short term. It was possible that they could've figured it out in the span of a month, maybe a year, or ten. But there was a much easier solution.

"We're ready, yes," Iana said and handed her a stack of papers. Plans for the gates, detailed explanations of the various runes, enchantments, space magic theory, analysis of the key and Taleen gates themselves, as well as theories on improvements and next steps.

She hesitated for a moment, holding the papers up but more towards herself than Ilea.

"You know you can trust me," Ilea said.

"It's... of course. Just... if this gets into the wrong hands..." Iana murmured.

"Meadow doesn't have any hands, so that doesn't apply," Ilea said with a smile.

"Not very disarming," Christopher said.

"This isn't a time for jokes," Iana snapped, handing over their research. "Make sure to destroy it once that creature has read it. I'd like to find out if it really is as capable as you suggest," she said with a determined look on her face.

*Oh honey.*

“I’m sure you’ll become good friends in no time. Are those the materials?” Ilea asked, gesturing towards a few crates.

“Yes. Enough to build two gates that could respond to either of ours here. Any optimizations the creature could make, you’d have to bring back to us so we can further study and develop it,” Iana said.

“I’ll blink back once I’m done talking to it but I have a few other things I want to take care of in the next few weeks,” Ilea said.

“Of course. It’s not like this is by far the most important potential discovery for humanity as a whole,” Iana said with a smile.

“We survived thus far. We can make it a little longer without teleportation. Best case, you’ll somehow create a black hole and suck this continent out of existence. But I digress. I’ll leave immediately,” Ilea said and patted the woman’s shoulder, quickly collecting the various crates with materials.

“Don’t worry too much. You both did wonderful work.” She smiled at Christopher too and turned around. “I’ll leave you two to your *research*.”

“What’s that suppose to m-” Iana started but Ilea had already left.

Ilea wanted this to succeed, if only to stop being a messenger girl between Hollowfort and Ravenhall. *My wings are just too fast.*

“*Raven to tree, do you read me?*” she sent into the void, closing in on Hollowfort.

“*I can hear you, if that is your question,*” Meadow said.

“*You’re supposed to reply with something like, Tree to Raven, I read you. But whatever. Can you summon me, or are you busy with grass reproduction?*” Ilea said.

She had deactivated her space magic resistance, feeling the magic manifest before her view changed to black grass.

“Oh?” she exclaimed, taking in the rather expansive space. “You remodeled your room!”

“*I did. Catelyn has allowed me to modify the ruins between Hollowfort and the Descent, under the condition that I provide elevator platforms for safe passage between the two. And the sealing of various leaks and open passages that local non awakened tend to use,*” it explained.

A few floors both above and below had been removed entirely. Massive pillars of stone that shined with enchantments provided ongoing stability to the massive statue in which the ruins had been situated. The whole thing was likely improved even.

Hills covered in grass and plants native to the Northern regions spread out for a few hundred meters, the Meadow’s tree now standing on a small hill. A creek flowed through the scenery, often up and over a hill, finally ending in a small waterfall out into the expansive crystal caverns.

“*As more creatures choose to live here... perhaps I will have neighbors at some point in the future,*” Meadow said.

“It’s quite lovely,” Ilea admitted, watching the fireflies float through the wondrous space. Various chunks of crystal had been fastened or fused into the ceiling above, lending their magical light to the colorful vegetation either grown or rooted by the Meadow. “I wouldn’t say no to a vacation home here.”

*“If you like, I can build you one,”* Meadow said, floating stone appearing out of nowhere, shaping into various forms that first resembled her own house and then changed into various creations that seemed Hallowfort inspired.

“I’ll coordinate with you at some point,” Ilea said with a laugh. “I didn’t expect you to be my personal builder too.”

*“I merely offer my humble talents to a friend,”* the Meadow said. *“You’ve come earlier than I had expected.”*

“Well, my friends tend to be busy people,” she said, glancing at the rolling hills and massive pillars.

*“They sure are... a lot of legislation. Elana Invalar is quite diligent,”* it said with a sigh that flowed over its new cavern, like a summer breeze through a field of flowers.

“The Queen of Rhyvor. I can imagine. I have something maybe a little more up your alley,” Ilea said and summoned the crates and plans. “Do you have a moment, or am I interrupting you?”

*“I appreciate the concern but as I have said many times before, I’m not quite as limited as a human like you. With only four limbs. Let me perceive,”* it said, the stack of papers floating out of her hands and spreading out. The crates vanished, leaving the metals, stone, and tools hovering too.

The Meadow made a weird noise.

“What is it?” Ilea asked, now sitting at the cliff like edge of its domain, her legs dangling down towards the lake.

