

D. of Pride 291

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Perhaps because she did not care or because she was in a good mood, she truthfully answered his question.

"A week ago while I was getting bored roaming around the city, I suddenly sensed the coordinator not far from the capital. As I patiently waited there to see what they were planning with it, you people barged in and activated the coordinator".

There were several things he wanted to retort her about but before that "What do you mean by the Coordinator?" he enquired.

Lucine didn't seem amazed at his question. The knowledge about the coordinator was limited to a small number of people after all.

"The machine that you had activated in the basement, is called the coordinator".

Simon nodded his head, just as he was about to ask what the shattered dungeon core was doing sitting at the centre of this coordinator, Lucine stopped him from continuing further.

"I cannot tell you that but if you want to know you can search for the answer yourself. Just know that knowing it will do you more harm than benefit".

After ending her explanation offhandedly, she looked at her surrounding with amazement and muttered in a voice only she could hear.

"This place, there is no mistaking it. To think that the prototype would work and create a portal that actually connected with one of the few islands lost in history. That thing is definitely here and it has resonated with that Demon".

She then gazed at Simon with an incredulous glint in her eyes. At this moment, the last person to enter the portal, finally woke up. Denzel opened his eyes only to find himself in a place covered with eternal snow. He only sighed in relief after seeing that he had his rapier buckled to his waist belt.

"Where are we?" he asked turning towards Simon only to widen his eyes in surprise at the unknown person beside him. Seeing them bicker back and forth, he couldn't help but wonder if they knew each other.

Simon opened his [Mental Map] skill to try and see where they actually were only to find that the skill was not working. For some reason, something was interfering with navigating skills.

He immediately thought about the hallucinating mist on his dungeon which similarly had such a function and could disrupt skills such as [Pathfinder], [Mental Map], [Echolocation] etc. With no lead to know where to go, Simon could only shake his head.

Walking around heedlessly in this endless snow and wasting their stamina, was more dangerous than staying still. However, it also wasn't like they could stay in this place forever. It might be his imagination or him being too cautious, but he felt like with every stroke from the snowflakes, his mana and physical abilities were decreasing.

"Eh?" Suddenly, the boy's body jolted as if he was electrocuted and his face had an incredulous look.

Seeing him like that Simon asked "What wrong? Did you find something?".

"No.. umm yes but how should I say it, it's just one of my skills reacting to something around here alerting me of danger" Denzel said confounded. No matter how he saw it, there was not even a single presence amidst this endless snow other than the three of them.

Simon fell into contemplation, he felt that something was wrong and now it was even confirmed by the boy. He did not know what skill was that; however, one thing was clear that they couldn't stay put in the place.

At this moment when the two of them started getting ready to move forward, Lucine who was pretending to be mute all this time, finally spoke.

"That boy is not wrong, it is the snow. You are getting danger alert because of this snow which is very slowly but gradually decreasing your battle prowess".

"What?!" Denzel erupted in shock whereas Simon narrowed his eyes. His intuition that was repeatedly warning him about this place, about this snow was right.

In any case, they couldn't stay here in this open field or else after a few hours, they wouldn't even have the strength remaining to walk. They must find a place where the snow can't reach them; however, looking at this endless snowy place, finding something like that could be said next to impossible especially when they can't even use their navigating skills.

Simon's eyes unwittingly shifted towards Lucine, this woman clearly knew about this place more than them.

Feeling the gaze of the other two on her, she gave an audible sigh before explaining.

"The place we are currently in is one of the forbidden grounds of this world filled with extreme dangers where it would not be surprising to lose your life at the slightest mistake. You cannot use navigating skills nor can you physically map the place out because of its vastness that is unless you destroy the formation that is creating this phenomenon".

Simon widened his eyes, from her words he could interpret that there was some kind of mechanism into play that is making the snow around them like that and if they wanted to proceed forward, they had to first deactivate or destroy that.

Although it sounded easy when voicing it out, it was bound to be exceedingly difficult. After all, a defensive mechanism that is capable of creating snow like that, would be hidden extremely carefully.

Nevertheless, they had no choice but to find the mechanism and deactivate it first or else this snowy place will be their burial grounds.

"How do we find it? Do we need to search this entire place?" the boy asked the question that even Simon had on his mind.

Lucine crossed her hands in front of her ample chest, her white hair like the snow fluttering with the wind as she surveyed her surroundings.

"A mechanism capable of covering this vast of an area, must take a lot of size. Even if it doesn't it is bound to leak some aura in a few dozen meters area around it. You just have to find that and destroy it before you succumb to the effects of this mechanism".

The two of them could only pray that the mechanism was huge in size, or else finding something small in this vast snow land would be next to impossible. They discussed among themselves which direction they would search before heading out to leave.

Before leaving, Denzel handed them three transmission Conch so that they could contact each other through it. Time was of essence and thus they hurriedly dispersed.

After walking for a while Simon turned around to see Luvaine following him. "What do you want?" he asked.

"I had this question for a while but did something happen after we parted ways back in the Ghastly Winding Forest?" Although she asked it subtly, Simon was more than aware that the woman wanted to know if her master had come by or not.

How can Simon answer her so willingly when all of this trouble he got caught into up until now was because of her schemes and the technique she had taught him? While it is true that the technique had helped him out a lot, it had also brought him many troubles in the form of a little girl.

Since his facial expression was easy to read, Simon acted as if this was the first time he had heard about anything like that and denied her words saying nothing unusual happened after she left.

He tried his very best so as to not drop any hint of her master currently being in the capital city of Ellesmere and was in hot pursuit of her.

"Hnn~" the woman narrowed her eyes and made a nasal voice. Her behaviour was just like a wife who was sceptical of her husband who had returned late after his office.

"Is that so? Then what are you doing here and how did you change your appearance to a human?" her beautiful tangerine eyes that could mesmerise one's soul, focused on him.

Instead of feeling pleasant for having the attention of such a beauty, Simon was sweating profusely and was inwardly cursing the woman for being too suspicious. Nevertheless, he had his answers prepared and just had to iterate them.

"Well, it's because I heard from those humans diving inside my dungeon that there is going to be a tournament held at the capital city of the kingdom nearest to me. As for my appearance, I changed it using an item that I had found. I can't go roaming inside a human society with that appearance of my can I?".

They say that the best lie consists of some truth at least in some parts. Simon concocted a lie that was not far away from the truth, part of the reason he was here was because he knew he would find her here who was interested in this tournament.

The same went for his appearance which had indeed been altered by an item but he didn't dare to mention its name in fear of her recognising it. Maybe it was because his lie worked or perhaps she couldn't find any faults in his words, Lucine nodded her head and went off in a different direction than him in search of the mechanism.

Although if she wanted to, she could easily break through such restrictions which was the most easiest hurdle of this island. Nonetheless, she restrained from doing so as it would make the trials difficult for the other two.

Additionally, the portal was opened by the Demon which could only mean that the thing inside had recognised him as one of the worthy successors. Thus it was only natural for him to go through the trials.

WOOO~ the infrequent winds carrying along the falling snowflakes brushed past his body. This time, though the change was very minuscule, Simon still felt strength being seeped away from his body a little.

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Simon hurried his steps and spread his senses all around him, now that his [Mental Map] skill was gone, he could only rely on his strengthened senses to detect any oddity around the surroundings.

The perpetual snow on the ground was so thick that a crunching sound echoed out whenever he took a step forward. His vision was blurred by the occasional snowstorm and gales. Simon tried avoiding places where there was an arctic storm raging out and only walked in areas where the weather was fine.

Whenever he glanced at the distant gigantic storm, fear would grab hold of his body making him unable to breathe for a while. Even from this long distance, he could tell that his powerful Demon

viscount body would be shredded into bits and drained of all of his strength once he was engulfed by that snowstorm.

It was not an exaggeration to say that the storm appeared just like a dull grey pillar of hurricane, a force of nature so powerful and terrible that you feel just like an ant in front of it.

Instinctively distancing himself from that storm, Simon searched for the mechanism all the while having his strength drained before coming to a sudden halt.

He looked at his left, right, front and back. His [Detect Presence] skill which had its range cut more than half after entering this snow region, alerted him of some presence that seemed to be drawing near him.

He strained his eyes and scanned the area all around him only to find nothing out of ordinary. However, Simon knew more than to ignore his instincts which had currently become extremely acute.

Whoosh... snow continued to fall unendingly, a chilling breeze brushed past his body. That was when some movements finally occurred, the thick glaciers beneath him, started trembling before a black shadow burst out from it.

Fortunately, Simon who was on his guard, dodged the entity with a timely backflip and carefully observed the being from a distance.

The thing or rather the monster that came out from the glacier, was three meters tall, standing on its powerful hind legs, had a dorsal fin on its back, their sharp spiky tail was connected to a caudal fin.

When the being opened its mouth, more than one row of sharp incisive teeth, just like a shark, came into view. What distinguished the being was its red and black colour, at a glance the thing looked just like an orca.

Simon who had dodged the enemy's attack, used [Analysis] on it.

