

Chapter 871 Heart

Just do what you do best, Ilea thought as she watched the six bleeding figures approach.

A mere split second passed, then they were upon her.

Ilea spread out her burning ash, sent out the spears she could summon in the short time. She dodged and deflected what she could, but four impacts struck her flesh, blood magic and sheer physical force ripping into her. She could feel her insides rupturing, her collarbone and shin cracked but not broken. Her fires spread still, and her ashen limbs cut into the chaos of red flesh and wings, six frenzied demons on her tail.

Ilea teleported a second time. She healed with her third tier recovery, but couldn't deal with all of the injuries in the short span of time. Her right eye had burst, and her lungs had downright exploded. Several of her organs had been ruptured.

She smiled, blood in her mouth as her ash mantle recovered, arms raised as she watched the creatures close the distance. It had been far, and they were slower than the original Oracle, now that the sky no longer bled. Already, she could see the burnt sections and small cuts on those she had injured.

Ilea could've summoned another gate. Perhaps to the Meadow, or more safely, just back to the swamp. But she decided not to. Possible risks were present with both options, and now that the healing factor seemed to have been stripped from her enemies, she knew she could win.

Immediately, she traded blows with the first of the creatures. Her fist crashed into the skull of an Oracle, mana surging into it as claws of blood ripped through her ash. She deflected a strike coming from her left, a kick slamming into her right leg, a claw digging into her shoulder. She was grabbed by her neck and pushed down as the others followed.

Ilea impacted the salt stone, the ground shaking as cracks webbed out in each direction. She raised one arm as a fist slammed into it. Another one struck her head, the boom echoing as her skull shook. The salt stone below splintered, shock waves rushing out from the movements of the six monsters, their flesh covered in burning ash.

She felt her perception slow, seeing her burning ash limbs cutting and piercing into the bleeding flesh. She saw grimaces of red, distorted by rage, and scorching fire. She felt her injuries mounting, felt her crushed limbs, her cracked ribs, her innards ripped apart by her own rupturing blood. And still, she was alive. She felt her healing magic, felt the power that remained within her very core.

Ilea teleported, as far away as she could from the group of monsters. She appeared and felt as her third tier healing knitted back her form. The cracks in her bones filled, the wounds closed, her organs reforming. Once again, her Shift came to life just before the creatures reached her. Ilea breathed in, the doubled healing and regeneration quickly taking care of her remaining injuries.

All the while, her fires raged, and the frenzied creatures tried to claw their way into her space.

She kept the spell active for one total second, her mana lower once again, but her body was restored, and her teleports had reset.

Ilea appeared and was once again beset by the still burning creatures. Her ash and fists did what they could, but once again, she was smashed into the salt stone, punches and blood magic ripping through her right before she teleported, repeating the healing process.

And still, she grinned and grabbed her dislocated right arm, pushing it back in with a resounding pop. A moment later, the mob of creatures closed the distance.

They can't kill me. Not without something else.

Ilea once again activated her Shift when the damage mounted to dangerous levels, repeating the process countless times as her fires and ash dealt mounting damage to the beings of flesh and blood. Finally, she felt her Fourth Tier return, the increased regeneration allowing her to slowly get back into the fight. She only used it during her Shift, the damage dealt to her mana too high otherwise. Short burst of both her Fourth tier and her Shift allowed her to regenerate her mana, and soon she could use her intrusion spells more freely once again.

Ilea marked the creatures with her attacks, and focused her attention on one at a time.

They used the same technique of their original. Yet after the skies had returned to normal, they were slightly slower and not quite as strong.

Countless exchanges later, the first of the beings dissolved, covered in burns and ripped through by destructive mana. Ilea teleported and activated both her Shift and her Fourth Tier, watching as her mana regenerated for a total of two seconds before she left the space again. Varying between healing and regenerating mana, she whittled down her opponents, until only three remained.

By now she could counter them for longer, the incoming damage not near as overwhelming as with six of them. She blocked and parried, fully on the defensive as her reversed healing and the fires of creation burned into her enemies. Her bones were cracked and her flesh was ripped away, her blood rupturing but less with every passing second. She went down to one knee when another of the creatures dissolved. Ilea raised her hand to block the coming fist, the ash and flesh stripped from the impact, muscle and bone holding back the strike. Turning her head to the left, she dodge a clawed swing strike of the other monster. A kick to her chest sent her skidding back over the salt stone.

Ilea breathed out, her flesh reforming on her hand as she raised both arms to meet the fast creatures. This time, she didn't use her shift. Her ash limbs and reconstruction did their work as she dodged and parried, quick jabs sending waves of destructive magic into the creatures, charged blasts of space magic slowing their strikes, each use wracking through the salt stone behind them.

