

Chapter 414 That's no Moon

Niivalyr spread his curse through the creatures, feeling health and mana return to him. He had little opportunity to test his newfound power after Ilea had split off.

It had been disappointing, the impact it had on her. Now he realized that it wasn't him at all. *An extraordinary human*, he noted, underlined even more by the present healer who lacked any of the confidence and power the huntress exuded.

The monsters quivered under his spell, their senses disturbed, an illness eating at their health and a steady drain slowly ridding them of their very life. And still they resisted. He sent barrier shards into their bodies, most glancing off the powerful plating. He focused on the corrupted spots to penetrate deep into their bodies.

He finalized the barrier in front of him as it appeared with a powerful vibration.

Catelyn floated above him, releasing a torrent of explosive spells that turned the hall into a furnace.

Maro sent beams of death magic at the creatures, slowly burning into them.

Niivalyr couldn't help but enjoy the sheer awe present on the newfound group of allies. Their uselessness was apparent as they displayed their power.

Ilas was waiting with them, blades drawn and ready to strike.

He respected the dark one, the only one who did not complain constantly. The only one who did not show disdain to what he was. If he had been alone, the lizardwoman would have been slaughtered, despite the present danger of the corruption.

A warrior of her level made little difference in a battle such as this. *She should return to the first layer to fight the hordes and not play at the core of it all.*

At least they were standing back, not acting irrational like so many young of his own species would.

His barrier cracked but he remained calm, already forming another one behind.

The creatures, like many in the Descent, had no way to fly or attack at range. In a situation like this, they would undoubtedly flee but the corruption prevented that, keeping them aggressive and attacking.

The small space also guaranteed that he could hold them back, for a while at least. At the same time their combined ranged efforts didn't go to waste.

It did not take long for the creatures to die to the attacks.

The familiar bell rang in his mind as he lowered the barriers once more, the shining white light fading.

"Well, that is quite a bit more than I had expected," Relly said in a nervous tone.

Niivalyr didn't show his fangs but the fear enticed him. It had been a while since he had eaten fresh meat and blood, hunted and killed with his own hands. Too much had happened in the last months. *I shall find time, after this annoying endeavor is dealt with.*

Catelyn felt the eyes on her. Another tale to add to the legends. She sighed, floating down in her large form.

The gate remained closed, singed and already damaged by the creatures.

She had calmed down considerably. Letting loose so freely was one of the greatest ways to deal with stress.

“What do you see?” she asked, glancing at the elf hovering a little farther back. His barriers were invaluable. Another thing to add to her list of growing debts. *I should have never let them go. That expedition was doomed the moment they left.*

It wasn't true and she knew it. Even a single person could have likely triggered whatever had caused the corruption to spread.

Calm down, focus on your meditation, she breathed in deeply and closed her eyes for a moment.

“There are enchantments in place. Against teleportation. Reinforcement too, for the steel. I doubt we are breaking in there anytime soon.” Maro said.

“I agree. We have to disable the magic first,” the elf said.

Both seemed to have calmed down a little, the act of slaughtering some corrupted monsters really helped one's demeanor.

Catelyn had nearly been driven nuts by their constant bickering. Arrogant and powerful in their own ways and she knew very well that she herself wasn't exactly very different.

Their fragile alliance wasn't made for this kind of pressure, not without the glue Ilea brought to the picture.

“Ilas, can you scout through the facility to look for more survivors?” Catelyn asked.

The dark one nodded in silence and vanished.

He really has made himself useful. Even I had doubted him and here we are.

“How many people were in that group, Carul?” she asked and turned around.

“Six people I believe. Verita being one of them,” the mage replied quickly.

She frowned, “Any idea what the others can do?”

“I did not know them personally, I'm sorry,” Carul said.

“Who's Verita?” Maro asked.

“She was one of the expedition leaders. Her level is close to yours. She wields two blades, ancient relics infused with light and fire. One of the most dangerous people near Hallowfort,” Catelyn said. *And a major pain in everyone's ass.*

“We have to assume they were corrupted. Can you tell if they are in there?” she asked.

“I know that the group I have tracked has come this way, yet I cannot pierce the enchantments placed on the gate,” the mage said.

“Let’s get to work then,” Maro said, nodding towards the elf.

“How did you find the facility?” Relly asked a moment later.

“Ilas is an exceptional tracker. Even in the desert, he could follow the magic trace,” Catelyn said.

“Speaking of desert, I felt something insanely powerful in there,” Maro commented.

“We are at layer twenty. So far there were singular monsters on layer ten and fifteen. Perhaps the Veramath originally resided in the fifth layer too,” Catelyn said.

Relly nodded. “There were sightings of massive sand movements. So far it has stayed away from this facility. Otherwise nothing would be left alive. Some have thought them to be natural sandstorms.”

Maro snorted. “The only good thing about sand creatures is that they usually stay in sand. Just fucking avoid deserts. Nothing about this place is natural,” he said in a dry tone, touching the gate in certain places as he pushed and pulled on the magic within.

