

Ilea stood within the prison, spheres of barriers all around, magic flowing from the distant walls of the grand hall, entirely empty beside the streams of magic set within straight lines of dark metal, orange red light pulsing with the energy, all of it powering the moving rings of steel and potent barriers.

An automated trap? Or perhaps an invitation? She smiled to herself as she continued looking at the patterns, soon realizing that they weren't quite as mesmerizing as the Meadow's, though still impressive. It would take some time for her to get through. Far from an impossible task. *Question is, do I want to?*

A rematch with Vor Elentir was not something she had planned for the day but she wouldn't say no either. If only to find out if and how much the being had held back the last time they had met. She cracked her shoulders and knuckles, trying to find anything besides the space magic patterns to focus on, to get an edge. If nothing would show up, she would simply have to escape, though not after setting a gate location within this realm. Already she set one down within the sphere, though she didn't plan to leave it in there.

Her attention shifted when she perceived an incoming teleportation spell. Not through her cut off domain but her awareness of space itself. She didn't react immediately, not about to offer too much knowledge about her own abilities. Still she was focused on the patterns, impressive but not manually created. Finally, she moved her eyes to the being now floating about five meters away from the barriers.

A near three meter body, links of metal joined together near seamlessly, faint glowing white light the only indicator of their existence. A line of four vertical white eyes took in the winged being covered in layers of ash. Its four arms were joined behind their back, two legs, torso, and shoulders broader than similar beings Ilea had seen before. A cloth of white fabric covered most of its body, wrung around its form with intricate patterns. Eight spheres of steel orbited the being in a slow moving pattern, its head shaped like a medieval knight's, two horns of steel curved up from its temples, going behind its head and finally down towards its neck.

She looked at it now, slightly tilting her head to the side, both flying in a casual manner. "Hi. Impressive trap."

"Peculiar. The goal was to find out which item an intruder would choose, but you took all of them. A faint relation..." the Ascended spoke with a deep voice, pausing for a moment. "Relation to the Azarinth, though their Order is no more. A remnant perhaps, looking to find the Azarinth Star? You have succeeded, thought at a great cost. Who are you?"

Ilea crossed her arms. "I'm not with the Azarinth Order. And I don't know if I should introduce myself to someone who keeps me locked in twelve layers of barriers," she said and moved closer, touching the first one. The magic sizzled slightly. *Azarinth Star? One of the items?*

[Metal Mage – lvl ?????]

The Ascended was just above level one thousand, at least according to Veteran.

He moved one of his four hands to his chin. "Precautions, I'm sure you understand. Those who would find what you have sought have not arrived here on accident. A human, I believe? Though one of your level... a rarity, to be sure. Perhaps I will entertain you.

"I am the keeper of this sanctum, Ker Velor. Welcome to Kohr, though you seem far too calm for any of this to be entirely unknown," the Ascended spoke. "Perhaps we were not destined to be enemies, if you truly are not part of the Azarinth Order."

"I've met and been attacked by one of your kind before," Ilea said.

"Yes, though you should not be surprised, if you seek and intrude facilities that are not your own. Your kind has a tendency to be rather disrespectful of the belongings of others, though it would be hypocritical of me to claim I was different. Which item have you sought? And who are you?" he spoke.

Safest bet might be the Fae. No way can he do anything to that monstrosity.

"Speak, I have no patience for the games of your kind," said Ker Velor.

"The Heart," Ilea said. "I'm reclaiming it for a friend," she said, neither lying nor telling the truth. She would certainly ask Violence about it, and return it if it belonged to them.

"Azarinth magic... and yet you come for the Heart of Verivyen. Your realm has changed indeed, so quickly do your species move, adapt, evolve. And still you fall prey to such obvious traps, flocking to the light like simple creatures. You have only answered one question," he said.

"Some call me Lilith," she said, guessing that with her description and his correct guess at her species, he would find out about her quickly if he inquired in Elos. "Why do you set traps for long past enemies?"

The Ascended considered for a few seconds. "You know more than most, though with your power, it is not a surprise. And yet you are still bound to flesh. It was... not entirely disappointing to meet you, Lilith, but I'm afraid I have no time to waste on your person. Your death shall be quick," he spoke and bowed in a respectful manner.

The rings started spinning faster, magic gathering all around as the Ascended watched with its four eyes.

Ilea did the same. She had figured out the patterns by now but Nes had talked so much about Ascended magic, she really wanted to find out what all the fuss was about. Looking up, she could see the spell glowing, more energy flowing into it as the rings kept spinning. Her enhanced perception let her gauge the spell. Impressive, surely, but mostly light and heat, two of her higher resistances. She would survive.

The rings stopped, now all of them aligned and aimed downward, runes shining on their edges before the bright sphere of light hanging twenty meters above burst into a beam of concentrated heat, flowing through the barriers without issue. For one second the entire hall lit up, the stone platform within the spheres gone in an instant.

