

Chapter 61 – Brey Canyon

Brey Canyon

After Old Welker left, only Leylin and Fraser remained in the room.

The Knight knew of Leylin's status as a magician, so Leylin's attitude was a little more lax too.

Half lying on the recliner, Leylin's eyes squinted, "What is the update on the withering woods?"

Fraser lowered his head to signify his respect, as he said, "Respected Young Master, according to your orders, I sent many scouts out to reconnoiter the withering woods. At the price of 1 dead and 2 seriously injured, I finally uncovered some clues."

Recent events at the withering woods had led to a direct decrease in herb harvesting. As of this moment, several huge factions had also sent scouts with the same intent. But even after having sent many scouts, they were all ambushed.

According to a few eyewitnesses, they had suffered from some ridiculous attacks from a black entity within the woods. So far, it was only known that that entity was an extremely swift monster. Apart from that description, nothing else was known.

"Go on." Leylin's voice was extremely calm.

"One bandit was finally able to see clearly what that monster looked like, during one of its ambushes. This is the sketch he drew."

The Knight handed over a sketch to Leylin.

Leylin took a look. On the sketch paper was a kind of four-legged, snake-like creature. Its body was littered with scales, it had a forked tongue, and on its crown was a small horn.

“What else did the bandit say?” Leylin asked.

“He said that this creature was about two metres in length. Its whole body was a yellowish-brown and it was extremely fast.” Fraser added.

“It had such an appearance?” Leylin said as hurriedly recalled an illustrated handbook of unusual creatures he had seen back at the academy, “It’s rather similar to the Blue Lizard, but the colour is not right. It also appears to be similar to a snake-type!”

“However, the fact that a few scouts were able to escape shows that this creature is not very dangerous. A level 2 acolyte should be able to deal with it.” Leylin calmed down.

At the moment, though, he still did not have any intention of settling this personally. Apart from the potion experiments entering a crucial stage, the withering woods event had not been investigated fully. Unless it was absolutely necessary, Leylin would not risk his life for unknown dangers.

“Pass these orders down. No matter who, as long as they can capture or slay this creature, I will reward them with 2000 gold pieces! Also, any materials from the creature, be it scales, blood, skin or horn, I will give an additional 200 gold pieces for them.”

Leylin said blandly.

“Yes, Milord, allow me to issue these mission orders.” Fraser bowed.

“Go.” Leylin waved his hands. Fraser bowed again before striding off.

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Three days later, east of Extreme Night City, in a small canyon.

Leylin wore black robes and walked on the mountainous path along the canyon. Against a person like him with all of the stats above 3, these obstructions were not an issue at all. He trotted on as if taking a leisurely walk in his backyard.

Behind him followed an armoured Greem, who also wore a mask with his helmet to conceal his appearance.

“We’re here! Brey Canyon Market!” Leylin said softly as he felt the energy waves fluctuating in the vicinity.

This market was on the map that Bicky had given to Leylin. It was situated close to Extreme Night City and served as a resource exchange point. Previously when Leylin chose the mission, part of his intent was to visit this market.

“Halt!” A girl’s voice rang. Leylin turned towards the direction of the voice. He discovered a little girl, riding a mountain goat, moving towards them.

The mountain goat’s four hooves skipped and hopped along the cliff. It actually moved very quickly, reaching Leylin’s side in a few moments.

“You are a magician?” The little girl sized up Leylin and asked indifferently.

“Yes, I am a wandering magician. I wish to enter the market. This is my servant!” Leylin pointed to Greem behind him.

“This servant’s strength has already reached that of a Knight’s? You’re strong!” The little girl gave a thumbs up, “The fee is 1 magic crystal each for you and your servant. If you think that’s expensive then he can wait outside.”

“No need for that!” Leylin took out 2 magic crystals and handed it over to the girl.

“I wish to know where in this canyon I can obtain the latest information!” Leylin asked casually.

“You’re new here, aren’t you? In here, I have the most updated news!” The little girl smugly tilted her head up and her face had an expression that said, “You may beg me for it.”

Leylin was rather speechless. From the A.I. Chip’s scan, this little girl was a level 3 acolyte. Her strength was actually higher than Murphy’s. She was definitely no longer a youth, appearances aside. It was hard to figure out why she maintained the countenance of a child.

“Could this respected guardian tell me what the price would be in order to obtain some news?” Leylin bowed slightly.

“You are rather pleasing to my eyes, so 1 news item in return for 1 magic crystal!” The little girl put on an expression that looked as if she thought highly of Leylin.

“Alright then!” Leylin smiled wryly and handed over a magic crystal.

“What is the progress of the war at Abyssal Bone Forest Academy?”

“Recently, magicians who bought news from me have also enquired about this.” The little girl scratched her head, “According to the latest updates from yesterday, Abyssal Bone Forest Academy still persists due to their reliance on their magic spell formation. acolyte fatalities have not been low, however.

Upon saying this, the little girl murmured, “Calm down! Calm down! The war’s conflagration will not extend to here. There aren’t even that many reliable resource

points in this place, so how can it attract the attention of the academies. Only acolytes might come here occasionally.”

“I know that. Then do you know the reason for this war?” Leylin handed yet another magic crystal.

The little girl hurriedly took it, “Who knows? It seemed to be for a sceptre or some jewel....”

“So it’s like this!” Leylin nodded his head, indicating he had nothing more to ask.

“Young man, I hope you find what you need in this canyon, without any problems!” The little girl waved her hands and patted the goat she rode. It resumed its hopping, and very soon they disappeared from his sight and into the canyon.

“Let us also go in!” Leylin said to Greem behind him.

Coming to the canyon this time, Leylin was on an extremely tight schedule. A number of his experiments have reached a crucial stage. The modified Azure Potion formula was also nearing completion.

It was a pity that some of the magic ingredients he stockpiled before had been depleted. He, thus, had no choice but to venture from his home.

“Soon! I only need to complete the supplementary ingredients, and then begin to try brewing the Azure Potion. By then my spiritual force, which has been slowly increasing, will receive a huge boost!” Leylin eyes seemed to glow with fire.

Following the narrow route along the precipice, Leylin carefully entered the depths of the ravine. In this resource exchange point, the stores were all set up within the holes that dotted the cliff, a little like the caves of primitive men.

Leylin walked into a potions shop called “Langford’s Potions”. The cave was extremely dark, only a few rocks radiating green light illuminated it.

These rocks seemingly made every item inside the cave emanate a green glow making the scene look extremely gloomy.

“Hehehe! What do you want?” A dark and sorrowful laughter could be heard.

From behind the counter, an old dwarf walked out. His face was full of wrinkles, was bald and most of his teeth had fallen off too.

“I require 20 standard servings each of Tendril Leaves, Water Crystal Fruits and Dragon-Eyed Grapeseed!”

Leylin enunciated slowly.

“Oh!” The old dwarf stood rooted to the floor not moving, “These are all potion ingredients and their prices will not be ordinary! Are you a Potioneering Master?”

“That does not seem to concern you in any way.” Leylin’s brows furrowed, this old geezer’s attitude made him rather displeased.

“Young man! Could it be that no one taught you to respect the elderly?” The dwarf geezer smiled and the pupils of his eyes seemed to swirl continuously.

[Warning! Warning! The target’s body is radiating magical energy waves!] The A.I. Chip’s alert sounded.

Greem who was behind Leylin fell without making a sound.

“Damn it!” Leylin cursed. A few acolytes and even official Magi, because of getting injured while advancing or due to being contaminated by radiation from experimenting, caused them to become mentally unstable. They often exhibited craziness. Obviously, Leylin met one such today.

According to the A.I. Chip’s scan, the dwarf opposite him was a level 2 acolyte, but his spiritual force was much higher than Leylin’s.

The magical power in Leylin's body circulated, allowing him to escape from the old geezer's spell, "An Illusionary spell? Doesn't seem like it! It should be some passive spell if it's like this!"

Leylin's robes shook, and a fire red potion was now in his hands. His whole body let off a very dangerous feeling.

"Hahaha... Just like this! Just like this! Death is beautiful, and is descending upon us soon!" The dwarf geezer laughed manically and danced in joy.

"This person has gone completely crazy!" Leylin got ready to throw the explosive potion in his hands, and to find an escape route.

He did not want to engage in a broil with a madman without cause nor reason. Besides, winning will not net him any gains.

"That's enough, Langford!" Just when the dwarf geezer was preparing another spell, a voice travelled over. It was the guardian, the voice of the little girl who rode the mountain goat.

"Marissa! I've had enough of you!" The dwarf geezer howled loudly, and he made an incantation. Black coloured smoke congealed in his hands forming a massive black ball.

The surrounding shelves that held various ingredients were on the verge of collapse under the energy waves emitted by the black ball.

"Damn it! Langford's time is here again. Which one of you can help me?" The little girl's voice travelled over again, this time sounding rather exasperated.

"Foos!" "Ocker!"

Two extremely short incantations travelled over and gave Leylin a shock, "They're all level 3 acolytes! I heard that not only can the spiritual force of level 3 acolytes support a few rank 0 spells, they have also grasped the technique of phrase casting,

which shortens incantations to a few syllables achieving near instantaneous casting.”

After the few syllables were cast, many green vines appeared within the cave. Some of the huge vines held Langford’s hands and feet together.

Langford roared continuously. He prepared to toss the black-coloured smoke ball out.

At that moment, a red coloured arrow ripped through the air and flew directly at the heart of the ball.

* Poof! * The surroundings let off a light ring as the black smoke and the red arrow continued to counteract each other before finally disappearing into nothingness.

“A positive energy arrow.” Leylin’s pupils contracted, “The level 3 acolyte who struck from the outside, no matter their battle ability or spell comprehension, they have far surpassed me!”

Chapter 62 – Modified Potion

Modified Potion

“What are you guys doing? Put me down quickly!”

At this moment, Langford, who was trapped, transformed rapidly.

The maniacal look on his face vanished, and his eyes showed sanity. The originally bald head had grown a large amount of green hair that quickly extended to his ankles.

“Look his hair is already growing, it seems like he has regained his sanity!” The little girl’s voice rang out and the green vines were retracted.

“Langford! You actually did not master anticipating when your episodes of insanity would trigger. You even broke the rules of the canyon by startling our customer! You better obtain our guest’s forgiveness. Otherwise, you will be chased out of this place!”

Two voices gradually left, and Leylin did not see the other two level 3 acolytes, even after the battle had ended. Moreover, even the interior of the cave remained unharmed.

Upon noticing that something was amiss, the dwarf hurriedly bowed before Leylin, “My apologies, Sir! Due to some mental strain, there are times when I’m unable to control myself. I hope you will allow me to make amends for the inconvenience I caused.”

Langford was a little dispirited, “Earlier I really thought I had the timing down. Alas, I never anticipated that it would flare up more often than before, who knows if I really have to move out...”

Leylin too did not know how to react in this situation. He could only say, “Then please wake my servant up. Also, hurry and bring the ingredients I requested!”

“Of course!” The dwarf geezer dragged his long shaggy hair and stood in front of Greem. He lifted Greem’s eyelid to have a look, “Your servant has only fainted temporarily. He will recover after a short rest!”

He then took some brown coloured powder from his robes and made Greem swallow them. Not long after, the burly fellow woke up.

Langford then brought out a small box and handed it to Leylin, “To compensate for your trouble. Furthermore, I can give you a 50% discount!”

“...” Leylin was a little speechless, but he still handed the magic crystals to the geezer and gave the box to Greem for him to carry before he bade farewell.

As they said their goodbyes, Langford bowed deeply again, “If you still wish to trade with me, please remember, only when my hair has grown past my ankle, will I be in a period of sanity. The rest of the time, avoid me for the time being.

Leylin nodded his head and left the canyon with Greem.

Originally, he was in a mood to browse around. However, after this incident, he had completely lost interest. Who knew if there were other crazy people in this canyon.

