

## Chapter 522 Mantises – Manti – Mantuu?

Her ash had spread enough, touching the mantis before she activated Flare of Creation, the pale white fire spreading through the whole room as the being slashed at it with its spear.

The fire didn't stick to the weapon but remained on parts of its body.

Ilea noted that it had been in a state of increased speed for close to ten seconds. She pushed against it now with her own offensive arsenal.

This time she took more risks, keeping her Flare up as she used Absolute Destruction with each strike, all sixteen limbs fanning out and moving as chaotically as possible to touch or strike the mantis.

The creature was on fire but retained its fighting prowess, cutting both ash and flames. It pushed against her fire with its own aura of blood magic, occasionally sliding its blade over its own carapace to get rid of the enemy spell.

Ilea was forced to dodge two blows with displacement and blink before the spear sliced towards her neck. She felt the damage coming and knew her armor was too thin, chipped away from the last hundred strikes.

Force pushed her back in the last moment, the spear's razor thin blade slicing through her throat.

She felt the magic spread into her before a third tier heal reformed her neck. Ilea's own ash had never ceased its attacks but the mantis countered with broad swipes of its weapon. Her limbs fell to the ground as if disconnected from her very essence.

Ilea felt the effects of the enemy aura lessen suddenly, accompanied by a message in her mind and a new resistance to call her own.

There was no time to check, with the sound of the notification three more strikes slashed into her.

It meant that she would grow more resilient as the fight progressed. Already she resisted the blood magic aspect partially, and each strike dealt to her damaged the enemy in turn.

The problem was the healing aspect. She could see the small gashes and dents on the mantis' slim body heal slightly with each successful hit it dealt to her.

If her Health Drain Resistance was responsible for countering this effect, time was on her side with that too.

The question was if she could survive until that became relevant. Flare of Creation seemed to do little and her mana intrusion had no visible effect so far. But Ilea knew that the mantis wasn't unbeatable. It dodged and deflected her fists and ash, had teleported to avoid Heart of Cinder and it used its blade to steal her health.

Displacement took too long to activate on the being and was simply avoided or resisted. The same was true for Force and the second tier of Space Shift. Ilea assumed it mostly had to do with her skills still being in the second tier. There was a chance too that the mantis simply had a high level space magic resistance which would further reduce its effects.

The creature suddenly vanished up onto a snow covered roof, forming a glob of pulsing blood in front of it.

Ilea appeared one roof over, catching her breath as she let her mana recover, the slight cuts and wounds healing.

Two seconds passed before the mantis spread its arms and the blood erupted.

Ilea had seen it come through her precognition, simply floating where she had before.

The blood magic spread in all directions, downright eating through the stone houses.

Her ash was disintegrating slowly, the magic spreading into her body as she healed against it.

“Impressive, but you should’ve seen the Praetorian explosions,” she said with a smile as her ash reformed.

The mantis replied with a few clicking sounds as its spear appeared in its hand, the creature moving into an offensive stance as another pulse of energy washed out.

*Again?! Are you ki-*

Ilea couldn’t finish the thought, her mind once again occupied by the hundred thrusts and swipes coming her way.

Her ashen limbs were removed before they could really form, each deflected strike followed by five more. By now the magic hit harder too. The mantis was using more resources or an additional spell to increase its destructive blows.

Whole sections of her armor were removed with each successful hit, an explosion of blood and acidic energy eating her flesh to the bone whenever the spear cut deep.

Ilea had to blink and displace herself at the same time to avoid the deadly strikes, knowing that the mantis already went for her head.

Its teleportation could keep up with hers.

The two spells didn’t buy her any time but simply allowed her to dodge the next attack.

*Tricky*, Ilea thought as she smiled and flickered through the frozen stone city with a murderous monster at her heels.

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Felicia was entirely absorbed by the battle, her blades of wind barely cutting into the powerful carapace of the enemy warriors.

