

## D. of Pride 571

Chapter 571 571- The 45th Floor, The Treasure Chests And The Chaos (2).

"Well it doesn't matter, in the end conquering this dungeon is only a matter of time" Brutus had no doubts about that. The dungeon may be dangerous, filled with mystery and irregularities but it wouldn't be able to stop them.

As Brutus sank into his thoughts, time flew by and soon it was time to move again. They got their weapons and armour all restored up and ready to be used once again.

The expedition force gathered near the entrance to the 45th floor, their current objective and started descending the stairs. Soon, they were in front of the 45th floor.

The 45th floor unlike the other floors they had trotted up until now, was a vast rocky terrain filled with boulders and mountains. No signs of greenery could be seen anywhere in this place, all around them were huge rock formations.

If the place wasn't a dungeon, it would have been a spectacular scenic view that would attract a lot of tourists.

"These are metamorphic rocks! They usually form in places that contain an immense amount of heat" The guild leader of the Ten Mountains Valley, Roberson Rangel spoke.

He bent down and touched the ground "The rocks are heated up... is this floor perhaps a volcanic area?".

"That can't be, this dungeon is a low ranking one. Special terrains and unique conditions can only appear in high ranking dungeons" The grey haired man denied those words.

"If it isn't from a special terrain, then it means that something on this floor had transformed these rocks into such" Brutus pointed out.

The other guild leaders also came to the same realisation. As the expedition force marched forward, they felt the temperature around the surroundings rise up. The closer they inched towards the centre of the floor, the higher the temperature became. Until it reached a point where even the breathing air

became hot and the adventurers felt like they were in the middle of a desert in a hot summer weather.

Some people who had resistance to fire, were fine but those who didn't, seemed to struggle a little.

"Cassius, what do you think?" Brutus who was in the forefront and leading the group, asked the guild leader of the Assassins guild who was standing on top of a huge rock formation.

Since this place had nothing but identical looking rocks, it was quite easy to get lost if one did not know how to navigate the way. And from up there, one could get a good view of the entire floor or so Brutus thought.

However, the answer that he received from Cassius was not an optimistic one.

"Everything here looks the same. The numerous rock formations hide the entire valley, I cannot see inside the rifts. I can say that we are not walking round and round but I cannot say if we are going in the right direction".

"I see" Brutus nodded his head. If they cannot navigate their way like this, they had no other choice but to explore the whole place and find the right path. But doing so would end up taking a lot of their time... that is if they marched as a single unit.

If they divided themselves into teams like what they did on the 40th floor, they would be able to explore the floor much more quickly. However, after what had happened the last time, Brutus believed that many guild leaders wouldn't accept this. He himself was against it too so he can't blame the others.

"Is there no other way than to divide ourselves into teams once again?" Brutus muttered, it was as if the dungeon itself was trying to lead them into doing so.

"It cannot be helped, if we want to clear the place faster, it is the best way" The grey haired man also arrived at the same thought.

"Personally, I don't have a problem if it's just the members of my own guild" the guild leader of the Crimson Demolition Guild, Arven Lantz interjected. He proposed that instead of dividing themselves into two guilds in each team, they all lead their own guild to explore the place.

This way, there was no chance that you would suddenly get ambushed from behind but it nonetheless opened up other risks.

"What are you going to do?" The grey haired looked towards Brutus. Since Brutus was made the leader of the expedition force, decisions such as this must be made by him.

Brutus pondered for a while, just as he was about to say something, the ground suddenly started trembling.

"What's going on?" the quaking of the ground became more frequent with time.

"We have company. I can see clouds of dust coming towards our way from all directions. It's the monsters, they have located us" Cassius who was surveying from above, interjected at this moment.

"What kind of monsters are they? Are they new species?" the guild leaders asked.

"Wait up, I cannot see clearly because of the dust barring my vision but they look humanoid. What? They are climbing up the rocks. Everyone be careful, they are some subspecies of demonic apes" Cassius reported.

His shout immediately caused the expedition army to raise their weapons and prepare for combat.

"This is bad, our current location is not a good one" Brutus examined his surroundings; all around them were large rock formations. They were squished in between cliffs and the space was narrow enough to only allow a couple of people to walk together side by side.

There was not enough space for the guilds to display their power. The paths ahead were also the same, if they huddled together, they would no doubt suffer injuries.

"Incoming!!!" as if to prove his words, the monsters fired huge fireballs that came from all around. Some missed their marks, some cracked on the cliff side while some dropped on the adventurers.

Although the adventurers were able to defend through it due to their skills, they all felt a little constrained around here. The monsters skilfully used the terrains to climb around the rock formation and cliff side and pincer them from all directions.

"Tch, a bunch of weak monsters think that they can use fire magic in front of me and my guild" the man with gaudy red robes and frisky crimson hair, spat. He raised his hand and the core stone embedded in his ring shined.

A vast amount of energy gathered around his hand and formed a golden rotating ball. The heat coming from the ball was so intense that it even distorted space and forced some of the adventurers to step back.

"WAIT!!... STOP!!... if you fire that magic here..." Brutus tried to stop but he was a step too late.

The guild leader of the Crimson Demolition Guild, Arven Lantz smiled "Infernal Magic Mastery-[Scorching Hell Blast]".

He had finished conjuring his magic within a few seconds and fired it towards a large group of demonic apes that were throwing fireballs from on top of a rock. However, contrary to his expectation, although he did manage to make charcoal out of the monsters, he had also engulfed the expedition force into its radius.

To make matters even worse, the cliffside couldn't handle the powerful magic and huge chunks of debris started falling down on them. Quite a few people got caught underneath it.

In a situation like this where they cannot display their full power, clustering together like this will only hamper them. Thus Brutus came to a decision.

"Everyone we cannot fight like this. The place is too narrow and disadvantageous for us to use our skills and magic. So let us divide ourselves into different teams and clear the floors separately. All the guilds will work alone and stay in touch with each other through the transponder conch. That is all, disperse".

Right after his command, the expedition force started separating and each guild hurriedly went towards a different path.

The 45th floor was like a grand canyon with numerous rock formations and rifts. Each rift and gorge was narrow and winding, it had multiple twists and turns and was like a giant maze one would have difficulty navigating through. On top of that, the floor was filled with Fire demon Apes who were quite powerful and difficult to deal with.

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3 hours into the exploration of the 45th floor...

"Dammit, these monsters are coming out of everywhere," Dalton Lance remarked, after the expedition force divided themselves up, he and his team who had chosen the northeastern direction, came to a stop after a while.

This place was filled with monsters and they came at you from everywhere. The Sea god's trident guild wandered around the rifts and when they finally found some broad area, they chose to fight their pursuers.

Skills and magic flew everywhere, and after half an hour, a mountain of monster corpses lay around them.

"Huff... Huff... is everyone alright? Those who are injured you can drink your potions and rest, we are going to a little break here" Dalton organised the team. Although this place still made them vulnerable to guerrilla attacks, it was better than the other place and broad enough for them to respond to monster attacks.

"Sir Dalton, what are these monsters? Although they look like demonic ape, their characteristics and attack patterns are so much different" one of the guild members asked.

The monster they were facing, was quite intelligent and individually were all above level 380. Not only that, they also knew fire attacks and used guerrilla warfare. A monster of such intelligence was rare even in [C] tier dungeons; however, this dungeon was filled with such monsters.

"Sir Dalton, come look at this" one of the senior members and one of his trusted aides, was scavenging through the monsters when he pointed at something.

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There among the mountain of corpses, was a couple of monsters that had died after a hideous wound was opened on their chest. Revealed from inside their wound, was something that was sparkling with a bright rubellite light.

"Core Stones..." Dalton was amazed, not because he had seen a core stone for the first time but because of the number of monsters that had formed the core stones. That mountain of corpses had around forty ape demons out of which core stones had formed inside the bodies of at least ten of them.

Not to mention these core stones were all of very good quality and filled with fire elemental power. If sold in the market, it would fetch quite a price.

What was going on? A core stone only formed in one out of hundreds of monsters and that monster had to be quite intelligent and with the potential to undergo further evolution. It was not easy for a monster to form core stones, which is why the prices of core stones in the market are quite high since one usually needed to defeat hundreds of monsters or a powerful one, to get a core stone.

However, the scene had turned this preconception of everyone in their heads.

"Are you telling me, all of these monsters had the potential to further evolve?" Dalton muttered under his breath. The Fire Demon Ape could already be classified as a super class monster with some of them being around level 400 but if they further evolved wouldn't they perhaps just reach the disaster class?

Good Heavens!! The moment this thought occurred to Dalton, he couldn't help but feel like he was struck by a lightning bolt. He was more clearer than anyone in this expedition force as to how unusual this dungeon was. Yet even he couldn't help but feel like he had greatly underestimated this dungeon at this moment.

He had this bad premonition assault his heart but before he could delve into this feeling, it disappeared like some kind of an afterthought.

The Sea god's trident guild harvested the core stones from the monsters before moving forward. They had only started walking for a short while when the team that they had sent forward to scout their surroundings returned with some startling news.

A few kilometres ahead of them, the path which branched to the left, a small colony of Fire demon Ape was spotted. According to the scouts, they seemed to be guarding a huge exquisite looking treasure chest.

