

D. of Pride 611

Chapter 611 611- The Second Fragment Of Pride

"Well more than assessing your worthiness, I believe the fragment was testing your heart, your willpower per se. Since you broke through that reality on your own, you aced it. As for why did the fragment choose you, isn't it because it deemed you worthy?"

"Ah! Before you start asking some more complex questions, let me tell you this. There are many things in this vast universe that you don't understand but it doesn't mean that they didn't occur".

"Everything that exists or occurs in this universe are an intrinsic part of it. One thing leads to another and connects to everything, so there is so no definite end. Once you understand its meaning, you will realise why the fragment showed you that reality".

"All I want to tell you is that, you still have a chance to correct things, nothing is over yet. You can still overcome your regrets from both past and present lives".

The demon smiled, there was a weird ancientness and depth to the words he spoke.

"Are you really me?" the impression he got from the demon was so different than his own that Simon couldn't help but ask.

"Haha, you will understand everything once you possess all the Fragments of Pride. It is time for me to leave, but before I go let me answer your last question. My motive is very simple, it is the same as you... to redo my wrongs".

"Anyways, let me give you a warning, the more fragments that you possess, the more the effect the fragments will have on you. Be careful, don't get consumed by it. You can treat it as my useless dribble if you want to."

The demon suddenly bid him goodbye, leaving behind those worrying words.

"Wait a minute, I still have a lot of questions..." Simon tried to speak up but the demon had already disappeared.

In this vast white space, he had once again become the only presence around.

Taking a deep breath, Simon took some time to comprehend the words left behind by the demon him before proceeding forward.

Counting the number of times, this was his third time coming to this place. Hence he knew where he had to go.

Simon started walking towards the thing that was beckoning him and before long he was in front of the thing that pulsed with a brilliant golden light just like the core of a sun.

Usually, whenever he came here he would feel a tremendous amount of heat assaulting him, making it impossible for him to approach closer to the object. However, this time he bizarrely did not feel any heat or any restriction holding him back from approaching the object.

On the contrary, he felt like the object was beckoning him to come closer. As Simon stood near it, he could hear its thoughts transmitting directly inside his head.

"As I thought, you were the voice that was speaking to me that time right?"

The time Simon was referring to was during his battle with Davis Hall. An egotistical voice filled with mystery, spoke to him at that moment.

[That's right, it was I who spoke to you at that time and it is also I that showed you that dream. You did well by breaking that reality and passing the test]...

"Wait a minute are you telling me, you are the fragment of pride?" Simon asked pointing at the glowing orb.

[That's right! More exactly, I'm the second fragment. It looks like your head is no longer chaotic, you must have met him huh?]....

He did indeed meet someone who looked like him, Simon nodded his head before asking the question that was bothering him the most.

"You said you are the second fragment of pride but how can you talk?".

He had the first fragment of pride for a while now but never once did it talk or initiated any conversation with him. Heck if not for the second fragment, he wouldn't even know that the fragments can communicate.

[Of course I can talk, what do you think we are? The fragments of pride are a part of the greater constellation filled with divinity and spirituality. Forget about just talking, we can perform far more than that. How can you forget that? Ah! That right, that happened...]

The second fragment explained, then it trailed off in between his sentence.

Simon opened his mouth but before he could say anything, the second fragment of pride transmitted its voice into his head once again.

[I know what you want to ask me. Why did I show you that dream? The reason is simple, it is to test whether you are ready for what is to come. Possessing the Fragments of Pride is not as simple as you think].

[There will be many tribulations and disasters coming your way in the future, and an unbending and strong willpower is needed to overcome them. But that is enough from me, you have been holed up here for a long time. Are you sure you want to stay here any longer?].

Now that the second fragment of pride pointed it out, Simon suddenly remembered that he had been here for far too long. Although he couldn't tell how much time had passed while he was experiencing that dream, the people close to him must have been worried sick over him by now.

He needed to wake up and tell them that he was fine; however, how should he do that?

[You don't have to worry about that. Just reach out to me, the second fragment of pride and your consciousness will return back to your body].

Simon did as he was told, he extended his hand and reached out towards the golden ball of light.

The instant he touched it, everything around him turned black. It was as if he had arrived onto a vast space of nothingness. There was only the light from the golden object around him; however, the

thing that he thought was the size of a ball, turned out to be a huge star, illuminating and radiating its brilliant golden light across the vast expanse of space.

"So this the second fragment of pride" he did not know why but Simon just instinctively knew it.

As he stared at the star, its vast starlight started entering his body. It rushed in from the numerous tiny pores in his body and quickly entered his veins and nerves before mixing in with his blood cell, transforming it and entering his organs.

The process didn't take much time and before Simon knew it, his consciousness entered a peculiar realm.

He was looking at a vast starry sky, in the middle of countless stars was a constellation in the shape of Cygnus. Out of the six biggest stars that made this constellation, only two stars that were located at the tail end of the formation were glowing, spreading their brilliant light.

The rest of the stars of this constellation were dark and weren't emitting any light. As Simon marvelled at this incredible sight, he realised that he had seen the very same formation in the [Constellation] feature of his [Main Menu].

Previously, since he only had the first fragment of pride, only one of the biggest stars of the formation was glowing. Now that he got the second fragment, another star lit up.

If the fragments of the pride represented the stars of the constellation, wouldn't it mean that once he possesses all the fragments, the dead stars in this constellation would light up too?

While Simon was having such thoughts, his consciousness was suddenly pulled and everything blacked out once again.

'Ugh.. what's going on?!'

Pain, intense pain, assaulted his body. Every nerve, every cell of his body was screaming in agony and he felt as if a mountain was weighing down on him.

Intense exhaustion and drowsiness surrounded him and he felt like he could sleep on for eternity. However, Simon's instincts were telling him otherwise, it was urging him to struggle and not fall asleep.

Simon instinctively complied and after an intense struggle, finally some light appeared in this bleak darkness.

At first, the images were blurry but after he adjusted to that light, he could finally see. It was difficult for him to move his head but looking at the familiar ceiling of the room, he could tell that he was inside his White Palace on his Main floor.

Simon tried to move his body, but the surge of extreme pain that assaulted every nerve of his body made him unable to even twitch a muscle.

As such, Simon simply lay there staring at the ceiling. He was on top of a bed and a powerful smell of medicine was wafting from his body. Although his senses were dull to the point of numb, he could still tell that he was wrapped in bandages from head to toe.

The extreme pain running across his body was telling him that it was not a dream, he had finally returned. No matter how much he wanted to stay in that dream, this right here, was his reality.

Althaea was his home and also where he belonged to.

'Dammit, my body is in a worse condition than I thought'.

While Simon made some groaning noises from his dry throat, the door to the room was opened and the beautiful figure of Irene walked in.

She carried a bowl and towel in her hand. After keeping the things on top of the nightstand, she inched closer to bed and was just about to help the body quietly laying there as usual, when suddenly her eyes widened in surprise.

Although very slightly, she saw his half-closed eyelids move ever so faintly. That was not all, his body that had stayed immobile up until, twitched every now and then.

Chapter 612 612- The Second Fragment Of Pride (2)

The surprise in Irene's eyes quickly turned into joy, then after a few seconds those very eyes became angry and then changed into calm. The transition was fast and the cycle repeated for quite a while.

Simon could see Irene's lips moving, she was saying something but because his senses were still numb, he couldn't hear anything. Though that may be the case, it wasn't hard for him to make out what she was trying to say from the various expressions she was showing.

Simon looked at her for a while before he found his eyelids becoming heavier and drowsiness took hold of him, he fell asleep.

The next time he opened his eyes, he saw Annette sitting next to him, taking care of him. After Annette, it was Bea and then Emma, Bianca, and Alice.

The person taking care of him changed every time he opened his eyes but the scenery around him remained the same.

How long had passed? Simon could tell that he was recovering; however, the rate of his healing was so slow, that one could barely tell the difference.

From when he first regained consciousness till now, many days must have passed, yet he still felt that outlandish pain all over his body. Forget about moving his body, just twitching his fingers posed an enormous challenge.

He was still stuck in bed day and night. Simon could see the look of concern in the eyes of those close to him. Every time they visited him, they would either try to keep their emotions in check, try to liven up the mood by talking to him or cry beside his bed, bawling their eyes out.

Days passed by with him barely making any progress. If he had to explain his healing rate, it would be 0.0001% every day. If this goes on, who knew how long it would take him to recover completely?

It was not like Simon did not have concerns and worries of his own, there were still mountain loads of things that he needed to do. However, his body felt foreign, it did not listen to him at all.

He tried to will his body every day, tried to maintain a positive attitude, thinking that his many regeneration and recovery skills would surely heal him. But that was just his hopeful thinking, Simon himself knew what condition his body was in.

It was completely destroyed to the point of no return. It was a miracle that he was still alive even after that. His current condition was no different than a cripple, there was no mana inside him.

If he had to describe it, his glass that was the vessel, was cracked and half broken. Forget about being able to hold water i.e. the mana, even if he could gather it, it simply fell off. It was no wonder that his many regenerative skills were not working.

In his current state, Simon could hardly be called alive. The powerful body of a Demon viscount that was made of mana itself, was unable to hold it. From this, one could tell the degree of injury that Simon had suffered.

