

Master 1251

Chapter 1251 1251. Abandoned Village

"This place definitely looks like it has been abandoned for some time." Su shook her head at the state of the small village. It had quite a few collapsed buildings while a few small ones still stood. But they were basically just sheds with dusty rotten hay inside them. On top of that, the only other standing structures were the small stone walls and the central water well shared by the people that once lived here.

"That's what happens when trade routes change. It's not the end of the world but it is sad that people so easily tossed it aside. Instead of just leaving it all though, I wish they had converted it in to something else." Walker couldn't help but think that the flat fields could have been made in to a small farming village to keep it alive.

"I know what you are thinking. They could have made it in to some sort of farm, right?" Gil had read Walker perfectly. "Look at the soil, it seems good, right? But because it is so flat, the water will pool up and drown the roots. That's the problem without proper irrigation. The fields here would need a lot of back breaking work and attention. They would be very limited in what they could or could not grow." It only ever took the party a second to remember that Gil used to live on a farm and naturally had this sort of information in the back of his head.

"We should set up camp near the well so we can draw water when we need it. That way brother doesn't need to use what he brought with him." Onyx spotted the still intact bucket and knew that it would save their traveling rations if they used it. Walker didn't have any issues with that.

"Then we can use the left behind wood as firewood. At least it will help clean the area up a little." Walker started to move and grab some of the wood after handing some rope to Gil to get water with the bucket. The party easily set up camp. They had been moving all day by this point after they had stopped for a short break to eat. Alice was the most tired since she had used her singing to help speed them up the entire day. She looked like she would fall asleep even before they had heated up some vegetables next to the fire to eat.

"If you are going to explore, just be careful. No one knows what is still left behind in these buildings. Some of them are only partially fallen and could fall all the way." Walker didn't worry too much. They had not run in to any monsters or anything remotely dangerous so far. But he still felt it necessary to warn Midnight who would have gone off without him saying anything or not.

While the rest of them hung about the camp, Midnight looked at the partially standing buildings with a glint in her eyes. It was time to explore! She thought it would be some practice before she would go in

to the ravine with the others. She also thought she might find some hidden treasure left behind by those that once lived in this village. Her eyes moved to the largest building that had been better built than the others. It was still small by comparison to Genesis but here it was large. It had a straw roof which had fallen in but the only building with stone walls completely. The wood window frames had fallen in but that gave her the perfect entrance since the door was blocked.

In one leap, Midnight was through and standing on top of the broken roof. Her eyes adjusted to the dark setting and she scanned the room finding that it had a lot more inside it than expected. It was a building that had been multipurpose. The fireplace had a broken table next to it once used for cooking. Yet, what caught Midnight's eyes were the books still looking readable next to a desk. She knew that Walker might be interested in them and started to look through for unfamiliar copies. She only found five that she had not seen in the library before. Her learning when it came to reading paid off and she was able to discern the title of one, *The Growth Of A Village*.

She held on to these in her mouth while she pulled at the debris on the desk to clear it. A few pieces of gold had been left behind making it more curious that it had all been left. If this was a merchant village why had it been left and why has no one been here to steal away what was left? As soon as that entered her mind she realized she should get back and let Walker know what was there. She snatched up two more books under the debris of the table and jumped back through the window barely able to hold them. She spotted the newly lit fire easily and rushed back to stand right in front of Walker.

"That was a little fast. What did you find?" He reached down and checked out the books with interest. Huh, these seem interesting. I wonder why they were left behind?" Midnight huffed and nodded toward the large broken house she had come from. "If this was there then I would say that this was the head of the village's home. If they left everything behind that's even weirder." The odd tone caught everyone's attention and they became a little more on edge. It was not normal for an abandoned village to have so many books lying around. Books were rare for small villages since they didn't have a large population of wealthy individuals to buy them.

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Chapter 1252 1252. Foolish Farming

Walker sifted through the books and was about to head toward the building to search a little more. But when he found the thin journal that Midnight had grabbed off the desk he stopped. "Production month fifteen. That's the title of the journal. I wonder what the village could be producing?" Walker had no idea what this could mean. He thought that this was a merchant stop and not a production village. There were no overgrown fields here so it couldn't be food.

"Production? What did they make? What does it say?" Gil was a little more interested and caught the journal from Walker who let him explore while he looked at the other books. "There have been a lot of travelers lately that don't seem to understand the value of what we are producing. The starlight cricket eggs will last for a month without any rot or death. They are much more sustainable than the average chicken. They can also be raised to be monster feed for tamers. People are blind!"

Everyone was looking at each other. "What is a starlight cricket?" Remey had to ask first. She had never seen anything special like that. Just small black crickets in gardens.

"You've got me stumped. I didn't know that there were more types than garden crickets." Su was equally at a loss. "Gil, what else does it say. Move to a further entry." This seemed to work since Gil widened his eyes while he read silently. He stopped and looked at everyone before speaking out loud.

"The we used to influence the starlight crickets seems to work too well. We are growing them to the size of cows in just a few weeks. We can even harvest them like cattle. They are perfect to change the world! I knew that this idea would make us the best village out there. Soon everyone will want to eat what we produce." His eyes were still wide with surprise; he wasn't sure why anyone would try and eat a cricket.

