

## Chapter 715 Looking for a Challenge

Ilea flew ahead, her map out as she looked for a close Taleen dungeon. She didn't plan to go to Iz immediately but teleporting through their network was bound to get them a few interesting battles. "Let's bother some ancient creatures that hopefully aren't Dragons," she said, slowing down with the two others in tow, literally. "Violence, if you think we should flee from something, let me know."

The little guy saluted in front of her and vanished back to his place on her shoulder.

"We're not exactly the best group to track down high level monsters," Kyrian said. "Except you got something new in the meantime?"

"I should be able to find signs at least but it's not been super useful so far. I'm sure we'll find something if we just teleport around a little. We'll just avoid the western part of the north," she answered. "Should be around here."

They dug down together, the three high level beings ripping through stone with their destructive magic until they came into an unlit Taleen corridor. A small one, Ilea immediately noted. No working Guardians remained, only a few pieces suggesting there had ever been any in the first place. She saw the gate but decided the broken in wall on the ground floor looked more interesting. For now at least.

"Explore a little before we use it?" Kyrian asked, the group appearing in front of the cavern entrance, all three using their own teleportation spells.

Ilea grinned, glancing left and right before she flew into the darkness. *Sure, there's always another Drake, but we're not so bad ourselves by now.*

Kyrian was thrown away, the metal covered man rolling three times before he impacted the wall with a loud crash.

"You're doing well," Ilea said, Feyrair next to her shaking his head.

She raised her hand and caught the tongue of one of the large lizards before her ash slashed through the tough skin. The still moving muscle she threw aside, her ash mantle splattered by blood. *Low three marks*, she mused and looked at the screeching creature. "Well now you know, you fucking idiot," she said to the being. They weren't even defending a nest or anything, just monsters roaming in the darkness, waiting for prey.

"His speed is lacking," Feyrair said.

"Well he can't just turn into a dragon," Ilea said when a ball of ash returned and circled around her head. "Nothing interesting farther down either. So I guess that's this one. Kyrian, clean up, we're going."

The man stood up and cracked his neck, the new metal he used giving his body a somewhat green sheen, his curse magic flowing through everything. "Understood," he said, the next tongue thrown

his way finding not his slow hand but a thin piece of floating steel. He finished the creature with a single heavy spear, nearly splitting it apart entirely.

“How do you like the metal?” she asked when they appeared in the gate room up in the small taleen ruin.

“Not perfectly intuitive yet... but my magic flows... as if I’m touching them directly. It’s very useful,” the man answered. “Thank you.”

“Thank Khan Joggoth,” Ilea said with a wink.

*Violence!*

“Indeed. Hopefully something a little more interesting next time,” she said and activated the map on the locator device. “Where to now gentlemen? Southern desert? Elven lands? The Vampire Courts I’ve heard about? Though I don’t exactly know where they are,” she mused, looking at the many destinations.

“I haven’t been south very far,” Kyrian said.

“No me either. Both Elven and Vampire land could be dangerous,” Fey said.

“Aren’t we looking exactly for that?” Ilea asked.

“In a way that doesn’t create enemies on the hunt for your allies and yourself,” the elf said.

Ilea rolled her eyes. “And here I thought you were supposed to be the irresponsible one.”

He flicked her forehead, avoiding her attempt to deflect him with ash. “We balance each other out.”

“Did you just flick me?” Ilea asked, raising one of her brows. “You’re awfully brave for a two mark.”

“If you want to stand here and flirt, I can go back to the frogs,” Kyrian said.

*Violence.*

Ilea selected one of the most southern destinations and activated the gate.

It worked and transported them.

They walked off the platform and waited for a few seconds. *Can they track us every time? Or only after a few uses?* Nothing showed up this time. “Maybe the pursuer just isn’t ready yet. Or this place isn’t a priority.”

Light came into the expansive hall, two dried out fountains were visible, faded banners and stone tables adorning the vicinity. Small piles of sand had formed where the cracks above were large enough.

“Close to the surface too,” she murmured.

“Well observed. And here I questioned your intelligence,” Fey said. “Maybe we should teach you how to read after all.”

“You’re being too generous,” Kyrian said.

