

Michael glanced her way for a moment but didn't comment. He summoned something to eat himself, as if he was reminded of the human need by the bowl in her hand.

Ilea checked the rest of her messages.

'ding' 'Deviant of Humanity reaches lvl 12'

'ding' 'Deviant of Humanity reaches lvl 13'

'ding' 'Identify reaches lvl 16'

'ding' 'Veteran reaches 3rd lvl 7'

'ding' 'You have learned the General skill: Devour Resistance – lvl 1'

Devour Resistance – lvl 1

A specialty school of magic combining the perfect control of one's body, blood, and mana to create a unique blend of highly destructive spells. Both used to damage the enemy's defenses and body with the benefit of partial health absorption. This school of magic can only be used by those with extensive knowledge and experience. Your survival either means a lack of willingness to kill by your enemy or an incredible defensive repertoire that rivals your opponent's magical prowess. Coupled with Blood Magic, Arcane Magic, and Health Drain Resistances, this new skill is just as specialized against Devour magic as that school of magic itself.

'ding' 'Devour Resistance reaches lvl 2'

...

'ding' 'Devour Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 1'

...

2nd stage: Really? Why? Your body refuses to be eaten by Devour magic. You should work on your diplomatic skills.

'ding' 'Devour Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 2'

...

'ding' 'Devour Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 6'

'ding' 'Blood Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 9'

'ding' 'Death Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 9'

...

'ding' 'Death Magic Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 11'

'ding' 'Astral Magic Resistance reaches lvl 2'

...

'ding' 'Astral Magic Resistance reaches lvl 17'

'ding' 'You have found a new realm. Again. And you faced some of its more powerful residents in battle – One Core skill point awarded'

'ding' 'You have met and fought an Astral Spirit – One Core skill point awarded'

Ilea was very close to just investing another core point into Force but she stopped herself again. *Keep your damn points.*

Instead she checked if any of the magic she faced had made new third tier resistances available.

To her surprise there were two new contenders.

- Health Drain Resistance

To face an enemy with Devour magic and come out on top is really quite impressive. While it isn't limited to its health drain aspect, the effects themselves are hardly comparable to conventional health drain abilities. A third tier in this skill should help mitigate such damage.

- Mana Drain Resistance

Astral Spirits are rare and powerful entities, close in essence and body to the very mana they wield. Anyone who decides to face such a creature must be able to strongly resist their powerful drain attacks to gain even a slight chance of ever defeating one. You may advance this skill to the third tier.

Damn, I want both!

She checked her status and found only one third tier general point available. It was her emergency point. She might have chosen to advance her Health Drain Resistance had the Queen still been alive but as it was, she regretfully leveled neither.

Ilea put her sixty five stat points into Vitality, bringing it to nearly one thousand.

More health to use for Flare of Creation, she thought and checked her new status.

Name: Ilea Spears

Unspent statpoints: 0

Unspent Core skill points: 23

Unspent 3rd tier General skill points [1795 Total skill levels]: 1

Class 1: The Azarinth Sentinel – lvl 367

- Active: Absolute Destruction – 3rd lvl 29

- Active: Sentinel Reconstruction – 3rd lvl 30

- Active: Azarinth Awakening – 3rd lvl 30

- Active: Blink – 3rd lvl 29

- Active: Sentinel Sphere – 3rd lvl 29

- Passive: Sentinel Core – 3rd lvl 30

- Passive: Azarinth Fighting – 3rd lvl 30

- Passive: Sentinel Huntress – 3rd lvl 8

- *Passive: Azarinth Perception – 3rd lvl 28*
- *Passive: Azarinth Reversal – 3rd lvl 22*

Class 2: Kin of Ash – lvl 367

- *Active: Armor of Ash – 3rd lvl 30*
- *Active: Aspect of Ash – 3rd lvl 30*
- *Active: True Ash Creation – 3rd lvl 30*
- *Active: Heart of Cinder – 3rd lvl 28*
- *Active: Storm of Cinders – 3rd lvl 23*
- *Passive: Ash and Ember Unity – 3rd lvl 28*
- *Passive: Ashen Wings – 3rd lvl 27*
- *Passive: Eyes of Ash – 3rd lvl 20*
- *Passive: Avatar of Ash – 3rd lvl 30*
- *Passive: Keeper of Ash – 3rd lvl 30*

