

## Chapter 553 Degrees of Monstrosity

“You mean not at all?” Ilea said.

“*Those I perceive are still. Entirely,*” Meadow said.

“Makes them even creepier. Not like they weren’t horrific already. I should probably take care of them,” she said.

“*If that is what you wish to do,*” Meadow said, obviously not happy with her removing the species.

“You said yourself that they have no mind to think,” she said.

“*Nothing is impossible,*” Meadow said.

“Just hiiiiighly improbable,” Ilea said.

“*Exactly. Though I admit, I would already focus on eight other species in the vicinity that show more promise. There is a particularly powerful mind mage present,*” it said.

“The little chicken? Still around?” Ilea asked.

“*The species. There are many more than one,*” Meadow said.

*Really? Guess I was lucky,* she thought with a smile.

“Can I leave you here? I’ll get Catelyn and the council,” she said.

“*Of course. I’ll try not to roll off this chair and fall into the abyss beyond this cathedral,*” Meadow said.

“I’m sure it’s a manageable task for a four mark earth and space mage,” she said.

“*Perhaps I can finally reach the fifth tier with this challenge,*” the being said.

Ilea rolled her eyes and blinked up.

She charged her wings and made her way to Hallowfort.

The guards let her pass immediately, every single one apparently familiar with her.

Gotta say, it is quite flattering.

Ilea found herself waiting in the Hunter’s Den.

Catelyn went to inform the other council members that the time had come.

She looked at the silver eyed former Queen of Rhyvor. Her hair looked less disorderly now, a little shorter. She wore a set of black armor, light and mostly protecting her vitals. It had various spikes and adornments of silver. No roses.

*They don’t do colors here, hmm?*

“What is it?” the woman asked.

“Didn’t think you’d be one for armors,” Ilea said.

The scoffed. “Dresses and crowns? Ilea, I was an adventurer too. For a long time. Dark ones think differently. It takes fierceness and strength to impress them.”

“No offense meant,” Ilea said with a teasing smile. “You look incredible.”

Elana looked away. “You didn’t find me at my most presentable time.”

Ilea didn’t comment on it. She couldn’t imagine staying in that trap of a basement for so many years, not knowing if your loved one and yourself could ever be saved.

“How was your trip?” Elana asked suddenly.

“Small talk? You keep going with those surprises,” Ilea said. “It was fine. I can fly pretty quickly by now.”

“You spent the day nearby then?” Elana asked.

“No, I spent it flying.”

“But... it’s daytime. The storms?” Elana said. Her eyes opened wide before she shook her head.

“No. Don’t say it. You’re not like him. You’re much worse.”

“Why does that feel like a compliment?” Ilea asked.

“Because it would, to someone like you,” Elana said. “You wouldn’t want to help me deal with some difficult officials from the Protector’s army? Or deal with a few Feynor outposts that have cropped up a little too close by?”

“I’ve been involved in a war recently. Don’t plan to jump into the next. Not if the enemies are thinking creatures,” Ilea said.

“What if they attack us?” Elana asked.

“Catelyn has my mark. She can call for me,” Ilea said.

“Knowing that does give me some peace of mind,” she said with a sigh. “Both for the town and Catelyn herself.”

“If you take in Meadow, I doubt you’ll have to worry about defending this place anymore. Not if the Feynor don’t summon an actual Dragon,” Ilea said. “They’re here.”

Elana turned her head to the door.

Haiden was the first to enter, the feline barkeeper of the Abyss, as graceful as ever.

“Hey,” Ilea greeted the man.

“Ilea... you. Have changed,” he said with a smirk.

“You’re in the way,” an absolutely massive dark one stepped inside, ducking under the already high reaching door frame to get into the den.

Haiden had already moved out of the way, his expression reserved.

The three meter tall being was clad entirely in black armor, the metal moving and adjusting in a way that suggested it wasn’t plain old steel. His voice was deep, resonating in the room with a hum.

*Didn’t even touch the door frame... and his steps are near entirely silent.*

“Oh? Is that the one everyone talks about... the ashen healer,” he said, bowing down to meet her eyes with his massive smooth helmet.

