

Chapter 540 Puzzling

“They still didn’t break through?” Meadow asked.

“No, no they haven’t. I have no clue what they’re doing. Felicia said they were arguing about siege engines and risk assessments,” Ilea said.

She tried to pet the wolf again, her arm freezing fully before it broke off.

“Come on,” she said, squinting her eyes at the Elemental.

Meadow had enlarged its hall to accommodate the large creature, its space magic chasing off the many spirits that had followed the Elemental to the city. Not that many had survived for longer than a few seconds in the Elemental’s presence.

Ilea was really annoyed that she had missed its arrival, instead having had tea with Felicia. Which admittedly wasn’t bad either but the former would have still won out.

Her arm reformed as she pouted, trying to solve the current puzzle.

A large chunk of ice nearly slammed into her face, manifesting so quickly she had barely even noticed it.

“Zaiked would have killed every last one of those Generals before storming the city herself,” Meadow said.

“Don’t act like either of you understand military tactics used in Elos. Think of it as if Zaiked had to storm your very chamber,” Ilea said.

“She tried. And failed,” Meadow said.

“See, that’s why it’s taking so long. Not that I really care. The longer it takes, the longer we have here without too much attention,” she said.

“Sixteen more days Ilea, and not a minute longer,” Meadow said.

Her time in Erendar was coming to an end but it hadn’t been spent idly.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Spirit of Death – lvl 328]

...

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Spirit of Death – lvl 572]

‘ding’ ‘The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 394 – Five stat points awarded’

...

‘ding’ ‘The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 396 – Five stat points awarded’

'ding' 'Kin of Ash has reached lvl 393 – Five stat points awarded'

...

'ding' 'Kin of Ash has reached lvl 395 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 239 – One stat point awarded'

...

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 240 – One stat point awarded – One Core skill point awarded'

...

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 244 – One stat point awarded'

Ilea assumed the experience she was getting from the Death Spirits was only due to the higher level at this point. Only the Astral spirits remained dangerous to an extent.

'ding' 'Sentinel Huntress reaches 3rd lvl 13'

'ding' 'Sentinel Huntress reaches 3rd lvl 14'

'ding' 'Sentinel Huntress reaches 3rd lvl 15'

Meadow's training worked wonders but the lack of danger made it just a little more efficient than using it during her battles. A little annoying when one considered the little use the skill had during actual fights.

'ding' 'Azarinth Reversal reaches 3rd lvl 27'

'ding' 'Storm of Cinders reaches 3rd lvl 27'

'ding' 'Eyes of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 27'

'ding' 'Phaseshift reaches 2nd lvl 18'

'ding' 'Phaseshift reaches 2nd lvl 19'

'ding' 'Phaseshift reaches 2nd lvl 20'

'ding' 'Flare of Creation reaches 3rd lvl 6'

'ding' 'Displacement reaches 3rd lvl 8'

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

'ding' 'Body of the Valkyrie reaches 3rd lvl 4'

Ilea refrained from getting Phaseshift to the third tier. It was an option but she just wasn't sure. Rushing it wouldn't help either with Space Awareness still in the second tier. She mostly just ignored it for now, focusing on whatever else she could work on.

‘ding’ ‘Deviant of Humanity reaches 2nd lvl 3’

‘ding’ ‘Gourmet reaches lvl 5’

‘ding’ ‘Monster Hunter reaches 3rd lvl 7’

‘ding’ ‘Oxygen Repository reaches lvl 19’

‘ding’ ‘Oxygen Repository reaches lvl 20’

So close... just a little more choking, she thought as she scrolled through.

It had become clear that she would have to advance either her Astral Magic Resistance or her Mana Drain Resistance. Ilea had two points available and one had to remain for emergencies. She agonized over which one to choose for quite some time, obviously wasting training time with all the damage she took anyway.

Ilea initially wanted to wait until she actually faced the Daughters to see which damage type proved more dangerous. Now that her goal of hunting Astral Spirits proved harder and harder to achieve, she had to make a decision. In the end it was Mana Drain Resistance, because while both their Astral and drain attacks were potent, only the latter also healed the creatures.

