

Last System 311

Chapter 311 Unfit Altar

The stars brightly illuminated the night's sky.

Shining like thousands of jewels scattered across the skydome, they cast a gentle, silvery light over the forest.

And in a small clearing of that forest, Vaner squatted down while overlooking the fire.

'It's so chilly,' the man thought, wrapping his hands around his shoulders and rubbing them.

Not even his cultivation could stop this chill. Because rather than coming from the cold temperature, it came from how different the area around him was.

Only two days after the world came to a likely end, Vaner was stuck in the early part of the borderland.

His healing abilities were pretty potent. And yet, his body was still covered in scars, unable to keep up with Vaner's pace.

For even wound that would heal, he would acquire two more.

"Tsk," Vaner clicked his tongue, bringing his hand towards a herbal bandage he covered one of his worse wounds with. "It's festering," he muttered, only to turn his lips into a thin line as his forehead wrinkled.

After the fight with a mind-boggling monster of the borderland, Vaner started to reminisce his fights with those violet monsters with nostalgia.

Vaner received only a single wound during the last fight.

To an outsider, it didn't sound bad at all. But taking into account how easily he disposed of the invading monsters before, the reality would only start to reveal just how dire it was.

"It's going to turn bad in roughly three to four days," Vaner muttered, pulling away the herbal plaster he made and taking a look at his rotting flesh.

The wound started right at his left shoulder and cut diagonally through his chest. It stretched all the way to the lowest level of his ribs.

On its own, a wound like that should heal in just a few minutes for a royal like Vaner... But this wasn't your everyday wound.

As the monster's attack was infused not only with the poison of the borderlands but also its wicked energy, any and all Vaner attempts to heal it would only accelerate the rate at which it degraded.

Yet, even though he couldn't really do much about this problem outside of slowing its progress down with some makeshift medicine, Vaner wasn't even thinking about turning back.

'At this rate, I should manage,' he thought, shaking his head and grabbing his spear only to use it as his support as he rose to his feet.

'A pity,' Vaner thought, taking one last look at the small fire he made before kicking a bunch of snow to extinguish it.

It was another element of the surrounding that unnerved him.

Befitting its names, borderlands marked the area not only between the two zones but also the land where nature would become freaky. And while it would still take nearly two months for the summer to start, it was pretty unsettling to be surrounded by snow in the middle of the spring.

As such, the small fire of Vaner's making was the only source of heat in Vaner's immediate surroundings.

'Now it's going to be chilly both inside and outside,' Vaner thought, shrugging his shoulders before taking a step forward.

He didn't come to the borderlands to rest or risk his life for nothing. But he didn't step inside in order to cross them either.

Vaner's target laid right at the deepest part of the borderland's section that he had mapped out over the last century.

Step by step, Vaner pushed deeper into the wilderness of the borderlands.

Even though this place was full of infertile mana and aggressive monsters, it was still a forest. As such, just by paying a little attention and keeping his guard up, he managed to progress quite a lot without encountering a single opponent.

"I would kill for Pathfinder's help now," Vaner muttered, his body's temperature slowly rising. It wasn't the counteraction to the cold of the outside, though, but a result of his festering wound.

In the borderlands, it was this one selected group of people that would be of most use for Vaner. Yet, being the same kind of royal slave to the crown as he was, Vaner wouldn't even be able to request their help without a fitting recompensation.

And in this world currently crumbling under the onslaught of the attacking monsters, there was hardly anything of value left that Vaner would be willing to part his ways with.

Despite all the doubts, Vaner continued to push forward. Every time a wave of torture would shake his flesh, he would accept it as a fitting punishment for the sins he committed in the past.

Every time his body would shudder under the constant attacks of the illness spreading from his festering wound, he would obediently stop and take a moment to rest, only to pick up the pace as soon as the attack would pass.

Vaner continued to push forward with no regard for his health or wellbeing. And it was all for the most straightforward reason.

