

Chapter 418 Ancients

Maro and Elfie continued to ask the Fae a bunch of questions, the three of them going through whatever else the sphere could provide. Most of its knowledge had been removed by the owner.

Ilea hadn't been too surprised to find essentially a computer here. It was simply powered by runes instead of electricity. Most of its data was gone but what remained was still rather significant to them.

"What do you think?" Ilea asked, looking at Catelyn lying next to her.

The fox murmured to herself before she looked at Ilea. "I think we might have to actually work on that Blood Manipulation Resistance. For now, all we can do is destroy whatever corruption is still left in here."

"I agree. I'll take care of most, still have some resistance training to do in the coming days and weeks," Ilea said with a smile.

"Ehm... we might have a problem with that," Maro said as he looked at them, pointing at the detailed information on the twentieth layer and its denizens.

Sand Elemental – level ???? - Success Rate: 5% - Status: Success

"Ah, fuck," Catelyn whispered.

Ilea started laughing. "Well, that's a problem. I don't think we can kill a four mark creature."

"It's a sand creature. Hasn't moved up yet. Why can't we just leave it here?" Maro asked.

Elfie shook his head. "Elementals are creators first and foremost. It will not stop until all of the Descent is filled with sand."

"How long do we have?" Ilea asked.

"It's hard to say," Maro said. "It's possible the thing is only here because creatures free of corruption remain."

"Us," Catelyn said.

Ilea expected a sudden rumble through the facility and an instant attack but nothing happened. "Lots of interpretation going on. I can just go and explore more, get powerful enough to fight it."

Maro laughed at her. "Fight an elemental? Ilea, this one might be beyond what humans can do."

Elfie hissed. "Have you been blind? Or do you simply reject our potential? We have found this... thing," he gestured to the Sphere. "Those who built it were not monsters but creatures like us, with higher intelligence. Potentially creatures that had already meddled with Elos Millennia past. If it is the Ascended then they were fought by the Taleen, by Elves and by your kind, Humanity. And they lost."

Ilea nodded. “Well, most people from that time aren’t around anymore. We still don’t have a clue what they want or who they are. They lost the war apparently, the remaining members scattered but their facilities still remain.”

“Resources, life, land. Isn’t it always the same?” Maro asked in a sigh.

“You’re not being creative enough. Maybe they heard of cake and came here to steal our most treasured recipes,” Ilea suggested with a smirk.

“She is right. We do not understand their motives. Neither do we know if this facility is truly still in use. Even if it is, it could be someone else has taken control. There are plenty of candidates that would be willing to cause destruction and death for the sake of knowledge and power,” Catelyn said and looked around. “This includes all species sadly.”

“Then let us gain what we can from this and use it for our own purposes,” Elfie said.

“And what purpose would that be?” Catelyn asked.

“To protect life. And to destroy those that would warp and corrupt it,” he replied with conviction.

“Alright, this is getting too big for me. I’ll help with destroying the corrupted but now we’re talking about ancient wars and politics,” Maro said.

Ilea had assumed he would push more, the possibility of a connection to Rhyvor certainly present. Maybe he really had made his peace, a speck of honor still remaining that at least itched to ask some questions. Not enough apparently to dig into another potential conflict.

“And I ask nothing more of you, Maro,” Catelyn said. “Now, I would rather we don’t wait until this Elemental fills half the dungeon with sand before we do anything about it. It is corrupted according to this sphere, there have to be ways we can use that.”

“It will not retreat nor fight in an intelligent manner,” Elfie said.

“We’re still talking about an elemental. It could be well beyond anything else within this place,” Maro said. “Even if we give Ilea enough time to train...”

“Did you not advocate for her potential growth?” Elfie asked. “And she will not be the only one to increase her power.”

“Yes... yes I know but that just... we are talking about a full blown Sand Elemental. This is not something another hundred, even another five hundred levels and more skills and potentially even classes will beat. It is a force of nature. I have seen the destruction caused by a young elemental. The only reason these lands aren’t ravaged by monsters of that power is because they do not care for it. Well now it’s corrupted. It will care,” Maro said.

“And,” he held up a finger towards Elfie, “Even now, I’m sure she would survive for a while but we are not talking about surviving its assault, we are talking about killing it. This whole layer is made of sand, it is its own territory. We are facing a living desert.”

Elfie thought about it but just hissed after a while.

“Are we even sure it’s corrupted?” Catelyn asked. “We should check before we even think about facing it.”

The Fae looked down and sent a thought to them all.

Corrupt

Death

“There’s your confirmation. I can get my Sand Resistance up to the end of the second tier, get some more levels and I’m pretty sure I can at least tank it while everyone else blasts it with their spells. There are other survivors too, they could help as well.” Ilea said.

