

D. of Pride 151

Chapter 151: Aldebaran (2)

It just so happens that the ruler of the Ancient Treant wanted to meet with Cecilia. He could use this opportunity to meet with the Ancient Titan Treant. That was why Simon wanted to know what kind of person he was before meeting him.

Fennel was lost for words as he didn't expect to be suddenly asked this question. He looked towards the middle of the large clearance where a titanic tree was standing and said.

"From what I can tell, that person seemed to hold our race in high regards and is even willing to protect us himself. He is a wise and benevolent person. At the same time, he has lived through the ancient times and a powerful aura radiates off of him. It is truly unfathomable to measure such a being".

He then shook his head and apologized "Im sorry, I'm not able to fully answer your question... but I can tell you that, he is by no means an evil person".

Simon nodded "Elder does not need to apologise, your explanation was plenty enough". At least he had a little bit of idea with that.

"Is sir Simon planning to meet with that person? If so then I can arrange one. It just so happens that tomorrow is the day I was planning to go there and give my greeting to the Ancient Titan Treant" Fennel said while looking towards Simon.

Simon was excited when he heard that Fennel could arrange their meeting. He was deliberating over how to plan his meeting with the Ancient Titan Treant, he didn't expect Fennel to solve his problem.

"That would be great. I was planning how to meet him but it seems that you made my work easier. You have my thanks" Simon thanked the elder.

Fennel hurriedly said "What is sir Simon saying, if anything it is us who must be saying our thanks. Your favour to us is as big as a mountain. If you thank me then I won't be able to raise my head from guilt".

“O-oh” Simon nodded, he didn’t expect his causal gesture to thank Fennel would evoke such an intense reaction from him.

He watched the Forest Spring Spirits laugh and eat the meal merrily and in the centre of all of this was Cecilia who was imitating him. At this moment, she truly looked carefree and happy just like a girl of her age should.

Simon was content, this meeting would untie some of the knots in her heart. As her big brother, he wanted to see her happy and carefree just as she was now. And for that, he has to grow his dungeon and himself stronger.

The banquet continued for a long while before its participants became dead drunk and tired before going to sleep. Cecilia wanted to stay with her aunt and talk some more and Simon was left amidst the drunkards.

The next morning, the Forest Spring Spirits all woke up in a good mood and the atmosphere inside was totally different than before. They were no longer behaving like a lifeless doll and their eyes seem to contain some hope in them.

Of course, the hope came from the news that Simon had rescued the children from their clan who had been caught by the adventurers and enslaved inside the village.

Cecilia even told them how Simon had defeated all those bad adventurers who had hurt their clan and made them cry until they remembered their mommies.

Along with Fennel and Cecilia, Simon decided to meet with the ruler of the Ancient Treants. “Ehhh! Grandpa Fennel, why must we meet with that treant? I wanted to talk with the others some more” while on their way, Cecilia made an unhappy face and complained.

“Silent now Cecilia, one must show respect their respect to their benefactor not to mention the territory we are currently staying in is his domain”.

Fennel explained. Even though the tree looked titanic from the distance, from close it looked even more so. By the time Simon and the others approached near, its shadow had completely covered the sky.

They had only reached halfway, but the gigantic tree had already blotted the sky. Its roots that protruded out from the ground was so thick and sturdy that it seemed to be connected with the very forest itself.

Its trunk was wide and covered in bark so ancient that it seemed nigh impossible to penetrate and hurt this titanic creature. All the treants that Simon had met before, had a defence so high that very few magic in his repertoire was able to hurt them.

However, all of that meant nothing in front of the Ancient Titan Treant. Its defence was superior... no it would be an understatement to say so. Its defence easily overshadowed even the likes of Balsa and was in a realm completely impossible for the current Simon to even imagine.

Even if there were thousands of him releasing the full might of his magic at the tree for a whole day, he reckoned that he wouldn't be able to even scratch it. A formless pressure engulfed everyone as they approached nearer.

Although the aura was tyrannic, it was something naturally released by the Ancient Titan Treant. When they finally reached the base of the tree, Simon marvelled at the absurdity of its sheer size.

Whilst a desolate aura surrounded the tree and it looked like it was dying, there was no denying the presence it emitted just by standing there. The colour of its trunk was that of the coal, and most of the leaves in its branches had fallen into the ground.

Its bottom half was covered with a thick layer of moss that shined with an emerald green light. Its appearance spoke of how ancient it was and the vicissitude of life the treant had gone through.

Cecilia made a wide 'O' with her mouth wide open as she looked at the titanic size of the tree. She pointed at the Ancient Titan Treant and said.

"Waaahhh, it's so huge. Is he the ruler of the Ancient Treants? He is much much bigger than that elder we met yesterday".

Grandpa Fennel panicked when he heard that and hurriedly disciplined "Don't be rude Cecilia. He is the person we Forest Spring Spirit owe our life to. Disrespecting him is equal to bringing shame to our race. Be quiet now, don't run your mouth wildly".

Though his voice was stern, his eyes were still tender when they looked at her. At this moment, the ground started to tremble as if a huge earthquake was occurring. A vast ancient aura started to descend before the branches and twigs of the treant started to coil together, taking a humanoid shape.

The humanoid that was born from the titanic tree was more than five meters tall and coal-black in colour. A greenish light ran through its body just like veins and pulsed with natural energy.

Pair of eyes as deep as the ocean looked at the people that arrived before him. With a deep ancient voice, the humanoid figure laughed.

“Hahaha, Fennel here is too stuck with the worldly matters. Young lady you don’t have to keep quiet, I will not take any offence”.

He gave a friendly smile and looked towards the other visitor “You must be the demon who had taken care of her. I am aware of the matters that happened yesterday. Young man, I must admit even I was shocked when you chose to return those spirit orbs. Truly... a decent character”.

Simon was not amazed that the Ancient Titan Treant knew the events that had occurred yesterday; after all, the new settlement of the Forest Spring Spirits was right near it.

Fennel stepped forward bowed his head before saying “He is the benefactor of my clan and not only did he save Cecilia, he also rescued the children...”.

“I am well aware of the things that have occurred inside the Ghastly Winding Forest” Right after saying that, he looked towards Cecilia and Simon before declaring.

“I am the ruler of the Ancient Treants, Aldebaran the Ancient. You can me Alder. There is nothing in this entire forest that I can’t sense through my roots. Haha, I have awaited your presence for a long time, young lady”.

He had a reminiscing look whenever he glanced at Cecilia.

Cecilia on the other hand tilted her head in confusion and asked “Me? Why did Lord Alder want to meet with me?”.

This should be their first meeting so why was this Ancient Titan Treant spoke as if he was already familiar with her.

Aldebaran laughed once again before replying “I sensed your presence the moment you were born and from that time I was anticipating our meeting. Young lady, you are special even amongst the people from your clan. Don’t you want to know more about your dormant abilities and your origin?”.

Aldebaran had lived since the ancient times and knew the answer to the mysteries that was shrouding the world.

“My origins?” Cecilia had a look that said that she was very confused, she was born and lived her entire life in the Forest Spring Spirit village what else was there about her origin?

Nevertheless, she wanted to know about her dormant powers. If she could harness those powers, she would be much more helpful to her big brother and her clansmen.

She excitedly nodded her head and said “Although I don’t know what Lord Alder means by my origin, it is true that I want to know more about my abilities and master them as soon as possible so that I can help my big brother”.

Chapter 152: Origins

Aldebaran was not surprised, he gave an understanding nod and smiled.

“A noble conviction. In that case, this ancient one may be able to help you understand more about your abilities. However, to understand your abilities you have to first know more about yourself and your origin”.

Simon who was listening from the sides, couldn’t help but furrow his brows at those words. ‘Wasn’t Cecilia born in the village of the Forest Spring Spirits? What does he mean by her origin?’. Does the Ancient Titan Treant know something about Cecilia that even her parents and clan did not?

Fennel who had similar thoughts running in his mind asked for clarity “Lord Alder, Cecilia is from our clan and the daughter of our patriarch. From the moment she was born, she was living inside the village and had never stepped out. All along, she was living with us. Although she was born with features that differentiated her from the average people of our clan, she is a member of our Forest Spring Spirit clan through and through”.

“Hahaha, you have misunderstood Fennel. I’m not saying that she is not a member of your clan. I’m simply telling her of her origins before being born in your clan. Her current self is indeed the daughter of your patriarch and a member of the Forest Spring Spirits.

“But do you really think it is so easy for a Forest Spring Royal Spirit to be born in your clan? A Forest Spring Royal Spirit is born from the purest essence of the nature and the wishes of the world. An existence that is considered extremely rare and sacred.” Aldebaran explained.

Simon narrowed his eyes, he was now sure of his conjecture. Aldebaran definitely knew more about Cecilia than even her parents and her clansmen.

Fennel was speechless, although he was a little sceptic, he didn’t dare to question the Ancient Titan Treant, an existence that lived since the ancient times. There was no reason for an existence like him to lie to them. Not to mention he was also their benefactor who had sheltered them saved them from their calamity.

Aldebaran looked into the starry sky and sighed. Memories from back then flashed in his eyes as he decided to drop a bombshell.

