

Chapter 488 Woman vs Machine

Ilea continued through the dimly lit streets of Iztacalum, systematically destroying every single Guardian or Centurion that patrolled the town.

There were fewer here than in the factory or city she had visited in the north. And still it felt like there were too many. Compared to the time during the expedition.

Then again, they hadn't explored the whole city. Only the Great Hall had been cleared out, even leaving the hall in front of the treasury alone.

With her advanced senses, speed and now two teleportation spells, clearing the city was only slowed down by her using mainly third Class abilities.

Monster Hunter allowed her to call for all the enemies in a specific area of town, before moving on to the next. Her Class still leveled but she already needed five to ten Guardians destroyed for a single upgrade.

It was good that there were this many around.

When she had last been here, each day had been a difficult battle, each Guardian destroyed an accomplishment. The machines a constant looming threat, hiding behind every corner.

Ilea needed no more rest. Her wounds healed instantly, her armor impenetrable. Even her Space Magic made short work of the left behind creatures.

Only a few hundred remained. More than she had expected but nonetheless a number without meaning, their power insignificant. Guardians not to the treasure of this dungeon and ancient civilization but to the two machines she had come to destroy.

Two birds with one punch, she thought, reaching the bottomless void stretching down into the darkness. Her eyes let her see the rubble below, several hundred meters away.

On the other side of the cliff lay the battered entrance to the Great Hall. The gates had remained open, beyond already visible the patrolling machines, both Guardian and Centurion.

Ilea checked her messages and cracked her neck.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Taleen Guardian – lvl 205]

...

'ding' 'You have defeated [Taleen Guardian – lvl 151]

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 16 – One stat point awarded'

...

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 67 – One stat point awarded'

'ding' 'Force reaches lvl 5'

...

'ding' 'Force reaches lvl 13'

'ding' 'Flare of Creation reaches lvl 7'

...

'ding' 'Flare of Creation reaches lvl 15'

'ding' 'Displacement reaches lvl 6'

...

'ding' 'Displacement reaches lvl 14'

'ding' 'Space Shift reaches lvl 4'

...

'ding' 'Space Shift reaches lvl 9'

'ding' 'Body of the Valkyrie reaches lvl 4'

'ding' 'Body of the Valkyrie reaches lvl 5'

'ding' 'Space Awareness reaches lvl 3'

'ding' 'Space Awareness reaches lvl 4'

'ding' 'Deviant of Humanity reaches lvl 9'

'ding' 'Identify reaches lvl 14'

'ding' 'Meditation reaches 3rd lvl 8'

'ding' 'Monster Hunter reaches 3rd lvl 2'

'ding' 'Warhammer Mastery reaches lvl 7'

...

'ding' 'Warhammer Mastery reaches lvl 9'

Ilea wasn't sure how long she had been here already. Night had definitely come, that much she was sure about.

Right now she didn't care about missing a night of Sentinel training. They had enough tools to advance and now that Trian was eager to take them out himself, she wasn't as integral to the process anymore.

Every corpse she had found including the nearby gear had been stored in her bracelet, to be given to the guild and the people who had requested it, should they still be alive and around.

There had been quite a few. Something she noted was that the healer woman from the Corinth Order was not among them. She assumed the woman had escaped before the expedition leaders had regrouped outside the dungeon. Or perhaps she had hidden and escaped at a later point.

The numbers were a little blurry in her memory but counting those she had returned with and those she had fought with in the Great Hall, there were at least twenty to thirty people unaccounted for.

With her sphere and perception abilities, she didn't think she had missed a lot of them. She rather mistrusted her memories. Especially considering the state she had been in back then.

The levels to her new Class skills made quite a difference, she found.

Force at level thirteen could be used in a nearly ten meter sphere around her. It's power too increased far enough for her to slow down the projectiles shot by the ranged Guardians. Only marginally but with the increased range, the difference was much more noticeable.

Flare of Creation received a 0.5 percent increase to its resilience bonus for each level. More importantly, the fires got stronger. So far the health needed to keep it active hadn't changed.

