

The Dread Lord of Essos

Chapter 66

Harry hopped over a downed tree whose trunk was nearly completely covered with a strange moss that smelled vaguely like caramel. Before moving on, he collected a large amount and stuffed it in his magically expanded bag. He was always looking for anything he could use to make new potions or medicines. If he could somehow extract a caramel-like taste from it, he could end up with some tasty treats. Closing his bag, he carried on deeper into the jungle.

The jungles of Leng were no joke. There hardly was an area of the ground that wasn't covered with slippery rocks, logs, or vines. A normal man would have broken his ankle by now, but Harry was far from normal.

He came upon a stretch of grass with blades wider than his sword and twice as tall as he was. He swiped his hand to the side, and a deep swath of grass tumbled onto the ground. He pushed into the overgrowth and swiped again, deepening his trail. The magical barrier he had placed around his body was doing its job well. Mosquitos the size of dragonflies were divebombing him from every direction, only to be pushed back by the barrier.

Harry had been flying over the wide expanse of neverending jungles, looking for anything that caught his fancy. He spotted the top of an ancient ruin sticking out of the top of the trees, but he couldn't see where the base of the ruin started. The jungles were so thick and had practically swallowed the ruin whole. The only option was to land close to it and search on foot. That was easier said than done. He continued through the thick grass field until the ground became marshy. He focused his magic and levitated a foot off the ground. A loud howl caught his attention. Harry looked up into the trees and saw a gray monkey with leopard-like rosettes dotting its fur. It was the size of a teenage boy, which was quite large for a monkey. Its tail was stubby, but Harry thought that might not have always been the case. It appeared damaged at the end, and the monkey probably lost it during battle or possibly due to disease. These jungles were very unforgiving. Ignoring its howls, Harry moved forward.

As he pushed his way through the bramble, he noticed the monkey continued following him from high up in the trees. It was watching him. Perhaps he was being paranoid, but the monkey seemed to watch him with intelligence that wasn't normal for such an animal. Harry kept moving, pretending not to notice. He lowered his mental shields and felt that familiar buzzing. 'The Old Ones,' Harry immediately thought.

From what had happened the previous night, Harry rightly concluded that these Old Ones were actively influencing the people of Leng. Seeing this monkey's strange behavior, Harry wondered if they were doing it to the animals as well. Were they watching him through the monkey's eyes?

He eventually reached a pile of worn stones that had clearly been carved by the hands of men. They were eroded and covered with moss and algae. This was the first hint that he had reached the ruins.

From what Harry could tell, the ruin had once been a large stepped pyramid that towered over its surroundings. Hundreds or even thousands of years of abandonment had changed that. The trees had grown monstrous in size, and the upper levels of the pyramid had collapsed. He drifted over the rubble and used his magic to clear out a portion of the jungle that had grown over the base of the ruin. It would take him far too long to find the proper entrance. It was way too overgrown. So Harry stood in front of a cleared stretch of the stone wall and snapped his fingers. The large stone bricks began shifting. Some pulled forward and slid to each side, creating an open rectangular doorway for him to walk through. He lowered his shields and checked again. The buzzing was getting louder and more frantic. Behind him, a terrifying screech made him spin around.

A gray blur struck him in the chest and knocked him backward. His back slammed onto the uneven ground, and a heavy weight settled on his chest. A vicious set of teeth snapped forward, and he was barely able to get his hand up. His palm struck the neck and kept the monkey from sinking his teeth into Harry's face. The monkey was screeching and snapping its jaws menacingly. Its long, pointed canines were stained yellow, and its breath smelled horrid. He squeezed its neck as the monkey struggled to break free. Its muscled arms beat against Harry's body with bone-breaking force. Its eyes were open wide and were filled with psychosis. The monkey's balled fist struck Harry square in the chest. Had he been a normal human, that blow alone might have killed him. Still, it hurt ... a lot. His anger flared, and Harry used his godly strength to hurl the enraged monkey into the air. As it tumbled head over heels, Harry unleashed a powerful Banishing Charm. The magical blast hit the monkey, and it exploded in a puff of meat and fur. Harry quickly got to his feet.

Suddenly, in the trees above, the howls of dozens of enraged monkeys filled the jungle. All it took was a thought for Harry's black battle armor to appear on his body. No sooner than it had, another gray streak blurred toward him. His sword flashed, and two halves of the attacking monkey flew by on either side of him. Severed at the waist, the top half hit a large rock with a wet splat while the monkey's lower half tumbled into the overgrowth. The truly amazing part was that the monkey's upper half continued to shriek at him. It rolled off the rock and clawed at the ground, slowly dragging itself toward him. It only made it a few feet before dying. If these Old Ones wanted to play, then he would play as well. He extended his arm and unleashed a torrent of fire similar in size to Daemon's dragonfire. It burst from his palm like a flamethrower, reaching high into the trees.

