

Chapter 393 Findings

Ilea just kept on punching, her mana recovering slowly with Meditation. Some of her hits lacked mana intrusion abilities to let her recover a little more.

Her ashen limbs continued to slash and cut at the thrall's arms that kept on regenerating.

Nothing much remained of his head but his heart was still beating, mana still active in his body. His magic still draining health out of her.

A loud crack resounded when Ilea finally broke his rib cage, the subsequent punches squashing his organs one by one.

She ripped out his mangled heart and squeezed it briefly, blood scattering over her ashen armor and the ground when it exploded. A ding finally resounded in her mind.

'ding' 'Your group has defeated [Corrupted Vampire Thrall – lvl 541] – For defeating an enemy two hundred and twenty or more levels above your own, bonus experience is granted'

Sure, so much help from my group. Ilea brushed off the blood from her ash covered cheek and stood up, looking at the remains of the corrupted man. *Seems safe enough here,* she thought and revealed her right arm.

Maro appeared in the room before the rest teleported down.

“Are you alright?” he asked as he stepped closer, watching her slowly cut into the top of her arm.

“Yea. Thanks for listening. Would have been a longer fight otherwise,” Ilea said as she crouched and took some of the corruption and blood. *Might not be my best idea but I suppose I survived it already.*

She covered the wound on her arm and felt the unpleasant feeling spread through her body. *The things we do for resistances.*

Her healing kicked in, keeping the disgusting and dangerous ooze at bay, Ilea gritting her teeth as she struggled against the effects. It felt worse than her first exposure to Kyrian's curse.

“That's dangerous,” Catelyn commented, more concerned than accusatory.

Ilea didn't even look at her, covering her arm with bone armor and ash once more. “Like being frozen in place by mind magic?” she asked.

Niivalyr chuckled, Catelyn shaking her head before she smiled too.

“I'm learning of the benefits. It seems in my old age, I've grown arrogant,” the fox said. “Still, I won't rub corruption into my wounds. I hope you understand.”

“It's a niche hobby,” Ilea commented, getting more and more used to the sensation in her arm. *Is it taking over?*

She quickly checked her messages to confirm.

'ding' 'The Azarinth Sentinel has reached lvl 319 – Five stat points awarded'

“Do I get more experience if the kill was mostly mine?” she asked the group.

“Of course,” Catelyn replied. “A sizable part is distributed amongst anybody else involved however, even if all they did was being frozen in place.”

“Good,” Ilea said. She supposed the available help and them being involved reduced it by quite a bit. Still, she had gotten a level out of it.

‘ding’ ‘Sentinel Core reaches 3rd lvl 9’

‘ding’ ‘True Ash Creation reaches 3rd lvl 12’

‘ding’ ‘Ash and Ember Unity reaches 3rd lvl 11’

‘ding’ ‘Keeper of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 12’

‘ding’ ‘Blood Manipulation resistance reaches lvl 19’

‘ding’ ‘Mental Resistance reaches 2nd lvl 16’

She put her five points into Intelligence when another ding resounded in her mind.

‘ding’ ‘Blood Manipulation resistance reaches lvl 20’

“It’s insane leveling speed for Blood Manipulation resistance,” she said.

The group had already made their way past her, looking through the camp.

Niivalyr joined her and looked at the mess left behind by her battle. “You can heal against it?” he asked, moving back the part of the robe that covered his arm.

A beautifully crafted dagger appeared in his other hand, the elf cutting a one centimeter wound into his skin. He crouched down and took some of the corrupted blood too, looking at it for a long moment before he glanced at her.

An ashen limb extended and started pushing healing mana into him. “Sure. It’s not very pleasant though. Just let me know if it starts to take over, we’ll have to cut off your arm.”

The elf pushed the corruption into the wound and hissed at the instant sensation. “Do... you know... of a place, where one can train against the mind?” he hissed again, perhaps in anger at his inability to resist the thrall.

Ilea moved the corpse with her ashen limbs, searching through it with her sphere. *He owned nothing? Expected another storage item from such a high level creature.*

“There is a Blue Reaper nest near Hallowfort. They’re pretty fucking though though. This one here used his magic in a much more nuanced way but in sheer force, the reapers are probably more powerful,” Ilea explained.

“The city of Dark Ones above? Do you... plan to visit the nest once more?” he asked, a little shy.

“Yes, definitely,” Ilea replied. “Miststalkers and training more resistances is probably going to fill my time in the coming months. If we survive this delve that is,” she smiled at him, revealing her face as the ash receded and her bone armor was stored.

“I will focus on the Taleen to enhance my strength but perhaps I might train against their drain magic,” he mused. “It seems less dangerous however than the magic of the mind.”

“Yea, mind magic is fucky,” Ilea commented and walked to the crude buildings too.

“Do you think he was corrupted before?” Catelyn asked, glancing back at her as she looked through the fireplace and some of the tools. “Or did he live here?”

“The corruption was deliberate, that much is sure,” Ilea replied, motioning with her hand to imply the cut he had on his chest.

“The ink hasn’t dried out,” Maro said as he stepped out of one of the buildings, holding a small glass container. “He kept a journal. In a language I can’t read.”

