

## Chapter 839 Riddles

“Five seals? For five rune languages?” Ilea asked.

“Not just languages,” Iana said as she turned around and once more touched the barrier. “An entire history. Their magic itself, the blood running through the veins of all. Five civilizations. Five riddles. Five seals.”

“Mana shared willingly,” Scipio said.

They all looked at the barrier for a few moments, the slight golden light exuded by it entirely static, unmoving.

“So let’s open it up,” Ilea said.

“We need them here. Representatives, willing, and knowledgeable,” Iana said.

“They will want to know what this is, and perhaps they will want whatever lies within for themselves,” Aki said.

“Goliath could solve one of them,” Iana murmured.

“Isn’t his enchanting ability somewhat limited?” Ilea asked.

“Knowledge and heritage is more important here than mere skill, otherwise anyone present could solve each of these,” Iana said.

“Which leaves Elven and Mava,” Aki said.

“Myr Iva bears the flame of creation. It’s strange... but I’d trust her with this, even if she could somehow take the Source herself. Which honestly, I don’t think is possible with you here,” Ilea said.

“I don’t think we should be too worried about the Mava. But if you have someone specific in mind, that’s good,” Aki said.

“You’ll just go with whoever she trusts?” Scipio said and looked at her. “You seem a little too trusting.”

“And yet you’re here,” Nes said. “As am I. Welcomed despite of what I am.”

Ormont started chuckling before it changed to outright laughter. “A devious vault indeed,” he muttered after he had calmed down again, the others looking at him. “I would have rather died than work with an elf to unlock it.”

“I’m sure most humans would agree,” Iana said with a sigh.

“*You can’t just open it up for us?*” Ilea asked the Baron.

No

“*That it?*”

Yes

“*Alright. Thank you for your extensive contribution,*” she sent back. *At least worth a try.*

The Fae grumbled something in a language incomprehensible to her, crossing its arms before it huffed and turned away.

She flipped the back of its head, the tiny spatial shield it conjured up shattering with the strike.

“Myr Iva is alright. As to the Elven one. Any Cerithil Hunter is fine right?” she said.

“I don’t know many of them, let alone well. Isalthar could likely solve the riddle,” Iana said.

“Are Elves not generally quite uninterested in history and runic language?” Ormont asked.

“The Hunters are different,” Ilea said. “They’re not in the Domains.” She thought about it for a moment and then smiled. “I have one. And I trust him too.”

“I’m not sure how trustworthy they remain, now that their purpose is fulfilled,” Scipio said.

“I trust him more than you. Plus he was interested in history and I’m sure he knows his elven runes, with how decorated his barriers are. Though I suppose he could be into the aesthetics alone,” she said. “Do you need all of them here at the same time?”

“Yes. The seals have to be broken reasonably close one after the other,” Iana said.

“Alright, let me check then,” Ilea said and focused on her marks. “*Myr Iva, can you help me with something? I’ll meet you near the Meadow. It’s a secret!*”

“*A secret? I’m busy eating all the humans, Ilea. I don’t know if I have time,*” the fox sent back.

*I see. At least someone else is taking the situation with the appropriate weight.*

“*Elfie, I need your help with something kind of secret. If you have time, meet me near the Meadow,*” she sent to the elf.

“*Of course, I’ll be there at once. For the supreme Queen, Lilith,*” he sent.

Ilea smiled. *Maybe I should introduce the two. He could teach her.*

“*Goliath, care to see something cool? Meet me near the Meadow. It’s secret,*” she sent to the last mark.

“*Godslayer of Ash, I shall arrive with haste.*” The smith’s words sounded amused.

*You idiot. Suppose word travels fast.*

“I’ll get them. Can I leave you alone without anyone starting an international conflict and the destruction of the Accords?” she said.

Scipio crossed his arms. “No promises.”

“And here I thought you lacked a sense of humor,” Ilea said.

He stared at her. “I’m entirely serious.”

“Good one,” she said. “I’ll find and murder you if you do.”

He smiled. “Pretty good too.”

