

**'ding' 'Sentinel Reconstruction reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 28'**

**'ding' 'Azarinth Awakening reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 25'**

**'ding' 'Sentinel Core reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 22'**

**'ding' 'Armor of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 27'**

**'ding' 'Aspect of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 24'**

**'ding' 'Avatar of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 19'**

**'ding' 'Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 7'**

...

**'ding' 'Arcane Magic Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 10'**

**'ding' 'Mental Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 3'**

...

**'ding' 'Mental Resistance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 5'**

**'ding' 'Pain Tolerance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 11'**

...

**'ding' 'Pain Tolerance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 20'**

**'ding' 'Pain Tolerance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 1'**

#### ***Pain Tolerance – 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 1***

***Being a bit of a masochist, you have learned to ignore some of the pain. No, only physical pain. You're feeling a little more numb towards pain but careful...the damage is still being done!***

***2nd stage: You've been through more pain than most others. You are now able to completely turn off your perception of pain. Be wary as there is a reason pain exists.***

***3rd stage: Pain comes in many forms. Pain to your body which you have learned to ignore. Pain to the mind itself which you have resisted. Pain to your soul, which you have endured. A pain coming with the forces of magic, the arcane, tearing and cutting at the core of what you are. You have experienced pain beyond which can be survived. And yet you live. A testament of resilience and perseverance, regeneration and a powerful mind. Let it fuel you, empower you. Pain now lets you focus, clears your mind instead of distracting it. You shall not be broken.***

**'ding' 'Pain Tolerance reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 2'**

**'ding' 'Soul Magic Resistance reaches lvl 9'**

...

**'ding' 'Soul Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1'**

#### ***Soul Magic Resistance – 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1***

***The fleeting conscience of man and beast. Flesh, energy, motion and thought. The Soul stands separate entirely, yet intertwined all the same. Through hardship you have learned understanding, not through meditation and study. A brutal yet comforting truth, strengthening***

*that which cannot be grasped.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> stage: Battered and cracked. Challenged and near broken. Your Soul has endured through sheer tenacity against that which meant to bring its end. A serene calm now sways through your very essence, changed and evolved, grounded and calm.*

*'ding' 'Soul Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 2'*

*'ding' 'Soul Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 3'*

*'ding' 'Space Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 9'*

...

*'ding' 'Space Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 14'*

*'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches lvl 10'*

...

*'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1'*

*Void Magic Resistance – 2nd lvl 1*

*The mystical magic usually used to enchant high level items applied as a form of combat magic. It's as deadly as it is silent. How exactly you survived is unclear, perhaps the caster willed it so. Next time it might work against a true enemy as well.*

*2nd stage: You have resisted the true magic of the Void, your body and will showing unrelenting grit. More than a simple spell will be required to invade your body with the void. Your very existence and all of its parts are connected to you through the threads of magic.*

*'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 2'*

...

*'ding' 'Void Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 9'*

*'ding' 'One third tier General skill point awarded'*

Ilea read through it all in passing, noticing how her mind focused as soon as her Pain Tolerance reached the third tier, keeping her calm and ready, her mind analyzing the changes. She understood why it had reached the third tier without a point necessary, the breakthrough possible thanks to her assisting abilities and the unique situation presented by the dense mana around her, collected for thousands of years and now funneled into her by the ancient being with destructive power. The fact that neither the Elemental or Trakorov attacking her had led to the same result made it even more meaningful.

She understood the change to her Soul, on a level she could not quite describe. The tears did not stop but she smiled when it advanced, as if she watched her child make its first friend, as if she was an innocent prisoner finally finding freedom after a decade long sentence. Neither applied to her and yet she felt them all the same. It was beautiful and confusing until the pain moved once again to the foreground of her thoughts and mind.

The change to her Void Magic Resistance was by far the most graspable and simple, the pain coming from that part of the arcane torrent flowing into her, moving to the background as she meditated.

Slowly, the power fizzled out and she was left with a feeling of lightness she had never experienced before.