"That's..."

"Gross!" Remey finished Su's sentence. Alice was nodding firmly to support this. The only ones that were not too grossed out by it were Midnight and Onyx. Walker just seemed to be a little put off since he still wasn't sure how this was possible.

"Wait, the last entry is weird." Gil seemed more confused than anything. "The spines on the male crickets' legs seem to grow sharper every generation. They are also getting too aggressive and eating at the grasses. We lost some to cannibalism just the other day. I swear, if we can't get rid of this" Gil looked up. "That's the end of it. From there it just has a few small scratches and wrinkles but no new entries.

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So, was this place just conveniently also a merchant stop? There were actually some weird farmers using to try and grow crickets in to food?" Rmeey was pretty disgusted. She thought that the idea was a huge mess and it had failed rightfully so. However, Midnight seemed a little more distracted. The entire group

was trying to piece together the problems here while Midnight turned her head toward the darkness of the night. The only thing that was making any noise or light was the campfire.

Her soft growl caused everyone to stop their thinking. Midnight was glaring down a ton of small white dots in the darkness. "I think we just learned why they are called starlight crickets..." Gil slowly moved to pull his bow from the ground nearby and notch an arrow. He felt Zephyr stir in her slumber to figure out what was happening. She knew that she would not feel Gil's mana reacting with hers unless he was in trouble.

"Gil, stay behind Su with Alice. I will change to my fill size. Midnight and Walker will use their shadow wrapping skills. I know you don't want to use it much, brother, but it will work well now with any skill you pair it with. Remey, you use fire and blind them. Elemental fists for every gross bug you see." Onyx played in to Remey's dislike for the crickets they had just read about. He also had learned how to direct everyone from Walker's previous actions on other adventurers. He was calm and slowly watched everyone prepare without causing sudden movements.

Walker used his all around appraisal skill on the eyes of the starlight crickets. He had to see what else they were made of so that he might warn everyone.

'Starlight cricket (starved)

The starlight cricket is a mutated cricket. The human tamers and mages that worked together to forcefully change this small species of monster created a true monster. Their caused them to grow and desire larger food items to survive. Plants were completely forgotten and they began to eat any living animals around. They are active for an extremely short period of time right after the snow melts. Other than that they sleep in the ground beneath large patches of grass to conserve energy. They are able to use their legs to create disruptive and confusing sounds. Beware their spiked legs and sharp pincers. They have lost their ability to hop far and fly short distances due to their weight and size. Their eyes are the only thing visible against the night, therefore, granting them the name; starlight cricket.'

"Alice, sing and stop them from making noise to confuse and disrupt our actions!" Walker souled out as he used the shadow wrapping skill with Midnight. The two were hidden from sight better than the crickets. Onyx changed size in a blink and reached his full height. It was incredibly intimidating which bought time for Gil to let loose a few arrows. Then, the sound started and their ears began to ring.

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Chapter 1253 1253. Monster Experiments, Really?!

The scraping and ringing that overtook all that the group could hear was too much. However, Alice had heard Walker and stuffed her fingers in her ears to deafen herself against them. Her voice began to rise in tone against them. The only light that she had to work with was the light from the stars and the moon. This was very little but it was perfect for her to become louder and create a strange bubble of flickering light around Su, Gil, and Onyx. The song was completely unfinished and had been an idea she had for a shield similar to Su's earth fortress. The inspiration was proving well earned as the sound of the starlight crickets was drastically dampened.

"Good job Alice, keep it up." Alice heard Onyx's voice in her mind and became serious. She let Su protect her and Gil keep their back secured. She would not stop her song until she heard from someone again.

Gil had perfect targets. The arrows he had let loose pierced in to the small dots that were becoming more visible as Walker created light orbs. He was not only creating light orbs. The group could see that he was creating spikes of earth below the crickets to pierce them. His goal was to make the surrounding area hard for them to move around while creating better shadows to ambush them in. This worked very well to protect the group since they were effectively in an ambush.

The growling and random bursts of flames from Midnight proved to create a burning smell. Yet this was increased as Remey used her elemental fist skill with the fire affinity knuckles. The group saw the alchemy fire spirit dancing above her causing the alchemy fire to grow within Remey's hands. It was like watching a mad brawler crack through shells. The image would scare any child but the party knew it was a carefully controlled balance of alchemy fire that would not burn Remey's fists and the elemental spirit causing the temperature to rise and harm the starlight crickets.

"You are just bugs!" Onyx swept his tail across a row of the starlight crickets. He also caused multiple spikes of shadows to jump out from beneath him and pierce them to end their attacks, the starlight crickets that had started snapping their pincers at them and trying to confuse them ended up as the ones being beaten. The group was not happy to be in this situation, however, they would be sending all of this information to the adventurer's guild. This sort of research and experimentation was terrible and had obviously cost many lives. The short activity period of the starlight crickets was the only reason this hadn't been reported just yet.

