

## D. of Pride 601

Chapter 601 601- Alice

A cold wind blew out from below the stairs bringing along a terrifying chill and pressure with it.

CLACK... CLACK...

Edgar suddenly heard the sounds of someone walking on the ice and a moment later an ethereal beauty, with azure blue hair, and an alluring face that could mesmerise any beings in this world, walked out.

She was wearing a crystal blue dress that shimmered with light coming from the phosphorescence crystal on the ceiling and accentuated her breathtaking curves.

Who could this figure be other than Irene? She casually walked up the now frozen stairs and stood in front of him. Her phoenix like eyes shone with a divine light and gazed straight at the place where Edgar was causing the latter to snap out of his daze.

"T-This can't be... nobody should be able to see through my [Perfect Ghost]"

Edgar thought internally. His skill [Perfect Ghost] was a Lost Ancient tier skill that only a small number of people in this world possess. It gave him almost perfect invisibility that the normal [Stealth] of an assassin could never compare to.

It not only suppressed his presence and aura until it was nil, but it also helps him avoid all kinds of detection abilities. Unless the detection skill's tier is greater than his [Perfect Ghost] nobody should be able to find him.

But the woman in front of him was definitely looking towards his direction, there was no mistake.

It was only natural that Edgar was confused after all, he was even able to escape the radars of the dungeon itself. And as per the information they had collected about the demon and his dungeon, there shouldn't be any entity strong enough to detect him, inside.

Or so Edgar thought, however, what he didn't know was that his information was erroneous, old and didn't take into account the unusualness of the dungeon Laplace.

Just like everyone else, the expedition force had severely underestimated the dungeon Laplace and the dangers it hid inside. When they did realise it, was already too late. The dungeon had already bared its fangs snapping down on numerous adventurers and making them its nourishment forever.

And Edgar was soon going to join their rank and go through the same realisation as all the others before him did.

The dungeon Laplace was extremely dangerous, it did not conform to any pre-established standards and was filled with strong entities. There was a reason why Simon was unfazed after seeing Edgar dive inside through the hole created by the floor buster.

And that reason was none other than the last defence he had placed to guard his dungeon core. If there ever came a time when someone managed to reach the bottom floors, they would meet her. The strongest entity currently present inside his dungeon.

Irene was guarding his dungeon core, there was no reason for Simon to worry.

Edgar and the others were soon going to find out that it was all a huge mistake on their part, the dungeon Laplace wasn't something they should have provoked.

An absurdly strong being stood in front of him. Edgar's instincts were screaming at him, telling him to run away. There was no way he could fight her, he never stood a chance. The only outcome of their fight would be him dying in an instant.

Absolute power difference—this wasn't the first time Edgar felt like that, he had met many entities back on the mainland that showed him that there was always a sky above a sky. However, even they did not make him feel such levels of intimidation and powerlessness like the woman in front of him.

"I was never told that there would be such a powerful person present inside the dungeon" he muttered to himself.

Even though he dodged that bone chilling cold wind earlier, he felt like his body was frozen. Edgar couldn't move a muscle, he wanted to run away but his feet did not obey him.

At this moment, he saw the woman walking forward, with every step she took, she froze everything around her to its core. It was like there was nothing in this world she couldn't freeze.

A vision played in his eyes, the woman walked past him and he saw himself instantly getting encased in a layer of ice. His body, bones and even his soul everything froze in an instant, it was a vision of his own death.

Edgar a powerful Ranker from the mainland, was frozen to his death without being able to even lift a finger. The mission that he carried, also failed and was forever encased in ice.

CLACK... CLACK... After walking past the ice statue, Irene's beautiful tranquil eyes looked towards the ceiling in concern. It was as if she could see through the layers of floors and peek directly at the 48th floor where the battle was going on.

After a while, she released a silent sigh. Although she was told to guard the dungeon core, she couldn't help but worry. The battle going on above was extremely fierce.

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BOOM... BOOM... BANG... on one part of the battlefield that was covered with tall trees and forest, a group of three adventurers were running through the trees dodging the volley of arrows that came at them at an unflagging pace.

HUFF... HUFF...

"Is she still on her tail?"...

"I can't tell but this place is concealed by trees all around, even she must have some difficulty finding us"...

"Seriously, what is she? I have never seen a demi-human like her"...

The adventurers discussed catching their breaths. Each of them were the guild leader of one of the two twenty guilds of the kingdom and currently, they were hiding.

Who are they hiding from? The answer was... from a little girl who looked no more than fourteen years old. As funny as it sounded, it was the truth.

The dread filled guild leaders turned towards the other guy who was the only one amongst them capable enough to contend with that girl in terms of firepower.

Arven Lantz was silent as the gazes of the other two guild leaders landed on him. To be honest, he had not the slightest idea of how to defeat that girl. The guild leader of the crimson demolition guild who was known for his highly destructive firepower, and ranked amongst the greatest mages if not at the top, was at a loss.

The Infernal magic, his prided magic that got him out of every troublesome situation and what got him the title of Pyromaniac, was at this moment rendered completely useless.

Not only was he losing in terms of firepower, but his infernal magic was also being completely suppressed.

Arven was in a state of disbelief and shock, no matter how much he wanted to deny it, the truth was he cannot defeat that girl. He clenched his hands so hard that blood flowed out of them.

"Guild Master Arven?" the other two guild leaders called out to him, their faces grave and hopeful.

Unlike him who was a mage, the other two were warriors and had no long range attack. Their sturdy armours and defences were completely ineffective against that girl's attacks who could neglect all armours.

The bodies of these two guild leaders were in a much worse shape than his own. If things continued like this, they will soon be defeated.

'We cannot win if we simply continue to run. Should I sacrifice these two to create an opening' Arven thought internally before making up his mind.

"You two listen closely, I have a plan"...

A few kilometres away from them, a young girl with blonde hair, was standing on top of a branch of a tree. Her entire body was engulfed in a layer of Tempest that twisted and twirled around her and made her look like the very manifestation of wind.

Her blonde hair was glowing at this moment, and the fluttering wind formed a cape behind her. Elements of winds shaped into birds flew around her and from time to time whispered something in her ears.

Her irises that were the colour of her hair had a cross in the centre now that looked somewhat like scope lenses.

Hidden inside the gale, one could vaguely see her body which was glowing with a layer of light and formed mysterious patterns all around her body. This was the racial form of Alice, the Wood Elf race.

It is said that this race has made a pact with the forest and merged with the spirits of wind becoming artificial spirits themselves.

They are the Forebears of all the forest races that exist today and are one of the ancient races said to have left their traces all over the universe.

In the world of Althea, it is next to impossible to spot a wood elf these days as they have already gone extinct. Very few records exist about them and the ones that do describe them as a fearsome marksman of the forest.

Nobody can elude their eyes that can see from extremely long distances and through their connection with the forest, they can easily locate you.

"Where~are~you?" the little girl smiled.

The trees around her started trembling and winds picked their speed, whispering into her long thin ears. They carried the voices of the adventurers and the sounds of their conversation.

Alice intently listened to their exchange and a crafty expression appeared on her face. Unbeknown to the adventurers, the little girl was already aware of their plan.

"Hehe, I wonder how they will react if I tell them I know all about their plan".

Chapter 602 602- Alice (2)

Carried by the winds, Alice swiftly travelled through the forest. She appeared on top of a tree above the spot where the unaware adventurers were.

"Hello~ Miss me?"

Her casual words of greetings immediately alerted the adventurers. They hurriedly jumped away from their hiding place and looked at Alice with an expression that was a mixture of shock and fear.

They thought that they had opened quite a gap and lost the girl, but the latter had already found them in less than a minute. What sort of tracking ability did the girl use?

They weren't able to recover much of their strength, how should they fight her in this condition?

"There is no other way, let's trust Guild Master Arven and put our hopes in his plan"

The two guild leaders with the warrior class looked at each other before rushing towards Alice. They rammed down the tree that she was on before using all of their skill and abilities on her.

The plan these three guild leaders cooked up was very simple, the two of them who had the warrior class, would stop the little girl. While they were holding all of her attention to them, Arven would start conjuring his most powerful magic from the distance and signal them when it was completed.

They would then timely back away and the enemy would get caught up in the magic. Simple and precise, for these guild leaders who had never worked with each other, it was the best plan they would come up with at that instant.

However, little did they know that they were just being used as baits, Arven never had any plans to attack.

While the two guild leaders were stopping Alice, he used this chance to get away from her. He thought that if he could join with Brutus and the others then perhaps they stood a chance against the little girl.

"She must be the strongest entity in this dungeon; there is no shame in running. Yes, I did the right thing. I must survive and gather others to fight her. An absurdly strong being like her is a huge threat to our expedition force"

Thinking so, Arven flew through the forest. But even he was mistaken about one thing, the teammates he wanted to join up with, were all fighting against absurdly strong beings like the he was facing.

Whatever scenario he had in mind, never existed in the first place. Even if he flew out of the forest, no backup was waiting for him.

