

Chapter 665 Tombs

They appeared in the crevice leading to the Penumra dungeon, Feyrair and Pierce joining them a few seconds later, no longer fighting.

Both were clad in armor and seemed calm and collected.

Professional idiots, Ilea mused, smiling to herself as she glanced at the locator. Nothing nearby of course but they had a direction to go on.

Two Elders and a Cerithil hunter, Ilea thought, looking at the waiting group.

“Where to bosswoman?” Pierce asked.

“Follow the arrow. How’s your lightning survivability? I know Fey and Pierce can manage,” Ilea said, glancing at Verena.

“I should be able to manage. Let me get used to it,” the woman said, flames spreading over her form as she ascended towards the cliff side above, dark clouds moving past above.

“Will she be fine?” Ilea asked.

Pierce chuckled. “Ah the young and unfaithful. If you didn’t exist, I’d say she’s the toughest human I know.”

“Not exactly an accomplishment,” Feyrair said, ignored by both women.

Ilea appeared above, spreading her wings as a bolt of arcane lightning struck her form, the energy slowly spreading through her body without leaving any lasting damage, the light burns healed in moments. She watched as Verena hovered upwards, energy gathering in the clouds before she was hit directly.

Her chest burst open as half her torso burnt up, gurgling noises resounding as a tinge of red mixed in with her fiery flames. Muscles flexed as the burnt and torn tissue regained its color, knitting itself together by what looked like sheer will.

“It’s quiet a gruesome sight, I think that’s why she doesn’t show it to too many people,” Pierce said. “Also I guess she has to get naked, kind of.” She glanced over at Ilea. “Are you turned on by this?”

Ilea glanced between Pierce and the regenerating Elder, another strike hitting the burning and flying form, this time leaving considerably less damage in its wake.

“I don’t think so, no,” Ilea said, watching pieces of flesh splatter against the stone ground below.

“Would have been fitting, but I suppose not all heroes can be legends,” the woman sighed.

“Effective,” Feyrair commented as he joined them, burning wings on his back.

Verena flew over a few seconds later, dull red runes now visible on her body, most of her features somewhat obscured by burning flames. “I’m good to go,” she said, her voice slightly deeper, with a distinct whispering backdrop.

“Now that’s pretty hot,” Ilea admitted, glancing over at Pierce as she refocused on the locator.

“Breaking news, Lilith sexually attracted to burning tattooed women. Well I can’t blame you, V, you look downright smoldering,” Pierce mused.

“Are you done?” the elder asked in a calm voice. It had not been the first time she had to deal with Pierce.

“I’ll take these two, or do you want to carry us all?” Ilea asked, looking at Pierce.

“What an honor, alas my ability will not allow for such feats. My flight is rather, delicate. Balancing four people, especially people of such... political... weight, would pose an issue,” she explained.

Ilea grinned. “Then I’ll carry these two,” she said, her ashen limbs extending as she charged her wings, aiming to stay somewhat low in the northern landscape, hoping to avoid whatever creatures dwelled far above the storms and clouds.

A moment later, they shot away, Pierce a mere streak of lightning forging on ahead, the group shooting over the barren northern landscape with incredible momentum.

Ilea kept an eye on the locator, adjusting the trajectory, occasionally going higher to avoid extensive outcrops of stone or outright mountains. No local creatures they saw braved the northern storms, either unable or not interested in the small and fast moving prey. Despite the fast travel, the group was struck by occasional arcane lightning, Ilea simply flying through the clouds as she was both unwilling and unable to dodge with her charged wings. Her resilience was supposedly increased greatly anyway, and in the worst case, she had displacement and phaseshift to figure something out.

About half an hour later, Ilea started to see distant magical impacts within some of the crevices, unlike what most of the wild creatures in the area tended to use in their hunts. She slowed down to observe, her eyes barely able to make out the distant spells.

“What do you see?” Verena asked, her body still clad in the same flames and covered in runic tattoos. Whatever her spell, it didn’t seem to be short lived.

“Sapient beings I think, fighting or hunting something,” she said and paused. “Fighting. Both sides, if there are only two, are using targeted spells.”

“Want to butt in?” Pierce asked.

Ilea checked the locator, which led them further north east. “No, just thought it curious.”

She grabbed the others again and continued the flight, assuming they had stumbled upon a battle between the forces of the Dark Protector and the Feynor. Either way, they had their own reason for being here and continued to follow the guidance of their derivative Taleen technology.

Night soon came over the northern landscape, mists forming on the ground and flowing down into the many fissures and crevices. Ilea slowed as she watched the serene dance of the Miststalkers resume, the locator now pointing behind them and to one mountain between dozens more. Nothing about it seemed out of the ordinary. In the north that was, the jagged edges and occasionally charred surface a staple amidst the storms, both for landscape and fauna.

“Down there,” she said, leisurely crossing the rest of the distance as she kept an eye out for any monster or Feynor ambushes. This was farther north than Ilea had ever been, excluding perhaps her short visit in the home of the Fae, but that mountain peak could’ve just as well been a separate realm for all she knew.

