

## Chapter 676 Living Steel

Ilea felt the weight with each step, her mana and heat fueling the living armor around her. She was sitting at her fully extended weight. Ilea simply didn't see a reason not to extend it for more heat generation. With all this bulk and slowed down to a crawl compared to her insane speed and maneuverability, the added weight simply wouldn't make much of a difference.

Her eyes were covered, over twenty centimeters of metal protecting her ash covered form, the mantle unable to defend the massive bulk of her armaments. She took a careful step, the magic flowing through the armor helping a lot with actually moving it all. Her strength would be enough but not quite to the extent of making the thing usable in battle.

"You're a bulky, blind, armored, idiot," Pierce said.

Ilea summoned her rifle, casually lifting it with her armored titanic hands before she aimed at a nearby boulder. Ashen limbs extended from the angled slits in her back into the openings of the rifle, which allowed the charged Embered Heart to be used, both in a controlled and more chaotic fashion. *Five times the charge speed*, Ilea thought with a grin, a beam of energy and fire punching through the stone a moment later.

Pebbles rained down from above as Ilea tried to jump back, the armor only lifting up by a few centimeters, still coming down with a loud crash. While her eyes were indeed entirely covered up, Ilea could see well enough with her dominion. It could be a problem of course if an enemy managed to stop her ability, but it would still have to get through the insanely thick plate of heavily enchanted dark metal.

"Point taken," Pierce said, looking at the smoldering furrow behind the non-existent boulder. "A ranged attack still, do you have anything for close quarters?"

Ilea didn't reply, the others wouldn't hear her anyway. Instead she moved forward, not quite running but a generous observer might describe it as a light jog. Her rifle vanished as she kept running, each step deliberate and calculated through her dominion. The impacts resounded through the vicinity as the armored Ilea built as much momentum as she could.

"Is she really going to?" Verena asked, the three adventurers following the two and a half meter titan with mixed expressions.

Ilea pushed on, her right fist crashing into a rock formation with a devastating blow. Her body followed. Chunks, bits, and pieces flew to the side as her weight and momentum barreled into the peaceful landscape. She got stuck halfway through, using her fists to progress until they couldn't reach anything else, her right leg stuck in a small crevice.

"A true barbarian," Pierce said.

"Give her a second," Fey reminded.

Ashen limbs lashed out, a chaotic storm of several dozen bladed arms ripping through what was left of the formation. Ilea didn't stop here, unleashing a near fully charged Embered Heart in a sphere around herself.

Chunks of stone crashed against the armored adventurers, Feyrair clapping a few times with Verena joining in.

“Slow, that is true,” Feyrair said. “But she’s not much less destructive.”

“But mobility is the main advantage we have against high level monsters,” Verena said.

“She won’t be fighting those in that armor,” Fey said.

Pierce flew a little closer. “Defensively it should be an upgrade too though, or am I wrong? Until it’s destroyed that is.”

Letters made of ash formed in front of the titan.

“Try. Mortal.”

“You’re just as human as I am, Ilea. Don’t you ever forget your roots, young woman, or I’ll befriend a dragon or something and get it to eat you,” Pierce said as lightning sparked around her. “Are you sure? I don’t think you want to go back for repairs.”

Ilea replied by forming ashen spears, aiming them at the flying woman. Her own wings here nowhere near enough to carry both the bulk of her armor and her own near as heavy form. The comments were mostly right of course, Ilea wouldn’t consider using this piece of equipment against an unknown four mark. It might’ve helped against the Wurm’s sun attack, but generally she much preferred her mobility and more so her teleportation. Displacement after all wasn’t enough to move the whole armaments of Lilith.

She raised her arm against the beam of lightning, several bolts crashing against her shoulders, chest, and head but nothing made it through even a part of her layered defense. *And I do have my mantle below*, she thought, healing the slight damage of the armor. It wasn’t quite as quick to repair as it was to heal her own body but compared to a timeless property, the upgrade was substantial. To the point where she could repair her armor during battle, granted she wasn’t fighting anything beyond a certain weight class. *The Meadow would rip this thing apart in seconds. Or would it? Maybe should’ve tested a bit more, the healing aspect too.*

She didn’t mind too much, asking the other two to join in too as she occasionally sent out an ashen spear or ten to make them move at least a little. Ilea could’ve tried to burn them out of the air with her Embered Heart, the spell coupled with her defense, beam cannon, and the heat generation boost from her weight increase most certainly her main weapon while using the heavy suit of living armor. But right now she wasn’t trying to prove anything. Stomping a few level three hundred Elders of the Shadow’s Hand wouldn’t exactly be an impressive feat for her in the first place.

With her limited mobility and more importantly, her limited range of dominion, anyone with a few brain cells would stay at a distance anyway, abusing her weaknesses until they managed to overwhelm her. *Not an easy thing either*, she mused, seeing Feyrair’s flames burn into her massive arm, Pierce’s lightning not quite leaving a lasting impression either. *Granted their elements aren’t really made to get through steel*, she thought while repairing the damage.

