

D. of Pride 271

271 Chapter 271

Simon fiddled with the object the size of his palm and covered in arrays, before shifting his gaze away. The next thing that attracted his eyes, was the emblem of phoenix.

No matter how he observed it, the shape of the phoenix in this emblem appeared to be the same as the one he had seen on Irene's forehead when she suddenly acted weird. Although he had no conclusive evidence, he guessed that the thing was somehow related to her bloodline or her race.

Simon tried to grab the emblem only to feel a bone-chilling cold that even made his soul shudder transmit from it. Just this sensation was enough to tell him that the item was anything but ordinary.

His guess was not wrong; however, when he used [Analysis] on it, the result he got even made him bewildered. Why would he not, the item was ranked [S] tier by the [Analysis], a grade that not even his highest tier item the Crimson Blazing Flame Sword couldn't compare to.

What did it mean to own an [S] tier item? Didn't it mean that he held one of the highest-ranking items in this world whose worth even he couldn't begin to guess, currently in his hand? Even those noble and highborn Demon Archduke, would go crazy over the item, there was no way Simon wouldn't.

Calming his wildly beating heart at this shocking of a gift, Simon read the description of the item.

Item- Ice Phoenix's Sigh, Grade- [S]... A dew born from the melancholic sigh of the Divine Phoenix. It contains some of the essence of the supreme netherfrost ice that is said to have the power to even freeze the entire world. When one puts their mana into it, a unique fog capable of tempering with the laws of this world is generated.

The extreme divine and ice properties of the dew makes it an excellent item to erase one's presence and make it seem that the person had completely disappeared.

Simon opened and closed his mouth many times unable to even speak a word. Ignoring everything else, just the part about it being able to erase his presence, was something that was unthinkable for Simon. Even his [Hide Presence] skill could only mask his presence with his surrounding a little so an item can completely erase one's presence was so absurd that he had a hard time believing it.

Nevertheless, it was an item from Irene and even his [Analysis] testified the authenticity of it. Simon was overjoyed, with this item, he had one more life-saving artefact in his arsenal

With ecstatic and excited feeling, he rested his gaze onto the last item, the scarlet orb. Out of the three, only this item induced a wierd reaction from the [Analysis].

Item- Philosopher's Stone, Grade- unknown... A mystical item highly valued by all beings. It is made of an unknown substance and holds the ability to store any kind of magic no matter how powerful it is. Once the magic stored within it is used, it takes a long period of time for it to be usable once again. Note- the magic can be used without the caster's mana. Cooldown period:- 1 Year.

Simon's eyes were widened to their limit when he read the description written about the stone. At first glance, the usage of the item appeared to be the same as the skill crystal; however, unlike the latter, the philosopher's stone does not need the caster's mana to use the magic nor does it have any limit of the magic it can store.

Just these two aspects made it far superior to any skill crustal of any grade.

When he held the stone in his hand, he felt a vast amount of power emanate from it, indicating that the magic stored within it was not ordinary. Without having a need to think over it, Simon knew that Irene had stored some magic in it already.

Even the slightest trace leaking out of the stone was already so frightening; he wondered what kind of terrifying magic was stored in it.

With the last item now in his hand, the illusory space around him collapsed and he was back in his room at the inn.

"Haa... haa..." Simon took hurried breaths of air before calming his wildly beating heart. Currently in his hands were three items, the first was the Ice Phoenix Sigh, the second was the Philosopher's stone and the last one was the mysterious item covered in multilayered and complex runes.

Just when he kept the items on his inventory, an uproar sounded out from outside his room, people who were jolted awake by the sudden burst of bone-chilling cold, came to investigate where it originated from.

Knock...knock... His door was knocked and Simon had no choice but to open it.

"Sir Simon are you alright? We felt the invocation of an incredible magic from here" the members of the convoy asked him in concern when they felt the energy was leaking out from his room. It seemed that he had underestimated the energy that leaked out from the bead, even after secluding himself in a room, the energy still managed to travel outside.

Dispersing the issue as nothing but the invocation of his magic, he was able to somehow deceive these people; nonetheless, they still kept sceptical looks as they eyes the frost covered room of his.

A day passed with the convoy members resting their tired bodies. The morning of the next day, Cynthia who was dressed in an elegant black dress and accompanied by her guard commander and some of the silver guards, took her wagon to visit a place.

While on their way, the striking appearance of the Bane Moose attracted a lot of eyes but when these onlookers saw the direction where the wagon was headed, they gave up all thoughts of investigating the origins of these people.

Not long after, the carriage stopped in front of a large gate beyond which laid the grand castle of the Duke Montford. Guards wearing sets of armours were stationed around and patrolled the area. When they saw a group of people surrounding a wagon approaching near, they stopped them before inquiring about their identities.

The gate was opened and the carriage swiftly entered in. The personal residence of a duke was truly huge, even the area around his castle was well maintained with many small gardens and big buildings here and there.

After what took a couple dozen minutes, the wagon finally stopped in front of the entrance of a grand castle emanating a sturdy and powerful ambience.

Cynthia along with Alvara who was donned in her battle garb, climbed the stairs to meet a maid and a butler who were already waiting for them.

"Welcome Your Highness, I'm the head maid assigned by lord Montford to take care of any of your needs. Please come in" the maid made a gesture with her hand.

Cynthia nodded her head before asking "Where is His Grace Duke Montford?".

The head maid elegantly bowed and replied "His Lordship is currently busy with a guest from the Adventurer's Association, he will come down to meet with you soon".

'A guest from the Adventurer's Association?' the words of the head maid made her frown nonetheless, she allowed them to lead her to a hall. Apart from the guard commander Alvara, all the other silver guards were asked to stand stationary outside the castle.

The interior of the castle was no less impressive than its exterior with each room decorated lavishly. After waiting for a while in the hall, the door to the room was opened and a man who looked to be in his forties with ageing grey hair, walked in.

He was wearing a tailored suit that matched the colour of his hair and his stoic face and sharp eyes, gave him an aura of a person of authority. Who could the person be other than the duke of this castle?

Following behind him was a handsome man in his twenties wearing lurid red robes. He carried himself with a smile and held a long cane imbued with a big core stone on top. The man was a mage through and through.

Cynthia and Alvara greeted the duke before seating back down on their seats. Duke Montford gestured with his hands and he and the man following behind him sat opposite them.

"Let me introduce him to you. He is Lucas Blackwood, son of the prominent Marquis family and also the youngest man to become the guild manager of the Adventurer's Association of our Castledor city. Additionally, he will also be participating in the upcoming 'Battle of the Finest' competition held in the capital"

Duke Montford introduced, the way he gave such high praises for the man, seemed to say that he held the other person in high regards.

Lucas smiled, appearing amiable and friendly to speak to.

"And Lucas this is..." Duke Montford motioned with his hands and was about to introduce the other party when Lucas stopped him.

"Your Grace does not need to expend his effort, who doesn't know Her Highness the youngest princess of the Kingdom of Ellesmere. It is said that her intelligence and her beauty were the greatest and the most precious gems of this kingdom. It seems that the rumours were true indeed"

Lucas smiled, his handsome face could instantly smitten any noblewomen. However, Cynthia simply nodded. With her intelligence, how could she not see the intoxication in his eyes and his attempts of leaving an impression on her?

She was aware of her beauty which was coveted by many of the noblemen and famous adventurers who repeatedly sent her gifts trying to court her. Nonetheless, all of it was a failed endeavour on their part, as nobody managed to sway her.

272 Chapter 272

After exchanging a few words with him, Cynthia shifted her attention back toward the duke.

"Your Grace I believe you are already aware of the intention behind my visit so I will not beat around the bush. I wish to borrow your Air Engine to travel back to the capital".

Her indifferent words did not induce any reaction from the duke as he simply closed his eyes and pondered for a bit.

"Well, I guessed that much the moment you decided to enter my territory. It is not a problem to lend you my Air engine to travel back to the capital; however, as you know it is very difficult to manufacture and there is only one in my entire territory. You see this young man also came to me with the same request as you and I had already promised him to lend the Air Engine".

Duke Montford said pointing at Lucas who was currently lost in his own thoughts. Cynthia made a difficult expression when she heard those words, she had entered the territory of the duke hoping to utilise the Air Engine he had to travel back to the capital.

But now that he had already promised to lend it to someone else, she cannot just tell him to go back on his words. Just when she was brooding over what to do, Lucas who had thought something up, suggested.

"If I may princess... how about we travel together since our destination is the same? As you can see, I am also in need of the Air Engine to participate in the 'Battle of the Finest' held in the capital. The Air Engine his grace owns, can only carry less than twenty people and excluding the driver and the members who will operate it, we only have twelve seats available".

"Fortunately, if we include his grace, myself and some of his personal guards there are still five seats available. What does her highness think?".

Cynthia fell into an intense contemplation and weighed her options. She cannot simply travel on a wagon as it would be too dangerous and takes up a lot of time. Then was her only option to travel with them? But then again her convoy consisted of more than twenty-five people who came with her all the way from city of Mountmend from the remote northwestern corner of the Kingdom.