The others fanned out a little, their own abilities surveying the environment as they made landfall near the mountain. No pools of mist reached their location, the distant beings entirely uncaring for the group of adventurers.

“No entrance on this side, not on the surface,” Verena said, her eyes scanning the shadowy mountain side. She whipped her head upwards.

Ilea followed her gaze, seeing a small group of Famine Crows fly past, their attention attracted by the bright light of both Feyrair’s wings, and Verena’s form.

“Let’s try not to attract too much attention to this place,” Ilea said and rushed off, heading straight at the swarm with spreading ashen limbs.

The large birds had a body reaching about one meter in length, their wing span four times that. Leathery skin covered their gray forms as they started teleporting towards their perceived prey.

Ilea impacted the group, space awareness coupled with her precognition allowing her to see where they went with each use of their magic. They didn’t stand a chance, eight of them sliced apart and falling before they had properly circled the ashen form. She teleported through the largest clusters, her ash alone enough to rip through their wings and bodies, screeches resounding as the bulk of their numbers scattered, rushing away from the surprisingly blender like human.

She continued to teleport through their retreating ranks, occasionally preventing some of them to use their skill as she observed her own ability with space awareness. Ilea had stopped her slaughter, simply using the quickly moving and teleporting birds as a source for some space shift training, her only remaining third class skill no yet at the end of the third tier.

“Those are close to four hundred,” Pierce remarked.

“Not worth killing,” Ilea murmured. “Yes. It’s annoying that most monsters just don’t understand what they should and shouldn’t attack.”

“Humans of our power are rare, how would anyone know,” Verena said, the group now flying again, the elder soon pointing out a small crevice leading into the mountain.

Ilea went in first, the locator ahead as she plunged into the darkness, quickly navigating the ancient cracks and tunnels, likely natural or made to look that way. She didn’t much fear tight spaces, but any apprehension she would’ve had evaporated with the existence of her spherical perception, and the knowledge that she could teleport out in *most* situations. Compared to her companions, she at least had her space magic at her side.

“No traps,” she murmured, letting herself fall into a broad tunnel, her embers the only source of light in the vicinity.

The others joined in the next minute, all finding their way down with more or less issues.

Pierce was the first, having teleported through most everything. “Ominous,” she murmured, a few sparks of lightning traveling over her armor. “Third tier light magic resistance?”

“Yeah, among other abilities, you?” Ilea asked.

“Similar. My lightning travels over surfaces. And I can see nearby mana sources, you for example,” she explained, glancing up. “Already here?”

Feyrair jumped down, hissing at the woman as he looked around, his eyes downright glowing in the dark, wisps of white flame clinging to his armored form. "I believe the last time you rushed into the unknown, you managed to anger a dragon of all things."

Pierce waved him off. "Ah, that's so far in the past, it's hardly worth a mention."

Verena hovered down, her eyes on fire. The tattoos from before were gone by now, as was the fire covering her whole body.

"This way," Ilea said and lead them through the darkness, everyone walking through the tunnel as if the sun shone on from above.

"Looks made by something intelligent," Verena murmured.

"There are a lot of sapient creatures hiding within the northern lands," Pierce said. "Let's hope they're weaker than us."

"We negotiate if they have a key," Ilea said.

"Ah yes, the holy Lilith. What if they decided four hundred years ago that the key is the very embodiment of their god?" she asked.

Ilea tilted her head back a little, glancing at the woman. "Then we borrow their god for a little while."

"How considerate," Pierce said. "Praise be Lilith, the merciful."

"No signs of anything living?" Ilea asked instead.

"Quiet. Empty," Pierce answered.

"Weird," Ilea said. "There's an entrance coming up," she added as they rounded a corner, coming towards a few old sets of stairs leading up to a rather large stone double door.

"Feynor," Pierce said immediately.

"How... ah, yes," Ilea said, looking at the carvings in the stone. Front and center was a prominent four legged winged being flying upwards, smaller horned distinctly Feynor creatures knelt near the bottom of the carving while kneeling in prayer.

She couldn't see any living creatures within, no light coming through the doors either. Nor were there any enchantments or traps preventing entry.

"Let's see what this is about then," she said and opened the gates.

The air inside was stuffy, with a faint hint of death. Ilea stepped inside, ready to be assaulted by whatever necrotic abomination claimed this place as their own but nothing came rushing at the intruder.

Beyond the entrance lay a small stone platform with a dark abyss beyond, a suspension bridge made of metal and wood led into the darkness about fifty meters away, Ilea already seeing the pyramid like stone buildings hanging from the cavern ceiling like carved stalactites. Only few windows adorned the structures, their barren forms desolate and imposing in the lightless cavern.

"Feynor alright," Pierce whispered and glanced down.

"Death in the air," Verena added.

“Can’t feel anything. Undead have mana too,” Pierce informed.

“This place creeps me out, let’s get the key and fuck off. No unnecessary teleports,” Ilea said and flew to the other side, carefully inspecting the air through her dominion, just in case there were any auras or enchantments in the way.

