

Chapter 409 Hunting Grounds

Ilea put her ten stat points into Wisdom as she spread her wings once more, flying up to avoid the coming horde.

The growls and roars made the hairs on her back stand up, despite the fact that she just shredded through over ten of them. The level difference and sheer power the beasts emanated still had an effect on her body and mind, or perhaps it was another ability she hadn't recognized yet. The lack of resistance or Veteran levels didn't support that theory.

The only problem are the blood explosions. If they shred through my ashen blades, the ones following have an easier time injuring me, Ilea thought. That's not the only thing though. They kill each other with those damn explosions. If I create a chain reaction, they're all going to die in moments. Instead of feeding me their magic first.

She flew silently through the cavern, the blue light barely enough to illuminate the moving dark creatures on the ground. Ilea was somewhat confident that they would lose her quickly in the vast space, their eyesight probably not much better than hers.

Kind of want to wait with the third tier point so I can upgrade a skill in both classes, she thought. Then again, would be a waste if it stays at 2nd 20.

'3rd tier skill points available [The Azarinth Sentinel]: 1'

'Skills available for third tier advancement in [The Azarinth Sentinel]:'

- **Sentinel Huntress**
- **Azarinth Perception**

The latter probably saved my life earlier this week, she thought. Sentinel Huntress was her only tracking skill and while certainly useful, it fell behind in sheer power compared to most of her other skills.

It was more a utility skill and less one to punch through an opponent's head. Ilea was reluctant to replace it with something else however, not that there was anything available anyway.

She had fought and traveled with competent people lately but moving through these layers alone had reminded her that tracking and perception skills were very much important. If only to find the next monster to slaughter. *Admittedly, the beasts didn't much conform to be found with Huntress.*

At this point it would take some time to level a new skill up to the end of the second tier and Ilea was interested to see what the third tier would bring. If it wasn't great and a better option presented itself on the way to or at the next evolution, she could still switch it out.

For now, she picked the immediately more useful ability.

'ding' 'Azarinth Perception reaches 3rd lvl 1'

Passive: Azarinth Perception – 3rd lvl 1:

Increases your perception and reflexes while fighting. To keep up with your faster moving body a healer of Azarinth has to control it.

2nd stage: Your perception spikes for two seconds, should you be about to receive a blow that would take 75% or more of your life. This can happen only once per hour.

3rd stage: Your resilience and speed is doubled during the spike in perception. Increases usage to twice per hour.

Category: Body Enhancement

Ilea read through the new addition. *Well, why not*, she thought. Not exactly the most useless bonus a third tier ability had granted but neither the best. Perhaps it could save her life twice in a row now.

It remained a mystery if the recharge time was half an hour now or if an hour wait time refunded both uses. Ilea didn't exactly want to test it. A being that could activate her ability even once should be avoided one way or the other.

Ilea decided the best use of her time and the frenzied creatures was engaging groups of three to six with deactivated resistances. She could still leave a couple groups at the end to just train her skills without killing them. That of course would reduce their usability to time and curse magic, the latter somewhat irrelevant either way, with her knowing Elfie.

Then let's fucking go, she thought and moved her wings, excited for the coming slaughter. Frenzied monsters that could hurt her but weren't exactly a danger to her life, basically just sacks of corrupted experience. Plus, rooting out corruption was one of the main reasons she was even here.

Her advantage of flight allowed her to find groups rather easily too, the monsters making no effort to hide or organize due to their corrupted state.

It's like this was left here for me, as a gift, she thought, landing with spread arms and a hundred blades moving on her armor. Perhaps it had only been a matter of time, the last ten layers somewhat lackluster when it came to the monsters within. High level and powerful but too little in number, lacking corruption. Some had even been too much for her to deal with. Now these, these were creatures that reminded her of Taleen Guardians back in her first dwarven dungeon.

Glimpses came and went after she landed, wounds showing up and vanishing. It reminded her of an old school slide show. With a theme perhaps, that few people could appreciate or could even stomach.

Ilea completely ripped the hyena panther hybrids apart. Or well, they ripped themselves apart, by attacking something that bit back. Her body was ripped through by teeth and claws in turn, the latter having a hard time penetrating her armor.

Corruption, curses and blood magic devastated her body but nothing quite reached the destructive force of the lightning Elemental or the Griffin she had faced before. At this point, she was pretty sure a Praetorian wouldn't pose much of a challenge to her anymore. With all the skill levels and third tier upgrades she had gotten in the meantime, Ilea was pretty confident.

Two might even pose a challenge, she thought with a smile. Many of the Zenadin Hunters were higher in level than Praetorians but she hardly considered them equal.

The last of the group's monsters exploding in a gory fest of guts, blood and bone.

She turned her head to the side as the visceral goop splattered onto her, infecting more of her cut open and exposed body with corruption.