"What should we do... Sir Dalton?" the team asked. Dalton contemplated for a while, with his experience he could clearly see that it was some form of a trap set up by the master of this dungeon. The cheese was the treasure chest.

Knowing that should they let themselves fall for such an obvious trap? Or should they avoid it? The treasure chest, however, is always filled with riches and are something that all the adventurer desired.

"Let us first go and check it out. If the number of the monsters isn't too much for us to handle alone, we will try to finish them off. If not we will walk around them". Dalton explained his plans.

The allure of a treasure chest might be irresistible to other ordinary guilds; however, their Sea god's trident guild wasn't your ordinary guild, it was one of the top five guilds of this kingdom. Their eyes weren't blinded by greed to the point of jumping into a situation recklessly.

If they found the situation wasn't worth the struggle they would just manoeuvre around the place. Though that may be the case, they were after all adventurers too and it is in the blood of the adventurers to seek romance and thrill.

And what better excited them than a treasure chest filled with the possibility of riches? Dalton was sure that many of the guild members of his, were thinking in the same line.

If it's too much hassle, they would simply ignore it but if it was being given in silver splatter they wouldn't hesitate to grab it. All of them were here to seek treasure after all, but the treasure that they had their eyes on couldn't be compared with the ones that could be found inside these treasure chests.

Or so they thought, but who would have expected, the things that were inside that treasure chest, would blow their mind completely once the news of what was inside was revealed?

After Dalton and his team followed the scout's instructions and turned left from the path that diverged into two ahead... they arrived at a wide open plot of space.

"There," the scouts pointed out. Though even without that, everybody could see it clearly.

There at the centre of this place, placed atop a peculiar looking rock formation, was an exquisite looking treasure chest which overflowed with vast mystical energy that could be felt even from here.

Just by basking in that aura, one could tell that the quality of contents inside that treasure chest was by no means ordinary. Everyone's eyes glossed with an indescribable light the moment they spotted the treasure chest.

Though that may be the case, reaching the treasure chest wasn't going to be easy either since quite a lot of monster was guarding it. At a glance, there seemed to be more than hundreds of Fire Demon Ape surrounding the treasure chest.

Dalton noted their numbers. Currently, their guild was hiding near a fork in the rift that led to this place.

"It looks like the monsters haven't noticed us," one of the scouts with an assassin class said after observing. Since the monsters were only guarding the vicinity of the treasure chest and didn't stray far from it, they would have to fight the monsters if they wanted the treasure chest.

Plus the enemy hasn't noticed them giving them the initiative of attacking first. But the problem was their number.

"Sir Dalton can't we just break open the chest with a ranged attack and see what's inside it?" an adventure suggested. He was a little hesitant to attack a whole colony of fire demon apes if they can just see what was inside the treasure chest by breaking it from a distance.

"That won't do... that treasure chest is no ordinary treasure chest, it's a high grade one. Even if you attack from a distance, it wouldn't even dent it" attacking the treasure chest was a bad idea after all what would you do if the things inside also gets destroyed if you used too powerful an attack?

From what they could tell from the ambient aura leaking out of that treasure chest, its content was definitely not ordinary. If by chance they damaged the treasure, they would have no place to regret it later. Hence that adventurer's suggestion was quickly shut down.

"Then will we just ignore the treasure?" ...



"There is no reason for us to do so. A treasure chest guaranteed to be filled with rich rewards is right in front of us, how could we as adventurers just walk away from it despite knowing that?"...

"What is Sir Dalton implying?" the members of the sea god's trident guild asked.

Dalton smiled turned towards them and said ostentatiously "We attack them. There is no reason for us to walk away from the treasure. Although the number of the enemy might appear intimidating, our numbers are clearly greater than theirs".

"We just need to stall them for long enough for mages to fire their powerful spells. Those who agree with me, ready your weapons, we are going to go hunt some fire demon apes".

The number of the monsters was in the hundreds. In comparison, the adventurers of the Sea god's trident numbered around a hundred and ninety. Clearly, they have the numerical advantage here. Not only that, but their levels were also much higher than the monsters.

The Fire demon ape may be a super class monster with the potential of evolving even further; however, each and every member of the primary team of the sea god's trident was above levels 400 and 450.

They all can solo one fire demon ape each and if they worked together, it would be even faster to finish them off. Be that may, fighting a super class monster and one that is a new species was very dangerous.

Many people might end up getting injured which is why, Dalton gave them a choice. He wasn't going to bring those that didn't agree with the idea forcefully and he was fine with them staying behind and watching their backs.

Perhaps his intention got through to his team, surprisingly there was no one who wanted to stay behind. After hearing Dalton's words, they were each filled with vigour and itching to fight.

On his mark, the group spread out and slowly encircled the monsters. The mages started chanting and with them firing off the first rounds of magic, the battle started.

ROAARRR... the fire demon apes who were taken in by surprise, roared in anger. A few who were cluttered together quickly fell to the bombardment of magic. Nevertheless, they were monsters after all, their instincts triggered and they quickly dodged the other incoming magic attacks.

Using this opportunity when they were disorganised, Dalton led the warrior and assailed the monsters.

"[Ten-Ton Hammer Blast]" he brandished his [A] tier hammer and sent any fire demon ape that came attacking him.

"Warriors use your taunt to keep the attention of the monsters on you. Assassins finish off the ones that stray away, do not let them approach the backlines" Dalton handed commands from the frontlines at the same time as he continued to mow down one monster after another.

A top guild was truly different from an ordinary guild, just from their movement, one could see that they were highly coordinated and had many years of coordination and trust under their belt.

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There was no flaw in their movements, it was as if they knew each other very well and could easily anticipate what the person next to them would do.

Each of the members of the sea god's trident were very experienced and knew the weakness or opening of the others making it nigh impossible for the fire demon ape to break through their frontlines.

"[Warriors Challenge]" a warrior beside Dalton used his taunt skill to attract the aggression of a monster towards him while he made use of the powerful rare skill of his class [Master Mercenary] to finish off the monster.

The others around him were also adapting a similar tactic. The warriors with the knight or guardian classes would use their high defence stats to halt the advance of the monsters while the warriors with the berserker classes with high attack powers would use their skills to finish off the monsters.

The Assassins with their swift attacks provided timely backup and maintained overall balance while the mages cast their magic from the backlines, healing the injured and disposing monsters with their powerful magic.

The team was extremely well balanced and made everything look so easy. Although they suffered some injuries it wasn't to the point it would affect the overall efficiency of the team.

The numbers of the Fire Demon Ape might be more than a hundred but they had no coordination whatsoever. Each fire demon ape acted on his own, there was no backup nor any support from the others.

It was only a matter of time before the adventurers started getting familiarised with the attack patterns of the Fire Demon Ape and turn the tables on them.

The fight was intense but under the allure of the reward, that sitting on top of that formation waiting for them to open it, their motivation increased to a whole new level. Time passed by and the bodies of the monsters dropped on the ground one by one and after a cumbersome battle, they finally managed to cull down the number of monsters to one fourth of their strength.

"Sir Dalton, the mages are ready" An assassin who materialised beside Dalton, reported. The latter looked at the remaining monsters and the condition of the front liners before issuing an orderly retreat.

"All warriors keep your shields up and back down. Mages hold your fire until we are out of your range. Assassins ensure that no monster gets away"...

"Roger"...

The frontlines did an orderly retreat and just when they were out of the range of the mages, a powerful chain of magic was set forth and engulfed the monsters inside it.

BOOMM... BOOM... BOOOM... the deafening sounds of the explosions rang out for a while and the entire place trembled. The warriors readied their shields in case any monster managed to survive the bombardment but it seemed like there was no need.

As the last embers of the magic died down, all monsters were found either lying on the ground scorched into cinders or slashed into pieces. Whatever their conditions were, one thing was clear... the adventurers had won this battle.

"Any casualties on our side?" Dalton asked one of his closest aides.

"None sir, though quite a lot of us sustained some serious injuries and would need some time to recover" that subordinate reported.

"I see then do so. Order those that can still move to follow me" Dalton nodded his head and brought the ones that were still relatively fine towards the rock formation. It was time they harvested the rewards for their efforts and open that exquisite looking treasure chest up.

They just moved a couple of steps towards the treasure chest when suddenly...

"Be careful" Dalton hurriedly pushed a couple of his subordinates out of the way and timely dodged an attack that came from their blind spot intending to reap their life.

A couple of figures covering their faces and bodies with a robe, appeared on top of the rock formation.

"Who goes there?" Dalton asked in anger. Thanks to his fast reaction, he had managed to stop his subordinates from dying but that attack earlier definitely intended to kill.

"Tch, you managed to dodge that huh? As expected of the former vice guild leader of the Sea god's trident, Dalton Lance you live up to your title" the man leading the group of assailants clapped his hands and praised.

"Cut the flattery. Who are you guys and why are you getting in my guild's way?" Dalton was in no mood to hear all that, he interjected the man in mid-sentence and cut to the chase.

"Haha, well it's a shame we can't tell you that. However, we will appreciate it if you let us take the items inside this treasure chest" the man shrugged his shoulders and gestured one of the people behind him to start opening the chest.

"You bastard... that treasure chest is something our guild had spent so much effort for. You think we will just allow you to take our rewards?"...

"That's right, that treasure chest is something our guild had spotted first. It belongs to our guild"...

