

D. of Pride 371

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The ninth horde arrived and just like usual he used every bit of his focus and attention on culling these zombies down. The clearing time of the ninth horde was two hours and thirty minutes. The timing may be the same as the eighth horde, but one must know that the numbers and levels of the zombies were higher than in the eighth horde.

There was a time during the ninth horde where the fireplace almost died out because of the time limit. Fortunately, he was able to find the zombie that had the crimson bead just in time to toss it into the fireplace.

As he laid down near the fireplace waiting for the tenth and the final horde to arrive, Simon was checking his status and grinning. He was currently level 377, not far away from reaching the level 400 barrier.

In the span of a few hours, thanks to the trail he was able to jump tens of levels. This level of growth once again solidified his impression of the forbidden trail and how it can affect one's advancement. If one wanted to become strong, there was no better place than the forbidden trail.

Simon was not wrong, however, that was only if one can survive the trail. Not everybody is like him who can do well under extreme situations or has a cheat like fragment which increases the experience he earns manifold.

It was because it was him that he was able to endure this long. But all his struggles and growth will be for nothing if he can't clear the last horde which would be the hardest of all the hordes.

Simon took a deep breath and composed his mind and body for what is to come. Even after pacing himself accordingly, he was still left with less than 30 percent of his mana, his stamina was also the same.

If he can't clear the tenth horde even after this... No, he must clear it, he has to clear it no matter what. There were many people waiting for him back at the dungeon, many reliant on him. There was also many unsettled responsibilities and grudges to be settled.

There was no way he can drop dead here, he will not allow himself to. The countdown ticked down to zero and the tenth horde finally arrived.

The ground trembled intensely making the dust fall down from the ceiling and an invisible pressure surrounded the hall. This was the first time after facing so many hordes, that Simon was feeling like that.

The heavy aura that was shrouding the place, clearly told Simon that the tenth horde was different from the previous hordes he had faced up until now. The shaking of the ground intensified making it clear that whatever it was it was near.

Just when the sound seemed that it was coming closer and closer, it abruptly stopped. Simon narrowed his eyes and immediately prepared himself.

That was when the walls on his left, right and front was suddenly broken down and something appeared from it. He did not know what the entity was but he could tell that it was huge just from its sheer size.

At a glance, it looked bipedal and had a humanoid shape. However, it was so hulkingly huge and buffed that it seemed more like some beast than a zombie. It was covered in rugged skin and released a brutish and berserk aura that can make a weak levelled person faint on the spot.

"One, two... three" Simon counted their numbers.

There were three of these hulkish huge entities in front of him. There seemed to be no other zombies spawning, it was only the three of them for the tenth horde.

Feeling their powerful energy, he immediately used [Analysis] on them.

Race- Zombie Attacker (Unique),

Level- 450,

Skills- [Brutal Charge], [Ultra enhanced Strength], [Ultra enhanced endurance], [Super Enhanced Defence], [Super Agility], [Berserk], [Super Throw], [heavy Punch], [Fire resistance], [Cut

resistance], [Blunt resistance], [Brawling], [Stomp], [Predator Aura], [Brute Force], [Attacker's Roar], [Drum Beat].

The moment he read the information given to him by his [Analysis] Simon's expression became grim. No to mention the numerous skills it has that was purely based for attack, its level that was the highest amongst all the zombies he has faced up until now, made it a huge problem.

Add that to the fact that there were three of them, the situation cannot be any more worse. If Simon was in his peak condition and was not so exhausted he might have been able to do something about them.

But right now, the situation only looked grave for him. Perhaps he could take one or two of them if he went all out and burned every last of his power. But if he had to fight three of them and all together while at the same time keep an eye on the fireplace, it made the situation much more complex.

UWROOOAAHH... the moment the huge attacker zombies laid eyes on Simon and the fireplace behind him, they roared in a deep guttural voice. They then started charging towards him creating a storm of wind around them.

"Shit" Simon cursed, even a Demon viscount like him felt threatened by that charge of theirs. He wanted to move away from their path but since the fireplace was behind him, he couldn't move away from his spot.

Conjuring dozens of flame spears, he sent them flying towards them hoping to stop their charge. The flame spears as intended, directly hit their targets but because of their skill [Ultra enhanced endurance], [Super Defence] and Fier resistance, the attacker zombies did not suffer much damage.

Nonetheless, the flame spears were still able to somewhat halt the momentum of their charge.

UWROOOAAHH...

As if annoyed by the last attack, the attacker zombies roared and their auras locked towards Simon. Judging by how easily they were taunted by that last attack of his, Simon inferred that the attacker zombies even though they have heavy attack power, their intelligence was very low.

Having their aggro locked onto him, Simon started dodging and kiting them around. He would attack with his wind and lightning magic at every opportunity he got to find out their weakness.

However, he cannot stall for them for too long since he also has to find which of the attacker zombies had the crimson bead before the flames in the fireplace goes out.

BOOM... one of the zombies who was near the wall, threw a punch at it resulting in the entire wall collapsing. The zombie then grabbed some big pieces of stones and hurled them towards Simon.

Simon used his sword and his fastly growing sword mastery to deflect any and all attacks. But each of their attacks packed so much power that his hand became numb every time he cut a piece of rock.

[Ultra enhanced Strength], it was the higher tier of the skill [Super enhanced Strength] and provided a marginal buff to one's strength stat. These hulking attacker zombies already had a huge amount of strength but if you add the [Ultra Enhanced Strength] on top of it, they really became monsters to reckon with.

While one of the zombies was hurling rocks at him, the other attacker zombies continued to charge at him.

BAM... Simon hurriedly dodged to the side, avoiding being body-slammed to the wall. Using this opportunity when one of the zombies was stuck to the wall, he performed a horizontal slash. However, because of its rugged skin and high defence, the sword did not manage to dig deep into its body.

"Tch" Simon clicked his tongue, before he could continue with his assault, the other zombies caught up to him forcing him to retreat.

The zombie that was just cut, roared in agony and in the blink of an eye, its skin started turning red. 'Berserk' Simon identified the skill the attacker zombie had used. Now due to the effects of the skill, the power of the attacker zombie was bolstered even further.

But that was good enough, if he stalls the zombie long enough, there would come a time when the duration of the skills runs out and an opportunity to attack would present itself.

The berserk attacker zombie jumped into the air and using that momentum brought its humongous fists down and slammed it into the ground, creating a shockwave attack that was directed towards Simon.

Simon hurriedly unfurled his wings and flew up dodging the shockwave. However, now that he was up, he was open to the attacks of the zombie that was hurling rocks at him. A big pillar came flying at him blocking his sight and forcing him to have no choice but to cut it down.

The moment he cut down the pillar, his instincts screamed alerting him of danger but it was already too late. Because the pillar had covered his sight for a second or two, he failed to realise that the berserk zombie was right behind it and now its huge fists was only a few inches away from him.

BOOOM... CRACK... it was as if a cannon was fired, the sound of the attacker zombie punching Simon was that loud. Like a bolt, his body crashed onto the ground destroying and raising a dust of cloud around him.

Simon tasted blood in his mouth, the punch was just like a ten-ton sledgehammer powerful enough to break multiple of his bones. Spitting out a mouthful of blood, he hurriedly flapped his wings and got out of the pit.

The moment he did so, the other attacker zombies came slamming down on that place. Not only were they powerful and their punch packed quite some damage, but even their jumping ability was also absurd.

Using that explosive power of theirs, the attacker zombies could fly as high as ten meters and easily reach the ceiling in a second.

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This means that even if Simon used his only advantage, his wings to fly around, they would still be able to reach him.

FLICKER... at this moment the flames of the fireplace flickered announcing that they wouldn't last long if another crimson bead is not supplied soon. The situation now had turned, Simon did not have time to stall anymore and have to raise his game.

"This will be a gamble but I have no other choice" eyes blazing crimson red, he uttered some determined words.

[Super enhanced strength] [Super enhanced Agility], [Super enhanced endurance] [super enhanced defence], [super enhanced magic], [Body Strengthening] Simon activated his augmenting skills and drank a few vials of elixirs of healing before starting round two.

Time was of essence, this time the concept of using his mana and strength sparingly was out of his head. These attacker zombies were unlike any other zombies he had fought up until now in the previous hordes and weren't an opponent he can defeat by pacing his strength.

The fact that even with the help of his [A] tier sword and its stats buff, he was still constantly on the back foot was proof enough that if he did not go all out, he can forget about defeating them.

Flames and lightning wreaked havoc around Simon. Now that he had acquired the [Concurrent Chant] skill and along with his [mana Lines] skill he can fight physically while simultaneously casting magic.

The magic he was going for, was a powerful AOE lightning magic which had the highest flexibility, swiftness and had enough destructive power to pierce through the defence of these tanky attacker zombies.

Simon clashed with the attacker zombies head on and showed them that they weren't the one dictating the tempo of this fight.

