

Chapter 668 History

“Would be cool to have that tech,” Ilea mused. “But I do like my fleshy body.”

“It’s rather traumatic apparently. Much is lost, and much is gained. Not likely a process our species could provide with the resources we currently have. I doubt even the Elves could match it,” he said.

“So Vor has been looking for the keys?” she asked.

Scipio crossed his arms. “I don’t know. I don’t know what he knows, or any other Ascended for that matter. Other than Nes. It’s been a very long time, since the sun was taken.”

“You don’t think any of them would continue the war?” she asked.

The man raised his brows. “There was no war, Lilith. Those who invaded Kohr were merely scavengers thinking themselves participants in a war. Underestimated, certainly, but had they faced a united Olym Arcena, not one would have returned, or so I believe. The sources were only taken thanks to those working to prevent further destruction.”

“Wait, sources?” Ilea asked.

The man remained silent for a few seconds. “So you don’t know everything at least. I hope you understand the implications.”

Now there’s more of them.

“How many?” she asked.

“It doesn’t matter,” he said, making it clear that he wouldn’t share anything else on the subject.

I suppose that’s true, she thought.

“I have told you much, Lilith,” he said. “May I learn how you know my name?”

Ilea smiled. “I don’t see why not.”

Rhyvor and her story with the royals shouldn’t have much of an impact on the other issues at hand. They suspected the Ascended had something to do with the more powerful monsters appearing in Rhyvor, but neither Maro nor Elana know anything definitive.

“These were your lands once, weren’t they? Human lands,” she said.

“A frontier, then and now. Though not quite as dangerous when we started building settlements,” he said.

“Rhyvor. I stumbled upon the Tremor dungeon in my travels,” she said.

He glanced at her. “I see. The capital remained in some form. Then you must’ve found records of me, or a portrait perhaps?”

Ilea paused, looking at him before she smiled. “No. I found Maro, and Elana.”

“Their graves? Why would there be a mention of me?” he asked.

“No, they’re alive and well,” Ilea answered.

He blinked his eyes a few times, looking out onto the north and back to her. “WHAT!?” he exclaimed, lifting a hand and pointing at her. “You... you’re fabricating this.”

“Maro Invalar, king of Rhyvor. He sacrificed himself at the end of some local war, taking over the dead kingsguard and most of the dead knights of Rhyvor, fighting off the invaders and defending the capital,” she explained.

“You need more proof than that to support such a ludicrous story,” he said.

Ilea tapped her cheek. “Hmm... something personal then. Maro didn’t actually want to be king, but he was just super charismatic. Not that I really get that part, he can be kind of an ass. Elana was the one really ruling. He was often off on adventures or similar shit. He gave me this,” she said and revealed the Legacy of Rhyvor. “But I suppose I could’ve just looted it somewhere. We investigated the Soul rippers, powerful monsters that came into the local dungeons, the same happening in many areas of Rhyvor. Based on runes I found later, I think the Ascended were responsible for their summoning.”

“That’s... true, all of it,” Scipio said. “But I still find it hard to believe. Thousands of years... and they did nothing?” he asked.

“Well Maro was stuck in the machine controlling the knights, which were later taken over by the city turned dungeon. A bit unfortunate I suppose, but I don’t think he expected to actually succeed. Elana took care of him and managed to sleep through most of the time,” Ilea said, not mentioning that the woman may or may not have lost a few of her marbles along the way. “How do you feel about them?” she asked instead.

“It’s been so long, I barely remember their faces,” he said quietly. “But a part of me... would like to see them again. We were adventurers together, a very, very long time ago. When we were all still young, so full of stupidity and idealism. I parted ways with them and Rhyvor many years before that idiot was declared King. I knew immediately it was Elana,” he said and laughed. “She was just too cold for our peoples, but I’m sure in time they understood, and came to accept her.”

“Have you been to Hallowfort?” Ilea asked.

“You mentioned it before. A settlement of Dark Ones in the north, is it not? I have heard whispers but have yet to find its location,” he said. “Is it within the Dark Protector’s domain?”

“It’s independent,” Ilea said. “And Elana joined their council.”

He smiled lightly. “She did always advocate for other species. A woman before her time, I suppose. Maro is by her side, I assume?”

“He’s... no. I have no idea where he is. Asila some time ago, but who knows where now,” she said.

“You’re aware of how dangerous that could be? That man has a way of influencing people,” he said.

“It’s weird right? Some kind of hidden Charisma stat,” Ilea mused.

He nodded. “I was sure he wasn’t human. Some kind of mind magic creature hiding in his skin, but I never found conclusive evidence.”

“You could find him and ask, maybe he’s mellowed out a bit after all these centuries,” Ilea said.

“No. Never. Not with everything on the line,” he said. “Maro can’t keep any secrets, nor would he want to be involved in the things I know.”

He looked up at the waiting group, Verena and Feyrair ready to storm inside the moment Ilea called. Pierce was juggling with daggers.

