

## D. of Pride 331

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Strength Assessment Test, this process had always been an important step to filter out any dregs who refuse to follow the instruction till the bitter end.

"Lightning Shaper's seven participants, please come to the stage"

The seven people participating from the side of Lightning shaper's guild, immediately stood up from their seats and walked down a path of stairs to the main stage. Following which, they were told to put their palms on a smooth black mirror.

After their results matched the criteria set for participating in this tournament, they were asked to draw a lot from a box kept near and returned to their seats.

"Sky Slashing Blade..."

"Six River's Streax"

"Tyrant Mountain..."

Waves and waves of participants whose guilds were called out, came down to the stage for strength assessment and lot drawing. Unlike the previous tournaments where the quality of the participants would be a little low, this year's tournament saw a drastic improvement in both the quality and quantity of the participants.

The people who were assessed were mostly around 40 years of age and their levels were above 250. Though very rare, there would be sometimes people below 40 years of age and above level 300.

As for someone below thirty years of age, there was none yet.

The result of the perusal mirror was also displayed to the audience so that they could enjoy this moment of excitement and tension.

While the participant's level and age were the criteria for participating in the tournament, what the people really had their eyes on was the Participant's potential and their class.

Even a completely talentless person could be groomed to have a level above 200 if one had immense wealth to buy the resources needed to level up. However, it is all useless if the potential of the person is not high since they would be meeting a ceiling they can't break this way.

Similarly, a class represents one's strength, it was directly related to one's ability and power. If their class was too common, they wouldn't be able to rise high in the rankings. What they were expecting to see was not low or medium potential or a common class but high potential with a rare class for their future heroes of the realm.

However, it did not mean that one could neglect their levels, a perfect mixture of potential, class age and level was necessary to win this tournament.

Groups after groups of participants came down to assess their strength, those who did not meet the criteria was immediately kicked amidst the jeer and laughter of the crowd.

Before long, half of the participants have already been assessed but none of them had a high potential. Moreover, 70% of these participant's strength was centralised around level 250 all with common warrior class and low potential.

Those with medium potential and above level 300, were far and few between. A person below age 40, with a medium potential and above level 300 would already be considered a genius in any guild or even in the capital city.

However, because of the standard of this year's tournament that had risen too drastically, the current results of the participants appeared too normal. In previous tournaments, these results could already be considered very decent and worthy of a high ranking; however now they looked all too mediocre.

"Castledor City, Adventurer's association branch, one participant... Lucas Blackwood" the moment the name Castledor city was announced, the entire audience abruptly became quiet.

Castledor city was the territory of one of the four Dukes of their kingdom and was rather well known across all the regions. Its governor, Duke Montford was also a renowned person liked by the masses.

In fact, many people who lived in the distant north-western region, also came here to watch the tournament. For one of the four dukes to endorse a person, how could that individual be ordinary?

A young man wearing fiery red robes, walked down the stairs and entered the main stage. With the way he carried himself and the inborn noble aura that he exuded, told others that he was unlike any other participant who had come down to the stage before him.

Name- Lucas Blackwood, Age

- 38, Class- Pyroblitz Magus, Level- 400, Potential- High.

The moment the result was shown to the audience, a burst of exclamation came from their mouths and their eyes widened to their limits. Those participants and geniuses of their guilds that have come before him or are yet to show up, felt a great challenge from his result and couldn't help but become dispirited after realising the difference between them.

Finally, there was someone whose potential, class and age was in the realm of the heroes. Lucas Blackwood, someone who came from the remote north-western region and whose results shocked the entire audience.

During this entire process, Lucas was extremely calm as he drew his lot and silently returned to his seat. With Lucas's result as the start, more and more geniuses of the prominent guilds across the kingdom, came down to the main stage to be assessed by the perusal mirror.

Although there were some promising results with a few having a rare class, none of them managed to surpass the record set by Lucas.

"Crimson Demolition Guild's Seven Participants, please come down"

Finally, the moment that everybody was waiting for, the top five guilds that inspired awe and reverence from the masses, finally began to enter the stage.

Seven participating members from the Crimson Demolition Guild, walked out from the seating area they were allotted to and in front of the eager eyes of the audience, took the assessment.

Name- Kenan Lantz, Age- 45, Class- Arch Wizard, Level- 393, Potential- Medium.

Name- Jason Lantz, Age- 42... Potential- Medium.

While it cannot be said that their results were bad, it did not live up to the expectations the audience had for them who were from one of the top five guilds.

The seven participants from the Crimson demolition guild assessed themselves one after the other and when it was time for the youngest two amidst the group to assess themselves, the result they got finally evoked some exclamations from the crowd.

Name- Tyler Rees, Age- 30, Class- Berserker, Level- 390, Potential- High..

Name

- Conor Rees, Age- 30, Class- Battle Spellcaster, Level- 391, Potential- High.

The entire audience was pleasantly stunned by the result, one of the top five guilds indeed lived up to its reputation, it not only produced one but two members with High potential. Five members with medium potential and two with high, not only that, they also had a few with rare classes.

The geniuses from other big guilds looked at this awe-inspiring line-up and couldn't help but feel shocked in their hearts. They who had heard about the reputation of the top five guild, had with their own eyes witnessed the dreadfulness of the top five guilds.

The seven participants from the Crimson demolition guild did not seem surprised by the audience's reaction and smiled in content after looking at the result shown in the perusal mirror.

After the Crimson demolition guild, the members of the Assassin's guild also went down to the stage. The name top five wasn't just for show, the quality of their participating members weren't any inferior, each and every one of them had decent talents with some genius in the mix.

After the Assassin's Guild, it was Magician's Guild's turn.

Karina who was calmly seated on her seat, flashed a mysterious smile towards the seating area where the Guild master of Sea God's trident and Savannah Beast guild were.

"Hallie it's your turn now, make our guild proud".

The girl seated beside her nodded her head. She had a beautiful complexion that could enrapture any man, smooth black hair that was tied with a silk ribbon and a lithe body that made her seem just like a fairy.

She wore icy blue clothes that accentuated her figure and had a pretty strap tied to her mesmerising waist. Looking at her from afar, she radiated a charming and proud aura that was detached from this world.

"Magician's Guild three participants please come down"

The moment Cyrus called out the name of the guild, all eyes were focused on the seating area where the Magician's guild was. That was because, amongst the top five guilds, only the magician guild sent the least number of participants.

Not only that, when the Magician guild recruits, they have a strict restriction of only taking female mages whose aptitude and talent are very high. At the same time, each and every member of the Magician's guild were extremely pretty.

Karina the current guild master of the magician's guild for example held the hearts of many reputed nobles and guild masters from the various regions of the kingdom.

Three girls with an ethereal appearance, descended the stairs and arrived onto the main stage.

The young geniuses from the various guilds who had never seen such temperate beauties and had spent most of their time and hour training, doing commissions and diving into dungeons, how could they keep their composure? The moment they saw them appear, they were instantly smitten.

Name- Tiana Lowe, Age- 29, Class- Great Magus, Level- 395, Potential- High...

Name- Anna White, Age- 29, Class- Arch Wizard, Level- 394, Potential- High.

The first two females to access themselves got a result that silenced the audience, the strict requirements they heard for getting into the Magician's guild, was not for show indeed. Although

they had the least number of participants, the quality of each of their members was not inferior to any guild's top tier talent.

"That Karina... she indeed has eyes for diamond in the rough" Benny Belcrow said glancing at the last girl that was yet to assess herself.

"Sadfully, this year we do not have as good of a talent like her. If she is allowed to grow, she might take her guild to new heights in the future".

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On the seating area of the Savannah beast guild, Brutus patted his son and smiled fiercely.

"Son, wouldn't you say the tournament is extremely boring if there is no challenge? This event is getting more and more fun".

Like father like son, Marcus too smiled fiercely and looked ready for a challenge. On the main stage, Cyrus who was the moderator for the event, noted the power levels of each girl. His gaze then landed on the last girl and his eyebrows arched for a minuscule of a second.

"Karina Lowell... you really did bring out a monster this time. It seems like the third prince can't just keep his eyes only on the sanguine empire" he thought internally.

Everyone's eyes landed on the last girl who was yet to take the assessment for the Perusal Mirror. As they patiently waited for her result, it was soon displayed in the mirror.

Name- Hallie May, Age- 22, Class- Blizzard Magus, level- 400, Potential- Very High.

At that moment, the entire crowd was stunned silent for a couple of seconds before a huge clamour erupted from every corner of the coliseum.

The King of Ellesmere, Henry Alaric Ellesmere got up from his seat and intensely observed the results written on the perusal mirror before sighing heavily. A 24 years old level 400 mage with a very rare class and a potential that outclassed all the other participants before her.

It would be not an exaggeration to say that she is one of the top class contenders for this tournament. A boy calmly seated beside him also looked at the results displayed on the perusal mirror, a hard to describe emotions flashed in his eyes.

The guild master of the Crimson demolition Guild and Assassin's guild looked at the girl, unable to keep their calm.

"Where did the girl come from, why was it that we never heard her name?" similar thoughts floated in their mind, their eyes inadvertently shifted to Karina. The woman must have done everything in her power to keep any information about the girl in tight check.