“Let me see, there is a chance I have encountered it before,” Elfie said as he stepped forward.

Forgot he’s a languager, Ilea thought and watched him step into the building.

“More experiments in here,” Lucas commented from within another building. “Tinctures, potions and a lot... I mean a lot of blood.”

Ilea stepped closer, getting within range of her sphere. *Hmm?*

Some of the glass containers were familiar, the same design as the blood vials she had found back in the fourth layer, before she was hanging out with Hana. The ones she still had.

One of the machines was there too. The freaky looking chair with various injection needles, and restraints, half covered in blood.

“Horrific,” Lucas murmured when he saw her enter. “To think someone would warp the creations of magic... mhm,” he shook his head, smelling on some of the herbs and potions.

Ilea nearly gagged at the smell of old and rotten blood and other bodily fluids, leaving the building again without commenting on what Lucas had said. The sight itself wasn’t as disturbing to her anymore.

The implications were worse but Ilea had been dulled towards scenes like this. Perhaps hardened, depending on who one might ask.

Ilas carefully looked over some tools when Niivalyr exited one more, a somewhat worn and torn book in hand.

“It is a language of old, one found within many a ruin in these parts. Closer to Standard than Rhyvor’s language,” he explained, his gaze focused on the pages.

“This one’s name I believe was Malbrunt Krad’il’etar, a priest of the so called Red Church and he was most certainly untainted by corruption mere weeks prior to today,” Elfie added.

The rest of the group joined now, listening to what he had to say.

“Kradiletar? With apostrophes?” Ilea asked.

The elf nodded in response and turned the page, careful not to increase the damage to the book.

Ilea just rolled her eyes but didn’t comment on it further.

“The day of salvation is here. The true blood was released, in its active form. From their slumber they woke. To deliver upon me their promised deliverance,” Elfie looked up and glanced at Ilea. “He wrote in blood by the way... just in case such is relevant.”

He focused on the book once more, moving a finger along the lines. "A frenzy strikes those who are freed, their path enlightened and focused. No more do they stall and stray. Their power unleashed, they seek to spread that which is truth," he squinted his eyes but then shook his head. "A messy writer. It appears his wits were barely present even before the corruption."

"Those in our way will be slaughtered. The old gods have spoken, finally, I will be free. Come upon me, thy servant. So long have I waited, so long have I suffered. The mind will open, soon," Elfie finished.

"That is the last entry. It appears he corrupted himself afterwards," he said and instead opened the book at the beginning.

"I don't feel the enlightenment," Ilea said, looking at her arm. She continued to heal Elfie, preventing a further spread of the corruption in both her own body and his.

"Many years has he wandered, in search of truth. May he find rest now," Elfie said as he read through the book.

"It appears this one was exiled from the church, removed for his methods that he himself called righteous and necessary. There is note of a tuner he found deep within the ninth layer. An apparatus to apply and extract blood. Change it," Elfie added.

"Probably the chair thing in there," Ilea said, pointing to the building where Lucas and herself had been in before.

"He decided to make camp there, cover his tracks and set illusions. The entries become increasingly confused it seems, full of rage and self loathing," Elfie said, continuing on. "It appears the church came looking for him at one point, several... inquisitors. Slaughtered and their blood extracted."

"Is there a mention of his power?" Catelyn asked. "A human at level five hundred... seems unlikely."

"He does appear to have avoided most of the monsters on his way down here, yet there is no mention of his actual level. He did capture Tusk bears only, apparently a beast common on this layer. The Wyverns... he seemed to have held them in high regard. Wait... there was a fight at one point. He was injured heavily and had to retreat. He too speaks with respect of the Shredders and the Reapers we have faced before."

"What was the level of the corrupted Dark Ones on the first layer?" Ilea asked. "There were some, weren't there?"

"Indeed," Catelyn said and contemplated.

"I failed to identify them," Ilea supplied.

"I didn't look at each and every message. There were hundreds," Ilea said. "Maybe the two classes get merged into one of a higher level."

"It is possible. The dungeon taking control once the corruption kills whatever it has infected," Catelyn said.

"Man becoming monster," Maro said. "Hmm."

"Like your knights?" Ilea asked.

He nodded absentmindedly, looking at the corpse of the priest.

“So it’s not the red church that was responsible?” Ilea asked afterwards.

“He was not part of them anymore. The old gods he spoke of, they may simply be higher ranked members of the church,” Catelyn said.

“Yea, or they were fucking with shit they didn’t understand. Left behind by whoever built that bunker we found,” Ilea said, scratching her cheek.

“Possible. The true blood... in its active form. It seems he had known about the true blood, whatever that may be... and had simply failed to activate it?” Catelyn asked.

“The substance rarely found within the Descent? Retrieved and sold to the highest bidder,” Ilea said, shaking his head lightly. “The corruption may very well be unleashed upon the world already.”

Ilea shook her head. “This guy tried for ages and he failed. Even if it is the same substance, I doubt much will come of it. Plus, someone else might not be as happy to become an infected zombie,” she said.

“Not as happy as you?” Maro asked.

