

Chapter 898 The Adventures of Reginald and Valery

“That’s a dragon,” Erik said, the two standing atop a mountain on the other side of the broad valley. “You moved it here. That’s crazy.” He laughed. “Ah, I like it. I think it suits the city. I’m not so sure about all of those cannons. Takes away some of the nostalgia.”

“Strand wiped out most of the city with the demons he summoned to get to Kohr,” Ilea said. “I think it’s more than reasonable to add some defenses.”

“I won’t argue with that. I’m sure if we had the resources back in the day, we would’ve done the same. Those are dwarven, aren’t they?”

“Tech from the Pit, yes,” she said.

“Ah, the war machines that were present. I wasn’t familiar with that place,” he said. “The world really is quite vast.”

“Says the guy who’s been to how many realms? Ten? A hundred?” Ilea said.

He smiled ever so slightly. “That does not change where I’m from. Are you from this realm?”

“Where does that question come from?” she asked.

“Is it that strange to ask?”

“Kind of,” Ilea said.

He chuckled. “Your pronunciation is very refined, but you don’t dress or act like nobility. And there is this joy I see, when you fly. I’ve seen realm travelers before, accidental and not. There is just something about them. And then there’s the fact that you’re a four mark.”

“Can’t anyone reach this level?”

“In theory, yes. But many deep believes are ingrained before one reaches a fighting age. Becoming an adventurer is something scary. Joining the Shadow’s Hand is impossible. Reaching level three hundred is unheard of. And anything beyond, most people don’t even consider. Rules and believes ingrained in our cultures, those deviating are rare and often ostracized. However, when someone with different base believes is moved to another realm, where the rules and limits they thought governed existence are suddenly shattered, I found that they often exceed what conventional wisdom suggested. All theories of course, but you stand out, in more than one way.”

“Can’t say you’re wrong either,” Ilea said.

He laughed. “All theories. Care to tell me where you’re from?”

Ilea hesitated for a moment. Then she wondered why.

“A place called Earth. No magic as far as I know. We had a pretty high tech level. Metal boxes driving and flying around, machines that could do millions of calculations per second, enough food for billions,” she said.

“Untouched by magic it sounds, but incredibly advanced. And you arrived here on accident? Or did you execute some ancient rituals you found somewhere?”

“Went to bed one night, woke up here in the morning,” she said.

“Ah. Then it has begun. Your world is no longer without magic, I’m afraid.”

“What does that mean exactly? Dragons and monsters appearing everywhere?” Ilea asked. If that were the case, she would prioritize her examination of the tear that brought her here, and if it wasn’t there, she would find that Transporter.

“No. Not yet. It takes centuries for mana to permeate a planet. Slow changes. Altering weather patterns, strangely behaving energy sources. People will need to adapt, and they will. An interesting time for sure, especially with established governments and billions of people as you suggest.”

“An interesting time that will lead to a shit ton of chaos,” Ilea said, wondering how the slow appearance of magic would alter Earth.

“There is always chaos. But life will find a way, and all returns to balance,” Erik said, moving his hand to indicate a circle.

“How do you know all this stuff? I mean I know you’re old as fuck, but even the Fae I met couldn’t tell me those things with certainty,” she said.

“I travel, and I listen. Perhaps the Fae understand more than I do, for I am only human. It’s possible that my explanations are simplifications or contain logical errors. I don’t think I’ll ever stop learning, and it’s possible that my answers to your questions would be different in a thousand years, and different again in two.”

Ilea smiled. “I think it’s comforting anyway. Suppose I’ll go find my own answers in time.”

“You should. The universe is vast, and life is a gift, despite the pain and loss that come with it.”

She stayed quiet and sat down on the mountain peak, feeling the cool snow as stone crunched below her weight. “I’ll wait here, if you want to visit.”

“Not a fan of crowds?” he asked.

“I’m a bit famous, is all,” she said.

“I could wrap us both in an illusion. I doubt many here would see through it,” Erik suggested.

“You can do that?”

“I can do a few things, illusions being one of them,” he said and raised one hand. A ringing sound rang out, a strange wave of magic flowing past.

It felt as if she was underwater for a mere moment, then the air returned.

“There you go. Two level eighty adventurers,” he said.

“You’re still a four mark,” Ilea said.

“You are not affected of course,” Erik said. “Come, see for yourself.” He jumped down the mountain side, a board of arcane energy appearing below his boots before he boarded down.

Ilea raised her brows. *He’s snowboarding?* She grinned and jumped, forming a board of volcanic glass below her feet. She landed a few seconds later, the impact slamming the board deep into the stone, debris exploding outwards as she was sent tumbling down. Ilea spread her wings and arms as her Fabric Alteration took hold of the rocks all around, preventing a possible avalanche.

Hmm. That sucks.

She instead flew down and landed near the slowing Eregar.

He sighed with a wide grin. "I missed that. The last realm had barely any mountains, let alone snow."

