

Ilea glanced at the key locator again, teleporting back when she saw a group of flying creatures in the distance. She crouched low and moved to the edge of the peak, looking down at the fast moving group. Humanoid, sunlight glinting off their armor. They flew into another valley, vanishing from her sight. She still felt the cold air, lying down now as she looked at the mountainous landscape. Arcane storms were faintly visible to the north, none of them however close by. The frozen valley itself lay in perfect serenity, not a cloud floating above, nothing moving to disturb the mist.

That'll be a risk, even for me. She reset the gate location and opened a connection to the Meadow's domain. Stepping through, she rolled her shoulders and cracked her neck. Exploring the western lands stressed her out. Dangerous monsters she could deal with any day. Elves potentially as powerful as that Monarch she faced were a different story. As was Audur, though the green dragon she assumed she had managed to avoid, that gate position now deep below ground, the key however deeper still.

"Need a bath," she sent to the Meadow, deactivating her space magic resistance. Her gate was located near the black grass, most visitors unable to get this close to the tree due to the high mana density. The domain however had become quite a lot more busy since the festival in Morhill three months prior.

"Welcome back, Lilith," the being spoke and moved her into her room.

She sighed, activating the runes to fill the bath as she stepped over to one of her walls, cleared to allow for a massive plate of thin stone. She looked at the large map and walked closer. Two small key like pins remained, the one furthest to the west she moved another slight bit to the left. The other one she let be.

The Plains were near the bottom right of the four by four meter map. Far to the North was Hallowfort, even farther north a variety of landmarks Ilea had labeled. One being the City of Glass dungeon where she had found Owl and her Lich companions. Obviously there to mark the location of Scipio and Nes Mor Atul. West and at about the same longitude as Hallowfort was Audur's domain, labeled very liberally. West of the Plains were the Navali forest and the various Elven domains she had mostly just heard about. Only the Fire Wastes of Ash were depicted in any detail.

"I found the Still Valley," she informed the Meadow, using her earth manipulation to make a small figure. A snow flake, or something close enough. She wasn't nearly as good with earth as she was with ash. Ilea embedded the symbol far northwest of Karth, beyond the Wastes and west of even the little dragon head she had made. She stepped back and crossed her arms, sending a few spheres of ash into the water to heat it up.

"So you were right, the key isn't in the Fire Wastes," the being spoke.

"It isn't. I'll go back in a few days and see if I can fly around the valley. Let's hope it's not there either," she said.

"Elves in the area?" the being asked.

"I saw a group, yes. Don't think they spotted me," Ilea answered, cracking her neck again as she got rid of her mantle and walked into her pool. She sighed immediately, taking in the rising steam as the heated water welcomed her.

“You will face them sooner or later,” the Meadow spoke.

It was unclear if the Elves had taken notice of the newly present teleportation gates as of yet. Even if they did, according to her Elven friends, the Oracles would hardly care. It was the males, primarily the ones of the Fire Wastes, she was worried about. Some of the distant explosions and lights she had seen suggested more than a bit of fire power. Even if they could respond near instantly with the gates, a high level elf could deal devastating damage to a human settlement in less than a minute.

It didn't help that people had already started pushing into the west again. Not just south of Karth. Riverwatch had always been at the Frontier but now that it could be reached through the gates in a manner of half an hour, mostly due to queues and security checks, more adventurers were willing to explore the eastern Navali forest.

Ilea had taken her time with the keys to focus on her training. The Source in Iz was still a consideration, but so was the continuously more real prospect of removing the Taleen threat. She wasn't the protector of humanity, but if her actions had a direct impact on such large scale events, Ilea felt at least some responsibility. Few of her friends knew about Iz and Karth, let alone about the Source. Some were in the know when it came to the Elven hierarchy, but none had faced a high level elf. Most humans thought she was a monster. Now that a gate lead straight in front of the Hallowfort bridge, more people were starting to realize that she was just one of many.

“Stressed?” the Meadow asked.

