

Chapter 863 Hunting Grounds

Ilea spent the next few days traveling between various settlements of the Accords. She visited Felicia a few times, trained with the Mava, trained with the Sentinels, and the Meadow, and she tried raising her Curse Resistance with Kyrian.

Between the food, baths, and training, she focused on her Soul Perception, trying to see the healing process while describing her discoveries to Owl.

Aki had managed to set up a few custom enchanted machines to measure the curse below Paarah, finding it unchanging. Neither did the dwarf attack the city, or any other settlement they knew of.

Ilea watched the busy streets of Virilya, sitting on the balcony of a high end inn. Closer to the government buildings where Felicia had her meetings. It definitely had nothing to do with them acting like adventurers who got to know each other on that very day.

The people of Virilya went on with their business, unknowing of the monsters she had faced, unknowing of the cursed artifacts of the Sanguerrihn, the possible threat of the Ascended, or even the monsters hunting beyond their city walls.

She sipped from a glass of wine, watching a few fire mages perform their routines. In her mind's eye, she could see the small spheres shot out by the dwarf, the resulting explosions, and the pressure that came with it. Nothing less than artillery. She wondered how many houses could be destroyed by a single one of his spells. How many people would die.

A tap on her head made her turn. She found yellow eyes staring at her, brows raised.

"You're distracted," Felicia said.

"I just considered the damage Savien could do," she said.

"I thought this was a date?" Felicia said, sitting down next to her. "And all I hear is Savien this, Savien that."

Ilea smiled, feeling her hand being grasped.

"How is your soul?"

"Better. The fires help a lot, and Owl says my resistance helps as well," Ilea said.

"The curse?"

"I think most of the effects linger from the soul, but I'm getting better either way. Things in the city?"

"I'm glad you're recovering so fast. Things are... good. Trade, jobs, entertainment options. The immigrants from Baralia have integrated well, and our deals with the Accords are immensely helpful. Of course plenty remain stubborn, especially with the machines," Felicia said.

"They don't know Aki," Ilea said.

"Yes, and I agree that Virilya requires more gradual change. People are not ready to give up their power and control. And the populace might have opinions on you, but they're nowhere near as happy to receive the Accords as a whole."

“As long as they’re fine,” Ilea said.

Felicia smiled. “They have everything here. I don’t doubt the pressure to adopt technologies and Guardians from the Accords in a more widespread manner will increase in the coming years and decades, but for now, the capital remains as a cultural and commercial hub. And the only thing they fear are other people, organizations, and monsters summoned by them.”

“Yeah, Adam and the High King didn’t help, did they,” Ilea said and snorted.

“What happened to him, if you’re allowed to share that information.”

“I think he’s just imprisoned somewhere below Hallowfort, offered to help with whatever he could,” Ilea said. “Not that Verena didn’t want to rip off his head. Plenty of others wanted too, but there was a vote among the Accords.”

“How did it go?”

“I wasn’t there,” Ilea said.

“You didn’t care? After what he’d done?”

Ilea glanced over at the woman before she once again looked at the hundreds of people in the broad main road below. “Back when I fought him in Kohr, yeah. I would’ve killed him. But you should have seen the man.” She shook her head. “Living on with what he’s done is far worse a punishment. But honestly, I’ll leave that to the Accords. It’s not a decision I want to make.”

“Fair,” Felicia said and swirled her glass. “I like what the Accords has done to the nobility here.”

“You mentioned it. Less backstabbing, a common enemy so to say,” Ilea said.

“I don’t sleep enough,” Felicia said. “I wouldn’t say enemy, more a rival.”

“I would hate to kill you,” Ilea said.

“I’m tasked with changing your allegiance, you know that,” Felicia said and moved in for a kiss. They separated again, her arm around Ilea’s neck, her face close. “And finding all of your weaknesses,” she whispered and kissed her again.

Ilea smiled, touching the woman’s chin. “I have no weaknesses.”

“Oh? Is that so? I did hear about some cataclysmic battle between a storm and something that may or may not have been you,” Felicia said.

“How did that information even get out?” Ilea asked. She had of course shared the story with a few people, and a few others might have overheard.

“I heard that scavengers beyond Hallowfort reported the absence of a moving storm in a domain they previously avoided. The Wind of Aveer, they called it, its removal providing entire new scavenging and hunting grounds, access to ruins, and so on. I don’t know who talked, but someone did. Probably to praise you.”

Ilea smiled. “I didn’t lose though, nor am I weak to lightning or wind based magics.”

“You nearly died,” Felicia said.

“Just a little,” Ilea answered.

“Which means all we have to do is get a few of those moving storms and we can take you down,” Felicia said with a smirk.

“Right, I’ll be happy to fight more Elementals if you point me their way. Other rumors from the North about moving storms?”

“Not quite. It’s funny though. When even Empress Alyris struggles to properly explain the danger you pose. The demonstration with all of those machines helped cement the Accords in their minds, but some people still think you personally are just a dangerous Shadow at most.”

“That’s on them,” Ilea said.

“Yeah, but some people never learn.”

