

D. of Pride 161

Chapter 161: The Tenth Step

The young man in front of him definitely possessed the Fragment of Pride, he was not mistaken. The aura that was coming out of him was exactly the same as the lord he used to serve, the primordial demon of pride, Samael.

But that was exactly why he was in a state of pure disbelief. He couldn't imagine the Fragment of Pride which had achieved an unimaginable rate of synchronicity with the primordial demon of pride and which refused to show up even when the other fragments were choosing new owners, suddenly acknowledging a new owner.

Just when the storm of thoughts was about to overwhelm him, from the corners of his eyes Aldebaran spotted Cecilia.

"Master..." Just then a thought struck him like a lightning from the ninth heavens. "Could it be... but there is no way... the existential core should have been..."

His turbulent thoughts didn't last long as he suddenly saw the young man whose body was severely injured and drained to the extreme, healing at a rapid speed from the golden light that was engulfing him.

WHOOOSH... It didn't take long and before Aldebaran's dumbfounded eyes, all the injuries in his body healed and Simon slowly got back up on his feet.

Looking all around him he saw that he was still in the same place where he fell unconscious. Was he here for three whole days?

Simon contemplated and found that everyone was still present here, there was no way the trial would continue even after three whole days had passed. So what did this mean? Was he mistaken about the passage of time inside that mysterious white space or was the law of time different in the white space than in the real world?

Simon did not have an answer but what he was aware of was that the trial was still going on. Another thing that amazed him was that his body had fully recovered from those terrible injuries he had suffered from the reckless use of his magic back then.

He remembered how his astral body healed in these past three days while he was trapped inside the mysterious white space. However, that was only his astral body, not his physical body.

“Was all this the doing of that mysterious space?” he pondered. The more Simon thought, the more puzzled he got. If all this was true then he had benefited immensely. Not only was his injuries fully healed, but even his mana was also back to its peak. Now he can focus on completing his trial once again without any worries.

The moment he got up, Cecilia who was being protected within a field of energy brought her hands to her mouth and gasped. Her eyes were so excited that she even forgot all the worry and unease that she had a few moments ago.

“Big brother!!” She shouted and tried to get out of the field of energy when she was stopped in her tracks by Simon.

Simon stared at her tear-stained eyes and a pang of guilt and remorse assaulted his heart. He sought strength so that he could protect the ones he held dear and survive in this world. But in his pursuit of power, he ended up making them worry over him.

Simon silently pledged that he would never make a shameful display of himself like that once again.

With his reinvigorated powers, Simon felt the pressure that was bearing down on him lessen. Although it was still suffocating and unbearable, the condition of his body was much better than before and he knew that he had a far better chance of passing the last step of the trial than before.

He picked the crimson sword in his hand which fell to the ground after he had fallen unconscious and felt the pressure on him reduce even further.

By now, even the buff from igniting his Ancestral Symbol was gone and he had no other trump cards remaining. But that wasn't enough to discourage Simon, on the contrary, blazing flames of determination burned in his eyes as he set his sights on the last step.

Treading the tenth step was more difficult than the other steps combined. Even lifting his foot by an inch was insanely difficult.

Simon smiled, he knew that after he took the last step, he would have won the wager he made with Aldebaran. Not only that, the trial itself helped him solidify his determination and reignited his conviction to get strong once again.

His body oozed with a newfound confidence that wouldn't dampen even if he was faced with a difficult obstacle such as this one in the future.

"You have my thanks... the trial will help me reach new heights" Simon slowly muttered and closed his eyes.

Swiftly, everything around him surrounding disappeared and even their presence and aura was completely gone. He had reached a focused state where all the unnecessary things from his mind vanished and the only thing that was remaining was the remnants of the pure energy that he had felt back inside the white space.

Concentrating on that energy, he circulated it all around his body and at that moment the pressure bearing down on him completely disappeared and he trod the last Tenth Step.

Right after he took the last step, Simon turned around and looked towards Aldebaran and said "Lord Alder... I have completed the trial you set for me. Do I have the qualification to protect the Forest Spring Spirit clan now?"

His words like a clear bell rang out across the area. Fennel who was observing the whole event from start to finish, couldn't help but nod his head in appreciation. There was a smile hanging on his face as he looked at Simon pleased with his character.

"Being protected and regarded so highly by a person such as him, is a blessing for my entire clan. It seems that this old one has to do some work and convince the others to go along with him inside his dungeon".

Fennel tapped his aching back as he turned around and silently left.

Cecilia who couldn't hold her joy, rushed towards him and carefully inspected his body. Seeing that there were no injuries on Simon, she hugged him tightly.

“Big brother... you did it, you finally completed the trial. Hehe, I knew it... big brother can do anything once he sets his sights on it... uwuh... I’m truly glad you aren’t hurt” she started sobbing midway.

Simon quietly patted her and before long she stopped crying and was back to her confident self. She pointed towards Aldebaran said in an elated tone “Did you see that? My big brother has completed the trial you set for him. He has proved his ability and prowess”.

Aldebaran was still lost in his thoughts and was staring at Simon as if he had seen a ghost. This time he had clearly sensed the energy that was released out of Simon when he took the last step.

“There is no mistaking it. It is the power of the Fragment of Pride... did it return after being absent for thousands of years?” Aldebaran mused.

If he was not completely sure before, now after that energy was released from Simon one more time, he was absolutely sure that the Fragment of Pride has appeared in this world once again.

“So the Fragment of pride has found a new owner” he sighed the moment the thought struck him.

A fragment choosing a new owner could mean only one thing and that was the previous owner of the fragment had died, leaving the fragment ownerless. Once the owner of the fragment dies, the fragment will automatically search for the next suitable individual worthy enough to become it’s master.

He looked towards Simon one last time before closing his eyes.

“Out of all the seven, only the existential core of the Fragment of Pride was broken. It appearing once again... is this the choice you made lord Samael? If so then as your loyal servant, I shall see it through for as long as I live”.

Aldebaran nodded his head at Cecilia’s words before saying in a booming voice “Yes, he has indeed exceeded my expectation by far beyond and completed the trial I thought would be impossible for him. Young man, you have truly proven the words you have said to me earlier. Indeed with your potential, given enough time you would be able to reach the pinnacle of this world. Keeping in mind your talent, it is not impossible to accept your request of sending the Forest Spring Spirit clan to live in your dungeon”.

When she heard till here Cecilia immediately beamed in joy.

“Then let’s hurry up and go. I want to tell everyone that we are moving inside big brothers dungeon...”.

But before she could become anymore merry, Aldebaran’s ancient voice which carried an added depth of solemnity, rang out.

“However, the current you is still very weak. You who was able to barely cling onto life under the pressure of my aura. It was only due to the power hidden within you that you were able to complete my trial”.

“Boooo” Cecilia pouted her lips and tightly clung onto the clothes of Simon worried that Aldebaran might put him into another disadvantageous situation.

“What do you mean by that? My big brother has completed the trial fair and square. It is too late to go back on your words” She was angered the moment she felt that the Ancient Titan Treant was going back on his words.

Chapter 162: The Seven Year Agreement

No matter what she had already decided to follow her big brother back inside his dungeon. There was no way she is gonna listen to any more of Aldebaran’s selfishness.

Aldebaran on the other hand simply laughed at her childish antics. He had lived for thousands of years, his composure couldn’t be broken by some words of a child. Or else he would have lived all these years for vain.

Fixing his gaze on Simon, he stated “I know that you have unlimited potential and the level you would reach in the future would be even higher than mine. But to realise that, you still need time”.

“Right now you are just a hatchling of an eagle who has just broken out of his shell. There is no way you would be able to protect yourself much less her”.

He pointed towards Cecilia who was sticking close to him. Realising that Aldebaran was simply worried about the wellbeing of Cecilia and her clansmen, Simon spoke with an incomparable determination in his voice.

“I understand what Lord Alder is worried about. However, you can rest assured that I will not stop getting stronger and keep on increasing my strength until finally, I’m strong enough that nobody would dare to harm them”.

Aldebaran nodded and an aura so vast and ancient that it gave him the illusion of hundreds of mountains collapsing at once, descended onto the area.

Simon was stunned beyond belief and his whole body was stiff just like a statue. The pressure of the tenth step was nothing compared to the aura that had engulfed the area. He felt like a tiny boat in front of a huge tide that could capsize at any moment.

It was only now that he had realised that compared to now, Aldebaran had not even released a tiny percent of his aura during the trial. The difference in strength between them was too vast.

Simon was aware that Aldebaran was strong but he didn’t know that he would be this strong. Just his aura was strong and overwhelming enough to engulf the whole Ancient Treants Territory which spanned hundreds of miles.

Every treant that inhabited the area, bowed in deep reverence to this aura.

‘So this is the strength of one of the Seven Kings, the true rulers of the Ghastly Winding Forest’ Simon thought feeling the vast presence. The Ancient Titan Treant was already this strong, he couldn’t imagine how strong the other six kings were.

While Simon lost in his thoughts, Aldebaran spoke once again “Young man in regards to your unyielding willpower and determination, I’m willing to agree with your request. However, you must pass another of my trial”.

His tone was resolute and it seemed like he wouldn’t take no for an answer. Simon widened his eyes when he heard that Aldebaran was willing to accept his request of harbouring the Forest Spring Sprits inside his dungeon. But the next second he immediately frowned when he heard that the trial was not over yet.