Simon deflected all of their simple attacks with ease and countered with his sword attacks that were much more powerful after the buff from his skills now. Even though there were three enemies attacking him, their attacks were simple enough for Simon who had a fair share of battle experience, to dodge it.

After suffering setbacks repeatedly, the two other attacker zombies skin had also started to become red indicating that they too had gone berserk. Now Simon was up against three attacker zombies that would stop at nothing to tear him apart.

In this wide hall of the tomb, destruction spread everywhere. As far as the eye could see flames and electro wreaked havoc and the mana around here was in turmoil. Four entities crisscrossed around the place at a speed that was difficult for an average person to see with their eyes.

At a glance, the battle looked extremely chaotic with punches kick and sword attacks flying everywhere. However, if one looked carefully, they would be able to see that three of them were currently engaged with an individual who looked like a demon in the truest sense of the word.

His crimson eyes, jagged horns, blood-drenched body, bat-like wings and the way he bent the elements to do his bidding, gave him a fierce appearance. Time slowly ticked by and before Simon knew it, half an hour had already passed.

The flames in the fireplace was almost about to die out yet he was unable to determine which of the zombies had the crimson bead inside it. This exchange with the attacker zombies, once again reminded him how troublesome of an enemy they were and how high their HP bar was.

Even after suffering so many magic attacks, cuts and slashes in their head, they were still able to stand back up again. The [Ultra enhanced Endurance] of theirs was so ridiculous that Simon wondered if they were really zombies or not.

Clenching his sword tightly, Simon brandished it in a flurry creating a storm of sword shadows that rained on the attacker zombies that were trying to charge at him with [Brutal Charge]. Next, he flapped his wings and created some distance from them.

Right now, his body was encased in flames and electro. While fighting with the attacker zombies he was also simultaneously channelling the amalgamation magic of flame- electro. Even though conjuring such a magic would eat up his already depleted mana pool, he had no choice; no, he was left with no choice but to use it.

Even his most powerful intermediate tier lightning magic was unable to damage them much. Simon glanced towards the fireplace and noticed that the flames were so dim that even a gentle blow of air can snuff them out.

In this situation where he was barely able to fight against these zombies, it would be bad if the curse activated and made them even stronger. He did not have the confidence that he would be able to handle them then.

Thus he had to take the gamble and expend all his mana for one last attack that had the potential to defeat them.

ROARRR... bright crimson flames mixed with purple electro roared as they mingled and spread around the surroundings and covered every inch of the hall. The attacker zombies had very low intelligence but even they could tell that the magic conjured was extremely dangerous.

They stopped their wild attacks and started fighting back against the elements that were going crazy. The three attacker zombies started beating their chests in a rhythmic order. Their powerful beat was enough to cause the air to ripple and set the mana in disorder.

The quickly spreading flames and electro, suddenly halted their advance at this moment and slowly started backing down. Seeing this phenomenon, Simon locked his brows. The way they were beating their chests, he could tell that it was definitely a skill.

[Drum Beat] he quickly recalled one of the skills they had in their status. To be able to disturb the flow of mana and set it turbulent, the skill was definitely like the [Disruption roar] that he had seen a few times.

First was against that butler who had turned into a beast after over-exerting his incomplete Beast inheritance skill and the other in the 'battle of the finest' tournament where a human named Marcus had used a similar kind of skill to stun his opponent.

DUM... DUM... DUM... the dull beating started spreading and quickly overpowered the flames and Electro that he had set around the hall. Simon's expression was grave, this was the worse skill they could use against him at this time.

Amalgamation Magic required an enormous amount of mana and control to conjure, if his mana was suddenly disturbed there was no doubt in his mind that the magic would fail and he would suffer a severe repercussion.

Not to mention he had dumped all of his mana into this attack hoping that this would be the last. No matter what, he cannot allow his mana to be disturbed at this moment but then again, he had nothing on him to stop an intangible attack like that which only left him with one option and that was to endure.

Flashing a defiant smile to trick his mind and heart, Simon gave up all resistance and instead started channelling his mana into the amalgamation magic even more fiercely.

RUMBLE... the elements which had been halted, started becoming active once again and rebelled against the turbulent mana.

DUM... DUMM... DUM... the sound echoed out across the entire hall and brushed past Simon making his entire mana pool go haywire and his mind go blank.

BITE... Simon bit his lips and tasted iron in his mouth, he used the stimulus of the pain to forcefully stay conscious. It would be all over if his mind faltered now. Activating [High-Speed Thought processing] skill he forcefully made the turbulent mana within him flow through his mana lines and kept on feeding his mana to his magic.

Resisting a disruption skill without any artefact or ability and only with sheer willpower and persistence, was something only a madman like Simon would do. Doing something like that would no doubt put an extreme pressure on his mana lines and might even leave him with permanent damage.

However, Simon had no mind to pay attention to these details right now as all of his focus was on enduring the [Drum Beat] skill that kept on disturbing the flow of his mana.

Fortunately, for him, the skill lasted a couple of seconds before the drum beat stopped allowing his mind that was strained to its limit, a moment of respite. Simon had survived through the disruption skill and had managed to keep his magic from going out of control but it did not come at no cost. C

urrently, his entire face was beet red, eyes bloodshot, and blood flowing from his nostrils and ears. It took every bit of his energy and mental endurance just to keep channelling the mana to fuel the magic.

ROOAARRR... and finally the magic was near its completion, the ten meters long crimson dragon made of flames and electro, opened its mouth wide and roared towards the attacker zombies.

Usually, the dragon formed from the amalgamation magic of flames and electro would be around twenty meters long but because he was completely spent and the disruption skill had dissipated much of his mana, the magic was formed albeit a little less powerful.

Using all of his mana into this one last attack, was a big gamble and something that had to be done to win the round. Simon had absolute confidence that this attack would be able to defeat his opponents.

He let out a spirited shout and willed the dragon formed from his magic, to proceed forward. "Electro-Flame Mastery"... [Crimson Lightning Dragon]".

RUMBLE... As the magic started moving, the whole hall trembled and an aura of destruction spread everywhere.

GROOORARR... the attacker zombies roared and hurled the huge debris onto the crimson dragon in a last ditch effort. However, how could these attacks be able to stop the magic? The crimson dragon proceeded towards the attacker zombies unabated by the debris and swiftly reached them.

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Like water released from the dam, the magic swept away the three attacker zombies who tried to muster all sorts of resistance against it.

BOOOOMMM...

The crimson dragon carried their bodies, crashed onto the opposite side of the hall and bore a deep tunnel through the wall. The entire place rocked like crazy as if it would cave in any moment.

Fire and electro spread everywhere depicting the intensity of the destruction. Only after a few seconds passed, did the disruption stopped.

"This should do it" Simon fell on his butt, wheezing heavily. After that last attack, he was completely spent. The duration of his various augmenting skills had also ended right now leaving him with heavy repercussions to suffer.

At this moment, even moving a finger sent a jolt of pain all across his body. Simon laid on his back as he waited for the notification telling him of his successful clearance of the tenth horde to arrive.

DING... the notification arrived; however, it wasn't about his clearing of the tenth horde and instead the fireplace going out.

[The fire in Yela's sacrificial crematory had gone out. Warning, the light binding Ozy has been removed, his powerful curse is now able to reach all around the tomb].

The moment he read the information, Simon's breath got stuck in his throat and he hurriedly turned around to look at the fireplace. Indeed, the fire there had gone out, since he failed to find the crimson bead in time.

p But it shouldn't matter now that he had defeated the last of the hordes or that should have been the case unless the attacker zombies hadn't... Simon turned his head towards the dark tunnel that his magic bore through the wall and strained his ears and senses. He could hear a low growling sound akin to a beast that was on its deathbed.

"They are not dead yet?!" Simon realised to his surprise that one of the attacker zombies although was mortally injured, had failed to die from his last magic.

"Was the power not enough to kill all three of them" he mumbled in shock. He had used every last bit of his mana and stamina to conjure that magic; however, it was still not enough?

"Dammit" Simon cursed punching the ground. He willed his body up and was barely about to keep his exhausted body standing. There was no point in questioning and spiralling in the mire of self-contemplation.

The fireplace or the Yela's sacrificial crematory as per how the trial called it, had already gone out which mean that the effects of the curse would soon be taking effect. He needed to do something before his opponent got even more powerful but what?

If he couldn't defeat the attacker zombies even with his most powerful magic, how was he to defeat them now when he was all exhausted and their power boosted even higher?

At this moment, as if to mock him an eerie aura that could give nightmares to anyone, started seeping out from the walls and the ground. The wicked and fiendish energy, quickly started spreading and entered the dark tunnel where the bodies of the attacker zombies were.

WHOOOSH... a cold wind appeared in the hall out of nowhere and snuffed all the remnant flames and electro away.

GROOOAARRR... a deep guttural sound that was a mix of insanity and brutality, came from inside the tunnel.