Ilea and the pirate had vanished outside at some point, taking three of the beings with them.

The lower leveled creatures had fallen to their spells quickly, many of them choosing to flee in the frenzy of battle.

Four mantis warriors remained, each far above Felicia’s level. She had only survived so far thanks to the shields Michael had created time and time again.

Two of his had followed the pirate out through the large hole blown out by one spell or the other, the other three had remained here.

Velamyr was engaged with one of the creatures, the two teleporting through the hall too fast for her to follow, their movements in sync as his spells clashed with the monster's claws.

A deep gash on her side healed painfully slowly, her spells keeping her focused on the task at hand. She knew deep down that she had to flee, that she would die here fighting against these creatures but she wouldn't leave them behind. Not as long as she could actually do something.

Her wind was faster than Michael's gold, allowing her to support the man against the three warriors focused on them.

He now held two blood swords in each hand, flat spheres of blood forming wherever the creatures would strike, his golden spikes following the fast moving creatures with each step they took.

Felicia sent four more blades at the nearest creature, simply pushing air towards it when it ignored the attacks. She didn't watch as it was blown back to the nearest wall.

A storm formed between her hands before she released it upwards, the spell expanding as it rushed towards the mantis that crawled on the wall, its rope pushed aside as it tried to entangle one of Michael's copies.

The man had formed dozens of runes on the ground, his domain slowly expanding as his blood splashed to the ground. Gold followed the same principle, appearing in globs before it splashed to the ground and formed intricate runes connecting together.

Felicia stayed within the area he focused on, avoiding the runes whenever she moved. She felt his magic was significantly more powerful within his domain, his shields forming far quicker and stopping more blows before they dissolved.

Velamyr appeared on the ground next to her, his legs gone as he crawled forward with gritted teeth.

She didn't step to his side but trusted his abilities, her focus switching to the closest mantis warrior as her blades rushed out.

It deflected the first six and was cut by the last one.

*That one's weaker*, she thought and pressed her attack, not letting any of the others out of her sight. Her ears were focused on the winds when she suddenly ducked.

She could feel the talon move through where her head had just been, the creature slamming into a shield of blood before it vanished, the expanding red spikes not fast enough to injure it.

"Can you survive?" one of the Michaels asked, his copy pierced through by a long claw at that very moment.

Velamyr didn't reply, parts of his legs appearing once more. They didn't regenerate but were simply back again.

Michael's struck copy dissolved into blood and gold, both flowing over the creature that seemed unable to teleport away.

Felicia formed another storm when she crouched and now sent it towards the occupied warrior, pushing back the creatures that tried to intervene.

She watched as gold seeped into the mantis' orifices as it twitched and clawed against the fluids sticking to it. It died a moment later.

The other warriors didn't stop but Velamyr was shooting out spells again, his lightning hitting the targets near instantly, leaving scorch marks and molten flesh.

Felicia breathed out when the warriors circled them slowly, clicking and screeching at the death of their sibling.

Michael's domain kept expanding but his numbers had been reduced from three to two.

"What are our chances?" Velamyr asked.

"Our isolated fight here? Not terribly well. The two strongest remain," Michael said. "Girl, you're bleeding out."

Felicia looked down on herself and saw the deep gash on her leg hadn't healed yet. Her sight grew a little blurry but she simply focused on the gash, pushing her mana towards it and watching the wound close.

"Stay defens-" Michael said when one of the creatures appeared close to him, crashing against his blood shield before the other two appeared on each side.

His body dissolved into a bloody silhouette of a man as the three clashed together, his gold armor denting inwards as the blood escaped.

The other Michael lifted both hands, making the destroyed armor split into shrapnel that cut into the two creatures that still remained.

At the same time Velamyr suddenly stood up, his movements unnaturally fast. His eyes glowed a bright blue as his hands extended.

A wild torrent of lightning expanded outwards, slamming into the creatures and the palace beyond. The bright arcs burned deep into the stone and through the mantises.

