

Ilea landed near the massive gate of the supposed main Guild hall. The connection to the Sphere remained. *“So... there’s really a sun in that thing?”*

“A Source. Calling it a sun is... both wrong, and simplified. I’m still deciphering the information I have available, on everything. The nature of the Source is not a priority, nor something I will be able to grasp quickly. It seems even the High Makers did not truly comprehend what they found in Kohr. The Ascended are... terrifying,” Aki spoke.

“Seems like you’ve got your work cut out for you then,” Ilea said. *“Hope you’re not angry that I put you into a supercomputer.”*

“I’m just overwhelmed, Ilea. Even with everything here, it is a lot to take in. I’m not a machine, not in practice,” Aki said.

“Right. You’re a dagger I found in an old dungeon,” she said with a smile, watching the Executioners push open the dusty ancient gates.

“Technically, yes. But you have a hammer now anyway. Perhaps that one will be in control of the next army of forgotten beings you come across,” the dagger said.

“Don’t joke about that. Silent Memory might actually be capable of that. Not in a good way though,” she said and followed the Hunters into the massive hall. Green lamps flickered to life on the ceiling, a few of them not turning on.

“The ancient halls of our enemies,” one of the elves spoke. *“Forgotten. Left to ruin.”* He hissed and sent a sphere of fire into a part of the table. Bits and pieces of stone exploded outwards. *“None to pay for their atrocities.”*

“That was always how it was supposed to end,” Isalthar spoke, moving closer before he touched the elf’s shoulder. *“Thousands will live, due to our actions here.”* He hissed.

“The Monarchs will not watch without action,” Zorithanael spoke. *“A vacuum will be created.”*

“We will deal with that, when the time comes,” Feyrair said with a joyous hiss. *“Now let us feast.”* He summoned a carcass and threw it onto the large table, the dead beast leaving a trail of fresh blood behind as it slid before coming to a stop.

Ilea opened her eyes wide as the elves started hissing, some of them summoning their own food, others simply slumping down onto the various stone chairs, exhausted from the battle.

Violence.

“Yeah. I suppose they do have a way with food,” Ilea said, moving her hand to stop a splatter of blood with her space magic. She chose one of the massive stone chairs and improved it a little with some ash, sitting down before she summoned her own meal. She chose a salad. Not because of the carnage around her, but because she didn’t feel like eating anything hot right now. Even warm was too much. *Gummy teeth. Maybe I should drink smoothies for a while.*

She relaxed in the chair and finally looked through the notifications from the battle.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Taleen Guardian – lvl 203]’

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Taleen Guardian – lvl 210]’

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Taleen Guardian – lvl 160]’

...

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Hunter Praetorian – lvl 753]’

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Executioner Praetorian – lvl 805]’

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Taleen Destroyer – lvl 756]’

...

‘ding’ ‘Your group has defeated [Executioner Praetorian – lvl 806]’

I suppose the Sphere Guardians did fight at my side, she thought with a smile. It felt strange, to think that this was it. She had fought the green eyed machines since Dawntree, coming across the Taleen creations time and time again during her travels. And now. Well, in a way it felt fitting, to have brought an end to it with the strange dagger she had found in her first dungeon. While exploring with Lorcan. He still didn't get that bow. Hmm. She smiled to herself as she recalled the battles, nearly dying against single Centurions, their core explosions enough to endanger even the highest leveled fighters of the expedition.

And now I'm eating in the Guild Hall of the Taleen, alongside the Cerithil Hunters.

Niivalyr entered the hall with a group of elves, Neiphato one of them. He dusted off his coat and sat down next to Ilea.

“You survived,” she murmured.

“Yes, barely,” he answered.

“I'm checking through my messages,” Ilea said, tapping her head.

“I'll do that in a minute,” the elf said and sighed, slumping into his stone chair before he hissed in annoyance. “Who makes chairs out of stone?”