**[Warrior – lvl 315]**

*Pretty high level. Why weren't you in the Descent? Can't imagine I'd miss something this bulky.*

A powerful aura suddenly spread through the room, exuding from the warrior. It felt like a challenge.

Ilea saw both Haiden and Elana tense up slightly.

She smiled and activated her own.

The warrior took a step back. “Oh...,”

Ilea deactivated it again, his efforts impressive for a sapient being but nothing comparable to the presence of even an Astral Spirit. Not that she could match that with her Deviant of Humanity. *I do wonder what he felt.*

“The stories... maybe they're not all made up,” he said. “They call me Doravin. We will have to fight.”

“Okay,” Ilea said.

He stepped aside and filled a good fourth of the large hall, sitting down on the ground as his armor moved to accommodate his maneuver.

A four legged winged insect creature appeared close by, two large fly like eyes taking in the room. A small trunk adorned its face instead of a mouth.

“Varahan is this one's name... it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance at last, ashen one,” she said and bowed slightly.

“Greetings,” Ilea said and waved at the creature.

“This one has heard you found a powerful creature that is interested in moving here?” Varahan asked.

Her form reached a little over one meter.

**[Warrior – lvl 235]**

“All in due time,” Haiden said.

She made a sucking noise but relented, finding a spot particularly far away from Doravin before she settled within an empty cupboard, her spindly legs hanging out.

Catelyn joined them with the last dark one, another warrior. He seemed familiar but Ilea couldn't place him. He looked just like some of the guards around town.

The armored creature bowed. “Ashen savior. Welcome back to our humble town. My name is No.”

**[Warrior – lvl 211]**

“Nice to meet you, No,” Ilea said.

*Could've lead to a few misunderstandings.*

Catelyn closed the door with one of her tails. “Everyone here, except Goliath.”

“That old smith doesn’t ever leave his home,” Doravin said in a booming voice, laughing to himself.

Catelyn looked at him but didn’t comment.

“We’re here because Ilea has brought a potential ally to a nearby dungeon. It’s important that we meet this being and determine if it would be acceptable to accommodate it here in Hallowfort,” she said.

“Is it a Dark one?” Doravin asked.

“Yes,” Ilea said.

“Then my answer is yes,” he said.

“What is the nature of this being? You mentioned it was powerful but you wouldn’t have gathered the whole council for something mundane,” Haiden said.

“It’s better to meet it directly,” Catelyn said.

“You’re being secretive again,” Varahan said, the creature jumping out of its cupboard before it flew a little closer. “I won’t be meeting this creature if we don’t know more.”

Catelyn looked at Ilea.

“It’s a four mark space, barrier, life, earth, and wood mage,” she said.

Various curses were spoken out in different languages.

A minute passed with people looking at each other, thinking things over for themselves.

“Can it be trusted?” No asked finally.

“Yes,” Ilea said.

“Then my answer is a yes too,” the warrior said and bowed again.

“A four mark...,” the massive warrior said. “Perhaps I should meet it after all.”

“You would invite a creature of such power to this settlement?” Varahan said. “It could destroy us all.”

“If the ashen savior puts her trust into it, there is no concern left,” No said.

“She is a friend of Hallowfort, yes... but she can’t speak for this four mark,” Haiden said.

“Are you not ashamed to speak so, in front of Ilea?” No asked, stepping closer to the barkeeper.

“Can we cut it guys? Let’s just meet Meadow. You can talk it out then,” Ilea said, her armor forming once more. “If anything, I’m sure it won’t kill any of us.”

“Why is that?” Elana asked.

“Meadow does not kill sapient creatures. It even refused to kill those directly attacking it,” Ilea said.

*I suppose the gate closure killed a bunch. Not directly Meadow though. Or is this one of those gravity killed you, not me pushing you down situations? I wonder if it got experience from all that. I didn’t.*

“What help is it then?” Doravin said, the large warrior now standing up.

“You ignorant fool... a barrier mage of that power could improve our defen-” Varahan said as she buzzed a little closer.

Haiden stopped her with a tap on her shoulder. “Remember who you are talking to.”