The first tree burst into flames, and the air was filled with the agonized wails of burning monkeys. Harry swept his hand to the right, lighting the treetops of every tree in the fire's path. Harry watched dozens of monkeys jumping from tree to tree, trying to avoid the rolling inferno. Some missed their intended branches while fleeing in panic. They dropped from very high up and hit the ground with meaty thumps. Others were less lucky. He ignited one tree, and over

twenty burning monkeys fell out. Their yowls were terrible to hear. When every tree surrounding him was aflame, Harry cut the spell and put his hand down. He stood there, watching the jungle burn around him.

"It's quite the sight, isn't it?" Harry heard a very familiar voice behind him. He couldn't help but smile. He turned and saw the lovely visage of his boss, Death.

Most humans thought of the personification of Death as an imposing figure. A skeletal figure covered by a tattered, black cloak usually came to mind, but they would be quite shocked if they discovered the truth. The Death that Harry knew wasn't physically imposing by any means. At just over five feet tall, she was short even by human female standards. Her hair was dark ... even darker than his. Harry often teased that her hair was woven from the void of space, and her eyes radiated starlight. Though she pretended to be annoyed, he could tell she enjoyed his compliments. Her face was strikingly pretty, with large eyes that drew you in and a small, cute nose perfectly proportioned with her other lovely features. Her mouth was wide, and her lips were delightfully plump and kissable. Her flawless skin was pale like exquisitely crafted porcelain. Despite being so small, her figure was tantalizingly sexy. Her breasts were large, her waist was slim, and her hips were wide. All in all, she had a very sexy hourglass figure.

Death stood there with a cute smile on her face. Harry's eyes twinkled amusedly as he slowly walked over to her. "I've been wondering when you were going to call. I've missed you, love," he said happily and wrapped his armored arms around her waist. He lifted her up in a hug and spun her around. Death squeaked and smacked his shoulder.

"Put me down, you brute!" she cried out. Harry chuckled and set her back on her feet. She scowled at him and tried to steady herself. "I hate when you do that! I always get dizzy," she huffed and fixed her hair. She then smoothed out her dress. Harry's eyes drifted down her curvy form, and he whistled appreciatively.

"That's some dress," he complimented her choice of attire. Death smiled teasingly at him and struck a pose to accentuate her considerable assets.

"Do you really like it?" she asked, running her hands down her toned belly. Her dress was oddly familiar. It was nearly skin-tight and showed off a lot of cleavage. It had one long slit starting at her hip and ending down at her ankle. He could see the full expanse of her smooth leg as it showed through the slit.

"You better believe it," Harry said, checking her out. "What's it made of?" he asked, running his fingers down the fabric. Death smiled cheekily at him.

"Your silk ... I stole some," she said, giggling when Harry's eyes widened.

"I've been watching you for years," she confessed. "It's like a very amusing television show for us."

Harry wasn't surprised in the least. In fact, he expected it. The Reapers often tuned into the vacations of other Reapers. It was a good way to break up the monotony.

"I'm glad you're enjoying it. It's had its moments, but overall, I'm enjoying it too," Harry truthfully told her. Death smiled happily at him.

"I have to say ... I'm a bit jealous. That Melisandre girl you're with is quite the looker, and she has a great sense of fashion. I styled this dress after hers," Death told him while angling her body so he could see more of it.

"Well, it looks great on you," he said, checking out her ass.

"I know," she smirked. "Anyway, I've come here to talk about a problem."

"There's a problem back home?" Harry wondered. Death shook her head.

"No. As I said, we've been watching, and the wannabe gods of this world have a real problem respecting the free will of others. You know the higher-ups take great issue with that kind of thing," she said seriously. Harry nodded.

That was true. Reapers had been sent after gods who didn't play by the rules before. Sometimes, things got really messy.

"The higher-ups are now aware and are watching them closely. They haven't made any decisions until now. These Old Ones have to go," she explained.

"So they sent you? Why not a regular Reaper?" Harry asked her. She shook her head.

"Nah. This is your world, and they don't want anyone butting in. They want you to handle it," she told him.

"But you took my Higher Powers before sending me here. How am I supposed to reap their souls without it?" he asked her confusedly.

"You don't need to reap them. Just absorb their powers, and we'll collect their souls when they enter the Astral Plain," she said.

"I have two problems with that," Harry began. "Stealing their powers is a clear violation of our rules. The other problem is, again, I don't have my Higher Powers."