Ilea activated her resistances again, pushing back the orange veins forming on and within her. *Pretty gross. They got that down at least.*

What if these things are actually as powerful as Praetorians? She wondered. They were of a higher level, had deadly magic that might take out most without as much defense and healing as Ilea and they were even faster.

The death explosion wasn't as impressive and they were smaller in size of course but otherwise? Ilea flew up again afterwards, her ash cleaning over her healing body, getting rid of all the foreign blood and gore.

How much did I actually improve? She wondered. There were third tier skills of course, as well as resistances and stats but Ilea found she had lost track a little of the sheer power her skill levels alone provided.

With all the ridiculous boosts to healing magic and body enhancement spells, she had gathered quite the assortment of power over even just the last week. Most of them were above level ten of the third tier already, something that was supposedly a very difficult task to achieve.

These rules apparently didn't affect someone who fought creatures twice their levels on a daily basis quite as much. *There must be others like me. Of course there are.*

They're either dead or somewhere out there, in the huge monster dimension or hell itself, endlessly ripping apart monsters to the glorious sounds of Metal. She smirked.

Her attack spells alone must have benefited greatly. No wonder she was killing monsters of such ridiculous level with only a few blows. Absolute Destruction and Storm of Cinders didn't have any actual damage numbers listed but she could only imagine them to be ridiculous.

Sentinel Reconstruction at level twenty one of the third tier could regenerate 324 points of health per second. With the low cost of four mana no less. Ilea could heal her health back to the full 7710 points in less than twenty four seconds. A feat quite ridiculous coupled with all her defensive bonuses. The only reason her third tier healing was even needed was the terrifying reality that mere seconds were enough for a powerful monster to chunk her health down to half or below.

Both her main auras were free of charge by now and provided three point five percent additional power to their respective bonuses for each level in the skills, the multiplication a courtesy of her classes.

Blink reached a solid 42.5 meters by now, quite a difference compared to the initial fifteen. Of course the longer ranged required a higher cost in mana but did it really matter when she could travel nearly a hundred meters in two seconds just by blinking alone?

Her sphere could see farther as well, close to thirty meters by now and her defensive buffs coming from Armor of Ash and Sentinel Core were rising by a significant amount each level.

The newfound power to her ash coming from Avatar of Ash or the utility of her third tier sphere certainly overshadowed the comparatively small increase in power brought by a simple skill level but all of them combined? It was a steady increase in power.

Ilea had little to test it on, finding new challenges with each layer. Beasts that even she couldn't take down, or even withstand for longer periods of time. She could only imagine the havoc her presence would have wreaked if her current self had been present at the siege of Virilya.

A fucking slaughter, I presume. Might have actually lured out the most powerful generals to try and stop me. Not that I understand that conflict enough to even want such responsibility. It was easy for her to justify the slaughter of slavers but if a whole people and culture did it, was not she the one in the wrong? To invade their way of life and kill off a tenth of their population because of her view on morals. A bit of a dilemma, she found. One she really wanted to leave to other people.

The war was likely still raging, if they didn't find some agreement in the meantime. Virilya just broke out a couple weeks ago and after a year long siege, they surely wanted some cities to burn in the very least.

All they do is reduce the already laughable power of humanity. If they knew could only learn from the demons and monsters around them, the challenges in the wild. Maybe petty politics wouldn't be such a problem, she thought and sighed. It wasn't that easy. She knew it, knew humans and how they thought.

Ilea had thought about this problem time and time again and she doubted even in a thousand years that she would find an answer. Forming an organization and training healers was a step in the right direction, as well as further increasing her influence in cities like Ravenhall and Riverwatch.

While she wanted to keep said influence rather passive, it could still lead to a lot of good.

Hundreds of the beasts still remained, prowling along the frozen tundra, bathed in the dull blue light shining down on them.

She slaughtered four more groups in the next twenty minutes. Perhaps less, perhaps more. Time magic brought that problem with it.

Not a small part of the time was spent on finding suitable groups, with enough distance to others. The battles themselves were only dragged out because even in a corrupted state, the beasts often retreated after a blow to reassess the situation. She assumed it was ingrained in their instincts, to let their prey feel the curses flowing through them, to let them understand that the foe they were facing was ancient and overpowering.

Well, in a sense Ilea had turned the tables. There was little satisfaction to the fights however, the monsters having lost all their intelligence and nuance, a fraction of what they must have been before the vile blood manipulation took their lives and resurrected them as these lousy husks. Time magic prevented her from intervening too much, from dodging and weaving through them, simply relying on her powerful skills instead.

Ilea had plenty of reasons to face the creatures, the main one being a bunch of levels to various of her skills. As well as her task to slaughter every host of corruption she could face.

Some would surely question her sanity, seeing the wrecked state Ilea's body was in after each engagement. And yet she remained with a smile, bathed in blood and guts but triumphant, without a hint of pain or inner turmoil.

