

Chapter 433 Breach

“Language change accepted,” the voice said.

“Displaying map of testing facility Zeta.” A hologram appeared once more, showing the same layers. This time, number twenty five wasn’t listed as unknown anymore. It showed not creature either.

“No boss here then,” Ilea said, almost a little disappointed.

The real boss is the horrific mana we drained on the way, she thought with a smile.

“Can you check through the information in there? Same stuff we looked at before,” Ilea said.

The Fae nodded.

“Project Animus – Priority: 1

Field test of Blood Manipulation Agent III. Control of spreading corruption with impact expectation of mass extinction.

Status: Failed”

“Ain’t that fucked up. There is more information though, which is good,” Ilea murmured and scribbled everything down into her notebook.

“Subject Enavurin failed to change composition in meaningful way. Distribution approved by Vor Elenthir in case of facility breach. Document success rate.”

“Is that a name or a title?” Ilea asked and wrote it down.

Unknown, the Fae said and moved on.

“Project Fluctuation – Priority 3

Observation and documentation of mana fluctuation and change in relation to Project Dusk.

Status: Complete”

“We’re getting to the juicy bits,” Ilea commented. “I’m pretty sure Project Dusk has to do with the supposed third sun Elos had back in Maro’s days. The name is too fitting. Anything you can add to that?”

Mystery

Possible

Perpetrator

“First of, holy shit you’re old. Second, we don’t know for sure if it’s related. I feel pretty sure about it though. What exactly happened to that sun?”

Vanished

“Hmm... any idea what they did?”

The Fae shook its head.

“Well, let’s check the rest then.”

“Project Eden – Priority: 2

Test compatibility of subject organisms in transformed area. Document changes and behavior of subject organisms and long term survivability.

Status: Ongoing”

“Do they mean the transformed area just within the Descent or the north in general? Any notes on that one or further information?” she asked and wrote it all down.

Negative

“Alright, check for Project Dusk.”

The Fae nodded.

“Project Dusk – Priority: 1

Execution of-”

“What is it?” Ilea asked.

The Fae looked frantic, its magic making various runes glow before the sphere whirled and shut down.

Detected!

Ilea grabbed the Fae and rushed out of the room, seeing the chunks of steel she had ripped out of the platform liquefy and flow back into the destroyed thing.

Fuck

She blinked close and slammed into a barrier, sending destructive mana into it and failing to blink through.

The platform had already reformed, runes appearing on it before a surge of power rushed out.

Ilea blinked back to the Fae, grabbed it and turned towards the ripped open gates. She could see the runes that had formed near the exit, many of them damaged, magic failing to put up a barrier.

She stopped and looked at the Fae.

Know what?

“Hide. I’m not about to run without a good fucking reason.”

The Fae looked at her and nodded, vanishing.

Careful

“You know me, epitome of caution,” she said and turned towards the platform.

She took a deep breath and checked her spells, her sphere, armor, both bone and ash, her auras supplying her with power and her full mana pool.

She floated in the middle of the hall with her wings moving lazily behind her, ashen limbs ready to strike and arms at her sides.

Nothing happened for a full minute before finally a surge of mana expanded from the platform.

She could feel the presence a moment later. Subdued but still brimming with power. Her instincts told her to run, quickly quenched by Veteran and simple experience.

The being floated out of the room, a humanoid creature two and a half meters in height and composed of dark interlinked steel pieces that glinted a little in the magical light. Obviously enchanted robes rested loosely on its form, lined with silver patterns. Its head was vaguely oval in shape, angles in the steel parts suggesting jaw and cheekbones.

A thin protrusion atop its head jutted out, reminding of a fixture holding feathers atop a roman officer’s helmet. There was nothing attached to it however.

Two glowing white eyes took in the hall, resting on the pried open gates before they focused on Ilea.

[Mage – lvl ????]

“Greetings,” she said and waved at the being.

It remained floating for a moment. If it was taken aback by the casual greeting, it didn’t show it.

She felt the attack coming, flying back to avoid the steel ripping out of the ground to pierce her. Splinters of steel ripped out of the ceiling, floor and walls, turning the air into a mist of shrapnel.

Ilea blinked but found herself closer to her previous position than she wanted, unable to do anything as the steel rushed at her. She felt a variety of effects on her body at the same time as she watched the steel approach. *Void*.

She twirled in the air to avoid the magic that was about to rip out her head and heart. The shrapnel hit and dug through her ash and deep into her body. Another familiar magic extended. *Blood*.

The eruptions ripped through her, each piece of metal the center of a small blood explosion. She used her third tier to heal the massive damage as she reformed her wings and flew again, dodging the beams and tendrils coming out of the floor and ceiling.

