

Chapter 673 Absolutely Nothing

Ilea really, really took her time with her meal, going back in long after her mana had topped off, her soul recovered, and her palate satisfied. The Lich had remained with her during it all, either not trusting her enough to leave her out of his sight or simply too impatient, now that something was finally capable of facing the Void Lord.

She of course would find out what it was he so desired, still a little confused why he didn't just teleport past the creature. Would he get caught and killed? She doubted it would be that easy, he was a four mark too, they should've at least been at a similar power level. The Lich definitely didn't strike her as an adventurer or fighter, more just someone used to command others to do their bidding, be it monsters it controlled or well, monsters that looked like Ilea, lured by interesting fights and kept there with threats, a horrible mistake that one.

Ilea once again jumped down into the dark, teleporting a few times until she was once again beset by the void magic monster. This time she simply moved past, using her skills in tandem to make more distance. She summoned the locator occasionally, assuming the location of whatever treasure the creature was hiding to be the same place where she would find the key.

About ten seconds had passed since she had entered the cavern before she found a spherical area illuminated by various glowing items, the makeshift storage room stacked with shiny stones, crystals, and various other trinkets, mostly notable in their color alone. She instantly found the key among the other treasures, its design prominent among the mostly natural ore. Ilea stored it and started identifying the rest, an eye out for the creature that was still on the hunt for her.

[Silver ore – High Quality] – [Metal]

[Crystal – Common Quality] – [Not metal]

[Lich Phylactery fragment – Timeless Quality] – [Enchanted / Fractured]

“Ah, I'd guess the lich wasn't looking for some silver ore,” Ilea mused, looking at the faintly blue glowing enchanted sphere. She grabbed the other two as well, both hidden between the various likely less valuable ores. *Three pieces, three lich fragments. If only I knew a necromancer to figure this one out.*

Ilea teleported away when she saw the Void Lord approach again, their battle continuing as she lured it towards the section it had already started clearing out. She wanted to try and figure out the field it produced in its immediate vicinity but thought it too dangerous to do so in the confined space, especially with the teleportation traps it set with its spheres. First, she needed an actual cave, not this field of nooks and crannies.

She thought about what to do with the phylacteries in the meantime, pretty sure they were what Death was looking for. The Void Lord was a good source for void magic resistance and she was sure it would use even more dangerous abilities if she managed to push it a little. So far the only damage she could deal was with her reversed healing and even that was questionable.

It took the two of them about half an hour to hollow out a large enough section of the underground for Ilea to confidently engage the monster in battle. As the area became larger, she found it easier to dodge the spells with her wings and occasional teleports, but the damage alone was still nothing to scoff at.

She persevered, the experience similar to her previous four mark encounters and other battles of attrition against monsters far beyond her magical prowess. Ilea checked the few messages she had gotten in the process before she rushed the monster in the darkness.

‘ding’ ‘Sentinel Reconstruction [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 8’

‘ding’ ‘Sentinel Core [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 8’

‘ding’ ‘Drill reaches lvl 9’

...

‘ding’ ‘Drill reaches lvl 12’

‘ding’ ‘Oxygen Repository reaches 2nd lvl 10’

‘ding’ ‘Void Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 12’

...

‘ding’ ‘Void Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 14’

She was surprised her continued efforts didn't reward any levels in Veteran or Deviant but she supposed it really wasn't that special after all. The Void Lord wasn't the first eldritch creature she had fought in complete darkness and it would surely not be the last.

Ilea sacrificed about fifteen thousand points of health into her flames and aura as she reached the creature, avoiding the void magic on her approach. Her ash fanned out, the white flames lighting up the makeshift cavern of perfect spheres, latching onto an invisible field of magic around the one eyed monster.

A flash of void magic fanned out in a sphere around it, getting rid of the flames before more came in again.

Ilea sent low charges of her fire beams at the dodging monster, the energy vanishing whenever it reached the being. She watched the space around the creature as the spells reappeared in random locations in a radius around its body. None actually reached it and she came to the conclusion that none ever will, not if she attacked in this way. Ilea had an inkling that it wouldn't work but had to try regardless. She rushed the being and tried to punch it, her fist ringing with a magical force before her spell connected with something. The stone exploded a few meters away from her.

Figured, she thought, her eyes having seen her fist connect with the body of the Void Lord but the result was the same. A series of void blasts pushed her back, her mantle whittled away more with each blow before she managed to heal it back up again, flying wide in the artificial cavern to make sure the being couldn't hit her as easily.

Ilea continued to observe the space around the creature as she started to experiment with heat charged ashen spears, first simply sending them at the creature and watching them reappear, then using her own spacial manipulation skill to displace them to a different location before they entered the field or once they reappeared. After several dozen attempts, she got in a hit.

