

“Want to team up? You didn’t come back in time,” she said, still holding him.

Ilea displaced the both of them away from the quickly advancing machine.

The elf hissed, now flying next to her as the Praetorian ran up on magical platforms. “It would be more efficient, for our purpose here,” he hissed through gritted teeth, likely not from physical pain.

An arcane field appeared between them and the Praetorian, the creature stopped by the floating rune like apparition. Its silver body glowed before a blast of void magic tore through the field which shattered in an instant.

“Impressive,” Asay said in an intrigued voice.

“My spells will be mostly useless against this one,” Farthorn admitted, looking at the creature with apprehension in his eyes. “I shall inform Isalhar,” he said and vanished.

Didn’t expect him to back down that quickly, Ilea thought, appreciating the rational thinking.

[Executioner Praetorian – lvl ???]

Ilea displaced herself and Feyrair again to get away. The elf’s legs and armor had reformed by now. “It’s above level eight hundred,” she supplied.

“A worthy challenge,” Feyrair noted. “Be wary, it can recover from damage. I’ve thrown everything I had at it but it wasn’t enough to overwhelm it. And it learns, far faster than a normal version.”

“Let’s try together then,” Ilea said with a smile. “What’s your Void Magic Resistance at?”

“Highest second tier,” the elf said. “Can you hold it off while I rest a little?”

“Of course,” Ilea said and vanished.

She appeared close to the Executioner, her own reflection visible on its silver body. Ilea saw its head turn as it moved, its two green eyes shining bright.

It turned in midair, ignoring the ashen limbs that moved towards its body as it slashed at her with incredible speed, magic vibrating at the tip of its two curved blade arms.

Ilea moved her wings, barely able to get out of range as her ash hit a shimmering purple shield, spreading both fire and cinders. She watched the creature take another step, catching up with her and slashing once again. Her eyes opened wide when her precognition informed her about the incoming damage.

A smile blossomed on her face as she blocked the attack with her arm, the thin silver blade cutting through her armor in an instant, severing flesh and muscle alike before it bit into her bone. And she held, fire spreading onto her enemy as her ashen limbs continued to crash into its barrier.

She felt the void magic tearing at the fabric of her being, her hand extended to stop the second blade coming at her.

The Executioner moved its blade back, instead going for a thrust towards her stomach.

Ilea blinked behind it, her fist hitting once before the machine had turned again, one blade coming at her with a horizontal swipe while the other stabbed at her with precise and quick moves, the silver arm molding into a straight rapier like extension.

She simply let the attacks happen, several of her organs pierced by the blade that managed to punch through her armor. Ilea watched as her white flame shimmered on its shield, slowly burning through the powerful defensive barrier.

When the Executioner aimed for her eye instead, Ilea vanished again. She wasn't sure if the thing could somehow pierce her brain but she wouldn't want to find out.

Her wings moved as she circled the floating being, its steps sure and quick as it ran at her. A wave of void magic formed in an instant, precognition the only reason she managed to displace herself in time to avoid the spell. A set of intrusion and ash attacks crashed into the creature before it turned to retaliate.

Ilea had already blinked again but this time she found the being was already turning. Her ash slashed into the shield at the same time as her body was pierced by the thin silver blades, one of them narrowly missing her eye thanks to her movement.

"Be careful!" Feyrair shouted, still recovering from his extended battle with the creature.

"How did-" Ilea replied, teleporting twice to deliver a single blow, retreating a few meters again before she dodged seven quick thrusts. "...you survive this long," she got out, spreading her flaming ash onto the being, gaps in its dense shield starting to show.

"It only showed up in the end, after I had destroyed the rest," Feyrair said. "My changed form could resist the damage for longer."

Are you telling me his armor is stronger than mine? Ilea wondered. She had dealt with the arcane lightning more efficiently. And his fire wasn't much trouble to her but then again, she had her healing and insane resistances. Had she won their bouts thanks to her intrusion more than anything else? *I mean he's got a dragon related Class. You'd hope he's resilie-*

Her thought was interrupted by the Executioner, the creature closing the distance yet again.

"When can you change again?" she asked, dodging four blows before she traded the next three for a few punches, one of them hitting the steel itself, her magic spreading into it.

Her innards were pierced and slashed apart, her fists crashing against the shield and body of the creature. She teleported away to heal, forced to distance herself further with a second spell when she saw the being advance quickly.

Doesn't even have wings, she thought, flying around it as they traded blows. The machine certainly learned and adapted quickly but Ilea had enough experience to match it in that department. She started to understand the void blades better as well, knowing now that they didn't just pierce her ash but force it apart on a minuscule level. Enough to destabilize the integrity of her armor and push the silver blades through.

I need more ash density for this guy, she thought, intrigued by the way it applied its magic. Almost surgical, compared to the other void users she had faced before who seemed more inclined to use a brute force approach.

