

Venomous Coils

There was no sunlight in this world, only the ominous illumination of those crystals, faintly showing signs of non-biological life in this underworld. The overworld seemed so far away now, I had been travelling through this place for days. Thankful as I was for the fact that I had met no more giant spiders, there appeared to be an abundance in insects here, and I was not yet ready to meet whatever lurked in the dark, where the luminescence of those crystals could not reach. Like a constant feeling of dread, a set of peering eyes deep in the void. An ever-present entity that could only be described by the darkness it found itself in. For the first time in a near-decade, I had felt out of my league, like any step could be my last. It was refreshing, in a bad way. But whatever happened from there on out would change me forever. For the better or worse, that was something I could not tell. These walls made me feel imprisoned, even when I attempted to climb further up through vines or over rock. At first, I was impressed by the sheer size of this new world, but I had now learned to fear it.

Sometimes it is good to know that there are things out there that you are not ready to face. It keeps a man trying to learn. But then again, I could have done without the next lesson. High up above, I could have sworn that I had spotted a hint of sunlight. The air down there had grown humid, yet stale, like it had not moved for a thousand years, and I was the first to disturb it in many an age. I stepped forward quickly, vitality flooding my system as I was promised a way out. And in the obscurity surrounding me, a creature moved. One that I could not face, not alone. Its scaled hide was a dark, yet venomous green, like the poison in its veins. It shifted and crawled yet made no sound. Like a river with no end here or beyond the horizon, I was shaken out of the illusion of hope by the sound of a slither, and a hiss. And then I saw it. Eyes as large as dinner plates, glowing a soft yellow in the dark. I had to look twice; my eyes having grown used to the dark. And as it left the shadows, from whence it came, it showed its many coils. I froze, not in fear, but in disbelief. A creature of myths and legends. Unlike the creatures I had encounter so far in my journey, all I had heard of this one was folktale. Stories from a time when man relayed their thoughts and ideas by mouth, and not by writing, like I am doing for you now. A creature associated with death, even more so than the Reapers. You see, the Reaper was known for its sudden and deadly attacks, thus the name. But this animal, it was so much more than that. It was a reminder that no mortal may conceive itself as invincible. Not in the eyes of what counted as a demigod to me then. A Basilisk. Frozen in awe, the beast took its chance and shot at me, fangs exposed, for no mortal man would escape its teeth freezing touch. I dashed out of the way, dodging the initial attack. But I had grown exhausted and hungry, only having lived on what few rations I had, along with the ground water I could find. I fell and when it got ready to strike again, I got ready to endure a hit. That was when Coco busted through the cavern's ceiling and saved me from imminent doom. Like the massive eagle he was, he swooped down, and like an elder's biology lesson, carried the snake up high, before slamming it in the ground. Not once, not twice, but five times, until it was dead. I still have yet to thank Coco for the service he did me that day, in full, as even with a thousand times thanks, I could not repay that effort.

Worlds In-Between

After making my escape from those caverns on Coco's back, I returned to the blue skies above. Naturally, I used the first few moments to drink and eat something, it had been too long since I had a proper meal. Well, a proper meal was perhaps not the right term to use, but it was definitely better than mushroom and sucking the excess water from dripping moss. And as lands far and wide stretched out before me again, I started to recover from the crippling darkness of those caves and focused my sight on the horizon once more. Even now, after the reaper, the hive queen, and the basilisk, I was not quite ready to go home yet. And as it went forever on, the Earth ahead of me, so did my will to explore it further. My next destination took me north, far into the coldest reaches of the land that I called my home, a place where the winters were destructive, and the summers cold. I was looking for a special creature, one of which only rumours were known. I traversed the grim skies and frozen mountain peaks, frostbitten plains, and icy hills, in search of the beast, yet I did not find what I was looking for. It was a barren, empty place. Life was distant in the cold, like a tiny spark blown off in a sea of freezing winds. I know now that there was no such creature, but at the time, I was stubbornly following my senses further north, into the heart of a place that I did not know. And in a snowstorm, with a wolf hide over my head like a hood, and the cloth of my scarf pulled over my mouth and nose, I saw it below. An old structure, perhaps even more ancient than I thought at the time. I descended through the grey sky, on Coco's back, and was soon landed in that white mass. Some sort of temple stood before me, small and humble, yet enduring in the harsh winter. The stone had been filed down by the cold air, smoothening the bright bricked walls. A rectangular main structure, standing tall, with a sloped roof, also made of stone. An eery feeling washed over me then, in retrospect, a possible warning for what was to come. The arch in the front of it called to me, showing nothing on the inside. Darkness settled behind it, it whispered to me. Words of warning and beckoning calls, asking me to step forward, and so I did. One step at a time, I paced ahead, my eyes on the way the stone crumbled just a little bit upon my touch, as I silently brushed my fingers over it. And as I approached, the whispers got louder. Coco got uneasy behind me, flapping his wings uncomfortably as I took the leap. Then all went black. I do not recall falling, or even touching the ground at all. I just remember how dark it was. For a long time, I had thought that there were not many things darker than the most obscure of nights, but I had never before experienced something as unnerving as that veil of mystery. But relent my mind did not, I could feel my consciousness wander underneath the weight of that place, transferring itself into a different place, a different world. I could see nothing, yet I was perfectly aware of what was happening. Then my thoughts started to spin in my head, words lost their meaning, and thoughts moved around like gravel in an ocean current, moving away from me, and I was forced to follow. After them, I went, moving faster and faster to keep up, running after something that I could not quite comprehend. All I knew was that I had to move, until, at the end, a white light in a dark hallway could be seen. Foolishly unrelenting, I continued to follow, until that light consumed every living part of my being, and all was engulfed in a white so bright that even the darkest of night could not resist.