Days flew by and as the gravity of the situation dawned on him, his hollow eye became more and more blank by the day. He was starting to lose hope, an aura of despair emitted out of him.

He was taken care and visited by his subordinates every day who hoped he would get better and talked to him. But Simon was no longer looking at them. He was starting to hit his mental limits, his spirit was starting to waver.

What if he strayed like this forever? This state which was no different than a vegetative state was a torture far worse than dying.

Who knows how long will it take to heal? Would he even heal and even if he healed, would he go back to his former condition?

Simon was tormented by these thoughts of his. It was not like he didn't try anything, he tried to open [Main Menu] but even that didn't work. He was unable to move the muscles of his body nor utter any coherent sounds from his throat.

How would he be able to call the [Main Menu] out in his condition?

He also thought that he could fasten the rate of his healing by drinking a couple of healing elixirs but his subordinates have been doing just that all this time. The medicinal liquid he is been fed every day was in no way inferior to the elixirs from the [Shop].

Yet even then he was unable to recover.

Given all this, it was only natural that Simon fell into despair. He could see no hope of recovering; he was starting to give up all hope and even thinking about dying.

He was unable to call out the [Main Menu] which was his one and only hope out of this, made him despair more.

Until one day, while Simon lying on his bed. He couldn't tell if his eyes were open or closed because there was only darkness all around him both literally and metaphorically.

What was he supposed to do? Even if he survived like this, his future was nothing but bleak. It was not like he couldn't predict what would happen to a dungeon whose dungeon master was out of commission.

With time as more and more powerful enemies flooded in, the dungeon would soon reach a point where it would be unable to repel the invaders and before long it would be captured.

Worse, what would happen to his subordinates? The forest spring spirits living inside his dungeon.

The promises he made, the lofty goals he set for himself. Simon felt as if everything he had done and achieved up until now was breaking apart. The more he thought about it, the more it agonised him.

Why did the second fragment of pride bring him back in this condition? It could have said something or just let him die. It would have been far better if he had just let himself fade into that dream.

That way he wouldn't have to agonise every second like this.

Hold Up!... just as Simon was regretting over his choice, he remembered the words the second fragment of pride told him.

[I know what you want to ask me. Why did I show you that dream? The reason is simple, it is to test whether you are ready for what is to come. Possessing the fragments of pride is not as simple as you think. There will be many tribulations and disasters coming your way in the future, and an unbending and strong willpower is needed to overcome them].

Before the second fragment of pride sent his consciousness back to his body, these were the words it said to him.

Was his current condition one of the obstacles it was talking about? Even if it was, what did it want from him? It was not like he could do anything in his current state.

Even if he had an unbending and strong willpower, how was it going to help him in the condition he was in?

"All I want to tell you is that, you still have a chance to correct things, nothing is over yet. You can still overcome your regrets from both past and present lives" Simon also recalled what the demon told him.

Both of them subtly pointed out at something.

This was not the end, if it was, they wouldn't have told him all those things. Light slowly returned inside his hollow eyes that had given up all hope.

It was too soon to give up, he at least had to do everything in his power before thinking about dying. But what is it that he could still do in his current state? What was inside his body that could aid him at this moment?

When Simon's train of thought led him till here, he soon realised what it was that he haven't tried.

There was something inside his body, something that was no less mysterious and formidable than the [Main Menu] itself. He haven't given it any thought until now but wasn't there still the two fragments of pride inside him?

Although he didn't understand much about them being some part of a greater constellation, but if they were filled with Divinity and Spirituality, shouldn't they be able to somehow help him in his current situation?

Holding onto his last hope, Simon desperately reached out to the fragments of pride inside him. At that moment, his consciousness saw the two glowing stars in the formation glow brighter and brighter until the vast expanse of space was covered in their starlight.

At the same time, a powerful energy surged inside Simon's body. His veins, muscles and body started glowing with the same starlight and his critical injuries, even the most precarious ones that rendered him crippled, started healing at a rate that would leave all bystanders gawking.

His bones grew anew, his torn muscles regenerated, his ligaments strengthened and new veins destroying the old ones formed.

His outer skin wiggled and crawled as if it was some kind of unique life form, expanding and contracting again and again. This was no healing, the process could only be called as being reborn once again.

The rate at which Simon was transforming was visible to the naked eye. The person in question himself felt as if hundreds of millions of nano ants crawling on his body, biting and transforming him.

This phenomenon had occurred before too, specifically during the trials he faced in the Ancient Treants territory.

During his last step, when Simon lost consciousness, the fragment aided him and repaired his body just like how it was doing right now.

Chapter 613 613- Demon Earl

However, the degree of injury that he suffered back then wasn't as severe as now. Nevertheless, with the power of the starlight, Simon's body quickly regenerated.

Along with this energy, a powerful aura of pride also radiated out from him. the aura was so mighty and unfathomable that the whole Main floor of the dungeon Laplace shook at this moment.

"W-What's going on?" the Valkyries that were inside the palace, bobbed their heads around in shock.

Irene who was silently sitting near the shore of the pond of serenity, hurriedly turned her head around and gazed at the palace. Before anyone knew it, her figure had already disappeared.

Lying on top of his bed, Simon marvelled at the rate at which his body was healing. His mana lines had already been repaired which meant that he could gather mana once again. But the dominant energy that was running inside him healing every corner of his body, didn't just stop there.

After running who knows how many cycles around his body, the dominant energy evoked another change shocking Simon once again.

[Ding... You have reached the max level of your rank]...

[Ding... the bloodline limit has been reached]...

[Ding... the experience threshold exceeds the limit. Unable to progress]...

[Ding... Character has met all conditions for [Promote]. Do you want to use Purifying Crystal Essence (Medium) to promote character?

Purifying Crystal Essence (Medium) needed- 100.

On hand-88.

Promote character—YES/NO].

Multiple notification windows popped up in front of him. Simon did not call out the [Main Menu], which meant that this change was something that was triggered by the dominant energy inside his body.

He read all the notifications but his eyes mainly stayed glued to the third one.

Promote character as soon as Simon read those few words, his heart started pounding. His blank despairing eyes suddenly started burning with a never before seen excitement.

The significance of that notification cannot be explained in a few simple words. It was something that he had been eagerly waiting for ever since he ranked up to a Demon Viscount. And as he levelled and inched closer to the level 500 barrier, his excitement only increased further.

Until today when he finally heard that notification.

Promote character, the implication that these words carried could only be understood by the term bloodline limits. The limits placed on each individual in the world of Althaea that shackled them from progressing further based on the purity of their bloodlines.

It was a wall that most of the people of this world arrived in front of after reaching a certain level. They despaired and anguished unable to do anything in front of it.

Only a small population of individuals ever manage to break through that wall and progress further.

From this, it was easy to understand how the bloodline affected an individual's growth. It was more so for Simon who had an impure bloodline to begin with. He had long foreseen this wall even before he stood in front of it.

The enormous gloomy wall that made most of the people in this world despair and heartbroken. However, unlike the others, Simon who was standing in front of the wall, felt nothing.

It would be more appropriate to say that he looked calm, there was no despair on his face. Why would he? after all, this was not his first time standing in front of one.

Yes, Simon had arrived in front of a wall before this one. Though the current wall was many times bigger and sturdier than the previous wall, he had nevertheless overcome one. So there was no need for him to despair against the current one.

No matter how the unwritten law of this world bound him, he had a way to slip past those restrictions, break the wall in front of him and proceed forward.

The way he was talking about was none other than the promote character itself. [Promote] was one of the functions of the [Character] option alongside [Constellation] which he created to help players break past their limit.

The purpose of this function is to break the level cap and allow players to reach new heights. That is to say, using the [Promote] function Simon can overcome the limiters placed on him and break through the despairing wall standing in front of him.

Simon himself knew well how impure his bloodline was, no matter how much effort he put, how many monsters he defeats, he would forever be unable to proceed any further.

The demon viscount was his limits; no, he should have reached his limits long before that. The Demon Baron should have been where his progress stopped. However, he overcame that challenge rose through the rank and arrived in front of a new wall.

It was all thanks to the [Promote] function.

Unlike the last time when he was unsure whether the function would work, Simon was more or less unfazed this time. He had already experienced how the function worked so he had no doubts in his mind.

Though that being said, his heart was still pounding and his blood was boiling in excitement. He was about to reach a new height, a new rank. After reincarnating in the world of althea and ever since becoming a demon noble, increasing his ranks had been one of his biggest goals.

Counting the time when he became Demon viscount, this would be his second time using the [Promote]. The way this function worked was simple, he just needed to gather the right amount of materials needed and the rest would be handled by the function.

The problem was that he did not have sufficient materials. In this world and even in the game, one needed a material called Purifying Crystal Essence to promote a character.

The purifying crystals are a special ingredient designed by Simon to be used for this process. Although it was something that he learned later after transmigrating into this world, but the purifying crystal essence seemed to hold some unique energy inside them.

Anyways, looking at the number of purifying crystal essence needed, Simon nodded his head.

He needed 100 crystals whereas he only had 88 of them sitting in his inventory. But that was no problem for Simon since the crystals can be bought from [Shop]. Other than the [Shop] they also dropped from the [G??????] option from time to time. The 88 crystals that he had gathered were from that option.

