

Chapter 735 Grinding Grounds

Ilea stood blood covered and burning with white flame above the unmoving remains of her foe. She took in a deep breath, stepping out of the gore a moment later. The Hadranim had proven a troublesome creature to kill, more durable than some higher leveled four marks she had met, and at least able to damage her. It had been a good fight. She shook off the bits and pieces still stuck to her, the fires of creation slowly getting rid of everything but unable to instantly wipe it all away.

“Are you two still around?” she sent to her allies through the still established telepathic connection.

“Finally done?” Kyrian asked. *“We mapped out most of the cavern but had to retreat where we saw entire groups of those creatures.”*

Ilea grinned as she stretched. *“That sounds horrible. Where?”*

“I’ll show you,” the man answered. *“Also found fire lizards in the late eight hundreds. They like to hide and ambush. Less dangerous than the Sarguihn who seem to live inside of the lava. Four marks those but I don’t think you’d prefer them over the Hadranim.”*

“We’ll see about that. Any connections that lead deeper down?” Ilea asked.

“Definitely,” Kyrian said as he landed near her. *“You destroyed this entire section.”*

“Well observed. Thank you. Do you know what time it is? I kind of lost track,” Ilea said, scratching the back of her armored head.

“I was busy trying to survive. Fey is trying to ambush the lizards in his dragon form,” he explained.

Ilea opened a gate to Riverwatch and put her head through. *Early afternoon I guess.* She went back and stepped into a nearby patch of lava, scrubbing herself clean. *“I have to run some errands. We can continue later of course.”*

“That sounds good. I would appreciate a break. And Fey needs one too, not that he would admit as much,” Kyrian answered.

Ilea gave him a thumbs up and submerged herself in the molten rock. The warmth was comforting. Welcoming, and all surrounding. It felt nice after a long and involved battle, though she was glad to have found another group of monsters against whom she could go all out. More importantly a type of four mark that wasn’t fifty times as large as she was.

Done with her lava soak, she collected her allies and brought them north. She herself summoned her armaments and created a large gate. *“I’ll be getting the representatives of the Pit now,”* she sent to Claire, Catelyn, and the Meadow.

“We will be ready,” the fox replied, both of the council members calling out to various people.

The sounds vanished and were replaced by distant hammering when Ilea stepped through the portal and behind the shut gates of the Pit. She made the fissure disappear and turned her attention to the waiting group of polished war machines. *Did I stumble into some kind of cosplay convention?*

Shifting heads, shoulders, and weapons. None spoke, their attention moving between Ilea and Helwart.

“Yer late,” he spoke.

“Sorry. I was engrossed in glorious battle. I’m sure you understand,” she answered.

He grunted. “Aye. However, more importantly, how exactly did you just appear here?”

“You don’t have an elaborate mesh of anti space magic protections set up. Not that I think it would help much,” Ilea answered. She could feel the discomfort in many of them, some starting to murmur amongst each other. “There are very few of us.”

“That doesn’t help,” Helwart said and laughed. “So, where is this meeting taking place?”

The tone in his voice was clear. *Can’t keep them together for long eh. “Sorry for the entrance. I didn’t expect everyone to just stand there.”*

Ilea made her armor vanish to seem less threatening. “Please follow me. The meeting will take place near Hallowfort. You’ll get a chance to meet the famed smith, Goliath himself.” The mention was enough to cause an enthusiastic wave of chatter to go through the group. She formed a large gate and stepped through, welcomed by the waiting council members that were still present. She walked to the side and sat down on a chair, smiling when she saw Helwart come through with his saw bladed mace at the ready.

He paused, taking in the scenery before he walked forward, his weapon vanishing. He had moved just fast enough to avoid the next set of war machines about to stumble into him. He glanced towards the smithy but instead focused back on the group of waiting people.

“Welcome to the North, Helwart Maulstroem,” Catelyn said with a light smile.

Ilea raised her brows when she saw the dwarf bow, his massive war machine groaning at the motion.

“It is an honor to meet you, flame touched hunter,” he spoke. “And to... finally see Hallowfort.”

The fox grinned. “This is the domain of the Meadow. Hallowfort is located above, but I’m sure there will be time. You have heard of me then?”

“Ancient tales, legends. Much like what we know of Goliath,” Helwart admitted as more and more of his allies stepped through the gate.

