

## Chapter 419 Meeting the Competition

Ilea glanced at the Fae and entered the cavern. The sand ended at the entrance, a little bit blowing inside, sticking out against the black rock. *Is that charcoal?* She wondered, brushing her ash over the walls and floor.

There was no light within, Ilea trusting her sphere as it expanded outwards. “Think I should make light?”

The Fae shook its head.

She felt the mana in here, the density making it nearly graspable. Definitely a spot that a powerful creature would like, if she had learned anything about mana.

“We don’t exactly want to fight it though, maybe some light would be good. As a warning,” Ilea suggested.

The Fae considered before a white flame appeared between them.

“You never used that before, we could have trained more resistances!” Ilea said in a loud whisper, disappointed in her friend.

*Negative*

“You mean it wouldn’t help me or you just don’t want or can’t use it on me?” Ilea asked.

*Heat*

“Ah, hey how did you know I capped that resistance already?” she asked.

*Deduction*, the Fae replied as if it was the most normal thing in the world.

“Deduction my ass,” she whispered to herself. “Also why not just use my staff?”

*Insult*

“Didn’t mean it that way Mr. White Flame,” Ilea said with a chuckle.

The Fae tilted its head before it shook it. It pointed to itself and shook its head before pointing into the darkness ahead.

“An insult to the thing in there?” she asked.

*Child*

*Learning*

*Proud*

“You sound decidedly sarcastic. Don’t get cocky just because you’re an ancient revered being that is entirely too cute,” she said and bumped the Fae’s head with an ashen limb.

It giggled in her mind before focusing forward again.

Ilea felt the being now, similar to the Elemental outside. She could hear it breathe, could feel the heat and magic coming from it. Still she assumed it to be several dozen meters away, invisible in the darkness and not yet in her sphere's influence.

"It's sleeping," she whispered, suddenly feeling the pressure increase ten fold.

Her buffs and resistances kept her alert, Ilea not showing a reaction to the presence, except to be wary in her mind.

A low growl resounded, entirely too close. She could feel the magic flow over her. The second tier of Veteran prevented her from freezing but this was not something in her league, not something she could entirely comprehend. Her instincts themselves had to be reigned in to keep her mind and body steady. Prey in the face of a predator.

But Ilea wasn't prey. She smiled and growled back, the sound enhanced by Monster Hunter and a good imitation of the monster's warning. She was glad the magic helped, otherwise she would have made herself quite ridiculous by now with her monster noises.

The flame between them intensified and grew, its light reaching farther as the sound of something heavy impacting the ground reverberated in the cavern.

Ilea could see a faint shape now, massive talons dug into the black ground, three times her height in length and several times as broad as herself.

*Tall fucker*, she thought and looked up, feeling magic emanating from her companion.

Another growl resounded as two fiery red reptilian eyes closed in, the shape of its head illuminated by the flame. Several horns protruded from its skull, a layer of broad dull black scales covered its head. Ilea's first thought was a dragon but as her eyes adjusted, she thought more of some kind of dinosaur.

Its head was too broad to be what she thought of as a dragon or drake, neither could she spot any nostrils. The two largest horns looked similar to her own, jutting out of the skull and angling forward, close to its head.

*Now that's material I could use for armor*, she thought.

**[Trakorov – lvl ?????]**

*Maybe not quite yet.*

The head alone was four or five times her body's size. A behemoth, truly and possibly the largest living creature Ilea had ever seen.

*That flying thing back in the arcane storm might have been close*, she remembered. As well as some of the flying Taleen machines in Iz.

"Friend?" Ilea asked the Fae who was obviously communicating with the creature. She was pretty sure her little companion was the only reason she hadn't been squashed already.

*Negative*, the response came.

*Ally*, the Fae added a moment later.

"That's all we need really," she said with a smile.

*Corruption*

The Fae looked at her and gestured to its own hand.

“You want me to show it to the Trakorov?” Ilea asked and got a slight nod in return. She summoned a vial filled with the orange goo and revealed her right arm, cutting into it with her ash before she let a couple drops fall into the wound. Her resistance was deactivated.

She held out her arm to the creature that moved a little closer, its eyes focused on the orange goo.

It growled.

Ilea could feel the magical pressure increase so decided to improvise. She started healing herself to show the spread stopping. “Healing magic can stop it from spreading but it cannot destroy it,” she said and started charging her Heart of Cinder.

The Fae pulsed with mana next to her and sent a quick thumbs up into her mind.

“A second tier Blood Manipulation Resistance can fight it,” she said and activated her skill, showing the receding corruption before she stopped again.

Several of her limbs moved in front of her, angling towards her own arm. “Fire works well against it too, burning it away,” she explained and released her spell, the heated beam of flame and energy removing the corruption without injuring her body.

She used a couple more drops of the agent. “If fire isn’t available, cutting out the corruption works as well.” she kept eye contact with the being as her ashen limbs ripped out a chunk of her flesh, dropping the bloodied piece of corrupted skin on the ground in front of her.