Simon opened the [shop] and quickly moved over to the miscellaneous section where he found the purifying crystals listed.

It needs to be mentioned that the purifying crystal essence needed for rank up this time was different than the time when he ranked up to demon viscount. The purifying crystal essence he used last time was only around 10,000 DP each.

However, the ones he needed this time were around 20,000 DP each. The difference was because of the size of the crystals.

The Purifying Crystal Essence (Medium) was twice as big as the crystals he used to rank up to become a Demon Viscount. It was not only their size, but the energy they held was comparatively higher too.

Naturally, it was twice as costly as the normal purifying crystal essence. Simon purchased the additional crystals needed. It cost him around 240,000 DP but to Simon who had nothing but Dp in abundance, this amount was nothing.

Now that he got the additional 12 crystals and met the requirements, it was time. With bated breath and accelerated excitement, Simon reached out and pressed YES.

[Ding... Purifying Crystal Essence (Medium) sufficient, commencing promotion].

Another notification popped up in front of him and immediately as if being swallowed by an unknown source, the hundred crystals disintegrated into tiny light particles before disappearing.

Simon had no mind to pay attention to that since the dominant energy inside his boy which had become stagnant for a while, suddenly started rampaging after combining with a new energy once again.

The temperature of his blood started rising and before long, perspiration started dropping down from his head. His body had become so hot that he felt like he was a human furnace.

Under that heat, his newly formed bones and regenerated muscles, started dissolving. He felt like his entire body was wiggling and going through a metamorphosis of sort. Just like a caterpillar before becoming a butterfly, the state of Simon's body couldn't be any different.

His organs, veins everything had melted, even his outer shell was visibly wiggling just like a slime. Of course, intense pain accompanied that change.

However, Simon who had gone through a similar change before, endured the pain of a destroyed body for who knows how many days, silently endured the pain.

He fell flat on his bed and squirmed like a worm. He had expected the process to be extremely agonising; it was far worse than he thought. Yet even so, Simon grit his teeth and endured on.

Unlike the last time when he lost consciousness due to the intense pain, he stayed awake and during the whole process never once did he utter a peep.

"Master"

At this moment, all the valkyries hurriedly entered the room. They had felt a vast amount of aura descend onto the main floor a few moments ago. Unable to contain their concerns, they ran towards the room where their master was recuperating only to become shocked the next second.

"Master..." they called out in fear and were just about approach him when Irene appeared in front of them and stopped them from doing so.

"This state... do not approach him carelessly"...

"B-But Master is.. he look like he is in extreme pain"

The valkyries protested, their concerned eyes rested on Simon and became moist with tears threatening to flow down any second.

Chapter 614 614- Demon Earl (2)

The man who didn't even move an inch or shown any emotions all these months, was suddenly twitching and squirming like that. Although the valkyries didn't know what happened, looking at his facial expression, they could tell that he was in extreme pain.

Seeing Simon like that, the Valkyries felt as if their heart was being pierced by thousands of blades, making them unable to contain themselves.

If it wasn't for Irene stopping them, they wouldn't know what to do anymore.

Looking at them like that, Irene released a deep breath of sigh and explained Simon's current situation. Although others might not be able to understand, but Irene had accurately seen what sort of state Simon was in and what these changes meant.

As expected, after she explained the reason behind their master's current behaviour, the significance it held and what it meant to be disturbed, they instantly calmed down. That being said, it was not like all their worries had disappeared.

"So miss Irene is saying that master is right now in a mysterious state where his body is slowly being transformed and reformed. If we disturb him carelessly, he might fall into a precarious situation?"

Annette who was the smartest of all the Valkyries, instantly grasped the gravity of the situation while her other sisters were still racking their brains to understand.

"That right, he is shedding his old shell and evolving into a higher race. His entire body is going through a qualitative change and cannot be disturbed right now. Although it might be hard for you all to watch him suffer like that, you must hold yourselves back".

"You should know that this is a very important time for him, if he somehow fails due to outer interference, there is a risk that he might die. That is why, all we can do right now is pray that he can overcome this obstacle".

After Irene finished explaining the situation, the atmosphere inside the room turned gloomy. To dissipate that gloomy atmosphere she added—

"That being said, there is no reason for us to believe that he will fail. I have seen him turn even the most impossible situation around and return back even from the grasp of death numerous times".

"His willpower, tenacity, temperament, everything is on the level of a superhuman. You have all seen how his life force became incredibly strong every time it was on the verge of flickering off. I'm sure that this time too he will overcome it and return back to us. Not only that, he will come back all restored and more powerful than before. Believe in your master".

The Valkyries all nodded their heads, although their hearts were hesitant and filled with worry, they chose to leave the room and not disturb their master. All they could do was pray that everything would be alright and believe in him.

Seeing the leave, Irene turned her eyes towards the struggling Simon. There were many complicated feelings flashing within those crystal blue. She was angry, worried, happy, scared, hopeful, surprised, sad, anxious... a myriad of emotions was going through her.

She wanted to complain, protest and criticise his actions. He was far too reckless this time with him being just an inch away from death. There were numerous occasions in which even she thought he wouldn't make it back alive.

She was worried and frustrated over the feelings she had no control of.

"Hmph, they are so worried about you and yet here you are risking your life every time as if you like gambling with your life". Irene muttered to herself before disappearing too.

Though she did not go far away and silently monitored his situation with her intent.

Time passed by, Simon who continued to struggle like a flame on a storm, could feel the changes occurring around his body. And since he wasn't unconscious, of course he felt the presence of Irene and the valkyries rushing into his room.

Nevertheless, all of his attention was currently preoccupied towards his rank up and enduring this horrendous pain, that he couldn't spare any to them.

Finally, after an excruciatingly long time, the pain running across his whole body slowly receded and his squirming finally stopped.

"Cough... Cough... Kugh!..Hahahahaha"

Simon who was coughing severely, suddenly started laughing. His laughter rang across the room for a while before he finally settled down.

He could clearly feel it, he had succeeded. He had successfully ranked up. That right, he had finally stepped onto the ranks of a Demon Earl. The excitement he was feeling right now was so overwhelming that he couldn't stay still.

As soon as his body recovered some strength, he pounced out of the bed and observed his body.

As Simon clenched and unclenched his fists, he could feel strength brimming from every inch, every corner of his body. As he was now, he felt like he could even break an armour made of whitesilver with only his physical strength alone.

Not only that, his body currently housed a ridiculous amount of mana incomparable to the times when he was a Demon Viscount. It was not a quantitative change, but a complete qualitative change.

If before the mana inside his body was in the state of gas, now it was compressed to the point that it had turned into a liquid like state.

After the rank, not only his mana capacity increased, but it was compressed dozens of times than before. Simon felt like if he cast a magic, even if it was of novice tier, it would be dozens of times more powerful than before.

What's more, his understanding of the mystical energy had also increased after his rank up. Many profundities that eluded him before, naturally came to him at this moment. He was slowly starting to understand the mysteries of mystical energy.

If he felt like he could activate [Mana Armour] in an instant. He was also capable of producing mana wings now.

"Hmm? Did I grow more taller?" noticing his increased line of vision, Simon remarked. Although very little, he had definitely grown a few centimetres taller. Being from the demon noble race, Simon was already very tall standing at around 190cm.

However, after ranking up to Demon Earl, his height would be now around 193cm.

Other than that, Simon also felt his muscles becoming more compact and defined. His bone density increased and the tribal like markings on his body became darker. The crown like horns on his head also became a little bigger and sturdier. Simon felt they wouldn't break as easily as before.

After becoming a Demon Earl, his stats saw a sharp increase but it wasn't only his physical body that had gone through a complete change.

Matching his upgraded hardware, his software had also seen drastic changes. Many of his old skills evolved into superior skills and his MP (Mana Pool) increased to a whole new realm.

That was not all, he was flooded by a stream of notification windows displaying the numerous skills that he had gained.

[Ding... Learned Demon Earl's Intimidation]

[Ding... Learned Resilient Mana Hide]

[Ding... Learned Piercing Demon Roar]

[Ding... Learned Black Flash]

[Ding... Learned Dark Deprivation]

[Ding... Learned Dark Lock]

[Ding... Learned Chilling Touch]

[Ding... Learned Soul Empowerment]

[Ding... Learned Poison Resistance]

[Ding... Learned Blunt Damage Resistance]

[Ding... Learned Cut Resistance]

[Ding... Learned Piercing Resistance]

[Ding... Learned Demonic Eye Resistance].

He had acquired a number of skills at once. Simon wanted to try out all of them and see what they did but his eyes were fixed on his [Status] window.

That was because listed amongst the skills, there was a magic that he finally learned at last. Dark Magic Mastery, Simon had finally acquired it.

All these days he constantly wondered why he was unable to learn Dark Magic even though he was a demon, a being whose alignment lie towards darkness.

Especially after looking at the Bloodthorn Demonic Warhorse showcase the might of dark magic, he became more eager to learn it. It so turned out that, one had to become a Demon Earl before they could learn it.

The Dark magic unlike the other forms of mana was one of the four rare attributes of mystical energy. Although in terms of pure strength and destructiveness, it lost to Infernal and Thunder magic, it had a vast range of applications and effects that the other two magic cannot even compare with.