Move it, you’re using up all my mana. Ilea tried to spot Bralin but the dwarf had unsurprisingly hidden away in the small home the Meadow had added for him. Someone she did spot instead was Terok, his lean war machine standing behind the council members with a few others from Hallowfort, all whispering amongst each other.

“Ancient tales are likely quite a bit more exciting than reality. But as informed by Lilith, there are certain things we can offer that perhaps come close to legend,” Catelyn continued. “May we invite you all for lunch?”

“I never decline an invitation,” Helwart said and walked towards the waiting group, followed by the influential individuals from the Pit.

Ilea finally closed the gate when the last of them had come through. *Down to a tenth.* She glared at the dark green war machine, the dwarf trying to stay unnoticed but it seemed he could feel the eyes of a predator on his form, the tension obvious in his every move.

She let her mana recover as she watched the meeting transpire, the amazement of the gathered dwarves not focused on the Owl, the Meadow, or the gathered council, but more so on the Soul Forge, Goliath, and Aki.

Their excited murmuring soon turned into conversations, diplomatic ambitions thrown aside as they couldn't help but ask questions about the present wonders.

"Not getting all of the attention for once," Ilea sent to the Meadow. She watched a group of dwarves gathered around the close teleportation gate connected to the outskirts of Ravenhall, voices rising as they insulted each other, laughed, quiet again as they whispered in disbelief. Iana's appearance to answer questions didn't particularly help.

"Indeed. They should all bow to me," the Meadow spoke. *"Helwart seems a capable leader. The group is incredibly diverse, both with their interests and demands."*

"Former prison," Ilea informed.

"You say that as if it explains something," the being answered.

"Does to me," Ilea said and stood up. She wasn't full on mana but she had some time on her way to Virilya. Stepping through a portal, she came out near Riverwatch. A few teleports got her into the air, her wings spread and charging before she shot off towards the capital of Lys.

Once again the guard was informed about her, as respectful as they had been the last time around. *Finally, treated like the Queen I never wanted to be.* She landed near the Halls of Eternity.

"Lady Lilith," a waiting guardsman spoke as he approached, full plate armor with a gray helmet covering his head. The man stopped a few meters away. Ilea couldn't tell if he was scared or simply being respectful. He hid it well if it was the former.

"That would be me, yes," she answered.

"The Immortal Guard has asked me to escort you upon arrival. Lady Syrithis is waiting for you," he said.

Ilea smiled. "I'll follow," she said, looking at his calculated movements. She assumed he had been a military man most of his life.

[Sword Master – lvl 218]

Hasn't faced any really dangerous monsters, I suppose. "What's your name?" she asked as they entered the Halls of Eternity.

"I'm Major Luwin Karrick, Lady Lilith," he answered.

"Karrick. The adventurer guild family right?" she asked, trying to remember what Claire had told her about them.

"Our family manages many of the guilds, yes. We pride ourselves on our adventuring experience before joining the ranks of the Lys military," the man explained as they reached an enchanted door at the end of a well lit and decorated corridor. Every inch of the ancient halls was a monument of wealth and power.

"Sounds reasonable. Shadow's Hand offers quite a lot of options too. Never done learning," Ilea said. She didn't mean it as an insult, more an offer to someone that may or may not feel stuck in

their current position. She could imagine plenty of nobles who enjoyed exploring the wilderness were instead sitting behind desks or discussing politics in a court.

“If the circumstances allow for such in the future,” the man spoke. “Though I would be more interested in the Medic Sentinels. My great granddaughter has been talking about them for some time.”

Ilea smiled. “You don’t sound convinced.”

“With all due respect, Lady Lilith, my opinion on Healing Orders has not changed in quite some time, and for good reason. I understand that your organization prides itself in being different, but I will remain cautiously pessimistic,” he said.

“I appreciate the honesty. Funny how they’re already being talked about in the Virilyan circles of nobility. The training is quite hard but I’d think for a noble born the most difficult part would be being admitted,” she explained.

They stood in front of the door still, the man crossing his arms.

“You dislike the addition of educated youth? Capable of critical thinking and with the backing of influential families?” he said.

