

Chapter 655 Intruders

“He’s doing well,” Feyrair admitted, his arms crossed as they watched Kyrian fight a four mark Bluetail in the valley of blood.

The group had extended the slaughter in the weeks they’d been here, mostly killing the one species. One that didn’t seem to be exhausted quite as much as Ilea had thought based on the present corpses.

She watched her friend closely. His approach seemed methodical, all his movements and teleports the same based on the monster’s body language. Kyrian reacted before it could even cast its spells.

It’s like a better form of my precognition. But I don’t think he has a spell like that, Ilea thought. What he showed could only be achieved with continuous fighting against a single monster type. It reminded her of her battles with the Taleen Guardians. By now she could predict most of their attacks before they could even start them.

He wouldn’t be receiving quite as much experience in this battle as Ilea had for her first four mark Bluetail kill but it was important for his evolutions. He had already gotten lucky with the Wyrms he finished before they found him but this was proof that he could face a four mark all on his own.

The creature used its deadly wind blades but he had already prepared his position, metal plates hovering in thin air as the blades arrived, cutting through the steel but weakened enough to be deflected by the next layer.

Kyrian didn’t move a single step during the barrage, focusing fully on his metal. The second volley he deflected too, before the third managed to cut through one of his arms. He didn’t wince, simply catching the limb before he retreated, holding the bleeding body part to his shoulder.

Compared to Ilea, he didn’t have to get in close to overwhelm the creature. He simply had to keep it enraged and focused on him while his curse and steel slowly burned away any defensive measures and health the being had.

Ilea thought it quite a boring way to fight, but the results were obvious. It was how humans hunted large and dangerous prey back on Earth. Traps and exhaustion.

The creatures of Elos often had many more tools at their disposal than say a bear, but Bluetails weren’t exactly the most intelligent of beasts. Even a Drake would’ve likely tried to flee at this point in the battle. A more intelligent beast would perhaps understand that Kyrian fought defensively, not overextending. If one could force him to become the aggressor, he would likely make mistakes.

If he’s capable of making those, Ilea thought with a smile. She watched his every move, the mage entirely outclassed by the creature in both speed and sheer magical might. He remained calm through it all, his every move calculated and precise. It had been the fourth attempt of his at killing the creature, in only one of which Ilea had to intervene to get him out. They had retreated and regrouped, the two Elves, Kyrian, and Ilea discussing what had gone wrong.

Compared to her, Kyrian couldn’t allow himself quite as many mistakes. Nor could he simply outlast the creature as it sent barrage after barrage after him. He lacked the ability to absorb enemy spells and heal himself to the same degree as she could. His curse did allow him to steal mana and

his third Class allowed for some insane regeneration, but those were simply necessary to even face the creature alone at all. The question was if he could push through and actually overwhelm it.

“If he doesn’t fuck up again, he might actually win,” Ilea said, summoning her cannon before she aimed at a nearby Bluetail that seemed interested in the ongoing battle. *No you don’t*, she thought, a beam of energy flashing out, cutting the creature apart. Burning pieces of smoldering flesh fell to each side as a ding resounded in her mind. Kyrian was still in there.

“You weren’t entirely idle,” Feyrair said. “A weapon or a focus?”

“Focus,” Neiphato said.

[Beast Warrior – lvl 430]

[Wood Mage – lvl 368]

“Neither were you,” she said, her eyes on the fight as she smiled, seeing Kyrian dodge an entire set of volleys.

“These isles provide wonderful training grounds,” Feyrair said. “Though I must admit, it is getting a little boring.”

Ilea chuckled. “Says the elf who’s been fighting Taleen for how many centuries?”

“They adapt, learn. Different versions and dungeons provide different experiences. And there is a goal, compared to this,” he said and spread his arms. “It’s but a mindless slaughter of stupid beasts.”

“Mindless slaughter that provides much more levels. Maybe you should’ve done this for a few years or decades instead. Would’ve allowed you to fight the Taleen more efficiently,” Ilea said.

The elf hissed. “Opportunities do not present themselves so easily. But I won’t ignore this one.”

Kyrian ultimately felled the beast on his sixth attempt, another intervention of Ilea necessary on the fifth, but considering the difference in levels alone and the available spells, he still did incredibly well.

The same could not be said about Feyrair’s attempt at facing a Wym.

While Kyrian was methodical, Feyrair was reckless. The metal mage knew when to retreat and regroup, to learn from his mistakes. The elf simply pushed harder, missing half his limbs and burnt up.

Needless to say, Ilea saved him many times. The lessons both her and Kyrian seemed to think obvious had to be learned over extended periods of painful fighting. Feyrair would’ve died at least fifty times in the few days they tried if his body wasn’t just as stubborn as his mind. More so perhaps. What he lacked in regeneration and healing, he made up in sheer resilience.

Neiphato proved much more adaptive, his approach downright cautious for an elf and his magic quite suited for ambushes and traps. He was the only one who didn’t need saving, though neither did he face a four mark. He simply lacked Classes powerful enough to be up to the task.

