

## Chapter 872 Deadlands

Ilea finished her food as she pondered her options. “Any thoughts on Fourth tiers, Mr. Violence?”

The Fae sat on her knee, tilting his head to the side at the question.

“I can choose either a skill from my ash class or from my space class,” she said.

*My fires did an insane job against both Oracles. As did Primordial Shift. But I suppose the former wouldn't be possible without my ash. And without my mantle I'd have been dead ten times over.*

“This one isn't easy,” she murmured.

*Gut*, the Fae sent.

“That's what it will be, but at least want to consider,” Ilea said.

From her Ashen Titan Class, there were only a few options she deemed reasonable. Her mantle, and her ash creation. Tempered Seal remained a good source of damage, but she just didn't think it would be more useful than advancing any other skill. Same went for Embered Heart. Titan Core and most of her passive skills were useful, but compared to her creation and her main defense, they just weren't quite at the same level of utility.

*But if it's a one time use thing, or a short term buff, then my Mantle would essentially be another Primordial Shift.*

*Creating and controlling ash has always been the main draw of the Class. Well that and wings, but fourth tier wings just sound ridiculous. Ashen limbs, spears, the ability to spread around my fires. Let alone the times where it saved me, but I suppose that's Authority of Ash and Embers, and not the creation spell.*

There were a lot of pros and cons to consider, with all of her skills. But her creation spell felt like the right choice to advance.

*Or I could go with Primordial Arbiter instead. But that's a harder choice to make. The fires are insane, Primordial Shift feels like I'm breaking reality itself, and a fourth tier of Space Manipulation could become something ridiculous.*

Ilea decided to go with her second Class first. She'd had it for ages, and it would feel wrong to slight her ash like that, a companion she'd fought with for years already.

***Would you like to upgrade [Origin of Ash and Embers] to the Fourth Tier?***

She smiled, and confirmed the choice.

***'ding' 'Origin of Ash and Embers [Enhanced] reaches the 4th Tier'***

***Active: Origin of Ash and Embers [Enhanced] – 4th Tier  
Create ash and embers in a certain radius around you.***

**2nd stage: You can control the density of the ash and the heat of embers to an extent.**

**3rd stage: You have proven your dedication. Ash and embers move to aid and destroy at your whims. The amount of ash and embers you can create is vastly increased.**

**4th tier: You are maker and being of ash and embers. The Fourth Tier allows for true harmony. While you are using the Fourth Tier, any self caused movements from your position will reduce your harmony to its previous limit.**

**Category: Ashen Magic**

Ilea read through the addition and raised her brows. *What. No time limit? No cooldown?*

She tried it immediately, and gasped at the feeling within her. She breathed slowly, unable to really place what she grasped at, what had changed in the moment that she flipped the switch of her new Fourth Tier. It felt both mundane and terrifying. She had created both ash and embers thousands of times before. She had moved it around, had made spears, limbs, even copies of herself. It was the same still, the same connection. But something had changed. It felt as if before, there had been a gate, through which she had summoned her ash. A gate that only fit what she could move.

She had improved it over time, had advanced her skills and control to allow for more. With this new Fourth Tier however, there simply was no door. It felt as if she was standing in an endless waste of ash, brimming with the embers glowing within.

Ilea raised her hand and the connection held. She looked with her eyes and saw the swamp. She saw the gnarled trees, and the faint light shining in from the distant horizon. And then she willed the waste to move. And it moved.

A cloud of ash formed above the marshes, more and more, and more. Ilea felt her mana drain as she watched the cloud grow ever larger, blotting out the very suns. Lines of glowing embers drifted within the expansive ash. She saw it, and thus she could control it.

Ilea willed it all into the form of a single sphere, and the ash whirled to fulfill her wishes. She held her breath, her arm shaking slightly as she felt the immense weight and power of her creation. A smile tugged on her lips but she didn't quite know if she should feel afraid or ecstatic. She held on to what felt like a small mountain, shaped into a perfect sphere that blotted out the suns. And she made it hover above the swamp, as if it was a spaceship or a mere illusion. But Ilea knew that it was real, that it was there. She knew that she could will it down like an asteroid impacting the ground, and she could feel how much it would take to will it into motion.

She watched the sphere and let go of true harmony. Instantly, the gate returned, and what she could control was limited once more. Much of her mana was gone, fueled into the now descending sphere. She could tell the Fourth Tier remained available to her, whenever she wished to use it.

*Creator*, the Baron sent as he watched with her.

Ilea raised her brows, reminded of the Fae that she had seen not too long ago. *Creator*, she repeated in her mind.