"Not in your life you rotten cricket!" Su was taunting the smaller starlight crickets that dared come near her. They stupidly charged at her and were smashed upon the ground. The light shield formed around her with the assistance of Alice's song. This put them in the perfect state of gaining energy and resisting the potential damage. It even seems to help Gil speed up the rate at which he fired arrows.

"Now let's see how many more of you there are!" Walker's shout came as soon as the noise had died down to almost nothing. He used a great deal of mana to cause all of the light around them to condense and form a powerful light orb. It revealed many small starlight crickets rushing away from their lives. The group seemed to have taken down the majority of the adult starlight crickets that had come out as soon as the night had fallen. They had no chance in fighting against the party with their weak bodies and poor resistance. They had failed as soon as they thought to ambush them while Midnight was alert.

"Don't chase them. Stay here and Walker will form an earth wall for the night. We will wait this out for the morning. Then we will check out the homes for more information and move on!" Onyx gave the order. It was a wise plan since fighting the dark could only go poorly as they chased the starlight crickets further from each other. They also needed more information to pass on to the adventurer's guild when they returned to Genesis. Walker would also be able to send a notification to keep others away from this area during the starlight crickets' active period. It would protect all the young adventurers going out on their own.

Once Midnight and Walker had fallen back, Su helped Walker with the earth elemental spirit to create dense earth walls. They built up the fire slightly and looked at each other. They were a little dirt covered but overall fine. The quickly orders from Onyx had proven very good since they were able to counter the attack from carnivorous crickets.

"I swear, if anyone out there is experimenting on monsters like this, I will punch them until they lose all sense to do foolish things like that." Remey slammed her fist on the ground with a flurry of alchemy fire that the fire spirit was slowly calming down. They were both equally fired up from this battle and needed a few moments to recover any calmness they had.

"What stupid ideas some beings have. It's almost as bad as the ones that thought it wise to seal away spirits. World ending." Zephyr scoffed at the people who had the idea to create something so dangerous. The only person that seemed unaffected was Alice. She had sung her heart out to form sound dampening barriers with the minuscule light around them. When Walker went over to see to her wellbeing, she fell against his shoulder completely asleep. She had used a lot of concentration to make it happen in that instant without any practice of the song.

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Chapter 1254 1254. Just Shells

"Looks like it's about time we move these walls. Walker saw the sun coming up and had not heard many sounds outside for some time. It seemed that their counter attack against the starlight crickets had been enough to scare them away. That, and they were too hungry from recently waking up to stay in one place and attempt to get a tough meal.

"Then we can do it together." Su was ready with her earth spirit partner to move the earth wall away back in to the ground where it should be. She had a feeling that they would see a slightly gruesome sight when they did but was ready for it.

Just as she had imagined, there were plenty of shells around. The walls fell away easily with her and Walker working together. But that was it. There were only shells. "They ate each other. That's even worse." Remey kicked away one of the larger pieces of shell from the black crickets. They were too soft to use for anything but still, the fact that they had been unable to gather any materials from the endeavor was disappointing.

"I can still take these shells back for the guild to study and record. I'm sure they will be helpful." The shells even blew slightly in the wind that seemed to be picking up for the day.

"Alright, we can check out the few places still intact and recover whatever we find to bring with us. Then we will leave from here and keep moving." Onyx was acting as the driving force for them to stay on track with his plan. They would be a little behind but he had factored in a longer travel time even though he had said two and a half days. It was better to be optimistic and say that than any shorter. Now it would be about three days which didn't seem to make much difference.

Midnight was leading the way for Walker since she wanted him to see the place she had found the books and still had more there. She wasn't sure if anything would be able to shine more light on what happened here but it was worth the shot. It was also one of the reasons that the group had been on edge enough to react to the sudden appearance of the starlight crickets.

"Are you feeling better this morning?" Walker had seen Alice eat and seem to act as if she had recovered her enemy. She was slightly slower though which made him think that she was still a little off after forcing a new song she had yet to properly refine in to a working protection.

She started to nod her head yes before she stopped herself. She seemed to realize something before she shook her head side to side instead. "Head hurts." The words sounded as if she was embarrassed. Walker realized that Alice had not wanted to hold the group back but thought better of hiding it.

"Then we can help out with that. We have a low tier healing potion that should help out. Then take some of the warm mint leaf tea that Remey brought. It should help you relax a little." Walker grabbed the water bottle that he had in his storage of the tea and held it in his hands while manipulating the

small amounts of fire elemental mana from the rising sun. The bottle warmed up slowly. It was the best invention for traveling since they could put it right in to the fire. The dwarves that sold them must have made a fortune. "Thank you for telling me. I don't want you to end up hurt while we are out here."

The moment had gone uninterrupted by Midnight since she could tell it was a meaningful one. However, they were at the building that she had searched while Su, Gil, and Onyx were at the others. She hopped through the window followed by Walker and Alice. Walker got to work storing away the books and anything that seemed important. He managed to find a small box of torn letters and writings that seemed to be to other similar villages.

"I hate to say it, but I think this kind of monster experimentation is more common than we thought. And also seems to be more than one race. These letters are from the demi-human kingdom. They have their seal from letter carriers. Not that they would know what was written inside." This meant that more than one small village had attempted something foolish like this. It had easily been many years ago but still a terrible idea. "We can just hand all this over and have a group investigate it. There might even be answers when we ask around."