But who said he could even get out of the forest? Arven who was marked by Alice, never stood a chance of getting out of the forest. There was no escape from her [Hawk Eyes] and her range that seemingly covered the entire floor itself.

"Hm.. Hm... Hmm~" Alice hummed as she notched another arrow from her seemingly infinite quiver and locked onto her target.

Anyone marked by her skill [Mark] even if they run off to a place she cannot see, or hide in a place she cannot reach, they would still be unable to escape her.

Alice was a Valkyrie created by Simon to snipe opponents from extremely long distances. An expert marksman who never missed her shot. Two bodies that lay motionless beside her, were the perfect example of that.

The bodies of the guild leaders had a hole in their heads right between their brows. There was not even a millimetre of difference between the two wounds. They were both shot in the exact same place.

"Hmm? Would it be the twelfth time I'm firing today? Ahaha... gotta be careful or else Master, big sister and the others will scold me"

Alice stuck out her tongue. It was very important that she counted the number of times she had fired today as it had a direct relation to her strength.

If asked who amongst the Valkyries had the highest firepower, that achievement would no doubt go to Alice. The reason for that was her inherent skill [Combo Fire] which increases the destructiveness of her consecutive attacks by 30% every time.

That is to say, if her first arrows dealt X amount of damage, the second arrow would deal 30 percent more damage than the first and the next arrow would have an added 30 percent more power to that and so and so forth. The power kept on stacking.

The destructiveness of her attacks kept on increasing the more she fired in succession making her a fearsome opponent to face.

However, It needs to be noted that the [Combo Fire] can only be used till a certain number of times before Alice ran out of mana. Plus, any attack that surpassed her mana limits would break the combo.

Similarly, her attacks have to be uninterrupted for the [Combo Fire] to work.

The skill had quite a few drawbacks; nevertheless, the existence of [Combo Fire] and many other skills was what placed Alice at the top of the Valkyries in terms of firepower.

RUMBLE... the twelfth arrow buffed by [Combo Fire] was notched into the bow causing the very space around Alice to warp and distort. The power bestowed inside that arrow was so great that the very forest trembled in fear of it.

"Lock on... Fire" her irises that was like scope lenses, locked onto her target's before she released the arrow.

WHOOSH... the arrow immediately took the form of a unique coloured fiery bird that bypassed every barrier and sped towards its target.

SHINE... Arven who was flying low and crisscrossed around the trees to avoid the enemy's attacks, felt his back suddenly heat up. When he touched it with his hands, he soon realised that there was some kind of a glowing mark on his back.

"What is this?"



Before he even had the time to think, Arven's eyes saw a fiery bird with a terrifying amount of power, fly through the forest and reach him in the blink of an eye.

The bird penetrated through his body before flying up and crashing into the ceiling creating an enormous hole in the process. Although it did not breach the ceiling, it was very close.

As for the guild leader of the crimson demolition guild, he did not even have the chance to create any barrier to defend himself before dying. Three powerful guild leaders whose names shook the kingdom, died just like that.

And the person responsible for their death was a little girl who looked no more than fourteen years old.

"I wonder how Elder Sister Annette and Bianca are doing?" Alice muttered reverting back to her normal form.

Dozens of kilometres away from the forest, towards the north-western direction, was a place that was completely devastated until the very topography around here had changed. The land around here had turned into a desert, a telltale of the fierce battle that occurred here.

A couple of figures could be seen laying on the sand with severe injuries on their bodies and breathing heavily. Many among them had died, their bodies beaten so brutally that one cannot even recognise them anymore.

Some were scorched until they were black cinders, some missing all their limbs and some squashed until they were just pieces of flesh.

Those that were still alive, were barely hanging on to their last breaths. Their eyes staring at their opponents with a mixture of shock, despair and loss. Who would have expected the lineup comprising of the most powerful guild leaders of the kingdom, to be beaten so thoroughly and by only two opponents?

They had lost, defeated and crushed utterly by the overwhelming powers of the two maids who were coldly looking down at them from the skies.

One was covered entirely in Adamantium while the other was a spiritual body. They slowly landed on the ground and approached the guild leaders who did not have the slightest strength to even move their bodies.

"Gugh.. bwargh... We give up... please at least spare our guilds"

Brutus who could still somewhat talk mustered up all of his energy and spoke. He realised that conquering this dungeon was impossible, with these beings guarding it, there was no way it would fall.

Unless it's party comprised entirely of Rankers, it would be foolish to even think about conquering a dungeon like this. On that note, they could be considered fools for thinking exactly that.

Lying on the floor powerless and defeated, it faintly dawned on them how stupid and ignorant they were. The dungeon cleverly hid its fangs, it never gave them even the slightest inklings of what it was capable of.

It lured its unaware prey closer and bared its fangs the moment it was ready. The true dangers of this dungeon far surpassed even their wildest of dreams and anything they had ever encountered.

It could also be said that they were largely at fault for underestimating the dungeon but who would have ever thought that a low ranking dungeon would be this terrifying? It not only deviated from all pre-established notions, but it broke all common sense and knowledge the adventurers had of the dungeon.

It wouldn't be wrong to say that this place was no dungeon, it was a maw of a fiend. Only death awaited those that entered it.

Escape? That was impossible too. The return scroll did not work, and even if it did there was no way their opponent would just sit still and let them use it. There was no way out of this dungeon. The reality was harsh but it was the truth.

Brutus at least wanted the members of his guild to live. As long as his son was alive, the Savannah Beast Guild had infinite possibilities to get back on his feet again. But his final hope, the only thing preventing him from losing consciousness was brutally smashed apart by the words that came out of the maid next.

Chapter 603 603- Unfamiliar Voice

"There will be no mercy for you people. Every single person who has intruded this dungeon, on orders of our master will die. Nobody will be spared".

There was not even the slightest emotional disturbance in the maid's voice when talking about killing them all. It was cold and emotionless as if it was not human lives she was talking about, but some insignificant things.

Brutus and a few other guild leaders who were still alive, trembled. They could vaguely hear the sounds of scream and cry coming from the distance telling them that the killing had already started.

The lifeless eyes of the guild leaders became even dimmer as they silently lay on the ground waiting for their inevitable end.

Their death came to them in the form of two beautiful maids who had reverted back to their normal forms.

With Brutus, Dalton, Cassius and everybody being killed one after the other, it was only one person that was still left alive.

"Heok!!...p-p-please sp-spare me"

Layton Sea begged, all of his limbs were missing, making him look very miserable. He begged the maids to spare him however, how could Annette and Bianca forgive this person?

The reason why they didn't kill him yet, was because they had something far worse planned for him. The two Valkyries were extremely furious at the comment this person made towards them and their master.

Layton Sea had questioned the very faith of Annette and Bianca by asking them to desert to their side and betray their master. For them, Simon wasn't only their master, but their creator. Questioning their loyalty to him was like the greatest humiliation they could ever suffer.

Not only that, but by doing so Layton Sea had also slighted their master, an offence that was unforgivable. Getting all of his limbs chopped was just the start of his suffering, his fate was bound to be so miserable that the death of the other guild leaders would look like salvation compared to his.

No matter how much he would beg for death, it would be the only thing that wouldn't be granted to him. Tormented and excruciating every day, his future was full of suffering.

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Finished with their task, the two Valkyries joined up with Alice and headed towards the centre of the floor where powerful fluctuations of energy was still wreaking havoc.

On their way, they noticed almost all of the other subordinates of their master, have also finished their battle. The expedition force was on the verge of suffering a full wipe out, it was an overwhelming victory on their side.

The Diluvian High Orcs led by Berigard, the former three overlords of the north and the Ogoraths have completely wiped the floor with their enemy. Although they did suffer some loss on their side, it was negligible if you look at what they managed to achieve and earn in return.

Now the only element remaining in this dungeon defence was the battle going on at the centre of the floor between the master of this dungeon and the leader of the expedition force.

After checking on the subordinates and the overall situation across the floor, the Valkyries hurried towards their master. Powerful shockwaves besieged them the more closer they got, evidence of the fierce battle that was going on.

Although they had full faith in Simon, they nevertheless were a little worried. After all, their master was facing the strongest adventurer among the intruders. He was fighting someone that was hundreds of levels above him.

Centre of the floor, inside an enormous crater, two figures could be seen tightly locked in a fight. One of the figures had a peculiar appearance, more appropriately no appearance and a greyish body, while the other was a human.

The two figures were none other than the finger of Ozymandias and Davis. Their battle was very intense, every move and attack from them was powerful enough to even fracture space itself.

Davis used his mastery over the Holy magic, his numerous skills and his years of battle experience to fight the finger of Ozymandias. And although the fight looked even from the third perspective, when in fact it was not.

Davis was a mage, his class [Arcane BattlePriest] did allow him to fight on the frontlines; however, in the end he wasn't a pure warrior. In a direct confrontation against the finger of Ozymandias, he was severely suppressed.

The being he was facing, did not show any life, nor did it take any damage from his Holy attribute. Just like a lifeless puppet, it was immune to most attacks.

