

Chapter 625 Furnace

Ilea sat with her arms crossed, a small stone ledge giving her a good view of the field below. Dozens of Stone Specters had gathered, fighting the three mages with stone magic and boulders. A nearby stream of lava slowly flowed down from above, illuminating the spectacle.

She saw Kyrian swing his flails through eight of the creatures, his weapons punching through the creatures with little resistance, bits and pieces of stone flying to the side.

Feyrair sent small beams of white flame through the monsters, melting rock as his fires enveloped them entirely.

Some of the Specters were larger, their spells more intricate as they reached levels up to six hundred. Neiphato had the most problems, keeping the enemies at bay with his roots from a defensive perimeter he had created himself. They would have difficulties getting to him but it would take time for him to dispatch them.

She glanced at the sea of lava expanding behind the battlefield, a cascade flowing further down into a deeper section yet. The rising gases and growing heat demanded much from the wood magic elf. For the others it simply reserved a part of their regenerative powers.

Ilea coughed, summoning a meal that instantly burst into flame. *Ohno*, she thought, storing it again immediately. *Need me some volcano proof food and ale.*

I wonder if Helena would be able to provide something like that. Literal lava cake, or maybe soup? With added noxious gasses. Have to ask her the next time I see her.

Ilea wondered if she should wait until she could hide her three marks from people above level three hundred, or if the benefits would outweigh the potential dangers. *Now that I think about it... isn't it possible that other humans have hidden their level from me before? Gotta make sure I trust my instincts instead of relying on identify.*

A few moments passed as she watched the fighting group, her eyes narrowing when she spotted something in the underground lake of lava. *Another Rubble Guardian?* she wondered, her wings spreading behind her back, just in case she had to interfere quickly.

She watched as a large clawed hand emerged from the lava, molten rock pooling onto the stone ground as the creature lifted itself out of the thick liquid. *Not a rubble guardian*, she thought, charging Monster Hunter as she started to descend.

"Retreat," she sent to her three companions, feeling the hairs on her back stand up as she looked at the single reptilian eye looking straight at her. Her aura activated, a whistle resounding as she watched her allies retreat. Even Feyrair heeded her call, if only to allow her the first try at the beast.

The monster slowly pulled itself up and out of the lava, its body dripping with the burning rock. The creature was only halfway out and already reached a height of nearly twenty meters, dwarfing everything in the vicinity. Black rock like scales covered the entirety of its body, jagged and ancient. Its form made the air around it vibrate, with both heat alone and magical power. Its head resembled that of a drake, its jaw alone however larger than one of their kind. Loud grinding noises resounded when it opened its mouth, the motion slow and strained, chunks of black stone falling to the ground before it roared.

'ding' 'You have heard the roar of a powerful creature - You resist its effects'

Ilea felt her body tense up, her wings pushing against the magical force emanated by the cry. The ground shook, rubble falling from the ceiling as the Specters fled. She landed among the fleeing monsters, covered in ashen armor and brimming with arcane power. A speck compared to the presence of the monster now fully moving out of the lava, prowling to the side with a predatory litheness.

[Scorching Wyrms – lvl ?????] - [Armored]

The Wyrms had six legs jutting out of its body, the creature now reaching about thirty meters in height. Its whole form was covered in the black scales, its tail splitting into six thinner protrusions that seemed to float in the air as it moved.

"I don't suppose you're friendly?" she asked, raising her brows at the panther like movements of the stalking creature. *You know I can see you. Everyone with any sensory organs can. You're massive.*

"Peace?" she sent the thought, trying to establish a connection with the creature. Veteran informed her that it should be around level one thousand and two hundred. Higher than the Bluetails she had killed, higher than the rot Queen. But not quite as strong as the Trakorov, likely the closest comparison she could draw. While she knew that levels didn't say a whole lot about a monster's abilities, Ilea could tell that she was about to bite off a little more than she should chew.

She cracked her neck and knuckles, four ashen protrusions moving out between her wings as she grinned. *Maybe I am mad. But it just feels so very right.*

The monster answered her question, its eye glowing a bright fiery color before a beam of heat and fire enveloped her form.

Ilea stood her ground, only teleportation fast enough to dodge the formation of the spell anyway. But she wanted to know what exactly she was dealing with. Precognition was one thing, experience another. She found the beam to be similar to her Heart of Cinder. Heat, energy, and fire combining into a devastating spell. Her ash was burned away in seconds, her skin and organs erupting as her insides were brought to a boil.

She teleported away when most of her skin had melted, her brain functions slowing as the organ could no longer resist the incredible heat. Her third tier healing recovered the lost health and healed the heavy damage. She watched as the Wyrms moved its eye, the beam coming with it near instantly. Ilea still grinned, her body covered in flames she had gathered with her third tier Heat Resistance. The Lava equivalent had let her gather enough heat to fully charge Heart of Cinder.