She grinned when Verena entered her dominion, the woman rushing forward with both axes at the ready, her body glowing with magic before she vanished, several strikes hitting Ilea’s armored back. She tried to turn around, but the Elder simply moved away, her assault continuing, each strike hitting harder, the impacts resounding with dull notes.

Ilea decided to use her ash, a few limbs lashing out against the woman, cutting deep into her flesh before she was forced back to regenerate. Ilea could’ve simply used her dominion to push destructive mana into the Elder, but where was the fun in that? Her grin faded slightly when a

dragon came crashing down about ten meters in front of her, the creature rearing back its head before a barrage of bright magical fire came for her.

Ilea formed burning ashen walls, the barrage colliding with her defenses as she formed more and more, quickly overwhelmed before she raised both arms, healing against the continuous damage from Feyrair's breath. *This is just ridiculous*, she thought, watching her living armor melt, metal dripping to the ground as his white flame burned into and through her.

The plating was reduced by more than half before the dragonling rushed forward, his form towering even above her, albeit not by much anymore.

His burning claw came down, biting deep into her shoulder and a part of her head, his body moving forward as he tried to pierce the titan's chest with his second set of claws.

Ilea laughed when his blow was stopped about three fourths of the way to her mantle, the angle not quite perfect. She moved her half molten arm and grabbed his, her heavily damaged armor repairing itself with the help of her healing.

The dragonling roared, using his massive form and strength to try and lift the titan, his efforts failing as his clawed talons dug into the stone ground. Instead he tried to bring her down, his claws still stuck inside the steel and slowly pushing deeper.

Ilea used her ashen limbs to help stabilize herself, her footing good enough to make his efforts an absolute joke. Feyrair was strong, even more so in this form of his, but there was a limit to how much he could move. Apparently it was her. Angling a few ashen limbs towards his extended arms, Ilea released a beam of energy, eliciting a roar from the dragon who moved his wings and jumped back, smoking bone revealed where her beam had struck.

*Come at me then*, she thought, taking a step forward with her right arm raised and gesturing. The cuts on her shoulder and chest were reforming, much like the Executioner machines she had fought before. *I suppose this is how Aki feels right now. Just a lot faster, and even lighter.*

Feyrair didn't have to be taunted twice, the dragonling taking flight and moving back, power rushing out from his form before he rushed down and towards her, burning claws extended, with fire in his open maw.

Ilea took a step forward when the claws were about to reach. She ducked as well as she could, her massive knees bending as the ground slightly cracked. She could see the talons bite into her shoulder and brought up her fist, her aim perfect as she struck the monster's skull, his breath exploding outwards in a bright plume of destructive white flame, to her side and into the northern landscape.

He turned his head, flames flickering in his throat when his eyes met an extended armored hand. His reptilian eyes narrowed before he turned back into an elf. "I need those evolutions..., why am I wasting time here," he said and shook his head.

She appeared on top of her still regenerating armor, holding on to the large head while using its shoulder as a rest. "You don't have to stay, you know," she said and smirked, happy with her victory. Though she had to admit, without her evolutions she would've maybe even lost this one.

"You will use this thing... to get inside... but I won't be able to join. Meaning yes, I think it's best if I find something else to fight. There should be enough nearby," the elf said and took flight.

"Sure. You have the mark. I'll let you know when I'm done here or if I need help," Ilea said.

“Good. May you be victorious, Ilea,” Fey said, a bit absent minded as he flew off.

“Great. Now you wounded his pride,” Pierce said in an exaggerated tone. “How will he ever recover from this??”

“Maybe he can put you down in a few more bouts,” Ilea said, healing the rest of the damage to her lovely toy. *Suit of heavy living armor, not toy. Apologies*, she mused, tapping its head. *If you try to take over my body, I’ll rip you apart*, she added. Just in case.

“Ahh,” the Elder moaned. “I wish. But he’s gone now. What should we do?” she asked, a storm cloud moving closer.

“I mean he’s right. I’ll use this thing to get inside, you two could just wait, or go explore a bit,” Ilea answered.

“We’re not quite as invincible as you are,” Verena said. “I think waiting is the best approach.”

Pierce groaned next to her, the first bolts of lightning crashing into the ground. “Can you not get us in too? We could be your armorers, your slaves, or some kind of deployed human warriors.”

Ilea noticed more lightning coming from above than usual, most of them hitting her armaments or close to it. She summoned it when the damage became more extensive. It could survive inside a storm with the help of her healing but she didn’t have to push it. *Living lightning rod more like*.

“I’ll see what I can do, bored Princess Elder,” she said and walked towards the crevice.

