

Chapter 458 Reputation

Ilea watched the resolve and caution in the adventurer melt away in the face of money. *It's just too powerful a weapon.*

She still had four hundred and twenty four pieces of gold with her. A small price to pay for calming her conscience.

Ilea didn't care as much for Karheim. In part because the undead just seemed much less dangerous to her than the Specters did but mostly because she just didn't know anybody there. Checking in quickly would be enough. Worst came to worst, she was sure most would escape anyway.

One Specter on the other hand would just rip people apart. *No wonder we hide behind walls. Even low level Elves would have difficulties with those fuckers.*

It was a good thing after all that not every species living in this plane of existence had similar ambitions as humanity.

"Questions... I want you to answer a few questions if possible," Sophia said after she had regained her focus.

"I will choose to answer but shoot," Ilea said. There was little reason not to share some knowledge with the mage. The lack of sharing in this world was a major factor why humanity struggled to gain more of a foothold.

"Your name is Lilith, isn't it? You are the healer from Ravenhall?" she asked.

"Didn't you ask that before? Hmm, well I guess I didn't confirm it. Yes. That is a name I use. Started kind of as a joke but I suppose it stuck. It would be useful if I didn't share my actual name all the time," Ilea said and shrugged. She was just not cut out to be a cautious politician or rogue. If her honesty and carelessness became a problem, she would deal with it the way she dealt with most problems. On the fly.

The woman nodded excitedly. "Your level is really at three forty?"

"I won't confirm nor deny. But I have passed the three hundred threshold."

"That is huuge! Wow... you must be one of what? A thousand? A hundred?" Sophia said and giggle.

"Tell me, why did you choose us? Was it because we were a low level team? Or because of one of our classes?" the woman asked.

Ilea tilted her head to the side. "I just happened upon you. Been looking for the Caverns of Rot and you knew where it was."

"But you could have just asked for directions!"

"You still think this is some evil plot?" Ilea said and sighed. "You offered me food. And I thought it would be fun to join a normal adventuring team for a change. I've mostly been solo and I doubt a Shadow team is the usual experience."

"So you are a Shadow too. Yes... okay. Okay, I will risk it. I accept. Do you need to carve it into my chest or something?" the mage asked.

"What, no. I just push mana into you," Ilea said. *Calling it rape. That's such bullshit.*

“Ah, I see. Well, I’m ready,” the woman said.

Why is she blushing? Ilea asked herself as she set the mark. *Could it be?*

She smiled but didn’t comment on it. Sophia was obviously dealing with last night’s experience. *Maybe some other time*, Ilea thought and stepped away.

The adventurer looked at the mark on the back of her hand and smiled. “Did I just sign over my soul?”

“No, my dear. You didn’t. If things here go south, call for me. It should be an instinctual thing,” she explained.

Sophia nodded.

“See you around,” Ilea said.

“See you.”

The flight back took a little longer, Ilea making a beeline for Karheim. The small village seemed entirely the same, people drinking in the inn’s common room, some entirely passed out and others sleeping in the rooms above.

No incident then. Good.

Her breakfast consumed, she strolled to the arena, finding even more people than on the day before. Any arguments as to who would be permitted to participate were silenced as soon as she was there.

Someone clad in ash and two question marks above their head were a little more convincing than the meek handler.

He apologized for the delay, despite her reassurance that everything was alright.

Ilea was just glad someone else managed the screening, payment and reservations. Today they had an even larger hall. One obviously used for a little more destructive testing and training.

She spotted a few people in entirely black gear, their levels in the two hundreds. Not people she remembered but according to their body language and the looks they gave her, they at least knew about her.

“Welcome all. I’m sure you are informed already. Start whenever you want to. Jerry will evaluate your participation and you will be paid accordingly. His word is gospel and if you start shit with him or argue too much you won’t receive anything at all. If you go further, I will personally fly you up above the clouds and then drop you. Understood?” she said.

The three Shadows nodded immediately. Everyone who had participated previously did too. Some few looked around with a confused expression, others even chuckling at the declaration.

Ilea didn’t know if it was pride or just a darker sense of humor. What she knew was that if they came back again tomorrow, they would nod just like the others. *Yes, learn and grow, my resistance providers!*

She needed six more levels for another third tier point. Blood would soon reach the end of the second tier but she still needed Void. Veteran was close as well. Which left Monster Hunter. Four points plus one for emergencies. Which already left her with one.

I should probably spend them all before advancing. Ten seems like a good number for a potential achievement.

One of the Shadows vanished and appeared closer to her before anyone had started to whirl spells at her. He wore light armor, intricate carvings covering large sections of it in a language unknown to her.

[Mage – lvl 226]

“I would like to start, if you would allow?” she said in a gravelly voice.

A woman? Interesting. Didn't look like one.

“Sure. If you think your spells too powerful, step forward,” Ilea said.

The other Shadows as well as a few of the others came closer.

The first woman was the highest level person present.