With his newfound understanding of the mystical energy, Simon understood how powerful the dark magic was. Strictly in terms of influence, it can suppress all the other five basic forms of mana.

Every magic and skill has its counters like how Fire is weak to Water and Earth Magic, Earth weak to Ice, Lightning is weak to Earth and Wind weak to Ice and Lightning.

However, the dark magic is so overbearing that it suppresses all other basic attributes of mana. Of course, the dark magic wasn't all omnipotent; it had its own super effective counter too.

Light magic... just like the Dark magi, it was considered one of the four rare forms of mana and the bane of darkness. The Light Magic wasn't just the weakness of dark magic but it buffed and strengthened the other basic forms of mana.

In that regard, it can be considered the polar opposite of dark energy. Of course, Simon had already guessed that the elements had their own power structure but thanks to the knowledge that he gained after ranking up, he understood the power balance of this world more clearly.

Simon had no doubt gone through a complete qualitative change; however, the thing that saw the most improvement from the [Promote] would be his bloodline. It was far more pure and powerful than before.

Chapter 615 615- Sentiments

His bloodline had seen a massive change, that being said, it was still a far cry from reaching the ranks of a Demon Marquis.

Simon had felt it before when he had newly risen to a Demon Viscount but after becoming a Demon Earl, he felt it even more clearly, the distinct and the clearly defined hierarchy of the demon nobles.

Forget about the vast power difference between each ranks, just the purity of their bloodlines was so vast that it couldn't even be compared. No wonder he felt an absolute sense of suppression just by glancing towards the Demon Archdukes and Demon Dukes.

He couldn't even begin to fathom how pure their bloodlines were. Though one thing was for sure, it couldn't be denied that Simon had stepped into the ranks of Demon Earl and had become a true demon noble in the sense.

Even though Demon Baron and Demon Viscount were also called Demo Nobles but they were in reality considered false nobles in the demon hierarchy. The reason for that was simply the impurity of their bloodlines and them not being able to use Dark magic.

It couldn't be stressed the importance of bloodlines in this world. And it was more so evident in the hierarchy of the demon nobles.

The bloodline was the most important factor that determined that demon's future and what allowed them to acquire new skills. The Dark magic was widely known as a forbidden magic in the world of Althaea practised only by demons and those creatures whose alignment lie towards darkness.

But the Demon Nobles viewed it differently, they looked at Dark magic as the symbol of their strength. That is why, lower ranking demons such as the Demon Baron and demon Viscount who cannot use dark magi are looked down upon and despised by the other demons.

"Dark magic huh..." Simon couldn't wait to practice it but before he did that, there were other things he needed to prioritise right now.

Taking a deep breath to control his excitement, he turned his head towards the exit of the room where a couple of figures were quietly waiting for him. They were silently standing there, looking at him with varying emotions.

The Valkyries had their hands covering their mouth, their eyes gleamed with tears and their bodies trembled ever so slightly. It was evident from looking at them how worried they were.

The instant Simon turned towards them and smiled, the valkyries were no longer able to hold themselves back. They rushed towards him and dived into his embrace.

"Hic... Hic... Uunghh... Masterrr~" the maids cried for a long time, tears trickled down their faces and their eyes were swollen red from all the crying.

Simon consoled all of them, patting the heads and allowing them to hold him for as long as they wanted. And after a long long time, did the valkyries finally stop crying.

Their tear stained eyes and dishevelled faces were a sight to see. If the people that fought them saw their faces right now, they would be shocked and in disbelief. To think that the valiant warriors and the nightmares they couldn't do anything against, would also have such a cute and soft side to them.

Seeing them like this, Simon felt a pang of guilt. he could imagine how worried they must have been all this time looking at this body which could hardly be called alive back then.

The valkyries one by one wiped their tear stained faces before kneeling on the ground with Annette leading the pack.

Simon who was taken aback by their behaviour, looked at them in confusion. At this moment, the eyes of the valkyries glinted with a fierce determination as they started to speak—

"Master our sin is unforgivable, please punish us. we were created to be your shield in times of need, to protect you from all harm. Yet we couldn't even perform our duty well. It is due to our inadequacy that master got hurt".

"If only we came to master's side earlier, master wouldn't have got hurt. Our crimes are so grave that even if we die tens of thousands of times, it wouldn't be sufficient to repent".

Annette who spoke on behalf of the Valkyries, deeply bowed her head. One could see the resolve to die if the order was given. It was not only her, all five of them shared the same sentiment.

When Simon got hurt so badly, they were shocked and regretful to their very core. They walked on edge every day wondering when their master will gain consciousness. Their heart felt like it was being stabbed brutally every time they took care of him and saw the hideous injuries on his body.

They cried and prayed every day but Simon still didn't show any signs of recovery. Worse, his life force which was just like a flicker of flame, seemed like it would blow off any moment.

They were tormented and plagued by such thoughts every day to the point of going insane. It couldn't be counted how many times they blamed themselves for it. If not because of their sense of duty towards the dungeon that their master cared so much about and Irene stopping them, they might have committed suicide to repent.

Seeing them blame themselves like that, the pang of guilt that Simon felt became stronger. Since he created them, he thought that he knew the Valkyries very well. However, he couldn't be any wrong, the level of devotion, loyalty and love that they showed towards him clearly went beyond the settings he entered for them.

There was not even a shadow of doubt on their face, they were truly ready to die for him. They might have been characters of a game, but right now they were breathing, living entities that couldn't be any more real.

Of course, they would have feelings, it was not like they were soulless dolls. Given the condition his body was in, it must have killed them from within looking at him suffering like that every day.

Hearing their words, Simon felt even more responsible. Most of all, he himself was to be blamed for his condition. It was extremely foolish of him to dive inside that dangerous spatial storm without thinking about the consequences.

He did not even consider what would happen to him, his dungeon, subordinates and those around him if he had died in that storm. He had no excuse.

The Valkyries who were deeply bowing their heads, suddenly heard a dull thud. When they raised their heads in a hurry, they were shocked to find that their master was bowing towards them.

Yes, Simon too kneeled down at this moment.

"M-Master" the Valkyries hurriedly called, the sight of their master bowing like that was unacceptable to them.

However, before they could say anything further, Simon stopped them and expressed his apology.

"Although I know a simple sorry is nowhere enough to make up for the pain you guys faced, but still let me say this... I'm deeply sorry. I want you all to know that the condition my body was in, the damage that it took was due to my own fault".

"None of you are to be blamed for it. That is why, if somebody that needs to be punished it is me. You guys achieved the task I gave you splendidly; the one who messed up this time was me. I'm truly sorry".

Simon bowed his head in apologised numerous times. The Valkyries tried to stop him multiple times but he was adamant.

"Master please raise your head, we cannot see you bowing your head like this" before he knew it, he was once again surrounded by the Valkyries who pulled him up.

"Master, I know that we are lacking, we are still inexperienced and nowhere as powerful as we need to be but please... please rely us on a little more. Hic... Hic... please don't do something as dangerous as that again. Please don't leave us..."

They even started crying at the end of the sentence. It took a long while to appease them again. In the meantime, Simon was mulling over their words.

To think that he would have such great subordinates even though he was a no good person in his former life. It would have been such a waste if he had just died like that. Truly, they deserved better, he was glad that he made it back.

At this moment, a new goal sprouted in his heart and he started cherishing his life more.

Seeing that the Valkyries had finally settled down, Simon looked around and asked— "Where are Irene and Cecilia?". He couldn't feel their presence here on the main floor.

"Miss Irene and princess Cecilia are in the forest spirit village" the Valkyries informed.

Simon recovering from his injury was great news, they wanted to quickly spread it with the rest of the subordinates of this dungeon.

The Valkyries teleported alongside him to the forest spirit village. During this whole time, they stuck close to him as if they couldn't bear to separate from him.

The forest spring spirits he met on the way, were all overjoyed to see him. They had heard from Cecilia how bad his condition was and were quite worried about him. Their worries stemmed not only from the fact that without his protection they wouldn't be able to live as happily as now in the surface world, but also because he had long since become the pillar of their faith.

They believed that as long as he was around, they would have thousands of years of prosperity. As such, they spared no efforts to grow all kinds of mystical plants and herbs that have the ability to cure all kinds of injuries to save him.

Chapter 616 616- Sentiments (2)

If any alchemist saw the numerous plants and herbs that were used to aid Simon's recovery, they would no doubt have their jaw dropped on the ground at the incredulity. All of the plants and herbs that were used for medicine were so rare that they were on the level of legendary in the outside world.

You can't even see some of these herbs these days as most of them have gone extinct. Only the race of Forest Spring Spirits known to have been blessed by the nature can grow such miraculous plants.

In a way, it can be said that the forest spring spirits played a large part in Simon's recovery.

"Big brotherrrr..."

As soon as he got into the house that was made for him by the forest spring spirits, he was tackled by a small girl with emerald green hair.

The lovely and delicate face of the little girl was at this moment, was swollen red due to crying a lot. Even the speckles of light that always surrounded her were floating around in disorder indicating her concern and worries.

Cecilia cried and cried, her loud bawling was heartbreaking to hear. This was the third time ever since losing her father and mother that she had cried in such a way. From this, it was easy to tell how great Simon's place was in her heart.

