

Chapter 521 Warriors

How very military of you, Ilea thought. “Let me talk to them first at least.”

“If they attack, it’s over,” the General said.

“I hope they do,” Hector said as he joined them.

“How stable is this exactly?” Felicia asked.

“We cannot collapse it. It’s simply impossible. With the knowledge and power at my disposal,” Michael said.

Felicia glanced at the group before she gulped and joined them.

“I won’t stay back,” she whispered.

“I agree with Lilith. A diplomatic approach will lead to more gain,” Michael said.

“For you and your research. They’re not human. Treat them like you would treat Elves,” Velamyr said.

As I intend to do, Ilea thought with a smile behind her ashen armor.

She wondered why the creatures before had already been frenzied as soon as they arrived. A question she would ask Michael if the opportunity presented itself.

“The three we were hunting aren’t here,” Velamyr said.

“Probably went through already,” Michael suggested.

Ilea walked close to the gate and stretched out her hand. “Then let’s see what’s waiting for us in the realm of life.”

When her hand touched the fissure, it created ripples on the surface but she didn’t feel anything. It felt no different than the very air currently around her. Her hand pushed further and she noticed something peculiar.

Ilea pulled out her arm and pushed it in again.

“What is it?” Michael asked.

“Yeah, get on with it,” Hector said and jumped through without waiting for any feedback.

Ilea didn’t let it disturb her.

“My hand was gone,” she said.

Michael touched his chin. “It’s possible. Your arm really was in a different place entirely.”

She smiled.

Freaky.

And stepped through.

Ilea was hit by freezing air. Air at least and not a vacuum or a different substance entirely.

Like water, she thought, reminded of the great salt.

She felt the mana around her to be substantially more dense than back in Elos. It compared to some of the deeper dungeons she had visited but didn't come close to her experience at the bottom of the Descent.

It was dark, leaving the impression that she was underground but Ilea quickly realized that wasn't the case.

Ice crystals formed on top of her armor but quickly dissolved again, unable to push against her resistance. Her breath formed a mist in front of her armor.

Hector stood close by, his face scrunched into a displeased grimace.

"Alright there, waterboy?" she asked.

He looked at her, the ice forming on his body crunching with the movement. "Fuck this place."

She couldn't help but laugh.

They were situated in a spacious courtyard, the pyramid like temple before them extending upward. Around them were rudimentary stone structures, pillars, and walls. All of it was covered in a layer of snow and ice.

She looked up and saw the obvious culprit for both the cold and the dim light. A solar eclipse was currently in progress.

There were various beings present, hiding behind nearby pillars or in the doorways leading into the halls beyond. They were of the same species as the monsters they had fought back in Nara but their levels were significantly lower. All were still above two hundred.

Their behavior however was very different, their many eyes focused on the newcomers and the fissure behind, intelligence shining in them compared to the mindless creatures they had faced before.

Ilea felt distress from some of them with her Sentinel Huntress skill.

Peace? She sent to the nearest creatures, trying to establish contact with her third tier Mental Resistance.

A few of them reeled back, others outright ran away.

She got no answer.

"What did you do?" Hector asked.

"Just tried to talk," she said, spreading her arms wide.

"Do you speak our language?" she asked when Michael came out of the gate.

All five of his self were there, suggesting that he had a way to return to Elos or he really believed the gate to be stable. He used a few spells on himself to ward off the cold and the arcane power as he looked around.

Ilea could see the freezing air around him warm up through her sphere.

Velamyr and Felicia followed.

The latter immediately buckled.

Ilea was by her side an instant later and pushed healing mana into her.

“What is this?” Felicia asked, an armor of wind flowing around her.

“You’ll be fine. It’s pretty dense mana. And just freezing air,” Ilea said to her, keeping up her healing. “Do you want to go back?”

Felicia lifted her head and stared at Ilea, the look in her eyes changing suddenly. She shook her head slowly.