A very high potential, this was the first time someone was assessed like that by the perusal mirror. None of the participants from the top five guilds that came before her, were able to get such a score.

Simon who was calmly seated in his seat, was also a little surprised. Compared to the ones he had fought up until now, the people who came with the desire to win the tournament, were clearly in a different realm, even the aura they naturally released was much stronger.

Their age was young and their potential and high level made it so that the ceiling they could reach in the future was also higher.

After the Magician's guild, it was time for the guild that everybody had their eyes on, the Sea God's trident. Standing up to its name, three out of the seven participants it sent, had rare classes and high potential with age below 40 and levels above 390.

There was only a single person below age thirty amongst them. While the result may be better than the other top five guilds, compared to the girl from the magician's guild, it was a little lacklustre.

However, even then nobody dared to underestimate the guild which had produced the unprecedented genius Godwin during the last tournament. It must be said that the training and experience the guild provides for its members was truly exceptional. If one underestimated a participant from this guild, they were sure to have the rug pulled out from beneath their feet

"Savannah Beast guild, seven participants please come down"

After the Sea God's trident, it was time for the last of the remaining top five guilds to assess themselves.

"So the rumours were indeed true, he really is participating" such murmurs and cries rang out across the whole coliseum. All of the crowd had their eyes on the seven people descending onto the main stage or more exactly the person leading the group.

Since the guild master Brutus sarge did not bother to keep this a secret, the whole audience was aware that his son Marcus Sarge was also participating in this year's 'Battle of the Finest' tournament.

The participant that everyone had their eyes on, placed his hands on the mirror.

Name- Marcus Sarge, Age- 23, Class- Beast Warmaster, Level- 402, Potential- Very High.

WOAHHH... the audience erupted in a huge clamour of awe, every lips had the words 'As expected of the son of the guild master of Beast Savannah guild'.

The crowd was no doubt surprised but even the guild masters of other various guilds and factions were too. The royal family and the delegates of the foreign nation had a shocked look in their eyes as they observed the young man whose aura seemed wild and rampant like that of a beast remove his hand from the mirror.

He was one year older than the girl from the magician's guild but his level was more than her and he was similarly assessed by the perusal mirror to have very high potential.

Karina's crescent eyebrows arched a little, she had long heard that Brutus's child was a genius and had a talent that was greater than his father; however, even she didn't expect him to have a very high potential not to mention breach level 400.

It must be mentioned that each hundred level was a barrier that was as difficult as ascending a mountain. The difficulty increases the higher the level one reaches. Innumerable geniuses who think they are better than the others, get stuck in such barrier for years or even decades unable to proceed even a little.

For someone to breach that barrier at such a young age, they could only be considered as the top tier talent, a genius amongst geniuses. However, one cannot just simply attain such a level, from this result it could be seen how much effort Marcus and the guild behind him had put throughout the years.



Cyrus on the main stage smiled wryly, he thought that the greatest challenge for the royal family would come from the side of Sanguine Empire and the other foreign nations never did he think that the top five guilds would produce more monsters like Godwin, making it more difficult for the third prince.

"There is no way of telling which way the tournament might go this time".

The remaining participants were assessed with medium with only one high potential. However, it was hard for that person to gain attention after Marcus's extraordinary result.

"As everybody knows, this year's Battle of the Finest tournament is different from the ones held before. Participating in this tournament would not only be the guilds from our kingdom, but also the delegates from our surrounding nations. We believe that this event will foster better relationship and cooperation between our nations and also lead to continuing peace".

Cyrus spoke what he was told to say to make the audience see the participation of other nations favourably.

'Sigh, I feel for his majesty. Politics is indeed complex' he thought internally.

"With that, I request the Kingdom of Blackthorn's four participants to come down to assess themselves and draw lots".

"Hehe, it seems it's finally our turn" a man with a long black hair tied into a ponytail, walked down to the stage along with three other people wearing an insignia of a black tree on their clothes.

Name- Ivan Mavis Blackthorn, Age- 47, Class- Battle Knight, Level- 400, potential- High.

A few perceptive people in the audience, immediately narrowed their eyes when they saw the surname Blackthorn displayed alongside his name. that was the name that the royal family of the Kingdom of Blackthorn carried.

A foreign prince participating in the tournament, how could it go unnoticed by all of them? But since the person himself had kept his identity quiet from the moment he came to their capital city Ellesmere, they did not disclose his identity and simply kept quiet.

Cyrus glanced at the audience stands where the royal family was seated. Seeing the king nod his head, then only did he proceed with the other participants.

The results of Ivan from the kingdom of blackthorn was astonishing, but not as shocking as the results of Hallie May and Marcus Sarge from the top five guilds. Aside from Ivan, the results of the other participants from the kingdom of blackthorn didn't seem all that dazzling.

Although it might appear so to the normal masses, observant ones could see that the levels of all the participants from the kingdom of blackthorn on average was higher than any other individual faction.

"Kingdom of Ingolf's sole participant, please come down..."

After the kingdom of Blackthorn, it was the Kingdom of Ingolf's turn to send their participants. Hearing that they only sent one participant, the crowd became slack-jawed. Many speculations flew around as to why the kingdom of Ingolf only sent one person to participate in the tournament.

'Are they so confident of their victory that they only sent a single person?' even the guild master of the top five guilds were having such thoughts.

There was no need to beat around the bush, all those words said by Cyrus about how the tournament would help increase cooperation and friendly ties with the surrounding nations was all bullshit.

The only reason the other nations wanted to participate in this years tournament was solely because of the dazzling rewards presented by the headquarters of the Adventurer's association.

That being said, if their goal was to win the rewards through the tournament, why would they send only one participant... unless they have absolute faith that he would win.

Lazing in the seating area reserved for their kingdom, Oman gave a wide smile.

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"Finally, I was kind of getting bored from all the wait" Oman turned towards the person behind him and said, "Go on, it's your turn. Show them what you have gone through all these years".

The person beside him was donned in a black robe from head to toe, nodded his head and walked towards the main stage.

Name- Graydon Brown, Age- 35, Class- Tainted Knight, Level- 401, Potential- Medium.

The audience gasped, this time the reaction they had was different than all the other times. Instead of getting surprised by the result, they were more surprised by the fact that the kingdom of Blackthorn decided to send a single person with medium potential to participate in the tournament.

While it is true that his level was high, that was all there is to it. Cyrus glanced at the person once before shifting his gaze, there was no way of telling what the other nation was thinking hence it was useless to mull over it.

Taking a deep breath, Cyrus next gazed at the stands where the delegates from the Sanguine Empire were seated. He was just about to call their participants on the stage when he saw Vouves, the Royal Court Magician, stand up and cup his hands.

"This old man is extremely regretful to ask such a bizarre favour, but would it be alright for the participants from the royal family to go first since one of our participants is running late. It seems that this old man has failed to properly educate that child, I request his majesty to overlook it this once".

The King of the Kingdom of Ellesmere, Henry Alaric Ellesmere was silent for some time before nodding his head. He could see that one of their participants was indeed missing plus, he cannot not give face to a Ranker whose power and authority, probably even surpassed him as a king of a low tier country.

With the approval of the king, Cyrus moved on to the participants of the royal family from their very own Kingdom.

"Four participants from the side of the royal family, please come down to the stage".

"Father, I'm going" a young man wearing white clothes embroidered with red lining, said.

The king nodded before reminding in a subtle tone "Remember, do what you can, no need to push yourself too hard".

Cynthia wished him luck while Alstin patted his back. The young man nodded and headed down towards the stage along with three other participants. As he stepped down the stairs and reached the stage, all eyes were focused on him.

The entire coliseum was so silent that it felt like the crowd was waiting for this very moment. If Hallie May and Marcus Sarge represented the top five guilds of their kingdom, then the young man on the stage currently represented the kingdom and the royal family that ruled it.

There was no way they wouldn't be excited to know the results of the person the royal family regarded as their greatest genius. The various guild master had their eyes on him too, whether the royal family could achieve victory in this tournament or not, depended on the shoulder of this very person.

TAK...TAK...TAK...

A boy hurriedly ran up the stairs, his mouth was continuously mumbling and huffing "This bad... this is bad, I'm late".

He wore black clothes that looked like a uniform, a navy hat on his head and carried a rapier strapped to his waist. At this moment his clothes were messy and his hair dishevelled.

"Haa... haa... I can't believe I got lost again".

The person was none other than Denzel who got teleported along with Simon and Lucine to the forbidden trial grounds. Currently, he was running up a flight of stairs in a hurry.

After following the direction the soldier had told him, he finally reached the VIP rows and came out just in time to see the gallery erupting in a huge clamour that overwhelmed every other sound in the coliseum.

Denzel was stunned, he wondered what was going on when, a voice mixed with concern and fury, rang beside him.

"You Brat... you are finally here. Do you know how much inconvenience you have caused me? Look how I complain to Cedrick after we go back" Voves got up from his seat and approached him.

Having nothing to say in return, Denzel could only helplessly scratch his hair. After he was pulled along to his seat, he looked at the odd expression of the crowd before asking a question.

"What happened here, they all look like they have seen a ghost?".

