

Chapter 809 A settlement needs your help

Ilea found the creature very much dead, its flesh mangled to the point where recognizing its previous form was difficult at best. She kept her fires burning, making sure little to nothing would remain of the being. A few ashen spears formed, rushing out to take out the demons she saw in the vicinity. While they weren't particularly dangerous to her, they retained their inherent ability to turn whoever they kill into more of their own.

Wiping them out was a priority. She charged Monster Hunter and whistled, attracting another few dozen that had avoided the stone bombardment.

No levels from that one. Guess I didn't exactly contribute a lot to that kill, she thought, using her dominion and reverse healing to kill the approaching demons. She flew towards the approaching machine army, the demons that reached them shred apart by a sea of blades, arcane beams and arrows ripping apart entire clusters of spawn.

Ilea wondered what would happen if she let Silent Memory tear into the remains of the squid like creature but decided one four mark creature was enough to deal with right now. She trusted the hammer, but not quite that far. Yet.

Might try that in Kohr. I'll have to look for those kind of creatures, maybe they're in the oceans?

She flew above Aki's army, contacting one of the Hunter Praetorians with her telepathy. "Anywhere else I'm needed?"

The machine glanced up. "The territories of the Accords have been mostly secured. There are some areas in Lys and the former Baralia where we're currently working with the local governments to clear out demons and other invaders. Kroll has sent word that they have lost two of their northernmost towns. Official and paid jobs to help fight the invaders and anything they have summoned. They have rejected my offer to send in Guardians and every Sentinel and Shadow that could help with the possible magnitude of such a task is already busy."

"How do I get there?" Ilea asked.

"The related gates are cut off. But you can travel from Halstein," Aki informed her.

"Why not. Tell them Lilith is on the way," she sent and charged her wings, shooting off towards Yinnahall. She found the gate to Morhill well protected by both machines and local guards. She was let through without question, appearing in the teleportation hub. She had been in the capital of Kroll to inform the Corinth Order the day prior, finding the gate and appearing outside the city.

Accords and local guards stood at the enchanted stone structures protecting the teleportation circles, smoke rising from beyond the city walls. Even just seeing this much, Ilea could tell the attacks on Halstein weren't nearly as extensive as those on Virilya.

The local guards reacted to her arrival with some confusion, many increasing the grip on their weapons, gulping when they saw her.

"You lost two towns in the north," she said. "I'm here to clear them out."

"I... will get someone," the guard with the most elaborate armor said and rushed to the city walls.

“Are these attacks happening just here?” one of the nearby shadowguards asked, one of the four present to make sure the city wouldn’t break their gate treaty.

So much for that, Ilea thought. “They’re happening all over. Most of the attackers are already dead,” she said, making sure everyone present heard her. They knew there was at least one copied gate leading to Kroll, and she wouldn’t be surprised if anyone she had met at King Eilhart’s court had been involved, at least in some manner.

The shadowguard sighed. “That’s good to hear.”

The guard returned with a Paladin of the Corinth Order following by his side. “A volunteer, Lady Lilith. The capital remains our priority.”

“Two towns gone and you can’t spare a single guard?” Ilea asked before she looked at the woman.

“I’m Paladin Varya. I fought by your side at Fort Kalwart, I will show you the way to Bervom and Kait,” she spoke, armored head to toe in white full plate, dents and scratches visible with blood and dirt marring the well made gear. She held a two handed flamberge in her hand, blood and bits of flesh stuck to it.

[Paladin – lvl 124]

“Any gates that lead closer?” Ilea asked.

“Yes, follow me,” Varya said, briskly walking towards one of the stone structures.

“Your armor is damaged,” Ilea said, looking at the woman’s chest piece as they stepped onto the gate.

“It’s manageable,” Varya said.

They appeared in another structure where Ilea teleported the chest piece into her hands, ash moving out as the Paladin realized what had happened.

“What are...”

Metal bent and groaned as Ilea’s ash straightened the dents before she teleported the thing back onto the woman. “There you go,” she said, watching the Paladin open and close her mouth. “The towns,” Ilea said.

“Yes. Of course,” Varya said and stepped out of the gate. “We’re still about a five hours ride south of Bervon.”

Ilea spread her wings and grabbed the woman with a few ashen limbs. “*Telepathy. You show me the way. Try not to pass out,*” she said and charged her wings. She hoped the woman was more resilient to the high velocity of her flying compared to Iana and Christopher, the two enchanters even at a higher level. *Let’s see what a low level Corinth Paladin can withstand.*

“*Understood, Lilith. I’m ready,*” the woman said and grit her teeth, magic activating as she sheathed her sword and crossed both arms on her chest.