Some of the hot headed members of the sea god's trident guild immediately flared up at that remark. Their guild had fought so much for that treasure chest, how was it possible for them to just allow another party to snatch it right in front of them?

Some of them immediately got ready to intercept these people.

"Hehe, there is no such rule as finder's keepers in a dungeon. The reward belongs only to the ones that have the strength. Well, I must at least thank you for clearing the monsters, because of you we get to enjoy these rewards" the leader of that mysterious band laughed inciting the members of the Sea god's trident guild even further.

"It's not certain yet as to who gets to enjoy it" Dalton who had been patient up until this moment, finally had enough as he brought out his hammer.

Following his actions, the members of the sea god's trident also readied themselves. The enemy was just eight people. If these eight fools thought that they can underestimate the sea god's trident guild they were up for some awakening.

Dalton was just about to move when suddenly the assassins of his guild notified him of multiple approaching presences.

"Sir Dalton please give us the orders. We will smash their ugly mug so that they can never spout anything from that mouth again"...

"That's right, no one is qualified to snatch the rewards belonging to our guild"...

The warriors of his guild were ready to bring the fight to those mysterious people.

"Not so fast, I know how powerful the sea god's guild is. However, are you really sure you can fight us on top of facing those monsters while you are in that condition? Dalton Lance, I believe you are a smart man. will you risk the lives of your guild members?" the masked man commented.

Right after his words fell, a couple more figures similarly masking themselves with robes and hats, appeared from the other side of the rifts bringing hordes of monsters behind them.

"Consider this as a small present from us" the leader of this mysterious band joined up with the other newcomers, pried open the treasure chest and quickly stored the item inside before disappearing.

The present that they left behind was none other than the horde of monsters they lured over with them.

"You bastards... come back here" looking at their disappearing back, the members of the sea god's trident roared. However, their hands were currently filled with the incoming monsters that were rushing towards them.

"Sir Dalton what should we do?" the assassin who was one of his closest aides asked.

Dalton contemplated their options for a while before shaking his head. "Many of us are injured and are currently unable to fight, we need to protect them. It is not worth the risk to follow them while fighting the monsters at the same time".

"Though that may be the case, our reward was snatched right in front of us, how could we just stay silent? Doing so would besmirch the name of our guild. Hicks, take two people with you and tail them. I want to know who they are and which faction they belonged to?".

The assassin named Hicks nodded his head, he was just about to proceed forward with the plan with two other people, when Dalton patted his shoulders and added—

"Remember, tail them from behind. You don't need to confront them or anything. Our first priority is to gather information about them and why they are doing this".

Hicks moved his head in understanding and chased after those mysterious fellows. Dalton and the others watched them go before shifting their attention to the onrushing monsters.

"Listen up you all, I know that everyone must be feeling very frustrated from having the reward being taken in front of your eyes. Hence you are free to take it out on these monsters".

With his rallying shout, the members of the sea god's trident who were filled with this inexplicable negative energy of frustration, used the monsters as the outlet and went ham.

The number of monsters in this horde was only around thirty and nowhere near the number they had just faced. Thus it didn't take much long for them to dispose of this horde.

Some of the adventurers who were exhausted by the continuous fight fell on the floor panting while others took turns to stand guard and watch out for any other attacks.

Dalton who was examining the now empty treasure chest was joined by other senior members of his guild as they discussed something.

"Sir Dalton that was..."

"Yeah, it was without a doubt cross-cutting"...

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Dalton narrowed his eyes and said with certainty. Cross Cutting, it was something very common inside a dungeon and happened to a lot of adventurers.

It was a term that was invented by the adventurers and it occurs when one adventurer team stumbles upon the path of another party and uses them as bait to get out of any sticky situation. It was something that only an adventurer knew and was looked down upon by all in their profession.

Hence to Dalton and all, it was very much clear as to who those people who confronted them were. Their comrades from the other big guilds, the truth might sound ugly, but it was the truth. And it at least cleared the confusion that it was not the doing of a monster that can turn itself into a humanoid form.

Be that as it may, this discovery in itself was very problematic since it showed that the monsters weren't the only thing they needed to be careful of proceeding forward in this dungeon. They also needed to be careful of the other guilds conspiring against them.

"Sir Dalton, there is no way of telling what the items were inside the chest just by their lingering aura" a subordinate reported.

"I see, you did a good job, go and take a rest. We will take a break here before joining up with Hick and the others" with Dalton's orders, the group moved to take some rest.

Meanwhile, somewhere within those twisting and winding gorge, a small group of people was currently gathering together inside a cave that was made artificially. These groups of people were all hiding their identities by donning a robe and a mask. They were joined by another group of people who just came in.

"Oh! If it isn't Kaiser's group. Weren't you guys tasked with acquiring that treasure chest guarded by hundreds of fire demon apes and so?" one of the masked men among the group asked the team that just entered.

"Yeah, fortunately the Sea god's trident cleared that monster colony for us. We were able to take advantage when they were all weakened and acquire the items on that treasure chest amidst the chaos" the team that was referred to as Kaiser's group, reported.

"I didn't think it would be the Sea god's trident to find that treasure chest. What happened to them, were you guys followed?"

Kaiser, the leader of the group that confronted the Sea god's trident shook his head and assured "Don't worry Norman, they should be busy fending the monsters that we lured. There is no way they would have the time to send people after us".

Everybody felt relieved by those words, they did not want to be enemies with one of the top five guilds. It was a good thing that none of the three tridents was present during this expedition. If they were, it wouldn't have gone their way.

"I wonder about that" A voice suddenly interjected from the entrance.

A new group of people entered the cave; however, unlike the rest they did not bother to hide their identities. A badge depicting a vast sea and a lone sword could be seen hanging on their chest.

"Dylan, even if you do not care, think about your guild at least. It wouldn't bode well even for your Absolute Sea guild if the other guilds found out that you have been conspiring behind their backs" Norman spoke, although his face could be seen, judging from his tone it looked like he was quite displeased by Dylan's actions.

"Oh please, that disguise makes me look silly. I would rather kill all of the people and leave no evidence behind than wear that thing" Dylan remarked shrugging his shoulders.



He and the members of the absolute sea guild that was following behind him nonchalantly entered the cave and threw three corpses in the middle of the cave.

"They are?" Norman asked.

"Heh, they were following Kaiser. I found them tracking you guys so I quickly disposed of them and brought their corpses here" Dylan explained.

"What?!" Kaiser was stunned, he believed that the sea god's trident would be too busy to track who knew that they had sent people after him.

"He should be Hicks, one of the finest assassins of the Sea god's trident" Norman identified one of the corpses.

"Kaiser did you accidentally reveal your guild?".

"That cannot be, I was prudent enough to not reveal any of the skills that could associate me with my guild" Kaiser denied.

"Well, you guys don't have to worry, I killed them as soon as I found them, so I don't think they were able to relay much information back to their guild" Dylan spoke with confidence.

"I hope that is so. If any of us got found out, it will encompass all our three guilds, the Absolute Sea Guild, the thunderstorm and the Six River's Streak, none of us will get out of it unscathed. At that time, we would become the enemy of the entire expedition army. It would be better for all of us that we cooperate with each other".

All of them nodded at Norman's words.

"Alright, enough with the heavy words now. Were you guys able to acquire the items from those treasure chests?" Dylan changed the topic of their conversation to the most important matter.

"Yeah, it was a success"...

"No problem from my side either" Kaiser and Norman nodded.

"I see. Then counting the ones I acquired and the ones we already collected, we have gotten our hands on four of them" Dylan took out a round emerald green orb the size of a fist from his space ring.

The moment the object appeared, a vast natural aura brimming with life and vitality immediately filled the place. There was no need to even use Analysis, just based on the aura alone, one could tell it was no ordinary item but an unparalleled treasure that would make anyone in this world covet them.

Yes, the thing in his hand was none other than a spirit orb from a forest spring spirit. The treasure recorded in the legends and ancient texts said to have the ability to raise one's bloodline and power to new and greater heights.

The ultimate reward promised that was promised to them by the grey haired man, they couldn't believe they found it on this floor and inside the treasure chests no less.

"Yeah, they are even worth making enemies with the top five guilds" Norman agreed, sitting inside his space rings was a fist sized round emerald green spirit orbs similar to the one in Dylan's hand.

"I was a little uncertain about this whole thing at first. But seeing the result, I cannot help but agree with you guys. Teaming up with your two guilds had brought unbelievable rewards. Our effort would surely please the guild masters" Kaiser added.

"Well, I agree with you two. Who would have expected that our three guilds would stumble at the same place and find the secrets of the treasure chests of this floor before anyone? Because of the ingenuity of our guild masters, we will be able to get more rewards than any of the other guilds" Dylan smiled, looking at the spirit orbs excitedly...

The 45th floor although it looked simple with nothing but rocks, it hid a shocking secret. The 45th floor had quite a number of treasure chest spawned that was heavily guarded by colonies of Fire Demon Apes.

These treasure chests contained riches and items that were so rare and priceless that even these big guilds of the kingdom weren't able to stay composed in front of it. Some chests had numerous grade [3] mana crystals, while some had Gold grimoires.

Some contained high levelled core stones and serenity stones, while some had artifacts of tier [C] and above. The treasure chest was filled with exceptional riches; however, although few in number, there were also some special treasure chests spawned that released vast natural energy.

