

‘ding’ ‘You have unlocked three unique Classes – One Core skill point awarded’

A little late, are we?

Ilea finished her meal, refilling her mug with ale as she relaxed on her ashen sofa. She tried imbuing the construct with mana, finding the process as instinctual as the creation itself.

Guess I can’t exactly give commands to a couch, she thought and formed a sphere instead. The little ball looked smooth, like black glass or cast metal. It’s not just ash anymore though, is it?

She focused on the space next to the floating sphere of ash and instead formed a ball of embers, the fiery sphere bursting to life with radiating heat and glowing light. She moved it into her hand and looked at it, felt it. A moment later she fused the two spheres together, lines of embers breaking up the ashen surface. She tried storing heat within but failed. What she could do was increase the heat from the embers themselves, her creation and manipulation allowing her some manner of control.

Embered Heart generated heat within her core, so that wasn’t the issue. She extended a tendril of ash to the floating sphere. The connection established, she managed to pour heat into it. *I see. So no wireless heat transfer. A little less utility but I suppose it hardly matters.*

The small sphere quickly started to show cracks, the embered lines glowing brighter. She could feel the structure struggle against the heat she tried to store. Ilea stopped the process and sent the sphere flying, the little ball impacting against the cavern wall, bursting into an uncontrolled wave of energy and fire. *Hmm, not quite as smooth as my own sphere. The heat just bursts out where the sphere breaks first. Like a grenade or something.*

“You can store heat within your ash now?” Kyrian asked, the man standing nearby as he watched her.

Neiphato glanced at the sofa instead. “Imbued with... stability?”

“Yes to both,” Ilea answered and formed another sphere. This one she imbued with mana, trying to give it a command.

Move in a circle around Kyrian. Dissolve when he says bird.

Ilea had no idea how much was too much. This wasn’t exactly a simple command but the instructions were somewhat clear. Her ash would have to hear what he said, if such a thing was possible.

“Can you say bird?” she asked him, watching the sphere float in a circle around him.

“Bird,” Kyrian said.

Nothing happened.

So no communication, she thought and took control of the sphere again.

Float around Kyrian as fast as you can. Dissolve when he claps his hands together.

“Now clap your hands,” she said, watching the sphere swirling around his armored form.

He did so and this time, the little ball dissolved.

How far can I push this, she asked herself and made a copy of herself. Out of ash of course. She added a few burning cindered lines as an aesthetic touch before she imbued the ash with her mana. She could tell that with her current abilities and harmony, she could maintain just about five such copies. Many more limbs, spheres, or spears of course, but an actual humanoid made of ash would be quite a bit more versatile than a sphere.

Protect Kyrian. Dissolve when he claps. Do not defend him again me. Do not attack me.

She watched as her copy jumped back, moving close to Kyrian.

“Are you controlling this thing?” the man asked, touching the ash carefully. “This thing is dense... sure you’re not some kind of golem maker at this point? It’s basically an armored copy.”

“I’m testing how complex of a command I can imbue them with,” Ilea said and stood up. She walked up to Kyrian, finding her copy moving between them with its fists going into a fighting pose. When she took a step back, the ash clone relaxed its posture again. “I’ll attack you,” she said and sent a sphere of ash at her friend, aiming for his shoulder.

The ashen Ilea hovered to the left, deflecting the projectile with a decisive move. Then it attacked, charging Ilea with a few quick steps, its punch coming short when Ilea took control again.

She looked at the clone in mid punch, walking around it. *So that was too much. Maybe the attack didn’t count as me attacking him because I used my ash? But it attacked me... ignoring the last command too.*

“Can you clap again?” she asked.

The clone dissolved when he did so.

So they take up manipulation capacity... but I can leave them behind somewhere or send them scouting into an area. Not that they could report anything back to me. Or can they?

The next twenty minutes she spent fiddling with her commands, both for spheres, ashen mist, humanoid copies, and spears. Once imbued, the creations couldn’t change form again. However all of them could float, much like if she controlled them directly. Ilea found it difficult to figure out the exact limit of her commands. Complex things like *Help Neiphato* or *Annoy Kyrian* both worked surprisingly, though the results were a little unclear.

Helping someone who couldn’t explain what they needed help with was difficult. She felt like her ash did the closest of what she had in mind, or the closest of what she would do at the time of imbuing. It couldn’t use any skills of course but the copy helping Neiphato moved to locations where the elf pointed it to. It also managed to collect pebbles for him after he showed the action himself, pointing at more pebbles and then to his hand where he held a few already.

The copy tasked with annoying Kyrian jumped around him, poked his armor, and chucked little rocks at him. All without success. Then again, Ilea didn’t know how to annoy the man either.

