

Ilea felt her resistances rise over the next few minutes. She used her gate to escape when the magic of the Oracle started to overwhelm her. Once more, she slowly paced on the salt stone of Kohr, waiting for her mana to recover, her body healed and heavy. She drank more, having survived another two uses of the Fourth tier spell, the latter one successfully dodged with two subsequent teleports, more used to the large area of effect.

There was little nuance in the actions and spells of the Oracle. It reacted to what Ilea did, but it didn't adapt, not really. And it didn't learn. Ilea felt almost disappointed. A god like being with immense power, strong enough to wipe out entire cities or even countries, but there was so little there to see, to feel. She wondered if the creature even felt anything, if there was something left within its mind, or if what she fought was just a husk of magic, roaming through the marshes without a goal or purpose.

She returned and found it again, repeating the fight before she fled again. There were no changes, Ilea now dodging the powerful area spell with ease, the short warning before it activated more than enough for her to escape.

Around an hour passed as she continued to pressure the being, mostly just training her resistances to better deal with the ridiculous magics.

'ding' 'You have survived the Dessicated Land spell – One Core skill point awarded'

'ding' 'Azarinth Barrier [Mythic] reaches 3rd lvl 30'

'ding' 'Bulwark of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 18'

'ding' 'Spear of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 10'

'ding' 'Mist Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 2'

...

'ding' 'Mist Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 5'

'ding' 'Water Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 9'

...

'ding' 'Water Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 12'

Ilea went on. She felt the water and mist pearls burn into her mantle, the effects subdued compared to her first encounter. Fire and intrusion spells crashed into the mist form of the Oracle, the creature floating without reaction. The only indication that it was a living creature at all was the magic emanating from its figure, and the vaguely humanoid features.

Ilea teleported twice when the fourth tier spell activated, seeing the nearby trees and ponds bereft of their water. She stood less than half a meter away from the reach of the spell, the effect unchanging between uses. It remained strong enough to activate her perception spike, the issue more related to

her mind getting knocked out than because of the health loss. She even considered it a higher risk, in case the Oracle tried something else in that split second where her brain recovered.

She teleported back in before the falling rain halted, her own Fourth Tier activating as she resumed the offense. *I wonder if I can even kill it.* She could tell the water absorbing spell of the creature affected the density of the mist close to it, marginally, but there was a change. If Ilea couldn't out damage the monster's recovery, they were in a stalemate.

She ignored the mounting damage on her mantle, pumping more and more destructive mana into the ethereal creature until she saw the two white eyes light up with power. *No precognition. And the mana usage is low. Space magic?*

Ilea could feel the pull, as if the two eyes wanted to draw her in. The spell was simple enough, and resisted just as easily. She had dealt with far more complex and powerful space magic from the Meadow. *It's not stopping.* She could feel the power increase, the spell remaining simple at its core but the mana used pulled more with every passing moment. She knew she could escape, either using her teleportation or a gate, but it really was the first interesting thing to happen in the past hour, and Ilea didn't plan to miss it.

Deactivating her space magic resistance was an option, then she would immediately be moved to wherever the eyes were pulling her. But she was more interested to see if the Oracle had the raw power to move her without any help. The Meadow still managed, albeit not far, and with far more complex spells to account for her defenses.

Ilea wasn't disappointed. She felt the power of the spell increase to ridiculous degrees until she saw the shift. The surroundings changed immediately, the wisps different and less defined. Her marks remained but the directions were obscured.

Everything around was made up of dense mist, the ground perfectly even with a thin layer of water on top. She could barely pierce the veil, even with her dominion.

There was no air to breathe, there was no wind, no sound beside her own heart beating. She felt the dense mana all around, even more prominent than when she had stood right next to the Oracle. Ilea remained at her highest increased weight, her resilience as high as it went. She felt the heat within her build up, the surroundings cold.

Another realm?

Not quite, she thought, looking at the wisps. She felt some familiarity with the concept of this space, from her experience with Primordial Shift. Ilea couldn't quite define it, her understanding of the fabric more based on instinct and feel rather than on academic understanding. It wasn't the ever present mists, the lack of air, nor the high mana density.

Kohr and Elos felt grounded, massive, the wisps almost palpable, the fabric feeling vast and unending, part of something greater. This felt like an illusion of sorts, a small fabricated piece of reality. Real enough in everything important, but forced into existence by magic alone.

A domain that was not hers.

