

D. of Pride 321

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Compared to others, Frida fared relatively well. Though the mana within her was still erratic, she managed to sever her will from the magic before the roar arrived. Thanks to that, she was not coughing out blood like the other mages.

"Are you alright... what happened?" Blake hurriedly ran towards her and supported her up.

"Haa.. haa... it's the [Disruption Roar]" Frida explained with a pale face, the shout earlier was a specific skill of a high-level beast that allows them to disrupt the mana around their surrounding with a roar.

The skill was very troublesome in the sense that none of the mages would be able to cast their spell when the roar hits them. Worse, the backlash that comes from having your magic disrupted, is similar to suffering a severe blow for a mage.

Blake's eye became grave when he heard those words, he now understood the severity of facing a beast multiple levels above them. With Frida's magic out of the picture, they lost a marginal amount of their firepower.

"Go to the backlines and rest... leave the rest to.." before Blake could complete his sentence, Frida vehemently shook her head in denial.

"Are you stupid? With me gone, who will deal damage to it. If you are the wall that stands before our enemy like a mountain, then I'm the cannon that brings them to their knees. Don't worry, I don't think it can use the same skill again and again. It must have a long cooldown... trust me" she asserted looking straight in his eyes.

Blake contemplated for a while and decided to leave her to her own devices. Her presence was something that even he couldn't fill in this guild and if she were to step down at this point, the void that she would left would be too big for any of them to cover.

He arranged a group of [Sword Masters] to guard her while she rests and joined the frontlines. After the previous attack, it was clear that if they want to defeat this beast, they would have to do so

physically, magical attacks on the level of novice tier and short-area intermediate magic were mostly useless against it.

Unless it is a powerful large area magic that takes a long time to prepare, it is unlikely to be enough to pierce its defences.

There was no need for him to worry about the mages in the rear guard as they had Kody backing and healing them. Clearing his mind and setting his sights on the entity in front of him, Blake stood between the entity and his teammates who were behind him.

Ever since the beast appeared in front of them, it did not move an inch from its place. It wasn't because the entity did not have the leeway or was forced by them into a corner, it was simply because there was no need for it to do so in the first place.

From its point of view, they must look so weak that it did not even have to move to deal with the lots of them. However, now that most of the mages were down, if it wanted to attack or make its move it would be now.

Blake along with the other warriors stood in an arrowhead formation with their shields raised, their attitude seems to say that no matter what they wouldn't move from there.

As if to mock their resolution, the entity neighed once, scraped the ground with its foreleg and charged towards them. Its charge was neither fast nor strong but for some reason, the moment the entity charged the entire aura around it changed.

It was a very drastic transition and was witnessed by all of them. The moment when the beast was about to collide with their formation, they all saw it, an illusory image of a humongous mighty being that looked somewhat similar to the warhorse, appeared overhead.

BANG...with a powerful force of a battering train, the warhorse crashed into them. A heavy dull thuds of metals colliding and bones breaking, rang out followed by miserable screams of many adventurers.

The warriors that tried to stop the charge of the Bloodthorn Demonic Warhorse were sent flying and rolling on the floor crying. Their shields were crushed and their bones shattered into powder after that collision.

Those that observed the scene from the rear, were astounded by the scene that lay in front of them. They who knew how reliable and sturdy their teammates were, couldn't believe the outcome. These [Sword Master] classes were specifically buffed with high defence and Strength stats that made them as sturdy as a boulder.

Classes like that were ideal to be the tanks of any team; nevertheless, these trusty teammates of theirs, did not even last a move against the beast in front of them. Slowly, an invisible fear started creeping into their hearts and started affecting their minds.

NEEEIIIGGGHH... the Bloodthorn Demonic warhorse marvelled at the result of its actions before shifting its gaze towards the backlines. It repeated the same action of scraping the ground with its foreleg before starting its charge once again.

The backlines which have lost the protection of their vanguards, started panicking the moment they saw the entity charge at them.

"Miss Frida what should we do?!" the mages asked the woman in front of them who was one of the pillars of their guild. To their surprise, the woman fearlessly stood in her place and started chanting her spell-like a beautiful hymn.

There was no worry on her face nor was there any kind of anxiousness, only a calm focused expression could be seen on her face. The same went for their one and only Light magic user Kody who cast his healing spells on the warriors on the frontline.

Due to them being disarrayed by an intangible sinister force, they failed to realise that amongst the warriors, there was one more person who was yet to go down.

"HIYAAAAAAHHH" With a loud spirited shout, a man with flaky red hair and donning an crimson armour stood between the entity and them. His back was wide enough to give people a sense of assurance and protection. The man was none other than the guild master of their guild, Blake Gunvald.

Blake who stood in front of the Bloodthorn Demonic warhorse felt the incredulous power behind its charge. The clash earlier where all of their front-liners were sent flying, was still fresh on his mind and that is why this time he did not dare to hold back any of his power.

"Super Enhanced Strength, Super Enhanced Defence, Super enhanced Endurance, Harden Skin, Greater Shield Guard, Fortress, Body Enhancement, Scorching Armour... [Fortification]"
Activating all of his skills, Blake stood still like a mountain unwilling to move.

His class [Crimson Guard] allowed him to tank a large number of hits and his defence was second to none in the city of Mountmend, matching evenly with Chuck.

His skills bolstered his already superior defence and even if it was someone hundreds of levels above him, they would at least need to spend some effort to bypass his defence. That was how abnormal his defence stat had become.

Therefore, it was only natural for Blake to think that he could at least stop its charge. From the corner of his eyes he could see Frida and the other mages channelling their magic and preparing to attack.

If he could stop the charge of the beast, he had no doubt in his mind that his comrades would be able to damage it. However, what he didn't know was that standing in the path of Bloodthorn Demonic warhorse's charge was extremely foolish.

Even beasts multiple levels higher than it wouldn't dare to stand before it when it charged, forget about a human multiple levels below it. While it may be true that the warhorse was plentiful strength with its magic and defence, its true power lay withing those explosive six legs of it which were like the most powerful engine.

Once its charge began, there was only one outcome.

THUD..THUD...THUD

When the galloping sound of the warhorse rang out, the fearful cries of monsters as they hid themselves deep within the forest could be heard.

Blake who was standing at the path of its charge, at this moment felt the shadow of death grasping his body. Perspiration trickled down his face and seconds before they collided, the man realised how foolish his decision was.

A powerful force so brutish and ridiculous that it crushed every bone in his body, hit him making him lose his consciousness immediately. He was just like a twig in front of a car unable to stop its rush.

BANG... CRACK... an extremely dull sound echoed out followed by a man being sent airborne and crashing onto the ground limply.

SILENCE~

A stifling silence descended onto the area where the adventurers were. Their eyes opened wide at the incredulous, non-sensical scene that unfolded in front of their eyes. 'Impossible' that was the only word revolving around their heads.

The guild master, who they all thought would be able to easily tank the charge of the beast, and whose defence was stronger than anyone they knew, was defeated just like that. How could they believe such a scene?

Many of them even rubbed their eyes thinking that they were hallucinating and all of this was just an illusion. But no matter how much they rubbed their eyes and reject the possibility, the evidence was right in front of them.

Blake Gunvald was lying on the floor bleeding heavily with his armour and shield broken.

NEEIGHH... the roar of the beast woke them up from their daze, it's simple shout was enough to disturb their frame of mind.

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The mages who were casting their spell forgot to channel their mana leading to the magic dissipating in the air, while the warriors who were trying to get back on their feet after receiving healing and taking a potion stood motionless.

"It is Impossible after all, we can't defeat it" having their morale broken after seeing the condition of their guild master many of them fell on their buttocks unable to remain standing.

"Kodyyy" Frida's sharp cry, woke the priest who was still in a daze.

"[Healing Light]... [Ailment Heal]..." Kody chanted one healing spell after another without worrying about conserving his mana while Frida who had completed her magic, blasted it towards the beast.

A huge flaming ball like a miniature sun dropped down on the Bloodthorn Demonic Warhorse and engulfed it in an explosion that encompassed dozens of meters of area. The intermediate tier Flame magic was enough to rock the surroundings and cause a miniature earthquake.

Using this opening, she unfurled her illusory wings and swiftly carried Blake away. Kody hurriedly approached them and inspected the condition of the man.

"How is he?" Frida asked anxiously.

"Multiple bones broken, numerous fractures, organs displaced and heavy bleeding. We need to treat him immediately or else he might go into a concussion".

He said with a grave face. Never in his wildest dream would he have believed that Blake whose defence was something that made him the steel wall that protected this guild, would get knocked like that.

Frida bit her lips, her eyes misted over when she saw the bloody condition of the man. She clenched and unclenched her hands before making her decision.

"I'm going to use the [Scroll of Return], you take command over all of them".

Right after saying all that, she brought out an old scroll from her space ring and pulled it open. The scroll had many crisscrossing and complicated lines and diagrams which lit up after she inserted some of her mana onto it.

When the scroll started burning and turned into ashes, those diagrams floated up in the air and formed an intricate array.

