

## Chapter 511 Infiltration

“We’re not going to get far in Yinnahall if you kill everyone who mistreats their slaves, just saying,” he said, keeping pace next to her.

They ran fast but not so much that it would turn heads.

“We’ll see about that. We just need to stop the ritual, I doubt they can set it up super quickly anyway, there were thousands of runes carved into the halls,” she said.

“The slaves you *freed* might already be dead too. The fear and confusion you sowed with that spectacular intervention may cause a chaotic reaction,” Hector said.

“It may. Or they will live happily ever after,” Ilea said.

“Do you really plan to go check in on them?” he asked. “You *really* care?”

“Why not? I’m pretty quick,” she said. “And yes, I do. Not everyone is as far gone as you are.”

“That’s true. Well have it your way,” he said and finished his second mug of ale that he still had with him, the drink remaining inside the mugs likely thanks to his magic.

“I will,” she said.

“I’m gonna rob the nobles too by the way. No matter if they’re nice to their little pets or not,” Hector said. “And I might have to kill some people too. Do you have a problem with that?”

“Maybe I will. Depends on who you’re killing and if I’m close by,” she said.

Hector groaned. “Then let’s focus on the ritual first so we have that out of your way. You can go hunt down the *evil* evildoers and I go make some bloody gold.”

“Sure, not like the fate of this city would be any better otherwise,” she said. “No kids.”

“No kids?” he asked.

“Don’t kill any kids,” she said.

“I didn’t plan to. Who do you think I am?” he said.

Ilea glanced his way, slowing down on a dirt path between two fields, a few farms visible in the distance. “The Destroyer? You know, the walking warcrime?”

“Said Lilith, the walking warcrime,” he said and laughed.

“Not exactly the same, is it?” she said, smiling at his antics.

“Eh, fair enough,” he said.

“Worlds between really. How many did you kill in your time? Ten thousand? A hundred thousand?” she asked.

Hector didn’t answer.

“Suddenly not funny anymore? I probably killed a few hundred humans. A drop in your bucket,” she said.

“A drop in my ocean,” he said seriously.

They walked a few minutes in silence.

“Why are you working with me then? And with the Lily for that matter? You care a lot about the morality of war and killing. I’m sure you know that each of us is a monster in their own right,” he said.

“It’s not my job to police the world. What good would it do to fight you? And the Lily? Being a member I can maybe exert some good influence or at least further trade and the cooperation between Ravenhall and other nations. Fighting would just cause more of the same,” she said and shrugged.

“You’re implying you could actually take me,” Hector said with a sly grin.

“Not yet... but you couldn’t kill me either, I’m pretty sure,” Ilea said and stretched.

“I already know your weakness. Just gather up everyone you care about and torture them to death, you’d be broken instantly,” he said.

“Broken and angry,” Ilea replied.

“And angry. Yep, that would change things. You don’t want any of the members angry, least of them us. You’re not quite in yet however. Three vetoes and you can’t join,” he said.

“Shouldn’t one veto be enough? Being a veto and all?” she asked.

“Hey I didn’t make up the rules,” Hector said. “I’m sure you have Helena’s vote, mine too obviously, and probably Velamyr’s after news of our efforts reach his ears.”

“Who would veto me then?” she asked.

“Hmm... difficult to say. Definitely Elizabeth Pierce. She’s a noble from Nipha who really wants more influence in the remaining independent cities. You don’t have to worry too much though, she’s failed where you succeeded without even trying,” Hector said and laughed.

“How do you know I didn’t try?” Ilea said.

He shrugged. “You just don’t strike me as someone to focus fully on politics for longer than two minutes. Elizabeth is downright obsessed with it, so much so that her actual fighting prowess holds her back greatly. Barely at two eighty last I saw her.”

“Michael is even lower,” Ilea said.

“Yes, but there are reasons for that. Good ones. He’s not like Elizabeth at all. If he focused as much on influence as he does on his research, half the world would be in his grasp. Especially with his damn gold magic,” Hector said.

“He’s a creator?” Ilea asked.

“No... at least I doubt it heavily. But he’s always been rich. Nothing is ever too expensive for that man, no matter how much I tried to ridicule him in trade deals. He definitely has a way to get more and it has to do with his magic,” Hector said.

“What does he usually buy from you?” she asked.

“Gathering information are we? Why I wonder? Do you really not plan to kill each of us? Take over all of the human plains? You’re not the first who tried,” he said and laughed.

Ilea rolled her eyes. “You really think I’m fooling you? What about you? Maybe you’re just playing a role too.”

“No. Neither of us is acting. We’ve enjoyed the real joys of life, there is no need to pretend,” Hector said.

“Food?”

“I was more thinking about sex,” Hector said.

She knew what he really meant. While sex is surely enjoyable, it pales compared to facing a terror of unimaginable power, ancient magical beasts in undiscovered depths of the world.

“We’re weird,” she said.

“Oh young one, still haven’t accepted your true nature? I pity thee,” Hector said and shook his head.

They reached a fork in the road, a much broader one leading towards a hill in the distance.

