

## Chapter 388 Safety?

Lucas was still watching Ilea as she knocked on the steel that separated them from a chaotic sea of teeth and claws. “Is Catelyn alright?” His voice quivered a little as he spoke.

“She’s fine. As is everybody else.” Ilea said.

“Can the Shredders get to us?” Ilas asked, his pacing had stopped, focusing on the healer. The blades he held were near completely black now, drenched in the beasts’ blood. Streaks of orange still showed on them, dripping to the floor as he spoke.

“They are failing to penetrate the steel.” Elfie replied. “Quite durable.”

Ilea nodded. “Yea, they’re scratching it but if they can’t wrap themselves around this whole place, I doubt they will make much progress. I’d love some of this steel for armor. Any idea what it is?” She gave a nod to the elf.

Niivalyr glanced at her with a confused expression. “Do I look like a craftsman to you?” He hissed, the stress and adrenaline from the battle still running through his veins.

“Dunno, maybe you came across this particular metal in your hundreds of years of experience.” Ilea joked and glanced at the others in turn.

Lucas looked to the floor, Ilas shook his head and Maro ignored her.

“Should have brought Goliath with us.” She murmured and tried cutting into the wall with an ashen limb, leaving only a scratch. *This will take ages.*

“There are enchantments in place.” Maro said suddenly. “It won’t be the same if you cut it out.”

“The runes are weak. It will still be formidable.” Niivalyr added. “Yet I agree with the necromancer. Please refrain in weakening our only barrier against those creatures.”

Ilea nodded and stopped. “Thought we were doing quite well. Only around ten of them remaining I think... wait, twelve.”

Niivalyr hissed angrily, a faint sense of a curse washing over Ilea. “We were forced to flee! Like-”

“Humans?” Ilea asked in a calm tone, looking at the elf with piercing eyes.

He took a step back and glared at her, not saying a word.

“Definitely the right decision.” She said and watched the beasts through her sphere. “Now we can exploit this defense and their frenzy. I’m nearly topped off again.” She murmured the last part, quickly looking through her notifications.

***‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Corrupted Shade Shredder – lvl 520] – For defeating an enemy two hundred or more levels above your own, bonus experience is granted.’***

...

***‘ding’ ‘Your group has defeated [Corrupted Shade Shredder – lvl 462] – For defeating an enemy one hundred and forty levels or more above your own, bonus experience is granted.’***

***'ding' 'The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 317 – Five stat points awarded'***

***'ding' 'Kin of Ash has reached lvl 316 – Five stat points awarded'***

***'ding' 'Sentinel Reconstruction reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 18'***

***'ding' 'Armor of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 18'***

***'ding' 'Storm of Cinders reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 5'***

***'ding' 'Blood Manipulation Resistance reaches lvl 5'***

***'ding' 'Blood Manipulation Resistance reaches lvl 6'***

***'ding' 'Blood Manipulation Resistance reaches lvl 7'***

***'ding' 'Blood Manipulation Resistance reaches lvl 8'***

***'ding' 'Wind Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 10'***

Her bone armor was back on, slowly regenerating. They had killed eight of the creatures already, Ilea four of them herself.

“Ready when you are.” She said finally, looking at the elf.

“Don’t be ridiculous. We barely got away.” Ilas intervened, stepping between the two.

Ilea looked at him with confusion.

Niivalyr shook his head, a hiss directed at Ilea as he straightened his enchanted cloak. A ripple of powerful mana exuded from him a moment later. “Ilea can kill them.” He said after a pause.

“And you can get me out.” She added, giving the elf a nod. “Can you see through the wall?”

“I can see the magic in and beyond.” the elf supplied.

“So you see my ashen limbs?” Ilea asked.

“Your form is unmistakable, yes.” he replied, unclear if it was a compliment or an insult. Perhaps both.

“You’re not seriously going back out there?” Lucas asked, having looked between them a couple times as his eyes continued to widen.

“We should wait for Catelyn to wake back up.” Ilas said.

“And ruin my fun?” Ilea asked. “No. They’re stupid as fuck and easy to kill. I just need to get out from time to time to regenerate.”

