

Chapter 431 Grounding

They quickly moved down again, the Fae already using its shield against the heat.

Nothing had shown up on either layer.

“Hmm... did you specifically mean the roar?”

The Fae nodded after a moment.

Why, she sent.

The Fae looked at her in a contemplative way.

Dragons

The answer was simple and comprehensive.

Ilea laughed.

Confused

She calmed down and shook her head.

“Just... of course it’s because of Dragons. Everyone here pisses their pants at their mention. I bet it’s going to be a massive let down once I actually meet one. You fear them too?”

No

“Of course you don’t. So why should I?”

Human

It pointed at itself.

Fae

“So what?” she asked and summoned a meal. Hungry after nearly dying to some floating energy.

“You said I’m special.”

The Fae shrugged and looked away at the same time.

Special

Stupid

“Hey, you’re free of corruption because of this special stupid human.”

True

Nice

Special

Stupid

“Oh? Four words! You’re slipping up, my guy.”

The Fae giggled and twirled.

“Do you like it here? Where the mana feels fucking choking?”

Yes

“Do you have a home? Somewhere you would go after this?”

It nodded.

“Is it like here?”

The Fae seemed to hesitate.

Rules

“I see, I see. You’re not allowed to talk about it. Outsiders and all. I get it. I don’t approve but I get it. I’d say you should be an independent Fae that needs no rules but I don’t understand your species at all.”

Considerate

“I know. I’m the beacon of tolerance and inter-species understanding.”

It giggled.

I mean considering most humans would probably try to eat you or something I’m actually alright. Same with Elves. Might be one of the only humans with friends of various species.

“Elf, Fae, Spirit, Dwarf, Firefox, Mind Weaver, Maro, Dagger turned Machine... I’m pretty good. Think I can befriend those arcane bolts?”

Try

“I will, you know I’m not kidding. Oh I forgot the Trakorov. Also a good friend.”

No

“Dude loves me. Did I mention the Lightning Elemental?”

Stop

“You start to sound like my notifications. Are you the system in my head?”

Yes

Ilea squinted her eyes and grabbed the Fae, moving it close to her head.

It giggled.

Would certainly fit with Fae supposedly being tricksters and all. I told it my name, right? Well I didn’t give it. Just said it. I’m perfectly safe. Not like a certain demon warned me from saying my name.

“Do names have power?” she asked, actually interested now that the thought crossed her mind again.

Names?

“Yes, like my given name. If someone else knows it, can they use magic against me?”

The Fae shrugged.

Unknown

“I see. Or it would just be something related to Mind Magic or another school.”

It nodded in response.

Boring

Friend, it sent and pointed at one of the moving bolts of pure arcane energy.

“Ah yes. I’ll have to introduce myself,” Ilea said and stored the empty dish.

The mana surged through her, partially wrecking her body. Nothing much to worry about. A bunch of fried organs and a couple thousand points of health gone in mere moments.

Another surge formed and rushed through the dark cavern.

Ilea blinked twice to catch it, gritting her teeth as the energy flowed through her. She stayed upright, her wings moving behind her as she took a deep breath, healing the damage to her body.

“I don’t think it likes me!” she shouted to the Fae that was floating near the entrance where so far no arcane lightning had reached.

It waved back and twirled in joy, clearly visible to her Eyes of Ash.

‘ding’ ‘Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 2’

Nice

She continued chasing the arcane beams for a while, their insane power enough to push her Resistance even higher.

Ilea spent another couple hours in the layer until it became boring.

The damage was certainly there but not having an actual enemy to face made the whole thing much less exciting.

“We’re leaving!” she shouted to the Fae and blinked towards the exit she had found some time earlier.

The Fae appeared on her shoulder while she checked her progress.

‘ding’ ‘Sentinel Reconstruction reaches 3rd lvl 27’

‘ding’ ‘Azarinth Perception reaches 3rd lvl 9’

‘ding’ ‘Ashen Wings reaches 3rd lvl 11’

‘ding’ ‘Eyes of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 5’

‘ding’ ‘Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 3’

‘ding’ ‘Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 4’

She jumped down into the stone shaft.

Boring? she asked.

The Fae shook its head.

Impressive

“I guess... been a while since I tested but are these arcs more or less powerful than the lightning up and above the dungeon?”

Similar

“Hmm.”

The mana density mostly remained as they descended farther down but was joined by frost forming on the walls and her armor.

“Lava to mana to ice. I’m sure a large part of this dungeon was made by whoever built all those steel structures but can something like this form naturally as well?”

Possible

“Really? I mean these are some fucking extremes.”

Mana

Powerful

“The more density, the more volatile it all becomes?” she asked.

The Fae nodded while sitting on her shoulder, grabbing some ash to tuck itself in against the cold.

Ilea helped out, leaving only its eyes uncovered under the makeshift skiing gear.

She kept a look on its vitals as they came out into the next layer. *Only three remaining*, she thought, barely able to see ten meters far in the mist of snow and wind.

Ilea used Monster Hunter again, her roar echoing through the unknown areas, moving far.

Nothing responded to her call.