The contents of those treasure chests were astonishingly the super rare treasure, spirit orbs that were sitting inside the space rings of these three.

"Are the other guilds aware of it yet?" Norman asked.

"Since the Sea god's trident guild didn't seem aware of the items inside the treasure chest, I would say not all guilds have found out about it. But I would say that the news about the spirit orbs being inside the treasure chest should be spreading soon amongst all the guilds?" Kaiser thought before replying.

"In that case, we should hurry up and join with our teams. We have already offended quite a lot of guilds and caused them to suffer many casualties. They wouldn't stay silent for long plus I feel like the assassin guild is onto us. We should disperse before they get to us" Dylan advised.

The other two leaders and the members they led nodded their heads before pointing at the corpses.

"What should we do with them?"...

"Just leave them here, the dungeon would absorb them in no time"...

A huge piece of news that shocked all the listeners to their very core, spread amongst the guilds six hours after the exploration into the 45th floor.

The news was so shocking that, many of the guilds had difficulty believing it. The crimson demolition guild that was led by guild leader Arwen Lantz, stumbled upon a treasure chest that had a spirit orb inside it.

The report came from a trusted source hence the other guilds had no choice but to believe it and soon many such news started appearing from everywhere.

Spirit orbs, just the name was enough to drive the guilds into searching for them crazily. All the guilds actively started hunting monsters and opening treasure chests leaving no place unturned.

## Chapter 575 575- The Scattered Expedition Force (2)

Nine hours into the exploration of the 45th floor, another piece of news came to light, some unknown people hiding their identities, were targeting guilds and stealing the rewards amidst the chaos.

At first, the other guilds ignored it but when they themselves became the next victim, things became more chaotic. It wouldn't have bothered them much if it was just some ordinary treasure; however, if the news were to be believed, the treasure chest had spirit orbs inside them.

An unparalleled treasure like that was a loss that was hard to swallow. Not to mention many guilds had also suffered numerous casualties because of the masked people stirring things up while they were fighting the monsters.

Such reports started coming from everywhere and soon things started going out of proportion. Although the guilds were unable to identify these masked people, they were at least aware that it was the doing of some guild.

Bitter at their loss and filled with frustration, these guilds became more prejudiced against the other teams so much so that many battles broke out whenever two or more teams stumbled upon each other.

These clashes led to injuries and injuries led to casualties. Unknowingly the two twenty guilds started sinking deeper into a mire that they had no hope of returning from. The fragile bond or the link that was holding these guilds together finally came loose.

The expedition force fell apart.

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White Palace, Main Hall. Everybody was silently looking at the expedition force with pity and loathing in their eyes. The ones comrade that had worked together to clear multiple floors, were now doing their best to kill, rob and impede each other.

No form of unity or coordination could be seen within them. They acted just like barbarians who were blinded by greed and only knew how to shed blood. They had no camaraderie nor any trust left in each other.

The expedition force that seemed so formidable before, was on the brim of falling apart and scattering. The powerful members of the primary teams that could solo any spawned monsters on this dungeon were falling one after the other.

The funny thing about this situation was that most of the casualties that the primary unit of the expedition force suffered were dealt to them by their comrades or on their own. Monsters and traps had little to do with it.

The ones that helped Simon cull their numbers, were the adventurers themselves.

"They are surprisingly so fragile from the inside" Bea commented, a small smirk on her face.

"Yeah, it's like they never had any trust in each other in the first place" Annette added maintaining an indifferent face.

The other Valkyries nodded their heads in agreement.

What was happening on the 45th floor was the very definition of chaos. And all it took was some small misunderstanding and the greed of these people to cause that fire. It was not like they had used some mind encroachment skill or anything.

"But my lord is it alright?... Using those fakes isn't it just telling them that we have the spirit orbs?" Coleus questioned.

The spirit orbs that the adventurers were making so much fuss about, was in fact a fake that was prepared by Cecilia when Simon was rummaging his head thinking about what treasures should he put inside those treasure chests that can blind their eyes with greed.

He didn't want to strengthen them by putting high ranking weapons and artefacts there, so he could only put the treasures he got after clearing the third trial of the forbidden grounds and from the Diluvian Orcs territory.

At that time, Cecilia came to him and told him to use the spirit orbs shocking all of them. The hundred or so spirit orbs that were harvested from their friends and families, was still resting inside the space ring on Cecilia's hands.

The forest spring spirits had insisted that Simon kept it; however, he adamantly denied it and handed them the space ring back. Ultimately it was given to Cecilia who was the daughter of their patriarch to keep.

She kept it close to her and treasured it like her life so when she suggested that idea, many were shocked.

Simon was too, he was about to shake his head saying it was not necessary when Cecilia explained her plan. According to her, she can now create a faux spirit orb that gave off the same aura and energy any real spirit orb would using her powers.

The Faux spirit orb that she created, looked very much similar to the original one so much so that even Simon was fooled for a second. However, he who has seen the original ones soon spotted a few differences and was able to recognise the faux from the original.

Be that may, for the adventurers who had never seen an original one in their life, they would be unable to differentiate the original from the fake.

Using [Analysis] also didn't help since it was a perfect imitation that none other than Cecilia, a forest spring royal spirit had created. Nevertheless, it was not like the faux was completely flawless, as it was made with Cecilia's energy, once that energy runs out, the faux spirit orb will disappear.

According to Cecilia, the energy inside those faux should barely be able to last for a day. That is to say, the spirit orbs sitting inside the space rings of those adventurers, would disappear soon enough.

Simon wanted to see what kind of reaction they would have when they realise that the treasure they spent so much effort into, even going as far as killing and betraying their own comrades, goes missing from their space ring after a couple of hours.

Would they realise it was fake or would they in their hot-headedness start blaming one another? or would this be the end of the expedition force?

"There is no point in keeping the spirit orbs a secret from them since I'm sure they are aware of it" Simon explained. From the intel he gathered from the members of the seven swords guild responsible for destroying the forest spirit village, they had already revealed this secret to Benny Beckerman, the guild leader of the Sea god's trident guild.

That is to say, one of the top five guilds of this kingdom was aware that the dungeon Laplace was harbouring the Forest spring spirits and had hundreds of spirit orbs.

Simon did not know how many guilds were aware of it but given that the top twenty guilds of this kingdom were attracted to tackle a mere [D] rank dungeon, he would say that their objective was fairly obvious.

If it was an intermediate tier dungeon, Simon would have understood but other than the spirit orbs, a low ranking dungeon like Laplace didn't have much allure for big guilds like them. Hence revealing the existence of the spirit orbs didn't matter much at this point.

On the contrary, if his revealing its existence could sow discord amongst them, Simon was more than willing to use this Faux.

However, even he didn't imagine that using those faux spirit orbs would have this much of an effect to the point where these adventurers would kill one another to get their hands on one. Especially those three guilds, their action was the last straw that broke the camel's back.

Thanks to them masking their identities and attacking the other guilds the whole incident had blown out of hand. Even if they tried to control it, it wouldn't be as easy as that time on the 40th floor when only two guilds were fighting amongst each other.

"Hehe, it would be wonderful if they wiped each other just like this" Alice commented laughing merrily.

"That would be a naïve thinking Alice. The expedition force isn't an easy opponent that could just be dealt with with small mind tricks. Sooner or later they will snap out of it and realise that they had fallen for our trap".

"At that time, they would start putting their efforts together and become a stronger force than before. Perhaps what we should be wishing from this chaos is for them to wipe as many of their numbers as possible".

Irene looked at all of this more objectively. Divide and Conquer, Simon's plan was good and all. The expedition force wouldn't be a threat to them if they were scattered and dealt with separately.

However, if through the trials they manage to eliminate their prejudices against each other, work like a single team, and focus their strengths together, they would become a serious threat to their dungeon.

The possibility was low, but it was not like it was none.

Simon understood what Irene pointing at nevertheless he believed that it was impossible for them to come together at this point. A mind was often the hardest thing to read, thus he failed to take one aspect into consideration and made a fatal mistake.

"Alright, it's time for us to initiate the second phase of our plans... 'Hit where it hurts" Simon ordered.

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Nineteen hours into the exploration of the 45th floor, the silent scenic floor, had turned into a complete mayhem. Sounds of explosions broke the silence and destruction spread everywhere. No matter where one looked on this floor, one wouldn't find a place where there was no battle occurring.

Near the entrance to the next floor, a couple of guilds with a gloomy atmosphere around them, had gathered together. The air around the place was heavy and suffocating to the point where any low levelled person would instantly faint.

"So tell me who is responsible for this madness?" At the forefront of this group, was the grey haired man who was looking at the distance where all kinds of battles was occurring.

His eyes that was peeking through the mask, glared at the seven guild leaders beside him who had gathered here along with their guilds at his call.

Chapter 576 576- Hit Where It Hurts

As for others, it did not even need to be said as the chaos and explosions echoing around all across the floor were self-explanatory. The guild leaders had a frown of exasperation on their faces, as they themselves tried to understand the cause of this madness.

Although they understood some of the reasons why the other guilds were fighting each other, none of them had any conclusive proof as to who was the main culprit behind all this.



