

The Mafia 221

Chapter 221 The Depths of the Alpine Woodpecker Forest

Casey had lost his little sister when she was even smaller than Nina. Considering how much Vice and his sister had suffered, this man couldn't help but see a lot of his sister in Nina.

'You pathetic vermin! I'll take everything you have.' He saw his cue and moved, moving his mana through his body to his Magic Gem, ready to get the truth by force.

Having recently advanced to level 5 of the Acolyte stage, few people in Millfall could resist Casey's powers!

When he reached the third floor of the abandoned building where his target was, he had no trouble reaching his target, a middle-aged man who looked like a mercenary from a distance.

But he wasn't a mercenary. He reeked of blood, like a murderer.

"Do you know why I'm here?" Casey suddenly appeared behind the man's back, taking him by surprise.

But being an experienced assassin, the level 3 Acolyte didn't freeze in fear. When he heard someone's voice coming from behind his back, he drew one of his daggers with one hand and poison with the other.

Casey was much quicker and stronger than that man. Seeing the assassin's move, he broke his target's right arm with a kick while dodging the dagger aimed at his neck.

Casey's third eye opened, and his two Magic Pentagrams, one red and one orange, appeared in front of it.

"Now I'll see everything you know, worm." He said as he looked into the man's eyes while one of his hands grabbed his target's neck and squeezed.

The man couldn't get away from Casey. As he looked into the third eye on the tanned young man's forehead, the assassin began to convulse, feeling as if all the information in his mind was quickly being stolen from him.

Casey could do many things with his ability. He could read what was in his targets' memories, manipulate them, and even remove them by force.

He had ways to do all of this without affecting his targets' brain functions, but if he wanted to, he could severely damage the existence of people like that assassin.

When dealing with the level 3 Acolyte, Casey showed no mercy. When he looked into the man's eyes, he removed everything in his mind harshly, practically destroying his existence.

But the cruelest thing of all was that Casey's target would feel it all and more, living the nightmare of being 'broken,' incomplete, for who knows how long. Because young Rogers acted so as not to endanger his target's life, he guaranteed endless torture for the assassin!

But even in extreme agony, convulsing as he went into a maddening spiral, the assassin couldn't even scream for help.

With his nervous system severely damaged, he had lost the ability to speak!

Closing his eyes, Casey ignored society's garbage and looked at the information he had in his head.

'Symons family, huh?' He clenched his fists. 'Wretched Marcus! Don't think you're invulnerable just because you're the Viscount's son!' He felt even angrier when he discovered what was behind Nina's disappearance.

He knew very well what could have motivated that action. It could only be Marcus' sick jealousy of Shelby!

Thinking about how the poor Nina should be scared because of an idiot and how it had all been caused by something so small made Casey even angrier about the whole situation.

His little sister had lost her life because of something small!

'You're going to pay for this, even if I can't take you down, you piece of shit!' He opened his eyes and left, determined to solve Nina's situation.

...

While several of Vicente's friends and allies acted to find Nina, another day passed.

Vice had no idea what was happening in Millfall. Now, he was slowly approaching the point marked with an 'x' on the map in his hands.

After joining his group with the teachers from Ironcrest, Vice and his people returned the way they had come, following the trail on the map.

As they had noticed earlier, the map showed trails that did not go through any magical creature territory in this area of the Alpine Woodpecker Forest.

Even though they had faced several Rougarous the day before, they hadn't dealt with any powerful creatures in the past few hours.

As they made their way to where the treasure was supposed to be, they had practically only encountered magical creatures that posed little danger to their group, ignoring almost all of them.

But in the last few hours, a being powerful enough to threaten them had appeared in their path. Luckily, it wasn't following them, and after hiding from the woodpecker, the group continued on their way to where they were now.

"How strange..." One of the weaker teachers in the group commented as they walked in the formation Vicente had planned.

"What?" Another teacher asked as they moved slowly, trying not to cause any unnecessary disturbance since they were less than an hour away from their destination.

"Our situation is strange. We haven't had any problems for a whole day. But ever since we entered this forest, we've had problems." That teacher said while looking at his surroundings with an expression full of doubt.

Julian then said. "It is not always dangerous to travel through such an area. Despite the characteristics of some races of magical creatures and their violent reputation, many have no interest in looking for trouble with groups like ours.

They are especially defensive in their territories against any group. But fights don't happen for no reason. We've probably invaded the territories of the creatures that have been acting against us in the past few days."

Indeed, a meeting of magical beings in the middle of a forest was no guarantee of conflict. If one didn't bother the other or wasn't in the other's territory, the chances that two creatures would meet and go their separate ways without confronting each other were not zero.

Of course, this could be influenced by other factors. For example, some magical creatures could strengthen themselves by devouring others, so if the one who encountered another group of magical creatures wasn't strong enough, even without provoking the other party, they could attract trouble.

But even that could vary greatly. Sometimes, a creature would have just finished feeding, and even if it saw someone who could be a good meal, it wouldn't move against them unless it was threatened.

The teachers who knew the most about the behavior of magical creatures didn't find this situation so strange.

"On the other hand, this might have happened because of the deterrent effect of our group. We are numerous and not weak." The strongest of these teachers agreed with Julian and added this justification.

Vicente heard this and said nothing. They were partly right.

Having already realized the value of his map and the presence of powerful beings in the Alpine Woodpecker Forest area, Vicente was fully aware that not entering the territory of beasts had helped them a great deal.

Already deep in this forest, he knew there were several tribes of powerful magical creatures, the most important of which were the woodpeckers. From what he had noticed in the past few hours, there were even 3rd-stage woodpeckers in this area!

Knowing this, he wanted to clear his doubts about where this map would lead him as soon as possible.

He said. "Keep quiet from now on. We're less than ten minutes away from the point marked on the map."

The group immediately stopped their side conversations as they moved slowly, sensing several level 4 and 5 creatures near this dangerous area.

Chapter 222 Yellow Pentagram

After Vicente's comment, everyone fell silent and walked slowly, taking care not to step on the leaves on the ground.

After doing this for about 10 minutes, slowly following the map, the group suddenly stopped when they saw Vicente stop to recheck the map.

"What is wrong?"

"We're here," Vicente answered Rory's question as he looked at the details around the map and what was around the group.

The group was halfway to the top of the hill they were on, the top of which was covered with ice and the lower parts with huge, spiky trees.

Where they were, there was a lot of leaf litter on the dirt and stone floor, with trees and bushes of various kinds, some leaning in odd directions.

There were some holes in the sides of the tree, probably traps, but also caves in plain sight.

Looking closer, Vicente realized this must be the place marked on the map.

But finding nothing special there, he narrowed his eyes and ignored the comments of his men.

