

Chapter 897 Ascended

Ilea landed next to the ancient wielder of the arcane, a smile on her face as she cracked her neck.

“You win,” he said.

“I’m sure you didn’t show me everything you had,” she said, shaking the Watcher in her hands.

“I’m fine,” Aki’s voice spoke. “But please don’t do that again.”

“I will not deny your accusation,” Erik said. “But I would argue the same.”

“Fair. I can certainly push it more,” Ilea said, the two now standing before a rune covered section of stone, nondescript and embedded into the side of a mountain. “This the place?”

“Yes and no,” Erik spoke and waved his hand, a set of dozens of blue runes lighting up in the air. The ones in the stone lit up in turn. “We can enter now. Just teleport beyond the stone.”

Ilea watched him vanish and appear beyond, her domain no longer blocked by the enchantments she assumed to be embedded in the rock. She teleported with Aki and appeared in a dark hall clad in steel. There was no furniture, and there was no obvious entrance or exit.

Another rune lit up from Erik before a few lights started glowing in orange-red light. “This is a chamber we used a few times to talk.”

“When is the last time you’ve met this Ascended?” Ilea asked.

Erik looked at the ceiling. “Hmm. A while. A long while. Not mere centuries.”

“And how do you contact them?”

“I don’t. But I’m pretty sure this hall is just a part of a larger installation. Always told me he hates intruders. Messy fleshbags disturbing his order,” Erik said.

“So what’s the plan?”

“Disturbing his order,” he said.

“Oh. I can do that.”

“There might be traps.”

“I sure hope there are.”

“Your rise to power is less surprising by the minute.”

“Should’ve seen me when I had a measly healing spell and a wish for some fiery wings. Speaking of healing. You knew the Azarinth, right?”

“Of course. Everyone at the time knew them. Infamous, I’d say. Their downright eradication in the decades after the Extraction didn’t exactly surprise anyone.”

“So they didn’t hide or leave somewhere?” Ilea asked.

“I was mostly interested in their magic and their elixir, but getting information from any Healing Order is downright torture. And would require literal torture, which I was not willing to conduct. I had some leads but before anything could bear fruit, they were done.”

Don't see why I shouldn't share this bit.

“I see. Well, if you ever want to study their elixir or arcane healing, we managed to make a safe version.”

“Yet another tool for the Accords. I'm starting to have hope,” he said, the last bit in a dry tone.

Ilea laughed, walking to the center of the room as she tried to pierce the ground with her domain. “Can't find anything obvious.”

“I didn't expect it to be easy. Ascended steel is notoriously resilient.”

“Ever seen cosmic magic?” Ilea asked him.

Erik walked over. “Only once, and it nearly killed me.”

“Then watch closely, old man,” Ilea said and waved her hand.

Cosmic Deconstruction manifested before her, blueish and white sparks appearing in the air and dissipating the steel with which the very floors were built.

“Eerie,” Erik said, the two now looking at the two meter hole in the ground. More metal was below. “Do that again.”

Ilea obliged, this time sending a few waves down into the ground, the steel opening up in an oval shape, to reveal another hall below.

“I knew it,” he said.

“I'll go stir up some trouble. Let's see how much this Ascended of yours cares about this place,” she said.

“I would say show restraint, but then I believe that would have the opposite effect,” Erik spoke.

“You are a wise man,” Ilea spoke and handed over Aki.

Erik held the Watcher for a moment before the thing flew out of his hands, twirling in the air as the green eye angled downwards. “I can fly myself.”

The man laughed and patted the machine.

Ilea jumped down, landing with a loud and thundering impact on the metal floor below.

It held.

The hall was dark, but she didn't need any light to see. *Defensive enchantments?* She raised her arms and summoned a small set of eight hundred spears of black glass, then sent them flying into the walls and ceiling. She watched as parts of the walls exploded with traps, others opening up to reveal runed metal arms reaching out, bright fire extending outwards, slowly filling the entire hall.