Ilea felt her body heat up slightly, the damage done to her by the cold now healing, even without her interference.

Berserker stuff.

“They’re not hostile,” she said.

Velamyr looked around, lightning flowing on his armor, his movements not visibly slowed by the surrounding energy.

Ilea could tell that the mana was bothering him, if only a little.

Only Hector and herself seemed to be entirely unaffected. His water of course proved problematic but other than a comedic frozen look, it didn’t seem to inhibit him.

“Same conclusion on the gate, Michael?” Velamyr asked.

The gold mage only nodded, staring at the manifestation behind him.

“Do they speak a language?” the General asked.

Michael loudly said a few words, supposedly different languages. He tried to form something with his gold and finally used blood magic to directly connect to some of the creatures.

All it did was make more of the beings run off.

They’re scared.

“None of them are three marks,” Velamyr said.

“If their mana gets out of control, their minds will be destroyed and their power will be pushed to the highest possible ability,” Michael said.

Dude seems to know everything, Ilea thought. She knew the Knights of Rhyvor had been taken by the dungeon somehow. Maybe this was similar.

Would this have happened to Elfie had he succumbed to the mana?

“A lack of mana does the same as too much of it?” she asked.

“Likely,” the gold mage said and gave her a long look.

“So they can’t go to our realm without turning into monsters. Let’s see what we can loot then,” Hector said.

“Leave one of your own here to protect the fissure. We don’t want any of them to get through,” Velamyr said. “If we can find any answers or beings that can communicate with us, then in there.”

He pointed to the temple in front of them and the two large stone gates standing wide open, a stairwell leading up right behind.

Ilea used Heart of Cinder to keep the freezing air from even touching her armor.

“Let’s go,” she said and walked towards the temple entrance, trying to seem as non threatening as possible.

Hector did the opposite, clapping his hands towards one of the ants hiding behind a nearby pillar. The thing rushed away as he cackled.

The rest followed too, all of them with magic flowing around them.

Ilea immediately felt the cold subside when she stepped past the threshold.

Something else however took its place.

A presence, something that pushed against her mind with a curious interest.

To anybody else it might have seemed like a mental attack but to her it was obviously just someone making contact.

She could tell that the being was located deep within the temple, its mind magic capabilities rudimentary at best. Enough to make conversation perhaps but nothing compared to even Weavy.

Ilea smirked at the thought of considering Weavy a low point in mental powers.

Nobody else had reacted in any way as they ascended the broad and high stairs.

She sent something back to the being.

Hello.

Coupled with a mental wave of her hand and peaceful thoughts. She wasn’t exactly far beyond the powers of this thing when it came to mind magic.

Clicking noises could be heard from the top of the stairwell by now, a bunch of mantis creatures looking their way before they ran off.

Ilea heard a moan that sounded decidedly human, picking up her pace as they rushed up.

They reached a large open space, dozens of beings present. A central mantis creature glared at them and punched the blade of a spear through an armored man’s head.

Not a single drop of blood or brain matter splattered out before the spear was ripped out again, leaving a hollow wound both to Ilea’s eyes and sphere.

The mantis creature looked similar to those she had faced before. A pale pinkish color and two large bulges holding two small beady eyes. The being was naturally armored, covered from head to its thin legs in a pink carapace. Flowers of various colors and sizes decorated the being’s armor and head, fastened to it with simple frayed string. It looked a little smaller than the many other mantises in the room, almost delicate.

The spotless spear of bone and steel coupled with the savage execution suggested otherwise. It held the weapon with the natural grace of an experienced hunter, moving it into a defensive position as it watched the newcomers.

The murdered man had been clad in white plate armor, several uneven cuts, dents, and blood suggested a recent fight. Two more human corpses lay by his side, and a few other corpses from the various present species.

[Warrior – lvl ??]

Her Veteran skill informed her that the creature wasn't far beyond her identify range but probably still beyond four hundred.