For the first time in what felt like a lifetime, she breathed in, filling her lungs as her mind relaxed. Her eyes opened slowly, blinking as she looked at the Fae. A slight smile spread on her lips as her ash wiped away the tears, snot and blood covering her.

The Fae bowed deeply.

*Friend*

*Pain*

It added a thought of deep respect and relief.

“It’s alright now, little one.” She felt the mana around them had normalized. It was still dense and powerful, as all mana in the north, but a mere puddle to the ocean it had been before.

“We did it. Are you okay?” she asked.

The Fae nodded.

“What exactly happened anyway? It felt like the mana pushed into me just like a mana intrusion spell.”

The creature nodded again.

*Destruction*

*Merging*

*Dispersion*

“But energy can’t be destroyed, right? So it should still be somewhere around here, no? Even if it flowed into me.”

The Fae shook its head.

*Complicated*

“Hmm... as many things huh, little guy?” Ilea said and laid back, looking up at the ceiling and the runes covering all the metal.

“It’s like a huge battery, storage of energy... and you just sent all that energy into me?”

*Yes*

“Can I use it?”

*No*

*Destructive*

It pointed at her.

*Ash*

*Healing*

Ilea huffed. “I see. Kind of a waste then, eh? If I could just take that then it probably wasn’t a lot either.”

*Wrong*

*Four*

“Four what?” she asked.

*Day*

“Are you telling me four days have passed since you started?” she asked but couldn’t quite bring herself to care right now. She felt serene, calm.

The Fae nodded.

*Apology*

*Pause*

*Dangerous*

“Don’t worry about it. If people can’t be without me for a couple weeks, I did something wrong,” she said and chuckled. “That might change for a while though... if I finally start up that healing organization.”

The Fae sent a questioning thought.

“Hmm? I have quite a lot of wealth now, buildings as well as influence. I know compared to a Trakorov of you I’m pretty weak but for a human I’m very powerful. I should at least try to help out some people.”

*Knight!*

“I hate that you understand that concept,” she said and chuckled.

The Fae giggled into her mind.

*Why?*

“Why what?”

*Help*

“Seems right to me. Plenty of assholes around that cause misery and shit. I won’t involve myself too much. As soon as we have a class and some baselines, I’ll leave Trian to run it.”

*Knight?*

“Eh... not exactly. He’s an alright guy though. I hope he won’t put righteousness and law over our interests though.”

*Dark*

*Knight*

She formed a ball of ash and threw it at the giggling creature.

“How do you know all that anyway?” She didn’t expect an answer but it came nonetheless.

*Travel*

*Watch*

*Talk*

*Read*

“Are all Fae like that?” she asked.

*Many*

*Knowledge*

*Important*

“That it is. Cool that you get us, being what I assume to be immortal creatures and all.”

*Understanding*

*Key*

Ilea threw another ash ball but this time upwards, catching it again. “Never had a psychiatrist. I guess you kind of count.”

The Fae sadly didn’t lie down on a magical couch with a pen and notebook.

“It really hurt... you know.”

*Know*, the Fae sent, the thought laced with enough emotion to bring home the truth of its simple statement.

“Do you have classes as well? With skills that you have and can level?” she asked.

*One*

“And ten skills? Five active, five passive?”

The Fae nodded.

“Interesting... what about general skills? Like resistances. You weren’t taken by the corruption so you must have at least something like that.”

*Yes*

*Healing*

*No*

*Pain*

*Difficult*

“Yeah... it helps. You could join with the training if you want. I can heal you as you take damage.”

*No*

*Body*

*Different*

*Dangerous*

“I see. Well the offer stands. My future students are certainly going to participate in that.”

*Sympathy*

“Really? It’s beneficial though. The sooner they get over the pain the better. I’ll let it be their choice of course. We’ll hopefully get a healer class out of it. The benefits of resistances is incredible. Only reason I could survive what we did here.”

*Class*

*Helps*

“Ye, ye. I know. Should we move on by the way? According to the sphere robot we have another layer to explore.”