[The mighty Ozymandias snarls at the one who harnesses the light, his powerful curse carries his deep-seated grudge for the one who trapped and tormented him for thousands of years. Warning- All beings under his depravity, will have their strength restored and power buffed by 300%].

Another notification popped up in front of Simon informing him about the effects of the curse. Even without trying to sense it, he could tell that the attacker zombie that had survived was feeding on this energy and was quickly getting stronger.

However, instead of cowering in front of this absurdity or cursing at it, right now his mind was occupied with something else. The eerie energy that was filling up the entire hall was somehow...

TREMBLE... TREMBLE... the entire place trembled with the footstep of the attacker zombie and before long, it once again showed its appearance coming out of the tunnel.

If previously it was a hulking fellow at around five-meter, right now it was more than seven meters and looked even more menacing than before. All of its wounds were healed, it had grown four more hands and its body was emitting the very same black aura of the curse.

At a glance, the attacker zombie appeared as the very incarnation of carnage. There was no need to mention its power level which was many times higher than before. Even from a distance, Simon could feel the vast power that was overflowing from it.

The current attacker zombie was above level 500, a level that was even above the Lightning Draconic Serpent that could change the weather from its power. if he compared the current attacker zombie with the previous three, it was a difference between day and night.

Level 500 was a different realm in itself and one that cannot be understood if one hadn't reached such a level. There was a reason why millions of beings get stuck here unable to make even the slightest progress even after decades or millennia.

Once one reaches this level, they would start to comprehend the true concept of mana and how to better harness it. Their power won't just be bolstered by a little but would magnify by a whole new realm.

If the difficulty of facing the three level 450 attacker zombie with all the constraints and time limit could be said as extremely difficult, then now it was next to impossible even without any added factors.

Forget completing the fourth trail, the possibility of him coming out of this tomb alive was so low now that it was not even a laughing matter anymore. Nonetheless, why was it that instead of having his face covered with gloom, Simon looked unfazed, excited even?

The reason for that was none other than the malevolent curse that was covering every corner of the hall. The powerful curse of Ozy, had a deep seated grudge and intent within it, it abhorred light and was filled with evil and hatred.

The curse energy was so full of negativity that anybody would be affected by this curse and their powers might even plummet due to it. But Simon was an exception, there was something on him, something deep, that resonated with this curse energy.

Thanks to it, he did not feel any sense of discomfort, on the contrary, when his body was exposed to this energy, he felt exhilarated. It was as if this energy was extremely docile in front of him and instead of harming him, it was aiding him, healing his wounds and restoring his energy.

"Hahaha..." Simon laughed like a madman at this sudden incredulity of situation.

Just when he thought that everything was over and he was done for, the curse instead of affecting him in a negative way, through some strange coincidence that was beyond his understanding was actually benefiting him.

Simon felt his whole body lighten, his exhausted body started filling up with power as he was exposed to more and more of this curse energy. This was an opportunity, one that might not present itself again, and Simon took full leverage of it.

"If the energy can increase the attacker zombie's power, then there is no reason to think that it can't do the same with mine" Simon muttered as he started focusing on absorbing more and more of this energy.

The curse energy that he was absorbing was fundamentally very different from the mystical energy he was used to and both shared no resemblance to each other. Normally, it shouldn't be possible for him to absorb this energy which he had no prior knowledge of but due to some reason he had no problem circulating this energy as a substitute for his mana.

As he activated his [Mana lines] and started channelling this energy all around his body, he started feeling a little different. His body started getting bigger, his horns became denser, and the ancient symbols on his body started shining a bright golden black.

That was not all, out of all the parts of his body, the one to be heavily influenced was his mind which wanted to bathe in blood and stomp on his enemies. Feeling the changes in his body, Simon gave a wicked smile displaying his two sharp canines.

[Your level is being temporarily bolstered by the curse energy. All your basic abilities and power are increased by tenfold].

Simon clenched and unclenched his hands feeling the enormous power that was brimming inside him.

TREMBLE... TREMBLE... feeling the ground beneath his feet shake, he looked up only to see the humongous fist of the attacker zombie come flying at his face.

"Too slow" Simon said as he casually extended his hand and caught the fist.

BANG... a dull sound rang out and just like that, the powerful punch of the level 500 attacker zombie powered by its skill [heavy punch] was easily stopped by Simon. if it was the previous him without the buff of the curse energy he would have no doubt been caved inside the wall and heavily injured by that attack.

However, the current him facing the attacker zombie that was above level 500, felt nothing. No, saying that he felt nothing would be wrong as there was a smile of pure pleasure on his face right now.

Simon extended his other hand, grabbed the huge fist of the attacker zombie and hurled it airborne before smashing him to the ground.

BANG... the force and power with which he did so, was enough to shake the entire hall and create a deep depression on the ground.

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,m Simon observed his hands, just like the attacker zombie, his body too was giving off a surge of curse energy. Smiling, he relished on the feeling that the curse energy was giving him right now.

From his expression to his appearance, it couldn't be said anymore as to who was more menacing, the attacker zombie or him.

GROOARRAR... the attacker zombie bellowed, it tried to stand back up only to be kicked to the wall by Simon.

BAM... Whatever was left of walls after the destruction, caved in from that kick. He did not even use much strength yet the force from his causal kick was enough to cause this much damage. This once again showed how powerful he was right now because of the curse energy circulating within him.

It wasn't like this was his first time coming in contact with an energy that deviated from the standard mystical energy. Cecilia the Forest Spring Royal Spirit that he had taken in as his little sister also used the power of nature's energy that was different from the mystical energy.

He remembered Irene also telling him about how there were different types of energy. Nevertheless, the one that was more abundant and widespread in the world of Althaea was the mystical energy.

The curse energy might seem more powerful, but he had no way of harnessing it nor any knowledge about it.

Shaking the distracting thought out of his head, Simon checked his status. There he could see his level was currently bolstered to level 488 temporarily along with his stats and basic abilities. No wonder he felt so powerful, the curse energy had directly boosted his level by a total of a hundred.

Although there was still a couple of levels and an entire realm gap between him and the attacker zombie, one also had to factor in the race they both belonged to. Simon was a Demon Noble with a rank of a Demon Viscount, how could a mere zombie who managed to breach level 500 thanks to the effects of the curse energy be able to match him?

On top of that Simon from the beginning was used to defeating opponents that were dozens of levels higher than him, this much of a difference was basically non-existent to him.

BANG... the attacker zombie got up after pushing the debris aside and immediately charged at him bellowing loudly. [Brutal charge] the skill was way more powerful now; nonetheless, Simon did not feel like there was a need for him to dodge or get aside.

He simply extended his hands and said condescendingly "Flame Magic Mastery- [Flame Spear Barrage]".

But the next instant, he frowned his brows when he saw that nothing happened. He was unable to use or invoke any response from the flame Magic that he was so proud of.

"Gale Magic Mastery... Lightning Magic Mastery" What was happening, why was he suddenly unable to use any of his magic? Just as this thought surfaced in his mind, a notification popped up in front of him.

[Due to using a different form of energy other than the mystical energy, you are unable to harness the elements. A different method is needed to invoke the cry of the elements].

"What?!" that was the first reaction Simon had after reading the instruction and boom, the next thing he knew, the world was spinning around him.

Simon's body crashed onto the ground and only stopped after breaking a few big pieces of debris on the way. It seemed like he was tackled and sent airborne by the charge of the attacker zombie while he was distracted.

The situation had changed it was all cool and good when he was overpowering the attacker zombie with just his physical ability alone. However, to defeat it he needed to use his magic which he was unable to due to him using a different form of energy.

All along, he had been using the mystical energy to harness its different forms but it seemed that the same wasn't possible while using the curse energy. Simon tried channelling the mystical energy nonetheless, it failed for two reasons.

First, there was no mystical energy within the hall and secondly, his body can only absorb one energy at a time. That is to say, as long as his body hosted the curse energy, he cannot use mystical energy.

If he cannot use the mystical energy or his magic, then what should he do? Simon was pounded onto the ground and on the air like a ragdoll as he contemplated as to what his next set of actions should be.

Thanks to the powerful effect of the curse energy, that bolstered all his stats temporarily, his body had become so strong that he didn't feel much damage even when hurled like that.

[Your level is being temporarily bolstered by the curse energy. All your basic abilities and power are increased by tenfold]. He recalled the notification that had popped up when he absorbed the curse energy.

"I guess there is no other way than to use my physical prowess to best it" Simon used some force and easily got out of the grasp of the attacker zombie and sent it flying away just like it did to him.

Since the curse energy was boosting all his basic abilities by tenfold, then didn't it mean... at that moment, a wide pair of ominous bat-like wings and incisive claws that was coursing with curse energy, simultaneously protruded from his back and hands.

BOOOM... a debris that broke the speed of sound, was hurled towards him by the attacker zombie.

Simon who was still getting used to this newfound energy, extended his hand and casually swiped it down.