Race:-Red Killer Orca

Level- 311

Skills- [Berserk], [Tail Axe], [Ultra Smooth Swim], [Enhanced Sensitivity], [Swift Water Slash], [Water Torpedo], [Hydro Blast], [Flame Magic resistance], [Enhanced Agility], [Enhanced strength]

Inherent Skills- [Enhanced Deadly Jaws], [Predator Aura], [Slippery Body].

The multitudes of skills that the enemy possessed, made Simon widen his eyes. The enemy was clearly a race that he had never seen in the ghastly winding forest and was on a level that even he couldn't look down on it.

To make matter worse, the being was clearly hostile to him and in this environment where his strength was continuously being chipped away, he decided it was better to escape from the enemy rather than fight it.

FLAP... with a push from his shoulders blades, a pair of magnificent bat-like wings came out from his back, utilising his [High-Speed Flight] swiftly opened a distance between him and his enemy.

Now that he was all alone, he did not have to keep the pretence of being a human. Along with the appearance of his wings, his looks also changed, the powerful appearance of a Demon Viscount was on full display.

FLAP...FLAP...

After flying for a while, Simon landed on the snow-covered ground or rather the glacier and unfolded his wings. There were two reasons that made flying in this place an absolute stupidity.

First was that the rate at which the snow was falling on his body had increased marginally due to him flying at a high speed which made the effects of this place all the more apparent. The second was because he was flying at such speed even while restraining his flight skill, that he couldn't search the places for the mechanism at all.

Therefore he had no choice but to give up on his hope of using his [High-Speed Flight] Skill to scout the area faster. Just as Simon was frustrated at the absurdity of this place, his [Detect Presence] skill started acting out again and before long a scene that had happened not so long before, repeated again.

The Red Killer Orca that he had used his flight skill to open up a distance broke through the glacier and appeared in front of him again.

"You got to be kidding me, it has not even been five minutes since I left the place but it has already caught up to me?" he complained but there was no one to listen.

He utilised his flight skill once again but the Red Killer Orca was able to track him back once again. Once is an accident, twice is a coincidence and thrice is a pattern. Simon did not have to repeat it thrice to know that there was no way he would be able to escape it.

The Red Killer Orca clearly had a skill that allowed it to track him even from a few miles away. Thinking that there was no point in running, he decided to bite the bullet and defeat the enemy in front of him before anything else.

The Red Killer Orca seemed to perceive his intention and bared its sharp rows of teeth. Its powerful legs dug deep into the surface layer of the snow as it initiated its charge.

FWOOSH... just like a jet of water, its three-meter body was covered in water and it charged straight towards Simon like a torpedo. The momentum and power behind the attack of the Red Killer Orca was so great that Simon had no leisure to go easy on it.

Dodging the attack [Water Torpedo] with a quick sidestep, he invoked his [Lightning Magic Mastery] and quickly dished out lightning attacks on his opponent.

Thanks to his habit of using [Analysis] on his opponent, he was able to see that the being had the [Flame resistance] skill that made the flame magic that he was most proficient in, mostly ineffective. If not for that information, he would have mostly like opened this initiation with his flame magic.

In a situation where he couldn't depend on his flame magic, his efforts of evolving his Novice tier electro magic into Intermediate tier Lightning magic was finally paying off. Thick bolts of blue lightning clustered together to form a crude weird bolt and flew towards his opponent.

Perhaps it was the right choice to begin the attack with a Lightning Magic, the enemy's reaction to it surprised Simon.

KIEEEKK... recognising the danger, the Red Killer Orca dug deep into the snow and bore through the glacier and into the water below.

Its response to his attacks stunned him for a while before he came to a realisation. The Red Killer Orca although had resistance to Flame Magic due to it being an aquatic monster, its weakness was also obvious. It was weak to Electro attribute of mana.

Simon stood still for a while, gobsmacked at the sudden turn of events. He who had thought that he would have to engage in an arduous battle, didn't expect the situation to turn 180° all of a sudden.

Anyways, now that his opponent had run away, he could now search for the mechanism with an ease of mind.

High up above the sky, a woman of ethereal beauty could be seen looking down at the snow-covered land below. Her hands were crossed above her bounteous chest and her tangerine eyes examined a certain figure down below.

A transparent circular shield that was difficult to spot with normal eyes encased her within and blocked every single snowflake from touching her body. The thick arctic clouds behind her, even seemed to be afraid of her.

"From their appearance, they resemble the Demon Spirit Orca race who are one of the members of the sea tribes. So does that mean that this island is hidden near the Chaotic Sea Continent? If so then why did those sleepy old farts didn't say anything about it?" Lucine muttered to herself.

From the dubious look in her eyes, it could be seen that even she was amazed by the appearance of the Red Killer Orca.

"Anyways, I didn't expect him to have also mastered lightning magic! No wonder that fellow ran away. However, if he thinks that the matter has been settled, then he is up for some surprise. It has almost been one hour, the effects of this place should soon be taking effect".

Down at a certain corner of the snowy land, multiple figures could be seen entangling and encircling a person in the middle. From the intermittent muffled booms and the breaking down of the glaciers, one could see that this group was currently engaged in a battle.

Simon took hurried breaths and stabilised his breathing, at this moment he was surrounded by four Red Killer Orcas radiating a bloodthirsty aura. The Red Killer Orca that he had thought fled away after he displayed his Lightning magic, came back but this time brought multiple of its comrades along with it.

Each of them were around level 310-320 and their skills were mostly the same. Two of the Red Killer Orcas behind him used their skills [Water Torpedo] which swiftly covered their bodies in a layer of water and came barrelling towards him in a pincer.

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FLAP... with a small flap of his wings, Simon was able to smoothly dodge the two attacks and counter with a lightning attack. Thick bolts of lightning accumulated and swiftly took the form of a bow.

When Simon grabbed onto it, he felt a slight dissonance which arrived from him not being able to give it the shape of his desire. Nevertheless, the lightning bow was powerful enough to dish out attacks that were no less powerful than his flame spears.

He swiftly condensed two lightning arrows and let loose onto the Red Killer orcas who had their backs currently facing him.

SWISH... SWISH... suddenly two blades containing a berserk energy materialised and collided with his Lightning arrow dissipating each other spectacularly.

Simon looked down and spotted the other two Red Killer Orcas swinging their caudal fin-like tails. The attack that dissipated his attacks from connecting, was definitely one of their skills.

Clicking his tongue at their unusual coordination, Simon circled around them and utilised his advantage of having wings to attack them from behind. No matter how good they were at coordinating, how could they be as good as the Diluvian High Orcs who could seamlessly cooperate with each other as easily as breathing?

One of his lightning arrows managed to dodge past their counterattacks and hit one of them severely injuring it in the process.

KIEEEK... After one of them was injured, the rest immediately went berserk, their eyes glowed a bloody crimson and the [Predator Aura] they were releasing, got even stronger.

'Since my opponents cannot fly, I can use this to my advantage and deal damage to them from a distance' while fundamentally, this kind of thinking was not wrong. However, opponents who can think for themselves can break this kind of advantage with some of their skills and overcome this edge he had as if was never there.

The Red Killer Orcas unable to reach their target, did something unexpected. They bore through the glaciers below them and swiftly returned to the water below.

Just as Simon thought that they had fled, four columns of water that broke through the glaciers and like a fountain, rose hundreds of meters high. These four columns surrounded Simon in between and using the water as a medium what appeared amidst them, were none other than the Red Killer Orcas.

They had utilised their skills [hydro Blast] which they can only use while they are near a water body, to reach their prey who was flying in the sky. That was not all, in front of Simon's stunned eyes, they used another ability of theirs [Swift Water Slash] that utilised the dorsal fin on their back to create a wide slash attack that came from four different corners and left him with no way of escape.

[Swift Water Slash] an ability of the Red Killer Orcas that they use when hunting for prey deep down on the ocean floor. Although the might of the attack was far less on the air compared to when in the ocean; nevertheless, four of these attacks were deadly enough to bisect even a Demon viscount who had reached the limit of their growth.

Not underestimating the attacks of his enemy, Simon brought out the twin blades from his inventory and slashed at the attacks coming from four different directions. His [A] tier Crimson Blazing Flame Blade although retained its sharpness, was mostly useless against these foes who were resistant to flames.

Additionally, since each attack from the sword eats up a lot of his mana, it was unsuitable for this kind of situation where his energy, stamina and stats were constantly being drained.

He positioned the twin blades and focused all of his attention on the incoming attacks. From watching how the little boy fought, Simon became aware of another area where he was lacking.

When it came down to a simple sword fight without any skills or magic involved, he was sure to lose against the boy who had wholeheartedly trained in the way of the sword.

Perhaps he had been lackadaisical or overly reliant on his power physical stats, that he ignored training his sword skills even though he was a swordsman just like Denzel.

The four attacks coming from four different directions, was redirected by him amidst not so effortlessly and crashed onto the snow below. Each carved a deep cut through which the seawater seeped out.

Splash... seeing that their attack had failed to connect with their prey, the four red Killer Orcas dived back onto the sea below and utilised the same tactic once again to reach their enemy.