She didn't just call him big brother, but truly thinks of him as one.

Elder Fennel, aunt Daphne, and everyone who was present there, felt her pain from her cry. They knew how mentally devastated the little girl was these days when Simon showed no signs of recovering.

When she first heard that her big brother was seriously injured during the defence of the dungeon, she fainted multiple times. Every time she went and visited him, she would come back with a devastated face.

She who always had that high spirited, spring like air around her, was covered in a gloomy and desolate aura day and night.

Ever since returning that day from the main floor, Cecilia seemed to have changed. She started putting more and more effort into awakening the hidden power sleeping inside her, believing that it might be able to help her big brother. It was to the point that others thought she got possessed.

She aided in growing every kind of miraculous herb she knew or heard about from her parents, manifested new healing abilities and even strained herself to create some heaven defying effects.

To that extent, she spared no efforts for the cause of her big brother but he still did not show signs of recovery. One could imagine what pitiful state the girl was in from her thinning figure and baggy eyes.

Elder Fennel, the last surviving elder of the forest spring sighed in relief as he arched his head up towards the ceiling. He was thanking his ancestors for blessing their clan. He could finally put down his worries now that he saw Simon healthy and recovered.

"Uwahhh... big bowdow yguu gahh bwaa..."

Nobody could understand what she was saying.

It took Simon even longer than the Valkyries to pacify Cecilia. She held his clothes and cried and cried until they became wet. However, Simon did not mind, he bent down and sat beside her.

Her crying stopped after an hour but that was only due to her running out of tears to shed and her throat becoming coarse.

During this time, Simon wondered how to console her but gave up believing that it was better for him to accept her feelings rather than to use words which would sound like an excuse. After all, he had failed to keep his promise to return safe and soundly to her.

Looking at the delicate shoulders of the girl who kept her head down, clutched his clothes and cried, he released a deep sigh. He felt even more guilty making her cry like that.

How could he not know that after losing her father and mother, he had become her next pillar, the support she was using to hold herself together? Knowing what condition his body was in, she must have been worried sick.

At some point in time, the people around them had tactfully exited the place, leaving the brother and sister to talk it out amongst themselves.

The room descended into silence with Cecilia continuously looking down and Simon having trouble finding the right words.

"Cecilia... forgive your brother. I know I made a promise to you and I failed to keep it. As such, I will make it up to you in any way you want, I promise. Whatever you want, I'll do it... so please stop crying"

Finally, Simon broke the silence. He extended his hands and caressed the emerald hair of his little sister.

Sniff.. sniff.. hic... Finding comfort from his spoiling and his words, Cecilia's trembling slowly stopped. Then, she raised her head, wiped her tears, looked straight at his eyes and without avoiding it, she asked—

"Anything I want?"

Simon who was taken aback by this abrupt change, nodded his head in confirmation "Yeah, anything you want".

If he could appease his little sister, he was willing to do anything.

"Then... please... please promise me that you will never die. Promise me that you won't leave me behind and disappear... like my father and mother. I don't want anything else... just promise me this".

Cecilia's voice was resolute, she wouldn't budge down if Simon didn't promise her that.

'To never die' Simon who was expecting her to ask something materialistic, was speechless for a second. The thing that Cecilia asked of him was very difficult.

Of course, it was not like Simon was planning to die or something; however, a promise is something that cannot be taken lightly. he had already broken one promise that is why, he didn't want to break another.

Simon wasn't a diviner, he cannot predict the future. But after living in this world for close to two years, what he can say for sure is that it is a dog-eat-dog world. The laws of the jungle reigned supreme here.

If you don't climb up the food chain, you are just another prey for someone. Your fate, your life, everything would be dictated by the person above you in the food chain. Simon who didn't want a fate like that would no doubt try to fight against it.

And when that time comes there was no guarantee that he would still be the last man standing. Of course, he would rebel against his fate till his last breath but there was no telling what the future held in hand.

The obstacles he would have to face would be multiple times more difficult and dangerous than now. There was a chance that he might lose his life, knowing that how could he make a promise like that?

Seeing the hesitation and the troubled look on his face, Cecilia tugged his clothes.

"Brother, you told me you would do anything. I am not asking for anything difficult, I just don't want you to do anything that would put your life at risk. I just want you to live".

Simon's words came back to bite him. He did say that he would do anything and cannot rake it back. Plus it was just like Cecilia had said, she didn't ask for anything big.

Simon thought for a while but after seeing the endearing and pleading look of his cute little sister, he finally melted.

Dammit if it was like this, then he would survive no matter how challenging the circumstances he faced in the future, he would doggedly hold on to his life. Come hell or high water, he would survive like a cockroach if need be.

"Yeah... I promise" As such, Simon finally made the promise.

"Not like this... big brother, you have to extend your pinky finger like this and lock it like this with mine. Yes, like this and now say it".

Forced to make a pinky swear with Cecilia, Simon promised her that he wouldn't die.

"Hehe, I'll forgive you for now, but big brother, a promise is something that must be kept no matter what. If you break it again, I will never forgive you. Do you understand?"

Simon nodded his head, being scolded by his little sister, he felt a weird sense of déjà vu.

Cecilia's mood improved now that she got what she wanted. With the crying and the gloomy air gone, the two siblings though not related by blood, discussed various things.

"Eh?! Your level is above 500 now?"...

"Hehe" Cecilia gave him a bright smile.

When Simon used [Appraisal], the higher version of [Analysis] on her, he was shocked to find that she was not lying.

"Level 503" was what was displayed under her name. Now that his [Analysis] had advanced, normal blocking skills couldn't stop him from prying on their statuses as such he was able to see Cecilia's skills which he was curious about up until now.

[Matter Manipulation], [Spirit Enchantment], [Variation Correction], [Nature Empowerment]...

Although not a lot, Cecilia had skills that Simon had never seen before. And even though he did not what these skills did, he could tell that they were extremely powerful given Cecilia's background and unique power.

It also made sense that her status was different since she utilised a different system of energy than the mystical energy. That being said, she did not even have a single offensive or defensive skills which made Simon worry a little

Name- Cecilia

Race- Forest Spring Royal Spirit

Level- 504

Inherent Skills- Matter Manipulation, Spirit Enchamnemtn, Magical Energy Manipulation, Psionic Creation, Nature Empowerment, Nature Manipulation, Existence Creation, Random Outcome, Alteration, Organic Magic, Abjuration, Fertility Magic

Chapter 617 617- Sentiments (3)

Other than that, he could also tell that a portion of her hidden powers sleeping inside her body had awakened. What kinds of changes would it bring once it is completely awakened?

Would the Cecilia that he knew still be there? Or would she become one of the Eight Emissaries that Aldebaran told him about?

"Hm? Big brother, why are you making such a gloomy face all of a sudden? Right did you see my [Status]... hehe, it's quite good right? Do you see this [Abjuration] skill? This new skill that I learned allows me to use healing magic on anything that I want. I can fill them up with vitality as long as they are not dead".

Cecilia demonstrated the powers of her [Abjuration Manipulation] on a nearby flower in the garden. Like a cute little sister that wanted the recognition and praise of her big brother, she looked at him with stars in her eyes.

Simon spoiled her as much as she wanted. He could see that the skill [Abjuration] wasn't as simple as healing, but he left it at that.

After playing with Cecilia for a while, Simon's started darting around seemingly to find someone.

Noticing his gaze, Cecilia made a crafty smile as she asked "Is big brother perhaps searching for big sister?".

"Eh?... Yeah" Simon scratched his head and nodded. Since Irene wasn't on the Main Floor, he thought she would be here. But it turns out that she wasn't here either.

"Big Sister was here a few moments ago, but she left"...

"When was that?" Simon questioned.

"When you arrived" Cecilia looked at him and continued "She was quite angry you know. Perhaps the one who was concerned and worried the most, was big sister. After you got hurt, everybody was devastated. Big sister not only had to look after you, but she also managed the dungeon and all the people living here all alone".

Now that Cecilia mentioned it, with him being out of commission, there was only one person who could have managed his dungeon.

The Valkyries were fully concerned about him to pay any attention to anything else. Cecilia was a wreck and the forest spring spirits had no combat abilities.

In a situation like that, he could imagine the kind of responsibilities that Irene had to carry all alone on her delicate shoulders.

"Big brother I'm fine now, you should go and console big sister. If you take too long, perhaps she might sulk and not talk to you for a long time" Cecilia smiled, prompting Simon to hurry up.

Looking at his little sister talking like all grown up, he patted her head before nodding his head. He opened the [Dungeon] function of his [Main menu] and quickly found her whereabouts.

Main floor, near the shore of the serenity pond.

A tranquil beauty was quietly sitting by the side gazing at the pond in front of her blankly.

"I knew this is where I would find you"

Suddenly the silence of this place was broken by the arrival of a young demon who casually walked to the side of the beauty and unceremoniously sat beside her.

As Simon turned to look at the beauty next to him, he saw her staring at the pond and not bothering to look at him. She was giving him the silent treatment.

Simon made a bland smile before picking up a topic to speak but Irene was hell bent on ignoring him.

