

Ilea glanced between the massive cube and her two companions. *“Looks like it worked.”*

“Most of the power is gone, yes,” Verena answered before she flew over.

“Oh did we do it? I was so nervous!” Owl said, the latter half in a quiet voice. Her ethereal four mark hands were shaking slightly. She laughed. “I nearly missed the first two spells.”

“Good thing you didn’t,” Ilea said with a smile. “Guess we would’ve seen an interesting explosion. Ah well.”

‘ding’ ‘You have helped remove the defensive enchantments of the Soul Forge – One Core skill point awarded’

Nice. So we really did make it. She informed the waiting group with her Telepathy and landed near the entrance.

The others soon gathered too. A large part of the protective stone cover had been blown away by the many spells that had hit the enchantments in their coordinated effort. Bralin started removing the rest when he reached them.

“Perfect. Well done,” Iana said with a bright grin when Aki set the two enchanters down.

The Shades seemed just as excited.

“Kind of wanted to see what would’ve happened on a fail,” Pierce said from within her war machine.

“Yeah, me too,” Ilea said and glanced over.

“Just ask the Meadow to blast you away. I’m sure it wouldn’t have been more impressive than whatever it can conjure up,” Iana said. “Now who will have the honors?”

“Is that even a question?” Pierce asked, looking at Ilea. “She’s the most durable. Whatever is waiting inside, she has the highest chance of survival.”

“Still hoping for that explosion, hmm?” Ilea asked.

“Something along those lines,” Pierce mused and made some distance.

Ilea couldn’t perceive any major defensive enchantments anymore, her dominion still prevented from piercing the steel walls however. “Anything else we can do?”

Iana’s eyes had been glowing blue the entire time. She shook her head lightly. “No. The entrance is still locked but it’s purely physical.” She walked down the stairs to join Pierce. “And I agree. You have the best chance. Good luck.”

“So easily discarded,” Ilea mused.

Verena gave her a thumbs up and joined the others. Owl was the only one that remained by her side.

“What?” the Lich asked when Ilea glanced over. “I might not be as versatile, but I have more health than you. And more levels.”

“Not exactly, if we count all Classes,” Ilea mused as she charged up her space manipulation.
“Ready?”

“When you are,” Owl replied.

She smiled and grasped the large double gates with her control, her hands closed into fists, each focused on one of the steel doors before she pulled with a charge.

Steel screeched and shook, the metal pulled outwards by an arm’s length before it gave against her invisible grasp. The thick steel doors were ripped out, hinges and all before they flew to the side. One impacted the ground with a loud crash. The other one sent a wave of fluorescent blue water splashing out where it landed.

“Nice!” Owl rejoiced. “Should we go inside?”

A mist of steam floated out from the open entrance. Her dominion could pierce inside now, instantly locking onto the many Soul Warden models, one especially. Most were the Tuned model but one was larger, metallic wings attached to its back, a spear in its hands instead of a sword. Its head was adorned by a steel crown. But the being wasn’t moving, nor did she feel any magic come from its form.

“Lots of inactive Wardens in there,” Ilea warned. “And one... creature,” she mused with a smile.

“What is it?” Pierce asked.

Ilea looked at Owl and gestured her to follow. “Let’s find out.”

The steam was neither toxic nor curse or death ridden, to Ilea’s disappointment. The innards of the cube were sectioned into rooms and halls, much like someone would design an underground research facility. It reminded her of Nes and Scipio’s home in the north in some ways. There wasn’t quite as much memorabilia as with their facility but a few rooms were definitely made to be comfortable. There was even a hearth in one, but Ilea didn’t understand where the smoke would go.