There was disappointment as they left the building. However, the disappointment seemed to continue when Remey handed over a box of journals that seemed to record the progress of their experimentations. "I have more like that about feeding. I think one of them actually tried to make them like that while the others thought they were making a new food source to save the kingdoms from potential famine." Su really felt the desire to help and knew it could push people to extremes.

"It's terrible. That last house over there even has diagrams about how to change a grass eating monster in to a carnivorous one. It's kind of messed up." Gil didn't even have proper words for it.

"This whole village is messed up. Onyx, I know we are here for a reason and it was just a stop, but thanks for stopping here. This is valuable information that should help people in the future." Walker was really thankful. Knowing about dangerous monsters was always better than being surprised by them in the future.

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Chapter 1255 1255. I Will Handle It

It took the group another hour or two of scouting around the crumbled sheds and village huts. They didn't manage to find anything else other than a few gold coins or ruined goods. From those they managed to prove that this had definitely been a spot to stop for merchants at one point. It might have even been what fueled the experimentations.

"Now that we have dealt with that, we should head out, right leader?" Walker looked at Onyx who had managed to get them back in to a group to go over their findings so that Walker could send as detailed a notification to Clara as possible. He didn't get a response since she was exceedingly busy but this was not an extremely pressing matter. It was a random occurrence that the party had happened upon completely by accident.

"Yes, party member. We will get in the carriage and continue on if songstress Alice is feeling up to it." Onyx teased Walker right back a little but was serious when he looked at Alice. She had gotten much more active and felt very good about heading out now. She raised a small fist to show she was all in on getting them ahead of their travel schedule. "Then onward we go!" With the starlight crickets behind them, the party was on their way yet again.

"... You go out to hunt for a ravine and search it for serpents and you find mutated crickets? What even is this." Clara was in her office rubbing her temples. She had no idea what kind of luck her party had but it was extremely unusual. Not only this, but she saw that they had documents and other evidence for the adventurer's guild to take and use to investigate.

Since the group had been out, Clara expected some interesting results about the ravine. It was a worry that many merchants had come to the guild with since it was a danger they could face while transporting goods. There was the possibility that it could grow more like some had in the past and cause ascertain trails to be unusable. But this was just out of nowhere.

"We need to send a party to investigate an abandoned village. I want four mages, two tamers, and the rest guards!" Clara yelled out and a staff member just outside of her door rushed to get a party together. "I need someone to contact the demi-human representative as well. I want them to come by my office!" Clara also saw the notice from Walker about demi-human connections meaning that it could have been a small group of researchers that split off from the two kingdoms and joined together in their slightly twisted ideals.

The next ten minutes were filled with Clara sifting through some old documents she had been brought about experimental farming. There were many that had strange ideas to improve farming but the human kingdom had not delved in to this too much. They trusted their farmers to rent the land and work hard to make everything that the kingdom needed. It tended to work out since the farmers always had great pride in the way their produce grew and hoped they could show off their hard work. That and they would be able to sell their best produce for better income.

"Someone came to ask me to see you. I didn't think the adventurer's guild would be asking from me, especially after your big announcement. Need some advice on infighting already?" Scylla had assumed that she was called upon because of her battle strength. She knew that there might be some trouble between some of the smaller and inexperienced adventures trying to get the best herbs.

"No, nothing like that. It's about farming. In particular, experiments farming with monsters. Mutated monsters." Scylla held up a hand. She was much more serious.

"We put a stop to that some years ago. During a reduction in food due to root rot and additional rain, we lost a few fields. Those that wanted to prevent that came up with many different ideas. Some were not acceptable. Mutating plants can work. Mutating monsters...despicable." Her voice was heavy. This was something that the demi-human kingdom had not been proud of. From what they had learned, they had acted swiftly.

"We stomped out those problems as soon as they arose. The fools made berzerk hounds, venomous lynx, and even tried to turn a simple fish in to a fast growing monstrosity which caused us to completely bury our largest reservoir. But they and everyone that fell for their ideas were imprisoned or dealt with otherwise. My people do not stand for such experimentation." Seeing that Scylla felt so strongly assured Clara that this was something she could rely on her for.

"Then it will not be a surprise to you that our heroic friends found an abandoned village that was once used by humans that spoke with your prisoners. Apparently, they followed those theories and experiments to create something called a starlight cricket. One that they had an encounter with since the village apparently still had living specimens there." The look on Scylla's face was one that could silence any army out of fear. This was the look of the real general that stood at the front line of battles.

"Then I will personally take troops to handle it. Do not worry yourself. This is on my shoulders. I may have been a few years younger when I learned of it, but that does not mean my feelings have changed over this matter. It would be a failing of the entire demi-human race if I did not clean this up." Clara nodded and handed over a document she had been writing with all the information and location the party had just been in. She trusted this matter to Scylla completely.

