

Chapter 448 Corruption

“This substance was actually considered a potential world ending threat by some of my colleagues. It is made with what I assume to be blood magic or alchemy. The result is an orange ooze that corrupts, damages and ultimately takes over.”

“Don’t worry, you won’t be alive by then, just a ravenous monster. Now... if this substance was splattered on a random citizen outside... the results would be potentially devastating. Not just to this city but the human plains as a whole,” Ilea explained, casually moving the glass container around in her hands.

“You sure this is safe?” Trian whispered inaudibly.

Ilea nodded his way. “Now. What do you think one can do against such corruption?”

A few students lifted their hands.

She pointed to one at random.

“Burn it,” he said.

“That’s an option. Potentially more painful than others,” Ilea said and pointed to another.

“Healing?” the girl said.

“Healing stops it from further spread... sufficiently powerful healing that is. However, because the ooze is somehow not considered an invasive body, healing will only stop it, not get rid of it. The method we initially used was to simply cut out infected tissue and regrow it,” Ilea said.

Some of the students looked at each other and gulped.

“What about a resistance?” one of them asked.

“That... is the right answer. Now any sane adventurer, even a Shadow... wouldn’t administer this to themselves for the required period of time. It is painful, deadly and spreads quite quickly.”

“So, any volunteers who aren’t quite that sane? Trian... you should join as well,” Ilea said.

The man gulped and looked away. “I’m not entirely sure this is a good idea, Ilea.”

She whispered. “Your pain will be theirs. It will connect you. Otherwise you remain the torturer and administrator.”

He thought about it when a few students raised their hands.

Ilea picked one in particular. “Lorelai, right?” she was older than most of the others. Definitely more experienced. She would likely become an important figure for the younger ones. The woman was most definitely older than Ilea but she didn’t think it wise to think of herself as less experienced. Ilea could see the use the name Lilith held.

A symbol, Alfred, she thought with a smirk. Her name would be even more important because she didn’t plan to stay here all the time.

“Yes, ma’am,” the woman said and joined her.

[Warrior – lvl 60]

“Have you ever lost a limb, Lorelai?” Ilea asked.

The woman shook her head. “Not so far. I’ve been among the lucky ones.”

“You were an adventurer before?” Ilea said.

“I worked at a castle in Stormbreach. Came to the Empire after the elven attacks. Picked up many things in my time,” Lorelai said.

“Then I trust that you share your inputs and opinions wherever applicable. Now tell me, what happens to someone who loses a limb?”

“That depends on many factors. How did they lose the limb, which limb, how much blood is lost, are there bandages or anything else to stop the bleeding and most importantly, is there a healer nearby. One that can regrow limbs,” she said.

“Yep. That last part is pretty much the crux,” Ilea said. “I’m not sure how long it takes but if you haven’t regrown it in a while, even a healer won’t be able to help anymore. Now, if you all get a healer class... and I’m sure you will, you can easily take care of such an injury yourself,” Ilea said.

“May I remove your arm?” she asked the woman.

Lorelai gulped and nodded slowly, holding out her arm as she kept her eyes focused on Ilea.

“I’ll try to make it clean,” Ilea said and sliced through flesh, muscle and bone with a single swipe of one ashen limb.

Lorelai went to one knee and grit her teeth, panting hard as she grunted.

More angry than in pain. Good thing I have nearly three hundred levels on her, Ilea thought as she started healing the woman.

“Wound closed, bleeding stopped regrowing your arm now. Aaaaand we’re back to normal. How do you feel?” Ilea asked.

The woman remained on one knee and cracked her neck. “Violated.”

Ilea laughed. “You’re free to pay it back once you’re strong enough,” she said. “I just want to make it clear that this isn’t some miracle magic done by me... I mean magic itself is miraculous but pretty much any healer at a certain level of power can achieve this effect.”

“If you can heal your group of adventurers after an encounter, you can move on with your mission or your dungeon dive, despite otherwise even fatal injuries. If you can heal yourself from shit like that... well let me tell you, you’re going to be respected. I have reached the point where my body is mostly expendable. A resource just like my health, stamina and mana.”

“Lorelai, ready to test the blood manipulation?” she asked.

The woman gulped and nodded.

“It’s going to be painful. If you reach critical condition, I’ll cut off your arm. I’m already healing you to stop the spread for now. Ready?” Ilea said.

“Get on with it,” she said.

Ilea nodded and put a drop of the corruption onto the back of her hand.

It stayed and didn't change at all, her healing making sure of that.

"How does it feel?" she asked.

Lorelai's face was distorted. "I hurts," she got out through gritted teeth.

"I will have to let it spread for a moment, to see how much it affects your health. Are you okay with that?" Ilea asked.

