

Chapter 582 Entanglement

Ilea stood as the storm subsided. Pouting as she glanced at the ancient elven mage. “You interrupted,” she said and winked.

The shade of a smile returned to his face as he turned to face them. “You have fought well. Perhaps I had the want to show my power.”

Bullshit, Ilea thought, raising her eyebrows at him. *Thought we couldn't survive this one. But now we will never know!*

She checked the messages, not exactly expecting much from the fight.

‘ding’ ‘Your group has defeated [Executioner Praetorian – lvl 800]’

‘ding’ ‘Flare of Creation reaches 3rd lvl 20’

‘ding’ ‘Displacement reaches 3rd lvl 15’

‘ding’ ‘Space Shift reaches 3rd lvl 12’

‘ding’ ‘Body of the Valkyrie reaches 3rd lvl 17’

‘ding’ ‘Deviant of Humanity reaches 2nd lvl 20’

‘ding’ ‘Veteran reaches 3rd lvl 16’

‘ding’ ‘Void Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 3’

‘ding’ ‘Void Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 4’

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

‘ding’ ‘You have survived and prevailed in battle against a level 800 foe despite brain death and continued damage to your body – One Core skill point awarded’

Let's not get dramatic okay? I was barely in danger there, she thought and crossed her arms with an annoyed expression behind her ash.

The lack of levels made sense to her based on the group setting. And still it seemed harsh after that battle. New enemies, especially that dangerous, usually rewarded at least a level. *It was three hundred levels higher than me*, she thought, checking if Deviant had the option to be advanced.

- Deviant of Humanity

You have proven without a doubt that you are the exception. One of few to have faced creatures of the likes you have killed in droves. Your name is a myth to many, feared or revered in the lands of humanity.

Hmm... two points available. Could also go for something else.

Ilea decided to keep her points for now, not seeing the reason to have another intimidation bonus when she already had little problems pissing off creatures far above her level. With fellow humans, the aura was plenty already, let alone skills like Monster Hunter or just her ash alone.

She noted that Feyrair had also not leveled since the fight had started. *No wonder he wants to be alone when he fights these machines.*

“Well done,” she said to the elf who had finally returned to his normal form, lying down on the floor as he caressed his temples.

“You two fought well together,” Asay said as he landed. “Thank you for the help, though it turned out unneeded,” he added, gesturing to Isalthar.

He would’ve at least gotten more range out of his own teleport with the initial displacement. Ilea hadn’t really expected Isalthar to intervene, let alone as effectively as he did.

“Advance with caution,” he said, looking at the splatters of silver left behind. “Creatures like these are rare and placed only in facilities of high importance.”

The elf turned and vanished.

Ilea watched the line in the spacial fabric, curious to see that he could teleport past the hall’s entrance.

“Hey Fey, I know a place where you could show off your fire,” Ilea said.

He glanced at her, still on the floor. “Please let me rest for a few minutes.”

“You can rest on the way. Want me to carry you?” Ilea asked.

The elf hissed and flew up. “Very well.”

“Asay?” Ilea asked, turning to the elf who was examining one of the remaining blobs of silver.

“I shall rejoin Farthorn, to continue our exploration,” he said. “However I must thank the two of you, for that wondrous display of arcane spectacle,” he added with an elegant bow.

Ilea smiled, waving at him. “We can pause longer if you need it, I was just kidding.”

The elf waved her off. “No, you’re right. There’s plenty of time on the way. I just usually prefer to start any battle with my spells ready and resources topped off.”

“Reasonable, but you have me. Worst case, we run the fuck away. I doubt even another Executioner could catch us. And then we can still call for the Avatar,” she said.

“Avatar?” Feyrair asked.

“Hmm... you’re right that doesn’t make any sense. He can only control wind. Isalthar I mean,” she said.

“I see. You make peculiar remarks. Perhaps it’s just your human nature,” he said.

Ilea twirled to face him in mid air. “Said the hissing carnivore.”

He looked at her and smiled. "I suppose our species would have its peculiarities when viewed with human eyes."

"It's your teeth mostly," Ilea said.

Feyrair smiled, showing the aforementioned.

Ilea smiled and led the elf to the facility she had destroyed. "How many points did you get by the way?" she asked as the elf looked around the far larger hall she had fought in, a dozen small craters showing where the cores had gone off.

"I was stuck with the Executioner," he said with a hiss.

Oh but I thought it appeared just before we arrived, Ilea thought but decided not to push him further. She knew his defeats had affected him. If anything, she respected the more stereotypical elf for having the discipline not to lash out. The only reason someone like Seviir or Heranuur didn't do so more frequently were the beatings they received in turn.

Feyrair at least put up a fight and even if he lost, no damage would last for more than half a minute.

"Do you think we could take Isalthar if we worked together?" Ilea asked, thinking back on the powerful display of magic.

"No," the elf said. "Not yet. He is far more powerful than what little he shows. You should treat him like a force of nature. But I suppose he wouldn't truly fight us anyway."

