

Chapter 777 Assault

Ilea considered asking the Meadow for help with the barrier, the ancient being able to throw a metric fuck ton of stone and wood through her gates and directly onto the defenses. For now however, she deemed it a bad idea. The tree was her hidden ace after all, in case everything else failed. She didn't feel like revealing the power of her ally to all the Hunters and potentially the One without Form. Not without exhausting all other options first. She twirled the dagger in her hand before she made it vanish, checking to make sure that all the keys were stored in her Legate Guardian necklace.

"We have found a suitable location," Isalthar said as he approached. "The barrier reaches through an extensive cave system, the other side very likely unoccupied."

"You don't think we should try and attack together?" Ilea asked.

"We will. In the same location," he spoke. "If the barrier is sufficiently damaged to get through with any teleportation, we will do so. And advance upon Iz."

"We should test my space magic. In case we have to retreat," Ilea sent.

The old elf looked at her for a few seconds. *"I understand your concern, Ilea. However. You have gathered the keys. Our enemy is in Iz, and it is on the defensive. This is our time. The battle we have worked towards. The battle we have waited for. There will be no retreat, not without a revelation that would warrant such. We will fight. Until the last of the Taleen, are destroyed."*

Ilea took in a deep breath. She looked at the many Cerithil Hunters within her dominion. They had one thing in common. Everyone was calm. Ready. They had all fought thousands of the machines before. And now all that stood between them and the capital of their enemy was a golden barrier powered by what she assumed to be a star. That and however many thousands of machines the One without Form had gathered to repel a potential attack.

"Right. But if shit goes south, I'll try to get people out. I don't care about your downright zealous dedication," Ilea said. She understood in a way. A purpose they had taken themselves, one that branded them as Cursed. It wasn't exaggerated perhaps that for some of them it had become their entire selves. But understanding their background didn't mean she would just let them die if she could prevent it.

"I admire your courage. Though you know that such actions will lead to hostilities from our kind. It is all I will say. Common purpose has brought us here, but we are no Order of humans. Each shall do as they will. I trust you will do your part," Isalthar spoke as he floated towards one of the earth mages, the other Hunters readying themselves, gathering, and moving towards the prepared corridor.

Ilea smiled. *"I think I pissed off the One without Form a little too much. There's no turning back."* She gave the elf a nod before she glanced at Kyrian, the two humans moving with the group of elves deep below Karth. *"Ready?"*

The massive steel form glanced her way, a dulled chuckle resounding from within the confines of his defensive layers. *"I haven't survived the Krahen Isles to be scared of some machines. And I know the same is true for you."*

She grinned in response but didn't reply. Of course he was right. She had after all just recently fought a bunch of flying abominations far more powerful than anything they were likely to find down in Iz. Other than perhaps the being in control of all the machines.

"Let's just hope Fey doesn't do anything reckless," Kyrian sent.

"Right," Ilea mused. *And with all the other Elves here, they're probably going to try and one up each other with dangerous maneuvers.* Even just their walking and flying figures gave off an air of unnecessary style. Floating coats, shifting armor, glowing weapons, and glittering spells. The latter entirely unnecessary, knowing that most of them likely saw perfectly well in the dim light.

Ilea felt the shifting space on her right shoulder, not reacting in a visible manner when the creature stayed hidden. *"Changed your mind?"*

Violence

Sneaky

Hidden

"Did you get an item or something? You seem more shrouded than usual. Scared of the elves?" Ilea asked.

Secret

Lilith

Reputation

Violence

Hidden

"Whatever suits you," Ilea said. *"Just stay safe."*

Indestructible

"I know I am," Ilea said.

The Fae tried to pop her eye, failing to do so.

"Proving my point, little one," she sent as they entered into an expansive cavern, light glowing from crystal growths on the walls. Water dripped down from hundreds of meters above, small creeks flowing down, either vanishing into the depths or pooling at the barrier. Crevices were visible above, some shrouded in darkness, others illuminated by glowing mushrooms or more crystal. She spotted small critters rushing away at the sound, larger ones glaring down with sets of four deep blue eyes. They did not approach.

The barrier thrummed with incredible power, a near sixty meter section exposed in the open space of the natural cavern. Golden light mixed with the pale illumination of the crystal growths. It was difficult to see through the defensive spell of Iz but Ilea knew it looked different at the very least than the area they had seen before. She could probably get them through here.

Isalthar didn't speak when everyone had arrived. The Hunters did not take a formation. They each chose a spot and remained there, either standing, flying, or hanging. And still they waited for his signal. The time to show off their powers was over. The Cerithil Hunters had gathered, here at the outskirts of Iz, and they were prepared to fight.

The Val Akuun raised his left arm as magical power gathered, the very air trembling at his will. A spear thrummed to life, ghostly and incorporeal.

Ilea felt like the world was taking in a deep breath. She grinned and cracked her neck, glancing at Kyrian and Feyrair. Then she found Niivalyr and nodded his way, the elf putting on a mask as his magic came to life.