Ilea summoned her tracking device, not getting a signal from the surroundings. The arrow pointed towards the closest key, somewhere to the east. *At least it's not on another continent entirely.*

With her marks positioned throughout the north, the plains, the Krahen isles, and the Isanna desert, she had a pretty good idea of where she was.

They had avoided using the gates excessively so far but with her main Classes above five hundred, she felt confident enough to start her exploration. Her allies still needed time to gather strength and Hunters, but when the time to strike came close, she wanted to have at least enough keys to learn more.

If they're as easy to get as the Tungsten one, we'll be done in no time, she thought. Ilea wasn't sure what she was getting into. She hoped for the best and was prepared for the worst.

"You'll be off again then?" Kyrian asked.

"Yeah. I'll map out some of the gate locations and try to locate the keys, or at least the direction in which they lay," she said. If the Taleen interfered or prepared traps for her, she would have the best chance of escaping due to her space magic and long range teleportation.

The metal mage nodded, rolling his shoulders. "Can you take me to Ravenhall?"

"Now that you're getting so close?" Ilea asked jokingly.

"I don't think I'll get there on these isles. Don't expect of me what you can do," he said. "Hunting them is getting easier, but the experience is slowing down just as much."

"You don't think it's enough?" Ilea asked.

He shook his head. "Feyrair thinks the same. But compared to him, I have yet to fight the Taleen. I will gain a sizable boost from them. If I don't die trying."

"Nice death flag. I won't let you die," Ilea said.

"Ah you mentioned that I believe. I thought I would die many times on each day during the past years. And that hasn't changed with your presence. There is a reason we both have the Deviant of Humanity skill. We tread on paths beyond our species. It's only natural for there to be risks," he said and smiled lightly.

Ilea wanted to tell him that it was alright. To settle down, to stop. But she knew the thought was selfish. He had made his choice and he would see it through, just as she would. And who was she to stop him?

I'll be looking forward to your progress.

"I met up with the Redleafs a while back. Aliana asked about you," she said.

"Aliana," the man mused. He looked up to the cavern ceiling, sadly wearing his helmet. "She still remembers me? I've been gone for so long, and we barely knew each other."

"Must've left an impression," Ilea said with a grin. "Maybe you can ask Claire to send a letter? Or I can bring you to Virilya right now?"

He raised both his arms. "No... no no. That... won't be necessary. I think. The letter does sound, more reasonable."

“I’m pretty sure she’s still very much interested. But take all the time you need. Just know that not everything waits forever,” Ilea said.

“You’re sending mixed messages,” he said with a growl.

Ilea shrugged and laughed, activating her third tier Transfer. They appeared in her house, Ilea instantly spreading her wings as she avoided the wooden floor.

Kyrian wasn’t quite as heavy, his focus however just like Ilea’s on the two guests sitting at the dinner table.

“Finally,” one of them murmured, taking a drink from a large jug. A woman who looked to be in her mid twenties, her skin tanned and scarred in many places. Long curly brown hair fell onto her bare shoulders, a thick steel chest piece covered her torso, the dark red color scratched off in a few places. A red fur loincloth padded with leather covered her waist and parts of her legs, thick fur boots dirtying the floor with mud.

[Flame Berserker – lvl 342]

Ilea had seen her before, though not from up close. *Verena Quil, Elder of the Shadow’s Hand.*

Next to her sat another woman, her eyes wide as she stared at the two newcomers. Blue just like Ilea’s. Her skin was pale to a near unnatural degree in Elos, her hands currently holding a piece of raw meat, blood dripping onto a plate below. She was considerably smaller than Verena. Where the Elder looked the part of a Berserker, the muscles on her arms rivaling some male warriors, this woman looked downright fragile. Her hair was straight and long, falling freely to her back.

She wore a pale blue summer dress, well made and richly decorated with both embroideries and inlaid jewelry.

Ilea knew without identify that this was a trained warrior just as much as herself or Verena.

[Lightning Mage – lvl 318]

The woman stood up, throwing the piece of meat behind herself as she extended her arms, lightning crackling in her hands as she grinned widely, her eyes squinting in joy. The quick movement flicked a splatter of blood onto Verena’s cheek.

“Welcome home, Lilith! Or should we say, Ilea?” she said and giggled. “I love fake names like that, did I mention that?” she asked, looking at Verena. “Hey, you got blood on your face. Let me get that,” she said and walked over, trying to touch the Elder’s face.

Verena slapped away the woman’s hand, leaving the blood where it was.

“Anyway, welcome! We’ve been waiting for hours. Super boring. And she didn’t even let me kill the cats in the cave! Can you believe it? Dangerous creatures so close to your house and we’re right here?! Ah well. Who is he?” the woman asked and licked her lips. “Oh... you’re powerful too. Just as expected from the mystical figure of Lilith. I assume he’s already taken?” she asked, glancing at Ilea with a downright lecherous expression.

Ilea tilted her head to the side a little, her wings slowly putting her down. The landing made the ground creak just a little bit. “Excuse me, who are you? And what are you doing in my house? How did you even find it?”

