

52 – Parasite Insidious III

Sera was moving through the air, unfettered by gravity, while Elye and I ran after her, although I was starting to trail behind the spry Elfin. Not for the first time, I cursed my poor physique.

After moving between some buildings, we started up one of the root-bridges, which snaked between towers of various shapes and were intersected by other bridges. Quite a few Elfin were coming towards us, and a few muttered warnings to my companion, though seemed to not deign me with such courtesy.

Then we heard the commotion that had made the people run for their lives. It sounded like a bull trapped in a confined space, as sounds of slamming and thrashing echoed through the air with steady intervals. I was certain Imir was dead, because there was no way he could survive something like the monster I’d seen through Karasumany’s eyes.

We went around the curving wall of a balloon-shaped house, before catching up to Seramosa, who was hovering just beyond the edge of the root-bridge, looking back at me expectantly.

“I will destroy it utterly.”

I blinked. She was staring at me intensely.

“You’re waiting on my permission?”

She grumbled.

I nodded. “Reduce it to ashes, but spare any who might still be alive.”

With an elated shriek, the Condemned Ifrit shot down towards the ground below, like a missile of incandescent fire.

I ran over to the edge of the bridge and looked down towards the ground. The root-formed monstrosity was so much bigger than what I’d seen and a dirty-red aura was emanating from it like noxious vapour. I hadn’t seen a Haunter with an aura before, but it was nothing like the kind that humans and Elfin had, as it moved about too erratically and seemed to almost be controlling the monstrosity like some ghostly rider. Before every enormous slam of its claws, the ‘aura’ moved a moment early, telegraphing the move.

In a narrow alley between two spiralling three-story buildings, Imir and another warrior was squeezed in tight, with some civilians behind them. The monster was trying very hard to get at them, but it was too large to get a hold of them. But that did not stop it from trying, as indicated by large hideous gashes in the outer walls of the buildings, as well as torn up dirt and moss from the ground.

Seramosa crashed into the back of the root-formed Rotmaker, releasing a burst of superheated air that I could feel all the way from where I stood like a dense wall of pressure. Then came a loud and intensely-bright pillar of fire, which seemed to connect the ground and the heaven with a spear of scalding fire.

I gasped and lost my footing as every last bit of my energy was forcefully sucked from my body. As my knees hit the roots of the bridge, my vision blacked for a moment. When I looked up, I saw that Karasumany and its countless copies were all sitting on nearby buildings and the ledge of the root-bridges, watching me with an intense glare.

“Are you okay?” Elye asked.

I sucked in a breath and exhaled slowly. “My Ifrit went overboard,” I answered. “But I’m fine.” She helped me stand up and I leaned over the edge of the bridge to stare down below.

That’s insane...

The ground where Seramosa had landed atop the monster was like a perfect sphere of carbonised glass, forged through heat so immense that it might very well have come from the bowels of a volcano. There were remains of the root-formed Rotmaker, but it was clearly dead, as the majority of its body had instantly been vapourised. The nearby Elfin looked terrified, but were otherwise okay. The same could not be said for the nearby buildings which had been charred and blackened from the fragment of a second where it’d seemed as though an unfiltered solar-ray had impacted the planet.

With Elye’s help, we moved down off the root-bridge that hung about four stories above ground. I had scarcely set foot on the ground before Imir and some of the children he had been protecting came up to me.

“Thank you Andasangare Yuuta,” said the tall Elfin. His right arm hung limply by his side, but otherwise he seemed alright. His fellow was worse off however, as he had clearly broken his hip and femur. It would be fatal if he did not get immediately aid.

“See to your friend,” I told him, “I will follow the Rotmaker to its den.”

“What do you mean? You have defeated it.”

I shook my head and moved to where the remnants of its body lay. As Elye lent me her shoulder and I hobbled over, I felt the heat radiating off the carbonised glass left behind but Seramosa’s insane attack. I looked at the little bit of root-formed arm and tail that remained of the body, then followed the noxious thing that flowed away and up into the air.

“What do you see, Yuuta?”

“It is like a spirit that possesses the roots and forms them into malevolent shapes.”

I bit my lip. I knew for a fact that nothing of the sort was described within my Encyclopaedia.
Perhaps if I had the other tomes that Owl kept from me...

“Perhaps it is a Shade, or some manner of Poltergeist.”

A Poltergeist is a type of shade, I corrected Armen. But I have never seen an apparition with so strikingly-malicious a form. And it is only visible to me, as though it is more akin to an aura than an invisible Shade. I do not believe it is a Shade at all. Perhaps it is something entirely different. Unlike a Shade, it seems to me that it requires a vessel to interact with the world. But I do not understand its motives. It drains the living buildings as though feasting and attacks the living with monsters shaped from roots and born from cocoons.

Imir came over to me, having left his friend in the care of a capable-looking woman, who also seemed in charge of the children, as though some kind of instructor. Still, I did not think the man would live to see the morrow’s sun.

“What did you mean when you said it was undefeated?” he asked.

Elye glanced at her dad, then back at me, readjusting her grip on my side where she held onto me.

“I have not dealt with this sort of apparition before,” I told him honestly, “but it seems to possess roots and take on menacing shapes, while also consuming the lifeforce of your buildings, like some sort of energy parasite.”

His eyes narrowed. *“Are you certain in this, Andasangare?”*

“You cannot see it, but a noxious fume-like spirit is billowing from the Rotmaker’s corpse and moving into the air like smoke with a mind of its own,” I explained, pointing into the sky and tracing its path into the western part of the city with my finger, even though they could not see it.

