

Ilea checked her levels from the endeavor, eating another meal as she bathed her feet in lava.

'ding' 'Monster Hunter reaches lvl 19'

'ding' 'Monster Hunter reaches lvl 20'

'ding' 'Monster Hunter reaches 2nd lvl 1'

Monster Hunter – 2nd lvl 1

Many times have you faced creatures well beyond your level. You revel in it, seek them out and you prevail. Your presence demands respect. Growl to show your prowess. Effects vary depending on those affected as well as their levels in relation to yours.

2nd stage: You become better at communicating your intent. Infuse your voice with up to 100 mana to increase its range and effect on those that hear it. Fully infused, you may lure even powerful creatures towards your location, depending on your intent.

'ding' 'Veteran reaches 2nd lvl 15'

'ding' 'Veteran reaches 2nd lvl 16'

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

'ding' 'Heat Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 3'

'ding' 'Lava Magic Resistance reaches lvl 11'

...

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

Lava Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 1

An elemental form of molten rock, reserved for those few living in conditions most consider deadly. You have met and fought such a being, its magic opposed by Heat and Earth magic resistance but ultimately something different, more primordial and ancient.

2nd stage: Your body can store heat more effectively, your skin and muscles less prone to melting. Lava has become to you like water is to others, its substance less restricting as you move through it.

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

...

'ding' 'Lava Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 20'

'ding' 'Pain Tolerance reaches 2nd lvl 10'

'ding' 'Space Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 6'

Nearly a day had passed, the Trakorov happily assisting in her training between dozing.

The thing was lazy and Ilea was pretty sure it sustained itself off mana alone. There really wasn't another explanation with how little prey was present in these layers. Some of the monsters hunted and ate, like the Wyverns, Cyclopes and Varass Drowners but to sustain the heat this creature produced, it would have to consume whole towns worth of people.

Ilea was certainly glad that wasn't necessary. Otherwise these monsters would roam instead of simply sleeping in their caves.

She didn't have enough data on the Trakorov to be sure about it but even if it roamed from time to time, it reminded her more of the lizards she knew from earth. Mostly chilling out on a branch or hot stone.

Her Monster Hunter skill felt much more refined and the range was incredible when she charged it fully. The noise however annoyed the Trakorov and she refrained from using it any further.

The second tier for her Lava Magic Resistance coupled well with her third tier Heat Resistance, allowing her to both charge her Heart of Cinder more quickly as well as adding a bunch more power before her body started taking damage.

She was getting closer to her twelfth third tier general point as well.

Even training with the Trakorov, none of her class skills had leveled. It made her feel much more comfortable around the creature, an additional hint that it didn't mean her any harm. Not anymore at least.

Compared to most of her previous training, the past day felt more like a spa to her. She didn't keep her pain perception up throughout the whole thing either.

As soon as she had reached the second tier of Lava Magic Resistance, she left the skill active from time to time to enjoy the heat.

Coupled with other skills, she could definitely understand why the massive creature enjoyed lazing about in its cave all day.

She simply had too many other hobbies she enjoyed but if she would be reincarnated as an animal, it would be a hard decision between bird and lizard.

Done? the Fae sent.

Ilea had noticed it was lazing about as well but for the last couple hours the being had become increasingly restless. Neither did it particularly enjoy the sparring matches with her ashen clone.

"Twenty minutes or so? Then we can check out the deeper layers," she replied.

The Fae twirled vertically.

"Come on... exploring the unknown? Even more ancient and powerful beings to befriend or fight."

It stopped the twirling and looked at her.

Violence?

Maybe, she sent.

Boring

"I'm sorry. You can send a complaint to our support address. I apologize for being an inefficient activity organizer."

The Fae lifted a pebble of black rock and shot it at her head.

"Hey! That could have killed me if I was a normal human."

It giggled into her mind.

Normal?

Monster, it sent with a sarcastic tone.

“Oh?” Ilea asked and covered her face in ash. “Then what does that make you?”

Prey, she sent the response and blinked to the creature.

They flew around the cavern, giggling and using spells to fight each other.

A loud roar resounded a moment later, massive eyes open and focused on them as the Trakorov stared at them. It huffed, steam exiting from its mostly hidden nostrils.

Danger

Definitely

Leave?

Leave

The thoughts were exchanged in quick succession as they giggled and flew past the massive creature, sending their goodbyes as they approached the small crack in the wall at the end of the cavern.

No gate blocked the way, simply a small cave entrance carved into the black stone.

Ilea flew down, Fae by her side. The cave was more like a hole, leading straight down for nearly a hundred meters.

She noted that the heat was rising, even with all her buffs and defenses. When they reached the ground, she had to actually heal against the damage.

Ilea included the Fae as well, though it didn't seem overly concerned. Still it accepted the small ash cocoon she formed around it, holding the creature in her arms.