'This is a 2D map. It has its limitations. Maybe its creator marked a point that wasn't on the surface?' He looked up and saw nothing in the treetops above him.

That left him with only one alternative!

"The place we're looking for must be underground in this area." He said to his group as he looked down.

At that moment, his Magic Gem shone out from under the metal mask on his face, and a red pentagram emerged from his body, causing everyone in the group to feel its pressure.

Even the strongest of those teachers felt a certain discomfort as Vicente activated his ability to the maximum and felt the metals in his body stir.

'What an absurd power! No wonder he killed those Rougarous in one move.' The leader of Julian's group thought as he stared at Vice.

Meanwhile, Vicente searched the basement below where his group was, mentally mapping out the metal structure of the area below where they were.

After doing this for about a minute, he found an empty space that contained nothing that his ability could manipulate.

'Air. Only air can have so few metallic elements that I feel nothing.' He thought as he opened his eyes and followed the path that felt nothing to the right of his group, 50 meters in that direction.

When he looked around and saw the narrow entrance to a cave, Vice smiled under his mask and said. "I think what we're looking for can be accessed this way."

Everyone looked in the direction of a narrow crack in the floor of a small cave, the teachers of Ironcrest staring at it a little uncertainly.

'Is this really it?' Julian wondered.

"Okay, Cesar. Let's try what you suggest. If it doesn't work, we'll continue hunting with you on the surface." The group leader said, thinking that it wouldn't get them anywhere.

Vicente's men would never question their leader, so they immediately followed his suggestion and quickly made their way to the cave, where most of them had to stand outside due to its small size.

"I'll check the place out first," Vicente reached the crack in the cave floor, a place that could only hold five people at a time.

"Are you sure?" Julian asked as he looked through the crack and saw a great darkness.

There could be nothing beneath such a place. Besides, considering how thin the crack was, it would be somewhat nerve-wracking to go through that place.

Claustrophobics would definitely get sick just looking at that crack!

Vicente manipulated a piece of metal from his armor and dropped it through the crack.

After 10 seconds, everyone there heard the metallic sound of it falling to the ground.

"Don't worry. As narrow as the passage is, there's enough room for several of us to follow this path." He said before manipulating the metals on his body to make it easier for him to pass through the crack, which was about 45 centimeters in diameter.

When they saw Vicente enter, the teachers and Rory were silent for a few moments until they heard his voice a minute later, already inside the underground area.

"You can come now. There's plenty of room here." His voice reached them.

Meanwhile, where Vicente was standing, there was a relatively large tunnel in which he could stand, and up to three people of his size could stand side by side.

The place seemed to be partly a natural formation, but looking ahead, Vicente could see almost smooth surfaces, which indicated to him that such a place was not entirely natural.

The place he was entering was probably a natural fault that had appeared next to the artificial structure, but there was no way that intelligent beings had never manipulated the place ahead.

Narrowing his eyes, Vicente realized who might be behind it.

'Woodpeckers...'

Woodpeckers were great builders. Not only that but by becoming magical beings at a certain age, a woodpecker could do much more than create wooden structures.

'The place marked with an 'x' is probably guarded by woodpeckers.' He clenched his fists as he stepped forward to make way for the first of his group to enter the area.

The first to follow was Rory, followed by some of the Mazzanti family soldiers, until the first teachers made their way through the crack.

Once there, they realized this area was not as terrible as they had imagined.

In no time, the whole group was there, and Vicente made his way to the place that must have been under the ground where he had stopped a few moments before.

But as they left the part that seemed to have been formed by natural movements of the ground, not only Vicente but all the teachers in the group realized the path they were following led to something special.

The mana in the environment was much more concentrated, making the artificial tunnel ahead look like a special meditation chamber that one would pay several gold coins to use in any town in the province.

As they continued, they felt a special vibration they could all recognize coming from a few dozen meters below them.

Following the path faster and faster, but without moving the mana in their bodies too much and watching out for possible traps, they soon changed tunnels. As they did so, they saw a yellow glow

coming from the end of a tunnel even larger than the previous one, capable of holding twice as many people walking side by side.

Seeing this yellow glow at the end of the path ahead, Julian swallowed his saliva as he mumbled subconsciously.

"It can't be..."

Everyone in his group from the Rexnelts Academy opened their mouths as they realized that what Vicente's group's map led to could only be the same thing they were looking for!

But before anyone could say it out loud, Vicente stopped in front of the group and stared at the thing that emitted that glow, peering through a hole in the wall on his way.

"Magic Pentagram!" He muttered in amazement.

Chapter 223 Accidental Connection?

Seeing it on the other side of the wall in front of him, Vicente swallowed his saliva, not expecting to find a naturally formed yellow Magic Pentagram.

That was a precious resource for any magician!

'Shit!'

But he couldn't help cursing his luck. 'If it was an orange pentagram, maybe I could...' He thought, imagining that maybe such a pentagram could be his as long as he had an affinity with it. But since he was only at the 2nd stage, Vicente didn't know if he could absorb and use the powers of a yellow pentagram.

He had never used the yellow pentagram from his second gem because he had a bad feeling when he awakened his powers. Hence, he thought he couldn't withstand the magical power of something like it, which was a shame because he couldn't take advantage of such great luck.

Yes, it was great luck to come across something like it. After all, it was an accident of fate, something that in other situations would be very good for groups like his.

And even though naturally formed pentagrams could exist outside a body longer than those formed in living beings, the time they could exist like this wasn't long. Vicente definitely didn't think he could move fast enough to take advantage of such a thing if he collected it and took it back to Millfall.

Rory saw what it was, and soon, the teachers were peering through the cracks and holes in the big wall.

"This must be what you're looking for, right?" Rory asked them, already wondering what Vicente had in mind.

"Yes." Julian didn't deny it, for the expressions on the faces of everyone in his group showed it.

"A student from Seidel Magical College should be arriving at Ironcrest in the next few days to receive this pentagram from our group." The teacher leader declared, trying to dissuade Vicente's people from any dangerous ideas they might have in mind.

If they were to aim for that pentagram, they would aim for one that belonged to the magic college of the kingdom!

Vicente heard it and laughed bitterly.

"Don't worry. None of us has the minimum necessary to covet such a thing. But since it's going to a noble magic college student, we can gain something by helping you collect it, can't we?" He asked, already seeing a big problem for Julian's group.

He said as he saw the professors looking at him strangely. "Behind that wall, there seems to be a part of a tribe of woodpeckers. I can feel the aura of a 3rd stage beast coming from that place, and there are several 2nd stage beings near the place we are now. If you act in any way, you'll create a deadly problem not only for yourself but also for my staff.

Besides, you won't be able to collect the essence."

The group leader there realized it after a quick analysis of what was behind the 1.3-meter-thick wall.

