

Chapter 257: Giant Hunting

After a moment of confusion, I tried to stand again.

In some ways, I had been prepared for this. With *[Little Guardian's Totem]*, I had already been able to ride along the perspectives of my Coreless, able to see through their eyes and hear through their ears. It meant that I wasn't taken off guard by the change in perspective; it meant that it felt *natural* to me, even if it was anything but. I didn't feel odd seeing through a Coreless' eyes, or feeling with their flesh.

In other ways, I wasn't prepared for it at all. There was a big difference between riding along or feeling someone's perspective and actively *controlling* it. Especially when the body that I was controlling had parts that I wasn't used to using.

All of that meant that I was able to perfectly understand what I was seeing and feeling as my legs failed me for a second time and my face plummeted towards the floor.

This time, I managed to get my arms in the way first.

I was *learning*.

You Skies-damned idiot, give me back my -

I cut off the Coreless' thoughts again, having briefly let them escape when I lost focus. A quick flex of my will fixed that. And then I launched myself back up again, pushing hard against the ground with my arms and legs.

A little too hard.

I soared into the air, and then realized I had no idea how to land. But I couldn't let that stop me. If a Coreless could move their own body right, then surely I was smart enough to -

I landed.

On my face.

This was going to take a while. It was a good thing that I had used so much extra death essence - what should have been *more* than enough to heal injuries that this body took for quite a while. Apparently, I would need it.

The enemy Coreless' foot came down again before I could make another attempt to stand, landing on my back and shattering the bones of my spine.

Of course *he* had no problems using his legs.

I was a little resentful of that.

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I let out a hiss as my Coreless-self fell again, the sound muffled by my tail and the stone that surrounded me. And then again as its spine was shattered, forcing me to wait for the bones to put themselves back together.

Still, it wasn't all bad. Even if I was having a harder time controlling the once-leader's body than I thought I would, I was still *doing* it. It would eventually work out the way I wanted.

In the meantime, there were still other things that I could be doing. Struggling to move as a Coreless didn't mean that I couldn't move at all; I still had my own body to move with.

A proper one, legless and all.

And now that my reserves had slightly replenished, *[Mana Restoration]* restoring a small portion of the mana that I had previously used, I could actually *do* something. I'd have to

be careful; I was still running low on mana. A hard enough hit would be hard for me to recover from.

But was that really any different from how it was before I got *[Transient Reanimation]*? I had always been easy to hurt. Easy to kill.

I only had to look at the number of times that the Great Core had brought me back to see that.

Still, that didn't mean I had to be stupid about it. There were better ways of doing things than rushing in blindly - and luckily, the Blessings of the Great Core allowed me to take advantage of those.

The stone shifted around me as I finally began to move, releasing my tail. Unfortunately, it was slow going. I had to be careful; some sections of stone hid bits of black-water behind them, and it was difficult to tell which ones unless I paid attention.

It was only through trial and terrifying, terrifying error that I discovered *some* form of safety. Somewhere around the third time that I nearly slithered into a small section of black-water, I realized that the stone around the dangerous liquid was slightly different; a little more brittle and porous, as if the black-water was leeching away some important, integral part of the stone itself.

Which is probably *exactly* what was happening. Either that, or it was somehow forming inside of the stone itself, and the brittle, porous nature of the stone was due to the black-water inside of it not being quite as solid as the stone was.

Either way, it made for a challenging series of slithers.

By the time I had made it past the dangers of the black-water deposits, reaching where I knew the nearest wall was, I was hissing praise after praise to the Great Core for its wisdom in designing my form the way it did. I moved simply and easily - and most importantly, all without having to worry about useless things like *balance* and *footing*. If I had been forced to use legs to make my way through the stone, I probably would have tipped over and fallen into the first bit of black-water that I came across.

My Coreless-self falling another two times during the course of my slithers might have had something to do with my newest bout of gratitude.

Just a little bit.