Seeing that the princess had fallen into deliberation, Duke Montford couldn't help but speak out.

"There is no need for your highness to make a decision now. The Air Engine will leave tomorrow morning from the south field of Castledor city. Take your time and think over it".

Duke Montford stood up and Lucas after throwing her beautiful face one last glance, exited the hall.

Alvara who was similarly pondering over their options, asked "Princess what shall we do now? If we don't take the Air Engine, we wouldn't be able to reach the capital before the coliseum opens".

To those words of hers, the princess of the Kingdom of Ellesmere, simply smiled "Let's go back, we can decide what to do after we get back to the hotel. Also, contact the branch office of our Serene Palace Merchant Guild located in this city and ask the person in charge to come meet with me as soon as possible".

The time was noon; Simon who was forcibly pulled out of his room to stroll the market of the Castkedor city by Adalinda, was coming back to the inn after spending loads of money on foods and other various attractions.

Of course, All this money went from his pockets, the little girl acted as a freeloader all the time without spending even a dime. There was a moment when Simon asked her why doesn't she pay for

her own share of food? The reply he got was absurd to say no less. She felt it was a waste of space to carry these trinkets of metals that held next to no value to her.

Just as they approached the hotel, he sensed a sudden tension coming from within. Curious, he opened the entrance only to be greeted by the members of the convoy who were currently assembling in one of the halls.

'What is going on?' Simon wondered, he was about to follow them when from the corner of his eyes he spotted Chuck. It seemed that the latter had also spotted him as the adventurer greeted with a simple nod of his head before hurriedly excusing himself.

Simon creased his brows, for the past few days some reason he felt like the adventurer was consciously or subconsciously avoiding him a little.

"Hey let's go, there seems to be something interesting going on over there" Adalinda called out and before he could even ponder further, he was pulled along.

In one of the large halls of the Centre Point Hotel, a group of people gathered. Standing in front of them was Cynthia her guard commander and a few new faces.

"I believe everybody is gathered here? If so then let me tell all of you the reason behind assembling here".

The Mistress of the Serene Palace went on to detail how they would travel from here to the capital and also revealed the Air Engine that they would use to travel. When everybody heard that there are only a few seats available and they all cannot go, many of them became disheartened.

After travelling with each other for a while and overcoming numerous dangers, they all developed a sense of camaraderie. They started treating each other as good friends and people they could trust, the news of them not being able to travel together came out as quite a shock.

"The Serene Palace Merchant guild keeps its words and rewards those that have worked hard and have incurred heavy losses in the process. Although I believe this isn't enough, I have prepared your rewards with your achievement in mind" .

"Additionally, for your help this time I would like to give you all a position of honorary member and this badge that shows your position in our guild" Cynthia signalled with her eyes and the

middle-aged man behind her swiftly brought out numerous boxes containing items and pouches of gold.

From amongst the group, Simon squinted his eyes. The woman was quite calculative, although the circumstance didn't allow her to bring these adventurers along with her, she nevertheless, didn't want to lose these powerful and loyal warriors and wanted to keep having them as her pawns. The honorary member and the badge was just a decoration.

Seeing that the rewards were handed out appropriately she further added.

"Other than myself and the guard commander there are still three vacant seats available. Relating to these three available seats, I will select three individuals based on their achievements from our travel up until this point".

"Of course, you have a right to reject this spot in which case, you will still receive the promised rewards and benefits from my guild. The vacant seat will then be filled by the next suitable candidate".

Cynthia's eyes roamed across the crowd and swiftly landed on the three people she had decided to take with her.

Southfield of the city was a wide area of land specially used for holding military drills and training for soldiers of the duke's personal army. The field was mostly empty with only a few instruments here and there used by the soldiers during their training.

This part of the land of the Castledor city was restricted for most people, hence only soldiers, could be seen walking around. The morning light of the sun began to fall onto the land and brightened the place, an airship in the shape of a blimp more than a hundred meters big and completely covered in black could be seen stationed in the middle of the field.

A group of people could be seen coming and going out of it, investigating every corner of the airship. The airship owned by Duke Montford called the Air Engine had numerous windows and a single wide gallery for people to view the scenery outside.

It had four huge engines, two located at its bottom and two at its rear end. Loud noises echoed out whenever the engine started and powerful vibrations travelled through the ground.

Seven people observed the air engine from a place not very far away. Out of the seven, one was Duke Montford and the other Lucas Blackwood. The rest were soldiers and adventurers appointed by them to guard their safety.

At this moment, they were discussing some important issues when out of the corner they discovered a group of five people approaching near.

"Hmm... they have come," Duke Montford said focusing his attention on the other party. He then stepped forward and walked towards them, following behind him was Lucas and the others.

"It seems her highness has made her decision. In that case, let us not wait any longer, the air engine is ready to take off" duke Montford greeted the beautiful woman walking in front.

The group that just arrived was none other than Cynthia and the members of the convoy. Lucas too greeted the princess of Ellesmere Kingdom with intoxicated eyes and sweet words. He then roamed his eyes on the people that she had brought along.

His gaze first went over to the female warrior with short black hair and having an alluring body, closely following behind Cynthia. She was the very same person who had followed the princess yesterday too.

Then he observed the burly adventurer fully decked out in an armour made out of blackgold. When his gaze went over to the remaining two person, he couldn't help but frown.

Lucas who prided himself for reaching a high level and his achievement of becoming a branch manager of Adventurer's association at such a young age looked at the young man with pith black hair who appeared to be similar to his age.

Chapter 273

Not only that, the man was as handsome as him or maybe even more with those devilish looking aspects. The fact that he couldn't see through the status of the other party with his [Analysis], told him that the man was not simple.

What surprised Lucas even more was the little girl who was nonchalantly walking behind. From her doll-like appearance, she seemed like she was less than fourteen years of age; nevertheless, her presence was something even he couldn't fathom.

The two of them clearly stood out with the aura of unusualness around them. After Cynthia's announcement yesterday at the hotel, the three people that consisted of Simon, Adalinda and Chuck, were selected out of all the other people from the convoy.

Simon guessed that it was because of their accomplishments but he was quite relieved that they were chosen; after all, their destination was not the Castledor city governed by the duke but rather the distant capital of this kingdom.

The mistress had also dodged a disaster by selecting Adalinda. Who knew what this girl would have done if she wasn't given a spot.

No one from the convoy voiced any disagreements nor show any discontent towards the selected individual as they were all aware of their powers and valour. They simply accepted them as the most deserving candidates.

Although Chuck was about to decline the offer because his two teammates were not selected, his comrades worked him out of it saying that they will find a way to come to the capital soon and he should just go ahead. the man must have some compelling reason to go to the capital. However, his behaviour was a little peculiar this past few days thus Simon found it a little hard to initiate a conversation with him.

After exchanging a few words with the Duke, Cynthia accepted his goodwill and swiftly walked towards the air engine along with her people. After everyone boarded the airship, a loud combustion noise erupted from it before it took off the ground.

The airship hovered over a thousand meters for a while before its altitude started rising and only stopped after it reached beyond 7000 meters. The other pair of engines at the rear of the ship activated and propelled the airship forward. And in a few moments, the large air engine, became a small black dot on the horizon that was getting further and further away.

City of Mountmend, in one of the big buildings that are constantly swarmed by people going in and out. A logo of a burning bow and arrow was beautifully carved on this building that attracted the onlooker's attention and also symbolised who this building belonged to.

Burning Arrows Guild, the organisation that came to rise after the downfall of the Sea God's Trident branch guild in the city of Mountmend. They were currently by far the top guild in this city and received an average of a hundred commissions per day. They were reputedly number one and no other guild came closer.

Currently, on the fourth floor of the building, in one of the rooms that was used as the personal room of the guild master, a man with curly brown hair sat on his seat going through one document after another.

His eyes were lively, his build was that of a warrior and he kept that unkempt facial hair that gave him a rough look. The man wearing light leather armour over his burly body, was none other than the guild master of the burning arrow guild.

After arranging the documents, his eyes went over to the last remaining one kept on his table and his brows locked in a grimace. The last remaining document was more like a letter that was addressed to him the guild master.

Reading through the contents of the letter, the frown on his forehead deepened, that was because the letter requested of him to complete a particular task. Normally, he would have ignored such a request that was not made officially, but the sender this time was not ordinary.

The Head Branch of the Adventurer's Association had requested him to explore the dungeon that have recently emerged near their city and report every detail and their findings back to them.

The man had the urge to tear the letter apart, asking them to report every detail of their exploration and findings, it was the same as the other party asking them to hand over all their contribution and knowledge for which they have shed blood and sweat, to them for free.

He was just about to throw the letter in some corner of his desk when he saw the name of the sender which matched exactly to that of the Head Branch director of the Adventurer's Association.

They were a colossal existence whose reach extended to every corner of the central continent. Each Kingdom or Empire, had a head branch and many divisions spread all around their territory. Since

the main headquarter did not have the time to monitor their each and every division, the head branch that is located at the capital of each kingdom, is responsible for that.