Vouves smiled and pointed his finger at the main stage, more specifically at the young man standing gallantly on the stage.

"Hoho, what a surprise. It seems the Royal family of Ellesmere spared no efforts nurturing this child" he caressed his beard and light-heartedly commented.

The girl seated beside him, Alice also nodded. Seeing his sister agree too, he observed the young man and his gaze finally landed on the perusal mirror on the stage.

Name- Erwin Curtis Ellesmere, Age- 20, Class- Arcane Spellcaster, Level- 407, Potential- Very High.

There was no way he wouldn't know what the mirror was, thus he immediately knew what was going on.

"What do you think?" Vouves asked vaguely.

"I can't wait to battle him" the reply he got was more enthusiastic than he expected.

The audience was reeling in shock after the mind-boggling results from their third prince. They who thought that Marcus's result was already the greatest for this year's tournament were given a pleasant surprise.

'No wonder he was hailed as the greatest genius of the Ellesmere family, to achieve such a height in the mere age of twenty, his achievement might not be lower than Godwin' Benny Beckerman thought.

Cyrus who had personally mentored the young man, nodded his head at his achievement.

'Looks like training in the Chamber of Guidance for the past couple of weeks have benefitted you immensely. With your result I believe his majesty can put down some of his worries' he thought internally and glanced towards the king whose mood seemed to be much more relaxed now.

Why would he not? His son had achieved a result that outshined all the other geniuses of his age group, an accomplishment that was worthy of praise. The other participants from the royal family were equally matched with the rest of the geniuses of the top five guilds.

"It looks like the third prize would win this tournament, the first prize reward would be won by the royal family it seems" one of the spectators commented.

"That is not guaranteed, Marcus and Hallie May are also there. Although their levels are lower than the third prince, one must also look at their abilities, background and the experience they have gone through up until now. Nothing can be decided yet"

"You are right, it looks like these three would be the top contenders for the First, Second and Third prize for the Battle of the Finest' tournament this time... haha".

The audience discussed pleased with the result of the new generation of heroes. Now that all of the teams were done drawing lots, they could move on to the next stage, the battle royale or so they thought.

However, Cyrus reminded them that there was still one team that was yet to go down the stage and assess themselves.

'The greatest challenge for the third prince might very well be him' Cyrus glanced at the audience seat and saw that the delegates from the Sanguine Empire were all seated in their seats. His gaze especially focused on the young boy whose age seemed to be less than their prince Erwin.

Seeing that their participants were ready, he called them onto the stage.

"Sanguine Empire's two participants...".

A boy and a girl wearing a black uniform mixed with some red, walked down to the main stage and placed their hands on the mirror in front of the eager eyes of the audience who wished for the first round of the tournament to start.

Name- Alice Alma Sanguine, Age- 16, Class- Multicast Spellcaster, Level- 400, Potential- Very High.

At that moment, the eager crowd was stunned; a girl whose age was even younger than that lass from Magician's guild, attained a result that was no less than her.

However, before the shock from the result could register in their brains, another blow that shattered their previous preconception was shown to every eyes present in the coliseum.

While the crowd was befuddled as to how to react, Alice smiled brightly and congratulated Denzel.

"Congratulations big brother, you have become even more stronger. Uncle Cedrick will really be delighted".

"Haha" Denzel smiled bashfully, the next second though his face was clouded by some emotion she had never seen on him before.

After placing their hands on the mirror, the duo calmly drew their lots and walked back to their seats. Without any care for the audience whose faces were masked with utter disbelief, they returned to Vouves' side.

The royal court magician calmly welcomed them, his unfazed attitude seemed to say that this was all expected.

Back on the main stage, a few lines of words were written in the perusal mirror.

Name- Denzel Caius Sanguine, Age- 17, Class- Hellreaver, Level- 420, Potential- EX.

The first person with a potential that was measured as Exceptional (EX) even by the standards of the perusal mirror had appeared in the strength assessment stage.

Moreover, this was the second time in the history of the entire 'Battle of the Finest' tournament, that someone got assessed with an EX (Exceptional) potential, preceded only by Godwin. Other than

his potential, his level was also the highest amongst all the participating members of this tournament making it clear cut who was the real genius.

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Denzel's result was just like a bomb exploding in the eyes and hearts of all the participants, causing them to be completely stunned. His level and potential was something they could never begin to comprehend.

To them, it felt like they were suddenly doused in a bucket of cold water and they felt all the hair on their body stand on end. It was not only for the participants, even the guild master of various guilds and faction, felt the same.

They couldn't understand how the boy was trained to be able to reach such a high realm at the tender age of just 17 years. The name the boy carried, Sanguine was finally carved onto the hearts of each and every member of the crowd.

Why the Sanguine Empire was a mid-tier nation was displayed in front of all the eyes. To be able to raise such a monster, no wonder they were much more stronger than their kingdom of Ellesmere.

Level 420, wasn't something that one could underestimate. In their kingdom of Ellesemere, there were countless people above level 300; However, those who actually breached level 400, did not even make a hundredth of that number. In their kingdom, one could be considered a true elite if they breached level 400.

From this, one could see how difficult it was to reach such a level not to mention at such a young age. This made one wonder how high the boy would reach in the future if he continued to put effort like that.

Perhaps, the only one to not be surprised amongst the crowd would be Simon who had already met the boy before and knew how powerful he was. Seeing his results, Simon couldn't help but flash a wicked smile.

His suspicions were correct; the boy was indeed above level 400 and possessed a rare class and talent. However, even he didn't know that the boy was a foreign delegate from the Sanguine Empire who came to participate in this tournament.

"It is boring if victory is already guaranteed to you, a true victory only tastes better when there is a true challenge in front of you. Who can be a better opponent for you on your path to victory than that prince? Ain't I right son?" Brutus said as he patte the shoulder of his son.



Amongst the few participants who weren't daunted by Denzel's result, Marcus was one of them. He gave a wild smile and nodded at the words of his father.

In contrast to the astonishment of the crowd, the surprise in the eyes of the top five guild leaders only lasted for a few moments before they calmed down. To them, this result was not completely unacceptable, there was no particular reason for that, it was just because he was from Sanguine Empire.

"Erwin, the look on your face seems to say that you have already accepted your defeat. While it is true that levels matter a lot, in a battle it is not the only thing that can solely determine an outcome. If you believe you have lost even before the battle began, you wouldn't be able to win against him later on".

Erwin who was lost in his thoughts while looking down at the ground, opened his eyes wide at those words of his father.

"You are the greatest genius of our family, have faith in yourself some more".

After the shock from Denzel's result subside a little, a new wildfire begin to rise within the crowd as they eagerly waited for the first round of group battles to begin.

"With every participant taking their lots, we will now move onto the first round of the tournament, the 'Battle Royale'. The format of the round is extremely simple, you just have to defeat five enemies from your group to advance to the next stage".

"If you push them out of bounds, it will be considered your victory. Of course, killing someone or dealing a death blow is not allowed. Any person that is found violating this rule would be eliminated immediately and dealt accordingly".

"Within a group, an average of sixty participants would be competing for the spots to the next stage. There are a total of 85 groups who will be competing in the thirty-six secondary stages in turns. The winners from each group will then be competing in the next stage of the tournament. That's is all, let us begin this competition".

With Cyrus's loud declaration, the 'first stage of the 'battle of the finest' tournament finally began. The first thirty-six groups of participants jumped down onto the secondary stages and the battle Royale finally commenced.

All you needed to do was defeat five opponents, the instructions sounded fairly simple however, one needed to also keep in mind the diverse strength of the crowd. There were people above level 300 while there were also people below level 300, that is to say, it would be an easy victory if they just went after the weaker ones.

Similarly, they were bound to be defeated if a strong opponent set their sights on them. The strong ones would prevail and the weak would be trampled upon, there was all there is to it.

As the audience watched on, it didn't take long for those participants with levels below three hundred to be targeted and be the stepping stones for those above level three hundred.

"WHOOA.. look at the twenty-third stage, that guy who is sweeping the stage is from the Thunder fortress guild". Someone from the crowd bellowed.

Simon looked in the direction the person was pointing at and noticed a man who had defeated a total of twenty participants with just a single skill of his. This was one of the things about Battle Royale, although Cyrus mentioned that all you needed to do was defeat five opponents to move to the next round, there was no such mention about defeating more than five.

That is to say, some participants are bound to display their might and sweep the floor with the other participants. There was no way that every stage would have the set number of winners.

While Simon was thinking all that, his eyes suddenly went to a stage where he saw a familiar figure. Lucas was standing still on the stage with battles occurring all around him. A few meters area around him was empty indicating that all the participants who had seen his results, were wary of him and did not dare to step near lest they lost their chance to move onto the next stage.

Level 400, he was on a realm completely different from them.

"Haha, Lucas Blackwood it seems we are in the same group. I'm Lark Sea from Absolute Sea Guild, let me test my strength on you".

Of course, there were bound to be some opponents with overinflated egos who tried to bite more than they can chew.

"Oi, Oi... isn't that guy from the Sea Absolute guild, one of the top tier guilds from the southwestern region?"

