

Last System 426

Chapter 426 Compounding Rune Arrays

"That should do it," I muttered to myself once I properly finished the first part of my job.

There were a total of nine stones. They all came from a natural source and were used as some sort of filler in the building, allowing me to chance upon them while scouring the ruins.

Then, using the time and relative peace of only a few cultivators remaining, I filled every single stone with a whole array of runes, making the best use of the little surface space each of them had.

"And now, let's test it!" I joyfully muttered to myself, quickly arranging the stones into a specific formation.

First came a hexagon. Or rather, an imaginary hexagon as I only planted the stones at its six corners.

Then, came the secondary part of the formation in the form of three additional triangles, each composed from one spare stone I had left and then placed in a way that made use of two corners of a hexagon to construct a triangle.

All in all, the finished product resembled a slightly deformed triangle. But its purpose and the level of formation complexity it represented...

It wasn't all that much in my own opinion, yet it was a piece that would put some of the greatest formation masters of this world to shame. And all because of a simple yet insanely annoying quirk.

"Now, something to power it up..." I muttered as I threw a glance around.

There were no treasures of any kind for me to use as the fuel for the formation. Yet, there was an abundance of random materials that I could infuse with energy to make them a simulated treasure for my current purpose.

And so, I quickly grabbed three pieces of rubble. It was a broken leg from a chair, a crushed shard of marble, and a shattered piece of brick.

'I wonder how this looks to everyone who's watching,' I thought to myself, allowing a small smile to quiver in the corner of my lips.

"You are up to no good again," Mia whispered softly while hiding her own smile.

"Do I look like that?" I asked, genuinely concerned.

Up to this moment, I always considered my poker face to be an impregnable barrier to my emotions. And yet, Mia just came in and shattered all the confidence I had in keeping a straight face!

Sure, I wasn't on my guard and particularly trying to appear emotionless... But I had no active intention to show my enthusiasm either!

"Well, you could say I'm simply proud of my work," I then said, turning my head and glancing over at the stones. "Work that's several levels beyond what others will think of it," I added, allowing a sour note to enter my voice.

The trick that allowed me to construct this formation lay in imprinting several levels of runes into a single rune stone. It was something I learned in one of the times when I continued to level up my warden ability by raising and dissolving them over and over again.

In one of those times, I failed to properly erase the necessary runes from the stone before imprinting a new set right on top of the old one. And rather than raising a proper warden...

I created a small monstrosity of a mana construct.

Back then, I simply took it as a failed invocation of my ability which resulted in the mana flow between the runes getting disturbed and interfering with some leftover mana from my earlier attempts.

And then, it happened again. And then again.

By the time it happened thrice, I realized that there was something wrong going on, something that I failed rather than a random chance of my ability going awry.

And then, upon studying rune stones from five more failed attempts, I finally managed to figure out the problem.

Compounding runes one over another would never work. By providing mana with two different pathways for it to flow and act, all logic for the flow of mana would vanish, replaced by total and utter randomness.

Yet, as I dug deeper into the topic, I realized that there was a simple workaround, something so damn obvious yet counterintuitive I was amazed that not only I managed to somehow notice it but also by how long it took me to do so.

Because when one compounded entire arrays on top of another array... those two arrays would work in tandem. Or, to put it in even simpler terms, when two arrays were compounded upon each other, the one at the top would do its job first before guiding the mana toward the deeper one.

This form of mana flow within the rune stone itself presented another problem, though, as doing rune arrays in this new, vertical pattern, would prevent the mana from flowing toward the runes imprinted next to the compounded one.

It was at this point that I did something that every person who ever had any contact with coding would do. And rather than trying to solve the entire thing at once, I made each of the rune arrays on the stone display a different element.

With this new method, it took me only a few tries to finally figure out the pattern in which the mana would move around the stone outfitted with compounding arrays.

The activator for the formation, just like I discovered all the way back when I first dabbled into the formations, had to be placed on a separate stone. Then, starting from the place where the activator would connect to the compounded stone, the mana would first penetrate as deep into the compounded arrays as it could, before bouncing off the solid material of the stone and going back up. The mana would then activate each of the compounded arrays going from the bottom layer to the top layer before connecting to the next formation and repeating the entire process.

In the end, there was only one problem that stopped me from further exploring this topic back when I first discovered it. And it was exactly the same reason why I had to make sure to upgrade the local formation slowly, as to entice everyone to bring me more and more treasures to work with.

And the problem lay... in how fragile random stones were. Because not even after a hundred attempts I managed to find a single piece of material that could withstand carving more than a triple compounded rune array on it!

"That's quite... a disappointment," Levi suddenly appeared by my side once I finished laying down the stones in the exact shape they needed to be for the formation to work.

'Was he trying to scare me?' I thought, annoyed by the sudden appearance of the man.

And then it struck me.

Levi didn't try to stealthily approach me. No.

Judging from the annoyed expression on his face, he actually waited for quite a long time before finally resorting to a loud voice to pull me out of my thoughts!

"What do you mean?" I asked, swallowing down my anger as I raised my eyes at my former master.

"This formation, obviously," Levi twisted his lips in an ugly grimace. "I took a quick look at it and..." he shook his head. "I doubt it will even activate."

That much... was given. After all, one had to look really closely to notice the second layer of rune arrays within the stone, not to speak about the third!

"Well then, let it be a lesson for you, master," I said with a small smile while placing down the simulated treasures into the three outer triangles of the formation. "A lesson that the topic of formations is far deeper than even you could imagine!"