The fly creature stopped and made another sucking sound. “It has been some time. This one is happy to think she had forgotten.”

Doravin laughed and vanished, appearing in front of the Hunter’s Den.

Ilea joined him, the creature now holding a single bladed axe that reached nearly four meters in length. *Mid range just with his size and that weapon.*

“Impressed? You’re staring,” he said.

Creatures nearby tried to avoid the area.

“It’s the biggest axe I’ve ever seen,” Ilea said with a wink.

“Would you like me to hit you with it?” Doravin said in a quiet but obviously excited voice.

“Sure, but not here. We can fight in Tremor,” she said.

He laughed, the axe nearly slamming into a nearby building as he extended his arms. “Wonderful! This day is truly blessed.”

The others joined too.

“Are we to leave Hallowfort without its council?” Haiden asked.

“I shall stay,” No said. “My answer is final.”

“Everyone else with me then,” Ilea said and spread her wings.

The group moved through the crevices near Hallowfort, all moving at a reasonably fast pace until they reached the area near Tremor.

Ilea brought them the rest of the way with Displacement when no storms were around, glad she could even move the bulky warrior with her spell.

“Here we are,” she said, appearing in the decrepit cathedral.

“Where is the creature,” Doravin asked, looking around the large hall.

“Here,” Catelyn said, her voice composed but her ears pressing down onto her head.

Elana went a little closer to the fox.

“*There is no need to be afraid,*” Meadow said from its position on the chair.

Haiden recoiled, holding his head the same way Varahan did.

“Is it the presence?” Ilea asked, blinking to the two and healing them through her ash.

“*Their mental fortitude is not enough to comprehend my lacking telepathy,*” Meadow said. “*I greet you, council of Hallowfort.*”

Catelyn looked at Ilea before she took a deep breath.

Doravin walked to the chair and casually went to grab Meadow. “Are you the one talking in my head?”

“Indeed,” the Meadow said, blocking the warrior’s hand with a distorted field of space.

*Subdued but still enough for this guy?*

Ilea smirked.

“Greetings, Meadow,” Catelyn said.

“I shall refrain from talking to those two. Shall I create writing?” Meadow asked, stone forming from thin air before an apology in Standard appeared.

Haiden and Varahan had calmed down, their minds not damaged much.

Elana’s eyes were fixated on the ball of stone, not a word leaving her mouth. Her lips quivered slightly.

“That would be appreciated, yes,” Catelyn said. “There is much to discuss. You can understand spoken language?”

“I do, if you are this close,” Meadow answered.

Doravin still tried to grasp the creature, taking a step back when it failed. “Can I try to smash you?”

“If that will alleviate your curiosity, be my guest,” Meadow answered.

“Doravin,” Catelyn said.

“It allowed it. Just one try,” he said.

Ilea giggled.

He ignored them, several auras activating as he lifted his hammer with impressive speed and more importantly, grace.

The thing came down in a perfect arc, stopped dead by a thin barrier.

A small shock wave expanded before Doravin removed his axe.

“Hmm. As expected. Impressive. I welcome you to Hallowfort, Meadow,” he said and bowed.

“It is appreciated, Doravin,” Meadow said.

“You want to stay here and listen to the talks? Or go have some fun? I haven’t been in this dungeon yet,” the large warrior said, looking towards Ilea.

*I feel like I’ve had this conversation before.*

“Sure. Catelyn, call for me if you need anything,” Ilea said.

The fox kept her gaze on the Meadow, standing in front of the other two council members. “I shall.”

Ilea blinked, teleporting a few times until she reached a large square. There were still cracks from her last battle here.

*Been a while,* she thought with a smile.

Doravin landed a dozen meters away, crouching in a way that minimized his impact.

“Ashen healer. You have taken a spot in the minds and hearts of people I respect. I’d like to see why,” he said.

Ilea smiled. “Come at me then, you’re already boring.”

The warrior vanished.

Ilea spread her ash, using her limbs to stabilize herself as her auras flared up.

The axe hit her light a freight train an instant later.

She didn’t budge.

“Good,” the Dark one said, jumping back. “No need to hold back.”

