

Chapter 389 Bunker of Steel

Elfie appeared on her side and floated next to her.

Glad to see at least someone came. Catelyn had made her point and so did she. Risks would be necessary and dangerous encounters were inevitable. Splitting up and going into the unknown without anybody having your back was questionable however.

If there was help available, Ilea wouldn't say no. Not when the people weren't holding her back.

Ilea led the way, walking through the corridor before they reached the end of it. A thin, barely visible line showed a rectangular gate that was currently shut.

"Can you figure out the enchantments?" She asked, glancing over at the floating elf.

"There is none, human." He said a moment later.

"Calling me human again, I see." She commented, slamming her fist into the steel with full force. The metal creaked and dented, the loud back traveling through the hallways.

Ilea waited a while and listened. Nothing replied to her call.

"You are out for blood. So driven by emotion." Elfie commented.

She glared up at him, enjoying the sight of him backing off a little before she continued her assault on the door.

"What are you driven by then? Oh glorious elf." She asked, a sizable chunk of the metal bent in by now, revealing a path. Neither commented on its uselessness by virtue of their teleportation magic.

"Distinct intent." Elfie replied as he watched her walk through the opened gate.

A rectangular room opened up beyond, machinery whose purpose was unknown to the healer built into the walls, four stone tables in the middle of the room. Dim light shined on from a magical light built into the ceiling.

I know who fucking built this place. Ilea thought as she walked over to some of the machines, their design distinct, the color and feel she got from it.

"You still call me Elfie, despite me having given you my name. An honor I must explain, amongst those of elven descent." Elfie commented on her earlier inquiry, having called her human.

Ilea toyed with the machine but nothing happened. "This whole thing, was built by the same people who had facilities in the demon realm." She said. "I've seen these designs before. Not exactly but distinctly similar."

"Also, the nickname is endearing. Take it as a compliment. We humans like to do that to our friends." She added and checked the stone tables.

Runic carvings had been scratched into the stone from bottom to top, the four tables standing out in the otherwise technologically advanced room.

What's the chance of this place being built by the same people fucking with the Rhyvor dungeons? Pretty fucking high if you ask me. Ilea wondered.

She wasn't in the mood to get the ex king and hear his opinion. His earlier comment still irked her. *Of course exactly his intention. The other side of his charm skills, the anti charm. Effective enough to get him killed one day.*

"I will allow it then, because it is you." Elfie said after a while. "As to your assumption, it is an interesting theory. However there could be other explanations. If we find more facilities like this one in the deeper layers, I am inclined to believe we have found the creators. Or the place they had resided in at the very least."

Ilea glanced up at the shimmering light. "What makes you think they ever left?"

He followed her gaze and shook his head. "The mana density in these regions is high, in dungeons even more so. The Taleen have found ways of harnessing this power, why not others?"

"Damn, you're right." Ilea said and smiled. "Guess I like the prospect of sucker punching whoever made this."

"The purpose is of yet unclear. The fate of their kind may have driven them to create such a place or they merely came to study what others had left behind." Elfie theorized as he too inspected some of the machines.

"You're surprisingly open and positive. I doubt this corruption suggests a lot of good intentions. I'm happy to be proven wrong however." She said. "Also, we might not want to fuck with too much of this. Not knowing the purpose of it all."

Elfie stopped tinkering with the machine and nodded. "Enchanter's work." He agreed. "Remember, I came to travel these parts in search for those who might have answers. To my people's plight. And perhaps not only the Taleen."

"Your oracles. Can't help you much there. Maybe Isalthar has some insights for you." Ilea commented, walking to another closed gate on the other side of the room.

"I wonder if he does." Niivalyr said as he followed.

This time, Ilea blinked through the door, neither her teleportation nor her sphere interrupted by whatever enchantments had remained.

More corridors opened up beyond. "Are you good in remembering layouts?"

The elf hissed joyously. "We will not get lost, human."

"Now you're just doing it on purpose." Ilea said and rolled her eyes, choosing a direction at random.

"What do you mean? It is simply my nickname for you." He deadpanned.

She snorted, checking the hallway for any magical residue. Anything that would lead to anybody that had walked these halls in the last weeks and months.

They examined a couple more rooms and halls but found them devoid of any life, all of the machines and tools not giving off any magical power. This world's form of electricity it seemed.

Heat and motion could still be used, evident by forges and waterwheels. Ilea wondered what would happen to a battery brought here. *It would convert to magic or explode. No middle ground.* She decided, knowing very little about how batteries actually worked.

“We should return soon.” Elfie said after a while. “Neither traps nor beings seem to remain in this facility.”

“Guess you’re right.” Ilea said, having calmed down from her earlier argument. The scouting had been rather boring, no traps or beings the opposite of what she was looking for.

“You sound disappointed. Perhaps we can attack you for a while later, that seems to help your mood.” Elfie commented.

“I’m touched by your concern.” Ilea replied with a smile. “It sounds lovely. What would your barriers constitute as anyway?”