SHIIING... PSSHH... At that moment, a powerful incisive curse energy came out of his claws slashing the boulder like debris and the attacker zombie in the distance in one go.

GROAARRR... blood like a fountain erupted out of the zombie as it reeled back, fazed by the attack.

"So that's how the curse energy works" Simon commented looking at his ominous claws and the scene of destruction caused by his simple action. It seemed that he was wrong, he did not need his magic to kill the attacker zombie, his physical powers and basic abilities were enough to do the work.

Flashing a wicked smile, Simon flapped his wings and with a dull booming sound, he disappeared. No, that was not right, he had not actually disappeared but simply moved at a speed that was difficult for the eye to capture him.

The attacker zombie with its low intelligence was unable to tell where its target was. It looked all around when suddenly it felt a presence directly behind him.

The attacker zombie hurriedly turned around and extended his six hands to grab and mash its target when they suddenly fell down on the ground limply. It took a few seconds for the zombie to realise that its arms had been severed.

When it looked back up it saw Simon smiling sadistically at him. The next second a foot came flying at its face and sent it flying back in the distance.

BOOM... though the next it got back up once again.

ROOARR... the attacker zombie bellowed and regenerated its arms in a grotesque way and started hurling everything that was near it towards Simon in anger.

BANG... BANG... BANG... dozens of small and big debris came flying at him with the speed of a missile. Nevertheless, none of them managed to hit their mark as Simon was so fast that it seemed like he was teleporting and dodging all of the attacks.

FLAP... with every flap of his wings, he would cover the distance between him and his opponent in an instant. Now that he was somewhat familiar with the curse energy he finally understood some of its uses.

It could be seen from how strong his flight ability and claws had become just from channelling curse energy into it. So what if he can't use his magic? His current physical prowess was enough to go against even a Demon Earl.

What was a attacker zombie compared to it? Although it would be a little troublesome given its uncanny regeneration, he still had the confidence to kill it given that its weakness should also be its head.

Simon laughed, he was sure that whoever set this trail, did not expect this kind of change to trigger.

Zippering through the barrage of debris, he appeared in front of the attacker zombie and threw a storm of punches towards it. The entire hall rocked with criss-crossing cracks appearing everywhere and soon even the ceiling was starting to collapse.

The scene had transitioned from him losing to suddenly having the upper hand was so drastic that even Simon had difficulty believing it.

After the rain of punches, the attacker zombie had a badly disfigured body with fist size holes dotting its figure. Nonetheless, its regeneration triggered swiftly repairing its body.

Simon smirked, this was precisely what he wanted. After fighting with the attacker zombie for a while, he finally understood how its uncanny regeneration worked. Since it instinctively only defended its head not allowing any attacks to pass through, it knew that was its weak point and any damage done to the other parts of its body could be swiftly healed by the regeneration.

However, as someone whose regeneration was similarly bolstered by the curse energy, he knew that when the body suffers too much damage, most of the energy within the body gets directed towards the wounds to close it leaving one defenceless for a moment.

Simon was waiting for that exact moment when the attacker zombies regeneration kicked in to deal it the final blow.

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Simon circulated all of his curse energy towards his claws and extended his hands in a stabbing motion towards his opponent's head.

The attacker zombie realising the danger, raised all six of his hands in an attempt to block his attack. However, now that all of its curse energy was directed towards healing its wounds, its defences were naturally lowered which made it easier for Simon's claws to penetrate through all six of its arms and reach its brain.

SPURT... as if a watermelon had been smashed apart, the content of its brain splattered everywhere. The body of the attacker zombie became motionless before dropping down to the ground.

Huff... Simon took a breath of relief and sat down on a rock. He had finally defeated all of the three attacker zombies which meant that he had finally cleared the last horde. As if proving his words, the notification popped in front of his face.

[All ten hordes have been successfully cleared, the powerful curse of Ozymandias recedes. Insert all of the crimson beads to proceed forward with the trial].

The moment the notification arrived, Simon noticed that the powerful curse energy within the hall swiftly receded away. Even the one that was within him and the body of the attacker zombie, scattered into thin air.

He sighed when he felt his body revert back to his original exhausted state. The curse energy, the sensation of overwhelming power and being the one in control was like a powerful drug one that was hard to resist once you get the taste of it.

Simon felt a little regretful once the curse energy left his body; however, he knew that it was only a borrowed power and was not something that was his own. If he wanted overwhelming strength and be the one in control, he must get stronger and achieve that level himself.

That was why he was here of all places in the first place and after he got the taste of what he could with that much power, his craving for strength was stronger than ever. Simon took a rest to recover from his exhausted state before looking around the destroyed hall for the crimson bead.

While he doing that, he was also inwardly contemplating as to why he was able to utilise the curse energy which should have only affected the zombies.

'Was it because I am a demon noble? No, that doesn't sound right'. The curse energy was completely different from the mystical energy which meant that it should have also affected the demon nobles.

Simon recalled the sensation when he was exposed to the curse energy, it was... yes, it was as if he was already familiar with it. The more Simon thought, the more unlikely it seemed.

Before entering the comb of depraved, he had never come in contact with the curse energy. So how can it be that it felt familiar to him? In the first place, the curse energy originated from the being named Ozymandias.

Simon shook his head unable to find an answer and concentrated on the task at hand. After a while of searching, he found the crimson bead inside the body of one of the attacker zombies that had died in the tunnel created by his amalgamation magic.

Simon picked it up and tossed it into the fireplace. The moment he did so, the fireplace became alive. The flames inside the fireplace burned intensely and in the blink of an eye, it became a huge fire that took the form of a woman.

Simon was surprised for a second before hurriedly composing his mind.

[Yela's sacrificial fire purges the evil curse energy and pushes it back temporarily. However, it is not enough to stop Ozymandias' powerful grudge. Find the other two glistening jewels and insert them back into Yela's crown to stand a chance against Ozy's onslaught].

As he read the instructions, Simon immediately understood that the woman in the flames was Yela.

Yela clasped her hands in prayer and the fire around her immediately started converging and taking the form of a golden glittering crystal. Simon extended his hands and the crystal landed on it giving him a clear look of what it was.

Other than being pretty, Simon couldn't see any practical use for it. However, [Analysis] told him that it was a Quest item (1/3) which meant that he needed to find two other crystals just like this one and insert them into the crown to complete the fourth trial.

When he looked back up he saw that Yela's form had disappeared after she handed him the crystal. Now that he got the glistening crystal, it was time for him to leave this hall. Looking around he saw that the entrance from which he had come inside, had opened up indicating that this was also his exit.

Exiting the hall, Simon was back to the place where the Altar was. Since there was no other exit out of the hall, it meant that the other door which was yet to be opened, was the exit.

He was proven right when he opened the door to the left, there was a teleportation circle right in the middle of the room.

Simon did not know how to read the ancient text but if he had to guess the text written on the altar it would read as such. In front are two doors, the door to the left leads to the exit while the door to the right takes you to the comb of depraved. Obtain the glistening crystal from the comb to unlock the left door and exit the tomb of burial.

It did not matter if he was wrong and the text on it meant something else, in any case, he had cleared this tomb and got the quest item.

Simon unhesitantly walked in the middle of the teleportation circle and a few seconds later he found himself back in the middle of the wilderness where he found the stone structure. Though the stone structure was now gone, he could still somewhat recognise the place.

The Northern Outlaw Forest, home to many monsters, bandits and all the outlaws. It spanned for hundreds of miles and was an excellent place to hide for those who are wanted or have been branded as a criminal.

Deep inside the forest, there was a town of some sorts ruled by the various factions that had emerged here called the 'Black Town'. Naturally, the town attracted all the criminals/outlaws from all of the regions of the kingdom of Ellesmere.

You would find no good person walking in this town that was filled with crime and murders everywhere. Perhaps you cannot find any other place more barbaric than this town.

There was no law binding anyone within this place. If there was one it would be the law of the jungle that prevailed here. In other words, it meant that the weak were the prey for the strong here. The one with the bigger fist, had the final say, it was that simple.

This place was like a utopia for the rough and tough outlaws where they can do anything they please, kill, steal or rape, they were was no one stopping you as long as you have sufficient strength.

Of course, even if the town was ruled by the primitive law of the jungle, there are certain factions that have rooted themselves deeply here that you cannot dare to offend even if you have hundred times the gall.

Otherwise, you wouldn't live to see the sunlight of the next day. These factions are the true ruler of the northern outlaw forest so much so that their infamy had even spread to the surrounding regions.

It was not like the nobles and the governing authority of the regions surrounding the northern outlaw forest didn't try to eliminate them given the threat they represented. However, the forest was their territory and they banded together to form a big coalition whenever the surrounding region assembled a force to eliminate them.

Thus, they were able to survive the onslaught and become a hegemon in this vast northern outlaw forest.

Other than this aforementioned reason there was another additional reason that the coalition forces never really tried to completely eradicate the town. That reason was none other than the usefulness the town had.