"We can negotiate our payment. We can split it with you. But I can't promise you more than that. If you want, you can accompany our group back to Ironcrest to see if you can get something else. That's all I can offer." He said, knowing that the skills of Vicente and his group would be needed to complete the mission.

Vicente smiled. "That is enough. I already intended to go to Ironcrest after I finished my business in the Alpine Woodpecker Forest." He said as he looked at his staff and waved to them.

All of the men there raised their weapons and moved to the edge of the area, taking up their positions while giving Vicente room to act.

Only the teachers didn't understand all of Vicente's commands, so Rory advised them. "Cesar will open the way for us. We can't stay in sight of potential enemies while he's acting."

Julian and his colleagues moved to the side, taking up fighting positions as they broke out in a cold sweat at the sight of Vice activating his ability once again.

But this time, he would do something different from what they had seen, using his first ability and an earth-based spell simultaneously.

Touching the wall in front of him with one hand, Vice concentrated his mana on that spot, and in a few seconds, it shook, and the dark wall in front of him turned to sand.

An oval-shaped passage appeared in that wall, with all the metals from the rock in front of him floating in the air and the remaining stone components in the sand that had flowed out onto the ground.

The teachers were surprised by the versatility of Vicente's powers, but they understood how he could help them. With such power, Vicente could enter anywhere in relative safety without attracting attention!

When they saw what was through that wall, the teachers there smiled at the sight of the beautiful pentagram floating in the air on what looked like a small altar.

There were only torches here and there in the surroundings, with a large entrance door to that chamber where the pentagram was in the middle of the area.

It looked like a vault improvised by the dominant beasts of the area!

Having reached the inside without passing through the guards, the group immediately considered the possibility of collecting the pentagram without as much difficulty as they had imagined.

'Perfect!' The leader of the teachers felt and waited for Vicente's signal to move and collect it in the special device he had with him.

But when he looked at Vicente, he and the others realized something was wrong.

"Cesar? What's wrong?" Rory asked as he saw his friend's body and hands shaking.

Gulp!

"The pentagram..." Vicente muttered as he felt a strong attraction between himself and the pentagram.

From what he could feel, this pentagram had more than 90% affinity with him, an outstanding value for adding new pentagrams.

From what he had learned in magical theory, pentagrams had to have at least a 50% compatibility with the magician to be absorbed with relative security. Below that, the absorption could go from failing to causing problems for the magical base of the magician attempting such a process.

But the stronger the affinity, the greater the attraction between the parties, which made absorption easier but increased the attraction between a Magic Gem and the pentagram by many orders of magnitude.

When Vicente used his ability a few meters away from the yellow Magic Pentagram, he immediately felt it and saw a potential host in Vice!

Pentagrams were not living beings, but they were special essences that sought out beings to connect with!

The moment he felt this thing connect with him, Vicente realized he would have a problem.

"Damn it, that pentagram has connected to my gem!" He shouted to his group before trying to walk away.

But the pentagram was already moving towards him, and if he tried to stop it, it could be dangerous for him!

"What?"

The teachers there completely blanked their faces, not expecting this turn of events.

But they hadn't even considered the possibility that Vicente had tried to rob them. When they noticed the pentagram moving, they all realized that the highest-level essence was the one who had chosen Vicente.

"Shit! What are we going to do?" Rory was nervous, knowing that his friend was in danger both if he tried to absorb it and if he tried to avoid it.

Julian was already pale because, either way, his group would lose the pentagram. Either it would combine perfectly with Cesar or dissolve after the absorption failed!

Chapter 224 Magical Attraction

"Quick, start meditating, Cesar!" Julian said as he considered the theories behind the absorption of Magic Pentagrams.

"What? Are you crazy?" One of Vicente's men asked.

One of the teachers turned completely pale as he looked at Vicente and then said. "This should not have happened. But since it did, this is your leader's only chance."

The leader of these teachers clenched his fists tightly, seeing that there was nothing else for them to do. "Now that the pentagram has connected with him, he must absorb it successfully, or he will fail and suffer the consequences. Either way, the pentagram is no longer of use to others.

Until a pentagram is connected to a magician, others could absorb it. This worked for naturally formed pentagrams or even those developed in living beings. Although only the person responsible for the death of the being that created the pentagram would be advised to absorb it, others could try their luck, though their chances were practically nil.

However, once the pentagram was connected to someone, either by its own action or that of the magician trying to absorb it, it would lose part of its essence. This would make it unstable, and if that magician didn't absorb it, it would disappear after the absorption failed.

The teachers were aware of this. Even if they didn't like losing their target to Cesar, these men knew the only alternative was for their temporary ally to try to absorb the pentagram.

They were in a dangerous place, where there was even a 3rd stage being nearby. Losing Cesar would be dangerous for them all!

Now that the milk had been spilled and no one could change what was happening, the best outcome would be for Cesar to absorb the yellow pentagram successfully!

"But... But the body of..." Rory knew nothing about the second gem or the other pentagram Vice already had. Being familiar with the magical theories of this world, he was naturally afraid for his friend.

"I know. His body shouldn't be able to take it." Julian commented in a tense tone, speaking quietly not to attract the attention of the creatures guarding the other side of the wall from the area Vice had penetrated. "But it's too late now. Magic Pentagrams rarely connect with magicians of their own volition. But it can happen if the magician's compatibility with it is very high. In those cases, there's nothing to do but try to absorb it or lose it.

The literature says that such cases can happen with a certain frequency if the pentagram is created by special phenomena without the involvement of living beings. But there is no case of a person of a lower physical level than the pentagram. So..." He hesitated.

"So we don't know what will happen to Cesar if he fails." The strongest of the teachers said.

If it was someone of the same level as the pentagram, failure would only result in the loss of the pentagram, and at most, the magician would be exhausted and temporarily weakened.

But since Vicente was weaker than the pentagram, these teachers thought he had no chance of refusing such an essence. If he tried, the risks to his magic base and his body would be too great.

His situation was very different from the magical theory these men knew. That's why they thought that Vicente couldn't refuse the absorption that was beginning!

"Sigh... Magical Attraction really is a complicated thing. I didn't expect to see this here." One of them muttered as he saw Vice do as they advised, sit down, and start meditating to absorb the pentagram.

In a cold sweat, Vicente did as he was told. He sat in a lotus position under a metal plate he had created, agreeing with every word the teachers said.

'I will succeed!' He thought as his first pentagram from his first Magic Gem appeared, and the yellow pentagram was positioned above him.

As they watched, standing in the same places they had been a moment before, the men around Vicente looked at him nervously, tense for similar reasons while thinking of different things.

Vicente's men were terribly afraid that their glorious leader would die attempting this feat with no record of success.