“We shall avoid it if possible. Let us hope the corruption hasn’t reached it,” Catelyn said.

“If it needs sand to travel through we’re probably fine. Even if it’s corrupted,” Maro said.

Ilea squinted her eyes, lying prone on the steel floor right behind the gate that led into the eighteenth layer.

It was located a couple dozen meters up from the ground of the layer like with the time hyena layer. The gate had been pried open from the bottom which had prompted her to lie down and survey for a moment.

The Fae stood next to her head, on one knee and with a hand to its nonexistent chin. The only things missing were a cowboy hat and a leather jacket.

“What do you think, Indie?” she asked, her eyes kept scanning over the landscape. Without her second tier light magic resistance, she would have certainly gone blind a couple times already.

Ilea couldn’t exactly tell what produced the bright light, other than the fact that it was coming from above. The landscape itself reminded her of the desert in the south. It looked wrong however, reflecting a little too much light. The sand too looked too hard, too flat.

She occasionally saw small spots flying high above the ground. *Guess for this one I can’t just fly up to get to safety.*

A blink brought her out and she quickly flew down to the ground. The ground looked even weirder from close up and when she landed, it cracked under her weight.

It does look like sand though, she wondered and dug a little deeper with some of her limbs, finding normal sand farther down. *Hmm.*

Heat

She looked over at the Fae floating a meter away.

“Ah, I see,” she said, looking up to see one of the flying forms approaching.

“We’ve got a visitor. Stay behind me,” Ilea said, tilting her head a little.

The Fae listened and moved close to her back.

She spread her wings and tail, flying up a couple meters to make sure she wouldn’t lose the advantage her new third tier bonuses provided.

The creature certainly looked like one of the weirdest things she had seen so far. An elongated vertical body that resembled a plant’s roots perhaps? Wings spread behind it, made of the same thin root like tendrils that intertwined into each other, the speed not corresponding with the slow and eerie movements at all. Not that the thin tendrils provided enough physical resistance to create working wings in the first place.

It was white in color but more akin to faded bark or bone. Its head reminded Ilea of dice, a single ten sided one perhaps but smooth.

It stopped a dozen meters away, itself easily that large, its wingspan double that.

[Elder Sun Sprite – lvl ???]

“Quach sezim naa quip.” Sounds reached her mind but Ilea had no clue what to do with it. There were no emotions transmitted either nor was there an incline or decline in the noise, indicating a question or statement.

The words seemed taxing to her mind but she was pretty sure it hadn’t been intended as an attack.

“English, Elos or emotions and thoughts?” she asked, sending calmness and a mental greeting along.

The creature remained quiet for a moment.

“Sena lari,” it said but Ilea just shook her head.

“I don’t understand you,” she said.

Stupid

She had to focus for a second to realize the thought came from the Fae.

The Sun Sprite twitched a little, moving a meter closer.

“What is it little guy, can you talk to this one?” she asked.

Danger

Stay

Hidden

The Sprite suddenly appeared behind her, at the same distance. It immediately screeched into her mind and focused a sphere of bright energy between its thin tendril like arms.

Ilea could feel the energy from the distance as well as the heat. She turned and kept the Fae behind herself, waiting for an attack.

“Saaa maduun,” the creature said, the mental pressure much more powerful this time.

“He’s a friend, alright? We’re just going to move through. No fight needed,” she said.

“Saaa maduun,” the Elder Sun Sprite repeated.

Warning, the Fae conveyed.

“I figured as much,” Ilea said and started moving backwards over the landscape, slowly and with spread arms.

The being followed at the same speed, energy still held within its hands.

“I’ll protect you, little guy, don’t worry,” she said.

Danger, it said and pointed at its own body.

No danger, it added and pointed at Ilea’s back.

She saw the gestures through her sphere.

“Yeah, seems like it has a problem with you. I’d rather side with something that can communicate with me than a weird sprite sending cryptic warnings for no apparent reasons. Hear that flying root thing! You better back off!” she laced her voice with Monster Hunter.

The being recoiled at the sound before the energy in its hands was unleashed.

Here we go, she thought and was hit near instantly. The light magic attack came faster than her precognition could inform her. It burned a hole into her ash and left behind a seared spot on her skin. Impressive power but nothing that posed a danger to her. She was somewhat sure the creature hadn’t used all its power however.

The ash reformed, as did another ball of energy. Ilea could see it form within her sphere, the gathering power within a near invisible field around it. The field quivered before a minuscule opening formed that let everything out in a focused beam.

She was seared again, deeper this time. “You might want to think about what you’re doing, big guy,” she said, once more lacing her voice. A warning this time.

Ashen limbs spread behind her and heat started to gather in her chest.

The being stopped collecting energy and instead lifted one of its arms, a bright ball coming to life, nearly blinding Ilea even with her resistance.

Flee

Ilea trusted the Fae. Never before had she felt such urgency coming from a transmitted thought. She turned and sped up, not risking the charge up her third tier wings provided. An ashen limb moved the Fae from her back to her front, her hands holding it in a protective manner as ash formed to further shelter the creature.