"I heard that you managed the dungeon all alone while I was unconscious? You even looked after me and all of my subordinates. You see when I gained consciousness a few days, I saw you taking care of my body and feeding me medicine".

When Simon finally mentioned the last part, there were some changes in the mood of Irene.

"Snort... I was just making sure that you didn't die on your bed. More than me, it was those maids of yours that took care of you so if you are grateful, you should..."

Before Irene could complete her sentence, a hand swiftly entwined around her willowy waist and pulled her towards the man next to her. Then the lips of the man instantly ceased hers and before she knew it, she was embraced by him.

At that instant, her mind blanked and her body as if electrocuted stiffened like a rock. It was only when she felt a tongue that wantonly invaded her mouth and lustfully tried to explore around, did she come to her senses.

She hurriedly pulled away and tried to break away from his hold but the words that came from Simon next dissipated all her resistance.

"Thank you..." it was two short words, but Irene could feel the many emotions and sentiments from just those few words.

"Thank you for looking after me, my dungeon and all of my subordinates"...

"Hmph... there is no need to thank me because I know you will go risking your life somewhere else again. After all, you like gambling with your life so much" Irene complained, her voice was meek but also full of fury and sorrow.

"I'm sorry" Simon apologised. He had no pretext or justification for doing what he did back then.

It was as she had said, jumping into the spatial storm was nothing short of gambling with his life. It was not only once or twice that he did something like that, whenever he faced some difficult obstacle, he would always resort to gambling with his life.

Simon recalled that his life up until this moment have been a series of gambling where if even a tiny factor was missing, he would have already died tens if not hundreds of times.

Irene was right to chastise him like that. Simon who knew he was guilty, had no words for his defence. He looked at the breathtaking beauty in his embrace. Her flushed face filled with anger and embarrassment, her moist eyes, her soft pink lips and her small nose.

She looked so endearing that Simon was at a loss for words.

As the two people embraced each other, the place descended into silence once again. With the picturesque serenity pond as the backdrop, the place could be any more better.

How long had it been? Finally, a tiny tear trickled down Irene's face. The cold phoenix beauty who was like a millennium old ice, had finally budged. And the man to accomplish that was none other than Simon.

BADUMP... BADUMP... as her pounded like a drum, to her surprise, Irene found that she could no longer maintain her composure. Her emotions which should have been frozen and sealed, were always in turmoil because of this man.

Whenever he was around, she could never catch a break. Every single time he would do something stupid and unexpected and wreck his body.

She should be getting mad at him, she should have given him the silent treatment so why was it that when he said sorry, her heart melted like that? For the first time in a while, Irene found herself caught up in a situation where she didn't know what to do.

"?"

While a myriad of sentiments was going through her head, she suddenly sensed the hands that were resting on her delicate waist suddenly roam around at this moment. Those big bad hands taking the liberty of the situation, started moving all around her back.

Feeling the delicacy of that smooth soft skin, it started moving downwards towards those mighty and majestic buns. Just as the richness and plumpness of those two mountains was about to be grasped in entirety by Simon, his hands were suddenly smacked away.

"You!!" Irene who quickly fled away from his escape was looking at him while gritting her teeth. She then turned around and refused to look at him.

Simon who got absorbed in the moment, couldn't help but blame his hands for being mischievous at this time. He was here to mend the situation not make it worse, what was he going to do if Irene reverted back to ignoring him again?

Simon didn't know what was going through Irene's mind hence he decided to thicken his face and continue their conversation.

"Cecilia made me do a pinky promise. She said that if I didn't do it, she would never forgive me".

"What promise did you make with her?" Maybe the topic interested her or maybe it was because of something else, Irene questioned with her back facing him.

"She asked me to promise that I would never die and I couldn't bear to reject so I made that promise. That being said, I fully intend to keep it; however, I am not so naïve to believe that I can get through all the obstacles in the future all on my own. That is why, I want you to help me"

Simon bowed his head "I want to get stronger. Strong enough that I wouldn't worry those around me anymore. Strong enough so that they won't have to cry anymore".

Hearing his earnest words, Irene who was looking away slightly turned her flushed red face towards him. She looked at his bowing figure before sighing.

"Alright, I will support you in every way that I can. But just to make it clear, I haven't forgiven you yet. Not only did you gamble with your life but your earlier behaviour too..." the moment she mentioned the last part, her heart started beating rapidly and her face became furious.

"Anyways, make sure you are fully healed, we will start training after you are done with your tasks" leaving behind those words, Irene disappeared from the place as if escaping from a predator.

Now left all alone, Simon looked at her escaping back profile and then at his hands as he smiled. That feeling earlier was the best, these were his honest thoughts.

Chapter 618 618- Upgrading The Dungeon & Training

Later that day, to celebrate the recovery of their lord, the Forest Spring Spirits threw a big party. Of course, all of his subordinates were involved in the preparation.

The Valkyries spared no efforts to cook all kinds of dishes showcasing their [Cooking] and [Housework] skills. Guided by the maids, Cecilia tried her hands at some new cooking too. Although she wasn't bad, the dish she created was just... let's leave it at that.

The forest spring spirits decorated the entire village making seem like a festive season. The town square was lit up with activity, people danced with their partners and enjoyed the food and drinks on the table.

Of course, Simon who was the man of the show, was also enjoying the entire thing. But he was also busy at the same time with families coming to him asking for his blessing.

"Lord Simon please bless our baby" A young forest spring spirit couple approached him with their newborn baby in tow.

They asked him to touch the baby's head who was soundly sleeping wrapped around a towel. It seemed like in their custom, they usually asked the patriarch of their clan to do it. Now that Simon had become a similar existence for them, they came to him asking for his blessing.

It was not only them, many new couples who had sired a baby, made a line behind the first to get the blessing for their babies too.

Since it was a good thing that the dwindling population of the forest spring spirits was growing, he happily complied. Although Simon had no divine powers, he prayed and wished for good health and prosperity for all the babies.

And just like that, amidst the festivities, the day came to an end.

The next day, Simon gathered all of his subordinates on the [Main Floor] and asked them about the current condition of the dungeon.

"What voice? Gifts?"

When he asked them for details, Simon was surprised to find out that the rank of his dungeon had increased. Dungeon Laplace which was a [D] tier low ranking dungeon before, has risen to become a [C] tier intermediate ranking dungeon.

Because he had spent the remainder of his day apologising to his subordinates after recovering his body, Simon had completely missed this point.

Now that he thought about it, he could feel the density of mystical energy on the main floor had increased tremendously. Not only that, there are numerous other changes that occurred on his main floor that Simon could take his time and investigate.

For now, he concentrated on the reports of his subordinates. The voice that they mentioned seemed to have come from the dungeon when it ranked up and the gifts that they received were similarly due to this cause.

Now that Simon had ranked up to a Demon Earl, he had inherited new memories. Hence after recalling, he understood what this Gift was.

Gifts referred to a special present bestowed by the dungeon to every individual when it ranked up. These presents can be in the form of new abilities, levels, improvement in aptitude, evolutions, skills...etc..etc.

Depending on their need, every individual received a different Gift. For example, the [Helpers] received new skills that allowed them to perform their duties better.

Some of them gained skills that allowed them to scout and observe the invaders of the dungeon more proficiently. While others gained skills that increased their hiding capability.

It was not only the low ranking members of his dungeon that received the gift, even the Bloodthorn Demonic warhorse, Valkyries, Cecilia also received gifts.

In the case of the Bloodthorn Demonic warhorse who was one of the major contributors in the dungeon defence, it not only received a ton of levels by killing thousands of adventurers, but the gift it received was in the form of a skill called [Nether Shift] where it can go into a form that allowed him to ignore all physical damages for a couple of minutes.

For the Bloodthorn demonic warhorse who was quick to charge into the ranks of enemies, the [Nether Shift] would allow him to cause even more chaos. Plus Simon could tell that the rank of the skill was not low, at the very least it was a Rare Ancient tier skill.

From the Bloodthorn Demonic Warhorse, he also learned that the former three overlords of the north, Berigard and a couple of Diluvian High Orcs and some who performed splendidly during the defence, also received some good gifts.

In the case of Cecilia, no evident change happened to her but she herself told Simon that her gift was in the form of aptitude. As could be seen from the way how quickly she manifested her hidden powers.

All of his subordinates received some kind of Gift; however, the ones who received the most benefits from this, would be the Valkyries.

Although they did not receive some fancy skills or abilities, their gifts were in the form of limit release. That is to say, Annette and the others who had their levels suppressed and locked when he summoned them from that bugged option, finally gained their original strength back.

They who were constrained at level 699, finally gained their original powers which increased their overall level to 750.

Of course, one cannot just simply only look at their levels to determine their strength after all, each of the valkyries also had their racial forms which further boosted their strength.

Nevertheless, it was the truth that the overall strength of the valkyries increased. Now, if they can also get their Heirlooms too, the valkyries would reach their peak setting, just the way he had created them.

Looking at all the incredible gifts that his subordinates received, it would be a lie to say that Simon wasn't jealous. Because unlike them, he had not received any gifts.

Of course, as the master of the dungeon and it being a part of him, Simon received a large amount of levels when the dungeon increased in rank. But due to him reaching his bloodline limit, those levels and experience points were stored away.

