

Kyrian kept his eyes peeled. The distance was too far for any specifics but he would be able to spot a human.

The sphere still burned but it seemed to slow down finally, the air where they stood already cooling down.

“Do you see her?” Feyrair asked, the elf walking in circles, his own eyes not quite able to see the distant happenings.

The burns on his body had healed already, mostly thanks to Kyrian’s interference when the dragon had charged forward in an attempt to help. He might’ve been more resistant to heat but Kyrian doubted even that. What he didn’t doubt was that his regeneration was worse than Ilea’s.

“Not since she appeared above the lake,” Kyrian answered. *And there wasn’t much of her there.*

Feyrair checked the mark on his hand, murmuring something to himself in another language as he once again walked closer.

“She’s survived worse,” he said, not because he knew but because he wanted to calm down the elf. Ilea wouldn’t be happy if the dragonling died trying to save her. He grinned to himself. *Well, I’m pretty sure she Did survive worse. Fire and heat is kind of her thing, just as much as it’s that Wÿrm’s.*

“Why didn’t she teleport out?” Feyrair asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe she felt like she could take it,” Kyrian said. “You heard her. She’s killed four marks before.”

He hissed, likely because he knew he wouldn’t have survived this.

Kyrian thought about saying something to encourage the elf but he had no idea what the dragonling wanted to hear, so he kept quiet. He didn’t know what it felt like to have one’s pride hurt after all. He was just hoping Ilea would survive.

Neiphato had retreated further back when the spell had started to form, the heat pushing his healing too far. Wood didn’t quite fit as well against this spell as ash did.

The darkness returned to their section of the cavern, the sphere vanishing into nothing, its effects finally gone. Much of the ground solidified again quickly, small mounds of lava still glowing as the Wÿrm slowly stood up.

Now, now, Ilea. Don’t keep us waiting, he thought right before he saw a blueish arcane explosion rip through the ground, the ashen healer jumping out with a smooth motion. “There she is. I told you it’s just the way she trains resistances.”

The elf glared at him for a moment before he grinned. “You’re not human either.”

Kyrian shrugged. “Deviant actually. Same as her. Don’t lump us in with those meatbags,” he said and focused back on the small ashen form.

Feyrair hissed with joy, crossing his arms.

Now get that thing, girl.

Ilea locked eyes with the Scorching Wyrms, spreading her arms before she curtsied, a grin on her face. “Nice sun, asshole.”

Her Heat Resistance had reached level twenty in the meantime, most of the latter part of the spell spent trying to find the best spot for efficient training. She was thoroughly annoyed that she had to stay under lava, unable to fully take the monster’s spell. *Next time*, she thought, cracking her freshly grown neck.

The tremors returned, much stronger now.

The Wyrms stared at her with its one eye, perhaps in some way failing to comprehend how this little creature had survived its creation. Or it tried to figure out a way to deal with the ashen being. Communicating, it did not.

Ilea spread her wings, her ash fanning out into twenty separate extensions. *Back to shredding those defenses, can only be a matter of d-*

Her thoughts were interrupted when the cavern wall exploded outwards with an ear shattering hiss, an orange scaled snake the size of a city wall bursting forth. Bone spikes jutted out between its scales, white eyes focused on the turning Wyrms.

‘ding’ ‘You have heard the hiss of a powerful being – You resist its effects’

“Looks like I’m not the only one you pissed off,” she said, watching in awe as the snake was slapped aside, its form quickly winding around the Wyrms’ body with bone spikes grinding against its thick scales.

The claw marks on the snake’s head were already healed up when it reared up, opening its mouth further and further, its teeth elongating to a ridiculous degree before it bit down on the Wyrms’ neck.

Ilea didn’t wait any longer, joining in on the fray with a quick move of her wings. She flew past a part of the snake’s body, continuing where she had left off. A quick glance to the right showed a heated beam searing a part of the snake’s side.

Hold on now, don’t get yourself grilled already, she thought, using every second the monster gave her to weaken the Wyrms’ scales.

