

Chapter 865 Mist

Ilea didn't plan on bothering the crocodile. Something about it looking so similar to the ones back on Earth made her less inclined to hunt and kill it. Though she admitted the argument would likely change it if was at a high enough level to benefit her.

Might find some freak of nature deeper in the swamp. Then again, I guess a level six hundred crocodile is a bit of a freak of nature already. I just happen to be even more of a deviant.

Ilea smiled to herself, feeling some kind of kinship with the predator. She wondered if the creatures had gotten here the same way she had, just millions of years ago. That or the ones on earth actually came from here. *Probably not. A normal human on Earth could never kill a level six hundred monster.*

She stepped out from behind the trees and saw a few raven like birds fluttering down to eat the flesh that remained. Large talons adorned their legs, bloodshot red eyes staring at her as they ripped into the chunks.

[Wisp Raven – lvl 252] – [Hungry]

Aren't we all.

Ilea followed the shallow tracks left behind by the Dread beast, or elf. She wasn't sure yet on how she should call them. The similar look couldn't be a coincidence. She wondered if young elves had walked into the swamps where something then killed or turned them. There certainly were enough curses and mind magic creatures around, and the whole environment here was seeped with magic.

So far however, Ilea couldn't feel any curse magic, nor anything of the mind variety, but she made sure to stay vigilant.

Ilea moved through another pocket of mist while following the trail of the Dread beast, the act made more difficult by the obscuring magic. She came out at the edge of a murky lake, distant sections of marshland covered in mist, other sections clear. She heard faraway howls and spread her wings. She saw the murky water went deeper as she flew over the lake. Ilea teleported aside when roots shot up from the depths, dodging what she assumed to be a wood monster of sorts.

She flew backwards as she kept her eyes on the emerging wood covered in seaweed. Reaching the other side, Ilea landed in the mud, watching the tendrils return into the depths. Nothing followed her out, but far more confusing was the fact that Identify hadn't returned a monster name or anything of the like.

So is it hiding down there?

Ilea looked behind herself, the trail of the Dread beast gone after it had led into the lake. She covered her eyes with ash, the rest of her body protected by her mantle. *If you don't want to come out. I'm happy to join you.*

She flew back to where the wood had come out and dived into the muddy waters. Still, she felt the magic permeating the vicinity, a little stronger now than in the outskirts of the swamp. While she could see through her ash, she trusted her dominion within the dark surroundings, moving through the waters with ease thanks to her various resistances.

When she reached around ten meters in depth, Ilea could see roots once again move in from below. Her fires lit up as ashen limbs rushed out to cut into the creature. She found there was resistance, but she got through with a bit of push, her ash leaving only bits and pieces behind, the lake returning to the same calm she had found it in.

So where did that come from?

Ilea swam deeper and soon reached the bottom, long visible within her dominion. The ground didn't suggest that a creature was hiding nearby, nor that massive roots had recently broken out to attack someone above. She muddled up the floor but nothing reacted, nothing showed up.

So what the fuck attacked me? The swamp itself? She tried to identify the ground but it once again came back with nothing.

Ilea teleported back up and out of the waters, mud and liquid burned away by her fires of creation as she made her way back to the other side. The resistance she had felt when cutting through the roots, she assumed a creature at level two hundred, perhaps even stronger, would have difficulties getting away.

Ilea used her marks to orient herself, moving northwards and deeper into the marshes.

She saw more of the ravens, often eating remains from battles she'd found too late to see. Crocodiles were sitting in the shade or swimming in shallow waters, mud covered and waiting for monsters to come by. She found remains of Dread beasts, and tracks that led her into and past small pockets of mists.

Soon she heard more howls, seeing running creatures past the trees, vanishing into the mists beyond. She followed, finding more tracks now, the mists growing more dense, fewer sections uncovered by the strange magic and her dominion further impacted. *I wonder if it would damage me without a resistance.*

She tried, deactivating her Mist Magic Resistance and immediately feeling the strange sensation of the mist passing through her. The damage was slight but present, not quite enough to get past her natural health regeneration but that still meant the environment would be too dangerous for many, especially lower leveled creatures. In addition, she found that her perception was cut off near fully without her resistance, no longer just reduced.

She activated the resistance again, hearing sounds from ahead. Hissing. She teleported and caught a glimpse of a single Dread beast caught by the moving branches of a tree, aided by roots growing out of the earth.

The creature hissed before it was ripped in half, the chunks splattering against the ground, to be found by interested predators if the mists would clear.

So they're getting attacked as well.