Thanks to that, the head branch of the Adventurer's Association held enough power and authority that was no less than the top five guilds of their Kingdom. A letter with the name of the head manager of such an organisation was something that he couldn't ignore.

The guild leader of the burning arrow's guild sighed and massaged his forehead, he felt a headache coming after reading the letter.

"It seems that I have no choice but to go along with this" the man mockingly smiled before taking out a small conch from the drawer of his table. Inserting some of his mana into it, the runes around the shell lit up and a voice from the other side sounded out.

"Guild Leader? Is there something you need from me?".

"Yes, gather everyone other than those members that have dived inside the dungeon and assemble in the main hall tonight. I have some announcements to make" he said before ending the call. After that, he stood up from his seat and looked out of his window from the fourth floor.

The elevation he was in, gave him a clear sight of the city and also the distant vast field. If one travelled down the city and crosses the vast field, they would soon be treading upon the lands of the Demon Continent, the Ghastly Winding Forest. The newly emerged dungeon that was the talk of the town, was located there.

The interior of the air engine, was unlike its simple black exterior and was made in a way that provided its passengers' comfort. Even the noise of the engine from the outside did not come in.

Simon roamed his eyes all around the airship, this was his first time after reincarnating into this world that he was using a different means other than his wings to fly around in the sky. Not only that, but even the way the engine of this airship operated with the help of magic stones, intrigued him.

The ship was controlled by a group of eight mages with each of them having mastery over Fire magic or wind Magic. Then there was also the mysterious runes supplied by thousands of magic crystals in the cockpit of the ship.

According to Adalinda, this was just a third class ship at best and she had seen much much better ones.

"The client said that it would take us four days of travelling by the air engine to reach the capital" Simon said, the client he was talking about was the mistress of the Serene Palace Merchant Guild.

Adalinda who was standing not far from him smirked, her gaze pasted at window. "Good, the more early we reach the better, this way not only will she fail to sense me since I'm travelling by an airship, but I can even make some preparations before she comes to the capital".

She then looked at him and said "Anyways, that woman turned out to be a princess of this kingdom. As you had guessed, her origin was not that simple. It also makes sense now that she has that Soul Ring. It might be one of their most precious treasures".

Earlier when they met with the other group of passengers, one of them who turned out to be the duke of this territory addressed their client as the princess. Therefore it was no longer a secret to them that the mistress of the Serene Palace Merchant guild was the princess of this kingdom.

Simon walked around the cabin for a while before opening the door to the gallery outside. A transparent barrier was erected here that blocked the wind and gave the passengers a wide view of the sky.

When Simon entered followed by Adalinda, his eyes spotted a couple of familiar figures. Two beautiful figures that could instantly steal one's attention towards them, were sitting on a row of chairs.

"Oh if it isn't sir Simon" Cynthia said, turning around.

The moment he discovered them, he too was noticed by them. Other than them, there was also the duke and a young man wearing a lurid red robe and holding a cane embedded with a huge core stone. It seemed that both the parties were in between their talks when he came in.

"Princess, they are?" Lucas asked, observing the two of them.

"Ah.. let me introduce them, they are the adventurers who had helped me fight off the bandits and the dangerous monsters of the northern outlaw forest. Sir Simon and Miss Adalinda" Cytnhia said smiling gracefully.

"Oh, so they are the adventurers who managed to defeat those pesky bandits and their Brigand master?" Duke Montford after hearing that, got up from his seat and approached Simon.

Chapter 274

"Young man, you did us a lot of favour by taking care of them. Previously no matter how many times I sent a commission to a guild or sent my personal soldiers, those irksome bandits would always hide some corner of the forest making this whole venture a huge headache for me".

Even when a duke approached him, the young man didn't seem fazed and simply nodded his head.

Duke Montford did not mind his lackadaisical attitude and laughed it off. Though the same wasn't true for Lucas who was beside him. It seemed that he didn't like the attitude of the adventurer that didn't respect royalty. After sparing the other party a few more glances, he didn't bother with them anymore.

"That's right, why don't you sit with us Sir Simon, Miss Adalinda. We have plenty of seats vacant here" Cynthia clasped her hands and invited.

Duke Montford nodded, he had no qualms with adventurers sitting beside them. Simon was just about to reject their offer when Adalinda pulled him along and sat on her designated seat. After being pulled along and brought near the seat by her monstrous strength, he had no choice but to comply and sit with them.

'This little girl, she definitely thinking of some mischief to relieve her boredom' Simon was already used to her antics after travelling with her for a month. Hence he could somewhat guess what the latter was trying to do.

Simon felt a headache coming, How did he end up in this situation? He was just trying to observe how the scene outside looked from the gallery and know more about the air engine. Little did he know that he would be dragged between these two parties.

"So what happened to your convoy when you were attacked by a group of battle bears late at night?" Lucas asked trying to shift the conversation. Even he did not notice that his tone had

become a little sour after the two new entrants sat beside them. His eyes constantly gazed at the princess, trying to initiate a conversation with her.

Cynthia looked at Alvara beside her who decided to reply him on her behalf.

"Yes that is right, we camped at the place without knowing it was the nest of the battle bears. No, I guess sir Simon did inform us about that but because we were too tired to search for a different campsite and due to our negligence in determining the gravity of the situation, we got ambushed by the Battle bears and a Battle grizzly that night".

"However, before we incurred any more casualties, Sir Simon defeated the leader of the battle bears, the Battle Grizzly and forced the rest to flee".

She recounted, a small smile appeared at the corner of her lips when she thought about how many times they were saved by the adventurer and his vast knowledge.

"Hoh... to be able to not only recognise the nest of the battle bears with simply a few signs and to defeat even a Battle grizzly, is quite the feat if I must say so... hahaha" Duke Montfort caressed his beard and said.

He then tapped on the table and added with a serious face.

"Young man I hold talents like you in high regard. If you ever think about quitting the adventurer's profession, I would be glad to have you as my soldier and offer you the position of a commander if you want? Anyhow, the doors to my Castledor city will always be open for you".

Simon shook his head and tactfully rejected the offer from the duke. There was no way he was going to work as a soldier after spending his previous life working for someone else. In this life, Simon had decided to do what he wanted and stay true to his desires.

While everybody was having a pleasant conversation and a decent time, there was someone who did not share such sentiments.

Lucas was annoyed by how many times the adventurer's name came up during their conversation. 'Simon this...Simon that' the conversation that he had changed shifted back to the young man once again.

What annoyed him, even more, was that the princess whenever she gazed at the adventurer, would reveal an interested expression which was unlike the indifferent gaze she threw towards him.

'What is so special about this peasant adventurer? If I want to, I can easily incinerate a group of Battle grizzly. Just because he defeated a single battle grizzly, he is allowed to act so haughtily?' Lucas cursed internally.

A seed of emotion called jealousy that he had never felt before sprouted in his heart at this moment. Suddenly, he remembered something and a crafty light flashed in his eyes as he smiled.

"That's right, since adventurer Simon is so strong, then is he participating in the 'Battle of the Finest' tournament that is going to be held in the capital?"

If Simon participated in the tournament, he would be able to show the princess that he was more powerful than the peasant adventurer who had no proper education and mentor and whose bloodline made it questionable if he could become any stronger.

Simon simply shook his head at those words, he was not going to the capital to participate in the competition and instead he was going there to search for the disciple of this little grandaunt. He had no interest in this tournament called 'Battle of the Finest' whatsoever.

"Ah, is that so? Well, that's a shame because this year many powerful individuals are participating and it will be a good experience to know where exactly your power stands. Other than that there is also the enticement from this year's reward which is rumoured to be a powerful Skill Grimoire amongst the many other rewards" Lucas explained while internally snickering.

Simon processed all the information that was provided by Lucas, he would be lying if he said that his interest wasn't piqued when he heard about the reward and some unfamiliar terms.

Duke Montford laughed loudly before declaring in an excited voice.

"Right, it is as Lucas said, this year's rewards and the people who are participating, are something else. Although a handful of people are privy to it, but the rewards this time was given by the Adventurer's Association, so it cannot be ordinary. According to what I know, many guilds and their guild leaders would be paying a close attention to the winner of this competition".

He then looked at Cynthia and smiled mysteriously "Even the royal family of Ellesmere is sparing no efforts to nurture their members and prodigal young people from their side... isn't that so princess?".

At this moment when all eyes focused on her, Cynthia sighed and replied.

"Indeed it is as you have said, currently royal father and everyone in the palace is quite busy with grooming the third brother for the upcoming competition. I must say that your information network is quite wide, Your Grace".

Duke Montford waved his hands and shook off the remark.

"No such thing your princess... although I was aware that the royal family was doing its best to nurture some people, by buying all of the elixirs and mana crystals they could find all over the region, I couldn't have guessed it was for the prodigal third prince. However, even if it is the third prince, it won't be so easy for him to take the number one spot with how the top five guilds are eyeing the top reward".