“A level one hundred human would literally melt down here, you know,” she commented, taking in the layer.

A large cavern, black rock like within the Trakorov's lair. Lava pooled into orange glowing lakes, streams flowing in from cracks in the walls and ceiling. Large stone protrusions, platforms and boulders dotted the area, the sound of slowly moving molten rock the only thing audible.

Ilea had to do a double take, the air shimmering as if twisted and torn by the heat. Many of the rocks resembled half burnt down candles, melting slowly from the top but not quite enough to form another pool of lava.

She coughed, wondering if there was even any air within the layer. Drowning wasn't much of an issue to her anymore which made her doubt suffocation or smoke poisoning would be a lot scarier.

Safe? she asked her little friend.

Safe

How the fuck can it survive this, she asked herself, still not quite able to grasp its body with her healing magic.

Nothing moved in the layer, other than the streams.

Ilea flew around for a couple minutes but nothing showed up. Neither from within the lava or hidden near the ceiling or behind the rocks.

The layer was empty. Perhaps her perception simply did not allow for her to see the creatures or there was no interest on their side to challenge her. With the Trakorov so close by, she could certainly understand the lack of inhabitants.

She took the Fae and made her way towards the next layer, another shaft that led down into the unknown. There was a case to be made about training Heat Resistance here or perhaps gain a skill against the smoke and lack of air but she could tell the Fae wasn't doing so well.

Plus with Avatar of Ash, she could reach the same result inside a small forge with no ventilation.

As they descended, the heat was replaced by something else. Something Ilea couldn't quite place immediately.

Her eyes opened wide a moment later. It was obvious. Mana. Pure unadulterated mana. She had last felt it coming in waves from the Sand Elemental and Trakorov, before and during their battle.

The permanent feeling now was something she hadn't felt in a long while however. To a lesser extent perhaps when she had first flown into the north. Her Sphere was muddled, barely recognizing the walls right next to her.

It didn't exactly feel like drowning, nor the effect gravity magic had on her. It was a little more subtle. Her heart was beating faster, her jaw and fists were clenched. She could feel the hair going down her back, could feel the ash close to her body, her tongue in her mouth, as if all of it was foreign.

Slowly it became more difficult to breathe, her wings barely keeping her up anymore as the controlled descent turned into a free fall. She tried grabbing at the walls. Blink activated but it felt like moving through water, and not water with her second tier resistance, but water from when she was a kid and swam for the first time.

Her healing still worked, informing her that nothing was wrong with her body. And still she could barely move, finally slapping against the stone ground below with a loud thud. The injuries were minimal, quickly taken care of by her regeneration. The rock looked worse off.

Okay? It was the Fae's turn to ask, the creature popping out of the cocoon and floating close to her face.

Maybe, she sent back and used her ashen limbs to slowly move her back up into the corridor. She was severely slowed down, any monster could just rip her apart.

Half a minute later, she was hanging ten meters up within the shaft, ashen limbs barely holding her body in place. Something that should have been simple, even for just one of the protrusions.

The Fae seemed concerned, floating around her, asking her if she was okay from time to time.

'ding' 'Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 18'

I see, she thought. *It's that bad, damn. Come on second tier, you're supposed to deal with exactly that.*

Magic, she sent.

The Fae looked at her before it nodded in understanding.

Help?

No, she sent back, deciding that she should get used to it herself. The creature could drain her mana so she assumed it had some way to assist her in this but at some point the Fae wouldn't be there anymore. Stuck within the stone shaft, she felt it an opportune moment to get her resistance to a higher level.

The Fae got bored after half an hour.

Ilea suggested eye popping.

An inspection of her arms made her realize that dark blue and purple veins had formed, pulsing with something that wasn't her heartbeat.

Same shit that happened to Elfie, she thought, remembering him passing out after the Praetorian fight.

Should I teleport up and get out. I could just chain blink, even if it feels muddled.

There was no immediate danger however. The elf had survived and so would she. She trusted her ash to keep her hanging in the tunnel. Already her limbs felt more in control, sturdier.

'ding' 'Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 19'

The difference was minimal but she did feel it.

Heat so intense it melted her skin even through her armor was something she could deal with, something she was pretty used to by now actually.

It was obvious that a human shouldn't be here but that was exactly why it was important to stay, to get her resistance up and to the third tier.

Arcane lightning and now this. Nothing else seemed so hell bent on killing her while being incredibly effective at it.

"Can... you... explain?" she asked the Fae with strained words. At least she could speak now, her body slowly taking in the surrounding power, helped by her resistance.

Human, it sent and pointed at her before it popped one eye. Even with the suggested training it kept her right eye unharmed, perhaps concerned.

Uncomfortable

She smiled. *I can feel that, little one*, she thought.

"Is... it.. just... more... dense?"

Much

"You... don't... mind?"

The Fae shook its head.

Like

"I... see," Ilea said.

"Is... it... normal?"