The mood of the grey haired man already looked very foul, so they dared not say anything that pissed him off even further. Unless called out none of them provided any explanation.

"Cassius you were responsible for communicating with all of the guilds, tell me what in the world happened here?".

The guild leader of the Assassin's guild exhaled a deep breath of air, one could see the look of tiredness on his face as he explained the reports that he got from his subordinates.

"I understand the gist of it. So someone interfered in between the activities of the other guilds and while they were busy dealing with the monsters those people stole their rewards causing them to suffer some casualties. Is that right?" The grey haired man asked.

"That is correct" Cassius confirmed.

"What is the possibility that it was the work of some monsters?"...

"None. From the reports I got, it seemed like those people interfering in the way of the other guilds are using cross-cutting".

The grey haired man narrowed his eyes the moment that term was mentioned. If it was cross cutting, it was hundred percent the work of the adventurers. However, what he didn't understand was what could drive these guilds to the point of fighting and killing one another.

"Are the rewards in those reassure chests really that lucrative?" the grey haired man asked. He did not participate or tag along with any guilds in hunting for the treasures. From his perspective, whatever that could be inside those treasure chests wouldn't be worth his time or be of any importance to him.

From the start of this exploration, he was only interested in locating the entrance to the next floor. When he finally found it, he was made aware that the situation had evolved into what it was now.

"I believe it is because of this item".

Arven Lantz and his crimson demolition guild who was one of the seven groups to have assembled here at his call, replied. He took something out from his space ring and presented it in front of everyone's eyes.

"Huh?"..

"HUH?!"...

"HUHH?!!"...

Everybody was surprised at the thing that Arven took out, though their surprise was for a whole other reason. Nevertheless, their surprise wouldn't even be able to hold a candle in front of the shock that Arven was feeling inside.

The reason for all of them being surprised was none other than the thing that he took out from his space ring. Sitting in his hand, was a shiny looking rock as big as a fist.

What was going on? He had clearly taken out the greatest reassurance that was currently stored inside his space ring so why did a stone come out instead of it? Arven was in a state of loss for a moment.

"Is this some kind of joke? Is that shiny stone supposed to be the reason why those guilds are fighting amongst each other?" the grey haired pointed at the shiny looking rock.

It was true that the stone looked aesthetically beautiful and might make some country nobles collect them. However, other than it looks it had no other value.

The other six guild masters also wondered why he showed them a stone when he had that treasure with him.

"Eh? No, I was trying to show you the spirit orb that our guild found inside a treasure chest while exploring the floor". Arven explained while frantically searching for something inside his space ring.

"Spirit Orb!!" The grey haired man's voice increased up a notch the moment he hear Arven mention the spirit orbs.

"That's right... I received many reports saying that a couple of guilds have gotten their hands on these treasures. It is because of these spirit orbs that the other guilds are fighting amongst each other" Cassius explained.

Even though his guild and the others here except for the crimson demolition guild didn't encounter any such treasure chest with spirit orbs inside them. But based on the multiple reports that he received, he believed that it ought to be true.

"You found the spirit orbs?! That... How... Can you show it to me?" The grey haired man tried to maintain a calm face, but he still ended up fumbling with his words.

The dungeon harbouring the forest spring spirits was a secret that only a handful of people knew. In this expedition force, only he and the people from the Sea God's Trident guild were aware of it. But didn't that suggest that the expedition force as a whole was now aware that the dungeon was in possession of the spirit orbs since they were now being rewarded inside the treasure chests?

It was true that he lured the top twenty guilds by promising them a spirit orb each as a reward for their efforts. However, he hadn't had the slightest intention of ever handing them the spirit orbs when the moment came. It was all just a lie, a trick that he used to borrow the power of the guilds.

After killing the demon who was the master of this dungeon, he planned to harvest all the spirit orbs from the forest spring spirits living in this dungeon and teleport out of here, leaving the guilds to do whatever they wanted.

A supreme treasure such as the spirit orbs, only an idiot would think about sharing it with an unrelated party. The item would be put to better use if the adventurers from their side were to use it. That way, they would be able to suppress the spreading influence of that organisation on the mainland.

That was supposed to be the plan; however, everything was ruined with the appearance of the spirit orbs on this floor, everything that he had planned had gone down the drain.

'Why is the demon using the spirit orbs as the reward for the treasure chests? Is he not aware of their value?' the grey haired man questioned internally. Never in his wildest dream would he have imagined that the demon was not only aware of the value of the spirit orbs, but was also using them to manipulate the guilds just like he had done.

"What's wrong... why aren't you showing it to me?" Seeing that Arven was dilly-dallying, he couldn't help but wonder if the other party was hesitant to show the spirit orb to him.

"It is not that I don't want to, it's just that..." a drop of sweat slid down Arven's face as he repeatedly searched his space ring.

"What about you guys? Didn't any of you find the spirit orbs inside those treasure chests?" While Arven was still searching, the grey haired man turned to face the other six guild leaders who shook their heads with bitter smiles in answer.

There were only a few treasure chests spawned on the entire 45th floor, and the ones that had the spirit orbs within them were even fewer. These guild masters did stumble upon a treasure chest or two in their path. However, all it had were a couple of grade [3] mana crystals, a few artefacts, serenity stones and such.

Although all of these were no doubt extremely good treasures, they cannot be compared to the spirit orbs. That is why, they were extremely jealous of Arven and his guild who were lucky enough to stumble upon one.

When the great haired man heard that, he couldn't help but wonder what was the motive behind the demon only using a few spirit orbs as the reward.

'He couldn't be...' At that moment, a thought suddenly struck him and he finally realised something that sent the chills down his spine. Since his face was covered with a mask, there was no way of telling what kind of expression he was making.

"Something's wrong..." Arven who was similarly having the shock of his life, chose this moment to speak up.

"What's wrong guild leader?" Seeing that their guild master was acting differently, the members of the Crimson demolition guild became concerned and approached him.

Arven looked at them and said absentmindedly "I... can't find the spirit orb that we got from that treasure chest".

"Huh? What are you saying guild leader, you put the spirit orb in your space ring, it should be there" the guild members reminded thinking that their guild leader was playing some joke on them.

"That's what I'm saying. It's not there anymore... the spirit orb is not in my space ring" Arven clarified causing the smiles on the members of the crimson demolition guild to freeze at this moment.

"D-Did you check properly guild leader" they couldn't help but question. A treasure like the spirit orb going missing was not a small thing, it need not be even mentioned how other guilds have gone berserk when their spirit orb was stolen from them.

"If you don't believe me, you check my space ring yourselves" Arven was frustrated enough by this, so when his own guild members questioned him, he flipped and directly passed his spirit ring to them.

"Guild leader does not need to be angry at us. However, if the spirit orb is not in your space ring, then where did it go?" ...

"I would like to know the answer myself. The spirit orb was definitely kept by me inside my space ring at that time. However, now when I tried to search for it, I couldn't find it anywhere" Arven spat.

Chapter 577 577- Hit Where It Hurts (2)

The hubbub around Arven became loud enough for the other guilds to notice them. Seeing that something was wrong with the crimson demolition guild, the other six guild leaders approached Arven.

"What's wrong?"...

Arven looked at them, deliberated something inside his head for a while before coming out clean.

"What? You lost the spirit orb?" the other six guild leaders had a disbelieving face. Nobody could blame them after all, it sounded too much of a lie coming out of Arven now of all times when the grey haired man wanted to see it.

"You don't have to look at me like that, I'm seriously telling you all the truth" Arven tried to justify.

"Guild leader of the crimson demolition guild, I just want to look at the spirit orb with my own eyes and confirm the fact that the treasure chests on this floor do indeed hold the spirit orbs. You can rest

assured that I do not have intention towards that spirit orb that your guild got" the grey haired man approached Arven and spoke.

He thought that the latter was hesitant to show him and that was why he said all that. But who would have expected that Arven wasn't lying and instead was speaking the truth? It was just that the faux spirit orb he had in his space ring lost all of its energy and turned into that shiny rock in his hand.

"Please believe me I'm not lying. The spirit orb has really gone missing" Arven had a bitter face, the missing of the spirit orb was already painful enough but now he even had to prove to them that he really did not have the spirit orb.

"Really..." Brutus, Florence, Cassius and the other guild leaders had sceptical faces.

"Please trust my guild leader, he is not lying. The spirit orb has really gone missing" the members of his guild convinced.

"Believing that you really lost it, do you know where and how it happened?" the guild leader of the wind sky dome, Elrod Dome asked. He was the oldest amongst the people present here and seemed to be around sixty years old.

He had a long well groomed white beard, wore a worn down robe and had a plain looking staff beside him. Elrod Dome, there was no mage in the kingdom of Ellesmere who had not heard his name. After all, he was one of the few mages who could be compared with Karina Lowell in terms of attainment in magic.

Other than that, the old man was also respected by all the other guild leaders and maintained a cordial relationship with everyone here.

Arven scratched his head and explained the situation with as much detail as he could.

"What you are saying is that you do not know where and how you lost it and it simply disappeared from your space ring?" Elrod had a dark face as he reiterated Arven's story. He didn't think that the latter would lie to his face.

"I'm telling the truth. I definitely kept the spirit orb in my space ring at the time when I got it. So it wasn't possible for somebody to steal it or for it to get dropped somewhere. The spirit orb simply disappeared and this shiny stone was left instead of it" Arven defended.