“Really? That's it?” she murmured, absorbing the heat that came close, not even feeling the fires as her own heat started growing. She raised her arm towards one of the walls and released her Volcanic Source, the beam lighting up the entire hall, slamming into the steel with an explosion of heat and fire.

She saw the glowing hole and molten steel. *Like butter.* Beyond, she saw lava. "I reached the rock," she said.

"Are you sure you're not a dragon?" Erik asked, looking down from above.

"I wish," Ilea said.

"I suggest going deeper."

"Deeper it is," Ilea said, using her ash and glass to hammer the ground, the impacts reverberating through the hall as cracks started forming in the steel. *My shit is harder.* She changed to a broad spike, feeling like she was damaging the entire facility instead of actually going deeper.

The spike soon broke through, opening another path to the next layer.

She jumped down and found herself inside of a smaller hall, three closed metal doors leading away. Near one edge of the room stood a Varitan sphere, covered in runes. "Perfect."

Before she could fuck with it, she felt space magic from beyond one of the doors.

It opened a moment later, the hall lighting up in orange-red colors as a single being floated out and spread its arms. Humanoid. Two and a half meters in height, instead of exposed skin, it showed interlinked dark pieces of steel slightly reflecting the light. The enchanted white robes lined with silver patterns were familiar to Ilea.

The two glowing white eyes stared at her.

She stared back, then pointed at it.

The being sighed and crossed its arms.

"Oh hey. Now that's just a mega coincidence," Ilea said with a wide smile.

"Lilith. Once again, you break into one of my facilities," Vor Elenthir spoke and gestured around himself. "Leaving naught but destruction in your wake. Why?"

"Wait. You know who I am?"

The Ascended sighed and looked up. "I see. You didn't come alone." He floated a little closer to look up, apparently unconcerned about her proximity. "You didn't bring that Fae, did you? Or is that title a faen illusion of sorts?" He glanced at her with glowing white eyes.

"The one you imprisoned and nearly killed?" Ilea asked, raising her brows.

"Incessant little creatures. Worse than humans. Violence this, violence that. Perhaps I should've killed you both and lived with the consequences. But here we are," he said.

"Here we are indeed. And we have an unresolved dispute," Ilea said, heat starting to gather within her.

"Humans," Vor spoke as he floated back, magic emanating from him. Blood, void, space, and metal.

It felt different than last time. Underwhelming. Ilea hadn't even activated her Fourth Tier Reconstruction. What was an Ascended compared to Elementals and Dragons?

"Old friend!" Erik shouted from above. He appeared in the hall and landed between them. "I am so, so sorry, for your facility. I couldn't think of another way to reach you on such a short notice. And Lilith, whatever history you two have, can you give it a few minutes? Or is it really that bad?"

“He tried to kill me,” she said. “And his corruption killed hundreds, if not more.”

“She invaded my property. Twice,” Vor Elenthir spoke, as if that was a far worse offense. “Your kind chose to invade my facility. You knew of the danger, and went on despite. There are consequences to your choices.”

Oh are there? Ilea thought and raised her brows.

“There is a reasonable concern that the Architect has built a second mesh and is intending to extract another sun from Elos,” Erik interrupted.

Vor looked on with his two white eyes glowing.

Ilea sighed. She knew why they were here. Their fight was some time past, her emotions in regard to the Ascended mostly faded. She did feel like landing a few punches, just to show where they stood, but at the same time, she could acknowledge how childish that thought really was.

“Talking shit about Violence,” she murmured and shook her head. *He’s a treasure.*

“Building a second mesh in this realm would be near impossible with one of our kind alone.”

“This is Ker Velor,” Erik said.

And he really just wanted to fight me. Brave, or arrogant. Ilea wondered if she was the arrogant one here, but if he had really tried to kill her the last time, then he was perhaps comparable to a level five hundred human. And if he had held back considerably to not instantly kill both her and the Baron, then all she could do was trust her perception. His presence and magic felt nowhere near what she had faced before. And while she was unsure about his true intentions, she knew the Architect had tried to kill her in the end, and even his power was nowhere near the weight of Aveer or an Oracle.

