

Chapter 525 Diverging Possibilities

Ilea found no human corpses in the hall that hadn't already been there.

What did you try to achieve here? she wondered, looking at the Elder of the Order.

She wasn't sure it was actually him but most of their knowledge suggested such.

She sent a few peaceful thoughts and emotions to the mind lurking below, not ready to find out who or what it was quite yet.

A few blinks brought her out to the gate, its flawless form still a part of this reality, a gateway to another world. The world she now called her home.

Ilea stepped through and found Hector on the other side.

"I saw the message," he said. "Well done."

"It wasn't me who killed her," Ilea said. "The others?"

"In the factory. Your friend survived, sleeping off the heavy wounds now. Michael apparently got her out in the end. He's already busy working through the information we got from this," Hector said.

"What information?" Ilea asked.

Hector chuckled. "You didn't think it weird that a blood mage obsessed with magic came to help with the war efforts of an Empire that restricts it?"

"Go on," she said.

"Michael was here to see what the ritual did. He must have understood a large part of it before coming to this shit town and I'm pretty sure he's the reason this last ritual went so well," Hector said.

"Really? You think he supplied the Order with information?" she asked. "Why? Just to see what they would achieve?" she said.

"You say that like it's a minor thing. We found another realm. I'm sure he's going back in there the moment he knows it's safe," Hector said. "I'm not sure you understand the value of that little gate behind you."

"Lots of powerful creatures to fight," Ilea said and nodded.

Hector laughed.

"See, that's why you should be a pirate and not choose the role of a righteous knight or benevolent ruler," he said.

"You're going back to loot now?" she asked, ignoring his comment. Her stance on him hadn't changed.

"One dangerous creature died. There's plenty more. I need a moment to recover. Those were death and astral spirits, Ilea. Do you know how rare even the former is? I haven't even heard of the latter!" he said. "And they're nearly all above five hundred. I need my crew to even try and deal with that."

He shook his head and sighed. “And that fucking annoying cold. My water froze before it even hit the targets. Neely nearly died. I nearly died!”

“Where’s Velamyr?” she asked.

“He basically died. But it’s not that easy, killing a high level time mage,” Hector said. “Trust me, I tried. Michael’s retelling was pretty funny though. I don’t think he knew. Probably assumed the General risked his life in their battle.”

“He probably still did, if he nearly died,” Ilea said.

“You’d like to think that, right? You’re unkillable too. I wouldn’t even know where to begin. You fought a level four hundred sapient creature, with two unique Classes. And you somehow didn’t die. That fucking beast took me apart in ten seconds. If she had focused on me for a few minutes, I wouldn’t be here right now,” Hector said.

Ilea didn’t go into how close she got to death in there. Hector knew they both constantly threaded a thin line. It was the only way to improve at a reasonable pace at this stage.

“You survived too,” Ilea said.

“That’s true... say, you’re not interested in fighting those hordes on my side?” he asked.

She smiled and shrugged.

“Hector, Hector. You know very well that I can take them myself. Why would I share with you?” she asked.

“Because you’re a nice and upstanding human, ready to save a fellow mage,” he tried.

“There’s no reason for you to face them anymore. Don’t think I’ll come to save your ass,” she said and meant it.

He looked genuinely hurt. For less than a second.

“Teleport far when you go meet them, a few local investigators are trying to figure out why the mana density is increasing in this district,” he said.

She nodded.

“I’ll stay here for a while. Don’t worry, I won’t kill any of your precious Dark Ones should they chose to join me here,” he said.

Ilea doubted it but she also doubted his words on the others.

A few quick blinks brought her into the factory hall.

Two Michaels were present, working on a few desks they had gathered.

“You’re back... are the creatures dead?” he asked and looked at her.

Ilea checked on Felicia, touching her brow as she felt her friend’s condition through her healing.

“You got her out?” she asked.

One of the Michaels stopped his work. “Yes. She was mortally wounded. Her survival was uncertain, as was mine.”

Ilea glanced at him. “Thank you.”

“What about Velamyr?” she asked.

“The creatures?” Michael insisted.