Seeing Frida busy herself, Kody gritted his teeth and held the mallet in his hand in determination. Taking out multiple vials of mana recovering potions, he gulped down on it before casting a wide area Light Magic.

"Cleanse this land of all evils... [Purification]".

From a distance, a bright light could be seen surrounding a part of the forest like a barrier illuminating the place with its milky shine. If one looked carefully, the barrier had a mysterious symbol that gave others a strong suppressive feeling.

When the snowflakes like light fell onto all those adventurers, they felt their bodies mysteriously lighten up and couldn't help but look at the barrier over their heads.

"Sir Kody? What is he trying to do?"

"He is expending his last bits of precious mana on erecting a powerful barrier that heals you over time if you are inside it".

Just as they wondered why one of their three leaders was doing something like that, the heated roar of the priest that usually stayed silent and calm, echoed out.

"Since when did the burning arrows guild have spineless cowards like you all? We came here fully knowing what kind of dangers lay ahead and now that our leader is down trying to save all of us, but instead of holding the frontlines in his stead, you people are lying on the floor like some spineless cowards".

As the snowflakes of light continued to drop on their body, black smoke started coming out of them and they felt like their mind clearing. The instant their mind cleared up, they got up on their feet and frowned.

From the moment they entered this floor, they have been sensing that their mind was being affected slowly by something. That feeling just got confirmed when they saw black smokes come out of their body.

Nobody retorted against those words of Kody, it was by their own mistake that they had fallen prey to this sinister effect. Also when they saw their leader being defeated, their morale had indeed hit rock bottom.

Seeing them wake up from their trance and clench their weapons tightly, Kody spoke.

"Frida is invoking the [Scroll of Return], buy her as much time as you can. As long as you stay inside the barrier, the beast's mind corrupting abilities won't be able to affect you".

Everybody nodded their head and got into formation, all of them were aware of the [Scroll of Return] which was their final trump card that could get them out of this dungeon.

The scroll of return that they got for accepting the request from the Branch headquarter of the Adventurer's Association was a powerful item that contained the laws of space and could connect two places together.

That is to say, with the scroll they could get out of here. However for the effect of the scroll to invoke, it needed a long time to prepare and an enormous amount of mana to fuel it. On top of that, the caster has to constantly focus on evoking the magic contained within the scroll leaving them completely defenceless.

That is why it was up to them to stop the advance of the beasts who would clearly not miss this big of an opening. The enemy was clearly just one, if it was just buying time, they could throw their numbers at him.

As the adventurers were thinking that, the Bloodthorn demonic warhorse who was staying unusually silent after defeating Blake, sulked seeing the light barrier. The mental effect that its [Demonic Grip] skill was having on all those people who had invaded his master's dungeon, was purified by this damn light barrier.

The adventurer that was responsible for it, had created it big enough to engulf dozens of meters of land around this area. For some reason, being under it made it feel uncomfortable, but since Irene told him not to kill them, it couldn't attack them with its other skills leaving it with only one option.

Just when everybody wondered why the entity had gone unusually silent, it opened its mouth and gave a coarse ominous roar.

NEEEIIGGHHH... a huge shadow of the warhorse manifested itself exerting its aura all across the forest. The adventurers hurriedly closed their eyes worried that the scene from before would repeat once again.

However, when they saw none of the mages having any problem, they wondered what the roar was all about.

Frida and Kody narrowed their eyes, they knew that something was up, the unsettling feeling they had, won't go away. And if to prove them right, they immediately knew why they had this feeling.

The ground rumbled and the distant noise that seems to be coming closer, echoed from every part of the forest. Adventurer that had detection skills, immediately knew what was going on, their face going pale white.

Before the others could wonder what was going on, cries of monsters and their approaching footsteps, rang out. It was not only one or two but was coming from every direction and in hordes.

After a while, the adventurers found themselves encircled by monsters all around with nowhere to run. The Bloodthorn Demonic Warhorse used its roar to dominate all the various monsters spawned around this floor and obey its orders.

After it had woken up from its slumber, its level had increased marginally, it had gained new skills and even became self-aware. There was no way these ordinary monsters would be able to endure the bloodline suppression it had exerted.

"This is bad" getting sandwiched by all these monsters on top of also having to face the unknown beast was extremely dangerous. If nothing is done, their guild might very well be wiped off just like that guild... Kody thought internally.

He looked behind him and saw Frida who was doing her absolute best to invoke the Space magic inside the [Scroll of Return]. From her looks, it seemed that it would still take some time before the magic was complete.

That is to say, they had to fend off all of these monsters during this time. The absence of their guild master who would calmly assess the situation and give orders at this crucial time, became all the more apparent.

'No, we can't lose hope now. Other than that Beast, all the other monsters are no threat. If I can just...' at that moment, an idea struck him. Kody glanced at his teammates and tightly clenched the mallet in his hands.

The enemies that surrounded them, gave no time to compose themselves and pounced at them. The warriors at the front, did their best to keep the droves of monsters away while the mages in the

centre of the formation cast one spell after another to reduce the number of their enemies and lighten the burden on the frontline.

With just a single roar from the warhorse, the previously silent forest had become a chaotic mess with blood and magic flying everywhere. After descending nineteen floors, the Burning Arrows guild found themselves face to face with an entity they had no chance to win against.

Worse, their current situation was where it would not be surprising to see their whole guild get wiped out.

Why weren't they calling upon the subsidiary team waiting for them on the floor above to help them? That is because there was no point in doing so, the beast had made it clear that be it one or hundreds of them, it made absolutely no difference.

The gap between their strength was just that big.

Frida who was channelling her mana onto the [Scroll of return] looked at the scene in consternation. The life of her guild mates, was a heavy thing to shoulder.

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From time to time, she could see some of them getting injured and falling on the ground before getting back up healed by the light flakes dropping on their body. The only reason they could hold on for so long was because of Kody who used the last of his mana to create the [Purification] spell.

Where did it go all wrong? Did they underestimate the dungeon too much? An existence of that level would definitely raise the difficulty of the dungeon. The fact that the being might be an underling of the Demon Noble, weighed heavily on her mind.

Forget about the task assigned to them by the Adventurer Association's branch, if they did not get out here, all of their life would very well be forfeited. After Blake got defeated so easily, Frida could now clearly see it, the entity was playing with them and was not serious at all.

From the level it had reached, they might as well look like ants to it. A being of that level was the underling of the Demon Noble... then didn't it mean that the Demon Noble residing here was even more powerful?

The moment she realised that, she felt her body getting cold. They had made a serious mistake of underestimating the dungeon, the potential of this dungeon was beyond her imagination and wasn't something the likes of them could think about conquering.

Gritting her teeth, she compelled herself to complete the [Scroll of return] faster when from the corner of her eyes she saw Kody running out of the barrier and into the storm of enemies outside.

'What is he trying to do?' Frida's eyes went wide, the man was a [Priest], a class just like the mage with more focus on Magic stat. The condition he was in, with his mana drained and without the help of his pendant, would make him unable to withstand an attack even from the weakest of monsters.

So what was such a man trying to accomplish running out of the protection of his barrier. As her mind ran at full throttle trying to figure out what Kody was trying to do, the man in question raised his mallet squeezed out the last bits of mana remaining within him and cast a simple light magic.

The light magic was so weak that it seemed like it would dissipate at any moment. Kody smiled widely and sent the light spell that looked like a small orb of light flying towards the warhorse.

Everybody who witnessed this act of his, was stunned silent not knowing what to do; however, to their surprise when the light orb touched the entity, for the first time in a while, their enemy showed an aggravating look.

NEIIGGHHH... the angry shout of the Bloodthorn demonic warhorse rang out, even with its high defence that was unfazed by other magic, light magic managed to deal it some damage.

Kody smiled, called out his illusory wings and used his [Flight] skill to fly over in a different direction. Only now did everybody realise what he was trying to do.

'No...' Frida called out anxiously but she was in no position to go and chase after him. She knew that the action of her friend was unusual nevertheless, even she couldn't have imagined that he would use himself as a bait to lure the enemy...

FLAP... at this moment a loud sound of wings flapping could be heard and the beast used its wide draconic wings to chase after Kody who had managed to hurt it.

Kody looked behind and to his delight, saw that his plan had worked. His vision was becoming blurry by the second and he felt a severe pain assault his head nonetheless, he still held on and continued to fly.

In a few minutes, Frida would be able to complete the spell and they all would be able to go back. Although they are surrounded by monsters all around and there might be some injuries, the Burning arrow guild isn't something that can be done in so easily.

He looked behind and saw the beast following him, with the entity distracted, they would somehow be able to fend off the other monsters.

"That is good, this is how it should be. Blake when you wake up, you would still be able to see your guild and all its members" he gulped down a vial of mana recovering potion and continued to fly around aimlessly.

From the moment he thought of this tactic, he had accepted his fate. After being chased by a disaster class beast like that, there was no way he would be able to get away from this alive. But that was fine, he had done his task as one of the three leaders of the guild and ensured its survival even at the cost of his life.