[Horned Tunneler Serpent – lvl ???] - [Blind/Livid]

Got woken up, hmm? Three mark but at least above nine hundred.

“*Friends*,” she sent, both the word and the closest representative feeling she could manage to piece together.

Ilea had no idea if the snake understood but if it chose to fight her too, she would gladly take the additional levels.

The creature constricted around the Wyrms, its bone spikes dealing little damage to the scales, some breaking off while others just slowly ground themselves down.

The Wyrms finally managed to rip itself free of the Serpent's teeth, its searing beam burning into the three marks' mouths, the back of its head exploding in a gory mess showering the Wyrms' backs and Ilea.

She grinned, ignoring the red liquid when a fully charged Archon Strike crashed into the set of scales, the now brittle stone breaking as a wonderful set of blue veins flowed into the roaring creature. A wave of heat pushed her back before she returned with teleportation, her fists slamming into the stone as she worked her way through the thick layer.

Waves of heat now washed out as the Wyrms turned, rolling on the ground with the Serpent still locked around most of its body.

Ilea laughed when she heard another hiss, the snake twitching before it resumed its assault, her short-lived healing hopefully appreciated. Dominion coupled with teleportation easily brought her back to the weakened spot, each punch sending a thousand units of destructive healing into the being, her reconstruction both healing herself and the serpent, the reverse component slowly eating away at the Wyrms' likely insane amount of health.

With its focus on the larger and more restricting enemy, Ilea just punched away, quickly emptying her massive pool of mana into the monster. She was glad when the Wyrms started another breath attack, the flames engulfing a large part of the serpent, Ilea herself bathing in the fire while sucking up every bit of mana she could.

'ding' 'Heat Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 21'

With each level, Sentinel Core could absorb even more. She teleported into the beam attack aimed at the scorched Serpent, taking in a bit of the damage before she moved away, distracting the Wyrms from its initial target.

One healer is annoying. One healer and a regenerating super snake? That's just plain unfair, she thought while laughing, flying around the creature before she let the beam hit her again. A glance at the snake showed petrified skin falling off where the Wyrms' tails had managed to pierce the Tunnelers' scales. *Already has a way to deal with that. How useful. Maybe I should learn how to shed as well.*

When the Serpent bit into the Wyrms' neck again, Ilea vanished, the beam searing past the walls and ceiling of the cavern, leaving a burning line of glowing rock.

She resumed her punching, chunks of the thick scales now falling away as a thick trail of red boiling blood flowed out, allowing her four large ashen limbs to cut deeper. *Should've become a healer,* she thought with a grin, her armor covered in blood as she dug into the wound, waves of arcane energy now ripping through the monster's insides, chunks of flesh torn to shreds or entirely vaporized.

She barely heard the roar come from the Wyrms, feeling the weight shift as it threw itself against a nearby wall with its dash spell. The Serpent hissed, a part of its body bludgeoned but continuously regenerating, helped a little by Ilea's dominion.

Her efforts didn't slow, arcane charged punches destroying the monster's insides as she waded through its body, until she found its beating heart. *Shitty for you that I'm not the best surgeon*, she thought and charged up her middle finger. She pushed health into the spell too, adding some to her aura for just a bit more punch.

"Fuck you," she said and flicked the heart with her fully charged Archon Strike.

Arcane magic surged into the organ, rupturing it from within before it welled up and exploded.

Ilea spread her arms, her armor entirely red by now. A ding resounded within her mind, followed by several more noises as she felt the Wyrms crash to the ground, sliding to a stop a few seconds later.

She used displacement to get out of the monster's chest. Her wings flapped once, blood splattering to the ground as she landed.

The Serpent slowly unwound itself from the Wyrms, its jaw opening to show dozens of bleeding spots on the armored creature's neck.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Scorching Wyrms – lvl 1238]'

"I wasn't exactly alone though, was I?" she said, leaving the blood on her armor as she looked at the snake, its eyes white as it slithered around the massive corpse.