Davis could have still managed the situation if it was just this; however, there was more to the puppets than what meets the eye. It was capable of using some kind of peculiar energy that eroded his own every time their attacks collided.

As time went on, it burdened his mana reserves and weakened him slowly. The more he fought with the greyish puppet, the more he realised how dreadful that energy it was using was.

That purple-black miasma was now being released by his body, eating and spreading inside him like an infection. He tried to stop its spread but that further increased his mana consumption. And after several failed attempts, he finally realised that he cannot suppress the energy on his own, he had been exposed to that energy far too much.

Davis needed the help of another ranker to suppress this energy but on the orders of the demon, the popped was relentless. It attacked him again and again without giving him any time to even compose his breath.

Slowly, he was pushed into a backfoot and suffered numerous injuries. His clothes were torn, his body covered in blood and purple-black miasma continuously corroded him from the inside.

His current appearance no longer had its previous haughtiness and nobility that he used to carry himself with. It was instead masked with a look of uncertainty and loss.

No matter how much Davis wanted to deny this possibility, his instincts were telling him that he would lose. He, an officer of the Adventurer's Association and a powerful Ranker from the Mainland was going to lose?

"Don't fuck with me... [Astral Prison]"

Davis gave a loud shout, conjured a powerful magic and trapped the finger of Ozymandias inside. After that, he stormed towards the demon who had been controlling that puppet.

Since he couldn't defeat the puppet, it was an understandable choice of option that he would target its caster, the demon. Unlike the puppet, the demon himself wasn't very strong. As long as he took him out, the finger should stop naturally.

Thinking so, Davis sped towards the demon, he was current in thinking that. However, he had underestimated the power of the finger of Ozymandias and overestimated his power.

Using his increased understanding of the curse energy and the [Dominators control] technique, Simon shapeshifted one of its arms into a huge hammer and slammed it onto the barrier.

CRACK... the barrier easily fell apart from a few swings of the hammer and the finger of Ozymandias regained its freedom once again.

Even the powerful barrier that was cast around Yela's tomb on the fourth trial was unable to stop the finger much less a barrier that was cast by Davis in his weakened state.

The moment the [Astral Prison] collapsed, Simon recalled the finger back towards him and made it stand in front of him lie a shield.

"Dammit..." seeing the puppet break out of barrier and block his path, Davis couldn't help but curse in frustration. He then looked at the demon and bellowed loudly "Stop hiding behind that thing and face me demon".

A desperate attempt to rile his enemy into making a mistake. It was obvious to Simon that Davis was unable to defeat his finger of Ozymandias and hence was trying to irk him into coming out because that was the only way he could win.

Knowing that, why would he even give his enemy the chance to turn the table? He was just about to command the finger to press forward when he saw a couple of familiar figures approach him from the distance.

They stopped beside him and bowed their heads in respect.

"Master" the figures were none other the Valkyrie sisters.

Simon nodded his head in acknowledgement towards them before asking "Are you guys done with your tasks?"

Alice was the first one to respond, she flashed a wide smile and showed a V sign of victory.

"Hehe, master... I have already taken care of the intruders. The adventurers calling themselves guild leaders of what not guild. They weren't much. You see.. you see.. I used the bow that master gave me and bang I shot them like that. after that they ran and I chased before they all... ouch"

"Enough, you are not making any sense. Master does not need to worry, the intruders on this floor are almost but wiped out" Annette gave a chop on the head of her little sister who to side tracked before explaining things calmly to Simon.

"Un, good job you all. I also received a transmission from Bea a few moments ago saying that they are also done over there. Which leaves only this guy" Simon turned his attention towards davis who had a shocked look on his face.

"Whya are you guys here? Shouldn't you be fighting..." Davis whined, his sentence stuck got stuck in his throat when he saw it wasn't only the maids that rushed here, all of the subordinates of the demon also approached this place one after the other.

This made him realise that the battle on the other fronts are already over, and since its only the subordinates of the demon that showed their faces here, it meant that the expedition force he brought along with him, had already died.

Chapter 604 604- Unfamiliar Voice (2)

"Tch... those useless fools, they can't even defeat some monsters" Davis cursed incessantly.

His plan had been foiled but that was alright, as long as Edar reached the bottom floor and destroyed the dungeon core, it would be his victory.

On that note... "What's taking him so long? Donlt tell me... he couldn't have"

Edgar was a Ranker as powerful as him or even more. The puppet of the demon was an anomaly that he didn't take into account in his plans; however, there shouldn't be more than one of them inside this dungeon.

So then why? It was at this moment, he recalled the words the demon said to him before they started fighting.

"It doesn't matter to me how many people you send below, there is no way they would ever be able to get closer to the dungeon core. You asked me if there was still anything that I can do? The answer is yes, I'm still yet to play my trump card".

What if the trump card the demon mentioned wasn't the peculiar puppet he was using but something else? Something that was on the bottom floor.

If Edgar was done in by that trump card, it was no wonder that the dungeon was still standing. It was no wonder that the demon was unfazed even when somebody dived down. It turned out that he still left some of his forces on the bottom floors as a precautionary measure.

"T-This can't be..."

Davis was finally faced with reality, he realised that his plans had completely failed. Not only did he not get the thing he came here for, but all his efforts also went into vain. Worse, he even lost a powerful ranker.

The demon was multiple steps ahead of him this whole time, he had been completely outwitted.

Even for an organisation like the Adventurer's Association, a loss of a Ranker was a significant blow. How was he supposed to report this to his higher ups? Forget about suffering severe punishment, he might even lose his position.

And all of this was because of a single low ranking demon. Davis had truly fallen into the pits of despair at this moment.



"Hey human, tell me how does it feel? To have your hopes crushed right in front of you, the things that you have worked for disappear. Are you having regrets? Do you feel despair?" Simon revealed a wicked smile displaying his sharp fangs.

These were the same words Davis used to look down on him. Not that their roles have reversed, it was Simon's turn to enjoy the show.

This feeling of achievement and ecstasy of cornering your prey and looking down at them at the end, was the very best. No wonder the demons were so true to their desires, this feeling gave him a weird sense of fulfilment and strength.

It was as if he was getting empowered by those negative feelings released by his opponents every second. To think he was inhibiting such feelings by suppressing his demonic side, it was quite foolish of him.

This intoxicating feeling... MORE, he wanted to bask in that feeling more. He wanted to step on his enemy some more and break them completely. Feed on their despair and pain.

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At that moment he felt like a voice whisper to him and the time around him come to a crawl. He could see everything move at a very slow pace.

While this mysterious change was occurring to Simon, Davis on the other hand was going through a crisis. The words that the demon said to him were the very same he used to condemn the demon. Every word, every line felt like a tight slap on his face.

"Dammit... Dammit... it's all your fault demon. It's all because of you... I'll kill you, I'll make sure that your dungeon is destroyed"

Davis suddenly howled like a wounded beast and took out something from his space ring. It was a round amethyst disk with many runes inscribed around its edges.

Davis grabbed the disk and poured all of his mana into it. Immediately, the disk floated up and started rotating. The space around the disk violently fluctuated before a small whirlpool formed in the air.

That Whirlpool violently sucked and pulled Davis towards it.

"What?! The floors were tampered to disrupt spatial laws using space magic. It should be impossible for teleportation and other gate magic to appear here" Alice muttered in shock.

"The floors were redesigned to only stop low tier space magic and artefacts. That item he used definitely had some intermediate or advanced magic cast on it. Quickly stop him before he gets away" Annette ordered.

The Valkyries and the other subordinates quickly sprang into action but none of them could approach closer because of the violent spatial storm released by the whirlpool.

"Don't think that you have won demon!! I'll make sure to repay today's debt in the future. Enjoy your short victory while you can, because there will be no more for you in the future. Now that you have made enemies with the entire Adventurer's Association, you will regret this".

"Mark my words, I'll destroy your dungeon. I'll expose those forest spring spirits you are hiding to everyone in this world".

Davis left those ominous and hate filled words while getting sucked into the whirlpool.

"Bastard" the Valkyries cursed, they wanted to capture the person; however, the spatial storm was too much.

"Shut Up!!!"

Simon didn't let the voice within him say any further. He suddenly rushed towards the whirlpool while using the finger of Ozymandias as a shield.

For the first time since that Historia, he saw the finger taking damage. The violent spatial storm was powerful enough to even damage the extremely sturdy skin of the finger and dissipate the curse energy around it.

The more closer to the whirlpool he got, the more violent the spatial storm became. Until it reached a point where even the [Dominators Control] technique couldn't keep up. The finger of Ozymandias was blown away by the spatial storm.

With his shield gone, it was only normal for Simon to also retreat yet instead of backing away, he stormed on and continued forward.

The spatial storm powerful enough to even keep the Valkyries away and damage the finger of Ozymandias was endured through by Simon. His body bled, his skin and muscles were torn, bones crushed but like a madman, Simon continued towards Davis without caring about his body or what happened to him.

"You fool are you that tired of living?"