“Survivors of an Expedition that was wiped out by the creatures we killed. It won’t make much of a difference. Adding ten level two hundred mages against a mountain is not enough,” Maro said.

“I agree. According to the few records we have, Elementals remain within their territory and are rarely even hostile, no records would exist otherwise. They predate most beings we know of. And this isn’t a young one, like the one in the tenth layer,” Catelyn said.

Just another Drake, Ilea thought, a little annoyed at the pessimism. “Then what? We let it be and evacuate Hallowfort? Move away and wait until we have gathered enough power to deal with it?”

“That is an option,” Catelyn said.

“Or we just ignore it, let it exhaust itself against the monsters. If it goes further north, it might even find something too powerful for it to challenge,” Maro suggested.

“That is. A terrible idea. This is the place where it must be defeated, otherwise this corruption will spread to beings even we cannot deal with. Miststalkers, Famine Crows and worse,” Elfie said, shaking his head.

“We should at least try to fight it, find out more before we dismiss everything else. We could try to collapse the ceiling or flood the whole place with water,” Ilea said.

“Neither would make a difference. Even if you replaced the water with lava. I suggest you try to face it and get an idea of its power. I’m sure even you will find it difficult to argue afterwards,” Maro said. “Trust those more experienced for once.”

Ilea hissed, the sound imbued with power, magic washing over everyone present.

Only her three companions resisted the effect entirely and still she felt distress from all but Elfie.

“I haven’t faced death a thousand times to listen to someone talk about what is possible and what isn’t. You called yourself an adventurer but I find it more and more difficult to see you as one. While you hid within the shadows, I have fought and bled, have killed and...,” Ilea said and stopped herself there.

An old forgotten king who found his power thousands of years ago.

“I have asked you to come and for that I am sorry,” she said and smiled, her face revealed. “You bet your fucking ass I will try and kill that mountain, with all I have and all the help I can get.”

“You will die,” Maro said.

Ilea smirked. “I’ll recover.”

Elfie chuckled and hissed. “I shall help you, with the little power I can give.”

“As will I,” Catelyn sighed. “I won’t get you out of there though, you’re alone.”

Ilas gave her a silent nod.

The rest looked around a little awkwardly.

The Fae twirled in the air and giggled into her mind.

Death

Ilea looked at it and smiled. "I know we lack the power but I will at least try. You'll see some violence, that's for sure."

The Fae shook its head and pointed at Maro.

Truth

Before she could react it went back to the sphere and used its magic to change the orange hologram into a map of the twentieth layer.

Help

Another facility in the corner of the area came into view, massive steel gates closing off a rather large cavern, at least half as vast as the whole layer itself.

Trakorov – level ???? - Success Rate: <1% - Status: Failed

Ilea read the description as a broad grin bloomed on her face. She looked at the Fae and nodded slowly.

Violence!

"I kind of wanted to fight it alone first," Ilea murmured to herself.

The Fae pointed at her.

Strong

Proud

It pointed at the map.

Stronger

"Hey, I didn't say I could kill it alone, just that I'd try. Same with the Sun Sprites, I knew I wasn't ready," she said, not thinking herself too overconfident and proud.

Truth

The Fae sent and changed the map to the eighteenth layer, activating the Elder Sun Sprite description.

Weak, it pointed at the floating letters.

Strong, it again pointed at Ilea.

The elemental came up again and it shook its head, *Death*.

"Alright, alright I get it. No need to shame me." Ilea said.

The Fae giggled and appeared on her shoulder, its arms extending before it hugged her face.

Friend

Brave

It let go and pointed at the map. *Help*

Ilea thought about it. *Not really a lot to consider here*, she thought, pretty sure about what the Fae suggested.

“Are you two lovers going to let us in on your plan?” Maro asked, his voice calm and charming as it tended to be.

“I thought you wanted to fuck off?” Ilea asked.

“I understand where you’re coming from, Ilea. And I admire you for it but I stand by what I said. I have been king for decades and I have been an adventurer for just as long before. People with your attitude and confidence have died in droves, sure of their victory,” he sighed.

“I admit that your magic allows for some insane things and I know you don’t rush in completely without thought but what we are facing here is different. Now, please don’t tell me you’re planning what I think you are,” he said.

“And here I thought you’d like it,” Ilea said with a smile.

She didn’t agree with Maro that the Elemental was different than any monster before. If it was still alive, then maybe. But it was just another corrupted creature, frenzied and lost. It was likely much more powerful than anything she had faced before, sure. Too powerful for her to prevail.

And yet she had thought about the Praetorians the same way, had thought of Elves the same way. And now she could fight them, perhaps even kill them herself.

Soon she would get all her skills into the third tier but so far no ceiling in potential growth had shown itself. Her whole time in Elos had been proof that humans could survive and thrive in a world like this.