Meanwhile, the teachers were also concerned about Vicente's fate and what it meant for them. But some of them couldn't help but take the time to observe and analyze rare phenomena.

For scholars like them, this was an opportunity to see the attempted absorption of a pentagram of a higher level than the magician's level. But it was also an opportunity for them to study Magical Attraction.

Magical Aattraction was a phenomenon that was generally very positive. It occurred when very similar essences became relatively close and connected with each other. This could happen with pentagrams formed by special phenomena, with Magic Gems, but also with precious artifacts.

As in the case of Magic Gems, one could connect to one of these essences and easily awaken their magical powers.

In other cases, this phenomenon could alert magicians or powerful creatures to the location of items of great value to them, which could greatly facilitate their journey to a treasure.

When the Magical Attraction happened, even if the magician didn't want to connect with such a thing, it would happen.

But because it was usually a positive phenomenon, magicians rarely took precautions to avoid accidentally connecting with a free essence.

That day, however, Julian's group witnessed a negative aspect of this phenomenon. It could happen if lower-level magicians were involved with higher-level essences.

And there were great risks involved!

If Vicente succeeded, he would gain a lot, but the opposite was also true. If he failed, he would lose as much as he could have gained by succeeding!

Julian recorded some of the things he had seen and felt in his mind, hoping to study them further when he returned to Ironcrest.

'If I survive this journey, I will seek out the scholar Atlas.' He thought as he watched the pentagram above Vicente slowly descend over this man's body and begin the integration process.

The leader of the teachers did the same, thinking about what he knew regarding naturally formed pentagrams. 'If Cesar were at the beginning of the 3rd stage, it would be effortless for him to absorb this pentagram.'

Even people with low-level talent can quickly absorb pentagrams formed by natural phenomena because there is no will left in those essences. As long as you have more than 50% compatibility, you have almost a 100% chance of success in absorbing something like this.

But I have no idea what might happen and how long it might take Cesar to go through all the stages of absorption.'

He felt like writing it down, thinking that since he had lost the chance to fulfill his mission there, he could at least collect something relevant to send to the Seidel Magic College.

As he was about to take out a small notebook from his spatial ring, the expressions of the whole group suddenly changed as they felt a terrible aura approaching the chamber where the pentagram had been a moment ago.

Chapter 225 Escape!

Gulp!

"This can't be!" Rory looked in the direction of that chamber and felt his whole body tremble with the terrifying aura of a 3rd stage creature approaching from there.

Everyone near the tunnel where they had positioned themselves a few moments ago turned their eyes toward the altar inside the chamber.

Sensing the same thing, they felt the nervousness that would come to any being who challenged a higher-level creature, and it showed itself to act against them.

"What are we going to do?"

"Damn it! We have no way of dealing with a damned Mage beast!"

Vicente's men muttered among themselves while the teachers opened their mouths and their eyes wide, ignoring Vice for the first time in the last two minutes to look in the direction from which a mighty beast was coming.

From the aura emanating from such a being, they could tell it was furious with the bold humans who had tried to steal that essence!

"We have to run!" The strongest teacher shouted, moving opposite from where the chamber was.

"How? Cesar can't be moved! Moving him will only increase the chances of him failing to absorb the pentagram!" Rory said, trying not to scream.

"If he stays here, he will surely die," Julian expressed, understanding the position of Rory and the others.

But for this group, there were no options. Either they fled, or they would die to the 3rd-stage creature when it arrived and noticed that the yellow pentagram had been lost.

Pentagrams could not be absorbed by beasts that were capable of creating pentagrams in the same way that magicians could. That is, they couldn't use it to gain a new skill, stabilize their base, or increase the density of their mana. However, magical creatures capable of forming pentagrams could benefit greatly from living, meditating, sleeping, or eating near these essences.

They found it easier to develop their power, and even the pentagram within them, when they were in the presence of such a thing. As such, pentagrams had value even to beasts.

Since the only pentagrams that could last for "long" periods outside of living bodies were the naturally formed ones, only those had value for beasts.

In other words, those magicians had taken the greatest treasure from the woodpecker that was coming toward them!

There would be no chance for them if they stayed there!

Rory could understand that, but he knew Vicente would be in a bad situation even if they escaped. Just by being moved while meditating, Vicente would have significantly hindered the process of absorbing the pentagram.

The simple fact of moving someone in the middle of meditation triples the difficulty of absorbing a pentagram or even trying to advance a level.

But as long as there was a chance for Vice to survive, Rory was willing to risk it!

Gulp!

"All right. I want eight of the strongest in the group to carry and protect our Don's body!" Rory decided. "The rest of you stay with me. We'll buy time for our companions!"

"Are you crazy?" Julian asked, sensing that such a young man would end up killing himself with such an absurd plan.

"Forget it, Julian. We don't have time to talk." The teacher leader said as he looked at Julian.

With that, the men of that group began to move, while Rory and ten Acolytes of the Mazzanti family saw the teachers and the men carrying Vicente move away from them.

At that moment, Rory activated his own ability, making his red pentagram appear as he targeted the supporting structures of the walls and parts of the tunnels in the area.

As he did so, he said. "Guys, prepare your weapons!"

"Aim!"

The ten soldiers aimed at the interior of the chamber, specifically at the door at its entrance.

Then, as the door there was destroyed by a winged beast slightly larger than an adult human, followed by several Acolytes of the same race, Rory shouted.

"Fire!"

Bang! Bang!

...

Boom!

BOOOOOOOM!

Julian and Vicente's group, already several dozen meters ahead of Rory's group, heard the sound of several shots from the Mazzanti family's guns and then the sound of explosions.

Some looked back, afraid of what might happen to their friends and allies, but everyone kept moving while Vice kept his eyes closed, meditating.

The ground and walls around the tunnel they were moving through shook while crackling sounds were heard in the area, indicating the possibility of a landslide.

'Damn it, we've got to get out of here as soon as possible.' One of the teachers there felt it, sweating in fear of being buried to death by the madness of Rory's movement.

As much as they were Acolytes, they weren't monsters that could withstand falling from great heights, being crushed by tons of rocks, or other things that could kill ordinary humans.

Their ability to cast spells and subtly alter reality made them different from mortals who could not awaken their powers. But they were very vulnerable until they reached a high level of power, with a large amount of mana in them.

Many things could kill them!

Considering the trouble they were in, these teachers even forgot about their mission and Vicente's situation as they ran in fear of losing their lives.

Vice's men were also worried about themselves. But unlike those teachers, they had confidence in their leader's potential!

'If the boss survives and successfully absorbs the pentagram, we can also survive!' One of them thought as he and three others carried the metal plate on which Vicente had sat.

Meanwhile, the other men of the Mazzanti family had their weapons prepared to fire and moved cautiously through the increasingly narrow tunnel.