"I think his level was around 380 with a rare class. He has already defeated more than seven participants so why is he throwing his chance to move onto the next stage by challenging someone higher level than him?"

"You idiot, this is a battle royale where you have to fight in a confined space and a warrior holds absolute superiority in this kind of stage. No matter how you look at it, the other guy clearly seems to be a mage".

Simon inwardly snorted, while what they said might be true in most cases, there were clearly some exceptions and as far as he knew, Lucas was one of them.

The guy named Lark Sea smiled widely, brandishing his spear he charged at the latter without giving him any time to chant or conjure any magic. Just when he was a meter away from him, he dished out a routine of quick slashes and thrusts.

However, before the attack could even reach Lucas, a wall of fire, surrounded him like a protective wall and blocked all of the attacks.

BANG...BANG..BANG...

"What?" before Lark could even stabilise his stance, the wall of fire suddenly started rotating and picking up speed. In the blink of an eye, it became a huge fiery whirlwind that covered half of the stage.

"Flame Magic Mastery [Flame Strom]" Lucas nonchalantly mumbled the name of his attacks.

The flame storm raged and engulfed half of the participants on the stage. It only died down after seconds, the thirty or so participants who were unlucky enough to get sucked into the storm appeared extremely miserable with most of their skin burned and thrown out of the stage.

Nevertheless, the most miserable one out of them was Lark Sea who was the target of the magic. His clothes and hair was burned and his appearance evoked pity from the spectators.

Lucas after destroying half of the participants from his group, silently walked down from the stage. No one dared to stop nor call out to him.

"Was he venting his anger from that attack?" Simon mused, he clearly felt the emotions of anger coming out of his magic.

"He is clearly more worked up for his own good," Cyrus said looking at Lucas.

The battles on the other stages were boring with little to no unexpected events occurring. The participants from the top five guilds swiftly took down their targets and walked out off the stage gallantly.

With that, the first thirty-six group battles was concluded with only 200 or so people moving up to the next stage.

The number was far too low when one considers that there were 60 participants in each group. The groups who would battle in the thirty six stages next, came down and the audience immediately boiled with excitement.

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That was because some of the star participants from the top five guilds would be competing on the various stages.

"Oh look at that, the battle occurring on the eleventh stage is already in full heat. Most of the participants are already out"

"Yeah, those guys... they are from the kingdom of blackthorn. It seems that they were in the same group and thus tagged together to defeat all the other opponents".

With so many participants in the tournament, it was not uncommon for a guild or faction to have multiple of their members in the same group. The kingdom of blackthorn who had three of their members in the same group, wiped the floors with their opponents.

Even some big guilds had some of their members failing for being unlucky enough to be in the same stage as them.

"Sigh it's so unfortunate for that young man from the Thunder fortress guild to be in the same stage as them. Truly unfortunate, I was hoping to see upcoming rounds some more"

"You think so. Well I pity the ones who are on the same stage with Marcus, Hallie, and the other from the top five guilds".

When the matches were filled with so many spices, how could the audience be able to resist gossiping? Of course, the same went for the group of merchants that were seated near Simon. They were fervently discussing as to who would win from each stage.

OHHH... suddenly the crowd exclaimed, their eyes glued to stage three and fifteen where a particular participants confronted each other.

On stage three, was a participant from Crimson Demolition guild, Kenan Lantz confronting an opponent from the Kingdom of Blackthorn, while on stage fifteen were members of the top five guild, Assassin's guild and Magician's guild confronting each other.

Sparks generated everywhere and the atmosphere around the coliseum became instantly heated. The participants confronted each other in a short exchange before each realising that they cannot defeat the other in a short period of time and thus disengaging to find other targets.

"Well, Well.. would you look at that, aren't you very eager to clash with the participants from my guild, Grey" Karina said smiling towards the area where Grey, the guild leader of Assassin's guild was seated.

Grey smiled but did not comment further, it was just the first round of the 'Battle of the Finest' tournament, there was no need for them to go for a difficult opponent right now.

The participant from the Crimson demolition guild and kingdom of blackthorn did the same, after dishing out a few blows as a way of greeting, they each went to find their own prey.

The audience who were looking for a heated battle were left a little disappointed but that small clash of strength was enough to give an appetizer of what would come later.

The matches on the other stages were just like the previous ones, where the weak were quickly filtered out and the strong moved on to the next stage. Most of the small region guilds who brought their participants over, had all of their participants defeated while some of the medium-big guilds had a few of their members moving onto the next stage.

Obviously, the top five guilds had all their participating members in this round move onto the next stage. Hallie May, Marcus Sarge and a few members of the Sea god's trident flawlessly achieved their victory and stepped from the stage.

The strong devours the weak, everything was going as the audience had predicted when the moderator monitoring one of the stages, declared the elimination of a certain guild from this tournament which nobody expected.

"Absolute Sea Guild... Eliminated".

"Ah, my apologies, I did not know that you were the last participant from your guild" Ivan Mavis Blackthorn said looking down at the unconscious opponent he just defeated.

"You are kidding me right... the absolute sea guild got eliminated?" the audience couldn't believe what they heard.

One of the big guilds of their kingdom, a faction that had taken the seventh place in the previous "battle of the finest" tournament, had all their participants defeated. What kind of concept was that?

The crowd was in a state of disbelief, even the guild master of the Absolute Sea guild looked bewildered, unable to accept what had just transpired. Earlier it was Lark Sea who had underestimated his enemy and now even Marvin Welch was defeated.

The top two remaining participants of their guild who had the highest talent out of all the others, were defeated. The Absolute Sea guild was eliminated in the first round of the tournament. Nothing could be more humiliating for a guild that placed seventh in the last tournament.

The audience sighed, it was truly an unfortunate disaster for their guild which held so many expectations from the audience and the people of their region, to be eliminated like that.

Lark Sea and Marvin Welch were both individuals with levels above 380 and a rare class, to see them dropping out on the first stage, was truly a pity.

The Second Round of the First Stage 'battle Royale' concluded with 210 students moving on to the next stage. And now finally, the last round of the 'Battle Royale' would start.

Out of the 85 groups, 72 groups have already competed in the 36 secondary stages and the winners have moved on to the next phase leaving only 13 remaining groups to compete. Though there would only be 13 groups competing in the secondary stages, the hype of the audience for this round was much for than the previous 'Battle royal' rounds.

The reason for this being the 'princely round'. That was what the audience were calling it. In this round, two princes, one foreign and one their own third prince, would be participating in their own group battles.

There was no way the audience wouldn't be excited to see the top two participants in action. The 780 participants from the 13 groups, stepped into their prearranged secondary stages and waited for the battle to start.

They observed their opponents and at the same time prayed that they weren't in the same group as the two princes.

The first prince of the kingdom of Ellesmere, Alstin sighed in relief when he saw his third brother walk up to a different stage than the one from the Sanguine empire's prince.

"It's a good thing that they are in different groups. It is far too soon for them to clash in the first stage".

The third round of 'battle royale started when every member got onto their stages. Just like every round, the participants with the weaker level were quickly filtered out and before long it was only the strong ones still standing.

All the participants avoided coming near the two princes and only targeted those opponents that they have a chance to win against.

As time ticked by, multiple winners started to arise, Princess Alice from the Sanguine empire calmly walked down the stage after pushing five of her opponents out of bounds with her magic.

The members from the top five guilds and the big factions were also starting to emerge victorious one after the other.

"It's time he moved," Vouves said caressing his beard tied in a dreadlock.

The moment he said that, he saw Denzel positioning two fingers of his right hand as a sword and slash down. The move though very imperfect was still a skill that the [Sword King] Cedrick had taught to his disciple.

A two meters big blade shadow was created from Denzel's movement and was controlled by him to target exactly five people. Those five people did not even know what had attacked them before they were slashed and sent out of bounds.

WHOAAA.. the audience cheered like crazy when their eyes were fed something so exciting. On another stage, they saw their own third prince achieving a victory effortlessly by defeating five people.

Satisfied with the performance of their future heroes of the realm, the crowd was just about to move on, when a huge explosion that rocked every corner of the coliseum, rang out.

Every eyes present in the audience stands, was drawn to the stage where a completely unbelievable had occurred. Every participant on stage 1 was blown away and defeated except for a single person. The crowd couldn't follow what had transpired in the few seconds when their eyes were drawn to a different place.

"This is a lie right... a single person was able to defeat all the other participants? There were even some members from those big guilds on that stage"

"Isn't that guy the representative from the Ingolf kingdom?"

"That bastard is looking down on our kingdom. Even though he could obtain a victory and move onto the next stage by just defeating 5 members, he had to deliberately wipe everyone out of the stage and flaunt his powers"

"I wish the third prince or somebody from the top five guild takes him out in the future round".



The crowd clamoured, they were obviously enraged by this display of power. The moderator of that stage looked at Cyrus asking what to do next. The Royal Knight captain thought over it a bit before nodding his head.

Although it was a little uncalled for, there was no such rule abstaining someone from defeating all of the participants on the stage. That is to say, Graydon Brown did not do anything that went against the rules of this tournament.

Thus he was moved on to the next stage of the tournament. When the moderator announced so, the audience was a little disturbed while Oman, the prince of Ingolf Kingdom smiled derisively.