The path of a Magus is treacherous, each failure in advancement—be it through an experiment or as a side effect of spell radiation—can cause irreversible damage to those involved, even costing them their lives sometimes.

Adding prolonged longevity and immense power, over time a Magus' character would undergo some kind of change; some may even develop mental problems.

Leylin thought of Langford and the two level 3 acolytes who had rendered their assistance. The feeling they gave Leylin was completely different from that of the acolytes of Extreme Night City.

To put things in perspective, it was like a pack of wolves against lambs.

“It seems like real magicians very seldom prefer to stay around humans, and they predominantly stay in rural areas.

Seeing the might of those two level 3 acolytes today made Leylin somewhat more zealous, “Once I have successfully brewed the Azure Potion, I too can quickly advance to that level!”

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In the lab, under the brilliant light, Leylin took and stared at a test tube from the table. It continuously bubbled with blue froth.

With extremely firm hands, he shook it according to a mysterious rhythm.

The blue bubbles in the test tube continued to froth upwards then vanish as it reached the brim.

[The reaction in the potion has become extremely stable, and is estimated to exceed the threshold in 3 Minutes 24 Seconds!] The A.I. Chip's observation alerted.

After reporting this condition, a timer at a bottom corner of Leylin's visual field started the countdown.

When the countdown reached 0, Leylin immediately used the ancient Byron language and muttered an incantation, “This is the azure blue ocean, come! My little babies!”

His other hand immediately dropped some of the blue crystals he was holding, into the test tube.

* Weng Weng! * The test tube started to tremble.

A few streaks of a brilliant blue light flew out of its mouth and rotated around it turning into little blue coloured mermaids.

These little mermaids had a girl’s torso and were only the size of Leylin’s thumb. On their chests hung two shell pieces while the bottom half of their body was that of a fish’s tail. At this moment, they were holding hands together, circling the test tube, singing, and dancing.

Their sweet distinct elegant voices sang and it reverberated within the room strumming on Leylin’s heartstrings.

“The final step! Resist the alluring voices of the mermaids!” Leylin’s expression tightened.

Rumours had it that the singing voices of mermaids not only have terrifying bewitching energy, but these voices were also used to prey on sailors in the deep seas. Many suspected these mermaids as main culprits behind the creation of ghost ships!

Right now, Leylin felt a strong impulse to throw everything he owned to the side, and dive straight into the ocean.

“This is only an illusion. It only has the 10% of an actual mermaid’s might. If these were real or were cast by mermaid Magi, what would the effects be?” Leylin

clenched his teeth and gave off a layer of grey-black light from his body deflecting these voices.

“Manse!” After waiting for roughly 30 seconds, Leylin suddenly blurted out a word.

* Chi Chi! * Black coloured needles appeared piercing through the chests of those little mermaids.

Agonised expressions could be seen on the pretty faces of the mermaids. Suddenly, they dissolved and turned into a few drops of blue liquid that returned into the test tube.

Huge amounts of bubbles, crystals and the drops of liquid rapidly merged and at that instant turned into a test tube half filled with a dark blue potion.

* Crash! Leylin shook the test tube lightly. From within the test tube came the crashing sound like that of great surging waves in an ocean.

[The modified Azure Potion has been brewed successfully.] The A.I. Chip indicated.

“A.I. Chip, how potent is this potion compared to the original formulation?” Leylin asked.

[Beep! Collecting the vapours. Analysing and comparing data... Estimated to have 33% of the original potion's effect.]

Although the previous estimate was 35.4%, there would be some minute differences during the actual brewing. Furthermore, it was the first time he did this experiment, so achieving this effect made Leylin very content.

“A pity that the consumptions of Hove Violet Leaves for this process is too high!” Leylin looked at the remnants of the Hove Violet Leaves lying on the side.

Only the essence from the middle of a whole piece of Hove Violet Leaf could be used for the potion. Apart from that, many complicated steps also had to be accomplished resulting in the high consumption rate.

He estimated that even after Welker bought all of the ingredients available, it would only allow Leylin to brew the potion another 30 to 40 times.

“Now, I wonder what the effects of this ancient potion are?”

Leylin’s eyes flashed in anticipation. He directly walked to an empty space and sat cross-legged on the floor. He then poured the Azure Potion into his mouth.

“It’s a little bitter, and has a rather fish-like odour.” The muscles on Leylin’s face twitched, “The palate of these ancient Magi was just so-so....”

“According to the A.I. Chip’s calculations, the best complement to potions that increase spiritual force is meditation!”

Leylin thought of this before completely entering into a meditative mode.

This time, the meditations effect was very obviously different from before. With a vague concept of time, Leylin felt like he was in the middle of an azure blue ocean and boundless blue sea water squeezed his middle almost suffocating him.

When seen from the outside, the muscles on Leylin’s handsome face twitched, and drops of sweat continuously dripped out.

Almost two hours later, Leylin abruptly opened both of his eyes.

“Phew! The feeling from meditating like this is several times more uncomfortable than before!” Leylin shook his head.

The meditation of an acolyte, more often than not, led to exhaustion afterwards. However, right now Leylin felt his whole body aching, especially his brain, which

felt like someone took a large metal hammer and kept smashing it. Even now he was somewhat dizzy.

“A.I. Chip. Display my stats.” Leylin ordered.

Immediately, a blue screen appeared before Leylin and showed a stream of numbers.

[The Host’s spiritual force has been detected as undergoing a rapid rise!] [Host is under the influence of an unknown, spiritual force increasing by 0.01] [spiritual force increasing by 0.01] [The meditative state is deepening. Effect optimised. spiritual force increasing by 0.03] [spiritual force has reached the threshold, increasing by 0.05]

.....

[Meditative state ended, Host’s stats undergoing change. Strength: 3.1, Agility: 3.3, Vitality: 3.2, Spiritual force: 4.9, Magic Power: 4.0. Status: Healthy]

Rows of data were displayed, and Leylin discovered at the end that his spiritual force had increased by 0.2.

“This figure!” Leylin’s eyes widened, “If the original ingredients were used, doesn’t that mean that I can increase the spiritual force by about 0.7 at a time! It is indeed worthy to be called an ancient potion. Even for official Magi, this is a pretty good outcome!”

“A.I. Chip, assuming there are enough potions on hand, how much time will I need to reach 7 spiritual force points?” Leylin asked.

[Inputting effect of Azure Potion, establishing simulation, factoring tolerance principle, calculation in progress....]

The A.I. Chip began calculating, dozens of seconds later, the A.I. Chip’s voice intoned.

[According to the Host's resistance to medicinal properties, it is estimated that the Host will achieve 7 spiritual force points after two months!]

The necessary conditions to advance to level 3 acolyte was to have mastery over at least 2 spell models, a spiritual force of 7 and to use a reactive elixir.

Leylin had gotten the spell models and reactive elixirs long ago. What kept him back was this spiritual force bottleneck.

“A pity, though! The success rate for brewing the Azure Potion is extremely horrifying. Even if it's me, I will at most succeed one out of ten times!”

“Hove Violet Leaves. I need huge amounts of Hove Violet Leaves. If it cannot be done, I must organise a trading party to acquire them from other cities.”

Leylin clenched his teeth. His eyes revealed obvious desire.

“Young Master!” As he walked out from the lab, Anna, who was waiting outside, greeted him immediately.

“Pass these orders down. From now on, our establishment will cease all operations and devote all resources towards purchasing Hove Violet Leaves. Moreover, Fraser is to make a trip to nearby cities to acquire them!” Leylin's expression was extremely grim.

“Yes!” This was the first time Anna had seen this side of Leylin, so she hurriedly retreated.

Chapter 63 – Mutated Organism

Mutated Organism

The bitter cold of winter passed, and the weather began to get warmer.

Standing on the villa, Leylin could already see the minuscule green dots from afar. On nearby fields, there were even farmers laboriously working.

“A year has passed unknowingly; I am already 15 years old now!” Leylin’s hands pressed on the windowsill, and his eyes seemed to be disconcerted.

All of the Hove Violet Leaves available in Extreme Night City had been bought by him. With continuous brewing, he managed to get 5 Azure Potions, bringing his spiritual force to 5.8.

Unfortunately, any potion, when used excessively, would produce a resistance towards it, and the effects would be reduced over time. Originally, he had estimated that his spiritual force would reach a value of 5.9 with the resources available. However, in reality, it fell short by 0.1 without any apparent cause.

“Right now, I can only place my hopes on Fraser and the rest who have gone to neighbouring cities to purchase the ingredient.”

Leylin rested by the windowsill. He stretched his hands and plucked a bunch of red berries from the table munching on them as snacks.

“Compared to other acolytes, however, my progress is akin to flying. After all, even the heir of a large family cannot use potions endlessly. What’s more, these are precious potions that could increase spiritual force.”

Within a month, Leylin already chased up to the fifth-grade acolytes who had pulled away from him over a year ago.

“It’s fortunate that I’m outside the academy. Only then am I able to pursue my experiments without fearing of the consequences, and use potions such as these!” Leylin was suddenly rejoicing over the benefits that the war brought him.

“However, even if the war ends now, I wouldn’t dare go back. I must, at least, wait until the 3 years mission duration is up. Only then will my excuse be plausible.

At that moment, Leylin estimated that he would already be a level 3 acolyte. Apart from the professors, he would be considered to have power, and would be regarded as a more important member. Moreover, with these years as cover, he would have enough time to think up a few explanations to cover his tracks.

“Master! An emissary from the city lord has arrived with an invitation.” Anna knocked on the door, entering only after getting Leylin’s permission.

Because of some Magus’ doings, her face looked as youthful as ever, never changing.

“An invitation?” Leylin was a little skeptical. He did not have many relations with Viscount Jackson all this while.

After looking the missive over, “A gathering? On the invitation, it was specifically stated that Murphy and his circle of people were invited, which are all acolytes!”

Leylin surmised, “Could it be? Some mysterious thing has happened that requires the help of magicians?”

“Anna, prepare a horse carriage and a set of formal clothes for me. I have to leave for a while.”

Leylin said this without giving it another thought. Towards the Grand Knight, Viscount Jackson, who was also the Lord of Extreme Night City, it was difficult for an acolyte to interfere with his might. Therefore, Leylin did not want to be on bad terms with him.

Moreover, due to the decreased supply of Hove Violet Leaves recently, Leylin did not have any other important things to do, so he could make time for this gathering.

“I’ll have a look, and I haven’t seen Murphy for some time now!”

In the heart of Extreme Night City, the castle-like building which was built using grey rocks was extremely magnificent. There were many soldiers patrolling the area, revealing its prestige.

* Ta-Ta! * A black horse carriage suddenly halted in front of the city lord’s castle. The carriage door opened, and a brown-haired noble youth stepped down from it. He looked rather thin, but his bright eyes were filled with vigour.

At that same instant, another horse carriage, made of reddish brown wood, halted alongside it too. From it stepped out a white bearded geezer who was carrying a book. He radiated a scholarly aura.

After seeing Leylin, every wrinkle on the old geezer’s face loosened as he smiled. He took the initiative and spread his arms out, “It’s been a long time, my friend!”

“I’m very pleased to meet you, Scholar Murphy!” Leylin smiled as he gently hugged the old man.

His relationship with Murphy was pretty good. Although this old geezer had a few demerits, but it was undeniable that some of his experiences were a source of great enlightenment for Leylin. When Leylin had first arrived in Extreme Night City, Murphy had also given much help to Leylin.

Both of them conversed casually. They flashed their invitation cards at the same time as they went past the guarded entrance.

A person, rather like a butler, led Leylin and Murphy through the garden and brought them to a small-sized living room.

Several acolyte residents were already there and Leylin went forward to greet them.

There was a circular sofa in the middle of the living room, with a mahogany table at its centre. It seemed to suggest equality between status and levels.

“Welcome, my friends!”

The tough looking Viscount Jackson entered. He looked the same, to Leylin, as he looked a year ago. Time did not seem to have caused any changes in him, apart from a few more strands of hair white behind his ears that is.

