

D. of Pride 711

Chapter 711- Pursuers (2)

Facing her contempt, the person named Herm laughed out loud "Kuhahaha... Oh my, I wonder what the guard captain is talking about. I don't remember receiving such grace. To her, I was only just a fallen noble who lost his family, territory and everything, that she too pity on".

"She took me into her merchant guild only because of my ability and experience. In the end, I was only just a pawn for her that she discarded to a remote side region after I ran out of my use"...

"You idiot, the princess only did that because she didn't want you to get caught in the ugly conspiracies of the royal family. This was the reason why she made you the manager of a remote branch. But you..."

"I don't want to hear anything. Do you think I don't know what the real reason was? His Highness the second prince has told me everything. So don't you dare try to use your rosy words to sway me".

Alvara tried to reason with Herm; however, his mind was already completely influenced by the second prince.

"Sir Herm although I know this issue is important for you but master's orders hold the highest priority right now" The tall man hiding his identity, reminded.

"Tch... I know, you don't have to remind me" Herm turned to face Cynthia, his face distorted with a twisted expression.

"As much as I would have liked to converse with you all, let's wrap things up. Princess Cynthia, on behalf of the fact that you took care of me all those years, I recommend you to surrender. Marrying that person is the only purpose you have right now. You should have seen enough bloodshed already, do you want these people to die too?"

"Shut your trap!! Your Highness do not listen to this man. The second prince has completely bought him over. Please continue to run, you do not have to worry about us. You all take her highness away from here" Brett hollered drawing out his daggers.

"Princess let's go, it's dangerous here" Alvara pulled Cynthia as they continued their run. The other member of their group cleared a path for them.

"Since you don't want to listen, then don't blame me for giving you a warning. You all attack, kill all of them except for that woman" On Herm's command, the people behind him immediately executed their onslaught.

"Don't think you can ignore this old man. [Shadow Revolution]- [Dance of Blades]" With a vigorous cry, Brett roused all of his energy and executed his powerful skill. The twin daggers on his hand danced with an ominous light as he repeatedly appeared and disappeared through the shadows.

This forced some of the pursuers who were after Cynthia, to slow down and focus on defending themselves.

"Hoh, a level 419 Assassin, not bad. To think that she still had these many skilled combatants with her" the man donned in a robe, observed.

"Hiiiihhh!!... L-Level 419 you say?!!" Herm freaked out when he heard that the old assassin was above level 400.

"W-will those adventurers we hired be able to do their job?"...

"That's a given, we have more than forty adventurers on our side who are all above level 350. Not to mention the team leaders are themselves above level 400. Even if they have some decent combatants, no matter how you see it, we are the ones who hold an absolute advantage".

"And besides, by any chance if those adventurers aren't able to do it, I shall personally step forward".

When Herm heard that the person in the hood will personally take action if anything goes south, a look of relief and excitement flashed on his face.

Over on the side of Cynthia's group, they continued to run piercing the thick mist of the floor. Whenever any monster popped up, Burg or Marba swiftly took care of it.

"According to the map, the entrance to the 29th floor is just near here" Alvara stated, looking at a map. The map detailed the layout of the floor, the demographics of monsters and various treasures and objects that can be found here.

It was charted by the adventurers and sold in many shops in the tower town. Before diving inside the dungeon, Alvara made sure to buy as many maps of the floors as she could find. Thanks to these maps, they soon arrived in front of a large dark staircase covered in mist that led to the next floor.

"Alright, let's go everyone" the guard commander beckoned, however... "You all go ahead" Burg stopped in his tracks in front of the staircase.

"What are you saying.."

"They are here. Someone needs to stay behind and hold them back. Go now!!" the knight roared turning to face the pursuers.

The group made a complicated face nevertheless, they did not stop and continued to push ahead. However, their situation did not get any better. There were far too many pursuers after them.

One by one all of Cecilia's close subordinates left her side until there were only three of them remaining. The mage Marba, Guard Captain Alvara and Cynthia herself.

"Captain, we cannot outrun them like this" Marba, the mage, analyzed the situation with a serious expression.

Alvara thought for a moment, biting her thumb in contemplation before reaching a decision. She pointed to a specific area on the 29th floor and declared—

"There's a special area up ahead. It's known to be extremely dangerous, but it might be the perfect place to throw off our pursuers".

Without further hesitation, the three of them rushed toward the special area. A few moments later, at the spot where Cynthia and the others were just a few moments ago, a couple of figures arrived. These figures were none other than the pursuers that were after them.

"Where did they go? Don't tell me you lost them you good for nothing fools?" Herm cursed seeing the adventurers suddenly stop in their tracks.

"Sir Herm calm down. No matter where they go or try to hide, the adventurers will find them. After all, when it comes to dungeon, they are the experts in the field. I'm sure with the many tracking skills they have they will quickly find them" the person in the robe spoke.

Just like he had said, the adventurer's team started moving once the Assassins returned back after scouting.

29th floor, Special Area... The designation "Special Area" was a euphemism, used by adventurers to describe a zone in the dungeon that brimmed with peril and uncertainty. In reality, it was one of the most recent additions to the dungeon, that was installed to be an insurmountable challenge for the adventurers.

Unlike other floors in the dungeon, the Special Area's purpose was not to lure adventurers or tempt them with treasures. Instead, it served as a deterrent or a challenge for those brave enough who were looking for a place to test their strength.

Unique and powerful monsters that usually do not spawn on the same floor, roamed the region, making it a sanctuary for some of the deadliest monsters in the dungeon.

Even adventurers who were diving inside the dungeon for a long time, usually avoid the special areas after all, the possibility of encountering monsters get significantly higher there. To willingly enter this domain was to invite near death situation, and thus, most adventurers would go out of their way to avoid it at all costs.

Somewhere inside the special area, Cynthia's group pressed on while trying to hide from the monsters as best as they can.

Huff.. Huff.. the group huffed while hiding behind the ample foliage of the forest.

"It looks like that skill of her highness worked" Marba commented after seeing that a powerful monster, called the Salamander passed by them without being alerted of their presence.

"I'm truly sorry, right now I can only help like this. Leo was gravely injured in that great battle one month ago in the capital and is currently hibernating inside the ring to recover some of its strength" Cynthia apologised with a heavy heart.

"What are you saying, princess. It is entirely thanks to your skills that we were able to get this far without any monsters here" As Alvara had said, their group of three were able to get this far without alerting the many powerful monsters was because of her skill.

Thanks to the skill that was bestowed on her by the beast spirit Leo, they could mask their presence and camouflage their aura to make it seem natural with the habitat here. But as they say, good fortune and bad fortune are the two faces of the same coin.

It didn't take long for their good fortune to flip over.

Grrrr... the salamander that they thought didn't notice, suddenly appeared from behind them, glaring at them menacingly.

Towering at a height of twelve feet, the salamander possessed a formidable and imposing presence. Its body is covered in crimson scales that shimmer with an eerie glow, giving it an otherworldly appearance.

Its red hide reflected the element of fire and was sturdy enough to provide it with an almost impervious defence. As it prowled through the ground, it left deep scorched footprints in its wake.

Seeing the salamander suddenly creep behind them, the guard captain was immediately alerted. SHINING... she unsheathed her sword at the first signs of danger and was just about to engage with the monster when.

"Don't, leave this guy to me" Marba stated as she stood her ground while flashing a smile to deceive her nervousness.

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"We can't all stay here and fight. If we do, our pursuers will catch up to us. I'll stay behind and hold off the monster while you two run ahead. I'll catch up with you soon," Marba said firmly, sacrificing herself to buy time for her companions.

Alvara was torn with emotion, biting her lip so hard that blood trickled out. Nevertheless, she grabbed Cynthia and pressed ahead leaving her comrade behind to deal with the monster.

She was fully aware of what would happen if Marba a mage were to fight a monster without any frontliner that can protect her. However, she also knew what would happen if they were to stop here and engage the beast.

In the end, Alvara had no choice but to grab Cynthia's hand and flee with her highness, leaving Marba to face the beast alone. It was a difficult decision, but it was the only option to ensure their safety.

However... "No!! No more, I have lost enough people already" Cynthia broke away from her hold and refused to move.

"Princess what are you saying. This is not the time to be stubborn. Think about the sacrifices the other made to get you here. Just hold on a little more longer, I'm sure that guy will come..."...

"He won't" Alvara tried to reason Cynthia into moving but after seeing the adamant look in the latter's eyes, she couldn't help but swallow her words.

