

Chapter 455 Abominations

Sean and Edgar went back with the unconscious man while the rest remained in the cavern.

Ilea wondered if they would return with a squadron of guards or if they would return at all.

Sophia got over her initial surprise, now quite interested in the ways Ilea got so resistant to her magic. The confidence she had shown previously wasn't just fractured, it lay broken on the ground.

"You are going to find creatures that you can't beat... no matter how many spells and punches you rain into them. It's more important to think of your defense and even more so to make sure you can get away. Teleportation and flying are good options for that," she explained and casually dodged the warrior's attacks.

The man would have a hard time penetrating her defenses even without her ashen armor but she didn't feel like completely breaking the adventurer. Not after what it had done to Sophia.

It's almost like they don't face life threatening monsters on a daily basis. Would maybe put their abilities into perspective. Instead of comparing themselves to sub par adventurers and calling it a day.

Ilea didn't have a problem with someone making their living this way but for Sophia to be so distraught about the difference in power seemed naive and dangerous to her.

"You are simply too fast... it's like you know where I'm going to strike," Colt said as he stopped to breathe.

"Yep... well I kind of do," Ilea said with a shy smile.

"Hmm... interesting. Which means," he said and continued to attack. The result however, was the same.

"I can tell what the result of an attack will be, Colt. I can't read your mind," Ilea said.

"Fuck. Then you win. Nothing I can do," he said and laughed. He looked at his axe and nodded. "I will come with you. And I will win the next fight."

I doubt that my dear, Ilea thought. She didn't dislike the optimism however.

"And you, stop moping and attack me. Might be some of your skills will rise as well," she said and nodded to the mage.

Sophia looked up. "Really? I mean... yeah maybe that would help."

Sean and Edgar returned shortly after, a little confused at their two team members attacking Ilea with abandon.

"Did we decide otherwise now?" Sean asked.

"She offered," Sophia said. "It's not an everyday thing to be able to attack a level three hundred person without worry."

The man grabbed his bow and an arrow. “Mind if I join?”

Ilea rolled her eyes. “No. But we should start actually fighting monsters that want to kill you.”

“You don’t?” Edgar asked. “I’m kidding,” he added right after, an awkward smile on his face.

“Not at the moment. No,” she replied and motioned them to stop. “Come on, let’s see why this dungeon is on the danger list.”

They made their way farther in, the group quickly switching to their serious and trained behavior they had already employed earlier.

If only they had a little more ambition and a healer. They’d be Shadows in no time, she thought as another creature closed in.

“Incoming,” she said and formed some ash around herself before storing her leather armor and clothes. There was no reason to destroy gear after all.

She ignored the quick glance Colt gave her before he focused on the enemy. Sean and Edgar seemed to have their baser instincts more in check or simply weren’t interested.

“God, fuck. You’re ugly,” she said as the beast came into the range of her sphere. The team apparently had adequate sight in the dark, deciding against torches.

More arms than Ilea with her ash and just as many eyes.

She wondered if the creature could match her sphere in visual prowess. *Probably not,* she thought and used the same ability to guide the enemy projectiles towards her own body. Not that much intervention was necessary. The creatures weren’t exactly smart.

They were loud and disgusting, shocking and powerful. To most that was. Ilea had seen worse, smelled worse and fought beings that would rip these Abominations to shreds in the span of a second.

She let it attack, let it bite and tear into her body with all the appendages and projectiles it could throw out and move in a coordinated fashion. The pain she felt only added to her perception, her ability to keep an eye on the team behind her, their thrumming heartbeats, the fear in their eyes.

And the spells they shot out.

Ilea wasn’t scared of the thing, nor was she scared of the dark corridor or for the lives of those that now depended on her protection. She was in control.

This creature was nothing but a monster, one unfortunate enough to have met her. Just a creature here to deliver experience and possible skills to her and those she called allies.

And that’s how she treated it. She experimented with her sphere, used it to move both the enemy spells but also her allies’ abilities towards herself. Ilea was the center of this fight and she was unmovable.

She watched with fascination as appendages grew and formed, some shooting out to strike her, others flailing uselessly. A creature truly bringing honor to its name.

[Rotten Abomination – lvl 330]

The level was close to hers, the numbers governing magic and power in this world considering it nearly equal to herself. A comical miscalculation. One born perhaps of few humans striving for the power she now held. Potential only unleashed when someone pushed beyond their stand. Or she really beat the system, with healing and ash as her allies, few creatures finding an answer to her overwhelming resilience and regeneration.

It had been that way from the start, since the first Drake she had fought. Anybody without healing would have died. She had survived. And she continued to do so.

Ilea kept her focus on the enemy. She was prepared to intervene should they be flanked, despite the simple tunnel they had found themselves in. She was ready to respond to any hidden abilities or allies that might spring up to help the creature. Many of her enemies had died because they had underestimated her. It was important that she remembered it. To acknowledge what she had achieved but to be mindful of what was out there, what would always be out there.

