

Last System 254

Chapter 254 - What Wont I Do For Science?

Thump.

The dull sound of my shoes hitting the hard stones of the floor wasn't loud enough to attract anyone's attention. The shouts of the people from the auction hall all rushing in to deal with the fire were more than enough to cover the noise I made.

'No one should be able to see me,' I thought, quickly changing my position from where I landed.

With the fires to my back, the area that their light didn't reach would turn subjectively even darker. Anyone who would as much as throw a single glance towards the commotion would have a way harder time noticing my silhouette in the darkness.

It was a trick I learned... by reading books. Something that one of my favorite authors pointed out, explaining why guards in the medieval cities rarely used fires while patrolling the walls through the night.

'A torch would make one feel safer and illuminate his surrounding, but it would make it nearly impossible to see deep into the darkness as well,' I recalled the reasoning of said author.

It was something that I also tested myself, eager to satisfy my curiosity and check whether the author's ideas were anything more than just horseshit.

And as it turned out, when I held the torch outside of the well-lit area directly around me, my eyes couldn't penetrate the darkness just a bit further beyond. On the contrary, after extinguishing the fire and giving my eyes some time to readjust, I could see far deeper into the night than when I had a torch on!

'I need to be quick,' I thought when I distanced myself far enough from the commotion.

Without even a second of hesitation, I tore my robes out of my body, throwing them away a bit deeper into the alley.

The cold wind of the night caressed my naked skin as I pulled out a different set of clothes from my storage ring.

'I wonder if I can get sick,' I thought, pulling the merchant-like attire on my garb and then... turning right back.

The last thing anyone would expect from someone escaping would be for that person to return to the place they were initially caught at.

This small piece of psychology was abolished on the earth, even giving the birth of the saying that an arsonist would always return to the place he set on fire.

And that's exactly what I did.

'This is going to be fun,' I thought, patting myself on the pouch that I attached to my belt.

As I was going right back into the zone of danger, it was better to be prepared. Even if the chances of anyone spotting and recognizing me were slim, I wasn't going to go back into the auction hall unprepared!

'Woah,' I thought when I finally emerged from the street in which I hid previously.

The fires spread out towards an entire side of the auction hall building. Outside of the top and ground floors, it appeared as if the rest of the building was already on fire.

"I can't believe this is happening!" some girl in the crowd cried out, hiding her face in her hands.

"Did someone send for the fire brigade?" someone else asked, calmly trying to take stock of the situation.

In short, the space where I landed after jumping out from the hole I made was now squirming with people, all eager to watch and all hesitant to help in any pragmatic way.

'Perfect,' I thought, sneaking deeper into the crowd and acting just like any other pesky civilian attracted to the disaster-struck area.

"Do anyone knows what happened?" I asked in a natural voice.

Given how excited everyone around me was, it would be weird if I were the only one standing in silence.

"No information yet," someone in the crowd shook their head. "It's not like they will tell us what the hell happened here either," the random man added, a sour expression appearing on his lips.

For the next few moments, I continued to squeeze through the crowd, slowly making my way to the other end of the commotion.

Yet, when I took a dive into the commotion, what appeared as a simple task turned out harder and harder with each passing second.

More people continued to gather every moment, eager to observe the exciting event. And while it meant my cover would turn better and better, actually reaching the doors of the building would also get harder by a second.

By the time I finally managed to free myself from the crowd, parts of the building had already burned out, revealing the frantic attempts of the clerks inside.

'I don't have the time for that,' I thought upon realizing that I followed the crowd's example and simply stared at the desperate attempts to contain the fire.

'Now that I think about it, did I start something pretty big?' I thought, a cold sweat appearing on my back.

I then shrugged my head and turned my attention to the things that really mattered.

'Mia warned me that there would be an attempt at my life,' I recalled the very reason why everything went down the route it did. 'I can't blame myself for taking precautionary measures to keep myself alive,' I added in my thoughts, forcing my guilt aside as I directed my steps towards the entrance.

The building itself was quite different from any of the auction halls that I have been to so far. The interior had a quite familiar feel, but I could tell that this place wasn't built to house the auction hall but adapted for that purpose instead.

'Well, it's not like any of the auction halls that I saw before bear a striking resemblance to each other either,' I thought, pushing my way through the building's entrance.

From the inside, the situation didn't look anywhere as dire as it did from the outside. The building was massive enough for the blaze to be still considered as nothing major but a small inconvenience. And from how the auction hall clerks rushed about, it was only a matter of time before they would bring the situation back to its natural state.

"Sir, I'm extremely sorry, but right now..." a female clerk approached me, a look of distress all over her face.

"Don't worry," I said, waving my hand as if to dismiss the girl. "I can see what's going on. Until you take care of the fire, I will just wait here," I said, adding an encouraging smile.

'Fuck, this really feels bad,' I thought when the feeling of guilt nearly overwhelmed me.

Even though the woman wasn't injured, her face was tired, and her body was covered in darker spots of where ash fell upon her.

