

## Chapter 796 Missions

Ilea rushed into the next hall, teleporting monsters towards her before her claws shred through them. A beam of heat disintegrated a dozen creatures. She vanished. A crushing wave of space magic flattened another group. She grinned and moved on to the next, a whirl of claws and spreading fires, the creatures cut apart and wracked through by intruding arcane magic.

She coughed up blood, ignoring the waves of sound hitting her large form. Ilea raised her arm, squinting her eyes before she let go, spikes of burning bone rushing out in a strange sensation. They struck the monsters but remain within her control. The curse told her to push and pull, to let chaos reign. She did just that, watching as the bone magic infected and took over the beings, their resistance unable to stop the combined efforts of herself and her divine artifact.

Bones broke and expanded, the monsters shred apart by their own skeletons as spikes of bone grew out from their own bodies. A few of them outright exploded. Chunks of bone flying through the hall while expanding spikes slammed into the stone walls, keeping the remains in place.

*Delightful*, she thought, feeling the wish to control the dead bodies. *No*, she answered. Ilea had no wish to become some fucked up necromancer with bone monsters. Well, maybe she did, but not these insect creatures. Instead she moved on to the next group, obliterating them with her claws in inhuman strength alone.

*Eight hundred. What a joke. I want something stronger to test this on.*

Golden shields appeared to block waves of sound, Ilea watching as her friend shred apart the last few groups of monsters.

She could feel the power wane, the red gem set in the hammer glowing far less bright than mere moments earlier. Ilea could feel the pain intensifying and focused, gritting her teeth as her bones were broken yet again, the claws receding and the wings breaking off. She heard them impact the ground just when her hearing returned, healed from the constant barrage of powerful sound magic. The silver treads receded until only a single one remained around her ash covered arm, her entire form returning to her normal height. She looked at the hammer and smiled. *“That was fucking awesome.”*

The red gem flickered with light one last time before it dimmed.

Kyrian cleared out the last group and appeared nearby. *“You’re back. What the fuck was that?”*

Ilea glanced at him and smiled. *“Hmm. Guess I just went with the flow. I like this thing,”* she said, twirling the silver hammer.

*“You should’ve seen yourself,”* he said.

*“Oh, I did,”* Ilea answered. *“Pretty terrifying. The bone change felt weird, I tell you.”*

He shook his head ever so slightly. *“How could it even affect you, I thought you could resist the magic.”*

*“I can. It asked. I let it,”* Ilea said. *“Turned off my resistances to help as well.”*

*“Doesn’t sound like the best idea,”* Kyrian said.

“Well, it’s good that I didn’t turn into some rage monster then. You would’ve not made it out,” she said and winked.

“That depends entirely on how well it could’ve used your magic, if at all,” he said.

“Fair,” Ilea said, checking her messages.

**‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Craw Listener – lvl 903]’**

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**‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Craw Listener – lvl 852]’**

**‘ding’ ‘The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 623 – Five stat points awarded’**

**‘ding’ ‘The Ashen Titan has reached lvl 620 – Five stat points awarded – One Core skill point awarded’**

**‘ding’ ‘The Primordial Arbiter has reached lvl 613 – One stat point awarded’**

**‘ding’ ‘Reality Warp reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 9’**

**‘ding’ ‘Curse Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 16’**

**‘ding’ ‘Sound Magic Resistance reaches lvl 19’**

**‘ding’ ‘Sound Magic Resistance reaches lvl 20’**

**‘ding’ ‘Sound Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1’**

**Sound Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 1**

*Intricate and difficult to master, used by both mages and monsters. You have withstood and survived sound attacks, making you more resistant to its effects.*

*2nd stage: Any defensive magic you conjure is adapted to be more efficient at resisting sound waves.*

**‘ding’ ‘Sound Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 2’**

...

**‘ding’ ‘Sound Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 6’**

**‘ding’ ‘You have survived the use of a divine artifact – One Core skill point awarded’**

*No skill or anything for the hammer stuff. At least a core point I suppose. So before that I wasn’t even using it? How far can it go anyway? It did need to charge up before. Hmm.*

Ilea looked at the hammer before she made it vanish.

“Seems we’ve cleared it out,” Kyrian said.

“Maybe,” she said and looked at her status. *Ten core points.* All of her skills were already enhanced. *I could add a class modifier for ten points.*

She looked at the option for a little while before closing her status again, deciding to pile up more points for now. One option was still locked after all.

“Let’s check the place quickly,” she said before they flew through the facility. It turned out to be one meant to produce Guardians, though Ilea couldn’t figure out what version. She assumed Executioners due to the high priority Aki had given to this place. A large portion of the production machines were damaged or entirely destroyed however, perhaps due to the sounds or light they had given off, a target for the monsters that had chosen this dungeon as a dwelling.

They found a small cavern adjacent to the dungeon, Ilea using her fires to clear out the eggs in the monster nest. *And not a single Queen in sight*, she thought with a bored sigh. *Well at least I got to transform into a bone monster. One upside to this dive.*

“You seem angry,” Kyrian said.

“Angry? No. Frustrated maybe. I want to fight something more dangerous than these sound insects,” she said.

