

[Metal Mage – lvl 412]

Ilea looked at the man as he dispatched the few Centurions in the small dungeon with simple punches.

“Can’t believe you killed three Mature ones already,” Kyrian said. “Your Classes are stupid.”

“You’re free to pick up a healing Class too,” Ilea said.

“I have one that helps me regenerate. I’m still not crazy enough to face one of them,” the man said.

Ilea walked past him, putting the key into the slot before she looked at the destinations. “Then maybe get crazier,” she said in a deadpan tone before selecting the Iznakor dungeon.

The spell manifested before they appeared on the Krahen Isles. *I wonder if we were detected already. How many more times can we use this key?* she thought, looking at the wonderful tool before she stored it again.

“I’m content with the level of my madness,” Kyrian said.

Kyrian followed Ilea out and to one of the smaller isles. His eyes opened wide when he saw the absolute carnage left in the valley. He glanced at his friend before he took another look.

“You...,” he started, failing to find more words.

“Three weeks, Kyrian,” Ilea said.

“Three weeks indeed,” he repeated. Kyrian had never seen that much blood. And he seriously doubted he ever would again. Most of the corpses were devastated, half eaten or ripped apart by arcane lightning. The ground itself had turned a dark shade of red, limbs, bones, and chunks of flesh littering nearly the whole valley.

The dragon like elf flew towards them, hissing when he arrived. A pleasant hiss, Kyrian surmised. “Welcome back, to the Valley of death.”

“Wasn’t it valley of blood?” Ilea asked.

“Valley of carnage might be more fitting,” Kyrian said.

“It’s a feast,” Feyrair said, looking at the corpses with a pleasant smile on his face.

You eat that?

“Neiphato?” Ilea asked.

“Waiting,” Feyrair said. “Are we finally allowed to fight something else? Queen Ilea, ruler of the Krahen Isles?”

“You haven’t even killed a level nine hundred Bluetail,” Ilea said.

The elf hissed instantly. “Don’t.”

Kyrian really couldn’t tell if the elf was joking or if the fact that he couldn’t kill a monster more than double his level truly hurt his pride. Perhaps it was both?

“I’ll get him,” Ilea said and vanished, leaving the two alone.

Kyrian remained silent for a moment, finding the elf staring at him. “She... eh... really did that, hmm?”

Feyrair turned to look at the valley of misery. “Wonderful, isn’t it. I knew I had to travel with her.”

Not sure if inspiring Elves is a good thing or not, Kyrian thought as he grunted in approval.

“Here we are,” Ilea said, appearing with the other elf in tow.

Kyrian liked him more.

“So, where to?” the woman asked, a broad smile on her face.

He glanced at the massacre once more before he looked at her. *The same person did that.*

“There was a large keep. Full of traps. It was built within range of the storms, leaving a lot of the entrance destroyed but I always wanted to know what was inside. Then there are the caverns within the volcanic isle. Not sure if that is safe for all of us,” Kyrian said, looking at the Elves. He elicited two individual hisses, slightly different in meaning. “There are a few more dungeons and one keep that is underwater.”

“Not the underwater one. Do you think there are monsters in the trapped keep?” Ilea asked.

“Probably,” Kyrian said. “There were always golems and gargoyles, though their level was usually nowhere near the stronger Bluetails.”

“Doesn’t matter, if they provide a challenge,” Ilea said. “Let’s check it out.”

She was done fighting the damn birds. Bored out of her mind. Not because they lacked power. What they lacked was creativity and intelligence. She followed Kyrian, the group flying towards the distant isle while she reminisced about her fight with Queen Zaiked. If only she could face her one more time.

“There it is,” Kyrian said, pointing to the cliff side of the isle.

The group advanced with Kyrian at the front. The entrance to the large structure had been carved into the stone itself, a few outcropping stones suggested a landing area or dock had once been part

of the area, long destroyed by the many arcane storms moving through. It was a wonder the entrance itself was still visible, some of it collapsed.