Rare

Mountain

Cave

So just high up or far below the ground? Ilea thought. She wasn't sure about the exact meaning but at least it wouldn't be something that just randomly happened.

It really shouldn't come as a surprise that there were insane natural forces at play here after the last couple layers. She just didn't expect it to be something other than another creature.

"Third... tier... help?"

Maybe.

Human.

Different, the Fae sent.

As we are... as we are.

Finally, the message she was waiting for popped up. The veins on her arms were already a little less visible, her ash even stronger now. It seemed her body had overcome the initial shock.

'ding' 'Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 20'

'ding' 'Space Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 7'

- Arcane Magic Resistance

Magic, a force mysterious and powerful. It fuels both deadly spells and incredible creation. You have seen and felt it in its raw and chaotic form. It has coursed through you, has permeated your very core. Few live through what you have. Not just in general... that too... but just the Arcane itself. The recommendation to visit a psychiatrist is still something you should consider. Really.

Got it!

Joy, she sent, watching the Fae twirl in place.

That's a point I'll gladly spend.

Arcane Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 1

Wielding the true arcane is a rare and powerful talent only accessible to few. The raw energies tear at not just flesh and bone but at the magical structure and minds of whomever faces them. Its red glow turns purple the more refined it is. This skill shall help you counter masters of the arcane.

2nd stage: Your flow of mana has been ruptured many times by the raw form of magic, making it substantially more resistant to both adept mages and natural occurrences of the true arcane.

3rd stage: You have survived both arcane storms and immeasurably dense pockets of mana. Your body has changed and adapted, both able to walk within mana sparse as well as highly saturated areas. Constructs made from your mana become more resistant and substantial.

Ilea immediately unclenched jaw, the power in her limbs returning, increasing even compared to before. A breath left her before she filled her lungs again deeply.

"Whoa, this is fucking weird," she murmured. The first part of the bonus was obvious, the result immediately felt.

"I can move in mana dense areas now," she said to the Fae, giving it a thumbs up.

Nice

“No shit. Hmm... would I have died had I been weaker?”

The Fae pointed at itself.

Savior!

“I mean if you hadn’t been here. I’m aware that you’re my shining knight.”

Dark

“Dark Knight, whatever,” she said with a smile.

Yes

Death

“Damn... pretty fucked up if you ask me. What if I walk into an area that’s even more dense? I mean the description of the skill now suggests I could do that but do you think it would be a problem?”

Dangerous

Maybe

Death, it said and shook its head after the last word.

“What about the Trakorov for example... I’m sure it wouldn’t give a shit to come down here... just like you. Would you die if you went south? Where there are no arcane storms? Or even out of a dungeon... wait no, there was a Fae I met in the south.”

Uncomfortable

Death, it again shook its head.

“So it just applies to weak as shit species like mine?”

It nodded with a giggle.

“Fucking busted. Is that why shit like a Trakorov doesn’t just waltz around in the south, stomping down cities?”

Possible

“It could though, right? It’d just be uncomfortable as fuck.”

Likely

“You’re very vague.”

World

Varied

It sent with an annoyed tone.

“I know, I know. Sorry. They can just get resistances too... hmm maybe not. Or can you train Arcane Magic Resistance in a mana sparse area? Maybe Mana Starvation would be a skill one could pick up,” she suggested.

No

“Now you’re absolute again.”

It giggled into her mind.

Maybe

“I’ll go with maybe. Maybe if I ate the Trakorov’s kids and it really wanted revenge.”

Bad

Idea

“Are you sure? I already thought about stealing some scales.”

No, it bumped her head with a stumpy arm.

“I was kidding.”

“Would be pretty powerful armor though...”

Another bump.

“Just saying.”

The second part of the skill talked about magical constructs. Ilea could feel that her ash was included in that. The difference was noticeable but nothing spectacular. Perhaps equal to five or ten percent in her Avatar of Ash third tier. A difference still, one that would make a fine addition to her collection.

She jumped down and looked around the dark cavern. Her sphere was still a little muddled but not quite as much as before.

“Sense any creatures?”

The Fae shook its head.

Both of them watched as a sudden spark of purple energy flared up in the distance, zapping through the cavern before it vanished into the ground.

“Is that a creature? Another Elemental?” she asked with an excited voice.

The Fae shook its head.

Natural

Dangerous

“You think so. Who would have thunk.”

Ilea charged up Monster Hunter and roared into the cavern, trying to lure anything out that might be lurking within. *Huh, should have done that earlier as well.*

She waited a minute and blinked up a couple times, repeating the same within the Lava layer.

The Fae shook its head.

What? she sent.

It didn’t say anything.

“Hey, I’m a human. I could only laughably imitate a roar before. Let me have my fun.”

Dangerous

“Why?”

Proud

“That’s the whole intent of the skill. I piss off powerful creatures and they come and fight me.”