It was only after he ranked up to a Demon Earl, that the stored experience points started acting up. His ears buzzed at that time with the repeated notification of him levelling up.

Simon's level which should have been 501 after just ranking up, rose all the way up to level 535 in one go. It was just like the time when his dungeon ranked up for the first time. After killing Gelgar and his cronies who declared a dungeon war on him, his dungeon ranked up from [E] to [D]. At that time, he received a large amount of levels.

Well, in a way it can be said that his gift was levels. It was good thing. When he thought about it this way, Simon's mood immediately improved.

Of course, now that the dungeon had ranked up, there were a lot of new options and settings that opened up. Various new sections and items in the [Shop] that he could purchase before due to the limitation of the dungeon, became available to him.

Simon had no doubt in his mind that once he installed all those upgrades, his dungeon would become even more powerful. However, exploring with all the new upgrades came later, right now there were other pressing things that he needed to address.

According to Irene, close to two months had passed while he was lying in his bed unconscious. He needed to catch up with all the news and what was going around inside his dungeon. He needed to know about the current activities of the adventurers, the tower town and so on so forth.

"Coleus... tell me what's the current situation of the dungeon?"

When called out, Colues the leader of the [Helpers] stepped forward and reported.

"Replying to my lord, the current situation of the dungeon isn't very good. the new adventurers that were attracted to the dungeon a month ago, have already conquered the 50th floor and have been steadily making progress every day"

"Although miss Irene added new floors to delay the adventurers, it is unknown how long it would be able to stop them".

While he was listening to Coleus' reports, Simon's eyes simultaneously scanned the [Main Mneu] which was showing him the three-dimensional structure of his dungeon.

Irene who managed his dungeon while he was out of commission, indeed added few new floors from where he left that is to say, from the 56th floor. She added four new floors and shifted all the important floors below.

It was a good decision on her part to add more floors but the problem was that the floors she created were far too simple and wouldn't be able to contain the adventurers for long.

"Who are the ones that are currently keeping the adventurers busy?" Simon asked, he could see some allies that were represented by green dots on the 51st floor. there were quite a few green dots up there but there were also a lot of red dots that indicated they were facing the invaders.

Two months was a long time, Simon did not believe that his dungeon was capable of stopping the current batch of adventurers, especially if they were stronger than before. There had to be someone stopping on the 51st floor all this time or else, their conquest wouldn't have just stopped on the 50th floor.

"On miss Irene's orders, the Ogoraths have been stationed on the 51st floor. Sir Bloodthorn Demonic Warhose was also there a few moments ago. Other than them, the three disaster class beasts are also placed there to stop the advance of the dungeon at any cost".

So that's what was going on, it seemed that Irene had created a defensive wall of sorts on the 51st floor knowing that the lower floors won't be able to stop the adventurers for long.

Chapter 619 619- Upgrading The Dungeon & Training (2)

The more he heard about the current situation of the dungeon, the more frustrated he got. He was frustrated not at his subordinates, but at himself. To think that he would leave his dungeon in such a precarious state.

What would have happened if he didn't make it in time? Had he decided to stay in that dream, would his dungeon be still standing? Losing everything he had built so far, just the thought of it send shivers down his spine.

Simon released a deep breath of sigh and thanked his subordinates. Had it not been for them, he would have lost everything.

"You guys have worked hard". He could see from the exhausted look on their face that they did not have an ounce of rest for a long time.

"My lord, this is our duty. Even if we have to lay our lives down, we will keep the dungeon safe" Coleus and the other [Helpers] hurriedly bowed their heads and declared.

Simon couldn't help but helplessly shake his head at their loyalty. There was no way he was going to let that happen. Now that he was up and conscious, he was going to make sure that everything goes back to normal.

"My lord" Coleus called out.

"?"

He extended his hands and passed a bag towards him. When Simon looked inside the bag, he was surprised to find that it was full of space rings.

"My lord, these are the space rings that we gathered from adventurers after the dungeon defence" Coleus explained.

The space rings were full of various sorts of artefacts, weapons, armours and possessions of the adventurers. Their qualities were not bad, most of them were around [B] tier with some [A] tier in the mix.

The rank up of the dungeon and the gifts weren't the only benefits they received from the whole ordeal, the massive amount of DP and possession of the adventurers were also left behind for them to use.

Simon nodded his head and kept the bag inside his inventory. Once he sorts out all the items inside the space rings, he would distribute them to his subordinates as per their needs.

Though that being said, these items were meant for the adventurers to use so most of them might be unsuitable for them. Well in the last case scenario, he can always use them for the treasure chests or inside that mysterious abyss of his main menu.

The last time he failed to evoke any response even after throwing dozens of [C] rank artefacts inside it but maybe it will show some response this time once he used this many items.

In any case, they were consumables for him to use and if it could help him better understand some of the mysteries of his [Main Menu], then why not?

After discussing various others issues with his subordinates, Simon asked them to continue putting their efforts for a few more days. During this time, Simon started upgrading his dungeon like a madman.

First, he altered the new floors that Irene had created, making them treacherous and more tricky to tread before moving on to adding new floors.

One of the newest upgrades after his dungeon became an intermediate tier dungeon, was the increase of floor count. Now Simon can add up to a hundred and fifty floors to dungeon Laplace.

Not only that, he can also apply floor effects called the 'Affliction' on some of the floors. The Affliction can be in the form of various status effects that can nerf, weaken, deteriorate the status or the condition of the invaders making it more difficult for them to clear the floors.

Or he can also instead choose to strengthen the condition of the natives of that floor using the Affliction. It was one or the other.

For example, he can apply the Affliction of -15% stamina on the invaders on a floor or he can choose to strengthen the monsters with the very same Affliction..i.e monsters +15% stamina. Of course, he cannot apply both because of the limitations of the dungeon.

Additionally, only one kind of Affliction can be applied on the floors of a [C] tier dungeon at a given time. There were different kinds of Affliction like the Attack -10%, Healing rate -15%, fire resistance -35% and so on and so forth.

One needed to choose carefully which Affliction to apply on what floor since it had a long cooldown time and took a ton of DP to remove the floor effects. Of course to Simon who was a former game developer, this was an element he could take full advantage of to make his dungeon stronger than ever before.

Other than that, the maximum number of floors that can be applied with Affliction on a [C] tier dungeon was 10.

Of course, once his dungeon's rank increases further he would be able to apply affliction on more floor, not only that he would be able to use more than one Affliction on each floor and of varying effects.

But that is something for the future, currently he had to make do with only ten floors and one Affliction each.

The other upgrades that the dungeon received after increasing in rank was the [Spawn] option. Simon was now able to spawn more powerful monsters befitting the dungeon's rank like the hellhounds, sand golems, firefox and such.

Not only that, traps like the magical traps, teleportation traps also became available for him to install now.

Simon finally understood why it was so difficult to conquer a dungeon starting from the intermediate rank. It was because of the existence and influence of these many elements that made the intermediate tier and higher ranked dungeon so formidable.

Simon quickly got to work, his fingers swiping around the windows at an astonishing pace. Even though his dungeon had ranked up to become an intermediate tier dungeon, with the way it was right now, it would not be wrong to say that in essence, it was still at [D] tier dungeon.

He needed to quickly install all of the new upgrades and fortify his dungeon as soon as possible.

Simon put all of his years of knowledge, experience and achievement into it and soon new and new floors started popping up every day. With him back and taking the helm once again, his subordinates felt much more sense of peace.

The gloomy aura that the inhabitants of the dungeon Laplace were surrounded with, dissipated like it was never there.

After a few days, Simon called all of his subordinates from the frontlines back and the wall of monsters blocking the 51st floor was removed, allowing adventurers to explore further.

New floors, new monsters, new traps and new Affliction were installed in the dungeon every day. One would think that with the way, Simon was splurging his DP stocks, he would soon run out.

However, far from it, his DP showed no signs of reducing instead it showed an increasing trend. With the greater influx of adventurers diving inside his dungeon, the DP that he earned was higher than before.

Not only that, with him offering generous rewards (the items he got from the expedition team) for clearing floors, higher levelled adventurers also flocked into his dungeon and soon the dungeon Laplace entered a flourishing time.

During this time, Simon dedicated himself to his role as the dungeon master. Of course, he didn't forget the date he made with Irene.

Training floor, a vast expanse of land with nothing in sight for as far as the eye can see.

"You are here early? Did you finish your task already?" Irene who saw Simon walking over asked.

Simon flashed a bitter smile, shrugged his shoulder and retorted "The job of a dungeon master is never over. In fact, the more I work, the more the tasks seem to increase. It's like its never ending".

"That being said, one needs a change of pace every now and then. Doing things excessively is not good. I have just survived from a near death experience, I cannot afford to collapse again and make my subordinates worry. Besides, the dungeon is stable now, even if I leave my post for some time, it should be alright".

Seeing Simon make jokes like that, Irene felt that something was different about him. Ever since he came back to his consciousness and recovered from his injuries, something about him had changed.

It was not the external change that Irene was talking about, if she had to point it, it would be more of an internal change. Like how the air around him was different. He used to have that reticent and impassive aura around him. But looking at him now, he seemed to be more relaxed and composed.

As if a weight that has been weighing on his heart for years, has somehow disappeared. Irene did not pry about his changes and started their training just like usual.

