

Chapter 534 Escort Mission

The Meadow's estimate in regards to the survivor's training had been a little too optimistic.

It took them a little over three weeks to reach high enough levels of Arcane Magic Resistance. Michael helped provide testing for lower mana density with siphoning runes that created an area with lower mana.

They confirmed that the resistance worked for lower density too, allowing the dark ones to tread the prepared areas without issues. Ilea's healing wasn't even necessary.

It was impossible for the man to provide an area even close to Elos' mana levels but both her and Meadow were confident the Dark Ones would survive with Ilea's supportive healing. Either that or they had to reach a third tier resistance, which all things considered, was pretty much impossible.

"Well done," Meadow said when their testing was concluded.

Michael bowed. *"Endless Meadow, your generous comment is well appreciated."*

Ilea glanced at him before she looked towards Meadow's tunnel. *"What's up with him?"*

"Some people know to respect knowledgeable and powerful wielders of the arcane," Meadow said.

"But you're not an arcane mage," Ilea said.

The meadow sent a mental sigh.

"I could bring you sacrifices as gifts. Oh great Endless Father of the world and space itself, me, thy unworthy-" Ilea felt herself being moved but only appeared a few meters away. *"Oh Father! Hast I offended thee? I shall punish mine own body until thy forgiveth mine personage!"*

"Are you sure you're not an annoyance mage?" Meadow asked.

"Who knows, might be my fourth and hidden Class," Ilea said with a shrug.

Michael glanced at her but didn't comment. He hadn't heard a thing.

"Why did you only contact me initially by the way? With him, the pirate, and Velamyr present?" she asked.

"Your mind appears differently. I believe you're the only one of them with a third tier resistance to mind magic. Coupled with your designation as a healer, I deemed you the most reasonable of them," Meadow said. *"I was wrong. Michael is much easier to deal with."*

"Yeah, but he'll eat your Dark Ones and dissect each grass blade of yours if he can get something useful out of it," Ilea said.

"A man in pursuit of knowledge. Pain and sacrifice may be necessary to achieve certain goals. Did you not help in torturing the survivors with the goal of gaining resistances? What is such pain to them if it means their continued survival?" Meadow asked.

"Not exactly the same," Ilea said. *"I only do it when people consent and if there isn't another way. Admittedly though... I haven't seen him do any shady shit. It's mostly what I heard."*

"Second hand information is often unreliable. Like many of your books. Some of the described magic and Classes simply cannot exist," Meadow said.

“That’s fiction... it’s not real. On purpose. Written by people barely hitting level fifty,” Ilea said.

“Simply for entertainment... yes. You’ve explained it before. It just seems... intentionally misinforming, though... enjoyable,” Meadow said.

“You should write an angry letter to the local publishers. I’m sure that will bring change,” Ilea said.

“You have provided sufficient samples of sarcasm, Lilith. There is no need to add to the growing pile,” Meadow said.

“Are you sure? You’re a monstrous Meadow... I don’t think you Really understand,” Ilea said.

“Will you move them then?” Meadow asked.

“Sure. I’ll have to check in with a friend beforehand and make sure the local authorities here don’t get in the way. Though with how their siege is going, I doubt they’ll care much for our endeavors here,” she said.

Baralia had still not fallen. It had been kind of expected, knowing how easily Lys had conquered most of the kingdom. A lot of their higher leveled people and much of their resources had been concentrated in the capital over the last few months.

Ilea hoped it would work.

“How long will you need?” Meadow asked.

“The journey is quite long. And with their low levels I can’t just fly through the storms. It shouldn’t take me more than a week or so,” she said.

“You mentioned having to talk to a friend before?” Meadow asked.

“Oh don’t worry. If she doesn’t agree, there are mostly safe alternatives,” she said and summoned her notebook. *“Can you inform them that we’re moving?”*

“Of course. What about the local authorities?” it asked.

“They won’t dare attack me,” she said, ready to knock a few people out if she was wrong. The highest level individuals of Gyffold had joined the war efforts, leaving a thinning garrison of both Empire and Gyffold troops that were busy enough with the situation as it was. Dealing with Lilith and her antics was definitely beyond their pay grade.

“You’ll bring the creatures through to Elos?” Michael asked. He had ditched his helmet, the full plate gold armor replaced with an elegant suit. There was still plenty of gold worked into the black and red colored attire but he didn’t look like a warrior anymore.

Ilea found the man looked rather plain, his hair now disheveled and his eyes a little sunken in.

“Did it not inform you?” Ilea asked.

“Merely that I should not interfere with your actions,” Michael said.

“I’ll bring them north. They should be able to survive there,” she said.

“It’s a dangerous territory,” Michael said. *“But the mana density will likely be enough.”*

“That’s what I thought, yeah,” she said, not sharing anything in regards to her knowledge of the north. *“You should catch some sleep. And eat something.”*

He looked at her and blinked, rubbing his eyes. *“Useless human shell,”* he murmured.