‘ding’ ‘The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 622 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Ashen Titan has reached lvl 619 – Five stat points awarded’

‘ding’ ‘The Primordial Arbiter has reached lvl 612 – One stat point awarded’

Would you look at that. A whopping three levels. She wasn't surprised. Executioners were the only machines aside from the sphere guardians that provided some challenge, and even then she could deal with entire groups of them by now.

‘ding’ ‘Eternal Huntress [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 6’

‘ding’ ‘Eternal Sight [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 14’

‘ding’ ‘Origin of Ash and Embers [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 13’

'ding' 'Ashen Wings [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 29'

'ding' 'Vision of Ash [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 11'

'ding' 'Primordial Shift [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 13'

'ding' 'Primordial Shift [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 14'

'ding' 'Primordial Shift [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 15'

'ding' 'Fabric Tear [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 24'

'ding' 'Reality Warp [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 8'

'ding' 'Primordial Flesh [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 21'

'ding' 'Primordial Flesh [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 22'

'ding' 'Space Manipulation [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 25'

I suppose the corridor was good for something. Not that I'd repeat that.

'ding' 'Ashen Limbs reaches 2nd lvl 13'

'ding' 'Azarinth Barrier [Mystic] reaches 2nd lvl 15'

...

'ding' 'Azarinth Barrier [Mystic] reaches 2nd lvl 20'

'ding' 'Bulwark of Ash reaches 2nd lvl 17'

'ding' 'Identify reaches 2nd lvl 6'

'ding' 'Meditation reaches 3rd lvl 21'

'ding' 'Meditation reaches 3rd lvl 22'

'ding' 'Monstrous reaches 2nd lvl 7'

'ding' 'Oxygen Repository reaches 2nd lvl 18'

'ding' 'Oxygen Repository reaches 2nd lvl 19'

'ding' 'Warhammer Mastery reaches 2nd lvl 5'

...

'ding' 'Warhammer Mastery reaches 2nd lvl 7'

'ding' 'Astral Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 1'

Astral Magic Resistance – 3rd lvl 1

The power of the stars, harnessed and used to wreak unimaginable destruction. Few beings are able to channel this power through their bodies. It would not come as a surprise to find a human, of all beings finding a way to modify their weak vessel for its use. You should not let your encounters fool you, this school of magic is quite extraordinary and just as rare.

2nd stage: You have faced enough wielders of Astral Magic to warrant a second tier resistance. Your body is much less likely to disintegrate against this powerful school of magic.

3rd stage: Your body has survived immeasurable amounts of astral magic, adapting in turn to become considerably more resistant to any adverse effects of this magic. Your natural health,

stamina, and mana regeneration is increased by an additional 1% when in the light or in the proximity of a star.

‘ding’ ‘Astral Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 2’

...

‘ding’ ‘Astral Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 8’

Now that. Is interesting. A breakthrough without using a third tier point. And the benefits for my regeneration are nice to have. Most significant for my stamina actually, with all the bonuses I already have for the rest. Nice.

‘ding’ ‘Blast Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 19’

Not even enough for another void resistance level.

‘ding’ ‘You have learned the General skill – Star Touched – lvl 1’

Star Touched – lvl 1

The Human body is not normally able to channel or absorb the energy of the stars. Great change is required to even consider such a feat. You did it anyway, through sheer tenacity. And have learned to absorb and potentially channel some of the astral energies coursing through the void of space. Please stop.

We both know I won’t stop, Ilea answered with a smile on her face. So. Astral magic, without an evolution, elixir, or anything else. Maybe just the third tier was enough? Or me specifically absorbing the heat and energy in there and shooting it out? Just being in there for a while?

She didn’t particularly care for now. It was nice to have as an option, and for future evolutions it would certainly be a considerable achievement.

‘ding’ ‘You have walked through the fires of a star – One Core skill point awarded’

‘ding’ ‘You have survived the fires of a star – One Core skill point awarded’

‘ding’ ‘You have entered the control room of the central Sphere of Iz – One Core skill point awarded’

‘ding’ ‘You have exchanged the Guardian of Iz – One Core skill point awarded’

Reasonable. Wasn’t really me who replaced the One without Form though. But I suppose Aki got a bit more than just a few core points. Now... can I get a Mystic skill to the third tier?

