

D. of Pride 361

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Feeling the severity of the situation, Lisa involuntarily nodded her head. Nonetheless, her mind was somewhere else 'Chuck, you cannot hurt that demon, he was the one who saved us'.

Back at the place where the violent storm was still brewing.

PUFF... GUGH...

Simon spouted out a mouthful of blood trying to prop his body up from the large gorge he had created on the ground. Visibility was extremely low with the dust still falling from the sky. The shockwave from the attack had pushed him thousands of meters back where his body skidded the ground and remained motionless for a while.

With the last attack, he had used every last bit of his mana and if it still did not manage to damage his enemy, then there was nothing he could do.

For a second, he thought about using the 200+ Elixir of the Sacred Sanctum that he had been buying ever since his dungeon started to produce a good amount of DP.

The elixirs were an extremely important item that would become the cornerstone for his growth and something he knew would become crucial for his future. The elixir of Sacred Sanctum was an item that could basically become his lifesaver and could turn around any situation and predicament he might find himself into in the future.

Using it right now, seemed like a huge waste and other than increasing some of his stats, the elixir won't be able to have much of an impact. In the end, he rejected the idea.

As he was sprawled on the ground unable to get up, many memories came crashing inside his head like a tidal wave. One of them was what Lucine had said right before she disappeared. She had gone out of her way to specifically mention the trail that they had gone through.

"If you want to become stronger, you might want to risk your life clearing the forbidden trail" was what she said. As absurd as it sounded, it was true that the forbidden trail did increase his level significantly in the few days he was inside.

if he had that much growth from just a couple of days of being inside, one could imagine what would happen if he spent a week, or even a month inside.

As enticing as it sounded, it wasn't gonna be that easy since even with the help of Lucine and Denzel, they were barely able to pass some of the trials. Simon did not even want to imagine what would have happened in the case that they failed one of the trials.

'Bear this humiliation in your heart and use it as a driving force to get stronger' he reminisced taking out a black hexagonal stone from his [Inventory].

It was also at this moment that he felt two auras lock at him. Needless to mention, it was from Godwin and Raven. At this moment, the both of them were standing in the air with illusory wings protruding from their back.

When Simon saw the unscathed appearance of Godwin, he couldn't help but groan internally and tighten his fists. Since it has come to this point, there was no other way than to use it.

"Allow me to deal it the death blow for you".

Raven said looking at the demon sprawled on the ground, bathed in the pool of his own blood. At this moment, his expression was extremely serious and there was no longer that condescending smile on his face.

But before Raven could proceed forward, Godwin extended his hands and created two mana swords that dug deep inside the demon noble's wings and pinned him onto the ground indicating that he was not done yet.

In the face of these powerful enemies, Simon at least wanted to stand on his own feet, his pride did not allow him to appear pathetic while sprawled on the ground and being looked down by them. Thus he willed his body to get up but his attempt to do so was met with Mana Swords that pinned his wings on the ground.

"I'll ask you for the last time, tell me demon what happened back in the Ghastly Winding Forest".

Godwin asked straining on every words. From his tone to his attitude, it could be seen that he was dead serious. Though it might have been effective had it been somebody else; However, the one he was up against right now, was Simon who became extremely stubborn at certain times.

Even while blood continued to flow out from his wounds and the burning anger raging within him, the cheeky smile never left his face. He looked more like glared Godwin directly in the eye and pointed his middle finger at him.

'You think you have me pinned?' Simon roared internally and used his immense willpower and his remaining strength to pull himself up. All the while, a CHII...CHIII... sound continuously came from his wings as he forcefully tried to rip his wings from the mana swords that pinned him to the ground.

His actions that suggested that he wasn't the least bit afraid of them, surprised Godwin and Raven. This was the first time in their countless adventures, that they met a demon who refused to bow down even in the face of death.

'As I thought so, this demon that does not fear death, cannot be left alive. Although it would hamper some of the plans of the guild leader, but keeping him alive would bring too much of a risk in the future' Raven mused, his eyes flashed with a hidden killing intent.

Right now, the demon was no threat to them; however, the same couldn't be said for the future. His willpower coupled with his unyielding temperament that did not cower even in front of death might actually allow him to rise in power in the future. A potential threat like that was better to be nibbed as early as possible.

"I see so you remain adamant to stay silent. Then there is no longer any need for this conversation" Godwin summoned his [Tempest Blade once] again and was just about slash the demon in half once and for all, when suddenly he felt multiple presences approaching this place from the direction of the city.

Baffled, he turned his head only to see a group of people who he was familiar with, coming towards this area.

"What is the branch president doing here?" Seeing the old man flying in front, Raven asked.

"Haha, this old man is here to settle some personal matters. What about Mister Raven and Godwin, what brings the two of you here?" the old man said indolently.

Raven's crafty-looking eyes narrowed a bit at those words as he replied "What a coincidence, we too have some personal matter we came here to settle".

At this moment, Chuck who was silent all this while spoke out "Lisa?! What are you doing here?". It was quite a surprise for him to see her here when she should have been in the capital.

Just like him when Lisa spotted him, she immediately rushed towards him and nestled in his embrace.

"Wow, two couples reuniting once again, what a dreamy scene. But do you mind taking it somewhere else, we are in the midst of something" Raven commented, snapping the two out of their daze.

"Ah!" Chuck hurriedly tore himself from the embrace, looking a little flustered.

Godwin was unbothered by their arrival, he was just about to swing his [Tempest Blade] towards the demon and finish what he started when a few people stepped in front of him.

"What are you doing? Move" Godwin asked, raising a brow towards the branch president who was silently standing in front of the path of his blade.

"I'm afraid, this old man can't step out of the way" the branch president smiled helplessly.

"Does the branch president intends on defending that demon even while knowing what it did to the capital? This demon not only made a huge mess by sneaking into our kingdom but also killed so many of our comrades" Raven on the side, had frigid cold eyes as he put his hands on his blades. "

If the word gets out that the branch president of our kingdom of Ellesmere is siding with the demon, do you know what kind of chaos you would create?" he pressed for more. No matter what, he cannot let the demon live especially after what he had managed to accomplish.

"Wait you can't kill him" Lisa cried out and joined her father who was barring Godwin's path.

The latter was surprised to see a member of his own guild oppose him; however, the one who was more surprised was Chuck who didn't know why Lisa was suddenly acting like that. Worried that Godwin might misunderstand; he stepped forward and tried to reason with her.

"Lisa what are you saying, he is a demon noble who is responsible for turning our capital upside down like that. Step aside from there".

Nonetheless, the girl did not step aside and only shook her head.

"I can't let you kill the demon who saved you and me that day," Lisa said, her voice quavering a little from the pressure Godwin and Raven exerted.

"What?!" Chuck couldn't help but utter in shock. After he woke up from that disaster he always asked her about the events of that day and how did they manage to escape.

However, no matter how many times he asked she never opened her mouth and always kept it a secret from him.

"I'm sorry, I wanted to tell you earlier but when I thought that how it might negatively affect you, I couldn't bring myself to tell you the truth" Lisa apologised.

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Lisa apologised, the reason for her keeping it a secret from him was because she understood Chuck's character the most. Once he realises that he was saved and that too by a Demon noble, a race that they considered as their enemy, he would be disheartened and it might even leave a shadow that he cannot come out from.

Even if it made her a little cruel to keep him away from the truth, she didn't want the talent of her man, his shine to diminish like that. Lisa though that she could keep it a secret from him; however when she heard that Chuck was taken along with Godwin and the others to hunt down the demon noble who was responsible for saving them, she couldn't keep herself out of it.

"W-Why are you telling this to me now?"

It was as she had expected, Chuck's mind was suddenly thrown into a disarray. He didn't know what he should do anymore. He was already feeling guilty knowing that the person he had travelled with all along from Mountmend to the capital, was a demon.

But now that he was made aware of the one who saved him was also the very same demon noble he was trying to hunt, his mind suddenly felt lost.

It was not only him, even Godwin was surprised when he heard what Lisa had to say. The [Phantom Blade] that he was about to swing down, trembled ever so slightly. After that event back in the ghastly winding forest where chuck's guild was almost completely wiped out, he made many investigations and assumptions.

One of them was that the demon noble, master of the newly emerged dungeon was one of the main perpetrators along with the seven swords guild behind the tragedy.

Feeling the hesitation in Godwin's aura, Raven was once again certain that he couldn't allow the demon to live. Not only was he very unusual from the demon noble they knew but was also able to turn his enemies into his ally.

Although he had no basis for that, but he had a feeling that the demon was not ordinary. Raven wanted to snuff this growing bud of concern within his heart, as soon as possible.

"Hahaha, what did I just hear, a demon saving humans? Demon Noble, a race that is hostile with us humans, suddenly acting all saintly and saving people? Do we really believe that? Lisa this is not the time to tell jokes".

Raven said trying to shift people's opinion away from what Lisa said about the demon.

"Are you saying that my daughter is lying? This old man can personally testify to it" the branch president said making those that were having a sprout of doubt in their hearts, consider her words once again.

The prestige of the old man couldn't be doubted, he was the branch president of the Adventurer's Association and one of the senior-most person in their kingdom commanding respect from hundreds of thousands of adventurers.