How long had passed? Kody couldn't hear anything, the battlefield was too distant. His ears kept ringing and his health was quickly deteriorating but he kept on flying determined to buy as much time as he could for his guild.

Suddenly his vision went white and he felt his body crashing down. His body slammed and skidded on the ground heavily; however, his senses were so dull that he felt no pain.

THUD... lying on the ground motionlessly, he heard the sound of something else landing on the ground. Needless to say, it was the beast who had followed him.

With his fuzzy consciousness he heard it approaching him and just when he thought that he had accepted his fate, he heard Frida's courage filled and loud cry.

"Now!" the moment her voice sounded out, multiple rumbling noises sounded out and he felt somebody grabbing his body and taking him along with them.

With his blurry vision, Kody saw his comrades bombarding the beast with their spell and backing away immediately.

"Why?" he asked dryly.

There was no need for them to come back for him and take this risk, he had done all of this just so his teammates could get away from here safely. There is no point in him doing all of that if they put themselves in danger once again.

"You idiot, did you think we gladly accept your actions and allow you to sacrifice yourself? Did you forget what kind of person our leader is? Even if he had to come back to the twentieth floor again, he would take your corpse back with him".

"If he was conscious right now, there was no way he would allow your sacrificial attempt to buy us time".

Frida replied, her tone a little angry, a little sad. Now that she had given up on using the Scroll of Return, their only option out of this was to use the stairs that led to the upper floor of the dungeon.

However, with all those monsters and the beast standing between them, it was unknown how many of them would survive.

NEEIIGGHH... the angry roar of the beast sounded out in the distance. The various monsters of this floor heeded its cry and became even more fierce. A dark dreary aura quickly filled the room dropping the temperature to the pits of hell.

Everybody could feel a shadow of death grip their hearts and made a run for the exit together. Casualties were bound to arise with the monster horde going berserk like that.

Battle bears, Stromwolves, Orcs threw themselves onto the adventurers without caring about death. Many adventurers were torn apart by the savage claws and teeth of the monsters, their cries of agony echoing across the floor.

There was no formation and the only thing everyone focused on right now was to make a beeline towards the exit. The Bloodthorn demonic warhorse watched all of these with cold eyes, its gaze fixated on the man who could use light magic among the bunch.

It was just about to unleash its true might and decimate all of them, when a cold energy shrouded its body and stopped it from doing so.

Frida who was carrying two people while flying towards the exit, looked behind her and frowned when she saw that the beast was not chasing after them. There was no way it had given up. When it released its might, she could clearly feel its anger, they were no match for it so why?

Frida shook her head and turned around to fly towards the exit as fast as she could. It didn't matter why the entity was not moving from its place, it was a good thing for them. When the exit was in sight, she handed the two unconscious bodies to her guildmates and took out her staff.

"Keep running, I have already contacted the subsidiary attack teams, they are on their way to aid us" After saying that, she started casting multiple flame and earth magic and dropped it down on the chasing monsters.

With her magic as the backup, she stopped any further casualties from occurring and hurried her teammates to keep on running.

With Kody down, the dark and dreary around swiftly spreading around every corner of this floor was too much for them and if they came in contact with it, they were sure to lose their mind and get mentally encroached upon once again.

Huge earth pillars, Flame arrows dropped down on the monsters killing and barring them from advancing further. Frida kept on casting until she found her mana running out and only stopped when she saw all of them had reached the stairs they used to enter this place.

Just before exiting, she gazed at a certain part of the forest where the beast was standing and saw an illusory and beguiling figure appear next to it.

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Irene's crystal blue eyes gazed at the retreating humans one last time before she shifted her eyes. She gently patted the warhorse beside her and smiled.

"It's alright, showing them your presence is enough to buy us plenty of time. By the time your existence leaks out and powerful humans come flocking inside, the dungeon will become even more stronger. The third Guardian has already started moving, it won't be long before our defences gets even more strengthened".

The Bloodthorn demonic warhorse nodded his head and asked "What about that man?".

Irene knew who he was talking about and explained "That human used Light magic, as a being with strong affiliation to dark attribute, no wonder you were damaged and feel a strong repulsion to it".

It wouldn't be long before the news that the Burning Arrows guild was destroyed on the twentieth floor and had to retreat with their tails behind their back, spread everywhere around the tower town and the city of Mountmend.

With few members returning and their guild master and Priest heavily injured, there was no way they could hide the evidence. At the same time, the news that the dungeon was unconquerable even by the number one guild around this part, would travel far and wide, attracting the attention of all the big guilds of this kingdom.

Two days had already passed since Adalinda stormed out of his room saying that she would prepare something to capture her disciple. Simon who had nothing to do roamed the capital for the past few days.

During this time, he learned that the Serene Palace Auction was opening soon and that more and more people were flocking into the capital. The capital was bustling with hubbub and activity every day as the day of the competition was approaching closer.

Hearing the commotion outside his window, Simon got out of the inn and walked towards the commercial district of the city. One of the largest and awe-inspiring building, was owned by the Serene palace merchant guild and used for holding auctions.

A huge crowd of people lined up against it trying to get inside. Today was the day when the auction was finally going to open and thanks to the approaching 'battle of the finest' tournament, the things that would be auctioned off was bound to be precious and extraordinary items.

Not only ordinary people, but even those participants, powerful guilds and adventurers were guaranteed to be present. Simon who had nothing to do now that Adalinda went off on her own, decided to attend the auction.

Currently, he had donned a long robe and a hat to cover up his appearance. There were many entrances that one could use to get inside the auction; however, most of them required money or needed a special invitation or token from the merchant guild.

Guards donning the insignia of the Serene palace merchant guild maintained order around the place. Of course, it was not just their presence but their weapons and stern gazes that compelled people to do so.

Simon estimated that all of them were above level 200 with some of them even reaching level 300. A lineup like that was assigned as outer guards, the influence of the merchant guild could be seen just from that.

Their network and wealth were so wide that nobody wanted to offend them. Everyone that went inside the building, did so very calmly and politely. Simon didn't line up where the ordinary people were queuing and instead took a different entrance.

That was because Cynthia had handed him the VIP token of their guild which allowed him to have certain privileges when entering any of their establishments. A guard near the entrance checked the token he passed and immediately double-checked it.

After checking the authenticity of the token, his attitude also became mellow as he respectfully bowed towards him. Simon was taken aback by the attitude shift of the guard.

He looked at the VIP token in his hands, Cynthia did tell him that this was a special token of their Merchant guild given only to a handful few. After he entered the building he was stopped by a pretty lady with a charming smile standing beside the corridor to lead all the guests and see to their convenience.

When he passed her the VIP token he had, her eyes immediately became the size of the saucer. After giving him a polite bow, she led him up the stairs and into a room that had a clear wide view of the hall below where the auction would be taking place.

The hall was very huge being able to accommodate more than ten thousand people with rows of seats and gallery booked for VIPS. At the centre of the hall was an elevated stage and a basement connected to it.

"Esteemed guest, I will be waiting outside. Please call upon me if you need anything" right after saying that, the pretty lady exited the room and closed the door.

Now left all alone inside this room, Simon saw people swarming inside the hall like ants. In a mere hour or so, the huge action hall was filled with black bobbling heads of the crowd and various noises and hubbub started spreading from all directions.

Simon calmly sat in his room and closed his eyes, until every noise was blocked off by him. There was still some time until the auction starts. As people started filling up the seat and the noise was starting to reach its peak, when suddenly everything went silent.

This was because an aura so strong and wild that it intimidated everyone into silence entered the hall. A man wearing clean red robes, haughtily walked towards one of the VIP seating arrangements and flumped himself on the seat.

From his appearance, it seemed like he was around twenty five years old.

"Isn't he the son of the guild master of savannah beast guild, Marcus?"

"He is... it seems like he wants to use this opportunity to buy something that might increase his strength in the tournament".

Simon opened his eyes and observed the man, from the hubbub around him, he knew that the man was named Marcus. However, what interested his eyes wasn't the man or his powers but the guild he belonged to.

Savannah Beast Guild was one of the top five of this Kingdom much more powerful than any guild in Mountmend.

At this moment, Simon's eyes was jolted to another surprise, a group of men hiding their faces with black robes entered the place and pushed back the wild aura Marcus had released. Leading the group was a tall lanky man with an unhealthy face, he carried an old staff with him and wore a sly smile.

The moment they entered, the crowd started becoming silent as hushed voices could be heard everywhere.

"The Kingdom of Ingolf are also here. It seems that they too are interested in the auction"

"That tall man who is walking forward, he is the crown prince of their Kingdom, Oman Dercis Ingolf".

During the past two days, when Simon was collecting information, he got to know that there had been some changes to the Tournament and that the surrounding Kingdoms were also participating in it.

It didn't come as a surprise to him that they were also participating in this auction. After all, the best items would always end up in the hands of the powerful and wealthy who might also be your opponent in the tournament.

The auction is the best opportunity to know your opponents and bar them from getting any items that might make them more powerful.

With only a few minutes remaining, the VIP rooms were getting filled up one after the other. Among them were some of the familiar faces like Duke Montford and Lucas who he travelled with on the Air Engine.