She knew the spell would be borderline useless against the monster, releasing it in a sphere around her to disrupt the incoming beam. A direct use might even heal the creature or empower its attacks much like her own absorption abilities. Ilea shot off the ground, her wings moving quickly to stay out of the monster's sight. While she failed in the endeavor, she noticed the beam lagging behind ever so slightly, the energies taking a few hundredths of a second to reach her. Enough for her to avoid a direct hit.

She laughed, flying through the expansive cavern, occasionally exposing herself to the continuous beam in an effort to train her resistances. Ilea prepared when she saw a pulse of less focused energy flow through the beam, transferring away when she felt the eruption coming.

A wave of heat and fire flashed up behind her, the arcane explosion around her counteracting some of the spell's effects. She had teleported far enough away to avoid most of the damage, glancing back to the melting stone near where she had just been, a new crater added to the cavern. Her armor recovered from the wave as she looked at the creature, its eye focused on her, its spell however gone.

'ding' 'Heat Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 15'

"Surprised?" she asked, flying through the air as she kept her gaze on the monster, its jaw opening again as it produced a guttural clicking sound.

The noise turned into a roar as it turned its body towards her, heat gathering within its rock like throat.

Now let's see how you compare to my friendly Elven ally, she thought with a smile, watching the cavern light up with the river of flames extending outwards. Ilea didn't bother with any additional defenses, spreading her arms as she welcomed the flames, her own fires burning away at the monster's magic as it washed over her tiny ashen form.

Her ash burned away, her body heating up time and time again as she used her Lava Magic resistance to counteract what she could, releasing whatever she managed to absorb in spheres of fire. She could see her skin and muscle burn away, healing magic turning mana into flesh in a constant regenerative cycle. Her smile came and went, always within her mind but often lacking muscles, lips, or even an entire jaw. The same was true for her vision, her whole focus on her mind as she fought to keep her brain protected, the mana now within her bones adding another layer of defense she was thankful for.

The beast empowered the torrent of flames with a last stretch of effort, displaying its overwhelming might and ancient natural power. An Apex Predator within its domain, challenged by a mere human less than half its level. Flames born of magic set fire to a hundred square meters of cavern walls, the stone itself melting as it joined the ever growing pool of lava. Nothing should come out unharmed against such a cataclysmic display of fire magic.

And yet, when the fires finally subsided, Ilea spread her wings once more, her arm raised with fingers stripped to the bone, protecting her head where little skin remained. Flesh grew once more, muscles and skin covering the blackened bone in instants, followed by ash itself. Blue eyes reformed within the shaking air, their focus once more on the enemy eye.

'ding' 'Heat Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 16'

I think it's high time we find out how your regeneration stacks up in this competition, she thought and rushed forward, transfer bringing her close to the creature before a charged punch of Archon Strike smashed into a part of its head. Ilea felt the impact shake her whole body, most of the mana used in her attack returning to her.

A teleport brought her in front of its eye, her punch hitting the hard surface without a discernible reaction, a heated beam of energy rushing past as she dodged away.

Intrusion ineffective. Eye is a nono too. Still plenty of ideas.

She flew past the monster's swiping arm, targeting a section on its side with another archon strike, aided by Storm of Cinders. Fire and arcane energy exploded on the dark scales, ever so slightly damaging the material. Her ashen limbs rushed out, adding to the deterioration of the strong material.

Ilea braced for the incoming attack, a wave of heat extending around the creature a moment later. She was pushed back a few dozen meters, a part of her ash gone and recovering. She glanced to the side where the monster's tails moved through the air, the ends barely broader than a whip. Her dominion picked up magic but she couldn't tell what kind exactly.

Transfer brought her past the tails and the beast itself, her ashen limbs splitting up again into twenty as she focused entirely on Storm of Cinders, weakening the section of scales against mana intrusion. Her Archon Strike wouldn't do a lot against the thick stone scales. *A waste of mana for now*, Ilea thought, instead choosing the much cheaper and dedicated spell. She stretched out her hand and sent out all the heat she had gathered from just being close to the creature, the flash of light and energy burning into the scales without a visible impact.

Guess we're both made for each other, she thought, her wings turning her sideways to avoid another beam attack.

The Wyrn had turned its neck, looking back at her before it jumped to the side, the impact of its landing sending tremors through the ground, its beam cutting into the stone as the ashen healer advanced, laughing as she circled around the spell.

She transferred into the expanding heat, some of the impact disrupted. Ilea heard the beam attack cease behind her as she sent storm of cinders into the back of the creature, dodging past the fast moving tails. One of them flipped to the side, hitting her leg and making her tumble.

A use of displacement brought her away when she felt weird magic spread from the slight cut on her leg, the tail having managed to get through her armor. *Some kind of corruption?* she asked herself, pushing against the effect with her healing. The magic only seemed to slow slightly, Ilea looking down to see her skin turning to stone. *Oh*.