"He won't. Think about it, if he had any intention to come he would have shown up already. It's already been a week and I have lost many precious subordinates in this cat and mouse chase inside the dungeon".

'It needs to stop now. Instead of clinging to and waiting for some hope that would never arrive, I would rather fight and do what I can at this moment. And besides you should know more than anyone that Marba cannot win against that monster alone. Even if her magic is powerful if the beast covers the distance between them, she will die. If I can save her then I will fight" Cynthia made her decision.

"But Princess if you stop here now then..."...

"If that is my fate then so be it. I am tired of losing people close to me". Saying that, Cynthia turned around and rushed towards Marba to aid her.

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"Eat this... Lightning Magic Mastery- [Lightning pulse]" Marba cried out casting a magic of the lightning attribute. Powerful lightning bolts released out of her staff and bombarded the salamander.

However, the monster's hide was just too tough for the magic to pierce. Other than electrocuting and infuriating the monster, the magic didn't seem to have achieved any other effect.

"Damn," Marba clicked her tongue and tried to open some distance from the monster. But the Salamander was uncannily fast, it was already upon her. Its wide open jaws that were decked with sharp elongated teeth threatened to tear her apart.

"Is this where it ends? Sigh, in the end I couldn't buy much time. I hope they used this chance to get far away" Marba closed her eyes in resignation of her fate.

However, the expected death did not come. Instead, she felt a tight grip around her body and the sensation of being embraced.

Hurriedly opening her eyes, Marba saw the image of Cynthia who holding onto her with a gentle smile.

"Your Highness?!!" in shock, she couldn't help but question "Why are you here?".

She should have used the few minutes she bought her to get away from here. Yet the person came back to rescue her.

"I have lost enough people already, I cannot afford to lose you too. And so I decided to stop running and fight".

Right after saying that, Cynthia unleashed a torrent of elemental magic, each attack imbued with the strength of the peculiar golden white markings that appeared on her body at this moment.

"Argh... let's defeat this beast as soon as possible then" Marba, no longer helpless, joined in the assault. With renewed vigour, she chanted incantations, her own magic intertwining with Cynthia's.

The Salamander roared in fury as Cynthia and Marba unleashed a relentless barrage of magic upon it. Fire, Ice, wind, lightning and earth, a dazzling array of magic was cast by Cynthia.

However, the monster's tough hide and resilience wasn't for show. Even after taking that many attacks, it did not flinch a single inch.

BUZZ... at this moment, the salamander opened its maw wide, flames beginning to condense into a breath. The very air seemed to distort at this moment from the intense heat indicating the power bestowed in that attack.

Just when the fiery breath was about to be completed, a sword pierced its maw causing the breath to blast in its own mouth.

Alvara landed in front of Cynthia and Marba after dealing some damage to the monster "It's Endurance is off the charts, however, it should still have some weakness. I will use my attacks to break its scales. Princess, Marba.. the both of you match your attacks and concentrate on that single spot" Alvara came up with a plan.

The level 410 salamander wasn't an opponent that they can take out so easily. Its level might be low compared to them, but it was a monster belonging to a powerful species. Attacking it head-on was utterly foolish.

"Understood!" Cynthia and Marba replied in unison.

Alvara skillfully drew the monster's attention toward herself, deftly manoeuvring around the creature and striking its thick scales with her sword, causing them to crack and shatter.

Meanwhile, Cynthia summoned her elemental prowess from the backlines, while Marba employed her lightning magic. Over time, their coordinated assault gradually wore down the Salamander's defences.

Each well-timed strike chipped away at its red-scaled armor, exposing its vulnerable spots. The creature howled in pain and thrashed about violently. In its berserk state, its enormous tail, capable of snapping trees and shattering boulders, struck Alvara, sending her flying and spewing blood.

"Alvara!!" Cynthia called out in concern.

"I'm... alright..." The guard captain replied picking herself up. Even though that last attack shattered some of her bones, the guard captain refused to fall down.

"The monster is on its last legs. Keep attacking those spots, let's finish this" Alvara declared, her attacks were like a dance, and her sword strokes were precise and intense. Every strike and movement was calculated and aimed at further weakening the creature's defences.

"Alright" a fierce determination also shone in Cynthia's and Marba's eyes. The former channelled all her energy into her next attack, pouring the combined strength of fire, ice, wind, lightning, and earth into a single, concentrated blow.

Meanwhile, Marba continued diverting the monster's attention, providing crucial support to Alvara.

The Salamander writhed in agony, its once imposing red skin now marred with cracks and burn marks, and its roars grew more and more anguished. So when the attack that had the fusion of all those elements came targeting its weak spot, it created a devastating blow that finally brought the monster down.

BOOOM... clouds of dust rose high up to the ceiling and the air was heavy with the aftermath of the intense battle. All that remained was the sound of heavy breathing and the echo of victory.

"Huff... Huff... It's finally down. Is everyone alright?" Alvara turned towards Cynthia and Marba behind her.

"Yeah, we are fine"...

Battered and exhausted, everyone sat on the ground and collected their breaths.

"I can't believe we won against a monster like this" Marba spoke, a little out of sorts. As the dust settled down, it revealed the scorched earth the large crater and the monster lying motionless amidst it.

The mage was still unable to believe that they were able to prevail over such a powerful monster.

"If we were to believe the information from the adventurers, the Salamander should be a monster that should be on the middle or lower middle floors of the dungeon. The fact that we encountered one here, goes to say how dangerous the special area is. This place is filled with such monsters. We cannot waste any more time here and..."

Before Alvara could finish her sentence, a voice, dripping with anger and frustration, echoed through the area.

"Found you all" Black shadows rushed out of the forest and appeared before Alvara and the others. The figures were none other than their pursuers who finally caught up to them.

"I must say those subordinates of your highness gave us quite the trouble. However, no matter what tricks you use, its useless. You cannot escape. Give up before I run out of patience" Herm shouted walking up from behind the adventurers.

As always, the tall person in the hood followed closely behind him. Although Herm's voice sounded arrogant and conceited, judging from the haggard state, it was clear that they had to fight a series of difficult battles to get to here.

Alvara hurriedly rushed towards Cynthia, even while bleeding from her head, she stood in front of her like a shield. Her worst premonition finally came true, their pursuers had caught up to them.

"Sir Herm this is a Special Area, this was not part of the deal" one of the adventurer leaders grunted.

Their teams had taken heavy losses on their way here, many of his comrades had died. This wasn't the part of the deal.

"Huh?! As if I give a damn if it's a special area or not. The deal was for you guys to guide us inside the dungeon and aid in capturing them" Herm spat back, not in the best mood.

Chapter 713- No Way Of Escape (2)

"That's not what we are talking about. Sir Herm won't know because you are not from the tower town. But there are different areas in the dungeon that are more dangerous than the normal floors. The reward is not worth the risk"...

"Shut your trap! As if that matters to me. Your job is to capture them, so do it no matter the cost".

The tension in the air was palpable as the other side suddenly started arguing among themselves. The adventurers of the tower town who had been commissioned by Herm for this mission started demanding that he increase their reward and reimburse them for their fallen comrades.

While the latter firmly remained adamant on the terms agreed beforehand and unwilling to relent an inch.

'Are they fighting amongst themselves?' Seeing that their pursuers suddenly fall apart and argue amongst themselves, Alvara realised that this was an opportunity. The chance to escape was now.

Alvara hurriedly grabbed Cynthia and Marba and slowly started retreating back. However, unlike the others, the person in the robe had his attention firmly fixed on them. So when he saw their targets escaping, he hurriedly informed Herm.

"Stop creating more trouble for me Princess. You think you can outsmart me and escape? Give up already, maybe I will even consider sparing the life of the remaining subordinate of yours" The latter spat with a twisted grin on his face.

Cynthia's retreating steps suddenly halted and her mind raced with numerous thoughts. But when she remembered her comrades who had fought bravely for the sole sake to let her escape, she found herself refusing to back down at this moment. After all, if she did, she would be letting their efforts be in vain.

An unwavering determination surged within her, the determination to survive no matter what. Alvara and Marba, her two loyal subordinates and friends, stood in front of her, ready to fight and protect her till their last breath.

"Hmph, it seems like I underestimated your Highness's stubbornness. If that is the case, do not expect any mercy" Herm roared glaring at Cynthia.

Just when it seemed like a confrontation was inevitable, the ground beneath them trembled, and the air took on a crimson hue. To everyone's horror and confusion, the Salamander who they thought was defeated by Cynthia and her group, suddenly rose up and crawled out of the crater.