The Black Town was no doubt a dangerous place and a gathering of outlaws. However, it was also an important information exchange point for the kingdom. With all of the outlaws gathering from the various regions of the kingdom and probably even from outside, the town was bound to be circulating with many big and small information.

Even the black market where most of the stolen things, some of which can even be considered treasures flowed and exchanged hands every day was located here.

Of course, there was no reason to mention as to who bought these things. The strong and the governing authority of the surrounding regions might show their disdain openly for the town, but deep down they were the one of the parties profiting from this business.

It was in human nature to love chaos and to seek any possible profit from it. How could they let go of this big temptation that was the 'Black Town'?

Although on the surface they showed that they periodically sent forces to cull down the numbers of the bandits and outlaws that was gathering inside the forest, it was just an act to fool the ordinary mass.

Therefore even though people knew that the place was full of danger, there were still many people that swarmed into this place with various motives in mind.

The 'Black Town' was full of spies and assassins sent by the neighbouring regions.

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Inside one of the pubs located at the centre of the town, a man donned in a shoddy looking black robe was quietly drinking when another person with a rough appearance, sat down beside him.

The establishment was full of people; however, it was still not packed to the brim for another person to suddenly sit on a bench already occupied by someone else.

As barbaric as the town was, a fight would be inevitable and not a single person would be fazed by it after all, fights breaking out was like a daily occurrence in this place.

"This is my seat, find somewhere else to sit" The man in black robe said, he was not in the mood to fight and tactfully shooed the other person away.

However, the latter didn't seem to have any intention to move away from here and even initiated a conversation.

"The fuck with you? Can't you see that I'm minding my own business, get the fuck out of here" unable to contain his irritation any longer, the black robed man threw his drink and barked out loud.

Contrary to him, the other person seemed the very personification of calm and ordered his own drink from the bartender.

Seeing his attitude, the black robed man had it. When was it the last time that a person disrespected him like that? he grabbed the latter by his collar and was just about exert strength and throw him out, when he realised that he couldn't move the man.

Usually, no matter who the other party, he would be able to easily flip them over. However, the guy with the rough appearance was different from those other thugs and emitted a solid presence that was no less powerful than his.

'How could this be possible? I am a level 500 warrior with a rare class. There shouldn't be many opponent that can match my power even in the entire northern outlaw forest. But his face isn't one that I recall' the black robed man thought internally.

"Well, why don't you settle down for a moment, I have something I want to talk with you" the other guy grabbed his hands away from his collar and initiated a conversation once again.

Understanding that he cannot take the other party lightly, he sat back on his bench and waited for the latter to continue.

"Good, it seems that you are perceptive enough to understand your situation. It also makes it easier for me..."

Passing over a badge on the table, the guy asked "Do you perhaps recognise this badge?".

At this moment, the bartender also brought the drink, the rough looking man sipped in his drink and smiled languidly.

"This?!... You are" the expression of the black robed man turned completely pale the moment he saw the insignia on the badge. He was just about to dash out of this establishment when he heard the latter mumble lightly.

]"There is no point in running, do you think that we tracked you all the way here without any preparations".

GULP..GULP.. the rough looking guy gulped down his drink in one mouthful and lazily wiped his mouth with his sleeves.

"What do you want?" Seeing that he cannot hide from them, the black robed man sat back down and asked in a grave tone.

"Oi..Oi, don't tell me you already forgot what you did to us? Do you want me to make you remember it" the other party teased, battle intent flashed deep inside his eyes.

"Hehe, anyways I didn't come here to say all that, I was asked to bring you up. Somebody is waiting there for you there".

The black robed man frowned, for all he knew it could also be a trap. However, he was in no position right now to reject the offer and could only nod his head.

The man with the rough appearance led him upstairs to one of the sound proof room on the second floor of the building reserved only for VIPS.

In this place, information meant money, hence there were many such establishments like the building designed to keep any or all noise from being overheard by somebody else.

The other guy, stopped in front of one such rooms and knocked on the door in a pattern before signalling towards the black robed man to get in.

The latter did as he was told and entered the room to see a person sitting on the couch awaiting his arrival.

"Why don't you sit down" the person said as he started brewing tea.

"Y-you are Raven one of the three tridents" the black robed man shouted in shock realising who the man waiting for him was.

"Correct... it's quite a coincidence that we found you here Morgress or should I say the former guild master of the Seven Swords Guild" Raven smilingly said, he took out a transmission conch from his space ring and put it on the table.

"Gavin Morgress, level 500 [Grand Lightning Warrior] I guess this would be our first time meeting each other... I am the guild master of the Sea God's Trident, Benny Beckerman" the voice from the other side of the transmission conch said.

SIGH... seeing that his cover was blown, the black robed or rather Morgress took off his robe and sat on the couch opposite to Raven in resignation to whatever his fate was.

"How did you find me?" He asked.

He or rather his seven swords guild was hiding in the northern outlaw forest that was filled with outlaws from all over the kingdom. Given how vast this place was and the various factions in it, it was quite a difficult task to find them when they are living a life of exile.

"Hmm? It is as Raven said, finding you guys here was truly a coincidence you see. The northern outlaw forest is vast, even if we knew that you guys were hiding here, it would take quite some time, effort and manpower from us to find you".

"However, due to some turn of events, some of our members who were sent here on some other mission found a person from your guild. The surprising thing was that he came to us on his own accord. Thanks to him we were able to locate your hideout and each and every one of you within a day".

The voice said, from his tone it could be said that he was in a good mood. Though, the same couldn't be said for Morgress who had an expression that said that he couldn't believe what he just heard.

"That is not possible, you are lying" Morgress retorted in a flurry. At his moment, his expression was complicated.

Why would it not? If he were to believe the other party than didn't it mean that someone from his team had sold them out. He would rather believe it was a lie cooked up by them instead of actually believing it.

"Oh dear it looks like you don't believe us. As a leader of a guild myself, I can understand why you refuse the truth. But you know, you cannot have a blind faith on them without realising what they want. You say that is not possible? Of course it is possible especially when you neglect a wish of one of your subordinates. Raven, bring that guy".

As Benny Beckerman's voice fell, two powerful assassins that have been lying in wait in the room from the start, finally showed their appearance after coming out of their stealth. One of them was a member of the sea god's Trident and a subordinate of Raven while the other someone Morgress knew very well.

"How can that be? Out of all the people, I can't believe it is you that betrayed us Boris" Morgress said springing up from his seat. His breath was uneven and his face was flushed red in fury.

"Now... now, there is no need to be so impatient guild master Morgress. Why don't you first listen to what your subordinate has to say?" as if enjoying the situation, Benny Beckerman remarked.

"Why? Why would you do this Boris?... tell me!!" Morgress demanded, enraged by the betrayal of one of the seven swords and his most trusted subordinate.

Boris looked a little hesitant and struggled internally for a while before making up his mind.

"I had no choice since you were not willing to listen to my wish".

"What did you say?" Morgress asked back.

"You spared me no option, you did not listen to me when I said that I wanted revenge. My little brother Laris died in the Ghastly Winding Forest, killed by that demon. How can I sit calmly and hide here like a coward when I should be out there taking revenge for him".

Boris barked back, his body trembling from the emotions that he had suppressed all this while. Laris was Boris' little brother who had joined the Seven Swords Guild because he looked up to the latter.

And had it not been for him, who allowed Laris to take charge of that mission with the Forest Spring Spirits, his little brother wouldn't have died.

If not for the fact that his subordinate Ted managed to send a sound transmission telling them of the events that happened in the Ghastly winding Forest just before his death, they wouldn't even be aware of what had transpired there.

Knowing that his brother had died in the hands of the demon, how could he just let it be? But instead of seeking revenge for his little brother, Morgress instead decided to hide and live a life of exile in this dark and gloomy northern outlaw forest.

How can Boris who sought revenge, possibly accept that? He was living his life tormented by these thoughts every day when one fine day he saw a member of Sea God's Trident roaming around the Black Town.

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Boris gave it a lot of thought and decided that this was his only chance to take revenge and approached them thinking that it was worth a try.

When Morgress heard all of that, he had a face that said he was absolutely baffled by the idiocracy of his teammate.

"You goddamn moron".

Boris wasn't the only one who had suffered a loss that day, their entire guild had. Not only did they have to discard their base that they have been using for like a decade and run here to live a life of exile, but Morgress himself was also stripped away of his peerage.

Their guild had made an enemy of one of the top five guilds, an existence that they cannot dare to offend and was being chased all over by them. They couldn't use their adventurer's card any longer since they were branded a wanted men and had no choice but to live a life of exile.

All of this was because of Boris's little brother who had annihilated the entire branch guild of Sea God's trident located in the city of Mountmend. That good for nothing made the situation worse for them, how could Morgress have the heart to take revenge for someone like that.

However, it seemed that he had failed to see Boris's attachment to his little brother which made him go as far as to betray his own guild.