“How do you know it’s a keep?” Ilea asked.

Kyrian gestured for her to enter through the still sizable entrance.

‘ding’ ‘You have entered the Krahen Keep dungeon’

Ah

The inside opened up after the initial debris, a large hall made of stone, all built in the same style as the keep Kyrian had stayed in.

Here too there was old furniture, colorless tapestries and empty frames, where paintings had once decorated the walls.

“You talked about traps,” Ilea said.

“Not here,” Kyrian answered, pointing at the open double doors leading into a corridor.

No frames down there, Ilea thought, not even seeing hooks for torches or anything of the like. “And the traps were dangerous to you?”

“I haven’t tried in a while,” Kyrian admitted. “But yes. Getting crushed by several tons of stone isn’t good for my health, and I doubt that has changed much.”

Ilea smiled and walked into the corridor. “Stay back until it’s safe. You too Fey.”

The elf hissed. Of course he did.

Kyrian watched as dozens of enchantments lit up at once, hundreds of spears coming out of the walls, most of them bent and destroyed already. Those that weren’t, were stopped by Ilea’s ash armor, the metal giving way.

“And you were scared of this?” Feyrair asked.

He didn’t say anything, deciding to let the traps do the talking.

Ilea’s ash fanned out, ripping the traps out of the walls before she walked on. Another set activated, the healer looking up before the ceiling descended with enough force to push aside the air.

Kyrian expected her to teleport out of the way but she just remained where she stood.

Her knees bent as she struggled against the weight. Finally, the block of stone went back up, Ilea glancing back with near glowing eyes.

Ah but there’s more, Kyrian thought, watching as the stone came back down, knocking her prone before it tried to squeeze her under its weight.

“Why does she not teleport out?” Kyrian finally asked.

“And let the boulder defeat her? You have much to learn,” Feyrair said.

A dull cracking sound came from the trap, increasing in frequency until fissures formed on the side of the stone. Ilea had started hitting the block from below, the stone unable to resist her continued abuse as bits and pieces were flung to the side. Four ashen limbs moved through the cracks and pushed outwards, ripping everything apart with a smooth motion.

Feyrair clapped as Kyrian watched in disbelief. Not because he couldn't believe her strength. He had just expected some more, subtlety? Now that he thought about it, he wasn't sure why he had expected anything different.

Ilea continued through the corridor, breaking every trap, most of them on the physical side. She assumed Kyrian could get through here without much trouble, the man simply having a different idea of risk management.

It took about twenty minutes to get to the other side, a few last poison darts failing to penetrate her armor before they fell to the stone floor. “It's clear!” she shouted and displaced one of the darts into her hand.

She looked closely before she slammed the dart into the palm of her hand. A familiar feeling came from the location. One she hadn't expected down here. The smile faded as she flung the dart aside, the blood manipulation in her palm quickly subsiding due to her resistance.

But this place looks nothing like I've seen from the Ascended. Maybe they just have a similar poison here? She stored the darts in her necklace.

“Stay focused, we might have intruded in an Ascended facility,” Ilea said when the group arrived.

“How do you know?” Kyrian asked.

“Blood Manipulation agent in the poison darts, it felt *very* similar to what I encountered before,” she said.

“It pierced your armor?” Kyrian asked.

She glanced at him. “No, of course not. I injected it.”

“Ah, I see,” he deadpanned, considering for a moment to say something else before he decided to remain silent.

“Just keep your distance, there might be more traps,” she said and walked on, down a long flight of stairs and over a tiny stone bridge above a natural cavern, water flowing into the place from somewhere.

The facility opened up again on the other side, various stone hallways leading away, two broad flights of winded stairs leading into a hall. Two humanoid creations stood at the center, Ilea looking at them as she leaned onto the parapet.

[Krahen Golem – lvl 521] - [Active / Stone]

[Krahen Golem – lvl 530] - [Active / Steel]

Thick layers of metal fused together to form sturdy and broad armor. They were nearly three meters tall, wielding no weapons. Neither had fingers, one having stone stumps, the other ones made of steel.