"Last realm?" Ilea asked, landing near him. She noted that nobody on the road was looking their way. *Masked in the illusion?*

"Oh yes. Lots of tundra," he said.

"What were you doing there?" she asked as they started towards the city.

"Void infestation."

"I don't know what that means."

"When void monsters appear from cracks in the fabric. I believe it has to do with planetary alignments or something to do with the suns. But I've seen it a few times by now. Depending on the species and geography, it could wipe out an entire realm."

"So you were there helping? Just killing monsters?" she asked.

"That too. Next to teaching all kinds of things that could help," he said.

"You had to learn the language and everything? How long were you there for?"

"Around eight years, give and take. Didn't stay there throughout all that time. Though I plan to go back once this is dealt with, one way or the other. And yes, a few main languages, for the rest there were translators. I pick things up pretty quickly by now." He looked at the guard when they reached the gate and smiled. "Greetings. So this is Ravenhall?" he said and looked up at the dragon. "That thing is massive!"

The guard grinned and raised his shoulders just a little. "Right it is! Got a Dragonslayer of our own. Founder of the Sentinels. Welcome to the city."

"No entrance fee?" Erik asked.

"None, sir."

"That's just wonderful. And the guard armor looks impressive. Any idea how someone like me could join?" Erik said and touched the man's shoulder.

"I... I mean you would have to join with the Shadowguard, but I don't know if any applications are open. I could ask my captain," the guard said.

"That's quite alright, I don't want to hold you up any longer," Erik said and looked behind where a small queue had formed. He waved at them and smiled. "Apologies strangers! I hear there's a Dragonslayer in town!"

A few of them smiled, some seemed slightly annoyed.

"Come, Valery, let's see if the rumors are true," he said and rubbed his hands. "Thank you," he said and shook the guard's hand before he finally entered the town.

"Reginald, you're always wasting everyone's time," Ilea said as she walked past the guard. "Thank you," she repeated and shook his hand as well.

“Ah, Valery. You should learn to live in the moment. But an old dog never learns.”

“Where to?” she asked as she stepped next to the man.

He had put both hands to his hips, standing in the middle of the road and looking out into the city.
“Just. Straight ahead. Some food would be nice.”

Ilea smiled. “We might not be so different, you and I.”

“Nono, you’re a dragonslayer and space mage. I’m just an old scholar. Reginald. I like that.”

“Right,” Ilea said with a smile. “If you want to eat, I know a few places.”

“Lead the way,” he said but in the same breath walked towards a painter who had set up shop on the side of the street.

This will take some time, Ilea thought and decided to just go with the flow. His illusion seemed to fool everyone around, which was both amazing and slightly concerning at the same time. She would have to inform Claire, maybe ask him to demonstrate as well, if he was willing. At the same time, she just felt comfortable with him there. He was so genuine and carefree, it was downright infectious. *And he’s right. I’m a Dragonslayer and four mark. I don’t have to rush things.*

She realized that she hadn’t even thought about checking the ground for cracks since entering the town. Luckily, the streets were well made, and either she had gotten considerably better during her training, or Erik’s illusion masked the impacts of her boots.

“He’s great, isn’t he?” Erik asked, looking at her before he turned back to the artist. “The depth is impressive. How long have you been painting?”

Ilea smiled. Somehow she just knew he was the better painter of the two. *I’m starting to question who would win between the two of us.*

They left the city in the late afternoon. Well fed and having visited Viscera, the Haven, and the dragon corpse above the city, already a tourist attraction and mine.

Erik had stopped bothering her with questions when she started to tire from the constant interaction, instead talking to any random person he thought interesting.

She wondered how he managed all that but decided that extroverts were just a different breed.

Walking out of the city, Erik tapped one of the Guardians. “Can you talk?”

“Not those variants,” Ilea said as the green eyed machine turned to look at them. “There’s a watcher up there,” she said and pointed at the distant dot she saw with perfect clarity.

“I do think I should ask first,” Erik said and teleported up, Ilea following behind.

They flew to the silver sphere where Erik raised his hand. “Aki, it’s me, Erik Anderson.”

“It is?” the machine spoke, turning to look at Ilea. “An illusion. I cannot pierce it. You were in the city?”

“We were, might want to check security measures against that type of magic,” Ilea said.

“Oh, don’t be so harsh on him, and don’t be harsh on yourself, Aki. My spells have fooled divine horrors of the void and ancient masters of divination alike,” Erik spoke.

“You seem in a great mood,” Aki said.

“Ravenhall is blooming, like the most precious of flowers. I felt young again, walking those streets. It’s marvelous,” he said and sighed, pausing for a long moment before he looked at Aki. “One of the cleaners I talked to mentioned Iz, the former capital of the Taleen. I was wondering if we could visit? Without their gates, and difficult diplomatic relations, outsiders could never enter their towns, let alone their capital.”

“I don’t see a problem with that,” the Watcher said.