Ilea looked over the edge of the pool and out of her enchanted one way windows. Various new buildings had cropped up near the Soul Forge, mostly occupied by wealthy or state sponsored scholars dealing with the Meadow. Diplomats were around too. Most of the people she saw walking through the streets were Shadows and Sentinels embarking on exploration or training missions, others returning from the same. Finding treasures in the North was far more likely than in the Plains, dozens of ancient city ruins lying deep below the barren surface. With Elana they had a source of quite a few points of interest, some of the cities of course long taken by tribes of Awakened, the Dark Protector, Feynor, or monsters that have made it their home. Others remain mostly untouched, though a silent ruin often harbored more dangerous things than a few Star Chasers or Famine Crows.

“It's been a busy few months,” she sent back. *“I suppose I have. Despite all the distractions.”* She smiled, biting her lip.

“You're spending too much time with her,” the Meadow spoke.

Ilea raised her brows as she pushed away from the wall, submerging herself in the water before she spun and came back out. *“Envy? From a being such as yourself? Am I not spending enough time here for your liking?”*

“Don't be ridiculous. I'm just concerned. What if you suddenly reproduce. Such an occurrence changes the behavior of humans in unpredictable manners,” the Meadow said.

“You know we're both women,” Ilea mused.

“You underestimate the adaptability of humans. Life will find a way, and if it cannot, it will evolve to do so,” the Meadow said.

“You weren't concerned about Feyrair,” she said.

“He did not affect you. As your absolute best friend, I feel it is my responsibility to warn you in case I notice your cognitive abilities being affected by someone in your life,” the being spoke.

“You don’t sound like yourself, Meadow. Here I thought I didn’t have a brain at all,” Ilea replied.
“Plus, haven’t you been spending quite a lot of time with Twin?”

“That isn’t the same at all. I constantly check for magical intrusions into myself. You seem to actively invite them,” the being spoke.

“Of course. It helps build resistances. I’m afraid I wasn’t born in the perfect form of existence like yourself. I have to actually work to get stronger,” Ilea said, a smile on her face.

“You keep using the same arguments. Just because you struggle, doesn’t mean you’re better. It’s cute in a way though, I’ll admit that much. Seeing all the Awakened around me, toiling away day by day. I would suggest you join the scholars from time to time and actually study. All that damage to your skull isn’t improving your intelligence,” the being spoke.

“And that’s where you’re wrong,” Ilea mused. *“Thanks for the talk. Helps take my mind off things.”*

“Just let me know when it gets too much. I’m here if you need a few thousand tons of stone to splatter you into near nothingness,” the Meadow said.

“You know just what to tell me, darling,” Ilea mused, relaxing near the back wall where she looked through her status.

Name: Ilea Spears

Unspent statpoints: 3

Unspent Core skill points: 4

Unspent 3rd tier General skill points [2594 Total skill levels]: 3

Class 1: The Arcane Eternal – lvl 570

- **Active: Archon Strike [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 24**
- **Active: Sentinel Reconstruction [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 27**
- **Active: Azarinth Awakening [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 26**
- **Active: Transfer [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 22**
- **Active: Arcane Dominion [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 25**
- **Passive: Sentinel Core [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 27**
- **Passive: Eternal Brawling [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 25**
- **Passive: Eternal Huntress – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Passive: Eternal Sight [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 4**
- **Passive: Arcane Circulation [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 24**

Class 2: The Ashen Titan – lvl 568

- **Active: Mantle of the Titan [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 27**
- **Active: Titan Core [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 23**
- **Active: Origin of Ash and Embers [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 2**
- **Active: Embered Heart [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 24**
- **Active: Tempered Seal [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 25**
- **Passive: Authority of Ash and Ember [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 19**

- **Passive: Ashen Wings [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 22**
- **Passive: Vision of Ash [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 2**
- **Passive: Avatar of Ash [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 27**
- **Passive: Embered Form [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 23**

Class 3: The Primordial Arbiter – lvl 553

- **Active: Primordial Shift – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Active: Fires of Creation [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 24**
- **Active: Fabric Tear [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 18**
- **Passive: Reality Warp – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Passive: Primordial Flesh [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 12**
- **Passive: Space Manipulation [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 18**

General Skills:

