

## Chapter 373 A relaxing afternoon

“You gave up high leveled classes to take other ones?” Ilea asked. “You lose the level in that case, right?”

“You do.” Feyrair confirmed. “And I have. Perhaps I was foolish and proud. My decisions however are my own and they have led me to what I am on this day.”

“I’m sure you’re going to be nuts after hitting three hundred.” Ilea commented. “I know a couple high level dungeons up north, you could get there in no time.”

Feyrair smiled at her. “May we start?” He asked and extended a hand.

Ilea moved back her ashen armor near her stomach and stored her bone armor. She summoned the gear once more and touched it with her ashen limbs. It wouldn’t regenerate in her storage item, she assumed.

“Go for it.” She said, both Feyrair and Maro releasing their spells.

Ilea healed herself and the elf, magic burning and decaying chunks of their unprotected bodies.

The elf had revealed his left arm, the piece of scale armor previously protecting it had vanished.

“I know plenty of dungeons myself. Our quest however is not one of personal growth but far beyond such goals. In time, I will reach level three hundred and beyond. A steady pace that will allow high skill levels even in the third tier as well as achievements unlikely to show themselves in mere years or decades.” Feyrair explained.

Ilea didn’t see it. Leveling to the next evolution would give him a significant increase instantly. He was going the long route it seemed, the very long route. Even taking new classes entirely and losing whatever progression he had before.

She assumed he hadn’t been any lower than two hundred. *Still possible in a couple years. He can’t be as reckless without a healer but Isalthar is nearby too.*

“You disagree.” Feyrair said. “I understand. How old are you, Ilea, Guardian of Cerith?”

“Twenty two, three. I’m not sure anymore. Sometimes I didn’t count the days that passed.” She replied.

“Younger than I had thought.” He said. “Even more impressive then, for you to have reached such power at that age. An extraordinary combination of classes, close to both death and life. A thin line few may traverse safely.”

“I think in decades and centuries, not in months and years as your kind tends to do.” Feyrair said. “Our quest has not waned through it all. Through human empires and kingdoms forming and falling, millions of your kind birthed and dying once again.”

Ilea smiled. “I get it, you’re old. Still seems more effective to me to just go out and get the levels. You’re powerful enough to melt even a Praetorian’s shield.”

The elf chuckled. “That I am. Rare machines they are however and once defeated, not even I am safe from the detonation.”

“They do pack a punch.” Ilea said, remembering the blasts.

“You defeated some then? Where?” Feyrair asked, his interest sparked.

“I might tell you at some point. How did you get your dragon form? I defeated you again.” Ilea retorted.

He smirked, sharp teeth showing. “Perhaps I might tell you at some point.”

“I have to say.” Maro chimed in. “It’s just not a good feeling to have you act casually while my death magic decays your bodies.”

“Inefficiently.” Ilea pointed out.

Maro looked at her and rolled his eyes. “That’s the point, smart-ass.”

“So taking a new class will give you more options?” Ilea asked.

“Of course. Everything you do will influence the possibilities.” Maro said.

“He speaks the truth. However still, with all my advancements, I cannot recommend it. Not with classes as powerful already as your own.” Feyrair said.

Ilea thought it over. It seemed like a stupid idea overall. Rarity of one’s class and magic was important, sure but skill and class levels alone would be more beneficial. In the short term at least.

“Is there a level ceiling? Like an end to leveling or something that makes it harder to get higher?” Ilea asked. She could see how someone having reached the maximum level possible would choose a new class for better skills. Still kind of stupid but with centuries to live, she didn’t know if the choice would stay as obvious.

“Not to my knowledge.” Feyrair replied. “Of course you need to fight more and more powerful monsters, many with resistances. The higher you go, the fewer obvious weaknesses they have.”

“That’s part of the plan anyway.” Ilea said. “Any idea about third classes and third tier general skills?”

He grinned. “You are asking questions few humans get to ponder. I can see you are on the right track for both. And no, I have neither nor do I know more than the general requirements. Elves I trust have confirmed their existence, however each of them preferred not to share the specifics of those secrets.”

Ilea sighed. “Why do people not share information here? It would help other elves out just as much as humans. What are the general requirements?”

“I share this with you, only because you have defeated me twice. Guardian of Cerith, and because you have chosen to help the hunters of our kind, despite our respective race’s history.”

“To reach the third tier of general skills, you must level general skills. To reach a third class, must simply get stronger.” He explained.

“That’s more general than I had assumed. How many general skills and to what level? By stronger, do you mean simply my class levels?” Ilea asked.

“Those are the secrets I do not know.” The elf said, apparently amused at his own lack of information. It seemed he could empathize with her frustration.

Ilea frowned. "I heard someone got a third class by doing an extraordinary feat. Is that not possible?"

"I have yet to hear of such a story. Perhaps it was a lie? Or maybe it is possible, past level three hundred." He suggested.

"We could ask the other two." Ilea nodded towards where Isalthar and Ben were talking to Walter.

