

## Chapter 569 Request

Ilea stayed with the Reapers until she could think with little strain while their magic pressed down on her.

It took her another full day, the time passing quickly thanks to her meditative state.

***‘ding’ ‘Lightning Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 8’***

***‘ding’ ‘Lightning Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 9’***

***‘ding’ ‘Mental Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 13’***

***‘ding’ ‘Mental Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 14’***

***‘ding’ ‘Mental Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 15’***

As the strain lessened, so did the rewards.

Ilea didn't feel confident enough to disable her Mental defenses. Not for a long while. Neither did she think it reasonable to remain for much longer, deciding that other skills should be prioritized.

*About six days left until my meeting with the Elves.*

She slashed through the hordes, destroying the monster eggs just as much as the living. The larger versions had a higher level than most of the small Reapers but they lacked any mental powers, instead using their claws and high speed to fight.

Neither of those properties impressed Ilea.

***[Blue Reaper Guardian – lvl 482]***

The creature slashed its claws into her ash, getting stuck before its head was pierced by ash, exploding in a splatter of gore.

The level difference and low number of Guardians led to no level ups for Ilea's main Classes, not that she really expected anything.

At the other end of the cavern, she found a large Reaper stuck inside a web of blue fleshy tendrils. It slowly opened its eyes to stare at her.

***[Blue Reaper Hive – lvl 520]***

“Do you want to talk?” Ilea asked and established a mental connection. *“Hello.”*

A low hum resounded as the creature gathered magic. A moment later, a blast of mind magic slammed into Ilea's defenses.

*“I guess not,”* she sent, having found the attack more than disappointing after the combined efforts of over a hundred Reapers. *“My turn.”*

She held up her right arm, releasing the heat and energy she had formed within her core.

The spell turned the remaining Blue Reaper to ash, the crevice it had lived in charred and glowing.

*“Didn't want to talk,”* Ilea said.

*“Well... would you be inclined to cooperate after someone murdered all of your children?”*  
Meadow asked.

*“No. But I’d at least acknowledge that they were little brats, attacking the intruder without trying diplomacy first,”* Ilea said.

*“At least I can observe what the removal of a monster species does to the surroundings. Now I’d like to implore you to stop hunting random monsters here if all they’re doing is remaining in their nest. That is, if you don’t have any remaining grudges,”* Meadow said.

*“Just down in the Descent. And pretty much just the Sun Sprites. The rest I don’t really care about,”* she said.

*“Will you go there now?”* Meadow asked.

*“Nope. I mean I could go challenge the Griffin... but I think I should work on a few skills before reaching five hundred. Can I use the portal again?”* Ilea said.

*“Of course. I’ll supply the energy. The changes your friends have made should allow someone like you to use the gate independently. Though the cost is still quite high,”* Meadow said.

Ilea appeared in the large cavern and checked in on the two enchanters. The new platform they were building looked simpler if anything. *A good sign I suppose,* she thought and checked the few messages still in her mind.

***‘ding’ ‘The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 406 – One stat point awarded’***

*Very useful.*

*So saving a species rewards a Core point but exterminating one doesn’t? Hmm... well I suppose it’s not the only nest in the North. Would take quite some dedication to hunt down every single Blue Reaper.*

*“I’ll see you around then, have fun you three,”* she said with a wave, stepping onto the platform she had arrived on.

*“Have fun training,”* Meadow said.

*“What? When did you get here?”* Iana said when she looked up.

Ilea just laughed before she vanished in white light.

It was early morning in Ravenhall, the first light of the suns still hidden behind the mountains.

Ilea stood next to a large table on her breakfast terrace. On it was a map.

*I have eleven marks... well the waiter is probably not going to get killed at this point.*

She dissolved the mark, assuming that Helena had left town ages ago.

*Which leaves nine free marks.*

Besides Claire and Trian, none of the marks were in Ravenhall and while she could gauge a general direction for the others, it was impossible to pinpoint their location.

With Claire and Trian however, she could make good guesses as to where they were.

“Ma’am? There’s a woman here... looking for you... eh... she has a lot of cats with her?” the waiter said when he stepped out of the stairwell.

“Yeah, let her up. I hired her,” Ilea said.

A woman in her thirties joined her a minute later, a dozen cats either clinging to her leather robes or walking close to her.

**[Mage – lvl 84]**

“Pleasure to meet you,” Ilea said with a grin.

“You’re the one they call Lilith?” the woman said. “I’m Cali. You don’t strike me as particularly impressive, I’ll be honest.”

“I don’t really care,” Ilea said. “Are those wild cats that live in the city?”

The woman eyed her and nodded. “Yes. Just like the request said. But let me tell you, if you plan to eat, sacrifice, fuck, or skin them, I’ll make them leave right now.”

“I just want to mark and track them,” Ilea said. “It’s harmless.”

“Of course it is,” Cali said and walked a few steps closer.

Ilea displaced the closest cat into her hands, using her healing to calm the frightened animal. She stroked its head with a smile before placing a Sentinel Huntress mark onto it.

“That’s one,” she said and let the cat go.

