

Chapter 610 Search

Ilea sighed when the core explosion rushed over her, destroying the stone throne and parts of the hall. It had ended too quickly.

Another gate key was hidden in the hall. She displaced it into her hand and walked towards the exit, finding Feyrair casually leaning against the wall. He followed without a word.

She ignored the staring enchanters and went for the closed door leading to the teleportation hall. A single punch cracked it open, rubble flying into the stairwell beyond before she descended.

A few more hallways and halls later, some with Guardians, others with traps, Ilea came into a spacious cavern that seemed more natural than the rest of the ancient underground town. Water poured in from an opening in the cavern wall, flowing into a pool where ivy and other vegetation had taken over half of the hall.

The floor itself was perfectly even, at the center of the room a single teleportation gate, the location of the control mechanism suggesting they could all use it.

“Here you go,” Iana said, walking past to check out the panel.

The rest went onto the platform, ready to fight in case anything came out after the activation.

The enchantress inserted the key and grinned when the same runes lit up again. She selected the destinations and chose Izvanata, glancing at Ilea to confirm.

“Go for it,” Ilea said.

Iana smiled and removed the key, touching the rune for activation. Mana and light enveloped the group a moment later, the space around them shifting.

Ilea made sure not to miss the process, as usual trying to figure out how the spell affected space itself. She looked around to find a stairs leading up in one direction. More interesting however was the opening in the wall to the left. Sunlight poured into the room, a familiar sight visible in the distance.

An arcane storm.

They were high up, somewhere in the side of a mountain, with a cliff going down immediately outside.

“I thought you needed to leave the key inside,” Feyrair said as he looked around the hall.

Iana moved the key outside of the platform’s circle, the gate powering down immediately. “Once activated you can take it with you through the gate. Took us a while to figure out how they did it but they were paranoid if nothing else. Wouldn’t have worked on the gate on that isle because the controls were so far away from the actual platform... or well, corridor in that case.”

The elf nodded, obviously not quite as interested as his question would’ve suggested.

Ilea stood next to the opening, brushing her hand past the wall. “This is pretty precise.”

“Cut by a blade,” Feyrair confirmed. “We’re in northern lands. Any idea where?”

“We know where,” Iana said and activated the gate again, selecting the destination and gesturing to the map.

“Relative to anything else? No. I can’t tell if I’ve seen those mountains before,” Ilea said, looking out at the sprawling landscape. “So let’s see if we can find anybody. Nothing in this room,” she added and walked to the stairs.

A quick search of the facility turned up destroyed Guardians and Centurions, not a single Taleen machine left in working order. All were cut apart by blades, precise cuts having taken their limbs, dents and scratches suggesting the wielder had used two not overly large weapons. The dungeon itself was small, only a little more spacious than the one on the isle of Garath.

“So we’d have to look for someone who came here two years ago and left through that hole in the wall,” Iana said. “Do any of you have any skills that would help with that?”

Ilea had used Sentinel Huntress with both Kyrian and Zoy in mind, neither turning up anything. The blades suggested that Zoy had been the one to come here, Kyrian simply using a different fighting style.

“I don’t think this is worth pursuing for now. Maybe with Seithir or specialists from Hallowfort,” Ilea said.

“Let’s at least check the other location before we make a decision.” Neiphato said. “Is this Zoy person important to find? I believe you mentioned the other one more.”

“Not at all. Just thought we could give her a hand if she’s stuck in a Taleen dungeon,” Ilea said.

Iana inserted the gate key and checked the destinations. “Second location then. Let’s see what we have. It’s very far out.”

The spell activated once more and they found themselves in the familiar dim green light of Taleen making.

‘ding’ ‘You have entered the Iznakor dungeon’

“Salt,” Ilea said, sniffing the air. “We’re near the ocean,” she said, her eyes opening wide when she turned around.

Someone had carved letters into the stone wall near the exit.

Do not leave during daylight – Arcane storms.

Do not stay low at night. Avoid the Mists.

Do not fly high or over the ocean – Bluetails hunt at all times

Member of the Shadow’s Hand stranded on Isles – Find me within the Keep, do not attack chained creatures. Food and shelter available.

“How does that sound?” Feyrair asked.

Ilea stood there with a smile, walking closer to the wall before she brushed over the letters. No dust or signs of wear.

She checked the room but found nothing else of interest, stepping out into the corridor.

Exit →

“Helpful,” Neiphato said.

“A trap perhaps?” Christopher remarked.

“Let’s find out,” Ilea said, her mood slightly improved. She followed the signs through the corridors, the facility already larger than the place Zoy had been teleported to. Much like in Izvanata, the corridors were littered with destroyed Guardians.

Feyrair crouched down to inspect the first few they encountered. “Spears, and small cuts,” he said. “Seems like he extended his battles beyond the direct way to the exit,” he added and pointed to the end of a corridor where a dimly lit hall extended beyond, signs of Centurion explosions and more destroyed Guardians barely visible.

