

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 9 : Expanding Production - Read What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 9 : Expanding Production

Chapter 9: Expanding Production

Candlelight dispelled the darkness of the cellar as Rena carefully descended the steps with a candlestick in hand.

She had changed into a plain dress, tied a leather apron around her waist, and put on that red hooded shawl again.

After coming down, she lit an oil lamp, then finally turned around.

Leon followed her down, still holding the Flintlock Pistol in his hand, the muzzle continuously trained on her.

“Hey, we’ve already started cooperating. Do you really need to keep pointing a gun at me?” Rena tried to protest to Leon.

Having reached a cooperative relationship, she was no longer that worried that Leon would suddenly shoot her for no reason.

What she feared was an accidental discharge.

“Stop talking nonsense.” Leon ignored her protest, did not put the gun away, and even cautiously looked up at the ceiling.

In a place where Magical Beasts were kept, he especially needed to stay alert.

Low-ranking Witches did not have much combat power, but it was said they could manipulate Magical Beasts to fight on their behalf.

Slimes and Head-Hunting Rabbits were both low-level Magical Beasts that even ordinary people could easily kill, but Head-Hunting Rabbits could slice open a person’s artery in a single strike, causing them to bleed to death.

Slimes, on the other hand, could ambush from the ceiling and suddenly drop down, completely enveloping a person’s face and drilling into their mouth and nose to block the airway, suffocating them alive.

Neither of the two was completely without danger.

This cellar where Magical Beasts were raised was the true home ground of the Witch in front of him.

If her earlier compliance had only been an act, she would very likely try to find a chance here to counter-kill him.

Naturally, he could not help but be extra cautious.

However, upon first entering the cellar, he did not immediately see any traces of Magical Beasts.

There were only various miscellaneous items piled on the ground, with a workbench placed on each side.

One of the workbenches was piled full of tools for preparing potions, such as mortars, balances, test tubes, and measuring cups.

Many small tin bottles were neatly stacked beside it, all sealed, seemingly filled with finished potions.

The air was permeated with a strong herbal scent, the most prominent being a fragrance similar to mint.

The other side looked both like an operating table and an altar.

Several candles were placed on it, and tools such as scalpels, forceps, and scissors were neatly arranged.

Faintly, dried bloodstains could be seen along the edges.

This was likely a surgical experiment table used for slaughtering and processing Magical Beasts.

“Where are the Magical Beasts kept?” Leon asked.

“Here. Down here is the breeding pit. All the Magical Beasts are raised inside.” As Rena spoke, she somewhat laboriously pushed the experimental table on the right aside, revealing a vertical shaft beneath it, sealed with an iron-grated cover.

From a distance, Leon peered inside.

The candlelight could not reach the bottom of the shaft, but he could vaguely see specks of red light flickering intermittently in the darkness, which looked rather eerie.

“That red light is?” Leon asked.

“It’s the reflection of the Head-Hunting Rabbits’ eyes in the dark,” Rena explained.

“How many are there?”

“There are six adults and six juveniles,” Rena answered.

“And where are the Slimes kept?”

“They’re in there as well. Right now, there are eight of them, big and small.”

“Keeping two kinds of Magical Beasts together in such a small space? Won’t they fight each other?” Leon was somewhat surprised.

“As long as I mix a small amount of my blood into the feed, they become very obedient. They won’t attack each other, and they won’t attack me either. Moreover, raising the two kinds together is more convenient. The meat scraps and waste left behind by the Head-Hunting Rabbits are taken care of by the Slimes, which keeps the breeding pit clean,” Rena replied.

“A Witch’s ‘Blood Pact’?” Leon confirmed with Rena.

It was said that some Witches could control a large number of low-level Magical Beasts at once as long as they had consumed the Witch’s blood.

This ability was called a “Blood Pact,” and not every blessed Witch possessed it.

“Yes.” Rena simply acknowledged it.

Hearing this, Leon felt a bit pleased inside.

A Witch with the Blood Pact talent had an innate advantage in raising Magical Beasts.

This time, he could be said to have picked up a real treasure.