“I suppose they don’t,” Ilea said.

“I checked with the Library of Souls by the way. They don’t know much about Paarah, or the Sanguerrihn. Mentions in ancient poetry that is thought to be religious in nature. No mentions of specific curses either.”

“You trust them to share everything with you?” Ilea asked.

“I trust them to monitor me. And I trust them to have personal motives to get close to me, and with that, possibly close to you.”

“I’m flattered,” Ilea said in a dry tone.

Felicia smiled. “And by getting close to you, they can get close to the Meadow.”

“Now I’m hurt.”

“You should focus on recovering, my dear,” Felicia said. “Stop getting hurt.”

“I bet they would lose their minds at all the books we found in Paarah,” Ilea murmured.

“And you’re back to talking about your adventures,” Felicia said and stood up. “I got one of the dresses back already. Come on, I can’t wait to see you in it, and then undress you.”

Ilea rolled her eyes, but smiled, finishing her glass of wine before she teleported into the room.

It took four days for her soul to fully heal. Far faster than what even Owl had predicted. Ilea made sure to use her fourth tier often, not quite sure if any of it actually reached her soul but it strengthened her flames at the very least.

Spending a few days on more mundane training instead of fighting god like creatures proved useful in its own way. Sure, her Class levels remained the same, but every little bit would help, especially skills directly related to countering the Sanguerrihn.

‘ding’ ‘Soul Perception reaches 2nd lvl 13’

‘ding’ ‘Soul Perception reaches 2nd lvl 14’

‘ding’ ‘Teaching reaches lvl 17’

‘ding’ ‘Teaching reaches lvl 18’

‘ding’ ‘Telepathy reaches 2nd lvl 1’

Telepathy – 2nd lvl 1

You learn to communicate with beings through thought alone. Initiate conversations with anything that may be receptive to this form of communication.

2nd stage: You can now act as a relay between up to ten beings, allowing them to telepathically communicate with each other and you.

Category – Mind Magic

The addition made communicating through telepathy even easier. Ilea could already talk to multiple people at the same time, but when someone used to answer, another person didn't receive that answer, only Ilea did. Now they could essentially have full fledged group calls.

‘ding’ ‘Curse Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 27’

The level was more than welcome. Kyrian's damage output was nothing to scoff at, but she still had to entirely remove her curse resistance and leave her mantle deactivated for him to damage her enough.

‘ding’ ‘Ash Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 9’

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‘ding’ ‘Ash Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 11’

‘ding’ ‘Corrosion Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 2’

‘ding’ ‘Dark Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 15’

...

‘ding’ ‘Dark Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 17’

‘ding’ ‘Dust Magic Resistance reaches lvl 11’

...

‘ding’ ‘Dust Magic Resistance reaches lvl 17’

‘ding’ ‘Water Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 5’

Most of the other levels came from the few high level Mava that trained with her, more than willing after her Harbinger of Popi title had spread.

A splinter group of Taleen and Mava, coupled with Evan and a few of the Cerithil Hunters had joined Aki and Meadow in the colossal task of looking through the collected knowledge from Paarah, filtering through things they already knew, and possible additions that could be helpful to various fields of study.

The primordial curse remained a mystery, for the time being. Ilea soon found that she didn't care as much anymore. To both learn about the curse or to understand it. She had survived, and now she had a title that may or may not allow her to heal against the spell. The more she would face it, the

more resistant to it she would get, that much she knew. She had faced it once, she could face it again.

But not quite yet. She knew she had pushed the dwarf a little, to reveal some of his magic, but she needed more than just her fourth tier and an increased resilience to fight him. More levels would help, as would a second fourth tier skill that she knew would unlock at level eight fifty in all of her Classes. Not an easy task, but not an impossible one either, and Ilea had a few places where she assumed high level monsters could be found.

While the Meadow and Aki made inquiries into high level beings in the north, the latter even searching himself, Ilea looked at another section on the crude map within her notebook.

She stored the book with her wings spread and flying northwards, having started at the new Oasis of Verivyien.

The suns were already setting, and Ilea kept her eyes peeled for the region that supposedly even the Mava avoided. The Cursed Marshes.

Four days with leisure activities and light resistance training left her with quite a bit of motivation to let loose. Her wings thrummed with magical power. Blue runes occasionally lit up to boost the teleporting black winged form.

Ilea passed high reaching rock formations and even an abandoned Druned built settlement as she sped over the northern parts of the Sava desert. The sands had darkened, the sky clear with stars and moons shining down onto the wasteland.

Ilea grinned when she saw a series of flashes light up in the distance. She slowed and flew closer, seeing a few more flashes. Roars resounded, none of the sounds familiar to her. She landed on a rocky hill, hoping she hadn't just stumbled upon a group of hunting Mava. What she saw instead were humanoid creatures, some with four arms, others with two, gray armor marked with red color. Some wielded weapons, others were fighting with their hands, some few using magic, all of them engaged with a single two tailed black salamander the size of a truck.