“I know what you’re trying to suggest,” Ilea said as she leaned against the wall. It was structurally enhanced with magic. “But we’d rather have people join who have the heart to become a battle healer, ready to delve into the most dangerous dungeons the wilds have to offer. Nobody who’s not committed would endure the training regime. But if your granddaughter wishes to try, she is welcome to apply.”

“It was good meeting you, Lady Lilith,” Luwin Karrick said as he knocked on the door. “Lady Syrithis will welcome you now.” He stepped away as the door opened.

“I’ll see you around, Mr. Karrick,” Ilea said and stepped inside, the door closing behind her. *His granddaughter. I wonder how many nobles have to fight with their offspring to prevent them from joining the Shadows or the Sentinels. It’s not a phase dad! I want to fight dangerous monsters for a living, you wouldn’t understand!*

“Is my office amusing to you?” Syrithis asked, the half elf sitting at a broad oak desk, carved from the trunk of a single tree. The floor and walls were made of marble, furs combining well with the fireplace providing warmth.

Ilea looked up, seeing the masked half elf stare at her with obvious annoyance. “Why? It’s super simple. I like the desk.”

“I’m not here a lot,” Syrithis said.

“Why so pissed? Annoyed that I know your secret?” Ilea asked as she sat down on the large leather chair opposite the white desk.

The half elf waved her off. “You wouldn’t…” she started, then hissed.

“Frustrated. That’s what that hiss means. At least I’m pretty sure about that,” Ilea said.

“You spent a lot of time with the Hunters if you know that much,” Syrithis said.

“Yeah, been hanging out with your uncle just an hour ago,” Ilea said.

The half elf tensed up slightly. “Doing what?”

Ilea shook her head. "What do you mean? We fought monsters. Well we were in the same area, fighting monsters. Didn't exactly do it together, worse experience that."

Syrithis remained silent for a long moment. "I see. The letter you brought. Alyris has suggested a few changes to the contract, but most of it was acceptable." She summoned a sealed envelope and held it out towards Ilea.

Fabric tear brought the thing to her, stored in her domain a moment later. "I'll make sure to deliver it."

"You have all this power... and yet you... fly around, delivering letters," Syrithis said.

Ilea smiled. "You don't quite understand the exact distance." She stood up and stretched. "Plus once these gates are set up, I'll be out of a job. Finally. Back to hunting creatures."

"Good," Syrithis said.

Ilea raised a brow. "What did I do to piss you off so much?"

The half elf looked to the side.

"Oh? Too much attention on the ashen healer? Half elf suddenly not quite so much of a novelty anymore?" Ilea suggested.

A wind blade slashed into her skin, the Empress Guard standing up immediately with a placating gesture. "I'm sorry... I didn't m-

Ilea waved her off. "You fucked up there. Instigated a war and all. I'll be destroying the city now. Do you need an official declaration or is this fine?"

The half elf sat down again and buried her masked face in her arms.

Ilea laughed. "I'll see you around." She vanished through the anti space magic enchantments and out into a nearby inn. Her gate opened inside of an empty room before she stepped out into the domain of the Meadow.

"New letter from the Empress," she said and handed the thing to Claire.

"Wonderful. Thank you," the woman said and immediately opened it. "Yes... hmm... acceptable... that one's pushing it a little... well, let's see," she murmured as paper and a pen appeared in front of her.

Ilea looked at the approaching Pursuer, his request for a spar gladly accepted. *Will have to hold back a little after that Hadranim fight.*

The next two weeks passed quickly. Ilea trained and killed many of the creatures down in Karth, the trio exploring more of the caverns at a steady pace. None of the appearing monsters proved too much for them to handle, especially after Feyrair broke through the five hundreds himself.

Her training bouts once more included the elf, the two more or less at a stalemate again. Ilea felt it was less balanced than with Evan, the lack of time they were willing to invest into their bouts however leading to draws more often than not. Feyrair's scale armor got some ridiculous upgrades after all.

The constant battling with four mark monsters, the elf, and her weekly bouts with the sand creator pushed her skills back to comfortable heights, each increase adding to her power. The rest of her time was filled with continued deliveries, the setup of gates, and even some construction work in Morhill.

Ilea floated in the darkness of the Karthian depths, dead creatures all around as she checked her status.

She had leveled enough to enhance yet another skill. Ilea chose Primordial Flesh now that her main aura skills were catching up again.

