

Chapter 877 Chapel

The group returned to the facility below the Haven after having discussed their findings so far with the Meadow.

Ilea had transported all the books and materials to its Domain, various scholars and enchanters already working through everything.

It would take time to confirm what Eregar had shared, or what Eregar's hologram had shared.

If everything was true, they couldn't remove the Source, even if such were possible. At the same time it would mean that various Ascended had been involved in securing it within the Haven. Which could possibly mean that it was safer than even the Source within the Core of Iz.

The question posed by Eregar remained.

What was it that they sought?

They had once again gathered around the spherical device, the shimmering near golden light depicting the same robed form of the so called Erik Anderson.

One of Aki's Executioners stepped closer. "We seek a way to stop another Extraction from taking place."

"I believe the possibility of such a threat minuscule, though a possibility it remains. I can share with you the network of facilities used for the previous Extraction. They have been disabled, but you should seek them out and make sure that remains the case," Eregar spoke.

"It's not the same mesh. We assume it's a new one that we haven't found," Aki said.

"As of yet, there is no way to measure or find preparation for the Extraction. You must find an active location in a mesh of connected facilities meant to prepare an Extraction. There is information in this device that will tell you what to look for, and how to locate the rest of the mesh once you have found a single facility. You must find this mesh and destroy the mana gathering domes."

The light Eregar looked around the room as if to emphasize. "You have reason to believe there is a new mesh in Elos. What makes you believe that? Who is responsible?"

"This could be a trap. Should we really share Ker Velor's name?" Chris said.

"If this was all orchestrated by the Architect, he would've already been warned of our presence here," Nes said. *"I suggest we mention his name."*

"I agree," Ormont said.

"Divination magic revealed that Ker Velor, the Architect, is working towards another Extraction," Aki spoke.

"You mentioned the Architect. Please contact me immediately. There are two ways you can reach me. Find the dilapidated chapel three kilometers northwest of Myrefield. Go to the basement and find the bells that remain there. Then crush them. I will arrive as soon as I can. Don't expect me for a few weeks at least.

“If you do not know of Myrefield, there is information in this device that will guide you to the specific location using a variety of landmarks. If neither is possible, find the Golden Lily.”

Ilea raised her brows.

“They are an organization of influential humans with the initial task to bring stability to our lands and our kind. Talk to any senior member and tell them you seek audience with the Founders. Tell them that the third star shines the way in the dark. Only the other Founder knows of the Source.”

The third star shines in the dark? Ilea thought and raised her brows.

“So he’s offering help?” she asked.

“It appears as such,” Aki spoke.

“This whole setup here strongly suggests that Eregar is trustworthy. We should try and contact him. He might not be able to find the Architect or his facilities, but his expertise could be valuable. Objections?” Aki spoke.

“As much as it annoys me, he did fight for his kind, and for Elos,” Ormont said.

“Another being with resources and knowledge. I don’t see why not,” Elfie said.

“I would have to request permission to operate on Empire land in such a capacity,” Aki said.

“I don’t,” Ilea said. “And I know what to expect near Myrefield.”

“Then it’s settled,” Aki spoke. “Those who wish to remain, I will continue to review the information from the Varitan sphere.”

“I’ll update you with what I find. The rest of you, I’ll see around,” Ilea sent before opening a gate to Iz.

Short trip to the Plains. Bells? Really? Let’s hope they’re still there and work.

“Closest gate that isn’t Myrefield itself?” she sent to the massive golden sphere at the center of the former Taleen capital.

“Iz to Morhill, to Virilya, to Kramfield. Then you fly southwest until you see Myrfield.”

“Thanks,” Ilea sent. *Now we just need to get him connected to a network of smartphones and we’re good.*

Finding the gate to Morhill, Ilea found the present adventurers, merchants, and civilians stepping aside with awe and terror in their eyes. She didn’t slow, standing on the platform with her ash armor active, three question marks above her head, and the title of Untainted. Hiding her status was fun from time to time, but she may just as well use it when there was a need. Or when there was no need, and she just didn’t feel like hiding who she was. What she was.

She followed the steps Aki had outlined, appearing in Kramfield and spreading her wings, charging them when the gate activated again. A few Scouts had tried to follow her near Virilya. She shot off into the distance before they arrived.

The flight was short, less than half a minute, and she quickly spotted the dilapidated chapel in the middle of a grassy field. *Reminds me of that Paladin. Gretmoor? I hope he’s doing well, reunited with his people.*

She landed with a heavy thud into the earth, bits and pieces of grass and dirt flying aside. "I can see you," she said at the two people standing in front of the building, both shrouded, neither quite as good as Eve. She assumed they were assassins, based on the proximity to Myrefield. Ilea ignored them and checked the chapel with her dominion.