The Void Lord was sent stumbling to the side, an explosion of heat and fire engulfing its side, ash and white flames clinging to its skin as more burning spears came flying through the darkness, accompanied by the laughter of an invading battle healer.

Ilea started to unravel the defensive field but found the creature could manipulate it rather well, her attempts remaining somewhat random with an occasional hit she knew would happen. She charged up her core, only using negligible energy within the spears to continue to annoy the being as she herself dodged its void magic while enduring its constant damaging sphere.

There it is, she thought with a grin, seeing one of her burning spears vanish. Ilea aimed her rifle about two meters away and above the fast moving creature, a chaotic stream of heat and energy burning into the wyrm's eye before a beam of concentrated heat slashed into thin air.

She watched the beam vanish just before it would've hit the ground, the monster set alight as a glowing fiery line showed up on its body. For the first time it opened the mouth on its chest, several tentacle like extensions moving within as it screeched in a low pitched tone.

"Didn't like that one, did you?" Ilea said, charging up her next beam. She kept an eye on the glowing injury, the scorched skin not healing immediately. *Wonderful*, she thought when an incredible burst of mana spread out with the being at its center.

Ilea didn't notice the change with her precognition, the same teleportation trap present which kept her in place instead of risking an early activation of whatever this was. She noticed all the sound had vanished as soon as the sphere had engulfed her, her dominion couldn't perceive a single thing either. Not the ground, the ceiling, or the creature itself. The previous remains of her fires were gone, no source of light remaining as she felt an oppressing force of void magic burning into her defenses from all around.

Her flare of creation fought back as she healed her mantle, staying calm despite her rapidly declining defenses. She would be overwhelmed in time but Ilea had experienced a literal mini sun burning her alive. This was manageable. *Nothing in my dominion, light doesn't travel, enhanced eyes can't see anything*, she thought, floating through the dark space as her wings kept her going. *No air*, she noted. *No gravity?*

It all felt wrong, the fabric itself entirely different than anything she had seen before. And yet there were wisps here still. Displacement and transfer worked both but she arrived in the same darkness of the void, her defenses still being burned. She was down to the last layer of her mantle by now, more already dissolving as her third tier healing reformed layer after layer, the surrounding magic simply too much to handle for her alone.

'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 15'

She still had her lifeline of a third tier transfer but with the trap still in place, she didn't know if it would work, or if she wanted to risk it. The only thing she could perceive were the wisps. *I solved the Meadow's puzzles and escaped from a bloody Dragon*, she thought, using her dominion to map out everything in the area. She sent spears of ash flying, moved her wings and ashen limbs to see how everything behaved, if the projectiles flew in a straight line or disappeared.

She smiled, feeling her ash move through the darkness, her eyes following the zigzag. She formed spheres instead, sending them all around the space as she teleported from one to the other, moving them out and back, finding dozens of void magic fields that simply lead to another space. When she started to figure out the layout, her skin started to dissolve. *If my brain fails, I'll be fucked*, a part of her thought, her body teleporting through the expanding field of ashen spheres until she had figured out a large enough part of the space to realize she was in a spherical space far larger than what the creature had created in normal space.

Ilea had a theory that phaseshift could bring her out if she timed it correctly and reached the border but where was the fun in that? Instead she focused her whole mind on finding the center of it all. Where she knew the Void Lord was hiding, controlling everything in the area around it. She didn't know how the void interacted with the fabric of space to create this field but what she knew for certain was that while this thing was active, the protective magic around its body could not exist.

Her hair was gone, her muscles burning away when she appeared above the center. The mesh here was complex but the being wasn't the only one with a few space tricks at the ready. Ilea added her third tier displacement gate to the mix, between the mesh and her target, her body moving through before she slammed her fist down, a fully charged Archon Strike coupled with her tempered seal and a spherical blast of her Embered Heart flashing out for a split second. Her fist impacted something.

A pained screech resounded as the darkness fell apart around them, void like darkness replaced by stone Ilea could see, the floor and cavern appearing in a multitude of angles, directions, and distances, much of it falling apart as she noticed deep cuts appearing on her whole body too. She moved her head to avoid a split into her skull, only her neck deeply sliced instead.

The oppressive mana was gone when she slapped to the ground, landing on one knee with her whole body skinned and reduced to half her muscles, her third tier healing quickly working to overwhelm the remaining damage field of the creature as her mantle formed above bleeding flesh, skin already reforming her face as the dozens of cuts were closed.