*Pause*

*Okay*

It sent and landed on her chest, mimicking her posture as it laid onto its back.

Ilea smiled and enjoyed the quiet, closing her eyes until she dozed off.

She woke up again to find the Fae floating close to the wall. She summoned a meal and dug in.

The Fae noticed her a couple minutes later and floated over.

“Good morning.”

*Morning*

*As if it's the most fucking normal thing in the world*, she thought with a grin.

“Found anything interesting?”

*Collection*

*Only*

“Hmm.” Ilea didn't particularly care. The mana was gone now. “How long will it take to collect again?”

*Long*

“I'll inform Catelyn. Maybe we can go back at some point to study the runes.”

The Fae nodded.

*Important*

“I know, I know. Why do you care so much by the way?”

*Unnatural*

*Powerful*

*Dangerous*

“There must be a lot out there that is dangerous. Don't worry too much. Just gives you headaches,” Ilea said and smiled, finishing her meal.

The Fae giggled into her mind.

*Okay*

*Try*

“Do that. So... excited to find an Arcane Elemental in the last layer?” she said and moved herself up with an ashen limb, her wings and tail extending at the same time as she started to hover.

The Fae saluted and sent a stern yet excited thought.

Ilea laughed and tapped her shoulder, smiling when the creature appeared on it.

She walked to the center of the dome like layer, finding a small entrance that led farther down.

“Hmm... looks more like this would have been used to get the mana out.”

*Agree*

Ilea nonetheless jumped down and followed the small steel tunnel until they hit a wall. *Straight up closed off*, she thought and started to work on the ground below, seeing through it with her sphere.

It took a while but she ultimately punched through. A blink would have sufficed but again, she wanted a physical way to get out in case something locked her within the layer. The experience she had gotten from the collected mana, the runes and the Fae would at the very least make her more cautious.

She wanted to avoid paranoia, knowing very well that powerful creatures and potential world ending threats, toxins, corruption and curses must exist both in Elos and beyond. Everything beyond her immediate surroundings was out of her reach, making it less of a concern.

What she could do however, was thinking of an exit strategy before entering the last layer of the most dangerous dungeon she had ever been in.

“Well, isn’t that ominous?” she smiled and bent the last pieces of steel out of the way with her hands and ashen limbs.

The last layer was smaller by a large margin. A couple hundred meters in each direction. A bridge made of steel ended right under the exit. Brackets and beams suggested something could be placed right below the pipe. Perhaps to funnel the mana into or to feed it.

For all she knew, the creatures who built this were mana eating slimes invading different worlds to collect and eat their magic.

At the other end of the three meters wide bridge lay what looked like a castle or temple of steel. Stairs led up to a simple steel gate several meters in height. The structure had neither windows nor artistry, formed of rectangular and sharp steel bits without so much as a seam.

*One large blob of metal.*

The castle still dominated the small cavern, illuminated by crystal growing on the close walls and ceiling. It had a presence that exuded power without over complicated displays of artistry or wealth. The simple fact that it was located here, thousands of meters below ground and at the end of the Descent made an impression.

“Found the Alien sci-fi castle,” Ilea commented and gave a thumbs up to the Fae.

“If things go south, you teleport out okay? I’ll leave through the tube. Can you tell if anything is in there?”

The Fae shook its head.

*Can’t pick up anything either*, Ilea thought, using her skills and eyes to scan the area as they slowly floated towards the steel structure.

It certainly looked the least decrepit compared to all the other buildings she had seen within the dungeon. Ilea was sure this one hadn't been touched by a living being in a long time.

"What do you think? Necromancer? Elemental? Cursed Dragon?" she joked as they landed on the stairs.

She checked for any magical resonance, enchantments or traps but couldn't find anything. "Let me know if you see enchantments."

The Fae nodded.

Ashen limbs slashed into the steel gate, leaving small dents and cuts until Ilea could get her hands inside, slowly prying the whole thing open with sheer brute force.

Magical lights shined from various lamps embedded into the ceiling.

A large main hall opened up.

