



Chapter 3. The Trap in the Dark Cave
Scene 4. The Shadow on the Cave Wall

To their surprise, the crew members had a terrifying but fun ride as sliding down the water slope. The slope covered with water was so smooth that they didn't even feel any pain, and it only took them a short time to slide into a dark pool. More surprisingly, the underground world was not so dark at all. There was dim light for eyesight to adjust to see the outline of the surroundings. When Monique and Nova slid into the pool and then managed to walk through the water to reach the ground, they found that Stark, Omar and Howard were already there, relaxing and laughing at them.



: (wiping off water from her skirt) What's so funny?


















: Nothing, hahaha ...



: Nova, were you coming to Earth this way? Spinning and screaming, hahaha ...



















Nova didn't reply amid such an embarrassing moment, and just shrugged resentfully because he didn't know whether he should thank Monique or be mad about her bold move.

	: Thank God, we are all together again! Like Master said, just trust our instinct for the adventure! Let's go chase Bondi! I saw her shadow on the cave wall, but she ran away. This could be a trap, keep looking over your shoulder!
	: Wait, Stark, did the bats attack you when they flew out?
	: I thought I disturbed them, but they simply ignored me! Omar told me that you got attacked, why?
	: It's mysterious, and very maliciously! That's why we were forced to jump onto the water slope.
	: (rolling her eyes) You didn't jump off by your own will, coward!
	: (contesting emotionally) All right, thank you ..., but ... but you should've considered the possibility of an abyss down there.
	: (turning her head aside) I don't want to argue with a chicken-man!
	: (speaking wryly while shaking his head) Whatever ...
	: Monique, don't be so harsh with Nova. He has done his best to help us taking a couple of challenges already. He just needs some time to get used to our cruel world. ... All right, let's move on to find Bondi.
	There were three different tunnels in connection to the pool under the water slope, but Stark was not sure which tunnel Bondi's shadow had shifted into. Since the crew had started to believe that the "thing" was not really Bondi, they decided to play the game with it without worry about scaring Bondi.
	: (shouting) Bondi, where are you? Bondi ...
	They nervously waited for some moments after the weird creepy echoes of Stark's voices dispersed, but there were still no response from "Bondi".
	: Look, there is a shadow appearing on the wall of the left tunnel.
	: Where? I don't see it. Anyone else see it? Omar, are you sure?
	: Yeah, definitely.
	: All right, let's try the left tunnel first.
	The whole crew carefully approached the entrance of the left tunnel. Then they saw that the source of light in this underground world seemed to be located at the other end of the tunnel. When they entered the tunnel, they felt that they were quickly descending down to a deeper and deeper world, but the weird thing was that, visually, it didn't look that way.
	: Hey, with the light getting brighter, there might be an easy exit of the cave at the other end of this tunnel.

	: That would be good. ... Just hope we can see Bondi there.
	: Unlikely, because we're going down. Actually the light spectrum is very different from that of sunlight.
	: What do you mean, Nova?
	: Uh ..., I mean this cave just looks so supernatural!
	: Ha, so we could be in the dollhouse of the Dark Magician.
	All of a sudden, there flashed past a vague figure with a blurred shadow from side to side at the end of the tunnel, and the long waited Bondi's voice finally broke the silence.
	: (giggling) Hi guys, let's play hide-and-peek!
	All the crew members rushed toward the end of the tunnel with their hearts pounding hard. However, when they were there, they were all completely amazed by what they saw - it's not an exit of the cave or something easily to imagine - there was the entrance of a huge complex labyrinth full of more intricate tunnels.
	: Oh, my god, I guess this is what Bondi means for playing hide-and-peek.
	: (in a childish tone) Oh, great, I'm too tired to play now. This could kill me.
	: Holy cow ..., who had built this intriguing compound structure?
	: Could be some pirates who tried to hide their treasures here. Maybe this is our final destination for the mission.
	: Bullshits, I guess this must be an underground mirage created by the Dark Magician!
	: I agree with Monique. Master won't make the mission for us to steal pirates' treasures from robbery. Nova, we could be trapped in this maze - could you figure out its structure for us to escape later?
	: Yes, no problem. Islemma had frequently taught me how to play this kind of games. Not to mention, the palace where I live is built inside a complicatedly designed labyrinth for protection.
	: (in a wicked tone) Guys, come to get me!
	As Bondi's voice came out again, there simultaneously appeared many blurred shadows of Bondi on many walls of the different tunnel passages. It was so overwhelming and mind perplexing that all the crew members were astonished to temporarily lose sense of direction! Only Nova was busy for tracking and analyzing to allocate the true location of the sound source.

