

Ilea landed near the cliffs, looking at the endless oceans of the Great Salt. The feel had changed. She still felt apprehensive about the dark waters, but it wasn't quite fear anymore. Respect perhaps. She had a new title, and her first skill in the fourth tier.

"How much time has passed during that fight anyway? Could you keep track?" she sent to the Fae. She did have an appointment in the afternoon, not that she could tell the time of day in Kohr. With no sun in the sky.

Two

Hours

"Means we got a few more to go. Thanks," she sent back and smiled at the creature.

The Baron gave her a thumbs up and veiled itself into its strange spatial pocket atop her shoulder. Somehow still linked to her.

She watched it, trying to figure out the spell. It seemed simple, somewhat reminiscent of her Primordial Shift, but much less complex. Less complex, less powerful, and yet perfect in its simplicity. She shook her head when she felt a headache coming, the sensation fading as fast as it had appeared. *Strange little creature. The things they could do, and yet they choose to travel and observe. I suppose it might be better for the world. There are plenty of monsters already.*

She considered, watching the dark waters. Checking through her magical information, she found something new.

Fourth Tier skill points available: 0

Requirements to unlock your next Fourth Tier skill point: Has reached level 850 in three Classes while human.

She smiled and cracked her neck. *A hundred levels. Simple enough.*

Ilea spread her wings and flew down into the waters.

I like simple.

Once again she slipped into the ocean, flowing down into its dark depths with her white flame lighting the way. A new tool at her disposal. And a title to warn the creatures of this realm. A title that Ilea felt was adequate. Monster Hunter rang out when she felt she had reached suitable depths, the pressure still noticeable despite her new second tier in Harmony of the Drowned.

Maybe I'm much deeper than before.

She wondered how deep the ocean was generally speaking. Of course it would be different depending on where she was, but perhaps Kohr was different to Earth, and to Elos, not that she had explored much of the ocean in the latter. She had some mathematical idea of how deep Earth's

oceans reached but to be swimming in the dark, to feel the pressure, knowing and experiencing were vastly different.

This time, nothing answered her call. Ilea remained floating, swimming with her wings, forward and down, without an idea of where she was. Everything was water. No living creature was anywhere in her perception. Other than herself and the Fae, though the Fae wasn't exactly present either. Even the surface levels of Kohr's ocean were devoid of life, the lack of sunlight turning even the first meters into a void. All of it was cold, and still.

She swam for the better part of ten minutes when she felt something brush against her mind. Whispers yet again, but different than what she had perceived from the creature of light and space. When the whispers of the light had felt more like a byproduct of the powerful magic, this felt much more deliberate. A being wielding mind magic. And it was closing in, she could feel its presence now, a few hundred meters away. The mind she felt was absurdly powerful. Overwhelming in scope and presence, as if a magical ocean within the watery depths.

Ilea steeled herself, forming two ashen copies of herself, imbuing them. *Come and get me out if my mind is taken out, hide for now.* She saw them float away in the dark, vanishing a few seconds later when they exited the range of her dominion. Ahead she could see nothing, her enhanced eyes and the light of her fires letting her pierce the dark but there was nothing to behold where she knew the monster to be. Its presence only grew, Ilea now feeling the magical pressure even without considering its mind.

You are in the realm of gods, godslayer.

She smiled, though apprehensive. This creature was entirely unknown to her, and it was possible she had simply been lucky with the one before. A strange presence entered her dominion, though she could not make out a shape nor could she identify the being. But she knew it was there.

"Hello there, being in the dark," she sent, trying to establish a connection. Just in case she was facing an Enavurin or something similar.

The connection was refused, the whispers in her mind increasing a thousandfold.

Ilea grit her teeth, healing flowing through her mind to keep the incredible pressure at bay. Distorted visions punched into her mind. She felt pain despite her negation, felt terror despite her resistances. Irrational, mind magic induced, she knew in some part of her but still she screamed, screamed in the dark oceans of Kohr, the remaining air leaving her lungs.

The pressure didn't ease, building like a white noise in her mind for what felt like minutes. Ilea teleported as far as she could, finding respite for a mere moment as her third tier healing flowed into her brain. She shuddered, her lips trembling before the terrifying spell found and gripped her once again. She took in a sharp breath, water filling her lungs before she started coughing, the visions far worse than the sensation of drowning.

She kept teleporting, the short moments when the being searched for her mind enough for her to keep her sanity, healing flowing through her mind time and time again. She couldn't see it but she knew it was there. Somewhere in the dark.