The smell even was something she had gotten used to by now.

A single bath would change that back immediately but while she was here, fighting and in constant strive, her senses hardened. No food remained in her belly and the required muscles to gag were often ripped out anyway. Simply removing her nose and tongue was an option too but Ilea disliked the idea, already being monster enough for her own tastes.

She found herself close to one of the layer's walls, more natural than the ones in the prior level. The incline wasn't straight but simply very steep. Boulders, sharp edges and even some flat areas interspersed the slope.

Ilea landed on one such flat plane, sitting down before she summoned herself a well deserved meal, be it breakfast, lunch or dinner. Time had no meaning below the surface, not to her that was.

She knew the food would be ripped out by teeth or a blood explosion soon but it did not matter. The cooking was consumed for the joy alone and not the nutrients it would provide. More notifications were present in her mind, ready to be read but not before she started digging in. A pasta dish with prawns, quite fresh in taste with some few daring notes of flavor.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Corrupted Zanedin Hunter – lvl 630]'

...

'ding' 'You have defeated [Corrupted Zanedin Hunter – lvl 598]'

'ding' 'The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 331 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'Kin of Ash has reached lvl 330 – Five stat points awarded - One third tier skill point awarded'

'ding' 'Sentinel Reconstruction reaches 3rd lvl 22'

'ding' 'Sentinel Core reaches 3rd lvl 16'

'ding' 'True Ash Creation reaches 3rd lvl 19'

'ding' 'Ash and Ember Unity reaches 3rd lvl 18'

'ding' 'Avatar of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 9'

'ding' 'Keeper of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 16'

'ding' 'Veteran reaches 2nd lvl 3'

'ding' 'Blast Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 15'

'ding' 'Blast Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 16'

'ding' 'Blood Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 1'

Blood Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 1

The arts of blood manipulation can be deceptive and dangerous to both ally and foe. You have stood against the old magic and lived. Next time your chance of survival will be even higher.

2nd stage: Masters of this ancient art have found ways to use the very essence of your life against you. With sheer ferocity, you have shown that not every creature born of blood is prey alone.

They will find it a challenge to invade and use what belongs to you alone.

'ding' 'Blood Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 2'

'ding' 'Blood Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 3'

'ding' 'Blood Manipulation Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 13'

'ding' 'Blood Manipulation Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 14'

'ding' 'Curse Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 13'

'ding' 'Curse Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 14'

'ding' 'Curse Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 15'

'ding' 'Time Magic Resistance reaches lvl 14'

...

'ding' 'Time Magic Resistance reaches lvl 19'

Fewer class skill levels than before, despite more kills. I should maybe use Monster Hunter more. Should be easy to level it here against these ridiculous beasts.

The new addition to her blood magic resistance likely meant a defense against its intrusive nature, the way Edwin had used it against her in their training.

It seemed her resistance levels too were slowing down a little. Those in the second stage at least. Ilea knew her Avatar of Ash ability at least didn't ignore existing levels altogether as soon as a resistance was disabled. The levels themselves were similar in number as those from her previous confrontations but this time, she had faced near twice the numbers all in all.

Damn, I should really eat more seafood. This stuff is great when it's not frozen and shipped over half a country before a fast food chain prepares it with entirely too much fat and frying.

Show me the third tier points my dear, she said in her mind and took another bite.

'3rd tier skill points available [Kin of Ash]: 1'

'Skills available for third tier advancement in [Kin of Ash]:'

- Ashen Wings

- Eyes of Ash

Not much left hmm? She pondered.

Ilea was intrigued what the bonus to her ashen eyes would be but after having faced the Elemental and the Griffin, she could do with an upgrade to her wings. The lack of dodging her speed and maneuverability had provided was a concern.

Against the Griffin, she had even decided to move on the ground instead with her otherwise superior wings. Too many spells with a powerful impact had forced her to abandon one of her greatest strengths.

She remembered when her wings had made the difference against her first Taleen Centurion. Even now, they allowed her to see this layer as the farming ground it was, instead of a horde of bloodthirsty frenzied beasts that would follow her without pause.

The choice for now was clear and soon her remaining skills too would advance as well.

'ding' 'Ashen Wings reaches 3rd lvl 1'

'Passive: Ashen Wings – 3rd lvl 1

Your understanding of ash allows you to form wings from ash and ember. Strike your enemies from above and close the distance to deliver your wrath.

2nd stage: Your wings become more dense and tangible, able to help you defend and attack.

3rd stage: Ash Creation and Unity prove you are above the rest. Shape and form your wings to your liking, now directly affected by your control. An added tail shall make you one with the skies above, not a mere human imitating flight but one who revels in it. You may charge your wings with mana and stamina to dramatically increase your flight velocity at the cost of heavily reduced control.

Category: Body Enhancement – Ashen Magic