Ilea gave it a nod. "*Friend*," she sent again.

The Serpent hissed a long, exhausted hiss before turning its attention back to the corpse, its teeth elongating again as it started to rip on the monster's neck, biting away freely. With the Wyrms' life and magic gone, the process became a little easier.

She watched the snake wiggle around with its teeth deep inside the Wyrms' neck, the violent movements making the ground shake slightly. With a final pull, the Tunneler managed to rip away the other monster's head, throwing it to the side before it sunk its now only two meter long teeth into the bleeding wound where the Wyrms' throat used to be.

"Enjoy the meal," Ilea said, herself more interested in the discarded head. She tensed up slightly when the snake revealed its now bloodied maw again.

It slightly whipped its head towards her, a chunk of fresh Wyrms meat landing a few meters away. Expectant blind eyes stared in her direction.

Ilea laughed, shaking her head as she walked towards the chunk of meat as large as her entire body. She crouched down, the armor on her hand extending into a blade before she sheared off a piece.

"*Thanks*," she sent and ate the Wyrms meat, blood dripping down her chin as the Serpent watched. It tasted much like raw meat.

The creature hissed before it returned to its own meal, sinking its head into the neck as it ripped away scales, discarding the armor to get more meat.

Ilea spotted a Rubble Guardian in the distance, walking along the cavern walls as it looked towards the Wyrms corpse. A few Stone Specters were returning too, though likely uninterested in the remains. She transferred closer to the massive head, touching it carefully. *Hmm, the scales might be one of the toughest materials I've encountered before. Especially against fire.*

Kyrian landed nearby. "The snake dangerous?"

"Not to me. Just don't disturb its dinner," Ilea said.

“Exceptional fight. I was afraid you had died,” Kyrian said.

“Dancing on the edge, as always,” Ilea mused. “Though it’s becoming quite difficult to kill me,” she added with a smirk.

Feyrair landed too, looking around. “Not quite a dragon,” he said. “But impressive nonetheless.” He hissed, bowing lightly. “Did you get your next evolution?”

“Yes. I’ll wait until we’re somewhere a little less crowded,” she said and hissed towards the Rubble Guardian prowling a few dozen meters away, her voice enhanced by Monster Hunter.

The creature took a few steps to the side but seemed to consider still. That was until the Serpent added its own thunderous hiss, the Guardian running back to the cavern wall, watching instead from a distance.

“*Appreciate,*” she sent to the snake. *Fucking idiot attacks the one who just killed a Wurm. How dare you.*

She almost wanted to punch the creature a few times for its insolence. A mere level eight hundred monster!

Feyrair hissed, apparently agreeing.

“Go play,” Ilea said with a smile.

“I will... but first,” Feyrair said and walked to the head. “May I partake?”

“Meat? Sure. Either you or whatever monsters walk these caverns,” she said.

Kyrian watched the serpent with his arms crossed. “I always wondered who made the tunnels.”

“I like her,” Ilea said, jumping onto the massive head before she crouched near the eye. The thing looked to be around twenty centimeters in diameter. *Thought it was bigger... guess the beams and magic added to the impression.*

She tapped the orange red eye, the material reminding her of glass. *Kinda want this, as a memory if nothing else,* she thought, trying to pry the thing out with her ashen limbs.

“Seems to be wedged between the scales,” Kyrian said. “Let me help.”

The man summoned his metal, a small drill forming that dug into the head from the exposed neck, vanishing inside the meat.

Ilea looked on as the eye started to move, the whole thing sucked away a moment later. Metal floated out of the neck once more, carrying the eye before it was dropped into her open hands.

Holy... that’s heavy.

[Scorching Wurm Eye – Draconic Quality] – [Focus your flames]

She whistled. *Draconic... awesome.*

Ilea stored the item, having a vague idea what it did but not about to test before she evolved her ash Class. “Kyrian, can you carve away the scales? I’m pretty sure armor made of that stuff would be pretty insane.”