“I was not concerned and merely pointed out the oddity of your apparent addiction to have your body damaged.” He said and looked forward. “My barriers remain in the physical realm, no resistance to be gained for you.”

Ilea nodded with her eyes closed. “Of course you weren’t.”

“I wasn’t.” The elf said once more, sounding more than a little unsure.

“Yes. Yes.” Ilea confirmed in a dry tone. “You should lead the way back, I’m not a hundred percent sure anymore where we are.”

He hissed and led them back through the empty steel corridors of the weird facility built into the dungeon.

Knowing the way, the two reached their little camp shortly after, teleporting through the rooms with little pause.

Catelyn had replaced Ilas as the guard, the latter sleeping in his bedroll, helmet of course still on.

The fox nodded their way. “Welcome back.” She said and glanced at Ilea. “May we have a word?”

Ilea glanced at Elfie and back to Catelyn before she nodded. “Sure.”

They teleported a little further away, some of the others likely still in hearing range.

“I wanted to apologize.” Catelyn started. “A lot is at stake in this mission and it can be irritating to see your casual demeanor. Your actions however speak the opposite and I thank you for the help. It is a great boon, to have you and your power with us.” She kept her gaze on Ilea’s face.

The healer sighed. “Sorry for snapping at you, Catelyn. You know I care, about you and the city. Not as much as you do perhaps but I’m still here instead of killing Miststalkers.”

“With all these people dying, the wars and everything else going on in Elos, I don’t want to be serious all the time. It helps me to deal with it all. Laughing in the face of death and horrors. It’s who I am I suppose, who I became.”

“We will fight off and destroy the corruption and those who created it.” She finished and extended an ashen limb towards the fox.

“That we will.” Catelyn smirked and extended one of her tails, tapping the ashen limb with it.

“Also, thank you for all the cake. Yet it might be appropriate to wait with more until we are done with this. It leaves a sour taste in my mouth, to eat something so sweet in the face of danger.”

Ilea chuckled and started to walk back to the others. “See, that’s exactly where we’re different.” she said and summoned one of Keyla’s meals. Perhaps she was indulging a bit too much but even Ilea

wasn't completely unfazed by going through a dozen shredders. All the while her healing and sphere informed her about the exact state of her skin and muscles.

Enjoying a good meal was just an additional fuck you to the creatures and corruption of this fucked up place.

Ilea shared the findings from their little scouting trip as well as some of her theories.

Maro hadn't paid attention until she made the possible connection between the demon realm, Tremor and the Descent.

"What do you think?" Ilea asked the necromancer, glancing his way.

"If Reyker's findings can be believed... and that man wasn't one to deceive anybody. Then there definitely was someone tinkering with the dungeons. The Descent had always been peculiar. Finding out now that it was built or at least manipulated to this extent. There's a chance the same people are responsible." Maro surmised.

"Did I miss something? Who are they?" Catelyn asked, glancing between the two.

"We don't exactly know much. It could honestly just be different ancient civilizations, another race or elves." Maro added. The revelation seemed to have pushed him past his lethargy, the man now pacing through their little campsite, a hand to his helmet's chin.

Niivalyr hissed at the mention of elves but didn't comment on it. He knew just as well that it was a possibility. They simply knew too little about these affairs.

"Either way, we're here to stop the corruption." Catelyn said and looked over the group. "Two hours and then we leave. Any objections?" she glanced at Ilea.

"Sounds good to me." the healer replied and blinked to her bed. "I can take watch in an hour."

"I'll wake you up." Catelyn said, stepping to the edge of their little space.

Ilea managed to fall asleep rather quickly, waking up again with a furry tail tapping her nose. She squinted and saw the fox standing near her bed. *Doesn't feel like any time has passed at all.*

Meditation and healing mana flowed through her, Ilea's body immediately awake. She felt rested, even though a part of her disliked the notion. *Two hours just isn't enough. Even if it is.*

Her bed vanished as she stood up, still in her bone and ash armor. *Time for breakfast.* She summoned a meal and started eating.

The others were woken up too, only Maro grumbling a little.

Ilea smiled, looking over the group, armor changing and a mask appearing on Elfie.

He hissed as she glanced at him, the elf straightening his robe.

It's like we had a sleepover. Always wanted that. Wait, we need snacks for that.

“Eat and drink, we leave in fifteen minutes.” Catelyn said.

“I’ll take the packs again when you’re done.” Ilea said to Ilas and Lucas.

They nodded and started rolling up their sleeping bags.

Maro made his bed vanish too, cracking his shoulders. “We should try to kill as many of these worms as we can. Any of them escape this place and we have a problem.”

“I agree. Ilea can apparently kill them as long as she has time to regenerate. How many until that is the case?” Catelyn asked, looking at her.

“Two or three.” Ilea replied, swallowing a bite before talking. “But with magic support it could be three or four. The problem is that they will attack you lot when I leave to regenerate. Also, having Elfie around to help me teleport away would be handy.”

“We have to find open spaces that allow us to fly far enough above them. Should be easy enough with those corrupted.” Maro suggested. “First, we should try to find any caves adjacent to this facility. The steel walls will allow you to use the same tactic as you did earlier.”