“She is the reincarnation of one of the Eight Emissaries that used to once serve the Primordial Demon of Pride, Lord Samael”.

Those words struck like thunder to all those who were listening. Who was the primordial demon of pride? He was one of the demons that lived during the ancient times and a pinnacle powerhouse of this world. One could imagine what kind of storms those words brewed inside the hearts of the three listeners.

Simon widened his eyes to their limit in surprise, but what made him more shocked was the statement that Cecilia was one of the Eight Emmisaries that used to serve the primordial demon of pride at that time.

It wasn’t only him, even Cecilia herself was stunned. She was the reincarnation of someone? Then why didn’t she have any memories of that then? Thoughts such as that ran through her head as she tilted her head and frowned intensely. Her pondering face was extremely adorable.

Aldebaran saw the confusion in everyone’s face and said “It is natural for all of you to be sceptic about it. Nonetheless, it is the truth. I cannot be any more certain about it; after all, I Aldebaran was her loyal servant serving the same master at that time”.

He dropped another bomb casually and every listener was stupefied by it. What did his words mean? He just confirmed that he too was one of the subordinates of the primordial demon of pride and a loyal servant of Cecilia of that time.

“During the ancient times, that is approximately more than 13,000 years ago, the Forest Spring Spirit race was freely hunted by the other races all over the world. Needless to say, it was because of their spirit orb that had endless allure to those looking to strengthen themselves and purify their bloodline”.

“It was a dark age for them but that was until lord Samael decided to save and bring them under his wing. His powers were so great that every inhabitant of this world had to recognise and fear. He became the protective umbrella for the Forest Spring Spirit and many other endangered clans.” his voice had an unconcealed pride whenever he talked about Samael.

“I was just an ordinary treant at that time, weak and insentient, unworthy of even catching a glimpse of our lord. However, it all changed when lord Samael summoned her” Aldebaran pointed at Cecilia who was curiously listening to him recounting the events from back then.

He narrated “After she was summoned she quickly became one of the pillars supporting our lord. Though she had no combat potential, her abilities in itself were heaven-defying. Her radiance at that time was truly brilliant.

“Under her care, many of the races that were deeply connected to the natural energy started breaking through the constraints placed on them by the world because of their impure bloodline. I was fortunate enough to be one of them. Your Forest Spring Spirit race and our treant race were some of the few who served her at that time. It was also during that time that our race and yours became friends. Since your race was crucial to the sustenance of the dungeon but had no combat capabilities, she made us Ancient Treants your guardians with the duty to protect you with our lives. Although none of them are alive now, as long as I am alive, I will never let this bond that she had created be broken”.

Simon contemplated as his gaze swept towards Cecilia. Deep astonishment and shock could be seen flashing in his eyes. He finally understood why Irene was so shocked and protective towards Cecilia when she saw her for the first time.

Her abilities were already so shocking nonetheless, it was just the tip of the iceberg. No wonder her awakened abilities at that time were able to raise someone on the level of Aldebaran from just an ordinary treant.

The Ancient Titan Treant in front of him was so powerful that everything that the Analysis told about him was shrouded in question marks. Simon was not even able to catch a glimpse of his power with Analysis.

That alone told him that the difference in their level was too vast for the Analysis to even work.

At this moment, Cecilia raised her hand and asked a question “Are you saying that I was alive 13,000 years ago? Then why don’t I have any memories or recollection of any of that ever happening?”.

Aldebaran couldn’t help but laugh at her cute actions before replying “It is natural that you have no recollection of it. Your memories have been locked along with your powers and because of that you cant harness your abilities”.

“But it is not like your powers are permanently gone, as long as your abilities start unlocking, so will your memories”.

Cecilia’s power was already starting to manifest and if what Aldebaran said was true, then it wouldn’t be long before she would be able to recall her memories.

Simon was conflicted, he didn’t want the current personality of Cecilia to change and at the same time, he couldn’t just deny her of her growth. He could only hope that even after recalling her past memories, Cecilia would still remain the same little girl that he was used to.

There were still many questions about the story of Aldebaran that made Simon sceptical like... if the primordial demon of pride was so powerful then how did he die? What happened to the other Seven Emmisaries and how did Cecilia reincarnate to the current timeline? there were many questions; however, it seemed that Aldebaran didn’t want to reveal much information in that regard.

Simon did have one of his doubts concerning the relationship between the Ancient Treants and Forest Spring Sprit race cleared. He had speculated many ideas about their connection but who would have guessed that they were allies who served under the same master during the ancient times. The Ancient Treants were the guardians of the ancestors of the Forest Spring Spirits.

Cecilia who had a frown stitched to her face all this time, seemed unconvinced and voiced out “I’m me, I don’t know who Lord Alder is talking about but I’m Cecilia now. the daughter of the patriarch of the Forest Spring Spirit clan”.

Aldebaran helplessly shook his head and chose not to argue with her “Whether or not it is truth, you will have your answers with time. Regardless, you can just call me Alder. You need not address this servant of yours with lord”.

After beholding the figure of Cecilia, his eyes became melancholic and he muttered in a voice that only he could hear “Back then lord Samael self-destructed the existential core of the fragment of pride to cast the Space-Time magic on the Eight of them before disappearing forever from this world”.

“During the ancient times, lord Samael had the highest assimilation rate with the fragment of pride compared to any other demon lords and their fragments. The other fragments have chosen different owners over this period time. But the fragment of pride was the only one which had disappeared along with sir Samael never to appear in this world again”.

Simon and others could not hear what he was muttering but they knew that if it was something that they should hear, he would have told them and if it’s not, then Aldebaran wouldn’t tell them even if they asked.

Chapter 153: Proving One’s Ability

Aldebaran sighed as he recalled those happy yet sad memories from the past. No matter how powerful he got, he couldn’t see himself contending against those people. The least he could do was fulfil his duty of protecting the Forest Spring Spirit clan

However, even that would come to an end after a few hundred years. His body was slowly dying and an aura of desolation emitted out of him. His lifespan was nearing its end and he had already reached the limits of his power.

In these thousands of years, he didn’t hear any news about the Emissaries nor did he knew if they were dead or alive. However, just when he was nearing the end of his life span, Cecilia who was one of the reincarnations of the Eight, appeared before him.

He was delighted to see the mistress he had served once again and hence he had no more regrets. if there was any it would be a... Just when Aldebaran was lost in his thoughts, Simon stepped forward and spoke.

“Lord Alder, Cecilia being a reincarnation of one of the Eight Emissaries was a surprise. However, our purpose for coming here is to request something from you. I wonder if lord Alder is willing to listen”.

Cecilia who was beside him also nodded her head after his words.

“Haha, what is it young man? You have done a great favour by saving her life. If there is anything you want to request of me ask it without hesitation. If it is within my power, I shall fulfil it no matter what”.

Aldebaran smiled as he looked at Simon. He was aware of the calamity that had befallen the Forest Spring Spirit clan. However, since he couldn't move from his location, he couldn't save them in time, he could only hope for the Forest Spring Spirits to enter the area which he governed in time.

The young man in front of him protected the Forest Spring Royal Spirit in his stead. Plus his character was also to his liking. Therefore if there was a request that the young man had, he would try his best to fulfil it.

However, even he didn't imagine that Simon's request would be so outlandish.

“Many thanks to lord Alder for his magnanimous words. In that case, I wouldn't hesitate anymore. Lord Alder may not know but I have created a dungeon inside the Ghastly Winding Forest” Simon said carefully phrasing his words.

“Ah, about that I already know. Haha, nothing stays hidden from my sight within this entire Ghastly Winding Forest. Every event and occurrence that happened inside the forest, I am naturally aware of it. Your presence and dungeon is no exception”.

Aldebaran said as he gave a mysterious smile towards Simon. He was could connect with the roots of every tree inside the forest and see through them like it was his own body.

Naturally, the peculiar movements of a demon and the creation of a dungeon didn't go unnoticed by him. However, since Simon was just a low-rank demon, he didn't pay much attention. After all, there were six other beings of his level inside the forest that needed more of his attention.

In these past thousands of years, the humans that have wandered inside the forest were countless but those that returned alive were a handful. Those that managed to escape alive, spread the news about their existence and gave them the title, the Seven Kings.

Collectively, they were the true rulers of the Ghastly Winding Forest. It was also because the neighbouring kingdoms feared their existence, that they did not dare to intrude inside till this date.

By no means does it mean that the Seven Kings were united. Over the years, they had many territorial disputes and conflicts of interest. However, it never erupted into a full-blown war as the other kings were stalking them with the eye of a predator.

Nobody wanted their thrones to be stolen from them. Hence the seven of them formed a weird equilibrium of sorts where they kept each other in check. Although Aldebaran was one of them, he kept his neutrality and did not take action until unless his territory is intruded upon.

The next words that came out of Simon, made both Aldebaran and Fennel shocked.

“I see... so lord Alder is aware. Then that makes it easier. I want to bring the Forest Spring Spirits that are living here inside my dungeon. I am already sheltering some of the people of their race, but they are all children. They need the care and guidance of the adults to grow and know more about the abilities of their race”.

