

Chapter 400 Fear

Ilea only spent a little over an hour with her newfound friends, exploring the eleventh layer in the process.

There were a surprising number of creatures around, none of them corrupted. Maybe the cold temperature was an issue for the blood virus or whatever it really was, or the monsters had taken care of those that fell to it, their corpses now resting under a thick layer of snow.

She had crossed a long distance on foot, taking in the environment and watching the massive stone creatures move on the other side of the river. One eye and crude weapons made of rock. Some were literally just carrying a chunk of stone.

They threw it at other creatures from time to time but otherwise kept to themselves.

Do they not need to eat? Hunt? Are they having conversations? Ilea lacked answers to all those questions.

Another sound in her mind took her out of the moment, informing her that her ice resistance had leveled once again. *Avatar really is a bloody miracle.*

'ding' 'Ice Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 8'

'ding' 'Ice Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 9'

The spirits left suddenly, moving away with the winds and disintegrating in the process.

She watched them, not interfering as killing them wouldn't exactly provide anything. They weren't even corrupted.

Ilea shrugged and moved forward, finding her foot stuck to the ground. Her ash was frozen over, the rest of her body quickly following. *What?*

Her sphere was crisper than ever, nothing around her moving in the slightest. *Is this just natural?*

She couldn't detect a monster nearby and forced herself to move, the ice on her ash cracking but reforming again quickly. Her second tier mentioned that her body wasn't affected anymore by freezing temperatures. *Might just be that I wouldn't even be able to move, let alone think and see without that bonus.*

Her Resistance didn't level as she moved towards the river, not seeing any of the creatures anymore. *They have some way to tell. Whatever this phenomenon is, even a Spirit of Winter decided to avoid it.*

She pressed on through the snow, her wings instantly freezing over whenever she summoned them, the magic pulling her up before the frozen wings broke from the movement and let her fall once more.

Her blink worked of course but she decided to wait with that in case something was about to attack.

As suddenly as it had come, the phenomenon left again. Ilea released Heart of Cinder, charged for a couple seconds before she moved her body, the last of the remaining ice falling to the ground.

That could be fatal during a fight. If whatever I'm fighting is immune to it at least.

She saw one of the massive rock creatures stick their head out from a small cave entrance, spotting her in the process.

It roared in anger, rushing out with a chunk of stone in hand.

The humanoid creature was at least five meters tall, closer to six and half as broad. Its skin resembled rock, both in color and texture. One eye was visible in the middle of its head and it was staring right at her.

[Stone Cyclops – lvl ???]

Ilea spread her ashen limbs and smiled, watching the monster approach.

‘ding’ ‘You have met the gaze of the Stone Cyclops. You are paralyzed in fear for three seconds’

I’m not exactly afraid of this fucker, she thought and noted her mistake of looking into its eye. An obvious trap really.

Wait, do I even have to look into it? her thought was interrupted by a chunk of rock crashing down on her, the full weight of it enhanced and sped up by the creature hit her and she felt her legs nearly give out, her spine aching as her feet dug into the snow and hit stone, digging into that too.

She was reminded of old cartoons, blood dripping from her nose when the stone hit again. This time her legs snapped to the side, the joints unable to take the stress. She fell onto the snow with her back and blinked away right before the crude weapon came down again.

Her legs were healed, helped along with her ashen armor snapping them into place as she willed them to straighten. Ilea landed and cracked her neck, her eyes closed.

“Alright, big guy,” she murmured and vanished, appearing behind the massive monster. Her limbs fanned out and slashed into his back, a fist colliding with his right knee as her destructive mana pushed into him.

He turned and tried to hit her with the rock, surprisingly quick for his size but a long way from Ilea or the lightning Elemental.

She charged her Heart of Cinder while she continued her simple approach to the somewhat simple creature. Until it staggered forward, held its knee and roared.

Her eyes remained closed but she still felt her body tense up.

‘ding’ ‘You have heard the terrifying roar of the Stone Cyclops. You are paralyzed in fear for three seconds’

‘ding’ ‘Veteran reaches lvl 17’

You’re sitting me, right?

Ilea watched as it discarded the crude weapon and turned, grabbing her in its massive hand before it squeezed hard, moving her to his mouth.

Teeth ground into her ashen armor, pushing her throat shut and squeezing everything within to paste. Destructive mana flowed into the creature but it just bit down harder.

She let the beast try and rip off her head as she started charging Absolute Destruction, adding a hundred mana with each second all the while Heart of Cinder was burning in her chest.

Ilea felt one of the bones in her neck shift, her body going limp in the process.

Fuck, she thought, calm but a little annoyed to be inside this fuckers mouth. It didn't actually smell as bad as a bunch of half burnt rotting corpses riddled with corruption but it wasn't exactly pleasant either.