“City lord!” The acolytes all nodded their heads.

“Come, no need for formalities! Sit!” Viscount Jackson casually sat on the sofa and serving maids that wore low cut blouses served some red tea as refreshments, with matching flavoured cake and biscuit snacks.

“Why does the atmosphere seem to be like a conference and afternoon tea?” Although he had his doubts, Leylin never revealed anything.

Viscount Jackson and the acolytes sat in a circle, and, from time to time, they discussed the latest news. On the whole, the atmosphere felt extremely amiable.

“A pity, Viscount Jackson is known to be a cold-blooded person. I heard that to suppress a riot, he immediately ordered the execution of a whole village, even hanging all its resident’s heads on wooden stakes....”

Leylin still put on a friendly mannerism, but deep down he exclaimed, “As expected, to interact harmoniously, one must first have the prerequisite of equal power!”

“Yes, speaking of Baron Fey, he has recently been distressed about the issues of the medicine shop!” Viscount Jackson inadvertently spoke of this while chatting idly.

“We have also heard of the withering woods of Dark Night Woods for some time now. Only that we have not arrived at any solution yet!” An acolyte sitting at the side spoke, playing at being a character interested in delving deeper into this topic.

Murphy’s brows furrowed, “I believe that my lord Viscount will definitely have a solution, right?”

However, Viscount Jackson smiled wryly, “My friends! I have already used ravens to inform the royal family, but up to now I have not received any reply....I am completely at a loss about what to do in this situation!”

“Royal family?” Leylin’s heart thumped, the royal family behind the Poolfield Kingdom was supported by Abyssal Bone Forest Academy. The relationship between the two parties was extremely intricate. This mission appearing in Abyssal Bone Forest Academy was finally no longer strange anymore.

Speaking of which, he was even the representative sent by Abyssal Bone Forest Academy to remedy this problem, but he had been lackadaisical about it. He had finally forced Viscount Jackson to have no solution but to request help from this group of acolytes.

Although deep within he smiled cynically, on the surface Leylin still put on the same front. He picked up the cup of hot tea and sipped, without any intention of owning up.

“Is it only a high levelled creature that had mutated? Could it be that Sire cannot even resolve this?” A red-haired, middle-aged man asked.

Leylin recognised this person; he had opened an apparel store in Extreme Night City and many clothes in his villa had been purchased from there.

The city’s residents knew that the owner of this clothing store was a friendly, middle-aged man, who even has a beautiful daughter. But they never knew that he was a magician.

“Truth be told, I have already struck against it once before! I have even killed a lizard type creature, but it was of no help towards this withering woods case!”

Viscount Jackson flicked his hand.

“Right now, the withering woods area has expanded to a span of about two villages. If not resolved, sooner or later, it will encompass the whole of Dark Night Woods. When that happens, obtaining another herb from it would be only a dream!”

Viscount Jackson clenched his fists.

The herb industry was the pillar of Extreme Night City’s economy. Every year the city lord’s castle gained a lot from the high taxes it imposed on these trades. Right now its tax income had been drastically reduced. It was no wonder that Viscount Jackson was unable to sit still.

“Could you let us have a look at the composition of some of that lizard’s body parts?” Murphy asked.

“Yes!” Viscount Jackson clapped his hands, and a golden yellow-haired maid brought forward a silver tray. Displayed on it were some brown-yellow scales.

The surrounding acolytes all picked up a piece; Leylin too placed one in his hands.

“A.I. Chip! Scan!” The brown yellow scales were the size of a thumb, cold to the touch.

[Suspected to be the scale of a mutated creature, estimated to be a mutation of a lizard type in the Poolfield Kingdom! The surface emits mild radiation, the quality is a mess, extractable materials have been destroyed, useless as component material!]

The A.I. Chip relayed the information after the scanning.

“No wonder the magicians in the canyon did not react! There was simply no use of this creature’s body parts to magicians. It’s the whole body is not even worth a magic crystal. Who would do such a strenuous yet unrewarding task!”

Leylin was somewhat enlightened. To Magi, benefits were paramount. They will not do anything that reaped no benefits.

The withering woods case happened on the boundaries of Extreme Night City. If there were any benefits or some magician who liked the creatures material, it would have long been resolved by the acolytes at the resource point in the ravine.

Their letting this current state of affairs continues only meant one thing: there were no benefits at all from solving the withering woods debacle, only trouble. If there were any benefits, they were too small to cover the potential losses a venture would incur. This was why it had not been resolved after all this while.

“What a pity! It is not a high-level creature that magicians need, just a mutated organism, which has no use to them!” Murphy said after picking up a magnifying glass like object and scrutinising the scale for some time. He reached the same conclusion as Leylin.

“How is that? Any solutions?” Viscount Jackson put on a hopeful expression and looked at his guests.

“Most mutated organisms were caused by long-term exposure from its surroundings. Without further detail and research, I cannot make arrive at any conclusion from just this! Moreover, I don’t think that this creature is the main culprit for the withering woods.”

Murphy shook his head.

“I am willing to give 30 magic crystals to every person, in addition to 5000 gold coins to ask you guys to scout the area. How about that? This is my request, on account of us being old friends!”

Viscount Jackson looked the people in the circle and saw that the other acolytes too lacked interest. He could not help but clench his teeth as he stated this.

“Since it is troublesome for my lord Viscount, I definitely will not refuse!”

Murphy said somewhat grudgingly.

Chapter 64 – Withering Woods

Withering Woods

Pressured by Viscount Jackson's aggressive request, very soon the other acolytes agreed too.

After all, they had been in his territory for so long, and he was also a Grand Knight, so it would be awkward if they were to decline.

However, there was an exception, the acolyte with acne, whom Leylin saw before, refused without hesitation.

Finally, the Viscount's gaze focused on Leylin, "How about you, Mister Leylin?"

Viscount Jackson had some reservation towards Leylin. This was because the timing of Leylin's arrival was a coincidence which made him guess that this acolyte was the emissary who had accepted the royal family's mission.

It was a pity that ever since Leylin had arrived, he had spent most of his time in the manor, and rarely left the place. Neither were there any magicians who came forward seeking revenge on him, so it seemed like this acolyte was truly reclusive.

If it were not for the fact that Leylin gave orders so a mission to the withering woods would go forth, Viscount Jackson would have been utterly disappointed.

"After all, it has to be done, and going in as a party is better!"

Leylin thought deep down, yet on the surface he appeared extremely hesitant, “Recently I have been researching potions, and am extremely busy. Some of my experiments have reached a crucial stage....”

“Still, I beseech Mister Leylin to take time out for this!” Viscount Jackson said suddenly, “I know that you have been buying Hove Violet Leaves en masse recently. This ingredient is rather rare, and other cities as well do not have too much of this in their reserves. However, our castle has a storehouse. If Mister Leylin agrees to go on this scouting trip, I am willing to add those in our reserves as a reward!”

“Hove Violet Leaves?” Leylin eyes flashed; this was an unexpected surprise. He estimated this offer to be Viscount Jackson’s threshold. Leylin appeared to ‘struggle’ on the surface, before finally agreeing.

Afterwards, the acolytes made plans for a concrete time to meet, before leaving hurriedly to make preparations.

For this bunch of acolytes, who wholeheartedly wanted to retire and live like princes, Leylin did not put much stock in their actual battle prowess.

“However, when all is said and done, they are still acolytes. Their basic spells, once cast, should still be something.” Leylin consoled himself.

At this moment, Murphy who just bade the others farewell walked beside Leylin with a frown on his expression, “Young man, when we reach the withering woods you have to protect me.”

“Sire! You are level 3! A level 3 acolyte! While I am but a level 2 acolyte!” Leylin eyes widened.

“Sigh...I’m already too old for this. I have forgotten much of my spell repertoire. You understand, forming the spell model is meticulous work, a small miss-step, and the explosion will not even leave behind corpse!” Murphy had a helpless expression.

“You, how long has it been since you last cast a spell?” Leylin suddenly had a bad premonition.

“It seems almost 30 to 40 years! As you know, I have always regarded myself as a scholar!” Murphy said very innocently.

“F*ck!” Leylin felt rather regretful suddenly.

Two days later. In the morning, Extreme Night City’s gates opened. Through those gates came a squadron of soldiers escorting a party in the middle. The group left the city’s perimeter at a rapid pace.

“I never thought that Viscount Jackson would also set off with us!” Murphy seemed to be very happy. Having a Grand Knight around, left him greatly assured.

Riding beside him, Viscount Jackson wore black-coloured, steel armour with a helmet that covered his entire face.

“How are your preparations?” Leylin found a suitable time and whispered into Murphy’s ears.

“I have concentrated these past 2 days, and can barely use two spell models,” Murphy replied softly.

“That’s good!” Their conversation before was of a joking nature. Leylin would never believe that this crafty old geezer did not have any life-preserving trump cards up his sleeves.

The Magus world is not a peaceful place. Without enough skills, Murphy would have long since died. So how could he have survived until now as a mere scholar?

“However, even the Black Iron Guards have been activated? There seem to be two small squadrons, about 20 men!”

“Of course, these are all elite troops of the city!” Murphy said. Actually, both he and Leylin knew that in the withering woods, those two squadrons served only one purpose. Cannon fodder!

Dark Night Woods wasn't that far from the city. After travelling for about half an hour, the group managed to reach the wood's outskirts.

“The danger level here is comparable to Abyssal Bone Forest Academy, despite its smaller size. At least, if a normal human were to be more alert, they can enter and leave here as they please when gathering the herbs!”

Leylin was at the centre of the party. Seeing the two squadrons paving the way at the front, his mind wandered.

Along the way, Leylin felt the life force of the Dark Night Woods reducing. Although it was spring, the woods seemed to lack vitality.

Moreover, everyone felt that their bodies were getting heavier and there was a shadow that veiled over their hearts. It felt extremely repressing.

Leylin looked around. The roots of the tree showed signs of withering. Some of the fresh sprouts have even turned pale yellow.

“The withering area has not extended to this point, but this is just a hypothesis!” Leylin gasped.

“It is indeed different here now! My family used to be hunters. In past years, there used to be animals prancing about in this area. There were many wild vegetables and fresh herbs....”

Leylin overheard the words a few soldiers whispered among themselves.

“A.I. Chip! Any change in the air around here?”

[Scanning. Comparing with the database! Conclusion: Oxygen density/levels decreased by 3.7%, Nitrogen density increased. An unknown noble gas has appeared. It currently accounts for 1.2% but its density continues to rise!]

The A.I. Chip’s voice intoned.

“Could this inert noble gas be the perpetrator of this withering woods event?”
Leylin stroked his chin, allowing the A.I. Chip to continue.

“Be careful! We have entered the withering domain!” Viscount Jackson roared at the forefront of the group.

Leylin patted his leather armour. Beneath it was the grey robes of Abyssal Bone Forest Academy acting as a second layer of defense. He had even purposely removed the academy’s insignia earlier.

What the accompanying acolytes lacked were the ephemeral defensive constructs that the Magi layered around themselves as they went into battle. Victory often revolved solely on whether the spells cast managed to strike an opponent.

“Instantaneous spell casting, Potioneering Spells, magic artifacts were all great enhancers of an acolyte’s battle strength!”

Leylin reached into his robes and took out a potion from a leather bag tied around the waist.

In Brey Canyon, he had replenished his ingredients and had made many explosive potions as his ammunition for this expedition.

As the group advanced, the environment began to change.

More and more dried withered plants and trees filled the woods. They let off an aura of death and decay.

Leylin reached out and grabbed a twig in passing. His eyes flashed, “It has already lost all its water content, and even....”

Exerting a little more force in his palm, the twig immediately turned into white dust, trickled through the gaps in his fingers and floated down towards the ground.

“Even the internal structure has been completely destroyed!” Leylin’s heart felt rather heavy. A power like this already exceeded his expectations.

“Where are we supposed to go?” Viscount Jackson asked Murphy who was beside him.