"See, I told you guild master...ah, I mean former guild master Morgress, you cannot neglect the wish of your subordinates like that. See what that led you guys to" Benny Beckerman said from the other end of the transmission while Raven was sipping on his tea with a delighted expression.

Morgress had a resigned face and sat back down powerlessly. Now that the Sea God's Trident guild had found them and even went as far as to send Raven, they were done for.

Escape? That was a foolish choice given the opponent they were facing wasn't any ordinary one but the head of the top five guilds of their kingdom. The fact that they had many powerful members on the level of the seven swords made it so that escape was completely impossible.

Perhaps he who was level 500, could give them a fight but even he wasn't a match for the one sitting opposite him. Although Raven had restrained his aura till the point that he just seemed like an ordinary person, a veteran adventurer like Morgress could easily tell how dangerous the man was.

Even now, he felt like a dagger would come targeting his throat the moment he made a rude comment.

"Since you have already found us, there is nothing else I can do. Kill us if you want to and get it over with" Morgress said accepting his fate.

"Kill you? Well, that may as well be an option in the future; however, it is too much of a waste to do it now" the voice from the transmission conch said making Morgress confused.

"What do you mean?" if the other party wasn't here to kill them then why were they here.

"Hahaha, you see our first intention was to kill you all and settle the score forever but I couldn't help but have a change of mind once I heard the offer from that subordinate of yours. I must say I

was quite surprised when I heard the deal he wanted to make with us after all, the information he offered was too much of an enticement to reject".

"Wanting to keep all of them to yourself, won't you say that you are quite greedy former guild master of the seven swords guild?" Benny Beckerman pointed out something in a vague and roundabout way.

Listening to his words, Morgress couldn't help but have a feeling of foreboding. It was further proven right when he looked at Boris who was standing at the side of Raven.

"Don't tell me you told them about it?" he asked, more like demanded.

"I had no choice" Boris replied.

Morgress finally realised why the Sea god's trident wasn't fighting and how Boris managed to strike a deal with them. He must have told them about that ancient clan living deep within the Ghastly Winding Forest.

"Now that the cat is out of the bag, there is no need for us to mask words. The only reason I haven't ordered my guild members to kill all of you yet is because I want to take possession of the forest Spring Spirits myself and your Seven Swords guild will help me in that".

Morgress closed his eyes and sighed, it was as he had expected, to convince them Boris did indeed tell them about the Forest Spring Spirits that they had discovered living in the Ghastly winding forest.

This was also the reason why they had spent so much manpower, time and resources on it but even after that, fate didn't want them to get hold of it.

"Well, I at least understand the reason now why that little brother of that subordinate of yours killed so many members of my branch guild. But you know the fault mostly lies with that guy, not only was he incompetent enough to contain the forest spring spirits in their village, but he even allowed the demon to trick him and get hold of them before him".

"Frankly, I don't understand why would you put him in charge of such an important mission guild master Morgress. Thanks to that guy, our reputation was hurt and our entire branch guild was

almost wiped out. Isn't it only natural that you compensate us with something? Fortunately, thanks to this teammate of yours we know now where the Forest Spring Spirits are residing".

Benny Beckerman said mocking Morgress for his short-sightedness.

Raven too sneered at that comment. The seven swords guild almost managed to have them but because of one individual, the whole mission was compromised. Had that individual been in their guild, Raven would have killed the guy himself.

"You mean to say is that we should..." Morgress said but before he could, the voice from the conch competed his sentence.

"Raid that dungeon for us, all seven of you".

"But that is impossible, leaving the fact that we are wanted men and the soldiers of duke Redcrest is searching for everywhere, we cannot get the clearance to raid that dungeon from the adventurer's association in the first place".

"Plus we will need a few more members to raid a dungeon that has been labelled [D] tier by the Adventurer's Association" Morgress tried to reason but it seemed that his opponent came prepared with all the answers.

"You don't have to worry about that... I can pull some strings and get you the clearance from the Association branch located in Mountmend. You also don't have to worry about adventurers, I know a few that would get into any kind of job for a sum of money. As for how to evade the soldiers of Redcrest, do something about it yourself. How about that, are you willing to raid the dungeon now?".

'If the other party was going so far as to provide him with all that support, there was no reason to deny. But he wasn't a fool, he knew precisely well why the guild master of the Sea god's Trident was pressing this job on them.

They were the bait, or in other words the guinea pig to test the powers of the dungeon. Morgress had no intention of being a test bed for someone, he was just about to come up with another excuse when Raven muttered in a low voice as if reading his thoughts.

"I hope that you don't make an immature decision, guild master Morgress. You and your teammates' life hangs by a margin of thread".

A clear threat, there was no other meaning to it.

"Haha, don't be like that Raven, I believe that people are more useful when they are alive rather than death. I know guild master Morgress will make the right decision. While I'm at it, let me make this clear for you".

"I not asking, this is an order and also an opportunity for your guild to get back to that demon who foiled your plan. Don't you want to tear that bastard apart who foiled your plan? You have one day to think over it, Raven would be waiting for you all here".

Benny Beckerman put down his ultimatum now it all depended on Morgress whether he followed the order or turned Raven into his executioner. Seeing that the other party had one-sidedly ended the conversation, Morgress was frustrated but he could only suppress it down given his circumstances.

He glanced at Boris one last time before turning around and leaving. The latter too left after a while.

Watching their expressions one could easily guess that a fight was inevitable; however, it did not matter to Raven nor did it concern the Sea God's Trident.

"Fate works in mysterious ways, who knew we would stumble upon such great information while searching for traces of the Demon. Forest Spring Spirits, a sacred race blessed by the essence of nature. It is said that they can easily manipulate the nature and hold one of the greatest treasure known as the Forest Spring Spirit orbs in their body".

"It not only increases the purity of your bloodline, talent and aptitude, but can also heal a person from near death. There are so many myths and legends about them in the annals of history, some even say that they were all extinct, who knew that they were still living inside the Ghastly winding Forest".

The voice coming from the conch was filled with anticipation.

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Raven who had been keeping to himself all this while, asked sceptically.

"Guild master, do you think what that assassin told was the truth? Can there really be Forest Spring Spirits in that dungeon?"

The conch went silent for a while before Benny Beckerman spoke from the other side of the transmission.

"While I cannot be certain, the story does indeed make sense if the forest spring spirits are involved. Ask this to yourself, why would a guild that has a solid foothold in their city, be willing to take such a risk and send most of their forces to the Ghastly Winding Forest if they weren't searching for something?"

"I don't think there is any guild in this entire kingdom who is willing to make us their enemy... even if they do they must have some extraordinary reason like the forest spring spirits. In any case, I feel like Morgress didn't have the intention to embroil our branch guild in all of it from the start. the situation turned into this mess because of the incompetency of one singly subordinate".

"Is guild master saying that Chuck got caught in the trap that was laid for that demon?" Raven asked.

"Right. Anyways, even if this whole thing is just a lie, we can still use them to probe and see how dangerous that dungeon is. Once they are done scouting it for us, finish them off. That demon is sure to be hiding inside his dungeon. Send a few adventurers to monitor that newly formed town in the Ghastly winding Forest".

"Additionally, keep all of this secret from Godwin. Since his character is too upright, I don't want him to get involved in this".

After saying all that, Benny Beckerman cut the call.

Raven thought for a while as to how to proceed before directing the assassin subordinate beside him.

BOOOOMM... ROOAAARRR...

A huge crimson blue dragon made of magic, opened its mouth and roared towards the heaven. It was so powerful that the space around it was distorted and the mana around the area turbulent.

Facing it were a couple of Carnivorous desertivines that had a crown made of leaves around their petals marking that they were a little different from the ordinary Carnivorous desertivines.

Nevertheless, in front of the might of the crimson blue dragon even they were trembling.

Simon who was hovering in the sky, extended his hands and willed the huge Crimson lightning dragon to proceed forward. Immediately with a loud thundering noise, the thirty meter long dragon charged forward and towards the Carnivorous Desertivines that were spraying needles, acid and doing everything they could to stop the magic.

However, everything was useless in front of the might of his powerful amalgamation magic of Flames and Lightning. There was no point in mounting a defence, even with their [Hyper Regeneration] and [Root] skill, the magic was able to destroy them from their very foundation leaving not even their ashes behind.

The crimson lightning dragon continued forward and just like that evaporated four more Carnivorous desertivines in the distance.

More than a month had already passed since Simon had entered the forbidden trial grounds. By now he was already used to seeing the same view again and again and fighting the same monsters day and night.

During this period of time, his level had seen a drastic advancement and he was only a few levels short of reaching level 400. Countless numbers of carnivorous desertivines and zombies had perished from his hands and countless more were being added to that number.

It wasn't like he wasn't making any progress with the trail, currently, he had successfully cleared two of the tombs and had gained two glistering gems from them. And right now, he was proceeding towards the last tomb to find the remaining glistering gem and complete Yela's crown.