Ilea nodded before they shot off into the distance. The landscape rushed by, moonlight the only source of illumination as soon as they left the vicinity of Halstein. A few minutes passed before the clouds above shrouded the last bits of light, leaving them in utter darkness. Ilea didn’t mind, her sight was just as effective. She noted that the Paladin was still awake but certainly struggling. A few

more minutes passed before she saw a glint of light in the distance, a part of the sky colored red, black smoke rising.

“That one of your towns?” Ilea asked.

“I... I cannot see. I’m sorry,” Varya sent back.

Ilea flew closer still, now seeing the walls of the settlement. Two rivers passed the town, one on each side of the square stone wall, dozens of small ships visible on the water, those meant for trading likely unusable by now thanks to the teleportation network of the Accords. A forest of beeches and birches extended along the northern river, extending out into the wilderness. Ilea hovered above a set of fields, many of them not growing a thing despite the summer season.

“Bervon...” Vayra spoke.

Ilea flew closer, seeing the fires raging in the town, a large section in the eastern part entirely alight. Explosions still resounded, small flashes of magical spells visible. She couldn’t see the red flashes of blood magic rituals however.

“So what’s the deal? It’s an official job, right? I go in and clear it out?” Ilea asked.

The woman nodded. *“That is supposed to be it... I didn’t expect it to be this bad. Are you sure you alone are enough?”*

Ilea watched the spells for another few seconds. *“Yes. I’ll go clean up. Until it is done.”*

“I have to be there. As witness. You will receive no rewards if I cannot confirm what happened,” Vayra spoke.

“I don’t really care. You’re safer here. I’ll grab you once it’s over,” Ilea said.

“I... want to be there. I want to help, where I can,” the woman said.

“Fair enough, let’s not waste anymore time then,” she said and flew down, teleporting a few times before she dropped the woman on a nearby two story house.

Ilea heard shouts, screams, laughter, and magic. Fires raging in the background. The sky was colored a red hue, black smoke rising from the small town of Bervon. Ilea summoned her ash and formed as many copies of herself as she could. Dealing with a problem of this scale would’ve been impossible for her back when she arrived in Riverwatch, but by now it wouldn’t be an issue, even if the attackers had been elves. But they weren’t elves, nor any kind of four mark beasts.

Just a bunch of low level invaders, overcome with blood lust and power. Go now, and kill them all.

Her ash rushed out and way, Ilea choosing a path where none of them had gone, no limbs on her back as she used up all of her capacity for copies. She flew through a group of raiders, from the northern plains based on their appearance. Barbarians clad in furs to shield them from the cold, wielding crude weapons made to kill large beasts instead of humans. Blood and guts splattered to the side, her wings slashing through the surviving trio, torsos ripped from their legs as she healed the few people on the square that still breathed. She didn’t stay, hearing more screams from ahead.

This is gonna take a while.

Vayra saw the battle healer rush away, her broad wings moving in the night. She saw ash materialize before horned humanoid beings of the dark material formed around the floating woman, each one of them rushing away into the city, the healer and her ashen creations gone a second later.

She steeled her will and unsheathed her weapon, the wave bladed sword heavy in her hands. Her body enhancement spells activated, her teeth gritting as she felt her strength and resilience increase. The flight alone had taken a lot out of her, but she would fight regardless. Looking down, she jumped off the two story house and landed with knees bending. She grabbed her weapon and rushed down the road, towards the smoke rising in the distance.

Corpses littered the streets and alleys, buildings set alight, homes broken into. Wanton violence the likes of which Varya had never seen. And she was alone, without the healers and Paladins of her Order. Just her.

She slowed when the realization hit her, all the confidence of Lilith convincing her that she could make a difference here, that she too was supposed to fight. The woman had used her ash to bend steel. *We are not the same*, she thought, raising her blade as she slowed, more aware of her surroundings now. She wasn't attacking any invaders, she had chosen to be stranded in the den of monsters. A scream resounded from an alley ahead. She grit her teeth and walked forward, a brisk step as she listened and watched, stepping around the corner to find two large men, one of them holding up a struggling woman before he slammed her into the wall of a house.

Varya took in a deep breath before she walked into the alley. She didn't identify the two people, lest she falter. *Hella, give me courage*. She used her rush skill to close the distance, her blade cleaving in a horizontal arc and through the neck of the first man. He raised his axe to deflect her blade in the last moment. It didn't matter. Her momentum coupled with her strength pushed his weapon aside, her blade cutting half way into his thick neck. She gripped her blade and finished the arc, leaving him falling forward with his head barely holding on.

"Bitch," the second man spoke, throwing the bloodied woman aside as he grabbed two small axes from his belt. He wore no shirt, his leather pants rugged, both clothes and skin covered in blood and ash. His eyes were full of mad joy, his hair shaved at the sides.