Although he was composed, that wasn’t true for Cecilia who immediately flared in anger after she heard the shameless words of Aldebaran.

“Huh? How come he has to take another trial? He has already passed the trial you have set for him. Are you trying to go back on your words now that you have lost? Snort... Big brother doesn't need to bother with this shameless old tree anymore. He is unwilling to accept defeat and that's why he is trying to lure you into accepting another one of his nonsensical trials”.

Her words were sharp and didn't contain any mercy towards the Ancient Titan Treant. Aldebaran old face twitched a little, but he tried his best to maintain his usual composure.

Ahem... forcing an awkward cough, Simon lightly knocked on Cecilia's head. “Oww... big brother why did you hit me?” Cecilia complained.

“Be silent Cecilia. He is only thinking about the wellbeing of your clan and family. Don't be rude” Simon said calmly. Cecilia simply snorted and didn't bother to speak anymore.

Simon stared at Aldebaran for a while and deliberated over his words. He couldn't sense any ill intent from him nor was there any deception in his words.

Nodding his head, Simon asked “May I know what the second trial is? Lord Alder!”.

Aldebaran smiled, he knew that given the character of Simon, he wouldn't back down from achieving his goal. And he had seen that first hand during the trial.

“It is not a trial per se but an agreement between you and me of some sort. For your second trial, you must first subdue the three troublemakers of the north side of the forest within two year” Aldebaran said, musing a little.

Simon thought over it before nodding his head. He knew who Aldebaran meant by his words the three troublemakers of the north. Unwittingly, he remembered his previous shameful act of running away from the Earth Splitting Lower Dragon, one of the three overlords of the north.

At that time, he swore that he wouldn't take the humiliation lying down and would re-engage with his foe sooner or later. It just so happens that the goals Aldebaran set for him coincided with his own. There was no reason for Simon to deny him.

Nodding his head, he said “Alright, I agree to your trial. Within a year I will subdue all three of them. But I believe that there is more to lord Alder's trial than just subduing those three right?”.

Simon smiled as he looked towards Aldebaran. The way he phrased his words, Simon was sure that there were multiple phases to this trial and knowing the concern the Ancient Titan Treant had for Cecilia and her clan, there was no way the trial would be this simple.

Aware of what the young man was thinking, Aldebaran gave a loud laugh. His voice booming towards every corner.

“Young man, I am aware of the big goals you have set. Naturally, how can the trial be this easy? But you must not get careless. I have seen your fight with the Earth Splitting Lower Dargon previously. If you think its strength is the same as before then you are sorely mistaken”.

Simon felt his face heating up when he heard Aldebaran mention that. Him saying it like that was just giving Simon face. There was no fight when he met the Earth Splitting Lower Dragon. Far from it, he was forced to run away pathetically from the scene.

Of course, Simon was shocked that he was being monitored by Aldebaran all the while without even being aware. The distance between here and the northern region where one of the three overlords of the north lives was truly vast.

However, given the strength of Aldebaran, that might not be impossible. Although he was concerned about what Aldebaran said about the strength of the Earth Splitting Lower Dragon, it wasn't enough to cower him like before. He had grown mentally a lot by then and even his rank and prowess had increased.

‘The next time we fight, things would be different’ Simon resolutely said.

Seeing that the flames of determination were burning intensely in the young man's eyes, Aldebaran stated.

“Secondly, within the time span of Seven years, you must reach the rank of Demon Duke”.

Simon was surprised nonetheless, he nodded his head in agreement. Simon was already a Demon Viscount and Demon Duke was two ranks above him i.e. above Demon Earl and Demon Marquess.

Although reaching the ranks of a Demon Duke with the time limit of Seven years would be extremely challenging, a herculean task like this was what Simon needed to keep on moving forward. Though it was difficult, it was not impossible.

To keep his promise and more so to protect those close to him, he must go beyond his limits and attain strength to protect them as soon as possible.

Aldebaran silently observed the facial reactions of Simon and seeing that there was no hesitation and only pure determination to succeed, he couldn't help marvel at the young man once again.

“And Lastly within the allotted Seven years, you must become the ruler of the entire Ghastly Winding Forest... you must agree to these three conditions of mine”.

Aldebaran said in a solemn voice. He knew that he was asking for something incredibly unimaginable but precisely because he thought so highly of Simon's potential that Aldebaran believe that he could do it.

It may be impossible for other high ranking demons but Simon was not ordinary. He was the person that was chosen by the very same fragment that once belonged to his lord.

Ruling the Ghastly Winding Forest mean ruling over the Seven Kings. They were existence on his level and similarly ruled over their own territories. One could even say that they were the pinnacle existences in this forest. The task may be impossible for someone else but Aldebaran believed that it not so for the possessor of the fragment of pride

Simon was dumbfounded by Aldebaran's last condition. To subdue beings on the level of Ancient Titan Treant who view the three overlords of the north as nothing but troublemakers, was a monumental task to say no less.

If somebody else heard what Aldebaran had said, they would have a mental breakdown by now with how impossibly hard the task was. But Simon simply smiled.

‘It seems he had seen through my ambitions’ Simon mused, an intense flame to accept the challenge rose within his heart. Bringing them all under his rule within the stipulated Seven years would be an incredibly difficult task even for Simon.

‘It seems he had seen through my ambitions’ Simon mused, an intense flame to accept the challenge rose within his heart.

Bringing them all under his rule within the stipulated five years would be an incredibly difficult task even for Simon. However, even without the conditions that Aldebaran made, he already had plans to rule over the entire Ghastly Winding Forest and make it his territory.

Now though he just has to push his plans a couple of years forward. Anticipation was apparent in his crimson eyes as he made a wide demonic smile and met the gaze of Aldebaran.

On the contrary, when Cecilia heard the last condition that Aldebaran made, she couldn’t help but widen her eyes like saucers. It was clearly an impossible task no matter how she saw it.

From what her mother told her back in her village, these Seven Kings were incredibly towering existences that have survived the Second Apex War if not lived for thousands of years. And were beings that were on the same level as the ruler of the Ancient Treants. Aldebaran being one of them.

It was precisely because of their presence, that no empires dared to invade the forest. Just their title was enough to instil fear inside those leaders. To have her big brother subdue them within the time limit of just five years was insane.

No matter how she thought about it, Aldebaran was trying to give him an impossible task that could very possibly kill him. Of course, she was not going to stay quiet and let her brother be bullied.

But since she was told by Simon to remain quiet, she could no longer throw her tantrum. Tugging at his clothes, she looked at him with worry-filled eyes “Big brother... it is too dangerous...”.

Simon lightly patted her head and said comfortingly while looking ahead “I had already decided to make the entire Ghastly Winding Forest my territory. Even if I accept his conditions, it’s just a matter of putting my plans forward by a few years. Believe in me Cecilia, I’ll become strong enough to protect you all. And to realise that, I can’t back out now”.

Cecilia became silent, she could feel his intense emotions to get stronger and no matter what she said, it wouldn’t change his mind. She convinced herself to get stronger along with her big brother so that she could help him one day.

Seeing that his words had successfully persuaded her, Simon looked towards Aldebaran and nodded his head.

“Lord Alder, I accept the conditions of yours. I shall within the stipulated time limit of Seven years, rise to the rank of a Demon Duke and achieve strength strong enough to subdue the Seven Kings of the Ghastly Winding Forest”. His voice was clear and unfettered.

Aldebaran hearing Simon’s words, simply laughed in appreciation as he said “Young man, you can just call me Alder, you don’t need to add lord. But are you sure that you can achieve it? Subduing the Seven Kings means you also have to contest against me, the ruler of the Ancient Treants”.

The moment he said that the branches of the titanic treant swayed a little and a storm of wind like a gale, which had enough strength to clear the looming clouds above, was generated.

“Of course, I am looking forward to our next bout. At that time, our strength wouldn’t be this far apart” Simon said with a resolute voice.

“Hahahaha, marvellous... young man tell me your name. I hope that the next time we meet, you won’t disappoint me”.

Aldebaran said more and more impressed by the person chosen by the fragment of pride.

“I am Simon...” he said answering Aldebaran’s question.

“Hmm... very well, Simon from this moment on you are the friend of all the treants living inside the Ghastly Winding Forest and none of them will be hostile to you. You may come and go within the Ancient Treants territory freely. As for your request to move the Forest Spirits inside your dungeon, I approve of that too. However, it will depend on you to convince them to move into your dungeon. That is all, you both can return back” .

Aldebaran’s ancient voice boomed across the entire Ancient Treant territory and all the treants inhabiting the area bowed their heads in response. The orders from their ruler were absolute and nobody dared to go against them.

Aldebaran’s words solidified his position as a friend within the Ancient Treant territory and not only that, he may come and go inside it as he wished. What did it mean to freely pass through the Ancient Treant territory?

It meant that in future when he encounters any danger within the western region of the forest, he could quickly delve inside the Ancient Treant Territory.

“Thank you very much Alder” Simon bowed his head in thanks while Cecilia albeit a little unwilling, still chose to bow her head mimicking his action. They turned around and returned to the Forest Spring Village.