Everybody was fed up with his lie and didn't know what to say to him anymore, they could only turn towards the grey haired man and hope that he does not get angry. But contrary to their expectation, the grey haired man instead of getting angry, was frowning his brows and thinking about something very deeply.

"Did you just say that the spirit orb vanished and this stone appeared inside your space ring in its stead?" he asked, a peculiar glint in his eyes.

Arven nodded his head.

"I see... believing that you did indeed have the spirit orb, I can see why the other guilds are fighting over it. If somebody steals something as valuable as the spirit orbs, a bloody battle like that cannot be avoided" the grey haired man willingly believed Arven's story shocking the other guild leaders.

"There is no reason for the guild leader of the crimson demolition guild to lie to us especially when he had already told us that his guild got a spirit orb while exploring the floor. In any case, our focus shouldn't be the spirit orbs but how to stop the guilds from fighting anymore" he added.

The seven guild leaders gathered here, nodded their heads. What the grey haired man said was right, they still had a lot of floors to go before they can conquer the dungeon, and fighting among themselves would only weaken them.

They were just about to move and suppress the guilds that were fighting in the distance when the transponder conch on Cassius suddenly started emitting transmission. Cassius picked up the transmission conch and some static noises amidst some screams started coming from the other side.

"What's going on?"...

Everybody had the same question. The transmission conch on his hand was just the start, one by one the transmission conch on the other members and other guilds started ringing too. The same static and scream noises could be heard coming from all the transponder conchs making everyone in the scene puzzled.

"H-H... Help... attac.k... we are... father help" Finally, the conch on Brutus' hand emitted some coherent words. But the words that were uttered didn't make any of the guild leaders happy on the contrary, a sudden sense of foreboding feeling engulfed them.

"Is that Marcus? What is going on over there, your voice is not clear. Did something happen while you guys were going back up?" Brutus asked but the transmission ended abruptly and everybody was left hanging.

Immediately, they all started redialling to the transmission conch on the other side; however, it failed to connect every time. The mood that was heavy to begin with, became even more gloomier with this unknown sense of ominous feeling assaulting them.

The transmission of all the guild leaders acting up together, the screams and the static noises and the last message they heard. Even a fool would be able to understand that something had happened to the tertiary team.

The tertiary team that was left back on the 34th floor, should be making their way back up after they healed their injuries. Something bad must have happened for them to send so many sound transmissions like that.

Brutus who was unable to calm down after hearing the last message, immediately took out their guild's treasure, the blood saint tiger's claw. The moment he laid eyes on that claw and saw its colour slowly turning pale red, his body immediately froze.

The blood saint tiger claw had the life imprint of his son, Marcus on it. Under no circumstances it would turn pale red unless the life of his son was being threatened.

"This... the tertiary is being attacked".

This was the only explanation. The countenance of all the guild leaders turned pale at that realisation. The tertiary team had the geniuses of their guilds, if anything untoward happened to them again, it would deal more damage than just paralysing the guild.

Not to mention after that incident on the mysterious ruins, the tertiary team was left severely weakened. This was the reason why the tertiary team was left on the 34th floor with the orders to go back to the surface after their injuries were healed.



By now they should have climbed back to the middle floors already, and there shouldn't be any monster to threaten them there. That is unless...

The guild leaders tried to contact the members they left there to ensure the safety of the tertiary team. However, no matter how many times they sent a sound transmission, nobody from that end picked up.

"We need to go back up immediately" Elrod Dome, leading the sky earth dome guild, spoke. If the situation was what they thought, then they cannot leave it be.

Everyone was of the same thought, they nodded at old man Elrod's words and were prepared to leave this floor and climb up.

"Everyone, please wait. I know that you are anxious about the younger members of your guild. However, if you leave the 45th floor and climb up, you would be forsaking all the efforts and the casualties you suffered to reach this place".

"Even if you go and back up your tertiary teams, the monsters would already be spawned on the floors above by the time you come back down. Do you want to abandon all the sacrifices you made up until now when we are so close to reaching the end?"

Seeing the guild leader ready to leave, the grey haired man chose this moment to speak.

"What is Sir implying?" Brutus asked, his brows locked into a frown. The geniuses of their guild were much more important than conquering a [D] tier dungeon. Although it would be regrettable to abandon all their efforts up until now, backing up their tertiary teams was their first priority.

"The guild leaders misunderstood me. I'm not suggesting that we sacrifice the tertiary team. if they are facing a problem they need to be backed up. However, why don't we leave that to the secondary team? Wouldn't it be much more practical that way?"

"The secondary team is powerful enough to solve whatever problem the tertiary team is facing right now. Not to mention it is led by miss Karina and the various vice guild leaders of your guild. And even if worse comes to worst, they always have the option of using the return scroll".

All the guild leaders fell silent and after a few seconds, they all turned their heads towards Florence, who was leading the mage guild in Karina's stead.

"Alright, I'll contact my guild leader"...

Chapter 578 578- Hit Where It Hurts (3)

A couple of hours ago, 21st floor- a vast forestland.

A group of adventurers climbed up the stairs and arrived before it. The group was none other than the tertiary team of the expedition force, comprising of all the geniuses and newbie adventurers from all the guilds.

Initially, when this group dived inside the dungeon and cleared the floors, it was filled with a vibrant and dominant aura. Yet after reaching the 34th floor, they understood the true dangers of a dungeon. Suffering a disastrous loss inside that mysterious ruin, their egos along with their superiority complex was shattered into pieces.

These young fellows who had lost their fangs, were surrounded by a gloomy and depressed aura. Many of them had bandages and a strong medicinal aura wrapped around them. Those that have lost their arms or limbs were being carried on a stretcher.

Just a glance at them was enough to tell that they had been defeated.

Marcus helping the team of adventurers at the frontline in clearing the floor, looked behind him at those people and sighed.

"Young master Marcus, there is no point in delving into the past and hurting yourself. As your father, the guild leader has said, you must accept the fact that you were defeated and move forward".

"Your future is still right in front of you, so you must not get lost in your past nor must you forget it. Learn from your mistakes, over the challenges and become a better adventurer in the future... Those words of guild leader, you must always remember it".

A warrior spoke as he approached Marcus while exuding an aura of experience.

"Yeah... I know uncle Kain. It's just that every time I think about it, I cannot help but regret that I could have gone about it a different way. I feel responsible for the lives of the brothers I lost down there" Marcus expressed his regret tightly clenching his sword.

Out of the five hundred comrades that he led inside that door only around 100 people managed to survive. And if you counted all the teams that dived there, the numbers that added, didn't even make up one-tenth of their total numbers.

If not because the primary team arrived at the right time, perhaps they might have... Marcus felt his heart tremble at that thought.

"Sigh... young master, you cannot get distracted. We are still inside the dungeon after all. The first thing that we need to do is get out of here and...".

Marcus understood that what Kain was saying was right. They were still inside a dungeon, he could get distracted and brood as much as he wanted once he was out.

"Hm? What's wrong uncle Kain" Seeing Kain halt in his steps all of a sudden, Marcus couldn't help but ask.

But before he could get an answer, several adventurers all releasing a veteran aura, gathered around Kain at this moment. All of these people were high levelled and very strong, if not because they were asked to aid the tertiary team, they would be in the primary unit of the expedition force and exploring the lower floors by now.

"Marcus!" a clear voice of a girl sounded out. Hallie with her two sisters, Tiana and Anna walked over to him. It was not only them, several other geniuses— Kenan Lantz, Tyler Rees, Park Garrett, Gallio Stallard, Levin field and all the others who were assisting in clearing the floor for the injured behind them also gathered around here with their guilds.

"What's going on? Why are all the veterans of our guilds gathering in one place?" Kenan Lantz asked. He and the members of his crimson demolition guild were busy clearing the monsters on the 21st floor when all of a sudden they were brought here by the seniors of their guilds.

The question that Kenan asked was also on the minds of all the others.

"Young master... everyone, get ready. It looks like we have company" Kain who had years of experience under his belt, spoke. The veterans around him got into formation in an extremely coordinated way. Each knew what they must do and what their role was.

Marcus and the other younger members of the twenty guilds also hurriedly followed commands and got ready to engage the enemy.

The atmosphere around the floor which was all normal up until now, suddenly became serious. One could even feel a weird chill in the air.

Time passed, but even after some time, nothing happened.

"Do you think that you are hidden, why don't you come out now?" Kain shouted, his gaze looking straight ahead. There was nothing there but clear grounds in front of him.

Marcus and the other geniuses looked at the direction where Kain and the other veterans were looking; nonetheless, they couldn't even spot anything unusual.

However, how could it be that these veteran adventurers would be duped too? Although they too couldn't see anything abnormal ahead, based on their years of adventuring and their keen instinct, they could tell that danger lied ahead.

Finally, after that provocation from Kain, a footstep sounded out and in front of the shocked gazes of everyone, the space around a couple of meters ahead of them, distorted revealing a beguiling figure wearing a maid outfit.

That appealing face coupled with those destructive curves stole the breath of everyone watching. Peach hair and a gentle looking face that hid her sadistic side, holding two daggers in her two hands, the third eldest of the Valkyrie sisters, was here.