Between the rings floated a smoking human, flesh burnt and blackened, stripped in parts to the bone. Her body and ash reformed in mere moments, dissolved wings reappearing in turn. "Not bad. Can you turn it up a little?"

'ding' 'Light Magic Resistance reaches 3^d lvl 7'

Ker Velor remained quiet, summoning a small device and what looked like a pen before he started writing something down. "I'm busy. But I suppose data is data," he murmured the latter bit. "And yes, that was thirty percent. What most monsters at a level of one thousand one hundred can manage if they've matured. How did it feel?" He looked up, his pen ready.

Ilea looked at his eyes. "I don't feel pain."

"Yes. Of course. Even those who remain in imperfect forms have ways to adapt. Let's try seventy percent," he said.

Ilea put a finger to her mouth and looked at the barriers. "It does sound fun, but I don't like being caged." She teleported out and in front of the being when the room lit up again. That one she would not have survived as easily. *Point taken Nes.*

This time the Ascended reacted, spreading his arms as his tools vanished. "A space mage... the Heart... of course." He flew backwards. "You are part Fae then? Or evolved to imitate their kind?" His eyes glowed a little brighter. "You would prevent my magic? In my domain?" He sounded confused more than anything.

"Oh, you wanted to teleport?" Ilea asked, flying around him in a lazy manner. "Mad, now that the fly in your trap escaped?"

He looked up and followed her form with his eyes, arms stretched out and at the ready. "I am intrigued, human. You show promise. Perhaps..." He slammed two hands together, the grip of space magic crashing into her.

Ilea felt her eyes nearly burst, healing them as she rolled her shoulders. "Please," she said and charged her own space manipulation, focusing on his form before she squeezed.

The Ascended shook for a split second. He recovered just as quickly and again he clapped, just once this time. "Marvelous. Truly! Show me more, Lilith!" he spoke in an excited voice now, several hundred spheres of steel materializing around him, each one surrounded by a strange red glow.

Ilea watched the projectiles swarm her from all around but she simply let them come, her mantle now erupting in white flame. She could feel the blood magic before the first projectiles hit, the impact creating a shock wave before two dozen more struck her flying form. Blood magic erupted from the touch, seeping into her armor and flesh before rupturing her form. She found the effort a nuisance more than anything. She waved her hand, using fabric tear to move away the closest spheres. Already they stopped coming.

"Feedback on Blood Magic. I have not encountered such in centuries. You have survived a great deal, human. On purpose perhaps? Or due to your likely Azarinth magic?" the Ascended asked, raising one arm. "Will this give you pause?"

Ilea raised her own arm, a beam of near white energy and heat lashing out at the flying being.

Walls of steel immediately formed, three burst through before the fourth managed to divert the energies. The Ascended answered in turn, once more with a familiar school of magic.

Ilea nearly rolled her eyes when she was engulfed by soul magic. Potent but she had trained with a Greater Lich. Her fires of creation burned bright as she let the spell flow through her form. It itched.

Ashen walls moved with her, a dozen spears at the ready as she advanced on the being, white flames flaring up before she teleported away, a beam of bright light slashing through the air from the center of the hall.

The orange red energies spread out from the dark lines of metal, thousands of runes activating as new spheres moved out of the walls.

“This is not a battle, Lilith,” the Ascended spoke. “Though both your resilience and tenacity have managed to garner my attention. You do remind me of her.” He considered while Ilea took in the massive hall coming to life.

She tried to move closer when a hundred small beams of light forced her back yet again.

“The Unity was broken... who is to say a human source cannot be considered?” he murmured before he floated closer, arms spreading out. “Would you not consider joining me? To be reborn, in perfection. Your power would be unmatched, rid of your flesh stricken form.”

“Why would I switch to anything else?” Ilea asked. “You probably can’t even eat.”

“Eat?” the being asked with an annoyed sound. “You would let your instincts govern your decisions?”

“Yeah, I might’ve thought about it for a second longer if you hadn’t tried to kill me a few times already,” Ilea said. “Why would I ever trust you?”

“Trust... food. Your vision is... limited, Lilith. You could rule by her side. You would be a god! Unlike any other human. Ascended!” Ker Velor spoke, as if to a student that failed to understand the most basic concept.

Ilea just stared at him. “You sound like a madman. I like this form.”

The Ascended touched his face with one hand, his entire form shaking slightly before he calmed down. “A foolish notion, to consider a species such as yours. My apologies. I have wasted both our time. Now leave this world and return what you have taken.”