"Plus, this year Lucas representing our northern region of the kingdom, would also be participating at the tournament. He is someone who at the mere age of twenty-one, was able to reach level 300 and become the youngest branch manager of the Adventurer's Association. Haha, I cannot wait to see who comes out as the final victor".

Duke Montford stated positively, his hands patting the young man in red robes beside him.

Lucas smiled "His grace is exaggerating, all of this was more than ten years ago. I'm sure that the third prince's achievement is already far greater than mine".

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After exchanging a few more words, Simon and Adalinda were the first ones to excuse themselves followed by Cynthia and Alvara.

The journey with the air engine was extremely smooth and they had covered a vast expanse of land in two days. Something that would have been previously impossible to cover with wagons. The travel these past few days was unexciting with nothing much happening.

On the third day, a disturbance that worried the passengers of the air engine occurred. Out of the eight crew of the airship two fire mages that were above level 200, collapsed due to overexerting their mana.

"What is happening?! How could something like this occur?" Duke Montford thundered. His face was masked with anger when he was reported of such a crisis in between their journey.

"Y-your grace according to our calculation three fire mages and four wind mages would have been enough to keep the air engine running for four days. However, due to the airship not being used for a while, the engine might have gotten clogged and ate more mana than usual" the pilot who was sweating profusely replied.

At this moment, the other passengers also entered the cockpit drawn by the commotion.

"You idiot I'm not asking for your stupid excuses. I want you to quickly find a solution through this crisis" Duke Montford shouted, his prestige cowered the crew members.

"What is wrong your grace?" Cynthia asked with a frown.

"Haaah... apparently, two out of the three fire mages that were operating the fire engine, collapsed due to over draining their mana. Currently, only a single fire mage and four wind mages are keeping the airship operational" Duke Montford replied with an ashen face.

Simon, Adalinda, Alvara and the others knitted their brows when they heard that. From his words, they could interpret that the journey that they thought would go smoothly wouldn't go as such anymore.

Chapter 275

BANG...

With a loud creaking sound, the airship trembled intensely. The ship started slowly falling from the altitude scaring some of the crew members and passengers silly.

At this moment, Simon who was worried about their swiftly decreasing acceleration asked "What about the other four wind mages? Are they all alright?".

Duke Montford looked towards the pilot, he too wanted to know the answer to that question. Since the air engine was malfunctioning and eating more magic than usual, then doesn't that mean that all the crew members operating the ship, were affected the same.

The pilot wiped the sweat from his face and replied nervously "Although the pressure on the wind mages is low due to them having more numbers, it couldn't be said how long they can hold on".

Everyone's eyes widened when they heard that. Losing two out of the three fire mages was already a big blow to the functioning of the airship; however, now they would also have to worry about the other mages who were somehow keeping the air engine floating.

Seeing the tension in the cockpit reach a boiling point, the pilot suggested a solution with a pale face.

"There is a way to resolve this crisis; however, it would require your assistance. If any of the passengers who use fire or wind magic could lend us their help, then it would be possible...".

Everyone present when they heard his words, made a pondering face. Duke Montford nodded his head all the while wearing an intense frown on his face.

"Lucas please lend us your strength". He looked at the young man in red robes and asked.

Lucas stepped forward and spoke dissolving the tension in the air "What is his grace saying. It is natural that I help out when all of us are in this crisis".

Duke Montford nodded his head, he then directed the pilot "This young man has incredible mastery over fire magic, make use of his powers as you see fit".

The pilot hurriedly obliged, he then looked at the pale faces of the other four wind mages and asked "Is there anyone with mastery over wind magic?".

Seeing everyone's pensive look, Alvara glanced at Cynthia before stepping forward.

"I use Gale magic to strengthen my attacks. Although my class is a warrior class more focused in agility and magic stats, I'm quite confident over my mastery of the gale magic". The guard commander stated, her voice was neither hesitant nor boastful.

The intense frown on duke's face finally receded a little "Quick pilot direct them what to do before the whole ship falls down".

BEEP... BEEP at this moment, the airship was fiercely shaking, its hull making creaking noises. The pilot gulped and immediately set forth to direct the two towards their position in the magic array laid in the cockpit.

"Sit in your respective seats and channel your wind magic through that large magic stone in front of you. The principle behind keeping the airship afloat is the same as how you engulf yourself in your magic. In this case, your body is this airship and your magic is this formation".

Alvara and Lucas nodded their head before sitting in their seats and channelling their magic.

BANG... the shaking of the ship intensified and it was hard to keep balance with the ship tilting left and right every now and then.

The passengers of the air engine audibly gulped, the tension only faded when they felt the altitude of the ship was stable now. Little by Little, the air engine started to rise and reached its top altitude once again.

The journey that became rickety for a while, seemed to have become smooth for a while when eventually the remaining four wind mages ran out of mana. It seemed that the consumption from the air engine was still too much for them.

Fortunately, they did not faint like the two fire mages and simply got up from their seat to rest.

"Will the airship be alright with the support of just the two of them for a while?" Duke Montford asked.

The pilot who was holding the staring wheel, seemed to look at the multitudes of gauges and meters on his dashboard before somewhat hesitantly nodding his head.

"Although our speed would be reduced marginally, the air engine will still remain floating and work nonetheless. If we want to increase our speed, we would need another mage or a warrior with a high level who can support that miss with the wind magic".

Cynthia crossed her hands in front of her ample chest and pondered. The ship would still work even if it's only the two of them working together, however, their journey would be delayed and they would be arriving later than expected. It was not only the princes but all the passengers including Adalinda who thought the same.

Simon who made an expression like he had no other choice stepped forward, and decided to use this chance to offer his help.

"I can use wind magic too... with my help and after the recovery of the other mages, how long will it take us to reach the capital?".

Hearing his question, the passengers and ship's crew, focused their eyes on him. They were all rejoicing internally that they had another person with mastery over wind magic with them.

However, those who have travelled with Simon for the past couple of weeks, looked at him with gobsmacked eyes. If they were to believe the young man, then didn't it mean that not only was he adept with fire and electro magic, but was also proficient in wind magic?

A person with mastery over three different kinds of elements, how rare was that? Even in the capital, they thought that there were only a handful of such skilled individuals.

"Hoh... you can also use wind magic? That is great news, pilot do you think our speed will increase now?" Duke Montford stroked his beard and asked.

The pilot mused over it for a few seconds before replying in a relieved tone "In that case it will only take us half a day more than the estimated four days of journey".

Everybody nodded in rejoice after knowing that the voyage wouldn't take more than four days. The trip after that was extremely smooth without any more hiccups, with the help of three people with enormous mana, even the ship's crew could take it easy and preserve their mana.

On the morning of the fourth day, they approached near the capital which was only half a day's distance away. From their elevation, they could see multiple air engines in the distant skies arriving from different regions of the kingdom.

The allure of the tournament that is soon going to be held in the capital was so great that it brought people from every corner of the kingdom.

Simon who was watching the many air engines dotting the distant sky from the gallery, noticed that all of them were gathering in a certain direction. After the mages of the airship recovered from their mana drain, they held their respective positions once again which made Simon, Alvara and Lucas free to do whatever they want.

"Since the capital city of Ellesmere is a no flying zone, the air engine has to land at the airfield a few kilometres away from the capital. That is why all of the airship will be heading there".

"Look over there, beyond the vast mountain range that you see, lies the capital" Cynthia who had entered the gallery at some unknown point in time, explained after seeing the direction he was looking at.

Simon nodded his head and nonchalantly inquired gazing at the distant mountain range "So you were a princess huh?".

Cynthia tucked her violet hair behind her ears and smiled "It was not like I was hiding it, it's just that the situation at that time did not allow it. Besides I never wished for such an identity". Her smile had an unknown depth of emotion in it.

"We will be reaching the capital soon and your job as my escort will also end. What will you do after that?" She asked turning her gaze towards the man who was lost in his own thoughts.

Simon focused his eyes, an unusual glint flashed in them as he replied "We naturally have our reason for coming to the capital so we will be parting ways after this".

Cynthia tilted her head and pried "You are not here for the 'Battle of the Finest' tournament that is going to open soon?".

The young man simply smiled neither agreeing nor denying her words. Well, it was not like the reason they were here in the capital was not related to the 'Battle of the Finest'; after all, the disciple that they are searching for is headed for the capital with the exact same reason.

"Hnn~ anyways our Serene Palace Merchant Guild is going to open their auction two days before the tournament. Obviously, there is going to be many good items and rare artifacts. I'm sure all of the participants of the tournament are looking forward to the opening of the auction to increase their powers. If you have time, you should visit our auction, I'm sure you won't be disappointed".

Cynthia leaned against the railing of the gallery and rested her hand on her cheek. At this moment, the evening sun cast a reddish hue across the horizon painting the sky with its brilliant colour.

It had been more than four days since they had boarded the air engine and amidst a couple of hiccups in between, they were finally about to reach the capital of the kingdom of Ellesmere.

Simon spread his senses and was astounded to find hundreds of thousands of presences coming from the direction of the distant mountain range.