It was only after a while when Simon and Cecilia left the scene, thick thunder clouds blotted the sky. One could see red coloured lighting streaking across them with a might that could instantly obliterate everything.

A humanoid person with sharp amethyst eyes like that of an eagle holding a majestic violet coloured spire descended from the clouds. He had unkempt wild hair and a beak for a mouth. He had talons at the end of his legs so sharp that they had a glint that indicated they were no less sharp than an [A] tier weapon.

Splendid purple coloured falcon wings arced in lightning. The moment he descended, the mana in the surrounding went into a turmoil and a booming noise of thunder reverberated everywhere.

With a resounding RUMBLE...

the being looked towards the towering presence of the Ancient Titan Treant and laughed merrily.

“We haven’t met for a while Aldebaran. Won’t you come to greet this old friend?” the man said laughing haughtily.

To act so in front of the Ancient Titan Treant; obviously, the man had a standing not inferior to the other.

At this moment, the roots and twigs coiled around and the humanoid form of Aldebaran appeared in front of the man.

“King of the Wind-Lightning Draconic Falcon, Vesgard. Indeed it’s been a while. I assume you have been well” Aldebaran spoke as he measured the man in front of him.

The man was none other than one of the Seven kings of the Ghastly Winding Forest just like him.

The territory of Vesgard was far away from his own but to a being of his species, travelling thousands of miles in an hour, wasn't any big deal.

"Hahaha, It just so happens that I had some free time so I decided to visit an old friend. The forest is too silent and there had been no action going on for a while. Just staying holed up in my territory is too boring".

Vesgard said cosily as he brought out two bottles of wine from his ring and passed one to Aldebaran.

Aldebaran nonchalantly caught the bottle and sipped on it without standing on ceremony.

"Gulp... Gulp... Haa, an excellent wine. Where did you get your hands on these?" Aldebaran said delighted with its taste.

"Haha, I knew you would like it. A bunch of humans blinded by greed from the ancient rumours decided to sneak into my territory. Of course, they were all killed by my underlings. I found this wine in one of their inter-spatial rings. They had such a huge quantity, those people must have been quite the drunkard hahaha. If you like I can give you a few bottles more".

Vesgard said he drank a few mouthfuls from his bottle.

"Yeah, I appreciate it. But I guess you are not here to talk about such silly things over a bottle of wine are you?" Aldebaran asked as he quietly thought about the purpose behind Vesgard coming here.

"Of course, I am here to talk about that thing. Isn't it about time for you to open it. If we two can pair up, we would have a higher possibility of obtaining it compared to the other Seven Kings. What do you say?" .

Vesgard asked, excited by the possibility of obtaining that thing.

Aldebaran simply shook his head denied those words saying “No matter how many times you ask me, the answer would still remain the same. It is not time yet. If we open that thing now, its aura would leak out and even with the slight aura, those pinnacle existences would be able to sense it and break the space to jump here. At that time, even if we wanted to get a share of that, we wouldn’t even be entitled to a tiny portion of it”.

Vesgard looked unconvinced with this explanation. However, he did know the consequences of forcibly opening that thin was and since he couldn’t force the issue, he could only give up on and wait for when the time is ripe.

Sighing out loud, he looked towards Aldebaran and suddenly realised that he looked very happy.

Vesgard couldn’t help but ask “You seemed to be in good mood did something happened?”. Aldebaran simply laughed nor agreeing with his words neither denying it.

Vesgard scoffed, there was no way he would believe that nothing had happened. Aldebaran acting in that abstruse manner, only fueled his suspicions even more. Suddenly from the corner of his eyes, he spotted a small village not very far from here.

Beings of his race had superior eyesight and can even zoom on a tiny grain miles away. There was no way a village that near to the titanic body of the Ancient Titan Treant would be missed by him.

Chapter 164: New Subordinates

“Ohh! You seemed to have some guests over. Is that why you are in a good mood?”.

Vesgard asked as he spotted the village that the Forest Spirits recently made. Although he was a little amazed, it wasn’t an unusual thing to find a rare race or two deep inside the Ghastly Winding Forest.

“Haha, it as you say. There are some promising individuals amongst the guests that makes me want o look forward to their future growth”.

Aldebaran smiled as he remembered his conversation with Simon.

“Hohh!” Vesgard said immediately losing interest. He wasn’t bored enough yet to watch over the growth of someone else. Only a truly old man like the one in front of him would have the time in his hands to do something like that.

Although he was a little curious as to see who was this person that had caught the eye of one of the Seven Kings, he wouldn’t deliberately ask it himself if Aldebaran didn’t reveal it. The only thing he was interested in was to increase his own strength.

After reaching the realm he was in, every level forward would take many years unless he found some treasure that could immediately increase his level by a fewfold.

Aldebaran stared towards the distant village before gulping the contents of his bottle down and said to the person seated beside him.

“I believe it wouldn’t be long before we can open that thing”. As soon as those words came out of his mouth, Vesgard’s emotions were riled up. Truly the man wore his emotions on his face.

“Hehh! you must have some basis to say all that right?” Vesgard asked.

Aldebaran continued to look towards the forest spring spirit village and said with a mysterious smile “At that time there would be no need for us to team up; after all, we would be on the same side”.

Simon with Cecilia in tow walked back towards the village.

Cecilia was in a good mood as she tiptoed around and looked at Simon’s wide back and felt a sense of reliance and safety. Even she did not know why she believed in Simon that much. Just that whenever she looked at him, she could feel a sense of comfort wash over from deep within her.

And being a Forest Spring Royal Spirit, she could easily sense the evil within a person. For some reason, she felt safe whenever she was around him.

“Hehe” Cecilia smiled as she followed behind Simon.

Seeing that Cecilia was smiling over something, Simon became curious and asked “What is it that is making you so happy?”.

Cecilia smiled brightly and said “It’s nothing... I was just thinking that big brother and big sister Irene looks so good together”.

Simon stumbled and was about to fall face-first into the ground. He did not know what gave Cecilia such an impression. Ahem... forcing a cough, he increased his pace back towards the village.

“Ah big brother wait for me” Cecilia said as she hurried along. It didn’t take long for them to return back to the village and as soon as he entered it, Simon was amazed to see the people inside busy packing their things.

Everyone was scurrying around doing something to the point where none of them were standing around for long.

“W-what is going on?” He asked Cecilia beside him. But just like him, Cecilia was also out of clues regarding the actions of her clansmen.

At this moment, Fennel came out of one of the bamboo houses and immediately spotted them. He came near Simon and immediately bowed his head and said.

“Congratulations lord Simon for winning the trial. It was truly a magnificent scene to have witnessed it with my own eyes. I hope that from now on, lord Simon can take good care of us”.

His voice was respectful and the way he seemed to look at Simon, was clearly reverential.

Simon was stunned by the way the elder of the Forest Spring Spirit was addressing him. It was as if the old man already recognised him as his lord.

“What does elder Fennel means?” Simon asked glancing at the forest spring spirit who were bowing towards him as soon as they spotted him.

“Hoho, lord Simon does not have to be polite. You can just call me Fennel. As for the meaning, I believe it is as clear as the day. All of us here have been moved by your valiant and sincere actions. Not only are you our great benefactor, but you are even kind enough to bring us into your dungeon and protect us. Us Forest Spring Spirits cannot be anymore indebted to you and are willing to serve you as your subordinates”.

Fennel explained why these people were looking at him with such reverence in their eyes.

Simon was absolutely gobsmacked. While on their way, he was thinking of various ways as to how he would convince them. Never did he imagine that he wouldn't even have to expend his efforts trying to convince them as they had already taken him as their lord and were willing to come back with him to his dungeon.

“Truth be told, we were already deliberating over whether we should move into your dungeon as there is no future to the Forest Spring Spirit clan without the children. Once we learned that they were safely rescued and are inside your dungeon, I was thinking about when to bring this issue to you. I would have never guessed that lord Simon was already thinking the same thing”.

“We Forest Spring Spirits aren't good in combat but we can support lord Simon in various other ways and would be eternally loyal to you. Lord Simon can leave the management of the dungeon to us “. Fennel said trying to clear up the confusion Simon had on his face.

Simon looked at all the surviving members of the Forest Spring Spirits and each and every one of them was bowing towards him. Appreciation and reverence deep within their eyes.

“All of you please get up. I'm deeply thankful to you people to be willing to come to my dungeon. I shall promise you all, that once you become my subordinate, I shall not do you any unfair and protect you for as long as I live. I only hope that you all support me and help me manage my dungeon”.

Simon said matching the gazes of all the people that were staring at him. What he said was the truth and his sincerity was felt by the Forest Spring Spirits as they became excited and bowed their heads even deeper.

Fennel on the other hand smiled as he looked towards Cecilia who was grinning from ear to ear as if this was all her achievement. He now knew why Cecilia looked up to Simon since he himself couldn't help but admire the young man.

To have the protection of such a person who was destined to reach great heights was their fortune. This way, their entire clan would gain a strong protection and can peacefully live inside the dungeon. Giving their service in return, was just a trivial thing.

“Patriarch can you see this... it was your daughter who had found this person. She really is the hope of our clan” Fennel said as he looked towards the sky.

At this moment, the ancient voice of Aldebaran came from the distant and rang across the village.

