

## Chapter 840 A relaxing afternoon break

Ilea found that her wings didn't fit into the tight corridor dug by one of Aki's machines. Dissolving them, she instead just jumped down. The tunnel went nearly straight down, her descent more of a fall. The occasional shower of sparks lit up the dark when her ash touched the stone walls rushing past.

She saw the ground coming, ashen limbs slamming out into the walls, digging deep and instantly stopping her momentum. Ilea didn't even notice the shock. *Disappointing. Gravity isn't what it used to be.*

Jumping down the rest of the way, Ilea landed as silently as she could with her relative weight.

Aki stood waiting, the tight corridor giving way to what seemed like a cavern at first.

Ilea quickly recognized the familiar spherical shapes left behind by various void magic spells she had encountered in the past. Not so much an underground cave, but a battleground much like what she had left behind with the Void Lord. She did recognize more rectangular shapes here and there, but there were few.

No light source other than herself and Aki was present. There were no noises at all that she could hear.

***'ding' 'You have entered the blood soaked caverns'***

Ilea couldn't smell any blood, but what she could see were rotted corpses. Most of the armored and humanoid, but there were plenty of Void Creatures as well. Dead ones, similar to what she had seen in Tremor. There were other versions as well, some smaller than Soul Rippers, others larger. The monsters were hacked apart, limbs cut through, deep cuts in their strangely shaped heads, those who had heads at all. Dozens of them littered the spherical shapes in the ground.

The knights didn't look much better. Missing limbs, heads, and bowels. The injuries themselves suggested void magic.

"*Any clue who they were?*" Ilea asked, spreading her wings now that she had enough space once more. She flew over to one of the more intact corpses and crouched down.

"*Humans. But these corpses are old. Ancient. Likely from before the Extraction,*" the machine said. "*There are faded banners, leaders among the knights. Farther in there are supplies and remnants of campsites.*"

"*Void monsters crawling around then?*" Ilea asked.

"*There is one. But most of the monsters here are human. Or they were human, once. Knights of Marahn. Records found in Rhyvor libraries suggest they were a neighboring kingdom to the north. The crest they carry shows their goddess Liria. They retain most of their abilities with their weapons, but they're more bestial, faster, and more brutal than most humans I have seen. The range I encountered was seven to nine hundred.*"

"*More zombie knights. I know the kind,*" Ilea said and cracked her neck.

*“The sound of battle will attract more of them. A lot of teleportation and physical attacks, coupled with light magic. But the main issue is the one Void creature I encountered. It took out two Executioners in seconds. A flying creature, two wings of magic and a vaguely ball shaped main body, made entirely of writhing flesh. It can shoot beams that break through an Executioner’s shield instantly.”*

*“I thought you weren’t sure if there was anything interesting here,”* Ilea sent back with a smile, standing up once more. *“Both seem like fun monsters to battle.”*

*“You’re far more resilient than an Executioner,”* Aki sent. *“I didn’t want to get you excited when it could just be a mundane four mark.”*

Ilea grinned. *“A mundane four mark. Nice.”*

*“If you find more tunnels that look the same as the one we came through, my drill machines are going deeper, but they have yet to find anything worthwhile in this location.”*

*“The Ascended facility?”* Ilea asked.

*“That is the goal. There were signs in the caverns occupying the void creature.”*

*“I’ll be on my way then,”* Ilea sent.

*“Can you send this one back to Iz?”* Aki said.

Ilea opened a gate. *“I’ll report back when I have something.”*

The Executioner’s eyes shone a little brighter before it stepped through the gate, the magic vanishing to leave her alone in the ancient corpse riddled cavern.

She took in a deep breath. *“Bones and rot. Absolutely disgusting,”* she murmured, moving her wings to fly over the uneven terrain. Her white flame flickered to life, flowing over the increasing layers of ashen armor as she looked for the first monster.