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Chapter 1256 1256. Train While Walking

"We didn't make it as far yesterday, but that's not a problem. Today we will make it to the ravine and Alice won't even need to sing. We can take the slower ride to prepare ourselves and relax." Onyx was sure this was the best course of action. He knew that Alice would be better off well rested for their

journey in to the ravine where the light elemental mana would be scarce. He also knew that Walker and the others were thinking or stretching their legs to walk about and train slightly. They all had their own goals and should have the freedom to work on it if it made them better prepared to take on the mysteries underground.

"I like that idea. I'm getting out of this cramped thing!" Remey had personally hated the carriage. She liked being a little lazy in the beginning, but after the second day, she had lost her patience. She wanted to move and burn off more energy. The starlight crickets had been nothing to them and they had not encountered another monster at all. Gil had spotted some but they had rushed away when they saw the carriage and smelled Midnight.

Gil decided to hop out right behind Remey. He had decided to try to work on his dagger skills. The movements that made up the water elf technique were tough to keep up long term so moving in that way would best help him improve. He also needed to start incorporating the forest elf dagger techniques here. "Wait, are you just going to be trying to punch rocks and break them?" Gil watched as Remey wound up to strike a rock on the ground nearby.

"How else am I going to learn to use my defense breaking palm and elemental fist together? I have to make a defense breaking elemental fist. It's not easy. I need to punch something solid with my knuckles." The response was a little more sarcastic than Gil liked but he couldn't argue it. Instead, he watched the poor rock gain a small dent. Remey had used the earth affinity knuckle to gather earth elemental mana and smash in to the rock. However, it was far from the defense breaking palms effects. There was no in depth damage that showed through the sturdy rock.

"Hm, if you could use that against me I would be able to improve. Let me know when you have progress. I will see if I can get some disposable metal shields to try and use my light shield to defend. Until then I will focus on understanding the elemental mana around. I need to catch up." The simple goal that Su had was still to catch up to Walker and Midnight. They had a much better understanding of elemental mana meaning that they would be able to use it better. Su was a draconic guardian. She needed to be able to use the same elemental manas as Midnight and Walker. She had to get closer to using natural mana related skills.

"Alice, what are you planning to do?" Walker looked at Alice and found that she had started to scribble away in her journal. She was testing out small humming sounds to see if her songs would work. Walker knew that he would have absolutely zero attention from Alice. He would just need to wait and see what new song she thought up to show off her skills. The focus she had did inspire him though. He had said he would work on his earth sculpting skill and he wanted to do just that. In particular, he wanted to try and combine two skills.

Midnight had jumped from the carriage as well and carefully watched Walker. She wanted to see what he was doing. In this, she had attracted Fleur who decided to rest on top of her head and watch Walker too. She felt that Walker was going to be using his own skills and mana so that she could create what he wanted to create.

"If I create a flame doll, then the fire takes the shape I want it to." He established this under his breath. He knew this and could manipulate it. Therefore, he could give it orders so that the flame doll could train others and even defend against enemies. "My earth sculpting skill lets me create earth and even shape it better. I've made training dummies that can fall away in to just dirt." Talking himself through his ideas was not always his approach. Walker would normally just feel it, yet, at this moment, he wanted to ensure that his thoughts were parallel to his desired effect and how he would best combine the earth and fire elemental mana. He could easily do so, but not in the proper manner at an instant.

The ground around him was soft and a little rocky. These were fields that had never been plowed or combed. Therefore, he would need to be able to manipulate the rocks and the soil to bond with the fire elemental mana. His first goal was to manipulate some while removing the water elemental mana from it. "Without water in the soil, the fire won't resist too much. It should bond with the earth better." There was a slight steam that came around them while Walker did this. The water had to evaporate somewhere and was soon blown away by the wind. "Hm, no air either. If I have too much it will be flames and lose heat. The fire will just leave burnt earth." The wind had helped him realize that he could not leave pockets of air within what he was going to create. Walker was going to take it all in to account without failure.

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Chapter 1257 1257. Fire And Earth Combined

Midnight was watching how Walker was taking the water out of the earth. She had not considered mixing the two when she had trained her elemental breath attacks. She had the fire breath and the golden flame breath. She also had the decaying breath which was a darkness elemental breath that was similar in appearance to fire. It would confuse anyone when it came to what it really was since it seemed so close to real flames. It just decayed things at a rate similar to burning them.

The thought to add water and earth together to make a fusion elemental breath attack was something that she could try. Something that would challenge her and her higher ability to create elemental flame breath attacks due to the golden flame heart. As she started to pull the water elemental and the earth elemental mana toward her, Fleur hopped in to the air surprised.

Fleur could feel what Midnight was trying to do and grew excited. She wanted to train with them too but knew that Walker wanted to focus on his own. Therefore, she began to pull more of the earth and water elemental mana toward Midnight to help. She watched as the mana entered Midnight's body and built up in her center. It was still separate but Midnight could easily push them together. Water and earth were often bonded in some way since they worked together to nourish plants in the soil. It could be said that they were some of the closest working elemental manas. It was similar to the water in the air or the light in the air.