Simon said as he tried to explain the situation with all his sincerity.

Cecilia also added as she looked towards Fennel with expectation “Grandpa Fennel you must convince others to come with us. Big Brother’s dungeon is amazing, we can live there peacefully. When he becomes strong in the future, nobody would be able to hurt us again”.

She then proudly puffed her chest and said “To tell you the truth, I am already helping big brother manage his dungeon and it has already recognised me as one of its guardians... Hehe, how is it?”.

Aldebaran was shocked when he heard Simon, but he was absolutely stupefied by Cecilia’s words. Did these people not hear him, or did his words just went out of their heads? He was duty-bound to protect the people from the Forest Spring Spirit race.

He was already regretting the fact that he wasn't able to protect their village and was only able to shelter a small number of them. And Simon wanted to bring them to his dungeon, what was he thinking?

"Young man, you must be joking right? Even if I told you to request unhesitantly, you should show some restraints. On what basis do you think that you can keep them safe and protect them better than me? You can ask for anything else... treasures, artifacts, protection and even power. But your request is out of the question".

Aldebaran's ancient voice had an added depth of severity. From his view, the demon in front of him had an impure bloodline whose growth was very limited. Even if he works hard and used various kinds of treasures to alleviate his limit, he would still be stuck in the ranks of Demon Earl.

The powers of a Forest Spring Royal Spirit only worked on members who were closer to the natural energy hence Simon would be unable to benefit from it as he did.

It did not extend to the member of the demon noble. Unless he goes back on his words and uses underhanded means like the spirit orbs, Demon Earl would be his limit.

A Demon Earl in the eyes of Aldebaran was nothing but an ant he could squash with just a thought. It wasn't like he was looking down on demons particularly since even the Lord he served, Samael was a demon.

But how can the weakling in front of him compare to his master, the primordial demon of pride? He was even more shocked by Cecilia's statement. Did she not understand a word he said? Even if her memories didn't awaken, she would be in far too danger if she stayed inside that newly emerged dungeon.

Although she was his master and his current achievement was all thanks to her, he couldn't go along with her selfishness to stay inside the dungeon.

After so many millennia, Aldebaran had finally found the reincarnation of his master. How can he allow her to go back into such a dangerous place? Not when he was aware of the existence of those people.

'After her abilities awaken, those people would come again. Lord Samael is no longer here, I must protect and hide her no matter what... even if it makes me look bad' Aldebaran thought as steeled his mind.

“I cannot agree with your request young man. The Forest Spring Spirit race must stay here under my supervision. If there is any other request, you can freely ask”.

Cecilia made an unhappy face when she heard that, pointing at Aldebaran she demanded “What gives you the right to tell my clan what to do?”.

Sticking out her tongue, she made fun of him “Blululu... you are not our patriarch”.

Aldebaran unaffected by her antics, simply snorted “I will not go along with your selfishness master”.

Fennel made a helpless smile when he saw how the two of them were acting. Simon knew that it wouldn’t be easy to bring the surviving Forest Spring Spirits inside his dungeon after listening to Aldebaran’s story. However, he couldn’t just give up now as that would be akin to hampering the growth of the dungeon and his future plans.

Therefore, he couldn’t back out. Simon insisted “Lord Alder I don’t have any request other than that. I am aware that from your standpoint, I seem no less than ant. But give me a few years and I’ll show you that I’m no weakling. I have already promised to protect them and I’m willing to keep my promise till the end”.

Cecilia gave a lovely smile while Fennel was amazed at those words coming from their benefactor.

Aldebaran stared at Simon’s unwavering crimson eyes and felt his conviction. With an audible sigh, he shook his head.

“Don’t think that I don’t know what your plans are. I can see that you have lofty ambitions and it is true that you need the help of the Forest Spring Spirits to achieve it. However, young man no matter how high a goal one sets, if he doesn’t have the sufficient strength to see through them, then it just becomes meaningless ideals. I respect your wish to protect them but you are far too weak to promise something like that”.

Chapter 154: Proving One’s Ability (2)

Hearing him preach, Cecilia wore an unhappy expression while Fennel had a complicated face.

Aldebaran continued “Young man do you wish to see the same tragedy that had befallen them occur once again? The next time the enemies would be prepared and wouldn’t be as weak as those fellows. Do you still think that you can win at that time? I know the current master has formed a deep bond with you. But you should also think about her, once her ability awakens her energy will start to spread across the whole forest and even beyond”.

“Once the world becomes aware of the existence of a Forest Spring Royal Spirit living inside the Ghastly Winding forest, they would try to capture her or try to snatch her royal spirit by any means. If the Forest Spring Spirits stay here, naturally I would protect them at all cost or are you saying that you can protect them better than me?”.

Aldebaran’s words rang like an ancient bell that weighed heavily at the listener’s heart but was unable to falter Simon’s determination. Of course, he was aware of his limits that was set by his bloodline. If it was any other demon, they would have already been cowered by the towering presence of Aldebaran.

However, Simon was different, he had the [Main Menu] with him and as long as he was alive, he could reach the pinnacle of this world. His confidence couldn’t be shaken by some words or enemies he had yet to meet.

Then again, he couldn’t reveal the existence of [Main Menu] which was his top guarded secret to them and could only think of some other ways to convince the Ancient titan Treant.

“I know it might be difficult of Lord Alder to believe but given adequate time, I can break through the restraints placed on me by my impure bloodline. At that time, I will have the necessary strength to protect them. You are right, I have grand plans but that is why I need the help and support of the Forest Spring Spirit clan. I hope lord Alder would understand”.

Aldebaran was silent as he looked at the resolute and firm eyes of Simon. He had lived a long long time and could easily see through the minds and hearts of other people, what they were thinking, what they desired... nothing goes unnoticed by him. He didn’t know why but for some reason, the words said by Simon even made him want to believe them.

At this moment, observing Simon he was reminded of another person who was as resolute and determined as the young man before him. ‘Their resemblance is too uncanny’ Aldebaran thought inwardly.

“Young man, what makes you think that you can break through the restraints of your bloodline which similarly binds billions of beings of this world? If you cannot convince me, then I cannot agree to send master back to that dungeon” he silently stated.

Just when Cecilia was about to throw another one of her tantrums, his ancient voice sounded out once again.

“However, if you can convince me that you have what it takes to break the unwritten rule of this world and rise above others, I can consider it. Prove it to me that you have sufficient ability to protect them. In the case that you cannot, then forgive me for sending you away without allowing you to say your goodbyes”.

with a resolute voice, Aldebaran had said his piece and it seemed like he wouldn’t change his mind until unless Simon proves what he said and displays his ability.

The Ancient Titan Treant was testing Simon, to see whether the young man in front of him was all talk or if he really had it in him. After all that talk, Aldebaran was curious as to where this confidence of Simon stemmed from.

Simon knew that he couldn’t convince Aldebaran in any other way. That being so, his only way was to prove his ability to him. Simon nodded his head and replied.

“Alright, I guess it will be much faster to convince you with my ability rather than words. So how do I prove myself?”.

Seeing Simon readily agree, Aldebaran nodded his head in approval. If Simon showed any sign of hesitating, Aldebaran was planning to renege his words then and there. Although he did not know where the confidence of the young man was coming from, he quite like Simon’s attitude.

If one did not even have a strong determination to go against the odds, then no matter how hardworking they are, they will never be able to break away from the restraints placed on them by the world. In that regard, the young man in front of him had passed splendidly.

However, that was not enough. The young man was trying to harbour the fates of the forest Spring Spirits on his shoulders. If he didn’t have the necessary ability, there was no way he would allow Simon to bring them inside his dungeon.

“It’s very simple. I shall test you myself and see whether you have what it takes to protect them” Aldebaran smiled deeply as he observed Simon.

On the other hand, Simon when he heard what Aldebaran said, he couldn’t help but frown “You don’t mean that we fight right?”.

If that was the case, there was no point. Forget about proving his ability, he would even be able to make a scratch on the body of that Ancient Titan Treant even if he stood there all day.

After listening to Simon’s worries Aldebaran couldn’t help but laugh.

“Hahaha, young man you don’t have to worry. I will not fight you directly as there would be no point in doing this in the first place. I will use my aura to suppress you. If you can move ten steps from the place you are standing, then it’s your win”.

Fennel was shocked, he didn’t think that Aldebaran the ancient would test Simon himself. Not to mention give him a task that seemed impossible for Simon from his point of view.

Fennel did not know how strong Simon was but even if he had some ability, how can he match against Aldebaran who had lived since the ancient times. Who was Aldebaran? He was the treant who was once the subordinate of the primordial demon of pride.

Cecilia on the other hand wasn’t worried at all. She was fully confident that Simon would be able to easily pass this test set by Aldebaran. Her confidence in Simon did not stem from nothing, after staying with him inside his dungeon for a while, she naturally became familiar with him.

‘Even sister Irene said that big brother is no ordinary demon. There is no way he would lose’ she thought.

Simon nodded and agreed with Aldebaran’s request “Very well, we shall do as you say. I just have to endure your aura and take ten steps right?”.

Aldebaran simply replied with a smile “That’s right. If you can endure my aura while taking ten steps from your original place, it’s your win. However, I won’t go easy on you”.