She waited another three seconds and unleashed her stored heat, a sphere of fire and energy bursting forth, burning the inside of the Cyclops' mouth and throat as well as the palm of his hand.

The monster howled and released her head, staggering back as he kept his hold on her body.

Healing instantly spread through her, the bone in her neck popping back into place. Ashen limbs moved in from above, failing to cut the thick skin of the creature and instead pushing into her armor, wedging his hand open by a small amount and allowing her to get her right arm out of his hold.

An ashen spear formed above her, smooth and sharp. "Hey, dinner for you," she said, watching the angry monster turn its head back to her with a furious expression on its stone face.

The spear rushed out, slamming into its eye from close range and digging a couple centimeters deep. Her limbs rushed out and moved around the back of his head, getting him closer with a yank as it howled in pain.

She made the spear vanish, revealing the thin cut on his eye before her fist slammed into it and nearly three thousand mana with it.

The magic was ripped out of her, spreading into the Cyclops' eye before it searched for a place to go. To continue its destructive path. Apparently that was rather difficult, the eye swelling up before it burst with a loud sound.

Blood and eye matter splattered onto her, the creature dead the instant its stand out feature was destroyed. Its grip was still somewhat strong on her, the two falling together before they hit the icy ground.

Ilea was glad she had her ash armor to protect her from the gore, pushing against the hand that still clung to her despite its master's death. "Come the fuck on," she murmured and pushed, her limbs helping out.

She quieted down when she heard heavy steps coming closer, four thunderous legs at least. *Come on*, she finally slipped out, blinking away right when she saw the two creatures come closer. More Cyclops.

Be there in a second, she thought and spread her wings, flying low and fast before she crash landed in a heap of snow, rolling several times until she slid to a stop on her back. Her mana wasn't where she wanted it to be.

'ding' 'You have heard the terrifying roar of the Stone Cyclops. You are paralyzed in fear for two seconds'

"Yes, I get it," she sighed and waited for meditation to bring her mana up again. *Charging it is almost not worth it.*

She stood up and patted off the snow, cracking her neck when she heard another roar, feeling herself freeze up again.

'ding' 'You have heard the terrifying roar of the Stone Cyclops. You are paralyzed in fear for two seconds'

'ding' 'Veteran reaches lvl 18'

This paralyzing shit is so fucking annoying. I bet ninety percent of high level people die to this crap.

She heard the creature approach and saw it move into her sphere a moment later. A fast stride brought it to her in three steps.

Second number two passed and she blinked back, her eyes closed as she formed several ashen spears and started charging her fire spell again.

Neither used up a ton of mana and she would refrain from using her intrusion skills for a while. At least until she was back at around six thousand mana.

Again, she waited for the Cyclops to move into her sphere before she released her spears, one by one, aimed at its eye from various angles.

It swatted away two of them with a quick move of its massive hand. Too quick as far as Ilea was concerned.

She had felt magic from the creature but hadn't been able to discern it. Neither did it matter as the third spear slammed into its eye from above, causing an angry roar as it tried to get it out.

Ilea focused on the second creature and continued with the same tactic, finding it hunkering down and protecting its eye with both hands.

Suits me, she thought and waited, her mana recovering slowly as she moved backwards and away from the angry monster, the scratch on its eye really bringing its mood to a boil.

Ilea released heart of cinder in a cone in front of her, charged for around fifteen seconds by now, the energy slammed into the creature.

It stopped for a second but seemed to shrug it off. Its one eye opened wide before a glint of fire showed.

Ah, Ilea was struck by realization before a beam of fire enveloped her. She chuckled through it, her ashen armor melting down to her timeless bone before it started to reform. A chunk of mana had returned to her, back from what she assumed to be a copy of her spell.

Does that mean I could damage myself? Or is it amplified by this fucker's level?

Now that their roars had been used, she decided to get close again, blinking behind the one she had enraged and slashing at its back, delivering Storm of Cinders with each strike.

She kept an eye on the second one who was still protecting its eye, apparently more scared of having it hurt than its will was to attack her.

Ilea kept her assault going, chipping away at the rock as the monster was slowly filled by destructive energy punching into it. She could tell that its natural resistance to mana intrusion was high thanks to its skin but with each hit, Storm of Cinders weakened it a little.

Its eye didn't share the defensive capabilities but the Cyclops was careful now, constantly having one hand close to its eye, watching her through the gaps between its fingers.

The monster still held its club like chunk of rock in its right hand, slamming it at her once every second.

Ilea felt herself get into the rhythm before its hand suddenly sped up mid swing, magic wisps glowing lightly in her sphere as she blinked away.

