

Chapter 377 “Healing”

Hours had passed, the body enhancement spells and healing skill keeping Ilea topped off in both health, mana and her ability to function efficiently. If anything, she had gotten better.

The numbers were thinning, nearby at least. It was good that most of the species had good senses, making them pick out and focus on Ilea the moment they got even forty or fifty meters close.

She fought atop a literal mountain of corpses, limbs, blood and the orange corruption that permeated through it all.

I'll need the biggest fire in the history of fire to burn all this down. Ilea thought. Her sphere and magic sight was the only thing even remotely capable at making out the living monsters amongst the twitching, oozing sea of gore.

It would have affected her much more, had they all been sentient but she was pretty sure most of the creatures attacking her had been monsters devoid of higher thoughts.

In any case, the corruption had killed them and taken over. If there was a cure, it was either too late for them or most certainly not the time and place to find it.

We need some necromancers to raise these skeletons. Maro was still gone, either taking up a different spot or heeding her request to go and get the elves. Having five more high level beings help in the fight could make a difference, especially with their skill sets.

A rumble suddenly went through the ground, shifting the soft earth and forming new cracks in the land. Bodies tumbled into the openings as well as living beasts trying to get away, trampled by larger monstrosities or simply swallowed by the ground.

Ilea blinked up, her wings making the earthquake irrelevant. The masses nearby had thinned out once more, rushing along the mountain of bodies as they searched for prey to tear apart, to infect with their corruption.

Might be good to check on other survivors, top off Catelyn again and anybody else that might be injured. She thought and flew alongside the running monsters, the occasional spell or projectile flying her way, one as ineffective as the next.

The flames had died down a little, not because of a lack of spells but because there was simply nothing quite as flammable as a forest remaining. Not for a couple kilometers.

It was easy for Ilea to make out the brightest flames, coming from the direction where they had made their stand. Small specks hovered above, spells raining down into the masses.

The first mages were passed quickly thereafter, confused expressions at the sudden arrival of the ashen clad healer.

Numbers were still high here, various streams of beasts coming from distant cracks and caves leading up into the first layer of the Descent.

Walls of stone had been erected, forming an open dome like shape manned by various defenders. Catelyn was outside, a couple hundred meters ahead and amidst the chaos. As were others.

Ilea waited a couple seconds longer before she came down amidst the beasts, ten of her ashen limbs pointing towards the arriving wave before a beam of heat and energy tore into them, a chunk of monsters disintegrated in an instant. Many more left crippled and burnt by the sheer heat.

The rest of her limbs smashed through the skulls of six more monsters. She blinked and appeared flying above the flaming fox, her ash reaching down to heal her.

“Better than last time.” Ilea commented with a smirk.

Catelyn jerked her head up and snarled. “We have healers too.”

“Monsters are thinning out in that direction.” Ilea said. “We should-” She was interrupted by another earthquake, more crevices forming both within the flood of monsters as amongst the groups of Dark Ones that remained.

“It’s coming up soon!” Catelyn shouted. “Check the injured while you’re here. I can hold them off.”

Ilea nodded and blinked towards the dome, the only reasonable place for anybody in need of a healer to be.

Cracks had formed here too, the Dark Ones however avoiding them expertly. Everyone present was above level two hundred, few above two fifty however.

“Healer, over here!” One of them shouted, motioning to a group of people lying down.

Ilea blinked and spread her limbs, pushing her mana into them.

Another two healers were present. “The corruption is extensive with these. We can’t just cut it out anymore.” One of them informed her, blood on his brow. A reptile like dark one, exhausted and tired.

Ilea extended an ashen limb to him too. There were six injured here, orange pulsing from various wounds on each body. “Nobody who can destroy the corruption from within?”

The healer shook his head.

“We’ll just have to combine our efforts. This one first.” Ilea said and lifted the dark one up, at least ten open wounds dripping orange ooze. It was only for magic that he was still alive.

Her limbs extended, forming sharp blades as the other healers stepped up and used their spells in addition to hers. “I’ll get as much out as possible, let’s try to keep him alive.”

She focused and sacrificed five hundred health, her limbs lashing out and cutting into the groaning dark one. The corruption had gone deep, forcing her to remove his limbs one by one, healing them back with surprising speed, the help making a massive difference. As did her healing change at level three hundred, removing some of the the benefits only applicable to healing her own body.

He survived, barely.

There was still corruption left, visible now to Ilea thanks to her healing skill and her hour long exposure to the stuff.

So far she hadn’t been cut or injured but knowing that a simple removal of the physical corruption was enough made it less of an issue for her personally.

Again, she cut into the dark one, his torso this time. She tried avoiding his organs but some were infected too, forcing her to rip them out as well. Her ash was pretty much as effective at this as her hands at this point, her high manipulation skill allowing for fine tuned movements.