The hall exploded in light, hundreds of beams burning into her mantle, her teleport bringing her away from the Ascended and towards a distant exit. Her gates refused to form, another set of defenses preventing her magic. *Shit*. Primordial Shift activated when the large beam fired once more, splintered reality illuminated by distant light and fires, moving flames and flesh entangling with the external source of power. But a moment, before reality returned, Ilea teleporting through the patterns laid out by ancient enchantments, landing on the other side of closed metal gates.

She spread her wings and once more tried to summon a gate, half her body burnt and regenerating. Once more it failed but she could feel the magic all around. As if dampening the very fabric. She could use her spells in here but she would not connect to anything outside. *Got to get out of this place*. The gates behind her opened, this hallway too erupting into motion, metal striking out to catch her, thin spears trying to pierce her skull.

Another teleport brought her into the next hall, three more letting her navigate through the massive facility. She saw a distant throne in darkness, the ceiling so high she couldn’t make it out, square and triangular shapes made up the entirety of the likely underground structure. She passed the hall in several teleports, all cold metal. Out, she found herself in a labyrinth of corridors, hundreds of rooms, some with life creatures. Ashen limbs broke locks in passing, extended arms ripping away steel bars and fists slamming through protective glass. Some of the monsters tried to attack her instantly but she didn’t give them time, moving through the facilities whilst aiming upwards.

She reached a ceiling but found another set of enchantments working to stop her space magic. This time she simply used Destruction, her fires and arcane energy exploding upwards with drills of burning ash and beams of heat in turn. Light enveloped her as the first metal spheres slammed into

her back but the ascended was too late. She broke through the thick metal barrier, crashing into rock as explosions resounded around her. A wild ashen drill pushed her up and through the stone, heat laden spears sent back inside, the explosions dull and distant. It only took a few minutes for her to break out of the ground, nothing following her anymore.

She landed on salt rock in a crouch, waiting for a few seconds for the Ascended to follow. He did not.

“Coward,” she murmured, not missing the fact that she had to flee his facility. *If that counts I can use the Meadow’s domain as my home base. Let him try to escape that.*

Her magic was no longer restricted and she had secured a bunch of items, yet she didn’t want to leave already. Her gate location was still within the prison deep below but with all the enchantments present, she neither wanted to go there again, nor did she think it was possible in the first place. *Let’s just change it to here. Can always drill down and break in again if I have to.*

“Ker Velor,” she mused, hearing a bunch of familiar screeches nearby. Three Demon Spawn charged her. Two ashen limbs lashed out, chunks of meat slapping to the ground with blood spraying onto white stone.

Another Ascended. With a trap left in Elos. I’ll have to look at those items but he seemed pretty well informed, and he was right, couldn’t have found his vault without a locator. How many people did he catch with that? And a realm traveling trap in the first place? Complex barriers and anti teleportation and space magic? With a damn light beam powerful enough to kill even me? At least he doesn’t seem keen on following me immediately. “Because you would die without those machines,” she murmured, though not entirely sure. He had shown some of his abilities but surely not everything.

‘ding’ ‘You have escaped a facility designed by Ker Velor – One Core skill point awarded’

Enough to enhance my last Arcane Eternal skill. She had hesitated so far because of the marks but it was time. Once she was back. *Will have to talk to Nes as well. She might be able to explain some of what he said. Become an Ascended? Probably doesn’t offer that to someone every day.*

She was tempted to go back down, to just probe the facility and destroy what she could from without. None of the beings she had seen in the cells seemed intelligent, nor did anyone call out for help. *He’ll have to slaughter or catch them all again.*

Ilea considered for a moment. *Fucker nearly killed me. Least I can do is wreak some havoc.* “Piece of shit is going to regret treating me like some research animal.”

She teleported up a few times and charged her wings, flying off into the distant night of Kohr, dark clouds above with occasional glimpses of moonlight illuminating the barren lands, hordes of demons on their endless hunt.

Far enough away, she checked her surroundings and summoned a gate, catching a glimpse of something massive moving through the distant clouds, long tendrils of flesh extending down and towards the ground.

“Meadow. Can you check me for any space wumbo jumbo? Just fought a four mark Ascended,” Ilea said and flew closer to the tree, the gate closing behind her.

“A strange air has entered my domain... where did that gate lead to?” the being asked. “I do not detect any magic, mark, or locator on you.”

“He was a soul mage too,” Ilea added as an afterthought.

Owl appeared nearby.

“Owl, Ilea requires assistance. Are there marks on her that were not there before?” Meadow asked.

“No. No foreign mark would survive against the fires raging to protect your essence,” Owl said.

“Though I can tell you have been recently struck by soul magic.”

“Good. Thanks you two. Owl, why don’t you stay here for a moment,” Ilea said. *“Can you get Iana and Chris? I have a few items I’d like to have a look at. They might be dangerous. If any of the Fae are around, that’s be great too.”*

“Violence is playing in Hallowfort. Conducting important research I mean. I will call for him,” Meadow spoke.