

Golden light flared up when the small runic circle activated, Scipio sitting in the middle, floating with his armor on.

He does look pretty cool, I'll admit that much. Not as good as an eye covered meatball though. I have that on him.

"The realm you hail from then, has it been invaded by my peoples?" Nes spoke.

"I don't know," Ilea admitted. "I could see... my home, through the device that brought us back from Kohr, to Elos. I saw many other realms too."

"We could find out what Olym Arcena had planned, if there had been anything at all," Nes said.

Ilea shook her head. "I... don't know." She had built a life in Elos, her friends, allies, entire organizations. She knew she didn't want to go back to her old life, that much was clear. But what if the Ascended had already invaded Earth? *Could they even win? Against fighter jets, modern bombs? Or would they just bury deep into the ground and build some facilities to study us and our technology?*

Her eyes widened. *Or take our sun.* She shook her head. "What do you think?" she asked, looking at the Ascended.

Nes tilted her head to the side a little. "The Architect is aware of your existence. There are many realms, Lilith, many realms the Olym Arcena has found, most of them left untouched. Should you investigate, it is possible others will take notice. However I will support you, should you wish to find out more. You have seen it in the transporter, which means there might be a weak anchor left within your realm, a connection, perhaps due to your birth. The first step would be finding the name we have given your realm, and for that we would require a working transporter."

"I'll think about it," Ilea said. "Thanks Nes. Maybe you can tell me where the transporters were before. I'll come back here... soon."

"You do not know the location of the one you have used?" the Ascended asked.

She shook her head. "No idea. Everything here looks the same."

Nes looked up to the moon, clouds shrouding the light a moment later. "It has not always been like this. Life once flourished in Kohr." She shook her head, looking to Scipio.

"Any moment now," he said, a thin needle of golden magic flickering to life above his palm. He grinned. "There you go. Your connection worked."

"What are we looking for exactly?" Ilea asked.

"You do not have to accompany us, Lilith, though I will not deny you. There are materials, tools, technology, impossible for me to build on my own, all hidden within facilities left behind, locked, or perhaps breached. Some of them my own. We could not ignore the opportunity," she said.

Ilea looked up, cracking her knuckles. "I don't see how that will benefit me to be honest. Except you have something tangible for me."

“You have proven resilience beyond that of an Ascended. I do not believe there is much I can offer you, Lilith. Not yet. I will look for a transporter, and depending on how much is left of my facilities, I might be able to offer suitable training for your resistances. Some at the very least,” Nes said.

Ilea glanced at Scipio before she looked back to the Ascended. “You have my mark, Nes. Though I will enhance that skill soon. I’m not sure if they’ll stay... you two have a safe way back then?”

“Yes,” Scipio said. “Though it will be difficult to create a reliable anchor here in Kohr. Perhaps we will once more require your help in the future, Ilea. For suitable compensation of course.”

“If you find anything on Ker Velor’s location or plans,” she said and stood up. “I’d love to know it.”

“You will be the first to know,” Nes said and gave her a nod. “Thank you, Ilea. Should you ever require my help or assistance, in battle or without, I am at your service.”

Ilea smiled. “Well, I won’t say no to that.”

Nes’ face moved into what seemed like a grin before she glanced over to Scipio.

He sighed. “Sure. Me too.”

“You’re not quite as impressive,” Ilea said.

He shrugged.

“I’ll see you around,” she said in a thoughtful manner, summoning a gate back to the Meadow’s domain.

“Good fortune, on your travels, wielder of the Azarinth Star,” Nes spoke as Ilea stepped through the gate.

It vanished behind her, Ilea taking in a deep breath before she sighed.

“*That bad?*” the Meadow greeted.

“*Well I did tell you about that enhancement... flesh growth?*” she sent back, tilting her head to the side.

“*Well. You did survive. Again,*” the Meadow spoke. “*Have you fought the Ascended?*”

“*No. A trap left behind. Light magic. I’ve never felt anything like it, not even from you,*” she said and walked towards the Soul Forge, ready to take yet another bath.

She gave the Meadow a quick rundown of the events and newfound knowledge from Kohr, most of it to be distributed to the Accords. Perhaps it would push for even more investments into defensive structures, detection, and enchantments. Though with what she had seen, Ilea simply didn’t know what her and her allies could do against such destructive power. The Ascended would’ve killed her, had she not enhanced that one skill. *Well, that’s not entirely true... every bit of resilience helped me survive that.*

Ilea sat in the water, brooding.

“*I had a dozen eyes,*” she sent.

“*An improvement for sure. Did it open your mind to new possibilities?*” the Meadow asked.

“*The contrary,*” Ilea said. “*Freaked me out like nothing... like few things before.*”

“*I understand. Perhaps one day you will see the light,*” it spoke.

Ilea looked up from the water and rolled her eyes, the two of them she had.

“What do you think about Earth?” she asked.

“Do you feel a strong connection to your realm?” the Meadow asked.