Boom!

Suddenly, a louder explosion shook the whole area, and one of the side walls of the area broke, revealing more underground tunnels.

Then they looked down and saw huge insects the size of adult Labradors glaring at them.

"Oh, fuck!"

"Are there any more magical creatures in this underground area?"

"We're fucked!"

Without hesitation, Vicente's men looked at these creatures and fired their weapons as they saw what looked like giant ants leaping towards them!

Bang! Bang!

"No wonder!" The strongest teacher finally drew his sword, realizing he had no choice but to fight the 2nd-stage insects that had suddenly appeared in their path. "Those insects, not the woodpeckers, must have made some of the tunnels we found!"

They were probably trying to steal the woodpeckers!" He realized correctly, solving the mystery of why there was such a good way to the place where the yellow pentagram had been minutes ago.

The owner of this place would never do such a thing. Those tunnels had been made by others who wanted to steal that pentagram!

Chapter 226 Time for the Rescue?

While Rory's and Julian's groups fought various enemies underground in one of the hills of the Alpine Woodpecker Forest, the situation in Millfall was still the same for Nina.

But as much as she was still missing, those searching for her were getting closer to her position.

Casey was about to attack a place where he thought she might be when he suddenly noticed someone approaching his position and turned his attention to his surroundings.

Realizing who it was, he lowered the poisoned weapon he had picked up.

"So you've come this far... No wonder they say you're the most talented Captain of the local royal army post, Miss Bain." He said as he looked at the blue-haired woman he already knew to be a friend of the Fuller family.

Casey was no fool. He didn't ally himself with anyone without first knowing the contacts, friends, and enemies of potential partners. He knew about every meeting between Vicente and Nova, and as much as he didn't know the young Fuller's plans for such a soldier, he knew she wasn't an enemy today.

When he saw her appear near where he was hiding in a treetop next to an estate at one end of Millfall, he wasn't surprised to see her there.

Nova took one look at him and immediately recognized him. "Mister Amnesia." She muttered Casey's alias.

Casey wasn't a famous person. He had to be unknown to do part of his job. However, some high-ranking soldiers and magicians in Millfall knew of the man who served the local nobles with his uncanny ability and had been helping some of these families with their problems for the past three years.

Since Casey usually erased the memories of his targets, he had earned the nickname "Mister Amnesia." But Nova knew that the black-haired man's abilities went far beyond that.

"I didn't expect you to go after her as well. The Fuller family hired you? I didn't know you did investigative work as well." She said as she looked seriously at the man, tense because he was very powerful and dangerous.

Considering his story in this city, she didn't have a good impression of Casey.

It was only natural that she looked at him defensively!

Casey ignored how Nova put a hand on the sword hanging from her waist and said. "You're here to save Nina, right? What are you going to do, Miss Bain? Are you just going to attack at my side and get her out of here?"

"What else is there to do?" Nova asked him.

"Punish the real culprits."

She narrowed her eyes as she frowned. "And who would that be?"

Although she had arrived there almost together with Casey, Nova didn't have the same level of information as him. She didn't know that the young master Marcus Symons had ordered all of this. As such, she was only there for the rescue.

Casey smiled and said. "The Symons family. Marcus Symons."

"What?" She opened her mouth, her countenance changing. "Are you serious? Why would they do that?" Nova moved closer to him.

But Casey didn't move away when he saw her approaching his clothes to question him.

Ignoring the woman who wrinkled his shirt as she seemed to demand the truth, he said. "I know that as a soldier of the kingdom, you must doubt accusations against the nobility. But I'm sure and I can show you what I saw."

With his ability, Casey could also share the memories of his targets with other people!

He smiled and decided to test this woman. "If you want to know Marcus' motivation, I can't say for sure. But it's connected to the meetings between Vicente Fuller and Shelby Staples."

"Shelby Staples?" Nova let Casey go, wondering what Vice could have done with that woman to upset Marcus.

'Would Vice... No. He wouldn't.' She thought about the possibility of Vice getting involved with Shelby. 'Besides, that woman is no fool. She wouldn't risk it.'

Confident the man she most wanted to see right now wouldn't get involved with another woman behind her back, Nova said to Casey. "If you can prove what you said, I'll see what I can do. But he's the Viscount's son. It won't be easy to deal with him officially."

"When Vicente Fuller finds out what Marcus Symons has done, he'll try to settle his affairs personally."

Nova frowned. Vicente had never shown aggressive behavior, but this would be a good reason for him to get upset.

'Is that so? He's going to get in trouble.' She was worried and showed it to Casey.

Casey saw the look on Nova's face and was impressed. 'You seem trustworthy... But will you be when you find out who he is?'

But even with this doubt in his mind, nothing could stand in the way of his temporary partnership with Nova that night!

With her by his side, he was confident that he would be able to outwit the level 4 men from the criminal group Marcus had hired to kidnap Nina.

"Anyway, we're not here to talk. How about we team up for now? I have my own reasons to save that girl."

Nova looked at him and agreed. "I'll take the front, and you take the back. Your skills will be more useful in rescuing her without putting her in danger."

"Okay."

With that decided, the two split up, with Nova going to the entrance of what looked like a barn, where three men stood at the perimeter, guarding the place as if it were just an ordinary barn.

She grabbed her sword as she appeared there and glared angrily at the people who had held Nina captive for the past few days.

But without saying anything, she ran towards them, moving her sword as one of her pentagrams appeared above her weapon.

As she slashed at her enemies, who weren't expecting this sudden attack, Nova did something few would have guessed she was capable of in broad daylight.

With a single movement, she created a blade of mana that quickly traversed the space, slicing the bodies of two of the three level 4 men in half.

With her next move, her sword glowed a shade of red, and then she struck a blow that went through the third opponent and the door in front of them, destroying them as if they were nothing.

Normally, she would have brought them to justice, but as criminals willing to act against a disabled child, they didn't deserve to stay alive.

The worst punishment was not death, for only life could make one suffer enough to repent. However, these men had acted on the orders of the Viscount's heir and were unlikely to be imprisoned for long.

Killing them was the only way Nova could guarantee their punishment!

That night, Nova would have blood on her hands as she and Casey slaughtered a group of previously notorious criminals in this area of Millfall.

Chapter 227 Human Losses?

A few moments later that night...

"Shit! We're screwed!" One of the teachers next to the men carrying Vicente shouted as they encountered a group of insects, beings between levels 3 and 5, surrounding them.

They encountered many of these beasts in the area they were now, but to get to this place, they had to fight several insects along the way. That had not only cost them their energy but also caused injuries and even the death of three of them.

One of the teachers had died in the last five minutes of their escape, while two men of the Mazzanti family who had already absorbed their new pentagrams had also perished.