“Have you met any five marks?” she asked.

“Five marks? No. Not yet. I would hope they exist,” he said.

“Why?”

“Once I reach the point where four marks aren’t a challenge anymore, what else would stand in my way? I’d live on forever, bored, and unchallenged. What a horrible fate that would be,” he said.

“I mean even if there are five marks, that will be your fate if you continue to get stronger,” Ilea said. “Maybe get some other hobbies too.”

“I have too many things already taking away my time. Otherwise a runt like you would’ve never reached my power. Let alone so quickly. Plus while I’m optimistic, I doubt some of the beings out there are even killable,” he said.

“Yeah, with what I can already do...,” Ilea said, considering if she should share something about the Ascended. Maybe the man knew something she didn’t.

She decided against it. Hector was only an ally through circumstance. The more she gave him, the more it would hurt once he became her enemy.

“There are definitely creatures far above the normal four marks. The power differences are huge,” he said.

“Yeah, I noticed,” she said. “Speaking of which, have you met any humans with three marks?”

He smiled and shook his head.

“They’re out there though, I’m sure of it. Just hunting and fighting. Despite my efforts however, I’ve not met any. The founders must be close,” he said.

“Founders?” Ilea asked.

“They don’t like it when people talk about them. The whole thing where mentioning the Lily or asking about it gets you killed... that initially came from them. Maybe Maureen would actually fight me for once if I talked openly about her... heh, probably not,” he said.

“First time I hear that name,” Ilea admitted.

“I doubt many of the members even know them. But I doubt you’ll make trouble. Just be sure not to share it without a good fucking reason. Helena would be forced to act,” he said.

“Them? You said there was more than one,” Ilea asked.

“You won’t get that out of me,” Hector said and laughed. “I already said too much.”

“I’ll meet them eventually I suppose,” Ilea said.

“Not necessarily. They’re not exactly involved, not anymore at least,” Hector said.

“Interesting. How did you come across them anyway? What makes a man like you join a secret organization with the goal of stability and human progress? If Helena didn’t lie to me about that,” she said.

“Those are the goals, yes. It’s more about preventing chaos and war than anything else really. As to how I joined... I met my match. I lost, one of only very few humans that managed such. I was forced to cooperate and thus ended my conquest. Before that I thought a single ruler in control of everything would be for the best, no matter how much blood and death there was on the way.”

“I still believe that but my ambitions have changed to other ventures. Not only because of that experience. I was young then, hot headed and brash.”

“You still are,” Ilea said and smiled.

There was a patrol of soldiers walking towards them, the two stopping their conversation for a little while. Hector greeted them in the native tongue and they continued on their way without being questioned.

She soon realized why. They weren’t the only soldiers going towards Yinnahall. As they approached the hill in the distance, Ilea realized that it was the city itself.

A massive town built onto and beyond the large outcrop of rock in the otherwise only slightly uneven territory. It reminded her of Tremor, just actually above ground.

She wordlessly healed a few of the injured, getting grateful looks as well as confusion in return. The people often talked but she had no way to understand them, some just closed their eyes and finally relaxed.

“I could’ve never cooperated with you back then,” Hector said when they reached a stretch of empty road.

Many of the soldiers were camping out in the fields too, some of them building defensive structures or digging out trenches. Ilea saw whores, slaves, and cooks. All thanks to her improved eyesight. Most of the people she saw walked towards the city or were waiting near the distant gate.

“Good thing you changed then,” she said. “Might not be as easy as you thought to get in.”

Hector smiled. “Are you kidding me? They’re busy. Busy is even better than literally under siege. They won’t look at us twice. And we can just teleport in. I doubt their enchantments work against Space magic. Just move us past.”

“Maybe you’re right,” Ilea said.

“Of course I am,” he smirked before they shut up again, reaching another group. Hector greeted a few of the scantily clad women but moved on quickly.

*I doubt that’s just for appearances,* Ilea thought.

Already she saw much of a society that revolted her. Slaves being whipped, children in chains, and soldiers refused entry into the massive city.

There was a laughably one and a half meter high outer wall they had already passed, not a single guard protecting it. The area between it and the first real city wall had thousands of huts and simple houses, the slums of Yinnahall. People were being dragged out of their homes to make defensive structures out of them, or simply to destroy them for more space.

There were merchants shouting to sell their goods, smugglers loudly talking about getting people into the city, slavers selling people, and soldiers ignoring most of it all. It was utter chaos.

Judging by a few burnt up patches and destroyed houses, Ilea assumed war had brushed them already. Perhaps Hector was right and there were forces already present, too few or not willing to commit to an all out attack.

The slums provided a bit of a problem, the area between the high city walls and the poor outer district was separated by a trench. Ilea couldn't see yet what was inside of it or how far it reached but they couldn't just walk up to the walls and teleport through.

Hector gestured to her before they both entered a half burnt down house.

"They're talking about raids in the night, tensions are high and people want to get behind the walls," he whispered in a barely audible voice.

"That's good then, they won't notice a few more troublemakers amidst the chaos," she whispered back.