Velamyr screamed as his lightning arc continued.

A shield of gold formed where the General stood, deflecting the claw of the third mantis.

Michael's main body had reformed, once again clad in golden armor. His copy already worked on replacing the domain runes lost to Velamyr's spell, the arcs just now subsiding.

The man collapsed to one knee when his lightning ceased, his armor reduced to just a few sparks before his movements quickened again, another assault by the remaining warrior dodged.

"Two remain!" Michael called out.

Felicia could feel the being appear behind her. This time she didn't try to dodge but instead trusted her defenses. This one was inferior to the mantis that had targeted Velamyr.

She turned and flew upward, the creature's claw cutting past her wind and steel armor, finding flesh and muscle as she charged her spell.

Her storm was localized and heavily focused, enough to even injure herself. It roared against the mantis, its claw still digging deeper, now cracking bone with its strength. A shield of blood appeared before her to deflect the creature's other arm.

The mantis ripped out its claws and vanished, leaving Felicia floating in the air before she fell.

She found her health at below ten percent, the bleeding not stopping.

One of Michael's shields pushed against her side and sealed off the wound.

She faintly noted that Velamyr was standing again, a deep cut on his chest and one arm missing.

*Only two remain*, she thought and tried to move, finding herself lying on the ground.

“Focus on recovering,” Michael’s voice reached her muddled mind, the man standing close to her, pushed to the defensive by one of the creatures.

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Ilea felt the warrior’s aura getting stronger once again, her resistance to the weird magic of the mantis in turn increasing by the minute.

The creature noticed too, again using its incredible temporary boost to try and overwhelm her.

Ilea’s ash coupled with all her resilience bonuses and incredible healing proved too much however. She deflected, dodged, feinted and attacked. Her reverse healing pushed into the creature whenever her ash connected, Flare of Creation only activating when the monster didn’t use its powerful boost.

She knew that with enough time, she could take this. That was if she didn’t lose her head.

The mantis didn’t have the power to cut through her bone but it didn’t have to. As the battle went on, it learned more about Ilea’s anatomy.

It separated limbs at the joints instead of trying to cut her bone. The practice wasn’t very useful against Ilea, who could regrow them almost immediately.

By now the mantis focused mostly on her chest and head, trying to either pin her down or remove most of the senses for long enough to keep her in a regenerative state until she was dead.

Ilea had punched enough destructive mana into the creature to kill a Specter but it remained focused and continued its attack unimpeded.

Any pretense was gone by now, both of the fighters going for the most lethal hits they could think of. Nothing seemed to work however.

Their continuous battle was interrupted when another mantis slammed into and through a nearby house, the heavy tooth used as its weapon embedding itself into the stone pyramid one street over.

Hector followed, waves of water coming with him.

Ilea and the spear mantis watched the man approach. A third mantis rushed down from above and landed near the destroyed house, going in when the first one came out, blood and cracks showing on its carapace.

She could tell the spear mantis was breathing more heavily, the increasing damage not entirely shrugged off after all. It was simply equalized by its health steal and possibly another skill Ilea didn’t know about.

The spear mantis teleported to its allies, its eyes once more focused on Ilea. It relaxed even more now that the others were close.

Ilea's eyes opened wide when one of them touched the spear mantis, the scratches and dents on its body healing visibly.

"Yeah, that one can heal," Hector said in an annoyed tone, his water moving closer.

"The spear one uses something called Devour, a mix of blood and arcane mag-" Ilea said.

"I've encountered it before," Hector interrupted her. "The big one is just fucking durable. Great warrior but nothing special in the grand scheme of things, if it wasn't for the healer. Also a strong warrior, don't get me wrong."

"Mine has some kind of ten second boost it can use every twenty to thirty seconds. Nearly enough to dismantle me," Ilea said.