Simon was aware that it won't be easy since even without being the target of the pressure, the vast aura that was naturally released from the Ancient Titan Treant and which enshrouded the area was already so strong. He didn't know what would happen if all that aura came crashing down on him.

Nonetheless, he wouldn't back down as this was the only chance to prove his ability to Aldebaran. Steeling his mind, Simon clenched his hands and declared "Alright, when do we start?".

"Now!" Aldebaran's ancient voice sounded out and immediately after, a vast ocean like aura came pressuring down on Simon.

"Gughh" the force was so great that Simon's knees immediately gave out and his entire body kissed the ground. Every muscle in his body trembled as tried to pick himself up. But the pressure bearing down on him was so great that he was barely able to lift himself up an inch.

"Haa... Haa..." Sweat trickled down his face and fell to the ground. Drip... Drip...

"What's wrong young man? Is this all you have got? I have barely used any of my aura and you are already on the ground" Aldebaran said in an indifferent voice.

Cecilia also had an anxious face at this time. She didn't imagine that the pressure would so great as to bring her big brother down immediately. However, her anxiousness didn't last long as she saw Simon standing up slowly.

"AAAAaaaaahhhhhh" with an invigorating shout, Simon propped himself up. His whole body trembled and his face was flushed red. The Ancient Titan Treant had barely used any of his aura on Simon but it was already enough to put a great burden on him. One could only imagine the kind of torture Simon would have to go through when Aldebaran consciously decides to use all of his aura against Simon.

The Ancient Titan Treant arched his eyebrows when he saw the young man getting back up. The aura he had released previously, was enough to make a person of Simon's level immobile. Though he was a tiny bit surprised, that was all about it.

"Damn it" the pressure bearing down on him made him unable to move an inch, it took all he had just to remain standing. He had to take a step or else there would be no meaning.

Clenching his teeth, Simon circulated his mana all across his body before forcefully taking a step forward.

BANG... the ground immediately shattered from the weight as spiderweb-like cracks spread in a few meters area around him. The FIRST STEP.

Chapter 155: The Onerous Ten Steps

As soon as he took the first step, he found his body immobilized once again. His knees trembled like a newborn fawn but Simon endured it all while gritting his teeth.

Just as he was about to lift his other foot to take the second step, the aura bearing down on him doubled and his knees immediately gave up. BANG... the ground cracked even more and Simon collapsed face-first onto the ground.

However, just as his face was about to smack the ground, he supported himself with his hands. He was back to the same position once again after only just one step, there were still nine more steps remaining.

Simon could see the anxious face of Cecilia as she tightly clenched her hands and observed Simon.

‘The test had only just begun and I’m already grovelling on the floor. Pathetic! What would she be thinking seeing her brother in this state?’ various thoughts ran inside his head as he tried his best to get back up.

Simon punched the ground with a great force and stood back up from its recoil. “Haa... haa... haa” his breathing was ragged and every muscle in his body spasmed. Looking at the ground, he was surprised to see that even after taking the full brunt of his punch, the ground he was standing on was still very much fine with just a small fist-sized dent.

“The ground bears the weight of my titanic body. For thousands of years, my roots have absorbed the mystical energy from the mystical veins flowing inside the ground, nourishing it in the process. As of now, the veins of the mystical energy beneath your feet is so numerous that you won’t even be able to count them”.

“Bathing in the presence of an incredible amount of mystical energy for thousands of years, the soil had become extremely tough. Obviously, it would be many times harder than any ground you have trodded. Even if you cast an advanced magic here, it would only be able to displace at most a few meters of land”.

Aldebaran explained when he saw the surprised face of Simon after his punch failed to damage the ground the slightest.

‘So that’s how it was. How could he have overlooked that? The ground that they were standing on, carried the weight of the Ancient Titan Treant, an existence thousands of meters in size. How can its toughness be compared with any other ground’.

Simon thought as he stared at his fist which had become numb after that punch. Just as he was contemplating how to take another step forward, an idea suddenly struck him.

“I see, so the ground can even take the full might of an advanced magic...hehe. Indeed I have never trodded onto a ground this tough before” Simon repeated as a wicked smile crept up to his face.

His crimson eyes shining with a crafty light as he pushed the mystical energy inside his body to its limits. He aligned one of his hands behind him and towards the ground before bombarding it with his magic. “Flame Magic Mastery- [Flame Blast]”

Boom... a crimson coloured heat that erupted out of his hands, came crashing towards the ground beneath with a thundering sound. The moment the magic erupted, a crimson flash covered the area before the ground trembled ever so slightly.

However, even after taking on the full might of his magic, the ground did not seem to be affected much at all. The land could take even the full brunt of an advanced to say nothing of intermediate tier magic which was a tier below it.

Though the moss in a few dozen meters was burned and the ground was scorched black, but those were some minute damage. Flames spread across the area and covered Simon in it.

Seeing that Simon was testing the toughness of the land even after his words, Aldebaran couldn’t help but snort.

“Young man, I already told you. The land here is hundred of times sturdier than any other part of the forest. Even a wide-area advanced magic wouldn’t be able to deal much damage to this land. Forget about your intermediate tier flame magic. Instead of wasting your energy by testing the authenticity of my words, you should focus your efforts on trying to take the second step”. His voice showed that he was a little displeased.

It was not only him but even Fennel and Cecilia were confused by Simon's action. If he had that much strength to spare, he should have used it to take the second step.

Flames bathed the area as layers of smoke rose into the air. Within the smoke, a vague silhouette of a person could be seen standing. When the flames died down and the smoke settled, Simon's figure came into view. His body was still trembling and it seemed like it took all he had to just remain standing. His clothes were tattered and the area around his ankles were burned. It looked like the attack earlier did nothing but damage himself in return.

However, Aldebaran was amazed. That was because Simon had taken another step forward.

The Second Step, the young man had taken the second step and had remained standing. Just as he was about to praise Simon, he received another shock.

BOOOOM... A thundering noise louder and more impactful than before rang out in the surroundings as flames rampaged across for dozens of meters. Just as it was about to reach the spectating duo, Aldebaran swiftly dissipated them.

The surrounding area which was already scorched black became a darker shade after another attack. However, he had no mind to pay attention to that and stared unblinkingly towards the place where the attack originated from.

Right after a few seconds of taking his second step, Simon had already finished his third step. The skin around his ankles and hands was burned as blood slowly leaked out of it. The two intermediate tier attacks earlier were used right next to him and his body received most of the recoil and damage from it.

Although he had [Fire Resistance], it was only a novice tier skill. How can it defend against flame magic which was an intermediate tier magic? Not to mention, the user of the magic was Simon himself and he had used all of his powers when casting that magic.

"Huff... Huff" every bone in his body creaked from the immense amount of pressure that was bearing down on him. Sweat drenched his clothes wet and he was out of breath. Nevertheless, there was still a content smile plastered on his face and his eyes were as sharp as ever.

After he took the third step, the aura bearing down on him tripled and it felt like even taking an inch was an impossibility. It was only because he used the full might of his intermediate tier magic that he was able to take the third step.

Yes, he was not mindlessly using the magic nor was he trying to check the authenticity of Aldebaran words. On the contrary, as soon as he heard that the land was many times sturdier, he came up with this plan.

Simon used the recoil from the impact of his intermediate tier magic detonating right next to him to propel himself a step forward. Though he suffered injuries in the process, it was all he could think of at this moment to endure the huge pressure that bore down on him like a mountain with every step.

Aldebaran couldn't believe it. The young man in front of him was not only determined and strong-willed, but he was also cunning enough to use the environment in his favour. He finally understood why Simon used his magic repeatedly on the ground. It was not to check whether the land was as sturdy as he claimed but to use the propulsion from the magic detonating right next to him to take another step.

Although this idiosyncrasy method would hurt the user in return, Aldebaran was quite impressed by Simon.

BOOOOM... BOOOM... as he was silently observing, the young man in question had used magic once again to propel himself another step. This time, Simon had simultaneously cast two intermediate tier magic of Flame and Gale.

The might with which they bombarded the ground was enough to send a slight tremor across the ground. Flame accompanied by gales rapidly spread towards the surroundings and Aldebaran had to step forward once again to contain them.

BANG... Simon left a deep footprint as he stepped on the ground that marked his fourth step.

Deep cuts and burnt marks spread across his arms and legs as blood continuously trickled down from them and fell on the ground. The scorched ground was turned a shade of red from his blood.

By now, veins were pulsing on his forehead and he ground his teeth so hard that the pressure on his gums forced blood to seep out from them.

Right after he took his fourth step, he was brought right onto his knees as the aura pressuring down on him increased by ten times.

“Huff huff” Simon was already out of breath and no matter how he tried to move his body, it failed to listen to him. He could feel his muscles screaming in pain, trying to tell him that this was his limit. Going any further was impossible.

Simon smiled as these thoughts ran inside his head as he silently stared at the ground.

Aldebaran didn't say anything as he quietly observed the young man. “They bear such uncanny resemblance... sigh, he is truly extraordinary” Aldebaran muttered as memories from long back came surging back.