Right before Graydon went onto the stage, he told him to knock all the participants of that stage out and display the might of their Kingdom of Ingolf to everyone. The crowd's dismayed reaction was very much to his satisfaction.

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"Hehe, it'll be problematic if you all get disturbed over just that after all, there are too many surprises left for you people from the Ellesmere Kingdom to see," Oman thought internally.

The final round of the 'Battle Royale' concluded with a slight twist. Out of the initial, 780 participants, only 70 went up to the next stage. Cyrus walked up to the main stage and declared in a loud voice.

"With the conclusion of the last round of the first stage of battle royale, I now announce the end of the first stage of the tournament. The second stage of the Battle of the Finest tournament will begin tomorrow".

"The 480 or so brave participants who will be moving onto the next stage will be divided into 5 groups. All competitors in each group will have to participate in 3 fights and the top ten most outstanding participants from each group that is 50 in total would be selected for the next stage of the tournament".

"In the second stage, you will be ranked based on your performance and the number of your wins. Therefore I suggest you to give your all. Any competitor who is dissatisfied with any of the fifty chosen participants may challenge them in a one on one duel. In the situation that they win, then that participant can take the other's spot".

"The second day of the tournament will conclude with all the fights and the name of the 50 chosen participants that will be moving onto the third stage of the tournament. With everything said, I request the participants to take ample rest and preserve their strength for the upcoming battles tomorrow. That is all from me, the First Day of the Battle of the Finest tournament ends here".

After those words from Cyrus, everybody from the crowd gave a loud cheer for all the participants before moving in an organised way towards the exit.

Simon who was seated in the VIP rows, got up from his seat, the sun was about to set and had painted the sky with its orange hue.

He wasn't surprised that the first day of the 'Battle of the Finest' tournament ended with just the strength assessment and battle royale since he knew that the tournament goes on for multiple days and provided a kind of festival and holiday for the people.

The guilds that have won and the guilds that have lost, each faction sorted out their feelings before exiting the stage. The participants and the VIPs had their own exit gate with soldiers stationed everywhere to ensure no fighting broke out.

Exiting the coliseum, Simon went back directly to his inn. While on his way, all he could hear was the events of the tournament that had happened today and like a wildfire, it was gossiped by one person after another.

Even at the dining hall of the inn, all Simon could hear being discussed was the tournament. After having his dinner, he silently went up to his room and flumped himself on his bed as he recalled the events of today.

Since his dungeon was near the central continent, Simon felt like it wasn't a bad idea to get an understanding of the kingdoms around him. The 'Battle of the Finest' tournament was a good occasion for him to know more about the class system, adventurers, their strengths and how they fight.

It was not like Simon wasn't enjoying the tournament, in all honesty, he was. The tournament was a good testbed for him to see and learn from those higher levelled than him.

There were so many skills and classes that he wasn't aware of, his inquisitive mind naturally wanted to know about them more. Add that with his precautious nature, he had a tendency of wanting to know more about the strength of the people of this kingdom closest to his dungeon.

He knew that one day these adventurers might set their eyes on his dungeon and when that time came, the information that he gathered today, would be extremely useful.

Other than that, Adalinda who had gone off in search of her disciple after Simon had informed her that she was near the capital, was yet to return.

As such, Simon decided to wait and see the conclusion of the 'battle of the finest' tournament. While he was having such thoughts, a sudden voice that came out of nowhere, disturbed his train of thought.

"Hey Simon can you hear me?".

"Wha?!"

Simon jolted up from his seat when he heard Adalinda's voice in his head. He looked all around him and spread his senses everywhere to see if she was around.

"Good, it seems that you can hear me. Listen up, I finally found my disciple; however, she immediately ran the moment she saw me. Hmph, this naïve disciple of mine thinks she can outsmart her master a second time? Anyways, I am currently chasing her, so I want you to wait in that city".

Her transmission ended as abruptly as it started out leaving Simon completely stunned. She had just communicated with him inside his head, leaving him some instructions before quickly disconnecting.

"What was that all about?" Simon thought, at the very least he knew that she had found Lucine and is currently chasing her.

With nowhere to go, he could only attend the tournament to relieve his boredom.

The next day started off early with the inhabitants of the city unable to calm down from the excitement of yesterday. However, the eagerness they had for today's event was even higher.

The inhabitants of the city started waking up and became active even before the sun rose and filled the city with their hustle and bustle. This excitement was contagious and spread onto everyone.

Queues to get inside the coliseum started out very early and was a few kilometres long. Nobody wanted to miss the second day of the tournament and thus wanted seats that had a better view.

The competition unlike yesterday would start early, right after the dawn break. When Simon reached inside the coliseum, he saw that most of the audience and even the VIP seats were mostly packed with people.

They were all waiting for the royal family and Cyrus to initiate the start of individual matchups today. Unlike the 'Battle Royale' from yesterday where they could see the full extent and strength of the winning individuals, they would be able to do so during the individual matches.

Every participant would have to fight a total of three matches which would be scored by the moderators based on their performance and only the top ten from each of the five groups would be selected for the next stage.

That is to say, most of the participants would show their true skills and power today to win their matches. Even without having to think, the crowd knew that they were up for some thrilling moments.

Right when the radiance of the sun started spreading to every corner of the city, the moment that the people were waiting for, finally arrived. The royal family and all the participants had arrived, it was finally time to start the second day of the 'Battle of the finest' tournament.

With the call from the moderators, the participants called out dropped down to their stages and the match finally began.

All 36 secondary stages had eyes dazzling battles going on that only served to foster the hunger of the audience even more. With stars in their eyes, they would erupt in joy when the participant they were rooting for won or sit down dejected when they lost.

The series of events continued, participants after another came down to the 36 secondary stages for their battles.

Some matches were bound to attract more attention from the audience with the matchups than the others. Some crafty people in the audience stand even made a temporary betting counter to profit from the event and the crowd willingly got baited into it.

Gambling was something that cannot be separated from the people especially when they have some money to spare. There was no way they wouldn't bet on the participants they thought had a higher chance of winning.

And so, the second day of the 'Battle of the Finest' tournament, started off with a blast.

"Look at that, it's Vin Borseki from the Assassin's guild vs the guy from the Blackthorn Kingdom. Who do you think will win?" the audience clamoured.

"Hmm, it's hard to say, they both had won their first match and didn't have to put all their efforts into it. I guess, it will all boil down to who has more skills and experience"

"That may not be true. Although that guy from the Kingdom of blackthorn has a few levels higher than Vin Borseki from the assassins guild, it is because he is older. One shouldn't underestimate the top five guilds, I'm sure he has something up his sleeves even if he is not the star participant of his guild"

"I see... wait aren't those two who are going up the eleventh stage members from the top five guilds?".

The attention of the audience was immediately stolen by a particular matchup on another stage of the coliseum that was sooner or later bound to happen. Yes, the participants from the top five guilds of their kingdom were finally clashing against one another. Something that the crowd was intensely waiting for.

The two participants who went up to the eleventh stage, were both below age 40 and around level 390. One was from the Crimson demolition guild, the other from the Sea God's Trident.

Although both of them were not the star participants from their guild, the audience couldn't wait for members of the top five guilds to clash with each other and display their strengths.

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The battle went on for more than half an hour and it was every bit of a roller coaster and eye dazzler as the audience had expected before the participant from the Sea god's trident won the match.

The audience wasn't surprised by the outcome of the battle and gave a huge applause for both the participants. Though the participant from the Crimson Demolition guild had lost, he had done his utmost and used every bit of his skill.

"That was a good fight, for a second I thought the Crimson demolition guild might secure a victory against the Sea God's Guild"

"Haha, I thought so too. As expected they are the number one guild for a reason" the audience was enamoured by the battle and continuously chirped about it.

Their elation didn't last long and was stopped short when the moderator declared a particular participant's victory. The crowd was shocked to see the participant from the Kingdom of Blackthorn walk down the stage unscathed after defeating his opponent.

"Vin Borseki lost? How did he lose?"

"I-I don't know, I wasn't paying attention to their match"

"How could this be, Vin looks completely spent while his opponents seem more than ready to fight another bout"

The audience seemed lost as to how the participant from the kingdom of blackthorn achieved a victory against a participant from the top five guilds. They asked people beside them only to get the same answer, they too were not paying attention to this match.

"That energy feels oddly familiar" Simon narrowed his eyes as he watched the participant from the kingdom of blackthorn slowly walk away. Including him, only a few people saw how he won and similarly furrowed their brows, the people from the Assassin's guild were the same.

The audience brooded over this for a while before they moved on, there were plenty of other eye-dazzling matches for them to feast on and everything was going on simultaneously that they wished they had more eyes.

The participants from the big guilds and factions went all out and displayed their skills to defeat their opponents in hope to catch the eye of the moderator and get selected for the next stage.

The enthusiasm of the audience was all-time high when it was raised even further when participants such as Marcus and Hallie May started coming down to the stage to face their opponents.

Needless to say, they achieved a complete and flawless victory without spending much efforts. Their opponents cursed their fate for having to go through a matchup like that before finally accepting reality and giving their best.

