

Chapter 464 Thresholds

Lightning surged from the being, yellow and bright like the suns. Thunder did not follow, the power sneaking through the sky without so much as a whisper.

Ilea was ripped out of her amazed stupor when the lightning crashed into the stone, ripping through with little resistance as she blinked away.

Not far enough, she thought as the shockwave sent her flying, residue lightning slowly flowing through her body as the damage was healed.

A wave of mana washed over her as she floated with her ashen wings, locking eyes with the being.

Le ave

Its voice rumbled through the vicinity like a spell of sound and air, broken by Ilea's resistances and her mental fortitude.

Ilea's own aura marked her as a human of not quite the ordinary sort, her second tier Veteran skill keeping her moving, despite the level difference. And yet the creature seemed unimpressed. Still, it gave her a chance to flee, asking her to leave them in peace. Or perhaps it was asking her to die.

"Not until you make me," she said with a smile, ashen spears forming around her, looking pitifully small against the thing they were supposed to injure.

Battle, she sent and charged the being.

It floated, without reaction, moving its wings before its mana manifested.

Lightning and air surged out, homing in on Ilea as she twirled and moved through the air with all the speed, precognition and maneuverability she could muster. The spells were dodged and still she was seared by lightning, its sheer proximity enough to burn through her armor.

Slowly, the magic spread through her, leaving heavy damage that was instantly healed, the magic cost more than replenished by the spells themselves. The waves of air did nothing but push her further, her form circling the Basilisk as she was pushed away and closed in again.

The spells that missed her slammed into Karth itself, leaving deep gashes in the stone, the magic sending debris and boulders flying that would surely result in catastrophic avalanches.

When the lightning elemental was a machine gun, this creature was the orbital artillery.

Ilea knew very well that a direct hit would be catastrophic to her but the intervals made her confident that her third tier healing could keep her alive. She wondered if this creature too was holding back, like the Griffin had.

The fact that it hadn't obliterated their caravan on their first meeting spoke for such a theory and yet there could have been other reasons entirely.

Doesn't hurt to play a little, Ilea thought as she circled the massive being. She narrowly avoided the attacks coming at her without pause, realizing shortly after that they were increasing in number. At the same time they came at her far quicker, the power in each bolt however reduced compared to before.

Clever girl, she thought and pushed forward, a wave of air pushing her back and towards the mountain side.

A blink let her avoid a swath of lightning projectiles, only to make her realized thirty more had already reached her.

The spells broke into her ash, spreading slowly as she counterhealed, using the third tier a few times as she was pushed back into the mountain.

Fuck

The spells subsided only to let through a massive beam of lightning, aiming at her exposed torso.

Ilea knew what to do, happy to see her perception slowing down to allow for an easier maneuver.

Lightning hit, the power surging through her, now even further slowed down as she focused on the energy. First to her core and out of her right arm. She couldn't aim it, barely holding it away from herself.

The arm swelled up as the lightning spread through it, exploding in a splatter of gore and bone, the energy rushing out and into the night, most of the damage mitigated.

Her arm reformed as she pushed herself out of the stone, ash covering her once more, her bone set back inside of her necklace.

The Basilisk moved its wings lazily, yellow eyes looking at her from hundreds of meters away.

Ilea looked back.

Okay, she sent and let herself fall down. *I got the memo. The Basilisk is a no no.*

She couldn't help but summon her bow, sending one last arrow at the creature as she descended down the side of the mountain.

A few bolts of lightning came as a response, moving after her like living beings before she dodged and weaved through them, using blink to avoid the last one right when she entered a sea of clouds.

Her sphere let her maneuver through without any fear of collision. She broke out below and slowed down, letting herself fall towards the dark landscape below.

The small excursion was most definitely worth it, not only because of her quick test of strength against the being.

'ding' 'Sentinel Reconstruction reaches 3rd lvl 30'

'ding' 'Blink reaches 3rd lvl 22'

'ding' 'Sentinel Sphere reaches 3rd lvl 16'

'ding' 'Sentinel Core reaches 3rd lvl 25'

'ding' 'Azarinth Perception reaches 3rd lvl 14'

'ding' 'Armor of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 30'

'ding' 'Ashen Wings reaches 3rd lvl 17'

'ding' 'Eyes of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 9'

'ding' 'Avatar of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 23'

'ding' 'Deviant of Humanity reaches lvl 3'

'ding' 'Deviant of Humanity reaches lvl 4'

'ding' 'Deviant of Humanity reaches lvl 5'

'ding' 'Heavy Archery reaches lvl 7'

'ding' 'Veteran reaches 2nd lvl 19'

'ding' 'Veteran reaches 2nd lvl 20'

She checked while falling, moving her wings from time to time to make sure she wouldn't splat against the mountain side.

- Veteran

You have faced creatures completely out of your league, since arriving here and up to this very moment. Not just that but you mostly faced them alone, even managed to get two four marks to fight each other. It's hard to say if you're a veteran or just a plain lunatic. Either way, you may unlock the third tier of Veteran.

Damn right I can!