Hector glanced at the beings with a smile on his face. "Guess I had the weak ones then, well now that we're together, let's kill the healer first."

**[Warrior – lvl ??]**

**[Warrior – lvl 365]**

**[Warrior – lvl 312]**

The last one was the healer and likely the easiest target.

Ilea waved at them and tried to initiate contact once more but the creatures didn't react.

She felt the presence again now, the one she had felt when they walked up the stairs.

A jumble of confusing emotions and thoughts came to her mind. *Frustration, peace, pleading.*

Ilea noted that she wasn't the only one looking towards the somewhat distant temple.

The spear mantis had turned its head too, making a few clicking sounds before it once again focused on Ilea.

"We can still stop this," she said to the creature, using a charged monster hunter to send the intent.

None of the creatures were frozen.

The spear wielder raised its weapon and vanished.

Ilea did the same, focusing entirely on the healer now.

Her avatar of ash remained stronger due to the long fight but it hadn't reached its peak yet. She appeared and focused on the head, her ash and Flare of Creation surging to injure the being.

Ilea dodged the tooth moving past above her, displacing herself two meters to the left. She heard the flowing waves behind her.

Four beams of pressurized water slashed into the ground next to the healer, one clipping a leg.

Ilea pushed through, ignoring the creature's attacks as she went fully on the offensive. She had seen a glimpse of the spear mantis moving up to meet Hector. A welcome distraction.

Her reverse healing flowed into the creature as her ashen limbs cracked against the hard carapace. Her ash had spread out over the mantis and behind herself, flaring up in white flame to stop the approaching warrior.

The second being teleported to get to her but Ilea simply maneuvered herself below the healer, her offensive not stopping in the slightest.

It cut into her ash with its talons but its attacks lacked the same penetrative power of the spear. The other warrior refrained from striking down its ally to get to her, instead reaching out to grab her.

Ilea's wings moved her out from below the mantis as she blinked and displaced herself between the two of them, all her attacks and mana focused on the healer alone.

It only took a few seconds and dozens of attacks to make the being dazed, cuts and dents showing on most of its body.

The higher leveled warrior made a clicking noise towards the spear mantis.

Ilea wouldn't give them the time.

Heart of Cinder activated with a healthy dose of sacrificed health to empower it.

The flames consumed the two creatures as Ilea hammered her fist into the healer's head. Its eyes dented in and its skull followed but she didn't stop.

Even when the heavy tooth hit her back with enough strength to crack her spine, she continued.

A flood of water slammed into them, washing the trio away instantly.

Ilea kept her hold, her ashen limbs pushing deep into the twitching mantis from all sides as her fists slowed down under the heavy pressure. She instead charged Absolute Destruction as her limbs approached, pumping all the mana she could into her enemy. Flare of Creation lit up underwater, further slowing down the creature's recovery.

The other warrior pushed through the water near uninhibited, its heavy weapon rising before it came down on her. The thing moved as quickly as a fencer could strike with his rapier, simply slamming into the water, ash and into her, damaging her insides and bones despite all the resilience and shock absorption she possessed.

It was too late however, Ilea's fist had already connected. Destruction rushed through the mantis one last time, its body lighting up with spreading flames both fiery red and white in color, the former quickly subdued by the water around them.

A ding resounded as she displaced herself and used her third tier healing to reform her mangled body.

Her wings spread again as she rushed towards Hector, his dome of water reduced to a puddle against the quick slashes of the devouring spear.

His beams of water were dodged before they even reached the creature, his dome reforming time and time again as the mantis slashed away at it, taking large swaths of water as its spear only slowed down marginally within the heavy pressure.

Hector's right arm and shoulder were eaten through, nearly dissolved entirely but his face only held a wicked smile. One warrior facing another.

Ilea blinked between them, frowning when she saw the broad wings spreading on the heavy weight she left behind.

A pained squeal speaking of anger and death sounded out from the flying creature, giving no pause to the spear mantis' assault.