

Chapter 672 Sphering Voidening

Ilea invested her stats into Vitality, to get a little bit more of an edge against anything that waited for her down in the dark cavern below. She checked the locator for a moment and found that it pointed in the same direction. *Because of course it would. What if the Fragment wants the same thing I want?*

She tried not to overthink it. As it stood, she expected to fight the lich either way. It either believed itself invincible against her or was simply too focused on whatever it wanted from the death of the void creature. A creature it couldn't slay on its own, a level one thousand sapient lich fragment. In the end it had blackmailed her, threatening to kill her allies if she didn't do its bidding. A bidding that seemed to be a win win situation but Ilea would make sure its actions had consequences. Something the creature must've forgotten in its undead life dwelling in its northern dungeon.

"Will you go then?" the fragment asked in a strained voice.

"You've waited how? I might die if I rush it and you can wait another thousand years for the next suitable candidate," she murmured absentmindedly, spreading her wings and layering her mantle as she gathered heat within her chest. *Maybe I can even ally myself with whatever is down there,* she thought with a smirk and jumped.

Her wings made her float down slowly, her dominion spreading out again below as she left the influence of the icy walls in the City of Glass dungeon above. The environment turned to stone, more jagged and natural than what the liches had surely created or altered. Her enhanced eyes let her see even in the complete darkness of the cave.

Ilea noted the lack of space in the area, seven small crevices leading deeper into the stone with dozens more spreading out like the roots of a tree. She saw occasional spheres of stone missing in the area, easily explained by the void magic mention.

So far she couldn't find a creature waiting for her, so she instead used her locator to find where the key would be. It was the only reason they had come here after all, and now that her companions seemed to be safe up above the dungeon, she could do pretty much whatever she wanted. Ilea planned to fight the monster either way, now or whenever she was ready. If only to fuck with whatever the lich was planning to do.

She listened for anything in the vicinity, checking with Eternal Huntress to see if she could find trails of a powerful being. She did.

Well, very informative, she thought, her skill letting her know that there had been a creature beyond her level somewhere within these caverns. She smiled to herself, wondering if that part of the skill would ever truly be useful. Pretty much everywhere she went had monsters that outmatched her in pure magical prowess. *Me seeking out dangerous places doesn't help,* she thought, climbing deeper while mostly using her teleportation. She didn't exactly want to brute force her way through with her ash. Everything seemed somewhat unstable. Nor did the skeletons of various creatures currently stuck between chunks of stone instill a lot of confidence in the structural integrity of this den.

Gods I would've slapped myself back on Earth if I ever even considered going cave diving. Without a lamp, rope, a radio, a team to get me out if something happens, or enough space to move through stuff.

Ilea just hoped half of it wasn't full of water but so far that didn't seem to be the case, the temperature even so far down into the earth still incredibly cold. Her dominion skill made any considerations for claustrophobia entirely irrelevant. Coupled with her teleportation and sheer physical might, there was simply no rational reason to be scared of confined spaces. And Ilea never had that fear to begin with, one of the common ones she understood on a logical level.

Same as deep waters, she thought, shuddering as the eye of the Leviathan flashed within her mind. *Aftershock mind attack I suppose*, she thought, trying to discern where the water creature was located in the surrounding space. She hit her head when she found a single eye staring back at her. Not the Leviathan's but that of a mostly humanoid creature hanging on a wall deeper in the cavern.

It had a single head with a single eye, its body thin and elongated, its rib cage open to reveal a gaping maw that followed most of its torso's length. Four thin and bony three jointed limbs with long clawed fingers kept it on the side of the wall as it looked her way, waiting.

Ilea couldn't shake the instant familiarity, the being reminding her of the Soul Rippers from Tremor in a more than uncanny way. The way its spine pushed up through the skin, barely ten kilos of meat on the two meter long creature, and most of it was arms and legs. *Can it see through the stone*, she thought, the creature still a few dozen meters away from her.

"Hello," she sent, in an effort to find a diplomatic solution.

The creature didn't react, remaining where it was without making the slightest move.

Not a communicative fellow then, she thought, checking her locator to find the key deeper still. She teleported once more and found the pupil of the being following her, its body remaining in the same position.

Yeah, that's very soul rippery. Did you get summoned here by the Ascended too? she wondered. Next she used monster hunter without any changes to it, trying to see if there were more of them or other creatures. But again, the thing remained motionless.

Don't mind me then, Ilea thought and teleported past, going for the key. As soon as she had passed the height of the creature, it moved, its arms quickly pushing it through the crevices with practiced and instant motions.