‘ding’ ‘Mana Drain Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 1’

Mana Drain Resistance – 3rd lvl 1

Rare foes will have the ability to drain your mana. Either for their own use or simply to weaken you. Having encountered one such being, you have learned of its destructive effect. This skill will help you reduce the effect any mana draining abilities will have on you.

2nd stage: Your mana is bound to you, making it harder for anybody to drain it from you. In addition the mana removed from you damages the enemy, should they desire to use it for themselves. The damaging effect increases with every point of mana lost.

3rd stage: Mana formed within you is intrinsic to your very essence. Any being that dares to steal what does not belong to them shall find themselves poisoned by your arcane power. Enemies take damage over time for each point of your mana in their pool.

The effects sadly weren't enough to overwhelm the creatures but they at least pushed her in the right direction.

‘ding’ ‘Mana Drain Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 2’

‘ding’ ‘Space Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 5’

‘ding’ ‘Wood Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 15’

...

‘ding’ ‘Wood Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 20’

The stat points she had gradually invested into Vitality, Endurance, and Dexterity, in the end spending ten points to enhance each stat.

“I’m surprised the General hasn’t asked me for help, in exchange for something,” Meadow said.

Ilea looked away from her status. *“Too proud. And he hates all you represent.”*

“And that is?” it asked.

“Proof that humanity is fucking weak,” she said. *“I just want to pet her, can you ask her again?”*

“She says you are free to try,” Meadow said.

The wolf looked her way, resting on her icy paws.

Ilea grabbed her removed frozen arm and shook it towards the creature. *“Just wait until I have a third tier resistance!”*

“I doubt it would make a major difference,” Meadow said.

Ilea didn't listen, displacing various floating objects and projectiles as she silently flew through the hall filled with magic.

She felt dozens of pulses, the wisps here moving as if separated from the normal fabric of space. A lot was going on. The Elemental's arrival hadn't helped much with that.

Michael's brain had nearly exploded when Meadow informed him of the creature's coming. He pushed for an extension but finally agreed to keep the date the same when he realized the Elemental couldn't nor wouldn't talk to him.

It had started interacting with Ilea once it realized her body was damn near indestructible, mostly freezing her or sending projectiles to either be malicious or help in her training. Ilea wasn't quite sure yet which.

She displaced herself again and stopped moving. Something peculiar stood out to her amidst the hundreds of floating pieces.

What?

Ilea moved her hand towards the floating stone.

She stopped in the last moment, right before touching it.

Phaseshift activated as she focused on the weird phenomenon. She extended her hand and grabbed not the stone but what lay beyond.

Despite the active spell, she found her hand coming back with an object grasped between her fingers. It was a piece of ice that she could neither feel, smell, nor see. Not with her eyes at least. But she knew it was there.

Phaseshift deactivated, her body manifesting and with it the piece of ice she had known to be there.

It instantly exploded and froze half her body.

The Elemental twitched its ears slightly, its tail moving over the black grass.

Asshole, she thought with a smile, the heat within her quickly taking care of the ice as the damaged section healed.

“What was that?” she asked.

“A surprise gift, to celebrate your success,” Meadow said in a dry tone.

“Aha,” Ilea said.

“You should be able to level your skill now, Ilea. What you just did should be impossible with a mere second tier ability,” Meadow said.

“Really?” Ilea asked with a bright smile. She checked and indeed found it possible to advance Space Awareness to the third tier. “YES!”

Meadow laughed. *“Took you long enough. I was getting worried you had some kind of space retardation.”*

“Sure, sure,” Ilea said offhandedly and pushed Space Awareness to the third tier.

‘ding’ ‘Space Awareness reaches 3rd lvl 1’

Passive – Space Awareness – 3rd lvl 1

You become more aware of the density and shifts in the fabric of Space itself.

2nd stage: Further understanding of the spacial fabric allows you to manipulate its forces with greater ease and higher intensity. You learn to perceive even the tiniest ripples in space. In the case of active fissures, you find yourself able to peer into the other side.