There was a representative from each of the top five guilds and other various guilds from different regions of the kingdom.

At this moment when the excitement of the auction had reached its peak, a beguiling woman with silky violet hair and wearing graceful purple clothes slowly walked up to one of the VIP rooms. Her beautiful skin and glossy lips mesmerised the crowd and her ample curves took away everyone's attention.

The crowd immediately became silent as if a charm spell had been cast on them. The woman who just showed up, was none other than the mistress of the Serene Palace Merchant Guild and also the princess of this Kingdom.

All of the people seated inside the VIP room greeted her with their gaze or nod. She made herself comfortable in her seat and indicated the auctioneer to start the event.

The old man on the podium bowed his head and enthusiastically started the auction.

"First of all, I thank everyone for attending this auction held by the merchant guild of ours. This old man is called Alfonso, pleased to make your acquaintance".

The old man carried a good-natured smile that could give anyone a good impression of him and had an aura that said that he was a master of his profession. The old man beheld the crowd before clapping his hands once.

At that instant, several pretty girls walked up the stage with silver plates on their arms. In each of the silver plates was an item that was draped over by a red cloth.

The red cloth was made of a material that did not allow the aura from the item inside to leak out nor did it allow any prying attempt from others.

"I know what everyone is eagerly waiting for, so let us start this auction without wasting any more time".

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The old man nodded his head and the first girl removed the drape from the silver plate in her hand.

OHHH~ a noise of exclamation came from the crowd down below as they gazed at the item that marked the beginning of the auction. Lying on the silver plate was a dagger less than fifteen-inch in size and made with a peculiar material that gave its blade a crimson sheen.

"This item was found from a [C] tier dungeon and its name is [Rogue Blade]. A [C] tier item that further enhances your strength and bestows you with many powerful skills. Feel free to [Analyse] the item and see for yourself how good the weapon is. The starting bid for the item would be five hundred Blackgold coins".

Blackgold coins were more in circulation in their kingdom of Ellesmere than the higher denomination platinum coins. Thus, the auction mostly used Blackgold coins to trade.

The result of the analysis wasn't far away from what the old man said, the item was indeed a [C] tier item, Refinement rank 2 and gives +200 buff to your Agility and Endurance stats when equipping.

It also has quite a few skills like [Dagger Mastery], [Cutting enhancement], [Piercing enhancement], [Lethal Strike] and [Faint Slash].

The crowd immediately became awed by the appearance of the dagger. This was the first item that went up for auction, one had to imagine what sorts of treasures were sitting around to be auctioned for later.

At the same time, some of them became disheartened by the astronomical price. There was no way they who had brought a limited sum of money, would be able to contest for it.

A fierce bidding war started for the [Rogue Blade], the bid started with 530 blackgold coins and immediately inclined up to 850 coins. Some of the people in the hall who were still bidding for the dagger when they heard a voice come from one of the VIP rooms on top.

"1200 Blackgold coins".

The man who spoke out was the crown prince of Ingolf Kingdom, Oman. He lazily sat in his seat and took joy glancing at the unhappy faces of the crowd below.

Simon who was watching this scene from his own VIP compartment, closed his eyes. Although the dagger was not a bad weapon, it wasn't something that he was interested in especially when he had the Crimson sword and the twin blade with him.

Plus, dagger techniques were different from sword techniques and even their reach and way to use were different.

Perhaps because the people seated in the other VIP rooms were thinking on the same line or had their own agendas in mind nobody increased the bid after Oman and the item was sold to him.

Simon leaned against his chair and supported his head with his arms. He knew that the first few items would be appetizers to fill the hunger of the ordinary mass below, the true highlight would only appear later.

With his laidback attitude, Simon appeared to be enjoying a show as he saw one item after another come up the stage and be fiercely bid for. During this period, he did not participate at all.

As time passed, the artifacts and items that were being auctioned, gradually started becoming valuable and some of them even started holding his interest. For example, one of the artifact that just came up now, bestowed the wearer with a [Flight] skill.

Although the skill had a duration and a long cooldown time, it must be said that humans unless they reach a specific skill do not manifest a flight skill. Thus when the item came up, it stir quite a war between different parties, each eager to win the item no matter what.

Simon was a Demon Noble born with a pair of wings thus he had no interest in these items. Nonetheless, it was not like none of the items was able to catch his interest.

Satina's earrings, an item that gave the user Wind resistance for a fixed period of time. There was an intense bid for this item before being auctioned to Lucas who had offered the highest bid for it.

As Simon was observing Lucas, the person in question seemed to detect something and hurriedly glanced towards him. However, since Simon was covering even his appearance with a hat and a black robe, Lucas wasn't able to notice anything peculiar.

"The next item for sale is an old scroll containing space laws within it. But because it was recovered in an extremely rough condition, it was damaged and may or may not be able to work like usual. The tier of the item is [B] and the starting bid is 2000 blackgold coins, let the bidding begin".

The audience voiced out sounds of exclamation when they heard it was a scroll that contained some kind of space magic within it; however, when they heard that it was damaged and might not work, they immediately lost their interest.

Space magic was one of the rare forms of magic even rarer than the Light and dark magic. There might be a few light magic users in their kingdom; however, they had no person capable of using space magic.

That was because to learn space magic, one needed a very high level of aptitude and talent. One had to be a genius at controlling mana and have a teacher who is willing to bestow his knowledge upon them.

,m That is why, there is no space magic user in their kingdom. A few seconds passed; nevertheless, there was none from the audience who wanted to bid for an old damaged scroll for that amount.

The old man auctioneer knitted his brows, he too knew that the item might not be bid for at all but because he couldn't reject the supplier, he took his chances though it seemed that it was all for nought.

Just when it seemed that the item would go without getting any bid, "2000 blackgold coin" from inside one of the VIP rooms, came a voice.

The crowd was stunned for a moment, they couldn't believe that there was someone from the VIP rooms foolish enough to go for a damaged scroll. In 99 % of the cases, a damaged scroll would always end up being a dud not to mention a space type scroll would cost a lot.

One had to know that a scroll type artefact engraved with a magic can only be used once before it gets destroyed. The old scroll for auction even though had the incredibly rare space magic, it can only be used once not to mention there is a high possibility that it might even not work.

No matter how they saw it, the item was not worth that amount of money. All the eyes turned towards the black-robed man with a hat, the bid came from his room.

Cynthia who was observing the auction calmly, gazed at the black-robed man. Her beautiful eyes lingered on him for a few seconds before she shifted them towards the auctioneer.

The old man getting the hint was just about to auction the scroll to him when an unexpected bid that came from another VIP room stopped him from doing so.

"2500 blackgold coins"

A cold mocking voice sounded out from the VIP room designated for the guests of Ingolf Kingdom. The one who spoke out was none other than Oman. He was lounging in his seat and had a playful smile on his face.

The crowd was thrown into surprise once again, there was someone who was willing to offer even more for something which did not have any value in their eyes.

Those with sharp eyes and intuitive ones could see that the crown prince of Ingolf Kingdom was deliberately making this harder for the person in the black robe. Some looked at the scene with amused eyes, ready to see a good show.

Simon glanced at Oman and narrowed his eyes. There was no way he would not understand the intention of the other party, they just wanted to make it difficult for him by increasing the price and making a counterbid.

"3000 Balckgold coins" Simon calmly raised his offer.

"3500" Immediately after which came the counter bid of Oman.

"4000"

"4500"

"5000" Simon narrowed his eyes and declared, his heart becoming cold.

"5500" Sensing the atmosphere, Oman raised the price once again, a ruthless smile on his face.

"Your royal highness, it would be foolish to spend this much amount of money for a damaged scroll. Instead, we should save the money for the highlight of this auction, the Serene Palace Merchant guild is sure to bring out something good for this occasion" an attendant behind him, suggested.

Oman glared at the attendant before dismissing him with his words.

"You think I don't know that idiot? I'm just livening up the atmosphere of this auction by providing everyone a good show".

He wasn't interested in the thing anyway, he just wanted to goof around and make the other party look like a clown. With his identity as the crown prince of Ingolf Kingdom and his deep pockets he could easily achieve something like that.

"6000" When Simon raised the price once again, Oman snickered and lazily yawned on his seat. His attitude seems to say that he was no longer interested in the item.

The auctioneer had a bright smile on his face as he observed the audience for any possible counterbid before tapping the hammer in his desk thrice and selling the item to Simon.

"Congratulation to this sir for buying a Gold Scroll for 6000 blackgold coins, truly an extraordinary treasure" as if to mock him for his idocy, Oman clapped loudly from his VIP room.

Simon flashed a smile from under his hat but his eyes were frigid cold. If not for the man, he would have been able to buy the scroll for 2000 blackgold coins.

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But now he was forced to spend 4000 coins more which was clearly too much for a damaged scroll. Although human money was just some numbers to a Demon viscount like him, it still didn't mean that he was okay with how the other party had played him.

If not for the fact that he was interested in learning space magic and that Irene who knows space magic, might be able to fix it, he wouldn't have bothered spending so much money on it.

