

## Chapter 391 Newfound beverages

Niivalyr smirked as he spotted the dark wings moving in the purple mist. *She prevails once again.*

Death magic and poison. A dangerous combination that would even cripple and kill Niivalyr if his barriers failed.

He itched to test his curses on the monsters in this place but reckless behavior was reserved for the brave and foolish. If he was to advance in strength, he had to be smarter than his brethren, had to think not like them but find his own way.

Ilea had shown him that not all humans were the same in their approach to battle. If she could act like a young elf then he too could become more. She wasn't thoughtless however, her actions mostly deliberate. More so than the young of his kind.

Brash and reckless at first glance but that human was more durable and persisting than anything he had seen before, monster or not. It made him excited when he looked at her. Niivalyr respected her, perhaps even feared her.

And yet she called him friend and he did the same. *Ridiculous. A human.* The thought came like an impulse and he smiled, resisting the urge to lick over his sharp teeth. Ilea had pointed out that it was creepy.

He simply hadn't noticed the habit before, so normal amongst elves that he didn't question it. Now he resisted it, as if it was a part of his past self. A part of his old self, before his evolution, both his mind and now his body.

The change had not been instantaneous. He was a hunter now, cursed and rejected from the domains. Still he sometimes found himself thinking of the oracles in their unparalleled wisdom and unquestioned superiority.

It would take time. To accept this change and to find power like he never dared dream of.

The ashen healer flying towards him reminded Niivalyr of what was possible, not in power alone but in freedom. Humanity, hidden within their flimsy city walls, forgetting and ignoring the wild, the balance and chaos of magic.

And yet here she was, fighting beasts beyond her comprehension. She persisted and prevailed.

He felt the magic around him, the dense and powerful arcane seeping into his very bones, reminding him of his sins with every second he remained in a place of creation. And yet he smiled, his heart pumping life through him, beating faster than it had in the last six hundred years.

He calmed himself and formed the words in his mind. The words that guided him since he left his life behind to save that of another.

*Your name is Niivalyr Olanis and you are free.*

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Catelyn sighed as she spotted Ilea flying toward them. *We didn't even know she was so far away. That girl is going to die.*

*It's her own fault.* She reminded herself, failing to convince the part of herself that sought to protect the healer. *She's going to surpass you in a month, a week or even today already. You should worry about your own survival.*

This was no place for self doubt, no place to stop a reckless warrior from seeking her destiny. Catelyn saw the writhing tentacles moving up to catch the ashen healer, the woman twirling in the air to dodge it all.

*This poison is getting on my nerves.* Her healing was active constantly by now, just to counteract the vile toxin hanging in the air.

A dark fiery red sphere formed in front of her face, released when it reached the highest heat and density she could manage.

The spell flashed through the air, arcing down into the unknown before it exploded in a bright light, a wave of heat washing over the floating group a moment later.

Screeches followed, the sound of beasts mangled and burnt. The price she paid to use her power. *May you find rest in death.* Several spheres formed, between her tails and in front of her mouth, her form expanding as her mana concentrated into spells.

"She certainly gathered a sizable group," Ila commented, the warrior wisely sitting this one out.

*So she did.* Catelyn thought, watching the writhing mass of vile creatures moving through the poison mist. Creatures that should have been left to rest, deep in the dark. Now roused by fire.

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Ilea heard the creatures behind her, beams of death magic flashing past as they focused on her. Powerful and expansive fire spells created shock waves below her. Each impact burnt dozens of tentacles, maybe just as many of the creatures.

*Not as welcoming an opportunity than a group of Shredders.* Ilea didn't think facing twelve death magic spells at once was particularly wise. *Wouldn't they damage each other?* She wondered, nearly turning back to find out.

*Get closer first.* She suddenly realized that the spells had slowed down, only two beams coming for her in the past three seconds.

Ilea turned around and squinted her eyes to see anything in the purple haze, illuminated only by magic spells. A flash of fire exploded in the midst of the chaos, the split second of bright light

revealing one of the creatures, corrupted and frenzied. Its brethren ripping into it with magic and tentacles, fighting off the revived and frenzied monster.

*Now's your chance.* Ilea thought and blinked down, joining the fray as she tried to avoid the corrupted beast.

There were dozens of them, a cluster fuck of limbs and spells.

Ilea smirked as an idea came to her, blinking closer to the frenzied beast as an ashen limb extended.

She clung onto one of the beasts and used all her offensive spells while she healed the corrupted Reaper, already close to death as it was overwhelmed by the others.

Catelyn and the others had moved closer by now, their spells raining down from above.

The familiar feeling of Elfie's curse spread through her, many of the creatures reacting quite a bit more, their magic missing her suddenly, their tentacles sluggishly attacking the pool of poison below them.

The corrupted Reaper however didn't seem to mind, ripping into the others and occasionally healed by Ilea.

One of them died a little later, its body pulsing with corruption as it woke once more, the odds now less overwhelming.

Constant trashing and fighting as well as the expansive spells brought more beasts as the battle went on. Some of them were corrupted, others not.

