

Chapter 489 Arcane Energy

Ilea didn't give the machine time to recover its shields, unsure if it even retained that capability.

She focused on its damaged legs first, ripping through them with her ash. Without its main defense present, she found it quite simple to cut through the steel.

The mace was easy to avoid. Displacement countered whatever teleportation aura the being had, doubling down on the speed advantage she had.

Ilea didn't use her mana intrusion abilities, cutting off one leg after the other until she moved on to the arms.

She wondered if somehow she could keep the remaining molten chunk of Praetorian intact, preventing the explosion entirely.

When the second arm was separated and the mace came crashing down, the being looked at her with a palpable fury.

She grabbed its head, floating with her wings to even reach it. Their eyes met as sixteen ashen limbs cut into its neck, time and time again until its eye darkened, the half molten metal piece vanishing into her necklace.

Ilea focused on the body, hoping for a moment that that was it.

A pulse of mana dashed her hopes, Ilea instead blinking close and charging Absolute Destruction. The second pulse came.

She waited until the last moment, creating ash and fueling her spells as she sacrificed a few thousand points of health.

Magic and energy flowed into it when her punch landed, her fist digging twenty centimeters into the steel with an explosion of power.

Ilea jumped back and cursed when she felt the heat rise once more.

Still not enough, she thought and prepared her defenses again.

The energy reached her and she remained standing, as she had before.

All that remained of her two adversaries was bubbling steel and rock.

She summoned the severed head and looked at it before she closed her eyes. "May you rest in peace, if you had a soul at all," she said and placed the piece back into her necklace.

Ilea had already learned that revenge felt hollow, unable to bring back the dead. This time however it felt different. She liberated the corpses that had remained here, had retaken the dungeon that proved too much for the Dawntree expedition. And she destroyed the monsters that had nearly caused her death.

It hadn't been a perfect execution. She failed to gather a new body for her dagger friend. *Hopefully next time*, she thought, wondering if her third Class would eventually bring the difference she needed to take these machines down before their self destruct activated.

Only time would tell.

She cracked her neck and checked her messages, her mana quickly recovering as she floated in the destroyed throne room, the scorching heat from the two explosions lingering.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Taleen Praetorian – lvl 605]

'ding' 'You have defeated [Taleen Praetorian – lvl 603]

'ding' 'The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 352 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'Kin of Ash has reached lvl 352 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 68 – One stat point awarded'

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 69 – One stat point awarded'

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 70 – One stat point awarded'

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 71 – One stat point awarded'

...

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 86 – One stat point awarded'

'ding' 'You have found and destroyed those you had feared – One Core skill point awarded'

Ilea was quite happy with the levels, now sitting at ninety three unspent stat points.

It was enough to get her Wisdom to one thousand.

'ding' 'You have reached one thousand Wisdom – One Core skill point awarded'

I don't feel like these are worthy achievements compared to the others. Oh well, I'll take it, she thought with a smile.

Fifteen stat points went into Intelligence, bringing it up to eight hundred. Four went into Vitality and fifteen into Endurance. The last point she kept. More would come soon enough.

Status:

Vitality: 820

Endurance: 420

Strength: 515

Dexterity: 425

Intelligence: 800

Wisdom: 1000

Health: 8200/8200

Stamina: 4092/4200

Mana: 11328/20000

She checked her skill messages with a satisfied expression, breathing out as she lowered herself into the half molten Taleen throne.

No teleportation key or other treasure had shown up after the destruction of the Praetorians.

'ding' 'Absolute Destruction reaches 3rd lvl 25'

'ding' 'Blink reaches 3rd lvl 28'

'ding' 'Azarinth Perception reaches 3rd lvl 24'

'ding' 'Heart of Cinder reaches 3rd lvl 21'

'ding' 'Storm of Cinders reaches 3rd lvl 19'

'ding' 'Ashen Wings reaches 3rd lvl 25'

'ding' 'Keeper of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 28'

'ding' 'Force reaches lvl 14'

'ding' 'Flare of Creation reaches lvl 16'

...

'ding' 'Flare of Creation reaches lvl 20'

'ding' 'Flare of Creation reaches 2nd lvl 1'

Active - Flare of Creation – 2nd lvl 1

Let the fires erupt, burning away your health in the exchange for devastating power. Attacks with your body are infused with the Flame of Creation, dealing lingering damage to health, mana, and magical constructs. You are immune to stunning, fear, and shout abilities. Your resilience is increased by 35.5% [284%]

2nd stage: The pale flame settles within your core. Flare of Creation now affects enemy health regeneration. This effect is higher for areas directly touched by the Flame of Creation.