Chapter 276

From the readings Simon got from his senses, the population of the capital they were about to enter, outmatched all the other cities that he had been to.

At this moment, Adalinda, Alvara and Chuck also entered the gallery after sensing the air engine change direction suddenly.

The little grandaunt excitedly waltzed towards him and pulled him into a corner.

"What's wrong?" Simon asked.

"Hehe, that stupid disciple, I found the aura left behind by Lucine when she tore the space around here" Adalinda excitedly reported, her eyes were like that of a predator that had found its prey.

"Can you find her?" Simon asked, he too wanted to find her disciple as soon as possible and repay the favour he owed her.

Meanwhile, Chuck approached Cynthia and gave her a courteous bow "Your Highness, I would like to excuse myself after we reach the capital. My fiancée is waiting for me there and I also have to report back to my guild".

Cynthia nodded and turned towards Alvara who handed her a badge from her space ring.

"Take this token with you. You can use this to exchange for your reward from our merchant guild and also be able to enter our auction without any invitation. Also, I'm very grateful for your assistance up until now, adventurer Chuck Remington".

The adventurer unconditionally accepted the token, kept it in his space ring and turned to leave.

"What about Sir Simon and Miss Adalinda? Will you also be leaving after we reach the airfield?" the princess inquired.

Hearing her question, the two looked clueless and unsure. To which, she offered her assistance "In that case, how about you two leave with me? the capital is very bustling with hordes of people and activities everywhere, it is very easy to get lost. I can drop you to the commercial district where it would be easy for you to find a good inn and rest"

As she said that, her gaze diverted towards the marvelling site that appeared in front of them. A gigantic city that lived up to its name as the heart of the kingdom, the capital city of Ellesmere lay beyond the mountain range. Even from their elevation, they couldn't see the full extent of the city which was full of vibrance.

Tall spires, buildings of various shapes that showcased architectural advancement, dotted every corner of the city giving it a unique look. Added with the abundance of hills, the capital's grandeur was something to marvel at.

The city was not only full of activity, but the amalgamation of different cultures mixing together, gave it the look it has now.

A powerful barrier that even gave Simon a sense of dread, engulfed the city like an inverted bowl. According to Cynthia and Duke Montford, the barrier was laid by a powerful mage to protect the city from any unknown threat.

At the centre of this city, lay the grand castle that outshined all the other manors around it. Its splendour was one of a kind and could be seen as one of the points that added to the attractiveness of the city.

Thousands of soldiers patrolled the city donned in their shining armours carrying the symbol of the royal family. The townspeople depended on these very soldiers to resolve any dispute and keep their city safe and sound.

The glory and grandeur of the city far outmatched any of the city that Simon had seen up until now after his reincarnation.

"Welcome to the capital city Ellesmere" the pilot said reducing their altitude. The air engine turned around and followed the path the various other air engines were following and silently drifted towards the mountain range.

A large field that seemed to be made out after cutting the mountain in half, was where the airships were landing. Various kinds of air engines in multiple shapes, were parked in this field.

Naturally, those who could own an air engine were not ordinary people and were nobles and influential people just like the duke. They were accompanied by their line-up of guards, as they boldly walked forward boldly and dignifiedly.

Simon's eyes roamed and landed on those guards, each of their levels was no less than 300 and some were even above level 400.

,m After their airship landed with a heavy thud, the staff members of the air engine opened the exit for the passengers.

Landing off the air engine, Simon saw the others following a path and entering the air station that was built to receive the guests coming from the airships.

"Your Highness, I will be troubling you to send a letter to the minister. I will be going to my villa first before meeting up with his majesty" Duke Montford said passing a nearby soldier a badge that holds his mark.

After the soldier inspected the mark, he hurriedly ran outside the station to ready a carriage for him. Because the identity of each guest arriving from the air engine is very powerful, the station provides multiple guards along with the carriages to carry these personages.

Duke Montford nonetheless, rejected the offer of the soldiers and boarded the carriage that was prepared by the soldier along with Lucas and his guards. Since he brought guards from his dukedom, he did not see a need to trouble these soldiers who were diligently doing their work.

Princess Cynthia enjoyed the same privilege as the duke when the soldiers spotted her. Her beautiful face and reputation that was renowned across the capital was something that these of the city, were not unaware of. They swiftly prepared a carriage and assigned soldiers to guard her.

Cynthia too rejected their offer initially, only to be insisted on fervently by these soldiers. Since Simon and Adalinda counted as Cynthia's guards, they obviously boarded the carriage with her. Adventurer Chuck found himself a different carriage and went off his own way.

With everybody in, the two carriages carrying the Princess and the Duke, departed for the capital which was only a few kilometres away and located at the base of this mountain range. One could see the city more clearly from the windows of the carriage and its vibrant life.

"Do you all have a destination in mind? If not then Alvara here can recommend you some good inns. Since the capital is flooded by people coming from all of the regions, due to the tournament, most of the inns will be already pre-booked. It would be very hard to find an empty inn and a good one at that" Cynthia said looking at Simon and Adalinda.

Simon deliberated over it before accepting her offer, the capital was brimming with people as she had said. Therefore finding a good inn might be very difficult than one would assume. Adalinda too did not have a reason to refuse since she was yet to find her disciple who was hiding quietly in this city.

Before long, the carriages appeared in front of a tall rampart surrounded by many soldiers who were checking the identity of the passengers.

"One must pay a toll fee to enter the city and register their name; however, since you all are travelling with me, there would be no need to do so this time. If any soldier asks you to show your identity, simply show them the badge of my Serene Palace Merchant guild, it would be enough proof for your identity" Cynthia said.

Meanwhile, the guard commander passed a badge engraving the emblem of the royal family to the soldier who hurriedly saluted and made way for them.

The moment, the carriage entered through the gate, Simon felt a vast energy that was from the barrier protecting the city, wash over his body. The power contained within the barrier was so strong that he felt like even the strongest magic in his arsenal, would only be able to create a small ripple in it.

The carriage passed through the gate and entered the city, a tidal wave-like liveliness enshrouded the city at this moment and one could see that every inhabitant in this place, was in a festive mood.

The roads connecting the city were very wide and allowed more than four carriages to pass through simultaneously at once. People in different garbs, walked on the pavement of the road, each going through their own routine for the day.

Troops of soldiers patrolled the area after every few minutes and the security of this place was top notch.

The carriage containing the duke, after bidding the princess goodbye, headed for a different intersection in road. Whereas their carriage headed for the commercial district of the city. Which was also where most of the businesses and inns were located in.

After travelling for a while in the extremely busy streets, the carriage stopped in front of a hotel that was no less than the one they had stayed in when they arrived in Castledor city.

It seemed that the hotel was run by the Serene Palace Merchant Guild which made it easier for Simon and Adalinda who were accompanying the mistress of the guild, to get good rooms.

Simon had honestly underestimated the merchant guild, he didn't think that they would have their branch in every corner of the kingdom and different chains of business. After dropping them off, the carriage left for the royal palace.

"Esteemed customer, your room has been prepared on the third floor and these are your keys. Your food would be provided to your rooms or you can dine in the hall... if you need anything please don't hesitate to tell us. I hope you enjoy your stay" the manager of the hotel brought out two keys from the drawer and spoke to them cordially.

Simon took the keys and passed one to Adalinda, he was just about to climb the stairs at the corner of the hall, when he noticed that the little girl was locking her brows in a frown.

"What's wrong? Did you sense the aura of your disciple nearby?" he asked.

Chapter 277

Adalinda shook her head, she then glanced at Simon before narrowing her eyes and remarking "Don't you think that princess was too kind and hospitable to us?".

"Eh?" being asked something like that all of a sudden, he became speechless. He thought over the actions of the violet hair woman who also turned out to be the princess of this kingdom. Although her actions might seem as being too kind to others, Simon who had increased his value in front of her and saved her precious friend and aid didn't think much about her action.

He told Adalinda not to worry over it too much and climbed up the stairs before disappearing inside his room.

Now left all alone in front of the door of her own room, she pursed her lips and softly mumbled "Did that beast soul say something to her... Anyways I hope that you are right and this is just me thinking too much".

A carriage travelled through the commercial district of the city, passed through many luxurious manors and castles, before appearing in front of a fortress that surrounded the royal palace in the centre.

The royal palace including the fortress and the surrounding areas, covered almost 3% of the entire landmass of the city. The soldiers guarding the royal palace were much more stronger than the ones patrolling the city and each and every one of them was releasing a strong presence.

Seeing the carriage that had arrived, was carrying the princess, the leader of the soldiers allowed the carriage to pass through. After meandering around the front yard of the castle. The carriage finally stopped in front of the royal palace where the royal family of Ellesmere resided.

The maids and the servants of the palace, made a neat line to welcome the princess who had just stepped down from her wagon.

"Welcome back your highness" all of them performed a graceful bow simultaneously.

Cynthia nodded her head and walked in alongside her guard commander. The interior of the palace just like its exterior, gave off an aura of ambience with many artistical designs and decorations filling up the place.