The mages flying high above were largely ignored, the origin of both explosions and curses hard to pin point, even for Ilea.

She was pretty sure the beasts were capable of dealing with the corrupted on their layer. But why miss a fight with a bunch of death magic tentacle horrors when it's available? A new motto to add to her list.

It came to a point where only the beast Ilea currently engaged was focused on her, none of them diving down into the poisonous broth, either because there was simply too much entanglement or because of the corrupted.

Catelyn and Elfie continued to be effective because of that, as well as Ilea who was cutting through tentacles with her ash, delivering blows and beams of fire whenever possible.

Untiring and relentless, she pushed on. Amidst the beasts as just another enemy. A nuisance to them that they most certainly underestimated. Perhaps a creature they hadn't ever seen before. Prey at most, to be ignored in the face of their own being turned and corrupted.

Ilea certainly didn't mind it, killing the creatures left and right as time passed. Minutes or even hours by now. The only thing she could reasonably deduct about the duration of her battle was that Catelyn's spells had stopped six times already. The fires always returning after a short break.

Thanks to her Sentinel Core, Ilea didn't have the same problem. Elfie too seemed to be fine with his mana drain, no break in his curse.

The sluggish beasts were overwhelmed, Ilea now focusing on the corrupted as she joined the Reapers.

Near black ashen wings moved silently behind her, Ilea looking over the still smoldering remains of the Tangled Reapers, both corrupted and not.

***‘ding’ ‘Your group has defeated [Tangled Reaper – lvl 542] – For defeating an enemy two hundred and twenty or more levels above your own, bonus experience is granted.’***

...

***‘ding’ ‘Your group has defeated [Corrupted Tangled Reaper – lvl 532] – For defeating an enemy two hundred and ten or more levels above your own, bonus experience is granted.’***

Dozens of them had come and were slaughtered, by their own or Ilea’s group.

Ashen limbs extended to her floating companions, healing them against the poison that was still in the air.

***‘ding’ ‘Kin of Ash has reached lvl 318 – Five stat points awarded’***

***‘ding’ ‘Azarinth Awakening reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 16’***

***‘ding’ ‘Sentinel Core reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 8’***

***‘ding’ ‘Azarinth Reversal reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 8’***

***‘ding’ ‘Aspect of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 13’***

***‘ding’ ‘Heart of Cinder reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 8’***

***‘ding’ ‘Storm of Cinders reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 7’***

***‘ding’ ‘Keeper of Ash reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> lvl 11’***

***‘ding’ ‘Harmony of the Drowned reaches lvl 2’***

***‘ding’ ‘Veteran reaches lvl 11’***

***‘ding’ ‘Veteran reaches lvl 12’***

***‘ding’ ‘Curse Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 6’***

***‘ding’ ‘Curse Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 7’***

***‘ding’ ‘Death Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 6’***

***‘ding’ ‘Death Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 7’***

***‘ding’ ‘Death Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 8’***

***‘ding’ ‘Heat Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 19’***

***‘ding’ ‘Poison Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 10’***

***‘ding’ ‘Poison Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 11’***

*Hours spent productively.* Ilea smiled to herself as she read through all the level ups.

Elfie had really pulled through with his curse magic. Ilea was sure the fight would have taken hours longer if his spells hadn't given the edge to the corrupted early on.

"I'm not sure if we should use them like that," Catelyn said, as if she could read Ilea's mind.

"They attacked me. I didn't just want to leave them," Ilea retorted, putting her five stat points into Vitality.

"I do believe it was wise to kill them. I meant simply the corrupted," the fox clarified.

"As long as we can kill them. I think the corruption actually helps," Ilea said, cracking her neck. "Next layer?" she was hungry for more.

"I can't wait to get out of this poison swamp," Maro said with a sigh.

"Did the beasts drop anything upon death?" Ilas asked, glancing at Ilea.

"Didn't see anything. I can go check. Wanted to swim a little in the poison anyway. You lot should too so this doesn't happen again," she said and floated downwards. The next layer could wait for a couple minutes while she filled some bottles with the fluid.

"Any of you have empty bottles?" she asked, ignoring the looks she was getting.

"I don't plan to come her again," Catelyn said as she dropped a couple flasks down.

Ilea caught them all with her limbs. "Bigger ones too," she said and gave a thumbs up upon receiving containers with several liters of volume.

*What if I drink it.* She did so, finding the poison having the same effect as it did upon simple touch. It also hurt her throat but all that did was make it hard to speak.

She decided on a bath alone, her ashen armor relegated to a bikini as she stored her bone armor.

The bottles were filled and stored away, concentrated rupture liquid for a later use. *I should really make sure to get level twenty before I leave this place for a longer time.*

Niivalyr floated down and touched the liquid, his face hidden behind the steel mask. "May I use my health drain on you?"

"Of course, use all you have," Ilea replied and extended an ashen limb to him. "I'll take care of the rest if it's not enough."

"How very considerate of you," Elfie said.

*It's hard to tell when he's sarcastic and when he isn't.* Ilea thought and realized she was rubbing her skin with the poison liquid. *This isn't soap.*

Ilas was leading the others, flying over them.