"How did he become as powerful as he is now? If he's not even up for a bout," Ilea asked. "Or are higher ranked elves just born that way?"

Feyrair's hair color changed from orange to a deep red. "Isalthar's past is his own to share. We are not born into such power. None but the Oracles. You know the risks of reaching such heights, the battles and bloodshed needed. You humans are far more concerned with political power and wealth, but even you should already know the attention personal strength can bring. Little of it beneficial. Now replace every political move, every form of blackmail, or assassination plot you love so much with direct and open duels."

"Sounds like a lot of capable people dying," Ilea said.

Feyrair grinned. "Every elf to reach his level has killed their own. You may question our ways, as I question yours, but know that no elf has reached their standing without the necessary skill and power to back it up."

"I judge them individually anyway," Ilea said, glancing at him.

A people forged by constant strive. In a world where killing rewards power.

"Why did you become a Cerithil Hunter?" she added. "Or did you accidentally stumble into a dungeon?"

The elf slowed down, glancing at her. "Why do you care?"

Ilea shrugged. "We fought together, defeated an Executioner even. Why wouldn't I be interested?"

He looked at her, the suspicion obvious in his eyes. "Very well. I thought our ways stagnant and meaningless. Fighting I always enjoyed but Isalthar gave me purpose where there was none before. I gained no pleasure killing other Elves and the most dangerous creatures lurk in the places of

creation. What better enemy is there to fight than the very one who has kept us occupied without perspectives for millennia?"

"You think the Elves would change if the Taleen weren't here?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Who knows? I'm not knowledgeable on the various Houses and their dealings, nor do I know the monarchs on a personal level, or understand the plans of the Oracles. But I know that far fewer of our young would die as early as they are right now. It may bring change, for the better or the worse."

"Wouldn't they just find something else to fight and die to?" she asked.

"Humans you mean? Possibly, yes. But even now they could not take your cities. Not the larger ones in the east that is. And no established elf would have an interest in venturing into human lands. It's so terribly drab and your cities are noisy and stuffed," he said.

"I thought you liked eating us?" Ilea asked.

"You do taste good. But there are many other creatures... ones that make for a better hunt," he said and grinned.

She nodded. "I see. So if I proof the strength of humanity, you'd come and hunt us down."

"I've grown more interested in your kind, thanks to you. So perhaps you're right," Feyrair said. "But contrary to Ben, I'm not interested in culture. Only the taste of your magic, your blood, and the terror when you know there is no hope."

"Now you sound like some battle crazed vampire," Ilea said.

Feyrair scoffed. "They are far too concerned about appearances. If only more of them would be obsessed with battle, perhaps I'd try to meet them again."

"You fought them before?" Ilea asked.

"Oh yes, though only on a few occasions. Neither of our kind normally travels far beyond our domains. But my position as a Cerithil Hunter has provided ample opportunity to do so," he explained.

"Using the Taleen network?" Ilea asked.

"Precisely. Their technology wasn't the only thing impressive about those dwarfs. The reach they had on this continent was second to none, or none whose marks remain," he said.

Ilea smiled. *If the taking of the sun changed environments, maybe it was easier to set up back then. I'd think some areas can only be reached using the remaining gates. For normal people that is.*

They reached the mine a moment later, Ilea gesturing down into the massive gaping hole. "Want to set fire to everything? There are two Hunter Praetorians nearby too. You can have one," she said and winked.

"How very generous of you. And why should I waste my precious magic on these lowly Guardians?" he asked in a mocking tone.

"Ehm, because you want to set things on fire?" she asked.

"Oh, you know me so well," he said and floated out into the cavern, white flames dancing around him.

“Go get them, pyromancer,” Ilea said and turned to the nearest Praetorian. “I’ll deal with these guys in the meantime.”

She ignored the heat and spreading flames to her right, appearing close to the first of four Praetorians. Her attacks crashed into its shields a moment later, their counterattacks and spells barely even noticeable compared to the Executioner she had just faced.

Ilea flew back when the first of them detonated, glancing over to the pit. All she saw was a fast moving elf, swaths of white flame spreading in a downward spiral as Guardians lit up and fell.

She focused on the rest, quickly stripping them of their shields before she shredded one after the other with her ash and fists, the last two exploding quickly after one another. Ilea stood amidst the slowly spreading energies, joined by Feyrair.

He casually landed next to her, the spreading spheres of magic tugging on his scale armor but other than his hissing, she couldn’t detect a visible reaction.

“I see you’re already done,” he commented. “I would’ve hoped you’d let me join at least for a little while.”

“They’re just the wardens. Let’s see if I can attract the actual threat,” Ilea replied and charged monster hunter.

She cupped her hands in front of her mouth and imitated Feyrair’s dragonroar.

He looked at her with a confused expression before he hissed.

Ilea just laughed. “I can slowly copy people’s abilities. Soon I’ll have your dragon form figured out.”

The elf looked horrified for a second, his eyes squinting a moment later. “You lie.”

“Can elves not lie?” she asked.