“It seems I was worried for nothing. Young man, your charisma is strong enough to even charm the people from the Forest Spring Spirit clan. Hahaha, indeed I was not wrong you are quite the extraordinary fellow. I shall open a teleport near your dungeon. Consider this as my parting gift”.

Aldebaran said as a vast energy travelled through the earth and instantly crossed hundreds of miles of land. The energy that travelled through the ground felt quite similar to Cecilia’s.

However, unlike her the energy that Aldebaran released was far less pure and felt similar to the energy released by a Forest Spring Spirit clan member. The released energy from Aldebaran quickly travelled through the lands of Ghastly Winding Forest and soon located Simon’s dungeon.

The enormous energy that travelled through the ground quickly spotted Simon’s dungeon and just when it was about to probe inside, a repelling force so strong that it nearly made the energy disperse came from inside the dungeon.

“What?!” Aldebaran who felt his energy being repelled immediately became stunned. Who was he? He was one of the Treants that had survived through the Ancient Times and was one of the Seven Kings of the Ghastly Winding Forest. The level and power of his energy was unimaginable and wasn’t something that could be matched by anyone other than the seven kings from the forest.

“But the force that repelled my energy felt different than any of those six fellows that I am aware of” Aldebaran contemplated as he thought about the force that came out of the dungeon and repelled his probing attempts.

He looked towards the distant village of the Forest Spring Spirits and stared at the clueless face of Simon. Aldebaran had reached a level of power where he could see large distances that would be absolutely impossible for ordinary people, from a bird’s point of view.

“What could it be?... No, he is the new holder of the Fragment of Pride it would not be unusual to see strange things occurring around him and his dungeon” Aldebaran thought. He credited the peculiar force that came out of the dungeon to Simon’s fragment.

Chapter 165: New Floor: Forest Spring Spirit Village

“What could it be?... No, he is the new holder of the Fragment of Pride it would not be unusual to see strange things occurring around him and his dungeon” Aldebaran thought. He credited the peculiar force that came out of the dungeon to Simon’s fragment.

Although the force repelled his energy, strangely the force wasn’t strong enough to completely disperse it. His energy formed once again and created a teleport gate near the dungeon and connected it with the gate he created inside the village.

Simon was amazed to see a teleport gate being formed in front of his eyes. He wondered what level of mastery one needed over space magic to create a teleport gate like this. The gate formed was a revolving spiral that was as dark as the night.

The Gate formed was similar to the one that had formed inside his dungeon during the Walpurgis. Snapping out of his thoughts, Simon gave his thanks and immediately dived inside the gate along with the Forest Spring Spirits.

As soon as Simon entered the gate, dizziness assaulted his mind and the sense of gravity left him. After what felt like a few seconds, he was thrown out of the gate and his senses returned to normal.

It was not only him but all the people that had followed behind him experienced the same thing. Simon could never get used to this feeling. Strangely though when he looked towards Cecilia she appeared to be completely fine as if she was completely unaffected by the effects of the space magic.

Cecilia stared at the distinctive spiral tower ahead and said merrily towards her clansmen who were gawking from the change of scenery. One must know that these Forest Spring Spirits had led a secluded life deep inside the western region of the forest and had hardly wandered much distance from the village.

To them, the scenery of the eastern side of the forest was completely new as they curiously stared around. Due to Cecilia’s urging, they came out of their daze and fixed their gazes on the spiral tower that lay ahead.

The Spiral tower which stood above the dungeon was hundreds of meters tall with intrinsic patterns and carvings all around that made it quite distinctive in the area. Although the tower wasn't very domineering, it had a strange feeling that was quite hard to describe to it.

Fennel muttered, "So this is the dungeon of Lord Simon".

Cecilia answered him for Simon "Hehe, that's right this is big brother's dungeon and also our new home. But it's too early to get surprised... wait till you enter inside".

Fennel, Daphne and the others couldn't help but smile as they looked at the excited and beaming face of Cecilia. It seems that Cecilia was already accustomed to this place and had already started seeing it as her own home.

Simon silently opened [Dungeon] function of the [Main Menu] and swiftly transported all of them inside.

Inside the Main floor, Irene was accompanying the Forest Spring Spirit children as they took care of the Trees of Mana which had grown more than two hundred meters in size and started to display their abilities and gather mystical energy from the surroundings.

Suddenly Irene felt a minute spatial disturbance before a bunch of new presences entered inside. Irene wasn't surprised as she felt two familiar presence amongst them. There was no doubt, it was the group of Simon that had returned from the western region of the forest.

Irene smiled looking at the number of people that Simon had brought in. 'It seems that he was successful in winning them over' She thought as she looked at the dozen or so Forest Spring Spirits following behind Simon.

The moment Cecilia spotted Irene, she immediately ran towards her. "Big sister Irene..." Her sonorous voice sounded out as she immediately jumped into Irene's embrace.

After she had lost her father during their desperate efforts to escape, Irene and Simon became her moral support after they saved her. Unknowingly even to her, she became very attached to them.

Especially to Irene who took such good care of her and whose smile was just as beautiful as her mother.

The children who were helping to grow the tree of mana, saw Cecilia return and immediately ran towards her in excitement.

“Cecilia... you are back. What happened back there? Did you manage to find others on your trip?” Maya asked, expectations flashing in her eyes.

Cecilia held the nervous hands of her best friend and nodded in assurance “Un”.

She did not even have to say anything further as Maya’s eyes trembled and tears started to overflow out of them as she looked at the silhouette that were standing at the distance.

“Grandfather!!...” Her voice was quivering when she spotted her grandfather who she thought she would never get to meet in this lifetime, amidst the people. Similarly, Fennel’s whole body shuddered as if he was electrocuted, when he saw his granddaughter.

Fennel was the parental grandfather of Maya. It was during their escape towards the Ancient Treants territory that his son and daughter in law were killed while his granddaughter was captured.

Fennel did not know how many times he had cursed fate for keeping him alive. But now that he had seen Maya well and fine inside the dungeon, he couldn’t help but thank the heavens. He shed tears as he saw his granddaughter run towards him and he immediately hugged her.

A sense of relief washed over his body and tears started flowing from his eyes. It was not only them, similar scenes were happening all around them. Each of the children that Simon and Irene saved, was someone’s family, little brother or relative.

All of them shed tears as they hugged their dear one and rejoiced for their reunion once again.

Simon who was quietly watching the scene from the sidelines made a content face as he stared at the Forest Spring Spirits.

Suddenly out of the corner, Irene appeared beside him and said “You did a good thing by reuniting them”. Her tone appeared indifferent but Simon who was accustomed to her could sense a slight trace of delight in her voice.

“You did all that just so you could make me protect them right?” Simon asked as he stared at Irene’s pearly white face. Her crescent brows arched up a little but she still held onto her composure and remained silent.

Simon immediately took her silence as a yes and felt quite amused by her reaction. These past few weeks, he became more and more aware of Irene’s personality. Though she appeared to be cold and indifferent on the outside which pushed others miles away, that was only a façade.

Only those who truly knew her, would be able to tell that her personality wasn’t as cold as she seemed to display on the outside. Irene’s brows furrowed and her face heated up a little seeing that Simon was staring at her. Even she herself was amazed by her reaction.

Cecilia who was rather in a fantastic mood, came running to them smiling as she said “Big brother, big sister Irene... hehe, what are you guys talking about?”.

Quickly dispersing the thoughts in her head, Irene said while caressing Cecilia’s hair “Nothing much... we were just talking about some unrelated things”. She looked at the group of forest spring spirits who were hugging and consoling each other and asked “You don’t want to be a part of that group?”.

Cecilia simply shook her head and said “They found their family and relatives that they desperately sought the comfort of. I don’t want to disturb their moment. If I go now, they would focus all their attention on me. Simply watching from the sidelines is enough for me”.

Her eyes were melancholic as she stared at her clansmen who were rejoicing after finding one another.

Simon was amazed, he didn’t expect this level of mental maturity from a girl less than six years of age. Although she displayed a smiling front, internally he knew that Cecilia’s heart ached and yearned for her parents.

Irene saw the pain in her eyes and silently hugged her. This little girl for the sake of not destroying the happy moments of her clansmen was hiding all her pain.

Sniff...sniff... although she tried her best to act tough, Cecilia's eyes turned watery as soon as she was hugged by Irene.

Simon silently sighed and was about to leave the scene when Irene asked "What do you plan to do now that you have taken these Forest Spring Spirits as your subordinates?".

Her crystal blue eyes that seemed to hold the brilliance of the ocean, reflected his image.

"I am going to make a new floor for the Forest Spring Spirits to live in peacefully. They can build a new village there under the safety of my dungeon" Simon said and immediately teleported to a different floor.

The new floor that he created for the Forest Spring spirits was more than forty kilometres wide. Phosphorescence crystals protruding from the walls and ceiling lighted the area. The place was a forested area filled with greenery and looked similar to the Ancient Treant territory the forest Spring spirit used to live in.

Of course, the plants and trees in the area were just ordinary and nothing as mystical as the one he saw in the area inhabited by the Ancient Treants. But Simon was least worried about that as he had the best subordinates who could grow even the rarest of plants. He had even experienced that first hand when he went to their village that they built near the Ancient titan Treant.