Trial of Elements

As I came back to my senses, and my vision cleared, I was greeted by a biting cold, and the insides of my eyelids. Like a whip on my back, the ice carried on the wind lashed out at me, tearing the skin from my back. I let out a quick cry of pain before trying to get onto my feet, shielding my eyes from the miniscule blades that pierced my skin. I groaned and grunted as I stumbled forward, attempting to blindly fight shelter, my instincts taking the wheel as my mind could not quite comprehend what had just happened, still in a haze after that sudden transition. I moved for the structure that I had entered, believing that I had somehow been pushed back outside, yet I could not find the frame anywhere. All I could feel was the shards of ice on the wind, painfully lacerating my skin and getting stuck in my fresh wounds. I felt myself getting weaker, considering just lying down and waiting the blizzard out, but suddenly, in a split-second, all of it disappeared. The wind just stopped in an instant, completely gone, and I could feel warmth on my skin. I blinked extensively as the white made way for golden sunlight, opening my eyes, and looking upon the horizon. I found myself in a large open field of vibrant green grass, with a forest to my flank. An empty plain with no sign of the gate that I had entered through. As I came back to my full awareness of the situation, I began to notice a strange ticking. *Tick tock, tick tock, tick tock.* It just went on and on and on in the back of my head, like a metronome stuck in an endless loop, no man there to stop it. The confusion of it all started to hit me then, as I turned around to see where the wind went. Then I saw it, a great wall of air, spiralling behind me, moving away now, at the speed twice that of a horse, it raged. Every tree and patch of grass that came out of it would be white with frost for just a moment, before going back to its natural green shade. But that was when it hit me. In a moment of realisation, I turned around, my winter clothes swaying with the movement, as I was greeted by another wall. This one not of air carrying shards of ice, no, but something arguably worse. A wall of fire, a mighty blaze reaching high up in the sky. The ticking in my head got louder as it moved towards me, scorching the land that got caught in it. It was too wide to get out of the way of, that would just be my death. My only hope was to try and outrun it long enough to find shelter. So, I started to sprint in the opposite direction, away of the wall of flame, and towards the wall of ice. My breath started getting heavier as the heat became more apparent, blown forward on the currents of wind that passed by my ears. I could feel the sparks and whips of fire starting to touch my back, lashing out at me violently, like the ice had done. Then, far from up above, a familiar sound I heard. Coco came from the skies, diving down above, before stretching his wings to catch the air, his talons outstretched below to catch me, and pick me up before the embers could reach me. Just as it started to touch my feet again, Coco started to fly me back up. I got a view of the fiery tornado below, the wall of ice, and a mighty, rainy storm moving ahead of the ice. Together they spun around a building in the centre, which appeared to be the source of its power. Perhaps some time I would return to take a closer look at that place. But for now, I was happy to leave it again, through that same blinding light between the clouds above. Everything went white once more, until to be replaced soon after with more familiar horizons, when I climbed onto Coco's back once more.