The woman watched with a confused gaze as Ilea placed the rest of her marks.

“You didn’t take that one,” she said, pointing at a white cat sitting next to her.

“Mhm,” Ilea said and turned to the map. “You can let them go now. I promise I’ll cause them no harm.”

“As you wish,” Cali said, something about her aura changing.

A few of the cats remained nearby, the others jumping onto nearby roofs or leaving through the stairwell.

“Good luck with your experiments then, Lilith,” the woman said and turned away.

Ilea watched her go before she focused on the map. Nine ashen dots floated over the location of the terrace. Two dots were located at other locations in the city.

She focused on her skill and took a deep breath.

*Okay, now we wait,* she thought and tried to visualize the various marks in her mind, using her ash to relate their movements on the map.

The first twenty minutes were absolute chaos but as time went on, Ilea slowly got the hang of it. She had to fly up a few times to get an aerial perspective, the different marks much easier to distinguish from above.

When she landed for the fifth time, a new face had joined her terrace.

Or more accurately, a new mask.

“Sulivhaan,” Ilea said as she landed and moved the ashen dots around. *A distraction might help with the skill.*

“Ilea, it’s been some time since we last talked,” he said, face covered in the same mask he always wore.

**[Mage – lvl 275]**

*Getting closer to three hundred, hmm?*

“I suppose it has,” she said.

“You weren’t lying about your planned meeting attendance,” he said and chuckled.

“Why would I? Plus you’re doing well. There’s no need for me to hold you back,” Ilea said.

He stepped over to the map and inspected it. “Fascinating. A tracking spell?”

“Yeah, marked a bunch of cats,” she said with a smirk.

“It should prove a challenge to keep track of so many. Ravenhall is indeed experiencing a time of prosperity, but that isn’t solely due to our efforts,” he said. “Your proposed alliance is going to cause a lot of issues we’ll have to deal with.”

“And benefits,” Ilea said.

He nodded slowly. “And benefits.”

“Did you come to convince me of an alternative? Or to stop the whole thing?” she asked.

“No. Not at all. Please understand that my skepticism isn’t based on a feeling of superiority, but personal experiences and historical knowledge,” he said.

“Oh? So humans have forged alliances with Dark Ones before? Including a four mark space mage?” Ilea said in a teasing tone.

“No, but sapient creatures work much the same as we do. Differences lead to conflict, even just nationality, age, or skin color. Dealing with entirely different species will only amplify this problem. It will be a challenge to overcome. As to your question, I’ve heard of your endeavors here and thought to seek your assistance with a problem,” he said.

“Describe the problem,” Ilea said, moving the ashen dots around slightly. A few cats were starting to move more quickly.

“We keep track of criminal activity within and below Ravenhall. One group must’ve found a cavern system or ruins deep below. Reports of humanoid monsters in the one to two hundred range have become more frequent,” he explained.

“You want me to kill the creatures?” Ilea asked.

“Not exactly. They’re called Threshers. Both the Shadowguard and Shadows themselves can deal with them without much trouble. They’re afraid of light, use teleportation and powerful claws but they’re nowhere near the danger we faced with the Demon invasion. The dungeon itself is the problem. We’ve only managed to push through two rooms so far. One party of five lost all their members to a set of traps. The second party lost half their people,” Sulivhaan explained.

Ilea looked at him and crossed her arms. “How did the Threshers come through then?”

“Most didn’t. There were dozens of corpses in the small part we could explore, many of them ancient and rotten. Before we lose anymore lives, the council thought it best to simply close up the entrance and be done with it. Some of us that is. But you may have both the durability and interest to dig a little deeper,” he said.

Ilea squinted her eyes at him. “You’d just ignore an ancient ruin below Ravenhall? It could hold so many potential secrets.”

“And seven dead citizens. Ilea, ruins are found all the time. Powerful people thousands of years ago burying themselves with monsters and traps is not something new. Little treasure and history remains in the damp and rotten tombs of old. Death and curses are usually the main contenders. There’s a reason many are left well alone.

“The fact that these ruins exist below our very city is however more concerning than most other dungeons we find. I’m aware of your Taleen explorations, which is why I’m bringing this up at all. And perhaps your habit of finding joy in death and curses,” he explained.

“Yeah, I do like those,” Ilea said, nodding to herself. “But I might unleash some ungodly creature if I go down there and explore more.”

“I take full responsibility should this operation lead to damage to Ravenhall. However if we want to expand further, we will have to deal with this at one point or the other. For now we can simply close it up but in five years, maybe ten, we’ll have to find a more permanent solution. Perhaps you are that solution,” Sulivhaan said.

“I can check it out, sure,” Ilea said. “Can I leave a mark on you, just in case I stumble upon something I shouldn’t have woken or touched and need assistance.”

“There is no need. We have two talented Divination experts that will be able to track your movements and actions at a distance of a few kilometers. And a mind mage that will be able to communicate with you directly. The entrance will be shut and reinforced once you’re inside, with two Shadow teams and a hundred guards ready in case they’re needed,” he said.

“This is starting to sound like a much larger operation than you let on at the start,” she said.