She demonstrated her magic on the ground, a chunk of stone vanishing in an instant.

Many of the people present recoiled and started murmuring amongst themselves.

“Void. You, my dear. Are very welcome,” Ilea said with a wide grin. She walked close to the woman who remained motionless. “I hope you don't have plans for the coming weeks. My friend there will pay you handsomely for your continued participation,” she whispered the second part.

The woman ever so slightly turned towards her. “I am sure we will find an agreement.”

“Good. Very nice to meet you. Don't go for the head and we are golden,” she said and looked to the next person in line. Another Shadow.

She wore light armor too, mostly treated hides. Very little metal. A hood covered her head and a scarf most of her face. Dark orange eyes stood out from the otherwise dark aesthetics of the level two fifteen mage.

The woman lifted a hand and black smoke formed above. It looked similar to Ilea's ash but much less dense and defined.

It was quite literally just smoke.

“Interesting. That would be a new one,” Ilea said.

“That is what I had hoped,” the woman said and giggled, the joy not reaching her eyes. A crossbow appeared in her hands, the heavy tool easily moved by the woman.

“I will use this too, for the price of the bolts,” she added.

“Jerry, can you handle that?” Ilea asked and nodded towards the man.

“Of course,” he replied.

“Good. What do you have?” Ilea said.

“Poison, explosive, fire, lightning, paralyzing and a few more that I will not declare,” the Shadow said and winked.

“Perfect. Use everything but explosive. Ah and... feel free to throw in some of those mystery bolts. Would be interesting to see,” Ilea suggested.

“Hmm... I just might do that. Oh... before we continue, I usually use my smoke to choke and disorient my prey. The attacks are less direct,” she said.

“Even better. I have Oxygen Repository, so feel free to make me gasp for air,” Ilea said and winked back.

“Oooh, I like this,” the woman whispered to herself and leaned in. “Do you perhaps have a spot free in your team?”

A new Shadow? Or she wants to switch. “Not at the moment. But I will let you know when something comes up.”

Ilea nodded to the last Shadow. A level two hundred and four warrior. He was tall, over two meters. His gear had to weigh as much or more than the man below. A large sword was strapped to his back, the form reminding her of a katana but its size was closer to a greatsword. Two meters or more in length as well and currently sheathed.

His armor was made of black steel, dents and scratches telling a story of their own. Four varied horns adorned his helmet, only two sockets showing his eyes behind.

The others were all below two hundred and none of their skills were anything new to her. She suspected that the majority of them simply overestimated their own abilities or they didn't believe the stories from those who had participated in the course already.

When it was the Shadow's turn, he looked to the waiting group and spoke. “Cover your ears.”

He then focused on Ilea, took a deep breath and shouted.

She felt the power reverberate through the hall, washing over her as if it was a wall of stone that hit her.

Sound magic... that's good. I'm pretty low there. And something else, she thought and tried to place it. *Ah, yes. I can even tell he's not particularly good at it.*

“Mind magic too. Interesting combination. I suspect you confuse your enemies and cleave them apart with that thing there?” she assumed.

A few of the people present had gone to their knees, some even bleeding from their ears. The Shadows didn't react.

“You noticed it. As expected from someone with your reputation,” he said, surely sporting a smile below his helmet. The magic he exuded meddled with her sphere, if only a little.

“Can you focus it more? I don't want people to get hurt,” she said.

“If you stand farther away, yes. I will use another angle. Someone can put up a wall of stone or ice. That should do it,” he said.

“Earth mages,” Ilea said and looked at a few she knew to be practitioners.

Two of them nodded and raised a wall in mere moments.

“May I ask something?” the Shadow said.

“Of course,” Ilea replied.

“I sense the presence of your mind. The only time I felt something similar was when I met a powerful mind magic wielding creature ten years past. A part of the attack was even thrown back at me,” he said.

“Hmm... that is a little secret of my own. Maybe you’ll find out more if you continue to join,” Ilea said and winked.

Resistance, she sent the thought to him and smiled when she saw his eyes widen.

“You...,” he stammered but focused again quickly. A laugh resounded as he walked to his spot. “I expected much and it still wasn’t enough.”

“Wait until you see her just stand there,” one of them said, shaking his head as he avoided looking directly at her.

As if that would protect you, Ilea thought with a grin. “Well, that settles it. Shadows, please start with low power attacks. We will find an effective system.”

Lorelai frowned when she reached the large table, eyeing the corpse laid out on top of it.

Sidney had asked for someone to show what they had learned about anatomy in the previous week. On a real body. With a dagger.

“What is it?” the teacher asked. “I can give you a sword or axe if you prefer it. Just don’t make a mess.”

“That’s not it,” she said and looked at the body again. The hips, modest chest, the skin color and most importantly the muscle. *Beheaded*.

“I’m sorry to ask but... where did you get that body?” she whispered to the teacher next to her.

The woman leaned closer and smiled. “That is classified. If you don’t want to do it, I will ask someone else.”