Ilea knew the longer she remained, the more she would resist its magic, the higher were her chances of finding and actually fighting it. If such a thing was possible at all.

Godslayer

What the hell am I doing?

'ding' 'Fear Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 9'

Why am I hiding? Why am I running away?

Ilea slowed her breathing. She focused on her meditation, her healing. The terror felt overwhelming, pushing against her human mind, primal instincts demanding that she flee, promising that whatever this being was, she could not stand against it. A mere human? Fighting against this invisible terror. It was not something she could even consider, her senses were overwhelmed. And still she remained, floating without movement. Her eyes were closed, the visions flowing through her brain, growing worse by the moment.

But she refused to give in.

She was not the same human who ran and hid from the Elves back in Riverwatch. She was not the same human paralyzed by the sheer power of the Basilisk. She had seen the Daughters of Sephilon, had trained with the Meadow. And she had hunted four marks.

Godslayer.

That is who you are.

The voice resounded in her mind. Somewhere below and above the terror that gripped her, paralyzed her. It was her own voice she realized.

It was her.

And she was here.

Not fleeing. Not paralyzed in fear.

'ding' 'Mental Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 26'

She was here to hunt.

Ilea opened her eyes, feeling now that her mana was being drained. She felt the water in her lungs but she knew she didn't need any air to survive and fight. She could feel the terror in her mind, but she knew it was just magic. Just a spell, forcing its way into her head.

For a split second she felt calm, as her magic was drained and her mind was battered. She considered the switch and calmly flipped it.

Her magic surged, a shield in her mind now thrumming with newfound life. She felt it through her whole body. Her mind focused instantly. A chunk of her mana was gone but the drain slowed now, slowed as her fourth tier rushed through her. The terror was there but her mental fortitude felt hardened, as if layered now in pure arcane power. She shot forward, towards where she felt the source of mind magic. Nothing was there, not in her dominion, not in her vision.

And yet she impacted. Ashen limbs striking into a solid surface, invisible to her. Ash spread out and white flame took hold. Ilea felt the strength in her arms, the light of her runes flaring up when her fists impacted the surface, waves of force and magic exploding out in the waters, blue and white lines like cracks appearing in the dark. She felt her body burn away, felt her bones and muscles tremble with each dull impact.

Something felt wrong.

Her fires waned. The lines of her intrusion fading far too quickly. The waves of arcane energies exuded with each punch, gone in moments. *Absorbed.* She felt an attack coming, raising her arm

when something impacted her. It was heavy and fast, the waves in the water suggesting a smooth limb, one of many. Ten strikes slammed into her, runes flaring up on her body as the dulled impacts resounded, deflected and blocked by magic and ash, by golden shields flaring up, now inlaid with a tinge of blue and the same runes visible on her form. Shock waves expanded with every hit, water rushing in to fill the gaps before being pushed away once more.

Ilea did not move. Swaths of mana were ripped away with every strike, meditation and her first tier healing regenerating what they could, Sentinel Core absorbing from the magic in her mind. She was losing, but she remained there, in the face of this being. Her spells were absorbed and so she stopped using spells. She dodged the strikes she could see coming, many far too quick and erratic to avoid without teleporting. Instead she punched back, with no magic, only her fourth tier enhanced body and the strength she could summon. With the second hit, she converted her intrusion spells into physical power with the third tier of her Embered Form. The shock waves rattled through her body, but she found the damage that her punches did to herself absorbed by her mana, and strengthened yet again by her fourth tier.

They exchanged blows for three more seconds, Ilea teleporting out when her health reached the half point. The arcane within her waned, the frayed feeling of her very cells set alight returning.

Her mana had taken a hit, more so now that she healed herself with her returning third tier of Reconstruction. But even the physical blows had only harmed her mana.

The pressure fell back on her mind, her teeth gritting once more but already it felt just a little more manageable. Known. The battle had not lasted long enough for her to resist the magic itself to a much larger degree, but just knowing the spell, having felt it, having seen the visions. Some of the unknown had vanished.

She had found the beast. Had exchanged blows with it.

Ilea focused on teleportation for now, sending the occasional ashen spear in the direction of the beast she knew to be there. She didn't know if it could absorb the ash or the magic within but it hardly mattered with a creature as powerful as this one. She focused more on distracting it, unable to go in without her fourth tier for now as her resilience against the monster and its magic grew with every passing minute. When she felt her fourth tier return, she immediately teleported to the being and continued her assault.