Awfully motivated now. Ilea quirked up an eyebrow. *Revenge of Rhyvor?* She chuckled at the thought. With all these ancient kingdoms, orders and civilizations, she didn’t exactly expect much to remain within this dungeon.

“An agreeable course. We should explore this facility as well.” Ilas said, the first words out of him in a while.

Ilea cracked her neck and put away her empty food box. She really was living the high life, eating Keyla’s cooking nearly every day. *If this was a novel, something bad would happen to her.* Ilea balled her fists at the thought and shook her head. There were no words to describe the hell she would unleash on anybody that would try.

Of course there was no reason to believe anyone would specifically target the cook. She did have a storage item now, was probably one of the most famous cooks in Ravenhall and well, she was in Ravenhall. A soon to be independent city defecting from the empire.

On the other hand, she had the protection of the Hand as well as Lilith, was herself at a comparatively high level and resided in one of the most well protected cities known to man.

The thoughts were only brought up by Ilea’s high consumption, the fear of losing this nectar of life itself. *I’m an addict.* The realization hit her but there was nothing she could do. People would think Ilea the power behind Lilith, her influence reaching over various cities in the human plains when the true mastermind was nobody else than a devious cook. Her power, unlimited.

“Have you seen death?” The voice of Niivalyr brought Ilea back, his eyes swirling with gray mist.

“Perhaps I have.” Ilea said in a grim tone before she shook her head. “I will lead the way, in case of traps. Also, don’t destroy them. I might be able to get resistances out of it.”

“Speaking of-” she added.

“Yes, we will attack you while we explore. Although we won’t be hidden from anything lurking in these halls.” Maro said with a sigh.

“I thought that was the point?” Ilea asked, cocking her head to the side.

“She is right.” Niivalyr said and hissed in amusement.

The next hours were spent exploring the facility, occasionally teleporting into nearby caves to stomp around and attract Shredders.

Catelyn agreed with Ilea's suggestion to leave the machines alone. Both agreed however to take some of the things with them. It was easier to get machines and tools up to an enchanter or smith compared to getting the people down here.

Ilea managed to kill another fifteen Shredders in their exploration, ten of them from a single cavern. However none of them counted as her own kills, leading to no level ups as the experience was split.

At the same time it meant less danger and a much easier battle altogether, now that they were prepared and could retreat behind the steel walls in case the creatures overwhelmed them.

Little usable information could be retrieved from the facility itself. No maps, no writing and other than a few more crude looking runed tables, there was nothing out of place.

Maro was sure the runes related to blood magic but he didn't know them, taking half an hour to copy down some of them into a notebook. Ilea healed his mind as he worked, even looking at the things causing damage.

Ilea was amused at the fact that reading complicated texts in this world literally damaged the mind.

"We have mapped the whole facility." Ilea suddenly said, the group having just rounded a corner.

"Really? Looks new to me." Ilea said, squinting into the dark corridor.

"No entrance or exit, no teleportation gate, no rotten food, no chambers to sleep." Maro murmured, shaking his head.

"Maybe they're like super introverts." Ilea suggested. "Or slimes that don't need to eat or sleep."

"There are many species without a need for either. Most lack a higher intellect." Catelyn commented. "It seems either this facility was built into the very stone or it was moved here. It is certainly hidden. Protected against nature and beast."

Like a bunker deep underground. Ilea thought and looked up at the walls. *Maybe I can build a vault for my shit under my house.* She remembered the cellar in the Azarinth temple and chuckled. *Not exactly a novel idea.*

The difference was of course that this place was hundreds of meters below ground.

"The change in the north might have moved it." Lucas said, brushing a hand over the immaculate steel wall.

"Potentially." Maro said. "We won't know more if there is no writing, a corpse or anything... that would give us an idea about what this is." he sounded frustrated, his demeanor back to how it was before Ilea revealed what they had found.

"We should move on to the caverns then. See if we can find more Shredders before going to the eight layer." Catelyn said and turned around, sending a beam of fire at Ilea.

The heat washed over her, the rest of the group using their spells in a bored fashion. After hours it had become routine to attack the healer.

Little damage and danger led to few levels however. Ilea looked through her notifications once more.

'ding' 'Heart of Cinder reaches 3rd lvl 7'

'ding' 'Blood Manipulation Resistance reaches lvl 12'

'ding' 'Blood Manipulation Resistance reaches lvl 13'

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

'ding' 'Death Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 5'

'ding' 'Light Magic Resistance reaches lvl 18'

'ding' 'Light Magic Resistance reaches lvl 19'

'ding' 'Wood Magic Resistance reaches lvl 10'

'ding' 'Wood Magic Resistance reaches lvl 11'

'ding' 'Wood Magic Resistance reaches lvl 12'

Ilea was glad now that Lucas was there, providing easy level ups to two of her skills. She had hoped Niivalyr would reach level three hundred in his second class already but it didn't seem like he was quite there yet.