'What is my health worth if I'm not free to manage it on my own?'

The chains that bound him to the royal will of the crown were created by the very same royals that bound him. And even though Vaner was of the same rank as those ancient monsters, the gap between their experience and accumulated power was too massive for him, especially when the showdown started right after his advancement.

And even now, after a century of toiling away with his head lowered and no word of complaint, Vaner finally found a way to free himself from those shackles.

"There it is," the man muttered when the trees finally gave way to an old stone structure.

Right now, thousands upon thousands of years after it was initially constructed, it was hard to even consider it a building. All that Vaner could see in a small clearing of the forest were several piles of the old, decaying stone bricks stacked in a haphazard manner.

'It's preserved far better than I expected,' Vaner thought, quickly scanning the area with his eyes. And sure enough, right between two of the more conspicuous piles of stone bricks, there was a path leading underground.

'Jackpot,' Vaner thought, his lips turning into a smile.

Reaching this place took him an entire day of travel through the borderlands.

Even though it wasn't all that far from the border of those treacherous lands, this was the first time in his life when Vaner could even think about reaching it.

Firstly because the true royals of the kingdom were likely too busy with the monsters to pay any attention to the connection that linked them to Vaner's slave status.

And secondly, it was because Vaner, for the first time since he started to explore this place, pushed forth without any regard for the idea of coming back.

'If I keep my status of a slave, I will only end up dying after those monsters will use every last bit of me,' Vaner thought, sneaking towards the depression into the ground before slowly sliding down the slope.

And just like that, an underground room appeared before the man's eyes.

"Damn," Vaner muttered through his teeth, awed by the fact that the room still stood, seemingly free from the influence of the elements.

But what was important was a small altar that took place right in the very middle of the underground room.

'It's just as... simple as it was supposed to be,' Vaner thought, only to swallow a gulp of saliva as he approached the simple construction.

Between the insane durability of the room and the simplicity of the altar, one could get a massive dissonance because the altar appeared to be massively out of place.

In a room that survived intact for thousands of years, one would expect its decorations and functionalities to at least look important!

The altar on its own appeared as a set of four cubes of stone arranged in a near formation with a perfectly round stone suspended just a few inches above the square stones.

It floated in the sky as if hanging on some sort of strings, yet even by waving his hand over the stone ball, Vaner couldn't make it fall.

'It's just like in the texts,' he thought, taking a deep breath.

Vaner then pulled out his sleeve, revealing a small yet elegant mark of a crown burned out on the inner side of his right wrist.

It was a small emblem, a decoration of sorts, that he was willing to go for nearly any length to get rid of.

'It all ends now,' Vaner thought, biting his thumb and shaking his finger towards the ball, making a single drop of his blood fall upon the stone.

This was the last test he needed to ensure this place was the one he found out about fifty years ago.

And just like Vaner hoped, upon absorbing his blood, the round stone started to shine. And a mere moment later, it started to swirl around, faster and faster with each passing second.

Once the man could no longer even perceive the movement of the ball, the spaces between four cubes of stone below suddenly shone with a bright light, as if the empty space ended filled up with extremely condensed mana.

"Here goes nothing, I guess," Vaner muttered, biting down his teeth before closing his eyes and pushing his hand down on the spinning stone ball.

He expected the feeling of having his entire arm torn off the second the momentum of the ball would transfer to his flesh...

But no such thing happened.

Yet, the second Vaner's flesh came into contact with the perfectly even surface of the ball, a powerful sucking force appeared, squeezing every last drop of mana from his royal flesh.

The mana in the free spaces between the cubic stones suddenly turned red while the ball stopped spinning in an instant, denying all the reason of one that would see the change.

And then, a single spike grew up on top of the ball, enticing Vaner's eyes with a small glint right on its tip.

"It's time to cast aside those shackles that bound me for over a century," Vaner muttered before decisively pressing his thumb at the spike.