The crowd too clapped for them, although inevitable, they did their best and gave everything they had. After these matches more and more star participants from the top five guilds and foreign nations came down to the stage to battle.

Everyone was enjoying the second day of the battle of the finest tournament when suddenly they heard a miserable scream come from the direction of one of the stages. The spectators that were watching the battle unfold, had dreadful looks in their eyes as they watched the back of the man who had brutally defeated his opponent.

Fresh blood splayed everywhere and the condition of the other participant didn't seem to be good.

"Hehe, this is how a true battle should be. Not like those pointless fights going everywhere. It's too bad that the rules don't allow us to kill an opponent" Oman said, his tone sounding a little regretful.

"Isn't that participant Graydon Brown from the Kingdom of Ingolf? To think that he would be this heavy-handed even while he had so big of an advantage"

"Yeah, he was the very same person who defeated all the other participants on his stage during the 'battle royale'".

Talks about the man named Graydon Brown and his savagery spread wildly amongst the crowd. They had seen how he hadn't given his opponent a chance to admit defeat in the beginning and beat him until he fainted.

The relationship between the two countries wasn't good in the first place, and added that with the unseemingly conduct of the man, it was only natural for the audience to jeer at him.

Especially the guild Graydon's opponent belonged to, looked at him with hostility in their eyes. However, as if to say that he wasn't fazed by it one bit, he calmly walked past them.

The crowd which was set agitated, suddenly went silent when they saw a young man no more than twenty years old, wearing white robes embroidered with red and holding onto a staff, walk up to the stage.

"What do you think? Will it be another surrender in the beginning by the opponent?"

"You bet. Even if the opponent is from a big guild, they wouldn't dare fighting prince Erwin and risk being unable to fight in the other matches".

The spectators chatted, they who had seen his previous two opponents surrender at the start of the battle were predicting if the same would happen once again or not.

"Participant Bastille from Baskerville guild admits defeat, with 3 wins participant Erwin obtains complete victory in the second stage" the moderator announced loudly and with pride in his tone.

The words of the moderator, proved the audience right. All of his opponents surrendered at the start of the round allowing the price to win without having a need to move.

Although the crowd was disappointed a little, they knew that the other factions didn't want to fight the third prince and risk being put out of commission for the rest of their battle. Being knocked out and being unable to continue with the remaining matches would be a humiliation for any guild.

The action to concede defeat could be seen as a tactical retreat and everybody would understand, after all, their opponent was the third prince, someone above level 400.

Above level 400 and below level 400 were two different realms that was incredibly difficult to gap. The people who achieved victory by default due to their opponent surrendering, were Erwin, Denzel from the Sanguine empire, Marcus and Graydon whose last opponent conceded defeat right at the start.

In the case of Marcus, he only had to fight once while the rest of his wins were by default. By the time sun was about to set, all the matches were concluded and the audience was tightly rooted in their seats, patiently waiting for the names of the top fifty participants from the five groups to be announced.



These fifty participants would be the main show of the third day of the battle of the finest tournament. Everybody knew that most of the spots in this ranking would be taken by the participants from the top five guilds.

Nevertheless, the other big guilds and factions were still hoping that some of their star participants who managed to attract the eyes of the moderator, would be able to get into the list.

After a considerate debate where all of the moderators came together, the list of 50 participants who would be competing on the main stage of the coliseum on the third day, was handed to Cyrus to announce to the crowd.

The crowd settled their murmuring and placed their undivided attention on the royal knight captain who was about to call out the names of the selected participants now.

"The fifty participants with the most potential that are selected are... Erwin, Denzel, Marcus, Hallie, Alice..."

As expected, he called out the names of the participants who had established their powers right at the start of the strength assessment test. The audience wasn't surprised, they were the strongest participants in this tournament and were bound to get to the main stage.

The names that came afterwards were from the top five guilds, foreign nations and a few from the big factions. There were also a few dark horses from the other regions who had shown boundless talent and strength in the previous rounds getting into the list.

"These are the fifty participants who would be competing on the main stage tomorrow. The format of the competition would be the same, each of the fifty participants would have to fight a total of three battles out of which only the top ten participants would be selected for the final day ranking tournament."

"I wish all the participants all the best for their upcoming battles. With that said, it is time to close today's event; however, before that, as I had mentioned yesterday, if there is any competitor who is unsatisfied with any of the top fifty selected, they may challenge them for a battle and in the case they do win, they might replace the other in the rankings".

His words reminded everyone that he did say something like that yesterday. The crowd, the guilds and the participants that had lost, fell silent. Getting into the top fifty the words may sound very enticing; however, the condition was that they had to defeat the other participant in a one on one duel.

These words might sound easier said than done since all of the participants that have been selected, were the cream of the crops and have been sifted from 5000 other contestants. Plus they have experienced first-hand how powerful each of them were.

The silence lasted for a while and just when Cyrus thought that everybody was content with their standings, a competitor who looked like he cannot accept it, suddenly raised his hands and step forward.

"A moment please sir knight captain. I would like to challenge somebody".

The crowd was stunned, so there was someone gutsy enough to challenge these fifty participants. When they shifted their gaze towards the direction they heard the voice from, they saw a man donned in a black armour, looking unsatisfied.

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Behind him were the other participants from his guild and from their surprised expressions, it seemed that they did not expect their teammate to suddenly step up and challenge someone.

Cyrus gave a deep glance at the man before nodding his head. He waved his hand and said:

"In that case, you may challenge anyone you wish to replace. However, I would like to point out that you cannot challenge the same opponent you had suffered a loss against. If you accept the condition, you may proceed forward".

The person seemed determined even after Cyrus's warning and fiercely glared at one of fifty participants standing on the stage.

"You, accept my challenge" he pointed at the participant and loudly declared.

WHOOAAA... the spectators clamoured, they who thought that the show was over, got an unexpected surprise by this sudden issue of challenge.

This excitement was not because they would get to see another fight but because the one who had been challenged by that guy was none other the Graydon Brown, the participant from the kingdom of Ingolf.

Due to his unseemingly and brutish conduct, he was very infamous amongst the crowd and they couldn't help but cheer for the guy who had the guts to challenge him.

"Isn't that guy Levin Field, the big brother of the participant that was destroyed by Graydon?"

"Yeah you are right, he was unlucky enough to be matched against that prince from the Sanguine Empire. It seems that he wants revenge for his brother"

"Well he might be able to do it after all he is the star participant from his guild which is quite renowned in his region"

"Ohh... Beat that bastard back to his country"

"That guy has been getting on my nerves, put him in his place"

"Yeah beat him and you get to replace him on the rankings. Show him that this is not his kingdom where he can act as he wish"...

It was to be expected, the crowd loudly jeered for Graydon who had been acting impertinently up until now.

Graydon's face could be said to be the very definition of calm, even amidst the loud jeer and cusses, he maintained his composure and stood tall on the stage. He glanced at the audience stand where the people were seated and saw Oman stretch his hand and slowly make a fist.

The intention was clear, the way he motioned it seemed to mean crush the other party.

Cyrus after contemplating for a second, requested all the other participants to get down the stage. He then asked the concerned two participants to climb onto the stage.

"I hope that you all already know the rules. Killing someone is strictly prohibited or dealing a death blow. If you push the other party out of bounds, it is also counted as your victory. You can give either by saying it out loud or staying down on the ground for more than ten seconds. Now let the match begin".

Even after Cyrus commenced the match, the people on the stage did nothing but glare at each other for a while.

"I'll make you pay for what you did to my brother," Levin said hatefully.

After that match with Graydon, his little brother was in a serious state where multiple of his bones were broken, organs ruptured and severe internal bleeding. Even after taking multiple healing elixirs and spells, he was yet to wake up.

Seeing his brother being beaten to the brink of death, how could he as the elder brother take it. Levin saw this as his duty to beat this opponent down and take revenge for his brother.

In contrast to Levin who seemed to be raring to go, Graydon looked extremely bored, his eyes seemed to be indifferent of the opponent in front of him.

His opponent's unconcerned attitude appeared to have rubbed Levin the wrong way, he brought out a sharp blade from his space ring and rushed towards Graydon while roaring loudly.

"I'll Destroy you".

From the viewpoint of the crowd, Levin's rage was justified since his opponent had badly beaten his brother to the point where it wouldn't be surprising if he couldn't continue with the career of an adventurer anymore.

"With just you? you are not qualified" Graydon said cleaning his ear with his pinky finger.

In front of many shocked gazes, he stretched out his hand and empty handedly greeted Levin's sharp blade. His arms smashed onto the back of the blade and with an intense clanging noise of that of a metal colliding with metal, the blade was shattered in half by him.

Levin's sharp blade that he had been imbued with abundant energy, and which was made of whitesilver was easily broken in half by his opponent with just his bare fist.

Before Levin even had a chance to scream from shock, Graydon's right foot had already flown up and kicked him squarely on the chest.

BANG...

With a loud muffled noise, Levin's armour was broken as easily as if it was made of rotten wood. The momentum from the attack pushed him back several meters and he couldn't help but vomit out a mouthful of blood.