Category: Aura – Body Enhancement

Ilea activated the spell and moved her ashen limbs in front of herself. *Interesting. Maybe I should test against the Specters... does it affect shields too? Hmm, it explicitly says enemy health.*

Probably not.

'ding' 'Flare of Creation reaches 2nd lvl 2'

'ding' 'Flare of Creation reaches 2nd lvl 3'

'ding' 'Displacement reaches lvl 15'

...

'ding' 'Displacement reaches lvl 20'

'ding' 'Displacement reaches 2nd lvl 1'

Active – Displacement – 2nd lvl 1

Shift space to your will, making an object or person appear somewhere else.

2nd stage: Your familiarity with teleportation and Space Magic allow you to move one additional

object for each level in the 2nd tier. Magical constructs are now affected by Displacement.
Space Magic

“Oh!?” she called out and stood up, creating a few ashen spears before she used displacement on them.

The spears appeared where she willed them to.

She clapped and twirled in the air before settling down again.

“Awesome!”

Which means I can teleport spells coming towards me... or maybe slow them down if I aim for an area behind them. Coupled with Force it could be quite strong, even against something higher leveled than me.

With one more object for each level, I could even teleport a whole group with this. Or a group of spells, I suppose.

The use right now would still be limited against enemies of higher levels, the spell barely doing anything against the Praetorians. It would get stronger with time, as would her third Class. Or at least she hoped.

Either way, moving spells was a very welcome change.

She created a small ball of ash, this time without a tiny tendril connected to it, and moved it back into her hand.

Coupled with her manipulation, her ash was now just as maneuverable as her own body. She created an ashen clone of herself and displaced it successfully.

This could be worth a thought... with my ashen armor, this thing looks nearly the same as I do.
Hmm.

‘ding’ ‘Space Shift reaches lvl 10’

...

‘ding’ ‘Space Shift reaches lvl 16’

‘ding’ ‘Body of the Valkyrie reaches lvl 6’

‘ding’ ‘Body of the Valkyrie reaches lvl 7’

‘ding’ ‘Space Awareness reaches lvl 5’

I should probably get all these into the second tier before leveling much further. Just in case there’s an evolution, though I doubt it with getting the Class at three fifty.

The Space Shift levels were quite welcome too, enhancing her Displacement distance to a little more than twenty five meters.

‘ding’ ‘Veteran reaches 3rd lvl 5’

‘ding’ ‘Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 17’

Ilea quickly checked if there was an upgrade option for Blast Resistance by now.

- Blast Resistance

Taleen Praetorians are made to destroy their enemy. If they reach critical health, their remaining energy is channeled into a complicated set of enchantments, creating a magical explosion that could rival four mark creatures. You have proven to be quite adequately prepared to face such power. Twice in a row even.

Yes!

'ding' 'Blast Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 1'

Blast Resistance – 3rd lvl 1

Explosions can be an unpredictable and chaotic thing. You have survived quite an impressive one to get this skill. It will help you negate the damage ever so slightly for the next time you chose to stand in one.

2nd stage: Despite common sense, you just keep on doing it. Either you should start reading safety manuals or embrace that you are a true explosion elemental. Your organs, bones, muscles and your skin become partially shock absorbent. Please stop.

3rd stage: It's difficult to even find a source of power strong enough to warrant such a resistance. Congratulations? We worry about you. Your bones and muscles have adapted to the stress you have put them under, weaving an even more intricate fabric of your ever increasing defensive capability.

Ilea immediately felt the change happening. A weird feeling, though not entirely unpleasant. The added weight was noticeable to her enhanced perception, grown from magic and added to her very self.

She moved around a little, finding it hardly impacting her speed and flexibility. If anything, she needed to get used to it for a little while.

I should stay away from scales.

It would be funny to join a heavy weight tournament with my relative size.

She smiled at the thought, happy about the slight upgrade.

'ding' 'Divination Magic Resistance reaches lvl 6'

Cless!

She rolled her eyes, wondering if Claire had gotten worried.

Yes, yes. I'm nearly done here.

She wondered for a moment if somebody else was watching her but ultimately dismissed the thought. Even if there was, what would she do?