“Well you could warp into some kind of golden sphere. Or become a Meadow,” she suggested.

“Either may be more efficient. I shall consider it for the future,” he said.

Only three Michaels had remained, the rest likely gone to take care of matters in Kroll or Baralia.

By now she could tell the difference between them by the way they talked and moved. The original always moved a little more deliberately than the others. Even just the way he turned a page looked slower and more precise than the more careless behavior of his clones.

She didn't deem it impossible for him to fake all that just in case Ilea or the Meadow turned against him. By now she gave it a fifty fifty chance that she was right. It took her sphere and extended exposure to his mannerisms to come to the conclusion. If he tried to fake it, he would likely be a little more obvious.

What she deemed the original had remained here at all times. He didn't train or fight, just talked to the Meadow, his notes and books now extending over several tables he had put up. A small library had been added to the hallway.

“Please don't. I'm sure your body is warped enough as it is, with your blood and gold magic,” Ilea said.

“Our potential is quite extensive, truly. You are living proof of that,” Michael said. “Will you return here after the survivors are taken care of?”

“Of course. The closing of the gate remains,” she said.

He looked at her and sighed. “There really is no other way, is there?”

“I know you want it open but the risk remains,” Ilea said.

“I've made more progress in the past six weeks than in the last three years combined. Endless Meadow is a fountain of knowledge, one I wish not to give up. The tests it is capable of executing are incredible... the sheer output of power,” he said, his eye contact waning before his speech turned into a murmur.

“Will you oppose it?” Ilea asked.

He looked up. “No... no of course not. I agree with your assessment. No matter how much I learn here, we cannot allow the Spirits to enter Elos.”

“You could just leave a few copies here. Maybe they'll figure out a way to get back at some point,” Ilea said.

“Unlikely. And I would weaken myself for an extended period of time. Theoretically they should survive even if the gate is removed. The problem of transmitting information remains. I'm not a space mage,” he said and looked at one of his copies.

“I... Lilith. I can't be certain but... did you use realm encompassing teleportation before?” he asked.

She didn't reply.

“When you returned a few weeks ago, I hadn't seen you leave. I would at least detect you when you left for the gate or the spirits,” he said.

“What do you want?” Ilea asked.

His hand were shaking. “Truly... then it’s possible... do you plan on remaining here when the gate is being closed? You have a way to go back after all. You don’t have to answer... but I will leave my copies here, to observe the closure. And the ensuing battle. Perhaps you could remain too, and bring the knowledge gathered back to Elos.”

“That’s quite a favor to ask. Knowing the danger involved,” she said.

“I shall compensate you, handsomely. Gold, influence in Kroll, knowledge, tutoring, whatever you require. This is a one time chance and you may be the key to documenting this event,” he said.

“*You wanted to stay anyway, or am I wrong?*” Meadow asked.

“*Of course. Do you think I’d avoid meeting those insane Spirits you mentioned?*” Ilea sent back.

“*You would not remain alive. The Daughters of Sephilon would devour even you,*” Meadow warned.

“*I told you I would stay, no need to convince me even further,*” Ilea said.

The Meadow sent an image of rolling eyes. Thousands of them, all disembodied.

Freaky.

“I’ll think about it. First I’ll have to get them north without issues,” she said.

“*Don’t close the gate before I’m back!*” she sent.

“*We have more than two hundred of your days left,*” Meadow said.

“*Even I have felt the mana change. And that was a few weeks. The longer we wait, the more dangerous it’s going to be. Both for you and us,*” she said.

The Meadow didn’t say anything.

“*Are you alright?*” she asked.

“I’m sure I’ll find something to pay you...,” Michael said, taking a few notes on a piece of paper.

“Go sleep. You’ll be more efficient afterwards,” she said.

“I can’t... there is too much unanswered... too many things unaccounted for,” he murmured.

Ilea decided he would collapse at some point. *No reason to force it.*

“*I... find myself... sentimental. At the thought of losing that which I have gained,*” Meadow said.

Ilea smiled.

So confident before, about millennia alone.

“And what is that?” she asked.

“*A friend. I suppose,*” the Meadow said.

Ilea giggled.

“*What?*” Meadow asked.

“*I’m touched. I feel the same way, Meadow,*” Ilea said. “*Let’s talk again when I’m back from the north. Make sure he doesn’t die.*”

“I shall try,” Meadow said. “Thank you, Lilith. I believe that without you, these species would have been doomed.”

“Call me Ilea,” she said and waved to the survivors.

They had plenty of time to read Meadow’s instructions, uncertainty obvious in their body language. They followed nonetheless.

“A pleasure,” Meadow said.

She stopped them right in front of the gate, stepping through herself.

The two dozen mages and warriors sitting behind powerful barriers, enchantments, and explosives tensed and relaxed when they realized who had come.

“Hey. Hello. Yes, it’s me,” Ilea said.

The troop had become even less impressive now that Gyffold had folded to the Empire’s demands. She had wondered why neither Velamyr nor other Imperials had sent people to reinforce the gate.