She nodded.

Ilea stopped healing and watched as the corruption immediately spread out. Faster than with the level two hundred beings she had seen in the north but not as quick as she had expected. *Possibly still just limited in growth speed*, she thought and started healing again as soon as half of Lorelai's arm had been taken over.

She was barely holding on by now, panting hard with gritted teeth.

"Can you endure it?" Ilea asked, crouching down next to her as she healed.

"... With... h... heal... y... yes," she got out and screamed.

"Perfect. We will do that for as long as you can then. Just tap me when you need a break," she said and straightened herself. "The second tier lets your body fight the corruption. Without healing it would still be dangerous but you won't turn into a frenzied monster by the end of it," she said.

Should I add more now or just focus on this for now?

"How many can you support?" Trian asked before murmuring something to himself.

"Shouldn't be difficult to support everyone," Ilea said. "Decided to join?" she asked with a smile.

"Don't give me that look. Yes I do."

The next two hours were spend with carefully spreading the corruption and monitoring the students. Compared to Trian's lightning form the previous day, this method was both more rewarding skill wise but at the same time much more dangerous. Everything depended on Ilea's ability to heal and monitor the students.

Something she actually found quite interesting to do. With her ash spread in a mist that came up to everyone's waist, she found it trivial to keep the corruption in check. The difficulty was the encouragement, monitoring pain and taking care of the people that lost consciousness.

She stopped after the two hours were up, mostly because she wanted to try out some other things as well that day. *Now that, was a success*, she thought and piled up the severed limbs, replenishing the corruption she had used up with fresh ooze. Heart of Cinder activated, disintegrating everything that remained of the vile substance.

"Check your clothes, each other's clothes, the ground around you, your hair or anything else where corruption might remain. I don't have to tell you how deadly and dangerous it is. Be thorough," Ilea said and checked them too, both with her eyes and sphere.

Nobody spoke as they carefully touched each others' clothes.

“I don’t think it’s safe for that substance to be in this city,” Trian whispered to her as he approached.

“I agree. That’s why it’s with me,” Ilea said.

He sighed and shook his head.

“It’s the first thing to prevent the effectiveness of such a corruption. Having people that can fight it, are immune to it,” Ilea said. “Don’t you agree?”

“Of course I agree. But you can’t expect normal citizens to go through that training. It’s insane. I haven’t felt pain this bad in... some time.”

“I don’t expect everyone to go through this. Nor do I reasonably expect a corruption of this level to ever reach Ravenhall. Just in case that it does however, the Sentinels should be prepared,” Ilea said.

“What you have there is a weapon that could cripple and destroy empires... does it really turn the dead into monsters?” Trian asked.

“It does. Well they don’t get much more powerful and they lose most semblance of tactics and instinct. If we want Ravenhall and thus humanity to be able to face larger threats, training against this is necessary. Especially with how simple it really is. The pain is worth it. Trust me, Trian.”

“I know it is. Despite your retelling... seeing the corruption work on me and the others... it seems ridiculous,” he said.

“You should have seen the hordes in the north. Good thing we stopped that. For now at least,” she said.

“For now? What do you mean?” he asked.

“There were thousands of bodies. Hundreds of people involved. Just one of them has to be greedy enough to sell it to someone. It’s a good thing humans rarely go so far north,” she said.

Trian opened his eyes wide. “I see. I had thought it more contained. It seems the least we can do is provide our students with a resistance. Maybe the Shadow’s Hand should do it too.”

“Definitely. But I don’t trust every member to that extent. Tell Claire to fund the creation of a less powerful agent. Maybe Orthán can figure something out here with us?” she suggested. “Then people can train the resistance with each other and with less involvement from me personally. This is just the fast course,” Ilea said.

“If he can study the corruption, I’m sure he could come up with something. Nothing he could create would be this frightening. Many have tried before, I’m sure,” the man said.

“I will talk to him tomorrow at noon. After I conclude the testing with Iana and Christopher. Can you inform him?” she asked and turned her attention back to the recovering students.

Ilea wondered how much her healing dealt with the psychological strain this training surely had on them. *The pain alone should make people vomit, cry, scream and potentially do even worse.*

Little of that showed in the students however. *Maybe that’s an aspect of arcane healing?*

“Trian, do you know if healers can take care of recent psychological trauma? Like this training we are doing?” she asked.

“You are talking about the strain caused by the pain? I am not sure. Few worry much about such effects. The nobles I had contact with who run somewhat similar operations as this mostly think it a

test of character. Those that break will break. I myself limited my own training in ways to deal with these issues. Perhaps some of the healers had an effect on my mind as well, who knows?" he said.

Ilea nodded. "That's worrying. I'm pretty sure my healing can deal with such matters. To an extent."

