

Chapter 564 Uphill Battle

Ilea quickly checked her status, letting the Queen move up towards her. At least the woman was pretty slow and didn't teleport. A very welcome change of pace and the only reason Ilea could keep this thing up. Otherwise she would've had to lure her out of the dungeon before escaping, hoping the town would've survived that. She doubted they could. Not when the rot could make even her puke up blood at a close distance.

Name: *Ilea Spears*

Unspent statpoints: 11

Unspent Core skill points: 63

Unspent 3rd tier General skill points [1919 Total skill levels]: 2

Class 1: The Azarinth Sentinel – lvl 447

- **Active: Absolute Destruction – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Active: Sentinel Reconstruction – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Active: Azarinth Awakening – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Active: Blink – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Active: Sentinel Sphere – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Passive: Sentinel Core – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Passive: Azarinth Fighting – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Passive: Sentinel Huntress – 3rd lvl 18**
- **Passive: Azarinth Perception – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Passive: Azarinth Reversal – 3rd lvl 29**

Class 2: Kin of Ash – lvl 443

- **Active: Armor of Ash – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Active: Aspect of Ash – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Active: True Ash Creation – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Active: Heart of Cinder – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Active: Storm of Cinders – 3rd lvl 29**
- **Passive: Ash and Ember Unity – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Passive: Ashen Wings – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Passive: Eyes of Ash – 3rd lvl 29**
- **Passive: Avatar of Ash – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Passive: Keeper of Ash – 3rd lvl 30**

Class 3: The Faen Valkyrie – lvl 380

- **Active: Phaseshift – 3rd lvl 9**
- **Active: Flare of Creation – 3rd lvl 16**
- **Active: Displacement – 3rd lvl 12**
- **Passive: Space Shift – 3rd lvl 7**
- **Passive: Body of the Valkyrie – 3rd lvl 12**
- **Passive: Space Awareness – 3rd lvl 3**

General Skills: Hidden

Status:

Vitality: 1300
Endurance: 450
Strength: 515
Dexterity: 450
Intelligence: 1200
Wisdom: 1300

Health: 20842/22594
Stamina: 2480/4500
Mana: 16823/26000

Hmm... I reached nineteen hundred at some point. So two third tier General points available. Could go for Rot once it's at level twenty but right now that doesn't help me.

The only other thing... Core skill points.

Core Skill Points available: 63

[3rd tier Class Skill Point]

[Stat Gain]

[Skill Boost]

[Locked]

[Locked]

[Locked]

[Locked]

[Locked]

Nothing new unlocked. Got everything in the third tier and skill boosts don't seem worth it at this point. They'll advance while I fight this thing.

Question is, is it enough?

She glanced at the Stat Gain option for a little while. Two points for fifty points in a stat. 500 for twenty? A thousand for forty? I mean how many could I need at my next evolution?

Ilea didn't want to waste the points but her Intelligence was sitting at 1200. If she invested just twelve points, her damage should theoretically increase by twenty five percent. With all her multipliers it may be enough to overwhelm the creature.

Theoretically... if the cost doesn't increase, I could nearly double my Intelligence.

She bit her lip. The achievement of killing a four mark while alone would surely be massive for her next evolutions. But she wasn't about to dump all of her gathered Core skill points into it just to achieve it.

Okay, first let's try the normal way. I can try to inspect her with Sentinel Reconstruction to see how much of an effect various abilities have. Let's see what I can learn.

Ilea continued her fight, more familiar with the Queen's spells and movements. With the full fifty percent reduction from Body of the Valkyrie, she could generally ignore the cyclone around her.

The direct applications of blood and rot magic still damaged her enough to force a short retreat. And while the Queen's attacks weren't quite as frequent as those of the Meadow, they could quickly overwhelm her if she stopped evading.

Ilea found the training to be quite efficient at the very least. All her Class skills were benefiting from this. Her main goal however was to end the creature, if something like that was even possible.

Reconstruction did allow her to gain some insight into the health and anatomy of the Queen. What she learned didn't exactly reassure her. If anything the creature was closer to a spirit than a human at this point. A being of mana, not one of flesh and blood.

The only noticeable damage Ilea managed to deal was caused by a powerful use of Heart of Cinder coupled with overcharged auras and the expenditure of the fifteen minute bonus from Aspect of Ash.

It really was quite ridiculous.

And when she checked a mere second later, the damage had been healed both visibly and to her spell.

Funny, she thought and blinked up through the destroyed complex of tunnels and rooms. By now most of it was just separated holes and corridors in the mountain, much of it collapsed or ripped apart.

Ilea landed, stretching as she stared at her Endurance. It had nearly reached zero.

How?

She shook her head, watching the numbers go up with each second. Admittedly, fighting the Queen took a lot of concentration and moving, both her body, limbs, and wings constantly in motion. Her precognition allowed her to keep up with the sheer number of spells flying around but she couldn't just tank it all, not with the main attacks dealing so much damage.