He laughed. “Sure. Yeah. You don’t have to do this either, just saying.”

“And let you find the hidden four marks? I don’t think so,” Ilea said as they flew back to the taleen gate. “Let’s hope the next one is a little more challenging,” she added and cracked her neck.

“For once, I agree,” the metal colossus spoke, curse magic flowing over his armor as the gate activated.

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Willa chucked another rock at the tree in the distance. This time it struck true. She smiled, using her ash to carve out another chunk from the ruined building. The top floor was gone entirely, the second one at least partially there. A warm wind brushed against her cheeks as she moved her arm back and threw again. This time she missed. *Fuck*. She summoned an ashen copy and had it shoot the tree with its bow instead.

“I’m boooooooooooooooooooooored!” she shouted, lying down on her back.

A cloud obscured one of the suns, the other one blinding her.

She rolled to the side. *I need that second tier Light Magic Resistance*. She tapped the stone floor and sighed, sitting up again. The village was empty. The people had either fled or been killed, as with many settlements in the former lands of Baralia. Strange monster attacks, from this direction. They had found tracks, sure, but nothing had shown up.

Willa had thought that with the teleportation gates, they could fight monsters all the time. To be fair they did fight monsters far more frequently, but right now they didn’t. And that was annoying.

*Not like we’re even close to as strong as a normal Guardian. Shit. Shit. S h i t.* She had her copy shoot another arrow, herself rolling over the floor.

Ember appeared on the first floor, yawning as she stretched. She scratched her cheek and looked at Willa. “You’re restless again.”

“And you guys sleep too much,” Willa answered.

“S... sorry,” Ember said, looking at the floor.

*By the gods*, Willa thought and rolled her eyes. She teleported to the woman and pinched her cheeks. “Stop. Apologizing. It’s. Annoying.”

“I’m s... s...” the Sentinel stammered out.

Willa rolled her eyes and let go, looking at a support beam that still remained. She squinted her eyes and ran, jumping up before she tried to land on the top. She hit the wood at an awkward angle, falling before she rolled to catch herself. *Hmm*. She ran again and jumped.

On the fifth try, she managed it, giggling as she balanced at the top of the beam.

“Stop fucking around,” Phoebe said from the village square.

“What? I can’t hear you!” Willa shouted with a giggle.

“We didn’t find any tracks,” Phoebe said.

Willa jumped down before she teleported. “Yes, I told you. The monster isn’t here.”

“You’re too close,” Phoebe said and pushed her away just a little.

Willa smiled and raised her brows. *She’s blushing. How. Very. Interesting. And here I thought she only liked Mila. Guess she hasn’t made a move yet. Frustrated?*

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Phoebe asked.

She grinned. “No reason. At all.”

“Anyway. Should we go back to Ravenhall? We could train some resistances,” Phoebe said.

“Or we could explore a little more? Not here, it’s boring. Maybe there’s something interesting in Yinnahall,” Willa said.

“We’re supposed to have some time off,” Ember said. “Resistance training isn’t that.”

“I agree, so let’s see if there’s anything to do. Maybe some people need healers,” Willa said. “This village sucks.”

Phoebe shrugged. “You lead then, adventurer.”

Willa showed her tongue but signed with her hand at the same time. Agreement in this case.

They quickly moved to the closest town, not having found any trace of the monster that had attacked in the vicinity. If it showed up again, they might find more. Or a more specialized team was required to find it.

The town of Merina in the eastern part of the former Baralia wasn’t large. It wasn’t famous for particularly defensible walls or for an interesting geography. Nor were there any goods produced here that were sought in the Plains. And still it had experienced an economic surge in the past years. Willa understood it had to do with the war, Merina simply not interesting to any of the factions involved and thus mostly left alone. Mediocrity as a boon.

*Empires come and go, but small towns and villages like this one remain. For thousands of years, she thought when they arrived, looking at the shoddy wall and the boring thatched roofs. The guard*

tower was downright falling apart, though recent repairs and a second tower showed the local leadership at least invested some of their growth back into the town.

“How long do you think a place like this will survive now that the gates are available even here,” Ember said.

“Why would they move away?” Willa asked. “They’ve been here forever. A gate won’t change that.”

“It might,” Phoebe said as they entered the town through the only dirt road in the area. High reaching firs stood on either side, birds chirping somewhere to their left.

Willa looked up at the clouds, the warm summer day mostly clear.

They soon appeared near Yinnahall. The gate buildings here were simple stone, light coming in from the open entrance of the dome like structure. There was grass on the ground still, the gate simply set into the earth.

“Shouldn’t there be guards?” Ember asked, looking around in the small building.

“To a gate that leads to Merina? You can go look for someone to activate this one, if you want to go back.” Willa said, shaking her head at the ridiculous suggestion. She stepped off the gate and out into the open. *The air in there sucks.* A look to the right showed her the city of Yinnahall, one of the more flourishing former Baralia settlements. The lack of blood rituals helped, as did their involvement with Lilith, and the preparation their new leaders had made before Lys actually reached their city.