3rd stage: You have peered through the fabric of space itself and have learned to unravel its intricate structure. You gain the ability to perceive and differentiate magical frameworks and how to manipulate them within your space without failure.

Category: Body Enhancement – Perception Aura

“I have no clue what this means. Meadow, please explain,” she said and read the information to the creature.

“A good addition to your abilities. Definitely,” Meadow said.

The wolf formed a flower made of ice.

“She thinks the same. Very powerful indeed,” Meadow said.

“Now there’s two of them...,” Ilea whispered in her mind, squinting at both of the creatures.

“Speaking of which, does the Elemental want to come to Elos too? Not sure if I could manage that but it’s an option I suppose,” she said, tilting her head a little sideways.

“Did you already forget about your new skill?” Meadow asked.

“Oh, right, so what does it do?” Ilea said.

“Better to demonstrate,” Meadow said.

A wooden root broke out of the ground and slowly moved towards Ilea.

It slowed in front of her chest and touched her.

“What’s that supp-” Ilea asked, interrupted by the Meadow.

“Don’t talk. Perceive,” it said.

Ilea did just that, focusing once more onto the space around her, the root, her body. *My body. The root.*

Is this..., she thought and grabbed the root, trying to confirm her assessment.

She smiled brightly, looking at the tree with joy. “You knew this all along!”

“For your thick skull to finally grasp the solution, you needed more than frustration. I thought it wise to withhold this knowledge from you. While it wasn’t certain, I expected it,” Meadow said.

Ilea shook her head. She knew the creature was right.

Frameworks, she thought about the description. To her it felt more like different flows.

She kept touching the root, a root that represented Meadow itself, permeated by its magic and power.

Ilea displaced herself, focusing on her own flow only.

She appeared at her target destination, the root remaining where it had been a moment earlier.

“Fuck yeah!” she called out and jumped. “Do the full prison,” she said with a wicked smile.

“I shall oblige,” Meadow said, forming a wooden prison around her with spiked ends cutting into her armor.

Ilea had to focus a little harder this time, the different flows not as easy to separate than the simple touch of one root. She still managed it quickly, displacing herself out of the prison as if it hadn't been there.

The damage to her armor repaired itself as she spread her arms and twirled. *“I’ve finally reached my goal.”*

“And what is that?” Meadow asked.

“Complete immortality!” she shouted with a pose.

The Meadow laughed in its usual magic way. *“It is a major step towards that goal. However just in case you really believe that, I have to remind you that you are very much mortal. Just like me and the Elemental.”*

“I don’t really think either of you can be killed either,” Ilea said. *“Also I don’t care. Let me enjoy this. More roots,”* she said and tested various ideas.

Blink worked just as well as Displacement did.

“As to your earlier question. The Elemental informs you that this is her home and she very much likes her mountains. The cold it is spreading should even last long into the years past the current eclipse.”

“I should inform you that she likes to take century long naps. The desolate landscape of Erendar supports her lifestyle more than your realm ever could,” Meadow explained.

“Even if it means it won’t see us ever again?” Ilea asked. *“I’d think we’ve gotten pretty close.”*

She displaced herself close to the wolf’s head, trying to pet it again.

Ilea blinked back to where she had started, her form falling to the ground with a thud. It really wasn’t very pleasant to have one’s body frozen entirely.

Heart of cinder came to the rescue yet again.

“She’s intrigued as to your heat spell that seems to prevent long term freezing. Most fire spells she has seen could not counteract her ice so easily,” Meadow said.

“It’s ashen magic,” Ilea said. *“Forms the heat within my core.”*

“Your resistance, healing, and general resilience are the main factors here. She simply hasn’t met something both so weak and yet so durable in her existence. No high level Awakened have crossed

her path. Not of a species that starts at such a low level at birth. That would explain her reaction,” Meadow said.

“You two really like to be insulting,” Ilea said and used Phaseshift.

Oh yes... oh... yes yes yes, she thought and watched her ethereal hands. Please.