Neiphato motioned to the others, pointing at a destroyed machine. “This one seems different.”

“Heavy spiked weapon. Near fully crushed. It reminds me of Ilea’s punches, just about thirty times larger,” Feyrair said.

Ilea walked over, seeing the dented in torso of the Guardian, its head entirely flattened and pushed into the steel below. The metal had been punctured in a few places, each hole large enough to suggest a war pick. *Seems like you weren’t idle.*

“Wind coming in,” Feyrair noted a few minutes of walking later, the group following the exit markers to a fault, any trap or machine on the way already destroyed entirely.

They found an elevator shaft with a few runes carved into the wall. The Exit sign suggested to go up.

“This shouldn’t work,” Iana said, touching the runes.

Feyrair leaned into the shaft and chuckled. “Yeah, the platform is in pieces, down at the bottom.”

Ilea spread her wings and grabbed the enchanters, flying up and out a few dozen meters later. A large hall spread beyond, the scent of saltwater now much more present than before. Fresh air came in from somewhere.

She set the others down, the Elves joining them. “A fire to cook,” she said and walked over to the small camp. There were several simple beds with old blankets.

Feyrair sniffed the air and walked over, opening one of the pots. “This was cooked a week ago,” he said, taking out a fried fish.

He ate it.

“That’s Taleen steel,” Neiphato said, holding up a plate. There were other utensils lying around, all made from the dull green metal.

It was possible Kyrian had found it all but Ilea had another idea. “He’s a metal mage,” she said, looking around. She found a map with their location marked, all of it precisely carved into a stone wall. *Steel needles*, she thought and quickly copied the thing into her notebook.

Feyrair joined her, still eating as he summoned a booklet too. He stepped a little closer to the sketch, likely because he had a good view of Ilea's creation.

She didn't mind.

"It's well seasoned," the elf said, crunches resounding as he ate the fish's head.

"He's a good cook," Ilea said with a smile. *Did he stay here? Why three beds then? Shelter for someone who could come through the gate?*

She opened the large double doors marked with Exit, a breeze of ocean wind immediately flowing through. "Fey, let's check. The rest should stay because of the potential storms."

The stairwell led to another closed gate, this one significantly heavier but just as old. The wear really showed on the other side, where the water and salt had worked on the stone entrance. Light broke in when they opened it, the suns low on the horizon. Waves crashed into stone just ahead, the ocean beyond extending in its infinite reach.

A loud crash resounded a few hundred meters to the left, Ilea turning her head to find familiar dark clouds hanging to the side of a high reaching mountain side, purple lightning crashing into the stone below, leaving a mark as chunks fell, some splashing into the ocean.

They were at the very bottom of a high reaching cliff side, Ilea unable to spot what was on top or how far it reached due to the angle. The isle was larger than the map had suggested. If the written note hadn't mentioned an isle, she would've simply thought to be on a larger land mass and near the ocean.

She looked at the map again before she searched the three visible mountains until she found the massive keep.

"It seems the storms don't reach that height," Feyrair remarked, having followed her gaze. "That's a long walk."

"And a short flight," Ilea said and walked back inside. She hadn't failed to notice the many flying creatures in the distance. Winged with two legs and what looked to be dragon like heads, blue in color. Wyverns of some kind. "We'll fly low."

Feyrair smiled. "Below the storms."

"We found the keep where he called us but the environment seems somewhat dangerous. Neiphato, you can't survive the northern storms yet, right?"

"I haven't tried lately," the elf said. "But you two go. We will wait," he added with a smile, giving her a nod.

"Make sure the gates are closed and if the mists flow inside later, retreat to the gate room. And should there be any Taleen coming for you, use the gate. Iana you have my mark too, just call for me," Ilea said.

The woman crossed her arms. "We'll manage. Now go find your friend."

Ilea looked at the three for a moment before she stepped back outside, making sure the gates were closed shut. A cloud had formed above the ocean nearby, purple light briefly illuminating a section of water.

“The storms seem to move towards the land. Nothing further out,” Feyrair remarked, spreading his wings.

Ilea did the same, turning towards the keep in the distance before she ascended.

The land was barren, any plant, tree, or even soft earth devastated by who knows how many years of arcane storms. Mostly stone and rubble remained, a few crevices had remained or perhaps formed from the abuse. Ilea spotted signs of living creatures at the base of the narrow fissures but if this place worked the same as the rest of the northern lands, whatever they were, they would have to deal with Miststalkers at night.

They took note of the high reaching mountains as they approached. The most interesting part aside from the massive stone keep proved to be the treeline that went around the mountains almost like a halos. A rather thin line where the trees could live. Anything below was plagued by arcane lightning and everything above was either too steep, simply just stone, or perhaps even too cold, snow and ice in parts reflecting the low hanging suns.

“Do you think he built that keep?” Feyrair asked.

Ilea glanced at him.

“What? Such a ridiculous question?” he asked.