'ding' 'Primordial Flesh [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 1'

Passive – Primordial Flesh [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 1

The flame of creation flows through your veins, increasing your resilience by 35.5% [497%]. Increases your physical damage resistance by 9.1% [127.4%]. Increases your magic damage resistance by 9.1% [127.4%]. You won't be fazed anymore by heavy damage or powerful sources of light and sound. Your natural regeneration can heal any injury.

2nd stage: Your body has withstood incredible damage, endured the hardships of battle. The fires flowing through you have hardened your bones and muscles. Your health is increased by 14.2% [198.8%].

3rd stage: Your ability to adapt to your enemy grows. Continued battle against the same foe or species of monster increases damage reduction against their attacks by 0.55% [7.7%] per minute to a maximum of a static 50%. This effect will remain even after a battle has ended. The primordial flesh is released should you reach one point of health. Your remaining mana will be used to create both spatial shields and rapid growths of flesh to prevent death. This effect can only occur once every six hours.

Category: Body enhancement – Space Magic – Flesh Magic

The addition of monster species meant that Ilea didn't have to build up the damage reduction against each Hadranim, instead gaining the full fifty percent against each and every one of them from the get go. Nor did the effect drop between battles. Her fifty percent against Feyrair remained, even if they didn't have a bout for half a day between.

The flesh growth death prevention cooldown being reduced from a day to six hours was welcome too, but Ilea had yet to experience it, nor did she plan to ever have it activate.

The levels were considerable too, her skill increases and ability to adjust to the Hadranim and Sarguihn didn't quite bridge the gap between their levels. Though she did notice a slow down of levels gained after the first week, despite her increased kill count in the second one.

Her stat points she invested into Vitality, Wisdom, and Intelligence. Every point allowed her to fight for just a little bit longer, both in terms of mana, and required healing.

Name: Ilea Spears

Unspent statpoints: 2

Unspent Core skill points: 3

Unspent 3rd tier General skill points [2392 Total skill levels]: 1

Class 1: The Arcane Eternal – lvl 535

- **Active: Archon Strike [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 16**
- **Active: Sentinel Reconstruction [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 23**
- **Active: Azarinth Awakening [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 20**
- **Active: Transfer [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 15**
- **Active: Arcane Dominion [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 18**
- **Passive: Sentinel Core [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 23**
- **Passive: Eternal Brawling [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 18**
- **Passive: Eternal Huntress – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Passive: Eternal Sight – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Passive: Arcane Circulation [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 15**

Class 2: The Ashen Titan – lvl 533

- **Active: Mantle of the Titan [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 21**
- **Active: Titan Core [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 14**
- **Active: Origin of Ash and Embers – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Active: Embered Heart [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 14**
- **Active: Tempered Seal [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 16**
- **Passive: Authority of Ash and Ember [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 12**
- **Passive: Ashen Wings [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 15**
- **Passive: Vision of Ash – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Passive: Avatar of Ash [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 20**
- **Passive: Embered Form [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 15**

Class 3: The Primordial Arbiter – lvl 522

- **Active: Primordial Shift – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Active: Fires of Creation [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 16**
- **Active: Fabric Tear [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 12**
- **Passive: Reality Warp – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Passive: Primordial Flesh [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 6**
- **Passive: Space Manipulation [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 13**

General Skills:

- **Ashen Limbs – lvl 20**
- **Bulwark of Ash – lvl 14**
- **Dancing – lvl 7**
- **Deviant of Humanity – 3rd lvl 27**
- **Drill – lvl 13**
- **Elos Standard language - lvl 6**
- **English Language – lvl 15**
- **Gourmet – lvl 8**
- **Harmony of the Drowned – lvl 16**
- **Heavy Archery – lvl 11**
- **Identify - 2nd lvl 2**

- *Meditation* – 3rd lvl 17
- *Minor Earth Manipulation* – lvl 4
- *Minor Ice Manipulation* – lvl 3
- *Minor Lava Manipulation* – lvl 5
- *Monster Hunter* – 3rd lvl 15
- *Monstrous* – lvl 15
- *Oxygen Repository* – 2nd lvl 11
- *Sage of Torment* – 2nd lvl 18
- *Soul Perception* – lvl 15
- *Spear of Ash* – 2nd lvl 2
- *Teaching* – lvl 10
- *Telepathy* – lvl 7
- *Veteran* – 3rd lvl 30
- *Warhammer Mastery* – lvl 9