Many of the creatures moved through the hall at the clicking of the central one, likely their leader.

She noted how some of them were in distress, while others didn't seem to mind the tension. Six Mantises specifically, standing close to the spear wielder. Two of them had weapons too, one wielding what looked like a massive tooth and the other holding a rope made of a black material that constantly flowed around it as if it was alive itself.

"Those are the people we fought before, all three of them," Felicia supplied.

"We come in peace," Ilea said.

The being simply continued its clicks, all of the present creatures fanning out into what looked like a defensive formation.

"I don't think they're peaceful," Hector said with a grin, his sphere of water forming around him.

They all prepared to fight, Michael saying a few words in various languages.

Ilea tried to make a connection with the beings here, specifically the spear wielder. All her tricks did was make the creature focus on her.

The highest level mantises were all between two ninety and three fifty, warriors without exception.

As soon as Michael formed a shape with his gold, all hell broke loose.

A dozen creatures sent their spells at the group of humans, many who didn't attack still stuck in indecision it seemed.

The seven main Mantis creatures didn't hesitate, rushing at them with claws and weapons. A few vanished instantly.

Ilea used monster hunter, whistling, before she saw a spear coming at her. *No teleport*, she realized, dodging the quick attack thanks to her precognition. She felt the attack shift to where she went, grazing her ashen armor and ripping a chunk of it out.

What?

She vanished, focusing entirely on the battle as she sacrificed five hundred points of health to activate her third tier aura. Displacement moved a dozen projectiles back at the creatures, her wings carrying her above most of them as spears of ash formed.

Ilea used force to try and trip up the warriors assaulting her group.

Shields made of blood appeared around them, flashes of lightning crashing into the creatures as a storm of air exploded through the hall.

The fifth Michael left behind joined the battle near the stairs.

She saw Hector on top of a wave somewhere to her left, water flowing into the paralyzed beings as if a dam had broken.

Ilea displaced some of the creatures into the coming flood, subjecting them to the heavy pressure and near guaranteed instant death Hector's magic would provide.

The spear wielder watched Ilea for a second before moving, its thin legs running against the air as if it was the most solid of grounds.

Fuck that thing's-

Another stab nearly got to her but Ilea blinked away, deflecting a claw attack from one of the high leveled mantis warriors before her limbs slashed into it, ashen spears rushing out to the various creatures close by.

Her punch landed on the creature before her, slightly chipping its carapace before lightning cracked, a bright and condensed beam slamming into its right eye, leaving only scorched flesh.

Ilea broke away before she joined Felicia and two Michaels, his shields and armor deflecting projectiles and claws. Blades of wind and small spikes of gold flew around them, trying to injure the creatures.

The warriors dodged with their teleportation and resumed their assault, clashing with Ilea and her ash.

One of them managed to dig its sharp claws into her shoulder, using a combination of auras, and some kind of condensed energy around its natural weapons.

Ilea had seen the damage and chose to trade its blow with a chance to pin it down. Force barely slowed the higher leveled creatures but when their bodies were connected, it hardly mattered.

She deflected its other hand with hers, reverse healing coupled with Flare of Creation, Storm of Cinders, and Destruction crashing into the thing as she tried to cover it fully in white flames.

Ashen limbs smashed into its open maw that tried to bite into her head, Ilea holding its left arm tight and within her shoulder to keep the beast close.

It didn't weaken in the few seconds of their engagement, its attacks still coordinated and focused.

She had it pinned down however.

Ilea only let go when the rope wielder tried to trap her. She ripped the arm out of her shoulder and moved her ash, blinking away as to not get trapped by the unknown weapon.

She caught a glimpse of Hector, engaged with the tooth wielder who teleported around, slamming its heavy weapon into his water sphere with surprising efficiency. The beams of condensed water were simply deflected by the carapace covering its arms.