“Oh thank you, brave adventurer. I will trust in your expertise at handling these barbaric ruffians!” Pierce said, back in a lovely blue dress that got shredded by the next bolt of lightning. “Fuck... ah well, worth it.”

“Gladys won’t be happy,” Verena mused in a dry tone.

Pierce waved her off. “Ah that sellout can’t complain. Leaving Virilya to go south, just because this Lilith person offers this opportunity and that. *A new market, the new center of commerce, blablabla*. How sad, the influence of such a witch upon the civilized lands of humanity!”

“Are you done?” Ilea asked, jumping down with the two of them following.

Pierce changed into her armor and sat down on a nearby rock. “Yes, quite. No go off on your task, wild one.”

“Awe, I didn’t think the separation from your elven boy would cause so much grief,” Ilea said and changed back into her massive set of living armor. She took a knee, as hard as that was. “I will not fail you,” she formed with floating ashen words.

Verena’s laughter echoed through the cut in the land with Ilea making her way towards the protected entrance of wherever the next key was located.

She had pushed her weight to the limit and soon reached the same distance from the large entrance as she had before. This time however, nobody stopped her.

“Welcome to the Pit,” one of the guards said, looking through the thin slit of the right side bunker.

Ilea looked over and formed words made of ash. “Greetings.”

“A mage. Interesting combination, and that looks like a living warmachine. Quite capable too...,” he said and burst out laughing.

The dwarf next to him joined in.

**[Axe Warrior – lvl 204]**

**[Shield Breaker – lvl 230]**

*Can't pierce Monstrous, it seems,* Ilea thought, checking the ones on the left but finding them at a similar level.

“You're not from around here, are you?” another dwarf asked.

“No,” Ilea showed.

“Yeah, and you're not dwarven either,” he said, his eyes glowing with magic now.

*Ah, already discovered,* she thought.

“Is that a problem?” she asked with ash.

The dwarf shrugged. “Probably not. Hit that wall over there to show that thing isn't just a mighty nice looking piece of jewelry. We test everyone like that.”

*Sure you do,* Ilea thought and walked over to the indicated spot. She didn't even pull back, simply slamming her armored fist into the stone. A heavy impact resounded, her hand half a meter deep inside a small crater before she pulled it out with pebbles and debris falling to the ground. She didn't need to ask if they were satisfied, the smiles and laughter coupled with exchanged gold was enough.

“Seems to hold up at least,” the dwarf said, receiving a small pouch filled with coins himself. “You may enter. Don't cause trouble,” he said which elicited another bout of laughter from the dwarves close by. He too had to crack a smile at that.

*What the fuck is this place?* Ilea asked herself and formed another set of letters. “May I bring in companions? There are two humans in my employ.”

“May I... employ? I'm starting to think you don't fit in after all,” the dwarf said and shrugged. “But aye, two is fine.”

Ilea leaned down a little closer, raising her hand before a cone of heat and energy flashed upwards, leaving a furrow in the side of the crevice. “Appreciate it,” she formed, waiting for the others to join her.

“You're puzzling,” the dwarf said, not visibly impressed like the others. “No voice module but a cannon like that. I suggest you check some of the stores. And don't walk around without that on, wouldn't want to get hurt. Except... well if you're here to start fights, that's fair. I suggest you apply for the Dome either way. Would love to see that thing in battle.”

Ilea gave him a steel thumbs up, the Elders teleporting through the crevice until they reached her side, both of them hiding their faces with cloaks.

The dwarf touched a nearby rune. Enchantments brought a mechanism to life, the double doors made of steel and stone slowly opening inwards. Dents and scratches were clearly visible on the entrance.

Pierce glanced into the slit and grinned. “You lot are supposed to stop a monster from coming in?”

Some of them frowned, the dwarf who had talked to Ilea laughed instead. “This isn’t some honorary guard, lass. We’re here because it’s the closest place to the shit out there. Just barely,” he said and made a gesture with his hand. “Barely better than execution.”

“Novel,” Pierce replied. “Take it this isn’t some high and mighty dwarven kingdom, is it?”

“This... is the Pit, now fuck off, I don’t get paid enough to answer stupid questions,” he said.

Pierce smirked. “I like you, dwarf,” she said and stepped inside.

Ilea followed with heavy steps, the gate more than large enough to let her pass.

“Strong bunch. How long will they last?” one of the guards asked.

“Depends where they go. And why they’re here,” another said.

“Two gold that they just want to go down for metals,” one said.

“Three gold that the big one joins the Dome, I have a feeling,” another said, the gates closing again behind the group, the noise from the mechanism drowning out the conversation.

They found themselves inside an expansive hall, perfectly angular. The walls were stone. The floor was stone. There were no stores or houses, just a bunch of armored beings sitting on a few benches some dozen meters away. Ilea saw a rectangular tunnel leading down into the depths, a somewhat steep slope to it and large enough to fit ten of her, including her armor.