She noted the Dark One wasn’t convinced and sighed. “You don’t want these things alive when more people from Hallowfort come down here. And if they find a way to burrow up to the higher layers, we’re fucked. They’re not going to stop until they’re dead.”

“Can’t argue with that.” Maro said and chuckled, his back still resting on the wall as he sat and rested.

“Want to join?” Ilea asked, looking at the necromancer.

“No.” his answer simple and final.

“Your loss. Elfie, I’ll scratch the wall with one of my ashen limbs if I need you and your barriers. Can you cast them through the steel?” She asked. The possibility would make the whole thing much easier.

“I will have to come to the other side. The beasts however are slow to react to flying enemies. Especially if you have their attention.” The elf said and walked closer to the wall, a hand reaching out to it.

“Should work well enough.” Ilea murmured and looked at Ilas. “I’m only endangering myself and maybe Elfie, just a little.”

The Dark One didn’t say anything but nodded a moment later, walking over to check on the unconscious Catelyn.

“We should leave these beasts behind.” Lucas said seriously. “We have escaped these monsters once, you might not succeed another time.”

Ilea didn’t comment on it and formed ash around her, preparing her skills and auras. Heart of Cinder was charging as she watched the thrashing Shredders still scratching into the enchanted steel.

She put her ten stat points into Vitality, to perhaps stay for a couple seconds longer. The allocation was confirmed and she vanished, appearing with a grin and cold eyes, welcoming the screeching corrupted beasts.

*Monster’s back.* She thought and moved to attack.

The frenzied Shredders got into each other’s way trying to grapple Ilea to use their teeth and magic.

It allowed her to focus on one most of the time, sometimes a second one wrapping around her legs if the previous beast allowed it.

Knowing what they could do, how the corruption affected her and how long it took for her to kill one, she methodically slashed through them.

Mana came and went as the Shredders were slowly drained of their health by mana intrusion, ashen limbs and Heart of Cinder.

Two of them died before they got through her defenses, cutting into her flesh and muscles below.

Ilea finished a third one, healing herself through the damage and using her third tier recovery when necessary. She extended an ashen limb through the bloodthirsty monsters and scratched over the steel wall behind her.

Elfie appeared and sent his barriers between the monsters and their prey, allowing each to breath for a moment.

She blinked back through the wall and breathed in deeply, her ashen armor reforming as blood and corruption dripped to the floor.

Ilea wrung out her hair and nearly puked up a little of her food at the combination of smells and the texture of the orange ooze dripping down.

Lucas looked at the gore with disgust, turning away from her as his face blanched a little.

Elfie appeared right after her. “Three already killed.” He said, voice filled with joy.

“There were more coming.” Maro commented. “Are we supposed to wait here while you continue?”

“Feel free to help or explore.” Ilea said. “Although I do like the solo experience I’m getting here.” She added, moving her ash through her hair.

The three kills hadn’t given her a level up yet but she was well on her way. At least it felt that way.

“Wait, what if there are corrupted in here? We should stay together.” Ilas interrupted. “Please... we are here for a reason.”

“I wasn’t about to run deeper into this place.” Maro said and chuckled.

“Then let’s wait until Catelyn is awake.” Ilea said. “Maybe get out some sleeping bags and prepare some food. We should get some rest after this is dealt with.”

“Can you summon our packs?” Lucas asked.

“Oh yes.” Ilea said and got out the two packs she had in her bracelet.

“Ready for the next round?” She asked, looking at Elfie.

He confirmed with a light nod, turning once more towards the steel wall.

It took around twenty minutes to get in and out of the fight before the last of the creatures was felled. Ilea felt pretty comfortable dealing with them in the end but while more had appeared, their numbers were limited.

Fifteen she had killed, now standing amidst the gore as her armor reformed.

Elfie floated above, surveying the cavern as they waited for more.

“I think that was it.” She said after a while and blinked back inside.

Niivalyr appeared next to her. “For now at least. I do not think that was the extend of the seventh layer’s creatures.”

Sleeping bags were rolled out now, a small fire rune heating up an unidentifiable sludge inside a heavy looking cooking pot.