Ilea checked the rest of the hall and moved on to the areas she had already explored.

No enemies remained in most of the connecting parts of the Great Hall. She did find a few Guardians within the armory, surprisingly quite busy, compared to the previous patrols.

What are they doing? she wondered, blinking behind a pillar to see more through her sphere.

Her eyes opened wide.

What?

Precisely cut steel had been formed into several large forces, reminding her of the designs she had seen in the Centurion factory back north.

Are they building more Guardians?

There simply wasn't enough machinery here. Either that or much fewer components than she thought were necessary for their creation.

She confronted the machines, using her third Class skills to finish them in the span of a few minutes.

'ding' 'Force reaches lvl 15'

I should meditate on my Space Awareness. Maybe inside my Armaments.

Ilea pushed aside the destroyed machines and inspected the forges. Reaching a hand inside brought out what she had seen within her sphere.

A half molten sword. Of Taleen making.

Raw materials. They're melting whatever they find here? I did wonder where all those destroyed machines went... there were hundreds.

Her eyes opened wide before she quickly destroyed everything, ripping through the steel and stone with her limbs and Heart of Cinder.

She vanished a moment later and teleported a few times, appearing in the hall where Edwin, Felicia, and Aliana had left.

A single Centurion had remained, likely the last Guardian of this dungeon.

The last enemy she would defeat.

I could try for a Centurion body for Aki, she thought, her attention shifting to the small white stone pedestal behind the gate, within it a Taleen Gate Key.

Ilea turned back to the charging Centurion, wrapping it in ash before she pushed destructive mana into it. Absolute Destruction charged for a few seconds before she tapped the machine, unleashing a large amount of mana and killing it instantly.

She waited for a moment, receiving the kill notification as she watched the core.

Simply storing it would be an option but she didn't want that thing to blow up the Sentinel headquarters.

When thirty seconds had passed, she deemed it safe enough and stored the machine. She hoped its insides weren't fried enough to make it unusable.

"Now what do we have here," she whispered and walked towards the pedestal.

Another key could help Iana and Christopher.

Ilea reached the thing and squinted her eyes. She turned her head to the platform with interest.

The wisps here seemed a little different. More aligned than everywhere else in the hall. It felt more... dense. *Focused*, she decided on the more accurate word.

"It's active..." she said out loud. The fact was quite obvious with the mana she could see exuding from the thing. The part that made her pause was the fact that this gate led somewhere.

Somewhere where the molten bricks of Taleen steel had been delivered. She hadn't seen any of them here after all. Somewhere where more machines might have been coming from.

But why did the Praetorians remain in the throne room? In this dungeon even? Did they place the gate key? Who else could have done it?

Ilea looked at the platform and took a step towards it.

"I really shouldn't," she said, stepping to its center.

She felt a pull immediately. The device was trying to do its job but failed to grasp her. Ilea could see the wisps of space converge on her but she remained within the circle. More mana flowed out of the device until she disabled her Space Magic Resistance.

The spell immediately took effect, the world around her shifting before she appeared within another teleportation circle.

'ding' 'You have discovered the Izacan dungeon'

'ding' 'Successfully infiltrated the Izacan dungeon – One Core skill point awarded'

Ilea blinked up and to a darker part of the area, her Space Magic Resistance back on as she surveilled her new surroundings.

Holy shit, she thought as her enhanced eyes took in the hundreds of machines partially placed into the cavern. Steam covered the entire ceiling a few hundred meters above, gloomy green light partially shining through the veil.

The ground wasn't lit, nor was it particularly intricate. A mostly natural cavern, with only a few roads dug into it, not quite as well angled as she had been used to from the Taleen.

The dull noise she heard from the machinery all around marked it as an active dungeon. Another production facility. Eyes of Ash coupled with her light magic resistance bonus allowed her to view near the entire facility, and the army of Guardians, Centurions, and Praetorians steadily moving up and through a distant tunnel entrance.

She spotted variants she had not encountered yet, one of them hanging on to the side of the cavern walls, its green eyes finding her own ones as it moved up its great bow.

Ilea watched in disbelief as the Praetorian, clad in steel as dark as the night, pulled on a string as thick as her arm. Something manifested but her sight was muddled.

She blinked as far as she could, finding the creature immediately turn its head towards her, the bow following with a fluid and near instant movement.

Gotta be kidding me, that thing is like two hundred meters away!

It loosed.