- **Ashen Limbs – 2nd lvl 5**
- **Bulwark of Ash – 2nd lvl 2**
- **Dancing – lvl 10**
- **Deviant of Humanity – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Drill – lvl 15**
- **Elos Standard language - lvl 7**
- **English Language – lvl 15**
- **Gourmet – lvl 11**
- **Harmony of the Drowned – lvl 18**
- **Heavy Archery – lvl 11**
- **Identify - 2nd lvl 3**
- **Meditation – 3rd lvl 18**
- **Minor Earth Manipulation – lvl 16**
- **Minor Ice Manipulation – lvl 14**
- **Minor Lava Manipulation – lvl 19**
- **Monster Hunter – 3rd lvl 18**
- **Monstrous – 2nd lvl 3**
- **Oxygen Repository – 2nd lvl 14**
- **Sage of Torment – 2nd lvl 18**
- **Soul Perception – 2nd lvl 2**
- **Spear of Ash – 2nd lvl 8**
- **Teaching – lvl 10**
- **Telepathy – lvl 10**
- **Veteran – 3rd lvl 30**
- **Warhammer Mastery – lvl 9**

- **Arcane Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 26**
- **Ash Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 6**
- **Astral Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 20**
- **Blast Resistance – 3rd lvl 13**
- **Blight Resistance – 2nd lvl 8**
- **Blood Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 21**
- **Blood Manipulation Resistance – 2nd lvl 20**
- **Bone Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 20**
- **Corrosion Resistance – 2nd lvl 20**

- *Crystal Resistance – 2nd lvl 18*
- *Curse Resistance - 3rd lvl 10*
- *Dark Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 13*
- *Death Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 20*
- *Devour Resistance – 2nd lvl 8*
- *Diamond Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 6*
- *Divination Magic Resistance – lvl 15*
- *Dust Magic Resistance – lvl 10*
- *Earth Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 17*
- *Emerald Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 5*
- *Fear Resistance – 2nd lvl 2*
- *Flesh Magic Resistance – lvl 16*
- *Gold Magic Resistance – lvl 1*
- *Gravity Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 20*
- *Health Drain Resistance – 2nd lvl 20*
- *Heat Resistance – 3rd lvl 27*
- *Ice Resistance – 2nd lvl 20*
- *Lava Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 13*
- *Light Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 6*
- *Lightning Resistance – 3rd lvl 13*
- *Mana Drain Resistance – 3rd lvl 8*
- *Mental Resistance – 3rd lvl 18*
- *Mist Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 20*
- *Obsidian Magic Resistance – lvl 3*
- *Pain Tolerance – 3rd lvl 4*
- *Petrification Resistance – 2nd lvl 1*
- *Poison Resistance – 3rd lvl 4*
- *Rot Resistance – 3rd lvl 6*
- *Ruby Magic Resistance – lvl 18*
- *Sand Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 20*
- *Sapphire Magic Resistance – lvl 16*
- *Shadow Magic Resistance – lvl 19*
- *Silver Magic Resistance – lvl 6*
- *Smoke Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 7*
- *Soul Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 5*
- *Sound Magic Resistance – lvl 18*
- *Space Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 14*
- *Stamina Drain Resistance – 2nd lvl 20*
- *Time Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 20*
- *Topaz Magic Resistance – lvl 20*
- *Vine Magic Resistance – lvl 14*
- *Void Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 18*
- *Water Resistance – 3rd lvl 4*
- *Wind Resistance – 3rd lvl 13*
- *Wood Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 8*

Status:

Vitality: 2000
Endurance: 500
Strength: 545
Dexterity: 450
Intelligence: 1900
Wisdom: 2000

Health: 65920/65920
Stamina: 4989/5000
Mana: 113283/120000

The increases were quite formidable, the variety in monsters providing a slew of resistances, the four marks below Karth adding to her Class levels. Her extended exploration and survival added a few core points too, allowing her to enhance three of her Class skills in total. For her General skills, she refrained for now, deciding to focus on the skills she could work on for the time being. Her bouts with Kyrian, Fey, and Evan helped her get used to the changes rather quickly.

Her stats she used to increase her resources and Intelligence, for once investing into Endurance as she did dip below half a few times.

Various skills reached the second tier as well.

Ashen Limbs 2nd lvl 5

You have mastered the ability to fight with limbs made entirely of ash. Required manipulation is reduced by 27.5%.

2nd stage: Increases the speed at which you can form ashen limbs by a static 25%.