Most of the rooms however did seem to be dedicated to research and experimentation. She could see several libraries and four halls reminding her of Bralin’s smithy in the Pit. Those housed most of the war machines. *Are they really war machines if they can’t be piloted? War monsters? Soul machines?*

The central hall mimicked the external cube in shape, horizontal platforms built within suggesting that this was indeed the intended orientation of the facility. Within was what she assumed to be the main lab. Mostly because it was the most chaotic one. Tables and workbenches covered in tools and notes, tubes with dead beings strewn about. A few corpses lay dissected and below glass covers on enchanted steel tables. She saw dwarves, humans, even an elf. At the center of the main lab stood a four meter high apparatus made of metal, a dozen arms connected to it and aimed forward, various tubes and containers attached to it. Ahead of it was a platform equipped with various mounting supports similar to the ones Bralin had used to prop up her living armor.

Ilea teleported herself and the Lich in front of the closed entrance. She saw no enchantments but the door was closed. Unlocked however. “Don’t kill it,” she said to the being.

“I can perceive it now... and I’m curious too. I liked the other one,” Owl replied.

Ilea brought them inside with another teleport, her eyes falling on the single small being made of black abyss. Large white eyes turned her way as its head tilted to the side, a telepathic giggle flowing through their minds. She had found another Fae.

“Hello,” she sent with a smile and waved at the creature.

It moved its six wings of white energy, floating a meter up with a twirl.

Ilea watched, entranced by the complexity she perceived with her space manipulation.

The Fae spread its handless arms to the side before it spoke, its voice a high pitch and fluctuating in a confusing pattern. “Who intrudes THE KING’S domain?! You will die for this transgression.”

“Eh,” Ilea got out and glanced at the Lich next to her, both of them holding back their laughter. She knew not to underestimate a Fae, more than most. But the voice coupled with what it had said was a little too much to take seriously.

“How dare you, think to ridicule me!? The almighty KHAN!” the Fae exclaimed and moved its arms towards them.

Ilea tensed up, her body bursting into flame, her mind ready to teleport the Lich and herself. Her companion remained entirely calm, still apparently amused by the creature.

[Fae – lvl 112]

A burst of space magic rushed out from the Fae’s hands. The blast didn’t quite reach the two intruders, just barely sending a few pieces of paper from a nearby workbench fluttering down to the steel floor.

“What’s going on?” Ilea asked, the tension in her body gone too as her flame deactivated.

The Fae floated down a little, its arms to its side once more, the previous tension gone entirely.

Friend, the Fae spoke. The voice felt distinctly feminine. A feeling of calm followed with it, interest, trust, and some amusement coupled with the simple message. It paused and seemed to consider, floating just a little closer.

Arbiter

Creator

Greetings

“Greetings,” Ilea said, again. “*Didn’t expect to meet one of you down here. What was all that about?*”

The Fae seemed amused, tilting its head to the side as it took in both Ilea and the Greater Lich.

Unusual

Pair

“*I suppose we are. You’ve been trapped in here then? Or is this your facility? You did just call yourself Khan,*” Ilea said.

“*This being... houses two souls,*” Owl said. “*It’s... confusing. Is this normal?*”

Ilea shrugged. “*You’re the soul mage, you tell me.*”

The Fae giggled, a hand in front of its non-existent mouth.

Abnormal

Soul

Remains

Not

My

Facility

Khan. Joggoth. Capture. Me. Die. In. Battle.

The being floated around the hall and motioned to the massive apparatus and then the large inactive war machine.

Unfortunate. It sent and paused. Another giggle. *Accident.*

“That was supposed to be his, I assume?” Ilea asked, looking at the massive steel creation.

Unknown, the Fae sent, very much in the know.

Ilea smiled. “Let me guess,” she mused and activated Fabric Tear, the machine switching places with the Fae. “Something like that?”

Accident

Reenactment

Accurate

Impressive

Arbiter

It nodded to underline its words, acting surprised at Ilea’s apparently boundless intuition.

“*Ilea. I have the feeling that it wasn’t an accident at all,*” Owl whispered to her via telepathy.

“*Oh gosh jolly, Lich King, what do tell gave it away?*” Ilea asked with an exaggerated expression of shock. “*It’s a Fae. I’m pretty sure that capturing the little buggers for anything but a nice cup of tea is a baaaaad idea.*”

“*I... see. I’m a little confused still. Its essence is quite beautiful. The other bit looks similar to that of your companions, but somehow... in there too. It’s confusing,*” she said and shook her head as if trying to get rid of the image in her mind.