Active - Flare of Creation – lvl 15

Let the fires erupt, burning away your health in the exchange for devastating power. Attacks with your body are infused with the Flame of Creation, dealing lingering damage to health, mana, and magical constructs. You are immune to stunning, fear, and shout abilities. Your resilience is increased by 32.5% [260%]

Category: Aura – Body Enhancement

Ilea hoped a second or third tier would remove the heavy sacrifice. Otherwise she wouldn't necessarily be able to use the spell against dangerous foes. Foes against whom she needed her healing prowess.

Displacement had grown quite considerably too, now usable at a range of around twenty meters. The time and effort it took to displace Guardians had been reduced quite a bit too, Space Shift being part of the reason for these changes.

Passive – Space Shift – lvl 9

Space yields easier for you, allowing you to unravel its mysteries. Teleportation abilities can be used again 54.5% faster [109%] and you can travel 24.5% farther [49%].

Category: Space magic

Space Awareness remained a mystery. It crept up alongside Body of the Valkyrie, despite the lack of damage she was taking.

Passive – Body of the Valkyrie – lvl 5

The flame of creation flows through your veins, increasing your resilience by 17.5% [157.5%]. Increases your physical damage resistance by 5.5% [49.5%]. Increases your magic damage resistance by 5.5% [49.5%]. You won't be fazed anymore by heavy damage or powerful sources of light and sound.

Category: Body enhancement – Space Magic

She shouldered her warhammer and blinked over the vast divide.

The closest Guardians spotted her without a need for Monster Hunter.

Ilea watched the first enemy approach, its spindly legs moving over the rubble and stone without issue.

Quite efficient. She couldn't help but admire the workdwarfship that went into these creatures, watching the Guardian as it vanished, displaced into thin air above the gaping abyss.

“A good flight to you!” she said and waved, smiling at the flailing creature.

It didn't scream as it fell but she did hear the impact.

It was quite fortunate that gravity could be used without the need of magical study. Although she was quite interested in how completely demolished these machines would become if Sulivhaan added a little pinch of his magic to their fall.

One after the other, the Guardians fell. Perhaps it was wasted potential for her new skills but there were more of them in other dungeons. If there was enough of anything in this world, it was monsters. And Taleen Machines.

Ilea failed to teleport the Centurions but she had another plan for them anyway.

The first one was punched a few times, Ilea using her main skills to entirely shred through the machine.

When its core started to glow, she cut off its arms with ash and grabbed one of its legs. A short twirl sent the grenade towards its approaching brethren.

She quite enjoyed the ensuing cascade of explosions and shrapnel. The light, blasts, sounds, and shrapnel didn't bother her. She had resistances for everything and specialized defense skills on top of that.

Her challenge was clear, her message sent.

Flare of Creation receded as she stepped into the hall. All gates were open but she was only focused on one. Heart of Cinder started charging, soon reaching a point where the heat forced her to heal.

She spread her wings and approached the throne room.

It's been a while, she thought, perceiving the rotting corpses and the dried blood nobody had deemed necessary to clean up.

She would bring them all up, to provide an appropriate farewell.

Ilea slowly lifted up, her wings moving as she passed the bent and broken gates.

The throne room still showed the damage from the long ago battle. Cracks, cuts, and shrapnel covered the walls close to the door, less so farther away. A few corpses were present here too, not in a better state than the ones outside.

Once experienced adventurers, here to explore the newly discovered Taleen Dungeon.

Ilea couldn't help but smile at the thought. *Experienced, below level two hundred.*

The north would blow their mind. Then again, a mention of it usually did.

"I'm back. Anybody home?" she said after nothing had happened.

The ground in front of the throne opened up.

Ilea saw them within her sphere. The hairs on her back stood up, Meditation calming her down. *You have fought their kind before, and worse.*

"Intruders," one of the Praetorians said, "The throneroom has been breached."

"Indeed it has," Ilea said and fanned out her ashen limbs.

She didn't give them any time to assess the situation, blinking close to the Scythes wielder and starting her assault.

The machines responded in kind.

[Taleen Praetorian – lvl ???]

[Taleen Praetorian – lvl ???]

The three marks weren't as impressive anymore, nor was their size or speed.

Ilea dodged the attacks as she twirled through the air, her limbs delivering Storm of Cinders into the arcane shields, slowly burning into their defenses. Her precognition and spherical awareness allowed her to maneuver around them with practiced ease.