The woman curtsied, the movement rather cute. Her whole demeanor made her seem younger, thought Ilea thought her to be in her early thirties. When she had reached the two hundreds that was. For all she knew the woman could've been centuries old.

"Dragonkiller Pierce, Elder of the Shadow's Hand and exiled daughter of House Pierce of Nipha. We wanted to finally meet you and I decided we could invite ourselves here because let's be honest, you would've probably done so anyway. Also fucking with the enchantments seemed fun at the time," she explained. "As to your last question, the guards said you usually came from this direction so we went and looked. This place isn't exactly hidden. I know a few good builders that can make underground dungeons nobody will eever find, if you're interested. Also by the blood of womankind, you're a three mark? How?"

"That's a lot to take in. You wanted to meet me, why?" Ilea asked, a little unsure about the whole situation. Pierce seemed... a bit volatile. The presence of Verena put her at ease a little, partially because of her stoic behavior. The blood was still on her face. *And she's supposed to be the berserker.*

"I was in town. Not often this far south. Felt Verena was here too and we hadn't seen each other in..." she trailed off before she refocused. "So here we are! I heard you fought off demons and went to the north! Have you been north north? Like up there, where even the lightning doesn't reach?"

"I... I'm not sure what you mean," Ilea said and slowly approached. "Have you taken my food?"

"We wouldn't dare!" Pierce exclaimed. "I hunted this myself. It's deer. Do you want some?" she asked and walked back to collect the now slightly dusty piece of bloody meat. She used her cute shoes to clean up the blood, mostly just spreading it out a little more.

"I'm good right now, just ate," Ilea said. "What about your reasons?" she addressed Verena.

Pierce walked past Ilea, taking a good look at Kyrian. "You're new," she said and tried to get closer, the metal mage taking a step back. "Shy too... how interesting. Can you not speak?"

Ilea left her friend to his terrible fate, looking at the mud and blood in her living room. She sighed and sat down opposite Verena.

"She wanted to meet you. I'm impressed you managed to reach level five hundred before all the Elders. Congratulations," Verena said, drinking from her jug. "I will clean up when we leave. The enchantments, I can't repair. She never holds back, and gets frustrated easily."

"Thank you," Ilea said, unsure where to go from there. They had arrived to two Shadow Elders in her house. Without much of a reason to be there other than meeting her.

Kyrian had reinforced his armor, engaged in a slow battle with the much smaller woman as both took calculated steps. Her to corner him and him to escape. A hunter and her prey.

Ilea thought it valuable experience for him. With his status and soon surely wealth too, he would have to be able to handle this and more. Better to do so in a safe environment and with someone he would likely not accidentally kill.

"You must've fought some strong creatures. Four marks too. You have a third Class, no?" Verena asked.

"I do. And yes, among others. I was lucky with some high level creatures available in abundance," she said.

“That’s how it goes. Most of the threats I hunt are no match for me, or lack the numbers to provide a climb like yours,” Verena said and drank. “Don’t tell me about the third Class. I’ll figure it out myself when I get there.”

“Sure, it’s kind of self explanatory anyway,” Ilea answered.

Verena grunted. “Pierce, leave him alone. You’re making him uncomfortable. We’re guests here.”

The woman turned on her heel and smirked. “You’re no fun. Have you ever seen a man of his level? With so little... *experience?*” Pierce said and walked over, lightly brushing Ilea’s shoulder as she passed and sat down on one of the chairs. “I suppose if he fought with you, it’s no wonder. You made quite the waves in the plains. Lilith this, Lilith that. I was sure you were some kind of beast masquerading as a human adventurer. But here we are. You’re flesh and blood, just like us. I can’t say I’m not at least a little envious. Your healer thing must’ve really worked out for you.”

“It’s quite powerful, yes. I was lucky,” Ilea said.

The woman waved her off. “False modesty. Luck is always involved. Even in being born. We all have opportunities and while they may differ, you have certainly proven yourself. To be here, capable of... killing both of us... with a mere afterthought,” she said and shuddered slightly. “It’s... exciting.”

“You’re freaking me out a little,” Ilea said.

“Ah, yes. I do that to people. Not many have the balls to say that however,” she said and laughed, leaning back in her chair. “It’s so fucking enjoyable to behave like this surrounded by stuck up nobility. But you wouldn’t get that. You’re low born, aren’t you?”

“I am,” Ilea admitted. “You’re related to Elisabeth Pierce then?”

The woman grinned. “The little bitch? Yes. Somewhere along the family tree. But nobility come and go, most poisoned or killed in their sleep. And yet they call me the monster. It’s lovely.”

Ilea couldn’t help but smile. It was just so very absurd. “Certainly sounds like a lovely way to grow up.”

Pierce blinked her eyes before she shook her head. “Ah no no, my parents did wonderful work. I’m not this way because of my family, may they rest in peace. I was always... a little different. So, what are you up to? What kind of monsters is the three mark Lilith, ruler of Ravenhall and the southern mountains, terror of Baralia, and savior of Hallowfort up to?”