Chapter 166: New Floor: Forest Spring Spirit Village (2)

All sorts of rare fruits and plants that he had never seen, and which had effects that could even be said as outright magical was presented to him.

One must know that Forest Spring Spirits that were living there were the escapees that had successfully managed to throw off their pursuers. The new settlement that they built there didn't even have the necessary resources to grow rare plants and herbs.

But they still managed to do all that with what little resources they brought with them while escaping. Simon couldn't even start to imagine the rarity of plants and herbs that they used to grow back in their village.

If he could provide the Forest Spring Spirits with seeds of rare plants and herbs, they would be able to grow them easily and without much effort.

Next, he purchased another pond of serenity and placed it at the northwest of the floor.

Staring at the pond of serenity, Simon fell into a deep contemplation. The original pond of serenity was supposed to look like this, clear blue and giving off a serene feeling that soothed one's heart.

The one that he had installed on his main floor behind his white palace had gone through mutation thanks to the slowly manifesting powers of Cecilia and completely became something else.

The purity and concentration of mystical energy inside the pond had reached such a level that even with his Demon Viscount body, he couldn't endure it for more than a minute. Just the sheer volume of mystical energy that the pond was oozing with was on a whole different level.

He could understand why Irene said that the pond of serenity became a great asset for him that could make him stronger. Just immersing himself inside the pond for a minute was enough to make Simon realise that his base MP (Magic Points) had risen by a lot.

If not for the intolerable pain, Simon would have dived inside the pond a little more. Not to mention there were numerous peculiar objects such as the scarlet mutation crystals growing inside the pond.

If that was not enough, as of this moment the mystical energy inside the pond was still getting stronger and all of that energy was being funnelled towards the twenty or so Trees of mana planted nearby. Even without the need to check, Simon could feel the density of mana inside his main floor increasing day by day.

By now, the entire backside of his white palace where the pond was located, was covered by a thin white mist that endlessly lingered there. Although the effect was apparent only on his main floor, but Simon had already seen the magical effects of the Trees of Mana.

For his next step, he needed to plant the Trees of Mana on multiple floors to make the effects more ostensible.

Increasing the density of mana inside his dungeon was one of the crucial key points in increasing its rank. Fortunately, his plan was going smoothly since he managed to acquire the help of Forest Spring Spirits.

Furthermore, he browsed for other items like the obsidian slate from the [Shop] and placed them near the pond.

The Obsidian slate is a type of rock that absorbs energy from the surroundings and fuses it with anything it is in contact with. In this case, the obsidian slate will absorb the mystical energy present in the air and fuse it with the pond of serenity.

That is not all, the obsidian slate is even able to absorb magic to some degree and release the mana stored back inside the pond. In other words, the obsidian rock will be able to absorb the residue energy from the magic used in the surroundings and deposit it back into the pond.

The slate was black in colour and had an unusual gloss to it. Simon bought seven slates for a total of 525,000 DP and placed them around the pond.

He further bought another twenty or so Tress of Mana and planted them across the pond. After finishing all the preparations, he teleported back to the main floor only to find the Forest Spring spirits making a neat row, waiting for his arrival.

Seeing Simon teleport in front of them, they all bowed their heads in unison. Simon nodded and declared “Alright if you guys are ready, then we can move to the floor where you people can make your new village”.

His voice was not loud yet it could be heard clearly all across the main floor.

When they heard his words, all the Forest Spring Spirits showed excited faces and just when Simon thought that they were all ready, Fennel stepped forward and spoke for all of them.

“Lord Simon we cannot even start to show how grateful we are that you saved us from this peril. We Forest Spring Spirits from this moment on will be eternally loyal to you and serve as your subordinates”.

He bent his body more than ninety degrees and one could feel his sincerity through his tone. It was not only him, all the Forest Spring Spirits behind him were similarly bowing their heads displaying their allegiance.

Simon was lost for words. Although he did save the Forest Spring Spirits, he did all that for Cecilia and his dungeon. But it seemed that it didn't matter to the Forest Spring Spirits as they were deeply grateful to Simon for saving the children, the hope of the Forest Spring Spirits.

Of course, Simon was affected by their sincerity as he nodded his head and accepted their heartfelt allegiance. No matter what, now that they have become his subordinates, he would protect them with all of his power.

After declaring his allegiance, Fennel earnestly added "Lord Simon does not need to worry Mistress has already told us about our duties and we shall do our utmost to help our lord".

This time Simon was shocked, his brain failed to register some of the words that Fennel just said. 'Huh?!... wait a minute... Mistress' Simon thought as his eyes involuntarily went towards Irene, who for some reason was not meeting his gaze.

It was at this moment that from the corner of his eyes, he spotted Cecilia smiling mischievously. Suddenly it dawned onto him.

'So it was all her work. She must have said something to Fennel and the others' Simon sighed internally looking at Cecilia who was trying to make a straight face. Shaking his head, he teleported all of them to the new floor.

The scenery around them changed and quickly became a place filled with greeneries. The moment the Forest Spring Spirits looked at the floor, they became stunned while others became emotional.

The reason for this sudden change was because the new floor that Simon had modelled, looked exactly like the forest where their village was located previously and from where they were forced to escape.

How could they not be reminiscent after being shown such a place? Fennel's old eyes were trembling as he stared at the forest that lay ahead of him and he involuntarily asked "T-This is...?".

“Hm? Ah! This is the new floor where you guys would be staying. I tried to make it as similar to the Ancient Treants territory where your original village was located. Although the things that I could replicate was limited” Simon looked content seeing the reaction of the Forest Spring Spirits.

Fennel and the others looked at their lord once again, touched by his sincerity.

After being momentarily stunned, the Forest Spring Spirits soon began to work on building their new village near the pond of serenity. Seeing them getting busy, Simon silently left the scene and teleported back to the main floor.

He left Cecilia there as she wanted to help her clansmen build a new village.

ROAAAR... a loud demonic roar sounded out and the Bloodthorn Demonic Warhorse came running towards him. The guy mostly hanged around the 29th floor and was kind of like the boss to the Chimera Beers and Savage Warrior Monkeys that inhabited the floor.

Patting the warhorse that came running to him, Simon walked towards his white palace. There was a large difference between the mystical energy on any floor and on the main floor. A refreshing cool feeling assaulted his senses as he appeared closer to the white palace.

The mana inside him also started to resonate with the mystical energy outside and frantically started circulating inside him. The rate of circulation was many times faster here than on the outside.

Simon had a vague feeling that if he kept on bathing in this energy, even without defeating any opponents; he would be able to level up soon. After defeating Laris, he was on the verge of breaking the level 300 hundred threshold.

And after going through the trial set by Aldebaran, he knew that he could increase to level 301 soon. Every hundred level represents a huge threshold that is very difficult to cross and more so when your bloodline is impure.

One needs a great amount of effort, dedication and increase their skills constantly to cross that threshold.

How does Simon know that? Well, after going through the trial that put an immense amount of burden on him, both physically and mentally, he had levelled up multiple of his skills such as the [Regeneration] which had evolved to become [High-Speed Regeneration], [Super Endurance] that

had become [Enhanced Endurance]. He had also gained some new skills such as the [Minimal Mana Consumption].

—

Name:- Simon

Race:- Demon Viscount

Titles:- Demon of Pride [Incomplete Fragment 1/5]

Level:- 300

HP:- 44,991

MP:- 60,035

Stats:-

Strength:- 2800

Defence:- 3000

Agility:-3400

Magic:- 3800

Endurance:- 3100

Luck:- 2100

Skills:- Language Comprehension, Analysis, Flame Magic Mastery, Gale Magic Mastery, Electro Magic Mastery, Thought Processing, High-Speed Regeneration, High-Speed Flight, Super Strength, Super Agility, Enhanced Endurance, Super Defence, Body Enhancement, Fire Resistance, Wind Resistance, Pain Resistance, Blunt Damage Resistance, Sense Presence, Natural Recovery, Demonic Eyes, Minimal Mana Consumption

Amalgamation Skills:- [Flame-Gale Mastery], [Electro-Flame Mastery]

Inherent Skills:- Dungeon Creation, Main Menu, Ancestral Symbol Ignition

Chapter 167: New Floor: Forest Spring Spirit Village (3)

The [Minimal Mana Consumption] skill helps the user to limit the mana consumption and help cast the magic more efficiently. In other words, a person with the skill [Minimal Mana consumption] can cast the same magic as the person without the aforementioned skill with less amount of mana.

Though the mana required for the magic has gone down, it doesn't mean that the power of the magic would also be reduced. Far from it, instead of going down, the power may even increase by a fewfold.

Simon remembered that he had seen an upgraded version of this skill in Irene's status. It seemed that he had acquired a skill that would help him bridge the gap in their power in the future.

About skills, Simon also became aware of another fact. Skills have the possibility of evolving into higher tier skills when used repeatedly or when one gains sufficient mastery over them. The higher the tier of the skill, the more powerful the effect of the skill.

For example, the rate at which his evolved skill [High-Speed Regeneration] heals his wounds, is many times faster than the [Regeneration] skill. At the same time, it is not easy to increase the tier or evolve the skill. One must know the kind of torment that Simon had to endure under the pressuring aura of the Ancient titan Treant. He had to repeatedly push his body to its limits and beyond.