Class 3: The Faen Valkyrie – lvl 190

- *Active: Force – 2nd lvl 20*
- *Active: Flare of Creation – 3rd lvl 1*
- *Active: Displacement – 3rd lvl 1*
- *Passive: Space Shift – 2nd lvl 15*
- *Passive: Body of the Valkyrie – 2nd lvl 14*
- *Passive: Space Awareness – 2nd lvl 8*

General Skills: *Hidden*

Status:

Vitality: 995
Endurance: 420
Strength: 515
Dexterity: 425
Intelligence: 900
Wisdom: 1000

Health: 15681/15681
Stamina: 4198/4200
Mana: 19982/20000

She smiled to herself and looked at Michael, done with her food.

Ilea was downright appalled by the lack of interest he had in his own dish, swallowing most of it without even chewing. The smell and look didn't speak for his vile nourishment either.

“What are the chances of more rituals being prepared here?” she asked.

“Low. They reached their goal after all, though the resulting consequences they met are admittedly quite ironic,” Michael said.

“Are you searching the city with your other clones?” she asked.

“No,” he said.

Ilea wondered if he was lying or if he simply hadn't been able to recreate all of them yet. *Or none of them are actually really him.*

“Are you allied with Lady Redleaf?” he asked, the direct question surprising her a little.

Ilea glanced at him and then at Felicia.

“More just friends,” she said after a moment.

Am I allied with her? Maybe. But I wouldn't help her get rid of nobles in Virilya. Not anymore.

He smiled.

“To think Lilith has friends. The songs coupled with the impression you left suggested something else,” he said.

Ilea had only uncovered her mouth to eat. The man only knew her as the ashen healer.

“Well I'm sure you have people too that you would consider friends. Or do all common relationship models cease to exist when one becomes as powerful as you?” she asked.

Michael just looked at her for a while.

“I believe I have remained human during my life. I'm not quite as old nor as powerful as some of the other members. You flatter me,” he said. “Especially with your high level and third Class. I'm aware of some of the required achievements.”

Ilea assumed his first sentence was meant as an answer, that he indeed had people he cared about.

“Your knowledge on blood magic might have prevented a whole city from being wiped out. If you really told the truth,” she said.

She was aware of his selfish motives but it didn't change the result.

Felicia finally woke up then, blinking a few times.

“Lilith,” she said with a broad smile. She got up and hugged her.

“You survived,” Felicia said.

Ilea nodded and hugged her back. “As did you.”

The woman registered Michael in that moment and let go a little awkwardly.

“Apologies,” she whispered.

“Don't worry about it,” Ilea replied, noting that she had still used her made up name.

“Thank you for the help in there,” Felicia said, bowing lightly towards Michael.

He waved her off, already absorbed in his work again.

“I'll go back in. Do you two want to remain here?” Ilea asked.

“With you and the Destroyer present, I shall join you,” Michael said.

Still have to test those new third tiers, Ilea mused.

“We’ll go on ahead,” Ilea said and vanished. Felicia followed her and glanced back when they appeared in a nearby alley.

“That’s a little rude. He saved my life,” Felicia said but still smiled. “Tell me everything!”

Ilea blinked again, this time into another empty hall.

“I just wanted to try something out,” Ilea said and formed a sphere of ash. It floated above her hand before the thing ignited with a pale white flame.

It’s that easy, she thought with a smile. She moved it around and kept the flames alive. She quickly told Felicia about the fight and the hordes they had faced.

“Spirits and a Queen?” Felicia asked after Ilea was done. She grinned. “Well, seems like your intervention once again prevented my death.”

“I’m a healer. I do that,” Ilea joked.

The woman waved her off. “You’re far more than a simple healer. Now… explain that thing to me,” she said and pointed at the blazing ball of ash. “Could you not do that before?”

“No… not exactly,” Ilea said and added one hundred more health to the spell, seeing it flare up slightly.