She wanted to use her Fourth Tier, just for him to feel it.

Ilea took in a deep breath, and chose not to use the spell.

Humility is always preferred. The strong show their true character when faced with humility.

She assumed she was the stronger one here, and the recent words of Erik rang true. She had used her power many times to end arguments, or to intimidate others. She had told herself that she didn’t have a choice, and most of the time, she hoped that that was true. She had fought and bled to get to this point, and now that she was here, was there really a need to throw around her weight? To be as arrogant and domineering as the Architect or the Ascended now floating before her?

Vor Elenthir had fought her, had tried to kill her. But now, she had a choice.

The arrogant do not learn, she thought, looking at the four mark being that would’ve rather killed a low level human than let her go. A four mark being that would’ve rather seen his corruption wipe out an entire settlement, perhaps thousands more living in the northern landscape. A four mark being that had once been a Navuun, so blinded by his power and age that he seemed callous, that he seemed to have forgotten what he once had been.

It felt like a sign. To see his body made of steel. She had rejected the proposition of the Architect, but now she realized it had nothing to do with steel or flesh, and all to do with power. She spit on the ground.

I am human. Not a god, nor ascended, but human.

“How certain are you of this circumstance?” the Ascended asked.

“Divination magic suggested the plan. Executed in Kohr. Lilith’s battle with Ker Velor confirms he spoke of Ravana. She is back, Vor, or will be.”

“Ravana...” he spoke, then glanced at Ilea. “You fought him? And survived?”

“Will you help or not?” Ilea asked.

“The Accords are conducting the search. You, alongside an Ascended whose allegiance they’ve secured, will be tasked to break through his security and find the other parts of the mesh. I know how much you know about the Extraction process and technology. I hoped you could assist,” Erik said.

“Another Ascended? Who?” Vor asked.

“I don’t know as of yet. But if you find it impossible to work with them, then that is that.”

“There are a lot of variables here, Eregar,” Vor said.

“I have seen parts of the plans. They are solid. You’re not working with the Shadow’s Hand from back then. These lands have changed. I implore you to at least have a look,” Erik spoke.

The Ascended raised his chin, then sighed. “Very well. If only to prevent a plan of the Architect. I hope this is not a waste of my time.”

“I assure you, it won’t be,” Erik said.

“Then we should move,” the Ascended spoke, heading up and towards the hole in the ceiling.

“Right through here,” Ilea said and opened a gate to the north. She walked through and glanced at the Executioner already waiting. “*You caught all that?*”

“*Indeed. I appreciate your restraint. I hope the citizens of Hallowfort manage to do the same,*” he said.

Ilea took in a deep breath. “*I suppose with everything in mind, we still have him to thank for the stability of this realm.*”

Vor Elenthir and Erik walked through the gate.

Ilea closed it a moment later.

“Greetings,” the Meadow spoke. “*I believe it is time for some introductions. A few of our main representatives have gathered. Before I move you into the council, I must offer some names to make sure cooperation is possible in the first place.*”

Erik nodded.

“*Baron Violence of the Fae.*”

The Ascended sighed. “*If it must be there.*”

“*Nes Mor Atul,*” the Meadow spoke.

“That makes sense,” Erik said.

“I didn’t know she remained alive,” Vor spoke. There was more, Ilea could tell, but he didn’t deny the possibility of cooperation.

“Ormont of the Makers.”

The two white eyes of the Ascended glowed steady.

“Nelras Ithom.”

“What?” Vor spoke.

“He was killed by the Architect, his soul sealed away. Ilea has found the device and brought him back here. He has taken a different form,” the Meadow explained. *“But remains who he was, to an extent.”*

“An Elven Monarch,” the Ascended spoke and glanced at Ilea. “You are dabbling with powers you should not invoke, human.”

Ilea shook her head in slight confusion. *Is he serious?*

“You are aware that my title is not an illusion,” she said.

He stared at her but didn’t say another word.