This time she immediately focused on physical attacks only, the mana it drained from her directly would eventually poison it thanks to her third tier resistance. The surface she felt was solid. It would take minutes or even hours for her to harm it without her magic, but enhanced by the fourth tier, she could feel the impacts, could feel the vibrations and the movements of the creature whenever she punched it. The blows she suffered in turn would have been problematic but with the limitations of her fourth tier, she could not remain long enough to begin with.

With it active however, she felt like she was punching at least near the monster's weight class. The questions remained if its resilience and regeneration were as great as hers. Something Ilea didn't expect to find out in a mere matter of minutes.

Again, she broke away, preparing to teleport away as far as she could when she felt a new attack through her precognition. Not magical in nature. She teleported and deactivated her fourth tier, healing herself as she looked into the darkness. Sending out a burning spear of ash, she found a dark cloud where the monster had been. Through it she could see the silhouette of the creature, its physical form made visible by the black mist it had summoned. For just a moment she could see the

sleek surface of the squid like creature, right before the magic in her flames were absorbed, and the distant scene went dark once again.

She had not felt any impending damage from the attack. *Maybe it's just ink, like from a normal squid? Who am I kidding. It's probably acid or something.*

Her mana was rather low, and with her fourth tier on cooldown for at least fifteen seconds, she would have to avoid the creature for the time being. *Might even have to use it just to regain more mana. Those strikes eat up a lot.*

While she regenerated her mana a lot faster during her fourth tier, she didn't have the burst heal of her third tier, meaning the attacks continued to slowly dwindle down her mana. *I'm probably going to get hit by that stuff sooner or later anyway*, she thought and vanished to lessen the mental pressure for a split second. Sending out a beam of Embered Heart, the concentrated heat had a momentary effect, showing a spot of pitch black carapace where it struck. It didn't start glowing however, the fires neither spreading nor punching through as the magic was quickly absorbed. The blemishes she could see near the spot were mended in turn.

Ilea teleported again. *So it's not just absorbing my spells and stealing my mana, it's healing itself while doing so.*

Suppose I'm getting hit by that cloud at one point or the other anyway. If it's a defensive ability, I might as well find out-

A teleport brought her away when the creature sped up and reached her, both the mind magic intensifying and its limbs lashing out to strike her.

Might as well try to find out if I can stay in there to keep attacking.

Ilea vanished again, aimed at the area where she had first seen the dark mist. She could still see the difference with her enhanced sight, though her magic perception didn't pick up anything in the area. Swimming through, she felt her body tense up.

'ding' 'You have been poisoned by the Mists of Clarity – You are paralyzed for eight seconds. Your innards are melting. -1832 Health per second.

She found that her wings weren't affected by the poison cloud. Only her actual limbs. The health loss alone wasn't much of an issue but she felt her organs affected as well, leaving her perception in a slightly clouded state. She was struck a dozen times before she managed to teleport out, her third tier healing mending the internal bleeding, and the damage from the poison. She found she couldn't neutralize it either.

Good, she thought, teleporting a few more times to avoid the approaching creature while the poison ran its course. *Finally, a way to level my poison resistance even higher.*

The effects finally waned after she was struck two more times in quick succession, the eight seconds feeling like an eternity with the two fast moving combatants. *So I can survive*, she thought, teleporting again before she activated her fourth tier. *But the paralyzing effects are a problem. Especially against my mind.* She appeared near where she felt the mind of the monster, striking it repeatedly with her arcane imbued body. Her ashen limbs didn't manage to break through its invisible carapace, the gold and blue shields she summoned shattered with single strikes. Her ash mantle negated some of the damage but the blunt impacts rained into her just as her own punches sent shock waves through the creature and the surrounding waters.

Ilea once again felt the mists coming, her fires flaring up as the poison exploded outwards. Enhanced by the arcane power of her fourth tier, she managed to push them away, landing more hits as the creature whirled around in an attempt to strike back. *One way to avoid it, just burn it all.*

She grinned, pushing herself for another two seconds before she vanished, the arcane magic gone before she healed herself once more. She floated in the dark, alert when the mind magic pressure vanished. Instead she felt an incredible amount of mana coalesce near the creature.

Using your own ace, I see, Ilea thought as she braced for the impact, ready to use her teleportation or Primordial Shift to survive whatever was to come.

Instead she felt nothing, just the dark waters around her, calming fast yet again after the erratic battle.

A strange pulse followed, almost pleasant.