The Baron glanced between them and then looked at Ilea.

“It’s true little one, I’m sorry. I’m stupid,” she said and flew up, crashing through the ceiling and sand beyond with her ash covered skull. Ilea twirled in the air with a giggling Fae on her shoulder, sand pouring off her ashen form, sent flying when she flicked her wings. *Desert.*

She turned around and found dark spots in the distance. *More interesting.*

“There are machines down here!” Kyrian shouted up.

“*Centurions and a few Praetorians. Not worth your time,*” Ilea sent. “Anything strong in that mountain chain?” she asked the Fae.

The Baron tilted his head to the side. *Can’t*

*See*

“I just assume you’re omniscient,” she said when the others appeared nearby, her ash already fanning out to collect them as her wings charged.

Fey looked up into the sun and sighed. “Wonderfully warm.”

“It’s too hot,” Kyrian said. “No, I don’t need more Heat Resistance, don’t look at me like that.”

Ilea shrugged. “I just look out for my friends.” She shot off a moment later, the others whipped into motion, neither of them bothered by the insane forces involved in the maneuver. *I like them. They don’t break easily.*

*This place might as well be Erendar,* she thought, not a single speck of civilization visible in any direction. Of course there could’ve been hundreds of ruins like the Taleen one hidden deep below the sand. The ones close enough to the surface the trio would find, Ilea deliberately flying low. Also in an attempt to get monsters to attack. If there were any even capable of catching her high speed form. Nothing did.

She slowed down near the jagged dark mountains, the group now higher above the terrain. “Let’s see if this helps.” Ilea charged up monster hunter and sent out a challenge. Her whistle echoed through the valleys of sand. She immediately picked up movement from various directions but most of it fled. “Come on, I’m just a three mark.”

“A three mark human,” Fey said with a wicked grin. “But look, one of them is not afraid.”

Kyrian gulped.

Ilea grinned.

A few kilometers away, a rock slide moved down one of the largest mountains, the entire mass of stone stacking up at the bottom. More and more was added to the mass, geometrical shapes starting to be visible in the growing form. The entire thing didn’t seem to have a cohesive structure, more just a floating set of shapes. Most of the pieces were simple rocks, natural in their form, others perfectly cut pyramids or squares.

“Looks like we angered a children’s puzzle,” Ilea said.

“You. You angered it,” Kyrian said and gestured her to go.

*Where do you even begin fighting a creature like that. Is it even a creature or is there a high level earth mage hiding somewhere?*

“What do you think, Baron? Violence or retreat?” Ilea asked. The moving form was entirely too far away for her to gauge anything about its level. The ground however shook and the creature’s approach itself was louder than a thunderstorm.

*Violence*, it answered, nodding slowly. *Yes*.

“Alright, if you say so,” Ilea said. “Maybe stay at a distance until I figure out how strong this thing is.”

“Way ahead of you,” Kyrian said, already flying back and up.

She advanced with slow moving wings. “*Greetings*,” she tried to send to the being, not exactly expecting a response. Her mental resistance protected her when she did. A jumble of confusing thoughts and concepts, the ageless stone, the change of time, the sun and stars, traveling past in the unending turning of celestial bodies. Shapes and numbers, thoughts either far too complex for her mind or maddening in nature. She didn’t know, just that she had to cut the connection. Either way, she saw a thousand projectiles shoot up from the ground, like artillery aimed at an enemy military position, or perhaps a pet trying to show off its toys. She didn’t know, and it hardly mattered. Ilea already knew that she was entirely in over her head, which was the entire point.

### ***[Earth Elemental – lvl ????] - [Timeless]***

*Does that mean it’s unkillable?* The shapes remained at the center of the half shambling half floating avalanche.

The Fae had remained with the others, watching at a distance as she started dodging the large chunks of stone, some as large as entire buildings.

Ilea opened her eyes wide when the few hundred tons of rock around her stopped in mid air, unmoving for a second before they exploded into a mist of tiny splinters. All she could do was protect herself with ash, her wings forming a cocoon around herself as the impacts reached her. The onslaught didn’t end, her entire perception full of fast moving splinters. Her defenses were ground away, layer by layer as she healed against it but even with everything she had, Elementals remained beyond her ability to simply shrug off. Especially ones above level two thousand.

