

## Chapter 587 Opportunity?

Ilea and Feyrair appeared in the massive production hall, most of it already destroyed. An extensive battle had been needed to clear out the space from both Praetorians and special variants. Towards the end of the fight, an Executioner had shown up.

Right now it was the only enemy remaining. They had ran from the machine to take a break and recover their resources. The elf had agreed to that measure at least so that they could face every Executioner with some preparation and a full pool of health and mana. The fact that the machines learned more about them during the battles made them enemies they didn't want to engage for too long.

Ilea had been a little scared that the information would somehow be shared between the various Executioners but that hadn't seemed to be the case. Or they were somehow pretending for now. She didn't let her guard down either way. And with Feyrair there, she would have someone trustworthy to get her out in an emergency, as was the case the other way around.

Bright white flame clung to her ash, charged through Phaseshift for the start of the battle. Heart of Cinder was already reaching capacity as Feyrair changed into his dragon form. The two didn't waste any time, rushing the machine as it noticed them.

Ilea's fire spread over it, ignoring the blades that came for her in an attempt to keep the machine engaged with her. Feyrair landed on top of them, trying to pin down the creature.

It barely slipped away, one of its legs burnt by the powerful flames.

Ilea sent an ashen lance at the ground a few dozen meters away, Feyrair moving his wings to reach the position. She activated her third tier of Displacement and watched the Executioner retreat right into her appearing gate.

This time, the dragon didn't let the steel being slip out. Ilea had already healed the deep cuts in her body, now deflecting or tanking the hits of the powerful machine as she tried to protect the dragonling behind her. Storm of Cinders and Destruction slammed into the shield, quickly overloading it with mana. With a final punch, the purple energy exploded in a surge of mana.

She felt the heat build up behind her, the armor on her back starting to glow a little before a torrent of white flame flowed over both her and the struggling Praetorian.

She dealt with the heat much better, overcharging her Heart of Cinder with the gathered energy and healing herself continuously with the absorbed mana.

Silver steel pooled below the creature, Feyrair slowly tightening his grasp, massive red scales and black claws pushing down on the melting machine. Intrusion spells continuously worked against the reforming shield, keeping it at bay as two sets of fire slowed the machine's recovery.

Feyrair didn't let up until he had expended most of his mana, stripping away every last bit of the machine, leaving its core exposed.

Ilea had charged Destruction and displaced the thing right in front of her. She punched the core, sizzling blue energy flowing through as her ashen limbs helped work through the powerful shield.

"Go!" she shouted, continuing her attacks as the dragon behind her roared.

Health flowed into her auras, the flames flaring up as she held her arm right in front of the unshielded core.

Feyrair turned back to his Elven form, displaced away immediately after.

Ilea grinned as she felt the heat gather, moving through her arm as it ruptured her body. A bright light appeared in front of her palm, energy and flame forming in a concentrated point before it extended outward and into the floating core. The air itself was set alight behind the small sphere, cracks forming on the powerful artifact.

Time stood still as Ilea watched the last bits of heat leave her arm, the core brittle and cracking. She displaced herself back as far as she could, using her blink right after. When she appeared again, the void explosion had already thrashed through the center of the hall, leaving a large sphere like shape in the stone entirely gone.

Feyrair grinned with a self satisfied smirk. "Easy."

Ilea rolled her eyes but her expression matched his. "Well done this time," she said to him. "Come, the others should already be waiting."

He glanced back at the missing stone and followed with a glint of magic in his red reptile eyes.

***'ding' 'Your group has defeated [Executioner Praetorian – lvl 800]***

***'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 417 – One stat point awarded'***

***'ding' 'Space Shift reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 15'***

Ilea and Feyrair had a race on their way back to the gathering near the now destroyed teleportation platform. Because of course they did.

"I win," Ilea said to the group, twirling as ashen fireworks formed around her.

"You always win," Ben said, shaking his head as he looked at the scene.

Feyrair appeared more than ten seconds later, a new record perhaps. The elf of course had a longer way to catch up the further they went into the facility.

She let him share the new mapped areas, his long life allowing even the dragonling to work on his cartography skills far more frequently than Ilea.

"It just keeps going on, how many of these facilities do you think there are?" Ilea asked.

Isalthar looked thoughtful, ignoring the question they had pondered about a few times before.

"What is it?" Asay asked, the elf apparently interpreting more in Isalthar's behavior than anybody else.

The wind mage looked at him and remained quiet for a few seconds. "A... discovery has been made," he said. "An oversight perhaps, or another ploy to lure us into further danger."

"Did you find more dangerous machines?" Ilea asked, looking at Feyrair with a glint in her eyes.

The elf smirked back. "We should first learn to fight Executioners on our own, Ilea."

She smiled back. “You’re actually learning. Impressive. But don’t let caution get rid of your excitement. High risk of death is how we thrive.”

“Who’s the Elf again?” Ben asked, looking between the two of them.

Farthorn hissed. “The discovery?”

