

## Chapter 853 Nap

Ilea sat between a set of trees, birds chirping, a creek flowing past beyond massive roots breaking out of the moss covered earth. Fireflies illuminated the surrounding forest as she leaned back against the wood of what should have been an old palm tree. This time it was her to eat cake, though she shared with the few Mava around her, Myr Iva included.

Lights of small fires had sprung up all over in the vicinity, flashes of magic spells into the sky reminding of the many beings still present.

Entire rivers and trees had sprung from the Heart of Verivyen, born through the magic provided by the Mava, that or conjured by the being she had seen.

Ilea focused on the cake, not quite able to shake the memory. *Just one unbelievable being after the other. And this one I wasn't exactly prepared for.*

It had been a Fae, perhaps a fragment, perhaps the full thing. She didn't know. The fires had been, tremendous, and space moved to its will. It had almost felt like they were the fabric itself. And yet it had spoken with her, had recognized her. It had known the Baron, had known that she had been a Faen Valkyrie, that she now carried the title of Arbiter. How, she didn't know.

Was it the same Fae she had already met? Just now with further understanding and awareness? The Mava hadn't even seen the flames, let alone the winged being. *Did the heart summon it, formed a connection to it, or is it some kind of trapped spell that requires a ritual and fuel to function?*

*I'm just trying to distract myself with these questions,* Ilea thought and took another bite of cake. Sweet. A lemon flavored flour base with plenty of butter, sweet berries and cream to top it off.

"Thank you for the gifts," Myr Iva spoke, the fox lying sprawled out on the ground, her pupils slightly dilated. It seemed like it took quite a lot of effort for her to formulate the telepathic message.

Ilea smiled. *"I'm just the delivery service."*

*"An important task. Without you, there would be no cake,"* the Mava observed.

*I suppose that's true. Maybe they should take baking classes from humans. This desert would be transformed by magic into industrialized animal farms and kilometers of wheat fields. An entire ancient and powerful people devoted to cake.*

She didn't know if that would be a good thing or not. What really was the goal of civilization? Here in Elos, she supposed for many it was just survival. Walls to fend off the creatures of the wild. Now with the Accords, she supposed that many could start to ask such questions. She herself was more than happy with all the things she got to experience.

Ilea formed an ashen blanket and watched as the Mava built a small campfire. She felt tired, not because her body was exhausted but because her mind had been battered with impossibilities. For the first time in a while, Ilea fell asleep.

She woke with blinking eyes, something itching her nose. Ilea rose up between the trees, sunlight streaming past the high reaching stone petals, the high reaching palm trees colored in lush green. She was careful not to disturb the pile of Mava all around, realizing she had slept on top of them. *Maybe that's why I didn't wake up*, she thought with a yawn, stretching her arms and realizing she didn't need stretching at all. Her body was far beyond what such an exercise would provide.

This time she did spread her wings, mostly due to the minefield of sleeping foxes. Teleporting up, she moved the ashen appendages. Her eyes went wide. A forest of palm trees, rivers, and rock spread out in each direction. Thick high reaching trunks breaking out here and there, branches large as entire trees growing in every direction, birds and foxes populating the newly formed ecosystem with Druned adding stairwells, platforms, and rooms.

The stone petals were broken through by roots in more than a few places, but they remained mostly as a reminder of what this place had looked like before.

Ilea flew southwards, slowing when she saw a set of waterfalls flowing down into a small valley that had not existed before. This was far beyond just an oasis, it was an entire new landscape, terraformed by the Heart or the Fae that it had summoned. She glanced back towards the center, holding her breath as she expected to see the winged being once more. All she found was a small lake, Mava drifting or swimming in the waters.

She could see the desert in the distance, but the roots and waters had spread far into the newly added settlement. And when she reached the edge where sand and dirt now met, she could tell that the artifact uncovered from the vault of Ker Velor was not quite done.

*With the stories about the Fae, teaching others magic. Maybe they really made Elos into what it is today*, Ilea wondered. *Or It's the dragon body and elementals*. She grinned at the thought. The one thing she knew for sure, was that she knew terribly little, and that there were beings out there with incredible powers. Beings she wanted to meet, and perhaps one day, fight.

The growing city of strange shapes and bridges brought her back to the moment, sand and winds pushing the memory of the Fae and the oasis to the back of her mind. She knew she could just turn around and see it, but Ilea chose not to. Instead she used her marks to find the southernmost point in the settlement.

*Wait was this why Violence hasn't been around for a while? Was it there yesterday?*

She squinted her eyes, the mark of the being somewhere in the North. Close to Hallowfort. *Maybe not*.