Although his progress might be slower than when he was with Lucine and Denzel, one should also know that he was alone right now. He was clearing the trail all alone using nothing but his own powers.

Well, the circumstances and fate was also favouring him so if he counted that factor, it was quite a good speed.

The reason for him saying that the circumstances was favouring was because after the second tomb, Simon was sure that the curse energy of the being names Ozymandias couldn't harm him. On the contrary for some reason, he was able to harness that power and use it in his favour.

Simon was quite sure that the trial did not mean for any challenger to be unaffected by that energy much less use it in their favour. In that accord, it could be said that he had broken some of the rules but since even he did not why this was the case with him, he did not think it as him deliberately breaking the rules.

It just ended up with him being able to benefit from that energy along with the trail monsters.

Knowing that the curse energy cannot harm him, Simon was a lot more confident moving forward, he felt like he was a gamer who suddenly found a cheat.

The second tomb was cleared by within a week of clearing the first tomb and now he was proceeding towards the third tomb that was deep within the territory of the King Carnivorous Desertivines.

This species was the evolved form of desertivines with more hideous-looking features and power. If the levels of the carnivorous desertivines he had fought until now ranged from between 407-450, the king Carnivorous desertivines levels were above 480 with some even reaching 495.

His most powerful single target magic which was the amalgamation of flame and electro was far less effective on them.

If previously he could kill four to five of them with it, against the king carnivorous desertivines which could utilise the novice tier water magic to attack and defend, he could hardly defeat even one.

However, just like the previous times when under pressure, Simon would rise up to the challenge. After many unsuccessful attempts and tries which ended up harming himself, he was able to finally managed to combine his two most destructive intermediate tier attributes and create a more powerful spell that could even turn a powerful king carnivorous desertivines into nothing but ashes.

Yes, he was now finally able to amalgamate his two intermediate tier magic of flame and Lightning allowing him to create a much more powerful and solid magic.

If one wanted to know the reason for him being delayed for so long, it would be because Simon was busy learning and experimenting his two intermediate tier magic. Although it had ended up taking a lot of time, if one looked at it objectively, the benefits he got far outweighed the cons.

In any case, without learning the amalgamation magic of flame and lightning he would be able to defeat these evolved species and proceed forward. After resting for a while, Simon conjured his crimson Lightning dragon magic, took out a bunch of them before proceeding forward.

The levels of the king carnivorous desertivines kept on getting higher and higher indicating that he was close to the last tomb.

After spending more than a month of time here, Simon was becoming a little impatient to get back to his dungeon. It has been a long time since he left the dungeon and given the rapid increase in his DP, he sensed that more and more people were diving inside his dungeon now.

During this period of time, the growth of his DP was so absurd that it had reached half of the total DP that he had accumulated up until now and that number was still increasing. Even if he left his dungeon Laplace in the care of Irene, as a dungeon master how could he not be concerned for it?

Especially after he created such a ruckus outside, he knew that many powerful would be targeting his dungeon now. Aside from that, he wanted to know how they were doing and what the situation of his dungeon was.

Since that was the case, Simon involuntarily increased his pace. Creating another Crimson lightning dragon he cleared a few more of the carnivorous desertivines and finally in the distance he could see the vague figure of a stone structure.

Simon immediately ran towards the structure and in a couple of seconds, he was standing in front of it.

[You have discovered the last of the tomb of the depraved. Find the Glistening gem and insert it into Yela's crown before Ozymandias' subordinates destroy it. Warning, once entered you cannot leave it until you clear the trail or become one of the depraved].

A prompt window appeared in front of him, Simon skipped most of the content of it since every one of them were mostly the same. If others saw his attitude right now that was making light of one of the trails of the forbidden trial ground, they would have called him a fool, a conceited person that was digging his own grave.

However, there was a reason for Simon being so full of confidence and that was none other than the presence of Ozy's curse energy. As long as the trial had that, Simon was certain that he can clear the fourth trial.

To confirm his theories, Simon had allowed the timer to run out on the second trail but instead of being defeated like the trail intended to, he was able to overcome the obstacles with the help of the curse energy.

That is to say, as long as he did not play by the rule, the curse energy would invade the tomb as intended powering all the monsters inside it.

Simon took a deep breath of air before pressing the Yes button in the window [Do you want to enter the trail now? YES/NO].

The land trembled and a part of the tomb that was buried underneath surfaced.

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Simon used the entrance to dive inside the tomb and found himself on a dry and dark pathway. Igniting his flame magic, he proceeded forwards and soon arrived in front of a big hall in the middle of which was an Altar.

Although Simon couldn't read those ancient writings, it seemed that all the tombs had an Altar which had the exact same letters written on it. It might have some specific meaning but since he can't interpret it, there was no point dwelling on it.

Behind the Altar, he could see five doors each of which had a different letter written on it. Simon walked in front of one of the doors and tried opening it; however, it was locked. He tried opening the door near it but just like the other one, it seemed to be locked too.

It was not like he did not try opening it using other means, he even channelled his mana into it nonetheless, it remained locked.

Since that was the case, Simon tried opening all the doors and the one on the leftmost corner was the only door that clicked open. He narrowed his eyes, checked the marking on the door before boldly walking inside.

[You have entered the first vault of numerals, Ozymandias is furious at the one who seeks the crown and sends its subordinate to destroy it. The crown is inside one of the doors that lead to Yela's crypt].

]Find the zombie that has the key to the door before the time runs out and Ozy's subordinates destroy the crown. Warning, each wrong zombie that you kill will strengthen the other zombies. Time limit- 5 hours].

As soon as he entered, a window popped up in front of him notifying him of the rules of this trial. There were many information to take from that but first, what did it mean that he had entered the first vault of numerals?

Were the mark on different doors numbers? If that is the case then did it mean that the door he opened was numbered one?

There were many information given but Simon got the general gist of it. He just needs to find the zombie that had the key to the door that leads towards Yela's crypt where the crown was before the time runs out.

Additionally, he couldn't kill the other zombies since it will only strengthen the others. The information was fairly simple, Simon even felt that the time limit was too much just to find a key.

But when the zombies started spawning in this wide hall, he had to retract this preconception of his. There were thousands of zombies flooding the place all of whom were unique zombies with abilities that made them quite annoying.

Additionally, what he didn't mention yet was that the trail was set in a way that the zombies became stronger along with the growth of the challenger. That is to say, the unique zombies that are spawned, were much more stronger and higher levelled than the time when he was clearing them in the second and first tomb.

If previously the unique zombies were around 350-380, now after his growth, they were all above level 400.

TSK... Simon clicked his tongue, although finding that one zombie amongst these hordes of zombies was annoying he still felt like the time limit was just too generous. He had this foreboding feeling as if he was missing something.

 GRAAAHHHH... the moment the unique zombies spotted him, they pounced on him using their unique attacks such as claws, acid spray, grapple and various other skills. After fighting so many of them and for so long in this trial, Simon was used to their attack pattern and dealt with them accordingly.

He took out his crimson blade and cut off their torso so that they couldn't move for the time being. By now he had also acquired the sword mastery skill himself and was much more adept and confident in his sword swings.

Simon immobilised one special zombie after another but there were thousands of them and there were still many more spawning from the ground. It was just like an endless horde and the worst thing about it was that the zombie that had the key, was hiding with the horde.

However, since Simon was for some reason immune to these effects, he did not have any problems, on the contrary, he even felt a sense of familiarity with it. His gaze shifted and landed on the hordes of zombies that showed no signs of stopping being spawned.

p He would have agonised about the unfair condition of this trial otherwise if not for him being able to use the curse energy. Now though, he did not find them being spawned all that unpleasing.

Simon used his claws that was being augmented by the curse energy in a wild flurry of attacks as he culled down numerous zombies one after the other. The curse energy that would seep out from their body would be absorbed by him making him stronger by the second.

"[Cursed Claw Fury]".

After familiarising himself with the curse energy over the first two tombs, Simon was now even able to create some skills with it. A huge hideous looking claw that was three meters big and made of curse energy, materialised itself.

With his will, it flew forwards and easily bisected any and all zombies that were in its path. Now that he had found the flaw in the system, he no longer needed to play by the rules. That is to say,

there was no reason for Simon not to kill all of the zombies that spawned instead of just killing the one that had the key.

And just like that, a huge massacre started with the demon noble going wild, culling the number of the zombies which kept on spawning. More than an hour had passed by now and Simon was engaged in a frenzied battle with the zombies when suddenly he saw a zombie that had a key tied to a locket on his neck, getting spawned not far away from him.

"The Key" Simon yelled and immediately started clearing a way towards that zombie.

A few seconds later, the key was finally in his hand.

"With this, I can now open the door that leads to Yela's crypt" holding the key in his hand, Simon rushed towards the exit of the vault, not caring about the zombies whose numbers kept on increasing by the second.