"Let's keep up with them," she suggested to the elf, his feet now dipped in the liquid without boots on.

It took them nearly an hour to find the exit and the way down. Various cracks and tunnels led out of the poison filled cavern but most just led to even more poison.

They did confirm that most of the place was cleared out and Ilea did level her poison resistance once more, the skill now in the second tier at level twelve.

*Need stronger poisons.* She put it on her imaginary list, right next to more powerful spells of literally all varieties. *Is it impossible to gain resistances when it deals no damage to me at all?*

It certainly seemed more difficult now that she was so tough. Perhaps it was more reasonable to not level anymore and focus on them. *On the other hand, third tier skills. If I keep advancing, it doesn't matter either way.*

She was pretty sure there were creatures out there that could rip her apart even if she reached level four or five hundred. Already, she had met some of them. It only meant that she would have a hard time training her general skills with other sentients.

***'ding' 'Curse Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 8'***

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

Elfie certainly didn't disappoint with his new evolution either way.

"Let's hope for a more welcoming environment," Catelyn sighed as Ilea jumped down the hole leading to the ninth layer.

A thin trail of poison was running down the side of the crack, dripping on the bright crystal below with a sizzling noise.

*Some fucking light finally.* Ilea's mood immediately lifted as she drank a sip of concentrated poison. "Disgusting," she remarked and carefully stepped through the openings in the crystal.

What she found beyond made her pause for a moment. Her wings moved behind her as she entered the vast cavern. Lush green plants and grass covered what looked like floating islands of rock in a sea of mist blocking any visibility below.

There were creatures she saw in the distance, wings moving quickly before the red forms vanished into the mists.

"You can come. It's safe," she said, looking up as she floated a little further down.

Ilea suddenly turned her head to the side, squinting her eyes at movement right below the surface of the white sea.

A roar resounded a moment later. Too far away to be of much concern. Still, she felt her body locking up.

***'ding' 'You have heard the sound of a powerful beast. You are paralyzed for five seconds.'***

She felt herself drift down, caught a moment later by a barrier appearing below her feet.

"Thanks," she said, looking up when the effect had worn off. "You didn't get paralyzed?"

"For one second only," he said, joined by the others climbing out from the crystal that covered most of the cavern's expansive ceiling.

"What was that?" Catelyn asked, looking around.

"Saw something red, with wings," Ilea supplied what she knew. "Dragons?"

“Don’t joke around,” Catelyn said seriously. “You might summon one.”

“Really?” Ilea asked, excited as she twirled in the air.

“No. I believe it was in jest,” Elfie said. He locked eyes with her and was silent for a moment. “You damn sarcastic fuck.”

“Trying out new insults?” Ilea asked, proud of the elf.

“It is a good word,” he confirmed.

“Let us land on one of the visible areas. I think I can see some cave entrances already,” Catelyn said and started floating down.

Ilea followed, quickly getting ahead. She landed on the stone and checked the surroundings with her skills. One smell immediately stood out, Ilea immediately raising a hand to signal the others to be careful.

“Blood. And corruption,” she said and followed the trail, quickly after finding tracks suggesting talons the size of her own head.

Chunks of rock seemed ripped out, deep marks showing where something had clawed through. Scorch marks showed on the nearby plants as well as the grass sprouting from sections of the island.

Ilea was led mostly by the smell, the tracks simply so obvious she had immediately noted them thanks to her sphere.

It seemed whatever had fought her had fallen off the side of the nearby cliff.

She looked over and saw a ledge below, jumping down a moment later.

An open cavern led into the massive stone pillar sprouting up and through the mists still hanging farther down.

The vegetation was growing more freely inside, crystal light pouring in from various cracks and openings in the surrounding.

Ilea waited for a moment, seeing Elfie fly down the side of the stone island or pillar. She wasn’t sure yet if it was floating or not.

A nod sent his way, she followed the smell and finally found what she was looking for.

The corpse of a seriously mangled creature. Red wings torn to shreds and a dragon like head missing most of the skin and both eyes. A long tongue, half oozing with corruption uselessly hung from the creature’s exposed jaw, bits and pieces of muscle barely holding it together.

“We might have found the end of our journey,” Elfie said as he stepped up.

“Why, know what it is?” Ilea asked, looking at the tiny red scales covering parts of the once corrupted monster. Two legs with massive claws and teeth that could bite right through her thigh.

“Wyvern,” Catelyn said, landing on a ledge overlooking them.

Ilas took a step back as soon as he saw the creature.

“Fascinating,” Lucas said as he approached slowly, touching the body as he closed his eyes.

“Mhm... it has been a while, since I have seen one of them,” he smiled, reminiscing the memory.

“You fought them? Aren’t they just discount dragons basically?” Ilea asked and rolled her eyes at the immediate reactions. “What’s it with you lot and dragons?”

Elfie chuckled, the only one who hadn’t reacted at all. “The legends will never fade. Calamity and destruction, wrought on a whim. The dragons of old, reshaping civilization with each step they took.”

“Has anybody here ever seen one? Or someone you know?” Ilea’s question was only met with shaking heads. *Superstitious folk here.*