“Seems like they try to the best of your knowledge,” Kyrian said.

“Yeah... it’s a little problematic that I can’t further specify these commands... other than one additional condition,” she answered, forming another copy.

Train those who challenge you. No killing.

The copy stood, waiting until Ilea stood in front of it and got into a fighting stance. It mirrored her.

When she started to circle the copy, it moved as well, its foot work eerily similar to her own style, likely imbued to an extent with her experience and abilities. She attacked, getting into a hand to hand battle with the ash. A few decisive blows let her take the fight rather quickly, her own speed and finesse far superior to the being made entirely of ash and embers.

“It’s surprisingly intelligent,” Kyrian said.

Neiphato hissed approvingly. “With creation, the element you make is always formed from your mana. A part of you. It will retain some understanding of what you are, what you want, and what it is itself.”

My ash did protect me before, moving even without my own command.

“It’s pretty awesome either way. Can you charge it with heat too?” Kyrian asked.

Ilea formed an ashen spear, imbuing it with mana and pushing heat inside at the same time.

Search the cavern and hit the closest monster. Do not injure allies.

Tipped off with heat, the spear shot away, hovering through the air as if it was moved by her will.

Ilea followed it, moving her wings as she watched the spear descend on a Stone Specter, striking the creature directly before a flash of fiery heat and energy exploded outwards, shattering whatever held the floating stones together.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Stone Specter – lvl 508]

“Guided missiles...,” she murmured, returning to her couch. “This is pretty ridiculous,” she added and made a small sphere.

Go find Claire.

The ball immediately shot off, flying out of the cavern and into the tunnel they had used to come here.

Oh? Know where you’re going little ball?

Ilea didn’t see the thing anymore, nor did she feel where it was. She knew it was somewhere, a small part of the ash she could control used up. While she couldn’t give it a new command or make it move, she could let go. Due to her true creation, or now origin spell, the ash itself remained, its command however was gone. It would remain as a sphere until the magic within was used up, a process she knew would take quite some time. A few days perhaps.

Would it know the direction of Claire’s mark? And then? How far would it travel to find her. Forever? Like some simple drone left with its one purpose? As long as I keep it active. What if the mana runs out but the command and my will for its existence remains?

Ilea assumed the ash would collapse nonetheless, unable to sustain itself without more mana. She let a sphere swirl around herself in a ten meter radius to test, imbuing it with particularly little mana.

Now, how about my armor, she thought, summoning her bone set before she moved her ashen armor to near her neck. She could still move it around. The same was true for deactivation, though Ilea saw little reason to ever not use her Mantle. One of her limbs rushed out and tried to cut into her arm, however it failed to penetrate.

Oh no... can't get through my own defense anymore. That might be troublesome. Ah wait...

She moved the armor away from her arm, storing her bone set once more before her limb once again cut into her. This time just her flesh. And it managed to penetrate. The others looked on as a frenzied ashen limb cut and shredded through flesh and muscle, the tissue regenerating just a little slower than the damage being done.

More muscle density? That's more of a difference than I expected, Ilea thought, her ash finally ripping off the lower part of her arm, near her elbow. Her mind removed the Mantle's restriction to cover her arm before she healed the injury. Bone, skin, muscle, and ash reformed at the same time, her hand forming a fist. *It's like the ash isn't even there,* she thought, looking at her hand.

Before it had usually felt like a glove. Her sensitivity differed greatly depending on what exactly she did. Now however, her ashen mantle felt like her very own skin, the near black material smoothly covering her moving hand and fingers. *I wonder if an Executioner can get through this just as easily.*

She activated the new addition to her Mantle, more ash quickly forming on top of her current set. The layers each took the same time as her initial armor to form, adding the same thickness until she reached the maximum three hundred percent increase. *Four sets basically,* she thought, feeling the weight and bulk of her new defense. Each layer required some focus from her Authority, using up the equivalent of about two ashen limbs.

Her spears and spheres required considerably less focus, except when she wanted to do more than shoot them at an enemy.

Ilea stood up slowly, catching herself when she took a step forward. *This will take some time to get used to,* she thought.

"You grew?" Kyrian asked.

"More ash," Neiphato said. "Just her armor. Though it seems... more in tune, with her real body."

"It's smoother too," Kyrian added.

"It's pretty heavy," Ilea said, her voice coming out rather muffled.

The man nodded. "You'll get used to it. Just train with it often."

I will, she thought and kept the armor extended. She focused on her various skills, transferring away a few dozen meters where she floated in the air and formed heat. At first she only used her Embered Heart, feeling the heat rise up. Faster than it had ever before. Then she added mana, using Titan Core to generate heat at an accelerated speed. Hundreds of points of mana turned to heat with each passing second, skyrocketing her production into unprecedented heights.