In the following turns, there were many good items that were auctioned but none managed to catch the interest of Simon as he simply became an observer. However, that did not mean that there was any less buyers, each and every item that came in the next rounds, evoked a fierce bidding battle amongst the audience.

"The next item we have here is something our merchant guild merchant guild personally got hold off and we can guarantee the power and toughness of it" the auctioneer hyped up the crowd with his words before bringing out something huge and heavy.

The moment the item came in front of the audience, a fiery heat enveloped the place and everyone took hurried breaths of air. Placed in front of them was a huge crimson hammer radiating intense heat and giving off a pressure that turned everyone silent.

When the item came up, Simon was momentarily surprised. The reason being that the weapon being auctioned was something that he had seen in the possession of the Brigand Master back at the northern outlaw forest.

He who had exchanged blows with the Brigand master who was utilising the weapon, he knew how powerful the item was.

"Hoh" Oman arched his body and fixedly stared at the hammer which was like a wild beast ready to pounce and smite anyone.

"The name of the hammer is Crimson Warhammer and as you all can see it a [C] rank item. However, this hammer here is a cut above even amongst the rest of the [C] rank since it has been refined twice by our craft smith".

"It gives a marginal boost to your strength and endurance stats and alongside with the numerous skill it bestows, the hammer is sure to raise your powers to new heights. The starting bid for the item..."

"7000 Blackgold coins" Before the auctioneer could even complete his sentence, the agitated voice of Oman sounded out. He had directly raised the price of the item to 7000 blackgold coins.

The crowd immediately became silent, 7000 blackgold coins was no means the best amount for the Crimson warhammer but because they were afraid of the identity of Oman, that they dare not bid against him.

Oman glanced at the audience down below from his VIP room, his eyes threatening and his intentions clear. His attitude was clearly saying to everyone that this is my weapon, they should stay away from it if they knew what's better for them.

"8000 Blackgold coins" the silence didn't last and was broken by another man sitting inside one of the VIP rooms.

"The weapon is well worth buying, my Savannah Beast Guild will also participate in this bid" Marcus who was keeping quiet all this time, finally spoke up. Although his words were neutral, everybody who heard that, could easily tell that he was indirectly jabbing at Oman.

After Marcus bid for the weapon, the representatives from other top five and renowned guilds across the kingdom also started to put forth their offers.

As the bid kept on rising higher, Oman grit his teeth and made an angry face. This was not the kingdom of Ingolf where he could assert his dominance. Although he could easily cower the

ordinary populace, it was hard for him to try and suppress the top five guilds of the kingdom of Ellesmere with his influence alone.

While reluctant, he could only join the battle with his bids.

"12000 Black gold coins" Oman stated.

"12500" Marcus joined in.

When the price reached a whopping 14000 coins, it was finally won by Oman, though his face told that he did not look all that pleased.

Simon did not participate because he already had better weapons with him. The successive items that came, were won over by Marcus, the representatives of the five guilds and Lucas who was accompanied by Duke Montford.

"The next item is a large core stone that was recovered after slaying a fierce beast that had transcended level 500, a Disaster class so as to say".

One of the pretty girls behind him removed the embroidered cloth from the plate she was holding and a sparkling sapphire gem that was bigger than one's fist, came into view.

The moment the cloth was lifted off, everybody no matter where they were seated inside the auction, could hear a faint rumbling sound echo out in their ear.

WOAH... the noise immediately flabbergasted the audience and they couldn't help but give the sapphire core stone a deep look. To be able to resonate and hold the attribute of the beast it previously belonged to so well, it definitely was a high-grade core stone.

Expecting the kind of reaction from the crowd, the auctioneer gave a bright smile "Ladies and Gentlemen, I believe you already know but this item is something that is extremely desirable for lightning attribute mages. So without further ado, let's start the auction... the initial bid for the stone is 2000 Blackgold coin".

"Sigh it's a pity that the core stone is a lightning attribute one, if it was a flame attribute one, it would have strengthened my attacks even more" Lucas spoke regretfully after examining the core stone.

Duke Montford who was seated behind him, similarly made a remorseful face "Yeah, if we could get our hands on a large flame attribute core stone, your chances in the upcoming tournament would significantly increase. It truly is a pity that the stone that came up was a lightning attribute one. Other than for a mage of the same element, it is basically useless for everyone else".

It was as he had said, although the lightning attribute core stone could be considered a good treasure, it was only a treasure for those who could utilise the same element. Lucas whose mastery lied in flame magic, could only sigh in dejection.

"2000 blackgold coins" when the crowd was silently deciding whether they should buy the core stone or not, from one of the VIP rooms came a voice that was unhesitant on bidding for it.

"OH~" Omar turned his head and saw the black-robed man donning a hat, bidding for an item once again. Immediately, his sour mood recovered and a mocking smile appeared on his face.

"2500"

There was no need to even ask who the voice belonged to, Simon turned and saw the smiling face of Oman. With a frustrated huff, Simon raised the price only for the latter to increase it once again.

The scuffle went on like that until the price reached 6000 blackgold coins which was clearly too much for an intermediate attribute core stone.

The crowd down below looked with pity at the black-robed man since he had unwittingly attracted the attention of Oman.

Oman smiled derisively, with the way the other party was quickly increasing the price and seemed agitated whenever he increased the price, he inferred that the other party was a lightning attribute mage or was in a dire need of one.

How could he let such an obvious flaw pass by? Omar immediately raised his offer bringing the bid to a striking 7000 blackgold coins. The auctioneer on the stage, was having the time of his life as some of the items he hadn't expected was going beyond their estimated price range.

Oman was waiting, the crowd was waiting for Simon to increase the price once again but when they heard no bid come even after a while, they got curious and looked towards the VIP compartment only to see him lazily stretching his hands and feet while yawning. They immediately understood what had happened.

The crown prince of Ingolf was played by this mysterious man, who got back at him for what he did previously.

Oman had an ugly face as if he had just swallowed a fly. He was not an idiot, he immediately knew that his attempts of playing with the other person had backfired. The black-robed man had deliberately pretended to be interested in this item only to lay a bait in which he splendidly got caught in.

"Your Highness..." the attendant behind wanted to say something but when he saw the murderous face of Oman, he gulped down his words and backed off.

"Bastard..." hostility overflowed from his eyes as he looked at the black robed. Never in his life was he the one who was played by others like that. He who was born with a golden spoon from birth, was always the one toying with others and did things that always benefitted him.

Even if they were scammed or cheated, nobody had the guts to say it out since he was the crown prince. However, this place was not their kingdom of Ingolf and his authority did not reach this place or else, with his personality there was no way he would take this lying down.

"Heh~ are there some people too afraid to bid higher or are they too poor I wonder" Oman commented trying to induce Simon into bidding once again.

However, the reply that he received, made his face green from the insult.

"Haa... 3000 blackgold coins is already enough for this intermediate tier core stone. Only an idiot would buy it for 7000 coins" Simon said scratching his ears.

The crowd was sent into a laughter after those words, they who were unable to bear the overbearingness of Oman secretly laughed at his plight.

The people sitting inside the VIP rooms smirked before looking towards the black-robed man whose background was unknown to them.

"Okay... you will regret this" Oman mumbled some words, gritted his teeth and sat back down.

Since nobody was willing to increase the bid, the lightning attribute core stone went to the crown prince.

As one item after another went up for auction, the event soon neared its end and the things that were being sold became more and more valuable. And soon, the highlight of the event was brought up to the stage.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I sincerely thank you for attending the auction on behalf of our Serene Palace Merchant guild and I hope to have the same cordial relationship with you in the future too. For the Highlight of this auction, our guild had put quite some effort to acquire it. So without further ado let us present you the item".

The auctioneer this time presented the item and lifted the cloth. Seated on the golden plate was a small crystal the size of an egg and shining with a pale green light.

The moment the item was brought up in front of numerous eyes, a commotion immediately erupted. That was because the item in front of them was something they all had heard or seen.

"I guess you can already tell but this skill crystal is not of any ordinary grade and is of grade [3] which in itself makes it very rare and difficult to stumble upon. However, that is not all, when we found this crystal our expert [Analysed] it and found a powerful advanced tier storm magic sealed inside it. That is to say, when someone acquires it and if they have sufficient mana, they could unleash a devastating advance tier spell".

The audience sucked a deep breath of air after listening to the explanation, their gazes seemed to tell that they were in a state of disbelief. A grade [3] skill crystal was already very rare to chance upon but to also have a powerful spell of advance tier sealed into it, what kind of concept was that?

The value of this skill crystal could only be imagined now. No wonder this was the highlight of this event as the item held far more worth than any other items auctioned in this event.

The crowd was thrown into disarray, an item like that appearing now could immediately upset the result of the upcoming tournament and those that came here seeking to increase their chances for the tournament wouldn't let this chance slip by.

Duke Montford seated in his room with Lucas, shifted his gaze towards Cynthia at this moment.

"What is the princess thinking bringing such an item at this point in time? Wouldn't it benefit the royal family more if she kept the item for the third prince?"