Is that... She squinted her eyes as she watched, not yet engaging because she could tell the humanoids were the aggressors, the salamander showing wounds and cuts, but remaining in the fight which suggested to her that it was a mere monster. *That's not armor, and is that hair?*

The gray she had seen was skin instead, their waists covered in what looked like animal hides, the beings adorned with lion like manes and even tails, two tusks jutting out from their upper jaws. They shouted and grinned as they fought, even those injured by the acid sprays and long claws of the salamander.

Based on their speed and magic, Ilea assumed they were around level two hundred, if she compared them to lower leveled Shadows. One of them wielded a crude great hammer, the thing a downright boulder, attached to wooden roots. She raised her brows when she saw another one of the creatures take what looked like a flintlock rifle from its back, aiming down the simple metal sights of the weapon before it pulled the trigger. A small red flash came out of the barrel, the distance too high for her to see or hear an impact.

Not an explosion. Red like blood. She wondered what it was, certainly curious about this hunting party. Perhaps they were just monsters, but monsters rarely used weapons.

Let's crash the party, shall we, Ilea thought as she dissolved her wings and ran down from the hill and towards the fighting creatures.

She wondered how long it would take for any of them to notice her. While they were certainly focused on their foe, she would expect a bunch of Shadows to at least notice another person approaching their ongoing battle.

Ilea switched from a run to casually walking when she was about fifty meters away from the party, her body covered in her ash mantle as she watched the hunters surround the salamander with their various magics and weapons at the ready, striking whenever they got an opening.

The rifle wielder turned her way when she got closer, aiming down the sights of the weapon and signaling the others with a grunt. Based on the anatomy she could see now from this distance, she assumed the rifle wielder was a male, his hips less broad, and his muscles a little more defined than some of the others in his party.

He simply aimed at her, his two eyes a dark shade of green, barely visible in the starlight. The rifle was made entirely of metal, the barrel and butt a dull steel while the trigger and the likely enchanted shooting mechanism were made with a silvery metal. The creature was tense, watching her with focused eyes and a finger hovering right in front of the trigger.

A dangerous situation to be sure, but Ilea didn't plan on attacking one way or the other. She could tell that many in the party had noticed her by now, though still very much focused on their prey. Those who perceived her had moved to the other side of the large monster, bringing its body between themselves and her. *Still focused on the hunt.*

She assumed they would occasionally get curious Mava interrupting their battles if they hunted in the Sava desert, though she knew the often playful creatures would likely not outright kill other sapient beings without good reason. Locking eyes with the rifle wielder, Ilea watched the fight through her dominion.

[Ranger – lvl 218]

About the level I expected. She considered his ranger class, wondering how the rifle compared to a bow. Identifying some of the other fighters, she found many of them at a similar level, about half of them lower and below two hundred. There were twelve in total.

“Good evening,” she sent.

His finger moved slightly towards the trigger, but the ranger remained calm otherwise. Apprehensive, but calm.

“Ash being of the night. Do you claim our prey?” a voice answered to her telepathy, gravely, and with an accent she hadn't heard before, the e and I sounds noticeably different than how most humans talked in the Plains.

“Your prey is yours,” Ilea said, going with the flow. “That is an interesting weapon you wield. I am Lilith, human of the east.”

“We thank you, Lilith, human of the east,” the being spoke and grunted, to which the warriors spread out again, surrounding the injured salamander, two of its legs covered in deep cuts.

[Black tail Salamander – lvl 384] – [Angered]

Don't think anger is for the best, Salamander, Ilea thought before she returned her attention to the ranger. “Who are you? I have not met any of your kind.”

The four arms holding the rifle tensed for a moment as the being considered. “I am Rahk, of the Fanged Maryit tribe, ranger of three eyes. Have you come for battle?”

Ilea saw the beings finally overwhelm the salamander, a few of them fanning out immediately to flank her. *Experienced, as futile as it would be.*

“I seek the cursed marshes towards the north, but now I’m intrigued by your weapon. May I see it? Or is such a thing offensive to you?” Ilea said.

“I will not lay down my weapon. You would have to take it,” said Rahk.

Ilea smiled. The tone of his voice was confident, and challenging. *“If that’s what is required,”* she sent and simply teleported the tool into her hands, the frameworks easily distinguished.

She ignored the grunts and spells beings readied, instead marveling at the design of the weapon.

[Bloodcoil Hunting Rifle – High Quality]

Ilea looked at the fine engravings, the detailed metal workings, neither likely required for the rifle to work or be efficient. Compared to the crude steel weapons some of the warriors nearby wielded, what she held was a piece of art. She aimed down the sights and towards the sand dunes away from the hunters, and pulled the trigger.

Blood magic surged within the device, a small and compact spell that propelled a slug of metal outwards. She teleported in front of the flying projectile and raised her hand to catch it, the piece impacting into her mantle covered palm.

Interesting. She could tell it was coated in poison, but the effects were far too weak to affect her, even if the slug had managed to pierce her mantle. Teleporting back, she took a last look at the rifle before she threw it back towards the being, all of them tense and watching her.

Eager for a fight too, she noted, seeing the familiar look in some of their eyes.