- Azarinth Barrier [Mystic]

You have pushed the Azarinth Star to its very limits, protecting both yourself and your allies from harm whilst charging into battle. You may wield its full potential, should you will it so.

Why not. I have enough points. I will it so.

'ding' 'Azarinth Barrier [Mystic] reaches 3rd lvl 1

Azarinth Barrier [Mythic] – 3rd lvl 1

Channel your mana through the Azarinth Star to form healing infused golden barriers of arcane magic around you.

2nd stage: Form a powerful barrier in the shape of either a dome or sphere with you at the center. Movement is considerably slowed while this spell is active.

3rd stage: Channel your mana into the Azarinth Star to create an extensive dome or sphere like barrier with you at the center. You cannot move while this barrier is active. All beings within the barrier are healed by any excess mana channeled into the Azarinth Star.

So like a shield the size of my dominion, or larger? Gonna have to test that out. Could be pretty useful if the activation time is short. Not being able to move sucks, but maybe I can teleport away at least?

Ilea touched the necklace when a group of Executioners entered the hall, carrying large carcasses of dead creatures. They threw the bodies onto the large table.

“A gift, and a token. Given freely, and without asking anything in return,” Aki spoke, through one of the beings.

“I shall accept,” Isalthar said, walking over before he ripped out a piece of the large dead monster, its skin a deep blue. He ate the flesh, blood dripping down his chin as he chewed.

“What does that mean?” Ilea asked, glancing over at Elfie.

“An old tradition. Dead prey can be offered in an effort to start some kind of conversation. One preferably without ripping each other to bloodied pieces,” the elf explained. “Blood in place of blood, so to say.”

“I should do that too,” Ilea mused. “Then at least I get something out of it when someone recognizes me.”

Violence, the Fae confirmed.

“It’s about the food though,” Ilea said.

Boring

“You take that back,” she growled.

One of the Executioners stepped forward. “The remaining Hunters in Iz have agreed to join us. Those interested in the conversation. A few have already left.”

“Left? Iz?” Ilea asked.

“Indeed,” Aki replied through another machine that glanced over.

Ilea looked at Isalthar. *“Why would they leave now? Wasn’t the whole purpose of the Hunters the destruction of the Taleen? The end of this war?”*

The white haired healer looked back at her and smiled ever so slightly. *“The war is over, is it not?”*

“Yeah, but what’s the plan? Where are they going? Where are you going?” she asked.

“I am surprised to hear such questions from you of all beings,” Isalthar spoke.

Ilea thought about it for a moment. *“Fair enough.”*

“They will find their way. As will we,” Isalthar said. *“However we remain exiles. Cursed and hunted.”*

“You plan to fight the Monarchs?” Ilea asked.

He looked at her for a long moment. *“That remains to be seen.”*

Isalthar turned towards the Executioner. *“Sentinel of Akelion. We have fought the Taleen for centuries, have crippled production facilities, and have destroyed entire armies. It is strange now, to see our enemies stand before us without hostility. What is it you intend to do with this army of machines?”*

A series of green eyes looked at the Hunter, other elves now interrupting their meal to listen to the Val Akuun and the new Guardian of Iz.

Ilea glanced to the broad entrance where a few more elves arrived, the group soon finding seats at or near the extensive table.

“The One without Form... was limited, in its creation. The Taleen feared a more elaborate being in control of their armies would betray them, in pursuit of total power. A being like myself was never intended to be the Guardian of Iz. And yet I am here.”

“I am a Sentinel, but I’m not bound anymore to one body. It will take time, for me to fully understand the extent of my capabilities and the reach of these creations,” Aki spoke as the Executioner glanced at a closing silver hand. *“The Sentinels aim to defeat monsters in the wild, they aim to teach healing, and to protect adventurers in their endeavors. I was tasked with the protection of our Headquarters, but I believe the interpretation of my duties has to change. In accordance with this newfound power.”*

“Then have you reached a conclusion already?” Isalthar asked.