She didn’t have to wait long, hearing noises from an adjacent tunnel. Flying inside, she saw an armored humanoid. Rusted and dented metal protected the man’s back, the attachment on his helmet damaged, whatever had been fastened to it gone a long time ago. Any color on his clothes and armor had long faded. His arms and legs were protected as well, the full plate obviously made to stand the test of time.

Metal groaned slightly as the knight turned to face Ilea, her wings dissipating as she came to a stop. She watched the large two handed axe the knight casually held in one hand. There was no life behind the slit of his helmet.

### ***[Knight of Marahn – lvl 820]***

*More impressive than those in Tremor. But I guess it could just be survival bias. Most everything here is dead after all.*

She watched the knight touch the insignia engraved in the damaged chest piece. Magic pulsed outwards, every seam on the warrior glowing for a moment with golden light. He crouched, the greataxe resting on his shoulder as he prepared to charge.

Ilea smiled when the knight didn’t move. *“Annoying right?”* she said, her smile widening into a grin when the remains of the once human warrior charged.

He was fast, the bones below his armored boots crushed and turned to dust. His axe swing started halfway there.

Ilea watched the move, felt the pulse of mana, the power that animated this man who should've fallen millennia past. She saw the attack, felt the damage it dealt to her. And she let it happen, raising her arm to intercept the heavy weapon.

The steel slab crashed into her hand, the blade of the axe more dull crushing weapon than made to cut after all this time. Her legs strained, her arm pushed back, jaw slamming shut as the force of the impact rushed through her. The ground shook slightly, pieces of stone falling from the ceiling.

Ilea grinned when the knight slammed his fist into her face. The impact rocked her head back, her neck straining not to snap. Again the knight punched her, raising his weapon once more before he brought it down from above.

She raised her arms and crossed them below the weapon, just in time. The ground shook.

Healing flowed to the sections directly affected, the bruises taken care of near instantly. The slightly damaged ash reformed, pushing against the steel. She dodged the next strike, kicking against the knight's leg but finding him step aside. She closed the distance and feinted, her fist rushing past his raised arm, impacting his steel helmet with a dull sound.

The knight staggered back, catching himself before raising his weapon, a slight dent in his helmet.

Ilea shook her head and smiled. Her fires receded, the only remaining light her bits of ember embedded into her mantle, and the residual golden specks shining from below the knight's armor.

The advanced.

Steel hit ash, and ash hit steel. Ilea was faster. She found the knight experienced, but her precognition and perception overwhelmed him. She trusted her skills, her fighting ability. He could see most of her feints but it didn't matter. Three strikes slammed into his chest, Ilea dodging the hilt of the axe, her elbow slamming into his face. She mirrored his backsteps, one, two, her arm pushed aside the axe. Another strike slammed into his face. She traded blows with the next, her nose withstanding the heavy impact as if it was made of hardened steel.

She didn't use Archon Strike, didn't use Tempered Seal. This was not a fight for survival. This was fun.

Ilea didn't let up, the time between impacts shortening as she dented in his armor. She found his attempts to strike back growing more desperate, his tactics dirtier. He went for her throat and her eyes. She let him. Her ash was pushed back, her wind pipe cracked and smashed. She didn't stop. He let go of his bulky weapon, unsheathing a rusty dagger. Ilea moved her head, the metal scraping against her ash, his other hand grabbing onto her face, a metal thumb pushing into her eye.

She held his arm with her right hand, then angled her left around his elbow and pulled. Her arms strained, his gauntlet pushing into her eye. She ignored his other arm, the dagger striking her left eye as he held her head in place. The steel managed to pierce, stopped by her skull a few centimeters in. Blood dripped down her ash but she smiled, a snap resounding when his right hand went limp, falling to the side.

Ilea grabbed on to the partially embedded dagger and crushed it, the old metal unable to endure the pressure. It snapped. Ilea moved her foot behind his leg when he moved, moving her knee up to unbalance the knight.