"Hnn~ It seems like those hanging at the edge of level 600 are different than the others. I thought that the normal [Stealth] skill would be enough for you guys. I guess I was wrong" Bea commented, her face didn't hide her condescension.

Kain and the other veteran adventurers of the top twenty guild were somewhat irked at that remark but they knew better than to let their emotions take control. They suppressed their thoughts and looked at the maid with caution.

No matter how beautiful she was, her presence in this dungeon of all places... not to mention erasing her presence to the point that even they had difficulty sensing her told them that they couldn't underestimate this woman.

"Well, I guess you guys can be considered lucky but what about those behind you?"

Just as those words left her mouth, a loud neigh of a demonic horse sounded out and the entire ground started trembling.

RUMBLE... RUMBLE... The adventurers could hear the ground underneath them shudder, making them wonder what was the cause behind it.

To their shock and disbelief, a few seconds after the quake began, hundreds of demonic looking warhorses with flaming bodies and nightmarish looks, appeared from the left side of the forest and galloped towards the injured and the exhausted adventurers that were in the backlines.

"What?!!!" Before anyone could do anything, the galloping warhorses reached the backlines and started a one sided stampede.

These adventurers were already severely injured from the last time, it would be a tall order for them to stop the Bloodthorn Demonic warhorse who had started its charge even if they were in their peak condition much less now.

Many were killed by being stepped underneath those scorching hot hooves or dangled along those thorns becoming a decoration.

[Stampede], one of the powerful inherent skills of the Demonic Bloodthorn Warhorse. After its evolution to disaster class, all its skills, power and stats received a huge boost. Forget about these worn down and defeated adventurers, even the primary unit of the expedition force would have difficulty blocking the [stampede] skill

"This..." Kain exclaimed in shock. The hundreds of demonic warhorses were so near them yet they did not even feel their presence until the last moment they came charging out of the forest.

As all the illusions of the Bloodthorn Demonic Warhorse looked extremely real, it was hard to differentiate the real from the fake. To these adventurers, it looked like there were hundreds of demonic horses galloping.

The veterans looked at each other, they only needed a glance to understand what the other party was thinking. Some of them quickly turned around and were about to back the group behind when the Maid that was in front of them, suddenly appeared behind them.

"Now, I can't let you go and back them up. You guys will amuse us for the time being" Bea spoke charmingly. She opened a gate behind her and Emma along with hundreds of Adromedas mk9 poured out of it.

"Those are... the golems from the mysterious ruins. Everyone be careful, these golems possess some unusual weapons" Marcus immediately recognised the war machines that he had fought back inside that door and cautioned everyone.

"Two maids, hundreds of demonic warhorses and those golems huh" Kain and the other adventurers silently activated their skills. They needed to go and back up the group behind them fast but they cannot ignore the threat that was in front of them.

Out of the 5000 strong people in this unit, only around 300 of them were veteran adventurers who can fight against those monsters. The remaining were people from the tertiary team, the newbies and the injured.

There is no way they could be counted upon especially when facing such powerful enemies like those demonic warhorses. Although the golems didn't appear much of a threat to them, the maids on the other hand gave him a bad premonition.

"Young master, I'll leave the tertiary team to you. Can you handle those golems?" Kain turned towards Marcus beside him.

"Of course, leave it to me" the latter nodded his head.

"In that case, we will divide ourselves and block them. I will leave it up to you all to choose your enemies".

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The veteran warriors were all from the different guilds, it was next to impossible for him to lead them. Thus, he left it up to the veteran themselves to choose their opponents.

"Hehh~ I have been watching you guys so I know how arrogant you guys can be. But to think that you even have the nerves to discuss your strategy in front of your enemy, it looks like we have been underestimated Emma" Bea gave a deep smile.

"Hihh!! I-I'm sorry..." Emma as usual, behaved timidly. She extended her hand and immediately all the veteran adventurers that were about to make their moves felt their body come to a halt all of a sudden.

"What are you guys doing get moving" Kain spoke impatiently.

"There's something wrong, we can't move our body" the adventurers reported. No matter how much they tried to move, they felt like their bodies was bound to something.

"What?" Kain and the others were surprised. When they looked over to see what was wrong, they were unable to spot anything different.

"Strings... they are entangled by strings" Alvin Claud, the vice guild leader of the Assassin guild explained.

"What? Strings?" Kain looked over once again but no matter how hard he tried he couldn't see anything unusual around the adventurers.

This was given, Emma's string were no ordinary strings, they were specially produced by her and couldn't be seen through ordinary means. Only someone possessing special visual skills would be able spot the threads that were so thin and inconspicuous that it even the veteran adventurers failed to see them.

If not for Alvin pointing it out, they would have been unaware of the threads at all.

"Be careful of your surroundings, do not get caught by those threads" Kain hurriedly cautioned. Since the thread cannot be seen without a special visual skill, it would be foolish if they fell for the traps like the others.

"Leave it to me, I can see them" the vice guild leader of the Assassins Guild, said as he used his skills and blade techniques to cut the strings around from those adventurers thus freeing them.

"Let me help you Senior" Gallio added. Thanks to his mystic eyes showing him the source of danger, he could see the threads in red color. Thus allowing him to cut the strings.

"T-Thanks" those veteran adventurers that were freed from their bindings, thanked Alvin and Gallio but the next second, they weirdly became all silent.

"Gugh..." Blood sprayed out of their mouth and neck, in front of the horrified eyes of the others around them their heads rolled down the ground. Just before their deaths, these adventurers felt a chill brush past their body and their life mysteriously disappearing.

"To be able to cut Emma's strings, that is quite some skills. However, she isn't the only opponent you need to be careful of" A cold voice sounded from behind the dead adventurers and Bea strangely materialised next to their bodies.

All eyes opened wide in surprise, nobody was able to see her move much less see her attack. The atmosphere around the adventurer's turned grim. They could hear the miserable screams and noises of people getting squashed, their bones being crushed from the distance.

The backlines urgently needed backup, yet they cannot free themselves from the enemy in front of them. The maid did not just stop there, after killing those few adventurers she disappeared once again and appeared beside the ones who were similarly trapped by the strings.

SLASH... SLASH... SLASH... with every swing of her daggers, a life would be harvested. The adventurers that were killed couldn't even move their muscles as they felt their life slipping away from them.

And due to the invisible threads, the other adventurers could even move freely or assist them. They could only watch helplessly as the other around them got killed one by one.

"Use your [Mana Armors]" Those adventurers that were above level 500, used their mana armors to shield themselves but the ones below that level weren't that fortunate.

Bea's dagger were precise and ruthless, as if practiced over hundreds of thousands of times, there was no wasted movements. She appeared and disappeared from one place to another and targeted only those adventurers that were the easiest to kill and had no way of defending themselves.



Her every move was relaxed and lethal, as if she was out strolling in a park. There was no gracefulness in her attacks, it was all technique and pure strength. Yet seeing her draw blood and immerse herself into the pleasure, it was bizarrely mesmerising.

"Kain... I'll deal with her. You go after the maid that is controlling the strings. Gallio you are the only one other than me who can see those strings, you need to go and help Kain" Alvin shouted, he didn't wait for the other two to respond as he activated [Ghost Steps] and chased after Bea.

Kain and Gallio who were called out, nodded their heads.

"I'll help too"..

"Me too"...

"Us also... we cannot just stay behind and let the seniors protect us all the times". Brutus, Hallie, Tiana, Kenan and all the other geniuses stepped forward in an attempt to assist.

Nonetheless, Kain shook his head and pointed above them "The golems are yet to move; however, it doesn't mean that we can leave them unchecked. I want you all, the geniuses of this generation to team up and take care of those golems. Leave the maids and those demonic warhorses to old timers like us".

Although part of his intention was to keep them out of danger, it was true that the golems were being unnaturally silent. They didn't know what kind of tricks it had or what it could do. That is why, he left it to the young master of his guild and the other geniuses who have faced the golems before inside those mysterious ruins.

Maids aside, Kain could tell that those demonic warhorses wrecking havoc in the backlines were all disaster class. A level that even an elite veteran adventurer like him has to be careful of.

Marcus and the other nodded their heads, they understood that they were no match for the monsters in the backlines and the maids were far too big of an opponent for them whom even the veteran adventurers were having difficulty facing.

By the process of elimination, the golems were the only ones they could take on right now with their levels.

Leaving behind those words, Kain moved. Gallio followed behind him and helped him cut all the strings barring their path towards the maid that was controlling them. The veterans and the other adventurers couldn't move freely because of these invisible strings.

The hindrance that is to say the maid who was controlling them, needed to be taken care of first and only then they would be able to provide backup to the backlines.

"Listen up Gallio, once we reach the maid, I will be the one take her head on. You just need to assist me... alright?" Kain emphasized, it was too dangerous for a level 415 assassin to take on a maid whose power was too mysterious.

It was up to him to resolve this situation. Kain made up his mind, he was one of the top five members of the Savannah Beast guild, hence he had quite a lot of confidence in his strength.

While they were making their way to the maid that controlled the strings, Alvin chased after Bea and interrupted her from slaying any more adventurers.

"Woman, your opponent will be me" Alvin stated, unsheathing his short sword and pointing at her.

"Oh~" Bea merely smiled and licked the blood that was on her dagger.

"You think you are qualified to take me on?" her words carried an aloofness that only the powerful possessed.