The sphere descended, ash drifting away as the form distorted slightly, both by wind and gravity. Then it all impacted the ground, the sound heavy and continuous. A wave of ash and heated embers drifted out in all directions.

Ilea covered the little Fae with her hand and stored her remaining food when the cloud like wave reached them. She didn't need to breathe, and she could see through ash itself, so she waited, until it all settled.

It took minutes, and when the ash stopped moving, the landscape had changed. What had been marsh before, now laid covered in gray and black ash, steam rising where the embers had come in touch with water.

"Like gray snow," Ilea murmured, taking in the first breath since she had used her spell.

She simply watched, and finished her resummoned meal.

The Fae jumped down and played in the ash, but for once, Ilea didn't feel like making an ash copy of the being.

She downed a bottle of ale and stood up from her dissolving chair. Activating the spell once more, she could feel a connection to all the ash around her. She knew that she could move it, that she could will it into anything that she desired. Her harmony was limited only by her mana.

*Meditation doesn't seem quite as situational anymore,* she thought to herself and smiled.

Any use of her teleportation spells interrupted the connection, and it took a moment to reestablish it. Nowhere near as long of a cooldown as with her Reconstruction Fourth Tier, but she wouldn't be able to switch it on and off in mere instants. Using Fabric Tear on the Fae didn't interrupt the connection, but her Primordial Shift apparently counted as her moving herself.

*That's a bummer,* she thought, gulping as she looked at the ashen wasteland before her.

She turned around but the wave had reached dozens of meters in that direction as well. "Come on, I want to move a bit away from here," Ilea said to the Fae, the creature promptly teleporting to her shoulder.

*So stats then,* she thought as a way to distract herself a little.

She distributed her 189 points into both Intelligence and Wisdom, now seeing another reason to increase her mana pool.

*Not that the extended fight against the blood Oracle wasn't reason enough.*

*Hey, it didn't use its Fourth Tier again. I wonder how often the Sanguerrihn can use his silver copy. What was his name again? Savien, right.*

*I feel like my Fourth Tier is better, if his silver copy is one of his. Hmm. Though I guess if a copy of mine could use my mantle and intrusion spells, it would be crazy too.*

She thought about the sphere again and shook her head. A copy she could grasp, but the wasteland that she felt within her. That, she would have to get used to, and she didn't know if she ever could.

She flew over the marshes with no goal in mind, seeing the occasional Dread Beast fighting or running.

*The last of them, I suppose.*

*And with that there's only one Fourth Tier skill remaining. If that really is the limit.*

***Fourth Tier skill points available: 0***

**Requirements to unlock your next Fourth Tier skill point: Has reached level 950 in three Classes while human.**

She smiled. *Who would've guessed.*

*So where do I find another ten Oracles. Should I scour the Domains, start a war with all of elven kind?*

Ilea grinned at the idea, but she still felt apprehensive when it came to at least the Ice Oracle that she had met. Compared to her, the creatures she had killed felt like mere monsters. *Because they were. Anything with a conscious mind wielding their power would've been an entirely different thing to face.*

*One Oracle for the mists, one for the Dread Beasts.*

*Trees and roots from the depths, attacking for little reason. Does that mean there is another one in there somewhere? The Marshes itself?*

She wondered when she received a message through her marks. From Aki.

*"Did you do something in the Marshes? Dread Beasts are near my position."*

*Shit.*

Ilea opened a gate to Iz and stepped through.

*"Get me to the gate near the Marshes. I killed the creator of the beasts, maybe they're running wild,"* she sent and was quickly directed to a nearby teleportation platform.

*"I will try to help with cleaning up. Seems like you've been quite busy,"* the dagger replied.

Ilea smiled and vanished, appearing in the desert where she found several of the creatures fighting the present Centurions and Guardians, many of the machines already destroyed.

*Violence?*

Ilea flew up and sent down burning spears. *"Just cleaning up the mess I've made,"* she sent to the Fae.

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Rahk sniffed the winds and grunted, signaling his tribe to hide and wait. He moved with them into the high fain trees, the green eyed silver spider following without a word.

He grabbed the sturdy bark and flung his rifle around his back, climbing up with practiced motions until he had a view of the entire dust fields. The suns were rising on the horizon. They had made good time. Past below the marshes in a single night. No monster attacks. No surprises.

But something had changed in the wind. Something from the Cursed Marshes themselves. Nothing ever changed with them.

He looked out onto the hills, his tribe climbing up the nearby trees, the silver spider standing on air itself. He didn't question its magic. It was stronger than all of them here. And it knew many things.