Ilea couldn't help but feel a little creeped out, watching the thing approach through her dominion at a far faster pace than seemed both logical and possible in these cramped and dark crevices. When it reached a ten meter distance, its eye started glowing within her dominion.

She could detect several auras, one expanding past her and currently eating away at her mantle at a concerning pace, another one closer to the being and seemingly only reaching about the ten meter radius around it. She knew it would do something to her teleports but compared to Audur's preventive aura, this one seemed a purely defensive one. The being stopped when Ilea didn't move, remaining about seven meters and just as many nooks and crannies away from her.

Hmm, void huh? she thought, watching her mantle in a constant battle of destruction and reformation. *Pretty impressive stuff too.*

Ilea teleported up a few times to see if the creature just defended its lair, but she found that it followed now, its destructive aura similar to her own dominion coupled with reverse reconstruction. *Well, we can see who has better recovery, mr void*, she thought and sent destructive mana towards it in turn.

The creature didn't react at first, not even flinching at the reverse healing capable of destroying Taleen Guardians damn near instantly.

Ilea could feel the fabric around her changing, corrupted in a sense as she watched the wisps float away, pushed instead of guided. She was about to teleport when she saw the spherical field of magic around the core of whatever spell the being was casting. Something would happen if she passed through with a skill, but she didn't yet know what. Deciding to avoid the ability in a more direct sense, she simply crossed her arms in front of her, added a few ashen spikes and slammed into the stone.

Barely a moment had passed since she first sensed the creature's spell, her armored body crashing through several sets of stone walls, everything behind her collapsing before it all vanished. The larger magical sphere had manifested in the fabric, closing in on the core and taking all matter with it. A loud noise resounded as the nearby air filled in the void, some of the stone pulled away too.

Ilea had managed to avoid the area mostly, her left wing healing from the much stronger effects of the concentrated spell. Her Eternal sight hadn't activated, likely due to her third tier Void Magic Resistance. She wouldn't vanish like the stone and air. *I wonder where that matter goes, it can't just vanish entirely. Maybe just made into mana? Or sent to some general pocked dimension? Maybe there's a space in the fabric always available but just empty?*

It hardly mattered, Ilea now teleporting next to the creature to finally get a read on it with her identification skills. *Thought as much*, she mused, appearing a few meters away from the being just where its aura ended. *Can't teleport into matter after all, or what is perceived as matter.*

Another sphere formed where she stood, Ilea risking the activation now that she saw what had happened before. She teleported out, her spell interrupted where she passed the field, all the void magic flashing towards the breach instead of the previous center. She didn't wait for it to reach her, instead using her second teleport to try again. The field was gone and neither was she interrupted once more but it meant she had to use both her spells on one of the spheres to escape.

Where she appeared, another sphere formed. Her first skill would likely be ready once the sphere closed but she simply pushed forward, not quite able to break through the walls as well as on her first attempt, the void magic ripping everything around her into nothingness, a part of her mantle dissolving and her flesh and bone below shaken by the flash of dense magic. She coughed up blood, half her body destroyed by the spell and healing quickly. She didn't lose any limbs or organs but everything felt wrong, her third tier healing working hard to recover everything.

Before she could do anything else, the next sphere appeared, this time coupled with three more.

Ilea didn't hesitate, her mantle flowing into an ashen drill before she pushed onward, her healing recovering her armor as she punched through the dense underground breaking walls and stone, barely slowing down within the caverns as spheres of void magic caught the falling debris and sent it into nothingness. *Might as well have that thing remove its whole lair*, she thought with a grin, back at full health as she circled around.

The creature still rushed after her, ignoring the falling chunks of stone hitting its body as its eye flashed time and time again.

Ilea started adding sharp turns to her repertoire, noticing the creature placing spells ahead of her to catch her off guard. A few of its many spheres hit, leaving her defenses vulnerable and her body injured but the main issue was part of her drill dissolving. Her body twitched when she had slowed down due to a partially missing boring tool, four spheres hitting her near instantly before she

teleported out with both skills, appearing closer to the creature and in the tunnel of spheres it had created by now.

She spat out a chunk of bloody flesh, healing her wounds as she got her first glance at the creature running towards her at the ceiling of its own void tunnel.

[Void Lord – lvl ?????]

Ilea estimated it to be at around one thousand one hundred, just a bit higher than the Lich fragment that sent her down here. She wasn't surprised that it hadn't been able to fight that creature on its own.

It rushed towards her with its arms in impossible angles, sending itself flying with continuous pulls, its skin the same purpleish color as the Soul Rippers, another indicator that they might have been from the same realm. Its head had small thorns coming out of it in what seemed like completely random patterns, the main feature its one eye that stared at Ilea no matter where she was. Of course that one was purple too.