Bulwark of Ash - 2nd lvl 2

Many times have you used walls of ash to defend yourself and your allies. Resilience of ashen walls is increased by 31%.

2nd stage: Required manipulation for wall like structures made of ash are reduced by a static 20%

Monstrous – 2nd lvl 3

You have achieved level 500, reaching the realm of true monstrosity. Those of your kind may not find it easy to accept your newfound nature. You can choose to mask your power to those considerably weaker than you [230 levels below your highest Class level]. Specialized abilities or enhanced Identification may breach this ability.

2nd stage: You may choose to reduce the effects of your magical presence to those around you. People actively considering your presence will be able to pierce this veil.

Soul Perception – 2nd lvl 2

Through sheer luck and naivete, you have achieved enlightenment. A part of it that is. And perhaps not really enlightenment. Others might call it that but it's really just the ability to perceive your soul or essence. It's a dubious skill that might help philosophers understand a piece of life's puzzle but for you it will be mostly useless. Congratulations regardless. A skill that didn't require killing and blood to unlock. Marvelous.

2nd stage: You are able to gauge the presence of Essence in other beings, should they not be shielded against your perception.

Petrification Resistance – 2nd lvl 1

You have encountered petrifying magic. Its effects are difficult to counter but yes, simply cutting away until there is no more stone works. Extended study and preparation could've helped but hey, you do you. It'll be even easier next time.

2nd stage: Your natural regeneration can now fight petrifying effects, slowing it down or stopping it entirely.

Ilea finally revisited the gem magic dungeon, though the process of leveling her resistances proved quite difficult. The golems were simply not quite powerful enough anymore. She had to gather all of them in one spot and turn off all her defenses.

The first skill she enhanced was Eternal Sight.

Passive: Eternal Sight [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 4:

Increases your perception and reflexes while fighting. To keep up with your faster moving body, the Arcane Eternal has to control it.

2nd stage: Eternal Sight spikes for two seconds, should you be about to receive a blow that would take 50% or more of your health, or should your mind be incapacitated with an incoming blow. This can happen only once per hour.

3rd stage: Your resilience and speed is doubled during the spike in perception. Increases usage to thrice per hour. Spend a static 25% of your mana to increase the effect of Eternal Sight by one second. You gain the ability to gauge enemy mana usage and may learn how strongly a direct hit of a spell will impact you. Increased ability to gauge incoming damage depending on your familiarity with the respective magic type.

Category: Body Enhancement

The new additions let her gauge the gathering magic of enemy spells and abilities, including how dangerous they would be if they hit. Another incredible tool for resistance training, allowing her to remove her defenses to the point of taking the optimal damage. Of course it allowed her to be more aggressive as well, the ability similar to her precognition but not only helpful immediately before the enemy attack struck her.

Active: Origin of Ash and Embers [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 2

Create ash and embers in a certain radius around you.

2nd stage: You can control the density of the ash and the heat of embers to an extent.

3rd stage: You have proven your dedication. Ash and embers move to aid and destroy at your whims. The amount of ash and embers you can create is vastly increased.

Category: Ashen Magic

The second skill she enhanced was her ash creation. Despite the set back to the beginning of the third tier, she could already create an additional copy of herself, the new bonus rather straight forward in its benefits.

Passive: Vision of Ash [Enhanced] – lvl 3rd lvl 2

Increases your perception by 51% [612%] when fighting.

2nd stage: Opportunity calls, you notice possible critical weak points on enemies with more ease. You can see through ash and embers.

3rd stage: Your eyes are vastly improved. Great distances and a lack of light won't pose a problem to you anymore. You can control ash and embers that you can see. You gain the ability to see heat. Heat you can see may be absorbed into nearby ash.

Category: Body Enhancement – Ashen magic

The last skill she could enhance was Vision of Ash, the new bonus allowing her to activate a sort of heat vision, the more important benefit being her ability to absorb heat around her into her ash. The bonus allowed her to use Embered Heart more frequently in hot environments, which the depths of Karth most certainly were.

All in all the three months she spent fighting and leveling were perhaps some of the most productive since her arrival in Elos. Teleportation gates and a set of powerful monsters and people to fight against and train with pushed her forward. And yet she wished she would grow faster. They had delved deep and Iz would soon be getting close. Ilea would not flee again.