Hella, guide my blade.

She held her sword near her shoulder, the tip angled towards the crouching man.

He teleported.

Varya used her twirl skill, using all her strength to hold on to her weapon. Her arms shook when her blade cut through the man's right arm, coming to a stop halfway into his torso. She looked at his wide eyes and let go of her weapon, feeling the pain in her shoulder, one of his axes wedged inside. *Hella, give me strength*. She felt the warmth as magic surged within her, her left fist impacting the man's face, bones shattering as her gauntlet broke in his jaw.

He fell backwards, groaning before they impacted the ground.

Varya raised herself up, wincing as she tried to push herself up with her right arm. She used her knees instead, punching her bloodied gauntlet into the man's face. Blood splattered to the ground, teeth mixed in with the gore, his skull finally giving in.

She heard the sound in her mind, informing her about the kill.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Axe Wielder – lvl 105]'

Not far below her own level, but not enough to grant her a level either. She grit her teeth and ripped out the axe from her shoulder, hitting the stone wall to her right with her back as she raised her arm to the mangled bit of metal. Her healing flowed into the wound below, stopping the bleeding as well as she could for now. She didn't use more mana, finding her sword before she walked over to the woman. *Still alive*, she realized after crouching down. Varya checked her and healed her face and throat, the woman looking around with panic in her eyes.

"Quiet now. You need to hide somewhere," Varya said. She saw the blood covered brown hair and the terror in the young woman's face. "In there," she said, pointing to a splintered door of a nearby home, wood on top of a stone base.

"Y... you killed them," the woman stuttered as Varya moved her towards the entrance, listening before she entered the ground floor, little visibility inside the dark room. She searched the vicinity and found an entrance to the cellar, ripping open the lock before she opened the small hatch.

"I c... can't... I can't go down there," the woman stuttered, her hands shaking.

"I can't do anything else for you, I'm sorry. Go down there and wait through the night," Varya said and pulled the crying woman down into the small room with her, helping her get settled for a minute. She found a blanket and put it onto the woman's legs before she grabbed her shoulders. "I'm Varya, Paladin of the Corinth Order. You will survive," she spoke. "May Hella guide you. Be not afraid. Help is on the way."

An impact resounded from above, silence returning a moment later.

"I have to go," Varya said.

The woman opened and closed her mouth, sobbing once more as Varya reached the top. She gave the survivor a last look before she closed the hatch, leaving the lock destroyed.

Varya prepared for another fight but found no enemies in the room with her. She closed the door to the home as well as she could, before she moved on, glad she had at least managed to regenerate some of her mana. She checked around the corner and went through an alleyway. Coming out on a square on the other side, she heard a familiar twang from above and used her rush skill to dodge, a crossbow bolt hitting the cobblestone behind her.

She rushed to the wall of a house and found cover, magic lighting up on the other side of the square where two people had hidden, one running towards her with two daggers drawn. Varya looked up to see a woman in leather armor aiming down at her with a crossbow. She fired but her arms had moved in the last moment, the bolt going wide.

The woman fell, her crossbow clattering to the ground before her body impacted the cobblestone with a wet sound. The back of her skull was split open, blood running out of the large opening.

Varya saw how the running attacker slowed and stopped, the mage behind shooting small bolts of fire at a target above her.

“What is that?” the warrior asked with wide eyes as a humanoid form of ash descended, his large sword dodged with an expert and fluid motion, the first punch breaking several bones as it struck his rib cage. The being grabbed his pivoting form, one ashen hand striking into his neck before it tore, ripping away his skull and a part of his spine with a sickening sound of tearing flesh. It let go of the remains and floated straight at the wide eyed mage.

Varya watched with her back to the wall, seeing the mage teleport away, the being of ash following after him, calm returning to the square.

She gripped her sword and took in a deep breath, looking at the severed head on the ground, the warrior’s eyes wide open.

A set of explosions drew her attention to the end of a nearby street, flames spreading over the houses as windows shattered. She saw a group of people rushing over the rooftops, one dark figure following them, this one with wings. Varya watched as all the men vanished and appeared in front of the being, a single wing cutting through them all in one motion. Lilith vanished before the first bits of flesh even hit the rooftops.

She watched the gore splatter down to the ground. *I’m not needed here.* She considered for a second then smiled to herself, looking at her bloodied sword. *Then again, I’m a much more reasonable target to attack than Lilith.*

She ran towards the opposite building and jumped, clinging to a window as she sheathed her sword. Once more she jumped, this time holding on to the roof with her hands. She pulled herself up and landed on her feet, crouching in case there were enemies nearby. Varya waved in the general direction where she had seen Lilith go to.