We're here.

The spear flashed forward, crashing into the bright golden barrier with a shrill sounding impact. And a storm followed with it.

Ilea's dominion lit up with magic as the gathered elves unleashed a torrent of destruction. Four marks she had battled but she could not fathom a way for many of them to stand against the combined efforts of the Cerithil Hunters. The entire cavern shook as the fires of creation roared to life, arcane beams and waves of sound slashing through each other and into the conjured barrier. The shock waves did not seem to stop as a constant pressure came from the central point Isalthar had aimed for at the start, the residue magic in the air enough for Ilea to recharge a portion of her mana.

She too sent concentrated beams of Embered Heart into the midst of the chaos with her Wyrms eye cannon, adding burning ash into the mix to light up the entirety of the visible barrier. Impacts resounded like the combined artillery efforts of an entire modern army. Ilea felt the hairs on her neck stand up as she spread her wings, watching the central barrier give way, slowly pushed aside by the powerful spells. *Hmm. This is shaping up to be quite fun.*

The last bit was pushed through, leaving a sizable hole in the barrier.

Isalthar hissed, the sound reverberating through the shaking cavern as rock and crystal fell from above. A savage sound. A sound to frighten not just children but grown men and adventurers alike. Not the arrogant hiss of a hunting elf, but the sound of hatred, and war.

The others joined in with their own and pushed forward through the barrier, teleporting or flying.

Ilea appeared on the other side, the cavern dark and quiet. Tunnels extended into the depths below, the sounds already audible. Fast moving metal steps on stone ground. She glanced back to see the last of the Hunters appear in the darkness, their silhouettes backlit by the golden light. The barrier closing.

Hissing resounded as elves lit up with magic, fast moving bodies rushing forward into the dark and towards the green eyed hordes of silent machines. Spells zipped past, spheres of complex magic. A split second later the darkness was pushed back, explosions of fire and arcane illuminating the armies of machines, dozens of Guardians ripped apart by the blasts, Centurion cores exploding with Praetorians moving past, their spells sent out as bows were drawn, the first Executioners rushing past above, clashing with the incoming Elves in a tumble of steel and magic.

"And so it begins," Feyrair said as his form transformed into that of a dark red dragon.

"That's not your line," Ilea answered. *But I suppose it fits.* She summoned her silver hammer into her right hand, a single strand of thorned metal snaking up her arm. The Azarinth Star glowed with power as she fueled it with magic.

Clad in her mantle, she lit up with the fires of creation. *Time to join the party.* Her wings charged before she rushed into the masses, metal bending around her form as she twirled, near thirty burning ashen limbs lashing out around her, silver thorns joining in as barriers lit up periodically. Heat

charged, she raised her arms and focused on three Executioners, a push of space magic slamming into them from above.

She flew forward, slapping aside a group of Centurion variations with her limbs as the silver machines reached the ground. Fabric Tear brought them closer before her fires exploded outwards. Ilea teleported to the closest one, its shield already gone, half the metal blown away. Three waves of Archon Strike exposed the core, her limbs ripping the thing out before she clad it in her fires. A moment later the thing cracked, Ilea holding on to the other two stumbling machines with her Space Manipulation. She checked her dominion and teleported every Taleen creation she could see towards herself right before the void explosion ripped out a sphere of reality.

She remained mostly unaffected, the powerful blast not quite comparable to what she had recently dealt with in Kohr. The same could not be said about the machines now removed from the cavern. Ilea was left flying in the open space, the battle raging all around as she resummoned her hammer. A hundred more machines were already moving in on her position, beams of arcane energy sent out by flying variations.

She basked in the magic, her wings pushing back against the combined efforts as void blasts joined the arcane, all of it fueling her with more mana as she healed her slowly damaged mantle. *Not quite the same as last time*, she thought with a grin and teleported into their midst. A flurry of ashen limbs ripped through the nearest machines, sprays of burning ash moved out farther, Ilea teleporting to the highest level enemies as she left behind burning shrapnel and dented metal.

She watched as a blast of sound sent a hundred machines flying, flattening those closest to the hovering elf. Her wings pushed against the powerful magic, her hearing gone for a split second before her healing took care of the issue. She saw the elf move on to the next cluster and chose one herself, the enemy hordes unending.

You're not the only ones who have faced entire armies.

She landed amidst the creatures and sent a blast of her charged heat into the approaching sea of green eyes. Her spell left a glowing furrow in both stone and metal, dozens of machines left to collapse as she shred through a hundred more. Ilea raised her arm towards a tunnel and pulled down, several tons of stone crashing down onto the Taleen rushing forward through the underground.

She flew up and glanced back at the expansive cave system. Dozens of spells lit up continuously, explosions reverberating through the massive cavern. The lower level Hunters had gathered to form a perimeter at the back, the flying group barely visible to her now other than the spells they conjured and the golden barrier behind them. Single high level Hunters were fighting the flowing streams of machines, thirty tunnels and crevices leading into the vicinity, a mountainous formation of stone splitting the cavern in two near the center.