"Everyone, be aware of your psyche. If you're scared of the training, feel numb to it or anything else. Talk to each other and the teachers. Not being able to handle it isn't a weakness. It's important in your development. And even if you have to stop the training for one reason or another, we will find another job or position you can fill," Ilea said.

She wasn't a trained psychiatrist or a psychology major and this world lacked knowledge on such matters. It would be a challenge to deal with such issues that may arise during not just the training but the lives of all Sentinels. If there were skills to deal with it, that would simplify the whole situation. *Fear Resistance, Mental Resistance and healing itself should be part of it.*

It was necessary for them to experience some of the shit she went through to reach the power she now had but if they all got PTSD through that, the efforts would have been more than wasted.

"They're not allowed to leave the facility?" she asked Trian.

"Only for classes in Viscera. Enchantments are in place to prevent entry and exit. Only we two can currently come and go as we please. Just until a certain normalcy has been reached. I believe it's important that they bond together. From personal experience it is easier to accept and push through difficult situations if an alternative at least requires some steps to achieve," he explained.

"I see. It does seem rather harsh but for now it might be for the best. Make sure they have enough literature, food and other potential past times to fill the time. And make it clear that people can leave if they do not wish to go through the training," she said.

"You're worried about them. I understand. I don't know your background, Ilea. Just know that all of them went through things equal if not worse to what I have experienced. Wars and monsters claim many lives, not only in a direct and measurable way. They want to be here and I will make sure to continually confirm that. We do not want someone that is unable to cope with it. We want those who excel through it," he said.

She just nodded. *What a fucked up world. Hmm, I guess the same was true for many countries back on Earth. I was a somewhat sheltered first world kid after all. Trian seems like a good mix though. Between pragmatic and caring. It may seem harsh but I've experience enough of Elos to know it's necessary.*

"It's just different. To subject myself to pain and danger and to expect it from others," she said.

"They will be able to protect others in turn," he said simply.

Ilea noticed that most of the students were ready again, waiting for them to finish their talk. Very few, if any could hear them talk in the low whispers.

I would tell them all of that if they asked. No issue there, she thought.

"How are you?" she asked.

"That was pretty bad," Celeste said. "But I somehow feel better after all that."

"I feel the same. It might be the healing... or the process of acquiring skills," one of the men said.

“Hunger is worse,” another said.

Several people nodded in understanding.

Ilea smiled. *You won't have to hunger anymore. Oh no... I'm getting attached.*

“Next up is ash magic,” she said, to get her focus on something else. “Again, if anybody is unwilling to participate anymore, you can leave at any time. I assure you that there are no negative repercussions.”

She waited for a moment, using her sphere to gauge the distress levels of the present people. Three seemed to be having quite the struggle.

Ilea wordlessly spread a mist of ash and grabbed their hands, leading them out into the stairwell.

Her healing magic seemed to subdue the panic they initially felt. *Interesting.*

“It's alright. Grab some food and water, read a book or train. Or just sleep. Whatever may help,” she said.

Trian appeared to her side and looked at the three.

“I don't think I need you for the rest of the lesson. Take care of them,” she said with a smile.

“I will. Thanks for keeping it somewhat discreet. Come on, then,” he said and waved to the three, walking up the stairwell.

Ilea appeared back in the hall and continued to address the others. “Again, there is no shame in fear, pain and thinking yourself weak. The system that governs classes and skills grants everyone power, if they wish to reach it. Overcoming one's own blockades and pain will lead to even better results. It isn't easy and giving up is neither weak nor deplorable. It is perhaps the sane thing to do. Admitting our own shortcomings and inabilities but pushing forward nonetheless is a large part of what makes us successful. We can evolve, adapt, learn and recover.”

“To get this ash class, I had to come close to death many times. Had to fight creatures and machines many levels higher than myself. Something only possible through the healing magic that I possess. Being able to recover even otherwise fatal wounds has its perks.”

“Even the basic Ash Wielder class I originally received had great perks in both defense and offense. I can only imagine what you all will receive with the Resistances and understanding of healing. I think something related to ash would be great but any element or even non-magic Classes should be interesting. As long as you have a healing ability in any of them,” she explained.

“To bring you a little closer to the element of ash, what better way is there than to train a resistance?” she said.

“With elemental creation and manipulation, you can form what you want and how you want it,” she said, moving around ash as she created an aerial view of Ravenhall itself with as many details as she could remember.

“The ash that is connected to me counts as my body, benefiting from body enhancement skills as well as my healing abilities. As you have surely noticed. It would be more beneficial for you to have long range healing compared to mine but at the end of the day, you get what you get. And you have to practice and learn about your abilities,” she said.

“Let us start.”