"Oh dear sister... ah, it's such a relief to see you come back safe and sound. Your first brother here was worried sick when I heard you were travelling back without waiting for the royal escorts".

Just as she reached the wide hall of the palace, an emotional voice carrying warmth and concern, sounded out. Turning her head, Cynthia spotted a man with reddish-brown hair and wearing a neat black suit, approaching her from the other entrance of the hall.

The man was of average height and accompanied by his handsome face and the amiable aura he released, he was the bane of many noble ladies. At this moment, he was accompanied by his guards as he walked towards her.

"First brother, thank you for your concern, I was able to reach the capital safe and sound" Cynthia smiled her elegance was not the least bit out shadowed by the person in front of her.

"Haha, It's all good as long as you are fine. your brother is quite busy with the upcoming events that our city is going to hold so I will not accompany you any longer. We shall have a talk some other time".

Saying that, the first prince walked past her and disappeared from the hallway.

Cynthia looked at the back of the man who she had just referred to as her first brother. Alstin Elrand Ellesmere, he was her half-brother and just like her, born to a mistress.

He was a man who carried himself with grace and was popular amongst the royal servants and guards. Although in terms of martial prowess he cannot be compared to her third brother, he still had quite an attainment at his age.

After coming out of the hall, the next person to cross their path was... "Big Brother!?" Alvara shouted delightedly from beside Cynthia. She rushed towards him and nestled in his embrace.

The middle-aged man in front of them was the very own brother of the guard commander and also the strongest royal guard of the palace responsible for guarding the safety of the king.

He was donned in an armour that gave off a blue sheen whenever the sunlight shone on it and carried a large greatsword that was one of the treasures of the kingdom. Draping over his back was a red mantle with the mark of the royal family engraved on it.

"You little girl... do you know how worried I was these past couple of weeks" the royal guard said tousling the hair of his sister who was a head shorter than him.

Alvara pouted and acted just like a little sister would in front of her brother.

"But big brother Cyrus is always busy with work and does not even have time to look after his little sister".

Looking at his little sister who was brooding and trying to act cute, Cyrus could help but laugh bitterly. He patted her head when he was relieved that she had suffered no injuries before turning his attention towards the princess.

The royal guard got on one of his knees and bowed "Please excuse the rudeness of my little sister your highness. Usually she does not act like this but it appears that I have spoiled her a tad too much".

His words immediately made the face of the guard commander beet red and she couldn't help stomp her foot in annoyance.

Cynthia smiled seeing the sibling bicker the moment they met and also at the same time her eyes became melancholic. Looking at the familial love and the care the two had for each other, she was once again reminded how incomplete and alien her family felt to her.

There was no such unbounded love and even the slight concern her brother showed towards her was all a façade. It would be a lie if she said that she wasn't jealous of her friend who could enjoy something like this without having to struggle for it.

"I don't mind the least on the contrary I quite enjoy seeing you two like this. It's a rare opportunity to see my guard commander who always appears to be apathetic and cold to others, act like that. That reminds me, Alvara there was missing you quite badly during our trip saying things like 'If

only big brother was here then all of this would amount to nothing', 'was I able to close the gap between me and my brother even a little bit with this level up' and so on and so forth".

Cynthia explained grinning wildly.

At this moment, Alvara felt like dying with embarrassment and her entire face till her neck was a shade of red.

Cyrus laughed at those words from the princess and exchanged a few more greetings with her after which his expression became serious. His earlier attitude of easy-going and friendly, was nowhere to be seen taken over by the solemnity and aura of a warrior.

"Your Highness, although it is not my place to inform you about this, I still feel indebted to you for taking care of my sister and that is why I ask of you to remain vigilant even if you are in your personal quarters".

His sudden change in expression and tone, alerted the two as they knitted their brows.

"Did something happen big brother?" Alvara asked hurriedly. If he the strongest royal guard is saying that something was up and they should remain vigilant, they cannot simply ignore it.

Cyrus made a difficult face and shook his head saying "I cannot say any more than this. If the princess wants to find out more she can employ those fellows from her guild to dig out more. Additionally, now that the princess is here, you should visit his majesty. There are bound to be a few more changes to the tournament".

After saying what he needed, he patted the head of his little sister before excusing himself. He was after all, the leader of all the royal guards tasked with protecting the safety of not just the king but also all of the royal members.

During this time when hordes of people are arriving from different regions of the kingdom and possibly even from foreign lands, he was bound to be busy and his days hectic.

Alvara made a frustrated face and badmouth her brother who had left without explaining the whole thing "Kuh, he is always like this. He never explains the whole thing and shrouds everything with a layer of mystery".

p Cynthia smiled bitterly and consoled her friend who rarely showed such emotions other than when in front of her brother.

"Don't say like that. He is your big brother and is very concerned about your safety. There must be a reason for him not being able to say the whole truth to us directly. Nonetheless, he still told us to remain cautious and dropped a clue".

Though she did not know why she needs to remain vigilant even in her personal quarters, she had an inkling as to why even the captain of the royal guards couldn't say a word about it to anyone. Other than the king himself who else had the authority to make the royal guard to remain silent.

'I must deploy the shadow guards and get to the root of it' Cynhtia thought internally before walking towards the study of her father, the king where he spends most of his time.

The study room of the king was located at the edge of the hallway and one must pass through many line up of soldiers to arrive before the room.

"Royal father I'm back. Can I come in?" Cynthia knocked on the door that was more than three meters wide.

Chapter 278

"Let her in" a coarse voice of that an old man sounded from inside the room. The guard that was standing by the door, pushed it open allowing her and Alvara to walk in.

A wide room with numerous bookshelves came into view. An old man with white hair and beard, sat at the table in the corner of the room. He wore tailored white clothes embroidered with crimson linings and donned a black long coat on top.

His face had many wrinkles, brows like two sharp swords and his eyes carried the might and presence of a king. The man was none other than the King of this Kingdom of Ellesmere. A wide map of the Kingdom, was hung on the wall behind him.

The old man wore spectacles and was looking at the parchment of paper in his hand. After Cynthia and Alvara entered, they chose to quietly sit on the sofa placed in the centre of the room.

SIGH... the king sighed putting the parchment down and walked towards the set of sofas placed to receive any guests coming to his study.

"Father"

"Your Majesty"

Cynthia and Alvara addressed.

The old man who was the king and also the father of Cynthia nodded and glanced deeply at her before closing his eyes. Though he did not say it out, but he was relieved to see his only daughter return safe and sound.

"Father is your health alright? Are you still taking your medicines properly?" Cynthia asked in concern after looking at the thinning figure of the old man. While it is true that she had not received any familial love since young from her sibling and others, she at least knew that her father was the only one who truly cared for her.

However, he was king of a kingdom, he did not have much time on his hands to look after all of his children and thus the relationship between them never grew any closer.

Though that may be true, the man sitting in front of her was still her father and seeing his depleting health, how could she not feel pain. Despite her cold and business-driven exterior, she only holds the best interest for her father and this kingdom at heart.

That is why she still cannot get over the suspicions that her father might be poisoned. Although all the doctors and alchemists failed to detect any poison on his body, Cynthia still firmly believed that was the case. Or else how could her father's body which was already above level 500, be so frail and weak?

On an average, a person's lifespan increases with the increase in their level. It is especially so when they cross a high threshold like her father where their powers multiply manifold. Essentially a person who has broken through level 500, has peeked into the mysteries of mana and has reached a realm where it would not be unusual for their life expectancy to go up by hundreds of years.

That is to say, her father who was only above two hundred years of age, shouldn't be reaching the limit of his lifespan. Although she was suspicious, there were too many suspects and no evidence.

"Haha, you don't have to be so concerned my daughter. Even though my illness has suddenly flared a few days ago, Doctor Norm has diagnosed me already and given me medicines. He said that it's because of the old injuries that I have accumulated on the battlefield, taking its effect now. He is not wrong, I had indeed left those injuries unattended thinking that they would heal on their own".

Her father reminisced leaning back. He then waved his hands shifting the topic from his waning health to something else.

"Hmm... Cynthia for you to have directly come to my study after just arriving, you must have met Cyrus. Did he inform you about anything?" the king inquired, his eyes deceiving his body were filled with power and authority.

Cynthia shook her head and replied with only a few words stating that he had only told her to stay careful.

The king nodded and muttered, "He...sigh. It cannot be helped, he is a brother and extremely loyal to me after all. It is understandable where he is coming from".

Cynthia saw her father crease his forehead in worry before getting up from his seat.

"The reason I called you here is because I have been informed that our neighbouring kingdoms, the Kingdom of Blackthorn and the Ingolf Kingdom are also attending the event and have requested the headquarters of Adventurer's Association to make an exception this time and allow their young geniuses to register for the tournament too" her father walked back towards his study table and passed her, who was following behind, the parchment.

Cynthia carefully read the contents of the letter which was addressed to the head branch of their Adventurer's Association, more accurately, the branch president.

According to the letter, the kingdom of Blackthorn and Ingolf want to hold a joint cooperation by making the tournament that their kingdom of Ellesmere holds every decade, an international event.