He advanced again, shrouded in wisps of dark magic that licked the air and ground as he moved.

Ilea watched him vanish, a slow line moving through space and to her side.

*A slowed teleport?*

His axe appeared mid swing, Ilea already crouched to let it pass by above.

An aura of darkness exploded outwards from the being, his hand outstretched towards her.

It was obviously meant to create distance but Ilea simply remained where she stood, grabbing onto his armor as she activated her reverse healing.

“Who will lose first?” she asked with a smile.

He ripped himself away and jumped, only to find himself right in front of her again.

“Already back?” she asked.

He growled, punching away her arm before he vanished.

Ilea looked at him and focused on the frameworks around him. *Hmm.*

This time the being didn’t vanish.

“Pretty heavy, I’ll give you that,” she said, inspecting the ludicrously massive weapon no longer in his arms.

“Stop with the tricks,” he said, walking towards her slowly.

“Oh?” Ilea asked, dropping the weapon.

It was still in the air when she reached him, her fists lashing out, neither Destruction nor Storm of Cinders activating upon impact.

His magic was still active as he tried to punch back, twisting his armor and body as spikes formed on his gauntlets.

Ilea’s precognition coupled with her healing, buffs, and massively higher speed made the fight trivial.

She dented his armor a few times, going for his right leg with a kick before she disengaged to dodge a strike.

Ilea saw the axe fly through the air towards him.

Instead, she displaced it into her hands, twirling in the air and slamming it into his chest with both her strength and its momentum.

It broke through his plate, digging deep into the being.

Doravin staggered back, chuckling to himself with a deep sound.

“Beaten with my own weapon,” he murmured, ripping out the axe. “I stand not defeated, but entirely outclassed.”

“You’re not the first,” Ilea said with a smile.

“You have earned your titles, ashen savior. Please forgive my arrogance,” the being said and bowed deeply.

“No reason not to have a quick bout,” Ilea said, watching his armor reform. Only darkness had been below, no blood visible on the steel blade of his axe.

*Guess I expected more from a level three hundred.*

“I’ll be off then,” she said.

“A successful hunt to you,” Doravin said, sounding almost gleeful.

Ilea displaced herself into the darker part of Tremor, her sphere and teleportation speed allowing her to find a single Soul Ripper almost immediately.

The creature stood out in the street, unmoving. Its long arms held up the near skeletal purple body, the flower like head closed like a tulip before its bloom.

*Around six hundred again. Shouldn’t be a problem at all by now. Let’s see.*

Ilea started charging Heart of Cinder, just standing there until the heat within her started to eat away at her health. She activated phaseshift and started sacrificing health for both Flare and Awakening.

*The heat should remain until I get out.*

A few seconds later, her skill deactivated.

White flames ignited on the near black ashen armor.

The Soul Ripper turned towards her slightly but didn’t jump yet.

Ilea took the chance instead. She displaced herself next to the creature, setting it alight with burning ash. Her hand extended, she released the stored up heat in a single beam.

The energy and light subsided with a sizzling sound, leaving behind the smoldering remains of a dead Soul Ripper.

***‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Soul Ripper – lvl 620]’***

“Hmm. Well if that isn’t anticlimactic. Not even a level for Faen,” Ilea murmured to herself.

*Do I outclass them so much already? I mean I did grow quite a bit since last time. My damage just wasn’t quite there yet.*

She cracked her neck, reminding herself that she had just used one of her most powerful abilities with charged up auras.



*Soooo, just do the same while flying above the buggers, dropping down and use a sphere attack?*

Ilea charged her spell again, flapping her wings as she flew towards the open fields outside of the city walls.

*They didn't react it seems. Not the most perceptive creatures.*

*What if they don't even get what's going on if I don't show myself?*

She formed a cloud of ash, slowly letting it all float down towards the hordes of Soul Rippers.

*Burn.*

The cavern lit up with white fire, engulfing the many creatures in deadly flames.

They ran around, looking for the culprit.

Ilea spread her arms and let herself fall, a grin on her face as she landed in the largest cluster of the dangerous monsters. A glint of joy lit up in her eyes, perhaps just a reflection of the fiery energies exploding outwards.