“Dead. But there were many more. Spirits who I’m sure will come for the city sooner or later,” she said.

“I’m not so sure. Powerful barriers kept out the cold in the palace. Not a single spirit attacked despite the extensive battle. Perhaps the defenses are there for more than just the weather,” he suggested.

“As to Velamyr Ryse. A spell activated when his heart was destroyed. I felt both time magic and a teleportation spell. Both quite powerful. I suspect he’s somewhere in the Empire now, in a place only he is aware of,” the man said.

“You’re sharing secrets like that with someone that isn’t even a member yet?” Ilea asked with a smile.

Michael gave her a long look. “The Empire of Lys is a powerful player and Ryse is a strong piece on the board. I’m simply sharing a piece of information that might help you in the future,” he said.

She nodded. With what she knew on his views about magic, she could definitely see how an alliance with her and Ravenhall would be more interesting than stronger ties with Lys. Maybe there were more personal reasons involved too but she knew very little about the two men, let alone their relationship.

“You lied to me, didn’t you?” she asked.

The second Michael glanced her way now too.

He smiled and nodded. “The pirate hinted at it. Or did you figure it out yourself?”

“You told them how to do the ritual? You’re good with space magic runes, aren’t you?” she said, not sharing the fact that Hector had told her. She didn’t even know what hint he meant.

“Not good, no. That wasn’t a lie. They were simply abysmal. I’m surprised a blood mage of Elder Zion’s level could have this little knowledge of blood magic rituals. Fanaticism truly is a breeding ground for magical accidents and misinformation. Their focus on sacrifices made the whole process more unstable than they had intended. I was sure it would fail nonetheless, at least preventing the unneeded death of tens of thousands but alas, I was wrong,

“I assumed the other side to be simply incredible at space magic. To force a connection between realms. It was quite disappointing to find no runes in their realm, already taken by the hidden figure responsible for this ritual. The Mantis you and the pirate have killed, I presume,” he said.

“Likely,” she said. He did inform the enemy but the fact that he saved the city’s population remained. Had the original ritual gone off, they’d still be cleaning up the Cursed.

Ilea just wasn’t sure what would be worse in the end.

“The gate has to be closed,” she said.

“Under no circumstances,” Michael said. “It’s a gate to a new realm... potentially new magic, ancient knowledge by sapient creatures living in that city. The ritual alone, if we can somehow find the knowledge. It would let us research long range space magic gates with an actual possibility of success!”

Ilea didn’t share anything about the project she founded herself.

“I don’t think you understand... that world is lost. Whatever that city had once been, its rulers are dead. Its population is dead. Spirits of insane power roam the wastes and they will find that city, that temple, no matter how powerful the defenses are. And when they come through to Elos, the north will look like a holiday vacation spot compared to here,” Ilea said.

He paced around for a few seconds. “I... I’ve faced Spirits of Death before. I’m aware of the dangers. I just think the potential rewards still overshadow the risks. Surely not all of them would go through the portal? Many would return once they feel the mana here. Or they will remain in Gyffold and its surroundings, the ambient mana slowly rising in the coming years,” he said and stopped her reply with a gesture. “Either way... we cannot close the gate. I’ve said it to Ryse and I’ll say it again to you. With my power, it’s simply impossible. Perhaps if I could research the ritual, the runes from the other side.”

“I won’t try to stop any of your from scouring that temple but if I find a way to close the gate, I will,” Ilea said.

Michael again just looked at her, his copy continuing its work.

“I understand. I haven’t fought the hordes the Pirate has mentioned. His stories tend to be exaggerated but if you think the risk unacceptable, I won’t try to disprove it. You two are more experienced when it comes to combat after all,” he said.

Surprisingly reasonable, she thought and walked back to Felicia, stroking her hair lightly. She knew the risk of showing their relationship but with everything else Michael knew, it might even be an advantage for her friend. Felicia wasn’t powerless herself after all. Taking her as a hostage or killing her to get to Ilea would prove dangerous.

“Did you lie about the little countermeasures you set up too?” she asked.