Isalthar looked to the ground, a rare show of uncertainty. “Many gates we have found, most not activated or leading to forgotten exits in the Navali forest or the mountains of Naraza. Few have lead to facilities, oft insignificant compared to the place of creation we have found here, far below the Isanna desert.

“However, one I have entered, to find a place only one of us has seen before,” Isalthar said and looked up to find Ilea’s eyes. “The core of the Taleen network, or so we believe. The dungeon named Iz.”

“Shit,” Ilea murmured.

Feyrair stood up as flames burst from his body. “What are we waiting for. We have to go there now. Ilea can find Izta again, we know where it is. If the gate is active still, we should use the opportunity.”

“I would certainly be intrigued to visit such a fabled dungeon,” Asay said with an excited smile. “Truly a worthy discovery.”

“I do not wish to see you die,” Isalthar said after a pause.

“Who says we’d die? We didn’t die here,” Feyrair said.

“Isn’t this what you’ve been waiting for?” Ilea asked. “I mean you can go around destroying facilities all you want but if you want to end the war, Iz is certainly a better place to try than here. I’ve seen it. Armies of Taleen, flying variants, and a huge floating sphere that glowed with power and light,” Ilea said. “And we could maybe find out more about that prototype calling me a Key warden.”

“You are not ready,” Isalthar said.

“How would you know?” Ilea asked. “Maybe you can finish it all yourself? You can fight Executioners on your own. Why should Iz be any different?”

“It will be,” Asay said. “But I agree with the human. This is an opportunity we cannot miss.”

“And I can get us out if everything else fails,” Ilea said.

Isalthar glanced at her with interest. “You have a way to circumvent the teleportation gate network?”

Ilea smiled. “I have my own long range spell, as you’ve seen before. And I have a way to bring others, though I’d like to refrain from that if possible.”

“That option may justify an increased risk...,” said Isalthar.

Feyrair clapped his hands together. “Then what are we waiting for. Let’s hit our enemy at their core.”

“We can always return to finish the job here,” Ilea said.

Isalthar showed the hint of a smile, sighing right after. “I simply ask you all to prioritize your own survival.”

Ilea smirked. “Where’s the gate?”

Ilea looked at each of the Elves standing on the large platform. Feyrair right next to her, the elf now at level three eighty five. Elfie had managed to reach level three thirty five, Neiphato rather close now with his three twenty.

Seithir and Asay hadn’t leveled at all and Ben had only advanced twice, reaching three twenty five. Farthorn had been overtaken by Elfie, his current level a few below at three thirty two.

The main power in their group came from Isalthar of course, the elf floating near the center of the platform with a poised expression.

Ilea remembered her last visit to Iz, that one very much involuntary. She doubted they could deal with the hordes she had seen but she had yet to witness the Val Akuun going all out. Though she knew she herself wasn’t exactly the same person anymore either.

The force they had gathered could certainly wreak some havoc. The Elves were quiet, each prepared to unleash their magic at the first sign of danger, every one of them an experienced veteran in the fight against the Taleen.

Ilea deactivated her space magic resistance when she felt the platform thrum to life, the fabrics shifting as the enchantments flowed into a singular spell. Bright light flashed and they were gone, appearing in a dark hall.

***‘ding’ ‘You have entered the Iz dungeon’***

*Welcome back*, Ilea thought, the lack of light no longer an issue as she took in the surroundings. Compared to Izta, the walls themselves here looked ancient. She saw ivy grow in the corners of the hall, the mana here noticeably denser than back in Izta.

*Same stuff as in the first dungeon*, she thought, glancing at the ivy that somehow managed to survive in near complete darkness.

The Elves slowly spread out, Asay hissing a moment later.

“The gate,” he murmured.

“It is as expected. Seithir, lead us to a secure location,” Isalthar said, a powerful aura surging up from within him as his eyes started glowing slightly, a trail of white following them as he moved.

Ilea glanced at the gate, seeing the magic slowly seep out, the thrum from before gone entirely. *Cut off.*

A thud resounded where a large exit led into the dungeon, followed by three more impacts.

“And the welcoming party is here,” Feyrair said with a grin, his flames flaring up as he stepped towards the exit.

“Centurion,” Seithir said, magic emanating from his floating form, his voice calm and steady.

“Are they mocking us?” the dragonling asked.

“Neiphato, you may deal with them as the rest remains hidden. We shall not reveal our numbers and capabilities if the enemy does not yet know of it,” Isalthar said, floating to the side.

Asay and Farthorn each formed spells, concealing the group that appeared next to them.

“Didn’t know you could do stuff like that,” Ilea commented, curious as her sphere was cut off from the space around her. She still saw through the barrier but assumed anything on the other side wouldn’t be able to perceive them anymore.

“We are after all, full of surprises,” Asay said and hissed a joyous hiss.

Neiphato stood near the exit and waited, four normal Centurions rushing into the hall with their spears at the ready. He didn’t let them advance, roots flowing out of thin air, slamming into the creatures with powerful thrusts, breaking into their armor.

More roots still formed, quickly enveloping most of the four machines, the wood slowly pressing down. Steel groaned as the machines looked on with bright green eyes, their spears and arms unable to get through the dense conjured material.