The smell was at least more enjoyable than the corpses and gore outside the facility they had found themselves in.

Catelyn had been covered by a heavy blanket, quietly breathing.

Maro was resting in an actual bed, getting a thumbs up from Ilea when she saw it.

Lucas and Ilas were still waiting vigilantly, the latter keeping his attention at the corridors leading away from their position.

The group was located in a corner where two hallways met. Forking ways were visible around fifty meters away in each direction. It looked like the corridors ended in closed off walls.

“You should stir this.” Ilea commented and walked to the pot, using the ladle inside to move the sludge around. She heard Maro chuckle, the man hiding his helmet covered face behind the book he was reading when she glanced his way.

“Perhaps they had hoped you would supply food.” Elfie commented and stepped closer, his eyes full of disdain as he glared upon the sludge. “Upon seeing their disgraceful creation.”

“Funny, coming from an elf.” Maro whispered to himself, aware that everyone heard him as clear as day.

“Humanity has a way to focus on the mundane and find progress in it. I can admit that we are no culinary masters.” Niivalyr replied, still glaring at the stew.

“The beasts are dead.” Ilea commented. “Forgive me. I have doubted you.” He spoke, not looking their way.

Ilea shrugged and summoned her own bed, lifting Catelyn with three ashen limbs before she dropped the fox onto the soft feather bed. After giving her an ashen rinse of course.

The Dark One curled up a little more, dragging the blanked closer as her expression relaxed.

*God, this fucking fox. I need to get a pet that doesn't want to eat me.*

“What matters is that they're dead.” She said and summoned a meal.

“And that you leveled up again.” Maro said from the side.

“Oh yes, I did.” Ilea said with a grin before she checked her messages, starting to eat in the face of envious glances.

***'ding' 'You have defeated [Corrupted Shade Shredder – lvl 503] – For defeating an enemy one hundred and eighty or more levels above your own, bonus experience is granted.'***

...

***'ding' 'You have defeated [Corrupted Shade Shredder – lvl 521] – For defeating an enemy two hundred or more levels above your own, bonus experience is granted.'***

***'ding' 'The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 318 – Five stat points awarded'***

***'ding' 'Kin of Ash has reached lvl 317 – Five stat points awarded'***

***'ding' 'Sentinel Core reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 7'***

***'ding' 'Aspect of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 11'***

***'ding' 'Blood Manipulation Resistance reaches lvl 9'***

***'ding' 'Blood Manipulation Resistance reaches lvl 10'***

***'ding' 'Blood Manipulation Resistance reaches lvl 11'***

*I should probably focus on skill leveling again. Can't be healthy to get all these levels. Then again, I could level more third tier skills if I had more.*

Ilea concluded that fighting and killing monsters was definitely the way to go. Perhaps her focus was more on the food she was consuming than on the intricacies of her leveling.

So far, her gut hadn't led her astray. She would continue to trust it. As well as her incredible regeneration and ability to get out of dangerous situations with various powerful magic spells others would kill to have.

Looking over her stats, she noted that Endurance was starting to fall behind pretty hard. Something that could actually become an issue during fights. So far it hadn't, mostly because Stamina regeneration was faster than mana regen. She could however see a scenario where stamina drain creatures would even it out.

*Still, can't really justify it. Not even with my third tier reverse skill.* Ilea distributed her ten points into her three priority stats, evening out the numbers a little.

**Status:**

**Vitality:** 736  
**Endurance:** 400  
**Strength:** 510  
**Dexterity:** 415  
**Intelligence:** 700  
**Wisdom:** 770

**Health:** 7330/7360  
**Stamina:** 3821/4000  
**Mana:** 5428/7700

The problem with her third tier reversal increasing her Destruction and Reconstruction based on the lowest stat was that she had to invest in both Dexterity and Endurance by now. If she reached five hundred in each of them, she would in turn have to invest in Strength.

Ilea preferred to have more Health or Mana available, even if the bonus from her skill was a percentage compared to the raw numbers Vitality and Wisdom provided.

"Hmm... would you perchance be willing. To trade?" Lucas asked. He scratched the back of his head when the healer didn't react.

"Ilea?" He added.