Davis screamed in panic, his face pale white. Now that he had used all of his mana into that disk, he was extremely vulnerable. Not to mention the miasma that entered his body was continuously eroding him from within.

Even Valdris had problems neutralising the curse energy much less Davis who was all but spent. At such a time when his defences were at its lowest, an attack from the demon would be life threatening.

But he wasn't the only one who was in a panic, the Valkyries who saw their master rush headfirst towards the whirlpool were also shaken to the point where all blood drained from their pretty face.

They hurriedly call out to him but Simon did not stop, it was as if he was under some kind of spell, he could only see his goal in front of him. Even the extreme damage his body suffered, did not register to him.

Simon tightly clenched his [A] tier sword which was refined to its max refinement and plunged it towards the chest of his horrified opponent. That was not all, he even emptied his mana pool into his sword and brought out its true might.

BUZZZ... the blade of the sword glowed with the intensity of the sun, scorching and melting the insides of his opponent.

"AAARRRGHH!!!" Davis screamed miserably, his face terror-stricken. His body swelled with the heat and burst apart at the end with his remains getting swallowed by the whirlpool.

Even until the end, Davis wore a face that was unresigned to his fate. Perhaps he would have escaped with his life had he kept his mouth shut. However, he had to incite Simon and that was his downfall.

After hearing that death threat, Simon would be an idiot to let him live.

"There is no way, I'm going to stand by the side and watch this time..." Simon muttered under his breath before losing consciousness.

BANG... the spatial storm destroyed his body and slowly sucked him towards the whirlpool.

"Master!!" the Valkyries screamed jumping towards the whirlpool without caring about their lives.

Just when it seemed like Simon would be swallowed inside that whirlpool, a resounding clear cry of the phoenix echoed across the floors and an enormous azure shadow tore through the floors and appeared in front of the whirlpool.

The illusory azure figure then spread its magnificent divine wings covering the entire floor and freezing everything except the living that was on their side. It brought a violent snowstorm and even the spatial laws itself showed signs of freezing, covering the whirlpool in a layer of frost.

CRACK... a crisp noise sounded out and the whirlpool shattered like a glass. Simon who was about to be swallowed by it, was also caught by that figure dressed in azure blue clothes.

"Seriously, you never change. How can you be so reckless?" that figure spoke in a soft voice that carried complex emotions and melancholy.

The figure was none other than Irene who was currently tightly hugging the blood covered and unconscious body of Simon as she slowly descended down.

Chapter 605 605- The Beginning Of A New Storm

"Master" the Valkyries and the other subordinates ran towards Simon but were shocked the next second after seeing how bad his condition was.

Tears welled up in the eyes of the Valkyries as they hurriedly carried his body and teleported to the main floor.

The battle had ended, and the dungeon defence was successful. It was an overwhelming victory on the side of the dungeon Laplace and so all the hidden conditions were fulfilled. Every inhabitant of the dungeon Laplace heard a voice inside their heads at this moment.

[All conditions achieved... the dungeon will now undergo rank increase. All [Roles] will be bestowed a gift. Time until transformation finishes:- three days].

All the monsters and inhabitants of the dungeon raised their heads towards the ceiling, many of them started glowing and undergoing evolution.

It was not only the people inside the dungeon that felt the change, those above ground, namely the people of the tower town also felt the change. The buildings started shaking and the ground beneath them trembled.

Those that were outside, witnessed a massive amount of mana rush out from the dungeon and shoot towards the sky painting it with beautiful polar lights.

These Auroras could be seen from far and wide, the city of Mountmend, the Great Sphinx Desert, the Tall Alps of the Snow Valley and even the depths of the western region of the Ghastly winding forest bore witness to this phenomenon.

To those knowledgeable ones, this was not a sight that they were unaware of. In fact, this was a unique phenomenon that only occurred during certain times and those times were when a dungeon underwent a rank up.

The Auroras are the natural phenomenon that appears in the sky when a vast amount of mana is released out of the dungeon during the transformation. That was not all, even the tower of the dungeon Laplace was covered in that light as it slowly grew taller and bigger.

The phenomenon disappeared after a day but the commotions it caused around the surrounding lands lasted for a while.

Days passed by, and soon a month ended and another came by yet before the first commotions could die down, another big piece of news that shook the people of the kingdom of Ellesmere to its very core, came from the tower town.

The expedition force which was made of the twenty best guilds of the kingdom and led by the guild leaders themselves, was wiped out inside the dungeon. There was not even a single survivor to tell the tale.

The kind of storm this news generated, could be imagined. Many influential factions and families had their eyes on the expedition force and the dungeon that appeared in the ghastly winding forest.

Yet even after more than a month, there was no movement. Forget about any activities, there were not even any signs of anyone from the twenty guilds coming out. The reports that their spy gathered from the headquarters of these guilds that strangely closed their borders further strengthened these suspicions of theirs.

Many adventurers of the tower town dived inside the dungeon to look for the expedition force yet each and every one of them came out empty-handed.

Finally, after having no choice and under the instigation of many forces, the Adventure's Association branch of the Tower Town released two pieces of news.

The first was the revelation of the defeat of the expedition force and the second was the emergence of an intermediate tier dungeon.

The news swept the kingdom and the surrounding countries like a storm, bringing about a new and unforeseen change. Many factions, guilds and countries became aware of the dungeon that appeared out of nowhere and rose like a phoenix.

The dungeon Laplace which was only known around the kingdom was now infamous among many countries of the north-western region. The tower town in particular, soon boomed with many people from different walks of life and country, arriving.

Adventurers, guilds, merchants and such who want to try their strength on the dungeon and make it rich, started setting up their base here.

The fact that twenty guilds from the kingdom were wiped out did not daunt them, instead, it made them even bolder. With the arrival of more adventurers, the influx of human traffic inside the dungeon increased even further.

Further north of the Ghastly winding forest, located in the demon continent was the Great Sphinx Desert. A vast barren landscape that spanned for as far as the eyes can see. The place was hostile to any life form and was perpetually assaulted by sandstorms and violent gales.

In terms of landmass, the Great Sphinx Desert was ten times bigger than the Ghastly Winding Forest. As it was located in the demon continent, it was home to many dungeons and demon nobles.

Near the southern region of the Great Sphinx Desert bordering the Ghastly winding forest, was a ruin of a pyramid half of which was buried underneath the sand.

In its heyday, the place would have been a landmark around this parts; however, now it was laid to waste by sandstorms and was home to many wild monsters.

BOOM...

The land around the pyramid suddenly trembled and a huge sandworm with a spiky exterior and menacing appearance, showed its face.

Desert Dune, a common monster around this part of the desert and a great source of trouble. Due to them preying on both animate and inanimate things, they are also called as dungeon eaters around these parts.

It is said that a Desert Dune becomes larger as it evolves reaching up to a size of thirty meters. And looking at the size of this Desert Dune, it could easily be inferred that it has gone through multiple evolutions to be more than 24 meters.

Its level was around level 400 and even when placed inside the ghastly winding forest, it would be quite high up in the food chain. However, at this moment the body of the desert dune made some peculiar movements before bursting apart like an inflated balloon.

"Seriously, these things are so annoying"

A couple of figures came out of its body covered in fluids. The woman leading them, commented in frustration as she cleaned herself with tempest magic. She was donned in a revealing red dress that emphasized her fiery curves as well as her slender waist.

Her eyes that were of unusual peach colour and her fine black hair which was casually bounded by a hairpin, gave her a demonic charm.

A pair of bat like wings protruding from her back was holding her airborne. Two horns decorated her head, her cherry red lips hid sharp fangs that occasionally peeked out whenever she spoke.

"Miss Delphyne, we found the core but It looks like the dungeon was really destroyed" a being that looked like an ogre, reported.

"Hnn~ it doesn't look like the dungeon was captured as there are no traces of battle. The core was in its place and wasn't taken away which meant that it wasn't the doing of adventurers. So the only likely possibility was that the dungeon master was killed".

"Sigh~ my dear brother after not seeing you for a couple of years, I find your dungeon in ruins. What sort of trouble did you get into that got you killed?" the woman named Delphyne muttered to herself as she looked at the ruins below her.

"What should we do Miss Delphyne?" the figures around her asked, they were all sentient humanoid monsters.

"What else can we do? I need to report this to father, so investigate this place thoroughly. There has to be some clues that would lead us to his actions before he got killed" Delphyne replied in a sour mood.

The whip on her hand made a crisp noise and immediately the monsters around her got to work. They dived inside the pyramid looking for any clues or signs.

'Even if he was an outcast, he was still a part of the family. Father wouldn't be too happy with this. Dammit... it had to happen just when that auction is about to open' Delphyne mused internally.

It might be obvious looking at her appearance but she was a Demon Noble. Rank wise, she was a Demon Earl and she was also the elder sister of Gelgar the Demon Viscount that Simon had killed when the former declared a dungeon war on him.



Currently, Delphyne was investigating the ruins of Gelgar's dungeon. She had come here on orders from her father to bring the outcast back because their father had some use for him.