Ilea felt the attack coming, a blade of mist that rushed through the space without a sound, wielded by the floating form of the Oracle. She could see it, right before the being arrived. No longer did it have any eyes, no longer did it stay still. Instead it flew, wielding floating blades of coalescing mist, twirling around itself to increase the impact.

Golden shields came to life, walls of burning ash forming in front of her, Ilea raising her arms to block the heavy impact. Her defenses were broken more than cut, the momentum behind the silent blade crashing past and slamming into her chest. The wave of force traveled through her as mist magic stripped away her fire and ash. She was raised and sent flying despite her weight, her shock absorption and immunity to getting stunned keeping her in the fight as she landed with a heavy impact, already healing the extensive internal bleeding and damage to her organs.

Another blade was already there, the Oracle keeping up with her flight.

Ilea teleported, as far as she could to avoid the blade and to give herself some time, her weight decreasing again as her wings and fires spread. Her Fourth Tier came to life, blue runes lighting up as she felt arcane power flow through her every cell. She got a second to recover, the Oracle upon her yet again. She teleported, unable to see or hear the creature now lurking deep within the mists, her precognition the only thing that warned her of the arriving blades.

She sent out a chaotic blast of Embered Heart, to where she had expected the being. The spell tore a column of fire through the mists, only the tip of a single blade visible from the Oracle rushing through the air to reach her.

Ilea raised her defenses, the silent blade shattering the gold and blue barriers before ripping through her ash and armor, slowed enough for her to block the strike with her raised arms. Silent Memory appeared and rushed out, only to be sent flying by a single strike, gone into the mists. Ilea punched as burning ash spread out and ashen limbs cut towards the floating fog like figure.

The Oracle dodged back and spun around, her long blades slashing deep into Ilea's side, past the ash and stopped by the blue light of the Fourth Tier.

Ilea staggered to the side with the impact though remained on the ground.

Reverse healing burned into the creature as it dodged to avoid the spreading flames. Mana flared up all around as the fires were pushed back.

Another chunk of mana gone.

Ilea teleported yet again, this time getting close to the creature she still saw. Her ashen limbs cut into the faceless being, a single punch spreading Archon Strike and Tempered Seal into her enemy, leaving behind a mark that she could track. Another strike landed on her despite her precognition, the high weight more detriment now that the Oracle had changed its fighting style. She was pushed back but managed to land a few slashing strikes with her ashen limbs in return.

Another strike forced Ilea to teleport away. She saw a silver thread come through the mist and wrap around her arm, the hammer returned as she tracked the fast approaching Oracle with the mark she had left.

It moved silently and floating as if carried by the absent winds, spinning with its blades angled perfectly, fast enough to nearly counter all the teleports.

Ilea deactivated her Fourth Tier, seeing her mana lowered from the hits she had already taken. She used a charged push of space magic, aimed towards the creature.

For just a moment, the mist was pushed aside, the Oracle slowed ever so slightly, the last bits of flame flickering on its form. A dozen tendrils of mist, invisible to everything but Ilea's eyes, reached up into the endless fog, moving as the creature moved, pulling forward the blade wielding arm about to strike Ilea.

She summoned a gate to Kohr and stepped through, closing it just before the weapon made of mist could reach her.

‘ding’ ‘Mist Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 6’

‘ding’ ‘You have escaped the Domain of the Lost – One Core skill point awarded’

Another fourth tier spell? Or just a place one is not supposed to escape from?

Ilea took in a deep breath, recovering her lost health. She had spent barely ten seconds in the strange mist domain, but already she had learned some things. Cracking her neck, she grinned. *Finally. Guess I reached the point where a real fight is at least possible.*

And I still have my gates set in there. Question is if the space is always there or if it's summoned when the thing uses some sort of spell.

She focused on recovering her mana, her weight returning back to normal, her heavy armor stored again.

Ilea summoned a gate when she was ready. It opened, and she stepped through.

Back within the mist. The ground remained covered in a thin layer of water. There was no air to breathe, and no sound came from around her.

She smiled.

No more water drop dancing. Though I do wonder what those mist strings implied.

For now, she decided on just facing the blade wielding creature, now with her full speed. It took less than a second for her to be attacked. This time, she crouched, having seen the blade come with her precognition. She spread her burning ash and stepped aside to avoid the second cut, delivering a single punch to mark the creature and to damage it.

Ilea saw the Oracle spinning backwards, the blades moving with it, two horizontal swipes too fast for her to dodge. She teleported instead, but forward and not back, closing the distance immediately before she delivered another punch. This time, she flew away just as the Oracle spun aside with the same fast strikes, before her precognition even warned her. She stayed in the air, and stayed moving.