This time, Simon was prepared; he allowed them to dive inside the sea because he wanted to try something.

"[Sword Mastery], [Piercing Enhancement], [Cutting Enhancement], [Super Enhanced Strength], [Super Enhanced Agility] [Lightning Magic Mastery], ...Thousand Lightning Misery" the moment he saw them resurfacing, he slashed his twin blades thousands of times down below onto the holes quickly being formed on the glaciers with a superhuman reaction.

Though the [C] tier twin Blades did not provide much in terms of stats and skills, it was still a weapon that was on the upper tier of [C] rank weapons and after the upgrade, its power and the feeling it gave Simon increased much more.

He brandished the twin blades thousands of times in a matter of a few seconds, utilised his powerful body and mana to dish thousands of Lightning charged slashes.

At this moment, feeling the sensation of the blades cutting through the air, Simon finally became aware of how to use the twin blades. The figure of Laris flashed briefly through his mind, the way he wielded his swords to his every movement and skill, one could see the hard work and practice he had put into it.

The Thousand Lightning Misery attack that Simon had dished out was fundamentally a little similar to Laris' [Hell Lightning Slash], just that it had his own variation mixed onto it.

After all, everybody learns like that, they utilise their past experiences, mix different variations and styles to create their own technique.

Each of these thousand lightning slashes were half a meter in size and carried destructive lightning and an incisive aura with them. The moment four columns of water rose up from the sea, they were bombarded with thousands of lightning slashes and created a beguiling spectacle in this colourless white world.

THUD...THUD...THUD...THUD...

Four figures that were badly electrified, fell on top of the ground and repeatedly writhed around. Their bodies were scorched with blood and smoke coming out of them; nonetheless, they were still releasing a ferocious aura.

The moment they tried to move their body and return back into the sea, Simon came swooping down like an eagle and fiercely stabbed at their vitals with all of his strength.

The four red Killer Orcas quickly stopped moving after their heads got pierced, and succumbed to their death. In some other cases, Simon would have celebrated his victory, however, right now, there was no joy on his face that a victor should have after winning a fight.

All one could see was a gloomy face. The reason for that was because, during their clash, he could constantly feel his strength slowly draining away from him whereas his enemies didn't seem to display any signs of being under the same effects whatsoever.

That is to say, the red Killer Orcas, the inhabitants of this place, were completely resistant or the restrictions placed on this place did not have any effects on them.

Although the fight with the Red Killer Orcas allowed him to level up once, Simon did not have an ounce of joy, instead the urgency to find the mechanism, went up even more.

From this fight, he became aware of beings that were residents of this place and from their perspective, he was the intruder. It made sense that they were hostile to outsiders. At the same time questions like, where this place was, who set up all these mechanisms and for what reason, piqued his interest.

For starters, he knew that this place did not look like this from the start and was tinkered by someone. These arctic clouds, snowflakes and the vast glaciers upon which he was standing on, was created by someone or something, and the way they set it up, seemed almost like a task or trail that they wanted someone to undergo.

He might be wrong, but Simon felt like he had unknowingly triggered a chain of quests that he had to complete before he could get out of here.

Simon hurried his steps and did his best to find any trace of the mechanism, it had already been more than three hours since all of them went their separate ways in search of it. The only reason they have not contacted him yet might be because they haven't found the mechanism yet.

His eyes looked at the thin window in front of him, though his status did not show it, Simon could distinctly feel his strength had gone down. This foreign feeling of something restricting him from displaying his full strength, was distressing to say no less.

Thus he wanted to get rid of it as soon as possible; however, as if to laugh at his resolve, his [Detect Presence] skill started warning him. This time, the scale of alarm was much bigger than previously and he could detect multiple presences swiftly approaching him from underwater.

The glacier all around him started cracking and soon beings that looked like Red Killer Orcas, surfaced out. They showed up in double the numbers of what they previously appeared in and surrounded him from all directions.

Simon laughed bitterly, forget about searching for the mechanism, these beings did not allow him to move around much before they came hunting him in droves.

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Defeating them ones did not mean that it would be easier the next time, especially when his strength was slowly going down and their numbers up. He forced his mind to calm down and used his [High Speed thought Processing] skill to think of a way out.

The enemy for some reason, can quickly detect his presence and surround him from all directions. This uncanny ability of their resembled the High orcs of the ghastly winding forest. However, unlike them, these Red Killer Orcas were clearly using something else.

'Is it because of the [Enhanced Sensitivity] or does it have something to do with the natural trait of theirs' Simon thought, it was not like he couldn't take a guess. After the last time he was pincered by four of them, he used the item Ice Phoenix's sigh to cover up his presence though.

But it seemed that the enemies were using something else to locate his position. Suddenly, he looked at his feet and that was when it struck him.

The ground, more accurately the glacier he was standing on can also be considered a water body that is floating on the surface of the sea. So if he walked on top of the glacier which was connected to the sea, there was bound to be some vibrations and if the orcas were using this, no wonder they could locate him so easily.

Simon made an ugly face at that realisation, though it was just an assumption, he knew this was much closer to the truth. Making his decision, he hurriedly unfurled his wings to disengage with them and quickly opened up a distance.

If he were to believe his senses, his stats were already lowered by more than one fifth. Simon didn't want to tangle with them here, leaving aside whether he could win them with their numbers, it would severely deplete the limited amount of time he had before he ran out of strength.

Like a black streak cutting through a white dome, Simon flew using his full speed before coming to a stop. The flight skill had increased the rate of snowflakes accumulating on his body and thus shortening the amount of time left before he ran out of strength.

However, he did not directly drop onto the glacier below and kept his flight skill activate just enough so that he levitated a few centimetres above the ground. Just like he expected, this time the Red Killer Orcas did not come chasing after him because they couldn't feel the vibration caused by his footsteps.

The method that he had discovered, was a temporary one nonetheless, it gave him sufficient time to search for the mechanism.

Time flowed by endlessly and before long twelve ours had passed. By now Simon could feel that his power had gone down by more than half and he could feel that his stats was back to when he was still a Demon Baron.

Unable to support his flight, he landed on the ground and took hurried breaths. Other than depleting their strength, this endless colourless world also played with their mind and exhausted their mental fortitude.

Stranded in this place and unable to find a way out, you are bound to get a little paranoid and impatient. During this time, he had searched for the mechanism everywhere; however, he got nothing to show up for it.

Forget about finding any peculiarity, there was nothing out of place in this goddamn place. If not for the fact that he could still somewhat contact the other with the transmission conch, he would have thought that he was the only one alive here.

He was not worried about the boy since he knew he had his sword skills other than his flame magic to rely on. Even though that was the case, the effect of this place was the same for all of them and by now he should also be running on fumes.

Never in his wildest imagination would Simon have thought that in his pursuit of knowing the truth behind what the shattered dungeon cores were being used for, he would end up on this island.

Regret was a bitter pill to swallow, but Simon was already used to the absurdities of life. Although he was cursing out a lot, he was still keeping a rational mind.

"There is bound to be a mechanism that is creating this kind of effect. You only need to find and destroy that thing to get out of here" these were the words that Lucine had said before they all had parted their ways in hopes of covering a larger area.

There was no reason for her to lie to them, therefore it could only mean that even after searching for this long, they were overlooking something. Just as Simon was about to delve deeper into his thoughts, his face suddenly darkened.

That was because he could feel multiple presences hurriedly approaching him from below. There was no need to even ask who these presences were as the red Killer orcas swiftly surfaced from the sea boring a hole through the glacier.

"Jeez, can't you guys take a break or something?" Simon commented. From his looks it didn't seem like he was fazed by their appearance; however, internally he knew that the current him was not their opponent.

The only rational choice here was to run away again but Simon was tired of that. No matter how he saw it, even if he ran away now, he would only be delaying the inevitable.

He was gloomy though it did not mean that he had given up all hopes, even now he was thinking about how to clear this absurd trial. If there was one area that he didn't search, it would be that huge snowstorm brewing at the centre of this white world.

Simon had been instinctively avoiding that place because of the colossal amounts of berserk energy that it was releasing. The energy was so powerful and berserk that not even hundreds of him would be able to contend against this force of nature.

But now that he was left with no choice, he did find it weird. The snowstorm that was at the centre of this area twelve hours ago, was still sitting at the same place as if it has no intention of going anywhere.

It was at this moment when Simon was caught up in his thought that the group of red Killer Orcas maddened by the death of their brethren, charged. The twelve of them surrounded him from all sides and used their caudal fin like tails that were as sharp as a blade, to dish out multiple slash attacks.

The [Tail Axe] ability of theirs was not unknown to Simon and he displayed surprising level-headedness by dodging the attack before they even came. Call it a unique trait of his that he had built up while surviving inside the ghastly winding forest, but he had an ability that allowed him to predict the attack and behaviour of a group of enemies that he had already fought with once.

Perhaps because he had not fully understood this ability of his that it had not manifested itself as a skill on his status. Anyways, the point is that after fighting with them for so long, he could somewhat predict the attack pattern and behavioural traits of his enemies.