A few seconds later, the first explosion resounded, followed by three more. Charred and blackened wood fell to the ground, steel shrapnel stuck within.

The group fanned out, Seithir leading them with a quiet confidence as he teleported through the dark facility. Everyone kept close, appearing next to him without trouble. Ilea wondered what kind of abilities each of them used to see or follow the soul mage, but it wasn’t the time for such considerations.

“Executioner,” Seithir said and pointed in a direction vaguely behind them before he vanished again, moving three floors up in the place they had found themselves in.

Ilea saw dozens of cells all around, iron barred doors locked with the occasional skeleton visible within. They continued to move up until they appeared in a wide open space, Seithir not stopping as he pushed on with quick uses of teleportation.

The others followed, Ilea glancing up to see a bunch of magical lights on the distant ceiling, so far away that she couldn’t make out any details. Around them were high walls or even cliffs leading up, Ilea not quite sure if they were natural or dwarven made. The valley they moved in was broad enough for even groups of Praetorians to show up but so far they had remained undisturbed.

Seithir slightly raised a hand. “Hide,” he spoke, several spells activating around their group a moment later.

Ilea watched as a group of Praetorians followed by special variant Centurions rushed past, their steel steps barely audible.

*Reinforcements sent to deal with us?*

She looked up and quietly pointed, dozens of ranged Guardians crawling past while clinging to the high walls.

They waited for a few minutes before Seithir continued moving, his teleportation bringing them to the other side of the valley and up a broad staircase.

When they appeared at the top, a familiar sight spread out before them. This time however, Ilea had received a few upgrades to her visual organs. Iz fanned out as far as the eye could see, the facility not made to produce machines but to inhabit an entire people. A city, perhaps even larger than

Virilya. The ceiling reached so high in the cavern that Ilea could barely make out the distant lights built into it. No crystals but most certainly machines meant to look like stars or gems.

The city sloped downwards from their position, various mountain like structures jutting out from the sea of stone buildings and streets, steam rising from thousands of pipes, layering whole districts in a thin gray mist. Thousands of green lights dotted the city, fiery colors mixed in here and there.

At the lowest point of the city and the very center of its crater like form, a circular hole the size of an entire district lead downwards into an abyss. Above it floated the golden orb Ilea had seen before, bright light emanating from it as it glinted with magic and pulsed with energy. Its surface looked smooth and even. A single set of floating stairs led towards the structure from the surrounding city, over the abyss and onto what looked like a tiny platform jutting out from the golden orb.

Ilea could barely make out any details from the distance, sure that the sphere alone rivaled half of Ravenhall in size, if not more.

Flying machines patrolled the skies, moving in larger groups closer to the light of the sphere. Machines ranging from Guardians to Praetorians stood on roofs or patrolled the streets, everywhere Ilea's eyes lingered, she could find at least ten enemies.

Seithir made a noise to get their attention, even the Elves distracted by the sight for a moment. He lead them all into the large structure nearby, bouts of steam rising into the air above. Gears turned in the walls, some jutting out slightly, the humming of machinery audible all around.

Ilea entered behind the rest, Seithir looking around before he glanced at Isalthar. "Safe."

"For now," Ben said with a sigh, sitting down on a nearby wooden chair.

They had found themselves in what looked like an office far up in the production facility. Not a production facility for taleen machines but in fact for furniture. While gears turned and machines were active, nothing was being produced at the moment. No guards stood within but Ilea could see a few ranged guardians cling to the roof above them, unaware of their group's presence as of yet.

Large windows lined two of the walls, allowing for a broad view of the expansive Taleen city. Green light came from the magical lights above, the whole area tinged in the color.

Feyrair sat down on the large chair, his armored legs hitting the top of the wooden desk in front of him as he smiled. "So this is Iz."

Elfie wrung his eyes away from the windows and instead made his way over to the many bookshelves on the other side of the large office.

Isalthar floated next to Ilea, their gaze focused on the floating sphere at the center of the city.

"What do you think?" she asked.

He remained silent for a moment before he turned towards her. "There are too many. I have never seen such numbers of both Hunters and Executioners in one place, let alone in such an open area. They would wear us down in little time," he said.

"I agree," Ilea mused. "But while we're here, I'm sure you don't just want to leave without at least some destruction," she said with a slight smile.

"Indeed. We shall find out what we can while we are here. However I believe a more... subtle approach is beneficial for the time being," he said.

Ben stepped next to Ilea and hissed. “An overwhelming sight,” he said and looked at her. “Your marks. Do you know where we are?”

“Ah, yes. I was a little too excited to be back,” she said with an embarrassed smile, checking the location of the various Huntress marks in the lands.

Her eyes opened wide, trying to make sense of the information. She had expected them to be deep below in the north, or in the Frozen Wasteland the Elves had talked about, perhaps even on another continent altogether.

“Well?” Ben asked, the Elves nearby glancing at her.

Ilea smiled before she started laughing. “Oh, but of course,” she said and shook her head. “Where else would we be but below Karth?”