A powerful beam of light slammed into her side, not destabilizing her but burning into her shoulder. Four more beams slammed into her back, one into her face. Her healing reformed the molten skin and muscle.

She sped up and used the newfound agility in her flight to twirl up and down, changing trajectories so quickly a normal human body would've been squashed to a pulp.

As she moved, Ilea saw the dozens of sprites behind and around her, moving in from all directions. Many of the beams missed at this point, their eyes and arms not moving as fast as their actual spells.

Her wings were burned through from time to time but her healing took care of it quickly, the beams rather concentrated and small. The attacks would have been more dangerous if they lasted longer.

Ilea continued her acrobatics without retaliating, knowing her body would be reduced to a steaming pile of bones the moment she stood still. Even her quick recovery wouldn't deal well with all that.

The attacks stopped for a moment and she focused on the distant wall that was barely visible, flying as fast as she could, still moving in a zigzag to offset the beams.

Her eyes went wide when the moving landscape around her slowed down. Her limbs reformed into a thin barrier of ash on her back as she felt magic emanate from the Fae in her arms. She glanced back and found a circle of at least fifty Sprites, a large flaming ball of light in their midst.

The beam reached her instantly, slamming into an invisible barrier that quickly cracked and vanished, her ash washed away and then her skin. She felt her bone vanishing as she activated her third tier recovery.

The beam passed before her perception sped up again, her body explosively growing back bones, organs, muscle and skin as it was covered once more by ash. She fell, her wings catching her as soon as they reformed. A slight wobble and she was back on track.

The Fae had passed out, a slight nudge reaching her mind.

Go for it, she said and deactivated her mana drain resistance.

Her eyes were cold now, her focus the far wall and her arms gripping the creature with as much protection as she could provide.

Ilea stopped and created as much ash as she could in a wall behind her, charging her wings with power in the meantime. She sacrificed two thousand points of health and near instantly recovered it with her healing, bright blue runes shining on her skin below the ash.

She felt her wings reaching the necessary power and rushed forward, keeping the ash connected to her back, as dense and compact as possible.

The air was split by her passing, her wind resistance working hard to keep the pressure down. Healing mana poured into herself and the Fae as she formed a protective cocoon of ash around it, adding to her back as well right before time once again slowed down.

The constant up and downs to her perception were confusing, disorienting but she kept her focus on the wall. Heat reached her back, burning into and through the ash in an instant. She saw a small hole in the distant steel right before her brain was scorched.

She came to again, her wings instinctively flapping once as her body reformed. Her chest and arms were still there as she held the small creature surrounded by ash and a thin barrier.

The last dozen meters flew by, her wings and tail twisting to the size as her body was yanked into the right position, her body moving into the slit of the steel gate before she tumbled to a stop.

Ashen limbs spread and dug into the steel to slow her down as she formed ashen walls in front of her, her wings too adding to the protective wall. The Fae she moved behind herself, the creature still siphoning mana from her as it slowly woke.

It opened its eyes and held out both hands, a bright barrier appearing in her sphere.

The steel gate in front of them vanished a moment later, the barrier cracked and shattered and her ash was burned through. Her armor followed before the magic vanished.

Ilea took a deep breath, the slightly molten skin on her chest, face and legs reforming as she looked at the creatures floating a hundred meters away.

“Come on... I’m right here!” she shouted, her voice rushing out in a boom as she spread her arms, a thick mist of ash forming behind her to protect the Fae.

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

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

‘ding’ ‘Armor of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 23’

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

‘ding’ ‘Avatar of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 13’

‘ding’ ‘Veteran reaches 2nd lvl 7’

‘ding’ ‘Light Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 5’

...

‘ding’ ‘Light Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 10’

The collective messages didn’t surprise her. Nothing so far had decimated her defenses to that extent, not in an instant. Not the Griffin and not the lightning Elemental. *And here these fuckers thought they could take me down.*

‘ding’ ‘Monster Hunter reaches lvl 10’

...

‘ding’ ‘Monster Hunter reaches lvl 12’

“Is that all you have?” she asked, her voice more subdued, almost disappointed. She floated up and moved out of the hole in the wall.

The creatures formed another attack, remaining motionless and silent.

The beam came and washed past her defenses, her bones now barely withstanding the blast. A part of her neck and arms had always remained, keeping her necklace and bracelet in place.

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

Oh by all means, keep it coming, she grinned now, the joy not reaching her eyes as she counted the monsters. More had appeared now, the ball of energy growing once more.

You think you can overpower the Azarinth Sentinel?

She heard a giggle in her mind.

Cheer!

“You’re not taking t-” her throat and mouth were gone for a moment before she could continue, “this seriously,” she finished, more and more mana returning from the spells due to her rising resistance.

The Fae bowed to her, the gesture visible through her sphere.

Friend

The word made her smile and she nodded in return, seeing the scorching laser light up again.