'ding' 'Veteran reaches 3rd lvl 1'

Veteran - 3rd lvl 1

You have experienced the shouts and spells of beings completely out of your range of imagination. You will not survive but at least you won't be completely immobilized while you get eaten. Good luck warrior.

2nd stage: You are immune to the fear of facing that which you do not understand. Be wary, some might sense your arrogance in the face of power, others might fear it.

3rd stage: It seems you don't just happen upon impossible fights, you outright look for them. Your confidence and experience is obvious, not just to yourself but others too. Your second tier now extends to allies within a fifty meter radius, should you allow for such to happen.

Additionally, your ability to gauge an unknown enemy's power is vastly improved.

Most definitely worth it, she thought with a smile. The buff to allies was welcome but she was more intrigued by the second part. Might just check again. Should I?

Ilea smirked and changed directions, flying up once more and through the clouds.

The Basilisk was flying close to the mountain, not immediately taking note of her.

[Basilisk – lvl ?????]

She knew instinctively that the creature was at least a thousand levels higher than her but anything more than that was a mystery.

Thousand three hundred at least, interesting. I wonder what I can tell about the Hatchling.

Ilea decided against checking when the monster turned her way once more, instead blinking away and down back through the clouds. *It's just that I'm not interested. I could've easily sneaked past. Easily. Definitely.*

She respected the Basilisk, knowing most importantly that it had given her several chances, likely not killing her intentionally. *To think that caravan nearly got wiped out by the warning of an illusion. Let's not tell that to the relatives,* she thought on her descent.

I wonder what I'd get from the Fae with the third tier, she thought and pushed on, realizing that she had little idea of where exactly she was on the mountain. *Could check on Dawntree. Claire said they had a revolution or something going on? Ah, this was enough human conflicts for tonight. Maybe Iana and Christopher are done with their research.*

She used Dale's mark to find Riverwatch and continued on from there, once again flying low and through the forest until she reached the Azarinth temple.

A blink brought her down and to the two enchanters. "Back," she said and waved.

"Good," Iana said. "I believe this has been frustrating enough. We can leave," she added with a sigh.

"That bad hmm?" Ilea asked.

"The fountain is in some way connected to the grass that should grow on the walls. Without it we can't reproduce its effects, not that it would be easily possible with the grass present," Iana explained.

"Both enchantments are quite interesting however, they should help with our research," Christopher said.

"Yes, but we can't just copy them. Why would they use such overly complicated layouts? And this azarinth type of arcane magic is just frustrating," Iana said.

"I could demonstrate it," Ilea said with a smile.

The woman held up a hand and rubbed her temple. "No thanks, I've seen it enough already. Your class changed up your body to an extent where the study of your mana won't provide anything. Either the enchanters of this order were extraordinarily stupid or brilliant."

"Often goes hand in hand," Christopher said.

Ilea laughed, the enchantress didn't.

"Come on, it's funny," Ilea said.

"Do you have anything else that you wanted to show us?" Iana asked, clearly tired.

"Show? Hmm, well more someone you two could meet," she said. "You can sleep there too but I plan to leave again a few hours before dawn."

"That doesn't leave much time," Christopher said.

"Exactly, so let's move. His name is Weavy and he's a master of mind magic as well as a... user of demonic runes. Some other people there could also be of interest to you two," Ilea explained.

"Where is there?" Iana asked, the three of them back out in the open.

Ilea formed cocoons of ash around them, leaving their heads uncovered this time. "The Vultures Brotherhood of course, an order of necromancers and dark mages."

“Great,” Iana said.

“Great!” Christopher confirmed, a broad smile on his face.

“That’s the most terrifying thing I’ve ever seen,” Iana whispered, not able to take her eyes off the creature in front of her.

“Good! Not all of you humans are lost,” Weavy said into their minds. “Mistress Ilea... you have, changed once more,” he said, looking at her with an apprehensive air about him.

“Don’t worry, demon. I still don’t eat your kind,” she said.

“No... you merely slaughter us,” he whispered, not afraid but inspired.

“From time to time,” she said and walked past the being. “Be so kind and teach them something about demonic runes... and the Ascended stuff.”

“The secrets of my kind... so easily pried from my claws,” he said and looked at his hands with the two abyss like holes within his skull.

“She has that effect on people. Christopher, nice to meet you. A mind weaver? Fascinating. I’m sadly just a boring human,” the enchanter said and laughed.

Weavy laughed as well but he had some work to do on that front, the sound more demonic gargle than anything else.

“Hey Eyn,” Ilea said, waving to the boy.

He bowed. “Mistress,” he said with respect, joining his teacher after she had passed.

“Ah, it’s you. With visitors, again,” Walter said as he stepped out of his inn.

“I flew here. Shouldn’t have left a trace, don’t worry,” Ilea said.

“Your expedition to the north went well then?” he asked and walked back inside.

Everybody else seemed to be out.

“So and so. Maro didn’t come back yet?” Ilea asked. She was sure the necromancer would join them.

“He came in, chose a room and left again. Said something about needing some sea air for a while. Ah, Ilea. The red haired elf really wants to meet you again, said something about his evolution. He is... eager,” Walter said and poured two mugs of ale.