Though understanding your enemy is one thing and having enough strength to contend against them is another. Simon quickly utilised his flight skill, the only advantage he had over them before swiftly flying away.

However, unlike the previous times where he tried to throw them off with his speed, this time he allowed them to follow him. Matter of factly, the place that he was leading them in was also the most dangerous area on the land.

The huge hurricane-like storm that seemed like it could devour anything was brewing at the centre of this land radiating terrible energy that struck fear onto anyone that gazed at it.

These Red Killer Orcas, that only had a little bit of intelligence to start off, gave chase the moment they saw their prey running away. While they were an aquatic tribe much more proficient and faster on water rather than on land, they still managed to keep up with Simon.

Of course, they were only able to do so because the latter had purposefully slowed his speed. Their [Slippery Body] came into handy as it allowed them to slide through the ice and use their body just like they did underwater.

The chase continued for a while, the red Killer Orcas were hell-bent on killing their prey apart and thus were hot on his tail. Only when they were a few kilometres away from the disastrous snowstorm, did they slow down their chase.

Fear apparent in their eyes, their body shuddered intensely before they bore through the ground and swiftly fled underwater.

Simon narrowed his eyes at their intense reaction; nevertheless, he did not stop his momentum.

"There is definitely something there, the possibility of the mechanism being inside that snowstorm is also very high" he mumbled trying to keep his quickly stiffening body straight.

Even the slightest energy leak that came out of the storm, was enough to raise goosebumps on his body not to mention what he was trying to do was extremely suicidal.

Following his gut feeling, Simon utilised his flight skill and quickly approached closer to the storm. Being near it, he felt like an ant trying to survive through the storm, the hurricane like snowstorm was truly that colossal.

The moment he approached a hundred meters of what seemed like a speedily rotating wall of cloud, he felt like his body was grasped by some humongous entity that was quickly pulling him towards the storm.

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The updraft was so powerful that Simon felt like his wings and flight skill was useless here. His body was flipped up and down, left and right before being finally sucked into the centre.

At the same moment, Denzel who was fighting hordes of Red Killer Orcas dozens of miles away from where the snowstorm was, took hurried breaths of air. His body tattered by the numerous

battles he had gone through and his left hand that was holding the rapier, was trembling ever so slightly.

If not for the fact that he had trained the way of the sword diligently as if his life depended on it under the guidance of his master, he would have long fallen prey to these monsters who suffered next to no damage when he used his intermediate tier Flame Magic.

Though his mastery of the sword had saved his life numerous times, it was still unable to beat the effects of this place that was slowly chipping away at his strength.

"Argh dammit, what is wrong with these guys? Why can they chase me even when I use [One Sword] to cover my presence" Denzel who was currently running away from a group of six red Killer Orcas, complained at the injustice.

When in the beginning only a single of these monsters appeared, he swiftly disposed of it thinking of it a quick exercise. However, after a few hours passed and there was no contact from his teammates nor any news of the mechanism, he had started to become a little impatient.

His frame of mind that was still a bit immature, started taking out the anger on these Red Killer Orcas and before long he found himself surrounded by dozens of them. His strength had decreased over time and he had also failed in his job to scout the areas.

Somehow the training that he had undergone through childhood, was able to snap him out of this trance before the situation went any more downhill. Realising that he had no chance if he simply wasted time fighting them, Denzel utilised his swiftness to open up a distance between him and his enemies and ran like mad.

Though he did not act like one, he was still a child and couldn't help the tears pooling around the corner of his eyes when he thought about how he might possibly die here where nobody could find him.

He did not know how long had passed since he only focused on running and after a while, he was out of breath. The fact that he couldn't see the two other people who had entered with him through that portal, weighed on his mind.

The transmission conch that he gave everyone, didn't ring which could only mean that just like him, they too failed to find the mechanism that is generating this snow.

Left with nowhere to go and enemies surrounding him from all directions, Denzel was just about to give up all hopes when he saw the terrible snowstorm at the centre of this white world that he was indirectly avoiding, show some faint disturbance.

The pillar of colossal snow that was rotating in the centre of this island at an insane speed started to show some disproportion in between and the thick arctic clouds on top of it, glowed with peculiar lights.

Denzel did not know what was happening, but he could tell that his enemies, the red killer orcas were clearly afraid of it. When they saw the huge snowstorm show some weird movements, they started cowering and dived back into the sea without even looking back.

The way they swiftly retreated back was as if... "Are they afraid?" Denzel asked glancing at the holes on the glaciers that connected with the sea below. He then looked back at the snowstorm at the centre before deciding to slowly walk towards it.

Although the terrible energy fluctuation coming from it was still too fearful; nevertheless, he gritted his teeth and walked towards the place. That area was the only place which the red Killer orcas were afraid of and hence did not approach it.

Thinking that he might get a moment of respite he slowly paced towards the distant snowstorm only to realise all of a sudden that his strength was no longer being sapped by the falling snowflakes.

"What is happening? Did someone deactivate the mechanism?" Denzel asked feeling the unknown sensation that was restricting his stats, dissipate away.

"W-what is with this place?".

,m Simon involuntarily uttered when he saw the scene that lay in front of him. He was currently inside a dark gloomy ruins filled with an aura of desolation and antiquity.

Recalling back to what had happened, he was pulled inside the colossal snowstorm and experienced a strong energy fling his body round and round. The next thing he knew he had lost consciousness and appeared inside the ruins when he opened his eyes back.

To be frank, after the centrifugal energy tossed him around inside the storm, he thought that the choice he made with his life on the line, was the wrong one and was regretting it internally.

"Did the storm at the centre of that snow world an entrance to some portal that threw anyone here who was sucked in?" Simon wondered as he observed his surroundings. As far as he could see the wall had cracks, filled with peculiar writing and weird paintings.

There was moss all over the walls indicating that the ruins he was in, was very old and had seen the vicissitude of time. The ceiling reached as high as twenty meters and water sometimes leaked out from some of the cracks.

He was currently standing in a wide hallway with a road leading straight forward, behind him was just a wall and not any gate or portal that he thought brought him here. With only a way forward and no path to go back, the decision was fairly simple for Simon.

He first tried to activate his skills and only then did he risk going forward. It was also at this moment that he realised that he was no longer under the effect of the peculiar phenomenon where his stats were gradually being suppressed.

Feeling power return back to his body, Simon felt his mood improve and he hurriedly took out the transmission conch from his space ring to call the two people on the other end.

Surprisingly, the transmission got through which told him that these ruins was somehow connected to the snowy world.

"Oh~ as I thought, you were the first one to discover the mechanism weren't you? So where are you right now?" the first one to pick up his call was Lucine. Her teasing voice rang out from the transmission conch and from her tone, he could perceive that she was not the slight bit surprised with him finding the mechanism first.

Simon told her about the snowstorm in the middle of the snowy world and how it was a portal leading to the ruins that he was currently in.

Surprisingly, the moment he mentioned the ruins, her tone became a notch serious and she hurriedly ended the call leaving only a message that she would be swiftly there.

Next, it was the boy who picked up the call and his high spirited voice came in through the other end of the transmission conch.

"Mister thank god you found the mechanism, I was so fed up fighting those fish monsters. It seemed that the mysterious effect of the snowflakes stopped, did you destroy the mechanism already?".

Simon tilted his head at that sudden question from the boy, his face showed that he was confused by those words. "Wait a minute, what do you mean by the mysterious effects of those snowflakes stopped? I did not find any mechanism but I did find a portal that led to a ruin".

Perhaps he expected too much critical thinking on the little boy's part, but the answer he got was fairly straightforward.

"Oh if it's not mister... then perhaps it is that lady who found it. Ah! Right, the snowstorm at the centre, made some bizarre movements before the mysterious effect of the snow disappeared. Anyways this place no longer suppresses our strength anymore".

Simon knitted his brows and digested the information; it seemed too much of a coincidence that the stats suppressing effects of the falling snow disappeared when he reached this place.

"It's like whoever created this place, designed it in a manner of a trial where you have to proceed with one hurdle to get to the next " Simon mumbled, the suspicions that he had about this place being some trial of a kind, was getting stronger and stronger.

"What??" the boy who was on the other end of the transmission conch, asked confoundedly.

"It's nothing. Anyways, if you don't want to get chased constantly by those fish monsters, you better run towards the snowstorm. It's a gate that leads to the ruins I'm currently at" he quickly told the boy about the existence of this place before ending the call.

Simon did not dislike the honest to a fault personality of the boy and although he held a minor grudge against her for leading her master towards him, Lucine never did anything directly to harm him.

In his previous life, when Simon had fully immersed himself in creating the game neglecting even his health, he had a friend who would always call and visit him. That friend of his would always try to persuade him not to overwork himself till he ruined his health and even go as far as to visit his house sometimes with homemade food that his family had prepared.

However, that was until Simon had shunned even him. He didn't pick up his call, stopped going home and even avoided him when he came in person.

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. Now that those memories that he locked up deep inside his heart flooded out, he couldn't help but regret. A friend who genuinely cared about your health and wellbeing, was hard to come by but no, the him at that time had to adopt a personality that pushed others back and shun one of the few people who showed him kindness.