“The fewer who learn of us, the better,” Scipio said. “Even if you may trust them, it would mean a lot if you kept our presence here to yourself.”

Ilea did trust them, but this had become a little bigger than she previously thought. She trusted Feyrair, especially after what happened in the Praetorian facility, but she didn't know how he would react to what she learned here. If anything, he didn't seem like someone capable of keeping secrets for extended periods of time. Nor was she, if she was honest.

What she definitely wanted to avoid was the Elders learning about everything here. She decided to talk to Feyrair later, and in private. Right now they were all working together, perhaps in a pursuit of a future alliance, but with the knowledge she had gained here, she wasn't entirely sure anymore. Before it had been about stopping the Taleen, but someone would get the source. And she didn't know if Isalthar would leave it to them.

“I don't think I'll be able to tell a convincing lie about what happened in there,” she said. “But I can try. I suppose it depends on what you're actually doing here. There were tubes with humanoids inside them, and all the Ascended research I've seen so far was rather... problematic, for all living creatures on Elos.”

He chuckled. “I understand. I suppose after everything they've done, it's only natural to think them our enemy. Especially after so much time has passed. I guess nothing but the truth will do. I don't know if I could stop you, nor do I want to risk myself and Nes to try. Too much is on the line. Come, let me show you.”

Ilea followed him back inside, teleporting past the quickly deactivated anti space magic field.

“I will show her around. It's going to be fine,” the man whispered to Nes who still sat in the same chair, her glowing eyes looking at Ilea before they focused back on Scipio.

She followed him down into the cellar where she had found the containers before. Nes remained upstairs.

“Navuun,” Scipio said. “The ones saved before their sun was taken.”

“They're dead,” Ilea said.

“Not quite. Not yet. What your magic fails to perceive is the genetic material and tissue present. No longer able to sustain themselves, they were put into a near perfect stasis. What you see here is what we believe to be all remaining Navuun. And we aim to bring them back to life,” he said.

Now that's a risk, to tell me that, she thought. “Commendable, I guess. But why here?”

“You don't deem them a danger to mankind?” he asked in a curious voice.

“If you don't implant their minds with some kind of terminate all humans command. I befriended a Mind Weaver, Fae, fire fox, and a tree of all things. I think it's safe to say I don't really care,” she said.

“I have several new questions, but regardless, that is our cause. I have learned much about their physiology and they require a lot more mana in their environment than humans do. The north is appropriate but the conditions have to be perfect, especially upon their waking,” he explained.

“They're gonna have a shock when they wake up after all those years, that much is sure,” she said.

“These are children, Lilith. Young enough to remember very little. It was the only way they could ensure their survival. Nes tells me the adults died upon entering the stasis,” he said.

Ilea didn't know if he was speaking the truth. If he was, she didn't see a reason to reveal their location to anyone or to hinder them in any way. The Navuun had the same right to survive as everyone else. Those not directly responsible for the sun removal that was. The fact that Nes hadn't immediately attacked or insulted her was nearly enough to convince her already. And the way she reacted when Ilea had mentioned the demons. She wouldn't take any of it back. They slaughtered near all of Ravenhall, but she could empathize with Nes's view point. To an extent.

“What were you doing with Cless? I don't think you being in the same dungeon was a coincidence,” Ilea said.

“It wasn't. I look for fissures in this realm, connections and shifts. You should understand if you can see the fabric. It has always fascinated me, but now it's more than that. Anything could come through, worse even than Ascended. And sometimes reasonable beings from other realms show up, willingly or more often, not. Cless could not share any world changing research with me, but I was happy to save her in a place unknown to her, and to teach her some things that may help her on her journey,” he said.

“What if we hadn't shown up?” Ilea asked.

“You are aware of the concept of an orphanage, I hope? A gifted child like her would have a better chance than most others. In her realm, she benefited from education far beyond what a child her age would receive in even a noble household,” he said.

“Any clue how she got here? I don't think she's a capable space mage who tore through the fabric,” Ilea said.

“There are many possibilities. I can share my research on the topic with you, if you are interested. In regards to Cless herself, it is as you say, she lacks any perception of the fabric. To her, she simply appeared here, much like many I found before,” he said.

Nothing new here, Ilea thought, a little disappointed. “Can you go to other realms?” she asked instead.

“I fail to understand what this has to do with the work we're doing here, or your secrecy,” he said.

“I thought we were done with that already,” Ilea said. *You didn't attack me and you saved Cless. What additional evidence do I need?*

He blinked his eyes a few times. “You are far more trusting than I dared hope.”

“Yeah, that's why I have multidimensional friends,” she mused.