“He was here for a few years, no a millennia,” she said.

“You should see what some high level stone mages can do,” Feyrair said with a smirk. “Should I hide my elvishness?”

“I don’t think that will be necessary. Possible that he attacks, I don’t know if he ever had encounters in the past. But I doubt he would hate your whole kind, especially with someone as diplomatic as yourself,” she said.

He laughed.

“What?” Ilea asked. Now she was the one who saw the way he looked at her.

He didn’t say anything though and just smiled to himself, the two approaching fast with their separate flying magic.

A few of the blue Wyvern like creatures were flying near the mountain on which the keep was located but either the two hunters flew too quickly or their size simply didn’t interest the creatures. Ilea simply didn’t entertain the idea that they couldn’t see them, especially with Feyrair’s fiery wings.

The keep itself looked to be carved into the mountain itself, jutting up and outwards with obvious extensions. The stone was darker but she found it had mostly to do with how the light broke against the more even and smooth structures. Some higher parts of the mountain showed a similar shade. It was absolutely massive, a massive grated steel gate blocked the entrance, no visible road leading up to it. In design it looked more like a military structure than anything built for aesthetics. Rough and imposing but obviously weathered. All the towers had remained however and Ilea wouldn’t have been surprised if they were perfectly functional inside.

There was no visible courtyard but a rather spacious terrace where they landed, a few doors leading into nearby towers and one larger gate that led into the main structure.

Ilea used Sentinel Huntress once more and now she picked up residual magic. She wasn't sure if it was from Kyrian as there were a few different kinds. Some parts of the terrace were covered in ice, the altitude already far past the treeline.

She went to the gate and displaced the two of them inside.

"No light," she murmured. It wasn't an issue for her of course but she assumed her former teammate would at least light some candles.

"Can you hear that?" Feyrair asked.

She stopped moving. "Yeah. Farther down. Let's see what it is," she said and blinked down, the elf following right after.

It turned out there was a courtyard, just near fully walled off on all sides. Light came in from a small visible part of the large grated gate. On the other side there was a tunnel entrance leading into the mountain. The gates there were only partially closed.

"Over there," Feyrair said, the two walking over to a closed door.

"Chained. Don't attack," she said, seeing through the stone walls with her sphere. The door was made of steel and seemed to be locked. Nothing a use of displacement couldn't breach.

[Vrayar – lvl 268]

"Now this is interesting," Feyrair said. "He breeds his own food. Smart man."

Ilea looked at the creatures. Feathered birds, brown or gray in color, each the size of an eagle. They took note a moment later, a few of them turning their heads, gray beaks opening as they screeched at the unknown intruders. Ilea cocked her head to the side a little, locking eyes with one of them, near fully white eyes staring back, a thin slit like black pupil looked back.

She felt a ripple of magic as the spell manifested. A subtle and terrifying feeling spreading over her. She grinned, knowing the familiar sensation. "I don't think they're food," she said, seeing the chains around their ankles. There were bones lying around and one of them looked rather frail.

"Why keep animals like this? Especially when they use soul magic of all things," Feyrair asked, looking around the room.

The creatures had all turned towards them now, their shrieks growing more frantic.

"We're scaring them. Let's leave," Ilea said and blinked back outside. *Soul magic birds. Why don't I have that?*

Feyrair appeared next to her and looked around. "What now? Should we wait here?"

"He keeps them as pets," she said, answering his earlier question before she walked towards the tunnel leading into the mountain. "And I found a trail."

"Not entirely useless your tracking spell, I see," he said.

"Hey, it's the same one I use for my marks. One of my most important abilities," Ilea said.

Feyrair glanced at the back of his hand. "This little thing? I suppose it makes sense," he murmured.

Whoever had built the keep had dug rather deep, rooms, halls, even an armory visible to her sphere as they walked through the dark tunnels. The magic she felt became more noticeable as they

continued, leading them through many pathways until they came into a long tunnel, a closed gate at the end of it. Faint light broke in through the thin slit between the two stone doors.

“He went out this way,” Ilea said as they walked closer, about to use her blink when she saw the gates open.

Light flooded in from outside, a trail along the side of the mountain leading away from the exit. Steel chains had pushed against the gates, massive bloodied mace like chunks of steel floating in the air in front of an armored man.

Kyrian looked larger than she remembered, his armor obviously full plate but less covered in spikes than the last time she had seen him. There were a few hooks and spikes jutting out but they seemed to serve a purpose other than aesthetics or intimidation. A few were dripping with blood, a piece of flesh still hanging from one of them. His eyes were entirely hidden, the man casually dragging four more chains behind him, taking with him a dead Wyvern surrounded by chains and pierced by savage spiked chunks of metal much like the two floating in front of him.

Ilea felt the familiar curse, more powerful than ever before, a tinge of blight welling up within her. She rushed the man with a hug, a dull noise resounding when her ash covered body crashed against his steel clad form, the impact not moving him a single inch. “I found you,” she whispered.