He accumulated so many self-inflicted injuries that it was impossible for his [Regeneration] skill to keep up. It was under this situation that could make him crumble at any moment, that he was able to evolve his skills.

Due to his upgraded skills, he could distinctively feel that the threshold that was holding him back, was not there anymore. The trial set by Aldebaran had unexpectedly given him a pleasant surprise.

As he was lost in his thoughts, he unknowingly appeared in front of his palace and was unable to notice the presence of Irene in front.

“Hmm... it seems that I will need to evolve my other skills in some wa-gagh” Simon crashed into something soft and fragrant.

BAM...

He fell to the ground and felt something soft under him. Hmm~ if he had to describe it, the sensation he felt was as soft and cottony as the marshmallow yet as tangible and substantial as a water balloon.

Unwittingly, Simon grabbed onto it ㄟ ㄗ ㊦ ㄟ ㄗ.

“Ah~~” he heard a soft moaning sound coming from under and his dazed mind finally returned back to reality. He looked down and was dumbfounded to find Irene under him.

Her pearly white face that could dawn even the brilliance of the moon, had a tinge of red onto her cheeks. Her crystal blue eyes appeared to be the most precious gem, were staring directly onto his own.

“Ehhh?!” Simon soon realised that they were in an awkward position. Right now, Irene’s willowy and beguiling to the extreme body was pressed under him. Her breath which was as fragrant as a flower that had bloomed in the coldest of weather trickled his face. And her two full mounds that were pressed under his chest, changed their shape whenever Simon moved a little.

“Gulp” Simon audibly gulped and tried to contain his berserk desire that threatened to take over his mind.

However, he did not need to expend any effort to repress this emotion as a bone-chilling cold came assaulting him from Irene.

BANG... His body was pushed back and rotated in the air before falling face-first into the ground. Forst had accumulated onto his body and his teeth were chattering. Fortunately, the bone-chilling cold did not last long and swiftly dissipated.

Sighing in relief, Simon propped himself up and turned towards Irene who was avoiding his gaze. Simon gave an awkward laugh when he thought about what just happened a few moments ago. At that time, he was completely engrossed in his thoughts to pay any attention to his surroundings.

Simon's eyes involuntarily went towards his hands, he could still distinctively remember the sensation he felt earlier.

From her perspective, it must look like Simon had deliberately bumped into her and taken advantage at that moment. Simon did not know what Irene was thinking at his moment as his own thoughts were muddled.

"Ah... that was I did not push you down... I mean I was on top of you but I did not deliberately touch you there... No, what I mean to say is..." His eyes twitched as he himself did not know what his mouth was blabbering on.

"I'm sorry," Simon thought that it was better to not make any more excuses and simply apologise.

Irene's cheeks were still burning red but her eyes were ice cold. When she saw that Simon had earnestly apologised for his actions, the chilliness in her eyes swiftly disappeared. Earlier it was also her fault that she appeared in front of him without letting her presence known. And she could see that Simon was lost in his thoughts and did not deliberately bump into her.

"It's alright," Irene said softly, her voice did not appear to be particularly angry. However, she was still avoiding his gaze.