Despite the fire erupting right at her workspace, she still did her duty and attended to me the second I reached the main hall of the place!

"I..." the woman hesitated, not sure how she was supposed to react.

"Quick, we need more water!" someone shouted from the direction of the fire, forcing the girl to make her decision.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said, nodding her head and turning around. "Thank you, sir," she added, rushing to grab one of the buckets filled with water that other clerks constantly brought to the middle of the hall.

'I guess I will wait,' I thought, following up my words with actions and taking a seat on a bench situation near the wall of the hall.

For the next few moments, I did nothing but observe how the clerks of the auction hall worked like diligent bees. Yet, even after several moments passed, the situation didn't seem to get anywhere closer to being resolved.

'Wait, did I do something really bad?' I thought, unable to stop my guilt from reaching my consciousness anymore. This feeling was only reinforced when the first people injured in the fire started to come out from the endangered part of the building.

Having them take a rest near the other wall of the main hall didn't help either.

"Why isn't someone using elemental techniques?" I muttered, trying to figure out why the battle with the fire was taking so long.

Given how I could do wonders with my mana, there surely had to be someone capable of using their cultivation to wield fire or water, wasn't there?

"It's a domain only royals and ascenders can reach," someone suddenly replied to my soft mutter.

I turned my head to the side, only to see another merchant sitting by the wall and waiting for the event to conclude. "Even though this auction hall is rich and powerful... They are not THAT powerful," the man said, rolling his eyes. "We are in the outpost, not the headquarters," he added.

An alarm bell rang in my head.

'Was it just a coincidence?' I asked myself, steeling my resolve to fight for my life the second any risk of attack would appear. 'Was it a coincidence he mentioned headquarters, or was it a slip of the tongue?' I tried my best to figure it out.

But the man didn't utter another word, making it impossible for me to guess whether he just happened to bring up my former location or if he was trying to imply something.

Yet, after a moment of thought, I realized that there was something far more important hidden behind his words.

'Is it?' I asked myself, putting the man's statement into a question.

What was even fire, to begin with?

The answer for that, for me, was simple. It was a chemical reaction of oxidization during which energy would be released.

'Wait, energy?' I thought, a sudden and wild idea appearing in my head.

I swallowed a gulp of my saliva before standing up straight.

"Brother?" the merchant who prompted my curiosity with his earlier words raised his head, taking a long look at the profile of my face.

'Doesn't this sound like something... I could actually use?' I thought.

Since mana was nothing more than energy, the fire was just a manifestation of a chemical reaction and freed energy...

"I just want to try something out, don't mind me," I calmed the merchant down before taking my first step towards the fire.

Even though it began as nothing more but a distraction to slow down those who would dare to chase me down, now it was quickly becoming a real problem.

'And it wouldn't be wise to antagonize the auction hall, the first thing I did upon arriving at this town,' I thought, my mood worsening with each passing second.

Yet, this was an opportunity. A chance to test something that I couldn't miss out on.

"If you want to help, just go and get more water to the fire," the merchant advised, pointing his hand at the long row of buckets filled with water.

"Thanks," I replied, gently nodding my head. "I will make sure to work for both of us," I added before leaving with a small snicker on my lips.

I grabbed two buckets of water and followed deeper into the building, right in the direction where the smoke was coming from.

'This is really making me feel guilty,' I thought when I finally realized the true scale of the fire.

It was nowhere close to what I started. And despite not having any experience in fire behavior, I could tell that it spread out way too fast for a small blaze I started.

'Was someone else involved?' I thought, only to bite down on my lips. 'No, if whoever knocked on my doors really wanted to attack me, they would obviously make this matter way bigger than it was,' I corrected myself as my face darkened. 'Otherwise, they wouldn't be able to explain the traces they would leave in my room,' I realized, pressing towards the fire without hesitation.

"Sir, it's dangerous!" a young man shouted upon noticing me. His lips turned into an ugly grimace, proving that there was anger rather than a genuine worry underneath his professional words. "It's not safe here!"

"Thank you for your warning," I said, swinging my arm and splashing the water at the fire nearest to me. "But I want to try something. If I succeed, I might be of some help," I added as I dumped the second bucket into another burning place.

Then, I took a step forward and reached out with my hands. Despite the intense heat produced by the blaze, I pushed my hands deeper and deeper, all the way to the point when they were entirely covered with flames.

"SIR!" the clerk shouted, shocked by my seemingly unreasonable actions.

Then I noticed him. A man that I actually recognized.

He only flashed in the corner of my eyes, but I was damn certain that I knew him!

'Fuck, it's not the time for this,' I lectured myself as I regained my composure. Then, I drove my mana through my body while, once again, holding my aura back.

A mere merchant would never be able to reach my current cultivation stage at such a young age. As such, I had no other but to appear as someone far weaker than I was in reality.

The momentum of my energy reached its maximum. Squeezed down by my attempts to rein my aura in, pushing my mana like that actually made it quite a painful experience.

'What won't I do for science?' I asked myself with a small giggle before refocusing my attention on the flames.

'Absorb!'