“There is no reason for deceit when power triumphs all,” he said.

“I feel you, but it’s just a stupid thing to say. What if someone manages to manipulate a monarch to hunt you down? And that person might not be stronger than you,” she suggested.

“There is no glory in such an action. No elf would try something like that,” he said.

“You underestimate your kind,” Ilea said with a smile. “Sapient creatures are willing to go far beyond their natural disposition, education, and principles if their survival depends on it, or if they’re fueled by hatred or necessity. Did you not defy the Oracles yourself? The very authority of your kind?”

“But there is glory in defying the powerful,” he said.

“That’s what you think. Maybe someone else might justify deceit with the goal they’re trying to achieve. Say the death of an Oracle. They could not do so directly but if the goal is reached through deceit, manipulation, or a trap, would the ends not justify the means?” she asked.

“A very human way to look at things,” he said. “There are always those who defy normalcy, just like you stand here right now, fighting Taleen side by side with an elf. I would not be unreasonable to assume there are those of our kind who would apply the means you speak of, yet I’d still deem it rare.”

Ilea nodded, looking at the two quickly approaching Hunter Praetorians. “That makes sense, I suppose. Just be aware of it, before you get fucked over by a fellow elf. I take the left one.”

He hissed, turning into his dragon form with a surge of magic and heat.

Ilea smiled, her auras flaring up before she vanished, blinking towards her target in the hopes of destroying it before the elf managed to finish his.

She heard a roar from behind but ignored it for now. The Hunter tried to get some distance between them as soon as it realized the situation, the corridor rather large to allow both of them to run side by side.

Ilea didn't mind, easily catching up with her double teleportation and wings. Her first punch landed when the whole corridor suddenly exploded in fire.

She turned and spread her arms. “Really?” her voice was lost in the continuous torrent of flame, arcane arrows flying past her small form and towards the source of the fires.

The two Hunters had no way to escape in the tight space, Feyrair catching up with his powerful wings as he kept his breath attack up. Ilea was sure she saw the dragonling smile with his toothy and monstrous jaws.

“You fuck,” she murmured and rolled her eyes, following the three massive beings before she set her displacement gate. They all vanished and appeared behind her, now facing the mine.

Might as well move them towards the things they were meant to destroy, she thought. And hopefully a surprise for Feyfey.

She smirked as she charged Heart of Cinder, strolling through the still heated corridor as she followed the rampaging beast and arcane machines. Their shields were already gone, Feyrair's breath definitely not easily ignored, if he actually managed to hit anything with it.

He followed one of the archers into the large cavern, Ilea speeding up and appearing next to the other. Heart of Cinder released as her ashen limbs started cutting into the thin protective layer of metal.

The two explosions resounded nearly at the same time, Ilea appearing outside the range of the blast whereas Feyrair regrew the massive scales and wing taken by the arcane surge.

A roar resounded from below, closer now than before. Ilea glanced towards the sound, seeing nothing in the darkness. Instead she felt a presence, something trying to invade her mind.

Fuck off, she sent towards the mind magic beast, using Monster Hunter to roar back. The attack didn't stop however, only increasing in intensity. She felt a complex spell manifest within her mind, fear, pressure, and madness itself. It was a subtle change but easily noticed with her extensive experience in the matter.

“How's your mental resistance?” she asked, glancing at the dragonling. “There's something down there invading my mind.”

“In this form? I'm rather resistant. Though I do feel a pressure. Shall we go into the dark, together?” he asked, moving his massive wings to join her.

“Can you see it?” Ilea asked. “I saw a glimpse of a creature before and would rather avoid getting close.”

He roared. "How unexpected. I cannot see the creature."

Ilea landed next to his head and pointed. "I can feel its mind somewhere around there," she said, the pressure increasing, an urge to go and fight the thing surging up within her.

"We should get closer," Feyrair said.

"Can't you shoot fire from here?" Ilea asked. "You know what, you're right. Let's go down there."

Feyrair flew into the dark, joined by Ilea. The remnants of white flame burned on the walls around them.

Ilea didn't feel the presence anymore, just a pull. Something that called her, to fight, and to show her power.

They reached the darkness, white flames burning on Feyrair's Elven form and Ilea's ashen one. Everything was quiet, the light of their fires illuminating only what lay right before them.

Slithering tentacles with serrated teeth writhed, spreading out and welcoming them in their wonderful embrace. Ilea felt happy, and content. She didn't remember why she had wanted to fight something as beautiful as this.

Teeth sunk into her ash, set alight by the fires. She didn't understand why the ashen limbs coming out her back were cutting into the loving creature.

The creature screeched and retreated, flames clinging to its body as Ilea's head started to pound. She felt the mind magic now, could push it aside like she had done so many times before. *That was a close one*, she thought with a smile and slapped Feyrair, his dazed look not exactly becoming on him.

She felt more magic slowly seep into her mind but with her flames and ash, she now knew she could resist. "Let's nuke this place from orbit," she said to the confused elf and pulled him up towards the top of the mine.