He fell, about to catch himself when she spun and slammed her heel into his chest.

The stone cracked when he impacted the ground, bits of armor and bones impacting the walls.

Ilea moved to his head and stomped down, the stone breaking with a heavy impact, the knight having moved his head in the last moment. She stomped again, sidestepped his attempt to grapple her leg with his working arm. The third stomp connected. The fourth one slammed in his visor, the fourth one brought the dull sound of crushed bone. She didn't stop, not until the knight stopped moving.

She took in a deep breath and ripped her ashen boot out of the mangled chunk of metal and bone.

*Fun.*

*And Aki had issues with that?*

Ilea found herself curious as to why there was no notification for her kill. She checked her dominion and the fabric around her, realizing there was no anomaly near her shoulder. *Guess the Baron was getting a little too bored with me. Or he needs a break from too much violence.*

*Whelp, he knows where to find me,* she thought, taking a few steps back as she watched the insignia on the knight's dented chest light up with golden energy. Lines of light flowed into and through the knight's battered form, his mangled arm twisting before it was set straight, cracks resounding as his skull reformed. Metal groaned as his helmet bent back into shape.

"Hey, so that's how my opponents feel all the time," Ilea said, letting the knight recover. It didn't take particularly long, but compared to her own healing, it wasn't quite the same. *Suppose if the knights of Rhyvor could've done that, I wouldn't have been able to kill them at all.*

She watched the golden insignia, the flowing shapes. Something was there. Magic far beyond anything she felt from the knight himself. Her eyes burned and her mind reeled but she kept her focus, felt the magic. "*Who are you?*" she sent, trying to form a connection with the strange energy she felt.

And then it was gone. Leaving her with a mostly recovered knight and the strange sensation. *Not very unlike the light I saw recently.* She wondered if there was a being nearby that kept these knights alive, or if it was something less graspable, hiding in the fabric, the void, or maybe some other place she hadn't even heard of. *Maybe I just saw the power of a god?*

Ilea was woken from her thoughts when the knight once again slammed his fist into her face.

*Right.*

Blue runes lit up as arcane power rushed through her. Ilea's hand rushed forward and impacted the knight's chest plate, white flame extending on her mantle as her fingers punched through the steel. The warrior's fists struck her head with no impact. Ilea closed her hand, and ripped out the insignia with a snapping sound. She looked at the symbol and stored it in her necklace, turning to the knight she had expected to crumble.

Instead he raised his arm, greataxe appearing within.

She took in a sharp breath, slapping aside the strike, the steel embedded in the stone wall with a thunderous impact.

"Rest now," she said, her voice calm as she raised her hand. Ash formed around the knight, burning with white flame. She willed it, and what remained of the warrior was crushed and burned away in

instants, the ash joining her own as her blue runes and fires dimmed, returning the ancient tunnel to near absolute darkness.

***'ding' 'You have defeated [Knight of Marahn – lvl 820]'***

No Classes or skills leveled from the short battle.

Ilea summoned the piece of metal she still had, her ash spreading through the tunnel. Something about the light she had seen. A wish? Purpose and desperation. A strange connection she couldn't quite place, but after having met the Fae, the Meadow, Icy, and plenty of other strange beings, she wasn't particularly surprised.

There was no magic present in the symbol now. Just a piece of metal, but she thought she understood. At least in part.

Ilea closed her eyes, ash set alight in the entirety of the tunnel. "Go now, and find rest," she spoke and saw the golden light. For just a split second as her fires consumed the remains all around.

She heard the noise from ahead and opened her eyes. The light on the symbol was gone. Instead she saw a dozen armored knights running her way, all within a single long tunnel, just broad enough for two of them to run side by side.

More appeared farther back, teleporting to the noise or the fire, she didn't know. Some wielded large swords, others shields and swords, some sickles, and others yet war hammers or maces. They moved quickly, unable to teleport once they reached the range of her Reality Warp.