She kept the mace wielding machine behind the scythe one, unsure if the former even had the capability to use any spells or skills like the Praetorian she had faced in the north.

Either that or it never deemed it necessary against the expedition forces.

Ilea sacrificed two thousand points of health, infusing her Azarinth Awakening before she aimed and released Heart of Cinder.

The improved and buffed spell manifested in a blinding flash of light and fire, enveloping the first machine entirely before it spread onto the second.

Her third tier healing recovered the lost health near instantly as she pushed on, closing the distance to the slightly stunned machine.

A fist slammed into solid metal as Absolute Destruction and Storm of Cinders spread into the creature, the lack of a shield surprising her.

Ilea smiled as a pale flame formed around her, the clouds of acid now forming behind the first Praetorian not a concern for now.

Her Space Magic barely inconvenienced the creatures, not that it was necessary with her speed and teleportation. She only had to be aware of the blink canceling spell the mace wielder might have.

The scythes flashed past, one of them scraping her arm without leaving any permanent damage. Her fists continued slamming into the metal, slightly denting it from the outside.

She knew that the insides were looking much worse, the pale flames spreading on the surface but even more so within. The same was true for her other mana intrusion abilities, Storm of Cinders building up with each hit.

When the clouds came, Ilea simply let them spread into her. *It even has difficulties with my ash*, she thought with a smile, happy about the returning mana the Praetorian provided.

Ilea dodged the mace and displaced herself behind the first machine, once again removing their advantage in numbers. *Like a fly*, she thought and twirled in the air to avoid the thrown blades. A laugh escaped her. She couldn't help herself.

"Do you remember me?" she asked, sending a dozen ashen lances at the damaged machine, its shields only recovering slowly, not even covering its legs yet.

She wondered if she had accidentally damaged the shield generator, if they had such a thing.

Ilea didn't let up, blinking close again and continuing her assault. Whenever the position allowed it, she spread out her ash and ignited the machine's shields with Flare of Creation, her extended body funneling vast amounts of destructive healing mana into its shields and body, dozens of fully charged punches adding to her overwhelming force.

An overconfident parry cost her an arm, only reducing her offensive capability for a moment until her third tier reconstruction built the limb once more.

A dozen punches slammed into her targeted Praetorian until the severed arm reached the ground.

Ilea blinked and caught it at the last moment, storing it inside of her necklace before she continued, displacing herself to get back instantaneously.

No teleport, no regeneration, lackluster damage. “You are no threat,” she said, feeling the energy build within her target.

“Let’s see who fares better,” she said and winked at the second Praetorian.

It swung wide and quickly, the mace blocked by her hand, ash, Force, and body. She was pushed a few meters through the air, her wings finally equalizing the momentum. No bones had broken this time.

Another set of ashen spears slammed into the first machine, Ilea finding herself unable to blink towards it. She smiled, instead using displacement.

The hunch turned out correct, her body appearing close to the damaged machine. Its shields had barely reformed, pushed back once more by expanding ash and fires.

She used her teleportation again when the mace wielder reached her, the time not enough for the first Praetorian to increase its attack speed.

Ilea took some time to recover mana, circling the beings in the large throne room, happy to receive the ranged acid attacks that only fueled her even faster.

She kept an eye on the shields, now definitely sure that they recovered at a slower pace.

The mace wielder of course was mostly undamaged but she had time. Flare of Creation vanished again, her healing turned off to get a little more mana out of her regeneration.

Her fully powered offensive arsenal slowly drained her, especially against enemies that could take a lot of hits without sending magic her way. Compared to the Specters, she hardly had to dodge them either, allowing for more frequent attacks.

Granted, there were a few more there than the two Praetorians here. Let alone the sheer uselessness of the mace wielder. She almost felt bad for that one, all of her resistance training paying off, her ash several times harder to dissolve than it had been the last time.

While she had to manage her mana against the two creatures, she knew now that her strength had reached a threshold. One high enough to kill Taleen Praetorians.

If they understood or not, they did not show, continuing their assault without pause.

Their ranged attacks were downright pathetic, Ilea just giggling as she blinked through the air, sometimes letting the scythes scratch past her on purpose. The thrown attacks could still penetrate her ash, she knew as much thanks to her precognition.