For a moment, Walker sensed this and only spared a single glance at the two while they worked together. He was sure that what Midnight was training while walking forward was going to be a good development for her, especially if Fleur had become interested in it. He needed to focus himself though. He was about to start a flame with some of the dried grass within his storage. He needed to be able to control the fire elemental mana to enter the earth he was slowly shaping. The only problem was that he didn't know what shape he wanted it to take.

Thoughts of golems entered Walker's mind but he felt that the al metal creations the dwarves made were too complicated. He lacked the understanding to properly make them able to move and function. He wanted something simple and easy to control. Something that would pose a challenge and act as another defender with Su. Thus, when he thought of the silver golem they had faced in the caves with the dwarves, he was struck by inspiration.

The simple form of a golem with a core was easy to replicate. It also added the shaping that would allow the fire elemental mana to dwell in the center of the earth and heat it throughout to meld them together. The high earth sculpting skill began to work overtime while Walker slowly walked with the ever changing dried earth and stone mixture beside him. The legs formed in to stumps of hardened and condensed earth. The head was basically just a larger rock that Walker had drawn to him. The body was large and its arms heavy enough to be used as clubs. It was extremely simple but it would be perfect for defense.

The single hole within its chest had many small veins running from it. They were for the flames to ignite and begin to form. The amount of mana that Walker had used was not small. It was enough to say that he needed a few low tier mana potions, which he gulped down while holding his concentration. The added challenge of carrying the golem with his grand elemental manipulation was enough to burn extra mana. Adding in walking and trying to gather any fire elemental mana from the air he could, was much tougher.

"I know I can't make a golem. That takes years and I wouldn't be able to control it. But I can steal the shape and use it to my advantage!" Walker talked himself up while he pulled the straw and dried grass

from his storage. It ignited instantly with the addition of fire elemental mana. He immediately thrust it in to the golem shaped body he created. Then, his next challenge began.

Guiding the fire elemental mana that he had just added to the hollow center of the earth doll he created was much harder than he thought it would be. Walker needed to keep control of the fire constantly. Every single time he would try and allow it to spread and meld with the stone and earth, it would cause the heat to melt it. The magma it would create would be good to attack with but it would be hard to control and all the work shaping it would go to waste.

"I need to keep it controlled." This realization caused him to slowly step away from the flames. They were hot but not enough to cause him lasting damage, therefore, he allowed thin wisps of fire to follow from his fingertips. This was the minimal control he needed without fully releasing the flames to destroy the earth he condensed. It was radically different from the flame doll which just needed fuel to burn or else it would dissipate. Walker was the source of control for it so that the balance between the elemental manas would meld and not clash.

The constant control allowed the flames to start to show through the joints of the earth doll he had created. His hands moved to guide it and soon the creature was walking beside him. Burned footprints in the wet grass left behind. Smoke drifted off of it slightly. It was a sight that would scare away any weak monster that saw it.

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Chapter 1258 1258. Testing It Out

'The skill burning stone puppet has been taken from the elemental puppet master system. The skill burning stone puppet has been learned through precise control and balance of elemental mana, skills, and knowledge.'

'Burning stone puppet- 40 mana cost, earth mana, fire mana

The user will blend a large amount of their own mana in to ambient earth and fire elemental mana. The user must possess skills to manipulate and shape fire and earth elemental manas to create this puppet. The user will retain the connection to the puppet using flame stings. This constant feed of mana will allow the user to control it without needing to move their own hands. This is considered an ideal protector for a weak bodied puppeteer. The strong defensive force combined with the heat of fire causes burns on any that attack it. While slow, it is incredibly hard to break with the connection remaining intact so that the user can repair the burning stone puppet at will. The burning stone puppet

can fall out of elemental harmony if the elemental mana connection is lost causing it to fall to pieces or melt in to magma.'

'The skill flame strings had been taken from the elemental puppet master system. The user has learned the skill flame strings due to related skills and current experiences.'

'Flame strings- 1 mana cost per minute

The flame strings require very high concentration, therefore, come with a consistent mana cost per minute. The user can reduce this by training with the particular fire elemental mana and understanding it better. The user will be able to control strings made of fire that only require mana or air to burn. The strings are not very strong but can be used to attach or create other things. They are ideally made by puppeteers to control their puppets.'

Everyone stopped. They had been watching Walker work on his skill combination since it had become more and more evident that it was becoming something intense. However, when they saw the golem with flames in its joints, they were stunned. It was completely unexpected. Not only this they saw Walker trying to control it through small flaming strings. It was as if he had just changed in to a different person before their eyes.

"Remey, bring it on!" Walker was barely finishing another mana potion. The constant concentration and mana for these skills was too much to keep up for a long time until he had trained it more. Yet, he could not resist the urge to train it under pressure. He wanted to feel the strength this burning doll had. He wanted to see what he could do with it and what weaknesses it left him. He needed to know if he could protect everyone with this around him.

"I'll shatter that stone thing you made. Just watch out and don't cry after!" Remey's face twisted in to a battle ready smile. The alchemy fire spirit couldn't resist the urge to enhance the fire affinity knuckles that Remey swapped to. She was going to fight fire with fire since she saw that the burning doll had flames between the joints. It would be safer for her to convert the flames in to alchemy fire when she came in to contact with it. Therefore mitigating the damage taken and enhancing her attacks.