Half her body was gone before she formed six gates around herself, healing herself as the stone moved through, impacting with itself for a split second before the entire flow changed, bits and pieces slammed together once more into shapes and forms that looked natural to her. The air around her returned to normal, her space magic gone. She looked towards the being with a smile on her face. Ilea felt the attack come. She let it happen, holding up her hand towards the near instantly forming stone lance as thick as her head. The projectile materialized a few meters in front of her, breaking through the sound barrier in the next split second.

Her attempt to slow it down with her space manipulation failed. The marginal slow down wasn’t enough to prevent the thing from crashing into her chest. Cracks formed on the stone when it came to a stop against her rib cage, slowed by her mantle and space magic beforehand. She started laughing, trying to rip it out with both her strength and space manipulation. Neither could compete with the remaining control the creature had over the lance. White flame snaked up the length of the magical construct until she her ashen limbs could finally cut through the weakened material, the remainder of stone within her chest expelled and the damage healed a moment later.

“*What’s the goal here exactly?*” Ilea asked, flying past the still shapes and rocks towards the avalanche that now remained entirely unmoving. More thoughts reached her mind. “*Look I don’t understand what you’re trying to say. But if you feel like fighting for a while, I’m interested.*”

She turned towards the Fae in the distance. “*You have any clue what’s going on with this one?*”

*Concepts*

*Rational*

*Thought*

*Impossible*

*Communication*

...

*Difficult*

“*Even you can’t get through to it? I mean if it will help us train, I don’t mind,*” Ilea said.

She used Monster Hunter when nothing moved, again infusing her voice with a challenge, this time to compete with their magic directly.

*It seems ridiculous challenging an Elemental like this but I’ve trained with the Meadow, let’s see how far I can go,* she thought and shot out towards the largest mass of stone, ashen spears infused with heat shooting out. They were met with spheres of stone, smothered as the prisons ground them down. She detonated the heat, white fiery cracks showed on the stone, most of it withstanding the energy.

Lances formed all around her, fabric tear, space manipulation, and her wings letting her avoid the projectiles that shot at her with ridiculous speeds. She wondered what the Elemental could do to a city, all the talk of reasonable defenses gone out the window when she faced the sheer magical prowess of this being. Another set of lances made her use her gates. This time the spears stopped right at the edges, instantly, the change in momentum sending shock waves out into the open air.

They came back at her when she deactivated the portals, teleporting away to avoid the attacks. Whenever she had enough heat charged in her ash, she would try and attack herself, slowly moving closer to the main mass of shapes much like she would try to get to the tree of the Meadow. She knew it was stupid to treat this encounter the same, not even the Baron truly comprehending what the intent and understanding of the Elemental truly was. And precisely because of that risk, she pressed on.

Soon she fell into a trance of battle, too much going on for her to focus on anything else but her spells and the magic around her. Despite all her abilities, the being managed to catch her several times, only her ability to separate herself from the magical frameworks around her keeping her alive through the endeavor. Several minutes passed, a large chunk of her mana gone to keep the fight going but she had more to show for it than resistance levels. Half of the shapes were on fire. She had managed to destroy some of the chunks entirely with both her Archon Strike and Embered Heart.

Her issue lay with the fact that destroying a bit of stone didn’t seem to have an impact on the being at all. Her healing didn’t help her with grasping its form, nor did it seem more defensive with any of its parts. The continued fires helped immensely with her ability to keep her mana up and herself in the fight, meaning she at least managed to burn away some mana. Her allies didn’t join the fight. A good decision, as neither of them would be able to escape the stone grasp of the Elemental once trapped. *Space magic baby,* she thought, starting to think that perhaps she could defeat the being if they fought for long enough. The magic she still felt from... well everywhere around her, suggested

the battle would take days, maybe weeks, maybe forever if its regeneration was higher than the damage she managed to cause.

Her considerations turned out to be irrelevant when the shapes started moving once more, moving into the mountains below as if using an ability similar to phaseshift. Ilea could perhaps follow with her drill and third tier earth magic resistance but when she reached the ground, every sign of the being was gone. The last wounds on her body closed, her mantle reforming. She flew upwards.