As soon as he came out of the first door, he started unlocking the doors with it thinking that the door that the key unlocks was the one that was Yela's crypt but to his surprise, the very first door that he tried opening with the key clicked open just like that.

[You have opened the second door of the vault of numerals and find an empty place. The doors will be reset, tries remaining $\frac{3}{4}$].

Before Simon could question the information, he found himself back inside the first vault of numerals.

The zombies immediately pounced on him the moment he was sent here. As he culled the number of his enemies, he pondered about the information that popped in front of him when he opened the second door of numerals.

It was empty which meant that he had opened the wrong door and was thus sent back here again. At this moment, he finally realised his oversight, something that he was seeing clearly previously.

In the first place, the information never told him that there would be only one key that would unlock the door leading to Yela's crypt where the crown was. There were multiple doors there for a reason, since the first door was open and the others locked, it meant that he had to find the key to unlock those doors.

But he cannot just randomly open any doors as it could be seen from his last attempt. Excluding the first door, three out of the remaining four doors were hoaxes placed to eat up his time.

"That's right, time!!" when Simon looked around at the window displaying the time he had remaining, he immediately narrowed his eyes.

The time limit was now less than 4 hours and in that time limit, he had to find the correct door and key from the hordes of zombies that were continuously spawning. Additionally, from the information, he knew that the logic that the second door was a hoax, wouldn't work anymore since the information clearly told him that all the doors of numerals would reset.

Which meant that he cannot count on the second door being a hoax again. It was all fine up till here but what bothered Simon the most was that he only had a limited amount of tries.

Out of the four tries, he had already used one and now he only had 3 more chances. Simon did not want to think about what would happen after all three chances were expended.

Unlike the first two tombs where the worse that happened when the time limit ran out was the influx of curse energy seeping out from the ground to cover every corner, the third tomb was different in that it involved Yela's crown.

If the time limit was up, Yela's crown, a quest item that he needed would be destroyed and he would fail the trail. Just thinking about that soured Simon's mood and he couldn't help but curse the one that made this forbidden trail ground.

Simon continued to cull the numbers of the zombies and absorb the curse energy to prevent the zombies from getting stronger. However, there was also a limit as to how much curse energy he can absorb, once that limit is passed, he would have to tread more carefully.

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As Simon was worrying about that, from the corner of his eyes, he saw a zombie being spawned with a key. He immediately made short work of it and held the key in his hand, his eyes wondered whether this was the right key or not.

Unlike the last time, Simon did not immediately rush out to try the key and instead waited for some time. The reason for that was simple, he wanted to know whether there would be another zombie that would spawn with a key while he was holding onto one.

His inquisitive mind wanted to solve more of the mysteries of this trial. His patience had proven right after a while, another zombie that had a key on its waist, spawned from the ground.

Simon used his claws that was buffed by curse energy to immediately dispose it.

Now, the next thing that happened surprised Simon. When he grabbed the second key, the first key that he was holding onto, scattered away like dust indicating that he can only hold onto one key at a time.

Was this the correct key? Simon did not know but until unless he tries he would never know.

Holding onto the key, Simon rushed out of the vault only to find that the positions of the door had changed probably even the numbers on them was reset, there was no telling.

He observed the key carefully and observed that there was a number corresponding to one of the doors carved in it.

The door that the key matched with, was right most corner. Simon deliberated for a while before looking at the time limit which was slowly ticking down.

He cannot dilly dally anymore and decided on staking it on his luck. He inserted the key and pushed the door open only to get another disappointing result.

[You have opened the fourth door of the vault of numerals and find an empty place. The doors will be reset, tries remaining 2/4].

It was yet another empty room. Who was he kidding, his luck was never good from the start, staking his chances on it was a big mistake on his part.

Well at the very least, he opened a different door in his second try, this can be seen as progress right?

Simon tried thinking positively so as to keep his mind cool until he figures out an answer.

Just like the first time, he found himself back inside the first vault that was spawning zombies like crazy. However, Simon did not go crazy and start another one sided massacre and instead only immobilised them by cutting off their torso so that they weren't able to move.

Although doing so would only strain his mind and body, he had no choice but do so because if he killed any more zombies, he would be unable to absorb the curse energy they release and it would only end up harming rather than benefitting him.

As he busied himself in supressing them, Simon finally realised why the trail had given a time limit of five hours. He couldn't help but laugh at himself who thought that the time limit was too generous at first.

Now though, no matter how much time he was given, he would still think that it would never be enough to solve this trail.

At least for him, he could somewhat cheat and make use of some of the flaws within the system. However, for an ordinary challenger who had to follow the rules, this trail was nothing sort of nightmare.

What Simon failed to realise was that the forbidden grounds doesn't just invite anyone and those that it does, bring along group of teammates with them who they can clear it with.

The trail was design in way such that the challenges can only be overcome by working together to share the burden and the reward. It was by no means meant to be cleared alone.

It was not like there was no case of somebody trying to clear it alone, blinded by greed, many conceited ones who were over confident of their strength, entered the forbidden trails alone.

However, none of them managed to clear it. Those who managed to clear the forbidden trails had the aid of their subordinates or teammates, even then they were exceptional even among extraordinary and were now the tyrants of this era.

There is a reason why high levelled people cannot enter the trails, each of the forbidden grounds have a powerful barrier protecting it that repels any or all high level beings that try to enter it.

Lucine managed to enter the forbidden ground because she had utilised a special technique and locked her strength. Though if the trail had detected her true level, the consequences she would have had to suffer would have been disastrous.

Thus, there weren't many fools who tried to use such an advanced technique to slip inside the forbidden grounds.

In that regard, Simon was an anomaly even amongst anomalies. He wasn't all powerful nor did he bring a group of subordinates to aid him, yet he was clearing the trail all by himself.

As time ticked by, the spawning rate of the zombies started becoming higher and higher leading Simon to cull some of the few even though he knew that would strengthen the other zombies.

"This one doesn't seem like the key, not this one either" Simon discarded one key after another. Though there could be a high possibility of the correct key being amongst the few keys he had discarded, he just instinctively felt like those were just hoax keys meant to waste his time and reduce his number of tries.

TICK..TICK..TICK... the time limit kept on ticking down and there was less than half an hour remaining now. The curse energy inside the vault was quite dense now leading to the unique zombies becoming quite stronger.

Nonetheless, Simon himself was also buffed by that energy and hence managed to somehow keep up with their number. But his real enemies were not the zombies, but the time.

By now, he had killed at least a dozen of key zombies and could have used those to try his luck on the doors outside.

Nonetheless, he did not do so and waste his last two chances. The trials are not that much different from a dungeon, the clue should definitely be in that information.

As a game developer before and a dungeon master, Simon just knew it.

"What is that I am missing??" he racked his brain and recalled the information again and again all the while fighting a horde of level 480+ unique zombies.

[Ozy is furious at the one who seeks the crown and sends it subordinate to destroy it. The crown is inside one of the doors that lead to Yela's crypt. Find the zombie that has the key to the door before the time runs out and ozy's subordinates destroy the crown. Warning, each wrong zombie that you kill will strengthen the other zombies].

As he was thinking about that, Simon culled another key zombie with his claws. While he was holding the key deciding whether he should risk it or not given the limit was now less than twenty minutes, from the corner of his eyes he curse energy seep out from the body of the key zombie and spread around the surroundings.

At that moment, it finally dawned onto him and what was that he was missing. The information said that each wrong zombie that he killed would strengthen the other zombies which meant that all of the wrong zombies had curse energy within them.

That is to say, the key zombie that did not have curse energy within it, was holding the correct key.

The moment Simon realised that, everything suddenly started making sense. There was no need for him to find the correct key from the numerous key zombies, there had always been only one correct key from the start.

The clue was right there in front of him all along, the other information was just there to divert his mind.

Simon looked at the time limit and cursed, sweat tickled down his face. Now that it had to this, he had no choice but to take on the entire horde find the right key zombie that was hiding within it.

 ROOOAAARRR...

Simon issued a loud demonic roar and with a reinvigorated spirit, dived amidst the horde. He activated his augmenting skills and further buffed his already powerful physical body.

Since he was using the curse energy instead of the standard mystical energy, he had no way of harnessing the element. Although he can't use his magic, it did not mean that he couldn't use his basic skills.

Instead of powering them with mana, he used the curse energy to achieve the same effect.

With outstretched claws and wings and the overflowing curse energy oozing out of his body, he looked extremely demonic.

With every swipe of his claws, dozens of zombies would be culled and mowed down underneath him.

'Not this one... this one is no good either' Simon muttered internally after seeing that the key zombies he had defeated release curse energy from them.

Time ticked down and just when Simon was getting anxious, he noticed a peculiar zombie standing still at the back of the horde for a long time.

It had a belt on its waist which had a key hanging on it. There were many zombies with key all around him but for some reason, that zombie which had been acting atypical from the other zombies around it, attracted his attention.