She formed a mist of ash before her and made it swirl around.

Felicia smiled. “You’re not g-”

The whole thing suddenly blazed up in white fire.

Interesting. More health because it’s larger? Or because it’s not connected to me?

It turned out it was both.

The difference in cost wasn’t huge but definitely noticeable.

She made the flames die down and tried out her other new ability. “Don’t resist.”

Felicia raised her eyebrows but didn’t say anything.

She appeared a few meters away, upside down. The woman remained floating in the air, her smile looking like a frown from the angle.

“That won’t be super useful against trained warriors,” she said.

“Not all of them can fly,” Ilea said.

“True,” Felicia said and floated closer, slowly turning back as the air flowed around her.

“You said your second Class helps with the berserker stuff, right?” Ilea asked.

“Helps me get out of it, yeah,” Felicia said.

“I remembered something when I checked my resistances earlier. Do you have Soul Magic Resistance?” she asked.

“No. I don’t think I’ve ever knowingly met a Soul mage,” Felicia said.

“Maybe you should,” Ilea said. “There’s a section in the second tier that says *A serene calm now sways through your very essence, changed and evolved, grounded and calm.* Maybe that could help.”

“Hmm... that’s interesting. Thanks!” Felicia said. “I’ll see if I can find a trainer somewhere in the Empire but I’ve got it mostly under control.”

“Sure,” Ilea said and tried to use the main new part of Displacement. She focused on the closest spot her ability could reach and marked the area. At the same time she marked an area on the other side of the hall.

Interesting, she thought as she watched the phenomena form thanks to Space Awareness. There was a slight distortion in the air even visible to the naked eye but the sight her awareness provided proved much more confusing.

“What did you do?” Felicia asked, looking at the changed air.

Ilea felt the spell drain her mana quite quickly, a conscious effort necessary to keep the magic active. *A little less than four hundred mana per second, four fifty without regeneration and meditation I think.*

Forty to sixty seconds with a full pool.

Destruction and Storm of Cinders still used up way more if she went all out. Against a strong enemy like the Queen, that simply wasn’t possible because of dodges, missing attacks, and various teleports mixed in between. Something like the hordes she had fought earlier didn’t really count either because their constant magical attacks fueled her with more mana, heavily increasing her up time for various skills.

She made an ashen sphere and shot it into one of the five by five meter areas.

They watched with fascination as the sphere vanished and flew out on the other side.

Its momentum hadn’t been used up and the thing simply continued another three times through the two areas before it finally fell to the floor.

Ilea let go of the spell.

“Huh.”

“It’s like an actual gate...,” Felicia said. “Can I step through too?”

“I would imagine that works, yes,” Ilea said. “It’s a space connection between two areas, nothing less and nothing more.”

“Limited range?” the woman asked.

“Yep. Eight hundred meters right now,” Ilea said.

“Hmm... still usable in a siege or to break in somewhere without detection,” Felicia said.

“Or to send the combined efforts of ten explosion mages into an enemy line,” Ilea said with a grin.

“That works too,” Felicia said and giggled.

Though I suppose I can do that with normal uses of Displacement too. Maybe not as easily but it definitely costs less than this.

Ilea could definitely see how the addition could be useful, if only to get allies through anti teleportation enchantments. One issue was the size of the two areas. They had to be quite large, meaning she couldn’t just form a small hole to send a few of her limbs through but had to create the around five by five meter portals. She knew instinctively that a larger area was possible too.

“Can you move them?” Felicia asked.

“No,” Ilea said. She had tried but she would have to remake new gates if she wanted to change where they existed. *Over four minutes to use it again.*

I guess I could have used it against the mantis... just place it in front of me and as far away as Displacement could have gotten me. The distance might have allowed me to flee more easily until her buff ran out.

Insane that she could keep up with me either way. Maybe she had two teleportation spells too.

“Done testing?” Felicia asked.

“One thing...,” Ilea said and aimed her hand towards the open space before her.

She formed a mist of non condensed ash that simply flowed forward. Flare of Creation activated, the flames spreading through the simple ash like wildfire.