No enchantments.

"Who are you?" one of them asked, but Ilea had already teleported inside. She saw one of the assassins rush towards Myrefield immediately, the other one creeping in behind her, holding a strange curved blade shimmering with magical power.

Ilea set off the various traps in the stairwell leading down, a few poison darts clanging against her armor. The cellar was damp, a few rats rushing for safety at her approach. Rotten benches sat spaced out in the broad room supported by two stone beams. An empty altar sat at the opposite wall. The two bells were connected by a small string, hanging from a nail wedged between two bricks. She walked inside and scrunched her nose.

Rotten. Lovely. She teleported the bells into her hand and looked at them.

Ilea saw the shrouded form of the assassin reach the cellar, her weapon drawn, body frozen.

"Well? Attacking or not?" she asked. "I don't plan to hurt you."

"T... those bells a... are not y... yours," the woman spoke in a quiet tone, her weapon angled in a defensive stance, though still mostly hidden.

Illusion? No, Dark Magic.

She looked at the small rusted bells and crushed them in her hand.

Magic pulsed for a moment, followed by the sound of a bell, elongated and reverberating in her head like mind magic.

Ilea saw something move within the fabric. Ever so slightly. "*Found the bells. Call is out, I suppose. Might want to think about sending someone here to wait.*" she sent to Aki.

Guess I can try and deal with this, now that the assassins are here already.

"How long until the cavalry is here?" Ilea asked and walked past the frozen woman.

Scared because of me or because someone can perceive her in general? she wondered and walked up the stairs, teleporting a few of the poisoned needles into her hand. *Nowhere near potent enough.*

She turned to look at the chapel. A small tower reached up from the elongated form of the building. Old wood, near black in color, with ivy and wildflowers growing all over. A thin dirt walkway led away. Remnants of low stone walls built with rocks instead of magic still remained nearby, not part of the chapel itself. She walked over to one of the larger sections and carefully sat down on it, her ash spreading to support the shoddy structure.

Her mantle remained as she looked out onto the vast fields. Massive clouds moved faraway, towards the ocean. Otherwise, the sky remained clear.

"There you are," she said.

A dozen shrouded figures had appeared nearby, one of them just about emanating enough annoyance to be Helena.

And I barely even notice them.

“What’s your business here?” Helena spoke, her magic waning to reveal her form in studded black leather armor, her brown hair up in a bun.

Ilea showed the bits and pieces left of the bells.

Helena narrowed her eyes. “Why would you come here to destroy that?”

“*I Called Erik,*” Ilea answered.

“Everyone, leave,” Helena said and sighed, the presence of the assassins waning quickly. “*You could have at least let me know you were coming. And what do you mean by Erik? What is that name to you?*”

“*Still playing mysterious? Erik, the founder next to Maureen. I already met her after you warned her of me? Or what was it you wanted again?*”

Helena snapped her mouth shut and looked at her for a few moments.

“*Look, I don’t care. You wanted the founders to have a look. Maureen had a look. Now we want Erik, and with this,*” Ilea showed the rusty metal bits again and let them fall to the grass. “*He’s on his way.*”

Helena shook her head. She looked at the bits and pieces with disbelief. “*He told me... an heirloom... of course. How did you find out about it? About him?*”

“*I can’t tell you. But he offered his help with something,*” Ilea answered.

“*His help. To you? He’s coming here? To help you?*”

“*To offer his help to... us. As far as I understand. Not that the Accords are in dire need exactly, but he’s been around for some time,*” Ilea said. “*And we’ll need to know when he’s here. Can we station a few machines here?*”

Helena just stared at her.

“*Just inside of the chapel. I don’t think anybody has been in there for some time,*” Ilea said, rolling her eyes.

“*I will want to talk to him,*” Helena said. “*Is this about all of the preparation you’re undergoing? The so called threat?*”

“*I hope it’s just a so called threat. I don’t care what you do when he’s here. Can I get the machines?*” Ilea said.

Helena waved at her, turning around before she paced a few steps.

Ilea opened a gate to Iz, a Hunter Praetorian stepping through.

“You can stay in the chapel. I broke the bells down there, here are the pieces,” Ilea said and pointed to the ground. “Helena, Aki. I’m sure you’ve met.”

“We have made our acquaintance,” the machine spoke.

“We have,” Helena said. “Any info you can give me on all this? What’s going on? What has he to do with it?”

“We’re discussing in the Accords still. That information is off limits for now.”

Helena sighed and hissed at the same time. “Not even, on my fucking own territory,” she said, walking away and towards Myrefield. “She just fucking lands, ignores my poison, ignores my assassins, then shits out a killing machine that can wipe out half my fucking town,” she ranted, hands gesturing close to her face before she vanished in a shroud. “Absolute fucking lunatics. Our lands are done for. Space magic everywhere. I want to go back to flying.”