He was truly amazed once again by the determination shown by the young man. Aldebaran had designed the trial so that it was impossible for Simon to complete it.

Chapter 156: The Onerous Ten Steps (2)

Aldebaran had designed the trial so that it was impossible for Simon to complete it. He had no intention of sending his master back to that dungeon in the first place. The motive behind him designing such a trial was to make Simon give up willingly after realising his limits.

After all, if one did not have strength in this world, even if they have lofty ideals, it is all meaningless. Power reigned supreme, that was the absolute truth... no, law.

“Yes in front of absolute strength, you don't even have the right to decide your own fate” Aldebaran's ancient voice had a tinge of sorrow as he reminisced.

‘Master, I hope that you can forgive my insolence. One day when your memories return, you will naturally realise the intention behind my actions today. The world is vast, at that time, we detected their presence too late. Not even lord Samael was able to foresee that’ he muttered as he saw how anxious and distressed Cecilia was seeing the demon struggle.

At this moment, tears were streaking down her cheeks and if not tightly held by Fennel, she would have already run towards Simon.

The ten steps was a task to make Simon aware of his own limits and how powerless he was in front of absolute power. He could try unorthodox methods like using magic to take advantage of some of the flaws in the rules, but it would ultimately bring him only this far. There was no shortcut to victory.

In front of absolute strength, every trickery and deception was useless.

“Hehehahaha...” Just when everybody was silently observing him, Simon burst out in a peal of laughter. His voice was hoarse from how much out of breath he was, but even then he continued laughing.

Fennel who was quite a distance away and protected by a barrier erected by Aldebaran, closed his eyes and softly said “So this is as far as he could go”. He lamented and shook his head.

Fennel was quite impressed by the character of Simon not to mention, their clan already owed a big debt of gratitude towards him for saving Cecilia and the other children enslaved back in their village.

However, there was nothing he could do. Although he felt that it would be righteous action to go back with their benefactor and help with his dungeon, he couldn't put his surviving clan members in the mouth of danger once again.

Plus their numbers had already been cut down a lot and they need a strong backer just to survive. If they lived under the protection of the Ancient Treants, they wouldn't have to worry about humans finding them again and that cruel nightmare repeating itself.

Even if agreed to come with Simon to his dungeon, Aldebaran might not agree with it. Fennel was convinced after listening to the story of the Ancient Titan Treant, he was especially careful around Cecilia the daughter of their patriarch.

Aldebaran had lived for thousands of years and there was no reason for him to lie to them. And according to him, Cecilia was the reincarnation of one of the Eight Emissaries and also his master. Until unless Simon shows sufficient strength to convince him, there was no way Aldebaran would allow Cecilia to stay in that dungeon.

Simon kept on laughing for a while, his hoarse voice ringing across the surrounding.

“Young man, there is no shame in defeat. On the contrary, those four steps proved that you are indeed quite outstanding. I must admit, I didn’t even expect you to cross the third step.” Aldebaran said.

Even if it was a peak level Demon Viscount hovering at the edges of the level 500 barrier, they would similarly be unable to get past the fourth step. However, the young man in front of him had not even reached the peak of his rank and even with his low level, he was able to take the fourth step under his pressurizing aura.

From his perspective, Simon had already proved his determination and strength with that fourth step. Nevertheless, it was not enough. That level of strength was not enough to protect the Forest Spring Spirits and his master.

Just when Aldebaran was about to reject Simon’s request and say some consoling words so as to not destroy his future, his words got stuck in his throats. That was because when he stared at the eyes of the young man, he could see them shining with intense fervour.

Simon’s eyes contained incredible willpower that refused to succumb to his fate.

Looking at those eyes, Aldebaran had to redouble his view of the young man. ‘Is he still going to try? Is he not convinced by the limits of his powers or does he still have something up his sleeve?’ he mused and silently observed the young man who was doing his best to stand up.

Simon struggled repeatedly to get up, just when he lifted himself up a little, he fell right back. Tens of times, hundreds of times whenever he musters a little bit of strength to get up, the aura bearing down on him made him fall on his knees right after.

Simon did not know how many times he had repeated this action, but by now his muscles and every part of his body was screaming in pain. Trying to tell him to stop and do them a favour.

Even his thoughts were starting to lean towards giving up ‘That’s right just give up. There is no way you can complete the ten steps if you are this exhausted after taking only four steps’.

‘Haha, you are at the end just a Demon Viscount. There is no way you can endure the aura anymore. Just give up!’

‘Give up!’ Give up!’ Give up!’ Give up!’... the words starting to coagulate and become his inner thoughts.

“Yeah, I have done plenty. Now I can give up without...” just when those thoughts were starting to overwhelm him, memories from his past life came flooding him. His unfulfilled wish and his untimely demise. If he gave up now, everything that he worked hard for in this life, the convictions that he had made will be all over.

The scene changed and an azure blue silhouette came into his view. The figure was alluring and had a charm that could mesmerize every being of this world.

‘Irene? there is no way she would be here?’ he was correct that was all his imagination. ‘But why now of all times?’ as his thoughts churned, he suddenly remembered the resolve he made for himself. Back then looking at her fleeting image, didn’t he vow to himself to get stronger no matter how arduous it would be.

He wanted to reach the same realm as Irene and stand beside her. Even he did not realise but unknowingly at some point, it became one of his goals. Giving up like this wasn’t like him.

Even during his previous life, he had suffered many setbacks and had even thought about giving up. However, he held on until the moment he died in his previous life. At this moment, he felt like if he gave up now, then everything that he struggled for all the convictions that he made previously will become nought.

If he gave up now, his determination to get stronger will falter and he might not reach the level he thought he would one day.

“No that not right. I’m afraid! Afraid of losing Cecilia who I took as my little sister here. Afraid of going alone to the dungeon. Afraid of meeting the questions that Irene would ask if I come back without Cecilia”.

Simon finally knew why his heart was beating so fast, he finally had answers to his question. So it turned out that he did have a reason to not give up. Then what the hell was he doing grovelling at the floor looking so helpless and pathetic.

He turned to look towards Cecilia whose face was masked with tears and anxiousness. Simon shook his head and muttered ‘I really fail as a big brother to make her worry over me like that’.

A brilliant light flashed in his crimson eyes and his muddled mind suddenly became clear. Six more steps... a smile that could only be described as wicked, crept up to his face.

“Haaaaaaaahhhh” with a hoarse roar, he lifted his spirit and discarded all negative thoughts.

[Body Enhancement], [Super Strength], [Super Agility], [Super Endurance], [Super Magic], [Super Defence] activating all the skills that increased his stats for a short period of time, he stood back up.

However, unlike those previous times, his body did not falter and even the trembling of his muscles due to the pressure he was under, completely stopped. Though he stood tall and unmoving it did not mean that his muscles weren’t screaming in pain. On the contrary, after activating all those skills the pain his body had to endure increased even further.

A body of a demon viscount wasn’t strong enough to use multiple skills at once. He could only keep them activated for a short duration of time. After that time limit ends, his body is sure to break down under the internal and external pressure.

But Simon was alright with it. He needed the boost from the skills to keep on going. Although he could only keep them activated for a short period of time, that was enough. He has to... No, he will complete the ten steps before the skill ends.

“Wha...” both Aldebaran and Fennel were stunned to see Simon standing back up again. Until only a few moments ago, he struggled to get up. However, a few seconds later he stood tall and unmoving like a mountain.

They were shocked to say no less and were thinking that the young man would soon realise his limits and give up. Nor Aldebaran neither Fennel had predicted this turn of event.

But this was just the beginning, the next thing that Simon did, made them absolutely gobsmacked. “Amalgamation magic, Flame-Gale Mastery [Blazing Hell]”... BOOOOOM.

Chapter 157: The Onerous Ten Steps (3)

“Amalgamation magic, Flame-Gale Mastery [Blazing Hell]”... BOOOOOM.

TREMBLE... the ground shook as a blazing heat raced across the surroundings burning anything and everything. The heat was incomparable to the previous flames that Simon had dished out and was even able to gouge out large rubbles of earth from beneath him.

That was not all, the amalgamation magic of Flame and Gale, travelled at an insane speed and instantly covered hundreds of meters of land, scorching them black. The damage output of the attack was on a completely different realm because of the multitudes of skills he had activated earlier.

His power had spiked up a lot but Simon was aware that it was only temporary. After the skill ended, he won't be able to even move his body much less complete all the tens steps. That was why he had to hurry.

BANG... His foot landed making a deep indent on the ground. The Fifth Step.

Right after taking another step, the aura pressuring down on him intensified by another tenfold that nearly made him bend his body and fall to his knees. The veins on his forehead spasmed and he hurriedly circulated the mana all around his body.

CREAK... a cracking noise came from within his body that indicated that one of his bones had succumbed under the pressure and cracked. An incredible amount of pain assaulted his senses and even his vision blurred for a moment.

However, Simon did not pay it any mind and swiftly straightened his body. All the while, the smile still did not leave his face. Why was he smiling? That was of course because of Cecilia. That crybaby would burst her dam the moment he displayed a pained expression.

In his previous life, he had severed all his relationships with his family and had led a lonely life. It was exactly because he had previously led that kind of life, that he realised how precious and important the thing he discarded was.