Ilea blinked and then displaced herself. Phaseshift deactivated and she was back to normal.

“It woorks!” she called out.

“That is quite impressive. You really are a natural,” Meadow said.

“Didn’t you say literally the opposite for weeks now?” Ilea asked.

“Your understanding itself is lacking. A more practical approach was necessary and you’ve succeeded through that. Your lack of thought coupled with your intuition and your trust in your spells make you quite adept at using them. But not at understanding or explaining the theory behind the magic.

“I doubt you’ll ever push the frontiers of spacial runes or theory but when it comes to using the abilities that evolve through your Class, you’ll exceed,” Meadow explained.

“I don’t see the point in pushing my magic theory further as long as I’m progressing as fast as I am. My approach is obviously working,” Ilea said.

“For now, yes. It is a shame. The foundation you could forge through research and study would surely bring you further. Perhaps something you’ll remedy once your life has spanned for as many centuries as mine,” Meadow said.

“I’m not exactly looking to revolutionize magic. I can help others do just that but it’s not me,” Ilea said. “But yeah, if I live to a century or even longer, I’m sure I’ll try out different things.”

“On a more important note... I can teleport during Phaseshift,” she said and tried it out again just to confirm.

Displacement worked on objects around her too while the spell was active.

Meaning I can even move projectiles while it’s going on, she thought and smiled. The spell just became twice as good. Though it almost seemed like an overkill at this point. Now that she could escape grapples with her teleportation anyway, Phaseshift mostly just added some defense.

Still pretty good. And who’s to say nothing can interrupt my teleportation. I can do it, so others should be able to as well.

“The doubled resilience is pretty nuts though... with teleportation I could have tanked Zaiked’s attacks much more easily,” she murmured.

“Are you still unsure?” Meadow asked.

“No. No I think it’s worth it. Other options still exist but I think with teleportation available to me during its usage, it beats out the competition,” she said and pushed Phaseshift to the third tier.

Active – Phaseshift – 3rd lvl 1

Expending a large amount of mana, you can temporarily unbind your body from the physical and pass through barriers. You may let spells and physical objects pass through you unhindered. Be aware that certain types of magic will retain some or all of their impact.

2nd stage: Resilience bonuses from skills are doubled when entering Phaseshift.

3rd stage: You have bent space to your will. To avoid death and to cause it. You gain a deeper understanding of the Flame of Creation. Abilities sacrificing health may be used during Phaseshift with all effects activating once your body returns to its normal form. The duration of any resulting effects equals that of the preceding Phaseshift.
Category: Space Magic

Ilea read through the new tier and nodded to herself. *Basically a safe space to stack Flare of Creation before it's unleashed?*

She tried it out, activating the third tier health sacrifice at its current six hundred health per second. The flames didn't form around her but her health was still reduced. *Can't do more than six hundred per second in here either. Wait a minute. It said Abilities sacrificing health?*

Ilea used her third tier Azarinth Awakening, putting a whopping five thousand health into the skill. Nothing happened as her third tier healing pushed her health back to the max. She repeated it four times.

Four seconds had passed and Phaseshift's upkeep was steadily growing. She deactivated it, another second of the skill passing as the space slightly shifted. She appeared once more, a bright white flame flaring out on her body coupled with intense blue light from her azarinth runes she uncovered by moving her armor.

Holy shit.

She actually felt the change.

The difference her third tier aura added was barely noticeable at this point, partially because of the diminishing returns of her various inflated stats but mostly because she already had incredible bonuses active at all times. Another few hundred points in whatever she boosted hardly made a difference.

Ilea didn't know if it was just the amount of health she sacrificed or the duration it was applied to. *I can just dump my whole health pool into the skill while Phaseshift protects me against enemy attacks.*

She was pretty sure her Awakening wouldn't flare up this much if she tried the same normally.

So she did and confirmed that while she could regulate the strength of her third tier Awakening boost, there was an upper limit. Phaseshift however ignored that entirely, providing the bonuses for however much health she had invested during its active time.