If a mountain blocks your way, you start with the first stone. If that’s too heavy, you get the first pebble. If that is still too much, you train, find someone to help or get better equipment.

Angry?

The thought reached her, coming from the Fae floating a couple meters away.

“No, a little annoyed at worst. I know he’s not wrong. Just expected him to be a little more unreasonable. A little more fun,” Ilea said.

Fun?

“With insane monsters birthed from nightmares and death itself, threatening to kill and destroy you, what else can you do but laugh and welcome them?” Ilea said.

Flee

Hide

Negotiate

The Fae nodded, one hand on its chin.

“It’s more a figure of speech. I’d do all those things first to make sure I survive. I mean it more... as an adventurous spirit. You have something like that too... the Fae, found in unfortunate situations and trapped even though I’m sure you could be quite safe and happy somewhere else.”

“It’s a way to give a massive fuck you to the horrors of the world, both monster and human, to go where no one else dares. To face what everyone else fears.” Ilea tried to explain.

The Fae seemed to consider and then nodded.

Freedom

“You get it, little man,” she said and smiled.

Adventure

Violence

It nodded.

Ilea wasn’t sure if the last word thought was the necessary conclusion but she knew very well that it was part of it. Violence and death were so normal to her at this point that she had to be consciously aware of herself walking the line between human and monster.

A single punch could end someone’s life and her influence reached over whole towns by now. Her enemies certainly thought of her as a monster already.

Just have to make sure I stick to some principles, she thought. There was no reason she couldn’t live her life of adventure while others benefited from her power.

Ilea didn’t think herself the pinnacle of morality and fairness but if she had learned anything from both Earth and Elos, then that there were always completely selfish assholes obsessed with their power over others.

She would leave the details to those she trusted and called friends but it wasn’t a hard decision to oppose racism, speciesism, slavery, oppression and genocide.

She was glad she was obsessed with a different kind of power, the more magical kind. Before her eyes, she saw a being that went beyond anything a human should be able to oppose. A natural catastrophe that if left alone would swallow whatever it could find.

Ilea felt the tingle in her brain, felt the hair on her neck and arms stand up as she took in the raw magical power of a Sand Elemental. It might have been the most terrifying and beautiful thing she had ever seen. To think magic could go that far.

And yet she felt the pain and anger the Fae next to her openly transmitted. The Elemental had been killed, its magical might now twisted and corrupted, bent on chaos and destruction.

[Corrupted Sand Elemental - ?????]

She could identify it, even though she couldn’t make out the core of the being, the body that she assumed to be there, somewhere amidst the storm that expanded over several kilometers of the layer.

Sand cut into her ash, brushing against the Fae’s shield at the same time.

Ilea had spent an additional six hours training with the Deep Mirage, bringing her Sand Magic Resistance to a more acceptable level. Not quite what she had wanted but even the Fae had urged her to move the plan along.

‘ding’ ‘Sand Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 2’

...

‘ding’ ‘Sand Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 13’

‘ding’ ‘Stamina Drain Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 4’

...

‘ding’ ‘Stamina Drain Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 8’

The storm had grown in that time, the sand moving more wildly now.

Catelyn and her team focused on finding the survivors, clearing out the corrupted creatures that had found themselves inside the facility. It was up to them to decide if they wanted to fight against the Sand Elemental or if they were more liability than help.

Every bit of damage and support would help, of that she was sure.

“Can you see it?” Ilea asked, looking at the Fae.

It nodded, white eyes focused into the storm of sand, a whirlwind of destruction.

“Let’s meet our friend then,” she said with a smile, blinking away from the storm, quickly followed by the Fae that kept up with her.

They reached the second facility after a couple minutes of fast flying, the layer quite a bit more vast than some of the previous ones.

A massive steel gate was inlaid into the rocky wall of the layer. Ilea landed a couple dozen meters away, feeling a breeze flowing over her as she checked the surroundings for monsters.

The sand storm wasn’t visible anymore from the distance but she knew it was there, in some way even felt it in her bones. The sheer magical pressure that both enticed her and made her instincts scream for her to run away.

She walked to the gate that was twice her height and three times that in length. Her sphere had a hard time penetrating through and her blink only brought her back in front of the entrance.

I’ll just dig a way around it, she thought before the Fae sent a thought her way.

“Sure, if you think that’s faster,” she said, feeling her mana draining into the creature.

Half a minute passed before a surge of mana ripped out a chunk of the steel gate, making it vanish in an instant.

“Whoa, nice one,” Ilea said with a smile.

The Fae twirled and sent a thought of joy her way.

“That’s some grade A violence, my dear,” Ilea said and felt the heat flowing out of the dark tunnel that had opened up. *Here we go.*