Ilea wondered if the blades or the machine had some kind of armor piercing benefits or skills, unsure of how else the rather ordinary looking weapons could get past her defenses.

It didn’t matter either way. She didn’t allow them to hit her directly. Getting the curse wasn’t a good idea, however ineffective it was at this point in time.

Ashen lanced rushed out, four of them penetrating the damaged machine, a few more deflected by the second Praetorian, now standing in a defensive stance before its ally.

Interesting, she thought, Flare of Creation activating once more before she vanished.

Three punches slammed into the slowly reforming shields, breaking through and delivering their payload into the creature.

It turned sluggishly to respond, the white flames joined by fiery red ones as Storm of Cinders continued to build within the being.

Only a few minutes had passed since the fight had started, most of that time spent on flying around and recovering mana.

Another punch landed before she displaced herself, the second machine having circled its companion once more.

Ilea advanced when she felt a surge of mana, the power washing through her before she blinked away.

She laughed as she circled the two beings, watching as the damaged Praetorian followed her, unable to keep up with her constant teleportation through the large room.

It would be simple to get out, to make distance between herself and the coming blast but that was not what she had planned.

She wanted them both here, both destroyed within the very hall they had been tasked to protect.

Ilea felt the second wave wash through her as she collected the bodies strewn around the hall, some more recognizable than others. They couldn't take the blast. She could.

I hope, she thought, still grinning. Last time she had a few Elves, Terok, and Maro putting up defenses. This time she just had herself.

And vastly improved defensive tools, she thought as ash formed around her, teleporting with her.

The core finally cracked and burst, her sphere lighting up with power, her eyes squinting slightly at the flash of green light.

What followed was a storm of power, all life leaving the Praetorian as it was ripped apart by the energy expanding outwards. The stone itself was disintegrated by its wrath, the explosion spreading through the hall with a certainty of death.

Death to most, Ilea thought and blinked, sacrificing two thousand points of health. She appeared between the retreating Praetorian and the expanding green light. All the heat and power she had gathered left through her arm, engulfing the remaining machine in fire and light, its shields broken through, as if they were flimsy conjurations of an apprentice barrier mage.

She displaced herself before the energy reached her, appearing behind the stunned machine.

Mana, six thousand, health, topped. Ash, ready, she thought and summoned her bone armor, her ash spreading in front of her to form a wall. Her limbs joined the defense as she landed near the wall, crouching down to form a smaller target.

Black wings joined the defenses as she watched the second Praetorian tumble, the energy breaking through the remaining scraps of its shield before its steel armor bent and melted.

Very well executed, she thought, taking a last glance at her sixty four available stat points. *Ah fuck it, I don't need them.*

The power came and washed over her. The stone behind her cracked and melted, her ash slowly burnt through until the magic reached her more resilient armor. It took a moment to entirely vanish, the energy fueling her mana as her healing took over.

She stored her bone armor before it was entirely destroyed, her skin and bones reforming as the power continued to burn into her.

Her laugh turned into a cackle as her throat melted and reformed, her ashen armor returning in parts before it was burnt away once more. She screamed with all she had and stood up, her body buckling under the stream of magical power, laughable compared to the energy she had absorbed in the Descent, negligible compared to the power of the Trakorov.

Steaming rock flowed towards the ground behind her, Ilea still standing as her eyes reformed, looking at the bones of her hand, only partially covered with muscle and flesh.

She stopped her healing and watched as it all reformed, her ashen armor flowing towards her neck. The slowly closing wounds were exposed, healed by her natural regeneration. Her skills remained active, fueled not just by her remaining mana but the energy she had absorbed.

Ilea ignored the messages within her mind, instead turning her attention to the slowly moving machine before her.

It hadn't fared much better, the sleek lines and predatory design of its body unrecognizable as it straightened upwards. It grabbed the mace that had dropped to the ground, the weapon now a single lump of steel, all spikes molten into its form.

She smiled at it, ash lazily swirling around her body as she spread her now unblemished arms.

The Praetorian watched her with its one remaining eye, the green light shining brighter as it took a step forward, steadying itself as if surprised at its own weight.

"You should have finished the job," Ilea said in a whisper and vanished.