Ilea teleported to the tree but found it non hostile, the branches slowly moving back into the gnarled wood, and the roots moving back into the ground where they molded into the magic of the earth and mud. Ilea spotted a few marks on the bark, scratches from sharp nails. *Is that how...*

She moved a single ashen limb, cutting into the bark and immediately eliciting a response from the tree. Roots moved out to catch her, Ilea remaining still as the wood tried to dig into her mantle, raising her up with some difficulties before it tried to rip her apart in a similar manner as it had the Dread beast. She resisted, teleporting out after a few seconds before she watched the tree.

It didn't move out to catch her, the roots and branches returning with no other tree attacking her.

It's defending itself, but it's not particularly intelligent. More just a reaction.

She didn't linger too long, continuing to follow the tracks she could see within her impeded dominion. Soon there were no pockets left without any mist, Ilea mostly trusting her marks and her hearing. Howls and hisses resounded from time to time, snuffed out again in turn, either by the swamp itself or by the creatures fighting each other.

Ilea walked through the mud and finally came up on the first Dread beast not already engaged in combat or running away.

The creature was crouched over a set of dead ravens, eating with its sharp elven teeth before it turned with a snapping motion, to look at her with blood shot eyes. The being gulped down the bird meat, including feathers, before blood magic pulsed through its body. Claws extended, it hissed and rushed at her.

[Dread Beast – lvl 528] – [Enraged]

Ilea ignored the claws scarping at her mantle, catching the creature by its neck before she slammed it down into the mud. She held it down. *“Do you hear me? Can you talk?”*

The monster didn't reply, slashing into her ash covered neck and face with its claws.

“You don't hear me?” She tried again and gave up when the creature didn't stop. Ilea punched down, smashing into and through its skull with a wet crunch, bits and pieces of flesh and bone falling aside when she removed her hand from the dead and twitching beast.

Ilea turned when she felt a strange pulse of magic. *Blood? And rage.* It was faint, barely noticeable within the heavy mana of the swamp, and the presence of the mists. *Was that aimed at me?*

Her precognition hadn't warned her, but she had faced a lot of monsters. Something about the pulse felt targeted, almost like a shout or roar. And now it was gone again.

She heard more hisses from ahead and followed, the prints in the mud showing various Dread beasts going in the same direction. Not towards the pulse, Ilea noted, though it had been far too weak to determine a specific direction. She stopped in her tracks when she felt rain drops fall from above, hearing the impacts all around. Ilea took in a deep breath, closing her eyes as she felt the water, laden with magic more potent than anything she had felt so far within the marshes.

There were no averse effects but the environment reacted, hisses resounding from all around, Dread beasts howling and hissing. Hundreds, she realized, from all around and hidden in the mists. *Guess I'm just one of them by now. I'm just wondering where we're all going.*

She sped up now, following the trail and ignoring the beasts she found, most of them failing to notice her at all within the obscuring mist, those few she stumbled into clawed her way or hissed before she cut through them. She felt the pulse, every time she killed one of the beasts, though the further she got into the mist, the weaker the pulse felt.

As she walked on, Ilea in turn felt the magic in the mist become more dense. The sounds became more distant, even the smells of the mud and wood subdued. Light rains occasionally fell, the drops even more potent than before. She could still feel her marks without issue, and the fabric remained undisturbed.

She slowed when she felt her foot impact a dead Dread beast. She crouched and checked the corpse with her dominion, her perception reduced to less than a meter around her. There were no obvious wounds on its body beside the superficial cuts most Dread beasts so far had shown.

What killed you?

Ilea stood up from her crouch and opened her eyes wide. The mana density around her was palpable, even with all of her resistances.

It got too close. The mana killed it.

She listened and pushed with her dominion, trying to perceive the source of the magic all around. It felt oppressive, like once the presence of the Meadow had felt to her.

Am I close to the center?

Is there a creature that's causing all this?

“Is somebody there?” she called out.

The mists were quiet. No howls or hisses replied to her call.

There was nothing she could hear, nothing she could see. Just the presence of mana.

Let's try to get a reaction then, she thought and spread out her ash. Quickly, she filled the vicinity, and a moment later, all of it lit up with fire. Not intended to light the way, but to burn the mist magic itself.

Ilea found the mists incredibly potent, but her fires burned away at it, inch by inch. Slowly, her dominion was freed, and what she saw was death. Corpses all around, Dread beasts littering the ground, as if they had stumbled to their deaths. Ilea moved her burning ash as if a guiding torch. She walked in the direction the creatures had chosen before they had died.

The mists grew stronger yet again, Ilea sacrificing health to keep them at bay, and to keep her visibility at a reasonable distance. The marshes were around still, the trees, the ponds, the mud, but here it seemed the magical balance had changed. Instead of an all present vibrant thrum within the ground, all of it was dead, all of it was mist, and drops of rain.