The more he thought about how he fell into that pathetic state due to his own negligence and denial, the more the regret welled up within him.

Simon took a deep breath, a strong musty scent of the ruins went inside through his nostrils and calmed his beating heart and dissipated that wistful feeling. He cannot right the wrongs that he committed back on earth now that he was dead.

However, he can still make up for his regrets now that he had a fresh new start in this world. Never again would he fall back into that state where he rejected the world and shut himself to his work.

Simon made a resolve that he would pay kindness back with kindness and ill intent with a hard fist. At that instant, after that declaration, he actually felt changes occurring to his mind and body which felt refreshed for some reason.

Simon explored his surroundings in the meantime while he waited for his companions that had entered the portal together with him. It didn't take long for the first person to arrive and seeing them land, he finally understood how he entered these ruins.

A one-way tunnel that connected these ruins to the snow world, formed on the ceiling and spat the person out before disappearing.

The person who had arrived first, was none other than Lucine, her beguiling body landed gracefully as she stared at the unknown place she found herself with curiosity.

"To think that the mechanism was hidden inside the snowstorm, what kind of lunatic created this place" she lightly commented and waltzed towards Simon.

She observed him for a while before speaking with a smile "Great job finding this place".

He nonchalantly nodded his head and accepted her words since he could feel that she was genuinely praising him. After all, to discover this place, one must first conquer their fear and even gamble with their life.

The snowstorm at the centre was so frightening that had it not been for the pressure of getting cornered, he would have definitely not chosen to dive inside.

The woman after praising him, started observing her surroundings and investigated the peculiar writing on the wall. Since his [Language Comprehension] couldn't decipher it, he believed that those writing were so ancient that it was beyond the level of his skills.

"Can you read those?" Simon asked without expecting a reply in return.

To his surprise, Lucine, vaguely nodded her head "I can somewhat... but my comprehension is nowhere near complete and I can only understand a sparse few words".

Simon glanced at the wall which depicted strangely dancing letters and pictures. Thinking that the letters might mean or indicate something like a clue, he was just about to ask her what did it say, when the tunnel that brought the two of them here, suddenly opened and threw another person out.

THUD... with a heavy thud, that person crashed onto the ground and lost consciousness immediately. Simon's eyes twitched when he looked at the little boy sprawled on the ground.

He finally understood why he was unconscious and lying on the ground when he entered the ruins, it turned out he had experienced a similar fate like that boy. Shaking his head off the thought, he turned towards Lucine and asked her what the letters said.

"Hmm~ let see it says... [Every hour, every minute, every second counts... directions are never-ending flowing like a river yearlong... go right or left... right or wrong?]" She iterated locking her brows.

Simon too frowned his brows when he heard those words, the words sounded like a clue but was very vague and written in an ancient language very few people in this world can read.

At this moment, the boy finally woke after getting knocked unconscious from that fall and immediately ran towards them in high spirits. He looked all around him with wide eyes and asked.

"Are we inside a dungeon?".

He had heard his master telling him about how dungeons were the best place to increase ones skills, level and a place where riches can be found. Denzel had been travelling with his master to different kingdoms and forests to increase his level and mastery over the sword.

When he heard his master mention that over one of their trips, he couldn't help but get curious and decided that he would one day dive inside a dungeon just like those adventurers and challenge himself.

Simon was just about to deny him when he thought that the possibility of this place being one, wasn't zero. His suspicions of this place being some kind of trial made him unable to not consider this possibility.

However, it seems that his suspicions was for nothing since Lucine who was clearly much more knowledgeable and experienced about the place than them, shook her head at those words.

"This place is not a dungeon... but hmm it can be considered a little similar in that it is one of the few Forbidden trial grounds that was once part of this world. It was connected to Eastarth but had disappeared due to certain events in history and pulled into a different plane".

"Although I said disappeared, they do surface sometimes and choose suitable inheritors. The other way to enter it is by using the coordinates."

Lucine said looking at Simon, she knew from their blank faces that if she were to start explaining from the start, even a few days of time wouldn't be sufficient.

"Anyways, what I'm saying is that this place is not a dungeon. You guys have already experienced the first trial so do not mistakenly think that our path ahead is going to be easier than before" She warned them before walking forward.

Simon who was looking at her back, caressed his chin. Was he overly conscious when he felt like he saw Lucine smiling excitedly as she stepped forward? Was she enjoying this trip to this so-called lost trial ground?

Shaking his head, Simon cleared his mind, one of his suspicions was finally cleared, this place was indeed a trail ground, one that was designed during the ancient times.

The three of them walked for a while before a large passage that led deeper towards a hall lit by huge torches appeared. Even from this distance, the three of them could sense the smell of danger that permeated every corner of this passage.

Huge statues that were made of what looked like dark indigo stones carved astutely, stood on two sides of the hall overlooking two doors.

"There is something written over there?" Denzel said squinting his eyes, the place where his finger pointed, was below the statues and near the torches. Inserted inside the wall was a stone slab with neat writings drawn on them. Right after pointing it out, he hurriedly dashed towards the hall.

Simon wanted to stop him; however, he was a step too late. The moment the boy ran, he had stepped on a switch which activated something and they all clearly heard the sound.

Suddenly, the entire passage started shaking violently, it was not only the passage but the entire ceiling felt like it would come crashing down.

At this moment, Simon regretted not having a [trap Detection] skill, he hurriedly shouted everyone to run towards the hall. Fortunately, his decision was right as the entire passage collapsed down revealing a bottomless hollow ground below.

How did they know it was bottomless? Because no matter how much time passed, there was no sound of the rocks hitting the ground. From a distance, it just looked like a huge dark pit with no end.

Additionally, due to some interference from the ruins, skills such as his [High-Speed flight], was unusable here. That is to say, had they not run away in time, they would have fallen into that...

Simon sighed a breath of relief before looking all around him. For some reason, he felt slight similarities between this place and a dungeon.

'Those people in the ancient times couldn't have thought about recreating the dungeon exclusive to demon nobles could they?' he laughed at the silly notion that supposedly popped up in his head.

"It's here" Denzel said leading the group towards the tablet in the middle of the hall.

[The two were once brothers, fighting and protecting the empire side by side, their powers unparalleled. Until one day, one of the brothers was led astray by his powers and slaughtered hundreds of thousands of innocent lives until the other brother had to step in].

[The Jury was angered and sentenced the two brothers to engage in a life and death battle. The crowd watched jeering at the two brothers killing each other. The two doors depict the path that they have taken up until now and the convictions they hold].

[ELIGE PLUDENTER]

Lucine scrutinised the writing before telling them the gist of what it said.

Simon calmly observed the stone tablet, the two statues and his surroundings. Only now did he notice that the place they thought was the hall, actually looked like the arena of a coliseum.

"So what big sister is saying that we need to find out who the brother that committed the crime was and ignore that door?" Denzel asked.

Lucine nodded before falling into contemplation. The trial cannot be something as easy as finding the correct door, there definitely has to be some implications, something that they can't see right now.

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The two doors that represented the path and convictions of the two brothers was located at two different corners of the hall overlooked by two gigantic statues of warriors.

One had a huge sword in its hand, the other only had a shield. Aesthetically, they looked visually marvelling. Needless to ask, the statues that stood tall in this place was the depiction of the two warrior ins the tablet.

The group sat down and calmly investigated their situation and their options. It was clear that just with the trials earlier, if they made any mistake, their life would be in grave danger and thus they need to make a right choice as to which door they should open.

Who knew what lay beyond that door? The tablet at the centre of the hall other than telling them the history of the two warriors and reminding them to choose a door wisely, didn't give them any other clue.

The only inference they could make was from the story. The torches in the hall flickered with the flow of time; however, the group was unable to come to a decision. They searched the room all around in hopes of there being more clues hidden somewhere; however, it turned out to be a wasted effort when all they found was dust and moss left by the passage of time.

It was at this time when it seemed like the group would require additional time to make a choice, one of the torches died down. Since there were so many torches hanging below the ceiling, the change was so subtle that it was unable to attract anybody's attention.

It was only when more than three torches went out and the lighting around the hall dimmed down ever so slightly, did Lucine stretched her head to look up.

At first, the dying of the torches didn't seem out of ordinary; however, the way they were dying out in a sequence was what seemed suspicious.

Counting all of the torches, there was 36 of them out of which seven had already died down. The torches were placed in a neat row with 36 of them covering all the sides. Weirdly enough, the seven torches that died down, went out in a clockwise sequence starting from the centre.

As if to prove her right, one more torch that was next to the seven in a clockwise direction, went out. Lucine narrowed her eyes, she did not know what these torches signified; but whatever it was, it was giving her a feeling of foreboding.

This time she waited patiently and counted the time it took for the torch next to the eight to go out. From what she noticed, the torch only lasted 3 minutes before dying down. It might be just her thinking too much but the torches looked like a countdown to her.

Seeing that Lucine was distracted by something else, Simon couldn't help but voice out "Hey you seem sidetracked, did you find something?".