The Ascended was one thing. There were other things too. Beings like the Fae, malevolent in spirit. Ancient and incomprehensible. *Like Trian said. One step at a time.*

‘ding’ ‘You have learned the General skill: Deviant of Humanity – lvl 1

Deviant of Humanity – lvl 1

You face creatures most other humans have nightmares about, call beings your friends that occupy the pages of legends told by your kind. You have reached a level of power that few humans will ever call their own. And yet you push onward, knowing of the dangers that wait in the dark. You anticipate them. Welcome them. Those who would dismiss you may now take notice, should you wish for them to do so.

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

Flesh Magic Resistance – lvl 1

Not perhaps the prettiest of magic schools nor the most sanitary. Its ability to disturb and maim at the same time make it quite effective against those of higher thought. For the same reasons it is rarely found used by humans or those who preach purity. You stood unwavering against its power, unimpressed and with the only intent to learn this skill. Perhaps it would fit you.

Wow, alright there mr system! Maybe you should go fucking learn Meat magic!

The first skill at least seemed pretty cool. Mostly its description. The actual use was dubious, as many of her recent skills. *Would the Fae treat me differently? Wouldn't my level alone already make me quite special? Or is it the same as Veteran at the second stage?*

She could feel the ability to mold a new presence, a warning perhaps that others might pick up on. Another thing to add to her growing list of tools. To survive, explore, and prevail.

Ilea was sure the thing was close to dying when another large chunk of rock hit one of the few faces it sported on the constantly regrowing and shifting body. A last spike of bone slashed into her face, stopped by her skull.

‘ding’ ‘Your group as defeated [Rotten Abomination – lvl 330]’

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

Bone Magic Resistance – lvl 1

The ability to shift, grow and use ones own body to gain an advantage in battle is as old as magic itself. A skill which many humans had mastered in a time before language. Now most of that knowledge is gone and few remain to practice these arts. You have faced it in battle and survived. Of course you did. Sigh.

Did you just sigh me? Why not just have a conversation at this point? Hmm? Maybe if I start to see my own soul, we'll be able to duke it out.

“Another level...,” Sean said, his knuckles white as he gripped his bow.

“Yep, good job with the attacks,” Ilea said. It took them a while to down one of the creatures. Understandable with their low levels.

To think this was just normal for me, back when I was below two hundred. Now I could kill these abominations in less than a second.

She could tell the group was getting a little more stressed out. Now that they were walking deeper into the dungeon with the only light source being the torch in Ilea's hand.

“I suggest you try to fight one yourselves. Would benefit evolutions greatly,” she said as she led them farther down, choosing a direction at random. She noted that Edgar was sketching a map of the place. Quite intricate, according to the movements of his pen.

“They would overwhelm us. We don't have a good answer against the projectiles, let alone the brute force,” Sean said.

Ilea glanced at him and waved her torch around. “I didn't mean you as a team. I meant each one of you, individually. But I suppose it might be too much of a risk without self healing.”

Sophia lost the last shred of color on her face. “Alone?”

“Yes dear. Most of my class evolutions had high level kills as requirements, both in groups and alone. Not like you lads couldn't accomplish something like that. Granted, the abominations here are quite tricky, especially in these tight tunnels,” Ilea said and pointed at Sean.

“Ranger... you could trap something and just shoot it until it dies. Doesn't really matter what its level is, as long as it stays put without regenerating and you deal damage. Same goes for you two, ice and earth magic should be versatile enough to make something like that possible. Even here... a wall or two, frozen ground, a prepared hole covered in ice that you can shatter when the enemy is on top... seems reasonable. Colt... well your skills are a little harder to utilize like that. Just make sure to get a life steal or self heal ability as soon as you can. Then just wack it.”

The man grasped his axe and smiled. “I can do that. Sounds simple compared to them.”

Ilea shrugged. “It's what I did. Definitely hurts but Pain Tolerance will take care of that problem as time goes on.”

“The problem isn't trapping or even killing the creatures,” Sean said. “It's getting out without injury. If one of us gets hit... even once. We might not be able to get out of this place alive. Not without you.”

“Or another healer,” Ilea pointed out.

“I would fucking worship you if you manage to push that healing organization of yours through,” Sophia said and wrung her hands.

Ilea laughed and turned forward again. “Well, it will take some time. Doesn’t mean you can’t work on it yourselves. Get some abilities to regenerate health.”

“Wouldn’t help with a broken leg,” Edgar commented.

“Maybe not the first tier. Second, maybe,” Ilea said.

The next several hours were spend guiding the adventurers through the maze of dark tunnels, helping them survive the encounters with the various Abominations inhabiting the dungeon. There weren’t as many as she had hoped but enough for each of the team to gain a few levels.

She didn’t inquire about their skills but just watching their spells through her sphere told enough about their progress. *Very promising*, she thought.

The dungeon itself wasn’t quite ideal. The creatures were too powerful and hard to deal with. She could use it to send teams of healers down to gain Fear Resistance, to bond them as teams or perhaps to gain some kind of dark vision. Only with their consent of course and with her watching over them from a safe distance.

