

Chapter 370 Red Scales

Ilea's buffs flared up and she met him with her full arsenal. Ashen limbs smashed into his armor before he reached her, glancing off the hard scales. Heart of Cinder started burning in her core as she felt the heat of his white flames bite into her ash.

She dodged to the side as the elf slid to a stop and appeared before her, his claws slashing at her with a blazing white edge, several centimeters long.

Ilea knew he would penetrate her ash halfway but not further. She let him hit and slammed her fist into his stomach, absolute destruction and storm of cinders pushing their mana into his scales and body, a big chunk of the energy blocked by his armor.

His claws penetrated, suddenly expanding and cutting through all her ash before they scratched along her bone armor.

She ducked under his other arm and grabbed his leg, twirling around before she slammed his form into the stone with all the might she could muster. Rock cracked and shattered as his massive weight crashed down.

The elf was unfazed by the blow, getting up when sixteen ashen limbs slashed into him, each delivering Storm of Cinder.

He ripped his leg free of her hold and vanished, appearing a couple meters away in a crouch. His eyes narrowed before heat gathered in front of his face.

Ilea felt it form the distance and waited. Azarinth Fighting told her of his powerful attack, likely fire that would burn through her ash. *He's insane for his level.* She thought and watched the white flame form, small at first but expanding in an explosive wave as if a dam was opened in an instant.

She blinked in the last moment, appearing thirty meters to the side. Her eyes opened wide as she watched the cone of fire arch towards her, the other elves disappearing to avoid the attack.

Her wings appeared and formed a cocoon as she dived down.

The fire enveloped her a moment later, partially burning through her ashen armor. This time his attack didn't penetrate to her bone armor.

She smirked, feeling a chunk of mana come back. *You won't win with that my long eared friend.*

Ilea rushed him, surprise showing in his eyes before she slammed fist first into him, grappling the elf before they tumbled, stone cracking at their impacts.

Twenty meters away, the fight continued. Ashen limbs continued to slam into him, scratching the scales but failing to penetrate. An attempt to attack his open helmet was dodged by him, even in her grasp.

She felt heat form and tanked it, a sphere of white flame expanding and pulverizing the rock below.

Her ashen armor reformed quickly, a part of her bone armor singed. The ash he had created with his fire slammed into him from below as Ilea delivered punch after punch. She felt his armor cracking with the third one before he once again ripped himself free of her hold and appeared ten meters away.

Ilea's ashen armor reformed. *He nearly got through with his claws.* She noted the damage to her bone armor, still hot from his white burning claws.

"Fantastic!" The elf exclaimed before a burst of mana rushed out from him.

Ilea crouched in surprise, feeling the sudden change in power. *And size.*

She jumped back but the heat caught up to her. A massive cone of flame engulfed the whole area, her blink getting her out before the flames reached her once more.

This time she healed her ash, both her wings and her armor to make sure he wouldn't get through. The result however was similar. Her bone armor was slightly singed, by the heat alone that penetrated her ashen armor. Only a thin layer remained before she reformed it with the skill itself aided by her healing. A mere instant.

She couldn't believe her eyes as she moved her wings in the air, white fire blazing on the tips of nearby trees and rocks alike. The creeks supplied from above provided the constant sound of flowing water. Before her stood a dragon.

Two arms and legs, wings, covered in red scales and dark horns. Red eyes staring at her from a dragon's head with teeth as long as her forearms. He was longer than a drake and taller too. Perhaps half the size of a Taleen Praetorian.

Impressive and certainly cool but Ilea couldn't help but be a little disappointed. She landed a dozen meters in front of him and smiled. "I expected dragons to be bigger."

Laughter resounded, coming from the floating elf in human clothes.

The dragon elf frowned and shot a white cone of fire at the elf who promptly vanished.

"None have faced my fire as unscathed as you, human. My name is Feyrair Kaa, Cerithil Hunter and honored to fight you." His voice was much deeper, snarled in parts as if he had to get used to the difference in size and form.

"Likewise. My name is Ilea Spears. Shadow and Medic Sentinel." She said and crouched, her ashen armor at the ready, light steam visible around her from the singed ash and the burnt up sweat below. "Enough talk."

"Enough talk." He repeated, standing tall as he prepared another spell.

Ilea extended ten of her ashen limbs and sacrificed a thousand points of health, releasing her charged up Heart of Cinder through the limbs.

The beam of energy and fire slammed into Feyrair before he could do anything, sending him rolling over the rocky terrain with heavy impacts before he was pushed off, wings and legs tangled up.

Ilea immediately started to charge her Heart of Cinder again. She could hear a roar that reverberated through her very being.

No Veteran warning?

The red dragon moved his wings with powerful swings, flying up as the light burn marks healed. "Full of surprises. This little one." He spoke and rushed her.

Ilea appeared behind his head in the last moment, avoiding the claws before her charged fist slammed into the back of his head. Destructive mana spread through him as her ashen limbs slashed into his wings, the thin skin incredibly resistant but ultimately penetrated by her ash.