"The Higher-Ups have issued a waiver. You can safely absorb their powers, and we'll take them from you when you return to work. As for your other concern ..." she said while holding out her hand. The handle of his sword appeared in her palm, and she lifted it up to inspect it. She ran

her delicate finger along the length of the black blade, making it momentarily glow pale blue. She then gave it a test swing and nodded.

"It's a beautiful sword," she complimented his work. "It reminds me of my early days. Back then, Soul Cleavers were used by most Reapers before they fell out of fashion. Anyway, it now has the ability to absorb power, but remember, don't use that ability without our permission. The Higher-Ups get twitchy about that kind of thing," she warned him. Harry nodded and accepted his upgraded blade.

"There's an entrance to the underground cities in this ruin. You should be able to track the Old Ones easily," she added.

Death snapped her fingers, and his helmet disappeared. She levitated off the ground and wrapped her arms around the back of his neck. She smiled sweetly and kissed his cheek. "Finish up with this world and come back. I miss you," she told him. Harry smiled back.

"I will. You can always come and visit me, you know?" he said.

"I'll keep that in mind," she chirped, softly kissing his lips. She then disappeared, leaving him alone once again. Harry shook his head as his helmet reappeared. He could hear more monkey activity in the distance but ignored it and moved into the ruin.

The inside of the largest chamber was dark and foul-smelling. He conjured a ball of light and made it hover over his head. He first noticed the massive square support pillars spaced evenly apart. They were green and damp like so many of these old stones were. Many were half-crumbled and looked none too safe. Harry ignored the danger and began walking. The chamber was large and deathly silent. Other than his footsteps, the only sounds were the slow dripping of water seeping through the cracks in the ceiling. He stopped and examined one of the pillars more closely. He ran his gloved hand across the surface, wiping away centuries of grime and algae. There were carvings hidden beneath the muck. He waved his hand and magically cleaned it. Carved on the pillars were three figures, each tall and lanky. There was something alien-like about their depiction. Each figure was holding a spear as long as they were tall.

He trekked deeper into the chamber and came across an old copper brazier that had been tipped over. The metal was heavily patinaed and warped. The sounds of howls were getting louder outside, so Harry pressed on. Spotting the entrance to the underground wasn't difficult. There was an area on the floor where newer bricks were added. They were still greened from age, but their condition was much better than the stones around them. Harry flicked his hand, and the mortared blockage was ripped from the entranceway. It tumbled off to the side and broke into pieces with a loud boom. A weathered stairwell was exposed with nothing but pitch-black darkness beyond. Harry descended without a second thought.

The damp and slick stone stairs plunged deep into the earth. Harry climbed down them for nearly half an hour before leveling out. The ball of light above his head lit his path forward. He

followed the stone-lined archway in the only direction he could. The air was stale and thick, and he imagined that a normal human would have difficulty breathing down there. After a certain distance, he came across an intersection. He could go left, right, or forward. Harry closed his eyes and concentrated, lowering his mental shields. His mind was immediately bombarded with the mental shriek of the Old Ones. It was a disturbing thing to feel. They were trying to scare him off, but Harry latched onto the probe and examined it closer. They were the ones who were scared. He could feel the terror they felt. They wanted him gone, but Harry had his orders. The probe was coming from his right, so Harry took the right corridor. The Old Ones panicked and tried to pull the probe back, but Harry had a firm grip on it. He was locked on and wouldn't let go.

After another five minutes of traveling, Harry began to hear a soft hiss and the lightest pattering on stone. It was coming from up ahead, beyond the range of his light. The hiss turned into multiple hisses, and the pattering turned into clicking. Harry pushed his light further down the dark corridor but still didn't see anything. He pushed it a little further, and something reared up.

A centipede that was monstrous in size reared so high that its razor-sharp pincers brushed the top of the corridor. Judging by how high the corridor ceiling was, Harry estimated that the centipede was more than fifteen feet long. The carapace was glossy and black, but there were red bands between the large segments. The thing hissed again, and suddenly, many more burst from the darkness, menacingly skittering toward him. Harry thrust his hand out, and the ball of light exploded violently. His eardrums protested as the concussion of the blast reached him. A portion of the ceiling collapsed, crushing any of the giant insects that hadn't already been destroyed by the explosion. Harry was momentarily bathed in darkness before conjuring a new ball of light. He coughed as he breathed in the cloud of dust while walking forward. He reached the caved-in portion of the corridor and listened. He could hear more screeching and hissing coming from the other side. Thrusting his hands forward, he sent the rubble rocketing down the corridor, leaving a trail of smeared insect goo and body parts in its wake. It was a disgusting sight to behold, so he tried not to concentrate on it as he stepped through the mess.