However, when she came here all she found here was a ruin of a dungeon, a shattered dungeon core and a couple of Desert Dunes eating the ruins.

The brother she was supposed to bring back with her had gone ahead and died. Knowing the temperament of their father, Delphyne knew that she couldn't go back without thoroughly investigating this matter.

Thankfully, it didn't look like it was too long ago that her brother had died. Finding clues to his demise shouldn't pose too much of a problem.

'I wonder what kind of being you are to have laid your hands on a Demon Duke's family' Delphyne narrowed her peach coloured eyes.

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At the same time, deep inside the western region of the Ghastly winding forest, inside the territory of the Black Ogres that was hidden by a dense layer of mystical mist, a dreadful scene was currently playing out.

Hundreds of Diluvian High Orcs were captured and made to kneel on the ground. At the forefront of this group were two orcs with distinctive features.

They were none other than Belrock and Belmond, the two orc generals who refused to bow under Simon's rule.

Chapter 606 606- The Beginning Of A New Storm (2)

"So you guys are saying that the only reason the Diluvian tribe was able to win the war was because of Berigard who had formed a contract with a Demon Noble"

A mighty and pressuring voice sounded out. An ogre with a single purple horn protruding from their forehead was sitting on a throne overlooking the orcs.

He had a leaner build than most of the ogres around him and had a bright crimson hair that looked like it was on fire. He was donned in a sturdy looking armour and carried a big bastard sword around.

If not for the horn, he didn't look much different from a human. The fact that he was sitting on a throne, established his identity.

There was only a single ogre in the tribe of black ogres that could sit on that throne and that was none other than the king of Black ogres, one of the seven kings of the western region of the forest, Gil-Garna.

"Your lordship, we are not lying, it was the appearance of the demon that changed the course of the war. He was the one that killed Giz-Bozo and Giz-Mogo" under the pressure of that gaze, the orc general unhesitatingly confessed.

"Are they speaking the truth Gish-Bagh?" the king of the black ogres turned his eyes towards his second in command.

An ogre with an indigo horn stood below the throne, nodded his head.

"My lord they are speaking the truth, I have investigated these orcs individually and all of them have given me the same answer. As such it cannot be false".

"I see" Gil-Garna nodded his head then pointed at a scrap of metal that was also found in the territory of the orcs.

"What is that thing?".

"Although it looks peculiar, I believe that is a golem. I found them mining near the territory of the orcs. When I asked the orcs about it, they told me that it was part of the agreement with the demon for saving them" Gish-Bagh reported.

"Is that so... What about the Ancient Inheritance? Were you able to find some leads as to who might have taken it?" As much as he tried to keep his aura in control, a faint trace still leaked out of the ogre king's body intimidating all life forms in this area.

Gish-Bagh was shaken too; however, he was quick to regain his composure as he replied by shaking his head.

"I am not sure as to who took the ancient inheritance, since we do not know who killed the orc king Belgarious. But I did find some leads. According to what these orcs told me, the demon had emptied all of their treasury as payment for saving them. I believe the thing my lord is looking for, might be with that demon".

Hearing that, Gil-Garna's eyes involuntarily turned towards the eastern direction of the forest. "The demon huh" he slowly muttered as he closed his eyes.

"My lord if it's your command, I shall immediately attack that demon" Gish-Bagh stated, his indigo horn glowing for a moment.

"The phenomenon that appeared in the eastern skies a month ago, was from that demon's dungeon. Although I don't know much about dungeons, that convergence of mana was definitely not ordinary".

"If we want to siege that dungeon it would take some planning. Besides the other seven kings and that Gufardus is also very suspicious. Wait till I completely assimilate with the Six Nether Flower, we can advance our plan after that."

Gil-Garna was more practical about it. He got up from his throne and was just about to enter the enormous temple behind him when Gish-Bagh stopped him.

"In that case my lord, what should we do with these orcs," the latter asked.

Gil-Garna didn't turn his head and simply left behind a few cold words "kill them".

A scene of carnage ensued next. The ogres did not have any idea that the Andromeda that they had captured, was still working and sending all the information back.

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Meanwhile, inside some cave in the tall alps of the snow valley, a figure quietly sat on top of an enormous carcass of the ancient beast that had died a long time ago.

Even though that was the case, the aura released by the carcass was still extremely powerful, speaking volumes of the power the beast had when alive.

"So they arrived"

The figure who sat quietly until now muttered. He had a head of a lion, the lower body of a minotaurus, tail of a serpent and the wings of a demon.

The hulking figure who looked like some chimaera, was none other than Gufardus, one of the seven kings of the forest.

"Oh?! Number 001 you are already here. It looks like you brought the thing we asked for?" a new presence that walked in from the entrance of the cave, spoke.

Unlike Gufardus, the new entrant was completely covered in bandages and looked just like a mummy. They wore a black gold coloured pharaoh's headdress, a pair of bracers and greaves.

They were tall, taller than even Gufardus and their eyes along with the gaps in their bandages, glowed purple indicating that they were not human.

"To think that one of the Named ones would personally show their face here. Did the Creator send you here? Do they still not trust me enough?" Gufardus commented in a not so friendly manner.

"Haha, what are you saying... of course we trust you. It's just that in the off case you do betray us, none of the Numbers would be able to handle you. It was either 000 or the Named ones like me, one or the other was bound to come to retrieve the item. Though I don't think you will ever betray us because we have her... isn't that right?"

The bandages around the face of the person wrapped, forming a hollow smile.

"YOU!!!... huff... huff... don't forget our agreement. You cannot harm her or else..." His mane blazing with fire, Gufardus roared in anger.

"Hehe, the name is Khep Tutan. It would do you good if you remember it the next time" the mummy introducing himself as Khep Tutan, simply laughed off at Gufardus' warnings.

"So that is the thing Creator wants huh? Hmm, I can feel an enormous power emanate from it. Perhaps, it might even be possible to create another Named one with it. You did well bringing it to us. However, why did you choose the snow valley as the location instead of your territory the Ghastly Winding Forest?" Khep Tutan asked.

"Did you think that it was easy getting the item from that orc under the eyes of those beings? Hmph, even if I elude them somehow, the Ancient Titan Treant would still be alerted from your presence" Gufardus explained begrudgingly.

"Hoh" the purple glow in the eyes of Khep Tutan glowed brighter when he heard the other party mention the Ancient Titan Treant.

"That old remnant of the ancient times huh? I don't know why the Creator is so wary of him but I don't believe he is such a big deal. Right Gufardus, who do you think will win if that old remnant and I fought?"

He suddenly posed a question.

"Don't kid yourself" Gufardus scoffed.

"Hehh... I thought so, well it would be fun to fight that guy some day" Khep Tutan smiled merrily not taking any offence.

"Anyways, can you get down, I have to store that thing" the bandages around him came loose and a suction force immediately pulled the enormous carcass of the ancient beast towards him.

To be able to store such an enormous thing inside him, one had to wonder what was hidden inside those bandages.

Khep Tutan after storing the item, turned around to leave when Gufardus suddenly spoke.

"Bring a message from me to the creator. You better keep her safe or else he can forget about the thing he wants".

"Haha..."...

Soon after both the parties left the cave became empty once again.

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Central continent—Somewhere in the Mainland, a tall tower pierced the very dome of the sky. It was so huge that, its top couldn't be seen with human eyes.

The striking appearance of the tower evoked awe and respect from the people around it and also gave it its name, the Tower of Babel.

Inside one of the many rooms of the tower, a girl with long black hair could be seen reading a book. She was wearing a loose white shirt with puffy sleeves, a long black skirt, black stockings, high heels and some kind of a necklace on her neck.

A black hat rested on her desk, and aligned next to it was a beautiful staff inlaid with seven sparkling stones of varying colours in the pattern of a star.

Numerous books, and blackboards recording complex formulas could be seen all around the room. The place was a study; however, it was so messy that there was no room to even walk.

FLIP... FLIP... the turning pages of the book sounded in intervals bringing some noise into an otherwise silent room. Just when it seemed like it would continue, the door to the room was knocked.

"Come in"

The girl replied keeping down her book.

"HAAA... seriously, what is this place, a stable? How can one even live here? you have numerous bookshelves why don't you use them" A tall boy entered the room while scratching his hair.

He was similarly dressed in a simple white shirt and black pants. He was not overly handsome but he was nevertheless good-looking. If there was something that gave others a lasting impression, that would be the numerous complex markings covering his body that not even his shirt could cover.

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The markings started from the orb embedded in the boy's chest and spread all around his arms and up to his neck.

"Glenn you are not here to chew me off are you?".

The boy who was referred to as Glenn, gave a hollow laugh before his face became all serious.

"I came to tell you that we have found some leads that could be the tails of the organisation we are looking for, Chloe".

"Cerberus?!" Her expression changing immediately, the girl called Chloe hurriedly got up from her seat. She picked up her hat and staff and walked over from her desk.