*Suppose the critter just has other friends, and interests besides violence. Hmm, no. I doubt that. I guess the levels of violence wouldn't matter to it much, otherwise it would've never traveled with me back in the Descent.*

She landed on a long suspension bridge made of stone, the structure swaying in the wind, a thin layer of sand covering parts of it. At the end stood a single tower, added onto a large outcrop of rock, as if a lighthouse looking onto the desert seas.

Ilea reached the structure. Inside she found a circular hall, two Druned sitting beside a set of layered stone. She counted twenty four.

"I'm here," she sent to the two of them.

"That you are," one of the Druned replied after a delay.

Ilea sat down near the two and waited.

*“You remain a seeker of challenge,”* the Druned spoke into her mind.

She nodded.

*“Then you shall travel west, to the mountains of Olruin. There you shall find the entrance to Paarah. Sealed eons past, and sealed it shall remain,”* the Druned spoke.

*“How do I get in then?”* Ilea asked.

*“Sealed to those within. Not those without,”* it spoke.

*“Fair, and what’s sealed inside? The challenge?”* she asked.

*“The remnants of Paarah. We ask that you bring to an end what we could not. Return the cursed silver crown that rests upon the first warrior, so that we may bury it in the depths of the desert. Do not wear it. Hide it away in your storage device or spell, or encase it, in stone or ash.”*

*“Rid Paarah of its remnants, and the history that befell its glory,”* the Druned spoke, its voice more intense than she had heard any of them speak. She couldn’t quite place the emotion she heard.

*“Sounds like your average clean up job. What kind of monsters can I expect? Level ranges and abilities?”* she asked.

*“That knowledge shall remain with us, shall die, with us. It is sworn. You will find your way, and you will find what remains,”* the Druned spoke and stood up, walking over to Ilea before it raised its arm.

A small stone sphere covered in runes fell out of its bulky hand.

Ilea caught the thing and looked at it. Pushing mana into the thing, it started to exude a dim blue light. Moving it around, she realized the runes moved, the light pointing in the same direction. *And here I thought the name of those mountains was all I would get.*

*Guess that’s my activity for the day,* she thought and bowed her head to the beings. *“Thank you, I’ll return once I have the crown.”*

The Druned did not reply, instead returning to their game.

Ilea teleported out and spread her wings. *Westward,* she thought, looking at the small sphere in her hand. She looked at the overgrown section of the settlement in the distance and charged her wings. Cracking her neck, she paused and rolled her shoulders. *Time for the next hunt. Let’s hope the Paarah doesn’t disappoint.*

Magic surged before she shot off, her mantle around her, her hand protecting the precious artifact of the Druned. Quickly, she left behind the settlement of the Mava, trying to mentally register the location based on the marks she had left on a few of the fox like beings.

Dunes rushed past, the morning suns not quite as unforgiving as they would become later in the day. Neither would matter to Ilea as she flew over uncharted territory with full confidence. She wondered when the last human had traveled through these lands. Perhaps she was the first one. Still, there was more life here than in Erendar or Kohr. Small critters unable to notice her passing far above, monsters, some of them able to see her but far too slow to escape the godslayer, if she cared to hunt them down.

Ilea left them be, watching with her enhanced eyes and perception, seeing every little creature on the sands a hundred or more meter below. A high dune came up but she kept going, sand exploding outwards when she emerged on the other side, hardly slowed and gone long before the sand would settle.

She laughed, speeding over the lands with her wings moving in slow patterns. This time she didn't use her Fourth Tier, just in case a four mark was hiding in the expansive desert, her loud passing an annoyance perhaps.

Ilea traveled for hours, nothing standing in her way, no challenge emerging from the dunes. To her disappointment. Even the western lands felt too safe to her. *I'll have to visit those Marshes, and maybe the Vampire territory. And the Frozen Wasteland.*

Plenty of options for her to choose, including the domain of Audur, though she didn't think herself quite ready to face a Dragon, let alone that one. *Devious*, was all that she thought, reminded of the trap Audur had lain. *Maybe she prepared as well, in case she meets me again. Seemed pretty angry that we got away.* She smiled at the thought. *A good memory, that one.*

When the suns were high on the horizon, Ilea slowed, seeing a distant mountain range in the west. High reaching. Higher than those near Ravenhall. The sky was cloudless, the only thing reducing visibility, the heat itself.

Checking the sphere, Ilea assumed this to be the place. Either that or there were mountains beyond this range.

She crossed the rest of the distance and slowed once more, landing atop the first peak she came across. Ilea took in a deep breath and looked at the sunlit mountain sides, kilometers of rock and stone, reaching up towards the skies. Dark valleys lay below. Winds whistling past when she heard the roar of a monster. She felt enticed to find and fight it, but her instincts told her there was little to be gained.