Even if it was Raven, one of the rising stars of their kingdom, he did not dare to challenge the authority of the old man.

"That's not what I'm saying old man. This demon noble had killed hundreds of our members and has now become a personal matter of our Sea god's Trident guild. Our guild master has also specifically commanded to apprehend the demon but since he was resisting, we simply made sure that it doesn't go anywhere" Raven asserted.

Although Godwin had covered it up, Raven who was watching their fight closely, saw it. The moment the two huge attacks clashed, Godwin had a trail of blood coming out of his mouth after he retreated back to dodge the aftershock.

Since the both of them were partners, it wasn't unusual for him to see Godwin bleed or injured while clearing dungeons. This small of an injury might be nothing for Godwin but the shocking thing was not the injury itself but the one who did it.

A Demon Viscount, someone whose power level wasn't even above level 400, managed to hurt Godwin who was above level 600. If he hadn't seen it with his own eyes, he wouldn't have believed it.

The fact that the demon was able to do so, was one of the reasons why he wanted to finish off the demon as soon as possible.

The branch president fell into a conundrum when Raven mentioned Sea god's trident, the head of the top five guilds and its guild master, Benny Beckerman. The adventurer's association in the kingdom of Ellesmere was in no position to contend with the private guilds who has years of accumulated resource and manpower.

The fact that the top five guilds hoarded most of the powerful adventurers of their kingdom of Ellesmere, proved it. This place was not the mainland, the Adventurer's Association branch in their kingdom did not have many strong adventurers who were willing to stay with the association and reject the enticement from the private guilds to join them.

The thing about the demon killing their members and it becoming their personal matter was clearly a craftily spun plot. The branch president locked his brows, he knew the kind of person Benny Beckerman was.

For a person as clever as him to send their branch members at the demon knowing fully well what would happen, if somebody said that this wasn't the situation he desired, he wouldn't believe them.

The thing about them apprehending the demon was bullshit, as long as the latter fell into their hands, his life and death would be dictated by them. There was no way the demon would be able to escape the Sea God's Trident guild once he fell in their grasp.

Seeing that Godwin was still pondering, Raven decided to take things into his own hands. He unsheathed the short swords made from the same material as Godwin's sword and rushed towards the Demon Viscount who was being uncannily silent for some reason.

"Mister Raven you cannot".

But before he could approach near, Lisa stood in front of him obstinate on protecting the demon. Ignoring her words, he circled around her but was stopped once again, this time by the adventurers the branch president brought.

Being blocked again and again, Raven was clearly irritated. He applied more power and sent the adventurers blocking his path, reeling back. He was one of the three tridents of Sea god's trident guild, the man who acquired the legendary [Phantom Night Assassin] class after breaching level 500, seven years ago.

How could these adventurers stop him if he wanted to proceed forward?

The branch president narrowed his eyes, he didn't expect Raven to suddenly take action. He was just about to step forward himself when he saw Chuck block Raven's path this time.

Not wanting to hurt his own guild member, Raven somewhat restrained his power at the last moment and clashed with the latter.

CLANG... unable to bear the power behind Raven's charge, Chuck was forced to take a few steps back. Nevertheless, his [Guardian Knight] class allowed him to stand tall like a boulder in front of the other party.

With a complicated expression, Chuck looked at Raven and said:

"Please wait Sir Raven. I know that demon has killed some of our members but it is also a truth that it saved my life. Please just this one time, let this demon go".

Godwin was surprised when he saw the action of the man, Chuck was bowing his head as he said that. Raven was conflicted, just like Godwin, he too was fond of Chuck. Had the matter been something else, he wouldn't hesitate to agree with the latter; however right now other than him, nobody else could see the threat the demon represented.

If they allowed the demon to grow, who knows what kind of calamity it might become. Their sea God's trident guild had already fallen out with him and had formed a deep grudge that cannot be rubbed off easily with the demon.

When Raven looked at those glaring crimson eyes that was filled with hatred and maliciousness, he had no doubt in his mind that the demon would seek revenge against their guild sooner or later.

As he saw it, it was for their own good that they nipped the disaster in the bud even if he had to fallout with them. Raven sighed, activated his [Phantom Night] skill and rushed towards the demon who looked like he was watching a good show.

The speed he erupted out with, was so fast that other than Godwin and the branch president, for everyone he seemed to have disappeared.

Brandishing his short sword, he activated a few more skills that changed the colour of his short sword to a bright yellowish-green. Raven was not playing around anymore and was completely serious to take down the demon noble.

He was just a few meters away from it when a voice stopped him in his tracks.

"Stop" unable to believe his ears, Raven turned towards Godwin who looked like he made his decision.

Godwin who was hovering in the air, stepped down and unfolded his illusory wings. He then looked towards everyone and said "Since it was that demon who saved Chuck and Lisa, a part of me wants to let it go".

When everyone heard what Godwin had to say, they momentarily became surprised but the next words that he said, brought them back to reality.

"However, it is also true that he killed dozens of my guild members, its bloodthirsty nature cannot be changed. Chuck, he may be someone who saved you once because of some whim but he is an enemy nonetheless".

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"Additionally, our Guild master has ordered us to subjugate the demon which as a guild member, you two are obligated to follow" Godwin emphasised in a commanding tone.

"But" Lisa wanted to say something but the former was yet to finish his words.

"As such the greatest compromise I can make is not killing that demon. I Godwin promise all of you that, nonetheless, it must come with us. This is the extent of the concession I can make. Is the branch president fine with that?"

Lisa looked a little unsatisfied, while the branch president wore an intense look of frown. He pondered about it for a bit before sighing helplessly. Even if he was the branch president of the adventurer association, this is the limit of how much he can help his daughter with her will.

He cannot not give face to a powerful adventurer who was destined to join the status of the rankers in the future. Thus, he backed out even though he knew his daughter wouldn't be happy with it.

CLAP... CLAP... CLAP...

As they were discussing all that, suddenly the sound of someone clapping rang out. When they turned their heads around, they saw the demon clapping while wearing a smile on its face. In their midst of conversation, they had almost forgotten that the demon was right near and could hear them.

"What is so funny demon?" Raven who was the nearest to the demon, asked.

"Hahaha, how is it not funny? Since when did you all start thinking that you can decide my fate? Who the fuck died and gave you the right to decide? Do you puny humans really think that you have the ability to keep me here?"

Simon declared with a coarse demonic voice, his face had that symbolic demonic smile of his.

"Just a bluff. Hmph, you think I don't know that powerful protector of yours is gone. Why isn't that girl helping you yet? Call her out, let this guild master also witness how we can't keep you contain here".

At this moment, a huge Air Engine could be seen approaching from the distant sky. At the helm, on top of the air engine was a bald man decked out in Mythril armour and carrying a golden spear in his hand.

The aura he realised was no less powerful than Godwin and he carried himself with an air of authority. The voice that just rang out, was from him.

As his figure became clearer, everyone was able to tell who he was.

'So he even came himself huh. It seems that there is no hope for the demon to escape today' the branch president thought as he glanced at the distant man. To be able to release this kind of domineering aura of authority, who could it be other than the guild master of sea God's Trident, the head of the top five guilds.

"Guild Master Benny" the branch president greeted.

Benny Beckerman glanced at the old man with bemused eyes before extending a greeting himself.

"So it's the branch president of the Adventurer's Association. I guess our movements these past few days have troubled you, please accept my sincere apology".

At this moment, the air engine stopped a few dozen meters away from them. Benny Beckerman, from his vantage point, observed everyone who was present there.

Godwin and raven nodded their heads, while Chuck and Lisa looked a little flustered as they bowed their heads. The rest found their bodies stiffen whenever Benny Beckerman's gaze landed on them.

After observing everybody, the guild master of the Sea god's trident finally shifted his eyes to the tattered and weary looking demon. There was no need for him to think why the demon was so battered; it must have battled with those two to end up like that.

After seeing that his job here was mostly done, he put down some of his worries. He had blockaded the fortress city of Volkan thinking that the demon would come from there, however, it turned out that the demon noble was actually travelling from the north-western side.

Good thing, Godwin and Raven were perceptive enough to rush to the city of Aqualin to intercept the demon or else he would have escaped them once he got through the city and into the northern mountains.

The fact that the demon would take such a long route, further ascertained his suspicions that someone was supporting the demon noble from behind.

'Is it the branch president? No, he won't do that since he owes me one. Who could it be then? Is it that battle junkie?' as his thoughts spun, from the corner of his eyes noticed the air around the demon was a little unusual.

Thinking that it was nothing, he took out his transmission conch and was just about to call the other guild members stationed in the Volkan city here when suddenly the space around the demon started distorting and behaving peculiarly.

All of the people present, were stunned by this sudden ripple in the space and in front of their astonished eyes, the body of the demon started undulating. It was only when a black halo appeared around the demon noble's body did they understand what that phenomenon was.

"Stop that demon, he is invoking a space magic".

Immediately, Benny Beckerman shouted out.

Raven who was the closest to the demon, unsheathed his short sword once again and plunged towards Simon. However, his blade passed through the black halo as if it was made of air. Raven's attack wasn't able to damage the black halo surrounding the demon at all.