She felt the air around her shift as the heat exuded from her increased. Her wings moved her a little farther away. A smile on her face, she formed twenty spears, moving them all close to her back, all connected to her body. The heat she had formed within filled all the spears to the brim near instantly.

Ilea pointed at the ground, her spears moving out around her before they all shot down. The gesture of course was unnecessary but it felt better that way. Her smile only widened when she watched the cascade of explosions expanding through the dark valley below her. They didn't look like spheres at all, just wild fiery energies surging out of the ashen spears, ripping the element apart from within to deliver the brimming heat stored within.

Guess I did get an effective area attack after all, she thought, quite happy with the insane heat generation increase.

Ilea formed an ashen spear and shot it towards the large area where she had fought the Wyrms. She watched the projectile fly into the distance, her control still present. When she could barely see the small spear, she made it turn to the right.

Her ash reacted just as quickly as if it had been next to her.

The distance made it difficult to actually do something specific with the spear but just the added control would make it harder for enemies to dodge a long range attack. *Especially if they're charged with heat.*

She tried to imbue a few of her spears with the command to hit the cavern walls, finding herself unable to command more than ten of them. *No massive swarm then. Still useful of course.*

Ilea grinned when she felt her wings starting to struggle slightly, a few uses of teleportation bringing her back to her companions. Feyrair was still engaged with the Rock Lizard somewhere near the massive lava lake.

She landed, the impact resounding as her knees bent. Her arms felt heavier now, the effort required to lift them considerably higher. The increased weight hadn't turned her into an immobile chunk of flesh and ash but the added density would impact her speed considerably. *My defense should be higher too. More weight should equal more density.*

It took her five minutes to reach the highest point of her Titan Core weight increase. The heat she could now generate seemed downright absurd. She started laughing as she stretched out her arm and released a massive beam of wild fiery energy, burning the very air it passed.

Now let's see if this thing is worth anything, she thought and summoned the Wyrms' eye. She tried to hold the thing in one hand but found it a little too bulky. Instead she formed ash around her arm, placing the eye into an extension that reminded her of some kind of cannon. The palm of her hand now rested on the back of the monster part, ash extending around it. As if to form a barrel, she extended her ash a little further and held her occupied arm with her other.

"Get some distance before you blow us up," Kyrian said, crossing his arms.

Ilea displaced herself and charged up heat, her teleportation luckily unchanged by the massive weight increase. She charged up and aimed, Embered Heart released from her arm.

All the energy and heat rushed into the Wyrms' eye, a focused scorching beam flashing out on the other side, digging into a distant wall with devastating power.

Kyrian watched his mad companion flap her wings as she tried to keep herself afloat, her laughter reaching far and wide as she sent beams of concentrated fire and heat into the cavern walls.

“Are we sure the Wyrms didn’t win and somehow took her form?” Neiphato asked as he watched with a wary expression.

“I know her. That’s her,” Kyrian said, allowing himself a smile. “I’m more worried about the explosions she rained down onto that crevice. That will allow her to kill hundreds of monsters in the span of a few seconds.”

“You don’t trust she will use her powers wisely?” Neiphato asked, raising his eyebrows as he looked at him.

Kyrian chuckled. “No. I mean yes. I just hope I get something just as powerful with my evolutions. I feel like she’s learned to be more responsible with her power.”

They watched the woman burn through walls, laughing manically as she charged up a few dozen ashen spears, tremors reaching even their position from the massive heated explosions.

“Are you sure about that?” Neiphato asked.

The metal mage chose not to reply.

Ilea still giggled as she shot her last beam, releasing her ashen cannon extension around her arm. She held the still glowing Wyrms eye, feeling the residual heat burn into her ashen mantle.

“Wonderful... my precious,” she whispered, storing the thing once more. *Could also nestle it within my ashen limbs to shoot the beam without giving up an arm.*

She couldn’t quite decide which option was cooler but both would always be available. As long as she managed to hold on to the eye.

Ilea summoned it again and tried to somehow apply her flame of creation, the fires however unable to enter the eye effectively. *Bummer. Only the ashen flamethrower remains.*

Bits and pieces of the white flame had spread from the heated projectiles she had shot into the ground and walls. Another option to weaken her enemies from a distance.

Thinking of distance..., she thought and created another set of spears, sending them away. When they had flown a few hundred meters, pushed forward by her authority, she made them burst into a thin mist of ash.

Her flame of creation failed to take hold of the faraway ash, a limitation she hadn’t previously encountered. *Well, already burning ash exploding is plenty of utility. Though a sweeping mist of burning ash would’ve been awesome. At least I have my carpet bombing.*