"Yes, but it might also push the Order to get their ritual done as fast as possible. I heard whispers of sacrifices. It's not uncommon in these parts but people speak of it in hushed tones. Some know of it, more than is good for the Order," he said.

"How do we get inside?" she asked.

"No patrols along their walls. They're confident the enchantments will prevent teleportation. A few flying guards so we can't go in from above. I doubt either of us can just dig a hole but maybe we can get close enough, teleport into the trench and then into the city," he said.

"Any clue what's in there? Water?" she asked.

"It's just a deep trench probably. Sharpened sticks and some monsters probably. I heard someone talk about an execution, a disobedient slave just thrown down there," he said.

*Makes sense, with water mages around. Crocodiles would have been cool though.*

"Wait a second," she said and blinked. *I heard right*, she thought and blinked again, her ash slamming through the man's skull before she made the body vanish. Ilea covered the woman's eyes and mouth with ash before she healed her.

She vanished again, the woman sobbing to herself as she curled up on the ground.

Ilea didn't know how much her healing could change but she doubted an experience like that could just be removed entirely.

"You didn't joke about intervening whenever you can," Hector whispered when she appeared again just a few seconds after she left.

"She was getting raped," Ilea hissed.

He smirked.

“Don’t... don’t start shit here. After we stopped the ritual, I don’t give a fuck but don’t test me now,” she said.

“Alright, alright, miss overly sensitive. Let’s get it over with, there’s booty waiting in town,” he said.

Ilea was annoyed but she focused on what was at stake. Everyone here could be wiped out and turned into Cursed. And perhaps she had a chance to prevent that from happening.

“It’s a large fucking city,” Hector said as they approached the wall.

So far they only got a few glances but no special attention. The armor really went a long way and nobody wanted trouble with a higher leveled soldier.

“It is... might take a while until we find it,” she said with a sigh.

They were close to the thirty meter high wall now, quite far from the gates too. There were people patrolling on top but many of them didn’t look particularly vigilant, let alone focused on the slums below.

Ilea displaced a pebble past the wall and found the spell working uninterrupted.

The continued their walk, waiting for an alarm or reaction but nothing happened.

*Now it’s just a question what we’ll find on the other side, she thought. If we appear in front of a patrol or even just random people it’ll mean trouble.*

“How far can you move things?” Hector whispered when they reached a quiet spot.

“About forty meters at the moment, way past the wall,” she said.

“That’s really good range... we could hire someone to have a look or get a map, both will take time and bring their own risks,” he said.

“My perception can’t get through,” she said.

“Neither can mine,” he admitted. “Should we just chose a spot and go?”

Ilea thought about it. Some of the buildings behind the walls were higher than the walls themselves but it was still hard to gauge where the cellars would be exactly or if they were unoccupied. The wall was built onto the slope leading up to the high hill after all.

“Don’t they have sewers?” she asked.

“Maybe but those will be patrolled more than a random cellar,” Hector said.

“But we can see use our perception then,” Ilea said.

“It would take hours to walk to the other side of the city” Hector said.

“What do you mean?” Ilea asked.

“Well there’s a lake there. I would think they’d pump their shit into the massive body of water instead of thinking of something more difficult to implement. And we can’t just teleport around freely without being seen. Not out here,” he said.

“I don’t feel like wasting a few hours,” she said.

“Neither do I,” Hector said and looked around. He entered a nearby house without a sound.

Ilea followed, noting that the door had been locked. He used flowing water to get past the mechanism.

*Handy*, she thought, pretty sure her ash or force could do the same. Not that she needed to unlock doors with her teleportation. Enchantments would likely mean magical keys too, meaning she couldn’t just use it for closed off sections either.

A tiny kitchen was located one room over, various ingredients sitting on a battered table. The dirty floor and small coats draped over a chair in the hallway suggested a family with kids.

“Straight across, see the high building?” Hector said and pointed through the murky window in the wooden door.

“Mhm,” Ilea mused. “The distance is fine,” she said. “I’ll just start really low and we’ll work our way up.”

She tried to move both herself and Hector into the building’s cellar.

The second try already did it, both of them appearing in a dark and rancid room.

“Wonderful smell,” Hector said and formed water around his head.

“We’re not alone,” Ilea said, taking in the sights and activities. If outside the walls was chaos, the this was utter madness. *Talk about overpopulation*, she thought and walked over to the dying group of people, healing them all as she summoned food. “Water please,” she said, the man not refusing as a few pots and crates were suddenly filled with liquid.

She caressed a girl’s cheek as she displaced the steel chains binding her arms. Her first target was an older woman two floors above, currently in the process of watching two men kill each other, both heavily injured with a few guards watching.

“First the ritual,” Hector said.

Ilea ground her teeth. “Just her,” she said.

“We can also split up,” Hector said.

“Yes, we meet back here in two hours,” Ilea said and tried to wake the girl. She needed just a confirmation. Enough to stop what was going on upstairs. Hector was already gone, likely looking for the closest and largest cache of gold. “What have they done to you,” she whispered, holding the girl’s mouth closed as her healing mana flowed into her.