"Physical attacks don't work in that case..." Benny Beckerman said clenching his golden spear tightly before hurling it towards the sky.

At that instant, the whole sky turned dark with black clouds suddenly looming over from nowhere. In the blink of an eye, the sky for hundreds of meters was covered by the dark clouds that were brimming with a frightening destructive energy.

Seeing this phenomenon, Simon smiled. No matter how powerful an attack the guild master of the Sea god's guild invokes, as long as it doesn't come down in time, it was useless.

He unclenched his hand and a hexagonal black crystal floated over. The distortion in the space, the rippling in the air and the black halo were all because he had activated the Return Transit Rock.

Normally, to activate the return transit rock, you would have to channel your mana inside it for a long period of time. Thanks to these people arguing and forgetting about him which bought a sufficient amount of time, he was able to activate the return transit rock without a problem.

RUMBLE... the sky trembled with a devastating energy so powerful that the land shuddered from it.

Seeing all of the lightning bolts gather at one spot, more specifically the spear, all of the people inside its range hurriedly retreated. Godwin manifested a few more mana swords and send it flying towards the black halo surrounding the demon noble; nonetheless just like Raven's attack it simply passed through it.

RUMBLE... at this moment, a huge column of thunder in the shape of a dragon peeked its head from the clouds. The dragon was made of red lightning and was so lifelike that one could even mistake it for a real one.

if one looked carefully, they would be able to see the golden spear in the middle of the dragon's head. The moment the lightning dragon formed in the sky, a never-before pressure descended onto the land and covered the onlooker's face with dread.

The might of the attack conjured by the guild master of the Sea God's trident, a man whose level was above 600 and who stood at the pinnacle of their kingdom, was displayed in front of them.

Forget about marvelling at it, the adventurers brought by the branch president and even Chuck and Lisa saw the full might of the person they call their guild master for the very first time.

"Thunder Magic Mastery- [Thunder Dragon Fang]" Benny Beckerman roared and dished out his strongest attack.

If physical attacks don't affect, then what about magic on the level of advanced tier. There was no hesitation in his attack, if the demon died then it died. If by chance it lived, he would be able to know the secrets of the forbidden trial ground.

ROOAAARR.. the huge lighting dragon opened its mouth and roared causing the land for miles to tremble before dropping down on the demon.

BOOOMM... a loud deafening sound reverberated across the lands and even reached the Aqualin city frightening its citizens.

The lightning dragon was like a huge bolt of red lightning connecting the skies with the land. The bolt of lightning was so bright that even from this distance, the people had to cover their eyes. In their hearts, they incessantly wondered what kind of monsters were fighting there.

Perhaps this was the first time in their life that they got to witness such a spectacle.

ZzzSssTtt... ZzzSssTtt... after the residual lightning died down, everyone in the area to their amazement saw a huge dark pit with an unknown depth appear where the demon should have been.

Everything around that area was scorched and destroyed beyond recognition; there was not even a trace of the demon to be found. No one knew if he had died or survived.

Benny Beckerman looked at the huge empty pit in consternation, now that he couldn't get the information from the demon, he could only try his luck onto the trail ground regardless of the casualties they would have to suffer.

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The forbidden trail ground that Benny Beckerman had read about in some ancient texts and writings that he found on the mainland, was said to be a place filled with danger and death in every step. However, despite all the dangers, what made it so enticing for the others was the numerous treasures that it held.

It wouldn't be weird for a guild as powerful as theirs to get wiped out there, that is why he wanted the information from the demon noble who came back alive from it. However, even after mobilising the entire strength of his guild, he wasn't able to catch the demon who was stranded alone in their kingdom.

Although it annoyed him to no extent, he had no other choice but to give up for the time being and change his plans.

The Sea God's Trident guild monitored the area for a couple of days but after finding no clue about the demon, they left the place. The events and the fight that happened near the Aqualin city would become a piece of huge news that would spread like a wildfire across the whole kingdom.

People would come and see the traces of destruction, get some information from the locals about the battle before drawing their own conclusions and spreading it to the rest of the regions.

The demon noble that managed to invade their kingdom, became a hot topic that would be discussed by every single individual of this kingdom.

He was not only able to turn their capital upside down but was also able to outwit the Sea God's trident guild who pursued him to the distant western borders of the kingdom.

Amongst the many rumours floating about him, some even go as far as to say that he has a strong subordinate capable of defeating a powerful Ranker and an officer of the Adventurer's Association. Others say that he was powerful enough to contend with Davis Hall.

With the word of mouth, each rumour was exaggerated to the point where the whole truth seemed to have become obscured. Before long, the Demon Noble and his dungeon, would become a piece of gossip that the people of the kingdom of Ellesmere talk about every day.

Adventurers would head towards the city of Mountmend closest to the ghastly winding forest. Some seek to dive inside the dungeon for its riches while others have their own motives in mind. Nonetheless, the dungeon Laplace would no longer remain an obscured dungeon known only around the remote north western region.

"Ugh" Simon groaned in pain, as he laid down on the ground completely exhausted. His eyes blankly stared at the sky and his body remained motionless for a while. "Hahahahah" suddenly he burst into laughter and continued to laugh out loud like a madman for a good long while.

When his laughter stopped a strong malevolent and evil aura burst out of his body like a broken dam. Simon extended his hand towards the sky and swore "I'll fucking kill those guys".

It was truly a close call, had the teleportation not activated by then, he might have died by that last attack from the guild master of the Sea God's Trident.

The thunder dragon summoned by Benny Beckerman was powerful enough to kill him instantly. Advanced magic, after all, was the pinnacle of an element and in the hands of someone high levelled, they would show an unimaginable amount of power.

This venture to the capital, finally made him come to term with himself and at the same time resolved any attachment he had towards humans. The illusion he had been harbouring inside his heart, was finally gone and he finally saw himself for who he was.

Simon chuckled, seemingly at nothing.

"That peculiar ability of that sword seemed to have finally dissipated" Godwin's sword that carried a special ability to delay or slow down any healing or regenerative abilities when cut by it. Fortunately, now that some time had passed and he was far away from them, his [Super Regeneration] skill finally kicked in, swiftly healing his wounds.

Simon also took multiple Elixirs of healing to increase the healing rate before closing his eyes and resting for a while. His body was so exhausted that even making light movements seemed an impossibility at this moment.

When he opened his eyes again a couple of hours had already passed. All of the wounds on his body had mostly healed and he had recovered more than fifty percent of his strength. Simon would have liked to rest some more; however, he was in the forbidden trials where danger lurks everywhere. He couldn't just relax his guard completely and focus on healing.

Since that was the case, he decided to survey his surroundings. Currently, he was in the middle of a vast wilderness with hot winds blowing from time to time. The sun overhead was in full heat, raising the temperature quite high. As far as his eyes could see, he was surrounded by the same scene.

"This should be the fourth trial"

The scenery here was quite different from the ones he had explored so far, thus it didn't take him time to draw the conclusion that it was the fourth trial.

Simon strained his senses trying to detect any enemies or monsters nearby. However, there was no one around. Although there were no presences around him, it did not mean that he put his guard down, on the contrary, being unable to sense any presence, made him alert even more.

Picking a direction, Simon travelled for hours taking a few minutes of break every now and then. During these past few hours, he had discovered that finding your direction here was an impossibility.

Just like the first trial, skills such as [Mental Map] or any other navigational skills didn't work here. Added that with the same scenery all around, it would be a wonder if he didn't get lost.

The forbidden trial grounds was a place that he had difficulty clearing even while he had the help of Lucine at that time. Now though he was all alone here and without any way to get back. The return transit rocks only allows a person to teleport in and out of the forbidden trail once before crumbling.

That is to say, if Simon wanted to return, he would have to find another transit rock.

"Seems like there is no other choice but to clear this trial," he said making up his mind. Though it is true that the choice to return here was something he had made in a moment of desperation, in some corner of his heart he wanted to come here again.

The reason for that being none other than the growth he had in the past few days while he was here. The forbidden trail ground was no doubt dangerous, a place where he would have to risk his life at every turn but so was the world outside which at every point reminded him of how important it was to have strength.

Without power even if you were innocent, nobody would hear you nor would you have the right to decide your fate. Without sufficient strength, you would only be trampled down upon by others more powerful than you.

Simon was sick of it, he wanted to become powerful as soon as possible and thankfully, the trail was able to help him.

After a while of cluelessly walking around, he stumbled upon an area that had plants that looked like weird Cactuses growing around. The reason for him calling them weird was because they were purple in colour and other than having a body similar to a cactus, they had a flower bud on top.

Another thing he noticed was that the cactus was huge, probably more than five meters tall. Simon was about to nonchalantly approach the cactus but maybe because of his prudent nature or just out of habit, he used [Analysis] on the plant only to get a big surprise.

The cactus that he thought was a simple-looking plant, was in fact a type of monster called Carnivorous Desertvine. They lay in wait for the prey to approach closer to them before opening their huge mouth to gulp down the prey or strangle them with its body.