The corridor was very cold, and he could see the clouds of mist coming from his mouth with every breath. Harry focused on the mental thread connecting him and the Old Ones. He followed the path through a maze of twists and turns. Hours passed, and he could tell he was getting close. The corridor came to an end with a large, smooth slab of stone blocking the way forward. Harry swiped his hand up, and the slab trembled. He heard the sound of metal tearing right before two loud metallic pops. The slab shot upward while chains rattled from the other side. Harry walked into the next room and intensified the ball of light. A golden haze met his eyes.

The chamber room was circular in shape and as big as the Great Hall of Hogwarts. Lining the walls were dozens of golden statues of various Lengii figures. The statues were nearly as tall as the chamber itself and were expertly crafted. They looked like giant Lengii that had been dipped in gold. Aside from the statues, there wasn't anything else in the room. No table or chairs ... There wasn't even a door. There was only one other thing of significance ... a circular pit

centered in the middle of the chamber. Harry walked up to the edge and looked down. There was only darkness. He created a second ball of light and tossed it down. The light dropped down, illuminating the walls of the pit before disappearing into blackness. The Old Ones were frightened. They were frantically trying to wrestle the probe from his grasp. The probe was leading him down into the pit, and they did not want him going down there. He was about to jump down when he heard the sound of rushing liquid. Harry jumped away from the hole just in time to avoid getting hit by a massive jet of black liquid. It splashed against the ceiling, sending it flying in every direction. Harry covered himself with a magical barrier, but everything else in the room was covered by the sticky, oily black ooze. Suddenly, there was a sound behind him, and Harry turned to see one of the golden statues pulling away from the wall. It was coated in the oil, and somehow, it was coming to life.

Harry knew that Leng was well-known for its magic users, though he hadn't met any since his arrival. Were the Old Ones magic users or possibly Shadowbinders? There was something magical about them. He was sure of that. However, at the moment, he had other things to worry about. Every statue was covered with that foul ooze and was breaking free of its restraints. The one directly behind him reached for him with its arm and let out a terrifying screech. That was followed by dozens more screeching. Harry swung his hand out and banished the statue against the wall. It hit hard enough to crack the stone behind it, but no visible damage was done to the statue. The rest of them began charging.

The sword in his hand ignited, bathing the room in a fiery glow. The first to reach him had its arm severed in a shower of sparks. This did nothing to dissuade it. It swung its remaining arm, forcing Harry to duck. Another shot forward and tried to tackle him. Harry faded away and appeared on the opposite side of the room. Harry levitated the one closest to him and sent it flying into a group of others. The bang of the impact was deafening, and it sent the entire group crashing into the opposite wall. Harry didn't even have time to appreciate his work before an oil-smeared golden hand shot forward, ready to strike. Harry conjured a magical shield at the last second. The blow was so hard that it shattered his magic. Less than a second later, more were closing in. With merely a thought, the air around him began swirling at tornado levels of speed. The statues closest to him were instantly swept up. Harry focused and increased the size of the vortex. More and more statues were lifted off their feet. The clanging and banging of the statues slamming together as they twisted through the air told him some serious damage was being done. Chunks of the walls were being ripped off and added to the maelstrom.

Keeping the wind going, Harry pointed his sword and unleashed a stream of fire into it. Swirls of orange fire streaked the twisting wind, and he saw the statues begin to glow red hot. Harry focused while ignoring the pleas of the Old Ones. He thrust his free hand forward, and a serpent made of Fiendfyre erupted from his palm. It immediately turned on Harry and hissed, ready to strike. However, Harry's will was much more powerful than that of the magic. The serpent turned, ignoring its master, and slipped into the swirling wind. The screeching of the statues grew louder as the serpent wormed its way through, unbothered by the power of the wind. Pops of sparks nearly blinded Harry as the serpent devoured everything in its path. When the screeching stopped, Harry waved his hand, causing the serpent to disappear. He cut the flames

from his sword and stopped the wind. A boulder-sized glob of molten gold splattered on the floor, filling the room with intense heat. Harry pointed a finger at it and blasted it with a stream of frost. Once it had cooled, Harry waved his hand and sent the gold to his operation on Sothoryos. From what he could tell, all the black oil had been burned off. His drones would study it and get back to him. Harry slowly walked up to the pit, ready for something to come out. Nothing did. By then, he was growing annoyed with the Old Ones. They were doing their best to stop him from going down there. Sadly for them, Harry was determined. He had never let Death down and refused to let that happen today. Harry stepped off the edge and fell into the waiting darkness.