Large parts of her sphere lit up with magic of the void, making her weave through the areas before the air itself was removed. *Blinking is a bad idea. Need to get out of this steel trap.*

She made for the door, dodging through the attacks. A last lunge brought her through, before she hit an invisible wall. Ashen limbs and her fists lashed out to send destructive mana into the barrier as she felt the void magic manifest behind her.

Ilea punched through with a last effort, landing on the stairs leading to the steel bridge. Her legs were gone, as was half her torso. Her blood had barely started flowing out when she used her ashen limbs to propel her forward onto the bridge, spikes forming under her.

Her body was reformed when she saw the being appear above the stairs.

She formed a dozen ashen lances and sent them at the creature. All of them vanished. At the same time she felt something form around her, moving her towards the being. *Space*, she realized, seeing the void magic manifest within her sphere. Enough to make her whole being vanish. *Where would I go?*

Focus.

The being tilted its head a little to the side as it watched her, one of its arms lifting towards her.

Ilea blinked back in the last moment, the void taking a part of her chest and her nose. Both reformed as she ascended higher up and away from the steel tendrils trying to get to her.

The metal splintered into shrapnel before it all rushed at her. It was simply too crowded to avoid it all, forcing her to blink once again. *Space barriers*, she noted with annoyance, finally figuring out what prevented her blink from working as intended.

She appeared and formed as much ash around her as possible, feeling the space magic constrict her like invisible tendrils holding her back, more void magic manifesting just as the steel dug into her, exploding in ferocious ruptures as soon as it reached her blood. Huge chunks of her were ripped out as she rushed against the barrier ahead of her. Instead of trying to destroy it, she used it to provide momentum with the few ashen limbs that still held up against the steel shower.

Ilea pushed off, the little shreds of her wings that had remained vanishing in the manifesting void. She landed on the steel below, her feet immediately pierced. More came instantly. Her ash armor receded at her hips before her limbs slashed into them.

Wings reformed right when another shower of shrapnel approached. Her eyes opened wide when all of it simply vanished, appearing right around her body instead. *Fuck*

The blood ruptures ripped through her but she focused on two of her limbs, keeping them intact as the ruptures helped rip out her legs, allowing her to propel herself away from the bridge. She left behind two legs that were by now nearly fully entwined by steel.

An expected barrier prevented her to get off the bridge but her Heart of cinder had finally charged enough. It blasted out, shattering the invisible space magic as well as pushing back some of the shrapnel still following her. Her body reformed once more as she flew up and away from the bridge.

She watched the being appear near her severed legs, large parts of the bridge bending and forming into spikes, sharp floating pieces, beams and tendrils ready to pierce her. That wasn't the end of it however. More steel formed out of nowhere, wicked shapes and efficient designs. Each ready to deliver the blood magic imbued within. *Steel Creator*, she noted.

Ilea barely had time to form a coherent thought during the battle so far. Nor had she been able to get close at all. Its offensive was unrelenting, unstoppable.

She realized that the short lull of less than half a second hadn't been without reason. It had provided her with a short moment to breathe. To realize that she was out of her depth here. By a long shot. This was a being wielding power equal to the Lightning Elemental, perhaps even more powerful.

With four schools of magic at its disposal.

A surge of mana rushed past, with it a tingle that went through her body.

Ilea knew what that was. She watched the projectiles appear closer, the swarm supported by space magic trying to hold her in place, void magic forming around her.

If it hadn't been for her second tier Veteran, she would have died here. Blood, void and space helped too of course, each one providing her with the additional resilience required to only lose half her body in this battle. And not all of it.

Her perception slowed down as she watched the impending doom, two uncaring white eyes watching it all from beyond.

Heart of Cinder released, the little power it had garnered pushing against the space magic before she blinked away, towards the exit into layer twenty four. This wasn't a battle she could win. *What the fuck did I even expect?*

She appeared fifteen meters away instead of over forty, a swath of steel bits flying past as she dodged and weaved through as many of them as she could. *Up, out. Trakorov might help*, she thought as a dozen blood explosions erupted within her. One of them unfortunately took half of her head but she kept moving onward, her ash taking her where she had intended to go while her mind wasn't there no more.

Only a moment passed until she was back, a moment that otherwise could have cost her life.

Ilea used her third tier wings and sphere to avoid the void magic spheres appearing in her way, used her Absolute Destruction and Wave of Cinders to crash through the barriers trying to block her way. Reversed healing magic pushed against the space magic hold that constantly tried to grasp her.

The being couldn't control the steel anymore as soon as it entered her body, meaning the blood eruptions were the only thing it could do. She knew her second tier in Blood Magic Resistance helped out considerably, despite the likely high tier and level of her enemy's spells.

Ilea knew she couldn't remain in this layer. She knew just as much that the layer above would be another death trap. *Can't use the tunnel*, she thought and dodged more projectiles, using the void magic to her advantage as she moved close to the ceiling.