She had made a little progress changing the defense breaking palm in to a punch. She understood that it came with the way she struck. The vibrations that came from using her palm were where the damage came from. Thus, if she changed the way she struck and replicated the vibrations then she would cause the same damage with a fist while adding the elemental effects to it.

The burning stone puppet slowly swung a club like arm down on her. Remey's speed was too fast for it and she dodged by a hair's breadth. This was perfect for her to get to the side of the puppet and strike out. The hit didn't even produce a spark though. The fire that Remey had tried to control had lost its strength when she had attempted to change the way her fist would hit the golem. She had to merge the two skills better. Yet, she needed to jump and roll back first. The puppet swung its arm sideways to try and attack her again. Walker was sweating heavily while controlling it since he had to use the flames and the earth to change the direction of each attack.

The next strike that Remey tried was a quick burst of speed so that she could get underneath the puppet's guard. She punched straight at the stomach area causing a slight crack. However, the flames still did not show the same as they would when she would normally attack with the elemental fist. The small vibrations had caused more damage. The change in shape had started to create the defense breaking fist she wanted. "Again!" Her shout was loud and powerful enough to make everyone focus on this training more. They had not realized that Remey was taking this so seriously. That she had truly committed to being better about balancing her training and alchemy.

"Give it all you have!" Onyx thumped his tail on the ground in encouragement after he moved to the ground. He felt the energy and wanted to see Remey break the new skill Walker had just learned. The skill that was taking so much of Walker's concentration.

Remey didn't let up. While the club like arms of the doll swung about and more patches of burnt grass shown around them, as the technique refined. The cracks she created were slower and slower to heal as Walker controlled the puppet. Small sparks of alchemy flames gathered with each hit. They grew and grew slowly covering Remey's fists in alchemy fire as the alchemy fire spirit danced above her. It shouted in joy as her partner became one with the alchemy fire that it was made up of. They were reaching a whole new level of bond together.

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Chapter 1259 1259. Remey's Bond

The change in their walking while training was completely unexpected. It was just a perfect moment before they got to their destination. A moment that they could have to bring each other closer and make each other stronger.

Remey's fist slammed down on to the burning stone puppet. A burst of deep red alchemy fire burst out and the alchemy fire spirit rushed to land on Remey's fists. It was no longer content with just watching and helping to control the flames. It wanted to be part of this battle. It wanted to grow with its partner.

The next punch came after Remey ducked under the puppets arms yet again. The puppet had been unable to land a single blow while Remey had caused parts of its body to shear off with her attacks. The next one was no outlier. The strike came down and a devastating crack echoed through the fields. A single arm of the burning stone puppet fell off in pieces releasing a stream of fire.

Before any of them could react, Walker was falling to his knees due to the strain that came with trying to contain the flames he no longer could manipulate properly. Midnight burst forward releasing her gathered breath. Her attack had fused the water and earth elemental mana inside her. This combination caused cold mud to cover the puppet. Sizzling mud began to dry on it while the steam speedily cooled the stone. Midnight was only able to use it for a single breath but the combination was powerful. Even though the time to gather the mana and mix it had taken her a longer duration it proved perfect for the situation.

The flame strings that Walker had made to connect himself to the puppet dissipated and the stone golem collapsed in to pieces while still cooling. The flames had been quenched and the mud was keeping everything from shattering due to the difference in temperature.

"That was amazing. What was that skill!? And Remey, how did you and the fire spirit work together like that!? Gil was full of energy. His dagger training while walking was nothing compared to the two breakthroughs he had just seen. Walker's burning stone puppet and flame strings were spectacular in his eyes. Then adding in the visible learning, improvement, and adjustment they had witnessed to Remey's elemental defense breaking fist was too much to handle.

"Burning stone puppet...I wanted to use the flame doll but tougher so I mixed it with...earth. Gah! I'm tired." Walker fell back on to the damp grass trying to cool down and catch his breath. Alice started to sing while he lay down. But her song was not for him.

"Your hands are burned pretty badly, Remey, you need to learn to hold back." Su was helping Remey with a health potion since Remey couldn't easily uncover the top of the vial.

"I did hold back. We held back a lot. We just need to fine tune the flow of the flames. We learned a new skill too, you know. I combined skills and we found a skill to use together." Remey winced in pain while she felt the skin begin to heal on her hands. They were burned much more than she should have allowed.

"Well, your new skill came at a cost. I don't want to see you pay this price again." Su was still not having it. But Gil was right there to ask Remey what the skill was.

"And the skill is?" His expectant tone made Remey a little more arrogant. But the alchemy fire spirit had already melted in to the spirit mark to rest. It had used a lot of its stored elemental mana to push itself and Remey further.

"Alchemy fire gauntlets. I can only use it with my partner. It wraps itself around my fists while I use skills. It's perfect. We fight together causing more fire damage and stealing flames from what we stroke. It was amazing. I could feel our manas mixing toget-" She flinched again while Su wrapped her hands in healing potion soaked bandages.