"Hmm, what?" She asked, finishing her plate as she sat on the edge of her bed. "Trade?" She added, her brain filling her in on what her ears had perceived.

"A plate of your food." The elder said, a faint glimmer of hope in his eyes.

"For what? Gold?" She wasn't sure if he had anything to offer.

"Hmm, the position as elder, in the Shadow's Hand?" He asked, tilting his head a little to the side.

Ilea chuckled. "You can't offer that. You explained it to me yourself. How about more resistance training. You have light magic too, right?"

He immediately frowned at that but didn't instantly decline.

"Come on old man, there's something here we both want. Let's do it, you and me." Ilea said and winked, a smirk on her face.

Her bone armor was now nearly fully regenerated. Ten to fifteen minutes seemed to be the usual time depending on how much of it remained.

"Give me the damn food." Lucas finally said, his frown remained as he showed his true priorities, snatching the plate from her hands before he turned away.

He still looked back and thanked her.

"Is nobody going to eat the sludge?" Maro asked after a while, turning the page on his book. More a tome really, the binding alone priceless in its materials and artistry.

"It is my food and I will eat it." Ilas said. "As soon as my watch is ended."

"We have a watch?" Ilea asked.

A deep sigh made her turn then, fiery red eyes staring at her with annoyance.

"Who put me in this bed?" Catelyn asked.

"Do you dislike it?" Ilea asked.

"We were nearly killed, how can you sit there with such a smirk..." Catelyn started but sighed, looking around at the relaxed group now staring at her. "I'm sorry."

"We killed the remaining Shredders and are now within some weird super steel blocked off facility. No scouting yet and Ilas has first watch. You seemed to need the rest." Ilea explained quickly.

"Here, have some cake." She summoned another one and placed it away from her bed, not to sully the thing.

Catelyn teleported to the thing, her head alone expanding before it vanished in her maw.

*Twenty six Catelyn silencers remaining.* Ilea thought, checking her necklace as she lay back in her bed.

"You went back in there... why? The risks were too high." Catelyn said, not a hint in her voice about the whole cake she just ate. A hidden void ability perhaps.

"The healer thought them not to be." Ilas spoke. "Her success speaks for her interpretation."

"Ilea..." Catelyn just shook her small furry head. "That's why Elana implored me to keep you close and in good terms at all costs."

"How expectedly calculated." Ilea said, enjoying the softness of her bed as her bone armor vanished, the back of her ashen one thinning a little.

"You will serve nobody by dying to corrupted Shredders." The fox added in a stern voice.

"I had Elfie help out. They were frenzied and easily manipulated. Also, since when do I have to justify my actions to you?" Ilea asked, her voice the same as it had been before.

“Since we are here together and your actions have consequences concerning the rest of us.” Catelyn said, staying calm as well.

Ilea sat up and tilted her head a little. “You mean like helping you shrug off that Shredder and healing you afterwards? Killing that Veramath before everyone’s brain was fried because I’m such a loony to train with Blue Reapers?” She stood up now and walked towards the fox.

“Or healing everyone after the first encounter in this layer nearly killed half of this group?” She smiled. “I don’t remember owing you a thing, Catelyn. I saved your ass before, as did Maro. I like close fights and in my few years here I have come closer to death than you would ever know.”

She was standing right next to Catelyn now. “Don’t act like I’m a liability to your suicide mission, Catelyn. I’m here to heal and kill. And I will continue deeper into this fuckfest of a dungeon, with your permission or without.”

A moment of tense silence came and passed.

“I will follow the mad human.” Niivalyr said, leaning on the steel wall, the grin practically shining through his vicious mask.

“Always the same with women.” Maro said and sighed.

Ilea rolled her eyes and slammed an ashen limb through his book. “Fuck off, Maro.” She said and stepped past Ilas. “I think it’s about time we scouted through this place a little. Wouldn’t you agree?” She asked, glancing at Catelyn.

The fox nodded, not saying a word.

“If anyone wants to join, I’ll have a look around. The others should rest. We all know this was just a taste of what’s to come. If you’re not ready to take risks then I suggest you turn back now.” Ilea said and picked one corridor at random.