That kick earlier had such brutish energy that even after destroying his armour the wild energy within was wreaking havoc inside his body. Stumbling on his steps, Levin stabilised his body; however, when he shifted his eyes in the direction where his opponent should be, he noticed that the guy was no longer there.

BANG...

Another muffled sound echoed out followed by the dull sound of a body skidding and rolling across the stage. 'What had happened?' before Levin even had the chance to think why he was sprawled across the floor, he saw a foot come crashing down on his right hand.

CRACK... AHHHHH... the sounds of bones being broken was very apparent and the crowd could feel the pain in his scream. They were reeling in shock when another pain-filled scream echoed out.

CRACK... this time, Levin's left hand was broken.

BANG... BANG... BANG... he did not even have the time to scream as a foot came repeatedly stomping down on him. His right leg, left leg, head, back all these areas were targeted. The man was plastered onto the ground by Graydon.

The audience was horrified by the scene that was playing in front of them. This was no longer a match but a brutish display of strength and torture.

"STOP" the guild leader of the guild Levin belonged to, got up from his seat and thundered loudly. From his furious expression, it could be seen that he was completely enraged and if nobody stopped him, he would jump down to the stage.

Graydon's foot that was just about to smash on top of Levin sprawled on the floor, stopped mid-way. He turned his gaze and looked at the furious expression of the man, a sadistic light flashed in his eyes.

The foot that had stopped midway, came smashing down on Levin one again.

CRACK... sounds of bones being shattered echoed out.

"YOU DARE..." the guild master bellowed, he was just about to jump down to the stage when somebody from his guild stopped him. Jumping down to the stage when a match was going on was strictly forbidden and was looked on with contempt by everybody.

Besides if he did so, then according to the rules set in this coliseum, the moderators would be bound to step in and the guild that had committed that felony, would be banned for future tournaments.

The other guy knew that and thus stooped his guild master from doing something reckless. Graydon smiled derisively, he was just about to continue with his parade when Cyrus' cold declaration sounded out.

"Levin Field is down for more than ten seconds of time, winner Graydon Brown from the Kingdom of Ingolf. Please step down from the stage".

His declaration announced the winner of this match and at the same time, spared Levin from being tortured anymore.

"Hmph" Graydon snorted, his fun was ruined by the referee. Without taking another glance at Levin, he expressionlessly walked down the stage.

"What a savage fellow. He already knew the disparity between their strength and could knock his opponent in one hit. However, he had to torture the latter and ruin the mood for everyone. Sigh... let's go, there will be no changes in the participants. Staying anymore will only sour your mood further".

Karina Lowell, the guild master of the magician guild said. The members from her guild nodded their head before proceeding to exit with her.

Only after a while when the results was declared, did the crowd woke up from their daze. The battle earlier was too horrible for them as such they couldn't help but pity Levin who had been put into that state.

Levin was two years older than his brother and was also far stronger than him. Nevertheless, the result of this match was just the same, a complete oppression from Graydon.

Although it angered them to admit it, but the participant from the Kingdom of Ingolf was strong enough to be placed in the current standings. Probably, only the participants from the top five guilds could defeat him.

They were upset however, more than them the ones who were more aggrieved were the people from the Phantom Light guild whose two brilliant participants had been put into such a miserable state.

They immediately ran towards the stage to check on Levin the moment the result was declared. They all made an ugly face checking the condition he was in.

Healing teams that were already stationed nearby hurriedly provided first aid before taking him inside in a stretcher.

"Young man don't think that you can get away after doing all of this just because you are with the entourage of a foreign prince," the guild master of the phantom light guild said turning towards Graydon.

The latter ignored him and nonchalantly walked past without any care in the world.

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After such a horrific incident, there were no longer any competitors who were dissatisfied with the standings and thus the second day of the 'Battle of the Finest' concluded right when the sun was about to set.

The event of today spread like wildfire to even the surrounding cities and regions. The influx of people trying to get inside the city to witness the third day of the tournament increased even further.

Simon came back to his room after filling his stomach on the way. He sat down on his bed, closed his eyes and recalled all the battles that had happened today. It was spectacular how each and every participant displayed their skills and powers to face against their opponents.

These matches were extremely informational for Simon who was a Demon noble and a dungeon master. Who knows he might even have to face them in the future when his dungeon grows further.

From what he noticed, levels played an important role in this battle; however, what it boiled down to at the end was the class they each had. A human in terms of pure stats was inferior to a demon noble but to make up for it, they have class and class-specific skills.

Though even amongst class there were some rare classes that more than made up for these differences and Simon had witnessed a few of them with his own eyes. His earlier preconception that he would be able to win against any humans similar to his levels with just his stats alone, was brutally destroyed during the matches today.

The top 50 participants all had rare classes and displayed abilities that showed people why they were better than the others.

"There are classes that focus on a specific stats and classes that boosts all your stats in general. It would be obvious to see the latter win over the former with a landslide margin. However, that was not the case".

"The people with classes that focused on specific stats clearly had more of an edge on people with classes that gave an increase to all stats in general. It was not because they had skills matching their stats, but also knew what their weak and strong points were and used it marvellously against their opponents".

Simon contemplated, he felt like he too was improving as he retrospected what he saw today. Unlike the ranking system of Demon Nobles, the class system of humans was varied and each gets the kind of class depending on their mastery, suitability, the path they have walked on and their vision.

Classes were classes at the end, it wasn't the only factor that made these participants strong. One also had to factor in their years of experience and training and also their potential which represented their latent talent and how high their ceiling was.



It also showed the purity of their bloodline and how powerful they can become in the future. Most of the top 50 participants had high potential with a handful of few having been assessed with very high.

It would be not an exaggeration to say that people with very high potential will have less difficulty moving up the levels and are more likely to get more rare classes during class changes in the future.

Additionally, Simon noticed that the stats from the previous class get stacked with the stats that one gain after they class change to a new class. That is to say, a truly powerful human would have high stats suiting to their level.

If one looks at it like that, they were powerful opponents even for Demon nobles. As Simon was lost in his thoughts, suddenly the voice of Adalinda rang inside his head.

"Hey can you hear me? Hehe, I have finally caught my disciple but since she ran too far, it will take some time for us to reach the kingdom of Ellesmere. Wait for us there".

Simon got up from his seat but unlike the previous time he was looking cluelessly all around, this time he did not seem too surprised. Just like always, she ended the transmission after leaving a few words of instruction for him.

Well, he had already decided to watch the 'battle of the finest' tournament to its end so there was no problem on his end to wait for a few days.

Additionally, he did not have to worry too much about his dungeon since Irene and the Lightning draconic Serpent was there. Thus he could take his time to explore the outside world and train in the meantime.

After all, an opportunity to get outside the Ghastly winding forest doesn't present itself every time. This trip to the capital city Ellesmere was proving to be very beneficial for Simon. His level was not stagnant anymore, he was getting a change of pace and he was also constantly learning by watching these talented and young geniuses who were the future of this kingdom.

BOOM... BOOM... the morning of the next day started with firecrackers going off. Even before the sunlight greeted the land, the people started becoming lively with activity going on all around. Stalls lined up everywhere, inviting customers with the delicious aroma that was wafting off.

Today was the third day of the 'Battle of the Finest' tournament and the mood of the people was festive. The coliseum was already jam-packed with people when Simon entered.

Looking all around, he noticed that the main stage was a little different than yesterday with peculiar mechanisms placed at the four corners of the stage. These mechanisms had huge mana stones (shouldn't be mistaken for Mana crystals) powering them.

After a while, Cyrus arrived on the stage and declared the start of the third stage 'Individual Ranking' that would be held on the main stage.

"To protect the safety of the people and to prevent the rampaging energy to reach the audience stands, we have placed barriers around the stage so that everyone can watch the battles without any worry. This barrier was created with the help of dozens of level 450+ mages and is even capable of withstanding an attack from someone above level 500".

With Cyrus revealing the purpose of the weird mechanism placed at the corners of the stage, the audience finally understood why they were there for and at the same time also understood that the matches would be unlike all the previous battles and would be so fierce that a barrier would be needed to protect them from the aftershock.

"The name of the participants whose name I call out, please come down to the stage. First battle, Roscoe Ironwood from the kingdom of Blackthorn—Vs—Marcus Sarge from Savannah Beast Guild".

The moment the last name came up, the audience erupted in a huge clamour. This was the first battle of the day and who else was better suited to start it off than one of the strongest participants favoured to win the tournament.

Cheers of encouragement and support, sounded out for Marcus as he walked over to the main stage. His opponent was someone from the Kingdom of Blackthorn who have a unique way of fighting.

"Listen up Marcus, that prince from the sanguine Empire, Erwin and that Lass from Magician's guild is one thing, but you must also be careful of those participants from our neighbouring nations. Particularly those participants from the kingdom of blackthorn, the weapons and artifacts they used during the second stage of the tournament for some reason make even me unsettled".

As he observed his opponent, he remembered the conversation that he had with his father last night.

"Even father thinks those weapons are dangerous?".

Brutus Sarge nodded "Right... though weapons are weapons at the end, depending on the person who uses, it makes them strong or weak. Remember, you must end the battle as soon as possible if you come around any participants from the Kingdom of Blackthorn. If you draw the battle for long, you will expose your skills and strength to that monster of a prince and Erwin".