Ilea sent another wave of space magic at the machines closing in, flying away as a few dozen of them crashed into those running behind them, a cascade of Centurion explosions ripping through more. She found Isalthar hovering above the central mountain, each of his gestures sending furrows of wind through the machines.

"We're not getting anywhere," she sent, rushing down into the fray to assist two Hunters against a group of Executioners, all of them damaged and the elves injured.

"To me," Isalthar spoke, his whisper like voice audible even through the explosions all around them.

Ilea healed the Hunters, fighting in a sea of flying shrapnel as they took down the Executioners one by one, their cracked cores sent into clusters of Taleen with Fabric Tear. She glanced up and flew towards the wind mage and healer, flying variants of Taleen battleships crashing down with half their forms gone from Executioner core explosions.

Many of the others gathered, though just as many remained fighting, either unable or unwilling to join Isalthar.

“Lead us to the city. If you will,” the elf spoke, white eyes taking her in.

Ilea smiled. “It will be my pleasure.”

They all flew together, the lower leveled perimeter joining them as they came down with dozens of spells, shredding through the approaching hordes with beams of glowing magic. Shields flared up to stop or deflect incoming attacks, roots pushing away entire groups of machines. Ilea ignored the tunnels and simply formed a drill, Kyrian and a few others doing the same nearby. A second later they were digging down at an angle. Towards Iz.

Earth mages kept the tunnels from collapsing, barriers erected at the back as the high level Hunters fought off the Executioners breaking in through the stone all around, their void magic ripping out entire sections of the walls.

Ilea kept an eye on the elves, healing them where she could. There were others doing the same, including Isalthar. It took them a few minutes as an unending tide of machines came in from all around, the tunnels themselves doing little to obstruct the higher level creations.

Ilea finally broke out on the other side and was met with a sea of stars.

Shields flared up around her when she realized the lights were arcane arrows coming from Hunter Praetorians hanging from the distant walls and standing on the buildings of Iz. There were thousands.

The city was alive, hordes of machines moving over the buildings, so numerous they looked like waves of dull green water. Ilea saw the distant golden sphere hovering above the central abyss. She formed shimmering barriers and walls of burning ash as the arrows exploded, teleporting away as many of the projectiles as she could. The air was filled with them, dozens of explosions lighting up the central cavern of the dwarven capital. Hundreds if not thousands of flying beings were visible, beams of arcane energy flashing up in the distance.

Ilea flew ahead, spreading her ashen limbs as far as she could to take in as much of the enemy magic as possible, the silver strings of her hammer doing the same. Her wings and mantle were ripped through as she felt herself get fueled by the spells, healing the damage in turn before she sent a wave of space magic crashing against a few hundred incoming arrows. Everything she could see lit up with blue arcane energy.

“*To the Core,*” she sent to everyone she could connect to, moving forward through the exploding storm of magic as her shields flared up and were shattered.

She could see a group split off and fly down into the stone corridors below, the lower leveled Hunters unable to proceed with the Taleen assault. Thirty of them remained with her, moving forward as they sent beams and projectiles back at the machines. A drop against their continuous torrent. Most of their magic now was spent on dealing with the incoming barrage, the flying machines in range by now.

Ilea flew in an arc around the city and towards the core, followed by the high level Hunters that had made it this far. She watched roots the size of houses grow out of Naradan as he twirled with a joyous hiss and crashed into ten approaching Executioners, taking them down towards the city streets, an entire section of houses flattened by the impact. Trees grew around him as roots broke out of the ground. She flew onward, sending a beam through a group of flying machines, several cut in half as her spell left a line of fire in the city below, windows burst and walls exploding inward.

Isalthar and Zorithanael teleported to her side, their combined magic breaking through the shields of a dozen Executioners. Feyrair roared from above, a torrent of white fire flaring up before the magic focused into a single bright beam. He reared his head and moved the spell in a horizontal line, ten cores exploding with purple energy as buildings collapsed and streets were set aflame, every Guardian standing nearby left to burn and melt in the fires of creation.

Violence, the little Fae whispered straight into her mind.

Ilea didn't have time to respond, twisting in the air as she dealt with the incoming arrows, the sheer number pushing their group back. Burning spears of ash flew through the distant flying machines, leaving two dozen of them to burn and crash before she gave up on controlling the ash, teleporting their entire group as a thousand homing arcane arrows turned in the air to follow them.

A wave of air and space magic set the fleet of projectiles alight, two spheres of fire and a wall of ice dealing with most of the remaining spells. Around a hundred still got through, Ilea moving in front of an injured elf to tank the blasts, healing the missing arm and chest of the Hunter. She felt herself be pulled, a gust of wind moving their group towards the city center, Isalthar flying ahead as invisible sound magic pushed back an army of silver machines. They were getting closer.