“The heart of the woods! Only by reaching the center of this withering region, can my spell exert enough effect!” Murphy had an extremely solemn expression. He withdrew a spectacle-like item and hung it on his nose.

A wide withered tree lay on the ground. It had an extremely spongy feel when stepped on.

[Warning! Warning! Dangerous organism ahead!] The A.I. Chip’s alarm went off suddenly and Leylin tried to think of an excuse to use so he could warn the others.

* Hu! * Suddenly brown-coloured branches and twigs flew up. A black figure came charging towards them.

This figure was extremely quick. It opened its jaw littered with snow white fangs. A red-coloured tongue flicked out.

* Su Su! * The tongue coiled around one of the guards on duty at the front and retracted its tongue. * Pa! * The guard’s spear fell.

“Be careful!” At this moment, Viscount Jackson gave a warning.

“Argh!” The miserable cries sounded. The guard, trapped in the tongue’s coils had already disappeared into a black hole. He was snapped into two halves. Fresh red blood and guts spilled onto the ground.

“Damn it!” Viscount Jackson shouted angrily and brandished the wide sword that hung from his waist. He immediately went and engaged the black figure.

“Sluggish Spell!” The red-haired shop owner waved his hands. A yellow-green light was shot. It turned into a circular ring that closed on the black figure. The other acolytes began reacting and started their own incantations.

* Sssii! * With the hissing of the creature, the black figure’s speed finally slowed down revealing its appearance to everyone.

Its body was clay-yellow in colour. It had four legs, a tongue that was like a snake’s and a small horn on its forehead.

“Wasn’t it reported that this creature died already? Why is there still one?” Leylin was suspicious, but he still activated the A.I. Chip.

[Beep! Unknown organism. Strength: 5.5, Agility: 4 (6-7), Vitality: 5, Spiritual force: 3. Similarity to Blue Lizard 67.4% and to Mance Earth Snake 45.8%]

“It’s a rather strong creature. Apart from its low spiritual force, it doesn’t have any obvious flaws. Their numbers are also unknown; no wonder Jackson was not able to deal with them alone!”

However, as the Sluggish Spell took effect, this strange lizard’s speed obviously took a hit. After a brief exchange of blows, the Viscount shouted, “Death Arc of Light!”

From within his blade, a resplendent circle of light expanded into the shape of a blade. It streaked past the lizard’s neck.

“A Knight-class killing technique! It has the same properties as my Cross Slash. However, Jackson uses it with ease. He has not even used any Knight secret technique.”

* Bang! * The two passed each other. The huge lizard charged forward another few steps before suddenly crashing to the ground.

* Sssii! * Clay yellow scales landed on the floor one by one. Around the lizard’s neck area was a huge cut. Dark red blood spilled on the ground.

“All of you look!” An acolyte shouted suddenly.

With the death of the lizard, its body continued to cave inwards, with the scales continuously falling off and littering the ground. The blood quickly evaporated too. Within a few short minutes, there was only a white skeleton and some yellow scales left on the ground.

Chapter 65 – Deep Underground

Deep Underground

“There’s no need to look anymore. The same thing happened when I killed these creatures before.”

Viscount Jackson took out a white handkerchief and wiped his blade clean, before sheathing it into the scabbard.

“There’s actually a self-disintegration phenomenon when it dies!”

Leylin was somewhat surprised. This did not correspond to the laws of nature.

Looking at the skeleton that was still emitting white smoke, Leylin picked one of the bones up.

The dried white bone was littered with cracks. It felt like any slight press would cause it to crumble. Leylin exerted a little more force, and with a hissing sound, the dried bone turned into fine powder.

“En, something’s off!” Leylin’s eyes flashed. He discovered some fine threads of veins within the white bone powder.

[Target still exuding vital energy. Identified to be a high-level pathogen. The host is recommended to keep a distance!] At this moment, the A.I. Chip’s scan appeared in Leylin’s vision.

Leylin hurriedly flung off the powdery substance and began radiating internal energy particles from within his hands to cleanse them.

“What’s wrong?” Murphy too discovered that something was amiss.

“Be careful of those bones, there’s something inside it!” Leylin’s brows furrowed and he hurriedly distanced himself from it.

* Sssii! * At that moment, more red blood veins appeared on the desiccated lizard’s skeleton. The bone began to exhibit innumerable puncture holes. It seemed like the veins resided within the bones previously.

Countless more blood red veins took shape, intertwining like the branches of a tree and started transforming into a small-sized creature.

It was rather similar to the creature before, but now its body was blood red. From time to time, red veins popped out. The creature did not have eyes or a mouth. Its four legs appeared extremely sturdy, however.

* Xiu! * The creature’s attack was extremely fast. Before Viscount Jackson and the other acolytes could react, it left its original position. Only a red, blurry line could be seen.

“Give chase! This creature definitely has something to do with the withering woods!” A person covered fully in grey robes whispered something to Viscount Jackson, who immediately gave the order.

“That grey-robed person has always been following Viscount Jackson ever since we left Extreme Night City. He must be a trusted aide. He also has great detection abilities.”

Leylin eyes narrowed as he used the A.I. Chip to scan. “This appearance and figure, there is also the energy waves of a level 2 acolyte? Interesting!”

“Hurry! Keep up!”

Upon hearing Viscount Jackson’s orders, the Black Iron Guards immediately followed suit, overtaking Viscount Jackson and keeping him in their midst. The grey-robed person followed closely behind.

The remaining acolytes looked at each other. Murphy, a little helplessly, said, “Let’s follow them!”

Leylin purposely suppressed his speed and kept to Murphy’s speed, “That thing earlier, do you have any guesses as to what it was?”

“It seems to be some kind of parasite! According to its strength, the mother-parent has, at least, the strength of a level 3 acolyte....Or even that of an official Magus!” Murphy smiled bitterly.

Leylin and his small group were no threat to an official Magus. Any rank 1 spell could easily obliterate their entire party.

“That shouldn’t be!” Leylin shook his head. According to the A.I. Chip’s calculations, that parasite’s strength was not bad. The mother-parent’s body should at most have the strength of a level 3 acolyte, theoretically speaking. Otherwise, Leylin would have been the first to run away.

“It is only....just an investigative mission, I even picked it myself. That it can actually involve an organism with the strength of a level 3 acolyte, how bad can my luck be....” Leylin did not know what to think of himself anymore.

He was happy that he did not come here on his own before. Otherwise, unlike the main characters in the novels of his previous world, he was incapable of those fictional bursts of power in times of adversity. And the only outcome would be death.

“Be careful, we are venturing deeper. I can already feel the dense negative energy aura in the air!”

An acolyte howled.

Leylin had a higher perception towards negative energy. After all, his main affinities were Shadow and Dark Element particles. Just like Plant affinity and Light affinity emphasized on positive energy research, Leylin’s affinities made him spend more time exposed to negative energy compared to the others.

“It’s almost like the surroundings of Abyssal Bone Forest Academy. No wonder I feel like a fish back in the water.”

Leylin pulled up his sleeves and covered the smile that pulled at the corners of his lips.

* Clang! * Sounded their armour as the group halted.

“It disappeared! I saw that red creature pausing at this spot for a moment, then it suddenly disappeared!” Jackson brandished his long sword, “Be on guard!”

The Black Iron Guards immediately formed a circle protecting Jackson and the acolytes within to prevent any sneak attacks.

“This should be the heart of the withering woods!” Murphy rubbed his nose.

“The scouting method I have prepared can now be used!” Murphy took a black coloured potion from his robes and poured the contents on the ground after opening the plug.

* Plop plop! *

After the black coloured potion was poured on the forest floor, it actually turned into tiny ants scampering in all directions.

After the potion was used up, Leylin estimated that there were close to ten thousand ants that appeared.

“A scout like this can be considered to have omnidirectional coverage. It will be extremely difficult for that creature to escape!” Leylin thought.

As expected, after roughly a dozen minutes, a black coloured ant appeared at Murphy’s feet, crawled on his robes all the way to his ears, and appeared as if it whispered something.

“It’s been found! Follow me!” Murphy followed the ant and led the group to a withered oak tree.

“Move this oak tree away!” Murphy pointed at the large tree, “According to my probing, there seems to be a secret tunnel underneath it.”

“Squad 1! Go!” Jackson waved his hands.

Several Black Iron Guards went forward and stabbed their pikes at the oak tree.

The withered oak tree did not seem capable of withstanding the assault. After being pierced multiple times by the pikes, many pieces and chips of bark filled the air as if it were snowing. The ten guards hurriedly moved the completely withered oak tree away revealing a dark sinister tunnel.

“Here it is!” Murphy’s eyes flashed, and he chanted an incantation.

The widely spread black ants returned from all directions and entered the hole.

Suddenly, Murphy’s face turned pale, and his body fell backwards, almost fainting.

“What happened?” Leylin appeared behind Murphy and supported his waist.

“There seems to be an extremely dangerous creature inside. It destroyed all of my precious babies!” Murphy’s expression appeared very unsightly.

“What should we do?” An acolyte asked, apparently wanting to leave.

“Prepare a fire!” Jackson waves his hands, “We’ll have a look down there!”

“Yes!” The guards quickly carried out their lord’s orders. Leylin and the other acolytes looked at each other. Having no other choice, they could only follow.

The hole was rather small. A grown man needed to crouch before they could enter. However, the tunnel became more spacious the deeper it went, until a number of guards could walk abreast, even raising the fire torches high did not touch the cave’s ceiling.

“This is going to be troublesome! From the height of this cave, that ‘parent’s’ body will definitely not be small.” Leylin felt the leather sack hanging from his waist. If not for the multiple trump cards he prepared, he might have already sneaked away and left the group by now.

After all, his life was more precious than the wrath of a city’s lord.

“Lord Viscount! There’s a fork ahead!” A squad leader reported to Jackson.

“Let me have a look!” Jackson stepped forward.

Leylin followed behind. As expected, there seemed to be two perfectly similar tunnels ahead. Looking at the darkness of their unfathomable depths, one could not see the tunnel’s end. It felt like walking into the huge mouth of a beast.

“The negative energy in here is becoming too dense. Some of our scouting methods cannot be used here!” The city lord’s aide, the grey-robed person spoke.

“Call two men to reconnoiter each path ahead!” Jackson’s brows furrowed as he gave the order.

“It would be better to let me do it!” Leylin walked forward suddenly.

Since he knew that the ‘parent’ was extremely powerful, he did not want his side to lose too much battle strength.

“Since Mister Leylin has decided to step forward, then it’s for the best!” Viscount Jackson smiled.

Leylin walked forward several steps and took out a transparent crystal from his robes.

“Gurisitong – Jiaonateyer!” Leylin chanted. A black vertical pupil suddenly appeared within the depths of the crystal.

The vertical pupil was the same size as a human’s, but it did not have the white of a human eye. Looking at this pure black pupil made one feel as if it could tear their souls from their bodies.

“This is... The Negative Energy Eye!”

“Only acolytes who specialise in negative energy are able to use it!”

The acolytes behind began to whisper and their gazes contained more hostility and fear than before.

The rank 0 spells of magicians who specialises in negative energy are generally more destructive and their personalities were more bloodthirsty and savage than most other Magi. This normally meant being a Dark Magi.

The regular magicians’ hostile looks were understandable.

Leylin did not have any inclinations of explaining himself to the people behind him whatsoever. His fingers exerted force and pinched the crystal to pieces.

The black pupil split into two. One floated into each tunnel.

Following the vertical pupils mentally, Leylin's closed his eyes. Viscount Jackson became rather nervous as he stared at Leylin. The group grew quiet, only the constant soft snapping noise of torches burning could be heard.

A few minutes later, Leylin opened his eyes, "On the tunnel to the left are a few mutated lizards. At its end is a large granite rock."

"As for the one on the right, I only know that it leads unknown distance downwards. My spell got smashed after I tried probing further."

"Since it's that way, let's all go down together." Jackson pointed to the tunnel on the right.