“These machines were made for war, the One without Form created in a combined effort of fear and greed. I reject those ideas. With this reach, I shall guard not only Ravenhall, but all of humanity and its allies.”

“You will not hunt our kind?” Isalthar said.

“I will answer any aggression as I see fit. Elven, human, dwarvish, Dark One, and anybody else. I have no reason to hunt for your kind, Val Akuun,” Aki spoke.

“And how do we know you speak the truth?” another elf asked.

“I know what you are, Hunter. I do not speak deception. Cer areth akaar,” the Guardian spoke.

Hissing and whispers went through the attendants.

Elfie too hissed at the exclamation.

“What did he say?” she asked him.

“A vow... of sorts. An old one. I have only heard it spoken thrice, every time before a duel to death. It is not spoken lightly,” he answered.

“You are no elf,” another Hunter said.

“It does not matter. The Guardian has said the words,” another elf said.

More hissing went through the room but it seemed most of the present Hunters now had a respectful attitude towards the Sentinel. The entire air in the hall had changed.

Yeah, they do take that seriously.

“I will consider the best use of the remaining facilities and machines under my control. The Cerithil Hunters are welcome in all of them. You may remain in Iz or use the teleportation network of the Taleen to travel to a destination of your choosing, all of you,” Aki said. “I have collected the bodies of the fallen, so they may be consumed.”

Isalthar bowed his head lightly. “I thank you, Sentinel,” he said and turned to address the Hunters in an Elvish speech.

Elfie translated into Ilea’s mind. *“You have answered my call, and I shall answer yours. Our duty is fulfilled, the ancient enemy that has plagued our lands defeated. Better, changed, a guardian to those who might become our allies. I do not ask of you more now but to consider the future. Too long have the Domains remained unchanged. We have found purpose in our exile, in our betrayal, and have been freed of the ancient rules. Those who would consider, I ask you to remain here.”*

Ilea watched as some of the elves whispered amongst each other, many of them hissing. A few stood up and left, some of them showing respect in their departure, others leaving without a word or gesture. None were openly hostile.

She glanced to the entrance where a familiar sand mage landed and rushed inside, wide eyes as he looked at the scene, a tome appearing in his right hand and a pen in the other. He appeared by her side and started talking. “I... ca-” he coughed, bloodied sand hitting the ground. “I... finally... what’s happening? Don’t tell me I missed it!”

“You missed it,” Ilea said immediately. She saw his eye twitch and started healing his mind.

“I shall retell what I have seen, librarian,” Elfie said, a light smile on his face.

Ilea could feel the frustration in Evan as he glanced around the room, unable to even consider sitting down.

“Why did the machines stop?” he asked. “They talked to me!”

“Lilith went into the sphere,” Elfie said. “And replaced the previous Guardian of Iz.”

“You... did...” Evan murmured, looking at her before his eyes wandered to her shoulder. “Is that a... Fae?”

Violence

“I did not mean to offend,” Evan said and bowed lightly.

Manners, the Fae sent to Ilea before he tapped the side of her head.

“Can’t even squish my eyes, why should I bow to you?” Ilea asked. “Elfie can tell you all about it.”

“Elfie?” Evan asked.

“Niivalyr is the name. But I’m sure you’re familiar with Lilith,” Elfie said.

“I am. Now... please repeat what you said before. The Guardian of Iz was replaced?” Evan said, now leaning against the broad table with slightly shaking hands.

Ilea let the two have their talk, herself watching the remaining Elves mingle. There were still quite a few present, including of course the ones she knew. “*With that offer, I guess it’s time to introduce the Hunters to the Accords,*” she sent to the Sentinel of Akelion.

“*I will try to smooth things over. Few of them should have more reason to reject the Cerithil Hunters than they have rejecting me. But we shall discuss the possibilities. Whenever you are ready,*” Aki sent.