“Skovslot has dealt with this kind of Rotmaker before,” he revealed.

“Really?”

“Our elders will know more. But you must first tell me where it is going, so I can prepare the warriors and scouts.”

I nodded. “Fire seems good at taking it out, but killing its vessel will not slay it, only make it move to a new spot.” This latter part was mostly just guesswork, but it seemed to explain why, after each of its previous vessels had been slain, it had found a new tower in a different part of the city to infest.

Grim determination fell over Imir’s face, and he said, “We will make torches.”

Elye looked at her dad with a face mired in disbelief.

Until then, I hadn't realised that there had not been a single fire in Skovslot until Seramosa had summoned a pillar of righteous flame.

I had recouped enough to energy to walk on my own again, but it was slow going. If the parasitic Rotmaker had more of its monstrous vessels waiting across the city, then there was nothing I could do to help.

I had pointed Imir to the area where it seemed the noxious aura was moving, and Elye was now taking me to the very centre of Skovslot, where a tall spike at least eight stories tall stood. Its design was far more aggressive than the cocoon-and-pod-shaped towers, and it was also far wider, each floor seeming as wide as three towers' floors combined.

“This is the heart of the Enclave,” Elye told me.

Evidence to its importance was seen in the many warrior Elfin that moved about the area. They were obviously on high alert given the monster that roamed their city.

When one of the men saw Elye and me, he came up to us and asked, *“Andasangare, what business have you here?”*

“Imir told me the ‘Elders’ might be able to help me deal with the Rotmaker.”

The man took my words at face value, with not a trace of suspicion, and said, *“Follow me.”*

I was led into the enormous spike and up to the third floor. A large portion of the floor was occupied by what looked like a lounge, as spongy moss-covered sofas and tables and other indiscernible shapes took up a lot of space. There were also a portion reserved for making food and beverages, almost like a bar, and it was tended by two stoic-looking women and a man. They were each holding plates of food, which seemed some sort of beef and fish sashimi, as well as some strange treacle-consistency beverages.

You would think they are facing a life-or-death situation and not simply making meals and drinks for some old people.

“Elfin hierarchy is bizarre.”

Suddenly Seramosa appeared out of the ether, becoming visible to me as she took on her incorporeal form. *“Be respectful of the Elders!”* she warned.

I was planning to. By the way, next time you want to use every last molecule of energy within my body, it would be nice with a head's up.

“I told you that I honed my fire!” she argued.

Perhaps I am the fool for believing that you meant it had become less destructive.

“**You cannot argue with her results,**” Armen said, praising the Ifrit, which I thought was a bad idea.

You most definitely can! Thanks to that stunt, I am running on fumes and have no recourse if we come across another Rotmaker vessel in the next few hours.

Elye put a hand on me.

“Yuuta?”

“Sorry, I was spacing out.”

“*You do that a lot,*” she remarked.

I frowned. I had to get better at handling the internal dialogue with my familiars in a way that didn’t make me seem like a weirdo. Granted, I was already talking to myself as far as most observers were concerned, so maybe it was a futile thing?

Our guide, the warrior Elfin, was standing before a group of three seated figures at the far end of the floor. The wall in that portion of the floor was like a gossamer film, providing a view out over the surroundings. Despite only being on the third floor, it was an impressive view.

The Elfin turned towards me and gestured me to come over. I obeyed and Elye followed behind me, although seeming to prefer to stay in my shadow.

A gnarled-and-wrinkled hand touched the warrior briefly on his forearm, and the man thudded his chest with a fist before leaving.

The same gnarled hand indicated a sofa for me to sit in. I did just that, relishing the spongy moss and the ability to take the weight off my legs for a bit. I was still groggy from Seramosa’s expenditure of my essence, so it was a nice respite.

I looked at the three seated figures, each of which were quite old, judging by their wrinkled skin and temperaments. Most Elfin were like energetic puppies, but these three were wise in their movements and their eyes gleamed with a cunning I had not seen other Elfin.

“*Andasangare,*” said the first, a woman with her hair in a bun and two thin forward-curving horns. Her aura was blue-green and similar to Elye’s in terms of potency. “*You have dealt with the Rotmaker?*” she asked, each word sounding carefully-considered.

“Not yet,” I answered. “I was told by Imir that you may have the answers for how to deal with it.”

Two of the three shared a glance, but the third continued to stare at me. Even next to the two other Elders he was a category of ancient of his very own. His horns were like the impressive antlers

of a full-grown stag and his aura was powerful and orange, a colour I realised I had not seen before, but which I guessed might be equivalent to a Librarian. Unless, there were many other Roles I had yet to come across.

“I have seen it before,” the man said, his voice having none of the lilting speech of his kin. It almost reminded me of one of my old history teachers from High School, who had a gruff voice from smoking too much and the personality of a hard-boiled detective. “The last one was vanquished by a Necromancer named ‘Mortl’.”

My attention perked-up at this. “When was this?”

The man eyed me for a moment, while his fellow Elders seemed to wait on his next words with bated breath. Even Elye squirmed a bit where she stood behind my seat. I got the sense that this man wasn’t just any ‘Elder’, but rather someone quite powerful within the Enclave, perhaps even a sort of leader.

“Your parents’ parents would have been but tiny things back then,” he answered. “He called the Rotmaker a Necrotic Parasite. He left with me the means by which a similar Rotmaker might be vanquished, but I possess not the means by which to carry out his instructions.”

This was a lot more than I could’ve asked for. I leaned forward and said, “Please tell me more.”