If they didn't have any healers around, everyone with corruption was as good as dead.

She finished removing the last bit, near the dark one's eye before his skin reformed and his breathing first hastened and then stabilized. The pain and torture he had went through was real, had happened just moments ago but now he was healed, conscious without anything inhibiting his body.

"You alright?" Ilea asked, lifting up the next barely alive creature.

He glanced at her, horror in his eyes before he fumbled and grabbed the damaged armor pieces that had been removed from his body. "We have to get out of here..." He murmured to himself.

Ilea didn't mind. If he fled, he might still survive. A terrified warrior was no help against these monsters. What they needed were killing machines like Catelyn and herself.

The spells raining down from above as well as the shouts and war cries coming from beyond the barricade proved that there were at least more of them out there.

Contrary to the similar situation back in Ravenhall, everyone here had likely been prepared, not immediately surrounded by summoned demons.

Ilea got better with each treated patient, ripping out corruption and keeping them alive. It would have taken quite a bit longer without the healers as she would have been forced to work slower and more carefully.

With the insane recovery, she could cut off limbs without issue, even going as far as damaging the heart and brain of some of them.

"That's all of them." She said and turned around.

"Thank you." One of the healers said and sat down, resting his face in his hands.

The other one was crying.

Ilea blinked up and spread her wings, quickly making her way back to the maelstrom of death that was Catelyn.

Many of the Dark One warriors nearby kept quite a distance to the fox, fighting the stragglers that had ignored the fox or those simply too far away to take notice.

She started heating up her core again and landed near Catelyn, continuing her dance of destruction and death.

A dark one clad in black armor rushed her, massive axe in hand. His breast plate was split open, sowing bone and blood dripping from within. Corruption had taken over, his eyes focused yet lifeless.

Ilea put him down like the rest. She had been too late for him.

Several minutes of brutal battle passed before the whole area came to a sudden standstill.

Everyone froze, including Ilea.

'ding' 'You have felt the effects of an ancient beast invading your mind. You are paralyzed for three seconds'

Fucking outrageous. Ilea thought, feeling the slight headache. The familiar pressure of mind magic. *I have a second stage resistance. What the fuck is this?*

'ding' 'Veteran reaches lvl 7'

The ground rumbled, the earthquake now stronger than before. Cracks formed all over, some of the frozen beasts and dark ones toppling over from the shifts.

Three seconds passed, the rumbling intensifying as Ilea blinked around, collecting the frozen dark ones she could reach.

Silence washed over the vast cave before the ground shook once more, something massive breaking through amidst the beasts and monsters still frozen in place.

A twenty meter wide scaled worm like creature rushed out of the collapsing hole, dozens of beasts flung aside, just as many entering its maw that split into four separate triangle shaped jaws.

Ilea saw no eyes, just teeth. Teeth and brown scales. No signs of corruption were visible but it was only a matter of time until it got injured by one of the beasts. For now it didn't matter.

She flew back and collected as many of their allies as she could, leaving Catelyn behind who was still frozen in place.

The pressure had lessened, suggesting the spell wasn't permanent.

Ilea couldn't hold more than sixteen people, putting them down within the barricade they had hastily constructed before she moved out to get more.

Catelyn was moving again then, her tails swaying behind her as she looked at the massive creature.

The worm dived down and took with him another fifty creatures, breaking through the hard and stony ground as if it was mere mud. A creature beyond the comprehension of most men.

[Goliath Veramath – lvl ???]

"What do you think?" Ilea asked as she stepped next to Catelyn. "Let him have some fun?"

Catelyn slowly started floating, a vicious grin on her face as she glanced to Ilea. "Let him. Get out the rest and then join me, we have to guide our new instrument of destruction."

Ilea smirked. "Why don't you help? You have tails." She said and rushed down, grabbing more of the Dark Ones.

Some of them were moving again but the same was true for the beasts. Ilea just hoped the worm really wasn't corrupted yet. Even if it was, the sheer size would crush most of the monsters anyway.

No longer paralyzed beasts jumped at the hundreds of meters long form still moving past, confirming that it was yet to be taken.

Ashen limbs slashed through heads and bodies as Ilea collected the last of the front line Dark Ones and dwarfs close to Catelyn, most of them already past the paralyzation and retreating themselves. There were at least a couple hundred of them still standing.

Can't believe they all agreed to join this battle. I thought the residents of Hallowfort were less territorial and would just fuck off somewhere else. Ilea brought the people down and pushed some healing into their minds, even the last of them able to move now.

“Retreat, those able to fly, help the others. We’re going to use that worm to take out as many monsters as possible. Ranged mages with quick evasion and mind magic resistance, with me.” Ilea quickly shouted to the groups within the stone barriers.