The right side of the cave got damper and more humid. Leylin touched the mud walls and found a few moss-like plants strewn all over it dripping wet, "It's moist!"

Leylin's heart lurched, but his expression remained impassive. He took out a white handkerchief from his robes and wiped his hands clean.

"I'm afraid we're nearing the nest of those strange creatures."

Chapter 66 – Rune Shackles

Rune Shackles

“Light! There’s a light ahead!”

A guard walking in the vanguard shouted.

Leylin took a look. Indeed, the far end of the tunnel was radiating light.

“Enter!” Jackson gripped his large sword with both hands and was the first to rush in.

The rest followed suit.

Light! Eye-piercing light radiated downwards from above!

Leylin's eyes were stinging — tears flowed down uncontrollably. He immediately used his hand to cover his eyes.

“Argh!” “Monster!” “Be careful!”

Various shouts resounded, and weapons were brandished.

[Alert! Imminent attack ahead! Optimal response: step back and crouch!] The A.I. Chip's voice intoned and projected a faint blue screen.

On the screen, a talon the size of a palm was clawing towards Leylin.

Leylin hurriedly retreated a step and crouched to dodge the attack.

Amidst the wails all around, Jackson's faint howling could be heard.

After the A.I. Chip's scan, Leylin could see that many lizard-like creatures were making use of their familiarity with the geography to attempt a massacre of Jackson and the squad of guards around him.

The sneak attack was so quick that when Jackson and the rest finally reacted, the whole squad already suffered heavy casualties.

As Leylin swept his gaze across the scene before him and his eyes finally adjusted to the bright light. He realised that the floor was already littered with corpses. Many of them had traces of having been chewed on by these strange creatures.

At that moment, only the 2 Knight level squad leaders and the grey robed figure, who always followed behind Jackson, were all that remained of the group with Jackson.

As for the acolytes, one had fallen to the ground and another had a large wound on his abdomen that was oozing blood.

At the apex of the cave, white-coloured jellyfish-like creatures were floating. The flash from earlier had radiated from their bodies.

“The surge of light radiated from these jellyfish could actually increase instantaneously and produce an effect similar to a flashbang grenade. The coordination demonstrated by these strange creatures that caused several deaths and injuries definitely hinted at some intelligence controlling them from behind the scenes!”

After light burst from the jellyfish, they seemed to have become a little dispirited as they floated around in the air. Although there was still some light emanating from their bodies, it was not piercing to the eyes. It seemed like the flash from earlier was a one time attack.

“This is a Flash Jellyfish, a kind of subterranean creature. Their earlier attack can only be used once. They need a day of rest before emitting such an intense burst of light again!”

Murphy appeared, clutching a book to his chest.

“What we need to deal with are not these parasitic organisms, but that fellow in the middle!” Leylin pointed to the centre of the cave, and smiled bitterly.

Leylin and the rest entered a large underground cave earlier, where the ceiling was littered with stalactites and Flash Jellyfish, which allowed them a panoramic view of the interior.

At this moment, in the cave, there were many mutated, yet familiar creatures. There were lizards, brown bears, and elks, all numbering over a dozen. At the centre most of them all, there was an enormous yellow snake that seemed to be the king, as it was guarded by the other creatures.

“It’s Mankestre – Great Withering Snake Mankestre!” Murphy’s book fell from his hands to the floor, letting off a bang.

“A.I. Chip, scan!” Leylin instructed.

[Great Withering Snake – Mankestre (Half-adult body) Strength: 11.9, Agility: 6.5, Vitality: 14, Spiritual force: 8] [Abilities: 1 – Parasitic. A Mankestre is able to develop an extremely strong parasite in its body, and spread it to other organisms, making them its underlings.] [2 – Wither. In any areas where a Mankestre has passed by, the plants will die, and become a type of nutrient for the Mankestre. An adult Mankestre possesses the strength of an official Magus, and can transform an entire forest into withering ashes.] [Source of information: ,]

The A.I. Chip delivered the information immediately in front of Leylin.

“Half-adult body? It doesn’t seem to be at its adult stage!” Leylin first heaved a breath of relief, before shouting out loud, “Murphy, don’t be fooled by its appearance. This is but a non-adult Mankestre. We still have a chance!”

“Indeed!” Murphy scrutinised the brown yellow colour of the huge snake and finally recovered from his fright, “An adult Mankestre is at least 100 metres long, and this snake is obviously not of that length yet. A number of parasites that it produces is also not right!”

“This huge snake is the cause of the withering woods?” Jackson asked at the side while staring at the huge snake as his Adam’s apple moved.

“That’s right! A Mankestre uses the juice of plants as their food. They are rather crafty and lazy, and also hate to move about. Basically, it uses the parasites to gather food for itself!”

Murphy, who had bountiful experience and wisdom, was extremely aware of the habits of the huge Mankestre Snake.

“So then, if we kill it, the herb production in Dark Night Woods can recover again?” Jackson used his long sword and pointed at the huge yellow snake that was protected by its parasitic mutated creatures.

“In theory, it should be the case as long as you kill it or drive it away. Although its death cannot revive the withering woods, it can still allow the prey and woods to slowly recover back to what it once was!”

Murphy smiled wryly.

* Hiss! * The snake coiled in the centre of the cave hissed, and let off a low, snake-like speech.

It was a kind of sound made by the friction of rubbing two pieces rotten leather together, which was extremely unpleasant to the ears.

The creatures surrounding Leylin and the rest seemed to have received orders, and howled as they charged forward!

Leylin casually took a look, “There are too many creatures, and the parent body is not yet dealt with, I must conserve my magic power!”

“A.I. Chip! Simulate the most optimal method of attack!”

Leylin pulled out his cross blade.

[Beep! Inputting situation data, initiating build with Host's stats!] [Calculating battle simulation for the most optimal method!] The A.I. Chip continuously displayed the attack style of creatures surrounding home.

Leylin's feet moved as he dodged a brown bear's attack. The cross blade in his right hand drew a strange trajectory, and deflected the paw of the bear, and directly pierced through its skull.

* Bang! * The huge brown corpse of the bear fell to the ground, and even the Mankestre Snake had taken notice, looking at Leylin.

Leylin's scalp tingled, as he hurriedly kept his distance.

“Nicely done!” Jackson shouted in admiration. His body seemed to turn into a gust of wind, and continuously ravaged the mob of creatures, leaving a trail of blood behind him.

“It seems that Jackson has ignited the secret Knight technique! His technique should be enhancing his agility ”

The few acolytes also casted their rank 0 spells that they had prepared and assisted in killing these creatures.

Leylin only took a look and did not bother about them anymore.

* Sssii! *The corpse of the brown bear that Leylin had killed rapidly decomposed. From the bones, many veins appeared, which turned into the creature that Leylin and the rest had been chasing earlier. The creature then climbed into the Mankestre's mouth.

The Mankestre Snake opened its mouth and revealed rows of razor sharp teeth. Its tongue coiled, as it swallowed the strange red veined creature into its belly.

“Retrieving its parasite huh?” Leylin was rather shocked.

After swallowing the parasite, the Mankestre Snake finally uncoiled and looked at Leylin and the group, who were unrestrainedly slaughtering the creatures. Its crimson eyes showed signs of rage.

* Bang! * The huge body of the snake shot out, and the entire cave trembled violently.

The huge Mankestre Snake's body moved at an alarming speed, charging towards Jackson.

“It's too quick! With an agility of 6.5, I can only see its afterimage ” Leylin rapidly retreated, and at the same time, he used the cross blade to block his chest.

A surge of immense force came rushing over, and the cross blade that Leylin held onto flew in the air, completely broken .

“Such a strong force, and it's only a casual swipe!” Leylin's pupils constricted.

The Mankestre Snake opened its jaws wide, and its razor sharp teeth snapped at Jackson, bringing about a fish-like smell. If Jackson were to be caught, he would definitely die without a corpse left.

“Sir!” The remaining two Knights and the grey robed person shouted.

“Hah! Good try!” At the brink of death, Jackson finally released all of his internal energy, and the sword pierced at the crown of the snake with a speed that was hard to track by eye.

The sword, however, only left a white spot on the scales of the snake. As for Jackson, he used the force to rebound, and twisted his waist, evading the snap of the snake's jaw.

“Protect our Lord!” The two Knights rushed forward. The Mankestre Snake let out a ferocious roar, and directly gobbled the two Knights into its belly.

“Secondary Fireball!”

“Acidic Aqua Shot”

At this moment, the other acolytes also cast their spells, striking the body of the huge snake.

* Bang! * A black arrow with a yellow flame exploded from the body of the huge snake, revealing two scorched holes/wounds/gashes.

The huge snake let off a roar, which carried a tinge of agony. Its scales shook, and it sent its tail flying towards the few acolytes.

“The vitality of the snake is too high, any normal rank 0 spells would not be able to affect its movement at all!”

The huge snake swatted its tail, and a few acolytes who were unable to dodge in time were turned into meat pancakes, and blood oozed from beneath the snake’s body.

“No! Decker! Lancer!” Murphy cried hoarsely in anguish.

“There’s no choice, we have to retreat first!” The few remaining people huddled together, when the grey robed figure behind Jackson spoke in a deep growl.

“No! This damned worm dared to kill Decker and the rest! I will definitely not let it go!” Murphy’s eyes were rather bloodshot.

“I have a spell that can temporarily restrict its movements, the rest will be up to you guys.”

Murphy stepped forward, placed the monocle that he always carried in his hand, and tossed it towards the huge snake.

* Bang! * The glass shattered on the huge snake, and many dark red runes suddenly surfaced.

The dark red runes multiplied, and turned into the shape of a long chain, binding the snake within it.

“What a powerful restraining spell!” Leylin’s eyes flashed, “It will not be able to move for at least half a minute, so use whatever methods you guys have in that time.”

Chapter 67 – Defence Potion

Defence Potion

The fine rune shackles were the size of a strand of hair compared to the huge Mankestre snake. However, under the restraint of the shackles, the huge snake was helplessly locked to the ground, not even able to move.

“Hurry, charge!” Jackson howled, and the huge sword radiated light.

On the other side, the grey-robed person too lifted his cloak, and revealed a Half-Beast Man appearance as he hurriedly chanted an incantation.

* Roar! * The remaining creatures felt the danger that their parent was in, and rushed forward, with no thoughts for their own safety, towards Leylin and the rest.

“Go to hell!” Leylin pulled out a few fire red coloured explosive potions and decimated the remaining creatures into ashes.

“To the Mankestre snake, the eyes are their achilles heel, and is even more vulnerable than the heart.

Leylin howled, at the same time chanting.

Along with the chanting of the mysterious and ancient Byron language resounding in the cave, a hoard of congealed and thick black oily bodies appeared beside Leylin, completely surrounding him.

These black, oily figures circled around Leylin, giving off bubbles from time to time, and letting off a sound that was akin to decomposing material. While he continued to chant, the black oiled figures continuously changed shape, finally turning into a black lion head-like apparition.

“Go!” Leylin pointed.

The black lion head roared, and charged towards the crown of the huge snake which was being restrained.

* Pu! * The lion head immediately bit on both of the Mankestre snake’s eyes.

* Sssii! * The huge snake writhed continuously, letting off an agonised screech. The rune shackles on its body were also emitting off red smoke.

“Hurry!” I cannot keep this up much longer!” Murphy completely diverged from his scholarly image and howled without a care.

The black lion head continuously chewed on the head of the huge snake, and finally dissolved, turning into a puddle of greasy black oil, that covering the head of the huge snake, and eventually covered both of its eyes.

“It is now!” Leylin eyes flashed and withdrew a test tube. The contents radiated a blood red light, which excreted feelings of danger.

This was an explosive potion, but was much larger in comparison had a larger blast radius was larger in circumference as in compared to the previous potions.

The muscles of Leylin’s right arm bulged as he tossed the potion directly into the black oil.

* Bang! * A tremendous flame rose, completely engulfing the huge Mankestre snake, and burning it savagely.

The huge snake continuously tossed its head, which looked like a huge burning torch from, side to side.

