

Chapter 114: Dark Fire

“Let’s go.”

As the words left my lips, I didn’t even need to check whether or not my guildmates would be with me. I knew they were, from when I took the first step towards the giant. And they were still there as I took my first step into the air.

I stepped down hard on the Qi platform, using my enhanced manipulation to slingshot myself up into the air. As my foot landed I took a deep breath.

With an [Iron Will], I took hold of the raging energy. I drew from my wellsprings, a torrent of Qi that flooded my every muscle. I burnt with energy, golden and silver power rushing underneath my skin intensely enough to make me sparkle slightly. I coursed it through my body, becoming tougher, faster, stronger...

Then I pushed.

With each fibre of my being I leapt into the air, Qi platforms being woven into the air with each step I took. My allies rose with me. The giant was still kept busy by Orvan, firing arrows of stygian flames that were extinguished by a prodigious amount of Mana.

Until we crashed into the battle of titans.

Rocketing into the air, I found footing on platforms created by myself. I drew power from then, pushing energy from the balls of my feet through my body, and releasing it as I explosively stabbed forward.

My spear slammed into the monster’s tough skin, enhanced by my power, my Qi, my supernatural strength, and the weapon itself having grown beyond anything mortal smiths could make. It was a terrifying noise that it made, slamming into iron hide.

When it hit, my spear lodged itself a foot deep into the monster... then stopped. Barely a scratch given its size. I grit my teeth, trying to drive my Qi into its body, but the energy was instantly ravaged and consumed by black fire spilling forth from the wound.

Acidic blood sprayed as I withdrew my spear, trees wilting and their leaves melted from the fetid liquid. I grimaced, quickly doing another slash to remove the corrosive from my weapon. Around me, more impacts hit the giant. Matt slammed his sword forward, Liam was there with a storm of daggers, Emilia’s Mace slammed into its ankle...

We left surface wounds. Chris had the most success out of all of us, by targeting the ground rather than the giant. Shifting the earth underneath one of its enormous legs made it stumble for a moment, which allowed Ann and Orvan to land more attacks.

Projectiles of fire and earth and air and ice slammed into it, digging into the tough hide. But the giant didn't seem bothered. It simply took another step, regaining its footing, then its shoulder blurred.

I jumped back a step on instinct, as with a whip-crack the flaming arm passed by in front of me.

The air howled in its wake, the winds tearing down a few trees in the forest, as a wave of black flame swept forward, consuming part of the world. I had dodged... but it hadn't even bothered to *look* at me.

How? We had grown so much? How was it still so far above us?

It made me furious. I saw it with my allies, too. They wanted to break this monster. Yet it felt hopeless.

I thrust my spear at it again, breaking skin and spilling a faint amount of blood. I stabbed it again, breaking muscle fibers, but then I heard a vibration in the air again. A moment later, Matt was sent flying through the forest.

Pink petals still swarmed around him, so he would be fine. Another attack by Orvan impacted the titan, slamming into its skin with waves of power that washed over me, blowing my hair back. But even then, wordlessly, soundlessly, the monster rose again.

Black flamed crackled, even as I stabbed it again. Fire gushed from the wound, singeing my face with the heat as I dodged away. What we were inflicting were *surface wounds* at best. We needed more. Something - an opportunity for Orvan to blast it to bits.

Another horrible crack sent my ears ringing, the world shaking around me. Orvan countered the attack with blindingly bright starlight. We needed to act. To give us a chance. I couldn't do it on my own, though. But I didn't need to.

I locked eyes with the leyburn, and asked it for a favour, a moment granted.

"Please," I mouthed at it, and it understood. The creature that had once left me broken, now turned to an ally, and retreated a few steps to gather momentum for a charge.

Despite being the size of a house, it was easily dwarfed by the titanic monster we were facing now. But it wasn't an insurmountable wall, anymore. It wasn't unbreakable. I saw it, glimpsed it through its wounds.

Inside the thing there were stars, too. A whole damn firmament. And it made me wanna pluck it from the sky.

With a savage grin, I took a few steps back, too, allowing Orvan to hit the giant with a wave of exploding stars, each one louder than the last, making my ears ring even more. I felt blood trickle from my eyes faintly as the crashing waves of power sent me off balance.

Gritting my teeth I bore with it. We needed firepower. Everything we could get. Everything. I needed Ann, right here, with us. So, I charged my voice with Qi, and called for her, the magic carrying it all the way to the walls, all the way to her ears. "Ann. I need you to blow it up."

Magically, the reply came within moments. "I thought you'd never ask. Be right there, love."

A smile wormed its way on my face at that. The leyburn was ready. I looked to Matt, his robes scorched, his hair singed, one of his arms terribly bruised. His sword made from broken fragment.

I looked at the savage light in his eyes and knew he was ready.

Emilia knew me, and retreated. Liam followed, and so did Chris, all of the shells. We gathered again, as another horrible crash split the sky in bright and dark fire. An agonizing second passed, and then another, until Ann appeared by our sides.

Divine radiance, a terrific blessing imparted by Reya, glowed within her. Her Mana was already gathering, torrent of power ready to spill out. We needed only a little bit of a chance. A destabilization.

"Chris, Emilia. Make the ground under its feet falter. Liam, you and the Leyburn will knock it to the ground. Pull it with its shadow. Matt and I will help by attacking when it's off balance. Ann, I need you to finish it off - use your crown. Crush it under its own weight."