"Yes yes, skills and fire. Now just sit still and let Alice and I heal you. Gil, stop encouraging her and go check on Walker. Then tell Midnight she did a good job. That puppet was going to shatter if she didn't do something." Su was fairly impressed as well, but if she showed it then she would undermine her reprimands. They were out in the wild and they had managed to do this. She could only shake her head.

"I know I should have stopped them, but they seemed like they needed this," Onyx spoke only to Su and knew that she was not going to openly reprimand him. He had made a good decision to let everyone stretch their legs and burn off energy. Now they would be able to focus on the task at hand.

"We won't do any more training today. When we reach the ravine we will settle in for a rest before we go in to it in the morning tomorrow." This final order from Onyx was not unheard. they nodded in agreement and decided that they would start to teach and show each other their thoughts as they had gone through their progression. Walker knew that Midnight and Su would be able to understand the mana he used better while the combination of skills that Remey used could open their minds to inspiration. The more that they improved and put together theories to make combination skills, the stronger they would get. One could only become so powerful alone. If two or three skills came together then there was no way to know what they could do. This was the path to becoming a truly powerful hero without forcing their levels higher and higher to build up stat points.

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Chapter 1260 1260. The Guards

After they had taken their time to recover. Walker looked a little better and less pale. He had also changed in to less sweaty and dirty clothes. Remey had healed a lot more but Su and Alice had told her she needed the bandages on all night soaked in healing potion if she wanted to punch a pillow let alone

monsters. Remey was not even able to argue against them since she could feel that she had made a mistake by pushing so far so fast with the skill.

"Look, that should be the camp near the ravine," Onyx called out from the top of the carriage. He had spotted the five guards sitting around a small fire. They had tents set up and didn't seem on edge at all, which was a very good sign. It meant that there hadn't been any monsters that had crawled out of the ravine to cause trouble.

The carriage soon caught their attention and they began to make waves to move the carriage to the side. The guards quickly caught on when Midnight jumped out and started to run toward them. They had been given notice that the party was coming and they could not fail to recognize Midnight. Especially when she leaped in to the air and flew towards them in a short burst.

As she landed in front of them with a huff, the carriage came behind her. "You know we have been waiting for you. The guild master changed our return trip from a quest to come here and guard this out of nowhere. Now you can help us get out of this so we can get back and celebrate with everyone else." The five laughed. They were still adventures even though they had been changed to guard duty.

"Out of this? Who will guard the entrance while we do an investigation? We need people to hold it down." Walker smirked knowing that the group was messing around since they had been waiting for quite a few days.

"I assume you want to hear what has been seen and sensed by our mage?" The leader of the five approached Walker.

"I would say yes, but that will be for Onyx to decide. He is the pen in charge. You see, we might be able to find more abyssal serpents down there." The five that had been guarding the ravine entrance for days were very surprised that Walker was not in charge. They turned their head to Onyx who had slithered down to the ground and raised his head to look at them.

"My brother is correct. I would like to hear what you have noticed around here. Anything odd? Specifically shadows out of place?" Every single one of them seemed even more surprised to be asked this.

"That's exactly it. Early in the morning, we keep seeing shadows out of the corner of our eyes. They always seem to dart away toward the ravine again. Even weirder, we see clumps of shadows on the edges that seem like they would be cast from a small group of rocks or plants. But then we will notice that nothing is actually casting the shadow at all." The leader of the guarding adventures was speaking a little loudly. He knew that he sounded a little crazy.

"And what of the eggshells that had been reportedly found at the bottom?" This was even more important to Onyx. he needed to see them if possible. He would be able to have Walker appraise them to see if they really came from an abyssal serpent.

"We had them, but they slowly turned in to dust over the past few days. It's odd because we weren't sure what was happening to them. We assume that's because they weren't eaten by the monster that hatched from them. Not that all monsters eat their eggshells."

"Unfortunate...is there anything else to note about what you might have seen or heard?" This was the last question before Onyx made his plan for the morning.

"Just a few things we can see from the top. We aren't here to investigate so we aren't going down to the bottom. There seems to be a carved cavern down there. It's not quite ruin materials, more like someone started digging out a cave that was already there years ago." This was the best guess that all of them had come up with. It made sense and they could say that better than any other possibilities.

"Then we will take a look. We will keep you company for dinner tonight before we head down to the ravine and explore. We don't plan to be in there for a long time. I'm sure you will get someone along to replace your guard duty soon." The cheeky reply was enough to lighten the mood and make the ones guarding realize that Onyx was not just forcing his serious act because he was in charge. The seriousness had come from how much this mattered to him and now that it was done they could chat and share stories in to the night.

"Ah, so that means you should have brought some interesting dinner options?" One of them spoke up looking at the group. A small smile on his face. They had been eating rations for the days they had been here. Not many monsters had passed by.

"We might have a few things. The real question is, can you show me that you are deserving of my cooking?" Walker chimed back in while Gil walked away to sit and prepare arrows. Su did the same with

her shields while Remey smirked and pulled out a deck of cards she recently got for journeys like this. No one had noticed that Alice and Midnight had already moved near the fire to relax. They wanted to take their time resting for the night.