Now that he was reincarnated in this world, he had finally recognized someone as his family member. Simon did not want to make her worry and that was why he was smiling to reassure her and tell her that he can do this.

"How can that be? He was able to take the fifth step!!... It seems like I had underestimated the young man. He still had a few tricks up his sleeves. Interesting, let me witness how far you can go young man" Aldebaran said with astonishment.

How many years or millennia had it been since he was this excited by something. At this moment, he had already forgotten the reason behind why he set the trail. He just wanted to see how far the young man who had previously proclaimed that he would be able to break the restraints placed on him by the world, would go.

A part of him was burning with excitement to find a rare genius in him.

‘If you can really do what you said and reach the pinnacle of this world, then letting the Forest Spring Spirits stay in your dungeon wouldn’t be impossible’ Aldebaran thought. However, he soon realised that it would be impossible for Simon to take the Tenth Step since even a newly ascended Demon Earl wouldn’t be able to handle it much less a Demon viscount.

Even if he liked and was impressed by the young man, Aldebaran wouldn’t deliberately make the trail easier as that would be going against his principles and would also put his master in danger.

Even if he had to be cruel, he wouldn’t allow the Forest Spirit clan and Cecilia to reside inside a newly emerged dungeon.

On the other hand, Cecilia looked on with tear-stained eyes at her big brother, who was giving his best. Clenching her hands, she stopped her crying and looked at Simon and decided to trust in his abilities.

She did not know where it stemmed from but she had absolute belief and confidence in him. Although they were from a different race and were not related by blood, for some reason she felt very close to him. So how can she cry when her big brother was doing his best, even the smile that he put on his face while enduring that unimaginable amount of pressure was to relieve her of her anxiousness.

If she cried even after that, wouldn’t she be mocked by him as a crybaby once again?

While everyone was busy observing Simon, with another explosion that sent a tremor through the ground he took his sixth step. That attack that was set off by Simon was enough to crack and break apart the surrounding land which was hundreds of times sturdier.

One could imagine the amount of damage that Simon had received in return from his reckless and idiosyncratic methods.

At this moment, most of his clothes were burned and the pale white skin around his hands and legs were scorched black from which blood continuously trickled down. It was not only his arms and legs but his entire body had turned red from burns and cuts.

Simon's clothes had been dyed a shade of red from the excess amount of blood they absorbed. However, even after injuring himself to this point, that smile of his refused to fade from his face.

His mind had become numb and his ears were continuously ringing. Everything disappeared from his line of view and the only thing that accompanied him was his ragged breathing.

Right after taking the sixth step, the pressure intensified by another ten times and had brought one of his knees to the ground. His other leg that supported him, was shaking continuously and he could hear the creaking noises from it. He was aware that he had already exhausted his body by far too much and even the MP he had, was being expended at a rapid rate.

Nevertheless, he couldn't stop now. Now when he only had four more steps to tread. His sight was focused on the path ahead and the resoluteness in his eyes displayed his immense willpower.

With a jolt, he moved his immobile body and placed his charred hands on the ground before smiling like a mad man. His crimson eyes did not contain any pain but instead had a weird excitement that grew even more intense with every step.

At this moment, Simon looked very much like his race. A wide pair of bat-like wings that looked domineering, protruded from his back and unfolded in front of everyone.

Three meters wide bat-like wings extended from his back and appeared in front of everyone observing.

Even with all the stats enhancing skills activated, it was becoming incredibly difficult for him to stand back up. His muscles were having internal bleeding and many of his bones were starting to crack.

He felt like a statue that was made of clay unable to move. If he did move, he would crumble apart. However, that wasn't enough to stop Simon. His eyes had an intense fervour that was only looking towards victory.

Spreading his wide wings that were starting to bend from the pressure, he placed his charred hand on the ground and roared “Haaaaaaaahhhh”.

His mana churned at a rapid speed before the magic was released out of his hands. BOOOM... All the other sounds was drowned by the explosion and a large amount of flames accompanied by rippling gales wreaked havoc around the surrounding.

The land that was supposed to be hundreds of times sturdier, was now full of small potholes and cracks.

PSSHH... as if a vein had been burst open, blood spurted out his charred hands as the recoil from releasing the magic directly onto the ground, was far too much for the current Simon to handle.

Nonetheless, Simon was not bothered by the pain as he had accomplished his goal of standing back up. His whole body was trembling from the pressure that was heavier than a ten thousand meters tall mountain. His eyes were starting to grow dim and hazy intermittently.

But Simon gritted his teeth and endured it all. Aligning his trembling and charred hands towards the ground once again, he fired another round of Amalgamation magic that was strong enough to even burst apart the surrounding land.

BOOOM...PSSHH... blood sprayed like a fountain from his arms that was quickly turning a shade of black and blue.

Aldebaran was astonished to his very core. He had never met a person as determined and strong-willed as Simon. The young man which he thought wouldn't even be able to go beyond the third step was able to reach the sixth step right before his eyes.

No... that's not right, the person had taken yet another step forward which marked his Seventh Step.

“How can that be? Isn't he just a normal Demon Viscount?” the Ancient Titan Tree couldn't understand how Simon managed to accomplish that. The man had gone far beyond the strength of what his rank would allow.

At this moment, for the first time in his long years of life, he felt that he couldn't see through Simon. The young man in front of him had flipped his thinking upside down. Just taking the

Seventh Step under his aura which kept intensifying manifold, was worthy enough to be regarded as an above-average genius.

Aldebaran had to admit with that ability and determination, Simon might be able to break past some of the barriers that would arise due to his impure bloodline. And might be able to reach a rank or two above what he predicted, but that was all.

Even if Simon reaches the rank of Demon Marquess one day thanks to his relentless willpower and determination, it wasn't enough to protect the Forest Spring Spirits much less Cecilia who was a Forest Spring Royal Spirit.

Chapter 158: The Onerous Ten Steps (4)

'Once her memories awaken, her abilities will start to unlock too. At that time, her aura will be released for hundreds of miles. Those strong demons and angels nearby will be able to instantly sense her. However, if her aura goes berserk due to her awakening then even those people might be able to sense her. At that time even I won't be able to protect her'.

Aldebaran sighed as he remembered those scenes from the past. Observing Simon, for some reason he didn't know why but he felt like the young man in front of him resembled that person.

"If you can really prove that you have the ability to shake this whole world, then it would be best that master stays with you" Aldebaran muttered with expectations flashing in his emerald green eyes.

He would be lying if he said that his hopes weren't ignited after seeing the intense determination of Simon to pass the trial. In some corner of his heart, Aldebaran wanted the young man to win and prove himself wrong.

However, he knew about the trial more than anyone; after all, he was the one who set it. And far as he could see, no matter what tricks or techniques Simon used, he wouldn't be able to take the last Tenth Step.

Cecilia who saw Simon fall down and bend till his nose touched the ground after the Seventh Step, couldn't help but tightly clench her snow-white hands. At this moment, his body was burned everywhere and blood-drenched his figure red. His majestic wings that looked so grand and mighty was bent in an unnatural way and bones could be seen coming out of them.

Seeing his ragged and beaten figure, Cecilia's face became pale and tears threatened to fall out of her eyes. However, she held onto her tears and observed Simon. She did not want her big brother to

worry for her anymore and more than that, she wanted Simon to know that she had absolute belief and faith in him.

Fennel who was holding her hand tightly so that she wouldn't run towards Simon, finally released his grip. When he saw how anxious and worried Cecilia was for that young man, he couldn't help but pat her head consolingly.

"Grandpa Fennel will he be okay?" Cecilia asked biting her lips looking extremely concerned.

Fennel gave her a gentle smile and said "He will be alright. That man is someone destined for greatness. Even I am impressed by his incredible willpower and resoluteness to pass the trial even if it meant harming himself to this state in return. Cecilia, you have found an incredible big brother who is willing to go through so much for you".

Fennel closed his eyes and said. The next moment he opened them, it seemed that he had arrived at some conclusion.

"Huff... Huff" Simon couldn't hear anything other than his hurried breathing. His eyes were hazy and he could only see a few meters around him. Blood started to leak out from his nose and mouth and his whole face had become red.

At this moment, he was in so much pain that he could no longer feel any sensation from his body. It was almost like somebody had given him a dose of anaesthesia. Reality was trying to elude him and a dream-like state that could relieve him of all his pain and suffering was trying to overwhelm his mind.

Even he did not know how long his consciousness would last as he had already gone far beyond his limits. But he knew one thing and that was he was very close to passing the trial set by Aldebaran.

Three more steps, he only needed to tread three more steps. However, the last three were bound to be the most arduous ones. The power spike from activating all those skills was starting to diminish and would be gone soon.

Once the skills were disabled, the repercussions from activating all of them at once will come assaulting his already tattered body. At that time, it would become impossible for him to complete the last few steps.

Therefore he must finish the trial and finish it fast before that happens. He tried to circulate the mana inside his body but it felt sluggish and didn't respond to his commands well. His current state even failed to use magic and he couldn't even pick himself up.