Nodding her head, the woman told the other two about the peculiarity that she had identified. Since what she told was the truth, it didn't take long for Simon and Denzel to believe it.

They too focused their attention on the torches as they thought about how it may or may not be related to the trail they are about to go through.

"Say Miss, don't you think the dying down of the torches seemed to be like the countdown of a clock?" Denzel pointed out tilting his head.

"Hmph, who are you calling a Miss? If you want my advice address me as big sister?" Lucine said begrudgingly.

The little boy scratched his head and did what he was told.

"You are right, they can indeed be seen as a countdown to something. But to what, even I don't have a clue. Though my instincts are telling me we should make our choice before that countdown hits zero" the woman remarked.

Simon who was lost in his own thoughts, suddenly widened his eyes at those words. He glanced at the tablet in the middle, the two doors guarded by the two huge statues before clicking his tongue.

The hall, the story, the riddle, everything made sense to him now. He finally understood what choice they had to take and the meaning of the riddle they had encountered back at the start.

"Quick open up the door to the right" Simon did not have the time to explain it to them hence seeing their clueless face, he couldn't help but ask them to hurry it up.

Perhaps in their mind, they thought this was the right answer and that Simon had found it, they chose the door with the statue holding the shield.

Simon glanced back and looked at the thirty-six torches out of which only twenty-two remained lit before heading in with Lucine and Denzel.

What lay beyond the door, was a wide path of stairs that led towards the ceiling of this hall. The walls around the staircase had drawings illustrating how the shield-bearer lived his life, dedicated his time to train his shield, his techniques, years of battle and his time with his brother, the sword bearer.

Simon observed the drawing as he went up the stairs without stopping, the group hurriedly followed behind him.

'His techniques are beyond that of a King Pin, he must have touched the level 900 Sovereign Stage' Lucine mumbled observing the various carvings depicting the exploits of his life.

From these drawings, one could see how powerful the shield-bearer was; No, the two brothers were as they ran rampant and unstoppable on the battlefield with their combat prowess.

No matter who the enemy or their size was, they would be impartially mowed down or brought down to their knees in front of the two of them.

"Hey, don't you think you have some explaining to do? Why did you tell us to choose the door on the right? Did you figure out something?" Lucine asked gazing at the figure of the man in front of her.

Ever since she met him back at the Ghastly winding forest, he gave her a mysterious feeling even though he was just a low-rank Demon viscount. Then and even now when he activated the coordinator and was chosen as a potential inheritor by that thing, the feeling he gave her was complex.

The more she tried to see through him, the more she felt like she was diving inside an abyss with no beginning and end in sight.

The little boy nodded his head, he too wanted to know the reason.

Simon explained while not stopping his feet even for a second "Remember the riddle written at the start of this ruins, [Every hour, every minute, every second counts... directions are never-ending flowing like a river yearlong... go right or left... right or wrong?]

"Yeah, what of it?" Lucine asked.

"I believe, the riddle wants to say is that there is no real answer, both the answers are correct and at the same time incorrect. We should believe in the choice we make is right because if we keep on delaying making a decision, we would never be able to take any action" he answered recalling the situation.

"The hall had a countdown in the form of the torches which goes out after a fixed interval. It didn't matter which door we choose, we had to finish the trail within the time limit".

The two people who were following behind him, were shocked. They didn't think that the trail would disguise itself like that. If they kept on dilly-dallying until the time limit was up, they would have automatically failed and in that case, who knew what might be the consequence they had to suffer.

Thinking about the consequences, the bottomless pit and the effects of this place that made them unable to fly came to mind.

"If choosing any of the doors didn't matter, why did you make us choose the door on the right?" Lucine asked, the more she conversed with him, the more she understood why he was recognised by that thing as a potential inheritor.

After climbing the stairs, they found themselves in a small room that could barely accommodate more than ten people. The space was narrow and a peculiar energy fluctuation covered every corner of this room.

The moment they stepped foot inside the room, the place started moving, the walls and ceiling started shifting mechanically and before long, the floor that they were standing on arrived in front of the hall suspended in front of the huge bottomless pit below.

It was also at this moment that they realised that the entire hall was hovering above the pit. Inside these ruins which restricted their flight skills, they would have only one ending if they failed this trial.

"You asked me why I chose the door to the right? That is because we have less than 22 torches worth of time remaining and in that time limit we would have to defeat..." Simon couldn't get to complete as his voice was drowned out by the trembling noises of the two huge indigo statues suddenly moving.

As evident from the booming noise they made whenever they moved, the stone statues were incredibly heavy and made of a material that made them appear very sturdy.

BANG.. BANG... the two statues moved stepping towards the centre of the hall. From the closeup, they looked like two giants who had woken up from their slumber and were about to stir up a storm.

"W-w-what?!" Denzel couldn't help but stutter an exclamation when he saw what he thought were dead statues, suddenly start moving like a golem.

"So we have to defeat that?" Lucine who was good at adapting to her situation asked, her eyes had a peculiar glint with which she observed the two statues.

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"Yes but..." just at those words left Simon's mouth, the warrior statue brandished its sword and started moving towards the other statue.

BAM... with just the slight movement of the statue, wild winds started generating at the centre of the hall as the sword-bearer swung its sword.

In comparison, the statue with the shield seemed to be just standing still.

BOOOM... a loud clacking noise echoed out, the sword hit squarely on the shield-bearer statue and knocked it back towards the other side of the hall where it kicked up a cloud of debris and rocks.

"What? Why are they fighting among themselves?" Denzel asked sounding perplexed.

"They are not fighting among themselves but rather us. Since we have decided to open the door of the shield-bearer and have chosen to follow the conviction and path he walked on, we became the shield-bearer himself".

"The hall that you see, actually looks similar to a coliseum which might be the place where the two brothers once fought each other. I think to pass the trial, we have to follow the play and defeat the sword-bearer" Simon explained.

At this moment, the sword-bearer statue walked towards the shield warrior, grabbed him out of the wall and flung him towards the centre of the arena. The shield-bearer crashed and rolled into the ground, unable to swiftly get up on its feet.

The way the statue behaved unresponsive, was as if it was waiting for something. Without missing a beat, the sword-bearer thundered down towards the shield-bearer one again and pummelled him all over the place.

The area was devastated with clouds of dust and debris falling everywhere, the condition of the shield-bearer was also so, it had cracks and dents in its previously neat indigo body.

The way the scene played out, was quite a contrast to the picture and drawings of the valour they had seen of the shield-bearer when they opened his door.

"Did we make a mistake? Why isn't he fighting back?" Lucine asked seeing that their situation was not looking good. If the shield-bearer lost, they will fail the trial and be forced to fall into this bottomless pit where they can't even fly.

Although the restrictions placed by that thing was unimaginably strong, she can still somewhat bypass it if she used all of her strength. However, the trial grounds are known to have spiritual intelligence and the moment they detect a powerful invader, the entire island would go into a self-destruct mode annihilating every being on it.

This was not uncommon as there were many cases in history where the powerful Sovereign classes forcefully entered the trial grounds only to have their entire members annihilated and them receiving serious injuries.

There were so many cases that nobody dared to underestimate the trial grounds anymore and Lucine was aware of that. Thus, unless she wasn't backed into a corner, she wasn't willing to use her powers.

Simon was silently biting his teeth, he was able to guess the trial up until now but even he had no clue as to why the shield bearer was not doing anything.

'Did I really make a mistake? Should I have gone for the sword-bearer instead of the shield? But then with the defensive prowess of the shield-bearer, we wouldn't have been able to win against it within the time limit'.

The reason behind him choosing the shield warrior was because with the limited amount of time they had, it would be increasingly difficult to defeat the shield warrior had it only focused on defending.

p His many years as a game developer and his instincts as a dungeon master, were telling him to pick the shield warrior if they wanted to scrape up a victory. However, looking at the current scenario, he couldn't help but have double thoughts.

Just as he thought that the shield warrior would be bashed up by the sword-bearer, to his surprise, the statue that had been taking a beating all this while, finally took a stance and blocked the sword with its large shield.

BOOM... CLANK... a heavy clanging noise along with a burst of shockwave spread towards every corner of the hall, even reaching the platform that three of them were standing on.

The sudden movement of the shield-bearer, stunned Simon and Lucine, their eyes widened with shock and pleasant surprise. The shield-bearer after stopping the sword with its shield, deflected it to a side and slammed its body onto the sword-bearer pushing the statue away.

"Hehe, so that's how it was" as Simon was confounded over the sudden activeness of the shield-bearer, a cheeky voice sounded beside his ears. Turning his head, he spotted the little boy taking the same stance as the statue and holding onto a shield that looked like the replica of the one the huge statue was holding.

Denzel who attracted the attention of his two comrades, smiled brightly and scratched his hair, the statue imitating his movement.

"Uhm, I found this shield levitating at the corner of this room and couldn't help but touch it out of curiosity. However, to my surprise, it linked me with the shield-bearer and I can use my movement to connect with it" the boy explained his discoveries.