“Perhaps. Dagon and Elana insisted on an expedition force but the whole thing became a little more complicated when even a Shadow nearly died to the traps. A consensus in the council couldn’t be reached quite yet but me and Claire suggested sending you instead. If you have the time,” he said.

Ilea grabbed the map and rolled it up. “I’ll check it out. Sounds interesting.”

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“Another one is hiding in the tunnel ahead, to the right, hanging from the ceiling,” Josie said, feeling the presence of the weak mind in the dark tunnel.

Uriah gestured to the team, his shield held up above his head as he turned the corner.

The Thresher jumped down immediately, dodging the sword that came for it with a use of its teleportation spell.

Josie felt the mind appear and sent a beam of light at its right leg.

The child sized monster stumbled back, its one eye blinded by the flash.

Uriah slammed into it with a charged shield bash, his heavily armored form swatting the creature into the wall with a wet thud.

An arrow slammed into its eye, finally killing it.

***'ding' 'Your group has defeated [Thresher – lvl 163]'***

Josie glanced at the large claws, walking closer before she inspected the body. “This one has scars too. Corruption in its right shoulder. I believe its eyesight was impeded too, though I can’t tell if it was injured,” she said.

“It’s the last one?” Uriah asked, the massive warrior stepping closer as he held his shield towards their water mage.

A beam of pressurized water cleaned off the blood and Thresher bits.

“Can’t detect any others in this area,” Josie said.

They were supposed to join an expedition into the newly discovered dungeon down below Ravenhall. Sulivhaan himself had summoned whoever was interested in the job. But the discovery had turned out to be a little more complicated than initially assumed.

The Threshers were obviously not the problem, though Josie supposed in larger groups, they could pose a reasonable challenge. Similar to the demons they had hunted in the south of Lys before joining the Shadow’s Hand.

“Then let’s return, before we stray too far away,” Uriah said.

“Back already?” Finnley asked as he glanced at the group. His yellow eyes twinkled in the torchlight.

Josie was sure the man had no difficulties seeing in complete darkness. She tried to avoid his gaze.

Uriah stepped towards him. “How’s your rogue?”

Finnley slightly nudged the sitting man. The Shadow had been heavily injured when exploring one of the dungeon chambers. Something with saws.

“He’ll survive,” he said.

Josie felt the third mind materialize next to the rogue, a Shadow that came very close to the name.

Makai, the third and last member of Finnley’s team. He wore black robes that ended in a large hood covering his face. Darkness seemed to gather within, nothing of his face revealed.

The robed mage felt like death and decay, like a spirit or cursed monster.

Josie knew rationally that the man was a human, his mind didn't look different after all. It still took everything she had not to shiver whenever he was around.

He whispered something to the rogue before he straightened from his crouched position.

Finnley glanced back towards the dungeon entrance and smiled. "Fucking finally. The masked bastard is back. And he brought a lady."

Josie looked towards the entrance, a simple rectangle cut into the stone wall. Everything here was rather new, carved out by expert earth mages and coordinated by architects. To think there was something hidden below.

*Wouldn't be the first time we find a dungeon in an unexpected place. Perhaps right under an old city isn't quite that unusual,* she mused and glanced at the torches.

About eighty members of the Shadowguard had been sent down here, aided by around forty adventurers. All experienced warriors and mages. It was an expedition force, but more coordinated than Josie had ever seen before.

*Well Uriah had called it a military unit. Probably the only reason he agreed to explore an unknown dungeon.*

Their team had taken few missions since joining the Shadows. She hoped he wasn't throwing caution to the wind for reputation. She looked at their leader, his body covered in thick plate armor, his head protected by a sturdy helmet, nothing on his face revealed.

A slight smile came to her lips. *He wouldn't.*

He gestured them to follow and walked past Finnley, his shield always at a position where he could react should the other Shadow become more than just provocative.

Sulivhaan appeared a moment later, still wearing his dark robes and mask. He had always been friendly but she definitely felt the pressure coming from him. An arcane power they had rarely seen in humans before coming to Ravenhall.

### ***[Gravity Mage – lvl 275]***

He wasn't just one of the highest ranking Shadows but a council member of Ravenhall. Perhaps that was why Uriah had answered the call.

Sulivhaan was followed by a woman clad in simple leather armor, her blue eyes taking in the surroundings.

Josie's mouth opened slightly, her lips trembling as she felt the mental defenses that protected her mind.

### ***[Battle Healer – lvl ??]***

The woman locked eyes with her and smiled. "Hey there."

*Did she... was that her? It has to be... she's a mind mage too? But that shield.*

"Look who finally decided to show up. Now can we get the fuck on with it before we all fall fucking asleep?" Finnley said as he walked past their group. "If it isn't Lilith, the ashen cunt. Sulivhaan shat his pants so hard he had to bring your fairy ass down here?"

Uriah gestured their team to take a step back.

Josie felt his aura strengthen, the man ready for a fight.

Finnley on the other hand spread his arms and walked towards the two monsters.

“Of all the unwise things to say,” Makai said with a hint of amusement, the robed slither of a man floating to Finnley’s side.