Ilea laid back. *“I was born there... but it’s no longer my home. This is. I would visit maybe... if I wouldn’t lose my magic.”*

“Your magic is yours,” the Meadow spoke. *“No matter how little ambient mana a realm offers. You are born human, and you remain so. Mostly. But it seems you are more worried about losing your own magic than you are concerned about your realm.”*

“You’re right. I mean Earth has such a diverse history, so many countries, billions of people. If I’m honest, I care about it the same as I care about the Nipha Empire or Kroll. I do care about the few friends I have there... but they probably think I’m dead. It would cause a ton of issues if I suddenly showed up, though seeing Mark’s face would be funny. Straight up punching through walls.” She grinned at the thought and stood up, her mantle forming as she cracked her neck. *“I’ll look into it if Nes finds a transporter. Until then, I have skills to train.”*

“To everyone. My mark might disappear. Will reset,” she sent to everyone with one of her marks.

‘ding’ ‘Eternal Huntress [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 1’

Passive: Eternal Huntress [Enhanced] – 3rd lvl 1

Huntress turned Eternal. Your eyes are unmatched and so is your nose. Perceive the smallest irregularities in your surroundings as well as the ambient mana to find clues about your target’s whereabouts. Perceive the trails of dangerous prey.

2nd stage: You gain a sense for the distress in the people around you. Amplify this by sacrificing mana. You gain a sense for the arcane, feeling even minor spells around you. As you practice to differentiate these spells, you will learn of their intent.

3rd stage: Through Azarinth magic, you may mark an enemy or ally with the Eternal Mark.

Allies may use the mark to send a short message to the Arcane Eternal once per hour. The Arcane Eternal can send a short message to each non forcefully applied mark once per hour.

One hundred marks can be maintained. Marks forcefully applied have a limited duration. You may use any long range teleportation spells in your Arcane Eternal Class to teleport to a being marked by Eternal Huntress.

Category: Body Enhancement

She closed her eyes and sighed. *Good. That’ll help. “Okay I didn’t lose anything. And I can travel to marked people with my third tier transfer.*

Ilea wondered how the cooldown on the ability worked. Could she travel to each mark every few hours or was there something separate? Transfer itself didn’t change and mentioned nothing. For now, she assumed it was limited in the same way the other destinations were, which would still offer her a great deal of destinations, mostly within Ravenhall.

Even more time to save. She thought about fighting the creatures in Kohr right away but perhaps a visit to Felicia was in order first. Ilea considered waiting five hours to get her space flesh ability back in case the Architect somehow followed and prepared another trap but she went with her gut in the end. *She would make every hour count. And when I find him, I’ll be ready.*

Ilea checked in with her allies more frequently in the coming days, constantly expecting an Ascended to pop up near one of their cities. Her time she spent with training, her newfound ability to teleport to marked individuals helping tremendously with her efficiency. The marks all had their individual cooldowns, which allowed frequent changes of her location, and her complete disconnect from the teleportation network everyone else used.

A few weeks came and went. Any responsibilities she still had with the Accords were gone by now, the network expanding through the Plains at a rapid pace. Entire settlements were built and grew as Ilea and her allies pushed farther into Iz.

She looked at the expansive cavern, no light present, the lakes and rivers of lava long left behind kilometers farther up above. She could sense powerful magic in the vicinity, far beyond the already high ambient mana so deep below Karth. They had fought hundreds of monsters, most beyond four marks. For some it took entire days of battle to breach through their regeneration or high defense.

A white flame moved forward into the perfect darkness, as if to call for anything that hid within. It was snuffed out a moment later.

Ilea squinted her eyes, unsure of what she had just seen. *Void?* Something had made her flame disappear entirely. As if taken from the fabric. She felt the magic then, right next to her. The fabric was torn, as if moved aside by whatever forced its way.

A four armed being with a head but no face came out from the void itself. Its skin was dark and barely visible, strange scales covering its entire form. Half its torso came out of the darkness before a mouth opened on its face, a dark substance spewed out from within.

[Karthian Lurker – lvl ?????]

Ilea raised her brows as she gauged the magic, a single vibrant golden shield appearing in an instant, the dark ooze splattering against the creation of the Azarinth Star. Silent Memory appeared within her other hand, raised before a set of silver thorns lashed out at the monster, just three of them going around her arm to bite into her ash.

The void swallowed everything, the creature returning into nothing.

She grasped at it with her space manipulation but found its form strangely slippery, as if her spell could simply not find purchase on its body. She assumed it was in the mid thousands, more powerful perhaps than the Trakorov and Corrupted Sand Elemental she had fought. The highest level being they had faced in the Karthian Depths. Fey and Kyrian were fighting more familiar monsters a few kilometers back, the two only moving on when Ilea found a new path to delve deeper.

She checked all of her perception, walking farther into the expansive cavern as her ash and fires spread outwards. She could sense no heat beyond the one in the very stone itself, could sense no essence apart from her own, nor did she find anything awry within the fabric.