“Did you kill it?” Kyrian asked, eliciting a chuckle from the elf.

“No. Maybe it got bored, or I did manage to hurt it,” Ilea answered with a shrug.

“Couldn’t tell with your healing?” the curse mage said.

She shook her head. “Couldn’t gauge it at all, nor the thoughts it sent my way. Just... strange.”

“Well, you might be the first human to try and communicate with an Earth Elemental, let alone survive a forty minute fight against one,” Feyrair said. “I heard of even Ancients dying against such beings. Makes more sense now that I’ve seen it fight.”

“Ancients?” Kyrian asked.

“Below the Monarchs, usually less powerful,” he said.

“Are you an Ancient?” Kyrian said.

Feyrair hissed in an amused way. “No.”

“What about Isalthar?” Ilea said, turning in the air to find more monsters.

“He might’ve been an Ancient, yes. But it doesn’t matter, not anymore,” Fey said. “Where to now? Back to the gate?”

“No. We wanted to go south, right?” Ilea said and grabbed them again.

The mountain chain soon gave way to more desert, sandstorms visible in the distance. Ilea considered the possibility of them being Sand Elementals, veering towards the phenomenon as she looked through her messages.

**‘ding’ ‘Archon Strike [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 4’**

**‘ding’ ‘Sentinel Reconstruction [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 12’**

**‘ding’ ‘Azarinth Awakening [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 10’**

**‘ding’ ‘Azarinth Awakening [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 11’**

**‘ding’ ‘Transfer [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 8’**

**‘ding’ ‘Arcane Dominion [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 4’**

**‘ding’ ‘Arcane Dominion [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 5’**

**‘ding’ ‘Sentinel Core [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 11’**

**‘ding’ ‘Sentinel Core [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 12’**

*'ding' 'Eternal Brawling [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 5'*  
*'ding' 'Eternal Brawling [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 6'*  
*'ding' 'Arcane Circulation [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 8'*

*'ding' 'Mantle of the Titan [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 5'*  
*'ding' 'Mantle of the Titan [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 6'*  
*'ding' 'Mantle of the Titan [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 7'*

*'ding' 'Titan Core [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 4'*  
*'ding' 'Titan Core [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 5'*

*'ding' 'Embered Heart [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 5'*  
*'ding' 'Embered Heart [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 6'*

*'ding' 'Tempered Seal [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 3'*

*'ding' 'Authority of Ash and Ember [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 6'*

*'ding' 'Ashen Wings [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 8'*  
*'ding' 'Ashen Wings [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 9'*

*'ding' 'Avatar of Ash [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 10'*  
*'ding' 'Avatar of Ash [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 11'*

*'ding' 'Embered Form [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 3'*  
*'ding' 'Embered Form [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 4'*

*'ding' 'Fires of Creation [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 5'*  
*'ding' 'Fires of Creation [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 6'*  
*'ding' 'Fires of Creation [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 7'*

*'ding' 'Space Manipulation [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 4'*  
*'ding' 'Space Manipulation [Enhanced] reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 5'*

*Just proof again that real danger and unknown enemies are just the best, she thought with a grin.  
Now I just need to find a few more high level Elementals in the wild.*

*'ding' 'Spear of Ash reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1'*

*Spear of Ash 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1*

*You have mastered the ability to form and throw spears made of ash. Damage dealt with ashen spears is increased by 20%.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> stage: Ash formed into spear like shapes requires 50% less focus and harmony to maintain.*

*'ding' 'Telepathy reaches lvl 6'*

***'ding' 'Earth Magic Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 10'***

***'ding' 'Earth Magic Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 11'***

***'ding' 'Earth Magic Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 12'***

***'ding' 'Earth Magic Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 13'***

***'ding' 'Earth Magic Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 14'***

***'ding' 'You have communicated with an Earth Elemental – One Core skill point awarded'***

***'ding' 'You have challenged an Earth Elemental – One Core skill point awarded'***

***'ding' 'You have survived an extended battle with an Earth Elemental – One Core skill point awarded'***

*Nearly enough for another enhancement. On we go.*