

# CHAPTER 77 – EXTENDED

## WARRANTY II

With curious yet shaking hands, Cal opened the creaking mailbox and took the contents from within.

What he found confused him even more. Inside the mailbox was a simple match and a lump of coal tied to a handwritten note. The note was written in vibrant ruby-red ink with a curling copperplate hand.

### Witch Hut Warranty:

*Congratulations! Your house is covered under our comprehensive Witches, Wizards, and Warlocks warranty. Kindly start a house fire (materials included) in order to initiate the Phoenix Reincarnation Cycle (P.R.C.).*

*–Like a good cackle, Witch Farm is there.*

Cal looked at it, then at Slyrox, who was mumbling to herself. He handed her the letter, and the koblin read it a few times, or at least gave the impression that she was.

“We must fast-act show Shrubley!” she said, hopping up the steps and leaving the offending arson materials in Cal’s bony hands.

Shrubley was organizing the survivors, leading them to the door and making sure that nobody was left behind. He moved with determination and purpose, but there was a heavy weight to his actions.

As much as Cal wanted to tell him what was in the mailbox, he didn’t want to give him any false hope. He had enough loss as it was, and the last thing he wanted was for his friend to get his hopes up.

Cal caught up with Slyrox just as she was brandishing the letter at Shrubley. He managed to catch her and spin her around with a curious expression from Shrubley who shrugged and went back to helping an elderly woman to her feet.

“Let him get these people to safety,” Cal whispered as he dragged Slyrox away a few feet. “We don’t know for certain that it’ll work. I won’t do that to Shrubley.”

Slyrox scuffed her long floppy shoe on the floorboards. She grumbled, but nodded her agreement.

If there were any surviving serpentii, they were in hiding or had already fled. It was a relatively subdued but easy task of guarding the remaining people and monsters who were either too sick, young, old, or injured to fight.

A wizened little goblin that looked like a moldy green apple walked with the aid of a tiny, gnarled cane. She smiled and rambled about her grandson, telling Shrubley how much he reminded her of him.

“He has a good little heart, too,” she said with a quavering voice. “Always wanting to help people. But you know how some folks are. They throw stones at my poor boy, but he just gets back up and smiles as if nothin’ ever happened. Bless the lad, his kindness will be the end of him one day, but better than to live in fear and anger like the rest of the clans, I say.”

Shrubley, who was escorting her by lending the old goblin a wooden arm, patted her hand and gently asked questions about the young goblin. Anything to keep the old and very slow woman talking and moving.

Cal and Slyrox brought out the old stretcher that the Countess used and headed up the rear. A few of the farmers watched curiously, not feeling exactly comfortable leaving their Lady in the hands of monsters.

With only an extra pair of eyes watching, the two went into the house with the note, match, and piece of coal. Cal was about to strike it on the splintery floorboards when Slyrox stopped him.

“Pssh-koh! Can’t light coal with just match! Need more to burn. Gib paper.”

Cal found some crumpled napkins and, at Slyrox’s guidance, some sawdust from the various repairs, even a few slivers of Cluckley’s planks that had been damaged in the battle.

Once they were all piled together, the match was struck. Its wavering light was reflected oddly in Slyrox’s black lenses. She stared at it long enough for Cal to clear his throat, prompting her to drop it on the pile of tinder.

“I feel like we should say something,” Cal said, stepping back slowly out of the hut and onto the porch.

“Is important to be doing, not trading tongue-flaps,” Slyrox told him.  
“Cluckley understands.”

One of the younger men, hardly a boy, walked up as the fire started to catch.  
“What’re you doing?”

“Arson,” Slyrox told him.

The sandy-haired boy looked at her, then back at the house. The fire had started very small, but it was catching so fast it was a wonder the hut hadn’t spontaneously combusted prior to this point.

“It was a good house,” the boy said solemnly. “We owe it our lives.”

“Aye, lad,” said the older farmer. “A good house indeed. I’m sorry to see it go, but better a proper funeral like this than to see it taken over by rot and ruin.” He looked at Slyrox and Cal. “Didn’t think you people understood such things.”

“Pa!” the young boy said. “You can’t say that.”

“Say what? I didn’t mean nothin’ by it!”

“But you can’t go around saying ‘you people’ like that. It’s not right.”

The older man pursed his lips sourly, but dipped his head in the direction of the two monsters. “My apologies. I’m old and set in my ways, didn’t mean anythin’ by it o’course. We got a vampyr for a Lord and Lady and all.”

The kid cringed but didn’t press the issue.

They stood there solemnly for a few minutes, watching the blaze take over the house. It happened much faster than it should have, and the fire just kept burning hotter and hotter.

The roof fell in, what was left of the windows shattered, and the house caved into itself in a great conflagration sending spiraling embers skyward in a glorious dance.

In less than ten minutes, the house was gone, consigned to the flames.

An egg rose out of the cooling ashes.