No matter how she wanted to write it off, Simon had still involuntarily grabbed her chest. Even if she tried to pretend, it was still embarrassing for her. She could still feel the sensation earlier when Simon gave a fierce grab(づ) and every time she remembered his actions, her emotions would become turbulent and her thoughts muddled.

~~~~~

There was an awkward silence between them before Simon hurriedly tried to dissolve it. “You were looking for me?” He asked as he thought that Irene must have been looking for him to appear in front of him so suddenly.

Irene’s face was back to her aloof self as she nodded her head and inquired “I heard from Cecilia that to bring the Forest Spring Spirits with you, you had gone through a trial set by the Ancient Titan Treant and had even accepted multiple of his conditions”.

Although she masked it perfectly, Simon still felt the slight concern in her voice.

Nodding his head, he replied, “Yeah, it was the only choice I had to bring the forest Spring Spirits inside my dungeon”.

Simon remembered the seven years agreement between him and Aldebaran. The task might sound impossible and outright lunatic to most, but Simon did not doubt himself and his abilities. No matter what he would raise his rank to Demon Duke and subdue the Seven Kings of the Ghastly Winding Forest within these seven years.

Irene deeply stared at Simon’s eyes that was burning with an intense determination and excitement. Her crescent brows made a frown as she asked “Cecilia told me that you nearly destroyed your body in the first trial and now you have even accepted something as ridiculous as raising your rank three times in the span of just seven years?”.

Her voice sounded exasperated as she added “Honestly I don’t know what to think anymore. Seeing how readily you agreed to those conditions, you must have something planned out. I’m not saying it’s bad to be positive but aren’t you underestimating the ranks a little too much?”.

Simon was surprised as he looked at Irene. He never thought that she would be so concerned for him. He understood the vast gap in strength that the rank represent and frankly he was not underestimating it. Far from it, since he knew the level of strength that each rank up represents, he wanted to attain that realm of strength.

Although Seven years might be too short, Simon knew himself better than anyone. As long as there is a goal in front of him to achieve, he would not stop until he realises it.

If somebody heard the details of the agreement, they would mock him and see it as nothing but a ludicrous dream. Nevertheless, Simon was not concerned with what others thought about him.



Since he had already promised Aldebaran that he would raise his rank to Demon Duke, he would achieve it within these seven years and subdue the Seven Kings to become the true ruler of this Ghastly Winding forest.

Meeting Irene's gaze, Simon asked "Do you also think that it is impossible for me to achieve it?".

He wanted to know what she thought about him who had accepted these conditions.

Irene stayed silent for a while and observed Simon, it was only after she felt the determination and resoluteness in his eyes, that she sighed.

"It is not about whether I believe in you or not. But seeing how determined you are to achieve your goals, it seems that whatever I say cannot change your mind. Hmph, as long as you still hold onto that willpower, it is not exactly impossible a task". Saying that she separated her gaze from Simon and looked away.

Simon couldn't help but smile at her reply "So you were simply worried about me?!".

Right after he said that, Irene's brows twitched and her beautiful eyes widened a little "Worried? Hmph, you seemed to be thinking too highly of yourself".

Her reaction was as if somebody had seen through her inner thoughts. Simon was honestly surprised, he never expected his casual words would elicit such a reaction from her. He suddenly had a desire to tease her more but before he could do so, Irene spoke first.

She crossed her hands in front of her ample chest and those ample mounds of her whose softness was just like a quagmire one could endlessly sink in and whose fullness he had experienced firsthand, changed shape magnificently as they were pressed underneath her hands.

Even her simple azure clothes was unable to cover that devastating sight.

Failing to notice where his gaze was, Irene said "How confident are you to increase your rank by a total of three times within the span of seven years?".

## Chapter 168: Skill Tiers

“How confident are you to increase your rank by a total of three times within the span of seven years?”.

Tearing his gaze away, Simon cleared his mind from the unexpected blow he had received and said “Thirty percent. I’m thirty percent sure that I can achieve it”. His reply made Irene frown and at the same time, she looked somewhat surprised. “It is higher than what I had expected. But regardless of that, it will be extremely hard to achieve. If you don’t mind me asking, how are you going to achieve it?”.

It was not like she was underestimating him, but even without using her skills, she could easily tell that the bloodline that Simon possessed was fairly impure and it would be nigh impossible to achieve a rank as high as the Demon Duke. However, seeing his confidence, she did not want to dampen it.

Simon knew what Irene was thinking and deliberated for a while before revealing about the existence of his inherent skill [Main Menu] whose one of the functions allowed him to purify his bloodline and raise his rank.

Although the [Main Menu] was his biggest secret, he didn’t know why but he didn’t feel it uncomfortable to reveal its existence to Irene. Of course, he didn’t reveal anything about him being reincarnated.

Irene was silent for a long while after being told something like that. Even she was hard-pressed to believe that something like that which broke all the common sense existed in this world. Although she was a little surprised, she wasn’t in a disbelief as she was aware of heavenly treasures such as the royal Spirit orb that can remove one’s restriction placed on them by their bloodline.

The fact that stunned her most was that the man in front of her was in possession of one that she had never heard of.

Exhaling a deep breath, she asked “Is it alright for you to reveal the existence of such a thing to me? Isn’t that inherent skill your biggest secret?”.

Simon simply smiled looking at her and waved his hands and said “That’s alright. Since I decided to reveal its existence to you, naturally I have enough confidence in you. I feel like it’s alright to reveal its existence to you”.

Irene crystal blue eyes trembled and all the reasoning flew out of her head. She wanted to refute his words, but for some unknown reason, words failed her.

“Baseless confidence... you don’t even know me...” Irene silently whispered in a voice that only she could hear.

“Haha, anyways why did you suddenly ask something like that?” Simon questioned. He felt like Irene wouldn’t have asked him such a question if she didn’t have something in her mind.

Her state of mind returned to normal and her bearing was back to her aloof self. Instead of answering him, she asked a question of her own.

“How much are you aware of skills?”.

Simon fell into silence as he pondered over her question. Frankly, he did not know much about the skills and whatever he knew was from experimentation and trial.

He shook his head and said, “I only know that skills just like magic should have different tiers since some of my skills have evolved into better ones after repeated uses”.

Irene nodded her head, her eyes flashed with a mysterious light as she observed Simon.

“Correct, just like magic have different tiers, skills do too. However, just like gaining mastery over a form of mana, evolving skills to a new tier is equally difficult. There are three types of skills Normal, Rare and Lost skills. Each of these three types of skills has different tiers”.

“A Normal skill can evolve up to two tiers i.e Superior tier and Ancient tier. Whereas, a rare skill has the potential to evolve up to three tiers namely Superior, Ancient and Legendary tiers”. Irene paused here and glanced at Simon who was intently listening to her.

She further added, “As for the lost skills, they have a possibility of evolving up to four tiers:- Superior, Ancient, Legendary and finally the Phantasmal tier”.

Simon was amazed. The knowledge he inherited was limited, he did not know that there existed so many types of skills not to mention that there were even different tiers to them. But... “Wait a

minute... what do you mean by that they have a possibility of evolving? You don't mean that there is a chance that they might not evolve?"

He asked befuddled by her explanation.

Irene was not surprised that Simon asked such a question. On the contrary, she was expecting such a question. She clarified "You are not wrong. Even a Lost skill has a possibility that it might not evolve. Skills are similarly restrained by ones bloodline. If their bloodline is not pure, they are unable to reach higher ranks and similarly, their skills are unable to evolve. One not only needed to continuously increase their proficiency with the skill but also need a pure bloodline to go forward".

"You must have guessed by now but the type of skills represents how hard they are to acquire. A Normal skill is easy to acquire while a rare skill is difficult to get. The same goes for the Lost skill, they are the most difficult to acquire".

"Not only that, Rare and Lost skills are more difficult to evolve than Normal skills since one needed a very pure bloodline and a high rank to increase their tiers. So even if one gets extremely lucky and acquires a Lost skill, they cannot evolve it their entire life if they possessed an impure bloodline".

Simon who was processing all this information, couldn't help but mutter "So that's how it is. The better the type of the skill, the more difficult it is to acquire them and increase their tiers. Does that mean that a Rare skill is stronger than a Normal skills and a Lost skill is stronger than a Rare?"

Seeing Simon's enthusiasm to fill the void in his knowledge, Irene was quite pleased. She shook her head and said "Not exactly. You have to also consider that evolving a Rare and Lost skill is more difficult than a Normal skill. If a normal skill evolves into a Superior tier, it should be stronger than a Rare skill that has not. And similarly, a Rare skill that has evolved into a Superior rare skill is more stronger than a Lost skill that hasn't evolved and so on so forth".

As Simon soaked all of this knowledge, He felt his understanding of skills increase more and more. Suddenly though, a thought flashed in his mind and he couldn't help but ask once again "If there are only three types of skills, then what about inherent skill?"

Simon opened his status and looked at the row which displayed his inherent skills. If according to Irene that there only existed three types of skill, then what about the inherent skill that was displayed by his status?

Irene deliberated as to how better phrase her answer before saying “Inherent skill is not a type of skill. It is displayed by the status that governs the laws of this world, the various skills that are unique to you or your race”.

Simon finally understood as to why the [Dungeon Creation] was listed in his inherent skills. Dungeon Creation was a skill unique to the demon race.

“As of now, most of your skills could only be said as are Normal-type superior tier at best. The only Rare skill that you have in your possession is the [Demonic Eyes] skill” Irene said while observing Simon with that mysterious glow in her eyes.

Simon was a little surprised that Irene knew all about his skills but when he thought that she might be using Analysis on him, he soon relaxed. What Simon did not know was that his status that even the subordinates of the Demon Lord couldn't see through, was easily read by Irene.

What Irene was using wasn't as simple as Analysis and was something totally different.

Simon was amazed by the vast knowledge of Irene, he was reminded of the vast gulf between them once again. He didn't doubt her words since he felt that her origins were quite mysterious.

“So it turns out that the [Demonic Eyes] skill that I got as a gift after winning the dungeon war was a Rare skill. Since I don't use it much, it would take quite a bit of time to increase its tier”. Simon mused as he brought out his status window.

He stared at all of his skills which according to Irene was mostly Normal type of skills. Suddenly, out of curiosity, he asked the question that suddenly popped into his mind “I get that most of my skills are Normal ones but what about my other skills such [Dungeon Creation], [Ancestral Symbol Ignition] and [Main Menu]”.

Simon was quite curious about the type and tiers of these skills that were listed in his inherent skills.

Irene looked at Simon, her eyes were strange as they observed his status. It was only after a while that she sighed, her chest heaved up and down as she said.

“No matter how I see it, it's clearly strange that all Demon Nobles have the skill [Dungeon Creation] which allows them to create a such as this. No wonder the status has listed it in your inherent skill”.

Irene said in a low voice after a deep contemplation. Simon's interest was piqued after he heard what Irene had to say. Although he asked the question out of curiosity at first, he didn't expect such a response from Irene.

---

Tiers of Skills-

Phantasmal [★★★★★]

Legendary [★★★★]

Ancient [★★★]

Superior [★★]

Base [★]

Normal Skills:- Evolve Possibility [Superior, Ancient]

Rare Skills:- Evolve Possibility [Superior, Ancient, Legendary]

Lost Skills:- Evolve Possibility [Superior, Ancient, Legendary, Phantasmal]

Chapter 169: Skill Tiers (2)

“What do you mean by that... is [Dungeon creation] that much of an unusual skill for a Demon Noble to have?”.

Since Simon wasn't originally from this world, he didn't find it unusual having a [Dungeon Creation] skill as it was quite handy. Heck, even his very race had changed from a human to a demon so he had no mind to spare for that.

“What do you think... having a skill as convenient and amazing as the [Dunegon Creation] is all that common?”.

“The [Dungeon Creation] skill is a Lost Legendary tier skill. I don’t know how all the Demon Noble race got a hold of something like that but it’s clearly unusual. A skill that helps you to create a dungeon with all those functions is an incredible skill to say no less”.

From Irene's words, he understood that there is a vast difference between a Normal, Rare and Lost skill. Even after putting all that effort into increasing his strength, Simon had only gained Normal skills. The only Rare skill that he had on him was something that he got after winning a dungeon war.

What he couldn't understand was how the entire Demon Noble race got hold of something like that. It seemed that even Irene was perturbed by that but since they did not have an answer for that yet, it was no use dwelling over it.

“As for the [Ancestral Symbol Ignition] skill that you have... assuming that it is similar to my [■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■] in essence then it is a Lost Phantasmal tier skill”.