“You better hope it doesn’t take over, old man,” she winked at him, her ashen limbs looming behind her.

“That would indeed pose a problem,” Elfie murmured, still reading through the book. “Also he does speak of finding true blood within this place. As well as the facilities of the old gods, their technology too advanced to understand. It leads me to believe whoever they are, they are not a part of this church.”

“Certainly capable blood magic scholars,” Maro commented.

“Maybe one of these survivors managed to activate the true blood, if that is really what the corruption is,” Ilea suggested. “Is there a mention of the expedition passing through?”

“Nothing so far,” Elfie answered a moment later, turning the page. “Fascinating. It seems this individual infected himself with the blood of a vampire... on purpose. Giving up a high leveled class to become a thrall. In search of understanding.”

“He fought a vampire?” Maro asked, somewhat in disbelief.

“There is no mention of a battle, necromancer. Merely the acquisition of blood,” Elfie replied.

Catelyn sighed and looked at the ceiling. “So there might be a vampire down here too...”

“Don’t look so defeated. I thought Wyverns were already the worst possible outcome,” Ilea joked.

The fox shook her head and chuckled. “Well... let us at least hope it did not get infected. With the legends pertaining to its blood, one would assume it is a difficult to corrupt creature.”

“Have you seen one? Fought one?” Maro asked, facing her now.

“No,” Catelyn said.

“How do you know of them here? I believed it to be a legend amongst humans alone. Perhaps one attributed to elven kind,” the necromancer said, getting an absentminded hiss from Elfie.

“Man and his arrogance. Do you think a creature of blood is particular in its hunger?” Catelyn asked.

“I thought they only ate virgins,” Ilea said. “So yes.”

“Then you are wrong. They are feared amongst Dark Ones as much as it appears they are amongst humans,” Catelyn said. “Yet it matters little,” she sighed. “The farther we descend, the more dangerous it seems the monsters are becoming.”

“As grows their resilience against the corruption,” Ilas said.

“Do you guys want to make camp here? Maybe scout around a bit, find the way to the next layer?” Ilea asked, her bone helmet appearing once more, ash covering it a moment later.

“You wish to battle the Wyverns,” Elfie said. “I will read through the rest of these records. I will accompany you however, should you request such.”

“We should focus on why we are here. I understand that you want to face them, Ilea. And I won’t stop you. Yet they will still be here, whenever we come back up,” Catelyn said.

“I agree with you, mostly. This fucker here however already knocked out half our team and without me and Maro, you’d probably be dead now,” Ilea said, neither trying to insult nor belittle her.

“What are you trying to say?” Catelyn asked.

“She wants to fight the Wyverns to get stronger,” Maro assumed, tilting his head to the side lightly as he looked at Ilea.

“Marginal increase will make little difference-” Ilas said.

Maro interrupted him. “It will with her. Since we encountered the Shredders, she’s been the one to mainly deal with the monsters. We can survive and flee as a team but I doubt we would have been able to decimate everything the way we did. Not without her insane resilience and recovery. She’s the main tank and healer we have.”

“And we are to wait until she is powerful enough for us to continue the journey?” Catelyn asked. “I admit, you have already saved us many times but as a team, we will be able to progress more safely. And more importantly, faster.”

Ilea sighed. “And then what? We hit a wall we cannot break because whatever creature is down there will be too powerful for anyone here to face.”

“It is doomed then? Our path at an end?” Ilas asked.

Maro shook his head. “Don’t be ridiculous. The expedition went through here. Either that or we missed them. We continue on but simply don’t fight every single beast on the way. We find them and get them out, if they’re still alive. If there is a source to the corruption that isn’t a powerful beast, we take care of it too.”

“Every corrupted beast is a source of the blood manipulation,” Catelyn said before she looked at Ilea. “Are you to be the weapon to destroy it?”

“I have a higher chance to take a hit and live,” Ilea said and crossed her arms. “Even more so if I fight and kill a bunch of beasts here. Alone.”

Ilas nodded. “If she is to face them alone, perhaps it may be worth the time loss.”

“We will lack our healer,” Lucas said, glancing at each of them.

“Most of us can heal however,” Catelyn sighed. “Even for me, it would have been difficult to face the Shredders or Tangled Reapers alone, I will admit it. I lack the resistances and sheer resilience. However I won’t leave the Descent while the corruption is still rampant, my people’s fate uncertain.”

“We can go farther down,” Maro said. “Me, you and the elf. We find the expedition or what’s left of them. We find the source, if it exists and destroy it. With your fire and healing, we should at least survive that far. Ilea follows as she progresses.”

He looked at Lucas and Ilas. “You two are a liability by now. I suggest you ascend once more and help defend the first layer.”

Lucas sighed. “Hmm... I have been wondering, when we would have this talk,” he chuckled and smiled. “If nobody objects, I would like to study the trees and plants in the fifth layer. There was something peculiar about them. I will be able to seal more exits, should I encounter them.”

“Ilea... if it is no bother, may I collect some of the vegetation here as well? Now that I am here already,” he asked, smiling at her.

“I don’t mind, as long as you don’t get in the way,” Ilea replied and nodded.