Ilea stopped when her fires cleared away the mists ahead, clinging to something they could not burn away. A moving veil of mist that slowed and stopped when the fires clung to it.

“Is anybody there?” Ilea called out once more. She could see the veil spread and turn, the dense mana everywhere around shifting, moving as if turning on its heels.

Her flames ahead were pushed aside, ethereal mists moving as the fires of creation tried to cling to its fleeting form. Wisp like arms floated, attached or not to the slim figure emerging past the burning fog. Two white eyes with neither pupils nor irises stared without focus into that which disturbed its domain. Mist moved atop its ghostly form, as if long white hair, covered in a veil that reached far behind.

Ilea stared into the eyes of the being, seeing nothing. Endless white. Not organs but gates leading to a realm of its own. She could see the wisps within, and didn't know if this creature was here or there. If it existed at all.

[Weeping Oracle of the Lost – lvl ?????] - [?]

She watched as the being spread its arms. The falling rain halted in the air, floating as if frozen by time itself.

“Greetings,” Ilea sent, as the drops started moving once again.

Slow and in circular patterns around the unmoving creature of mist.

She felt the attack coming with her precognition when a set of drops got close to her. Simply stepping aside proved difficult as there were more water droplets all around. She found a spot and crouched, her precognition still warning her, this time of a set of drops moving closer to her back.

Ilea teleported where she felt safe, only to find more drops moving in.

“*We don't have to fight,*” she sent to the creature but the slow moving droplets didn't halt. She had to use Fabric tear to teleport a few of them away, the circular patterns all around changing as soon as she had used the spell, every single one requiring a large chunk of her mana to move. Her precognition warned her again, this time of several groups of dense drops coming her way. Ilea teleported them away but her reprieve was short, more drops flowing in, this time vanishing into a summoned set of gates.

Again, the patterns changed.

She tried to teleport away but the drops were more densely placed now, Ilea unable to use the spell. Instead she sent away the drops that came close, opening and closing her gates as the patterns adjusted. Not in her favor.

She couldn't use her teleports without getting hit, and simply stepping aside only changed which projectiles were getting closer, like a slow moving net adjusting to her abilities and movements. Her flames were still around, Ilea still burning her health to keep the mists at bay.

I'd need all of my gates to not get hit. Might as well get hit and see what happens.

Her precognition only warned her of significant damage to her mantle. What happened after, she couldn't tell. Instead of trying to avoid the magic, Ilea instead formed golden barriers and walls of ash, starting to increase her weight for the higher regeneration, resilience, and heat generation.

The drops burned through the shields, shattering them as more water came from the other side, white fire burning away at the dense drops but only reducing their potency by a marginal amount. Her defenses were burned through, the dense water magic imbued with mist. She could see the attacks and had ample time to react, the speed of the projectiles laughable. And yet she couldn't find a single way out.

At least she could still form her gates in case the enemy overwhelmed her entirely, but she wouldn't try and flee until it was absolutely necessary.

“Are you sure you want to fight?” she asked, this time speaking. Ilea tried to send an intent for diplomacy using Monster Hunter, but the slow cascade of water continued moving on without pause.

When the drops broke through her shields and ash, they burned into her mantle, dissolving everything in their path. Her fires fought back and they did burn away a lot of magic, but there was more still. A lot more.

Is this an actual Oracle? It doesn't identify as a Class, but as a monster. Does that mean it's not awakened? Is this where they come from? Or is this an Elven Domain?

Maybe this one was taken over somehow, everything within turned into monsters?

Her weight slowly increased and her resilience grew. The slow nature of the enemy magic helped a lot with her buffs, but the water still burned through layers of her mantle, soon reaching her flesh. She added her Scorching Wyrms Armor, but the scales were shredded through even faster than her mantle.

Veteran informed her that the creature she faced was near the level of the Meadow, perhaps even a little above. It just felt strange to her. As if there was no urgency at all. As if they weren't even fighting. The two white eyes still looked her way, the creature floating, the only thing moving, the wisps of fog clinging to its form.

"What are you?" she asked as the water and mist burned away her flesh near some of her ribs, her left arm dissolved to the bone, the mists slowing down but not stopping either. She healed against the damage but the new flesh was dissolved as well, just like her mantle.

I'll have to start fighting back. Before I die to this slow cascade.

She raised her arm and released the heat stored within, burning past the droplets that remained moving in the air, reaching the ethereal being still watching her. There was no scream, no twitching, nor any visible injuries. Her fires came and went, clinging to the mist like creature and destroying what they could.

The Oracle remained as if nothing had happened, the moving rain uninterrupted as shields were shattered, ash and flesh dissolved.