Along with it, the temperature around the surrounding also soared as the monster's fiery breath seethed from its gaping maw. Gasps and cries of terror erupted among the adventurers who recognized the fearsome creature.

"The Salamander lives! It's still alive!" one of the adventurers shouted in disbelief, and the others called out the monster's name in dread.

The Salamander's return unleashed chaos upon the floor. Its crimson scales glistened menacingly under the flickering torchlight, and its fiery breath emanated a scorching heat that made even the bravest of adventurers step back in fear. T

striking at adventurers with its massive tail, tearing through formations with its ferocious claws, and breathing flames that the air crackled with the intensity of its power, and the ground beneath its massive form shook with every step it took.

In mere moments, the Salamander launched into a rampage, striking at adventurers with its massive tail, tearing through formations with its ferocious claws, and breathing flames that consumed everything in their path.

Panic turned to terror, and screams filled the air as the adventurers struggled to find safety amidst the devastation.

"Do not panic, maintain your formations. The beast is near its death throes, we can kill it if we attack it together" On the orders of the adventurer leaders, the panicking adventurers hurriedly got into formation and started engaging the monsters.

However, in this special area, the Salamander wasn't the only powerful monster that had to be wary about. There were also Frostfang serpents, whose icy blue scales could freeze their victims with just one bite, Boulderbacks, massive beasts with impenetrable shells, and Stormchasers, quick and nimble creatures that could strike from afar with electrical energy. Many other monsters were attracted to the area due to the sounds.

"There are more monsters coming this way! We're surrounded!"...

"We can't handle this! Fall back, fall back!"...

"No don't, if we turned around right now, we will be decimated. Hold the line! We can't let them overrun us!"...

"I-I've never seen monsters like these before! They should be from the lower-middle floors, they are too strong!"...

"God we are done for, I don't want to die"...

Unsystematic orders, low morale and dissimilar opinions, the formations of the adventurers completely collapsed with the other monsters surging in. The hopes of controlling the situation shattered as the reality of their perilous circumstances sank in.

In the midst of this mayhem, Cynthia and her group moved with purposeful stealth, taking advantage of the adventurers' distracted state. With their formation in disarray and the attention focused on the onslaught of monsters, they slipped away unnoticed, leaving the other adventurers to face the overwhelming threat alone.

Behind them, the sounds of the skirmish grew fainter with each step, and the chaos of the special area engulfed them. Nevertheless, Cynthia and her group pressed on. With their hearts pounding with nervousness, they navigated the dark and treacherous passages of the special area.

The roars of the monsters and the cries of the adventurers continued to reverberate through the air, creating an atmosphere of chaos and dread. Thanks to Cynthia's skill, they managed to escape multiple monsters on their way and pass through numerous treacherous areas.

At every turn, they would glance over their shoulders, checking if someone was following them.

"It looks like we successfully threw them off. However, we aren't out of danger yet. We need to find some place to hide. I see a hidden cave entrance up ahead. Let's go hide there" Alvara pointed at a rocky outcrop ahead.

The cave was skilfully hidden amidst the overgrown bushes and trees. The fact that one could miss it entirely if one did not pay it enough attention, made it the perfect place to hide.

On Alvara's lead, the three of them headed towards the cave. The atmosphere inside the cave was cool and damp, providing a stark contrast to the chaos they had just escaped. It was spacious enough for them to move freely, yet its walls felt suffocatingly close.

As Cynthia, Alvara and Marba ventured inside, the only sounds they could hear were the soft echoes of their footsteps and the distant rumble of the ongoing battle outside. Soon, they found a relatively secluded spot inside the cave and stopped there to catch their breaths.

"It doesn't appear there are no monsters inside the cave" Alvara commented, loosening the grip on her sword hilt.

"Alvara you are injured, you should take some rest. This entire time you continued to lead us while holding onto your injuries. I would have given you a potion; however, the ones I have are all over" Cynthia spoke with a guilt trodden voice.

"I'm alright princess, these are just some minor injuries and nothing to worry... Kuh!!" The guard captain suddenly clenched her left chest side in pain.

Although she said it was just some minor injuries, it was anything but that. The tail of that salamander was like a battering ram, that completely overwhelmed her defence and deal heavy internal injuries.

Alvara reckoned that the left side of her ribcage was broken and those broken splinters have punctured her lungs making it even difficult for her to breathe.

"Let me support you" Cynthia came forward to support her guard and friend.

"No need princess, aren't you exhausted yourself? Activating those magic without Sir Leo's help must have taken a heavy toll on your body. You shouldn't have been that reckless".

Just like the guard captain had said, Cynthia too was heavily injured. It could be seen from her pale appearance and her shrivelled look. To defeat the salamander, she pushed her body beyond her limits.

It was not just Cynthia and Alvara, Marba too was injured. In fact, there was no one in their group who wasn't heavily injured.

"It's weird, the outside is oozing with powerful monsters. Yet there are no presence of any monsters or signs of them coming near the cave. Although it's a good thing for us, I can't help but wonder why is that" Marba wondered as she fell back on her butt, exhausted after using all of her mana.

The question that she raised, also bothered the rest of them. According to the information they gathered from the adventurers, Special areas were places filled with dangers at every turn. Even experienced adventurers usually avoided such areas.

Forget about finding a hideout like this, there shouldn't be any safe place like this.

It was only natural that Alvara and the others who relied on the information from the adventurers to find the place they were in, unusual. After all, even the adventurers were wrong about Special Areas.

The term Special Areas was something that the adventurers gave to areas like these which were flooded with powerful monsters that did not belong to the specific floors.

These areas were a recent addition to the dungeon and much was unknown about them. As such, it was still much of a mystery for them. That is why they did not know that the actual euphemism for the place was Danger Zones.

A setup that was created by Fey to slow down the advance of the adventurers or stand in their way as a trial. It shared a common factor with the Hidden Chambers in that it also had the high risk high reward dynamics.

The place might be flooded by powerful monsters; however, they do not go out of the designated area almost as if they are safeguarding something.

Chapter 714- No Way Of Escape (3)

What is it that these monsters are safeguarding? It was something for the adventurers to find out after they explore the area.

The thing to note about the Danger Zone is that since it is named as such, there are likely to be areas designated as Safe Zones as well.

Just like what the name means, they were specific areas in the Danger Zones where the monsters can't get in. They were created to provide some respite to the adventurers seeking to explore or clear these special areas.

The cave where Cynthia and the others were currently, was precisely one such place.

"Let's not dwell on that for now" Alvara leaned against the cave wall, wincing as pain shot through her body. "Our priority is to tend to our injuries and regain our strength. We won't last long if we don't recover ". She spoke with a strained voice.

Quite some time had passed as they continued to hide inside the dimly lit cave. It was long enough for their pursuers to either get eliminated by the monsters outside or to give up on the search.

Still, the group continued to bide their time inside the cave. It seemed as though they had successfully evaded danger when suddenly a light appeared at the entrance, accompanied by the sound of footsteps.

As the light from the cave entrance grew brighter, Cynthia, Alvara, and Marba exchanged anxious glances. The hope that they had finally managed to elude their pursuers quickly dissipated and they were thrown into the pits of despair once again.

Alvara's heart pounded in her chest as a bead of sweat formed on her forehead. Her mind raced, trying to come up with a plan to escape. She grabbed her sword and with much difficulty, she stood back up.

But with those injuries and in an exhausted state where she was quickly losing consciousness, it seemed almost impossible to confront their pursuers head-on.

Outside the cave, the voices of Herm and his accomplices became audible. Although their words were muffled, but their intent was clear – they were determined to find the princess and put an end to their escape.

"Search every nook and cranny!" Herm's voice boomed. "Don't let her get away!".

The adventurers replied in affirmation, their footsteps growing louder and more frantic as they scoured the area. Alvara's grip on her sword tightened, and she tried to steady her breathing, praying that they wouldn't be discovered.

They slowly inched back further inside the cave; however, it was only a matter of time before they were discovered.

And just like she had feared, one of the adventurers suddenly let out a shout of excitement "Hyohoo, I found something! Over here Sir Herm".

Alvara's heart sank as multiple footsteps could be heard coming towards them. Using magic to light their way, their pursuers slowly appeared in front of them.

"Come out, Princess! There is nowhere left to run!" Herm spoke, his voice filled with triumph.

"You bastard... how did you escape from those monsters?" The Guard Commander asked standing between Herm and the princess.