When Simon looked at the details provided by his analysis, he was very surprised when he saw that its level was around 407 having multitudes of skills. It was a good thing that he did not approach it carelessly and used his [analysis] beforehand or else he would have become prey for that Carnivorous Desertvine to munch on.

As Simon was examining its skills, he noticed that the Carnivorous Desertvine had [Water Magic Nullification] as one of its skills. This means that water magic was completely useless against it.

Simon deliberated whether to fight it or go around it but when he saw that there were more than hundreds of them spread evenly across the distance, he choose to take his chance and see if he can defeat them.

No matter what, he has to explore that area and avoiding them every time seemed like a pain in the ass, plus if they were going to attack him, it would be best to know about their attack patterns and whether he would be able to defeat them or not.

Making up his mind, Simon slowly approached closer to it. When he was about three meters near it, the plant suddenly awakened and the bud on its top swiftly spread open to reveal a bewitching yet deadly-looking flower.

Race- Carnivourous Desertvine

Level- 407

Skills- [Sweet Scent], [Hyper regeneration], [Super Enhanced Defence], [Super enhanced Endurance], [Strangle], [Bite], [Water magic Nullification]

Inherent Skills- [Root], [Thorny Bpdy], [Vine Trap], [Acid Spray], [Needle Spray].

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The moment the flower blossomed, a sweet purple fragrance drifted over making Simon intoxicated to it. Fortunately, he was on his guard and hurriedly able to get out of its intoxication. Using a novice tier wind magic, he dissipated the intoxicating fragrance.

"So this is one of its skills [Sweet Scent] that it uses to attract preys towards it".

Seeing that its sweet scent failed to lure its prey towards it, the carnivorous desertvine next used the numerous needles on its body to spray Simon with it.

Simon used his flight skill to dodge left and right, he took out his crimson blade and deflected those needles that he couldn't dodge in time.

Each of the needles was so sharp that it raised goosebumps on his body. Other than that, the tip of the needle was also laced with something acidic that melted the ground and produced a burning sound.

[Needle Spray] and [Acid Spray] each of these skills would be disastrous and extremely painful if they hit him.

The Carnivorous Desertvine spun like a top and sprayed a few more rounds of those needles. By now the ground all around him was decorated with those needles. Nevertheless, the plant as if saying it was nothing, grew more of it in the blink of an eye.

Deciding that it was too risky to approach the plant with the threat of that needle spray coming at him at any time, Simon decided to see if he can fight it from a long distance. He conjured a few flame spears and threw them towards the cactus.

Though the desertvine tried to dodge it, Simon whose flame magic was only a few steps away from reaching the advanced tier, controlled it skillfully. The flame spears dug deep into the body of the Carnivorous desertvine resulting in an unexpected frenzied writhing from the plant.

Although it did not wail, from its action Simon was able to tell that his flame magic was working. But just like the elder treants he had met in the ancient treant territory back in the Ghastly Winding Forest, the carnivorous desertivine was able to regenerate from all the damage it suffered through the help of [Root] and [Hyper Regeneration] skill.

[Hyper Regeneration] was the higher tier of [Super Regeneration] while [Root] was a race specific skill that allows plant-type monsters to borrow the energy from the mystical veins beneath. As long as it borrows the energy from the mystical veins it would be a troublesome enemy to defeat.

Simon was reminded of how all his attacks were useless against those treants who were able to recover swiftly from that damage. Even Irene's advanced tier Permafrost magic and Bloodthorn demonic warhorse's dark magic were only able to delay their regeneration for a while.

Though unlike the elder treants, these desertivines did not have those super steel-like defences, they were a troublesome opponent on their own.

"Seems like if I want to defeat them I will have to the amalgamation magic of Electro and Flame and eradicate them from the roots".

As long as their [Root] ability was active, using the [Hyper Regenerative] ability of theirs they would be able to heal through any damage.

Though that may be the case, he was also not the same he was back then when he was fighting the Elder treants. His level was higher and his magic stronger. In fact, his electro magic had even increased up a tier and became intermediate tier Lightning magic.

However, Simon did not believe that he would be able to use the amalgamation magic of Lightning and Flame handily. Amalgamating magic of two intermediate tier magic was different than doing the same with novice tier magic. The difficulty, the risk and the power needed to achieve something like that was on a whole new league.

If it was so easy to amalgamate two intermediate tier attributes, there wouldn't be so few people in the world capable of using amalgamation magic. And from the 'Battle of the Finest' Simon was also able to understand that amalgamation magic can take different forms based on the insights and understanding of the elements.

Even if there were multiple people casting the magic with the same elements based on their understanding of the magic, they would be able to create a somewhat different magic. The magic created cannot be said unique but at the least, it displays the person's understanding of that magic.

For example, Connor Lantz from the Crimson Demolition Guild had mastery over Flame and Wind magic with flame magic being his prime focus. He was able to create an amalgamation magic that bolstered the prowess of his flame magic instead of one element complementing the other like Simon does.

In this way, it also goes to show how different the insights of Simon and Connor were when it came to the understanding of the same elements. Anyways, just because he was able to achieve an amalgamation between flame and electro before, didn't mean that he can do the same with lightning magic this time.

Simon could use his old Flame and electro combination to defeat the Carnivorous desertivine but he who knew the importance of strength wasn't satisfied keeping one of his newly evolved and strongest magic unused.

"Since this is the perfect opportunity, let me try it on you" Simon said getting out of the range of the plant. Only after he opened up a few dozen meters distance between them and saw that it had gone back to its hibernating state, did he sigh in relief and sat down.

To create a new amalgamation magic of Flame and lightning was easier said than done especially when the latter was a magic he got hold of not long ago. Though it was difficult, it was not impossible and Simon had just the perfect item for it.

Taking out an oval shaped white stone from his inventory, he grinned. The unremarkable looking thing in his hand was none other than the Serenity Stone. Before going out on this trip with Adalinda, Simon had made many preparations.

Naturally, most of them pertained to keeping his dungeon but some of them also included him. He dived inside the Serenity pond and took a couple of serenity stones that had newly formed before departing.

There was no need to even mention the usefulness of the serenity stone and how rare entering self-transient state was. Keeping the serenity stone on the ground, Simon first tried to feel the magic more closely.

,m He conjured flame magic in his left hand and lightning magic in his right and slowly brought it closer. The element on his left hand was giving him a feeling of wild and rampant, flames that wanted to devour and burn everything while the element on his right was like a fierce beast arrogant and powerful who wants to dominate everything.

When these two elements with vastly different natures came together, it wasn't hard to imagine them repelling each other. The feeling of resistance while combining them was so intense that Simon had his whole body perspiring.

Nevertheless, he kept going on and supplied them with his mana trying to achieve any reaction when suddenly they created an explosion sending him reeling back.

COUGH...COUGH... Simon coughed out a mouthful of blood, the explosion from the two elements negating each other had sent his whole mana in a state of turmoil. He sat cross-legged, calmed his mana and contemplated.

He sat like that for a while before reigniting flame and lightning on his left and right simultaneously once again. He tried bringing them closer but just like his first attempt they exploded resulting in another failure.

Simon kept on trying to combine the two elements again and again. Every time he failed, he would take some time to recover, contemplate and start it all over again. Seconds became minutes and minutes turned into hours.

BOOOM... flames crackling with lightning burst apart resulting in a huge explosion. From amidst the explosion, a tattered body with burnt marks everywhere was sent flying until it rolled on the ground for a couple of times before stopping.

Who else could the person be other than Simon? Currently, he had a painful yet excited expression on his face. After his repeated failures, he was finally able to prompt some reaction from the two elements.

At a glance, this attempt too seemed like a failure; however, Simon who tried to combine these two elements clearly felt their struggle to negate lessen a little. Although the negation had reduced by just a little, he was still happy that he was progressing.

It was true that achieving an amalgamation of Flames and lightning seemed a little vague at this rate; nevertheless, it was not a dream. It must be said that creating an amalgamation magic of two

intermediate tier elements, even if it was a person closer to level 500 they would find it very difficult.

Simon on the other hand had not even breached level 400 but had mastery over not only two, but three intermediate tier magic and was now even attempting to create a new amalgamation magic using his two most destructive elements.

If Vouves, the Royal Court Magician of the Sanguine Empire who was renowned across these regions as a powerful ranker and magician, saw this scene, his whole perception of genius, would turn upside down.

While it was true that some races including the demon noble had more affinity with magic, this level of mastery was uncanny and was downright abnormal.

The reason for Simon achieving so much so fast was because he was applying some of his previous world's knowledge here. He was by no means an unparalleled genius, in fact, Irene had also once told that Simon was not any genius but just a hardworking person who did not know when to give up.

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After recovering his mana, Simon did not get down to combining the two elements again and instead used the serenity stone. He did not use it sooner because the serenity stones were precious and he only had three with him.

Now that his understanding of combining the two elements had increased, he deemed it worthy to use one serenity stone to try his luck on the amalgamation magic. A transparent, inverted bowl like barrier appeared around him and he was soon covered with an aura that claimed his mind, cleared him of his unnecessary thought and increased his concentration.