I doubt this experience will allow me to get Ice Resistance any higher, she thought and slowly made her way through the terrible weather.

Chunks of ice formed on her ash but her second tier bonus to Ice Resistance made it not dig much further.

The Fae certainly didn’t enjoy the experience but neither did it complain behind its shield and ash.

Twenty minutes of searching and a trail of ice later, the two found the way into the next layer. No creatures had shown themselves here either and she suspected that nothing else would come up.

Maybe the extreme conditions didn’t allow anything to stay down here or nothing had found this place yet. She had too little of an understanding about how dungeons worked to make a reasonable assumption.

The good part was that there were no signs of corrupted creatures. The Trakorov would take care of most anyway but if she could help out before, that was preferable. For her own levels and growth as well as a help for the creature.

A corrupted Trakorov was not something she would want to face.

“What’s with these layers?” she asked as they once again descended farther down.

Barrier?

“Natural barriers you mean? But the Trakorov is much more of a barrier than any of this,” Ilea said.

Creature

Hide

“You’re right. The expedition reached level twenty without much trouble and they’d be swatted by even layer six or seven monsters. Just weird you know... Maro talked about going deeper than layer twenty but everything is different since he shut himself into his machine.”

“I guess these layers would stop scavengers dead in their tracks. Or force them to face the creatures first,” she noted.

The Fae nodded.

Ilea and the creature came into a small room made of steel. The mana here felt even more restricting, more dense and powerful.

“Still just nothing to you?”

Nice

“I bet it is,” she said and looked around. A corridor led away from the small room, no traps, enchantments or runes visible to any of her skills.

Ilea walked to the closed door and touched it, seeing into an open space beyond. Her sphere wasn’t obstructed but muddled instead, even more than before. More than in the hallway itself where the mana density reached levels close to the twenty second level.

“Teleport in or open the door?”

She decided on the door, to make sure she had a way out in case it locked her into the area of high density. Her ashen limbs smashed into the steel, cutting through with difficulties but considerably easier than when she went to rescue the Fae.

Granted, the door wasn’t exactly ten meters of pure steel. More like ten centimeters.

As soon as she pierced through, the mana leaked in and made her step back. “Holy fuck...,” she grumbled, feeling the power. She could see the change with her Sphere but more than anything she felt it in her bones.

Ilea coughed and spat out blood as she healed herself. Without the third tier, she would have probably collapsed immediately.

Interesting, the Fae sent as it floated right in front of the hole, looking into the open space beyond.

Unnatural

“No shit,” Ilea said and breathed in deeply.

‘ding’ ‘Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 5’

She propped herself on her knees before righting herself up again. “I’m fine.”

Blood

“Ah, I’m fine,” she repeated. “You’ve literally seen me ripped apart, a little blood isn’t a concern.”

Okay

“Don’t give me that look. Come on, let’s check it out,” she said and smiled at the creature.

The Fae nodded excitedly as it watched Ilea pry open the steel gate with her ashen limbs and arms.

She breathed in deeply and walked out into the open space.

Magical lamps illuminated the hundred meter high dome like structure, thousands upon thousands of runes glowed with dark orange red power on every piece of metal that formed the creation.

If any doubt in her mind had remained that this was made by the same beings as the facility in the demon realm, then it was shattered right then and there.

Goosebumps formed on her arms and neck as she took a couple steps, struggling to move in the dense mana. It wasn’t constricting and paralyzing as it had been in the twenty second layer but nonetheless it felt overwhelming.

Ilea could see the runes on the steel plates clearly and still she failed to grasp their form. It didn’t hurt in her mind but she could tell her Mental Resistance was responsible for that. She was looking at knowledge and truth her brain could not comprehend.

Hmm, does that mean I can look at a bunch of Eldritch shit without going mad? Bring me the elder scrolls, she thought with a smile.

Wrong, the Fae said into her mind.

It was disturbed, frantically looking around.

“Are you concerned about this place?” she asked.

The Fae looked at her and nodded.

“I have no clue what the runes do though. Do you know?”

Concentrate

Mana

“Hmm... so that’s what this is. Why you said unnatural?”

It nodded.

Dungeon

Formed

“This place is responsible for the dungeon?” she asked.

The Fae nodded.

“What do you want to do then?”

Destroy

“We could learn a lot from this though. Plus we don’t know how destroying this place will affect all the creatures within the Descent,” Ilea said.

The Fae considered and nodded.

Agree

Dangerous

“We can go to the next layer I guess, see what’s around. With everything else empty I don’t really except another powerful being like at fifteen and twenty. Might bring some answers if this is essentially the core of the dungeon. There’s an opening in the middle leading down.”

Maybe

Idea

The Fae looked at her and then averted its gaze.

No

“What?”

Dangerous

“Maybe I can help?” she asked.

The Fae nodded.

Needed

Yes

Dangerous

“I’ll help if I can. Just explain what you’re thinking about.”

Collection

Slow

Drain

It sent and pointed at itself and then her.

“You want to drain the mana?”

The Fae nodded excitedly.

“How?”

You

Damage

“Show me,” Ilea said.