According to them, doing so would increase the cooperation and peace between nations. They petition for the 'battle of the finest' tournament to also include young geniuses from their kingdom.

"Those foxes, they are clearly after the reward that the Adventurer's association has prepared for this event. Peace and cooperation are all nonsense, a façade they are using to get themselves involved in this tournament" The King mocked looking at the wide map on the ceiling.

The Kingdom of Blackthorn and Ingolf were their neighbouring nations with a geography of more or less as big as them.

"Has this petition been accepted?" Cynthia asked creasing her delicate brows.

The reward that person from Adventurer's association had prepared for them, was for their kingdom. No matter whose hands it fell onto as long as that person was the inhabitant of their kingdom, it would be their nation who would get stronger in the end.

However, all of it will become moot if this petition were to be accepted.

Her father did not answer her and simply sighed, from his behaviour, it was plainly obvious that the petition was already passed and accepted.

"What is father thinking? Wouldn't everything be alright if we are the ones who win the tournament?" Cynthia thought over it before suggesting.

Alvara who was standing behind the princess, also nodded. Even if it was the Kingdom of Blackthorn and Ingolf participating in this tournament, it was not like their kingdom had any lack of talents to compete with them.

With the participation of their prodigal third prince, they had a strong possibility of winning no matter who the other kingdoms or the guilds brought forward.

The King, Henry Alaric Ellesmere sat on his seat and said in a somewhat unsure tone "Things wouldn't look that bad if it was only those two neighbouring kingdoms; however, from the information that I have received, there would be some guests arriving from the Sanguine Empire too. I can only put all of my hopes onto your third brother".

"What?" those words immediately caused the two listeners to widen their eyes.

Unlike their kingdom and the two others who were just bottom tier kingdoms in this vast Central Continent, Sanguine Empire was a genuine powerhouse and a middle-tier empire at that. In terms of military power, they were dozens of times more powerful than them.

'Did the allure of the first place reward also attract the attention of the Sanguine Empire?' Cynthia thought internally, even she wasn't privy to the information related to the reward for this year's tournament other than her father who seemed unwilling to disclose it.

Although she knew it was not an ordinary item, even she didn't expect it to be so grand as to attract the attention of the surrounding kingdoms. They cannot lose the reward to them at all costs.

"Royal father, I have not seen the third brother around, is he not in the palace?" Cynthia inquired.

King Henry supported his chin with his hands and nodded "He is currently training inside the Chamber of Guidance and is yet to come out. I have currently restricted anyone from approaching near the area and have placed guards just in case".

The Chamber of Guidance was a special space left behind by their ancestor who was a Ranker and their founder to train the future genius of their family. It is a room engraved with many complicated runes and arrays to draw in the surrounding mystical energy to achieve a special effect that helps one to train.

Most of the things related to the Chamber of Guidance was a tightly kept secret and Cynthia only knew that the room had an extremely beneficial effect in training one's skill and level. Since the array and the mystical effect need a lot of time to restore, the room was last opened more than 30 years ago and only the future kings of the kingdom had the right to enter it.

However, it could be seen from how important the upcoming event was for the royal family to even open the chamber of guidance for the third prince, a change that had never been done before since the establishment of their kingdom.

She nodded her head and only excused herself after she saw her father busying himself with his work. After they got out of the king's study room, Cynthia directly headed for her palace.

"Order all the leaders of the shadow guards to assemble in the guild by today also ask the silver guards to remain cautious for these past few weeks".

Cynthia directed after they reached a moon-white palace that was the symbol of her merchant guild. Alvara bowed and left her side to perform her orders. The situation was so that it needed her immediate action.

Chapter 279

In one of the hotels of the Serene Palace Merchant guild, Simon sat cross-legged on his bed, his hand sweeping through the thin film of window in front of him. Items such as boots, canes, wrist guards and rotten sandwiches littered the space around him.

What was he doing? Currently, he was using his steadily increasing DP to get something out of the [Ga?????] (Previously [Gacha]). Everything that was littering the room presently, was something that came out of the option.

After his dungeon started getting a steady income of DP, Simon had made a habit of using [Ga?????] every day. However, getting a good item from the option was so astronomically low that the [B] rank Bloodthorn Demonic Warhorse was still the best he got out of it till now.

It would be a lie if he said that he was not frustrated but he had no one to blame for this other than himself; after all, he was the one who had put the probability so low. Though, at that time he had no way of knowing that he would reincarnate with the system that he had created.

By now, he had used the [100,000 DP] option more than ten times and the highest rank items he got were still the [C] ranks. So why was he still using [Ga?????] and drawing items from the option?

The reason was simple, Simon who had survived the extremely dangerous lands of Ghastly winding forest, knew how important it was to have lifesaving items and trump cards. If he could draw something useful from the [Ga?????], he would have another card in his arsenal that he could use during dire times.

Especially now when he was in a foreign land where his strength and the things he had was the only thing he could rely on. He couldn't be blamed for wanting to have a few additional cards up his sleeves.

Simon had a belly full of anger at the things he was drawing out. And after using the [100,000 DP] another ten times, he was just about to give up when the option lit up with a brilliant golden light.

The light coming out of the window was so piercing that it brightened the entire room and forced Simon to cover his eyes. His heart nonetheless, was pounding furiously in anticipation of the thing that was about to come out.

The phenomenon was different than when he had summoned the Bloodthorn Demonic Warhorse, a [B] rank subordinate. The light this time was not any weaker which naturally rose his expectation of the thing that was about to come up.

The golden light only settled after a few seconds passed thus allowing Simon to remove his hands covering his eyes. Suspended in the air, in front of his wide-open eyes and wildly pounding heart, was a row of golden stones the size of a fist.

Each of these stones, were engraved with a rune that looked extremely striking with the way it was carved. When using [Analysis], this was the result he got.

Golden Guardian Stone, [B] tier. A protective stone that was crafted by a divine craftsman as a way to pass his time. Though the name of the craftsman is lost in the annals of history, his creations still remained.

The Golden Guardian stones are forged after condensing every advance tier attribute of mana making it an incredible defensive artefact. Creates a golden shield around the person when shattered and protects them from every skill and magic under a certain level. Duration:- 1 second.

The stones were an incredible artefact with their protective ability to create a shield around the user. Although the description did not say how powerful of an attack the shield can take, seeing that the stones were analysed as [B] tier, they were definitely not an ordinary item.

With ten of these stones in his hands, Simon had an additional lifesaving card. The value of the Golden Guardian Stones, were well worth the 2,000,000 DP investment he had put into the option.

The gag and frustration of drawing boots and rotten sandwiches was long gone from his mind. If he had something to complain about, it would be that the stones were a single-use item and their duration was only 1 second.

However, he who was only drawing these garbage items before did not have the leeway to have such thoughts.

Knock..Knock...Knock... suddenly, his door was knocked and the excited figure of Adalinda rushed in slamming the door open even before he could open it. 'What is the point of even knocking if you were just going to break in?' he thought internally.

"Simon.. she is nearby, I used a special technique which showed me that she is in this city..." Adalinda elatedly said; however, her sentence was stopped short when she saw the messy room and the rotten smell drifting around his room.

"Geez, this room stinks... you better clean up before I come back again" she pinched her nose, threw her selfish words and darted off the room.

It was only now after Adalinda had made him aware that he became conscious of the smell that was currently occupying his room. He was so engrossed with the item that he had got from the [Ga??????] that he totally forgot about the heaps of stinking boots and rotten sandwiches.

Simon opened the windows to clear out the air and tidied his room. He gathered all of the boots and sandwiches in his space ring and decided to throw them when he went out. it would be too weird if he asked the staff to do it since h did not want to be subjected to their dubious and questioning eyes when they find all of this.

There was once a time when drawing this rotten sandwiches, he thought that they might have some special abilities hidden and used analysis on each and every one of them only to come out disappointed.

These were the gag items that his colleagues from his department had added onto the option to annoy the players a bit and make it so that one does not get a good item easily. But with a stroke of fate, he was the one who had ended up drawing the short end of the stick was him because of this system.

After stretching his body and looking at the bustling streets of the royal capital, Simon had an inexplicable feeling to roam the roads of the busy city.

In corner of the city, one could see multiple old compartments neatly lining up together. The building were not very tall and only three stories, their architecture was old and moss could be seen growing on the walls.

Clearly, this place was the residential area of the middle-class people. At this moment, a man wearing a grey robe that covered his figure from head to toe and a mask concealing his face, appeared on the empty street like a ghost.

The person looked around himself as if trying to see if they were being tracked before walking towards a dark alleyway. TAK... TAK... the sounds of footsteps rang out before the person stopped in front of a sewer hole, carefully opened the cover and jumped in.

Contrary to one's expectation, the sewer hole, was for reason kept quite clean and had not been in use for a while. The light inside was dim and as the person walked for a while, a wide space soon opened up.

"Eight... what took you so long?" A voice came from the other side of the place. The person in grey robes who was referred to as Eight, glanced at one of the many pillars of this place and spoke.