Ilea raised her hand, stopping the blade going for her eye as her reversed healing poured into it, most of its shield gone by now, unable to reform in the construct consuming flames. *At least it*

knows that I don't want my head pierced, she thought with a smirk, turning her head to the side to let the blade slam into her skull, stopped by her bone that apparently resisted the void more so than her ash.

Feyrair stopped himself from jumping into battle, his changed form still not ready, let alone his mana. He needed more, focusing on the surrounding magic, dense and nearly fluid to his eyes. It rushed into him, filling him with power and purpose. The urge to shred the Executioner apart was great but he needed to focus on control.

It had proved to be too dangerous for him alone to defeat. If they wanted to stand a chance without invoking Isalthar, they had to work together. And he needed to trust the human who had demonstrated her superiority to him many times before.

Exciting really, to know that a human out of all the species he had faced could challenge him. Perhaps Ben had been right all along, and their worth was far beyond what they had thought. He grinned at the thought, more proof that the domains were nothing but arrogant fools, their ancient ways foolish and stagnant. He couldn't wait for Ilea to reach the heights of Isalthar, or perhaps even that of the Oracles themselves.

Only for him to drop her in their midst. *Let them go mad*, he thought, laughing out loud.

Asay floated a little farther away, giving him a look as he hissed.

"You should be watching her instead, scholar," Feyrair said without glancing over.

The mage grinned. "Oh, but I am," he said. "Her displays of space magic are quite impressive."

Space magic? Her fast teleportation? Feyrair questioned. He wouldn't admit a lack of understanding to the old fool. *Her ability to teleport even when they touch... that's what he means.*

Ilea moved around the massive being like an insect, her fists and moving ash stinging with powerful blasts of both intrusive mana and physical strength.

He had endured it himself after all. His mana was reaching acceptable levels and his spell was ready once again. "I could join, or wait a little longer!" he shouted to the human.

"It's fi-" she got out, deflecting another set of attacks as her mana burned into the shieldless machine. "Recover."

"She doesn't need our help," Asay said in a mocking tone.

Feyrair ground his teeth and suppressed a hiss. *And how exactly does that not hurt your ego? How can you look so disinterested when she calls for us to show our power?*

"I shall meet her challenge, when I'm-" his voice got stuck when he watched Ilea miss the last of a series of feints, her hand pierced and pushed aside when the second blade slammed deep into her eye.

Her body twitched, her left eye losing focus.

Feyrair watched as the Praetorian slashed through her body with its second blade, dozens of thrusts in mere moments, each ripping through the ash that moved to defend the disabled healer. Limbs of ash still crashed into the creature, moving wildly, as if in a panic.

“It is time,” Asay said.

Feyrair didn’t say anything, his form moving forward as he invoked his spell.

Shade of Garonoth.

Magic burned within him, an incredible heat burning both his body and soul, bright flame and magic flaring out as his body was reforged into the image of his ancient patron. Scales expanded and wings broke out of his back, his hands elongating and broadening as massive burning claws spread out.

He felt the magic around him, knew it was his to command. It swirled and condensed, pouring into him like an ocean of heat and fire.

Feyrair roared, white flame rolling out in a broad cone that enveloped both his enemy and friend. A part of him wondered how long the woman could survive in the clasp of the Praetorian. He did not truly believe she could be killed, admitting that a part of his belief came from his inability to do the same.

His wings moved as he moved closer to the floating duo, his fire unrelenting and growing in heat and power, the two beings engulfed in their entirety.

The Praetorian jumped away its blade slipping from the burned skull of Ilea, her body caught by a field of arcane energy.

Feyrair kept his focus on the Executioner, sending beams of seeking fire at the machine, the upper layers of its armor melted and dripping to the ground below. He perceived Ilea right below him, her eye reformed already, her body healed and quickly covered in ash.

“What did I miss?” she asked in a joyous voice, appearing on his back.

“You almost died,” he hissed with a broad and toothy dragon smile. “Had your brain pierced. The way it shredded through your body... I was sure you were already gone.”

“That would’ve been embarrassing. At least we’re even now,” she said.

Even?

“I was not close to dying,” Feyrair insisted, sending more spells at the creature, its body repairing itself, silver metal flowing into place again.

“Neither was I,” Ilea said. “Now stop the banter and let’s kill that thing,” she said, her voice tinged with ice he had not heard from her before.

Indeed. Let us hunt, together.

Ilea held on to the fast moving dragonling, her gaze on the Executioner. Feyrair roared below her, his fire extending in a cone, following the fast moving machine.

She still charged her Heart of Cinder, prepared to use it at any point in time. Flare of Creation burned on her, neither her nor the elf bothered much by their respective spells.