A grunt from Fero. A question.

He grunted back. He didn't know. But there was no enemy nearby. Not any that he could see. "I do not know what has changed, but magic moves from the Marshes that has not moved before." He shouldered his rifle and took out his enchanted glass. Looking through it, he channeled his mana and saw into the distance.

The cliffs reached high, only rocks and hills, deadland, extending below. At the top of the cliffs, he saw wracked stone, and beyond, the murky light of the Cursed Marshes. He scanned the entire width before his eyes went wide. "A beast, atop the cliffs. A Dread Beast. It is moving closer. It fell down. It's getting up again, moving into the deadlands. More of them moving past the stone above."

"Dread Beasts?" voices echoed as his tribe shifted in the trees, confusion in their voices. He could taste their fear and growled, more growls coming from those older. Stronger.

"Do not fear them, for they do not fear us," Fero spoke. "We will hunt them down before they reach our lands.

"We must hunt with caution, and with wits. Do not make a sound. We stalk them, and we fight once night has fallen," she spoke.

Rahk grunted in agreement. She was an experienced hunter, as were many of the others, though blood would be shed in the coming nights. *Dread Beasts moving from the Marshes.*

It was unheard of. The beasts remained within. Always.

*Could it be the being of ash that we saw?* He wondered, though he didn't truly believe it. She would have died by now, or she would have killed some of the beasts, returning home with injuries and newfound strength.

"I would not interfere with your hunt, but I advise you to stay in these trees for a few more minutes," the Sentinel of Akelion spoke. He had asked questions before, and had shown interest in trade. This was different, Rahk knew. He glanced to Fero.

"We lose our advantage if we stay. Why should we?" she said.

"Help, is on the way," the spider said, green eyes glowing.

Fero looked at the silver spider for a long moment and then nodded. "We will wait."

Her word was spoken, the tribe silent as they watched the deadlands and the moving beasts, many more now past the cliffs, some dead from the fall, most running forward. Some fought and killed each other. There were too many still. The hunt would be long and arduous.

Rahk watched through his looking glass as the beasts advanced, some of them still fighting each other. "We should lead one to the other. They fight their own kind."

"Such is known, but their behavior is changed. We have to be more vigilant," Fero answered.

Wise words, he knew, and kept on watching.

A grunt resounded.

*Above.*

He scanned the sky, squinting his eyes to shield them against the brightening light. To the south and east, he saw a winged figure. Tiny, with two arms and legs, dark in color. It was moving closer. Fast.

Rahk kept on watching, the figure now close enough for him to see details. It was the ashen hunter they had met in the desert. The one strong enough to not only disarm him, but to beat Fero in direct combat. *So she has survived the Marshes. Then perhaps it was her after all? Three marks, just like the silver spider.*

The Untainted stopped above the deadlands, hovering a few hundred meters above ground with her wings moving in steady motions.

Rahk saw spears of ash come to life all around her flying form. He heard the gasps and surprised grunts of his tribe and lowered his looking glass. He strained his arms to hold on to the tree, seeing thousands of spears hovering in the skies. More yet appeared, darkening the horizon, numerous like the sands in the desert. He grunted as well when he saw them descend upon the lone forms of Dread Beasts. Whistling sounds culminating into a strange roar, almost like a storm. Hundreds of spears digging into the ground, striking flesh, impaling and even ripping apart the creatures of flesh and blood.

Those that survived the first spears, were shredded through by another wave. The Untainted did not miss any of the running creatures. Only two of them remained after mere seconds.

Rahk watched as two massive things formed in the sky. Not mere spears, but large enough to be houses. The ash lit up with white flame, as if two more suns had been added to the skies. He saw the woman raise her arm, pointing at the living Dread Beasts. A moment passed and the ash came roaring down towards the injured monsters.

Two crashes resounded as the beasts were buried by the exploding ash covered in flames. Two shock waves of heated air reached the trees, Rahk holding on as best he could. A few of the others fell, caught by those stronger.

*It was her.* He knew it now. A fool. He grinned to himself, knowing he had aimed at her with his weapon. Her strength had already been unquestioned, after her display, but now. Now, he knew what she truly was.

“Ranok,” one of the others uttered the word.

Many of those young and inexperienced had uttered it when seeing those with strength. Rahk had not seen many that are deserving of this name, but the ashen being fit. More so than all of those he had seen before.

Fero grunted, signaling them to wait.

There would be no hunt. Not for them.

The Dread Beasts were dead. Rahk looked at the form in the sky. She hovered for a few seconds, and then flew down into the marshes.