“*I’m Lilith,*” Ilea introduced herself. “*I’ve met several of your kind before.*”

Lilith, the being sent with a note of both interest and respect.

Beings

Similar

Yet

Different

“*I’m not sure I get your meaning. I’m not exactly on the level of a Fae when it comes to mental capacity,*” she said.

Self

Aware

Amusing

Different. Whole.

Mark. Similar.

Friend. To. Fae.

“Alright. Different... Whole? So you’re from a different cluster? Is that an issue?” she asked.

Coexistence

Always

Preferable

She knew the being spoke the truth. On a downright instinctual level. “Good. Do you lay claim to the stuff here or can I and my companions look through and take what we want?”

Knowledge

Gained

Long

Ago

Commence, the being spoke and floated closer.

Accompany?

“You want to accompany me?” Ilea spoke out loud.

Interesting

Being, it sent, just as straight forward as the Baron tended to be.

“Sure, I suppose. If you can explain what happened here and why you’ve got what I think is the soul of Khan Joggoth trapped within you,” Ilea said.

“Imbecile. I will grind your very soul down until nothing remains of what you were and ever will be,” the Fae spoke in a downright adorable voice, hands shaking in outrage before it resumed a calm stance.

Apologies

Outburst

Soul. Transfer. Initiated. On. Presumed. Death. Skill? Enchantment? Both. Likely. Joggoth. Cruel. Arrogant. Transfer. Interrupted. Soul. Fused. Control. Remains. Mostly.

“So you’re the one who defeated this legendary soul mage?” Ilea asked.

The Fae waved her off.

Amusing

Ilea failed to grasp exactly what the being tried to convey with the feelings and thoughts added to the sent word. “Alright then. If you don’t think you’re a danger to other creatures with that soul

inside of you, you can travel with me for a while. You'll have to stay back when it's dangerous though, and I'll have you hide occasionally. Not sure how that will work if you have those outbursts..."

Acceptable, the being sent with a thought of amusement.

"Also, this shoulder is already taken," Ilea said and tapped her right one.

Envy

Of

Prime

Shoulder

"*Primordial actually*," Ilea answered.

The Fae tilted its head and vanished, appearing on her left instead.

Left

Good

Too

Ilea glanced down at the creature that simply sat and observed, the wisps of the fabric moving around as if at its will. *This one seems more mature than Violence for some reason. Would it even have talked to me if not for the mark the Baron has left on me?*

"RABBLE!!" the Fae shouted in her ear in a high pitched voice.

"Yes," Ilea said and patted the little being with an ashen limb. *Maybe not the best idea.* She observed the being for a few minutes with Owl floating around her. "Do you need help to get back to your cluster?" she asked after a while, neither her or the Lich able to perceive anything particularly dangerous about the creature. The Baron had incredible space magic at his disposal for his level and could survive attacks that would entirely remove a level one hundred human from existence but Ilea doubted the creature alone would be able to harm her, or anyone above level two hundred. She was pretty sure about it, mostly because she knew it was a deliberate choice. The Fae could simply move through the fabric with the entirety of its self, but it didn't. If the Meadow thinks highly of their power and knowledge, there was no other explanation.

The second soul was concerning, of course, but both the Fae and Owl confirmed that the control of the body remained in the hands of the original owner, apart from the short outbursts.

Now

Free

Appreciate

Offer

Hmm, this one is more willing to talk in less confusing words too. Either more familiar with humans or well, less of a little shit than Violence.

She grinned, thinking of the little bugger. *Hah, might as well.* "Hey. Found other Fae. New friend or dangerous?" she sent the words to the creature.

The being on her shoulder looked up and away.

Ilea didn't miss that the direction corresponded exactly with where she could feel the mark on her friend. *Perceptive, are we?* Even with everything she had, she couldn't really see the messages sent through her marks. Other than a vague magical pulse to a random direction, easily missed in the ambient mana and the magic of her auras.