The Trakorov kept its eyes on her before it growled, heat and a furnace like smell hitting her as it slightly opened its mouth, sharp black teeth the size of a greathammer showing.

She watched as orange red light came from behind the huge teeth, the substance slowly flowing forward before it dripped down its chin and onto the ground.

The Fae moved back but Ilea remained, her eyes focused on the Trakorov’s as the lava flowed out and over the the corruption, burning it away in an instant before it reached her feet.

She healed her ashen armor, her maxed Heat Resistance doing its job to negate most of the damage. Still, she felt it wouldn’t take long for the lava to get through her defenses.

“The Elemental will not stop until everything in its path is dead, you included,” Ilea said, feeling the magic pulse from the Fae.

A growl was her answer.

“We have to stop it here. Now,” she said and spread her arms, wings and ashen tendrils fanning out behind her. “I will help, heal you and cut out corruption that spreads onto you.”

The creature puffed as soon as the Fae had translated, its nostrils visible for a moment below the scales, their size and form reminding her more of a carapace.

She felt the attack coming but remained where she was, seeing the lava spurt out before it covered her entirely, the ground around her sizzling as it burned into her.

Ilea moved her arms back and looked at them as her ashen armor was eaten through. *It’s not just Heat, is it?* She thought with a broad grin that was soon revealed.

**‘ding’ ‘You have learned the General skill: Lava Magic Resistance – lvl 1’**

### ***Lava Magic Resistance – lvl 1***

***An elemental form of molten rock, reserved for those few living in conditions most consider deadly. You have met and fought such a being, its magic opposed by Heat and Earth magic resistance but ultimately something different, more primordial and ancient.***

For the first time since its rescue, Ilea felt distress coming from the Fae, if only a little.

She laughed as the lava made its way through her ash, healing her skin as it started to singe her flesh.

Ilea stepped forward through the lava and stopped right in front of the creature's looming head. She started charging Absolute Destruction, deciding on around a thousand mana as well as a thousand Health sacrificed into her Awakening. Any longer would have made it quite awkward.

Chunks of molten rock still dripped from her body, a part of her skin molten but regrowing. She looked at her fist and back at the Trakorov, the heat coming from its mouth now nearly damaging her with its intensity alone.

Azarith Awakening activated and she slammed her fist into the creature's massive chin, a dull noise resounding as a tiny shock wave moved over the ground, her ashen protrusions moving back slightly. A chunk of her mana was ripped out of her as it flowed in chaotic patterns into the creature.

She felt that a large part of it had been unable to penetrate but she had also very much noticed the slight distance its head had moved as the physical energy went through her body, bones vibrating. It felt like she had hit solid steel with a normal human body.

The energy that flowed through her only leaving her unaffected thanks to all her buffs, her high resilience coupled with the second tier of Blast Resistance as well as her increased weight.

A minute had passed and she growled once more, her body healed and her armor reformed, eyes locked with the creature.

### ***'ding' 'Monster Hunter reaches lvl 14'***

The being puffed and turned its attention back to the Fae before it growled and stood up, the ground shaking in the process.

"Did you convince it?" she asked with a broad grin on her face as she flew over to the Fae.

It appeared on her shoulder as they flew up together, Ilea trying to make out where the Trakorov's head went. The thing was like fifty meters in height, nearly reaching the cavern's ceiling.

The Fae shook its head slowly as they reached the exit, teleporting out into the light, moving away from the gate quickly.

Ilea saw the Fae point at her face as it giggled in her mind.

### ***Convincing***

In the same moment, the steel gate bent outwards, as well as a thirty meter section of the stone wall. It wasn't a violent explosion but reminded more of a burrowing creature bursting out of soft earth. The material of course, wasn't soft at all.

“Holy shit, what did we unleash?” Ilea asked in an excited voice, watching the massive armored dark creature shake off debris of twice her size, its eyes scanning the surroundings before they fell on their flying form.

*Challenger*

“Yeah, fucking right. You think you can survive on my shoulder? I don’t intend to watch from afar,” Ilea said and flew towards the Trakorov.

*Distance*, the Fae confirmed but for now remained with her.

The monster really reminded her of some form of dinosaur, dragon mix. The creature lacked wings as well but with the small demonstration from before, she gauged it was more the underground type anyway.

It stepped out into the sand, four armored legs with claws that could shred through city walls with ease. Its form was massive, built for armor and weight instead of speed and flexibility. Despite all that it moved with fluid steps, neither sinking into the sand nor losing balance.

Its horns were slightly chipped and vicious, near black bone jutting out from its skull as well as numerous parts of its over a hundred meter long body.

It terrified her and she loved it.

*I bet it won’t notice if I nick a bit of its armor, Goliath would love it*, she thought and landed on its head, moving her ash around some of its horns to keep steady. Ilea didn’t consider asking or slowly approaching. This creature emanated power, it was the only language they shared.

“That way, dear Calamity,” she said and pointed, enhancing the last word with magic as she imbued it with her excitement.