"Eleven... nothing specifically, I just finished my work and arrived. How about you, did you finish what you were told?" Eight asked. The pillar Eight was looking at, distorted a little before a person in an off white robe and wearing a mask, walked out.

Eleven took silent steps towards eight before laughing casually "Haha, who do you think I am, of course, I am done with the task on my end".

From his loud and husky voice, It could be ascertained that the other party was a man.

Eight nodded his head and inquired "Has that person arrived yet?".

Hearing Eight mention that person, the atmosphere around Eleven turned serious. He didn't speak anymore and simply beckoned Eight with his gesture to follow him. After crisscrossing through a long and complex route, the two stood in front of a large concrete door in the shape of a circle.

If one wanted to pass through, they had to push open the door themselves with their own strength. The concrete door or more exactly the cover was more than 3 meters in diameter and looked extremely heavy to move.

Nonetheless, Eight grabbed it with a single hand and slide it open as it was made of thermocol. Behind the door lay a large space big enough to be called a small stadium. The numerous pillar supporting the place, was each a meter thick and had fire torches on them to light the area.

The two of them immediately used their fire magic to light up those torches and illuminate this wide and dark area. After a few seconds when the entire space was finally lighted up a black figure that was currently leaning against a pillar came into view.

The distance and the light were not adequate enough to see the full figure of the person on the other side. However, it was not a problem for the two of them.

The being; yes, the being in front of them was not a human, it had two jagged horns, a pale white skin and glaring crimson eyes that were terrifying enough to even give them a sense of dread.

Chapter 280

The pair of crimson pupils silently watched them before revealing a hard to describe emotion.

Eight silently gulped and compelled his body to move forward, Eleven followed his lead and arrived in front of the being who can only be described with two words Demon Noble.

"Your Lordship" they bowed their heads and got on one knee.

As if liking their etiquette, the Demon noble smiled and slowly walked towards them. When the figure of the demon Noble came in front of the torchlight, they could finally see his face and expression that seemed to be smiling.

In terms of purely looks, the man in front could be certainly called devilishly handsome if not for the heavy foreboding and dark aura that he was constantly releasing.

"Hoho, I thought I would have to wait a little longer but you two have arrived earlier than I have expected" the Demon Noble said observing the two.

Eight hurriedly shook his head commenting "How can that be, even if we have ten times the gall, we would never dare make a Demon Earl such as your lordship wait".

The Demon Noble who was in the truest sense a nobility amongst the Demon Nobles, laughed.

"It seems that the city above is in a festive mood? Their happy peals of laughter, joy and merriness makes me want to... plunge the city in despair hehehe" the Demon Earl looked at the ceiling or more specifically, the city above him and a twisted expression surfaced on his face.

Hearing those words and feeling the presence the demon was emitting, Eight and Eleven had their nerves taught and their faces under the mask, had gone pale. The demon did not hide his desires and said them in an extremely offhanded and trivial manner.

"That.." Eight tried to form some words, but felt like his throat was so dry that he couldn't even speak.

"Hehehe, relax I'm just kidding. I have no desire to start a war with that guy".

Eight felt his nerves that had been stretched taut by all the tension, relax at that moment and he surreptitiously released a breath of relief. He was more than aware that if not for the presence of that person, this twisted demon would have certainly done what he have said.

Eight gave a dry cough and moisten his throat before asking in a hoarse voice "I'm sorry if my words seem impudent, but has your lordship been discovered when entering the city?".

The Demon Earl who was up until now enjoying teasing them, knitted his brows all of a sudden. His extremely glaring eyes radiated an even more frightening aura that pressured the two in front of him.

"Hmph, at first I thought sneaking into this city would be as easy as flipping my palm, however, the barrier that is surrounding the city, appeared to be more of a challenge than I thought. Since the barriers restricted any intruders, I had to break it forcefully".

The demon narrated clearly a little angry that he was not able to deal with a barrier of such level.

The two humans kneeling in front of him, Eight and Eleven, had shocked expressions plastered on their faces if one could see through their masks. Why wouldn't they be? After all, the barrier that had been set by an ancestor of this kingdom and one of the strongest humans around this area, was evaluated by this demon as only challenging.

Although the barrier had been created and inlaid for more than 800 years ago, it still retained more than 80% of its power to this day.

Those words once again solidified how insanely powerful the demon in front of him was. However, in the next second, the implication of forcefully breaking a city-wide barrier dawned on him and he hurriedly asked:

"Your Lordship, please pardon my offence but since you have broken the barrier, that must mean that... you have been discove...?!".

Before Eight could complete his sentence, he felt a terrifying set of eyes pause on him. His body, no his senses at this moment told him not to speak even a word more if he wanted to live.

His guess was spot on since the mood of the Demon earl was fluctuating like crazy whenever he mentioned the barrier.

"Tch, the likes of you do not need to worry about that. How can the puny brains of you humans be able to understand the greatness of a demon earl? Even if they felt the vibrations of me entering forcefully through the barrier, I was careful enough to mask my presence. With their intelligence, they should only be able to find insignificant clues" The demon earl boasted, his words were laced with disdain for the race.

Eleven clenched his fists tight, he felt extremely indignant when the race he belonged to, was ridiculed like that. Nonetheless, he was not so naïve as to act out on those emotions or else he wouldn't have reached the position he was currently in.

Although he felt unresigned and repulsed internally, he did not allow it to show through his body language and suppressed the feeling internally. Right now his topmost priority and order was to get the item from the demon.

The Demon earl looked at Eleven enthusiastically but lost interest after a while when he saw the latter not falling for his bait. He then shifted his eyes on Eight who had been meticulous enough to keep his emotions in check from the start.

"I have already ascertained that you have been sent by that guy. Tch, the nerve of him to send his lackeys to me instead of coming personally. Anyways, you are here for that item right.. then did you bring the thing I asked?" The Demon Earl complained in a foul mood.

"Please appease your anger, your Lordship Demon Earl Avrox. Our master would have certainly come to receive you but him coming here would cause a chain of events in the city and hence he had sent the two of us instead. As for the item, it is here" Eight replied tactfully and passed a space ring.

The Demon named Avrox, scanned the contents of the ring once and a wicked smile inborn to demons, crept up to his face.

"Not bad... that guy has kept the end of his bargain. It is natural that I do so too but given the strength of you two I can simply kill you here and make my way back".

Eight stood still, the way he seemed unfazed, told Avrox that his teasing did not work.

"In that case, our master will give a visit to your dungeon when the time comes" he replied calmly.

Avrox revealed his deck of sharp incisive teeth and smiled widely "You are quite cheeky for an underling. Such a waste, if you were a demon noble, I wouldn't mind taking you as my own subordinate".

Saying that, Avrox brought out a small box the size of a brick and tossed it towards the grey-robed man.

Not minding his words, Eight caught the box and gave its contents a go through before immediately keeping it inside his space ring. He then along with Eleven bowed towards the demon one last time before turning around to leave through the entrance they came from.

"Wait..."

Just when they were about to reach the Circular concrete lid, the coarse voice of the Demon Earl echoed around the empty space. The two of them turned around unsure why the Demon would them all of a sudden.

ZzzSssTT... with a burst of thunder, a black figure suddenly appeared in front of them as if teleporting. The speed was so absurd that they did not even have time to blink their eyes before the very person who was supposed to be more than a few dozen meters away from them, was suddenly in front of their face.

"Hmmm?!" Avrox caressed his chin with one of his hands and his eyes intensely observed the grey-robed man. An unknown pressure that made it difficult for Eight to breathe, descended onto his entire body making him feel like wax in front of a flame.

"W-what's wro.." Eleven tried to interfere; however, with just the gesture of the hand, he was slammed into the wall by Avrox.

"Why is it that I feel the aura of Demon Noble on you? Judging from its purity, it should be a Demon viscount no less" He questioned, pressuring the other party with his gaze. It was clear that he would not take any excuse as an answer.

Eight who was suddenly thrown into such a bizarre situation thought over the question carefully. Nevertheless, nothing seemed to come to his mind.

Looking at his confused face, Avrox frowned and mumbled "It looks like you are not lying. But how is it so that I can feel the trace of a Demon Viscount on you? Although the trace is very faint, it was left not more than a month ago".

When the Demon earl gripped him by the neck and suspended him in the air, Eight replied in between his gasps for air.

"Y-your Lordship... I haven't...met any...Demon Viscount.....recently".

"Hehh" Avrox put him down before absorbing his aura back. It seemed that he had used a skill to determine the authenticity of Eight's words.

The Demon earl then disappeared into the dark room while mumbling something. Soon all the torches that were illuminating the place, went off one after the other and not even a trace of light could be found in this wide dark space.

"Cough..cough... you alright?" Eight propped himself up and walked his exhausted body towards Eleven who had been plastered onto the wall quite deeply.

Seeing that his companion was still conscious, he sighed a breath of relief. A deep sense of exhaustion of avoiding a crisis, brushed over his body.

"Still what did he mean by those words? When did I come in contact with a Demon Viscount?".