"Although I agreed to train you, what sort of picture did you have in mind when you asked me that at that time?" Irene questioned.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm asking what sort of direction do you want to grow in. As you know, the race of demon nobles are blessed with an allround stats. Physical combat and magic casting, it excels in both the fields. So which discipline do you have in mind?"

"I was thinking... both" Simon replied after thinking about it for a bit. he knew that his magic stats were higher than all of his other stats and he tends to rely on his magic all the time. However, his other stats weren't lagging behind too far apart and it would be a waste not to utilise them.

Chapter 620 620- Upgrading The Dungeon & Training (3)

"Haa!!..."As if expecting his answer, Irene released a deep breath of sigh. "So you are telling me that you want to dig two disciplines at once? Do you know how hard that is? Just digging one discipline takes others a lifetime and even then, it is not guaranteed that they will be able to reach the essence of that discipline much less reach true mastery in it".

"And here you are talking about digging not one but two disciplines at once. Do you think it will be that easy?"

"I know it won't be easy. However, I have to do it. I have too many things I need to protect. if I don't become stronger than anyone else, I won't be able to keep others from taking away the things that are dear to me".

Silent glanced at the silent Irene and explained his reasoning. Thinking that it still might not be enough to convince her, he added—

"I know, it might sound foolish and I may come to regret it in the future. However, I still want to give it a try".

Seeing him insist so much, didn't want to reject him outright and throw a cold bucket in his parade.

"Alright, but it doesn't change the fact that what you decided to do is extremely foolish. With your average aptitude even understanding the essence of one discipline will be a monumental task not to mention you have to accomplish that in two disciplines".

"The effort you need to put in has to be hundreds of times higher than all the others. Are you prepared for it?"

Simon readily nodded his head not knowing what kind of hell was awaiting for him and how much he regretted this day. Nevertheless, from this point on, there was no turning back for him.

"I have often seen you run headfirst at your enemies. It was not only this time, but whenever you find your magic having no effect, you resort to a physical exchange. And honestly, you have won all of your battles up until now because of your powerful items. However, in the future as you start facing true powerhouses, that advantage will be gone"

"Weapons and artefacts are secondary strengths, they shouldn't be used in any other way but to enable yourself. Your own strength is primary and what you can rely on every time. Of course, having a better artefact can many times become the deciding factor in a fight and I'm not telling you it is bad to use".

"But you tend to rely on them too much. There are several ways to disable the buffs of an artefact or weapon. At that time, the only thing that will help you is your own strength and skills"

"That being said, you attack patterns and the way you use your skills are too simple and easy to avoid. Have you ever wondered why your enemy was able to easily read your movements?"

As Irene talked on, Simon became silent. He had no excuse for his lack of strength. After all, what Irene said was all true and Simon himself wanted to get stronger. He didn't have time for a slow and mellow training. Instead Irene's current harsh tone suited him much better since it told him all the areas he was lacking in.

Simon recalled his fight with Davis, his opponent was seemingly able to read his moves easily. He thought that after acquiring the Sword Mastery skill, he would be able to hold his own in a direct physical fight.

However, his clash with Davis showed him otherwise. Even though the guy was a mage, his physical combat abilities were higher than his own.

"If you are thinking about that person from the adventurer's association, you should know that the only reason he was able to block all of your attacks was due to the [Intuition] skill" Irene mentioned.

"Intuition Skill?" What kind of skill was that, Simon frowned.

"It is a skill that allows one to predict the movements of their opponent. Didn't you find it strange how that guy was able to see through all of your attacks? It was due to the [Intuition] skill. It was also one of the skills that I want you to acquire if you are hell bent on learning physical combat".

So it was because of that skill, no wonder Davis was able to read through all of his attacks as if he could see them coming. It wasn't because the other party's physical abilities were greater than his, it was because they had the [Intuition] skill.

"Higher levelled warriors usually have the evolved version of this skill. So if you want to combat [Intuition] skill, you need to acquire [Intuition] yourself".

Simon continued to absorb Irene's knowledge. Before he knew it, he found himself becoming the same Simon who had newly joined the company and was hungry for knowledge.

Irene told him about a set of skills that he needed to acquire before reaching the next rank and what sort of training he needed to do for that.

"Right, open your status and have a look?"

At this moment, Irene suddenly made a peculiar request. Nevertheless, he complied with it and looked at his [Status].

"Can you see the difference after your rank up?"...

"Yeah, I gained a lot of new skills and most of my old skills evolved"...

"That's right, most of your normal skills have evolved into Ancient tier, even the Rare and Lost skills have at least become Superior tiers. A person's strength isn't judged by how many skills they have but by the quality and tiers of their skills".

"In this aspect, you already have a superior foundation than most of the other demon nobles around your rank or even the humans to say. Do you understand what I am getting at?"

Irene folded her hands and looked at Simon. If there were glasses on her eyes, she would look like the most ideal of teacher.

That being said, Simon did understand what she was pointing at.

"You want me to increase the tiers of my skills?".

"That's right, though strictly speaking increasing the tier of a skill is even harder than acquiring a new skill. Especially when the tiers of your skills are already that high".

"But didn't you say that I need to focus on training and acquiring new skills? Are you saying that I need to focus on all of them at once?"

When he mentioned that Irene's crystal blue eyes stared dagger at him.

"Of course, you also have the option of increasing the tier of your skills by ranking up an option that not just anybody has. But didn't you tell me that you wanted to become proficient in both physical combat and magic? I thought you already understood how incredibly difficult that was? if you understand then get ready to train till you spew out blood from your mouth"

It might just be his imagination but he saw her flash a cold smile at the end of her sentence.

"...Yeah" Simon replied.

This was a side of Irene that he had never seen before. Did she really plan to train him till he spewed out blood? For a second there, he was starting to regret his choices. However, the dice had been cast and Simon was not a person to go back on his words. Which meant that it was already too late, it was do or die.

What Simon didn't know was that, had anyone else said the exact same thing about digging two disciplines at once, she would have no doubt flat-out refused them for their idiosyncrasy.

However, she didn't do so for Simon was because she partly believed in his potential and partly because he had the aid of his dungeon, his subordinates and most importantly, the pond of serenity that was turning out to become quite a treasure in itself.

His average aptitude was not a problem because the pond would be able to slowly change him not to mention the other benefits he would get from it.

Perhaps Simon might really be able to do it. If that happens, he would become one of the strongest demon nobles out there.

"No, he has already started walking the Path of the King. Although I don't know how long I will be able to help you, I will make sure that you are strong enough to throw your weight around in this world before I..."

Seeing the figure of Simon pondering intensely while looking at his status, Irene muttered to herself.

And thus the prelude to an intense hellish training started. To help him out, the Valkyries were also summoned to the training floor. Where various sorts of terrains and equipment were built to help Simon with his training.

When he was done with the training for the day, he would be assaulted by the tasks of the dungeon that piled on. The busy life of the dungeon master of Laplace started like a hellish nightmare that had no ends in sight.

Even when he regretted his choice until his stomach turned green, he had no one but himself to be blamed.

The training was always varied and came with its own ups and down so there was never a monotonous day in Simon's life. It was the one thing that he was grateful for.

Name:- Simon

Race:- Demon Earl

Titles:- Demon of Pride [Incomplete Fragment 2/5]

Level:- 535

Stats:-

HP:- 201,501

MP:- 305,100

Strength:- 5005

Defence:- 5305

Agility:- 6075

Magic:- 6675

Endurance:- 5540

Luck:- 3000

Skills:- Language Comprehension, Analysis, Mental Map, Infernal Magic Mastery, Gale Magic Mastery, Lightning Magic Mastery, High-Speed Thought Processing, Ultra Regeneration, Ultra High-Speed Flight, Ultra Enhanced Strength, Body Reinforcement, Flame Resistance, Wind Resistance, Electro resistance, Pain Resistance, Blunt Damage Resistance, Sense Presence, Hide Presence, Abstruse Demonic Eyes, Ultra Enhanced Agility, Ultra Enhanced Endurance, Ultra Enhanced Magic, Ultra Enhanced Defence, Minimal Mana Consumption, Sharpened Senses, Superior Mana Lines, Sword Mastery, Demon Earl's Intimidation, Resilient Mana Hide, Piercing Demon Roar, Black Flash, Dark Deprivation, Dark Lock, Chilling Touch, Soul Empowerment, Poison Resistance, Blunt Damage Resistance, Cut Resistance, Piercing Resistance, Demonic Eye Resistance, ??????, ??????

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

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

High-Speed Regenration → Ultra Regeneration

High-Speed Flight → Ultra High-Speed Flight

Super Enhanced Strength → Ultra Enhanced Strength

Body Enhancement → Body Reinforcement

Super Enhanced Agility → Ultra Enhanced Agility

Super Enhanced Endurance → Ultra Enhanced Endurance

Super Enhanced Magic → Ultra Enhanced Magic

Super Enhanced Deene → Ultra Enhanced Defence

Mana Lines → Superior Mana Lines

Demonic Eyes → Abstruse Demonic Eyes

[??????] and [??????] in the stats were learned during the battle with the seven swords guild when Simon achieved a more profound understanding of the curse energy and created his own skills using it.