	: Nova, could you sense which way to go? This is getting more and more bizarre!
	: According to the sound, my signal-processing analysis carried out a probability distribution on all the possible directions to go. It looks that the best decision is to first try a passage where no shadow showed up – actually, those shadows are fake to mislead our senses.
	: Are you sure? But, without any shadow, how can we follow her then?
	: Wait, what's the game rule here? It's a setup to trap us inside at all!
	: Monique, guys, this is an evil world without reasonable rules. Just trust our own instinct one more time, let's see what the Dark Magician can do! By the way, Nova, what do you mean by "proba ... ba ... bility"?
	: Oh, probability - it's a concept which Islemma taught me about likelihood. Simply put, there is no sure thing on any single outcome, so there is a chance for us to find Bondi through every route of the maze. The higher the probability is for taking a certain pathway at a junction, the higher chance we'll find Bondi during the next steps.
	: Got it. Then maybe we should split to enter different pathways for increasing our total chance, right?
	: I guess so. But the risk is that we cannot help each other and lose the synergy of our intelligence to outsmart the Dark Magician. We could end up all getting lost individually.
	: Stark, no, we shouldn't split. Remember our last lesson.
	: Omar is right. Only I can dynamically assess the probability distribution about how to adjust our strategies for best choosing the route to go. We better stick together.
	: Hey, you know what. I got an idea to trick the Dark Magician. We can pretend to split and called for help with telling fake locations. Then, the weird Bondi could get confused and lose her patience to play the game soon, and show up thereafter.
	: Wow, Monique, you're truly a smart cookie.
	: You bet!
	: (opening his sleepy eyes) What, wait, Omar. Did you just mention a cookie? I am starving!
	Howard's goofy talk made the crew laugh out loudly, and surprisingly it not only eased the tension but also toughened up these little guys before they took the formidable challenge. They, confidently but cautiously, moved ahead among the complicatedly arranged walls and pathways while perfectly executing their strategies and tactics - even Howard did a good job for faking cry and telling false location from time to time.

	: Stark, if this is really a setup by the Dark Magician, what does he really want?
	: It's hard to tell now. Maybe he is trying to prove to Master that we're going to fail our mission sooner or later. The Dark Magician is no normal evil. Master didn't want to talk much about him, only mentioning that, after the Magicians' defeat of the Great War at the Enigma Canyon, the Dark Magician has been trying to revenge with his more and more matured tentacle magic power; but Master always reminded us not to lose our souls to him.
	: What does that mean? Sounds creepy. Is he a soul-eating demon or something?!
	: Well, we'll see. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Perhaps, he can provide lots of clues about our mission.
	Monique's strategy seemed working well because Bondi's voice was getting more and more impatient and the dramas of her shadow show were getting more and more bizarre - sometimes she was chased by strange monsters; sometimes she was surrounded by fire balls to burn her; sometimes she even fought with a witch, and whatsoever. The guys were pretty sure that these were just tricks of the Dark Magician and had no fear while Nova was eventually nailing down the direction for catching Bondi with higher and higher probability. Finally, they reached a dead end of a pathway - a plain stone wall with only some strange words carved on it. For some moments, there was no response from Bondi anymore. The guys were suddenly puzzled right there!
	: (looking at Nova with an upset tone as being still mad about Nova) That's it?! This is a dead end. It looks like that the Magician outsmarts us. His wizardry also beats Nova's technology!
	: Take it easy, Monique. There might be something hidden here.
	: Wait, there are some words on the wall!
	: Can you read them?
	: I don't know ... could be a hint or a warning.
	: (sneering at Nova with a taunting tone) Hey, maybe it says "congratulations, loser!"
	Nova felt that Monique was crossing the red line of his ego and was just about to take it off. Fortunately, Omar noticed that and was quick enough to ease the tension.
	: Maybe we should break the wall to see if there is the pirates' treasures.
	: Hahaha ..., here you go again. I rather hope there are some foods inside.
	: Stop talking nonsense, you stupid three stooges. I think that this is definitely a dangerous trap, let's go ... let's go!

	: Yeah, I don't feel comfortable over the atmosphere here now. Let's leave this spot to try the other routes. Nova, maybe there is something wrong with your analysis.
	: Sorry, I'll try to fix it.
	Just when the little guys turned around and tried to retreat from this dead end, there came Bondi's welcome message in a very cold and creepy voice!
	: (cold and creepy tone) You found me! Here I am!
	The little guys stopped and froze. Omar and Howard tightly closed their eyes and their bodies trembled as if there was a ghost standing right behind them. Stark and Monique were kind of sweating from neck, palm to hip. Only Nova felt good because he was right once again, and so he cannot help himself turning around to take a look.
	: Guys, it's fine. Just a blurred shadow of Bondi standing on the wall.
	: (getting bold and mad after turning around) What the hell are you? Stop playing the game!
	: (sobbing with her tone turning soft) Sorry, guys. I'm not playing a game anymore. Save me. I'm trapped inside the wall ... Wuh ...! If you cannot pull me out before my shadow vanishes now, I am afraid that you won't see me again.
	: Bondi, how? What should we do to pull you out?
	: Easy, just let Nova read the spell on the wall loudly!
	: Me?! Why me? I couldn't recognize those characters!
	: Only you have the needed magic power. Don't worry, just follow me to read it!
	: Whoa, wait, no way! It must be a trick! Now, I got it! You're the Dark Magician, not Bondi. You're trapped inside for some reasons and need our help to get out! Guys, don't listen to him!
	: (in a begging tone as crying innocently) No, no! Guys, listen to me, the Dark Magician is challenging your determination to rescue me. He said that I'm boring and pathetic, and you don't love me at all.
	: (shaking his head with a sympathetic look) Oh boy! Stark man, it's your call now!
	For the first time Stark hesitated and deeply struggled to make the decision!