Lorelai gulped. *No, no it can’t be. Or can it?*

She took the dagger and glanced at the waiting class. Everyone attentive. Sidney had made sure of that since the beginning.

“First, the heart,” she said and touched the cold skin with a hand. “Protected by the rib cage, there are a few places where a stab can reach it. If you can get under the arm,” she said and pushed away the arm. She made a double take, squeezing the skin.

It’s like fucking steel, she noted and stabbed the dagger into the corpse’s side. Or she tried to at least.

A little more effort and an awkward glance at the others was followed by the activation of a few skills. The blade only penetrated a few centimeters into the body.

Sidney stepped over and grabbed her hand, ramming the blade inside. “Better?” she asked.

Lorelai only nodded dejectedly. “If you can manage to hit this spot, it can be deadly. However an injured or destroyed heart doesn’t always lead to death. As you all have seen with Ilea.”

“We didn’t actually see her lose her heart,” one of the students said.

“She could probably lose her bloody head and live,” Celeste said and chuckled, leading to a few laughs coming from the group.

Lorelai looked down at the body, her eyes moving to the neck as her eyes widened.

“That’s enough for now, I’ll take it from here,” Sidney said and patted her back. “Don’t,” she whispered in her ear.

The woman nodded and stepped back to her seat.

“You look pale,” Luke said. “Must be scary to stab a body.”

“Leave her alone,” Nathan said.

“It’s just like cutting meat, stab, stab, stab. I don’t see the problem,” Celeste said.

It’s her. She can regenerate her head.

Her response to the realization was a giggle that turned into a full blown laugh.

“Lorelai, please. If you can’t control your laughter, calm down outside,” Sidney said and continued the lesson.

Four hours passed in the blink of an eye. Ilea learned that choking inside smoke is worse than simply choking due to a lack of air.

Void magic was still void magic but she could once more put into perspective just how insanely powerful that monster’s magic really was. The Shadow was close to Maria’s level of power. Ilea at least assumed as much. It was difficult to gauge with all the new power she had gotten since last training with the woman.

Everything deactivated brought the Shadow close to what Maria did to her back then. And it was immensely helpful. Sadly, there weren’t any competent blood mages involved but with Trian, Orthan and now the Specters, it was just a matter of time.

The warrior mostly focused on sound magic, the mind aspect not quite powerful enough to raise her level, even with Avatar of Ash.

The rest of the group delivered however, close to a hundred and twenty people participating again today. Many were below level one hundred however but their contribution accumulated to quite a few skill levels.

She enjoyed some lunch while she waited for Iana and Christopher to adjust the enchantments again. Orthan was occupied with the corruption, quite a few books and tools now occupying his small work space within the Core.

Ilea checked through the notifications while she let them work.

‘ding’ ‘Oxygen Repository reaches lvl 3’

‘ding’ ‘Oxygen Repository reaches lvl 4’

'ding' 'Crystal Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 4'

'ding' 'Crystal Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 5'

'ding' 'Dark Magic Resistance reaches lvl 18'

'ding' 'Divination Magic Resistance reaches lvl 2'

'ding' 'One third tier General skill point awarded'

'ding' 'Earth Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 7'

'ding' 'Lightning Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 2'

'ding' 'Mist Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 12'

'ding' 'Sound Magic Resistance reaches lvl 5'

...

'ding' 'Sound Magic Resistance reaches lvl 8'

'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 12'

'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 13'

'ding' 'Water Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 7'

'ding' 'Water Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 8'

'ding' 'You have learned the General skill: Smoke Magic Resistance – lvl 1

Smoke Magic Resistance – lvl 1

Usually the result of fire magic, this school focused on smoke itself. Wielded by a master, it can be just as deadly and destructive, if not more so. Knowing you, you probably just set fire inside a closed off cave and enjoyed the choking sensation. Slut.

'ding' Smoke Magic Resistance reaches lvl 2'

'ding' Smoke Magic Resistance reaches lvl 3'

My subconscious thinks I really enjoy being choked. Might just be worth a try, maybe I AM into it.

The third tier point was welcome too. She quickly looked over the options and found she hadn't spent her twenty stat points yet either.

They went straight into Intelligence. I won't reach a thousand Wisdom until three fifty anyway. Might as well make my magic hit just a little harder.

Ilea chose to finally advance her Wind Resistance with the new third tier point she had gotten.

'ding' 'Wind Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 1'

Wind Resistance – 3rd lvl 1

The ever elusive magic of Wind can cut from any side. You have learned that it might've been a good idea to become a Void mage. This skill helps you resist the power of wind a little more.

2nd stage: The mana flow inside of you has acclimated itself to the air around you, making you more aerodynamic.

3rd stage: As you adjust to the flows of powerful wind magic and natural torrents, you find yourself often capable of using some of the power. Perhaps to propel yourself forward or stop abruptly. Wind mages might think you one of their own.

A nice potential surprise for the Griffin, she thought with a smile.