"Heh, why should I answer you? Hmph, I have a feeling that you and your group may be up to something, even in your last ropes, you are still thinking about some way to escape. But it's all useless, I have you cornered. This cat and mouse chase is over"

The latter laughed at their resistance. Herm's laughter just rang out when suddenly...

"Marba now!!" Alvara cried out and ducked into a corner.

RUMBLE... Immediately after, lightning started generating inside the cave and the figure of the Mage hiding behind Alvara all this time and preparing her magic, came into view.

CRACK... the core stone embedded inside her staff burst apart and a vast amount of mana overflowed from it.

"This is bad sir Herm, she is overloading her magic staff" One of the adventurers reported with a pale face.

"Overloading what?!" Although he did not understand what the adventurer meant by those words, even an idiot can understand that the magic the mage was casting was dangerous and was very powerful.

Seeing that she was pointing her magic at him, he screamed frantically and tumbled onto the ground.

And in this pivotal instant...Eat this..." Marba shouted at the top of her lungs and cast her Lightning Magic Mastery- [Volt Strike]...

Powerful electrical currents generated from her staff, instantly incinerating the adventurers in the path before moving towards Herm.

"Sir Roderick.. Please help meeee!!!". At the very instant his cry rang out, a figure jumped between the Lightning magic and Herm.

BANG... the [Volt Strike] connected with the target blinding and shaking the entire place. As for the caster, she fell to the ground puking a mouthful of blood.

Marba had already exhausted all of her mana and mana recovering potions. As such, it was normally impossible for her to even cast even a novice tier magic much less a magic as powerful as this.

The only reason she was able to cast her magic was because she had overloaded the core stone embedded inside her staff and used the overflowing mana from its destruction to cast her magic.

However, using this method posed several risks to the caster since the mana wasn't theirs. For trying to overload the core stone, Marba had to bear a significant amount of repercussion in return.

That said, the power gained from using such a method was also very substantial. When one casts a magic by overloading the core stone, the might of that magic triples or even quadruples.

Added with Marba's level and mastery of lightning magic, the attack should have wiped their enemies or at the very least severely injure them.

That should have been the case... however, when the dust settled, Herm looked almost fine. Standing in front of him was the robed person who took on the brunt of the attack for him. And yet even after that, they came out unscathed. Only a small part of their robes got burned but other than that, the magic seemed to have achieved no other effect.

Other than that, what stood out was the shield the robed person used to defend them. It was a huge round shield, pitch black in colour with a greyish-black aura oozing from it. Its design was simple and the material it was crafted from also did not seem to be too special.

However, it was this shield that stopped Marba's attack. Even after taking that intermediate tier magic powered from the overload of core stone, the shield did not have the slightest scratch.

"Hehe... hahaha. I'm saved. Your last attempt failed" Like a twisted symphony, Herm's laughter echoed inside the interior of the cave. That magic would have killed him if not the robed person's timely intervention.

'That's right, as long as I have him with me, there is no way I will die' Herm thanked the robbed person before picking himself up. His previous miserable and cowardly attitude was gone, replaced by a bold and triumphant look.

"How did..." Marba, sprawled on the ground, wore an expression of disbelief as she extended a trembling finger toward the robed man. However, before she could say anything further, Herm lashed out at her.

"You bitch!! You dare try to kill me?"...

BANG... BANG... BANG... A barrage of brutal kicks erupted from Herm's enraged onslaught upon the injured mage, who lay defenceless. His kicks mercilessly targeted her stomach, chest, and even her face, unrelenting even after she lost consciousness as he vented all of his frustration out.

"You bastard... stop!!!" Unable to see her comrade being tortured like that, Alvara rushed out while swinging her sword. However, her weapon was effortlessly swatted away by the robed figure, who then seized her by the neck.

"Kuh!!!" the guard captain groaned with a pale face after being lifted off the ground. If she was in her peak condition, and not so severely injured as she was now, she might have been able to do something in this situation.

However, it was impossible for her to muster even the tiniest bit of resistance right now.

"Stop!!... Stop it!! If you hurt them anymore then... I will kill myself. Your objective is to capture me right? If die then you will fail in your mission" Cynthia threatened holding a knife near her throat.

Her face looked frighteningly composed even as a droplet of blood trickled down her neck from the sharp blade of the knife. The ring in her right hand finger glowed and even Alvara plead with her eyes not to do it.

However, at this moment other than doing something like this, she had no other choice. Her guardian spirit Leo had suffered grave damage in the battle at the capital and needed to fall into a slumber inside the ring to preserve its life.

All of her precious subordinates left her side one after the other and the ones that were remaining, were also at their last legs.

A dead end behind her and enemies in front, there was nowhere left for her to run to. If ending her life can bring an end to this nightmare, then she was no longer hesitant to do it. Although she did feel bad for her letting her subordinates down, in the end, she was powerless to change her fate.

Since It was like this, Cynthia gave a fearless smile and was about to plunge the dagger into her when something hit her neck hard.

In that split moment, she almost lost consciousness and the knife fell out of her hand. When she regained her consciuiness, she found herself immobilised. The robed person was in front of her.

Chapter 715- No hero but a demon

When did he move? Even Alvara couldn't see the robed person's movements.

"Haha... you can't do that princess. Even if you give up, you cannot die" Herm kicked the unconscious Marba away and wagged his finger.

"That's right, you asked me a question before as to how I managed to run away from all those monsters there? Hehe, let me answer it for you, think of it as the last favour I do for you all for taking care of me for all those years".

He pointed at the robed figure "It's all thanks to Sir Roderick. Because of him, we were saved from getting killed by those monsters. He cleared all those monsters on our way here. He is also a powerhouse who is above level 500".

His words caused Cynthia and Alvara to widen their eyes in disbelief. They had assumed that Herm and his group had simply managed to escape from the monsters, but the truth was far more surprising. They had battled their way through, and the robed man was the one who defeated all those monsters.

Pleased by their reaction, Herm continued "You should know who he is, your highness. After all, he was brought here from the Kingdom of Blackthorn by your second brother."

At that moment, the robed man finally revealed his face from beneath the hood. His features were weathered, adorned with scars earned from countless battles. Despite the years that had passed, he still exuded a sense of raw power and determination.

"You... you are Roderick Garnald" When Cynthia saw the appearance of the robed person, she immediately recalled who he was.

"That's right your highness, I'm a faithful servant of his Majesty, the king of Blackthorn and the protector of the royal family. I apologise for my heavy handed behaviour earlier; however, please understand that I was tasked to bring you with me no matter what" Roderick bowed his head towards Cynthia and introduced himself.

"I believe I have already rejected that proposal once".

"I'm afraid you have no say in this matter, your highness. Everything is already decided by the second prince. You should accept your fate" Herm sneered. "Sir Roderick, you achieved the objective you came here for. Take her Highness and get out of the cave".

Roderick nodded his head and picked up the immobilised Cynthia. "What about you?" he asked.

Herm flashed a lecherous smile as he glanced at the exhausted guard captain and said "I have some work here, you go ahead and wait for me outside the cave".

Roderick did not say anything more and simply walked away, taking Cynthia with him.

"Wait.. where are you going? Put the princess down" Alvara struggled to get on her feet.

"Hehe... Guard Captain, you should worry about yourself" Herm spoke as he slowly inched closer to her.

"You mongrel do not call me with that filthy mouth of yours" Alvara attacked. However, her attack was too slow and carried none of the strength that came with her level.

It was clear to anyone that she was very weak and exhausted right now. It was to the point where even Herm a non combatant with a low level could easily deflect her sword away.

CLANG... the sword fell on the ground and Alvara was pushed to the wall of the cave.

"W-what do you plan to do?" Pushing her to the wall and snatching away her sword, the guard captain felt a bad premonition.

"Hehe, can't you tell? I always wanted to do this to you captain; no Alvara" Herm brought his face close and sniffed her scent. Next, he stroked her hair, her neck and curves all the while enjoying her struggle.

"No!! Get away from me" Alvara pushed Herm away and tried to run; however, she was knocked down and pinned on the ground by the latter.

"If you try to run away or even resist, I'll kill Marba over there" Herm threatened, a maniacal light flashed in his eyes.

"You beast!!" When threatened with the life of her comrade, even the strong and independent Guard Captain couldn't muster up the tiny bit strength of resistance. She simply laid on the ground and allowed the other person to do whatever they wanted with a despairing and blank look on her face.

"Hehe, that's more like it. Don't worry though, soon I'll make you scream in pleasure and wanting more" Herm laughed, molesting her breasts and kissing her neck. He then tore her upper clothes and the corset underneath, revealing a pair of beautiful mounds.