Feyrair chuckled. "No. Neither will share. For different reasons. I have tried, believe me." He said. "Oh, you could add your ash to the attacks. My resistance to it is still below the second tier."

Small projectiles of ash formed and slammed into his arm, the force not enough to make him move.

"So you're saying Ben has a third class or third tier general skills?" Ilea asked. The elf was at level three twenty but his attitude didn't make him stand out as a very intimidating fellow.

"He says he doesn't." Feyrair replied. "He talks to a lot of people though and with all his hundreds of interests, I just don't see how he wouldn't know. It is of little consequence to me however. I will progress and pave my way through effort and an unwavering will."

Ilea nodded. *Sure you will. It's at least nice to know what to work towards.*

**'ding' 'Death Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 2'**

**'ding' 'Heat Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 16'**

*Heat too? That was quick.* Everyone acted very surprised that she could even stand against his magic but Ilea got more and more interested in what the other elves could do.

Glancing towards the elf who had yet to reveal his name, she found his head facing her.

"Do you want to attack me too with something? I'd appreciate the resistance levels." Ilea suggested, smiling towards him but still covered by a helmet and ash.

"I don't know if you want to go through that." Feyrair said. "It's unpleasant."

"Not more than burning alive." Ilea said, speaking definitively.

The elf shrugged and didn't contest her statement. He probably knew one thing or the other about fire and its effects on living beings.

"Soul and pain." The hovering elf said, a reply to her suggestion perhaps.

"Soul and pain magic?" Ilea asked. "I've never met anybody who could do that."

"Me neither." Maro said, looking at the elf with interest. "It would be exciting to see."

Feyrair didn't interrupt, just giving the other elf a nod.

"I'd love to have more resistances so you can try it on me." Ilea said and turned towards the elf. "I have pain tolerance in the second tier so you don't have to worry about that part."

The elf remained quiet, hovering near motionless.

Ilea didn't know if he was considering it or if he gave up on the conversation already. Either way, she was already getting results from Feyrair. If the other one would join in, it would simply be a bonus on top.

Loud laughter resounded suddenly, Ben walking over with a smile on his face. “Now this is what I call a good environment for experimentation.” He exclaimed and opened his arms wide. “You said you would be open to some ice testing?”

Ilea nodded. “Ice, fire, soul or whatever he has. Isalthar can join in too but I’d like to at least try to tank your attacks alone first.”

Ben lifted his eyebrows before he nodded. “You take risks I wouldn’t even consider. Very well, I won’t complain. Let’s just start very low and go from there. Can you stop for a while?” He addressed both Feyrair and Maro.

The magic ceased, both of them regenerating the used mana.

Ilea’s healing and ashen projectiles hadn’t taken much mana, her own regeneration enough to sustain it. The mana she got from the incoming spells didn’t really have a use in this situation.

“We can start with ice. Just let me know if you’re alright with joining after.” Ilea said towards the floating elf who hadn’t spoken another word.

“Go on Ben, I’ll let you know once it becomes an issue.” She extended her ashen armor and prepared herself. Azarinth Fighting would inform her about any excessive danger and should something damn near kill her, she still had her second tier Azarinth Perception.

Ben nodded excitedly, powerful mana emanating from him a moment later. Instead of heat, the air now cooled.

Crystals of ice formed on top of her ash near instantly. Soon, her body itself started to cool down but she noticed that the ice itself couldn’t quite penetrate.

“You have a second tier resistance.” Ben noted, smiling brightly. “Perfect.”

A chunk of crystals on top of her armor suddenly burst with a powerful explosion of ice and pure force. It didn’t manage to penetrate or even heavily damage her armor.

“Marvelous. You are definitely a valuable test subject.” He said and used more mana in his next spell, her entire body now covered in crystals.

*I’m literally an explosion test dummy.*

Again, the force ripped through her, stone cracking below as the others took a couple steps back.

Ilea was unharmed.

It looked like Isalthar and Walter got interested as well, the two walking over.

“Done?” Ilea asked, looking their way as more crystals formed.

Ben himself was now covered in a thin layer of ice, reminiscent of the ice mage elf Ilea had fought back in Salia. Ben’s armor looked much thinner, mostly see through and more flexible.

“For now.” Walter said. “You mentioned that you would give them the needed materials for today?”

“Yea. I’ll check it later. Or do you have to go already, Isalthar?” Ilea asked. She had planned to do some more resistance training while they were available.

“We can stay until nightfall.” The healer said.

Ilea nodded. “Do you have a list?”

Walter gave her a piece of paper that she took and stored. "Are you staying?"

"No. You make me feel inadequate at the best of times. I'd rather not see you monsters test magic on each other." Walter said with a dry voice. "Check in again before you leave. I'm sure the others would be happy."

"Not you?" Ilea asked with a smile.

"I think I would survive. Nothing against sharing a mug of ale of course." Walter said and smiled back.

"I'll be there." Ilea said and gave Ben a thumbs up to continue.

"You can join as well." Ilea said to the watching Isalhar. She assumed he was at least.

