

Last System 117

Chapter 117 - Questions With No Answers

"That's a good question," the pathfinder smiled as he threw all the spoils of the hunt to his storage ring. He then whipped out a herbal notion and threw it towards me. "Use it on your ears," he ordered before picking up the pace.

Just as expected, he judged that we didn't really have the time for me to carefully apply it while standing. Or maybe he just wanted to hurry up and get moving again?

'With how talkative he is, I guess there is no point even asking,' I thought with a small sneer.

This was our fourth day on the road, past the time of crossing the barrier. The third full day during which I took an active part in the hunting process, although the very first day when I actually contributed.

'I wonder how long does he need to make me a real spear?' I pondered as I followed the trail left by the pathfinder steps.

In order to hunt this beast down, we strayed from the route by a whole lot. Yet, for some reason, my guide deemed it a valuable learning experience for me and a perfect opportunity to make some quick buck on the side.

According to what he told me two days ago, a single monster spiritual core was as valuable as a whole bag of natural, mined spirit stones.

And after just a single moment of cultivating within an amplification array power by such stone, I didn't dare to have any doubts about it.

"At the current rate, we should arrive at the exchange point by tomorrow's morning," the pathfinder muttered once we finally managed to get out of the forest.

We strayed quite a lot from the main road, but we didn't actually get far from it. In order to approach the monster we hunted from upwind, we had to take a massive detour, basically quadrupling the distance that initially separated our prey from us.

Yet, even when aiming just to return to our path, we had no other choice but to meander in various directions, avoiding the strong predators that the pathfinder could somehow detect.

"To answer your question from before," the man muttered, right as I finally found some time to apply the ointment to my ears.

'Figures,' I thought with a small grin. The second I managed to do anything outside of making sure not to make any noise in the forest was also the moment when he allowed himself to speak.

While just a small thing, it meant that I was getting used to the life of a contractor that he warned me so much against.

"The level of the monsters here, on the continent, is mostly ruled by the amount of mana they manage to absorb from the air," the pathfinder finally started his story. "They are born with a certain level of strength, consume plants and other animals that have a certain amount of energy, but most of all, they absorb it from the air, just like all the other cultivators do," he said.

"Wait, does that mean the monsters can also set up the amplification array?" I asked, dumbfounded by this obvious realization.

So far, every single time when my strength improved past the barrier, it was while I sat down in the amplification array.

I didn't hear any ticking while just walking!

"That's because you don't really know how to cultivate yet," the pathfinder shook his head. "This is the greatest disadvantage of the promoters like you. You don't consider cultivation to be something as natural as breathing, but something that requires effort instead," the man shook his head. "While not particularly wrong, it bars you from cultivating naturally like the others," he added, his face covered in an uneasy smile.

"But?" I asked, aware that this wasn't all there was to the story.

"The monsters can cultivate like that to a considerable level... Because most of them live for far longer than humans," the pathfinder said. "On the other hand, what humans can reach with natural cultivation is far more limited," he said, throwing me a quick look.

As if his glance was a nonverbal scold, I hurried up with smearing the insides of my ears with the ointment.

"That's why once you reach a certain level, cultivating without the amplification array becomes a pain and soon grows to impossibility," he added, only to shake his head. "But that's not what you asked about, isn't it?" he added as a small smirk grew up on his lips.

"If that's how the monsters in the place rich in ma... in the spiritual energy grow, how does it work in the borderlands?" I asked, pointing out the exact spot of the story that the pathfinder missed.

But I didn't get the answer. Rather than just revealing the truth to me, the pathfinder simply smiled and moved his face away.

'I guess he wants me to come up with the explanation on my own,' I thought, rolling my eyes.

This was the method that pathfinder used on me whenever I had enough information, at least in his opinion, to figure something out. Whenever I had no basis to learn something by myself, he would be willing to help, just like he did with the spear.

But the fact that he refused to answer right now could only mean one thing.

He already gave me enough information within his story to derive the answer to my last question on my own.

'If they can't cultivate naturally, then can the reason be the food?' I thought. 'But what could they eat? Plants?' I thought, only to shake my head in denial.

Without mana in the air, how could the plants become a valuable source of food?

With that, the answer appeared to be quite obvious.

"They are eating each other to grow stronger, right?" I suggested a possible solution.

It still had its flaws, things that didn't line up... But overall, this was the only answer that I could think of.

"That's right," the pathfinder nodded his head. "There is no spiritual energy in the borderlands... But there is a lot of miasma," he said.

"Miasma?" I asked, even though I could tell why he cut his sentence short, before explaining the meaning of the word.

That damned theatrical bastard just wanted me to go out of my way to ask about it!

"That's right, miasma," the pathfinder smiled, satisfied with my reaction. "It's a strange energy that's... not really understood," he shook his head. "All we know is that it appears in the places where the spiritual energy doesn't behave the way it should," he said.

'Is it the result of this strange behavior of mana?' I thought, trying to rationalize the situation.

Even though this place was filled with things that would make most of the scientists go crazy, I just couldn't help but get the feeling that when it all boiled down, it still followed some strict, physical laws.

The existence of mana, magic, and cultivation of any sort didn't mean that science didn't work. It simply meant that the science of that aspect had yet to develop.

Yet, thinking about this suddenly made chill travel down my spine.

"From what we know, the miasma is the source of all the monsters appearing in the borderlands," the pathfinder continued. "That's the only reason we came up with why the monsters didn't kill themselves a long time ago," he said before turning silent once again.

But in my head, one question continued to freeze my thoughts.

Was the miasma a result of the mana behaving in strange ways... Or was it the reason?

People accepted mana because they could use it. But if that's how humanity always thought, then no nuclear technology would ever develop on earth!

So the question stood.

Was the miasma a result of the mana behaving in weird ways, or a reason behind this weird behavior?

Or maybe it was an entirely different force that simply couldn't mix with mana well, creating the places like tiered zones and borderlands?

I swallowed my saliva and shook my head.

'It's no use thinking about it now,' I thought.

Since no one in this world managed to understand this strange phenomenon yet, I would have to be pretty arrogant to believe I could just guess it on the go.

For now, I could only shelve this topic as a mystery that one day, I would likely spend quite a lot of my time and efforts to solve.

But today was not yet that day. As such, there was only one topic left that I had to raise with the pathfinder.

"I don't want to be annoying.... But can you tell me when you will get that spear done?"