"Whew... look at that? I always knew you had some great knockers underneath that skimpy and tight fitting leather clothes you wore. But they are even bigger than I imagined. F cup? No, they are at least G cup" Herm whispered near Alvara's ears.

"You bastard, I'll never forgive you" She glared at him with loathing and rage.

"It looks like you haven't learned your lesson. In that case..."

BOOOM... at this moment, a thunderous rumbling noise erupted shaking the entire cave and causing debris to fall down from the ceiling.

"It came from the outside, What is going on? Well, Sir Roderick is outside, even if a monster appeared I'm sure he will be able to handle it" Herm sneered before turning his attention back to the beauty pinned underneath him.

"Next, I'll strip you out of those trousers of yours... hehe".

Alvara tried to struggle; however, her resistance amounted to nothing in front of his strength. CHIII... her trousers were torn down revealing a pair of enchanting long legs.

"Slurp... As expected, the Guard Captain is on a whole another level compared to those whores from the capital" Herm commented wiping down the saliva that almost overflowed from his mouth.

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08:57

"Although it's a pity that I can't lay my hands on her Highness, I can at least have a taste of you as much as I want".

Ptooeey... Alvara spat on Herm whose every word disgusted and sickened her.

The latter did not mind and simply wiped away the spit on his face "Haha... I will see how long you keep that attitude". Slowly, he undid his belt and pants.

'No...' tears trickled down her cheeks as she looked at the cave entrance seeking for help. That was coincidentally when she saw a shadow rushing towards her.

"Alvara!!" The voice called out as soon as she appeared in her line of sight. It was Cynthia, the princess that she served.

Why was she here?

"Huh? Why are you here? Didn't Roderick immobilise you and take you out?" Herm who was just about to rape Alvara, turned around in confusion, not expecting Cynthia's arrival.

"Roderick?! Are you talking about this guy" However, she wasn't alone. Following closely behind her, were a couple of figures. They were people that he had never seen before.

The figure in the front, tossed out something towards him. It landed on the ground with a splat noise before rolling towards him.

The moment Herm saw what it was, for a second there his brain blanked out unable to process it. When it finally did, all the blood drained out of his face as he screamed and backed away from it.

The thing that the figure threw towards him, was a decapitated head and it was not just any head, but the head of the powerhouse, the protector of the Blackthorn royal family who was supposed to be above level 500, Roderick.

"H-How can..."

"Well, there is so much I want to know too but first, put away that sorry thing away" The figure stepped forward and kicked Herm away from Alvara.

The force from that kick was so powerful that all the air was expelled from his lungs as he crashed onto the walls, losing consciousness immediately.

"Alvara are you alright?!" the princess tightly hugged her and cried. The cave that appeared as the despairing pits of a nightmare, suddenly had a ray of light shining on it.

"I suppose we made it in time. How are the others?"...

"The mage here is heavily injured and unconscious. But other than that, she doesn't seem to be in a state of danger"...

"Master... stop looking at her"..

"Eh? Ah, here is a robe, cover yourself" the figure passed Alvara a cloth.

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Alvara slowly opened her eyes, her surroundings initially a blur. As her vision cleared, she found herself lying on a soft, cushiony bed. The brightness of the place was in stark contrast to the gloom of the cave she had been trapped in earlier. Confusion swept over her as she tried to recall how she got here.

"Where am I?" she mumbled, her voice weak from the exhaustion she felt. As she attempted to sit up, she noticed the bandages on her body, reminding her of the injuries she had sustained during her mission to save the princess.

"That's right, princess!!" panicked, she turned around only to find the person she was looking for, lying in a bed next to her.

Creation is hard, cheer me up!! Drop some Power Stones...

When did he move? Even Alvara couldn't see the robed person's movements.

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"That's right, princess!!" panicked, she turned around only to find the person she was looking for, lying in a bed next to her.

Chapter 717- The Situation In The Kingdom (2)

"That's Burg and Brett" Marba exclaimed.

"Where are they are they alright?" Alvara chimed in.

"They are alright and are in the room next to you. However, they are yet to wake up. Once they do, I will send someone to bring them here. Anyways, it's unfortunate that I was a step too late to save the others".

Cynthia shook her head, a small smile of gratitude touched her lips "No, that's not true. We are alive because you made it in time, we are truly grateful for everything that you did for us. Thank you for saving my subordinates".

"Well you should be, if not for my master, you all would have become the nourishment for the dungeon and some of you might even have been..." Bea spoke out, a small smirk hanging at the corner of her lips.

Although she didn't finish her sentence, it was clear as to what she meant as she glanced at Alvara.

BAM... Just like always, to correct the behaviour of her sister, Annette gave her a smack with her fist of love.

"You idiot, Master is not done talking. Why are you interjecting in the middle". It was a funny scene seeing how these graceful and poised maids, whose beauty could make others jealous of them, razzing like that.

Though thanks to them, it broke the tense atmosphere that settled onto the place.

"Haha, please excuse them. They are my dear family. Although Bea is always raucous, she didn't mean what she said" Simon glanced at Bea, who although was pouting a little still apologised to the other party.

"No, no you don't have to . What she said was true after all".

The group made a few more small talks before Simon shifted the conversation to the main topic at hand.

"Now then, may I ask the reason for your visit Miss Cynthia or should I say your Highness". Simon's eyes flashed brightly as he glanced at them.

It didn't look like they were here to deliver a message, the purpose for their visit seemed to be different from last time. What was particularly intriguing was the presence of the princess herself, which implied a matter of serious consequence.

Cynthia took a deep breath, gathered her thoughts, and proceeded to state the purpose of their visit without unnecessary preamble "Our situation is a complex one. The Kingdom of Ellesmere is facing both internal strife and external threats."

Her voice held a mixture of determination and concern "With the recent demise of the king, the struggle for the throne has intensified among us royal siblings. The first prince is amassing political power through the support of influential dukes, to solidify "Even Her Highness, the princess is not spared from their ambitions. The first prince is trying to betroth the princess with an his claim to the throne".

"While the second prince has resorted to underhanded tactics. He has allied himself with the Kingdom of Blackthorn who are our enemies, and using their support, he wants to secure his throne. This alliance has plunged our kingdom of Ellesmere into a web of political intrigue and manipulation. The struggle has consumed countless lives and territories, tearing our kingdom apart". Cynthia elaborated the turmoil that had gripped her homeland.

"Even Her Highness, the princess is not spared from their ambitions. The first prince is trying to betroth the princess with an ambassador from Duke Montford's faction and solidify his support. On the other hand, the second prince in his pursuit of the throne, offered the princess as a bargaining chip to win the favour of the King of Blackthorn. A marriage alliance that she had no say in, a decision that was forced upon her" Alvara chimed in, her tone sharp with frustration.

A sombre silence fell over the chamber, each word underscoring the magnitude of their predicament.

Cynthia's gaze met Simon's, her eyes reflecting the weight of the burden she bore "With my father's passing, my influence and support have dwindled. Alone and without a voice, I found myself fleeing the capital to seek refuge and escape the clutches of those who wanted to use me as a prey for their political machinations".

As her words fell, Simon crossed his arms and silently contemplated her words. Cynthia's recount painted a picture of the kingdom's dire state. The passing of the king had triggered a fierce struggle for the throne among the princes.

The first prince sought to secure his claim through political alliances, garnering support from powerful dukes and influential figures. Meanwhile, the second prince had aligned himself with the Kingdom of Blackthorn, a move that brought foreign influence into the kingdom's power struggle. And Cynthia who was caught in all of this.

After a while, Simon opened his eyes and asked "I see, I more or less understand the situation. However, what does it have to do with me? I am not your ally, so why did you come to my dungeon?".

"Why you ask? Simon, the princess needs your help..." Alvara spoke out her expression a little erratic; however, she was cut off by Cynthia whose hand gestured for her to stop.

"The reason we came here is to seek shelter, a sanctuary where we can bide our time without worrying about any pursuers. I know it is asking too much, but I can only humbly beg for your compassion to let us stay here and, if possible, your protection until the treacherous tide of political turmoil and power struggles subsides" Cynthia bowed her head, there was an air of vulnerability and despair in her action.

"We beg you" Alvara and Marba too plead following the actions of their master.

As their words hung in the air, the room seemed to hold its breath, waiting for Simon's response to their plea for refuge inside the dungeon.

At this moment his lips curved into a wicked smile, and the master of the dungeon came to a decision.

"You have an interesting choice of sanctuary. The dungeon is a treacherous place, everything here exceeds far beyond your imagination. You will find that it is not so easy to live here, you might have to face many challenging situations. Even then are you still willing to stay here?"...