Simon had entered the self-transient state. Flames ignited on his left whereas lightning appeared on his right. His hands slowly started coming together causing a repelling force to spread out which disturbed Simon's internal flow of mana, his mana lines.

But thanks to the serenity stone, his level of concentration was at its peak and he was soon able to calmly channel his mana once again.

ZZZzzzzz... the air started trembling and even the sky above the forbidden trail was affected. The mana around the surrounding was set into a turmoil and the very weather was beginning to change.

Thick grey clouds accompanied by winds, loomed over the sky and just when it seemed like they would turn into something they dissipated like they were never there.

[Weather Manipulation], a lost ancient tier skill that only a handful of people acquire after breaching level 500. It was an extremely powerful skill capable of changing the very weather in a way that further augments their power.

It was by no means a skill that should be displayed by a demon noble whose level was below 400. The lightning draconic serpent was able to use it because of its race and the little bit of powerful dragon bloodline that it possessed.

Simon was currently in a self-transient state and hence was unaware of the changes that he had created. Right now, all his focus was on the two intermediate tier elements on his two hands that showed an unusual calmness even when they were just an inch away from each other.

Perhaps, they might really combine this time and find an equilibrium? Simon was having these thoughts as he brought the elements closer and closer. However, how could it be this easy to combine two intermediate tier elements, not to mention both were of destructive nature.

Another huge explosion echoed out in this vast wilderness for the umpteenth time and a body rolled on the ground for dozens of meters before coming to a stop.

Sprawled on the ground, Simon blankly stared at the sky of the forbidden trial. This time, he even used a serenity stone and had the elemental riot in control. However, despite all that, this attempt too ended up in a failure.

Though Simon was disappointed a little, he wasn't discouraged. It wasn't like this entire endeavour turned out to be a failure, by attempting to combine the elements again and again, he was unexpectedly able to gain insights on the [Concurrent Chant] skill.

Thanks to his persistence for repeatedly trying to combine the two elements, he was somehow able to gaze into the foundation of the skill that Irene had once told him to acquire.

Just like [Mana Lines], [Concurrent Chant] is one of the basic or fundamental skills that one must acquire and further evolve them as they level up in the future to become truly strong. It's not just the

level that makes one strong, it is their skills and experience that they accumulate and train over the years, that becomes their foundation in the future.

For Simon who wanted strength, acquiring these basic, fundamental skills was a must. He got up from his seating place and started walking towards the Carnivorous desertvine.

One thing that he learned from his repeated failures to combine the two elements is that he cannot be impatient when it came to magic. Since he was not making any further progress, there wasn't any need for him to push things right now.

Besides, not being able to combine the two intermediate elements also meant that his insights on them were not enough for him to achieve that yet. Simon looked at the plant whose bud slowly spread open to reveal a hideous mouth and teeth.

Fortunately for him, he was presented with perfect opponents that he could use his magic on. The carnivorous Desertivines spread across this vast wilderness as far as his eyes could see.

"There is no need for me to waste time meditating when I can deepen my insights by fighting them," Simon said as he hurriedly opened up a sufficient distance between him and his opponent.

Flames lighted up on his left hand while Electro came to life on his right. That's right, although he had reached a bottleneck in his Amalgamation magic, he had not given up yet. He was trying to further deepen his understanding of these two elements by using the Amalgamation magic of Flame-Electro that he had already mastered.

Lightning was the intermediate tier of Electro, there was bound to be a few similarities between them.

Either way, he cannot just sit here and do nothing, to clear the trail the trail he has to proceed forward and for that, he had to defeat these numerous Carnivorous Desertvines blocking his way which can only be defeated by the strongest magic in his possession and that was the amalgamation magic of flame and electro.

Though he had the aid of Infernal Magic from his [A] tier Crimson Blazing Flame Blade, it wasn't his own power. Simon who knew the importance of building his own strength, he knew that he cannot always rely on his weapons to get him out of a pinch every time.

Flame and electro, two destructive elements that had enough power to destroy these pesky opponents from their roots. However, how could the desertvine allow him to simply complete such a powerful spell?

Feeling the distortion of mana in the air, the Carnivorous desertvine reacted by writhing its body and firing the numerous needles on its body towards him. Not only that, it even threw acid from its flower that was also its mouth.

Even though it had low sentience, it could still tell that the magic being conjured, was dangerous and could threaten its life.

Simon dodged left and right, back and forth. That right, Simon was dodging the attacks that was trying to hinder him from conjuring his magic. Previously, when he used to cast amalgamation magic, he would need multiple seconds to even a couple of minutes based on the intensity and size of the magic.

Additionally, he would have to stay still and focus his complete attention on the magic. The last time he used the amalgamation magic of Flame and electro on the Elder Treants, he needed the protection of Irene and the Bloodthorn Demonic Warhorse to guard his body until he completed the magic.

After all, amalgamation magic needs a large amount of mana and focus to conjure, if one wasn't careful or attentive enough the magic might even self-destruct harming the caster in the process.

Now though, he was casting the amalgamation magic and dodging the attacks from the Carnivorous Desertvine all at the same time.

Since he had gained some insight into it, he was trying to acquire the skill by forcing himself into a situation where he had no other choice but to do it.

Flames carrying extreme heat swirled around like hands like a vortex followed by a swift purple light that had a threatening intensity to it. Slowly, these two elements started equalising and combining together.

ZZZssssTTt at that moment, the very space started becoming turbulent and a heavy pressure descended onto the land.

Slowly, the crimson flame mixed with purple, started taking the vague shape of a dragon. The carnivorous desertivine writhed more, it could sense the powerful magic that was on the verge of being completed.

ROAR, the dragon that materialised, roared. Forcing even those desertivines that were in the distance, to wake from their slumber.

The Amalgamation magic, Electro-Flame Mastery [Flame Lightning Dragon] was many times larger and more powerful than when he had used it against the Elder treants.

It was not only more animate and destructive, but it also packed more mana. The might of this magic couldn't be compared with its past self. After all, Simon's level was not only higher now, he also had many new and improved skills and his understanding of the elements was also greater.

The Desertivines in the distance, writhed in panic showing how much fearful and wary they were of the magic. Nonetheless, they couldn't do anything since Simon was out of their range of attack.

Though it wasn't like Simon was able to conjure the magic unharmed, multiple needles had dig deep inside his body, he was bleeding severely and his skin was scarred by the acid. No matter how you look at him, he was clearly at worse just trying to dodge the attacks from a single desertivine.

Even though he was suffering and bleeding so much, his face had an excited and cheeky expression plastered on him. That was because, he could feel that he was incredibly closer to acquiring the [Concurrent Chant] skill.

ROOOAARRRR... a devastating roar mixed with Flame and electro echoed out, as the magic finally completed itself. Space distorted like crazy in the wake of the thirty meters huge dragon and the temperature around the wilderness which was already high, rose even higher to the point that the ground felt like a hot pan.

The moment the magic was completed, Simon willed it towards the cactus in front of him.

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CHIII.. the Carnivorous desertivine desperately tried throwing needles and everything at the crimson dragon only to have all of its attacks burned into nothingness. The dragon made from the amalgamation magic of Flame-Electro, opened its mouth and passed through the desertivine, destroying and devouring it into tiny cinders.

In front of the might of the new electro flame magic, the [root] skill wasn't able to achieve many effects. Though that wasn't all, after devouring one of the desertivines, only 20% of the power of the crimson lightning dragon had dissipated as it flew towards the other carnivorous desertivines nearby.

Just like the first one, all the other cactuses were immediately devoured by the magic unable to even muster up a resistance. It was only after decimating five level 407+ Carnnivoures desertivines that the magic completely dissipated.

The magic not only displayed how effective it was against the plant type monsters, but it also showed how much improvement Simon had made after that day.

Haa... Haa... Simon took hurried breath of air, with his vision that was quickly becoming blurry, he saw his attack taking out five of those cactuses before dissipating. Relieved, his exhaustion and pain caught up to him making him unable to support his body any longer.

THUD... he fell on the ground. His sight was getting dark and his regeneration was starting to slow down all of which hinted that he was poisoned. If he didn't take care of the poison soon, he might even die.

Thus, Simon hurriedly bought an elixir that healed all kinds of poison from the shop and gulped it down.

"That was too close, my HP almost ticked down to red" sprawled on the ground, he muttered. If Irene was here she would have sighed in exasperation and berated him for being too reckless.

Simon knew that he was being impulsive and rash; however, he who was made aware of how important having strength was in this world, knew that he won't be able to become strong without putting his life on the line.

Simon did not want to be trampled or be called weak therefore he had no other choice but to continue on this path of his.

It wasn't like he was being thoughtless; he had a form of plan in mind and knew that he was very close to acquiring the [Concurrent Chant] skill. He neither had talent nor was he a genius, if there was any defining characteristic about him, that would be his persistence.

After taking a rest to heal his wounds and restore his mana, Simon started walking towards the Carnivorous Desertivines once again. Why was he doing that? that was because he had no other choice. He had walked this wilderness for hours and this place was the only area that was full of monsters.

Given the peculiarity, Simon believed that a path that would lead him towards the fourth trial was present somewhere here. In any case, if he wanted to move forward he had no other choice but to defeat these plants.