They decided to take their chances when they saw a tunnel different from the one they had followed earlier under Vicente's guidance. Why that? Simple, they were sure that Rory's group hadn't managed to completely stop the group of woodpeckers.

If they fled along the path that only they would be encountered by the woodpeckers if such beasts reached them, they would end up in the terrible situation of being alone against powerful opponents. But if they took the other route that the insects in the area took, they might be able to get the beasts in the area to fight each other.

Using one enemy against the other was a logical decision. After all, these insects clearly planned to act against the woodpeckers while they outnumbered the invading humans in the area.

So the group had made their way through the insect-infested terrain of this area of the Alpine Woodpecker Forest, trying to distance themselves from the angry 3rd stage woodpecker still furiously searching for them.

This strategy, however, carried the critical risk of failing and ending up with twice as many opponents!

As they made their way through the depths of the underground tunnels, the group of magicians encountered a powerful bunch of insects before the woodpeckers reached them.

As the only enemies around, and with the pentagram, the men immediately became targets for the insects of various breeds at a crossroads of tunnels.

One of the Mazzanti family soldiers, holding the metal plate on which Vicente was, broke into a cold sweat and suggested. "Guys, we can't go any further. We have to hold our position until the boss succeeds."

"What?" Julian shouted, breaking into a cold sweat as he stood guard.

"Get real. We can't keep moving." The soldier said before looking at his companions. "Let's leave the boss on the ground and use all our ammunition against these creatures."

We can only buy time for the boss now!"

The soldiers were aware of it. As long as they moved, it would be harder for them to protect Vicente and for the black-haired guy to absorb the pentagram.

On the other hand, if they stood still, they could form a formation around their leader to protect him and use up the ammunition they hadn't used yet while carrying Vice.

This would give them some space and time for Vicente.

The disadvantage was that they could be surrounded more easily by these creatures.

"Let's do it!" The teacher leader ignored the cuts around his body, seeing that this was the best they could do.

After minutes of movement, he couldn't help but admit how incredible Vicente was. Anyone else in that situation would have failed to absorb the pentagram and probably suffered a magical rebound.

But Vicente was still relatively well, which gave not only his soldiers but also these teachers hope that he could absorb the yellow pentagram.

'I hope you succeed, young Cesar. With your skills, we'll probably have a chance of escaping alive.' The leader of the teachers thought to himself as everyone in his group took position around Vicente.

Meanwhile, Vicente was in deep meditation; his consciousness turned to the depths of his being, where he could see two essences emitting powerful vibrations.

One of them was darker, and he had no idea what it was other than the yellow pentagram he could see. The other was his first Magic Gem, which had its red pentagram circling around it, emitting weaker pulses than the other.

A yellow pentagram was on top of his less impressive gem, descending on it like a huge weight falling on a small creature.

Vicente concentrated on it, trying to slow down as much as possible as the third pentagram in the depths of his being, using his first gem and pentagram as much as possible.

'This is really heavy.' He thought as he felt a sense of weakness throughout his being, similar to what someone would feel when doing an exercise overloaded.

'But it's not out of my reach!'

His first Magic Gem and Pentagram inflated, increasing in size to contain the level of power of that pentagram.

'My body is able to withstand the yellow pentagram of my other gem because of its unusual quality and properties. But at the end of the day, both gems are in the same body! Even if my first gem can't withstand it alone, it's not alone!'

Understanding better how a being with two different essences worked, he forced his first gem to grow, taking some of the 'dominance' of the second one.

As this happened, the mana circulating violently through his body made both his first gem and the red pentagram tremble as they grew.

Small diagrams appeared around the red pentagram, with orange inscriptions on its sides.

At the same time, the same inscriptions formed beams of light in the air, connecting this pentagram, the gem, and the yellow pentagram falling upon them.

Vicente trembled considerably, outwardly convulsing as he felt all the mana in his being seem to erupt.

He was currently about 33% through the level 1. But suddenly, the mana in his body improved its density and increased in volume, reaching 49% in the blink of an eye.

He almost fainted when he felt this sudden increase in power. Still, before that happened, he felt as if something had changed in his surroundings. It was much easier for him to continue his meditation now.

Feeling a good sensation similar to when a headache suddenly disappears, he seized the opportunity. Vice quickly used his 1st Magic Triangle to solidify the yellow pentagram in the position of the second space of his first gem.

He was on his way to complete the absorption of that pentagram!

Chapter 228 Success!

When a magician awakened their powers, the mana in their body would be like blood flowing through their veins, nothing too difficult to understand. When they reached the 2nd stage, the mana flow around the body would give rise to small essences around it, known as Magic Triangles.

A level 1 Acolyte was nothing more than a magician with one of these triangles formed. In contrast, a level 5 Acolyte was someone with five of these essences.

When the five triangles came together at the end of the 2nd stage, they formed the Mana Vortex, which would give rise to the River of Mana at the end of the 3rd stage. From the river of mana, one's mortal body and magical soul would be separated.

Only then would one be freed from mortality and be able to perform completely abnormal feats for humans, no longer depending on food, rest, or ordinary mortal things.

Their powers would also increase greatly!

However, what mattered to Vicente now was that he already had one of the five essences needed to create the Mana Vortex. Although this was one of the essential parts of his progression to the 3rd stage, it was a part of him that could be used when absorbing the second pentagram.

As something superior to normal mana for his body, such an essence was the greatest weapon Vicente had to absorb the yellow pentagram successfully.

Aware of this, when he succeeded in positioning the yellow pentagram in the space available for his second pentagram, he immediately used his first triangle to mark the new essence of his being.

As he did so, small inscriptions appeared on the new pentagram, and Vice felt a change in his connection to it.

If before such an essence had been in sync with him, now it was integrated, allowing him to see new possibilities as his magic foundation stabilized.

The rays of light connecting his first pentagram and the gem disappeared. Soon after, his physical and mental attributes began to rise rapidly, making him realize what had just happened.

'I did it!' A satisfied expression appeared on Vicente's face as he felt the heaviness of a moment ago disappear, felt his muscles stronger, the mana in his being denser, and an elemental affinity more refined.

When he opened his eyes, he saw the world in greater depth. But he also realized the situation of his men, who were desperately fighting the insects surrounding them.

Vice was not surprised to find himself in such a different situation than when he had begun the process of absorbing his second pentagram. He knew that someone had moved him.

When he saw his surroundings, he simply stood up from where he was, eager to test his new abilities.

When one absorbed a new pentagram, in addition to solidifying one's magical foundation, which became unstable after one stage advancement, one would also gain a new unique ability and increase one's physical and mental affinities and characteristics.

This wasn't really an advancement because most of these abilities were already present in that body and just needed to be 'unlocked' to be achieved.