"We overcame numerous life and death situations to reach this place. Can it be compared to them?" Cynthia answered, there was not even a trace of uncertainty and hesitation in her eyes.

"Hmm... very well, I can give you refugee here; however, I have one condition" Simon extended his finger.

"What is it? If it's something within my power, I will not refuse" There is no such thing as free lunch in this world, everything has a cost. It is only natural that the Master of the dungeon would ask something of them in return. Cynthia replied nodding her head.

"I haven't decided yet. Don't worry though, I won't ask of something that won't be in your power. I will make preparations for your accommodations until then you have to stay on the prison floor. Oh, that's right, welcome to Dungeon Laplace".

With those words, the die was cast, changing the paths and destinies of Cynthia and the others.

"One of my subordinate will be monitoring you. You can contact me through him" After learning what he needed to learn, Simon and his battle maids left the place.

Now that they were gone, Alvara, her curiosity getting the best of her, inquired, "Princess, why didn't you ask for his assistance with the matter of the kingdom? With his capabilities, it would seemingly be within his grasp to help you ascend the throne, defeating the other claimants with relative ease."

It was a valid question, considering the immense power that Simon wielded. However, Cynthia's expression remained steady, her tone measured.

"Alvara, in bargaining, both parties must bring something of equal value to the table. I may be a princess by blood, but my support has crumbled, my influence shattered. I have lost the backing of my father, his majesty the King. In the eyes of my brothers who vie for the throne, I stand as a hindrance. That is why they want to get rid of me. My claim is weakened, and as someone seeking refuge, I bring no value to the master of the dungeon to involve himself in all of this".

"For now, my goal is to ensure our survival, to weather this storm that has engulfed Ellesmere. And in that struggle, I am willing to set aside the pursuit of the throne if it means I can protect those dear to me." Cynthia looked at Alvara and Marba who stuck with her despite the dangers.

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Underground Prison, Level 3.

The Training Floor of Dungeon Laplace was a paradoxical space, designed as a training ground on the surface but concealing a sprawling underground labyrinthine prison.

When one ventures into this floor, they would be met with a vast expanse, designed to resemble an outdoor arena. Grassy terrain stretched out, interspersed with strategically placed obstacles and training equipment, creating an ideal environment for combat practice and skill refinement.

However, beneath this seemingly innocent training ground façade, lay a hidden network of prison cells, chambers, and passages. Its layout was both intricate and foreboding, with multiple layers, each accessed through hidden staircases and passageways.

The first layer or the level 1, was where Cynthia and the others are currently being sheltered. It was a slightly remodelled area, meant to accommodate them temporarily.

Since Simon cannot house them on his Main Floor or the Forest Spring Spirit village because it might expose them to dangers no matter how minuscule, he had to temporarily use the prison as quarters for Cynthia and the others to rest.

Chapter 718- Weapons from the Kingdom of Blackthorn

That said, even though this was a prison, he had remodelled it with simple yet comfortable living quarters. Equipped with beds, basic furnishings, and even a few amenities that could be deemed luxurious in a dungeon. A juxtapose with its purpose.

Beyond the level 1, the prison grew more severe and ominous. Deeper levels delved into subterranean recesses, revealing narrow corridors lined with thick cell doors. The air in these corridors was heavy with the weight of desperation and despair.

Prisoners, criminals, and intruders who had committed grave offences and were not deemed deserving of swift death, were incarcerated here. The place had numerous scary tools designed and aimed to break the spirit of those trapped within, subjecting them to isolation, darkness and torture forever.

This undercover prison was not Simon's personal creation, but rather the work of his Valkyries and other subordinates of his.

Each level of the underground prison grew progressively harsher, with cells becoming smaller and more confining. In the lowest and most severe section, level 3, the confinement reached its peak.

The passages here narrowed to a suffocating degree, and prisoners were isolated in pitch-black chambers. The only sounds that reached them were the distant echoes of dripping water and the haunting symphony of their own thoughts.

Amid this bleak darkness, Herm who was imprisoned in one of the cells, trembled uncontrollably. The oppressive atmosphere and the complete absence of light weighed heavily on his psyche.

Even after just a day in this place, he could feel his sanity slipping away and his mind raced with fear and regret.

"Did I make a mistake? Sir Roderick wasn't supposed to die. He is a powerhouse above level 500... how" As he was contemplating his choices while tightly clenching onto his head, suddenly a faint noise broke through the silence.

Footsteps echoed in the darkness, gradually growing louder. Herm's heart raced as he strained his ears to identify the source of the sound. Soon, figures emerged from the shadows, and a dim light illuminated the prison cell he was in.

"You are..." Herm immediately recognised the figure outside the cell bars. There was no way he would forget that imposing presence and those features that he had only heard about in rumours and texts.

"Demon Noble" there was no mistaking it, the being in front of him was a Demon Noble.

Simon's arrival immediately caused the suffocating atmosphere of the level 3 to drop even further.

"Hieeee... s-stay away... d-d-don't come closer" Herm cried, retreating and huddling back into the corner.

Simon looked at the prisoner, whose appearance was a far cry from his once-arrogant demeanour. Fear had etched deep lines on his face, and his eyes were wide with terror. One day in this unforgiving place had broken his spirit faster than he could have ever anticipated.

"Prisoner," His tone devoid of any emotion, cut through the tense air "I have a question for you. You better answer me truthfully or else you will forever remain imprisoned here"...

"Hieeee.. y-yes... I have no hand in this, I was only following orders" Herm started screaming and pleading with a trembling voice however, "Shut up... only answer whatever you are asked" Bea's sharp tone immediately silenced him.

"Prisoner, tell me... what are those items?" Simon's gaze remained steady, and he gestured toward a table where they confiscated the belongings from Herm and his group lay.

Among them was a peculiar black shield emitting a greyish-black aura, it made Simon narrow his eyes.

"How did you come into possession of these items?".

"I... I don't know. We found them, but I swear, we didn't know anything about them." With a stammering voice, Herm replied.

Simon locked his brows, this wasn't the answer he was looking for.

"Master, leave it to me, He'll spill everything once I begin my methods of persuasion" Bea who was adept in methods to break one's spirit and open their mouth, stepped forward with a confident smirk.

Hearing the sounds of chains and dangerous equipments, Herm's desperation peaked, and he fell to his knees, his voice pleading.

"No, no, please! I really don't know anything about those items! I swear!".

Simon remained silent, his stern gaze fixed on the other party. It was only when Herm saw the maid coming back with something that looked like a Scold's Bridle, did his voice croaked and he started confessing everything.

"I-I'm speaking the truth, I really have nothing to do with those weapons. Please believe me, Those items belonged to Roderick Garnald! He was brought here by His Highness, the second prince from the Kingdom of Blackthorn. I swear, I didn't know about the weapons!"...

"Roderick?! Ah, the person who was holding Cynthia. So you are saying that these items belonged to him?" Simon inquired a little sceptic.

"That's right. We were given these items by him. He said that if we used them, we would be granted immense strength and abilities. However, when I tried to give it to one of the adventurers, although he displayed immense power that was unlike his level, he started going berserk shortly afterwards. It took a group of adventurers to put him down. Ever since then, we did not dare to use them"

Herm babbled, the sight of Scold's Bridle on Bea's hand was too much of a visual impetus.

"I see, what else do you know about these items? Tell me everything"...

"Y-Yes. These items were something that was brought over by Sir Roderick from his kingdom, it is something unique to the Kingdom of Blackthorn".

"Master he is speaking the truth" Annette whispered next to his ears. Being a superior spirit she had a skill that allowed her to look at the mystical energy within one's body and determine from the slightest fluctuation if someone was lying or speaking the truth.

From what she observed, Herm was speaking the truth, there was not even an ounce of falsehood in his statement.

Simon nodded his head. for some reason, when he heard the other party mention the Kingdom of Blackthorn, the frown on his face couldn't help but deepen. He now knew where these items originated from; however, that in itself evoked several questions and implications in his mind.

Simon's eyes shifted towards the shield and other various weapons kept on the table. A memory flashed inside his head, it was a memory from the time when he visited the capital of the Kingdom of Ellesmere.

More precisely, it was when he was observing the Battle of the Finest tournament that had created a sensation in the kingdom. Even the surrounding countries came to participate in it.

Among them were the Kingdom of Golf, the Kingdom of Blackthorn and the Sanguine Empire. If his memory served right, then he had seen the participants from the Kingdom of Blackthorn use these kinds of weapons.