She blocked a strike with her arm and punched back, her fist slamming into the monster's head with an explosion of arcane. Flesh and bone splattered onto the white stone as the being sunk down without a head, dissolving into nothing.

Ilea felt the impact on her head, her skull cracking slightly as she tumbled to the side. She got up, much of her mantle gone as she tasted blood in her mouth. She felt her jaw resetting, the crack in her bone healing as she deflected the next strike. Three more came, all of them deflected. The blood magic left little impression on her at this point, each following strike answered with her own.

She kicked down into the creature's shin, deflected a strike as her ash cut into its wings and shoulders. Ilea dodged to the side and delivered three quick jabs into its head, each flashing up with arcane and cinders. One of its eyes burst. Ilea didn't stop. She charged her wings now, blocking another strike as the ash was stripped from her arms, much of her skin gone as well. Raising her right arm, she released her wings, her bicep impacting the creature's head. She sent the monster

down into the stone, her arm dislocated and fractured from the collision. Slowing down, Ilea turned to see the monster get up, slightly dazed.

She smiled.

And charged her wings again.

This time, she impacted the charging creature with her knees forward. An explosion of gore followed, two mangled pieces of flesh slapping against the salt stone, one vaguely covered in ash, standing up with flesh stripped from her chest and legs.

Ilea took in a deep breath when her lungs had reformed. Her mantle was back, the blood on her burning away. Turning around, she found the remains of the last monster spread out on the cracked ground, dissolving like the rest of them.

‘ding’ ‘You have survived the Seven Blood Moons spell – One Core skill point awarded’

Ilea cracked her neck as she felt a presence on her shoulder.

Violence!

“You could’ve helped, you know,” Ilea said as she fell onto her back, lying on the ground with her arms spread out.

Too

Dangerous

Ilea

Survive!

The Fae jumped onto her ash covered chest and reenacted the battle with punches and flying, falling to one knee, blocking and dodging.

Ilea smiled, and soon sat up. She teleported the Fae back onto her shoulder.

Break?

“My mana is back,” she said and opened a gate to the swamp. “Let’s see how often she can use it.”

Ilea returned with her Fourth Tier active, resuming her battle with the single Oracle. Despite the higher speed and power of the creature compared to the other six it had summoned to fight Ilea even in Kohr, she found the single enemy far more manageable.

By now she got in a hit with every opening, seeing far more than before. She could tell which hits to dodge, and which to deflect. Blocking or trading hits still made little sense, with her Fourth Tier active. But this time around, Ilea started to try and continue the fight even without her arcane enhanced form.

She continued to deflect the strikes, both blood magic and the sheer physical impact lessened compared to the first time she had faced the creature. Still she was left battered and bruised, cracks in her bones until she switched into her Shift. Ilea could tell the Oracle would get past her defenses faster than her counterparts summoned by her Fourth Tier spell, but Ilea didn't care much. She used her Shift the same way now, as she had done in Kohr. Healing her body. Or regenerating mana. By now she could face the monster. She knew how it fought, knew the damage it dealt, and she could keep up the aggression. But not for long enough.

No matter how many strikes Ilea landed, the Oracle healed and healed.

Ilea did find that the creature no longer used its Fourth Tier, even though she was sure she had dealt more damage than before the initial use of the spell. Which meant either that the monster had used the spell for some other reason, perhaps on a whim, or that it couldn't use it. Ilea hoped for the latter.

She tried something new when nothing changed, summoning a gate behind herself just when the creature grappled her. The momentum and a push from Ilea's space magic brought both of them through, and into Kohr.

Ilea wondered if the proximity to the swamp made a difference, but when she teleported away from the creature, she found its charge had slowed. Its strikes were not as powerful, and it no longer healed at all.

Ilea beat it down into a pulp with the next few exchanges, bringing the creature to the ground with her charged wings before she grabbed onto its wings and ripped them out with one powerful pull. She watched as the remains of the Oracle dissolved, just like the others.

No sound reverberated in her mind.

The being was alive, but not here.

Fuck.

Violence appeared on her head, holding on to one of her ashen horns. *Violence*. It nodded.

"It's the fucking lake, isn't it?" Ilea murmured.

She rolled her shoulders, a little annoyed at how easily she had been played. Especially with her having trained with the Meadow for so long.

Ilea went back immediately, and found no figure remaining near the blood lake, the ripples still flowing over its surface.

She flew up and charged her heat. Her ash spread out, like a mist over the red liquid. She covered as much of it as she could, then set it all alight.

A scream resounded just before she shot down a fully charged beam of Embered Heart.

Tendrils of blood shot up from the lake as a new humanoid form rose from the center, the same long ears and blood red eyes.