So many ideas. I suppose nobles just don’t do this because the trainees would quickly overtake them in power and capability. Assassin guilds and the like probably try to brainwash people into obedience but with Mental Resistance as well as all the other benefits that come with high level classes and general skills, how long could you really bind someone to your organization?

Ilea was aware that plenty of her healers would one day find their own way, abandoning the Sentinels altogether or perhaps even fighting them. She definitely hoped the latter wouldn’t ever occur but the possibility would surely be present. Either way, more healers out in the world. And as soon as the orders realized she couldn’t be stopped anymore, others might just pop up with the same idea.

She checked her levels as they entered a vast cavern.

“What...,” Sean said as he began to cough.

Ilea spread her limbs out and healed all of them, barely noticing the damage she herself was taking. *Interesting... seems like its going for my organs directly.*

“Stop panicking, your health is fine. Just spit out the pieces, they are regenerating continuously,” Ilea said.

‘ding’ ‘Bone Magic Resistance reaches lvl 2’

...

‘ding’ ‘Bone Magic Resistance reaches lvl 4’

‘ding’ ‘Flesh Magic Resistance reaches lvl 2’

...

‘ding’ ‘Flesh Magic Resistance reaches lvl 5’

‘ding’ ‘Sage of Torment reaches lvl 2’

‘ding’ ‘Identify reaches lvl 12’

Quite the haul, she thought happily and clapped her hands together. “Now I believe this...,” she coughed, a slab of bloodied innards slapped on the stone floor with a wet sound. “This is a new one.”

Her group fought hard to keep themselves together. None of them replied, either on their knees or stabilizing themselves on the walls to stay upright. Their torn faces informed enough about the pain they were going through.

“We leave if you want to. Otherwise I suggest camping here for the remainder of the night,” she said.

“... leave,” Sean croaked out, his eyes bloodshot as he stared at her.

The others nodded slowly.

“Alright. I see you’re not fond of my ways,” Ilea said and spread her ashen limbs behind herself. “I’ll carry all of you. It will be faster than the way we came.”

They looked at each other but none had the will to disagree. Or perhaps they welcomed the offer.

Sophia watched the monster approach, her gait confident and relentless. *This is it*, she thought and gulped.

The ashen appendage moved out faster than she could comprehend, the pain within her body too much to use her spells. It wouldn’t make a difference anyway.

She was wrapped up and carefully moved behind the woman.

A quick glance at Sean told her that he wasn’t quite as confident as usual either.

Ilea spread ashen wings because of course she had wings too. If death really was a person, they would be envious of the ashen specter hovering into the air.

I feel like we haven’t even scratched the surface of her capabilities, she thought and dared hope that they would get out of this alive.

A loud screech echoed through the cavern, reaching them as they sped up.

‘ding’ ‘You have heard the challenge of the Specter of Rot. You are paralyzed in fear for 19 seconds’

‘ding’ ‘Veteran reaches lvl 11’

Fuck... fuck fuck...

‘ding’ ‘Fear Resistance reaches lvl 12’

Sophia wanted to scream and run but she remained calm, forced to do so by the healing magic that flowed into her. It made her aware that Ilea continued to move, only glancing back before she resumed the ascent.

“Specter of Rot... any clue what it might be?” the woman asked.

She sounds way to interested.

“Please... haven’t we seen enough abominations for one night?” Edgar asked, downright pleading.

“I haven’t heard of that creature,” Sean said.

“I see. I will investigate alone then. It would be too dangerous for you with that aura or whatever is causing our insides to turn to shit,” Ilea said.

Sophia gulped, thinking for a second that the healer would leave them here. *Don’t be stupid. She has protected you all this way. Why would she let you die now?*

Because she found a new and more interesting toy? she answered her own question.

“Are you sure it’s safe for you?” Colt asked. He did look a little comical, wrapped up in a couple ashen tendrils, carried as if he weighed but a single pound.

“Hmm... it will be interesting to find out. I do hope it isn’t,” Ilea said, the smile practically graspable, even with her face covered in ash.

Sophia kept herself focused, her expression schooled. *She’s gone... a complete lunatic. Who else could reach such power? I’ll stick to my fucking herbs, thank you. Fuck these tunnels, fuck the Abominations and fuck this unprepared and unsafe behavior.*

Her mind unintentionally went to the many notifications she had received during their horrifying delve, her emotions turning from complete abhorrence to a more conflicted mix.

‘ding’ ‘Glacial Core Enhancer has reached lvl 127 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Glacial Core Enhancer has reached lvl 128 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Glacial Core Enhancer has reached lvl 129 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Glacial Core Enhancer has reached lvl 130 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Glacial Core Enhancer has reached lvl 131 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Scholar of Frost has reached lvl 116 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Scholar of Frost has reached lvl 117 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Scholar of Frost has reached lvl 118 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Scholar of Frost has reached lvl 119 – Five stat points awarded’

...