He’s probably helping me out. Velamyr wants the gate closed after all. What better way to have that done than simply never mentioning the information to his peers. A dangerous game. Or would he just blame me if everything was revealed? Me and Michael?

It didn’t really matter to her. As long as she could get the survivors out and the gate closed.

“We managed to figure out a way to save the species living on the other side. The insect creatures some of you have seen before,” she said. “I’ll get them out one by one and then I’ll move them out of the city.”

“We have specific orders in case something none human comes out of that gate,” today’s officer in charge said to her, her voice surprisingly steady for a level one twenty mage addressing Lilith.

“Yes. Well here’s the deal,” Ilea said. “If you fight me now, I’ll knock you all out, rip off a few limbs here and there. If you attack while I get the creatures out and you kill one, I’ll kill those responsible. Think of them like refugees, just from another realm,” she said.

“You would... the Empire would,” the officer stuttered.

Ilea charged Monster Hunter and whistled.

“I don’t care. We all want this gate closed. For that I need you to stand down. Feel free to report what happened here, I’m sure a lot of people will be very angry. Both at me and you. Or you could just forget about it, wait for me to return, guard the gate for another few days or weeks and then go home when it’s closed.

“I’m sure you’ve heard some things about me,” Ilea said. “Be smart and stand on the right side of history.”

She expanded her ash into the hall and made all the explosives vanish into her necklace. They likely wouldn’t be dangerous to anything but the guards here but she wanted to prevent a trigger happy idiot to cause unnecessary casualties.

Ilea put her arm through the gate and gestured towards herself.

The first creature appeared a moment later, a Mantis at level two hundred and thirty. Her ash immediately caught the convulsing being and helped it fight the lack of mana.

A Willow Mother was next, long and thin legs shaking as it struggled to breathe. Next came a Wildflower Ant. No Needle Flies had remained, their curious nature leading all of them to travel through the incomplete gates.

Ilea waited as the beings stepped through, her mana slowly reduced as she healed them all. There were fifty four beings, each in pain and struggling in the new atmosphere. All of them remained stable.

The guards were watching with various expressions. Not a single one raised their hand against her.

Ilea watched the last creature push through the gate. The single remaining Rock Beetle, struggling to move its massive body through the small entrance.

She moved her ash to help, pulling on its front legs when a powerful push came from the other side, squeezing the large body through.

Ilea healed the rather extensive damage it suffered before she displaced half the creatures up. The second half followed less than half a second later.

She repeated the process until everyone was up in the city and below the night sky of Elos.

A few of the creatures had already calmed down enough to watch, their bodies however still stiff and twitching.

That beetle is so fucking heavy, she thought and pushed them all together, forming a large cocoon of ash that encompassed all the creatures. It was definitely not comfortable but right now that hardly mattered. She had to get north, quickly.

The continuous damage was more extensive than they had expected, her mana regeneration not able to keep up with the constant healing. *Even with knowledge on their anatomy*.

She checked the cocoon one last time and charged her wings.

Ilea held on to the large blob of ash with both hands and all her limbs, her charged wings moving her over and past the walls of Gyffold. Nobody attacked the weird creature.

They bobbed in the air but she managed to hold on, moving them over the lake and northward.

She quickly found that simply using Displacement was more efficient than trying to use her wings and strength.

The spell could be used several times per second, its range more extensive than before. The creatures didn't resist either, allowing her to move them without issues.

Mana wise it cost her more than simply using her wings but the faster she got them north, the earlier she could reduce her healing.

It still took them over half a day to pass over the Naraza mountain chain. Ilea had to stop a few times to focus solely on healing to regenerate her mana. Some of the more conscious creatures helped her along by shooting spells at her to fuel her absorption. It was part of the plan they had worked out together.

Ilea entered one of the crevices as soon as they arrived in the territory past the high reaching mountains, feeling the increased mana density immediately.

The creatures around her seemed like fish, finally thrown back into water.

The drain on her mana was reduced considerably, until it stopped entirely, all the creatures healed to their full hp.

I did it.

“Okay people. I need y-” she started when a purple bolt of arcane lightning slammed into the landscape beyond their crevice.

The insects looked around but kept close to her, checking on each other as they had finally reached a survivable mana density.

Ilea had marked several dungeons on the way here just in case her mana would have drained too much or the creatures were about to die.

Contrary to Elfie, their extended exposure to a lower mana density had continued to cause problems in their bodies. She simply deemed it a difference in their biology compared to the Elves. Ilea wasn't sure which difference was more extensive, the human plains to the north, or the north to a northern dungeon.

“You alright there, buddy?” she asked the massive Rock beetle.

It made a weird clicking sound.

“I'll mark you, as planned,” she said and extended a hand towards the creature.

The Rock Beetle extended one of its legs.

They would spend the day finding a save spot for the creatures to remain. At night, she would carry as many of the Dark Ones as possible to Tremor. Ilea could move safely through the arcane storms on her own but not with the creatures present.