I poked my head through the wall, careful to shift my scales into the color of stone through *[Illusion Spark]* as I did so, taking a peek at the battle. Nearby, I could see the dark cloud of death essence that surrounded the once-leader's body, hiding it from sight. A giant Coreless, wider and taller than all the rest, stood beside it.

I had noticed the size of his leg earlier when it was crashing down on my Coreless-self, but it was different seeing his entire body so close. The Coreless was *massive*; nearly two not-Needles tall and many slithers across, I would have thought him closer to being an overgrown bad-thing than an actual Coreless.

Because by size, he actually was.

Only the parts of his body that I could clearly match to all of the other Coreless made it clear that he wasn't some sort of bad-thing. Though, I guessed that it was entirely possible that he was half bad-thing, with his size.

I didn't want to think about the horrifying nature of however *that* would have happened.

Still, looking at him, I couldn't help but want to take the giant for myself, whether through *[Transient Reanimation]* or *[Spore Puppeteer]*. I focused inwards, checking on my reserve of spores, and let out a hiss of displeasure.

They were dead. Unable to grow.

It seemed like turning the giant, possibly half-bad-thing Coreless would have to happen the hard way. If I had been able to use *[Spore Puppeteer]*, I could have just infected him before trying to chase him away, and then let the spore-roots slowly grow and show him the glory of the Great Core. But, with my spores apparently unavailable in my undead state, the plan would have to change.

I would just have to kill him.

But that would be dangerous. The giant Coreless was strong even for his size, his every blow able to shatter the bones of my Coreless-self despite the ore-flesh that covered me. I was pretty sure my Coreless-self was feeling bits of ore-flesh *inside* of my body, where sections of the protective skin had broken and bent.

They weren't supposed to be there, I was pretty sure!

However, despite my current worries about ore-flesh in places where ore-flesh wasn't supposed to be, as well as my absolute failure to stand on two legs - but I was getting close! - the giant Coreless was nowhere near actually *defeating* my Coreless-self.

The cloud of death essence that surrounded me was too thick, and too dangerous. From where my snake-self watched, I could see places where lines of black had begun to trace themselves across the giant's flesh, slowly rotting away at his insides every time the Coreless forced himself to get close enough to attack my Coreless-self.

It wasn't much; the cloud of death that my Coreless-self gave off didn't have the focus of something like *[Death - Venom]*, *[Death - Wither]*, or even *[Death - Enervating Bite]*. But it was enough to make the giant hesitate, just a little.

Enough that I would be free to slither about without worry, turning his fellow blasphemers against him one by one.

And who knew? Maybe by the time I was done, I would be able to take a few steps with my own horrible, disgusting pair of legs. I would need to learn either way because when I captured the giant, I *really* wanted to be able to control his body myself.

There was something appealing about being so physically strong, even if the pair of legs that came with that strength were distinctly *unappealing*.

With a resolute hiss, I pushed my snake-self out of the wall, heading towards the nearest blasphemer. The Coreless was already struggling, desperately trying to push one of my undead away. Struggling a little *too* much. Even better, the wind that these Coreless' ore-flesh created around themselves was fading, his more than any of the others. I could tell by how poorly it pushed away at my undead Coreless' strikes, barely even managing to knock them off-course, and by the growing dimness of the ore-flesh itself. He was clearly weak, and only growing weaker. My undead had been impaled by one of the blasphemer's ore-flesh-tipped rods, carrying it within his flesh, and the enemy Coreless *still* couldn't finish him off.

Still, even if the blasphemer was too weak to become an undead that would actually be that helpful in defeating the giant Coreless, every little bit counted.

Maybe he could stand in the way of a blow or two before he suffered a true death.

I moved closer, silent slither by silent slither, *[Death - Venom]* held ready behind my fangs. The barrier of wind failed to push me away as I got closer, *[Clinging Grasp]* letting me stick to the ground and avoid being flung away like I had been more than once before while fighting this group of blasphemous Coreless.

And then, in a brief moment of distraction that my undead created, I struck.