Michael raised a brow. “No. There was a high chance they would use my information but one can never be sure. Should they have done the ritual their way, the districts we prepared would have been spared. But my word is all you have on that. I could share the ritual runes and countermeasures with you if you wish to have them studied.”

“Just like that?” she asked.

“I would ask for suitable compensation of course,” Michael said.

Ilea smiled. “I see.”

She formed an ashen armchair and plopped down. Ilea needed four baths and a restaurant’s worth of food.

The ritual was stopped and Felicia had survived.

She summoned a meal and started eating, closing her eyes as she finally read through the many notifications.

‘ding’ ‘Your group has defeated [Akina – Warden of the Sanctuary – lvl 220 / Venom Touched – lvl 208]

...

‘ding’ ‘Your group has defeated [Uryina – Queensguard of Erendar – lvl 312 / Bloodhealer Priest – lvl 302]

‘ding’ ‘Your group has defeated [Pyine – The Toothbreaker of Sephilon – lvl 365 / Queensguard

of Erendar – lvl 363]

...

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Spirit of Death – lvl 428]

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Spirit of Death – lvl 520]

...

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Spirit of Death – lvl 232]

She had slain hundreds of spirits, scrolling through before she forced them away, only looking at the level up notifications.

‘ding’ ‘The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 365 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 366 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 367 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Kin of Ash has reached lvl 365 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Kin of Ash has reached lvl 366 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Kin of Ash has reached lvl 367 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 161 – One stat point awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 162 – One stat point awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 163 – One stat point awarded’

...

‘ding’ ‘The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 189 – One stat point awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 190 – One stat point awarded’

The levels were quite formidable for the comparatively short fight. She had gotten more out of the city clearings. Those had been full days of constant battle and killing. Ilea assumed the much higher danger here coupled with a few above six hundred creatures resulted in the level ups.

Much more direct danger but in the end I could still just go in and fight them, then escape. If the Astral Spirits don’t try to hunt me down actively, I should have no issue just fighting those hordes for weeks on end, she thought with a grin.

Ilea had considered fighting Miststalkers but these spirits were generally at a higher level and their capabilities weren’t exactly mind blowing. *Spirits of Death at least.*

Some of the creatures could prevent blink but Displacement solved that issue entirely.

‘ding’ ‘Absolute Destruction reaches 3rd lvl 29’

‘ding’ ‘Blink reaches 3rd lvl 29’

‘ding’ ‘Sentinel Sphere reaches 3rd lvl 29’

‘ding’ ‘Azarinth Perception reaches 3rd lvl 28’

‘ding’ ‘Azarinth Reversal reaches 3rd lvl 22’

‘ding’ ‘Heart of Cinder reaches 3rd lvl 28’

‘ding’ ‘Ashen Wings reaches 3rd lvl 27’

‘ding’ ‘Eyes of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 20’

‘ding’ ‘Keeper of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 30’

Five skills at thirty for Kin of Ash... before Sentinel, she thought. The fact that nothing had gotten to thirty one by now suggested that it really was the current highest possible level.

She wondered when another tier would show up. Could also be that it just takes years to get to thirty one.

‘ding’ ‘Force reaches 2nd lvl 18’

‘ding’ ‘Force reaches 2nd lvl 19’

‘ding’ ‘Force reaches 2nd lvl 20’

‘ding’ ‘Flare of Creation reaches 2nd lvl 18’

‘ding’ ‘Flare of Creation reaches 2nd lvl 19’

‘ding’ ‘Flare of Creation reaches 2nd lvl 20’

‘ding’ ‘Displacement reaches 2nd lvl 19’

‘ding’ ‘Displacement reaches 2nd lvl 20’

‘ding’ ‘Space Shift reaches 2nd lvl 10’

...

‘ding’ ‘Space Shift reaches 2nd lvl 15’

‘ding’ ‘Body of the Valkyrie reaches 2nd lvl 4’

...

‘ding’ ‘Body of the Valkyrie reaches 2nd lvl 14’

‘ding’ ‘Space Awareness reaches 2nd lvl 4’

...