Fixing his vision towards the front, a golden light started to flash within Simon's crimson eyes "I guess I have no choice but to use that. I don't know what might be the consequence of using it in my current state but I guess it would be better than losing Cecilia here".

Right after his words fell, the complicated runes like tatoos in his body started lighting up with a golden black lustre. From dim to bright before igniting.

The golden black tattoos on his body slowly started burning with a brilliant golden black light before swiftly disappearing into nothingness.

Simon was forced to use his trump card [Ancestral Symbol Ignition].

As soon as those markings in Simon's body ignited with a golden black radiance, Aldebaran widened his eyes in shock. His humanoid body made of coiling roots, shuddered intensely as if he had received the greatest shock of his life and he went into a stupor for a long time.

Previously, he didn't pay much attention to the markings on the young man's body since it was partially covered by clothes. But now that most of the clothes in Simon's body was burned and became tattered rags, he could clearly see the ancient markings on him.

"Aren't those Ancestral Symbols? T-That's impossible. How can it appear on him? Isn't he just a Demon Viscount".

As Aldebaran stared at those markings, they suddenly started to ignite with a golden black radiance.

"I am not mistaken, it actually is the skill Ancestral Symbol Ignition!! That brat had this skill? But how can it be... one needed to possess Ancestral Symbol to ignite them. Does that mean that those markings on his body were Ancestral Symbol?".

He couldn't believe his eyes no matter how many times he stared at Simon. If his eyes weren't deceiving him, then those markings were genuine Ancestral Symbols.

What was an Ancestral Symbol? These were ancient markings possessed by only the holders of the Seven fragments. In other words, only those demons that are chosen by the fragments to be the next demon lord, can have those markings on their body.

Simon possessing one... what did it mean? Didn't it indicate that he was chosen by one of the fragments? Of course, Aldebaran would be stunned beyond belief.

He remembered his lord once telling him that the Fragments are highly intelligent and choose its own master and only those demons that have the potential to reach the pinnacle of this world, are chosen by the fragments.

The young man being chosen by one meant that he had the possibility of becoming one of the pinnacle powerhouse of this world, a Demon Lord.

But Simon was just a Demon Viscount whose bloodline wasn't even that pure. Even with his incredible willpower and determination, the peak he would be able to reach was just a Demon Marquess.

Suddenly Aldebaran remembered those words that Simon had declared earlier. He couldn't help the wildly rising excitement in his heart to see the true limit of the young man in front of him.

Aldebaran who had thought that the trial would be impossible for Simon, at this moment started to believe that young man might be able to clear it.

Simon who was forced to kneel by the aura bearing down on him finally used the skill [Ancestral Symbol Ignition] that he only used once ever since reincarnating into this world. The last time he used it was when he was just a Demon Baron and was surrounded by a pack of Direwolves. At that time, after massively boosting each of his stats for a short period of time, it disappeared after leaving his body exhausted and unable to move.

The skill [Ancestral Symbol Ignition] temporarily fuses all the skills the user has, leaving them unable to use any skill after the duration ends. It not only leaves him unable to use any skill but also puts a heavy burden on his body.

Simon had previously activated all those stats enhancement skills at once that put a toll on his body along with the aura that was pressuring him, his body was strained and could crumble at any moment.

He did not know what the consequences would be after this but at this moment, he needed strength to overcome the obstacle in front of him. He did not have the time and strength to think about the repercussion after.

As soon as those markings on his body ignited, he could feel a flood of strength rushing through his body. And the pressuring bearing down on him lessened by lot. Gathering his strength, Simon got back up and used another blast of magic to take the Eighth step.

As Simon had predicted, the last three steps were the most challenging.

BANG... just as he took the eight-step, Simon felt as if he was hit by a huge tidal that instantly swept his body away. His mind became blank and he lost vision for an instant. The pressure bearing down on could no longer be explained with words.

Using one skill on top of another put an immense toll on his body and his bodily function was steadily deteriorating. It was to the point where Simon was finding it difficult to breathe. His entire body was burned with cuts all over and he was having severe internal bleeding. If it was any other Demon Viscount receiving this magnitude of injuries they would have already died or become unconscious.

Chapter 159: Mysterious Space

BANG... just as he took the eight-step, Simon felt as if he was hit by a huge tidal that instantly swept his body away. His mind became blank and he lost vision for an instant. The pressure bearing down on could no longer be explained with words.

Simon's breathing was hurried and his vision was so blurry that he couldn't even see a few meters near him. His balance was unstable and it seemed that he could fall down any moment. Simon bit his lips and tasted some of his blood to remain conscious.

Maybe he was hallucinating or because of his exhausted mind, but he could see huge chains that looked extremely heavy, binding his arms and legs. These heavy chains were connected to a huge boulder that was as big as a mountain, impossible to budge.

Even if he tried moving his body, the boulder behind him wouldn't even move a bit. Circulating the immense amount of energy that he got after igniting his ancestral symbol, Simon released continuous magic towards the ground to use their recoil as propulsion to move forward.

But when he looked back, the huge boulder that the chains binding him were connected to only made a small clanking noise. SNAP... the muscles in his right arm snapped and the veins burst open.

However, Simon did not pay any attention to it and kept on firing magic. SNAP... this time the muscles in his left arm snapped making it very difficult for Simon to move them."Gugghh" Puking out a mouthful of blood, some clarity returned to his otherwise blurry vision.

His body faltered and he was just about to fall when his wings which were bent unnaturally, flapped once to stabilise his balance. CRACK... under the pressure of the Eight-step, even flapping once broke most of the bones of his wings. An intense amount of pain should have assaulted him, but his senses had become so numb and dull that he couldn't feel a thing.

DRIP... DRIP... Blood trickled down his body and fell on the ground dying it red. His chest fell up and down, but he still felt suffocated and out of breath.

Simon turned his head towards Cecilia who was watching him from a distance. Due to losing so much blood, he was unable to see her figure clearly, but he knew she might be crying her dam out looking at his figure.

He remembered when he brought her unconscious and injured body to his dungeon. Her crystal-like eyes were dead back then unlike her current clear and bright eyes. At that time even he didn't know that he would take her as his little sister.

Her concern and worry for him were heartfelt and before he knew it, he had started caring for her as his own little sister. She who couldn't even see a slight bit of injury on him would be worried sick looking at him now.

Previously he had promised her that he would make his dungeon so that she could live there peacefully and without any worry. Although he did not want to make her concerned over him, he had no choice. To prove the worth of his words and more so to show that he had the strength to protect Cecilia and her clan, he has to push his body beyond their limits.

He can't afford to be stalled here by a mere trial. He would complete it and win the trust of the Forest spirit clan and bring them into his dungeon.

“I will not be stopped here. Come to me... Crimson Blazing Flame Sword” a completely crimson-coloured sword as if tearing through space, appeared in his hands. The moment he held onto it a powerful flow of mana like lava circulated inside his body and strengthened him even further.

The sword bestows an additional 600 points to all the stats and +1000 to magic. Combined with the effect of the skill [Ancestral Symbol Ignition], the level of power he could display was beyond his rank.

Gritting his teeth, he moved his right leg forward. He could feel that the imaginary chains that were binding him to a boulder as big as a mountain, finally moving a little.

BANG... the ground cracked and a deep footprint was carved onto the ground that marked his ninth step.

The moment, the crimson sword appeared on Simon’s hand Aldebaran was stunned. No matter how he looked at it, it didn’t appear to be an ordinary sword that should be in the hands of a Demon Viscount. This goes to say that the sword in the young man’s hand was quite a high tier one possibly higher than a [B] tier.

Although he found it odd but compared to the shock he got from the symbols on Simon’s body, it was nothing.

“Possessor of a fragment, High tier weapon, his unyielding determination along with his amiable nature...” Aldebaran observed Simon and nodded his head approval.

“My time is limited... it just so happens that I can see the rise of a genius today. Show me young man... prove it to me that you have what it takes to tackle the world and surmount every obstacles”.

Cecilia whose eyes had become completely red, clenched her hands tightly in prayer as she anxiously looked towards Simon treading one step after another.

[TEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE] a continuous ringing sound echoed in his head and his vision started to become all white. The duration of the skills that have been boosting his powers was finally over and an extreme amount of exhaustion hit his body.

Crack...

his right thigh bone cracked under the pressure and his whole body came smashing down on the ground. “Huff... Huff” his breathing slowing down and his eyelids shut closed.

His body didn’t feel like his own and an overwhelming drowsiness assaulted all his senses. Right after he took the ninth step, the pressure intensified hundreds of times and even breathing under it was a difficulty.

His eyelids felt heavier by the moment before they completely shut closed. The pressure emitted by the aura was beyond what a Demon Viscount could endure.

“Huff... Huff” as he listened to his hoarse breathing, Cecilia voice intermittently rang in his head. “bi....ther... get... brot... up” However, due to the ringing sound in his head, her voice sounded incoherent. He knew that she was worried sick after seeing him fall down onto the ground just before the last step. He knew that he had to keep on going, but his body refused to budge even an inch.

His body which was exhausted past its limits felt foreign and immovable. Just when he was about to succumb and doze off, Scenes from the past flashed in his head.