He walked back towards the stairs. “As to your question. Yes, as can you. If you're asking if I can form a fissure myself, the answer is no. There are theoretical ways but they require a lot of energy, the sacrifice of essence, as is the case in blood magic, or simply an unfathomable amount of preparation and perfect execution. As there are always two or more realms involved, including the fabric that connects all, the conditions need to be perfect. The story changes when you have access to two realms, or a magically ingrained location in the fabric. Two anchors in two realms are not so different from two points in the same one, though more energy will be required to travel between. I have developed ways to detect shifts and fissures, one of the most reliable ways to travel to unknown realms still a simple occurrence of chance, as infuriating as that is to accept. Though I suggest you have an anchor here, to not get stranded, should you ever choose to follow such a trail.

I have seen worlds filled with creatures perhaps equal to the very Dragons that rule the skies far north of here.”

I poked his passion topic, Ilea thought, looking at the Navuun staring back at them.

“You have learned of our purpose then?” she asked.

“I did. I even know some people that might be able to help,” she said. *Can't keep this puzzle from the Meadow. Not after everything it's done for me.*

“I will not underestimate you again. Who would know more than us and be willing to help?” Scipio asked.

“My friend, Deus Ex Machina. The Meadow. It's entire raison d'être is to help creatures awaken. I'm pretty sure it would gladly assist your cause,” Ilea said. *And it could figure out if there was anything fucky going on. Just in case. And only because you sliced off my legs, Golden Eyes.*

“I will meet this Deus Ex being, and see if it truly is worth our time,” Scipio said.

Ilea looked at him and laughed.

“What?” he asked in a hissing tone.

“Ah yes, I'm sure it will be honored to meet a master space mage like yourself,” Ilea said in a mock encouraging tone.

“I'm ready to be humbled, Lilith, if that is what you think will happen. But I prefer to make my own impressions instead of trusting your judgment. Your extensive knowledge is the only reason I'm even considering it in the first place,” he said.

“Sure,” Ilea said, still smiling.

He squinted at her and crossed his arms. “Is Deus Ex the one who taught you about space magic?”

“I was joking before. It's name is just the Meadow,” she said. “And I did learn a lot from it, but I suppose the Fae was more detrimental in the actual Class acquisition.”

“You mentioned it. But the ones I encountered did not communicate, nor did they seem interested in me in any way,” he said. “How did someone like you... no offense... manage to gain their trust?”

“Offense taken,” Ilea said. “Maybe you just weren't *violent* enough.”

“They were some of the most peaceful creatures I encountered in my travels,” he said in a confused tone.

“Shame. Their realm really was quite unforgettable,” Ilea said.

“You... how did you get there? What did you do? Tell me?” he said, getting louder and closer, touching her shoulder at one point before he retreated, tearing at his hair.

Ilea laughed, finding Nes joining in.

“Long has it been,” she said when they had calmed down, Scipio merely grumbling to himself. “Since laughter filled this hall.”

Lovely marriage it seems, Ilea thought. “Maybe take a break and go on a date sometimes,” she said.

“Do not worry for us, dear. We find the time, but not here,” Nes said and gently touched her arm.

“How do you, you know?” Ilea whispered to her.

The Navuun put a hand to her mouth. “Oh, you already know his name. I shall not share any more of his secrets, Lilith. He is a private man.”

“Great, now I’m even more interested,” she said.

Scipio ignored them, murmuring about the Fae. “How. How do you contact them? Do you have a way? To return?”

“If you meet the Meadow, you might run into Violence. Ah if you hurt or use the little guy, I will hunt you down to the end of the very fabric of reality,” she said with a smile.

“Every creature with more than two cells in their brain understands the fallacy of such an action,” he murmured.

“Then Vor apparently lacks a brain,” Ilea said.

Scipio looked up in shock. “He did. Good to know. We might be able to use it against him if he ever finds us here. Making enemies of creatures in the realms of Dragons and Fae is the very downfall of the arrogant.”

“Eh... do you know Audur, per chance?” Ilea asked, scratching the back of her head as she laughed a little.

“The Guardian of the West. I have heard of her. Best avoid her domain entirely, she is apparently very easily angered and is known to hold on to grudges for millennia,” he said.

“Shit,” Ilea said.

The man stared at her for a full five seconds. “Well. Good luck.”

“Thanks,” Ilea mused. “I just have to reach a suitable level before she finds me.”

“If anyone can do it, I’m sure it would be you,” Nes said in a confident tone. “Despite your weak magical affinity, I was always fascinated with the drive and adaptability humanity showed.”

“It’s really just healing and resistances,” Ilea said. “And a bunch of luck.”

The Navuun chuckled lightly. “There is no need for false modesty. You are among people who know what it takes to get past level three hundred.”

“Speaking of levels, what would the Navuun be? They are mammals I assume?” Ilea asked.

“Pregnancy takes much longer than what you humans require, and it is, rare. Most were born at close to level two hundred, with high affinities for mind magic, space magic, and other variations depending on the parents’ genetics. The body you see before you is not that of a Navuun however, and we did not have to fight the same struggle to reach the power we wield, though I suppose as a civilization, the pursuit of technological advances is a struggle all on its own,” she explained.