In a sense, these improvements came after one had advanced a stage, but it was after one had absorbed a pentagram that one would achieve sufficient mastery to have all of their improvements at their disposal.

In any case, one would feel stronger after absorbing a new pentagram. Sensing this amid so many training options, Vicente moved with a smile on his face.

"Thanks for protecting me, guys. Time to return the favor." He said as he activated his first pentagram, feeling his material manipulation skills strengthen.

Pentagrams formed naturally, without the involvement of living beings, could evolve. That was the case with the pentagrams provided by gems. Consequently, by conquering his second pentagram, Vicente and everyone else would have their first ability strengthened.

He sensed the metals in a much larger area than before and felt a much more refined control over the metals in living bodies, like those insects.

But before he attacked them, Vicente activated his new ability, Electromagnetic Sight!

As he activated his new power and the yellow Magic Pentagram appeared around him, Vicente's eyes lit up as he perceived the world around him through magnetic and electrical patterns.

Seeing the field lines of the world, but also the living beings around him, Vice combined his two abilities and manipulated the electromagnetic field lines in the environment.

As Vicente and his companions moved about, jumping from side to side, they noticed that the beasts around them began to behave strangely.

Some of those attacking Vicente's men acted as if they had found invisible shields in their path. In contrast, others lost contact with the ground and floated in the air.

Seeing it, the strongest teacher of the group dropped his weapon and watched as the air in front of him distorted.

He tried to extend one of his arms in that direction, but the further he went, the slower his movement became.

It was as if it had suddenly become impossible to reach that point in space as if the space between him and that point had become infinite!

'This...'

No one there, except Vicente, understood exactly how his new ability worked, but everyone was shocked by its power.

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But Vicente, who had studied modern physics, knew what was happening!

The field lines didn't cross!

Combining his two abilities, he gained control over the electric and magnetic fields, enough to create barriers and much more.

Finally, he stopped moving around the area, looked at the level 3, 4, and 5 creatures around him, and clenched one of his fists.

At that moment, several bodies exploded around Vicente's group, staining the side walls of this underground area lit by the torches of the Mazzanti family men.

Amid this, an electromagnetic pulse emerged from that area, exploding in all directions, with bluish rays appearing in the area, hitting the legs, forefeet, and other pointed statures on the bodies of those insects that survived.

In the blink of an eye, Vicente killed more than half of the insects that had previously been around his group, deeply shocking the teachers of Ironcrest.

The men there watched with open mouths, seeing the first magician to conquer a second Magic Pentagram of the Yellow rank, a monster in many ways.

Seeing the surroundings stained with dark blood, with various remains of the exploded creatures or even whole bodies, Julian looked at Vicente and sighed.

"You really survived... Lucky for us. I'm glad I was wrong in my thoughts." He said as he fell to the ground in exhaustion.

"Hmm? But you said..."

"I know. But I didn't think you would survive anyway." Julian bitterly laughed.

"You bastard. I can't believe I saved you twice." Vicente closed his eyes and laughed, too, but he wasn't angry with Julian or the other teachers.

Yet, he quickly became serious when he realized the group was too small.

"Where are the others? What happened after I started absorbing the pentagram?"

Chapter 229 Last Day in the Alpine Woodpecker Forest (1)

Seeing the bodies of their enemies on the outskirts and hearing Vicente's question, his men bent their knees before him.

One of them said. "Boss, congratulations on your success in absorbing the yellow pentagram. We never doubted that you would be able to overcome such a challenge!

Not only were we confident of your success. I can tell you that the rest of the group was as well. That's why the deputy decided to stay behind to buy time for the rest of us."

"He stayed behind alone?" Vicente made a strange expression under his mask.

"No. Several of our men stayed with him to buy time for us." Another soldier said in reply.

Julian commented. "I don't know what the other group was doing. But after we split up, we heard gunfire and explosions, followed by earth tremors throughout the area.

Because of these tremors, we found this other network of tunnels where many insects like the ones you killed seemed to be hiding in the woodpecker area."

Julian summed up the situation well enough for Vicente to understand that he and his group were not yet safe but also that Rory's group still had a chance.

"In the meantime, we've lost some companions to get here." The leader of the teachers commented as he sighed deeply.

Now that things had calmed down with Vicente's success, such a teacher couldn't help but feel sorry for the fallen men.

"Drew and Theo died from some bugs the boss killed." One of the soldiers said, not daring to look at his boss, ashamed that he had been saved by one of those two.

He should have died instead of Drew!

"I see... That's a shame. I'm sorry I put you in such a terrible situation." Vicente lamented the deaths of these men while worrying about those still alive. "But there's no time to mourn. We're in enemy territory, and we have comrades who need help."

"Do you intend to act?" The strongest teacher in the group asked with surprise on his face.

He was sorry for the death of his comrades and worried about Vicente's men who had stayed behind with Rory. But that didn't mean he was ready to go back and help them!

That would be like courting death!

Vice looked at the professor and spoke. "Of course. I came to this place to make my family stronger. Would it make sense for me to abandon my men now?"

"But we're talking about a 3rd stage beast, Cesar. Besides, what will your men do without ammunition? I know their bullets must be running out by now." Julian argued.

"That's not a problem," Vicente responded as the mana in the surroundings concentrated around him, and the rocks in the area disintegrated under his first skill, forming metallic clusters.

In a matter of 15 seconds, the men watched as the rocks there turned into metallic spheres while their remains turned to dust. They then became ammunition for Vice's men's weapons.

But before it was over, a yellow pentagram appeared around these bullets along with the red pentagram, concentrating mana and elements similar to those in Vicente's body.

Small rays appeared around each of the more than 400 bullets formed, while Vicente saw the field lines appearing around them.

He smiled and said. "These are improved bullets. Use them wisely, my soldiers. They're not as resistant as the previous ones, but they have something extra that will help you."

If these bullets had been made with the right metals, they would be even better than the previous ones in every possible way. But since Vicente didn't have the necessary materials, he improvised with what he could find in that area.

Yet, with his new improvement and ability to manipulate magnetic fields, he could now increase the special fields around his creations.

Although these bullets weren't as resistant as the previous ones, they were just as destructive, if not more!

Each man excitedly accepted the bullets, eager to test their leader's new creation.

Julian was impressed to see Vice's abilities, but he still didn't feel comfortable. "Still..."

"Don't worry. Saving my men doesn't mean facing the 3rd stage beast." Vicente stated, calming the most worried hearts. "I'm not stupid enough to think that my companions are still in the same place as before."

After being left behind, they probably either died or made their escape. Let's go where they might have followed after the explosions earlier."

"And where would that be?" The teacher leader asked.

"Where those tunnels lead." Vicente pointed to the intersection of tunnels where they were standing.