She smiled, figuring out where she had seen this before. Ilea noted that the second creature was now copying its mate's strategy, covering its eye partially instead of fully. *Time magic.*

The addition made the fight certainly more interesting, both facing two of them at the same time and having the occasional burst of speed. Ilea didn't know how often they could use their roar ability either but if her own Monster Hunter skill had anything to add, she had no idea, because she hadn't tested it.

It felt like a disapproving Trian was watching over her, shaking his head even here, in this fucky dungeon below Hallowfort.

As far as Ilea was concerned, he could fuck right off. She'd finish them before they had another chance to freeze her.

Ilea jumped and blinked through the club, her ashen limbs moving around the monster's other hand and maneuvering her over it. Her fist slammed down, right into its eye. Magic pulsed as her spells rippled through the cornea and into whatever magical ass mucus resided below.

The Cyclops roared and let go of its weapon, lashing out with its hands with quick jabs. Its target however was already gone.

She focused on the second creature that had a hard time getting close while its brother was frenzied. Ilea even managed to maneuver them in a way to make one hit the other. Just once, but it made her proud, as if she could pay back the fact that she had nearly been eaten.

Wings moved behind her as she ascended a little over them, a mist of ash forming and spreading over the two confused monsters. Spikes formed within and slashed into their eyes as her reversed healing poured into their battered bodies.

Two massive ashen spikes were forming behind her, flying as tall as she stood, their design similar to the screw like projectiles she had tested when she had been training her ash manipulation. The sheer size would already be difficult to control and keep together, let alone the added torque she planned to integrate.

And yet her Ash and Ember Unity proved itself once again, the surface of her weapons smooth and without cracks. She started spinning them as the monsters below lashed out at the ash while they protected their respective eye.

Ilea waited until the projectiles nearly slipped from her control before she made the ash around the creatures vanish. She grinned when both of them looked up, eye wide open and ready to receive what she had cooked up for them.

The screw like spears slammed down. One of them bored into an eye with a sickening wet sound before it came to a stop. The other one slammed into an open palm, raised fast enough to get between. It didn't manage to penetrate, slipping to the side and spinning on the ground before it rolled to a stop.

Ilea was already forming new spears, of normal size this time and without added spinning. *And now there's only one of you.*

It took her a couple minutes to get through the defenses, the third tier of Storm of Cinders providing a valuable help against the durable creature.

Both were cautious by now, knowing most of what the other could do. Ilea had the advantage thanks to her recovery, finally besting the beast with an anticlimactic slash to its back.

Her ashen limb clinked against the stone armor without much of an impact and still, the Cyclops fell, lifeless. Dead.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Stone Cyclops - lvl 612] – For defeating an enemy two hundred and ninety or more levels above your own, bonus experience is granted.’

Ilea looked at the message from her first kill, before these two had even showed up. *This bonus stuff has really not been helpful. Most of what I fight is a higher level than me. Can I just turn it off?*

She hadn’t messed with her status much, liking it simple. The additional bulk coming with each kill had started to annoy her however, especially while fighting the hordes on the first layer.

Her will sent towards whatever created the messages in her mind, or whatever god or system governed it, she checked the rest.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Stone Cyclops - lvl 622]’

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Stone Cyclops - lvl 602]’

Yees! I hope I didn’t just get rid of all the bonus experience.

‘ding’ ‘The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 324 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘Kin of Ash has reached lvl 323 – Five stat points awarded’

Doesn’t seem like it, she smiled.

‘ding’ ‘Absolute Destruction reaches 3rd lvl 19’

‘ding’ ‘Azarinth Fighting reaches 3rd lvl 18’

‘ding’ ‘Azarinth Reversal reaches 3rd lvl 12’

‘ding’ ‘True Ash Creation reaches 3rd lvl 15’

‘ding’ ‘Storm of Cinders reaches 3rd lvl 10’

‘ding’ ‘Ash and Ember Unity reaches 3rd lvl 12’

‘ding’ ‘Fear Resistance reaches lvl 10’

‘ding’ ‘Fear Resistance reaches lvl 11’

“Because I was so afraid. Nearly shat my pants,” she murmured to herself.

The ten points went straight into Wisdom. To maybe one day be able to hit a motherfucker twice with a fully charged Destruction.

Never tested it, she noted and started charging Absolute Destruction in each of her fists.

It actually worked. *Holy fuck... six thousand mana?* she asked herself but soon found the limit still at three thousand, one and a half thousand each.

“Oh well, might still come in handy,” she murmured, enhancing her voice to quickly check how fast her monster hunter skill could be used after one another.

Her surrounding was clear, more Cyclops moving in the distance but none of them close enough to notice her, for now.

She found her voice could be infused once more after a minute had passed. *Are you happy now?* she asked, nobody in particular.

Now, doesn't seem like they were taken either, she thought, watching the creatures move in the distance.