“*Don’t think he can get past the Sphere security?*” Ilea asked.

“*Not without your help,*” Aki replied.

“Perfect. So which gate do we take?” Erik asked as he turned around.

“This one,” Ilea said and opened one to Iz. “Aki, can you prepare a Taleen gate destination closest to the Vampire Courts?”

“We don’t know the specific location,” he answered.

“I can give you rough coordinates, if that helps,” Erik said, a small piece of paper appearing in his hand, a pen in the other. He handed it over a split second later. “There you go.”

“Which system, oh, I see. That works,” Aki said. “Thank you. Perhaps you can share some other locations with us, if you are willing.”

“Why not,” Erik said and flew through the gate.

Ilea gave Aki a last glance before she followed, finding a stunned Eregar hovering in the air.

He took in a deep breath and spread his arms.

Ilea prepared herself to interfere if he cast a spell, unsure if his given reason for visiting was the truth.

“It’s beautiful,” he said after a while, then looked to Ilea. “I’m overwhelmed,” he said and wiped at his eyes, then hugged her again.

“You’re getting a little overwhelming yourself,” Ilea said and patted his back.

He pushed away and smiled. “I know, I know. I’m sorry. But seriously. Teleportation gate technology, the entire taleen machinery controlled by an independent Guardian, an ancient tree scholar from another realm, cooperation between so many species. Even the Mava were there! A dragon corpse above Ravenhall, with Dark Ones and Taleen walking the streets. I couldn’t build an illusion as compelling.”

“Maybe you just needed a vacation from your void infestation realm,” Ilea said.

He puffed. “Right. Even I forget that sometimes. Just so much to see and do.”

“You want to explore here as well?” she asked.

“I do, but priorities must be set. Let’s go west, and see if any of the Vampires I knew have survived,” Erik said.

“Aki? Where to?” Ilea sent.

A Watcher flew towards them. “This way.”

The two followed, coming into a highly guarded hall with a single Taleen gate set into the center.

“You’ll have to travel quite a long way west. If you can, I’d like you to take this Watcher along with you,” Aki said.

Ilea grabbed the thing and stepped onto the gate, disabling her space magic resistance. “We’ll take some photos.”

Erik stepped onto the gate as well before they were sent away.

And appeared inside of a near empty hall, a single Centurion standing near the gate, green eyes taking them in.

“Exit is up the stairs,” Aki said.

Ilea walked up, soon feeling the cold breeze coming in from far above. She spread her wings after a while to traverse the long stairwell a little faster.

Finally, they stepped out into a barren wasteland, a broad and massive cyclone visible in the faraway distance grabbing her attention, the storm taking up a large part of the western horizon.

She took in a deep breath of the fresh and icy air. The ground in all directions had cracks and furrows, nothing growing in this region, distant mountains to the east and north, more wasteland to the south.

“Is that normal? That storm is massive. Might as well be Erendar,” Ilea said.

“The storm has been raging for nearly three weeks already, and it barely moved,” Aki said.

Erik closed his eyes and breathed. “Ah, the west. Long has it been,” he said and paused, then pointed. “The Frozen Wasteland, bridging the lands of the Elven domains and the Vampire Courts. And it seems to be storm season.”

“Any clue what’s in there?” Ilea asked.

“Ice sprites, ice bears, ice wyverns, probably an elemental or two. I once tried to study the weather phenomena responsible for the cold temperatures in the region, but I couldn’t quite come to any conclusive findings. However there were no records or tales I’ve found from before the Extraction, that speak of the region. With the already complex planetary constellation, it’s difficult to pin point the forces at play here.”

“Were the vampires here before the Extraction?” Ilea asked.

“Oh, not at all. But you’ll see,” Erik said with a joyous grin.

“Right,” Ilea spoke.

“Let us fly,” Erik said as he ascended, powerful magic pulsing from his form. “I’ll lead the way.”

Ilea spread her wings and joined his side. “Ready when you are, old man.”

“I’m not just old, Ilea. I’m ancient. A downright relic!” He summoned his pipe and lit it, puffing on it before he stored it yet again. “Off we go.”

A shock wave of air exploded when Eregar shot into the distance.

“Ready, little one?” Ilea said, covering the Watcher in a few layers of her armor.

“Sometimes I miss being your dagger, as strange as that sounds,” Aki said.

“Fewer responsibilities,” Ilea said. “I get it.”

“Not just that. Going on adventures just has something exciting about it,” he spoke.

“You know you can do that now, on your own,” she said.

“The time of singular perception is gone, I’m afraid. As are some simple pleasures, but I do take a moment where I can. You should go, or he’s going to be gone, you know?”

Ilea smiled. “He’s not particularly fast for a four mark,” she said, charged her wings and activated Reconstruction. Power thrummed through her ash and glass, the sound unable to follow as she sped out towards the tiny dot of blue she saw on the horizon, the vast and distant storm illuminated by the orange hues of the evening suns.