“Is it just these two kinds of Magical Beasts?” Leon continued to confirm.

“Yes.” Rena nodded.

“Then, a batch of goods like the one you handed to Mrs. Hannah Weislan last time—how often can you produce that?” Leon continued to ask.

“For Head-Hunting Rabbits, I can produce about ten mature ones every three months. Slimes are made into gel and shipped once every two months. During winter, when it’s cold, Head-Hunting Rabbits go into hibernation, and Slime activity also weakens. There’s roughly a four-month period when they won’t reproduce,” Rena answered.

“That’s not important. What I’m asking about is Mana,” Leon emphasized.

Mana was the major source of profit in this business.

Compared to it, other materials could only be considered bonuses.

“What Grandma Hannah took away this time was the accumulated amount from four months,” Rena answered honestly.

“Four months’ worth? You mean you only ship three times a year, with only about five grams each time?” Leon confirmed.

“No. Just as I said earlier, Magical Beasts stop growing and reproducing in winter. So in reality, it’s only twice a year,” Rena shook her head and corrected him.

Leon immediately frowned upon hearing this.

He had already felt that three batches a year were a bit few, and now it turned out to be only two?

Judging from this batch, it was less than ten grams in total, not even enough to sell for two hundred thousand Fenni.

Even adding in the other Magical Beast materials, when the total sales were averaged out, it only came to close to twenty thousand Fenni a month.

Split fifty-fifty, it wouldn’t even reach ten thousand Fenni per month!

This was far from what Leon had expected.

The income could not be said to be very low, but once the immense risk involved was considered, it became extremely unworthwhile.

Bearing the heart of selling white powder while risking decapitation— even if it wasn’t as bad as selling cabbage, the revenue shouldn’t be on the level of an office worker.

“Not enough!” he suddenly said.

“Not enough? What’s not enough?” Rena was somewhat confused.

“This amount of Mana is far from enough! You have to expand production,” Leon shook his head repeatedly.

“Expand production?” Rena blinked in surprise, muttering softly, “That’s easy for you to say...”

“Listen, Miss Witch. I’m risking ending up on the Stake together with you, not to set up a stall selling junk with you! What we’re selling is high-end goods that can fetch twenty thousand per gram and make the rich scramble for them! How can you possibly stand producing less than ten grams a year?”

Leon raised his hand and pointed seriously at the shaft where the Magical Beasts were kept.

“At the very least, the output has to double! Let the Magical Beasts reproduce more, extract more Mana. If necessary, I can help you open up some more space nearby.”

Rena listened with a blank expression, then shook her head just like Leon had earlier.

“That won’t work!”

“What’s the problem? You can’t raise that many Magical Beasts?” Leon asked.

“No. I mean, no matter how many Magical Beasts you raise, it’s useless. The Mana output won’t increase,” Rena shook her head repeatedly.

“What do you mean?” Leon asked in confusion.

“Mana isn’t generated inside the bodies of Magical Beasts. It’s absorbed from the outside. Mana is produced in the Labyrinth. There used to be a Labyrinth in this mountain. Beneath this cellar, there just happens to be a fissure, right inside this breeding pit. It may have happened to connect to the Labyrinth, so a small amount of residual Mana leaks out. That’s why it’s possible to raise Magical Beasts here.

“How much Mana the Magical Beasts raised here can contain is completely determined by how much leaks out from that fissure. If the number of Magical Beasts increases, the amount of Mana each individual can hold will decrease. The total amount won’t change much. If too many are raised, they might even weaken and die from not getting enough Mana. Instead, I have to deliberately control their numbers,” Rena explained earnestly.

“.....” Leon suddenly fell silent.

His gaze unconsciously lowered as he sank into thought.

“Inquisitor, there’s really nothing that can be done about this...” Rena thought Leon had been dealt too heavy a blow and tried to console him.

In fact, the problem wasn’t just that Mana output wouldn’t increase with expanded production.

After a Labyrinth was sealed, its Mana concentration would decay year by year, and Mana output would also gradually decline.