Nes glared at him with intensifying eyes.

“What?” he said.

“We are guests here,” she said. “You should show some respect.”

“She started it,” he grumbled.

“You have a few thousand years on her, perhaps you could try and be a little more serious, considering the circumstances,” Nes said.

Ormont sighed, shaking his head ever so slightly before he turned towards the barrier.

Ilea stepped through her gate, appearing in the domain. She teleported close to the tree. *“Can we get a barrier?”* The dome appeared instantly. *“We need a few people to open three seals. I already informed Niivalyr, Goliath, and Myr Iva. Can you move them here?”*

*“Found what you were looking for?”* the Meadow asked as the beings appeared around her.

*“We’re working on it,”* she sent with a smile.

*“Ilea!”* the Mava sent, white flame flaring up as she smiled, tails moving in tune with the fires.

Goliath gave her a curious look, his golden eyes brightening slightly.

They looked between each other, both bowing slightly one after the other.

Elfie looked between the others and nodded. “What is it you need the three of us for? I’m curious.”

“We found a barrier sealed by five seals. Each one apparently corresponds with both the history, magic, and runic language of a people in Elos. Mava, Dark Ones, Elves, those are the ones we are missing,” she said.

*“I will help,”* Myr Iva sent instantly.

“What is behind that barrier?” Elfie asked.

“A Source possibly,” Ilea said.

The elf hissed.

Goliath made a strange squealing noise. “Oh, now this is interesting!”

“Source?” the Mava asked. *“I’m not familiar with that.”*

*“What is left from the process of Extraction. Essentially the energy of a star,”* Ilea said.

*“How does it look like?”* Myr Iva asked.

*“I’m not sure actually,”* Ilea said.

*“A round shape? Or a square one maybe? Or a bowl. Is the sun in there or is it imbued into something?”* she said.

*“I really have no clue. I guess you can come and see for yourself,”* Ilea said with a smile.

Myr Iva squinted her eyes. She considered for a few seconds and then spoke. *“I can do that.”*

“Let us depart at once,” Goliath spoke. “Do not forget my aura, young godslayer.”

“Stop calling me godslayer,” Ilea said, not missing the amused hiss.

“Godslayer,” Elfie said, tasting the word and showing a toothy grin.

“Elfie, don’t,” Ilea said.

He leaned forward slightly, a glint in his dark gray eyes as he spoke in a whisper. “Godslayer.”

"I could kill you with a mere thought," Ilea whispered back.

"Yes, I did not expect anything less from a godslayer. Slaying gods is a very impressive feat after all," he spoke. "Right, being of the flame of creation?"

"*It surely must be,*" Myr Iva sent. "*Most impressive,*" she added.

Ilea didn't even know if her reaction was genuine or sarcasm. She just rolled her eyes and teleported to her mark on Iana, connecting the others as her third tier Transfer formed.

They appeared soon after, finding no carnage or ongoing battles. She was almost disappointed. Instead everyone was busy studying the glowing runes. *Almost offended by the interruption.*

"Dark One, your aura is active," Scipio said.

"I do not mean to offend, golden spectral," the smith said and bowed.

Scipio smiled, raising his chin slightly. "Perceptive."

"You're not a godslayer though," Ilea said.

Elfie hissed in amusement as he took in the gathered group. "Can you work with an elf," he said to Ormont.

"I have little choice in the matter," the dwarf answered.

"That's good enough," Elfie said as he walked closer to the barrier. "This is incredible."

"Can you solve it?" Iana asked.

"I did not mean the runes. It seems complex, but whoever aided in this was not a master. No, this barrier," he spoke and paused, hissing in awe when he moved his hand closer. "Even the Oracles..." He shook his head. "I'll get to work," he added, his voice a little more subdued as he summoned a leather bound book.