Lucas too thought over the issue and focused his gaze on the beauty releasing a tranquil presence.

A fierce bid like none other immediately started for the item when the starting price was declared. In just a few moments, the price was raised so high that the ordinary audience seated in the hall sucked a cold breath of air.

All of the top factions present in the auction, participated in it. Simon too was no exception; however, how could the money he got hold of, be compared to the years of fortune of these big factions? he had to soon give up his hopes of acquiring it.

It was also now that he realised the amount of money he got after selling the elixirs to Cynthia which he thought was a lot, was nothing compared to these giants with their deep pockets.

Although he got hold of a mountain of coins in the treasury after clearing the third trial, their values and denomination were different. if he wanted to use them in the kingdom of Ellesmere, he would have to first convert it.

Blackgold coins might be a lot when buying ordinary things and stuff but when it came to buying treasures and artifacts, having platinum coins gave you much better chances.

After a heated war, the skill crystal was sold to a representative from the Sanguine empire who had offered an astonishing price of 400 platinum coins (100 Blackgold coins= 1 Platinum coin).

Although Simon was unable to participate in it, he had quite the joy watching the frustrated and regretful face of Oman.

Simon wasn't the type of person who would provoke the other person first but if the other party thought that they could take advantage of him because of this, they were up for some rude awakening.

While it might be true that the other party was a crown prince of some kingdom, Simon too wasn't just some ordinary person and was a Demon Viscount. As he gazed at the auction which had reached its peak, he stretched his body and propped himself up from his seat.

Although he was only able to buy a single damaged scroll, he who attended the auction only to pass time, was content with it. Just as he opened the door, he stumbled upon a pair of familiar faces.

"Hmm?" the moment he discovered them, he too was seen by them.

"This sir, do we know each other?" Duke Montford asked. The two familiar faces he mentioned, was none other than Duke Montford and Lucas who he had travelled with from Castledor City to here.

Simon shook his head and was just about to step away, when from the corner of his eyes he saw a group of people wearing black clothes approach them.

"Well, Well... look who do we have here? Isn't that the same person who had the galls to challenge me during the auction".

Of course, the man who was leading them was none other than Oman Dercis Ingolf.

Simon creased his brows and gazed coldly at the approaching men. Indeed, enemies are bound to meet on a narrow road.

"Oh, isn't this Your Highness the crown prince of Ingolf Kingdom?" Duke Montford spoke.

An attendant behind Oman whispered some words into his ears "Hoh so you are Duke Montford... so that must mean he is..." Oman shifted his gaze towards Lucas who was similarly observing the former.

"I'm Lucas Blackwood, it's a pleasure to meet you Your Highness" Lucas extended a handshake as a friendly gesture only to be given a cold shoulder in return.

"Hmph, it would be good for you if you gave up on any silly notions of winning the tournament. In any case, we shall meet during the tournament" Oman brushed past Lucas and stood before Simon who was donned in a black robe.

"Good.. good, you seem to be quite the fearless man. But let me tell you this, do not think that you are safe just because you are within the confines of the city. Let me see how long you can keep up with this appearance of yours".

After saying whatever he wanted to, he leisurely strolled out of the exit of the building.

"This sir, you have incurred the ire of the man. If it would be good if you watch your back from now, do not just blindly rely on the security of the soldiers since they already have their hands full from the tournament".

As Simon was just about to walk away, Duke Montford reminded.

Simon nodded his head and walked out of the auction house. Now that he was somewhat familiar with the layout of the city, he wandered around the market before coming to a sudden halt in between.

That was because he could feel multiple presences following and tracking him. Their aura was hidden; however, the open hostility that they displayed how could it go unnoticed by a demon viscount like him?

"Two..three.. No, a total of five people. From their familiar aura, it seems like they are the lackey of that guy. So you can't wait any longer to dispose of me huh" Simon's cold eyes flickered with a crimson light.

From the way they tracked him from the auction house, it seemed that the goal of these people was to take him out in a secluded corner.

Simon fulfilled their wish and deliberately walked into a corner of the street that had very less people. Suddenly, he saw two shadows jump in front of him, his back was similarly blocked by two other people.

"Is the last person thinking of observing the situation? If so then..." he closed his eyes and spread his senses all to find the position of the last person.

"Hehe, I thought it would be difficult to assassinate him with all the people around but who knew he himself would make our job easier," one of the men carrying a short sword said.

"Let's not waste time and quickly finish him before the soldier arrives. We can't afford to get ourselves captured here" the other man beside him hurried.

The four people nodded their heads simultaneously and pounced at Simon from all directions. However, before they could come anywhere near him, a silent gale dense and incisive enough to even sever a thick tree in half, appeared around him and cut them in half.

There was no sound nothing as the gale cleanly bisected them in half. These people who were only around level 200 and whose stats were more focused on agility, were no match for his intermediate tier gale magic.

After his successive level up in the trial grounds, he was now level 357 and added with the powerful stats of a Demon viscount, these ordinary goons were just like ants to him.

After the events in the trail ground where he found himself in a situation where his Flame magic was mostly useless, Simon started focusing on advancing his other attributes too and gale magic was one of them.

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He had been neglecting his gale magic because he was more fond of the destructive attributes but now that he knew how useful the other attributes can be in different situations, his thinking changed.

Because of his affinity with the gale magic, he was able to silently dispose of these goons without anyone noticing.

"Found you" Simon who had been keeping his eyes closed all this while, suddenly opened them and conjured a gale blade that had enough mana imbued in it to be able to easily pierce a thick steel plate.

The gale blade that was half a meter long flew at an extreme speed on the rooftop of a nearby building.

THUK... a noise sounded out and a body with a huge gaping hole on its stomach fell down. The last person who was tailing him, was successfully dealt with before they even had the chance to run away.

After finishing off his pursuers, Simon burned their bodies with his flame magic and hurriedly left the scene. Killing inside the city was prohibited and strictly dealt with when found. He had to get away from here before the soldier arrives and investigate the scene.

Fortunately, Simon was careful enough to bring these people to a secluded place where nobody could see him.

The time was of night, inside one of the lavish buildings that was specifically booked for a group of people, Oman was seated on his couch listening to the report of his subordinate.

At this moment, his expression was extremely unsightly as he kicked the subordinate who had come up with the report.

"You people are all useless. There were six of you and you couldn't even handle a single person. What's the point of even keeping you around if you can't even accomplish a single task of mine?".

The subordinate writhed around the floor before mustering up his energy to speak in a faint tone "Your Highness, that person was extremely peculiar, his aura was bizarre and his strength was difficult to measure. He might have some skill like your Highness that blocked all attempts of analysis. Also... he could use multiple attributes of magic".

The people who went after Simon were not five but actually six, one of them was tasked with monitoring the situation from a distant place and report everything back.

Oman had a pondering face just as he was about to say something, he felt a sudden presence from the balcony of his room and hurriedly dismissed the subordinate.

The beautiful moonlight of the moons hanging high up in the sky, cast a shadow on the being. Yes, the being who had entered Oman's room was not human, it had a wide pair of bat-like wings, glaring crimson eyes and jagged horns that protruded from his head.

The being was tall enough to dwarf most humans.

"You were listening to our conversation all along huh?" Oman said looking at the demon who had appeared in his place at an unknown time.

Avrox smiled and lazily lounged on the sofa, an eerie presence radiated off of him.

Seeing that the demon had no intention of answering his question, he brought out a different topic.

"Did my father inform you about the plan?".

Avrox suddenly got up from his seat and approached Oman, he only stopped when he was a few inches away from him. The sharp claws of the Demon Earl threatened to tear apart the neck of the latter.

"It seems that you don't know who you are talking to boy. Let me remind you of the hierarchy once again" his words just fell when Oman felt a strong clench in his neck and before he knew it, he was suspended in the air.

"Ugh" the crown prince struggled, his entire face was red but no matter what he did, he felt powerless in front of the being whose power was beyond his imagination.

"If you think a Demon Earl is the same as those Demon Baron subordinates that contacted you, then you are sorely mistaken. If I want to, I can decimate your entire capital in a single day and nothing can be more enjoyable for me than this".

"Me not doing so is simply because your father, the king of Ingolf kingdom and we Demon nobles are on the same side. If you understand that then be careful how you address me" Avrox whispered into the latter's ear in a coarse husky voice.

BAM...

Cough..cough... Oman was slammed into the ground and coughed repeatedly. Only after taking a few long breaths was he able to compose himself. There was no longer any haughtiness in his behaviour nor was he acting like a prince anymore.

"Your Lordship" Oman after that experience, got on one knee and bowed.

Seemingly finding his current behaviour much more pleasant, Avrox smiled and nodded "That's more like it, remember to address me like that from now on. As for the thing, WE agreed with your father, will be done. You just need to keep your end of the bargain. Oh right, here is a little present from our side, use it wisely".

Avrox tossed something towards Oman and was just about to leave through the balcony when his crimson eyes suddenly widened.

"Hmm? That's weird this aura is not something that I recognise yet why does it feel so familiar?".