He got to work without another word, his steel separating into sharp blades sliding into the neck, separating scales from the flesh below.

The individual ones were luckily small enough to be stored in her necklace.

[Scorching Wurm Scale – Draconic Quality] – [Fire resistant]

Gotta get this to Goliath, she thought. And my necklace is nearly full.

“Got everything you need?” Kyrian asked.

Feyrair roared in the distance, trying to grapple the fast moving Rubble Guardian in his dragon form.

“Yeah, think so. I don’t know how the Serpent would react if we approached now. Don’t want to disturb it,” she said, spreading her wings. “Neiphato is waiting?”

“Near where we entered, yes,” Kyrian said when they saw a swarm of Winged Shades descend from near the ceiling, flying past the Wurm’s corpse with a hissing Serpent trying to bite at them.

“Then let’s go,” Ilea said.

“Feyrair?” the man asked.

“He just saw me fight a Wurm. The least we can do is let him kill that Guardian uninterrupted,” she whispered, flying off towards Neiphato.

Kyrian chuckled as he followed. “Making even Elves insecure about their power.”

“Oh? Am I making you uncomfortable, metal man?” Ilea asked with a smirk.

“No, I’m surprisingly confident in my own ability. No reason to compare yourself to others anyway,” he answered.

“A healthy attitude. I’d feel insecure too, knowing both Meadow and Icy,” she said, the two landing near Neiphato.

He had prepared a bed of roots, a defensive perimeter in case anything came to attack him.

“And she returns unscathed,” the elf said and hissed.

Ilea smiled. “Plenty of scathing going around. I just heal it all. Unlike some monsters.”

“A fortunate circumstance,” Neiphato said. “Was it enough?”

She looked around, sitting down on an ashen sofa she conjured up, absorbing the heat from her surroundings to finally have her meal. “Yes, let me have a look.”

‘ding’ ‘The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 501 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 502 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 503 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 504 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 505 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Kin of Ash has reached lvl 495 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Kin of Ash has reached lvl 496 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Kin of Ash has reached lvl 497 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Kin of Ash has reached lvl 498 – Five stat points awarded’

'ding' 'Kin of Ash has reached lvl 499 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'Kin of Ash has reached lvl 500 – Five stat points awarded – One Core skill point awarded'

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 458 – One stat point awarded'

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 459 – One stat point awarded'

...

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 465 – One stat point awarded'

'ding' 'Displacement reaches 3rd lvl 24'

'ding' 'Space Shift reaches 3rd lvl 20'

'ding' 'Body of the Valkyrie reaches 3rd lvl 25'

'ding' 'Body of the Valkyrie reaches 3rd lvl 26'

'ding' 'Deviant of Humanity reaches 3rd lvl 9'

'ding' 'Deviant of Humanity reaches 3rd lvl 10'

'ding' 'Gourmet reaches lvl 6'

'ding' 'Monster Hunter reaches 3rd lvl 14'

'ding' 'Veteran reaches 3rd lvl 21'

'ding' 'Heat Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 22'

'ding' 'Lava Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 2'

'ding' 'Lava Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 3'

'ding' 'You have unlocked a 3rd tier General skill point'

'ding' 'You have learned the General Skill – Petrification Resistance – lvl 1'

Petrification Resistance – lvl 1

You have encountered petrifying magic. Its effects are difficult to counter but yes, simply cutting away until there is no more stone works. Extended study and preparation could've helped but hey, you do you. It'll be even easier next time.

'ding' 'Petrification Resistance reaches lvl 2'

'ding' 'Petrification Resistance reaches lvl 3'

'ding' 'Petrification Resistance reaches lvl 4'

Ah, maybe we should check out the tails later. If the serpent doesn't eat them.

'ding' 'You have defeated a Scorching Wyrms – One Core skill point awarded'

'ding' 'You have survived the Semblance of Light spell – One Core skill point awarded'

***'ding' 'You have found common ground with the notoriously irritable Horned Tunneler Serpent
– One Core skill point awarded'***

Alright, let's see what we got.