Simon as well as Lucine, were pleasantly surprised, it was only now that they realised that they were caught up in the situation so much that they did not even bother to check the room for any such possible device.

The boy utilised the replica like a shield to deflect the constant incoming attacks from the sword-bearer and ram the other guy back whenever possible. However, even though they found a method to use the shield-bearer, defeating the sword-bearer, wasn't going to be an easy task.

From the carving on the staircase that he saw when they opened the door, he could tell that the two brothers were immensely strong during their time. Although what they were facing right now was only a trial, a recollection of something that had happened long ago in the past, the statues still held some of the powers of the two no matter how minuscule.

Simon's eyes darted towards the torches up on the ceiling, their constantly diminishing numbers, was giving him a bad premonition. Even after they had chosen a door and the fight with the sword-bearer started, the countdown represented by the dying down of the torches had not stopped.

By now, less than half of the previous thirty-six torches remained lit, showcasing how much time they had left.

The fight continued for a while, the sword-bearer living up to its name of being a gallant warrior of the ancient times, brought forth storms of attack on the shield-bearer.

BANG.. BANG..RUMBLE... the scene of two gigantic statues fighting each other, was just like two natural disasters trying to engulf each other. The beautiful walls and floor of the hall, was wrecked upside down until the point it was no longer recognisable.

Pieces of broken rubble fell from the ceiling and dust littered everywhere.

BANG... with a huge sound of collision, the shield-bearer crashed on the walls for the fifth time. Its body was now battered with numerous crisscrossing cracks and gashes everywhere. If It was the genuine shield-bearer, it would have no trouble defeating the statue of the sword-bearer in a matter of a second.

However, Denzel was not the shield-bearer, even the primary weapon that he had trained in, wasn't the shield. As such he was having an increasingly difficult time landing a blow on the sword-bearer statue who still retained some of the original skills of the ancient warrior.

"Dammit, if only it was a rapier or even a sword, I wouldn't be losing this badly" the boy complained trying to get the shield-bearer back on its feet.

Simon agreed, if they still had time in their hand, it wouldn't have been a bad choice to choose the sword-bearer. However, they were restrained by time and had they not picked the shield bearer, given the combat potential of the two brothers the statues were based on, they would have lost automatically.

As the time passed, some cracks also started to appear on the shield the shield-bearer was holding, the same was with the sword-bearer. The sword in its hands had even more dents and cracks than the great shield held by the shield-bearer and had it not been for the strong durability of the material that is the indigo coloured stone that they were made of, any other ordinary rocks would have already crumbled.

However, other than the sword in its hand, its body was perfectly fine, unlike the shield-bearer statue. By now, there were only a handful of torches that could be counted in one's hand that remained burning.

Other than displaying the remaining time they had left, they were the only source of light that still illuminated the arena where the two statues of the great warriors were intensely engaged in a fight.

The previously bright and beautiful hall, had now devolved into a dark and dreary place filled with the aura of destruction. Like an unstoppable tide, the sword-bearer kept on pressurising the other statue and brought it to its knees multiple times.

Simon, Lucine and Denzel were intensely watching the scene, racking their head to see if the sword-bearer had any weaknesses. The lighting around the hall was quite dark adding to their already disadvantageous situation.

Denzel lowered his centre of gravity and positioned his shield in front of him in such a way that he could tank the attack without taking a step back from the recoil. When suddenly, the sword that he expected to come down on him from above, slither to the side and attack his defenceless arms.

BOOOM...

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BOOOM... with a deep rumbling noise like that of a mountain crumbling, the right arm of the shield-bearer was cleaved from its base.

The statue of the sword-bearer finally displayed one of the original skills of the warrior it was based on and easily outsmarted Denzel who was still a swordsman in the training.

The arm rotated in the air before falling down into the huge bottomless pit opened during the destruction of the passage.

Simon widened his eyes, held his breath and clenched his hands. He did not expect that they would suffer such a disastrous blow even before the time limit was up.

BANG...

The gigantic statue of the shield bearer crashed onto the ground after losing one of its limbs. However, before he could even grasp the severity of their situation, Denzel crouched down and howled in agony while holding his right hand.

"Aaaaaaaaaahhh".

Lucine who was beside him, immediately removed the shield replica from his hand and threw it on the side. Only then, did the little boy was finally able to grit his teeth and endure the pain.

"What's going on?" Simon supported the boy into lying down and looked at his flushed face and bulging veins. The way he acted was as if he was the one who had suffered the blow of having their arm severed and not the statue.

"I.. d-don't know... huff..huff. The moment the statue's arm got cut off, I felt an excruciating amount of pain from the shoulder joint of my right hand" Denzel explained while still trying to hold back the pain.

Lucine's eyes noticeably widened when she heard those words, she glanced at the shield lying on the floor and mused something.

Simon told him to rest for a while before picking up the shield himself. The moment he did so, Lucine cautioned him.

"Be careful, the shield is not just a high-grade artefact, but also a [Spirit Sharing Device]. It not only allows you to control the stone statue, but any damage that it receives will also be sent back to you. If you use the shield, you cannot allow the sword-bearer to deal you a fatal blow or else...".

Her words drifted off at the end as she glanced at Denzel who was barely able to endure the pain that was sent back to him.

Nodding his head at her concerned words, Simon placed the shield in front of him and took a stance. Just like the little boy, he too was not used to using a shield but with his ample knowledge of games from his previous life and his growing combat experience, he believed that he could hold his ground.

No, he can't just simply defend, he has to think of a way to defeat the sword-bearer before the remaining three torches go out.

The hall was extremely dark with the limited lighting from the torches falling onto the only standing figure of the statue. The indigo body of the sword-bearer appeared to be even more intimidating at his moment as it slowly walked towards the fallen shield bearer.

The story played on, the two brothers who once had to engage each other in a life or death battle, fought for more than three days and three nights. Their arena was no longer limited to the coliseum instead, the entire empire was their battlefield.

Before anyone knew it, Land, forest, cities, humans and even beasts were engulfed in the flames of their battle. The Jury, the Empire, nothing remained when the two brothers were hell-bent on drawing each other's blood.

Quite poetic considering that the very guardians who were supposed to protect the empire ended up becoming the tide that swept it away because of none other than the people of the empire themselves.

KLIIIIINNG... the sound of the sword scraping the ground rang out, the sword-bearer who was confident of his victory after severing one of the hands of his opponent, slowly approached closer.

It positioned its swords in an overhead stance and brought it down towards the shield-bearer in an attempt to behead the latter in one fell swoop. As the sword approached closer, Simon urged his remaining hand to grab the shield and defend his head.

CLANG... sparks erupted like crazy when the two weapons collided with each other. The power behind the swing was so great that the shield-bearer was forced on its knees, unable to bear the great weight with only one hand, its last remaining hand showed distinct signs of cracking.

The force from the attack and the cracks appearing on the statue, got transmitted to Simon in the form of pain. Even the mana inside his body was in a haywire just from a single attack from the sword-bearer.

It was only after exchanging a few blows that he realised how problematic the sword-bearer that Denzel was fighting all along was.

Seeing that its attack had failed to finish his opponent, the sword-bearer repeatedly slashed at the latter from all directions, exploiting the weakness of his enemy only having a single arm remaining.

CLANG..CLANG..CLANG

Simon defended like crazy, every time the sword clashed with his shield, he would feel a powerful backlash trying to enter his body and wreak havoc. Fortunately, his body was that of a Demon Viscount, much more powerful than an ordinary human.

Inhaling a deep breath of air, Simon tanked through the storm of attacks, his eyes glowed a brilliant crimson as he searched for an opportunity to counterattack.

"You must hurry, we do not have much time left" Lucine who was equally concerned about the consequences of failure, reminded from the side.

Even without her telling him, he was aware that they were running out of time. Compared to the battered appearance of the shield-bearer, the sword-bearer looked completely unscathed other than his sword.

At this moment, a brilliant idea struck Simon and he couldn't help but flash a wicked smile.

The lighting around the arena was extremely dim with only two torches providing the illumination. Loud noises of heavy objects colliding with each other, repeatedly echoed out. The sword-bearer as if a little annoyed that his opponent refused to give up, attacked the shield-bearer even more feverishly.

Time tickled down slowly and before long, the entire hall became dark with only a single torch lighting the place. Perspiration flowed down Simon's face; currently, he was under a heavy pressure to finish the battle before the remaining torch went out.

However, his opponent didn't give him a single opportunity to counterattack and the only thing he could do was defend to his utmost. The situation would have seemed completely hopeless to others but the heated gaze and the odd smile of his told others that the situation was still not as hopeless as it looked.

Perhaps because a part of her believed in the bizarreness and the repeated surprises that Simon had given her, Lucine quietly observed the scene unfold before her eyes.

CRASH...

With a loud crashing noise, the shield bearer for the umpteenth time was forced to grovel on the ground. This time though, it got back up immediately and clashed with the sword-bearer intensely. Even though she said clash, all that the shield-bearer or rather Simon did was defend.

Just when she was having a sprout of doubt grow in her heart, the scene that baffled even her appeared next. Simon smiled widely, the moment he was waiting for finally came.