She stepped back when a trio of Guardians rushed past, the machines running with steel contraptions on their backs, each one carrying nearly twice their size in goods. Metal impacted against stone as the six legged beings moved past. Willa watched them go, towards the city gates. She grinned, seeing dozens more of the machines on the fields outside of Yinnahall.

There were over twenty stone domes in the vicinity, all likely holding a gate, and those were just the ones Willa could spot. The main hub in the former lands of Baralia. Strong ties to the Accords had made Yinnahall the obvious choice. She glanced back to see the others following her out into the open. A few earth mages were working on improving the dirt paths leading away from the main stone road.

Shouts resounded from beyond a nearby set of domes, specks of activity visible as merchants went about their business. The initial idea of the gates being placed outside of the respective cities was a consideration of security. Willa grinned, watching most people that arrived move towards the tents and stands instead of to the city. *Improvise and adapt*, she thought, knowing that other cities simply forbid trade near the teleportation gates, though she herself had avoided some of those places before, simply to get what she wanted a tiny bit faster.

Willa was pretty sure there would soon be gates inside of big cities too, the economic pressure simply too much. Especially with the Guardians present as well. She didn’t much care. Either way they saw more of the Plains than any of the old adventurers she talked to ever did before. *The world was different back then!* she mouthed the words of one drunkard she had heard complain a few days prior. *As if it’s been centuries.* Now that high level adventurers were able to travel through the

entirety of the Plains in mere seconds, many of the local jobs of backwater villages and towns were resolved within hours instead of the prior months.

Low level adventurers could simply not compete. They had to get stronger, take more dangerous jobs, or do something else entirely.

“Hey,” someone called out from between a few stone domes.

She turned to see a young man glancing around, a brown hood covering a part of his face. He wore weathered pants and no shoes.

“Miss, you’re one of em Sentinels, are ye not?” he asked.

“Do you need a healer somewhere?” Willa asked, walking a little closer as the others followed.

**[Cook – lvl 28]**

He kept looking around. “You’re one of em, are you not? The same as Lilith.”

“I suppose I am,” Willa said. “Now get to the point.”

He waved her closer.

She went, checking their surroundings to see if there was anybody hiding. His low level and Class didn’t exactly seem threatening, though his behavior made her hesitate just a little.

The man looked at their group and scratched the back of his head. “I... there’s something. Maybe you can help. You know of these lands, do you?”

“Yinnahall?” Willa asked.

“Baralia,” he answered. “It is said that Lilith removed the slavers in this city. That she fought to free the people.”

“We heard the same,” Phoebe said.

“What about you?” the man asked.

“Slavery isn’t legal here anymore,” Phoebe said.

He shook his head in a fast motion, looking to the others.

Mila stepped forward. “Kram ret erevak,” she spoke.

Willa saw his eyes light up at the words. For just a moment.

He glanced around again and stepped closer to Mila, whispering a few sentences before he stepped back and looked around again.

“Go. We will have a look. I promise,” Mila said.

Willa had rarely seen her quite as determined. *Makes sense I guess. With her background.*

Mila signed to them. Danger. Job. Quiet. “Let’s go for lunch.”

The others remained quiet, not reacting to the signs.

“Should we eat something here?” Ember asked.

“I want meatballs,” Mila said.

“Ravenhall has the best ones. The Black Bull then?” Willa asked.

Phoebe shrugged. “Sounds good.”

Willa checked a nearby map propped up by a wooden stand, finding the gate to Morhill before pointing the way.

Two teleports later and they were in Ravenhall, soon reaching the Black Bull.

Sitting down, Phoebe signed a question. *Safe?*

“I think so,” Mila said.

They all sat at the table, Mila leaning forward. “He told me there are still slaves in Nara.”

“That’s not possible. The city is under imperial control,” Phoebe said.

“Just because they supposedly control the city doesn’t mean they know everything that is going on,” Willa said.

“Then we should report this,” Phoebe said.

“Or...” Willa said and grinned. “Hear me out. We go there and find out what’s going on. Did he say anything else?”

“He told me one of the barkeepers at the adventuring guild in Nara might know more,” Mila said.

“That was all.”

“I don’t know,” Phoebe said.

“I mean you’re the leader. But we were getting bored. And this is something we could actually help with. Everyone else is busy, and I don’t think a bunch of Guardians have the people skills to figure this out. If there are really slavers there, they would immediately hide. Nobody would be stupid enough to fight Aki.”

“We could get in trouble. If the people there are strong.” Ember said.

Phoebe opened one of her pouches and set down the enchanted cube they had gotten. Every Sentinel team now had one of them. “There should be Guardians around. Aki said he would be there near instantly, if we were ever in actual danger.”

Willa sighed. “I bet that thing is slowing down our growth.” She squinted at it.

“Just for when we’re not on training missions that the faculty hands out. You know we don’t *have* to carry it,” Phoebe said. “But in this case it seems like a good idea.”

“You really want to go there?” Mila asked. She looked down at the table.

“It’s important to you, and Willa is right. We have time. And we’re Sentinels. Ilea would do the same,” Phoebe said and smiled.