“Master is a bit... you can call me big brother if you want. That way as your big brother, it would naturally be my duty to protect you”

“Ehhhhh? What’s wrong... you don’t want to call me big brother? T-then you can call me anything you want”

“Un-uh... It’s not like that big brother... it’s just that big brother is so nice to me”

Simon laughed and patted her head. As those scenes replayed in his head, Simon willed the last of his consciousness to move.

“I can’t go down like this... at the very least I must take the last step” gaining a bit of momentary clarity, Simon circulated all his powers in a last-ditch effort.

[TEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE] that was when the ringing noise in his head sharpened as if trying to split his head apart. This kind of pain is different from the physical pain he experienced earlier and was many times more painful.

“Ahhhhhhhhh” Simon howled miserably as he clutched his head. “Stop... go away... ahhh” regardless of what he did, the pain did not soothe before everything blanked out and Simon fell into a dream-like state.

In this state, Simon was neither conscious nor unconscious. Just like an observer who could only gaze from the sidelines, he too was powerless to do anything.

“So I lost huh...” he felt empty and disappointed in himself who couldn’t do anything but boast to others. What peak level existence? What big brother? I can’t even complete the trial set for me, how can I protect others? Hehahaha... Simon laughed like a maniac for a while before snapping at the ringing sound that rang out even after he passed out.

Suddenly, “wait a minute... why am I experiencing the same buzzing sound even in my dreams? Does that mean that I haven’t passed out yet? Then what is this place?”.

Simon looked around at the endless white space that he suddenly found himself in. The place was completely white and had nothing in it. Its boundary couldn’t be seen with just a glance and other than him, there was nothing in this vast space.

“Where am I?” the peculiarity of the event was out of his understanding. He who should have fainted by now, suddenly found himself in this vast white space of infinite nothingness.

Unfortunately, there was no one to answer his question. Looking at his surrounding for a while, Simon fell in silence. He contemplated about all the strange events that had occurred till he ended up here.

First of all, that continuous ringing sound that suddenly sharpened and gave him a serious headache, must be related to this.

Secondly, the sound was still ringing even after he reached this mysterious space.

Thirdly, Simon vaguely felt that he was not fully unconscious yet. And the last of all... there was something here in this infinite white space that was calling out to him. It might be him jumping too soon to a conclusion but Simon was sure that the ringing sound was the one that called him here.

Chapter 160: Mysterious Space (2)

“Why did you call me here? What do you need from me?... I know it was you who called me here, who are you?” His voice echoes out everywhere and just like before, there was complete silence.

Nobody answered his question and just when Simon was starting to think that this was all just a dream, the ringing sound in his head stopped before sounding out once again.

The noise was intermittent and was not as sharp as before. It was as if the noise was trying to tell him something but unfortunately, he did not speak the language of [TEEEEEEE]. There was little to nothing he could understand from it.

Simon could only try and guess what its intentions were for trying to call him here.

“Do you need something from me?” He asked and the answer he got was yet another [TEEEEE]. Taking that as a yes, he asked another question

“Were you the one who called me here?”.

[TEEEE]...

“I see” It was quite a peculiar scene seeing Simon converse with a sound that was as monotonous as ever. But what was more astounding was that he was having a decent conversation with it. One might even wonder if Simon really did speak the language of [TEEEEEEE].

“So you are telling that you were the one who brought me here?... So that’s how it is. Huh! Go forward? Is there something there?”.

Simon started walking as per the request of the sound. After what felt like a long while, Simon arrived near a place that was shrouded in a mysterious light. He couldn’t make out the object that was there nor its shape.

But what he was sure about was that it was no ordinary object.

Ba-dump... Ba-dump... Ba-dump... the object pulsed as if alive and it was emitting an energy so pure that Simon had never felt something like that. The object was shining with a dull golden light that was so hot that it felt just like the core of the sun. the heat was so great that Simon felt that his body would melt if he approached any closer.

The moment he saw the object at the centre of this mysterious white space, for some reason the heart in his chest, started pounding at an insane rate.

Simon did not know why but for some unknown reason, the object felt very familiar to him. Even though he had never seen this object before now. It was also at this moment, the ringing noise in his head disappeared.

Simon did not know why that noise wanted to show him something like that nor did he knew its intention for bringing him here.

“What is that thing?” pointing at the object, he asked. However, unlike before there was no longer any sound in his head that was trying to communicate with him. He tried to call it a few more times but to no avail.

It was as if right after arriving in this place, that ringing noise mysteriously disappeared. Now left all alone, he did not know what to do, neither did he did not know how to get out of this peculiar space.

Simon couldn't help but worry about what might be happening outside at this moment while he was still stuck here. Would they think that he had failed right before completing the last step? Or was the trial still going on? He did not know how long had passed since he came to this mysterious space, but according to his estimates, more than three days might have passed since he was stuck here.

During these three days, all the injuries on his body had healed and he was back to his peak form. Although it was just his astral body that was here. His physical body was still out there. Three days was a long time, by now even if he was unresigned to lose in such a way, he had no other choice.

The trial set by Aldebaran would have been long over by now.

“Dammit... Just one step. If only I was not stuck in this goddamn place I would have willed all of my power to finish the last step even if I had to break every bone in my body in the process” Simon lamented. “Will I be going back to my dungeon without bringing Cecilia with me? Damn... if only I had enough strength... damn... damn...”

He punched at the space below but his power wasn't even able to create a single ripple. The space here was even more profound and mysterious than the land near the Ancient Titan Treant. Without enough strength, he can't even get out of here.

Strength... Strength... Strength, if only he had strength, then all this would have not happened. Just as he was getting more and more frustrated, the dull golden light coming from the object at the centre of the white space, shined upon him.

His whole body felt as if he was bathing in an energy so pure that every pore in his body rejoiced in excitement. Just as he was rejoicing in this feeling, the mysterious white space disappeared and his senses returned to his body.

Right after Simon fell down and lost his consciousness, Aldebaran and Fennel who were observing him with their taut gazes sighed in regret.

He was so close to victory, if only Simon could take another step, he would have won the wager between him and Aldebaran. But it seemed that taking the tenth step was asking far too much from someone of his level.

Aldebaran felt a pang of guilt seeing that the man had succumbed under the pressure of the tenth step. He had finally found a genius that had been chosen by one of the fragments plus with a character like that his future potential was unlimited.

He regretted his choice of setting the trial so that even a peak rank Demon Earl would have difficulty taking the last step. Truth be told, Aldebaran quite liked the character of Simon after the repeated display of his incredible willpower and determination. Along with the fact that his master the current reincarnation of Forest Spring Royal Spirit was the one who chose Simon, there was no way his nature would be evil.

Seeing that Simon was not waking up even after five whole minutes have passed, Aldebaran wondered if he should have relented when the young man was being so resolute about protecting Cecilia and the forest Spring Spirit clan.

Cecilia's tears finally burst out of her dam after she saw that her big brother's body became unmoving after the ninth step.

"Just one more step... big brother you can do it" she desperately prayed. But no matter how long she prayed, Simon body that had fallen unconscious, refused to wake up. She saw how badly hurt

his body was and couldn't help but get out of the barrier erected by Aldebaran and dash towards Simon.

He was hurt once again because of her. As these thoughts ran inside her head, she couldn't help but blame herself once again. Due to her lacking strength, it was always her big brother that got hurt because of it.

She had enough of watching Simon get hurt because of her. She wanted her powers to quickly awaken so that she could be of help to her brother instead of just observing from the sidelines. The seven-coloured tiny speckles of light surrounding her brightened a little as if following her wish.

The minute changes was so inconspicuous that it went unnoticed, even from the Ancient Titan Tree.

Just as Cecilia was about to reach Simon's unconscious body, a wave of energy so pure that it even gave them chills, burst out of him. The magnitude and purity of the energy was so profound that it wasn't something a body of Demon viscount could hold.

The burst energy generated a great storm as thick dark clouds suddenly loomed over the sky.

"Not good," Aldebaran said as he hurriedly shielded Cecilia with his powers right before the storm hit her.

BOOOOM... dozens of kilometres of land instantly cracked. The land which was hundreds of times sturdier cracked from the energy which simply passed by, showcasing its immense might.

Aldebaran was trembling, the titanic body of the Ancient Titan Treant was trembling. He was not shocked by the might of the energy, but by its aura. After all, he was very familiar with the aura that burst out of Simon.

"How can this be?... No this is impossible, I must have sensed it wrongly. There is no way the fragment that chose this young man is the fragment of pride" Aldebaran exclaimed, his voice quivering.

He tried sensing the pure energy that burst out of the young man once again. But no matter how many times he repeated the process, there was no hiding the truth.

Aldebaran went silent as myriads of thoughts ran inside his head. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. He never expected the fragment that the young man possessed was actually the fragment of pride. The very same fragment which his lord used to possess and disappeared along with him.

In his thousands of years of life, Aldebaran had seen many demons possessing the fragments to become the next Demon Lord. He had seen the fragments changing owner when the previous one died.

But never from the ancient times was there a new holder of the pride fragment nor was there any news about it. That was until now. The young man in front of him definitely possessed the Fragment of Pride, he was not mistaken.