*Is this how most four marks feel when I use Monster Hunter? Did someone just try to lure me in for some leveling?* She grinned, deciding the idea was still not enough to go check it out. Crouching, she saw a four winged creature rush past from beyond another valley, towards where the call had come from. Lightning surged around the bird as it rushed down to hunt.

Silence followed. Either their fight had been quick or quiet. She didn't mind either way, checking the sphere in her hand that pointed deeper into the mesh of mountains. Those more distant were snow capped. She spread her wings and crossed to the next mountain, and then past another one, higher, bringing her to a plateau.

Ilea looked at the faraway dark clouds, twitching when she saw a purple bolt crack into the land, the sound not quite reaching all the way but she was too familiar to mistake it for anything but arcane lightning. There were more clouds as well, moving in the same way as they did in the north.

*The same phenomenon.*

*"Just so you know. I just found arcane lightning in the western mountains of the Sava Desert,"* Ilea sent to Aki. She stood amidst boulders, watching the occasional flashes, easily missed due to the light and distance. There seemed to be fewer clouds than in the north, but they were here nonetheless. She wondered if the mists would come at night as well.

Growls resounded nearby, a four legged Salamander the size of a crocodile stepping out from a small cavern. Red feathers adorning its head fanned out as if to warn her.

***[Mountain drake – lvl 352] – [Fearful]***

She just looked at it and raised her brows.

It hissed.

Ilea hissed back.

She looked at the sphere and once more spread her wings, unsure how far she would have to travel. The territory could be as extensive as the north for all she knew. And so she continued, from mountain to mountain, through storms she now knew provided the same experience as those in the north, and the Krahen Isles.

Until the artifact of the Druned shifted, pointing down and to the north. Ilea landed on an outcrop of rocks on the side of a mountain. Looking down, she saw a valley cast in shadow. It looked the same as all the others did, but she didn't doubt the sphere in her hand.

Jumping down, she spread her wings once more and watched the ground. The occasional crack or cavern she could see, but nothing that would point to an ancient city. But she hadn't seen Tremor either.

Choosing the largest of the cracks, she went inside. There was no light, but she saw well enough, both through her dominion and her enhanced eyes. She had to teleport through a few tight sections, but soon arrived in a larger cavern. Water dripped from the stalactites above, a tiny creek breaking out of a jagged stone wall and ending somewhere in the ground. Insects and a few bat like creatures rushed away at the sound of her passing, or because they perceived her magic.

A cavern much like others.

The artifact pointed downwards. And so down she went. Through more cracks and crevices, more often teleporting than scraping against stone or punching her way through. Deeper and deeper she went, soon hearing the sound of rushing water. Coming out into another cavern, Ilea saw an underground river break out through the stone ceiling, falling down into the dark, the torrent turning into mist before it reached a lake.

Hundreds of meters down she went, her wings moving in serene patterns as she observed the surroundings. She saw two blue furred creatures glance up, each with four black eyes and two horns jutting out of their skulls. They rushed away at the sight of her broad wings.

She didn't chase them, instead looking at the broken stone bridge that led onto the lake. Beyond she saw an obsidian gate that looked darker yet than the cavern all around. Ten meters high and carved into the rock itself.

Ilea landed on the broken bridge and looked towards the entrance. There were no runes she could see, but words etched into the black stone. Words that she could read.

*Traveler of might*

*Heed these words*

*Sealed in stone*

*Our home remains*

*Turn away from here*

*For death yet lingers*

*Simple enough warning*, Ilea thought, after reading the words. She walked closer and started to feel the enchantments in the stone, brimming with power. Defensive and structural, much like what she felt in the walls of Ravenhall. But something felt strange. The direction of it all was aimed inwards.

*To keep death inside*, she thought with a smile. She reached what she had presumed to be a gate, but found no seam at the center. She touched the wall and traced the words. Her dominion could see within the stone, but there was nothing there but solid rock. Solid and enchanted rock. *And they must keep it running as well, or they have mana sources somewhere. Density is pretty high around here too.*

Before destroying the enchanted walls, Ilea looked around. She assumed there was another way in, one that wouldn't disturb the seals, or no Druned would send anyone here. *That other Mava went as well. Could be she died on the way here, but her being sent makes it likely that others were sent as well, and some must've made it here at least. But it's still locked tightly.* She looked down into the waters. *Well, they could've just repaired it I suppose.*

Looking at the sphere, she realized the light still pointed downwards.

*Can't be scarier than the oceans of Kohr*, Ilea thought with a smirk and jumped.