“Can you hear me?” she asked, repeating the question with her telepathy. “Why don’t you come out to play again?”

She twirled the silver hammer in her hand, a new golden shield now hovering just above her arm. The black ooze had fallen to the ground, all that it touched vanishing into nothing, the substance itself gone after it had consumed a chunk of the ground.

Ilea whistled her challenge, monster hunter flashing out in a magical ripple, reverberating from the walls as she waited.

An arm appeared behind her back, ashen limbs lashing out but unable to strike. A golden shield appeared as she turned around, the black arm blocked by the barrier. She could feel the void grip at her, a powerful spell manifesting all around. Her ash, skin, her very bones were pulled towards the arm but she resisted. Nothing would move her against her will, not even the Meadow. And this creature was no Meadow.

Her wings spread when the ground turned to black ooze, followed by the very air. She teleported out, some of it stuck to her form and weapon, the void slowly consuming her defenses. "This won't be enough, you know?"

"*Th...en..lee..a.ve...m..me...bee.*" The voice resounded in her mind, strange and alien. It vibrated with an intense calm, confusing sensations flowing into her in turn.

"*Why don't we talk?*" she asked, receiving a pained screech in response.

"*I...seek...rest..you..leave...p..please,*" it spoke again, the voice shaking a little more, anger mingling with the calm, more ooze spilling out from nowhere.

"*Alright, alright. Sorry for the disturbance,*" Ilea sent, her shields absorbing most of the ooze around her, parts of them outright consumed. "*Do you know a way farther down?*"

"*L...eave!*" it screeched now, drops of darkness falling from the cavern ceiling.

Ilea teleported out, the cavern a dead end as far as she could tell. She understood how annoying it would be for someone to just strut into one's home, especially when one was resting. The attacks were obvious and the Lurker only communicated with her once it couldn't consume or kill her. *Ah well. Not like I want to get sucked into whatever void like place it lives in.* Killing sapient four marks was not on her list, not if she didn't have a good reason to do so.

"*Let me know if I can help you somehow, if you need that,*" she sent, adding a similar intent with another use of Monster Hunter before she left the cavern, receiving no response from the creature.

She wondered what it was. A Dark One? Partially or fully awakened from a powerful void creature that lived down here? An elf or human that chose this existence as an evolution? Something controlled by a cursed item? Perhaps she would return at some point, with Violence. The Fae had a way to communicate with and befriend all kinds of creatures after all.

Her schedule was packed as it was however. She looked at the hammer in her hand and smiled, the few silver threads flowing in a serene manner, two of them still moving around her arm, biting into ash. The Silent Memory felt calm to her. Ready. She knew now that the hammer had some strange kind of intent. She didn't think it was quite consciousness but more, a temperament. Evan hadn't been wrong about her need to prove herself to the divine item. The Azarinth Star was far less moody, the mythic skill both reliable and incredibly powerful. And it improved at an incredible rate, likely due to her constant exposure to powerful spells, and her liberal use of the item.

She just wished there was a way for her to train with Icy. Ben's magic was strong but she assumed the Elemental could've pushed her far faster. Iz was getting closer and he still did not consider her ready to invade his home domain.

“Anything interesting?” Fey asked, blood covered and battered. He sat down on a chunk of rock, his fires returning as he regenerated the damage done to his form. He cracked his neck and spat out a set of teeth. “That damn brute... bone magic enhanced strikes.”

“I know the feel,” Ilea said as she leaned against the wall of the cavern, her ashen limbs having cut away enough stone for the two of them to comfortably stand around. Kyrian had left for the day, for what he called an important appointment. She would’ve just called it fucking but he was easily flustered.

“You do?” Fey asked, a hand in his mouth.

Felicia is so, so much better, she thought. “Yes. And no, just some void creature that doesn’t want to be disturbed. Couldn’t catch it.”

“Well if you couldn’t catch it, it’s gone,” he mused.

“I wanted to ask you something,” she added.

“Oh no, what ancient secret did you uncover now?” he asked, leaning back against the stone. They were both quiet for a moment when a slithering creature moved past a few dozen meters above, gone as quickly as it had appeared.

Ilea had seen them before, three mark creatures that looked like worms. They fed on essence.

“Are you familiar with the name Nelras Ithom?” she asked.

The elf looked at her for a while before he hissed in a thoughtful manner. “Ithom... I have heard that name before. I believe there are some that hail by that in the domain of light, the Sava desert. Though I’m not familiar with one such Nelras Ithom. Isalthar might know.”

“I could go bother them,” Ilea mused.

“To ask about an elf from the Sunlight Wastes? Is it that important? I don’t know how the others would react to your presence,” the elf said.

“They’re all Hunters, aren’t they?” Ilea asked and summoned her bone set, the rune still etched into the timeless material.

“Just warn Neiphato before,” Fey said. “Done for today then?”

“Yeah, come on, I’ll get you north,” she said and formed a gate.