Ilea watched as an arrow of blue energy manifested a few dozen meters away from the creature, the projectile striking through the air with a speed rivaling her enhanced flight.

Her brain was barely able to follow, only her precognition allowing her to displace herself away from the arrow.

Ilea's eyes opened wide when the arcane energy changed its direction in an unnatural angle, striking her defenses as she failed to displace or stop it otherwise.

Her hastily prepared wall of ash barely managed to stop the spell, parts of it breaking through in a bright blue explosion, entirely silent.

She felt the mana density increase around her, especially where the arcane energy weaved into her ash.

A rush of mana flowed into her, absorbed by her Sentinel Core, the spell burning through half of her armor before its power was depleted.

That fucker followed me!

She looked at the being, its bowstring already pulled back again, its eyes still focused on her.

I can take it, let's see how you fare once I'm closer!

Ilea rushed at the being, forming ash in front of her to soften the inevitable blow. She wondered if a blink directly behind the projectile would help avoid the damage.

She blinked to the right when an arrow came from the direction, suddenly appearing within her sphere.

Another one, she thought and found the culprit standing a few hundred meters away.

The next arrow hit her, the creature not giving her even a split second to breathe.

Her ash was broken through without issue, her armor pierced before the energy pushed into her.

Ilea blinked away and reformed her armor and ashen walls. *What!*

A sizable chunk of skin and muscle had been ripped out by the energy, reforming near instantly as her healing activated.

Another arrow came, stopped by her ashen walls. The following one broke through once more.

It's lowering the defensive strength? Or the structure itself?

She couldn't tell. It simply happened too fast.

What she knew was that there were now at least three of these machines aiming at her, judging by the frequency of attack.

She found a spot and blinked, displacing herself for the rest of the distance.

A few high reaching stone outcrops provided some cover as she assessed her situation.

This is worse than Iz, what are those things, she thought as the first arrow dug into the rock, fizzling out without taking much more than a basketball sized part out of it.

She peaked out to see the machines moving in the darkness, adjusting their angles. One of them she found was aiming up and above her.

When it loosed, a streak of blue arrows appeared shortly after, flying through the air in what she perceived as slow motion.

Two fast moving arrows flashed past her as she ducked back behind the outcrops, one slashing through the ash near her cheek, drawing blood as its energy erupted.

Ilea reformed her whole armor and watched as the arrows approached, forming a cocoon of ash as she tried to displace the projectiles, Force not having a noticeable impact.

She managed to slightly pull the arrows apart, barely noticeable but perhaps detrimental in the following cascade of arcane explosions.

Ilea didn't move, her defenses mostly holding as the rock around her turned into shrapnel. She healed the damage she sustained and found a new being within her sphere, quickly approaching.

There was no time to think, she had to get out of there.

[Executioner Praetorian – lvl ???]

The machine looked similar to the normal variant, instead of arms only wielding two blade like extensions that slightly curved inwards. The main difference in design was the entirely silver body, reflecting the blue energy of the arrows and explosions around it.

Ilea saw her reflection on its quick moving body, running through the air as if it was solid ground.

She blinked, barely avoiding a slash that passed with a familiar feel to it.

Void, she thought as she appeared as far away as she could. *It moved on mana appearing from thin air. Is that Space Magic? Or maybe air?*

More arrows hit her as soon as she appeared, forcing her to displace and blink in quick succession, some of the arrows passing her by or hitting the ground, only able to change directions once or twice.

Ilea had enough of the annoying creatures when an arrow nearly scalped her.

She turned and blinked into the cycle she had used to come here. Her resistance was turned off, the spell quickly taking her back into its embrace.

Eight arrows smashed into her body from various sides, five of them piercing through.

She appeared back in the Iztacalum as her wounds closed, swaths of blood dripping to the ground as she ripped out the gate key with an ashen limb, the rest crashing into the platform below her as her fist smashed into the stone, a ripple of energy dissipating a moment later.

Her ash and fists crashed down and a second later the whole area had simply been removed from the hall, only a small crater remaining.

They didn't aim for the gate. They aimed for me, she thought, moving the gate key towards herself before she stored it inside her necklace.

[Taleen Gate Key – Ancient]

Way to put a damper on my previous victory, she thought before chuckling to herself.

“Nine vs one. No other way to stop me, eh?” she said to nobody in particular before Heart of Cinder flashed outwards, adding another meter to the crater she stood in.