Seeing the demon earl who was about to leave, stop so suddenly made Oman anxious and he hurriedly asked "Is there something wrong your lordship?".

"Did you recently meet with someone?" Avrox questioned without turning around.

"Eh? Ah... if your lordship means those Demon Noble subordinates of yours then no. I was attending the auction before this" Oman replied after pondering for a while.

Avrox flashed a wicked smile when he heard those words "Auction huh... interesting".

Right after he said that, his body was covered in a black haze and the person disappeared just like he appeared.

Now left all alone, Oman punched the floor hard causing crisscrossing cracks to appear on it.

"Dammit" as he cursed, he looked at the item tossed by the Demon Noble and his eye immediately became wide.

In another part of the city, located at the heart of the commercial district was a huge building that out shadowed all the other ones around it whether it be in magnificence or importance.

Placed in front of the building was a signboard that read Adventurer's Association Main Branch. Inside one of the rooms of the building, was an old man seated at his desk glossing through a document.

Knock...Knock... suddenly, the door was knocked and a beautiful girl probably in her twenties, came inside.

"Father you called me?".

The old man put down the documents and removed his glasses before smiling adoringly towards his daughter.

"Can a father not see his daughter? Ah that's right, now that you are engaged with that man, you don't have any need for your father anymore is that right?" the old man teased.

"Father!" the girl shouted bashfully.

"Haha, this old man is just kidding. Indeed I called you Lisa" the old man picked up the document from his table and passed it to her.

"Here is the document pertaining to the thing you asked me to investigate. The messenger Krowl brought it just a few hours ago". Krooo... the old man caressed a bird that resembled an owl.

Lisa read the contents of the documents and her expression was immediately masked with surprise.

"You have already investigated that dungeon?".

"Yeah, it was a request from my darling daughter, how could I ignore it? I employed every means possible in my power as the Branch President of the Adventurer's Association. However, even I was surprised by the contents of the message".

The old man looked wearily at the ceiling and sighed:

"To be honest, when you said that demon helped you and your fiancé, I couldn't believe it so I used everything I had to investigate the case. The result I got was surprising to say no less".

"A Demon Noble helping humans, powerful subordinates and a dungeon that is rising in rank too fast. All of it sounds so absurd that I would discard it as some joke had it not been for the authenticity of the message".

Dungeon Name-Laplace

Possible floors-Above twenty

Discoveries:-Disaster class subordinates, Powerful monsters, Rich rewards, Dense mana

Exploration party-Burning Arrow guild

Average guild level-300,

Numbers-Upper 30

Exploring members:-Blake Gunvald, Frida Braun, Kody Barton...

Floors Explored-Twentieth floor

Exploration status-Failed (forced retreat), reason- appearance of disaster class monster

Casualty-4 dead, 11 injured, guild master rendered unconscious,

Approximate threat level of the dungeon-Above C or C+

Lisa had a serious expression on her face as she read the contents of the message. She who had experienced the dungeon first-hand and had seen the Demon noble and his subordinate with her own eyes, was not surprised by the result of the investigation.

Though the answer she wanted to know was still a mystery to her... why did the demon noble help them?

"Do you still resent them?" the old man asked.

"How can I not resent them who took all of it from me, my friends, my guild, even the condition Chuck is in currently is because of them. Do you think I can take this pathetic excuse that they escape?"

"Is the great name of Godwin just for show, a hoax only to scare the enemies? Wasn't he at the city of Mountmend at that time? To think that he wouldn't even be able to capture a single high ranking member of the Seven Swords Guild".

Lisa spoke in a dispirited but more so in a frustrated tone.

The branch president of the adventurer's association looked at her and sighed.

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Indeed, after the event where most of the members of their branch guild were wiped out, the Sea God's Trident retaliated against the Seven Swords Guild, the main perpetrator of the tragedy by sending their main members there.

However, for some reason before the members of the main guild arrived and even before Godwin got there, most of the high ranking members of that guild had escaped with just the ordinary members remaining.

Although their guild building was destroyed and their guild dissolved, for those that were directly related to the event, it couldn't be seen as a closure.

"My daughter, you know I can't see you heartbroken like this. I have already discussed this with Duke Redcrest, he is doing his best to monitor the territory and find any clue related to the escaped members of the Seven Swords Guild" the old man said consolingly.

After his daughter left the room, his doting eyes suddenly became sharp.

"It is too much of a coincidence, I can only think of someone tipping them about the movements of the Sea god's guild before they arrived in Morgress... possibly an insider".

SIGH... he sighed once more and massaged his temple, there were too many things on his plate right now.

The morning of the next day Simon got out early from the inn and roamed the marketplace. Today was the day when the coliseum would finally open and the excitement of the people was over the top.

Other than the stalls outside the arena, most other shops and establishment was closed, nobody wanted to miss the tournament. Lines of crowds could be seen near the coliseum that was located on the north side of the city.

The security around here was extremely tight with soldiers patrolling everywhere and the queue of people trying to get inside was so big that it was mindboggling.

Adalinda was yet to come back from her mission of capturing her disciple thus Simon was extremely free. Since there was nothing for him to do, he decided to attend the 'Battle of the Finest' tournament and see what the hype was all about.

Plus it would be a lie if he said that he was not interested in the first price reward. The coliseum was extremely big, comprising of more than ten percent of the entire north district. Hoards of people could be seen everywhere trying to get in.

There were numerous gates and soldiers standing in front checking the identity of the people and maintaining order. With the tournament about to start, the craziness and excitement of the people were on a different level.

Simon casually strolled towards one of the empty gates and passed the VIP token of the Serene palace merchant guild to the soldier. Cynthia had once told him that this VIP token would also work similarly like an identity card thus there was no problem for Simon to get in.

The soldier after checking the VIP token, respectfully invited him inside and requested him to go to the highest rows of seats reserved only for the most important guests.

On his way up, Simon felt many strong presences possibly from the participants of the tournament. After climbing up a flight of stairs and coming out of a dark hallway, he was greeted by the magnificent scenery of the coliseum.

The gallery where the audience sat, was so big that it could easily fit more than a hundred thousand people. The coliseum had one main stage at the centre and thirty-six smaller stages all around. Each stage was around sixty meters while the main stage was more than three hundred meters long.

Currently, the audience seats down below were already packed with most of the population of the city present to watch the show. On the top row which was reserved for important guests and participants, were plaques in front of each seat indicating the group that was allotted to sit there.

Among the numerous plaques, Simon found the one that belonged to the royal family of Ellesmere. Currently, the seats were empty with most of the participants yet to show up.

As time flowed by and it was high noon, powerful presences were starting to arrive and fill up those seats. Among them were some of the faces he had seen yesterday at the auction. Duke Montford along with Lucas who was currently donned in his battle garb from head to toe, were also seated in their seats.

At this moment when the hubbub of the audience reached its peak, a group of people as if prearranged, decided to walk in together. The moment they came in, all the people in the audience erupted in wild joy, their roar like thunder echoing across the entire coliseum.

The group of people who had received a warm welcome, were all renowned people in their kingdom and most of the individuals living knew their names and their valour.

The Top Five guild of the Kingdom of Ellesmere had finally shown up.

"Hoho, so they are finally here. What a grand entrance" A chubby man with a protruding belly and who seemed to be a well off merchant, said. The man was seated with his other companions who seemed to be merchants too.

Since they were conversing not far from Simon, he could clearly hear them.

"Look at that, the guild masters of the top five guilds are walking side by side altogether. What a rare display"

"Isn't that Benny Beckerman, the guild master of the Sea God's Trident? He has become even more ripped"

"Woah, Miss Karina Lowell is as hot as the rumour says. If I was a mage, I would have definitely joined her Magician's Guild"

"Heh, the Beast Savannah Guild led by Sir Brutus Sarge is a haven for all the warriors seeking to make a name for themselves. I heard his son is also participating this time... Oh, speak of the devil, he is walking right behind his father".

From the hubbub of the people around him, Simon was able to know the identity of the people walking in.

The guild leader of the Sea God's trident was a bald man with an extremely ripped body whereas, the guild master of the Magician's guild was a charming woman with a well-defined figure.

The Savannah Beast Guild master, had a ferocious face and a built like a lion. Out of the two other people walking beside them, one of them was a short-statured man donned in a gaudy crimson robe and carried a staff much taller than him, the other was an ordinary man with nothing remarkable about him.

However, out of the five of them, he was the one with the most ability to control their presence. With all the five most renowned guild leaders of the kingdom walking in together, it was sure to attract all the eyes of the audience.

"Hehe, what a display, to think that the renowned guild leader of all the top five guilds of this kingdom would make their appearance together, what a feast for the eye" a voice rang out followed by a group of people entering from a different entrance.

The people who just entered in, all had an emblem of a Black tree sewn in their garbs, from their attire; it could easily be attributed to them being from a different nation.

"So the Kingdom of Blackthorn are here too. It seems that you have brought over quite promising individuals for the tournament" the guild master of the Magician's Guild Karina Lowell said.

They exchanged a few pleasantries with many hidden meanings behind them before each taking their allotted seats. Each guild had brought a minimum of five participants with them who would be competing in this tournament.