The particles farthest away fell to the ground, out of her manipulation’s influence but still burning. She didn’t let up, creating more ash as she moved the flaming spray around.

Costs nearly nothing... other than health.

“Flamethrower unlocked,” she said to herself and grinned, moving her arm back as if it was a loaded weapon.

The flames subsided and left behind a thin carpet of ash.

The nature of the spell even allowed her to keep the ash burning as long as she had resources to spend.

More condensed constructs would have much higher range but this way, she could cover large beings with Flare of Creation in mere moments, without having to get particularly close.

“Flamethrower?” Felicia asked. “I guess that makes sense. I’m happy for you!” she exclaimed.

[Mage – lvl 252]

“You got a few levels too. No evolution?” Ilea asked.

She shook her head. “Sadly not. Two new spell options but nothing that seems more suited than what I already have.”

“Fair enough,” Ilea said. “Shall we then?”

“What’s the plan? Just explore?” Felicia asked.

“That too,” Ilea said as she switched into her Baralia armor and blinked out into an empty alley. “A being communicated with me through mind magic in there. I think meeting it should take priority.”

“You can talk to things with mind magic?” Felicia asked.

“I think most mind mages can initiate contact. I’m not sure why it only communicated with me... well, the others might have just not mentioned it. Bob might already be there, making a deal with it for whatever treasure their realm holds,” Ilea said.

“You know his actual name?” Felicia asked. “Makes sense now why he chooses to be called the Destroyer,” she added and laughed.

"It's not his real name but I think it fits. Don't get too close to the man, his reputation is based on reality," Ilea said.

"Oh I'm very much aware of that," Felicia said and giggled. "Velamyr warned me plenty."

"As much as I like the idea of fighting monsters in that new realm, our goal should still be to close the fissure somehow," Ilea said. "The danger is simply too high with the mana leaking out. I can't imagine the damage a single high level Spirit could do to this city, let alone the human plains themselves."

"We'll figure something out," Felicia said as she touched her back. "Don't worry."

Ilea sighed. "Just let me brood in my annoyance."

Felicia shook her head. "It's very unlike you. I understand. I really do. I nearly died today after all! But the ritual didn't kill the whole city so that's a start. Now we just have to figure out the next step," she said and smiled.

They reached the section of the wall where a dozen guards had sectioned off the area with a crude stone wall, shooing away interested civilians.

A large entrance had been dug into the wall, dense mana already seeping into the surroundings.

It was still nothing compared to the other side.

She simply displaced herself alongside Felicia into the hall.

A few people looked at them but as soon as she started healing some of the near frozen guards, their reception quickly changed.

They went through already.

Hector isn't here, she thought and looked around. Why isn't there a single healer present?

"Where are the healers?" she asked.

A warrior close to one fifty stepped up to her, his eyes had already been focused on the two newcomers before.

"Who are you? And why are you speaking in Standard? This is our jurisdiction," he said.

Ilea turned away from the now mostly healed soldier, still touching his shoulder as she tried to examine the condition he was in. *It just looks wrong... mana poisoning maybe? No veins or anything but he's breathing heavily.*

"Don't worry. We won't be here for long. Your men should avoid going to the other side. The mana alone could kill them. Bring them out of here and try to contain the mana spread if that is in any way possible," she said.

He seemed unsure for a moment, glancing around at the few guards present.

"If you attack me, I will injure you. So don't do it. We came to prevent the ritual that took place here. The one that wiped out four cities in your kingdom. Did you not call for healers because of the corpses here?" she asked.

"Who are you?" the man asked.

"Answer the question," Felicia said.

“Their attire suggests they’re members of the Order, yes. And our mages confirmed that this was a ritual site. Destroyed now but their lives have fueled something. And now we have this gate in the middle of our city,” he said, scratching the back of his head.

Smart man.

“I’ll try to close the gate if that’s at all possible. You should be above level two hundred with high resistances to cold temperatures and the arcane if you want to go to the other side,” Ilea said.

“You won’t claim it?” the man asked.

“Claim a realm?” Ilea asked before she smiled. “I’m not the British Empire.”