The rune shackles around it also let off creaking noises which meant that it could not endure for much longer.

“The decomposing oil water that comes from the subterranean area, together with the A.I. Chip’s modified explosive potion gives off a combined attack of at least 9 degrees!”

Blue light in continuously flashed from within Leylin’s eyes, as he recorded the figures from the explosion.

“Pant! Pant! The earlier attack has already broken through most of the huge Mankestre snake’s defence! Now is the time to kill it!”

Leylin panted violently, and his face was extremely pale. It was like he had completely depleted his spiritual force and magic power, and he staggered several steps behind.

From an area of his sleeve which was concealed from others, another of the modified explosive potions, which was used earlier, appeared in his hands.

Leylin would never place his hopes completely on others, especially at crucial times like this.

At this moment, the Half-Beast Man had finished chanting his spell.

“The strength of my forebearer’s totem, transform now into frigid ice, and grant me the might to slay the Mankestre snake!”

The Half-Beast Man finished his spell, and touched lightly on Jackson’s sword.

* Sssii! *

On the blade of Jackson's huge sword, a layer of frost began to envelop it, and the frost grew more and more, before finally enlarging the of the blade to double of its original size, and turning it into a frost greatsword!

What the Half-Beast Man had cast was actually a kind of rarely seen spell which could enhance weapons!

“According to the scan of the A.I. Chip, at this moment, the greatsword in Jackson's hands already has the strength of a basic level magic artifact!”

Leylin eyes flashed, “It is a rather decent enchanting technique!”

Jackson had obviously teamed up with the Half-Beast Man many times before. Earlier, he had been conserving his energy, and once the greatsword had completed the layer of frost, Jackson howled and raised it above him, charging and chopping towards the neck of the Mankestre snake.

The sword, which seemed like a giant crystallised ice sculpture, directly chopped at a blackened patch of the huge snake with Jackson's strength of a Grand Knight.

* Pu-chi! *

Red hot blood flowed down continuously from a deep gash on the neck of the Mankestre snake, which seemed to be almost half a metre deep. One could even see the whites of the bones. The huge snake roared, and headbutted with all its strength.

* Bang! * Viscount Jackson was immediately knocked away, and even the breastplate he was wearing was dented inwards.

The frost greatsword landed upright by his side, burying itself halfway into the ground.

* Ping Ping Ping! * The layer of ice continuously cracked, and finally even the sword, which was made of steel, shattered into countless fragments that landed on the floor.

“It seems like this spell isn’t completely flawless either!” Leylin was still in the mood to observe leisurely.

However, at this moment, Murphy’s complexion turned red, “I can’t control it any longer!”

Under the continuous struggles of the Mankestre snake, the rune shackles around it finally collapsed with a rattling sound. As for the price of being able to free itself, the snake had already suffered a dozen wounds which penetrated through its scales.

As for the heavily injured Mankestre snake, its bloodshot eyes turned even more crimson. With lightning speed, it swiped and coiled its tail. Before Leylin could react, he realised that there was one less person beside him. The Half-Beast Man which originally stood there was now wrapped up in the snake’s tail.

“No! Save me!” The tail continuously constricted, and the huge snake’s figure almost covered the entirety of the Half-Beast Man.

At this moment, Jackson, who was not sure if he was still alive or dead, lay on the side, and could not answer his subordinate cries at all.

* Ga-cha! * With a creaking noise, the ear-piercing sounds of bones shattering resounded in the air. The Half-Beast Man’s distressed cries climbed higher in pitch, until finally, it turned into dead silence.

Leylin watched the huge, moribund snake attentively, as he drew a few potions of various colours.

* Bang! *

A huge black figure attacked, and hit a yellow test tube that had left Leylin's hands. In the surrounding area, a layer of yellow light appeared, and engulfed Leylin's entire body.

The immense might crashed into Leylin and he was sent flying, crashing into a nearby granite rock. Mud flew above his head as he landed, and there was even a huge impression left on the rock behind his back.

At the same time as Leylin was sent back flying, a layer of intense red flames extended from the snake's tail, and multiple colours of light also blossomed on the snake's body, finally resulting in the cries of the Mankestre snake.

The yellow light shattered into many pieces, before finally dissipating into the air.

Leylin's body was completely unscathed, and seeing the many spots of dazzling yellow light, he grimaced.

“The weakness of acolytes is that they always have no defensive measures!”

The defensive spell models for rank 0 spells were extremely uncommon, as they were not very practical. When an acolyte is being attacked, rarely would they have time to chant those spells.

As a result, in battles between acolytes, whoever was struck first by a spell would end up defeated or killed.

This scenario would last until one reached the stage of an official Magus.

Apart from this, there was another method, which was to borrow strength from special items. For example, defensive or strange items which could instantly activate a defence spell.

However, such high leveled defensive items were even difficult to obtain for official Magus, so they rarely appeared in the hands of an acolyte.

Leylin and the other acolytes, together with the Half-Beast Man, all had no defensive items. At most, they only wore leather armour, which had absolutely no resistance against spells.

Moreover, a simple roll of the Mankestre snake would have already been able to grind them into a meat paste.

“According to the records of the academy, there are still a number of acolytes who die at the hands of Knights and Grand Knights. However, there has never been any instance of an official Magus dying at the hands of ordinary humans!”

As for this yellow potion, it was Leylin’s latest experimental result – Trevor’s Revolving Shield Potion!

A potion like this has already separated itself from the category of elementary potions. It was a kind of beginner’s potion, and even amongst the beginner potion category it was extremely difficult to brew.

As for the effect, it would produce a one-time defensive layer of light, which would defend against any spell or physical attack of ten degrees or less!

With Leylin’s amassed wealth from selling potions, together with the A.I. Chip continuous simulation, he had finally managed to make only two bottles of it.

The amount he spent for these had already exceeded over 1000 magic crystals!

“These potions are not easily affordable by others, and all official Magi attacks have an attack strength of over 10 degrees, so this Trevor’s Revolving Shield Potion is best used only at the level of battles between acolytes. However, every bottle costs at least 500 magic crystals. Even direct heirs to large families would not be able to afford it!”

However, for Leylin who had the help from A.I. Chip, which could elevate his success rate, combined with his Potions Master identity, he could brew the Trevor’s

Revolving Shield Potion, suppressing the cost to around 200 to 300 magic crystals. Although it still remained steep in price, as it was a trump card, it was acceptable.

“Leylin!” Murphy’s eyes widened, “You...Are you alright?”

“En! I’ve wasted an expensive defensive potion that I’ve acquired!” Leylin’s face darkened, and seemed to be extremely saddened by the loss.

“This damned beast, I’m going to kill it!”

On the other side of the battlefield, the huge Mankestre snake lay half dead on the floor, seemingly spent, and having wounds strewn across its body.

First, it was hit with Leylin’s hybrid attack, before almost having its head chopped off by Grand Knight Jackson. Afterwards, it escaped from Murphy’s rune shackles through brute force, before it was finally struck again by Leylin’s potions.

The snake head, which was always held high with pride, now lay helpless on the floor. Its tongue hissed, and blood continuously flowed out from its neck area.

“After having suffered from such a devastating injury, no matter how tenacious the life force of snake type creatures are, they will absolutely still perish!”

Murphy gritted his teeth, and shot a green coloured pyramid shaft, which directly lodged itself into the eyes of the huge snake.

* Pu! * The snake’s eyes were finally pierced through, and a layer of creamy red and yellow liquid splashed out, which was sparkling yet translucent.

Chapter 68 – Returning to Extreme Night City

Returning to Extreme Night City

“The eyes are where the life essence of the Mankestre snake is, and it looks like this huge snake is about to die!”

Murphy looked at the huge snake, which was in its last moments, and said rather bleakly.

“Be optimistic my old friend!” Towards Murphy’s bleakness, Leylin discovered that he actually could not utter any words of comfort.

After all, the casualties, this time, were too much. From a group of roughly 30 people, the Black Iron Guards were completely wiped out, and Murphy was the only acolyte that survived.

Moreover, the city lord and the Grand Knight, Viscount Jackson, was severely injured at this moment, and his life was in peril.

And the source of them all was this huge Mankestre snake!

“City lord? Right, Leylin! Hurry and look at Jackson!” Murphy slapped his forehead.

“You only thought of him now?” Leylin was rather speechless, and walked around the huge snake corpse, coming to the other side.

Viscount Jackson was lying on his back on the ground and his chest was sunken in a cavity. On the corners of his lips were traces of blood, and he was in an unconscious state.

Leylin hurriedly took a look, “3 broken ribs and the arm and leg bones are all also broken. As for the rest they are fine. With the vitality of a Grand Knight, he should be conscious in a few hours.

“That’s good! This is the only good news I’ve heard all day today!”

Murphy walked towards that huge, lifeless snake, and said, “This seems to be a Mankestre snake which has not yet grown to its adult stage. If it was an adult withering huge snake, it could be very likely that the water content in our bodies would have been sucked dry the very moment we entered the cave!”

The huge Mankestre snake’s head fell onto the floor, and a pair of eye-shaped pearls were pierced by the pyramid shaft, and dazzling fluid flowed out from within.

“Even so, the materials on this huge snake, would also be worth thousands of magic crystals!”

Murphy caressed the yellow-brown scales of the huge snake as he muttered to himself.

Suddenly, the other eye of the Mankestre snake opened! Its gaze, filled with hatred, immediately landed on Murphy. It opened its jaws, and the razor-sharp teeth was about to snap Murphy into two.

This huge snake was not completely dead!

Earlier it had feigned its death, and right now, it finally revealed its razor-sharp teeth and was about to kill this repulsive human.

Against such an attack, Murphy was completely not protected and he stood there stunned, not moving at all.

“Be careful!”

Right when the snow-white teeth was about to land on Murphy, a silver chain suddenly flew out and wrapped itself on Murphy’s waist, pulling him out of danger’s way.

A black arrow directly pierced the other eye of the snake, and the Mankestre snake continuously writhed and finally ceased moving.

* Huff! Huff! Huff! *

Murphy panted violently, “Ley... Leylin, thank you! I owe you my life!”

“No problem! You gave your support to me back then too, didn’t you?” Leylin smiled as his gaze fixed on the huge snake, up until when the A.I. Chip’s voice sounded, [Target has completely lost all signs of life] did he heave a sigh of relief.

Under the detection of the A.I. Chip, although there were no more energy movements from the huge snake earlier, there was still a thermal response.

Of course, many kinds of creatures must be dead for a while before all thermal signs completely vanish.

However, because of that, Leylin was even more vigilant. Besides, intentionally or accidentally, he led Murphy forward and finally verified whether the large snake was truly dead.

“What a pity! If this Mankestre snake were to die before, its other eye would have absolutely been valued over 1000 magic crystals, but right now, the value of the whole corpse is greatly reduced.”

Leylin was somewhat helpless as he looked to Murphy, who was at his side.

“About the attack earlier- you actually did not dodge it, which makes me rather surprised!”

An unexpected flush reddened Murphy’s cheeks, “After using the rune shackles, my spiritual force and magic power are greatly weakened. In this period, I am just another old geezer on the street....”

With regards to Leylin, who saved him earlier, right now it could be said that Murphy trusted him greatly and actually even shared such a secret with him.

“Alright! Let’s hurry and harvest the materials of this Mankestre snake, and then return to Extreme Night City!”

Leylin sized up the chaotic scene. Leylin and the three of them had absolutely no way to move those corpses on the ground, so they could only return back to Extreme Night City and ask people to retrieve these corpses.

With the death of the huge Mankestre snake, this area should no longer pose a threat in future.

“Haha... This time Leylin, your contributions have been the most, so you should be allowed to harvest the best material!” Murphy smiled.

Concerning this matter, Leylin did not have any notions of killing Murphy and claiming all the loot for himself.

Murphy did help him earlier, and on the other hand, right now Murphy and him were the only two acolytes left, so he would definitely monopolise a large portion of the resources, thus he did not have to take a risk and kill people.