*“Ilea... is this some kind of attempt at humor?”* it asked, not haughty but perhaps a little insulted.

Ilea thought she was the only one that could make the creature cringe but apparently she had been wrong.

“It’s the combined research of two insanely talented and experienced human enchanters. They’re not space mages by the way, so do cut them some slack,” she said.

*“... Perhaps... I’ll have to reclassify your species as not quite awakened. Ilea, there is no blade large or sharp enough to cut the slack I would have to remove to make this acceptable work,”* Meadow said.

“That’s why I brought it here, oh wonderful god of space and flowers,” Ilea said, tilting her head back to look at the crystal tree with a smirk on her face.

*“Now the baseline is quite interesting. I suppose their study of these Taleen Gates and the key they had used lead to this... abomination,”* Meadow said.

“Ye. Can you write down adjustments and suggestions for me to bring back?” she asked.

*“Why? They prepared a gate, let’s bring them here and I’ll show them myself,”* Meadow said.

Ilea jumped up. “It could work already?”

*“There are a lot of adjustments I’ll have to make on this side... and the mana required would suck most humans dry, but yes. It’s good that they didn’t change the baseline they found too much,”* it said. *“I do hope for their sake, that they didn’t test this on living creatures.”*

“Ah, just me,” Ilea said.

*“You are a durable test subject. Good choice,”* the Meadow said, teleporting most of the materials a few hundred meters away. *“I don’t suppose they can stand next to me.”*

“Good call, no, they’d die immediately,” Ilea said. “I don’t think you can talk to them either.”

*“Good thing I have a translator then,”* it said.

Ilea watched as space magic coupled with roots bent and formed the metals and plates into various pieces that were soon put together into what looked like a platform. Gaps were filled by stone, new runes etched into various pieces before it started thrumming with power.

*“Good enough,”* it said.

“You did that in less than a minute...,” Ilea said.

*“The pieces are already here. You simply need to understand how they work together. I admit that building something like this from nothing would have taken me at least a few hours,”* Meadow said.

“I’ll think of more groundbreaking ideas to change everyone’s lives for the better,” Ilea said.

*“I just so happen to be kind of an expert on teleportation magic. There’s no way for me to enhance your limited brain,”* Meadow said.

“Was more thinking along the lines of defensive enchantments and agriculture, but sure. Let’s add brain magic to the list, maybe I’ll find some four mark mind mage ready to warp our understanding of reality,” she said.

*“I would be vary of such creatures. Altering one’s mind is a dangerous prospect,”* it said.

*“So is teleportation, my dear Meadow. Who’s to say we’re the same people when we emerge on the other side?”* she said.

*“Basic laws and principles of space magic. You would understand that if you invested even a fraction of your fighting time into arcane studies,”* Meadow said.

*“Incomprehensible really, there’s no way we’ll ever know,”* Ilea mused.

“I could try to explain it in simple terms,” Meadow offered.

“No way really. An ancient mystery,” Ilea murmured telepathically.

“You may traverse the gate, I’ll supply the energy needed,” Meadow said offhandedly.

“Thanks. What about the way back?” Ilea asked.

*“As soon as a connection is initiated, I will know, and thus supply the required energy too,”* it said.

*“Sounds great, will be right back,”* Ilea said and winked, stepping onto the platform.

The thrumming intensified for a moment as the runes were filled with magic, space distorting around her as she disabled her resistance.

Bright white light emerged and vanished a moment later, Ilea finding herself staring at the bewildered eyes of two researchers.

“I’m back!” she exclaimed with a joyous tone.

“y...y.... you.... It.... Worked... it worked... IT WORKED!” Iana exclaimed, hugging the man standing next to her.

Christopher smiled warily, his eyes focused on Ilea. “What was its opinion?”

Ilea locked eyes with him. “A strong baseline. And a working gate. We can go back right now, I’m sure you three have a lot to talk about. Or well... I’ll translate early on because of your lack of mental resistance.”

“Ment-” Christopher started and gulped as Iana dragged him onto the platform.

She smiled at Ilea. “Initiating teleportation!”

The three vanished in a bright light once more, appearing on the heavily customized gate.

Both researchers glanced around for a moment before they immediately studied the runes and formations they stood on.

“Of course... of course... but why vertic... no that doesn’t make any sense,” Iana murmured to herself.

“*Welcome, to the North,*” Meadow spoke, only to Ilea.

The two felt the power nonetheless, turning their heads towards the location of the tree.

“Is that it?” Iana asked.

“Mhm... the Meadow welcomes you to the North,” she said.

“*So young and uneducated. To think these second rate enchanters would dare touch a topic so advanced! It’s not only irresponsible, it’s downright suicidal. Does your species not have a sense for self preservation?*” Meadow asked.