Nobody argued, people quickly forming groups and either retreating or flying up to join Ilea. They had seen her fight, either here or back when the Feynor had attacked Hallowfort. The ashen healer had a name in Hallowfort and more than a few grinned when they realized she was there, fighting with them.

Ilea absentmindedly noted that the distress in many of the Dark Ones lessened after her quick call. She watched the worm emerge again, now moving along the ground as it swept up hundreds of beasts, reforming the terrain with its massive form.

“Not much direction we could add.” Ilea said as she flew next to Catelyn, the two a couple hundred meters above ground now.

“Not yet.” Catelyn said, staring down. “Mages, continue to rain fire onto those not focusing on the Veramath. We have to kill and destroy every last one of the corrupted, lest they infect our city and these lands.”

She turned and looked at the flying Dark Ones, all elites in the eyes of a human, now faced with a near impossible task. “With me.” Catelyn said and moved down, her ten tails swaying behind her.

Heat formed in front of her snout before a series of fireballs slashed down and landed in deafening explosions.

A hail of crystals, ice, black sorcery and lightning followed. Beams of red arcane energy cut through the masses, bodies exploding in their wake.

Ilea flew with the group of around thirty mages, the only healer present. She decided to stay in the air, using her beam like heart of cinder whenever it had charged enough to damage her own body.

The output was much less frequent than the mages around her, raining down their magic spells with each motion of their hands. Some held them as if praying while others simply crossed their arms. Incantations were spoken aloud in various languages while others yet were silent.

The result was the same, powerful magic cutting through the corrupted monster hordes, killing dozens with each strike.

Fucking mages man. Ilea felt a little inadequate, only able to shoot a spell every thirty seconds or so. The power itself could hold its own against theirs but the frequency was an issue of course.

The ashen projectiles she continuously formed and shot down were much more frequent but the impact had less of an effect due to her lacking related skills.

Ilea even took out her greatbow to add some more damage, even if it was little. Some of the arrows pierced and at least injured some of the beasts.

“It is slowing down.” Catelyn said, the group watching the worm dig back down into the ground.

Hundreds of beasts were clinging to its protected scaled shell. How many of them managed to pierce its defenses was impossible to tell from the distance, neither how the corruption affected the beast and how fast it spread.

“We’re going to have a frenzied Veramath soon.” One of the mages said. “The corruption is spreading.” His eyes were lighting up in Ilea’s sphere, some kind of long range visibility spell.

I want that too. Also fireballs. Ilea thought and made herself focus on the fact that she could tear through hundreds of monsters when she was in melee range.

They made another round over the hordes that stretched nearly half of the cave at this point, a huge chunk already dead, simply littering the ground.

A sudden wave of mind magic flowed over them, one previously unseen shield shattering before a second one became visible. The group stopped, each looking at the mage who had put up the defenses.

Most of them held their heads, some of the magic getting through still.

Ilea had barely felt the pressure. "Well done." She said, extending her limbs to heal the group and their minds.

"Everyone without a resistance to mind magic should retreat now." Catelyn said. "Soon we will have to deal with the Veramath and its attention will be on us alone."

"Shouldn't we move in now then, already damage it while there are still monsters attacking it?" One of the mages asked.

"Soon. There will be a point when it is weakened from the corruption yet still under attack. If we damage its body enough then, the corruption won't take effect." The mage with the sight spell said. "Yet I agree, those unable to defend against its magic should leave, least they become a liability."

Most of the mages nodded and teleported or flew away, leaving only around ten remaining.

"Can we do enough with this many?" Ilea asked.

"It is what we have." Catelyn said. "The worm should not be able to regenerate, not quickly. We simply have to stop it from going further up. As long as there are survivors here to damage it, the beast will attack."

"Veramath tend to flee if they are close to death, to rest and regenerate. Something must have angered this one to come all the way up and attack the monsters." One of the remaining mages explained.

Ilea nodded. "On what layer do they reside normally?"

"In between. There were some sightings on this level even but never the Goliath. Perhaps its brethren were taken by the corruption." One of them said.

She nodded in silence, watching the behemoth, nigh natural calamity thrash around, flattening hundreds if not thousands of beasts and monsters. Corruption spreading in its body from thousands of cuts and injuries too small to make out from such a distance.

Ilea felt anger rise up within her, at whoever was responsible for this slaughter. While monsters, they each had their habitat in the dungeon, their prey and those that preyed on them. To be reduced to such a frenzy after a corruption had destroyed their mind and body was beyond cruel.

She had felt the same about the demons who had killed and turned whole populations of cities into mindless monsters. It had been in their nature to do so, perhaps there was a similar reason here. Someone who had brought it upon them as Adam Strand had brought the demons upon Ravenhall.

Ilea wanted to find out. An ancient fungus suddenly released or the fanatics that had ruled the fourth layer of the Descent, had experimented with blood and various creatures. She would find out and if it was in her power, she would end them.