From the whole Mankestre snake, the most valuable ingredient would be its eyes, after which the remaining materials would only add up to a total of 1000 to 2000 magic crystals, which was not enough to bewitch Leylin yet.

If right now there was some rare materials worth ten thousand magic crystals, who knew if Leylin would harbour some bad intentions.

“Decent scales, combined with the snake skin, should be able to produce many sets of soft armour.” Leylin went forward and unsheathed his cross blade, before dissecting the huge snake. Murphy too helped by his side.

After a moment of being busy, Leylin and Murphy had harvested some of the more valuable portions of the huge snake. As for the remaining items, they could only be transported with help from the city lord’s castle.

.....

* Gu Lu Lu * The axles of the carriage resounded continuously, and Viscount Jackson opened his eyes.

“I am...still alive?” What entered his vision was a sky filled with resplendent starlight, and he felt his body rising and falling in accordance with the movements of the horse carriage.

Viscount Jackson discovered that his chest was already bandaged, and a refreshing feeling dispersed the pain, which showed that the healing process was extremely professional.

“Who was it that saved me?” A doubt crossed Viscount Jackson’s mind, and he tried hard to untangle his thoughts.

“City lord! You are finally awake!” A face with a white beard and white eyebrows appeared in front of Viscount Jackson.

“How is it? Do you still retain your memories?” Murphy shook his finger in front of Viscount Jackson.

“Was it you who saved me? How are the others?” Viscount Jackson struggled to speak, and his voice sounded hoarse, like a ruined bellow.

“It wasn’t me, but Leylin who saved you!” Murphy pointed at Leylin who was driving, “We three are the only survivors of the whole group... After exiting the woods, it took me a while to obtain this spacious horse carriage....”

“They’re all dead?” Viscount Jackson flung his head to the side and an unexplainable sorrow welled from the bottom of his heart.

“Lord Viscount! It seems like you are alright now!” Leylin turned back, and tossed a green bottled potion, “This is a healing potion, I hope it will be of use to you!”

Murphy caught it, and fed it into the mouth of Viscount Jackson.

After taking the potion, Viscount Jackson only felt a hot wave surging through his four limbs, and he finally regained some energy from it.

“Towards Leylin’s generosity and grace of saving my life, I will definitely repay you when we return!”

“If possible, please give me all of the Hove Violet Leaves in the castle. That would be the greatest recompense!” Leylin raised his request without a tinge of restraint.

“Of course!” Jackson was stunned, before immediately agreeing.

With the advance of the horse carriage, the silhouette of Extreme Night City gradually appeared.

A few soldiers were still guarding the post, scrutinising the people that came and went.

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Jackson looked at the distant scene, and his eyes quivered, and finally two streams of tears flowed....

The city lord's castle's reconnoiter group had perished completely. Even news of Viscount Jackson, as a Grand Knight, having been seriously injured had spread and immediately caused an uproar in Extreme Night City.

Even after two days, the news did not die down. Instead, it even spread throughout the area,

As the city lord of Extreme Night City, Viscount Jackson always used his status as a Grand Knight to suppress many dark factions. However, when the news of him being injured spread, it caused several ripples and undercurrents inside the city.

At this moment, the strength of the city castle was waning, even the few acolytes who were friendly towards Viscount Jackson had died. Jackson who was nurturing his grief had to face with all these, and was rather overwhelmed by all these.

Leylin who stayed in the villa outside the city heard some of the news.

However, since he had returned from the venture, he always holed himself in the experiment lab, and even refused many invitations from the city lord's castle and other factions.

Under the bright light, Leylin stared; his eyes fixated on a petri-dish.

On the surface of the glass petri-dish, a small red lump of flesh continuously swelled, and from it grew many tentacles.

Leylin picked up another pipette, and placed a drop of the yellow potion on the lump of meat.

* Sssii! * The meat dissolved, and turned into a puddle of crimson-red with yellowish blood fluid.

“I have finally managed to purify it, the primordial blood essence of the huge snake!” Leylin looked at the petri-dish, as if seeing the most precious treasure in this world.

“A.I. Chip! Scan composition!”

[Beep! Mission establishing, scanning in progress...] [The list of genes has been generated, comparing to database....]

“99.8%.....”

[Beep! Similarity of the blood essence with a normal huge python: 99.8%! Determined as the blood essence of original huge pythons! After remodelling in the later stage, there were new types of genes...]

The A.I. Chip continuously reported the conclusions, and even projected the list of genes in front of Leylin’s eyes.

From the multicoloured image, the blood essence of the huge Mankestre snake that Leylin saw earlier was actually the same with regular huge pythons.

“Indeed! This huge python is the result of an experiment by magicians!” Leylin nodded his head. He still remembered clearly that after the A.I. Chip had scanned the huge python, it had added the words half-adult to its name.

However, if not for the accuracy of the A.I. Chip down to the atomic level, Leylin would never unravel the secret behind it. Even other magicians would not be able to realise the difference.

“Two more days, and that area should be calm again!”

Leylin informed his subordinates that he was going to undergo a very long duration of experimentation and that they are not to bother him with any matters and then he secretly left the villa.

Chapter 69 – Vestige Traces

Vestige Traces

The night was dark, and there was tranquility. Dried up old trees littered the surroundings, and on the branches, there were ravens ruffling their feathers.

* Bang! *

The grass patch below the tree tore open, revealing a dark passage beneath it.

Leylin was draped in black robes, and his face was veiled. One would not be able to see his face.

The nearby villa was still lit with lanterns, and the patrolling mercenaries did not know that their master had already left the villa.

In Leylin's experiment lab, there was a direct passage which Leylin set up himself, with no one being the wiser.

“Since that huge Mankestre snake is an experimental body, there should be some experiment labs nearby from magicians! Moreover, that huge Mankestre snake had actually occupied Dark Night Woods for a few years, and not one magician had stepped forward to deal with it. There could only be one reason for that!”

Leylin's eyes flashed, “That experiment lab is most likely abandoned! The magician in it, due to some circumstances, could no longer look after it, or is most likely dead! That is why the huge snake could escape from it!”

For magicians, seeking ancient vestiges had always been in their best interests.

The remnants left by ancient Magi, such as official Magi experiment labs, would often contain many valuable data and ingredients, high levelled research, spells and magic artifacts with immense might. These were all items that magicians always sought after.

Rumour had it that more often than not, there were examples of acolytes who were lacking having stumbled upon ancient remnants, and beginning to wield tremendous power after that.

Of course, there were failed ventures and explorations where they finally died under the ancient mechanisms or curses from the corpses.

However, for magicians, searching for vestiges was still a very beneficial thing to do.

From an experiment lab which could create a half-adult huge Mankestre snake, any one item in it could let Leylin immediately get rich quickly, and even obtain more precious ingredients and knowledge to pave the way for him to advance into an official Magus in future.

“Since I have already found some traces, I will definitely have a look at the experiment lab!”

Leylin’s gaze was determined. He was not afraid of risks, especially when the benefits strongly outweigh the risks.

For this venture, he had specially prepared many items, which were enough measures to counter against any sudden developments.

As for his subordinates? Not only were they easily susceptible to divulging news, but under the traps set up by official Magi, even Knights were only an existence slightly greater than ants. They were completely of no use, hence Leylin even kept his departure from them.

Leylin journeyed for several nights in a row. Since there were no people around, he could use many of his methods.

He splashed a green potion onto the ground, bringing about a ball of green coloured wind particles, which wrapped Leylin's body within them. His whole body seemed to turn into a breeze, and disappeared into the night.

What Leylin used was a hastening potion which he had formulated throughout the years.

As an outstanding Potions Master, no matter if it was using potions to journey or fight, he was entirely in his element.

In the original passage, where Leylin and the others had battled the huge Mankestre snake.

People had already been sent from the city lord's castle to retrieve the mutilated corpses and largely dissected huge Mankestre snake. What remained were many impressions on the ground, as well as traces of flames and frost, which spoke of the intense fight that had occurred previously.

“The scenario from earlier has already been recorded down by the crystal ball given by the academy. To use that to signify the completion of mission is absolutely acceptable.”

From the battle previously, Leylin had used the crystal ball to record only most of the exploration mission, especially the corpse of the huge Mankestre snake at the end.

With some ingredients from the corpse, as well as the record from the crystal ball, it could be said that Leylin's mission in Extreme Night City was finally completed.

However, he had no plans whatsoever to leave at all.

Not mentioning whether the mess of a war that Abyssal Bone Forest Academy was entangled in at the moment already had a victor, Leylin did not want to go back during this period.

He had just managed to formulate a modified formula for the Azure Potion. Now would be the best time to break through into a level 3 acolyte, so why would he risk going back to the academy and expose himself in the process?

As for Extreme Night City, Leylin did not even see an official Magus, which put him at ease to carry out his experiments and breakthrough.

Leylin would wait for a buffer of three years after the dust settled for the war of the Abyssal Bone Forest Academy. Although his advancement to a level 3 acolyte would still be fast that way, it would not be as eye catching!

At that time, he could figure out an excuse, and cover his tracks easily.

As for the corpses of the acolytes on the floor, naturally, they had already been inspected by Leylin. Back then, he had kept all the valuable items for himself before bringing the heavily injured Jackson and Murphy to leave the place.

“However, that group of acolytes were all paupers, and not a single one of them had more than 10 magic crystals! Only on that Half-Beast Man acolyte, there was still a frost smelted gold rune which can be considered to be rather good!”

Leylin grumbled in his mind, as he came to the centremost area of the cave.

Under the light radiated by the Flash Jellyfish, the whole cave was extremely bright. Leylin could see that on the ground at the centre, traces of where the huge Mankestre snake was coiled were still apparent.

“It actually managed to make such a deep impression, they are indeed of the same nature narrated by compendiums: an extremely lazy being.

Leylin crouched and felt the earth that was sunken in.

“A.I. Chip! Record composition!”

[Recording completed, comparing to normal earth data in the databank. The target has 0.0005% of compound remnants, and is tentatively determined to contain Maike alloy!]

The A.I. Chip’s voice intoned.

Maike alloy was a type of artificial metal, made by spells of magicians, that was extensively used to construct incubation pools in experiment labs.

“This is right!” Leylin eyes flashed with glee.

“A.I. Chip, is it possible to follow the tracks of the snake and find its original breeding area?”

[Scanning in progress! The target’s data has been heavily covered by other creatures and is lacking in important information. Mission failed!] The A.I. Chip’s voice intoned.

Leylin scanned the surroundings. The ground was littered with claw marks from various creatures. Such was the devastation left by the parasitic abilities of the huge Mankestre snake.

“What a pity....” Leylin shook his head.

“However, according to the habits of the huge Mankestre snake and the clues left by the other traces, that experiment lab should not be far off from here!”

Leylin commanded the A.I. Chip, “A.I. Chip, scan every item in the surroundings!”

[Missions establishing, beginning imaging!]

Along with the A.I. Chip intonation, the image of a blue coloured map was projected in front of Leylin’s eyes.

In the centre was a huge cave, with many small tunnels in the near vicinity. Leylin even found a few parasitic bodies that had survived through sheer luck. However, it was unknown how much longer they could live for when the parent was dead.

The map expanded until it finally reached the limit of its range.

Leylin’s brows furrowed, ” A.I. Chip, restart scan! Lower the precision to the lowest, and search in an extended perimeter! Begin running through a checklist of radioactive density!”

With the command, the map in Leylin’s eyes turned more out of focus. However, the perimeter extended, almost encompassing the nearby geography of the cave too.

“Maintain this area and precision!”

Leylin walked out of the cave and began running towards a direction. Following his movement, the edge of the map also continuously expanded....

A few hours later, Leylin walked towards a large black granite boulder.

“The surrounding areas have already been inspected. Although the radioactive densities are higher, this should be where the shedding of the huge Mankestre snake took place previously!”

“As for the only place with no radiation, but not within the scope of the A.I. Chip’s scanning perimeter, this is the only place!”