‘ding’ ‘Space Awareness reaches 2nd lvl 8’

The skills were coming along nicely.

Each level just provides a single stat point. I could just fight for hours on end in those hordes while trying to not kill anything but should I really just ignore leveling?

Evolutions would come one way or the other... but it will become harder as time goes on to get them.

She really had to get her skills higher before pushing on. Even if her third Class wouldn't evolve at two or three hundred like she suspected, her main Class skills should be capped before reaching four hundred.

Ilea quickly checked and found that she could level all three active skills of her third Class to the third tier. Each would cost one Core skill point.

I have so many at this point.

She quickly thought about the three skills. Force, Displacement, and Flare of Creation.

The latter two had proven to be simply incredible.

Flare of Creation added a new dimension to her damage, slowing enemy regeneration while damaging magical constructs, health, and mana. The immunities and resilience bonus were just additional.

Displacement was simple enough but already it had allowed her to bypass so many anti teleportation enchantments and even abilities. She thought herself lucky to not have encountered the same kinds of Spirits of Death before.

The offensive utility it provided created so much chaos amidst enemy lines, let alone the fact that she could even teleport allies.

Force had been useful, yes. It had saved her in a few close situations but she could've likely blinked or displaced herself out just as well. The stopping effect was minuscule and did essentially the same as Displacement when it came to the enemy spells' impact on her.

She'd rather throw projectiles back at enemies than just stop them. Maybe if she were a heavier fighter with a focus on armor and shields. The reality was that Ilea constantly moved. Most projectiles were either dodged or hit her on purpose to activate Sentinel Core.

The concentrated pushes were nice to have and definitely inconvenienced some high level targets of a similar size and weight as herself but compared to the other skills it just kind of fell behind.

Skills available for third tier advancement in [The Faen Valkyrie]:

- ***Force***
- ***Flare of Creation***
- ***Displacement***

Ilea decided to give the other available active skills a shot before making a decision on Force. The other two she advanced with one core skill point each. She didn't check her General skill levels yet.

'ding' 'Flare of Creation reaches 3rd lvl 1'

Active - Flare of Creation – 3rd lvl 1

Let the fires erupt, burning away your health in the exchange for devastating power. Attacks with your body are infused with the Flame of Creation, dealing lingering damage to health, mana, and magical constructs. You are immune to stunning, fear, and shout abilities. Your resilience is increased by 45.5% [364%]

2nd stage: The pale flame settles within your core. Flare of Creation now affects enemy health regeneration. This effect is higher for areas directly touched by the Flame of Creation.

3rd stage: Your experience with Flare of Creation allows you to infuse your magical constructs with its effects. For each level in the third tier, the skill's upkeep is reduced by a static 10 [10] points of health per second and you may sacrifice an additional static 100 [100] points of health per second to enhance the skill's effects.

Category: Aura – Body Enhancement

She read through the new part twice before she smiled. *The upkeep would reduce the cost from three fifty to just fifty points of health per second. And could I?*

She stopped herself from testing the new power right next to Michael but was very interested.

A hundred points for each level... meaning I could sacrifice three thousand points of health per second at level thirty? That's nuts... I don't think this skill should exist with someone having Sentinel Reconstruction in the third tier.

Ilea couldn't help but giggle to herself, trying to hide the noise with more food stuffed into her mouth.

She focused again and checked Displacement's third tier.

'ding' 'Displacement reaches 3rd lvl 1'

Active – Displacement – 3rd lvl 1

Shift space to your will, making an object or person appear somewhere else.

2nd stage: Your familiarity with teleportation and Space Magic allow you to move one additional object for each level in the 2nd and 3rd tier. Magical constructs are now affected by Displacement.

3rd stage: You may choose two flat areas and connect them through space. At the time of marking an area, it has to be within the range of Displacement. Areas have to be connected within one minute of activating the spell and cannot be further apart than 500m [875m]. This ability can only be used every 600 seconds [255 seconds]. Additionally you may change the orientation of the objects you displace.

Space Magic

Ilea decided to test this one instead of trying to understand what exactly any of it meant. *Being able to change the orientation of things is pretty tight.*