The dragon roared once more and turned with incredible speed, his claws lighting up in white fire and slashing at her.

Ilea blinked back but saw him immediately close the distance, an unnatural movement, as if teleported mid swing.

Why did I assume he couldn't use that spell in this form. She smirked before the claws cut into her, slamming her ash more than cutting it. She was thrown to the side, her bone armor damaged before her ashen armor reformed. There was damage to her body, some of her organs destroyed, her lung squashed. Her bones were uninjured.

Ilea twirled in the air and landed on her feet, coughing up blood from injuries that were already healed as soon as the liquid reached her mouth. She spit it out, the ash around her mouth closing up again.

Feyrair struggled more with his injuries apparently, stumbling in his step before he caught himself.

Did I knock his brain around a little? Ilea smirked.

Blood was dripping from the corner of his mouth before another surge of mana exploded out. White hot fire flared from his nostrils as he crouched in his dragon form.

He sped up, teleporting several times as he appeared and disappeared.

A cone of fire enveloped her, Ilea simply healing against it as she waited. When he appeared once more, she slammed a charged absolute destruction punch with three hundred mana into his approaching clawed hand.

Mana exploded, a big chunk flowing into his arm as it was pushed aside. His maw opened, fire visible in his throat before it rushed out.

Ilea crouched and punched upwards, two hundred health sacrificed. Her uppercut slammed into elf's dragon chin with incredible force, shutting his mouth as the last of the white flame puffed out.

His eyes rolled before he collapsed.

Ilea blinked away and watched the dragon form vanish, revealing the elf in his natural state, covered in red scale armor that looked chipped and damaged in parts, slightly singed.

The white haired elf appeared above him, a light breeze flowing in, a green hue in her sphere. "Mana intrusion." He mused. "You are indeed worthy of the title, Guardian." His voice was calm, dealing with a situation as normal as any other.

"Is he alright?" Ilea asked, unsure if to approach. He was a healer too after all.

"A while it has been. Since his health reached below half. Yet few of such mobility and resilience meet his flame." The elf spoke.

Feyrair coughed then, waking up as he moved and grabbed his jaw. "Oh wow..." He motioned for the healer to stop. "I deserve this, let me feel the pain." He sprawled out on his back and chuckled to himself.

The healer complied and stopped.

Ilea crossed her arms and watched the other elfs approach too.

The one with the hat hiding his ears rushed towards her. “Incredible... such prowess. What level of Heat Resistance do you have if I may ask?”

‘ding’ ‘Heat Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 15’

“I’d rather not say.” She replied with a smile.

“Of course... of course. Do you have ice resistance too? There were some things I wanted to test but he’s too weak and the other ones wouldn’t agree to testing. You’re a healer too right, so we could try? Speaking of healing... a meal would be nice, do you have any food to share? It’s been so long since I had a good human meal. One cooked by you I mean, not human flesh... though that is delicious too. Not that I eat them, haha.” He scratched the back of his head, his hat moving to reveal short light blue hair of a similar color as his eyes.

Ilea formed a table of ash, big enough to seat all of them, adding chairs as well before she summoned a bunch of restaurant meals she still had. She wasn’t sure yet if they deserved the divinity that was Keyla’s cooking.

The elf shrieked with delight and sat down on an ashen chair without complaint, looking at the food with a big grin on his face. He checked the plates and moved them around, sniffing on different ones before he looked at Ilea with a questioning yet delighted glance.

“Dig in.” She said and smiled.

He complied, quite literally slamming the food into his throat.

If he weren’t a level three hundred elf, she would have been concerned for his burned throat.

“You can get some too if you like.” Ilea said in the general direction of the others.

The healer appeared and bowed to her with a thankful expression before he sat down with grace, summoning a silver fork and taking the nearest plate.

He smiled delightedly when he took the first bite.

Feyrair appeared next to her and slammed his hand onto her shoulder, the ground below her left foot cracking slightly. “You are... most certainly a friend of ours. If you want to go again, I’m ready.”

Ilea smiled and motioned to the table. “Let’s eat first. I’d like to level my Heat Resistance against your flame if you’re up for that. Same with your ice, if that was your suggestion?” She asked the eating mage.

He spoke, mouth full of food, giving her a thumbs up. “Of course.”

The last elf hovered a dozen meters away, facing their way but staying where he was.

“He doesn’t eat?” Ilea asked.

The healer looked at her. “Rarely.”

“How often do you eat?” The ice mage asked. “I’m Ben by the way, nice to meet you. This is excellent, some of the best food I’ve eaten. Reminds me of southern empire cooking. Ravenhall or Morhill perhaps.” He grinned.

“Ben?” Ilea asked. “Wait, you know Ravenhall and Morhill?”