The others followed behind, the group silently landing on the other side and coming up to an open entrance into the connected structures. “Why build like this?” Ilea asked, stepping inside as she inspected the walls. There were a few defensive runes in place but none were active. Dust covered the floor but she couldn’t find the source of the smell.

“Creatures in caves rarely fly,” Verena said.

I guess Hallowfort was built high up too, she thought, impressed with the architecture. The inside seemed rather simple, but comfortable, granted with the hearths burning and other light sources present, coupled with the smell of food and sounds of people. As it was, it reminded more of a tomb than anything else.

But they had yet to find the dead.

Ilea led the group deeper into the structures, the combined size of the buildings enough to house enough people for a small city. They had built vertical more so than horizontal, to make the most of the space they had down in this natural cavern. Ilea wondered if they carved the pyramids into the ceiling or if they somehow added the stone with magic. Their weapons and spells didn’t seem behind anything else she had seen, the warriors who came for Catelyn more than capable.

She did think it a little weird that a group of beings worshiping dragons built their settlement so far below the earth. *Might just be my false expectations. Audur lived underground after all*, she mused, the locator leading them into a temple of sorts, various shrines depicting winged creatures of various sizes and distinct qualities. Ilea checked to see if she could recognize the Guardian of the West in any of the pieces but failed to find her.

The locator pointed at a large wooden chest sitting in front of a dragon coated in silver.

Ilea went over and opened the container, finding a few silver coins of various make, a few chunks of unrefined silver ore, and the pyramid like Taleen Key. “It’s here. I suggest I take it and we teleport out immediately.”

“We could loot the place, there’s plenty of treasure still around,” Pierce said.

Ilea sighed. It was tempting, but after her experience in the Izculen dungeon, she felt a little uneasy.

“They just left all this here?” Feyrair asked. “Their dragon gods are what they care about. I don’t think they would just leave these relics behind for no reason.”

“They’re stupid idiots. Maybe some kind of mind magic creature walked in and ate them all? Maybe they formed a new belief system and decided to move out? We can only waste time guessing, or get started looting,” Pierce mused, yet not having touched anything so far.

[The Stonehammer Key – Ancient Quality]

Ilea grabbed the key and stored it, waiting to see if something would happen. No enchantments came to life, no monster came to get them. “Alright, let’s see what we can get. But we stay together at all times, and everyone, communicate if you perceive even a sliver of something suspicious.”

“Not scared you’ll offend any dragons?” Verena asked as Ilea started looking through the various chests and cabinets.

“I already have one who wants to kill me for little reason. Why not add a few more?” she asked. *Bunch of oversized drakes anyway.*

Feyrair hissed joyously as he looked at the beings. He stopped near one of the meticulously crafted statues and grinned broadly, his hand raised before a beam of white flame burned through the length of the dragon, its head falling to the stone floor with a thud.

“What’s that about?” Pierce asked.

“Garonoth,” the elf hissed. “Next time we meet, I will win.”

“If he’s anywhere near Audur, you’re gonna have a bad time,” Ilea mused, leaving most of the clutter behind, focusing on gold alone, finding about a hundred and fifty pieces in total, distributed into various plates, chests, ornaments, and ceremonial armor.

She grabbed a dragon like helmet and put it on. “Hmm.”

“Very stylish,” Pierce said, grabbing one herself. “Might get a few looks at the next ball I won’t go to.”

“They’d ask about which esteemed smith made it,” Ilea murmured.

“You. Yes. Me, they’d ask what creature I slaughtered to get the skull,” the woman said.

“How did you get such a wonderful reputation?” Ilea asked.

“They don’t mean it in an admiring way,” she mused, making the helmet vanish. “These are made for rituals alone, barely worth looking at.”

“Might seriously wear it to a ball,” she murmured. “But I guess I can just replicate it with my ash.”

“Not that color,” the woman said and walked away, checking the sheathed swords fastened to the propped up armor.

“Treasury somewhere?” Verena asked.

Ilea shook her head lightly. “Not in the vicinity. I guess this is it, if they have one. Very central too.”

“I suppose,” the Elder said. “Shame they don’t like painting.”

“Some of the doors have nice carvings,” Ilea said, pointing at one of the exits.

The Elder considered before she walked over and ripped the thing off its hinges. She held the thick wooden door with both arms and smiled. “A souvenir at least.”

Ilea watched her hack away the sides until she could store it.

She sent out a few ashen birds, a little inspired by her recent dragon encounter. They would return to her if they found anything worth checking out.

When the ash had circled around the set of structures, Ilea motioned to the others. “We’re done here,” she said and spread her wings, flying towards the exit. The others followed without complaint, Ilea looking down into the abyss as she passed the suspension bridge. Nothing showed up to interrupt or attack her, which only made the slight feeling of unease worse.

She held her breath until they reached the exit again, leaving the mountain tunnels in exchange for the northern surface. Ilea didn't feel like dallying in the area, checking her surroundings for anything suspicious but failing to perceive anything. She looked at the locator which pointed northwest, collected her allies and flew off towards the next target.