How long have I been fighting her?

She had no clue.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Specter of Rot – lvl 612]

...

'ding' 'You have defeated [Specter of Rot – lvl 640]

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 381 – One stat point awarded'

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 382 – One stat point awarded'

'ding' 'Phaseshift reaches 3rd lvl 10'

'ding' 'Space Shift reaches 3rd lvl 8'

'ding' 'Body of the Valkyrie reaches 3rd lvl 13'

'ding' 'Monster Hunter reaches 3rd lvl 9'

'ding' 'Blood Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 13'

'ding' 'Blood Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 14'

'ding' 'Bone Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 10'

'ding' 'Rot Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 15'

...

'ding' 'Rot Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 18'

Should probably get that one to the third tier once it's at 20.

Ilea saw no reason to advance her bone magic resistance, easily able to avoid heavy damage from those spells because of her speed, teleportation, and ability to get out when grappled.

The rot damage however was high, and constant. The nausea could be dealt with by using her healing coupled with her enhanced body itself, only flaring up when the Queen directly used the magic type on her. Realistically it simply reduced Ilea's regeneration.

But it's not enough. Even if I'm a hundred percent resistant to that or could double my regeneration, that still won't allow me to just stand there and deck it out with that relic from the great skeleton war.

The four mark simply had overwhelming power.

What I need is enough damage to whittle her down.

[Stat Gain] – [Gain 50 stat points to distribute freely – Cost: 2]

Hmmmmmmmmmm. Let's use eight points and see if it makes a difference.

The cost didn't increase with each use, leaving her with 55 Core skill points and 213 total stat points to spend.

She put 210 into Intelligence.

Intelligence: 1410

My highest stat now. And it's multiplied a shit ton by my skills. Let's see if it's enough to make a dent.

Ilea felt her aura, trying to gauge a difference. She did feel more powerful but only marginally so. *Her resistances and regeneration are a fixed number too though. Just have to crack that, she thought and used Phaseshift to charge up her auras.*

Thanks for that constant rot mana supply, dear Queen.

She blinked down and flew past the monster with a smile on her face, grinning as she displaced herself away from the expanding aura before she used Monster Hunter to call her training partner back towards herself.

Ilea floated into the large courtyard, white flames moving on her armor.

The Queen hadn't gotten far, already joining her again with her cyclone of magic in tow.

Ilea used the last few seconds of her Phaseshift boost to inflict as much damage as she could, her ashen limbs lashing out before she was pushed back again by blood and rot magic, her body ravaged by the overwhelming power.

She felt neither pain nor anything else the spells may have caused in a human being. Her body regenerated as she pushed forward again, closing the distance with intent. Heart of Cinder released in a cone from her left hand, stripping the monster of its flesh, digging a burning gash into the stone behind. Her right fist slammed into the skeleton's head, Absolute Destruction and Storm of Cinders releasing as her ash spread out and set the Queen alight with white fire.

A pulse of blood magic sent her tumbling back, sharp bone spikes splintering as her body slowed down in the field of death. Her wings were shredded as she displaced herself out of the bones slowly digging into her ashen armor. A use of blink got her close again, her attacks resuming before the creature could even reform her body.

Ilea used her ash to push destructive mana into her, quickly checking with her healing if her increased Intelligence had made any difference so far. She punched one more time before she was pushed back, her awareness blinded for a split second before she returned, tumbling in the bone field.

My brain? Or just my eyes and enough mana to muddle my sphere?

It didn't matter. If the Queen had a way to pin her down and kill her, she would've used that moment. But she hadn't.

And now I know that you're vulnerable, Ilea thought with a wide smile, closing the distance before her limbs and ash attacked the dark sphere the Queen started to form. She tried everything to disrupt or stop the spell but found her efforts meaningless.

So far at least, Ilea thought, using her Space Awareness coupled with her sphere to try and understand what the spell was and how it connected to Ilea. Even just severing the connection would be helpful.

She inspected her own body too, mostly using her healing and Soul Perception. Neither revealed anything particularly useful. Not until she blinked up.

A tether... what's that?

It wasn't a connection through space but something much more physical. Ilea used her teleportation a few times and slowly zeroed in on what she was looking for. *That's so fucking subtle.*

She smirked, opening her armor as four of her ashen limbs cut deep into her chest, ripping open her rib cage before her hand reached inside. Ilea ripped out her heart and stared at the beating organ, blood dripping over her hand and to the ground. A new one had formed already, the wound in her chest closing as she stared at the thing.

Can't even see it.

Her sphere didn't lie however and she was pretty sure this was it.

Ilea looked at the approaching blood magic spell and casually threw her heart at the floating manifestation.

It was ripped apart by dozens of red wisps, pieces of it splattering onto the center as it attracted everything around it.

She watched with joy as the spell broke into itself, flaring up one last moment before it exploded in bright crimson light.

Ilea didn't waste any time, back to the Queen one moment later. She didn't know if the target would always be her heart but now that she figured out more about the spell, she could deal with it much better.