These were the last few words of caution his father had given him before the match. Cyrus looked at the two opponents who were raring to go and signalled the start of the battle.

As soon as the whistle was blown, Marcus rushed towards his opponent. [Gale Beat Claw], he utilised his class-specific skill, a huge green claw materialised in his right hand and came sweeping down on Roscoe.

CLANG...

A loud grating noise of metal colliding with metal sounded out and in front of their astonished eyes of Marcus, his beast claw was stopped from proceeding any forward.

"Hehe, it seems that even an opponent of a level higher than 400 is no match for these weapons that prince Ivan gave us".

Roscoe said smiling widely, his hand held a peculiar sword that had curves around the blade and had a dull edge. The sword was pitch black in black in colour but other than that appeared ordinary at a glance.

Marcus narrowed his eyes when he saw his green claw slowly becoming weaker and losing ground against the sword until finally it was pushed back. Marcus dished out a fierce leg sweep however, his opponent swiftly dodged it by jumping back.

After opening some distance from Roscoe, Marcus observed the former, more accurately the weapon he was holding. From what he could tell, his attack becoming weaker was due to the sword.

The weapon must have some ability that chips away at one's strength during collision.

"Father is right, that weapon indeed is bizarre. But that does not mean that it is omnipotent, if I can't touch the sword, I'll just have to target your body" Marcus thought inwardly before pressing forward once again.

A storm of punches and kicks assaulted Roscoe and forced him into defending.

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Seeing the scene of Marcus suppressing his enemy with just his combat skills, the crowd was in awe. The title of the greatest genius of Savannah Beast guild was indeed something that belonged to him.

Each of his attacks was ingrained with his experience and was extremely tricky that repeatedly targeted the vital spot of his opponent and gave him no chance to retaliate.

"AHH... this is getting annoying. [Black Hazard]" tearing himself away from his opponent, Roscoe brandished his black sword in a wide arc.

Immediately, the air around him seemed to darken a little and a black blade shadow that gave one chills was sent forth towards Marcus.

Marcus who thought about intercepting such a simple but changed his mind the last second and nimbly dodged it by stepping to the side. The Black blade shadow brushed past him and crashed onto the stage.

SHHHH... a black energy dispersed out of the area and corroded that part of the stage. Looking at this scene Marcus's eyes were grave. No matter what he couldn't allow this energy to hit him.

"Hehe, so you dodged it huh... so what, I can send dozens of those your way. Let me see how you dodge all of these" Roscoe cried out hysterically.

He swung his sword and send those blade shadows towards his opponent in droves. He knew that the difference in their actual battle strength was huge and if it came down to a frontal battle, he was sure to lose.

After all, his opponent was level 402, someone who had breached the level 400 barrier. His only chance to win against such an opponent was by making use of the advantage that he had and that was none other than the weapon prince Ivan had given him.

Before they left the kingdom of Blackthorn, they were each given an artefact or a weapon like his sword that marginally increase their power and help them go against opponents higher level than them.

Roscoe didn't think that he would be meeting Marcus, one of the strongest participants in this tournament on his first battle. But what of it? it seemed that he was needlessly wary of the latter, in front of the might of his sword, all his opponent could do was dance and dodge around helplessly.

The crowd spectating the match and hoping for an absolute suppression from Marcus, couldn't believe what was happening.

In front of their eyes, Marcus was forced to dodge left and right, his clothes were torn and his body which looked tattered was evidence that this was reality and the scene was actually happening. Whatever that black attack was, it was completely dominating Marcus.

Simon: "Isn't that..." Vouves: "....."

Brutus: "...."

The perceptive ones like Simon, Vouves and the guild leaders of the top five guilds were able to tell the nature of that energy apart. They were more befuddled than surprised as to how this participant was in possession of such a weapon.

After all, the nature of the energy the sword released was similar to dark attribute of mana, one of the four rare forms of mystical energy. Although it was far less pure and weak compared to dark attribute, it was unmistakably derived from it.

CHI... CHI...

As Marcus repeatedly dodged the attacks that showed no signs of stopping, the edges of his clothes were corroded and some of the energy seeped into his body draining him of his power.

BANG...

He materialised a dark green beast claw and counter-attacked; however, his opponent immediately backed away and opened a few meters distance from him. The other party knew that he would be in trouble and thus was avoiding close combat with Marcus.

"Dammit... making it needlessly hard aren't you. Tch, I planned on using this on those two, but I guess I have no choice".

Unable to get close to his opponent, Marcus mumbled. He stopped rushing towards his opponent and planted his foot on the ground.

"What is he planning to do?" Ivan furrowed his brows looking at the peculiar action of Marcus.

The latter was a warrior so most of his attacks comprised of close distance with a few medium range attacks. Even if the latter has a rare class that he was not very familiar with, this fundamental fact remained the same.

That is why, not him but all the spectators were surprised by Marcus's action except for the guild master of Beast savannah guild who had a calm face from start to finish.

"Using it now takes away the element of surprise in your future battle but I guess against such a persistent enemy you got no choice but to use it" Brutus said staring fixedly at Marcus.

Seeing that his opponent was starting to act different all of a sudden, alarm bells starting ringing inside Roscoe's head. He knew that he shouldn't give his enemy time for doing whatever he wanted to do but because in his attempt to avoid close combat with Marcus, he had opened too big of a distance for him to cover at once.

Even if it cost him quite bit of strain, he repeatedly send those black blade attacks in an attempt to disrupt the latter.

"If my attacks gets weaker the more it comes in contact with the energy around your blade, all I have to do is use an attack that your blade cannot touch".

Marcus sucked the air around him and his chest inflated a little. An emerald glow also appeared around his adam's apple and before anyone could even blink their eyes, he opened his mouth wide and roared.

ROOOOAAAARRR...

A loud coarse noise like that of a lion's roar came out of Marcus's throat and assaulted everyone's ears. The crowd hurriedly covered their ears, they felt like the whole world was crumbling down in front of them.

The barrier had no effects against attacks like that and did not provide any protection to them. Some of the weaker spectators, directly fainted after spewing out a mouthful of blood. If the condition of the audience who were seating so far away, was like that, one has to wonder what happened to the participant who was the main target of Marcus's attack.

Roscoe who hadn't predicted an attack like that would come at him, was caught unprepared. The roar like a tidal wave, easily passed through the multiple blade shadows he sent towards Marcus and hit him squarely.

It was as his opponent said, the energy around his sword might be able to weaken physical or magical attacks but an intangible attack like that was something his weapon couldn't do anything against.

Roscoe was hit squarely by the attack and at that moment his vision went blank and he could hear anything. The attack was so powerful that his eardrums had burst and he was bleeding from all his orifices.

After immobilising his opponent, Marcus easily dodged the incoming blade shadow and rushed toward his opponent. Up until now, Roscoe would never allow him to close this distance but because he was currently immobilised he could do anything.

"Gale Beast Claw...".

Marcus roared and sent forth a powerful attack that blasted his opponent right towards the audience stands.

CRACK... with a cracking sound, dozens of Roscoe's bones were broken and he spat out a mouthful of blood as he was sent flying.

BANG... his frame smashed onto a translucent yellowish barrier that protected the audience from the aftershock of the attack. Roscoe's body slid down the barrier and fell onto the floor below where he stopped moving altogether.

It was clear that he had lost consciousness after just a single attack from his opponent.

"Roscoe Ironwood is down for the count, Marcus Sarge from Savannah Beast guild Wins".

Everyone in the audience took a deep breath of air after such a shocking turnaround. From that initial loud roaring attack to the connecting claw attack, it did not even take a few seconds and before they could compose themselves, they saw Marcus's opponent get sent towards the barrier, heavily smashing into it.

Marcus who they thought was having difficulty against his opponent, had won after just a single exchange. But was it them or did he look somewhat unsatisfied by the result.

Marcus was indeed a little disgruntled, he had actually saved this skill to use against prince Denzel and prince Erwin. However, his first opponent of the third stage of the tournament, proved annoying enough for him to resort to use this skills.

Now that he had displayed such a skill, his opponents would naturally be worry about such an attack coming and have some guard against it. There was no way he would be able to defeat his opponent with just a single attack like how he did now.

Although, this victory was because his opponent was unaware of him possessing such a long-distance attack and hence was caught unprepared. Because of this, they couldn't muster an iota of defence before they were blown out of the stage.

Marcus glanced towards the area where Denzel and Erwin were seated before tearing his gaze away.

"Hmm that roar attack earlier could it be that he has... this young man does indeed have incredible potential. His disposition that does not cower even when faced with an opponent like you, is worth applauding. It's a pity that, he was born in a low tier kingdom such as this or else his future potential would have been something worth keeping an eye on".

Vouves said after observing Marcus.



"Eh? What is gramps saying?" Denzel asked seeing that the old man was blabbering something.

"Hoho, do you not see it. that participant on the stage was glaring daggers at you, it is obvious that he sees you as a rival"

"Is that so? A rival huh... hehe" Denzel smiled, there was a fire that wanted to immediately go down and battle an opponent like him inside his eyes.