So petrifying magic is a thing after all, she thought with a smile, watching the stone taking over. She looked at the creature, seeing it charge another beam attack. *Might as well optimize my resistance training*, she thought, letting the attack hit her before she turned and stretched her leg towards the flames.

Her stone skin was stripped away entirely, her bones as of yet unaffected by the magic. *Maybe due to the magic within? Or they're just more resistant in general*.

She teleported out of the beam, healing the massive burns. A quick use of her ash ripped away the previously affected leg, just in case. One second later, she was back at the creature, her ash lashing out, her higher mana pool allowing her to attack without restraint, even if she wouldn't be able to absorb a part of the Wyrn's spells.

Ilea occasionally got hit by the unpredictable tails, sometimes on purpose. Her ash simply ripped out the affected parts of her body, mostly her arms or legs. She didn't exactly know what would happen if the petrification spread over her whole body but she didn't plan to find out. She dodged another few tails and flew below the monster, her ash sending more magic into the scales before she teleported out, the massive creature trying to crush her below its form.

She was pushed back by another use of its area heat spell, watching as the creature started brimming with magic. *That's a new one*, she thought, retreating as the Wyrn stood up.

Its claws dug into the ground as its eye focused on her. And then it dashed forward, an explosion of air and heat pushed aside as it reached her near instantly.

She teleported away before the massive creature reached her, turning in the air to see the Wyrms crash into the cavern wall. The magic around it remained as it dug itself out, chunks of rock and rubble falling away before it jumped off, a shock wave exploding where its claws had been.

She simply teleported again, easily avoiding the large mass before she braced herself for the wave of air and heat pushed away from its passing. The ground shook when the Scorching Wyrms landed, steam rising from its mouth as its one eye looked at her.

“Annoying, I know,” she said.

The Wyrms growled, once more digging its claws into the ground but this time it looked upwards.

Ilea felt the cavern cool down, mana gathering within the Wyrms as it charged its spell. *Did that piss you off?* she wondered, choosing to remain for now. The light dimmed as a part of the lava lake froze over, the liquid turning back to stone, robbed of all its heat.

A challenge, is it? Ilea asked herself, landing on the ground and forming ash as she watched the creature’s open maw.

The air seemed to stand still before everything was pulled towards the Wyrms.

Ilea braced herself, ashen limbs digging into the ground as the black mist around her grew. She checked her marks and glanced towards Kyrian, the man barely visible to her over a kilometer away and hidden in the darkness of the cavern. The others were close to him.

Something flickered to life within the Wyrms’ throat, a bright light forming where only darkness had been before. The pulling effect was reversed, an extensive wave of heat flowing out from the creature. Pebbles and air alike were pushed aside.

The ground shook again, a tremor that seemed closer, its cause unlikely to be the Scorching Wyrms. Ilea couldn’t see anything within her dominion and focused back on the enemy at hand, the flickering light now stabilized, a three meter large sphere of concentrated flames. It looked like a miniature sun.

Hmm, maybe not good, she thought, feeling sweat drip down her brow. All the ash around her formed walls aimed towards the sphere, Ilea peeking past to see what was happening.

The sphere floated up and away from the Wyrms, stopping about sixty meters above ground, with the same distance between Ilea and her adversary. When it came to a stop, the thing started spinning ever so slightly.

Ilea felt the emanating heat increase a hundred fold, then more. She saw the Wyrms lie down on its belly, closing its one eye as it moved its legs closer to its body. And then the world, turned to fire.

She couldn’t even scream, ash itself set alight. Ilea fell to her knees, simply because the muscles keeping her standing were no longer there. She could feel her body burn away, her healing barely managing to keep her form together. *Don’t retreat,* she thought, seeing the melting cavern ahead of her. *You can take this. Trust in your magic, your mana. You’ve had worse.*

‘ding’ ‘Heat Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 17’

The edges of her vision were going dark, her healing pushing back time and time again. Her perception slowed a few times. *Just your mind going out,* she thought as short glimpses lit up in between the darkness. The ground had started flowing, bright fluid dripping from the ceiling, raining down on them. Her ash was gone. Her flesh too.

Another glimpse, only bright light somewhere to her left. Everything felt so very warm. She wanted to breathe but the air itself was on fire. She fell unconscious again.

'ding' 'Heat Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 18'

She woke again, breathing in literal lava. *I'm in the lake. Or did the whole mountain turn into a lake of lava?*

The sphere was still there, she could tell. Time must have passed, her healing now able to keep her brain active, some of her muscles back where they should be. Her wings formed before she transferred out of the water.

Bad idea, she thought, the heat worse with each meter closer to the sphere. Her form splashed back into the lava, an ice cold lake as far as she was concerned. *Eyes gone again. Great. Why even have these weak ass organs?*