Seconds became minutes and minutes turned into hours. Just like that, a day passed by. During this time, Simon hunted down the Desertivines, took rests in between and proceeded forward. Much like what he was used to doing back in the Ghastly Winding Forest, his time here was mostly spent grinding.

Since the enemies are all above level 400, they gave him a delicious chunk of experience allowing him to reach level 362. That was not all, his understanding of the lightning attribute was also deepening further and further from his battle with the carnivorous Desertivines and he would every so often try to amalgamate the two intermediate tier elements.

Though it failed still now, he knew that he was making progress. Additionally, he felt like he had a clear image of the [Concurrent Chant] now and it would manifest as one of his skills in his status any moment now.

Simon wasn't wrong, after only two hours he was able to acquire the skill much to his delight. The [Concurrent Chant] just like his [Mana Lines] skill was a Lost Superior tier and had the potential to reach the legendary tier.

There was no way he wouldn't be delighted after getting the two skills Irene had tasked him to acquire before reaching the rank of a Demon Earl. However, his delight didn't last long when even after a day and a half, he wasn't able to find any inkling of what the fourth trial was all about.

"It can't be that the trail wants me to eradicate all of these cactuses right? Does it think I'm its gardener or something?".

Simon made a pun, he was starting to get annoyed after making no progress with the trail. By now, he had delved quite deeper inside the territory of the Carnivorous Desertivines and yet there was no clue as to what he should do in this vast wilderness.

Even the levels of these cactuses were starting to appear was getting higher and higher at around 450- 500. Although he was yet to meet any evolved form of these Desertivines, it did not make them any less difficult to deal with.

After preserving on for a few more hours, he finally saw some changes in his scenery. In front of him was a peculiar stone structure that looked like a memorial at a glance, stationed in the middle of the wilderness.

All around him, other than the recurring Desertivines, this was the only unusual thing he found. Thinking that the stone structure would hold some clue towards the fourth trail, Simon approached closer.

From what he could tell, the stone structure was very old with cracks and decay everywhere. As Simon was inspecting the structure, he involuntarily touched it and at that moment, a window prompt appeared in front of him.

[Fourth Trial- Find the Glistening Jewel from all of the three Tomb of the Starved. Warning, Ozymandias' powerful curse lingers around to this day and will try to harm any and all who are seeking to piece the crystals together. Once entered, you cannot leave the temple until it is cleared or you become one of the starved]

[Do you want to start the trial? YES/NO].

GULP... Simon gulped, after spending a day and a half wandering this endless wilderness, the fourth trial was finally near his sight. But rather than looking happy, his face was more dire than before.

There was no other reason for that other than the text that was written in front of him. This was the first time, the trail was warning him of something, his instincts were telling him that it would be anything but easier.

Unlike the last time when he had Lucine and Denzel backing him up, this time he was all alone where even a single mistake might cost him his life.

Simon deliberated for a while before pressing the YES button. In any case, if he wanted to leave this trail, he had to get the return transit rock and to get them he has to proceed with the trial.

The instant he pressed YES, the land around him started trembling, and the sands around him shifted to reveal a small part of the tomb. From this, one could tell that the temple was buried underneath and from its design, it seemed prehistoric.

The part that surfaced, was the very corner of the temple and it only had one door and a passage that led deeper inside. Simon took a deep breath of air, draped over a serious face and unhesitatingly jumped in.

The moment he jumped in, the land started shifting again and the temple disappeared underneath the vast wilderness once again.

The passageway was dark and arid; however, it was no problem for Simon since he could use the Flame magic. He ignited a small fireball in his hand and used it as a torch to navigate his way forward.

After what seemed like a minute or two of walking, the passageway suddenly opened to reveal a huge altar made of bizarre stone. There were some ancient writing and runes on the altar which might have meant something but since Lucine wasn't there to translate it for him, neither was the tier of his [Language Comprehension] skill high enough for him to understand what it meant.

Beside it, were two huge doors that led towards the other areas of the tomb. Simon looked around him and only sighed in relief when he saw that there was no such thing as a torchlight that can be used as a countdown.

He stood in front of the altar and inspected it, trying to see if he could decipher anything. However, he soon gave up seeing that it was all just a wasted effort.

The absence of Lucine and his inability to read these letters, made him realise how important raising the tier of his [Language Comprehension] was. Though he knew it, he had no idea of where and how to even begin trying to evolve it.

Should he just learn some ancient texts or would it evolve automatically once he comes in contact with more of these texts? Anyways, now was not the time to think about all that.

There were two doors in front of him, the logic dictates that he opens one of them. But then again, he had no idea which door leads to where and if he was making the right choice or not. If the doors were like the second trial, then choosing the wrong option might spell doom for him.

Simon sighed, leaving everything to fate, he placed his hands on the door on the right. Immediately, the numerous runes on the stone door lit up and with a light tremor spread open. The dusty and arid air inside, indicated that the temple hadn't been in use for a very very long time.

When Simon entered inside, he was greeted by a huge hall the size of a stadium. Like a catacomb, there were human-sized rectangular holes all around the hall and on the other side of the place, was a big fireplace on top of a small elevation.

The moment Simon stepped inside, a window promptly appeared in front of him.

Name:- Simon

Race:- Demon Viscount

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

Stats:-

Level:- 362

HP:- 47,477

MP:- 67,037

Strength:- 2986

Defence:- 3186

Agility:- 3710

Magic:- 4110

Endurance:- 3348

Luck:- 2224

Skills:- Language Comprehension, Analysis, Mental Map, Flame Magic Mastery, Gale Magic Mastery, Lightning Magic Mastery, High-Speed Thought Processing, High-Speed Regeneration, High-Speed Flight, Super Enhanced Strength, Body Enhancement, Fire Resistance, Wind Resistance, Electro resistance Pain Resistance, Blunt Damage Resistance, Sense Presence, Hide Presence, Demonic Eyes, Super Enhanced Agility, Super Enhanced Endurance, Super Enhanced Magic, Super Enhanced Defence, Minimal Mana Consumption, Sharpened Senses, Mana Lines, Concurrent Chant,

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

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

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[You have entered comb of depraved. Objective- Survive the ten hordes and keep the fireplace ignited. The moment the fireplace goes out, the powerful curse of Ozymandias will activate strengthening all the creatures whose alignment lies with evil].

Right after he read the instructions, the entire hall started trembling. The trial did not even give him enough time to compose himself before creatures that looked like rotten corpses, dropped down from those numerous holes on the wall and immediately started running towards the fireplace and throwing themselves in it.

Looking at this scene, Simon was in a state of daze, trying to understand what these corpses were trying to do. Throwing themselves in the fireplace deliberately... at that moment, he saw the fire in the fireplace flicker and dim a little.

"No way are they trying to..." at this instant, he finally understood what these creatures were trying to do. They were trying to snuff the fire out by piling their bodies on top of the fireplace.

Simon recalled the last few lines of the instruction. [The moment the fireplace goes out, the powerful curse of Ozymandias will activate strengthening all the creatures whose alignment lies with evil].

He did not know what this curse was, but he knew more than to ignore it. Simon ran towards the corpses, took out his Crimson Blazing Flame Blade and started hacking and slashing towards them.

No matter what, he cannot allow the fireplace to go out. This was just the first horde, there were many more to come. After he pushed them away from the fireplace, he took this opportunity to analyse them with his skill.

Race- Common Zombies

Level- 200,

Skills- Insatiate, Super Endurance, Super Strength, Claws, Bite.

The monster this time, was none other than zombies who were supposed to be a low level mob in many of the games from his previous world. However, the ones in front of his were all around level 200 and at a glance, there were more than hundreds of them and that number was still increasing.

What astonished Simon was that even after being slashed in half by his sword, these zombies were still alive. He used Flame magic to burn them although it worked, it took a lot of time for them to succumb to their death. Their HP was just abnormally high.

"It can't be that their weakness is the same in this world too," Simon remarked observing the zombies. This time, instead of targeting their bodies, he used his sword to drill a hole or bisect their head cleanly.

Like a puppet that has lost its string, the zombies immediately stopped moving.

'It's a bit cliché but I guess zombies as a general have the same weakness no matter the world' he thought internally.

Now that Simon knew how to dispose them off quickly, he stood in between them and the fireplace swiftly ending any zombies that came near. Time passed just like that and before Simon knew it, he had defeated more than three hundred of them.

The numbers were too absurd but what was more absurd than it was the fact that it was just the first horde. There was still nine more hordes remaining. While Simon was taking a break to recover his lost strength, from the corner of his eyes he saw the fire of the fireplace dim by a whole lot.

Panicked, he swiftly approached the fireplace only to find that there was nothing wrong with it. Simon carefully observed the fireplace, he was sure that the light of the fireplace had dimmed a little and if to prove him right, it dropped again after a while.

[The second wave will start shortly, timing until it arrives- 30secs].

,m Right now, he was in no mind to pay attention to the alert that had popped in front of him as all his attention was currently on the fireplace which for some reason, was dimming down.

Was it set like that or was there some reason for it ding out like that? Simon did not know but what he knew was that the fireplace going out was bad news for him. By the time he could think of anything, the thirty seconds had already passed and zombies were starting to drop down from those numerous holes on the wall.