The damage itself had already been manageable but if she couldn't keep the pressure on the four mark up, it may as well be an impossible fight.

Ilea continued her assault, slowly working through each and every spell the Howling Queen could throw at her. She checked the damage she would take, the mana she absorbed, and the frequency the four mark could use them.

The Queen did switch things up from time to time but she didn't show exceptional cunning or battle experience, not even as much as the Specters.

Because she was a queen and not a warrior, Ilea thought, wondering how the woman had gotten quite as powerful as she was now. Was this another case where magic took over somehow and made this place into a dungeon? Where it strengthened the creatures within?

But she was human once... did she die? Or did something take over at one point? Madness or corruption?

Ilea flew sideways, letting several blades cut into her before she activated Phaseshift. The Queen used her powerful blood and rot magic right before the spell activated.

Getting better at the timing, Ilea thought and healed the damage. The direct attacks provided a lot of mana but they also ripped out a lot of health. The time it took to retreat and focus on healing was problematic. So instead she healed during Phaseshift, using the time to empower her auras instead. The Queen still had no way of detecting her but would usually remain stationary for a few seconds whenever her enemy vanished.

Three, four, Ilea counted and deactivated her spell. She displaced herself close to the Queen and greeted her with a punch to her skull. Her white flames spread out and over the woman, every split second they remained on her was important.

Ilea smiled, the quick check showing a change in her health. Perhaps ninety five percent or ninety six. It was hard to tell. The important bit was that it wasn't higher than that. Her continued assault was starting to have an impact.

Lull of Battle would be fucking useful at this point, Ilea thought, glad her more frequent Phaseshift uses prevented another Stamina exhaustion.

She ripped out her heart again when the next Seeking Wrath spell formed, the organ flopping against the incomplete sphere without an effect. It didn't matter, Ilea just kept throwing hearts until the spell exploded in the Queen's face.

“Hah, take that,” Ilea said, immediately pressing her aggression.

She fell into a trance, laughing as she circled the creature, sending out her spells in quick succession and perfectly timed with the counter aggression from the Queen.

The heart trick didn't work another time, Ilea instead having to figure out what the Queen had chosen as a connection. In the end it hardly mattered, be it limbs, or even her head. In the latter case, she at least blinked up to prevent another spell from taking her down in the short time she needed to recover.

As Ilea's skills grew in power, so did the Queen's resistances. When she finally reached the end of her second tier Rot Resistance, the tides started to turn.

'ding' 'Rot Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 19'

'ding' 'Rot Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 20'

- Rot Resistance

You've basked in the power of an incredibly potent Rot aura. Most humans would die near instantly when exposed but you of course, have come to enjoy it. Perhaps it's necessary for you to go to these lengths when other people can eat blue cheese for a similar experience.

The third tier was available and with the progression of the fight, Ilea thought it necessary to invest a point.

'ding' 'Rot Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 1'

Rot Resistance – 3rd lvl 1

With your regeneration and healing, it was unlikely that such a resistance would ever manifest. However you have found a powerful source of unnatural rot. Perhaps fueled by a curse or magic. Congratulations on yet another painful and horrific experience.

2nd stage: Your body has endured more than most, solely thanks to your magical regeneration. Time and exposure have made your body more resilient to infection, damaging bacteria, and fungal growth.

3rd stage: You damn near bask in rotten magic. Rotten matter just turned into a delicacy to you. The process of rot has turned beneficial, destroying but also healing you at the same time. The more familiar with specific sources you become, the more you'll be able to benefit from this boon. Just make sure to wash yourself thoroughly afterwards.

The bonus was more than welcome. It provided health on top of a higher percentage of resistance.

Ilea felt the change immediately, as if she had fought in a haze before. The damage she received lowered significantly, allowing her to ignore more of the direct attacks, stacking her offensive skills with a higher frequency.

The higher resistance meant more mana from Sentinel Core too. By now she was constantly fighting with the full benefits of Body of the Valkyrie, any defense against mana intrusion the fake skeleton had were long gone, Storm of Cinder making sure of that.

And yet it remained an uphill battle. Every slip of concentration led to heavy damage to her body and in turn a short period where she couldn't attack. Seconds trickled by as Ilea turned the powerful four mark's mana into her own offensive healing and fire.

Each of her skills worked in tandem, healing and defense keeping her alive, Sentinel core and meditation keeping her resources up, Flare of Creation working against the enemy regeneration and healing. Had her Classes been focused fully on offensive power, Ilea would've never been able to challenge this being. She would've been a smear on the castle floor the moment this creature set its glassy eyes on her.

But there was a reason Ilea had a third tier Veteran skill. This wasn't the first time she had to fight for hours on end against a monster she could just about challenge. In a way it even felt familiar to her. She felt prepared, ready, enjoying each and every moment.

She was a long way off from the magical power that beings like this one commanded, but hunting them? That she could do.