*If that isn't a fucking boss room...*, she thought and focused on all her senses. "No enchantments or runes?" she again asked.

*None*

Ilea stepped inside the hall and glanced around, finding several open entryways that led into various rooms. Worktables, machines of unknown purposes, a platform that looked like an elevator and lastly another sphere covered in runes.

Broad stairs led up and farther into the structure, Ilea deciding to leave the four open rooms for now.

"We can check out the sphere after I've seen the whole thing... the platform might be some kind of teleportation thing. We should find out if we can disable that. I don't feel like getting visitors," she whispered to her companion.

*Agree*, the Fae sent.

The stairs led towards a hallway with a variety of adjacent rooms, all of them open and without doors.

Many of them held a variety of empty tubes, worktables covered in runes as well as what looked like steel furniture. All of it empty of course.

Ilea and the Fae explored everything they could, finally arriving at another rather large hall at the end of the corridor.

*Enchantments*

*Careful*

She stopped and immediately focused on two things. The hall looked empty except for half a corpse leaning on the far wall and a steel sphere floating in the middle of the room. She tried to identify it but failed.

"Steel Elemental?" Ilea asked.

The Fae hit her head with an annoyed thought.

*No*

"What? I'm sure they exist."



*Yes*

It pointed at the sphere.

*Just*

*Metal*

“So they do exist, that’s pretty cool. Also scary... would that be metal magic or purely physical damage?”

*Both*

“Have you met one?”

The Fae shook its head.

*Focus*

“Right... right. A little tense, are we?”

*Understandable*

“Why? We fought a corrupted Sand Elemental. I refuse to fear whatever trap is lurking here. Honestly feels more like we’re just intruding on someone’s research base. Someone very obsessed with metal. Seems like we’re not the first either,” she said and looked at the corpse. Everything above the waist was gone, cleanly separated. The legs looked human, bare feet sticking out of the baggy colorful yellow and red pants, a part of it blood.

The Fae didn’t reply.

*Cannot*

*Disable*

“Really? You could easily take out the defensive enchantments on the sphere in the twentieth layer, why not these? I can also smash it if you point out where they are.”

*Destruction*

*Signal*

“I see. That wasn’t the case with the sphere?”

*No*

“Can you tell where the signal would go? That might be interesting information as well.”

The Fae’s eyes started glowing until it moved back a little.

*Unknown*

“You can’t tell?”

*Can*

*Location*

*Unknown*

“Eh... well it was worth a shot. No direction either or anything like that?”

*Not*

*Here*

“What do you mean?”

*Realm*

“Ah, fuck,” Ilea said, crossing her arms.

“Of course I of all people stumble into this place. They can send signals through realms?”

*Unclear*

“Any clue about the corpse?”

It shook its head.

Ilea nodded. “Let’s try and disable that platform we found earlier and then try and talk to the sphere... not this one, the one floating near the entrance hall.”

The Fae nodded.

They floated back and Ilea glanced at the Fae as it looked at the platform.

*No*

*Enchantment*

*No*

*Rune*

“Nothing? It does look like something though... an elevator maybe?” her sphere couldn’t find anything below or around either however.

“Mind if I smash it anyway?”

The Fae shook its head.

*Violence*

Ilea commenced to commit violence against the platform, cutting and digging out as much as she could.

It took quite a while but Ilea was proud of the result, chunks of steel distributed in the small room and out into the hall. Deep gashes dug into the now unrecognizable platform, its remnants only visible because the rest of the structure was smooth steel.

“Time to see if you can make the ball talk again,” Ilea said with a smile.

The Fae nodded as they approached the runed sphere.

It activated its magic to disable any defensive enchantments as some of the runes started to glow in a deep red.

Ilea felt the slight pressure of subdued Mind Magic when she looked at the runes, their forms unwilling to be recognized and stored in her brain.

“*Vanu Tes okuun. Ver saa,*” the familiar deep voice spoke from the sphere.

She smiled. *Let's see if this one's been cleaned out too.*