"That's good, my research was starting to reach a dead end too. I just need a little more information and then I can undo the curse on you and Bell. Then we can find that person and take revenge. I will make sure that he regrets what he did to all of our friends".

Chloe spoke, her eyes burning with anger but when she glanced at Glenn, it turned into a rare comforting smile.

"Un" Glenn's eyes fluctuated with many emotions as he was reminded of the past. He nodded his head and added, "Bell is yet to arrive from that Great Dungeon and master is away. For the moment, we cannot leave the headquarter of the Adventurer's Association alone".

The Tower of Babel located in the middle of the central continent was also known by another name, the Headquarters of the Adventurer's Association.

"Ah, this reminds me, the other day, I got a weird feedback from one of my artifacts" Chloe suddenly recalled something.

"Oh?! Did one of your inventions blow up again?" Glenn teased.

"That artefact was a complete product and my inventions don't blow up. Sure they cause explosions but I wouldn't put it as blowing up. Anyways, the [S] tier artefact that I created, ended up being stopped and destroyed mid activation by someone"...

"Someone managed to destroy one of your [S] tier items?" shock was apparent on Glenn's face. Although he always made fun of Chloe's invention, she was nevertheless one of the top Divine Craftsman the world has ever seen.

Even if it's just a prototype she made, they were always extremely sturdy and powerful. Forget destroying them even putting a scratch on them was extremely hard. But as per her words, the artefact wasn't just damaged but destroyed and it was an [S] tier one at that too.

It must be mentioned for an artefact to qualify to become an [S] tier, it must be made of some material that is not only insanely sturdy, but is also an excellent conductor of mana.

"Who did you give that item to?" Glenn asked.

"Hmm... I'm not entirely sure. As you know, the association has full jurisdiction over all the artefacts that I invent. So I do not know who has what items. What I do know is that the feedback came from near the borders of the Demon Continent, from the distant north-western direction".

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In a dark space that spanned infinitely, a man slowly drifted around. There was no light here, nor was there any end. It was hard to make out where the place was or if it even existed. In such a space all one can do is simply float around.

How long had it been since he was in this condition? Simon who was drifting around in this endless darkness suddenly saw a ray of light in the distance.

Involuntarily, he started drifting towards it and before he knew everything around him turned white. Simon blinked his eyes, it took some time for his eyes to adjust but he was finally able to make out where he was.



He was inside a room, on top of a bed. There was a window next to him with an open sill and curtain waving with the wind.

"Where am I?" he asked himself.

"Oh? So you finally woke up huh".

That was when he finally heard a voice coming from beside his bed. Sitting on a chair next to him, was a woman quietly peeling an apple with a smile.

The moment Simon saw her, his entire body suddenly jolted and his eyes widened to their limits. He looked like a guy who had just seen a ghost.

"You...!?!!" ...

"What is it? Why are you staring at me like that?" the woman locked her brows and looked at him in concern.

She had a pair of dark brown eyes and a beautiful face. Her long silky black hair was neatly tied behind her with a clip, her smoothly arching eyelashes appeared serene. Her smile just like her aura, had a calming presence about it. Just like the warm rays of spring that made one just laze around carefree and savour the moment.

At a glance, she appeared to be in her late twenties. The woman was no doubt very beautiful; however, the reason why Simon was so shocked, wasn't because of her beauty but because he knew her.

Why would she appear now of all times? He was sure that he had moved past her, he should have forgotten all about her so why again?

"Your face looks pale are you alright? You suddenly passed out in the office. Really how many times have I told you to take care of your health? Why do you never listen?"

What's more, she started saying the same lines from his memory. The woman got up from her seat, extended her hand and touched his forehead to check on his temperature.

"Hmm... you still have a fever, it's best that you take a few days off from office"

Office? What was she talking about? She shouldn't even be here...

At this moment, Simon's eyes went towards her clothes. White blouse, black blazer and a grey H-line skirt, she was wearing her usual office dress just like how it was in his memories.

Wait... wait a minute? What was going on? Now that Simon thought about it, even the room and the outside scenery looked familiar. It turns out that the place he was in was one of the rooms of a hospital that was closest to their company.

During his later years working for the company, he was admitted here many times after losing consciousness so of course, he was very familiar with the scenery here.

It can't be? Did he return back to his former life?

What happened to his dungeon? His subordinates? He remembered that he was defending his dungeon from the expedition army and was locked in a fierce fight with Davis, an officer from the Adventurer's Association.

After that, he suddenly woke up here...

Was everything that he experienced in that world a dream? No that can't be... he must be dreaming. This must be a dream or else why would she be here?

'Right, I just need to wake up'.

Thinking so, Simon gave himself a tight slap only to get baffled the next second. This pain, it was very real, his cheeks were red and a stinging sensation assaulted him.

What was going on, was it not a dream then?

"Hey, why did you suddenly slap yourself? Are you really alright? I'll call a doctor right away". Perhaps his actions were too startling for the woman, she caressed his cheek before getting up to call a doctor.

"Wait... Don't, I'm alright" Simon spoke stopping the woman from calling a doctor.

"Really? You don't look so well? Perhaps something happened in the office? Is it those guys again?" ...

Simon's eyes suddenly enlarged, a pain assaulted his heart and his breathing became distorted.

"You aren't acting fine, I should really go and call a doctor" the woman repeated.

"I said I am fine!!"

What was he mad at? Simon himself did not know but his voice came out angry.

"Alright"

The woman did not know what else to say, she suddenly became silent. Her eyes flashed with concern everytime she looked at him. This silence persisted for a while before she broke it.

"Ah! Look at the time, I must get going now. You should take a rest today, I'll visit you after work. Don't forget to eat the apples I peeled for you" She tried to lighten the mood with those words before getting up to leave.

Simon saw her off with his eyes before falling into a daze once again. Strangely, something about this occurrence was giving him a sense of familiarity. As if he had already experienced it before... yes, like a *Déjà vu*.

No, he shouldn't waste his time thinking over something that should be a dream. This wasn't his reality, he needed to focus on how to get back.

The world of Althaea was where he belonged, his first priority should be his dungeon and its inhabitants. At such a dangerous time, he couldn't leave them alone, he needed to get back as soon as possible.

But how should he do that? Simon who fell into contemplation once again, saw the plate of apples beside his bed. The slices were finely cut and peeled showing care and warmth for the person they were meant for.

"Dammit, no matter how harder I try to not think about her, she keeps on appearing in my mind". Simon scratched his hair in frustration.

His arms and body returned back to the way they were, thin and without many muscles. He didn't know what to think of any more, everything seemed so real.

The breeze coming from the window, the sensation of his body, this room, his life they were all so real. Simon flumped into his bed, and the adventures he had on Althea flashed past his mind like an episode.

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If that was reality then what about now? He closed his eyes and opened them back, the same familiar ceiling greeted him.

While he was in a state of dishevel, the door to the room was pushed open again and a man entered.

"Huh? You are awake huh. I heard you collapsed again. Seriously man how many times does that make it? Stop worrying me so much"

The person with an overly familiar manner of speaking was none other than his friend who stuck along with him even during harsh times. Until Simon even pushed him away.

"Alex?!" he muttered in surprise.

"That's right. What? Don't tell me you have even forgotten the name of your friend".

There was no mistaking it, this guy was his friend.

Alex came to a stop near his bed and looked at him carefully, before showing him a bag.

"Here"...

"What's this?" Simon looked at the bag and asked.

"Don't tell me you forgot? Today is the day the game [Rise of the Demolishers] the company you work for goes for sale. You told me to show some support by buying one" Alex explained.

That's right, he did tell him that. He was so excited from seeing his friend after such a long time that he had completely forgotten about it.

"Haha, it slipped my mind" Simon laughed. Looking at the game drive that was inside the bag many memories flooded his mind.

"You know I had to wait in a long line to buy this game. Seriously is it that good? Its genre is also different than the games we normally play. Did you perhaps work on it?"

The [Rise of the Demolishers] was a military science fiction game far different from the DMMORPG games they used to play. It wasn't surprising that Alex would ask him that question.

"Ahaha, yeah I did. But my contribution wasn't much, I just helped out here and there. The project was mainly developed by her..."

Simon suddenly stopped mid sentence while explaining.

Come to think of it, this game was the third biggest project led by her. He helped out in this game because he wanted the project she worked on to be a success. But fate had something else planned entirely.

The game contrary to their expectations would cause a huge incident and the project would be shut down by the board of directors. The one who will be held liable and bear the whole blame for all of it would be...

The weird feeling that was weighing down on him, suddenly became more clear at this moment.

If the [Rise of the Demolishers] go for sale today, then didn't it mean that incident was going to occur? Simon hurriedly turned towards Alex and asked--

"Hey, what's the date and year today?".

"Huh? Oi Oi... is your head seriously alright? If the work environment there doesn't suit you, you can just quit you know?"

His friend gave him a weird look. Of course, Simon knew that. In fact, that thought had crossed his mind quite a few times. But the only reason he didn't quit was because of her.

"Just tell me" he asserted.