Ilea couldn't teleport either if she kept the spell up, but right now she more than welcomed it. Holding out her arm, she summoned Silent Memory, the divine artifact thrummed with magic, silver threads moving around her arm as if in greeting. A golden shield appeared above her left hand. "We've got company," she said to the hammer, a smile on her face before she charged.

She ducked below the first sword strike, her hammer coming up with a heavy swing, the impact bending the knight's head to the side. Silver threads rushed out and cut into the next one, more golden shields deflecting or outright stopping the spears thrown at her. She gripped the hammer with both hands and took a step forward, slamming it down onto a staggered knight, bone and blood magic rushing through the man in a pulse.

Ilea let go of the hammer to catch the tip of a spear, pushing it aside before she punched the knight, his attempts to deflect her only working for the first three attacks. Her fist slammed into his chest, Archon Strike sending a pulse of destructive healing into whatever creature the once knight had become. She saw a glance of the same symbol on his chest piece. Ilea just smiled and moved on, her hammer rampaging behind her as she stepped forward, dodging and deflecting a hammer and sword, heavy impacts resounding with every punch she delivered. Metal dented and weapons shattered, she stood and pushed back, the momentum of the soon two dozen knights slowing, then stopping entirely.

She could see the injured knights behind her struggling to fight her hammer, the silver threads holding them back, cutting into the vulnerable slits of their visors and any gaps it could find within their armor. Bone and blood magic lit up within her dominion as she blocked a set of spears that stabbed forward from behind the knights she faced.

They stepped aside to try and surround her in the small space of the tunnel, unsheathing daggers to get closer.

“You want a fight?” she said, turning her head just in time to let a dagger scrape against her ash instead of her eyes.

Her runes lit up once more. Her body burnt with arcane power. Her muscles tensed, and her breathing slowed. “Then let’s have a fight.”

Ilea rammed her elbow into the knight to her right, a pulse of arcane magic downright exploding into its form, the wall behind it cracked, the knight himself falling with its entire back ripped open. She turned and slammed her fist against the dagger coming for her face. Steel shattered against ash. Archon Strike and Tempered Seal released when her fist reached the knight’s hand, metal, bone, and flesh burnt and shredded to nothing as he was spun to the side, his arm gone entirely. A golden shield appeared to her right as more knights pushed forward, Ilea slamming her fingers into and through the metal visor of her injured enemy before she ripped off its head and a part of its spine with a single pull.

*Ah, I like this.*

She smiled as the arcane energies wracked her every cell, pushed each and every one to the very brink of their limit. The golden shield came down. And Ilea charged. Every punch was deliberate. Slow. And methodical. She dodged the enemy strikes or used the Azarinth Star to deflect them. Archon Strike dented in chest plates, Tempered Seal leaving behind searing embers, the first explosions resounding behind her as she moved deliberately through the approaching plate armored warriors.

Fifteen were ripped apart when her punch broke the neck of the next. Her health was reaching sixty percent, the hammer behind her still engaged with the first few knights, some of those she had destroyed now shining with golden light, their grievous wounds knotted back together.

Ilea raised her hand and activated Embered Heart. Heat and arcane energies flowed together at the palm of her hand, her spell coalescing as the tunnel brightened. A torrent of light and fire followed, the chaotic beam burning through steel, flesh, and bone alike, the first few knights left with missing limbs and chunks of their bodies gone entirely, those farther back where the cone expanded were reduced to glowing cinders, their bodies mere shields for those still farther back.

She jumped back and held out her hand, a frayed feeling of pain and weakness spreading through her body when the effects of the Fourth tier waned. The Silent Memory let go of the knights and moved with erratic pulls and pushes of silver thread through the dark tunnel, the handle slamming into her palm, ruby glowing with ominous light.

“A little smaller this time, we don’t have a lot of space,” she said with a wide smile on her face.