Ilea had to blink again, avoiding the spear aimed at her heart. Her precognition had told her where to dodge but the mantis had adjusted yet again.

It has something similar, she noted.

The being didn't stop this time, hunting her with a teleport of its own.

She deflected the next blow, knowing the spear would cut into her arm.

Ilea ignored the damage. She felt both blood magic and arcane power from the attack. There was even a health drain but instant, compared to the more channeled versions she had previously encountered.

Her ash moved out in response, her fists stopped with quick movements of the spear.

The mantis slashed in a wide arc above, cutting through most of her limbs as if they were made of flesh and bone.

Ilea released Heart of Cinder, her sphere of fire and energy exploding into the close wall and the simple stone throne below.

Her enemy had vanished but now appeared again, Ilea's fists already rushing at the creature that had hardly finished materializing.

They were entangled for a moment, a few of her hits connecting, both her ash and fists but the same was true for the enemy spear.

It ripped out chunks of ash and cleaved through her skin, leaving behind a spell that ate into her flesh much like acid.

Ilea flew out through the broken wall, feeling the passing of a barrier that kept out the cold air.

The mantis followed, its unwavering assault cutting into Ilea's defenses as it tried to keep the ash at bay, mostly successfully. With every stab of its bladed weapon, the being winced back in a barely noticeable fashion.

Ilea only noticed thanks to her sphere. At least her third tier blood magic resistance was working, not that this being cared much.

The mantis stopped for a second, standing in the air with its spear aimed towards her.

Its mandibles clicked, its weapon moved in a way that suggested a challenge.

Ilea breathed out, the air once again a mist in the freezing temperatures. Her wings moved unimpeded.

Outside the temple, she could see a sprawling city of stone, frozen rivers breaking through the mostly pyramid shaped buildings.

A natural defense of rocky terrain protected this place, beyond she saw an endless waste of snow, ice, and mountains. The air was still, near frozen as the two warriors stared at each other.

Ilea activated her third tier Awakening when an explosion of power rushed out from the mantis.

Its spear glowed with a deep red, as did its body, its eyes focused on her with a promise of death.

Ilea's precognition recognized the attack as she flew backwards, Force and ash forming a defense in front of her.

The mantis turned left instead, past her defenses, its spear slashing into her side.

Her armor partially deflected it, the blade leaving a nasty gash that quickly reformed, no blood drawn but its spell still affecting her.

Ilea felt the same mix of blood and arcane wash over her entire body, more intensely where the blade had recently struck. Her healing nullified the impact, her form resisting the oppressive spell slowly eating her alive.

Next to the mantis' blade itself, the spell now extended in an aura around the warrior.

The creature didn't stop either, its speed multiplied as it rushed her. It dodged a dozen ashen limbs, moving through the air ignoring gravity itself. Its spear rushed out, extending its already high range to slightly below Ilea's limbs.

Both ash and armor were cut as Ilea was pushed to the defensive. Force slightly helped with deflecting the blows but most of the work was done by her fighting skills and her armor.

A few consecutive strikes opened her up and she was forced to blink, the mantis appearing at the same time and continuing its attacks. Three strikes cut away her ash before a fourth stabbed through her arm, sliding against the bone as the magic spread through her.

Ilea just healed the damage and continued the fight, blinking down and through the stone houses as she tried to catch a breath.

Heart of Cinder activated again but too little time had passed to make it powerful enough. The mantis simply stayed, its carapace slightly blackened as it used the moment to cut through Ilea's left leg.

The wound was already healing when another strike separated muscle, even biting into the bone below.

Ilea deflected dozens of blows, now using her ash purely defensively as she spread more through the small frozen home they had entered.

She had no time to think, acting purely on instinct and based on her skills when the mantis suddenly slowed considerably. Back to a manageable pace, one where she could see the blows as they happened and didn't have to rely solely on her precognition to even see the attacks.

The enemy possessed a similar ability, adjusting in tune with Ilea.