"Alright.. alright--today is the 15th of March, 2115" Alex answered when suddenly he saw Simon jumping out of his bed and running out of the room.

"Hey, where you going? You are supposed to be on bed rest today"

From behind, he could hear his friend calling out to him. However, he had no mind to pay attention to that right now.

She told him that she would visit him after work but as per his memories she never came. It was only after he saw the news that he realised the incident that shook the world. But by the time he gathered his courage and visited her, it was already too late.

Not wanting the past to repeat once again, Simon ran towards the elevator and in no time he was already out of the 200 storeys building.

All around him were tall skyscrapers that rose not only vertically but also horizontally. Hyperspeed highways running from the sky to the ground. There were numerous layers of ground, artificial sky and so and so forth.

Simon quickly got into one of the hyperloops and drove towards his office, the biggest magnificent building in the city.

Stopping on the second layer of the ground, Simon relied on his memories and started running towards sector C of the building. Because he remembered that was where the launch event should be taking place.

At this moment, Simon had forgotten all about his circumstance. There was only one thing on his mind, he needed to stop the launch of this event that the entire world had its eyes on at any cost.

It was something that he had learned later on in his life in the company, but it was all a big scheme. The game and the capsules were tampered with before the event by those guys to besmirch someone.

The professional players selected to officiate and endorse the game, needed to be stopped before they dived inside that game or else it would become a huge incident that would shake the world.

Haa... haa... finally after running for a while, Simon found the hall. He passed through the entrance where a small AI in the shape of a bowling ball, scanned his bio ID before letting him in.

Although he said earlier it was a hall, it was more like a lounge but bigger than even a football stadium. It was a place filled with architectural grandeur and magnificence, beautiful decorations and technologies.

This was a grand event for one of the biggest companies in the world, hence many people were invited to it. As such, it was bound to be crowded; however, it didn't get congested because of the hover plates.

Simon looked around the hall and quickly found the board of directors sitting around a table on one of the biggest hover plates.

He was just about to make his way over there when suddenly the crowd started going wild. Fireworks went off on the main stage as the key figures that the whole world had their eyes on, walked over.

Their holographic avatars walked beside them while letting everybody know who they were. The CEO, the staff who worked on the project, those guys and even she was also there.

The event had already started, he was too late.

Would he have to see the same scene play out once again? Would he end up becoming a bystander once again? Would he only be able to watch helplessly as those eyes of hers sought help?

No; there was no way he would allow the past to repeat itself once again.

At that time he was lying in the hospital unaware of the incident that occurred at the event until he saw the news. But right now, he was here. He knew everything that was going to happen, he can change the future.

Or so he thought but his naive hopes were crushed in front of his eyes. Simon realised once again how powerless he was then and even now.

Why didn't he think of it before? He never considered the possibility that one or several of the board of directors were also involved in this.

"Who are you? Do you even know your position?"...

"Who allowed you to get inside in those clothes?"...

"Do you think we will stop the event just because you said so? Throw this man out, the event must go on as planned"...

"Right, this is our only chance to curb the influence of that family, it needs to be done. Although we feel sorry for that girl, she will have to be sacrificed"...

"It's her own fault for being from that family, if not for them, we would have already monopolised the whole industry"...

What were these people saying? What family? What responsibility? Simon was unable to understand them.

They knew full well what was going to happen if these pros entered those immersion capsules and dived inside the game. Yet they could sit there smiling, enjoying the show while drinking.



This was not a new sight for Simon, he had already experienced and seen the darkness within humans. But even then, how could he sit still and do nothing when the tip of that spear of darkness was pointed towards her?

The woman who took care of him when he newly joined the company and showed him the ropes, the always optimistic senior of his who barged into his heart. And whose shadow he was unable to forget up until now, Emilia Aurelie.

Unbeknownst to even himself, Simon started sinking deeper and deeper into this reality. He tried everything he could to stop the event; however, he was up against a mammoth of an opponent. He couldn't even stir the smallest of waves.

What's more, he was even thrown out and arrested by the cyborg police by them.

Sitting by himself inside his cell, all he could think about was the event day and night. By the time he was released, everything was already over.

The ten professional players that entered the game, had died inside their Immersion Capsules and the project ended up becoming a huge disaster, breaking headlines of every news.

The blame, liability, and accusation was then dropped onto the shoulders of one woman, the leader of this project, Emilia Aurelie.

She would be laid off from her post she worked hard for years to achieve, held guilty for the crimes she didn't commit and become a sinner in the eyes of the whole world.

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From then on, it would just be an endless spiral of self-guilt and depression. Her whole world would collapse in front of her eyes, guilt would pile on pushing her to the brink of edge until she would ultimately...

Simon felt a pain assault his head, things and scene that he didn't want to see and things took him a long time to forget, started playing in his vision once again.

"Dammit" subconsciously, his feet lead him towards his office, the place he was most familiar with.

Even though such a huge incident happened not too long ago, the department he worked under functioned just like usual.

"She is not here..." Of course, she wouldn't, she had already given her resignation on the very same day the incident occurred.

What was he thinking walking over here? Nothing changed from the past, the event occurred just as it was supposed to. What good did having the information do him? He was unable to change anything.

"Oh if it isn't Mister Assistant? I thought you would be taking a leave?"

While Simon was lost in his thoughts, a voice spoke to him. The person who called out to him was one of the seniors of his and also one of the guys that he hated the most.

The reason for that was none other than their behaviour, their malicious conduct and their pedantic and inflexible way of thinking. He had lost count of how many times these people went out of their way to make things difficult for him.

They always tried to keep any newbies in check and steal their achievements. They suppressed those that did not follow their ideologies and pulled them down in whatever way possible.

If it was just that, Simon wouldn't have been that angry until his blood boiled over. He knew how much she had to suffer because of them that he was unable to tolerate their sight.

These people were the main culprits behind that incident that killed ten professional players. They were the ones who tampered with the game and made it so that all the blame fell on her. They were the ones who reaped the benefit from her disaster.

It was not only that guy, but all of the people here. They all shirked away from their responsibilities and left it all for her to bear.

"It's good that you are here, I'm reassigning you to a new project. As you can see, I'm the new department head, work hard for me ok, just like the way you did for her"

The man said with a dark smile as he patted his shoulders. If it was the previous Simon, he would have simply nodded his head and buckled under the pressure. However this Simon was different, his mind and heart was baptised by the other world and was much more resilient and tougher than before.

Without thinking of what the consequence would be, Simon clenched his hand and punched that ugly mug hard.

"Bwagh..." the man made some silly noise and fell on the ground, his face shocked by the event.

"Gugh... Bwagh... S-Stop!!" the punch was just the beginning, more and more rained down on the man changing his entire facial contour.

"Bastard!!" Simon spat angrily and left the man alone after the latter lost consciousness and stormed out of the office leaving the shocked bystanders behind.

The environment inside the company had become too stifling for him to breathe, it was a miracle that he was able to work here for six more years.

While feeling frustrated, Simon got inside the hyperloop and headed straight for her house.

In the past, he took a long time to gather his courage and visit her; but by then it was already too late.

"I should be able to make it, I can still change the course of events" even if he couldn't stop the disaster from occurring, he could at least stop her death.

While feeling a sense of urgency, Simon arrived in front of the building that she stayed in. Because of the incident involving ten professional players' death, there was a large mob of people in front and police guarding the enclosure.

Simon was somehow able to use the crowd and sneak past the security and enter the building using the code she had once told her.

156th floor, as soon as he arrived on the floor, Simon felt a familiar sense of energy pervading this place and a feeling of incongruity assaulted him.

Something was different about this floor, Simon couldn't exactly put his hands on it, but he just knew it. His instincts were telling him to be careful.

Relying on his memories, he made his way to her place and rang her intercom. Nevertheless, even after a while, nobody answered the door. The place was eerily silent as if nobody lived here.

Feeling a sense of dread, Simon tried to pry open the door only to find that it was not locked. He hurriedly barged in only to find a familiar scene play in front of his eyes.

"This cannot be, I even arrived early".

In front of him, lying on the table with her head down, was the motionless Emilia. The entire room was dark and emitted a gloomy aura just like what it was in his memories.

Simon gulped, the feeling of incongruity suddenly became stronger as he slowly made his way towards her.

"Emilia" he shook her body but there was no response.

BADUMP... BADUMP... His heart started pounding intensely; he called out to her once again.

"Un... S-Simon" Suddenly the woman opened her eyes and looked at him in surprise.

"What are you doing here?" She asked as she rubbed her eyes.

It appeared that she had fallen asleep on her table. A feeling of relief washed over Simon as he released a deep breath of sigh. The ominous feeling eating away at him from within disappeared and he suddenly felt the weight weighing down on his heart, become lighter.

'I made it in time' Simon rejoiced internally. However, when he looked at the face of the woman in front of him, he couldn't help but clench his hands.

A pang of guilt assaulted his heart as he saw her condition. There were bags under her eyes telling that she didn't get even an ounce of sleep in a while, she looked weary and her aura was very feeble.