“They’ll have to wait. I’ll have Elfie meet them soon enough but I should avoid the north for a little while at least,” she said.

“Want to tell me about it?” the man asked.

“Sure, the others are busy for a little while. Hey, you’re a dark mage, right? Can you attack me while we talk?”

“Still working on those resistances, hmm?” he asked.

“Yep. Plus third tier general skills by now. Each level is helpful,” she said.

“You don’t cease to surprise. Do tell. Maro only mentioned some annoying orange goo. He seemed a little down,” Walter said.

“Do you think he’ll be alright?” Ilea asked.

He patted her back and sat down. “I think so. Don’t worry too much about him. He was a king, wasn’t he? I’m sure he has been through worse. Now tell me. It’s been dreadfully negative lately, with the war and all.”

“You found them. And they’re still alive... four mark. That is dangerous, really dangerous,” he said and shook his head. “To think we fought a war against them thousands of years ago. And nobody remembers.”

“I’m sure some do,” Ilea said. “Not like most humans would care about a war fought so long ago. Speaking of four mark, I found the Basilisk again.”

“You did? The one from that caravan you traveled with years ago?” he asked.

“Mhm... turns out they have some kind of mirage or illusion ability. Its real form completely destroyed me. Might even have managed to seriously injure me if it wasn’t for my third tier lightning resistance.”

The man shot a dark projectile at her arm and smiled. “Good thing you had that then. You know... if I wouldn’t meet elves from time to time, I’d forget how ridiculous things are out there.”

“Walter... you live with a mind weaver and a literal skeleton. How does that surprise you?” Ilea said, downing her ale.

“Those things are normal. Fighting Basilisks, ancient corruption, Griffins and Sand Elementals... those are stories of legend. Do you mind if I write some of it down? I’d change the name of course.”

Ilea stood up and smiled. “Just call me Lilith. Plenty of people already do,” she said. “I have a training course to catch. Hope you don’t mind us leaving again.”

“You are always welcome,” Walter said, opening his eyes wide. “Wait, Lilith... from the songs?”

“That one,” she said and winked, leaving the inn in search of her companions.

“That makes a lot of sense actually,” Walter grumbled to himself.

She found them puzzling over a few runes scratched into a wall.

Eyn, Iana and Christopher were staring at it, blood dripping from their noses as Weavy watched them intently.

“A capable bunch,” he said to her when she entered.

“Of course they are,” Ilea said. “Guys, we’re leaving again. Or should I get you in a few days?”

Iana shook her head and turned. “No... no I believe it is best for us to get back to work. I will lose my mind if I continue this study. The world is a dangerous place,” she said with a sigh.

“Vast and full of possibilities,” Christopher said with a grin. “Don’t worry, we’ll figure it out in time,” he added and patted her back in a supportive manner.

“It came so easy to me... and here these ancient ruins trip me time and time again... the Azarinth, Demons, Ascended... what can a mere human do?” Iana asked, seeming lost.

Weavy just pointed a clawed finger at Ilea. “She is human too.”

“Barely,” Iana said and looked up. “But I suppose you’re right. We will figure it out. Just need more time... Ilea, we will have to reach level two hundred soon. To extend our lives.”

“You want to extend your life just to study runes?” Ilea said.

“Of course. What other reason is there?” Iana asked.

“Let’s not get into this discussion right now,” Ilea said. “Come on, let’s go before the suns rise.”

“I didn’t sleep,” Iana said.

“I’ll accelerate quickly again, you’ll be out for the duration of the flight,” Ilea said and patted her shoulder. “A higher level might help with that too.”

“True... Christopher, we will join a few combat lessons. Killing monsters will become a part of our routine. Our bodies are not prepared for the power of these runes.”

Did I just create a monster?

“I see. I’ll follow your lead,” Christopher said.

Two monsters.

Eyn chuckled. “They finally understand. Lady Ilea has saved my master and set him free. Now it is our turn.”

“Look what you did,” Weavy whispered to her in an accusing tone.

“Hey, take some credit, mind demon, I’m not the monster here,” Ilea said.

“Ah, but you are. Look at me, how could anyone think I’m a monster?”

Ilea did and could very much see the resemblance. She did however not comment on it, unsure if he was developing sarcasm. Either way it seemed he was mocking her.

“Demon,” she whispered, monster hunter rushing through the room as she froze everyone.

She proceeded to pick up her companions and waved at the others. “Have a good time. Eyn, don’t forget that you’re human. Go and play with some peers sometime. And don’t kill or eat them.”

She was already out in the forest when the two enchanters could move again, her wings carrying her through the tunnels in seconds. “Ready?”

“Yes,” Iana said and relaxed in her ashen cocoon, closing her eyes as she yawned.

Christopher nodded.

“Good, then off we go,” Ilea said and sped through the forest, emerging a few minutes later as she charged her wings. *Good night.*

The shock of near instant acceleration to whatever speed her wings could manage knocked the two out.

‘ding’ ‘Dark Magic Resistance reaches lvl 19’

That was a nice change of pace. Back to the boring old training then, she thought, wondering how long it would take for Baralia to strike back. She hoped to get in a few days of training at the very least.