Simon felt as if he was thunderstruck and it took him quite a while to process what Irene had said. He was still digesting the fact that he was in possession of one Lost Legendary tier skill. But to his amazement, the next skill he had was even higher than the previous one.

A Lost Phantasmal tier, he didn't even know what kind of concept was that. According to what he heard from Irene, a Phantasmal tier was the highest that a skill could reach and among all the types only the Lost skill had the potential to reach that.

It wasn't just Simon but even Irene was amazed by some of his skills that were so high in tiers. It wasn't until now when she used her abilities to check Simon's status was she able to find that he was not as simple as he appeared. Although his bloodline was impure, he had skills that were deep and unfathomable. It was also at this moment that Irene realised that she had greatly underestimated Simon.

'It might not be impossible for him to go up three ranks in a row in the span of just seven years after all' Irene mused as she reevaluated him.

Simon was out of sorts for a while before realising that he had some unbelievable skill. Two Lost skills and not only that, one was Legendary tier the other a Phantasmal. Simon did not know what to think anymore. Just as his mind was going blank, he suddenly thought of another possibility.

"What about my [Main Menu]?" if all his inherent skill was at least Legendary tier Lost skill, then what about his [Main Menu] skill that had transmigrated along with him from his previous world?

Irene made a troubled face when he asked that question and went silent for a long while. Her expression was complicated and constantly changing.

Finally as if giving up, she shook her head and replied with a serious tone "I don't know. From the description of the skill that you have told me, it is clearly a very unusual skill and not only that but it is even more unique than the other two inherent skills of yours to the point where even I am unable to see through it".

Simon was stunned silent this time. Never would he have thought Irene who had such vast knowledge, would be unable to tell what tier of skill the [main Menu] was.

But when he thought about it carefully, it came as no surprise to Simon that she was unable to identify his [Main Menu] as it was a skill that didn't belong to this world in the first place.



However, more than him, Irene was the more perplexed one. No matter how she tried to gaze into the depth of the skill, all her prying attempts were blocked. No, it would be more appropriate to say that even when she tried sensing it, she felt nothing but a vast emptiness that even made her feel threatened.

‘Abnormal’ she silently muttered. There was another type of skill more ancient and powerful than Lost skill. But Irene did not feel any need to mention it since she thought that there was no way such a skill would appear here not to mention on Simon that too.

The level and profoundness of such a skill appearing here was clearly an impossibility, that was what she thought up until now.

“To be able to summon me... it has clearly reached that tier. But at the same time, I’m not getting the same impression from a skill that should be on that tier” Irene contemplated and used some words that even Simon wasn’t able to understand. What he did know was that even Irene was unable to see through his skill.

For the first time, Simon felt like he had won against Irene. [Main Menu] was a skill that he had designed back when he was developing a game in his previous life. He would have freaked out if Irene had seen through even that.

Although Simon did not know which tier the [Main Menu] belonged to, at least he knew that his [Dungeon Creation] and [Ancestral Symbol Ignition] was no ordinary skill. Having two of the highest tier skills, Simon couldn’t help but feel pleased especially the [Ancestral Symbol Ignition] which had saved him numerous times.

The description of the skill and the power it bestows was clearly on a different scale and Simon felt that the more he increased his rank, the more powerful the buff from the skill would be. A Phantasmal tier skill was on a completely different level than all the other skills on his repertoire.

All along, the [Ancestral Symbol Ignition] skill was his trump. But it came with a disadvantage of its own, that is after it is used once, the skill disappears for a long period of time. Not to mention the skill places a heavy burden on the user’s body and the user is left unable to use any other skills after it expires.

However, ignoring the disadvantages, the power spike alone is enough to overcome most of the challenges.

That is not all, as he had mentioned before, the power bestowed by the [Ancestral Symbol Ignition] skill increases as he ranks up. The power spike when he activated the skill when he was a Demon Baron and now when he used it as a Demon Viscount, was in a totally different realm.

The skill seemed completely different now and even the buff the skill provided was longer and many times more powerful. It came to him as no surprise, the skill was worthy enough to be in the Phantasmal tier. But even if he said that, he did not know what makes a skill Phantasmal tier.

As if seeing through his query, Irene explained “A Lost skill is a type of skill only a limited amount of people in this whole world have in their possession. It is called Lost skills because many of such skills are forgotten since the ancient times and not many people have seen them.

“Not only that, the skills that fall in this category are very profound and when one evolves their skill to the highest tier, that is the Phantasmal tier. The skill has unlimited potential and grows along with the user. That is what it means for a skill to be in the Phantasmal tier. Only a skill that has the potential to grow along side the user, has the qualification to be called Phantasmal tier”.

The words of Irene answered most of the queries and mysteries regarding the skill in his head. Simon at this moment felt quite enlightened. The veil of mystery that covered the world, dissipated a little at a time in front of his eyes.

Simon glanced at Irene and deeply sighed “It appears that there is much for me to learn about the world and its mysteries”. Although he muttered it in a tone that only he could hear, Irene who was near him clearly heard it.

She smiled and observed Simon with those crystal blue eyes of her that was as vast and deep as an ocean.

## Chapter 170: Irene's Suggestion

While Simon was still lamenting at the inadequateness of his knowledge, Irene took a few steps and came near him. A clear and pleasant fragrance drifted to his nose and when he looked up, he saw her alluring figure that had enough charm to momentarily stun all the people of this world, in front of him.

The distance between their bodies was only a few inches away and if Simon wanted to touch her, he just needed to extend his arms a little. He could hear the sound of her breathing and her ample chest heaving up and down.

The way she moved her body, her pearly white hands that tucked her hair behind her ears to the flutter of her eyelids. At this moment, her every action to the smallest movement was so beguiling that Simon was stunned silent.

He involuntarily remembered the scene that happened a few moments ago and couldn't help but replay that scene in his head once again. His hands twitched, reminiscing the soft sensation that they felt before.

Realising her own action, she quickly stepped back and glanced at Simon who was in a daze. Even she did not know why she did that earlier. When she saw how Simon was glancing at his hand, scenes from earlier came rushing into her head.

Her pearly white face turned a shade of pink and her emotions became a mess. The atmosphere became silent and nobody spoke a word.

It was at this moment the Bloodthorn Demonic Warhorse who was roaming around the place, neighed as if waking the two people who were in a daze.

Simon hurriedly shook his head and came out of his stupor. He silently cursed himself for recalling the scene from the past again and again. It was his fault for making the atmosphere awkward.

Ahem... forcing a cough, he looked at Irene who had regained her composure once again and asked "Is there something you wanted to tell me?".

Irene nodded and observed Simon with that mysterious ability of her once again and said "Since you have already accepted the conditions from Aldebaran, I have nothing else to say. But even with the existence of the [Main Mneu], it would extremely strenuous and hard to jump three ranks in just seven years".

"You would have to put an insane amount of effort and willpower and it would still not be enough. Are you prepared?" She asked in a tone that seemed to suggest something.

Simon closed his eyes and clenched his hands into fists. He recollected his determination to become stronger once again to solidify his resolve. 'The reason I seek strength' unknowingly, the ethereal figure of Irene floated into his mind.

The place she was standing on, was so high that it seemed unreachable at a glance. To reach her who was up there, Simon once made his resolve.

‘Big brother... please don’t get hurt okay’ suddenly it was Cecilia’s voice that came into his mind. Her delicate fairy-like figure and emerald green eyes that seemed to look up to him, appeared in front of him.

‘That’s right, I must become stronger for the sake of Cecilia. To keep my words and protect the safety of her clan’. Simon opened his eyes and looked at the dungeon that he had created and named Laplace with so much care.

To protect his dungeon, he needed strength. He matched the gaze of Irene who was currently looking at him and said: “Yeah, I know the task seems monumental but I made my resolve and I’ll see it through”.

His voice was unwavering, clear and precise.

Hearing him put his determination out, Irene suggested “How about I help you. The task might be too much for a single person to bear alone but if it’s two, then we can easily endure through it”.

Simon was surprised, he didn’t expect Irene to say something like that. He asked furrowing his brows “What do you mean?”.

Without any change in her facial expression, she said in a serious tone “What I mean is that I can help you train and increase your strength. Although you have the unusual ability of that [Main Menu] skill of yours, and might not be shackled by the bloodline limit. You should still be aware that with just determination alone, you cannot increase your strength by three whole realms”.

“Each rank requires mastery and acquisition of many skills before you can level up and move on to the other. Mastering those skills would require techniques and years of practice before they can evolve. Not to mention that there are various other factors involved the higher the rank you go. To finish all that in just the span of seven years would be impossible for a single person”.

Simon’s eyes widened when he heard that. He had known that it wouldn’t be easy but he wasn’t aware of what he exactly needed to do to rank up. He had guessed that he needed to evolve his skill but he did not know where to start.

Understanding what she was suggesting, Simon asked to be sure “You mean that...”.

Irene simply nodded her head and clarified “I mean exactly what I said. I can help you achieve your goal. The skills and other requirements to rank up, I can help you train all that. It might be impossible if it’s you alone but if it’s the both of us, I have confidence that we can fulfil those conditions of the Ancient Titan Treant within the time limit”.

Simon was momentarily speechless and his mind went blank. Seeing him make such an expression, Irene couldn’t help but ask “What is it?”.

He blinked a few times and tried to put the words in his head “It’s just that... I don’t understand why you would want to help me. I mean I was the one who accepted the conditions. It’s not that I don’t want your help, for that I am more than grateful. I just don’t understand what’s there in it for you?”.

Irene furrowed her brows at his question and looked at him with her deep crystal blue eyes “What kind of question is that? Aren’t I one of the Guardians of this dungeon? According to this title, I am obligated to protect it. The dungeon and the dungeon master are connected. As one of the Guardian, it is natural for me to help the dungeon master when he is in trouble. Plus since you saved the Forest Spring Spirits, we can call it equal”.

Simon dryly chuckled at her reply. Although she pretended that it was all for the sake of protecting the Forest Spring Spirits, she wouldn’t be so concerned for him if it was just for that. And also she didn’t have to do it for them since he saved them on his own accord, not because he was told to do so.

Simon was able to find a cute little sister in Cecilia and also how amazing the Forest Spring Spirit race was. It should be him thanking them for all the benefits that his dungeon is going to receive, not the other way round.

Irene had a cold, noble and aloof temperament. It was also because she has such a disposition, that it sometimes got in her way and did not allow her to be completely honest with her feelings.

Simon did not know and maybe Irene herself was in the dark that she helped Simon not because of her obligation as a Guardian nor for the Forest Spring Spirits but because of a feeling that she herself did not quite understand it.

Simon did not refuse her offer and nodded his head. He was aware of how strong Irene was. Her status that he had once glimpsed upon when summoning her, was so ridiculous that he still remembered it.

There was no better person to train him than Irene. She was clearly more experienced than him in this field and Simon felt nothing wrong being trained by her. It was also the same during his life on earth.

Being taught by a senior in the company who had years of accumulated experience, hastened the progress of his learning and he quickly caught up to their pace. Simon did not think that his current situation was any different on the contrary, it was better to have someone to guide you rather than forging the way all alone.

Irene was even considerate enough to put it as her helping him to call it equal instead of him asking for her help. She was thoughtful enough not to hurt his pride and at the same time, provided a helping hand when he needed it the most.

“Alright, I’ll be in your care then,” Simon said as he looked forward to improving his skill and techniques to increase his rank.

Irene nodded her head and said, “Very well... Seven years is not a lot of time. Let’s start the training as soon as possible”. Right after saying that, she turned to look in the direction of the pond of serenity where a thin white fog lingered endlessly.

Although the mystical energy around the main floor was quite thick, the concentration was more than ten times near the pond of serenity.

Simon followed her gaze and looked in the direction and asked “Where are we going to train?”.

She pointed a finger towards the location of the pond and said “We are going to train there. The pond of serenity after being tinkered by the abilities of Cecilia have changed massively. The concentration of mana near the area is quite thick and very beneficial for your training. Compared to the other areas, it would be much more faster to train there”.