Nods followed. If we were facing a mountain, we'd just make it crumble.

We split. Again. Moments passed. The giant paid us no mind. As if we were insignificant. Less than bugs. We'd show it that we packed a pretty bad sting.

I viscerally felt the shift when our attack was ready. "Go," I whispered, the word reaching everyone's ears, and I channelled my energy.

The ground shifted. One foot of the giant suddenly crashed downward, the very earth splitting. It plunged in for half a dozen meters, its whole weight coming down enough to make the ground shake.

For a second, it looked almost startled, but I discounted the look as I charged more power. More and more golden energy poured into my spear, into my veins, into my body.

While the world still shook, I heard thunder. The leyburn was charging. With a rumble, it approached, inky smears of oil streaking by at the sides of its body. Its motion left the air almost undisturbed, and despite its size it looked almost graceful. As if it was ice skating...

Then it crashed into the giant's still standing leg. With all the force of a siege tower, it slammed into the usurper's flesh, monstrous energies crashing into the monster. Its flesh ruptured, scattered, and there was a horrible snapping and cracking sound, followed by the hissing of its blood against the trees.

Its shadow stirred. A hundred chains, spiked with wicked barbs that caught on any imperfection lodged onto the monster. Hooked into crevices and pulled downwards, with Liam, himself clad in the embrace of darkness pulling with all he had.

For the first time, the giant buckled. It stirred, beginning to fall, and alarm bells rang in my head. My own voice called out to me. "Go higher. Take Matt."

Thankfully, I did not hesitate. Within an instant, I had grabbed my friend, and ascended only a few steps higher, when black flames passed through where we had just been. One of my figments was extinguished, the essence scattered. Three left.

But with its wild flailing, the giant was even less stable. Slowly, it was beginning to crumble under the assault. I nodded at Matt.

With a burst of willpower, I pushed even more power into myself. A flood of Qi entered me, almost making me choke on the power. It leaked through my skin, golden and mirror energy dissipating into the air like a heat haze.

I smelled plums, and felt a brush of wind. Matt had turned into a tornado. We were ready.

Not even needing to speak, we charged, at the same time. The buckling giant saw us coming and stirred, but it was too slow. A moment before its other arm moved, we slammed into it.

Next to me, a torrent of pink slammed into the monster. The smell of plum was overbearing, and Matt's sword pierced into its chest. Then he slammed his whole body weight into it, too, using himself like a cannonball and a storm all at once.

Astraeus, too, hit the giant full force, with my own golden body barrelling against it. I summoned more platforms behind my feet and pushed with every muscle in my body. And it moved.

Off balance, the giant finally got past the point of recovery. Its body tilted, its legs, one buried, the other cracked or broken... it began falling. I quickly stepped back, Liam vanishing into the shadows, and Matt in a flurry of pink.

And then, a faint purple haze manifested around the usurper.

Ann floated in the air, her hair whipping about in the storm of mana she created. An amount I'd only ever seen archmages match coursed through her, into the diadem, and then crushed into the monster. Its slow descent accelerated.

The giant, once standing tall as a mighty castle... fell.

With crushing gravity and enormous power, reinforced by Reya and our own effort, Ann brought the monster to heel. Her magic coursed out in droves, to the point where her circlet started glowing hot from using the power. Her skin blistered faintly, but she didn't even seem to notice, *increasing* her output.

Purple gravity didn't just push the giant down, it slammed it into the ground, causing another violent shudder of the earth, and a faint crater to form around it. Then it sank deeper, and deeper again.

I felt a shudder run over my back, when I felt the Mana gathering in the air. Orvan, too, floated. His hands were enveloped by sigils, the stars within him stirring as the giant's seemed to dim ever so faintly.

His voice coursed through the air, sending another shudder through me. "Meteor."

That's all he said - and like a promise with the magic, it came true. An enormous mass of stone appeared from high in the sky. A tiny pinprick soon turned enormous. It was as big as the giant, and made mostly from glowing hot *metal*. Denser even than pure rocks.

Ann faltered, her magic finally cutting out, but the deed was done. The giant laid on the ground, the burning sockets of its eyes staring at its impending doom.

When the meteor slammed down, my whole world went white. I saw nothing for a few moments. The noise was the loudest I had ever heard, and my eardrums only survived the shockwave because I reinforced them with a gross amount of Qi.

All the world knew was destruction.

This was the power of an archmage. Focused only on destruction, brought to bear in full force. Some of the city walls had shaken from the impact, bits of brick falling down. But it stood, because it was not the impact site, because a hundred mages had erected barriers, because it was defended.

Irrithuriel had shielded us, too, even from the fallout.

Eventually, colour returned to the world. I saw again, the blind spots in my eyes disappearing. I saw our handiwork. Our bloody spoils.

Broken laid the giant.

Its deer skull was cracked, black flames flickering out. Its chest was ravaged, an open cavity of broken bones and torn flesh. Its legs had been blown off entirely.

"We won," I whispered.

"Ah, but we can't have that, can we?" someone asked.

The voice was familiar. I looked closer, and there it was. In the middle of the giant's corpse, it stood. A tiny figure, demonic, with a frog-like head and red skin. It held a tiny piece of obsidian in its hands.

"No, no. We can't have that at all," it said. Then it placed the piece of obsidian on the giant's broken chest, and the flesh squirmed.

A moment later a torrent of fire washed over the figure, but it was already gone with a dark chuckle. "See youse."

The giant stirred.