“Should we go around?” Kyrian asked.

“Why? You fought them before? Their level isn’t particularly high,” Ilea said.

“Might take a while, they’re very durable,” he answered.

Feyrair jumped down, turning into his dragon form as he filled out a third of the hall. He roared as the golems started moving, their forms slowly walking towards him.

Ilea watched as his flames enshrouded them.

The golems didn’t stop moving, magic forming as steel spikes shot out of the metal one, stone pikes punching out of the ground around the other. Neither managed to breach Feyrair’s scales but they seemed just as uninhibited by his flames.

“Impressive... a Bluetail at the same level would’ve already been incinerated,” she said.

“Told you they’re durable,” Kyrian said.

“Let’s see if mana intrusion works better,” Ilea said and joined the fray.

A few punches already showed a reaction, the creations not heavily protected against her type of damage. They flailed around trying to hit her, using area spells in between.

Ilea didn’t even avoid anything, steel glancing off her armor and stone breaking against it.

‘ding’ ‘Your group has defeated [Krahen Golem – lvl 521]’

‘ding’ ‘Your group has defeated [Krahen Golem – lvl 530]’

“I hope there’s something a little more dangerous down here,” Ilea said.

“Don’t summon demons,” Kyrian said. “But honestly... I agree, this was underwhelming.”

“Letting us do the dirty work,” Ilea said, looking at him.

“Didn’t expect you to complain about that,” he answered, jumping down to join them.

“I’m just kidding,” Ilea said, kicking open the large double doors at the other side of the hall. “They really like their stairwells.”

“There is powerful magic ahead,” Neiphato said, looking into the depths.

“Agreed. Barrier? Or blood..,” Kyrian said.

Ilea didn’t feel anything quite yet. “Let’s find out what it is.”

The deep corridor was faintly lit by a shimmering light a few dozen meters ahead. It spanned the entire width of the area, another hall visible on the other side.

“The walls are enchanted,” Neiphato said as they approached the light.

Ilea felt the power from the barrier. Impressive, but nothing she couldn’t deal with. “Should I take it down?” she asked.

Feyrair stepped forward, kneeling before he brushed away some dirt. “These are Taleen runes.”

“Anything useful?” Ilea asked.

“*Stay away. Danger sealed within. Stay away,*” the elf read and stood up again.

“Danger sounds good,” Ilea said.

“Danger sounds dangerous,” Kyrian suggested.

“Exactly,” Feyrair added with a joyous hiss.

“You lads flee if you get seriously injured, don’t want to collect your corpses afterwards,” Ilea said as her ash spread onto the glowing barrier. Her reverse healing and white flames flowed into the magic a moment later, slowly disintegrating the construct.

She heard noises the moment the barrier opened up. Whispers, coming from the hall ahead.

“Kill them. Fight them. Don’t let them through,” a male voice said, repeating the same thing a few seconds later.

Ilea walked past the threshold, a rotten stench hitting her. “Several things died down here,” she murmured, seeing pieces of dull green rusted metal. Guardians. The whispers had stopped.

She reached the railings looking down into the hall, rotten chunks of furniture littered the ground amidst dozens of destroyed and dented Guardians. A few small craters suggested Centurions had been here too. Dried up bones were visible amidst the carnage. And the source of the whispers.

A single human, bloodshot eyes staring at Ilea as he opened his mouth, revealing long fangs. His chest was bare, showing various scars and seams where someone had likely operated on him.

“Kill them. Fight them. Don’t let them through,” he said in the same tone and then he vanished.

Ilea moved back, seeing the attack come at her. Her hand moved out to deflect the punch when she felt something peculiar. Mana intrusion. A pulse had just flashed into her. Something she felt was very familiar.

[Frenzied Battle Healer – lvl ???]

Battle Healer, Ilea thought, trading blows with the man who matched her in both speed, strength, and technique. He didn’t just match her style somewhat. He used the same.