An instinctual hunter, Ilea thought, flying through the tunnel and away from the being as she reformed her drill and mantle, breaking into stone when its spheres appeared in front of her. *I'll make this whole mountain collapse if I have to*, she thought and summoned her beam cannon, aiming at the creature via her sphere before she sent a near fully charged Embered Heart towards it.

The spell burned through the stone walls as if they were paper, reaching the creature before the energy seemingly vanished, appearing on its back and flashing outwards in an uncontrolled manner, the redirected beam cutting into the ceiling and walls where tons of rock started to tumble and fall.

She had to avoid another set of spheres on her continuous flight, the echoing sounds of stone falling drowning out any other noise as dust and debris filled many of the crevices. Ilea turned away from a near solid formation, the lack of air pockets between too much for her to keep up the same drilling speed.

Some kind of field around it that redirects any magic? she thought and started spreading out ash behind her, most of it would dissolve from the continuous void magic but she hoped some of it would remain. Ilea thought it too dangerous to approach the creature in its preferred terrain, not knowing what other tricks it had up its void sleeves. Luckily it didn't seem particularly intelligent, happily helping her hollow out the mountain with its inexhaustible spells.

What's even the point of these creatures? Can't exactly eat what you void away, she mused, caught again in an area too dense to quickly get through. This time she used a charged Archon Strike in an external wave to shatter a large section of stone, her drill reforming as she entered the space and pushed forward.

Most of the debris was gone in the next moment, vanished by the Void Lord rushing after her on all fours.

Quite a terrifying sight, she thought as she watched its movements in her dominion, trying to analyze the space around it with her awareness whilst she continued to send destructive mana into its body, if any of it actually arrived. She didn't use her full power, requiring her healing to keep herself alive. *But not quite a Leviathan, are we?* she thought with a grin. *Just another powerful monster left behind in no man's land. And I'll gladly rid the world of you.*

She sent a cloud of burning ash at the flying creature, finding it stop before a sphere made most of it disappear. *Oh? We don't like that, do we?* she thought, checking her resources before she started

teleporting away and back to the entrance of the deep caverns. The creature tried to follow but lost her due to its lack of teleportation and the thin crevices in the way.

Ilea burst out into the city of glass dungeon, finding an expectant Lich fragment waiting for her. She didn't say anything and landed, healing herself as she recovered her mana. *Wouldn't want to get caught like that after I actually defeated that monster*, she thought, looking at the Lich. "I'm working on it. It's strong but pretty stupid too."

'ding' 'Sentinel Reconstruction [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 7'

'ding' 'Transfer [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 4'

'ding' 'Sentinel Core [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 7'

'ding' 'Ashen Wings [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 5'

'ding' 'Drill reaches lvl 4'

...

'ding' 'Drill reaches lvl 8'

'ding' 'Oxygen Repository reaches 2nd lvl 9'

She hadn't even noticed the lack of air down there, the fact simply not presenting a more pressing issue than the falling tons of rock coupled with the Void Lord hunting for her.

'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 10'

'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 11'

Ilea would only get better at dealing with it and for once, she wouldn't actually care much if it managed to hunt her beyond its lair. "Can I lure it up here?" she asked directly.

"It won't come. I've tried before," the fragment answered. "The environment presents a challenge on its own, I'm sure you've noticed. Based on the noise, I'm sure you don't concern yourself much with the integrity of this place."

"The more shit that falls onto that thing, the better," she said. "Why again do you want it dead?"

The lich ground its teeth. "It has something that belongs to me."

"Didn't look like it was running around with a purse," she said.

"Deeper in its lair, it has collected what it deems treasures, or so I think," he said.

"I could just get it and bring it here," Ilea said.

"I fear it would follow. No. That creature needs to be gone," the Lich said.

Well we agree on that one, she thought and summoned some food. It didn't provide any mana but after battles like this one, she always got hungry, no matter the state of her magically enhanced body.

Her mantle cleaned away all the dust and debris on her before she started eating.

“What are you waiting for?” the Lich asked.

“Strategic planning,” she lied. “I need time to think,” she lied again. There were a few things she had to figure out, and the least she had to do was stall enough for her soul to heal. Every little bit would help and somehow she enjoyed the growing annoyance emanated from the being in front of her. It felt like her boss giving her an annoying task on her last day, not that her boss in fast food had been such a dick, but she could imagine this Lich as some kind of difficult middle manager in the local dungeon company. *You have no power here, old man*, she thought with a grin.