“Meadow is impressed with your education, considering your young age,” Ilea paraphrased. “It’s impressive that you had taken the risk of building a teleportation gate without deep knowledge on space magic.”

“*That’s the opposite of what I said,*” Meadow grumbled.

“*What? Oh apologies... you see, humans don’t have the best short term memory!*” Ilea replied, hitting her own head a few times with an open mouth. It produced a slightly hollow sound.

“Our knowledge is limited. To think you had modified this prototype to a working gate is... overwhelming. It’s an honor to meet you, Meadow. My name is Iana, and this is Christopher,” Iana said with bright eyes, blue light dancing within.

“*Limited doesn’t even scratch the surface of your ignorance. To even call this a prototype is beyond reason,*” Meadow said.

“It is quite happy to meet you too. And will surely enjoy enlightening your bright young minds with the knowledge of an ancient space mage from another realm. It also apologizes for any rash comments. Socializing is not a focus of one of its many Classes,” Ilea said.

“*They are willing to learn. And humble enough, I suppose,*” Meadow said.

It formed a stone platform with letters on it.

“*Your work is shoddy. There is much you have to learn,*” it said on the stone.

“Of course it is. Humans take much of their magical knowledge to their early graves. We do intend to change that. What do you require in exchange?” Iana asked.

“I think Meadow will just help to alleviate bored-” Ilea said when new letters appeared on the stone.

*“Your souls and firstborn children,”* it said.

Ilea shredded through the stone with a few ashen limbs. “It’s a little sarcastic. You old joker you!” she said and laughed awkwardly.

“I can imagine the detrimental effects of a first contact with you,” Iana said and looked at her, almost pity in her eyes.

“Really? You’re going to blame this on me?” she asked.

“And even if it weren’t a joke. For this knowledge, I’d gladly sacrifice all that I am,” Iana said.

Christopher shyly raised an arm. “I... would like to keep my soul, sir, Meadow.”

*“Of course I’m joking. Though I too blame Ilea’s reckless behavior when meeting incomprehensible beings in other realms,”* letters appeared once again.

“Yeah, alright, I get it. Do you need anything else?” Ilea asked.

“I have everything with me, thank you,” Iana said. She spoke the words quickly, her lips quivering slightly. The excitement was palpable, even Christopher’s hands shaking noticeably.

“Yeah okay. Have fun then, you damn nerds,” Ilea said and rolled her eyes.

*“Enjoy monster hunting,”* Meadow said in a dry tone.

*“You know what? I will,”* Ilea replied with a smile. *“Take good care of them. And thanks, Meadow.”*

*“They are safe in my care, do not worry. I appreciate the interesting work. We’ll see how they handle my teaching,”* it said.

Ilea stepped on the platform again. “Mind a boost?”

The Meadow obliged, white light and energy pulsing around her as she waved.

*Well, that was much easier than expected,* Ilea thought with a smirk. *Now they just have to figure out a way for humans to do that on their own. In a safe and affordable manner.*

*That was it for today... hmm... I suppose it’s worth a shot.*

Instead of flying back to Ravenhall, Ilea opted to go westward. She had the better part of two weeks until her meeting with the Elves. She didn’t know about the specifics of clearing out a Praetorian facility but with special versions around, she didn’t expect there to be much solo fighting.

*I did grow in power quite a bit since last time,* she thought, her wings carrying her over the southern mountain range and towards the kingdom of Kroll.

Her journey westward was quick, Ilea entering the small settlement with a few uses of Displacement.

Nobody reacted to the sudden appearance of a high level healer, most people either drinking in the inn or fast asleep.

She went straight for the dungeon, checking her sphere for any familiar faces. There were none.

The caverns looked the same as last time, Ilea quickly teleporting through the upper layers, using her wings to guide her towards the section she was interested in.

*They were so helpful last time, letting me unlock my third Class,* she thought, floating into the dark void of the deep cavern.

The air stilled, any noises suggesting monsters or life stopping as if forced out by a boundary of power. A permeating feeling of rotten wrongness instead took their place, something Ilea was all but immune to at this point.

*To think lower level humans would just die from this. I wonder if it's an aura, or perhaps an artifact? It's not just mana density, that's for sure.*

*I hope it's an aura,* she thought with a bright smile.

The cavern remained quiet, the Specters she had fought and killed gone, their posts vacated and not retaken.

*A limited supply of monstrous experience bags then, hmm. I really was quite lucky to have stayed in Erendar for as long as I did. Now I have to go out and look for high level creatures.*

Ilea went further, soon discovering an entrance of stone, slightly ajar. The stone gate was about five meters high and set into the back end of the large cavern.

*So this is what you protected?*