She was pushed back when he landed a direct blow against her chest, a surge of destructive mana flowing into her.

The man rushed forward when a large flail slammed into his bare chest, piercing his skin before both crashed into the nearby wall.

Azarinth, Ilea thought, looking at the level six hundred being. She knew the moment he looked at her that there was nothing human left within him, that he had been taken by the dungeon at one point or the other. His skills however, remained.

“Keep him pinned!” Ilea shouted, blinking close when the man pushed the steel away and vanished.

She saw him appear next to Kyrian, the metal mage dodging the first punch before Ilea displaced herself next to the healer, the hole in his chest already gone.

The Elves joined in too, fire and wood rushing at the man who dodged and blinked between the attacks within the tight corridor, occasionally trying to get close to the mages.

Ilea had more teleportation uses but the man simply matched her technique, unable to shake her off but adding a downright feral quality to his punches. They traded blows, vanishing and appearing between flying flails, roots, and spells as their fists clashed, mana exchanged in destructive doses. He managed to grab her leg and twirled her around, only for Ilea to displace herself behind him, using his momentum to grapple him.

“His head!” she shouted.

One of Kyrian’s flails came down with a wet thud, everything above the man’s ribs squashed entirely, blood and bits slapping against the floor.

“Keep it there,” Ilea said, the flail having scratched past her armor. She kept pushing destructive mana into the healer, knowing he would regenerate the moment the flail was removed. “Fey, burn us. Kyrian, curse.”

She waited, letting the flames brush past her armor as the three slowly overwhelmed the healer’s recovery. It took several minutes, the body twitching as it was burnt and cursed, healing the damage as it was dealt.

A noise finally resounded, signaling the end of the peculiar fight.

‘ding’ ‘Your group has defeated [Frenzied Battle Healer – lvl 621]’

‘ding’ ‘The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 497 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Kin of Ash has reached lvl 490 – Five stat points awarded – One Core skill point awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 451 – One stat point awarded’

Ilea was surprised the group kill had rewarded a level to all of her Classes. Perhaps she had just been close.

“That was... familiar,” Kyrian said, looking her way.

“He used Destruction,” Ilea answered. “This guy had an Azarinth Class.”

“That’s the one you have?” Feyrair asked. “No wonder he didn’t care about anything hitting him.”

“No you don’t get it, I haven’t met anyone with this magic. They’re supposed to be long gone,” Ilea said.

Kyrian retracted his flail, looking at the corpse. “This one was long gone too. He just happened to still be moving.”

Ilea considered for a moment that something like that could happen to her too. But she quickly dismissed the thought. Someone had done this to the healer. *Someone the Taleen were fighting? Or did he use some kind of Azarinth Berserker Class?*

“More coming,” Neiphato said.

She moved her gaze away from the corpse, walking towards the steps. *Three people.*

One appeared next to her, a battle axe coming at her with a horizontal swipe.

Ilea displaced herself past and punched the warrior’s chest plate in, her second punch breaking his neck before her ash pierced through both his armor and body.

[Frenzied Axe Warrior – lvl 538]

She used his body to block the incoming sphere of fire, the explosion rocking the walls around them.

Kyrian rushed past, a fiery wave engulfing him before loud impacts resounded where he landed.

The last of the three looked to be a rogue, daggers flashing as he cut through the expanding roots of the wood magic elf. A beam of fire burned into the man’s head, leaving him tumbling before a set of roots skewered him, more of them punching through his thin armor a moment later.

Ilea kept funneling destructive mana into the axe warrior, his weapon uselessly crashing against her armor until her ash ripped away his arm. He stopped moving shortly after.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Frenzied Axe Warrior – lvl 538]’

The dust settled as she walked back to the railing, leaving the corpse behind.

Kyrian stood amidst thousands of floating needles, his flails gone as the remains of a robed mage fell to the ground, the entirety of his blood seeping out onto the floor. The metal mage looked up at the two large gates when they heard a muffled wail.