Huge parts of stone simply vanished, leaving behind spherical indents. Heart of Cinder released and dug deeper still. Ilea blinked as far as she could and appeared within the dome like mana collector. She kept her momentum and rushed towards the exit only to frown when the opened steel gate closed in an instant.

Another blink caused her to appear in front of it instead of past, the invisible magic blocking her way. Steel spikes formed below and out of the door, slashing out at her as she moved back.

Ilea came face to face with the being as it slowly ascended through the central entrance.

It looked around before focusing on her once more.

Her breathing had steadied, her wounds had healed. Ashen wings and protrusions on her back and at the ready. Walls of ash continued to form around her, ready to form into spears or shrapnel like the being had used in case she needed it. *Well done Ilea... brought the steel mage into the dome of steel. Attack, distract and dodge. Survive until an opportunity presents itself. Escape and try to use the other layers against it.*

She prepared to rush at the being, her eyes focused on its white ones. She would regenerate, would outlast it. If only she could survive.

“Azarinth Healer... why did you come here?” it spoke into her mind. A gravely and deep voice, balanced and without a hint of emotion.

Now you're interested? And you know the Azarinth, she thought to herself. Ilea took a deep breath and answered telepathically, the link established by the being.

“Corruption has spread through this dungeon, Blood Manipulation. I sought to destroy its source,” she answered. A conversation with words seemed like the better option compared to fighting this thing, even to her.

The being looked at her for a while, contemplating the words. *“I had thought all your members hunted down. You wield ash and concern yourself with corruption in a location lost to your people. What happened here... in this layer?”*

Neither of them showed the tension of the moment. Ilea floated around the stationary being, slowly moving her wings. Mostly to make sure she wasn't just letting it create a trap with its space and void magic.

Its body turned with her, floating at the center still.

That thing doesn't need an elaborate plan to take me down. Just time and effort, she thought.

“I'm not a member, I simply wield the long forgotten class. My people are those I consider as such. Some have died due to this corruption I believe you have left behind,” she said. *Shouldn't reveal what I know quite yet.*

“Long forgotten. Motives beyond misplaced pride and power itself. It pleases me to hear these words from one wielding Azarinth magic. You must know that your want for vengeance will end here. So tell me, Human. What happened here?”

Ilea smiled under her armor. The being was pissed they had drained its battery. The Fae had been right in its insistence. It would entertain her as long as she withheld that information from it or as long as its interest was overshadowing its patience.

“Scavengers and adventurers exploring ruins as dangerous as these certainly know the risks. I merely interfered because the corruption seemed too dangerous to be left alone. I came here for answers, not vengeance. You are more than I had expected,” she said.

“You avoid my question. Which means it was you. And yet I do not believe you a liar. Are you alone?”

Smartie that one, she thought.

“The Agent was a weapon conceived long ago. Intended as a way to cull our enemies, in a war that is lost to time itself. The tests suggested it would fail to completely corrupt even those of minor power. Your concern is misplaced,” the being explained.

Ilea smirked. *Interesting. Why is he telling me that? Does he think me dead anyway? A villain gloating before they kill the hero?*

“Why are you telling me this?” she couldn’t help but ask.

“I seek information you hold. You have survived more than any of those wielding your magic have before and yet you stand. Defiant.”

Is it praising me? Surprised? I mean it’s right to assume pain and death won’t make me talk. Not that I give much of a shit about the information he seeks. If anything it would be a last fuck you.

“Are you suggesting a trade of information? Before you kill me?” she asked with a smirk. Ilea had seen worse than the being, some of it mere hours and days prior. She was not about to start being afraid now.

It had talked about the corruption and the war so easily. Either it held no importance anymore or it really did not think she would live to tell the tale.

“Your fate is not yet decided, human. Considerable effort has already failed to capture or kill you. At the very least you confirm the apprehension I had held for the Azarinth.”

“It does? I’m interested. You said I survived more than any other. Was it you to hunt them down?” she asked.

“Some. It was however not my hand alone that led to their demise.”

Ilea nodded, knowing through its tone that this was all she would gain about the Azarinth Order.

“Do you really care so much about what happened here? Why did you even come to fight me if the corruption was made for a war long past?”

“Do I have to explain morality to a scavenger and thief?” it asked.

The information I learned from the runed sphere then. The corpse has a meaning too. As does that other ball of metal. Or the mana that was gathered here. Either of those could be the reason it came. Or it simply disliked people walking into its houses.

“What if I tell you? Would you leave me be?” Ilea asked. *Maybe I leveled a secret charisma stat that will get me out of here.*

It considered. *“That entirely depends on your answer. Time is running out. Do not overestimate the importance your knowledge holds to me. I am being generous in the face of your tenacity.”*