It was the strangest egg either of them had ever seen. It was made of tiny planks of wood, like a hardwood floor with bright silvery nails that caught the pale sunlight.

And it was heavy. Very heavy.

Cal and Slyrox had to work together to carry it while the farmer and his boy carried the stretcher for the Countess. Cal thought it would be best to let them do it instead of bringing out the snake skeletons.

“Needs upgrade,” Slyrox muttered as she opened up her [Kobbie Bag] and barely managed to fit it over the egg. Once it was inside, they hurried after the Countess and the rest of the group.

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Deep below the Haalften manor, the serpentii summoners believed they had finally gotten the portal well working again, much to their relief. Though that relief was temporary.

Mist poured out from the well, obscuring the chamber in a hazy veil of mana condensed into a vaporous state. Diminutive figure after figure jumped free of the portal well, lining up around the rim.

Most of the guards were out patrolling for potential attack by adventurers who might have slipped out of Taamra somehow. There was nothing to fear here, anyway.

“Yesss, welcome brothersss and sisssters,” the serpentii summoners chanted together. “Welcome to the feassst!”

The height and shape of their new family members was an oddity, but the serpentii simply couldn’t imagine they were anything but more of their kind arriving.

And then more joined them. Four small individuals turned into a crowd.

Shrublely, Cal, Smudge, and Slyrox marched out of the mist, bringing the battle to the serpentii, and catching them entirely by surprise.

Wreathed in Black essence, Slyrox uppercut a serpentii and tossed it into the air. As Slyrox back flipped, Smudge shot down as solid stone and crashed into the rising serpentii, crushing it flat.

Shrublely carved his [Death’s Razor] through one serpentii, and followed the flowing, spinning motion into the next cowed creature.

These summoners evidently possessed some sort of self-healing effect. Already the one that Smudge crushed was reforming, but the [Death’s Razor] was suited perfectly for such an enemy.

With every strike, the serpentii gained additional stacks of [Death's Grasp].

**[Death's Grasp]: A portion of the damage dealt absorbs all sources of healing and recovery magic or abilities. Repeated use creates additional stacks of [Death's Grasp].**

The ones that Shrubley attacked weren't able to restore their health like the others. The fact that [Death's Grasp] affected all sources of healing and recovery, so long as it was magical or an ability, gave him an incredible advantage. Perhaps if these serpentii were of a vastly higher rank than him, they might be able to resist the effect, but that wasn't the case.

Shrubley moved as fast as his twiggy legs could carry him. Faster even, as an unknown sensation bristled through his branches and pumped his legs. He had never known what rage felt like before, and its heady power spurred him on.

He swept his green glowing blade through every serpentii summoner there. Not enough to outright defeat them. That wasn't his intention. He wanted them to *hurt* for what they did.

The result was that Shrubley's opponents were left vulnerable to his companions, who were then able to concentrate their attacks without worry of their opponents getting back up again or even out-healing the damage.

One by one, the summoners fell as more and more allies came through the portal. When the summoners realized their doom, a few tried to run, but Shrubley bowled them over with his [Morph Shield] and Smudge crushed them flat where they lay.

In just a few short minutes the fighting was over. Shrubley hadn't known how going through the portal would work, so he had a rope tied off on one end to another person on the mirror realm's side.

He reached over and tugged on the rope three times. That was the signal.

One by one, the rest of the people trapped on the other side came through in a surge of boiling green liquid. Hands steadied the newcomers, preventing more than a few from falling back into the portal.

Cal looked back as the people filled the massive underground space. Shouts filled the cavernous room as shimmering [Emergency Adventurers Badges] appeared on several people's chests.

The skeleton swatted at his own chest as the [Emergency Adventurers Badge] shimmered into being there.

He couldn't help but grin as only a skeleton could.

The Guild was backing them.

Slyrox, Smudge and many others did a headcount, once people were calmed down, making sure nobody was left behind. The slime kept counting the number too high, but at least he tried.

He really did.

There were well over a hundred people, and just as many monsters. More if you counted those that hadn't made it. Cal fingered the amulet that the last person on the other side had been left with to keep the portal open. He gingerly poked the [Emergency Adventurers Badge] as if it would disappear.

"I got two-forty-three," Cal said, looking over his shoulder to where Shrubley had been standing. "What about you, Shrubley?"

"Nine thousand," Smudge interjected proudly. "Over nine thousand." Obviously, that was entirely incorrect to everyone but the slimes in attendance, who nodded enthusiastically.

Slyrox looked around. There was a distinct lack of shrubbery in the immediate vicinity. She looked at Cal.

"You don't think..." Cal started to say, but he already knew the answer.

"He's gone after the boss snake?"

Cal nodded.

"Smudge, you're in charge!" Cal called behind him as he ran toward the corkscrewing stairs. "Come on, Slyrox, we have to help him!"

"Pyuu?" the slime asked in bewilderment as countless faces turned to the tiny pink slime. "Pyuu," he added determinedly.