Ilea heard the agitated words continue for a few minutes until Helena had gotten far enough away.

“Plenty of assassins in the area. You’ll be watched,” she sent.

“I am well aware. Thanks for the quick work. It would’ve been more difficult to deal with her if not for you,” Aki said.

Ilea looked towards the distant houses. *“I didn’t mind. As much as I dislike the Heavenly Sweets, and the Lily for that matter, she did choose a scenic piece of land.”*

“How much does she know?”

“The rant not an indication?” Ilea asked.

“I don’t know her well. She could be acting.”

Ilea smiled. *“Honestly, I don’t think so. If anything, I don’t think she knows about the Source. Wouldn’t matter even if she does. I’m reasonably sure that’s why she’s pissy.”*

“The existence of the Accords has complicated her operations, that is true,” Aki said.

“I’ll be interested to know what Erik thinks when he arrives. The fact that he set up those seals implies he’s at least hoping for an allied Elos in some ways, no matter the species. Helena seems a little too narrow minded.”

“You remember when we first went into the Haven,” the machine sent, eyes glowing slightly as it stepped next to her.

Ilea glanced at it, then looked back out onto the fields. *“Training in the Hand. Been a while since then. Lots of change.”*

“For the both of us,” Aki said before the large Hunter Praetorian touched her shoulder.

She was a little surprised at the rare gesture, but didn’t mind it. The arm was heavy and cold, perhaps that was why Aki chose to refrain normally.

Ilea sat in silence for a few minutes. Aki had removed the arm at some point, though the machine remained standing next to her.

“I’ll be off then. But it’s not like I’m leaving you behind,” she said.

“Eyes everywhere. Always watching,” the Hunter spoke and pointed at her, eyes flashing green for a split second.

Ilea grinned and stepped into her gate, asking the Meadow to teleport her back out to her meditation spot.

“Done with your work?” the being asked.

Ilea rolled down onto the ground before spreading her arms. She looked at the storm laden sky above and thought about the question. Had it really been her work? Everything they had learned from Eregar, everything with Helena and the bells. Maybe they were done faster, and they had been

safer in the Haven, in case of any traps. *“There wasn’t much to be done,”* she answered eventually, deciding in the moment to switch her gate location in the domain of the Meadow to this location instead.

At a point, it had felt like a secluded spot. The ancient tree being overlooking its domain from within its vast caverns. Somewhere far in the North, far from any city. Hallowfort more a frontier settlement, hidden away underground. With the presence of the Accords and the gates, it had become an extension of civilization. Another branch on the sprawling influence of their species. Ilea didn’t think that a bad thing in itself, but she had always liked the freedom of sleeping out in the wilderness, the freedom of flying and fighting in uncharted territory.

With the new location, she could still be teleported into the de facto headquarters of the Accords at a moment’s notice, and she was still within the Meadow’s reach. To talk and train as needed.

It didn’t feel like her space had been invaded either. She had wanted everyone there, had wanted people to cooperate, to spread out the teleportation gates, to allow and encourage travel between faraway cities.

But that doesn’t mean I have to be there all the time.

Ilea knew that her power meant she could have an impact. But her skills were destructive. She could remove monster threats, could free ruins of ancient machines and golems. She could fight those who would threaten the Accords, the laws, technology, and prosperity they had brought. And if she was truly needed, her marks were spread throughout the lands. She could be there in an instant, and she had been.

All that however didn’t mean she had to be present all the time. That she had to be involved with every decision. The last years had been turbulent. The Meadow establishing itself in Hallowfort, the town changing from a fought over frontier settlement of Dark Ones to a stronghold of a new alliance. The Taleen had returned. Aki had taken over the ancient machines.

She had her part to play in all of it. Had brought the right beings together, had helped out with various problems that others might’ve not been able to handle. But now, it felt to her as if things had stabilized. Already she had taken incredible risks against beings like The Wind of Aveer. Maybe Trian was right and she pushed herself in some way to protect what she had helped build, because she had thought she wasn’t strong enough to face every threat that could emerge.

Maybe it was truly what she wanted, to fight these insanely powerful beings, and to win against them, in battle.

Or I’m just back to square one.

Fighting for fun. Because if I’m no longer here, I can trust that everything remains in good hands.

She smiled to herself, not perfectly sure if she had come to a conclusion.

But she knew that some of what Trian had said rang true. Fighting more and more powerful creatures just because she wanted to prepare for some possible threat didn’t make much sense. It felt like fear. And fear didn’t sit right with her.

She sat up and looked towards the terrain under which Hallowfort resided. *“There was something you wanted to discuss.”*

“There was,” the Meadow sent. *“But first, we need to have a bout.”*