It allowed them to overwhelm their opponents and turn the tide of the battle. At that time, Simon thought that the energy within those weapons was quite peculiar in that it gave more of a dark feeling similar to Dark magic used by the demons.

However, he was wrong. Now that he was looking at the weapons once again, he realised that the malevolent energy that defied the natural orders of this world, was none other than curse energy.

The Curse Energy was a system of energy that was foreign to this world, Simon knew because he had come in contact with this energy when clearing the fourth trial in the forbidden grounds.

Moreover, for some reason, he was even able to use it. As such, he was more familiar than anyone when it came to the Curse Energy and the weapons on the table were no doubt emanating that energy albeit it was very diluted and faint.

Curse energy, exuded an aura of despair that sent shivers down the spines of those who encountered it. Unlike the controlled and structured nature of conventional mystical energies, curse energy was a chaotic and unpredictable force, tainted by the very essence of malice and negativity.

It was similar to the dark magic in that both share sinister and negative nature. However, Simon who could use the Curse energy, knew that it was fundamentally different.

Curse energy had a direct affinity for tainting souls and minds, leading to a deterioration of one's essence. Its nature was sticky, metaphorically clinging to everything it touches.

This stickiness implies that curse energy has a tendency to linger and embed itself deeply in its surroundings. It doesn't just pass through an area; it saturates it, seeping into objects, structures, and even the land itself.

This sticky quality makes it challenging to cleanse or remove, contributing to its sense of malevolence.

Other than that, it was inherently chaotic and devoid of structure. This chaotic essence rendered it mercurial, capable of manifesting in a myriad of unpredictable forms.

Simon, despite being able to use the curse energy was still in the process of mastering this profoundly different system of energy, and thus, there remained much unknown about its intricacies.

However, when in the presence of curse energy he couldn't be mistaken about it. That is to say, the weapons confiscated from Cynthia's pursuers, unmistakably had the presence of curse energy.

The question that now lingered in his mind was how the Kingdom of Blackthorn had managed to possess this malevolent force. No, in the first place was it even possible for the natives of this world to interact with curse energy, let alone utilizing it to forge such weapons?

Simon remembered that Irene had once repeatedly emphasised that it was impossible for a native of this world to sense the curse energy much less utilise it like him.

Chapter 719- Owing Favor, an Obligation?!

In fact, she had stressed that it was a dangerous energy that even she was unable to utilise and that it wasn't something that should have been present in this world. Moreover, Irene had warned Simon against interacting with it, stating that it wasn't an energy that shouldn't be trifled with, much less someone of his level should come in contact with.

However, unlike others who usually recoil or experience adverse effects upon coming into contact with the curse energy, Simon had always felt a connection with it. Instead of the expected abhorrence, Simon felt an almost natural resonance with the energy, as if it recognized him as a kindred force.

For him, the curse energy felt docile, almost obedient, as if it had undergone some form of unspoken training under his guidance. It was as if the energy was tamed by his very presence, a power that acknowledged his mastery and willingly obeyed his commands.

In that regard, he was perhaps an anomaly, capable of manipulating this energy without being ensnared by its corrupting influence.

The origin of curse energy and the reason for his unique relationship with it, was a mystery, something that even Irene, with her knowledge, couldn't put her hand on. So how had the Kingdom of Blackthorn managed to acquire and utilize curse energy?

The more he thought about it, the more interested and puzzled he got.

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Now back at the Main Hall, of the White Palace, Bea's questioning gaze was fixed on Simon. Her confusion was palpable as she sought to understand his decision regarding those people he sheltered.

"Master, I don't understand. Why did you allow them to stay here? If it is because of the favour you owe them, haven't you repaid it already by saving them and treating their wounds?"

Simon settled into his favourite seat and spoke with a grin on his face "Bea, I believe there is a use for everyone. Besides, it was not solely about repaying a debt. They journeyed here through

difficulties, navigating the unknown dangers of this dungeon, facing the threat of their pursuers, and even withstanding the onslaught of a salamander".

"It was not easy for them to arrive at my doorstep, seeking refuge. In a way, their presence here is a testament to their determination and courage".

"I don't understand..." Bea blinked her eyes perplexed.

"Let me explain" Annette, the smartest amongst the Valkyries, stepped forward to explain. "Think about it. If someone you hardly know, someone you only briefly encountered in the past comes to you seeking help, it's not a simple decision to make. They need not only the means to reach you, but also the courage to ask for aid. I believe Master saw some worth in them right?".

"It's as you say" Simon leaned forward slightly "I do like people who are tenacious and are willing to struggle till the end. I'm sure seeking shelter is not the only reason they arrived at my dungeon. However, unless I see some value in them I am hesitant to involve myself in their struggles".

"As for their protection, as long as they remain within the boundaries of this dungeon, even their most determined pursuers will be unable to reach them. As such, there's no need to send them away when they've taken such steps to reach here," Simon explained.

"Also, I must express gratitude to Annette. Her quick thinking allowed us to detect their presence and intervene when necessary." He glanced towards the spectacled beauty who stood by his side, her demeanour composed and observant.

"It is my duty, Master does not need to thank me" Although Annette said that, there was a faint trace of happiness in her facial expression.

"For a demon noble, especially a true demon noble, a debt of gratitude is a binding force, it is not a matter of honour to repay a debt, but something much more compelling" Simon explained with a thoughtful gaze.

"Debts are chains that can shackle even the most powerful among us. The very nature of being indebted to another is a form of submission, a relinquishing of control. For beings like us, who are the very incarnation of desire and power above all else, owing anything to anyone is a deeply uncomfortable notion".

"We are creatures of authority and dominion, and anything that threatens that autonomy is to be avoided at all costs. It is for this reason that many demon nobles are unwilling to be indebted to others. Because if even once the scales tip in that direction, they are compelled to fulfil that obligation. This is why I am cautious about forming such connections and repaying any favour I owe".

And although Simon did not mention it, for him this obligation was even more of a binding force. As someone who possesses the Fragments of Pride, the concept of owing someone something goes beyond mere obligation.

It's a fundamental opposition that he feels to his core. This sentiment was true even when he possessed only one fragment, and now, with the second fragment, that feeling has only intensified.

As Simon slowly learned more about his origins, he was able to learn that the Fragments of Pride was more than just something that augmented his powers, it was his core. They shaped his very essence, influencing how he perceived the world and how he interacted with others.

That is why, for him to owe someone a debt, goes against the very core of his being. And even if he did, he was bound to repay that favour no matter what. This was not a matter of choice; it was the very nature of his core and the concept itself.

"I see thank you for explaining master" Bea nodded her head in understanding. She finally understood why her master went as far as to even shelter them. It was because of the nature of the demon nobles.

"I will leave the two of you in charge of our new guests. You can ask the Diluvian High Orcs to build them a proper shelter on the training floor. Also, make sure to give to give them proper hospitality, I don't want them complaining about us lacking in this area".

"Another thing, notify all the inhabitants of the dungeon that we have guests and that they should avoid the [Training Floor] for the time being especially the Forest Spring Spirits. I don't want their existence to get released"...

"Understood Master"

After giving his orders, Simon returned to his work. The life of a dungeon master and a demon who chose to forge his own fate, was quite busy after all. Training, strengthening the dungeon and fighting the giant piles of paperwork, amidst all this, ten passed by.

During this time, Simon's level never remained stagnant, it rose at an astonishing speed every day.

Using the method he created, he efficiently absorbed dozens and dozens of Mana crystals. His levelling speed only came to a stop when he reached level 560 and met a wall.

This wall was different from the bloodline wall that restricted one from reaching greater ranks, this one meant the end of his talent. If he wanted to press forward from this point on, he would have to do so by putting hard work.

That is to say, using Mana crystals to expedite his progress would be in vain; he needed to push himself to the limit and challenge the boundaries of his physical and magical capabilities. Only that way can he breach this wall that was looming in front of him, the wall of hard work.

In tandem with his own development, the dungeon had also grown significantly in these past few days. It now comprised 90 floors, not counting the ancillary floors like the [Training floor], [Workshop] and such.

Each of the lower floors was populated with powerful monsters and new ecosystems befitting the dungeon's rank. Not only that, it was also sprawling with numerous magical traps, arrays, mutated monsters and treasures.

Then there were also the special areas that provided high risk high rewards like the Hidden Chambers and Danger Zones to challenge the adventurers.