Ilea dodged the tendrils trying to grab onto her, feeling her innards rupturing from the powerful blood magic, and yet she found it manageable after having fought the creature for a while. She saw the creature below spread her wings, flying up to catch her.

This time, Ilea ignored it entirely. She focused all of her attention on evasion, while she rained down burning ash into the lake, even strengthening it all with her health. She tried to connect to the entity with her reversed healing, and found that it worked, adding another layer of damage.

She saw the writhing blood, all of it bathed in fire, finding it difficult to justify an attempt at close combat mana intrusion. With how much power the physical pursuer had, and with how strong the blood magic was, she felt a ranged approach was more appropriate.

While the lake could heal the elven form of the flesh creature, Ilea couldn't tell if it could heal itself. She continued for a long while, avoiding spells and healing damage, deflecting strikes and using her Shift as often as possible, to both heal herself and flare up the fires of creation that had now spread across the entirety of the lake. Ashen spears impacted the surface constantly, slicing into the liquid and spreading the flames from within.

The smell was foul and all permeating, but Ilea kept up her assault.

After a while, she realized that the lake level was lowering, the shorelines starting to show.

For hours, she fought, most of her focus required to avoid the elven form always close behind. Now that she could focus on her fires more than anything, she found it all quite manageable.

Ilea expected another few uses of the creature's Fourth Tier, but that didn't come to pass. She burned the lake down until nothing but a puddle remained.

At the center now, she could see the beating heart of the creature, raised atop a growth of bone. She used her Fabric Tear to grasp the thing but found her spell failing, feeling as if she had tried to use an ocean.

The elven form stopped following her. Instead it landed next to the heart and grabbed it with one clawed hand.

Her chest opened up before she pushed it in, the remaining blood of the lake flowing up to shroud her.

Ilea closed the distance.

One last brawl then. She grinned and landed in the bed of the lake, blue runes coming to life as she spread out her burning ash.

She deflected strike after strike, her own intrusion slamming into the creature with repeated impacts. Ashen spears dug into the healing flesh. Ilea dodged a series of wild strikes as her ash cut through the flesh. She stepped forward past an opening and slammed her fingers into the creature's chest, her intrusion converted to physical force. She grasped and squeezed with everything she had, pulling out the beating heart as it quivered against her strength. Ilea ignored the strikes impacting her shoulder and head, blue and golden shields shattering as her ash was broken through and stripped away. Arcane runes flared up as her mana took the damage.

It didn't matter anymore.

She brought her other hand towards the heart, turning to avoid the grasping hands of the Oracle.

Ilea squeezed, and the heart, gave out.

A last wail left both the organ and the elven form behind her as the heart burst into bits and pieces of flesh and blood.

A ding resounded in her mind as she watched the powerful form next to her dissolve.

She stood there and watched as the last bits of blood dissolved around her, the glow of her runes fading as her ash recovered, her health brought back to the top with her third tier recovery.

Faint light broke through the dim ambiance of the Cursed Marshes. The suns were rising, gnarled trees and lakes visible in the distance as Ilea flew out of the pit.

No bodies to look at either. Feels like I'm fighting bits and pieces of magic.

She took in a deep breath, smelling earth and water, moss and trees. The blood was gone.

Violence, the Fae exclaimed as it flew out from its hidden space. He nodded, underlining the deep thought.

Ilea cleaned herself off with white flame before she formed an ashen chair and summoned herself a meal. As per usual.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Oracle of the Forgotten – lvl 2081]

'ding' 'The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 842 – Five stat points awarded'

...

'ding' 'The Arcane Eternal has reached lvl 858 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Ashen Titan has reached lvl 836 – Five stat points awarded'

...

'ding' 'The Ashen Titan has reached lvl 852 – Five stat points awarded'

'ding' 'The Primordial Arbiter has reached lvl 835 – One stat point awarded'

...

'ding' 'The Primordial Arbiter has reached lvl 853 – One stat point awarded'

That's enough, Ilea thought with a wide smile. She shoveled food into her mouth and read the rest.

'ding' 'Ashen Limbs reaches 3rd lvl 12'

'ding' 'Bulwark of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 23'

'ding' 'Soul Perception reaches 2nd lvl 15'

'ding' 'Spear of Ash reaches 3rd lvl 14'

'ding' 'Blood Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 27'

...

'ding' 'Blood Magic Resistance reaches 3rd lvl 29'

'ding' 'You have removed the source of Dread Beasts within the Cursed Marshes – One Core skill point awarded'

'ding' 'Following requirements have been met. Has reached level 850 in three Classes while human.'

Only one skill can be enhanced to the Fourth Tier per Class. Choose wisely.

One Fourth Tier skill point awarded'

And there is number three.