But at this moment, Leon suddenly looked back up.

The light in his eyes did not dim; instead, it shone even more brilliantly.

“Then from another angle, as long as we move to a place with a higher Mana concentration—like inside the Labyrinth—the output can increase drastically, right?”

“Well...” Rena was caught off guard by his burning gaze.

“Theoretically, yes. But... if you’re an Inquisitor, you should also know that the Labyrinth in this mountain was purified by the knight order more than thirty years ago. All entrances were blown up and sealed. There’s simply no way in.”

“Who says there’s no way in?” Leon curled his lips beneath the mask.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 10 : You Were the Most Pathetic Witch He Had Ever Seen - Read What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 10 : You Were the Most Pathetic Witch He Had Ever Seen

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About an hour later, Leon carried a bag of tools on his back and arrived at a spot halfway up the mountain side by side with Rena.

Rena once again glanced uneasily at the shovel and axe sticking out of Leon’s shoulder strap.

They had all been taken from her house.

The whole scene looked disturbingly like someone was about to be taken into the mountains, killed to silence them, and buried on the spot.

“Is there really a path into the labyrinth?” Rena asked softly.

“Keep quiet.”

Leon held up the lantern and climbed a short distance up a gentle slope along a narrow path carved into the mountainside.

He kept pushing aside the grass on the slope to inspect it, and finally discovered a small pit filled with loose gravel behind a clump of weeds.

He set down the bag, picked up the shovel, and began digging.

After about six or seven minutes, the sound of the shovel striking something hollow echoed out.

He lifted his foot and kicked forward, and the remaining碎stones collapsed with a clatter, revealing a pitch-black opening.

“Here, come up!” Leon waved to Rena, who was waiting below.

Rena lifted her skirt, tied it up briefly, and then climbed up after Leon.

“You go in first.” Leon handed the lantern to Rena.

“This is the entrance? Will there be something inside?” Rena asked uneasily as she stared at the dark opening.

“Relax. There won’t be any danger,” Leon urged.

With no other choice, Rena took the lantern and bent over to crawl into the cave, which was barely over one meter tall.

She felt her way forward step by step, with Leon following closely behind.

The inside of the cave was damp, and the occasional sound of dripping water could be heard.

After walking bent over for a short distance, the space suddenly opened up.

Rena saw scattered points of faint light.

Looking more closely, she realized that many plants and mushrooms were growing on the stone walls of the cavern, some of them emitting blue or green bioluminescence.

From time to time, insect chirps could also be heard coming from the undergrowth.

“So this really is a labyrinth!” Rena raised the lantern and looked around curiously.

Places like this, completely devoid of sunlight, normally would not be so full of life.

However, the labyrinth was an exception.

The power of the Primordial Witch Moilai allowed all kinds of vegetation to grow out of nothing in the dark underground space, which in turn attracted animals and formed a self-sustaining ecosystem, providing breeding grounds for the Magical Beasts she created.

Although she was a Witch, this was still the first time Rena had ever seen a real labyrinth.

Before she could look around any further, the lantern was taken from her hands by Leon.

Leon walked deeper into the cavern.

The lantern light illuminated a rusted iron barred gate embedded in the rock wall, its surface completely tangled with vines.

He set down the bag, pulled out the axe, and began smashing the chain on the iron gate with brute force.

The chain had originally been extremely thick—something no ordinary firewood axe could cut through.

However, after decades of corrosion in this damp environment, it had long since become brittle.

Leon quickly shattered it, pulled the broken chain aside, and forced open the barred gate.

“Why did you know there was a labyrinth entrance here?” Rena asked.

“After the Church’s knight orders seal a labyrinth, they don’t immediately block off every entrance. They always leave a concealed entrance for inspections, to prevent incomplete handling that could let the labyrinth revive. The inspection work is usually handled by the local Inquisition, so the location of that entrance is marked in the Inquisition’s memorandum archives. I saw it before,” Leon said as he gestured for Rena to follow.

After the labyrinth had been sealed, nothing had gone wrong for a full ten years, so the Inquisition had only sealed this entrance in a perfunctory manner.