"Perhaps I will. Do you have a second tier wind magic resistance? Otherwise I would suggest acquiring said first." The healer said.

"I do." Ilea replied, an explosion of ice shards sent a shock wave over the group, Feyrair taking another step back.

"Marvelous, marvelous." Ben exclaimed happily.

Ilea had a feeling she would hear that a couple more times during the day.

After ten spells, Ben even warned the others to take a little more distance. The already splintered rock below Ilea was so cold, it cracked further from her weight alone.

It was a weird sensation. The air was so cold it should damage her somehow but the second tier of her resistance simply made it ineffective. The physics didn't make sense but somehow, her mana altered the properties of the air she breathed in, the crystals clinging to her body.

Only the shards themselves and the force of the explosion could actually harm her.

Ben's magic however was barely capable to rival Feyrair's feats. The range, speed and duration of his magic was vastly superior compared to the dragon elf but its slow nature had a hard time doing any significant damage to Ilea's ashen armor.

The ash froze of course and flaked off, whole chunks ripped out thanks to the explosions but the force wasn't enough to rip through to her skin or to rip her apart completely.

Ilea had a theory that was later confirmed, making her second tier Blast resistance responsible for the sheer lack of result.

Ben wasn't discouraged, even after trying for nearly an hour. Quite the opposite.

He was ecstatic. The man let loose all the spells and powers he had wanted to try. He could even partially turn into ice himself, moving through the frozen stone and air as well as the ice he created out of nowhere.

He tried to crush her with huge chunks of it, tried to cut through her armor with spikes, lances and shrapnel. He tried to squish her between moving pieces, tried to freeze her ash and body itself.

Nothing quite managed to leave a lasting impression. Ilea was too shock and ice resistant, her ashen armor regenerating too quickly and part of her body, benefiting from most of her defenses.

His spells gave her mana that once again were used for her to regenerate. In the end, Ben probably had some ways to potentially injure her but the stone below as well as his created ice were simply not as resistant as her body coupled with ash.

“Do you feel more comfortable now, to try your magic?” Ilea asked the floating elf once more. Isalthar hadn’t joined yet either but she already had wind magic resistance. Something new would add to her Avatar of Ash and with it provide a five or even ten percent increase to her toughness.

He didn’t respond, making Ilea focus back on the others. She did however glance back his way when he held out his hand.

His other arm moved back, as if he was drawing a bow.

In her sphere, Ilea saw exactly that. A bright whitish blue bow being drawn, a corporeal arrow placed on the string of light. Wisps of the energy flowed over both bow and arrow, moving out as if to escape.

“Certain?” The elf asked once more, doubt and anxiousness in his voice.

“Soul magic partially damages your soul. Your healing will have a much smaller effect on it. An incredibly painful and... unsettling experience.” Ben said, taking a couple steps away from her.

“What happens if my soul gets destroyed?” Ilea asked, looking at the drawn arrow.

It did not look like there was any strain on the elf’s face. He simply held the arrow and aimed and waited.

“The soul cannot be destroyed.” Isalthar supplied.

“Soul magic damages your health just as much and your mana. The added aspect of the soul is... difficult to discern or explain. This is information we learned when he joined the hunters, provided solely by him.” Ben explained.

*So I’m trusting this random elf to not lie.* “How do I heal it?”

“Rest.” The elf said and turned his head sideways, just a few degrees. A questioning glance.

She could see the sweat form on his brow. “Shoot.”

The arrow was loosed, a streak of bright light flowing towards her and through.

Azarith Fighting had informed her about the health loss but not the rest.

It felt like a chunk of her life force was ripped out with the arrow, the thing flying off into the distance. A chunk of life force and mana.

It had moved through, ignoring her armor just like the mist scythes of Elana had.

The worst part by far was the unsettling pain Ilea felt. Deep in her core, not a physical location but something so private and emotional. As if it had scraped and injured who she was. Not her mind or her memories but something Ilea had never felt before, yet had always known.

“What the fuck, was that?” She exclaimed and stared at the elf. The damage was massive in comparison to the others, healed in seconds nonetheless. The mana situation was a little confusing because she both lost and won mana. The feeling was distinct, it didn’t just mitigate how much of her mana was taken. Without a resistance of course, the mana she got back was minimal.

The elf lowered his hands and head, his mouth opening but closing again a moment later. He turned, in shame, avoiding the group's looks.

"That was beautiful." Ilea said. "And terrifying." She asked, noticing just now that tears had formed on her eyes. The ash prevented anybody from seeing it but her voice had quivered slightly. She felt the distress in him, as obvious as the sun was in a desert.

"Can you do it again?" Ilea asked after a moment of cycling healing mana through herself. It helped, slowly, comforting her. *This is the weirdest shit.* Ilea thought and laughed.

The elf had turned back a little, head held in a curious position. He looked unsure.

"Certain?" He asked once more, a scared voice, quiet and unsure yet hopeful at the very same.

Ilea smiled and braced herself. "Certain." She said and breathed out.