Leylin looked at the large black granite boulder in front of him. This boulder was of the height of several humans, almost the size of a small mountain.

In the map that the A.I. Chip scanned, this huge boulder had absolutely no traces of radiation. Even standing before it now, the A.I. Chip still did not detect anything.

“This kind of scenario has happened several times back at the academy. It is due to the spell formations set by official Magi, which are interfering with the detection of the A.I. Chip!”

Leylin stroked the surface of the large black granite boulder. It was ice cold, damp, and had algae growing on it.

“However...What I must do to enter?”

Leylin exerted strength in his right arm and grabbed some of the rock powder.

“A.I. Chip! Analyse composition!”

[Beep! Mission establishing, in the process of gathering data...] The A.I. Chip’s voice continuously intoned, and a screen appeared in front of Leylin that was densely packed with the various data of the granite rock.

“It seems like there are no differences between this and a normal granite rock!”

Leylin drew the data of normal granite rock and made a comparison. However, he finally had to acknowledge that the magician defended his secrets very well. Leylin had absolutely no way of finding the entrance to the experiment lab.

“However, since that huge Mankestre snake was able to come out, it means that the defense in the spell formation has some sort of problem. I just require more time to inspect...”

Leylin stroked his chin and began setting up a tent beside the granite rock.

He decided to stay here for a long time in order to continuously detect any loopholes or weakness in the spell formation, hoping to find a way to enter.

After all, there won't be anyone coming to the vicinity of the withering woods anymore, especially when the city lord's castle has sent people to retrieve the corpses of the acolytes, troops and the huge snake.

After chewing on several biscuits that he brought along with him, Leylin began to analyse the spell formation on the large black granite boulder.

Of course, he only dared do this as he was sure that the owner of the lab was already dead through his observations and conjectures. Who knew if that unknown magician had long since died a natural death.

“After having been here for so long, yet with no magicians coming out, the accuracy of this conjecture has yet been raised by 30%.

Leylin stared at the large black granite boulder before him with a zealous expression contained within.

“If I manage to dispel the spell formation, the items in there are all mine!”

For Leylin, who was a level 2 acolyte, an experiment lab belonging to an official Magus was a huge treasure trove!

“Only that... The traps set by official Magus are extremely dangerous. I must absolutely not be blinded by greed and fall into a trap!”

Chapter 70 – Gnawing Slate

Gnawing Slate

Time passed by. In the blink of an eye, Leylin had tarried beside the large black granite boulder for 5 days.

In those five days, Leylin tried every method he knew on the large black granite boulder. He finally found a few loopholes he could exploit.

Leylin already confirmed that the granite boulder had a spell formation set up within. But it was in a damaged state.

According to the wear and tear, this formation had already been in effect for over a hundred years.

The cause of this extensive damage might very well have had something to do with the huge Mankestre snake's escape earlier.

“Some portion of the magic spell formation has already been damaged by that snake. That's why there are detectable traces leaking out. Without those leaks, even with the A.I. Chip's assistance, finding this place would not have been easy.”

Glee spread across Leylin's face.

Due to his experiments these past few days, he managed to assemble a set of spells that gave him a 70- 80% chance of opening the entrance to this experiment lab.

The cyclical timing inherent to this spell formation meant that the damaged parts only appeared at certain times. Leylin needed to wait for this window of opportunity.

The sun gradually set and the surrounding area became shrouded in darkness.

Owing to the death of the huge Mankestre snake, the withering woods would eventually recover its former vitality. Unfortunately, this would require at least a hundred years. Right now, there was only that deathly suffocating silence permeating the withering woods, which would insidiously choke anyone who dared enter.

Leylin did not care a whit. Oblivious to the heavy atmosphere, he sought out a level rock and started brewing potions on it.

Moonlight fell. Very soon the woods was enveloped in a layer of silver sheen. The full moon today was exceptionally bright. Curiously, there was a tinge of saffron tinting the moon.

Leylin snapped open the pocket watch he brought with him, “It’s almost midnight!”

He rose and sauntered to the side of the large black granite boulder. As moonlight from the full moon shone on the surface of the granite rock, its black stone skin suddenly came off and revealed a network of blood vessels coalescing into a silvery archway. They pulsed continuously as if absorbing the moonlight.

“This is it!” Leylin’s eyes flashed. He quickly emptied the contents of the potions he just brewed onto the surface of the granite rock.

* Sssii! * A large amount of white mist rose and corroded the surface of the rock, leaving the network of blood vessels in chaos.

“Karamanda...” Leylin chanted the incantation softly. His voice sounded extremely depressed like the muttering of a jilted woman.

In time with the chanting noises, the silvery network of veins settled and continued to combine, then finally turned into a circular passage.

Seeing this, Leylin was elated. His chanting voice became more frenzied as he repeatedly tossed the few ingredients in his hands into the passageway.

* Bang! * Along with Leylin’s final chant, the large black granite boulder completed its shape change. Close to Leylin, the silvery archway earlier disappeared. Instead, the entrance to a dark tunnel materialized.

“A fake passageway actually got conjured!” Leylin shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

At that instant, the eyes of the black raven perched on his shoulders, glinted with human intelligence.

“By harnessing some of this spell’s effect, I should be able to use this raven to break into the experiment lab in a short timeframe. Everything it sees would then be relayed into my right eye like a holographic projection!”

As Leylin shut his right eye, the raven cocked its head lightly before giving a cry. Then, it directly flew into the dark tunnel.

Many scenes flashed past Leylin’s closed right eye.

He felt like he was flying. The scenery below him were all relayed into his mind’s eye.

The passage was extremely short. In moments, the raven reached the other end.

Leylin saw a small-sized villa appear in front of him. Its walls shimmered with spell light.

Green coloured vines crawled and filled the wall. On it were some sort of red-coloured flowers with what looked like bone petals.

“This is...” Astonishment surfaced from the depths of the raven’s eyes, “Devil Vines? Bone Eating Flowers? I originally thought they were all extinct, but there are actually some in here!”

On the villa’s entrance was a jagged circular hole the size of Leylin’s palm. Leylin surmised that this could be the spot the Mankestre snake broke through during its escape—way back when it was but a youngling.

Near the hole, a white skeleton draped in black robes lay on a grey-coloured stone platform!

“According to the way the skeleton is positioned, it was obviously an acolyte like me who accidentally stumbled upon this place. He tried to break into the villa and perished in this sorry state!”

Leylin’s steeled his heart. He telepathically maneuvered the raven to alight beside the bones and let the bird pluck on it with its black claws.

A crash resounded, a heap of items fell from the robes.

A book, several yellow parchment paper, a heap of bottles, and a yellow bronze ring tumbled onto the floor. A ‘K’ symbol was inscribed on it.

“Seems to be some kind of identity verification!” Leylin casually had the bird fiddle with the ring and peep at the book.

After using the raven’s feathers to clear the dust, a row of esoteric patterns and cursive handwriting emerged.

“These characters...? They seemed to be in Ancient Terrestrial Elven language! I have seen these before in the library!”

Leylin was stunned. He immediately began to decrypt the words, “Terrestrials... Terrestrial Elves! Alchemist of the Terrestrial Elves, Torozar!”

“It is actually information pertaining to alchemy!”

Leylin was in ecstasy, “It was mentioned in the library’s records that the Ancient Terrestrial Elves were renowned for their exquisite alchemy, as well as their enchanting capabilities! If I were to obtain these information, I may begin attempting some of the things recorded in the Lowian Academy Teachings....”

With the A.I. Chip’s overpowered calculation abilities, the Lowian Academy Teachings, which Leylin bought earlier, was already completely decrypted. Part of data was about a method for synthesizing a magic artifact.

Of course, it was only a low-grade magic artifact. However, in Leylin’s current state, this was a rather huge temptation.

He, alas, spent most of his time on Potioneering and Magic studies, so he had next to no inkling whatsoever concerning Alchemy and Enchantment. Moreover, such high level information was always kept under rigorous control. Regular acolytes did not have the clearance to access them.

Even if Leylin had a way to synthesize a magic artifact, it would still be extremely difficult.

Luckily, with the Alchemy information material here and the simulation capability of his A.I. Chip, Leylin completely believed that he would be able to synthesize this magic artifact once he became a level 3 acolyte.

“Bring this book out!” Leylin was already thinking of retreating.

To him, just knowing that within the granite walls was an abandoned experiment lab with degraded defenses made today's probe an extremely fruitful one. Obtaining advanced information on Alchemy was an unexpected bonus.

The raven grabbed the book with its claws with much effort. As it turned around, it lightly brushed the parchment paper. With a hissing sound, the ancient piece of paper disintegrated

Leylin was stunned, "Has it already eroded to this state?"

* Hehe! Haha! *

Just as Leylin's raven was about to fly off with the book, the surrounding area reverberated with a child's ominous laughter.

"The defence formation activated! Damn it, I only have two more minutes!"

The black raven flapped its wings, preparing to rise and fly away.

*Ka-cha! * The grey coloured platform split open, revealing a huge jaw serrated with razor sharp white teeth.

In one ferocious snap, the raven was torn to pieces.

* Pu! * On the surface of the giant black stone, Leylin crouched down and grabbed at his right eye with his hands.

A wave of searing pain hit him. It felt like someone was digging out his eyeball directly from its socket.

* Huff Huff Huff * panting heavily, Leylin slowly recovered a good while later.

The muscles of his handsome face contorted and red veins could be seen filling the white of his right eye. A blood vessel burst and drops of blood fell to the ground.

“Magic spell backlash!” Leylin sucked in a lungful of cold air and withdrew a red potion from his sack. He unplugged it and began drinking its contents.

Several moments later, Leylin stood up, feeling much better.

“Careless! I never thought that apart from the Devil Vines and Bone Eating Flower, there was even a Gnawing Slate.”

Leylin looked at the original position of the tunnel entrance. The surface of the huge black granite boulder remained smooth. The entrance seen earlier seemed to be merely an illusion.

“Devil Vines, Bone Eating Flower, Gnawing Slate, and other mechanisms. I cannot infiltrate in this place right now, what a pity....”

Leylin deduced this from the spells he had in his possession and the ingredients he owned.

“I’m afraid that only after I advance into level 3 acolyte, will I be able to enter this experiment lab!”

Leylin concluded, “Anyway, I now known the true location and its access protocols. Moreover, I have visually confirmed the presence of precious informative material regarding Alchemy inside. So this venture was not a complete waste of effort!”

Right now, the experiment lab was too dangerous for Leylin. He was not someone who got easily dazzled by greed. He decided to leave exploring this place to a later date and returned to the villa to cultivate.

Leylin calmed down as he focused on resting and recuperating from the damage done to him by the spell earlier.

He then went towards the tent area where stowed his things. He then erased all traces and tracks left by his recent activities.

“This defence spell formation has lasted over a hundred years. There were almost no loopholes a random passerby could exploit. I only need to erase my tracks. Adding more defensive measures or illusory spells would be superfluous.”

Having finished arranging everything, Leylin took a last glance at the black rock. Then, without the slightest bit of hesitation, he left.

“I have warned them before about the laboratory in the manor, so Anna and the others would not dare enter it. If I can return undetected to my laboratory, I can keep what happened here a secret.”

“Concerning Extreme Night City, Jackson only suffered some superficial injuries. He should be mostly have recovered by now after following my treatment. He is most likely pretending to be seriously injured to lure any turncoat and renegade from their snake holes!”

“Whatever the case may be, matters regarding the city lord’s castle are not my concern. I need not understand them. When I get the promised Hove Violet Leaves, I will immediately begin brewing the potions needed to breakthrough into level 3.”

To Leylin, increasing his own power was all-consuming. Otherworldly influences and the sort were considered a waste of energy. Since he did not care about such things, he was also disinclined to paying attention to these matters.

But if anyone dared to entertain the idea of harming him, he would kill them!

As far as magicians were concerned, eradicating a few worldly powers or factions required almost no effort.