Given the atmosphere of the Hamel Inquisition, no one would be conscientious enough to regularly trek into the remote mountains to inspect an entrance that had been blocked for over twenty years.

After passing through the iron gate, the two walked a short distance along the tunnel.

An opening with obvious excavation marks suddenly appeared in the stone wall on the left.

Leon glanced inside and led Rena in.

Inside was a spacious stone chamber.

The ground became noticeably flatter.

Leon raised the lantern to look around.

Unlike the damp entrance area, this space was relatively dry.

Various items were piled on the floor: a messy fire pit, overturned stools and small tables, and several abandoned tents.

“This place is...?” Rena asked.

“As expected, there really was a temporary encampment left over from when the knight orders purged the labyrinth!” Leon surveyed the area with satisfaction and nodded, then walked around to inspect it again.

“Very good. We’ll raise Magical Beasts here from now on. This will be your new workshop.”

“You... you really intend to do this?” Rena hesitated.

“What else? Did you think I brought you into the mountains for an hour just to go on a date?” Leon shot her a glance, then gestured toward the empty stone chamber.

“We’ll plan this place out. Make a list later of what you need, and I’ll prepare it. Once the new workshop is set up, we’ll move your Magical Beasts over here to be raised!”

Hearing this request, Rena imagined a massive amount of extra work appearing out of nowhere, along with the risk of being discovered.

She couldn’t help but let out a long sigh.

“Did you just sigh?” Leon’s sharp gaze swept over her.

“N-No, I didn’t!” Rena stiffened and hurriedly shook her head in denial.

“I’m starting to think you don’t seem very enthusiastic about cooperating with me,” Leon said as he carefully scrutinized Rena.

“Mr. Inquisitor, may I offer a small reminder?” Rena raised her hand and voiced a tiny bit of dissatisfaction.

“I was threatened into cooperating with you...”

“Threatened?” Leon spread his hands.

“You were already selling Mana. You just switched to having a different person help you sell it. I could have threatened you into working for me for free, but instead I offered you a fifty-fifty split. My goal is to earn three million, which means you can also earn three million. What exactly are you dissatisfied with?”

“But if I cooperate with you and get caught in the future, the crime I’ll be sentenced for will definitely be more severe!” Rena muttered softly.

“If you’re that afraid of trouble, why did you become a Witch in the first place?” Leon stared at her in confusion.

Thinking carefully, this little Witch was really strange.

Most people became Witches for no more than two reasons.

One was eternal youth and beauty, but Rena was still young enough that she shouldn’t be anxious about that yet.

The second was the ability to extract Mana and reap enormous profits.

Yet Rena didn’t even know the value of Mana and had been selling it to Mrs.

Hannah Weislan at one-tenth of the market price, apparently living in poverty the whole time.

In that case, why had she become a Witch?

After all, once a Witch was caught, even if the sentence wasn’t death, she would never again have the chance to obtain anything resembling true freedom.

“That has nothing to do with you...” Rena clearly didn’t want to discuss this topic with Leon.

“You should look at it from another angle. The moment you became a Witch, you’d already committed a grave crime. What difference does a little more or less make? Do you know? I’ve seen Witches in the archives who accumulated tens of millions in assets by selling Mana, and others who married nobles, poisoned them, and seized their property. Each one of them went big!” Leon said, then spread his hands toward Rena again.

“And then look at you!”

“W-What about me?” Rena was suddenly pointed at and became flustered.

“You actually let some countryside old woman treat you like a cash cow and slaughter you! You’re truly the most pathetic Witch I’ve ever seen!” Leon shook his head at Rena with a sigh, looking like he was furious at her lack of ambition.

Compared to the cases in the Inquisition’s files, Rena’s behavior really was an embarrassment to the Witch community.

“I don’t want to be successful in that kind of thing, okay?!” Being judged like this, Rena protested angrily.

“Aren’t all the Witches you mentioned caught in the end? What happened to them in the end? Say it!”

“...Burned to death.” After a brief silence, Leon answered.

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