The Fae landed on her outstretched palm, its eyes starting to glow white.

Sure?

Ilea nodded. “How bad could it be?”

It was horrible.

As if a thousand needles pierced her body in an instant, flowing through her body as they wreaked havoc.

Ilea went down to her knees and screamed, her healing trying to work against the power but the pain didn't lessen. This was purely arcane, magic damaging something beyond nerves and cells. Her head hurt, something deep within her being screamed and she felt her very existence lose focus, torn and shredded.

The Fae stopped after two seconds.

Perhaps the two longest seconds of her life. Then again, she had learned that horrific pain usually made her think it was the worst thing in existence whenever she was in the process of experiencing it.

'ding' 'Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 6'

'ding' 'Mental Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 2'

'ding' 'Pain Tolerance reaches 2nd lvl 11'

'ding' 'Soul Magic Resistance reaches lvl 9'

'ding' 'Space Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 8'

'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches lvl 8'

'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches lvl 9'

"What the fuck," she said and looked through the messages. *Not purely arcane at all... Pain Tolerance? But my pain is off?*

"This shit is weird, what's going on here? I just got resistance levels in like six different schools of magic." She touched her head, still feeling the aftermath of the experience flowing through her body.

The Fae nodded.

Painful

Dangerous

Runes, it pointed around the dome.

Spell, it pointed at itself.

Transferred

Body

Damaged

Friend

Resistant

Death, it pointed at itself.

Again it pointed at her.

Alive

Maybe

“How long do you have to do this?” she asked.

The Fae looked down and shook its head.

“Sure this is necessary? I really don’t feel like going through that again, even with all the levels...,”
Ilea said and bit her lip. It had felt wrong, entirely wrong.

No

Leave

“Tell me and be honest, friend. Do you think it necessary?”

The Fae looked away but found her eyes some seconds later. It nodded weakly.

“Why? Do you know what the runes can do, who the people behind this are?”

Power, it sent after a moment and gestured around itself.

Gathered

Millennia

Unknown

Possibilities

Corruption

Pain

Destruction

Ilea nodded. “I see. And the effect it would have on the people in the first layer and above? The creatures within the dungeon?”

The Fae shook its head.

Not

Destroy

Drain

“And that wouldn’t have an effect?”

Minimal

Certain

“I see. And you think the absurd pain I’ll go through is worth all this?”

Uncertain

Corruption

Pain

Drain

Necessary

“Hmm... I trust you, you know?” Ilea said and moved two of her ashen limbs between her jaws as she knelt down. She closed her eyes and nodded to the Fae.

Regret

Its eyes started glowing.

Friend

Courage

The pain came once more and all her senses were overwhelmed.

She only saw glimpses of her surroundings, noting that she was lying on the ground now, blood seeping from her nose and ears. Her body twitched from time to time as tears rolled down her cheeks.

Ilea screamed into her ash, her mind, soul, and body battered by the continuous stream of mana that flowed into her, to destroy and find its end. Her very existence shuddered, each level up marginally reducing the overwhelming nature of the experience. Not enough to change it in a meaningful way, not by a long shot.

Ilea had felt the concern from the Fae, knew it had been imprisoned here for years, centuries perhaps. It had struggled against the corruption until she freed it.

The being would not ask this of her if it wasn't absolutely necessary. Even now she could feel the regret, the pain of her friend seeing her in this state.

It was little consolation.

Ilea lost track of time, her whole existence pure agony. The mana kept her awake. Her resilience and all respective resistance skills reduced the effects by a large margin. Sentinel Reconstruction healed her mind and body, both from the physical and psychological damage. And still she felt like she was going numb, her very being torn apart by the incredible power.

As time went on, the experience changed. Thoughts from time to time came to her mind again, her brain not completely overwhelmed anymore.

More time passed and she found herself sitting up, rocking on the ground as the Fae continued to push mana into her.

Hours passed and she started to analyze the flows around her, started to glimpse at her inner being, her body, mind, the part of her she assumed to be her soul.

The mana was laced with different powers, various nuances she had seen before, had experienced before. Space, Void, Mind, Soul, and Arcane. The Pain was unnatural, something that resulted from the various magics, the purity and strength of it all. It became easier to handle as all resistances rose to meet the challenge. Her body adapted.

Her mind found calm as she opened her eyes and focused on the two white eyes staring at her still. She could tell her soul was cracked and injured, could feel her mind struggle to keep together a semblance of herself. And still she took in the power, felt it intrude her body as it burned and destroyed.

She wasn't rocking anymore, instead changing to a cross legged position.

More, she sent, knowing the Fae was holding back. She couldn't form words as she was but simple thoughts were possible.

The Fae looked at her and nodded slowly.

The damage picked up again, returning to an experience difficult to handle but not overwhelming. *I'm through the worst*, she thought, trying to relax her muscles and mind as she focused on the healing that flowed through her.

Ilea kept watching the stream of mana, warped and focused by the Fae. A part of her was glad she had agreed, seeing the levels come in. Another part of her screamed at her to get away, to stop it. *Persevere*, she told herself. *Persevere and prevail. Become that which cannot be destroyed.*