Burning fires spread out as she watched the fast being close the distance, easily matching Ilea's speed. She sent out a chaotic beam of heat and energy, watching as a torrent of water shot up from the still and liquid surface of the ground, absorbing all the damage as the Oracle came close.

Ilea engaged, blue runes coming to life as all of her abilities were enhanced. She dodged the fast strikes with quick movements of her wings, spinning in the air before she delivered a kick into the figure's chest, then an elbow into its neck, both sending waves of destructive healing into whatever form it had, reverse reconstruction flowing into it in turn, a new mark set. She kept up the spin and sped up to avoid the retaliating strikes, teleporting when a torrent of water shot up from below.

Once more she appeared, next to the mark where her strikes landed, devastating waves of intrusion burning into the figure, ash spreading, and limbs leaving burning furrows in the moving mist. She was gone again before the blades reached, but found the strikes mere faints, too fast for her to react

to with her precognition. She spun aside when the real strikes came, golden and blue shields flaring up when the second blade struck her arm.

Ilea lost a chunk of mana and was sent spinning through the air. She focused on her dominion, seeing the Oracle keep up to deliver another blow, this one piercing and aimed at her chest. Ilea formed a gate before her, the other end within this realm as well. Stabilizing in the air, she saw her mark move from next to her to where the other gate was placed. Cutting the two, she saw the mark fall to the ground for a split second, flying again the moment after.

Strings cut?

She grinned at the thought, Embered Heart spreading out to clear some of the mists. Ilea used her gate again, right in front of the rushing creature, but this time she saw it stop and veer to the side almost immediately.

Ilea dodged the blade and moved in, only to fly back to avoid the second, another feint, another three, and then two attacks she couldn't avoid without a teleport. Vanishing, she appeared as far away as she could, unable to determine the limits of this mist laden plane.

Silent Memory appeared in her hand as she rushed in again, reapplying her mark with every attack, the only thing that allowed her to track the creature within the oppressive mists. She flew and spun, in and out, both her and the Oracle adjusting their feints and counters. She grinned, teleporting back and away before she activated her Primordial Shift, creating another strange domain within the already fabricated space.

Ilea grinned, taking in a deep breath or at least trying. The fires of creation burned around her, space itself moving as the dull impacts of mist blades slammed into her defenses. Bit by bit, everything was cut away but with her absorption and regeneration increased by both the Primordial Shift and her Fourth Tier, she came out with more than when she went in, by virtue of the ridiculous magical power employed by the monster she faced.

The fight went on, strikes exchanged with Ilea avoiding and dodging when her Fourth Tier was unavailable, fleeing into the Primordial Shift, and returning when she couldn't avoid a strike. Her space magic kept her in the fight at all, the Oracle too fast for her to fight without her empowered state, too powerful to defend against even with everything she had. Avoiding the hits was the only thing she could do, and when she couldn't, she had to retreat.

Ilea appeared in Kohr with her severed right arm flopping to the ground next to her, cut just before she had left. Her health was low, her mana even lower. The gate had closed behind her, not that she thought the Oracle could join her here. It was obvious to her by now, whatever it was that she was fighting, it wasn't the real enemy.

But she didn't care.

Why would she? This was the best close combat fight she'd had in a long time. Perhaps since the Queen in Erendar. And as long as she didn't provoke the being that pulled the strings, she could keep the fight going.

Ilea teleported her right arm towards herself, ash extending to push the limb against her shoulder, her healing doing the rest. She raised her hand and moved her fingers, smiling to herself as she took in a deep breath.

Straight oppressive power. Each strike more powerful than what even the Meadow sends my way. Blades with magic dense enough to cut my bones.

“It’s good to be alive,” she said to herself, glancing at the silver hammer on the ground slowly spreading its threads again. She watched the wracked landscape of Kohr, impatient to regenerate her resources, nothing else on her mind but to go back into the mist. To fight a goddess perhaps, or the marionette controlled by one. Another Drake on her path. One she could test herself against. One that didn’t care to finish her as fast as possible. One that didn’t learn the same way she did.

Ilea knew that she could win. But until then, she had to fight perfectly, had to use her resources perfectly. Every mistake cost her time to recover, could take her out of the flow of battle. This time, she stored her hammer, the divine artifact not strong enough to make a difference in this battle.

Ilea knew that she could win. But she hoped it would take a while. Blue runes flared up on her body, ash wings thrumming with power and a grin on her face as she summoned her gate into the endless mists.