What was different about them was their levels were around 230 and some of them were a little unique with a few more skills.

Feeling the advent of the zombies behind him, Simon turned around. Since he did not know for what reason the fireplace was dimming down, he could only put it aside for now and concentrate on the situation at hand.

In any case, he could think of some solution after he was done with this wave. Just like usual, the numbers in which the zombies arrived was so absurd that for a second Simon thought that they wanted to drown this place with just their numbers alone.

SLASH...SLASH... with every slash from his sword, a head would drop down. The zombies other having a high HP and endurance, were nothing special if their weakness was targeted. They had no techniques whatsoever and weren't using their brain at all.

Disposing them and not allowing them was an easy task or so he thought. However, he couldn't be any more wrong. This time the horde not only consisted of normal zombies there were also some uncommon ones mixed in between.

They wore helmets and gears around their body and moved in a way that was much more agile than the rest. Simon identified a few amongst the crowd and took them out when they approached closer.

While clashing against them he noticed that unlike the rest, they were clearly a little sentient. Others were trying to simply drown him with their numbers, clawing and trying to bite. However, the uncommon ones mixed themselves with the crowd and only attacked when he dropped his guard.

Though that might be the case, dispatching them was still easy for Simon as their level was still not high enough to threaten him. Half an hour later, there were heaps of corpses all around the hall.

Huff...huff...

Simon took deep breaths of air as he sprawled himself near the fireplace, he had a few minutes of window to recover some of his spent energy and prepare himself. This time the second horde consisted of more than five hundred zombies and while it may be true that their levels weren't high enough, they were still a huge pain in the ass when one considers their numbers and the fact that he had to protect the fireplace behind him.

This was still the second horde and the number would keep on increasing. He could feel his mana as well as his stamina depleting at a fast rate after every horde. There was no condition or special effects in this trial, it was simply due to the number of enemies he had to defeat.

Nevertheless, Simon wasn't demoralised, on the contrary, he looked at the fourth trial as a training. He wanted to use this opportunity to learn how to adjust his energy and use only the minimum to defeat the enemies so that by the time the last horde arrives he still had plenty of energy to spend.

The fourth trial was not all bad, although the numbers of the enemy was a problem the fact that they provided a bountiful experience cannot be denied. In just the span of an hour or two, Simon had levelled up by a total of five times.

Though this might be beyond the expectations of the one who set the trial, thanks to the fragment of pride, the experience he got after defeating every zombie was bolstered many times.

Lying on the floor, instead of despairing about the upcoming hordes, Simon couldn't help but have his expectations rise up and his blood boil with exhilaration. If there was anything worrying him, that would be the dimming light of the fireplace.

As Simon was waiting for the next horde to arrive, from the corner of his eyes, he spotted a small crimson bead. Intrigued, he approached the bead and tried inspecting it with his [Analysis] only for his eyes to widen the next second.

That is because the description of the crimson bead said that it was a trial item.

Simon grabbed the bead that was as big as a marble and contemplated. There definitely had to be a reason for the bead to be here and the analysis telling him that it was a trial item further solidified this conjecture of his.

"But what could it be used for? Damn if only the [Analysis] provided a little more information..." Simon cursed, on top of everything, he also had to solve what purpose these beads served.

As he was busy deliberating what it might be, the third wave arrived and just like he had predicted, the numbers and levels in which they appeared were much more higher than before.

The average level of the zombies was around level 250 with many uncommon and special zombies in the mix. Seeing the horde, Simon snapped out of his thoughts and kept the bead in his space ring.

It seemed that it would take some time for him to figure out what it was used for. He propped himself up and engaged his enemies.

SLASH... SLASH even if their levels were higher his [A] tier sword was still able to cleanly bisect their heads. Simon used his sword mastery skill and made short work of them while trying to regulate his energy and keeping his expenditure minimum.

With so many hordes yet to come, he cannot just burn out at the start and has to learn pacing his energy.

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He was having these thoughts as he held down the zombies from proceeding towards the fireplace when suddenly he saw one of the special zombies jump from amidst the crowd and dive towards the fireplace.

The power from its jump and its sentient mind that took advantage of when Simon was inattentive, indicated that it was totally different from the common and uncommon zombies he had fought until now.

"Making me spend unnecessary energy are you?" Simon said conjuring a flame spear towards the special zombie.

He thought that might do the trick; however, the next second he was amazed when he saw how the special zombie dodged the flame spear mid-air.

"What?!".

Simon couldn't help but utter out loud. The special zombie's back was clearly turned against him and he shouldn't be in any position to see his attack than... how? As if to answer his question, the back of the special zombie's head grew an eye that was extremely hideous to look at.

After an unsuccessful attempt to dive towards the fireplace, the special zombie redirected its attention towards Simon and bared its fangs trying to bite and claw at him.

Simon did not have to worry much if the zombie was just targeting him, but the problem was that there was not only one special zombie. Mixed into the crowd, there were quite a few special zombies who were jumping here and there trying to dive towards the fireplace.

"This is getting annoying" Simon commented and used his crimson bale skilfully to puncture a hole in the head of one of the special zombies. At that moment when the body fell to the ground, he noticed a peculiar glint from inside its body.

Since he did not have time to investigate the thing carefully, he made a mental note of it. The zombies came at him in droves and in frenzy, their intention was no doubt to tear him apart and snuff the fire in the fireplace out.

Special zombies tried jumping here and there trying to use any and all opportunity to dive into the fireplace or to kill him while the uncommon and common zombies just bombarded him with their numbers.

Nonetheless, Simon refused to move out of their way and stood tall, he kept every wasteful movement to a minimum and only used enough mana and strength necessary to slay his enemies.

The experience he was collecting from this trail, was crazy whether it be combat experience or his level, both were showing a sharp incline in growth. The numbers in which the zombies appeared on the third horde, was absurd and it took more time and effort to kill them.

After an hour or so, the piles of bodies on the hall, made a small mountain. Seated on the platform where the fireplace was, Simon was looking at a crimson bead radiating a strong fiery light. The crimson bead on his hand, was something that he had scavenged from one of the bodies of the special zombies.

He extended his hand and from the inventory and took out another similar crimson bead.

"So the bead that I had found after the second wave, must have been dropped by a zombie. Since I was too busy slaying them, I might have not paid enough attention" Simon surmised.

He had checked all the other bodies, and couldn't find any other beads on them which meant that these two beads were the only ones that had spawned during the wave.

Now that he knew where they spawned from, the question of what their purpose was, still remained. Simon pondered, but before he could think any further, his eyes suddenly went towards the flickering flames of the fireplace.

The light coming out of the fireplace was very dim and it looked like it could go out any second. Even though he did not allow a single zombie to drop down on it and disperse the flame after the first round, the light coming out from the fireplace was still dying out.

Recalling the last few instructions before the trial started, Simon frowned. He cannot allow the fire to die out or else some kind of curse will trigger that will strengthen his enemies. He tried using his own flames to elicit some reaction; however, it was all for nothing.

While he was pacing back and forth pondering intensely, he suddenly noticed that the shine of the crimson beads got brighter the more closer he got to the fireplace. At that instant, an idea popped in his head and he tossed one of the beads inside the fireplace.

[Trial Item] this was the description he got when he used the analysis on the crimson bead. He did not what would happen if he did something like that but it was worth the try now that the fireplace was about to go out.

In any case, the crimson bead was a trial item and where would he use it if not in the trial.

The moment, the crimson bead came in contact with the flames inside the fireplace, it erupted into brilliant light and became the fuel that kept the flames burning. The fireplace that was about to die out, started shining brighter after the crimson bead was tossed into it.

"So that's what its purpose was" Simon muttered. Thankfully, his idea had worked out and the crimson bead did exactly what he thought it would. Now that the fireplace was stable, he sighed a breath of relief and played with the other remaining crimson bead.

Now that he knew what the purpose of this bead was and how to get it, new questions popped inside his head. 'Did the bead spawned with zombies every round?' 'how long can these beads last' and so and forth.

He had many questions whose answers he knew, he would get with time. After a minute or two, the fourth horde arrived.

The fourth horde numbered more than eight hundred with many uncommon and special zombies in the mix. Their levels were around 280 and little by little they were starting to become a problem.

Although Simon tried his best, it still took him an hour and a half to completely dispose of all the zombies of the fourth horde. If he didn't have to worry about saving his strength for the upcoming hordes that would be more powerful than the previous, he would have used powerful intermediate tier AOE magic that uses an enormous amount of mana to defeat them.

However, since he was thinking ahead and pacing himself, he couldn't just go all out. Anyways, the fourth horde showed him the answers to some of his questions.

First, every horde only spawns one crimson bead which is mainly with the special or uncommon zombies. There is no other way to find them other than defeating them individually.

Secondly, the crimson bead after you toss it inside the fireplace only lasts around two hours or so before it starts dimming down again.

The flame in the fireplace was still there, but Simon could see it dimming down little by little. This was a problem, with every horde the time it took for him to clear it only kept on increasing. His level and strength was no doubt increasing at a fast rate but so was the level of these zombies.