- *Arcane Magic Resistance* – 3rd lvl 23
- *Ash Magic Resistance* – 2nd lvl 6
- *Astral Magic Resistance* – 2nd lvl 20
- *Blast Resistance* – 3rd lvl 8
- *Blight Resistance* – 2nd lvl 2
- *Blood Magic Resistance* – 3rd lvl 18
- *Blood Manipulation Resistance* – 2nd lvl 20
- *Bone Magic Resistance* – 2nd lvl 20
- *Corrosion Resistance* – 2nd lvl 20
- *Crystal Resistance* – 2nd lvl 15
- *Curse Resistance* - 3rd lvl 6
- *Dark Magic Resistance* – 2nd lvl 9
- *Death Magic Resistance* – 2nd lvl 20
- *Devour Resistance* – 2nd lvl 8
- *Diamond Magic Resistance* – 2nd lvl 3
- *Divination Magic Resistance* – lvl 11
- *Dust Magic Resistance* – lvl 6
- *Earth Magic Resistance* – 3rd lvl 14
- *Emerald Magic Resistance* – 2nd lvl 1
- *Fear Resistance* – 2nd lvl 2
- *Flesh Magic Resistance* – lvl 11
- *Gold Magic Resistance* – lvl 1
- *Gravity Magic Resistance* – 2nd lvl 20
- *Health Drain Resistance* – 2nd lvl 20
- *Heat Resistance* – 3rd lvl 25
- *Ice Resistance* – 2nd lvl 20
- *Lava Magic Resistance* – 3rd lvl 9
- *Light Magic Resistance* – 3rd lvl 3
- *Lightning Resistance* – 3rd lvl 11
- *Mana Drain Resistance* – 3rd lvl 7
- *Mental Resistance* – 3rd lvl 18
- *Mist Magic Resistance* – 2nd lvl 20
- *Obsidian Magic Resistance* – lvl 3
- *Pain Tolerance* – 3rd lvl 3

- ***Petrification Resistance – lvl 14***
- ***Poison Resistance – 3rd lvl 2***
- ***Rot Resistance – 3rd lvl 4***
- ***Ruby Magic Resistance – lvl 14***
- ***Sand Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 20***
- ***Sapphire Magic Resistance – lvl 13***
- ***Shadow Magic Resistance – lvl 12***
- ***Silver Magic Resistance – lvl 6***
- ***Smoke Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 4***
- ***Soul Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 5***
- ***Sound Magic Resistance – lvl 18***
- ***Space Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 12***
- ***Stamina Drain Resistance – 2nd lvl 20***
- ***Time Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 20***
- ***Topaz Magic Resistance – lvl 18***
- ***Vine Magic Resistance – lvl 14***
- ***Void Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 18***
- ***Water Resistance – 3rd lvl 4***
- ***Wind Resistance – 3rd lvl 11***
- ***Wood Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 5***

Status:

Vitality: 1920
Endurance: 450
Strength: 545
Dexterity: 450
Intelligence: 1730
Wisdom: 1920

Health: 57284/60057
Stamina: 3820/4500
Mana: 83299/115200

Less health than before. Well. I'll get there again soon enough, she thought and watched the red dragon charging her way. It didn't exactly feel right anymore to call him dragonling. *Young dragon might fit. Or drake. Then again he does have four arms... hmm.* Beams of white flame formed out of nowhere, cutting into ash armor as Ilea held her ground, the stone wall behind her cut through, molten rock glowing as the flame of creation spread.

The dragon vanished and appeared above her, a sphere of heat and fire expanding to envelope everything in its range.

Ilea's head whipped back, several of her ash layers gone before she answered with a charged blast of heat, the attack leaving a glowing spot on her foe's chest. She vanished, a charged kick slamming

against his massive snout, the physical force creating a shock wave as his head was slammed downwards.

She decided his upgrades to limit mana intrusion weren't her fault. If anything, the elf had chosen to take a class specifically countering her most powerful abilities. At least her reverse healing still worked.

Kyrian watched from the sidelines, most of the cavern illuminated by white flame. The local ecosystem had long been obliterated, two maniacs and a curse mage had made sure of that.