He chuckled and waved her off. “A rare name for an elf, I know. We change ours usually when we become Cerithil Hunters. I thought it fitting more than such fancy titles most others bestow upon

themselves. I've visited a couple times, yes. Years and years ago of course. Nowadays it's difficult to get in unseen, with the new leadership and after the demon attack. Security is tight with the war and all."

Ilea chuckled. "You know a surprising amount about humans and their dealings."

"Ah yes, you have fascinated me for a long time. I questioned the oracles many a time to see if we could adopt some of your notions. Laws, common currency and the like. Few approved of such ideas of course. I suppose joining the hunters was inevitable for me." He laughed and slurped up the rest on his plate, grabbing another. "Either that or getting killed I suppose. But you know that kind of life, as a Shadow and all."

"What does it mean to be a Shadow?" Feyrair asked suddenly, having started to eat as well.

"They're a mercenary band, it's costly and difficult to join. They only allow level two hundred humans to get in I believe. Their elders are close in power to my own." Ben explained before Ilea could even open her mouth to answer.

"Mercenary? Those are paid by gold right?" Feyrair asked.

"Yes, exactly!" Ben damn near shouted. "And with that currency you can buy other things then. It's a marvelous system."

"You don't have mercenaries?" Ilea asked. "In the domains I mean."

"No... no, there's barely a currency more than a few houses use. And then they murder each other again and we're back to the beginning." Ben laughed. "Favors could be seen as currency I suppose. Those generally amount to similar services provided as you do with mercenary work." He explained.

Ilea chuckled and nodded. *Talkative fellow.* She didn't dislike the company. Seeing the distant elf still floating around, she summoned another meal and moved it towards him with an ashen limb, not looking his way before the ash disintegrated once more.

"So, you're looking for Taleen dungeons and destroy them?" She asked, switching the subject to a more elven oriented one.

"That is a part of it, yes. A big part of our work includes helping to find and destroy the Taleen armies that roam our forest. It is a vast and expansive land, few of us are out there and even fewer are quite as powerful as us, especially our leader." Ben explained.

"That would be you?" Ilea asked, glancing at the healer.

He ate in silence but turned his head her way upon hearing the question.

His eyes lacked pupils but it still felt like he was looking directly at her.

"I find those willing." Was his answer.

He's even more fucking cryptic than Elfie was. And he didn't offer his name either. Elfie two? ELFIE? Elfer? He seems more dangerous at least. Fuck, I forgot to ask Mauro about the Golden Lily. Oh well.

"You seem concerned about something." Ben said, a hand reaching out to hers.

Ilea was a little confused at the gesture but let him touch her.

“Ah, don’t mind it. Even after all these years, it is still a mystery to me when it is appropriate to touch a female human and when it isn’t.” He laughed.

“It is a complicated subject, one many human males don’t understand either.” Ilea explained. Her ash receded, revealing the cracks and cuts in her bone armor that repaired themselves ever so slowly.

“Timeless.” Elfer said, not revealing either way he felt towards this discovery.

“Yea, formed from the bone of an Undying Lord, a Spirit of Death and Dark One.” Ilea supplied.

“Few humans know of us, let alone Dark Ones. You have traveled beyond your plains then?” Elfer asked.

Ilea wasn’t happy with the nickname she gave him. “How may I call you? I have given you all my name.”

Ben stopped moving his fork, his hand hovering in the air as he closed his mouth slowly. Feyrair too stopped eating.

“I am Isalthar Nauum. Cerithil Hunter.” He said.

Ilea nodded. “Back to the elven names then. I’ve been to the north, where arcane lightning surges through the sky and Feynor war with Dark Ones.”

The others continued eating as if nothing had happened.

Ilea wasn’t sure if asking for the name had caused it or if there was something else to it.

“I am familiar with it. Dangerous to travel.” Isalthar said and continued eating.

“I assumed you could just ignore it.” Ilea said and chuckled.

“Can you?” Feyrair asked. “I can take one hit but it nearly kills me. A shame. Traveling through the cracks and crevices, like an ant.”

“I can take a hit too but I try to avoid it.” Ilea said.

The elf slammed his hand into her back. “I would love to see that! Your defenses are extraordinary and your offense isn’t a joke either. Too bad mana intrusion is one of my weaknesses, otherwise I would have destroyed you.”

Ilea just smiled, “I have some friends in and near Riverwatch. Perhaps we could set something up. I’d have to talk to them first though.” She said, looking to Isalthar and changing the subject once more, back to the initial problem.

“That is agreeable.” The elf replied, finishing his food. “Thank you for the meal. It is most generous.”

“Don’t worry about it. I own a bunch of restaurants, got plenty where that came from.” Ilea said and smiled.

“You own a restaurant? How does that work? Do you have to hire cooks?” Ben asked, his notepad out again.

Not sure if I like where this is going.

Ilea smiled at him and explained some things but adding that someone else manages it for her.

She noticed that the last elf who hadn't spoken much so far carefully approached the plate she had put out and grabbed it. A silver fork not much unlike Isalthar's appeared before he began eating in silence.