The monster roared, making her hold on with all her strength.

*Deranged*, the Fae sent to her excitedly.

Ilea just grinned and held on as the Trakorov jumped, magic vibrating before it dug into the sand.

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Niivalyr lightly adjusted his mask as he floated near the facility. He had offered to make sure no more creatures breached it from outside.

Several corpses riddled with corruption lay below, having fallen to his curse and barriers. A lack of ranged attacks really made them simple targets, as well as the mindless state they had been rendered to.

*Perhaps I should have joined her, should have fought these creatures alone to gain power*, he wondered. It was done now and he would not waste more time here than necessary. Through his destruction of the Taleen will he find strength. There were plenty of powerful machines remaining and his skills should be used to cull them.

And yet something remained, something that asked him why not? *You have abandoned everything, you are cursed. Why not gain Strength against something weak, something that cannot fight your abilities?*

He reasoned that the struggle that came from fighting the machines will prepare him for when he had to face more powerful ones while cursing creatures from a safe distance did not.

Niivalyr showed his teeth, his mouth spreading in a wicked smile. If only he had the regenerative power and melee abilities of Ilea. *You do regenerate and you do not feel pain, no longer.*

He nodded and certainly saw the benefits but in the end he liked his magic, liked to play with his prey. To catch and bind them as they were slowly drained of their life, shitting themselves to death.

The human was efficient and her healing and regeneration certainly impressive but it lacked a certain sense of pride. She was too savage for his liking, too much like his own kin. He respected her for that, for diverging from the path her human brethren liked so much.

He too would diverge and shape his own path.

“Brooding again?” the necromancer asked as he flew closer, having left the facility a moment ago.

“It is a past time I very much enjoy,” Niivalyr answered.

“Makes you age faster, not the best for your mental state either,” the man said, lacking the annoying spite and provocation he usually laced his words with.

“I have lived a long life, human,” he said, unsure what the necromancer was getting at.

“Have you?” the question sounded sincere. “You know, I have probably been alive far longer than you, perhaps as long as some of your species’ oldest. And still I feel like I’ve only truly lived a handful of years.”

Niivalyr considered his words but did not respond to them. “You have found the survivors?”

“Yeah, bunch of illusion, shadow, mind and dark mages as well as warriors that are pretty much just scavengers. Useless bunch for what we’re about to do,” Maro said and laughed.

*He has returned*, Niivalyr thought. It would be nice to return to his task and yet he could not fault the man for he has taught him patience like no one else before. Even the mad healer.

“They shall help us escape as soon as we fail,” Niivalyr said.

“Hmm?” Maro asked, “You don’t believe this ridiculous plan will succeed?”

He hissed with joy and laughed, “Only time will tell. Exciting it shall be, no matter the result.”

“You’re quite different,” Maro said and smiled, “But at your core, you’re as Elvish as they come.”

*You do not know what you speak of, human king*, he thought and let the words wash past.

The man chuckled to himself and floated down, landing in the sand. “A terrifying sight, is it not?” he said in a loud voice as he summoned a Cliff Wyvern’s corpse. One of six Ilea had gifted him before she had left to train her Sand Resistance.

Niivalyr glanced down before he once again looked at the raging storm in the distance. The power of the elements themselves, controlled through raw magic. *The power of the Oracles.*

His attention once more moved down as the necromancer pushed his death magic into the creature, forcing it to stand up once more. It seemed taxing and yet a single Wyvern, even at a much lower level, would make a difference.

Maro had said that four were his limit but Ilea had dumped another one, saying he should work on his skills and one more to train his mental and pain resistance.

*A visionary, truly*, Niivalyr thought with a smirk. It was a fine line between brilliance and utter stupidity but her overwhelming power and growth spoke for themselves.

It was no surprise when the necromancer managed to raise five of the Wyverns, only leaving one.

The survivors of the expedition joined them soon after, some few likely to provide useful spells. The rest would hide and wait for the fighters to return.

Niivalyr landed close to the Wyverns and smirked, impressed that the human could really fight them. It gave him a sliver of hope. Facing an Elemental and surviving is not an achievement many could boast, not for a lack of trying.

He watched Catelyn step up and grow into her massive form, joined by a masked Dark One clad in loose yellow pants and shirt.

***[Mage – lvl 305]***

*Perhaps another useful member*, he thought. Their little group wouldn't make a difference of course if Ilea failed to get the main target involved.

He felt a surge of mana flow over him, accompanied by a distant roar that sent shivers through his body.

***'ding' 'You have heard the roar of an ancient being – You are paralyzed for ten seconds'***

***'ding' 'Veteran reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1'***

***Veteran - 2nd lvl 1***

***You have experienced the shouts and spells of beings completely out of your range of imagination. You will not prevail but you will find yourself able to move, when others are paralyzed in fear. Good luck esteemed mage.***

***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.***

He smiled and bowed to the distant creature. Whatever it was, she had succeeded.