“Is cooperation possible with Nelars Ithom present?” the Meadow repeated a few seconds later.

“Yes. Yes of course,” the Ascended spoke, the tone of his voice slightly different.

“Ilea, do you wish to participate?” the Meadow asked.

“If you’re checking to see if these two have anything to add, or should be added to this operation, then no. I feel like I’d be biased, and I trust your judgment,” she said.

“Then that concludes the prerequisites. We will commence the meeting then,” the Meadow sent.

Ilea saw everyone else vanish, leaving her to roll her shoulders and summon a book.

“Your thoughts on the two at this point?” the Meadow sent.

Ilea didn’t look up from her book, now lying in a bed of ash. *“I like Erik. I’m sure he has his secrets, but he seems firmly on our side. My thoughts on Vor are a little more complicated. That’s why I’d be biased. He’s done some things that I won’t forget, but if everything about his contributions in the Haven is true, it changes things. If the Accords deem him trustworthy enough to assist, I won’t stand in the way of that.”*

“Noted. You certainly made an impression. It will make this talk much easier,” the Meadow sent and left her to her reading.

Ilea looked up when Erik appeared near her anchor in the north.

He looked at her for a long moment. “Shall we?”

Ilea set down her book. “I remember when I first visited the Haven. We speculated why it was there. It’s kind of surreal to see you here, let alone speaking to me.”

“Your name is more well known throughout these lands by now than mine ever was,” he spoke. “I was wondering if you wouldn’t mind a short detour to Ravenhall. It’s been... some time, since I’ve been there.”

“Of course not,” Ilea said and focused on the anchor in her house. “I’ll take you along.”

A moment later, they appeared.

Erik looked around and smiled. “I do envy your ease of travel.”

“It’s convenient, I won’t lie. How do you realm travel anyway? With bells?” she asked.

“No. The bells are a signal. I use Kohr most of the time. Due to the tampering of the Olym Arcena and the Extraction, it is far easier to reach than most other realms. I assume that’s why the so called demons are so simple to summon. And from Kohr, I use one of the Transporters, if you know about them,” he said.

Ilea raised her brows. “You know where to find one?”

“I do. There are other ways I can cross the realms to places I’ve already been to, but it requires far more preparation. Months reduced to mere weeks. But I imagine you have easier ways? Not just for long distances, but realm travel as well.”

“Yeah. Pretty much as fast as you’ve just seen. But I don’t really have a way to go to new places,” she said.

“Oh, there are many realms out there that you would enjoy, I’m sure of it. I can show you the Transporter whenever we go to Kohr,” he said. “If you promise not to destroy it.”

“I think I’d like that,” Ilea said. “Been wondering though, what’s the deal with the strange gates below Ravenhall?”

Erik smiled. “Oh? You’ve found those as well. Ancient gateways to other realms. Far less precise than a Transporter, and far more dangerous. I don’t recommend using them.”

“Noted,” Ilea said, the two teleporting outside where they flew up along the cliff side.

“The meeting went well, if you wondered,” Erik said. “The Accords has gathered quite an assortment of experts. I think Vor has been suitably humbled,” he added with a laugh. “Though him and that Fae have an open grudge.”

“Don’t think that’s good for the Ascended,” Ilea said as they crested the nearest mountain, looking out onto the valleys beyond. The sky was mostly clear, a few white clouds clinging to the mountain tops.

“No. I wouldn’t want to be in his shoes right now. Glad it took some of the attention off me,” he said.

“You’ve got me to have an eye on you. I might not seem like it, but I’m the Head Inquisitor of the Accords. Just a really good actress.”

“How am I doing so far, Inquisitor?” he asked.

“Just barely hanging on,” Ilea said with a smile. “Not sure if anyone mentioned the recent addition to your city.”

“I hold no claim to Ravenhall, but there is a part of me that still considers it home,” Erik said. “And no, there was no mention.”

“Then it’s a surprise,” Ilea said with a smile, the two flying at a casual speed over the forests and valleys of the southern mountains.