"The magic here is indeed welcoming," Goliath spoke. "As is the company. Many here I had wished to converse with. The revered Nes Mor Atul," he said with a floating bow. "It is an honor, to meet one of thine kind. Creators like few others. Perhaps none." He turned to look at the dwarf. "Ormont of the Makers. The ancient guild, knowledge lost to time. A travesty that befell your people. It is most joyous, to see you still alive, and back. I have read as much as I could, of the knowledge you have shared with the Accords. The introduction of flexibility enchanted and tempered copper wires for mana transfer is fascinating. Many days have I labored to even comprehend the new possibilities all of your knowledge has provided."

He chuckled with a bow. "Scipio, the Golden Spectral. Phantom of the North, it would be my pleasure to converse with you, if you would indulge an ancient artisan."

"I'm sure we'll find some time, despite the work," Scipio said.

Goliath laughed. "Perspective leads to creativity. It is often the angle we are focused on, that most holds us back. Now let us see what we have here," he spoke and floated forward, golden eyes shining as he looked at the runes. "These are ancient symbols," he muttered, pulling something out of some spatial storage. "Shameful work too."

"You're familiar with it?" Ilea asked.

“Apprentices there have been aplenty. This one was, fire touched, devious, with priorities of material nature. A great loss, to see it pursue with such lacking focus,” he spoke.

“They’re still around?” Ilea asked.

“No. Not to my knowledge. Though many come and go, their fates not often revealed to one such as I. This however, I will undo,” he spoke. “If only to remove one shameful bit of my legacy.”

Ilea smiled, watching him get to work. Ormont seemed a little less grumpy, Nes’ eyes shining a little brighter, even the usually stressed and shifty Scipio had an air of confidence about him. Though she didn’t know if she was a fan of the latter.

*Suppose these are genuinely a bunch of downright mythical figures, working together to solve a puzzle of similar proportions. Why am I here again?* She ignored the literal Fae on her shoulder.

Her look of concern must’ve been perceived by the three mark Mava and wielder of the Flame of Creation. “*Are you feeling alright? Your facial muscles seem in distress.*”

“*You don’t have to concern yourself with my facial muscles,*” Ilea sent to the fox. “*Can you help solve the Mava portion of the riddle?*”

“*It’s hard. But quite amusing,*” she said and paused for a moment.

Ilea could damn near literally see the gears turning in the fox’s head. “*You’ll get cake if you finish it.*”

“*That is not at all what I had intended. I am merely helping a friend, the bringer of the Heart, and wielder of the white flame,*” the Mava spoke.

*Lying, just like that. So easily corrupted. Popi, I worry about you. Maybe you’re the true Architect after all.*

She crossed her arms and watched them work, a smile on her face. Twenty seconds passed in silence. “So. How long will this take? I kind of have other things in mind.”

“A few days at least,” Elfie said.

“I would expect four cycles,” Goliath spoke.

Something lit up at the barrier, everyone’s attention moving to the bright glowing set of runes shifting before it all settled. “*I have fulfilled my work,*” Myr Iva spoke, literal burning eyes turning to look at Ilea, the joy downright palpable.

Ilea summoned a cake and teleported it into the other hall.

“You’ll have to do that again when everyone is done!” Iana said, trying to reach the teleporting fox.

“No less than a week,” Ormont said in a somber tone. “I believe I know who has created this seal. Old Garrivan could not deny a challenge, no matter from whom.”

“He’s not around anymore,” Ilea said. More a statement than a question.

He shook his head slightly. “No. No, he died before he could see the One without Form. His work was pivotal to the keys and the Sphere itself. Perhaps it was for the best.”

“I’m sorry for your loss,” Elfie said after a short pause. “May he find what your kind wish for after death.”

The dwarf looked at him for a long few seconds, Elfie already back to work when Ormont nodded ever so slightly. He didn't reply, instead repeating his words. "No less than a week."

"I'll get to hunting then, do call for me when you're done. I want to see this," Ilea said. "And let me know if the fox makes trouble." She ignored the splatter sounds and growling coming from the other hall.

*"I'll keep an eye on them,"* Aki sent.

"Thanks," she said, tapping the bored Fae on her shoulder. It seemed even the presence of a Source wasn't particularly interesting to the creature if it wasn't in some way related to brutal violence.