The beautiful senior of his who always emitted a tranquil aura and whose smile gave him strength, was at this moment looked very haggard and tired. It was obvious that she was tormented by the guilt, blame and the responsibility she felt from that incident.

Even though it was not her fault, she was the one suffering the most.

Simon wanted to comfort her just like she used to comfort him when he suffered a setback in the company due to those people. He wanted to tell her that it was not her fault, he wanted to reveal the evil scheme of those people, he wanted her to stop blaming herself, and he wanted to tell her how he felt.

There were so many things, so many emotions, so many regrets within his heart that were never expressed.

"So you were released out of the hospital, are you alright now?"

Even though she hurting internally and going through such a tough time, she still had the mind to worry about others. Seriously, she didn't deserve to be punished like that.

If only he had stood up at that time, if only he had approached her sooner after watching the news, if only he had talked to her at that time. Then probably she would still be alive.

BADUMP... Simon felt a pain in his heart and the feeling of incongruity deepened.

"Ah, look at me, where are my manners? Even though I have a guest, I did not serve you tea or anything" Flashing a smile so as to not worry him, she got up to leave when Simon stopped her.

"That's alright, I am in no mood to have tea," he said prompting her to sit back again.

"Ah then... what are you here for? Did you watch... the news?" her eyes evaded his, her shoulders trembled and her nails dug onto her palms. It was obvious that she was afraid, afraid that even Simon would blame her. She was scared that even he would look at her like the rest of the world.

Observing that side of her, Simon closed his eyes and opened them once again. This time, there was a gleam of resolution in his eyes.

"Yeah, perhaps in some corner of my heart, I did blame you. Maybe that is why I took so long to visit you in the past. I regret it still now, if only I had gathered up my courage and visited you sooner then perhaps you would have still been alive".

"Perhaps we could have had a conversation just like now. But by the time I realised everything, it was already too late by then. Haha, seriously how hopeless can I be? Instead of believing the person who has always supported and trusted me, I chose to believe the news. I guess my ending was well deserved, cut off by his friends and families, a lonely ending is what I should get".

Simon kept on speaking, he expressed every sentiment, every feeling, every emotion that he still carried in his heart even until now.

"What are you saying?"

Emilia made an expression that said she didn't understand what he was saying. But that was alright, Simon continued to speak his heart.

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"You know life was hard in the company without you, but I held on and ploughed through. The project that you left unfinished, I completed it for you. It was a huge success, it was your success".

"Although I still regret not being able to punish the perpetrators, all of them did not have a good ending. Right, do you remember the words you told me when I faced my first failure after joining the company?"

"You told me to 'Never give up on your dreams, Sometimes in life, we can only triumph after facing adversity, the obstacle we face is only there to teach us a lesson. Some people are able to understand it and simple people collapse under, but life is something meant to be experienced".

"So newbie, find a reason to get back up. At that time you looked really cool, so much so that my heart even skipped a beat".

"Ehh?! W-what are you saying"

Emilia had a faint flush over her cheeks, she didn't know what Simon was saying, but she could feel the multitudes of emotions from his words. He looked so determined that she felt like she didn't have it in herself to stop him at this moment.

Simon continued to speak to her, it was a one sided conversation with her adding in only a couple of times; nevertheless, it helped to slowly clear the gloomy and desolate aura around her and before he knew it she was back to her usual bright self.

"Hey Simon, thanks for cheering me on. I didn't know my junior was such a reliable and wise man. Ah! The room is so dark let me switch the lights on. Right, I'm going to make tea, have some with me"

She got up from her seat and started busying herself with her task. Simon simply sat there and watched her as if wanting to carve that figure into his memories.

He felt a sense of peace, this was what he wanted, this was what he yearned for. Perhaps it was not a bad idea to just live here?

Yeah, he should just live in this reality.

Just as Simon was about to accept the reality playing out in front of him, the vision of a little girl with emerald hair who made a promise to her big brother came into his mind waking him up.

That little girl was waiting for her big brother to come back.

The vision was like a cold bucket of water, waking his mind and making everything clear to him.

"You like your tea with milk right? Come to think of it, your little sister visited the office the other day while you were admitted to the hospital. I told her that you were away on a business trip because I did not want her to worry. Should I have told her?"

"Hey Simon, are you listening?" her words continuously sounded out from the kitchen adjacent to this room.

"Yeah"

Simon replied, two droplets of tears trickled down his cheeks.

After a while he closed his eyes and spoke—"I know you are there. That's enough, you can stop it now".

It was unknown who he was speaking to, but at that instant, the reality in front of him as if it was some kind of distant dream got covered up in a layer of haze and drifted off.

What greeted him next was a white space that extended as far as the eyes could see. How many times had he visited this place? This wasn't Simon's first time coming here.

As he observed the place, he was shocked speechless the next second when he was what was in front of him.

Standing not very far away with his arm crossed and arrogant eyes, was another him. Yes, the two of them basically had the same appearance. But unlike him who currently had the human appearance, the one in front of him was the demon Simon that lived in Althaea.

There was also some other noticeable differences between them like their auras and atmosphere. The demon Simon gave off an overbearing aura, his face was cold as if he hadn't smiled for hundreds of years.

His slightly raised brows carried inexplicable pride and arrogance. His sharp pupils which seemed like they could pierce one's soul, sometimes displayed a tinge of sadness and exhaustion. But it was quickly masked with a demon like ferocity and ruthlessness.

Simon did not know why but he felt like those eyes and those slightly arching brows had seen through a lot in their life, there was unique gravity about them. But more importantly, what set the two Simons apart were their auras.

The demon Simon emanated tremendous charisma even while just standing there silently. His presence was so strong that simply by doing nothing, he would ensnare all the attention. More importantly, he had this air about him as if he was a veteran of the battlefield who had gone through tens of thousands of battles in his life,



"Was that alright? You could have at least stayed there for tea or forever. Wasn't that what you wanted? A life with her" the demon finally spoke as he casually trudged forward.

Simon had no doubt about it in his mind, the reality that he was just shown, was because of this person. It was also because of him that he was having this feeling of incongruity ever since the beginning of the dream.

"Yeah, that's alright... It is just a wishful dream of mine that would never come true after all. Anyways, would it be weird to ask who are you?" Simon questioned.

The demon that was him, laughed at his question. The way he had his hands in his pockets and his mannerless speaking, he looked like a local delinquent.

"It is a weird question but I believe you know the answer. I am you, you are me. We are the same". the demon Simon pointed at him and then at himself.

Simon nodded his head, he had already thought as such.

"I see... then why are there two of me? Why did you show me that dream? What are your motives?".

"Woah.. woah.. So many questions at once. I know you are confused but you don't have to bombard me with so many questions buddy" the demon Simon joked.

"Hmph, you say you are me but how can I believe you? You just tried to deceive me into falling into that reality. And more importantly, I don't joke like that" Simon spoke with a face full of seriousness.

"Hmm.. is that so? Well, there can be some discrepancies between two personalities from two different timelines. That being said, it is the truth we are the same. Just like the two sides of a coin, you are the human side and I'm the demon side of the being named Simon. Do you understand it now?"...

"I don't!! What's with that esoteric way of talking? How am I supposed to understand that?" the demon's words only served to confuse Simon.

"Hmm... then there is no other way. To get through your thick skull, this is the only way"

The demon spoke flashing a wicked smile. It raised its hand and swung it towards its own face.

BANG... the punch landed knocking the demon down.

Simon who was wondering what the demon was up to, simultaneously felt a pain coming from the left side of his cheeks and got knocked by it. Surprised evident in his eyes he looked at the demon with wide open eyes.

"Do you understand now when I say we are the same?"...

There was no mistaking it, the demon punched himself yet why did even he feel the pain? With that example, Simon had no choice but to accept the words of the demon for the time being that is.

He nodded his head.

"Good, now answering your second question, I did not show you that dream?"...

"What do you mean?" Simon asked.

There are only the two of them here, who else could show him the dream than the demon?

"I understand your concerns about that dream but it was not I that showed you that rather it was a trail from someone" the demon answered.

"By showing me that dream you have dug up all the memories, regrets and emotions that I had suppressed deep within my heart. It's all your fault that my head is in such a chaos. And you tell me that it was a trail? Who would do something like that?" Simon bellowed, his voice angry.

"Now... now, don't be so mad. It was a trail from the Fragment of Pride, it was assessing you with that dream. Besides, weren't you happy seeing her again? I can tell that a weight in your heart had disappeared. The whole experience wasn't a bad thing, wouldn't you say?"...

It was true that he was happy to see her again, taking to her did indeed lift some weight from his heart. Nevertheless, the dream also showed him an aspect of his previous life that he could never redo again.

It was a complex feeling, after experiencing that dream he felt both happy and sad at the same time.

"What do you mean it was trial from the Fragment of Pride? Was it assessing to see if I was worthy of it or not? In the first place, I have been meaning to ask, why did the fragment choose me? I am neither a prideful individual nor a super powerful being so why?" Simon questioned.

"You ask some truly difficult questions don't you?"