If it kept on going like that, it would take more than three hours by the time the eighth or ninth horde arrives.

"It cannot go on like this... I must find a better way to defeat them" Simon clenched his hands and resolved himself.

The fifth horde arrived and then the sixth. Simon was lying on the floor beside the fireplace, huffing and puffing for air. The light of the fireplace drew a crimson hue on his face showing how exhausted he was.

By now, the best clearing time he could achieve was around two hours, far from what he considered an ideal timing.

The sixth horde was unlike the previous hordes where the wave mostly consisted of common zombies with some uncommon and special zombies in the mix. That was not the case any longer, the hordes now consisted of thousands of uncommon zombies, with special zombies and even unique zombies showing up.

Yes, there were new types of zombies that was identified as unique zombies by the [Analysis]. They not only had different appearances, but even had some annoying skills such as [Acid Spray], [Wind Blade], [Cut resistance], [fire resistance], [Charge] and so on...

Though these Normal skills might not be a problem for Simon, their levels were definitely starting to be. The sixth horde consisted of uncommon zombies with an average level of around 330.

Up until now, he was able to defeat the common zombies with a single slash of his Crimson Blade however; the uncommon zombies took a little more effort not to mention the special and unique zombies who were able to tank quite a few hits.

To be honest, the unique zombies were a pain in the ass with how sentient they were. They not only leveraged the annoying skills they have, they even knew when to attack and retreat, unlike the uncommon and special ones.

Simon did not know how many times in the course of the sixth horde, he was forced to use his magic on the unique zombies. Even if he was a demon viscount with far more stats than an average

human, he also had a limit which he knew he would hit soon if he continued to expend his mana and strength like that.

This conundrum and the window of time till the next horde arrived compelled Simon to think and find an efficient way of defeating these zombies so that he lasts till the tenth wave.

Various events and memories floated up to his mind and just when the seventh horde was about to arrive, an answer finally dawned onto him.

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Simon remembered the battles that he had watched in that tournament back in the capital. While it was true that the events back then had left a mark on him that he wouldn't be able to easily forget, on the bright side it served as a good learning experience from him.

The tournament especially, allowed him to see how humans fought. Their fighting style was mostly based around the class they had and their unique way of using skills to outsmart their enemies.

Mages had their own way of fighting while Assassins and warriors have their own. Even high-levelled humans like the royal court magician of the Sanguine empire and the officer of the Adventurer's Association, were not an exception.

In any case, that was how humans fought; however, he was not a human but a demon noble. Demon nobles have no such concept of classes, their race was blessed with good overall stats and a gift for magic that made them strong.

But herein lies the problem, Simon had never seen a high-ranking demon noble fight. Sure he had once fought with Gelgar, but he was just a Demon Viscount with a big dream and an overinflated ego. He was no help at all.

[20secs remaining before the seventh horde arrives].

Simon opened his status window and glanced at his stats, it was true that his magic stat was the highest among all the other six stats followed by his Agility and Endurance. His Strength stats was not up there but if he compared his strength with other warriors with rare classes around his level, it was no way inferior.

On the contrary, thanks to his racial benefits and the points he gains after each level up, his stats might even be higher. He was not lacking in the stats then... as he thought till here, he remembered how good Denzel was with the sword.

It was not just pure stats that the boy was using, it was technique. At that moment, Simon finally realised what direction he should make advancement towards.

His sword Crimson Blazing Flame Blade an [A] tier sword and one of his strongest trump that still remains till this day to be used till its full potential. An [A] tier sword, how many people in this entire world of Althaea can boast that they have such a sword in their possession.

It not only had an unparalleled sharpness, but it also bestowed its user with additional stats and skills. Up until now he only used the sword for the skill [Infernal Magic Mastery] that it bestowed. However, the sword had much more than this to offer.

"Sword techniques" Simon recalled his battle with Godwin, the latter used skills in a perfect harmony with his sword techniques.

The reason for him not being able to cull these zombies easily even while having a major advantage in stats, was because he had neglected his training in the sword.

Even though the crimson sword bestowed its user with [Sword Mastery] it was just a normal skill. 'The two of them definitely had the evolved tier of this skill' Simon thought internally as he tightly clenched the crimson sword in his hand. He was in a situation where he must sparingly use his magic, he might as well use this chance to try to master the sword and acquire the [sword mastery] skill.

Simon needed any kind of advantage he could against these hordes of zombies. While thinking that, he stepped forward.

The seventh horde was finally here. Amidst the wave of uncommon zombies, he spotted the unique zombies that had given him a hell of trouble previously. Brandishing his sword, he expanded more on the feeling when he activated the [Sword Mastery] skill bestowed by the sword.

His senses started spreading out, his surroundings got silent and the sword became a part of him. Simon's aura at this moment, became as calm as a lake.

Thinking that it was an opportunity, the unique zombie charged towards him. It had stone like hard skin, a hulking body and a disproportionate figure. Its powerful charge that made the ground tremble, gave Simon quite a hard time previously and because of its rugged skin, it took more than a few swings of his blade to cull it down.

Seeing it charge towards him as soon as it appeared, Simon closed his eyes loosened his shoulders and tried learning the way the skill [Sword Mastery] worked. The moment the unique zombie was a few inches away from tackling him, Simon hurriedly side stepped and performed a clean low sweep from his sword.

The rugged skin of the zombie made it so that the blade wasn't able to cut it in half nonetheless; it still got a large gash on its abdomen.

The sentient zombie wailed, it was just about to use the cover of the uncommon zombie to hide when Simon performed a slashing motion from his position.

A blade shadow a meter big was created and flew towards the unique zombie bisecting its head.

PSHHH... a sound of liquid being sprayed, sounded out. Simon hurriedly jumped to his side and the moment he did, an acid came spraying on the place he was just a few moments ago.

CHIII... the ground immediately dissolved showing how potent the acid was. The zombie that threw the acid, was tall and had a bloated throat just like a frog in which it keeps its poison.

Simon observed the zombie from his position and swung his sword. a blade shadow just like the previous one, was created and flew towards the unique zombie who used the uncommon zombies around him as a shield to dodge the attack.

That action in itself said how sentient the unique zombies were. Simon did not falter and kept his composure. One thing that he learned after going through numerous battles was that, no matter what the situation, he must always maintain his composure. The sword becomes dull the more anxious the user was.

Simon culled one uncommon zombies after another endlessly. The average level of the zombies of the seventh horde were around level 350, a level he cannot look down upon. Their numbers were also high and the fact that he must always protect the fireplace so that it does not go out, made the trial all the more hard.

And to top it off, he must also find the zombie that had the crimson bead within it before the time limit of two hours was up.

Why two hours? It was because two hours represented the time the crimson bead can keep the fireplace lighted up. Simon who had found an answer to his predicament, dedicated himself fully to understand the mystery of the [Sword Mastery] skill. And after a grindingly long two hours, he was finally able to clear the seventh horde.

It must be said that it was still not the best time he could clear the horde considering the fireplace was just about to go out. If not for the fact that Simon had an additional bead, he would have become anxious and his sword dull.

After a few minutes of rest, the eighth horde arrived bringing along higher number and levels of zombies. Simon who was pacing himself according to the horde was forced in multiple occasions to use more of his mana and energy.

Even finding the crimson bead was becoming more and more hectic. The eighth horde also made him realise that finding the crimson bead won't be as easier in the upcoming horde.

GULP... GULP... Simon gulped down a couple of elixirs of Healing and his wounds swiftly recovered. Although the elixirs of healing can heal his wounds, they cannot recover his expended mana or his stamina.

"Huff... huff.. two more hordes to go. I have already used the extra bead to keep the fireplace lighted. If I cannot clear the ninth horde or find the zombie that has the crimson bead, it is game over for me".

His clearing time for the eighth horde was two hours, thirty minutes. Far more than what he considered ideal. Because it became trickier to find the zombie that had the crimson bead and he had exceeded the time limit, he had to use the extra bead to keep the fireplace ignited.

While it was true that the situation looked dire, it was also a boon in disguise. Perhaps Simon had not realised it yet, but he tends to do better in the worst of the worst condition.

He does more well under pressure than when in not. The trail was no doubt very difficult; however it also pushed Simon beyond his limit and allowed him to break out from some of his restraints.

The growth he was having in these couple of hours, was many times faster compared to the time he came here with Lucine and Denzel.

[15secs reaming before the ninth horde arrives]

Simon looked at the prompt window and then at the sword in his hands. After fighting so many hordes, he was getting more and more used to how to swing his sword more efficiently. It wasn't like the [Sword Mastery] skill was providing him with some advanced level techniques or something, it was just simple slash, hack and cut.

Nevertheless, each of these actions and movements can be performed in hundreds of ways and each of these movements and actions has its own strength and shortcomings.

One has to perform every single action and movement thousands of times to understand which better suited them and which was better in which situation. And under the immense pressure of having to fight thousands of zombies whose levels only get higher and higher and having to protect the fireplace at all times, created the most ideal situation for Simon to acquire the [Sword Mastery].

Even without the need to activate the skill from the sword, he could feel that the sword had become an extension of his now.