*"Back to Kohr?"* the machine sent right before she summoned her gate.

*"That was the plan, yes. I'm sure there's plenty of creatures still down there,"* Ilea said.

*"I have something different. Could use your help but I'm not sure how beneficial it will be for you,"* the machine sent.

*"Something different than the unending dark depths of Kohr's oceans? I'm not inclined to say no. What is it?"* she said.

*"Nes gave us supposed locations of Ascended facilities she was aware of. They're difficult to find due to some of the changes brought on by the Extraction, at least those closer to the surface. Most of those I could find were ruins but there are occasionally artifacts and pieces of information left behind. One facility I found yesterday is proving to be difficult to enter,"* he said.

*"Difficult to enter?"* she asked.

*"Monsters roam what is now a dungeon, dangerous even for my Executioners,"* he explained.

*"I can check it out, sure. Let's go then,"* she said. *"Collecting all those keys is finally bearing fruit."*

*"Not like I ever did anything for you,"* Aki spoke, his tone rather dry as Ilea appeared in the Domain of the Meadow, an Executioner finding her quickly.

*"Nothing at all,"* she answered.

*"I am deeply hurt,"* the machine said, leading her to a prepared Taleen gate, the destination set by the Praetorian standing next to it.

Ilea looked up at the large machine, remembering when she had feared them. She glanced at the Meadow and smiled, the magic of the gate activating before she appeared inside of a nondescript ruin. Ancient crumbling walls half overgrown with moss and ivy, streams of broken light let in through cracks within the ceiling. She heard dripping water, somewhere deeper. The overgrown rooms she saw suggested quite a small ruin.

"What was this place?" she asked, spreading her wings as she saw the lithe silver machine advance upwards and towards a more spacious opening in the ceiling, the familiar sounds of distant impacts of arcane lightning audible.

*"An Outpost of the Taleen. Looking at the usual way they built these, I'm pretty sure it was deeper underground before the Extraction happened,"* the machine replied.

Ilea took a last glance at the overgrown ruin. A nestling place for some creature perhaps, at some point in the future. Forgotten to most. *As were the Taleen, until we brought them back.* She

wondered for a moment, about other civilization, entire peoples perhaps, hidden away deep below ground or up in the stars. The thought of other beings out there had crossed her mind from time to time in the past. She wasn't big into sci-fi, and she'd rather watch a movie than lie awake considering existential dread. But now she knew. Realms located in the same fabric, connected through it all, or that at least was her current theory.

She focused on the now when her wings moved her out into the sunlight. The wracked and crumbling landscape of the North. Testament to the invasion of the Ascended. The might of their technology and magic. Rhyvor, just among the many who were lost to time, lost to ruin.

Ilea swerved eastward to keep up with the silver machine, her eyes not even adjusting to the change in brightness. She followed Aki through an arcane storm, the Executioner moving aside when a purple flash rushed downwards. Residual energy flickered over the slightly purple shield.

Ilea was struck directly. She didn't even summon a barrier, instead taking in a sharp breath as she grinned, the arcane energies flowing through her, a meager trickle compared to the torrent she felt every time she used her Fourth tier.

*"How long is the flight?"* she asked.

*"A few minutes, the tunnel entrance is nearby,"* Aki informed, the Executioner running through the air.

She followed, the two moving over the landscape with the occasional bolt of arcane lightning impacting in their vicinity. Ilea slowed when Aki did the same. Before them, she could see a mountain range extend out from the rocky terrain, northwards and too high for the storms to reach. Snow tipped and jagged, the upper parts of the range far more smooth than the cracked and splintered base.

*Millennia of storms.*

Ilea wondered how long Hallowfort could remain without extensive barriers or some other solution against the arcane lightning. At some point the magic would surely break through.

She scanned the distant range, this side mostly cast in shadow.

*"Down here,"* Aki sent, the silver machine standing next to a round entrance.

Ilea flew down, glancing to the mountain range when distant thunder rolled over the lands. A storm was brewing beyond the high peaks.