CRACK...

With a dull cracking noise, the sword of the sword-bearer which had up until now been abused brutally and had suffered numerous assaults from his shields, finally gave in and snapped in half.

The attack that should have otherwise been enough to guarantee the sword-bearer the victory had the sword been in top condition was unable to achieve such results. The weapons of the warriors just like their body, was also made of the same indigo stone.

No way can it be compared to the legendary weapons of the original ancient warriors which accompanied them to mow down battlefields and their enemies alike.

BAM... the upper half of the sword made a full arc in the air for a while before falling down on the floor. The sword-bearer who held the memories or maybe the minuscule amount of will of the ancient warrior, was bewildered by the scene of his sword snapping in half and thus was unable to predict the unconventional movements of Simon.

Commending the shield warrior for its tenacity, Simon willed the warrior to tackle his stunned opponent and lock them in place. The statue even though it held just a tiny amount of memory or will from the warrior of the past whom they were modelled upon, had their own pride and obstinacy to not lose from the other.

The sword-bearer repeatedly thrashed around in an attempt to break away from the lock whereas the shield-bearer held the former in a tight bear grip refusing to allow them to get away.

With the sword-bearer locked in place, Simon finally initiated the plan he knew was extremely risky but nonetheless their only choice when they only had a few sparse seconds to spare.

"Aaaahhhh" with a spirited roar, Simon who was being transmitted the exact same sensation back to him thanks to the [Spirit Sharing Device], lifted the sword bearer from the ground and charged towards the other side of the hall where the bottomless pit was.

Realising the intention behind the action of the man beside her, Lucine couldn't help but be pleasantly surprised. But at the same time worry that the repercussion that he would suffer from doing something like this, would be many times higher than what the little boy resting on the floor behind them had to.

A plan like that was truly a make or break with a very high chance of risk that only a true madman would do.

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She couldn't help but glance at his face that had not even an iota of fear of death in them. Unknowingly, a curiosity to know more about the demon, budded in her heart. Suddenly, she saw the demon cough out a mouthful of blood and try to suppress the pain by grinding his teeth.

The sword-bearer at some point unable to get away from the grasps of the shield-bearer, plunged his half-broken sword onto the shoulders of the latter. Pain like that could make one flinch or even give up midway; nonetheless, Simon did not allow his stance or his lock to break and steadily carried the sword-bearer towards the edges of the cliff.

"Are you alright?" Lucine asked, her tone had unknowingly become a little softer when she saw him hurt.

"Doesn't matter if I get hurt or not, I must throw him onto that bottomless pit" Simon roared hoarsely in determination.

BANG... BANG... the heavy footsteps of the shield-bearer charging towards the pit rang out across the hall. Even though the shield-bearer only had a single arm remaining, it held on tightly to the other statue unwilling to let it go even when its entire body crumbled from the repeated assaults of the sword-bearer.

Finally, when everything seemed a race against the time, Simon willed the shield bearer statue to jump towards the pit making it to the edges at the nick of time.

SWISH... the last reaming torch that illuminated the small expanse of the hall, finally died down as the entire place descended into darkness. The only sound that resounded in the area was the heavy breathing of Simon and his pained filled gasps that he tried to quash with his breath.

Lucine hurriedly came to his aid and helped him remove the shield out of his hand. Immediately after the shield was taken out, his body that was creaking from pain and exhaustion, collapsed onto the ground.

"Haa.. haa.. did it work, did we win?" Simon asked looking at the dark space all around him.

"I don't know" Lucine shook her head and glanced at the two people sprawled onto the floor after giving their all to clear the trial. According to the message written on the tablet, they had to choose between the way of life walked by both brothers and open the door they thought was right.

As for how to defeat the other warrior statue, there was no such mention in the texts. While Lucine was deliberating if she could save the both of them in the case that they failed, a complex runic circle made of many interconnected circles, suddenly propped up under their feet.

"W-what is this?" Denzel who was resting on the floor, suddenly stood up from his position spooked by the sudden appearance of the circle.

"Relax it is just a high-level multi-layered teleportation circle. It appearing here could only mean that we have... cleared the trial?! We cleared the trial" Lucine who was frowning after looking at the teleportation circle, suddenly squealed in delight.

Her joy-filled words, immediately caused the other two to also get excited. If they were to believe her words, it could only mean that they have successfully cleared the second trial. The multi-layered teleportation circle below them, started glowing bright and bright and before long, its luminance covered the three of them.

Simon felt a slight discomfort and a weightless feeling that arises when one travels through space. When the light settled down and he opened his eyes, he found himself in a totally different environment than previously.

There was no longer a hall, a platform which they were standing on, nor was there a huge bottomless pit below them.

Their current location was a cavernous area with fire torches here and there lighting the area. When he saw the fire torches once again, Simon couldn't help but frown his brows. The trial earlier, created an aversion of torches in him.

Fortunately, this time they were not on a stopwatch and the torches did not blow out on their own. While Simon and the little boy rested and recovered from their wounds, Lucine took it on herself to scout their surroundings.

"As I thought, this place is the third trial ground and is humungous. Even with my senses, cannot chart the entirety of this cavern" Lucine commented coming out of one of the tunnels.

After a couple of minutes of rest, Simon could finally will his body as he wished. He propped his body up and scanned his surroundings. It was just like Lucine had said, the cave was so deep and winding that finding a right way out of this would be quite a hassle.

But the good thing was that, unlike the previous trials, skills that could be beneficial for this trial, wasn't blocked. He could use his [Mental Map] skill to chart out the cavern.

The group sat on a nearby boulder and decided how they would proceed forward.

"Another trial? I don't know how long has passed in the outside world. Is there no way to get out of this place?" Denzel asked.

Although he loved adventuring and wanted to be like those adventurer's, not being able to see and end or exit, he was starting to have claustrophobia.

His question piqued the interest of Simon, he too wanted to know if there was any way out of this. Unlike dungeons which have gates or a way to travel across different floors, the trial they were in, only had an entry point appearing whenever they cleared the trial.

It was normal to worry if they can't see the exit.

When Lucine saw them looking at her, she sighed in exasperation before explaining. Since she was the one more knowledgeable about the place than anyone else, the task of being a guide, fell on her.

"That is not quite so. While the Trial grounds are different from the dungeons build by demon Nobles, fundamentally they are a little the same. Instead of having exit gates or staircases to the other floors, the trial grounds have something called transit rocks that transports you back to the place you came from. While there might be some spatial turbulence on the way leading you to end up in different areas from where you came from."

Those words finally elicited a good reaction from the listeners as the mood of the group brightened a little. Now that they knew that there was a way to get out, the tension that was gripping their bodies, subsided a little.

"But how do we find those transit rocks?" Simon looked all around the cavern and the numerous rocks and pebbles scattered around. If they started to examine the rocks one after the other, there would be no end to it.

Lucine became silent for a while, she crossed her hands, closed her eyes and glossed through the information she knew about the trial ground.

"Every trial ground has its own way of spawning transit rocks. In the case of this trial ground, I do not know; however, after clearing the previous two trials, they should be starting to spawn soon. A transit rock is very unique than an ordinary rock, so when you are near them, there is no chance that you would miss it".

She recalled, though her words sounded a little unsure because this was her first time entering a trial ground and the information she had, was from the memories of her master and grandfather.

The group nodded before proceeding forward. Each of the cavernous tunnels wasn't big and barely allowed three to four people to walk side by side.

While the group walked, they paid special attention to the walls and ceilings of the caverns in hopes of finding some clues or drawings that might help in their next trial. However, even after walking a long distance, there was no such indication of any drawings or carvings on the wall until they reached a three-meter big metal door that was tightly shut.

"It's not opening," Denzel said after failing to pull the door open.

"Obviously, unless you deactivate the runes or blow it away with a powerful Amalgamation magic, the door won't open," Lucine said examining the complicated runic letters carved on the door.

When she put some of her mana into it, the letters started glowing and becoming more apparent. Simon and Denzel sat near the door while Lucine interpreted the words. Since they had someone who was adept in ancient letters, there was no need for them to open the door forcefully, they can simply enter after decoding the letters.

"How does Mis... ahem big sis know these letters? Even my master would be amazed by your knowledge" Denzel uttered dazedly.

"Hehe, are you by chance impressed? Hmph, this much is nothing for me you know" Lucine flashed a boastful smile, her mood becoming brighter by a little.

Simon blinked his eyes in amazement, this master and disciple were the same in that they get easily flattered even by the simplest of praise.

"Alright, I have decoded the words written on the door" Lucine said turning towards the two of them. Although they found no clue whatsoever about their upcoming trial, it at least gave them a slight idea.

The three of them after nodding at each other, carefully pushed open the door. The heavy metal door that might have not been opened for centuries or maybe even millennias, made a loud creaking noise when it was pushed open.

Darkness loomed over the other side of the door; however, the moment they stepped in, the torches around the walls, started igniting one after the other. The tunnel they were in currently, was broader than the one that had come from.

A rail track that had seen its fair share of use, was laid on the middle and went deep inside the cavern.