The Executioner rushed past, cutting into Feyrair's wing, leaving a bloodied gash that slowly knitted itself together.

Ilea managed to send a few doses of her spells into it as she pushed her healing into Feyrair, the gash already gone. "I think you can be a little more reckless," she said with a grin. "I have your back."

Feyrair turned quickly, Ilea's wings pushing to keep her on his back. His cone of flame caught the Executioner as it rushed past, one of his claws clashing with the silver blade, neither relenting before they disengaged.

The creature jumped back, trying to cut away the flaming ash with void. Somewhat successfully to her dismay.

"How long can you hold this form?" she asked, sure they could whittle down the creature if they had enough time.

"Not long enough," Feyrair said before he roared again, a beam of concentrated flame and heat slamming into the machine, pushing it back as it formed a purple shield to stop the spell.

Ilea grinned and crouched low on the dragon's back. "Get it to the ground," she said. "And be ready to hold on, no matter what. I'll protect you."

Feyrair rushed down with a mad dash, his wings soaring in the hall before his claws dug into the ground, missing the dodging creature.

"Again," Ilea said and watched its movements. She waited as it rushed past Feyrair's side, leaving a bleeding gash in its wake. The wound had healed before they finished the turn.

The dragonling rushed towards the machine, his massive clawed hands lashing out in horizontal strikes.

Ilea finished her spell right when the Executioner dashed back, its form vanishing in warped space before it appeared right below the dragon's claws.

He didn't waste the opportunity, clamping down on the machine with all the massive strength and magic he had at his disposal. The ground cracked and shattered as he pushed the silver form down into the floor.

Ilea appeared in front of his massive jaws, blocking the precise strikes coming for his mouth and eyes with her body, bones, and ash. The dark mist of her element spread onto Feyrair, healing him as she floated slightly to the side, gripping the blades with all the strength she could muster, keeping them within her chest and arm.

The Executioner pushed against the dragon's hold but found itself outmatched in weight and strength.

“Incinerate,” Ilea said, her eyes gleaming with joy when the dragon jaws above her shoulder roared, the heat burning away her ash and singeing her cheek, right before her vision turned white.

For what felt like minutes, the stream of flame did not subside, the ground around them blackened and scorched.

When the heat stopped and Feyrair roared, Ilea aimed her hand at the remains of the Executioner, a half molten torso sitting in a pool of boiling silver metal. Half her health went into her auras as her spell released, the stored heat flaring out in a single beam of condensed magic.

It ripped away the damaged steel, burning through the clawed arms still holding down the Executioner’s remains. Revealed in the midst of the pool lay a sphere the size of her head. Ilea displaced the thing into the air above, feeling the powerful mana circling within.

She started charging Absolute Destruction, her health recovered as she felt the sphere pull at the boiling silver in the crater below.

Asay floated closer, a layer of arcane energy forming with a set of runes to cover up the crater.

“Do you have another one of those in you?” she asked the dragonling.

He huffed. “I will pour in all that I am.”

She felt the mana around her move, perhaps absorbed by Feyrair himself. The silver started floating up, pushing against the shimmering blue energies that held them at bay. “How long can you hold?”

Asay hissed, both his arms extended now. “This is nothing.”

“I need another twenty seconds,” she said. “Feyrair, get ready to burn both me and the sphere. And get the hell out of here once it cracks. Both of you.”

She let her spell charge and finally displaced the sphere in front of herself. Her auras surged as she watched the glint of purple energy that surrounded the Executioner’s core.

Her ash came down with dozens of strikes, burning into the dense shielding as the runes flared up in purple light. She slammed her fist into the core with all the strength she could muster, her fully charged Destruction spreading into it with sizzling blue light and energy.

All the shields were stripped away and the dragonling roared from above.

White flame came down in a wave of heat as Ilea stepped back, barely seeing the floating sphere inside the bright magical fire.

She could see it wither away before it cracked.

Time stood still as the surrounding mana surged. Ilea watched the flames come down, slowed by her perception. She raised her hand and looked at Asay, displacing the elf away as far as she could. Walls of ash formed in front of her and Feyrair, her skill unable to transport his massive form. She stood in front of him, her wings forming a defensive barrier to shield at least a part of him.

The air stilled when a hand gently touched her shoulder, warm energy flowing out from it. Turning right, she found herself looking at two white eyes and the face of a familiar elf. Isalthar allowed himself a slight smile before he held up his right hand and turned his head to face the sphere.

Void magic surged out as everything was swallowed, the stone below instantly vanished as the sphere of void expanded outward.

Isalthar floated without a concern, the air around them changing in the blink of an eye. Ilea watched a tempest summoned right in front of her, the rushing air shining with magic as it clashed with the expanding sphere of void. A roar of magic and a display of arcane pinnacles that reminded her of Elemental strikes. She found she couldn't breathe but it didn't matter.