"Yeah, I'll be the one to take your head" Even if he can't take her down, he must at least delay her for long enough for Kain and the others to bring down that maid who controlled the strings.

Once these tricky strins were gone, they could work together with the others to bring the maid in front of him down.

Seeing that the maid looked unconcerned by his reply and was glancing towards the other maid, a thought appeared in his mind.

"Are you concerned about her? Looking at how she uses strings to attack, she must be a mage right? If so then she won't be a match for kain and the others" Alvin remarked.

"Hm? Are you perhaps trying to incite me by chit chatting? How foolish but I might as well amuse you in that foolish thinking of yours" Easily seeing through his inner thoughts, Bea answered amusingly.

"Of course I'm concerned, she my little sister after all. Having committed a mistake in the past already, we cannot afford to mess it up this time. That is why, I want to ensure that everything is going according to our master's plan. As for if she is a mage or not, she is more than enough to handle the likes of you".

"What?"...

"Never mind, I guess inferior minds cannot understand his greatness. If you are ready then let's start this..." Bea sighed, her words just fell when she appeared behind the man.

Alert, Alvin hurriedly turned around and used a roundhouse kick to push his opponent back and open some distance. The kick connected; however, the maid wasn't pushed back in the slightest on the contrary it was him who felt pain on his leg and had to take a couple of steps back.

The maid conflicting to her delicate and mesmerising appearance was quite strong. Not only that, even the armour she wore was quite sturdy and not any inferior to a mithril armour.

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"Although I do not have my Heirloom with me, this weapon that was bestowed to me by my master is enough for the likes of you. [Twelve Stride- First Stride]" Bea muttered to herself, her figure suddenly became ghostlike as she appeared in front of Alvin leaving counyless after images behind.

"W-What kind of skill is this dammit. [Mana Armour], [Super Enhanced Agility], [Blade Edge Mastery- Vector Slash]" Alvin wasted no time retaliating as soon as he saw the maid activate some skills he had never seen or heard before.

[Mana armour] increased his defence, [Super Enhanced Agility] increased his speed and along with his advanced mastery in the short sword, he erupted forth with an attack that he believed even the mysterious woman could not ignore.

"Second Stride"

The attack connected with the maid and passed through her easily.

"Afterimage!!" Alvin was shocked; he thought he had the right one but it turned out to be an afterimage.

"Nope, you had the right one" the afterimage that was behind the one he attacked, moved her lips.

CHII... at that instant, blood sprayed out from his chest and to his horror, he witnessed his [mana armour] getting slashed through as easily as if it was butter in front of a hot knife.

"Dammit" Alvin attacked the afterimage but the person had already relocated somewhere else. He used this chance to open some distance from the maid and down a potion.

"What? Why is not closing? Kuh" Alvin was confused as to why his wounds weren't healing even after he consumed a potion when something stabbed him in the back.

"Always keep your eyes on the enemy— something that our master always said" Bea spoke appearing behind Alvin.

"Rupture" she muttered something and the dagger stabbed to his back glowed red and the wound festered to become some kind of cancer that spread all around his body.

"Puff..." Alvin threw out a mouthful of blood and fell down on the ground while clenching his body in pain. The battle was over before it even started. Bea casually grabbed the hair of the assassin and lifted his face which was twisted in pain.

The gentle expression that she always carried herself with, crumbled apart replaced by a lewd sadistic one.

"W-wha... di.. dyou?" Alvin asked amidst his tears and snot, numerous cancer protruded out of his body.

"Hehe... to answer your question, it was the ability of this dagger, the [A] tier Blood Bane. The blade of this dagger has the ability that can negate all kinds of lower or medium tier healing".

"Not only that, it's another ability [Rupture] that you are infected with rapidly increases the infection rate of the wound until the target is paralysed with pain. AHH~ this dagger was something that was gifted to me by my master. You should be happy that you get to die by it".

After what happened the last time when a member of Cerberus, calling himself number 007 escaped from the clutches of the Valkyries due to them being equipped with poor items, Simon made sure that this time they had the best of the best equipment for the mission.

On that end, he spared no expenses and burnt down hundreds of [B] tier weapons like oil in the armoury to upgrade a couple of [A] tier weapons for the Valkyries. The dagger in Bea's hand, Blood Bane was one of them.

In a way, it was kind of similar to the [A] tier weapon of Donte Goodman, the Proliferate.

"This is bad, Mister Alvin is no match for that maid" Brutus and the other geniuses were watching everything from the distance.

"The other veteran adventurers cannot move because of the strings, it's up to us to back them up" Tiana spoke.

"But we are supposed to keep watch on the golems, we don't know when they will move" Kenan reasoned.

"Watch out, something is flying over here" Hallie interrupted, casting a wall of ice that blocked whatever that was hurling towards them. The thing crashed on the wall and only then they were able to tell that it was a person.

"It's Gallio... what are you doing here? Weren't you assisting mister Kain?" Marcus asked Hallie to dispel her ice wall and the group moved to support the genius of the assassin guild.

"Cough... cough..." Gallio coughed a few times before explaining things. According to him, during their fight, the maid all of a sudden changed the way she was using her strings.

From her initial way of binding her enemies with her invisible strings, she changed into attacking. Those thin invisible strings on top of being extremely sturdy, were also sharp enough to slash through all kinds of defences and armours.

To top it off, the strings that she was using now were many times more tensile and couldn't be cut apart as easily as before. The matter became worse with Kain getting severely injured without being able to even approach the maid.

Finally, after seeing no hope, he hurled Gallio back towards where the others were right before getting caught in those strings.

"What?! T-That cannot be uncle Kain is one of the strongest warriors of our guild. With his strength stats he should easily be able to snap out of the bindings of those strings" Marcus who knew Kain's strength the best, was in disbelief.

He wanted to deny it, but after seeing Gallio's condition and the situation the veteran adventurers were in, he had to accept the ugly truth.

"We need to go and assist them" he might have been shaken, but he was no gutless coward. His instincts were telling him to assist them.

The others also knew that the only way they could survive this calamity was by assisting the veterans. Thus everybody nodded their heads, they were just about to move when Gallio grabbed hold of Marcus.

"You can't go" he spoke in a faint voice.

"Wha... what are you saying? We can't win without those two. We need to go and assist them" Marcus pointed out. Nevertheless, Gallio didn't release him and shook his head.

"Wrong... they are not an opponent we can take on at our levels. Use your brains, if we go out there right now, we will simply just end up becoming dead weights. Do you wish to bring this team to ruin once again Marcus?" at the end of his sentence, Gallio even started yelling.

The shock and despair in his eyes were apparent, even the veteran warriors were helpless against the maid, What could they who had just newly risen to level 400 be able to do?

"So?"...

"Huh? Marcus you still..."

"Don't misunderstand; it is true that it was partly my fault for leading everyone to that mysterious ruin. However, the situation right now is different. The situation is not completely hopeless. There are quite a few veteran warriors with levels above 500 among us, as long as we get them out of their binds, they will be able to work together and deal with the maids".

Marcus shook off Gallio's hands and turned around, one could already see that he was transforming into his [Partial Beast Transformation] state. He and the others were just about to go and assist the others, when suddenly the Andromedas, that have been silently hovering over their heads all this while, started making some noise.

Some strange robotic sounds came out of them as their frames started shifting and a big muzzle, resembling a cannon came out of their chests.

*Zzzz...* as soon as the cannon formed, the Andromedas started firing. [Ballistic Guns], the original and the newly developed weapon of the mk9. The reason why the Andromedas weren't attacking, was because they were in the standby mode as they prepared to launch the ballistic guns.

These andromedas came right out of the factory, hence it took some time.

BOOMM... BOOMM... the power and range of the guns were on a whole different level than any of the weapons the Andromedas currently possessed. Their firepower wouldn't even lose to some intermediate tier magic.

The geniuses of the various guilds dodged the attacks or erected shields and defences. Nevertheless, attacks comparable to intermediate tier magic weren't that easy to defend against. Many of them got injured in the process.

"Dammit, these golems just had to start moving now. Everyone get ready, we will deal with the golems first before going on to assist the others".

Marcus roared, his present form was that of a bipedal crimson tiger with golden stripes. His body stood at 2.5 meters tall and he wielded the two-handed broad swords with just one hand. Be it his strength or aura, everything increased drastically at his moment.

"[Howling Beast Roar]"... he issued out a loud roar that interfered with the incoming beams of attacks, making them miss their mark or alter their course directly.

Hmph... Marcus snorted, blood red aura poured out of his body as he made a huge jump. He was so fast that he was already on top of an Andromeda before the war machine could even perceive him.

"I have already fought with you guys for long enough to know all of your weaknesses, you dumb golems" A storm of claw attacks rained down on that Andromeda, destroying its circuits and turning it into a dismantled piece of scrap in a few seconds.

Marcus didn't stop his attacks there, after destroying the first andromeda, he turned his attention towards the others. There were around fifty andromedas that had come out from that portal.

Compared to the thousand of golems he had faced back inside that door, this number meant nothing.

"Great Gale Claw" every attack from Marcus was accompanied by the ripping sound of the wind and the low roar of a tiger. After transforming into the [Partial Beast] state all his stats and skills received a huge boost and his attacks were in no way inferior to that of a level 480.