All in all, the dungeon Laplace was quite different from the time when it recently increased in rank. Now it was befitting of the name intermediate ranking dungeon and probably could even match Of course, all of these changes weren't the result of his own efforts, his subordinates also helped out a lot. If not for the [Helpers], it some [B] rank dungeons in difficulty.

Of course, all of these changes weren't the result of his own efforts, his subordinates also helped out a lot. If not for the [Helpers], it would still have taken the dungeon a long time to reach the level it was currently on.

Other than that, Simon was also informed by Annette and Bea who were tasked with monitoring the guests, that the other two people he had saved, the burly knight and the old assassin had also woken up.

They had been moved to a shelter that was built by the Diluvian High Orcs on the training floor.

Speaking of the Diluvian High orcs, they were quite an organised bunch. Thanks to their unique trait that allowed them to coordinate almost seamlessly with each other, they were the perfect labour force.

Simon was not saying that just based on the single traits of theirs alone, but because the Diluvian High Orcs were a colonised group that followed ranks and orders just like an army.

Coupled with the fact that they possessed powerful physiques, they were perfect for tasks that require manual labour. The shelter that they built was quite impressive in its own right and any stone mason and builder of this time would feel humbled if they saw their ability.

Chapter 720- New Summons

Simon believed that the Diluvian High Orcs had a lot of potential and they would become quite helpful to him in the future.

"I guess I should give them a little more benefits" Although he had created a garden of Bloodtrap plants on their floor, the plant was after all, a basic necessity for them to evolve. He should provide them with more resources to grow themselves.

Simon was sure that with Berigard's management, the Diluvain High Orcs would become something to look forward to. He quickly jotted down the ideas he had for the Diluvain High Orcs on one paper before keeping down his pen and sighing.

Usually, after finishing this task of his, he would either train or relax with his subordinates for some time. However, today was different from all the other days.

How was it different? That was because the dungeon had produced another emblem today that it can only produce one each month.

Simon looked at the coin shaped trinket on his hand that had a vague figure of a demon with golden black tattoos on it. These unique emblems that were produced by his dungeon and possessed his own unique traits and qualities, could only be used by the dungeon master, aka him.

Counting the one in his hand, and the two sitting in his [Inventory] Simon had three emblems with him. This meant only one thing, that right it was time to summon more subordinates.

Normally, Simon would go to the training floor to use the mysterious abyss after all, there was no guarantee what sort of thing would come from it. Based on the previous incidents, it was clear that the bugged option that was the result of the merger of two Menus was something completely incomprehensible.

From weird intergalactic dimensional creatures also known as Wisp to undead, the creatures of the netherworld. The option can dish out anything.

As such, using such an option on the Main floor was just inviting trouble. That is why, he would normally use the [Training Floor] when using the mysterious abyss. Valkyries, Ogoraths, the Vampire Twins all of them were summoned on that floor.

However, right now the [Training Floor] was being used to house Cynthia and her group. There is no way, he can reveal a card like the mysterious abyss in front of them. And so, he moved far away from the White Palace and also...

"Master, are you going to use that option once again? Hehe"...

"Master, leave it to me and my sister. Anything that comes through, we will sent it packing back".

A mischievous Wood Elf and a young vampire boy spoke. That's right, he also brought his subordinates with him. Their role was to aid him in suppressing any hostile being that came out of the Abyss.

Although, the probability of that happening was low, the option was no longer what it used to be as such, there is no way of knowing if the being that comes out of it will be loyal to him. That is unless the being coming out of the option was one of the Twelve Heroes that he designed.

"I wonder if big sis Mercy will come out this time. Master, you must summon big sister" Alice spoke, the big sis Mercy she mentioned was none other than the eldest of the Valkyrie sisters, Mercedes.

"There is no way of knowing what will come out of it after all, the option is a void of mysteries that defies understanding or conventional logic" The one to reply to Alice was Irene.

Being someone who was also summoned through the abyss she was very much interested in the option. Every time that Simon used the option she would always be present and try to understand some of its mysteries and the law on which it operates.

As for him, he was also trying to figure it out. However, every time he came face to face with this option, this unpredictable, unfathomable, cosmic enigma that toyed with the very fabric of reality. Something that bend the boundaries between possibility and impossibility, where logic started failing and hold no meaning, he would feel humbled.

It's not like Simon wouldn't like summoning Mercedes or the other Heroes. However, he was simply helpless in this aspect, he really did not know what would come out of it.

He had tried all sorts of combinations; nevertheless, he was never able to find any sort of patterns or for that say the limit for this option.

He had tried using one. two, three... and all the way up to six emblems. However, every time a random thing would pop out. The best examples were the Ogoraths and the Yin Yang Koi Fish.

On the side note, the upper limit of the emblem he had tried to use on the abyss was six and the results were, it threw out the vampire twins.

Right now, he had three emblems with him, this was the same amount he used to summon Irene. Incidentally, it was also the same amount that brought forth the [B] rank Ogoraths.

"Please give me something... something good" While hoping to Immediately afterwards, following the previous records the space in front of him cracked and shattered like glass, revealing a dark summon one of the twelve heroes, Simon inserted the three emblems into the option.

Immediately afterwards, following the previous records the space in front of him cracked and shattered like glass, revealing a dark black spiral like a maw of a monster.

This was the Abyss, the option that had everyone fazed. What was going to pop out of it this time? Simon had the figure of the leader of the Valkyries in mind. Although he did not know if imagining would help, he still did it.

The Abyss spun for a long time, this was nothing unusual. Depending on what was the thing that was going to come out, it might even spin for a couple of hours. It was so when summoning Wisp, the Null Elemental had taken its sweet time to come out.

Was it around four hours? Simon wondered. However, it did not look like the same was the case this time. The abyss started spinning faster and faster. Usually, this was the sign that the summoning was in its last stages and something would pop out after the gate slowly gets smaller.

Though this time, the abyss defied its usual behaviour. The spinning vortex, which was normally a prelude to the emergence of something, had taken an unexpected turn. Instead of shrinking and culminating in the appearance of a summoned entity, the Abyss was growing larger by the moment.

It was expanding like a voracious maw, its size ballooning to an extent that was unprecedented in Simon's experience.

From its initial size of five meters, it grew to become as big as eight meters, then slowly ten... eleven...twelve.

The dimensions of the Abyss exceeded all of its norms, reaching a staggering thirty meters in height and width. Spanned across this immense expanse, it created a surreal and imposing sight.

From this distance, it looked like an enormous gateway to the unknown.

What was going on? This was the first time the option behaved like that. Simon's mind raced, trying to comprehend what could be happening. Was this an anomaly? A glitch in the system? Or was it an intentional occurrence, perhaps triggered by something?

Questions flooded Simon's thoughts. If the Abyss was meant to adjust its size to accommodate the entity being summoned, then what kind of being could possibly emerge from a thirty-meter-wide portal?

Standing before the colossal Abyss, Simon felt a mixture of trepidation and anticipation. He was no stranger to the bizarre and the unexplained, but this event transcended even his wildest understanding.

Be that may, he could only wait, his heart pounding as he braced himself for whatever would emerge from the vast, expanding void before him. Whatever it was, it would undoubtedly be huge.

And Simon was proven right, it didn't take long for the mysterious abyss to chug out the thing it summoned. From within the seemingly endless void, a presence began to materialize, emerging with an imposing aura that made it hard to breathe.

The ground trembled beneath Simon's feet, the very air charged with anticipation as the enormous figures drew closer to the edge of the portal.

Alice immediately notched her arrow feeling the change in the environment and the twins appeared next to Simon seemingly guarding him of the thing that was coming out from the abyss.

<nullb>BOOM... as the figure took its first step onto the Main floor, its appearance also came into sight in front of everyone.

A towering entity wreathed in flames that danced with an intensity that defied natural laws. Its form was a mesmerizing symphony of reds, oranges, and golds, exuding an infernal heat that could be felt even from a distance.

As it stepped onto the land, the ground scorched beneath its feet, leaving a trail of molten earth in its wake. Simon's gaze remained fixed on the towering fiery entity, his mind churning with questions and intrigue.

"Master, what is that thing? I've never seen anything like it." Beside him, the twins pointed at the enormous thing that came out of the abyss.

"Elemental constructs," The one to reply in Simon's stead was Irene. Her voice carried both surprise and excitement as she looked at the Elemental construct.

"Elemental Constructs?! What are they?"...

"They are living manifestations of the elemental forces. Created by an ancient being known as the Elementalist, they hold immense power and carry the essence of their respective elements. Elementalist was said to have existed long before recorded history, a being who delved into the deepest mysteries of the world".