There were only three destinations for Rory's group. The first was to die where they had found the pentagram earlier. The second was to follow the path of the building dominated by the woodpeckers. Finally, the third was to follow the path of the insects.

Considering that it would be more dangerous to flee through the woodpecker area, Vicente thought that Rory or any survivors of his family would follow the insect tunnels, as this was the only way to create new enemies for their pursuers.

Since the earlier explosions had opened connections between the insect and woodpecker tunnels, it was almost sure that the survivors of his family would follow that route.

Julian looked at the four tunnels in the area, one of which they had used to get here. "There are three possibilities in front of us. How do we know which one is the right?"

Vicente's eyes glowed a yellowish shade as he observed the black-and-white world with many field lines nearby.

No matter how weak, every living being had its own magnetic and electric field. But stronger beings had stronger fields. Also, beings with similar affinities could create a more robust field together.

The field lines didn't cross each other, and some of them reached far away from the central point of the field.

Observing the perturbations to the area's natural magnetic field and those generated by living beings, Vicente found it easy to follow a direction.

"Let's go through that tunnel." He pointed to one of the three possibilities. "I don't know what lies ahead, but I think it's likely that many low-level magical creatures or some high-level creatures are in such a direction. That must be the way out of this area."

His theory was that the only way out, besides digging, was to use the insect tunnels. There should only be exits through the insect-controlled part of the area.

With that in mind, the teachers there didn't try to convince Vicente otherwise, knowing they had to keep going to get out of that area.

Chapter 230 Last Day in the Alpine Woodpecker Forest (2)

Three hours later, Vicente and his group would encounter groups of insects on the path he had chosen.

As expected, they encountered a large number of 2nd stage beings, many insects between levels 1 and 5.

But none of them were a match for Vicente. Halfway to the group's current position, he had wiped out his targets, while for the rest of the way, his men and the teachers acted on their own to prevent him from exhausting himself.

There were no 3rd stage insects in that area, something the group had expected. As the beings who wanted to steal the yellow pentagram from the woodpeckers, it was obvious that the insect coalition of the Alpine Woodpecker Forest didn't have anyone to oppose the region's leaders.

That made it easier for Vicente's group to follow their path through the area. However, as they advanced and saw lower creatures in their path, the group began to notice signs that might indicate the location of their group's possible survivors.

"Let's go back," Vicente said to his soldiers as they reached the core of the insects' underground network, where many 1st stage creatures seemed to be living.

"Why?" Julian asked.

"There are no powerful insects here. Do you know what that means?" Vicente asked, not waiting for an answer. "The leaders of these insects have realized that they will be wiped out and have decided to flee, or they are heading in the direction of the strongest enemy."

"And how would that be good for us?" The teachers' leader asked as he could no longer endure the battle after running out of recovery potions in his storage item.

"The 3rd stage woodpecker can only go after our group or the rest of my men who stayed behind to buy us time," Vicente spoke, noting that however much his group had been delayed a few moments earlier, they had probably been the first to reach their current position.

"We didn't have to deal with the woodpeckers, so the survivors of your family must be being hunted." Julian realized where Cesar's words were going.

"Cesar, I thank you for everything you've done for us and for the times you saved our lives. But I don't see our group coming back alive if we encounter a 3rd stage being. So we won't go with you." The teacher leader commented.

"But Sam, maybe we should..." Julian didn't like that. He felt they should help Cesar in some way.

"Julian, as team leader, I forbid you to stay and help. We have to go back. Our priority now is to get out of this area alive. We have nothing more to do here now that we've found a way out." Sam interrupted the man's words.

Vicente didn't blame him for thinking that way. "Thank you for your concern. But you've already done more than I could have asked for the rescue earlier. Good luck to you."

"Hmm, I hope you survive, Cesar," Sam commented as he looked at such a man's mask. "I hope to hear stories from you in the future."

"Maybe you'll hear from me sooner than you think," Vicente commented before their groups separated again.

...

Meanwhile, in the depths of that underground area, a young man with red hair was meditating over the corpse of a giant ant, with an orange pentagram above him, completing its fusion with his being.

Three armed men held their positions in cold sweat near the young man, waiting for their boss to finish what he had started an hour ago.

After the gunfire and explosions earlier, some of Rory's group had been killed by the collapse of the tunnels they had used to escape the woodpeckers after they had attacked them earlier.

However, they had managed to buy time not only for Vicente's group but also for their own to escape the angry woodpeckers in the area, who had initially lost sight of them after the landslide.

Of the ten men who had stayed with Rory earlier, three had died from long-range attacks by the earlier enemies or from the landslides. But of the seven who had survived, three had stayed by his

side, and the rest took an alternative route, an order from the young redhead in an attempt to divide the enemy forces.

Now, they had no idea how those four soldiers were doing. The only thing they knew was that the angry woodpeckers had not yet found them, and they were trying to seize the opportunity to strengthen themselves!

After defeating a group of insects that had gotten in his way, Rory had found a pentagram that matched him!

"How long will it take?"

"I don't know. The deputy killed the ant all by himself. I think we'll be able to leave in a few minutes." One of the three said, eager to leave this area even without his second pentagram.

Before entering that underground network of tunnels, the Mazzanti family group of 20 had 10 men, including Vicente and Rory, still without their second pentagrams.

But after the deaths of some and the success in obtaining the second pentagram of others, only 5 men were left to receive pentagrams in the group. Among them, 2 of the 3 people with Rory had yet to do it.

"I hope so. I don't know why, but I have a bad feeling. I think a powerful enemy is closing in on us.

...

After a few minutes of walking back the way they came, this time using an alternate route, Vicente's group had finally noticed signs of a battle ahead of them.

Vicente and his six men moved faster toward those targets but without leaving their formation.

Even though he was the strongest of the group, Vicente knew the advantage of having allies fighting by his side, and he wouldn't make the mistake of exposing himself unnecessarily.

It was true that the lives of his family members might be in danger, but he wouldn't risk the lives of more of his companions with an ill-considered action that perhaps wasn't so necessary.

He could already feel the auras of the woodpeckers ahead. So, Vicente shouted to his men, who were running with their weapons drawn.

"Get ready. We have several level 5 opponents ahead of us. I think our survivors just fought with woodpeckers and insects." He said as his group heard the sound of gunfire but also screams from further ahead.

As they moved forward, the men raised their alertness a few degrees, preparing for the worst and possibly meeting the strongest enemy in their path.

If there were such strong woodpeckers ahead, the possibility that the 3rd stage woodpecker was nearby was not small!

As he was about to reach the battlefield in a chamber just ahead, Vicente activated his two pentagrams and flew forward, taking the initiative to save his men.

'Time to use everything I have!' He thought as he appeared in the area where four of his men were, but also 6 woodpeckers and 10 insects, all level 5 enemies.