"Violence." It was all the being sent back, the meaning as multifaceted and confusing as anything else it could've said.

She knew him somewhat by now however. There was interest in there, some joy, hope, jealousy, and a seething want for absolute destruction. *Now I want them both to be on my shoulders like some kind of space combat drones.*

"I don't suppose you're particularly interested in violence?" Ilea asked the being as she started towards the exit.

Not. Direct. Violence. Magical. Demonstration. Of. Power. Amusing. And. Consequences. Of. Actions, the being replied, each word sent separately.

"Any reason you can't speak like when Khan takes over your form? I'm pretty sure you lack any voice organs but it still somehow works when there's an outburst," Ilea said.

Slowed. For. Your. Benefit. I. Lack. Power. To. Communicate. Adequate.

"I see. So how would you normally communicate?" Ilea asked.

The Fae tilted its head to the side. *Sure?*

"Yeah, go for it. I'll feed you a couple thousand mana if it's worse than anything else I've been subjected to," she said.

A fast moving set of images, thoughts, and feelings invaded her mind, cut off after a split second when the Fae reeled back, holding its tiny head with one of its hands.

Ilea healed it immediately. "Sorry. I forgot to say I have a third tier resistance."

Know. Defense. Perceived. More. Power. Than. Anticipated.

"I see. Well I didn't expect your normal way to talk would be seen as a mental attack, but I suppose I shouldn't be surprised," she mused. "Guess you can keep it to simple words then, for the simple monkey. Ah, I've got a friend I'd love to introduce you to. It's a massive fan of your species. I'd think it could handle your normal way of talking."

Oh? Amusing. Acceptable.

So this one is just Amusing instead of Violence? Baron Amusing? Lady Amusing? I'm not sure about those yet. Needs more work. "Do you have a name?" she sent.

"I'm Khan Joggoth, and you will bow before me," the Fae replied in a calm tone.

"Not you, the other one," Ilea said.

Name. Meaningless. Choose. Human.

"I'll have to think of something," Ilea murmured as she stepped out of the Soul Forge, her head to the side as she looked at the Fae.

“Oh, it’s Violence,” Pierce said and waved.

“It’s not the same one,” Verena said.

“A... Fae? What?” Bralin added as the two Shades bowed in a fluid motion.

Aki stepped a little closer. “Another one. When will you end your ceaseless need to collect strange beings from ancient ruins?”

The Fae ignored everyone but Aki, simply looking at the Taleen machine.

“*Found something amusing?*” Ilea asked.

Hmm, the being replied, not offering anything else.

“So what’s inside?” Pierce asked. “Other than that small space thingie?”

Small? said the being to Ilea.

“*She’s not a space mage. I know the concept of size doesn’t exactly apply to you,*” she replied.

Simple

Mind

“*Hmm, yes,*” Ilea mused, the two of them looking at Pierce.

“What’s with that mocking look in your eyes?” the woman asked.

Ilea turned around before she gestured everyone to follow. “It seems safe enough in there. Plenty of research, inactive wardens, and machines I have no clue what to do with. We have time too so knock yourselves out. Our arena fights are another day off.”

“Treasure,” Pierce mused as she stored her armor and vanished.

Iana walked in after her, dragging Chris with her. “Don’t touch anything yet!”

“I think you can get up now,” Ilea said to the Shades, their heads still bowed. They didn’t react to what she said. “*Can you tell them to stop bowing? They think you some kind of god,*” she said to the Fae.

Am

“Great,” she murmured and heard a giggling sound within her mind.

The Shades lifted their heads a moment later, looking at the being before they floated past, bowing once more right when they went by.

“You don’t want to go in?” Ilea asked, looking at Aki.

The being walked closer, eliciting a response from the Fae who hovered towards it. “Someone should guard the entrance.”

Ilea formed two ashen copies, each receiving a layer of her mantle. “These should be more than enough. Go play.”