Soon after, the Kingdom of Ingolf also arrived and took their seats in front of the plaque reserved for them. With almost all of the participants and seats full, the crowd was waiting for that moment which soon arrived.

With the whistling sound of something piercing the air, a sword could be seen hanging high up in the sky. It levitated in the air and released a sharp piercing aura that stunned the audience into silence.

As the sword descended down, a silhouette could be seen standing on the sword. After a moment, the figure of the person finally came into everyone's view. He was donned in a mythrill armour that gave off a sturdy sheen and carried a sword that was hailed as the treasure of the kingdom.

"Sir Cyrus is here" the audience cried.

Cyrus slowly landed on the main stage and beheld the crowd, he then nodded his head and addressed all of them.

"I am the Royal Knight Captain tasked with the duty of protecting the king and the royal family, Cyrus Skyler. I am extremely pleased to meet all the heroes of the realm and the outstanding youths gathered here in one place today".

"On behalf of the royal family, I along with a few subordinates of mine shall be the moderator of this tournament. However, before we start this magnificent tournament, let us all welcome the special guest sent by the headquarters of the adventurers association, the royal family of Ellesmere and the Royal Court Magician of the sanguine empire".

As his words fell down on the audience which took their time to absorb it, a gathering of people riding a fierce Warhawk, descended from the sky and landed on the seats of honour.

"Ohh, look at that, that Warhawk is the guardian beast of the royal family. The rumours say that it is extremely powerful and can even go toe to toe against Cyrus".

Simon's ears picked up a few details from the audience seated around him. He looked at the magnificent warhawk who stood fifteen meters in height and whose body radiated a powerful aura.

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What surprised him was the fact that his attempts at analysis was repeatedly blocked by the beast. If Adalinda was here, she would have been able to give him a detailed information with some words of condescension in the mix.

,m "Including the royal captain and the people who had just arrived, all of them possess a strong aura" Simon noted, the place was filled with crouching tigers and hidden dragons.

As he was observing the new entrants, he spotted two familiar faces within the group. One of them was Cynthia who stood prettily and whose appearance was enough to evoke a burning emotion within the hearts of all the men, the other was the guard captain, both of whom he was acquainted with.

After the new entrants took the seats of honour, Cyrus and the old man that seemed to be the king of this kingdom, exchanged knowing glances with each other.

"On behalf of everyone, it is my greatest honour to welcome Sir Davis Hall, an officer of the Adventurer's Association" Cyrus declared.

All the attention of the audience was now focused on a thin middle-aged man who had no remarkable features about him other than the luxurious suit he was wearing.

Davis laughed and waved his hands for the crowd, his gesture evoked a huge roar and applause from the crowd. The man was from the Adventurer's Association, an organisation that was like a behemoth that had its foot all across the central continent.

Another reason for his warm welcome was because the audience knew that the reward set for this year's competition, was presented by this man. All the top guilds of the kingdom, foreign nations participating etc all of this was because of the reward this man had provided. How could the audience not show their appreciation?

"Ladies and gentlemen, let us start this event by revealing the rewards for this tournament". Cyrus's words made everyone focus their gaze on him once again and listen earnestly.

Every decade, the prize for the tournament was different. This time though it was a little unique with the headquarters of the Adventurers Association providing the reward. Rumours was still rumours, the audience wanted to hear it with their own ears.

"The top ten participants will each receive hundred grade [2] mana crystals and three bronze grimoire. Third place of the individual ranking of this 'Battle of the Finest'tournament will receive ten grade [3] mana crystals, one Silver Grimore".

"Second place in the individual ranking will receive refinement [5] [C] tier weapon Trembling Earth and one Gold grimoire..."

As Cyrus said till here, the audience below was already filled with cries of shock, they couldn't believe what they just heard.

The grade [3] mana crystals, refinement [5] tier [C] weapon, not to mention the gold grimoire were each objects that were difficult to obtain even when one had enormous wealth.

Grade [3] mana crystals were something that could only be found near an adult Mana Crystal tree which is very hard to find in the first place because they only grow in places abundant in mana. They contain the pure, unpolluted mystical energy.

A grade [3] mana crystal can raise a person's level even if they were above level 400. It could be imagine how much allure it had for those who were stuck around this level for ages. Tens of them could be seen as an amazing reward.

As for the weapon, although a [C] tier was not extremely difficult to acquire, getting a master craftsman to refine it to refinement five was the difficult part. Professions such as alchemist and craftsmen is highly valued in the world of Althaea and only a Master Craftsman who is very rare to find even in their kingdom of Ellesmere, can refine a weapon to refinement five.

From this it could be seen how rare and valuable the weapon was, it would be surprising in itself if the crowd wasn't surprised. Especially for the still budding heroes of the realm, these rewards are something that can drastically increase their power and raise their ceiling.

All of the participants present, including those from major guilds, were staring blankly as they imagined themselves winning the tournament and holding the rewards in their hands.

However, this dream of theirs was short-lived when they stared at the participants around them. Each decade the participants in the tournament would increase and winning it would become harder and harder.

This year though, because of the extremely lucrative rewards given by the headquarters of the Adventurer's Association, the level of the participants had gone up marginally. It would be a steep dream for them if they thought that they could win this tournament easily.

The entire crowd intensely held their breath as they waited for the moment when the first price reward would be declared.

Feeling the anticipation of the crowd, Cyrus smiled and widened his hands in a grand fashion to declare the first price reward of this 'Battle of the Finest' tournament that every people in this coliseum were eager to know.

"The First place ranking for the 'Battle of the Finest' tournament that is held in the capital city of Ellesmere every decade, will receive one grade [4] mana crystal, one [B] rank artefact and one platinum skill grimoire".

His words like thunder, reverberated at the still silent coliseum. There was no sound nothing for a few seconds as the crowd was busy comprehending the lines of words the royal knight captain had just uttered.

WHOA... Soon after, like an erupting volcano, the audience stood up cheering, their clamour like a hot oil on a pan, refused to cool down even after a while.

One Grade [4] mana crystals and One platinum grimoire... what kind of concept was that?

"Goodness gracious, I thought it was just an exaggeration, a rumour for the first price reward to be something so precious that it had never been offered in the history of the tournament. However, now that I hear it with my own ears, I cannot not believe it"

"Idiot, did you think the kingdom of Blackthorn and Ingolf, not to mention the Sanguine Empire would participate in this tournament for nothing? Had it not been for the reason that they had their

eyes on the first prize reward from the start, they wouldn't have bothered showing up. Even the royal family wouldn't have put so much effort grooming their young generation for this tournament."

The group of merchants seated near Simon, discussed.

"A grade [4] mana crystal and a platinum grimoire. The Adventurers Association is really humongous titan far beyond the understanding of anyone to grant something so valuable so freely" Benny Beckerman, the guild master of the Sea God's Trident said.

"A grade [4] mana crystal is something that has not appeared in the kingdom of Ellesmere for centuries. Every single grade [4] crystal is the condensation of an extreme amount of pure mystical energy capable of even raising the level of someone stuck in the level 500 barrier for years. Thus allowing them to reach a height far greater than what they thought was previously possible."

"Not to mention a platinum skill grimoire is even rare in that it can permanently grant a person rare or even a lost skill of Ancient tier or higher depending on the competence and aptitude of the user" Karina Lowell remarked.

"Listen up Marcus, the reward as the informant told is something even your father wouldn't dare use on himself. However, you are different and your limits are much higher than your father's. That is to say, there is no candidate that I can think of who is better suited to use these items other than you. You must give it your 200% to win this tournament and get the first prize reward".

Brutus sarge, the guild master of the Savannah Beast Guild said looking at his son who was seated beside him on the seats booked for his guild.

Marcus glanced at the main stage which was more than three hundred meters big, a fire blazed in his eyes as he said.

"Don't worry father, this son of yours won't lose to anyone even if my opponents are from the top five guild, the royal family or the foreign nations. I will give more than my hundred percent in every match".

Hearing his declaration, Brutus nodded.

At a glance, there were more than five thousand participants out of which all the dregs will be filtered out and only the best of the best would be allowed to stay and fight their way through the Battle royale round until the final winner is decided.

Sensing the excitement of the crowd reaching a boiling point, Cyrus waved his hand and declared the start of the tournament.

"This session's 'Battle of the Finest' tournament has a total of seven hundred and forty guilds and families participating each bringing maximum of seven of their best talents. Which makes up for an astounding five thousand and one hundred eighty participants".

"The age of every single participant must not be greater than fifty and their levels below two hundred. Failing to meet these conditions, the participants would be immediately kicked out. Now we will draw out the lots and check the strength of every participating individual through the help of this Perusal Mirror provided by the adventurer's association. Those individuals whose name I call out, come to the stage for the assessment and lot drawing".

Perusal Mirror was a device that the whole audience was familiar with, it is something that accurately accesses a person's Age, Name, Level, Class and their Talent.

Even if a person has a [Analysis] blocking skill, they still wouldn't be able to fool an ancient device that had been in the care of the Adventurers association for eons.