She found the creature reeling on the ground, hands on its face with burns all over its form. Ilea vanished, finding the defensive field disrupted. "Welcome back to reality," she said as her fists came down with white flames, blue and fiery flashes lighting up as her mana intrusion penetrated through its thick skin. Its claws and mouth uselessly scraped against her ash mantle, her punches only growing in power and frequency as she simply ignored the void spells flashing up time and time again. The battle had been going on for long enough to reduce its damage by half, and she knew how much power each of its spells held by now.

More so, she knew when a monster got desperate. And so she stayed, her ashen limbs pinning the creature down and her onto it, explosions resounding through the makeshift cavern until most of her mana had been dumped into the being, a ding resounding in her mind.

She jumped back and waited, watching as she recovered her mana and listened for the Lich coming down or the Void Lord getting back up again. Neither happened.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Void Lord – lvl 1103]'

'ding' 'The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 505 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 506 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 507 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Ashen Titan has reached lvl 503 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Ashen Titan has reached lvl 504 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Ashen Titan has reached lvl 505 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 477 – One stat point awarded'

...

'ding' 'The Faen Valkyrie has reached lvl 486 – One stat point awarded'

‘ding’ ‘Azarinth Awakening [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 6’

‘ding’ ‘Transfer [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 5’

‘ding’ ‘Arcane Circulation [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 5’

‘ding’ ‘Authority of Ash and Ember [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 4’

‘ding’ ‘Avatar of Ash [Enhanced] reaches 3rd lvl 6’

‘ding’ ‘Deviant of Humanity reaches 3rd lvl 20’

‘ding’ ‘Meditation reaches 3rd lvl 16’

‘ding’ ‘Spear of Ash reaches lvl 16’

‘ding’ ‘Spear of Ash reaches lvl 17’

‘ding’ ‘Veteran reaches 3rd lvl 27’

I’m about to become the ultimate Veteran, she thought with a smile, standing silently in the dark as she healed and regained her mana. It would take some time but she assumed the Lich wouldn’t come down immediately, not with how scared he had been before.

‘ding’ ‘Void Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 16’

She put her forty new stat points into Wisdom and checked the last message.

‘ding’ ‘You have survived the Maze of Emptiness spell – One Core skill point awarded’

I suppose I did, she thought, somewhat proud of the achievement. For once it wasn’t just her resilience alone that allowed her to survive a four mark’s special ability. She checked the body for loot but didn’t find anything within her dominion, nor did she plan to rip apart the somewhat humanoid horror to find anything useful. She did store the corpse at least, thinking the Meadow, Fae, or her new contacts in the north would perhaps be interested in the remains.

She summoned the key she had found earlier and identified it briefly, a slight blue sheen on its heavily enchanted and reinforced surface.

[The Cobalt Key – Ancient Quality] – [Enchanted]

Another one down, which makes six.

*She could already get more out of the One without Form with the keys she had found thus far, but she assumed more couldn’t hurt. *Would be annoying if the last one is guarded fiercely by something I simply cannot pass by, beat, or convince,* she thought, not letting the pessimistic thought get the better of her. *I’ll get myself a little sun with these,* she thought and stored it away again, summoning a meal as she did after a good battle and lit up a bit of wood she had in her necklace. She sat down*

in an ashen armchair and watched the flames flicker in the dark cavern, her mana steadily recovering as she waited for the Lich to come down or for her resources to top off.

The surroundings looked like someone came through with a pair of reality shears, cutting chunks of stone out of the ceiling and floor, the spherical incisions still visible between everything gave the place a downright alien feel, especially knowing that they were below a frozen dungeon and the mountains of the north.

Maybe I should go check further down if there are any runes similar to the ones near Tremor, she thought, enjoying her meal to the last bite before she smothered the flames with some ash and stored the parts of the wood that were still good. A few uses of teleportation brought her deep into the mountain, the crevices giving way to solid rock after a few hundred more meters, the quick search not bringing any results.

“Ah well, guess I’ll find out how the Lich is doing,” she murmured, checking her marks to find the others now waiting far above and outside the dungeon. *Can’t contact Verena again. Hmm, it should be fine either way.*

“Found key. Will confront Lich. Come if high soul resistance,” she sent to Feyrair and teleported back towards the entrance, finding it after a minute of searching.

She appeared back in the same hall with the floating being waiting for her with crossed arms, the other two Lich Fragments now present as well.

“Did you succeed?” Death asked.

Ilea smiled. “Killed it,” she said and grinned, giving them two thumbs up and a wink.

“Do you have proof?” the Lich asked.

She dropped the corpse for a second and put it back into her necklace. “That enough for you,” she asked.

The Lich’s eyes glowered before he flew past with surprising speed and into the hole. Laughter resounded as he descended.

“So, did I just doom the world?” Ilea asked the other two, neither quite as excited about the news. *He’s gonna be mad in a few minutes,* she thought and smiled to herself.